Black(ness) in German African Studies

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Edited by
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This volume came into being by way of teaching. It is an extension and a further development of the fruitful, often complicated, sometimes challenging conversations that take place in and beyond the classroom. There are many ways in which we learned from and together with students. Some students knew texts and authors we had never heard of before. Others offered fresh and surprising ways of reading texts we had assigned, giving us a new perspective, sometimes challenging ours. Still others offered ways of writing and presenting their work that demonstrated how their intellectual horizons were simultaneously situated in many worlds at any one time: artistic, political, academic, and affective. Some built enough trust to share personal stories and family histories in the classroom, including the painful and angry ones. Others challenged us on questions around our selection of texts, our reading of texts, personal biases, pedagogy. We often felt that the students who were learning, who were really trying to understand something new, were us. We were not perfect teachers, as nobody can be, but we know that the discussions with students, inside and outside of the classroom help us grow. So here is a big thank you to our students, who are at the same time our teachers, for their contributions in this volume. We thank you for your creativity and trust, for your time and patience to go through various drafts with us and your willingness to deal with the pressure to deliver on a time sensitive schedule.

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Preface

Black cultural and intellectual contributions in Germany span from the 18th century philosophical works of Anton Wilhelm Amo (1703–1759), through the 19th century military music of Gustav Albrecht Sabac el Cher (1868–1934), to the 20th century writings of W. E. B. Du Bois (1868 – 1963). Despite their different historical contexts, these influential men of African descent made significant contributions to their respective fields while confronting structural racism and racial discrimination.

All three individuals produced knowledge, though their methods and circumstances differed greatly. They contributed to critical discussions on Blackness, exploring its intersections with identity, belonging, and resistance while challenging prevailing notions of race, colonialism, and exclusion. Amo and Du Bois actively challenged intellectual and social norms through their writings and organizing efforts,[1] while Sabac el Cher broke racial barriers in the military and cultural sectors through his visibility and success.[2] At a time when Africans were often deemed illiterate and inferior to Europeans, all three addressed racial prejudices and advocated for social justice and equality, both within and beyond academia.

The growing recognition of these and other Black scholars, activists, and cultural workers has fostered a stronger appreciation for frameworks that address historical and ongoing injustices faced by Africans and people of African descent in Germany, Europe, and globally. However, this recognition alone is insufficient to decolonize African Studies or institutionalize Black Studies in German academia, as progress is hindered by resistance within the predominantly white academic community to confronting systemic issues and legacies of racism. Moreover, reluctance to engage with Germany's colonial history and its ongoing impact on race relations perpetuates gaps in institutional support for Black Studies.

Incorporating Black Studies into African Studies is therefore one way to overcome this epistemic violence and create a more expansive, decolonized, and nuanced understanding of Africans and people of African descent. It acknowledges the interconnectedness of African histories, cultures, and identities across time and space, while addressing the legacies of colonialism, racism, and displacement. This integration fosters a more inclusive academic environment that values both continental and diasporic perspectives, ensuring a richer, more comprehensive engagement with the global Black experience.

1 Natasha A. Kelly, *Afrokultur: Der Raum zwischen gestern und morgen* (Münster: Unrast, 2016).
2 Gorch Pieken and Cornelia Kruse, *Preußisches Liebesglück: eine deutsche Familie aus Afrika* (Berlin: Propyläen, 2007).

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By including African voices and fostering collaborative research that centers African and diasporic perspectives, this book introduces this new approach to African Studies. It deepens our understanding of the interconnectedness of both disciplines and emphasizes the importance of bridging African perspectives with critical voices from Germany. This approach fosters a more comprehensive and nuanced dialogue that challenges prevailing Eurocentric narratives and promotes a broader discourse on Blackness in Germany.

Black Germany and the African Diaspora

In her 2010 analysis, the late Caribbean scholar Alanna Lockward highlighted the underutilization of the concept of the African diaspora in German academia, which traditionally deploys Eurocentric narratives, marginalizing non-European perspectives.[3] This academic bias has limited the engagement with the African diaspora, effectively sidelining the experiences and histories of people of African descent and their contributions to discourses on Blackness and Africa for decades.

Unlike the UK and France, which have more visibly confronted their colonial histories and the resultant African diasporic communities, Germany's reckoning with its colonial past in public and academic spheres is relatively recent. While political discussions on Germany's colonial legacy have only currently opened space to explore historical ties between Germany and Africa, the ongoing relevance of the African diaspora in shaping contemporary German society remains largely underexplored. This delayed recognition reflects a broader academic reluctance to engage with complex issues of race, identity, and belonging.

Prior to this, concepts of race and nation in Germany were often conflated, with "German" being synonymous with "white." This notion can be traced back to German colonialism, when the first generation of Afro-Germans were systematically denied citizenship under the so-called "Mischehengesetz" (*mixed marriage laws*). These laws, introduced during the colonial period, prohibited marriages between Germans and Africans as part of broader efforts to maintain racial purity and uphold colonial hierarchies.[4]

As a result, Black Germans and other people of African descent were systematically excluded from the national narrative, reinforcing a racialized perception

3 Alanna Lockward, "Diaspora," in *Rassismus auf gut Deutsch: Ein kritisches Nachschlagewerk zu rassistischen Sprachhandlungen*, ed. Adibeli Nduka-Agwu and Antje Lann Hornscheidt (Frankfurt: Brandes & Apsel, 2010), 56–72.

4 Fatima El-Tayeb, *Schwarze Deutsche: Der Diskurs um "Rasse" und nationale Identität 1890–1933* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 2001).

of German identity. This exclusion persists, as evidenced by the recurring question, "Where do you really come from?"– a reflection of entrenched structural, institutionalized, and interpersonal racism that has been affecting the legal, social, and cultural status of people of African descent in Germany for generations.

As the editors of this volume note in the introduction, African Studies in Germany – as well as individual efforts to institutionalize Black Studies – has been shaped by this colonial legacy and dominated by white male scholars for centuries, with limited representation of voices from the African continent or the diaspora. This absence of diverse perspectives has resulted in a narrow academic tradition, one rooted in colonial frameworks that often overlooks the rich experiences and viewpoints of Blackness. Consequently, African Studies continues to be dominated by white narratives, frequently undervaluing African knowledge systems, languages, and epistemologies, while the underrepresentation of Black Studies exposes a vital gap.

This exclusion not only limits the scope and depth of both fields but also perpetuates a broader societal reluctance to address Germany's racial dynamics and to fully recognize the contributions of continental and diasporic individuals and communities. By sidelining these essential perspectives, African Studies and the wider academic discourse are missing the opportunity to embrace a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of Africa and its global diaspora.

However, recent years have witnessed significant efforts to decolonize African Studies by challenging these colonial legacies. Scholars are increasingly incorporating African perspectives and local knowledge systems, a push that includes critiquing methodologies and theoretical frameworks inherited from colonial-era scholars. At the same time, Black German voices continue to gain momentum outside of academia.

Transnational Feminism and the Black German Narrative

The lack of critical approaches in African Studies and the absence of a dedicated discipline focused on the Black experience, history, culture, and liberation highlights the importance of activism as a key space for generating and disseminating knowledge about Blackness in Germany. This was evident during the feminist movement of the early 1980s, when the influence of Black US-American feminist, warrior, and poet Audre Lorde profoundly shaped Black German thought and ac-

tivism.[5] Lorde's concept of "double culture" led to the creation of terms like "Black German" and "Afro-German," which provided a framework for Germans of African descent to understand and challenge racism, forming a self-defined identity and community.[6]

During this period, Black women like May Ayim (Opitz) and Katharina Oguntoye organized within broader feminist movements, pushing predominantly white feminists to address issues specific to their experiences.[7] Since then, there has been increasing interest in Black feminist concepts such as Kimberlé Crenshaw's "intersectionality," which examines how overlapping social identities contribute to systemic oppression,[8] and Saidiya Hartman's "critical fabulation," which reimagines and reconstructs the lives of those marginalized or silenced.[9] These frameworks challenge traditional Eurocentric perspectives and offer innovative methods for analyzing history from both African and Black perspectives.

It is important to recognize that the contemporary Black German community grew out of the post-modern women's movement, placing Black feminist thought at its core. This evolution aligned with a growing interest in transnational feminism, reflecting a global shift towards recognizing and valuing the diverse experiences of Black women, often overlooked in African Studies. Moreover, there remains limited acknowledgment of the transnational connections between Black feminists in Germany and those on the African continent, ties that trace back to the colonial period. Notably, the contributions of African women in the German Empire, such as Maria Mandessi Bell and Katharina Atangana, who played pivotal roles in Cameroon's anticolonial struggle, are frequently overlooked in historical discourse.[10]

This publication emphasizes the need to integrate African and diasporic perspectives into African Studies curricula and research frameworks. By fostering dialogue between these efforts, it seeks to create a more inclusive academic landscape that fully acknowledges and explores the rich histories, cultures, and contributions of Black people in Germany, Africa, and the diaspora, with a particular focus on the experiences of women and other deprivileged groups.

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5 Peggy Piesche, ed., *Euer Schweigen schützt euch nicht. Audre Lorde und die Schwarze Frauenbewegung in Deutschland* (Berlin: Orlanda, 2012).

6 Kelly, *Afrokultur, 30 - 51*

7 May Ayim, Katharina Oguntoye, and Dagmar Schultz, eds., *Farbe bekennen. Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte* (Berlin: Orlanda, 1986).

8 Natasha A. Kelly, *Schwarzer Feminismus: Grundlagentexte* (Münster: Unrast, 2019).

9 Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 12 (2008), https://doi.org/10.1215/-12-2-1.

10 Robbie Aitken and Eve Rosenhaft, *Black Germany. The Making and Unmaking of a Diaspora Community, 1884–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Toward an Inclusive Academic Future

Despite the gaps and challenges in academia, grassroots organizations and community efforts in Germany have worked tirelessly to fill this void by creating platforms outside of universities where Black knowledge can be generated, shared, and preserved. These initiatives also strengthen bonds with Africa and the global diaspora. Since the early 1990s, annual events such as Black History Month have been organized regularly, growing into dynamic periods of reflection, celebration, and advocacy. In recent years, these events have gained recognition in mainstream media, providing essential spaces for people of African descent in Germany to honor our history, celebrate our culture, and address contemporary issues of racism and discrimination. Through educational programs, cultural events, community building, and political advocacy, Black History Month has contributed to a greater awareness of the diversity of Blackness and our ongoing struggle for liberation.

Additionally, the 21st century has seen the emergence of archives and community centers such as Each One Teach One in Berlin, the Theodor-Wonja-Michael Library in Cologne, and the Fasiathek in Hamburg. These institutions play vital roles in preserving and promoting Black German knowledge, while also bridging the continent with its diaspora. For example, the annual literature festival "Afrolution," held in Berlin since 2018, provides access to works by African and Black authors, fostering a deeper understanding of Blackness, Black Germanness particularly.[11] These centers also serve as hubs for community engagement and education, ensuring that our African heritage remains visible and influential for future generations.

Despite these community-driven efforts, Black Studies, with its focus on the global experiences, cultures, and histories of people of African descent, remains largely absent in Germany's academic landscape. Instead, the field relies heavily on these nonprofit organizations and contributions from individual Black scholars and artists to ensure Black histories are included in academic and artistic curricula, while African Studies provides a deep understanding of Africa's diverse cultures, languages, and histories, despite all adversities.

Bringing Black Studies and African Studies together allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the African diaspora and its relationship with the African continent. This integration bridges the gap between African and diasporic narratives, fostering a transnational dialogue that acknowledges the interconnec-

11 "Afrolution Festival," EOTO, last modified October 11, 2024, https://eoto-archiv.de/afrolution-festival.

tedness of Black identities across the globe. By engaging more closely, both fields can address their shared histories and the complex, transnational dynamics of the African diaspora.

This collaborative approach encourages a decolonized, inclusive academic framework that fully embraces the historical and contemporary realities of peoples both within Africa and across the diaspora. Ultimately, this merging of perspectives helps bridge the gaps between continental and diasporic narratives, offering a fuller and more nuanced understanding of African and Black experiences, and working towards more inclusive and decolonized forms of knowledge production in whole.

By decolonizing African Studies and incorporating Black Studies as an essential component, we can ensure that the contributions and experiences of all communities are integrated into the broader narrative of German and global scholarship. This inclusive approach fosters a more equitable academic environment, one that truly reflects the diverse and interconnected realities of our world. Merging the insights of both fields will make the research of Blackness in African Studies more comprehensive, addressing not only the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism and racial oppression but also highlighting the invaluable contributions of knowledge producers from both the continent and the diaspora, whose intellectual and cultural work has shaped global discourses for centuries.

Natasha A. Kelly

Contents

Glossary and List of Abbreviations Used

AAPF African American Policy Forum

AfD Alternative für Deutschland

AHSA African Heritage Studies Association

ASAA African Studies Association Africa

ASA US African Studies Association USA

ASNLH Association for the Study of Negro Life and History

ASWAD Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora

BIGSAS Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies

BR Bayrischer Rundfunk

Bilchiinsi Dagbaŋ Philosophie of the Dagbamba of Ghana, which refers to human dignity

BIPoC Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour

CCC Communal Conversation Circle CISPS Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies

CODESRIA Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa

CRT Critical Race Theory

CSU Christlich-Soziale Union

DFG Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft

EOTO e.V. Each One Teach One e.V.

FLINTA Frauen, Lesben, Intergeschlechtliche, nichtbinäre, trans und agender Personen (English meaning: Women, lesbians, inter, nonbinary, trans and asexual people)

FLSH Faculty of Letters & Humanities, University of Sousse, Tunisia

FDP Freie Demokratische Partei

FRG (Former) Federal Republic of Germany

FU Freie Universität in Berlin

GDR German Democratic Republic

HBCUs Historically Black Colleges and Universities

HWUs Historically *white* Universities

HWCUs Historically *white* Colleges and Universities

HKW Haus der Kulturen der Welt

ISD Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland

NdM Neue Deutsche Medienmacher*innen

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Netela handmade scarf made of cotton (Amharic)

Pamoja Die Bewegung der jungen afrikanischen Diaspora in Österreich

SPD Sozialdemokratische Partei

StuPA Student Parliament

ZDF Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen

Author Contribution

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Natasha A. Kelly, who holds a PhD in Communication Studies and Sociology, is an author, editor, artist, and curator. Her artistic works have been showcased at Carnegie Hall in New York, the Goethe Theater in Salvador de Bahia, and the German Historical Museum in Berlin. In 2018, she made her film debut at the 10th Berlin Biennale. She has taught at numerous universities in Germany, Austria, and the United States and is currently a Visiting Professor at the Berlin University of the Arts.

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Stephanie Lämmert is a historian of East and Central Africa and currently a fellow at the Merian Institute for Advanced Studies in Africa (MIASA) in Accra, Ghana. She is finishing a book manuscript that deals with agrarian change and women's protest in Tanzania. More broadly, her research interests center on the history of motherhood, intimacy and care work in twentieth-century East and Central Africa, and their broader implications for histories of feminism, labour and global capitalism.

Sadia Marie Ouro-Gbele is a cultural journalist, moderator, and writer living in Berlin. Her work explores literature and film analysis through an Afrodiasporic intersectional feminist lens, as well as pop culture. She is currently writing her master's thesis focusing on reworking tropes in Afrodiasporic family novels. Her work has appeared in various German publications, including Magazin Of Color, kino.de, and the anthology "Toxic" (published by lektora Verlag.)

Jaqueline Steinberger is an Afro-German academic specializing in African and Asian Area studies. Due to their family's history of migration and their own positioning as a racialized and non-binary female-read person, Steinberger was keen to engage more deeply with European colonialism, anti-Black racism and intersectionality. During their studies, Steinberger explored and focused particularly on the discourse on decolonizing climate justice, particularly by integrating indigenous and local knowledge into global (academic and political) debates. Steinberger completed their Master's in Asian and African Studies in 2025 and will begin working as a consultant on decolonization in development policy in April 2025. In their work, Steinberger will promote decolonization and anti-racism in development policy and develop them as cross-cutting issues.

Adey-Fana Tefera is a German-Ethiopian student of history and philosophy, with a long-term aspiration to become a teacher. Their academic journey began with three years of study in Asian and African Area Studies at Humboldt University, driven by a desire to deepen their understanding of their own indigenous heritage and its relationship with colonial powers such as Germany. Currently, Adey-Fana is actively engaged in student-led decolonial initiatives, such as the Free Palestine movement.

Stephanie Lämmert and Serawit Bekele Debele

Introduction
Black(ness) in German African Studies

For many decades, a dichotomy between Africa and its diasporas has been a dominant structure in knowledge production in African(a) Studies. Within what some scholars call "separate worlds," or "the well-preserved divide between African studies and Black studies," Africana Studies has been interested in comparing Black experience and global entanglements, while most Africanists have focused on the micro and essentialized ideas about an African specificity that rendered its history unfit for comparison.[1] In addition, scholars of color were relegated to work on diaspora histories outside of African Studies departments. This is particularly the case in the US academy. As a consequence, African Studies remained a field structured by whiteness and Eurocentric approaches. A conversation between the two distinct fields is only just beginning.[2] Of late, the study of Black internationalism and the African diasporas has gained currency and has begun to slowly transform African Studies. If the study of the African diaspora was previously a preoccupation of a field that Paul Tiyambe Zeleza calls "Afro-American African Studies"[3] that was separate from the classic "highly racialized field of study"[4] that African Studies really is, we now see the growing interest in questions related to the diaspora.[5] The boundaries between the fields have begun to

1 Maureen Maisha Auma, Eric Otieno, and Peggy Piesche, "'Reclaiming our Time' in African Studies: Conversations from the Perspective of the Black Studies Movement in Germany," *Critical African Studies* 12 (2020): 334, https://doi.org/10.1080/21681392.2020.1792319; Jean M. Allman and Adwoa Opong, "Separate Worlds: Histories of African Women and the Racialized Landscape of Knowledge Production in the United States," in *African Feminist Histories* (forthcoming); see also Carole Boyce Davies, introduction to *Decolonizing the Academy: African Diaspora Studies*, ed. Carole Boyce Davies, with Meredith M. Gadsby, Charles Peterson, and Henrietta Williams (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2003), x.

2 Allman and Opong, "Separate Worlds."

3 Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "Reckoning with the Pasts and Reimagining the Futures of African Studies for the 21st Century" (Social Science Research Council: February 2019), 7.

4 Jean M. Allman, "#HerskovitsMustFall? A Meditation on Whiteness, African Studies, and the Unfinished Business of 1968," *African Studies Review* 62 (2019): 9, https://doi.org/doi:10.1017/asr.2019.40.

5 For a summary on the history of writing on diaspora and African women, see Allman and Opong, "Separate Worlds"; see also Monique Bedasse et al., "*AHR Conversation*: Black Internationalism," *The American Historical Review* 125 (2020): 1699–1739, https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhaa513.

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grow less pervasive, giving rise to exciting and powerful studies, especially in the field of Black women's histories.[6] This scholarship highlights the fact that geographical boundaries that are translated into the institutional separation of African Studies vs Africana Studies/Black Studies do not amplify but confine understanding of Blacknesses and Africanness. The decision the African Union made in 2003 to recognize the African diaspora(s) as the sixth region of the African continent complemented this trend in scholarship, showing the political will to build on the organic relationship between the continent and its diasporas.[7]

However, Black Germany and the "new" European diasporas are rarely considered part of African Studies in Europe. It seems that African Studies in Germany is still hung up on the division between "Afro-American African Studies" and classic African Studies that cemented the existence of two parallel bodies of knowledge on Africa. Furthermore, it is a truism that in Germany, as in other places, institutional racism plays out in universities in shaping how these processes of knowledge production unfold.[8] However, these discussions are still considered off-limits, and are often denounced as "wokeist" or "Black noise," as Fatima El-Tayeb shows.[9] Similarly, Mirjam Brusius writes that in German academia, "being anti-racist as an academic is considered a risk, and addressing racism is a taboo."[10] Despite this pushback and labeling, a growing number of scholars are

6 Judith Byfield, *Cross Currents: Building Bridges Across American and Nigerian Studies* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Book Builders, 2009); Jacqueline Couti, *Sex, Sea, and Self: Sexuality and Nationalism in French Caribbean Discourses, 1924– 1948* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2021); Corinne T. Field and LaKisha Michell Simmons, eds., *The Global History of Black Girlhood* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2022); Jessica Marie Johnson, *Wicked Flesh: Black Women, Intimacy, and Freedom in the Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020); Annette A. Joseph-Gabriel, *Reimagining Liberation: How Black Women Transformed Citizenship in the French Empire* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2020); Carina E. Ray, *Crossing the Color Line: Race, Sex, and the Contested Politics of Colonialism in Ghana* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2015).

7 "The Sixth Region," accessed May 27, 2024, https://thestateofafricandiaspora.com/the-6th-region/.

8 Christina Morina und Norbert Frei, "Rassismus und Geschichtswissenschaft," *L.I.S.A*, September 24, 2020, accessed May 27, 2024, https://lisa.gerda-henkel-stiftung.de/rassismus_und_geschichtswissenschaft_morina_frei.

9 "Against Barriers and Binaries: An Interview with Fatima El-Tayeb," *Critical Diversity Podcast*, January 19, 2022, accessed May 27, 2024, https://criticaldiversity.udk-berlin.de/fatima-el-tayeb/.

10 Mirjam Brusius, September 24, 2020, "History is Located Inside, not Outside Racial Biases – Can Historians in Germany Break the Silence after Black Lives Matter? (Part 1)," *German Historical Institute London Blog*, accessed May 27, 2024, https://doi.org/10.58079/p1pi.

raising the issue of racism in German academia.[11] African Studies centers in Germany are not exempt from this, and the history of the field in Germany, with its origins tied to colonial extractivism, necessitates a rigorous examination of its past.[12] The fact that African Studies marginalizes Black Germany, we argue, is not an organic or logical outcome, but a political decision which is rooted in the historical development of the field and which has also formed our own intellectual trajectories as well as the ciritical lens we embrace in our scholarship.

The current volume aims at transcending the seemingly entrenched separation between African Studies and Black Germany, adding insights from Afro-diasporic German connections, so as to crack open African Studies in Germany to these new conversations. It attempts to create space in (German) African Studies for narratives that blur the lines of geographical belonging and epistemic location. In particular, we take our cue from German Afro-diasporic knowledges, work that German academic institutions disregard, but that is essential to both German African Studies and Black Studies. Specifically, our usage of Black Germany draws on Tiffany N. Florvil's articulation in her book on mobilizing Black Germany, in which she highlights Black Germany's internationalist, inclusive, and historically grounded orientation. In its internationalist and inclusive iterations, Blackness is a political category that extends beyond Germany to capture African, Caribbean, European iterations, the Americas and beyond. In addition, the category of Black Germans "consist[s] of not only individuals of mixed-race descent and individuals with ancestry from Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, Latin America, and the United States, but also other People of Color who understood

11 Felipe Espinoza Garrido, Caroline Koegler, Deborah Nyangulu, Mark U. Stein, eds., *Locating African European Studies: Interventions, Intersections, Conversations* (London: Routledge 2020); Jovita dos Santos Pinto, Pamela Ohene-Nyako, Mélanie-Evely Pétrémont, Anne Lavanchy, Barbara Lüthi, Patricia Purtschert, Damir Skenderovic, eds., *Un/doing Race: Rassifizierung in der Schweiz* (Zürich and Geneva: Seismo, 2022), https://www.seismoverlag.ch/site/assets/files/18046/oa_9783037778197.pdf; Maureen Maisha Eggers, Grada Kilomba, Peggy Piesche, Susan Arndt, eds., *Mythen, Masken und Subjekte: Kritische Weißseinsforschung in Deutschland* (Münster: Unrast, 2005); Daniel Bendix, Franziska Müller, Aram Ziai, eds., *Beyond the Master's Tools? Decolonizing Knowledge Orders*, *Research Methods and Teaching* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020).

12 Felix Brahm, "Colonial and African Studies in Germany and France: Academic Formations and Transformations, 1880s-1970s," in *In Search of Other Worlds: Essays towards a Cross-Regional History of Area Studies*, eds. Katja Castryck-Naumann, Torsten Loschke, Steffi Marung, and Matthias Middell (Leipzig: University of Leipzig Press, 2019), 289–314; Holger Stoecker, "Lehrer, Informanten, Studienobjekte. Afrikanische Sprachlektoren im Berlin der Zwischenkriegsjahre," in *Black Berlin: Die deutsche Metropole und ihre afrikanische Diaspora in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, eds. Oumar Diallo and Joachim Zeller (Berlin: Metropol, 2013), 71–85.

Black to be a political identity for community building and activism."[13] It therefore refuses being determined by "lineage and linkage through blood relationship or marriage alone."[14] Blackness as a historically situated political category defies boundaries of cultural, social, and economic alignments as much as it cuts across the fields of activism and academia in its fight for making available the necessary knowledge and information about and for Black people in Germany and beyond. Together with Florvil, we highlight that Black Germany fights against discrimination based on race and fights for the respect of human rights.

The questions raised in this volume emerge from two female scholars' years of observation of the workings of African Studies in Germany. These observations are the result of layers of exposure; as students of African Studies trained in Germany, as researchers and teachers who have been keenly involved in conversations about the state of African Studies globally, and as two of the principal investigators of the Volkswagen funded project *German African Studies through the lens of Critical Race Theory* who have spent months researching the issue. Equally, our gendered and raced positionalities within what scholars have called the "Africanist enterprise", referring to the white-male dominated African Studies, are reflected in our observations and interventions in this introduction, which we reckon are reflected in the entire collection.[15] Teaching and mentoring younger scholars has given us the opportunity to be actively engaged in an exchange with those whose views and insights do not usually receive a platform despite the fact that they are invested in the debates. We emphasize the fact that the views and criticisms our students express are just as indispensable as those we read in books and articles renowned scholars publish with high end publishers in the field. This is why we decided to put together this experimental volume, taking on the role of facilitators, in an attempt to amplify the works and voices of junior scholars and students. Part of what we intend to do is to challenge the assumption that students are echo chambers of concepts and thoughts of a prescribed canon and an already established voice. This collection decidedly brings to the fore students' theorizations of African Studies. The contributions are solicited from under- and postgraduate as well as doctoral researchers, who study in German institutions or did so at the time they were writing their contributions. As such, it

13 Tiffany N. Florvil, *Mobilizing Black Germany Afro-German Women and the Making of a Transnational Movement* (University of Illinois Press, 2020), 4.

14 Florvil, *Mobilizing Black Germany*, 2.

15 "Africanist enterprise" is the term William Martin and Michael West use to indicate the politics of knowledge production within US African Studies that privileges whiteness as an anchor, see William Martin and Michael West, eds., *Out of One, Many Africas: Reconstructing the Study and Meaning of Africa* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

is written by students and for those interested in the future curricular education of African Studies scholars in Germany. As facilitators, we want to give a stage to the fresh thinking that our contributors bring as they grapple with the disconnect between diaspora histories and African Studies.

In the rest of this introduction, we set the scene for the chapters that follow by laying out the historical and theoretical discussions and by specifically highlighting African Studies' indifference to the question of race[16] as well as years of neglect of the African diaspora in its focus. The volume draws on Mjiba Frehiwot and Cheikh Thiam's recent conceptualization of Pan-Africanism that goes back to Edward Wilmot Blyden. They understand Pan-Africanism as thought and praxis that rests on "the centrality of knowledge production and dissemination in the Pan-African project and the necessity to conceptualize the future of people of African descent from an Africa-centered perspective."[17] By highlighting Pan-Africanism as a response to Euro-American modernity, these scholars stress that people of African descent's "first gesture towards liberation is linked to knowledge production."[18] Contrary to much of the history of African Studies, Pan-Africanist approaches center not only the emergence of Blackness itself "as both a culture and a history, [that] was produced by the global forces of slavery, colonialism, and capitalism,"[19] but also serve as a counter-narrative outside of Eurocentric Africanist interpretations.[20]

Frehiwot and Thiam's theorizations of Pan-Africanism and Black internationalism demonstrate that writing histories from the vantage point of experiences from the continent does not mean to negate its links to the diaspora. On the contrary, the number of African scholars whose work speaks to questions of Black internationalism and Blacknesses is growing, as is the number of diaspora writers who engage African continental thought. Such scholarship brings to the fore "the complexities of internal continental Diasporas, as well as differences in global considerations of Blacknesses, with recognition that these are not homogeneous"[21] and shift over time and space. Take for instance the work of Keguro Macharia. Macharia suggests that we think about "how different black people across

16 With regards to indifference to race, the works of Jemima Pierre are instructive although she focuses on the history of anthropology. See Jemima Pierre, *The Predicament of Blackness: Postcolonial Ghana and the Politics of Race* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

17 Cheikh Thiam and Mjiba Frehiwot, "On Pan-Africanism: Epistemic Freedom, Knowledge Production and Decolonizing Politics," *Global Africa* 3 (2023): 67, https://doi.org/10.57832/w47e-z857.

18 Thiam and Frehiwot, "On Pan-Africanism," 61.

19 Kim D. Butler in Bedasse et al., "*AHR Conversation,*" 1709–1710; see also Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

20 Frehiwot and Thiam, "On Pan-Africanism," 61.

21 Leora Farber, preface to *The Imagined New (or, what happens when History is a Catastrophe?)* Vol.1, ed. Anthony Bogues et al. (Johannesburg: Iwalewa Books, 2023), 12.

multiple geohistories have co-imagined each other and attempted to create a shareable world."[22] Furthering this in his book *Frottage: Frictions of Intimacy Across the Black Diaspora*, Macharia traces and analyzes connections across the diaspora in the Americas and the Caribbean, challenging the boundary African Studies insists on in its determination to area-study Africans limited within the continent.[23] Similarly, Cheikh Thiam, suggests that an Africa-centered reading of Negritude has to be considered as a nexus between Africana Studies and Critical African Studies.[24] Thiam's work is in conversation with a new wave of decolonial scholars such as Shose Kessi, Akosua Adomako Ampofu and Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, who have spelled out the various dimensions – structural, epistemic, personal – that a serious decolonizing of African Studies in the twenty-first century entails and what an African Studies that centers the continent actually can achieve.[25] In the next section, we want to assess German African Studies within the framework of this trend of scholarship that foregrounds the global entanglement of Blackness. In so doing, we pay tribute to, draw on, and push further existing critiques of African Studies both developed within German African as well as Black Studies and outside of it.

The Disconnect in German African Studies and German Afro-diasporic Knowledges

One of the main consequences of colonial baggage and Eurocentric biases is the disconnection of African Studies from Africana Studies. Arguably, this is because the Africanist enterprise is not prepared to confront this loophole when it comes to the question of race. We know from the example of the USA that white schol-

22 Keguro Macharia, "On Being Area-Studied: A Litany of Complaint," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 22 (2016): 186, https://doi.org/10.1215/10642684-3428711.

23 Keguro Macharia, *Frottage: Frictions of Intimacy across the Black Diaspora* (New York: New York University Press, 2019).

24 Cheikh Thiam, *Epistemologies from the Global South: Negritude, Modernity and the Idea of Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2023).

25 Akosua Adomako Ampofo, "Re-viewing Studies on Africa, #Black Lives Matter, and Envisioning the Future of African Studies," *African Studies Review* 59 (2016): 7–29, https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2016.34; Shose Kessi, Zoe Marks, and Elelwani Ramugondo, "Decolonizing African Studies," *Critical African Studies* 12 (2020): 271–282, https://doi.org/10.1080/21681392.2020.1813413; Amina Mama, "Is It Ethical to Study Africa? Preliminary Thoughts on Scholarship and Freedom," *African Studies Review* 50 (2007): 1–26, doi:10.1353/arw.2005.0122; Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization* (London: Routledge, 2018).

ars' institutional gatekeeping has stifled efforts in the late 1960s by Black American scholars who insisted on the exploration of the organic and historical connection between Black American and African knowledges. This further entrenched white supremacy in area studies departments and produced two distinct parallel bodies of knowledge, with a clear hierarchy in terms of state funding in favor of African Studies.[26]

We observe a similar development in the German context, in which a more systematic engagement of Black German histories and research on diasporas, old and new, within African Studies departments are stifled. Just like its US counterpart, knowledge production follows two parallel lines of research where African Studies focuses on the continent (mainly on the so-called Sub-Saharan Africa), while Black German scholars and the specific perspective they bring to bear on their research, continue to be marginalized within the field of African Studies. As a result, scholars like Priscilla Layne call for the establishment of

> a Black Studies department that allows scholars to acknowledge all of the breadth and depth of Black achievement, including Black German achievement. If they won't teach students about Anton Wilhelm Amo in philosophy, then Germany needs Black (German) Studies to teach about him and break the cycle of silencing and repressing Black German history and culture.[27]

Not much has happened since Layne wrote this. Black Studies are still not institutionalized in Germany's academic landscape. Maisha Auma, Eric Otieno, and Peggy Piesche call this disconnect of Black Studies scholarship from German academia a "practice of transgressive resistance."[28] In addition to the absence of Black Studies in German academia (as opposed to Black Studies outside of it), Black scholars and Afro-diasporic Germans are still marginalized in Germany's Africanist enterprise. The sidelining of Black German scholars within African Studies and the exclusion of the themes and perspectives they bring into the field, has led to the exodus of a number of excellent Black German scholars to North American institutions. On the other side of the Atlantic, Black Germany has become a chic research topic in North American Black Studies departments, where several Afro-German scholars found an intellectual home. This means that most of the academic theorizing on Black Germany is being done from abroad and in English.

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26 Allman, "#HerskovitsMustFall?" 10.

27 Priscilla Layne, "Why do Black German Studies Matter Now?" *DDGC Blog*, July 5, 2019, accessed May 28, 2024, https://diversityingermancurriculum.weebly.com/ddgc-blog/why-does-black-german-studies-matter-now3706504.

28 Auma et.al., "'Reclaiming our Time' in African Studies," 343, 346.

From May Ayim to Fatima El-Tayeb, from Natasha Kelly to Maisha Auma, from Vanessa Thompson to Kira Thurman and Grada Kilomba, the work of Afrodiasporic scholars from Germany and Austria is foundational and fills important gaps. Yet, their scholarship is on the rise outside of Germany, and it is still not the type of work that finds its way into the canon of German African Studies. The few attempts that German scholars of color have made to theorize Blackness in German institutions has led them to become the targets of right-wing threats and attacks as we have witnessed in the recent defamation of Maisha Auma's persona.[29] In the words of Stefan Ouma, "the attempt of white positioned scholars to derail defiant scholarship on Africa by Africans and by those in the Diaspora, to doubt its relevance, objectivity and accuracy, or to simply invisibilize it, has a long tradition."[30] Despite this pushback from the right, there are actually several scholars who research on, study, and write about Black Germany, even though their voices are not part of the canon of African Studies. However, in most cases, this "occurs through or is based on conversation, is not written down or, if written, it is published in alternative contexts and as such does not even appear on the record/radar of the institutionalized global academic enterprise."[31] Indeed counternarratives about Black life in Germany are too often created, lived, and embodied outside of academia. For instance, the civil society alliance Dekoloniale advocates for the creation of an external independent research unit outside of university structures, in which research on German colonialism and racism would take place freed of the racist structures ingrained in German universities.[32]

Worth noting here is also the substantial work on German colonial history and Black/Pan-African internationalism that is largely silenced in German African Studies. For instance, in 2023, one of us had the good fortune to attend some of

29 Migrationsrat Berlin, "Angriff gegen Prof. Maisha Auma weit über Bayreuth hinaus brisant," *Migrationsrat*, February 3, 2021, https://www.migrationsrat.de/angriff-gegen-prof-maisha-auma-weit-ueber-bayreuth-hinaus-brisant/; see also Jaqueline Steinberger's contribution in this volume.

30 Stefan Ouma, "Navigating the Landscape of Defiant Scholarship in and Beyond Africa: On Archives, Bridges and Dangers. A Commentary on Patricia Daley and Amber Murrey's 'Defiant scholarship: Dismantling Coloniality in Contemporary African Geographies,'" *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 43 (2022): 182, https://doi.org/10.1111/sjtg.12423.

31 Auma et.al., "'Reclaiming our Time' in African Studies," 343, 346.

32 Decolonize Berlin, "105 Jahre nach dem Ende des deutschen Kolonialreichs: Erklärung des bundesweiten Bündnistreffens 'Decolonize the Bund,'" November 11, 2023, page 6, accessed June 3, 2024, https://decolonize-berlin.de/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Resolution_DecolonizeTheBund2023-1.pdf.

the sessions of a course entitled "Intersectional Archives: Black Europe."[33] In one of the sessions, Maisha Auma gave an introduction to Black/Pan-African internationalism in Germany where she spoke about the "lateness in talking about Black lives in Germany" and the "transient nature" of Black life in Germany. Doing so, Auma made abundantly clear that the counter-narratives about Black life and achievement in Germany rarely come from academia. Instead, they evolve outside of universities and despite anti-Black structures. Other issues that became clear from the seminar were the questions of archives in Black German Studies, the difficulty and sometimes the impossibility to reconstruct Black histories which stand in stark contrast to the sheer necessity of creating counter-narratives that challenge history as written by the white establishment.[34] In a similar vein, Deniz Utlu, the German novelist, writes about the absence of official archives that document the histories of the so-called *Gastarbeiter*innen*, guest-workers in Germany, beyond facts and numbers. There is an informal "archive of migration," writes Utlu, though it does not have a name nor an address. It spans Germany, and can be found in "old, dusty drawers in basements that have not been opened for a long time. Under houses and streets."[35] It is these non-official archives that enabled the likes of Tiffany Florvil, May Ayim, and Katharina Oguntoye to write their seminal books. They had to look for informal archives and they found them. These researchers earned trust in Black communities, and, as a result, people opened boxes they had stored away in their homes and granted them interviews, connecting them to other people they knew.

This question of archives also speaks to official commemoration politics and memory culture: whose life is worth remembering, whose story is important enough to be archived? What really makes a proper archive? The absence of the

33 This course was part of the project "Intersectional Black European Studies," a joint project by Technische Universität Berlin, Universität der Künste Berlin, and Yale University. Maisha Auma, Karina Griffith, and Fatima El-Tayeb ran it, and they taught about *Schatten-Archive*, shadow archives of Black, African, and Afro-diasporic peoples and communities in Germany, and to work towards a community-based digitization of these. It is worth noting that the other two Berlin universities, Humboldt University with its African Studies program, and Freie Universität with its Global History program, are not part of this project.

34 Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 12 (2008), https://doi.org/10.1215/-12-2-1; Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

35 Translation Stephanie Lämmert [Ich möchte von einem Archiv erzählen. Es trägt keinen Namen und hat keinen festen Ort. Es liegt verteilt im Land. In den Städten. In den Wohnungen. In Zimmern. In alten, verstaubten, lange nicht mehr geöffneten Schränken in den Kellern. Unter Häusern und Straßen], Deniz Utlu, "Das Archiv der Migration," October 31, 2011, accessed May 28, 2024, http://denizutlu.de/essays/das-archiv-der-migration/.

stories of "guest workers," like the absence of other racialized groups in official German archives, has to do with the unease and the refusal in Germany to come to terms with and to remember adequately their colonial and imperial history and their histories of migration. Prussia's involvement in the second stage of the Triangular Trade, the Transatlantic slave trade in the seventeenth century, amounted to the shipment of 30,000 Africans to the Americas.[36] This has been almost completely forgotten, it is as if an episode of German history does not exist and is hardly taught in schools. Noting this, Natasha Kelly uses the word "ent-innern" to describe this.[37] Ent-innern stems from the German word erinnern, which translates as "to remember," but works with the prefix *ent-* instead. This prefix has the meaning of reverting something. In this case, it means revoking; making invisible the history of Germany's involvement in the Triangular Trade and enslavement and, therefore, also eradicating its memory.

This marginalization notwithstanding, the project *The Living Archives: A Learning Diaspora Space* run by *Xart Splitta* documents, archives, and passes on intersectional knowledges from BIPoC communities in Germany today, some of which have been deleted, erased, or otherwise were lost.[38] Projects like *The Living Archives* or *Each One Teach One* (EOTO e.V.), which created "The 2020 Afrozensus," the first survey to collect data about lived realities, experiences of discrimination and perspectives of Black, African, and Afro-diasporic people in Germany,[39] demonstrate how people of color in Germany resist erasure, silencing, and the ent-innern of their histories. It is a testament to their resilience and strength that Black and BIPoC communities and their many brilliant writers, artists, and activists such as Alice Hasters, Tupoka Ogette, Sharon Dodua Otoo, and Manuela Bauche resist and defy the absence of the histories of their communities from official archives.[40] Out of this growing number of Afro-diasporic German voices, let us mention just two of the more recent ones that actively challenge

36 Joachim Zeller, "Nicht nur 'weiß.' Das afrikanische Berlin. Von den Anfängen bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg," in *Black Berlin. Die deutsche Metropole und ihre afrikanische Diaspora in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, eds. Oumar Diallo and Joachim Zeller (Berlin: Metropol, 2013), 32.

37 Natasha A. Kelly, *Schwarz. Deutsch. Weiblich: Warum Feminismus mehr als Geschlechtergerechtigkeit fordern muss* (München: Piper, 2023), 162.

38 *The Living Archives*, xart splitta, accessed May 28, 2024, https://thelivingarchives.org/.

39 "Afrozensus," EOTO, accessed May 28, 2024, https://afrozensus.de/.

40 Alice Hasters, *Was weiße Menschen nicht über Rassismus hören wollen aber wissen sollten* (München: Hanser, 2019); Tupoka Ogette, *Exit Racism: Rassismuskritisch denken lernen* (Münster: Unrast, 2017); see also Tupoka Ogette's Podcast, *Tupodcast: Gespräche unter Schwestern*; Sharon Dodua Otoo, *Adas Raum* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2021). The joint work of writer and novelist Sharon Dodua Otoo and historian Manuela Bauche is particularly important as it brings together memory politics, the Holocaust memory in Germany, and Black German perspectives, see Manuela

"ent-innern": Celia Parbey and Don Pablo Mulemba. In his joint podcast project entitled *Fascho oder Punk*/ *Springerstiefel* with Hendrik Bolz, Mulemba thinks through the 1990s, the so-called "Baseballschläger-Jahre" from his Black eastern German vantage point. Mulemba, son of a "guest-worker" from Angola and a white eastern German mother, thus gives a face, stories, and names to the silenced history of racist violence that peaked after the German reunification and has gone unmentioned for too long.[41] Similarly, journalist Celia Parbey writes for the German weekly *Die Zeit*. In one of her most recent texts, she reckons with her own university education and African Studies as a discipline. Parbey suggests that African Studies in Germany

> failed to come to grips with the diaspora, that is with the movements and experiences of Black people in Germany and elsewhere. [. . .] The history of the continent and today's present for Black people on the globe are entangled. Here too colonialism continues to have an effect. Colonialism is the origin of anti-Black racism. However, in German African Studies these continuities are ignored.[42]

Mulemba and Parbey's are but two of the manifold counter-narratives of Black experience and achievement in Germany that Black writers, artists, and activists have always produced against all odds, and much of it is still disregarded or at least marginalized in Africanist circles.

Such continuous marginalization of Black German voices in African Studies, as observed by Lynda Chinenye Iroulo and Juliana Tappe Ortiz is an outcome of the coloniality of German African Studies. We join them in arguing that this has been manifested in concrete practices of research, fieldwork and publishing,

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Bauche and Sharon Dodua Otoo, eds., "Geschichte schreiben," *Neue Rundschau* 123 (Frankfurt: Fischer, 2018).

41 Podcast, Don Pablo Mulemba and Hendrik Bolz, *Springerstiefel – Fascho oder Punk,* and the second season *Springerstiefel – Die 90er sind zurück.*

42 Translation by Stephanie Lämmert [Die Disziplin hat es in Deutschland versäumt, sich mit der Diaspora auseinanderzusetzen, also mit den Bewegungen und Erfahrungen Schwarzer Menschen in Deutschland und anderswo. Dabei ist der Blick auf Schwarze Menschen weltweit geprägt durch das rassistische Bild, das Weiße von Afrika haben. Die Geschichte des Kontinents und die Gegenwart Schwarzer Menschen weltweit sind miteinander verwoben. Auch hier wirkt der Kolonialismus fort. Er ist der Ursprung von anti-Schwarzem Rassismus. Aber in den Afrikawissenschaften hierzulande spielen diese Kontinuitäten keine Rolle], Celia Parbey, "Eurozentrismus: Auch Verlierer schreiben Geschichte," *Zeit Online*, June 26, 2024, accessed August 27, 2024, https://www.zeit.de/zett/2024-06/eurozentrismus-rassismus-alltag-afrikanischer-kontinent-weltbild.

teaching, and academic hiring policies.[43] Just like the question of objectivity excluded African American intellectuals and the knowledge they produced from the plane of what constitutes a legitimate knowledge within African Studies, the Africanist enterprise in Germany is trapped by the same, as a result of which it refuses room to other forms of generating archives and making knowledges. Many scholars have pointed out that objectivity as a tool to exclude is a legacy of developments within African Studies in the 1960s. For instance, one of the pioneers in oral history in Africa, Jan Vansina, describes three different types of scholars who took up the endeavor of writing the history of Africa in the early days: classic Africanists, "political" African American scholars, and "activist scholars" based in African institutions. The first group, classic Africanists, he writes, was "committed to strive for 'objective' scientific detachment, a position which was the accepted hallmark of professionalization at the time."[44] This position seems to have been the rule for decades. Vansina contrasts their approach to that of "political" African American scholars and "activist" scholars based at African universities. Unlike the Anglo-American scholarly tradition, in particular, that has begun to promote scholar-activism and consider scholarship worthwhile that is useful to the political struggles of the marginalized, "the German humanities uphold the ideal of scholarship as objective, and detached, which is rooted in German Idealism."[45] That is why thinking about the notion of objectivity and the role it was made to serve in the exclusion of non-white scholars is also a critical lens for an analysis of African Studies in Germany.

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Rüdiger Seesemann, and Christine Vogt-William make similar points where they take issue with the "continued lack of involvement of Africans in African Studies" in Germany, "be it in academic positions, in the curriculum, or in the bibliographies of the articles and books published by white scholars." They observe how the objectivity question serves to exclude certain scholars, such as Black diaspora scholars in Germany. Advocating for a decolonial approach, they demand "more robust epistemological and practical interventions."[46] Similarly, students of African Studies frequently complain about

43 Lynda C. Iroulo and Juliana Tappe Ortiz, "Dear German Academia: What is Your Role in African Knowledge Production?" *Africa Spectrum* 57 (2022): 72–82, https://doi.org/10.1177/00020397221085982.

44 Jan Vansina, *Living with Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1994), 118.

45 Mahmoud Arghavan, Nicole Hirschfelder, and Katharina Motyl, introduction to *Who Can Speak and Who is Heard/Hurt: Facing Problems of Race, Racism and Ethnic Diversity in the Humanities in Germany,* eds. Mahmoud Arghavan et al. (Bielefeld: transcript, 2019), 13.

46 Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Rüdiger Seesemann, and Christine Vogt-William, "African Studies in Distress: German Scholarship on Africa and the Neglected Challenge of Decoloniality," *Africa Spectrum* 57 (2022): 86, 88–90, 94, https://doi.org/10.1177/00020397221080179.

racism and lingering coloniality in teaching materials and the classroom, as the open letter by the Black Student Union at Berlin's African Studies department at Humboldt University from March 2022 indicates.[47] Letting go of the illusion of scholarly neutrality and instead encouraging a praxis of reflexivity throws into relief the role white privilege and whiteness as structure play in German academia. However, as we have pointed out, the question of reflexivity and positionality in Germany is being discussed only very slowly and with reluctance. In the next section, we will explore what might lie behind this delay and unwillingness. To do so, we focus on how privileging the local at the expense of global entanglements in African Studies contributes to the reluctance.

The Fetishization of the Local and its Impact on how we do African Studies

We were both trained within African Studies in Germany as students who were committed to searching for unique local stories that were different from whatever else we thought we knew. In focusing on the local, and the micro, we shied away from comparisons and theorizations outside of the continent (and often even within). This not only contributed to a fair amount of "(self) othering," but it also confined our thinking about larger entanglements within global power constellations. As a result, in our intellectual formation, there was little room for thinking about diaspora histories, Black experience, and Black internationalism. We believe that this disconnect between the diaspora question and "real" African Studies, that is ingrained in the field, is also responsible for the long silencing of the question of race, as well as the study of the Black diasporas within African Studies in Germany. The historical origins of modern African Studies (after the decades of brute racist colonial historiography), located as it is in the micro, found global entanglement and connections irrelevant. In Germany, the global turn and the emergence of global histories in the past two decades have not reversed this trend, since they are mostly written from Eurocentric viewpoints. Rather, the focus was on select African locales as tokens and to the neglect of larger patterns of Black experience in the world.

