Anti-Black Racism in Germany

Emilia Roig, Laurence Pagni

Within the framework of the research commissioned by the DeZIM Institute on the topic of racism monitoring, we present our analysis of anti-Black racism in Germany as well as a structured bibliography of relevant German and English literature.

We are currently halfway into the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent (2015–2024). The United Nations' main goals for this initiative are fighting racism and more accurately recognizing the social contribution of people of African descent. Having signed this resolution, the German government has undertaken the overdue task of (re)acquainting itself with its past and acknowledging its responsibility in upholding a system that has structurally discriminated against Black people and people of African descent for centuries. Our research provides historical context for the origins of this system and how it has relied on political, military, and epistemic violence to control and oppress one of its oldest minority populations. Starting from Germany's participation in the transatlantic trade of enslaved Africans, and including its colonial and postcolonial policies towards Black people, we focus on the resulting political, economic, and cultural marginalization of Germany's Black population.

The history of Afro-Germans is marked by incredible resilience, collective strength, and resistance. Despite the discrimination they have faced, Afro-Germans have a long history of activism and grassroots community organizing; for centuries, they have actively lobbied for their rights and better living conditions. To this day, this community continues to empower its members on all levels of society, as is highlighted by the rising numbers of contemporary Afro-German politicians, activists, artists, and community organizers contributing to this paradigm shift. Though this is the history of almost a million Germans today, it is a history that has yet to permeate into public knowledge. Instead, the dominant Othering narrative continues to stain relations between communities and perpetuate systemic anti-Black discrimination in various areas of society, including access to the labor market, housing, education, and the justice system, to name but a few. Clarifying the historical ramifications of the systemic discrimination faced by the Black population in Germany is an essential step towards individual and collective healing – and ultimately peace and equality.

Germany's Colonial Past

Participation in the Transatlantic Trade of Enslaved Africans (1400s–1800s)

In recent years, Germany's involvement in the transatlantic trade of enslaved Africans has been given more attention in mainstream academia, media, and politics. However, Germany's colonial past still remains widely overlooked by public opinion, which shows a fundamental lack of sensitivity towards the unspeakable crimes committed during that era. Jürgen Zimmerer (2004) describes this as the »colonial amnesia of Germans,« while Raphael-Hernandez and Wiegmink (2017) claim that colonialism and slavery should be recognized within German cultural memory and identity to a larger extent than has so far been illustrated and admitted in contemporary Germany. In a 2020 article, René Wildangel described Germany as being widely perceived as a *secondary* colonial power, at least in comparison to countries such as Britain or France, even though German colonial rule was imposed on African land with the utmost brutality. Some of these atrocities were inflicted in »Deutsch-Südwestafrika,« modern-day Namibia, where German troops committed an act of genocide against the indigenous Herero and Nama peoples, killing an estimated 80,000 people. This was the first act of genocide in the 20th century. In what is now Tanzania, Burundi, and Rwanda, German troops killed up to 300,000 people. Like several other European nations, Germany has built its trade and industry on the premises of military and political violence against Black bodies.

As early as the 15th century, German nobility invested heavily in the transatlantic slave trade, earning vast amounts of money from supervising slave ships and trading manufactured products in exchange for sugar, cacao, and tobacco produced on slave plantations. Slavery helped propel noble German figures into the wealthiest circles. One of these figures was Frederick William, Elector of Brandenburg. In 1682, he set up the ›Brandenburgische-Afrikanische Compagnie‹ (Austilat 2020) with the purpose of engaging in the trade of enslaved Africans. He did so by establishing in present-day Ghana the first Prussian colony. It was during that time that Fort Gross Frederiksburg was built there; it became the point of departure to the Americas for over 30,000 enslaved Africans. The following 200 years were marked by violence and oppression perpetrated against Africans and by the theft of African land by European nations, including Germany. All of this was supported by the changing narrative, introduced in Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries, known as the Enlightenment.

As described in Jamelle Bouie's 2018 article, the age of Enlightenment is remembered as the era of scientific thought and human freedom upon which our modern world has been built. However, the movement contained a paradox: »Colonial domination and expropriation marched hand in hand with the spread of ›liberty,‹ and liberalism arose alongside our modern notions of race and racism« (Bouie 2018).

Sandford (2018) describes the way Kant's theory of race paved the way for intellectuals and philosophers of the time, such as Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, to help bring about a white supremacist system. By coining the construct of race and establishing scientific racial theories to justify the arbitrary superiority of the »white race,« these scientists and philosophers gave European nations free rein to exploit Black people and perpetuate violence and racial degradation against them for centuries. Between 1750 and 1850, as more and more people from the African continent made their way to central Europe, the changing public opinion and growing hostility born out of this white supremacist rhetoric resulted in increased violence against Black people in Europe.

The Berlin Conference of 1884–1885: Apogee of the German Colonial Empire

During the 1870s and early 1880s, European nations increasingly turned to the African continent to appropriate natural resources for their growing industrial sectors. Countries such as France, Belgium, United Kingdom, and Germany began sending scouts to the continent in order to secure treaties from indigenous peoples. It is in this opportunistic context that, in 1884, Otto von Bismarck, Germany's first chancellor, hosted the Berlin Conference (also known as the West Africa or Congo Conference), during which 14 colonial powers negotiated the division of African lands amongst themselves. This established an era of new imperialism and heightened colonial activity in Africa that would later be referred to as the »Scramble for Africa«. Amongst other heads of state, von Bismarck sought to legitimize Germany's own claims on African land. Although the Berlin Conference did not initiate the European colonization of Africa, it galvanized European nations to intensify their exploitation of African resources and populations to the point that, by 1900, almost 90% of African land had been claimed by European states (Appiah 2010). Germany established protectorates across the following present-day countries: Namibia and Botswana (»German South-West Africa«), Togo, Ghana, Cameroon, Nigeria, Chad, Central African Republic, Congo, Gabon, Kapitaï and Koba, Mahinland (»German West Africa«), Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Mozambique (»German East Africa«), Kenya (»German Witu«), and Somalia (»German Somali Coast«).

