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Schwarze Deutsche (Black Germans) - Their experiences as Andere Deutsche (Other Germans) as discussed in isdonline.de and afrolink.de

ABSTRACT:

“Regardless of what every other says, I see myself confronted with every form of racism, intolerance, disrespect and such in Germany and we have to fight at any cost for our rights, to live in peace in ‘our’ land...”

The book “Showing Our Colors: Afro-German women Speak Out” edited by May Opitz and Katharina Oguntoye is a book that brought an old subject to light with a renewed interest and focus in the 80’s. This is the subject of racism, specifically the experiences of the Afro-Germans which are seen as manifestations of racism. Now two decades after, how did things change for the Afro-Germans? Are they still making the same experiences?

The Afro-Germans experiencing acts that are seen as manifestations of racism is still a reality up to this present. This is an impression made through observing two websites, the isdonline.de and afrolink.de. The discussions in these websites forums depicts that this dilemma is still pressing and it makes many Afro-Germans feel they do not belong in their own country, Germany. These experiences are encountered by the Afro-Germans because they are generally less considered in the society, not because they do not stand out but because they are still seen or considered as Africans but not as Germans. That is, they are seen as deviating from the fictional ideal type of a “standard” German. The Afro-Germans are the Black-Germans who trace their ancestry back to Africa. They are either born here or they grew up in Germany.

The Afro-Germans are therefore an ideal paragon of Mecheril’s concept of the ‘Other Germans’. According to him, the “Other Germans” are those people who have been socialized mainly in Germany and have made the experience of being considered as those who deviate from the fictional ideal type of a “standard” German.

Only time will tell how long will the Afro-Germans will still go through these experiences of racism. The increasing number of African German Organizations coming together however is

a progressive step towards tackling their concerns and making the public aware of their existence. This development is a needed one to ensure the future of the Afro-German people.

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INTRODUCTION

“Life will be easier if we no longer continually have to explain our existence...” This is a statement quoted from the editor’s introduction in May Opitz and Katherina Oguntoye’s *“Showing Our Color”*. If I am to evaluate it, it sounds to me, on one hand, like a statement of desperation, as if one has been or is going through some recognition difficulties. On the other hand I also see it as a statement of a will, a strong determination to fight one’s way despite these difficulties experienced. The book ‘Showing Our Colors’ (Farbe Bekennen) is composed of stories about such experiences narrated by a couple of Black German women. These women call themselves the ‘Afro-Germans’. They are Germans who trace their ancestry back to Africa. They are therefore Blacks but they are also Germans. Some of them were born and grew up in Germany and some came to Germany when they were still very young and have spent most of their lives in this country.

The Black Germans' struggle for recognition in the society is not something new. The book "Showing Our Colors" was published in the 1980's and the collection of stories are narrations of personal experiences that are from as early as the 1940's. These experiences made these women feel that they did not belong. One of the editors of this book, Katharina Oguntoye, narrates that in her daily life, she was always confronted with the question of origin, "*where are you from*" and if she replies that she was born and lived all her life in Germany the question "*when are you going back*" followed (Oguntoye, Opitz and Schultz, 1992: 125) This is but one example of their many experiences which are the reasons for their struggles. Yes, indeed they were Germans but many in the society do not see them as Germans. They were but outsiders because that is how they were seen and treated. One who is familiar with Mecheril's concept of the 'Other Germans', will agree that these women are an ideal paragon of this concept.

These experiences of the Black Germans do give rise to other consequences which are all due to their being seen as different. Since it has already been two decades back when this book 'Showing Our Colors' was published, it is indeed about time to take a look at these experiences resonated in these women's stories and see if they have persisted or are still evident to these days. This paper is all about the experiences of the Afro-Germans based on reflections from observing two websites: *AFROLINK.DE* and *ISDONLINE.DE*; therefore the title: *BLACK-GERMANS: Their Experiences as 'Other Germans' as discussed in isdonline.de and afrolink.de*, in connection with Mecheril's concept of the 'Other Germans'.

