THE MYTH OF WHITE GERMANY
ANALYSING THE RACIALISED POWER STRUCTURES WITHIN GERMANY'S CULTURAL ARCHIVE

By

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ABSTRACT

For many people 'Black' and 'German' are two mutually exclusive concepts. Illuminating the history of Black Germans during two watershed moments in history, this paper elucidates the myth of white Germany by outlining the exclusionary nature of its cultural archive. The paper asks how the experiences of Afro-German women shed light on the structures of white hegemony in Germany's cultural archive and the role of epistemic violence in identity formation. Centring the seemingly benign question 'where are you from?', the paper illustrates the much deeper and more complex meaning underlying this illocutionary act and uses it as a point of departure to outline the power dynamics of whiteness within the structures of German society. What meaning does whiteness carry in Germany? Who can claim the label 'German'? And what does this tell us about the racialised power dynamics within German society?

grenzenlos und unverschämt
ein gedicht gegen die deutsche sch-einheint

Ich werde trotzdem
afrikanisch
sein
auch wenn ihr
mich gerne
deutsch
haben wollt
und werde trotzdem
deutsch sein
auch wenn euch
meine schwärze
nicht paßt
ich werde
noch einen schritt weitergehen
bis an den äußersten rand
wo meine schwestern sind – wo meine brüder stehen
wo
unsere
FREIHEIT
beginnt
ich werde
noch einen schritt weitergehen und noch einen schritt
weiter
und wiederkehren
wann
ich will
wenn
ich will
grenzenlos und unverschämt
bleiben.

(Ayim 1996)

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borderless and brazen: a poem against the German "u-not-y"

i will be african
even if you want me to be german
and i will be german
even if my blackness does not suit you
i will go
yet another step further
to the furthest edge
where my sisters-where my brothers stand
where
our
FREEDOM
begins
i will go
yet another step further and another step and
will return
when i want
if i want
and remain
borderless and brazen

(Ayim 1996, translated version)

A NOTE ON TRANSLATION

Writing an academic paper about someone or something inevitably occurs within specific structures of power. It is the author's voice that is given a platform and they decide what angle to take and which information to include. Because this paper is written in the form of a traditional academic article rather than a narrative style paper which has often been deployed to offset certain power hierarchies (Edkins 2013; Nagar 2019; Daigle 2016; Inayatullah 2010), my analysis remains confined to very specific structures of power. This means that as a white, middle class woman writing in English about racial hierarchies and the experiences of Black German women, my position of power is starkly magnified. The Afro-German experiences I draw from in this paper were originally written in German. Because language is a major element connecting the authors to a nation that generally denies them recognition, translating their German words and experiences into my English words adds a further layer of power to the dynamics of my analysis. For this reason, I have chosen a specific structure of translation. The German newspaper articles written and published from a white German perspective have been incorporated in their translated version, as has the academic work of Fatima El-Tayeb. The original text can be found in the annex of the paper. The lived experiences recounted by Afro-German women, however, have been left in their original German form so as not to challenge their often denied 'Germanness'. For reasons of readership and comprehension, my personal translation of these words and experiences have been added in the footnote. They remain, however, partial and imperfect. The exception to this are quotations taken from the book *Farbe Bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte*. This book was translated into English, titled *Showing our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out* and presented and publicised by May Ayim (formerly Opitz) and Katharina Oguntoye, the editors of the original German version of the book. Experiences taken from this book, therefore, have been cited from the English version of the anthology. The original German readings can also be found in the annex.

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INTRODUCTION

In the second year of my undergraduate degree, I decided to take part in an Erasmus exchange programme and moved to Wales for a year. Shortly after I arrived, I took a day trip to a peninsula about an hour north of Swansea to go surfing for the day. In the afternoon, I wandered into a fairly empty restaurant for lunch and came into conversation with the bartender. After exchanging a few pleasantries, he asked me whether I was from the States. "No" I answered, smiling. "Canada?" "No," I replied again, "I'm German." "German? Wow, your English is really good!" I laughed, thanked him for the compliment and left to catch my bus back to Swansea.

People still react surprised when I tell them in my American accent that I am from Germany. It gives me a certain amount of pleasure to defy their expectations and portray myself as interesting and 'worldly'. It took me most of my life to realise that the enjoyment I get out of these encounters is a result of my white privilege. 'Where are you from?' has always seemed an innocent question to me. Yet how much of its innocence remains when it is not a fun question posed to get to know the other person, but when it functions as a vehicle for delimitation? When it imparts a message of the one questioned being different, being Other, of not belonging? For Black Germans this question often holds a very different meaning (Campt 2003a) than it does for me as a white German. Their anecdotes delineate how answering 'from Germany' is not accepted as sufficient and that the questioning generally continues until some connection has been made to an ancestor of African descent (Ayim 1997; Campt 2003a; Oguntoye et al. 1997). While my own answer is always welcomed with a smile of acceptance, Black Germans are repeatedly forced to justify their Germanness in reaction to this question. What does this tell us about social structures in Germany? What are the power dynamics hidden behind this seemingly benign question?

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A certain image exists in our minds of what constitutes 'Germanness'. This image is created by what Gloria Wekker and Edward Said have described as a 'cultural archive' which takes form through specific historical discourses and imaginaries (Wekker 2016; Said 1993). The German cultural archive is a storehouse of particular knowledge and what Said terms "structures of attitude and reference" (Said 1993: 52). It "is located in many things, in the way we think, do things, and look at the world, in what we find (sexually) attractive, in how our affective and rational economies are organized and intertwined. Most important, it is between our ears and in our hearts and souls" (Wekker 2016: 19). The German cultural archive, in other words, has historically enabled the fabrication of a specific sense of self structured through racial imageries which provide indications of what constitutes 'Germanness' and, more importantly, what does *not*. Through the prism of the experiences of Black German women this paper will examine the knowledge reinforcing the German cultural archive and the epistemic violence inherent in its preservation. As a guiding research question, I will ask how the experiences of Afro-German women shed light on the structures of white hegemony in Germany's cultural archive and the role of epistemic violence in identity formation.

The paper will begin by providing an alternative account of two periods within German history. Looking at the Rhineland occupation after World War I and the period of German reunification from an Afro-German perspective it will delineate how whiteness is constructed within German national identity and the concept of citizenship. Both the defeat of World War I and the period of German reunification are watershed moments in the formation of German national identity. While the former presents an episode in which nationalist pride was challenged by the defeat of World War I, the historical moment of German unification rebuilt national consciousness in the light of success. Albeit unfolding within decidedly different contexts, the racialised imaginaries and the meaning of whiteness within the German cultural archive displays a surprising sense of continuity within these two moments of Germany's past.

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The chapter on the Rhineland occupation will highlight the discursive frames through which Germany's national consciousness has been shaped by racial hierarchies within the cultural archive, while the chapter on German unification will show how these racialised systems of knowing remained powerful during a period of German 'success'. The final chapter will outline patterns of violence through the lived experience of Afro-German women as detailed in books and accounts such as the seminal publication *Farbe bekennen,* or Ika Hügel-Marshall's autobiography *Daheim Unterwegs* [Invisible Woman]. It will trace a selection of everyday experiences of Black German women within a hegemonic, white society showing how the enactment of whiteness contributes to the violence of their lived realities. Anti-Black racism is a concept often denied within contemporary German society (El-Tayeb 2020). The last chapter will therefore delineate how the racist discourse and the white power structures overtly circulating during the Rhineland occupation function implicitly in the everyday lives of Afro-German women. Examining the impact of whiteness from the bottom-up, the paper will show the covert structures of power and how they operate in the seemingly mundane of the everyday, not least through questions such as 'where are you from?' I will conclude by analysing what this alternative perspective on Germany's past and the lived experiences of Afro-German women says, not about the identity of German women of Colour, but about the identity of the white German majority population.

