

“Troubling the Nation: Blackness and Black Germans in German Public Space”
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In January 2018, local organizers in Frankfurt am Main began a campaign against the “Moor pharmacy” (*Mohren-Apotheke* or *Apotheke zum Mohren*), a curious feature of the urban landscape across Germany and Austria. Although most are artifacts of the last century or two, some are centuries-old: Vienna’s *Mohren-Apotheke* dates back to the mid-fourteenth century, although its name can only be traced to 1588, and Nuremberg’s *Mohren-Apotheke zu St. Lorenz* dates to 1442, with its name first appearing in historical records in 1578.¹ Generally speaking, these pharmacies trade on clichéd caricatures of blackness. Their names evoke nostalgia and exotic luxury, and their logos draw on medieval heraldry as well as on crassly exoticized and colonialist caricatures from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Their very familiarity – as of May 2018, there were at least 104 such pharmacies – made them a useful target for campaigners seeking to raise awareness of the lasting linguistic legacies of historical racism.²

In response to the Frankfurt protests, the civic organization representing migrant interests (*Kommunale Ausländer- und Ausländerinnenvertretung* or KAV) unanimously accepted a proposal brought by its member Virginia Wangere Greiner, a highly decorated social worker and human rights activist. The proposal called for an acknowledgment that the name and associated logos were racist and that they should be removed from Frankfurt’s public spaces.³ The proposal named two targets in particular: the *Mohren-Apotheke* in Alt-Eschersheim and the

¹ Felix Czeike, *Geschichte der Wiener Apotheken* (Innsbruck: Studien Verlag, 2010), 50; Peter Bräunlein, “Von Mohren-Apotheken und Mohrenkopf-Wappen,” *Zeitschrift für Kulturaustausch* 41 (1991): 229.

² Jeff Bowersox, “Moor Pharmacies (2018),” *Black Central Europe*, <https://blackcentraleurope.com/sources/1989-today/moor-pharmacies-2018/>. Unless otherwise noted, all websites were accessed on 9 September 2019.

³ “Critiquing the ‘Moor Pharmacy’ (*Mohren-Apotheke*) (2018),” *Black Central Europe*, <https://blackcentraleurope.com/sources/1989-today/critiquing-the-moor-pharmacy-mohren-apotheke-2018-english/>.

Zeil-Apotheke zum Mohren. The Alt-Eschersheim pharmacy, founded in the 1960s, came in for particular criticism because of its logo featuring a black head with a turban, an earring, and exaggerated lips. For its part, the *Zeil-Apotheke* was criticized for reviving an offensive name in 2017, when the owner (improbably named Alexander Schwartz) moved the business into a historic hotel building that features “*zum Mohren*” across the facade.⁴ In naming these two targets, the KAV expressed its disappointment that in 2018 it was still necessary to explain that words like “*Neger*” and “*Mohr*” have a “racist background” that Germans have been unwilling to acknowledge.

[ILLUSTRATION – ALT-ESCHERSHEIM LOGO]

When confronted publicly and without being approached, the pharmacy owners were surprised. The Eschersheimer owners immediately removed their logo, but they and owners of other such pharmacies in the surrounding state of Hessen rejected outright the idea of a name change.⁵ They insisted that the practice was a “tradition” and that it was even intended to be positive. One owner backed this up by speculating on the roots of the name, suggesting that it referred back to the noble Saint Maurice, the patron saint of merchants who is regularly portrayed as a black man, while most presumed the practice referred to the distant origins of many medicines. In any event, they suggested the original use of “*Moor*” could be said to celebrate the scientific achievements of foreign cultures.⁶ There were also practical objections to

⁴ Matthias Bartsch, “Darf eine Apotheke ‘Zum Mohren’ heißen?” *Der Spiegel*, 8 February 2018, <https://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/frankfurt-am-main-darf-eine-apotheke-zum-mohren-heissen-a-1191604.html>.

⁵ “Streit um die ‘Mohren-Apotheken’ – Inhaberin wehrt sich gegen Umbenennung,” *Focus*, 4 February 2018, https://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/rassistische-namen-sollen-verschwunden-streit-um-die-mohren-apotheken-inhaberin-wehrt-sich-gegen-umbenennung_id_8413856.html.

