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Developing Critical Consciousness:
Representations of Race and Gender in Two Afro-German Works

Maren Knebel

Thesis submitted to the
Eberly College of Arts and Sciences
at West Virginia University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
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1999

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ABSTRACT

Developing Critical Consciousness: Representations of Race and Gender in Two Afro-German Works

Maren Knebel

Eva Demski and Ika Hügel-Marshall are two contemporary women writers whose works contribute significantly to the Afro-German culture. Demski is a “white” German author who depicts in her novel the life of an Afro-German woman, Afra, as well as the life of her “white” daughter, Nivea. Hügel-Marshall, who was born in 1947 as the daughter of a German mother and an African-American father, depicts in her autobiography her own development from object to subject. This thesis demonstrates that both authors encourage a development of critical consciousness by creating written evidence of a shared Afro-German identity and by expressing the problems and pain of Afro-German women. Their works provide minority readers with opportunities to heal similar wounds and thus construct a positive self-concept. Additionally, they encourage self-reflective “white” Germans to re-evaluate their attitudes toward Afro-Germans and to help initiate changes that will improve the Afro-German public image.

Für Uromi und Oma Anna

- I miss you

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Zusammen singen sie mit mir das Lied von den 'Zehn kleinen Negerlein' und spielen mit mir 'Wer hat Angst vorm Schwarzen Mann' --nur mit dem Unterschied, daß ich mit diesen sogenannten Wahrheiten etwas über mich selbst lernen soll.

Ika Hügel-Marshall, Daheim unterwegs

Introduction

In 1981, bell hooks stated in her book Sisters of the Yam: Black Women and Self-Recovery:

Widespread efforts to continue devaluation of black womanhood make it extremely difficult and oftentimes impossible for the black female to develop a positive self-concept. For we are daily bombarded by negative images. Indeed, one strong oppressive force has been this negative stereotype and our acceptance of it as a viable role model upon which we can pattern our lives. (1)

Since then, only little effort has been made to change the way in which women of African or part-African ancestry are represented in the mass media in the United States. Even less developed though not less oppressive is the portrayal of German women with part-African ancestry in media and literature. To further democratic values within the global community, it is very important to challenge "white"-dominated perceptions of non-"white" women and to create a critical consciousness by fighting dominant stereotypes about women of color. A growing number of women writers have begun to do just this. For example, Eva Demski and Ika Hügel-Marshall counter widespread stereotypes including the notions that dark-complexioned people are stupid, uncivilized, criminal, and sexually overactive, by portraying sensitive and intelligent German women of African or part-African ancestry in their works. This is crucial since these authors not only create written evidence of a shared Afro-German identity but also give expression to the problems and pain of Afro-German women. Additionally, they often provide their readers with

opportunities to heal such wounds and thus construct a positive self-concept.

In this thesis, I will discuss ways in which the development of critical consciousness is encouraged in Eva Demski's novel Afra: Roman in fünf Bildern (1992) and Ika Hügel-Marshall's autobiography Daheim unterwegs: Ein deutsches Leben (1998). Demski is a "white" German author who depicts in her novel the life of an Afro-German woman Afra from her birth in 1945 until adulthood in Germany, as well as the life of her "white" daughter, Nivea. Leslie Adelson argues that the novel does not accurately reflect sociological reality: "Not a literary rendition of an Afro-German sociological reality, Demski's text nonetheless invokes a kind of social discourse that does have some bearings on the Afro-German project of self-definition in the 1990's as well as our disciplinary obligation to respond to it" (217). However, as I will show I believe that it indeed provides striking insight into prevailing stereotypes in modern German society and the struggle of the "victims" to deal with them. As Hügel-Marshall, who was born in 1947 as the daughter of a German mother and an African-American father, depicts in her autobiography Daheim unterwegs: Ein deutsches Leben her own development from object to subject. Both authors involve their readers in their stories by providing vivid depictions of how Afro-Germans are treated in the larger German society and by showing how detrimental such mostly hostile treatment can be. This Afro-German perspective is both new and urgently needed in order to make readers of the "white" majority aware of the suffering they sometimes inflict on "Black" German women. While Demski makes the readers experience the development of her fictional female protagonists, Hügel-Marshall verifies these "fictional" encounters by writing about her own "real" life as an Afro-German woman, addressing the stereotypes, misunderstandings, and animosities she had to cope with on her way to defining her own identity. Thus, Eva Demski as well as Ika Hügel-Marshall contribute to an education for critical consciousness, not only among Afro-German readers but also among readers of all genders and ethnicities.

I have based my concept of critical consciousness on ideas presented in bell hooks' Talking Back. Thinking Feminist. Thinking Black (1989). As is the case for "white" and "Black" Americans, achieving critical consciousness in Germany involves different stages and is a different process for Afro-Germans than it is for "white" Germans. The development of critical

consciousness for Afro-Germans begins with the recognition and acknowledgment of the pain manifested by constant encounters with stereotypes and animosities based on skin color. Secondly, Afro-Germans reflect on their childhood experiences and how these have influenced the way they cope with the present situation. The next step in healing past trauma is to define oneself and thus to avoid being defined by others. In the process of self-definition, “Black” women start defining themselves in public by challenging the perceptions of the “white” female population. The female population is addressed first, since they share the same gender and thus a common ground already exists or at least should exist.

Another important factor for Afro-Germans interested in developing critical consciousness is to find a shared identity within a community of people with whom they have many experiences in common. Afro-Germans are often denied access to the German community because of the color of their skin. The number of Afro-Germans or other people of African or part-African ancestry in Germany is very small. It is only about 33,000 out of a population of 83 million. Thus, most often Afro-Germans are isolated from each other. Making the effort to meet other people of a shared bi-ethnic--or double--identity can provide Afro-Germans with the dignity, strength and pride needed to carry on.

Finally, in the last stage of developing critical consciousness, “Black” Germans work in public toward increasing an awareness and acceptance of Afro-Germans as a part of the German society. They become politically active by participating in workshops, lectures, and other public forums, or by writing consciousness-raising essays and literature. In this way, they affirm and help other Afro-Germans in the process of developing a positive self-concept. Additionally, the same public work is used to make the larger society aware of the marginalized situation of Afro-Germans in Germany. It encourages “white” Germans to empathize with Afro-Germans and to develop a critical consciousness themselves by recognizing their role in such marginalization. As a result, self-reflective “white” Germans also re-evaluate their attitudes toward Afro-Germans and help initiate changes that will improve their public image, such as emphasizing the importance of teaching Afro-German history and highlighting positive role models.

I consider the development of critical consciousness to be extremely important in German society because it allows for a redefinition of the concept of “Germanness” in modern Germany.

My interest in this issue has caused me to focus much more on the content of Demski's and Hgel-Marshall's works than on their form. I will therefore discuss only briefly the two works' differing genres--novel and autobiography--in the introduction to Chapters One and Two. Otherwise, I will examine how the three female protagonists illustrate (or fail to illustrate) the different stages involved in developing critical consciousness. In Chapter One, I divide my discussion of the experiences of the two main fictional characters, Afra and Nivea, in two different sections, because Nivea's development is so different from her mother's and reflects greater self-awareness. Indeed, the order in which I discuss the three protagonists reflects the degree to which they were able to develop both a critical consciousness and a strong sense of personal and shared identity.

Besides the important insights I have gained from reading bell hooks, the work of numerous other scholars has also helped me in developing my analysis. Essays by May Opitz in the anthology Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte, edited by Katharina Oguntoye, May Opitz and Dagmar Schultz, as well as Stefanie Kron's Frchte Dich nicht, Bleichgesicht! Perspektivenwechsel zur Literatur Afro-Deutscher Frauen provided most of my background information about the history and current situation of Afro-Germans. Additionally, numerous articles analyzing the situation of Afro-Germans, racism and multiculturalism in Germany influenced my thinking and writing. Most important among these are "Now You See It, Now You Don't: Afro-German Particulars and the Making of a Nation in Eva Demski's *Afra: Roman in fnf Bildern*" by Leslie A. Adelson, and articles by Tina M. Campt, Erin Crawley, Karein Goertz, Sara Lennox, Karin Obermeier, and Dagmar Schultz. Finally, Ira Bruce Nadel's Biography: Fiction, Fact and Form, and Donald J. Winslow's Life-Writing: Biography, Autobiography, and Related Forms helped me in shaping my thoughts on "fact" versus "fiction" in autobiographies and novels.

The works of Kron, Crawley, Obermeier, Lennox and Campt additionally helped me in my initial thought-process concerning the "racial" terminology I will use. Throughout this thesis, I use the term "Afro-German" to refer to people who are of mixed (part-African and part-German) descent. According to Crawley, "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” (80). Obermeier confirms this and adds that, “The adoption of the neologism ‘Afro-German’ acknowledges possible relationships to various African traditions and particularly to the Afro-American movement to achieve a cultural and political identity within a dominant white culture” (173). I do not feel entirely comfortable with a hyphenated designation that joins two nationalities because it implies exclusion from the so-called “mainstream,” and divides Germans into different groups. Nevertheless, since it is still common to grant the status of “Germanness” only to those traditionally considered “pure” Germans (and not Afro-German, Turkish-German, Asian-German, etc.), it is very important to create an awareness of the multinational facets of German society. As Campt points out, “in German society, the ‘racial identity’ of blackness is imposed as a set of socio-ideologically constructed meanings, which equate blackness with exteriority to German culture, marginality within German society, and the status of ‘foreign/er’ in social relations” (113). Thus, using a hyphenated designation might for the time being help to create a multinational understanding of Germany since, as Lennox explains, “‘Whiteness’, is, after all, a category developed by racists, not antiracists, a way for European colonialists to distinguish Europeans of different nations from the indigenous people they sought to subordinate” (Divided Feminism 493).

Afro-Germans sometimes use “Black Germans” to describe themselves as well. But Bärbel Kampmann points out that it applies to all people with a dark complexion and German nationality (qtd. in Kron 10). “Black” as a political term in general refers to discriminated minority groups regardless of skin color or national origin. Campt explains, “The politicization of the term ‘schwarz’ has transformed it into the contested ground of meaning among members of ethnic groups as part of a process of reclaiming a positive conception of their ethnic identities” (122). While I, too, use the term “Black” Germans, in doing so I am referring only to people of African or part-African ancestry. Ika Hügel-Marshall capitalizes “Schwarz” as well throughout her autobiography in order to highlight it as a political term.

In addition, I will use the term “white” for Germans who are not of “visible” bi-cultural descent and thus frequently regard themselves as the qualitative “norm.” Some readers might in fact be offended by being stigmatized as “white.” Hopefully, this will encourage them to re-think

their own use of terminology and help them in the process of empathizing with people of part-African ancestry. “Black” in contrast to “white” is capitalized since its use is more overtly political. Both designations are set in quotation marks to make readers aware of how ludicrous, politically charged and stigmatizing it can be to use skin color as a way of distinguishing people. I will occasionally use the terms “traditional” and “non-traditional” Germans as well. These terms, like “Black” and “white,” are meant to question any fixed definition of being “German.”

As mentioned before, the depiction of Afro-Germans in literature is a recent development. Up til now, not much fiction has been written that addresses issues such as double identity and racial discrimination toward Germans of part-African ancestry. Thus, before I discuss Hügel-Marshall’s and Demski’s literary works, I will point out a few general historical facts that provide a better understanding of Afro-Germans’ place in and contributions to German society. Knowledge of the history of Africans in Germany is in my opinion crucial for the individual development of critical consciousness within Germany.

Afro-Germans are a rather small group within Germany whose historical origins date back to before the Middle Ages. To understand present-day stereotypes and prejudices towards Afro-Germans, we have to look closely at German history, especially colonial history, which undoubtedly solidified German racism toward people whose skin is of a darker hue. According to Opitz, it is not possible to determine when Africans first came to Germany. Paintings displaying Africans have been found which date back to the twelfth century (Rassismus, Sexismus 17). Since these portraits do not overly emphasize stereotypical features, researchers assume, as Kron points out, that racism based on skin color was not widely prevalent in those times:

Rassismusforscher wie Poliakov gehen davon aus, daß Vorurteile gegen andere zu dieser Zeit noch nicht mit Hautfarbe verbunden waren. Die nicht-stereotype Abbildung des Äthiopiens und der Mohrin Katharina sprechen dafür. . . . Es scheinen hier nicht in erster Linie die anthropologischen Merkmale zu interessieren, sondern Dürer zeichnete eine ‘Mohrin’ mit individuellen Zügen, in Beseeltheit und Würde. (21-22)

Additionally, according to Kron, the portrait of African people as servants does not occur prior to slave trade in the fifteenth century. Thus she concludes that, according to art and literature,

Africans participated in the European society and culture of the Middle Ages (as well as the Renaissance) as both sovereigns and servants.

Another example of a popular African in Europe is St. Maurice, the knight of the holy lance. According to James E. Brunson and Runoko Rashidi, “The Black St. Maurice is regarded as the greatest patron saint of the Holy Roman Empire” (61). In the tenth century, Otto I chose St. Maurice as the patron of the archbishopric of Magdeburg, Germany. By 1000 C. E. he was so popular that he was only rivaled by St. Georg and St. Michael. In Halle a monastery was founded and dedicated to St. Maurice in 1184 and an Africoid statue of St. Maurice was placed in the cathedral of Magdeburg in 1240. J.A. Rogers confirms the Africoid features of the statue: “Monuments to Negroes may also be seen in parts of Germany. The great Catholic Saint of Germany, St. Mauritius, or Maurice (from Moor) is depicted as a coal black Negro of purest type. He is shown with the German eagle on his head . . . and has a massive statue to him in the Magdeburg Cathedral” (Sex & Race 178). Rogers additionally mentions other portraits and statues in Cobourg, Munich and Berlin. In the fifteenth century a castle was named after St. Maurice--the Moritzburg--and according to Brunson and Rashidi, “The cult of St. Maurice reached its most lavish heights under Cardinal Albert of Brandenburg (1490-1545), who established a pilgrimage at Halle in honor of the Black saint. Between 1523 and 1540, people from throughout the empire journeyed to Halle to worship the relics of St. Maurice” (65). Especially in Eastern Germany the veneration of St. Maurice is still practiced today and nearly three hundred images of St. Maurice have been catalogued in Germany. This worship of a “Black” saint is especially important if compared with the way many Christians perceive dark-complexioned people as discussed in the following chapters.

Additionally, trade and import connections with Africa were popular until the nineteenth century, indicating that the African economy must have been highly developed in order to make trade possible at all. All of these examples taken together show that the stereotype of savage and underdeveloped Africans has to be revoked. Probably this negative image was constructed in the nineteenth century, when Germany as well as other European countries established colonies in Africa. The German Empire colonized Togo, Cameroon, German East Africa (present-day Tanzania), and German Southwest Africa (present-day Namibia). But before the first Europeans

ever came to Africa, there existed highly developed political, social, economic, and cultural forms of government. Especially women were highly esteemed in many African societies, which cannot really be said of medieval European societies.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Victorian virtues increasingly determined the image of the “perfect” woman in Europe and the United States. In describing women’s situation in the United States, Paula Giddings writes, “Now a woman had to be true to the cult’s cardinal tenets of domesticity, submissiveness, piety, and purity in order to be good enough for society’s inner circles. Failing to adhere to any of these tenets--which the overwhelming number of Black women could hardly live up to--made one less than a moral, ‘true’ woman” (47). While Giddings refers primarily to African-American women, the situation of African women in German colonies did not differ greatly. Value perceptions in African cultures were of course different from German value perceptions. As soon as the colonists arrived in their new territories, they imposed their moral values and beauty standards upon Africans and in doing so denigrated the African value system rather than appreciating the differences.

According to Opitz, the first larger numbers of Africans who came to Germany were from its colonies (Rassismus, Sexismus 29). Thus, the presence of Africans in Germany increased in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. However, the number still must have been comparatively small, because when “Black” soldiers fighting in the French, Belgian, and British armies entered Germany as part of the occupation forces during World War I, African soldiers who “invaded” Germany were considered a visible symbol of German defeat. Germany could not use soldiers from their African colonies because Britain blocked the sea passage. This enhanced the negative feelings toward them as Opitz explains: “Deutschland hatte im Krieg mehr notgedrungen als freiwillig, auf den Einsatz von Schwarzen verzichtet, da England den Seeweg blockiert hatte. Von daher fiel es den Deutschen leicht, den Einsatz von Schwarzen als ‘Akt der Unmenschlichkeit und Gefahr für das deutsche Volk’ anzuprangern” (Rassismus, Sexismus 45)

After a short period a small number of Afro-German children were born in occupied zones: “Nach dem ersten Weltkrieg wurden etwa 800 Kinder farbiger französischer Soldaten geboren” (Opitz, Afro-Deutsche nach 1945 85). These children were not discussed publicly for a long time, partly “weil ihre Zahl verschwindend gering war, zum andern, weil sich die Aussagen

der Mütter nur schwer mit dem Bild vom ‘schwarzen Vergewaltiger’ in Einklang bringen ließen” (Opitz, Rassismus, Sexismus 50-51). If they were noticed at all their “inferiority” was unquestioned since they did not belong to one so-called “race” or the other:

Daß Rassentheorien ausschließlich im kontinentalen Europa entwickelt und verbreitet wurden, macht deutlich, daß ‘Rasse’ ein sozialer Sichtvermerk ist, der wenig mit biologischer Andersartigkeit zu tun hat. Wo immer in der Folge von ‘Rassen’ die Rede sein wird, ist ‘Rasse’ als Beziehungsbegriff verstanden, der aus Abgrenzungen zwischen Eigengruppe und Fremdgruppe besteht, wobei die zugeschriebenen Merkmale wie Hautfarbe, Verhalten, Religion etc. als ‘Rassenmerkmale’ interpretiert werden. (Opitz, Rassismus, Sexismus 24)

To “solve” this Afro-German “problem” there were several practices ranging from deportation of interracial children to forced sterilization. Indeed, evidence exists that up to 1937, 400 forced sterilizations of Afro-Germans were conducted, for which there was never a legal foundation (Opitz, Rassismus, Sexismus 58).

