



# **WE WERE DANCING IN THE CLUB, NOT ON THE BERLIN WALL: Black Bodies, Street Bureaucrats, and Exclusionary Incorporation into the New Europe**

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To many in 1989, the fall of the Berlin Wall (hereafter, “Wall”) symbolized a new era of “freedom” that would usher in new possibilities for consumption and transnational travel. Behind this backdrop, however, this new era was also producing new forms of “noncitizenship” while simultaneously reconfiguring the grounds on which average citizens would become state actors. Contrary to the seeming universality of the initial exuberance, the fall of the Wall and the push toward German unification emphasized “Germany for the Germans,” East Germans “not being treated like a Nigger anymore,” more stringent regulation of the borders for those who were not already legalized permanent residents, and the requalification of the right to consume. These were the conditions for what I call “exclusionary incorporation,”<sup>1</sup> whereby noncitizens would be incorporated into the nation-state, but only as compromised subjects. More specifically, black noncitizen men could gain recognition via the emerging bureaucratic and sovereign status of white German women in club scenes in Berlin and other locations. In the post-Wall moment, marriage became one of the only routes to a long-term legal status for these men, as white German women with whom they related came to exercise intimate forms of bureaucratic judgment and state power. In what follows, I map historical and contemporary currents that shape these relationships, entangling hypersexual performances and rights with residency and consumption. Dance clubs act as key sites of production, as do bedrooms and other familiar spaces. “The State” and state power are being reinscribed here. Configurations of race and desire are shifting

as well. In a noteworthy inversion of Fanon's notion of the black need for "white masks" in European contexts, black skin itself opens up new possibilities (and necessities) for incorporation. Although white German women ardently and openly desire, even fetishize, black men, the terms of black male noncitizen incorporation remain exclusionary.<sup>2</sup>

### FROM NATIONAL SOCIALISM TO SEXUAL LIBERATION?

The imaginary of black masculinity has a particular history in Germany, linked in part to other European and colonial pasts. Following WWI, Europeans expressed outrage over the occupation by black French troops in the German Rhineland; images and imaginations of black men raping white German women circulated widely (see Campt 2004; El-Tayeb 2001; and Opitz et al. 1991). In her book, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany*, historian Dagmar Herzog notes: "While racism of any kind has necessarily always been about sex, this was especially true for National Socialism" (2005:10). She continues:

The Third Reich was an immense venture in reproductive engineering. But no less important than the dual project of prohibiting (through sterilization, abortion, and murder) the reproduction of those deemed "undesirable" and of encouraging and enforcing (through restrictions on contraception and abortion, financial incentives, and propagandistic enticements) the reproduction of those prized as healthy heterosexual "Aryans." . . . They also drew on profound (and strongly church-fostered) associations between sex and evil—and between sex and Jews—in order to make the disenfranchisement and murder of Jews appear morally legitimate. [Herzog 2005:10]

Herzog goes on to note that the Nazi's made strong links through visual and other media between "sex and Jews" and the supposed threat of rape.

Linking this body politics with an African presence in Europe, historian Heide Fehrenbach notes that in addition to mass murder, the Nazi era also included sterilization campaigns against Germans of African descent: "In 1937, the Nazi regime ordered the sterilization of all black German children fathered by foreign occupation troops of color stationed in Germany after World War I" (2005:1; see also Campt 2004). Even after WWII, as historian Maria Höhn (2002) notes, conservative commentators, religious leaders, and politicians heavily criticized relations between black GIs and white German women. In spite of this criticism, however, these relationships became increasingly public and increasingly popular.

A famous example can be found in the work of Leni Riefenstahl, a filmmaker contracted by the Nazis to make *Triumph of the Will* (1935), a film that powerfully promotes Hitler and the Nazi Party. In the larger corpus of Riefenstahl's work, one sees a shift in her own visual movement (and its popular consumption) from the idealized "Aryan" body to black bodies such as Jesse Owens's (who won four Olympic Gold medals in Berlin, conquering Hitler's claims of Aryan superiority). Riefenstahl's camera produces Owens's body as a central figure in her film *Olympia* (2000). After this film, Riefenstahl went on to gain popular recognition for her films and photographs of the Nuba (1982, 1997, 1999; see also Gates 1998; Müller 1995). As Lisa Gates writes, "Leni Riefenstahl left for Africa in 1956, armed with a Leica camera and a vision of the continent culled from the pages of Hemingway's novel *The Green Hills of Africa*" (1998:233). She quotes from Riefenstahl's (1992) autobiography:

I was magically drawn by a very specific Africa—the dark, mysterious and still barely explored continent. All this was very impressively conveyed in a photo with which I couldn't part and which shows a black athlete carried on the shoulders of a friend . . . the black man's body looked like a sculpture made by Rodin or Michelangelo and the caption read: "The Nuba of Kordofan." There was no other information. (462). [Gates 1998:234–235]

In Riefenstahl's own words, one sees a connection between her images of Jesse Owens and those of the Nuba, both reflecting her vision of a (fantastic) African "essence." As Gates notes: "She read the book [*The Green Hills of Africa*] in one night, she writes in her autobiography, inspired by the passage: 'All I wanted to do now was to get back to Africa. We had not left it, yet, but when I would wake in the night, I would lie, listening, homesick for it already'" (1998: 233).

In the 1960s and 1970s, when Germany's sexual revolution was in high gear, one could see a similar emphasis on sexualized and nude black bodies in the work of New German Cinema filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder. In *The Marriage of Maria Braun* (1986), nude sexualized images of a black U.S. GI become central. In *Ali, Fear Eats the Soul* (1989), a nude Moroccan immigrant body takes on critical visual importance. In both films, the white German women are the primary figures who look. In the same period, a group of women writers of the important left-wing Frankfurt paper, *Pflasterstrand*, concluded that "Some women dream of a foreignness that rises to the point of pain and just then into a wild orgy of the mob that then falls apart. . . . Eroticism is a search for the foreign Other."<sup>3</sup>

In *The Imperial Imagination*, Friedrichmeyer and colleagues (1998) link this type of encounter to a colonial fantasy, which persists in the present, and which, I argue, is transformed by the WWII defeat and the postwar reality of “African American” occupation. This occupation makes it possible for white German women to not only participate in the colonial imaginary (in many ways they already had) but also to become normative Germans who participate in regulating national belonging. This participation is fraught simultaneously with a sense of loss (they have lost touch with a “purer” form of sexuality). Relationships with black men offer the possibility to get back a relationship to this lost self (a self that is in touch with its body) in addition to escaping the dominance and “boringness” of white men.