⁶ Marie-Sophie Adeoso, “Diskussion um ‘Mohren’-Apotheken,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 24 January 2018, <http://www.fr.de/frankfurt/rassismus-diskussion-um-mohren-apotheken-a-1432558>; Florian Hagemann,

complying with the KAV's proposal, with most arguing that it would be expensive to change the name and would harm businesses that were already associated with the brand. Additionally, they argued that campaigners were being too sensitive, pointing to the fact that their customers were not offended. To support this argument, the owners of the Hof-Apotheke zum Mohren in Hessian Friedberg, founded 1621, collected customers' signatures on a counter-petition insisting that the owners proudly stand up for a local tradition; 3100 customers signed the petition in the shop and another 24,000 signed an online petition.⁷

As these responses suggest, the KAV proposal resonated widely. It produced widespread discussion in the press in Hessen and beyond, and it provoked scattered protests at pharmacies across Germany and a wave of threats aimed at the members of the KAV, Wangere Greiner in particular. The issue was also appropriated for political effect, most notoriously by a far-right candidate in Nuremberg protesting what he labelled authoritarian political correctness and discrimination against the German language. He stood outside the Mohren-Apotheke zu St. Lorenz handing out so-called "Negro kisses" (*Negerküsse*) and "Moor's heads" (*Mohrenköpfe*), confections whose offensive names are widely recognized as such because of past campaigns that inspired the protests against "Moor pharmacies" in Frankfurt.⁸ The KAV proposal was debated in the City Assembly (*Stadtverordnetenversammlung*) in early March 2018, but officials repeatedly delayed a binding vote. In late April, the governing coalition partners (CDU, SPD, and Greens) in the City Assembly's Executive and Finance Committee (*Haupt- u* *Finanzausschuss*) finally ruled on the matter. Across party lines they affirmed the importance of

"Diskussion um Namen: Mohren-Apotheke in Kassel bleibt Mohren-Apotheke," *Hessische/Niedersächsische Allgemeine*, 31 January 2018, <https://www.hna.de/kassel/vorderer-westen-ort140786/mohren-apotheke-in-kassel-behaelt-namen-diskussion-um-rassismus-9572401.html>.

⁷ Petra Ihm-Fahle, "Friedberg: Mohren-Apotheke will ihren Name nicht aufgeben," *Frankfurter Neue Presse*, 3 February 2018, <https://www.fnp.de/lokales/wetteraukreis/friedberg-ort28695/friedberg-mohren-apotheke-will-ihren-namen-nicht-aufgeben-10426624.html>; Email from Kerstin Podszus to Jeff Bowersox (24 August 2019).

⁸ Torsten Bliss, "AfD-'Negerküsse' für Mohren-Apotheker," *Apotheke Adhoc*, 8 March 2018, <https://www.apotheke-adhoc.de/nachrichten/detail/apothekenpraxis/afd-negerkuesse-fuer-mohren-apotheker-umstrittene-solidaritaetsaktion-nuernberg/>.

the debate over racism in language and also defended the KAV from abusive efforts to stifle their voices. At the same time, they could not agree on whether to label the term “Moor” as racist and thus would not require pharmacies to change their names.⁹

The dynamics of this debate over “traditional” uses of blackness in German public spaces were similar to those in other campaigns from the past decade and more, for example calls to change the names of classic confections and corporate logos, to remove outdated words from classic children’s books, and to question the use of blackface in carnival costumes and in German theatre.¹⁰ Campaigners (often but not exclusively Black) have pointed to experiences of marginalization that are perpetuated through an unthinking use of racist terms or images. They argue generally that racism is a structural problem made visible in the personal experiences of those affected, experiences that the white population generally does not see (or want to see).¹¹ Not the least of these experiences is the abuse received when activists raise concerns. Critics of these campaigners decry such efforts as over-sensitivity, divisiveness, reverse racism, and political correctness run amok. They argue that traditions need to be respected or, going further, that they are the ones being oppressed by minorities and their representatives. In this view, racism is not structural but rather an individual problem, defined first and foremost by conscious intention. As a Kassel pharmacist put it, “racism begins in the head, not with the name of a pharmacy.”¹²

⁹ Günter Murr, “Antrag zur Mohren-Apotheke abgelehnt,” *Frankfurter Neue Presse*, 25 April 2018, <https://www.fnp.de/frankfurt/antrag-mohren-apotheke-abgelehnt-10402660.html>.

