

Afro-German

You're Afro-German?

... ah, I see: African and German.

What an interesting mixture!

You know, a lot of folks, they still think

mulattoes, they're not

as smart

as whites.

I don't believe that.

I think: with adequate education ...

You're really lucky that you grew up *here*.

With German parents, even. How about that!

You planning to go back?

What? You've never been to Papa's country?

What a shame. ... Well, if you ask me:

A background like that, it sure does leave its mark.

Me, for example, I'm from Westphalia,

and I think

that's where I belong ...

Lord have mercy! All the suffrin' in the world!

Be glad

you didn't stay in the bush.

You wouldn't be where you are today!

I mean, you're really a smart girl.

If you work hard in your studies,

you can help your people back in Africa: That's what

you were predestined for,

they'll sure listen to you,

but for us—

it's sort of a lower culture ...

What do you mean? Do something here. What d'you wanna do here? Ok, ok, it's not all smooth sailing. But I think everybody ought to sweep his own doorstep first!

—May Opitz

ERIN CRAWLEY

Rethinking Germanness: Two Afro-German Women Journey "Home"

The marginal or "minority" is not the space of a celebratory, or utopian, self-marginalization. It is a much more substantial intervention into those justifications of modernity—progress, homogeneity, cultural organicism, the deep nation, the long past—that rationalize the authoritarian, "normalizing" tendencies within cultures in the name of the national interest or the ethnic prerogative.

—Homi Bhabha,
Nation and Narration

Within culture, marginality, though it remains peripheral to the broader mainstream, has never been such a productive space as it is now.

—Stuart Hall,
"What is this 'Black' in Black
Popular Culture?"

In Germany in the last few years there has been a tremendous surge in violence, at times resulting in death, against foreigners.¹ To people outside of Germany perhaps the most well known incidents were the events in Hoyerswerde in September 1991, in which temporary housing of those seeking asylum in Germany was fire-bombed. As the city bussed hundreds of people out of town in the middle of the night "for their own safety," many residents rejoiced on television that their town was now "foreigner-free." The other event widely publicized in the United States was the fire-bombing of a house in Solingen in May of 1993, which resulted in the deaths of five Turkish girls and women. Efforts by larger numbers of Germans to counter the increase in violence and right-wing and neo-Nazi activities were slow in coming. This left many countries with the uneasy feeling that Germany was once again on the brink of "national disaster," with little sign of protest from its citizens. Eventually, there were large demonstrations, initially in response

to Hoyerwerde, on the part of many Germans appalled by the harassment and murder of foreigners living in their midst.²

What remains to a large extent unacknowledged, however, are the hundreds of acts of harassment and violence directed against those Germans who are *perceived* to be "non-German," that is, Germans of color. In the German media, the violence is discussed most frequently as racial expressions of *Ausländerfeindlichkeit* (xenophobia), only occasionally as evidence of *Rassismus* (racism) in the society, and almost exclusively as directed against foreigners.³ The existence of Germans of color is so deeply denied that people of color are automatically labeled "foreign" by most white Germans. The extent to which race functions as a definitive category in the cultural configuration of a German identity has been too seldom addressed.⁴

My intent here is not to explore the causes of the rise in violence, nor to reexamine the historical significance of the opposition of the categories "black" and "white" as they pertain to a definition of German nationality. Nor do I intend to relegate this discussion to one of what is "other" or "the other" in German culture, a role that black diasporic peoples are so often assigned in academic writings in general. Rather, I want to consider ways in which what is "German" has been opened up to new configurations. To this end I will discuss three texts by two Afro-German women who are active in a growing Afro-German movement and in feminist circles. Katharina Oguntoye's "Erinnerung trifft Gegenwart: Wiederbegegnung mit der Kindheit (Nigeria)" (Memory Encounters the Present: Meeting Again with Childhood [Nigeria]), and May Opitz (Ayim)'s "Eine der anderen: Rückkehr in mein Dorf (Ghana)" (One of the Others: Return to My Village [Ghana]) can be read as creative attempts to reconceptualize German identity in terms that disrupt the dominant cultural encoding of German as white and posit alternative—and open-ended—definitions.⁵ Before turning to these texts, a discussion of a third text, May Opitz's poem, "Afro-Deutsch" (Afro-German), will help to illuminate some of the stereotypical assumptions concerning Afro-Germans against which both Opitz and Oguntoye implicitly write in their travel narratives.

The poem "Afro-German" reproduces, and in the process subverts, the commonly held German stereotype that all blacks "belong naturally" in Africa. "Afro-German" appeared in *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out*,⁶ the 1992 English translation of *Farbe bekennen: Afro-*

deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte, which was published in 1986 by the feminist publishing house Orlanda Frauenverlag. A collection of autobiographical essays, poetry, and historical background, *Farbe bekennen* was the first publication by Afro-German women and one that confronted the broader West German public with the history and present lives of a minority native to Germany, but largely unacknowledged by it. "Afro-German" opens in the midst of a conversation, though it soon becomes clear that we have access to only one voice. This voice, which I will designate as "the speaker," appears to be a white German, whether a man or woman is not clear; the unrepresented partner in the conversation is an Afro-German woman. In the first stanza, language unfolds as the site of a power struggle, one that concerns the power to define one's identity.

The opening two lines of the poem indicate the speaker's surprise and consternation on hearing the term *Afro-German*. The question "You're Afro-German?" followed by a pause and then the words "... ah, I see: African and German" sets up the tension: *Afro-German* is not recognized as a viable category. It is the stress on the word *and* that indicates where the trouble lies for the speaker; he or she is unable to incorporate the coupling of "African and German" into his or her conception of "German."