Looking back to the 1960s, the decade in which formal decolonization of much of Africa and a wave of academic "decolonization" synergized, helps to un-

47 BSU HU Berlin, "Offener Beschwerdebrief," accessed May 28, 2024, https://bsuhu.wordpress.com/2021/07/16/offener-beschwerdebrief/.

derstand these still lingering tropes in discussions around decolonization of African Studies. The 1960s are often described as the decade of the birth of African History and African Studies as an independent academic discipline that displaced an earlier tradition of colonial-racist historiography. In looking back, several of the self-proclaimed "founding fathers" of African history describe the "golden Sixties" as an exciting era that allowed for individual self-fulfillment and the making of a career. For example, Jan Vansina, whose work on oral tradition and oral history is a canonical reference for graduate students in African history around the globe, writes that "to be a historian of Africa in the 1960s was an exciting intellectual adventure. New 'discoveries' occurred all the time."[48] He goes on to state that in the 1960s, historians of Africa "could hope to contribute more to the advancement of knowledge than they could ever aspire to achieve in older, more established fields."[49] Indeed it was in the 1960s that the field experienced phenomenal growth in the US, Europe, and Africa. Being a historian of Africa was an "adventure." A new "frontier" opened, both in terms of location of workplace and locus of knowledge production. Those adventurous enough to be part of it stood the chance to discover a gem, a gem on which they could build an academic career. At the same time, this was not risky, but rather a financially rewarding enterprise. It should be obvious that it did not require British historians to "discover" the history of Africa in the second half of the twentieth century. Those who had lived it and their descendants to whom these histories had been passed down knew their history. Regardless, the discovery trope dominated and sometimes still dominates African History and African Studies. It dates to the explorers of the nineteenth century who "discovered" landscapes and regions at the advent of partition. The trope of discovering a gem and the frontier is also closely linked to the extractivist logic of colonialism and the system of the Triangular Trade and enslavement. No wonder that early generations of British Africanists harshly criticized some of the first African-authored critiques of the Africanist enterprise. For example, Arnold Temu and Bonaventure Swai received a great deal of inappropriate, harsh, and paternalistic criticism. Their book *Historians and Africanist History: A Critique* (1981) was written in the tradition of materialist history and took issue with the "nationalist" historiography of the 1950s-1970s. In a brutal review, Robin Law alleged that "poverty of thought" characterized the book. He suggested that Temu and Swai were ignorant about "what they [we]re attacking,"

48 Vansina, *Living with Africa*, 111.
49 Vansina, *Living with Africa*, 112.

and "they have not fully understood what they [we]re advocating."[50] Another reviewer, Christopher Saunders, stumbled over the "many limitations of Temu and Swai's disappointing polemic." He also noted that "the inadequacy of their critique matches the poverty of present historical scholarship in that region of the continent."[51] The way Temu and Swai's work was attacked brutally (or simply ignored, as was the case with Jaques Depelchin's *Silences in African History*)[52] demonstrates the existing power imbalance that still lingers in academia today. It lays bare the tacit and unspoken rules that structured interactions between those who had the power to set the agenda within the field and those who dared to challenge them. It also speaks to an anxiety about lost glory and relevance in an academic field.

While white Africanists described the 1960s as years of "discovery," the Benin philosopher Paulin Hountondji countered this by arguing that much of Africanist knowledge production works according to the logics of extractivism. Such scholarship sees Africa as a "theoretical vacuum" that derives from the way research data are being "extroverted" from the continent and processed elsewhere.[53] The continent merely functions as a large repository of empirical data. The work of conceptualizing, theorizing, and publishing is done outside and is led by scholars from the global North, while African scholars are "bound to remain permanent scientific tourists" or "learned informants for western science."[54] Hountondji makes clear that the politics of knowledge production are baked into the capitalist economy. In that sense, scientific extraversion and scientific dependence are ultimately political issues, and "Africanism itself, as a practice and as an ideology, is an invention of the West."[55]

This extractivist logic gives rise to a robust fetishization of the local or the micro among Africanists because it is the local that is considered unique and that

50 Robin Law, Review of *Historians and Africanist History: A Critique. Post-Colonial Historiography Examined,* by Arnold Temu and Bonventure Swai, *The Journal of African History* 24 (1983): 427. http://www.jstor.org/stable/181943.

51 Christopher Saunders, "The History of African History," *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 5 (1986): 187, 189, https://doi.org/10.1080/02589008608729460.

52 Jaques Depelchin, *Silences in African History: Between the Syndromes of Discovery and Abolition* (Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota Publishers, 2005).

53 Paulin J. Hountondji, "Scientific Dependence in Africa Today," *Research in African Literatures* 21 (1990): 5–15. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3819631. Hountodji's argument can easily be extended to discussions about citation praxis of Black women, see Christen A. Smith, E. L. Williams, I. A. Wadud and W. N. L. Pirtle, "Cite Black Women: A Critical Praxis (A Statement)," *Feminist Anthropology* 2 (2021): 10–17. https://doi.org/10.1002/fea2.12040

54 Hountondji, "Scientific Dependence," 10, 12.

55 Hountondji, "Scientific Dependence," 12.

needs to be extracted. It has to do with the self-understanding of a structurally white scholarship that attempts to unearth the "real" African agency[56] – contrary to much of the research on diaspora histories conducted at traditionally Black institutions where scholars were more interested in comparisons and shared experiences across geographies.[57] It is worth noting that this long search for African agency and African initiative was a response to centuries of imperialist and colonialist scholarship that portrayed Africans as passive and static subjects without a history.[58] The African agency/African voices debate that so occupied area studies scholars from the 1960s to the 1980s and up until now, might have been a well-meaning debate, but it was inward-looking and paternalistic. Its outcome was that many scholars fetishized the local as if historical developments on the African continent could never serve as a model for global theorizing and as if the history of Africa could not even be in a dialogical relationship with historical developments elsewhere on the globe. Local specificities were celebrated so much so that in Frederik Cooper's words "comparison [was] disliked for getting away from the precise meanings of local languages," and "theory was likely to be dismissed as being 'European.'" At the same time, Cooper and others state that oral history was a fetish as much as a method.[59] The self-congratulatory romanticism that sticks to the "roaring Sixties" narrative of discovering African agency and history still lingers in German African Studies and informs the divide between African Studies and research on Black Germany.[60] Marius Kothor's 2019 reflections strike a chord with our understanding of Germany's African Studies programs of our

56 Lynn M. Thomas, "Historicising Agency," *Gender & History* 28 (2016): 324–339, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12210.

57 Allman and Opong, "Separate Worlds."

58 Faheem Hemboum fleshes out this invented a-historicity in his contribution in this volume.

59 Frederick Cooper, "Africa's Pasts and Africa's Historians," *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 34 (2000): 315, doi:10.1080/00083968.2000.10751195.

60 To be fair, there were also other strands of research that developed after 1969 in the ASA-US. Their proponents took a keen interest in the politics of liberation. Martin Klein for instance writes that "in retrospect the appeal of Africa to myself and many of my generation of Africanists was very much the excitement of watching the destruction of an oppressive colonial order and being involved in the creation of a new one," see Vansina, *Living with Africa*, 111. Similarly, Jean Allman has described the appeal of researching African history during an interview at the ASWAD conference in Accra in 2023 like this: "It's been about liberation and the political imagination, the political hope that a better world was possible and that this was going to come from Africa, begin on the continent. The politics of liberation will make the world a better place, that's what got me in!" see Interview with Jean Allman by Darius Adu Bright and Adey-Fana Tefera, ASWAD Conference in Accra, Ghana, August 3, 2023.

times. What she writes about the US American context of African Studies resonates with students in Germany. Kothor writes

> it is not uncommon to walk into a lecture or discussion on an aspect of African history, culture, or politics and find the room absent of Black scholars, African or otherwise. Consequently, many undergraduate students go through their entire college career believing that knowledge about Africa does not come from Africans. At the graduate level, many African students often report being made to feel that their experiences do not constitute valid sources of knowledge. Overall, the marginalization of Africans within African Studies supports the notion that Africans can be informants and subjects of study but never theorists of their own cultures, analysts of their own politics, or historians of their own pasts.[61]

The African as a native informant, not as a theorist, is directly linked to the question of objectivity that we have raised above. Because Africans are insiders, and African Americans compromised due to their allegiance to the continent, the scientific value of their theorization is always under scrutiny. These are observations that we have made over the years as both students and researchers within African Studies in Germany and based on which we invited students and junior researchers to share their reflections in anticipation of joining others who have started pushing against this technology of silencing. From this, the current volume was born.

Teaching has always been a passion, privilege, and pleasure for both of us. In an attempt to enable junior scholars and student voices be heard, this collection brings to the fore the ideas of students of African Studies, both under- and postgraduate, who study in German institutions or did so at the time they were writing their contributions. Oftentimes, students are not expected to think for themselves but to follow the concepts and thoughts of a prescribed canon. In contrast to such a view, we want to give a stage to the fresh thinking that our contributors bring to bear as they are grappling with the disconnect between diaspora histories and African Studies. It is equally important to us that this volume features the work of persons who are multifaceted and active beyond being junior scholars in African Studies. Their biographies are deeply interwoven with their intellectual practice and what they present here cannot be complete unless we recognize the situatedness of their reflections its embodiment in the personal. Aside from being a PhD researcher at the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence at the University of Bayreuth, Samah Khalaf Allah is a feminist and human rights activ-

61 Marius Kothor, "Race and the Politics of Knowledge Production in African Studies," *Black Perspectives Blog,* April 8, 2019, https://www.aaihs.org/race-and-the-politics-of-knowledge-production-in-african-studies/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=race-and-the-politics-of-knowledge-production-in-african-studies.

ist. Asma Ben Hadj Hassen, also a PhD researcher at Bayreuth, has worked on several projects with migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean region. She is also interested in storytelling and novel writing. Faheem Hemboum works as a trainee at one of Berlin's largest art institutions, Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW). Taariqa-Rahamat Adepeju Ilupeju, today lecturer at the University of Ibadan, has worked on the documents taken away from Nigeria during the colonial period which are known as the migrated archives. Anna Frehiwot Maconi is interested in diaspora identities both as a researcher and beyond academia. Laetitia Caumes is an ecofeminist activist. Jaqueline Steinberger writes poetry, paints abstract art, and works in a youth environmental organization. Samir Ammour is interested in curating and filmmaking, global knowledge production and history of science. Olive J. Casey is involved in community organizing in and outside of academia. Sadia Marie Ouro-Gbele is a journalist and writer. Adey-Fana Tefera and Darius Adu Bright have chosen an entirely different format and captured their contribution in a video documentary. This collection thus sits at the crossroads of academia, art, and activism honoring embodied experiences.

Organization of the Volume

The collection is divided into four sections. The first section opens with Faheem Hemboum's article in which he discusses the relationship between African and Black Studies. He argues that the roots of African Studies are an Afro-diasporic enterprise that dates back to the seventeenth century and thrived in, but most importantly also outside of, universities, for example in schools and at the workplace. At the same time Hemboum laments the silence on Black German histories within classic African Studies in Germany. Samah Khalaf Allah and Asma Ben Hadj Hassen's as well as Taariqa-Rahamat Adepeju Ilupeju's contributions look at African Studies from different geographic and epistemological locations. Khalaf Allah and Ben Hadj Hassen write as North Africans based in Germany, thinking through the dichotomy of racialized conceptualizations of Africa South of the Sahara and North Africa, and Ilupeju uses her specific Yoruba Nigerian lens to make sense of her semester abroad in an African Studies course in Berlin, Germany, while also formulating her unease with the hegemony of the Black American experience that is too often presented as global. Darius Adu Bright and Adey-Fana Tefera present a documentary film that is based on interviews collected at two conferences, the biannual meeting of the African Studies Association Africa (ASAA) held in Lubumbashi in 2023 and the ASWAD (Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora) conference that took place in Accra in 2023. In

it, Bright and Tefera ask the question of what African Studies means in terms of epistemology for African (and Africanist) scholars based in various geographic locations. All contributions in the first section develop understandings of what African Studies can mean if conceptualized from different geographical spaces and epistemic locations.

In the second section, Samir Ammour and Laetitia Caumes' texts both discuss how universalisms have been used by Black writers and writers of color. Ammour discusses the work of Senegalese social scientist and women's human rights activist Fatou Sow, her understanding of Black thought and its link to universalism (and intersectionality) from a West African viewpoint. Highlighting Fatou Sow's role in destabilizing mainstream academic frameworks, Ammour demonstrates that Fatou Sow has always drawn on intersectional approaches at a time before this became fashionable. Caumes thinks through universalism as she looks at discussions on animalization of humans as a tool of oppression with a particular focus on French discourse. Through gender, animal, and decolonial studies, Caumes examines the unequal distribution of empathy and mourning.

Jaqueline Steinberger and Olive J. Casey's contributions in the third section center on the politics of anti-Blackness in German academia and the limits of the archives in writing Black German histories. Casey takes up one of the major questions of Black Studies, the archive question, with a specific focus on the (absences of) Black German archives. As she shows the usefulness of Saidiya Hartman's concept of critical fabulation for Black German histories, Casey builds on conceptualizations of the archive from Foucault to Stuart Hall. They argue that speculative-based narratives like critical fabulation can honor the existing tradition in Black German Studies that prioritizes self-narration and refuses to write histories of Black Germans as an addition to the white German canon. Steinberger brings up two recent incidents that took place in German academia, the defamation of Prof. Dr. Maisha Auma, and white scholars' attempt to create a Black Studies unit at the University of Bremen. By studying the two incidents through the lens of anti-Black politics, Steinberger demonstrates the issue of institutional racism at work in German academia and beyond.

The final section of the volume ends with both personal and conceptual texts by Sadia Marie Ouro-Gbele and Anna Frehiwot Maconi. In her contribution, Ouro-Gbele presents a unique rendering of the concept of *Blackademia*. The concept helps shed light on the various experiences of Black student communities and the violence that comes with being forced into a one-size-fits-all image of Black German women that centers on the dichotomy of being hyper-visible and invisible at the same time. Contrary to Taiye Selasi's *Afropolitanism*, Ouro-Gbele privileges the perspectives of non-elite and less privileged Afro-diasporic students in Germany. Maconi reflects on the meaning of Black, Afro-diasporic cultural

identities by focusing on Ethio-European cultural identity through an analysis of her own participatory installation titled 'What do I see?'. Focusing on the emotions of her Afro-diasporic audience in Berlin, Maconi maps some of the affective landscapes that shape diaspora identity formation.

Similar to the writer, artist, educator, and scholar S. A. Smythe, the contributors to our collection think of "reading as an extension of the act of creation."[62] In the sense that reading can be understood as an act of creation, the praxis of reading is also the assemblage of knowledges that can disturb an existing canon or an archive if you will. The archive that this collection wants to privilege has been there for a long time, but it has often been ignored or silenced. The contributions insist that this archive needs to be engaged. Like Smythe, who chooses to privilege Black and queer voices in a humanities literature still structured by white knowledge, and who questions dichotomies of race and gender, this volume also aims at decentering the knowledges we rely on when we write about Africa from Germany.

62 S. A. Smythe, "Black Girlhood Remains," in *The Global History of Black Girlhood,* eds. Corinne T. Field and LaKisha Michell Simmons (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2022), 106.

Part I: **African Studies from Different Geographic and Epistemic Locations**

Faheem Hemboum

Chapter 1
The Black Roots of African Studies

> Fugitivity—and fugitive pedagogy in particular—is the metanarrative of black educational history.[1]

The insurmountable tendency to separate African and Black Studies in the halls of Western academia, both supposedly distinct, yet overlapping fields of studies—or disciplines, depending on one's understanding of such—as well as the ontological partition of Africa and its separation from North Africa and especially ancient Egypt, have been noted on many occasions.[2] Mainstream scholarship dominated by a Eurocentric perspective views them as originating from vastly different geographies, historical contexts, as well as material and political circumstances. In this paper, I engage literature that shows how Black Studies and African Studies developed on similar pathways and were initially much closer to each other than they are today. Based on a close reading of Jarvis R. Givens's *Fugitive Pedagogy* (2021), I aim to show that the study and transmission of African history and culture were at the center of Black educational practices in the United States early in the 20th century. While often forced to exhibit acts of superficial adherence to the dominant pedagogical paradigm that white supremacy demanded, Black teachers were engaging in subversive pedagogical acts below the surface. Crucially, their personal and professional example shaped generations of Black students, whose interest in the study of Black life had a strong institutional framework, even outside of mainstream institutions. Black American scholars drew comparisons of the desolate state of Black life in the USA, the Caribbean, and on the African continent. Awareness thereof, awareness of their international scholarly and activist connections, as well as scholarship on African history and its importance for an understanding of global Blackness is largely absent in German knowledge production on Africa. An important contribution of Givens's work is that it urges us to acknowledge all the groundbreaking work done decades before the first Black Studies courses were officially established at institu-

1 Jarvis R. Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching* (Cambridge/London: Harvard University Press, 2021), 11.

2 Walter Rodney, "African History in the Service of the Black Liberation," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 5 (2001): 71; Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "Reckoning with the Pasts and Reimagining the Futures of African Studies for the 21st Century," (Social Science Research Council: February 2019), 9–10.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111446721-002

tions of higher learning. By engaging the pedagogical methodology embedded in Carter G. Woodson's own work, as well as in the work and knowledge production done by his Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH), Givens provides insight into an early stage of Black Studies; largely self-organized, outside of mainstream institutions, and conscious of the need to build links with Africa. Further, Givens's study details the development of extensive Black internationalist networks driven by scholars and educators. In a conversation that the *American Historical Review* facilitated, Tejasvi Nagaraja noted the debt owed to intellectuals and political movements that shaped the discourses and theoretical frameworks contemporary Black scholars are moving in, building on, and working to expand.[3] The recording and examining of local Black histories and Black presences placed against all odds served as a means to create communities organized around the production and dissemination of knowledge, which corresponded with study and research about African history and the global legacy of the Black diaspora. This is the tradition Paul Tiyambe Zeleza calls "Afro-American African Studies."[4] As Saidiya Hartmann explains,

> The intention here isn't anything as miraculous as recovering the lives of the enslaved or redeeming the dead, but rather laboring to paint as full a picture of the lives of the captives as possible. This double gesture can be described as straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and, at the same time, enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration.[5]

Although knowledge production that is questioning the fundamental tenets of the United States has played an important role, coming to terms with the colonial archives never has been an exclusively Afro-American, but rather Afro-diasporic endeavor. Hakim Adi mentions African abolitionist circles throughout North America, the Caribbean, and Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries, that sought a positive identification with their African identity, and early on gave the sense of a Pan-African belonging a higher value than national or ethnic heritage. He also emphasizes the role the Haitian Revolution and other slave uprisings have played a part in fostering a common Pan-African identity.[6] As Godwin Murunga and Robin D. G. Kelley note, scholars in the tradition of Carter G. Woodson, W. E. B. DuBois, and later Chancellor Williams, appreciated the fundamental con-

3 Monique Bedasse et al., "*AHR Conversation*: Black Internationalism," *The American Historical Review* 125 (2020): 1711, doi:10.1093/ahr/rhaa513.

4 Zeleza, "Reckoning," 7.

5 Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 12 (2008): 11.

6 Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism: A History* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 7–9.

nection between African and African American history, and produced comprehensive analyses to advance Black people. This global perspective on Blackness and the attempt to understand it in its full breadth was what made Black Studies international and comparative right from its beginning.[7] Since this tradition had to come to terms with the epistemological neglect of African history from its beginning, it is necessary to briefly outline how its intellectual counterpart is composed.

Precursors of what Zeleza terms "Euro-American-African Studies,"[8] the study of the cultures, languages, histories, and thoughts of Africans, can be found in the activities of missionaries, traders, and colonial administrators—studying languages in order to translate and teach the Bible, mapping mountains, trees, and rivers in order to extract, transport and sell goods of value at the lowest cost, collecting gods and sacred objects, and establishing the a-historicity, homogeneity, and mundane inhumanity of the people inhabiting this incomparably rich and diverse continent. Using an array of what are today immensely specialized disciplines, from Art History and Anthropology to Egyptology, History, and Sociology, Euro-American scholarship cemented the image of "peoples without history," as Eric R. Wolf pointedly explains. This a-historicity, and what colonial scholars found to be the lack of an ability for either human or societal development, is of course the outcome of historical processes and societal dynamics. Wolf connects the social sciences and humanities with colonization and the ongoing exploitation of the formerly colonized. He shows that imperialism established the framework in which anthropology operated to create groups of supposedly stagnant people outside of history, ignorant of interactions and entanglements that predated and traversed colonialism.[9]

By the same token, Hegelian dialectics—albeit Hegel's statements purporting to the contrary—inserts the African continent at the center of world history, notwithstanding all efforts to relegate it to its margins.[10] Susan Buck-Morss even goes as far as arguing that Hegel and other important philosophers were not only well-

7 Robin D. G. Kelley, "'But a Local Phase of a World Problem': Black History's Global Vision, 1883–1950," *The Journal of American History* 86 (1999): 1045–1046; Godwin R. Murunga, "Thoughts on Intellectual and Institutional Links Between African and Black Studies," *Africa Development* 33 (2008): 47.

8 Zeleza, "Reckoning," 7.

9 Eric R. Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Berkeley/London: University of California Press, 2010), 18.

10 Babacar Camara, "The Falsity of Hegel's Theses on Africa," *Journal of Black Studies* 36 (2005): 82–96; Charles C. Verharen, "'The New World and the Dreams to Which It May Give Rise': An African and American Response To Hegel's Challenge," *Journal of Black Studies* 27 (1997): 456–493.

informed about the proceedings of the Haitian Revolution, but also took inspiration from it.[11]

As the heightened activity of national liberation movements and changing geopolitical dynamics eventually ushered in the era of African independence, ideas of how African history was to be written and taught underwent rigorous scrutiny. Radical scholars of the humanities and social sciences, African and European, devised of ways to counter hegemonic narratives. One of their main goals was to assert African agency as well as historical achievements, contributions in their own right, and in the greater context of humanity. Major schools of African historiography developed on the continent at the universities of Dakar, Ibadan, Makerere, and Dar es Salaam, with scholars of both immense national as well as international reputation. Nationalist histories were written, assessed, questioned, and reconfigured, encompassing intense debates about the nature of the state, class formation, imperialism, development, and culture. Esperanza Brizuela-Garcia writes that historians saw themselves as contributing to development and decolonization when participating in the process to rebuild African nations from the ground up.[12] Issa Shivji, back then a student engaged in political activism at the University of Dar es Salaam, recounts that a guiding principle was the unity and indivisibility of knowledge. Students saw themselves as agents within and of theories that aimed to explain society in depth and in all its dimensions. Students aimed to support hypotheses and theories with fieldwork, gathering of data, and other forms of research, which were always debated in the classroom.[13] Important monographs that capture the political spirit of this period are A. M. Babu's *African Socialism or Socialist Africa?* and *How Europe underdeveloped Africa* by Walter Rodney. Methodological debates made their way through volumes such as *The Debate*, edited by Yashpal Tandon and *Emerging Themes of African History*, edited by Terence O. Ranger, which included less articles by African scholars, but nonetheless represented important debates and currents in the field of African history.[14] Importantly, scholars and student-activists engaged in continuous de-

11 Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

12 Esperanza Brizuela-García, "The History of Africanization and the Africanization of History," *History in Africa* 33 (2006): 89.

13 Issa G. Shivji, "The Life & Times of Babu: The Age of Liberation & Revolution," *Review of African Political Economy* 30 (2003): 112–113.

14 Abdulrahman Mohamed Babu, *African Socialism or Socialist Africa?* (London: Zed Press, 1981); Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Verso, 2018); T. O. Ranger, ed., *Emerging Themes of African History. Proceedings of the International Congress of African Historians Held at University College* (London: Heinemann, 1968); Yashpal Tandon, ed., *The Debate* (Dar es Salaam: Tanzania Pub. House, 1982).

bates with members of liberation movements and nationalist politicians. When the International Congress of African Historians took place in 1965, the history department of the University of Dar es Salaam was home to leading scholarship in the field of African history, as Brizuela-García recounts.[15]

Shivji further notes the absence of hierarchies in knowledge production. In the journal *Cheche*—meaning "spark" in Swahili, reminiscent of Lenin's *Iskra*—published by the United Students African Revolutionary Front, students and professors would publish articles next to each other. Every article was subject of the same kind of criticism. For instance, two students close to graduation were handed Walter Rodney's book manuscript.[16]

Symbolic examples like this highlight and emphasize the scholarly rigor as well as the egalitarian political scope of activism on the campus, and prompt to consider Monique Bedasse's note that Dar es Salaam should be seen as a legitimate site of Black internationalist knowledge production from a local context within a global framework. Students organizing at the University of Dar es Salaam situated themselves within the broader struggle for Black Power, and noted the actions taken by students in the United States at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and other universities.[17] The reverberations of this time of class struggles and revolutions saw a heightened global awareness of racial and national oppression, culminating in political ruptures that established Black Power as a viable alternative to the Civil Rights movement, which was often perceived to have a more accommodationist outlook. Activists of the Black Power movement considered armed resistance against the United States, within which many people of African descent understood themselves to constitute an internal colony, an oppressed and colonized nation that longed for sovereignty. Successes of political and legal struggles against Jim Crow segregation led to more and more enrollment of Black students in facilities of mainstream education, as well as to demands that HBCUs reflect the needs of Black popular and not elite education, which meant an education centered on the study and research of African and Black history and the taking of a political stance against racial exclusion, instead of an education built on the European classics, Latin and Greek. While Civil Rights and Black Power activists were confronted by and confronting police and white supremacists over demands for access to housing, health, education, and jobs, and Black workers were engaged in unionizing efforts, strikes, and attempts to

15 Esperanza Brizuela-Garcia, "The International Congress of African Historians in Dar Es Salaam," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of African History* (Oxford University Press, 2022), https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277734.013.1041.

16 Shivji, "The Life & Times of Babu," 110.

17 Bedasse et al., "*AHR Conversation*," 1715–1716.

take over factories, Black students, who were part and parcel of both of these movements and conscious of their working class background, took to armed occupations of university buildings to assert their demands for a change in educational policies.[18]

But neither the calls for the decolonization and Africanization of African Studies, nor the demand for Black Studies were entirely new. In essence, certain strands of what is today associated with these disciplines already had been practiced much earlier, a prominent example of which is Anton Wilhelm Amo's dissertation, examining the legal state and situation of Black people in Europe. The eminent African philosopher Paulin J. Hountondji encountered Amo first through *Consciencism* by Kwame Nkrumah, first published in 1964. Hountondji subsequently published an article about him in 1970, by far preceding an honest and thorough discussion as well as public awareness of Amo's legacy in Germany, as well as situating him within African philosophy.[19] Zeleza further located the initial engagement of African thinkers to counter Eurocentric epistemologies in the 15th century with the European encounter and its colonial repercussions.[20] Cheikh Thiam and Mjiba Frehiwot demonstrated the precedence of 17th-century Pan-Africanist thought to later systemic theorizations. They aimed to unsettle the epistemological foundations of European modernity and problematized simplified understandings of Africa. They also stressed the important place knowledge production takes in the struggle for liberation and posit that Pan-Africanism must be read as "an epistemic strand, a method, and a counter-discourse of Modernity."[21] This closely aligns with the concept of fugitive pedagogy outlined by Givens, in that the content that is being taught also informs the way in which it is being taught and transmitted. Black and African Studies, even when free of Eurocentric bias, are hence better understood by describing them as *decolonizing* instead of decolonized. Decolonization can in no way be viewed as finite, but as a process which is well alive intellectually, ongoing in its endeavor to systematically refute Eurocentric claims and re-enact African agency and Africa's position in

18 Abdul Alkalimat, *The History of Black Studies* (Pluto Press London, 2021), 125–126, 162–171; Reginald Major, *A Panther Is a Black Cat* (New York: W. Morrow, 1971).

19 Anton Wilhelm Amo, Stephen Menn, and Justin E. H Smith, *Anton Wilhelm Amo's Philosophical Dissertations on Mind and Body* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); Paulin J. Hountondji, "From the Faculty of Sensing – Thinking With, Through, and by Anton Wilhelm Amo: Re-Africanizing Anton Wilhelm Amo," *Mousse Magazine*, September 22, 2021, https://www.moussemagazine.it/publishing/from-the-faculty-of-sensing-thinking-with-through-and-by-anton-wilhelm-amo-re-africanizing-anton-wilhelm-amo.

20 Zeleza, "Reckoning," 18.

21 Cheikh Thiam and Mjiba Frehiwot, "On Pan-Africanism: Epistemic Freedom, Knowledge Production and Decolonizing Politics," *Global Africa* 3 (2023): 60–61.

world history. Scholars and teachers like Carter G. Woodson, W. E. B. DuBois, and the manifold networks they built have been instrumental in handing Black people conceptual tools for understanding and acting on their supposedly inevitable destiny. If, as Fred Moten and Stefano Harney argue, "critical education only attempts to perfect professional education,"[22] then African and Black Studies must go beyond a mere editing of or addition to the official curriculum. The task is, essentially, to produce knowledge that can neither be co-opted nor commodified. Since scholarship centered around issues of liberal democracy, modernization, and development towards the ideal model of a Western nation-state, tends to perpetuate dependence and underdevelopment, it is necessary to refuse the hegemonic paradigm.[23] As Jarvis R. Givens writes: "The theft of one's mind [is] directly relational to, perhaps even a precondition for, the theft of one's body."[24]

If "the *history* of black counter-historical projects is one of failure, precisely because these accounts have never been able to install themselves as history," as Saidiya Hartman cautiously observes, this has dire consequences for Black and African Studies. Instead of gaining institutional ground or entering mainstream scholarship in a meaningful way, they "are insurgent, disruptive narratives that are marginalized and derailed before they ever gain a footing."[25] My main attempt is therefore to reassess the unfolding of Black Studies not as an academic discipline, but as a practice that was deemed necessary for survival, and to show how it in its scope, as well as in its pedagogy, spoke to the realities of Black people in a way that had a lasting impact on the outlook of generations. Doing so, I offer a close reading of Givens's study of Carter G. Woodson's work with Black teachers and educators as a historian. The study shows, how the search for alternative epistemologies and historiographic approaches to Black life and African history have been part and parcel of Black diasporic scholarship and crucial for an appreciation of a Black humanity, that distances itself from empire. Givens's historical narrative as well as the historiographical representations of its agents echo Saidiya Hartman's approach: pushing back against archival constraints. The legacy of this tradition in connection with current debates in African Studies makes a case in point for decolonization and the necessity of an epistemological shift that constitutes a break with Western paradigms. As Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni writes, African Studies needs to commit to the constitution of Africa as "a legiti-

22 Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (Wivenhoe/New York/Port Watson: Minor Compositions, 2013), 32.

23 Claude Ake, *Social Science as Imperialism: A Theory of Political Development* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1979), 127, 179.

24 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 12.

25 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 13.

mate epistemic centre and home of Africans as sovereign human beings."[26] It is a practice of fugitive pedagogy that preceded and informed what Fred Moten and Stefano Harney call the undercommons.[27] I argue that this practice is crucial to the task outlined by Zeleza: to dialectically engage the ancient "Afro-Christian, Afro-Islamic, and griot libraries" of African historiography to counter the colonial library.[28] In addition, scholars need to be aware of the Black diasporic fugitive libraries that keep resurfacing in the work of Zeleza, Alkalimat, Adi, and especially scholars like Saidiya Hartman[29] and Christina Sharpe.[30] Givens states that "Black people's political clarity meant they understood their teaching and learning to be perpetually taking place under persecution, even as they created learning experiences of joy and empowerment."[31] This holds true for diasporic practices at large. In addition to various slave uprisings of which the Haitian Revolution is a successful and well-known example, Africans in the diaspora have confronted the rationale behind enslavement and colonization by engaging in intellectual debate, refuting claims of white supremacy, and asserting their own humanity. Abolitionists like Olaudah Equiano and Ottobah Cugoano, who formed the organization Sons of Africa during the 1780s, to counteract British engagement in the slave trade, vocally criticized the idea of racial inferiority. In addition to Equiano dropping the name he had to bear while enslaved, and reclaiming his original name, his self-identification as African was one of the first innovations that Pan-Africanist thought established in the 18th century.[32] Only Equiano, a witness of the slave trade, "depicts the habitual violence of the slave ship without recourse to the language of romance," writes Hartman, as upon "entering the archive of slavery, the unimaginable assumes the guise of everyday practice."[33] In 1900, the first Pan-African conference gathered in London around figures like Trinidadian lawyer Henry Sylvester Williams. His *African Association*, founded in 1897, could boast of the support of none less than Black educational thinker Booker T. Washington. Furthermore, Williams met Haitian philosopher and diplomat Benito Sylvain in Paris on his way to London, a meeting that seemingly influenced the scope and outlook of

26 Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Intellectual Imperialism and Decolonisation in African Studies," *Third World Quarterly* (2023): 13, doi:10.1080/01436597.2023.2211520.

27 Harney and Moten, *The Undercommons*.

28 Zeleza, "Reckoning," 20.

29 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 1–14.

30 Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake On Blackness and Being* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2016); Christina Sharpe, *Ordinary Notes* (London: Daunt Books, 2023).

31 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 8.

32 Adi, *Pan-Africanism,* 7–9.

33 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 6.

the conference. From 1890 to 1897, Sylvain published a newspaper which focused on Haiti and Black people in general, and had established an association in Paris, similar to Williams's. His PhD dissertation dealt with colonial exploitation. Fellow Haitian diplomat and anthropologist, Anténor Firmin, had published a work on the equality of races in 1885, answering to Gobineau's racist pamphlet that sought to underpin African inferiority.[34] One should bear in mind that at the same time as the African continent was being partitioned, colonial officials remained oblivious and ignorant of the fact that Africans had and could govern themselves well. Another participant of the London conference was Black educator Anna Julia Cooper, a pioneering Black feminist scholar and compatriot of Carter G. Woodson.[35]

According to Abdul Alkalimat, protagonist, informed archivist, and historian of the Black Studies movement, Black Studies was an outcome and a part of Black intellectual history. Black Studies, in effect, constitutes the dialectical unity and interdependence of the theory and practice of Black liberation.[36] Within this dynamic, five ideological and political currents interacted and informed each other: "Pan-Africanism, nationalism, Black liberation theology, feminism, and socialism."[37] This took place against the backdrop of independent Black organizations and intellectual circles focusing on knowledge production. Alkalimat noted an array of "newspapers, magazines, and journals," as well as "bookstores, special library collections, museums, and cultural centers" that facilitated learning, debates, and cultural exchange around Black history, while archiving its ideas, thus laying the foundation for later intellectual endeavors. While Black intellectuals were going to lengths to make their history visible, Alkalimat remarked that "for the most part, mainstream scholars ignored these developments and omitted Black thought from their curriculum materials, even though many of the authors had been their classmates—even in the Ivy League."[38] He made the case that the study of the Black experience started to emerge from scholarship with a foundation in the educational institutions established after the American Civil War. Alkalimat especially emphasized the close relation scholars had to cultural practice outside of academia.[39] As Givens related, even while forbidden to acquire and practice, enslaved Black people in the United States sought and enacted ways to make use of the knowledge to read and write. As Black people gradually gained

34 Adi, *Pan-Africanism,* 19–22.
35 Adi, *Pan-Africanism,* 22; Alkalimat, *The History of Black Studies*, 43.
36 Alkalimat, *The History of Black Studies*, 11–12.
37 Alkalimat, *The History of Black Studies*, 12.
38 Alkalimat, *The History of Black Studies*, 11.
39 Alkalimat, *The History of Black Studies*, 13–14.

more degrees of freedom, teaching became essential to the community. Teachers were not only instrumental for the transmission, but also the production of knowledge and the shaping of an insurgent Black consciousness. As Audre Lorde cautioned her readers, "*the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house.* They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change."[40] Hence, Black educators felt the need to create their own tools, if they didn't want to continue working with those owned by their masters. Curricula and methodologies had been placed orderly on the classroom table, so everyone would see knowledge and course of study were appropriate for Black people. Teachers were to infuse an education that instilled into Black minds respect for the terms of order and acceptance of their social position, limiting their conception of the place in society to which they could aspire. Givens emphasized the fugitive character of Black education as a practice that was criminalized when pursued by slaves in the south, and suppressed and persecuted when attempted by free Blacks in the north.[41] His chosen reference of Black teacher Tessie McGee reading out of Woodson's book, holding it in her lap, ready to cover it and revert back to the approved outline on the table, enunciates the kind of subversion practiced. These "necessary revisions to the mandatory,"[42] exemplified the literal sense of fugitive pedagogy,[43] and provided an opportunity for African Americans to learn about their own history in relation to the society and the world they were living in. In this way McGee and her students "escaped this official curriculum"[44] in which they and their experiences would be denigrated. He further remarked that in scholarship on Black education, characteristic terms demonstrate the role played by hidden and subversive acts.[45] Givens's historical examination also illuminated how exposed Black teachers were to continuous surveillance which forced them "to conceal their pedagogical objectives in the presence of intrusive white power."[46] They often had to find an instrumental balance between respectability and subversion, and hence needed to project a respectable image for the public in order not to call attention to the subversive pedagogy they were really engaged in. After all, the students they taught would later fill the ranks of the Black liberation movement. In an act of subversion,

40 Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name; Sister Outsider; Undersong: Chosen Poems Old and New* (Quality Paperback Book Club, 1993), 112.
41 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 3.
42 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 1.
43 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 5.
44 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 6.
45 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 3.
46 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 7.

Black educators equipped them with a sense of self and a Black political consciousness and supported them far beyond the classroom.[47] Doing this, they were trying to give their students means of epistemological self-defense against what Hartman called the founding violence the archive of slavery is built upon.[48]

The Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, initiated by Woodson in 1915, quickly gained ground not only in the United States but all over the world. In 1928 it had about 1,600 members, of which 34 were international members, located not only in Africa and the Caribbean, but also counting single individuals as far away as China and Australia.[49] The African continent too had a prominent place in Woodson's intellectual work. In his writings, he criticized the education practiced in the US as well as colonial education. He built on the legacy of abolitionist scholars who "reconsidered the history of Africa, drew on narratives of the Haitian Revolution when teaching school children, or challenged those who argued that African descendant people were the children of Ham to justify claims of black inferiority."[50] In his conclusions, he situated the predicament of the racially disingenuous education of Black people in the context of global white colonial hegemony and connected the plight of Black Americans with the one suffered by Africans.[51] This critical approach was practically expressed in the mission of the first African-owned school in Freetown, Sierra Leone, established by Adelaide Casely-Hayford in 1923. Having grown up in England, with a degree in music from Stuttgart, Germany, she developed a close relationship to Orishatukeh Faduma, who, himself a Sierra Leonean, had been studying in the United States, and was later part of a group of emigrants who relocated to Sierra Leone, where they met.[52] Casely-Hayford argued for an education that would teach Africans to appreciate themselves, their country, and their culture.[53] Rina Okokwo further portrayed a meeting of Adelaide Casely-Hayford and W. E. B. DuBois. On occasion of his visit to Freetown in 1924, she "spoke at the reception accorded him by the Sierra Leone branch of the National Congress of British West Africa. Dressed in African attire, Hayford, who had met DuBois during her visit to the United States, spoke of the great work he had done for the race and of the difficulties he had encountered."[54]

47 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 9.
48 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 10.
49 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 35.
50 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 111.
51 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 112.
52 Rina Okonkwo, "Adelaide Casely Hayford: Cultural Nationalist and Feminist," *Phylon* 42 (1981): 43.
53 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 119.
54 Okonkwo, "Adelaide Casely Hayford," 47.

This meeting of these two instrumental figures illustrates the importance of the global networks built by Black educational activists.

Similarly, Woodson's compatriot, public school teacher Leila Amos Pendleton explored ancient African history and anticolonialism in *A Narrative of the Negro*, published already in 1912.[55] Woodson himself later also wrote extensively on African history and folklore, even making it accessible for elementary level schoolchildren.[56] These histories and narratives often took up resistance in the form of slave rebellions and maroon communities, thereby fostering a strong sense of agency and self-determination. One of the strengths of Woodson's association was also its connection to African scholars living and working in the United States. Dr. Akiki Nyabongo from Uganda, educated at Howard, Oxford, and Yale, engaged in offering Black Americans a more immediate knowledge of African history and reality through his work with students at a teachers' college and Black schools. Through his guidance, they had the opportunity to experience the practice of African languages.[57] Not least through Negro History Week, the precursor to Black History Month that Black educators made a cultural part of educational practices,[58] Black students were incentivized to immerse themselves in the history of their communities, thereby playing a crucial part in capturing biographies and knowledge otherwise lost and making them not only students, but also producers and disseminators of Black knowledge. Established in 1926, Negro History Week quickly made its way to various Black communities in the US, and it became an international event not even twenty years later.[59] Its main objective was to popularize the ASNLH and their work, putting pressure on authorities to include Black life in the curriculum.[60] Woodson's actions were thus aimed at "providing curricular alternatives that invited new pedagogical practices for teaching black students to assume their role within a larger plot for black freedom," thinking around and beyond the limits of the ideas dominating Black education otherwise.[61] Teachers really taught students how to independently pursue knowledge, and personify its liberating content.

> This went beyond listening to their teachers stealthily read stories from Woodson's textbooks or standing by in silent consent as their teachers employed subversive pedagogical tactics.

55 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 140.
56 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 148.
57 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 191–192.
58 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 171.
59 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 17.
60 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 196.
61 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 160.

> They watched the work of their teachers and the politics they embodied. Likewise, black youth were positioned as students inheriting a tradition of protest through education.[62]

Givens observes that the

> goal for Negro History Week, like Woodson's larger educational project, was to vindicate black humanity by rewriting the epistemological order in a way that negated antiblackness. It was about bringing into being new scripts of knowledge for black students to learn from, scripts with new visions of the world and black people's role within it.[63]

But Woodson's ambitions were far from just wanting to make Black life an ordinary part of mainstream politics. In the course of his work, he kept criticizing the lack of knowledge that many Black educators themselves had about their history, and he emphasized the need for thorough study in which he and his association would assist and provide adequate materials. Moreover, "Woodson's experience as an educator allowed him to speak from a place of self-narration, where he put his prior self in the same category subjected to his critique,"[64] remarking "that it took him twenty years after completing his doctorate at Harvard University to recover from his thorough initiation into the Western world's highest orders of knowledge."[65] Yet, Black scholars sought to transform the foundations of higher education and firmly anchor Black epistemologies within them.

Eventually, while the ASNLH helped popularize knowledge of African and African American history and culture from an elementary school age upwards, the first degree program in African Studies was established by linguist and anthropologist Mark Hanna Watkins at Fisk University in 1943. Watkins, who earned his PhD in 1933, belongs to those students deeply impacted by the educational practices of Woodson's association who took their knowledge and struggle with them. Next to the Black schools around which Black teachers organized their activities, stood the HBCUs. Many were founded in the South after the Civil war by Black churches and often jointly by the American Missionary Association and the Freedmen's Bureau, which was established by the US Congress in 1865. HBCUs were essentially institutions aimed at fostering a Black elite by means of an education modeled on European enlightenment and based on Latin and Greek, that would then assist in governing the Black masses, thus upholding the power structure.[66] Yet, as we have seen, Black educators made use of every possibility to question

62 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 220.
63 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 170.
64 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 175.
65 Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy*, 97.
66 Alkalimat, *The History of Black Studies*, 38–46.

and subvert the spaces in which they had to move. Hence, the sites of Black education—schools, colleges, and universities—became battlegrounds, where African descendant people sought to provide the correct materials that would speak to their lives and instill a sense of self in the minds of fellow Black people.

This soul-searching followed the same trajectory that Pan-Africanist reasoning had already evoked. Hence, Black Studies became the main drive and expression of African Studies, as students and scholars engaged in the research and writing of histories that centered Africa as a geographical and philosophical space through the lens of Blackness on a quest for liberation. Striving to "represent the lives of the nameless and the forgotten, to reckon with loss, and to respect the limits of what cannot be known," Hartman argues, "narrating counter-histories of slavery has always been inseparable from writing a history of present, by which I mean the incomplete project of freedom, and the precarious life of the ex-slave, a condition defined by the vulnerability to premature death and to gratuitous acts of violence."[67] Zeleza notes that this early endeavor was soon trumped by what he, in contrast to "Afro-American African Studies," calls "Euro-American African Studies," which were strongly supported by the government in the midst of shifting global dynamics after World War II.[68] This reinforced white supremacy's ongoing epistemic assault on Black agency, in which Euro-American perceptions and experiences were consolidated to represent a universal model "that blissfully ignored the reality and diversity of global histories and geographies, cultures and societies, polities, and economies."[69] The Euro-American academic tradition infused the study of Africa with the same racism from which Black scholars sought to redeem it. Furthermore, it split Africa ontologically, with North Africa being cleansed from any touch of Blackness and relegated to the field of Middle Eastern Studies, a partition most academic programs still uphold today. Africa in this view essentially means Africa south of the Sahara. As Zeleza explains, the

> paradigmatic and political gulf between the two solitudes of the HBCUs and HWCUs in African Studies widened. In the latter, the field drifted to policy and development-oriented research and professional encounters with Africa, away from posing large civilizational and cultural questions and popular engagement valued by Pan-African intellectuals and many in the HBCUs.[70]

67 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 4.
68 Zeleza, "Reckoning," 7.
69 Zeleza, "Reckoning," 8.
70 Zeleza, "Reckoning," 9.

However, Black and African Studies soon were subjected to ideological contestation and political mobilization. Zeleza takes note of the "intertwined movements of African decolonization and American civil rights,"[71] while Alkalimat and Stephen C. Ferguson situate the movement for Black Studies also within the broader working class and world revolutionary movements that took place around the emblematic year of 1968.[72] The year notably marked an important event, when a confrontation between Black scholars and its leaders at the annual meeting of the African Studies Association US (ASA US), made clear that Black students demanded the involvement of Africanists in Black Studies to overcome the separation of both fields. After their efforts were not met with success, members of the ASA US's Black caucus formed the African Heritage Studies Association (AHSA), of which John Henrik Clarke, mentor and aide of Malcolm X, became president.[73] The Pan-African Cultural Festival held in Algiers in 1969 marked "the veritable shift to Postcolonial African studies as it is the moment when Negritude was announced dead."[74] In the classrooms on the African continent, as well as in those abroad, theory had to withstand the confrontation of its assumptions with real life. "Students wholeheartedly believed that they have a political obligation to join in the Black community's fight for survival and set in motion the ultimate aim of gaining liberation from white (bourgeois) control."[75] A theory's value lay in its usefulness and its contribution to said fight. In the quest to rediscover past findings, reading became a fundamental tool to engage with the Black radical tradition. Knowledge of the historical legacy it left behind could help to position oneself within the trajectory of various liberation movements. As Alkalimat relates, "one of the mandatory starting points of the Black freedom struggle is the reclaiming of Black history to become a living part of freedom consciousness."[76]

One of its main tenets today, Afrocentricity, was notably absent when Black Studies in its modern configuration entered mainstream institutions. Ferguson holds that instead it was Marxism that—as an ideology, and as a movement—heavily impacted the formation of Black Studies. Only through the suppression of, and opposition to political radicalism could Afrocentricity gain ground in the academy. One such example is found in the events that led to the recent termination of Marxist

71 Zeleza, "Reckoning," 1.

72 Stephen C. Ferguson, *Philosophy of African American Studies: Nothing Left of Blackness* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015), 22.

73 Jean M. Allman, "#HerskovitsMustFall? A Meditation on Whiteness, African Studies, and the Unfinished Business of 1968," *African Studies Review* 62 (September 2019): 17–19.

