

Tiffany N. Florvil, Vanessa D. Plumly, eds. *Rethinking Black German Studies: Approaches, Interventions and Histories*. Studies in Modern German and Austrian Literature Series. Oxford: Peter Lang, 2018. 330 pp. \$97.95, cloth, ISBN 978-3-0343-2225-6.

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The editors of *Rethinking Black German Studies* aim to showcase the directions taken by a new generation of scholars working in the field. Tiffany N. Florvil and Vanessa D. Plumly themselves belong to this second generation and have played leading roles in the development of Black German studies: Florvil as founder of H-Black-Europe and both as co-chairs of the Black Diaspora Studies Network at the German Studies Association (GSA) and as co-organizers of two seminar series in Black German studies at the annual GSA convention. Most of the contributions to their volume originated as conference papers workshopped in these groundbreaking GSA seminars.

In their introduction, Florvil and Plumly set out to first pay homage to those scholars, artists, and activists who initiated and sustained research into the history of Black people in Germany and to position their own work as indebted to this scholarship and activism. They also call on readers to engage in a questioning of positionalities: Under which conditions is it legitimate for white scholars to pursue research in Black German studies? And under which conditions do scholars, particularly those researching present-day questions, run the risk of appropriating the voices of Black Germans or of silencing their voices by speaking on their behalf? The notion of “rethinking” present in the

book’s title thus does not reflect a project of methodological correction or innovation but instead reflects a project of “rethinking what might be missing from the narrative, from the analysis, from the discourse and from one’s own perspective” to “rethink our own power to simultaneously reaffirm the diverse Black German actors, perspectives and experiences that we want to illuminate through our work and reject categories that often exclude, silence and haunt them” (p. 12). In an attempt to emphasize the “breadth of the field,” the book’s eight essays encompass a diverse set of issues that address specific histories ranging from the colonial period to today and that include imagological studies focused on white German representations of Black populations on the one hand, and autobiographical recounting of Black individuals’ experiences in Germany and Austria on the other (p. 21). The rough division into three sections (“German and Austrian Literature and History,” “Theory and Praxis,” and “Art and Performance”) reflects this diversity of content. The following presents each of the chapters individually.

Silke Hackenesch is an Americanist who authored *Chocolate and Blackness: A Cultural History* (2018). Her essay draws on this research to explore German representations of chocolate production and consumption. Opening with sections

on the global production of cocoa, Hackenesch argues that, although Germans were never very successful at producing cocoa themselves, they nonetheless produced images that insisted on German control and superiority. Drawing on the work of David Ciarlo and Volker Langbehn, Hackenesch analyzes the advertising postcards distributed by chocolate companies and argues that these played a role in educating the German public to associate chocolate with the labor of brown-skinned people: “With the advent of the advertising industry, cocoa and chocolate were marketed as colonial, exotic products. The knowledge of brown-skinned people toiling on cocoa farms for the pleasurable consumption of chocolate by Germans enhanced their exotic appeal” (p. 42). Citing the 2006 examples of a *Magnum* ice cream print ad and a French television spot for *Chocolate du Planteur* (2006), Hackenesch draws attention to the fact that this racist iconography persists in advertisements today.

Nancy Nenno, whose previous publications include research on African Americans in Weimar popular culture, usefully turns our attention to the question of Black Austrians to compellingly argue for their inclusion in research on “Black Germans.” The essay’s footnotes already offer a rich starting point for anyone hoping to engage in the field of Black Austrian studies, with sources ranging from the central works of published scholarship to the most recent posts of online activists. Nenno begins with a trenchant critique of the “Black Austria” museum exhibit of 2016, which seemed to erroneously suggest that there had not been a Black presence in Austria prior to the arrival of Black GIs during the US occupation of the country following World War II. Nenno challenges this notion by highlighting several chapters of Black history in Austria that reach at least as far back as the 1500s. But the essay’s main focus is on recent events in Austria that catalyzed the expression of a collective Black Austrian voice. When the asylum seeker Marcus Omofuma died in the hands of immigration authorities while undergoing de-