This inability, or perhaps refusal, to imagine such a configuration is more clearly indicated by the speaker's use of the expressions *Mulattien* (*Mulatten*) and *Mixtur* (*Mischung*). These expressions are loaded terms stemming from colonial and later fascist forms of racial categorization. With the words *Mischung* and *Mulatten* the speaker replaces the woman's choice of the term *Afro-German*, substituting what he or she considers the more appropriate label *mulatto*. The Afro-German woman's act of self-definition has been displaced in favor of the use of more familiar categories, ones that are, moreover, implicated in a genocidal past.

The speaker claims to understand the term *Afro-German* and even acknowledges that the woman grew up with German parents (although certainly a curiosity, as the phrase "How about that?" indicates), yet promptly inquires "You planning to go back?" underlining the assumption that the woman is not really from Germany. It is assumed that she must want to return to "Papa's country" (*die Heimat vom Papa*), to the "bush," where she "belongs." Africans are referred to as "[her] people" whom she is "predestined" to help: "If you work hard in your studies, /

you can help your people in Africa: That's what / you were predestined for." Just prior to this comment the speaker introduces an analogy as a warning to the woman of how indelibly marked one is by one's "heritage" (*Herkunft*), a heritage that is inseparably tied to one's place of origin: "Me, for example, I'm from Westphalia, / and I think that's where I belong. . . ." This insistence on a "place of origin" infers, in a vaguely threatening manner, that a really smart "girl," one with black skin certainly, belongs in her proper place, which has been constituted as "Africa"—an amorphous location, home to "all the suffrin in the world!"

The Afro-German woman has been put in her place in two senses; she is situated geographically *out* of Europe and *in* Africa, and she is patronizingly referred to as "a smart girl" (*'n intelligente Mädchen*)—who should know her place. Furthermore, an interesting paradoxical inflation and simultaneous reduction has occurred. The speaker's place of origin is Westphalia, a seemingly specific, circumscribed region, the naming of which implies a particular dialect and set of local traditions. Its parallel is "Africa," "Papa's home," "the bush," all three vague, generalized terms that take on mythic proportions: they are appellations for the mysterious dark continent, the realm of adventure and conquest, instant riches and agonizing deaths, the place of Germany's "unjustly" thwarted colonizing aspirations, immortalized in novels and films. At the same time, the phrases imply a homogeneous, contained space, a vast continent of many different countries and histories reduced to the size and complexity of Westphalia.

In addition to the geographical distance the speaker has established to the Afro-German, he or she has created a cultural gap. The justification which the speaker gives for the woman's "return" to Africa is that "they" (the Africans) would listen to her, thus she could help them in their "misery." The cultural gap between the speaker and "the Africans" is presented as unbridgeable, whereas the Afro-German woman is "naturally" closer to them. The speaker assigns the Afro-German woman a clearly non-German cultural position and indignantly denies that there might be work to do in Germany: "What do you mean? Do something here. What d'you wanna do here?"

The form of the poem reproduces the socially and culturally determined power relationship between the two participants; it is a monolog masquerading as a dialog. Questions are asked and responses are given

that have been prompted by comments not recorded in the poem. We have only the words of the one speaker, and it would seem that the partner in the dialog, the Afro-German woman, is absent as a speaking subject; she is silenced. Just as her words are not recorded, so her comments, her moves towards self-determination, are not registered by the voice we hear in the poem. The term *Afro-German* sets the speaker off on a course of mostly self-generated musings, with pains taken to reconstruct the woman within the stereotypical framework reserved for blacks: foreign, other, non-German. But it is not a "simple" matter of having merely re-categorized her. This re-categorization eliminates her as a German and dismisses those aspects of German history, particularly its colonialist past, that continue to affect the material lives of Afro-Germans.

This reading, however, underestimates the impact of the Afro-German woman on the speaker. Although the Afro-German woman does not appear to be present in the poem, she is not entirely absent; after all, the self-defensive posturing and (perhaps deliberately) ignorant comments of the speaker are prompted by his interaction with her. The speaker is unable to shut out completely the Afro-German woman, as the gaps in the "conversation" indicate. The ellipses in the poem mark the presence of the Afro-German woman as she disrupts the smooth flow of the dominant story concerning the "proper place" and "true identity" of blacks in Germany.

At a time when the unification of the two Germanies has brought with it intense efforts to create a *unified* German identity, with an unmistakable West German stamp, texts such as this and the narratives to be discussed below provide a basis for an urgently needed reassessment of what constitutes "the German." Writings by Afro-Germans demand learning to see and to talk about what is often, and with considerable effort, ignored about German culture—that it is and has been a diverse culture, not a homogeneous one. Recognition of the heterogeneity of German culture must go beyond lip service to multiculturalism, whether in Germany itself or in the U.S. academic field of *Germanistik*.⁷ Through writings, both literary and nonliterary, conferences, and workshops, Afro-Germans have confronted a culture in love with its self-image as a hermetically sealed, homogeneous space—the fantasy of a white nation that is, at its core, neither an "immigrant land," nor one polluted by "dangerous" racial types. Whereas it could be argued that such a fantasy might be operative only if one is talking of those Germans who identify

themselves with the far right, I would argue that the majority of white Germans across the political spectrum would be hard-pressed to accept the term *Afro-German*, since the concept of "black" and "German" lies outside the general conceptualization of Germanness.

