"JA, ICH HABE EINEN DEUTSCHEN PASS, ABER ICH BIN DOCH SCHWARZ":
BLACK GERMAN CONfrontations WITH BLACKNESS

by

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the complexities of constructing a German identity as a black German. The recent emergence of Germany's black minority group was generally perceived as an opportunity to reevaluate Germanness as it has been understood in the past. However, this thesis shows that a reevaluation of Germanness lacks full support because traditional German ideals of racial superiority continue to exist in the consciousness of all Germans—black and white. This suggests that theories of racial superiority continue to determine belonging and identity construction in Germany. Above all, the presence of Western racial ideology in black German identity construction signifies a development of self-rejection and the disunity of the black German population. This thesis explores these effects through black German literature, survey interviews and German media.
I would like to extend my thanks to those who inspired me to write this thesis. I am greatly indebted to Dr. Michelle Stott, whose personal library and discussions introduced me to black Germans. She has provided a critical voice as well as a voice of encouragement when I seemed to reach a dead-end during my research. Dr. Stott’s passion for learning has motivated me through my undergraduate and graduate studies. I would also like to thank my thesis committee for the time and effort they have put into this project. Dr. Lyon and Dr. Keele have provided invaluable advice on the content and structure of the thesis. Additionally, I would like to thank Brigham Young University’s Women’s Research Institute and the Internationale Frauenuniversität for supporting this project and making it possible for me to conduct survey research in Germany. I thank my mother for the educational opportunities that she has afforded me. Without her encouragement and sacrifices I may never have reached this point in my education. I would also like to thank my husband, Harrison, for his patience throughout this project. I am glad that he has always been willing to listen to the varied theories and conclusions I drew as I worked on this thesis. Above all, I would like to thank the many individuals who were able to share their personal experiences as “Other” Germans in Germany with me. I appreciate the time we spent discussing, laughing and eating.
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But it is a scarcely conceivable fallacy of thought that a Negro (...) will turn into a German because he learns German and is willing to speak the language in the future and perhaps even give his vote to a German political party. That any such Germanization is in reality a de-Germanization never became clear to our bourgeois national world. (...) Since nationality or race does not happen to lie in language but in the blood, we would only be justified in speaking of a Germanization if by such a process we succeeded in transforming the blood of the subjected people. But this is not possible.

Adolf Hitler Mein Kampf (388-389)

While his exact words are not remembered by a majority of Germans, it is the spirit of Adolf Hitler’s words that continues to live in the conscience of numerous Germans. According to many, blackness counteracts Germanness or as Hitler maintains in Mein Kampf, blackness is a sign of “de-Germanization” (Hitler 388). In recent years, this idea was particularly expressed in an event that attracted the attention of numerous journalists in the town of Hanover, Germany in the summer of 2000. I was able to meet with the young man to whom this happened. The conflict began on a train heading toward Berlin. A black African student stood in one of the compartments and came
across a 66-year-old woman who was making her way to the back of the train. As she came closer to him she began to assault and shout at the young man, „Neger verschwinde. Geh’ mir aus dem Weg....” In a desperate attempt to avoid this situation of conflict, the young man pulled the emergency brakes and brought the train to an abrupt halt—when the train conductor and police approached the scene, it was suggested that the man had caused a disturbance of peace. This case was brought before a court and the young man was found guilty. However, he appealed and the case was heard again. In her defense, the woman argued that she suffered from an allergy against Fremdrassen (foreign races), and was supported by a medical doctor certifying her allergic reaction to blacks, one usually observed between people and animals (he used the example of dogs), as legitimate. Eventually, the woman’s condition was deemed a psychosomatic case based on her description of the symptoms experienced when the phobia set in around blacks. While this medical condition baffled many doctors, the 66-year-old woman was still required to pay a fine of 460DM.¹

