Intimate Betrayals: Uncovering Eugenicist Logics in the Stories of Two Black German Women

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Abstract: This paper draws on data from an ongoing qualitative research study on the educational experiences and identities of Black transnational women to explore the question: "What can be learned about the transnational legacies of eugenicist thought as we examine the stories of two Black German women?" These data are represented in two vignettes crafted from interviews, conversations, and memories to explore the implications of eugenicist logic in the lives of Black German women. Decried as an ableist, racist, misogynistic, and pseudoscientific project that sought to improve "human stock," the objectives of the eugenics movement of the early 19th century have been rejected in most scholarly fields of the 21st century. However, the narratives centered in this paper show that eugenicist logic, ideologies, and discourses remain persistent, insidious parts of contemporary discourses. Theoretically and methodologically, the paper engages a Transnational Black Feminist approach (Burkhard, 2019, 2021) to qualitative research to attend to the ways in which eugenicist ideologies are narrated and reproduced in intimate moments of everyday life, highlighting the continuous need for contemporary feminist scholarship to consider global, transnational, and local lenses in knowledge production.
***Keywords*:** Black German women, transnational Black feminist thought, Black feminist storytelling, eugenics

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In *Mobilizing Black Germany*, Florvil (2020) outlines the complex history of Black German identity formation. She highlights that the linkage of German identity to Whiteness resulted in a paradoxical positioning of "Black Germans" from the perspective of their white compatriots, who believed that one could not be both *Black* and *German* (Florvil, 2020), which is indicative of the typically unspoken unexamined racialized nature of what is considered "unadulterated," or "true" German identity. In *European Others,* El-Tayeb (2011) contextualized the racialized nature of citizenship, nationality, and the broader narratives of who fits into a nation's envisioned identity by considering a broader European perspective. This article draws on both autoethnographic data and data from a qualitative study on the educational experiences of Black immigrant women by centering conversations between myself, Tanja, a Black German woman, and one participant, Ama[2], who also identifies as a Black German woman, to illuminate the ways in which our racialized identities have been shaped within the context and discourses of our upbringing in Germany, but

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also by our migration to the United States. Our narratives are presented in the form of two vignettes that highlight occurrences in which eugenicist thought was reproduced in the realm of our private lives. As such, the article is guided by the research question: "What can be learned about the transnational legacies of eugenicist thought as we examine the stories of two Black German women?"

To address this question, I will engage a Transnational Black Feminist approach (Burkhard, 2019, 2021) to Black Storytelling (Toliver, 2021) both theoretically and methodologically. This work carries implications for the contemporary discourses on race and racialization by rejecting the idea that eugenicist thought is a way of knowing the past and insisting that we must attend to its logic in the contemporary moment, which is marked by the emergence of neofascist ideologies and contentious debates about nations and those who and do not belong into them. To explore these layers, I will first review the role of race and racialization in a Black German context and then provide a contextualized discussion of eugenicist thought and its legacies before describing transnational Black feminist approaches to storytelling and presenting the vignettes, my analysis, and conclusions.

Race and Racialization in the Black German Context

Focusing on the cultural and religious contexts of Portugal and Spain, Sweet (1997) argues that racist thought in this region was established as early as the fifteenth century and formalized in the broader scientific community in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In this context, he argues, "[e]arly modern Europeans conflated what we now call 'culture' with what we now call 'race'" (Sweet, 1997, p. 144). Thus, the ideological and cultural foundations of racialization in Europe pre-dated and informed European efforts of conquest, domination, and enslavement. These ideas were later (pseudo)-scientifically explored by scholars in the 19th and early 20th century. For example, the German physician and naturalist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach published *On the Natural Varieties of Mankind* in 1865. In this work, he set out to categorize humans into five varieties ("Caucasians, Mongolians, Ethiopians, Americans, and Malays"; Saini, 2019, p. x) in an effort to refine a previous system of racial categories articulated by the Swedish scholar Carolus Linnaeus (Cokley, 2007). However, whereas Linnaeus' taxonomy centered geographical region as the primary context for these categorizations, Blumenbach also included physical traits and appearance, which introduced a (pseudo)-scientific reference point that would later become a theoretical foundation for theories that highlighted the supposed biological underpinnings of race. As Campbell (2013) notes, eugenics "supplied the basis for a scientific justification of racist thought" (p. 20), thus bolstering justifications for European domination through colonialism and chattel slavery. It should be noted here that Blumenbach himself opposed scientific racism and slavery, even though his work was used to develop arguments about the inferiority of those who were not considered white.