The term *Afro-German* was created in the early 1980s by black German women as an expression of their diverse cultural heritages and in active response to a continued inability on the part of other Germans to accept them as Germans.⁸ Like the term *Afro-American* on which it is modeled, the definition does not rest on skin color. Moreover, the term expresses a political choice to affirm an aspect of identity that is otherwise completely denied. Afro-Germans do not acquiesce in the position of "victim"; instead they assertively claim their heritages by opposing *afro-deutsch* to such terms as *Neger*, *Mulatte*, *Mischling* and *Farbige* (Negro/nigger, mulatto, half-breed, colored).⁹ This move towards self-determination is based not on biological criteria (developed most extensively in the eugenics movement of the early twentieth century, and further appropriated and adapted to Nazi programs of racial hygiene), which *Mischling* and *Mulatte* imply, but rather on a social criterion, that is, the condition of living in a white-dominated German society. It is also important to note that *Mischling* and *Mulatte* are terms made popular in the language of German colonialization, and they connote the dehumanization and brutalization of peoples defined as subhuman, concepts carried over and "refined" within Nazi ideology.¹⁰ The assertion on the part of some white Germans when confronted with the new term, that the more common labels *Neger* or *Mischling* are harmless and even preferable to the "ridiculous" term, *afro-deutsch*, indicates a certain determination to remain ignorant of their past.¹¹

In her essay "Die schwarze deutsche Bewegung und die Frauenbewegung in Deutschland" (The Black German Movement and the Women's Movement in Germany), Katharina Oguntoye discusses the constellation of events that contributed to the development of a movement by Germans of color.¹² She emphasizes three key aspects: the visit in 1984 by African-American writers and feminists Audre Lorde and Gloria Joseph to Berlin; the determination and energy of Afro-German women in the development of a broader Afro-German movement that started between 1985 and 1986, represented by the *Initiative Schwarze Deutsche* (ISD) (Initiative of Black Germans), and the later *Afro-deutsche Frauengruppe* (ADEFRA) (Afro-German women's group); and the Or-

landa Frauenverlag, the feminist publishing house in Berlin headed by Dagmar Schultz. One of the first white German feminists to raise the issue of racism in the women's movement, Schultz published translations of essays by Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich in 1983 under the title *Macht und Sinnlichkeit* (Power and Sensuality). She also arranged for Lorde's invitation to Berlin the following year. The Orlanda Frauenverlag was the only publishing house at that time that was committed to publishing works by women of color and contributions on antiracism.

Without underestimating the important work contributed by Afro-German men within ISD, Oguntoye finds a significant model for a kind of black consciousness-raising in the alternative space created by the West German women's movement. Certainly, not all Afro-German women had been directly involved in this movement. Oguntoye maintains, however, that it provided a relatively safe location for many of them to come together and this, in turn, led to explorations of issues common to their lives as black women in a predominantly white society. The opportunity to come together was crucial to the process of understanding themselves as members of a group rather than as isolated individuals, which made possible the eventual public confrontation with the existence and history of Afro-Germans. An initial step in this direction was taken by those who participated in researching and writing *Farbe bekennen* (Showing Our Colors).¹³ The Orlanda Frauenverlag provided access to a public voice.

The significance attributed to the West German women's movement in the development of a black German movement notwithstanding, Oguntoye makes clear that the women's movement did not foster the development of ISD or ADEFRA, nor was it necessarily more attuned than the general public to the difficulties faced by Germans who are black. Afro-German women could not contain their concerns and desires for change within the generalized concept *woman*, nor simply "add on" their oppression as women of color as a matter for concern, but found it imperative to create alternative spaces to address the specifics of their situation.

The notion of alternative sites raises questions concerning the constitution of margins and dominant centers and how the relationship between or among them is defined. The concerns and activities of those Afro-German women involved in feminist movements and of Afro-Germans engaged in *Initiative Schwarze Deutsche* could be (and have been)

dismissed as of little consequence to issues facing Germans today, due in part to the small number of people involved. Yet it is almost a cliché to say that one of the most disturbing questions facing Germans, at least since the Holocaust, is precisely what it means to be German, a question with which many Afro-Germans are seriously engaged. In spite of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissipation of the initial euphoria experienced by many in the unification of East and West, a German national cultural identity that is anchored in a racialized sense of a white self is still largely intact. To dismiss the relevance of issues confronted by many Afro-Germans is to underestimate the scope of the challenge they extend to current debates on German identity.

I opened this essay with two quotes commenting on the concept of marginality. What the two comments share is their positioning of marginality as an active space; and whereas the marginal and the dominant are necessarily defined in relation to one another, the marginal exceeds the boundaries accorded to it within the ideology of the dominant culture. The insistence by a dominant culture on the marginality of certain groups or people, and thus on their insignificance, paradoxically highlights marginality as a highly significant area of friction. It is often the site of pivotal attacks on the "self-evident" nature of dominant cultural, social, and political norms. Homi Bhabha's formulation of the marginal as an act of intervention¹⁴ takes the marginal out of its role as a passive space in which to "celebrate difference," and moves it beyond being a mere result of the dominant.¹⁵ For Hall, too, the question of marginality becomes how to style it as interventive, rather than to accept it as peripheral.¹⁶ To accept marginality as a passive peripheral state would be to accede to its designation as such within the discourse of margins and centers produced by the dominant culture. In other words, marginalized peoples do not simply react to dominant cultural norms; they affect their construction in complex ways, and destabilize those norms. It is necessary to keep such an analysis firmly in focus within the German cultural context, where discussions of diversity and multiculturalism are still often code words, however unintentional, for "foreign," or "not German," and therefore peripheral in importance.¹⁷