According to Bärbel Kampmann's article *Black Germans: Life's Reality and Problems of a less accounted minority*, Black Germans are the people who have dark skin color whose nationality is German. Generally it concerns the offspring of bi-national relationships where a parent is white and of a German ancestry and the other Black and of an African ancestry. He however adds that in a political sense "*Black*" pertains to all discriminated minorities, independent of their nationality and skin color. He adds that this is because sometimes it is very useful to put all minorities under a single concept which is effective, especially when they need to be heard and defend themselves. (Kampmann, 1994: 126) However in this paper I am specifically referring to those Black Germans who trace their ancestry back to Africa. For clarity reasons, I will therefore cease to use "Black Germans" and from this point onwards, will use the word "Afro-Germans", a term which was developed in the nineties by the Afro-Germans themselves.

AFRICANS IN GERMANY

Since we are dealing with Black Germans who have African ancestry, it is rather beneficial to take a short look at the history of the Afro-Germans in Germany. There is however no unequivocal method to ascertain when the first Africans came to Germany and therefore when the first Black Germans were born. (Oguntoye, Opitz and Schultz, 1992: 3)

Several paintings that survived from the twelfth century did already portray Africans living in Germany. In the nineteenth century, Germany's contact with Africa was of trade relations and the commercial ventures were of gold, ivory, spices and other raw materials. However, human beings were also eventually shipped to Europe as "tokens" and primarily to prove that Europeans have really been to Africa and to gratify the curiosity of colleagues who wanted to see what black people looked like. (Oguntoye, Opitz and Schultz, 1992: 3) During the voyages of discovery when European Powers had colonized Africa's territories, Germany was an active participant in the thirty years forerunning World War I. (Oguntoye, Opitz and Schultz, 1992: 19) The development of the African Germans in Germany as a distinct population goes back to these days of Germany's colonial empire when many German men became sexually active with African women and produced offspring of dual heritage -- that is, of African and German descent. (Carol Blackshire-Belay, 1996: 4)

The small group of Blacks in Germany relevantly enlarged after the first and the Second World War. Black colonial Soldiers were among the ranks of the occupation forces. During the First World War, French soldiers came from the French colonies and during the Second World War, Black soldiers from the USA came to Germany. The descendants resulting from the relationships of these black soldiers with white German women were black children. (Kampmann, 1994: 130) These children became an identifiable part of the German society, and there was a strong reaction from the German people. Children from the union of black soldiers and white mothers were called derogatory names. They were referred to as "*Rheinlandbastarde*", "*Occupational Babies*", "*Mullatto*" and "*Niggers*". (Kampmann, 1994: 130) They were discriminated against, and during the rise of National Socialism were sterilized so that they would not have children. This was a deliberate attempt to wipe out a generation of mixed children in German society. However, during the American occupation

after World War II, an entirely new group of mixed children came into the society. (Carol Blackshire-Belay, 1996: 4)

As of 1996, there were three hundred thousand (300,000) Germans of African descent living in the Federal Republic of Germany (Carol Blackshire-Belay, 1996: ix) In the last centuries, there are many students, migrants and refugees around the world, and a huge number of American soldiers who are living in Germany, among whom many of them are blacks. The country has therefore developed into a more multi-cultural society. Relationships between white Germans and blacks are more frequent than before. The children resulting from these relationships are Black Germans or also now called the Afro-Germans. (Kampmann, 1994: 130)

OTHER GERMANS

The Afro-Germans are generally less considered in the society. According to Kampmann, this is not because they do not stand out but because they are still seen or considered as Africans but not as Germans. (Kampmann, 1994: 127)

There could be many reasons for this notion and one which I personally think is of significance is ignorance, that is ignorance of their existence. I myself was not initially aware of the existence of blacks who are Germans. Until I took this course "*The Other Germans*", I never occupied myself with the thought of Afro-German's existence. I recognized the fact that there exist the American Blacks but Black-Germans was a remote idea for me. I considered all colored people living in Germany as either a foreigner or a "mestizo" which means the "mixed ones". After the course "*The Other Germans*", I also started reflecting on how we deal with the same case back in my country. Encountering a black person back in the Philippines is a rarity. The existence of a black who is a Filipino is not very common and although they exist they are seldom called Filipino but "Mestizo." But why was it easier for me to recognize the Black Americans? I believe again that it is because I have often heard and read about them, both in books and the news. Obviously, ignorance was the reason for my notion about the non-existence of the Afro-Germans. I didn't know they exist because I didn't hear or read anything about them. In the German school system for example, the history of blacks is seldom a theme, and when it is, it is frequently only in connection with the European History and emphasis is put on the latter. May Opitz mentions in her book "*Showing Our Colors*"

