

“I want Black children to know that they should never, ever, ever settle for things that society wants to give to them”: Self-published Black French and Black German Children’s Literature as Blacktivism

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Résumé de l’article

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“I WANT BLACK CHILDREN TO KNOW THAT THEY SHOULD NEVER, EVER, EVER SETTLE FOR THINGS THAT SOCIETY WANTS TO GIVE TO THEM”: Self-published Black French and Black German Children’s Literature as Blacktivism¹

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I analyze self-published children’s books by Black French and Black German authors as a form of Blacktivism. I study how the authors’ comments about their work echoes with an activist narrative, and how they participate in a fight for racial justice, not only through the message of their children’s books, but through their choice of self-publishing. First, I examine their motivations for writing and relate them to what I call “kidliteractivism,” to then show how self-publishing can be a form of literary and racial insubordination, and finally I shed light on how self-published children’s books by French and German authors of African descent are linked to broader Blacktivist movements in France and Germany.

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article aborde les livres jeunesse autopubliés par des auteur·ice·s afrofrançais·e·s et afroallemand·e·s dans une perspective de « blacktivism » (ou activisme noir). J’y étudie la manière dont le discours des auteur·ices sur leur propre travail participe d’un récit activiste. Ces auteur·ice·s sont en effet engagés dans un combat pour la justice raciale, et, si leur activisme se manifeste dans le message véhiculé par leurs livres, il s’exprime également par leur choix de

l'autopublication. J'analyse d'abord ce qui les pousse à écrire et lie ces motivations à ce que j'appelle le « kidlitteractivisme » (ou activisme en littérature jeunesse). Puis, je montre que l'autopublication peut constituer une forme d'insubordination littéraire et raciale, pour enfin situer les livres jeunesse autopubliés par des auteur·rice·s afrofrançais·e·s et afroallemand·e·s dans le courant plus large des mouvements blacktivistés présents en France et en Allemagne.

Keywords

Children's literature, self-publishing, Afropean authors, Blacktivism, race

Mots-clés

Littérature jeunesse, autopublication, auteur·rice·s. afropéen·ne·s, blacktivism, race

Children's and young adult (YA) books are an important tool for social change.² They have been used to promote abolitionist ideas,³ to defend colonialism⁴ and to denounce it,⁵ to sensitize children to climate change,⁶ or to encourage young readers to join the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.⁷ Part of this literature has been qualified as “activist” or even “radical.” If “radical” children's literature has often been defined with reference to its subversive aesthetics,⁸ “activist” children's and YA literature is usually identified for how its content aims to change society. In this paper, I approach activism in children's literature not through the messages of the texts, but through the writing motivations of authors and the publication formats of their books. I will show how self-published children's books by Black French and Black German authors⁹—irrespective of their content—can be considered a distinctive form of Blacktivism, participating in the fight for racial equality.

Blacktivism—a contraction of “Black” and “activism”—is best known through American movements like the Civil Rights Movement, the activities of the Black Panther Party, and the more recent BLM movement. However, countries like France and Germany have had their own movements led by Black people, fighting for racial justice and the rights of people of African descent. The French “négritude,” a literary and political movement against colonialism, as well as the German anticolonial “Liga zur Verteidigung der N*-rasse” [The League for the Defense of the Negro race] can be considered Blacktivist movements from the beginning of the twentieth

century. The Black German movement, launched by the Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland [Initiative Black People in Germany] (ISD) and the queer Afrogerman women's organization Adefra e.V. is a Blacktivist movement that has been fighting for the visibility and recognition of Black people in Germany since the mid 1980s. Today, France and Germany both count numerous Blacktivist organizations and collectives that are committed to fighting racism and/or empowering Black people.

Arguing that self-published children's books by Black French and Black German authors are embedded in Blacktivism is challenging, as those books do not always fit the usual definition of activism: Klar and Kasser, for example, define activism as "the behavior of advocating some political cause (for instance, protecting the environment or human rights, opposing abortion, or preventing wars) via any of a large array of possible means."¹⁰ Some self-published Black French and Black German children's books do indeed advocate for (or against) a political cause. These are books that deal with racism, race, and skin colour, and that explicitly promote racial justice, as well as books that introduce young readers to African and Afrodiasporic history, challenging the Eurocentric narration of history. Many of them can be linked to Blacktivist movements. Portrait books showcase Black people from all over the world who have made history, adopting a pan-African approach. The various Black French books about textured ("afro") hair that challenge racist standards of beauty are related to the "natural hair movement," which considers chemical straightening of textured hair an inheritance of colonialist alienation and thus refuses it. Those books can also be linked to the French Afrofeminist movement, which denounces racist beauty ideals¹¹ and misogyny towards Black women.

The great majority of Black German and Black French children's books published outside of the traditional book market, however, are everyday stories: stories about friendship, family, and school life. Some are also fantasy stories about superheroes, magical powers, or fairy-tale journeys. At first sight, these books do not seem activist or subversive, as they do not call for action or social change. Considering them as Blacktivist can thus seem farfetched. Nevertheless, I argue that self-published children's books by Black French and Black German authors participate in the Blacktivist fight, not (only) through the messages they convey, but, importantly, through authors' choice to self-publish. First, I analyze their motivation for writing,

then I show how self-publishing can be a form of literary and racial insubordination, and finally I shed light on how self-published children's books by French and German authors of African descent are linked to broader Blacktivist movements in France and Germany.

Context and Methodology

Black French and Black German children's literature is mostly invisible. I found 22 children's and YA books by Black German authors and 98 by Black French authors published between 2010 and 2021.¹² More than half of these Black French children's books were published outside of the traditional market, and when one looks at the books published between 2015 and 2021, this number rises above 75%. Of the Black German children's books published between 2010 and 2021, only two were published in a commercial publishing house. The rest of the books are self-published or published by small, non-profit publishing houses, where authors are usually responsible for financing their own work. (Tanguy Habrand describes these forms of publishing as "parallel publishing."¹³) Some Black French and Black German authors have also founded their own publishing companies, designed mainly to publish their own books. I include both books published in independent publishing houses but financed by the author and books published in a publishing house owned by the author within the broad category of "self-publishing." I do not attempt to identify differences in themes or topics between books published in publishing houses and those that are self-published, since my aim in this paper is to show that the approach of self-published authors towards publishing itself is explicitly activist.

This study is based on interviews I held with 14 Black French and Black German authors between July 2020 and August 2021.¹⁴ On occasion, I will also refer to the paratexts of the books of self-published Black French and Black German authors I did not interview, as well as to their homepages, their press interviews, and their crowdfunding campaigns (i.e., their books' epitexts). Due to Covid and/or geographical distance, all interviews except the ones with Cassianne Lawrence and Sita Ngoumou were held over Zoom. The one-time interviews were semi-structured and lasted about an hour. The interview with Diariatou Kebe lasted over two hours, as I interviewed her about her writing activity and about Diveka, the association

she founded to promote diversity in French children's literature and media. I selected authors and illustrators who identify as Black or biracial, who have written or illustrated a children's book with Black characters (or are in the process of writing one), and who were not under contract with a traditional publishing house at the time of the interview. I am based in Germany, and so partly for reasons of convenience, I spoke with more German than French authors. Being a Black person who lives in Germany myself also helped, as I was circulating in Black German spaces, and I benefited from the snowball effect, one interviewee leading me to another. There are far fewer Black children's authors in Germany than in France, and many of them know each other. I also contacted some authors online, through Instagram or their homepage. It was more difficult to get in touch with French authors as I lacked an initial contact. Few of the French authors I wanted to speak to have Instagram accounts, and when I tried contacting two of them through their homepages, one did not reply and the other did not have time for an interview. It was finally through Diariatou Kebe, a children's writer and the president of the association Diveka, of which I am a member, that I got in contact with Madina Guissé and Maka Traoré. Due to time constraints, I suspended the search for French interview partners after those interviews. I nevertheless plan to interview more self-published Black French authors.