In debates public and printed, many Afro-Germans make it clear that they are not interested in simply pointing fingers or assigning blame for their treatment in Germany as foreigners. Nor are they trying to set themselves up as "real" Germans in opposition to "foreigners" by

inventing a new category, *Afro-German*, in order to separate the insiders from the outsiders in an only slightly revised nationalistic game. The term *Afro-German* undoes what had been constructed as a fixed binary opposition: German versus black. This new alignment threatens the idealized image of a homogeneous German identity, an identity predicated on everything blacks are not and on the exclusion or "invisibility" of Afro-Germans as Germans.¹⁸

The two travel narratives by Katharina Oguntoye and May Opitz explore ways to reconceptualize their relationships to *both* their German and African heritages; in so doing they are constructing German identities that undermine the notion of a German identity predicated on being white. At the same time that they seek to define more clearly these relationships, they leave open the possibility of other interpretations of their experiences; the search for identity is understood as a process, one that is not expected to end in a concrete finished product of *the Afro-German identity*.

The essays were published in 1989 in the volume *Schwarz Afrika der Frauen* (Black Africa of Women) in the "Travel and Culture" series from the feminist publisher Frauenoffensive (see note 5 for complete citation). These are the only two essays by German women of color in a volume that contains essays written predominantly by white German women about their travels in Africa, and two essays by African women concerning their German friends. Both essays are placed in one section entitled "On Father's Trail: Afro-German Women." Katharina Oguntoye describes her trip in 1986 to Nigeria to visit her grandmother and father, whom she had not seen since living in Nigeria as a child. During her three weeks there she learns of her grandmother's death and takes a trip north to visit her uncle, his white German wife, and their two children, who are about the ages she and her brother were when they lived in life. The second essay, by May Opitz, also concerns a trip to Africa in 1986 when Opitz spent three months in her father's country of Ghana. For the first part of her trip Opitz joins an international work camp organization working in conjunction with a Ghanaian organization on projects intended to further social and economic structures in rural areas. It is more by accident than design that she later spends part of her trip with members of her father's family.

In their desire to open up unfamiliar ways of constructing and expressing a German self with ties to Africa, Oguntoye and Opitz each cre-

are identities in flux, moving in and out of memories and myths of a childhood self, or of those myths of the Western subject confronted by "Africa." Their separate journeys also challenge the conviction held by many of their fellow Germans (and one frequently conveyed to Afro-Germans) that they belong in Africa. The inability to imagine or to accept the existence of a black German is rooted in the belief, deeply embedded in European definitions of the self, that the link between place and identity, particularly racial or ethnic identity, is rigidly fixed.¹⁹ To a certain extent, a response to this unquestioned acceptance of such a link on the part of mainstream German society forms an important subtext of both narratives.

In their narratives Oguntoye and Opitz move beyond a preoccupation with how dominant cultural norms seek to define a black German presence in German society as marginal and foreign. They move towards an exploration of how ties to an African heritage could inform the creation of a German identity that would encompass the heterogeneity of conflicting cultural identities, even those defined within the dominant culture as an absolute contradiction in terms. Opitz and Oguntoye travel to Nigeria and Ghana not because they believe that they belong there more than they do in Germany (they are not turning a negative stereotype on its head to make a positive one), but because of their desire to explore the sometimes elusive connections to other cultural identities that dominant cultural constructions of "the German" do not permit. Both women claim ties to two different cultures without hiding the fact that they do not feel completely at home in either. The narratives trace a process of constructing an identity that both refuses to deny its basis in German culture and refuses to embrace uncritically the particular African culture to which each has ties. Each writer is conscious of the journey towards a self-defined identity and the dangers that accompany it—of the temptation to resolve conflicts and contradictions, to adopt a ready-made identity, to complete the process.

In her essay entitled "Memory Encounters the Present: Meeting Again with Childhood," Katharina Oguntoye recounts her three-week trip to Nigeria. The narrative is divided into nine short vignettes or musings on her trip and the situation of Nigerians. The trip, she writes, was the result of her decision to "travel alone to my childhood" and to visit her "beloved Grandmother" and father, neither of whom she had seen in eighteen years (p. 257). At the airport she meets a white German woman

her age named Margit; they are both happy not to have to begin this "trip into the unknown" alone (p. 257).

A tension is established at the beginning of the narrative between the narrator's desire to travel alone to a familiar place, the place of childhood memories, and the relief expressed at finding a companion with whom to travel into "the unknown." This unknown is configured by the potential confrontation of those memories with a present reality at odds with them, and the echo, however unwittingly, of the stereotype of Africa the dark, mysterious continent. From the standpoint of Europe (in the airport in Berlin), Africa is a mythic construct. It is a repository for childhood events, remembered and invented, on which the adult narrator seeks to draw in reinventing an identity not limited to the narrow criteria available to one who would call oneself German. Thus, there is a certain risk involved in revisiting those sites of childhood so tightly bound to this search.

The companion, Margit, serves as a foil to Oguntoye. Descriptions of Margit's reactions to events underscores what she and Oguntoye share as Germans, as well as how their different positions within that society—one as a white woman and one as a woman of color—affect their responses to their situation in Nigeria. The bond they feel together as travelers to an unfamiliar country underscores Oguntoye's connections to German culture; however, Margit's sudden anxiety as she realizes she is one of only a few white people in the crowd contrasts sharply with Oguntoye's sense of peace (p. 258).