that the connection between German colonial history and the history of Afro-Germans in Germany as of that year was not yet in school text books. Therefore, the historical presence of blacks and other minorities of color in German society have been deliberately neglected. (Oguntoye, Opitz and Schultz, 1992: 135) The existence of Afro-Germans is also not evident in early children and youth literature. There only exist the black-skinned characters who are exclusively Africans with the stereotype “exotic” roles. In this sense the quote “*lack of knowledge and information leads to ignorance*” applies.

The above mentioned early literature, where people with black skin only portrayed the stereotype “exotic” roles, did leave impact on the minds of the readers. In these literatures it is also projected that “*black*” symbolizes “*evil*” and “*undesirable*”. Eventually, people in Germany annotated the African appearance with cultural backwardness and other alleged undesirable characteristics. (Oguntoye, Opitz and Schultz, 1992: 134-141)

However, these Literatures from the earlier times did not only leave an impact in the minds of the White Germans but also affected the Afro-Germans. These annotations clogged their positive approach towards their African heritage and blemished their perception on their skin color. (Oguntoye, Opitz and Schultz, 1992: 133-141)

The Afro-Germans are indeed a classical example of the concept of the “*Andere Deutsche*” “*Other Germans*” – which is developed by Paul Mecheril. He defines the “Other Germans” as people who have been socialized mainly in Germany and have made the experience of being considered as those who deviate from the fictional ideal type of a “standard” German. This deviation is seen to have emanated from parents or one of the parents or the forefathers coming from a different cultural-circle and is incarnated through social or physiognomic features. (Mecheril, 1997a: 177) The so called “Other Germans” are those who live in Germany but do not possess a conventional “German history” because even though they grew up in Germany, they are seen as “foreigners”. He also adds that this concept covers those who experience to be seen as different whether they are really different or not, or whether they see themselves different or not. (Mecheril, 1997a: 177)

The Afro-Germans are therefore experiencing a recognition difficulty. Even though they do things and think about things that a “standard” German does, even though they speak German perfectly, and basically can relate best in “German” ways, they are everyday faced with the struggle of being seen and treated as different. Because of this, subtle feelings of inferiority

are constantly conveyed to them and may stagnate or totally choke the development of a positive self-image. (Oguntoye, Opitz and Schultz, 1992: 133-141)

ISDONLINE.COM and AFROLINK.DE

If one is seen as being different, there is the tendency to seek people who are in same shoes as they are or people whom they can relate with in the light of what they are going through. I personally as a foreigner in Germany tend to hang out with people who are also foreigners in this country. At present, there obviously exist more Afro-Germans than twenty or thirty years ago. For example, fifteen years ago one could find perhaps one or two African-German children in public, whereas now it is evident that there are many more. (Carol Blackshire-Belay, 1996: 120) This change means that the society should be now be more aware of the existence of the Afro-Germans. I believe that in the bigger cities people are indeed more used to seeing black people these days than many years back. This change in the number also connotes that there are greater possibilities to find people whom they can share common concerns and experiences. This means that they are able to see themselves mirrored more widely and that there are possibilities for exchange of common concern and experiences. With the development of technology and of the internet, these possibilities are even greater. The websites *isdonline.de* and *afrolink.de* are virtual social spaces where the Afro-Germans regularly meet to chit-chat and exchange pieces of their minds.

The *isdonline.de* is the official website of the “*Initiative Schwarze Deutsche (ISD)*” - the *Initiative of the Black Germans*. The book ‘Showing Our Colors’ was an important catalyst in the development of this organization. The ISD was established in 1986. It describes itself as a coalition of black people which goals are to represent the interests of black people in Germany, to promote black awareness, to counter racism and to broaden the networking of black people and coordinating their organizations and projects. (www.isdonline.de) It also serves as a communication tool for Black people as well as Black and anti-Racism groups around Germany and world-wide.