74 Thiam and Frehiwot, "On Pan-Africanism," 68.

75 Ferguson, *Philosophy of African American Studies*, 27.

76 Alkalimat, *The History of Black Studies*, 90.

associate professor Anthony Monteiro's contract at Temple University. His actions of solidarity towards Molefi Asante, "father of Afrocentricity" and at the time former chair of African American Studies at Temple, turned out to be fateful for his own status at the university. Monteiro himself was committed to "Black Marxism," as Ferguson notes. Monteiro hence organized a front of Temple University students and working-class residents of Philadelphia to rally support for Asante's attempt to regain the chair of African Studies, which had been filled with a white professor. After Asante was reinstated, he soon turned on Monteiro and accused him of spreading anti-African ideas. When the Dean of Temple's Liberal Arts college opted not to renew Monteiro's contract, Asante showed no sign of protest, or solidarity towards his colleague.[77]

Ferguson traces the philosophical contradictions of the main philosophical currents of Black Studies and stresses the importance of funding as a main strategy to co-opt the field. Drawing on Robert Allen's *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* (1969), he summarizes the fallacy Black politics fell prey to when corporate strategies entered the movement. Using the rhetorical repertoire of Black Power, a new Black entrepreneurial stratum aimed to generate support for their capitalist ambitions, and the respective policies that reinforced structural inequality, and therefore anti-Blackness. Under the influence of corporate ideology that fostered conservative views towards capitalist property relations, the transformative appeal of mass-based political movements was restructured to fit electoral politics, while any progress regarding racial inequality was tied to corporate and state interests. Ferguson concludes that by "the late 1970s, the working-class character of the Black liberation struggle was dialectically transformed as the Black petit bourgeoisie established political hegemony over Black politics.[78] After bourgeois hegemony diminished the politically astute interventions of Black Marxists, cultural nationalism and liberalism became the leading modes of thought.[79] Through Black conservative influences, Black politics at large stopped to pose a threat to capitalism, and merely became a shareholder, striving to be recognized as equal. Walter Rodney had described earlier, how by separating historical study for the sake of knowledge to intellectually restore the past, without any connection to political issues, African historians were essentially working to stabilize the ruling power structure. While Alkalimat emphasized the importance of reading as a means to regain knowledge and reconstitute Black intellectual history, Rodney warns about the danger of essentially getting trapped in museum or

77 Ferguson, *Philosophy of African American Studies*, 43, 16.
78 Ferguson, *Philosophy of African American Studies*, 33.
79 Ferguson, *Philosophy of African American Studies*, 36.

library collections, and distancing oneself from political struggles.[80] Ferguson further interrogates the rationale that privileges research of ancient African history over an engagement with contemporary Black experiences, far from the breadth of research and study during the initial years of Black Studies as an academic discipline. He quotes Manthia Diawara's resolute appeal:

> The Afrocentrists have recreated Egypt, the old African city, but their discourses, unlike James Brown's music in the sixties, do not serve the homeless in Philadelphia, let alone inspire revolution in South Africa. And I submit that until Afrocentricity learns the language of black people in Detroit, Lingala in Zaire, and Bambara in Mali, and grounds itself in the material conditions of the people in question, it is nothing but a kitsch of blackness. It is nothing but an imitation of a discourse of liberation.[81]

Rodney, Diawara, Ferguson, and others evidently share the same sentiment that African scholars of history have voiced on many occasions. If history is to serve a purpose other than acquiring abstract knowledge, or worse yet, obscuring knowledge, the concrete realities, and the subjectivity of Black and African people need to be centered. Only in this way can global history be truly global.[82] In African history, narratives that divert from mainstream scholarly traditions were called "new local historiographies" by Axel Harneit-Sievers. This practice could be viewed as a mode of African self-writing similar to the fugitive study that emerged in the US around the same time and with colonial rule still in its apex. These writers aimed to situate knowledge locally and make it available to a public outside of the grand narratives of academia.[83] Instead of assisting the machine of colonial knowledge production, African intellectuals sought to establish new pathways of thinking and writing the past. Above all else, these histories, in their various forms also contributed to a new formation of identities and communities and were thereby as much a political tool as a narrative one.[84] A case in point of historiographical innovation centered on rewriting history from a local perspective can be found in works such as Kenneth O. Dike's *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta* (1955). Apollos O. Nwauwa makes clear that for Dike, African history had hitherto been constructed from European sources, and there was dire need to take existing historical traditions into account. He contends that the "emergent historiography liberated not only the method, content, and scope of the study of

80 Walter Rodney, "African History," 70.

81 Manthia Diawara in Ferguson, *Philosophy of African American Studies*, 142.

82 Bedasse et al., "*AHR Conversation*," 1720.

83 Axel Harneit-Sievers, "Introduction: New Local Historiographies from Africa and South Asia: Approaches and Issues," in *A Place in the World: New Local Historiographies from Africa and South Asia*, vol. 2, African Social Studies Series (Leiden/Boston/Köln: Brill, 2002), 3.

84 Harneit-Sievers, "Introduction," 25–26.

African histories, cultures, and societies but it also forced a world-wide recognition of the intellectual contributions of Africans and people of African descent."[85] Similarly, Jeremiah O. Arowosegbe notes debates on the "relevance of indigenous languages and orature" for African literature, and the value of indigenous knowledge systems for African philosophy.[86]

That such questions are of crucial importance has been shown in the nitty-gritty of African politics after independence. Ironically, Léopold Sédar Senghor, the first president of Senegal and key philosopher of the Nègritude movement along with Aimé Césaire and the often-overlooked sisters Paulette, Jane, and Alice Nardal,[87] was at odds with Cheikh Anta Diop, the eminent scholar of ancient Egypt and precolonial African societal formations, who stated the political and cultural coherence of all of continental Africa. Senghor's philosophy, described by Mbukeni Herbert Mnguni as "romantic metaphysics,"[88] could not gain the support of radical students who wanted to see improvements of their material conditions. Hence, during May 1968 Senegalese students protested in fierce opposition to his regime.[89] Similarly, Tanzania's Julius Nyerere had an ambiguous relationship to the radical students and staff of the University of Dar es Salaam and regularly dismissed Marxism as a scientific method as well as its political implications regarding class struggle in African societies. Eventually, his regime suppressed the initiative of workers a government proclamation had initially evoked.[90] It is for such reasons that Ferguson critically remarks how an amalgamation of cultural studies with historicism and postmodern notions results in a further separation between cultural, social, and economic studies dealing with more material questions. Eventually, attention is diverted from the material and social relations that give rise to Black cultures, and Blackness in turn is taken out of its historically specific context.[91]

As shown through various examples, Black and African theorizing always courageously charged ahead to confront given frameworks. Even though conflicting in

85 Apollos O. Nwauwa, "K. O. Dike and the New African Nationalist Historiography," in *Emergent Themes and Methods in African Studies: Essays in Honor of Adiele E. Afigbo*, ed. Toyin Falola and Adam Paddock (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2009), 171.

86 Jeremiah O. Arowosegbe, "African Studies and the Bias of Eurocentricism," *Social Dynamics* 40 (May 4, 2014): 313.

87 Bedasse et al., "*AHR Conversation*," 1718.

88 Herbert Mbukeni Mnguni, "African Intellectuals and the Development of African Political Thought in The Twentieth Century," *Présence Africaine* 143 (1987): 116.

89 Omar Gueye, "May '68 in Africa: Dakar in the Worldwide Social Movement," in *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties* (Routledge, 2018), 352.

90 Issa G. Shivji, "Mwalimu and Marx in Contestation: Dialogue or Diatribe?" *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy* 6 (2017): 208–209.

91 Ferguson, *Philosophy of African American Studies*, 8.

philosophy and outlook, ideological currents such as Pan-Africanism, either from a Marxist or a cultural nationalist perspective, Nègritude, or Afrocentricity strive for an alternative rationale to situate Africa and Africans in the world and global history. As students at school and later at universities, generations of young Black individuals sharpened their minds in Black institutions and impersonated new epistemologies and practices of making reality and its history knowledgeable. Eventually, they set out to challenge the status quo not only in Black–but in all—educational facilities, upsetting dominant modes of thought. They made clear that education cannot be restricted to the realm of ideas, and they demanded knowledge to assert their humanity theoretically to in turn help advance their communities materially. Decolonizing scholarship, overall, cannot be impartial. Following Marx's famous statement about the need not only to interpret, but also to change society, Black Studies oscillates between studies such as Walter Rodney's *How Europe underdeveloped Africa* and the rallying calls of Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*. Furthermore, the thorough study of the work of an Egyptologist like Cheikh Anta Diop should have vast consequences not only for the historical understanding of the African continent as interconnected rather than split along the Sahara Desert, but also for contemporary politics of anti-Blackness persistent throughout much of North Africa.

The essential difference between Black Studies and classical Africanist scholarship is based on contradicting epistemological stances that have decisive political implications. For example, "Herskovits's insistence on so-called objective detachment rendered illegitimate any scholarship concerned with race, racial oppression, and racial justice, and that insistence had real and enduring consequences for the development of both African and African American Studies."[92] In addition, there is still the legacy of "institutions he helped build, which have worked historically to exclude Black scholars and privilege white scholars."[93] Conversely, the scholarship of Woodson, Cooper, and DuBois eludes the presumption of a linear unfolding of history, and the identification of modernity with progress and development. It escapes the spatial constraints of the nation state and builds a global context for understanding race and Blackness, that is connected to its locally specific dynamics and rooted in Pan-Africanism, able to hold space for a "fluid, horizontal, and multilayered understanding of *diasporic difference*."[94]

92 Allman, "#HerskovitsMustFall?," 14.

93 Allman, "#HerskovitsMustFall?," 14.

94 Alioune Fall, "The Pitfalls of (Anti)Essentialism: Pan-Africanism, Afropolitanism, and Global Blackness," *Global Africa* 3 (2023): 302–303, 305.

Africa, Black Studies, and German Academia

The history of African Studies in Germany has been described by anthropologist Peter Probst as one being "betwixt and between," delineating the specific trajectory that positions the field between francophone and anglophone African Studies.[95] The same could also be said about the fact that the field of African Studies took on different characteristics in the former Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). Comparative discussions of approaches prevalent in both countries, as found in Christiane Bürger's study of the genocide of the Ovaherero and Nama in East and West German historiography, are rare.[96] Finally, this remark also speaks to the production of knowledge about Africa, as it is contested by white, Black, and scholars of color in Germany.

As Probst notes, what initially distinguished German African Studies, was the "prominence given to linguistics and language."[97] And even if linguistics might have lost some of its importance,[98] it still features prominently in African Studies degree programs all over Germany, while only a few departments engage with more contemporary issues that concern languages, literature, media, and art side-by-side, or follow a stronger sociolinguistic approach. Historically, the prevalence of linguistics and language training at institutions such as Berlin's Institute for Oriental Languages, or Hamburg's Colonial Institute, aimed "to provide practical knowledge for the German traders, planters and government officials serving in the new colonies."[99] Both laid the foundation for the institutionalization of African Studies, which was later impacted by the colonial nostalgia of the 1920s that shifted the focus from language to culture, and a functionalist approach of scholars who looked to the social sciences as a means to organize order and social cohesion.[100] Eventually the field became involved "in the revanchist agenda of the Nazi regime" and

95 Peter Probst, "Betwixt and Between: An Anthropologist's Perspective on the History of African Studies in Germany," *Africa Spectrum* 40 (2005): 405.

96 Christiane Bürger, *Der Genozid in Namibia und die Geschichtsschreibung der DDR und BRD* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2017). Her work was subsequently criticized for homogenizing the views of historians in the FRG and the GDR respectively, as well as for overlooking broader contexts by a narrow geographical focus; see Ulrich van der Heyden, "Review of Deutsche Kolonialgeschichte (n): Der Genozid in Namibia und die Geschichtsschreibung der DDR und BRD, by C. Bürger," *Zeitschrift Für Politik* 65 (2018): 358–60.

97 Probst, "Betwixt and Between," 406.

98 Probst, "Betwixt and Between," 407.

99 Probst, "Betwixt and Between," 410.

100 Probst, "Betwixt and Between," 412.

tried "to document its own colonial usefulness."[101] While Probst also recounts how especially Marxist scholars opposed dominant ideas of what African Studies was supposed to be in the FRG and posited the need to politicize African Studies to counteract the imperialist Western agenda,[102] Maisha Auma, Eric Otieno, and Peggy Piesche remark that it took until 1986 to start a debate about the colonial and fascist legacies within and of African Studies. They argue that even within the Marxist-Leninist approach dominant in the GDR, academic practices regarding Africa's epistemic position were not consciously called into question or seriously challenged. "'Africa' remained the object of research and teaching."[103] Hence, "the German academic establishment is discussed here as a space where Black scholars might experience levels of discomfort, marginalization or even dehumanization." Still, they argue that Black scholars need to confront the vestiges of colonial African Studies to create spaces for themselves, and make sure their voices are heard.[104] What contributes to the hostile character of German scholarship on Africa toward Black people can be found in its foundational myths. Auma et. al. thoroughly criticize the assumptions of imperial German scholars' innovation in the field of African Studies:

> Frobenius' (rather late) realization that African historicity exists is hardly an achievement one should be proud of. His 'bearing witness' to the identity struggles of a people to whose oppression his own scholarship contributed, is characteristic of the white gaze. If anything, it indicates a major erasure of the life and work of Black scholars such as Anton Wilhelm Amo (c. 1703 – c. 1759) if African historicity was a novel insight in Germany.[105]

Consequently, research and scholarship on Africa and Africans by Black and African people is often neglected in comparison with Euro-American scholarship. The scholarly authority remains outside of Africa, while academia plays down "the intellectual agendas, interests and the authority of African scholars."[106] This structural inequality explains, as they argue further, "the well-preserved divide between African Studies and Black Studies."[107] To overcome this divide, Auma, Otieno, and Piesche sketch out four approaches to the state of affairs in African Studies prevalent in Germany. The first blatantly denies that there might even be a problem with the current configuration of the field, "calls for institutional

101 Probst, "Betwixt and Between," 414.

102 Probst, "Betwixt and Between," 416–17.

103 Maureen Maisha Auma, Eric Otieno, and Peggy Piesche, "'Reclaiming Our Time' in African Studies: Conversations from the Perspective of the Black Studies Movement in Germany," *Critical African Studies* 12 (2020): 337–338.

104 Auma et. al., "'Reclaiming Our Time,'" 339.

105 Auma et. al., "'Reclaiming Our Time,'" 341.

106 Auma et. al., "'Reclaiming Our Time,'" 333.

107 Auma et. al., "'Reclaiming Our Time,'" 334.

change by Black scholars are therefore considered ungrateful and are met with confusion, dismissal, or reprimand."[108] The second aims at gradual reform through the inclusion of Black scholars in what remains of the conceptually largely unchallenged Africanist enterprise. As a result, "the problematic foundations of African Studies are hidden behind a facade of a critical, self-reflexive contemporary discipline which, as has been shown, still lacks a will for a transformative, radical reform." It is this transgression of incremental reform to radical transformation that opens up the possibility for a connection, "a bridge between African Studies and Black Studies, a bridge that will take us from a space of reform to a space of liberation."[109] For the authors, the importance of a Black Studies perspective towards knowledge production about Africa and Blackness lies in questioning hegemonic epistemologies and methodologies. Importantly they mention the impact of Black Studies by "transforming or remixing research methods."[110] This notion of remixing creates an intriguing link with Hip Hop, arguably one of the main pillars of global Black culture. Music and Media scholars like Mark Campbell and Jared Ball have long evoked the importance of remixes as a means of insurgency, as they "often escape the official record that institutional archives have a role in creating and, therefore, legitimating knowledge production,"[111] thereby disseminating "art without sanction from a mainstream corporate industry, allowed for the kinds of communication ultimately threatening to power."[112] Similarly, for Auma, Otieno, and Piesche, "Black knowledge production has been forced to occur in many spaces on the outer margins of society," where it "creolizes the disciplines and unsettles the authority of the written word in science."[113] Eventually, they argue further, moving to a space beyond reform, it becomes necessary to acknowledge the limited capacity for change in academia, and to focus on the creation of spaces that are accountable to Blackness in and outside of academia, echoing the narrative of fugitive study that has been part of Black German Studies from its beginning "at what Peggy Piesche calls the kitchen table conversations."[114] Black German Studies thus complicates not only assumptions made in the wake of colonial African Studies, but also counters the hege-

108 Auma et. al., "'Reclaiming Our Time,'" 340.

109 Auma et. al., "'Reclaiming Our Time,'" 343.

110 Auma et. al., "'Reclaiming Our Time,'" 344.

111 Mark V. Campbell, "Mixtapes and Memory-Making: A Hip Hop Remix of the Traditional Archive," *Global Hip Hop Studies* 2 (2021): 132.

112 Jared A Ball, *I Mix What I like!: A Mixtape Manifesto* (Stirling: AK Press, 2011), 122.

113 Auma et. al., "'Reclaiming Our Time,'" 344, 346.

114 Auma et. al., "'Reclaiming Our Time,'" 347–348; Tiffany N. Florvil and Vanessa D. Plumly, "Rethinking Black German Studies: Approaches, Interventions and Histories," in *Rethinking Black German Studies*, ed., Tiffany N. Florvil and Vanessa D. Plumly, (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019), 12.

monic field of German Studies by pointing to the "many distinct arrivals of Blackness throughout the *spacetime* continuum that complicate collective and standard narratives."[115] Thus, Black Studies already incorporates and practices what Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Seesemann, and Vogt-William outline as structural, epistemic, personal, and relational decolonization.[116] Centering the African archive with its Christian, Islamic, and griot libraries, the archive of slavery, the Black German, and diasporic archives will help to bring to the fore the understanding shared by Issa Shivji from the days of radical student activism in Dar es Salaam, that, especially when dealing with African history and Blackness, knowledge cannot be compartmentalized.[117]

115 Florvil and Plumly, "Rethinking Black German Studies," 20.

116 Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Rüdiger Seesemann, and Christine Vogt-William, "African Studies in Distress: German Scholarship on Africa and the Neglected Challenge of Decoloniality," *Africa Spectrum* 57 (April 2022): 95–96.

117 Ndlovu-Gatsheni et. al., "African Studies in Distress," 94; Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 6; Shivji, "The Life & Times of Babu," 112; Zeleza, "Reckoning," 20.

Samah Khalaf Allah and Asma Ben Hadj Hassen

Chapter 2
Insights from Sudan and Tunisia on African Studies in Germany

Introduction

In the quiet setting of a small café across from the historical Margravial Opera House in Bayreuth, Germany, our discussions once pierced the usual stillness. Attempts at subdued whispers often escalated into a mix of voices, laughter, and animated conversation. Our presence introduced a lively contrast to the otherwise subdued atmosphere of the café.

We were two PhD students, newcomers to Bayreuth, each embarking on a journey involving academic pursuit and personal discovery. Our discussions ranged from the details of our research interests to our shared aspirations and occasional challenges. We talked about revolutions, Africa, and our unique experiences in this small German town, which had become a gathering place for scholars in African Studies over the years. Bayreuth had hosted many African students, artists, and researchers, enriching its academic and cultural landscape. Despite the distance between our homelands of Sudan and Tunisia, we discovered common ground in our experiences and reflections. With their turbulent histories and geographical positions straddling diverse worlds, both countries offered us complex identities to navigate and discuss. Our conversations in Bayreuth were personal and connected to the broader context of African Studies, reflecting the intersections and insights the town had fostered.

Our discussions evolved as we continued our daily lives in Bayreuth, mirroring our changing perceptions and thoughts. Drawing on our personal experiences, this text engages with the debates about (un)doing African Studies in Germany. It explores our epistemic, geographical, and social locations, demonstrating how they shape our engagement with African Studies. Our narrative reflects the historical and political construction of identities in our respective contexts and our position as North African students of African Studies. In doing so, the text reflects on the dynamics of location and identity: How does the experience of studying and living in Germany refine our perspectives as junior African scholars? Moreover, what insights can our positions as North Africans provide to the ongoing discussions in African Studies?

This exploration is articulated through two interconnected narratives. The first transports us to Sudan, where politics and education shape curricula and fundamentally influence identity formation. Here, the question of whether one is

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Arab, African, or both is not only theoretical – it is a lived reality. The second narrative shifts to Tunisia, examining a significant academic milestone: establishing a Master's Degree in African Studies. This development is more than just a curriculum update; it signifies recognizing and reviving an often-neglected Africanness within the national consciousness.

Our text draws from our personal journeys and academic experiences to advocate for including African identities in scholarly discussions. We blend personal stories with academic analyses to challenge outdated views and highlight the complex nature of African identity. This piece is more than an academic exploration – it is a personal mission to (re)negotiate notions of identity and belonging in the global academic landscape.

Between Roots and Lived Realities: African Studies in Academia

Integrating diverse African experiences and identities into academic discourse transcends academic obligation; it represents an important stride toward cultivating a fairer and fuller understanding of the African identity. By engaging with every narrative, every debate, and each subsequent revision, we begin to dismantle the monolithic perceptions that have long oversimplified Africa, fostering a nuanced and more inclusive dialogue that embraces the complexities of its diverse peoples.

When I received my acceptance email from the Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence at the University of Bayreuth for a doctoral position in 2021, I recognized the beginning of a transformation in my life. Despite my deeply rooted activism, entering the academic sphere stirred a sense of trepidation about integrating into a world far from home. A friend's congratulatory message, "*Mabrook!* You are now going to the greener side," unexpectedly prompted me to confront my identity as "the other" for the first time. This reflection recalled the words of the Egyptian writer Ameera Hassan Eldisogi in her novel "*Bas Ya Yousif* ":[1]

"نحن الآخرون بالنسبة للآخرين الذين نخشاهم، وهم الآخرون بالنسبة للآخرين الذين هم نحن،
وهناك آخرون يروننا الآخرون -نحن- والآخرون -هم- آخرون أيضًا"

It reads:
We are the others in relation to others we fear,
and they are the others to others who are us.
Others see us – the others – and the others – them – as others too

1 يوسف يا بس, الدسوقي حسن أميرة (2011, دار "دون" للنشر والتوزيع).

Embarking on my academic journey in Germany, I anticipated a certain estrangement from my roots. Yet, I also saw it as an opportunity to transcend the geographical confines that had previously shaped my experiences. In this new setting, I am perpetually suspended in liminality – neither entirely present in one space nor wholly absent from another. This in-betweenness permeates multiple aspects of my existence, bridging academia and activism and oscillating between interpretations of my identity. Within this framework of constant negotiation and reinterpretation, the concept of authenticity emerges as a central theme.

The discussion of "authenticity" in the context of African identity and cultural rebirth is about more than recovering an untouched, "pure" African culture. Realistically, such a culture, completely free from external influences, has never existed. African societies have always been dynamic, historically engaging, and evolving through interactions with various cultures.

So, when discussing authenticity, it is not about resurrecting a singular, unchanged African identity. It is about recognizing and valuing the rich tapestry of internal and external influences that have shaped the continent. Authenticity means acknowledging the whole, true complexity of Africa's past and present. Practically, this means embracing African cultures' diverse and multifaceted nature today. It is about validating all parts of the African experience and celebrating how they form a vibrant and evolving cultural identity. This understanding of authenticity is critical as we discuss and shape the future of African societies, ensuring that our cultural rebirth reflects its people's genuine experiences and identities. The question arises: What does authenticity mean for us, and how can it encompass Africa's varied experiences and identities today?

As an African who speaks and reads Arabic, I am often confronted with questions about my identity and how it should be perceived. The notion that Arabic might render me "less African" is a troubling imposition of simplistic identity markers that overlook the rich, complex tapestries that constitute one's identity. My skin color adds another layer to this complexity. I recall an incident at a meeting with colleagues from the Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies (BIGSAS), where a remark intended in jest – questioning whether my lighter skin spared me from the discrimination typically faced by Africans – underscored the pervasive challenges of racial and cultural categorizations; such comments also highlight a common misperception among Arabs in Bayreuth: to them, my complexion categorizes me as too dark to fit the Arab identity, reinforcing my placement in the "African" category despite the diversity that exists within both groups. These experiences accentuate the dilemma of living "in the middle," where one constantly navigates the overlapping and often conflicting spaces of cultural and racial identity. However, amidst these external pressures and imposed identities, the question of belonging and the agency in self-identification

emerges as a critical counterpoint. The ability to define oneself should not be contingent upon external perceptions or simplistic categorizations based on skin color. Instead, it should be a reflective and self-determined process, where one asserts their identity in a manner that resonates with their personal experiences and understanding. This realization has prompted me to delve into the works of prominent African scholars such as Achille Mbembe and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Their critical perspectives – Mbembe's exploration of postcolonial identities[2] and Ngũgĩ's advocacy for decolonizing the mind[3] – have inspired me to reevaluate the representation and discussion of identities within academic settings. Central to my experiences has been the exploration of belonging and the power to define my identity. I often ponder whether speaking Arabic makes me any less of an African or if it somehow distorts my understanding of what it means to be African. This internal dialogue challenges the traditional identity constructs and the underlying power dynamics that shape them.

The persistent misrepresentation and prejudice faced by students from North Africa, such as me, in academic and social environments globally – particularly in places like Germany – highlight a broader systemic issue of racism that sweeps beyond the African continent. These experiences are not just anecdotal; they are indicative of a pervasive pattern of racial and cultural misunderstandings that know no borders. The narrative often portrays North Africa as a region suspended between the polarized perceptions of the Global North and South, further complicating the identity dynamics at play. This misrepresentation is acutely felt in Sudan, where the complexities of identity are magnified by the nation's unique geographical and cultural position. Sudan, often caught in the interstitial space between being African and Arab, provides a case study for examining how global narratives influence local identities and vice versa.

Within this context, my PhD research on the intersections of queerness and political transformation in Sudan takes shape, employing autoethnographic and ethnographic methodologies. These methods explore and situate my experiences within the broader fabric of African identities, weaving the personal with the political. In a particularly revealing conversation, one of my interlocutors expressed, "I love being Sudanese, with all the complex layers in me. Being African

2 Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2001).

3 Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey, Nairobi: Heinemann, 1986).

is unrelated to certain features, but we feel more at home when we go south."[4] This sentiment encapsulates the essence of "Afropolitanism,"[5] a concept that challenges the traditional boundaries of African identities, advocating for a multifaceted understanding that transcends geographic or phenotypic limits. It posits that African identity is a rich tapestry of experiences and influences, which should be celebrated rather than confined. The quest for an "authentic" African experience raises complex questions about identity, history, and the impact of external forces, particularly colonialism. As we communicate in English, a language imposed through colonial rule, we must question whether this continues to perpetuate colonial dominance. Is our use of English a barrier to reclaiming a more authentic African identity, or has it become an integral part of our contemporary reality that enriches our global interactions?

The Sudanese Experience: A Microcosm of Broader Identity Challenges

Muhammed Abu Al-Qasim's work in *Historical Predicament and Future Prospects: The Dialectic of The Structure* (1996) presents a compelling analysis of Sudan's complex societal structure, which navigates between superficial unity and profound diversity. His exploration underscores the complex relationship between these dual facets, revealing a society where external homogeneity often masks an underlying heterogeneity rooted in historical, cultural, and ethnic dimensions.

4 Interview with a feminist, 37 years of age, Khartoum, September 2022.

5 The concept of Afropolitanism originated in 2005 in two different geographical locations simultaneously. In Europe, Nigerian-Ghanaian writer Taiye Selasi introduced the idea in her essay "Bye-Bye Babar" which discussed the urban and lifestyle experiences of young African migrants. At the same time, in Africa, Achille Mbembe also played a significant role in popularizing Afropolitanism to envision Africa's future and offer a counter-narrative to the prevailing pessimistic and crisis-driven portrayal of the continent. Starting from the idea of the circulation of the worlds, Mbembe and Balakrishnan described Afropolitanism as a "geography of circulation and mobility" while referencing it as a form of African identity that negotiates the African presence in a globalized world. It represents an approach to observing African cultures as hybrid formations influenced by diverse roots. Scholars like Gikandi and Eze see Afropolitanism as a new form of a connected hybrid Africanness that should be praised. However, the concept has faced criticism from scholars like Binyavanga Wainaina and Grace Musila, who view Afropolitanism as an attempt to commercialize and depersonalize an exotic African identity for global consumption; for more about the history of the concept of Afropolitanism see Albert Kasanda, "Afropolitanism as a Critique of Conventional Narratives of African Identity and Emancipation," *Human Affairs* 28 (2018): 379–394, https://doi.org/10.1515/humaff-2018-0031.

The origins of Sudan's cultural diversity are intricately linked to the Arab influx, a significant historical movement that facilitated the incorporation of the Arabic language into Sudanese society. This migration was multifaceted, originating from the north through Egypt and from the east via key maritime gateways that welcomed Arab settlers.[6] These dynamics are not exclusive to Sudan. They echo broader existential identity queries that have persisted in other regions, such as Egypt, during national introspection over Arab versus Pharaonic roots in the 1920s and 1930s.

The etymology of the name "Sudan," derived from the Arabic word meaning "land of the black," encapsulates a rich tapestry of cultural and ethnic narratives. This designation reflects the Arabic linguistic heritage, indicating the historical Arab presence and influence, and the descriptor "Sud," which refers to the Arabic term for black. This term has cultural and ethnic connotations, extending beyond mere skin color to embody a deeper, shared cultural identity. Simultaneously, it underscores the African heritage through its allusion to the land inhabited predominantly by Black people, thus weaving a complex identity that is both Arab and African.

Further complicating this identity narrative is the profound influence of Islam, introduced into the region with the Arab conquest of Egypt in 641. This event marked a seminal moment in Sudanese history, setting the stage for the deep-rooted Arab cultural, religious, and linguistic legacies that would shape the Sudanese identity landscape. This historical entrenchment challenges the conventional binary opposition of Arab versus African identities, prompting a richer, more nuanced understanding of cultural identity that has been debated vigorously in Sudanese intellectual circles since the 1930s.[7]

The debate over Sudanese cultural identity during the 1960s – and indeed, debates that some argue started earlier – reflects a society grappling with its complex heritage. Intellectuals and artists have variously portrayed Sudanese identity as predominantly Arab, decidedly African, or a hybrid of both. Yet others argue for a recognition of its distinctiveness as uniquely Sudanese, suggesting that Sudan represents a synthesis of multiple cultural influences, enriched further by symbolic representations such as the jungle and desert. These natural elements metaphorically embody the dual identities of African lushness and Arab aridity, a concept influenced by Leopold Senghor's discussions on the dual identity of Arab-

6 Peter Malcolm Holt and M. W. Daly, *The History of the Sudan from the Coming of Islam to the Present Day* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1979), 58–60.

7 Holt and Daly, *The History of the Sudan*, 22.

ism and Africanism in Senegal.[8] This confluence of identities is articulated by the poet Salih Abd Algadir[9] who details it as follows:

وأنا ابن وادي النيل لو فتشتني
لوجدت في بردي بطش أسود
وأنا ابن وادي النيل لو فتشتني
تجدين مجموع الكرامة والنهى
تجدين حلم البيض جهل السود

As a son of the Nile Valley, if you were to inspect me,
You'd find beneath my cloak the strength of lions,
As a son of the Nile Valley, if you were to inspect me,
You'd find the entirety of dignity and restraint,
You'd find the white's dreams and the black's ignorance.

Algadir's verses critique the simplistic conflation of identity with race. Instead, he emphasizes a deeper, volitional component of identity, predicated on a nuanced sense of belonging that transcends mere external appearances or racial classifications. This expression underscores the complexity of Sudanese identity, which cannot be neatly categorized but is a dynamic interplay of cultural, historical, and personal elements that define individual and collective self-understanding.

The statement "When we go to the 'Arabic' countries, they call us 'Africans'" encapsulates a profound struggle with identity experienced by many Sudanese people, me included. This internal conflict echoes the broader discourse on identity and belonging, articulated by scholars like Edward Said in *Orientalism*, where external forces impose identities that are subsequently internalized by the subjects.[10] My journey mirrors this dichotomy. Growing up, I frequented countries in the Middle East where I was often referred to as "Samara" or simply as the "Brown-skinned woman." While these terms could sometimes carry undertones of racism, they primarily highlighted the external imposition of identity. However, it was not until 2014, when I traveled to Kenya, that I truly felt a sense of belonging. Being called African for the first time, I was embraced by a community where my identity felt validated and normalized.

This duality resonates with Homi Bhabha's "hybridity" concept, where cultural identities are constantly negotiated and shaped by colonial and postcolonial dynamics.[11] In reflecting on my experiences, I question the need for external determinations of my identity. Why must someone else dictate who I am?

8 Léopold Sédar Senghor, *On African Socialism* (New York: Praeger, 1964).
9 *Al-Sahafa Newspaper*, October 25, 1976.
10 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003).
11 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge 2nd ed., 1994).

Ultimately, my identity is not defined by others but by my experiences, connections, and sense of belonging. The manipulation of identity by political entities in Sudan, particularly during the regime of President Omar al-Bashir, exemplifies how state policies can craft and reshape national identities to consolidate power. The "civilization project," emphasizing Islamization, represents a strategic approach to identity manipulation, where cultural and religious elements are used to forge a unified national identity that often suppresses the nation's inherent cultural diversity. This perspective is supported by Mamdani's insights in *Citizen and Subject,*[12] which discuss the profound impacts of such political maneuvers on a nation's cultural fabric.

Reflecting upon my personal experiences within the educational landscape of Sudan under President Omar al-Bashir's regime and as a product of this educational system, my narrative reveals the profound impact of education on identity formation. Coming from a small village in the river Nile state, some 550 kilometers from Khartoum, I was ensconced in a world where the comprehensive Islamization process, initiated by al-Bashir and his supporters, sought to redefine national identity through the lens of Islam. This experience, particularly in a context that attempted to forge a unified identity by emphasizing Arab-Islamic heritage over rich African roots, became a foundational element in my understanding of self and community. This project was not an abstract policy but a lived reality that aimed to permeate every aspect of our lives, including education. This Islamization was more than an ideological stance; it was a tangible manifestation of the belief that to be Sudanese was to inherently align with specific religious and cultural parameters.[13]

Such policies not only influenced the structural facets of our nation but seeped into the very fabric of our identities, compelling a reconsideration of whether we were Arabs or Africans – a question that al-Bashir's regime seemed intent on answering unequivocally. The personal moment of confusion I experienced as a child was sparked by the lyrics of a Sudanese song that proclaimed, "*Ana Sudani Ana Afriqi*," meaning "I'm Sudanese, I am African." I recall rushing to my father and asking him for clarification. He explained that Sudan's location in Africa meant that we are Africans. While his answer aimed to simplify a complex narrative for my young mind, he underscored Sudan's geographical and cultural placement within Africa, providing a foundational insight into the multifac-

12 Mahmood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

13 Samia Al-Nagar and Liv Tønnessen, "Sudanese Women's Demands for Freedom, Peace, and Justice in the 2019 Revolution," in *Women and Peacebuilding in Africa,* ed. Ladan Affi et al. (Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 2021), 103–128.

eted nature of our identity. This seemingly simple paternal explanation illuminated the early stages of identity formation influenced by familial and educational contexts, highlighting the role of parents in mediating the broader sociopolitical narratives that children encounter. This incident is not just a personal memory but a crucial educational moment that transcends the formal confines of schooling. In this context, my father's intervention serves as an alternative educational encounter that challenges the monolithic identity narrative propagated by the state's education system. I have a privileged position, having been raised in a family that supported my pursuit of education beyond the constraints of our context. My journey, therefore, reminds me of the urgent need to address the systemic inequities plaguing our education system. As I reflect on my own experiences within the context of Sudan's education system, it becomes clear that the curriculum, heavily focused on the Arab language and Islamic teachings, alongside the historical narrative of British colonization and the imposition of Sharia laws, was designed to cultivate a specific identity. By sidelining Sudan's diverse cultural heritage, this educational approach fails to embrace the full spectrum of our national identity, thus neglecting the rich mosaic of languages, cultures, and histories that define us.

The Sudanese Revolution of 2018–2019 represents a critical renegotiation of national identity, marking a significant shift in how the Sudanese people perceive and articulate their collective self-understanding. It was not a spontaneous disturbance but the culmination of deep-rooted socio-political tensions, marking a critical juncture in the redefinition of national identity. During this transformative period, Sudan's people powerfully reaffirmed the country's complex identity, weaving African roots with Arabic cultural elements into a dynamic synthesis. A consistent theme emerged through my doctoral research, which included extensive and profound reclamation and celebration of Sudan's blended heritage. Participants expressed pride in their African ancestry while also honoring their Arabic influences, highlighting the intricate duality brought into sharp relief by the revolution.

This evolution of Sudanese identity transcends the simplistic dichotomy of African versus Arab, historically used to oversimplify the rich cultural mosaic of Sudan. The revolution spurred a broader societal shift towards a more nuanced and inclusive conception of what it means to have a national identity in today's world. It encouraged an ongoing dialogue between historical legacies and contemporary experiences, enriching daily life and shaping the nation's collective consciousness. Moreover, this reassertion of identity was set against the backdrop of colonial and post-colonial attempts to divide and simplify complex identities. By challenging these legacies, the Sudanese are actively rewriting their cultural narrative through tangible expressions in art, music, and literature, which were prominently displayed in the vibrant renaissance of expression in the streets of Sudan.

The revolution's impact also extended into gender and sexual identity politics, highlighting the emergence of vibrant feminist groups in the post-revolutionary period. Drawing on Afrofeminist ideologies, these groups contest deep-seated patriarchal structures while reinforcing the African components of Sudanese identity. Their activism aligns with African feminist movements, situating Sudan within a broader continental discourse on gender and power. Additionally, the enhanced visibility of intersecting identities, with women, queer individuals, and other marginalized groups stepping forward as prominent leaders, underscores the importance of recognizing identity as complex and layered. Each navigates multiple dimensions of oppression and resistance, further enriching the discourse on identity. However, the identity narrative continues to evolve, further complicated by ongoing conflicts introducing new dimensions to the discourse on identity and belonging. The displacement resulting from these conflicts challenges many Sudanese to reassess their identities as they adapt to new environments and cultures. This exposure provides challenges and opportunities for dynamic intercultural exchanges, further enriching the Sudanese identity mosaic.

The fluidity and resilience of Sudanese national identity, as seen through the lens of displacement and conflict, demonstrate the adaptability of the Sudanese people. Identity is not fixed but continually evolves, shaped by both internal forces and external influences. As Sudanese individuals incorporate new elements into their identity, they contribute to a broader, more inclusive understanding of what it means to be Sudanese. Therefore, the Sudanese Revolution, far from being an isolated incident, represents a profound narrative of identity renegotiation and societal transformation. It highlights the ongoing endeavor of a nation to reconcile its diverse heritage with the challenges of the contemporary world, forging an identity that is distinctively and quintessentially Sudanese. The Sudanese Revolution, far from being an isolated incident, represents a profound narrative of identity renegotiation and societal transformation, a journey echoed in the evolving narratives of other North African nations. From the revolution in Sudan to the revolution in Tunisia, the parallels between these nations underscore the interconnectedness of their cultural journeys, highlighting shared struggles and evolving identities across the region.

Tunisia: The Road to Europe

When we started thinking together about how to describe and write about our personal experiences as African Studies students outside of our countries, our cultural and social "here," in another "there," Germany, I was confused, uncomfort-

able with the idea of exposing myself and expressing myself with a supposed "I." I felt that maybe my story wasn't worth telling. So, what stories are worth telling? Are some stories important and others not? Certainly, every "small story" is part of a "big story." That's how I understand this opportunity to go back in time and ask why and how. The small story is simple, ordinary, and banal. I come from a middle-class Tunisian family living in a village in the port city of Sousse in eastern Tunisia. I grew up in a big house with an extended family of grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. I didn't grow up between books but between the vast Mediterranean Sea and the olive groves. This family's heritage was built around these two spatial values: the land's anchorage and the sea's movement and immensity.

I chose Bayreuth to continue my doctoral studies in African Studies at the Bayreuth International Graduate School of African Studies (BIGSAS). Since 2022, I have been affiliated with the anthropology department, researching Ivorian care workers' migration experiences on the central Mediterranean migration route between Abidjan, Tunis, and Marseille. After completing a master's degree in African Studies at the Centre for Anthropology at the University of Sousse in Tunisia, Bayreuth was the logical destination. The master's program of African Studies, the first in Tunisia, resulted from German-Tunisian cooperation. Before describing the master's program and, more importantly, the context in which it emerged in relation to the question of identity, Africanness and political transformation, I will first discuss the complexity of my positionalities in Bayreuth and within the field of African studies.

Months after arriving in Bayreuth, an older woman called out to me in German while I was shopping in a supermarket. Although I thought she was saying nice things, I tried to explain that I don't speak German very well. She then asked me where I was from, and I replied in broken German that I was from Tunisia, adding "from Africa (*Ich komme aus Afrika*)." The woman was astonished because, according to her, my features resembled those of an Iranian or a Turk.

The woman's astonishment may reveal simple ignorance or pure curiosity. Still, it conceals how racial categorizations and identity belongings are constructed, grafted onto people's memories, embedded in prejudices, and manifested in the most banal social interactions. While they remain necessary, these social categories fail to capture the complexity of personal experience. For the woman, my physical characteristics place me in a group of people who belong to the Middle East, not Africa. However, these labels do not emerge from a vacuum; they are also the product of historical, social, and political contexts. A small, bourgeois town like Bayreuth does not seem easily reconcilable with the long-standing presence of African students. The visibility of these outsiders (including myself) is problematic insofar as they oscillate between two worlds: on the one hand, within

the university, which seeks to internationalize and present itself as a hub for African Studies, and on the other hand, outside the campus. There are, of course, language barriers, legal restrictions, and the conservative attitudes of many Germans towards migrants and refugees in general.

I arrived in Germany during the post-COVID era, where there were increasing restrictions on people's movement and a political climate marked by the growing influence of far-right ideologies characterized by xenophobia and nationalism. Interestingly, European policies encourage "skilled Africans," such as students and researchers, to enter their territories. When I received my visa after a long wait, my family and friends congratulated me. Tunisia is a traditional country for immigration, especially to Europe. They were not interested in my field of study at university; what mattered most was becoming a migrant and, even more so, going to Germany. Until recently, Germany enjoyed a positive reputation in the popular imagination, known for its Mercedes cars, punctuality, and hard work. Only one friend asked me about studying "African Studies" in Germany. Still, she quickly added that the most important thing was to leave Tunisia to pursue my studies in better conditions. I was privileged; I would not be without papers, crossing the Mediterranean, sleeping in train stations, or subjected to the humiliation that so many migrants face in Fortress Europe.

While in Bayreuth, I unexpectedly discovered I was only the second Tunisian student to join BIGSAS. I wondered why there were so few Tunisian students, especially considering the growing number of students abroad. Is it a question of language? Is there a lack of interest for Tunisians in African Studies, or are there quotas within BIGSAS for each African region? What does this situation reveal about the state of African Studies in Tunisia? How does it fit into the current debate on African identity in this North African country? What does it tell us about how Germany sees North Africa as part of the African continent or the Arab world?

Tunisia's First Master's Degree in African Studies: A Landmark Event

My story with Bayreuth and the field of African Studies began a little earlier. In 2017, I joined the first master's program in African Studies at the University of Sousse (in Tunisia), developed by the Faculty of Letters and Humanities (FLSH) and the Institute of African Studies at the University of Bayreuth. This research master's degree was created in 2014, simultaneously as a research center and a bachelor's degree in social and cultural anthropology. The master's program was mainly open

to anthropology students, with a small percentage allocated to students from other disciplines. The choice of anthropology was justified by its ability to "understand the new practices of social movements and the questions that arise from them" and to "get to know other cultures."[14] To this end, the master's program consisted of different courses taught in Arabic, French, and English and divided into four semesters. The courses in the first three modules provide a critical view of Africa. They include African Studies: concepts, fields, approaches, and perspectives; Africa and its borders and territorial dynamics; social diversity, political plurality, and identity negotiation; ethics and belief systems; Sociology and Anthropology of African Development Writing Africa, etc.

Tunisian and international university lecturers, including those from the University of Bayreuth, taught the courses. Academic exchange scholarships between the Universities of Sousse and Bayreuth facilitated their mobility, as well as that of the masters' students. In particular, the Tunisian students had access to Bayreuth's African Studies library and resources. The students also participated in conferences, summer schools, and seminars.

The fourth semester was devoted to writing a research paper on Africa using an anthropological method. With the production of the dissertations, the Nirvana publishing house created the "Anthropologie africaine" collection. This collection publishes dissertations and academic works that "use the tools of anthropology to study the African continent, of which Tunisia is a part, and particularly the division usually made between the Maghreb, North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa."[15] These three spaces represent the scientific field of the master's program and embody different social, cultural, and political dynamics.

Indeed, politicians, policymakers, and international institutions consider Tunisia a state of the Arab world.[16] This geopolitical perspective has placed the partnership around the master's program in the register of cooperation between Germany and the Arab world rather than between Germany and Africa. The North African subregion is often considered "less African" insofar as the continent of Africa is associated only with Blackness. Anthropologist Stephanie Pouessel ob-

14 Pierre-Noël Denieuil, "De l'anthropologie aux études africaines: Introduire et soutenir l'anthropologie en Tunisie et à Sousse, 2017" (Paper presented in an African Studies Colloquium, Sousse, Tunisia, 2017).

15 Translation Asma Ben Hadj Hassen, see Ramzi Ben Amara, Preface to *l'Afrique et des Africains dans les manuels scolaires tunsiens*, by Rahma Talmoudi (Tunisia: Nirvana editions, 2024).

16 The program was funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD): "Deutsch-Arabische Transformationspartnerschaft"/ "Deutsch-Arabische Hochschulpartnerschaften"/ "Partenariat germano-arabe pour la transformation" / Partenariats universitaires germano-arabes.

served that "the ethnonym 'African' is often used to designate 'the other', but more rarely to designate oneself. It refers to an exogenous African, synonymous with elsewhere or even culturally distant."[17]

The academic world has not escaped this dichotomy. On the contrary, the field of African Studies has strongly reinforced and reproduced this stereotype. African Studies have long been associated with sub-Saharan Africa. The Sahara serves as a dividing line, a pit, and a barren space. In *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa*, the historian Bruce Hall argues that the French colonial Empire, on the one hand, could not capture the complex hierarchies that existed before in the Sahel region. On the other hand, they feared solidarity between the Maghreb region and West Africa. Hence, the French decided to cut off the continent between white, North Africa, and South Black Africa. Religion also served as a marker of separation between "Black Islam" and "Arab Islam." In her article "Writing Trans-Saharan History: Methods, Sources and Interpretations Across the African Divide,"[18] Ghislaine Lydon, drawing on oral history, stressed that the Sahara has always been a space marked by continuous flows of peoples, ideas, and goods. This diversity makes it "a difficult world for the French to grasp." In addition, in his analysis of the after-effects of colonial ideology on post-independence African states, Frantz Fanon criticized this division, which "installs on the continent a racist philosophy that is terribly prejudicial to the future of Africa."[19]

This division between Black Africa and Arab Africa raised a lively debate within the Sousse Masters in Anthropology. Was Tunisia sufficiently African to be the subject of a master's degree in African Studies? The debate continued into the students' dissertations. The focus of the master's program was to work on "Africa" by doing "African" fieldwork. Faced with the difficulty of fieldwork in Africa due to a lack of material and financial resources (lack of research grants), some students were forced to readjust their methodology, sometimes favoring documentary or digital research. Other students were reluctant to write about Tunisia. A third group of students chose to write about Africa from a Tunisian perspective, i.e. from the point of view of the "sub-Saharan" migrant population living in Tunisia. This legitimate hesitation reflects a more general "malaise." To understand it

17 Stéphanie Pouessel, "*De la méconnaissance à la cohabitation," in Le Maghreb et son sud: vers des liens renouvelés,* eds. Mansouria Mokhefi and Alain Antil (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2012), https://doi.org/10.4000/books.editionscnrs.22878.

18 Ghislaine Lydon, "Writing Trans-Saharan History: Methods, Sources and Interpretations Across the African Divide," *The Journal of North African Studies* 10 (2005): 312, accessed May 5, 2024, doi: 10.1080/13629380500336664.

19 Fanon, Frantz [1961], "Les damnés de la terre" in *Frantz Fanon Oeuvres* (Paris: La Découverte, 2011), 594.

better, it is important to situate the creation of this master's degree, the first in Tunisia, within a broader local debate that has structured Tunisian society and which erupted after the 2011 revolution on Tunisian identity and Africanness, then within an African regional dynamic characterized by growing mobility and migratory movements that have made the country a destination for many African migrants, and finally within a global agenda in Western institutions (or not) to support African Studies.

The Revolution and the African Question

I arrived at the university for the first time in September 2011, a few months after the "fall" of the Ben Ali regime. He had ruled the country with an iron fist for 23 years. The end of Ben Ali's regime ushered in a period of political transition, during which a new constitution was adopted and democratic elections were held. In this context, a debate on Tunisia's identity has re-emerged. Several previously marginalized social groups are demanding national recognition.

In his quest for international recognition, Ben Ali has focused on promoting a progressive policy of opening to the West. This has led to the emergence of the Mediterranean as an important cultural reference point, emphasizing Tunisia's "strategic" position as a civilizational crossroads between the West and the East. The "Arab-Muslim" identity has been eclipsed by that of belonging to the civilizations of the Mediterranean basin.

The first debates on Tunisian identity date back to the period of independence in 1956. The first president, Habib Bourguiba (1957–1987), who came from a petty bourgeois family in the Tunisian Sahel and was influenced by the French model of the time, embarked on a political project of assimilation and "Tunisification." At the time, Tunisian national identity represented an "ethnocentric" identity based on the attributes of whiteness, Arabism, and Islam. This identity model had no official place for family ties, racial differences, or religious divisions. The voices of minorities (Blacks, Amazighs, Jews) in the construction of such an identity were reduced or even silenced.

Despite Bourguiba's commitment to Pan-Africanism and the strong friendships he forged in this context with Léopold Sédar Senghor, Félix Houphouët-Boigny, and Kwame Nkrumah, Africa as a reference point for identity remained absent or, at best, associated exclusively with the French-speaking world. In his work on Tuni-

sian school history, the Tunisian historian Driss Abassi[20] has described how school textbooks, especially history textbooks, have been containers of state ideologies and conceptions of identity. Questioning the place of Africa in school textbooks under the two political regimes of Bourguiba and Ben Ali, he concludes that Africa remains marginalized "from Tunisia's possible identity horizons."[21] In addition, Rahma Talmoudi, in her book on the image of Africa and Africans in Tunisian textbooks, shows that the country is often associated with stereotypes when the continent is mentioned. Thus, Africa is portrayed as "remote, primitive, poor and ravaged by wars and crises."[22]

Although the question of Africanity was not directly addressed, a current in the social and human sciences emphasized the reading of minority margins, cultural diversity, and trans-Saharan slavery, particularly in terms of cultural, artistic, and historical practices. This led to works highlighting artistic and ritual expressions of African origin among Black Tunisians.[23] In history, Lucette Valensi (1978) initiated the study of minorities, and since then, a new generation of scholars continued this work, such as Jocelyne Dakhlia[24] and Abdelhamid Larguèche.[25] More recently, young Tunisian researchers such as Inès Mrad Dali, who combines archival research and ethnography in her work on slavery and post-slavery in Tunisia and the Arab-Muslim world,[26] and Maha Abdelhamid[27], who combines academic research and activism, have continued this academic effort.