At times, the narrative has a fairy tale-like, or mythic, quality to it, evoked throughout the recounting of the journey in such incidents as overcoming with ease the overwhelming odds of finding her grandmother's house. This quality is like the desire, faint but present, to solve the "problem" of Oguntoye's identity, to find in Nigeria a safe, comfortable home not extended to her in Germany. It is, however, repeatedly undercut by an awareness that a fairy tale can be derailed by unexpected events. Hers becomes a tale constantly revised by new insights and information. In the early dawn, as Oguntoye stands with Margit at a bus stop outside the airport, the scene before her appears "as if in a film, . . . in a utopian distance" (p. 257). It is a scene that could be inserted with ease into the Western myth of an exotic African world, totally removed from any German reality. With a jolt, Oguntoye realizes her reaction to her surroundings stems from her expectations of finding the exotic

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Africa: "They [the Africans around her] are not unreal, rather it is [she herself] and [her] perspective that are European." It is not Africa and Africans, the statement implies, who are somehow unreal and distant, but the European, who cannot reach the people around her except through a veil of myths (p. 257). This realization serves to connect her firmly to her European upbringing: there is no natural, intuitive link between her and this particular African culture; her emotional response to her surroundings is deeply embedded in the culturally constructed phenomenon that is "Africa" to the "European." What she hopes for is to be able to move beyond such expectations, by becoming conscious and critical of them, and to form more concrete links between herself and her Nigerian family.

On finding her grandmother's house, Oguntoye confronts the bright sharp contours of a childhood memory full of great tall buildings, wide staircases, and Grandmother's house "flooded with brightness" (p. 258). Why, she wonders, is everything so small, so dark and shrunken? Through a neighbor who has come to interpret in English, Oguntoye learns that her grandmother died two years ago. She is speechless as the fantasy of her grandmother calling her to Nigeria and waiting for her arrival (p. 260), tightly held onto despite the recent unanswered letters, is shattered by a reality for which she has come completely unprepared. In front of Margit and members of the family who are strangers to her, she is unable to express her grief and anger at the loss of a woman "whose name I bear and whose face so resembles mine" (p. 260). Confronted with this knowledge, a part of her "ended the trip in this house on Jacob Street, in the room where my grandmother had lived and where she died in 1984" (p. 260).

The Nigerian relative who knew her as a child, the grandmother, was the catalyst for Oguntoye's journey to Nigeria; the father, after an initial mention, is dropped from the narrative. Oguntoye's pain at her grandmother's death is also pain at the loss of a part of herself, the child at home in Nigeria. There is anger that the grandmother is not there to welcome her, to smooth her transition from childhood memories to present realities.

Oguntoye's trip does not end here, however, and she decides to travel north to visit one of her father's brothers and his family. In some sense her fantasy of finding family and childhood happiness continues here, a happy ending to the union between African and German cultures with which to counter the "endless silence between my people in Ger-

many and my people in Nigeria" (p. 257). Oguntoye superimposes reconstructions of her childhood onto what she sees in the two children of her uncle Fela and his German wife Ilse. Her Nigerian uncle and German aunt function to connect Oguntoye more firmly to both her heritages: in Fela she recognizes her own love of language and way of thinking; with Ilse she shares a love of "Africa," as Oguntoye's own mother had done. Her time spent with the family "mirrors a part of my life, from which I had already greatly distanced myself" (p. 265). The lives of the two children appear so familiar to her that the distance is collapsed and she feels as if she knows "what the end of one phase of development will look like" (p. 265).

At the same time, Oguntoye is aware of the deceptive nature of this similarity as events continually conjure up "images of another time." The confusion between past and present is sometimes so intense as to leave her in a "somnambulist state" (p. 265). Through the image of the sleepwalker the narrator sidesteps potential efforts to be pinned down as to the reliability of her memories and of her interpretation of present events. There is a hope that the lives of this family will not mirror completely her own—the disintegration of her family, the silence between two worlds so important to her, and the alienation experienced as a black German living in Germany. She hopes that "some details had been changed and this time everything will turn out right" (p. 265).

In the conflict between earlier memories and her later experiences in Nigeria, as reconstructed three years after the fact, is encapsulated the struggle to connect various African and German aspects of her identity, a struggle that must be carried out in Germany, a place she calls home. She ends the essay in a kind of balancing act, straddling the gap between two worlds, acknowledging the difficulty and the necessity of living a consciously conflicted identity: "I was glad to return home. Berlin signifies for me secure ground beneath my feet. But the trip to Nigeria has changed me. . . . Now, after almost three years, I still don't find it easy to write about. I think that is due in part to the constellation of my family, and in part to the chasm between Europe and Africa. This is very large, but is less spatial than mental. For someone like me this means being in a deranged/displaced [*ver-rückt*] mental space, when I try now and then to occupy both standpoints simultaneously" (p. 266).

Ambivalence, felt towards a journey in search of one's roots and in relationships with relatives and parental figures, permeates the narrative by May Opitz entitled "One of the Others: Return to My Village."

Whereas for Oguntoye it is the need to see her grandmother that sets her on her voyage, for Opitz it is the conflicting desire to find, and to avoid, her father's family. This conflict stems from the uncertainty of her position both in her native German culture and in the "native land" (*Ceburiland*) of my father" (p. 267). Her ambivalence regarding a potential meeting with members of her father's family is not directly referred to until well into the narrative. Instead, the narrator diverts attention away from a narrative of searching for one's roots, which the reader has been set up to expect from the title heading of this section of the travel book—"On Father's Trail: Afro-German Women"—to travel details. Opitz begins with the simple statement that in 1986 she spent three months in Ghana, the country where her father was born. She then continues with a description of her thoughts on her impending trip, of her luggage, of the work camp, and of the pros and cons of such "aid work" in Africa. This seems fitting for an essay in a volume on travel to Africa, designed to help others preparing for their trips.

