

Jule Bönkost (Hg.)



# Unteilbar

Bündnisse gegen Rassismus





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## Hidden Spaces, Hidden Narratives – Intersectionality Studies in Berlin: A Case Study in Critical Feminist Alliance Work

Heidi R. Lewis

*»The encounter with these young feminist pioneers embodied my concept of teaching and lecturing, and also demonstrated that creating a space that fosters interactive participation regarding the transfer of knowledge is not only possible, but vital.«*  
– Cassandra Ellerbe-Dück on the FemGeniuses in Berlin (2014)

*»Little did I know that the students are from different backgrounds but with a passion to make a difference in their society after their study program. I was moved by the openness and readiness to learn from each other and to want to do something together in the future.«*  
– Olayinka Elizabeth Adekunle on the FemGeniuses in Berlin (2014)

*»I am especially delighted that matters of pan- and intra-Diasporic power and hierarchy have been brought to the table, as Afrodeutsche lately seem to be considered rather a >field of study< than an autonomous culture (with our own research) by many American and British academics.«*  
– Noah Sow on the FemGeniuses in Berlin (2015)

### Introduction

On a warm, breezy day in June 2016, I sat in my Charlottenburg flat anxiously and angrily waiting for my first student to arrive. This student asked to meet with me after learning I was displeased with a draft of their blog about an experience in my course, *Hidden Spaces, Hidden Narratives: Intersectionality Studies in Berlin*. I was displeased, because I found their draft to be situated primarily in frustrated and self-righteous criticism as opposed to appreciation, engaged learning, and generous critique. And this wasn't the first time a blog written by a student in that group had taken



that approach. To be fair, I often encourage my students to be critical of texts we engage – whether they be books, articles, films, or guest lecturers. However, I always ask that they first respectfully engage a text on its own terms and in conversation with experts in the various fields in which my pedagogies are situated before leveling critiques of any kind, even those that are celebratory. Still, this student – like many of their classmates that year – had been unable and/or unwilling to do that for two whole weeks. In addition to their problematic blogs, I found their participation in class sessions to be lackluster and flat. They didn't ask thought-provoking questions and, at times, seemed especially bored. I was struck by this, because it was the third consecutive summer I taught my course, and my previous students had always been excited about and engaged.

One of the most hurtful things about the 2016 session up to that point was that my disappointment was shared by many of my friends in Berlin, comrades I'd worked hard to build strong relationships with for the past three years. These relationships had become so strong that we all very much look forward to the return of my students – affectionally referred to as the >FemGeniuses in Berlin< – each year. For instance, Carolyn Gammon, our Jewish History & Culture Tour Guide, told this group she found it wonderful that my students' blogs about her tours featured so prominently on Google and that people sought out her tours, in small part, because of those blogs. Further, at the start of her session alongside Tina Ewokolo that summer, my friend Sharon Dodua Otoo jokingly asked who would be blogging their session because she wanted it to be the best of all the blogs written that summer. Similarly, Tina mentioned that her colleague and my comrade Mutlu Ergün-Hamaz told her how meaningful his experience with my students was in 2015, which excited her a great deal. In fact, in response to my request for a testimonial after his session, he wrote: »I rarely come across such a group of good listeners. They were very curious without crossing any boundaries, very open and attentive to the very complex story and information I shared with them.« (Ergün-Hamaz 2015) This sentiment had not been uncommon prior to 2016, as my students would come to their class sessions well-read and eager to share space with so many brilliant intellectuals. Moreover, I would often have to hurriedly rush them to their next meeting, because they would often continue seeking wisdom well beyond the official end of any given session. I was heartbroken and devastated, then, at the possibility of my critical alliance work being greatly compromised

by a group of students who, in large part, did not seem to appreciate the opportunities this experience provides.