After World War II, according to Opitz, only a few of the 800 Afro-Germans born of French soldiers were still in Germany (Afro-Deutsche nach 1945 85). They were not recognized as politically or racially persecuted and thus did not receive any compensation. In the 1950's, according to social-study surveys, children with mixed origins were regarded as biologically disadvantaged: “Während sich einige Untersuchungen . . . bemühten , die sozialen und psychischen Umstände in Betracht zu ziehen, die die Einstellungen zu den Kindern und damit ihr Fremd- und Selbstbild bestimmten, sahen andere bereits in der tatsächlichen oder vermeintlichen Andersartigkeit der Kinder eine ‘naturhafte Benachteiligung’” (Opitz, Afro-Deutsche nach 1945 86). Because of their darker complexion, Afro-Germans were regarded as a problematic group. Thus, the focus was on the problems of the group itself instead of on the majority population’s lack of tolerance. Additionally, most Afro-German children grew up in dysfunctional families with financial difficulties, which imposed additional social pressures. These so-called occupation babies, like the protagonists in Eva Demski’s Afra: Roman in fünf Bildern and Ika Hügel-Marshall’s Daheim unterwegs: Ein deutsche Leben, mainly grew up without any contact to other Afro-Germans. This is no real surprise, in view of the relatively small number of Africans, Afro-

Americans, and Afro-Germans living in Germany today. As I mentioned earlier, this number totals 100,000, and the number of Afro-Germans in particular is estimated to be approximately 33,000 (Opitz, Rassismus hier und heute 127). With Germany's population at almost 83 million, the number of Afro-Germans is indeed extremely small. And since they are scattered all over Germany, it is difficult for them to develop a group identity. The formation of a positive self-image is rendered even more difficult because of the information Afro-Germans get concerning their African origins. In children's literature as well as school books, African language, religion and art in comparison to German culture is--if mentioned at all--classified as inferior:

Schwarzen Kindern, die in Deutschland aufwachsen, wird durch solche Darstellungen ein positiver Zugang zu ihrer afrikanischen Herkunft erschwert. Ihnen werden subtile Gefühle von Unterlegenheit und Minderwertigkeit vermittelt, die sich hinderlich auf die Entwicklung eines positiven Selbstbildes auswirken können besonders, wenn sie nicht genügend von anderer Seite korrigiert werden. (Opitz, Rassismus hier und heute 132)

In 1989, the prospect of a new unified Germany posed another threat for non-traditional Germans and marginalized them even more as outsiders. Goertz explains that, "This new German solidarity creates a zone of inclusion and exclusion" (68) and May Ayim adds,

Ebenso wie andere Schwarze Deutsche und ImmigrantInnen wußte ich, daß selbst ein deutscher Paß keine Einladungskarte zu den Ost-West-Feierlichkeiten darstellte. Wir spürten, daß mit der bevorstehenden innerdeutschen Vereinigung eine zunehmende Abgrenzung nach außen einhergehen würde--ein Außen, das uns einschließen würde. Unsere Beteiligung am Fest war nicht gefragt. (208)

In fact, German unification in 1990 again aggravated the situation for Afro-Germans. Especially in the following years there was a growing number of racially motivated attacks against dark-complexioned people. Crawley points out: "In spite of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissipation of the initial euphoria experienced by many in the reunification of East and West, a German national cultural identity that is anchored in a racialized sense of a white self is still largely intact" (82). "The inability to imagine or to accept the existence of a black German" Crawley continues, "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” (84).

Having described the historical and current living situations of Afro-Germans generally, I now turn to the specific circumstances surrounding the lives of Afra, Nivea and Ika, the main characters in Demski’s novel and Hügel-Marshall’s autobiography. In the first main section of Chapter One, I will discuss Afra’s experiences as an Afro-German citizen in Southern Germany. In the second main section, Afra’s daughter Nivea will be presented. Even though Nivea has a “white” father and shares her complexion with her father, she is very aware of her part-African ancestry. Nivea’s story tells how a second generation Afro-German deals with the issue of double identity and discusses which role the bi-ethnic heritage plays in her life. Chapter Two focuses on the trials and tribulations of Ika Hügel-Marshall’s life and how they influenced her development of a healthy self-concept. Both chapters will be subdivided into the five different stages that help create critical consciousness (see pages 3-4). I will analyze the experiences of the characters according to these stages as they relate to their lives. As the comparison in Chapter Three will illustrate, Ika is, among the three protagonists, the one who is most successful in developing a critical consciousness. This does not, however, render the other two women’s experiences less valid. On the contrary, Nivea’s and especially Afra’s development make sensitive readers realize that a change in German society toward a development of critical consciousness is both desirable and inevitable.

Chapter One

The Depiction of Afra and Nivea in Eva Demski's Afra: Roman in fünf Bildern

Eva Demski, born in Regensburg in 1944, published her novel Afra: Roman in fünf Bildern in 1992. The book, which is nearly 500 pages long, is divided into five sections--or "Bilder"--as the title indicates. These sections are told by an independent narrator and cover specific time periods in Afra's and Nivea's lives. The first, titled "Der grüne Vorhang," talks about Afra's birth and life in her little Bavarian village until elementary school. Afra is the child of a "white" Bavarian mother, Theres, and an African-American soldier who returned to the United States before he even knew that Theres was pregnant. "Schule der Frauen" spans Afra's first school years until her mother decides to bring the thirteen-year-old girl into the city where life is supposedly easier. Division Three, "Da gehts hinaus," starts with Theres returning to the village, leaving her thirteen-year-old daughter Afra alone in the big city. It tells about Afra's "new" life in the city, her work and theater experiences and ends about six years later when Afra becomes pregnant. The fourth division "Salto Mortale," presents Nivea, her childhood and her relation to her mother. Nivea's voice is already heard in the first three sections, relayed in brief paragraphs, inserted in the narrative. They are very short and always present Nivea questioning somebody of Afra's past. The last division "Übern Atlantik" narrates Nivea's flight to New York. During this flight, Nivea reflects upon her whole life and finally comes to terms with herself the minute the plane lands in New York City. This is also the end of the novel. Thus, the author leaves open questions concerning Nivea's further development.

Very little secondary literature exists on Afra: Roman in fünf Bildern. In fact, the only article I could uncover is Leslie Adelson's "Now You See It, Now You Don't: Afro-German Particulars and the Making of a Nation in Eva Demski's *Afra: Roman in fünf Bildern*." In addition to the views expressed by Adelson in this article, my analysis also incorporates relevant issues of multiculturalism and racism as discussed in various articles by Opitz, Crawley, Pimienta-Bey, and Schultz as well as in J. A. Rogers' Nature Knows No Color-Line.

The dust jacket of Demski's novel promises the readers a panorama of German reality from the end of the forties to the present. According to Adelson, "This historical overview

juxtaposes and blends a national history with a particular one: the story of Afra, the only so-called *Mischlingskind* (mixed race child) in a tiny village in a Bavarian locale (*Gäu*). Both histories are filtered through a textual economy of black-and-white symbolism, at the generative center of which stands this lonely protagonist” (217). As the title of Adelson’s article reveals, she analyzes primarily the functions of visibility and invisibility in the novel and “in a larger socio-semiotic context in which certain problems are foregrounded while others are backgrounded¹” (218). However, Adelson suggests that Afra might represent “a collective minority of ‘mixed children’ in postwar Germany without having Afro-Germans in mind” (219). She even points out that Afra’s “Blackness” might be reduced to a “metaphoric function”: “The allegedly particular life of a single ‘black’ girl is appropriated for a national symbolic, the purpose of which is to render ‘visible’ the repression of the Nazi past in particular” (219). Even though I agree with Adelson’s comments concerning the need for further examination of the Afro-German culture in literary texts, I do not think that Demski uses Afra mainly as a metaphor to refer to the “‘blackened’ national history” (Adelson 226). Instead, I think that Eva Demski encourages the development of critical consciousness in her depiction of Afra and Nivea. To examine this development, I will adhere to the different stages as discussed in the Introduction.

In response to the question that readers might have concerning whether or not Demski’s characters portray “sociological reality,” I have consulted Amie Thomasson’s views on “artifactual theory.” To discuss this, it is useful to remind ourselves of what a novel is. According to the Dictionary of Literary Terms: “The novel is a narrative that does not limit itself to historical facts but creates fictional personalities dwelling in an imaginary world” (Barnet 60). Yet, since the author usually has specific intentions when creating a character, one can ask oneself how close to reality the lives of the fictional characters are. Thomasson points out that according to artifactual theory “fictional characters are a particular kind of cultural artifact. Like other cultural objects, fictional characters depend on human intentionality for their existence” (14). Thus, I assume that Eva Demski created her characters with the intention to reflect the “real” life of Afro-Germans or at least how she imagined their life to be. Especially since most of

¹For more detailed information see Adelson.

her characters' experiences are similar to Ika Hügel-Marshall's, I think that the readers should regard Afra and Nivea not merely as fictional objects but as characters who were consciously invented to portray social experiences in the world. In Thomasson's view, "fictional characters are not to be considered theoretic entities or mere objects of reference any more than tables and chairs, committee meetings, and works of art are. Instead they are a certain type of object referred to, and indeed not a peculiar type of object but a type of object relevantly similar to stories, governments, and other everyday objects" (21). Artifactual theory focuses on the intentionality of the author's creations, which justifies their relevance. Thus, I will discuss Afra and Nivea under the aspect of being "messengers" relevant for the Afro-German development of critical consciousness.

1.1. Afra

1.1.1. Stereotypes/animosities

Eva Demski bluntly exposes prevailing stereotypes in order to make her readers see how difficult it is for a member of a minority to grow up in a society that is indifferent or hostile to those who do not share the physical traits of the majority. Looking different is often associated with inferiority. People such as Theres, Afra's mother, are stigmatized for having had a sexual relationship with Africans or people of part-African ancestry. The narrator summarizes the townspeople's views: "Über nichts anderes als über der Theres ihr Schwarzes redeten sie, das Negerl, das angebrannte Semmerl. Eine solche Sau war sie, die Theres, das habe man nicht gewußt" (53). One reason both the female and male inhabitants of this village insult Afra's mother might be envy because they were rejected, either by her or by Afra's father: "Jeder konnte sehen, daß es keiner von ihnen war, den die Theres an sich gelassen hatte. Die Frauen waren neidisch. Die meisten hätten sich nicht lang bitten lassen von so einem" (47). "White" women often perpetuate the insult toward other "white" women who had sex with "Black" men. Thus, they hide their envy by stigmatizing those women with negative characteristics.

They do not only devalue the personality of the mother because she had a sexual relationship with a "Black" man, they also deny the child a "normal" life by imprinting negative characteristics upon her just because she has a darker complexion than the rest. Her darker skin

color makes people refer to the child as “des Teufels Tochter” (Demski 43). They associate the differentness with the devil and thus create a new scapegoat concerning all their fears and problems, including the large number of girls born after World War II: “Vielleicht war das Schwarze schuld an den vielen Mädchen, vom Teufel war es gemacht” (Demski 27). Because of her dark complexion, Afra is not considered to be God’s child, but is regarded instead as a creature of the devil: “Schwarze kamen in der gottgewollten Ordnung des Gruppenbildes nicht vor” (Demski 152). Associating Afra or African descent in general with the devil is an act of religious hypocrisy. Because of the color of her skin, Afra is regarded not only as the devil, but as more animal than human. The people in her village are particularly upset by the fact that she is baptized as a Christian: “Eine Schande, daß es [das Kind Afra] getauft sei und damit ein Christenmensch, eigentlich sei es ja ein Viech” (53). Afra herself is influenced very much by this talk and becomes very insecure. She starts doubting her own existence as a human being: “Afra spürte das, wie das Wetter, wie den Winter, der ihre letzte Zuflucht war vor dem furchtbaren Tag [Kommunion], an dem die Jungfrau Maria entscheiden würde, ob sie ein Gotteskind oder Viech sei” (121). Afra is afraid of the day of her first holy communion because she fears she will be judged by her outward appearance. She is too young to realize the hypocrisy of the so-called Christians around her and is simply afraid of being treated as an outsider once again. Also, she is afraid of Mary’s judgement since the townspeople have led her to believe that Mary will reject her. While Afra is too young to recognize the hypocrisy, the reader cannot help but notice it, and cannot help but ask, should true believers in God or the Creator not acknowledge and appreciate the variety of human beings since we are all of equal value in God’s eyes? How can people call themselves Christian, if they proclaim a hatred towards other human beings in the name of God? For this is precisely what happens: “Die anderen Mädchen, deren Zulassung in den Christenstand hauptsächlich durch Haß auf das Schwarze vorbereitet werden sollte, scherten sich nicht mehr darum” (149-50).

Christianity’s tenet that everyone is equal in the eyes of God is supported not only by other religious philosophies, but by science. As Rogers points out, there are no different “races” but only *one* human race: “Whatever be the point of view regarding which came first, black or white, both religion and science agree on a common human origin, which origin anatomy and X-

Ray confirm. The points of unlikeness between so-called races are as nothing compared with those in which they are alike” (Nature 2). Nobody is superior or inferior to anybody else based on complexion, different cultures, values or beliefs. Shouldn’t Christians not only *talk* about love but *show* love, accept diversity and try to learn from it instead of devaluing it because it is unfamiliar? Of course, everybody still has the right to express his/her own opinion but should we not be open to other ways of perception and to re-thinking and re-evaluating our own views?

Afra receives her holy communion regardless of the concerns of the Christian community and thus starts to feel accepted by God. She is grateful for the sense of protection this brings to her life:

Sie wagte es jetzt ganz dreist um alles und jedes zu beten,
Vatersohnundheiligergeist, die offenbar lang nicht gewußt hatten, ob sie sie haben
wollten, waren ihr am Weißen Sonntag in Gestalt eines runden Plätzchens zuteil
geworden und hatten damit ihr Einverständnis erklärt, sich um das Kind Afra zu
kümmern. Afra . . . war erleichtert, einen Schutzzaun aus geflüsterten kleinen
Gebeten um sich aufrichten zu können. Solange sie das tat, konnte ihr nichts
geschehen. (155)

She finds solace within Christianity even though the rest of the Christian community still does not perceive her as a member.

Besides religious hypocrisy, Afra has to cope with stereotypes such as “Black” people stink, they are like apes and should go back into the jungle, and they convey an explicit sexuality. The latter is reinforced by Afra’s employer Maja Weishäupel: “[A]ber daß solche wie Afra einen besonders heftigen Trieb hatten und auch fähig sein sollten, einen solchen in fast erloschenen Männern anzufachen, von denen, die normal im Saft standen gar nicht zu reden--das wußte jeder” (217). This causes one to wonder why a large number of “white” men, as Maja explains, are inclined to see Afro-German women only as sexual objects. Was this stereotype of Afro-German women’s extraordinary sexual appetite not invented to blame dark-complexioned people for “white” people’s sexual attraction to them? Does it have to be a sex drive triggered by African or part-African people? Why do myths exist about extraordinarily large genitals, as expressed in the following comment: “So redeten die Männer von den Eselsgemächten, die sie

bei den Nordafrikanern gesehen haben wollen” (Demski 47)? Is this not another means of covering up the envy they feel when “white” people are more attracted to “Black” men and women than they are toward people of their own ethnicity?

Afra is confronted with those stereotypical points of view so often that she starts to believe in some of them: “Und genau wie die Urgroßmutter wird sie das Kind [Nivea] beriechen, aber nicht, weil sie wie die Alte keine anderen Sinne mehr hat, sondern weil sie vor dem Wort: du stinkst, Schwarze, Angst hat. Du stinkst, Mohrenkopf, Lehmbatzen. Du stinkst Brikett” (20). She is afraid of the accusations and wants to make sure they cannot be applied to her daughter, whom she wants to protect from the racism she had and still has to cope with.

Even Afra’s teacher propagates wrong hostile “truths” not only about part-Africans but about people with bi-ethnic origins in general: “Und Wolinski hielt eine Stunde, in der er mit schwerer Zunge alle möglichen Mischabscheulichkeiten aufzählte, sämtlich von einem klugen Schicksal zu Unfruchtbarkeit und frühem Tod verdammt” (108). This passage by Afra’s teacher calls to mind frequently used terms about Afro-Germans such as “Mischling” or “Mulatte.” According to Opitz, the term “Mulatte” derives from the Portugese “mulato” and in general has never been a value-neutral term: “Hinter dem zunächst neutral erscheinenden Wort ‘Mulatte’ aus dem portugiesischen ‘mulato’, das bereits 1604 in den deutschen Sprachgebrauch aufgenommen wurde, verbirgt sich die Vorstellung, ‘daß sich der Schwarze zum Weißen verhält, wie Esel zum Pferd, und daß sie zusammen einen Hybriden hervorbringen, der unfruchtbar ist’” (Afro-Deutsche nach 1945 101). The climax of these propaganda-like discriminations is expressed by the former mayor of Afra’s village when he sarcastically asks the midwife of the village about Afra’s welfare in the hostile environment of this community: “Was macht eigentlich unser Mohrenkind? Lebt es noch oder haben Sie es endlich aus dem gesunden Volkskörper ausgemerzt?” (148). His question shows that he grasps the prevailing hypocrisy among the villager’s sanctimonious population.