On the other side of the post–Cold War border, although without black U.S. occupiers, East Germans also had a relationship to desiring black men, first through U.S. films and U.S. music (see Poiger 2000), and then also through the ways “freedom,” consumption, and desire became interlinked. Although direct access to black bodies in East Germany was limited (even though African students and workers, and U.S. images did get through; see Piesche 2003; Spennemann 1997), for some white German women, “black men” came to index “foreign” adventure, linked directly to expanded consumptive possibility. Daphne Berdahl explains how “The milk-and-honey promises of the [East German] regime that frustrated consumer desires, combined with the constant and inevitable comparisons to the West, ultimately laid the foundations not only for 1989, but also for the constitutive relationship between political legitimacy and consumption” (2005:241).

In other words, just as the Wall was falling and East and West Germans and the Allies (i.e., the United States, the Soviet Union, France, and the United Kingdom) considered unification, West German political legitimacy became linked to access to consumer goods. Newly consuming subjects compared BMWs, Audis, and Porsches to the East German Trabant, “a little car made of fiberglass and pressed cotton” (Berdahl 2001; see also Berdahl 2005; Borneman 1992; and Darnton 1991). As Berdahl, among others, describes, “Immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, one of the most pervasive media images consisted of East Germans on a frenetic, collective shopping spree. For many western Germans, as well as for much of the world, the ‘triumph’ of capitalism and democracy seemed to be reflected and confirmed in the ‘consuming frenzy’ (Konsumrausch) of the ‘Ossi’ (East Germans)” (2005:235). However, as the Wall was falling and consumptive possibilities began to expand rapidly, new trends toward officially differentiating the newly incorporated Germans from noncitizens coincided with and affirmed new trends toward racialized violence. In this context, the need for noncitizen

recognition became ever more acute. “black clubs,” and a persistent attraction to “black music,” provided the social space for this possibility.

Beyond the national context, one should note that contemporary desire for black bodies is not distinctly German, but part of a European sociocultural matrix established through historical images, diaries, literature, and scientific texts (see Gilman 1985; Friedrichsmeyer et al. 1998) in relation to colonialism and European encounters with the African continent. But one should also note a distinct shift from the Europe-wide outrage over the presence of black occupying French troops originally from Senegal and North Africa in post-WWI Germany (see Camp 2004; El-Tayeb 2001; Fanon 1967) to the social embrace of “African American” U.S. GIs in West Germany after WWII (see, esp., Fehrenbach 2005). In his memoir, Hans Jürgen Massaquoi, the son of a Liberian diplomat and German nurse who grew up in Hamburg, Germany, during the Nazi era, recalls that the end of WWII was a turning point for him as for other black men in Germany:

It was gratifying for me to note that my skin color, which for so long I had regarded as my major liability, had almost overnight turned into an asset. During my previous, mostly clandestine, encounters with German girls, I rarely could escape the feeling of being used as forbidden fruit—quite willingly, I admit, but used nevertheless. Now I had the new, ego bolstering experience of being pursued openly and unabashedly because, as far as the *fräuleins* of the immediate post war period were concerned, black was definitely in. [Massaquoi 1999:288]

Elaborating this experience, Massaquoi describes a trip to Nuremburg in which black U.S. GIs mistake him and his friend for U.S. soldiers and invite them to a dance in their segregated military barracks (former SS quarters):

The huge hall was jam-packed with hundreds of black GIs and their German dates. Never in my life had I seen so many blacks. And what a wide range of complexions, from white to deep ebony and all the shades in between.

It was quite apparent from the choreographed-looking jitterbug acrobatics put on display by the *fräuleins* [unmarried women] and their black GI partners that they had had plenty of practice. Watching rapturous expressions on the young women’s perspiring faces as they “jived” to what the Nazis had always derided as *Negermusik* [Nigger music], I was sure that if the Führer hadn’t blown out his brains, the mere sight of his cherished *Deutsche Mädchen* [German girls] with the “apelike creatures” would have killed him. [1999:323–324]

Because of the U.S. forms of racial segregation in the midst of Germany's racial reeducation, black and white U.S. troops went to different clubs and bars in the decades after WWII. But even the black clubs were frequented by white German women (see Fehrenbach 1998, 2005; Höhn 2002; and Ege 2007). After the Cold War, U.S. troop numbers diminished and Germany was no longer officially a country under U.S. occupation. However, the club scenes continue, now with largely "African" as opposed to African American men.<sup>4</sup> Although formal legislation makes it nearly impossible for Africans to immigrate into Germany, these club scenes undercut that impossibility via the discretionary power of white German women.<sup>5</sup> Men from Africa, the Caribbean, and even the United States who come as refugees, tourists, students, temporary workers, apprentices, or soldiers find possibilities to stay longer than they or the state had imagined.<sup>6</sup> They are empowered by a "female" gaze that erases their invisibility, giving them a new status as almost extra visible subjects.

#### **GERMAN UNIFICATION, PERSONAL DISCRETION, AND STREET BUREAUCRATS**

I only married him, because he was here illegally. . . . Maybe this is a sign that I take my politics seriously. . . . I was in awe of him, because he is beautiful. . . . The intriguing thing about multiculturalism is the mixing. I am turned on by the unusual. On one hand I am scared. On the other, I think that I can learn a lot. I have always found black people to be fascinating.

—German social worker<sup>7</sup>

Reference to "foreign" (and particularly "African") migration in contemporary Germany is often a reference to an asylum law that the national legislature changed in accordance with EU norms in the early 1990s.<sup>8</sup> These changes occurred with increasing discussion about the social and economic costs of unification, in which the financial and social support for East Germans and German ethnic migrants from other parts of Eastern Europe was leveraged against the ability to support those thought of as "unnatural," "economic" refugees. The 1993 legislation created many more restrictions for the latter, requiring, for example, that refugees leave Germany if the state deemed that the situation from which they fled was again safe. Refugees who first landed in neighboring countries deemed to be "safe third countries are excluded from the right to political asylum" in Germany (Donle and Kather 1993). These countries include all of the countries on Germany's borders.

The possibilities for asylum within Germany thus became much more limited. “By 1993 [for example], about eighty per cent of all applications for political asylum within the EC [European Community] had been filed in Germany. More than ninety per cent of these applications were finally rejected as unfounded” (Donle and Kather 1993). In recent years, the number of successful applicants has dropped even further. According to a UN High Commissioner for Refugees report from April 2001, asylum seekers have seen a steady decline in the number of cases the German government officially recognizes or that are filed at all. The numbers declined from 23,470 out of 127,940 applicants in 1995 to 10,260 out of 95,110 applicants in 1999 (Hovy 2001:11–12).

