



by Mithu Sanyal
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Fiction

🏆 German Book Prize
Longlist 2021

🏆 German Book Prize
Shortlist 2021

🏆 Ruhr Literature Prize
Winner 2021



The Goethe-Institut
supported the English
translation of this book.

Identitti

Identitti

review

Mithu Sanyal's timely fictional debut speaks to ongoing discussions around race, culture and identity. It will appeal to readers of English-language authors such as Bernardine Evaristo, Reni Eddo-Lodge and Afua Hirsch, as well as anyone with an interest in the issues raised by the Rachel Dolezal case (where a former college professor and activist 'identified' as black despite being born to two white parents) and other similar cases that have since emerged.

Nivedita (aka Identitti) is a well-known blogger and doctoral student at the University of Düsseldorf who follows her supervisor, superstar Postcolonial and Race studies Professor Saraswati, and idolises her almost like a goddess. In her blog entries she mentions the Hindu Goddess, Kali, with whom she holds imaginary conversations throughout the novel. Kali personifies Nivi's search for identity, and rather mirrors Saraswati's influence in Nivi's life. But a mere couple of hours after being interviewed on the radio about her blog and about Saraswati, Nivedita's life and sense of self are turned upside down, when it emerges that Saraswati is actually white (and German).

Professor Saraswati turns out to have been assuming a false racial identity. Coming to terms with this shock, Nivedita must re-evaluate her own assumptions and beliefs. Her defence of Saraswati on the radio just hours before the scandal breaks comes back to bite her, and, as her online reputation as an activist, intellectual person of colour goes up in flames, she starts questioning everything. The main

plotline unfolds in the days and weeks following the scandal. The narrative moves back and forth in Nivedita's life, focusing on specific moments that made her doubt her identity and her place in the world, and reconsider the lessons she has learned from Saraswati, including those she has had to unlearn. Saraswati insists on her position and tries to pass off her lie as being 'transracial' or even racial drag, but the online activists do not accept her transgression.

Identitti showcases the powerful role of internet culture in the current political debates about race and identity, highlighting the continual battles being conducted online, particularly on social media. The narrative combines blog entries, twitter threads and regular text, which are differentiated by headings and different font styles, and is interspersed with informative asides on sexuality, queerness, belonging, and the current German and international multicultural context.

Listen to translator Lucy Jones reading a sample translation from Mithu Sanyal's *Identitti*. This video is available as part of the [New Books in German](#) playlist on the [Translators Aloud](#) YouTube channel.

press quotes

'Identitti is a new kind of experience: finding yourself and being able to laugh along the way.'

Alice Hasters

'A ruthlessly funny search for identity that spares nothing and no one! If you're someone who's constantly asking yourself who you are (and why you are the way you are), you'll be both smarter and in a better mood after you've read this book.'

Alina Bronsky

about the author



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Mithu Sanyal was born in Düsseldorf in 1971 and is a cultural scientist, writer, journalist and critic. Her non-fiction work *Vulva. Das unsichtbare Geschlecht* was published in 2009 and *Vergewaltigung. Aspekte eines Verbrechens* in 2016.

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Previous Works: *Vulva. Das unsichtbare Geschlecht*, Hanser (2009);
Vergewaltigung. Aspekte eines Verbrechens, Hanser (2016)

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