Afra is incessantly considered an outsider: “Wir sind hier nicht im Busch, hatte ein Beamter des Finanzamtes zu Afra gesagt. Vielleicht begreifen grad Sie das nicht junge Frau, aber hier haben die Dinge eine Ordnung” (344). Her darker complexion indeed attracts reactions like this one by a civil servant who is supposed to be educated and know better. But this is just

another example of racism within the larger society. Most people do not regard Afra as a German or Afro-German woman because they cannot open their minds enough to appreciate diversity: “Ein Taxi hat zwar angehalten, aber der Fahrer hat mich angeschaut und gesagt, ich fahr keine Amiweiber, schon gar nicht bei der Nacht” (364). Dark complexion for the taxi driver calls to mind either Africa or the United States. Thus Afra’s experience corresponds to that of many real (i.e., non-fictional) dark-skinned Germans. Crawley writes: “The existence of Germans of color is so deeply denied that people of color are automatically labeled ‘foreign’ by most white Germans” (76). Obviously this cab driver also considers “Black” people dangerous since he does not only refuse to give Afra a ride because of her skin color but also because it is dark and he apparently assumes her supposedly criminal nature is more likely to reveal itself at night.

The people in her rural community are afraid of Afra’s color as well: “Jetzt hatten sie einen neuen Namen, eine neue Angst: das Schwarze. Alles Schwarze. Es war nicht das Fremde, wovor sie sich fürchteten, denn Fremde hatten sie nie bedroht und schon hundert Jahre früher einen Bogen ums Gäu gemacht. Es war nicht das Fremde. Es war die andere Farbe” (49). Concerning fear of the “other color,” José V. Pimienta-Bey offers the following hypothesis: “Perhaps, to the average European mind, the “blackest” Africans represented pale-skinned Europe’s genetic inversion and nemesis. Consequently, such Blacks had to be systematically suppressed or annihilated” (192). Adelson provides us with another reason for this fear: “The visibly ‘black’ becomes all the more threatening because it is no longer foreign but domestic” (226). Additionally, Afra’s presence is a permanent reminder to the people in this little Bavarian village of Germany’s defeat in World War II: “The birth of Afra who ‘remained of questionable color,’ signifies something more than simply the loss of the war: an irrevocable invasion by foreign powers” (Adelson 218). Afra’s midwife Aurelia realized this fact immediately and already predicted Afra’s rejection shortly after her birth: “Sie [hatte] gerade einen Beweis dafür ans Tageslicht gezogen . . . daß man mit der Anwesenheit des Amerikanischen noch länger würde rechnen müssen. Nicht spurlos waren sie damals gegangen. Die eben glücklich beendete Geburt machte das Gäu sichtbar amerikanisch. Das würde niemanden freuen” (13). Afra’s skin color not only reminds the villagers of the defeat but intensifies their feeling of humiliation. Since “Black” people were regarded as inferior and uncivilized, many Germans were especially

ashamed that they had been occupied by soldiers of a “menial” race and origin. This view is confirmed by Opitz:

Im Bewußtsein der Kolonialrevanchisten blieben die Schwarzen die Untermenschen, die es zu zivilisieren und zu disziplinieren galt. Es ist daher nicht weiter verwunderlich, daß der Einmarsch schwarzer Soldaten von weiten Kreisen der deutschen Bevölkerung als besondere Demütigung empfunden wurde. Menschen ‘niederer Rasse’ und ‘niederer Herkunft’ erhielten das Recht als Besatzer aufzutreten. (Rassismus, Sexismus 47)

All these stereotypes and prejudices have a negative effect on young children. They start hating themselves because of their color and thus develop a negative self-concept. Afra’s own mother even contributes to all these negative connotations about Afra’s skin color by trying to bleach it: “Theres gab es wieder auf, die schöne Haut ihrer Tochter mit Wurzelbürsten und Essig zu malträtieren. Statt dessen mußte Afra jahrelang einen Löffel Essig auf nüchternen Magen nehmen. Essig macht weiß, sagte die Theres” (109). Thus, right from the beginning Afra perceives her skin color as something dirty and ugly. Her self-worth has no chance to develop because everybody refers to her as ugly. Her color is not only referred to as “bedenklich” (7), “merkwürdig” (9), and “andersfarbig” (18) but as “falschfarbig” (20, 151) and “unauslöschlich” (45). The feeling that “black is ugly” remains with her throughout her life. Dagmar Schultz maintains that self-denial on the part of some non-“white” women is strong because of the power of “white” women to set beauty standards:

Weißer Frauen verfügen über *Definitionsmacht*--immer wieder sehen sich Schwarze Frauen damit konfrontiert, von weißen Frauen als exotisch, schön oder häßlich, schwarz und nicht deutsch oder deutsch, weil nicht dunkel genug usw., definiert zu werden. Schwarz überhaupt als etwas Positives oder Negatives anzusehen ist eine Folge übernommener rassistischer Denkweisen. (Kein Ort 171)

Afra tries to change her complexion with bleach products in order to become more like the beauty standard that is set by society: “Red nicht, hatte Afra zu ihrer Tochter gesagt, vielleicht wärst du nicht so weiß geworden, wenn ich mich nicht geplatzt hätte, jedenfalls bis zu BLACK IS

BEAUTIFUL, danach war's mir egal. Aber nicht lang" (389). For a short time Afra's looks were embraced by society, when Afro-looks were popular and the "Black Is Beautiful"-slogan conquered the world. However, it dominated Germany only for a short time and after that everything turned back to "normal" again and Afra's skin color was not "in" anymore.

1.1.2. Childhood influences

Afra, as a child, is completely innocent, she has no concept of skin color: "Ich hab damals nicht gewußt, daß ich schwarz bin. . . . Das war eigentlich die beste Zeit" (74). However, everything changed as soon as her mother introduced her to the public, thereby destroying her childhood innocence: "Im Frühjahr fünfzig begann die Theres, ihre Tochter offen im Dorf zu zeigen und beendete damit deren Kindheit. Erst die Blicke der anderen Gäubewohner machten das Kind schwarz" (Demski 77). According to Marguerite Wright, preschoolers are unaware of racial preconceptions and it takes a great deal to change their natural inclination. But she warns as well that if they are confronted with racist issues too early it might change their lives forever: "Since earliest learning is hardest to change, the racist talk they hear and the bigoted behavior they observe become entrenched and more difficult to unlearn when they are older" (35). Afra internalized the negative racist attitudes towards herself at a very early age and learned that to hide herself from prejudices, humiliations and degradations she must become invisible: "Afra hatte früh gelernt sich möglichst unsichtbar zu machen und trotzdem die Arbeit, die man ihr übertrug, zu tun" (108). The "im Unsichtbarwerden geübte Kind Afra" (121) initially manages to seek refuge in one of her many secret hideaways. As a child she is so good at making herself invisible that even her own mother gets used to it: "Sie war an die Unsichtbarkeit ihrer Tochter gewöhnt und dachte nur selten über sie nach" (171). Yet one can question whether this chosen invisibility really is of advantage to the poor child:

Afra hatte Glück. Sie wurde nicht mit Schlägen und Tritten aus ihrer Kindheit getrieben, sondern mit Blicken. Wenn ihr die Blicke zuviel wurden, ging sie weg. Ihre Rettung waren die tausend Schlupfwinkel und Fluchtorte, die Ställe und Wiesen, wo man den Feind schon von weitem kommen sah und sich verstecken konnte. Der Staubgeruch, malzig und kratzend in den Kornmandeln, den hohen

Hütten aus Garben, die nach der Ernte auf den Feldern standen wie verwaiste Dörfer und in denen ein Kind so allein sein konnte wie in einem Sarg. (78)

Afra's flight from the hostile looks of the community is referred to as a "Rettung." But is she really saved? Is it not a way to flee from confrontations one cannot cope with? Initially, hiding might be helpful because one is protected from hostility, but in the long run it does not solve any problems and one becomes closed up in one's own little hidden world. Loneliness is going to spread, a loneliness that for a child is comparable to being disconnected from the rest of the world, as if one were in a coffin. Thus, Afra's "Glück" and "Rettung" are at the same time her "Sarg."

Afra's way to survive in a hostile society is to become tough. Since she cannot trust anybody, she is very lonely. And she does not know any other Afro-Germans or other dark-skinned people. Thus, one day when she wins a black doll at a gypsy's wagon--"ein lakritzschwarzes Stoffpüppchen mit Augen aus grünen Glaskugeln und einem Bastrock um die Mitte" (90)--she starts to identify herself--to share her "Black" identity--with it. This doll not only has Afra's skin color which she despises so much but embodies as well the stereotype of dark-skinned people as savages wearing nothing but a bast skirt. The other children are amused about Afra's prize because they feel that the doll is like her: "Afra, Afrika! sangen die Kinder, Nußkohle, Brikett! Der Brikett hat ein Kind! Afra packte ihr schwarzes Stoffkind, das mit den dünnen Beinen schlenkerte und bestimmt fror. Das mußte sie jetzt liebhaben. . . . Afra, Afrika! klangen die messerscharfen Stimmchen von weitem doch sie hörte nichts mehr" (90). The children do not only marginalize her by using curse words that stigmatize her dark skin color and refer back to her African ancestry, but hurt her as well by implying that this stereotypical toy is the only thing she could ever be close to in life. Indeed, perhaps because others imply that she should share her identity with "something" instead of someone, or perhaps because of her loneliness, Afra tries to bond with that doll, even though she despises it. While the other girls discover their bodies by comparing their own with their friends, Afra is isolated once again because there is nobody like her around:

Da war das Anderssein wieder. Die Mädchen waren kein Spiegelbild für Afra. Sie suchten Ähnlichkeiten, die Haare, die Füße. Sie verglichen einander unermüdlich,

aber mit Afra gab es nichts zu vergleichen. Brikett, Roßhaarige, nicht Schokolade, Brot oder Kakao. Keine süßen Wörter für Afra. Brikett, Verbrannte. Zu lange gebacken, das war noch das freundlichste. (102)

Thus, she examines the doll for commonalities, and sadly, discovers some even where there are none:

Afra saß nach der Schule manchmal da und zog die schwarze Stoffpuppe immer wieder anders an. Dann versuchte sie, sich mit der ihrer Puppe so zu vergleichen, wie es die anderen kleinen Mädchen untereinander taten, schau, ich hab größere Füße und dickere Finger--schau, ich bin wie du, flüsterte Afra, aber die Puppe hatte keine Füße und Hände, sondern nur Stoffwülste, die schlapp vom Körper baumelten. (103)

By doing so, she accepts a mutilated image of herself in order to escape her isolation and to find somebody who is like her. However, in this case that somebody is a lifeless toy that bears almost no resemblance to her at all.

Afra is perpetually confronted with the juxtaposition between visibility and invisibility. Even though she prefers invisibility, society, especially after she has grown up, usually does not give her a chance to dive into the masses unnoticed: “[D]ie ganze Straße hatte ein Auge auf die Halbschwarze, die nicht, wie andere Leute, in einer Menge zu verschwinden vermochte wie ein Tropfen Wasser in einer Pfütze” (216). Her diversity--mainly manifested by her darker complexion--makes her prone to hostilities: “Der Winter machte die arme Afra vollkommen sichtbar: Wie eine dunkle Maus auf dem Schnee fühlte sie sich dem Schrecken ausgesetzt, irgendwer würde sie erwischen, es gab kein Entrinnen” (124). She feels trapped by her permanent visibility: “Das war Afras großer und hilflos ertragener Kummer: Nicht die schwere Arbeit, die ihr nicht schwer erschien, nicht die furchtbaren Gerüche und Geräusche des Krankenhauses oder die Duarmeskindgesänge der Nonnen, sondern die dauernde Sichtbarkeit. Sie konnte sich nicht verstecken” (216-17). This helplessness influences her ability to communicate with the “outside world”: “Afra, die immer noch Mühe hatte mit jemandem zu sprechen, weil sie spürte, daß man bei ihr über dem Anschauen das Zuhören zu vergessen pflegte, fragte die stupsnasige der Marien um Rat” (161).

On the other hand, when she wants to be visible and approached by others, she very often is ignored by an imposed invisibility: “Die Brünnerin hat gesagt, wenn ich nicht die falsche Farb hätt, wär ich die beste aus dem Jahrgang” (159). Her educational achievements are denied because acknowledging them would require the villagers to reconstruct and re-evaluate their perceptions of people with darker complexion who they regard as illiterate or as “so was Afrikanisches, wo sie keine Bücher haben” and thus inferior (37).

Afra still manages to create a world in which she is allowed to be herself regardless of her outward appearance. She starts collecting things which appear worthless to other people:

Jetzt als ziemlich erwachsenes Mädchen, hat sie sich immer noch nicht daran gewöhnt, daß die Leute es fertigbrachten, schöne, farbige und glänzende Dinge wegzuworfen, nur weil sie irgendeinem öden Zweck nicht mehr dienten. . . . Ihr Zimmer war im Lauf der Jahre zu einer Höhle voller Dinge geworden, die ihrer ursprünglichen Aufgabe nicht mehr dienen konnten oder wollten, und die meisten von ihnen waren rosa. (212-13)

Afra needs to compensate for her loneliness by creating a dreamworld. She develops an obsession for everything that is pink. This obsession evolves when she is a little child. She sees a pink bear at a gypsy’s jack-pot booth and for the rest of her life that color captivates her: “Aber das wunderbarste war der Bär. Groß und rosa saß er ganz oben auf dem Regal des Glückshafens, würdig und fern. Der Hauptgewinn. Auch dieses Rosa hatte vorher nie jemand gesehen, ein gefährliches, gewalttätiges Rosa, das für Afra zur einzigen königlichen Farbe wurde” (86). This is a marvelous metaphor to describe Afra’s situation. Pink, which stands for the pink skin of “white” people, “der rosaweiße Geruch der Mutter” (228), implies dignity and power. However, it is far out of the child’s reach. And of course she is not going to get hold of that toy which embodies all she wishes for.

Afra is completely self-reliant. She has never found anybody she can rely on and thus distances herself from society and builds a wall around her emotional self. Her mother never really was of any help to the child but on the contrary discriminates against Afra by inflicting upon her the stereotypes she learned about “Black” people and by rejecting her child: “Mama, Mama! äffte die Theres nach und sagte zum Spaß: Schau dich doch an. I bin gar ned dei Mama!

Wie könnt ich deine Mama sein? Dich hat der Krampus auf dem Weg nach Afrika verlorn!” (125). Even though Theres is joking, the child is too young to understand this joke and once again is confronted with the fact that she does not belong to this German society because of the color of her skin. Afra again feels like an outsider, loved by nobody, not even her own mother. In fact, this joking somehow becomes a sad truth, because Theres starts to consider her daughter as an obstacle she wants to get rid of, “ohne dieses Kind würde sie einen finden, der sie heiratete” (206). Thus, she decides to apprentice her thirteen-year-old child to a hairdresser, Maja Weishäupel, who lives in Munich:

Ihre Tochter hatte die junge Theres angeboten wie einen jungen Hund, denn eine Niederlage konnte sie verkraften, aber nicht zwei, und wenn das Leben oder die Blödheit und Blindheit der Stadtmenschen sie schon dazu zwang, zurückzugehen in den Kuhdreck und unter die Gewalt ihres alten Vatterteufels, so wollte sie doch wenigstens ihre Tochter untergebracht oder besser, sich ihrer entledigt haben. (206)

After giving Afra to Maja Weishäupel, Theres, unburdened, returns to the village.

How should a young girl be able to cope with a hostile society when she does not even receive a loving home environment but is pushed away by the person she feels closest to, her mother? Afra does not know better than to blame the rejection on her complexion: “Daß ihre Mutter sie loswerden wollte, nahm sie ihr nicht übel. Daß ihre, Afras Schwärze, hier erst einmal wieder am Anfang stand, bis alle sich satt gesehen und heiser geredet hatten, wußte sie auch” (Demski 207). It is obvious that society not only discriminates against “Black” people but imposes restrictions upon their relatives which makes them sometimes react in ways that are hardly understandable.

This isolation is probably one of the main reasons why, when she becomes pregnant, she is horrified by the thought of her child being dark as well. Nivea’s father, the first man that Afra sleeps with, is extremely light-skinned: “Einen so weißen Menschen hatte sie noch nie gesehen. Eigentlich waren die weißen gar nicht weiß, das war ihr schon früher aufgefallen, wenn sie sich mit den anderen Mädchen im Dorf verglich: Die waren gelb oder rosa, rötlich, manche auch grau. Dieser aber war ganz weiß” (289). She is so obsessed by her wish to have a light-skinned child

that she even asks people who press their ear against her pregnant belly whether they could *hear* the skin color: “Glaubst du, . . . du kannst hören, was es für eine Farbe hat?-- Ich bitte dich, hatte die geantwortet, wen interessiert denn das?--Mich! sagte Afra. Es ist fast das einzige was mich interessiert. Und ich kann daran genauso wenig ändern wie an allem anderen” (300).

The complexion is basically the only thing that matters to Afra. She does not care whether her child is healthy or not. All she wants to know is that the baby is not “Black” like her, so that she can be reassured that the child will be spared all the reprisals she had to deal with because of her skin color. With this, Afra indicates that her ability to challenge racist perceptions of dark-skinned people is no greater than her ability to change her child’s complexion. During a pilgrimage to Augsburg, she prays intensely for a light-complexioned child: “Laß es weiß werden, sagte Afra leise und schnell, ich tu dir auch was zu Gefallen. Ich schick dir Blumen. Laß es weiß werden und mach, daß keiner von dem, du weißt schon was, merkt” (311). Here she refers to her father but she cannot use the term “father” since she has no relation at all established to him and blames him for her “Blackness.” According to Afra’s experiences one does not have a chance in German society if one does not look mainstream. By blaming her father for her skin color she once again overtly demonstrates her negative self-concept. All the stereotypes, curses, degradations, and humiliations are burned deep into her soul and she cannot accept herself the way she is. To make things worse, Afra’s mother cannot help her develop a positive self-image either because she shares the rest of the population’s prejudices:

Statt einer Begrüßung hatte Theres ihrer Tochter nicht zu fest auf den Bauch gehauen und gesagt: Jetzt hast du den Dreck im Schachterl! . . . Gespannt bin ich was dabei rauskommt.

