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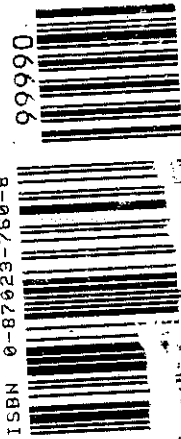
May OPTIZ

SHOWING OUR COLORS

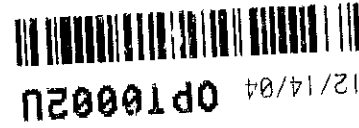
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SHOWING OUR COLORS



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In the spring of 1984, I spent three months at the Free University in Berlin teaching a course in Black American women poets and a poetry workshop in English, for German students. One of my goals on this trip was to meet Black German women, for I had been told there were quite a few in Berlin.

Who are they, these German women of the Diaspora? Beyond the details of our particular oppressions—although certainly not outside the reference of those details—where do our paths intersect as women of color? And where do our paths diverge? Most important, what can we learn from our connected differences that will be useful to us both, Afro-German and Afro-American?

Afro-German. The women say they've never heard that term used before.

I asked one of my Black students how she'd thought about herself growing up. "The nicest thing they ever called us was 'warbaby,'" she said. But the existence of most Black Germans has nothing to do with the Second World War, and, in fact, predates it by many decades. I have Black German women in my class who trace their Afro-German heritage back to the 1890s.

For me, Afro-German means the shining faces of May and Katharina in animated conversation about their fathers' homelands, the comparisons, joys, disappointments. It means my pleasure at seeing another Black woman walk into my classroom, her reticence slowly giving way as she explores a new self-awareness, gains a new way of thinking about herself in relation to other Black women.

"I've never thought of Afro-German as a positive concept be-

fore," she said, speaking out of the pain of having to live a difference that has no name; speaking out of the growing power self-scrutiny has forged from that difference.

I am excited by these women, by their blossoming sense of identity as they say, "Let us be ourselves now as we define us. We are not a figment of your imagination or an exotic answer to your desires. We are not some button on the pocket of your longings." I see these women as a growing force for international change, in concert with other Afro-Europeans, Afro-Asians, Afro-Americans.

We are the hyphenated people of the Diaspora whose self-defined identities are no longer shameful secrets in the countries of our origin, but rather declarations of strength and solidarity. We are an increasingly united front from which the world has not yet heard.

Despite the terror and isolation some of these Black women have known from childhood, they are freer of the emotional dilemma facing many white feminists in Germany today. Too often, I have met an immobilizing national guilt in white German women which serves to keep them from acting upon what they profess to believe. Their energies, however well intentioned, are not being used, they are unavailable in the battles against racism, antisemitism, heterosexism, xenophobia. Because they seem unable to accept who they are, these women too often fail to examine and pursue the powers relative to their identity. They waste that power, or worse, turn it over to their enemies. Four decades after National Socialism, the question still lingers for many white German women: how can I draw strength from my roots when those roots are entwined in such a terrible history? That terror of self-scrutiny is sometimes disguised as an unbearable arrogance, impotent and wasteful.

The words of these Black German women document their rejection of despair, of blindness, of silence. Once an oppression is expressed, it can be successfully fought.

Farbe Bekennen, "Introduction," 1984

It has been six years since I wrote the above. The appearance of this English translation of *Farbe Bekennen* fulfills the dream I had as I

wrote these words—of making the stories of our Black German sisters—and Afro-German history as a whole—available to the English-speaking Diaspora.

Farbe Bekennen tellingly presents the particular effects of racism in the lives of thirteen contemporary Black German women. And with the research of May Opitz, it also provides us with the little-known history of white racism in Germany and its influence upon Black German men and women, from the first African arrival to the present. It may come as a surprise to many that this period spans several hundred years.

The first book to be published in Germany dealing with Afro-Germans as a national entity, *Farbe Bekennen* resulted in the formation of the *Initiative Schwarze Deutsche* (ISD), the first national organization of Black Germans. There are now ISD groups in several German cities, both East and West. The material in *Farbe Bekennen* gains new importance now at this juncture in German history, when impending reunification raises critical questions about definitions of German identity.

Those of us who trace our roots back to the continent of Africa are spread across every country on earth. As we proceed upon the specific and difficult tasks of survival in the twenty-first century, we of the African Diaspora need to recognize our differences as well as our similarities. We approach our living influenced by an African mode; life as experiences to be learned from rather than merely problems to be solved. We seek what is most fruitful for all people, and less hunger for our children. But we are not the same. Particular histories have fashioned our particular weapons, our particular insights. 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.

Some of these women have sustained and nurturing relationships with their African relatives. Others have grown into Blackness in the almost total absence of a Black community. What does it mean to be defined negatively from birth in one's own country because of a father who one may never see or know? How do you

come to define a cultural identity when you have seen no other Black person throughout your childhood?*

Yet the presence of Africa in Europe goes back before the Roman Empire. A Neanderthal skull, discovered in Dusseldorf, Germany, dates back to the Old Stone Age and is the earliest African type found in Europe. Julius Caesar brought Black legions to Germany, and many never returned. The historical presence of Black Africans in the courts, universities, monasteries, and bedrooms of seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and nineteenth-century Europe comes as a surprise only to those scholars pseudoeducated in europeanized bastions of institutional ethnocentricity. At the University of Wittenberg in the early 1700s, William Anthony Amo, a Guinean who later became a state counselor in Berlin, obtained his doctoral degree for a philosophical work entitled "The Want of Feeling."***

Two Black German elders who tell their stories here represent the second generation of a four-generation African-German family. One of their granddaughters is also a contributor.

Racism cuts a wide and corrosive swath across each of our lives. The overt climate that racism takes can alter according to society and our national situations. But our connections are real. In addition to shaping our individual national identities within the Diaspora, the question pertains for African Americans and African Europeans and African Asians alike: What is our relationship to Africa as a whole? What should be our input into and expectation from strong and independent African states? What is our role as nationals in the liberation struggles of southern Africa? What is our responsibility?

As members of an international community of people of color, how do we strengthen and support each other in our battles against the rising international tide of racism?

I walk into a shiny tourist sweetshop in the newly accessible East Berlin of 1990. The young white German saleswoman looks at me

with aversion, snaps an outraged answer to my first question, then turns her back upon me and my companion until we leave the shop. Once outside, I look back. She turns also. Through the glass door, our eyes meet. That look of hatred she hurls against the glass in my direction is prolonged, intense, and very familiar. I have survived such looks in Jackson, Mississippi, San Francisco, Staten Island, and countless other North American cities.

I read the pages of *Farbe Bekennen* and there is no question our war is the same.

I write these words at a time when West Berlin, like all of Germany, is becoming a very different place from the insulated, internationally flavored city of six years ago. The grim wall that once enclosed this city kept it at an equal distance from West Germany and the rest of Europe. At the same time, it provided a veil of international glamour. Now the wall is down.

Geographically and politically, Germany stands at the center of Europe. Reunified, it will once again represent a powerful force in European affairs. Historically, this force has not been a peaceful one. A new Germany's potential power, and the relative part they will play in influencing the direction of that power—are part of the destiny of African-Germans, just as the political positions of the United States are a part of the destiny of African Americans.

Without a vision, every social change feels like death. Today, there are passions of violent hatred being loosened in East and West Germany, stoked by furies of bewilderment, displaced aggression at chaotic change, and despair at the collapsing textures of daily living. But these passions are not new in German history. Six million dead Jews and hundreds of thousands of dead, tortured, and castrated homosexuals, so-called gypsies, Poles, and people of color attest to what can happen when such passions are unleashed and directed into an ideology.

In East Germany after World War II, communism suppressed fascism but it did not destroy it. Racism, anti-semitism, and xenophobia were severely legislated against in the East, but never admitted nor examined as a national reality. They remain an unaltered psychic time bomb in the national consciousness. These

*With thanks to Ike Hugel for our conversation of July 10, 1990.

** See May Opitz's discussion; also Ivan Van Serina, ed., *African Presence in Early Europe* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1985).

and drinking beer. I feel myself assume a fighting stance as I read. For the first time in six years I am afraid as I read my poetry in Germany. I ask our Afro-German brothers to walk with us back to our car as we leave for Berlin. The beer drinkers lining the staircase as we leave do not know one of our Afro-German sisters is a black belt in Tai-kwan-do.

Black Germans are not passively accepting this state of affairs. East and West, Afro-Germans are coming together for support and action, often in coalition with other groups. They are learning to identify and use their power, however relative, for their own survival and toward the redefinition of a national German consciousness.

Members of the African Diaspora are connected by heritage although separated by birth. We can draw strength from that connectedness. African Americans and Afro-Europeans incorporate within our consciousness certain splits and alienations of identity. At the same time we concentrate within our being the possibility of fusing the best of all our heritages. We are the hyphenated people, spread across every continent of the globe, members of that international community of people of color who make up seven-eighths of the world's population.

The essence of a truly global feminism is the recognition of connection. Women in Micronesia bear babies who have no bones because of our history of nuclear testing in the South Pacific. In 1964 the CIA fingered Nelson Mandela for the South African police, resulting in his twenty-seven-year imprisonment. With the connivance of such senators as Jesse Helms, the United States sends millions in aid to the South African-backed UNITA forces in Angola, but less than 2 percent of U.S. aid goes to all the countries of the Caribbean. Women farm workers in Jamaica are some of the lowest paid in the world. Yet at the beginning of 1990, while aid to Eastern Europe ballooned, aid to Jamaica was cut by 80 percent.

American women of whatever color cannot afford to indulge ourselves in the parochial attitudes that often blind us to the rest of the world. The Black German women included in this book offer some insights into the complexities of a future global feminism.

This book serves to remind African-American women that we

forces are now finding their physical expression in the sharp increase of attacks upon all people of color, foreign guest workers as well as Black Germans.

Such attacks are also increasing in West Germany, encouraged by the same dormant neo-nazi element and stimulated by the prospect of a unification that will provide an economic and political climate within which to express this element. West Berlin children squirt water guns at a Black woman on the Kurfürstendamm. They use "Jew" as a curse word against any white neighbor their parents dislike, and do not even know what the word means. And this aggressive racism and anti-semitism in Germany have been further nurtured by the spread of a worldwide reactionary conservatism whose chief spokespeople for the past ten years have been Britain's prime minister Margaret Thatcher and the United States' president Ronald Reagan.

Communities of the African Diaspora are national minorities in the countries of their birth, but considered together with the populations of the African continent, the balance changes. Globally, the rising tide of reactionary conservatism can be seen as a case of the white superpowers, East and West, deciding to come together despite their ideological differences, because, with the imminent liberation of southern Africa, even they can see the handwriting on the wall.

In West Germany within the last two months of the summer of 1990, young Turkish boys were stoned to death. A Pakistani student was fatally beaten on the steps of a university in West Berlin. Afro-German women were verbally accosted on the daytime subway in Berlin by skinheads, while the white passengers looked on silently. In Dresden, East Germany, a Turkish woman was beaten and her teeth kicked in by a gang of male sports fans while local police watched.

Two nights after the occurrence, at a poetry reading in Dresden, I speak about the need to organize against such happenings. The audience is mostly white women, and young Afro-German men and women. Black and white women from East and West Berlin guard the door. Through the glass door as I speak, I can see large young white men outside bending down and peering in, laughing

are not alone in our world situation. In the face of new international alignments, vital connections and differences exist that need to be examined between African-European, African-Asian, African-American women, as well as between us and our African sisters. The first steps in examining these connections are to identify ourselves, to recognize each other, and to listen carefully to each other's stories.

In the interest of all our survivals and the survival of our children, these Black German women claim their color and their voices.

Audre Lorde
St. Croix, USVI
July 30, 1990

Preface to the English Language Edition

Dear Readers,

Six years have passed since we began work in 1984 on *Showing Our Colors*. In that time, changes—some of which are the result of this book—have taken place in German society. The isolation of Black people in Germany, which is described in the testimonies in *Showing Our Colors*, is still a fact, to be sure, and especially for those who have no contact with other Black Germans.

The question of how many Blacks there are in Germany is a difficult and political one. It is usually asked to silence us and to prove that we are only a marginal problem. But it is obvious that even in countries where there is a greater proportion of Blacks in the population, Blacks are not automatically accorded recognition or equality.

There are no statistics on the number of Black people in the population of the Federal Republic. If there were such data they would be significant only in that they would help us to gauge how many people must cope with the stress that comes with the racism that is subjectively felt and objectively experienced by a Black person living in a majority white—and, most important, self-defined white—society.

