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The Subject in Black and White: Afro-German Identity Formation in Ika Hügel-Marshall's Autobiography *Daheim unterwegs: Ein deutsches Leben*

Deborah Janson

Black Germans still experience prejudice and social isolation based on their appearance. Alhough they are born and raised in Germany, their fellow citizens often do not accept them as Germans because of their skin color. Such social exclusion makes it difficult for Black Germans to define for themselves who they are and where they belong. Yet through their own community-building efforts and the transnational diasporic interactions with Blacks in other countries, Black Germans are developing the means to resist marginalization and discrimination, to gain social acceptance, and to construct a cultural identity for themselves. This essay explores these and other aspects of Afro-German identity formation via an examination of Ika Hügel-Marshall's autobiography, a work that, until now, has received little scholarly attention despite its relevance to the ongoing—albeit relatively new—Black European identity movement. As an "occupation baby" of mixed-race origins who was raised in a Catholic home for children with special needs, Hügel-Marshall's transformation from a neglected and abused child into an empowered and politically active adult is inspiring, while her experiences with racism are paradigmatic for the Black-German experience. (DJ)

In Germany, it is still common to regard individuals with dark skin as foreigners. Despite the recent reform of citizenship laws that makes it easier for residents of non-German heritage to become citizens, a corresponding change in the majority population's understanding of what it means to be German has not yet been achieved. Because citizenship had previously been based largely on the exclusionary concept of "German blood," the idea that there are "Black Germans" seems counter-intuitive to many Whites.[1] Although White Germans frequently

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insist that "racism doesn't exist here," foreign-looking citizens experience prejudice and social isolation based on their appearance. Instances of anti-foreigner violence have been directed not only against non-white foreigners but also against minority citizens, including Afro-Germans, Asian-Germans, Jewish-Germans, Turkish-Germans, Sinti, and Roma. In response to such hostility and to the almost daily experience of exclusion, ethnic minorities struggle to resist marginalization and discrimination, to gain social acceptance, and to challenge the notion of Germany as culturally homogeneous.[2]

Commonalities in the experiences of the various minorities in Germany do not preclude important differences. For example, Turkish-Germans and Turkish residents of Germany are members of a large ethnic community that shares a common ancestry and culture and an identifiable homeland. Afro-Germans, on the other hand, frequently grow up in isolation from one another, without ever having seen another person of color—including the parent who bequeathed them their dark skin—until they are adults. Rejected as Germans but without a large ethnic community with which to identify, Afro-Germans have greater difficulty than other minorities defining for themselves who they are and where they belong. For this reason, both the community-building efforts that Black Germans initiated in the mid-1980s and the transnational diasporic interactions with Blacks in other countries have become very important for the construction of an Afro-German, or Black-German, identity. In this essay, I discuss these and other aspects of Afro-German identity formation as reflected in Hügel-Marshall's 1998 autobiography *Invisible Woman: Growing Up Black in Germany* (*Daheim unterwegs: Ein deutsches Leben*). As will become clear, Hügel-Marshall's life is in many ways paradigmatic for the Black-German experience.

My investigation is informed by Leslie Adelson's study of German identity, *Making Bodies, Making History* (1993), the anthology *International Dimensions of Black Women's Writing,* edited by Carole Boyce Davies and Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1995), Susan Arndt's 2001 anthology *AfrikaBilder: Studien zu Rassismus in Deutschland* (Africa Pictures: Studies on Racism in Germany), and Tina Campt's and Carmen Faymonville's contributions to *Callaloo*'s 2003 special issue on the Black German community, as well as by the scholarship of Fatima El-Tayeb, Ruth Frankenberg, bell hooks, Jeannine Kantara, Emily S. Lee, Sara Lennox, and Sidonie Smith. Taken together, these works emphasize the important role that bodies play in the constitution of ideology, history, community, and the social subject. In so doing, they offer a critical framework for understanding the hardships that Ika Hügel-Marshall has endured and the political resistance that she, quite literally, embodies.

Also relevant to my discussion of Hügel-Marshall's autobiography are works of fiction and non-fiction by other Black-German women. They include the 1986 landmark volume *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out (Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte)*, edited by Katharina Oguntoye, May Opitz and Dagmar Schultz; works of poetry by May Ayim; prose by Sheila Mysorekar; and the anthology *Talking Home: Heimat aus unserer eigenen Feder. Frauen of Color in Deutschland* (Talking Home: Home Made from Our Own Pen, Women of Color in Germany), edited by Olumide Popoola and Beldan Sezen (1999). The autobiographical nature of all of these works, whether they are poetry or prose, indicates the importance that sharing one's life story has for building a sense of identity and community, especially when, as in the case of these authors, common experiences, concerns, and interests may otherwise go unexpressed. Like other minority writers in Germany, these women hope that their autobiographical texts will foster a sense of pride and belonging within their community and will educate the public about the reality and consequences of racism in Germany.[3]

By claiming that Black-German and other minority literature is highly autobiographical, I am adhering to a broad definition of this literary designation. Some of the texts mentioned above include poetry and personal essays, while short stories and novels are frequently also considered autobiographical.[4] Whatever the literary category, autobiographical writing can be as successful aesthetically as any other form of literature. It is built on a combination of memory and imagination that the author organizes to provide an authentic picture of her or his life. Needless to say, persuading the world to see oneself through one's own eyes does not mean telling everything exactly as it happened. However, in this case it includes certain invisible aspects of life, such as the damaging effect that encounters with social prejudice can have on an individual's psyche.