In 1887, a group of colonial rulers, German nobility, and members of parliament then founded the German Colonial Society (Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft), aiming for a more expansive German colonial policy. At its founding, the organization already counted 15,000 members, who could rely on the support of their emperor Wilhelm II. His reign marked an era of aggressive colonial activity for Germany. Ulrich van der Heyden (2008) describes African resistance to colonial conquest and occupation as rife during this period in German colonial history. Resistance movements to colonial rule led to local uprisings, which were met with violence and conflict by European troops. In his assessment of the resulting suffering inflicted on Africans

following the Berlin Conference, the historian Helmuth Stoecker (1991) describes how »[a] large number of peoples, most of them for centuries seriously injured by the slave trade and damaged in their development, were deprived of their independence, very often also of their land and livestock, and even of their cultural identity.« Soon, migration from African colonies to Germany intensified as a result of the increase in trade. Although small in number compared to those who had newly arrived in France, Belgium, or the United Kingdom, Africans in Germany mostly took residence in Berlin and Hamburg. They made up a visible presence, and anti-Black hostilities began to intensify in that period. Meanwhile, in the United States new legislation, such as the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, was being passed, enabling African Americans to travel to central Europe.

African Resistance Movements Fighting for Freedom in German Colonies (1880–1918)

Throughout the late 1800s, anticolonial resistance movements on the African continent were actively fighting against colonial rule and towards dismantling the colonial system. Anticolonial movements were systematically persecuted by German government forces. Several uprisings in colonized territory led to military interventions and mass executions of indigenous populations. The genocide of the Herero and Nama people of present-day Namibia in the early 20th century was one of them. Over 100,000 Herero and Nama people were either killed or exterminated in concentration camps as punishment for rebelling against German colonial rule. This genocide is an example of the cruel extermination practices (also known as scorched earth policy) that prepared the way for the systemic mass killings continued by the Nazis with the Holocaust. Another well-known attempt of anticolonial resistance was the Maji Maji Rebellion in present-day Tanzania. This conflict was triggered by a series of aggressive colonial policies imposed by the German colonial rulers on indigenous populations, including extortionate taxes and forced labor on cotton plantations. The war that resulted in the region led to the death of an estimated 300,000 people between 1905 and 1907.

Recognizing this brutal period in German history is the focus of activist organizations such as Berlin Postkolonial, which for decades has been advocating for critically confronting German colonialism. In an interview with *Just Listen! Berlin Postkolonial* (2017), Mnyaka Sururu Mboro, board member and co-founder of Berlin Postkolonial, discusses the need for an official apology and for reparations for the crimes Germany committed during this colonial era. He points to one of these reparations being the restitution of human remains that were stolen during the German colonial era and that to this day can be found in the collections of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz (SPK) and the Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie,

Ethnologie, und Urgeschichte (BGAEU), as well as several other institutions all over Germany.

In an attempt to provide a framework for the restitution of colonial collections to their countries of origin, the »German Contact Point for Collections from Colonial Contexts« initiative was established in 2019 by several parties, including the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media (Staatsministerin für Kultur und Medien) and the Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office for International Cultural Policy (Staatsministerin für Internationale Kulturpolitik im Auswärtigen Amt).

One of the institutions in possession of a vast collection of colonial artifacts is the highly controversial Humboldt Forum in Berlin. The museum opened its doors virtually in 2020 after a €824 million renovation and is home to a collection of over 20,000 artifacts from Africa, Asia, and Oceania (originating mostly from former colonies). As one of its first exhibitions, the Humboldt Forum planned to show a collection of Benin Bronzes looted by British soldiers in the late 19th century from modern-day Nigeria. However, in March 2021, after increasing pressure from activist groups and after official Nigerian government requests for restitution, talks between the Humboldt Forum and the Nigerian government are taking place to negotiate the repatriation of the Benin Bronzes.

Being Black During the Weimar Republic (1918–1945)

Consolidating Anti-Black Sentiment in Germany

In the lead-up to the First World War (WWI), Black people in Germany faced an upward battle to maintain their personal safety (not to mention their living standards) while being confronted with restrictions that saw them progressively lose citizenship and all rights associated with it. It was within this increasingly tense social context that the term »degeneration« – in German »Verkafferung« – was coined. According to the German colonial lexicon, the term equates to the »lowering« of a European person to the cultural level of natives. This would occur, for instance, when a German was in continual contact with Africans, especially through engagement in mixed relationships or marriages. Fears of such »degeneration« were heightened by the apparent instability and insecurity of the colonized territories, as evidenced by indigenous uprisings. Back in Germany, German critics of the colonial empire pointed at mixed relationships and marriages as evidence of »degeneration«.

Come 1919, right-wing German media launched virulent anti-Black propaganda in which Black people (specifically men of African descent) were accused of widespread criminality, especially of a sexual nature. This intimidation campaign was waged primarily against the 25,000 to 30,000 French colonial troops originating from Senegal, Vietnam, and Madagascar who had been stationed in the Rhine

region after the French victory in WWI. The »Black Shame« or the »Black Disgrace« (*Die schwarze Schande* or *Die schwarze Schmach*) were terms the right-wing press and German nationalists used to describe false allegations, which ranged from rape to mutilation of German citizens, thereby creating a fear-based social fabric pitting whites against Blacks and justifying the impunity with which police forces and members of the public could inflict abuse against the Black population. The campaign reached its peak between 1920 and 1923, but continued until 1930. Christian Koller (2009) divides this propaganda campaign into an official and an unofficial part. The former was covertly directed by the Foreign Office and the Ministry of the Interior. Both ministries worked closely with official organizations such as the Rheinische Frauenliga and the Rheinische Volkspflege. They also supplied the press at home and abroad with highly racialized visual material to support these anti-Black stereotypes.