Black Tunisians identity claims, although present since the 1960s, only gained momentum after the 2011 popular uprising. During the ensuing period of political

20 Driss Abbassi, "Le Maghreb Dans La Construction Identitaire De La Tunisie Postcoloniale," *Critique Internationale* 40 (2008): 115–37, https://doi.org/10.3917/crii.040.0115.

21 Driss Abassi, "Les représentations de l'Afrique dans les manuels scolaires post-coloniaux en Tunisie," in *Noirs au Maghreb: Enjeux Identitaires*, ed. Stéphanie Pouessel (Paris/Tunis: Karthala / IRMC, 2012), 147–55.

22 Rahma Talmoudi, *L'Afrique et les Africains dans les manuels scolaires tunisiens* (Tunis: Nirvana, 2023), 130.

23 Pouessel, Stéphanie, "Les Tunisiens noirs," in *Noirs au Maghreb: Enjeux identitaires*, ed. Stéphanie Pouessel (Paris / Tunis: Karthala / IRMC, 2012), 77.

24 Jocelyne Dakhlia, ed., *Créations artistiques contemporaines en pays d'islam* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2006).

25 Abdelhamid Larguèche, *Les ombres de Tunis: Pauvres, marginaux et minorités aux XVIIIème et XIXème siècles* (Tunis: Centre de publication universitaire, Faculté des lettres de Manouba, 1999).

26 Inès Mrad Dali, "De l'esclavage à la servitude: Le cas des Noirs de Tunisie," *Cahiers d'études africaines* 179–180 (2005): 935–956.

27 Maha Adelhamid, "De la libération de la parole raciste à l'émergence d'un mouvement contre le racisme anti-noir," in *Tunisie: Une démocratisation au-dessus de tout soupçon?* eds. Amin Allal and Vincent Geisser (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2018), 343–356.

transition, these claims took various forms, including digital activism on social networks, the creation of exchange forums and Facebook pages, and the publication of articles denouncing racial discrimination. Associations such as Adam for Equality and Development, founded in 2011 and dissolved in the summer of 2013, and *M'nemty* ('My Dream' in Arabic), founded in May 2013, emerged to defend these claims. These struggles have led, among other things, to the proclamation of a national day for the abolition of slavery[28] and the adoption of a law aimed at eliminating all forms of racial discrimination in 2018.

The development of national identity in Tunisia since independence has been characterized by a post-colonial narrative that has often marginalized the contributions and experiences of minorities, particularly Black Tunisians. Through the efforts of researchers and activists the question of minority identity claims has gradually gained visibility on the public stage, especially after the 2011 revolution. It is important to note that these claims are still primarily rooted in a local framework, namely the reconstruction of Tunisian identity. The return to a more pronounced recognition of Africa in Tunisia will be further accentuated by the increasing mobility, migration, and visibility of the African diaspora in the Tunisian space.

Conclusion

This exploration into African identity and scholarship highlights the varied experiences that influence our culture. By examining everything from culinary habits and architectural styles to social practices and academic endeavors, we see that our cultural renaissance involves preserving traditional elements and embracing change. This transformation necessitates critically examining what elements within our culture align with our contemporary values, challenging us to adapt and innovate while respecting our historical roots. This reflection is particularly poignant for us as North African junior scholars navigating the complex terrains of identity and belonging within the context of African Studies in Germany. Our academic and personal journeys, stretching from Sudan and Tunisia to the halls of Bayreuth, have not only illuminated the profound impacts of geographical, cultural, and epistemic contexts on our engagements but have also highlighted the

28 M'hamed Oualdi, "Commémorer l'abolition de l'esclavage en Tunisie: Les droits des citoyens noirs et l'histoire des esclaves d'origines européennes," *Esclavages & Post-esclavages* 4 (2021), online since May 10, 2021, http://journals.openedition.org/slaveries/3907; https://doi.org/10.4000/slaveries.3907.

challenges we face. These challenges include combating the oversimplification of African identities and integrating our diverse experiences into a predominantly Western academic discourse. This synthesis is not an academic exercise but a profound endeavor to reclaim and redefine what it means to be African in today's multifaceted world.

Our narrative has underscored the fluidity and multiplicity of African identity, arguing against a static understanding of cultural identity. It calls for recognizing that Africanness and Arabness are not binaries, but spectra enriched by continuous dialogue and interaction. This dynamic understanding prompts us to question and redefine the boundaries and expressions of our identity. As scholars, our role transcends the mere study of African topics; we are active participants in the discourse, shaping and being shaped by the complexities of the identities we study. Moreover, the engagement with thinkers like Sylvia Tamale allows us to see Africanness as an ongoing conversation – a narrative continually woven through its people's lives and experiences.[29] These perspectives challenge us to reflect on how African identities are represented and compel us to participate actively in their representation. They beckon us to decolonize our understanding of Africa, to see it not as a monolith but as a vibrant tapestry of diverse communities, each with unique histories and contexts.

In this sense, our academic journey is a personal and collective quest to contribute to a discourse celebrating Africa's complexity and resilience. It invites us to rethink and reshape how African identity is perceived and taught, ensuring that our scholarship is not just about studying Africa but truly understanding and experiencing Africanness in its most authentic and diverse expressions.

29 Sylvia Tamale, *Decolonization and Afro-Feminism* (Ottawa: Daraja Press, 2020).

Taariqa-Rahamat Adepeju Ilupeju

Chapter 3
Thinking Through African Studies and Blackness from a Nigerian Perspective

This chapter reveals my perception of research literature on Black women I read as a Nigerian student in Germany. It exposed me to the fact that the history and struggles of Black women in a racially charged society differ from those in a society with a predominantly Black population. In Nigeria my ethnicity is Yoruba and among my West African people, my nationality is Nigerian. Upon arriving in Germany, I realized that skin color defined my ethnicity and identity. I became a Black person or a person of color. So, I needed to learn the history of Black women. The history of Black women does not exist in West Africa but rather the history of, in my case, West African women. In Africa, the concept of Blackness emerged from the outsiders' categorization of Africans South of the Sahara. Arab writers first used the term *Bilal al Sudan* (Black people), although it was perceived more as a geographical differentiation than as an ethnic identity. Reading through the works of research literature of Black women in racially stratified societies, such as the United States, I realized that "Black" was used to refer to dark-skinned African descendants or derogatorily to refer to descendants of the survivors of the Tringular Trade and enslavement. Being exposed to the discussions in the diaspora, I came to see that the term "Black" has been reclaimed and embraced by Afro-diasporic people as a political identity, thereby making visible its constructedness.

The history of Black people is not equitable to the history of Africa. Conceiving of it as such serves to alienate Africans who are multiracial especially those in North Africa. Moreover, Africans in West Africa do not define themselves as Black but rather do so through their cultural divisions. This argument is framed theoretically through the concept of decolonization of knowledge and through contingent theory. The decolonial approach allows for the diverse use of scholarly works as generative concerning contested issues and counter-narratives (Eurocentric views built against Afrocentric responses) while contingent theory explains the positionality. It further evaluates the distributional aspect of social injustice as we navigate epistemic racism and allow for reflective writing that demonstrates how the analyses are based on my personal opinion and experience.

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German Experience

I am a Nigerian from the Yoruba ethnic group who reside in Lagos. In Yorubaland, you identify as yourself, then as part of a family, and then as an extension of a community. The Yoruba concept of identity is captured in their *oriki* "panegyrics."[1] The *oriki* instil in the child a degree of self-worth which is often mistaken as arrogance. A child is born to be cherished, named after the circumstance of her birth, and the destiny of greatness she is to fulfill. For me, it is necessary to define my identity as I have known it to be before my arrival in Germany. I participated in the Erasmus Plus Mobility Stipend Exchange Program, and the Faculty of Theology at Humboldt University invited me as an exchange student. After the ordeal of the visa process, I arrived in Berlin on the 28th of October 2022. I was two weeks late since the winter semester started on October 15, and I reached out to register for the course on African and Black Diaspora Women Intellectuals: African History written by Black Women. I was interested in the course because it is an aspect of intellectual history that we call "Historiography" in Nigeria. The writers presented in the course take a multidisciplinary approach to analyze their information. The course examined how to teach Feminist Studies, the reading and analysis of literature focused on women's experiences. It did so through an evaluation of the role of class, racial struggle, and its effect on Black women. It also explored colonialism as it impacts women and slavery, the ordeals of female Africans, and, finally, what Africanness and Blackness mean.[2]

As a student of history, I was shocked at the use of the personal pronoun "I" in the texts. The use of the personal pronoun breached every aspect of scientific objectivity. My training had imparted on me that a historian is ethically bound to be neutral, to allow the evidence to speak without personal bias. However, the use of the personal pronoun invokes empathy; it creates a connection between the readers and the authors. It allows the readers to easily navigate the past along with the authors. The use of "I" humanizes the discussions, and the pronoun "I" brings the past closer, whereas neutral language makes the past very distant. I have come to realize that there has been a call for reflective writing and that the idea of neutrality stems from the perspective of privileging one literature

1 Bolanle Awe, "Praise Poems as Historical Data: The Example of the Yoruba Oríkì," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 44 (1974): 331–49, https://doi.org/10.2307/1159054; Karin Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women & the Past in a Yoruba Town* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 135–82, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctvwcjhqv.12.

2 My observation after reading, Mary Hames, "Teaching Black, Teaching Gender, Teaching Feminism," in *Surfacing: On Being Black and Feminist in South Africa*, edited by Desiree Lewis and Gabeba Baderoon (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2021), 56–72.

above the other.[3] Decolonization of knowledge production opens scholarship up to the plurality of societies, and it also acknowledges that there are multiple sources of information and knowledge. I affirm the notion that women's experiences differ across cultures, and there is no unified method with which to teach these multiple experiences. However, the use of oral interviews and thus moving beyond rigid written sources allows for a variety of experiences to be represented. Incorporating an audio-visual approach in which students are allowed to hear, listen to, and watch the stories of these women also makes the subjects more human.

The audio-visual method brings the discussion to life, the students see and hear the subjects narrate their ordeals. It also converts texts to human actions, which makes the stories, whether captured live or re-enacted, more relatable. In contrast, a neutral approach turns the human into an it, an object that lacks emotion and whose experience is a result of mathematical calculations of past actions. "I" allows readers to acknowledge how global issues affect individuals, but also how authors themselves always bring their own subject position and positionality as they are writing, whether they use the "I" or not. Bendix et.al. observe that the privilege to conceal one's identity as neutral and the privilege to produce a false objectivity is in itself a pillar of feminist analysis and thought.[4] However, my observations on the presentation of social issues in Africanist scholarship on Black women show that there is no universal approach to the study of feminism.

What does Blackness Mean to Me?

While in Nigeria I did not view myself as Black. Nigeria is a country that is not racially divided, and I was in the midst of people who looked like me. However, upon arriving in Germany, I found myself among the minority. Being Black to me is being a Nigerian in the diaspora. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie also shared this feeling of mine when she revealed that she became Black only when she got to

3 Grace Musila, "Thinking While Black," in *Black Academic Voices: The South African Experience,* edited by Grace Khunou, Edith Phaswana, Katijah Khoza-Shangase and Hugo Canham (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2019), accessed May 29, 2024, https://johannesburgreviewofbooks.com/2020/07/03/thinking-while-black-read-grace-a-musilas-essay-from-the-award-winning-book-black-academic-voices-the-south-african-experience/.

4 Daniel Bendix, Franziska Müller, and Aram Ziai, "Decolonizing Knowledge Orders, Research Methodology, and the Academia: An Introduction," in *Beyond the Master's Tools: Decolonising Knowledge Orders, Research Methods and Teaching*, edited by Daniel Bendix, Franziska Müller, and Aram Ziai (London: Routledge, 2020), 4.

America.[5] I cannot talk about the generality of the Black race as we may have the same skin tone, but we do not have the same shared history. Our experiences differ because our countries and systems differ. Our ability to adapt to a new environment depends on tools the hosts and the individuals in that environment put in place to make integration possible. The guest and the host must be willing to learn from each other. Unfortunately, it is not always so, especially in a society that is based on white supremacy, a whiteness that was created out of the colonial mentality of political domination of other races. This environment affects the influence of identity creation.

We must acknowledge that Africa does not have a singular identity. My experience as a Nigerian is different from that of a Ghanaian, Ethiopian, or Namibian. What flattens our complex identities is when we find ourselves as migrants within a country that pretends to be color-blind despite being structured by racist practices. In such cases, our skin color becomes an identifying factor. Ethnicity is transformed from the experience of people who share the same space and is reduced to the skin tones of the groups. However, my experience in my German course exposed me to literary and scholarly texts that portray the dynamic experiences of Black people. Mostly, depending on those who were presenting the topics, the class was divided into small units, in which people had intimate discussions on the debated issues, and within these groups, every opinion mattered.

The scholarship we studied analyzed the diversity of the Black experience. Mary Hames' "Teaching Black, Teaching Gender and Teaching Feminism," focuses on heteropatriarchy, sexism, standpoint knowledge, contestation, and music as the voice of the victims or a tool for creating awareness. Hames also reviews how formal university education in South Africa is channeled to keep women and other minorities subservient, and there is a need for social reengineering and new legal and policy frameworks. She advocates for preventing gender profiling and teaching differently, by exploring the victims' pains, silences, and shame, ultimately aiming to help them heal. We must also be open to learn about queerness and those whose culture appear different from ours. Hames' text and the classroom discussion on these topics prepared me for the course's additional content.[6] Wunpini Fatimata Muhammad's "Dismantling the Western Canon in Media Studies" exposed me to the danger of a one-sided narrative.[7] It questions white rheto-

5 Hope Reese, "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: I became Black in America," August 29, 2018, accessed May 29, 2024, https://daily.jstor.org/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-i-became-black-in-america/.
6 Hames, "Teaching Black, Teaching Gender, Teaching Feminism."
7 Wunpini Fatimata Muhammad, "Dismantling the Western Canon in Media Studies," *Communication Theory* 32 (2022): 273–280.

ric. One must be aware that there are other forms of knowledge production outside of the Eurocentric view. For example, I engaged my group on the beauty of oral tradition, and how stage plays, music, and other audio-visuals can be used to transmit knowledge.

It is quite strange to realize that Black history is being conceptualized through the Eurocentric view. What is the Eurocentric view of "Black?" It is an agenda where discussions of the Black race commence with the projection of Black people as a product of the Triangular Trade and enslavement. What is the African side of the story? What is this Afrocentric view that Europeans fear to acknowledge? And why do they fear the Afrocentric perspective? The Afrocentric view acknowledges that Africans are capable of thinking and writing their own stories. The Afrocentric view places Africa at the center of historical discussions. It acknowledges that Africans established their civilizations well before their contact with Europe. The sources for the study of African history from 1000–1800 rely on oral traditions, archaeological findings, and reports of Arab traders and foreign travelers.[8] K. O. Dike asserted that scholars assumed that "lack of written records in some areas of Africa meant also the absence of history."[9] He further observes that even during the heydays of white supremacy in the colonial period, the newly educated elites transformed the history of their towns from oral data to written documents. These authors, including Apolo Kagwa of Uganda, Samuel Johnson of Nigeria, and Reindorf of Ghana, were the pioneering authors of African historiography who used oral traditions as sources.[10] J. F. Ade Ajayi said that the teaching of African history during "the colonial era was the account of European merchants and colonial activities in Africa."[11]

In post-colonial times with the evolution of Western style universities in West Africa, the research of the past became revolutionary. Among scholars, an acknowledgement of oral evidence emerged along with other available data to document West African heritage before the coming of the Europeans. Some of these books were intended to teach students in secondary schools and at the university level. These scholars also created academic journals, which include the *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, the *Journal of Historical Society of Ghana and* the *Journal of African History*. From a wider perspective, there is J. D. Clark's *The Pre-*

8 J. B. Webster and A. A. Boahen with H. O. Idowu, *The Growth of African Civilisation: The Revolutionary Years of West Africa since 1800* (London: Longman Group, 1967), xiv.

9 K. O. Dike in the preface of J. F. Ade Ajayi, *Christian Mission in Nigeria* 1841–1891: *The Making of a New Elite* (London: Longman, 1965), xi.

10 Dike, preface *Christian Mission in Nigeria*, xi.

11 Basil Davidson and F. K. Buah and the advice of J. F. Ade Ajayi, *The Growth of African Civilisation: A History of West Africa 1000–1800* (London: Longman, 1965), preface.

historic Origins of African Culture; Basil Davidson's *The African Past*; and J. C. Anene and G. Brown's *Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century: A Handbook for Teachers and Students*. *The UNESCO General History of Africa* was the result of the Africans' collaborative works on African historiography and other writers on African history. The first set of historiographies utilized the nationalist approach, focusing on the promotion of the glorious African past and what we can now classify as the Afrocentric view.

The Eurocentric writers of the period also ignored Arabic sources on West Africa. Scholars of early twentieth century European history were obsessed with documentary evidence to achieve scientific objectivity in historical production. However, as a society that was obsessed with writing, they also distinguished between the types of written documents to be used. It appears that the colonial hegemonic control of scholarship only acknowledged documents Europeans produced. There are documentary sources of Black civilization from the ninth century AD in Arabic sources. The Arab writers who wrote on West Africa include Al Fazari, Alkwarizimi, Ibn Batuta, Al Bakr, Leo Africanus, and Ibn Fartua, among others. Some of their works include *Tarikh Al Fattash, Tarikh Al Sudan,* and *Kano Chronicles*. By ignoring these early documentary sources on Africa, the European writers of the colonial era practiced selective objectivity, an approach to the use of sources that is prejudiced and offensive. It is best described in Bendix's words as "epistemic racism in academia that is non-representation, silencing, racial stereotype or dichotomies."[12]

Students of history on the African continent learn about the rise and fall of empires in Africa. The empires include Ghana, Madinka, Songhai, and the Sefawa empires, among others. These empires existed from as early as the ninth century AD; some collapsed and others rose to replace them. The existence of these civilizations shows that Africans organized themselves and developed their societies. To erase over one thousand years of history is neither thorough nor arduous research.

In contrast, Africans in the diaspora learn about the horror of Black communities in the face of enslavement, imperialism, and capitalism in history, and their implications for today. Within Afro-diasporic communities, knowledge about the history of white supremacy, racism, imperialism, and the oppression of African people and people of African descent are crucial to understanding the consequences these have in the present. Diaspora narratives also emphasize Black resistance, Black joy, and Black pride. From my Nigerian vantage point, what is lost are stories about African achievement on the continent, even if I understand that to dehumanize humans the propagandists needed to also dehumanize their history.

12 Bendix et. al., "Decolonizing Knowledge Orders," 2.

Africans have responded to racist works of literature not only by publishing their history books in large numbers but also by carving out their methodology for the study of African history. The need to diversify the knowledge on the continent gave birth to the inclusion of the use of oral evidence to capture Africa's history. Many preliterate African societies preserved their past and culture in oral forms. To realize that after putting a lot of effort into the publications of African history books the works were not used to teach the history of the continent in the Western world is absurd. Those Africans who found themselves as history teachers chose to mute their voices and follow the set curriculum of their employers. I was a guest in Germany and was not under any compulsion to keep mute, but I felt the struggle of Black women in Germany, a new terrain I had to navigate. I was born in post-independence Nigeria. Nigeria's ruling leaders are my people, I did not inherit racist colonial baggage, and I certainly do not define myself as a descendant of enslaved people. In Nigeria, feminist struggles are championed towards acquiring equal space in the academic, economic, and political terrain. Women's problems are not blamed on white women or former colonialists but on Nigerian leaders.

Saidiya Hartman's *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Trade Route*[13] is a book that provoked a lot of emotion in me. I realized I was one of the lucky ones—at least my ancestors had not been enslaved. The narrative makes me carry the guilt of being the lucky one, carrying the responsibility that we who remained in Africa are descendants of those who escaped being taken or descendants of those who did the capturing, though many Africans believe that Africa already paid the price through colonialism. The history of the Triangular Trade that is so widely spoken of in Western literature is one that Africans would rather forget than remember. To Africans, history should be a narrative of a dignified past and the Triangular Trade and enslavement is a shameful past. This is where Black Africans in Africa differ from Black Africans in Europe and America who were victims of forced migration and labor. "From where we each were standing, we did not see the same past, nor did we share a common vision of the promised land."[14] Hartman's story is a story about rediscovering oneself, a journey she embarked on by searching through family history and national archives, looking for answers she could not obtain in America that led to her journey to Ghana. Who were they before they were enslaved? Hartman's style of writing is descriptive and provocative as she carries her readers along with her in her or-

13 Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Trade Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

14 Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 165.

deals and frustrations. The slave traders felt no kinship to the Africans they sold. These were economic transactions in which humans were objectified as commodities. It is a dark history, a past Africans of the "slave coast" would rather erase than relive. There are more historical publications on the Triangular Trade in Africa written by European Africanist authors than there are of indigenous authors. For example, P. D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census;*[15] John Lovejoy, *Transformation of Slavery;*[16] Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspective;*[17] and Kristin Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City.*[18] First, Africans were not keeping figures and data on the trade. Secondly, pieces of evidence of the slave trade that existed in oral data were focused on the nobles who benefited from the trade. Thirdly, it was a past not found to be dignifying. The trade is discussed briefly as a chapter in academic textbooks on the history of Africa or West Africa in two epochs, the Trans-Saharan trade in enslaved people and the Transatlantic trade. In East Africa, the trade in enslaved people across the Indian Ocean is also discussed. One factor that stood out from the African perception of the Triangular Trade is that the humans traded were seen as casualties of the sporadic civil wars in the regions. For West Africa the Triangular Trade marks the region's contact with the Europeans and abolition started the period of European colonialism. The Triangular Trade birthed the forced mass migration of Africans to Europe and the Americas. The Transatlantic system birthed white supremacy while colonialism institutionalized it.

Hartman's encounter with other Black people in Ghana made her feel more secluded; she wanted them to be sorry. Her quest for retribution prevented her from enjoying the company of those who welcomed her. There was a cultural gap, as she misinterpreted their jokes, and she felt out of place. She wanted them to remember that which they did not partake in. What, however, resonated with me was in the chapter titled "Afrophobia", where she witnessed the failed military coup in Ghana, the chaos, and panic and how she reached for her American passport in an attempt to escape back to America. There I said to myself she had the luxury of escape while the indigenes would stay to endure the outcome of the

15 Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

16 Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

17 Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, eds., *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspective* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977).

18 Kristin Mann, *Slavery and the Birth of an African City: Lagos 1760–1900* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010).

coup, had it succeeded. Then I realized that our experiences as Black people differ, our pains differ, and our ability to heal differs. The history of African people and of people of African descent is complex and messy. Obviously, there is not one Black narrative, but many.

I was curious to know more about the Black community I migrated into. The more I learned about the struggle of Africans in the diaspora the more I understood that their literary and scholarly texts are channeled towards emancipation. They are channeled towards self-discovery. Their texts are channeled towards earning their respectful place within academia and also extended to redefining their political space within the diasporic community. I was born into a culture that is clearly defined by a dignified history. I have been shielded by the African bubble that has protected me as a person and as an extension of a group. Growing up in Africa with a predominantly Black community shielded me from the legacy of the Triangular Trade. Being born decades after the end of the colonial era made me oblivious to colonial racism. In Adichie's words, "While the British left many cursed legacies in its wake, racial identity was not one in Nigeria."[19] But someone from South Africa will feel differently. "The Interconnected Histories of South African and American Sociology: Knowledge in the Service of Colonial Violence"[20] is a history of class struggle and class hierarchy. It is a narrative of Black women in a racially segregated African society. In it, poor Blacks are remembered, and rich Blacks are hardly spoken about because it does not suit the pitiful condition in which white supremacists love to see Blacks. On the other hand, the poor white is ignored while the rich white is remembered because it suits the narrative that whites are superior. Colonial hierarchy promoted white supremacy because the colonialists were white and, as a result, whites controlled state resources to the detriment of Black people.

I observed that Blackness as coined in the diasporas does not represent Black people in post-independent West Africa who reside in the region. However, Blackness represents the disadvantaged position of Black Africans in the global political terrain. Black has come to represent the oppressed while whiteness represents power. Achille Mbembe hoped for a world of "mutual belonging and not a world where ethnicity would be based on power relation."[21] Black intellectual study can

19 Reese, "Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie," https://daily.jstor.org/chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-i-became-black-in-america/

20 Zine Magubane, "The Interconnected Histories of South African and American Sociology: Knowledge in the Service of Colonial Violence," in *Mass Violence in Modern History: Cultural Violence and the Destruction of Human Communities,* edited by Fiona Greenland and Fatma Müge Göçek (London: Routledge, 2020), 77–94.

21 Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason, 20.*

be described in Mbembe's words as "the expression of resistance to multiplicity."[22] It represents Black struggle amidst white hegemony.

The Nigerian Gaze and Issues in Black Women's Historiography

Black women's history in Europe and the Americas emphasizes the systemic injustice done to people of color, and Black women's literary writing is in response to this inequality. In Nigeria, such literature is centerd on the concept of patriarchy. Afrocentrist literature that focused on African civilization silenced women's contributions to these great developments.

The UNESCO General History of Africa was also guilty of side-lining the study of women. While Volume VIII addresses women's role in the development of Africa as a part of Ali Mazrui's contribution to Africa towards the 2000s, the series did not have any women contributors. Mazrui analyzed gender roles in transition; he aligned with the notion that "traditional Africa before European colonisation knew great occasions of power-sharing between genders."[23] He cited Hatshepsut of Egypt, Nzinga of Angola, Yaa Asantewa of Ashanti, and Nehandra of Zimbabwe as historic powerful women of traditional times. Women were excluded from the political administration of the colonial era by the colonial government. The role of women in economic activities was also localized and international trade became the terrain of men. Upon independence, the colonial governments handed over the power to men. However, women have emerged as diplomatic representatives. Angie Brooks of Liberia, for example, was nominated to serve as the president of the United Nations General Assembly. Other women also have influenced the world of diplomacy, namely Elizabeth Bagaya Nyabongo, Margaret Kenyatta of Kenya, Alice Lenshina of Zambia, Mrs Sally Mugabe, Mrs Anwar al Sadat of Egypt, and Winnie Mandela, among others. The UNESCO's document of over 1025 pages dedicated solely nine pages to the discussion of women in the development of Africa (910–919).

As a result, the pioneering works in women's studies first focused on the rediscovery of women who occupied political positions. To find the place of women in precolonial times, scholars re-examined oral traditions and early documentary sources. LaRay Denzer observed that pieces of documentary evidence obtained

22 Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason,* 112.

23 Ali Mazrui, *General History of Africa,* VIII: Africa since 1935 (Paris: UNESCO, 1993).

consisted of Reverend Samuel Johnson's *History of the Yorubas,*[24] the nineteenth century writings of European explorers such as Hugh Clapperton, and Richard and John Lander, and memoirs of missionaries like Thomas Jefferson Bowen, *Adventures and Missionary Labours;*[25] William F. Clarke *Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland 1854–1858,*[26] among others.[27] Nina Mba and Bolanle Awe championed the positioning of women's history within Nigeria. Awe, in her review of the conference on women and development, observed that the African experience differs from other women's experiences. She debunked the idea of the universality of women's experiences and problems. As such, she advised that when studying case studies "emphasis should be given to indigenous scholars, by their permanent membership in their society, they are likely to have a better insight into their problems and the area that need closest attentions."[28] Awe, in her book *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective*,[29] examined the contribution of women to the development of Nigeria. She collated works under the themes of Savior of their society, and key female historical figures of the precolonial era such as Queen Amina of Zaria, Queen Kambasa of Bonny, and Nana Asmau were analyzed. In Yorubaland, women held key positions such as Kings, leaders, or traders, and regents. In northern Nigeria, before the coming of Islam, women also had the position of leadership. With the various political transitions in Nigeria, women worked hard to gain political influence. Nina Mba, who published *Nigerian Women Mobilised*, observed that women were marginally represented in politics, and their few appearances in political history were their attempts to obtain influence over those who held power.[30] Mba's work focuses on the changing role of women in the political sphere during the colonial era. Mba explained that there was a need to focus on women as a separate group to seek redress to the imbalance in the treatment of Nigerian women in Nigeria's historiography. Women as agents were downplayed in the documents of the colonial era, and only a few scholars paid attention to the effect of the colonial administrative system on women. Mba discussed the position of southern Nigerian women during the co-

24 Samuel Johnson, *A History of the Yorubas: From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorate* (Lagos: 1921).

25 J. Bowen, *Travels, Adventures and Missionary Labours in Several Countries in the Interior of Africa from 1849 to 1856*, 2nd ed. (London, 1968).

26 William H. Clarke, *Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland 1854–1858* (Ibadan, 1972).

27 LaRay Denzer, "Yoruba Women: A Historiographical Study," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 27 (1994): 3, https://doi.org/10.2307/220968.

28 Bolanle Awe, "Reflections on the Conference on Women and Development: I," *Signs* 3 (1977): 314–15, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173102.

29 Bolanle Awe, ed., *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective* (Ibadan: John Archers Ltd, 1992).

30 Nina Emma Mba, *Nigerian Women Mobilised: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria, 1900–1965* (Ibadan: International and Area Studies, 1997), preface.

lonial era, women in political parties, women organizations and pressure groups. The pioneering Nigerian approach to the historiography of women from the precolonial period was to examine narratives of female sung and unsung heroes of the past. It is the much later writers, such as Olufunke Adeboye's "Framing Female Leadership on Stage and Screen in Yorubaland,"[31] Abosede George's *Making Modern Girls*;[32] Oyeronke Oyewumi's[33] and Mutiat Oladejo's *Ibadan Market Women and Politics 1900–1995*[34] that delved more into social issues.

The social status of Nigerian women changed and so did the social issues during the British colonial administration. Abosede George's "Within Salvation: Girl Hawkers and The Colonial State in Development Era Lagos"[35] resonates with me because the author is a Nigerian and the scope of events happened in colonial Nigeria. However, I had to analyze the article with my colleagues who were not Nigerians, and the experience of the girl hawker contradicts their notion of a girl child. While the girl hawker appears to me as a powerful girl making her money, she appears to others as a disadvantaged girl deprived of her childhood. It was a learning experience for us. Who is a child? The Yoruba did not attribute sexual roles to children. Gender was fluid as is evidenced in Yoruba names except for children born under unique circumstances. Most Yoruba names are gender neutral, and Oyeronke Oyewumi explained that the idea of gender was instilled to enable patriarchy under colonial rule.[36] George's "Within Salvation" reveals the ordeal of a teenage Nigerian girl surviving in the colonial era. It also exposed the gender roles attributed to choosing a profession. It is not strange for Yoruba women to make their own money, and street hawking is similar to street trading. George created a social construct for the discussion—the welfare of the female child. She exposed the clash of culture that occurred in the perception of raising a child and the gender profiling that occurs in criminalizing the activities of the

31 Olufunke Adeboye, "Framing Female Leadership on Stage and Screen in Yorubaland: Efunsetan Aniwura Revisited," *Gender & History* 30 (2018): 666–681, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12396

32 Abosede George, *Making Modern Girls: A History of Girlhood, Labor, and Social Development in 20th Century Colonial Lagos* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014).

33 Oyeronke Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

34 Mutiat T. Oladejo, *Ibadan Market Women and Politics* (Langham: Lexington Books, 2015).

35 Abosede George, "Within Salvation: Girl Hawkers and The Colonial State in Development Era Lagos," *Journal of Social History* 44 (2011): 837–859, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41305383.

36 Oyeronke Oyěwùmí, "Making History, Creating Gender: Some Methodological and Interpretive Questions in the Writing of Oyo Oral Traditions," *History in Africa* 25 (1998): 265, https://doi.org/10.2307/3172190.

young girl.[37] The young girl is a weak child from the Western perspective who must be protected and groomed for domestic work. The British educational system was channeled to domesticate the activities of the girl child. From the Yoruba perspective, a young girl child is allowed to explore the world as much as the young boy. The women's group that was advocating for the welfare and safety of the girl child were educated and British trained. Why should customs be condemned based on Western parameters? The issue of safety raised was that of the sexualization of the young girl as a commodity for sex predators. The focus should have been on arresting the sex predators, rather it was placed on restricting the movement of the young girl. George uses multiple sources, including primary and secondary data, as well as statistics to reveal gender profiling during the colonial period in Nigeria.

As a Nigerian leaving Africa with so much hope, Europe was supposed to be the ideal place, a place where the fundamental human rights of all are respected. To many migrants from Africa Europe offers more economic value and advantages, especially in the aspect of wage remuneration. The continuous devaluation of the Naira (legal tender in Nigeria) has brought despair among the working classes. They envy their colleagues in Europe who supposedly earned more. The Japa (escape) syndrome, however, was soon to be replaced with a reality shock. Being exposed to Black women's scholarship from the diaspora reveals the social ordeals of women of color in Europe and the United States. Kimberle Crenshaw's "Intersectionality Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Colour"[38] explores the different circumstances of women's issues in their communities in the United States. These issues include identity struggle, social power, class structure, and systematic racism. Countries that are racially divided put Blacks at a disadvantage, and they create a class system in which Blacks are subjugated to be poor while whites have easy access to wealth. This is explained using the US example, in which Blacks are criminalized and victimized which makes it difficult to rise above the economic and further institutional hardships faced. This level of social injustice is revealed through the lens of the narrators. In Germany, the seminal text *Farbe Bekennen* or "Showing our Colors," edited by May Ayim, Katharina Oguntoye, and Dagmar Schultz,[39] portrays that systemic racism is evident across

37 George, "Within Salvation."

38 Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Colour," *Stanford Law Review 43* (1991): 1241–1299.

39 May Ayim, Katharina Oguntoye, and Dagmar Schultz, eds., *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out*, trans. Anne V. Adams with Tina Campt, May Ayim, and Dagmar Schultz (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992).

people of diverse nationalities and origins. There is a system of degradation of people based on their skin color. In the chapter "Occupation Baby in Post-War Germany," Helga Emde narrated her ordeal of finding a job as a Black German woman in Frankfurt Holst in West Germany in the postwar period in the 1960s:

> On day duty it happened now and then that a doctor on the station would see me and ask if anyone else was on duty. In his eyes I was nobody! So, am I really nobody? I am a German, I was born here, but yet I'm different. A Black woman. A mixture of black and white. I felt degraded and discriminated against.[40]

In the postwar years, the time Helga Emde portrays, white Germans had better access to public facilities and were considered for employment first. Germanness was equated with whiteness. Of recent, this is beginning to change after the Black German movement began contesting such a vision in the 1980s. But the change is occurring very slowly.

Showing our Colors contains also precious information on Black life in Germany during the Weimar years and Nazi Germany, a topic that has received too little attention. In the chapter "Our Father was Cameroonian, Our Mother, East Prussian, We Are Mulattoes," Erika and Doris narrate their experiences as Black women in Germany during the Nazi era while enduring the specific brand of state racism and antisemitism. The chapter is a conversation between the two sisters. As Erika describes her ordeal when she was looking for a training position, she was told at every turn: "What, you want to work for us? We only hire 'Aryans.'"[41] The experiences of these Black women as Afro-German or Black Germans reveal the Nazi state sanctioned racism and its legacy in postwar Germany. May Ayim emphasized that "blacks are not automatically accorded recognition and respect." The Initiative of Black Germans (ISD) was established to expose the social ills of racism and to create a support group for Black people in Germany irrespective of their origin. The racial injustice continued even in the Unification era of 1990. The German law *Ausländergesetz* (Foreigners Act) isolated immigrants from the Germans.[42] Racism in Germany, as in Euro-America at large, is more pronounced because of the power relation that evolved between the enslaved and the slavers, between the colonized and the colonizers during the Triangular Trade and colonialism. Such words as the N word were used to qualify Africans and enslaved people.

40 Ayim et al., *Showing Our Colors*, 104.

41 Ayim et al., *Showing Our Colors*, 58.

42 Ayim et al., *Showing Our Colors*, foreword to the English language edition, vii–xxviii.

Not all Black Africans are of slave descent. I found myself correcting that generalized assumption. The system is built to continue to suppress the fundamental human rights of Blacks. When will Black Americans be regarded as Americans? The term Black American appeared to my Nigerian sensibilities as racist, but I have come to understand that it has been reclaimed as a politically self-determined label in opposition to white racist terminology in the US and in a similar way in Europe. Black people share similar experiences of degradation in a country that does not recognize their rights as equal human beings and citizens. The world forgets that there were white and Asian enslaved people. The media imagery of the Triangular Trade focuses on Black slaves because it is easy to continue to oppress people of this race when their ancestry is synonymous with slavery. Those people who were forcibly enslaved were the real heroes who revolutionized the world's food supply in an era in which agricultural knowledge was limited. They were forced to work for free to build the industrial world we all benefit from today. Achille Mbembe in *Critique of Black Reason* has highlighted the connection between capitalism, enslavement, and the birth of the concept of race. He is however hopeful that in the future Blackness will be the symbol of beauty and pride.[43] It is indispensable to acknowledge that the United States was built on the labor of Africans and people of African descent. Their labor was not given freely and thus we must remember the terms under which African men and women were forced to labor. To build a world of equals we must be ready to acknowledge and accept Black people as equal inhabitants of our spaces. Hakina Abbas says "belonging is understanding, having deep love for black people, and marginalized black communities."[44] I go further to say to accept a group of people we must understand their history and to make them feel included we must treat people with respect. A very easy way to feel welcomed and included is to know that the law of the state accepts your existence as an equal human.

The diverse voices of Black women's experiences were heard through the works of literature, activists, testimonies of victims, and publications of Black intellectuals, who navigated the unfavorable conditions of their workplaces. To tell their stories and the stories of those unseen, they used multiple sources, including primary and secondary sources. As Hartman mentions, limiting our enquiry into the past to data in the archive is not enough.[45] It is a disservice. Governments censor the archive and control what the public can assess. She who seeks answers

43 Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*, 47.

44 Vanessa E. Thompson, D. Bergold-Caldwell and C. Löw, "Black Feminisms: Entangled Geopolitical, Historical and Contextual Backgrounds in Conversation. Interview with Hakima Abbas, Maisha Auma, Noémi Michel und Margo Okazawa-Rey," *Femina Politica – Zeitschrift für feministische Politikwissenschaft*, 30 (2021): 123.

45 Hartman, *Lose your Mother,* prologue.

must investigate all available sources, from written documents to oral sources. In Africa, not all written documents have European origins, there are many Arabic documents on areas South of the Sahara. Researchers should be aware that before the Trinagular Trade, there was the Trans-Saharan Trade. African kingdoms have been interacting with their Asian neighbors for millennia, and there is a multitude of evidence of their interactions. Afro-feminism (the African feminist movement) is centerd on gender equality, improving women's access to education and health facilities, empowering women to equal spaces that generate wealth and employment, and eradicating harmful cultural practices. African feminists, Black diaspora feminists including Black German feminists and European feminists share the same goal, namely the eradication of the doctrine of patriarchy that denies women equal rights and spaces. However, Black feminists have the additional task of intersecting racial inequalities in a patriarchal world. Several case studies expose that women's privileges and struggles vary across African and diasporic cultures. The Nigerian feminists' body of literature focuses on women kings and female warriors; they aimed at exposing young African women to a rediscovery and reclamation of their place in the political stratagem of the various countries. In cultures where women were largely marginalized, the literary works enlightened women to seek political, economic, and social power. Feminism in West Africa has also been centerd on issues such as female genital mutilation, high maternal mortality, early child marriage, wife inheritance, and harmful widowhood practices.

The classroom was a place where my knowledge about feminism in West Africa was complemented by Black perspectives from Europe and other parts of the world. The classroom was indeed a place for rethinking the past. The students analyzed and interpreted the works of literature by contributing new insight that explained similar processes in Germany from our respective countries/nationalities/positionalities. In many of the classroom activities, the class was divided into smaller units that enabled everyone to share their understanding of the texts. The major themes that resonated with the kinds of literature explored were the methodology of teaching Black feminist history, the processes of integration (inclusivity), and respect for Black people as well as minority rights in Germany and across the globe. Sadly, fundamental human rights of Blacks are violated across the world for different ideological reasons. But what we should realize is that we as Africans are bound to travel to other regions outside of our countries. Homes and public spaces should be safe to us; all humans should be able to travel the world without the fear of being violated. Our classroom was indeed a beautiful space for people of diverse nationalities where we learned from each other. If there we could listen to each other, share experiences, disagree without violence, and all feel heard, then it should be possible that people throughout the world could do the same.

Conclusion

The scholarship I read on women's struggle in Africa, historicizes the positionality of women to be included in the national narratives of their countries as equal contributors to the greatness of African civilizations. The feminist writers based in Africa challenged the status quo by creating alternative narratives in the form of biographies of women leaders during traditional times. In more recent feminist epistemology on Nigeria, other social topics are examined like the contribution of women in the nano-industries and to the general economic growth of the country. Many of these scholarly works were written as reaction to the concept of patriarchy through empowering women and presenting them as agents of change. However, Nigerian writers also tackle gender-based medical challenges such as female genital mutilation and mother/child mortality in Africa.

The experiences of Black women in a society in which racism exists, such as Germany, differ. The scholarship on Black women's experiences assigned in the German class I attended, focused on enslavement, class struggle, racial discrimination, the gender binary, and how to teach Black Studies. The literatures were specifically selected for the module in the German class I attended and do not represent other feminist classes at German universities. Nigerian literary works aimed to empower young women while the literature read on Black women, historicizes victimhood and inspires to create equal access for the Black minorities in Germany. I am a Yoruba, a Nigerian, and an African who struggled as a migrant to Germany to find her Blackness. By and large, my experience as a Nigerian student in a German class exposed me to the diversity of the documents on Black women intellectuals and their experiences. I became enlightened to the multiple approaches to the study of Black women's history. I learned empathy and fairness and unlearned my assumptions. My visit to Germany made me realize what it meant to be protected within a majority ethnicity in Nigeria and the complexity experienced in the transformation of my identity into a minority ethnicity in Germany due to migration.

Darius Adu Bright and Adey-Fana Tefera

Contribution 4
Thoughts on African Studies: Conversations at ASWAD and ASAA Conferences

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Part II: **Universalisms from Black Perspectives**

Samir Ammour

Chapter 5
Breaking Boundaries, Building Bridges: The Academic Journey of Professor Fatou Sow in Global Feminist Thought

This chapter reads Professor Fatou Sow's life, career, activism, and scholarship as a subversion of structural inequalities in global knowledge production and knowledge bodies. Forms of domination based on race, gender, class, and religion in academic knowledge production and bodies of knowledge create a hierarchized environment for scholars and students that privileges positions for those unaffected by them. Adopting allegedly "universal" positions, because of an assumed "neutral" stance, contributes to the exclusion of those who are rendered invisible. Scholars who oppose such a view are relegated to resistance and subversion, even as their work is based on the same principles and values of scientific research. This politically and institutionally enforced disjunction between allegedly "subjective" activism and "objective" academia has often served to delegitimize perspectives opposing the academic canon. The disjunction structures our bodies of knowledge towards often depoliticized and allegedly "universal" stances. With this in mind, I read Sow's work as a history of subversion of hegemonic knowledge production because, as a Black African woman, she undermines the assumed universal stance, which is white, male, and middle class.

The first part of this article outlines the atmosphere during Fatou Sow's studies at the University of Dakar. As an auxiliary French university until 1971, the university took on Eurocentric curricula while Senegalese intelligentsia questioned what European philosophy had done for them. In the second part, I think through the fraught relationship between universalism and Black thought in the works of Fatou Sow as I investigate how, as a Francophone academic, she deals with conceptual universalisms' predominance in Francophone academia. In many ways, Sow's thought was intersectional before the term was coined. As well, for Sow, universalism remained the benchmark, but she fought for a specific notion of universalism: the idea that people have similar struggles anywhere in the world.

The following three sections review her work in a broader manner, suggesting that Sow became more and more interested in subverting institutional practice besides unveiling false claims of universality in academic discourses. In the 1980s, Sow began working with the Council for the Development of Social Science

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Research in Africa, CODESRIA. Founded in 1973, CODESRIA's aim was to build an autonomous Pan-African scientific community and to promote the participation of Africans in scholarly, public, and policy debates. Sow held various positions at CODESRIA, for which she published in the 2000s as co-editor of their bilingual publications on engendering African Social Sciences. Her interplay of intersectional and universalist approaches characterizes her philosophical world view as much as her methodologies. From her personal publications to her influence as trainer at CODESRIA, Sow infused her personal reality into knowledge production and bodies.

Considering my own positionality, which is a non-Black male German citizen studying in Berlin and writing a seminar paper in a class on Black and African Women Intellectuals in Global History, my perspective is inherently Eurocentric and African Social Sciences emerge as a periphery. Fatou Sow's career demonstrates how African Social Sciences are *more* universal than European academia as their proponents worked intersectionally from the beginning, in contrast to the recent white appropriations of (self-)critical approaches. Perceiving knowledge production from the global South as a periphery is therefore not to lessen its importance or quality, but rather to reflect on structures and hierarchies in bodies of knowledge. That being said, Fatou Sow always transcended the periphery/center binary. In her view, feminism in Africa was first and foremost built for itself. Thus, while my findings will be presented as something new, they may be obvious to others.

University of Dakar: Between Auxiliary and Antagonist

Universalism is a philosophical and theological concept that asserts the existence of universal principles and values that apply to all human beings, regardless of culture, race, or religion. The origins of universalism can be traced back at least to ancient Greece, where the idea of universal natural law, applicable to all humans was formulated. Since then, the concept of universalism emerged in the monotheistic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam but also in the period of Enlightenment. Around that time universalism shifted into a tool of imperialism where together with a Christian interpretation – salvation through faith in Jesus Christ – it was instrumentalized to justify oppression and subjugation through which the white male became the universal human being and was to civilize non-white people. It is no wonder then that post-colonial thinkers employ the universalism of Enlightenment cautiously, fittingly exemplified by Achille Mbembe's ref-

erence to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*: Critique of Black Reason.[1] It exemplifies what is often left out from modern conceptualizations of universalism: universal principles and values are dictated from a white position and are only valid for white human beings. The hypocrisy has often been laid out, described, and analyzed. Yet the common definition puts emphasis on the irrelevance of culture, race, or religion because the principles and values are intended to be universally applicable.

In France, universalism conceptually functions to fortify the claim to an intellectual monopoly of enlightened and color-blind academic tradition.[2] Attempts of scholarly subversion that posit the subject in intersecting power structures – defamed as theoretical particularism – are consequently deemed unscientific or not universal, which in the respective context is virtually the same. Following in this path, universalism and anti-racism are antagonists and "irreconcilable entities."[3] Sow's career takes place in a time when scientific and activist knowledge production are underwritten by this conceptual ideology, particularly in Western feminist discourses' claim to universality. Her analysis focuses on differences of race, class, and religion, and stands in opposition to what is commonly analyzed under the guise of universalism. That is because although language connects Senegalese and French academia, universalism's role in the justification of colonialism posited Europe and Africa on different ends of universal values. Senegalese philosopher Souleymane Bachir Diagne goes as far as to jokingly ask if the postcolonial is anti-universal because its multiculturalism is used as "a war machine against the universal, against science."[4] According to Diagne,

> Léopold Sédar Senghor and his alter ego he called "my more-than" brother *(mon plus-que frère),* his friend Aimé Césaire, devoted all their lives to this idea that to be genuinely, authentically, preoccupied with the question of the universal, is to make sure that all the different cultures, all the different faces of the human adventure, harmoniously converge towards what the poet-president called [. . .] the "civilization of the universal". This implies that no single civilization should impose its "universality," and that true care for the universal means attention to the particular.[5]

1 Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).
2 Julien Suaudeau and Mame-Fatou Niang, *Universalisme* (Paris: Anamosa 2022), 6.
3 Suaudeau et al., *Universalisme*, 7.
4 Souleymane Bachir Diagne, "On the Postcolonial and the Universal?" *Rue Descartes* 78 (2013): 8.
5 Diagne, "On the Postcolonial and the Universal?" 7.

Seeking true "*care for the universal*" in the "*attention to the particular*" is, as I argue, how Sow subverts Francophone academic hegemony by unveiling the false claims to universality.

The impulse for Sow's academic career, as she retrospectively acknowledged, was encouraged by her parents. Both worked as public servants and completed the proposed curriculum in colonial French West Africa. Her father left his teacher position to pursue a career in the tax office, where he rose to become the first tax director after independence under President Léopold Sédar Senghor. By the age of 19, Sow was one of two female students out of 300 in the Department of Sociology at the University of Dakar. As the daughter of a civil servant she belonged to a disproportionately largely represented group at the university.[6] Senegalese students at that time were seen as a "privileged and transitory social group waiting to be allotted employment after graduation, often as members of the new state."[7] The French government contributed 80 percent towards the University's administrative costs and the staff and the directors were predominantly French – it remained a French University and an auxiliary of the French system of higher education until 1971.[8] Sow studied the French canon of sociology under the auspice of alumni from the French elitist school, *École Normale Supérieure*, and from established French professors.[9] Senegalese students were a minority within the university with the majority of students being of European, Lebanese, and other African backgrounds.[10] However, the Association of West African Students were vocal and politically well-organized ever since the university's foundation in 1957, and they took the lead in the anti-colonial struggle in Africa.[11] "In surveys of Senegalese students at the University of Dakar they emerge as extremely confrontational. A total of 74 percent of students from the university (higher than any other country) stated they had basic disagreements with the leaders of the country."[12] In 1968, the university played a pivotal role in the crisis that rocked the

6 "A survey at the University of Dakar showed that more than 27 percent of the student body had fathers in civil service [. . .] and less than 30 percent had fathers in either of the country's main occupations, farming and fishing," see Leo Zeilig, *Revolt and Protest* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), 179.

