

STELLA BOLAKI AND SABINE BROECK, eds, *Audre Lorde's Transnational Legacies* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 2015), Xii + 250 pp.

*Audre Lorde's Transnational Legacies* is a collection of essays edited by Stella Bolaki and Sabine Broeck in a transnational effort to show how the African American poet Audre Lorde's (1934-1992) influential work has lived on. It is a volume that is based on a number of collaboratively organized conferences, workshops, and panels between 2012 and 2015, above all in England and Canada. The book is prefaced by Sara Ahmed's very personal words, describing the meaning Audre Lorde has had in her own life as a woman "of color" (x) growing up in a white neighborhood in Australia. Ahmed's "Foreword" makes evident that Lorde's poetry, essays, and autobiography are political and have paved the way for radically voicing concerns about racism and sexism. It also reveals that the national is always already transnational since "the very ground of nations is shaped by histories of empire and colonialism" (xi). In times of a proliferation of the label "transnational," Ahmed embraces a very down-to-earth definition that evokes the feminist idea of "the personal is the political": "[...] the transnational is an actual lived space populated by real bodies. It is not a glossy word in a brochure but one that requires work. We have to work to learn from others who do not share our language. We have to travel out of our comfort zones, to open our ears" (xi). And this is precisely what the volume asks its readers to do.

The editors of the collection describe their aim as exploring "the depth and range of Lorde's literary, intellectual, and activist commitments by situating her life and work within transatlantic and transnational perspectives" (1). As early as in the introduction, readers begin to understand some of the dimensions of Lorde's interest in connecting with black women across national borders, how the 1980s and the few years in the early 1990s brought her to Europe—above all to Germany, Switzerland, and England—and how concerned and even shocked she was to see racism and sexism on the rise again. People had connected tremendous hope with the destruction of the wall in Germany, but the racist attacks spreading across East Germany at the time motivated her and Gloria Joseph, her partner, to write a letter of protest to German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and to ask: "Is this the new

German version of 'ethnic cleansing?'" (11). Such details of Lorde's European activities have largely remained hidden, at least to those who are not actively involved in the preservation of Lorde's legacy. They must, therefore, be spread across academia and into activist groups, in particular now that we have seen a renewed emergence of violent racist behavior since 2016, not only in Europe, but here most of all due to the current refugee crisis.

Owing to the atmosphere of the 1980s in Europe, Lorde encounters during her numerous visits moments of racism and people who seem to be unwilling to acknowledge the devastating consequences of earlier European colonialism. However, while emphasizing the important role of "People of Color" across the world in the use of "difference for something other than destruction" (Lorde's "The Dream of Europe" in 1988 [26]), both Lorde and the editors of this volume leave unacknowledged the many people, then and now, including so-called white Europeans, who work against racism—just consider the great number of volunteers who, especially in the first months of the crisis, helped refugees in their daily struggles to build a new life for themselves—and those who, for example, in academia, openly discuss these issues with colleagues and students. Although none of this is unproblematic and there are too many counter-examples, these efforts and people do not deserve to be included in what the editors with reference to Lorde's speech call "a rotten Europe" (24).

The book consists of three main parts entitled "Archives," "Connections," and "Work" (with 20 essays, including the editors' introduction and afterword). The essays draw on a number of perspectives such as those of "historical witnesses and members of Lorde's personal community of transnational friends and sisters" (14), of academic collaborators, and of views on the diversity of Lorde's understanding of "work" (15). As is always true for collections, it is impossible in one review to pay due attention to all essays and writers, but what is perhaps even more important is to acknowledge the collaboration of all contributors to make Lorde's legacies known.

In her contribution, Dagmar Schultz describes the making and distribution of her own film on Lorde's time in Germany, entitled *The Berlin Years, 1984 to 1992*. The process of the film's production and completion in 2012 was accompanied by a number of obstacles—financial, ideological, and structural. After its

release, the film was shown at numerous festivals, received many awards, and raised awareness in its viewers of the need to consider race as an integral part of intersectionality, a term which Lorde herself never used but which is exactly what she promoted in her work.

A number of interviews with Lorde conducted at different times by different people, among them the black German feminist Marion Kraft, the filmmaker Pratibha Parmar, and the British professor of creative writing Jackie Kay, as well as the recollections of Gloria I. Joseph, enhance the very personal note of the volume. What comes across in all contributions is the recognition of the 1980s as a time of major change, of the rise of both black and white women's feminist activities, the heterogeneity of these movements, but also the mutual misunderstandings as well as the racism—conscious or unconscious—present in many European feminist events, such as at the first International Feminist (or Women's) Book Fair in London in 1984. In an interview with Parmar and Kay, published in 1988 for the first time and republished here, Audre Lorde, who is known for highly valuing differences and their intersections, explains one of the differences she sees between U.S.-American and European feminism in naming:

In other ways our solutions are different. Take the issue of how we name ourselves, for example. In the United States, *Black* means of African heritage, and we use the term *women of color* to include Native American, Latina, Asian American women. I understand that here, *Black* is a political term which includes all oppressed ethnic groups, and the term *women of color* is frowned on. (80)

