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## Negotiating Blackness in White Germany

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### ABSTRACT

German ethnicity and nationality have been historically linked together and viewed as "natural". Minorities in Germany have navigated cultural and ethnic differences and national belonging in a variety of ways. Black Germans are one example of a minority that has a long historical presence in Germany but have been kept at arm's length by the majority White population--denied national belonging and association as Germans. A movement to establish group agency that began with Audre Lorde's visit in the 1980s began by negotiating the black German identity with the term "Afro-Deutsch". This process of negotiating a black identity in a dominant white culture continues to this day, with "black" becoming an increasingly prevalent designation that is both political and contains the potential to unify a far greater community than just Germans with African heritage.

*Keywords:* Blackness, German identity, Afro-deutsch

People of African descent in Germany suffer racial discrimination, Afrophobia and racial profiling in their daily lives, but their situation remains largely invisible to the wider society. [...] There is a serious lack of ethnicity-based disaggregated data, and an incomplete understanding of history, which obscure the magnitude of structural and institutional racism people of African descent face. (United Nations, 2017a, para. 1)

### Negotiating Blackness in White Germany

In 2002, the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner instituted the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent, tasking the team with conducting country visits to collect data and monitor the living conditions of people of African descent (United Nations, 2017a). (A tertiary point of interest is the presence of Franz Fanon's daughter on this committee.) The report on the daily occurrence of racism and discrimination found in Germany by the Working Group stands in tension with the national

narrative of *Toleranz* (tolerance) and the *Multikulti* (short for multiculturalism). Multiculturalism was introduced to encourage guest workers to settle permanently in the country, policy leaders claiming that foreign cultures are able to find a place in Germany and obtain full integration in society (*Is multi-kulti dead?*, 2010). As will be discussed later, a major problem with the *Multikulti* in practice is that existence and integration in German society is only acceptable if one remains postured as the "other" in relation to white Germans.

Because the color of one's skin is the first indicator of one's nationality in the German eye, German-born people of color find themselves subsumed into the category of "immigrant," along with every stereotype and bias that accompanies it. This improper understanding, resulting in widespread systemic discrimination on every level of society, is due to the misconception that the German nationality automatically implies white skin. One such German-born minority group is black Germans. Though referenced by varying monikers across discourses, the term 'black Germans' will be used here to refer to people born in Germany who are of African descent. In the context of widespread xenophobia, fear and a continued othering of the foreigner against the biologically (and culturally) "pure" German, those born in Germany whose native language is German and who have no other cultural anchors or references yet fall outside of the "pure" German racial construction find themselves again existing in a liminal space.

The aim of this paper is to explore a number of cultural forms to examine how the identity formation of German citizens of African descent has changed. Identity formation negotiations can be traced through social clubs as well as through cultural forms such as social media, vlogs, mass media production, theater and music. The younger generation is looking to further renegotiate the terms of their racial identity to reflect their identification culturally as German while accounting for the perceived "otherness" of their skin color. I will explore where and how this (re)negotiation of racial identity takes place in the context of increasing xenophobia, arguing that 2016 was a significant year in moving toward embracing *schwarz* (black) as a dominant expression of racial identity for black Germans.

### **German National Identity**

National identity formation in Germany is deeply rooted in history. What constituted Germanic regions was a matter of debate and negotiation for a long period, with each inclusion decided on a case-by-case basis (Scales, 2012). The ultimate unification of a "single German

people" was at the urging of the Italians, who encouraged the leaders of the German lands to adopt the concept in an effort to provide strong leadership (Scales, 2012). As Germany grew into its existence as a nation state, a cultural cohesion, known as the *Kulturnation* (culture nation), grew.

Nazism reached back into history to capitalize on this notion of *Kulturnation*. The Third Reich placed Jazz music in opposition to classical artists, claiming it was linked to the "Jewish Menace" (Schroer, 2007). At the end of the war, when Nazism's ideology of achieving a pure Aryan race was delegitimized, the notion of a pure ethnic nation was continued but in a much broader sense, largely based upon conceptions imparted by the Allied occupying powers. As the United States was tasked with leading the Germans out of Nazi racist ideology, it had to defend its own hypocritical practices of segregation and Jim Crow laws (Schroer, 2007). Knowing that complete extirpation of racist ideology was nigh impossible, the solution was to hold the United States up as a model for "equitable treatment for racial minorities," convincing the Germans that African Americans were well integrated into U.S. society (Schroer, 2007, p. 37). The broader definition of whiteness, based upon the model of the Allied powers, emphasized a quality that African Americans lacked, working to unite Germans with the other white powers while also "reinforcing the division between Germans and blacks" (Schroer, 2007, p. 5, 33). The concepts of homogenous ethnicity and common language and culture still define German citizenship through imagination and the policy of *jus sanguinis* (Finzsch & Schirmer, 1998).