7 Zeilig, *Revolt and Protest,* Ibid.

8 Zeilig, *Revolt and Protest,* Ibid.

9 Thérèse Locoh and Isabelle Puech, "Fatou Sow: Les Défis d'une Féministe en Afrique," *Travail, Genre et Sociétés* 20 (2008), 8.

10 Zeilig, *Revolt and Protest*, 178.

11 Zeilig, *Revolt and Protest*.

12 Zeilig, *Revolt and Protest*, 180. The surveys were undertaken by Hanna and Hanna and published in 1975. *University students and African politics* comprises data for several West and East African States, though reviews claim that the surveys were partly overinterpreted.

government. Students explicitly connected their struggle at their university to broader societal demands: "the movement was not simply a reflection of events in France."[13] Escalating food prices, declining living standards, unemployment, and the significant foreign ownership and control of domestic industries affected students and the broader society. By May 1 of 1968, the organized working class had adopted the political slogans the student movement championed.[14] At the same time, the University of Dakar embodied the intellectual heritage of colonialism. "This was consistent with Senghor's desire for a university at the crossroads of African, Islamic and Western civilization, 'essentially a European, French university at the service and disposition of Africa.'"[15] Universal ideals and principles formed the backbone of academic thought, as European philosophy never questioned its own limitations but assumed universal applicability. The irony of European philosophy's lack of self-awareness is captured in this conversation between two friends, namely Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor who contemplated the question of the universal.

> Towards the end of his life, Aimé Césaire has declared that the question he and his friend Léopold Sédar Senghor came to raise after they first met was: 'Who am I? Who are we? What are we in this white world?' And he commented: 'That's quite a problem.' 'Who am I?' is a question Descartes posed, and a reader of the French philosopher naturally understands such a question to be universal, and the subject who says 'I' here to stand for any human being. But when 'who am I?' has to be translated as 'who are *we*?' everything changes especially when the 'we' have to define themselves against a world which leaves no room for who and what they are because they are black folks in a world where 'universal' seems to naturally mean 'white'.[16]

Just like it was at the time the above conversation was had, French academia and political discourse[17] today still remain preoccupied with universality, affecting Francophone academia across borders. Sow was a student of sociology at a time

13 Zeilig, *Revolt and Protest*.

14 Zeilig, *Revolt and Protest*, 178.

15 F. Gross, "Dakar's Sorbonne South," *Africa Report* 6 (1968): 43, quoted in Zeilig, *Revolt and Protest*, 179.

16 Aimé Césaire and Françoise Vergès, *Nègre je suis, nègre je resterai* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2010), 23, quoted in Souleymane Bachir Diagne, "Négritude," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Spring 2023 Edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, accessed April 14, 2023, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2023/entries/negritude/.

17 Ava Djamshidi, Véronique Philipponnat, and Dorothée Werner, "Exclusif – Féminicides, Egalité, Première Dame, Crop Top: Macron Répond," *Elle*, July 1, 2021, https://www.elle.fr/Societe/News/Emmanuel-Macron-son-entretien-exclusif-avec-ELLE-3934484.
Answering the question whether he is a universalist or intersectional, French President Emmanuel Macron said in an interview with *Elle* that he is siding with universalists. He refuses to partic-

that prominent Senegalese intellectuals were debating their position in the world. As Senghor, Sow went for further training to France. After gaining a degree from the University of Dakar, Sow worked as a researcher at the French National Center for Scientific Research in Paris, and in 1969 went on to complete her PhD on Senegalese elites.

"Attention to the Particular"

In one of her first written works published in the 10th edition of *AWA: Revue de la Femme noire*[18] in 1964, Sow reported on the first African seminar of the International Federation of University Women held in Kampala, Uganda. The magazine was a platform for Black women to celebrate Black womanhood, promote women's literacy, and to raise women's political consciousness in this vibrant post-independence period.[19] The central theme of the seminar was rural women's intense labors on the field.[20] Sow showed interest in the psychological and social experiences women have in respect to their communities – particularly, in the nuances between women's experiences in respect to their class and cultural differences, as well as in contrast to men. Nevertheless, she would later say that the article did not have a "feminist" approach.[21] Sow argued that the status of women in traditional societies should not be considered through a Western point of view, but instead by reference to the cultural values of the respective societies.[22] In a Western point of view, Sow assumes, African women do not fall in with Western notions of modernity, which posits African women in a traditional backward past. Yet, Sow describes the women of her research as simultaneously African and modern,[23] subverting the dominant dichotomy of tradition versus modernity.

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ipate in any fight where each and every one is reduced to categories of identity or their particularism.

18 AWA is derived from the biblical mother Eve, Awa in Wolof.

19 Rama Salla Dieng and Korka Sall, "Blackness, Pan-African Consciousness and Women's Political Organizing through the Magazine AWA," *African Arguments*, January 31, 2023, accessed April 14, 2023, https://africanarguments.org/2023/01/blackness-pan-african-consciousness-and-womens-political-organising-through-the-magazine-awa/.

20 Fatou Sow, "L'évolution de la Condition Féminine au Sénégal," *AWA: La Revue de la Femme Noire* 10 (1964): 9.

21 Locoh and Puech, "Fatou Sow," 10.

22 Sow, "Condition Féminine," 9.

23 Sow, "Condition Féminine."

By connecting the experiences African women had to universal matters that women face globally, Sow undermines those assumptions and claims a position for African women in the international struggle of women in economic and social spheres. In one of her later works, *Femmes et tenure foncière au Sénégal*,[24] Sow analyzes the particularities in the way women face inequalities in landownership, despite representing the main workforce in the agricultural sector. By historicizing the situation in Senegal and referencing other African nations that experienced similar legal developments, from customary laws to formalized land ownership rights that led to further marginalization of women, she again seeks to recognize shared realities. She proceeds by widening her perspective to urban areas and factories, claiming that "à l'échelle africaine et mondiale, les femmes ne sont pas très largement représentées dans le corps des chefs d'entreprises en général." [on an African and global scale, women are not widely represented in the corporate leadership corps in general.][25] While African realities tend to be generalized based on an imagined African homogeneity, it was also assumed to be culturally distinct from the rest of the world and therefore not relevant to the experiences of women globally.

Throughout the 1990s, Sow regularly authored reports and articles on the international conferences that she attended as a scholar and activist. The direct confrontation with white women's organizations and global-northern countries at the fifth African Regional Conference on Women in Dakar in 1994 unearthed racial inequalities Black and African Women faced. While the participants agreed on the fact of global oppression of women, significant disagreement remained along geographic axes not to mention racial ones. The economic global order structurally favors the Global North and exploits the "Tiers-Monde,"[26] which Western representatives rebuke. Disarmed by the framework that accounts only for gender-based inequalities, African women are in a defensive position against "feminist imperialism."[27] Thus, the delegates from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe refused to consider sexism as the primordial and universal cause of oppression of women across the globe, as it neglected extractive and exploitative systems that particularly affect women. Representatives of "feminist imperialism"[28] denied this, claiming it is not their fault that they, the othered,

24 Fatou Sow, *Femmes et Tenure Foncière au Sénégal* (Dakar: Université Cheikh Anta Diop, 1992).
25 Sow, *Femmes et Tenure*, 7.
26 Fatou Sow, "La Cinquième Conférence Régionale Africaine Des Femmes De Dakar," *Recherches Féministes* 8 (1995): 176, https://doi.org/10.7202/057827ar.
27 Sow, "La Cinquième Conférence."
28 Sow, "La Cinquième Conférence."

were incapable of constructing economically viable and democratic societies.[29] This white feminist take on universality assumes that the problem of global inequality is based solely on gender, allowing feminist imperialists of the Global North to dismiss their participation in exploitative systems. These assumptions unravel the problem of color-blind conceptions of universalism that Sow tackles on a global scale.

Sow is not opposed to the general idea of elaborating universal values and principles because patriarchy's global involvement in the oppression of women is undeniable. But feminist movements since the wave of African national independences have made false claims of universality as they have failed to consider the particularities. For Sow, the question of how a single, universal, feminist critique can be articulated arose. One that is based on status, roles, and gendered relations as well as race, class, and religion.[30] Throughout her work, "la redéfinition des rapports sociaux en termes, par example d'entrecroisement, d'intersectionnalité" [the redefinition of social relations in terms, for example, of interweaving, of intersectionality][31] is a focal point. Sow reaches for an intersectional universalism that is built on differing experiences to conceptualize universal values and principles regardless of religion, culture, class, or race. Furthermore, she rebukes the deep-seated position in resistance to white imperial feminism, again in opposition to an "other" or existing only by negative definitions. African feminists spent decades deconstructing and correcting bodies of knowledge instead of building and producing sustained knowledges suited to the realities of African women.[32] She wishes that Western discourses, their struggles, and struggles they ascribe to the other will become their problem, and not the problem of future African feminists.[33] In her own words,

> Several decades of debates and actions of all kinds have testified to the mobilization of women around the issues that have troubled their societies. Admittedly, it is countries in the North that have generally determined the major global problems affecting contemporary global societies or more specifically women, including how they are analysed and tackled, and the strategies adopted to address them.[34]

29 Fatou Sow, "En Route pour Beijing," *Recherche Féministes* 8 (1995): 177.

30 Fatou Sow, "Langue, Identités et Enjeux de la Recherche Féministe Francophone," in *La Recherche Féministe Francophone*, ed. Fatou Sow (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2009), 27.

31 Sow, "Langue, Identités", 27–28.

32 Fatou Sow, "Mouvements Féministes en Afrique," *Revue Tiers Monde* 209 (2012): 154.

33 Sow, "Mouvements Féministes en Afrique."

34 Sow, "Social Change and the Role of Feminist Movements, CSOs and Networks in Raising Awareness on Women in Public and Political Life," accessed April 14, 2023, https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/headquarters/attachments/sections/csw/65/egm/sow_changements%20sociaux%20et%20participation%20politique_ep6_egmcsw65_en.pdf (2020): 20.

However, since the United Nations international conferences (1975–1995) women's movements in the North as well as in the Global South have "fragmented into a multitude of groups that attest to its diversity and richness."[35] Sow as an African woman at international conferences faced comparable opposition by white feminist groups and organizations in debates about the nature of women's marginalization and oppression. This is a fate that many feminists of color, both from the North and the South, shared. Hence, the division between North and South is not always clear-cut. But the power to define "major global problems" still rests with white feminists, that derive their conceptual framework from their experiences as white women. The development of feminsim as a tool for analysis inherited this blindness to racial inequality. Therefore, the replacement of the conceptual frameworks used to assess women's participation in public and political life is undoubtedly one of the most crucial steps in advancing the thinking and action of women's movements, especially feminists.[36] Sow encourages research that will tackle conventional beliefs in academia, as well as structures and ideologies based in stereotyped observations of gendered realities. She particularly encourages research in Africa by African feminists because of the failure on regional and national scales in all levels of societies to integrate a gender perspective into male-dominated disciplines.[37] According to Sow, diasporic feminists have done extensive work from which African feminists can draw. By connecting Africa and its diaspora, particularly focusing on "les femmes d'origine africaine-américaine" [women of African-American origin],[38] Sow places African thought within a broader historical framework.

The tense interconnection between universalism and Black thought has existed since the beginning of modern universalism, as it has been engineered in opposition to Blackness in that "abstract universality presumes particular forms of embodiment and excludes or marginalizes others."[39] In the concept of universality, it epitomizes the individualized form of universalism that grants members of the universal class rights and privileges, which is nothing less than an exclusionary conception of universalism. We can see this exclusion and/or opposition

35 Sow, "Social Change."

36 Sow, "Social Change," 20.

37 Fatou Sow, introduction to *Genre et Dynamiques Socio-Économiques et Politiques en Afrique*, ed. Fatou Sow and Ndèye Sokhna Guèye (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2011), x.

38 Fatou Sow, "La globalisation en Afrique: les femmes, l'État et le marché," in *Genre et Dynamiques Socio-Économiques et Politiques en Afrique*, ed. Fatou Sow and Ndèye Sokhna Guèye (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2011,) 2.

39 Saidiya Hartman, "The Burdened Individuality of Freedom," in *Afro-Pessimism Reader* (Minneapolis: racked & dispatched, 2017): 45.

in the work and the personal and philosophical struggles of W.E.B. Du Bois. In *Lines of Descent*,[40] Kwame Anthony Appiah delves into Du Bois' time in the German academy. Here, he studied the analytical tools of sociology that were meant for universal applicability. Yet his education and status did not exempt him from racism's indignities. Du Bois saw a need to align moral universalism with his special devotion to a group, to a Black collective in the United States, which he saw as one among many belonging to global humanity.[41] "At times, these could seem like 'two warring ideals in one dark body.'"[42] The conceptual ideology, here addressed as universalism, is multifaceted and an expression of Western intellectual hegemony enforced by its universities. The conflict of interest is a consequence of moral universalism's betrayal of his racial community in its repeated attempt to legitimize the community's oppression. Therefore, Du Bois's contentious relationship on behalf of the U.S. Black community with the imposed conceptual ideology resonates with many world regions, all excluded from greater equality, social justice, and effective citizenship, "so-called universal Western ideals."[43]

Sow's interest is not in the rehabilitation of universalism from its historic involvement in human and intellectual hierarchization, but rather to subvert intellectual hegemony through *more* expansive and all-encompassing universality, such as African feminists critically and empathetically engaging with the struggles of one another.[44] Elsewhere, she notes,

> Historiciser, sociologiser et contextualiser les différentes formes de domination, largement infiltrées par le patriarcat, nous permet à toutes de nous approprier au moins une universalité, celle du droit des femmes d'avoir des droits, au lieu de les questionner au nom de l'idée que l'universalité est occidentale. [Historicizing, sociologizing, and contextualizing the different forms of domination, largely infiltrated by patriarchy, allows us all to appropriate at least a universality, that of women's right to have rights, instead of questioning them in the name of the idea that universality is Western.][45]

This quote reveals her position. Demands for *more* universality and opposition to the idea that universality is Western, underscore Sow's understanding of universality. Even if historically Western notions of universalism repeatedly proved its failed universality, the idea of universality itself is universal.

40 Kwame Anthony Appiah, *Lines of Descent: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Emergence of Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014).

41 Appiah, *Lines of Descent*, 69.

42 Appiah, *Lines of Descent*, 76.

43 Sow, "Social Change," 3.

44 Sow, "Globalisation en Afrique," 3.

45 Fatou Sow, "Féminisme: Une Question Politique," *Tumultes* 37 (2011): 55.

Language Barriers and Cross-Fertilization

Francophonie and universalism's predominance in the West African academy are undoubtedly results of colonialism, in which French remains a communication tool in a plurilingual space. It also continues to produce colonial linguistic borders between Anglophone and Francophone African academia. Through her scholarship, Sow subverts both. Employing former colonial languages to express African socio-cultural specificities and to decolonize knowledge production once again poses a certain risk to incorporate linguistically and politically unapt ideas.[46] For instance, Charles de Gaulle declared French to be a language excellently adapted to the universal character of enlightened thought, which is true not because the French language is an inherently universal and global language, but because universalist principles and values have been developed according to the language.[47] While French is often the language in which many African scholars best express themselves academically, academic practice in French has a significant pragmatic reason. It is "un outil de communication et de sens dans un espace linguistique pluriel" [A tool for communication and meaning in a multilingual space.][48] Sow thinks of language as a vehicle to transport a thought, message, or value. Thus, decisive is whether the language and terms are used to transport something from the inside to the outside or whether terms and values from outside override the inside.[49] As Sow concludes, it is more a question of epistemological and political fittingness than a question of language itself that determines the aptness.[50] "Bien plus que de créer simplement des mots, il s'agit de rendre compte de la réalité à decrire et analyser dans des termes qui ont du sens." [Much more than simply creating words, it is about capturing the reality to be described and analyzed in terms that make sense.][51]

For instance, scholar and colleague Oyeronke Oyèwùmi rejects *gender* as a universal category. Gender implies that cultural hierarchies are based on the social differentiation between sexes, which according to Oyèwùmi's Nigerian/Yoruba perspective is not the case for "the African culture."[52] In her field defining book *Invention of Women* Oyèwùmi spells this out by saying

46 Sow, "Langue, Identités," 11.
47 Sow, "Langue, Identités," 12.
48 Sow, "Langue, Identités," 15.
49 Sow, "Langue, Identités," 19.
50 Sow, "Langue, Identités," 18.
51 Sow, "Langue, Identités."
52 Sow, "Langue, Identités." Oyèwùmi has done extensive work on African epistemologies of gender and argued "that historically gender was not the primary determiner of social hierarchy

> African feminists can learn a lot from the methods of feminist scholarship as they have been applied to the West, but they should scorn methods of Western, imperial, feminist Africanists who impose feminism on the 'colonies.' African scholars need to do serious work detailing and describing indigenous African cultures from the inside out, not from the outside in.[53]

This way, Sow, Oyèwùmi and their peers effectively subverted the Euro- and US-centerd definitions of gender and its role in feminist discourses. Western feminist discourses primarily focused on the relation between men and women, treating these categories as given facts and thereupon cementing them beyond their field of research. Oyèwùmi, on the other hand, treats gender as fluid and in a reciprocal relation with society. These insights gained primarily from African scholars were fundamental for Gender Studies globally, but they only gained in relevance in the past few decades.

The academic barrier also is translated to Africa in another way; we see simultaneous research without fruitful exchange, despite the need for transnational comparisons to comprehend the systemic disadvantages. "Colonial linguistic borders in the African academy prevented reflective scholarly cross-fertilisation urgently needed between scholars from French and English-speaking African universities."[54] It is unexceptional that in polyglot Africa research on "African XY" will not survey the various canons and hence produce fragmentary overviews.[55] A look at handbooks in Sow's field of research show that while Francophone academia will emphasize the importance of her work, Anglophone research does not mention her.[56] Her bilingual publications seek to bring the English and French speaking academies together, undermining the separateness of academies, the development of distinct

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in pre-colonial Oyo-Yoruba society, but instead seniority was considered most important. Oyèwùmi firstly based this on the argument that historically there is no mark of gender in the Yoruba language whereas seniority is marked and, secondly, that Yoruba social institutions and practices historically do not make social distinctions in terms of anatomical difference." Gender Bent, "'Ain't I a Woman?' on the Irony of Trans-exclusion by Black and African Feminists - AFROPUNK," AFROPUNK, 17 March, 2021, https://afropunk.com/2017/03/aint-i-a-woman-on-the-irony-of-trans-exclusion-by-black-and-african-feminists/.

53 Oyeronke Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 21.

54 Ousseina Alidou, "Award Ceremony BIGSAS Honorary Doctorate for Dr. Fatou Sow, 18.05.2022," accessed April 14, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EdSzE56dafs.

55 Academic debates in general are geographically bound and separated by language use and produce different foci and perspectives. E.g. the above discussed debates around *Universalism* are imperceptible in Germany.

56 Nakanyike Musisi, "Women's and Gender Studies in Africa," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Africa*, ed. R. Sooryamoorthy and Nene Ernest Khalema, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 137–154.

methodologies, concepts, and theories, precisely where cooperation is beneficial and needed.[57] *Engendering African Social Sciences*[58] and *Sex, genre et société*[59] are two bilingually edited volumes and a revolutionary academic intervention. These publications stand as significant scholarly contributions by African feminists and African scholars to the global body of knowledge. Furthermore, they have played a crucial role in dismantling the colonial linguistic barriers within the African academic sphere, facilitating much-needed scholarly cross-fertilization between researchers from French and English-speaking African universities.[60]

African Realities as lived by African Societies in General and Women in Particular

The title of the bilingual publication functions as a declarative statement, signaling that African Social Sciences must now integrate a gendered lens into their research paradigms. This imperative emerged from the recurring obstacles that Sow and her colleagues faced due to the absence of such a perspective.[61] The contributors to this compilation have drawn from everyday knowledge to inform their analyses, leading to a more nuanced understanding of gender dynamics. This cross-pollination not only facilitates transnational comparisons but also lays the groundwork for a self-reflective approach to scholarship. The subsequent examples from Wunpini Fatimata Mohammed, Saidiya Hartman, and the Cite Black Women Collective demonstrate how Sow's strategies of subverting and resisting mainstream academic frameworks have paved the way for innovative and progressive methodologies.

For instance, in her commentary on global politics of knowledge production and the decolonization of Western Media Studies, Wunpini Fatimata Mohammed[62]

57 Sow, "Recherche Féministe Francophone," 27.

58 Ayesha M-T. Imam, Amina A. Mama, and Fatou Sow, *Engendering African Social Sciences* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 1997).

59 Ayesha M. Imam, Amina Mama, and Fatou Sow, *Sexe, Genre et Société: Engendrer les Sciences Sociales Africaines* (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2004).

60 Alidou, "Fatou Sow," 44:44.

61 Fatou Sow, "L'Appropriation des Études sur le Genre en Afrique Subsaharienne," in *Genre et Sociétés en Afrique: Implications pour le Développement*, ed. Thérèse Locoh (Paris: Ined, 2007), 46–47.

62 Wunpini Fatimata Muhammad, "Dismantling the Western Canon in Media Studies," in *Communication Theory* 32 (2022): 273–280.

develops tools to "radically and critically reflect on [her] lived experience."[63] Her "autoethnography"[64] aims at destabilizing the canon and curricula that are essentially white supremacist, as they "reproduce colonialism, imperialism, and racism."[65] She does so by drawing on experiences and knowledge of a Black Ghanaian woman in the US that are traditionally and structurally excluded from means of knowledge production. This echoes Saidiya Hartman's approach in her monograph *Lose Your Mother*.[66] Hartman, a pioneer in her own right, interweaves historic research with autobiographical writing to tell the history of the unnamed girl lost on the middle passage. We know of her existence from the ship's manifest, the legal case, the newspaper profile, the death table, the actuarial chart, and the autopsy report. But Saidiya Hartman combines this information with extensive research on the routine on board a slave ship in an attempt to reconstruct her last days – a method she would later call "critical fabulation,"[67] which she describes as an impossible attempt "to save [. . .] the girl from oblivion,"[68] where the archive left no trace of humanity, only of lost cargo. Her research is a medium to test what kind of histories archives allow us to tell, whose perspectives are conserved and legitimized by time. While subjectivity has always influenced research and fiction has always nourished interpretation, consciously dismissing an objective appearance, breaks with academic traditions. Both Mohammed and Hartman intervene in citational politics because they value their knowledge and claim a position for Black women in global knowledge production. They subvert the white hegemony of the canon instead centring the experiences and knowledges of Black women, thereby shifting the terms, and seeking to transform academic practice.[69] In other words, their scholarship claims spaces in academia where Black women generally had

63 Muhammad, "Dismantling," 274.

64 Muhammad, "Dismantling." *Autoethnography* advocates empowerment within postcolonial discourses and grants authority to speak for African people where African scholars are expected to decentre themselves and epistemic traditions, or risk lacking objectivity. The use of the concept by two white Africanists was contested by Mohammed and fellow scholars of African heritage for this reason in 2022. See "Open Letter to African Studies Review Journal Editorial Board: Call for Retraction of Article 'African Studies Keyword: Autoethnography,'" Google Docs, n.d., https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdKo9OgNuU0DcYMBRbuTvv2wu-sJE3StYIIaFuclGJiDevx8g/viewform?pli=1.

65 Muhammad, "Dismantling," 273.

66 Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

67 Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 12 (2008): 11.

68 Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 137.

69 Christen A. Smith et al., "Cite Black Women: A Critical Praxis (a Statement)," *Feminist Anthropology* 2, no. 1 (March 29, 2021): 10–17, https://doi.org/10.1002/fea2.12040.

been marginalized from. Their praxis also echoes the initiative by the Cite Black Women collective which affirms Black women's role in knowledge production by saying

> Black women have been producing knowledge since we blessed this earth. We theorize, we innovate, we revolutionize the world. We do not need mediators. We do not need interpreters. It is time to disrupt the canon. It is time to upturn the erasures of history. It is time to give credit where credit is due: cite Black women. Cite Black Women is more than just a catchphrase or a hashtag: it is an emphatic statement, a command, a rebuke, a call to action, a celebration, an act of rebellion, an ethos, and an act of love. Behind it lies this critical question: What does it look like to dismantle the patriarchal, white supremacist, heterosexist, imperialist impetus of the neoliberal university (and its accomplices) by centering Black women's ideas and intellectual contributions? Embedded within this question we also find our response.[70]

Hartman and Mohammed's methods are built on long and ongoing efforts. In that sense, Sow needs to be considered a pioneer that paved the way for those who came after. It needs to be acknowledged that Sow has been purporting these ideas and engaging in such practices since the beginning of her academic career and long before the decolonial turn.

Viewing Sow as a pioneer in decolonial knowledge production might stem from a Western-centric perspective. This perspective may attribute her significance more to the structural dynamics of knowledge production than to her actual body of work. In an ideally just world, Sow's research would be considered conventional societal study, unaffected by the marginalization of her perspective due to the global structure of knowledge production. However, because of these existing structures, it is necessary to place Sow's academic journey in a historical context. In the current global context, writing about Muslim families in contemporary Black Africa from within these communities is revolutionary. This is crucial because in the words of Sow herself,

> The family is a social institution with its own criteria and functions. It is not a static institution; it is fundamentally historical and evolves through time. Diverse factors affect this history, such as the economy and system of production, the organization of living space, social stratification, group norms and values, religion, etc. For this reason, in order to understand the changes which have occurred, it is essential to review the components that make the black African family system distinct.[71]

In writing the specificities of the family, the Euro-American groundings of norms in traditional sociological paradigms and concepts are challenged. The nuclear

70 Smith et al., "Cite Black Women," 10–11.

71 Sow, "Muslim Families," 564.

family is the *natural* social unit in the Euro-American belief system. The consequences are two-fold: the first of course concerns as Sow demonstrates the obstruction of fruitful sociological analysis. If the social ties are limited to the nuclear family, it becomes impossible to thoroughly understand the criteria and functions of that social institution. The second, as Oyèwùmi points out, is that (white) feminism only conceives of the woman as a wife and the "role of the wife" is always inhabited by the woman.[72] "Beauvoir and others theorize as if the world is a white middle-class nuclear family,"[73] whereas African constructions of motherhood are different in significant ways from the "nuclear motherhood:"[74] she (the mother) exists outside the patriarchal family structures. "A number of researchers on gender in African societies have shown that feminist anthropologists of Africa tend to focus on social categories that they perceive to be defined by men, equivalent to the category of wife in the West."[75] Early on Sow challenged this notion by theorizing women's parental roles independently of men's,[76] certainly because she herself was already mother, African, and knew what it meant,[77] contrary to Euro-American white feminist anthropologists. Such an intervention affirms the independent humanity of African women, distinct from their male counterparts. This is significant as it transcends the white supremacist frameworks that define women primarily in relation to men.

Institutionalizing Feminist Theories and Practices

As a trainer and later as a member of the scientific committee at CODESRIA (1996–98) Sow gave "intellectual legitimacy to African gender and sexuality studies and exposed scholars and policymakers to diverse feminist theoretical frameworks from Marxist feminism, feminist eco-criticism and others and methodological approaches in the Social Sciences."[78] While writing her PhD in the seventies, Sow said that African female scholars were trying hard to institutionalize studies on women in Social Sciences in Africa.[79] "Engendrer," which was the title of her widely recognized publication at CODESRIA, became a way to critically examine

72 Oyeronke Oyèwùmí, "Family Bonds/Conceptual Binds: African Notes on Feminist Epistemologies," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 25 (2000): 1094.
73 Oyèwùmí, "Family Bonds."
74 Oyèwùmí, "Family Bonds," 1097.
75 Oyèwùmí, "Family Bonds."
76 Sow, "Muslim Families," 564.
77 Locoh and Puech, "Fatou Sow," 15.
78 Alidou, "Fatou Sow," 43:19.
79 Fatou Sow, "Féminisme," 51.

African societies and challenge both imperialist forms of feminism and entrenched institutional patriarchy.

As feminist thought and movement gained elevated traction in the late 1970s, male-dominated African academia was focused on stabilizing their newly gained independence, cultural reappropriation, and fighting neocolonial tendencies.[80] Questions of gender inequalities appeared and were treated as secondary matters.[81] Only in the early 2000s, Sow sees reason to claim that those questions are established in a way that such discussions, with all their controversies, can visibly take place in academia. Even if Sow self-critically states that her status and capital as an intellectual is a factor of disconnection to the mundane and everyday life struggles of the "normal woman,"[82] bringing those struggles to the table is something Sow has relentlessly fought for and what is being credited to her.[83] Considering her academic career and focus of scholarship, this pioneering role is evident.

From the beginning of her career, Sow attended multiple conferences that concerned the situation of women in academia and African societies, and she advocated on the international scene for more visibility for their struggles. In fact, Sow focuses on global conferences as an arena and meeting point for divergent feminisms.[84] Yet, noting the power imbalance, she shares her observations of such gatherings as follows:

> Les conférences mondiales des femmes sont des réunions gouvernementales, toujours précédées de celles des ONG. En 1975, au début de la Décennie, on compte des milliers d'associations africaines de femmes, mais peu d'ONG et de mouvements capables d'imposer le point de vue de l'Afrique des communautés sur le plan national et international. Aussi devant la puissance des mouvements occidentaux et surtout américains (É.-U.), les Africaines sont désarmées. Toutefois, elles arrivent mieux préparées à Copenhague, mais en position de dé-

80 Fatou Sow, "L'Appropriation des Études sur le Genre en Afrique Subsaharienne," in *Genre et Sociétés en Afrique: Implications pour le Développement*, ed. Thérèse Locoh (Paris: Ined, 2007), 45.
81 Sow, "Études sur le Genre," 45.
82 Sow, "Féminisme," 52. "En tant que féministes africaines, pouvions-nous parler au nom des masses féminines populaire ? N'étions-nous pas piégées dans notre petite tour d'ivoire académique, ou à l'abri dans cette hiérarchie des savoirs arbitrairement construite, comme le disait une certaine critique, hors de la quotienneté du terrain, en complicité au mieux avec ceux et celles qui sont supposés savoir mais vivent dans les hauteurs ?" [Translation Samir Ammour: As African feminists, could we speak for the popular female masses? Were we not trapped in our little academic ivory tower, or sheltered in that arbitrarily constructed hierarchy of knowledge, as a certain critic put it, out of the quotient of the field, in complicity at best with those who supposedly know but live in the heights]
83 Alidou, "Fatou Sow."
84 Sow, "Beijing."

> fense contre l'impérialisme féministe. [The world women's conferences are governmental meetings, always preceded by those of the NGOs. In 1975, at the beginning of the decade, there were thousands of African women's associations, but few NGOs and movements capable of imposing the point of view of African communities at the national and international levels. Also, in front of the power of the Western movements, especially the American ones (USA), the African women are disarmed. However, they arrive better prepared in Copenhagen, but in a defensive position against feminist imperialism.][85]

She states that despite the thousands of existing African women associations, they have little institutional leverage on an international scale, on which NGOs dominate debates. NGOs, the legitimate institutional powerhouses of the modern world, are largely state-funded and remain an important soft power tool for the West. They frame conflicts, protests, and movements, giving them legitimacy or delegitimizing them, with the media following their framed narrative. The inequality of financial resources directly translates to inequality of institutional representation. Placing an emphasis on those conferences to institutionalize African feminist thought is not to be neglected and even necessary, as their relevance is commonly judged based on international representation.

The second aspect of writing about world women's conferences is historicizing theory and practice. Historicity is how we make sense of the present, and often the foundation of claims of legitimacy. Sow's scholarship places an immense emphasis on the history of African women in African societies, inside and outside of academia. Examples include, "Initiative féminine au Sénégal,"[86] "Présence continue des femmes africaines dans l'histoire,"[87] *La recherche féministe francophone*,[88] "Féminisme: une question politique,"[89] "Mouvement féministe en Afrique,"[90] "Social change and the role of feminist movements, CSOs and networks in raising awareness on women in public and political life,"[91] and "L'appropriation des études sur le genre en Afrique subsaharienne."[92] Alongside

85 Sow, "Beijing, 176.

86 Fatou Sow, "Les Initiatives Féminines au Sénégal: Une Réponse à la Crise?" *Africa Development/Afrique et Développement* 18 (1993): 89–115.

87 Fatou Sow, "Présence Continue des Femmes Africaines dans l'Histoire," *Présence Africaine* 1 (2007): 732–737.

88 Fatou Sow, *La Recherche Féministe Francophone*, ed. Fatou Sow (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2009), 9–57.

89 Sow, "Féminisme."

90 Fatou Sow, "Mouvements Féministes en Afrique," *Revue Tiers Monde* 209 (2012): 145–160.

91 Sow, "Social Change."

92 Sow, "Études sur le Genre."

being a sociologist, activist, advocate, mother, woman, African, Muslim and more, Sow is an understudied contributor to global intellectual history. Her body of work especially summarizes, and references works from her colleagues, and puts them in dialogue. Her contributions are about crediting the work of African women and fertilizing the debate, crossing language barriers, and often adding a global perspective to subtly discard any assumptions of representing a scholarly niche.

Conclusion

Sow's ongoing legacy is a piece of Senegalese and African intellectual history that must be analyzed in light of its colonial heritage, which manifests itself in language, publishing, and structures of knowledge production. Her life's work is a story of action and agency, of independent and self-determined scholarship. While Senegal gained its independence in 1962, Sow has been always at least conscious about the significance of being a Black, African woman in a white and male-dominated university and world. Her world view has informed her research and writing profoundly. She does not describe her method or approach as intersectional, even though it is intersectional in every way. Furthermore, she connects her findings to universal values. Intersectionality is a relational approach that works with differences while the universalist approach searches for the smallest shared denominator to be universally applicable. This interplay of these two seemingly oppositional approaches characterizes her work.

"Francophone West Africa" or "Francophone World" refers to the former colonial empire, yet the French language use itself is heavily contested. Sow places her emphasis on being an African scholar and strives for African scholarly exchange and cooperation across language barriers on the African continent, particularly between Francophone and Anglophone academia. As her bilingual publications prove, it is something she actively tries to overcome. Her peers rightfully see it as a necessary measure to fertilize debates across language barriers as, language aside, there are shared positionalities in respect to global knowledge production. Her analysis of African political, social, and economic realities as lived and experienced by African societies and women, in particular, are enriched through her own personal insights and capacity to understand, write, and act, as she shares experiences located in those realities. Making sense of your own surroundings is not in itself pioneering, but in the context of hierarchies of knowledge production, taking up this position gives intellectual legitimacy to often ne-

glected realities. This Sow has extended throughout institutions to other African women. She imbued Social Sciences with a greater sensitivity to gender, and she became an important historian of intellectual history of African women's movements and Gender Studies in Africa. Sow institutionalized feminist theories and practices and by historicizing them, intellectually stabilized them.

Laetitia Caumes

Chapter 6
Differentiated Grievances

In the following essay, I will be discussing the question of animalization and dehumanization and how they serve as a tool of oppression for various communities. This reflection – as are most gender, animal, and/or decolonial studies – is inherently transdisciplinary and draws from a wide range of sources and voices. Centering solidarity between various groups of beings that are deemed less worthy, it explores questions of grief, empathy, dehumanization, animalization, and systemic oppression.

I'd like to start this reflection by deep diving into the concept of the "hierarchy of death." This term is used by journalists, but also by social scientists, to describe the disproportionate media coverage that various incidents of death around the world get. In an article for *The Guardian*, Roy Greensland writes that this rule states that "foreign deaths always rank below domestic deaths."[1] In France, this rule is called the *loi de proximité*, the proximity law or *mort kilomètres*, death-kilometers. To me, those two names further emphasize the centrality given to physical distance or proximity and their supposed correlation with our experience of empathy. This distance between "us" and the deaths which we are informed in news articles is assumed to play a role in our involvement, in our grief, in our mourning.

But why should our grief be conditional? What makes a life grievable? Who deserves to be mourned? Why do some deaths get media coverage for multiple weeks, while other deaths stay uncovered, ignored by the masses, silenced? In the words of Ashlie Sandoval, what do empathy's limitations "teach us about the emotional and material structures"[2] of our world? Questions also asked by Judith Butler who wrote: "Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, what makes for a grievable life?"[3] This disproportional and selective distribution of empathy and grievability acts as a magnifying glass of social inequality. What often hides behind unequal grieving are questions of race, class, gender, sexuality, (dis)ability, speciesism, etc. This last aspect, speciesism, is one I will go further into detail on in this essay. Because I believe, as French author and sociologist

1 Roy Greensland, "A hierarchy of death," *The Guardian,* April 19, 2007, accessed February 7, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/apr/19/thirtytwodieinamericanuniv.

2 Ashlie Sandoval, "Engaging with the Failures of Racial Empathy," *Hypatia* 38 (2023): 316–29, accessed July 25, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1017/hyp.2023.23.

3 Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (Verso, London, 2004), 20.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111446721-007

Kaoutar Harchi writes, that intersectional approaches to power relationships have taken into consideration questions of race, gender, and class but have often left aside and forgotten to question "another relationship that structures the social order: the border between animal species/humans and stemming from it, speciesism."[4]

In *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*, Saidiya Hartman writes: "From the Zong case he had learned that 132 live slaves dumped into the sea were just cargo. It was easier to feel fully the loss of one life and to hang your hopes on one girl. Too many deaths were unmanageable."[5] Unmanageable. 132 slaves dumped into the sea. How can our brains and our hearts manage those numbers? I believe that when, in Chapter seven of "The Dead Book" Hartman focuses on the horrible death of this single slave girl, when she goes into detail on the atrocious treatment she received, when she exposes us to the violence of her torture, she is fully aware of this unequal grievability. She knows that the human brain needs stories, it needs faces, it needs names in order to relate, to feel empathy[6] and finally, to grieve. Furthermore, she also asks this fundamental question: what happens when we have no name? That is the case here. The torture described by Saidiya Hartman is endured by a nameless girl. She writes: "(. . .) not even her name survived. I suppose I could have called her Phibba or Theresa or Sally or Belinda. With a name she might have been more difficult to forget. A name would have afforded the illusion of knowing her and made less painful the fact that the girl "never will have any existence outside the precarious domicile of words that allowed her to be murdered."[7]

The importance of knowing and stating the names of victims of injustices is underlined by movements such as #SayHerName, a campaign launched in

4 Translation Laetitia Caumes, Original : "(. . .) dans leur souci de tenir compte de l'expérience sociale de tous les groupes sociaux dominés, ont pris en charge le rapport social de race, de genre, de classe, mais sans tenir compte d'un autre rapport structurant l'ordre social: la frontière d'espèce animal/humain et, procédant d'elle, le spécisme." In Kaoutar Harchi, "Critiquer l'intersectionnalité, ou l'épreuve de l'ordre zoosocial," *Politis*, January 20, 2023, accessed February 7, 2024, https://www.politis.fr/articles/2023/01/critiquer-lintersectionnalite-ou-lepreuve-de-lordre-zoosocial/.

5 Saidiya V. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York, Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2008), 108.

6 The term "empathy" covers a wide range of different realities and behaviors and has been theorized and classified by numerous scholars. Heidi Lene Maibom's model differentiates between four different psychological states: emotional contagion, affective empathy, perspective-taking, and empathic concern (sympathy), see Heidi Lene Maibom, *Empathy* (New York: Routledge 2020), 15–16.

7 Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 105.

December 2014 by the *African American Policy Forum* (AAPF) and *Center for Intersectionality and Social Policy Studies* (CISPS). This campaign has been aiming to bring awareness "to the often invisible names and stories of Black women and girls who have been victimized by racist police violence".[8] Invisibilized victims. Kimberley Crenshaw pointed out in an article in *The Guardian*, that the campaign highlights forms of state violence that especially impact women, such as sexual violence: "There is little public discussion of sexual abuse by police officers, Crenshaw says, although "according to some reports, they are the second most-common report of police abuse."[9] Both Saidiya Hartman and the #SayHerName movement aim at making the invisible and hidden, visible. Similarly, in 2021 in France, *Collages Féminicides Paris*, a group which has been active for a couple of years in different cities around France organized a memorial in the 11th district of Paris. In 2020, 111 women had been victims of femicides in France. The collective put up posters of those 111 names alongside denunciations such as "reforms before we die", "guilty state, complicit justice."[10] On October 26, 2023, the Palestinian health Ministry in Gaza released the names of almost 7,000 Gazans (including the names of 2,913 children)[11] killed in less than 20 days. On April 23, 2024, according to the Gaza Ministry of Health, after 200 days of Israel's war on Gaza, 34,183 people have been killed, and 77,084 were have been wounded[12] do we know their names?[13] Do we know the names of the nine people that were killed by a far-right extremist in Hanau, Germany, on the 19th of February 2020?

Gökhan Gültekin was one of these nine victims and the words of his brother, Çetin Gültekin, particularly resonate here. He asserts that "remembering means

8 The African American Policy Forum, "Our demands - #SayHerName" accessed February 7, 2024. https://www.aapf.org/our-demands.

9 Homa Khaleeli, "#SayHerName: Why Kimberlé Crenshaw is Fighting for Forgotten Women," *The Guardian*, May 30, 2016, accessed February 7, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/may/30/sayhername-why-kimberle-crenshaw-is-fighting-for-forgotten-women.

10 "Féminicides: des militantes dressent un 'mémorial' à Paris pour les victimes de 2020," *Franceinfo*, January 10, 2020, accessed February 7, 2024, https://www.francetvinfo.fr/societe/harcelement-sexuel/feminicides-des-militantes-dressent-un-memorial-a-paris-pour-les-victimes-de-2020_4252031.html.

11 Chris McGreal, "Can We Trust Casualty Figures from the Hamas-run Gaza Health Ministry?" *The Guardian*, October 27, 2023, accessed February 7, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/26/can-we-trust-casualty-figures-from-the-hamas-run-gaza-health-ministry.

12 "In numbers: 200 days of Israel's war on Gaza," *Al Jazeera*, April 23, 2024, accessed May 4, 2024, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/23/by-the-numbers-200-days-of-israels-war-on-gaza.

13 Mohammed Haddad, Mohammed Hussein & Konstantinos Antonopoulos, "Know Their Names: The Thousands of Palestinians Killed in Israeli Attacks on Gaza," *Al Jazeera*, November 1, 2023, accessed May 4, 2024, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/11/1/know-their-names-palestinians-killed-in-israeli-attacks-on-gaza.

changing."[14] These diverse examples all highlight campaigns that invite us to remember and that aim at reminding us, viewers, listeners, watchers, by-passers in the street, that behind every death lied a life, a person with their own hardships, relationships, struggles, personality. We know that numbers can be – and I believe they are – deeply impactful. We need to hear them, to read them, to acknowledge them. Be it the 132 slaves mentioned by Saidiya Hartman on this ship in the 1790s, the 111 femicides in France in 2020, the 1,146 migrants who died in the sea only in the first half of 2021[15] or the 34,183 Gazans killed since October 2023. Statistics and numbers like these need to be widespread. Yet we all know that numbers don't affect us in the same way as concrete life stories do and if we go back to what Judith Butler wrote, we also know that our sensitivity and our empathy isn't equally distributed. Some might say "we can't mourn everyone or else we would stop living," but I strongly disagree. I think actively fighting in favor of sensitivity and against desensitization is a daily struggle, especially when it comes to not getting desensitized to death. As the poet Cole Arthur Riley writes, "protect the part of you that still winces at pain. Refuse to become too familiar with tragedy. Our souls were made to stir."[16] Yes, death is a natural part of life, but we do not face death equally and that shouldn't be rendered invisible, nor does all suffering result in the same empathetic concern and that shouldn't be rendered invisible.

In Chapter 7 of *Lose your Mother*, Saidiya Hartman tries to make it impossible for us to look away and to ignore said suffering. Our (understandable) instinct, when faced with intensely violent facts, numbers, images, is to look away. Saidiya Hartman forces us not to. We are faced with the torture inflicted to this girl, and we cannot look away. I would like to think that this act of seeing would automatically result in an act of acknowledgement itself resulting in an inability to deny said violence. But as we say in French, some still decide to *faire l'autruche*, "play ostrich" meaning that they skip over and bury those facts – and numbers, statistics, and realities deep down into the sand. Furthermore, even those who are willing to see, those who stick their ostrich heads out of the sand and who do engage in empathic behaviors do not automatically engage in further empathetic action.

14 Solvi Nymoen, "Bruder von Hanau-Opfer über Gedenken: 'Erinnern heißt verändern," *Taz*, April 4, 2024, accessed August 26, 2024, https://taz.de/Bruder-von-Hanau-Opfer-ueber-Gedenken/!6000057&s=Hanau/.

15 "Le nombre de migrants morts en mer en tentant de rejoindre l'Europe a doublé en un an," *Le Monde,* July 14, 2021, accessed February 7, 2024, https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2021/07/14/le-nombre-de-migrants-morts-en-mer-en-tentant-de-rejoindre-l-europe-a-double-en-un-an_6088196_3210.html.

16 Her poems can be found on her Instagram Account @blackliturgies – https://www.instagram.com/blackliturgies/?hl=en or in her book Cf Cole Arthur Riley, *THIS HERE FLESH: Spirituality, Liberation, & the Stories that Make Us*, (New York: Convergent, 2023).

As Myisha Cherry puts it, "one can imagine oneself in someone else's shoes without doing anything to give that person new shoes."[17] Moreover, as Sarah Ahmed wrote in her article *Feminist Killjoys (And Other Willful Subjects)*, the systems of power in place continue to frame those who expose a specific oppression as being themselves the problem: "Given that racism recedes from social consciousness, it appears as if the *ones who "bring it up" are bringing it into existence*. (. . .) Those who talk about racism are thus heard as creating rather than describing a problem."[18] Calling into existence what many try to bury down in the sand "kills the joy" as she writes. In her text, she uses the metaphor of the dinner table and goes on to show that people who call out and underline systemic issues are often not welcomed at the dinner table anymore. Their mere presence makes it harder for others to continue pretending.

Although used as an image by Sarah Ahmed, this metaphor can also be read in the literal sense, when ethical questions about the food we consume and the way we treat other non-human animals are being raised by the very act of sharing a meal. What if one of the guests at the table doesn't eat meat, fish or dairy, while others indulge in sausages, steaks, cheese, salmon, or other sorts of flesh? Just by being present at this table, this guest is disturbing the status quo, they are making what normally goes unnoticed – the fact that multiple corpses are being eaten without anyone questioning it – visible. Even if they do not speak about it, even if they do not mention it, the fact that they refuse to partake in it forces the other guests to question themselves and their (as for now) unquestioned eating practices. How not to write about speciesism when we talk about unequal grievances? But how to do so wisely? How to do so while being myself a white antispeciesist and fully aware of the moral implications of what Marjorie Spiegel calls *The Dreaded Comparison*?[19] Speciesism is a term coined by Richard Ryder in 1970 and it refers "to the widely held belief that the human species is inherently superior to other species and so has rights or privileges that are denied to other sentient animals."[20] Richard Ryder asked himself the following question: "Since Darwin, we have known we are human animals related to all the other animals through evolution; how, then, can we justify our almost total oppression of all the

17 Myisha Cherry, "What an [En]Tangled Web We Weave: Emotions, Motivation, and Rethinking Us and the 'Other,'" *Hypatia* 32 (2017): 439–51, accessed July 25, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12325.

18 Sara Ahmed, "Feminist Killjoys (And other willful subjects)," *The Scholar and Feminist online* published by *The Barnard Center for Research on Women*, Issue 8 (2010), accessed February 7, 2024, http://sfonline.barnard.edu/polyphonic/print_ahmed.htm.

19 Marjorie Spiegel, *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (Mirror Books, 1996).

20 "Dr Richard D Ryder," accessed February 7, 2024, http://www.62stockton.com/richard/.

other species?"[21] If we are related to other animals, why are their deaths, which account for millions every year, not mourned? Why are people still disregarding the atrocious torture endured by animals in slaughterhouses?