1. INVISIBLE POWER

My position as a white, western, middle-class scholar researching the effects of a racially structured society inevitably brings with it certain tensions and dangers of reproducing racialised power hierarchies. No matter how aware I am of the axes of power structuring our society, I will never be able to extract myself from a position of white privilege. I will never be able to move beyond or 'heal' my complicities in racism, because racism structures our everyday lives and – whether I want to or not – I will benefit from the system solely because of the colour of my skin (MacIntyre 2020; DiAngelo 2018; Arndt 2020). So how do I raise this issue? Should I even raise this issue? Is it my place to raise this issue? Questions like these tormented me in the process of researching this paper. It would unavoidably be an act of power and violence to use the lives and experiences of People of Colour as my object of research. However, keeping silent on the racialised violence within my own country seemed to be just another form of violence. How could I negotiate my white privilege and avoid flattening the experiences of the Black German population? I could certainly not let white saviourism guide my research because that would already entail a position of power, exerting violence and domination from the outset. Yet what would happen, I thought, if I turned the whole thing around and stopped trying to help others but instead tried helping myself? What would happen if I asked how the racialised structures of German society have shaped *me*?

I am not the first scholar attempting to negotiate her white privilege in the discussion of racialised hierarchies by turning her focus to the meaning of whiteness (Arndt 2020; McIntosh 1988; Bergerson 2003; Lennox 2017). However, because works such as *Farbe Bekennen* and *Sisters and Souls* were written by Afro-German women predominantly from and *for* the Black German community, using these sources even to create awareness and examine my white privilege remains an act ridden with tension. While the experiences recounted in these works and autobiographies clearly outline the impact of white hegemony on the everyday lives of

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Black Germans and are thus indispensable for the examination of white power structures within the German cultural archive, using these sources as a white, western scholar sparks the danger of "stealing the pain of others" (Razack 2007). Razack argues that "the pain and suffering of Black people can become sources of moral authority and pleasure, obscuring in the process our own participation in the violence that is done to them" (Razack 2007: 376). To avoid 'stealing the pain' of Afro-German women and negotiating my position of privilege, I will therefore engage in what Dianne Otto has termed 'the politics of listening' and attempt to educate myself and the reader about the complex causes of violence, highlight the political responsibility of us as listeners and thereby try to encourage "solidarity and action towards change" (Otto 2017: 244). With this method I want to investigate my own white privilege, 'invisibilised' (Wekker 2016) in a country that often denies the existence of a Black community (Wright 2004). Instead of focusing on how the German cultural archive has shaped the meaning of Blackness, I will thereby look at how the German cultural archive has shaped the meaning of whiteness.

"Whiteness", so Wekker, "is generally seen as so ordinary, so lacking in characteristics, so normal, so devoid of meaning" (Wekker 2016: 2) that its inquiry is often by-passed. Similar to how men and masculinity are seldom the focus within debates around gender, in "the realm of ethnicity being white is passed off as such a natural, invisible category that its significance has not been a research theme" (Wekker 2016: 22f). By focusing on the meaning of whiteness within the German cultural archive, this paper will take a small step towards balancing the "systematic asymmetry" in the way these dimensions are understood, "where the more powerful member of a binary pair – masculinity, whiteness – is consistently bracketed and is thereby invisibilized [sic] and installed as the norm" (ibid.). By using critical whiteness studies as part of my theoretical framework, I hope to avoid reproducing stark racialised power hierarchies. This does not mean, however, that I am absolving myself of the danger of recreating power hierarchies unwittingly. Peggy Piesche emphasises that the study of critical whiteness inheres

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the danger of re-centring the white subject and defining it against its racialised Others. Critical whiteness studies in Germany, so Piesche, should be aware of the risk of forming a white, anti-racist critique elite that analyses its own whiteness and through this boundedness reproduces discourses where whiteness again loses itself in its own progressiveness (Piesche 2020: 16). Piesche argues that the study of critical whiteness in Germany is by no means a purely academic field but is created through the everyday reflections of Black life in a hegemonic white setting. To avoid reproducing the normality/normativity of a (white) hegemonic discourse (ibid.), my work will therefore foreground the perspectives and experiences of Black Germans and especially those of Afro-German women.

My research is indebted to the analyses of Black scholars and activists' stories and experiences. They have enabled me to radically revise my image of Germany and my own positionality within the German nation and this paper would have neither standing nor substance without their ongoing scholarship and activism. I will assemble the historical perspective and lived experiences from written accounts such as Katharina Oguntoye's *Schwarze Wurzeln: Afro-deutsche Familiengeschichten von 1884 bis 1950* [Black Roots: Afro-German Family History from 1884 to 1950], May Ayim's collection of poems *Blues in Schwarz Weiss* [Blues in Black and White] and her posthumously published collection of essays *Grenzenlos und Unverschämt* [Borderless and Brazen], Ika Hügel-Marshall's biography *Daheim unterwegs* [Invisible Woman], Natasha Kelly's edited volume *Sisters and Souls: Inspirationen durch May Ayim* [Sisters and Souls: Inspirations from May Ayim], and of course the seminal publication *Farbe Bekennen* [Showing Our Colors] which inaugurated the Black German movement of the 1980s and coined the term Afro-German as the first non-derogatory denomination for Germans with one or more parents of African heritage (Lennox 2017). While today, the more common and inclusive 'Black German' is generally used (Campt 2003a), I am

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relying on much of the work of the contributing authors of *Farbe Bekennen* who self-identified as 'Afro-German' and will therefore use these terms interchangeably.

By examining whiteness through the experiences of Afro-German women I attempt, in a sense, to 'provincialize' this whiteness. The impact of white normativity is illustrated through the exclusion of Black Germans from the concept of national identity and the resulting violence evident especially during the time of German reunification and in the everyday lives of Black Germans. Dipesh Chakrabarty argues that universalised concepts such as the state, citizenship, the idea of the subject and social justice "all bear the burden of European thought and history. One simply cannot think of political modernity without these and other related concepts that found a climactic form in the course of the European enlightenment and the nineteenth century" (Chakraberty 2008: 4). Provincializing Europe, for Chakrabarty therefore "becomes the task of exploring how this thought – which is now everybody's heritage and which affects us all – may be renewed from and for the margins" (Chakrabarty 2008: 16). As outlined above, any attempt to 'renew' Black thought 'from and for the margins' from my position of white privilege would be futile and potentially violent. By 'provincializing' whiteness, therefore, I aim to lay bare the power its meaning holds within the German cultural archive and examine the structures and power dynamics of whiteness through the experiences of Afro-German women. I thereby strive to open space for reimagining its meaning and challenging its practice.

My work is embedded within a framework of feminist and postcolonial theory that has the objective of problematising "the very ways in which the world [or in this case Germany] is known" (McEwan 2001: 94). By highlighting the meaning and power whiteness holds within the German cultural archive and outlining the violence it exerts within German identity formation, I call into question the dominant narratives that make claims regarding the 'essence' of what it means to be German (El-Tayeb 2001). I am leaning here on Foucault's theory of the

connection between power and knowledge and attempt to retrace the "subjugated knowledges" of Black Germans to outline the impact of white historiography in shaping the German cultural archive (Foucault 2004: 7). By providing a platform for these knowledges that present an integral yet overlooked element of Germany's past, I hope to disclose the structures of white hegemony within the current discourse surrounding 'Germanness'. Because, as mentioned above, the cultural archive is located 'in the way we think, do things, and look at the world' (Wekker 2016), it is constitutive of (German) identity. Identity is a complex and enigmatic concept (Yuval-Davis et al. 2006; Hall 1996) and in the present context it is understood as the ways in which we navigate everyday life and its relations to feelings of belonging and recognition (Nordberg 2006). Identities are neither fixed nor singular and are based on processes of self-awareness, self-assessment, self-image, and self-reflexivity that are embedded within the internalised dynamics of our socialisation (Eggers 2005). These feelings of belonging and recognition and an idea of 'common sense' are created by and through the German cultural archive that has developed to conceive 'Germanness' as synonymous with 'whiteness'. Because they fall outside this demarcation, the everyday lives of Afro-German women are often permeated by both physical and epistemic violence facilitated through the dynamics of exclusion. The lack of these forms of violence for the white German majority already indicates the power inherent in the latter's positionality.