ISD’s prime movers and shakers were Afro- and Asian-Germans. (Oguntoye, Opitz and Schultz, 1992: xvi) My observation however reflects that at present it is composed primarily of Afro-Germans. It predominantly caters for Black Germans with African ancestry although it has officially declared in its website, that the organization is not all about proving African ancestry but all about people being discriminated against because of their outer appearance.

Afrolink.de on the other hand is one of the so called “community websites” of isdonline.de which is open to the black community. It can best be described as a platform for black communication- (*“Plattform für schwarze Kommunikation”*). A link for this website is provided in isdonline.de. These websites are virtual *“hang-outs”* of many Afro-Germans.

These websites is a place where Afro-Germans could virtually meet other Afro-Germans which offer them possibilities of exchanging their experiences, concerns, ideas and update each other with relevant news. The official language of both websites is German. In observing these two websites I made use more of the interactive tools, however both isdonline.de and afrolink.de offer interactive and non-interactive communication tools.

Isdonline.de non-interactive tools are announcements postings on different activities and gatherings of the ISD organization and other “black” activities such as parties, concerts, festivals, camping and holidays. There are also news articles from different newspapers which concern the black population in Germany and news articles from around the African Continent. It provides links to different black websites in Germany such as *FastAfrica.de*, *Afrolink.de* and *Black-business-club.de* as well as a link to the local ISD groups within Germany. A Gallery is also available where photos of the organization’s activities are posted. Its most interactive feature is the forum, which was my main tool in observing both websites. Here discussions about mundane and relevant issues take place. It also offers the possibility of private messaging between users. One however needs to register to be able to participate in the forum and send private messages.

Afrolink.de on the other hand is more concentrated in providing interactive features. It offers a chat room, a forum, private messaging and a possibility to post and customize one’s profile. Unlike isdonline.de, one does not need to register to be able to participate in the forum and to enter a chat room but is needed for private messaging and customizing one’s profile. Its non-interactive features include an agenda where events are posted. There is also a Gallery of pictures which contains pictures of the ISD- federal meetings (ISD-Bundestreffen) from year 2002 to 2005.

The users of both mentioned websites is a mix of people from those who are interested in black culture, those who are doing research, to those who have African girlfriends or boyfriends or are engaged with Africans, but it also is composed of Afro-Germans. A number of users of isdonline.de forum are also using afrolink.de forum. They also carry their

“nicknames” in isdonline.de to afrolink.de. In this way, the regular users are quite familiar with one another in both websites.

The topics in the forum do not only revolve around “African” or “Afro-German” issues but also involve other things such as current national and international politics, events and occurrences or even latest music releases. One of the most common themes in both websites is on the experiences the Afro-Germans make in their everyday lives. These websites therefore are made into medium and social spaces where the Afro-Germans are able to find people with whom they can exchange common experiences, seek word of encouragements and pieces of advice from and simply find people who are able to relate with them, people with whom they share the same fate.

THEIR EXPERIENCES

“Regardless of what every other says, I see myself confronted with every form of racism, intolerance, disrespect and such in Germany and we have to fight at any cost for our rights, to live in peace in ‘our’ land...”

-A regular poster in Afrolink.de

The experiences of the Afro-Germans which are tackled in this paper are experiences of racism. It is one of, if not the most profuse experience which is discussed in both of my observed websites. Over the last three decades there has been a trend toward racism becoming ‘politically incorrect’. The overt expression of racism has become increasingly socially unacceptable and showing blatant signs of racial prejudice has become socially undesirable. (Melior, Bynon, Maller, Cleary, Hamilton and Watson, 2001: 1) The users of both websites claim that they make experiences of racism even if the German public does not accept this claim. It could be that this situation mirrors the case in the United States, where a general cultural norm against racism now exists and because this trend has been so pronounced, the majority of Whites have come to believe that it is no longer a serious and widespread problem. (Melior, Bynon, Maller, Cleary, Hamilton and Watson, 2001: 1)