This essay can in no way cover at length the history of speciesism and its multiple facets nor mention the numerous controversies and ethically questionable stances and comparisons made within the movement. Bringing questions of anti-speciesism in parallel to questions of racism and systemic oppression is a touchy affair – especially so when it is done by a non-racialized person and it also has served numerous instrumentalisations. I will highlight the words of Fatima Ouassak, French political scientist, feminist, antiracist and ecological activist on this issue. As she underlines, "you can't tell people in the suburbs that fighting the racism they face daily and fighting the speciesism of which battery-farmed chickens are the victims are the same thing."[22] They are not the same thing, and we shouldn't compare human slavery and animal abuse in a world that still denies racialized people full humanity. But we need to underscore that who we mourn and why we mourn them is socially and culturally constructed. And thus, as Heidi Lene Maibom puts it our "empathic processes are also embedded in larger behavioral and social ecologies."[23] These social ecologies are, as ecofeminist thinkers, writers, and activists have been highlighting for decades, built on dichotomies and binaries separating humans from animals, culture from nature, reason from emotions. These binaries are at the root of sexism, racism, speciesism, and so many other isms. As the Ko sisters, Aph and Syl, authors of *Aphro-ism: Essays on Pop Culture, Feminism, and Black Veganism from Two Sisters*[24] remind us, "If you want to dismantle racism, you've got to go to the root of racism and the root of racism is this distinction between human and animal in a social way."[25]

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21 Richard Ryder, "All Beings that Feel Pain Deserve Human Rights," *The Guardian*, August 6, 2005, accessed February 7, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/aug/06/animalwelfare.

22 Translation Laetitia Caumes. Original "On ne peut pas asséner aux gens des quartiers que lutter contre le racisme dont ils sont les victimes quotidiennes et lutter contre le spécisme dont sont victimes les poulets de batterie c'est la même chose." In Jean-Jacques Fresco, "Fatima Ouassak: 'Mon combat pour le vivant, il est dans les quartiers populaires,'" *Info Nature Media*, August 24, 2023, accessed January 22, 2024, https://infonature.media/points-de-vue/3-questions-a/2023/24/fatima-ouassak-mon-combat-pour-le-vivant-il-est-dans-les-quartiers-populaires/.

23 Heidi Lene Maibom, *Empathy and Morality* (Oxford University Press, New York, 2014), 249.

24 Aph Ko and Syl Ko, *Aphro-ism: Essays on Pop Culture, Feminism, and Black Veganism from Two Sisters* (Lantern Publishing & Media, 2017).

25 Andreann Asibey and Gemma McNeilJanuary, "A Seat at the Table with Syl Ko: A Discussion on Black Veganism," *The McGill Daily*, January 16, 2018, accessed January 17, 2024, https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2018/01/a-seat-at-the-table-with-syl-ko-a-discussion-on-black-veganism/.

Numerous anti-racist activists, writers, and thinkers have highlighted the interconnectedness of animal liberation and anti-racist struggles. In 2012, Angela Davis said to Grace Lee Boggs:

> I usually don't mention that I'm vegan but that has evolved . . . I think it's the right moment to talk about it because it is part of a revolutionary perspective– how can we not only discover more compassionate relations with human beings but how can we develop compassionate relations with the other creatures with whom we share this planet and that would mean challenging the whole capitalist industrial form of food production.[26]

Our empathy is framed and restricted to specific individuals whose lives are presented as worth grieving. Constructed categories such as "humans" and "animals" serve these asymmetrical grievances. Angela Davis underlined this by saying: "I think there is a connection between, and I can't go further than this, the way we treat animals and the way we treat people who are at the bottom of the hierarchy."[27] Historically, specific groups of humans have been animalized while some animals have been humanized. *In a society where animals aren't deemed worthy of our grieving, animalized humans aren't either*. Myriam Bahaffou, author, scholar in philosophy and ecofeminist activist whose work questions the "philosophical construction of the animal through a feminist and decolonial perspective" highlights, in an interview for *ChEEk*, that she considers herself as part of those humans that have been "naturalized, animalized, (those) which do not fit correctly into the category of 'humans.'"[28] She calls for a reclamation of the categories of "non-human," "sub-humans," or even "dissidents of humanity," the creation of a category where "women, enslaved people, people of color, fat people, disabled people, all these bodies that are not 'correctly human'"[29] would finally belong.

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26 "Grace Lee Boggs in Conversation with Angela Davis," *Making Contact: Radio Stories and Voices to Take Action*, February 20, 2012, accessed February 4, 2024, https://www.radioproject.org/2012/02/grace-lee-boggs-berkeley/.

27 Jon Hochschartner, "Vegan Angela Davis Connects Human and Animal Liberation" *CounterPunch*, January 24, 2014, accessed January 20, 2024, https://www.counterpunch.org/2014/01/24/vegan-angela-davis-connects-human-and-animal-liberation/.

28 Faustine Kopiejwski, "Myriam Bahaffou: 'Si l'on veut parler d'écoféminismes, il faut parler des corps,'" *ChEEk*, November 15, 2022, accessed February 4, 2024, https://www.lesinrocks.com/cheek/myriam-bahaffou-si-lon-veut-parler-decofeminismes-il-faut-parler-des-corps-513191-15-11-2022/. Translation Laetitia Caumes, Original: "je fais partie des gens qui ont été naturalisés, animalisés, qui ne rentrent pas correctement dans la catégorie 'humains'."

29 Kopiejwski, "Myriam Bahaffou," translation Laetitia Caumes, original: "Ça m'intéresse beaucoup plus de parler des non-humains, des 'sous-humains' ou des 'dissident·es à l'humanité', que ce soit les femmes, les personnes esclavagisées, les personnes de couleur, les personnes grosses, handicapées, tous ces corps qui ne sont pas 'correctement humains'."

Myriam Bahaffou reminds us that colonialism was fed by discourses that associated certain populations with "nature," presenting them as "savages," "non-civilized," and "undomesticated" individuals.[30] Historically, human zoos have been the most direct illustration of this animalization of certain individuals, based on their morphologies and/or race. Animalization has served and still serves as a justification for inhumane treatment. Animalizing means finding the grounds for the unfair and unjust treatment imposed onto animalized populations in their existence itself. Animalized humans deserve to be tamed. *Those who tame them are to be thanked, not to be blamed.* Palestinian-American writer and poet Hala Aylan writes, "a slaughter isn't a slaughter if those being slaughtered are at fault, if they've been quietly and effectively dehumanized — in the media, through policy — for years. If nobody is a civilian, nobody can be a victim.[31] Author and journalist Moustafa Bayoumi expands upon this idea by stating that only those considered as human beings are considered to be political beings. He therefore asks: "Who gets to count as human?" Who is given political power and agency? Who is being referred to as "human animals"[32] to justify the way they are being treated? Who is considered as a member of "humanity" and who isn't? As Brigitte Nicole Fielder reminds us in *Animal Humanism: Race, Species, and Affective Kinship in Nineteenth-Century Abolitionism,* historically "by comparing the racial other to the animal other, human rights could be more easily denied within Enlightenment scientific and philosophical hierarchies that prioritized the category of the human."[33] Thus denying the racialized others their humanity meant denying them access to empathy by the non-racialized. As Ashlie Sandoval sums up perfectly, "empathy within our current social relations cannot be extended to Black subjects whose expulsion from the category of human—a condition that the category of human rests upon—renders them unable to be fully empathized with."[34]

30 Kopiejwski, "Myriam Bahaffou," translation Laetitia Caumes, original: "Si l'on veut parler d'écoféminismes, il faut parler des corps" . . . . "Car, qui sont les personnes associées au 'naturel', celles qui ne sont pas encore vraiment 'sorties de la nature'? Qui sont les 'sauvages', les 'non-civilisées', les 'indomestiquées'."

31 Hala Alyan, "The Palestine Double Standard," *The New York Times*, October 25, 2023, accessed November 25, 2023.https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/25/opinion/palestine-war-empathy.html.

32 Moustafa Bayoumi, "The double standard with Israel and Palestine leaves us in moral darkness," *The Guardian*, October 11, 2023, accessed November 25, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/11/israel-palestine-war-biden-zelenskiy.

33 Brigitte Nicole Fielder, "Animal Humanism: Race, Species, and Affective Kinship in Nineteenth-Century Abolitionism," *American Quarterly* 65 2013): 492. https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2013.0047

34 Sandoval, "Engaging with the Failures of Racial Empathy," 319.

Contemporary examples of this animalization abound. In September 2023, France faced a moral panic strongly entertained by media platforms and social media, concerning a rise in households reporting the spread of bedbugs. People claimed to have seen bedbugs in public transport, in cinemas, in theaters, etc. The fact that many researchers explained that this phenomenon was mainly linked to the rise of tourism and was due to the fact that bedbugs had developed a stronger resistance to the insecticides used to eradicate them, stating clearly that this had nothing to do with class nor hygiene, didn't stop the French far-right TV channel *CNews* from blaming migration and migrants. On September 29, 2023, Pascal Praud claimed: "Do we know why there are more bedbugs today? Is it linked to hygiene? Let me ask all the questions: there are a lot of migrants at the moment. Do they have different hygienic conditions than we have in France? Is this linked?"[35] Comparing migrants with parasites that need to be eradicated isn't a new rhetoric on the far right. It is also certainly not the first instance – nor the last, sadly – in which animalizing racialized people and comparing them to parasites serves as a justification for a differentiated treatment. In 2014, the French sociologist Eric Fassin wrote extensively on the comparison made between the Roma community and rats. What was framed and condemned as "intolerable" wasn't the living conditions imposed to them but *their existence itself*: they were the intolerable parasites. Across Europe, Roma people are turned into scapegoats, made responsible for the unsanitary living-conditions they are forced into and erected as threats to the safety and sanity of "local" communities – meaning non-racialized, non-animalized communities. In 2010, in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, 350 people from the Roma community were evicted from the city center and relocated in Pata Rât a landfill six kilometers away, most commonly known for being the city's municipal waste dump and chemical waste dump.[36] In 2023, around 1,500 people still live in one of Europe's biggest ghettos. In October 2023, during the *Transeuropa Festival* in Cluj, a festival that centered housing rights and was organized by the NGO *European Alternatives* I was working for as a research assistant, we were invited by the inhabitants to visit Pata Rât. We were greeted

35 Translation Laetita Caumes, original: "Est-ce qu'on sait pourquoi il y a plus de punaises de lit aujourd'hui? Est-ce lié à l'hygiène? Je vais poser toutes les questions: il y a beaucoup d'immigration en ce moment. Est-ce que ce sont les personnes qui n'ont pas les mêmes conditions d'hygiène que ceux qui sont sur le sol de France (. . .). Est-ce que c'est lié à cela?" In Romain Herreros, "Pascal Praud ose le lien entre punaises de lit et immigration sur CNews, ce député saisit l'Arcom," *Huffington Post*, September 29, 2023, accessed November 24, 2023, https://www.huffingtonpost.fr/politique/article/pascal-praud-ose-le-lien-entre-punaises-de-lit-et-immigration-sur-cnews-ce-depute-saisit-l-arcom_223755.html.

36 "Pata Rat landfill, Cluj Napoca, Romania," *Global Altlas for Environmental Justice*, accessed February 7, 2024, https://ejatlas.org/conflict/pata-rat-landfill-cluj-napoca-romania.

with a home-made goulash and a concert, and a resident told us without flinching: "We could die here, and no one would know. No one would care."[37] Displacing entire populations, placing them at the margins, moving them to the periphery ensures that this inhuman treatment goes unseen, unwitnessed, and therefore uncriticized and unstopped. Once again, the invisibilized needs to be made visible because, as David Nibert puts it, "today, most forms of oppression are invisible, at least to relatively affluent Western citizens," which means "we must create a system in which oppression is not naturalized and rationalized but is visible and thus can be seen and remedied."[38]

Lastly, let's remember that race and ethnicity aren't the only things used to *Other*, animalize, and dehumanize individuals. Disability and sexuality for example have also been weaponized. In an exhibition presented by the Schwules Museum in Berlin (September 2, 2022 – January 30, 2023) entitled *Queering the Crip and Cripping the Queer*, the scholar Carrie Sandahl writes: "sexual minorities and people with disabilities share a history of injustice: both have been pathologized by medicine; demonized by religion; (. . .) victimized by hate groups; and isolated socially." This exhibition reminds us that during World War 2, the Nazi "Aktion T4 program" ordered the mass murdering of disabled people in gas chambers: "The disabled, like other groups viewed as weakening the Reich, were deemed 'useless eaters' and 'unworthy of life.'"[39] Historically and contemporarily, religious differences have also been weaponized to justify differentiated grievances. So, the questions remain: Who defines who is worthy of life? Who defines whose lives are worth grieving and whose aren't? Who has to "audition for empathy and compassion," as Hala Alyan writes?[40] Who has to prove they "deserve it"?

The purpose of this essay is to underline the arbitrary nature of grievance and to highlight the voices of authors that have called upon us to extend our compassion. They have called upon us to engage in empathetic action, to rethink our models of empathy and to expose the systems of oppression that have led us to disqualify certain human or non-human animals from our empathy. I believe in the power of literature and arts in "providing context — expanding our empathy,

37 This gathering in Pata Rât took place during the *Transeuropa Festival 2023* organized by the NGO *European Alternatives*. "Transeuropa Festival" accessed February 4, 2024, https://euroalter.com/projects/transeuropa-festival-3/. See also: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-gY-5t8mhQ&embeds_referring_euri=https%3A%2F%2Feuroalter.com%2F&source_ve_path=MjM4NTE&feature=emb_title.

38 David Nibert, *Animal Rights/Human Rights: Entanglements of Oppression and Liberation* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002).

39 "Queering the Crip, Cripping the Queer," *Schwules Museum*, accessed February 4, 2024, https://queer-crip.schwulesmuseum.de/en/.

40 Hala Alyan, "The Palestine Double Standard."

granting us glimpses into other worlds."[41] But should we have to get into other people's minds and imagine feeling their pain in order to feel it in our flesh? Can't our shared humanity or sentience provide us with affective empathy when others are experiencing pain? And is empathy enough to end differientiated grievances?

This essay is an invitation to aim towards undifferentiated grief, to mourn each life to the same degree, independently of race, class, gender, sexuality, and of the humanity or the proximity to that individual. It's an invitation to oppose the devaluation of animal life at the root of the devaluation of those who aren't deemed human, those who are animalized and othered. It's an invitation to get our ostrich heads out of the sand and to not look away. It's a cry in favor of sensitivity, an active call to oppose desensitization, to extend our empathy and to act on it. As philosopher and literary scholar Chielozona Eze puts it, "empathy is not a mere intellectual exercise. Nor does it seek to patronize the other. Its goal (. . .) is to identify and address the pain of the other."[42] Over and above all, this essay seeks to serve as a reminder that empathetic feelings alone will not change everything. Fighting for undifferentiated grievances means fighting for empathetic feelings to be followed by empathic action towards racial justice and justice for all living beings. It means recognizing that until all living and sentient beings are free, none of us are free.[43] It means preceding and accompanying our empathy with a broader understanding of the ways we have been taught to see our differences rather that our commonness and our shared animality to serve a very specific system of power and hierarchy. As David Nibert reminds us, "the mistreatment of devalued humans and other animals is deeply embedded in the capitalist system and the social positions generated by the system: their oppression is profoundly intertwined and mutually reinforcing."[44] Consequently, proclaiming loudly that every death deserves grievance, every name deserves to be remembered, and that the invisible needs to be made visible means boldly confronting the systems in place, and it means that we probably will lose our seats at numerous tables. Those tables not only decide to deny grievances, they also deny lives. A death that is not mourned is a life deemed less worthy. Invisible deaths are the result of invisibilized lives.

41 Hala Alyan, "The Palestine Double Standard."

42 Chielozona Eze, *Ethics and Human Rights in Anglophone African Women's Literature: Feminist Empathy* (Palgrave Macmillan, Chicago, 2016), vii.

43 This is a nod to the well-known quote "None of us are free until all of us are free" attributed to numerous Black thinkers (Fannie Lou Hamer, Maya Angelou, the Combahee River Collective etc).

44 Nibert, *Animal rights/human rights*, 238.

Part III: **Anti-Black Structures in the Academic Landscape and the Archive Question**

Olive J. Casey

Chapter 7
Imagining the (Extra)ordinary: History Without Archives in Saidiya Hartman's Critical Fabulation

Saidiya Hartman's method of critical fabulation offers a radical way to study and practice history. She severs the historian's loyalty to the archives through a pivot towards what is not there and shows what could never materialize through the traditional practices of archival find-and-seek. Her (ab)use of the archives, her formulation of histories, and her rejection of traditional academic approaches provides a way of reading archival material for what was there (but was not recorded) and what could have been there (but was suppressed). Hence, the archives and the practice of archiving remain a place of contempt, insofar as they have bound the lives of Black women and queer radicals to their "encounters with power."[1]

The method of critical fabulation directly challenges the archive's memorializing and erasive powers. By undermining the historian's dependence on archival material, Hartman refuses to merely use and thus reproduce material systems structured to suppress and erase. Following discourses in Black German Studies, this essay reflects on whether Hartman's method could contribute to the "kaleidoscopic canon" of Black German Studies, without importing US-centerd approaches into the German context.[2] For a movement grounded in a tradition of self-narration and the "(re)discovery of narratives of past agency,"[3] speculative narratives could be a tool for subverting academic tradition while asking what it means to radically imagine a free past, present, and future.

Hartman's work, akin to the methods of Black German scholars, draws a continuous thread between the *then* and the *now* by defining what ties the two as the

1 Saidiya Hartman (quoting Foucault), "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism* 12 (2008): 2; Michel Foucault, "Lives of Infamous Men," in *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, ed Paul Rabinow and Nikolas S. Rose, (New York: New Press, 2003), 157–175, 282.

2 Priscilla Layne and Kira Thurman, "Introduction: Black German Studies," *The German Quarterly* 95 (2022), 365.

3 Fatima El-Tayeb, "Blackness and Its (Queer) Discontents, Fatima El-Tayeb," in Sara Lennox, *Remapping Black Germany: New Perspectives on Afro-German History, Politics, and Culture* (Amherst; Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 250.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111446721-008

"ongoing state of emergency" that Black lives are subjected to.[4] This forces the historian to confront how structural racism is deeply embedded in the creation, preservation, and exploration of archives, and addresses what it means to practice history while acknowledging the legacy of white and colonial violences rooted in the archive, and their continuity in the present. Yet crucially, her method is performed in such a way that an alternative future – drawing on community, enjoyment, and aesthetics – emerges out of the act of looking back.

Countering critiques of Hartman's approach as ahistorical or fictional, I argue that the use of her method is not only indispensable for the writing of deliberately forgotten histories but that a critical historiography needs to analyze and discuss speculative methods. In order to sketch out the narrative method that Hartman develops and uses to practice history the first section of this essay looks to define what the archive is to Hartman. I seek out this definition by tracing *Venus in Two Acts* and occasionally the thinkers who guide or critique her practice. The next section moves to Hartman's method as practiced in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* by looking at the need to conjure an *alternative* past and present in order to write inner histories of Black girls' and women's thoughts, desires, and lives. The concluding section considers how Hartman's method can and has been realized in contemporary historical approaches within Germany. All parts serve as a means to grasp why this distinct approach gives hope to an alternative practice of history that does not only serve to recover past lives, but also to entwine their lives with their contemporaries to imagine a radical alternative to white supremacist capitalist patriarchy.[5]

Archives and Archival Violence

More critical readers of Hartman have denied her work a place within the field of academic history. The line-blurring between the actual and the fabricated, the unknown territory of speculation and fabulation in which Hartman's voice finds narrative solace, is an unruly, unreliable practice that does not amount to *history* for some scholars: "Her work is not history—it's literature. We can't make up an archive that doesn't exist or read into the archive what we want to find."[6] But the

4 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 13.

5 bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 51.

6 Alexis Okeowo, "How Saidiya Hartman Retells the History of Black Life," *The New Yorker*, October 19, 2020, accessed April 16, 2024, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/10/26/how-saidiya-hartman-retells-the-history-of-black-life.

archives that Hartman delves into do indeed exist, it is what she makes of them that deviates from traditional readings. Her own relationship to the archival materials and their immense limitations is a shortcoming Hartman recognizes and which her methodical approach candidly addresses.[7] To understand this process of how speculative, unreliable narratives grow out of tangible archival material, I have tried to discern what constitutes as *the* or *an* archive to Hartman, and to other thinkers whose work she samples.[8]

Nell Painter, quoted above disputing that Hartman's work is *history*, said in the same interview with *The New Yorker* that "the past changes according to what questions we ask. The archive is a living, moving thing."[9] Echoing Stuart Hall's conceptualization of the archive, which characterizes the process of archiving as a fluid, continuous production that is always critical, always historical, Painter too sees value in the archive insofar as we, as historians, sociologists, anthropologists, are asking the right questions.[10] In a sense, all the raw materials we need already exist, so long as we have the right tools to access them.

Hall's *Constituting an Archive* helps further situate Painter's critique of Hartman and guides us to a substantive definition of what a "living" archive is. Hall's "living archive" is considered at once an ideal, a practice, and a project, rather than a physical or material entity. According to Hall, it belongs to a "discursive tradition" where each reading may add to or disrupt what came before. It is a heterogeneous practice, reliant on an assortment of publicly filed and privately collated materials, carefully brought together by professionals.[11] And importantly, it belongs to a state of incompleteness, bound to be overturned at any given point in time. Hall's account is heavy with hope that the archive, or the project of archiv*ing*, can become an inclusive endeavor that may serve the African diaspora. He continues that:

7 "I chose not to tell a story about Venus because to do so would have trespassed the boundaries of the archive," Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 9.

8 "Sample" here refers to Hartman's method of referencing, using, and borrowing words from other Black thinkers and sampling them within her work (in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*). Hartman likens this method of paying homage to other artists and creatives to the practice of sampling within music, allowing one work to form the basis of an entire new piece without the restrictions of traditional citation methods.

9 Okeowo, "How Saidiya Hartman Retells the History of Black Life."

10 Stuart Hall, "Constituting an Archive," *Third Text* 15 (2001): 89.

11 We can also ask how personal archives, oral archives, and other ways of remembering and collating histories fit into these definitions.

> Archives are not inert historical collections. They always stand in an active, dialogic, relation to the questions which the present puts to the past; and the present always puts its questions differently from one generation to another.[12]

This is the point where Hartman's theory of the archive diverges and is far less forgiving. Hartman's language too cements the archive's futility; by repeatedly referring to the archive as something to be "mined," she undermines the traditional practice of archival research entirely and condemns the archive's inability to hold anything other than raw material, "cargo."[13] Her hope lies in her own method, her tools, rather than in the individual's ability to find or discover what was deliberately forgotten. To her, the archive cannot be detached from the power structures that formed it. It is a "death sentence" that records only fragments of Black life; intentionally incomplete, inherently violent:

> The archive is, in this case, a death sentence, a tomb, a display of the violated body, an inventory of property, a medical treatise on gonorrhea, a few lines about a whore's life, an asterisk in the grand narrative of history. Given this, "it is doubtless impossible to ever grasp [these lives] again in themselves, as they might have been 'in a free state.'"[14]

While Hartman does not directly reference or engage with Hall's *Constituting an Archive*, we could suppose that if she were to, she would concede that the archive lives only through the continual production and *re*production of violence. And yet, these reproductions are bound to the select moments in time in which the historian writes, which too are bound to the current power structures that continue to exert control over Black lives. Any attempt to recount these structural violences can therefore only amount to fragmented, individual accounts, instead of what Hall imagines to be a living, discursive entity.

There is a fundamental difference between Hartman and Hall's conceptualization of the archive, which in turn makes Painter's critique of Hartman's method seem mistaken. Hartman does not look to the archive to "find what is not there" but concedes that archival material is a testimony to the white supremacist structures that thread historical actors and their histories to our present and, importantly in the development of her method, to a future.[15] When Hartman uses the archive, she is using material documents bound to the conditions of their production; their use value is finite, and therefore alternative methods of practicing and writing history are required to retrace the "intimate" details of livelihoods uncap-

12 Hall, "Constituting an Archive," 92.
13 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 10.
14 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 3.
15 Okeowo, "How Saidiya Hartman Retells the History of Black Life."

tured by state records.[16] This distinction is not attended to by Painter, who in some ways subscribes to Hall's living archive and holds faith in the ability of academics to subvert structures of power and reclaim actor-agency through progressive historical practice. Hartman, in concert with many decolonial and Black feminist thinkers, maintains that the structures that have historically oppressed Black people live on, adopting different means of control to keep in line with capitalism's contemporary form.[17] For this reason, her method seeks to recover a history that the archives, structurally, could never retain.

So far, Hartman's conceptualization of the archive has mostly been realized through a process of negation: it is neither living, nor fluid, nor ambiguous. Yet Hartman describes the exact conditions of her archive, and her method, in *Venus in Two Acts*. Through this piece, we are able to understand the development of her historical method and realize the innateness of violence to the archives. In *Venus,* Hartman, re-using words originally printed in *Lose Your Mother*, compares entering the archives of slavery to entering a mortuary, in that it "permits one final viewing and allows for a last glimpse of persons about to disappear into the slave hold."[18] She continues that the archives of slavery are built upon a "founding violence," and that any reconstruction of these histories subjects the dead to a "second order of violence," this time at the hands of the historian.[19] If we were to treat the archives as a bounty of factual truths and treat the historian as the middleman, then one can wash their hands of accusations of perpetuating violence. But as Hartman maintains, the archives are a product of white violence, violence which has in turn shaped and limited the archive's material contents. Any responsibility thus lies with the historian to write purpose into these endeavors, without simply *restoring* the conditions of violence.

In the context of German academia, we seldom see dialogues surrounding the reproduction of violence(s) as a side-effect of knowledge production. One way in which these violences are reproduced is through what Christina Sharpe terms a "culture of surprise:"

16 Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2020).

17 I think of Françoise Vergès, bell hooks, and Angela Davis. Angela Y. Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003); bell hooks, *Writing beyond Race: Living Theory and Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2013); Françoise Vergès, *A Decolonial Feminism* (London: Pluto Press, 2021).

18 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 4.; Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007).

19 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 5.

> a culture of refusal and disavowal, and the national as well as personal ability to maintain innocence in the face of knowledge and/or evidence to the contrary to be found in all aspects of juridical, social, economic, political, and everyday life; one in which, through the processes and politics of remembering and forgetting (history, narrative, lived experience, etc.), one (a person, (group, nation, faction) is continually positioned to be surprised by events, traumatic or otherwise, instead of, for example, prepared, knowing, aware of, or producing them.[20]

Yet the responsibility of the historian as a political entity has always been a concern within Black German Studies. Within the early movement, many Black German "activist-historians" worked within and against the white German culture of surprise to affirm their own existence and experience, as most eminently addressed in *Farbe bekennen*.[21] Maureen Maisha Eggers emphasized the role of Black women activist-historians such as Katharina Oguntoye, Fatima El-Tayeb, and Paulette Reed-Anderson, individuals who, like May Ayim, acted as "quotidian intellectuals" to bridge a societal and intellectual invisibility of Black German voices and their histories.[22] The activism and research of Black German women is, in Peggy Piesche's words, "very much oriented towards the future, towards how to change life."[23] This means an ongoing acknowledgement of the conditions that have archived, collected, and absorbed selected narratives into German cultural memory. As Hartman affirms, restoration is not enough.

In an assortment of interviews and essays, Hartman tries to make sense of this contingent relationship between archives, violence, and restoration. She reminds us that our questions are not new by drawing upon philosopher and abolitionist Ottobah Cugoano and his recognition that even by 1787, it had "already become too late" for attempts at restoration.[24] She adds that Cugoano acknowledged that mere depictions of the suffering of Black people were and, importantly, remain a wasted effort in preventing further deaths: "it is no longer sufficient to expose the scan-

20 "Note 217" in Christina Sharpe, *Ordinary Notes* (London: Daunt Books, 2023), 312.

21 May Ayim, Katharina Oguntoye, and Dagmar Schultz, eds., *Farbe bekennen: Afro-Deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte* (Berlin: Orlanda, 1991).

22 Tiffany N. Florvil, *Mobilizing Black Germany* (University of Illinois Press, 2020), 6.

23 Peggy Piesche and Sara Lennox, "Epilogue of Epistemologies and Positionalities: A Conversation," (Berlin, October 21, 2014) in ed. Sara Lennox. *Remapping Black Germany: New Perspectives on Afro-German History, Politics and Culture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2016), 276.

24 "Cugoano's plan for reform entailed working through 'the injuries already done' and operating within the limited scope of the possible, rather than making right a wrong, restoring what has been destroyed, or giving back what has been taken. By 1787, it had already become too late for that." Stephen Best and Saidiya Hartman, "Fugitive Justice," *Representations* 92 (2005): 3.

dal."[25] This line encapsulates Hartman's rationale to look beyond what archives can offer, and to look beyond traditional practices of history.

So far, her critics have only acknowledged the former, constituting a limited view of her approach. To expose the scandal is to continue to write histories that reproduce or restore, while refusing to look forward. Christina Sharpe too refers to this process in her seminal *Ordinary Notes,* reflecting on how "we" are "asked to embrace a narrative that acknowledges violence only to frame it as anomalous and intermittent and not foundational and ever-present."[26] For Hartman, postulating a method that fuses a practice of simultaneously looking backwards and forwards, while *mining* the archives, hopes to avoid unnecessary reproductions or fruitless restorations. The method is the radical practice of freedom: fabulation.

Futuring and Fabulation

This next section moves from analyzing the conditions of Hartman's material archive and towards understanding her choice of method, fabulation, by defending the necessity of fabulation as a method of historical writing and by outlining the centrality of imagining, and occupying, multiple temporalities in order to do so. I also look to define what Hartman refers to as *a free state*, a term borrowed from Foucault in his introduction to *The Lives of Infamous Men*, which becomes central to her method of fabulation throughout *Venus*, and within her second book, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*.[27] Hartman's entanglement of pasts, presents, futures, and alternatives is perhaps best captured in her introduction to *Venus.* In her own words:

> For me, narrating counter/histories of slavery has always been inseparable from writing histories of the present, by which I mean the incomplete project of freedom, and the precarious life of the ex-slave, a condition defined by the vulnerability to premature death and to gratuitous acts of violence. As I understand it, a history of the present strives to illuminate the intimacy of our experience with the lives of the dead, to write our now as it is interrupted by the past, and to imagine a free state, not as the time before captivity or slavery, but rather as the anticipated future of this writing.[28]

25 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 7.
26 "Note 20" in Christina Sharpe, *Ordinary Note*s, 31.
27 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 7.
28 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 7.

These temporalities must be seen as inseparable for a meaningful practice of historical writing that is entangled with the imagination of a (utopian) future. The reason for the intertwined nature of these epochs can be broken down into two main causes. Firstly, the ongoing violence that threatens the existence and fulfillment of Black livelihood as a "past that has yet to be done;"[29] the (incomplete) archives of slavery and their continued effects defy the categorization of this history as a closed chapter.[30] And secondly, to practice writing narratives and to construct histories that the archives were incapable of capturing, Hartman invokes the imagination of the "free state," which ties past, present, future, and alternative. The free state may exist in part as a utopian *future*: a process of imagining what *could* be alongside the *what is* and the *what was*. Yet, Hartman's critical fabulation also lets the free state act as a utopian-*alternative*. In this arrangement, histories can be reshaped and reimagined to create an alternative that a) *could* have existed (if structures were different) and b) may have *actually* existed (but structures did not allow for their archival preservation). Therefore, a utopian-alternative can exist in conjunction with any moment in time, rather than only evoking a future ideal.

It is possible that we can find a utopian-alternative in narratives of Black Germany. Priscilla Layne and Kira Thurman have drawn upon Hall's definition of cultural identity as belonging "to the future as much to the past" – a "guiding light" within Black German Studies.[31] Black German Studies "builds towards a future" through Black German activists, scholars, poets, and activist-historians' long established tradition of self-narration and self-writing that interweaves historical, reflective, future-oriented narratives.[32] In recent writings, there is a shift away from nar-

29 "I prefer to describe [the story of Venus] in terms of the afterlife of property, by which I mean the detritus of lives with which we have yet to attend, a past that has yet to be done, and the ongoing state of emergency in which Black life remains in peril," Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 11.

30 In reference to the continued effects of slavery and modern colonisation, see footnote 11 and *The New Yorker* interview with Saidiya Hartman: The result was *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America,* which argued, in dense and provocative detail, that Emancipation constituted another phase of enslavement for Black Americans, as they moved from the plantations to the punitive controls of the Black Codes and Jim Crow. Hartman was illuminating what she calls the "afterlife of slavery:" limited access to health care and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment—the "skewed life chances" that Black people still face, and the furious desire for freedom that comes with them. As Butler put it, "The question she returns to again and again is: 'Did slavery ever really end?'"; Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

31 Priscilla Layne and Kira Thurman, "Introduction: Black German Studies," *The German Quarterly* 95 (2022): 367.

32 Layne and Thurman, "Introduction."

ratives that recover, or make visible, to those that affirm and produce; what Piesche noted as a turn from "counter-narratives" to "alternative knowledge production."[33] Perhaps tools such as critical fabulation could honor these traditions of self-writing and narration. A practice that evokes a radical utopian-alternative goes beyond writings that reconstruct or add to the canon. A radical project tied to the present has implications for anyone involved in the "incomplete project of freedom" and the conditions that are reproduced through racial capitalism. Black German Studies has moved beyond attempts to write "counter-" histories, and it is this assertation that creates the space for alternative, radical, and speculative practices of history and narration.[34]

In conversation with Lola Olufemi, Hartman shared that by writing narratives using critical fabulation (as first postulated in *Venus* and fulfilled in *Wayward Lives*), she hoped to construct "archival moments that were not bounded by time," snippets of Black women's lives that are linked to "our present."[35] There appear to be a multitude of reasons why Hartman seeks to blur or distort these historical time stamps, but one common thread amongst them all is to decenter (subjection to) violence in the histories of Black lives. Her intention, as considered in the previous section, was not to recover, reproduce, or to restore lives and histories, but instead "to paint as full a picture of the lives of the captives as possible."[36] To do so, whilst creating boundless archival moments, Hartman's narrative captures with intent moments that can engender a sense of relatability. This, perhaps, is the most poignant element of her method: its refusal to propose a utopian ideal in its typical sense. She does not imagine an ideal, or (ab)use the archive to fabulate romanticized protagonists. Rather, the art of critical fabulation recovers the importance of the ordinary, day-to-day wants and needs by decentring violence and making space to ruminate the quotidian experience.

This shift in focus towards the ordinary could at first be read as a history-from-below-esque narrative; affording Hartman at most, a clearer place within historiography and at least, a half-rebuttal to Painter's aforementioned critique of critical fabulation as non-historical. But Hartman's technique and motivations go beyond this simplification. Hartman's shift away from the archive and from its violences towards a fabulated narrative also engenders a transference from ob-

33 Piesche, "Epilogue of Epistemologies and Positionalities," 275.

34 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 4.

35 Lola Olufemi and Saidiya Hartman, "Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Saidiya Hartman and Lola Olufemi," London Review Bookshop Podcast, accessed January 12, 2023, https://www.londonreviewbookshop.co.uk/podcasts-video/podcasts/wayward-lives-beautiful-experiments-saidiya-hartman-and-lola-olufemi.

36 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 11.

ject to subject status for the historical actors she retells. In *Venus,* Hartman asks, "why subject the dead to new dangers and to a second order of violence?"[37] She is clear throughout *Venus* that it is the archive that subjects Venus(es) to object status and to such violences; that it is the "dead book" that "seal[s] her status" as "cargo, inert masses," as "property," and as "commodity."[38] While she does not omit revisiting acts and instances of violence in her retellings, in *Wayward Lives* she refuses this subjection to object status through representation and through partial fabulation of Black lives and livelihood. Hartman instead tells a history with a narrative, embellished with a focus on pleasure, beauty, and joy, that overrules the fate of the archive. The components of critical fabulation – the *afterlife,* the histories that are *yet to be done*, the imagination of a free state, and the focus on the ordinary – act as the tools to practice history radically and imaginatively.

The idea of retelling lives as they existed within a "free state" draws upon an unfinished project of Foucault's and his relationship with history as an act of "seeking the conditions that have made these [practices] possible."[39] We can see that Hartman draws a parallel between her method (in practice) with Foucault's proposals (in theory) in *The Lives of Infamous Men*. Foucault's project – a collection of "short stories [. . .] suddenly emerging from two and a half centuries of silence" – sought to deal with untold stories of forgotten individuals drawn from early eighteenth-century records of incarceration.[40] Foucault outlined a set of criteria that each account would meet, in a style that we could acknowledge as reminiscent of Hartman's. Foucault continues by stipulating that the lives told "must have actually existed [and] must have been both obscure and ill-fated," that the records of these lives should be "as brief as possible," and that "the shock of these words must give rise to a certain effect of beauty mixed with dread."[41]

We cannot draw upon Foucault's work to trace the origins of Hartman's method without acknowledging her choice to not name the "famous philosopher" and the possible parallels between their respective methods.[42] For Foucault, this effect of "dread" is contained within the "particularly horrible crimes" committed

37 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 5.

38 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 10, 11, 13.

39 Paul Rabinow and Nikolas S. Rose, "Introduction," in *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984,* (New York: New Press, 2003), XI–XLI, xxiv.

40 Edward W. Said, "Deconstructing the System," *New York Times*, December 17, 2000, https://www.nytimes.com/2000/12/17/books/deconstructing-the-system.html.

41 Michel Foucault, "Lives of Infamous Men," in *The Essential Foucault: Selections from Essential Works of Foucault, 1954–1984*, eds. Paul Rabinow and Nikolas S. Rose (New York: New Press, 2003), 282.

42 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 2.

by infamous, forgotten individuals.[43] For Hartman, it could be said that any dread that arises from the archives of slavery, somewhat vetted through the practice of critical fabulation, is because of the injustices and horrors that the archive maintains and reproduces. As developed in *Wayward Lives*, narratives using critical fabulation refuse to subject lives to the moment in which they were captured by the state, their "collision" with power, both in the archives and in their retellings.[44] Where a famous philosopher has looked to and centerd infamous, forgotten individuals and their clashes with power, critical fabulation lets narratives unfold through the actors' driving desires and motivations and centers their emotional, interpersonal, aesthetic, and material wants.

Importantly, in *Wayward Lives*, Hartman does not outline her method in the same way that we are introduced to critical fabulation in *Venus*. Instead, she notes that she "employ[s] a mode of close narration, a style which places the voice of narrator and character in inseparable relation, so that the vision, language, and rhythms of the wayward shape the narrative."[45] Although it is not named as such, *Wayward Lives* serves a similar purpose in the way that it revives the intimate lives of the ordinary by extending the narrative far beyond the moments in time where characters have run into the law and have subsequently been captured by the archive. In painting this full, sensory picture of the day to day, Hartman in particular draws upon (the want for and admiration of) beauty to explore the desires of the protagonists while connecting her work to a larger feminist tradition. We can see this most clearly in Hartman's narration of the inner desires of Mattie Nelson, a "small-town girl" of fifteen determined to make it in New York City, who "treated possession as if it were conditional, rather than absolute, as if beautiful objects were intended to be shared, as if the loveliest things were rightly a communal luxury."[46]

Through the story of Mattie, Hartman recounts the role of beauty as an "aesthetic of existence."[47] Mattie holds a disregard for individual property ("*Mine, I own it, it belongs to me*—were terms that didn't carry much weight with her") and a deep longing to experience and to enjoy, not to possess.[48] Later in *Wayward Lives*, Hartman accentuates how this way of living and conceptualizing radically

43 Foucault, "Lives of Infamous Men," 282.
44 Foucault, "Lives of Infamous Men," 282.
45 Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, xv.
46 Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, 70.
47 bell hooks, "An Aesthetic of Blackness: Strange and Oppositional," *Lenox Avenue: A Journal of Interarts Inquiry* 1 (1995): 66.
48 Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, 70.

contrasts the essence of whiteness – *to own* – situating Mattie within a Black radical and "wayward" tradition.[49] This strongly echoes bell hooks' reflection on the entangled themes of beauty and aesthetics, possession, poverty, and community. hooks discusses aesthetics as a way of inhabiting, looking, and becoming to reflect on the two homes that she grew up in, and on Black aesthetics:

> [. . .] the lesson was that one had to understand beauty as a force to be made and imagined. Old folks shared their sense that we had come out of slavery into this free space and we had to create a world that would renew the spirit, that would make it life-giving. In that house there was a sense of history. In the other house, the one I lived in, aesthetics had no place. There the lessons were never about art or beauty, but always only to possess things. My thinking about aesthetics has been informed by the recognition of these houses: one which cultivated and celebrated an aesthetic of existence, rooted in the idea that no degree of material lack could keep one from learning how to look at the world with a critical eye, how to recognize beauty, or how to use it as a force to enhance inner well-being; the other which denied the power of abstract aestheticism.[50]

hooks' attention to the material force of beauty over the individual and the everyday experience can help us to understand how Hartman legitimizes Mattie's desires as a cultural project, an act of resistance, and as a politic of (self) care. With hooks in mind, we can read Hartman's idea of beauty as force that exists, has existed, but has not been retained. Hartman's way of narrativizing the intimate and radical imaginations of Black women constitutes not just an "aesthetic of existence," but a current for retelling Black, working-class women's livelihoods. In grounding Mattie's appreciation of beauty in a sense of community against the alienating ideals of excess and possession, Hartman plays with the *waywardness* of Mattie's actions: Mattie held no reputation for theft; she *found* lockets, undergarments, and bracelets and proudly wore them out "as if indifferent to rightful ownership."[51] Her actions are shown as an extension of "practicing" beauty as an aesthetic of existence, an ethics of sharing, and "cheap socialism."[52] Mattie's personhood is hence disconnected from an archive that neglected to preserve her letters home yet preserved her criminality. Hartman, through Mattie, defies the forging of Black and queer women's lives into "tragic biographies of crime and pathology" through a fabulation that transcends the essential needs of livelihood to include beauty and community as a core aspect.[53] Fabulation does not bridge

49 Hartman, 269; "whiteness is property," "Note 190" in Christina Sharpe, *Ordinary Notes*, 270.
50 hooks, "An Aesthetic of Blackness," 66.
51 Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, 71.
52 Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, 71; "I learned that beauty is a practice, that beauty is a method," Christina Sharpe, "Note 51" in *Ordinary Notes*, 80.
53 Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, 276.

archival gaps or retell a history, but attends and *tends* to the lives, livelihoods, and desires of Black women by using beauty as "a radical act of sustenance."[54]

Alternative Ways of Knowing

Hartman's practice of writing history is entangled with the act of future-building, with the envisioning of a quotidian-utopian, and with the imagination of how actors could have existed within a "free state."[55] Even while the traces of Mattie's existence are hinged on her prison records at Bedford Hills New York State Reformatory, her story is not.

These elements of critical fabulation can be, and are being, merged into historical narratives to find a value in archival material that has not yet been realized.[56] Hartman finds what has not been materialized in current narratives of the past – the quotidian, the wayward, and the unexpected – because of the continued structures that tie the past to the present. Such a method moves beyond efforts to reveal or subvert archival material by adding layers of informed speculation that captures the wants and desires of the protagonists and determines an alternative "way of knowing."[57]

In many ways, speculative-based narratives like critical fabulation can honor the existing tradition in Black German Studies that prioritizes self-narration and refuses to write histories of Black Germans as an addition to the white German canon. Critical fabulation could become another tool in the "practice of transgressive resistance" by not only blurring the disciplinary lines between literature, history, and *Germanistik,* but by wholly undermining them and the structures of knowledge and cultural production that center Whiteness as a universal.[58]

54 Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, 60.

55 Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, 276.

56 See Serawit B. Debele, "Trans(Forming) Archives: Speculative Biographies of Ethiopians between and beyond Genders," *African Studies* 81 (2022), 340–353.

57 Charmaine Pereira, "Between Knowing and Imagining: What Space for Feminism in Scholarship on Africa?" Feminist Africa 1 (2002): 1.

58 Maureen Maish Auma, Eric Otieno, and Peggy Piesche, "'Reclaiming Our Time' in African Studies: Conversations from the Perspective of the Black Studies Movement in Germany," *Critical African Studies* 12 (2020): 343.

Jaqueline Steinberger

Chapter 8
"Political Opinion" or Anti-Black Racism? Cases from German Academia

In this chapter, I examine the cases surrounding the defamation of Professor Dr. Maureen Maisha Auma by politicians from the right-wing populist and right-wing extremist party *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) and the attempt by *white* scholars to institutionalize Black Studies in Bremen. The case of Auma and the Bremen case shed light on the institutional and structural obstacles to addressing anti-Black racism in contemporary German society and academia. It also demonstrates how the post-race discourse in German society perpetuates right-wing and populist positions that are a threat to anti-racist academics. I use critical discourse analysis to examine the relationship between the discourse and the contemporary reality of anti-Black racism in the academic landscape. On this basis, I demonstrate the continuing existence of *white* supremacy, as I analyze how certain actors use and perceive the discourse on racism. Within this chapter, it is important to me, as an Afro-German and female read academic to question the current conditions within academia from an Afro- and multicentric (drawing on multiple perspectives, theories, and methods beyond Andro- and Eurocentric epistemologies) perspective and to uncover anti-Black racism within academic discourses. In doing so, I need to recognize that I have been socialized and educated within *white* Eurocentric structures and institutions and raised through my mother's transmission of a Nigerian, specifically Okrika culture which both have shaped the fundament of my worldview. Considering this, I also challenge my own assumptions about my perception of *white,* Black, Eurocentric, and Afrocentric knowledge.[1]

1 *White* is not an objective labelling of an external appearance, but a privileged positioning racism creates and is therefore shown continuously in italics. *White* supremacy means that the cultural, political, socio-economic, social, and religious hegemony of *white* Europeans has been universally established worldwide for centuries.

Black, spelled with a capital 'B' refers to people of African descent or ancestry. On the other hand, African refers to people born on the African continent. Afro-German or Black German refers to German-born Blacks, African migrants, and people of dual African and German heritage. In addition to these concepts referring to the Black, African and Afro-diasporic communities, there are many other self-designations. For example, concepts such as Blasian, Afro-Asian or Blackenese refer to Asian-born Blacks, African immigrants, and people of African and Asian descent or ancestry. Besides these there are further terms such as Afro-Brazilian, Afro-Iranian, Afri-

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111446721-009

So far, racialized patriarchal power structures undergird the academic culture of knowledge production, validation, and citation. Scholars such as Puerto Rican sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel refer to this exclusion as epistemicide, the erasure of non-Eurocentric knowledge and different forms of knowledge.[2] Peace researcher, political scientist, and gender expert Claudia Brunner, on the other hand, defines the process of knowledge erasure, or in this case the erasure of citations, as epistemic violence. Universities have historically been exclusively *white* spaces, Historically *white* Universities (HWUs), where Black academics are not heard and access to teaching and research is often made difficult or denied. I use the term Historically *white* Universities (HWUs) here to refer to universities that have historically enrolled primarily *white* students, particularly in regions or countries with a history of discrimination or racial segregation (such as the United States, Australia, and South Africa). The term Historically *white* Colleges and Universities (HWCUs) is used in discussions of higher education in the United States to distinguish them from "Historically Black Colleges and Universities" (HBCUs), which were founded in times of racial segregation primarily for African American students.[3] However, in examining a variant of epistemicide in HWUs in German academia within this chapter, the question arises as to how the discourse on citation politics and anti-Black knowledge takes place in German academic discourse. Examining the politics of citation and anti-Black knowledge shows us that knowledge about and of Black women is either erased or plagiarized at various levels in contemporary academic discourses in Germany.

There is no doubt that Black women, in particular, are subjected to epistemicide and face different barriers in other academic discourses around the world due to the history of colonialism. Concepts such as epistemic violence allow us to identify the intersections between knowledge and violence, such as the erasure of citations or the intersections of race, gender, and further social categorizations, which perpetuate relationships of *white* Euro- and Androcentric hegemony in contemporary universities. Further, the process of disqualifying Black and Afrocentric knowledge within the academic world establishes a practice of epistemic violence.

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can American, among others, see Latif A. Tarik, "Travel Notes: Pan Africanism (Re)Visited: From Sankofa to Afrofuturism – Summary of the '2nd Kwame Nkrumah Pan-African Intellectual & Cultural Festival,'" *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies* 12 (2018): 554.

2 Ramón Grosfoguel, "The Structure of Knowledge in Westernized Universities: Epistemic Racism/Sexism and the Four Genocides/Epistemicides of the Long 16th Century," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* 11 (2013): 74. http://scholarworks.umb.edu/humanarchitecture/vol11/iss1/8.