Ein Kind wird es schon sein! hatte Afra zornig geantwortet. Oder was glaubst du?
Ein Aff vielleicht? (303)

This shows that Afra is aware of the prejudices other people hold against her, including her mother, who, even though she had a relationship with an African-American soldier, nevertheless cannot overcome prevailing social stereotypes.

Afra later on, when she is visited by her actress colleague Hasinko, even refuses to breast-feed her “white” skinned daughter out of fear that her milk will darken the child:

In einem winzigen Anfall von Hellsichtigkeit meinte der Arzt nachdenklich: Sie glaubt wahrscheinlich, ihre Milch macht es schwärzer.

Es soll nicht mehr von mir bekommen, als es unbedingt braucht, sagte Afra zur Hasinko, die sie besuchte. . . .

wenn du sie stillst gibt das auf der anderen Seite aber jede Menge Abwehrkräfte [sagte Hasinko].

Ich hab längst entschieden, sagte Afra, sie kriegt die allerbesten Sachen, aber nicht von mir. Und Abwehrkräfte kann ich ihr auf andere Art beibringen. (318)

Afra wants her baby girl to survive in the tough social environment and recognizes that the easiest way to survive is to be as light-complexioned as possible. Her prayers and pleadings come true and she bears a girl that is “weißer als weiß” (218). The phrase is used to emphasize the extremely light complexion of the child in contrast to the dark complexion of her mother, who appears even darker in the white dress she wears for Holy Communion: “Afra in all dem Weiß von schwärzester Schwärze” (149). Even the grandmother is surprised by the light complexion of Afra’s child: “[D]enn sie wird ihre Enkelin für eine Heilige halten, für eine große Künstlerin, weißer als weiß, ein erworbenes, durch die Dunkelheit gleichsam geläutertes Weiß. Weiß auf die Welt kommen kann jeder! wird sie sagen, aber wieder weiß werden aus dem Schwarzen heraus: Das muß erst einmal nachmachen” (218). Afra’s mother Theres considers her granddaughter a saint and believes that some kind of miracle happened to wipe out her “misstep.” She is very proud of her granddaughter’s “whiteness” which indicates that even though two generations have passed, the concept of color within certain parts of German society has not really changed.

As soon as Afra gives birth to a daughter, she regards the child as her possession. She does not want to give it to the midwife and vehemently points out that “Das Kind bleibt da. . . . Es fehlt ihm nichts, es bleibt da. Es gehört mir. Es ist kein Viech, was sie dir erst schenken und dann wieder wegnehmen, es ist ganz allein meins” (316). By raising her child, her perceptions of society and her concepts of how to survive in it become evident:

Du mußst korrekt sein, damit sie dich tun lassen, was du willst. Wenn sie dir auf die Schliche kommen, auf irgendeinen blöden kleinen Fehler, auf irgendeinen Menschen, der dir was gegeben hat, weil du ihm gefallen hast, wenn sie irgendwas

von dir wissen, gehörst du ihnen. Du mußt sie füttern, dann lassen sie dich vielleicht, aber auch nur vielleicht, in Ruhe. Es ist scheußlich, wenn du plötzlich merkst, daß dir nichts wirklich gehört, daß sie dir alles wegnehmen können, nicht nur Geld, auch Zeit, deine Freunde, Tage und Nächte. (345)

Afra was hurt so often that she constantly is on her guard in order to prevent being hurt further. She is too weak to resist the oppressive system and retreats from society instead of fighting it.

1.1.3. Shared Afro-German identity

Afra suffers from another problem that is common among Afro-Germans generally. Because there are few Afro-Germans living in Germany, she has no one to share her part-African identity with. To make things worse, she, like quite a few other Afro-Germans, does not even know who her father is or what he is like. Except for the color of her skin there is nothing that really connects her with him: "Ich bin schwarz, sagte sie, weil mir das einer vermacht hat. Ich weiß sonst nichts über ihn. Nur daß er schwarz war, weil man das bei mir sieht. Das hab ich geerbt. Das kann man nicht wegerziehen!" (301). Since Afra despises her complexion until the very end and makes her father responsible for it, she cannot develop a positive image, let alone a bond, to him: "Es hatte Afra nie gestört, daß sie nichts über ihren Vater wußte" (251). On the contrary, she is surrounded by so many negative stereotypes about "Black" people that she imagines her father in those stereotypical ways: "Sie dachte an ihren Vater, den sie sich abwechselnd als Häuptling oder als Sklaven vorstellte, und daß der, wo immer er lebte, vielleicht weder das eine noch das andere war, sondern so ein schreiender Künstler in Schwarz" (251). She cannot think of her father in a positive light because he represents everything that the dominant society considers inferior. Either he is a savage or a slave or, if he is an artist, he screams instead of sings. She cannot or does not want to identify with him or any other "Black" person.

Eva Demski never refers to the existence of an Afro-German community. Though the narrator mentions once that there are other "Black" children in Germany (151), she does not go into detail. Thus, it remains unclear whether Afra was ever approached by other Afro-Germans or whether she simply did not want to meet them. Whatever the case, she was not able to benefit from knowing a community of individuals who had experienced many of the same problems she

had and who could have helped her confront her pain and grow as a result of it.

1.1.4. Quest for self-determination

Afra never really manages to develop a strong personality. She has been hurt too much. She struggles to survive in a society that confronts her with a lot of prejudices and racism. At a certain point, Demski makes this same society suddenly realize Afra's pain. Yet, this society does not regard itself as responsible for all the hardships Afra had and still has to endure but chooses to find another scapegoat for it, Afra's family: "Als nach langen Zeiten der Verlorenheit plötzlich die Seele in ihrem Versteck entdeckt worden war und jeder voller Entzücken erkennen konnte, daß er an nichts und wieder nichts schuld sei, weil es für alles einen Grund, eine Wurzel in seiner Kindheit und deren Torturen gab, war Afra für eine kurze köstliche Zeit der Star aller Erforschungen" (108). When people find out that Afra, despite her complexion, is a human being after all, they choose to blame Afra's family for her development as an outsider. They need to calm their conscience by finding another scapegoat who is responsible for Afra's hardships. It does not seem to occur to members of this society that their stereotypes made the family develop the way it did. Afra is too young and Theres too ignorant to understand what is going on.

Once Afra grows up, she seems to understand what society is imposing onto her. Before Nivea was born, Afra was hired for a performance by a theater ensemble. The director had Afra play the main character in one of his productions without even asking her to audition. He used her dark complexion to provoke the audience's reactions. The play was a success. Critics write that "Der Darstellerin . . . sei . . . für das fremde, wilde Element zu danken" (287). They do not refer to her performance but only to her exotic appearance. After that, however, her "Blackness" was not "new" anymore and thus she was no longer an attraction: "Der neue Star . . . machte sich, wie Hasinko und die Paralisi meinten, unnötig wichtig, es reiche doch schon, daß ohne jede intellektuelle Leistung ihrerseits die Sache einigermaßen gut gegangen sei. Froh solle sie darüber sein, denn Bestand habe das keinen, und die Liebe zum Exotischen reiche nicht als künstlerisches Programm" (287).

Both Paralisi and Hasinko, two actresses Afra works with, prove to be right and after a while Afra starts to realize that people take advantage of her:

Das hab ich gern! sagte Afra wütend. Nur, weil ich mit meinem Leben nicht hausieren geh und ihr nichts wißt, bildet ihr euch ein, ihr könnt mir die Richtung sagen. Das ist aber vorbei. . . . Ich bin immer allein gewesen, aber jeder hat mich beobachtet und hat gemeint, er kann mich herumkommandieren. Das Theater: Glaub doch du nicht, daß ich mir einbilde, ich wär die Becker oder sonstwer. Oder eure Leuwerik. Romy bin ich auch nicht, und nicht Carmen Jones, sondern nur ich. Verstehst du: nur ich. (293-94)

She claims to be herself and not what society wants her to be. She recognizes that she was only of interest to people when they “needed” her for their own purposes.

With her theater experience, it seems as though she has finally seen through the friendly facade of her fellow citizens. She realizes that people always used her and they tolerated her as long as she was no “threat” to them. Yet as soon as she turned out to be more successful than the rest they “put her back into her place” by animosities and verbal assaults. Even though Afra recognizes what is going on and develops a strong sense of who she is, she still does not like her dark skin and thus is unable to address racist perceptions. However, she claims that from now on she will only do things her way.

Afra realizes that money is a very powerful means of keeping her pride and independence:

Ich versteh das mit dem Geld, sagte sie, es gibt dir eine Sicherheit, du weißt, warum die Leute so zu dir sind und nicht anders. Man kann alles regeln und muß sich nicht bedanken. Ich hab es satt, wenn ich merk, daß ich irgendwem leid tu, oder wenn jemand sich wichtig machen will und sich als was Besonderes vorkommt, so wie die Panischewska, bloß weil sie nett zu mir ist. Hab ich schon gegessen. Hab ich schon genug. Immer zeigen die Leut etwas Unehliches her, wenn sie mich sehen. (221-22)

Money provides security, the security of being self-reliant and not dependent on the good will of so-called friends. But this passage shows that despite the comfort money gives Afra, a huge insecurity remains which reveals itself in the suspiciousness Afra projects towards “die Leut.” Thus, although she claims to have the power of money, she is still too weak to deal with the

racism she is confronted with. Instead, she decides to escape into a dreamworld: “In ihren Träumen ist im Lauf der Jahre ein Eigentum entstanden, das ihr niemand mehr streitig machen kann. Die Wirklichkeit kann ihr gestohlen bleiben” (211). She creates a world for herself--a world in which she can live. She does not want to confront the pain of reality, because, according to her own opinion, there is no way to heal the pain: “Man kann sowieso nichts ändern. Wenn man lang genug wartet, ändert sich alles von allein” (269). Thus, she decides to remain passive and wait for a change for the better. Until the very end her ultimate dream is to be “white” because that is the key to happiness: “DU BIST JA SO BLASS hieß Afras Schlüssel zum Paradies. Du bist ja so blaß! sagte später eine noch schlanke aber schon mächtige Afra zu ihrer kleinen Tochter, als sei damit spät ein ersehntes Ziel erreicht” (464).

Though Afra eventually found her identity, it is one that is based on a dreamworld. She is not too weak to survive but she is not strong enough to fight racism and stereotypes. Instead of making her environment aware of the problems and pains of being Afro-German within the German society, she remains silent and projects all her hopes onto her “white” daughter Nivea. Thus, Afra never manages to escape her role as victim and develop a healthy self-concept with which to confront her perpetrators.

1.2. Nivea

1.2.1. Stereotypes/animosities

Even though Nivea is very light complexioned and thus physically could “pass” for a “German,” her midwife is prejudiced against her because her mother Afra is dark-complexioned: “Der anschwellende Strom kleiner Jugoslawen, Afrikaner und Türken würde von ihr schon eingedämmt werden. Und jetzt die! Noch dazu eine hiesige, der man schon die zweite Sündengeneration nachweisen konnte” (317). Again, a person feels threatened by the outward appearance of other human beings and makes a statement that reveals religious hypocrisy. Nivea’s midwife talks about the “zweite Sündengeneration” which once again implies that sexual intercourse with a non-“white” man is a sin. The midwife is even so prejudiced that she is described as somebody “die nicht alles auf die Welt bringen wollte, beileibe nicht” (317). This means she still sticks to the Nazi-principles of a “pure” race. Thus, the midwife is another

example of Germans who discriminate against people of bi-ethnic origin.

Still today, Germany is sometimes regarded as a country of racists. Nivea was born in the late sixties and when she travels to the USA about 20 years later, she is confronted with statements like: “Von wo sie komme, hatte er gefragt. Als sie ihm Germany antwortete, hatte er heiser und hörbar und ungeübt gelacht. Lassen sie euch dort jetzt am Leben? hatte er gefragt” (393). Obviously, the speaker recognizes Nivea’s bi-ethnic heritage and refers back to the Third Reich when Hitler tried to “eliminate” anybody who did not look Aryan. According to the following definition, Afra would have been regarded as an “entartete Frau” during the Third Reich. As a result, she would have been sterilized and Nivea would not even have been born:

Sofort nach Hitlers Machtergreifung 1933 wurden Gesetze erlassen, die von Frauen gewünschte Sterilisationen und Abtreibungen unter Strafe stellten. Zur gleichen Zeit wurden aber auch Gesetze für die Zwangssterilisation aus rassehygienischen (eugenischen) Gründen eingeführt. . . . ‘Die Zahl der entarteten Individuen, die geboren werden hängt hauptsächlich von der Zahl fortpflanzungsfähiger entarteter Frauen ab. Die Sterilisation der entarteten Frau ist rassenhygienisch deshalb wichtiger als die des Mannes.’ (Opitz, Rassismus, Sexismus 54)

Although the Third Reich does not exist anymore some Germans unfortunately still stick to some of the national socialist ideas either overtly or covertly. While Nivea was growing up, she was referred to as “unbedarfter Mischling” (474), even though the African part of her heritage was not very obvious. People were only aware of it because they knew her mother. Nivea’s teacher points out that “Naja, sie hat ja auch ein gewaltiges Handicap. Nicht bei mir, natürlich, im Gegenteil. Aber gesellschaftlich gesehen ist es immer noch ein Problem, und gerade hierzulande bei dem Mangel an Toleranz. Dem Kind sieht man ja nur was an, wenn man es weiß” (Demski 371). If somebody regards Nivea’s African heritage, whether it is visible or not, as a “handicap,” this is a sign of racism. Even though her teacher claims that she is not intolerant like the rest of society, the mere reference to Nivea being handicapped shows her hidden racism towards people of African heritage. Adelson thinks that “white” people are especially afraid of the “invisibility” of Nivea’s “Black” heritage: “Nivea’s ‘other’ corporeality--her now invisible

'black' inheritance--is . . . masked optically by her 'white' skin, which nonetheless does nothing to absolve her of the threat that she seems to pose on German national culture" (222). In contrast, outside of Germany other people, like in New York City, seem to recognize Nivea's subtle part-African heritage as something "exotic": "Verzeihen Sie, aber ich erkenne das Exotische, auch wenn es nur Spuren, gleichsam angedeutet sichtbar wird--wie auf Ihrer Haut. Wir haben hier eine Stadt der Schattierungen" (Demski 442-3). The speaker does not want to appear racist, which is evident from his reference to New York City as a city of different hues. Yet, the mere reference to exotic looks already signals something "different" than the mainstream physical appearance.

Although Nivea shares the outward appearance of the mainstream society, she is very aware of her part-African ancestry: "Ich bin ein bayrischer Viertel neger weiblichen Geschlechts, antwortet Nivea. Berufserfahrung? fragte Abe Tannenbaum von oben herab ohne sich auf Niveas Herkunftsbeschreibung einzulassen, denn was ist schon ein bayrischer Viertel neger in New York?" (412). Since "Neger" is a negative expression referring to her African ancestry, Nivea as well seems to have internalized the negative connotation society has towards Africans. She struggles with her own identity. She does not really want to pass as "white" otherwise she would not refer to her part-African ancestry but deny it. However, Nivea obviously has a problem with where she belongs. She somehow feels like she does not belong anywhere. Her part-African ancestry appears to be unimportant to Abe, as it should be, but obviously important to Nivea. She cannot cope with it either way--on one hand she devalues herself as part-"Neger" but on the other hand that ancestry is important to her and she wants it to be recognized. She senses her double identity but cannot deal with it yet. Thus, she has difficulties finding her place in society even though she is not ostracized like Afra.

1.2.2. Childhood influences

Before Nivea manages to come to terms with her double identity after a long time of searching for it, she has to deal with some influences from her childhood. They are very profound and she needs to analyze them in order to become a whole person. One of these influential experiences is that Nivea, because of her light complexion, has the power to make herself invisible--a power her mother Afra could only dream of: "Afra hätte ihre Tochter beinahe nicht

erkannt, zwischen den Circuskindern verschwand sie, jener Tropfen Wasser in einer Pfütze, der Afra immer so gern gewesen wäre. Unsichtbar” (374). Thus, Afra, although she is proud of her daughter’s light complexion, is also envious of it: “Afra mußte bloß in einen Raum segeln, und keiner hat sich mehr gefragt, was sie ist oder wozu sie da ist, vor ihr sind alle stehengeblieben wie vor einer Mauer. Und sie war neidisch auf mich, weil ich mich bewegen konnte und überall durchschlüpfen, weil ich mir aussuchen konnte, ob ich Platz wegnehme oder nicht” (454-55). Afra herself makes several comments about Nivea’s invisibility: “Sie kann sagen, daß sie schwarz ist, wenn es mal wieder Mode wird, oder sie kann weiß sein--wie sie will” (322). Afra is glad that her daughter benefits from whatever is fashionable, and does not see the problems Nivea has with her bi-ethnic heritage. She only focuses on her own major problem--the dark complexion of her skin, which faded to “white” within her daughter: “Bei mir hat der Amerikaner durchgeschlagen, deshalb hab ich nicht ganz hineingehört, aber sie--sie kann sich drin sehen in der Kette, oder sie kann sich rauslösen, ganz, wie es ihr paßt” (330). Nivea is relieved to have the possibility of making herself invisible whenever she wants to: she “wollte hörbar, aber nicht zu sichtbar sein” (427). Yet why does Nivea want to be invisible? Does she have problems with her own self-concept? Does she have difficulties with her heritage? Or is she incapable of dealing with the visibility “imposed” on her by her mother who is so proud of her “white” daughter that she wants her to be the center of attention everywhere?