Although many witnesses dismissed the elderly lady’s condition as irrational ranting of an old woman, I noted that it represented a German cultural signpost. I believe this event to be an important example of the complexity of the politics of belonging in the German context. The elderly woman carefully constructed her argument in biological terms and thereby rendered the presence of the young black man unwanted and even reduced him to a trespasser in Germany. By identifying him as a member of a racial group that does not belong in Germany (Fremdrasse), she shows that the legality of his presence is unimportant, but that the indicating factor of belonging in Germany (whether

¹ I received this information from the student. He did not wish for his name to be used. The story was also covered by Hannoversche Allgemeine Zeitung.
temporary or long term) is based on the color of a person’s skin. Further, she constructs her arguments in qualitative terms. By presenting the conflict as one comparable to human interaction with animals, she asserts that the German is qualitatively different from the Black. The event makes the underlying point that a blackness and Germanness are mutually exclusive identities.

Few Germans can be dissuaded from the idea that non-white peoples cannot be German. When asked to comment about the murder of Alberto Adriano, the presiding Judge, Albrecht Henning, stated “Es geht erkennbar nicht um Ausländer allgemein, es geht um den farbigen Ausländer. Er wird seiner Hautfarbe wegen gehasst” (Golz 710). The judge, like so many others, constructed Adriano, who was originally from Mozambique, as non-German, a foreigner or even a refugee. Adriano however had lived in Germany with his (Caucasian) German wife and child for almost twenty years as a German citizen, and his wife often mentioned in interviews that her husband had felt at home in Germany. These cases and many others show that, while many acknowledge that Germany is a racially diverse society, with multiple cultural, linguistic and ethnic groups, Germans have a particular difficulty accepting that many of these individuals recognize Germany as their homeland and are by law German citizens. In short they are German. The presence of black Germans is particularly complex and a large part of the German populace remains unaware of their existence.

The book Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte (1986) announced the presence of black Germans in Germany. This watershed work is the first text to address the condition and existence of black Germans in Germany. It consists of numerous personal accounts by black Germans about their residence in
Germany. Published by a marginal feminist press, *Orlanda Frauenverlag*, the text approaches the question of blackness and Germanness from a feminist stance and only includes experiences by women. As a result, the presence of black Germans received little attention beyond German feminist circles and failed to grip the nation as a whole. Nevertheless, American academic interest in the recognition of black Germans has created a global, albeit academic, stage for the black German condition. Anglo-American critique of black German texts has popularized the study of African Germans at Universities in the United States and countries around the globe. This interest has unearthed historical evidence of blacks in Germany ranging from the Middle Ages to present day Germany. In addition to this, black German studies have brought renewed interest in Germany’s colonial and post-colonial relationship with Africa. Scholars at African, European and American academic institutions have since contributed considerably to this field of research.

As scholars are continuously drawn to the condition of black Germans in Germany, it has become increasingly unclear to whom scholars are referring when they say “African German,” “Afro-German” or “black German.” Researchers such as Leroy T. Hopkins and Carol Aisha Blackshire-Belay emphasize a biracial identity of black Germans: Hopkins states that black Germans are a “a heterogeneous, biracial group of individuals usually of German and African or African American heritage and born since 1945 (Hopkins 533). However, in *Farbe Bekennen* the authors maintain in the introduction that one is a black German whether an individual has one or two black parents. The most important aspect is that one has been extremely socialized in Germany; thus that one speaks German, knows German culture and possesses German
citizenship. In other words biracialism does not play a role, instead immersion into
German society is a more significant determiner of a black German identity. The general
(Caucasian) German opinion, as expressed through the press, perceives black
Germanness in a similar light, regardless of the “degree” of blackness, a black person
holding German citizenship is perceived as black German (Kantara 21). However,
independent comments by black Germans of mixed heritage argue that biracialism is a
cornerstone of black Germanness.