It is, however, a given that the number of Afro-Germans is growing. This point can be substantiated on the basis of certain observations: for example, fifteen years ago one could find perhaps one or two Black children in a Berlin school, whereas now there may be between five and ten such children; at least one Black child

**Racism, Sexism, and
Precolonial Images of
Africa in Germany**

MAY OPITZ

Precolonial Images of Africa, Colonialism, and Fascism



Portrait of an Ethiopian (an employee in one of the large trading firms of Augsburg), Albrecht Dürer, 1508

The First Africans in Germany

There is no precise method of determining when the first Africans came to Germany and when the first Afro-Germans were born. The first "half-breed" person in literature appears in *Parsival*.¹ Several paintings have survived from the twelfth century that depict Africans living in Germany. Until well into the nineteenth century, German contacts with Africa were limited to trade relations. The large commercial houses of Fugger, Welser, and Imhoff, in particular, were the first to finance some of the flotillas, which since the Middle Ages have traded under Portuguese and Spanish flags.² Initially these commercial ventures brought gold, ivory, spices, and other raw materials to Europe. Later, human beings were also shipped to Europe in increasing numbers as "tokens"—traded or taken as security for contractual agreements. According to historian Joseph Ki-Zerbo, humans were carried away primarily to prove that the Europeans had really been to Africa and to satisfy the curiosity of compatriots who wanted to see what Black people looked like.³

There are no figures available as to how many Blacks lived in Germany during the Middle Ages. In the mid-sixteenth century, one-tenth of the population in the Portuguese capital were Black slaves, and, as in France and England, it was probably also true in Germany—albeit less common—that having such an exotic figure in one's livery, parlor, and stable was the thing to do.⁴

The unique story of A. W. Amo has come from the eighteenth century. A Ghanaian, he was brought to Germany in 1703 as a

present to Count Anton Ulrich von Wolfenbüttel⁵ from the Dutch West India Company, one of the biggest slave trading enterprises of the time.⁶ The count and his son assumed sponsorship of Amo and sent him to the University of Halle, whose great fame was enhanced by a faculty that included a number of important figures of the Enlightenment. Given the thinking of the times, it was highly unusual that the count and his son "didn't stick the boy into a servant's outfit and turn him into a rich man's toy."⁷

Amo became one of the most important exponents of Christian von Wolff's philosophy, and, as a follower of John Locke's and Descartes's mechanical philosophy, he was prominent in the fight against the early Lutheran and pietistic clerics. His first scholarly work concerned the rights of the Moors in Europe and was published in 1729 under the Latin title *De juro mauro in Europa*. This work has been lost. Amo later taught as a lecturer at the universities of Halle, Wittenberg, and Jena. Manfred Paefgen mentions that Amo was appointed by Fredrick William I as a member of the State Council of the Prussian crown at the court in Berlin.⁸

Amo returned to Ghana in 1743, no longer able to withstand the increasing attacks by racial theorists. In Ghana (then known as the "Gold Coast") he once again wound up in the hands of slave traders. He "was surely one of the few Africans in West Africa who knew of the tragic fate of the slaves and was personally affected. For this reason he was moved into Fort San Sebastian, where he was under the complete control of slave hunters. He died shortly thereafter and lies buried in front of the fort."⁹

At the same time, another African had a "career" in Russia as "Peter the Great's Moor," under the name of Ibrahim Petrovich Hannibal. A century later (1847-48), a king's son, Aquasi Boachi, prince of Ashantiland, who was brought to Germany as security for a contract, became the first African to study at the Mining Academy of Freiberg.¹⁰

The Middle Ages: "Moors" and White Christians

The changes in the use of the terms "Moor" and "Negro" mirror the changes in Germany's and, more generally, Europe's relations with

Africa. "Moor" is the oldest German term for people of different skin color and during the high Middle Ages served to differentiate between Black and white heathens. *Môr*, from Latin *mauri*, was coined in the course of the conflict between Christians and Muslims in North Africa. It was, therefore, physical difference and unfamiliar belief systems that first characterized this concept.¹¹

Poliakov et al. point out that in medieval pictures one of the three wise men is depicted as a Black man and conclude that prejudice toward others was not as yet linked to skin color. As further evidence, they point to the medieval preference for fantastic stories set in the Orient.¹² It is hard to know if, in and of itself, this is significant. Heinrich Pleticha sees the Blacks in these stories depicted as fabulous creatures neither human nor animal: "They are situated on the level of exotic plants and animals. The essential feature is that the aura of the wild and uncanny is attached to them."¹³

Revealing indications of the low esteem in which Blacks were held are found in the ecclesiastical vocabulary of the time, where "Egyptian" is sometimes used as a synonym for the devil.¹⁴ In addition, there are examples in literature where white people were depicted with the blackness of the Moors, because they deviated in some way from the norm. One example is the version of the "Ywain legend," as written by Hartmann von Aue around 1200 ("Was welt ir daz der tôre tuo?" [What shall the madman do?]).¹⁵ The *Tôr* turns as black as a "Môr" and frightens people wherever he goes.

In all descriptions of witches, black became the mark of evil, but it was also used in other contexts. For example, an unfeminine woman was often "blackened." Thus the hero in Wirnt von Grafenberg's "Wigalois" is confronted by a female monster: black, ugly, and ill-mannered, a "freak."¹⁶ The same is seen in "Wolfdietrich's Saga," an anonymous poem from the mid-thirteenth century:

A monstrous woman, born in the wild, came toward him through the trees. There was never a bigger woman. The noble knight thought to himself: "O dear Christ, protect me!" Two monstrous breasts hung from her body. "Whoever gets you," the wise knight spoke, "gets the devil's mother, I do believe." Her body was created blacker than coal. Her nose hung over her chin; long and black was her hair. . . .¹⁷

The "monstrous woman" who approaches the "noble knight" in the woods ("through the trees") frightens him because of her immeasurable size, projected by her disproportionate ("monstrous") breasts. The knight prays for protection in his hour of need, thinking he recognizes the unmistakable features of the devil's mother in the lips blacker than coal, the nose hanging over her chin, and the long black hair.

In Christian symbolism, "black" embodies the essence of the undesirable, the ugly, the objectionable. Religiously inspired prejudices were thus able to perpetuate the negative image of the Black, by linking it to the particular Christian-patriarchal conceptions of the prototype of the "evil villain," already indicated in the projection of black color on whites (see above). Until the eighteenth century, prejudices toward Blacks were largely unconnected to ideas about the existence of different races. It was only in the age of Enlightenment that a clear change came about as one result of the rapid colonization of African countries south of the Sahara.

From "Moors" to "Negroes"

In the eighteenth century, "Negro" became a German concept. As an expansion and replacement for the term "Moor," it was used to describe people south of the Sahara and served "further as the term for the black race as such."¹⁸ In contrast to "Moor," which did not differentiate between lighter and darker Africans, the new term signified the ideological separation of Africa into white and black regions¹⁹ with the increasing colonization of the continent. Frantz Fanon characterizes the division as follows:

Africa is divided into black and white, and the names that are substituted—Africa South of the Sahara, Africa North of the Sahara—do not manage to hide this latent racism.²⁰ Here it is affirmed that White Africa has a thousand-year-old tradition of culture; that she is Mediterranean, that she is a continuation of Europe, and that she shares in Greco-Latin civilization. Black Africa is looked on as a region that is inert, brutal, uncivilized, in a word, savage.²¹

In the course of colonial exploitation, enslavement, and domination "Negro" (from Latin *niger*, i.e., black) became an especially

negative epithet. The thinking underlying this label attempted to link physical characteristics with intellectual and cultural ones.

The botanist Carl von Linné, who was the first to illustrate the place of the human within the animal kingdom, in his *Systema naturae* (1735), continued for decades to posit only somatic criteria as distinctive. It was not until the tenth edition of his publication (1758) that he made connections with the psyche.

In the order now named primate, *homo sapiens* is identified by various cultura, loco. The presentation of his varieties refers to skin color, hair, eyes, nose, as well as to posture, character, temperament, and mind, and also to the criteria regitur and regitur, clothing and customs.²² Thus, at the same time it takes on a significant valuation, whether it is the acerbic, choleric temperament of the American, the inventive European, . . . ruled by laws, . . . the melancholy, haughty, splendid- and money-loving Asian, or the African, of evil, lazy, and careless disposition, ruled by despotism.²³

Winckelmann's aesthetic anthropology was oriented in its theory of typology to the classical ideals of beauty of the Greeks. He claimed that the temperate climate of Greece produced the ideal type of human being. "Misformations" increased according to the distance from the climatically favorable center. "The pinched nose of the Kalmucks, the Chinese, and other outlying peoples is . . . a deviation, for it interrupts the unity of form. . . . The protruding, bulging mouth that the moors have in common with the monkeys in their country is a superfluous growth . . . , caused by the heat of their climate."²⁴

With the decline of the medieval perception of the world, in which God was accepted as the direct creator of all being, discussions proliferated concerning the genesis and determination of the human race. Central to these discussions was whether all humans shared a common origin. Were the differences among humans the result of genetic difference or mutable environmental influences? George Louis Leclerc, count of Buffon, was the first to draft a theory of evolution based on anatomical knowledge. He started with an assumption of the unity of the human race and linked the various races to climatic zones. In his reflections on the subject,

tion, classification of groups of people, and collection, or appropriation, of artifacts. On this point, an excerpt from the notes of the ethnologic traveler Adolf Bastian:

There is much talk of the extinction of the primitive peoples. Physical extinction, to the degree that it takes place, is not the crucial issue, for it is dependent on the almighty flow of history, which can be neither stemmed nor averted. But we are concerned here with psychic extinction, the loss of ethnic originalities before they are secured in literature and museums for study. Such a loss threatens our future inductive calculations with all kinds of falsifications and could put the very possibility of a human science in doubt.³²

Ethnologists used their own group as the standard when defining, valuing, and judging other population groups as "primitive."

Terms for these concepts were invented for the purpose of describing other peoples and cultures, but at the same time they belonged to—or ultimately became—the vocabulary of curse words and invectives of the naming group: "Barbaric," "primitive," "uncivilized" express the ethnocentrically constructed opposite of a world that could at best be associated with remote eras and living conditions overcome long ago (as, for example, in the "deepest dark ages"). The customary differentiation into "primitive" and "civilized" peoples reduces other peoples' forms of expression more to natural reaction than to self-motivated accomplishment. Hidden behind this separation is a conception such as that clearly formulated by Hegel in the nineteenth century:

As soon as man emerges as a human being, he stands in opposition to nature, and it is this alone which makes him a human being. But if he has merely made a distinction between himself and nature, he is still at the first stage of his development: he is dominated by passion, and is nothing more than a savage.³³

"Race": *The Construction of a Concept*

The concept of "race" can be traced to the thirteenth century and the region of the Romance languages. Not until the sixteenth century, however, did it become customary to use it to describe privileged membership and descent.

"Buffon considered very seriously whether Blacks could be transplanted to Denmark and isolated from the rest of the population in order to determine how many generations it would take until they turned white again, thus discovering how long it had taken for them to become black."²⁵ That the thought did not occur to him to send Europeans to Africa to see whether they would become black over time might be related to the fact that he, too, "esteemed the white European race as the most beautiful and best, above the races of black, red, and yellow people in Africa, America, and Asia."²⁶

The concept of an ideal human being, which gained ascendancy in nineteenth-century Europe—that of an emotionless, rational, and efficient person—was developed in accord with the growing needs of industrial capitalism. Other modes of living, cultural forms, and production technologies were similarly devalued, as were physical forms of expression and appearance that did not correspond to the sober aesthetics of classicism.

With the equating of civilization and work (which, in its limited or modern meaning, was understood as differentiated production of wares for individual profit), evolutionary anthropology of the late nineteenth century identifies civilization with the industrial occident and constructs a typology of society on the basis of its respective technical standards.²⁷

The outward appearance of Africans (particularly their color) and their subsistence economy made them the polar opposite of the "beautiful," "modern" man.²⁸ In general, in the eighteenth century, Africans were seen as the lowest human form, thought to be related to the highest animal form, the monkey.²⁹ "Europeans appeared . . . in contrast to the primitives, who were calcifying in a state of backward irrationality, to stand at the head of the cultural and technological evolution of humankind."³⁰

Out of this stance, ethnology came to be conceived, in the nineteenth century, as the opposite of historiography—as a science that made "peoples without a history" its subject matter.³¹

The principal objective of ethnological expeditions was not personal contacts with other peoples but rather abstract observa-

The fact that theories of race were developed and circulated exclusively in continental Europe makes it clear that "race" is a social endorsement that has little to do with biological difference. Consequently, whenever "race" is invoked it is understood as a relational concept that consists of distinctions drawn between one's own group (in group) and another group (out group), whereby ascribed characteristics such as skin color, behavior, religion, and so on are interpreted as "racial characteristics."