Analysing the development of the exclusionary nature of the German cultural archive, the next chapter of this paper will examine the discursive construction of German national identity and what this means for the idea of belonging to the German nation. Who is left out of the 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991) and what does this tell us about white hegemony within the German cultural archive? As a first step in retracing 'subjugated knowledges', the following chapter will therefore look at the Rhineland occupation after World War I and the emergence of the discourse surrounding the *Schwarze Schmach* [the 'Black Disgrace'] and the

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'Rheinland Bastarde' [the Rhineland Bastards']. The significance of the Rhineland occupation for shaping the German cultural archive are paramount yet remain largely untold within mainstream German history. Following Germany's defeat in World War I, a media campaign was initiated as the French deployed Black troops from their colonies in the occupation of the Rhineland. This media campaign turned into a global concern as its narrative rallied white allies to restore the 'natural' racial order and succeeded in winning their sympathies by portraying Black soldiers as sexually insatiable 'wild beasts' raping innocent (white) German women. By looking at the concept of citizenship and the 'German essence', I will analyse how the discourse surrounding the *Schwarze Schmach* highlights the dynamics of whiteness within the German cultural archive during this time of crisis.

2. WHITE BLOOD

The history of Black Germans can be traced as far back as the 16th century (Campt 2005), yet a narrative persists which argues that Germany is not affected by anti-black racism because Black Germans simply do not exist (Wright 2004). Since Germany's colonial past 'only' lasted around thirty years, popular myth portrays the number of Black Germans within the country as insignificant (Eggers et al. 2020). There are two fallacies inherent in this storyline. Firstly, this narrative assumes that for white supremacy and anti-Black racism to exist, there must be a significant number of Black people living in the country. This, however, ignores the fact that the history of white superiority was proliferated first and foremost through discourses surrounding the 'Other', meaning knowledge created about far away and 'exotic' places which functioned as a way to dominate, restructure, define and have authority over that which was (and often still is) imagined as 'The Heart of Darkness' (Said 2003; see also Conrad 2007). Through the medium of films, popular media and even children's books, whiteness has historically been associated with mildness, kindness, the rescuing of simpleminded Black people, white innocence, purity, and white heroism (Eggers 2020: 18). The idea of white superiority, in other words, does not require the presence of a large Black population within the country but has been incorporated into the cultural archive through books, movies, and other cultural and historical artifacts that have created a discourse of racial hierarchy (Said 2003; Steinmetz 2008).

Secondly, however, the reasoning that Black Germans do not make up a significant percentage of German nationals, because Germany 'only' spent 30 years colonising 'Africa', is itself a fallacy (El-Tayeb 2020; Eggers 2020). The history of Black Germans differs significantly from the history of Black communities in countries such as France, Britain, or the United States (Wright 2004). In contrast to these countries many Black Germans do not trace their past to German imperialism or colonisation but rather to three major moments within the

20th century (although immigration from Germany's former colonies certainly took place; see Doris Reiprich and Erika Ngambi Ul Kuo in Oguntoye et al. 65-84). These three moments in German history were (1) the Allied occupation of the Rhineland after World War I, (2) the Allied occupation of Germany after World War II, and (3) the post-war years from the 1950s onward (Wright 2004). This section will detail the first of these encounters.

1.1. The Black Disgrace

After the Treaty of Versailles came into force, the left bank of the Rhine, as well as Frankfurt and Kehl, were occupied by French troops. The approximately 85.000 soldiers included around 10.000 soldiers from North- and East Africa as well as the Asian colonies of the French Allied forces (El-Tayeb 2001). Germany, who had just lost its own colonies and with it any dream of imperial domination viewed the occupation by African troops as the utmost disgrace and humiliation, subsequently initiating a media campaign to express the indignation of being dominated by a 'lesser race' (Campt 2003b; El-Tayeb; Wright 2004; Oguntoye et al. 1997; Goertz 2003). Fatima El-Tayeb recounts that outside the colonial context, withdrawn from the control of the German "masters" and instead serving the interests of the French archenemy, these 'Africans', who were at best seen as "inferior", now morphed into rabid beasts within German popular discourse (El-Tayeb 2001: 161). Propaganda against the so-called *Schwarze Schmach* was proliferated by the German government as well as various private initiatives such as the "Deutschen Notbund gegen die Schwarze Schmach" [German Emergency Union Against the Black Disgrace] (ibid.). Shortly after the occupation began all German political parties apart from the USDP (Independent Social Democratic Party) submitted an interpellation demanding the withdrawal of Black soldiers from German soil (Oguntoye et al. 1997: 49). They wrote:

> […] The Germans feel this abusive use of colored people as a disgrace and see with growing indignation that they exercise sovereign rights in German cultural lands. For German women and children - men and boys - these savages are a ghastly danger. Honor, life and limb, purity and innocence will be destroyed […] At the behest of the French and Belgian authorities, public houses have been built in the

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areas they occupy in front of which colored troops are hording and where German women are being exposed to them! More and more voices of indignation are rising all over the world condemning this ineradicable shame. Are these inhumane processes known to the Reich Government? What do they intend to do? (cited in El-Tayeb 2001: 162 [translated])

Black soldiers are presented here as 'wild' and a 'ghastly danger' for the 'honour, life and limb, purity and innocence' of the German population. The narrative thereby (re)produces the image of whiteness as pure, innocent, and honourable, while Blackness is portrayed as dangerous, wild, and ghastly. The choice of words displays a variety of gendered and racialised tropes. While the Black soldier is painted in a stereotypical, mythologised image of the hyper-sexual Black man (Collins 2000) and is described in animalistic and dehumanising terms, the innocent, German (read white) woman is victimised and must be saved from the danger of being violated. For centuries, "[w]omen have served as symbols of the nation violated, the nation suffering, the nation reproducing itself, the nation at its purest" (Enloe 2014: 87; see also Heng 2004: 662). The discourse surrounding the *Schwarze Schmach* is therefore "easily translatable into the nationalist allegory of the (Black male) invaders who [hold] the German nation (white and female) under siege" (Wright 2004: 187) and readily lends itself "to nationalist discourse where Germany's humiliating defeat becomes synonymous with the entrance of the black rapist onto German soil" (ibid.). The texts and pamphlets proliferating this narrative of the French occupation highlight the gendered and racialised images (re)produced by and sustaining the power of the German cultural archive in which the idea of purity, innocence and (moral) superiority is meaningfully connected to the image of whiteness.

Visual propaganda material supplemented this textual narrative. Posters circulated showing images such as a giant Black soldier, naked but for his helmet, standing, legs apart, over a small village. His mouth is drawn open in a leering smile and draped over his hands are seven to eight seemingly dead or unconscious white women whom he holds in front of his pubic area (see Oguntoye et al. 1997: 48). Another example is a coin produced in Bavaria showing a white

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woman tied against her back to a giant Black penis wearing a military helmet (Oguntoye et al. 1997: 50). The distribution of pornographic propaganda such as this (El-Tayeb 2001) strengthened gendered and raced representations within the German cultural archive, disseminating literal images and cementing the idea of the monstrous and deviant Black man taking prey on the weak and victimised white woman who embodies the German nation.

In 1920, the discourse on the *Schwarze Schmach* received international attention when E.D. Morel, who had become known as the founder of the 'Congo Reform Association', published various articles and pamphlets on the 'Black Horror of the Rhine' (Morel 1921). Morel who through his work and research was viewed as an authority on issues regarding 'Africans' described himself as 'a friend of Blacks' (El-Tayeb 2001: 166) yet declared Black people to be the "most developed sexually of any race", reinforcing stereotypical images and proliferating essentialising claims about Black hyper-sexuality (Morel, cited in El-Tayeb 2001: 165; see Collins 2000). In his pamphlet titled 'The Horror of the Rhine' he writes:

> It is obvious […] that the sexual requirements of the North and West Central African troops which French militarism has thrust upon the Rhineland must continue to exist, and that in the absence of their own women-folk *must be satisfied upon the bodies of white women* (Morel 1921: 10, emphasis original)

Through the discourse in his pamphlet, he augments myriad tropes and racial stereotypes in the guise of objective neutrality and once again uses white women to represent the embodied violation of the German nation.