The narrator reveals, however, that what she has gone into some detail to describe is not what really concerns her: "As far as I was concerned, it was not participation in the work that was the main thing" (p. 268). Yet the narrative up to this point would lead one to believe that it was. The main purpose of her trip has been slightly deferred, displaced by a detour through discussions of travel preparations and work ethics. A much more important impulse behind her journey, Opitz offers, was the desire to "explore the roots of my African heritage, to get a sense of life in the country in which I could have just as easily—perhaps better?—grown up as the Federal Republic" (p. 268). In spite of this desire, Opitz proves to be reluctant actually to track down her father's family, although many people offer to do her this favor—"I was not at all certain that I wanted any kind of contact with family members, considering the fact that I barely knew my father and that he had not been living in Ghana for some time" (p. 270). There is a desire to connect with a little known family, but a discomfort with too easily donning a ready-made identity, and thus overlooking difficult questions: how to effectively, critically incorporate aspects of her African and German heritages into a new sense of being an Afro-German, rather than being forced to embrace one or the other.

In her ambivalence about immediately finding her father's family there also is her refusal to be sent home to Africa; she is interested in exploring connections to Ghana, not assuming them. In a similar way we

can read the detour in her narrative as a desire to resist the placement of her text "on father's trail." Her journey, this suggests, has less to do with anything she might have received from her father (thus resisting a biological connection to a Ghanaian culture) and more to do with finding a means to combat her treatment in Germany and to claim an identity which she has been brought up to believe is an impossible one.

In a manner similar to Oguntoye's, Opitz's journey to Ghana pushes the boundaries of her *German* self by insisting on the relevance of her experiences in Ghana to an understanding of herself as Afro-German, thereby unsettling the predominant definition of what constitutes the German. Hers is not a search, moreover, that will end in the discovery of an unproblematic African identity. Opitz is concerned with questioning herself as a Western subject and taking apart that narrative of the Westerner who goes to the aid of "poor Africans," as well as refusing the stereotypical German assumption that as a black woman she would naturally belong in Africa. Such concerns preclude a simple appropriation on her part of the culture of her Ghanaian relatives. Opitz does not tell the story of her journey to Africa as some essential African storyteller who finds peace in her proper place. As a Westerner of African and German heritage she occupies a paradoxical position. This is brought out in her discussion of her treatment as a white European in Ghana.

The title of Opitz's essay, "One of the Others: Return to My Village," captures with some irony the dilemma in which she finds herself in Germany and in Ghana. In both places Opitz is one of the others. In her German "homeland" she is expected to be as "white" as possible and as "exotic" as necessary to distinguish herself from "foreigners" if she wishes to be able to "compete, in other words to be on equal footing with white Germans," in the housing and work markets (p. 268). In Ghana, on the other hand, Opitz is treated with respect; she can walk the streets unquestioned and unobserved (a near impossibility on German streets). Yet she is not one of them, for as soon as she speaks people react in wonder: "a black German?! A black woman who was raised in a white family?!" (p. 268). She quickly is considered to be a white European and often is referred to as a "white Lady" (p. 268). This designation has little to do with skin color. Instead it is an acknowledgement of her as European in language and culture.

The contrast between her treatment in the two countries is forcefully drawn for, in spite of referring to her as European, she also is accepted as Ghanaian; no one feels the need to point out to her that she

"belongs in Germany," and most hope that she will decide one day to live in Ghana. This stands in marked contrast to her treatment in Germany. Thus, Opitz can speak of a return to her village—a village she had never seen, but which is home to her father's family—as a form of acceptance not extended to her by her own culture. At the same time she makes it clear that she cannot smoothly slip into Ghanaian society; she is not more at home here than in Germany, although the ripples that her presence causes are greeted with vastly different reactions in the two countries. Opitz does not try to resolve the contradictory positions she occupies in Germany and Ghana. She is preoccupied with determining what of "that light" from Ghana (p. 272), as her grandfather would later call it, she can bring with her to her life in Germany.

The driving force behind Oguntoye's and Opitz's work is not a search for fixed origins, but rather one for new ways to conceptualize their experiences as black Germans, for which there is no easily accepted concept in German. It is not an effortless return from the diaspora to "mother Africa," as even this stereotype is undermined. Although it might be tempting to read Oguntoye's grandmother as an incarnation of "mother Africa," such a facile equation is undercut by the grandmother's death, even if she remains a spiritual guide. For Opitz it is her grandfather who provides initial access to and acceptance into a world of belonging for which she yearns. She is not, however, identical with the people around her; she does not become "African." It is the recognition of herself as different from, yet related to, this particular Ghanaian culture that helps to ground her sense of self, and that she will seek to see realized in her culture of birth.

Weaving together the broken ties between their African and German heritages, Oguntoye and Opitz attempt to inscribe "new" experiences onto the concept of German and to break down the silence surrounding a German past of colonization and a present of oppression. The trips to Nigeria and to Ghana are to some extent attempts to recover histories of their selves repressed in German culture. They do not provide joyful open-armed discoveries of authentic African selves. For Opitz and Oguntoye, the journeys do more than fill in an unrecorded past of Afro-Germans. Instead, they challenge the form given to this past, the ways in which it has been recorded and distorted, that makes possible the inability, or refusal, to accept them as Germans. They question what their connections to Africa mean in the present and in Ger-

many. Through the intricate web of familial ties the potential for a German identity, which is not conceived in nationalistic terms that define and close out "outsiders," is opened up. By asserting their claims to cultures commonly held to be mutually exclusive, Opitz and Oguntoye unravel a tightly constructed and closely protected German identity that rests on the truism that, first and foremost, to be German is to be white.