¹⁰ On some of these campaigns, see Marie Lorbeer and Beate Wild, eds., *Menschenfresser -- Negerküsse...: Das Bild vom Fremden im deutschen Alltag* (Berlin: Elefant Press, 1991); Rita Gudermann and Bernhard Wulff, *Der Sarotti-Mohr. Die bewegte Geschichte einer Werbefigur* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2004); Katrin Sieg, “Race, Guilt, and Innocence: Facing Blackfacing in Contemporary German Theater,” *German Studies Review* 38, no. 1 (2015): 117-34; Monika Albrecht, “Negotiating Memories of German Colonialism: Reflections on Current Forms of Non-governmental Memory Politics,” *Journal of European Studies* 47, no. 2 (2017): 208-211.

¹¹ Maureen Maisha Eggers, Grada Kilomba, Peggy Piesche, and Susan Arndt, eds., *Mythen, Masken, Subjekte. Kritische Weißseinsforschung in Deutschland* (Münster: Unrast, 2009).

¹² Hagemann, “Diskussion.”

These divergent perspectives illustrate how a pharmacy's use of outdated terms and caricatures can raise profound questions about race, nation, and German history. In this essay I will discuss the foundations of these debates by surveying the shifting imagery of blackness since the Middle Ages. I will show that the origins of "Moor" imagery can be found in medieval efforts to develop an ennobling iconography of blackness that could be deployed as a symbol of cosmopolitanism and power. In the early modern period, when the first "Moor pharmacies" were founded, European imperialist expansion led to changes in this iconography, both through the introduction of demeaning stereotypes of backwardness and through depictions of "courtly Moors" as symbols of luxury and servitude. Finally, from the nineteenth century this iconography was shaped fundamentally by the rise of a commercialized visual culture reliant on racist colonial caricatures. Not only do the vast majority of "Moor pharmacies" date from this most recent period, but virtually all of them rely on terminology and imagery that reflect these caricatures. Rather than celebrating the presence of Africans and their descendants in the central Europe, these caricatures actively erase the far more complicated personal experiences of Black Germans who lived in these eras.

I will suggest that bringing these supposedly "marginal" stories to the center of the frame allows us to see an often unacknowledged history of inter-cultural contacts and struggles over inclusion and exclusion in the German lands.¹³ Doing so also reveals the processes by which a mythical idea of a homogenously white national community has come to be accepted both as common-sense and as fundamentally unrelated to the contemporaneous development of modern ideas of race. The investment in this myth of national innocence and cohesion helps to explain the defense of "traditions" even when fellow Germans insist that they are actively

¹³ Neil Gregor, Nils Roemer, and Mark Roseman, "Introduction," in *German History from the Margins* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 6-7.

harmful.¹⁴ At its heart, the campaign against the “Moor pharmacy” troubles this national myth and offers in its place a vision that acknowledges both the fluidity of Germanness and the lasting power of hierarchies that continue to govern our ostensibly egalitarian societies.

The emergence of the “Moor pharmacy” was the product of an iconographic shift that began in the twelfth century. In this period there was a dramatic increase in depictions of noble and ignoble black figures across Latin Europe. In the context of battles against Muslim kingdoms and contacts with an expanding Mongol empire, we can see this as part of a new worldview, a newly expansive vision of Christian authority that aspired to encompass the entire world. On the one hand, this vision could be articulated through negative depictions of blackness. A growing awareness of blacks in Muslim lands allowed artists to play on longstanding Christian associations of blackness with sin, darkness, and death. This led to a resonant way to talk about non-Christians as demonic figures to be overcome. On the other hand, these expansive aspirations could also be visualized through positive depictions of black converts, holy figures, and heroes, as befitted contact with black Christians in the Holy Land and, later, with ambassadors visiting European courts. Thus, alongside negative depictions there also developed an innovative iconography of noble black figures.¹⁵ Some of these depictions had staying power because they could be deployed usefully in struggles over power and legitimacy.

¹⁴ Fatima El-Tayeb, *European Others: Queering Ethnicity in Postnational Europe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), xxiii-xxix; Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 16-18.

¹⁵ Jean Devisse, “Christians and Black” and “The Black and His Color: From Symbols to Realities,” in *The Image of the Black in Western Art* (hereafter *IBWA*), volume 2, part 1, ed. David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates Jr. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 61-77, 115-37.