3 Elon T. Dancy, Kirsten T. Edwards, and James Earl Davis, "Historically White Universities and Plantation Politics: Anti-Blackness and Higher Education in the Black Lives Matter Era," *Urban Education* 53 (2018): 176–182, https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085918754328

Notably, the term *episteme* which finds its origin in ancient Greek *ἐπιστήμη* meaning "knowledge, science, or cognition," is also found as a key concept in Michel Foucault's work *Die Ordnung der Dinge*:[4] "The episteme is the dispositive that makes it possible to separate not only the true from the false, but also what can be scientifically qualified."[5] He explains that what we consider to be true lies in the episteme, as it defines our lives and dictates and prescribes what is defined as "valid knowledge." At the same time, the definition of what is true and what is not situates in a *unipolarity* (a hegemony of Eurocentric knowledge formation) in which the distribution of power is the criterion for the genesis of structural and institutional exclusion of non-*white* knowledge formation. In this way, universities reproduce epistemic violence against non-Eurocentric forms of knowledge, which further solidifies into institutional racism. Grosfoguel explains that the absence of situated theorization of Descartes' philosophy ushered in the first-person politics of knowledge. "[A]n 'I' that assumes itself to be producing a knowledge from no-where."[6]

By contrast, epistemic violence and its theorization and conceptualization, according to Brunner, refers to the violent relations in society that are inherent in knowledge itself, the episteme.[7] While Foucault identifies episteme as a system of ideas which structure the understanding of knowledge, Brunner identifies episteme as the knowledge itself in which epistemic violence is embedded. Epistemic violence has its origins in Europe, carries the historical classification in colonialism, manifests itself in racism, sexism, ableism, linguicism, and many other forms of discrimination as the basis of universal division of labor and ultimately (re)produces subjects who are adapted to and involved in these processes in different positions and institutions. In these processes, epistemic violence is unequally distributed across structures, institutions, discourses, and actors and produces the asymmetries of coloniality in which they become effective. The use of explanatory approaches such as intersectionality draws attention to specific subject positions, such as that of Black women, and enables epistemic violence that affects specific subject positions to be broken down more deeply. Through the concept of intersectionality, dif-

4 Michel Foucault, *Die Ordnung der Dinge* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 1974), 22.

5 Foucault, Die *Ordnung der Dinge*, 124; original citation: "Die Episteme ist das Dispositiv, das es erlaubt, nicht schon das Wahre vom Falschen, sondern das wissenschaftlich Qualifizierbare zu scheiden."

6 Grosfoguel, "The Structure of Knowledge," 76.

7 Claudia Brunner, *Epistemische Gewalt: Wissen und Herrschaft in der kolonialen Moderne* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2020), 274–75, https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839451311.

ferent subject positions within social movements are included and at the same time many categorizations of social discrepancies are emphasized.[8]

In examining anti-Black racism in the German higher education landscape, the methods of transcultural historical research, peace studies, and Critical Race Theory (CRT) play a supporting role in this work. In particular, the chapter examines the background and impact of anti-Black racism within the structures and institutions of HWUs from a multicentered perspective. The methodology of transcultural historical research is used to analyze the trajectory of anti-Black racism and the power mechanisms of colonialism that prevail today in the form of persistent coloniality. The term coloniality here refers to the consequences of colonialism that persist in the present.[9] I will draw on a number of reports and newspaper articles on the Bremen case and the case of Prof. Auma in order to highlight the effects of anti-Black racism on Black actors and Black knowledge in academia. To this end, an overview of the recent realities of anti-Black racism in German academia will be provided. This is done by asking how and in what dimensions *white* supremacy and anti-Black knowledge manifest themselves in academia.

This chapter also presents the concept of *bilchiinsi* and Afrofuturism as an alternative to the weakening of anti-Black racism in German academia. In her work on *bilchiinsi,* Wunpini Fatimata Mohammed presents a radical philosophy for decolonizing methodologies, explaining that indigenization follows where indigenous African knowledge systems present in languages, proverbs, folktales, folk songs, or cultural artefacts are incorporated to design a new framework for understanding various phenomena on the continent and in the diaspora. Afrofuturism, on the other hand, is a transdisciplinary and transnational cultural resistance movement from which a methodology developed.[10] The concept and approaches of Afrofuturism combine elements of science fiction, fantasy, history, and African or Africandiasporic culture. It explores speculative visions of the future, often reimagining the role of people of African descent in that future, while also critically engaging with the past and present to reclaim and reinterpret African identities, histories, and cultures through a futuristic lens, challenging traditional narratives and envisioning new possibilities.

8 Maria Klimansky, "Von Intersektionalität zu Interdependenz oder: immer Ärger mit den Kategorien," *HUch! Sonderausgabe Rassismus* (2008/2009): 30, http://www.refrat.de/huch/archiv/pdf/HUch_Rassismus.pdf.

9 Brunner, *Epistemische Gewalt*, 144.

10 Adriano Elia, "The Languages of Afrofuturism," *Lingue Linguaggi* 12 (2014): 83–85, DOI 10.1285/i22390359v12p83.

The Distinction between Political Opinion and Teaching Commitment

Since an interview with the Berlin daily newspaper, *Der Tagesspiegel*, published on 18th December 2020, Professor Dr. Auma has been the subject of racist attacks by politicians from the AfD party via the then still named social network Twitter, which is now called X.[11] In the interview, Auma criticized racism within the structures of German universities and explained that intersectional awareness is necessary to develop solutions and eliminate various forms of discrimination within academia.

> I mainly see Black life in German universities very early in the morning or very late in the evening, when the cleaning staff start their work. During the day, these are still *white* institutions, largely homogeneous milieus that reproduce themselves.[12]

In response, Dr. Hans-Thomas Tillschneider, scholar of Islamic Studies, publicist, and cultural policy spokesperson for the AfD in Saxony-Anhalt, stated on the AfD state association's website, "The criticism that German universities are too *white* is nothing more than crude racism against *white* people and lobbying for immigrants from Africa."[13] It is obvious that racism is tied to power relations. So, while *white* people can experience discrimination on various grounds, they cannot experience racism. Nationwide, organizations such as ADEFRA e.V. or the Fachschaftsinitiative Gender, Intersektionalität and Politik at the Freie Universität Berlin (FU) and individuals such as Fatima El-Tayeb or Peggy Piesche expressed their dismay at what had happened to Auma in an open letter of solidarity. In this let-

11 Christoph David Piorkowski, "772 Forschende fordern Konsequenzen," *Der Tagesspiegel*, Accessed February 19, 2021. https://www.tagesspiegel.de/wissen/hetzkampagne-von-afd-politikern-772-forschende-fordern-konsequenzen/26925442.html.

12 Christoph David Piorkowski, Interview with Maisha Auma: "Struktureller Rassismus in deutschen Hochschulen," *Tagesspiegel*, December 18, 2020, accessed October 27, 2023, https://www.tagesspiegel.de/wissen/nur-tagsuber-sind-universitaten-weisse-institutionen-6861115.html

Original citation "Schwarzes Leben sehe ich in deutschen Universitäten vornehmlich ganz früh am Morgen oder ganz spät am Abend, wenn das Reinigungspersonal seine Arbeit beginnt. Tagsüber sind das immer noch weiße Institutionen, weitgehend homogene Milieus, die sich selbst reproduzieren."

13 AfD Fraktion Landtag Sachsen-Anhalt, "Tillschneider: Rassismus gegen Weiße nicht hinnehmen! Maureen Maisha Auma in ihre Schranken verweisen!" January 5, 2021, accessed October 27, 2023, https://www.afdfraktion-lsa.de/tillschneider-rassismus-gegen-weisse-nicht-hinnehmen-maureen-maisha-auma-in-ihre-schranken-verweisen/; Original citation "Die Kritik daran, dass deutsche Universitäten zu weiß seien, ist nichts anderes als plumper Rassismus gegen Weiße und Lobbyarbeit für Einwanderer aus Afrika."

ter, Susan Arndt thanks Auma on behalf of the students and academics at the University of Bayreuth for her work in establishing Intersectionality Studies, Gender Studies, Childhood Studies, and CRT. The solidarity letter also condemns the racist attacks by the AfD parliamentary group in Saxony-Anhalt and points out that concrete university policy measures are needed to support racially marginalized academics.[14] It should be emphasized that Tillschneider currently works as a private lecturer at the University of Bayreuth and has been under intelligence surveillance by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution since 2020, as Tillschneider opposes the basic order of liberal democracy.

A team from Bayerischer Rundfunk (BR) and the Hof, Coburg, Suhl, and Bayreuth publishing group investigated the reasons as to why Tillschneider was allowed to continue teaching at the University of Bayreuth after he launched a racist campaign against Auma on Twitter/X. The University of Bayreuth's student parliament (StuPA) supported the open letter of solidarity with a resolution and made it clear that the university should be free of racism. Nevertheless, Tillschneider remained a lecturer until the end of July 2016 with StuPA Chairwoman Marlene Tillack arguing that he can separate his political opinions from his teaching duties. In a written question to the state government, the member of state parliament of the party *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD) Florian Ritter asked whether a state politician under observation by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution can lose his teaching position. The Bavarian Minister of State for Science and the Arts, Bernd Sibler, who belongs to the *Christlich Soziale Union* (CSU) party, replied, and confirmed that Tillschneider was doing "problematic things" in his political office. Freedom of opinion protects his activities and, as such, comply with the rules. The President of the University of Bayreuth, Stefan Leible, also commented on Tillschneider's teaching assignment and defended the legally guaranteed freedom of research and teaching.[15] Yet, due to his parliamentary mandate Tillschneider's university activities are currently on hold.[16]

The case of Auma illustrates the obstacles that relegate a constructive debate on anti-Black racism to the academic and political periphery. The argumentation

14 Susan Arndt, "Offener Solidaritätsbrief," Universität Bayreuth, December 18, 2021, accessed May 28, 2024, https://www.frauenbeauftragte.uni-bayreuth.de/pool/dokumente/Solidarita_tsbrief-Prof_-Auma-DT.pdf

15 Markus Feulner, "Die Uni Bayreuth und ihr Dozent von der AfD," *Bayrischer Rundfunk*, Accessed July 21, 2021, https://www.br.de/nachrichten/bayern/die-uni-bayreuth-und- ihr-dozent-von-der-afd,Sdn1gSK

16 Süddeutsche Zeitung, "AfD-Politiker soll Uni-Job aufgeben," *Sueddeutsche.de,* March 15, 2016, last accessed October 27, 2023, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/bayern/bayreuth-tillschneider-soll-uni-job-aufgeben-1.2908082

of the Bavarian Minister of Science and Art as well as the argumentation of Tillack and Leible that the law of freedom of expression protects Tillschneider's political statements illustrates the justification and self-understanding of so-called normative violence that US philosopher Judith Butler developed. It operates on the meso-level of epistemic violence.[17] By placing Article Five of the Basic Law on freedom of opinion above Article Three of the Basic Law, which prohibits discrimination, racist defamation and verbalization are not recognized. At the same time, power relations are maintained, hegemonic knowledge is constantly reproduced, and racism is declared a political opinion. The law reflects the state.

The state, in turn, is the macro level according to Pierre Bourdieu. In other words, the macro level is the level of epistemic violence in which the state is located as a universal form of authority and sovereignty. Epistemic power thus consists in the universal enforcement of the standardization of a particular mode of communication. In this case, the particular mode of communication is the articulation and justification of racist statements through Article Five of the Basic Law on Freedom of Expression. Epistemic violence is specifically linked to acting subjects at the micro level, which, in relation to Tillschneider's political position and role at the meso level, are linked to (geo)political positionings within power relations at the macro level.

The contemporary society is based on a post-*race* discourse. Post-*race* is the commonplace and presumptuous ideological claim that today's liberal democracies have overcome the logic of racism and *race*. In the context of contemporary post-*race* discourse, the return of racism is located at the level of the individual who did not know better.[18] By denying and disguising racism with the argument of freedom of expression, the case described here shows how certain actors within the discourse on anti-Black racism in academia can rely on a post-*race* discourse to legitimize their positions and actions by anticipating the legislative power of freedom of expression. According to Bourdieu, the supreme authority for classifying and legitimizing knowledge and citizenship relations is the state, which safeguards the symbolic power of institutions at the highest level, the macro level.

By fulfilling basic epistemic functions, such as the definition of knowledge or political opinion, the state is responsible for the maintenance of established orders of citizenship. The maintenance and constant reproduction of symbolic and epistemic violence is expressed in the role of the Bavarian State Minister for Science and the Arts and the President of the University of Bayreuth, who in their positions act

17 Brunner, *Epistemische Gewalt*, 288.

18 Sivamohan Valluvan, "What is 'Post-Race' and What Does it Reveal about Contemporary Racisms?" *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39 (2016): 2241, https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2016.1202430.

as arbiters and determine which knowledge and which statements are to be recognized and interpreted in which way. With the help of classification systems "which are laid down in laws, bureaucratic processes, the structures of the education system and . . . in social rituals, the state forms mental structures and enforces common principles of perception and classification."[19] The racist incident ultimately shows that Auma was subjected to epistemicide. Auma's encounter demonstrates how anti-Black racism works by erasing and delegitimizing the knowledge of Black intellectuals in Germany. By appropriating and twisting the word racism, by making statements such as ". . . racism against *whites* and lobbying for immigrants from Africa," Tillschneider aims to silence critics like Auma who publicly speak out against institutional and structural racism.

Appropriation of Black Knowledge

The attempt to institutionalize Black Studies at the University of Bremen in 2015 should also not go unmentioned. The erasure of several Black academics took place there. A group of *white* doctoral and post-doctoral students, mainly from American Studies, founded a group called Black Bremen Studies, which was then renamed into the Black Knowledges Research Group. Unsurprisingly, in January 2015, organizations and members of the Black communities in Germany and Austria, such as ISD Bund e.V. (*Initiative Schwarzer Menschen in Deutschland*), PAMOJA (*Bewegung der jungen afrikanischen Diaspora in Österreich*), the political scientist and activist Joshua Kwesi Aikins and the art historian and curator for African research at the Weltkulturen Museum Dr. Yvette Mutumba, among others, published a community statement and voiced massive criticism, after professors Dr. Sabine Broeck, Dr. Gisela Febel, and Dr. Rebekka von Mallinckrodt applied for funding for the implementation of a creative unit "New Black Diaspora Studies: Ethical and Aesthetic Challenges of the 21st Century" with the Excellence Initiative of the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* (DFG).[20] It reads:

> We protest against the appropriation, academification, and depoliticization of Black Studies in Bremen in the strongest terms, especially in light of the whitewashing that has accompa-

19 Pierre Bourdieu, *Praktische Vernunft*: *Zur Theorie des Handelns* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp 2018, 10th ed.), 106. Original citation ". . ., die im Recht, den bürokratischen Verfahren, den Strukturen des Bildungssystems und, . . . in den sozialen Ritualen festgeschrieben sind, formt der Staat die mentalen Strukturen, setzt gemeinsame Wahrnehmungs- Gliederungsprinzipien durch . . ."

20 Black Studies Bremen, "Community Statement: 'Black' Studies at the University of Bremen," Last modified January, 2015, 2, https://blackstudiesgermany.wordpress.com/statementbremen/

> nied the recent institutionalization of gender and queer studies, post-colonial studies, and critical whiteness studies in the German system of higher education.[21]

Since then, the Black Knowledges Research Group disbanded.[22] However, the organizations and members of the Black communities in Germany and Austria see this step only as a symbolic act, as the appropriation of Black knowledge continues and Black Studies is pursued as a project by *white* people, marginalizing and excluding Black academics.[23]

To better understand the irony behind the attempt by *white* scholars to institutionalize Black Studies and the connection to urban politics, it is indeed necessary to contextualize the history of Black Studies. One of the pioneers of Black Studies, which originated in the United States of America, was the civil rights activist and humanist Angela Davis.[24] Black Studies emerged in San Francisco in 1969 with the aim of academically analyzing Black history as Black issues and implementing new narratives and Black perspectives. In the attempt to implement the Creative Unit "New Black Diaspora Studies: Ethical and Aesthetic Challenges of the 21st Century," the Black community criticized the fact that no active steps were taken to include Black German academics and activists in an equal exchange in which the interests of Black university members were represented.[25] Thus, the original goal of Black Studies to implement Black perspectives and narratives within academia was completely missed as *white* academics tried to appropriate it. Here too, an erasure of Black knowledge, validation and citation took place, or in the words of Christen A. Smith and Dominique Garrett-Scott, "we are symbolically included but epistemologically erased."[26] The work of Black scholars was comprehensively excluded, while their names were listed as "potential" cooperation partners in the application for the implementation of the Creative Unit without their consent, which in fact is an act of epistemic violence.[27] Black literature and cultural studies scholar Peggy Piesche emphasizes that there has long been criticism of the appropriation of Black knowledge, while Black scholars

21 Black Studies Bremen, "Community Statement," 4.

22 Anna Böcker, "Postkolonialismus und Wissenschaft: Black Studies ohne Schwarze?" *taz*, February 26, 2015, https://taz.de/Postkolonialismus-und-Wissenschaft/!5018924/

23 Black Studies Bremen, "Update vom 23. Februar 2015."

24 Jeanette, Goddar, "Black Studies entfachen Debatte," *DUZ Magazin*, Last modified May 29, 2015, https://www.duz.de/beitrag/!/id/314/black-studies-entfachen-debatte.

25 Black Studies Bremen, "Update vom 23. Februar 2015."

26 Christen A. Smith and Dominique Garrett-Scott, "'We Are Not Named': Black Women and the Politics of Citation in Anthropology," *Feminist Anthropology* 2 (2021): 19, https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/fea2.12038.

27 Black Studies Bremen, "Community Statement," 3.

are marginalized in academic discourse, which demonstrates "the difficulty of perceiving ourselves as subjects."[28] The attempt to implement Black Studies at the University of Bremen illustrates in particular the meso-level of epistemic violence, which operates within institutions such as universities. The meso-level of the coloniality of knowledge deals with the concrete practices of the academic system that are historically and currently interwoven with colonialism.[29]

Nonetheless, I want to suggest some insights that I think can take us further in the fight against epistemicide and epistemic violence that I discussed above. As mentioned previously, concepts such as *bilchiinsi* or Afrofuturism can help to counteract anti-Black racism. In the Dagbaŋ philosophies of the Dagbamba (Dagomba), an ethnic group in Ghana, *bilchiinsi* refers to respect and appreciation of human dignity. *Bilchiinsi* opposes the violence of colonization and *white* supremacy by actively respecting and upholding the humanity and dignity of all people. Guided by Dagbaŋ philosophies, Mohammed introduces the potential of the Communal Conversation Circle (CCC), which is based on indigenous philosophy, but at the same time represents a first African feminist intervention in research methodologies by ensuring that female voices are not marginalized through the methodology of sensorial listening in data gathering. This intervention enables specifically Black female voices, which are particularly affected by intersectional forms of discrimination, to be heard within academia.[30]

To further reject several prejudices that refer to Black, African, or Afro-diasporic people of African descent, Afrofuturism operates on a metaphorical level while offering a counter-history that reconsiders the role of Black people in *white* majority societies in the past and provides alternative narratives for the future. By addressing common themes within a technocracy in a "science fiction" perspective, Afrofuturism seeks to connect the African diaspora while embracing a multimedia range of artistic communities. These share a common interest in imagining a Black past, a current disposition and a future that is connected through shared experiences.[31] Since the first wave of Afrofuturism only reached the mainstream to a limited extent, the first perceptions of Afrofuturism were strongly limited to its musical manifestations, which were shaped in the 1950s and 1960s by the African American phi-

28 Anna Böcker, "Postkolonialismus und Wissenschaft: Black Studies ohne Schwarze?" *taz*, February 26, 2015, https://taz.de/Postkolonialismus-und-Wissenschaft/!5018924/Böcker, Original citation "die Schwierigkeit, uns als Subjekte wahrzunehmen"

29 Brunner, *Epistemische Gewalt*, 145.

30 Wunpini Fatimata Mohammed, "Bilchiinsi Philosophy: Decolonizing Methodologies in Media Studies," *Review of Communication* 22 (2022): 8–18, https://doi.org/10.1080/15358593.2021.2024870.

31 Tarik, "Travel Notes," 540.

losopher, jazz musician and composer Sun Ra.[32] The interpretation of Afrofuturism as part of a Eurocentric canon in the German reading eliminated Black emancipation.[33] Especially since Afrocentric artists were hesitant to embrace the idea of Afrofuturism fearing the loss of a cultural and historical specificity.[34] By bringing the future of Black people in Germany into the focus of narratives and analyses, Afrofuturism can rethink their roles in the African diaspora and create alternative realities. Engaging with Afrofuturism is a strategy for Afro-German or Black German researchers, artists, and activists to offer liberating and alternative representations of Black people, to reinterpret the past, and to expose structural anti-Black racism to imagine a future without racism.[35] Drawing on transdisciplinary and transnational cultural movements, such as Afrofuturism, is essential for analyzing *white* European hegemony. The ideas, narratives, literary, and artistic representations of Afrofuturism can bring a new perspective to how global phenomena, such as anti-Black racism, are viewed from specific angles. The metaphorical approach of Afrofuturism offers an insight into the connection to everyday reality and brings forth wider socio-political contexts in different social fields.

Conclusion

To decolonize the academic landscape, non-Eurocentric approaches offer significant ways of thinking, concepts, methods, and theories to rectify our ways of knowing and critically challenge Eurocentric hegemony of knowing and knowledge. The consideration of non-Eurocentric approaches such as Afrocentrism has emerged as a tool for critically questioning epistemological, methodological, and ontological hegemony in the social sciences, which seeks the detachment of Africans from colonialism and Eurocentrism on historical, social, epistemological,

32 Natasha A. Kelly, *The Comet - 150 years W.E.B. Du Bois: Afrofuturism 2.0* (Berlin: Orlanda, 2018), 34; Jochen Dreier, "Afrofuturismus Widerstand gegen eine weiße Zukunft," *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*, Last modified January 25, 2017, https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/afrofuturismus-widerstand-gegen-eine-weisse- zukunft-100.html.

33 Kelly, *Afrofuturism 2.0*, 34.

34 Sofia Samatar, "Toward a Planetary History of Afrofuturism," *Research in African Literatures* 48 (2017): 188, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2979/reseafrilite.48.4.12.

35 Priscilla Layne, "Ursprünge und Ursachen des afrodeutschen Afrofuturismus," *Blog Berlinerfestspiele*, last modified October 24, 2018, https://blog.berlinerfestspiele.de/urspruenge-und-ursachen-des- afrodeutschenafrofuturismus/

and methodological levels.[36] The main methodological imperatives of Afrocentrism reject objectivity. It seeks to reduce the distance between participants and researchers, as well as to foster creativity and develop holistic thinking. Often the consideration of non-European cultures and forms of knowledge, through the perspectives of Eurocentrism, leads to biased interpretations and limits the perspective for approaching a full understanding of human experience and social reality.

It needs to be emphasized that for the decolonization of knowledge and the institution of the university, the element of language is especially important for the maintenance of epistemic and cultural identity and the mediation of different worldviews. If the decolonization of education aims to reduce inequities and marginalization, then the articulations and language of legislation must be decolonized and redefined to make visible the structural and institutional racism within HWUs and to counter epistemic violence.[37] Language and different modes of communication can only be understood if the interrelation between the cognitive, affective, and conative (acting) aspects of human beings are understood and analyzed within their cultural, historical, and social context.[38] These interrelationships need to be registered within the discourse of anti-Black racism within German academia to grasp the defence mechanisms and the prevailing mode of communication on which *white* subjects rely in universities to avoid constructive engagement with anti-Black knowledge and the superiority of Eurocentric scholarship on different levels. This was particularly evident in the case of Auma, who had to endure racist defamation from the then lecturer Tillschneider, who is currently the deputy state chairman of the AfD Saxony-Anhalt and second deputy chairman of the AfD parliamentary group in the state parliament of Saxony-Anhalt.

Equally important to addressing anti-Black racism and epistemic violence is the need to incorporate Afro-centered concepts such as African feminist interventions in research methodologies, notably *bilchiinsi*, to gain further perspectives for a holistic understanding of the interpretation of the Eurocentric hegemony of knowledge and to provide alternative understandings and perspectives for addressing and combating anti-Black racism and knowledge in data collection. Since academia cannot exclusively conduct the necessary epistemic struggles, the connection to political struggles, social, transdisciplinary, and transnational cultural movements such as Afrofuturism must also stand for an eradication of epistemic

36 Lisa Schreiber, "Overcoming Methodological Elitism: Afrocentrism as a Prototypical Paradigm for Intercultural Research," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 24 (2000): 654–57.
37 Mampane, Ruth M., Margaret F. Omidire, and Folake Ruth Aluko, "Decolonising Higher Education in Africa: Arriving at a Glocal Solution", *South African Journal of Education* 38 (2018): 2–4.
38 Schreiber, "Overcoming Methodological Elitism," 651–665.

violence.[39] Accordingly, it is particularly interesting for academic engagement with anti-Black racism to discuss transdisciplinary and transnational movements such as Afrofuturism within disciplines such as African Studies, Area Studies, or Gender Studies further and to analyze its metaphorical levels in more depth, while connecting them to other contemporary discourses and struggles around *white* hegemony and epistemic violence. Be that as it may, this chapter will not overcome forms of epistemic violence such as anti-Black racism. But the insights gained here can inspire further research on epistemic violence and hopefully promote and cultivate an intersectional multicentered perspective in the discourse on anti-Black racism.

39 Brunner, *Epistemische Gewalt*, 308.

Part IV: **Diaspora Identities**

Anna Frehiwot Maconi

Chapter 9
"What Do I See?" An Exploration of the Shades of Afro-European Cultural Identities

Introduction

"Africanness" and "Blackness" hold a multitude of meanings for us, Black, Afro-diaspora, and descendants living in Europe. While we carry within us the stories of our collective pasts, spanning the line between the known and the elusive, our individual experiences shape our identities and narratives we build around them in unique and distinct ways. In this essay, I will reflect on the meaning of cultural identity among Black, Afro-Germans, and Afro-European diaspora groups by focusing on a participatory installation presented between July 14–19, 2023 at Kunstraum in Potsdamerstraße, Berlin.[1] By applying Stuart Hall's understanding of cultural identity as both a commonality and an ever-changing entity to the analysis of the installation, I reflect on the meaning of being Ethio-European.

In the work, titled "What do I see?" participants engage with two separate audio recordings featuring six Black individuals, three of whom are of Ethiopian descent, discussing a historical picture of an Axum obelisk taken from Ethiopia to Rome during the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, while looking at three collages displayed on the wall. The intention is to prompt participants to visualize the discussed picture without its physical presence. Through the different responses to the same picture the interviewees present, one learns of the subjective nature of historical interpretation and how this is ultimately linked to one's cultural identity. We learn about an Ethiopian cultural identity distinguishing Shaft, Jona, and Heno from the other three Black people interviewed. At the same time, we also learn through Shaft, Jona, and Heno's eyes the different ways and sides of being Ethiopian. Ethiopia becomes a concrete space where one's family lives, like in the case of Jona. To Heno, who lived in Ethiopia until his twenties before moving to Germany, it symbolizes memories of childhood. To Shaft, raised by a white, mostly single mother in Germany, as a racialized

1 The participatory installation was part of a group exhibition titled "Potential Exhibition" curated by İpek Çınar. The exhibition was a product of a two-day workshop "Counter archives, potential histories," which aimed to question the power hierarchies that photography entails and to find alternative, more inclusive ways of photography and, ultimately, history-telling.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111446721-010

person, constantly reminded of his supposed "roots," which he does not concretely know, Ethiopia becomes a place of pride, nostalgia, and longing.

"What do I see?" An Exploration of the Different Cultural Identities

The installation, "What do I see?" (see Fig. 9.1) inspired by Ariella Azoulay's *Potential Histories: Unlearning Imperialism*,[2] aimed to challenge traditional ways of making and understanding history and photography by placing the observer at the forefront and seeing the past through their eyes. Azoulay argues that imperial modes of thinking govern all the institutions in our society from museums to ideas of sovereignty and history. Ann Laura Stoler, when referring to the specific French colonial history, refers to *colonial aphasia*,[3] a process through which colonial, imperial histories, and connections, although present in contemporary France are kept hidden or not acknowledged enough. Just like aphasiacs disassociate resemblances and build categories beyond comprehension, colonial historiography builds colonial connections and turns away from others feeding contemporary imperialism fragmenting and fracturing power.

Natasha Kelly uses the term *entinnern*, "disremember,"[4] when referring to Germany's refusal to acknowledge its colonial past while racism and racist categorizations perpetuate social and political structures in the country. This absence and avoidance can be problematic in the specific case of Black Afro-Germans. Being Black in such contexts means contending with the contradictions of official discourse that fail to recognize imperial racialized structures in which Black people are integrated. Consequently, individuals often seek their history through unofficial archives, where narratives of resistance and resilience can be found, providing counter perspectives to dominant historical narratives. An example is *Farbe bekennen: Afro-Deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*,[5] in which May Ayim (Opitz), Katharina Oguntoye, and Dagmar Schultz recollected the histories of Afro-German women born and raised in Germany but who still feel as foreigners within the country, thus demonstrating one integral aspect of racism within German socie-

2 Ariella A. Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019).

3 Ann L. Stoler, "Colonial Aphasia: Race and Disabled Histories in France," *Public Culture* 23 (2011): 121–156, 10.1215/08992363-2010-018.

4 Natasha A. Kelly, *Afrokultur: Der raum zwischen gestern und morgen* (Münster: Unrast, 2016).

5 May Ayim, Katharina Oguntoye, and Dagmar Schultz, eds., *Farbe bekennen: Afro-Deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte* (Berlin: Orlanda, 1991).

Fig 9.1: Installation "What do I see?" by the author. Photo by Julianne Chua.

ties. Azoulay offers a way forward to deal with colonial aphasia through what she calls *potential history*. It is a process of refusing imperial violence by acknowledging and then actively unlearning our imperial histories while at the same time reclaiming and making present our histories, which were made past.

Azoulay's view has inspired my installation. People engaging with the installation would need to sit on two chairs and listen to two different audio recordings of six people talking about the same historical picture while looking at three collages on the wall. The aim is to imagine the picture the six people are talking about without the picture being there. Can a historical picture be told without it being there? Doesn't a historical picture gain meaning, only through the different perspectives of the observers? While the collages represent my interpretation of the interviews, I also asked the observer of the installation to write down, jot down, and paint on a notebook I provided, what they thought the interviewees are talking about. The focus on the observer allowed for conversations and an exploration of the multi-vocal nature of history, photography and ultimately, as it will become clearer later, our cultural identities.

What then was the content of the picture I asked the observer to describe without it being there, just through the interviews and collages they would see? For my installation, I started with an old historical picture I found online of the Ethiopian King Ezana's Axum obelisk in Rome the Italians took from Ethiopia in

the 1940s as war booty. The stele was returned afterwards to Axum in northern Ethiopia.[6] As an Italo-Ethiopian myself, and in the 11 years spent in Ethiopia, I learnt that the obelisk holds an important meaning for many Ethiopians across the country and abroad. Taking this picture as a starting point, without talking about the content, I then asked six Black people (for privacy reasons, I will address them throughout the text through fictive names) between 27 and 45 years old, all residing in Berlin the following guiding questions: describe what you see in the picture, what comes to your mind when looking at the picture, what emotions does it trigger if any? And why do you think you have these feelings and emotions? I consciously asked the same guiding questions to three Black people whom I knew did not have any affiliation to Ethiopia and three who had at least an Ethiopian parent or lived in Ethiopia before moving to Germany. The intention was to shed light on the diverse perspectives, interpretations, and emotions intertwined with experiences and accumulated knowledge over time that lie beneath a picture's surface and, ultimately, our individual cultural identities and social positioning.

The First Group of Interviews: Being Afro-European

In the first group of interviewees, which I categorized as "non-Ethiopian," Fila identified as a Black Cameroonian German man, the second, Sina, as a Jamaican German woman and the third, Kira, as a Black American woman. All three are very engaged in decolonial and post-colonial thinking. Compared to the following ones, the interviews I had with this group show, on the one hand, greater attention to how the picture is taken and structured. The initial thing all three focus on when looking at the picture is the disposition of the picture and how it is taken and composed. Fila talks about "an old picture" where there is a "top-down perspective." Sina sees "lines here, then this diagonal that makes everything dynamic in the picture, and this is a parallel." Kira talks of a panopticon perspective. On the other hand, compared to the second group, Fila, Sina, and Kira do not have enough knowledge to link any object to a specific region of the world or identity, being uncertain about the content of the picture and leaving the obelisk and the surrounding up for guessing. When listening to the interviews, we often hear

6 Picture retrieved from a Twitter post stating: "1956 shot of #Axum Obelisk in Rome. It was stolen by Italy in 1937 and returned in 3 pieces in 2005 #Ethiopia," Twitter post, July 7, 2016, https://twitter.com/OnlyOneEthiopia/status/751171368587145216.

"maybe," "I am not sure," "I don't know." Fila states, "How those trees look like, it could be a lot of places. Southern or Eastern Europe or North Africa, I don't know, but the trees are not North African."

However, they all state how the picture is Eurocentric and how the statue feels out of place. Fila thinks the obelisk is a giant Greek or Roman "statement." Sina claims, "The statue does not look European at all. You know, if it were European, you would have a guy riding a horse with his sword." Kira, noticing how the statue is off-place, links it to the statues she has come across while living in Belgium,

> Somehow, this picture looks fake. The lack of people. It feels old, colonial in this case in the sense that there is something very regulated and tight about it. This statue is very abrupt, just like in Belgium when you find a big horse with King Leopold, and everyone knows that it is unnecessary and just too big. That is how the column feels like. In this case, it is not the column that is not necessary. It is the placement of it.

What is interesting about these last statements is that their experiences as Black people in Europe inform their judgment. While Fila confesses that his association of the obelisk to Greece, or Roman culture, lies in the histories and pictures he came to know throughout his life in Germany, Kira links her interpretation of the picture to her experience in Belgium. In a similar vein, Sina says, "You know, I was analyzing the picture and saying, 'man, this is really well taken.' Then I realized my perspective of looking at things is very European, but also the way the picture is taken is very European. Maybe that is why I said it." When Sina is conscious of her own way of being European although Black, we not only understand how the places we live in influence the way we look at things, but we also read in them what Hall links to Derrida's *différance* or in other words something new, born out of an encounter of various realities. Stuart Hall contrasts différance to the understanding that diaspora rests on a binary form of difference according to those that look at cultural identity as something to be dug up from the past and common to all members of a social group. Difference as binary opposition "depends on the construction of an 'Other' and a fixed opposition between inside and outside."[7] Différance on the other hand, allows for combination. Black or African is not opposed to European, but a new language comes into being out of the encounter. As the novelist Salman Rushdie writes, "hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation that comes of new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs" is "how newness enters the world."[8]

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7 Stuart Hall, "Thinking the Diaspora: Home-Thoughts from Abroad," in *Essential Essays*, ed. David Morley, vol. 2 of *Identity and Diaspora* (New York: Duke University Press, 2018), 212.

8 Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981–1991* (London: Granta Books, 1991), 394.

The Second Group of Interviews: The Ethio-European Cultural Identities

In the second group of interviewees, or what I called "Ethiopian," I talked to Shaft, who is in his early thirties and was born to an Ethiopian father and a German mother and raised in Germany. His father returned to Ethiopia when he was still a kid, and he went once to Ethiopia to visit him since then. That is also when, during a visit to a museum in the capital, Addis Ababa, he learned about the Axum obelisk that he, although with doubt, recognized from the picture. The second person I talk to, Jona, is in his late thirties. Born and raised in Germany by Ethiopian parents, he travels regularly to Ethiopia, where he has other family members he is in touch with. The third person I interviewed, Heno, is in his late thirties. He was born and lived in Ethiopia until his late twenties. He moved to Germany after marrying a German woman, and he travels regularly back to Ethiopia. In contrast to the other two, who decided to talk to me in English or German, he spoke to me mainly in Amharic.

Contrary to the first group, while only Jona and Heno and not Shaft knew that the picture was taken in Rome, all three recognized the obelisk and described it in more detail, associating it with Ethiopia. Here, Ethiopia is not just a nation-state with a specific geographic location. Through their words, Ethiopia takes form as an *imagined community*,[9] escaping any geographic boundaries and of which they are consciously part. "Ethiopia" triggers emotions such as pride, becoming a place of origin of someone's family, and somewhere one does not just come from but by which one is shaped, and a symbol of the wrongs of the world and of fights and solidarity. Through their words, we come to learn of a uniting force, of an Ethiopian identity. While Shaft links the picture to his experience in the museum in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, he also mentions how he felt pride because of his Ethiopian identity when looking at the picture and discovering that in Ethiopia, there was an old civilization able to build such a giant obelisk. "When I came to know about Axum, the time I was in Ethiopia, I felt proud because of the long history of Ethiopia because of my Ethiopian identity, and the obelisk is so big to manufacture. It was, to me, a symbol of power (of the Ethiopian civilization)." Jona adds to the feeling of pride the importance of the picture in his connection to his family residing both in Ethiopia and Italy, "This picture unites me, my family, Italy, and Ethiopia. It is not objective but very subjective. . . . It is important because it is a part of my family, and my family is part of Ethiopia, and Ethiopia

9 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 6.

is a part of my identity." Recognizing that the picture was taken in Rome he then can't avoid linking the picture to the Italian attempt to colonize the Ethiopian country and the atrocities committed by the "fascist country," how it reminded him of the stories he would hear about how Italians spreading toxic gas during the invasion and how the event was very traumatic for his family members in Ethiopia and to those scattered in the USA and Europe. As he states,

> This picture makes me think of the unethical and immoral handling of people. Not just Italians are culprits of it but the entire world that closed their eyes when the Duce sprayed gas. That was authorised by the League of Nations. Only Mexico said this was wrong, and that is why there is a square in Mexico called Ethiopia with a sculpture of King Haile Selassie in the middle. I came to know about it when visiting the country. And we also find Mexico Sqare in Addis.

Heno's interview, much lengthier than the other two, reveals a much deeper knowledge of the obelisk. He begins by recognizing the obelisk's significance for the Orthodox church in Ethiopia. He then follows to talk of the obelisk's meaning for him, for the Ethiopian nation, and humanity all together, "For me, too, it is important because it is not about me, and me being Ethiopian, but it is also about the idea of colonization, something people should be ashamed of. Any race, any people should be respected for what it is, and this pain is the biggest crime committed against humanity."

While all three men share an understanding of some of the core aspects of what "Ethiopian cultural identity" entails, the degree of consciousness and the way this common culture is shared differs among the three. While pride unites Shaft, Jona, and Heno in their way of taking part in this "Ethiopian imagined community," the three talk about and interpret this imagined community differently. From this, we understand how diaspora identities are not all the same, but "in the diaspora situation, identities become multiple. Alongside an associative connection with a particular island 'home' there are other centripetal forces."[10] What then are these centripetal forces in this case?

Firstly, from the interview extracts above, we understand how the social contacts with other Ethiopians affect one's cultural identity. Out of the three, Shaft has the least knowledge about the obelisk and the least contact with the Ethiopian state and people both living there and abroad. Consequently, Shaft's association of the picture with the Ethiopian identity is solely based on his father's nationality and his one-time visit to Addis Ababa. Jona and Heno, on the other hand, link the picture to religion, to the Ethiopian identity, the Italian attempted colonization, and both confess how the event was traumatizing for their families. Consequently,

10 Hall, "Thinking the Diaspora," 207.

while all three of them participate in a shared Ethiopian identity, the way this identity is experienced differs. The more social contacts one holds within a community, the deeper a knowledge of the historical events of this community, the deeper emotional attachment to the community and the shared pain will an individual have. In contrast, Shaft's emotional attachment is not directly linked to a specific event or community but to his father, whom he wished to know more, and an image of an idealized "land of a great civilization," Ethiopia, that he longs for.

Secondly, the different places one lived in or visited influence the consciousness, meaning, and understanding of a cultural identity and the associated values. We read earlier how Jona came to know about Ethiopia Square in Mexico, which enriched his understanding of the historical event in question. Following with a reflection on the unethical realities, he associates with the picture, Jona also adds, "The picture reminds me of the wrongs of the past and the wrongs that are still happening. One of which being the racism faced in Berlin (by Black people). . . . What I am telling you is linked to my experience in Berlin, what I read, my travels, and my family's story." The experience of racism in Berlin, his travels, and his family shape Jona's cultural identity in unique ways, which becomes evident through his unique interpretation of the picture. Heno, similarly, points out how a place and identity can influence the way you learn about history. When linking the obelisk to the crimes the Italian invaders committed, he contrasts his own narrative with the one he heard from other Italians. We hear how you learn knowledge differently if you grow up "as an Ethiopian" or "Italian." As he states,

> I don't know the society in Italy and how they think, but some of the information I get from my encounters is that the Italian narrative and the Ethiopian narrative are quite different. About Adua, for example (The battle where Italians were first defeated in their first unsuccessful attempt to colonize the country), or even when it comes to the fact of saying if Ethiopia was colonized or not. What many Ethiopians say is that the country was never colonized and that they won the battle of Adua, and our association with Italy is very negative, while Italians talk of the opposite without mentioning the battle of Adua.

Thirdly, generational differences can affect the way we experience and interpret cultural identity. Heno points to this third element interestingly distinguishing "our generation of Ethiopians," referring to those Ethiopians that were not yet born when the battle of Adua was fought or when the next Italian colonial voyage took place, to the older generations. As he states:

> You know we do not have direct knowledge of the events, and those events have different meanings to us than to our parents or great-grandparents. Especially the celebration of Adua has a new meaning for our generation, and when we think of Adua, Axum, Lalibela, and the victory over Italy, we think of how these events were important for Ethiopia, although we didn't experience them.

Heno points out how historical events, especially those at the core of a specific cultural identity, repeat themselves throughout generations. However, those histories are shaped and reshaped across generations to acquire and add layers of meaning.

Listening to the Picture

Two of the collages I made represent my interpretations of these specific two groups whose interviews I analyzed in this essay and that I reproduced at the exhibition (see Fig. 9.2 and 9.3). From a general perspective, I decided to use the collage technique as a symbolic emphasis on the observer of a picture and the process of associations their mind makes when looking at a historical picture. Like our brain when interpreting a picture cuts and reshapes past experiences, times, and events, I also cut and glued different elements taken from different books to build something new coming out of what already existed. In a sense, the collage also represented to me the mechanisms at play in the processual nature of cultural identity. I decided to make the collages small for two reasons. Firstly, to emphasize the importance of the audio instead of the figurative part of the installation. Secondly, the small size of the collages forces the observer to come closer to the picture to look at the details. Metaphorically, this process of coming closer represents the importance of looking at pictures "closer," to dig deeper, to understand and discover multi-layered meanings hiding beneath the surface.

Turning to the analysis of the content of the two collages, in the first collage, the only "Ethiopian" element, the obelisk, predominates the surface. Red lines, like those in analytical books, cross the image and underline the façade of the obelisk. In the background, we see a painting of an African hut. The obelisk is then located in a cold blue landscape with foggy clouds of red representing the foggy knowledge and associations Fila, Sina, and Kira make. At the same time, the red, together with the scattered golden drops, represent the emotional reactions the three interviewees had when associating the image with Europe and colonization.

In the second collage, the obelisk is put into second place to give space to a war scene and a crowd of people. The Ethiopian queen of Saba is riding a horse while, in the background, Ethiopian and Italian troops fight each other. We also see an Egyptian ziggurat, another symbol of power Shaft, Jona, and Heno associated the obelisk with when mentioning "the great Ethiopian civilization." On the top left corner, we see St. George surrounded by a green, yellow, and red crown, reminding us of the Ethiopian flag and the Orthodox Ethiopian church's flag. The landscape shifts from black to red and yellow, creating a dramatic background

Fig. 9.2: 18 cm by 14 cm collage from the installation "What Do I See?" featuring an obelisk in a cold blue background with foggy red clouds. Photo by Julianne Chua.

Fig. 9.3: 18 cm by 14 cm collage from the installation "What Do I See?" depicting a war scene between Ethiopian and Italian troops, the Queen of Saba riding a horse, and the Ethiopian flag crowning St. George on a white horse. Photo by Julianne Chua.

and reminding me of the intense emotions of pride, pain, and suffering I could sense from the conversations I had with Shaft, Heno, and Jona. And lastly, draping around the war scene is a piece of the traditional Ethiopian *netela*, a handmade scarf from cotton.

Conclusion

In a context where imperial modes of thinking govern our institutions and ideas of history and sovereignty, artistic approaches can offer alternative ways to engage with the contradictions of official discourse and dominant historical narratives. In the specific German context, works such as May Ayim, Katharina Oguntoye, and Dagmar Schultz's *Farbe bekennen: Afro-Deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren*

ihrer Geschichte,[11] present a narrative of resistance to what Natasha Kelly calls *entinnern,*[12] Germany's refusal to acknowledge its colonial past and the imperial racialized structures into which Black people are integrated. The installation, too, provided a space to challenge imperial histories.

While on the one hand, the installation aimed to show how a photograph gains meaning only through the eyes of the observer, it also provided a platform to explore Afro-European cultural identities and social positioning. Through the distinction of the two groups of interviewees, the "non-Ethiopian" and the "Ethiopian" group, we did not just understand the difference that exists between Afro-European groups, but we also learned of a common Ethiopian cultural identity that Shaft, Jona, and Heno share. These three interviewees are united by a common feeling of connection to Ethiopia, that transcends mere geographic boundaries forming an "imagined community." Ethiopian identity emerges through shared core values, a sense of pride, historical knowledge, and struggle.

At the same time, each interview emerges in its uniqueness. The different perspectives of each of the six interviews show how personal experiences in different places, education, social interactions, generational differences, access to mobility and social position, and family biographies shape cultural identities. All these factors contribute to creating always-evolving cultural identities that escape any categorization. So, instead of looking at a cultural identity in opposition to another, we should instead understand it as an evolving process. The collages metaphorically symbolize the complexity of cultural identities analyzed here and the cognitive processes involved in identity formation. Just as our minds cut and reshape past and present experiences to create new meanings, these collages combine different elements together to highlight the intricate nature of cultural identities.

11 Ayim et al., *Farbe bekennen.*

12 Kelly, *Afrokultur*.

Sadia Marie Ouro-Gbele

Chapter 10
African Diaspora Women and the Question of Belonging

Introduction: Being Hypervisible, yet Feeling Invisible

Being hypervisible yet feeling invisible – is my short answer to the question of how I feel as a Black Afro-diasporic woman in Germany. It neither covers my reality, nor does it describe the range of emotions that stir within me. "Being hypervisible yet feeling invisible" offers a possible basis to explain my situation, but it is definitely not a final answer.

In Germany, Black bodies are hypervisible and currently extremely popular. We see Black bodies on billboards for advertising purposes, Black female musicians like Meghan Thee Stallion[1] and Beyoncé are blowing up the charts in the US, and people around the world are having a Brazilian butt lift to fit the slim-thick body type, a body shape that is particularly common in Black women.[2]

The hypervisibility argument is easy to understand but how can I feel hypervisible and invisible at the same time? Being Black comes in various forms. One observation that has accompanied me and many other Black women throughout our lives is that we are enduring simultaneity.

Here is an example: As a Black woman, I can receive compliments about my hair, but the other person still wants to touch it; people can approach me in a friendly way and still fetishize my body; someone can have a "Fck Nazis"-sticker on their laptop and still cannot list three African countries. So yes, I can feel hypervisible and invisible at the same time.

Even tough Black bodies are getting an international boost, this comes with a grain of salt. I type the following into the search engine "first black woman" and immediately find women who are celebrated as pioneers in their field. An article

1 Thania Gracia, "Megan Thee Stallion's 'Hiss' Bows at No. 1 Following Feud with Nicki Minaj," *Variety*, February 5, 2024, accessed March 3, 2024, https://variety.com/2024/music/news/megan-thee-stallion-hiss-number-one-nicki-minaj-1235898447/.

2 Daniel F. Silva, "The hidden anti-Black history of Brazilian butt lifts," *The Washington Post*, August 1, 2022, accessed March 3, 2024, https://www.washingtonpost.com/made-by-history/2022/08/01/hidden-anti-black-history-brazilian-butt-lifts/.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111446721-011

from 2021 is headlined in a German magazine "First black woman in the Bundestag: 'After the Hanau attacks, I wanted to do more,'"[3] 2022 another headline "USA: First Black woman sworn in as Supreme Court judge"[4] and 2024 reads "She is the first Black Woman on the top of the Country-Charts."[5] Even if these headlines are celebrated as achievements, my first reaction is rather irritated. After all, how can it be that these successes are only now being achieved? Every time a Black woman is the first in her field, it just shows me which fields do not seem to have made room for Black people yet. It gives me that feeling of being hypervisible yet invisible at the same time. Since, even if these successes are celebrated in this way, it leaves a feeling that there were no people in the respective fields before, as if this achievement – that is framed as a success – inherits a fake power. For example, even if Awet Tesfaiesus is not the first Black woman in German politics, she is the *first* Black woman who made it into the Bundestag, the legislature of Germany in 2021. These headlines show in a bizarre way how much development is still needed in so many fields. Of course, these women still should be celebrated. I am not criticizing them; my critique is aimed at the system. As a Black woman in Germany, this feeling of having realized that a lot of things are not black and white, that we have to endure several conditions and truths simultaneously, is omnipresent and demanding, especially when it comes to one's own identity and the question of where one belongs.

This tension exists in academia and journalism; it is based on the question of where one comes from, and, also, despite this tension, there are ongoing efforts by the Black community in Germany to create places and spaces where we can negotiate our own identity. Therefore, the question "Where do you come from?" is inseparably connected to the concept of identity.

It is very important for me to position myself when talking about challenges that the Black community faces. The experiences of Black women in Germany are complex and vary. The oppression they face is based on systematic racism, but we are in no way a homogenous mass. I am a light-skinned, Black woman whose observations are important, but my experiences differ from those of dark-

3 Julia Weiss, "Erste schwarze Frau im Bundestag:'Nach den Anschlägen von Hanau wollte ich mehr tun,'" *Tagesspiegel*, October 2, 2021, accessed March 3, 2024, https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/nach-den-anschlagen-von-hanau-wollte-ich-mehr-tun-4280272.html 27.02.2024.