Notes

1. Although violence and the threat of violence against people of color are not new problems in the former East and West Germanies, widespread violent actions can be roughly dated as beginning after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. See, for example, May Opitz, "Das Jahr 1990: Heimat und Einheit aus afro-deutscher Perspektive," in *Entfernte Verbindungen: Rassismus, Antisemitismus, Klassenunterdrückung*, ed. Ika Hügel, et al. (Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1993), 206–222.

2. The criticism has been made that there was very little press coverage given to the increase in violence against people of color until sometime in 1991, and that few white Germans were present in demonstrations organized as early as spring 1990 against restrictions of the rights of foreigners living in Germany and those seeking asylum (ibid., 210–211). It was not until after the dramatically publicized events in Hoyerswerde that larger demonstrations involving white Germans took place. For example, the *Berliner Tageszeitung* reported October 1, 1991, on a demonstration of 3,000 people that took place in Hoyerswerde protesting the attacks; *Neues Deutschland* reported November 18, 1991, that 10,000 people took part in a demonstration in Berlin against the murder of a young Turk, Mete Eksi; the same report cited the "demonstrations of over 150,000 people in the previous week [throughout Germany], further indication that the until now silent majority is increasingly organizing against *Ausländerfeindlichkeit* (xenophobia)."

3. For some idea of the debate surrounding the use of the terms *Ausländerfeindlichkeit* versus *Rassismus* see Oger Aurrata, et al., eds., *Theorien über Rassismus* (Theories of Racism), eine Tübinger Veranstaltungsreihe (Berlin: Argument Verlag, 1989). In general, discussions range from dismissing the term *racism* as irrelevant to Germany, to carefully distinguishing situations that could be said to involve *Ausländerfeindlichkeit* from those that might be seen as "truly" racist, to criticizing the term *Ausländerfeindlichkeit* as a means to avoid dealing with present *Rassismus* and its historical basis in a German colonial and fascist past. I find the latter position the most persuasive; it is well argued by Anita Kalpaka and Nora Räthzel in their essay "Die Schwierigkeit, nicht rassistisch zu sein," *Au-*

trata, et al., 85–100. For a shorter discussion published in English, see Nora Rätzkel, "Germany: One Race, One Nation?," *Race and Class* 32, no. 3 (1991): 31–48.

4. For scholarship that does approach aspects of this issue see, for example, in addition to the work by Autrata, et al., work by Sander L. Gilman, particularly *On Blackness without Blacks: Essays on the Image of the Black in Germany* (Boston: C.K. Hall, 1982); Rosemarie K. Lester, *'Trivialnegers': Das Bild des Schwarzen im westdeutschen Illustrierenroman* (Stuttgart: Verlag Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1982); Anita Kalpaka and Nora Rätzkel, eds., *Die Schwierigkeit, nicht rassistisch zu sein* (West Berlin: EXpress Edition, 1986); *Beiträge zur feministischen Theorie und Praxis: Modernisierung der Ungleichheit* 23 (1988); *New German Critique: Special Issue on Minorities in German Culture* 46 (1989); Martha Mamozai, *Schwarze Frau, weiße Herrin: Frauenleben in den deutschen Kolonien* (Hamburg: Rotoro Aktuell, 1989); Rätzkel, "Germany: One Race, One Nation?" (see note 3); *Journal in Black Studies* 23 (1992); *Die Unterrichtspraxis* 25, no. 2 (1992).

5. Texts by or about Afro-Germans include: Katharina Oguntoye, May Opitz, Dagmar Schultz, eds., *Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte* (Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1986); translated as *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out*, trans. Anne V. Adams, with Tina Camp (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992); Reiner Pommerin, *Sterilisierung der Rheinlandbastarde: Das Schicksal einer farbigen deutschen Minderheit* (Düsseldorf: Droste Verlag, 1979), the first work to deal with the forced sterilizations and interments in concentration camps of black Germans in the National Socialist state; Gisela Fremgen ed., *... und wenn du dazu noch schwarz bist: Berichte schwarzer Frauen in der Bundesrepublik* (Bremen: Edition-CON, 1984); Karin Obermeier, "Afro-German Women: Recording Their Own History," *New German Critique* 46 (1989): 172–180; Ika Hügel, et al., eds., *Enfernte Verbindungen: Rassismus, Antisemitismus, Klassenunterdrückung* (Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1993); Tina M. Camp, "Afro-German Cultural Identity and the Politics of Positionality: Contexts and Contexts in the Formation of a German Ethnic Identity," *New German Critique* 58 (1993): 109–126.

6. Katharina Oguntoye, "Erinnerung trifft Gegenwart: Wiederbegegnung mit der Kindheit," *Schwarz Afrika der Frauen*, ed. Gabriela Mönning, *Reise und Kultur* series (Munich: Frauenoffensive, 1989), 257–266. May Opitz, "Eine der anderen: Rückkehr in mein Dorf (Ghana)," in Mönning, 267–272. I offer the following description of Afro-Germans given by Tina Camp: "Afro-Germans are German-born individuals of African descent. Estimates vary as to the side [sic] of the present Afro-German population. May Opitz estimates that out of 100,000 blacks currently residing in Germany, 30,000 are Afro-German, whereas others estimate the total number of Afro-Germans anywhere from 50,000 to 300,000. The contemporary Afro-German population traces its twentieth-century origin to African immigrants to Germany throughout this century, as well as to the African and African-American troops used in the occupation of Germany follow-

ing the First and Second World Wars. Some Afro-Germans trace their roots back to the nineteenth century." Camp, "Afro-German Cultural Identity," 110–111.