To my mind, *Invisible Woman* is a classic example of "pure" autobiography. Although it consists of events and experiences selected to raise its readers' awareness of racism in Germany, and although Hügel-Marshall's interpretation of her memories may have changed since she wrote her book, it nevertheless represents an honest attempt to present her life as she experienced it. It thus fits Philippe Lejeune's well-known definition from the 1970s, in which autobiography is described as "*retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality*" (4; italics in original). Like other straightforward autobiographies, Hügel-Marshall's work elicits what Lejeune calls

the "autobiographical pact," whereby the reader "agrees" that the protagonist represents the author because, as Paul John Eakin explains, the protagonist bears the same name as the author—a name that can be "certified" as referring to the real person it is known to represent (*How Our Lives* 2). While poststructuralists tend to deny an autobiography's referentiality, most readers join critics such as Lejeune and Eakin in their allegiance to it. It is, writes Eakin, "a kind of existential imperative, a will to believe that is, finally, impervious to theory's deconstruction of reference as illusion" (*Touching the World* 30).

As Linda Haverty Rugg points out in her 1997 work on the relationship between autobiography and photography, it is particularly important to acknowledge autobiography's referential power in works by women and minorities, since these deal with bodies that are culturally defined (10). This point is substantiated by Hügel-Marshall's life story, where referentiality is crucial to the author's message. It is, after all, her body, in particular her skin, that determines whether or not she is considered German, rather than her fluent and accent-free use of the German language or the fact of her German citizenship. It is her body, in other words, that has made Hügel-Marshall the target of racism. Throughout her life she has heard negative comments about her personality and moral character that are based solely on her appearance. Her identity transformation requires that she learn to love a body that she had previously been taught to hate. In the photographs that she includes in her book we see images of her body at various stages of life, alongside pictures of her mother and father and other people close to her. For example, one photo of her as a six-year-old reflects the sense of natural exuberance, pride, and belonging she felt as a young child, while another taken approximately four years later, when she is "visiting" her family in the summer, shows her sitting with sunken chest and rounded shoulders, thereby expressing a much more defeated and tenuous relationship to her surroundings. We also see her giving a speech at her high school graduation ceremony and participating in a Taekwondo class as a focused, happy, and empowered adult. Her use of photography in her autobiography thus corresponds to one of its functions as described by Rugg, namely, the proof of "something material, the *embodied* subject, the unification (to recall the autobiographical pact) of author, name, *and* body" (13).[5]

Central to an understanding of minority experience in Germany (and elsewhere) is the recognition that terms such as "Black" and "White," when applied to people, are socio-political constructs rather than inaccurate descriptions of skin color. These terms communicate meaning assumed to be beneath the skin—a way of being, thinking, feeling, and

doing that is, according to the construct, discernable from skin tone. As Emily S. Lee explains in her article "The Meaning of the Visible Differences of the Body," racism as well as sexism

> hinge on the visible features of the body even though the visible features of the body are completely arbitrary. The features of the body are the symbols for racism and sexism without which racist or sexist occurrences cannot be understood as racist or sexist. Through the visible differences of the body, one conjectures about the invisible differences of the person. (35)

This invisible meaning is derived from culturally determined values and assigned to individuals at the moment of perception. From the perspective of White Germans, dark skin usually signifies foreignness and may also suggest cultural biases such as inferior intelligence, closeness to nature, or unrestrained sexuality. On the other hand, the White German is unlikely to regard his own Whiteness as an important aspect of his identity, even though it is just as significant as Blackness is for constituting Black identity. As Ruth Frankenberg points out, Whiteness "refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (1). It is the social norm in Western societies, setting the standards by which all individuals, Black or White, are judged. Within this context, notes Ursula Wachendorfer, "it is no longer a White Person who speaks, feels and thinks, but the quintessential human being, representative of all humankind" (89).[6]

With Whiteness the norm in northern Europe and much of North America, it is not unusual for members of the White majority to view people of color as "abnormal," as not belonging to their community. This makes growing up in Western countries especially difficult for Blacks since, as Adlerian psychologists have noted, having a strong sense of belonging and connection with one's surroundings is of utmost importance for healthy human development. Particularly in Germany, where the conjunction of race and nationality—of Whiteness and Germanness—has a long and established history, Black Germans have no place they can call home. They are often asked by their fellow Germans where they are from, when they will return to their native land, and why they have such an amazing command of the German language. May Ayim provides a compelling description of this situation in her poem "sein oder nichtsein" (to be or not to be):

> in deutschland großgeworden habe ich gelernt, daß
> mein name
> "neger(in)" heißt
> und die menschen

zwar gleich, aber verschieden sind
und ich in gewissen punkten etwas überempfindlich bin.
in deutschland großgeworden habe ich gelernt,
zu bedauern
schwarz zu sein, "mischling" zu sein, deutsch zu sein,
nicht deutsch zu sein, afrikanisch zu sein,
nicht afrikanisch zu sein, deutsche eltern zu haben,
afrikanische eltern zu haben,
exotin zu sein, frau zu sein. (17)[7]

The crisis of not belonging that Ayim describes in this passage is shared by Indian-German scholar Sheila Mysorekar, who writes:

> Considered as "foreigners" by definition of our skin color, we do not easily come to terms with the fact that we have a right to call ourselves "German." In spite of never having been outside Germany, in spite of carrying a German passport, in spite of having German as our mother-tongue, many of us grow up calling ourselves "Nigerian" or "Pakistani," or whatever nationality our father may have. (80)

Yet while tentatively claiming it for their own, Black Germans often know very little about their father's homeland and are likely to discover, if they have the opportunity to visit it after they are grown, that their lighter skin tone causes them to stand out as foreigners there as well. An exception in either ancestral homeland, they sometimes feel like "nothing at all" as far as their sense of national identity is concerned (Oguntoye 155).

