



Susann Lewerenz. *Geteilte Welten: Exotisierte Unterhaltung und Artist*innen of Color in Deutschland 1920-1960.* Vienna: Bohlau Verlag, 2017. 528 pp. \$111.19, paper, ISBN 978-3-412-50569-1.

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In *Geteilte Welten*, Susann Lewerenz seeks to answer a paradoxical question: how could performers of color be a regular part of the entertainment scene under a National Socialist regime that was committed to a murderous project of racial purification? In answering this question, Lewerenz not only establishes a largely unexamined presence of Black, North African, Arab, and Asian performers in Nazi Germany but also illustrates how such performers maneuvered within the entertainment industry over a longer period ranging from the late nineteenth century to the 1950s. She demonstrates that stage performance imposed limits on entertainers, not least because the industry was governed by ambivalent dynamics of exoticization and racialization and was also subjected to increasing degrees of political intervention. At the same time, she insists that we appreciate how the industry also provided opportunities for a measure of self-expression and security, even in the precarious situation under the Nazis.

To illustrate how this operated, Lewerenz moves between two levels of analysis. On the one hand, she undertakes a structural analysis of the entertainment industry across a broad period to establish continuities and temporal particularities. On the other hand, she focuses on performers' ex-

periences and the varying strategies they used to navigate the swirling political currents in very different regimes. This latter task is challenging, given the ephemeral and fragmentary nature of popular entertainments, so Lewerenz focuses largely on case studies excavated from a wide range of public and private archives. These case studies provide a striking picture of entertainers' inventiveness and strategic choices even in the face of outright oppression.

Because Lewerenz is interested in establishing broad continuities as well as the particularities of different periods, she organizes the book chronologically. The first two chapters reach back to the Imperial (1871-1918) and Weimar eras (1918-1933) respectively, to establish the trends that conditioned how entertainers could perform in the National Socialist era.

In a relatively short first chapter based chiefly on secondary literature, Lewerenz analyzes the visual culture of the Imperial era. She argues that it was founded on an exoticizing and racist gaze meant to reinforce a colonial vision of the world. While she demonstrates that this culture was pervasive, Lewerenz's more important point is that it also contained persistent ambivalences that made it difficult to control. For example, there were ten-

sions between the public's desire for spectacle and critics' insistence on uplifting content. Performers in "people shows" (*Völkerschauen*) and circuses could resolve these tensions through claims to authenticity that played on notions of absolute difference and even racial hierarchies. However, performers also strategically adopted various roles to match popular exotic stereotypes, and this could reveal how contrived those notions were. Lewerenz only briefly notes the equally disruptive presence of African American performers before 1914, largely because the scholarship on this subject is sparse, but she insightfully notes that they offered a different set of ambivalent discourses. In contrast to colonial discourses based on absolute difference and hierarchy, African American music and dance allowed performers to embody modern elegance even as their parodic performances also called such distinctions into question. In this chapter Lewerenz establishes particular exoticized roles that were open to performers of color but also demonstrates that this entertainment culture shaped by colonial connections and global exchanges could not always be directed to support a colonial worldview.

The next chapter, on the Weimar era, explores in much more detail two distinct entertainment spaces for performers of color, namely, playing the role of the African American on popular stages and playing the role of the colonial other in people shows. Within each space she examines the distinct opportunities to make a living while showing how performers navigated the general interest in exotic spectacle, the increasingly politicized entertainment scene, and their own desire for security and dignity. The associations of jazz with glamor, modernity, democracy, and Americanization opened spaces for African Americans and for Black Germans to take up roles that conflicted with the prevailing colonial order, but these performances were increasingly targeted by reactionaries and conservatives both in rhetoric and regulation. Already before 1933 the environment had become hostile enough that some Black performers

eschewed American personae in favor of a less controversial orientalist exoticism. Turning to people shows, Lewerenz highlights continuities, but she shows that the changes are more interesting. Wartime and postwar disruption in the industry as well as an unfavorable job market for people of color led to the increasing participation of German-resident migrants in people shows, including managing their own touring productions. She suggests that this involved a strategic accommodation to colonial stereotypes and the cause of restoring Germany's lost colonies, but she uses suggestive examples of protests against poor pay and demeaning performances to show there were limits to this accommodation.

Having established the main roles for performers of color and their room for maneuver within the entertainment scene up to 1933, Lewerenz turns to her main subject in three substantial chapters on the National Socialist era. The first of these lays out the broad context for performers of color under the Nazis, showing continuities with the difficulties of the late Weimar era as well as the active intervention of authorities into the entertainment industry. Rather than an immediate and straightforward imposition of Nazi racial policy, however, she tracks a chaotic set of competing imperatives that opened vital spaces for performers of color who would not or could not leave the country. For example, officials insistent on diminishing the number of foreign entertainers on German stages conflicted with those officials and commercial interests who saw value in maintaining the international flair that had long been a hallmark of stage entertainments. Officials who objected to the presence of performers of color on stage on racial grounds conflicted with those officials who deployed them strategically to support foreign policy goals. Although Lewerenz demonstrates a clear direction in policy toward exclusion and persecution, with the war hastening this considerably, she also illustrates the inconsistency and arbitrariness of the system. Caught between rival interests, some performers of color could find

much-needed income and security in the entertainment industry even if ultimately it did not protect them from the Nazis' racial goals.