Sexism and Racism

I have pointed out that for the classification of other peoples, the qualities taken as the standard were those supposedly characteristic of the ideal type—the modern European. Upon closer examination, a further restriction must be made. "Jews, but also Italians, French, and Slavs counted as female to the Germans."³⁸ Gustav Klemm (1802–1867), in his ten-volume publication on general cultural history, makes a distinction between "active male" and "passive female" peoples. The former were the peoples of discoveries, inventions, and legal systems; the latter, those "who have always lived their lives, modest in their demands, satisfied with what life afforded them, and without political ambitions."³⁹

The racist and sexist oppression and denigration of other peoples and cultures should/must be placed in the context of events following the fifteenth century in central Europe. Early modern times—not the "Dark" Ages—were characterized by religious wars and burnings at the stake. At least nine million women—a number of sources indicate there were as many as thirty-two million—were burned as "witches" during the new, enlightened times, in attempt to purify them of ominous suspicious and alien powers. The triumphal march of science, of alienated industrial labor, and of the new global view was attainable apparently only through the annihilation of everything eccentric or unmanageable, especially women. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, after three hundred years of persecutions and murders of women, the rising bourgeoisie offered a new female ideal, characterized more than ever by passivity:

Two historical events in particular had a decided influence on the early concept of race: The Spanish *Reconquista* and the discussion of nobility in France. With the Spanish mandatory-conversion edict of 1492, Jews entered European consciousness as a "race," their peculiar status being further sealed by the claim for "purity of blood," *limpieza de sangre*, designed to exclude them as a powerful group from Spanish society, over and above the conversion.³⁴

In France the nobility attempted to use the concept of race to explain its privileges through heredity, thereby securing its position against the rising power of the nonhereditary nobility (the middle class) through the institution of peerage.

Arthur Count de Gobineau (1816–1882) was one of the leading race theorists and the first to propose a biological explanation for any inequality in the cultural, social, and political sphere. Enlightened ideas of equality were necessarily unacceptable to him since as a nobleman he belonged to that group that profited from the static relationships of the aristocratic order. His race theories presented a paradigm diametrically opposed to the ideas of the Enlightenment. Gobineau interpreted every social change as a sign of decay. Using his assumptions about the inequality of human races as a basis, he traced nearly every social hierarchy to racial differences.³⁵

From then on the division of humanity into "races" went far beyond the bounds of the classifications suggested in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Not just whites, blacks, Indians, and yellows were compared. Within the European group there were "historical" races, which were as essentially different from one another as the white and black races could ever be. The white "race" until that time, an example of monolithic integrity, was being broken down into "subraces."³⁶

Thus, in the course of the history of its usage "race" became a political catchword that linked social position with kinship. For Michael Traber "race" is "endorsement of a many-sided polarization":

1. spiritual polarization: "chosen—depraved"
2. status polarization: "aristocrats—commoners"
3. class polarization: "bourgeoisie—proletariat"
4. political polarization: "rulers—subjects"³⁷

Thus, the middle-class wife gradually was relegated as "a non-working woman" to the sphere of custodial reproductive *work* (giving birth, rearing children, creating a homey atmosphere); the husband, by contrast, embodied more and more the role of the man operating autonomously, who functioned in the public sphere and, as breadwinner, controlled property and dependent relationships.

The middle-class theoreticians of the Enlightenment did indeed call for substitution of contracts, made by equal partners of their own free will, for tradition and custom, as the basis for human intercourse; but, in truth, the theorists principally represented male interests. Women and children were placed, as a rule, under the "protection" of the man and thus silenced. The thinking of English philosopher John Locke (1632-1704) is an example of Enlightenment theories.

Rights of women and children to family property occur in Locke only in repudiation of the rights of third parties, particularly the State or other political powers. Within the internal relationship of the family, children and wife had no claims whatsoever against the husband and father.⁴⁴

The subordinate status of women was no longer justified as the will of God and sealed by original sin, but was now seen as derived from the "natural character" of wife and mother. In this manner, social inequality was the result of biology and was still immutable: women were "by nature" passive and emotional, so men were justified in unquestioningly imposing repetitious duties and a housewife existence upon them, which, because these were natural obligations, did not necessitate remuneration.

For Fichte a wife could only exist as a complement to her husband's rational nature provided that she was able to spiritualize her sexual desire and accommodate her husband's needs:

In the unspoiled wife there is no manifestation of any sexual desire, but rather only love; and this love is the natural desire of the wife to satisfy her husband. . . .

Only in this manner does the desire to give herself take on the character of freedom and duty that it must have, to be able to exist next

He [the man] is her natural representative in the State and in the society as a whole. This is her relationship to the society, her public relationship.

A reasonable and virtuous woman can be proud only of her husband and children; not of herself, for she forgets herself in them.⁴⁰

Not until the eighteenth century did "family" become an enclosed entity, which essentially remained limited to a circle of immediate relations (parents and children) and was separate from the remunerated, public sphere of production. The shift developed with the rise of wage labor and the needs of the capitalist economy for a mobile work force that could change its residence. In the preceding centuries, "family" had been a productive economic unit, which, in addition to parents and children, included other relatives and servants and lived largely independent of a market economy.⁴¹ Although in the Middle Ages the family was already patriarchally organized, with legal and social privileges accorded to the husband as head of the household, it was not until conditions of production changed that economic and ideological structures forced unemployed women into economic and emotional dependency on men. With the creation of a private sphere and the relocation of production away from the home, the role developed for the middle-class wife as tender, loving, caring mate, homemaker, and mother—closed off from the world of occupational and political life.⁴² This disempowerment was embellished and idealized, although in the eighteenth century the majority of German women did not fit the new feminine ideal because they were doing heavy labor in factories, or in any case, most did not belong to the bourgeoisie.

The concept of marriage as a spiritual and emotional community, of the family as the place for educating a person to a social-cultural being were products of this epoch. On this basis there arose the nineteenth-century model of the middle-class family as a well-situated nuclear family, in which the father determined the social position, the mother created the home atmosphere, both bound in marital love (whatever that might be), bound in the interest of rearing accomplished and well-behaved children, who, in their choice of profession and mate, followed the wishes of their parents.⁴³

The projections that justify the relationship of men as masters to women as disposable fit the stereotypical image of naturally ascribed characteristics, which is projected onto creatures considered to be "primitive." Hence, the alleged emphasis of "affectivity over rationality, instinct over intellect, immediate perception over abstraction; and mental and cultural immobility over the dynamics of history."⁴⁸

Notes

1. Jörg Becker, *Alltäglicher Rassismus* (Frankfurt, 1977), p. 206. See also Wolfram v. Eschenbach, *Perzival*, ed. Albert von Leitzmann, 7th ed. (Tübingen, 1967), vols. 1-6, no. 1.
2. Manfred Paefgen, *Das Bild Schwarz-Afrikas in der Öffentlichen Meinung der BRD 1949-1972* (München, 1976), p. 18.
3. Joseph Ki-Zerbo, *Histoire de l'Afrique noire d'hier à demain* (Paris, 1978), p. 208.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 209.
5. My information for this section is drawn primarily from Burkhard Brentjes's essay "Der erste afrikanische Student in Halle," in *Der Beitrag der Völker Afrikas zur Weltkultur*, ed. Burkhard Brentjes (Halle, 1977).
6. In the eighteenth century, Germany was still splintered into many small principalities and did not yet possess a navy.
7. Brentjes, "Der erste afrikanische Student," p. 4.
8. Paefgen, *Das Bild Schwarz-Afrikas*, p. 9. Paefgen gives no date.
9. Brentjes, "Der erste afrikanische Student," p. 5. Brentjes gives no geographical specifics about the location of the fort.
10. *Ibid.*, gives some information about their lives.
11. See Sander Gilman, *On Blackness without Blacks: Essays on the Image of the Black in Germany* (Boston, 1982), p. xii.
12. See Léon Poliakov, Christian Delacampagne, and Patrick Girard, *Über den Rassismus: 16 Kapitel zur Anatomie, Geschichte und Deutung des Rassenwahnns* (Frankfurt, 1984), pp. 64, 63.
13. Heinrich Pleticha, "Das Bild des Farbigen in der Jugendliteratur," in *Bücher spiegeln die Welt: Das Bild der Rassen und Völker in der Jugendliteratur*, ed. Horst von Schaller (Insel Mainau, 1969), p. 45.
14. See Becker, *Alltäglicher Rassismus*, p. 64.
15. See Gilman, *On Blackness without Blacks*, p. 12.
16. *Ibid.*
17. "Orneit und Wolfdiertich" from the Wiener Piaristenhandschrift (1906), cited in *ibid.*, p. 12.

to reason. There is probably no man who would not feel the absurdity of the reversal of things, ascribing to the husband a similar desire to satisfy a wife's need; he could neither assume such a need in her nor think of himself as a tool thereof, without being ashamed in the depths of his soul.⁴⁵

Completely contradictory behavior was demanded of the ideal wife. She was supposed to make herself desirable, but not tempting, to be educated, but not self-determining. Indeed, suppression of desire was required of the husband, too, by the constructed contradiction of reason and sensuality, but his socialization led much more easily to a self-conscious, self-responsible, and independent life. Thus the philosopher J.-J. Rousseau demanded an education for his male novice Emile that would make him independent of the opinions of others, but he had entirely different ideas for Sophie:

Nature herself has decreed that woman, both for herself and her children, should be at the mercy of man's judgment. Worth alone will not suffice, a woman must be thought worthy; nor beauty, she must be admired; nor virtue, she must be respected. A woman's honour does not depend on her conduct alone, but on her reputation, and no woman who permits herself to be considered vile is really virtuous. A man has no one but himself to consider, and so long as he does right he may defy public opinion; but when a woman does right her task is only half finished, and what people think of her matters as much as what she really is. Hence her education must, in this respect, be different from man's education. "What will people think" is the grave of a man's virtue and the throne of a woman's.⁴⁶

In that sense women were socialized into a gender-specific role, and the "product" of this training was explained as the true essence of woman.

Thus Scheler claims that

Woman is more guided by closeness to the earth, and to plant life, more unified in all experience and led more strongly by instincts, feeling, and love than Man—she is guardian of tradition, of custom, of all older forms of thought and will, and the eternal braking power of a wagon of civilization and culture racing headlong toward the destination of naked rationality and "progress."⁴⁷

34. Brunner, Conze, and Kosselek, *Historisches Lexikon*, p. 140.
35. Patrick v. Zur Mühlen, *Rassenideologien—Geschichte und Hintergründe* (Berlin-Bonn, 1977), p. 62. See also J. A. de Gobieneau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, 4 vols., 2d ed. (1883; Paris, 1953–55).
36. Poliakov, Delacampagne, and Girard, *Über den Rassismus*, p. 93.
37. Michael Traber, *Rassismus und weiße Vorherrschaft* (Freiburg, 1971), p. 42.
38. Marielouise Jansen-Jurreit, *Sexismus—Über die Abtreibung der Frauenfrage* (München-Wien, 1976), p. 702.
39. Zur Mühlen, *Rassenideologien*, p. 50.
40. Johann G. Fichte, Werke Bd. 3, cited in Annegret Stopczyk, *Was Philosophen über Frauen denken* (München, 1980), p. 143.
41. "Not only was the female labor force thereby devalued to the degree that its critical work functions were eliminated in the course of industrialization and the shift to a money economy—the latter having taken place relatively early in the era of the bourgeoisie. In addition, as the result of the burgeoning propagation of a cult of femininity, woman also experienced a redefinition of value, by which, as the representative of home and hearth, she had imposed upon her a new kind of duty and expected behavior that contrasted with the competitive, harsh, and hostile outside world." Gertraude Kittler, *Hausarbeit: Zur Geschichte einer "Naturressource"* (München, 1980), p. 49.
42. Heinrich Ebel, Rolf Eickelpasch, Eckehard Kühne, *Familie in der Gesellschaft: Gestalt-Standort-Funktion*, Schriftenreihe der Bundeszentrale für pol. Bildung, ed. Vorstand der Arbeitsgemeinschaft kath. soz. Bildungswerke in der BR (AKsB), (Darmstadt, 1983), pp. 49 ff.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 66–67.
44. Barbara Schaeffer-Hegel, "Feministische Wissenschaftskritik: Angriffe auf das Selbstverständliche in den Geisteswissenschaften," in *Mythos Frau, Projektionen und Inszenierungen in Patriarchat*, ed. B. Schaeffer-Hegel and B. Wartmann, 2d ed. (Berlin, 1984), pp. 51–52.
45. Johann G. Fichte, *Fichtes Werke: Erster Anhang des Naturrechts: Grundriß des Familienrechts* (Berlin, 1845–46; Fotomechanischer Nachdruck, 1971), p. 311.
46. From the bildungsroman *Emile* by J.-J. Rousseau (London, 1974), p. 328.
47. Max Scheler, *Vom Umsturz der Werte*, cited in Stopczyk, *War Philosophen*, p. 282.
48. Léclerc, *Anthropologie und Kolonialismus*, p. 12.