## The Beginning: Theoretical Frameworks

I became interested in developing this course in 2012 after thinking more seriously about how to further develop the curriculum in my department – Feminist & Gender Studies at Colorado College – in intersectional and transnational feminist ways. Intersectional feminist studies is important for my work because, as Kimberlé Crenshaw points out in *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics*, there is often »a problematic consequence of the tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis [which was and still is] dominant in antidiscrimination policy and that is also reflected in feminist theory and antiracist politics.« (Crenshaw 1989: 139) Further, transnational feminist practices are critical, because as Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal point out in *Transnational Feminist Cultural Studies: Beyond the Marxism/Poststructuralism/Feminism Divides*: »What we need are critical practices that link our understanding of postmodernity, global economic structures, problematics of nationalism, issues of race and imperialism, critiques of global feminism, and emergent patriarchies.« (Kaplan/Grewal 1999: 358) Hence, I wanted my study abroad course to converge intersectional and transnational feminist thinking in order to allow students to think more critically about >outsiders< who often do not consult and collaborate with actors abroad about their existing theories or politics, because they believe they are providing an unquestionable >good<, which results in oversimplifications, dangerous rescue paradigms, and homogenization.

I chose Berlin, because I wanted my alliance work to honor existing Black radical intellectual traditions set forth by W.E.B. Du Bois, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., Angela Y. Davis, and Audre Lorde, all who were influenced intellectually by their experiences in Berlin. More specifically, the sociological, historical, and civil rights work of Du Bois was greatly influenced by his two years of graduate study in Berlin from 1892–1894, as he once noted: »I began to see the race problem in America, the problem of the peoples of Africa and Asia, and the political development of Europe as one. I began to unite my economics and politics« (Green/Driver 1978: 7). Further, in



1964 during the Civil Rights Movement, King delivered a sermon entitled *East or West: God's Children* to 20,000 people at the Waldbühne stadium in West Berlin before crossing the Berlin Wall border at Checkpoint Charlie to deliver a similar sermon to 2,000 people at Marienkirche in East Berlin. In it, he noted: »We have found ourselves literally >thrown to the lions< in the arena of life [...] We are often abused, but we are learning to work together to fulfill our dreams through the political structures of our society.« (King 1964) Additionally, there were several manifestations of solidarity with and support for Black feminist and Black Panther Party activist Angela Y. Davis throughout Germany. And when she delivered a speech entitled *Not Only My Victory* in East Berlin in 1972, she claimed: »It is not only my victory, and it was not about freeing just one prisoner from the clutches of political repression in the U.S.A. This victory is a lesson for all the people in the world: if the repressed throughout the world band together, then we have the power that will enable us one day to defeat imperialism.« (Rossella 2011: 9) Last, but not least, Black, Lesbian, Mother, Warrior, Poet Audre Lorde spent part of each year of her life in Berlin from 1984 until 1992 when she died, and was instrumental in helping to develop Afro-German, especially Afro-German women's, communities.

I first became familiar with Lorde's alliance work in Berlin when I began reading the English translation of *Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte* (*Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out*) edited by Katharina Oguntoye, May (Opitz) Ayim, and Dagmar Schultz. This classic text, published in 1986, was the first collection of writing and visual art published by Black women in Germany; hence, it became critical for my own work long before I ever set foot in Germany. More specifically, in the Preface to the English-language edition, Lorde wrote: »To successfully battle the many faces of institutionalized racial oppression, we must share the strengths of each other's vision as well as the weaponries born of particular experience. First, we must recognize each other.« (Oguntoye [et al.] 1986: xiii) A few months after reading *Farbe bekennen* for the first time, I had the honor of serving on the editorial team for the global forum honoring Lorde's life and legacy curated by my colleague and dear friend Aishah Shahidah Simmons hosted on *The Feminist Wire*. Featuring many of Lorde's Berlin comrades and friends – Schultz, Marion Kraft, Ika Hügel-Marshall, Cassandra Ellerbe-Düick, and Ria Cheatom – this forum, as Aishah writes in *The Lorde Works in Mysterious and Magi-*

*cal Ways: An Introduction to TFW's Audre Lorde Forum*, was »a humble attempt to celebrate and uplift the groundbreaking intersectional work to centralize the margins within the margins in the United States, the Caribbean, and Germany.« My course, then, allows my students to learn about, appreciate, and honor this intellectual tradition as they develop their own commitments to critical alliance work through various pedagogical projects situated at the nexus of Black feminism, transnational feminism, LGBTQI studies, and other transdisciplinary modes of analysis.