Although contemporary constructionist scholarship on race and racialization and scholarship argues that race is a social construct rather than a biological reality (Omi & Winant, 2020; Smedley, 1998), the proliferation of Blumenbach's categories paved the way for the institutionalization of scientific racism in late 19th century and early 20th century Europe as a continuation of cultural racist ideologies that predated such theorizing. Although the evidence that race is a social construct rather than a biological fact is overwhelming, discourses related to race and racialization oftentimes implicitly or explicitly reveal evidence of a continued belief in race science rooted in biology by focusing on physical and behavioral traits.

In the German context, conversations about racialization and race had been largely taboo after the Holocaust, as the German word "*Rasse*" became so deeply intertwined with the history and language of antisemitism and Nazism that it does not adequately translate to "race" as it functions in the English language. The spirit of denazification and removal of race-related terminology in the decades that followed also created absences in the language that made it difficult for non-white Germans to name and describe their racialized experiences and identities, which in turn bolstered liberal multicultural discourses of a racism-free German society of the late 20th century and early 21st century. Tensions that emerged in part due to racialized othering were often presented as disconnected from race and instead framed through the context of migration, or "the foreigner problem" (Faymonville, 2003, p. 364). Thus, the idea of race in post-World War II Germany has become enmeshed in the narrative and imagination of a German nation that, despite unfortunate neo-Nazi movements, is largely free from racist beliefs and discourses but concerned about migration.

Müller (2011), who conducted a qualitative study with white German women activists, argues "[...] in Germany, race, and more specifically whiteness, disappears into a national naming" (p. 620). Thus, from a dominant perspective, whiteness, although it is oftentimes unnamed in the language, is a prerequisite for Germanness, while anyone whose appearance, speech, or other markers of social identities deviate from whiteness calls into question their lineage and belonging. The formation of the European Union in the 1990s added dimension to the implications of whiteness as a prerequisite for Germanness, as it ushered in a new era of European consciousness and identity formation that sought to move beyond the confines of the nation-state. El-Tayeb (2011) argues that this European identity "heavily relies on the trope of the Other, the non-European, in order to foster internal bonds" (p. 2). Given the various migration flows to Germany since the 1960s, questions of belonging, identity, and citizenship continue to rise to the fore. Silverstein (2005) highlights the racialized nature of the ways in which migrants in Europe are constructed, not only as the Other but as threats to the stability of the nation-state.

These discursive constructs are not only used in the vein of policy development and the making of the imagined communities (Anderson, 2005) of a nation but are also found in everyday discourses about difference and race- or absence thereof. The erasure of marginalized identities from the nation's imaginary can be considered a form of epistemic violence, meaning the systematic silencing of marginalized people by dominant groups (Dotson, 2011). To counteract this epistemic violence, also perpetuated through the erasure of Black Germans from the history of Germany, the Afro-German women's movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s, for example, found ways to highlight the ways in which the absence of language to name one's experience and identity is not only harmful in terms of self-understanding and community building, but also reifies master narratives about the homogeneity of German society in terms of race, and the idea that racism and misogyny were problems of a troubled past, rather than ongoing social problems.

The History, Legacies, and Logic of Eugenicist Thought

After the Enlightenment period of the 18th century, the eugenics movement emerged in the late 19th century among numerous scholars in the West. Prominent thinkers who contributed to its proliferation included the French psychiatrist Benedict Augustin Morel, who proposed a theory of "degeneration," which considered all illnesses to be hereditary (Conroy, 2017), and eugenicists such as Charles Davenport, who defined eugenics as the "science of improving stock" (Kühl, 2002, p. 4). Davenport and others, such as Gregor Mendel and Sir Francis Galton, posited that to eradicate perceived and actual societal issues, including poverty, addiction, mental illness, and others, human

reproduction should be guided through a process of selective human breeding and the forced sterilization of those who did not fit the definition of "good stock" as defined by eugenicists. Eugenics was not only built on the notion that illness and social mores were the result of faulty human "stock" but also that humans are subject to a clear hierarchy, with each group being associated with particular traits and mental and/or physical capabilities.