Through its propaganda and media campaign proclaiming racial superiority of white Germans over an inferior yet dominating "Black enemy" (Campt 2003b: 336), Germany implored its fellow white, western countries that Black occupying troops on white German territory would have the dangerous effect of destabilising the 'natural' racial order. It presented "the Black troops as a common 'enemy' of all white nations, against whom they should unite and overcome their differences. The extension of the threat posed by the Black troops to this

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more encompassing formulation created a point of identification between Germany and its former European adversaries via the threat to racial purity, i.e., '*whiteness*'" (Campt 2003b: 336, emphasis added). Through this discourse, which resonated strongly throughout the western world Germany positioned itself in the role of the victim and "the last protector of the white race" effectively recasting its victimisation "as a heroic sacrifice (or martyrdom) for the [white] race" (ibid.).

1.2 Enemies from within

The denigrating discourse surrounding the Black troops in the occupied Rhineland engendered national self-conception and valorisation of a white Germany. A great danger to this story of 'white purity' and superiority emerged with the children born from the liaisons between Black soldiers and white German women. Viewed as the 'inner enemy' these children threatened to destroy the national image by spoiling the purity of German blood and with it the very idea of the German *Volk* (El-Tayeb 2001: 169). In reaction to rising birth rates, the 'Deutsche Fichte-Bund', a collective within the German colonial association, published a 'Notruf wider die schwarze Schmach' [emergency call against the Black Disgrace], writing:

> Fact is that the birth rate of the mixed race (bastards) is constantly increasing. [...] "In the children's hospitals you can see small black faces here and there in the rows of snow-white cots, half negroes, half German, moving witnesses to the horrors of this shameful disgrace [Schandfleck] on the Rhine" [...] In view of such unsurpassed mockery and the threatening mulattisation of the Rhinish territories, the German Fichte-Bund e.V., based in Hamburg, calls on the national comrades [Volksgenossen] to a common defensive battle. (Deutscher Fichte-Bund cited in El-Tayeb 2001: 169 [translated])

The *Ärztliche Rundschau* [Medical Review] contended in 1921:

> Shall we tolerate in silence that in the future instead of the bright songs of white, pretty-faced, well-built, intellectually high-standing, active, healthy Germans, the croaking sounds of gray-angular, low-forehead, widenosed, plump, half-animalistic, syphilitic mulattos will be heard on the banks of the Rhine? (Ärztliche Rundschau, cited in El-Tayeb 2001: 169 [translated])

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The first quotation outlines the fear of the 'growing threat of a 'mullatisation' of the German nation. It deploys the denigrating term 'Mischlinge' and labels the children born of Black soldiers and white German women as a 'Schandfleck', a shame that must be removed from the pure image of a white nation. The second quotation epitomises the dichotomy of 'Self' and 'Other' created through the discourse surrounding the 'Black Disgrace' and shaping the German cultural archive. The white child is presented as singing 'bright' songs and is attributed a list of exclusively positive characteristics while next to it the child born of the Black soldier 'croaks' and is attributed with the ostensibly animalistic, impure traits of its Black father. This quotation illustrates strikingly clear the meaning-making of being Black and being white. The hierarchy created by these statements, and the power ascribed to the meaning of whiteness within the German cultural archive, I believe, needs no further explanation. The image demarcating the white, German Self from the Black, decidedly not-German Other, is strikingly evident.

1.3. Jus sanguinus

Fatima El-Tayeb argues that since the 19th century German national identity has been built on the idea of a 'national essence' that can only be passed on through blood (El-Tayeb 2001). According to Benedict Anderson, a nation "is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson 1991: 6, emphasis original). The 'imagined community' that constitutes the German nation has been historically imagined as exclusively white. 'Germanness' in the cultural archive is conceptualised in terms of the German nation as a distinct *Volk* that shares a particular cultural and *racial* heritage (Wright 2004). While officially the idea of *Rasse* (race) is separated from the concept of *Volk* which presents a more cultural understanding of the collective *people*, in practice the concepts 'Rasse' and 'Volk' have been historically fused and together constituted the basis for what is understood as a 'true' German identity (El-Tayeb 2001). "As a result of this narrow and fixed

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idea of "Germanness"" argues Michelle Wright, "Black Germans, despite having been born and raised in Germany and belonging to no other culture or nation, are often read not as German but rather as "African"" (Wright 2004: 185).

The principle of *jus sanguinus* in German citizenship law which enables the inheritance of German citizenship through 'blood lines' rather than place of birth (*jus soli*) is a major tool sustaining this delimitation within the German cultural archive (Campt 2005; Plumly 2015; El-Tayeb 2001; Arndt 2020). According to Fatima El-Tayeb, 'blood' as a metaphor has played a central role in the creation of the German nation as an 'imagined community'. From the very start "German blood", however, has been understood as synonymous with "white blood", making the hereditary element of 'bloodlines' only possible for white children (El-Tayeb 2001: 137):

> Although Afro-Germans certainly fulfilled the criterion of being a descendent from a German, that is, being of "German blood," this did not ensure their recognition as members of the German people [Volk]. On the contrary, they were the ones whose exclusion was most ardently demanded. In fact, only one drop of "black blood" was enough to destroy the hereditary effects of "German blood". The latter construct could, and can, therefore only exist in connection with the much stronger metaphor of "white blood" (El-Tayeb 2001: 138 [translated])

The discourse surrounding Black soldiers during the occupation of the Rhineland after World War I, clearly outlines how the German cultural archive has produced Germany as an 'imagined community' that is exclusively white. Although Black Germans born in the wake of the First and Second World War often had at least one German parent and were therefore legal citizens after the *jus sanguinus* principle, they were (and are) excluded from German national consciousness and thereby national belonging merely because of their Black heritage.

The knowledge created by the German cultural archive of Black Germans being the result of a violated nation has therefore placed the Black German community in a distinct position within the transnational Black diaspora. "[U]nlike the Black in Britain, France, and the United

States", Michelle Wright argues, "the "German Black" is not read as an Other-from-within, but an Other-from-*without*" (Wright 2004: 190, emphasis original). As the anecdote at the beginning of this paper outlines and the analysis in this section has substantiated, the question 'where are you from?' posed in this context indicates that "a significant number of white Germans insistently and consistently misrecognize [sic] Afro-Germans as Africans, or Others-from-without, even though they obviously share the same language and culture. In other words, unlike African Americans, Afro-Germans must confront a racist discourse directed at Africans rather than Afro-Germans" (Wright 2004: 191). Put simply, within the cultural archive of the German nation and white German subjectivity, Afro-Germans simply do not exist (ibid.).

Having illustrated how this period has constructed the knowledge of who 'belongs' to the German nation through the workings of the cultural archive, the next chapter will revisit the period of German reunification to look at the continuities of this racialised knowledge during a time of German triumph. Within a century scattered with defeats, the feeling of success associated with the *Mauerfall* presents another crisis of German identity, albeit this time in a decidedly more positive context. Although unfolding within very different circumstances the (re)definition of German identity during reunification (Plumy 2015) has further strengthened and consolidated the exclusion of the Black German community. The *Mauerfall* is generally understood in white German memory as a period of celebration, success and rejoicement. Retracing the memories of Black Germans and the Black population in Germany, however, reveals a very different narrative than the one (re)told in popular discourse and taught in contemporary high school curricula. Instead of universal happiness and celebration, for Afro-Germans, migrants, and other German minorities the time of reunification meant first and foremost a time of violence and fear (Ayim 1997; Plumy 2015; Kelly 2018). The increase of racialised violence after unification epitomises the exclusionary nature of the German cultural archive and its proliferation of the idea of who belongs and who does not belong to the German

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nation. This chapter will therefore explore reunification in terms of the meaning and power of whiteness within the German cultural archive. By listening to the experiences of Black Germans, I will outline how the power of whiteness and the idea of belonging within the (white) German nation shows striking patters of continuity between the German aftermath of World War I and the victory of reunification and highlight the detrimental effects these patterns of continuity entailed for the Afro-German population. It will outline how the (re)definition of German national identity during the time of German unification consolidated the image of Black Germans as 'Others-from-Without'. In her influential work *Wounds of Memory* Maya Zehfuss claims that "[r]emembering without forgetting is impossible" (Zehfuss 2007: 63). If this is true, we are forced to ask: who are we forgetting in the memory of the German reunification? This next chapter will highlight the power of whiteness within the memory of German reunification and delineate the continuities of racial hierarchies within the German cultural archive.