The German lands were the scene of distinctive developments in this trend because of the innovations of two Holy Roman Emperors who governed a realm that reached from northern Germany all the way to Sicily. To justify their rule and establish their power over their vassals and competitors, whether Popes or neighboring kingdoms, the Hohenstaufen rulers Henry VI (1165-1197) and his son Frederick II (1194-1250) combined an ideology of Christian universalism – that Christianity should be open to all the world – with an ideology of imperial universalism – that the Holy Roman Empire under their leadership should rule the entire world. We can see this illustrated in their revival of Roman traditions of pomp, for example gathering diverse retinues of people and animals from across their realm and parading them as symbols of the vastness of their power.¹⁶ Put simply, this was a propagandistic display of cosmopolitanism intended to intimidate any who would challenge their authority, but it was also more than simply propaganda. Henry VI and Frederick II also incorporated the various subject peoples, including conquered Muslims, into their ruling structures. While this was not always on equal terms, they nevertheless provided protection and avenues for advancement in ways that also mirrored their Roman model.¹⁷

This universalist cosmopolitanism led to a positive reevaluation of blackness within certain contexts, most notably illustrated in the veneration of the Hohenstaufen dynasty's patron saint, Maurice. According to his hagiography, Saint Maurice was the commander of the Theban Legion, a unit of Christian soldiers raised in Roman Egypt in the late third century CE. The legion was supposedly martyred in Agaunum (modern Saint-Maurice en Valais, Switzerland) when they refused the emperor's order to persecute local Christians. Whether or not the story is true, it is clear that Maurice became the focus of veneration in the region and

¹⁶ Paul H. D. Kaplan, "Introduction," in *IBWA*, volume 2, part 1, 12-18.

¹⁷ Hans Werner Debrunner, *Presence and Prestige: Africans in Europe* (Basel: Basel Afrika Bibliographien, 1979), 18-20; Julie Anne Taylor, "Muslim-Christian Relations in Medieval Southern Italy," *The Muslim World* 97, no. 2 (2007): 190-9.

was later adopted by German rulers as their patron saint.¹⁸ The Hohenstaufen, Frederick II in particular, took him up enthusiastically as a symbol of their ambition to defend and spread Christianity and to link all their disparate territories. Remarkably, under the reign of Frederick II Saint Maurice underwent a transformation. Previously depicted with light skin, Maurice was turned into a black man.

[ILLUSTRATION – MAURICE IN MAGDEBURG]

His outward features marked him as a man from distant lands, but Saint Maurice was nevertheless incorporated on equal terms into Christian iconography in central Europe as a symbol of the broad reach of the Christian faith and the emperor's rule. First represented in a remarkable statue in the Magdeburg cathedral from the early thirteenth century, Saint Maurice was portrayed as a black man to be admired, resplendent in golden European chain mail ringing his face like a halo. As Geraldine Heng suggests, Maurice's blackness was doubly useful: in his saintly blackness he symbolized the possibility of overcoming sin, and as a representative of a distant land he could inspire a spirit of reverence for the reach of the emperor and the church.¹⁹ Although the tradition seems to have died out with Frederick II, in the mid-fourteenth century Emperor Charles IV (1316-1378) revived it in an effort to associate his dynasty with the Hohenstaufen, establishing the convention of a black Saint Maurice in those regions allied with him.²⁰

¹⁸ Gude Suckale-Redlefsen, *Mauritius: Der heilige Mohr / The Black Saint Maurice* (Houston: Menil Foundation, 1986), 28-37; Devisse, "A Sanctified Black: Maurice," in *IBWA*, volume 2, part 1, 139-50

¹⁹ Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 234-5.

²⁰ Kaplan, *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985), 75-84; Suckale-Redlefsen, *Mauritius*, 56-71.

The Hohenstaufen use of black figures to convey their cosmopolitan power inspired others to adopt similar imagery within the systems of heraldry being invented in the thirteenth century. Over the next two centuries black Saint Maurices, black kings and queens, black heralds, and “moor’s heads” became common devices used across the German lands, often part of struggles for local legitimacy among courts, cities, dueling families, and aspirant individuals.²¹ Perhaps the most illustrative and consequential example in this regard was the powerful archbishopric of Cologne, site of shrines to Saint Maurice and the Three Magi (a.k.a. the Three Wise Men or Three Kings). In a fourteenth-century catalogue of coats of arms, the archbishopric’s crest was associated with a fanciful imagining of the crests of the three Magi that drew on a recently popular suggestion that one of the Magi came from Africa.²² The illustrator crowned Balthasar’s crest with a Moor’s head and gave him as his device a black herald.²³ The archbishops of Cologne embraced this innovation, securing the lasting tradition of a black member among the three Magi, and we can read this embrace as an iconographic challenge to the emperor’s authority. At the same time that Charles IV revived a black Saint Maurice in an effort to claim the mantle of cosmopolitan ruler, the Archbishopric of Cologne adopted a black saintly figure with far greater significance. Further, they pointedly refused to depict Saint Maurice as black, instead choosing a different member of the martyred Theban Legion, Saint Gregory, to transform into a black saint.²⁴