7. May Opitz, "Afro-German," *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out*, ed. Oguntoye, Opitz and Schultz, 138–39; "Afro-Deutsch," *Farbe bekennen*, 138.

8. This is not to say that no scholarship has addressed German cultural heterogeneity. There has been considerable work on topics such as class issues, contemporary Jewish culture, lesbian and gay cultures, Turks living in Germany, etc. One of the first important U.S. journals in *Germanistik* to address minority issues in German cultural studies was the *New German Critique: Special Issue on Minorities in German Culture* 46 (1989).

9. The catalyst for the development of this term was a visit by Audre Lorde in 1984 as a guest lecturer at the Free University of Berlin. She has briefly recounted this time in Berlin in *A Burst of Light* (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1988), 56–67. For some of the German women of color present, her courses provided the first opportunity to meet with other women of color and to discuss their lives in a predominantly white society. The idea for a book developed out of a conversation in 1984 between Dagmar Schultz, a white German feminist who heads the feminist press Orlanda Frauenverlag, Audre Lorde, May Opitz, and Katharina Oguntoye, during which Schultz and Lorde encouraged the two other women to write about Afro-Germans. Two years of intensive work produced a volume that moved beyond the original conception of a collection of texts and poetry by the group of mostly younger Afro-German women who had taken part in the *Frauenzimmer* (Women's Summer Seminar) of 1984. *Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte* consists of autobiographical texts, poetry, prose, and conversations written by several generations of Afro-German women. These writings are interspersed with and contextualized by excerpts from May Opitz's Master's thesis on the history of Afro-Germans. Audre Lorde wrote a foreword to *Farbe bekennen*, and a new foreword to the English translation, *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out*.

10. Oguntoye, Opitz, and Schultz, *Farbe bekennen*, 10.

11. See Mamozai, *Schwarze Frau, weiße Herrin* and the "Dokumentenhang" in Pommerin, *Rheinlandbastarde* (91–106), for the context in which these terms were used; they were without exception negative terms. In the colonies and in colonial Germany both terms elicited significant anxiety as they indicated that the impermeable wall that was supposed to exist "naturally" between Germans and Africans was a fiction. *Neger* was also a term commonly used in the colonies, and there is no question that it designated a being considered far inferior to German colonialists. Mamozai also mentions German colonial practices that were forerunners to policies carried out against the Jews in the National Socialist state, e.g., the use of *Suum Cuique* (to each his own), a motto on a banner placed above a street under which African workers passed on their way to work places; and the *Paßmarke*, insignia worn on clothing, that all Africans from the age of eight on had to wear in German Southwest Africa, without which they

could not get work and could be arrested by any white man. Mamozai mentions these as forerunners to the yellow Star of David that Jews were forced to wear under National Socialism (pp. 255–264).

11. The strongly negative reactions of Afro-Germans and blacks from other countries living in Germany to terms such as *Neger* is well-documented in Gisela Freytag's . . . *und wenn du dazu noch schwarz bist*. Although written by black women from diverse cultures and occupying different positions in German society, almost all of the essays state that the term *Neger* is offensive and de-meaning.

12. Katharina Oguntoye, "Die schwarze deutsche Bewegung und die Frauenbewegung in Deutschland," *Afrikarte* 4 (1989): 3–5, 33–37.

13. Full references are given in note 4.

14. See Homi K. Bhabha, "Introduction," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990), 4.

15. In other words, the marginal destabilizes dominant narratives of cultural homogeneity and continuity that are used to justify actions and practices defined in terms of national goals or ethnic priorities. In a German cultural context such priorities support, for example, the tight restrictions on German citizenship that aim to preserve a supposed homogeneous *Kultur*. This concept presents a socially, politically, and ideologically constructed entity, "the Germans," as a biologically defined group with "natural" affinities for one another based on a shared culture. This effectively places them outside the bounds of history: Germans belong together, and have always belonged together, even before the historical moment of the rise of nations. See Rätzl, "Germany: One Race, One Nation?" for a discussion of governmental policies concerning the regulation of the rights of foreign workers in the 1970s and 1980s and their significance in a postwar definition of Germanness (pp. 31–39), and her discussion of the concept of the German nation as biologically constructed (pp. 41–42). What is not considered in her article is how definitions of German ethnicity exclude the biological component if the person "born German" can also be defined as nonwhite.

16. See Stuart Hall, "What is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" in *Black Popular Culture*, ed. Gina Dent (Seattle: Bay Press, 1992), 24.

17. The word *multikulturell* often carries negative associations in German. The extent to which multicultural is coded negatively is exemplified by the description of Germany as a *multikriminelle Gesellschaft* (multicriminal society) offered by the Bavarian president of the cabinet council in 1994, Max Streibl (reported in the *Frankfurter Rundschau* of October 19, 1991), an obvious take-off on *multikulturell*. The comment was made in the context of Streibl's support of extremely conservative policies concerning foreigners living in Germany.

18. Tina Campt discusses the construction in German society of "blackness" as "foreign or external to German culture," pointing out that "Afro-German," as expressed in the strategies of three Afro-German women, resists rigid racial categorization and must be understood in social and cultural terms as

a part of what is German. Campt, "Afro-German Cultural Identity," 112–13. (Campt examines a discussion printed in *Showing Our Colors* led by Katharina Oguntoye, May Opitz, and Laura Baum.) Thus, I would argue that claiming the German in "Afro-German" could be interpreted as an important act of centering for many black Germans. This does not, however, have to result in a universalizing move towards a single stable definition of "Afro-German." Centering can be momentary, resistant, an act of political and physical survival.

19. See, for example, Sander Gilman, et al., eds., *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).