3. REUNIFICATION – 'OH HAPPY DAY'?

Growing up I was told and retold the story of the *Mauerfall*. When she was my age, my mother, like many other Germans at the time, witnessed Günter Schabowski, the spokesperson of the former SED politburo, declaring on the news in a confused and slightly uncertain tone that the new travel policy between the BRD and the GDR was effective '… immediately, as far as I know'[1]. These words heralded the end of a divided country and to this day engenders tears in the eyes of many who experienced the reuniting of the two Germanies. Germany belonged together and I grew up with the unquestionable knowledge that 1990 was a year of celebration for *all* Germans. Only now years later do I realise the exclusionary nature of my understanding of *all* Germans.

In a century filled with defeats the fall of the Berlin Wall was a beacon of success and therefore easily lent itself to a (re)definition of Germany's national identity (Plumy 2015). German unification rekindled a sense of pride and national consciousness as the idea of the 'German essence' resurfaced in the wake of over four decades of nationalist guilt for the horrors committed by Germany during the Second World War. The (re)definition of German national identity during the period of reunification solidified the image of 'Germanness' as synonymous with 'whiteness' within the German cultural archive as once again, a large part of the country's citizenry was excluded from the understanding of what constitutes the German 'nation'. The power of whiteness within the German cultural archive and the understanding of national identity resulted in very different experiences of German unification for Black Germans.

As an internationally celebrated poet who remains largely unknown within the country of her birth, May Ayim (formerly May Opitz) was one of the leading figures of the Black German emancipatory movement in the 1980s and helped coin the term 'Afro-German' through her

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[1] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZiAxgYY75Y at minute 2.30 [accessed June 2, 2021]

contribution as author and editor of the seminal book *Farbe Bekennen*. In one of her posthumously published essays 'Das Jahr 1990: Heimat und Einheit aus afro-deutscher Perspektive' [The year 1990: Home and unity from an Afro-German perspective], Ayim describes her experiences of the German reunification:

> In der gesamten Medienlandschaft war von deutsch-deutschen Brüdern und Schwestern die Rede, von einig und wiedervereinigt, von Solidarität und Mitmenschlichkeit … Ja, sogar Begriffe wie Heimat, Volk und Vaterland waren plötzlich – wieder – in vieler Munde. Worte, die in beiden deutschen Staaten seit dem Holocaust zumeist nur mit Vorsicht benutzt wurden oder gar verpönt waren und sich lediglich in rechten Kreisen ungebrochener Beliebtheit erfreut hatten, machten die Runde. […] [F]ür wen und wie viele war Platz in der gepriesenen neuen Heimat? Wer umarmte sich da in deutsch-deutscher Vereinigung, und wer wurde umarmt, vereinnahmt, verstoßen? Wer zum ersten Mal, wer schon wieder, wer schon immer? Die Vereinigung führte in wenigen Augenblicken zur Geburt einer neuen Bundesrepublik in einem – was die alte BRD betrifft – nicht sonderlich neuen Gewand. Die DDR wurde links liegengelassen. Als die Mauer fiel, freuten sich viele, anderen wurde es schwindlig. (Ayim 1997: 88f.)[2]

Ayim discloses in her essay that she began the year 1990 with a poem titled 'grenzenlos und unverschämt' [borderless and brazen]. The subtitle of the poem describes it as 'ein gedicht gegen die deutsche sch-einheit'. In this description she plays with the words of 'Scheinheit' (something phoney or feigned) and 'Einheit' (unity). She splits the word 'Scheinheit' into 'sch', which emits a hushing sound and 'einheit' [unity], insinuating that the German reunification represented a feigned sense of unity that included some but not [O]thers (Goertz 2003). Rather than being cause for celebration, the incessant chanting of *wir sind das Volk* carried with it a

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[2] In the entire media landscape, there was talk of German-German brothers and sisters, of united and reunited, of solidarity and humanity ... Yes, even terms like homeland, the people and fatherland were suddenly – again – in the mouths of many people. Words that had mostly been used cautiously or even frowned upon in both German states since the Holocaust and that had only enjoyed unfettered popularity within right-wing circles were now making the rounds. […] [F]or whom and how many was there space in this praised new home? Who was hugging in the German-German union, and who was being hugged, appropriated, and rejected? Who for the first time, who again, who all along? In only a few moments, the unification led to the birth of a new Federal Republic that – as far as the old FRG was concerned – did not showcase a remarkably new guise. The GDR was left behind. When the wall fell, many rejoiced, others felt dizzy (Ayim 1997: 88f.)

decidedly more menacing air for Black Germans and other minority populations living in the country in the years following the *Mauerfall*.

> In den ersten Tagen nach dem 9. November 1989 bemerkte ich, daß kaum ImmigrantInnen und Schwarze Deutsche im Stadtbild [Berlin] zu sehen waren, zumindest nur selten solche mit dunkler Hautfarbe. Ich fragte mich, wie viele Jüdinnen (nicht) auf der Straße waren […] Ebenso wie andere Schwarze Deutsche und ImmigrantInnen wußte ich, daß selbst ein deutscher Paß keine Einladungskarte zu den Ost-West Feierlichkeiten darstellte. Wir spürten, daß mit der bevorstehenden innerdeutschen Vereinigung eine zunehmende Abgrenzung nach außen einhergehen würde – ein Außen, das uns einschließen würde (Ayim 1997: 90)[3]

May Ayim's perception that even her German passport did not provide her with an invitation to join in the East-West celebrations epitomises Wrights' analysis of Black Germans being viewed as 'Others-from-Without'. Even though Ayim grew up in a German family and had a German mother, the colour of her skin prevented her from being viewed as belonging to the 'German nation'. In the documentary film *Hoffnung im Herz*, a biography of Ayim's life, she remembers standing at the subway station days after the fall of the Berlin Wall when a Turkish man came up to her and said 'now it will get worse for us'. The scene then switches to a mob of White Germans chanting *wir sind das Volk, wir sind das Volk!* [we are the people!] and *Deutschland für Deutsche, Ausländer raus!* [Germany for Germans, foreigners out!]. Viewing the German reunification against the backdrop of May Ayim's memories and memories like hers, presents this episode of German history in a very different light than expressed in mainstream narratives of Germany's unique past. The popular story told and retold about German unification, therefore, suggests the power inherent in the knowledge production of Germany's white population and the knowledge created from their memories.

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[3] In the first days after November 9, 1989, I noticed that there were hardly any immigrants and Black Germans to be seen in the city [Berlin], or only rarely those with dark skin colour. I wondered how many Jewish women were (not) on the street […] Just like other Black Germans and immigrants, I knew that even a German passport did not present an invitation to the East-West celebrations. We felt that the imminent, internal unification would bring with it an increasing demarcation towards the outside - an outside that would include us (Ayim 1997: 90)

The years following the fall of the Berlin Wall brought with it an upsurge in racially motivated assaults (Ayim 1997; Lennox 2017; Michaels 2006). According to the Amadeu Antonio foundation which is named after a man who was killed by a group of right-wing youth in 1990 simply because he was Black, the homicides committed by right-wing extremists against People of Colour living in Germany increased exponentially in the wake of German reunification. While in the year 1990 four racially motivated homicides were recorded, this number increased to ten in 1991 and twenty-eight in 1992 (Amadeu Antonio Stiftung n.d.). Busy celebrating the 'German-German brothers and sisters', however, the official media reporting hardly took notice of this rise in racialised violence (Ayim 1997). Ayim describes how, for the first time since living in Berlin, she now had to fight against blunt insults, hostile looks and/or openly racist defamations on a daily basis (Ayim 1997: 91). This is especially meaningful knowing from her autobiographical accounts the sense of belonging she finally experienced when she first moved to Berlin. She writes of a constrained and repressed upbringing in her foster family in Münster (Oguntoye et al 1992; Ayim 1997) and how, when she moved to Berlin in 1984, she finally found a place where she felt "more at home than anywhere else" (Ayim 1997: 89). What does it mean if the place you call home suddenly turns on you? In this context, I argue, it expresses the dynamics and structures of the power of whiteness that (re)produces certain knowledges within and for the German cultural archive and the concomitant understanding of national identity.