These examples illustrate the iconographic utility of depictions of blackness, even at a moment when black people were either absent or only passing through as very occasional

²¹ Devisse, “Maurice,” 150-65; Jean Devisse and Michel Mollat, “The Shield and the Crown,” in *IBWA* volume 2, part 2, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), 31-40; Devisse and Michel Mollat, “The African Transposed,” in *IBWA*, volume 2, part 2, 234-41.

²² Kaplan, *Rise*, 19, 91-5.

²³ Jeff Bowersox, “Imagining a Crest for the Black Magus (ca. 1370-1395),” *Black Central Europe* (<https://blackcentraleurope.com/sources/1000-1500/imagining-a-crest-for-the-black-magus-ca-1370-1395/>).

²⁴ Devisse, “Maurice,” 166; Suckale-Redlefsen, *Mauritius*, 124-8.

visitors. This utility must be understood within the broader production of racialized ideas of self and other in the Middle Ages. Religion was the central organizing category of Latin Christendom, which meant, for example, that Jews and Muslims were generally ascribed inherent characteristics that marked them as racial others.²⁵ By contrast, an assertive vision of Christian universalism opened up opportunities to re-frame blackness in the face of a longstanding, hierarchical opposition between white and black. Blackness could be used to represent a dangerous outsider or an exotic stranger, and many authors did so in ways that reinforced this binary. But it could also be used to encourage veneration of saintly or noble black figures who had been incorporated as elite Christian insiders, a way to show a connection to the wider world.²⁶ The modern defenders of the Moor pharmacies are not wrong when they point to the medieval period and an implicit valorization of difference within an important strand of iconography. However, by limiting their vision to this narrow aspect they create a mythical version of a tolerant, race-free Middle Ages and overlook the intertwined histories of expansion and race formation that followed.

The first Moor pharmacies appeared in the late sixteenth century, as some business owners sought a colorful symbol to distinguish themselves from rivals; in Vienna, competitors of the “Black Ethiopian” pharmacy (first identified as such in 1588) included the Golden Griffin, the Red Crab, the Black Elephant, and the Blue Pharmacy.²⁷ These pharmacists likely hoped that using a black man as their logo would suggest the reach and value of their wares. They could

²⁵ Heng, *Invention*, 3, 42-3.

²⁶ Heng, *Invention*, 240-2.

²⁷ Czeike, *Geschichte*, 139-40.

draw on the established medieval tradition of noble black figures, which evoked worldliness and even sanctity. However, they also drew on new pictorial conventions that emerged in the context of increasing maritime exploration and trade, which included the beginnings of the trade in African slaves. These new conventions hid the nuanced reality of black Europeans' lives, reducing them to symbols of exoticism and luxury meant to enhance the status of others

For our purposes, the most important of these pictorial conventions related to the "courtly Moor" (*Hofmohr*). From the fifteenth century onward, black people began arriving and residing more regularly in central Europe, occasionally as members of diplomatic embassies and more commonly as servants or slaves who were passed around as part of the gift economy that linked merchants and courts across Europe. Over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it became customary for aristocratic households in the German lands to display their status through black or Turkish servants. Regularly featured in courtly portraits adorned in fine clothing and jewelry, they served as symbols of luxury. As is clear from Antoine Pesne's portrait of the future King of Prussia Frederick II (1712-1786) and his sister Wilhelmine (1709-1758), the black figure's gaze and posture draw attention to the subject of the piece. In this particular work, an ornamental silver collar highlights the black man's servitude.