## The Beginning: Methodologies

After I had the idea to offer the course, Eric Popkin, then dean of Summer Programs helped me earn support from the Christian Johnson Endeavor Grant for course development, which allowed me to first visit Berlin in November 2013. Then, I began to design the course in careful collaboration with myriad activists, artists, and scholars whom I now call comrades and friends, including Celine Barry, Sharon Dodua Otoo, Rebecca Brückmann, Iris Rajanayagam, Jamile Da Silva, and many friends of and collaborators with Audre Lorde, such as Katharina Oguntoye, Cheatom, Ellerbe-Düick, and Hügel-Marshall. With their support and encouragement, I decided on the following description for the course:

In *grenzenlos und unverschämt* (boundless and outrageous), May Ayim writes: »ich werde trotzdem/ afrikanisch/ sein/ auch wenn ihr/ mich gerne/ deutsch/ haben wollt/ und werde trotzdem/ deutsch sein/ auch wenn euch/ meine schwärze/ nicht paßt« (»i will be african / even if you want me to be german / and i will be german / even if my blackness does not suit you«) (Ayim 2003: 14). This passage communicates the complex ways in which the identities and subjectivities of marginalized communities in Germany are constructed and developed, even in metropolitan spaces like Berlin. In this course, we examine how the identities of these communities – such as Black Germans, Turkish Germans, migrants, refugees, victims of Neo-Nazi terrorism and police brutality, and LGBTQI communities – are constructed, particularly how these constructions are dependent on racism, heterosexism, colonialism, imperialism, and other forms of oppression. Additionally, we examine how these communities resist, reject, revise, and reproduce these narratives as they construct their own subjectivities.



By the end of this course, students learn the importance of the following objectives, as well as the skills required to perform them at an intermediate level: examining, synthesizing, and responding to theoretical perspectives and methodologies most applicable to marginalized communities in Berlin; examining the identity construction of marginalized communities in Berlin based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, citizenship status, and other social, cultural, and political markers; examining the ways in which marginalized communities in Berlin understand and resist, reject, revise, or reproduce normativity as they construct their own subjectivities; and employing and synthesizing theoretical perspectives and methodologies most applicable to marginalized communities in Berlin in all coursework.

After the 2014 session, I revised the title in collaboration with Celine Barry in order to communicate the relationship between various >state-sanctioned< narratives about Germany and Berlin and the narratives marginalized communities in Germany tell about themselves. For instance, during the *Free Tour of Berlin* provided by an international tour company in 2014, we visited the Holocaust Memorial, and our tour guide mentioned that some members of Jewish communities »have problems with« the memorial. When my student Melissa L. Barnes inquired about their concerns, the guide was rather dismissive. He did not provide much clarity about those concerns, instead choosing to focus his comments on reasons why Jewish communities should be »thankful« in so many words, for Germany's admittance of guilt as manifested by the memorial. Similarly, we noted that some tour guides were >flippant< about the implications of the fall of the Berlin Wall, suggesting that »all was well« and that »everyone was happy« after the wall >fell< rather than spending a lot of time discussing the rise and fall of the wall through intersectional and transnational lenses. For these reasons, Celine noted after my 2014 course: »I am glad we started our project of researching the multiple narratives of the city, of confronting them, and of locating ourselves within these dividing hierarchies« (Barry 2014). Additionally, the revised title reflects my intellectual commitment to the study of storytelling and counter-storytelling, which relies, in large part, on the work of Critical Race scholars like Daniel G. Solórzano and Tara J. Yosso, who define the latter as »a method of telling the stories of those people whose experiences are not often told« (Solórzano/Yosso 2002: 26). Fortunately, my students and I have benefited a great deal from this kind of

storytelling during the walking tours we have taken to study the histories of marginalized peoples: Jewish History & Culture with Carolyn Gammon, Africa in Wedding with Josephine Apraku, Queer Berlin with Original Berlin Walks, the Student Movement of 1968 with Nadav Gablinger, the Women's Perspective Tour with Pen Hassmann, Little Istanbul with Intissar Nassar, and Women in the Center of Berlin with Iris Wachsmuth.