18. Uta Sadi, *Der Negermythos am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts in Deutschland—Eine Analyse der Rezeption von Reiseliteratur über Schwarzafrika* (Frankfurt, 1979), p. 1.
19. Paefgen points out that black Africa "is a European invention, referring to the area of the African continent with black-skinned people" (*Das Bild Schwarz-Afrikas*, p. 16).
20. At this point I want to refer to the following definition of racism, which, however, does not take into consideration its connection with sexism (gender-specific prejudice and discrimination): "Racism is the belief in the inequality of human races, in whose name certain races, certain cultures, are subjected to economic exploitation, social separation, and even physical extermination. Any person or policy is racist, whose dealings, conscious or not, are influenced by this belief." (Stefanie and Gabriele von Hohenwart, eds., *Taschenwörterbuch der Ethnologie*, 2d ed. [Berlin, 1982], p. 259.)
21. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York, 1965), p. 161.
22. C. v. Linné, *Systema naturae sive regna systematice proposita per classes, ordines, genera et species* (Leiden, 1735).
23. O. Brunner, W. Conze, and R. Kosselek, eds., *Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* (Stuttgart, 1984), p. 145.
24. J. J. Winckelmann, *Zur Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums*, quoted in Fritz Kramer, *Verkehrte Welten: Zur imaginären Ethnologie des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Frankfurt, 1984), p. 145.
25. Poliakov, Delacampagne, and Girard, *Über den Rassismus*, p. 81.
26. Brunner, Conze, and Kosselek, *Historisches Lexikon*, p. 147.
27. Girard Léclerc, *Anthropologie und Kolonialismus* (München, 1973), p. 12.
28. A subsistence economy is based on the family's own need and not geared toward profit.
29. George L. Mosse, *Rassismus—Ein Krankheitssymptom der europäischen Geschichte des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts* (Königstein/Ts, 1978), p. 11.
30. Poliakov, Delacampagne, and Girard, *Über den Rassismus*, p. 83.
31. Kramer, *Verkehrte Welten*, p. 76.
32. Adolph Bastian, *Der Völkergedanke im Aufbau einer Wissenschaft vom Menschen und seine Begründung in ethnologischen Sammlungen*, cited in *ibid.*, p. 76.
33. Georg W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History* (Introduction: "Reason in History") (Cambridge, 1975), p. 177.

African and Afro-German Women in the Weimar Republic and under National Socialism

30. Bikai D. Galega, *Bildung und Imperialismus in Schwarz-Afrika: Historische und sozio-politische Hintergründe* (Münster, 1984), p. 87.
31. Johann Emonts, *Der armen Heidenkinder Freud und Leid. Ein Missionsbuch für unsere liebe deutsche Jugend* (Aachen, 1923), pp. 28, 77.
32. See Mamozai, *Herrenmenschen*, pp. 95, 113.
33. Until the arrival of the Europeans, prostitution was unknown in Africa. See *ibid.*, p. 113.
34. "In another connection, in judging colonialization, I have added that Europe has gotten on very well indeed with all the local feudal lords who agreed to serve, woven a villainous complicity with them, rendered their tyranny more effective and more efficient, and that it has actually tended to prolong artificially the survival of local pasts in their most pernicious aspects" (Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham [New York, 1972]).
35. Mamozai, *Herrenmenschen*, p. 20. Her citations are from Maria Kahle, *Deutsche Heimat in Brasilien* (Berlin, 1937).
36. Winnie Mandela, *A Part of My Soul Went with Him* (New York, 1985), pp. 49–50.
37. The OAU was founded in 1963 as a political umbrella association of the independent states.
38. Galega, *Bildung und Imperialismus*, p. 244.
39. Dragolyub Najman, *Bildung in Afrika—Vorschläge zur Überwindung der Krise* (Wuppertal, 1976).
40. In Tanzania education reform was approached in conjunction with changes in the overall social-political conception. See Nyerere, "Erziehung zum Vertrauen," and Galega, *Bildung und Imperialismus*, p. 248.
41. D. Najman, *Bildung in Afrika*, p. 80.
42. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York, 1967), p. 140.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 111. (See original text: *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris, 1952).)
44. Awa Thiam, *Speak Out, Black Sisters: Feminism and Oppression in Black Africa*, trans. Dorothy S. Blair (London, 1986), pp. 107–8.
45. *Ibid.*
46. Davis, *Women, Race & Class*, p. 7.
47. Thiam, *Speak Out*, p. 114.
48. Adrienne Rich, *On Lies, Secrets and Silence: Selected Prose 1966–78* (New York, 1979), p. 299.

Defeat and Occupation of the Rhineland: The "Black Scourge"

German colonial rule came to an end in the very first years of World War I. With the exception of German East Africa the German colonies were occupied by French and English troops. For its role in the war, Germany lost all its overseas territories and was required by the cease-fire agreement to consent to the occupation of the left bank of the Rhine as well as the cities of Cologne, Coblenz, Kehl, and Mainz on the right bank. The Treaty of Versailles mandated the occupation by the victorious powers for a period of fifteen years and the gradual withdrawal of troops within this period, as long as Germany abided by the other treaty conditions (keeping up reparations payments, etc.).¹

Black colonial soldiers were also among the ranks of the occupation forces. Hence, when the Rhineland was occupied by French, Belgian, British, and American troops, Black soldiers were among them. The largest portion was in the French army, with between thirty and forty thousand Africans, some from Madagascar and Morocco, but for the most part from Algeria and Tunisia.² During the war, Germany declined—more from necessity than of its own free will, for England had blocked Germany's access to the seaway—to call Blacks into action. Hence it was easy for Germany to denounce the introduction of Blacks as an "act of inhumanity that was dangerous to the German people." In 1920 Field Marshall Hindenberg wrote in his book *Aus meinem Leben*:

Where there were no tanks, the enemy set black waves upon us. We were helpless when they broke into our lines and murdered or, worse, tortured the defenseless. Human indignation and indictment is directed not at the Blacks who carried out such atrocities, but at those who brought such hordes to German soil allegedly to fight in the war for honor, freedom, and justice. Those Blacks were slaughtered by the thousands.³

Hindenburg's comments demonstrate the hypocritical nature of this indictment: he condemns the French for appropriating the Africans for their purposes, but at the same time shows his own bigotry in his remarks about the brutality and bestiality of Africans. The indignation he directs particularly against the French bespeaks more resentment and frustration about the war than any genuine sympathy for the Black people sent to fight the war by the victorious powers. In the final analysis, the German "protection forces" had carried out their conquest in Africa with Black soldiers from other colonies.⁴

Pommerin writes that Hindenburg mentions a few lines later in his book that the Germans were superior to the Blacks in one-on-one combat. From this statement he infers, somewhat paradoxically, "There can be no talk of incipient racism in Germany at that point."⁵ To my way of thinking, however, a clearly emerging racism is evident in Hindenburg's vocabulary, which—looking at the colonial period—parallels the language of the German colonialists. When Pommerin says "incipient," he is, in my opinion, underestimating the continuity between racist tendencies before and during the war.

Nationalism and colonial zeal persisted after Germany's defeat. Supporters and members of the German Colonial Society were among those calling for the revision of the Treaty of Versailles, eager to see Germany alongside the other colonial powers.

Generous funds were put up for colonial propaganda as well as for the popularization of pseudoscientific theories that ascribed a cultural, social, national, or national-social meaning to the colonial policy.

Slogans like those about a "people without room," of colonies as a "national necessity," as a symbol of the "national honor," of "Germany's international prestige," of the "right to colonies," of Germans' "civilizing calling and mission" as part of the white race, to participate in the "education of underdeveloped races" were taught in schools, defended in universities in "scholarly" tracts, preached by speakers at gatherings, and disseminated in newspapers, magazines, brochures, and books of all genres.⁶

We Need Colonies!

Whether Center Party man, whether Democrat,
whether bowling club, whether union—
the voices are quavering.
It screams from flier and placard:
We want a colonial mandate.
We must cultivate!

Then the Wild Bills and the Romeos
would have a corner of land
to work off their raring energies.
So, hold fast to the word.
It's about the fight for German Southwest.⁷
We must cultivate!

The black man wants to come back to us,
to the whip, drill, and lover's luck
and Prussian manners.
Let's tear the dark continent piece by piece
from the foreign menace.
We must cultivate!

KARL SCHNAG⁸

In the consciousness of the colonial avengers Blacks remained subhuman creatures to be civilized and disciplined. It is no wonder, then, that the occupation by Black soldiers was felt by much of the German population to be especially humiliating. People of "lower

race" and "lower origin" had achieved the right to enter as an occupying force.

"Black Rapists" and "Rhineland Bastards"

Shortly after the arrival of the occupation troops, all political parties, with the exception of the Socialist party, submitted a parliamentary petition calling for the withdrawal of Black Troops.

Despite the peace accord, the French and Belgians are still using colored troops in the occupied Rhineland territories. Germans feel this improper use of the coloreds to be a disgrace and observé with growing indignation that they are exercising rights of sovereignty in German cultural territories. For German women and children—boys and men—these wild people are a dreadful danger. Their honor, life and limb, purity and innocence are being destroyed. More and more cases are coming to light in which colored troops have defiled German women and children, injuring, even killing, resisters. Only the smallest portion of the perpetrated atrocities are reported. Shame, fear of cruel vengeance close the mouths of the unfortunate victims and their families. At the behest of the French and Belgian authorities public houses are established in the territories occupied by them, in front of which



Advertisement for Hildebrand's German Chocolates, portraying Hermann von Wissman, governor of German East Africa (1895-96)

colored troops crowd in droves, and there German women are exposed to them. All over the world, increasingly outraged voices are being raised, condemning this indelible disgrace. Is the Imperial government cognizant of these occurrences, unworthy of human beings? What does it plan to do?⁹

As "victors," German soldiers in the colonies assumed the right to rape the women of foreign peoples. As a defeated nation, it was now German women who were subjected to rape by the "victors." The parliamentary petition did not attack this unwritten male right to enslave women, but merely propagated the myth of the "disgrace to the race." That was the context of the talk of "improper use" and "wild people." Where were complaints against white soldiers and white German soldiers to be heard? Luise Zietz, representative from the Socialist party, was one of the few who protested against the double standard of morals:

I want to further point out that the petitioners, who are now justifiably turning against the beastly acts of brutality in the occupied territory, found no word of protest when in Germany our own mercenaries perpetrated such beastly acts of brutality against German women. . . . I refer only to my fervent plea in Weimar to get the women representatives to unite in a protest against the many brutalities and violations of decency by the German soldiers against German women. . . . I linked it to a special case, where in Hamburg Noske's troops treated a woman in the most unheard-of manner, arresting the woman, beating her terribly, hoisting her skirts over her head and whipping her naked body, knocking her teeth out of her mouth, and abusing her in the most egregious manner. And what did the women representatives whom I asked to join me in a protest tell me? Oh no, we don't want to publicize that. . . . we'd better leave it alone.¹⁰

As for the German soldiers abroad, their behavior during the so-called campaign of the Huns in China is described as follows:

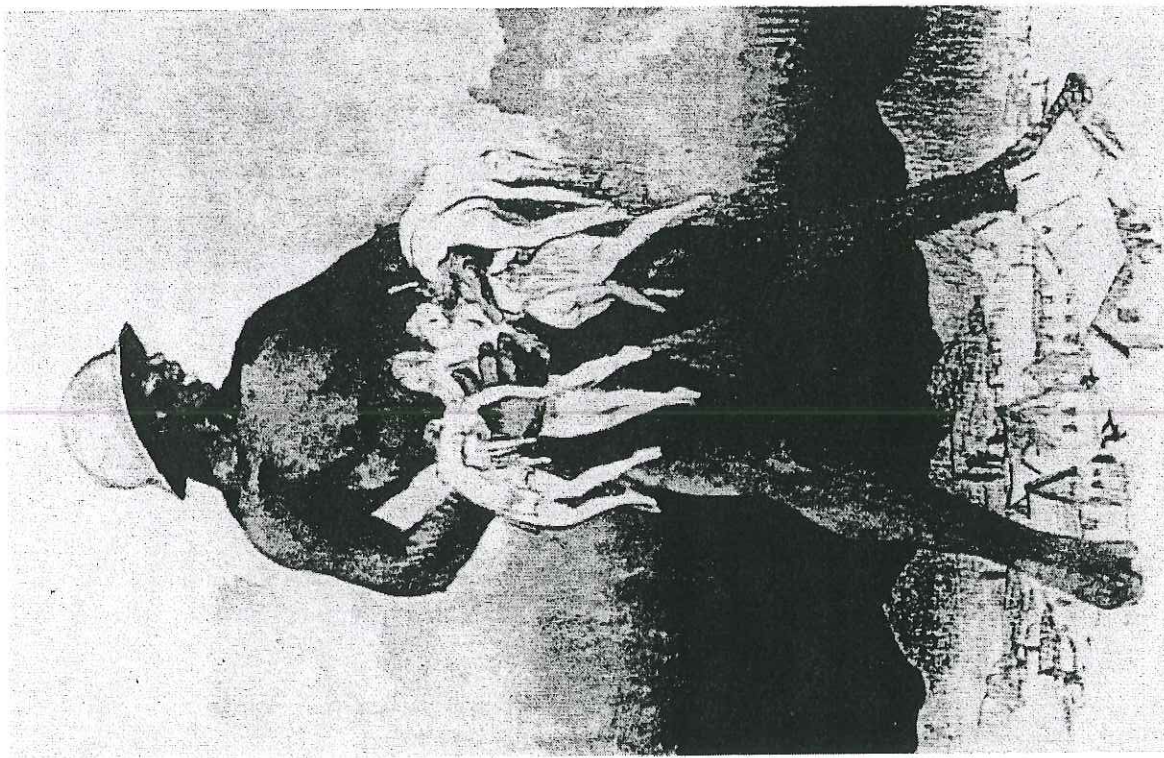
At that time reports were substantiated that in China, Germans set up bordellos, to which Chinese women were brought and abused by German soldiers. Fearful of being taken to these bordellos or of being raped by the soldiers, the Chinese women jumped into the well, preferring to drown in the water than to be subjected to the brutalities of the German soldiers.¹¹



A medal of the Bavarian mint (1920), from a plate by the Nazi graphic artist Karl Goetz. On one side, a long-haired blonde woman is shackled to an oversized, helmeted penis, which is meant to represent a Black French soldier. The caption reads "Black Infamy." On the reverse, there is a Black soldier whose foreignness is expressed with overemphasized facial features and an earring. The words "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité" are meant to be ironic and are representative of the open enmity directed at Black and white Frenchmen.