In short, "good stock" depended on one's race, ethnicity/nationality, gender, and whether one had a disability (Conroy, 2017). At its core, then, eugenics is undergirded by the following assumptions: (1) Humans, like other mammals, are seen as "stock," whose qualities can be improved or worsened; thus, humanity can be improved by ensuring only desirable characteristics and physical features are passed to the next generation; (2) Racial purity or impurity exist among humans and purity may improve or worsen "human stock;" (3) Human "racial" difference is biological and determines most, if not all, outcomes related to mental and physical health, education, "intelligence" (as measured by IQ testing), dis/ability, aptitude, and other factors; and (4) Those in positions of power decide who is of "good stock" and thereby fully human.

Although the overemphasis on biological determinism and the complexity of the "nature vs. nurture" debate has been complicated by sociologists, geneticists, and other scholars, some key ideas of the eugenics movement remain firmly rooted in contemporary discourses and ideas. As Gerald O'Brien (2015) notes, "[...] the presumptions and goals that supported eugenics gave a very long history and remain with us in somewhat altered versions today" (p. 2). Thus, it should be noted not only how these assumptions undergird the eugenics movement but also why they are problematic and oftentimes erroneous in nature.

For example, the first assumption that "human stock" can be improved by eradicating undesirable characteristics or physical features is problematic due to problems of definition. Thus, what constitutes a "desirable" trait or feature depends on how the defining and dominant groups (in this case, white, affluent, male scholars) determine what constitutes a desirable trait. For example, In the early eugenics movement, the process of diagnosing "feeble-mindedness," "being moronic," or "being a degenerate," and other diagnostic labels of the time was rife with methodological, theoretical, and diagnostic problems. Henry H. Goddard, an American psychologist, eugenicist, segregationist, and Director of Research at the Vineland Training School for Feeble-Minded Girls and Boys from 1906 to 1918, described some of these methodological issues in his article *Heredity of Feeblemindedness* (1911) in which he noted that he had initially sent a questionnaire to parents before they were to admit their children to his school. However, according to Goddard, the parents' answers were sometimes not useful, which is why he introduced a different system to identify the children's family history, inviting them to describe any relatives' illnesses, mental health concerns, or perceived amoral or deviant behaviors. Based on these family histories and observations, Goddard and his team then diagnosed the students at their school as "feeble-minded," "morons," and other diagnoses of the time.

O'Brien (2015) points out that the terms initially used by the eugenics movement, such as "degenerate" and "defective," were inadequate due to their vagueness, which is why "feeble-minded" and "moronic" became preferred diagnostic terms. This example points to the importance of the role of language in understanding the problematic nature of the eugenics movement, especially considering the medical and legal implications of these terms. In the 1926 landmark case of *Buck v. Bell*, the Supreme Court of the United States upheld the 1924 Virginia Eugenical Sterilization Act, which

> [...] permitted the involuntary sterilization of people who were deemed
> "mental defectives" as a matter of law. As a result of this decision,

thousands of women—mostly poor women of color—were sterilized against their will throughout the next few decades (Graham, 2023, p. 62).

The case was built around a teenager named Carrie Buck, who was a rape victim and foster child, and whose own mother was institutionalized due to "feeblemindedness." Carrie gave birth to a daughter in a mental institution, after which Holmes, considered a great American legal scholar, declared that "three generations of imbeciles are enough" (Cohen, 2017, p. 2). The decision was not only a monumental win for the eugenics movement at the time but also laid the legal and ideological groundwork for Nazi-era sterilizations and, as Palomo and colleagues (2021) argue, the forced sterilization of migrant women in ICE detention centers at the U.S. border in the 21st century.

Thus, eugenicist logic remains firmly embedded in contemporary thought, albeit obscured through their normalization and less explicit expressions. According to Raz (2009), the discourses surrounding the emergence of novel reproductive technologies are not only deeply connected to eugenics but have also shifted from being seen as connected to dystopian and authoritarian ideologies to becoming firmly rooted in liberal perspectives. In particular, Raz (2009) notes that contemporary work on eugenics takes the issue up in three different ways:

historical criticism of the 'old eugenics'; the continuation of this stream in the form of criticism of reprogenetics as a new, 'backdoor' eugenic regime of bio-governmentality – an area which also includes the application of Foucauldian and feminist perspectives; and the recent enthusiasm regarding 'liberal eugenics' (p. 602).