As a result of the 1990 concession to “immigrants” with long histories in Germany, many of whom were referred to as *Gastarbeiter* or “guest workers,” “German immigration and labor laws make a strict distinction between aliens already living in Germany and aliens having foreign residence. Non-resident aliens generally may not obtain a work permit or residence which exceeds three months” (Donle and Kather 1993). There are a number of exceptions, which include study, apprenticeships, temporary work as a chef in a restaurant of the “temporary” resident’s nationality, as well as a demonstration of the ability to fill highly trained positions that cannot be filled by equally qualified EU citizens or Germans. “Exotic” restaurant work, here, becomes like sex work in the case of black bodies.<sup>9</sup> Just as cooks from China would be given visas to cook in Chinese restaurants, in the informal club arena, black men gain access and recognition by living up to hypersexual expectations.<sup>10</sup>

“It should be noted, however, that *the alien and labor authorities have discretion about whether to issue such work and residence permits or not*. One of the central factors in exercising this discretionary power will be whether there are a sufficient number of German and/or European applicants, who are equally qualified for *that special job*” (Donle and Kather 1993, emphasis added). One must read “that special job” not only in terms of the formal economy but also in terms of the economy of national desire.<sup>11</sup> A law has gone into effect that allows asylum seekers to work, but they come after all of the above-mentioned groups in terms of their priority as potential employees. Furthermore, even though Germany has moved toward an official acknowledgment of the need for immigration, this possibility continues to emphasize highly skilled workers and limited stays. Although the law is changing toward what seems like more possibilities for incorporation, this incorporation remains exclusionary.

Who, then, gets to stay in Germany and how? It is critical to recognize how state power and formal law operate through personal discretion, often exercised by low-level bureaucrats. Stefan Senders, for example, describes how:

One bureaucrat working in the foreigner registration office in Berlin told me that he puts particular pressure on Poles applying for residence permits, offering them shorter residence periods and demanding more evidence of secure income from them than from other foreigners. Another bureaucrat, I am told, prefers Poles to other foreigners when granting work permits. [1996:156]<sup>12</sup>

In the German club scenes I encountered, this official form of discretion is configured in terms of the preference for black male bodies because of the way they move in both public and intimate spaces.

Attention to this type of discretion becomes critical to understanding white German women in relationships with black men as a form of “street-level bureaucracy.” In his analysis of “street bureaucrats” who “implicitly mediate aspects of the constitutional relationship of citizens to the state,” Michael Lipsky (1980:4) does not have these types of encounters in mind. In their official functions, Lipsky’s bureaucrats “hold the keys to a dimension of citizenship” (1980:4); in my analysis, the informal street bureaucrats hold the keys to the *possibility* of citizenship or legal residency at all. They hold the sovereign power to decide—in Carl Schmitt’s language, emphasized by Giorgio Agamben—when and how *not* to implement “the law.”<sup>13</sup> Agamben is concerned with the ways noncitizens are excepted (excluded) from universal belonging even while professionalized politicians claim that universal belonging is in operation (often via discourses of human rights and humanitarianism; see Ticktin 2006). I am concerned, however, with the exception to the rule of exclusion. That is, I assume that noncitizens and people of color are normally perceived not to belong and are actively excluded in everyday life (on the street and at the border). In this essay, however, I am interested specifically in the power that white German women have to make noncitizens legal residents, highlighting their ability to make an exception to the rule of exclusion. “Black” men obtain a legal status, not just because they have been seen, but because they are desired and they are willing to perform, and “white” German women (taking on the mantle of national sovereigns) ultimately decide to marry them.

I am interested in the expansion of the bureaucratic field, in which everyday citizens unwittingly become bureaucrats, and formal law accumulates interests and criteria beyond what it explicitly articulates. Here, I focus specifically on the



discretionary power exercised by white German women in their relationships with black men, drawing out how desire and rights become entangled. In these instances, the discretionary power of the state falls into the hands of unofficial state actors and one can see how law is constituted through informal, everyday decision making. White German women exercise state power through their intimate engagements. For black noncitizen men staying in Germany becomes contingent on being seen as beautiful and becoming hypersexual.

### ENCOUNTERS AND ENTANGLEMENTS

In *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler argues that the “exclusionary matrix by which subjects are formed . . . requires the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings, those who are not yet ‘subjects,’ but who form the constitutive outside of the domain of the subject” (1993:3).<sup>14</sup> In my analysis, those subjects being formed through their encounters with a “constitutive outside” are German subjects.<sup>15</sup> Moving beyond an explicitly inside–outside, self–other dichotomy (see also Agamben 1998; Stoler 1995), I invert Butler’s opposition of “subjects” and “abject beings” to point to what I call “exclusionary incorporation.” What previously would have been abject beings become subjects, but in a way that preserves and even depends on their position as outsiders. In the contemporary German context I analyze, black male bodies can be incorporated—if white women see them as beautiful and they successfully perform hypersexuality. The process is not one of normalization, but of hypersexualization.<sup>16</sup>

I began to recognize this process in the mid-1990s when I visited, observed, and danced in a number of clubs with names such as “Abraxas,” “The Plantation Club,” “Fu Na Na,” “Mandingo,” “Havana,” “the Salsathek,” and “the Strike Club.” Having entered Berlin with my anthropological lens focused on citizenship and “racial” inclusion, I was nevertheless surprised by the prominently displayed billboards, magazine covers, late-night sex shows, and multiple club scenes all featuring black bodies (see Figures 1 and 2). Almost completely naked black men danced on floats year after year in the now world-famous *Love Parade* (an annual Berlin-based daylong pan-European open-air summer techno party with an attendance that approached one million at its peak), at the Carnival of Cultures, and at Berlin’s Christopher Street Day gay pride parade (in one instance with an erotic float sponsored by the Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus [Party of Democratic Socialism], the post-Wall successor party to the official East German Socialist Unity party; see Figure 3).<sup>17</sup>