The greatly exaggerated stories of the particular brutality of the Blacks and of their uncontrolled physical urges nevertheless had the effect of denigrating and eliminating these male competitors for white women. White women became more inclined to place themselves under the "protection" of white men. One representative of the Bavarian Popular party pointed as laudable examples to America, "where a Negro is lynched if he assaults a white woman, and to England, which before the war required that no white woman work in the presence of coloreds in India or Ceylon, so as not to degrade the woman."¹² Incidents of rape that white German men/husbands perpetrated on women seemed irrelevant in view of the indisputably more frightful sexual offenses by Blacks.

For a long time, the birth of Black children in the occupied territories was not discussed either in public or in parliament. This was in part because their numbers were inconsequential, but also because it was difficult to reconcile the statements of the mothers with the image of the "black rapist," "for as we know from a later official investigation, only one mother attributed the conception of her child to rape."¹³



"Jumbo": a poster intended to depict the stationing of Black French soldiers in Germany after 1918

That a German woman might voluntarily associate with a French man—and a Black one at that—simply had to be overlooked by the Germans. To the degree that Afro-Germans did come under public scrutiny, the assumption of their particular form of inferiority was undebated, since they counted as “not even pure-blooded.” For example, a newspaper report in *Germania* in September 1920 carried the statement that it was a well-known fact that “half-breed” children would inherit the defects of both parents.¹⁴ This claim can be traced back to the race theory of Gobineau, who, in his pessimistic conception of history, was known to have interpreted any social and cultural change as an instance of decline.

A Swedish pastor named Liljeblad was the first to become interested in statistics and other official documents on Afro-German children. He traveled to Germany especially to do research. The motive for his investigations becomes evident in his claim that he had met children in Germany with the most varied appearance, including one with black and white stripes on his back. In his essay “The World’s Shame on the Rhine,” which he published after his visit to Germany, he made bold estimates, based on a birthrate of 1,500 children per year, that by the end of fifteen years of occupation, the total number of Afro-Germans would approach 27,000. The actual number of Black children according to official statistics at the time of his publication (1924) was only 78.¹⁵

Even if, in order to “conceal any forms of ‘fraternizing’ between the population of the Rhineland and the occupation soldiers,”¹⁶ Liljeblad’s figures had not been published, the birth of Afro-Germans attracted increasing attention. The ostracism of and attacks on Afro-German children and their mothers began not with National Socialism, but as early as the Weimar Republic. In addition to the controversial names “half-breed” and “mulatto”¹⁷ Afro-German children often were called “bastards” unreservedly.

The Society for Racial Hygiene (founded in 1905) began conducting sterilizations for “eugenic reasons” in 1919 for the protection and elimination of “racial diseases.” In 1927, the commissioner of the Palatinate informed the Imperial Bureau of Health that considerable cause for concern would arise as these Black

children matured. He inquired whether it was not possible to render those children infertile through a painless operation when they reached puberty.¹⁸ At that time there was no legal basis for such medical intervention, and restrictions governing sterilization stated that illegitimate children, who generally had the citizenship of their mothers, required a parent’s consent for any such intervention, and only in very rare cases, under duress, was it given. However, it is difficult to prove at this late date how many children were secretly sterilized or allowed to disappear, or who grew up in welfare institutions rather than under the protection of family or other caretakers. In the mid-1920s, the Imperial Ministry had already considered handing over “the half-breeds” to mission societies, with enough financial support to send them abroad.¹⁹ Quite apart from that, it was easily possible to sterilize children under the guise of preventing a “racial disease,” as long as no one had them in protective custody.

Protection of the Family and Forced Sterilization: Disgrace to the Race and Colonial Propaganda

In 1928 Hitler wrote in *Mein Kampf*:

It was and is the Jews who bring the Negro to the Rhine, always with the same concealed thought and the clear goal of destroying, by the bastardization which would necessarily set in, the white race which they hate, to throw it down from its cultural and political height and in turn to rise personally to the position of master.²⁰

With the rise of National Socialism, race anthropologists demanded more and more openly that mothers of Afro-Germans not only be granted the right to terminate pregnancy, but that they should be forced to do so.²¹ The calls for strict measures for handling those already born also grew stronger. Dr. Hans Macco, in his tract “Race Problems in the Third Reich” claimed: “These mulatto children were either conceived through force or else the white mother was a prostitute. In both cases there is not the slightest moral obligation to these offspring of alien-race.”²²

In contrast to Gobineau, who in his resigned interpretation of

the future thought that the demise of Aryans was unavoidable, his National Socialist followers were convinced that the "inferior genetic inheritance" could be weeded out and the master race consciously bred by means of rigorous state intervention in matters of birth control, marriage laws, and sterilization.

Immediately following Hitler's seizure of power in 1933, laws were enacted penalizing sterilization and abortion on demand. At the same time, laws were introduced mandating sterilization for reasons of racial hygiene (eugenics).²³ The calls for an increase in births by white, German, Aryan women and the laws for mandatory sterilization did not represent a contradiction in National Socialist ideology. These laws were different aspects of a single policy intended to bring female reproduction under greater control, thereby ensuring the existence of the racist system.

The number of degenerate individuals born is dependent primarily on the number of degenerate women capable of bearing children. In terms of racial hygiene, sterilization of the degenerate woman is therefore more important than that of the man.²⁴

The emphasis on the virtues of motherhood for German Aryan women was an indirect, coercive means of balancing out the "loss through degenerate offspring" with desirable offspring. It is obvious that only those Aryan women who brought Aryan offspring into the world were glorified. Those who bore Afro-Germans, Sinti-Germans,²⁵ or half-Jewish children were excluded from the cult of motherhood and were denounced as "whores" in public and often by their closest relatives.

In consideration of foreign-policy interests, caution was exercised not to allow the abuse of Africans and Afro-Germans to go beyond certain bounds. A note of warning from the Foreign Office stated:

Let us not forget, now that the accusations against Germany over the Jewish question are beginning to abate somewhat, that we must not allow the colored question to provide new substance to the enemy propaganda in the struggle against the new Germany.²⁶

In order not to antagonize foreign diplomats traveling to Germany and thereby jeopardize trade relations, a campaign was even begun



Cover for an issue of *Illustrated Film Courier*, featuring Hans Albers in *Carl Peters*. Africans—male and female—and Afro-Germans were hired for title roles and bit parts in propaganda films made to glorify German colonialism. Carl Peters was notorious for his excesses as a colonial officer and was finally disciplined, sentenced, and removed from his position as Reichs-Kommissar. His legend gave rise to a devoted following, however, and he was regarded as a harbinger of the Thousand-Year Reich—one of the "great educators of the German nation." The Department for the Propagation of German Literature announced in a statement of January 10, 1938, that Peters, who had died in 1918, had approached the ideology of the Third Reich fifty years before its establishment. In juvenile literature and even in a movie, this colonial conqueror was presented as a role model for the German youth movement.

against xenophobia.²⁷ In addition, the small minority of Africans from the colonies who came to Germany with merchant fleets were not to be unduly provoked. For the most part they came from influential families and their participation in the production of colonial propaganda would assure political advantages if a situation should develop wherein overseas territories should come to be distributed by mandate.

As a means of ensuring the facade of tolerance displayed to the outside world, individual Afro-Germans were deliberately granted privileges, whereas the majority were unable to realize their educational and occupational ambitions. The flexible operation of the "Aryan legislation" was to facilitate "in certain situations, when it would seem to serve purposes of foreign policy, the treatment, for example, of an African Negro as equal. Such a waiving of the race law in hiring the offspring of a 'racially alien parent' into the German civil service will yield advantages for colonial policy."²⁸

After 1937, it no longer seemed necessary to refrain from sterilizing Afro-Germans because of foreign relations concerns or for fear of protests from the church. In 1933, a study of twenty-seven children in Wiesbaden, carried out by Dr. W. Abel, then a research assistant at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Genetics, and Eugenics and later a professor at the University of Berlin, purported to prove scientifically the inferiority of Afro-Germans. In his investigations of Afro-Germans and Asian-Germans, whom he referred to in his study as Moroccan and Annamese bastards, he concluded that these children suffered from early psychoses with above-average frequency and attained their class average in school performance in only 86.9 percent of the cases. Abel linked his investigation results not to the hostile attitudes that marked the children's environment but to genetic factors, thus attributing the responsibility for the racial mixture and poor heredity to the mothers.²⁹

Abel himself³⁰ was the anthropological evaluator for establishing race membership in "Special Commission 3," which was inaugurated in 1937 with the charge of "carrying out the discreet sterilization of the Rhineland bastards."³¹

By 1937 four hundred mandatory sterilizations of Afro-

Germans had been recorded, for which there was never a legal basis. The partially available declarations of parental consent must be regarded with particular skepticism. This, all the more when we note the comment of legation counselor Rademacher:

Internal administrative measures make it possible to prevent the half-castes from reproducing. The mother can be won back for the German community through mandatory education in a concentration camp.³²

Notes

1. See Rainer Pommerin, *Sterilisierung der Rheinlandbastrade: Das Schicksal einer farbigen Minderheit, 1918-1937* (Düsseldorf, 1979), p. 7.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
3. Paul von Hindenburg, *Aus meinem Leben*, cited in *ibid.*, p. 10.
4. Martha Mamozai, *Herrenmenschen: Frauen im deutschen Kolonialismus* (Hamburg, 1982), p. 39.
5. Pommerin, *Sterilisierung*, p. 11.
6. Detlef Bald, Peter Heller, Volkhard Hundsdörfer, Joachim Paschen, *Die Liebe zum Imperium: Deutschlands dunkle Vergangenheit in Afrika* (Bremen, 1978), pp. 175-76.
7. The German colony Southwest Africa (Namibia).
8. In *Die Weltbühne* 22, no. 16 (1926), cited in *Entwicklungspolitische Korrespondenz*, ed., *Deutscher Kolonialismus, Materialien zur Hundertjahrfeier 1984* (Hamburg, 1983), p. 16. Hereafter EpK.
9. Verhandlungen der verfassungsgebenden Deutschen Nationalversammlung, vol. 343. *Anlagen zu den Stenographischen Berichten*, nos. 2676-3076 (Berlin, 1920), cited in Pommerin, *Sterilisierung*, p. 16.
10. Luise Zietz, *Stenographische Berichte der Nationalversammlung vom 20. Mai 1920*, cited in Mamozai, *Herrenmenschen*, p. 291.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 292.
12. Representative Ammann in *Verhandlungen des bayerischen Landtags* (Tagung, 1919-20), cited in Pommerin, *Sterilisierung*, p. 23.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 25, 28.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 28.
17. Within the initially neutral-sounding word *mulatto*, from the Por-

tuguese *mulato*, which had been adopted into German usage as early as 1604, is concealed the idea "that the Black is to the White as the donkey is to the horse, and that together they produce a hybrid that is barren" (Léon Poliakov, Christian Delacampagne, and Patrick Giffard, *Über den Rassismus: 16 Kapitel zur Anatomie, Geschichte und Deutung des Rassensubstanz* [Frankfurt, 1984], p. 64).