Afra presents her “white” daughter proudly to the public and “sells” Nivea’s “whiteness” by making her the star of commercials. She does not “sell” her daughter for financial reasons, but because she is so amazed by her “white” skin--something Afra has always longed for. Thus, Nivea learns at a young age how to present herself, a skill which appears useful in her later profession as singer:

Ihr öffentliches Gesicht unterschied sich vollkommen von ihrem Alltagsgesicht. . . . Auf Bildern lächelte sie, ein kleines, weißzahniges Lächeln, oder sie lachte über das ganze Gesicht. Im Alltagsleben, beim Einkaufen, in der Schule, bei ihren verschiedenen Unterrichtsstunden am Nachmittag lächelte sie nie. Sie war ein Arbeitskind, sachlich, verschlossen und ohne Illusionen. (370)

Her mother’s insistence on making Nivea a star deprives her of her childhood and thus

establishes a superficial relationship between mother and daughter, a relationship that makes Nivea very lonely: “Nivea hatte nie herausgefunden, wie Afra war und ob sie sie mochte. Wie soll man eine Frau lieben, die jedem gefallen will, die lügt und sich in ihrer Tochter betrachtet wie in einem Spiegel?” (426). Her mother is very distant and Nivea cannot be sure whether Afra loves her for herself or only because of her light complexion. Nivea does not understand what compels Afra to focus so much on the color of her skin. Instead, she really misses Afra’s motherly love: “Oh, ich möchte, daß mich jemand bis zum Wahnsinn liebt” (470). She cries out for love but is not capable of understanding how her mother shows her love, a love that Nivea considers rather destructive: “Nivea hat nie gewußt, ob Afra sie am Leben hält oder in aller Unschuld allmählich umbringt” (407). She misinterprets the intentions of her mother who wants her to be tough in order to survive. Thus, she feels lonely: “Nivea ist, wenn ihre Mutter sie nicht gerade hübsch angezogen in irgendein Fotostudie schleppt, oft allein” (355). It is a loneliness that her mother Afra experienced as well: “Jede Stunde allein ist eine verlorene Stunde, hatte ihre dicke Mutter gesagt. . . . Sie sei als Kind immer allein gewesen, auch mit Menschen” (405). Although mother and daughter share that loneliness, they are both unable to address it and become close. Nivea thus tries to buy affection from her classmates: “Das allererste Videogerät in der ganzen Straße, im ganzen Viertel, gehörte ihnen, und Nivea erkaufte sich mit Kassettengucken die Liebe ihrer Banknachbarinnen in der Schule und die Buben aus der Parallelklasse gleich dazu” (400). Money makes powerful, but in contrast to her mother, Nivea never really is happy with accumulating money. The power of money seems to be worthless to her: “Sie hatte immer viel Geld auszugeben, aber ohne Freude” (421). What she longs for is affection.

The obsessiveness with which Afra refers to Nivea’s physical appearance rubs off on her daughter: “Die einzige Wohnung, die sie immer leidenschaftlich und mit fast mißtrauischem Interesse beobachtete war ihr Körper” (341). Whenever Nivea feels afraid or isolated she takes refuge in her beauty, a beauty that everybody notices: “Nivea hat Angst vor dem Fliegen und ist in ihr Gesicht geflohen, einen vertrauten Ort” (Demeski 388). Is this not a sign that she lacks self confidence? A flight into her outward appearance? Since everybody pays so much attention to her looks but not to her inner value, Nivea feels worthless. Her make-up covers her like a second

skin and without it she feels naked and defenseless: “sie spürte die Schminke wie eine dreckige Haut auf dem Gesicht. Aber ohne? Udenkbar, eher nackt bei zwanzig Grad minus” (389). Without make-up she feels so vulnerable she cannot bare to expose herself. This once again is an effect of her mother’s obsession with Nivea’s outward appearance. Her inner worth goes completely unnoticed.

1.2.3. Challenging “white”-dominated perceptions of non-“white” women

Nivea never questions or challenges anybody when it comes to perceptions of non-“white” women. This might have something to do with her insecurity and consciousness of having a double identity--something she did not learn to deal with. Instead, her mother Afra taught her to be tough right from the beginning as a way to protect herself from getting hurt: “Leute wie du und ich sind, glaube ich, leicht zu bescheißen” (345). Nivea adapts quickly to this “toughness” at least superficially: “Wie ihre Großmutter und Mutter ging die Nachtigall am allergeringsten mit Vertrauen um, denn da konnte so viel daneben gehen” (424). However, as shown in the section on “Quest for self-determination,” Nivea is not as successful as her mother Afra at being tough and indifferent. She deals with her pain in another way.

1.2.4. Shared Afro-German identity

Nivea is triply challenged when it comes to developing an Afro-German identity. First of all, she does not know her father. Her mother deprived her of a father-figure since she did not consider it important for her child: “die Tatsache, daß der blonde Siggi ziemlich geräuschlos aus ihrem [Afras] Leben verschwunden war, störte sie nicht” (300). Thus, Nivea never has a connection to her “white” German heritage and additionally misses a caring and loving father: “Nivea kannte von früh an keine Kumpaninnen, nur Konkurrentinnen. Männer hat sie schon damals geliebt, in jedem mannsähnlichen Wesen begrüßte und umwarb sie den vorenthaltenen Vater” (427). The lack of a father with whom she could bond makes her project this missing fatherly love onto every male she meets.

Secondly, even though Nivea seems to embrace her part-African heritage, she cannot identify with her mother Afra since the two of them do not look at all alike: “In dem weißen

Kleid hatte sie dunkler ausgesehen als sonst, das fast weiße Kind. Kein Vergleich natürlich mit ihrer Mutter, die ihr ein Schwarzweißfoto zeigte, auf dem lauter helle Kindergesichter zu sehen waren, in der zweiten Reihe aber ein durch eine weiße, verzweifelt vors Gesicht gehaltene Kerze geteilter, schwarzer Fleck” (Demski 406). The fact that she and her mother do not share the same outward appearance makes it hard for Nivea to acknowledge their relatedness. Additionally, Afra devalues her “Blackness” all the time and tells Nivea how important it is to be “white.” Nivea cannot deal with the contradiction of embracing her African heritage and disliking it. She not only distances herself from her mother but starts to be ashamed of her: “Man sollte keine Mama haben, die so dick ist und so dunkel, die zu den Elternabenden immer in Rosa kommt, allein und ohne sich dessen zu schämen” (303). She blames Afra for Afra’s physical appearance, the dark complexion and obesity, and additionally for depriving her of a father-figure. Nivea indeed starts to despise her mother’s features and is afraid to become like her: “Meistens aß sie gar nichts, weil sie an das dunkle, wachsende und undurchdringliche Fett ihrer Mutter Afra dachte” (398). In addition to her missing “visible” link to her mother, she does not share a real emotional bond with her either:

In den Bunten Blättern gab es manchmal Berichte, in denen die mächtige Afra zu sehen war, mit unglaublich männerschuhbrauner Haut, daneben fast unsichtbar die hahnenfedernumwehte Nachtigall, dürr und weiß, und darunter Unterschriften wie: DER WICHTIGSTE MENSCH IN MEINEM LEBEN: MAMA! oder WIR ERZÄHLEN UNS ALLES! TOPSTAR NIVEA NACHTIGALL MIT IHRER MUTTER. Nivea besaß eine dicke Mappe voll solch wunderbar fremder Geschichten, die sie immer wieder las, weil sie sich darin so angenehm nicht wiedererkannte. (426)

She reads the articles over and over again not because she enjoys the lies presented there but because she wishes those lies were reality. Nivea longs for a closer relationship to her mother. It takes her a long time to accept this longing and to realize that she loves her mother.

Thirdly, Nivea shares the physical features of the dominant society but since she is aware of her part-African ancestry, she does not feel a connection to this society. Even though she

realizes that one's complexion does not really matter in a universal sense since we are all human beings, she is not able to apply it to her own life. One day, Nivea proudly tells her African-American friend Absalom about her part-African heritage: "Ich habe einen schwarzen Großvater gehabt! hatte sie Absalom eines nachmittags erzählt. Ich habe ihn natürlich nicht gekannt. Und ich, gab der Sänger zur Antwort, also mein Großvater war weiß und hatte eine große Farm in Ostgermany. Die werde ich mir eines Tages holen. Da begriff Nivea, daß der ganze Farb- und Familienwechsel nichts nützte" (394). Despite or perhaps because of this profound realization that skin color does not really matter at all, her heritage becomes very important to Nivea: "Was sie aus dem Leben ihrer Mutter braucht, nimmt sie sich - die Geschichten" (Demski 347). In search of her heritage she ends up in New York City. By chance, while window-shopping, she finds one of the quilts her great-grandmother, Theres's mother, made years ago. The old woman had worked her life experiences into the squares of the quilts. Both Theres and Afra had owned one. However, Theres did not really seem to appreciate her quilt and Afra lost hers. Thus, Nivea had to come to the United States to find a part of her German ancestry and additionally to acknowledge her denied African heritage. Nivea's friend Absalom regards her trip to New York City as Nivea's connection to her part-African roots:

Ja, erst habe ich gedacht, das wäre es, und daß du vielleicht erkennst, wo deine wirklichen Brüder und Schwestern sind. Weil du das bei euch nie gelernt hättest. Es geht nicht um deine drei weißen Viertel, sondern um das eine schwarze. Das begreifst du nur hier. Aber deine Bestimmung war eine gestohlene Geschichte zu finden und heimzuholen. . . . Es ist dein gestohlenen schwarzes Erbe!" (447)

Thus, finding her part-African ancestry is interwoven with discovering her part-German ancestry in the quilt her great-grandmother made. In New York City there obviously is a larger bi-ethnic community and it helps Nivea accept her African heritage. According to Adelson, Nivea's "musical performances in the United States, however, render her invisible inheritance visible" (221). Adelson refers to Nivea's musicians, who, as is shown in the novel, reflect an ethnic diversity: "Nivea Nachtigalls schwarze und weiße Bestandteile werden in ihrer Band sichtbar sein, schwarze und weiße Musiker und Techniker, nicht solche Bierzeltjubler und Kindergeburtstagsorchester wie daheim" (Demski 399). It is also at this time that she comes

across the lost quilt which makes her aware of her “white” German heritage. Nivea’s history, her stolen and denied heritage, somehow lies within this quilt. It is her mission to find it and acknowledge it: “Als sie damals mit dem Teppich nach Hause gekommen war und mit der merkwürdigen Ausbeute, die ihr nebenbei eine neue Musik, neue Texte und eine neue Art zu gehen eingebracht hatte, ja, und Angriffslust, hatte sie endlich gelernt, in Talkshows giftige Antworten zu geben und Produzenten zu vergrätzen” (Demeski 451).

This new found identity helps her at least partly to come to terms with her inner strife: “Ich bleib auf dem Teppich, sagt sie und lacht. Es ist ein bayrischer Teppich, und ich hab ihn wieder mitgebracht, erst von hier gerettet und heimgeholt, und jetzt kommt er wieder zurück” (476). Nivea carries the quilt with her all the time. It gives her security because it connects her to her heritage.

1.2.5. Quest for self-determination

Finally, Nivea manages to develop a stronger personality than her mother had. Yet, it was a long struggle. For many years, she tried to suppress her feelings, and even resorted to taking drugs. But Nivea realizes that drugs are no way out and she turns to a psychiatrist for help. Her psychiatrist discovers very quickly that one of the main reasons for Nivea’s problems is her strange relationship to her mother Afra: “Eigentlich, wird der Analytiker im Rollstuhl zu seiner Klientin Nivea sagen, müssten wir mit Ihrer Mutter anfangen! Und mit der ihrer und dann mit der ihrer und so fort, wird Nivea antworten. Das ist es doch. Eigentlich bin ich diejenige, die Sie am wenigsten nötig hat. Ich hab wahrscheinlich für die anderen angefangen, für die, die es nicht tun können” (353). Nivea feels like the burden of dealing with a denied part-African ancestry--which bothers her family--lies on her shoulders. However, she realizes that as part of her quest for self-determination she has to deal with this burden.

As a first step toward healing, Nivea needs to admit her deep longing for her mother. Her therapist realizes that Nivea is looking everywhere for a substitute mother. And Nivea herself slowly allows this longing for her mother to penetrate her conscience:

Nivea sieht jetzt . . . das Bett ihrer Mutter in tausenderlei Rosa, überbreit mit Gerafftem am Kopfteil und samtbezogenen, etwas schmutzligen Seitenbrettern,

dieses Bett mit der tiefen Kuhle, die sich trotz der zehnjährigen Haltbarkeitsgarantie unter dem großen, schwarzen Leib gebildet hatte. Nivea sieht schauernd und vor Sehnsucht leise heulend die Paradekissen. . . . (457)

Nivea remembers everything in detail which reflects how much she was longing for it. This visualization makes her realize how badly society had treated her mother and she even starts challenging societal stereotypes, though, only in a soliloquy: “Schämen sich für nichts und reden immer über unsere Schamlosigkeit, schluchzt Nivea, die sich vorher noch nie so nach einem Ort gesehnt hat, wie nach dem rosa Bett ihrer Mutter” (457-58).

Additionally, Nivea becomes aware of the fact that she needs a new start: “sie hatte nach einem Platz gesucht, von dem aus sie neu anfangen konnte ohne *Bravo* und Hitparade und dem Studiomief” (391). Thus, she decides to leave Germany and move to a place where she can develop her true self: “Nivea denkt . . . an das Zimmer in New York, in dem vielleicht noch etwas von ihr übriggeblieben ist, ein Fetisch, ein Empfangskomitee für jetzt, wo sie endgültig hinüberfliegt, um dort das zu werden, was man sie zu Hause nicht werden läßt” (391). In Germany she is obviously not able to live her own life. Does this mean that German society would not allow her to acknowledge and pursue her part-African ancestry? Is this not once again a reason to rewrite history and put a stronger emphasis on African achievements not only in Europe but in general, so that people realize their prejudices and re-evaluate their thinking?

On her flight into “freedom” Nivea starts to gain fortitude. She reflects on her life and begins to articulate what she needs:

Wenn sie jetzt einer fragen würde, zum Beispiel das etwas auf dem Platz neben ihr, was sie sich wünsche? Daß es weitergeht, sagte Nivea laut. Ich will einfach sicher sein, daß es weitergeht, in Wellen, rauf und runter, höher und tiefer als bisher. Nicht immer so müde sein, das wäre gut. Und jemanden kennen, der mir einen Kosenamen gibt, aber nicht Schätzchen sagt, weil das immer so klingt, als machte er sich nicht die Mühe, meinen Namen zu behalten. Ein Wörtchen irgendwas, nur für mich, und nicht diese blöde Creme da. (461)

As she talks to herself, Nivea finally realizes what she was deprived of--somebody who cares and shows genuine affection for her--a loving person to share life's experiences in its depths,

awareness, and sharpness. Especially on her second flight to America, she intensely occupies herself with her past, reflecting on it and learning from it: “[D]ie Nachtigall hat eine weite Strecke Vergangenheit und Gegenwart zurückgelegt im Flug” (471). Nivea knows that things are going to change and she trusts that this change is going to be for the better even though she does not know for sure: “Vieles wird anders werden, aber wo es hingeht weiß ich nicht” (478). But she realizes that strength lies within her and she only has to rely on it. She finally sees that nobody is allowed to define her except herself and that she has to live her life autonomously and independently: “Der Bordlautsprecher spielt bis zum Untergehen, eine schlammige, elektronisch aufgeweichte Musik. Nach Sekunden erkennt die Nachtigall: I DID IT MY WAY. Das ist es, sagt sie laut. Das ist es” (479).

Chapter Two

Ika Hügel-Marshall's Self-Portrait in Daheim unterwegs

Ika Hügel-Marshall was born in 1947 in a small town in Bavaria as the daughter of a “white” German mother and an African-American father. Her father, a soldier, had been sent back to the United States because of a disease before Ika was born. Her mother married a “white” German when Ika was one year old and one year later Ika's little sister was born. Hügel-Marshall's autobiography Daheim unterwegs: Ein deutsches Leben, which is told as a first person narrative, begins with her birth in Bavaria. Her first five uncomplicated years with her family are followed by a traumatic stay in a Catholic children's home. The readers follow her through school, including her studies at the university in Frankfurt am Main. As an adult in her late thirties, Ika meets other Afro-Germans for the first time. A couple of years later she starts searching for her birth father and travels to the United States to meet him in 1993. The good father-daughter relationship she develops with him is very significant for Ika. After meeting him, she applies for American citizenship which is granted in 1996. Some time after she meets her father she adds his last name to hers, changing it from Hügel to Hügel-Marshall. Since 1990 she has been working as a reporter for the publisher Orlanda Frauenverlag in Berlin. In addition, she has published several articles about the development of antiracist consciousness and antiracist education. In 1993, she co-edited the book Entfernte Verbindungen. Rassismus, Antisemitismus und Klassenunterdrückung. Recently, she is doing vocational training to become a consultant in intercultural therapy. In 1996, she received the “Audre Lorde Literary Award” to finish her autobiography Daheim unterwegs: Ein deutsches Leben.