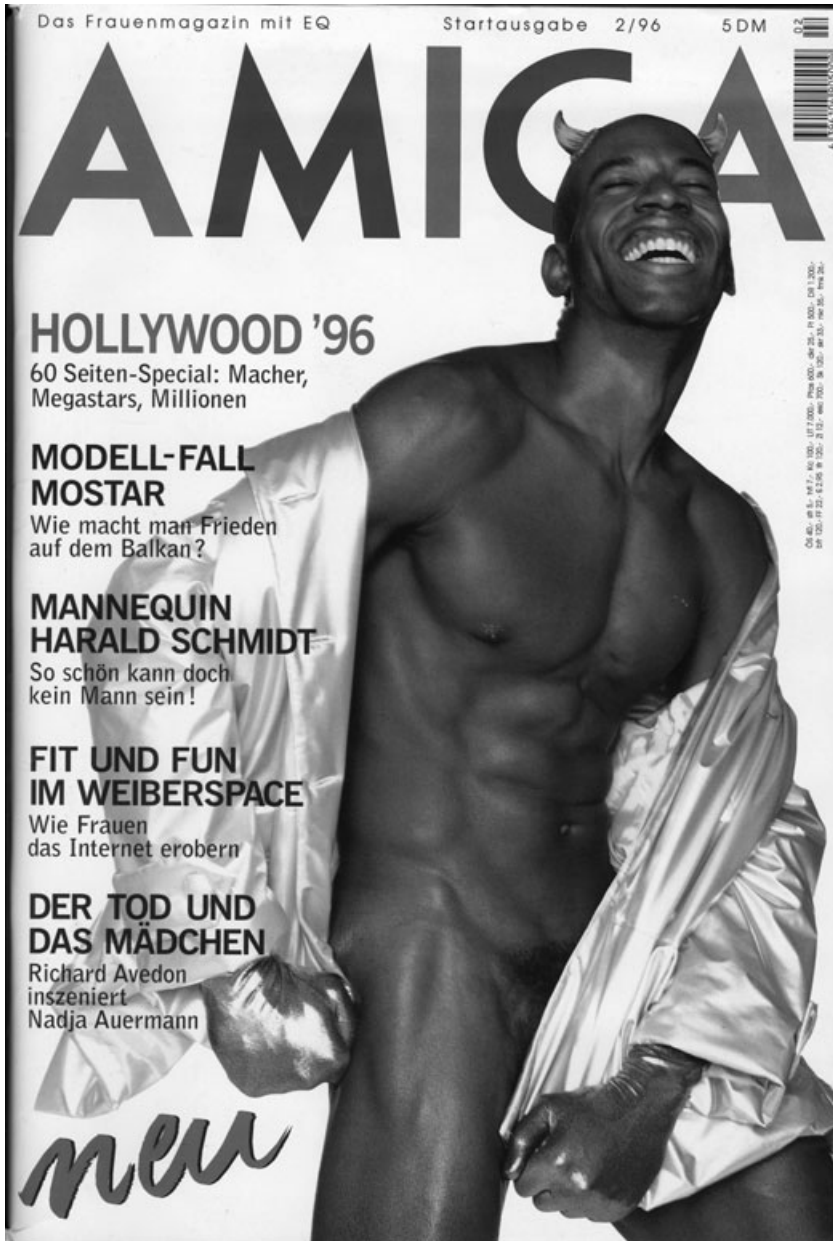


FIGURE 1. This image, which launched a popular German “women’s magazine,” appeared throughout Berlin in 1995–96. The initial advertising campaign cost 12 million German marks (approximately \$8.3 million; see *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 1996). According to the Associated Press Worldstream–German (1996): “Die erste Ausgabe habe sich knapp 300.000 Mal verkauft. Die Hälfte hatte man sich erhofft” [The first issue sold more than 300,000 copies. The initial hope was that half this number would be sold].

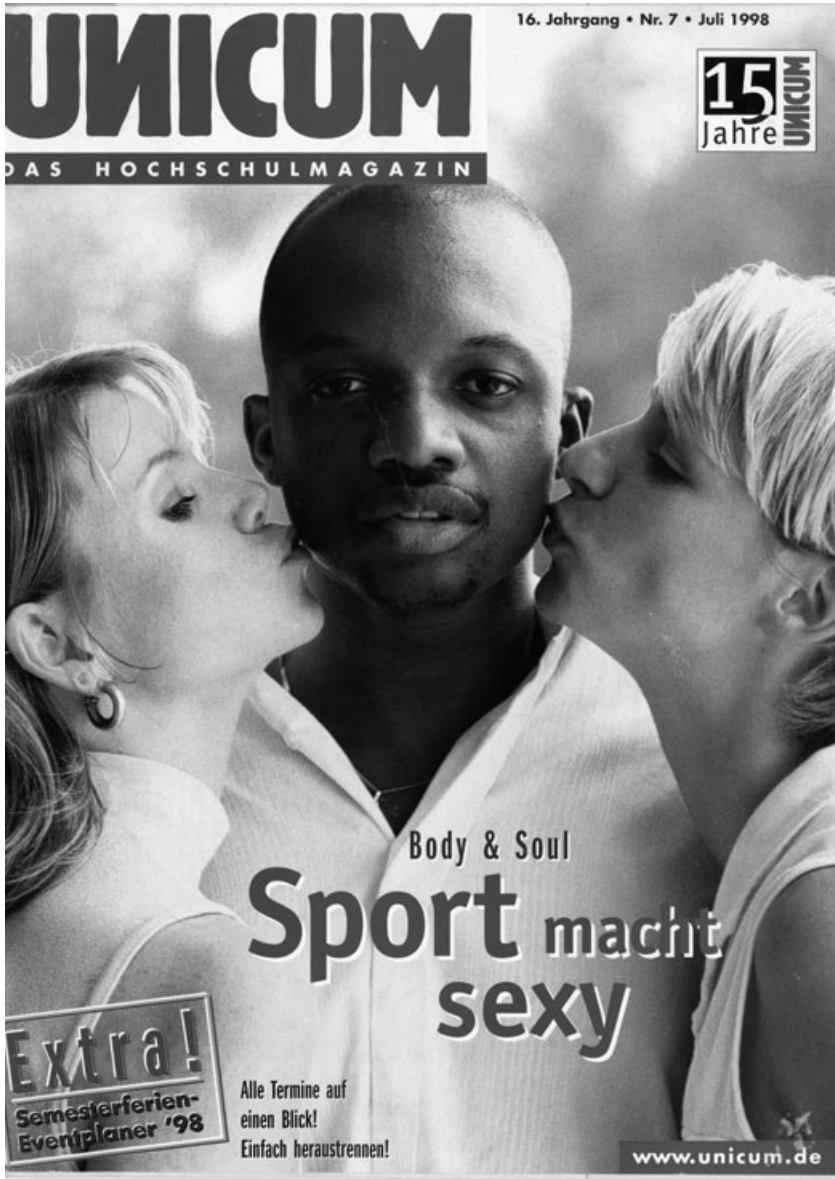


FIGURE 2. This is the cover of *Umicum*, a “university magazine,” that I found when visiting the travel agency across from the main building at the Humboldt Universität in Berlin’s center. In a mixture of English and German, the text on the man’s chest reads: “Body and Soul. Sport makes [one] sexy.” The “black” body stands in for “sportyness” and “sexiness,” confirmed not by nudity or actually doing sports, but by his mere presence. Germanness and “whiteness” are brought into the picture through the figuration of apparently heterosexual “white” German women. Either via sex and sports, the “black” body is a site of visual and erotic pleasure. It can also entice “white” Germans to pick up and read magazines.



FIGURE 3. Men on top of a PDS (reformed East German socialist party) float at the annual Christopher Street Day parade in celebration of gay rights.