Along these lines, our coursework is primarily experiential and dialogic. In addition to the aforementioned walking tours, we visit with NGOs committed to eradicating oppression, participate in convergence classes with English-language courses in Berlin, attend workshops at several museums that document the histories and contemporary experiences of subjugated communities, and listen to cross-generational discussions with artists, activists, and scholars that share our intellectual commitments. Additionally, I often assign collaborative, creative, and critical audio/visual final projects in the tradition of Cultural Studies in order to, as Paula Saukko points out in *Doing Research in Cultural Studies: An Introduction to Classical and New Methodological Approaches*, communicate the significance of examining »the interplay between lived experience, texts or discourses, and the social context.« (Saukko 2003: 11) Further, in suggesting that Cultural Studies intellectuals reject a singular notion of scholarly validity in lieu of validities, Saukko argues:

»Theories, methods and modes of writing that underpin our research open up different and always partial and political views on reality. Instead of considering this an outrage, scholarship suggesting multiple validities ask us to be more critically aware of what drives our research [...] acknowledging that there is more than one way of making sense of social phenomena, asks one to come up with a more multidimensional, nuanced, and tentative way of understanding one's object of study.« (Saukko 2003: 18)

Hence, I rely heavily on her three methodological approaches to validities (hermeneutic, poststructuralist, and realist/contextual) by requiring students to evaluate their work »in terms of how truthfully it captures the lived worlds of the people being studied« (Saukko 2003: 19), »in terms of how well it manages to unravel social tropes and discourses that, over time, have come to pass for a >truth< about the world« (Saukko 2003: 20), and their ability »to locate the phenomenon it is studying within the wider social, political, and even global, context.« (Saukko 2003: 21) Throughout



the course, then, students write and publish peer-reviewed blogs that briefly describe and thoroughly analyze mandatory sessions in the course.

### The Course: Critical Alliance Work in Practice

These blogs are then published on my *FemGeniuses* website, which I started in 2012 primarily to showcase my students' work, which was especially important to me concerning this course for two reasons. First, it was important for me to share our experiences with communities that do not have access to the course. This was especially important due to my privilege in being able to offer this course because of the resources available from my employer. While my dream has always been for marginalized students to benefit primarily from this course, it must be noted that Colorado College is an institution that primarily serves students that are privileged across many social, cultural, and political axis. For instance, as of fall 2016, the college's records indicate that 7 % of students identify as >first generation< college students; 25 % identify as >students of color< and 7.9 % as citizens of countries outside the United States; approximately 2.5 % identify as genderqueer, transgender, or agender/genderless; and finally, 8.6 % students receive a Pell grant, while 24.2 % receive other need-based aids (excluding the Pell grant) (Colorado College 2017). Further, in addition to tuition, which costs \$ 4,600 for four credit hours (one course) during the summer, students are required to pay a \$ 4,000 program fee to cover my course expenses, such as their flights from New York City to Berlin, lodging, transportation, and mandatory course activities. Hence, the course – while boasting one of the least expensive program fees for off-campus summer courses at the college – is rather expensive, even for students who receive financial aid. Therefore, the blogs allow me to destabilize this exclusion by allowing more people to share in our learning experiences, as well as to allow my students to develop their ability to produce decolonized knowledge.

Second, after a great amount of study, I learned how important sharing our experiences was for my comrades in Berlin. As Jasmin Eding wrote in response to the time she spent with my students in 2015: »The lives and struggles of Black people in Germany is not well-known in the U.S., so I was thankful to share some of our experiences in Germany, knowing that our stories will be shared in the U.S. This will strengthen solidarity, which is very important among activists and organizations here and there, specially

to fight racism and to share experience of resistance.« (Eding 2015) On that note, I have been pleased that our desire to share our experiences in the course have been realized more than I could have ever imagined. More specifically, in 2013 after I started sharing work on *FemGeniuses*, the site had approximately 800 visitors. After I taught my course in Berlin for the first time, visitors increased to almost 5,400 in 2014, to just over 7,500 in 2015, and to approximately 8,550 in 2016. Additionally, in 2013, almost 93 % of the site's views were from the United States, and that decreased to approximately 60-65% from 2014 through 2016. Further, from 2014 through 2016, *FemGeniuses in Berlin* was the most popular page on my site, while (*Emerging*) *Fat Activism in Germany with Fat Up!* by Nicole Tan was the most popular blog in 2014 and *Understanding Black Studies in Germany* by Meredith Bower was the second most popular blog in 2015. I comment on the popularity of the site, because it allows me, my students, and our comrades in Berlin to collaboratively challenge the marginalization of subjugated communities in Berlin by sharing their stories. As Noah Hofmann wrote after his time with my students in 2015: »It was a wonderful and refreshing experience to see young people studying the often-overlooked experiences of Black people in Europe!« (Hofmann 2015)