Writing Motivations and Kidliteractivism

As I interviewed the authors and illustrators and analyzed the paratexts and epitexts of the books of authors I hadn't interviewed, I was struck by the similarities of their discourses when it comes to their work. When asked about their motivation for writing, authors mainly gave reasons that were linked to a social cause rather than to a literary one. The main reasons provided by authors were the need for more racial diversity in children's books, the necessity to empower BPoC children, and a wish to transmit their cultural heritage.¹⁵ Insisting on the importance of representation, these authors adopted the discourse of what one might call the "movement for diversity and inclusion in children's literature," of which the current figurehead is the American organization We Need Diverse Books (WNDB). This non-profit organization, founded in 2014, "advocates essential changes in the publishing industry to produce and promote literature that reflects and honors the lives of all young people."¹⁶ It actively supports the publishing of books written by racial minorities, LGBTQ+ authors, and

authors with disabilities. Although We Need Diverse Books is the best-known organization fostering diversity in children's literature, it is far from being the only one. In the United States, the Council on Interracial Books for Children began fighting for these same ideals in the 1960s.¹⁷ A few years later, specialized publishing houses were created in the UK to offer Black children books in which they could see themselves in a positive way.¹⁸ Today the British organizations BookTrust and CLPE publish annual reports on the representation of people of colour among children's books authors and illustrators and on ethnic representation within children's books.¹⁹ The studies are driven by the conviction that more ethnic diversity is necessary in children's literature and publishing. So is the work of French organizations, like Diveka and *D'un livre à l'autre*, and German collectives, like Sekibu or Lit Qid, that all support minority authors and illustrators and promote diversity in children's literature. Through diffusion—that is, “the spread of movement ideas, practices, and frames from one country to another”²⁰—the movement for diversity and inclusion in children's literature has thus travelled beyond US borders. This movement for diversity in children's and YA literature is a form of activism I call “kidlitteractivism.” “Kid lit” is an abbreviation of “children's literature” and I use the term “litteractivism” to refer to activism through and around books. Kidlitteractivism includes children's and YA literature that follows an activist goal (literary activism) such as raising awareness of ecologist, feminist, or anti-racist causes, but it also covers concrete actions to change children's literature and/or its publishing industry (“market activism”).²¹

Black kidlitteractivism is more than a literary movement, especially in its effects on the publishing industry, where it has become a form of social activism. Through concrete action like workshops, trainings, and the creation of awards and writing contests that promote diversity, Black kidlitteractivism works to change the “all white world of children's literature”²² and aims to create a society in which every child can feel empowered by being pictured in a positive way in the stories they encounter.

What I found particularly interesting when interviewing the authors was the fact that the existence of books “for” Black children seemed to be more important to them than writing those books themselves. Many of them declared that they started writing because they couldn't find any books in

which their children would see themselves. Maka Traoré²³ explained that when her son was younger, she used to read him stories and realized that there were none about Black boys living in a French context: “*Donc, j’ai cherché un peu j’en ai pas trouvé. ... Donc, je me suis dit : je vais l’écrire*” [“I searched a little bit, but I didn’t find any. ... So, I decided: ‘I’ll write it’”].²⁴ Marion Bond had the same reflex when she desperately looked for books for her children: “*Je cherchais, cherchais, j’en trouvais pas beaucoup. Ou bien c’était un truc qui ressemblait pas à ce que j’avais envie de montrer là, maintenant à mes enfants, qui étaient petits, alors je me suis dit ‘allez hop, je vais écrire un livre !’*” [“I searched and searched, I didn’t find much. Or it was something that didn’t resemble what I wanted to show my children, who were young, so I told myself: ‘Let’s just write a book!’”].²⁵ Even if Traoré and Bond say they have always loved to write, it was the lack of books they would have wished for their kids that eventually lead them to writing those books themselves.

The phrasing of their testimonies not only highlights the fact that their writing motivation was born out of a necessity to remedy the lack of suitable books, it insists on the suddenness with which these authors came to write for kids. Writing is not presented as a long-held dream: these authors saw themselves pushed into writing by the circumstances. This narrative came up in many of my interviewees’ explanations of how they came to write for children, as well as in the paratexts and epitexts of books by other authors I researched, and echoes the testimonies of British children’s literature authors of colour interviewed by Melanie Ramdarshan Bold.²⁶ Ngozi Okwuosa, author of a picture book about albinism, never even pictured herself as an author, even after she was made aware of the discrimination against people with albinism in African countries, like her native country Nigeria, by a Nigerian friend. She felt it was important that there were children’s books addressing the subject matter in order to fight against such discrimination, so she launched a call for manuscripts on albinism on Facebook. As she was not happy with the stories she received—they were too complicated and too adult-centred—she finally decided to write the book herself.

Okwuosa has since discovered a passion for writing, but the genesis of her first book shows that for her, the most important issue was the existence of children’s books about albinism rather than the fulfillment of a personal wish to write. Authors who foreground their wish for literary and social

change when talking about their books might do so as a selling strategy—reminding potential buyers why their books are relevant—but if we define “activism” as a practice to change society, the fact that the authors systematically highlighted their social purpose in creating books for Black children places self-published children’s literature by Black French and Black German authors firmly in an activist dynamic.

Social Movements as Impetus for Writing

While writing as a form of activism has personal beginnings for authors like Traoré and Bond, others of the books I researched have their origins in social movements or controversies. Nancy J. Della, the author of a children’s novel tackling the use of racist language in children’s literature, explains that she had been writing for her own kids for years, but that it was the “*N-Wort-Debatte*” [the n-word-debate] taking place in the German children’s book publishing industry, that made her decide to take the step and publish. In 2013, a huge controversy had indeed divided the German public opinion, after two of the most important German publishing companies explained that they would replace the n-word in children’s literature classics, like Astrid Lindgren’s *Pippi Longstocking* or Ottfried Preussler’s *Kleine Hexe*. Newspapers of all political persuasions denounced this as an “act of censorship”²⁷ and Austrian bestseller children’s books author Christine Nöstlinger, denounced what she called the “new trend” of “political correctness.”²⁸ During our interview, Della explained that what annoyed her the most was that this discussion did not take into account the impact the n-word in children’s books had on Black kids. She then decided to write a children’s book on how hearing the n-word in a story told by his teacher affected a little Black German boy. Through her book, published on her own expense by an independent publishing house, Della suddenly became part of the debate that was raging throughout the German literary and educative world. She received many letters from teachers and professors strongly criticizing her book. In our interview, she mentioned how emotionally exhausting this experience was, thus highlighting an important affective component of activism.²⁹

Four of my interview partners mentioned the BLM movement when asked about the impetus for writing their first book. For Joceline Altevogt, the BLM movement was a wake-up call that gave her the idea for her book,

which celebrates different skin colours. She explained that the BLM movement pushed her to reflect on racism, even if she was lucky not to have experienced too much racism herself in her childhood. Her book and the creation of her publishing house, Nalingi, which as of late 2022 has published four picture books by Black authors or Black illustrators, show that the sudden confrontation with racism prompted for her by the BLM movement, has had a lasting impact on her wish to write and publish for children. Regina Feldmann, who since our interview has signed a contract with a renowned German publisher for *Kami & Mika*, wrote a yet-unpublished text as a tool to engage in a discussion about structural racism with her young kids after she brought them to BLM marches. The book is aimed at kindergarteners and explains the history of racism, its origins, and its different forms in a simple manner.