In my interviews, white German women described their attraction to black men as one based on the possibility of adventure, spontaneity, the exotic, and travel. They commented on what they perceived as an aesthetic of “black beauty” and the ability of black men to fully inhabit their bodies (as opposed to being “stiff” like white German men). They linked their desire to film images from childhood, music they had heard in their formative years or the fact that their parents always had foreign friends, opening them up to a world outside of the nation. I saw more images when I visited my female interlocutors at home. Images of black men were in their bedrooms and on their walls, from Marvin Gaye to anonymous beauties. Some also had books filled with images of black men. When I asked one white German friend who grew up in an East German town why she likes black men, she said that she liked the way they move. She said that she liked their buttocks. Consistently, films and popular culture were at the center of framing the desire for and production of black bodies.

### **ABRAXAS, 1996 (and 2008)**

When one walks into Abraxas, a Berlin club, on a Saturday night at 1 a.m., it is packed. You have to push a doorbell on the outside that actually flashes a red light on the inside. Usually, a bouncer of African descent lets you in. Once inside, there is a bar to the left, a seating area to the right, a DJ behind a glass window, and then the dance floor. The whole entranceway is crowded, mostly with men with Afro-complexions, “white” women

in groups, or, as on the dance floor, with these men. The music is amazing, funk, acid jazz, hip-hop, soul, rhythm and blues, and salsa. When it slows down, and as it gets later, grinding becomes the *modus operandi*.

Within this context, I often find the gaze of older white women fixed on me. At about 4 a.m. one night, my African American friend, Charles, and I are about to leave. An older woman with blond curly hair grabs my hand as she sees me making my exit from the dance floor and says, in English, "See you again soon?" I nod and smile, but leave. We haven't danced or talked all evening. Should I be flattered?

### SEXUAL EMANCIPATIONS

In February 2000, I attended a screening of the film *Fremd Gehen: Gespräche mit meiner Freundin* (Heldmann 1999) at the Berlin International Film Festival. (In German, *Fremd Gehen* means having an affair while already in a committed relationship. In this case, it also references the literal meaning of "going foreign." I translate the full title as *Having Affairs/Going Foreign: Conversations with My Friend*.) The film is a pseudodocumentary about a German woman writing her dissertation while sleeping with a series of "African American" GIs she meets at a U.S. military base in West Germany. In the subsequent discussion session with the film's producer, the audience broke into a heated discussion. One (German) woman said the film confirmed that "black men are sex machines." A man from Frankfurt revealed that the film reminded him of his daughter's contention that "black guys fuck better than whites." "I was jealous," he said. To this discussion, the moderator added: "When I was 16, I was really intrigued by the army base. . . . I also did it. I slept with a black soldier. But I never talked about it. This film was emancipatory for me."<sup>18</sup>

References to the emancipatory effect of relationships with black men recurred in my discussions with white German women. Some sought and found a particular kind of physicality. Others found pleasure while resisting family norms of sexual behavior. A woman I met through a group called *Eltern schwarzer Kinder* (Parents of Black Children) described her experience in this way:

I purposefully went into a club where they play black music, where black people come. . . . At the time, it was a club where there were mostly black Americans. There weren't so many Africans, just a few. And, yes, it was fun for me. I liked the music. I liked the way things happened. I liked the way that was danced. And so it was fun for me . . .

I didn't like German clubs. . . . They were not very fun for me, because the music was different. The people were different. I liked this [aspect in the other clubs]. There was a certain . . . I can't put it into words . . .

OK, so I was recently, for example, just on Friday, in a German club. From work, a woman organized a singles party. Not that I'm single, but I went because a female colleague also went. I went just for fun. It was, yeah, hip-hop music. And it was, yeah, a German club. It was totally boring. I thought, "No," in an African club, I know that I belong there. I feel more comfortable. Because . . . black men approach you. White men don't do anything. They just stand around with their beer. [I start laughing and she speaks louder with emphasis.] Yeah, it's true, they just stand there with their beer and gawk at you dancing.

Anna, a woman I got to know in another context, offered a similar analysis. Comparing her relationship with an African man to an earlier one with a white German boyfriend, she told me:

[The white German boyfriend] was a little boring. . . . Sex was boring. Of course, that doesn't have anything to do with nationality. . . . That's what I think of as Brazilian . . . knowing how to move with one's body. With sex . . . as a German, you don't learn that . . . to move freely with your body. I find it fascinating. That's Brazilian.<sup>19</sup>

In yet another context, Emma, who is married to a Nigerian man, said in comparing her relationships between German and "foreign" men:

In comparison to German men, the relationships . . . yeah, the relationships always have something new to offer. Always something unfamiliar. . . . I think that what moved me in those circles had something to do with the idea of something far away, with another culture.

But the German man. . . . The German man expects the German housewife. The German men want something traditional.

T. (my husband) is a man who cleans up around the house. But I don't think that has anything to do with the fact that he's African. That's just how he is.

Another woman, Silke, an advanced university student who had been dating a young "Afro-Brazilian" man, admitted: "I am more attracted to black men than to white men. American men don't do anything for me. German men don't

either . . . They are rigid. It takes a certain fluidity. . . . German men . . . they don't know how to live in their bodies." She went on to associate her desire for Brazil (and Brazilian men) to the film *Orfeo Negro*, a film she first saw when she was 12. More recently, Silke has become more critical of the film, partially because of her Brazilian friends' critiques, but she admits that her love of Brazil is connected to the film and the fact that "My father listened to lots of [foreign] music. . . . He always brought music back from his trips. He was also in Africa, for example."

Erika, a social worker originally from West Germany who had married a Senegalese man, revealed the formation of her desire for black men as follows:

I have always been interested in Africa and black people. I have been to Africa six times, and the country [sic] was great. . . . I have always thought that black people were great. . . . I was a kid. I became interested in Africa. It was all so colorful. And they were always laughing in the films. . . . As a child, Africa was always something for me that was far away and very big, but not in the sense of being exotic . . . but big and real. . . . The first thing I wanted to do was to meet real Africans. That was a childhood dream for me. In comparison to other children, I wasn't scared. I was interested.<sup>20</sup>

Julia, a white East German student from a small town on the border to Poland, added another dimension, explaining how her family's reaction to her Nigerian boyfriend fueled her interest:

That he was from Africa (or his skin color) was a problem for my aunt and grandmother. I wanted to show them that they couldn't control me. I knew from the beginning that he wasn't the one. It was a little bit of adventure. When I realized that I was being confronted by my family, then I wanted to show them: "If you have something against it, then I'll do it out of my own pride." That was a reason for staying in the relationship. Otherwise I might have ended it earlier.

Later in our conversation, Julia noted that her boyfriend was an asylum seeker. She didn't find his claim convincing, insisting that "He wasn't being politically persecuted."<sup>21</sup> Even though he had asked, she decided not to marry him.