The blogs also allow us to challenge narratives about marginalized people that have been >overlooked< and that have also served to further their subjugation. Along these lines, Meredith Bower was tasked with writing about one of our most difficult experiences in 2015, when we experienced the theoretical and material violence of dangerous storytelling during a walking tour. As I was conducting research prior to that year, I was excited to learn that a local touring company provided a tour on Turkish communities (a tour they thankfully no longer advertise). However, when I arrived at the meeting location, the tour guide noted that he didn't really know much about Turkish history and culture and that he did some research on the *Wikipedia* website to prepare. I was outraged, but since my students would be soon arriving, I decided I could attempt to use this as an opportunity to learn about the power of destructive narratives that serve to further marginalize subjugated communities. However, as Meredith writes in her blog article *Ignorance is Never Bliss: Our Turkish Tour Experience*, »Rather than addressing and problematizing the hurtful narrative that Heinz Ickstadt describes as the >fantasy< of the >>bad, bad Turk,« a mean tough, deceitfully clever with his knife – in any case, potentially a criminal< in



>Appropriating Difference: Turkish-German Rap< (Ickstadt 1999: 572), our tour guide actually played into this stereotype.<< Further, she writes:

»The tour came to a dramatic close [after just 30 minutes] as Heidi and all of us cringed when our tour guide laughed and told us he could not take us into a t-shirt shop run by a former member of the 36 Boys, because >we would probably get stabbed.< At this point, Heidi intervened and the next twenty minutes consisted of her strictly (and intellectually) informing him just how offensive his tour had been. He was shocked at Heidi's accusations, though he did listen to the criticism and even began taking notes on what Heidi was saying. Despite his attempts to understand, the deed had been done, and I was incredibly saddened by how he constructed the Turkish community.<< (Bower 2015)

She continues,

»It should go without saying that an entire community and its history cannot be whittled down to a single *Wikipedia* search. All of the emotions, experiences, issues, and viewpoints that should be discussed when teaching about Turkish history, culture, and politics cannot be quickly jotted down in a notebook at the naïve request of your supervisor. Accurate, complex narratives demand passion and intellect, and clearly there was none within this man who declared to us that Turkish history is >boring<. Today was a spot-on example of how racism continues to be deeply intertwined into society. To be clear, the racist is not necessarily the blatant asshole on the street shouting derogatory terms. Many racists today are the ignorant (and sometimes very >nice<) ones who do not care enough to educate themselves.<< (Bower 2015)

Probably needless to say, Meredith was terrified to write this blog. Not only was she a student who had only just finished her first year of college, she was especially worried about pushback we might receive from the tour company, if they ever learned about her writing. However, I assured her that I was confident in her writing and that I thought it was important that she, a young white woman, takes this opportunity to hold white supremacy accountable in order for her commitments to alliance work to be invested in justice for marginalized people and communities. Further, by that point, the students had read several texts written by, about, and for marginalized people; they had taken several walking tours with guides committed to justice for the oppressed; they had critical discussions with Stefanie-Lahya Aukongo, Maisha Eggers, the Oury Jalloh Initiative, Sandrine Micossé-Aikins, Salma

Arzouni, Sharon Dodua Otoo, LesMigraS, ADEFRA, Asoka Esuruoso, Noah Hofmann, and Kwesi Aikins; and they attended a powerful workshop at The Jewish Museum. Hence, I was certain that their learning experiences regarding the importance of storytelling and counter-storytelling would provide Meredith with the strength and wisdom she needed to fulfill her responsibility, and she definitely exceeded my expectations.

