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Introduction

In April 1885 a brief article in the *Teltower Kreisblatt* reported the return to Berlin of the German Consul in Cameroon, Eduard Schmidt.[1] Accompanying Schmidt for the duration of his home leave was a young Cameroonian prince, who was said to have been brought up in the Christian faith and was able to understand German. According to the article the pair drew considerable attention (particularly female) as they took a carriage through the city centre. Later reports named the prince as Ebobse Dido, the then youngest son of Epee Ekwalla Deido (Jim Ekwalla), the traditional leader of the Deido quarter in the coastal town of Douala.[2] Only ten months after the proclamation of German protection over Cameroon, the newspaper speculated that this was the first Cameroonian to visit the 'Fatherland'. Dido was certainly one of the first German colonial subjects to reach Germany, but a mobile population of Africans and African Americans was already becoming visible and increasingly attracting public attention. As early as April 1882 the same newspaper had reported that Berlin had a '*Neger* colony' of sixty people from both the United States and Africa.[3] According to the article many of them were not only fluent in German, but even spoke in Berlin dialect; three men were married to 'white girls' and their children were said to be doing well at school. While Dido's brief stay in Berlin received little press coverage, two years later news of the arrival of another Cameroonian, Alfred Bell (Belle Ndumbe), to undertake an apprenticeship in Altona featured in a number of regional and local newspapers throughout

[1] 'Konsul Schmidt aus Kamerun', *Teltower Kreisblatt*, 21 April 1885, p. 3.
[2] Section 'Steglitz', *Teltower Kreisblatt*, 4 July 1885, p. 4. For Cameroonian place-names we use the current, French, spellings throughout.
[3] 'Die Berliner Negerkolonie', *Teltower Kreisblatt*, 11 March 1882, p. 2. The story was picked up in the United States, see 'Minor Doings across the Sea', *New York Times*, 1 April 1882, p. 4. An article in the same newspaper some five years later suggested that there were now twenty-three men of African heritage in the city: 'Berlin's Negro Colony', *New York Times*, 12 November 1887, p. 4.

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Germany.[4] By 1890 147 Africans were registered in Hamburg and in 1903 the *New York Times* remarked that there were around 200 residents of African origin in Berlin.[5] In 1902 the *Berliner Illustrirte* newspaper reported: 'Everyday here in Berlin new dark faces appear, some of whom indeed come from the German colonies.'[6]

Young men with dark faces who hailed from Germany's new African colonies became the founding generation for a substantial black presence in Germany. For two centuries or more, individual Blacks had sojourned at German courts and universities or in German cities as exceptional individuals (though of widely ranging status and provenance).[7] Once a German nation state was formed in 1871, its emergence as a maritime and colonial power generated a metropolitan black population that displayed the potential for continuous growth. Coming mainly from Cameroon, Togo and East Africa, and very occasionally from South West Africa, colonial subjects formed the core of this population, which saw several thousand passing through Germany before 1914 and probably numbered up to 1,000 at any one time. And at the same time, the popular media which flourished under the very conditions of rapid economic and social development that fuelled Germany's maritime project articulated metropolitan interest in and curiosity about these new neighbours. These media produced and reproduced in print the vision of a collective black presence as well as refining visual and verbal stereotypes of Blacks themselves.[8]

Up to this point, the story of Germany's black population is not very different from that of the black presence in other European states that had African colonies. France and Britain, Germany's principal comparators and competitors, had larger empires that had been channelling people of colour into their metropolitan territories for a much longer time – not least through their massive and direct involvement in the transatlantic slave trade and colonial slave economies. But in both countries the arrival of people from sub-Saharan Africa in the wake of the late colonial settlement opened a new chapter in the history of the black presence. Numbers grew, fed simultaneously by continuous in-migration

[4] See press clippings in BArch R1001 4297, p. 31.
[5] Möhle, 'Von Duala nach Altona', p. 17; 'Stories of American Lynchings Inspire Assaults on Negroes in German Capital', *New York Times*, 4 October 1903, p. 4. The *Times* article reported that a 'Black and White Society (Schwartz [*sic*]-Weiss Verein)' protested against attacks on Blacks in Berlin inspired by reports from the US.
[6] 'Dunkle Existenzen: Aus dem Berufsleben der Berliner Neger', *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*, 13 June 1902, p. 40.
[7] For an early and still authoritative overview, see Martin, *Schwarze Teufel, edle Mohren*.
[8] On the dissemination of visual stereotypes in the print media, see Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire*.