While Feldmann was urged to write by the circumstances of the BLM movement and the lack of books providing answers to her young children, others, like Madina Guissé or Marion Bond, have taken up their pens to actively participate in the fight against racism. Bond had always been very vocal about racism, but felt that she was not actually changing anything: “*Et puis, quand le mouvement Black Lives a commencé, je me suis dit: ‘Ah, c’est ça que je veux faire. Je vais écrire un livre pour mes enfants’*” [“And then, when the BLM movement started, I told myself: ‘Ah, that’s what I want to do. I want to write a book for my children’”].³⁰ For Bond, writing for children is a way to participate in the making of change, and can thus be considered an activist activity. It is important to point out that her first book, *Cali, c’est moi*, is an everyday story whose plot is unrelated to the BLM movement—that is, it is the process of writing for Black kids rather than writing an explicitly activist storyline that is at the heart of her activism. Madina Guissé, author of two children’s novels with a cheeky Black girl called Neïba as their protagonist, had turned to other forms of expression since self-publishing her books in 2017 and 2018, but when the highly mediatized episodes of racist violence occurred in the US in the spring of 2020, she decided to get back to writing for children. During our interview, she remembered her shock seeing the video of George Floyd’s brutal murder. She explained: “*Je me suis dit: ‘il faut que je reprenne l’écriture de Neïba, c’est impératif’*” [“I told myself: ‘I have to go back to writing about Neïba. It’s imperative!’”].³¹ The feeling of urgency expressed by Guissé’s wording “C’est impératif!” illustrates the activist dynamics behind the writing of the third book of the Neïba-series. The

book has not been published yet, but in that moment, she felt that she had to do something immediately, in the same spirit with which people take to the streets right after an incident of racist police violence.

Self-published Black Authors' Mistrust of Publishing Houses

A majority of authors I interviewed self-published by choice, not because they did not have another option. Only three of them had submitted their manuscript to a publishing house before turning to self-publishing. Self-publishing is a growing phenomenon, and not only within the Black authors' community. In France, 17% of the books published in 2017 were self-published, when compared to only 10% in 2010.³² Reasons for self-publishing are diverse: it can be the difficulty of finding a publishing house, but sometimes it is due to financial advantages, a critique of the publishing business itself, or a refusal to comply with the expectations of publishers.³³ All the authors I interviewed mentioned at least one of these three last reasons. Of the four French authors I interviewed, none contacted a publishing house in the beginning.³⁴ Diariatou Kebe even refused offers from two publishing houses that wanted to publish and/or distribute her picturebook *Les Puissantes*. One of the main reasons that Kebe and other French authors deliberately chose self-publishing was the low share of the profits received by authors who publish through publishing houses. (This concern was not raised by any of the German authors I interviewed.)

A significant reason for self-publishing raised both by French and German authors was their mistrust of the publishing industry. They knew publishing through a publishing house could be difficult, and they feared it would be even more difficult for Black authors defending a Black perspective. Thomas Delarozziere, the illustrator of *Die Farbe der Haut mit allen Sinnen*, commented:

If you're coming with a really nice story, people will be like: "yeah, it is good, but it will make more money if the protagonist is white, because there are way much more white people." It is something that is really hard to fight against, because they have to make money. ... But I think it's changing: you have self-publishing and self-funding.³⁵

Tayo Awosusi-Onutor explained that if she ever worked with a publishing house, it would have to be a publishing house with an awareness for racism and a clearly antiracist approach. She insisted that it is important that Black authors feel safe, and that they don't have to spend precious energy explaining or justifying their positionality to publishers in order for them to be creative.

Only three authors I interviewed had actually had bad experiences with publishing houses due to questions related to race, but the fear of racial discrimination within the publishing business was deeply anchored in all the interviewed authors' minds. This fear seems to be mainly due to the lack of racial diversity in French and German publishing. Unlike in the United States or Great Britain, no study on racial diversity and racist discrimination in the publishing industry has been done in France and Germany.³⁶ Even without official numbers, staff pictures on the homepages of publishing houses in France and Germany suggest that most of the people working on the front line of those companies are white. Conversations I had with editors of three of the main German children's literature publishing houses confirm this. It seems safe to assume that the Lee & Low study's conclusion that publishers and their staff in the United States are mostly white can be extended to publishers outside of the United States.³⁷ Altevoigt actively looked for companies publishing authors who looked like her, but couldn't find any. This is one of the main reasons why she decided to create her own publishing company to publish her book: "Why should I go to them and give them my work when I don't even look like I could match with them. ... Because I looked [for publishing companies] at first ... but I didn't see any publishing house, where I thought: this is a publishing house where I can see myself."³⁸

The fear of not being welcomed into the established literary world also emanates from widely spread former testimonies of other authors and illustrators. Laura Nsafou's experience certainly played a role in dissuading Black French authors to reach out for publishing houses. The Black French children's books author, who recently was named one of "the five most promising authors" by French *Vogue*,³⁹ was told her book *Comme un million de papillons noirs*, about textured (afro) hair, was a niche product. One publisher even exclaimed that "she didn't publish a Black woman who writes for Black girls."⁴⁰ When her book became a great success in 2018, Nsafou

reported this experience in various interviews, shedding light on the structural racism still existing within the French publishing industry. Furthermore, the French Instagram Account @balancetonéditeur, which denounces “abuse, discrimination and bad practices in the publishing world,”⁴¹ certainly did not help to change the image of the publishing industry. The account collects and publishes shocking phrases heard by authors, illustrators, and publishing staff at their workplaces. It has over 10,000 followers and has been discussed by magazines like *ActuaLitté* and *Livres Hebdo*.⁴² Those kinds of testimonies confirm the negative image of the publishing world and push Black authors towards self-publishing. Traoré, for example, admitted that it was after reading testimonies about racism in publishing houses on different online forums that she abandoned the idea of searching for a publishing house. In the German publishing world, no such controversies have yet reached the public, but when asked about self-publishing, Awosusi-Onutor mentioned the experience of German-Lebanese award-winning author Andrea Karimé, who is very active in the promotion of BPoC German authors and who regularly speaks publicly about the difficulties she has encountered in the publishing world. Even if Awosusi-Onutor had other reasons not to submit her manuscript to a publishing house—her book was written and published as part of a funded cultural project—it shows that Karimé’s words are perceived as a forewarning by some BPoC authors.