Having grown up in Germany, Hügel-Marshall knows only too well what it means to be an exception. Born in 1947, she is the child of a White Bavarian woman and an African-American soldier who returned to the United States before her birth. As such, she reflects the mixed ancestry common among Black Germans, who, like May Ayim, Sheila Mysorekar, and many others, have a White-German mother and a Black father from an African, Asian, or Caribbean country, or from countries such as England and the United States where there is a large Black population. Hügel-Marshall also reflects the typical Black-German experience described by Mysorekar with regard to national identity. For although she grew up with only her White-German parent, she did not feel, when she was a young adult, that she had the right to view herself as either White or German, despite the fact that her mother's "German blood" entitled her to citizenship.[8]

As a young child, identity issues such as these did not play an important role in Hügel-Marshall's life. She did not yet feel excluded

from the world she was born into, which included her mother, her grandmother, and—a few years later—her step-father and her younger sister, all of whom were White. As reflected in her autobiography, her childhood assumptions show that human beings are not born Black or White, but that as we grow up, our identity conforms to these cultural constructs and the meanings imbedded in them:

> There was only one world, one culture—the white one—and that is the world I was born into. No black culture existed. [...] There was only one reality, one truth. Everyone was white, and all children looked exactly like their parents. And so I imagined that I must be white, too—what else could I be? [...] I saw no reason in the world that I wouldn't be able to grow up with my white mother in my white family and be perfectly happy. (19–20)[9]

This passage addresses one of the privileges White Germans tend to take for granted, namely, the privilege of being socially accepted, of being an insider. As a child, Hügel-Marshall regarded herself as White because she belonged to a White family and neighborhood whose members accepted her as one of their own. Skin tone had nothing to do with it. In fact, young Erika, as she was called then, experienced Germany, or rather, the German town in which she lived, as home. This was due to the strong love she felt for and received from most members of her family, but also—and here is the key—to her status as a young child. Her innocence protected Erika from social prejudice and from knowledge of German history. Later, when she was forced to attend school away from home, she was confronted with the harmful effects of racism upon her development. Her contrasting experiences as a young child and as a maturing youth thus correspond to the perspectives on home described by Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who write:

> "Being home" refers to the place where one lives within familiar, safe, protected boundaries; "not being home" is a matter of realizing that home was an illusion of coherence and safety based on the exclusion of specific histories of oppression and resistance, the repression of differences even within oneself. (qtd. in Smith 267)

In her autobiography, Hügel-Marshall cites a newspaper article from 1952 to relate a specific history of oppression that she was unaware of as a child. The article discusses the German government's attempts to "solve" problems posed by the country's 94,000 occupation babies (*Besatzungskinder*), in particular the almost 4,000 mixed-race children with one parent from Africa or of African descent (*Negermischlinge*).

One passage speculates whether "it would be better for these children to be relocated to the homeland of their fathers" (21). Another proposes that the so-called mixed-race children needed protection from the other schoolchildren: "the color of their skin makes them stand out [...]. Those experienced with children will be aware of how intolerant children can be of anything that falls outside the norm" (22).[10] Between each of the excerpted passages, Hügel-Marshall inserts her own subjective commentaries, making it clear that as a child she did not yet know enough to feel excluded from her homeland: "I was five years old and had no idea that I presented the people of my country with a moral and humanitarian problem" (21); or, "I was five years old and had no idea it would turn out to be not I who presented problems for others but they who presented them for me" (22). The juxtaposition between the five-year-old's sense of familial security and the specific history of prejudice evident in the excerpts illustrates the conflict between "being home" and "not being home" as defined by Martin and Mohanty and experienced by Hügel-Marshall as she grew up.

The federal government's view that it was best to remove or isolate "mixed-race Negro children" such as Erika undoubtedly influenced local policy makers. Although Erika had not encountered racism during her first year of school, local officials argued that her personal and professional development would be jeopardized by small-town prejudices. They persusaded her mother to take seven-year-old Erika to a larger town and place her in a Catholic home for children with special needs. She would attend a regular school near the institution and be allowed to return to her family in the summers. Adapting to institutionalized living, with its strictly enforced procedures and cold, punitive, and ultimately racist atmosphere, was very difficult for Erika. She had been a well adjusted seven-year-old who had not known she was different from other children. She had not known she was a Negro (*Neger)* and she had not known what a Negro was.[11] Gradually, though, she learned there must be something very different about her. Unlike the other children, whenever she misbehaved she heard remarks such as: "'That's the Negro in her coming out'" (43), or, "'that's where your kind belongs'" (31). Confused by such remarks, Erika would run to the washroom to look at herself in the mirror: "but no matter how hard I look, I can't see what's wrong with me. I have long, dark curly hair pulled back in a pony tail. I've got dark brown eyes, long legs and I'm one of the tallest in my class" (43). Erika did not yet understand the comments made about her because she did not yet know the invisible meaning signified by her skin color. She did not yet know that her brown skin marked her as "stupid, backward, primitive, uncivilized [...] unreliable, shifty,

dangerous, pitiful" (56). But with time and daily reinforcement, she came to accept what others said about her, internalizing their negative interpretations of the visible features of her body.