4 Mike Wilms, "USA: Erste schwarze Frau als Richterin am Supreme Court vereidigt," *Berliner Zeitung*, June 30, 202, accessed March 3, 2024, https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/news/justiz-ketanji-brown-jackson-usa-erste-schwarze-frau-als-richterin-am-supreme-court-vereidigt-li.242151 27.02.2024.

5 "Sie ist die erste Schwarze Frau an der Country-Spitze!", *"SWR DASDING,"* Feburary 27, 2024, accessed Feburary 27, 2024, https://www.dasding.de/newszone/beyonce-texas-hold-em-erste-schwarze-frau-county-charts-platz-1-100.html.

skinned people. In many ways we might feel a comparable pain, but I cannot and will not try to speak for dark-skinned community. It is up to them to share their stories and views, and for the rest of us to listen to them. It is also important for me to emphasize that the pain of dark-skinned people does not compete with that of light-skinned. Both feelings are valid and deserve spaces in which they can be negotiated. However, I want to stress that dark-skinned people face *Colorism* and therefore are confronted with discrimination on a different level. Hunter (2021) described Colorism as:

> Colorism is a structural and cultural system of discrimination that uses the status of skin tone to differentiate and value racialized bodies. Light-skinned people of color experience privilege in this system and dark-skinned people experience discrimination.[6]

In addition, I want to stress that some of my observations also apply to the FLINTA-Community (Women, Lesbians, Inter, nonbinary, trans and Asexual).

One of the challenges that I regularly face is the question of my standpoint. Besides academia, I have also been working as a journalist for a few years. Since I started expressing an interest for this field in 2017, one question repeatedly came up: How neutral can a Black female journalist in Germany truly be?

The Neutral Journalist: An Ideal that Can Never Be Achieved

Neutrality – the ivory white vest of journalism and the social sciences. Many principles that apply to one field are just as relevant to the other. Journalists create publicity, they set the agenda, they support democracy and freedom of expression.[7] Scocial scientists explore topics, develop theories, and create knowledge. Both fields are in flux. In the social sciences, there is a call to decolonize the body of knowledge,[8] and in journalism there is the need for more diverse perspectives. These are developments that have been initiated because knowledge production

6 Margaret Hunter, "Colorism and the racial politics of beauty," in Craig M. Leeds (ed.), *The Routledge companion to beauty politics* (London/New York: Routledge, 2021): 86.

7 Lynne M. Sallota and Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Investigating relationships between journalists and public relations practitioners: Working together to set, frame and build the public agenda, 1991–2004," *Public Relations Review* (2006), accessed February 25, 2024, doi:10.1016/j.pubrev.2006.02.008.

8 "From the Editor's Desk," *The American Historical Review* 125 (2020), xv–xix, https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/rhaa473

in Germany has a tradition of white, male thinkers. In both disciplines, you learn a craft to ensure the quality of the text. One of these quality characteristics is neutrality.

There are different ways to ensure journalistic quality in Germany. One institution, the *Deutsche Presserat* (German Press Council),[9] is "the **voluntary self-regulation of the print media** and their online presence in Germany" (emphasis in original),[10] and offers a guideline, the *Press Code* (Pressekodex), which provides standards for ethical behavior. As these obligations are voluntary, the German Press Council cannot enforce censorship, but it can issue *reprimands* (Rügen*)* and draw public attention to breaches of these ethical rules. This institution holds high prestige.

The latest version of the Press Code in German is from 2021 and lists several principles such as the journalists' duty of care (Sorgfaltspflicht), limits on research, and professional secrecy. I ask myself what the press code says about neutrality and search for the terms: "neutral," "neutrality," "independence," "independent" – but there is no search result. I try "impartial" and find the term "impartiality," but this refers to the body that decides on violations. Consequently, there is no ethical guideline from the German Press Council that literally suggests neutrality to journalists. The guidelines refer more to respect for the presumption of innocence[11] or the advice not to discriminate.[12]

Neutrality can be defined as a quality feature as follows: "'[. . .] Impartiality', which can be divided into balance and neutrality/separation of news and opinion and is particularly relevant for monopolistic and oligopolistic media."[13] Arnold also argues that impartiality has become established and maintained as a quality

9 "die **Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle der Printmedien** und deren Online-Auftritte in Deutschland" (highlited in the original), "Aufgaben und Organisation," Deutscher Presserat, accessed Feburary 28, 2024, https://www.presserat.de/aufgaben-organisation.html.

10 "Presserat," Deutscher Presserat, accessed Feburary 28, 2024, https://www.presserat.de/pressekodex.html.

11 Ziffer 13, "Presserat," Deutscher Presserat, accessed Feburary 28, 2024, https://www.presserat.de/pressekodex.html.

12 Ziffer 12, "Presserat," Deutscher Presserat, accessed Feburary 28, 2024, https://www.presserat.de/pressekodex.html.

13 "[. . .]die „Unparteilichkeit", die sich in Ausgewogenheit und Neutralität/Trennung von Nachricht und Meinung aufteilen lässt und vor allem für mono- und oligopolistische Medien relevant ist.", Klaus Arnold, "Qualität im Journalismus – ein integratives Konzept," *Publizistik Vierteljahreshefte für Kommunikationsforschung* 53 (2008): 497, accessed Feburary 28, 2024, DOI 10.1007/s11616-008-0012-y.

feature because it is seen as promoting a pluralistic democracy and "a neutral information basis is important."[14]

Another way to ensure journalistic neutrality is the so called two-source-principle.[15] The ZDF (*Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen*), a German television network that broadcasting fees finance, works with this principle to avoid false reports. Information about, for example, an accident must be confirmed by "two independent sources"[16] to get reported as a fact. However, this principle does not only apply to news, it also is considered as a baseline of research. Sturm focuses on how online-journalism must ensure good quality: "For every topic, the different sides and points of view should be researched and prejudices avoided. The more surprising, new and original the research is, the better the story can be."[17]

Besides the basic two sources, Sturm demands that by varying the sources, the journalist can deliver a good story. To guarantee that the journalist is unbiased, different points of view are important.

On paper that sounds like a noble strategy, but it ignores the fact that by simply deciding *who* a journalist wants to talk to, they cannot remain neutral. For example, if I wanted to write about healthier food in a university canteen, then I could talk to students and the university management. I could also interview the workers in the canteen, interact with suppliers, or with the student parliament. Depending on who I focus on, my article will look different, despite the basic topic. The headlines "Canteen workers need more working hours, with more vegetables in the meal plan" or "University management must decide between a healthy canteen plan and expansion of the west wing" show a variety of possible outcomes. Even if the journalist tries to remain neutral during the research process and tries to apply all the rules, there will be some sort of bias. Does the journalist focus on the perspective of the workers in the canteen or on the financial plan of the university? The ideal journalist however is free from such biases, at least according to these ideals.

14 "Eine neutrale Informationsgrundlage von Bedeutung ist," Arnold, "Qualität im Journalismus", 498.

15 "Was sind die Quellen der Berichterstattung?," ZDF, accessed Feburary 28, 2024, https://www.zdf.de/zdfunternehmen/fragen-an-das-zdf-118.html.

16 "Zwei unabhängige Quellen," "Was sind die Quellen."

17 "Bei jedem Thema sollten die verschiedenen Seiten und Blickpunkte recherchiert und Vorurteile vermieden werden. Je überraschender, neuer und origineller eine Recherche ausfällt, desto besser kann die Geschichte werden," Simon Sturm, *Digitales Storytelling. Eine Einführung in neue Formen des Qualitätsjournalismus* (Köln: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden 2013), 23.

"You can recognize a good journalist by the fact that he doesn't make himself common with a cause, not even a good cause,"[18] a quote that came up repeatedly during my journalism studies. It was presented as the maxim of neutrality. This quote is a sign of an uninfluenceable opinion, unimpeachable reason of a journalist who in the end always frees themselves from the shackles of their own motivation to tell the core of the story. It constructs a polished exterior that serves to be beyond any doubt, a polished exterior that does not work if diversity comes into play. How can you stay neutral when you have certain ideals or a specific background? This problem is also addressed in research by the German organization NdM (*Neue Deutsche Medienmacher*innen*). The organization conducted research on how culturally diverse German newsrooms really are. The research is not representative but has some interesting findings and statements, since they chose to do a survey with German newsrooms and extend their research by interviewing five editors-in-chief.[19] In the survey, they observe that *professionalism* is very important when it comes to journalists with a migration background.[20] This leads the NdM to the following conclusion:

> It seems that the skills of journalists with a migration background are implicitly questioned in comparison to their colleagues without a migration background. Conversely, 'good' journalists can report on anything, so according to this view, diversity is not a priority in editorial offices.[21]

This idea also implies that there is a way to be professional that can be achieved. A standard is implied and an ideal is desired. As a Black journalist this creates a lot of tension, since it pushes Black journalists to conform to accepted neutral be-

18 "Einen guten Journalisten erkennt man daran, dass er sich nicht gemein macht mit einer Sache, auch nicht mit einer guten Sache," Rüdiger Jungbluth, "Mit keiner Sache gemein? Die Wahrheit über das Hanns-Joachim-Friedrichs-Zitat," *Übermedien*, November 2, 2021, accessed Feburary 20, 2024, https://uebermedien.de/64851/mit-keiner-sache-gemein-die-wahrheit-ueber-das-hanns-joachim-friedrichs-zitat/.

19 Neue deutsche Medienmacher*innen, *Viel Wille, kein Weg. Diversity im deutschen Journalismus* (2020), accessed Feburary 15, 2024, https://www.medienradar.de/fileadmin/user_upload/CONTENT/06_DIVERSITAET/2_MS/pdfs/20200509_MdM_Bericht_Diversity_im_Journa-lismus.pdf.

20 *Migration backround* (Migrationshintergrund) is a German term that describes people who moved to Germany from another country and refers to their children. Therefore, when one parent did not possess the German citizenship by birth, the kid has a so-called migration background. However, the term is viewed critically because it can support discrimination and does not reflect the reality of a lot of people.

21 Original: "Es scheint, dass implizit die Kompetenzen von Journalist*innen mit Migrationshintergrund im Vergleich zu ihren Kolleg*innen ohne Migrationshintergrund in Frage gestellt werden. Umgekehrt können 'gute' Journalist*innen über alles berichten, so dass Diversity nach dieser Ansicht in den Redaktionen keine Priorität hat," in *Viel Wille, kein Weg*, 28.

havior in German newsrooms. Therefore, it also challenges their worldview and makes it difficult to push the envelope. This structure feels rigid, immobile, and stiff. There seems to be not much room for maneuver when it comes to neutrality. Instead of engaging with the different perspectives, there is the demand to negate them in the spirit of neutrality.

Not every step to find some sort of identification *feels* merely like a political or activist act. It is rather a step towards oneself, because it forces us to navigate our own positionality and perspective that in many ways differ so much from their perceived neutrality, which makes it difficult. However, the outside might be quick to judge my action as a Black woman as a political one. The bizarre thing is that from a feminist standpoint it can be argued that the private is political[22] and therefore the question of identification is part of that concept. When it comes to a Black perspective, it seems like being Black adds an extra dimension or layer that is perceived as *too much* in Germany. It is a white feminist concept that cannot grasp the intersectional struggles of a Black female identity in Germany. My actions as a Black journalist are always compared to the framework of acceptable political acts in newsrooms. Since my behavior sparked discussions that sometimes was characterized as out-of-the-box, there must be an accepted way of being political and one that is understood as being "too far." Previously, the question of neutrality also arose when I studied journalism.

I had to write a last assignment for my bachelor's degree in 2021 and focused on the question of Germany's distance to its colonial history regarding how they treat historical artefacts in museums. A topic I chose because our advisors asked us to engage with the topic *distance*. The assignment was a journalistic one. Every student had to write an article, and the whole seminar worked together as a newsroom, so in the end we would launch the project together. We collectively decided that we would work gender[23] into our articles in order to be more inclusive. The German language mostly operates in the so-called *generic masculine* (generisches Maskulinum). The German spelling dictionary Duden describes this as "cross-gender use of a masculine word."[24] As a result, the masculine version of a word is often used to express a plural without specifying weather or not this includes females and Non-Binary People. To include women and Non-Binary People in their texts, some newsrooms use the *Genderstar* "*" or the Colon ":" to

22 Vgl. Mauritz, Miriam. *Emanzipation in der Kinderladenbewegung. Wie das Private politisch wurde* (Wiesbaden: Springer 2018).

23 In Germany we use the Verb "gendern" to describe this action.

24 "Die geschlechtsübergreifende Verwendung maskuliner Formen," *Duden*, accessed August 22, 2024, https://www.duden.de/sprachwissen/sprachratgeber/generische-verwendungsweise-maskuliner-formen

show that a variety of people are included. For example, the term "teacher" can be referred to multiple gender-identities in English. In German the masculine version would be "Lehrer", the female version would be "Lehrerin", the inclusive gendered version would be "Lehrer*in"/"Lehrer:in". This also applies to the plural version: If I talk about "teachers"' it is not clear what gender I want to talk about. The gendered version "Lehrer*innen/Lehrer:innen" includes multiple gender identities. This is why my course decided to use the colon.

Since my article also focused on Black protagonists, I decided to write *Black* with a capital B, to show that I referred to Black people as a political group. This sparked a discussion as to whether I, as a Black journalist, was too politically involved, and if I was capable of remaining neutral.

Even though I gave my supervisors a couple of examples of German newspapers, in which journalists already used the capital B, my neutrality was questioned. In addition, most of the discussions were held without me. Reducing my aim to adapt the journalistic methods to fit *my* take on the assignment to a question of my journalistic abilities was quite confusing and hurtful. I found myself being criticized for my expertise in the field and my strength was somehow perceived as a threat. The newsroom and our supervisors were all *white* and were not experts on my topic. Even though I was permitted to use the capital B in my final article, my advisors argued that it was solely because we agreed to use gender in our overall assignment. In addition, it cost me a lot of perseverance to be visible, to be seen, and to be respected as a Black journalist. Today I believe that this case shows how newsrooms in general struggle with *intersectionality*.[25] It was important to include women, *white* women in the overall assignment, but the idea of inclusion excluded my Black female perspective. The project tried to be progressive and failed when I overstepped an invisible line that was perceived as "too much," and "too far."

The question becomes: Was I a politically motivated journalist or was it my expertise in my field that contributed to the assignment in a way that the other journalists would not be able to? Although I succeeded and was allowed to use the capital B, it cost me a lot of nerves and the feeling of being too much in a *white* environment. This did not feel empowering, it felt racist. Two years later, I scrolled through Instagram and saw that the next class took the same assignment with the topic *Powerlessness*. Two *white* students focused on the topic of missing diversity and structural racism in the German movie industry. In their final papers, the "B" for Black was also written with a capital.

25 Kimberle Williams Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Colour," *Stanford Law Review* 43 (1991): 1241–1299.

This specific case was discussed in *The New York Times* in 2020, when they published the article "Why We're Capitalizing Black."[26] The newspaper explains their decision-making-process and cites Marc Lacey, *The Time*'s national editor, who concludes: "for many people the capitalization of that one letter is the difference between a color and a culture."[27] Four years later, the ZDF also published an overview that gave an explanation as to why the B in Black should be capitalized.[28]

At the end of the day being a Black journalist in Germany is difficult. It challenges me to be secure in my identity and my worldview and conform to what is considered neutral. To me personally the concept of neutrality or impartiality is obsolete since it negates its origin. Those concepts are based on Eurocentric, white, and cis-male worldviews, which is almost everything I am not. Therefore, the question of neutrality becomes also a question of identity. The way I view the world is somewhat different from those standards. The social sciences and journalism have challenged me to position myself and find a clear voice. If I cannot be neutral, I can at least defend my position and argue that pushing the envelope will contribute to knowledge production. To be aware of your own positionality it is important to know who you are, for whom you can speak, and where your knowledge ends. In my opinion journalistic output would benefit from different perspectives and in some cases it would help if journalists position themselves clearer in their work. As a Black woman in Germany, the question of positionality can be difficult to tackle. I was born and raised in Germany, and my life is based here, but it is harmful to assume that I do not belong here. It is a process of othering:

> Othering processes, in which different groups are constructed and thus created, are central to both theories of racism that primarily speak of biologistic contexts of justification and those that interpret culturalization as a process of 'racial construction'.[29]

26 Nancy Coleman, "Why We're Capitalizing Black," *The New York Times*, July 5, 2020, accessed March 2, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/05/insider/capitalized-black.html.

27 Coleman, "Why We're Capitalizing Black."

28 "Sprache gegen Rassismus," *ZDF*, January 29, 2024, accessed March 02, 2024, https://www.zdf.de/kinder/logo/sprache-gegen-rassismus-100.html#:~:text=Mit%20%22Schwarz%22%20ist%20nat%C3%BCrlich%20nicht,wirklich%20um%20die%20Farbe%20handelt.

29 "Sowohl in Rassismustheorien, die in erster Linie von biologistischen Begründungszusammenhängen sprechen, als auch in jenen, die Kulturalisierung als Prozess der 'Rassenkonstruktion' deuten, sind 'Othering-Prozesse' zentral, in denen unterschiedliche Gruppen erst konstruiert und somit hervorgebracht werden", see Miriam Hill, *Migrationsfamilien und Rassismus. Zwischen Ausschließungspraxen und Neuorientierung* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2018), 17.

Othering, the perception that Blackness does not belong to Germany, is a systemic racist issue. It makes me feel hypervisible and invisible at the same time. Hypervisible, because I get othered based on my Blackness and what other people project onto me. Hypervisible, because it reduces me and my very being to my skin-tone. Hypervisible, because being Black is what makes me different in the eyes of others. But being Black also means being German. Getting othered makes me feel invisible because it negates the nuances that exist within the Black community. Invisible, because it negates the fact that Black German History dates back to the 12th century.[30] Invisible, because it puts the skin-color first and ignores the different lived experiences that come with it.

As a member of the African diaspora – with one European, and one African parent – I am used to reflecting on the way I am perceived. The frequent question where I *actually come from* challenges the question of where I belong.

Belonging – A Two-Sided Question

Developing a relationship with one's own Black identity in Germany can take different forms. Not every Black individual feels a connection to the African continent. Some try to educate themselves by gathering information that is not taught in German history lessons, e.g., the fact that Germany was a big player when it comes to colonizing politics: "After Great Britain, France and the Netherlands, Germany thus had the fourth largest European colonial empire."[31] Although Germany has a violent colonial heritage, it is certainly something that is not addressed enough in the regular curriculum. However, Kaya de Wolff's research that focused on the *Post-/colonial memory discourses in media culture. The genocide of the Ovaherero and Nama in the German-language press from 2001 to 2016,*[32] concludes that "[. . .]the colonial past is increasingly actively remembered in journalistic reporting and even 'colonial amnesia' is being critically addressed

30 May Ayim, "Die ersten Afrikaner/innen in Deutschland," in *Farbe bekennen: Afro-Deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*, ed. May Ayim, Katharina, Oguntoye, and Dagmar Schultz (Berlin: Orlanda, 1991), 27.

31 "Nach Großbritannien, Frankreich und den Niederlanden verfügte Deutschland damit über das viertgrößte europäische Kolonialreich," see Sebastian Conrad, "Das deutsche Kolonialreich," in *Deutsche Kolonialgeschichte*, ed. Sebastian Conrad (München: Beck, 2008), 22.

32 Kaya de Wolff, *Post-/koloniale Erinnerungsdiskurse in der Medienkultur: Der Genozid an den Ovaherero und Nama in der deutschsprachigen Presse von 2001 bis 2016* (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2021), 3.

at a political and social level."[33] That German history and African history are not mutually exclusive is a first step in acknowledging that people from the African diaspora can feel German and from the African continent at the same time. Talking about heritage and belonging can also be a painful experience for Black people in Germany because one might not have an immediate connection to the African continent but is still constantly associated with it.

Knowing your history is crucial to feel connected to a nation, a place, or anything else. In *Lose Your Mother*, Saidiya Hartman explains that coming from a family tree that was involved in the transatlantic enslavement can play an essential role in the question of who and where, in terms of locality, you are today.[34] Even the question *where* you come from, might be a sensitive one since some people simply do not know and/or can only give a simple answer such as a city, a region or a nation. An answer that is more a "Worthülse," an empty phrase that might mean a lot to one's parents and less to oneself. Stripping enslaved people from their memories was an active process in West Africa during the transatlantic enslavement, where Hartman conducted her research: "In every slave society, slave owners attempted to eradicate the slave's memory, that is, to erase all the evidence of an existence before slavery."[35]

I remember visiting Ghana for the first time as a teenager and not having the capacity to deal with all the emotions involved. My father planned a day trip with us to visit Elmina. A white castle by the sea, its dreamy image is deceptive, given that it was the place where enslaved people were forced to leave the African continent on boats and endure inhumane conditions. Even though at the time my English was not good enough to understand everything a young man told us about the atrocities within these walls, I felt that the information he conveyed was heartbreaking. I immediately turned cold despite it being an estimated 27 °C in the shade. The dungeons smelled musty and the mere idea that anyone had to stay here for more than five minutes made my stomach queasy. The guide led us to a door that prisoners had to go through to get onto the boats. *Door of no Return* was written above the door. I remember staring at the words and the gravity of the situation hit me. Never to return, to give up the present *Me* and leave everything I ever knew behind. What made this even scarier was that the people who were forced to pass this door probably did not know how to read or write in En-

33 "Die koloniale Vergangenheit in der journalistischen Berichterstattung zunehmend aktiv erinnert und dabei selbst die 'koloniale Amnesie' auf politischer und gesellschaftlicher Ebene kritisch thematisiert wird," see de Wolff, *Post-/koloniale Erinnerungsdiskurse*, 422.

34 Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 155.

35 Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*.

glish. Their destiny was simply forfeited by entering that system that forced them into a certain place. I do not only mean locally, given that the ships traveled to different destinations, but also socially. Suddenly, the enslaved were forced to adapt to a system that denied them basic human rights. A white supremacist system that enforced their racist ideas and limited worldview on them. Their bodies and lives were exploited to create a workforce that was simply just flesh.

Forgetting where one's own roots lie, one's practices, one's traditions was an integral part of enslaving people during the transatlantic enslavement.[36] Stripping them of their own identity, so that enslaved Africans became but a sheer number on the paper, not remembering where they come from, not knowing where to return to, that was the goal. "It was one thing to be a stranger in a strange land, and an entirely worse state to be a stranger to yourself,"[37] writes Hartman. It is a brutal fate, and it is disgusting to imagine how many people this affected. Hartman gives several examples of rituals that were performed to erase the memories of the enslaved people. For example, in "Ghana, captives were given ceremonial baths before sale to wash them clean of old identities."[38] In the north of Ghana, a plant named *manta uwa*[39] was given to them, due to traders declaring its many effects. It was believed that it made "you forget your kin, lose sight of your country, and cease to think of freedom [. . .] and it robbed the slaves of spiritual protection."[40] The colonizers wanted the enslaved Africans to enter their system as nothing more than flesh, bodies they could command, and empty shells, into which the colonizers could pour their own prejudges of what it means to be of African heritage.

Just standing there in front of the *Door of no Return,* centuries later, I felt strangely connected to my roots in Ghana. In this very moment, I was not ready to deal with these sudden emotions of grief and loss. I was probably not yet ready to accept that multiple situations can be true and meaningful at the same time. It took me a few more years to reflect on this moment more deeply to situate myself differently.

A few years later, when my sister recommended the book *Home Going* by Yaa Gyasi to me, I was taken back to that moment in Elmina. The novel focuses on a family that gets separated during the transatlantic slave trade. While one sister – Esi – gets sold into slavery, the other one – Effia – becomes a slave trader's wife at the former Gold Coast of Africa, today Ghana. Each chapter introduces a new

36 Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 157.
37 Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 157.
38 Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 156.
39 Hausa for "forget mother."
40 Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 157.

family member and presents the struggles of each generation after Esi and Effia. The family novel therefore provides short contextualizations throughout time, for example, life at the former Gold Coast of Africa, the struggles of living on a cotton-picking plantation in Mississippi, or the vivid life in Harlem.[41]

Reading about the part of the family that stayed in Ghana made me realize something that just never crossed my mind at the age of twenty: Why did I not grow up in America? Why did my family stay on the west coast of the African continent? This is a question that leaves me with a uneasy feeling with no specific answer, no direction, but weirdness.

What did My Ancestors do to Survive the Transatlantic Enslavement?

This question comes with a specific paradox and a specific tension, that becomes more pronounced when living in Germany, where there is focus on their recent history and the brutality of the Holocaust and where it is legally forbidden to deny the existence of the Holocaust.

"Ask your grandparents and great-grandparents what they did in 1945?" is a topic that comes up regularly on anniversaries regarding any date connected to the Holocaust. I have asked. I know partly what my great-grandparents did during the Second World war, I talked about it, and I thought about it. I have felt certain emotions. I visited the Concentration Camps (*Konzentrationslager*) in Dachau and Auschwitz-Birkenau, and I saw the Extermination Camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau. I did my research. It feels concrete. I am not saying that we should compare the horrors of the Holocaust with the brutality of the transatlantic enslavement. As a Black Afro-diasporic woman in Germany, I do feel like both parts belong to me and it is important to address that both emotions that these historical realities produce must be felt simultaneously. The pain that each event produces does not compete with the other.

One difference is that, when I speak of my great-grandparents in presumably Ghana or Togo, I know almost nothing about them. All I can gather from my father's side of the family are scary bedtime stories about children disappearing on the streets, their wish to forget, and their mission to move forward. I do not know how my family positioned themselves when it comes to the transatlantic slave trade. I have to accept that I might never know. Researching history only gives me a narrow idea of what could have happened:

41 Yaa Gyasi, *Home Going* (London: Penguin Books, 2017).

> Ghana, or the Gold Coast as it was called until 1957, had been entangled with the West for at least five centuries, and the buying and selling of slaves had been central to this association. The slave trade required that a class of expendable people be created. The big men of Africa and Europe proved themselves suited to this task.[42]

Positioning myself and my family tree in the context of Ghana's history might be the right track, or just another dead end for me. Feeling a connection to the African continent has always been a desire of mine. However, how can I track down my family's history, when I do not even know where they were located during the period of the transatlantic enslavement? As a result, how can I tie my own identity to a nation, a region that I know so little about? The struggle with how to develop an identity as a member of the African diaspora has already been discussed by Taiye Selasi among others, with her concept *Afropolitan* and *Don't ask where I'm from, ask where I'm a local.*

Am I an Afropolitan or do I belong to Blackademia?

Taiye Selasi came up with two concepts that base identity on personal experiences rather than the passport one holds. One of these concepts is called *Afropolitan.* Selasi speaks of the "newest generation of African emigrants"[43] and refers to an intellectual group of elites, coming from a rich culture and the privilege of deciding where they want to belong. The other concept "Don't ask where I'm from, ask where I'm a local"[44] bases identity on the so called three R's – relationships, restrictions, and rituals – that should help to identify where someone comes from. Both approaches consider the question of who you are and where you belong to in a different way. In both cases, the question of *where* one was born feels even more like a coincidence. Selasi's concepts challenge the idea of an identity that is purely based on geography.

With *Afropolitan,* Selasi created a concept, a label for Black people who feel a connection to the African continent while not physically bound to it:

42 Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 29–30.

43 Taiye Selasi, "Bye-Bye Babar," *Callaloo* 36 (2013): 528, accessed February 10, 2024. doi: 10.1353/cal.2013.0163.

44 Taiye Selasi, "Don't Ask Where I'm from, Ask Where I'm a Local," *TED Talk/ YouTube*, October 20, 2015, accessed March 3, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LYCKzpXEW6E.

"Ultimately, the Afropolitan must form an identity along three dimensions: national, racial, cultural—with subtle tensions in between."[45] I do agree with Selasi that people in the diaspora also hold the power to "*define* [. . .] [their] relationship to the places"[46] (emphasis in original) that they are connected to or live in. One could argue that this is a normal part of the process of building an identity, however as a Black person in Germany, that gets othered, you are challenged consciously with the question of how you identify with the place in which you were (randomly) born. Nationality feels even more like a lottery. The passport that you are given, too, feels accidental:

> Perhaps what most typifies the Afropolitan consciousness is this refusal to oversimplify: the effort to understand what is ailing in Africa alongside the desire to honor what is wonderful, unique. Rather than essentializing the geographical entity, we seek to comprehend the cultural complexity; to honor the intellectual and spiritual legacy; to sustain our parents' values.[47]

The question of belonging, of identity comes again with multiple factors that can be true at the same time. This makes forming an identity quite demanding. For example, if focusing on the "cultural" aspect that Selasi emphasizes, I was raised in Bavaria, Germany and, therefore, I was expected to own a Dirndl dress for certain events like a wedding or traditional festivities. It was even common in my high school to wear traditional Bavarian clothes when receiving your graduation certificate. In addition, during senior year, students usually have a theme week. My class decided on the theme of "tradition" for one day, where I wore traditional Ghanaian clothes. Even though I had worn my Dirndl several times before, the people in my class were curious as to why I decided against the Bavarian outfit. Back then it was important for me to find a way to combine my Ghanaian heritage with the one of where I was raised. I could not express my desire to feel Ghanaian, to feel African, but I knew that it was significant for me to show that I was proud of both sides.

"We are Afropolitans—not citizens, but Africans, of the world."[48] As someone with Ghanaian and Austrian roots I can identify with Selasi's words in some way. I feel connected to other Africans, especially those that share the same experiences, similar struggles – but at the same time I feel excluded from this connection that Selasi describes, from this clear identity, from this vision of united Afropoli-

45 Selasi, "Bye-Bye Babar," 530.
46 Selasi, "Bye-Bye Babar," 530.
47 Selasi, "Bye-Bye Babar," 529.
48 Selasi, "Bye-Bye Babar," 528.

tans.[49] My version of being a Black woman in Germany, living in the diaspora varies so drastically from the one that is presented here. To me Selasi's text is so euphoric, almost dreamy.

But one generation further, her idea feels more like an African dream than an African reality. Some of us in the diaspora are still deeply connected to their African roots, while others are trying to navigate the inner conflict of truly belonging somewhere, without hesitation, without a second thought. It is the question of belonging that is essentially grounded in my own identity. Reading Selasi's words felt like a utopia for those Africans with a higher education and the recognition they so well deserve, and whose children now flourish in this connected world, and are spoiled for the choice of *where* they want to belong. Selasi's idea is an empowering concept. And that is what it is, a concept, that does not apply to everyone.

The reality of my family differs so much from this idea: My father came to Germany only to visit his brother in the 1990s and fell in love with my mother. It sounds romantic, and it was, but it also meant that he had to try to make a living here without any academic training. Since money was for school and not for traveling, I was not granted the luxury of visiting my father's side of the family more than once. This exciting, yet elite concept of *Afropolitans* is therefore not the way I met other Afro-Germans, kids of African immigrants or Africans in the diaspora. I do think that *Afropolitans* exist, but I feel there are different identity-concepts to consider. I know that no concept will ever grasp every aspect of Afro-diasporic identity. One term that might help is "Blackademia," a term that has been used mainly by US-scholars like Lavelle Porter (2020)[50] who views it as a community of Black scholars. Wideline Seraphin (2017)[51] described the tension between being Black and aware of Black struggles while being a scholar. However, I did not come across who coined the term originally and did not find a broader definition. I will try to provide my own interpretation of *Blackademia*:

The normally white room is filled with Black faces, which is an unusual image for a German university, that only occasionally in seminars opens itself to new perspectives in group discussions. Invisible and hypervisible at the same time. Now: a visual feast, peppered with long curls and big afros, dark-skinned and light-skinned, goddess braids, rows of belly chains and locs. A group that

49 Selasi, "Bye-Bye Babar," 528.

50 Proter Lavelle, *The Blackademic Life: Academic Fiction, Higher Education, and the Black Intellectual* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2020), 3–14, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvr33dbd.

51 Wideline Seraphin, "Blackademic Negotiations When the Ivory Tower isn't enough: Finding Pathways to Activism as an Emerging Black Scholar," *Journal of Critical Thought and Praxis* 6 (2017): 95–102, accessed Agust 23, 2024. DOI: 10.31274/jctp-180810-76.

feels connected, even if they do not know too much about each other. They do not need to, because as Black students on a white campus, they seem to notice one thing above all: they are not many. They discuss issues that concern them. Chima's parents came from Nigeria and have opened an Afroshop in Germany. Their son is helping them since he was a kid. Abena, whose white mother raised two Black daughters in a small Bavarian town, but her father is not around anymore. Marina, whose father comes from Togo and repairs computers here, but her mother has only visited the country – that belongs half to her daughter – once. Dominik who visited Namibia regularly but never really knows how to define home. A feeling of connection, a feeling of belonging. Many cannot even talk to half of their family; they lack the practice of a second mother tongue, the understanding, the resources. Pictures of places that mean or have meant *home* to at least one parent. Anecdotes of family members who only exist on cell phone screens, whose lives take place on other continents. A meeting of students who ask themselves who they are. Sharing theories about Black intellectuals, books they have read about Black German History, recipes and practices they have taught themselves from all over the African continent in an attempt to understand each other. Also to withstand the tension between being othered and simultaneously having the one-sided experiences of only ever living in Germany. They are privileged because they operate in a university, yet they have to fight for room. For their perspective to be acknknowledged. They have a chance to be recognized and be accepted by the system. They are the *Blackademia.*

My spin on Blackademia is an addition to Afropolitan. People who belong to it have the privilege to share knowledge with each other within the Black scholarly community, but also in *white* spaces. This might not always feel like a privilege, but often more like a burden. In my opinion Blackademia can create sisterhood, joy, and belonging. Blackademia can open spaces for growth, learning, and communication.

A Hypervisible, yet Invisible Blackademian

The Question Of Belonging can certainly not be answered in such a short essay but the ideas presented here might be of assistance. Differences characterize the lives of people in the African diaspora, which makes it difficult to generalize anything. Describing the lives of the Afro-diaspora in Germany is impossible since it is complex. It is important to realize that especially for Black women, multiple things can be true at once. Black women in Germany must deal with the issue that they might challenge binary thinking simply by existing.

Black bodies are currently hypervisible, but their overall representation leaves me feeling invisible. This shows how challenging Blackness can be in Germany. The achievements of the Black community should always be celebrated, but there also must be room to engage with the hypervisibility in a critical manner. The ambiguous points of view that Black women in Germany can take, can also challenge the body of knowledge production.

Journalism and academia both demand neutrality to ensure the quality in those fields. The German Press Council and the two-source-principle promote the neutrality of journalists in Germany, even though these concepts are well established, they can only create an illusion of neutrality. German newsrooms demand diversity but the supporting structure that it requires does not exist.

Asking members of the Afro-diaspora in Germany where they belong to can lead to a broad range of answers. In my specific case, this question challenges the knowledge I am missing more than the one that I have access to. The transatlantic enslavement was possible because people on the African continent supported the colonizers. Forgetting played an essential part in enslaving people to strip them away from their own identity. Feeling connected and, at the same time, separated from your roots is a difficult feeling to describe. It challenges the idea of nationality and raises questions like: Where do we truly belong and why? What makes us a citizen of a certain country besides the lottery of being born there?

Taiye Selasi created two concepts that engage with this issue. “Don’t ask where I’m from, ask where I’m a local” and Afropolitanism help to reflect on one’s own identity. I decided to focus on the last, Afropolitans as members of the world with a rich culture and the freedom of choosing who they want to be. To it, I added my take on Blackademia. Even though neither concept can be a fit for everyone, with Blackademia I created a concept that is more inclusive and less elitist than Selasi’s Afropolitian, while it still recognizes that attending a university in Germany is a privilege that a lot of people do not possess. Blackademia embraces the part of the African diaspora that is less mobile, does not have extensive access to their African roots, and still tries to connect with it through kinship and community. Belonging to Blackademia is empowering and can put one under pressure because it can also mean being *the first* of their own family to get a university education in their respective field or even the first Black individual at their university. Blackademia is hopeful in that it allows for an opportunity for change. Blackademia and Afropolitanism share the possibility to be true and wrong at the same time. While both concepts could certainly be a good fit for a larger group of people, they both are inherently elite, since they ignore those members of the community who don’t access a university and/or are not successful in a capitalist sense. At the same time, it is important to include members of the African diaspora community in the discourse about knowledge production in

Germany. In my opinion, there is certainly also a need for a concept that also includes people of African descent that had to flee from their homes and one that includes the so called working class.

Being part of the African diaspora is beautiful, because an African diaspora community can be found in Germany that offers opportunities to form one's identity. Thinking about journalism, it comes to mind that there are magazines recently founded by Black Women in Germany. Magazines that focus on the joy of being Black, like the *Daddy Magazine* in 2016, *RosaMag* in 2019, *Magazine of Color* in 2020 and *Gurlz with Curlz* in 2020.

And yes, it is challenging to exist in the tension between what I want to be and what people expect me to be. However, this can also become a source of strength because you can form a clear picture of your future self and what you want to contribute to the world. We as Black women, possess the strength and the power to navigate those different shades of identity. This is not a simple answer, and many things can be true at once, when you accept simultaneity.

Serawit Bekele Debele, Faheem Hemboum, and Stephanie Lämmert

Postscript

Though we did not think of writing a conclusion, we decided to put these reflections together in response to a prompt by one of our reviewers who suggested that it might be interesting to have a "roundtable" of sorts to share some final thoughts on the way forward. Based on the reviewer's suggestion, we prepared four questions to guide us in our musings, which by no means resolve the epistemic and methodological challenge that we continue to grapple with. We asked ourselves and those who volunteered to join us the following: *What does African Studies mean when imagined through different intellectual trajectories of knowledge production (such as for example the decolonial lens) that arise in different contexts on both the African continent and Europe? How do both academia and activist/artist spaces take up current debates around Europe's reckoning with its colonial histories and race relations to enable more rigorous engagements and lasting changes in the university corridors and institutional structures? How could we generate conceptual and theoretical tools that provide vocabularies and spaces for a more rigorous engagement which will bring together scholarly and activist/artist knowledge production on Africa? What can be done practically? What could be some of the concrete steps to change knowledge production and elite reproduction in German African Studies?*

Serawit Bekele Debele

My answers are going to be brief and might not tackle the questions head on. But I am going to share my thoughts anyway as they might speak to the questions in one way or another. In a less known book entitled *The Scent of the Father* (by less known I mean compared to *The Invention of Africa*), Valentine Y. Mudimbe offers me a muse to respond to this set of questions.[1] The father (colonialism as embodied and represented by the missionary, the colonial officer, the teacher, the nurse, the anthropologist etc.) might have left but the "scent" still remains, different communities on the African continent and its diaspora as well as the project of African Studies are still haunted by it. Per Mudimbe, doing African Studies in a more radical way then requires exorcising this haunting, we must rid ourselves of these paternalistic epistemic relations. We have to be able to think against the West and in order to do so, we must find a way to bring an end to this filial rela-

1 This was first published in French as *L'Odeur du père* (Paris: Présence africaine, 1982). It was translated to English by Jonathan Adjemian and published in 2023.

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tion. We must escape that dominant epistemic paradigm that has defined us Africans and how we should be studied as well as how we study ourselves. Such a radical break necessarily requires acknowledging a). knowledge as a site of power struggle and b.) that our attempt at delinking from the hegemonic western paradigm will not come without cost. We must, thus also be ready to pay the price, which can be as concrete as, for example, the refusal to cite Black scholars or withholding of funding. We also have to recognize the fact that the smell is pervasive and the force to drive it out has to be matched with equal if not more force precisely because the scent has proven too stubborn and too attached to let go off its grip.[2]

From this powerful book, I learn that there are various modes of dependence on the scent, where westernization is not a mere epistemic and theoretical subordination to the West but of dependence on more concrete levels with concrete results such as development interventions, the unfulfilled promises of uplifting the economy so that the continent recovers from centuries of colonial exploitation. Because these modes of dependence are deeply intertwined with knowledge production, our modes of action to escape the father's scent necessarily demand a concerted effort which brings together forces from academia to activism and beyond. This means rethinking and doing away with the superficial boundary between so-called value neutral-objective versus the politically oriented research, where the former is conducted by disinterested scientists while the latter by invested-activist academics. It is imperative that we rethink this dichotomy mainly because knowledge making is not a dispassionate process of accumulation but rather constitutive of social and political actions as much as it is constituted by these actions, something we learn from Black and African feminist intellectuals. In her critique of the Social Sciences and knowledge production in the study of Africa, Elleni Centime Zeleke insists that theory and praxis are attached, there is no way theory shapes action and is not shaped by it.[3] Thus, knowledge is when it enables us to define a way of living and acting in a society. Researchers, as a result, cannot isolate themseves from action and simply focus on piling up knowledge. As a situated subject, the researcher is in relations and cannot simply write a theory of revolution or emancipation that is uninterested in those communities that the research claims to address. This call for acknowledging our subject position as situated researchers in relation and invested in social change, should not be conflated with a disregard to ethical research practice that requires a serious consideration of rigour, respect, discipline. It is not

2 Mudimbe, *The Scent of the Father.*

3 Elleni Centime Zeleke, *Ethiopia in Theory: Revolution and Knowledge Production, 1964–2016* (Boston/Leiden: Brill, 2019).

to mean that anything goes. It rather means that we need to have the humility to accept our partiality and subject ourselves to continuous interrogation of how we are doing research, as we reflect on our subject position, on our ethical, moral and political compass. In other words, there is need for a constant and rigorous self-examination: considering issues like the questions we ask, how we pose them, how we relate to our interlocutors, archives and other sources, and finally, what conditions of possibility afford us to do the kind of research that we do.

Faheem Hemboum

African Studies, when viewed with the intent of decolonization, is about the assertion of African people's humanity, and by extension that of Black people globally. The field of African Studies first was an amalgamate of disciplines useful for collecting and categorizing data, which led to the neglect of our ability to think and speak for ourselves. We need to question the social relations that created the canon of knowledge on Africa. This means "writing with and against the archive," as Saidiya Hartman explains, because the archive is a site of violence, too. Lastly, there is also a spatial dimension: Can African Studies truly be critical, leveraging its authority with European funding and research facilities? Let's not forget the African scholar wrestling with political or ethnic persecution, imprisonment or exile.

Especially in spaces were artists and art workers collaborate and co-create, demands for reparations and the restitution of human remains and subject-objects are fostering a critical engagement with Europe's colonial legacies. Provenance research has gained more importance, and scholars are engaging in transnational coalitions with communities. From an academic viewpoint, conversations about past injustices need to connect with research about current political struggles, because the same communities are still marginalized. The greatest challenge and contribution might be the deprivileging of the ivory tower.

I think Paul Zeleza rightfully placed the deep roots of various strands of knowledge production in Africa in a prominent position. I think this also means being assertive when countering certain perceptions. North Africa is not the Middle East. Disciplines like Egyptology would profit from an integration into African Studies. Tamazight should be studied alongside Luo. African Studies would profit by broadening its scope, drawing on more sources, and overall, undoing the epistemological partition of the continent. African Studies without North Africa is incomplete. In this way, African Studies could play a larger role in conversations about racism and nationalism.

As Maureen Maisha Auma, Eric Otieno and Peggy Piesche conclude, African Studies in Germany needs to be rooted in Black liberation struggles, and situated within Black Europe, while at the same time being firmly Pan Africanist in scope.

African Studies needs to create an infrastructure for scholarly exchange with Africa and its diaspora. Hence, there is the urgent need to actively work for the abolition of the restrictive visa regime, and the structural hostility towards non-white knowledge production embedded in German academia. German African Studies needs to acknowledge the fundamental importance of the political actions taken by Black and African communities for an understanding of categories such as identity and belonging, and in that sense hold partisan views—freedom of movement must be an essential part of its epistemic horizon.

Stephanie Lämmert

Our African Studies is still haunted by the "legacy" of centuries of crude extractivism.[4] This extractivism is palpable in the way whiteness structures knowledge production on Africa in Germany (and beyond). It is visible in the defensiveness or oblivion when being addressed on this question, that is certainly spectacular. It is visible in the reluctance to respond to changes on the structural and institutional level as demanded by critical students and faculty.

How could a more critical African Studies in and from Germany look like? There is an acute necessity to create the conditions of possibility for a conversation with scholarship on the Black diasporas, a conversation between Black Studies, scholarship on Black Germany, and African Studies. The first step would be to make it very clear that such a conversation is actually welcome and valued. In other words: African Studies in Germany should open their eyes to the potential of such a conversation, which lies in posing fresh questions to the established canon of African Studies and in the capacity to unsettle the primacy of trans-Atlantic, US-centric renderings of Blackness. At the same time, such a conversation brings new themes to the somewhat tired discussions in African Studies about the "local," about "African agency," and about decolonization, by foregrounding entanglements, global Black experience, and the question of power in a way that classic African Studies has for too long avoided.

In addition, it should be noted that current debates around Europe's reckoning with its colonial histories and race relations is driven by artists and activists outside of academia in and beyond Germany. In fact, these are discussions that are very vibrant on the African continent. Scholars of African Studies in Germany need to acknowledge and take responsibility for the relative silence within Afri-

4 The term legacy in itself might be inadequate because it signifies that something has ended, which, for Ọbádélé Kambon, does not apply to processes such as enslavement and colonialism. See Ọbádélé Kambon, "Legacies and the Impact of Trans-Atlantic Enslavement on the Diaspora," *Journal of Pan African Studies* 8 (2015): 41–61.

can Studies around the restitution debate. Critical cooperation between African and European scholars on the question of restitution such as the recently published collection *Fifteen Colonial Thefts* edited by Sela K. Adjei and Yann LeGall need to find more resonance in Africanist scholarship.[5] I learn from their book how the opening of boundaries between bodies of knowledges, and a rethinking of what constitutes knowledges in the first place, can foster much needed collaborations between artist/activist praxis and academic knowledge production. *Fifteen Colonial Thefts* gives a forum to artist/activist perspectives and destabilizes the notion of scholarly neutrality and objectivity, which has only served the cause of white privilege in African Studies in so far as it has excluded a number of scholars and a range of knowledges that were considered too emotion-ridden or too political. The book helps me to rethink what knowledge-making means. I also see the importance of involving students more, because, unlike the more established Africanist scholarship, the critiques student raise have not been mitigated through decades of institutional taming. Their critiques are often relevant outside of the university corridors and speak to the pressing question of structural racism and anti-Blackness in German society in and also beyond academia.

On a very personal level, I as a subject who happens to contribute to the "Africanist enterprise" in Germany grapple with the way Eurocentrism, structural whiteness in knowledge production, and my formation in German institutions have compelled me to think in a certain way. A rethinking of all this is an exercise that cannot potentially be concluded at any point, it is rather an ongoing process that by far transcends me as an individual. I am understanding that this indeed requires not only a critical investigation of the so-called canon of my own intellectual formation and the structures that undergird knowledge production, but also reflecting on my responsibility in the field. What can my role as white female researcher from Germany be?

Being reflexive of one's own epistemic location and subject position – being a situated subject in Serawit and Elleni Centime Zeleke's words – can also be a very practical exercise. This includes for white and European scholars, according to Shose Kessi, Zoe Marks, and Elelwani Ramugondo, to do the "extra work to catch up with African-led debates, indigenous knowledge processes, and public discourses for the purposes of listening and dialogue, not commodification or cooptation."[6] We can ask ourselves: to whom do the questions we ask matter? For whom are they relevant? What is the relationship between questions that are con-

5 Sela K. Adjei and Yann LeGall, eds., *Fifteen Colonial Thefts. A Guide to Looted African Heritage in Museums* (London: Pluto Press 2024).

6 Kessi et.al., "Decolonizing African Studies," 275.

sidered chic or sexy for Euro-American funders and those that matter to scholars committed to speak to African realities? The Tanzanian historian Oswald Masebo describes the still prevalent practice of knowledge extractivism. He observes that the majority of historians who come to do research in Tanzania do not engage with Tanzanian historians and their publications, they only come to collect primary documents, raw materials. Masebo reminds us that Africa must not be "simply a place where [Euro-American researchers] can advance their career and develop expertise."[7] As our collection has shown, Masebo's call has a long history, and it is still highly relevant.

Masebo's observation can be a practical guide to teaching. Instructors have begun and should keep asking themselves whose voices they are amplifying in their syllabi, which discussions they wish to engage and in what way their questions matter to their colleagues teaching in African universities. Similar questions can be posed when it comes to hiring, such as what is a relevant research profile? Can the criteria for search committees be restructured so that applicants whose resume defies Euro-American publishing standards and who chose to remain relevant for their communities can be considered at least equally to those who have gone down the path of publishing with high end publishers, often behind paywalls? Teaching receives too little attention in Germany, and so does Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work, which is too often shorthand for unpaid care work on an already precarious Mittelbau position. Some of the practical issues are not insurmountable and can simply be tackled.

Ultimately, we need to make sure that knowledge production in the ivory tower reaches the public and our schools. This is crucial because history as a discipline in German schools is still haunted by its colonial imprint. Representations of Germany's role and indeed responsibility for colonization and enslavement and the illogic of racial thinking born from the Triangular Trade in which Germany was involved are still too often misrepresented or silenced in school syllabi.

7 Oswald Masebo, "A Response to Steven Feierman's 'Writing History: Flow and Blockage in the Circulation of Knowledge,'" *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 37 (2019): 32, doi:10.1080/02589001.2019.1626008.

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