The African diaspora in Germany responded by founding various self-help associations. One of these was the »African Self-Help Organization« (Afrikanischer Hilfsverein), founded in Hamburg in 1918. Its goal was to establish a central organizing point for Africans living in Germany and serve as a »substitute for the tribal community and family in the homeland« (Koepsell/Aitken n. y.). It also intended to provide members with support in times of illness or loss. Sadly, the efforts and resources of the association were mostly needed to represent members against racist injustices and attacks, and to lobby for better rights and living conditions for the Afro-German community.

Nuremberg Laws: Disenfranchisement of Afro-Germans

It is estimated that 25,000 to 40,000 Black people lived in Germany during the Third Reich. They were victims of the racist imagery and language in German media propaganda during the lead-up to the Second World War. This new wave of racist propaganda was exacerbated by France's decision to mobilize over 100,000 colonial troops (mostly Black soldiers) and station them in the Rhineland region (Scheck 2014).

Relationships between German women and these soldiers resulted in a growing number of mixed-race children being born and raised in the area. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler called these children the derogatory term »Rhineland Bastards.« In accordance with the Nazi ideology of the Aryan race's supposed purity, all focus was placed on eradicating any citizens who by Nazi standards were considered impure or unfit to be considered German. The Nuremberg Laws passed in 1933 gave way to a systematic operation, between 1933 and 1945, to strip Black Germans of their nationality. These disenfranchisement laws left thousands of Afro-Germans stateless, stuck in a liminal state. Access to work and housing became increasingly restricted, thus pushing many Afro-Germans to look for work in the entertainment industry, mostly in films depicting Blacks as servants or as exotic performers in circuses and zoos. The

late Afro-German actor Theodor Wonja Michael describes surviving Nazi Germany by attempting to make himself invisible. He also describes avoiding all contact with white women, due to fear of forced sterilization and of being charged with racial defilement (Reucher 2019). The infamous »Afrika Schau,« which took place between 1934 and 1940, is one of the most notorious examples of a humiliating, yet life-saving employment opportunity for Afro-Germans during the Third Reich. This ethnographic exhibition, more accurately labeled as a human zoo, was used to promote colonial German ideologies. The historian Robbie Aitken points to the conflicting nature of this show: although it further contributed to the stereotypical and negative representation of Black people as primitive, it offered a form of employment for at least 40 Black people, mostly former colonial subjects and their German-born children, giving them a degree of security from the Nazis' increasingly violent racial policies and practices targeting Black people (Aitken 2017). By the onset of the war, hundreds of Black Germans were moved into concentration camps (Okuefuna 1997). The Afrika Schau closed down in 1940, and while a number of its participants sought exile outside of Germany, others, including the Cameroonian Jonas N'Doki and the Tanzanian Mohamed Husen, were murdered by the Nazis.

The Plight of Biracial Children and Families in the Third Reich

In addition to the Nazis' investment in propaganda against the Black community, they carried out oppressive practices targeting Black people and extending to anyone who would associate with them, specifically white women, who, according to Nazi ideology, were considered the cradle of the superior Aryan civilization. As such, interracial marriage and relationships became illegal under the Nuremberg Laws. Women giving birth to biracial children would see their status in society demoted. In her 2017 article, Tracey Owens Patten points to the fact that, based on German citizenship laws, the rights and benefits of citizenship status were extended neither to the mothers of mixed-race children nor to said children. On the contrary, the wives, partners, and children of Black men inherited their liminal status. The government even enforced policies that aimed to coerce German women expecting biracial children to terminate their pregnancies (Ayim et al. 1986).

Patton also shines a light on the Law for the Protection of Hereditary Health. This law was passed shortly after the Nazis came to power, and it called for the forced sterilization of any person medically designated as posing a threat to the ›health‹ of the social body. As a result, the Nazi government turned aggressively toward Black German bodies (Haas 2008). In his book *Sterilisierung der Rheinlandbastarde. Das Schicksal einer farbigen deutschen Minderheit 1918–1937*, the historian Reiner Pommerin (1979) estimated that the total number of biracial children forcibly sterilized by the Nazis was 400. Most of them were subjected to these procedures without their knowledge and against their will. To make matters worse, the sterilizations were known to be car-

ried out without anesthetics. This is proof of a systematic extermination plan against the Black population, which, albeit smaller in number than those carried out against Jewish or Roma populations, ought to be acknowledged, recognized, and remembered today.

Intersectionality, Colorism, and Black Identity in Germany

The events of the 20th century have deeply shaped the way in which Black identity has developed in Germany. As a result, biracial and Black people have faced similar patterns of discrimination in German history. Practices of colorism – where the lighter your skin color is, the more privileges you receive – were not as dominant in German society or governmental policy as in other colonial nations such as France and the United Kingdom, both of which heavily relied on this categorization to divide and weaken their respective Black populations. The lack of official demographic data on ethnicity and of systematized research into the lives of Black people in Germany makes assessing the full extent and consequences of institutional racism extremely challenging. As a result, research on the living conditions of Black people within German society relies heavily on qualitative assessments and grey literature. Researchers such as Anthony Obute (2019), Fatima El-Tayeb (2016), and Dominique Michel-Peres (2006) have all written on the topic of Black identity in Germany. In her master's thesis, Rebecca R. Hubbard (2010) used various qualitative methodologies to research the development of an Afro-German biracial identity. She concluded that her participants did not distinguish between being Black and being biracial when it came to discussing progress in the fight against racism in Germany. Instead, biracial people felt connected to other Black people and were aware of the fact that most people in Germany identify them as Black. However, their intersectional identity came through in all other components of their experiences, and in how they perceived the outside world as well as themselves as »being at an intersection in language, race, heritage, and culture.« That being said, even though the Black community has not been systematically divided and hierarchized to the same extent as it was in the French, British, and Belgian colonies, light-skinned Black people do experience privileges in Germany. The overrepresentation of biracial Black people as spokespeople of the Afro-German community exemplifies the invisibilization that monoracial Black people face in Germany. Intersections of class, migration, and residency status also play a role in the marginalization of Black people in Germany.

