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Katharina Gerund. *Transatlantic Cultural Exchange: African American Women's Art and Activism in West Germany.* Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013. 315 pp. EUR 39.80 (paper), ISBN 978-3-8376-2273-7.

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According to Heide Fehrenbach and Uta Poiger, âAmerican cultural imports adapted from the culture of various American racial and ethnic minorities are an understudied subject.â Reactions to such imports, Fehrenbach and Poiger claim, â[have taken] on complex and varying meanings in the construction of racial [and other] hierarchiesâ and in âconstructing and reconstructing differencesâ within recipient nations. [1] In *Transatlantic Cultural Exchange: African American Womenâs Art and Activism in West Germany*, Katharina Gerund makes a timely, substantive, and theoretically and methodologically sophisticated contribution to addressing this gap in the scholarship. Gerundâs book, centered on the reception and appropriation in West Germany of the work of four African American female artists and activists–civil rights activist and intellectual Angela Davis, feminist activist and poet Audre Lorde, and writers Alice Walker and Toni Morrison–supports Fehrenbach and Poigerâs contention about the adaptation of American minority cultural imports, as the work of these women was âinvested with specific new meanings [and] adapted to particular domestic [German] concernsâ of gender, race and nation (p. 12). In so doing, *Transatlantic Cultural Exchange* offers a salutary contribution to understanding postwar German cultural history specifically and Americanization more broadly and should be of interest to scholars in either area.

Gerund, the coordinator of the doctoral program âPresence and Tacit Knowledgeâ in the Institute for English and American Studies at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg, begins her work with a clear explication of her methodological and theoretical approach. Perhaps betraying the bookâs origins as a revised version of her 2011 doctoral dissertation in American Studies at Bremen University, the literature review which comprises much of the bookâs first chapter is comprehensive nearly to a fault. Those with an interest in race in postwar Germany will find her overview of the nascent and disciplinarily diffuse field impressively thorough. Theoretically, Gerundâs work is informed by New Historicism, a suitable framework for a project concerned not only with cultural products âbut even more [with] their resonances as they are transferred into another culture and appropriated, received and consumedâ (p. 25). Gerund deploys methods of discourse analysis and âthick descriptionâ in Clifford Geertzâs sense to reveal âthe clustering of discursive elements that occur in (West) German discourses on African American culture in general and African American women in particularâ (p. 27). In keeping with her interest in what Ruth Frankenberg calls

âdiscursive repertoires,â Gerundâs source base is varied (though weighted towards newspapers and magazines), encompassing print and visual media as well as archival documents and personal testimonies, particularly in the chapters on Angela Davis and Audre Lord. Gerund differentiates her approach from a history of ideas through her concern with âarchaeological analysisâ–here borrowing from Michel Foucault by way of New Historicism–aimed, despite the chronological organization of her work, less at a coherent, sequential historical narrative than following âresonances and reverberations of individual cultural texts, discontinuities, fissures, fault lines and breaksâ (p. 28).

In chapter 2, Gerund surveys literature on Americanization and argues for a new lens based on â*Americanizations* in the pluralâ (emphasis original) (p. 40). She contends that Americanization, due to–rather than in spite of–its elusiveness, ambiguity, and multiple meanings, remains a useful and valid analytical category. In her review of scholarship on Americanization in a variety of disciplines, Gerund demonstrates that the term has accreted differing and contradictory definitions, which conceive of Americanization as cultural imperialism, a system of selective borrowing or active appropriation, or a dynamic mix between coercion and seduction. Similarly, Americanization has been used in concert with a variety of other scholarly discourses on Westernization, modernity, and globalization. Gerundâs proposed plural (âAmericanizationsâ) allows scholars to retain and unify these disparate and disputed definitions. In chapter 3, she offers an overview of discussions and adoption of African American culture in West Germany–with emphasis on the particular role of African American soldiers, jazz ,and Josephine Baker–which supports this pluralized Americanization model. These examples of African American culture in (West) Germany were, as Gerund makes clear, âa topic in its own right which is not fully grasped by subsuming it under Americanizationâ but one whose âguiding parameters [were] set by Americanizationsâ; thus, African Americanization can be taken to be integral to, and distinct from, other Americanizations. Pluralizing Americanization in this way constitutes the primary theoretical and methodological contribution of Gerundâs work. Gerundâs second chapter should be of interest to those who seek to contextualize Americanization in particular times and places without sacrificing the essential unity of the concept.