To many White Germans, including her Catholic caretakers, Erika's skin not only signified intellectual inferiority but also miscegenation, the sin of her mother. As Fatima El-Tayeb notes in her articles on the role of race in German citizenship laws, miscegenation has long been viewed by White Germans as the "ultimate sin" ("We are Germans" 192). Beginning in the late nineteenth century, race scientists, colonialists, politicians, and the general public regarded "mixed blood" as a threat to German identity, with "one drop of black blood enough to poison the whole German nation" (El-Tayeb, "Blood" 160). As a result, sexual contact between the races was taboo and the children of interracial couples were considered deviant products of an abnormal situation ("Blood" 165). Even after racist persecution under fascism was renounced by lawmakers of the newly established Federal Republic, White women such as Erika's mother, who willingly engaged in sexual activity with a Black man, were regarded as "Negroes' whores" (*Negerhure).* For this reason, Sister Hildegard, Erika's guardian at the children's home, decided it was in Erika's best interest to have her Black soul exorcised. By way of explanation, Sister Hildegard told her:

> We all know you have an unnatural hussy for a mother, and that she let some Negro have his way with her. This was a very grave sin, and it means that your blood is impure. You have a great deal of Devil in you, child, but we're going to take you to Hamburg tomorrow and pray together that you might be made good and pure. (39)

Arriving at a church the next day, she is told to kneel in the middle of an almost empty room. Frightened by a large man who approaches her slowly and with heavy footsteps, she screams, stands, and tries to escape. The door is locked and she is forced to kneel again. She is blindfolded and told to repeat the phrases the priest utters, phrases that ask God and Jesus to forgive her sins and to purify her Black soul and that command Satan to leave her. "I'm overcome by nausea and chills. My entire body shakes and I vomit on the floor. I don't know where I am or what world this is, what reality. Is it the one I've been living in, which replaces the earlier dream of home, or is it something new?" (42). When removing her blindfold Schwester Hildegard reassures Erika that the exorcism was a success: "You've done it. Your devils have all flown out this window. And now, if you behave yourself and stop talking back and do as you're told, perhaps they'll stay away" (42). The

exorcism causes Erika to have nightmares for years to come. She imagines little black devils hiding everywhere, trying to catch her. "I am ten years old, and I'm riddled with guilt. I hate the color of my skin. From this time on, I have no greater desire than to be white" (43).

Besides this experience and the relentless stream of racist remarks that were directed against her and that eventually defined her identity as a young person, Erika's sense of self was also damaged by physical abuse. Some of this was standard treatment for all children living in the home. All children who misbehaved ten times or more in a given week were beaten in front of the others—a humiliating ritual. Even worse for the children was the experience of being forced to eat what they couldn't stomach. Hügel-Marshall recalls: "Sometimes I can't [stomach the food] and, forbidden to get up during meals for any reason, I am sick at the table. When this happens, my hands are tied behind my back to prevent me from striking out and I am force-fed my vomit, spoonful by spoonful. This happens more than once" (28).

Leslie Adelson's work on feminism and German identity, *Making Bodies, Making History,* is helpful in understanding the important role that Ika Hügel-Marshall's experiences of emotional and physical abuse played in the formation of her identity. In clarifying how our bodies function "as sites of social experience and political resistance" (4), Adelson refers to Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain: the Making and Unmaking of the World* (1985), an investigation of the role of bodies in torture and war. Paraphrasing Scarry, Adelson explains that "the real motive for torture is not in all cases the informational content of confession but the unmaking of the prisoner's world and the making of power. What this means is that torturers *accord* their prisoners no agency while *ascribing* certain forms of agency to them" (20). This lie, Scarry maintains, "'mimes something real,' that is, that 'the person in great pain experiences his own body as the agent of his agony'" (qtd. in Adelson 20).

Such a "double experience of agency" can be applied to Hügel-Marshall's life. Already as a child she recognized that certain powerful people in her life caused her a great deal of physical or emotional pain, yet she simultaneously viewed her body as the source of her distress, since she had learned that its Blackness "justified" the abuse it received. Also, it was her body that experienced the torment, including the pain of the beatings and the trembling and vomiting that occurred when she was frightened. Julia Kristeva's interpretation of the abjected individual's vomit as symbolizing "the process of becoming an other at the expense of [one's] own death" (3), illustrates Erika's experience and supports Scarry's view that the purpose of torture is to unmake the

victim's world in order to solidify the torturer's power. Erika emerged from the exorcism unsure of what world she was living in and full of fear, hate, and distrust of herself. This is just the position Sister Hildegard wanted her in—fearful that the devil would again inhabit her body if she did not behave "like a good girl" and do what Sister Hildegard commanded.

But Sister Hildegard proved difficult to please. Anytime Erika hoped to enjoy some normal moments of fun with her classmates—for example, when she was invited to a schoolmate's birthday party—she was not allowed to join in—to feel like she belonged—but was instead ridiculed for thinking that the others were really interested in her. It becomes clear from various textual passages that the nun feared Erika would become sexually promiscuous if she were not kept on a tight leash. This corresponds to the standard German view of Black women as sexual animals who are in "perpetual heat" (El-Tayeb, "Blood" 155). After spotting Erika with some boys at an ice-cream stand after school one day, Sister Hildegard decides it is time to send her away to a boarding school to complete her high school degree and receive professional training. Although Erika wants to become a teacher, Sister Hildegard does not feel she is suited for that profession:

> A career in social work is really your only option. I think you'll be capable of working with young children, though anything beyond that is quite out of the question [...]. Why, the very fact that I just caught you running around with a bunch of boys proves that you're incapable of leading a proper life [...]. (T)hose boys will use you, and you're such a dumb goose you'll fall for their lines. But do you really think anyone would want you for anything more? (59)