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and natural increase, and forms of collective life evolved as physical and occupational proximity (often the result of white racist exclusionary practices) threw together people who had different origins but who shared the fact of being identified as black by metropolitan society. Successive waves or major episodes of black immigration, like the arrival of the Windrush generation of West Indians in post-war Britain or the post-colonial influx of legal and illegal migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers since the 1960s, have added new (and often conflictual) dimensions to this history without breaking a continuity that can be traced in the public archives and in family memories, as well as being asserted and celebrated in the writings of black activists and intellectuals. Indeed one of the features of the black experience in the British and French imperial contexts has been the emergence of 'organic intellectuals' speaking as and for black people in the respective metropolitan societies and building institutional and discursive bridges between black people in different parts of the world.[9]

This continuity is what seems to be missing from the black German experience. Rather, the modern history of black people in Germany is notoriously *discontinuous*. The colonial generation and their families were dispersed, reduced in numbers and largely forgotten by the 1950s. Of the pre-World War Two generations, the 'black Germans' whose experience left traces in public memory and historiography were the several hundred children fathered by Africans among the French troops that occupied the Rhineland following World War One; they are remembered as the victims of Nazi Germany's first measure of mass sterilisation.[10] In the wake of the American occupation of Germany after World War Two some 5,000 children were born to German women and African-American soldiers. Those among these *Besatzungskinder* who were not adopted by African-American families grew up in white families or in children's homes in West Germany, often in relative isolation from other black people.[11] From the 1960s onwards the international interests of both West and East Germany encouraged the presence of new cohorts of African professionals and students, and East Germany also recruited

[9] On the growth of African populations in Britain see among others, Fryer, *Staying Power*; Killingray (ed.), *Africans in Britain*; Green, *Black Edwardians*; Frost, *Work and Community*; Tabili, *'We Ask for British Justice'*, esp. pp. 135–60. Historical writing on Black France has given less attention to the fabric of everyday life and local community; for some approaches see Fletcher, 'City, Nation and Empire'; Boittin, *Colonial Metropolis*; Boittin, '"Among them complicit"?'; Blanchard, Deroo and Manceran, *Le Paris noir*.

[10] Pommerin, *Sterilisierung der Rheinlandbastarde*.

[11] Lemke Muniz de Faria, *Zwischen Fürsorge und Ausgrenzung*; Fehrenbach, *Race after Hitler*.

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thousands of contract workers from Mozambique and Angola – on the assumption in both Germanies that their presence would be temporary.[12] In 2010 the Federal Statistical Office reported that there were some 500,000 people of African origin in Germany, of whom nearly 300,000 (mainly adults) had not acquired German citizenship.[13]

A key moment in the construction of this series of arrivals and departures as a coherent history was the publication in 1986 of *Farbe bekennen* (translated as *Showing Our Colors*) – a volume of narratives, critical essays and interviews on the experience of being black in Germany. Its making is characteristic equally of the diffuse heritage to which black Germans lay claim and of the hunger for collective narrative that accompanied the coming to consciousness of a generation. It documents an encounter between women of the post-World War Two generation whose fathers were variously African and African-American and who define themselves in the subtitle of the German edition as 'Afro-German women on the trail of their history'. The phrase 'Afro-German', with its explicit echo of 'Afro-American', signalled the beginning of a black German political movement; the 1980s also witnessed the creation of the first associations of black Germans, and this movement itself depended on and worked to reproduce through argument and practice the sense of a common interest rooted in history.[14] *Farbe bekennen* not only offered the first outline history of Blacks and colour-based racism in modern Germany, but it also reinstated retrospectively an interrupted genealogy, through interviews with the daughters of two men of the first, colonial generation. That book can thus be seen as the foundational text for a generation of empirical historical research on the black presence in Germany.[15]

Black Germany builds on that research, our own and others', but it aims to do more than synthesise what has already been done, and that has everything to do with the questions of internal cohesion and potential continuity that the work of the 1980s opened up. Our title is both assertive and interrogative. It invokes the Black Britain and Black France (and indeed the Black Atlantic) of recent activist and critical historiography, in order to raise the possibility of a Black Germany and to ask what

[12] Döring and Rüchel (eds.), *Freundschaftsbande und Beziehungskisten*; Schmelz, *Bildungsmigranten*; Kuck, '"Für den sozialistischen Aufbau ihrer Heimat"?'; Dennis, 'Asian and African Workers in the Niches of Society'.

[13] Statistisches Bundesamt, *Bevölkerung und Erwerbstätigkeit*.