### **(National) Identities of Blacks in Germany**

Identity for non-white Germans as a whole, and Germans of African descent in particular, has historically been defined by external sources. The term *Neger* (equivalent to the English "Negro") came into usage during Germany's colonial foray in Africa. It was during this brutal period of "colonial exploitation, enslavement, and domination, [that] the term Neger became an especially negative epithet"

(Blackshire-Belay, 1996, p. 97). Though still occasionally used by people of older generations, its usage has been generally eradicated in everyday German conversation as it has been deemed taboo. As discussed previously, *Mischling* (literally translated “mixed” or “half-breed”) became popular during and after World War II. It also remains common to refer to black Germans as *farbig* (colored) or *braun* (brown). Both the terms *schwarz* (black) and *dunkelhäutig* (dark skinned) are used to differentiate black Germans from those with darker skin tones, indicating that they perhaps do not have a German parent. According to Wright (2004), “For brown skin, the German language only has terms borrowed from eating and drinking, like ‘chocolate brown’ or ‘coffee brown.’” What becomes clear is that these adjectives are highly subjective and highly sensitive. Each person has his/her own relationship to each adjective based upon their own individual biography.

Being the holder of a German passport and citizenship, being socialized in Germany, or speaking German as a mother tongue does not prevent one German from identifying and categorizing another German based on their skin color. Questions of identity and national identity arise. That national identity is intrinsically linked to race (or one’s understanding of race). There exists a barrier for white Germans to conceive of people of color as also being German in a true sense. It is common to overhear white Germans constantly questioning the origin of a person of color. The conversation usually goes something like this:

*German:* Where are you from?

*Black German:* From Sachsen.

*German:* Yeah, okay, but where are you really from?

*Black German:* Dresden.

*German:* Yeah, but where are your parents really from?

Black Germans as a minority group are largely invisible. Much of the German population is unaware that people of African descent have lived in Germany for centuries and have no

cultural or linguistic connection to Africa. This invisibility has perpetuated systemic racism and discrimination. Recognition as a native minority group has been complicated by the arrival of many African immigrants (as a result of the current refugee “crisis”). As a result of this influx, there are now two very distinct populations that are conflated based upon the color of their skin. Due to the cultural understanding that racism is overt in nature, much racism is unacknowledged and rendered invisible, except to those who experience it. Black Germans remain labeled as foreign, despite their rooted lives on German soil. Possibly the most difficult aspect to defeating *Alltagsrassismus* (everyday racism) is the continued refusal to recognize black Germans as a minority group suffering discrimination. A major reason for the continued lack of recognition is simply the lack of data past the second generation. Statistics on black citizens were stopped in the 1960s when protests were expressed on the basis that Germany’s Basic Law deems it illegal to single out people on the basis of race (Fehrenbach, 2006). In addition, since 2005, Germany has maintained no government records of its citizens’ (or residents’) countries of origin (United Nations, 2017b). Black Germans are therefore found in the same broad category as newly arrived immigrants as well as long-term residents of Germany (perhaps even since birth) who do not hold German citizenship.

It was not until the 1980s that a shift in identity formation occurred. The publication of *Farbe Bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte* (Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out) in 1986 was a turning point for the black population in Germany. This collection of personal experiences written by women introduced the term for identification, *Afro-deutsch*, which took inspiration from the term Afro-American (Blackshire-Belay, 2001). *Afro-deutsch* as an identifier marked the first time that the black population had set out to self-determine their identification. *Afro-deutsch* expressed the hitherto unexpressed reality that a person can be both African and German. By claiming to be *Afro-deutsch*, one aligned oneself with the political agenda it was developing. Propelled by black German feminists and inspired by American writer and activist Audre Lorde, *Die*

*Initiative Schwarzer Menschen Deutschland* (Initiative of Black People in Germany) (ISD) was founded contemporaneously (DW Deutsch, 2017). The association was formed in an effort to provide a space for black Germans to meet, share experiences, and find political agency to combat discrimination and racism. ISD also provided a space to explore *Afro-deutsch* as a political identity (ISD, 2014). *Afro-deutsch* is not recognized, however, by the German government as officially identifying an ethnic minority.