### CONFINEMENT, RACIALIZED VIOLENCE, AND THE STAKES OF RECOGNITION

I was scared as I drove past the West Berlin border into the (former East German) state of Brandenburg.<sup>22</sup> I had rented a car and bought a map. I couldn't

find anyone who was willing to go with me and I had considered hiring bodyguards. Through my work with an antiracism initiative in Berlin, I had learned of what would become a public document in which asylum seekers had demanded that they be removed from a town, Rathenow, and a federal state, Brandenburg, where they were under constant threat of skinhead attack:

HONOURABLE STATESMEN;

We the asylum seekers in Rathenow have the honour most respectful to present our claims. We have thought it very wise that the silent scribble of the pen is stronger than the thunderous sound of the gun. We believe strongly in the power of argument and not the argument of power. Our claims have reduced us to the level of second-class citizens and have made some Germans to consider us as valueless to the extent of always beating us mercilessly. From these racist attacks we incur serious body injuries to the extent of death. We consider these attacks racist because of the words that always come out from the mouth of the aggressors. Exemple [*sic*]: “Foreigner, what do you want here, we hate you because [*sic*] you are a foreigner, we are fighting for our land, you should go back to your land and fight all the foreigners there.

[Excerpt from letter sent by asylum seekers in Rathenow, Germany to: “The Chancellor of Germany, The President of Germany, The Parliament of Germany, The Supreme Court of Germany, The Media, The Human Right Organizations, The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, The Churches”; 116 people signed the letter.]<sup>23</sup>

Asylum seekers in Germany are sent from their original point of entry (or the place where they request asylum) to a central distribution center where they are fingerprinted and receive a meal card that allows them both entrance into the “camp” (this is the term they use) and access to their daily meals. From the central distribution center, weeks or months later, they are taken on a bus and dropped off at various locations throughout Germany.

When the asylum seekers arrive in their new residences, their movement is restricted to the county lines. In the case of Rathenow, this is a 50-km radius. It is illegal for them to cross this border without explicit permission from the local “foreigner administration office.” Berlin is 35–40 minutes away by train. (I didn’t take the train, because I didn’t want to run into any skinheads.) According to John, a resident of the Rathenow camp:



If you go beyond, then you are caught by the police, you are going to pay a penalty between 60 and 120 DM [approximately \$36–\$72 at the time]. At times, when the police find you in a situation, in a place more than one time, they formulate a crime and put it on you, and say they caught you in this crime, and they take you to court and they judge you in court and you are punished.

According to one of the camp residents, whether or not one gains permission to leave depends on the mood of the official and even more importantly on which official. For personal trips or to see friends, according to the residents, permission is almost always refused.

Before meeting John, just as I arrived in the town, school was letting out, and I saw a skinhead leaving the school grounds with two of his friends on either side. As John later told me: “We are scared of being attacked. We are scared of being attacked. Because it happens just like that. You don’t know when it is coming. Always we have developed this attitude of moving in a group, because when we move in a group, we feel a little bit secure. It’s very difficult to see a foreigner here moving alone. It’s very difficult.”

In our conversation, John also revealed the dimensions of asylum camp living, explaining that:

According to the law, the asylum seekers are entitled to a space of 6 square meter(s). . . . That is what I have as a right. In this room, if you calculate it mathematically, it’s going to give you 24 square meters. And it is not even up to 24 square meters. And meanwhile a German shepherd dog is entitled, according to the law of Germany, to 8.30 square meters. So the German shepherd dogs are considered more than the asylum seekers here in Germany.

Later in the evening, I sat down with the men as they ate dinner. There were all men, almost all of whom were from sub-Saharan Africa, but who would be identified in both Germany and the United States as “black.” After dinner, we began talking again about the situation of asylum seekers in Rathenow (and more generally in the state of Brandenburg). John insisted:

Marriage is the only way to get out of this mess. You see so many people getting married and coming out of this mess, because there is no other situation. If you are waiting until your asylum case will be recognized, then it is just like somebody waiting to see God. [One of his friends and I laugh.] If you can

imagine that out of 90,000 people who are coming to Germany per year, they are just recognizing 3 percent or 2.5 percent.

Almost all of the men with whom I spoke in the Rathenow asylum camps had been to the local *Diskotheek* (club), and almost all of them had also been attacked there. One man lost some of his teeth one night at the club, and ran away when he saw my camera. German women in Rathenow, John tells me, do not have the “civil courage” to sit down with a black man in a club or talk to him unless they are much older. When the men enter the club, other men throw cigarette butts down their clothes, or people spit on them. In one incident, several of the men were kicked out for responding to one of these attacks only to meet a group of skinheads who were outside waiting. They ran all the way back to their asylum camp.

In this region, Berlin provides the only significant possibility of meeting German women. In Berlin, there are ample club scenes with “black” men and “white” German women.

## JASON

Jason, from sub-Saharan West Africa, has lived in Berlin for a number of years and was studying business when I first met him in the mid-1990s. He wears Gucci and Versace and is generally obsessed with his look. He makes an extra trip with me to Amsterdam, not just to send money (through a family acquaintance) to his brother in West Africa but also to buy a specific style of leather boots unavailable in Berlin. I run into and meet up with him year after year on my repeated trips to Berlin. On some visits, we meet up almost daily. He contrasts his current style with his previous years in Germany as a student who was subjected to hard and undesirable physical labor. This type of work was a reality in spite of the fact that his parents are former diplomats. His access to economic capital, however, shifted as he learned to move in new ways. He frequently talks about his encounters with white German women, and says that he prefers dating law or medical students (who seem to have more money and often come from wealthy families). He notes that he can tell whether or not a group of women are law or medical students just by looking at the way they dress. As if to prove that this isn't pure fantasy, on one occasion, he stops a young white German woman at *Bahnhof Zoo* (then the main West Berlin train station), gets her phone number, and plans a future date. He is always clean shaven and tells me that he has to have a particular style of Armani glasses that no one else has.

Once, I run into him on a summer visit to Berlin, and he takes me to one of his girlfriend's apartments near Savignyplatz (an upscale neighborhood in West Berlin) who is, in fact, a medical student. As it turns out, her parents own the high-ceiling, hardwood floor, courtyard-facing, modernized turn-of-the-century apartment. Jason is already married to another white German woman who also lives in the same neighborhood, and who we

see as we sit in a nearby café, but he tells me that this new girlfriend's parents are very wealthy and have agreed to give him a loan to pay for the tuition at Harvard Law School. (He wants me to help him with the application.) He has already transferred from Berlin to a top law program at a university in England. But his ultimate goal is the United States.

