

Black Female Identity in Contemporary Germany: How does the Black female identity in 2023 compare to that of 1986?

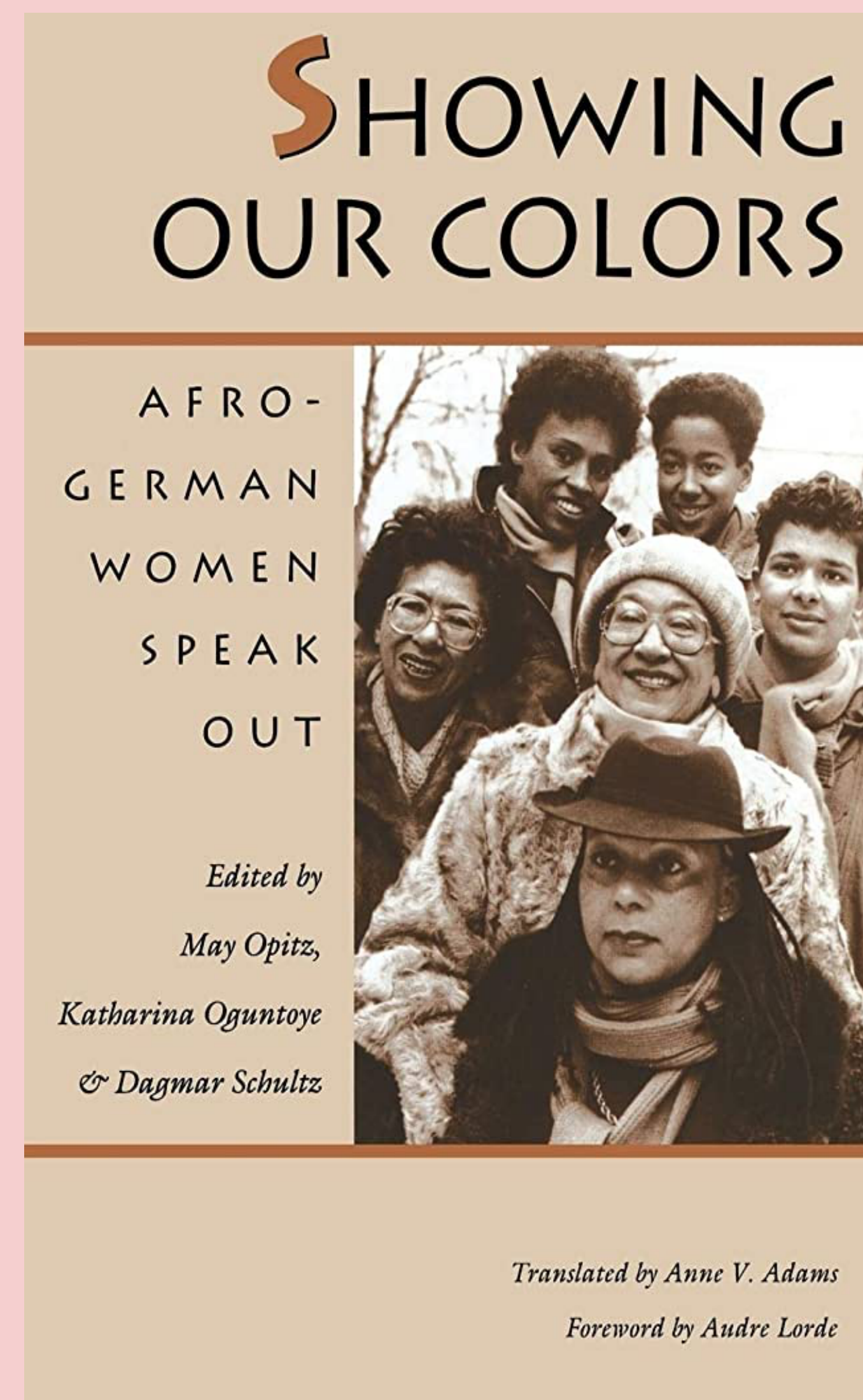


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Background

For centuries the Black female experience in Germany has consisted of hardship, ostracization, and a complicated understanding of self. Until 1986, no literature on this niche existed in Germany. With the help of American activist Audre Lord, Black women were brought together to share essays and poetry regarding their lives in a book titled *Farbe Bekennen* (Showing our Colors). The foreword asks: "Who are they, these German women of the Diaspora? ... Where do our paths intersect?" I wish to extend this questionnaire into today's world and develop a narrative for a group that has rarely received the attention it deserves.



Methodology & Metadata

For this project I am comparing written and oral data from the time periods around 1986 and 2023. I search for the main components of identity for each period and organize them by theme. Testaments from Black German women both then and now display trauma, perceptions, and emotions that provide insight into their identities. By identity I mean a set of characteristics that help define a person.

Identity Components 1986

Identity from difference

It means that part of what defines identity is the fact that Afro-German women are united simply by not being the status quo. This is arguably a major part of what separates Afro-German women from their white counterparts and helps them unite from the shared experience.

Identity is intrinsic

Identity being intrinsic means that it is something you are born with and something that is understood rather than decided, as it stems from the circumstances of one's existence. Identity is complex, and what can bring peace can also bring pain.

Internal Perception ≠ External

Internal perception of Afro-German's identity often does not match what they are perceived as. Though you may be German, speak German, have German parents, and have never left the country, you can still be perceived as not German. The implications of this are that Afro-German women, regardless of their claims and attempts to blend in, will never fit that mold.

German language as a barrier to portraying depth of Afro-Germans

German language is being weaponized for surface-level descriptors like skin color which places Afro-Germans on a color scale, one which has hierarchies. It also acts as a barrier because it does not allow Black people to categorize their experiences.

Identity Components 2023

Identity can be empowering

What is so beautiful now is that there are avenues for women to connect with one another and find beauty in their stories. Empowerment can be seen in the prioritizing self-peace and deciding to live for yourself rather than to serve others and seeing others with the same identity do the same.

Identity can be expressed

We now have larger platforms for expression. More Black women and girls are choosing and feeling comfortable with wearing natural hairstyles. Expressive art has also been a growing movement and can be seen on larger scales in big cities.

Carrying this identity means carrying trauma

Our combined trauma has caught up with us. We can look back and view the histories of our existence and realize our pain. Grada Kilomba states that "racism is a ghost that our society hasn't dealt with yet." It is an ongoing reality for every Black German woman, regardless of the extent of which it has been experienced by us.

Our identity needs a home

Our identity isn't the problem, structures that don't accept them are. Though we may claim Germany and possibly the lands of our parents and ancestors, nowhere feels completely right. The location of home is not clear to us, but the need for belonging is clear, and today, we search for that.

Conclusion

Researching the Black German female identity moves Black Germans one step closer to healing from post-colonial trauma and claiming autonomy over our own narrative. The themes I have found suggest a shift in how identity can be understood from being more suppressed to now being more initiative.

Future Work

In the future I want to expand my research into the nuances of Black German women. We do not all receive our Blackness, femininity, and our German identities from the same sources, which can implicate how our identities impact us. Some of us are adopted, have immigrant parents, have deep roots in Germany, or are part of the LGBTQ community. Our differences make us beautiful and are worth researching.

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