Self-publishing as an Act of Cultural and Racial Insubordination

For many of the interviewed authors, self-publishing is not merely a way to avoid yet another discriminatory experience, but also a means of keeping control over the illustrations and the narrative. Guissé explained that self-publishing spared her from having to justify her standpoint: “*Je ne voulais même pas que ce soit un sujet que les deux parents de Neïba soient noirs. Non. Pour moi, je pense que ça fait partie des raisons pour lesquelles je suis passée à compte d’auteur dans un premier temps*” [“I didn’t even want it to be a topic of discussion that both Neïba’s parents were Black. No. I think that for me, this was one of the reasons that I opted for self-publishing in the beginning”].⁴³ Her fear of having to justify her choice of writing a story with only Black characters is perfectly legitimate in the French context: until recently, most Black French children depicted in kid lit were biracial.⁴⁴ Furthermore, a few years ago

(adult literature author) Leonora Miano, who also works as a screenwriter, was asked to “whiten” one character in her script because the producers feared that the public would not recognize themselves in the Black couple she had imagined.⁴⁵

Okwuosa and Traoré both explained that self-publishing was the best way to make sure their story would not be accompanied by illustrations depicting Black characters in a negative way. Traoré feared that her main character would be illustrated with a large nose and thick lips, and Okwuosa expressed her fear of seeing the childhood memories of the African grandmother of her main character represented with “huts made of wood or of mud.” They agreed that the only way to be sure to avoid this risk was self-publishing, as self-published authors choose (and pay) their illustrators and have the final say in content-related decisions. Guissé’s explanation about the importance of beautiful illustrations reveals that there is more at stake than just aesthetics: “*Souvent les personnages noirs, ce ne sont pas les plus esthétiques, on a beaucoup de personnages noirs, avec des grosses lèvres ou des cheveux dessinés n’importe comment. Enfin, pour nous c’est un véritable enjeu de s’aimer ... c’est un enjeu presque politique. Notre amour propre est politique*” [“Often Black characters aren’t the most beautiful ones. You have many Black characters who have thick lips and badly drawn hair. But, for us, loving ourselves is a real issue ... It is nearly a political issue. Our self-love is political”].⁴⁶ For these authors, controlling the illustrations and the narrative is a way of reclaiming their right to a dignified representation. Faced with a publishing world that, they fear, is not able to grant this, self-publishing appears to be a logical step to take.

Some of the interviewed authors go even further, regarding self-publishing as an act of insubordination. Cassianne Lawrence⁴⁷ explained why after being rejected by publishing houses, she went through with publishing her book *Love the Skin You’re In* anyway:

I did try to get publishers. But I kept getting the same answer: “We don’t do that sort of book,” or ... “That’s not what we’re looking for right now.” Which—you know what?—[means] they’re not looking for Black characters in a book, blank, period. But I feel like it was important for the story to be told. It was important for these books to be on shelves. It was important for Black children to have

access to these books. So, I was not going to let that stop me.⁴⁸

This refusal to be stopped by rejection, combined with the conviction that the existence of her work was necessary, make Lawrence's self-publishing a militant act. The other authors I interviewed did not express this point so assertively, but, like Lawrence, they all refused to be held back by a publishing industry they felt was not ready for their books. These authors share a common refusal to bend in front of the publishing industry, evident not only in their strong critique of the German and French book trade, but also in their approach to publishing. Traoré declared that "*aujourd'hui tout le monde peut éditer un livre, en vrai. Je pense qu'il ne faut pas avoir peur d'éditer un livre*" ["today, everyone can publish a book, really. I think one shouldn't be afraid of publishing a book"].⁴⁹ Altevogt, who created her own publishing company, shares the same opinion: "It's easy to go out there, learn a little bit and just try [your hand at it]."⁵⁰ By adopting this uninhibited approach, they desacralize the publishing industry and implicitly plead for opening this still very exclusionary circle.

Of course, this refusal of subordination goes far beyond the literary world. Guissé explained that publishing her "Neïba"-dyptic was the result of a long process, during which she managed to emancipate herself from the white gaze. She remembers that in the beginning of her writing process, she constantly worried about her book being perceived as "too Black" or about the white readership not understanding some of its cultural references. "But," she declared during our interview, "*la Madina de 2021 ne se soucie plus du regard de celui qui n'est pas noir*" ["The Madina of the year 2021 doesn't care anymore about the gaze of the non-Black person"].⁵¹ Other authors said similar things, insisting on the fact that even if their books were for everyone, what really mattered was what Black people thought of them. Lawrence's statement about her music—she is also an independent musician—also applies to her writing, and the writing of many of the interviewed authors. She explained:

People don't trust your art, unless it's approved by the white man. Like, unless you're signed by Universal Music, you're not relevant. Unless you're signed with Penguin publishers, you're not relevant. And it's like: No, my art is completely relevant. But you choose not to see it that way. Because society has taught you [that] whatever

the white man says, is what is in style, whatever the white man says is what is okay ... and I refuse. I refuse-e!”⁵²

A similar sentiment was expressed by many of the other authors I interviewed. Their refusal to conform to the expectations of the white publishing industry, to let publishing houses dictate the content or financial valuation of their stories, as well as their general critique of the exclusion of BPoC authors (and readers) from children’s literature, are all behind the author’s choice to self-publish, and make it a profoundly activist stance.

Self-published Books and Blacktivist Networks

This choice, however, comes at a cost. Self-published books are not usually sold in regular bookshops, but via either Amazon or an author’s website, which forces authors to spend precious time answering online orders and sending the books by mail. Furthermore, self-published books do not have the same exposure as those released by publishing houses, due to the considerable lack of financial resources and networks for advertising. Luckily, many of those authors can count on the support of a network of activists that partly compensates for those disadvantages.

In France, the association *D’un livre à l’autre*, which organizes (among other events) the *Salon du livre jeunesse afro-caribéen* [the Afro-Caribbean children’s bookfair] is an important agent in the promotion and sale of self-published books by Black authors. This book fair, created in 2012, annually attracts up to 3,000 visitors. Its exhibitors come from mainland France, from the French Antilles, and from francophone Africa, and include both many self-publishing authors and a number of small, alternative publishing houses specializing in Afrodiasporic children’s literature. The fair is a place where readers can meet authors and participate in workshops, debates, concerts, conferences, and readings. It serves not only as a place to sell books, but also as a unique opportunity for self-published authors and small alternative publishing houses to gain some visibility. 73.3% of the people who participated in the poll of the 2021 book fair said that their main reason for visiting the fair was “to discover new books.”⁵³

Another good way to promote self-published books is public readings in Black spaces. In 2019, Lawrence read her children’s book *Love the Skin You’re In* in the library of Each One Teach One [EOTO], a Black German

educational project. The year afterwards, she was invited for a reading during the first Black History Month in Cologne. The organization “Black Dads Germany,” created to empower Black dads, has started a monthly public children’s book reading in March 2021. In their second season of their “Black Dads Readings,” starting in September 2021, they chose to mainly concentrate on Black German authors, most of them published outside of the mainstream publishing industry. They even organized a reading of an unpublished manuscript by Élodie Malanda (me) and Sita Ngoumou, giving them the opportunity to try out the story in front of their projected readership. Traoré has had the same kind of support offered by Read! Kidz, a book club created by Black French woman Laurie Pezeron. Read! Kidz is the children’s section of her book club Read!, which is focused on literature by Black authors. Pezeron invited Traoré to read her then-unpublished manuscript *Les Aventures de Djibril* during the reading club for children and their parents, and Traoré said the positive reaction of the audience and their questions about where one could buy the book led her to put it out rapidly through self-publishing.