Indeed the frequency of this topic as I observed depicts that it is still one, if not the most pressing dilemma that the Other Germans are faced with. I however have not encountered any discussion about first hand encountered racism which is in form of a physical attack or hostility but when a discussion about this matter exists it is in connection with recent news. In

comparison with the situations presented in the book “Showing our Colors” where physical attack is one of the fears, this is never mentioned in both websites. One could therefore argue that a change in the present situation has taken place. An article outlines that recent suppositions on the nature of racism conveys that over the last few decades it has come to be expressed in more subtle and ambiguous ways. This is because while many Whites proclaim egalitarian values, their cognitions and behavior are instigated by prejudices that are buried deep in their psyche. There is therefore a possibility that those who effectuate and those who experience racism may have different interpretations of events that involve racism. It also adds that because they are exposed to racism systematically, those who experience racism are in a good position to detect it if they have both knowledge of normal behavior for particular situations, and a general knowledge of racism. (Melior, Bynon, Maller, Cleary, Hamilton and Watson, 2001: 1)

According to Mecheril, the Other Germans do grow up in an experiential atmosphere of racism because ‘not-German appearance’ is considered as a symbol of inferiority in all levels of the German society- (although not all of the Germans do). (Mecheril, 1997a: 181) Because of the Afro-German’s deviation from the deemed “appearance of a standard German”, they are therefore exposed to daily experiences of racism which comes in varied forms and ways such as taunts, insults, hostilities, jostles and jokes. It is a common aspect of their lives and is experienced when they are out shopping, job hunting or looking for apartments, in social interactions, in their work places, in schools and in other institutions. In the absence of physical hostility, the harshest forms of racism which are discussed in both websites are probably taunts and insults.

The use of the word “neger” is one of the most common taunts. This word however is seen differently by the Afro-Germans. Some see it as insulting and some do find it harmless. Judging from the discussions in the forum, I can generally assert that the number of Afro-Germans who claim that they find it offending and insulting is larger than those who do not.

The instances and the ways this word is used do vary. In some cases it is carelessly and absentmindedly uttered. I will take for example a post of an Afro-German teenager who invited his girlfriend in a disco-bar where they normally play “black” music (like Hip-hop). The girlfriend, who is more into techno, commented; “*Why do we have to go there, they after all only play stupid nigger music there*” after receiving this invitation. Sometimes the word “neger” is used as a way of making a joke. Even though some of them know that when their

friends use this word, they do not mean anything insulting but it is taken as a sign of familiarity and easiness, some do claim that even if they are very close friends, the use of the word “neger” makes them feel belittled. In many cases it is done on purpose and with the aim to insult or belittle. I will take for example the post of a young woman in her twenties who narrated one of her latest experiences of being attacked verbally. According to her she was taking her dog for a walk in a public grass terrain near an apartment building. An old woman, a so called ‘standard’ German, who was glaring out of her window, suddenly yelled at her to remove her dog from the terrain pertaining to her as a “stupid nigger” and “bush nigger. Afro-Germans hear people refer to them as “niggers” in varied locations such as across the streets, in the malls and groceries, in the train stations or in the buses. Some of the ‘white’ Germans who are participating in afrolink.de and isdonline.de claim that many, especially the older generation use the word “neger” to pertain to black people up to this date even though they have become aware that this word makes many Afro-Germans feel belittled and insulted. It is quite difficult to erase this word from their minds because they became use to it already. Others however do remain ignorant of its ‘connotative’ meanings. According to Wikipedia online dictionary, the word nigger was once a standard and casual English term for black people during the chattel enslavement of Africans. Now it is a controversial term used in Germany specifically to refer to people of Black heritage who are seen as those who shouldn’t be alive, especially those who steal and claim benefits, those they called the “Rheinland Bastards”. The word is considered a highly offensive racial appellation. Associated with the word traditionally are: an institutional contempt, a presumption of distinctive inferiority and even of bestiality, making it highly derogatory and abusive. (en.wikipedia.org)