To this day, national identity for non-white Germans remains a space of negotiation. Outside of the term “Afrodeutsch,” the German language does not offer a term equivalent to the American racial labels “black” or “African American.” Racial labels are subjectively determined largely on an individual basis and can prove fluid over time. As the size of the non-white German population increases, the waters of national identity are muddied. However, what of the majority white German population whose national identity is still rooted in homogenous ethnicity and common language and culture? How has the changing demographics drawn them into the discourse? It is becoming increasingly difficult to deny “German-ness” to passport holders, and the question of what being German means is currently being renegotiated. As this re-negotiation takes place, white Germans are referring to themselves as *Bio-deutsch* (organic German), retaining a claim of authenticity and continuing to root the idea of German-ness in the body as a state of nature (*Name, data of birth, migration background*, 2016).

In an essay recounting her oral history project with African-Germans in 1992, Tina Campt (2005) relates a respondent’s intentional paralleling of his African-German experience to her own experience as an African American. The respondent referenced the African-American experience in multiple layers, first by drawing the parallel between African-German and African-American experience with interracial marriage and then further by making a comment to Campt (2005) that required her to “draw on [her] cultural knowledge as an African American to answer the question [she] had just posed” (Campt, 2005, p. 76). Campt (2005) understood her

interviewee’s strategies of reaching into the African-American experience as a means to bridge a “discursive gap” in the layered identity of German-ness and blackness (p. 77). In blogs, vlogs and interviews, black Germans regularly reference African-American history and language. Most notable is the tentative assertion that a Black German is *schwarz*. This declaration is significant because the adjective stands alone. When *schwarz* stands alone, it becomes a noun, yet it has yet to be formalized as a noun by capitalization. (This is significant since in German all nouns are capitalized.) When a black German says that s/he is *schwarz*, the American black community is automatically called to mind. Current commentary referencing the African-American community and experience is also careful to acknowledge the great distinction in historical contexts. When drawing parallels, it is possible to recognize both legitimate commonalities and discursive gaps. Distinctions between black Americans and black Germans found while comparing compound the reality that distinctions between black Germans are also significant:

[R]ace and racial difference are products of social interaction and interpretation, and [...] those interactions occur not just in Germany between whites and blacks, and not only during the war, when race in Germany was an individual’s defining feature. They also occur among Blacks from different social and national contexts in our contemporary transnational encounters. (Campt, 2005, p. 196)

Black Germans are socialized in various parts of Germany, all of which have distinct regional characters. Bridging internal distinctions is perhaps assisted by drawing upon the identity and experiences of other significant African diasporic communities. In *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*, Paul Gilroy (2002) confirms, “In particular, the culture and politics of black America and the Caribbean have become raw materials for creative processes which redefine what it means to be black, adapting it to distinctive ... experiences and meanings. Black culture is actively made and remade” (p. 202).

Black Germans are in the midst of this creative process.

### Identity Negotiations

In an attempt to trace this space of identity negotiation, I will examine vlogs, TV interviews and three of the most recent hip-hop songs produced in Germany.

### Video Blogs (Vlogs)

The vlogs examined were all self-reportedly aberrant from the usual videos produced and manifested the various identity formation issues previously discussed. Frustration and dismay are prominent emotions present in both of the following examples, as well as in many other videos. The videos act as a space of negation, facilitating a sort of dialogue between people of color. Each vlogger references comments or face-to-face conversations in which issues of identity are discussed.

The first case, Aminata Belli (Aimee), is a prolific vlogger and views this form of media as a platform for exchanging viewpoints, experiences, and knowledge, especially since most black Germans (herself included) do not have parents who understand what it is like to be mixed (*gemischt*). Deviating from her usual hair and beauty tips, she attempts to discuss her racial identity. She lacks exact language and fumbles through a string of descriptors: “identity,” “what would you call me?,” and “race in the English sense.” She found it difficult to express even what the topic of her video was: “I do not know at all what to call it.”<sup>1</sup> A professor’s suggestion that she combine her research paper on beauty for “blacks” or “half-blacks” with an ethnological aspect or “African-trend” analysis prompted Aimee to reflect further, though not in the direction her professor intended. She viewed the suggestion as offensive: “My looks have nothing to do with ethnology or African trends and [...] this is simply not what it should be.”<sup>2</sup>