portation to Nigeria in 1999, and when anti-government protests were held in response, the authorities mounted a massive drug raid targeting African immigrants. Nenno presents the works of two Nigerian-born residents of Vienna who responded to these events: Chibo Onyeji published *Flowers, Bread, and Gold* (2006), a collection of poetry and prose that “registers the horror and frustration that gripped the Black community” after Omofuma’s death (p. 84); and in *Morgengrauen* (2000), Obiora Ci-K “Charles” Ofoedu chronicled his experiences as he was caught up in the drug raid. Nenno concludes with a series of projects undertaken in the 2000s to bring awareness and discussion to the history and presence of Black people in Austria.

In her contribution, Meghan O’Dea turns our attention to the history of Namibians in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the tensions that existed between the official politics of solidarity professed by the East German government and the reality of “everyday racism” experienced by People of Color on the ground. After presenting a brief introduction to the history of the SWAPO (South West Africa People’s Organisation) liberation movement in the territory that would become Namibia, as well as the differences between the support that East and West Germany provided to the fledgling nation, O’Dea focuses on the experiences of two Namibian women who wrote autobiographies recounting their childhoods in East Germany. Lucia Engombe, the author of *Kind Nr. 95: Meine deutsch-afrikanische Odysee* (2004), was able to go to the GDR as a young child due to her mother’s political connections and was placed in a boarding school with other Namibian children. The experiences of Stefanie-Lahya Aukongo (*Kalungas Kind: Wie die DDR mein Leben rettete* [2009]) were quite different. Born in the GDR after her mother had been badly injured in Namibia, Aukongo was raised in a white environment by a foster family and had little contact with other Namibian children. Although O’Dea does not apply the term “intersectionality” to her test case,

she clearly outlines a situation in which the categories of “race” and gender that these two women shared were joined by other categories of difference that affected their experiences: the differing class status of their birth mothers, the differing institutional contexts in which they were raised, Engombe’s daily interactions with other Namibian children, Aukongo’s experiences with physical disability. It is not surprising that each woman developed a different personal network of solidarity within different social constellations.

Kimberly Alecia Singletary brings her own experience as a Black American in Berlin to the question of how “race” functions in Germany. Reworking Avery Gordon’s theoretical model of haunting, Singletary creates a concept of “racial haunting” to describe how “Blackness haunts the German national imaginary” in ways that challenge the role played by whiteness in organizing conceptions of German national belonging (p. 139). But what Singletary is really interested in exploring is the question of how an idiom of *American* Blackness often functions to displace German Blackness, providing a “hypervisibility of certain *kinds* of Blackness in Germany at the expense of an authentic Black German experience” (p. 145). Singletary provides compelling readings of Armin Völckers’s two “Leroy” films to exemplify this pattern. Both the feature film *Leroy* (2007) and the short film *Leroy räumt auf* (2006) feature a teenaged character with a white German and a Black African parent, who is in the process of learning how to reconcile his Blackness with his Germanness. Singletary shows that, despite the fact that his father is African, not American, the ways Leroy comes to understand and perform his Blackness are overwhelmingly drawn from a US context. Such depictions serve to reinforce “a popular understanding of Blackness that is always already *unGerman*” (p. 160).

Kevina King foregrounds her identity as a “Black German woman scholar in the United States” to highlight the parallels between experiences with police violence in the US and Germany

(p. 171). Arguing that incidents of racial profiling and police brutality in Germany are not the random cases posited by public discourse, King wants her readers to understand that they instead “entail daily realities and encounters with law enforcement and the judiciary that structural racism enables” (p. 169). Drawing on the publications of anti-racism initiatives in Germany, King recounts the most recent and widely covered incidents of racial profiling in Germany, including the 2016-17 New Year’s Eve incident in Cologne. Here, King sees evidence that the construction of the “dangerous, sexually deviant ‘North African’ aggressor” of the Schwarze Schmach campaign is still in effect today (p. 178). King also investigates recent incidents of People of Color being singled out for identification control on public transportation, particularly on trains, and reflects on the legal loopholes that enable this type of treatment despite the ban on discrimination in the German constitution. King concludes with a focus on the activist groups fighting against racial profiling in Germany, in particular the Kampagne für Opfer rassistischer Polizeigewalt (KOP), who are working to make the statistics of racial profiling public.