Erika is transferred to a school in Düsseldorf. From there, and despite continued adversity and self-doubt, she manages to graduate from high school, find employment as a supervisor in a children's home, receive an advanced university degree in social work (*Sozialpädagogik),* and "even" marry a White German—a marriage that lasts six years. While she thus functions in many ways as a "normal" (i.e., White) German, she continues to be rejected by her fellow citizens. For example, when she and her fiancé, Alexander, are waiting in the registry office to apply for a marriage license, the civil servant assigned to help them "takes Alex's hand. He asks loudly: 'But what's this, haven't you brought your bride-to-be along with you? She must be here too, you know, if we're to proceed'" (90). Only four weeks later, following their marriage ceremony, a similar, although more innocent instance of social exclusion occurs: "as we descend the grand steps of the courthouse, a

man dressed in the formal attire of another wedding party steps forward and respectfully congratulates my maid of honor on her marriage" (91). These examples of non-acceptance by White Germans show that dark-skinned minorities are invisible at the same time that they are highly visible. Because Hügel-Marshall stands out physically, her skin color marking her as a foreigner, she is invisible as a citizen. This means that she is not recognized as someone who should enjoy the rights and privileges accorded German citizens, such as marriage to a German. In fact, her union with a White German, since it could produce offspring, poses a threat to the purity of the German race. Behind her back she hears comments about her and her choice of groom that confirm the exclusionary attitude of her fellow Germans: "'Couldn't she find one of her own kind to pair off with? Did it absolutely have to be a German man?'" (91).

Hügel-Marshall's skin color—that which marks her as a non-German—is the one thing she knows she has in common with her father: "It's your fault, the fault of your black skin, that I was unwanted in my homeland" (14). Despite this, or perhaps because of it, she longs to meet her father: knowing him would allow her to better understand who she is and would give her someone to identify with. It might also provide her with reasons to reject the negative stereotypes she has always heard about dark-skinned people. As a teenager, she attempts unsuccessfully to locate her father in the United States, and even as an adult, her desire to know him does not subside. Yet at the same time, the negative views she has internalized about Black people make her afraid to ever meet him or other Blacks: "Blacks are utterly strange to me, and I fear them. I've come to hold certain beliefs about them by generalizing from my own case: I am black and I am ugly. [...] I'm a bad seed, wayward, immoral, filthy, stupid. The last person I'd want to meet is someone like me" (102).

Feelings such as these are at the center of Hügel-Marshall's struggle to overcome the damaging effect that social prejudice has had on her sense of self. While part of her believes what White people say about her and other Black Germans, another part of her recognizes their views as racist stereotypes that she must resist in order to survive. Additionally, she is caught between the impulse to swallow her feelings of anger and hurt so that others will like her, and to find and use her own voice. The older she gets, the more she dares to speak up for herself, to demand respect from others, to insist on being heard. This is never easy, for the fear of being rejected or having her innermost feelings and thoughts dismissed as unimportant is ever present.

Hügel-Marshall's work with White feminists—a collaboration that began in the early 1970s—exemplifies the emotional perils experienced by minorities who dare to speak out. Although she regards her "White sisters" as friends, she is repeatedly hurt by their lack of interest in fighting racism in Germany and in hearing about the racism she herself has endured. Whenever she summons up the courage to speak with White feminists about racism, especially hidden racism within their ranks, they respond with anger and defensiveness, labeling what she has to say as too subjective. While feminist theory provides a political framework for recognizing sexism, racism, and class exploitation as interconnected forms of social domination, many of the feminists she interacts with maintain that the struggle against sexism is more important than the struggle against racism because more women suffer from sexism than racism (105). Unfortunately, this view allowed some of those same feminists to believe that racism would be eliminated if sexism were eliminated, which in turn allowed them to ignore their own position of racial privilege. Hügel-Marshall writes:

> None of my sisters in the women's groups [...] is interested in hearing the story of black women's struggles. They don't want to see that our society is racist as well as sexist. These white feminists don't understand that they too are the beneficiaries of the racist status quo or that the pervasiveness of racism allows them to ignore that black and white skin are not accorded equal value. (98)

White feminists' general lack of interest in fighting racism has also been addressed by Black women in the United States. Indeed, African-American feminists began criticizing their Euro-American counterparts' dismissal of racism in the 1960s and 1970s, when the civil rights movement and the Black Power Movement provided Black activists with the confidence to reject blatantly racist social structures and more subtle forms of prejudice. In 1981, racist feminism was the focus of the National Women's Studies Association Convention in Storrs, Connecticut, in a program entitled "Women Respond to Racism." As Sara Lennox reports in her article "Divided Feminism: Women, Racism, and German National Identity," Dagmar Schultz, a White-German feminist who had attended the convention and "whose own politics were formed in the American civil rights movement," introduced this topic to German feminists via her coverage of the convention in the feminist journal *Courage* (30). In 1983, Schultz used her position as co-founder of the Orlanda Frauenverlag to publish *Macht und Sinnlichkeit* (Power and Sensuality), a translated selection of poetry and prose by lesbian poets Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich, who had been the guest speakers at the