Before turning to my analysis of Hügel-Marshall's book, I would like to briefly discuss its genre. Gero von Wilpert defines autobiography as a

literarische Darstellung des eigenen Lebens . . . die den Schlüssel zum Verständnis der Persönlichkeit in den Lebensbedingungen, der psychologischen Entwicklung und besonderen Erlebnissen sucht. . . . Sie wird als Ganzes immer zu einer nachträglichen Sinngebung des gelebten Lebens aus einheitlicher Perspektive--und sei sie negativ--neigen und das Leben als geschlossene Einheit

betrachten, so daß ihre Wahrheit letztlich immer nur eine persönliche, keine objektive Wahrheit sein kann. (58-59)

Wilpert's definition implies that autobiographies always reflect a personal point of view and thus the objectivity of the author has to be questioned. Donald J. Winslow confirms that an autobiography always contains subjective perspectives:

[T]he purely objective, as opposed to the subjective, biography² treats its subject so as to exhibit actual facts, the external events, not colored by the feelings or opinions of the writer. Although objectivity . . . is a desirable quality in a biography, in an extreme form it may interfere with the interpretative function of the work and result in a mere compilation of factual data. All biographical works, even the longest and most detailed, are the result of selection and the process of selection itself is a subjective matter. (44-45)

Thus, one can ask how much "fact" and how much "fiction" is contained in an autobiography and how extensive is the autobiographer's artistic freedom. Ika Hügel-Marshall definitely narrates her life according to real facts. However, she highlighted specific experiences and omitted others that did not seem important to her. By determining which facts are told and which are not, she cannot remain purely objective. Instead, she "creates" the story of her life even if everything she tells really happened. As Nadel points out, "Facts are to autobiography what character is to the novel-- a fundamental element of composition providing authenticity, reality and information. . . . But facts are not conclusions nor are they meant to be. Often, they are manipulated, altered or misused to sustain an interpretation or characterization" (4). Since autobiography is, in this sense, a made-up story, I feel encouraged to approach Hügel-Marshall's first person narration in the same manner I approached Demski's fictional characters, Afra and Nivea. This means I will refer to the author by her first name, and, more importantly, will focus on the ways in which her experiences reflect the various stages through which one traverses in order to develop critical

²"The usual definition is that biography is the history of the lives of individual people, as a branch of literature. . . . It is the written record of the life of an individual. . . . Until the word **autobiography** came into language (1797), the word *biography* included the self-written life" (Winslow 9).

consciousness.

2.1. Stereotypes/animosities

Since Ika's mother is German and her father is an African-American soldier who was stationed in Germany during World War II, she, just like Afra, does not share the physical features predominant in German society. And like Afra's mother, Ika's mother is stigmatized for having had a sexual relationship with a dark-complexioned man: "Wahrscheinlich ist die Mutter aus primitiven Verhältnissen, sonst hätte sie sich doch mit jemand anderem eingelassen als ausgerechnet mit einem Neger" (31). As in Afra's case, people do not only devalue the personality of the mother but impose an inherent lifestyle of lesser moral value onto the innocent child. For example, neighbors comment: "Die Kleine wird einmal genauso unmoralisch und labil wie die Mutter" (31). Sabine von Dirke addresses this myth about the disposition of bi-ethnic children in her discussion of Wolfgang Seeger's views:³

[H]e maintains that children of interracial marriages inevitably have a disposition for 'Charakterlosigkeit, Hemmungslosigkeit,' and 'Willensschwäche' and most likely show criminal traits because of the incompatibility of the genetic material of their parents. This example illustrates that it is not only the language of the Third Reich, but its racist ideology which clearly spoke through Seeger and others again in the 1980s. (518)

Because of Germans who think like Seeger, Ika, as a bi-ethnic child, is stigmatized as an outsider right from the start. Her social environment makes her believe in her imposed inferiority without giving her a chance to develop herself naturally like other children: "Wir wissen, daß du eine Rabenmutter hast, die sich mit einem Neger eingelassen hat--das ist eine schwere Sünde. Dein Blut ist nicht rein, und du hast viele Teufel in dir" (35). In this quote, the punishing role of the Christian religion reinforces the verbal attack against Ika's mother. Even though the Bible proclaims one should love thy neighbor as thyself, people who look different seem to be

³Seeger, who is one of the first representatives of the biologist-nationalist argument, claims that the integration of "non-traditional" Germans is against the *Law of Nature*. For more details see Sabine von Dirke.

regarded as inferior--as impure and possessed by devils. Schultz attributes the “unchristliche” behavior of Christian women to their desire to maintain power: “The attitudes of many white Christian women toward women of color and Jewish women remain characterized by fear, distance, and competition. White Christian women largely engage in denial of their own power and skin privileges” (Schultz, Racism 246). However, this once again manifests a hypocrisy of religion.

People should not judge others by superficial means such as outward appearance but question why they sometimes move within specific circles and which role the so-called dominant society plays in order to keep them within those circles. “Black” people, for example, are quite often perceived as being criminals: “Wie, du willst nach Amiland, wo mehr Schwarze sind, das sind doch alles Verbrecher” (Hügel-Marshall 92). Very often so-called “minority groups” are deprived of social and economic opportunities the “majority group” enjoys. To say people are criminals because of the color of their skin is to ignore the often bad economic and social conditions they have to live in. The question is rather why only negative stereotypes and images are stressed. Instead, positive African or part-African role models should be reinforced, not only to fight stereotypes but to establish a basis for a positive self-image among “Black” people.

Another prevailing stereotype that affects Ika’s life is the view that Afro-German women are exotic and sexually changed. Herr Siebert, a representative of the youth welfare department, persuades Ika’s mother that it is best for the development of her child to grow up in a Catholic children’s home: “Hier in der Kleinstadt hat es [das Kind Ika] keine Zukunft. Wenn es älter wird, wird es vielleicht seelisch labil, auf jeden Fall wird es für Männer Freiwild sein, uneheliche Kinder bekommen, alkoholsüchtig werden und was weiß ich sonst noch” (Hügel-Marshall 21). Being “Freiwild” refers to the exotic attraction which is very often assigned to dark-complexioned women by “white” men. However, this exoticism is just another form of racism hidden by a positive term that seems to reveal attraction: “In contemporary Germany, this eurocentric notion of beauty rejects women of color as ‘other,’ while paradoxically giving positive value to ‘otherness’ as ‘exotic’” (Campt 120). Thus, “exotic” women are marginalized from mainstream society.

2.2. Childhood influences

Ika's perception of German society as hostile for minorities developed right from the beginning. Her birth already marked her fate as an outsider in a society that is not used to dealing with diversity and thus rejects everything that is different:

Im März 1947 wurde ich geboren. Meine Ankunft ist im engsten Familienkreis gefeiert worden, leise und ängstlich, während die Außenwelt meinen und unseren Ausschluß aus der Gesellschaft längst beschlossen hatte. . . . Es gab nur eine Welt, die weiße Welt, in die ich hineingeboren worden war, eine Schwarze Welt existierte nicht, und es gab nur eine Wirklichkeit, eine Wahrheit. . . . Alle waren weiß, und da Kinder so aussehen wie ihre Eltern, war auch ich weiß, was denn sonst? . . . Noch teilte ich die Welt nicht ein in Schwarz und Weiß, eher vielleicht in Gut und Böse, in Freundlich und Unfreundlich. (17)

Like Afra, Ika as an innocent little girl has no concept of skin color. Until she goes to school, she does not have to experience discriminations based on the color of her skin. She categorizes her environment not in "Black" and "white" but in friendly and unfriendly according to her experiences with it. If we categorize at all, that is the way we should do it, according to ways people behave/react, not according to how they look. But we still need to consider why people react in a specific way in order to understand their actions. If we only rely on quick judgements, we are blind to the whole picture and perceive only fragments that reflect what we *want* to see. Some people regard their fragments as the truth, in fact, sadly, as the only truth and thus shape an incorrect perception which becomes solidified the more they believe in it and the more often people do not speak up against it:

Wenn grundsätzlich Einigkeit darüber besteht, daß es eine Schande ist, Schwarz zu sein, und daß Schwarze dumm sind und so weiter und so fort, und diese Einhelligkeit nicht in konkreten Lebenszusammenhängen aufgebrochen wird, dann bleibt auch mir nichts anderes übrig, als diese Werte anzunehmen. Da ist es kein Wunder, daß ich mit allen Mitteln versuche, mein Schwarzsein zu ignorieren, und daß mein Bedürfnis, nicht aufzufallen, immer stärker wird. Doch wie sehr ich mich anstrenge, nicht aufzufallen, wie sehr ich mein Schwarzsein auch verdränge,

dem Verletztwerden kann ich mich nicht entziehen. Ich bin immer sichtbar.

(Hügel-Marshall 46)

Ika tries to be invisible, yet her darker complexion is a difference that always makes her visible. This leaves her constantly vulnerable to the dehumanizing taunts of prejudiced people. Yet too often she is also treated as if she is invisible, since people ignore her even when she wants to be acknowledged. For example during her school years she is ignored by her teachers. This attitude makes her lose interest in studying, which only furthers the teachers' negative assessment of her abilities. To escape the impact of their negative perceptions, Ika creates a dreamworld which provides her with a place full of meaning and comfort:

Ich sammle Blätter, Äste, Steine, leere Marmeladenbüchsen, Streichholzschachteln, alte Papiertüten, Moos und Erde. Völlig vertieft baue und spiele ich stundenlang, spiele, um zu vergessen, spiele mit Dingen, die wie ich wertlos sind. So erschaffe ich mir eine Phantasiewelt, die nur für mich Bedeutung hat und die mir niemand wegnehmen kann. (26)

Even though the things she collects are considered worthless, to Ika they have personal value. She is like them: socially worthless but personally valuable.

All these racist attitudes have a strong negative affect on the young children toward whom they are directed. In the following passage, Ika describes her experiences with racism in the Catholic children's home:

Schlimmer als die Schläge sind die Lügen, die ich für Wahrheiten halte: Schwarze sind dumm, unterentwickelt, primitiv, unzivilisiert; Schwarze sind unberechenbar, triebhaft, gefährlich und zu bemitleiden. . . . Da alles Lernen in der Kindheit seinen Anfang nimmt, erhalte ich hier Wertvorstellungen über mich, die mein Denken und Handeln bestimmen. Ich lerne, daß eine Lüge dann zur Wahrheit wird, wenn jemand an sie glauben will. . . . Noch verhängnisvoller sind die Lehren, die dazu führen, daß ich mich selbst hasse. Im Heim versuchen sie systematisch meine Persönlichkeit zu zerstören, und ich helfe ihnen dabei, indem ich mich selbst verachte, um akzeptabler für sie zu werden. (51-52)

These lies that are taken for truths and that society imposes upon children with part-African

ancestry do not only damage their developing personality but make it almost impossible for them to construct a positive sense of identity. These children are incapable of dealing with the negativity that is directed toward them. According to Schultz, these negative perceptions taken as truths are again the result of a power-relationship established by the privileges of being light-skinned. Thus, they finally lead to self-annihilation because society does not embrace dark skin:

Rassismus ist also immer mit Macht verbunden, daher kann es keinen Rassismus von Schwarzen gegenüber Weißen oder gegenüber andern Schwarzen geben, sondern nur Vorurteile oder selbstzerstörerische Formen der Verinnerlichung des von Weißen praktizierten Rassismus, wie zum Beispiel ein negatives Verhältnis zu der eigenen dunklen Hautfarbe. (Kein Ort 170)

Ika does not understand why people dislike her and treat her not only cruelly but inhumanely:

Morgens, wenn ich in den Spiegel sehe, kann ich nichts Abstoßendes an mir entdecken . . . Und doch muß ich häßlich sein, sonst würden nicht alle immer und immer wieder an diesem Entsetzen festhalten, wenn sie mich anschauen, würden mir nicht die Teufel austreiben und mir nicht mit einer Wurzelbürste das Gesicht blutig kratzen, damit die anderen Kinder endlich den Beweis dafür haben, daß meine Hautfarbe echt ist und ich weder ein 'Negerkuß' noch aus Schokolade bin. (39)

Additionally, Ika is punished severely several times without knowing what she has done wrong. This is especially bizarre since no further explanation for the punishment is given:

An diesem Abend und sechs Monate lang werden mir jeden Abend, wenn ich zu Bett gehe, die Hände mit einem schmalen weißen Tuch fest zusammengebunden. 'Du willst zu einer Geburtstagsfeier, ausgerechnet dich soll sie eingeladen haben? Lern dich erst mal richtig zu benehmen, dann kannst du vielleicht Besuche bei anderen machen.' . . . Am nächsten Tag werde ich, während alle anderen ihre Schulaufgaben machen, in den Garten geschickt; ich muß meine Schuhe ausziehen und eine halbe Stunde lang auf einem Bein um einen Apfelbaum herumhüpfen. Ausruhen darf ich nicht, auch nicht von einem Bein auf das andere wechseln. . . . Ich habe also etwas Verbotenes getan, wie so oft. Und wie so oft,

weiß ich nicht, was und habe es auch niemals erfahren. (52-53)

The nuns who run Ika's children's home, who once again should act according to basic religious principles, choose especially cruel means to punish her, even though Ika has done nothing wrong. How can any person come up with such cruel methods unless he or she regards the punished child as inferior? Ika herself, reflecting on her experiences, questions how she should develop into an open-minded and open-hearted person--a person the society expects her to be--when she is the recipient of such treatment:

Wie kann ich mit verbundenen Händen dennoch bereit sein, mit offenen Armen auf Menschen zuzugehen, ihnen meine Hände zu reichen, aus Solidarität, zum Gruß oder zur Versöhnung? Wie kann ich nur auf einem Bein hüpfen und dennoch lernen, mit beiden Beinen im Leben zu stehen? Wie schaffe ich es, nicht hart zu werden, auch dann nicht, wenn der Preis für mein Überleben einem Drahtseilakt gleichkommt? (53)

Reflecting on all the influences that shaped her self-concept throughout her years of growing up, Ika reveals that without the love and support of her mother it would have been impossible for her to survive in Germany's hostile social environment: "Ich brauchte einen Menschen, von dem ich wußte, er liebt mich, meine Mutter liebt mich, ich bin ihre Tochter, für immer. Dieses Festhalten an der Liebe meiner Mutter hat mir das Überleben in einer rassistischen Gesellschaft, die mich auch heute noch ausschließt, ermöglicht" (138). This love not only enabled Ika to survive but provided her with a healthy core.

2.3. Challenging "white"-dominated perceptions of non-"white" women

Despite all the negative experiences she encountered as a child, Ika manages to "survive" and as she grows up, she becomes more and more politically aware and joins the "white" women's movement. This political awareness causes her--and the attentive reader who follows Ika's experiences--to realize a connection between sexism and racism. Yet when she raises this issue among "white" feminists, women whom she had considered allies in a common cause, their reaction is hostile:

Meine weißen Mitstreiterinnen, die gesamte weiße Frauenbewegung, hat kein

Interesse daran, sich auch mit der Geschichte Schwarzer Frauen vertraut zu machen. Sie wollen sich nicht klarmachen, daß unsere Gesellschaft sowohl sexistisch als auch rassistisch ist. Weiße Feministinnen erkennen nicht, daß auch sie Nutznießerinnen des existierenden Rassismus sind. Daß Rassismus ihnen erlaubt zu ignorieren, wie unterschiedlich weiße Hautfarbe und Schwarze Hautfarbe bewertet werden. Sosehr mein Bewußtsein an politischen Fronten wächst, und sosehr die weiße Frauenbewegung mich zum Nachdenken zwingt, sosehr behindert sie mein wachsendes Bewußtsein vom herrschenden Rassismus. (Erst viel später engagierte ich mich in der afrodeutschen Bewegung. Hier erst werden mir die Zusammenhänge von sexistischer und rassistischer Unterdrückung und Diskriminierung klar). (Hügel-Marshall 82)

There is an obvious contradiction: women are fighting for equal rights and against oppression of women (i.e., against sexism) but not against oppression of non-“whites” (i.e., not against racism). Sara Lennox also provides information on women supporting racism within the German women’s movement:

Antiracist feminists have tried to construct a different history of women in Germany, amassing evidence for women’s active support for racism and anti-Semitism in the German colonies and under National Socialism . . . they have argued that racism is a structural component of contemporary German society, including the female part (thus not only expressed in far-right violence). (Divided Feminism 490)

This racism developed during colonial times and still prevails within modern society. Yet, is racism not a denial of equal rights and the oppression of a so-called “minority group” which is regarded as inferior? How can any movement be emancipatory without acknowledging the existence of racism among their ranks? Once again, Ika is ostracized, with no-one willing to accept her differentness and to approach the problems caused by a social biases: “Ich fühle mich gesichtslos gemacht, nicht berechtigt, so zu empfinden, wie ich es tue. . . . Dankbar soll ich sein, wenn Weiße sich selbstlos für meine Belange einsetzen--wenn sie es denn tun. Undankbar bin ich, wenn ich nicht nur Worte, sondern auch deren Umsetzung will” (Hügel-Marshall 83-84).

She addresses the inability of “white” women to empathize with her situation. Instead of doing something, the majority feels offended and blames Ika’s “limited” loyalty: “Ich soll lernen, Rassismus gefälligst auf die anderen, die Unbekannten zu beschränken, und nicht auch noch um mich zu schlagen. Denn: Meine Wahrnehmungen sind zwar subjektiv richtig, aber objektiv falsch” (Hügel-Marshall 84).

In 1993, Ika Hügel published an article that addresses the divisiveness within the women’s movement: “Während wir ständig um ein Miteinander kämpften, begegneten sie uns beständig mit Ignoranz und stehlen sich noch heute aus ihrer Verantwortung” (234). In 1992, she had given a lecture about racism and violence in Germany in Amherst, Massachusetts. The reaction of her female “white” American audience did not in essence differ from the perceptions of “white” German women who consider themselves as being emancipated:

In der anschließenden aggressiv überheblich und verletzend geführten Diskussion der weißen Frauen schlägt mir ihr Unwille, sich Dinge anzuhören, die unbequem und herausfordernd sind eiskalt ins Gesicht: ‘Es gibt soviel Gewalt gegen Frauen und viel weniger Frauen, die von Rassismus betroffen sind, so daß ein Kampf gegen eine Gewalt, die alle betrifft , wichtiger ist als der Kampf gegen Rassismus.’ (Hügel-Marshall 105)

The reaction of the women at this lecture once again show that racism is a global problem that does not only occur in a particular country. Even though the United States and Germany are the only countries I have referred to, there are similar examples to be found all over the world where “white” women cannot acknowledge their own position of privilege nor the possibility that other forms of oppression are just as debilitating as sexism: “Weiße Frauen scheuen jedoch häufig Auseinandersetzungen, in deren Verlauf sie auf Dinge stoßen würden, mit denen sie sich noch nicht konfrontiert haben und auch nicht unbedingt konfrontieren möchten, nämlich Vorurteile, Ignoranz, mangelndes Wissen und mangelnde Bereitschaft, ihr Leben zu verändern” (Schultz, Kein Ort 162).