By looking at the events in Germany after the end of the Cold War from the perspective of Black Germans, the time of unification is presented in a very different light than the narrative today's youth are taught in German school curricula. Popular discourse portrays the *Mauerfall* as the best thing could ever have happened to Germany, yet it does not examine the flipside of this coin and what the *Mauerfall* entailed for much of Germany's minority population. The exclusionary nature of what constitutes 'Germanness' and the continuity of alienation of the

Afro-German population from the conceptualisation of the 'nation' engendered an upsurge in their experience of violence during this time (Ayim 1997; Plumy 2015). The constructed idea of who belongs to the nation consequently resulted in very different experiences of the *Mauerfall* within Germany. While on the surface disjoining borders were being torn down, the process of reunifying a country that had been divided for roughly 40 years and the concomitant (re)definition of German national identity entrenched the structural power of whiteness within its cultural archive and thus strengthened the image of Black Germans as 'Others-from-without'.

This ambivalent depiction of German reunification and the delineation of the racialised discourse during the Rhineland occupation has outlined how the idea of who belongs and who does not belong to the German nation presents patters of continuity within the cultural archive in different contexts and moments of Germany's past. The structures of power, the (re)inscription of whiteness into the cultural archive and German national consciousness, and the detrimental effects of this narrative have been illustrated within the contexts of the Rhineland occupation and German reunification. The next chapter will now look at the covert function of the power of whiteness within the everyday. Leaning on the autobiographical accounts of Ika Hügel-Marshall and the contributing authors of *Farbe Bekennen* the following chapter will highlight the racialised power structures in German society by listening to the experiences of Afro-German women. As Foucault has poignantly stated that "points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network" (Foucault 1987: 95), the chapter will also point towards various strategies of resistance deployed by Afro-Germans towards the violence reproduced by the German cultural archive that impacts their everyday lives.

4. THE POWER OF WHITENESS IN THE EVERYDAY

Several times, this paper has hinted at the power dynamics underlying the seemingly benign question 'where are you from?' Although my mother and I are exceptionally close, for us this debate generally ends in raised voices and a newly discovered pause-button when I bring up issues of race. While I certainly do not make the claim to know how every Black German in the country feels about this question, whether they feel passionate about it or wholly indifferent, what I have tried to convey to my mother, and what I am trying to convey with this paper, is the complexity of meaning underlying this question in the specific context of posing it as a white German. In our recurring argument, my mother implores how to her this question is merely a sign of curiosity and interest towards the life of the person she is asking and where, by all means, is the harm in that? In the following chapter I attempt to tease out how this element of curiosity can itself be seen as a manifestation of the power dynamics of whiteness within the German cultural archive. The previous chapters have made clear how we have learned to 'know' with such certainty that the Person of Colour in this exchange 'cannot' be as unquestionably German as their white interlocuter. On the level of everyday experiences, the following chapter will outline what effects this knowledge has and for whom.

Reading through the biographical accounts of Afro-German women collected in the seminal work *Farbe Bekennen* the question 'where are you from?' seems to repeat itself over and over again (see also Campt 2003a) May Ayim recounts:

> 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 [sic], but he answered very obediently (Oguntoye et al. 1997 151f., English version)

This anecdote clearly expresses Ayim's frustration with white Germans who simply cannot imagine a Person of Colour truly being *from* Germany. The white, German interlocuter in her

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story continues the questioning until he is satisfied by the answer that someone in her family at some point in the past, was born in a different country. The satisfaction seems to come from the fact that the man locates Ayim as originally from that other country, even though she never gives any indication of ever having been there. "It often happens", Ayim says, "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?"" (Oguntoye et al. 1997: 150, English version). The impossibility for the man in the anecdote to imagine May Ayim to actually be *German* illustrates the power of whiteness within the German cultural archive. "Encountering this inability on the part of white Germans to understand so simple a concept as one being both Black *and* German is most likely unique to the Afro-German experience", Michelle Wright contends. "The refusal to understand Afro-Germans as German, much less as equals, is the cornerstone of the German discourse on the white German subject and the African Other". She argues that while "[t]he African American has been and still is considered an American problem; the Afro-German barely exists in the German imagination" (Wright 2004: 191). Yet while Wright asserts that this "presents a complicated challenge to a counterdiscourse" (ibid.), the Afro-German counterdiscourse exists and has arguably become louder within the past decades evident, for example, through the publication of new and updated volumes of *Farbe Bekennen*, as well as the anthology on critical whiteness studies *Mythen, Masken, Subjekte* in 2020 and Black German scholarship and activism that inform documentaries such as 'Schwarz und deutsch – die Geschichte der Afrodeutschen' [Black and German – the History of Afrogermans], released by the Hessische Rundfunk on June 10, 2021. The questions May Ayim poses her interlocuter in turn can be seen as a form of everyday resistance. By mirroring the man and posing the same probing, personal questions which he feels entitled to ask Ayim, she unsettles him in his feeling of white

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entitlement and challenges the alienating encounter that starts with the query *where are you from?* and is inevitably accompanied by the unspoken assumption *not from here.*

Ayim is not alone in the experience of- and annoyance with these kinds of questions (Campt 2003a). "Yes, that happens a lot, People [sic] think I'm a foreigner. If I speak flawless German, I get this "admiration"" (Oguntoye et al. 1997: 150, English version), acknowledges Laura Baum. Most autobiographical narratives recounted in *Farbe Bekennen*, present this feeling of alienation and being rendered Other as a dominant recurring theme. The women telling their stories in these books were brought up and socialised in Germany, yet because of the colour of their skin they are treated as outsiders by the white majority population. "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 am German," I say, perhaps out of spite, to shake up their black-and-white thinking" (Oguntoye et al. 1997: 150, English version). These experiences and anecdotes recounted by May Ayim, Laura Baum and Katharina Oguntoye in a conversation in *Farbe Bekennen*, illustrate some of the lived realities of Afro-German women within a nation that views itself as exclusively white. The autobiographical accounts of these women delineate a variety of common experiences in everyday encounters that point towards the structures of power regarding whiteness within the German cultural archive. Despite significant differences regarding family upbringing, geographical location (growing up in East or West Germany), sexual orientation, and whether they had African or Afro-American heritage, these women share similar experiences and a similar socialisation due to their position as Black Germans within a self-defined white nation (Oguntoye et al. 1997: 9).

Many of the women grew up in exclusively white communities. This had the effect that, just like all the other (white) children growing up in exclusively white neighbourhoods, many of the

women telling their stories remember being fearful when they saw a Black person. Helga Emde remembers:

> Neither in my childhood nor as a young adult did I have the good fortune to come into contact with other Blacks in my surroundings. There just weren't any. As a child I only saw Black soldiers, and I ran away from them in fear and terror. This fear clearly shows that I must have internalized [sic] the prejudices and racism of my surroundings at a very early stage. […] For, how else can you explain that I didn't perceive my own blackness as such? (Oguntoye et al. 1997: 102, English version)

May Ayim remembers a similar fear in her childhood. She was given into foster care by her biological mother when she was a baby and so Ayim grew up in a white German foster family. Her biological father who had returned to Ghana after studying in Germany only visited her every few years. She was not used to seeing Black people and had grown up with the idea in mind that Black people looked strange; that they were a little bit ugly, scary and a bit stupid (Ayim 1997: 136), and her father frightened her (ibid.; Oguntoye et al. 1997). It was easier for her, she writes, to identify with white fairy tale princesses than with those characters that looked like her. The tortured relationship with her skin colour as a child is a powerful and often told story in Ayim's work. She remembers asking her foster mother to 'please wash her white' (Ayim 1997: 136) and recounts how, at one point, she even tried eating soap in the hope of 'cleaning' away her Black skin (Oguntoye et al 1997: 205).