The word is not however confined within the parlance of strangers and friends, but some of the discussions mentioned that this word has also been used in schools and in the newspapers. A couple of the users commented that their childhood have been marked by the word “affenbaby” (monkey’s baby) and/or “neger”. This experience according to some others who did not go through such an ordeal is one of their biggest fears as parents. They could but wish that the same will not be a cross to their children. To some parents, this fear is indeed a reality. Up to this present, some children make the experience of their teacher using the word ‘neger’ to describe a colored-person or they themselves are pertained to as ‘negers’. One discussion claimed that a teacher being confronted with a similar incident tried to justify his behavior. He claimed that what he did is nothing to be chagrin or enraged about because the word is not a curse word and that it belonged to his or her basic vocabulary. One mother also narrated a shock she got while reading a book with her small girl. The book is entitled “*the*

small mouse has a red stocking on”, and is from one of her favorite authors. In the Children’s ABC of this new book, the N suddenly represented “neger”. Aside from the word “neger” there are other terms which are used to refer to the Afro-Germans however they are less discussed in the sites. These terms are “Mischling” (mixed), “Ausländer Gesochs” (Foreign Black Sheep), “Mullate” (Mullato) and “Affenbaby” (Monkey’s Baby).

In addition to the experiences of being labeled as “negers”, the forum in both websites also depict that there are still experiences of “verbal attacks” up to this present, which are indeed sometimes very profane, foul and abusive. As already mentioned, their African appearance is being associated with many alleged undesirable characteristics. (Oguntoye, Opitz and Schultz, 1992: 140) The Afro-Germans are therefore often verbally attack in connection with these undesirable characteristics, being seen as criminals, inferior, sluggish, imbecilic and laggards. Let me mention a few examples presented in afrolink.de. There was a posted incident where an Afro-German who was queuing to pay in the shopping center overheard a “Standard German” attributed a stealing character to an African appearance. Having forgotten something, the “standard German” in the neighboring queue asked the cashier to quickly look after her bought stuff. The cashier noted that she is busy and might not be able to pay attention all the time to it. The “Standard German” just then asked the cashier to make sure no one with dark skin and curly hair will come near her things. The definition she gave of the deemed person who might take or steal her things away is obviously are African characteristics. Another incident posted narrates an old woman yelling profanities at an Afro-German (the poster), telling her to go back where she came from and added that *“it would have been better if they would have had them all gassed.”* Even in schools, events that are derogating are claimed to really exist. One Afro-German teenager remembers his Math teacher telling a classmate of his who did not know how to solve the problem in the blackboard, *“Why, do it like the niggers, always backwards!”*

THE EXPERIENCED EFFECTS

“I remember as a child when I moved to Germany, everyone calling me ‘neger’ or ‘kleine negerin’ (little nigger). I knew already that there exist people who have white skin and people who do have black skin but I wasn’t so grown up to be able to distinguish the division of colors black and white. For me everyone is the same despite the colors of the skin. I didn’t understand why they were always cursing or cussing, hitting, spitting, or throwing things on me. I was always asking myself what wrong did

I do to them, and of all people why me? I couldn't of course defend myself as I am still very small but I didn't cry, at least not in front of them. I knew that if I cry in front of them I will be considered as the weaker person and I didn't want them to see that all those things they were doing, hurt me. That's why I didn't talk about it to anybody. I kept it all to myself. Slowly as I grew older I begin to realize they all do those things to me because I look different from them and that my color is indeed not the same as theirs. Before, I didn't see any division in colors, but now I do see it and I can't do anything about it. Now I see the division between the white and the black people and because of these memories that I have a very small number of white friends. That's why until this days, this feeling in my stomach is still a real scare".

-posted in afrolink.de

The daily racism experienced by the Afro-Germans causes them, in the slightest case, wariness towards the "White German" society. However it may also result in anxiety and insecurity and sometimes this threat made through racism leads the Afro-Germans to pull back or retract themselves from the German public and leads to the avoidance of contact with the "White Germans". (Mecheril, 1994: 61) The above statement quoted from afrolink.de, is obviously a reflection of how an Afro-German can possibly develop this feeling of uneasiness and awkwardness towards the deemed "Standard German" public, sometimes discouraging the possibilities of real friendship development. Although this is not true for everyone, many Afro-German posters in both my observed website did claim that they find it difficult to be "real" friends with "white-Germans", although they do not have problems going out or hanging out with them. However when it comes to real friendship, they would rather trust or choose a "Black German", that is either of African decent or of Asian decent.