2.4. Shared Afro-German identity

Ika initially does not know anyone who shares her part-African ancestry. Like Afra, she

grows up without a father. While Afra never gets to know her father, Ika meets him when she is in her forties. It becomes very important for Ika to get in touch with her father in order to define herself: "Mein Vater ist schwarz . . . meine Hautfarbe verbindet mich mit ihm. . . . Ich will wissen, wer ich bin!" (11). The more she learns about "Black" people's history, the greater is her desire to know about this part of herself. She regards her father as a connection to the "Black" community, a community she misses so much and has not found yet within Germany. "White" people in Germany do not really give her a chance to develop her own personality or a sense of identity within "their" community. Though Ika should, as a German, belong to this community, she does not feel an affinity to it because she has always been treated like an outsider. Consequently, she is extremely grateful to her "new-found" father for making her feel welcome within his family's African-American community. In the following poem she expresses her deep appreciation concerning the important role he played in helping her find her own true self:

You knew how much I longed to get to know my black father. For 46 years, I had fought against being destroyed by white people, not to let them take my humanity away.

I found you, and I was compensated for all the humiliations and struggles.

I found you, and I knew that my survival in a white racist society was not for nothing.

I found you, and I felt that what whites say about Blacks is not true and only serves to oppress us.

I found you, and I felt stronger in doing my part to force white society to give us the respect we deserve.

I found you, and was full of fears and caution.

You stretched out your hand and put your arms and your heart around me.

Meeting you healed me and gave me strength to walk straight and with pride through this world.

I found you, and I will never lose you again. (133-34)

Ika's father, his existence and his love and acceptance of her provided the pride and strength Ika needed to carry on fighting social restrictions against Afro-Germans in Germany.

Ika already develops part of that strength prior to meeting her father. She grew up in isolation from other “Black” people in Germany and often wonders how she would feel in their company: “Von Zeit zu Zeit stelle ich mir die Frage, wie es wäre, Schwarzen Menschen zu begegnen, zu hören, was sie zu sagen haben, und zu spüren, wie ich mich mit ihnen fühle” (85). At the same time she would like to meet other Afro-Germans, she is also afraid to do so:

Ich bin nicht bereit aus meiner Anonymität hervorzutreten, mich womöglich sichtbar zu machen, für wen? Nein, ich will nicht in andere afrodeutsche Gesichter sehen und meinem Schmerz begegnen. Meine Angst ist zu groß, zu groß um all dem Erlebten, das ich versuche hinter mir zu lassen, erneut zu begegnen. Der Haß auf meine Hautfarbe ist viel größer als der Wunsch, andere afrodeutsche Frauen und Männer kennenzulernen. (88-89)

Ika is afraid of seeing her own pain in other Afro-German faces. She has suppressed this pain for a long time in order to survive, and she does not know what confronting it will do to her. Yet, her longing for community is very strong. One day, Ika got a call from an Afro-German woman unknown to her who invited Ika to an Afro-German meeting. This call finally encouraged her decision to take a life-changing step:

39 Jahre in völliger Isolation aufgewachsen zu sein, nur in mein eigenes Schwarzes Gesicht gesehen zu haben, kommt mir genauso unglaublich vor, wie die Tatsache, jetzt nicht länger allein zu sein. . . . Nun kenne ich andere Afrodeutsche und entdecke zum ersten Mal Unterschiede, die nicht trennen, sondern in erster Linie verbinden. . . . Unsere Hautfarbe und unser Kampf ums Überleben lassen uns eine Nähe empfinden, die wir bis dahin--unter Weißen--nie gefühlt haben. Jetzt bin ich nicht mehr allein auf der einen Seite dieser Welt. Es gibt eine Gruppe, der ich angehöre und die mich braucht. Unsere Begegnungen sind geprägt von Achtung und gegenseitigem Zuhören. Jetzt habe ich den Punkt erreicht, an dem Überleben für mich nicht länger eine Frage von Mut oder Stolz ist, sondern eine Entscheidung. (91)

Ika realizes that identifying those problems and pains and sharing them with other people who have lived through similar experiences helps her to come to terms with them. She feels part of a

community and finds new reasons to fight against oppression. Not only for herself but for the rest of her Afro-German community. She does not feel alone anymore and is treated with respect and dignity. She is needed within that community. Ika mentions that “survival” is not a question of courage or pride but a decision. It is a decision because now it does not only affect her but others as well. She develops a fortitude to fight for future generations and thus to make herself a stronger person: “Das Gefühl eine Community zu haben, gibt mir Kraft und stärkt meine Persönlichkeit” (91).

In addition to her Afro-German community, another very important and profound means of developing a positive concept about herself and other “Black” people is Black Literature. Even her friends realize her change and ask “Wie, du liest jetzt viel schwarze Literatur?” (91). Ika is particularly drawn to works by Audre Lorde, which provide her with the encouragement she needs to speak out against racism:

Ihre Texte machten mir Mut, und ich fühlte mich verstanden, konnte mich darin wiederfinden--nicht nur in dem Leid, welches ich und andere Schwarze Menschen erfahren hatten, sondern auch in der Botschaft, die sie vermittelte, daß wir uns nicht länger einem rassistischen System hilflos ausgesetzt fühlen mußten. (Hügel-Marshall 95)

Reading “Black” literature not only helps Ika and other readers of African ancestry to identify themselves as subjects, not objects, it also helps “white” or other non-“white” readers to recognize racist aspects of their society. Thus, socially critical literature by minorities provides many different readers with the opportunity to develop critical consciousness.

Along with her discovery of “Black” literature, Ika’s acceptance into the Afro-German community results in a gradual process of healing and self-discovery:

Schritt für Schritt fange ich an, meinen Weg zu mir selbst zu finden. Alle Zweifel, die verdrängten und doch spürbaren Schmerzen, die Weiße mir zugefügt haben und die letztendlich doch nur eingebildet, ein Resultat meiner Überempfindlichkeit sein sollen, werden in der Begegnung mit meinen Schwestern und Brüdern ausgeräumt. Ich kann wieder an mich glauben, mich ernst nehmen, vieles, was Weiße mich lehrten, wieder verlernen. Ich beginne mich

zu lieben, meine Hautfarbe, all das was mich ausmacht. Vorsichtig. Und bei jedem Stück meines Herzens und Körpers, von dem ich Besitz ergreife, schmerzt es. Endlich entdecke ich die Liebe zu mir selbst und zu meinen Schwestern und Brüdern. (92)

The Afro-German community provides Ika with a friendly “family” within which she can define herself. This is something that the larger “white” society denied her and that is essential in her development. In view of all the benefits she derives from her involvement with the Afro-German community, and all she has suffered as a result of her experiences with “white” people, her subsequent rejection of the majority population is understandable: “Wir reisen viel. . . . Manchmal wünsche ich mir, wir würden nie wieder zurückkehren, zurück in ein Land, das ich noch nicht lieben gelernt habe und von dem ich nur weiß, daß es mich nicht will” (75). Many “white” Germans obviously reject people who look different than they do. The questions are whether society cannot accept diversity out of fear of difference and whether it is true that the “Land” as a whole does not want her. Part of the solution could be to publish more Afro-German and other minority literature to give people the opportunity to become familiar with the diversity of people and see that it is nothing to be afraid of. To reach the ultimate goal of a “world community” we must recognize people as individuals and not group them according to gender, class and complexion. Of course there are differences among people, but that is what makes us individuals. It does not imply that people are of less or more value because of this differentness. We must learn to value differences rather than rank them.

2.5. Quest for self-determination

Ika’s acceptance of her pain makes her realize that she cannot just sit back and regard herself as a victim of society but that she has to get up and challenge those who put her in the role of victim:

Überleben heißt heute deshalb für mich immer dringlicher, meine Schmerzen endlich als solche zu erkennen, sie nicht mehr zu verleugnen und ganz allmählich zu spüren, wieviel Wut sich angestaut hat angesichts der Verletzungen, die mir zugefügt wurden und werden, Wut auch ob all der mir verwehrtten Möglichkeiten,

mich als selbstbewußtes Mitglied dieser Gesellschaft zu begreifen. (46)

It is important for her to completely re-evaluate and to develop her own personality to become part of the larger society. Yet, she realizes as well that society as a whole also needs to develop in a critically conscious way: “Irgendwann aber erkenne ich: Weiße brauchen gar keine Rechtfertigung, sie schlagen auch so zu, gleichgültig, ob ich reagiere oder nicht. Alle Weißen sind rassistisch. Sie sind es, weil sie - ebenso wie ich - diese sogenannten Wahrheiten über mich angenommen haben” (Hügel-Marshall 47). By developing some rules for survival in today’s world, she appeals to the common sense that is inherent in every human being. The following passage is one of two paragraphs concerning “Überlebenskunst” that Ika Hügel-Marshall included in her autobiography. By trying to develop a survival strategy, she questions hostile society:

Überlebenskunst I

Wie kann ich erkennen, daß mir Schwarze Identität verwehrt wird und daß Chancengleichheit in dieser Welt für mich nicht gilt--ohne aufzugeben? Wie kann ich es schaffen, menschlich zu bleiben, ohne geliebt oder gemocht zu werden? Wie kann ich ohne Handwerkzeug mit all dem fertig werden--es doch schaffen? Wie kann ich stark werden, wenn ich doch keine Möglichkeit habe, meine Kraft zu erkennen? Wie kann ich mich auf meinen Weg begeben, aufrecht gehen, auch wenn er noch so schwer sein mag? Wie kann ich verhindern, daß Weiße ihre Karriere auf meiner Unterdrückung aufbauen? Wie kann ich das Unmögliche möglich machen, das Unerträgliche erträglicher? (30)

Ika asks rhetorical questions in which she confronts the reader with the expectations that are imposed upon her, while simultaneously indicating that society does not help her to fulfill these expectations. By making readers empathize and realize their contribution to her pain, she prepares them to understand why she had to speak up against those injustices and articulate her concerns regardless of the often spiteful reactions of society: “Solange ich nicht weiß, was ich will, wissen es grundsätzlich die anderen. Solange ich mich nicht selbst definiere, nicht selbst weiß, wer ich bin, werden mich die anderen definieren; sie wollen bestimmen, was und wer ich bin und was ich zu wollen habe” (Hügel-Marshall 93). If she does not articulate for herself and to

others who she is, others will continue to define her. Part of her self-definition comes from her identification with the newly found Afro-German community. All over Germany, “Black” German self-definition groups emerge which are called ISD--Initiative Schwarze Deutsche. Thus, not only Ika but other Afro-Germans, too, start to define themselves in public:

In jeder größeren Stadt entstehen Gruppen der *Initiative Schwarze Deutsche (ISD)*. Wir definieren uns selbst als Afrodeutsche oder Schwarze Deutsche und geben uns damit einen Namen, mit dem wir uns identifizieren. ‘Mischling’ und ‘Mulatte’ waren für viele von uns die gängigsten Bezeichnungen, noch häufiger hießen wir ‘Besatzungskind’, obwohl die Existenz vieler Schwarzer Deutscher nichts mit den beiden Weltkriegen zu tun hat. (93)

“Black” Germans start to publish magazines and found Afro-German women’s groups. Literature starts to evolve as well. Its purpose is mainly to trace African heritage and history so that “Blacks” can form their own identity within Europe. A common history is created, a history Afro-Germans have been deprived of for a very long time:

Wir Afrodeutschen beginnen, in der BRD unsere eigene Geschichte zu schaffen, sie sichtbar zu machen und weiterzuentwickeln. Haben wir jemals was vom Leben Schwarzer in diesem Land, in Deutschland, erfahren? Haben wir jemals etwas davon erfahren, daß der erste afrikanische Student im Jahr 1729 in Halle mit einer juristischen Arbeit über Schwarze in Europa promovierte? Haben wir jemals etwas davon erfahren, daß Schwarze Deutsche in der Nazizeit verfolgt, unter Zwang sterilisiert, vertrieben und in Konzentrationslagern umgebracht wurden? (93)

Active members of the Afro-German community provide positive images of “Black” people to show that racism was not always prevalent. Additionally, Ika and other members of ISD establish connections with “Black” women all over the world, and organize conferences and, since 1985, a Black History Month. These activities are very crucial for Afro-Germans. As Tina Campt points out, until recently Afro-Germans had been deprived of a history or anything else that would help them identify with their “Blackness”:

In the United States, African-Americans grow up with a history of their cultural

heritage and the struggle of Blacks or other people of color as the basis of very strong forms of community. In contrast, Afro-Germans have no popularly acknowledged or recognized place in German history, few role models of African or Afro-European descent, and until recently no real sense of themselves as community. (112)

Ika, influenced by her role model Audre Lorde, becomes very active in the Afro-German movement because she realizes that self-determination is needed in order to develop one's own sense of identity. She dedicates her life to the Afro-German liberation struggle and does not give up the hope of being accepted within the larger German society. Such acceptance is important, not only for Afro-Germans living today, but for future generations as well:

Wir [Afrodeutsche] kämpfen, seit es uns gibt--und uns gibt es schon lange--, um einen Platz in unserer eigenen Gesellschaft, um den Platz, der uns zusteht. Für viele, die gegangen sind, war dieser Schritt nicht leicht, und schmerzvoll für diejenigen, die blieben. Trotz der rassistischen Gewalt kämpfen wir weiter und geben nicht auf. Nur wir können eine Schwarze Geschichte in Deutschland schaffen, die so notwendig und wichtig ist für alle, die nach uns kommen. (103)

Although Ika probably refers to Afro-Germans when she talks about "alle, die nach uns kommen," it is immensely important for Germany's future that all Germans, no matter what their ethnicity, learn to appreciate diversity. We all have to develop critical consciousness and question our prejudices in order to live together in a peaceful world. We have to realize that we are all related to each other and that we all deserve to be treated with mutual respect.

Chapter Three

Three Women's Journey to Critical Consciousness--A Comparison

Although Eva Demski's Afra: Roman in fünf Bildern and Ika Hügel-Marshall's Daheim unterwegs: Ein deutsches Leben belong to different genres, both books, as demonstrated, display common themes. Thus, the possible argument that Afra's life as a fictional Afro-German female is not authentic proves invalid since Ika verifies most of the experiences fictional Afra has. Ira Bruce Nadel even confirms that the goal of an autobiography is similar to that of a novel: "The best biographers re-invent rather than re-construct. Biography [with autobiography as sub-category] is fundamentally a narrative which has as its primary task the enactment of character and place through language--a goal similar to that of fiction" (8). According to Adelson, Eva Demski's novel indeed reflects parts of Afro-German reality: "[I]t is in the context of socio-discursive tensions between real and imaginary realms that this analysis of *Afra* may prove worthwhile. In this methodological sense it would be silly to fault the author for giving voice to a fictive 'black' character without speaking for a real Afro-German community or even to pretend to divine the author's personal intentions" (218). Since Afra and Nivea very obviously embody possible Afro-German females, I am going to compare Afra's, Nivea's and Ika's lives and developments on an equal basis.

3.1. Stereotypes/animosities

Afra and Ika are both so-called "occupation babies." Their mothers are "white" German women and their fathers are African-American soldiers. Since both of them do not know their fathers initially (and as we know, Afra never will), they have difficulties in connecting to and dealing with their "Black" heritage. Ika comments on this situation: "Kinder von GIs waren gewöhnlich abgeschnitten vom Land des Vaters, da diese alle wieder zurückgingen oder zurückbeordert wurden. So erfuhr auch mein Vater nie, daß ich geboren wurde. Ein Bezug zu Afrika herzustellen war deshalb kaum möglich, da ja noch nicht einmal der Kontakt zu den USA da war" (232). It is hard on any child to be deprived of a father figure but Ika's and Afra's situation is even worse since their dark complexion brands them as outsiders. And although

Nivea is fair-skinned, she still longs for a father and for information about her “Black” roots.

Ika and Afra are confronted with more animosities based on stereotypical perceptions of the larger German society than is Nivea, simply because their part-African ancestry is more visible than Nivea’s. Both first generation Afro-German women share the experiences of their mothers being devalued, and of themselves being perceived as criminals because of their darker complexion. They also encounter other stereotypes, such as, dark-skinned people are exotic and have an uncommon sexual appetite. Negative experiences they share include being punished just for looking different, and having to suffer at the hands of hypocritical “Christians.” Even Nivea, although her part-African heritage is almost “invisible,” becomes stigmatized as “zweite Sündengeneration.” Still, because her African roots are not very obvious, the social repercussions she experiences are “mild” compared to what Ika and Afra encounter.

Like Schultz, I believe, that Christian women have to move together and build one front against male oppression instead of inflicting a similar form of oppression upon other women:

White Christian women make up approximately 10% of the earth’s population. We have no chance to change anything on this planet unless we form coalitions with the other 40% of the female population and with a part of the oppressed male population. To build coalitions we do not have to love or even like each other, although this is, of course, a much more pleasant situation. Coalitions serve first of all the purpose to survive, and to attack and dissolve power structures. (Racism 250)

Coalitions would not only make sense in the fight against male oppression but would further important principles of sisterhood as well. After all, we are all related to each other.