Aimee discusses the different opinions held by black Germans about the words used to

describe them, acknowledging in true *Toleranz* language that each must decide for themselves. She abhors the term *mulatta* but recognizes that some would prefer it to *farbig* (colored). She also expresses dislike for food-related descriptors like “cappuccino” or “schoki/schoko” (a diminutive of chocolate), though admits that some black Germans she speaks with voluntarily use these terms to describe themselves. Her relationship to the term *Afro-deutsch* is tense. She admits to having to make use of it to negotiate her daily realities but rejects it on a personal level: “I hate the label *Afro-deutsch* but unfortunately do not know what it could [otherwise] officially be.”<sup>3</sup> Aimee talks through her relationship with the term, sometimes apologizing for the personal nature of the topic. The reminder that getting too personal outside of one’s family or closest friends is taboo adds another layer to the in-between-ness of being a black German. How does a person speak of what needs to change on a societal level for the sake of humanness when the very personal nature of said conversation is itself taboo? Aimee finds that *Afro-deutsch* does not fit her situation because it, by definition, means that the person comes first from Africa and then Germany. There is a hierarchy to the label. She protests that she is not from Africa, then acquiesces that through her father’s heritage, she is “officially,” using air quotes as she says it, from Africa, but since she herself did not immigrate, she only has a migration background per the legal categorization. Aimee does not identify with *Afro-deutsch* because it is Africa-bound. She considers herself German, not African. She experiences no identity crisis: “My roots are not in Gambia. My roots are here in Germany. My roots are in Schleswig-Holstein. This is my home. I feel at home here. I feel like a German woman. Completely.”<sup>4</sup> She continues, “In truth I am totally white, totally German. No one sees

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<sup>3</sup> “Ich haße die Bezeichnung Afro-deutsch aber leider weiß nicht was offiziell sein könnte.”

<sup>4</sup> “Meine Wurzeln sind nicht in Gambia. Meine Wurzeln sind hier in Deutschland. Meine Wurzeln sind in Schleswig-Holstein. Das ist mein Heimat. Ich fühle mich hier zu Hause. Ich fühle mich wie eine deutsche Frau. Komplett.”

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<sup>1</sup> “Ich kann’s gar nicht benennen.”

<sup>2</sup> “Mein Aussehen hat nichts mit Ethnologie oder Afrikatrend zu tun und das ist nicht was, und das ist einfach nicht was das sein soll.”

this because I look different.”<sup>5</sup> Though she feels completely German, the difference in her physical appearance is not lost on her. She explains how she identifies through her skin color and hair because they differ from those of white Germans and Europeans and because these differences are a daily issue for her. It is this difference that defines her, not any connection to Africa. She had no contact with her father, his home country of Gambia, or the Gambian culture or language. Aimee reaches into the African-American experience to try a point of reference for her identity. She says she knows that if she were to go to America she would be considered black but is quick to point out that being black in America is different from being *schwarz* in Germany. She points out that the term is used to differentiate races in the United States, whereas in Germany, it is not understood as an identity but rather the literal color of one’s skin. She is forced to use the more established label *Afro-deutsch* because when uses *schwarz*, people correct her, telling her that the color of her skin is brown (Belli, 2017).

The second example, Melanie Jefferson, a.k.a. MiszMelzCurlz, made her video entitled “Ich bin NICHT Schwarz?!?” (“I am NOT black?!?”) in response to the tremendous amount of feedback she received after posting a video about “what black people don’t like to hear.” Though a different subject matter and tone than she usually posts, she found this topic important to address. She reports having received a lot of comments from people telling her, “Du bist gar nicht schwarz. Du bist mittel.” (You are not at all black. You are [lit.] middle.) She appears indignant as she insists that people must simply accept that she is *schwarz* just as one accepts certain mathematical certainties and formulas. Her viewers sought to determine her identity, to pinpoint her blackness. She rejects this entirely:

But I am black. I was raised that way. I was raised with the knowledge that I am black. And just because people outside cannot understand that or see it that way do not have the right to

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<sup>5</sup> “In Wahrheit ich bin total weiß, total deutsch. Das sieht das doch keiner weil ich doch anderes aussehen.”

constantly tell another person, “You are not black.” “You are not white.” “You are not purple.” “You are not yellow.” Or whatever.<sup>6</sup>

## Interviews

There have been a few independent television stations and journalists that have touched upon the issues faced by black Germans seeking to bring the presence and issues of racism to the surface. The black German journalist and YouTuber who led the charge was Jermain Raffington, who interviews black Germans across the country about what the German identity means to them. He seeks to establish “a new black self-consciousness that is filled with pride.”<sup>7</sup> He was tired of being the object of the same clichés, finding it offensive. His conviction is that if the persistent racism and rigid racial categories are not addressed, nothing will change. He began his own TV station to change the situation that there were no black public figures for him to view as role models.