In the next two chapters Lewerenz uses a series of case studies to explore how demand for “exotic” and “colonial” entertainments created opportunities to play particular roles, how this was regulated by authorities trying to reconcile competing demands, and how performers of color tried to navigate the system. Lewerenz uses three case studies to illustrate how persistent public interest in “exotic” entertainments forced performers into narrow roles but also could question the Nazi racial project in surprising ways. She uses Homi Bhabha's notion of colonial mimicry to explain why the best-known people show of the era, the “German Africa Show” (*Deutsche Afrika-Schau*), was so troubling to authorities. Although the performers strategically put themselves in the service of colonial propaganda, they blurred racialized lines in unacceptable ways by playing contrived roles and presenting themselves as compatriots of their audiences. Doorlay's “Tropical Express” (*Tropen-Express*) offers Lewerenz a fascinating case study of an American-style revue made up mostly of international entertainers, including performers of color, who took audiences on a world tour. Its success was remarkable in an era when revues, international entertainers, performers of color, and anything American were disparaged by authorities. While the show exoticized its performers of color, she argues convincingly that the show also allowed them to play transgressive roles as cosmopolitan, glamorous, professional entertainers to be admired rather than people-show performers to be examined. The show's success depended on the combination of an exoticism that drew attention away from the American-style elements and Doorlay's own self-presentation as the German figure with whom audiences could identify, which distracted from the transgressive roles. Finally, Lewerenz explores official efforts to regulate “ethnic drag,” that is, German performers taking on international personae. Most notably, they

settled on rules that made any artifice explicit, so that audiences would not mis-identify a German performer or mistakenly identify with a foreign performer. Ultimately officials allowed this cross-dressing because it provided audiences with international flair without having to rely on foreigners or performers of color, but their efforts to install clunky rules reveal their concerns about audience interests and the impact of popular entertainments.

In her chapter on the uses of “colonial” entertainments under the Nazis, Lewerenz examines the widely varying opportunities for self-articulation available to different performers of color, according to how they fit into long-standing colonial tropes or short-term Nazi foreign policy goals. Black performers had limited opportunities to establish roles for themselves on stage, and those lay mainly in the role of loyal colonial subjects, a trope that had been useful for colonial revisionists since the Weimar period. However, as with the German Africa Show, claiming comradeship with audiences or emphasizing their Germanness could present an unacceptable challenge to the Nazis' racial order. This was especially true once the war brought a revival of propaganda campaigns demonizing the Black soldiers who had taken part in the French occupation of the Rhineland. Black women like Thea Leyseck, however, could escape censure, suggesting that Black women performers were relatively invisible to authorities. By contrast, non-Black performers of color who could serve a useful propaganda purpose could continue to perform even late into the war. They could play the role of heroic victims of British and French imperialism, bringing together exotic appeal with an appropriate political message, although their situation remained fundamentally precarious.

Lewerenz's final substantive chapter, on East and West Germany in the 1950s, explores which forms of exotic entertainment were still viable after 1945 and what impact this had on the increasing numbers of performers of color on German

stages. She argues convincingly that in both East and West popular exotic entertainments offered opportunities for presenting new visions of Germany that commented, often indirectly, on the colonial and National Socialist pasts and on the influence of American culture in the Cold War world. Using the example of Black entertainers in East Germany, she shows that colonial revisionist narratives had lost legitimacy in favor of solidarity with anticolonial struggles in Africa and antiracist struggles in the United States. Nevertheless, Lewerenz sees continuities in the fact that Black performers, including Black Germans, were always associated with distant lands in need of support. In West Germany, Lewerenz identifies a general continuation of exoticizing and racializing discourses that dated back to the Imperial era and that was tied to a lack of critical engagement with the colonial past. Using a Hawaiian people show and Black entertainers like Marie Nejar (a.k.a. Leila Negra), she illustrates how entertainers accommodated the project of reconstructing a sense of West Germanness after the Nazis. Although based on tolerance and a willingness to engage with the wider world, this project nevertheless required the construction of racialized others.

Lewerenz's survey of exotic entertainments over four very different eras makes a number of important scholarly contributions. She offers new insights into our understanding of people shows after 1918, and she encourages us to appreciate stage entertainments beyond the jazz musicians and celebrities who generally draw attention. Her exploration of the Nazi-era entertainment highlights the inconsistency of many of the regime's racial regulations as well as their increasing focus after 1938. More broadly, her insistence that we understand the entertainment industry as a workplace is a welcome shift away from a narrower focus on representations. This emphasis allows her to explore in more depth the heterogeneity of performers' experiences and the extent to which they were able to secure a place for themselves using

entertainment forms that marked them as different.

Lewerenz's title points to this central emphasis, playing on the oppositional meanings of the German word *teilen*, which can mean both "to divide" and "to share." Performers of color were "divided" from the rest of society by the exoticizing and racializing tendencies within the entertainment industry, which were encouraged in various ways by political actors. At the same time, Lewerenz suggests, the performers also "shared" in society by occupying an established and well-integrated role. This latter meaning feels a bit overextended given the limits imposed on the performers she studies, especially after 1938 but also already in the late Weimar era, but it does point to the most important contribution of her work. By highlighting the room for maneuver that existed within popular entertainments, Lewerenz allows us to see performers of color not merely as victims but as strategic agents who variously accommodated, manipulated, or resisted the trends and pressures surrounding them. Thus her work facilitates a more nuanced engagement with the politics of their choices. It also opens up pathways for discussing the liberating and oppressive potentials contained within popular entertainments across Europe and North America.

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