Further, I had received a great deal of support from Mutlu before the tour when he met with me to give me examples of violent narratives about Turkish communities in Berlin so that I would be aware if the tour took a dangerous turn. During his session, Mutlu commended Meredith on her blog and proceeded to provide more complex and compassionate narratives about Turkish migration to Germany, the ways young Turks embraced hip hop because of its resistive qualities, the ways the 36 Boys and other Turkish communities protected their communities by any means necessary, the ways Turkish communities were often excluded from reunification narratives after the fall of the Berlin Wall, renewed suspicion about Turkish communities after 9/11, and the continued ways Turkish communities resist oppression, including through their artistic expression. As my student Jade Frost wrote in her blog about the discussion: »It was in this session that it really hit me why we are here. Throughout this trip, we have listened to narratives about what it is like here from those who have been marginalized and oppressed. We are here to find these often hidden spaces and listen to these often hidden and silenced narratives.<< (Frost 2015) Still, I feel compelled to note that I often lament that marginalized people spend so much time and energy resisting oppression rather than focusing on their ability to generate, to be creative. As Toni Morrison notes,

»The function, the very serious function of racism is distraction. It keeps you from doing your work. It keeps you explaining, over and over again, your reason for being. Somebody says you have no language and you spend twenty years proving that you do. Somebody says your head isn't shaped properly so you have scientists working on the fact that it is. Somebody says you have no art, so you dredge that up. Somebody says you have no kingdoms, so you dredge that up. None of this is necessary. There will always be one more thing.<< (Morrison [et al.] 1975)

However, what I have learned about critical alliance work throughout my time developing and facilitating this course is that my comrades and I embrace this work in critically allied spaces, especially spaces that are



committed to educating our young people about the importance of our work. While it was not necessarily my responsibility to spend 20 minutes educating that tour guide about the violence he was doing, and it was not necessarily Mutlu's responsibility to correct the violent narratives that tour guide was spreading, we both took on that task to ensure that my students and all who read the blogs on my website have clarity about the necessity of understanding the most important kinds of alliance work.

My understanding of this importance also relies a great deal on multidisciplinary collaboration, evidenced also by the convergence classes in which we have participated each year. According to Alexander Refsum Jensenius, multidisciplinary work entails intellectuals from different disciplines collaborating by drawing on their disciplinary knowledges (Jensenius 2012). While most conversations about this kind of work is limited to intellectual production in the academy, I expand these theories in order to reject the hierarchies that exist among academics, artists, non-profit organization administrators and staff, volunteers, and all who serve marginalized communities in myriad ways, evidenced by our other course activities. In this case, though, the convergence class, which I also co-facilitate when I'm teaching on-campus, allows teachers to realize this vision by gathering at least two classes together for at least one session to think seriously about the ways they approach the study of a particular subject in similar and distinct ways by carefully engaging an article, film, television show, art exhibit, guest speaker, or another kind of >text.< We normally begin by asking students in both classes to share what they have learned in their classes up to that point, sometimes including their reasons for taking the course. Then, we ask students to discuss the central >text< in small groups for a specified amount of time in order to learn more about how they approached and came to understand the >text< from their own intellectual perspective(s) developed within and outside of their classes. Finally, we come together as a large group to share our thinking.

This is significant, because as Rebecca Brückmann points out regarding our 2014 convergence at the John F. Kennedy Institute at Freie Universität Berlin with students in her course *Can We Do It?: The 20th Century Women's Movement in the U.S.*:

»My students and I tremendously enjoyed our convergence class with the Fem-Geniuses. It was a unique, intercultural learning environment, which provided

the opportunity for direct debate and exchange of knowledge and ideas between groups of students who rarely meet each other despite their courses of study: students of U.S. history and Women's Studies in Germany and students of German history and Women's Studies in the U.S.« (Brückmann 2014)

The experience was so meaningful that we converged again with Brückmann and students in her course *The African American Civil Rights Movement*; and in 2016, we converged with Jule Bönkost and Josephine Apraku and students in their course *Bündnisarbeit intersektional gedacht* (Alliance Work Intersectionally Thought) at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. These classes allow both the teachers and students to begin building meaningful relationships that are required to do critical alliance work. As my student Cheanna Gavin points out in *Challenging the Discourse of the >Ally<* about our 2016 convergence class,