1981 NWSA convention. In 1984, Schultz invited Lorde, a leader in the African-American women's movement, to teach at Berlin's Free University. Lorde returned to Germany each year until her death in 1992, and in so doing provided long-term inspiration and guidance to the newly emerging Afro-German identity movement. Indeed, in collaboration with her, Germans of color adopted the term "Afro-German" for their movement, thereby providing themselves with an empowering means of self-definition.[12] Also, beginning in 1985, a number of organizations were founded to give Black Germans a sense of community and social identity, including the Initiative of Black Germans (*Initiative Schwarze Deutsche)* and ADEFRA (*Afro-Deutsche Frauen* [Afro-German Women]). These in turn led to the publication of Black magazines such as *Afrekete* and *afro look,* the implementation of *Black History Month,* and the organization of a series of conferences for Black, Jewish, and immigrant women, as well as many relevant publications, including the aforementioned *Showing Our Colors.*

The critique of racism within feminism and the development of an Afro-German identity movement coincided in a way and at a time that was particularly helpful to Hügel-Marshall's identity struggle. She first met other Afro-Germans in Frankfurt in 1986 when she was 39 years old. Her meetings with this group, which were "characterized by mutual respect and attentiveness" (107), were followed in 1987 by her first encounter with Audre Lorde, Lorde's partner Gloria Joseph, and Dagmar Schultz. As she describes in her autobiography, Hügel-Marshall became very well acquainted with these women, especially with Schultz, with whom she developed "a deep and intimate relationship" after she moved to Berlin in 1990:

> [Dagmar's] love and trust have enabled me to approach painful facts and experiences as well as passionate, beautiful things differently than ever before. We support one another, learn from one another [...]. We talk about what it was like to grow up in a racist society—she tells me what it was like for her as a white person; I tell her my experiences as a black person. We are united in struggle, particularly the struggle against everyday racism. We are there for each other. We share great and small sorrows, happiness, and joy. Our bond is a very close one. Dagmar is an irreplaceable part of my life. (112–13)

Interestingly, this description of her friendship with Schultz is the only passage in Hügel-Marshall's autobiography that indicates a departure from her earlier heterosexual orientation (as indicated by her marriage). Because of her lesbian relationship with Schultz, one can assume that

she has experienced social victimization not only as a Black but also as a homo- or bisexual woman. Despite this, Hügel-Marshall focuses exclusively on the effects of racism in her autobiography. Surely this is due to the fact—as indicated in one of her articles—that lesbianism can be denied, while Blackness cannot.[13] Because she cannot hide her skin, she cannot help but suffer from other people's reactions to it. Her sexual orientation, on the other hand, is not so obvious and is not the source—for her—of long-term suffering. Therefore, instead of focusing on homophobia, she is intent on using her autobiography to expose the social prejudice she knows best: the reality and harmful consequences of racism in Germany.

According to what Hügel-Marshall reports in her autobiography, her conversations with Audre Lorde also focus on racism and not on homophobia. From Lorde, who lived with her and Schultz for several months in 1991 and 1992, Hügel-Marshall learned more about the importance of using her own voice to break the silence surrounding the racism she and other Black Germans experience: "Audre encourages me and insists that I end my silence. She urges me not to let my fears deter me from speaking out" (113). In her tribute to Lorde, who died on St. Croix in November 1992, Hügel-Marshall writes: "Your legacy will be carried on—by me and by all of the black people of the world" (125).

Hügel-Marshall's involvement with the Afro-German community occurred at approximately the same time that she began learning from and working with transnational Blacks, particularly Lorde. Even before she met her, she had read Lorde's works and identified with their message: "Her texts gave me courage and made me feel understood. I'd rediscovered myself, not only in the way she expressed the pain that I and so many blacks felt, but also in her message that we must stop seeing ourselves as helpless victims of a racist system" (111). She thus resembles other Black Germans who, as Mysorekar maintains, draw comfort and courage from literature written by Blacks in other countries:

> In countries without a cohesive Black community, such as Germany, [...] Black literature serves as a spiritual connection with other Black people, breaking the silence and isolation of the individual Black man or woman. Now that we have started to write ourselves, we [...] not only feed on the books that reach us, but we send out messages as well. (83)

After thirty-nine years of growing up in complete isolation from other Blacks, Hügel-Marshall has become an important member of the Black-German community, encouraged by other Afro-German members, by White-German anti-racist activists, and by members of the Black

diaspora. Her involvement in this movement and her interactions with other Blacks thus mark a turning point in her sense of self. With other Blacks she is finally able to discuss openly the racism she has endured, receive understanding from them, identify with what they are going through, and have proof that the negative stereotypes about dark-skinned people are untrue and unfair. She now counters these stereotypes and the racism that accompanies them by means of a wide range of activities: she participates in conferences organized for and by Germans of color, teaches courses on identity issues, provides inter-cultural counseling, and gives lectures and writes texts about racism in Germany. Her work thus connects her to individuals in other Black diasporic communities who, as Carmen Faymonville points out, are united by "a political project of resistance against marginalization, discrimination and silencing, and not merely by the color of their skin or ancestral origin outside of Europe" (369).

At the age of forty-six, Hügel-Marshall's identity transformation is aided when a friend locates her father for her.[14] This turn of events is a dream come true, since her father and his entire family—his wife and their five children—welcome her with open arms. She discovers how much she resembles him physically, and what a wise and gentle man he is. Indeed, her interactions with her father and his family provide further substantiation that all the negative stereotypes about Black people that she heard throughout her life are untrue. Although he dies less than a year after she first meets him, the experience of finally knowing her father is truly transformative. She closes her book a new person:

> I have everything today: my life, my longings, my love, a lighthearted happiness, humor, respect, and pride in myself. Every morning, I look forward to the coming day and experience the world anew. I look in the mirror and am happy, for there's nothing in the world I want to be but myself. (158)

As we contemplate Hügel-Marshall's transformation from an unhappy, mistreated child to a confident and engaged adult, a number of questions arise. One wonders, for example, how an individual's spirit withstands such abuse, and how it learns to resist domination. When experiencing any sort of pain that is inflicted to "unmake one's world," as Scarry would say, it is necessary for the victim to separate her self as object (as the object of torture, rape, a hate crime, or racist ridicule) from the self as subject—to become momentarily a disembodied subject. This prevents the perpetrator from gaining full control of his or her victim, since the subject-object separation allows the victim's mind to disengage from what is being done to or said about the victim's body.