18. Palatinate Commissioner Jolas's document is reprinted in Pommerin, *Sterilisierung*, pp. 92-93.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 32. I was unable to find any information about which countries were considered as sites for deportation and whether such deportations took place in individual cases. One can assume that the children were to be taken to countries of former colonies.
20. Adolph Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (New York, 1939), pp. 448-49.
21. Pommerin, *Sterilisierung*, p. 42.
22. Hans Macco, "Rassenprobleme im Dritten Reich," cited in *ibid.*, p. 43.
23. Laws against voluntary sterilization were contained in para. 226 St. GB; paras. 219 and 220; also para. 218, for abortion, from 22 May 1933. Laws on preventing congenitally diseased offspring from 14 July 1933; "as of 1935 there was then 'eugenic' pregnancy interruption also, formally tied to the consent of the woman, but tied to subsequent forced sterilization" (Gisela Bock, "Zum Wohle des Volkskörpers . . . Abtreibung und Sterilisation im Nationalsozialismus," *Journal für Geschichte* 2, no. 6 [1980]: 58).
24. Bock, "Zum Wohle des Volkskörpers," p. 59.
25. An ethnic group of Central European gypsies.
26. *Stichworte für die Chefbesprechung am 21. November 1933 über die Rassenfrage*, cited in Pommerin, *Sterilisierung*, p. 55.
27. See *ibid.*, p. 54. For the same reason, Hitler ordered anti-French posters withdrawn from circulation that were slated to be shown at the 1934 exhibition "German People and German Work" and contributed up the "Negroization of France." See *ibid.*, p. 64.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
30. Abel's name deserves special mention here because several investigations from the postwar period were largely uncritically based on his results. For example, Walter Kirchner's study, *Untersuchungen somatischer und psychischer Entwicklung bei Europäer-Neger-Mischlingen im Kleinkindalter unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der sozi-*

alen Verhältnisse (Berlin, 1952). Further attention is given to Abel's investigations in the following chapter.

31. Pommerin, *Sterilisierung*, p. 78.

32. *Aufzeichnung Rademachers zu R. 62669/41*, 4.12.1941, cited in *ibid.*, p. 83.

15. See Karla Fohrbeck, Andreas J. Wiesand, and Renate Zahar, *Heile Welt und Dritte Welt: Schulbuchanalyse* (Opladen, 1971).
16. Fanon, *Black Skin*, p. 98.
17. FU-Info, "Bilderbücher: Männer aktiv. Frauen passiv" (Berlin, 1982), p. 14.
18. Europe is apparently still undiscovered.
19. I put the term *minorities* in quotation marks here because those with power impose the status of "minority," "marginal group," or "outsider" through the exploitation of their power.
20. Dieter Bossmann, ed., *Folgen eines Tabus: Auszüge aus Schüleraufsätzen heute* (Frankfurt, 1977), quoted in Jörg Becker, "Die verpaßten Chancen der Erneuerung, Rassismus im deutschen Kinderbuch," in *Das Gift der frühen Jahre*, ed. Regula Renschler and Roy Preiswerk (Basel, 1981), p. 201.
21. Gert Paczensky, *Die Weißen kommen* (Hamburg, 1970), p. 52.
22. "The economies of all highly industrialized Western European nations will continue to be dependent on foreign workers in the future, as can be concluded from the prognoses for economic developments and for labor needs" (Cappenberg Discussion, *Ausländerpolitik im Zielkonflikt* [Köln, 1982], p. 52).
23. "In this phase, economic interests alone determine the extent of the recruitment and thus the scope of the employment of foreigners. The consequences of introducing a large number of foreign laborers were not considered in the planning and remain completely ignored" (Ministry for Workers' Health and Social Affairs of the State of North-Rhein Westfalia, *Leitlinien der Landesregierung NRW zur Ausländerpolitik* [Düsseldorf, 1981], p. 21).
24. From *Ansprache des Parlamentarischen Staatssekretärs im Bundesministerium des Innern*. Carl-Dieter Spranger, in *betrifft: Ausländerpolitik*, ed. Bundesminister des Innern (Bonn, 1983), p. 92.
25. INEAS, *Meinungen und Einstellungen zu Ausländerproblemen—Endbericht* (Bonn/Bad Godesberg, 1982), cited in Georg Tsiakalos, *Ausländerfeindlichkeit—Tatsachen und Erklärungsversuche* (München, 1983), p. 104.
26. Peter Schürt, *Der Mohr hat seine Schuldigkeit getan: Gibt es Rassismus in der Bundesrepublik?* (Dortmund, 1981), p. 39.

*Laura Baum (age 22),
Katharina Oguntoye (age 27),
May Opitz (age 25)*

*Three Afro-German Women in
Conversation with Dagmar Schultz:
The First Exchange for This Book*

DAGMAR: "To be beautiful"—What does it mean?

KATHARINA: Yesterday as I was passing by three guys, one of them said: "Hey, look out: Black!" Immediately I was aware of this as a rejection of Blackness, on the one hand, and on the other hand, that there was also an idea of—"Hm, how about that!" I didn't react to it at all, because I was too busy trying to understand this two-sided thing.

LAURA: Recently I ran into two drunks. As I was going by, one said to the other: "Hey, look!"; the other said: "Charcoal lighter—hope it burns." To which the first one responded: "Hey, she's good looking!" and the other answered: "But she's not European."

As a colored woman you're mostly viewed as exotic, it fits the usual stereotype found everywhere. With men it's different, I think.

KATHARINA: Since we're not perceived as European, internally we develop this feeling of being different.

Awhile ago you were talking about your mother, who felt that if you develop more toward the African side, and therefore look more African than European, then people like you less. I remember how a friend once told me that I surely looked more like my father. (She neither knew my father nor had she ever seen a picture of him.) I vehemently refused to accept that and was inwardly very confused about having repudiated it so strongly, for I know I resemble my father and have always been sort of proud of it.

It might have been like the situation with those three guys: I resisted being pigeon-holed like that, but at the same time I felt bad, because in doing this, I separated myself from African-looking

women. African women don't fit the European ideal of beauty; for them there's only the role of the "exotic beauty." And I didn't want to be seen like that. It really enrages me that this society makes it so hard for me to regard African women as beautiful. Words don't really exist for me to describe African looks with regard to African women or myself without these inferior standards of beauty. It's not my brown skin that is considered beautiful, but my light-brown skin. . . . With my broad nose it was a similar situation: on the one hand I rejected it because it made me look more African, and on the other hand, rejecting this part of myself made me feel bad, because I like broad noses on people.

MAY: For a long time I carried with me an image of myself as being ugly because I look African. Fortunately, I overcame it at some point. I'd even like having a broader nose. I think broad noses are fantastic.

However, it really depressed me when I found out in Kenya how terribly important it is there (at least as important as here) to have a thin nose, straight hair, and, if at all possible, not to be too dark. They have creams to lighten the skin, and on important occasions, women try to straighten their hair with hot combs.

I met two sisters who felt more uncomfortable in Tanzania than here—they felt more stared at and more marveled at there precisely because of their lighter skin color.

KATHARINA: It must have been really frustrating to be conspicuous again just when they both thought that finally in Tanzania they wouldn't stand out anymore. . . .

MAY: Yes, their father thought they should decide between a life here in Germany or in Africa, and that in any case, in Africa it would be easier for them. Both of them disagreed, saying that in Tanzania they were always, though unintentionally, the center of attention.

KATHARINA: And actually, that has nothing whatsoever to do with you yourself, but only with how light or dark you are.

DAGMAR: You once said that you now perceive of yourself as beautiful and that this wasn't the case before. Do you know how and why that changed?

KATHARINA: I was an ugly duckling, but everyone knew I'd turn

out to be a swan. I had no idea how—I was so short and fat and had a short neck, but everybody kept telling me: "You'll be a beautiful woman." Was it different with you?

MAY: Yes, the dumb thing was that when I really could have used it, nobody told me I was beautiful. It changed though when I fell head-over-heels in love. Then everything was just wonderful, and I saw myself as beautiful, too. But I never actually looked at myself in a mirror somewhere and decided I was pretty. I think it came more from an inner feeling. I felt good, and the world was all rosy. For the first time people told me that I was pretty—women, too.

KATHARINA: How you feel about yourself also has a lot to do with how often you get compliments like that.

MAY: That's true; it's often like that; when I'm feeling blah and look in the mirror and think: "My God, *no way*," then nobody else has any reason to tell me I look good.

LAURA: During puberty I felt absolutely ugly. So ugly that I actually had a complex. I was afraid to go out in the street, and I felt really uptight.

MAY: Recently I saw some pictures from back when I felt so ugly. I was rather surprised but I found myself to be really pretty.

KATHARINA: With me it was just the opposite. I feel like I looked ugly in those pictures and can't understand at all how people could have told me I was beautiful. Maybe it was due to my sunny disposition and didn't have much so do with my outward appearance.

MAY: I was never really told I was pretty, but I felt like I belonged. I sensed that others liked being with me and found me fun to be with. Maybe a number of things figured into this. For example, my parents never allowed me to wear clothes that were "in." I always had to wear hand-me-downs from a distant cousin who was three times fatter than me. My grandma would just put an elastic band in them and then thought they were "pretty." I went around in tents. I also couldn't wear long pants and I always felt kind of shut out, especially since in those days it was very important to wear jeans or corduroys and not plaid pleated skirts.

LAURA: With me it was just the opposite—my mother always dressed me up. I often heard people say that as a child or teenager I was described as pretty. During puberty, when I felt so ugly, I was

amazed to hear that. Most of the time I got: "Well, she has a pretty face." With time that became more frequent. I could never really believe or accept it, for when I looked at myself in the mirror, I'd get ill. Now I don't hear "pretty" any more, but "beautiful." In the beginning I was pleasantly surprised, because people attributed something to me that I myself didn't even see. And slowly I'm finding out that I am beautiful.

KATHARINA: It's also really a question of what beautiful or ugly is. I find that I often perceive people to be attractive only from a distance, because I find them to be ugly in the way they express themselves.

DAGMAR: The word "beautiful" does have a different meaning from "pretty" or "good-looking." Is that related to what you were just saying?

LAURA: That brings to mind my reaction when people would make it clear that my color, compared with being white, had an "exotic" attraction for them, a foreignness, but not quite as foreign as black. I get this "beautiful" thing at school. A student said to me that mulattoes were especially beautiful people. She finds white pale, but very black, on the other hand, not good either, because she can't recognize faces, they're "too dark." This mixture is seen as the most desirable thing a person could want.

KATHARINA: I can't take that seriously. In the summertime Germans lie out in the sun and try to get as brown as me. In this case it's considered positive to be a different color. Otherwise it isn't positive. I'm very skeptical whenever I hear something like that.

LAURA: It also means that people evaluate each other using purely external factors. That then gives a stereotyped or ideal image of colored women as singing, dancing, laughing, and being otherwise erotic and exotic. I stopped feeling good when I realized that a certain kind of behavior was also linked to this "beauty"; a kind of behavior that's not German or European. That is, rather than a cool and relatively calm temperament, another very specific kind of demeanor was expected instead. That bothered me, and I didn't want to fit into those conceptions. Sometimes it was nice, but, in general, it wasn't.

KATHARINA: Would you rather be white?

LAURA: I wouldn't say that; but I wish I didn't have this status of uniqueness.

DAGMAR: You just said that it's nice sometimes. What were the nice parts?

LAURA: It has to do with my self-confidence, which wasn't so well developed before. The status of uniqueness provided me with a kind of affirmation that often satisfied me when I was feeling bad about myself. While I wasn't acknowledged as an equal, I still received a boost from it. It was kind of nice, although I felt sort of ambivalent about it.

MAY: There's a lot involved in this "beautiful" thing. Actually "beautiful" has more the connotation that people find you interesting because of your color and because they expect that there's an exciting story behind it. A lot of people assume that I have a particular relationship to Africa, even when I explain that I've never lived there. They tell me that they were in Africa, took a drumming workshop, and are fascinated with how Africans dance. . . . I always wonder why they're telling me this. When they really realize that I don't speak any African languages and can't dance like an African, their interest quickly disappears: "Oh, then you're already Europeanized."

LAURA: I haven't had such extreme experiences as that. Often I do notice disappointment, but a certain interest too. People see that it's not so wonderful as they'd pictured it. But there always remains a little piece for them to fantasize about. I've often picked up a feeling of inferiority among such people and that they quite consciously idealize me and my "specialness," into a fantasy. That kind of stuff I don't need because for one thing I'm not a fairy princess and I don't come from someplace with strange creatures and smells. . . .