In her autobiography, Ika Hügel-Marshall elucidates similar feelings towards her skin as a child. She describes that it took a while for her to realise that she was different than the other children. Looking into the mirror in the morning, she could not find anything wrong or 'repulsive' with her looks. She saw long, dark-brown hair that was curled and pulled into a ponytail, dark-brown eyes, and long legs that made her one of the tallest children in her class (Hügel-Marshall 2020: 33). And yet, she writes, "muss ich hässlich sein, sonst würden nicht alle immer und immer wieder an diesem Entsetzen festhalten, wenn sie mich anschauen, würden mir nicht die Teufel austreiben und mir nicht mit einer Wurzelbürste das Gesicht blutig

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kratzen, damit die anderen Kinder endlich den Beweis dafür haben, dass meine Hautfarbe echt ist"[4] (ibid.). The anecdotes of May Ayim and Ika Hügel-Marshall clearly illustrates the power and impact of whiteness in their experiences of the everyday. As children, the information that they were different was conveyed yet not explained to them outlining how the meaning of whiteness within the German cultural archive was imparted to them through the embodied experiences of epistemic and physical violence.

Like Ayim and many other Afro-German children in the wake of the First and Second World War, Ika Hügel-Marshall was given into a children's home by her mother. Her mother fought long and hard with the decision of bringing her to a catholic children's home yet relented against the arguments of a youth welfare officer who said that it would be the best possible decision for Ika's future. And so Ika (then called Erika) moved to a children's home and only returned to her mother, her sister, and her stepfather during the summer holidays. Much of her autobiography deals with the traumatic experience of having to leave her home, where she had felt safe and loved and moving to a place where she was treated as a deviant.

> Irgendetwas an meinem Aussehen muss so schlimm sein, dass sie besonders mich so oft und besonders hart schlagen, nur mich nie in den Arm nehmen oder streicheln, nur mir nie sagen, dass ich hübsch aussehe, mich einfach nicht so lieben, wie sie die weiße [sic] Kinder lieben (Hügel-Marshall 2020: 33)[5]

Having her face scrubbed bloody to show that the colour of her skin would not come off is only one powerful example of the physical and epistemic violence Ika Hügel-Marshall experienced in the children's home. She recounts how she was dictated in every area of her life.

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[4] I must be ugly, or the others would not cling to this horror over and over again when they look at me, they wouldn't cast the devils out of me and scrub my face bloody with a brush so that the other children would finally have proof that my skin colour is real (Hügel-Marshall 2020: 33)

[5] Something about my appearance must be so bad that they hit especially me so often and especially hard, that I am the only one whom they never hug or caress, that I am the only one they never tell how pretty I look, that they just don't love me the way they love the white children (Hügel-Marshall 2020: 33)

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She was forced to eat the food given to her, even if she could not stomach it. On several occasions she threw up at the table upon which her hands were tied behind her back and she was force-fed her own sick (2020:20). On another occasion the catholic sisters took her to Hamburg to 'cast out the devils' inside her. „Wir wissen, dass du eine Rabenmutter hast, die sich mit einem Neger eingelassen hat – das ist eine schwere Sünde. Dein Blut ist nicht rein, und du hast viele Teufel in dir" (Hügel-Marshall 2020: 29)[6]. The reference made by the matron to Ika Hügel-Marshall's 'impure blood', once again outlines the power dynamics of whiteness within the German cultural archive and the principle of *jus sanguinus* designating that 'one drop of 'Black blood' is enough to destroy the inheritance of 'German blood'' (El-Tayeb 2001: 138) and with it the 'German essence'. This particular episode resulted in years of nightmares for the young Erika. She describes having felt scared of herself and the darkness and started imagining small black devils all around her. She felt afraid that the devil would find her, catch her, and throw her into a deep pit. "Ich bin zehn Jahre alt und fühle mich schrecklich schuldig. Ich beginne meine Hautfarbe zu hassen. Fortan gibt es für mich keinen sehnlicheren Wunsch, als weiß zu sein" (Hügel-Marshall 2020: 32)[7].

The epistemic violence, often resulting in psychological trauma is a common experience described in the written accounts of Afro-German women. "The constant trembling of doing something wrong and then from such trembling breaking twice as many things as my other sisters and brothers. "No wonder nobody likes me."" (Oguntoye et al. 1997: 207, English version). Describing her childhood, May Ayim writes:

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[6] We know you have a bad mother who got involved with a negro - that is a grave sin. Your blood is not pure and you have many devils in you (Hügel-Marshall 2020: 29)

[7] I'm ten years old and I feel terribly guilty. I start hating the colour of my skin. From now on I have no dearer wish than to be white (Hügel-Marshall 2020: 32)

> Childhood is when a child continues to wet the bed and no one understands that the child doesn't do it to punish its parents. Childhood is living in fear of beatings and not being able to get over it. Childhood is getting bronchitis every year and being sent repeatedly to a sanitorium. Years later a doctor says in response to my surprise over the sudden disappearance of my chronic bronchitis after I was fifteen: Didn't you know that that, like bedwetting, is a psychosomatic illness? Fear that constricts the air passage? There certainly was enough fear. Probably fear of the outside world. Or fear of bursting open. Fear of breaking to pieces from beatings and scoldings and of not being able to find yourself again (Oguntoye et al. 1997: 205, English version)

Ayim is plagued by thoughts of suicide and she is not the only one in the anthology *Farbe Bekennen* who describes these feelings. Ellen Wiedenroth recounts her contemplations of jumping off her balcony as a young woman. She even writes her mother a farewell letter, but the fear of not dying and having to live with a disability holds her back. Her mother ends up finding the letter. "My mother was hurt. […] I was ashamed" (Oguntoye et al. 1997: 169, English version). Corinna N., as another contributing writer of *Farbe Bekennen* does not convey thoughts of suicide but tells of her attempts to run away from home. She writes that she detached herself internally from her parents when she was eight, because she no longer felt comfortable with them. Helga Emde tells the story of her white sister-in-law who for years had been her best friend. During a psychoanalysis her then sister-in-law came to the insight that Helga's Blackness frightened her, and that Helga's personality was too 'strong' for her (Oguntoye et al. 1997: 107).

These anecdotes present only an extract of the physical and epistemic violence emanating from the white power dynamics within the German cultural archive. I, as a white German national, chose these anecdotes because they made clear to me the impact of white supremacy on the lives of Black Germans. I am not suggesting that they are representative of the Black German experience or that they are the most significant experiences in the lives of these women. The violence described grabbed my attention because I cannot relate to it. I believe I can empathise, but I cannot relate because I grew up white in nation that defines itself as such. I am privileged with the 'German essence' and yet Germany is not my country of birth. I am

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emphasising this point, because I did not select the anecdotes to describe who these women are but to understand the meaning of whiteness in Germany. These women are artists, poets, mothers, partners, sisters, daughters, friends. They may be happy, sad, loud, quiet, extroverts, introverts, lazy, active – the point is, I do not know. These women are more than their stories convey but what their stories do convey is that whiteness in Germany means power, means privilege, means belonging and being viewed as 'normal'. Contrary to popular belief, whiteness is not devoid of meaning. Racism is not something that affects only People of Colour. The power of whiteness means that white people have the choice to look away because racism for them is not a question of survival. The anecdotes are therefore not a tool to excavate the lives of Afro-German women. They are a tool to excavate the violence (re)produced by the German cultural archive.

CONCLUSION

My mother has often pleaded with me to acknowledge her efforts of trying to understand the effects of racism in our society. Sometimes, she says, she just wants to hear some reassurance that she is doing things right and that it is her efforts and goodwill that should count. I can relate to her feelings because I would also like to have someone tell me that I am on the right path, that if I continue improving myself, I will someday be absolved of my complicity within our racialised system. What I am beginning to understand, however, is that this will forever be a futile goal. No one can truly give either her, or myself the satisfaction we desire. The patriarchal, racialised dynamics that structure the society we live in will not change within the foreseeable future and it is an unfair and unethical burden to expect the Black community to laud us for our efforts of trying to understand their marginalised position in this system. I understand the anxiety my mother feels about saying something wrong and about seeing ones' own complicity in the violence of these structures. However, I am also starting to understand that this anxiety is necessary to have as a constant companion if we truly want to advance 'solidarity and action towards change'. This anxiety is what prevents us from pressing the pause-button – a button only granted to us by our white privilege – and engenders the courage to tell more difficult stories about ourselves and our position within the system.