*PULS* is a program supported by *Puls*, an online broadcast for the youth generation in Bavaria. It seeks to report and investigate cultural movements, upcoming artists, and social figures. Kokutekeleza Musbeni (Koku), a singer from Bavaria, is a black German. She was one of the interviewees in *PULS*’ expose on black Germans. Koku is another example of the diversity of the black German community. She does not identify primarily according to her skin color but according to her regional identity as a Bavarian. In addition to being an advocate of the Natural Hair Movement, she is passionate about *Schwarze* (Blacks), standing up and taking pride in who they are. Koku uses her talents not just for her own success but to break white Germans

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<sup>6</sup> “Ich bin sowohl Schwarz. Ich bin so erzogen worden. Ich bin aufgewachsen mit dem Wissen, dass ich schwarz bin. Und nur weil Menschen draußen dass nicht verstehen können oder nicht so sehen haben sie nicht das recht ständig bei jemandem anderen zu kommentieren du bist nicht schwarz, du bist nicht weiß, du bist nicht lila, du bist nicht gelt, keine Ahnung.”

<sup>7</sup> Eine neue schwarze Selbstverständnisse, was zeigt, dass es auch mit Stolz behaftet ist.”

out of their “in-the-box-thinking” (Rundfunk, 2013).

In March 2017, the Deutsche Welle produced a documentary about the history, presence and reality of black Germans called *Afro.Deutschland*. It follows Germany’s first black news anchor through the country to interview various significant *Afro-deutsche*/black Germans as she tells her own story and experiences as an orphaned *Afro-deutsche* (DW Deutsch, 2017). The Deutsche Welle is not an alternative news station like the other programs that have thus far reported on the black community in Germany. Instead, the Deutsche Welle is Germany’s international broadcaster and receives its mandate from the 1960 Deutsche Welle Act (modified in 2005). Its mission is to “convey Germany as a nation rooted in European culture and as a liberal, democratic state based on the rule of law. DW is known for its in-depth, reliable news and information and promotes exchange and understanding between the world’s cultures and people” (Deutsche Welle, 2017, para. 5). The UN Working Group’s report filed in February, 2017, was the first official government-level recognition of the discrimination and racism existing for black Germans. Perhaps it is not insignificant that an official state broadcaster, albeit international, so timely produced a personal story-driven look at some very harsh realities that are not widely recognized. The Deutsche Welle might have enough sway with its reach and reputation to open the door for more mainstream networks to explore these themes.

### **Hip Hop/Rap Songs**

Hip-hop and rap are just two genres that fall under what Germans call Black music. Also included are R&B, reggae, and house music. Despite its ambiguity, Black music is popular in Germany, an industry dominated by *Afro-deutsch*/black Germans. Rapper and music producer Sammy Deluxe states that, in the rap scene, he felt he had a “home court advantage” for the first time as a black German (DW Deutsch, 2017). African-American culture acts as a model for “first world black populations.”

According to Camp (2005), “At the level of visual representation, black American music, in particular the proliferation of hip hop, house, funk, and R&B through the medium of music videos has made African-American style ... a focal point of identification for blacks in Germany” (p. 77). Three songs produced by black Germans in 2016 demonstrated a decisive break with the term *Afro-deutsch*. Each song proclaims line after line: “Ich bin schwarz” (“I am black”). These songs echo the larger movement, however disjointed, to return to self-determined identification. The demonstrated resistance to being defined by white Germans is gaining speed.

The first song, “Ich bin schwarz”, is by rapper Nura in the group SIXTN. Nura’s song is filled with ironies and stereotypes of what white Germans believe to be true about black people in general. The official music video begins with a copyright warning screen typically of movie films that warns the viewer that “in the following scenes, many black people are shown. Nazis and other right-winged sympathizers are urgently dissuaded from watching the video” (SIXTN, 2016). If the sarcasm is not thick enough, the screen continues, “All chicken parts were anonymously sent to SIXTN” (SIXTN, 2016). Nura finds it better to speak to racism with humor, instead of “creating a Nazi-hate track.” She repeatedly says “Ich bin schwarz,” asserting her identity. “Ich bin schwarz” here serves both to proclaim and define an identity as well as to confront the white German listener.