Social media is another important tool for the promotion of self-published books. The growing importance of social media for the current traditional publishing business has been documented.⁵⁴ For self-published books it is even more important, as it offers authors a cheap way to promote their books. Black bookbloggers and organizations can also play an important role in targeting the Black community specifically the Black community. Black bookbloggers and bookstagrammers like Ndey Bassine Jammeh-Siegel of @afrokids_germany or Elodie-Aude of @labooktillaise, as well as non-Black bookbloggers specializing in (children’s) books about diversity occasionally review self-published books by Black authors on their Instagram accounts. Karimé, the German-Lebanese author and kid lit activist, organized two Instagram Live sessions with self-published authors Awosusi-Onutor and Susann Bee to promote their books. Furthermore, Sekibu, a children’s literature working group of the Black German organization ISD, relays the information about new self-published books by Black German authors on its Facebook page.

An interesting way for self-published authors to sell their books, outside of Amazon and their homepages, is through specialized online bookshops. In 2020, Black Frenchwomen Prisca Ratovonasy and Ulriche Alé, best-known

for their podcast *Les enfants du bruit et de l'odeur*, which deals with racism at school, created L.E.B.D.O., an independent online bookshop. The bookshop focuses on inclusive children's and YA literature and essays, touching on subjects linked to decoloniality, queerness, and feminism. The goal of these two activists was to "highlight BPoC authors, for whom it's often more difficult to find a publishing house than for others."⁵⁵ A similar opportunity exists in Germany with the online shop Tebalou, created by two Black German women. Olaolu Fajembola and Tebogo Nimindé-Dundadengar launched the shop in 2019 with the goal of selling books and toys that reflect a positive self-image to every child, regardless of their race, religion, or body type.⁵⁶ Their shop offers self-published books by Black German authors, and their Instagram page regularly highlights Black German authors' work. In France, one can also find these books in the Nofi Store. The (online and on-site) store is part of the Nofi-Group, a Black French media group that also publishes articles about Black culture on their homepage and on their online magazine *Negus*. In the store, Nofi sells cosmetics for Black skins, Black dolls, and books—amongst them self-published children's books. Furthermore, Nofi recently started operating as a publisher for children's literature, reprinting previously self-published children's books such as Guissé's *Neiba* books.

Offline Blacktivist events that are not related to children's literature can also provide a platform for highlighting and selling self-published books by Black authors. Guissé sold numerous copies of her first *Neiba* book at the Parisian Natural Hair Academy, an annual fair that celebrates textured hair and Black beauty. The fair does not focus specifically on literature, but Guissé knew she would find an interested readership at a fair celebrating Black culture. And although I have not observed similar sales strategies in Germany, Okwuosa is convinced that this is the right way to do it. She believes self-published books by Black German authors cannot just be sold in shops: "*wir müssen ein bisschen aktivistischer unterwegs sein. Wir müssen zum ISD-Treffen gehen und dort Büchertische aufbauen und direkt unseren Markt erreichen*" ["We have to be more activist. We have to go to the annual meeting of the ISD, put our book tables out, and reach our market directly"].⁵⁷

Blacktivist networks are useful for more than just the promotion and sale of self-published children's literature by Black French and Black German authors. Sometimes they also provide support in the production and even

the writing of these books. In June 2021, the Black German collective Sekibu organized a writing workshop with published Black German children's author Chantal-Fleur Sandjon, and the group is planning to organize more workshops related to writing, publishing, and self-publishing to encourage Black people living in Germany to write and publish for children. In France, Afrolab, an Afrofeminist network supporting Black women pursuing their entrepreneurial projects, organized a workshop about digital publishing with the children's author Laura Nsafou in November 2020, and in February 2021, Diveka (which promotes diversity in children's literature) invited Nsafou for a writing masterclass on how to portray Black characters without drawing on stereotypes. Nsafou herself benefited from the Blacktivist network when she was starting out, as she financed the first 1,000 copies of her best-selling picture book *Comme un million de papillons noirs* through crowdfunding and published them with a tiny, independent publishing house. Bloggers like the founder of afrokidzstyle.com or the online queer Blacktivist collective *Cases rebelles* interviewed Nsafou before the book was out, and promoted the crowdfunding campaign, granting her visibility within the community of their readers.⁵⁸ These examples show how the growing number of self-published children's books by Black people in France and Germany is linked to the possibilities offered by Blacktivist organizations and events within the Black community in France and Germany. This seems to confirm Feldmann's sentiment about the Black community not necessarily needing the publishing industry: "*Jeder aus der Schwarze Community hat Netzwerke. Social Media, oder so . . . Und ich denke mir, wir haben eigentlich so eine Power selber*" ["Everyone in the Black community has networks. Social media, for example ... And I think, we actually have this power [to publish books] ourselves"].⁵⁹

The rise of Black authors publishing for children in Germany and France is thus closely linked to a rising sense of collective identity and a growing awareness of the need to make Black voices heard. Black French and Black German children's literature inscribes itself in a general collective awareness that is also manifested through the growing number of podcasts, homepages, Instagram accounts, and online magazines by Black French and Black German people that celebrate Black culture, Black bodies, and Black experiences and advocate for racial justice.

Conclusion

The interest in children's literature shown by Blacktivist media group Nofi, whose goal it is to "affirm and unify the Black community and fight against racial discrimination,"⁶⁰ by the online collective *Cases rebelles*, which concentrates on "stories, cultures and fights of Black peoples,"⁶¹ or by the ISD, the most important German organization fighting for the rights of Black people, demonstrates that children's literature is viewed as an important activist tool in the fight for racial justice within the French and German Blacktivist movements. The children's books by self-published Black German and Black French authors follow in the wake of this Blacktivism. Authors indeed affirm that they write mainly in order to offer young BPoC readers positive representations of themselves, thus participating in building a society in which BPoC children are valorized the same way that white children are. Some of these authors' motivations for writing emerged from social events tackling racial justice, like the Black Lives Matter movement. Their choice of self-publishing can be viewed as an act of resistance against the publishing industry, which is prone to structural racism, and even as a way of resisting the white gaze. Furthermore, self-published children's books by Black French and Black German authors rely on the activism of Blacktivist organizations, events, and actors, as well as on Black business, to gain visibility and support. This embeds self-published children's literature by Black German and Black French authors in an activist dynamic.

However, although self-published Black German and Black French children's authors benefit from the growing outreach of Blacktivist events, organizations, and actors, they are also limited by their choice to self-publish. At least six of the 14 authors and illustrators I interviewed have manuscripts ready to be published, but do not have the time, the energy, or the financial resources to turn them into books. This confirms Grossman, Spahr, and Young's observation that the promise of new technologies such as Amazon to democratize access to publishing may be a false one: "While new technologies have made publishing and distributing books easier, only people with disposable income or the ability to cultivate funders can tirelessly divert cash into projects that never break even."⁶² Some authors, like Diariatou Kebe, who during our interview did not show any interest in working with a publishing house, have changed their opinion since I spoke

with them. After experiencing the amount of work and logistical effort it took to store hundreds of copies of her self-published book *Les Puissantes* and ship them all over the world, Kebe conceded that if she ever had to publish a book again, she would perhaps submit it to a publishing house.⁶³ Others already recognized the importance of institutional publishing options when we spoke. For example, Regina Feldmann told me she would try to publish in publishing houses, despite her critical view of the publishing industry and her belief that Black children's authors do not necessarily need the traditional book market. She believes it is important that Black voices are represented in big publishing houses in order for them to have a broader outreach. Since our interview, Feldmann has signed her first book deal with S. Fischer Verlag, an important German publishing house. Kebe, for her part, has seen a shift within the publishing industry since the BLM movement went global: "*Il y a eu une certaine prise de conscience . . . par rapport aux vies noires*" ["There has been a certain awakening ... with regard to Black lives"].⁶⁴ Even if Kebe is cautious about the real impact of this sudden awareness, it is possible that as soon as it is complemented by an openness to other kinds of narratives and positionalities in children's books, self-publishing as an activist stance may no longer be necessary. In the meantime, more and more Blacktivist organizations and Black French and Black German authors are playing with the idea of founding their own publishing houses, pursuing their wish to change the publishing industry—and, thus, society—through Black children's literature.