### NEEDING MORE THAN MERE ATTRACTION

Although black masculinity in these scenes carries with it a certain cachet, an asylum status does not. In my conversations with both German women and African diasporic men, I have repeatedly heard about relationships broken (or never pursued) when a woman suspects that her partner is an asylum seeker. One acquaintance, for example, describes his experience as follows:

I never lied to any women. I say that I am a poor refugee. . . . [But] I have realized . . . After three [relationships], it has become clear to me that the women are unsure and insecure, because my legal status is unsure and insecure . . .

. . . After three weeks, we were going out. She knew that I lived in an asylum *Heim* (camp/hostel), but she wasn't interested in the specific conditions. After a concert, she said, "P., what status do you have?" I said, "I have asylum." She was in shock. She suddenly changed. She didn't say anything. I was *allowed* to accompany her [home].

. . . Or another woman. She had a daughter. She was five years older than me, but very, very pretty—my ideal female body type.

I met her in a club. I was hitting on her. I was a little drunk and thought, 'I need to hit on her. I want to be with her.'

. . . We loved it. It was great.

. . . Out of the blue, I got a letter.

She knew that I was living in exile. My asylum case had not yet been decided. She wrote a letter: "P., if you think that you can marry me one day for the papers, it's out of the question."

I was extremely angry. I had bought two tickets on that day to go to the movies.

One of her relatives had been disappointed [about our relationship]. She apologized, but I was hurt. Someone says, “I love you,” and then has such ideas.

After three times, it has become clear to me. . . . For that reason, I’ve decided not to get married in Germany.

Clearly, attraction (or even love) alone does not suffice. When we spoke, P. was experiencing the strain of imminent deportation. The *Ausländerbehörde* (the agency responsible for foreigners in Germany) had recently sent him a letter telling him to arrange his return to a situation he still believed to be life threatening. His hair had grown longer than usual, and he no longer maintained his clean-shaven look. Furthermore, he now seemed to have a chronic cold and headaches. At one point in our conversation, he told me that it was up to the German government to decide whether or not he was in need of protection. He had already been denied intimate recognition.<sup>24</sup>

#### “MARRIAGE EFFECTS”

Importantly, “Marriage has no longer any immediate effect on nationality under German law” (Krajewski and Rittstiegl 1996). The five years of marriage required (three years for residency) before citizenship is even considered puts German women (and German men) married to non-EU citizens in the position of unofficial state regulators with their partners under constant surveillance. As one German woman noted in an interview, some German spouses use the threat of deportation in order to get their husbands to do what they want, such as cleaning up around the house.

#### INVERSIONS, RETRENCHMENTS

Another deep source of the contemporary appeal of *Black Skin, White Masks* is the association it establishes between racism and what has come to be called the scopophilic drive—the eroticisation of the pleasure in looking and the primary place given in Fanon’s text to the “look” from the place of the “Other.” It is the exercise of power through the dialectic of the “look”—race in the field of vision, to paraphrase Jacqueline Rose—which fixes the Negro from the outside (Fanon’s word, which I will use in this context) by the fantasmatic binary of absolute difference. “Sealed into that crushing objecthood.” . . . “Overdetermined from without.” . . . Not only is Fanon’s Negro caught, transfixed, emptied and exploded in the fetishistic and stereotypical dialectics

of the “look” from the place of the Other; but he/she becomes—has no other self than—this self-as-Othered.

—Stuart Hall, 1996, pp. 16–17

In contrast to contemporary Berlin club scenes, in the colonial context that Frantz Fanon describes in *Black Skin, White Masks*, recognition (what Butler [1993] reading Hegel calls a type of “negation”) requires approximating whiteness: “I wish to be acknowledged not as *black* but as *white*. Now—and this is a form of recognition that Hegel had not envisaged—who but a white woman can do this for me? By loving me she proves that I am worthy of white love. I am loved like a white man” (Fanon 1967:63).

The scene(s) of contemporary Germany inverts this matrix. The realities of patriarchy, Nazi genocide and German guilt, “African American” military occupation, and the success of “African American” popular culture have led to a situation in which “white” German women openly desire black men. Many of these women experience their desire as liberatory. Many also express concern about racial violence and other forms of political exclusion while also expressing their desire for the “exotic,” and asserting their discretionary power. They operate, in effect, as street bureaucrats. Their desire can determine opportunities for their “black” partners, as it also shapes the conditions for the black partner’s incorporation. The politics of consumption as freedom drives this process while reinscribing an opposition between what is German and what is not. It is in this context, among others, that what I call “exclusionary incorporation” operates. The successful performance of beautiful, hypersexualized black masculinity in contemporary Germany means limited access to national rights while also augmenting the space of national desire.

### ABSTRACT

*In this essay, I explore the micropolitics of citizenship and sovereignty via the emerging street bureaucratic status of “white” German women in relationships with “black” men in Germany and Berlin. In the midst of the fallen Berlin Wall and increasing Europe-wide restrictions on immigration and asylum, it examines further the extent to which a consistent “black” male hypersexual performance is necessary for legal recognition via “white” German women who, taking on an informal bureaucratic status, ultimately decide which “black” subjects to marry. A history of desiring “black” bodies, the essay argues, coincides with several important moments of sexual liberation (incl. post–World War II African American military occupation, 1970s West German feminism, and the fall of the Berlin Wall), which make these relationships both possible and public; however, the hypersexualized conditions under which “black” subjects get incorporated into contemporary German life are also ultimately exclusionary.*

**Keywords:** citizenship, sovereignty, blackness, sexuality, feminism, Germany

## NOTES

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1. The term *exclusionary incorporation* is a critique of Soysal's (1994) emphasis on the incorporative language of European laws in a range of Western European countries. By stressing the "empirical reality," I point to the disjunctures and negotiations between formal law and everyday social life.
2. In the contemporary era, German politicians and prominent cultural figures have worked to emphasize European belonging and coalition politics over the reemerging strength of national sovereignty.
3. Quoted in *Die Tageszeitung* 2002, my translation.
4. This shift represents a shift from occupiers to potential immigrants (which should not obscure the fact that some African Americans have also become German residents). As I argue elsewhere, the fact that Germany has a history of black U.S. GI clubs also opens up regularized space for other black subjects to enter into the clubs, and also enter into relationships with "white" German women. As the historical circumstances change (away from occupation, and toward an increasingly fortress European mentality), however, the meanings and possibilities for these other relationships also change.
5. My point is not to condemn these relationships, but to point to the conditions under which they take place. There is no innocent sex here, even if one imagined that they were having it. Furthermore, I should note that I have used pseudonyms to protect the anonymity of the men and women.
6. In this essay, I write about a range of black men, that is, those with and without a status that allows them to stay in Germany. "African Americans," for example, have a different status than those who are from Togo and living in asylum camps in hostile (Neo-Nazi) territory. I point to both "African Americans" and asylum seekers, though, to point to their differential relation to the nation-state, residency, and national citizenship, and also to point to the fact that a process of hypersexualization works across a range of bodies and black subject positions.
7. It is not clear that the desire for black bodies, and in particular, the black male body is attached to a particular class status. This desire was and is part of popular culture, and its revolution coincides both with U.S. military occupation and the sexual revolution of late 1960s and the early 1970s. Here, the sexual politics that emerged from the left (see Herzog 2005) coincides with an antiracism that imagines it can achieve revolution in part through sleeping with the Other (see Ege 2007). This fantasy persists in the 1970s and 1980s as a group of German feminists begin to see the Caribbean, West Africa, and other sites as alternatives to the white male masculinity that seemed dominant even on the Left (see Herzog 2005). As