[14] On the actual and imaginative dialectic between African-American and African-German identities, see Campt, 'African German/African American'. The African-American poet Audre Lorde contributed an essay to *Farbe bekennen*.

[15] This began with the publication of the master's thesis of one of its authors: Oguntoye, *Eine Afro-Deutsche Geschichte*.

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became of it. Evidence of connections among individuals over space and time seems critical to the vision of a black history, and it is striking that three decades of meticulous and imaginative research with black German subjects at its centre has achieved a *collective* account largely by accumulating individual case studies in anthologies or monographic biographies.[16] One of the aims of the research underpinning this book, then, was to fill what we saw to be a gap in the historiography by asking how these individuals related to one another – and in that sense to see whether we could see German Blacks as a living collective rather than a collection of lives. At the centre of the book is an effort to make visible the relationships among them and between them and other Germans – ties of kinship, affinity, neighbourhood and association – that should enable us to understand what *might have* grown from the founding presence of the colonial generation, as well as to gain a more rounded understanding of individual lives and actions. That is, where up to now we have taken a broken history as read, this book looks at the sources of possible continuity in the connected lives of individuals in order to better understand *how* it was broken.

As our subtitle indicates, in asking after connections, relationships and collective trajectories, and with the social history of other black immigrant populations in mind, we were seeking to test whether it is possible to characterise the undeniable black presence in Germany in terms of community. 'Community' is a word that does not translate easily into German (or even French);[17] as applied to the lives of black people in Europe it invokes an ideal type. It draws heavily on features of the African-American experience and the way it has been narrated since the 1960s, when the vision of an embattled but cohesive urban neighbourhood emerged as a response to discourses of social pathology in public and academic discussion of urban riots. In Britain, the discussion of black communities can be dated from a comparable moment of contest, following the riots of the early 1980s in English cities. Critical thinking about the parameters of black community intersected with a scholarly interest in the relevance of community to the politics and culture of the working class, and in particular in the ways in which

[16] Even the recent monographic study by Peter Martin and Christina Alonzo, *Im Netz der Moderne*, offers a collage rather than an in-depth study, placing heavy emphasis on the dramatic and relatively well-rehearsed themes of political mobilisation and persecution under National Socialism. Other representative monographs, articles and edited volumes are cited below in individual chapters and in the bibliography.

[17] 'Community' is increasingly used untranslated in Afro-German activist circles; AntiDiskriminierungsBüro (ADB) (ed.), *TheBlackBook*, has a section on political and cultural initiatives headed 'Schwarze Community'.

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'community' could act as a basis for or even the object of progressive social movements, reinforcing class consciousness or serving as an alternative point of reference for solidarity and self-defence. In Britain it also coincided with a critical approach to public anxieties about street crime in which discourses of race and racialised urban space played a significant role.[18] Following Anthony Cohen's characterisation of community as a 'largely mental construct, whose "objective" manifestations in locality or ethnicity give it credibility', Paul Gilroy's 1987 breakthrough study *'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack'* argued in detail for its salience as a social reality among British Blacks. His account starts from the 'mental' phenomenon – the self-conscious deployment of a rhetoric of community in the riots and their aftermath – but also observes that the idea of community is rooted in the materialities of neighbourhood, daily experiences of face-to-face communication and involvement in kinship and associational networks.

As Gilroy pointed out then, communities however articulated can be divided and contested in practice. 'Black' is a social construct that comprehends people with a variety of backgrounds and interests, and the idea of a *black* community that emerged in the crisis is a political one. It is at least as much an acknowledgement of antagonism between Blacks as a group and the majority white society as it is a statement of internal solidarity.[19] Accordingly, work on black immigrant history which has used the term 'community' to signal both everyday networks and associations and their expression in collective identities often distinguishes – as Diane Frost does in her study of Kru seafarers who settled in Liverpool – between historic ethnic and occupational communities and a wider 'black community' which is structured by external perceptions of 'blackness' as well as by internal practices and articulations of identity.[20] The inherently political sense of this use of 'community' means that it can take on a normative character; it excludes as well as includes, and when paired with 'black' it may be used as a measure of who is really black or whose black experience counts.[21] The possibility of articulating new and

[18] See Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (ed.), *The Empire Strikes Back*.
[19] Gilroy, *'There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack'*, pp. 223–50. The quote from Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, p. 109, is on p. 235.
[20] Frost, *Work and Community*, pp. 187–96. See Lawless, *From Ta'izz to Tyneside*; Chessum, *From Immigrants to Ethnic Minority*.
[21] Brown, *Dropping Anchor, Setting Sail*, explores the ways in which the assertion of community undercut solidarity in practice in a city where self-identification as 'black' in the face of institutionalised white racism has a long history. On the ambivalence of 'black community' for individuals – especially those of 'mixed' heritage – who are perceived as 'not black enough', see also Tate, 'Translating Melancholia'.