It is however not possible to totally retract oneself from the German public and to completely avoid encountering White Germans. The Afro-Germans who are living in the smaller towns and villages are most of the time the sole Afro-German family in the area, if not, there are only two or three more. The situation in the bigger cities however is different where it is easier to find other Afro-Germans. It has however also been my impression from reading remarks in my observed website regarding this matter that Afro-Germans do not necessarily become "real" friends just because they have this special connection of ancestry. It is also not true that because there are only two Afro-German families in one area, these two families immediately form friendships. Like one poster confirmed, *"I have this feeling of connection*

with them because they have darker skin like me, but I did not find that spark for a deeper friendship". This poster added that this might be due to her open mentality. She is more open minded than the other which make it more difficult for them to find common grounds for a closer connection. The presence of organizations like ISD and its activities like the yearly "*Bundestreffen*" (state meetings) is indeed a way for Afro-Germans to find other Afro-Germans whom they are able to relate with. The websites isdonline.de and afrolink.de is another medium where they are able to do this on line or virtually, which they may eventually end up offline and may lead to building closer connections and friendships.

There are other users of afrolink.de who attest that they never experienced any form of racism at all. Some of these users even eventually left notes of farewell to the community and giving the reason that they cannot advance forward because the topics of racism in the forums are repeating themselves which are not worth lingering on. Like the quote above, the poster did not want anybody to know about the hurt and the pain he or she is experiencing in fear that he or she will be seen as the weaker one and therefore did not lose any word to anybody about it. Here I remember the similar situation in which Rava Mahabi was, in Mecheril and Theo's Article on Psychology and Racism. Rava Mahabi also did not lose any word to anybody that the experiences he made stirs up anger, sorrows and aches, injury or distress. This silence is Rava Mahabi's form of protection. The discussions about this matter in afrolink.de also concluded with the thought that maybe those who say that they have never experienced racism at all yet simply want to suppress this fact. The experiences of daily racism is incriminating that they would rather keep silent about it in place of opening and talk about it. It could be that by not expressing the emotional effects of discriminating experiences, like Rava Mahabi, they are protecting themselves. (Mecheril, 1997a: 188-190)

Whoever lives in Germany and deviates quite largely from the "deemed" ideal appearance of a "standard" German, lives in a continuous self-worth crises once again because an appearance which deviates from the 'standard German' one is seen as a symbol of 'worthlessness'. He adds that indeed there are some of those who are caught in this swirl of symbolism that consider themselves as inferior. (Mechril, Theo, 1994: 61) In the discussions in isdonline.de and afrolink.de, this self worth crises and identity problem is also one of the pressing topics. The experience of being defined by others, a definition which the Afro-Germans do not feel comfortable with, and a definition to which certain negative characteristics are attached, do lead to self-worth crises. As already mentioned, these definitions include the different names given to them such as "negers", "Mischling" (mixed),

“Ausländer Gesochs” (Foreign Black Sheep), “Mullate” (Mullato) and “Affenbaby” (Monkey’s Baby) which are very derogatory.

In terms of identity, the Afro-Germans feel that it is difficult to find a definition that suits themselves and those who tend to define them. I will take for example a poster who considers herself a “Schwarze-Deutsch” (Black-German) and an acquaintance of her remarked that she should stop calling herself a Black-German because it does not exist. She then pours her frustration in a post disclosing that she couldn’t stop the tears from falling because when she thinks about it, it makes her realize that half of her soul (the German half), is not recognized. Some also reacts that most of the people including both the white and the blacks seem to always expect the bi-racial people to negate or deny their bi-raciality in favor of “Blackness”. That is if you were of Asian and German decent, one shouldn’t say that she’s Asian-German but must negate the German and only be Asian or with the case of Black-Germans, negating Germans and being solely “Black”.

