

Discrimination against Afro-Germans (January 21, 2011)

Abstract

An Afro-German academic describes the racist prejudices which the several hundred thousand Black Germans encounter in their daily lives and details their various coping strategies in the face of lingering discrimination.

Source

Afro-German University Graduates Have to Prove Themselves

Nkechi Madubuko has studied the situation of Afro-German university graduates. Those who wish to establish themselves in a profession often have to perform better than similarly trained Germans without a migrant background.

“I always had to be the best wherever I was. I had to be the best at basketball. I was the best in my high school graduating class. I was one of the five best students in my year at university.” Victoria, with a degree in education and a German-Nigerian background, speaks about an experience that many migrants in Germany share: If you want to become established in this society, you often need to achieve more than similarly educated and trained Germans without a migrant background. The Marburg sociologist Nkechi Madubuko has studied this issue.

Victoria (name changed) is one of 37 highly qualified men and women of migrant background whom Madubuko interviewed for her recently published dissertation. Of them, 27 are Afro-Germans; as a control group, she also interviewed ten migrants from European countries and Turkey.

“University graduates with a migrant background frequently try to escape the stereotype of the less educated, integration-averse foreigner—and still find themselves repeatedly confronted with reservations,” Madubuko notes. The experience of being rejected because of their ethnic origin leads to acculturation stress. This applies, for example, to an Afro-German lawyer who in court is often asked where he got his degree. His brilliant arguments then silence the doubters—until the next trial.

“I didn’t intend to write a study about discrimination,” Madubuko stresses, but many statements shocked her. Personally, she experienced little rejection, probably also because quite early on she found her niche “in a multicultural environment.” The music channel Viva 2 cast the daughter of Nigerian parents as a TV host in Cologne when she was 21. She stayed there for three years, then worked as a presenter for Premiere World 2000 and the sports channel DSF.

Madubuko no longer wanted to be the Viva girl, however, but a trained journalist. After studying sociology she completed a trainee program at the TV station ZDF. Her face is also familiar from TV shows; she had her debut on the weekly crime drama *Tatort* in 1998. She did the research for her dissertation during two pregnancy leaves. Today, the 38-year-old sociologist works as an editor and author for 3Sat TV’s culture magazine program *Kulturzeit*.

Does she also feel pressure from this need to be better and better? “I always charged ahead,” says Madubuko. She was also a competitive athlete, breaking the Nigerian record in 1990 with 1.86 meters in the high jump, and after she took German citizenship in 1991 she was also a member of the German national track and field team.

Madubuko identified four strategies among her interview partners: “Retreat and Fight,” “Support and Fight,” “Processing Experts” and “Ethnic Independents.” She classifies Victoria within the group “Support and Fight.” She long suffered from the negative attributes assigned to her as a Black woman and ignored or repressed racist bullying in school and “jokes” made by her fellow university students. And she showed everybody what she was capable of with her splendid achievements. But nowadays she doesn’t have to fight anymore, Victoria explains—thanks to the support of her family, an Afro-German network and a therapist she found through the latter.

The “Retreat and Fight” group lacks this support. From an early age, they were exposed to the racism in their environment. Their parents did not succeed in conveying pride in their ethnic origin, and also advised their child to disregard physical and emotional abuse. A weak ethnic identity and the tendency to see all Germans as racists often produce anger and apathy, writes Madubuko.

The lawyer belongs to this group, as does Martin, who studied Communications. He worked for a large company and resigned after three years of being passed over for promotion and having to listen to remarks about “Negroes.” Madubuko assigns nearly half of the 27 Afro-Germans she interviewed to the category “Retreat and Struggle.” But some of her interview partners found havens where life was easier for them: international organizations, media enterprises, big cities with intercultural diversity. In a more international environment, the “Fighters” could meet the “Processing Experts” who handle unequal treatment head on.

Finally, the Italo-German Angelo, an executive in the media field, is typical of the “Ethnic Independents.” He views the fact that he was socialized in two cultures as an “advantage and added value.” In his work life, he says, his origins have brought him only goodwill. The European and Turkish migrants interviewed by Madubuko all reported experiencing less discrimination.

According to Madubuko, the fact that Afro-German migrants in particular face massive reservations in the German workplace has not yet entered societal consciousness. Her work is an important contribution to changing this.

Source: Amory Burchard, “Afrodeutsche Akademiker müssen sich beweisen,” *Der Tagesspiegel*, January 21, 2011.

<https://www.tagesspiegel.de/wissen/kaempfer-und-kuenstler-afrodeutsche-akademiker-muessen-sich-beweisen/3713852.html>

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