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more inclusive models of black community has been the object of critical work since the 1990s.[22]

We use the term here not in a normative but in a descriptive manner. We take the model sketched above in relation to Britain and France, of a dynamic set in motion by high colonialism that involves an interplay of demographic growth, geographical concentration, social networks and sustained interactions, self-articulation as black and address to a global black population, as a starting point for asking whether we can find the traces in Germany of a comparable evolution from presence to community and from black identity to black politics. Approaching black German history with this comparative question about the prospects for continuity also allows us to reflect from a new angle on the features and peculiarities that perplex and preoccupy us as students of German national history (or of the society made largely by white Germans).

In order to do this, we have adopted the strategy of tracing the careers and experiences of a particular group among the founding generation, between the time of their arrival in the metropole and roughly the 1960s. Our study focuses on those, like Ebobse Dido and Alfred Bell, introduced at the beginning of this introduction, who were born or grew up in Cameroon when it was a German colony. Cameroon, a territory extending some 300 miles east and over 500 miles north from the port city of Douala on Africa's west coast, was one of four African territories where German control was formally acknowledged by international treaty in 1885. In that year the Berlin Conference, seeking to bring some order to the 'scramble for Africa' in which the European powers were engaged, ratified a set of treaties that had been made in the previous year between Germany's representatives and native leaders in the coastal settlements of what then came to be called Cameroon, Togo, German South West Africa (now Namibia) and German East Africa (now Tanzania). Echoing the terms of the original treaties, the General Act that concluded the Conference gave each of these territories the status of protectorate; Germany's continued right to rule was contingent on the 'protector' power maintaining a local administration. 'Native tribes' were to be preserved, and the 'improvement of the conditions of their moral and material well-being' to be attended to. The promotion of the economic development of the territory was also envisaged. In the case of Cameroon this meant modernising the port and shipping facilities, increasing the production of plant-based raw materials, especially palm oil, and opening up the hinterlands to exploitation through infrastructure

[22] Stovall, 'Harlem-sur-Seine', provides an excellent summary of this discussion.

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developments. The terms of the Conference licensed the exercise of military and police powers, as German administration was extended inland from the coastal trading posts and the building of a railway into the interior called for the forcible recruitment of labour.[23]

Because of the size of the territory, its opening to the western oceans and the ambitions of a cosmopolitan elite which we discuss below, natives of Cameroon constituted the largest single group among colonial Africans present in Germany in the early twentieth century. They were also prominent in the associational and political initiatives that were among the first documented manifestations of the black presence in modern Germany to come to scholarly attention.[24] We have been able to identify 285 individuals who made the journey from the Cameroon territory to Germany; the 70 whom we know to have stayed for an extended period and to have been present in Germany after 1914 make up the core of our narrative.

The decision to focus on Cameroonians may require explanation in the light of our claim to be writing about 'Black Germany'. The strategy of following the fortunes of a particular group of people presented itself as a way both to direct the search for elusive data and to limit and structure what turned out to be a very large body of information about individuals. More important, it makes it possible to trace the growth and extension over time of the networks of association that both define individual horizons of survival and identity and enable collective action. Finding and understanding the connections between individuals as they existed at any one point and developed over time calls for exploring individual lives in some depth and detail; the everyday forms of association and sociability that are self-evident to the subjects often elude observers (whether contemporaries or historians) more interested in their public personas and actions. This only works, though, insofar as we understand where our subjects were coming from in the most precise possible terms, and that dictated the choice of individuals who had generation and point of origin in common.

To return to our title, the notion of Black Germany (or black Germans, or German Blacks) hypothesises that our subjects have 'become black' and raises the question of how this happened.[25] The starting focus on

[23] On the colonial history of Cameroon see Ardener, *Kingdom on Mount Cameroon*; Austen and Derrick, *Middlemen*.

[24] See Chapter 6. The earliest scholarship on African-German political movements was produced in the GDR – notably by Adolf Rüger – largely because the Colonial Office files were held in archives there.

[25] The phrase is borrowed from Michelle Wright, *Becoming Black*, which shares our comparative interest, though her work focuses on textual evidence for subjectivity rather than social and material processes.