- several interview partners who have been active in the German feminist movement noted, black bodies were seen and desired as an alternative. As other authors have noted, "With new economic power, many Euro-American women are seeking an identity beyond the confines of the traditional gender scripts offered in their cultures" (Pruitt and LaFont 1995:423).
8. Although the new *Zuwanderungsgesetz* (immigration law) that went into effect on January 1, 2005, formally acknowledges the possibility of immigration into Germany, particularly when tied to "highly qualified labor," the new law remains highly exclusionary (see Die Bundesregierung 2004a, 2004b).
  9. Here, I do not mean that black men are literally dancing in "exotic" clubs as professional dancers, but I do want to point toward the relationship between the formal legal arena and this informal network of dance club encounters. It is important to note that just as there is a space in the formal law for (exclusionary) incorporation of "foreign" bodies, the same type of space exists in the broader social reality. "You can stay here, if (and only if) you dance." Of course, hardly anyone says this literally, but this is the effect of the social and legal conditions.
  10. In this instance, one sees the relationship between formal policy and the significance of an informal bureaucratic status linked to a desire for "black" bodies.
  11. The term *economy of desire* alludes to the fact that there is more at work than innocent love in these relationships. There are social and state pressures, histories of desire, gender and racial investments, readings, and subjectivities in addition to social, juridical, and moral laws. This economy is based on the nexus between images and imaginations of "black" bodies in relation to histories of German patriarchy, colonialism, and fascism. It is also based on 1968 leftist and feminist resistances, German unification, and possibilities to consume.
  12. Even though Poland is now a member of the European Union, its entrance into the union did not immediately give its citizens the right to move through Germany without visas. Poland was not originally one of the Schengen states. Its borders to Germany were only opened in December 2007 (see Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland n.d.).
  13. Classically, the sovereign "decides on the state of exception" (see Agamben 1998, 2005; Schmitt 2006). Following from Walter Benjamin in 1942 (1969), Agamben links the state of exception to the state of emergency, which "has become the rule" (Benjamin 1942, 697/257)" (2005).
  14. For more on abjection in relation to Jewish and homosexual subjectivities in Austria, see also Bunzl 2004. He argues that there has been a contemporary shift toward the recognition and incorporation of these subjects.
  15. Even though many of the "white" German women who had been in relationships with "black" men thought of themselves as resisting "white" male patriarchy and German racism, they were also involved, via these relationships and the difference implied in their descriptions of their "black" partners, in producing new forms of Germanness. Relatedly, in a study of tourism, gender, and sex with "single" or "unaccompanied" women on Jamaican and Dominican beaches, which, in addition to ethnographic research, included a survey of 240 women, sociologist Jacqueline Sanchez Taylor reports that:
 

White women, in particular, explained that they felt valued in the Caribbean in ways in which they are not back home. Their economic power and their whiteness means that they are not treated as local women but respected and protected. Their bodies are also valued over local women's bodies and they are offered a stage upon which they can simultaneously affirm their femininity through their ability to command local men and reject the white men. [2001:760]
  16. By referring to "the process of hypersexualization," I would like to distinguish between the process in which normative sexuality and subjectivity are produced and the process in which "black" subjects are made and incorporated into Germany. For another recent analysis of processes of differentiation at work in the German context, one should refer to Dominic Boyer's piece "On the Sedimentation and Accreditation of Social Knowledge of Difference: Mass Media, Journalism, and the Reproduction of East/West Alterities in Unified Germany" (2000).

17. The parade floats emphasize “black” bodies as sites of desirable excess, not only not German but, in many ways, also not modern rational (“boring”) subjects. This is a point emphasized by an anonymous *CA* reviewer. I saw more such images when I visited women interlocutors at home.
18. I have reproduced the discussion here from my own notes.
19. Once again, “blackness” is understood as bodily as opposed to the cerebral distance of (boring) intellectual conversation—the way she describes her former “white” German boyfriend. In popular imagination and frequent performances in Berlin, Brazil, like Africa, represents good music and having a good time.
20. Fear versus contemporary interest points to earlier histories of the national reception of black bodies.
21. She tells me that she doesn’t know and even doesn’t want to know about his past. When it comes to the politics of asylum, in spite of her left-leaning politics in other areas, here, she takes up a normative story, assuming that his claim is false. The larger media and politician driven discourse understands Africans as economic and not “political” refugees.
22. Although I do not agree with their use of the term *Fremdenfeindlich* (xenophobia), inasmuch as it naturalizes the opposition between “foreigner” and “native,” in their recent book, Behrends and colleagues note (2003:12): “Opfer einer fremdenfeindlich motivierten Straftat zu werden, ist im Osten der Republik ungefähr zwanzig Mal so groß wie im Westen” [The chance of becoming a victim of a xenophobic attack is 20 times greater in the East as opposed to the West of the Republic (Federal Republic of Germany)].
23. Letter dated April 26, 2000; see Rathenow Asylum Seekers 2000.
24. The point here is to emphasize the stakes of recognition and the stakes of the performance. What types of bodies does a failed performance produce? How do failed performances emphasize discretionary power?

*Editor’s Note:* *Cultural Anthropology* has published numerous essays on race and gender, including, Deborah A. Thomas’s “Democratizing Dance: Institutional Transformation and Hegemonic Re-Ordering in Postcolonial Jamaica” (2002); Helen A. Regis’s “Second Lines, Minstrelsy, and the Contested Landscapes of New Orleans Afro-Creole Festivals” (1999); and Jacqueline Nassy Brown’s “Black Liverpool, Black America, and the Gendering of Diasporic Space” (1998). *Cultural Anthropology* has also published a number of essays on Germany. See, for example, John Borneman and Stefan Senders’s “Politics without a Head: Is the “Love Parade” a New Form of Political Identification?” (2000); Dominic C. Boyer’s “On the Sedimentation and Accreditation of Social Knowledges of Difference: Mass Media, Journalism, and the Reproduction of East/West Alterities in Unified Germany” (2000); and John Borneman’s “State, Territory, and Identity Formation in the Postwar Berlins, 1945–1989” (1992).

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