The idea of liberal eugenics, then, focuses on the idea that individual consumers should be able to make reprogenetic decisions. Given the on reproductive rights in the contemporary U.S., leading up to and following the repeal of *Roe v. Wade*, it should be noted that the goal of highlighting the connection between reprogenetics and eugenics is not to judge practices such as prenatal testing for certain conditions as an inherent eugenicist practice, but rather, to highlight the ways in which eugenicist logics, discourses, and practices remain firmly anchored in 21st-century ways of knowing without being labeled as such.

Finally, the idea that race is biological rather than socially constructed and that it carries implications for dis/ability, intellect, and behavior is a central aspect of eugenicist thought. Even though Blumenbach's categorizations are no longer invoked, the idea of fundamental, biological racial difference remains a part of contemporary eugenicist thought. Kühl (2002) notes that in the 1980s, scientific racism was revived in North American academic and media circles, as scholars such as J. Philippe Rushton at the University of Western Ontario posited that white and Asian people are more intelligent and family-oriented compared to Black people. In contrast, others sought to correlate low intelligence and crime rates in Black populations. Thus, the generalized perception of behaviors and traits of racial groups was viewed as directly linked to genetic predisposition rather than social contexts, including histories and policies that have resulted in poverty and marginalization.

Methodology: A Transnational Black Feminist Perspective on Narrative Inquiry

Okpalaoka and Dillard (2012) posit that in order to answer the question of who we are as African ascendant people, we need to take a closer look at the role that history, time, displacement, and geographical location have played in our migrations and the dynamism to the nature of the identities we adopt within and across national contexts (p. 122). Considering the roles of history, time, displacement, and geography (Okpalaoka & Dillard, 2012), the methodology of this paper is framed from a Transnational Black Feminist framework, which is founded on transnational,

endarkened, and Black feminist/womanist epistemologies that not only take the unique, albeit diverse, standpoints of Black women across the world seriously, but also position Black women's experiences and ways of knowing as a source of knowledge-production that provides insights into contemporary societies. Thus, I follow Toliver (2021), who posits that "[s]torytelling is an integral part of Black existence" (p. xiv), and Nadar (2019), who outlines several key aspects of "narrative knowing," a "defining feature of African feminist epistemology" (p. 18), which include critically approaching master-narratives, rejecting the guise of objectivity in storytelling, engaging in reflexivity, and pursuing this work for social change.

The vignettes presented in this paper are a combination of autoethnographic writing that draws on the author's memories, journal entries, and conversations, as well as data drawn from Ama, one participant in a qualitative research project that centered the educational experiences of seven Black women who had migrated to the United States. As the vignettes are crafted with the starting points of different data, they differ in their presentation. As such, the approach to this work is rooted in a Transnational Black Feminist/womanist approach that acknowledges the unique and interconnected standpoints of Black women within local and global contexts shaped by colonialism, anti-Blackness, and misogyny (Bailey, 2021). Hall (2019) articulated Transnational Black Feminism as guided by "intersectionality, scholar-activism, solidarity building, and attention to borders/boundaries" (p. 91). Specifically, this paper is inspired by the efforts of the Afro-German women's movement.

From a qualitative methodological perspective, this conceptual charge invites us to consider the interlocking systems of oppression (Collins, 1990) that shape our participants' lived experiences. Nash (2018) invites us to read the analytics of Black feminism and transnational feminism alongside each other "to unleash *intimacies* among women of color, and *intimacies* between analytics that have been wedged apart" (p. 106). This paper takes seriously the need to strive for intimacy between women of color in a way that does not seek to gloss over "difference" but to truly engage in a process of vulnerability guided by an ethic of care (Reich, 2021). In this approach, I also consider the role of language, following Deiri (2022), who argues that "[l]anguage is intimate in the ways we express love, ourselves, our thoughts, desire, fears, delusions, and nostalgias" (p. 87).