A Partitioned Germany: East–West Relations (1945–1989)

After Nazi Germany surrendered unconditionally to the Allies in 1945, and until the country was partitioned into two states in 1949, the Black population in Germany was

essentially made up of French and British colonial soldiers, African American GIs, and Afro-Germans who for the most part had settled in Germany at the beginning of the century and had managed to survive the war.

In communist East Germany (GDR), the state established a postwar message of solidarity with the continents of Africa and Asia in their battle for supremacy over capitalist nations. The GDR also extended its support to African Americans fighting in the Civil Rights movement.

The East German government set up several exchange programs to invite students, children, and »contract workers« *(Vertragsarbeiter)* from African socialist countries, such as Angola and Mozambique, to Germany for extended stays. One such exchange program took place between Namibia and East Germany during the South African Border War. Between 1966 and 1990, a total of 430 children were brought from Namibia to Bellin in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and provided with accommodation, health care, and education. These children were mostly preschool war orphans or South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) family members. The GDR government offered this program in response to SWAPO's request for material assistance and saw it as a contribution towards the socialist revolution.

Unfortunately, the GDR's official message of solidarity and racial equality was often far from the day-to-day experiences of Black people living in East Germany, as highlighted by various reports of physical attacks and public shaming (Ofodile 1967). As in the Nazi era, white German women expecting biracial children were still strongly encouraged to abort their pregnancy or to abandon their children in state-run orphanages.

In her 2002 publication, Piesche writes about the Black German minority that – despite this systematic violence against biracial children – emerged in the GDR in the early 1960s amid the societal tensions between ideal and lived governmental policies. »In what can be described as a relatively homogenous and closed society, Black people were seen as exotic, foreign, and different.« This perceived exoticism is a typical form of non-belonging to society, one which inevitably points towards the expectation that Black people would only be allowed here temporarily (Piesche 2002).

The Plight of Postwar Black »Occupation Babies«

In the south of Germany, the arrival of African American GIs and their role in liberating concentration camps and restoring areas across West Germany contributed to a shift in interracial relations. Public opinion was deeply divided, as some applauded their arrival, while others strongly opposed their presence. After all, the concept of »race degeneration« was still ingrained in German postwar values. This resulted in the social shaming and ostracization of wives or partners of Black sol-

diers, especially if a child was born from these relationships. In her 2011 book, Angelica Fenner (2011) describes the existence of these children as »a visible signifier of German national defeat.« This status was exacerbated by disagreements between the US American and West German governments about whose financial responsibility it was to take care of these children. Most African American soldiers who had fathered German children returned to civilian life in the US after the war, leaving the German women with all child-rearing duties. In response to the question of what to do with these children, many German officials »encouraged« mothers (by routinely using blackmail and intimidation) to give up their children for adoption or placement in orphanages and children's homes. In 1951, these children were officially recognized by the US government as orphan children under the Displaced Persons Act of 1948, which led to a 5-year US adoption plan for Afro-German children, under which so-called »brown babies« from Germany were matched with African American families and sent to live in the US. By 1968, approximately 7,000 Afro-German children had thus been adopted. This adoption policy is a shocking example of the way Black (biracial) people were objectified by both governments, since it was designed to specifically target them based on their racial classification and implemented without consent, against their will. This policy had many supporters in Germany, however, as it was argued that these children would face less racism in the US and that it would reconnect them with Black culture (Lemke Muniz de Faria 2003).

From the late 1950s and 1960s onwards, West Germany welcomed an influx of African students who, together with exiled African American veterans, contributed to the thriving political scene of the African Diaspora in Germany. They became instrumental in the rise of Black activism and in community-building in postwar West German society.

The Birth and Rise of the Afro-Feminist Movement

The Black feminist Audre Lorde first visited Berlin in 1984, when she received a visiting professorship at the Freie Universität Berlin. In the following decade, which was marked by major political and social change, including the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of East and West Germany, Lorde's work had a great influence on the Berlin-based Afro-diasporic social justice movement. While in Berlin, Lorde connected via her lectures with many women of African descent and encouraged them to share their experiences by bringing to light the largely ignored story of Black people in Germany. Lorde also worked with white German women by challenging them to acknowledge their white privilege and to deal with differences in more constructive ways. Following Lorde's example, Afro-German women began to write their stories and form political networks on behalf of Black people in Germany, thereby starting the movement of Black Feminism in Germany. Authors such as May

Ayim, Katharina Oguntoye, and Ika Hügel-Marshall started publishing during this period. Perhaps the most significant work born out of this period is the book they wrote collaboratively in 1986, titled *Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte.* The book depicts their experiences and shared identity as Afro-German women. By coming up with the term »Afro-German« to describe the community of Germans of African descent, Audre Lorde contributed to helping an entire generation to claim a shared identity after centuries of systemic discrimination, exclusion, and marginalization.

Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland and Generation ADEFRA

The so-called »brown babies« generation thus contributed to establishing the Afro-German movement that is still with us today. In the late 1980s, organizations focusing on Black empowerment were founded in the East and West alike. These enabled Afro-Germans to collectivize in greater numbers and articulate their positions as Black Germans. Two pivotal organizations came to life following the publication *Farbe bekennen*. The first, Generation ADEFRA, was co-founded by a group of Black feminist activists from the Black queer feminist scene in Berlin. Its founding members included the late poet May Ayim, sociologist Dagmar Schultz, and historian Katharina Oguntoye. ADEFRA focuses on empowerment through representation and the emergence of an organized Black community. In more recent years, it has also played an active role in representing other marginalized groups, especially raising awareness for migrant communities.