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Notes

¹ Quotation in title from Cassianne Lawrence (author of *Love the Skin You're In*) interview by the author, October 29, 2020.

² See Julia Mickenberg and Philip Nel, "Radical Children's Literature Now!" *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (2011): 445–73.

³ See Karen Sands-O'Connor, *British Activist Authors Addressing Children of Colour* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 18–26; and Paula T. Connolly, *Slavery in American Children's Literature, 1790–2010* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2013): 13–51.

⁴ See Matthieu Letourneux, *Le roman d'aventures : 1870–1930* (Limoges: PULIM, 2010); and Jean-Marie Seillan, *Aux sources du roman colonial (1863–1914)* (Karthala, 2006).

⁵ See Mathilde Lévêque. "Pour le cœur et pour l'esprit, tous les hommes sont frères". Édý-Légrand, Claude Aveline, Blaise Cendrars et Léopold Chauveau, littérateurs pour la jeunesse," *Aden* 1, no. 4 (2009).

⁶ See Suzanne van der Beek, and Charlotte Lehmann, "What Can You Do as an Eco-hero? A Study on the Ecopedagogical Potential of Dutch Non-fictional Environmental Texts for Children," *Children's Literature in Education* (2022), doi:10.1007/s10583-022-09482-z.

⁷ See Élodie Malanda, "I look at books as being a form of activism'. Afroamerikanische Kinder- und Jugendliteratur als Teil der Black Lives Matter Bewegung," in *Protestbewegungen und Protestkulturen im deutsch-französischen, europäischen und globalen Kontext. Soziale Akteure, politische und mediale Ausdrucksformen, transkulturelle Dimensionen*, eds. Ulrike Dausend, Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, and Luitpold Rampeltshammer (Saarbrücken: Universaar, forthcoming), 325–51.

⁸ See Kimberley Reynolds, *Radical Children's Literature: Future Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 24–44.

⁹ I define authors of African and French descent and authors of African descent of any nationality living in France as "Black French." I define authors of African and German descent and authors of African descent of any nationality living in Germany as "Black German." I use "Black German" rather than "Afrogerman." Historically these two terms have coexisted, but they incorporate slightly different identity claims. As all of the authors I interviewed, except one, use the term "Black," I do the same. People of African descent include Black Caribbean people, African-Americans, people of any other Black diaspora, and mixed-race people with one Black parent.

¹⁰ Malte Klar and Tim Kasser, "Some Benefits of Being an Activist: Measuring Activism and Its Role in Psychological Well-Being," *Political Psychology* 30, no. 5 (2009): 755–77, at 757.

¹¹ See Mwasi, *Afrofem* (Paris: Syllepse, 2018), 9, 21, 25.

¹² These numbers are subject to change. As there is no bibliographical tool to search for authors by their race, I relied on the authors' presentations on the homepages of

publishing industries, blogs, and online bookshops specializing in children's literature by BPoC authors—which means that I certainly missed some books. Furthermore, I didn't count books teaching African languages, for example those published by Habte, an independent Ethiopian publishing house based in Berlin.

¹³ See Tanguy Habrand, "L'édition hors édition : vers un modèle dynamique. Pratiques sauvages, parallèles, sécantes et proscrites," *Mémoires du livre / Studies in Book Culture* 8, no. 1 (2016): doi:10.7202/1038028ar.

¹⁴ Bibliographic information about the authors and illustrators I interviewed, together with notes on their works, and on the paratexts and epitexts I analyzed, are to be found in the Appendix.

¹⁵ Of all the interviews, paratexts, and epitexts I analyzed, only the homepage of Fatima Nascimiento didn't mention one of these three reasons. As she writes in German and Portuguese and has written a book on her Nagô identity, one can surmise that transmitting her cultural heritage is one of the motivations for her writing, but this would have to be verified through an interview.

¹⁶ See <https://diversebooks.org/about-wndb/>.

¹⁷ See Rudine Sims Bishop, *Free within Ourselves: The Development of African American Children's Literature* (London: Heinemann, 2007), 85–87.

¹⁸ See Karen Sands-O'Connor, *Children's Publishing and Black Britain, 1965- 2015* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

¹⁹ Melanie Ramdarshan Bold, *Representation of People of Colour Among Children's Book Authors and Illustrators* (London: BookTrust, 2019), https://www.booktrust.org.uk/globalassets/research/represents/booktrust_diversityreport_execsummary_april2019.pdf; CLPE *Reflecting Realities—Survey of Ethnic Representation within UK Children's Literature 2019*, CLPE, November 11, 2020, <https://clpe.org.uk/research/clpe-reflecting-realities-survey-ethnic-representation-within-uk-childrens-literature>.

²⁰ Donatella Della Porta and Sidney G. Tarrow, eds., *Transnational Protest and Global Activism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 3.

²¹ Amit Chauduri, who crafted the term, uses it to qualify publishers and agents who abandon the traditional way of evaluating novelists: Amit Chauduri, ed., *Literary Activism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2017), 3. I, however, use the term in the same way as Sands-O'Connor, when she describes the activism of literacy organizations like CLPE and BookTrust: Sands-O'Connor, *British Activist Authors*, 172.

²² Nancy Larrick, "The All-White World of Children's Books," *Saturday Review*, September 11, 1965, 63–65.

²³ The authors gave me permission to use their full names in this article.

²⁴ Maka Traoré, interview by the author, August 12, 2021, audio, 03:04-03:06, 03:44-03:45. All translations to English from the interviews are by the author.