»[Per the professors' instructions], the discussion around allyship was supposed to start with possibilities and opportunities that may come from allyship. Yet, in the large group, as well as in my own smaller group, we struggled to find >benefits< of allyship. In addition, there was confusion between the term allyship and the German translation which is Bündnisarbeit. As understood by the students from the U.S., allyship was seen as an individual practice. The German students, on the other hand have a more institutional understanding of allyship.« (Gavin 2016)

This illustrates the ways multidisciplinary spaces allow us to better understand our comrades theoretically and politically, which allows us to discuss how we can continue to understand the >text< and our subject, not in search of sameness of thought but in pursuit of critical complexity. On this particular subject, like Cheanna, I find it important to continue thinking about the distinctions made between >allies< and >accomplices< in *Accomplices Not Allies: Abolishing The Ally Industrial Complex* by Indigenous Action Media. They write,

»Accomplices listen with respect for the range of cultural practices and dynamics that exists within various Indigenous communities. Accomplices aren't motivated by personal guilt or shame, they may have their own agenda but they are explicit. Accomplices are realized through mutual consent and build trust. They don't just have our backs, they are at our side, or in their own spaces confronting and unsettling colonialism. *As accomplices we are compelled to become accountable and*



*responsible to each other, that is the nature of trust.*« (Indigenous Action Media 2014, emphasis in the original)

It is my contention that this trust can begin to build in small part in the classroom, in those spaces where students are doing the serious work of learning. These relationships must not end there if accountability and responsibility are to be seriously developed; however, I appreciate having the opportunity to facilitate the beginnings of such in my class.

### Conclusion: Thinking Back, Looking Forward

I was frustrated in 2016 not because many of my students were struggling in the course. I was frustrated because they often seemed to resent and reject the struggle and were resistant to learning the significance of critical alliance work through my intersectional and transnational feminist pedagogies. Along those lines, when I met with them on that warm, breezy day in June, I noted, »This is the Blackest course I will ever teach, and the fact that you all are angry about failing so miserably is especially telling about how you understand me as a professor and yourselves as learners.« I made that point, because while Blackness is certainly not monolithic – even in the United States, let alone when we’re thinking about Blackness transnationally – relying on the many ways in which I >grew up Black< has been my best teacher in terms of learning. And that learning has been critical for my experiences building relationships with my comrades and friends in Berlin to do critical alliance work. On that note, I continued,

»The best cooks in my life never went to culinary school. Every Black person I know that taught me how to cook paid careful attention to the best cooks they knew. They watched; they learned; they practiced. The best hairstylists in my life only went to cosmetology school, if they even went, to earn the credentials they needed to do hair in beauty salons. Because almost every Black woman who ever braided my hair learned how to braid by paying careful attention to the best braiders they knew. They watched; they learned; they practiced.«

I designed my study abroad course in a way that honors that tradition, a tradition that demands you >sit at the feet< of the wiser – those who know more than you, those who are experts in the things you want to do – and learn so that you can one day teach.

Many of these students struggled with this, in my estimation, because they had become accustomed to exceling in ways that traditionally exemplify learning in a higher education setting. More specifically, I noted,

»I chose you all to attend this course, because you had strong applications, strong interviews, strong recommendations. And since I know most of you, I know that you are great students, if we’re only considering >white ways of learning and knowing.< You come to class prepared, having read all the material I assign very critically. You come to class with great questions. You’re some of the best discussants I’ve ever had in class, so much so that I even trust you to lead discussion in my stead at times. Now, please don’t mistake me. I appreciate that way of >doing knowledge.< In fact, I think I’m quite good at it. However, it is but *one* way, and *this* way means as much to me – if not more – than *that* one. *That* way is limited to the confines of our classrooms on our predominantly white campus, where we primarily engage with texts and each other. You often get to be the smartest students in any room on our campus when it comes to thinking about power and dominance. However, *this* course requires you to leave that space and interact with people >doing intellect< in artistic spaces, activist spaces every day of every month in every year. *This* course requires you to appreciate and honor your own smallness in that regard so that you can see and respect these people and their work and *learn* from them.«

It is important to note that critical alliance work certainly does not require one erase their own knowledge or expertise, but listening becomes more important than talking, giving becomes more important than receiving, and learning becomes a fundamental part of one’s ability to teach.