The second organization born out of Lorde's activist circle is the Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland (ISD),[1] whose founding members also include Oguntoye and the late Ayim, as well as the late actor and journalist Theodore Wonja Michael. ISD represents and advocates for Germans of African Heritage in Germany. Since its founding in 1986, ISD has used activism to empower the Afro-German community and engage in decolonization campaigns. One example of such a campaign is the Tearthisdown initiative,[2] which shines a light on Germany's colonial legacy by demanding the removal of colonial public monuments and street names that deny the systemic oppression that the Afro-German community has historically endured.

One of the areas to which both ADEFRA and ISD greatly contributed is the notion that anti-Black racism needs to be approached from an intersectional perspective, as factors including but not limited to identity, language, gender, sexuality, class, and disability play defining roles in the experiences of the Black community in Germany.

1 https://isdonline.de/

2 https://isdonline.de/antirassistische-website-fuehrt-zu-hausdurchsuchung/

Various community-based organizations, such as AfricAvenir,[3] Joliba,[4] and TANG,[5] provide valuable support for members of the African diaspora across Germany in areas ranging from educational programming and lobbying to culture and arts. Amongst these is the Central Council of the African Community (Zentralrat Afrikanischen Gemeinde in Deutschland – ZAGD), which aims to empower individuals, organizations, associations, and initiatives of people of African origin to train and pass on tools; the organization also aims to enable its community to gain more visibility and a broader reach across Germany. The ZAGD carries out important lobbying and committee work at the political, social, and institutional level, thereby conveying on behalf of the Black community crucial messages relating to their needs and concerns, such as developing strategies and measures to counteract anti-Black racism.

Re-unification, Migration, and the *Ausländer* Rhetoric (1990-Present)

Race & Othering

As Germany lost the Second World War and was unilaterally condemned for its crimes against humanity, the discourse around the term *Rasse* (race in English) and scientific racism were relegated to the past. Fast forward 50 years, and a new expression of racism arose from the complex social fabric of post-reunification Germany. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the official reunification of East and West Germany in 1990, the initial euphoria was soon followed by fears and uncertainties over the resulting changes. A political vacuum arose in the first post-reunification years, as the newly formed government failed to properly address the stark inequities between East and West. It is in this vacuum that racist discourse targeting minorities and immigrants (re)emerged, especially in more deprived areas of East Germany.

In a 2019 Al-Jazeera interview led by journalist Gouri Sharma (2019), the German-Ecuadorian psychologist and activist Lucia Muriel criticized the government's failure to address the issues that led to a post-reunification surge in far-right ideologies. Muriel argued that Germany stopped addressing its Nazi and colonial past, and that postwar generations thus perpetuated the racist ideology of the white Übermensch as the dominant race. This latent racism very quickly led to aggressive, violent attacks perpetrated by far-right adherents.

3 https://www.africavenir.org/

4 https://www.joliba.de/

5 https://tang-ev.de/das-netzwerk/

In the same article, Joshua Kwesi Aikins, a German-Ghanaian political scientist and activist from Berlin, comments that the slogans »Wir sind ein Volk« (we are one people) and »Wir sind das Volk« (we are the people), which had been used to support the peaceful revolution and reunification movement, were actually appropriated after reunification by far-right movements (Sharma 2019). Though the Nazi ideal of the German people as a project of homogeneity and superiority still remained central to racist discourses, the term »Ausländer« took over as the new proxy that the far-right movements used to take advantage of the uncertain political environment and to build their message around »Othering.« This phenomenon works by defining or labeling some individuals or groups as not fitting the norms of a given social group. The fact that Germanness is to this day associated with whiteness and Christianity still explains who would be given the Other/Ausländer label.

Post-reunification Germany lost the vocabulary needed to identify racism and racist systemic structures, namely the words »Rasse« and »Rassismus.« In their article included in *Who can speak and who is heard/hurt?*, Courtney Moffett-Bateau and Sebastian Weier (2019) describe a particular type of colorblindness: being unable to see racism because the lens that is needed to see it has gone missing. In another section of this book, Maria Alexopoulou (2019) asks: »Why, for instance, would a Polish person be called *Ausländer* in Germany, while a Swede would be described as a Swede? Why is Germanness still associated with whiteness, so that Afro-Germans born in Germany regularly receive compliments on their excellent German-language skills? This is proof that the term ›*Ausländer*‹ is ultimately a racialized concept.«

As the European Union was founded in 1993, the link between German/European identities and whiteness became reinforced, whereas people of color, regardless of their citizenship status, continued to be identified as perpetual Ausländer or Others. According to Fatima El-Tayeb (2011), Europe is »a colorblind continent in which difference is marked along lines of nationality and ethnicised Others are routinely ascribed a position outside the nation, allowing the permanent externalization and thus silencing of a debate on the legacy of racism and colonialism.«

The 2015 Migration Wave: The Diversity Debate

The migration wave of refugees originating from the Middle East and Africa that began in late 2014 triggered a sharp increase in anti-immigrant violence and racist crimes in Germany. With approximately 1.4 million migrants arriving between 2014 and 2016, the majority of whom were from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, this wave led to a large-scale demographic change (European Migration Network 2016). As this wave raised questions about how to successfully integrate these newcomers, the discussion on diversity took on a new dimension. According to the European Network Against Racism, the level of racist and xenophobic violence and speech targeting migrants and refugees in Europe peaked in 2016. Not a month passed without an as-

sault, a hate speech incident, or a new discriminatory policy against asylum seekers and migrants in Germany and across Europe (European Network Against Racism 2020).

Community-led Activist Organizations before/after the Murder of George Floyd in 2020

The German Afro-diaspora has continuously relied on its deeply rooted practices of community engagement to empower its members. Several initiatives have arisen in the last 10 years. An example of an organization whose reach extends nationwide is Each One Teach One (EOTO), founded in 2012 in Berlin. EOTO is a community-based education and empowerment project carrying out crucial educational work and political lobbying on behalf of the community of people of African descent in Germany. The EOTO library provides access to literature by Black scholars and authors, thereby encouraging transgenerational dialogue and helping shift the narrative away from the hegemonic eurocentric historical perspective. In 2020, the organization played a key role in mobilizing the Afro-German community to take part in the first Afro-German census in order to gain more insight into the lived experiences of Afro-Germans with regard to racism, discrimination, and structural inequality.