These differences in naming suggest the strong need for networking across national but also sexual and ethnic boundaries in order to point to discrimination that exists among women, even within the same ethnicity. Racism and heterosexism, for Lorde, as Lester C. Olson points out in the essay on "Sisterhood as Performance in Audre Lorde's Public Advocacy," "harmed solidarity among women in the interest of realizing political, economic, and social change for women" (111). All essays repeatedly focus on Lorde's idea of sisterhood that made her move beyond the U.S. borders across the world to reach out to black women in the Caribbean, South Africa, Europe, and Asia. Again, an awareness of what it means to

be called black was for Lorde essential, since being labeled black did not and does not mean the same thing in the nations of the world. As Olson explains, "Lorde knew that *black* does not imply African descent in either New Zealand or Australia. In Australia the word refers to indigenous aboriginal peoples such as the Wurundjeri, while in New Zealand it refers to the Maori" (115). Olson's attempt to find a term with which to adequately describe Lorde's international activities results in suggesting "[t]ransnational sisterhood" (116), at least "when thinking geographically about Lorde's advocacy" (116). The way in which Olson summarizes Lorde's idea of sisterhood deserves representation here since its implications are present, as I believe, in all essays of this volume and capture Lorde's political activism and outreach in a nutshell:

For Lorde, sisterhood is not simply demographic (*women*), geographic, or even relational (*oppression*). Rather, sisterhood is contingent, and it is enacted in ways that demonstrate a communal commitment to doing something about transforming oppression while encouraging oppressed women to embrace each other within and across national boundaries. [...] Sisterhood is a deed or a performance. (119)

Transnational outreach is always accompanied by "transracial feminist alliances" (122-23), as the German Katharina Gerund, in her well-researched essay on Lorde and (West) German Women, points out. In Germany, Lorde pointed her finger at racial segregation and supported Afro-Germans in their struggle to promote "a critical reflection of whiteness in the feminist movement" (131), which can be seen as a position from which critical whiteness studies "has increased the awareness of racist structures within feminism" (131). While this is an important aim in feminism as well as Critical Whiteness Studies, I find it troubling to encounter the term "white guilt" (e.g., 129, 131) in some essays in this volume, even if sometimes only by implication. Racism existed then and still does now, but most of the white European feminists of the 1980s, just like those in the 1960s in the U.S., had to undergo a process of consciousness-raising and of becoming aware of their own collaboration with racist social tendencies. In order to build transracial alliances, feelings of guilt are not an effective position from which to start such an endeavor. Inter-

ethnic racism existed and still exists, but so does intra-ethnic discrimination. Guilt is a legal or moral term that presupposes a trial in which the positions of victim and perpetrator usually result in the latter's designation as the guilty one. Gerund maintains that the interactions between Audre Lorde with white and Afro-Germans "expose the main problems in collaborations between white and Afro-German women—such as white guilt, racism, and white superiority—but also indicate their possibilities, productivity, and creativity" (131). Today, the latter should certainly be the basis for feminist transracial alliances.

In the same way Audre Lorde criticized German racism, she also exposed the corruption of the Saint Croix government after Hurricane Hugo had left its devastating traces on the Caribbean islands. As Alexis Pauline Gumbs points out, "[t]he government took days to respond to the hurricane disaster, and even then its emphasis was on securing corporate property. Lorde describes the response as 'man-made ugliness'" (165). The response in no way differed from "the 2005 nonresponse and military antagonism after Hurricane Katrina" (165), as Gumbs continues. These events and their management reveal one of the main reasons for Lorde's activism: no matter where she went and no matter whether the country was predominantly white or black, she found corruption and discrimination that had to be fought just like cancer. As Tamara Lea Spira argues: "As Lorde lay in bed in Grenada, battling cancer, she felt deep clarity about the intricate connection between the diseases of racism, sexism, capitalism, and imperialism and the cancer in her body" (187). This is more than a symbolic equation; it literally refers to the U.S. government's cutting of research grants to the National Cancer Institute in 1986 and turning the money over "illegally" "to the contras in Nicaragua" (187).

After reading through all the essays (including those that could not be mentioned

here in more detail by Cassandra Ellerbedueck/Gloria Wekker, Rina Nissim, Zeedah Meierhofer-Mangeli, Tiffany N. Florvil, Paul M. Farber, and Sarah Cefai), it becomes very clear that Audre Lorde's legacy lives on, in art installations in Liverpool (Chantal Oaks 212), in feminist publishing series in Greece (Christiana Lambrinidis 220), in Black German organizations (Peggy Piesche 223), in commemorations of the twentieth anniversary of Lorde's death in 2012 (Piesche 222), in the work of many black women writers in Germany (Piesche 224); that is, in the personal, political, and academic legacy that Audre Lorde has left behind. Lorde has become present and influential, beyond the countries already mentioned, in Spain, Serbia, Italy, and Russia; in the work of the Palestinian and Muslim poet Suheir Hammad; in cancer narratives; and her influence keeps growing (Bolaki and Broeck 226-30). There is no doubt that the editors of the volume are right in concluding that "Lorde is a truly transnational figure, and her work has far-reaching legacies" (229). What is equally important, however, as I believe, is to historically situate Lorde's work, to be aware of the changes she has or has not motivated, and to not forget that people in the second decade of the new millennium might have seen social improvements as well as curricular developments in academia that can no longer be classified as racist. It is certainly true that we still encounter few black people in powerful positions in society, in particular in Germany, and we, therefore, need to be aware of Black Lives Matter. However, we also have to continue to collaborate across all kinds of borders and differences and not to revive one-sided allocations of guilt. The volume is aptly entitled *Audre Lorde's Transnational Legacies*. In that sense, we need to focus on collaboration and not confrontation: The volume is an excellent source to help us do so.

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