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Cameroonians – a particular group – allows us to trace in some detail the incomplete and contested process through which individuals of varied backgrounds, languages and religions, who shared little apart from their African origins, came to be 'black' – or to be seen by others and to articulate themselves in terms of the skin colour they shared with people who had come from quite different places with quite distinct expectations. Even 'Cameroonian' is a problematic category. Our subjects arrived in Germany as Christians or Muslims, speakers of Duala or Beti or Ewondo or Batanga, from the coastal towns or the up-country sultanates (though not in equal numbers). At the point where our narrative begins it was Europeans who identified them with a single territory, 'Kamerun', created by a combination of German military force and international treaties and with a name deriving from the Portuguese.[26] But by the end of World War One we find them speaking of and for Cameroon, at the same time as we observe them associating and politicking with Africans and people of African descent from other parts of the world. Over subsequent decades the distinctions between their situation and forms of self-articulation and those of other people of African descent become increasingly insignificant, so that occasionally, and more often as the narrative progresses, we widen the lens to take in the experiences of Blacks who were not of Cameroonian or even German colonial origin.

Forms of public self-articulation are central to our use of a second key term: we use the terms 'diaspora' and 'diasporic' in this book in the sense of a self-consciously transformative identification with other people of colour around the world. This definition structures the account of politics in Chapter 6, whose title invokes Brent Hayes Edwards' emphasis on the construction of a diasporic vision of the world through practices of translation.[27] But 'becoming black' in this sense is always part of a dialogic engagement not only with other Blacks but with racialising discourses in society at large, and that can involve active processes of appropriation and answering back. One index of the process of racialisation on which we comment further below is the use of the term *Neger* in everyday and official language to characterise people of African descent irrespective of their origins; the parallel term in French, which would become an enforced second language for some of our subjects, is *nègre*. Cognate with both 'negro' and 'nigger', these words had complex national histories and could be deployed in relatively neutral, descriptive

[26] For historical studies of the conquest, settlement and geography of Cameroon: Ardener, *Kingdom on Mount Cameroon*.
[27] Edwards, *Practice of Diaspora*.

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ways; *Neger* was particularly ambiguous, since in Germany the use of 'Black' (*Schwarze/r*) as a noun was practically unknown before the late twentieth century (while *noir* was established as a neutral or philanthropic usage in France by the late eighteenth). By the 1920s the pejorative or abusive sense of the terms had become sufficiently well established that it was an acutely political gesture when first a French anti-colonial and anti-racist organisation and then its German sister organisation adopted *nègre/Neger* into their names to signal the common oppression and common interest of all people of African descent.[28]

That said, a developed political consciousness of this kind constitutes only one, and by no means the only possible or plausible outcome of the process of becoming black or even building community in a majority white society. There is another way of understanding 'diaspora' that informs this book. In complementary approaches to the history of black Europeans that reflect the impact of feminism and gender studies on black studies since the 1980s, Jacqueline Nassy Brown and Tina Campt have elaborated a vision of diaspora that draws our attention away from global interactions. They offer a critical perspective on James Clifford's challenge to understand comparatively 'the specific dynamics of dwelling/traveling' in migrant lives, and his characterisation (following Gilroy) of diaspora discourse as something that 'maintain[s] identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference' and the celebratory refiguring of mobility that has followed the reception of Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, inasmuch as they explore in different ways the implications of finding oneself in one place. Brown, who has done ethnographic work on the Liverpool black community, invites us to think about diaspora in terms of both location and wanting, writing of 'situated encounters in which people actually express a desire for connection', a desire which is based on the acknowledgement of difference as well as what they have in common.[29] A pioneer in the historical study of gendered subjectivities among black Germans, Tina Campt has most recently offered the terms 'diasporic dwelling' and

[28] The Comité / Ligue de défense de la race nègre and the Liga zur Verteidigung der Negerrasse are discussed at length in Chapter 6. On discussions of the use of the term *nègre* among Francophone black activists, see Boittin, 'Black in France'; Miller, *Nationalists and Nomads*, pp. 30–41 (with particular reference to Lamine and Léopold Sédar Senghor). While individual Africans testify to the shock of being called *Neger* for the first time, once settled in Germany members of the first generation used it routinely as a descriptive term, at least in dealings with the authorities. See for example Mandenga Diek's characterisation of Bruno Ekwe Ngando as *Neger* in a letter to the Berlin police confirming his status as a Cameroonian native: Mandenga Diek to AAKA, 30 March 1904, BArch R1001 5149, p. 13.

[29] Brown, 'Black Europe and the African Diaspora', p. 201.

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