Ah Nice (2016) is a young rapper who had lived in Germany for seven years at the time of his hit song’s release. As a refugee who quickly acquired German citizenship, he has faced a variety of issues which he specifies in his song. As a male, he brings a different viewpoint and set of experiences and stereotypes to the table. His narrative is quite different from most black Germans as he was born and raised in Africa. He is important to the conversation, however, because the number of Africans gaining German citizenship is increasing, and as a black public figure, he has great influence, especially on younger generations. His lyrics also play off of stereotypes and everyday interactions that tend to be irritating and offensive to black Germans.

*Afro-Spartana*, released by Leila Akinyi in 2016, is about being black in Germany. She talks about her identity as *schwarz*: “I was born this way. And I don’t plan to bleach myself or become white. I have to find a way to live. [...] Being black means nothing to me. I also do not see at all that I am black. [...] what I’ve often experienced is [that] I am reminded by others that I am black” (JUICE, 2016; MPMTV, 2017). Her message is for young black girls (and all black women by extension) to love themselves as they are, to accept themselves as they are, without wanting to be white so badly that they resort to skin bleaching. She calls the idea of believing that a person is more beautiful when they are lighter-skinned “twisted” and “wrong” (MPMTV, 2017). Leila sports a large Afro hairdo in her video, recalling images of the Black Panthers. She named her song “Afro Spartana” because a Spartan is strong, courageous, and fights to the end. Leila regrets that it is taboo to talk about being black or about being different. She believes that by wrapping up the Spartan in the art of song, the fear of the powerful black woman is softened. She deals with similar stereotypes as those in the first two examples but reaches into the African-American “Black is Beautiful” Movement and into her Kenyan roots. Though Leila would most likely find common ground with those who identify as *Afro-deutsch*, she declares her blackness on almost every other line. Due to the language she invokes, there is a distinct feeling of black empowerment that is emitted through the combination of lyrics and melody.

### Discussion

Black Germans recognize that importing the term “Black” is problematic due to a historical background and development that they cannot and will not claim. While openly borrowing language from the African-American experience and claims of racial identity, black Germans have remained constantly aware of the varied histories present in their communities. Changing the national narrative about what constitutes the citizenry of Germany is a struggle that a growing number of black Germans have undertaken. The ISD is still seeking to expand

and is adapting to the new developments within the black community. The development of community identity is not one of the primary goals of the ISD, though they do offer a politics-centered one as a cohesive element for its members, offering those without a purpose or identity a home. This identity is still framed around Africa as a “homeland,” excluding those black Germans who have no connection to Africa. Though *Afro-deutsch*-centric, ISD has expanded the language on its website and documents to utilize *schwarz*. *Schwarz* is consistently used as an adjective as of 2016 instead of *Afro-deutsch*. Perhaps the most dynamic example of ISD’s incorporation of *schwarz* is the theme of the black youth weekend retreat: #young#gifted#black. The advertisement card for the retreat reads, “Are you black? Of African descent? Afro-deutsch?” (ISD, 2017).

A common theme through the interviews and vlogs is a noticeable lack of black role models. Black Germans are making their way into the media industry, but progress is slow. The hip-hop scene is the one area dominated by black Germans and others of African descent that stretches across national borders. Most people who use *schwarz* instead of *Afro-deutsch* expressed frustration at not being able to fully identify with any one label. This shift in identity terms is a reaction and rebellion against the larger societal struggle to adjust to an ever-increasing multicultural society in which definitions and perceptions of race are historically rooted and remain quite rigid. It seems that this transition also marks the beginning of a period of black pride in Germany. Artists are leading the way. The three hip-hop/rap songs released in 2016 played a vital part in putting out language (*schwarz*) for the larger community to grab onto and continue the identity negotiation already well-underway.

*Schwarz* has proven to be a unifying descriptor, largely catapulted forward by the global nature of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. Berlin is the epicenter of Black Lives Matter and all other anti-racism organizations. The growing sense of self-definition served as the foundation upon which BLM built a center stage in 2020 (Milman et al., 2021). The protests surrounding



the death of George Floyd provided a transnational context for “blackness” to become a more defined, solidified and unifying identity not only for black Germans, but for many minorities on German soil. Partridge (2022) examines how minorities “become [...] Black” through what he identifies as “woundedness” (pg. x-xi). Blackness acts for the disenfranchised as a source of social and political empowerment in a political context in which identity politics do not exist. Identity and solidarity coalitions are quickly proliferating across Europe surrounding anti-blackness, anti-racism, and, increasingly represented, immigration. Partridge (2022) predicts a future in which refugees play a crucial role in propelling change forward.

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