All the prejudices that Ika and Afra are confronted with result from “white” people’s fear of “colored” skin. In fact, because of their skin color, Afro-Germans still are considered “foreigners” in their own country. As Schultz points out, racism within Germany “has to do with skin color and affects Black Germans just as much as immigrants of color. ‘Hostility towards foreigners’ is, therefore, also incorrect insofar as this hostility is not directed against white foreigners” (Racism 245). Afro-Germans have to bear the double burden of racism and the denial of acceptance within the society they belong to because of their skin color. Both Ika and Afra are

initially incapable of handling the racism they are confronted with and struggle to develop an identity on their own--an identity which is even harder to grasp since it is a double identity, and as such, rejected by German society. Campt describes the German elements of Afro-German identity as follows:

On the one hand, the experience of being denied acceptance as Germans based on their color leads them to feel that they have no place in the society of their birth. Thus they experience a form of socio-ideological marginalization in German society. On the other hand, the fact that these Afro-German women were born in Germany and brought up in its culture and traditions makes it impossible for them to deny the German elements of their identities, despite the various forms of cultural rejections they often face. (114)

Not only Ika is aware of this double identity, Eva Demski addresses it in her novel as well: “Ich sag dir, sie lassen sie den Affen machen und lachen sich tot, weil sie so schwarz ist und trotzdem bayrisch” (Demski 276). Other people talk about Afra and realize her double identity. But the question remains whether Afra is aware of it as well since she constantly attempts to deny her part-African heritage.

3.2. Childhood influences

As young children, Ika and Afra, like other children, have no color concept. Both “learn” about their “differentness” by the attitudes expressed by others. Both of them do not fit into the traditional concept of being “German” and thus are stigmatized as outsiders. Their experiences and existence as Afro-Germans should clarify the need for a change in the definition of what it means to be German: “Perhaps most significantly, the effects and implications of an Afro-German identity challenges who we think of as German *historically*, for it raises the question of who has been excluded from German history via the category and concept of ‘the German’” (Campt 126). A new “concept” has to be created that includes *all* Germans, regardless of complexion.

All three female characters have to deal with the conflict of visibility versus invisibility. Ika and Afra both long for “invisibility.” They do not want to be excluded from society because

of their darker complexion but instead long to fit in. Nivea, on the other hand, has this power of becoming “invisible,” due to her light complexion. Time and again she really enjoys this physical “advantage.” But sometimes Nivea almost despises her “whiteness,” in part because her mother always calls attention to it, thus forcing her to be “visible.” While larger parts of society are not interested in Ika’s or Afra’s personality because they are viewed as “outsiders,” Afra highlights her daughter’s “whiteness” so much that she becomes a public person whose real personality is hidden. Ika and Afra feel unimportant because they are ignored and devalued while Nivea feels unimportant because only her physical appearance seems to matter.

Ika receives strength from the loving relationship she has with her mother. She claims that her mother’s love made it possible for her to survive in a racist society, and later to fight racism. Afra, on the other hand, does not have a loving and caring relationship with her mother. She had to rely on herself right from the beginning. Thus, already at a young age, she starts to build an emotional wall around herself to protect her from the pain she experiences, be it inflicted by racism or the deprivation of love. She never learns to love or share her love, not even with her own daughter. Since everything she had ever liked had always been taken away from her, she is afraid to feel affection for Nivea. Additionally, Afra is unable to connect with any other person since she cannot accept her own “Black” self and thus cannot establish a bond to herself. I personally believe that as long as a person cannot love herself, she will not be able to have a loving relationship with another person because she will not regard herself as worthy of the love received.

Nivea starts out just like her mother. She builds up a wall around herself and distrusts everybody, which is what her mother tells her to do. Because of the lack of love that she experiences, she tries to buy love or retreats into her physical beauty as a way to deal with her emotional pain.

3.3. Challenging “white”-dominated perceptions of non-“white” women

While Ika is vehemently and incessantly challenging “white” women’s perceptions of non-“white” women, Nivea and Afra remain silent. Thus, both women stagnate in their attempts to define themselves. bell hooks confirms that “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 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” (Talking Back 9). “Talking back” and overtly questioning why “white” women act the way they do makes it much easier to overcome one’s insecurity than Afra’s method of maintaining indifference. Since Ika realizes the importance of “talking back,” she starts to challenge racist perceptions. She feels that she has to defend and define herself in public so that she is not defined by others. In speaking up she urges feminists to confront their own racism, which is immensely important for a women’s movement that should serve the needs of all women, not only a small percentage of them. Lennox confirms the importance of “minority” women joining the global women’s movement: “*Farbe bekennen* led to the formation of the Initiative Schwarze Deutsche, a political group that embraces all Germans of color. It also gave Afro-German women the confidence to make common cause with immigrant and Jewish women in Germany, to demand that white Christian feminists confront the racism of their own movement . . .” (Antiracist Feminism 226). Thus, Lennox stresses the fact that both sides have to participate, interact, and work together.

A stronger focus of the women’s movement on the concerns of women of color might have helped Afra and Nivea confront their pain. Instead of closing up and isolating themselves emotionally, they might have had the help they needed to overcome their lack of self-confidence and develop stronger personalities.

3.4. Shared Afro-German identity

Ika and Afra both grow up without having connections to other Afro-Germans. As discussed, this is nothing unusual for children born in Germany in the decade after World War II. Adelson writes: “the children of so-called mixed racial heritage who were born in the 1940s and 1950s frequently did grow up in isolation from one another, often not seeing another person of color until they had reached adulthood” (219). Because of this isolation, Afro-Germans have a hard time developing their own identity, especially since it involves coming to terms with their mixed ancestry: “The most commonly shared experience of Afro-German women is the isolation

that results from socialization in a predominantly all-white environment with virtually no affirmation of a ‘double-identity’” (Obermeier 175). While Ika’s father is a very important link to her “Black” heritage, Afra has internalized society’s prejudices against people of color so much that she despises both her father, whom she has never met, and herself. When Afra was growing up, she longed for a person who cared for her. Later on--as a result of countless experiences of abuse--she decides it is best to rely only on herself.

While meeting her father eventually becomes the missing link to Ika’s African ancestry, Nivea is constantly searching for her African roots as well, though not through her father but through her mother, Afra. Nivea also longs for a father or a loving person in general, since she does not really feel loved by her mother. Her situation is the reverse of Afra’s. While Afra cannot identify with her “white” mother, Nivea, who looks “white,” cannot identify with Afra. The two of them do not look at all alike and additionally Afra denies her part-African heritage. Thus, Nivea is missing both a “white” and a “Black” role model.

Ika is the only one of the three who establishes contacts with the Afro-German community. Eva Demski’s characters do not even mention this community. But Nivea collects anything she can find concerning her part-African and part-German heritage--a heritage that is symbolized in the quilt. Nivea tries to contact other people of part-African ancestry such as Absalom and her musicians in order to define her “Black” and “white” heritage.

Ika indeed becomes part of the Afro-German community. This proves to be crucial for her development of critical consciousness since she cannot only share common pain but for the first time in her life is treated with respect and dignity. The supportive community helps her to fight against societal restrictions and her own former indifference, which, like Afra’s, had been prompted by the widespread racism directed against her. Ika manages to overcome her self-hatred while Afra is never able to do this. Nivea, on the other hand, does not look for any connections to an Afro-German community but she establishes a sense of shared identity via contact with African-American musicians, like Absalom.

3.5. Quest for self-determination

With regard to the topics discussed thus far, the characters’ experiences have been very

similar. The degree to which they achieve self-determination, however, differs from one person to the next.

Afra establishes a more or less successful way to live her life. However, she never looks for information about her African ancestry or other Afro-Germans. She completely internalizes the various forms of racism she had to experience and thus despises her complexion and denies her “Black” cultural heritage. Karin Obermeier describes some effects of racism on Afro-German children that relate to Afra’s development:

Some common individual reactions to the various forms of external and internalized racism have been/are expressed through: (1) self-hatred, often exemplified through the common occurrence of skin diseases among Afro-German children; (2) the longing for an environment without real or perceived differences; (3) the search for another, more tolerant, friendlier heritage, usually in the idealized persona of an Afro-American or African father; (4) rebellion against a (most often white German) mother, who projects her own fears and ostracism onto her child, or against ‘well-meaning’ foster parents, who seek to protect their ‘half-breed’ (‘Mischlingskind’) against a racist society by a strict and often harsh upbringing. (175)

Afra clearly manifests self-hatred and even though she has no skin diseases she does develop an eating disorder and becomes a very heavyset woman. Even her daughter despises her because she is so “fat.” Afra’s obesity might be a way to compensate for lack of love and devotion from within the family as well as the lack of respect she received from the larger society. Additionally, she establishes for herself a “dreamworld” and longs to be “invisible,” or like everyone else. Since her self-hatred is very strong, she is unable to search for her African heritage. Also Afra’s mother projects the ostracism she experiences on Afra and even blames her for it. Thus Afra as a grown-up reacts rebelliously towards her mother and retreats from her family ties. She tries to maintain her stability by becoming tough, accumulating money, and doing things “her way” without considering potential losses. She hides her hurt behind a strong facade, pretending to be indifferent in order to survive. She neither develops a healthy self-concept nor challenges racial stereotypes. Her development should make readers wake up and question whether their attitudes

and views contribute to the negative self-image that some Afro-Germans have.

Nivea is not as “strong” as her mother and cannot keep up Afra’s emotional toughness. She cannot handle self-denial. Instead she is looking for an identity that is based in her family’s history. Thus, she has to deal first with the pain inflicted upon her mother before she can understand Afra and forgive her. Forgiving her mother is important for Nivea in order to come to terms with the lack of love and emotional security she experienced throughout her childhood. Nivea’s own path toward critical consciousness only begins once she has started to articulate her needs. The story ends when she realizes that what really matters is how she defines herself and not how others expect her to be. Whether she is able to live according to her new-found self-concept and whether she develops the strength to address and thus challenge society’s racist perceptions remains unanswered. But in the end, she definitely acknowledges and embraces both her African and German heritage.

Ika is the only one who really calls on both herself and the larger German society to develop critically. Thus, the Afro-German community becomes an important part of her own identity. Tina Campt describes this “Afro-German identity” as an identity that moves back and forth between both cultural heritages:

The position of Afro-German women, simultaneously on the margins of German culture and thoroughly permeated by it, and between traditional conceptions of black and white racial identifications, has led to their developing a cultural and ideological ‘agility’. By ‘agility’ I mean a capacity for movement among a variety of cultural and ethnic identifications, a versatility which enables these women to resist both complete marginalization and assimilation within German society.

(116)

Ika Hügel-Marshall occupies a position between two ethnicities. This empowers her to question racial and cultural biases, as defined by the dominant culture. She shows the readers the desirability of claiming an identity that embraces both cultures, without privileging one over the other. By establishing her own Afro-German identity and sharing her experiences and development with others, Ika not only encourages other Afro-Germans to follow her example, but urges the rest of the society to acknowledge the Afro-German presence in Germany. Such

acknowledgment is, however, only the first step toward developing critical consciousness. The next step is to construct the history of Afro-Germans. Camp explains the need for an Afro-German history by comparing the development of an African-American identity with the development of an Afro-German identity:

But one of the most significant differences between the experiences of African-Americans and Afro-Germans is the fact that in the United States, there exists an established history of African-Americans that grounds this community. It is this history that plays a decisive role in the construction of a sense of ethnic identity among African-Americans. In Germany the initiation of the process of writing and reclaiming the history of Afro-Germans is only in its beginning stages, but the work of Opitz and Oguntoye in *Showing our Colors* is a significant contribution to this process. The role that this yet-to-be-written history will play in the construction of Afro-German identities will be no doubt as decisive as it has been for African-Americans. (125)

After an Afro-German history has been written, it needs to become part of the school curriculum so that future generations will realize and acknowledge the diversity within Germany. If students learn about the assets of this diversity, we will move closer toward a unified society. Some people disagree with my ideal of a diverse society within Germany. Their arguments are that the “German” culture will get lost by intermingling with other cultures. However, especially after unification, German citizens have the duty to re-think and re-evaluate what being “German” means: “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, [Afro-German] texts . . . provide a basis for an urgently needed reassessment of what constitutes ‘the German’” (Crawley 79). Afro-Germans as well as other minority-Germans are a living example of Germany’s diversity. Karein Goertz confirms the need for an “up-date” on “Germanness” by arguing that, “Apart from the fact that cultures are ‘necessarily plural, always coexisting with other cultures and always internally diversified,’⁴ the particular reality of present-day Germany

⁴Here Goertz quotes Russell Berman’s Cultural Studies in Modern Germany: History, Representation, and Nationhood (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1993. 11.)

renders the vision of an ethnically homogeneous society completely out of date” (69).

Conclusion

Throughout human civilization, stereotypes about human beings that look, behave or think differently than the majority have prevailed. Since stereotypes often reflect and accompany more serious forms of prejudice, it is imperative that their use be challenged. Yet to fight against stereotypes, one first needs to become aware of them, and this involves recognizing which of one's own perceptions are unfair or simplistic characterizations of others. One way to reach a greater awareness of one's own prejudices and the debilitating effect they have on others is to read so-called "minority literature." Writers who are not part of society's mainstream often reflect in their literature instances of prejudice that they or other members of their minority group have encountered. Readers of such literature are placed in the protagonists' situation and experience how they see and feel the world and the behavior of their fellow human beings. As a result, even "mainstream" readers may begin to empathize with the protagonists and thus be stimulated to re-evaluate their own perceptions.

Eva Demski's Afra: Roman in fünf Bildern and Ika Hügel-Marshall's Daheim unterwegs: Ein deutsches Leben provide insights into many of the stereotypes, problems and hostilities Afro-Germans face. The readers follow Afra, Nivea and Ika throughout their lives and are confronted with all of their problems. They will notice that especially Ika and Afra--as "visible" first generation Afro-Germans--encounter similar prejudices. While Ika manages to overcome and confront society, Afra retreats completely in order to survive. The readers observe that Afra never really succeeds in accepting herself the way she is. But Afra cannot be blamed for her "weakness," on the contrary, *her* specific way of dealing with an oppressive society must make readers more aware of how helpless people can become when exposed to racist attitudes, and how destructive this experience is for the development of their personality. Thus, readers should hear both Afra's silent cry for help and Ika's challenge to our firmly established set of wrong truths.

We, as attentive readers and members of the global society, have the obligation to amend these lies. We, as people of all ethnicities, have to initiate a change in how dark-complexioned people are depicted. This would be a change from the current portrayal of people of African or

part-African ancestry as being uneducated or inferior, a misconception that we should not accept just because it has been passed down to us. Let us recognize and acknowledge that all over the world there exist both educated and uneducated people and let us recognize that skin-color does not provide an accurate means of determining inferiority or superiority. Positive role models are immensely important to develop a positive self-concept, and they are especially needed in many parts of the world in order to correct wrong perceptions of African or part-African people. Furthermore, those who are members of the educated “white” society, need to recognize that they are always the ones getting the attention, and that it is, generally speaking, “Blacks” who need to be listened to.

History plays another important role in shaping critical consciousness. We have to acknowledge the contributions of Africans to Europe and particularly to Germany. We have to realize and accept that Germany began to rank people as inferior or superior when colonies in Africa were established. The purpose then was to devalue Africans in order to maintain power over them. Unfortunately, the desire to have power over others is still prevalent. It is necessary for everybody to participate in the active process of challenging any form of oppression, because silence is not value neutral. There is no neutral place from which to observe evil. Hence Josephine Donovan and Carol J. Adams are right when they proclaim that “To observe in silence is to be complicit” (8). If we don’t challenge racism, we further it.

Especially *Afra* shows the effects of racism when it is not challenged. Though *Afra* is a fictional character, what she experiences resembles the social reality of many Afro-Germans. For certainly people in Germany who do not look like “traditional” Germans are marginalized and regarded as outsiders. And exactly this racism has to be opposed. According to Karin Obermeier, “The emerging cultural and political consciousness of Afro-Germans as well as other indigenous ‘minority’ populations throughout Europe is bringing the problems and challenges of racism home” (179). Thus, in my opinion the significance of establishing an Afro-German literary movement must not be underestimated, since it helps to make people aware of prevailing racist attitudes. But non-fictional records about Afro-German history are just as important. Germany has to realize that there exists something other than “German-Germans.” According to Leslie Adelson, only a few literary publications by Afro-Germans and/or about Afro-Germans have

been marketed: “In contrast to, say, Turkish-German or German-Jewish culture, that of the growing community of Afro-Germans is known to an even smaller public sphere and has yet to attract much critical attention in academic circles” (226). Afra: Roman in fünf Bildern and Daheim unterwegs: Ein deutsches Leben reflect the efforts of this growing community. They make the readers aware of the inequities and injustices Afro-German people have to face. Obermeier explains the importance of Afro-German literature in her comments on Farbe bekennen: Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte:

Farbe bekennen, a unique combination of personal histories, poems, group discussions, and scholarly texts, is the first published account by Afro-German women of the historical and contemporary aspects of their experiences as ‘outsiders’ in a white society. This is a volume that breaks many silences: the silence of isolation, the silence of non- or misidentification, the silence of self-denial. (172)

Eva Demski’s and Ika Hügel-Marshall’s works break these silences of isolation, non- or misidentification and self-denial. Hopefully they will encourage more and more traditional Germans to start thinking about the advantages of multiculturalism for their everyday lives and to stop treating people who look different than they do as outsiders. I agree with Goertz, who states that “This hybrid, multicultural identity is both a source of creativity and self-empowerment, as well as a critical position from which ideologically rigid constructions of nation, race, ethnicity and culture can be questioned” (85).

These two books allow us to see that the larger society imposes severe restrictions upon the development of individuals. By being open to the messages contained in Eva Demski’s and Ika Hügel-Marshall’s works, we prepare ourselves for the efforts needed to make changes within society possible. Critical consciousness needs to be developed by everyone, not only people of African or part-African descent.

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