Without a doubt, one of the tragic, yet transformative events of 2020 for the global African diaspora was the brutal murder of George Floyd at the hands of police officers. As the video of his murder went viral, the response was felt overnight amongst Afro-Germans, who mobilized and organized nationwide protests to denounce systemic racism and police brutality against BIPOC (Black, indigenous, and people of color). The protests brought tens of thousands of people together and were initiated by the younger Afro-German generation via the transnational movement Black Lives Matter (BLM). The younger generation has shown how important it is to join forces with the global African Diaspora. Together, these movements use public resistance to build on the work of community mobilization and empowerment accomplished by organizations such as ISD and ADEFRA in the 1980s and 1990s, and to bring the fight against white supremacy and for racial justice to a global united front.

Political Lobbying and Governmental Representation

The efforts of grassroots, community-led organizations have contributed greatly by lobbying for the acknowledgement of Germany's colonial past and for the improvement of living conditions for the Afro-diaspora. They also paved the way for electing the first generation of Black politicians to German state and federal offices. Albeit small in number, these politicians elected over the past 10 years have drawn media attention to the structural nature of anti-Black discrimination and specifically to

issues such as the increase in far-right attacks against the community. Amongst these politicians are Sylvie Nantcha (CDU), the first Afro-German city councilor in Freiburg i.Br. and the first Afro-German state executive member in Baden-Württemberg (2009–2013), and Dr. Pierrette Herzberger-Fofana, who was elected as Member of the European Parliament in 2019 as a candidate of Bündnis 90/Die Grünen (Alliance '90/The Greens). Charles M. Huber (CDU) and Karamba Diaby (SPD) were elected as members of the German Parliament in 2013; both men are of Senegalese descent. Another rising political figure is Aminata Touré (Alliance '90/The Greens), elected in 2017 to the State Parliament of Schleswig-Holstein. Since 2019, Touré has served as its vice president, advocating for her constituents on migration, antiracism, women's, queer, and religious issues.

One common thread linking these politicians has been their experiences of systemic racism in their field of politics. In 2019, Diaby was targeted when his office was riddled with what appeared to be bullet holes. Racially motivated intimidation practices are on the rise and used against Black public figures, including politicians speaking in favor of immigration. On the European front, Touré, Diaby, and Huber joined forces with fellow Black European elected representatives in 2018 in an open letter, published in *The Guardian* (Lewis et al. 2018), that condemned the defamation case against Cecile Kyenge, a former Italian minister for integration who accused the Italian Lega Nord party of racism following various online attacks against her. It is important, however, to stress the slow pace at which legislation is meeting public demands to systematically tackle racism within public institutions, such as the police, in Germany. So far, only the state of Berlin has passed an anti-discrimination law under which victims could be entitled to compensation if officials discriminate against them based on ethnic origin, religion, political worldview, disability, or a range of other criteria. The voting over this law triggered vast controversy nationwide. Critics included the Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, who positioned himself in support of police forces and stated that he does not believe racism is a structural problem within the police force, thereby reinforcing the usual »bad apples« argument (Brandes 2020).

Measuring and Addressing Individual and Structural Forms of Anti-Black Discrimination

A 2019 report from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), titled »Being Black in the EU,« surveys the experiences of almost 6,000 people of African descent in 12 EU member states. It showed evidence of widespread discrimination by and exclusion from crucial sectors of society, including labor, housing, and education. These observations come 20 years after the ratification of EU laws forbidding discrimination based on race, ethnic or social origin, religion or belief, and political

or any other opinion. Racial discrimination is a reality in all areas of life for people of African descent in Germany, with a staggering 48% of respondents having felt racially discriminated against in the previous five years. A majority of them named skin color as the most commonly identified ground for discrimination, followed by ethnic origin and religion or religious beliefs (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2019).

Need for Reliable Data Sources

The absence of national censuses that include diversity and equality data in Germany is a major hurdle in taking effective measures against discrimination in Germany. Reliable quantitative and qualitative data sources are essential in understanding the extent and consequences of discrimination against Black people in Germany. Without access to accurate data, addressing the issue systematically is virtually impossible, as it critically limits the ability of governmental and non-governmental organizations to efficiently allocate resources or assess whether their efforts are paying off, and hinders policymakers' efforts to raise adequate funding.

Yet there are currently no official government statistics on the country's Black population or the number of Germans who identify as Black. It is estimated that one in four Germans have a »migration background.« Out of these 21 million people, approximately one million are Black, which amounts to 4.7% of the German population. However, even this basic statistic is an estimated guess, since the German government does not collect ethnicity data. Instead, this approximation is based on people with a migration background and of African origin. This approach is problematic, since it does not take into account people from other Afro-European or Afro-American origins, nor does it include anyone beyond first- or second-generation Black Germans. In a 2020 *Deutsche Welle* article, interviewee Sarah Chander of the European Network Against Racism criticizes this approach, as it limits the notion of diversity to nationality or links it to migration (Chimbelu 2020a). Another issue with discrimination data collected in Germany is that it tends to lack depth of analysis. Studies on discrimination mainly focus on binary gender data (male/female). This fails to capture the intersectional nature of discrimination (not to mention trans* or non-binary identities), as aspects such as race, religion, class, and sexual orientation combine with gender to create more vulnerable sub-groups. Lumping everyone into one category ignores the fact that the experience of discrimination is not homogenous.

In a bid to collect the much-needed data on Black people, Africans, and the Afrodiaspora living in Germany, the first official Afrozensus initiative was launched in

2019 (EOTO/Citizens for Europe 2019).[6] The aforementioned online survey aimed to obtain a comprehensive picture of the experiences of people of African descent in Germany. The themes of the questions asked ranged from discrimination experiences to perspectives on politics and society. As soon as the resulting statistics are compiled, the Afrozensus initiative plans to make this data available to the public and to policy makers, in a bid to develop concrete measures to address anti-Black discrimination as well as to protect and promote the Black community in Germany.