Within Transnational Black Feminist qualitative research, it is imperative to attend to these intimacies of language and to engage in ways of storytelling and representation that seek to do justice to the complexities of participants' lived experiences. In crafting the vignettes that follow, I considered the context, language, multiple voices, and poetics of Black women's speech at play. Ama's and my conversation in the first vignette are represented in German, with translations provided under each paragraph. I shared our conversation this way because, although my interview questions were in English, Ama and I did not conduct our interviews in English. We share German as the language that shaped and started our friendship, the language that felt "comfortable and intimate (Deiri, 2022, p. 83). Thus, switching to English beyond a few phrases feels inauthentic to our relationship, which started when my supervisor pointed out that there was "another Black German student somewhere on campus."

After he mentioned this other "Black German student," I went in search of Ama. I found her in a different department, after which we became longstanding friends, co-conspirators, and mutual support. She shared her stories with me not only to build "intimacy" but also because she knew that having grown up in Germany. However, in a different part, I knew them to be true and could validate them in light of dominant discourses that described Germany as a society that had exorcized and reckoned with its racist and anti-Semitic past. The second vignette is a result of my own reflections on a conversation that occurred the day after I was born, which I have been told

various times throughout my life by different people. As such, this conversation has become a part of my birth story.

Dehumanizing Logics: Two Vignettes

Vignette 1: Questioning the Color of our Blood

Ama identifies as a "*Schwarze Deutsche*" (a Black German woman). She was born and raised in a major city in the German North as the daughter of Ghanaian parents. She describes the community where she grew up as a vibrant, diverse setting, "*mit Leuten von überall*" (with people from all over). Ama notes that in the context of her upbringing, the role of nationality was more salient than race. Describing key moments of her upbringing and educational experiences, Ama says:

> Weil meine Freundinnen kamen ja von überall, aber sie waren ja trotzdem weiss. So. (Tanja: ja) Und ich, ich weiss noch, ha. Das war Frauke Meyer*[3] [...]. Wir waren super gut befreundet, sie kam aus irgendnem Vorort aus Berlin, ja. War halt auch oft in Berlin, aber es war halt irgendwie so ne hippe Stadt für sie, ja. Frauke, mit der hab ich mich sehr gut verstanden und wir haben zusammen gelernt und habens voll gut und sind an dem einen Tag hergefahren und saßen bei mir zu Hause und haben irgendwie Schränke zusammengebaut und da sagte sie tatsächlich: "Ja darf ich dich mal was fragen?" Und ich so: Na klar! Und die Frauke war ne ganz ganz Schlaue, muss ich dazu sagen. Sie war immer sehr vorne mit dabei und sie hat mich tatsächlich gefragt, ob mein Blut denn auch rot sei. (Tanja: hhh. Frauke) Ama: Ja, wirklich FRAUKE!
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> [Because, my girlfriends, they came from all over, but they were still white. Yup. (Tanja: yes). And I, I still remember, ha. Her name was Frauke Meyer [...]. We were such good friends. She came from some suburb of Berlin, yeah. She often went to Berlin, but it was kind of a hip city for her, yeah. Frauke and I got along well and we studied together. One day, she came over and we sat in my home and assembled cabinets or something, and she really said: "Hey, can I ask you something?" and I said "of course"! And I have to note that Frauke has always been a really smart person. She was always on top of her studies. And She really asked me whether my blood was red. (Tanja: *gasps*. Frauke. Ama: But really, FRAUKE!]

I remember that Ama's sharing of this story stunned me into silence. Though we laughed about Frauke's question, the pain that swelled underneath our banter was palpable, at least for me, propelling to the fore the many ways in which the everyday injuries of racism, particularly within relationships I deemed safe, stayed very close to the surface of my consciousness, in this case, activated by Ama's story. Ama then shared:

> Und es war halt, das war so 'Boa, das ist aber hart, jetzt gerade.' Und du bist dann halt auch irgendwie, du bist dann irgendwie perplex, du weisst halt auch nicht, was du sagen sollst. Und als ich schon gesagt habe, also ich glaub ich war mir, also jetzt, wenn mich das jemand fragen würde, boa, kannst dir gar nicht vorstellen, was der alles zu hören kriegt, ja! Aber

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[3] All names are pseudonyms

damals war das halt auch wie gesagt, ich wusste noch nicht so viel über diese Thematiken und was denn jetzt gesagt wurde, und wie viel biologischen Hintergrund von Black Inferiority es eigentlich gab war mir zu dem Zeitpunkt eigentlich auch gar nicht bewusst. Woher die Fra... und das ist das was ich meine, so, ne. Diese Postkolonialen Theorien sind ja schon wichtig, wenn du jemanden hast, der Deutsch-Deutsch ist, ja und dir so ne Frage stellt, dann weisst du ganz klar, dass dieser biologische Hintergrund da mitspielt, ja von schwarzer inferiority auf deutsch i don't know, und dass man biologisch anders gebaut ist und vielleicht nicht so klug ist. Und das sind ja auch Dinge, die irgendwo verankert sind in der deutschen Geschichte irgendwo, ja. (Tanja: ja) Und das, also ich glaub das war schon hart.