This paper is the result of trying to tell one of these more difficult stories about my position as a white woman within the mythologised story of white Germany. By centring the experiences of Black Germans and examining two defining moments for German identity formation, my analysis has outlined how structures of white hegemony are shaped by a cultural archive that proliferates the knowledge of 'Germanness' being synonymous with 'whiteness'. Using the question 'where are you from?' as a point of departure, I have illuminated the continuity of these power dynamics within Germany's past and social structures. Through discourses such as those surrounding the occupation of the Rhineland by Black military forces, the meaning of

'Germanness' in its connection to 'whiteness' has shaped the imaginaries created by the German cultural archive. The exclusionary nature of German national consciousness as outlined by the discursive framework surrounding the *Schwarze Schmach* shows a striking continuity even (or perhaps especially) during the historical period of German reunification. A time popularly remembered through a lens of nationalist pride, looking at the process of reunification from a Black German perspective highlights the ambiguity of Germany's success and points towards the violence experienced by those generally excluded from the conceptualisation of the German nation. Finally, the last chapter has showed how the explicitness of this white national consciousness is evident implicitly through forms of both physical and epistemic violence in the everyday experiences recounted by Afro-German women. Far from being devoid of meaning, therefore, listening to the stories and experiences of Black Germans shows us how whiteness in Germany signifies purity, intelligence, beauty, normativity, and *belonging*. The preceding analysis has therefore indicated how this 'knowledge' of German whiteness has been shaped and the violent effects it emanates on the structures of our society.

ANNEX

p.11f.

[…] Die Deutschen empfinden diese mißbräuchliche Verwendung der Farbigen als eine Schmach und sehen mit wachsender Empörung, daß jene in deutschen Kulturländern Hoheitsrechte ausüben. Für deutsche Frauen und Kinder – Männer wie Knaben – sind diese Wilden eine schauerliche Gefahr. Ihre Ehre, Leib und Leben, Reinheit und Unschuld werden vernichtet […] Auf Geheiß der französischen und belgischen Behörden sind in den von ihnen besetzten Gebieten öffentliche Häuser errichtet, vor denen farbige Truppen sich scharenweise drängen, dort sind deutsche Frauen ihnen preisgegeben! In der ganzen Welt erheben sich immer mehr entrüstete Stimmen, die diese unauslöschliche Schmach verurteilen. Sind diese menschenunwürdigen Vorgänge der Reichsregierung bekannt? Was gedenkt sie zu tun? (El-Tayeb 2001: 162)

p.14

Tatsache ist, daß die Geburtenzahl der Mischlinge (Bastarde) ständig zunimmt. […] „[I]n den Kinder-Hospitälern sieht man hier und dort in den Reihen der schneeweißen Kinderbettchen schwarze kleine Gesichter, halb Neger, halb Deutsche, ergreifende Zeugen der Schrecken dieses Schandflecks am Rhein" […] Angesichts solcher nicht zu überbietender Verhöhnung und der drohenden Mulattisierung der rheinischen Gebiete, ruft der Deutsche Fichte-Bund e.V., Sitz Hamburg, die Volksgenossen zum allgemeinen Abwehrkampf auf. (Deutscher Fichte-Bund cited in El-Tayeb 2001: 169)

p.14

Sollen wir schweigend dulden, daß künftig an den Ufern des Rheins statt der hellen Lieder weißer, schöngesichtiger, gutgewachsener, geistig hochstehender, regsamer, gesunder Deutscher, die krächzeden Laute grauscheckiger, niedrigstirniger, breitschnäuziger, plumper, halbtierischer, syphilitischer Mulatten ertönt? (Ärztliche Rundschau, cited in El-Tayeb 2001: 169).

p.16

Obwohl die Afro-Deutschen das Kriterium der Abstammung von einem Deutschen, also des »deutschen Blutes« zweifelsfrei erfüllten, sicherte das nicht ihre Anerkennung als Mitglieder des deutschen Volkes. Im Gegenteil waren sie diejenigen, deren Ausschluß am heftigsten gefordert wurde. Tatsächlich genügte ein Tropfen »schwarzen Blutes«, um die erbliche Wirkung des »deutschen Blutes« zunichte zu machen. Letzteres Konstrukt konnte, und kann, also nur in Verbindung mit der ungleich stärkeren Metapher des »weißen Blutes« bestehen (El-Tayeb 2001: 138)

p.24

Neulich hat mich wieder einer so angequatscht: „Woher kommen Sie? Wo sind Sie geboren?" – „Ich komme aus Münster und bin in Hamburg geboren." Schließlich habe ich dann doch zu seiner Zufriedenheit preisgegeben, woher meine Eltern sind. Worauf er allerdings nicht gefaßt war, das war die Fragerei, die ich nun anfing: „Und woher kommen Sie? Und Ihr Vater? Und Ihre Mutter?" Der Mann war sichtlich verdutzt, hat aber brav geantwortet. (Oguntoye et al. 1997: 151)

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p.25

Ich erlebe oft, daß Leute ihre Erwartungen über das stellen, was ich ihnen sage. Wenn ich erzähle, daß ich hier aufgewachsen bin und mein ganzes Leben hier verbracht habe, kann es dennoch sein, daß hinterher die Frage kommt: „Ja, und wann gehen Sie zurück?" (Oguntoye et al. 1997: 150)

p.26

Ja, das passiert häufiger. Die Leute denken, ich sei Ausländerin. Spreche ich einwandfrei deutsch kommt diese „Huldigung." (Oguntoye et al. 1997: 150) (Laura Baum) […] „Ich habe ab und zu das Gefühl nirgendwo hinzugehören; andererseits bin ich hier aufgewachsen, spreche diese Sprache, fühle mich eigentlich hier sicher und kann mich ausdrücken wie ich will. Ich teile den Lebenshintergrund mit diesen Leuten hier, auch wenn sie mich nicht akzeptieren. „Ja, ich bin deutsch," sage ich vielleicht schon aus Trotz, um sie in ihrem Schwarz-weiß-Denken zu verunsichern." (Oguntoye et al. 1997: 150) (May Ayim)

p.27

Weder in meiner Kindheit noch als junge Erwachsene hatte ich das Glück, in meinem Umfeld mit anderen Schwarzen in Kontakt zu kommen. Es gab einfach keine. Als Kind begegnete ich lediglich schwarzen Soldaten, vor denen ich in Angst und Schrecken floh. Diese Furcht zeigt deutlich, daß ich schon sehr früh die Vorurteile und den Rassismus meiner Umgebung verinnerlicht haben muß […] Denn wie ist es sonst zu verstehen, daß ich mein eigenes Schwarzsein nicht als solches empfand? (Oguntoye et al. 1997: 104)

p.29

Das ständige Zittern aus Angst, was falsch zu machen und dann vor lauter Zittern doppelt so viel herunterschmeißen wie die anderen Geschwister. „Kein Wunder, daß mich niemand mag"" (Oguntoye et al. 1997: 205)

p.30

Kindheit ist, wenn kind immer wieder ins Bett macht und keiner versteht, daß kind das nicht tut, um seine Eltern zu bestrafen. Kindheit ist, mit der Angst vor Schlägen zu leben und damit nicht fertig zu werden. Kindheit ist, jedes Jahr Bronchitis zu bekommen und immer wieder zur Kur geschickt zu werden. Nach Jahren sagt mir ein Arzt über mein Erstaunen, daß meine chronische Bronchitis seit dem 15. Lebensjahr plötzlich weg ist: „Wissen Sie nicht, daß das wie Bettnässen ein psychosomatisches Leiden ist?" Angst, die sich beklemmend auf die Atemwege legt? Angst gab es genug. Wahrscheinlich Platzangst. Oder Angst zu platzen. Angst unter Schlägen und Beschimpfungen zu zergehen und sich nicht mehr wiederfinden zu können. (Oguntoye et al. 1997: 203)

p. 30

„Meine Mutter war Verletzt […] Ich schämte mich" (Oguntoye et al. 1997: 168)

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