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- ²⁵ Marion Bond, interview by the author, July 14, 2021, audio, 1:49–1:59.
- ²⁶ Melanie Ramdarshan Bold, *Inclusive Young Adult Fiction: Authors of Colour in the United Kingdom* (New York: Palgrave Pivot, 2019), 76–77.
- ²⁷ Ulrich Greiner, “Die kleine Hexenjagd,” *Die Zeit online*, January 17, 2013; Harald Martenstein, “Rassismus in Kinderbüchern - Achtung, Zensur,” *Der Tagespiegel*, January 20, 2013.
- ²⁸ Christine Nöstlinger, “Der Neger bleibt ein Neger,” *Die Zeit online*, January 24, 2013.
- ²⁹ Cher Weixia Chen, Paul C. Gorski, “Burnout in Social Justice and Human Rights Activists: Symptoms, Causes and Implications,” *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, Volume 7, Issue 3, November 2015, 366–390.
- ³⁰ Bond, interview, 1:42–1:47.
- ³¹ Madina Guissé, interview by the author, July 16, 2021, audio, 42:43–42:46.
- ³² Nicole Vulser, “Un livre autoédité dans la première sélection du Prix Renaudot,” *Le Monde*, September 7, 2018. https://www.lemonde.fr/economie/article/2018/09/07/un-livre-autoedite-dans-la-premiere-selection-du-prix-renaudot_5351885_3234.html.
- ³³ See DED, *Manifeste pour l'autoédition* (Antibes: Self-published, 1987), 1; Mathilde Loire, “Pourquoi les plates-formes d’autoédition séduisent de plus en plus d’auteurs confirmés,” *Le Monde*, March 16, 2019, https://www.lemonde.fr/pixels/article/2019/03/16/pourquoi-les-plates-formes-d-autoedition-seduisent-de-plus-en-plus-d-auteurs-confirmes_5437126_4408996.html; Mario Parent, “Développement de l’autoédition au Québec : la lutte pour la reconnaissance,” in *Édition et pouvoirs*, ed. Jacques Michon (Sainte-Foy, QC: Presses de l’Université Laval, 1995), 103; Claude Vallier, *L’auteur en liberté. Guide de l’édition alternative* (Paris: Michel Eyquem, 2001), 15, 31.
- ³⁴ Guissé started to look for a publishing house once she realized how time-consuming it was to promote and sell her book.
- ³⁵ Joceline Altevoigt and Thomas Delarozier, interview by the author, May 29, 2021, audio, 1:08:34–1:09:21.
- ³⁶ Tin Cheuk Leung and K Coleman S. Strumpf, “Discrimination in the Publishing Industry?” *SSRN*, January 14, 2022, doi:10.2139/ssrn.3660289; Anamik Saha and Sandra van Lente, *Re:thinking ‘Diversity’ in Publishing* (London: Goldsmith University Press, 2020); Bold, *Representation*; Bold, *Inclusive Young Adult Fiction*.
- ³⁷ Lee & Low Books, “Where Is the Diversity in Publishing? The 2019 Diversity Baseline Survey Results” (January 28, 2020). Accessed February 6, 2023. <https://blog.leeandlow.com/2020/01/28/2019diversitybaselinesurvey/>.
- ³⁸ Altevoigt and Delarozier, interview, 1:06:48–1:07:05.
- ³⁹ Lauren Bastide, “Les cinq écrivaines françaises les plus prometteuses du moment,” *Vogue*, February 15, 2022, <https://www.vogue.fr/culture/article/jeunes-femmes-ecrivaine>
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⁴⁰ Yves Deloison and Laura Nsafou, “Une petite fille noire peut être aussi universelle que le petit Nicolas,” *Le Courrier de l’Atlas*, March 25, 2019, <https://www.lecourrierdelatlas.com/dossier-du-courrier-laura-nsafou-une-petite-fille-noire-peut-etre-aussi-universelle-que-le-petit-nicolas-21700/>.

⁴¹ “Collectif contre le harcèlement, les discriminations et les mauvaises pratiques dans le monde de l’édition,” Instagram community, <https://www.instagram.com/balancetonediteur/?hl=fr>.

⁴² Nicolas Gary, “Balance Ton Éditeur : ‘Il fallait que ça sorte,’” *Actualité*, April 15, 2021, <https://actualite.com/article/99833/edition/balance-ton-editeur-il-fallait-que-ca-sort>; Dahlia Girgis, “Balance ton éditeur’ dénonce ‘un milieu souvent idéalisé et encore trop opaque,’” *Livres Hebdo*, April 19, 2021, <https://www.livreshebdo.fr/article/balance-ton-editeur-denonce-un-milieu-souvent-idealise-et-encore-trop-opaque>.

⁴³ Guissé, interview, 34:14–34:19.

⁴⁴ See Nathalie Thiery and Véronique Francis, “Figures et représentations de l’enfant noir dans les albums pour la jeunesse,” *Spirale - Revue de recherches en éducation* 55, no. 1 (2015): 39–57, 43–45.

⁴⁵ See Leonora Miano, *Afropea : utopie post-occidentale et post- raciale* (Paris: Grasset, 2020), 143.

⁴⁶ Guissé, interview, 12 :47–13 :10.

⁴⁷ Lawrence is an author and musician from the Caiman Islands. She writes in English, but as she lives in Berlin I count her as a Black German author.

⁴⁸ Lawrence, interview, 11:29–11:56.

⁴⁹ Traoré, interview, 55:47–55:52.

⁵⁰ Altevogt and Delaroziere, interview, 9:23–9:28.

⁵¹ Guissé, interview, 39:32–39:39.

⁵² Lawrence, interview, 16:09–16:42.

⁵³ Due to Covid, the 2021 fair was held on the online platform Discord. Even if the online version offered the various activities listed above, this response might be due to the limited possibilities of buying books. Furthermore, the online fair attracted a far smaller attendance than its previous iterations.

⁵⁴ See Simone Murray, “‘Selling’ Literature. The Cultivation of Book Buzz in the Digital Literary Sphere,” *Logos* 27, no. 1 (2016): 11–21, 16–18.

⁵⁵ “On a également voulu mettre en valeur des auteurs et des autrices racisé·e·s, qui ont souvent plus de mal que les autres à trouver une maison d’édition.” Prisca Ratovonasy to

Fiona Schmidt on Fiona Schmit, “Podcast et librairie jeunesse : ces deux amies déconstruisent le racisme à l’école”, *Les Inrockuptibles*, March 12, 2020: <https://www.lesinrocks.com/cheek/podcast-librairie-jeunesse-bruit-odeur-racisme-308427-04-12-2020/>.

⁵⁶ “About Us,” Tebalou, accessed November 9, 2022, <https://tebalou.shop/ueber-uns/>.

⁵⁷ Ngozi Okwuosa, interview by the author, April 18, 2021, 40:42–40:45.

⁵⁸ Laura Nsafou, “En attendant Adé : rencontre avec Laura Nsafou,” *Cases rebelles*, September 19, 2017, <https://www.cases-rebelles.org/en-attendant-ade-rencontre-avec-laura-nsafou/>.

⁵⁹ Regina Feldmann, interview by the author, October 20, 2020, audio, 33:23–33:35.

⁶⁰ As the group’s Wikipedia page puts it, “affirmer et unifier la communauté noire ainsi que ... lutter contre la discrimination raciale”: “Nofi Group,” Wikipedia, last modified April 12, 2022, https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nofi_Group.

⁶¹ “... histoires, cultures et luttes des peuples noirs”: <https://www.cases-rebelles.org/notre-collectif/>.

⁶² See Claire Grossman, Juliana Spahr, and Stephanie Young, “Literature’s Vexed Democratization,” *American Literary History* 33, no. 2 (Summer 2021), 315.

⁶³ Kebe mentioned this during an Instagram Live session on @diveka_asso (April 8, 2022), 21:20–21:36.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 21:59–22:05.on.