[And it was like "Whoa, that was rough, just now." And you are kind of, like, you are kind of perplexed, you don't know what to say. And as I said before, I think if someone asked me this now, whoa, you can't even imagine the ear full I would give them, yeah! But back then, I didn't know as much about these topics and what was said and that the biological background of black inferiority existed was also not something I was aware of. Where the question…and by this I mean, postcolonial theories are important, if there's someone who is German-German, yeah and they ask you this kind of question, then you know clearly that this biological background plays a role, and that black inferiority, I don't know it in German, that you are biologically built differently and maybe not as intelligent. And these are also things that are somewhere rooted in German history, yeah. (Tanja: yeah) So, I think that was tough.

Tanja: Was hast du darauf gesagt zu ihr? [Tanja: What did you respond?]

Ama: Ich glaub. Ich glaub ich hab so gesagt "Hä?". Ich glaube ich hab glaub ich so ein bisschen so gelacht, so verschmitzt, weil du ja selbst auch nicht weißt wie du antworten sollst. Da hat sie mich angeguckt und ich meinte so: "Meinst du das ernst?" Dann meinte ich: "Ja klar, was denkst du denn?" Dann meinte sie: "weiss ich nicht, ich dachte, vielleicht ist es ein bisschen dunkler, oder heller, oder ein bisschen anders oder sowas." Und, ich glaube, und sie meinte es wirklich ernst. Und ich glaube nicht, dass ich als Mensch anders für sie war, aber sie war sich wirklich nicht bewusst, dass wir wirklich gleich sind, biologisch.

Ama: I think, I think I said: "Huh?". I think I laughed a little, impishly, because you yourself don't know how to respond. Then she looked at me and I asked: "Are you serious?" and then I said: "Of course, what do you think?" And she said "I don't know, maybe it is a bit darker, or lighter, or a bit different, or something." And I think she was really serious. And I don't think I was different for her as a human being, but she really didn't know that we are equal, biologically."]

Vignette 2: Dis(re)membering Heads and "The Good Ones" in the Aftermath of Slavery

Eustache Belin was a former slave born in Saint-Domingue in 1773, right before the French and Haitian revolutions. Eustache became well-known among Europeans for saving his master during the revolution. So, "a cast was thus made of the former slave's head to prove that he had an overdeveloped empathy organ ostensibly atypical of Blacks" (Conklin, 2021, p. 107). The cast is a bust of Belin's head and shows his eyes and mouth closed, brows furrowed and drawn down. Considered an unusual specimen, the bust was sent across the Atlantic to Europe and back. At the time, the science of craniology and, later, phrenology used the practice of measuring skulls to draw conclusions about intellect, ability, and character. As Marcille and Carr (2023) note, "The field surged, despite its heavy reliance on correlation without established causation" (p. 174). Eustache's story was not the only one that altered and inspired discussions about Black people's perceived lack of humanity by phrenologists like Franz Josef Gall or James Poskett, who envisioned phrenology as "a language through which to imagine a universal system of instruction' as well as a guide for hiring teachers" (as cited in Conklin, 2021, p. 107). Eustache was made into one of the "good ones," the exception to the rule that stated that Black people were less than human and therefore enslavable.