The purpose of this thesis is to discuss the underlying factors that fuel these
differences in the definition of black German identity. Until this point, critics and black
German authors have presented very similar arguments about this minority group.
Despite the inclusive nature of black German identity that is presented at the beginning of
the book Farbe Bekennen, writers such as May Ayim and Katharina Oguntoye, defined
the black German literary heritage by focusing primarily on two aspects: first, the biracial
heritage of black Germans, and second, the unified struggle of the group. Following
Ayim’s and Oguntoye’s collaboration in Farbe Bekennen (1986), each one continued to
publish essays and books on black German existence. Ayim’s book entitled Grenzenlos
und Unverschämt (1997) was gives a more detailed view of Ayim’s aspirations as writer,
critic and representative of the black German population. While the work celebrates
black presence in Germany, it expresses a conflict with being recognized as such. The
essays by Ayim and conversations held with her make it clear that we are dealing only
with a biracial experience and its conflict with the larger white German population.
Critical essays that have since been published have followed a similar pattern. Various
journals have dedicated a volume to the Other in German society, with contributions by
leading critics such as Tina Campt, Susan Zantop and Leroy Hopkins. In addition to this, there have been a few texts that have discussed early publications by black German women. The two volumes, Blacks and German Culture (ed. Reinhold Grimm, 1986) and The African-German Experience (ed. Carol Aisha Blackshire-Belay, 1996), published at two highpoints in academic discourse about black Germans, extend their study to the presence of black Africans in Germany and German presence in Africa. Nevertheless, the chapters that address black Germans specifically draw a line between German and non-German, biracial and pure black.

This thesis differs very much from any previous research in the sense that it concentrates on the relationship between black Germans. Unlike most studies, I use Ayim's and Oguntayo's early definition of black German, where pure blacks are included. I will show in this thesis that black Germans have internalized a racialized conceptualization of Germanness that is held by the larger and dominant Caucasian German population. There are two ways in which black Germans show that they have internalized a racially predicated understanding of Germanness: first, by emphasizing that the white race, which is passed on through blood, is significant to a German identity, and hence to a black German identity. Second, they express their racial view by hierarchically categorizing the black German population. Here black Germans of mixed heritage are placed above pure blacks.

This thesis is divided into five sections. The first section shows that contemporary Germany remains immersed in racially predicated notions of Germanness.

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because it sustains a memory of its colonial heritage in Africa. Although Germany occupied territories in Asia and the Pacific Islands, it is its profitable stronghold in Africa that impelled German authorities to perceive African colonies as substantially more significant. While the African colonies played a more meaningful entrepreneurial role, they were also consequential in swaying German socio-political issues. It is during this time that Germanness took on a *racial* rather than *regional* foundation. This section will explore references to German colonial achievements in the media that indicate that colonialism and its ideologies remain important and relevant elements of contemporary German society.

The second section further expands on the idea of the first. This section shows that it is not only the larger Caucasian German populace that perceives Germanness as a racial concept, but also black Germans. I argue here that black Germans have purposefully linked their identity to the *Mischling* model in order to remain within the racial boundaries of Germanness. Paradoxically, the *Mischling* model was employed by Germans at the turn of the century and in the Third Reich to set individuals of mixed (German and Jewish) heritage apart from those of pure German descent. In a reversed sense black Germans utilize the *Mischling* model to prove that they are German by showing that German blood really *does* flow through their veins.

The third section explores personal accounts by black Germans. These accounts express the extent to which black Germans have internalized German racial thought. More basically, the section shows that by adopting mainstream German perceptions of

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Germanness, which are based on race, black Germans have a difficulty incorporating blackness into their identity and subdivide their group population hierarchically.

The fourth and concluding section examines the implications of the racial barriers that are constructed among black Germans and offers some concluding remarks on the future of the black German condition in light of this study. The fifth section, which serves as an appendix, presents excerpts from interviews I conducted with black Germans in Germany. This part aids the reader in understanding the reality of the black German condition.