Since the mind ultimately resides in the body, however, it will, if it is not too damaged, elect to resist the perpetrator's power, whenever and however it can, in order that the whole person—the reunited mind/body—may survive and even thrive.

Hügel-Marshall and other victims of oppression have traversed various levels of this process. Although Hügel-Marshall was damaged by racism, she also had enough support, determination, and resilience to eventually counter it. Indispensable in this regard was the love she received from her mother, sister, and grandmother in early childhood. Because she had developed a strong sense of her own goodness as a young child, her subsequent encounters with racism did not completely break her spirit. As she matured and was able to recognize prejudice for what it was, her body ceased to be a manipulated object and became instead an embodied subject, the site of political resistance.

According to Hügel-Marshall, her transformation would not have been so successful had she not found a community of people who love her, listen to her, and respect her. Her experiences in the Afro-German movement, with her African-American family, with other transnational Blacks, and with supportive White friends have given Hügel-Marshall what Adelson calls "the collective conditions for the social production of identity" (8). Through these relationships and her own struggles, Hügel-Marshall has gained the confidence she needs to continue on her individual path of self-discovery. By talking with other Blacks, she is able to validate her experiences and arrive at a positive sense of self: "I am able to believe in myself, to take myself seriously and to unlearn much of what whites have taught me" (108).

Throughout her autobiography, Hügel-Marshall's central focus is on this process of self-discovery. Already in the opening frame, she expresses the longing to know who she is and how she can come to terms with the seeming contradiction between her skin color and her nationality (11–12). The book's opening thus sets up the author's intent to tell the story of her identity transformation—the long process of coming to accept, love, and believe in herself; to recognize that what Whites say about her is worth resisting; and to know that what she has to say is worth expressing and worth hearing. As she explains in an interview that I conducted with her in August 2004, Hügel-Marshall decided to write her autobiography not only to come to terms with the circumstances of her own life, but also, and primarily, to show other Afro-Germans that they can and must have faith in themselves, and that there are ways out of the despair to which many have succumbed. In addition, she hopes to educate White readers about the history and situation of Blacks

in Germany, thereby contributing to the transformation of critical consciousness concerning matters of race in German society.

All of these authorial intentions speak to the importance of Black Germans finding their own voice, and are consistent with Black diasporic experience in other countries. Like Lorde and other members of the Black diaspora, African-American scholar bell hooks writes about how important it is for Blacks to publicly share what they have been through if they are to heal their wounds and realize themselves. She writes:

> Moving from silence into speech is for the oppressed, the colonized, the exploited, and those who stand and struggle side by side a gesture of defiance that heals, that makes new life and new growth possible. It is that act of speech, of "talking back," that is no mere gesture of empty words, that is the expression of our movement from object to subject—the liberated voice. (9)

This way of speaking, hooks continues, "is characterized by opposition, by resistance. It demands that paradigms shift—that we learn to talk—to listen—to hear in a new way" (15).

Hügel-Marshall's autobiography encourages Germany's minority citizens to define their own identity while challenging the White majority to expand its awareness of the effects and causes of racial prejudice. Hügel-Marshall's own identity transformation is reflected in many different ways, including her change of name (besides turning Erika into Ika, she adds her father's family name to her mother's to create her hyphenated last name); her change of citizenship (she becomes a dual citizen of Germany and the United States, a final wish of her father's); and the self-assurance with which she speaks. She rejects anyone else's attempts to define her and insists that she is both White, like her mother, and Black, like her father. In response to a White woman who tells her she is not dark enough to call herself Black, Hügel-Marshall asserts:

> No one but me has the right to define who I am. No one else can tell me if I have "the right" to call myself a black woman. [...] I have learned to unify the two cultures—black and white—in me. [...] Black history is my history too, and in that I include the story of blacks in Africa, America, and Europe. I'm proud of African and African-American history and proud to be a part of it. (122)

Hügel-Marshall thus assumes a hybrid, or diasporic, identity that both reflects and contributes to Germany's changing national landscape. As a Black female (lesbian) German from a working-class background, Hügel-Marshall challenges traditional ideology of the (German) subject

as male, heterosexual, White, and middle-class while demanding a place in German history and society for herself and others like her. Her autobiographical practice is thus subversive. She hopes to undermine the status quo by demonstrating that "Germans can also be Black" (106). After a lifetime of being defined and excluded by Whites, Ika Hügel-Marshall has found the strength to speak out against racism, to identify herself as both Black and White, and to claim Germany as her home.