However there are also some cases where their own definition of themselves does not include their African ancestry and they also have problems being proud of their color. Like one regular user said that until now he has a problem relating his identity with his color because he believes that his “black part” does not exist anywhere. Nobody tells him that, “...*you belong here*” except his “white” family. There have been disputes in the forum regarding the appreciation and acceptance of both their German and the African so to say “parts” in them. Some of the users argue that they identify themselves with German mostly because this is the culture they can relate with most. They are probably black in color but they do not understand anything or are not very comfortable with their “black culture”. Others however say that this is not right because even if the society considers them as “Blacks” they are not solely Blacks but they are also Germans, and in the same way, even if they have very little agreement with the Black culture or they choose to identify with the German culture, the reality that they are also Blacks exists.

The emergence of the word “Afro-Deutsche” is a result of the experiences of being identified by others, and the difficulty of the Afro-Germans in finding an appropriate term to define and relate themselves with. May Opitz and Katharina Oguntoye together with Audre Lorde created this term borrowing from the “Afro-American” as a term of their cultural heritage. The term, according to them, seemed appropriate since most of them have an African father and a German mother. However, emphasizing this is not the bottom line in using this term. It

lies in their commonality of being black and having experienced a major part of their socialization and life in confrontation with the West German society, a society that is not 99 percent white but that have always behaved as though it were or it should be. With this term they mean all those who wish to refer to themselves as such, regardless if they have one or two black parents. They have proposed this term in opposition to the more commonly used terms like “mullato”. (Oguntoye, Opitz and Schultz, 1992: xxii) The discussions in the forum also show that many of the posters are convinced that many Afro-Germans go through the phase of self-crises, where they try to find who they really are and what is their worth. This is due to the experiences that make them feel different and that they do not belong. However they are also convinced that no matter what the society thinks about them, only they alone have the right to define themselves, nobody else does.

Indeed, isdonline and afrolink.de became a sort of refuge for some Afro-Germans seeking answers. The posts in the forums shows that some of the users come to find people who can help them, to find people who are making the same experiences as they do and seeking reactions, ideas and even advices. The strongest message that is mostly conveyed in many of their discussions leads to the conclusion that Afro-Germans has to be proud of themselves despite the fact that they are seen different and that they are considered as “outsiders” in their own country. As I have already outlined that some still have problems with their color and their African ancestry. Some choose not to recognize it. Some even try to bleach their color to make it a little lighter. These reactions exist for no reason. The majority of the Afro-Germans are very well versed in their personal experiences, and they knew well that they needed to do something for their voices to be heard.

“My skin is brown, my hair is frizzy, it doesn’t matter where I get to, I always look different”.

-Joy Denalane, Vier Frauen: Album Mamani

The release of literature like “Showing Our Colors” and the existence of Afro-German showbiz personalities such as rappers and pop singers who recognize and talk about their experiences as Afro-Germans are seen as inspiration to many. The discussions in isdonline.de and afrolink.de show that the Afro-Germans are proud to associate themselves with these artists and encourages them to be even more open and deal with the problems encountered in connection of being seen as different. The above is a text from the song “Vier Frauen” – Four Women in Joy Denalane’s album “Mamani” which depicts the experiences of an Afro-

German. Her songs describe the world of the Afro-Germans, trying to explain who they really are. She is one of the present Afro-German artists whom other Afro-Germans look up to. She's one of the artists who are discussed about and revered in my observed website. As one of the users who attended her concert remarked, "...the concert gave me courage and I was truly proud! She did her part in proclaiming who we are. For my part I will organize a reading by Afro-German writers in my town." She adds that she is now convinced that it is important to sensitize the people in her home town and to make clear to them that she is not the only Afro-German, on the contrary there are a number of them and that they belong in Germany.

Indeed, there still exist experiences of racism by the Afro-Germans in the present times. Indeed the isolation, the not belongingness, the confusion which are results of these experiences are still very much of a reality. Many ask the question, "*How long are we still going to take on and go through this?*" I however have no answer to this question. Nevertheless, the development of African Germans coming together and organizing themselves is increasing in numbers. This is a positive step to advance the level of awareness of their existence in their own country. This development is a needed one to ensure the future of the Afro-German people.

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