The General Act on Equal Treatment (Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz)

Since reunification, Germany has introduced new laws and agencies to address discrimination, yet these are still very limited in their scope and power. The anti-discrimination strategy was built on the General Act on Equal Treatment (abbreviated to AGG in German) and the subsequent founding of the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes – ADS) – in 2006. The AGG's purpose is to prevent or stop discrimination on the grounds of race or ethnic origin, gender, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation. It incorporates four EU Anti-Discrimination Directives into German law and governs the claims and legal consequences in cases of discrimination, both in the field of labor and in civil law. Any person experiencing discrimination can report their case and will receive independent counseling, using what the ADS calls a horizontal approach. As described by the ADS, this horizontal approach considers all types of discrimination to be of equal importance, since people are frequently discriminated against on more than one of these grounds – whether on the grounds of race or ethnic origin, gender, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual identity (Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency 2019).

According to the ADS, this approach provides more efficient protection against so-called multidimensional discrimination, or discrimination on multiple factors, as even amongst vulnerable groups experiences can differ widely. For instance, a second-generation Afro-German whose first language is German is likely to experience discrimination differently from a recently arrived migrant from the African continent who does not yet speak German, although both identify as Black. Based on the ADS's 2019 annual report, almost every third citizen in Germany (31.4%) has experienced discrimination within the preceding two years (Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes 2020). The ADS received approximately 3,500 requests for counseling. Out of these, almost a third were linked to discrimination on the basis of race or ethnicity. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance pointed to the

6 International Women* Space (2020): »#Afrozensus – Erfahrungen teilen, Politik verändern, Gesellschaft gestalten«. https://iwspace.de/2020/03/afrozensus-erfahrungen-teilen-politik-verandern-gesellschaft-gestalten/

ADS's limitations and room for improvement in their 2019 country report: the ADS's mandate is too limited in scope, as it does not explicitly cover hate speech, discrimination on grounds of skin color, language, citizenship, and gender identity, or intersectional discrimination. In addition, there are areas, both in the public sector and in the private sector, that do not fall under the ADS's mandate. Furthermore, the ADS lacks fundamental victim support and litigation competences. It is currently underfunded and does not operate fully independently (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance 2020).

The German Federal Government has committed itself to tackling racism against Black Germans and initiating counter-measures in alignment with the UN International Decade for People of African Descent (2015–2024). To this end, a cabinet committee focusing on the fight against racism and right-wing extremism was set up in early 2020. Between 2021 and 2024, over 1 billion euro will be made available to projects and initiatives on a range of topics, from educational policy to tackling the international network of far-right organizations. With a strong focus on youth work, the cabinet committee aims, for instance, to expand international youth exchange programs and reappraise the way Germany's colonial past is taught in textbooks.

Police Brutality and Racial Profiling

The FRA defines racial profiling as an unlawful practice that undermines people's trust in law enforcement. Profiling involves categorizing individuals according to personal characteristics, which can include racial or ethnic origin, skin color, religion, or nationality. The 2019 FRA survey points to a large prevalence in Germany of survey respondents who experienced police stops as racial profiling (14%), with only two EU member states scoring higher (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2019).

In the past 20 years, two cases of police brutality became emblematic of the fight against endemic police brutality in Germany. In 2004, Laya-Alama Conde was taken into custody by the Bremen police and forced to consume emetic drugs, which later led to his death. In 2005, Oury Jalloh was arrested for similar charges as Conde, though his death occurred in a fire that erupted at the Dessau police station. His corpse was discovered with hands and feet bound to his bed frame. To this day, no member of the police force was sentenced for either of these crimes. Both deaths triggered renewed demands from activist organizations, including the German faction of Black Lives Matter, for an independent inquiry into racial discrimination within the police forces. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance 2020 report points to numerous police services and representatives in Germany that claim to be unaware of, or that do not admit the existence of, racial profiling in the police forces, despite extensive evidence. In 2015, overwhelming evidence of racially-

motivated conduct by law enforcement and of police racial profiling practices was brought forward by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights. In addition, the UN Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent concluded that racial profiling is endemic among German police officials.

For years, activist groups as well as some politicians have accused the police of not doing enough to find and expel potentially violent far-right nationalists from their ranks. Interior Minister Horst Seehofer, claiming that it is not a problem, has actively opposed any demand for a study. Following a string of new far-right scandals within the police forces in 2020, Seehofer conceded to a study, albeit not the one demanded by activist groups. The study will, for instance, also consider violence and hate directed against police and shall exclude »looking at allegations and aspersions cast against the police« (Reuters 2020).

Access to Labor and Housing Markets

The FRA survey findings on labor market participation are particularly concerning, as they show that people of African descent are often engaged in employment below their level of education. Baraulina, Borchers, and Schmid (2008) offer additional insight from the Federal Statistical Office and the Federal Employment Agency to show the low employment rate of people of African descent in Germany relative to white workers. These lower rates are partly attributed to barriers in accessing the labor market, which translate into people of African descent being proportionately more likely to be employed in informal and precarious employment, regardless of their qualifications. Paid work rates are also not a level playing field in Germany, with people of African descent being paid on average 10% less than the general population rate (this gap widens to 14% for women of African descent). Out of 25% of all respondents across 12 EU member states, one in four felt racially discriminated against when looking for work. The same proportion had experienced racial discrimination at work in the five years leading up to the survey. The causes for this discrimination were overwhelmingly attributed to skin color and physical appearance. These findings point towards the structural nature of anti-Black discrimination in the German labor market. Studying the gender gaps and differences in experiences between first-, second-, and third-generation people of African descent would offer even more insights into the intersectional ways in which the Black community experiences discrimination.