It often happens that when people ask me my name and I answer: "Laura," I get reactions like "But that's not an exotic name at all." Frequently they look at me with such a well-meaning smile that it's clear that they weren't seeing *me* at all. For example, when somebody would address me with "Hi, Trixi," and I'd answer that I'm Laura and not Trixi, they'd say, "Oh, you mulatto girls all look alike." Always these generalizations and mixing us up. . . .

KATHARINA: That's always made me suspicious. I really only ever believed my friend Karin when she said she had seen a woman who looked like me. Otherwise, I never believe for a moment that someone else looked like me. When the "Afro-look" came in, giving credence to the idea that everyone who wore an Afro looked alike . . .

LAURA: Right. Angela Davis or Joan Armatrading . . .

KATHARINA: I actually thought that I looked like Joan Armatrading, and if others who knew me well said it, that was fine with me.

DAGMAR: How do others see you—how do you handle it?

MAY: It often happens with me that people have their own expectations and ignore what I say. When I tell them that I grew up here and have spent my entire life here, the question still might come afterward: "Yes, and when are you going back?" Crazy. Now and then I have the feeling of not belonging anywhere; on the other hand I've grown up here, speak this language, actually feel secure here, and can express myself as I want. I share a background with these people here even if they don't accept me. "Yes, I'm German," I say, perhaps out of spite, to shake up their black-and-white thinking.

KATHARINA: Often I really want to get people away from the narrow-minded attitude that German is just blond and blue-eyed. There are so many different types of people here.

MAY: I often used to think I had to justify my being here. In the meantime, I've realized that I'm bold enough to just ask if there's something wrong when somebody looks at me curiously. Often the person will recognize his rigid way of thinking and the audacity with which he asks the most personal questions.

KATHARINA: In my experience, people of mixed heritage always have special positions in groups. I think we also bring part of it upon ourselves, because we are noticeable and have to deal with both our African and our German parts. As a result, we develop an agility that's not required of a white child. In a seminar, for example, a woman spoke to me, saying that I must have already learned to express myself well in groups some time before then. I'm not

expected to be able to speak German well, but I simply present myself the way I am. Then that counts as being intelligent.

LAURA: Yes, that happens a lot, People think I'm a foreigner. If I speak flawless German, I get this "admiration."

MAY: The way they speak to you is sort of paternalistic or patronizing. They take on this attitude automatically. As soon as they see me, they think I can't speak German. I remember a baker that I used to go to often. Each time he would explain every little thing with extravagant gestures. Once he even explained how the weather was . . . I just laughed.

KATHARINA: Continuously playing this same old game makes it hard to make real contact with people. When someone acts like that, I pull back.

LAURA: Well, on the shopkeeper's level you can more or less accept it, get angry about it, or laugh; nothing will change. Now and then I say: "I'm a German." Otherwise, when I meet people I've often made a point of saying that I'm no different from anyone else and would prefer that they have no special expectations of me on the basis of how I look. After we've gotten to know each other better, people often acknowledge having had certain expectations of me, but as a result of my speaking to them about it, we've managed to reach a level where we can change this.

MAY: That always gets on my nerves. No matter where I go, I know some guy is going to say something to me—especially at parties: "Well, where do you come from?"

LAURA: Only from guys, not from women?

MAY: With me it's mostly guys. Recently at an ecology party a guy came up and asked where I was from. I answered, from Münster. So he hounded me until I finally said that my father was from Ghana. Then he said: "I have a fiancée from Rwanda, and you remind me of her." I wasn't the least bit interested; he even dug a picture of this fiancée out of his pocket. I didn't look anything like her. He clung on to me until I abruptly said I wasn't interested in talking with him.

Recently another guy came on to me like that: "Where do you come from? Where were you born?"—"I come from Münster and I

was born in Hamburg." Finally, to his satisfaction, I did reveal where my parents were from. But then he wasn't ready for the third degree I gave him: "And where do you come from? And your father? And your mother?" The guy was visibly taken back, but he answered very obediently.

LAURA: That reminds me also that people often attribute things to African men and women that are missing in themselves. I'm often confronted with the sexist view that Africans are uncivilized and have a primeval sense of rhythm, know how to vent their feelings better, because they aren't so restrained by standards as Europeans are. . . .

KATHARINA: They just project these images onto people without looking closely.

LAURA: And the image is continuously disseminated by the media.

KATHARINA: And primarily by the entertainment industry—the clincher is the *Zitty* magazine caption "We're Getting Some Color."

LAURA: We're getting some color, fun; action as opposed to gray, as opposed to drab, as opposed to white, as opposed to boring.

MAY: In May there was a national conference in Münster of all groups involved with development politics. I had previously written an article on neocolonial thought patterns and neoracism, and I handed it out in my workshop. The people found it so good that they urged me to send it to the local newspaper. The article was written from various perspectives: what I find objectionable in others, in my workshop, and in myself. Among other things I wrote that, earlier, in a frame of mind of the-whiter-the-better, I had stressed: "I'm not black—I'm mulatto." The article was adopted and in the introduction it said, of course: "M.O. questions our thinking and our dealings, as a member of the solidarity movement, and as a mulatto." When I saw the introduction I was very disappointed; after all, it's an alternative newspaper, and the fellow is very politically committed to development and has written several really good books on South Africa.

DAGMAR: How do you see the question of not belonging and being appropriated at the same time?

KATHARINA: When I was between fifteen and twenty, I often had

the experience of being thought of not only as an African or American; every possible nationality claimed me. For example, a Sinti gypsy once came up to me and asked if I were Sinti and was quite disappointed that I wasn't. The same thing happened to me with a Filipino, with a person from Grenada, with some others. They all thought I was from their country. I felt strangely appropriated.

MAY: People try to classify me right away: from north Africa, from South Africa, from Argentina or Hawaii or India—depending on where they had just been on vacation, so that they think that I'm typical for that place.

LAURA: I haven't experienced that here yet except that I'm taken for an American. But to people in the GDR I was from Africa or Cuba. In the GDR it was clear that I wasn't of North American origin; that's rare there.

KATHARINA: It's a weird feeling when every possible culture lays claim to me. That's how I got the idea that I could pass for this one or the other; actually I'm nothing—I fit in everywhere.

MAY: Before, I used to think I didn't belong anywhere, because I stood out everywhere. I thought, I can never be just me; I'm always walking around in this skin color. Then the idea of a country like Brazil, where the population is mixed, consoled me; there, without being particularly conspicuous, I could be accepted. That gave me a feeling of internationality.

KATHARINA: I know that feeling, but it's difficult too: I'm not a Sinti, nor am I from the Philippines or Grenada; I can't pass for one of these nationalities because I don't know what it feels like to be from there. It was clear to me that I feel like a German and feel the closest connections here: to my language; to my growing up here. At a certain point that became what I've identified with. The options for identification offered me from being appropriated by other groups were very confusing to me; sure, it was exciting to feel international, but it also took too much out of me.

MAY: It's basically two different things: the one, being judged from outside; the other, feeling that you belong to a group.

Another thing that comes with being judged or appropriated is, for example, Turks complaining to me about their trouble with

Germans and not even seeing me as a German. Even though I can understand their problems, I'm still not a part of them. Since I've come to understand this conflict, I feel more conscious of being a German and also recognize the differences that are there, despite everything we have in common due to discrimination.

KATHARINA: I was always against being equated with Blacks and thereby being separated from Germans.

Once I was with an Afro-German guy in an American disco. On the one hand I found it was great that only Afro-Americans were there, but on the other hand I felt like I was in a ghetto where I couldn't move and behave freely because I was too unfamiliar in the milieu. I would have had to join them entirely—and I just want to be the way I am.

MAY: How do you mean, be the way you are?

KATHARINA: For example, I was ready to get to know Blacks as an Afro-German, but I immediately pulled back when they wanted to claim me.

MAY: I resist being appropriated just as much. Sometimes I find that Africans are appalled that I've never been to Ghana and can't speak any African language. Then I try to explain to them that there are other things that are important to me. But when they refuse to understand that, I pull back fast, because there's nothing I can do about the situation.

KATHARINA: An African fellow once told me he thought my hair was wonderful. I was rolling it in those days, so it was very straight falling in big curls; it looked very nice. He felt I'd have the best chances in Africa and asked if I wanted to go to Africa—to him, that seemed the most natural wish. On the one hand he admired my smooth hair and my being European and, on the other hand, he felt that I belonged in Africa.

LAURA: To get back to the feeling of "home": In the GDR it was made crudely clear to me that I was a foreigner and that I am not viewed as a German. In the smaller towns it's very strong, but in East Berlin, too, people would often turn around to look at me: "Hey, look." I have no feeling of "home," because this pressure from outside was so great. I speak German. That's the only thing I have to identify myself with. To be a German is for me a definition

that others give to me through an ID card and a language, but in principle I don't feel like anything, not even international. This summer in Paris I had the feeling for the first time that I wasn't conspicuous, that no one was turning around to look at me or giving me a special smile, just because in Paris there are so many people of African descent. That was very important for me; I simply felt integrated—on the street, in the subway—even without being able to speak the language.

Here I don't have a feeling of home, because, for example, sales clerks are always saying to me: "You speak German so well!" I'm constantly getting confirmation that I'm not German. Somehow that also seems to have had effects on me, and it's certainly related to my move from the East and to my moving X number of times within the GDR. I wasn't tied to any place; I did live in East Berlin for ten years, but in spite of that there isn't much that ties me to it, at most my relationships with friends, which also shaped me. That's my real identification, the things that formed me; there's nothing national about it.

KATHARINA: Recently in a flower shop another woman again said to me: "You speak such good German." I answered that I grew up here, and she said so sweetly: "A German girl," and that really made me happy. She didn't get irritated over my answer, and it didn't embarrass her, instead just affirmed me.

DAGMAR: How do you feel about color as part of your identification?

KATHARINA: I wouldn't call myself white, but then again it's not correct either to say I'm black. But sometimes I feel like a white person.

LAURA: I don't actually consider myself white, but there are situations in which I'm not conscious of, or nobody makes me conscious of, being colored.

MAY: I remember a dream where I had on a black skirt and a white blouse. I was hopping around like in a game of pick-up-sticks. I remember distinctly that I was white and had a horse's tail.

Afterward I wondered whether that was perhaps because I usually see only white people around me. My color only registers when people mention it to me. Have any of you had that happen?

KATHARINA: Not as a dream, but as a fantasy.

LAURA: No, not really. But I have thought about why I'm proud of being colored. I don't want to be white or black either, but I do want to be colored. Surely that has to do with the advantages I get out of it.

MAY: In elementary school I got a lead role as a devil in a play. Everybody thought I'd be ideal for the part, because I wouldn't have to wear any make up. I put my heart and soul into playing that devil's part. But later when we wanted to do a play where everybody was a worker in the heavenly bakery, I suddenly got scared that I wouldn't be able to be in it. I thought: "Oh gosh, a black angel, that doesn't fit." I was really glad when I found out I could be in it, too.

KATHARINA: I remember as a child talking with others about my color, that my color looked like coffee with cream. I thought that was a very pretty color, and so did the others.

Until I was about ten, I didn't perceive myself as either white or black. I felt like a normal little German girl; in Africa, too. There I did see the African part of me, but also the difference from people in Africa—for them I was "Eubio," the European—because I looked different. In Africa I felt like a German, because I didn't connect German with skin color. Of course, I also had African relatives and was glad that I belonged to them. It would never have occurred to me to feel in any way different from my blond-haired Norwegian friend.

There were English and German kids and a family with four Afro-American children. Since nothing was said about it, it seemed perfectly normal to me.

The first reactions came in Heidelberg; to white people in Heidelberg I was something different. Then I began to worry about what I actually was. Not only had I been in Africa, but I was born in the GDR besides. For example, they would say: "You speak standard German," because I didn't have a southern German accent. I even had Afro-Czech and English cousins. From this connection I gradually moved from preferring to consider myself a German to being an Afro-European. In the meantime that has changed also, for there's actually nowhere in Europe where I can feel at home.

LAURA: Because you're always viewed as a foreigner?

KATHARINA: Yes. I think my consciousness as an Afro-European still doesn't give me a feeling of belonging. I can still be pushed out.

MAY: I actually find the term "Afro-German" or "Afro-European" quite good. I am declaring that I look different, perhaps move differently, too, also in some respects think or feel differently based on my background and the life situations conditioned by it, but I don't want to be put into a black or white compartment.

KATHARINA: I used to have such a strong desire to consider myself a "normal" white person, that I just acted as though that were the case. This need to fit in still remains subliminally within me. Although I am now consciously dealing with my blackness and place a positive value on the word "Negro," I nevertheless don't like to lie out in the sun to get darker. When I look pale, I feel less foreign and can move more freely.

MAY: I also used to think I would be less conspicuous if I were lighter. Now I'd like to be black, plain and simple.

KATHARINA: Then you could pass in Africa.