I do a great deal of reflecting each year after my course is completed, and I did so a great deal more in 2016. I am thankful that the 2016 students and I have reconciled, and they were especially engaged in the course after our difficult conversation. My only regret is that I did not initiate that conversation sooner. Still, the only thing I decided to change about the course after that year was to better communicate the pedagogical nature of the course to students who express interest, especially if they decide to apply for enrollment. While the course description and objectives may forever evolve, the goals I developed in conversation with my comrades and friends in Berlin remain the same, as I am surer now than ever that intersectional and transnational feminist collaboration is essential for those of us that are oppressed to thrive, let alone survive. As Maisha Eggers (who spent time with my students in



2015 and 2016) writes in *Knowledges of (Un-)Belonging Epistemic Change as a Defining Mode for Black Women's Activism in Germany*,

»Sharing knowledge is perceived to entail a deeper commitment than merely consuming information. It involves engaging deeply with the power-critical analyses produced in everyday contexts. Within a critical pedagogy of decolonization, access to alternative knowledges can deeply influence action and the direction of social movement work.« (Eggers 2011: 13)

Still, I also continue to think about the words of Katja Kinder (who spoke on a panel with Eggers and Peggy Piesche about Generation ADEFRA 2.0 during my 2016 course), »No I don't have to be in any book, I don't want to be in history. We exist, period. We have so many books, but we still have all of this oppression. We need to think about much more than just books.« (Hernandez 2016) In my estimation, the wisdom of both Eggers and Kinder must carefully understood. More specifically, it is important that those of us doing critical alliance work remain especially careful about the relationship between the knowledges we desire to share and the oppression we hope to eradicate.

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## Rassismuskritische Bündnisarbeit im Schwarz-weißen Team

Josephine Apraku und Jule Bönkost

»The mere presence of a cross-racial team, coupled with the explicitness of the discussion on race, will challenge and unsettle everyone's racial socialisation.« (DiAngelo/Flynn 2010: 10)

Seit vielen Jahren arbeiten wir zusammen im Bereich rassismuskritische Bildungsarbeit. >Wir< sind zwei Frauen – ein Schwarz-weißes Team. Aus unserer Zusammenarbeit ging nicht nur eine tiefe Freundinnenschaft, sondern auch die gemeinsame Gründung des IDB | Institut für diskriminierungsfreie Bildung in Berlin hervor, das wir bis heute gemeinsam leiten. Den Großteil unserer Arbeit führen wir gemeinsam durch, von der Konzeption, Vorbereitung und Planung über die Durchführung bis zur Nachbereitung und Evaluation der einzelnen Projekte. Gemeinsam haben wir mehrere hundert Bildungsveranstaltungen im Themenfeld Rassismus durchgeführt, z.B. Lehrveranstaltungen an der Hochschule sowie Fortbildungen und Workshops für verschiedene Zielgruppen. Zusammen erstellen und begutachten wir Lehr- und Lernmaterialien, halten Vorträge und führen Prozessbegleitungen durch. Mit diesem dialogischen Artikel ist es unsere Absicht, rassismuskritische Bildungsarbeit im Schwarz-weißen Team zu diskutieren und dabei unsere eigene Zusammenarbeit im Hinblick auf Bündnisarbeit in rassistischen Gesellschaftsverhältnissen kritisch zu reflektieren. Hierfür haben wir uns vorab Fragen überlegt, die uns besonders relevant erscheinen. Sie sollen den Artikel inhaltlich strukturieren:

1. Welche Bedeutung hat die Zusammenarbeit im Schwarz-weißen Team für unser gemeinsames Vorgehen? Welche Rolle spielt Bündnisarbeit dabei?
2. Welche Möglichkeiten und Chancen im Hinblick auf unsere Zusammenarbeit im Schwarz-weißen Team nehmen wir wahr? Welche Rolle spielt Bündnisarbeit dabei?