In 1832, Eustache received the "Académie Française's prize for virtue for his purportedly 'faithful' and selfless actions" (Bouton, 2020, p. 502). I was born more than 150 years later, in a small town in southwestern Germany, to a Black Jamaican mother and a white German father. At the time of my birth, West Germany prided itself on its multicultural and welcoming stance to migrants and foreigners (so long as they assimilated culturally and linguistically). My mother worked tirelessly to pursue fluency in German, perfecting her pronunciation in almost incredible ways as she moved through the German adult educational system to become a member of German society. My mother's retellings of my first days on earth always describe two things: crude comments made by a German labor and delivery nurse while she was laboring in horrible pain and the moment my father's closest friend from school came to visit the hospital. As the story goes, he came into the room, peeked into the bassinet, and commented, "*Sie hat aber einen negroiden Hinterkopf*" ("The back of her head has quite the negroid shape"). Not much else was said (or not much else is remembered), but I know that my mother took deep offense. I know this because she has repeated this comment to me enough times to make me lift my hair and move it just so as to examine my head shape in the mirror as I was growing up, wondering what a negroid head shape was and what it said about me. Like an invisible cloak, the comment and its implications covered the story of how I came to be as a Black German child, with many reminders throughout growing up that, like Eustache Belin, I better strive to be one of the good ones.

Discussion

Ama's narration in Vignette 1 highlights multiple layers of the Black German experience and provides insight into the ways eugenicist logic of othering has maintained its foothold in the imaginations of Whiteness, Germanness, and the nation, and the construction of the Other that is required in order to delineate these imaginations. In discussing Ama's narrative, it should be noted that Ama positions herself as a Black German woman and clearly states that she does not identify as "Afro-German." The note on terminology is important due to the distinct history of both terms. In the 1980s, poet, feminist scholar, and writer Audre Lorde organized alongside German women of African ascent to develop the Afro-German women's movement, which helped to birth a new consciousness related to the tension between Blackness and Germanness. Ama and I were both

born shortly after the emergence of these movements, whose labor became evident in the cultural productions of Black Germans and other Germans of color in the 1990s and 2000s, even if the knowledge about the movement was not widespread.

In 1986, members of the movement, such as May Ayim, Katharina Oguntoye, and Dagmar Schultz, published a co-edited a book titled *Farbe bekennen: Afro-Deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren der Geschichte,* which was later translated to *Showing Our Colors: Afro-German Women Speak Out.* Campt (1993) argues that "[t]hese Afro-German women's conceptions of their cultural identity reveal the inadequacies of traditional models of cultural and racial identity which posit an either/or choice between opposing categories of cultural or racial identity (i.e., foreign/German, black/white, Black/ German)" (p. 109). In many ways, Afro-German identity evolved to become another site of struggle, and the term "Schwarze Deutsche/Schwarzer Deutscher" (Black German) has become a term many, including Ama, find to be more inclusive and welcoming of a range of identities and experiences within Blackness and Germanness (see also Campt, 2003; Florvil, 2020; Hightower, 2024).

Knowledge Construction in Ama's Story

Ama refers to various layers of knowledge and knowledge production in her story to position and highlight the magnitude of Frauke's question. Ama constructs her story of Frauke's question of whether Ama's blood is red by emphasizing Frauke's intelligence and intellectual prowess. She says, "*Und die Frauke war eine ganz Schlaue, muss ich dazu sagen*" [And Frauke was a really smart woman, I have to add] and "*Sie war immer vorne mit dabei*" [She was always at the helm (of her studies)]. Ama thus positions Frauke as a knower, an intelligent woman from Berlin, Germany's largest city that prides itself in its cultural diversity. Providing this information about Frauke's intellect and worldliness then emphasizes the shocking nature of her question about the color of Ama's blood all the more, as even this intelligent, university-educated white German woman, then, is still capable of reproducing ideas about biological racial difference. In turn, Ama constructs herself as someone unaware at the time of this incident, as she notes

> [...] war mir zu dem Zeitpunkt eigentlich auch gar nicht bewusst. Woher die Fra... und das ist das was ich meine, so, ne. Diese Postkolonialen Theorien sind ja schon wichtig, wenn du jemanden hast, der Deutsch-Deutsch ist, ja und dir so ne Frage stellt, dann weisst du ganz klar, dass dieser biologische Hintergrund da mitspielt, ja von schwarzer inferiority auf deutsch i don't know, und dass man biologisch anders gebaut ist und vielleicht nicht so klug ist.
>
> [...]'wasn't aware at the time where the question came from, because if you have someone who is German-German, who asks you this kind of a question, then you know clearly, that the biological foundation plays a role, of Black inferiority [...] that you are biologically different and maybe not as smart'].