MAY: No, not for that reason. I used to wish that, when I was thinking I don't fit in anywhere, but that's nonsense. For a while everybody said I belonged in Africa with my father; they asked whether I didn't want to get citizenship, take his name, and move there. I felt really shut out and was aware of my differences with respect to Africans—I don't speak the language, I don't know or don't accept much about the culture.

KATHARINA: You're more different there than here. For a while I had the idea of just disappearing into the Afro-American community somewhere in the United States and finding a home there.

DAGMAR: Why do you always say "disappear" or "be absorbed," rather than to be "taken in"?

KATHARINA: Because of a desire to finally disappear, to finally cease to be an exception.

DAGMAR: What does it mean to be an exception?

KATHARINA: As a child I often felt like I was a mean child—people were so nice to me and I was always defensive and arrogant.

I enjoyed it most when I could pull my friends into it, like when someone new came into the class and then asked a dumb question.

I really played it up; in those days I used to wear llama sweaters a lot and would always be asked if they came from Africa. Those typical Latin American sweaters that were "in" then, and that everybody was wearing, were suddenly from my grandma in Africa; and I would just generally exploit those stories. People even believed it, and the others really got a kick out of it.

MAY: In elementary school they often asked me where I came from. And I would tell this one friend the craziest stories from Africa.

Once we had a student exchange with Israel, and the Israelis were with us for two weeks. On a class trip a German family came up behind us and thought I belonged to the Israelis. They thought everything was so wonderful here. I acted like I could barely understand German and when they tried to teach me the word *squirrel*, I really played dumb.

KATHARINA: Walking a tightrope between making fun and exploiting an advantage! On a job I play on the fact that I'm of a different color and kind of pretty, in order to get what I want or because it's simply the most pleasant way for myself and others. If one of my colleagues says something against the way I do my work, I smile at her. Then she doesn't say anything else.

DAGMAR: That reminds me of situations when I've played the feminine role; if I can get my way with someone by smiling, then I'll sometimes smile, although I really don't think it's good to play along with that sort of thing.

KATHARINA: Yes, at my job I've often consciously pretended to be naive, in order to avoid being bothered with things that didn't have to do with my color.

At school in the GDR I had a definite advantage over my schoolmates.

DAGMAR: Do you think that teachers were somewhat afraid of being viewed as racist if they punished you?

LAURA: Yes, but there was another side, too: I did have an advantage, I was something different and wasn't taken as seriously as the others.—"She's different anyway, there are other expectations of her and she is also more intelligent. She has to struggle with her

environment more, thus she is more critical and more argumentative."

KATHARINA: There's also a form of pity underlying this kind of thinking.

In school I often thought underprivileged children needed such pity much more than I did. For example, there was a boy named Giovanni: he was Italian and lived in a children's home; he was always taunted with "Dago," and no teacher gave him any consideration. On the one hand, he couldn't be himself, because he had difficulties with his environment; on the other hand, he also caught it from the teachers and their own prejudices.

LAURA: I was once chosen for the "Physics Olympics"; when I went in they asked me with well-meaning smiles whether I hadn't also been in the "Math Olympics." I didn't like saying no.

Along with all of that I heard how the teachers used to talk about me: "She's such a cute girl."—"Yes, and so intelligent." Appropriately, I became unbearably arrogant.

KATHARINA: With me it was more that the teachers did their best not to show me favoritism. "You needn't come here flashing those big eyes," one said to me once. Actually I thought it was good that they didn't want to single me out.

DAGMAR: That's one explanation; another one would be that they couldn't bear your being better than the others.

LAURA: In school here in West Berlin they don't make such a personality cult as in the GDR. Here there are so many individualities that you have to be really outstanding to be recognized. And the teachers don't expect anything special of me.

MAY: Being an exception here isn't generally associated with high expectations of intelligence and performance. Hence, Africans aren't privileged in schools and other situations.

LAURA: Right, here I'm not privileged.

MAY: I remember a biology teacher who I'm certain couldn't stand me because of my color. His manner of handling subjects having to do with race brought out all his racism, and several schoolmates then emulated him in his prejudice. It was terrible for me, especially since biology was my favorite subject. I got A's on

practically all the tests and always got a C as a final grade. When I spoke to the teacher about it, he justified the C's with notes he had made about me on the side. I couldn't do anything about it. At some point in high school it suddenly got better; I don't know why.

DAGMAR: Considering everything you have talked about, how would you name yourselves?

KATHARINA: Whether I think about it or not, whether I argue about it with others or not, it doesn't change the fact that I have African characteristics—my looks, a way of expressing myself, or, for example, that way of holding my hand—you hold it exactly the same way, it's nice.

Because of the time I spent in Africa I'm conscious of the parts of me which were alive there and simply don't exist here in Germany. Because nobody wants to get to know them here, especially not my friends. I think about why that is, and I believe that racist structures prevent us from talking about it. Furthermore there's a lot of unacknowledged fear underlying this.

MAY: Yes, and there's no natural name for us as there is for Afro-Americans; in Germany everyone just talks right around it: half-breeds, coloreds, mulattoes, Blacks, or Negroes.

For me it's even uncomfortable to say the word "Negro"; it has a negative connotation and is used negatively.

KATHARINA: My father, grandmother, and other relatives that I met during my stay in Africa—and whom I like—are Black. I don't want to separate myself from them; that's why I define myself as Black. I call myself "Negro" only rarely or more as a joke.

MAY: For me it's hard, too; for one thing, because Africans sometimes have an offensive way of "proclaiming" their "negritude," and for another thing the word "Negro" itself has all sorts of meanings: "Negroes" are everyone who's a little darker, regardless of what they look like or where they come from, they're all lumped together. Furthermore, in a lot of sayings "Negro" stands for slave and other such things. When I was riding to Berlin recently, the driver, filling the gas tank at the last station before the GDR border, said: "All the FRG drivers fill up here one more time so they won't have to fill up with the *Negro-gas* in the GDR. Or, a friend of mine told his brother: "I'm taking your car today, you can

get some other Negro to bring you home." But when a kid says: "Look, Mommy, a Negro," I see that as something different.

With terms like "colored" or "Black" it's similar. For myself I find "colored," for example, not particularly negative; for a long time I was able to identify myself with that more easily than with "Black," because it doesn't obliterate the difference from Africans. One South African in my study group, who counts as "colored" in South Africa, doesn't like the word and finds "mixed" better, which I again can't accept for myself. To say "Negro" to her is still more strange for me, since I associate certain characteristics with that. She has straight hair and looks more Indian than African.

Since then, in the course of our discussions, the term "Afro-German" has come into being.

KATHARINA: I wouldn't want to use the term "Negro" as a designation either, but I would consider a discussion about it important. I'm tired of separating myself from people in Africa, just because here people are always using expressions like "black as a Negro," "You can find yourself another Negro."

MAY: I agree. I'm also reminded that my lighter skin was an advantage when I was going out with a Black guy. Maybe that's why now I'd like to be darker; believe me, I can do without people finding me beautiful and interesting because I'm dark but not too dark. With him I rarely got into a disco, whereas alone I'm a little exotic attraction. On the street, people stared at us shamelessly, and I got a bigger share of comments than usual. They also thought I didn't understand German. In general I experienced the environment as much more hostile and had a much stronger feeling of being Black.

KATHARINA: You probably also allowed yourself to get involved more than I would; I considered my lighter skin as an advantage with which I could also support Africans. If I didn't want to be stupidly stared at with an African in a disco or a café, I immediately addressed the waiter coolly in the most elegant German. Then no one would bother us anymore.

LAURA: I've always felt very comfortable with Africans and Afro-Germans, since I wasn't the sole exception anymore. When I walk down the street with a white boyfriend, I get scrutinized from head to toe.

How do you interact with each other?

DAGMAR: You once mentioned how, when Afro-German women get together, insecurity and maybe competition arise, perhaps because you aren't the sole exception anymore. Is that one of the reasons why there's been so little contact until now among Afro-Germans?

LAURA: When I meet African women on the street, they usually smile in a spontaneous and friendly manner; but not so with Afro-German women; first comes an appraising look and then maybe some other response. I often have mixed feelings, possibly out of competition, I don't know. With Katharina I didn't feel that way, but that's very seldom.

KATHARINA: Yes, but you did look at me pretty critically.

LAURA: I know, I felt terribly insecure, too.

MAY: I found you to be a little cool, too.

DAGMAR: So, what did you think in that situation?

LAURA: "Oh, that's May! Boy, she looks great!"

KATHARINA: But there's always that kind of appraising look among women; I don't know if that's the reason why we didn't speak to each other and get to know one another better. It's easier for me to make contact with colored men; then the competition in a group doesn't come into play. When I met you, Laura, I had ambivalent feelings, too; on the one hand I wanted to show solidarity with you, and on the other hand I thought, if she sees me as a competitor, that'll make me angry and I'll act that way.

LAURA: In the GDR I met women of color, too, and it was always much harder to get together with them than with others. First, due to all of us checking each other out, but then, too, because others mixed us up so often: "Oh, you all look so much alike." They simply didn't want to acknowledge that we had different names and were different women. That's happened to me often, mostly with men. I remember I was in an adult ed course with a colored woman, she was my height, but otherwise we didn't look alike. People we knew called us both by the other's name; I thought they were all crazy. Between that colored woman and me there was definite competition; it still bothers me how it was between us. I

knew her only slightly, before we were in that class. We had gotten into a conversation once at a party, and I took down her address. I asked her if we could get together sometime, but she never had time. Then when we got into the same class, I approached her again. But she couldn't find anything better to do than to turn people against me and tear me to pieces. In the beginning I didn't know anything else but to do the same thing until I ended up avoiding the whole thing.

KATHARINA: A conflict between two white women is no different from one between a Black and a white woman.

LAURA: Oh yes it is, because you can only have competition between two similar people—or if it's about color. I'm never in competition with white women.

KATHARINA: I always am. For example, in school I considered my color an advantage, in the same way that others could express themselves well, or were good with figures. As a result things just got competitive. But when I meet Afro-German women, something else happens: I sense a pull, I think we could really have something to offer each other, but then we just pass right by one another. I remember a ballet dancer who avoided all contact with me. At first I thought it was because she was two years older than I or had an entirely different life style. In Heidelberg, for a while I constantly used to run into a colored woman with fascinating green eyes. She always kept her distance. I was afraid to initiate an acquaintance with her for fear of competition.

DAGMAR: Over what or whom do you compete?

KATHARINA: Primarily it's about affinity and recognition, maybe about your own identity also.

MAY: I've experienced that, too. I remember one colored woman I thought was incredibly beautiful and whom I didn't have the nerve to speak to, out of a mixture of respect and a feeling of inferiority. In that connection the thought occurred to me that I consider my color a plus, in addition to the fact that perhaps I really am good looking.

I haven't had any conflicts with Afro-German women; there also weren't any around my age. At school there was a girl four years younger than I; we ran into each other once in a while but we

never spoke to each other, even though I would have liked to. I didn't want to speak to her just because of her color, I wouldn't have liked that myself. Because I'm doing these interviews now, I spoke to her recently, and this time it was great. With her I needed a reason, whereas otherwise with people who seem pretty nice, I find a way somehow. But it's really exciting meeting Afro-German women. Recently I met a South African woman in a study group on South Africa. We found an incredible number of parallels; she grew up with various foster parents who were similar to mine—we were both amazed and excited.



May Opitz and Katharina Oguntaye (photo: Dagmar Schultz)

Ellen Wiedenroth (age 30)

"What makes me so different in the eyes of others?"



I'm German, and I'm dark. But then not all that dark either. I've often looked in the mirror and asked myself what distinguishes me, what makes me so different in the eyes of others. Inside I am German because of my German environment, school, my home—just German. And yet it was always made clear to me that that is exactly what I am not. But why? It's all based on externalities.

For brown skin, the German language only has terms borrowed from eating and drinking, like "chocolate brown" or "coffee brown." If someone tries to place me on the color scale, I could be classified as "coffee-and-cream brown." Does that even exist? Oh sure, in people's perceptions there's an unlimited number of shades and corresponding labels. *What you people have in common is divergence from the generally unspoken norm—whiteness.*

But no matter how many nuances are defined, it always comes down to the same thing: You are branded (no, marked) as non-white. And in the final analysis, all the various shades are of no importance whatsoever. "Nonwhite" is essentially "black."

Identifying all those shades is so clumsy, not least because it is intrinsically dishonest. "Black-white": this tediously contrived differentiation breaks down to this opposition. Color is not seen as value-free. "White," the "abstraction" of all colors, is equated with purity (hygienic and moral), with wholeness. "Black," by contrast, the "subtraction" of all colors, stands for dirt, for evil as such, for menacing nothingness.

Around here it isn't proper to denigrate a person openly. But that's easy to get around, since built right into the color symbolism