APPENDIX

Figure 1: Bibliographic information about the interviewed authors and illustrators

Black French authors

Author	Date of interview	Title(s)	Publishing form	Genre
Marion Bond	14.07.2021	<i>Calé, c’est moi.</i> 2020.	Self-published	Picture book, everyday story
		<i>Les petits super-héros sont les plus forts.</i> <i>Mission en eaux troubles.</i> 2020	Self-published	Illustrated novel, adventure

Madina Guissé	16.07.2021	<i>Neiba Je-sais-tout (ou presque). Tu sais garder un secret ?</i> 2017.	Self-published	Illustrated novel, everyday story
		<i>Neiba Je sais-tout (ou presque). Un portable dans le cartable.</i> 2018.	Self-published	Illustrated novel, everyday story
Diariatou Kebe	13.07.2021	<i>Les Puissantes. Portraits illustrés de 20 femmes noires d'hier, d'aujourd'hui et de demain.</i> 2021.	Self-published	Documentary, biographies, Black women
Maka Traoré	12.08.2021	<i>Les Aventures de Djibril. Djibril, un jour de pluie.</i> 2019.	Self-published	Picture book, everyday story
		<i>Les Aventures de Djibril. Djibril à l'école.</i> 2019.	Self-published	Picture book, everyday story

Black German authors and illustrators

Author/ Illustrator	Date of interview	Title(s)	Publishing form	Genre
Joceline Altevogt	29.05.2021	<i>Die Farbe der Haut mit allen Sinnen.</i> 2021.	Nalingi Verlag (publishing house created by the author)	Picture book, skin colour
		<i>Trau dich zu träumen.</i> 2022.		Picture book, biography, female footballer
Tayo Awosusi-Onutor	21.05.2021	<i>JOKE! Club: Jeké, Dui, Drin - 3 Freundinnen in Berlin.</i> 2021.	Self-published	Illustrated novel, everyday story, Roma & Sinti
Susann Bee (auth. & ill.)	29.07.2021	<i>Zoey the Superhero and the Spider - Zoey die Superheldin und die Spinne.</i> 2021. E-book.	Self-published	Bilingual picture book, adventure, superhero, overcoming fears
		<i>Zoey, the Superhero: Oh no, a Spider - Zoey, die Superheldin: Oje eine Spinne.</i> 2021. Paperback.		

Thomas Delarozieri (ill.)	29.05.2021	<i>Die Farbe der Haut mit allen Sinnen.</i> 2021. <i>Trau dich zu träumen.</i> 2022.	Nalingi Verlag (publishing house created by the author)	Picture book, skin colour Picture book, biography, female footballer
Nancy J. Della	28.05.2021	<i>Das Wort, das Bauchschmerzen macht.</i> 2014.	Edition Assemblage (independent publisher; publishing financed by the author)	Illustrated novel, racism, racial justice
Fatoumata Fatajo	23.11.2020	<i>Hallo Flugzeug! Wo kommst du her?</i> 2020.	Self-published	Picture book, everyday story
Regina Feldmann	22.10.2020	<i>Kami & Mika – Die phantastische Reise nach Wolkenbain.</i> 2023.	S. Fischer Verlage / Sauerländer (traditional publishing house)	Illustrated novel, fantasy
Cassianne Lawrence	29.10.2020	<i>Afrokids. Love the Skin You're In.</i> 2018.	Self-published	Picture book, empowerment, race
Sita Ngoumou (ill.)	21.10.2020	<i>Hallo Flugzeug! Wo kommst du her?</i> 2020.	Self-published	Picture book, everyday story
Ngozi Okwuosa	18.04.2021	<i>Rapulu's Rainbow Stars.</i> 2021. <i>Maik & Malaika. Der herbstliche Schuhsalat.</i> 2022. <i>Maik & Malaika. Die versteckte Weihnachtskrippe.</i> 2022.	Self-published	Picture book, albinism Picture book, everyday story Picture book, everyday story

Figure 2: Paratexts and epitexts

Author/ Illustrator	Title(s)	Publishing form	Other sources	Genre
Ashley Auguste (France)	<i>Little Nappy</i> . 2019.	Self-published	Crowdfunding campaign: https://de.ulule.com/little-nappy/	Docufiction, textured (Afro) hair
Assida Traoré (France)	<i>Mon voyage chez les Soniké</i> . 2018. <i>Mamady fête l'aïd</i> . 2018.	Wagadou Jeunesse (publishing house created by the author)	http://soninke.tv/2018/10/13/entretien-avec-assida-traore-lauteur-de-mon-voyage-chez-les-soninkes-et-mamady-fete-laid/	Picture book, travel Picture book, everyday story
Avocado Blues (Ger.)	<i>Taino & Kende: Geheimnisvolle Post von Mami Wata</i> . 2015.	Self-published	Author's presentation Press: Caren Miesenberger, „Ein positiveres Bild Afrikas“, <i>TAZ-Nord</i> , October 21, 2015. Interview by Verband binationale Familien: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VbiMOAxAhc	Picture book, fantasy
Ophélie Boudimbou (F)	<i>Kanika - Dans la cuisine de mamie !</i> 2019.	Self-published	Blog interview: https://lesanctuairedepenelope.org/2019/11/ophelie-boudimbou-l-afrique-a-ce-pouvoir-d-emeveiller-petits-et-grands.html	Picture book, cooking, travel

Cissé Diambissy (F)	<i>Kia et Atim.</i> 2017.	Self-published	Press Interview: https://afropreneur.ia.net/index.php/cisse-diambissy-lauteur-de-la-serie-de-livres-jeunesse-kia-et-atim/decouverte/artculture/ Crowdfunding: https://fr.ulule.com/jumelles-intrepides/	Picture book, everyday story
Safia Enjoylife (F)	<i>My type of bad gyals.</i> (n.d.)	Self-published	Homepage: https://grandeurnoire.fr/content/4-quest-ce-que-grandeurnoire	Biographies Black women
EOTO (G)	<i>Tayos Weg.</i> (n.d.)	Self-published	Preface	Documentary, Afrogerman history
Valérie HackbARTH (F)	<i>Shake Shake Shake tes vanilles.</i> 2019.	Self-published	Crowdfunding campaign: https://de.ulule.com/shake-vanilles/	Illustrated novel, everyday story, textured hair
Dayan Kodua (G)	<i>Odo.</i> 2019. <i>Odo und der Beginn einer großen Reise.</i> 2021.	Gratitude Verlag (publishing house created by the author)	Preface of <i>Odo</i>	Picture book, everyday story
Fatima Nascimento (G)	<i>Die Seerose Alba.</i> 2017. <i>Gregor und das Ei.</i> 2020. <i>Minha baianidade nagô</i> (n.d.) <i>Ode está a Magia do Natal?</i> 2020.	Fafalag (publishing house created by the author)	Homepage of the author: https://fatimanascimento.de/	Picture books, tales of animals and plants, Identity Everyday story

G. Ngassa (F)	<p><i>Le Pouvoir mystérieux de Tamara Ngougouli.</i> 2018.</p> <p><i>Patou n'aime pas le foufou.</i> 2019.</p>	Crepinouilles (publishing house created by the author)	<p>Preface of <i>Le Pouvoir</i></p> <p>TV: Ghyslaine Ngassa, association "les Crépinouilles"</p> <p><i>Le journal d'Afrique sur TV5 Monde</i>, 2.1.2019 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kpfbGYNR7Mk</p> <p>Crowdfunding Campaign: https://fr.ulule.com/le-projet-tamara/</p>	<p>Illustrated novel, textured hair, detective story</p> <p>Everyday story</p>
Venessa Yatch (F)	<p><i>J'ai mal à mes cheveux.</i> 2017.</p> <p><i>Rêve plus haut que la tour Eiffel.</i> 2019.</p> <p><i>Passage anticipé.</i> 2020.</p>	Self-published	<p>Homepage of the author: https://venessayatch.com/accueil/</p>	Illustrated novels, everyday stories

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