It stood out to me that Ama not only constructed Frauke as a hyphenated German (Deutsch-Deutsch/ German-German), but her interpretation of the question about the color of her blood ultimately calling into question her smarts is an interesting connection that points to the implications of eugenicist thought within her remembering of this incident. Of course, Ama's story is told at a time when she studied and became aware of postcolonial theories and myths of Black inferiority, as she notes. However, it is noteworthy that she has recalled this narrative and contextualized it within German history.

In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson (2005) describes "nationality, or as one might prefer to put it in view of that word's multiple significations, nation-ness, as well as nationalism" as "cultural artifacts of a particular kind" (p. 48). As such, Anderson invites us to carefully consider the historical contexts in which nations have come into existence, as well as the role of affect in their maintenance. Focusing on the discursive construction of Black Germans, Wright (2003) notes that Western constructions of Black people as primitive, genetically inferior, and out of place in 21st-century civilization are predictable and raises the question, "How does one respond then to a discourse that seems incapable of understanding the basic fact of your existence? (p. 296). The discourse to which Wright alludes here is one that imagines the German post-World War II nation as one of white Germans and Others, placing the "hyphenated people of the diaspora" (Lorde, 1991, p. 67).

As white Germans have been and oftentimes still are the assumed holders of full and legitimized German citizenship, there usually is no need to hyphenate them in contrast to Germans of color. Thus, Ama's reference to Frauke as "Deutsch-Deutsch" (German-German) destabilizes this idea and places white Germans on equal footing with the cultural others.

Reflections and Connections: Examining Intimacy

Conducting the interview with Ama reactivated the story about my father's friend commenting on the shape of my head as a newborn. My father has told me this story with annoyance in his voice, noting that there was nothing "negroid" about my head, but my mother, who has been living in Europe for as long as I have been alive, was unsettled by it beyond annoyance. My parents' differing reactions obviously had to do with their own racial and gendered identities, but both found the comment to be inappropriate. When I learned about the extensive measuring, collecting, and stealing of skulls by European scientists, I began to realize its embedded eugenicist (or at least race-scientific logic) and the desire to visually inspect, observe, and draw conclusions about people's intelligence and ultimately worth based on physical attributes. The co-opting of Eustache Belin's story and, ultimately, his head to illustrate an example of a "good Black person" further dehumanized him and simultaneously became a powerful rhetorical device of condemnation regarding anyone who sought to rebel against or resist colonization.

This adds a layer of consideration to the idea of intimacy because, as Bouton (2021) aptly notes, "[s]lavery did not always prevent bonds of intimacy based on 'familiarity and shared experiences" (p. 503), but these bonds were formed within communities and hierarchies of slavery, race, gender, and class. The idea that intimate bonds (and, by extension, interactions) must be examined from a lens that also considers social hierarchies and power can also be applied to Ama's story, as well as my story in Vignette 2. Both moments occurred within intimate and personal settings, in Ama's case, while hanging out assembling furniture with a close friend, and in the case of my mother, in the vulnerable time shortly after giving birth. While Ama generously notes that she did not think her friend truly did not see her as "different," but asked the question in good faith, it left enough of an impression on her to remember it years later as a moment in which she would have acted differently. As such, her remembering and re-storying of that moment from her present-day perspective allow her to indeed examine her relationship with her friend from a vantage point that connects her story to the bigger struggle of resisting dehumanization and rejecting myths of Black inferiority. Thus, the Transnational Black feminist pursuit of intimacy between women of color requires us to listen closely to each other's stories and remain open to critically examining these dynamics with an ethic of care.

Conclusion

This paper explored the legacies of eugenicist logic and thought in two different stories. Considering the persistence and resurgence of eugenicist discourses and logics, for example, in the contemporary context of political rhetoric about poverty, migration, and women's reproductive rights and the further development of novel reproductive technologies, ongoing practices of forced sterilization of immigrant women in detention centers (Palomo et al., 2022), it remains pertinent to uncover the logics of eugenics within discourses reproduced publicly. For example, Currell (2019) highlights the legitimization of populistic eugenics in the 2016 election, as few batted an eye when Donald Trump's doctor, Ronny Jackson, declared that Donald Trump "has incredibly good genes and it's just the way God made him" (quote by Smith in Currell, 2019, p. 291). However, Ama's story—about a close friend asking her whether her blood was red—also bears implications for the need to examine how we relate to each other across differences and invites us to examine the intimate, private realm as a contested locus of knowledge production.

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