In chapter 4, Gerund turns her attention to Angela Davis, whose activism and, as the chapter highlights, iconic appearance had a considerable–though circumscribed–impact on the West German student movement and on debates in the popular press. Davis, a former professor at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), was tried in 1971 and 1972 for her role in a failed hostage taking which left four dead. Davis, who had not been present during the crime but had purchased some of the firearms used in its commission, was nevertheless charged with kidnapping and murder. Student groups and leftists on both sides of the Atlantic interpreted this as punishment for the political beliefs which had seen Davis fired from UCLA in 1970. Davisâs trial was highly publicized in West Germany, thanks in large part to her striking appearance, and was, as Gerund argues, a key moment in debates surrounding the legitimacy of political violence taking place within radical movements and the West German press. Davisâs appropriation in both contexts shared broad similarities. In keeping with the pluralization of Americanization, students and left-leaning journalists who followed Davisâs trial from across the Atlantic saw no contradiction between their embrace of African American culture and activism, one form of Americanization, and their opposition to Americanization born of cultural imperialism. For many West Germans, support for Davis never resulted in âquestion[ing] the notion of Americaâs role as a potential model for West Germanyâs futureâ (p. 155). The currency acquired by Davisâs iconic, revolutionary image–one with which she herself was uncomfortable–served to intensify but also further compartmentalize interest in her trial. When Davis was found not guilty, interest in her in West Germany faded, as her trial had been interpreted in the popular press and student activist circles as an individual and above all, America-specific cause. This last point recurs consistently in Gerundâs work. Germans often interpreted African American female authors and activists as speaking to specifically American issues of racial justice. These concerns were of interest given the pervasiveness of Americaâs cultural and economic influence. Despite this interest, Germans did not connect African American womenâs experiences in the United States to similar issues of race and gender in West Germany.

Audre Lorde, the subject of chapter 5, functions as the exception to this general rule. Unlike Davis, who spent only a short time in Frankfurt, Lorde maintained continual contact with West German activists and intellectuals. Lordeâs influence on the Afro-German movement in the Federal Republic was considerable, though largely unremarked upon in the West German media. This gap in coverage obligates Gerund to focus her analysis more

squarely on Lordeâs thought rather than its mediated reception. Gerund closely examines Lordeâs views on the role of Afro-Germans in the wider black diaspora. As part of this analysis, Gerund engages in a lucid overview and evaluation of recent redefinitions of diaspora, a concept of vital importance to Lordeâs vision of the responsibility of African American culture as an inspiration for the Afro-German movement. Lorde, Gerund argues, utilized a definition of diaspora which emphasized the specifically national character, the ârootedness and settlement.â of diasporic identities (p. 196). This aspect of Lordeâs writing had a paradoxical effect on the Afro-German movement as it took shape in the 1980s. On one hand, Lorde encouraged Afro-German activists to locate their identity at the â[center] of Germany and Germannessâ (p. 196). On the other, her influence fostered continued identification with and reliance on African American cultural models and narratives, which had the potential to crowd out alternatives which spoke more specifically to Afro-German experiences.

In chapter 6, Gerund shifts to a discussion of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison, best-selling authors on both sides of the Atlantic. In contrast to Audre Lorde, Walker and Morrison were the subject of intense media attention in West Germany and the post-reunification Federal Republic, particularly surrounding the release of the film adaptation of Walkerâs *The Color Purple* in 1986 and Morrisonâs Nobel Prize in 1993, respectively. Gerund analyzes newspaper reports and film reviews, finding evidence for what Anne Koenen refers to as the âGermanification of black womenâs literature.â[2] This âassimilation, appropriation, and incorporation into the parameters of a white German reading/viewing public, a literary elite and a still predominantly white male cultural establishmentâ took place in reviews of *The Color Purple* that treated race as an essentially foreign, American concern (p. 268). This can also be seen in analysis of Morrisonâs writing that highlighted âuntranslatableâ–and thus Otherered–images of race and gender which were presumed to be incomprehensible for the average–that is, white male–German reader. This attempt at âassimilation, appropriation, and incorporationâ is never complete or completely successful, Gerund argues, as its representation of African American female Otherness âstill harbors a potentially unsettling qualityâ (pp. 268-269). Even if, as the chapter concludes, an âessentialâ or âoriginalâ authorship cannot be maintained by the process of âassimilation, appropriation, and incorporation,â it nevertheless makes visible âthe workings and mechanisms, unarticulated assumptions, ideological undercurrents, and subject positions of [West] German discoursesâ (p. 269).

On the whole, *Transatlantic Cultural Exchange* functions both as a compelling example of, and argument for, studying the pluralization of Americanization with sensitivity both to the specific form of Americanization in question and to the context in which Americanization is and has been adopted and adapted. Cultural historians of West Germany will find much of value in Gerundâs discussion of the ways in which German racial, gender, and national identities were represented and negotiated through discussion and interpretation of African Americanization. In this respect, Gerundâs work may hold possibility for interesting comparisons with similar discussions with regard to the Turkish presence in Germany.[3] Finally, for scholars of Americanization specifically and the migration, adaptation, and translation of ideas across borders more generally, *Transatlantic Cultural Exchange* offers a theoretically and methodologically innovative model for future scholarship. It merits a wide readership.

Notes

[1]. Heide Fehrenbach and Uta Poiger, âIntroduction: Americanization Reconsidered,â in *Transactions, Transgressions, Transformations: American Culture in Western Europe and Japan*, ed. Heide Fehrenbach and Uta Poiger (New York: Berghahn, 2000), xv-xvi.

[2]. Anne Koenen, âThe Germanification of Black Womenâs Literature,â in *Multiculturalism in Transit: A German-American Exchange*, ed. Klaus Milich and Jeffrey Peck (New York: Berghahn, 1998), 101.

[3]. Rita Chin, âGuest Worker Migration and the Unexpected Return of Race,â in *After the Nazi Racial State: Difference and Democracy in Germany and Europe,* ed. Rita Chin, Heide Fehrenbach, Geoff Eley, and Atina Grossmann (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009), 80-101.

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