Notes

[1] In this essay, I capitalize "Black" and "White" whenever these words refer to racial constructs. Like Susan Arndt, I do so to show, "dass hier nicht körperliche und geistig-kulturelle Eigenschaften miteinander verbunden werden, sondern eine soziopolitische Identität..." (33). While it is more common to politicize and therefore to capitalize the term Black than the term White—indeed, Hügel-Marshall does this in her original German text—I feel it is important to capitalize both to foster an awareness that Whiteness is no less constructed than Blackness, and just as central to the White individual's sense of identity. Later in this essay, I do the same by referring to White Americans as "Euro-Americans." With this term, I challenge the sense that only Whites are "normal" or "real" citizens of the United States, and all others—all those subsumed under hybrid constructions such as African-American, Asian-American, Jewish-American, Mexican-American, etc.—are "exceptions." Although terminology equivalent to "Euro-American" is not possible for Germans of European origin, the term "White German" serves the same purpose.

[2] The reform of Germany's citizenship law was enacted on 1 January 2000. Prior to this date, legislation passed in 1913 determined that German citizenship was based primarily on "German blood" (*jus sanguinis*). It granted citizenship to children with at least one German parent, and it also permitted naturalization of "ethnic Germans" who lived in other countries. But it did not permit "ethnic foreigners" who had lived in Germany for generations to become citizens. This created the unfair situation whereby "an evergrowing number of 'cultural Germans' is created, who are treated as foreigners solely because they miss the qualification of 'German blood'" (El-Tayeb, "Blood" 149). The new citizenship law that took effect in 2000 makes it possible for children born to non-German parents residing legally in Germany for at least eight years to become German citizens. It also makes it easier for children of non-German ancestry born after 1990 but before 2000 to naturalize. The reform does not apply to foreign residents

born before this date, however, and they are usually unable to obtain German citizenship.

[3] Black-German men (and Black male residents of Germany) have also been writing interesting autobiographical works. They include Hans Massaquoi's *Destined to Witness (Neger, Neger, Schornsteinfeger,* 1999), Chima Oji's *Unter die Deutschen gefallen* (Dropped among the Germans, 2001) and Detlef Soost's book *D!* (2004). These texts provide readers with broad knowledge concerning the Afro-German experience, since they relate the lives of individuals born into different generations: Massaquoi, born in 1926, grew up in Nazi Germany; Oji, a Nigerian doctor who studied and worked in Germany, was born in 1947—the same year as Hügel-Marshall; and Detlev Soost, dance coach and media star, was born in 1970. Soost represents a new generation of Black Germans who have been able to capitalize on their Blackness in show business, while at the same time recognizing the benefits of being regarded as an exotic (*Exotenbonus*) as another form of racism. Other performers of this generation who have had similar experiences include the female journalist (and former dancer, model, and actress) Abini Zöllner, whose life story is recorded in *Schokoladenkind* (Chocolate Child, 2003), and the actor and hiphop musician Tyron Ricketts, creator of the short film *Afrodeutsch* (Afro-German). While Ricketts' music and film unmask right-wing racist violence, Soost's and Zöllner's texts are written along the line of personal memoir and are not as intent on critiquing the existence and harmful effects of racism in Germany as are other autobiographical texts by Black Germans.

[4] Works of fiction that have an autobiographical basis are common, for example, among Turkish-Germans such as Renan Demirkan, Alev Tekiney, and Emine Sevgi Özdamer; the Italian-German Franco-Biondi; and the Syrian-German Rafik Schami.

[5] Most of the preceding two paragraphs on the relationship between autobiography and identity transformation is borrowed, with the editor's permission, from my article in the 2002 issue of *Glossen*.

[6] Translation mine.

[7] "Raised in Germany I learned, that / my name // is "negro (negress)" // and that human beings / though equal, are also different / and that I am in certain matters somewhat over sensitive. / Raised in Germany I learned / to regret // being Black, being a "half breed," being German, / not being German, being African / not being African, having German parents, / having African parents / being an exotic, being a woman." Translation mine.

[8] Until 1975, the 1913 citizenship law allowed children born in wedlock to receive German citizenship only if the father (and not the mother) was a German citizen at the time of the child's birth; but the law

granted citizenship to children born out of wedlock to a German mother, which corresponds to Ika's situation.

[9] All quotations are from the Gaffney translation of *Daheim unterwegs*.

[10] Hügel-Marshall indicates in her text that these newspaper excerpts are taken from an issue of *Das Parlament* dated 19 March 1952.

[11] *Neger* is a German term for dark-skinned people that generally has a more derogatory, racist connotation than the English equivalent "Negro," but less racist sentiment than the extremely pejorative English term "Nigger."

[12] The terms "Afro-German" *(Afro-Deutsche)* and "Black German" (*Schwarze Deutsche*) can be used interchangeably, although, according to Tina Campt, "Black German" is preferred by many because it suggests greater inclusiveness (288). Still, the original intent behind adopting the term Afro-German was to be inclusive, as can be discerned from the following passage in *Farbe bekennen*: "Mit dem Begriff 'Afro-Deutsch' meinen wir alle, die diese Bezeichnung auf sich beziehen möchten, egal ob sie einen oder zwei Schwarze Elternteile besitzen. Ebenso wie mit der synonym gebrauchten Bezeichnung 'Schwarze Deutsche' geht es uns nicht um Ausgrenzung nach Herkunft oder Hautfarbe, wissen wir doch allzu gut, was es heißt, unter Ausgrenzung zu leiden. Vielmehr wollen wir 'Afro-deutsch' den herkömmlichen Behelfsbezeichnungen wie 'Mischling,' 'Mulatte' oder 'Farbige' entgegensetzen, als einen Versuch, uns selbst zu bestimmen, statt bestimmt zu werden" (10).

[13] See Ika Hügel, "lesbischsein läßt sich verleugnen, schwarzsein nicht."

[14] It was Sara Lennox, German professor at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, who located Hügel-Marshall's father for her.

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