With regard to discrimination in the housing market, the FRA lists similar findings in their 2019 survey (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights 2019). Skin color, a »foreign-sounding« name, and having an accent all contributed to respondents feeling racially discriminated against while applying for accommodation. Among the general population in the EU, 7 out of 10 people own the accommodation in which they live, making ownership the most prevalent tenancy

status, yet this statistic sinks to only 15% when we look at respondents of African descent. Discrimination is also virulent in public housing, which disproportionately affects migrant families. Germany, along with Italy, Austria, and Luxembourg, accounted for one of the higher rates of perceived discrimination experienced by people of African descent when looking for housing (33%). Because of the additional hurdles faced by the Black community in the housing market, many live in more precarious conditions, which exacerbates social exclusion.

Hair, Body, Gender, and Sexuality Politics

As discussed in the section on »Race & Othering« above, the hegemonic representation of German identity as »blond, blue-eyed, and able-bodied« was developed from colonial racial theories and became further anchored in Nazi ideology. Kamille Gentles-Peart (2018) points to the European colonial discourse to understand the origins of the aversion to Black people's appearances. The depiction of Black women by European colonizers as having big, monstrous, and unwomanly bodies was used as a signifier of their inferiority both in an intellectual and physical sense. These practices of Othering were constructed in contrast to the delicate and pale bodies of aristocratic white women. As such, whiteness became an essential criterion for femininity and true womanhood. Similar depictions were made against Black men, as shown for instance in the 1920s »Black Shame« propaganda, which emphasized the stereotype of the »violent black man.« Within the eurocentric aesthetical frame, Black people were traditionally defined as being sexual rather than beautiful. This has created the basis for their dehumanization, thereby upholding a system within which physical, mental, and emotional abuse against them was justifiable.

Nowadays, abiding by these unachievable beauty standards continues to fuel an entire beauty industry that is responsible for the manufacturing of toxic chemical products that are targeted specifically at Black people to achieve European hair textures and lighter skin colors.

Examining the social constructions of beauty also provides us with crucial insights into the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality and how these multiply the marginalization experienced by Black women. This has been central to the work of Black feminist scholars and activists such as Angela Davis (1981) and Audre Lorde (1980).

Epistemic Violence and Access to the Education Sector

Compared to other European countries, educational opportunities in Germany are strongly determined by a pupil's socioeconomic background. In »Kanak Academic: Teaching in Enemy Territory,« Ismahan Wayah (2019) describes how the three-tiered secondary school system of Hauptschule, Realschule, and Gymnasium in

several *Bundesländer* inherently privileges students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, particularly with regard to the pursuit of a university education. In contrast, pupils from immigrant and/or Black families, who are disproportionately affected by socioeconomic marginalization, are more likely to be encouraged to follow vocational training, which in turn will lead to lower-income professions. Furthermore, Black students who do have access to university education will be expected to blend into their predominantly white and middle-class environment in order to successfully navigate through their studies. At the doctoral level, Germany's failure to retain Black and migrant PhD students can be interpreted as being due to the structurally, culturally, and epistemologically »white spaces« cultivated by academic institutions. The notion of »whiteness« is highlighted by Sara Ahmed (2007), who describes it through a phenomenological lens by drawing upon experiences of inhabiting a white world as a non-white body and by exploring how whiteness becomes worldly through the noticeability of some (non-white) bodies over others. Ahmed points out that in order to decolonize knowledge, especially when it comes to Black Studies, one cannot rely on white research perspectives to dominate the discourse. All too often, Black scholars are relegated to giving minor input, and their experiential knowledge is dismissed.

Microaggressions

Racism has transformed over the last decades, as overtly blunt forms of racism lost their social and moral acceptance in German society. As a result, racism often occurs in more subtle, hidden, yet repetitive ways known as microaggressions, which is a term coined in the 1970s by the psychologist Chester Pierce as he stressed the harmful nature of these repetitive acts of racism in everyday life.

Extensive research has been done on the cumulative effect and persistence of racial microaggressions on the psychological and physical well-being of Black people. In »Perspective Matters: Racism and Resistance in the Everyday Lives of Youths of Color in Germany,« Lili Rebstock (2019) argues that in Germany, the dominant research about racism mainly represents the perpetrators' views. She also points out that racism today is marked by »the staggering, long-term effect of constant demeaning and excluding messages that frequently go unsanctioned. The harmful impact of everyday racism is either ignored or dismissed once it is addressed as the feelings of the perpetrator are put ahead of the wellbeing of the victim.«

Closing Thoughts: Healing via Social Justice

We hope to have brought some clarity as to the historical ramifications of the systemic discrimination faced by the Black population in Germany. We see this as an

essential step towards accountability, reparations, individual and collective healing – and ultimately peace and equality. In light of this, the first step needs to be the official and complete acknowledgement by the German government of its responsibility for the discrimination that continues to take place against its Black population. Accepting the endemic nature of this problem and how it pervades all areas of society is the next indispensable step. Speaking on the topic of reparations in the US on *The Ezra Klein Show* podcast, Bryan Stevenson describes the first step as committing to truth-telling in order to be genuinely engaged and to recover from human rights abuses: »You can't jump to reconciliation, nor to reparation or restoration until you tell the truth and acknowledge the wrongdoing. Until you know the nature of the injuries, you can't actually speak to the kind of remedies that are going to be necessary« (Klein 2020). Reparations for the harm caused need to constitute an integral part of this healing process and only then can Germany aspire towards an equitable economic, social, and moral system. This includes correcting school curricula to accurately recount Germany's colonial past and introducing Black Studies in academic studies, where Black scholars and members of other marginalized groups can engage in empowerment practices by actively producing and sharing knowledge about their historical background and their socio-economic condition. It includes the restitution of indigenous art and human remains collected during colonial times, and addressing the financial disadvantages that Black people accumulated through centuries of marginalization and limited opportunities. Now, more than ever, the government should align with the demands issued from activists, academia, and civil society to make amends for the past and to safeguard equal opportunities, free of discrimination, in all areas of life for everybody.

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