Kira Thurman has researched and published several pieces on the relationship between race, music, and national identity across the Black Atlantic, and she is currently preparing a monograph on Black classical musicians in Germany. Her essay for the volume draws on this research to examine how white Germans and Austrians defined the relationship between art music and Black musicianship in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At this time, Germans remained the gatekeepers to the world of art music. While African American musicians sought admittance to this world, they faced a dilemma: the more European that Black musicians’ music sounded, the more likely the Germans were to consider it beautiful—but also the more likely they were to dismiss it as inauthentic. Thurman highlights the strategies musicians used to navigate this complex terrain: Black performers greatly attended to questions of

respectability reflected in their choices of performance attire and venue, by giving lectures on their music, and by juxtaposing spirituals with Western art music while positioning themselves against popular African American music styles. In the context of twentieth-century primitivism, spirituals came to be compared to European folk traditions—as music understood to reflect an earlier stage of development but that had the potential to become art music. To make this transition, German critics argued that spirituals needed a genius—someone to do for African American music what Franz Liszt had done for Hungarian folk music. Thurman ends with a look at how spirituals were received during the jazz age and gestures toward the postwar era, when jazz appreciation in the West was met with the promotion of spirituals in the East.

Plumly brings our attention to the German rapper and hip-hop artist Samy Deluxe. Born in Hamburg to a white German mother and Black Sudanese father, Deluxe introduced the concept of “BlackWhite” to challenge reductive ascriptions that would reduce the mobility of his identity. To provide context, Plumly traces the contours of a discourse of Black male hypersexuality and threat in the first half of the twentieth century that shifts to the “attractive, desirable and sexually consumable object” of the African American male following World War II. She then reads Black German men’s “own articulations of heteronormative masculinity” today against this backdrop, with particular interest in the world of hip-hop, where she finds these selfsame norms often problematically perpetuated (p. 247). In the case of Deluxe, Plumly analyzes album covers that feature images of Deluxe as he self-fashions a range of performative identities. These readings are associative, and some readers will disagree with the details of Plumly’s findings while nevertheless agreeing with her conclusion that Deluxe’s various performances “expose the fact that gender and race are just identity ‘covers’ under which any true self—a self that is undergoing constant change—might seemingly lie” (p. 272).

Jamele Watkins is currently working on a book project focusing on Black performance in Germany following the completion of her dissertation, “The Drama of Race: Contemporary Afro-German Theater.” Her contribution to the volume is taken from her research on the three-year theater project “real life: Deutschland” launched in 2006. With the initiative to create a forum for Black youth empowerment, young Black Germans met for a series of workshops where they studied Paolo Friere’s theory of communal learning and engaged with improvisational strategies developed in Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979). They then launched their own theater project in which they reenacted their own personal experiences with racism as a way to engage each other and their audiences in a process of working through

and counteracting racism's effects. While Watkins argues that the process of putting the play together was more valuable to the youth actors than was its actual performance, she nonetheless finds import in the various vignettes included in the finished product. Most important in this regard are how the youth incorporated and engaged with other Black voices, both from other places within the diaspora, and from other times of earlier generations. By drawing these diasporic and temporal connections, the youth positioned themselves at the center of a larger conceptualized community—one that they were able to build on as they performed the play for Black German audiences.

In her afterword, Michelle Wright surveys the vast scope of material covered in the volume and draws attention to an additional way the reader is called on to “rethink Black German studies”—perhaps most important are how the case studies “intersect with broadly diasporic practices, traditions, and experiences” in exciting new ways that center the Black German experience (p. 311).

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