[ILLUSTRATION – PESNE]

It is easy to read the presence of black courtly servants as illustrations of a rising European racism, of the long reach of slavery all the way back to Europe. In fact, many of the black people featured in such portraits were slaves, with most of them brought from the Americas at young ages. At the same time, life in courtly society was very different than life in the Americas; these courtly Moors were integrated alongside servants who were also unfree in

various ways, with their experiences determined less by their legal status or skin color and more by their relationship with their prince.²⁸ Not all were fully content with their status; many left courtly service when given the opportunity to do so, while some challenged their legal enslavement in order to claim the higher wages of a freeman.²⁹ However, courts generally provided secure status and unique privileges, and most seem to have seized on those to establish a place for themselves in German society.

[ILLUSTRATION – SOLIMAN]

The well-known example of Angelo Soliman (ca. 1721-1796) illustrates how erstwhile slaves could integrate into German society, at least within particular spheres. Enslaved in sub-Saharan Africa at the age of 8, he later was sold to the powerful Austrian Prince Lobkowitz, who educated him and eventually made him a trusted military advisor. After Lobkowitz's death, a free Soliman entered the service of the influential Prince Liechtenstein. Liechtenstein was happy to craft an exoticized image of Soliman to enhance his own prestige, as a surviving portrait illustrates, but he valued Soliman far more for his administrative abilities. In this capacity Soliman became a well-known figure among Vienna's elite who, with the support of the Liechtenstein family, enjoyed a quiet retirement with his daughter Josephine.³⁰ Slavery and developing ideas of racial difference obviously shaped Soliman's life, but they were not simply limiting factors dividing him from society. This does not mean that we should idealize elite society as a place where all differences were celebrated and racism did not exist: this is the

²⁸ Anne Kuhlmann-Smirnov, *Schwarze Europäer im Alten Reich. Handel, Migration, Hof* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2013), 119-32.

²⁹ Kuhlmann-Smirnov, *Schwarze Europäer*, 231-41; Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, "Verhandelte (Un-)Freiheit: Sklaverei, Leibeigenschaft und innereuropäischer Wissenstransfer am Ausgang des 18. Jahrhunderts," *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 43, no. 3 (2017): 347-80.

³⁰ Philipp Blom and Wolfgang Kos, eds., *Angelo Soliman. Ein Afrikaner in Wien* (Vienna: Wien Museum, 2011).

mythical vision that is implicit in the defense of the Moor pharmacies and their logos. Instead, examining black experiences allows us to see an ongoing *contestation* of demeaning associations with blackness that were being produced at the time.

Already by the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, blackness (associated with labels like “*Mohr*” and “*Neger*”) was becoming linked with perceptions of inferiority and irredeemable otherness.³¹ These associations derived from contacts around the coast of Africa, the dehumanizing treatment of black slaves in the Americas and, arguably, the Enlightenment, as Europeans translated their encounters with difference into terms that could justify exploitation and expansion. This process even affected St. Maurice, as we can see in shifting depictions in Coburg. When the City Hall was rebuilt in the late sixteenth century, the architect Hans Schlachter prominently featured Maurice as a black knight, drawing on medieval and Renaissance representations. Impressively attired in full European plate armour, Maurice has the honour of holding the city crest. A century later, Maurice was immortalized in an entirely different form in the Rückert fountain only 150m away; still holding the city crest, he is naked except for a grass skirt, the epitome of an exoticized “savage.”³² Such imagery linking blackness and backwardness was also taken up by Moor pharmacies and is still used by some today, for example in Vienna, Halle, and a recently closed pharmacy in Schwäbisch Hall.

[ILLUSTRATION – COBURG RATHAUS AND FOUNTAIN]

³¹ Peter Martin, *Schwarze Teufel, edle Mohren* (Hamburg: Junius, 1993), 81-88; Kuhlmann-Smirnov, *Schwarze Europäer*, 79-94.

³² See also Jeff Bowersox, “St. Maurice Becomes a Savage and a Caricature on a Family Crest (ca. 1345-Present),” *Black Central Europe* (<https://blackcentraleurope.com/sources/1500-1750/st-maurice-becomes-a-noble-savage-and-a-racist-caricature-on-a-family-crest-ca-1345-present/>).

These associations were neither abstract nor harmless, as is clear from the grisly, posthumous fate of Angelo Soliman. After Soliman's death in 1796, the Austrian Emperor secretly claimed his body. He ordered the body skinned and stuffed, dressed as a "savage" in ostrich feathers and shells, and put on display in his cabinet of curiosities along with two other Africans and exotic animals. With the support of the Catholic Church, Soliman's daughter Josephine sued for the return of her father's remains but was unsuccessful. Soliman's body remained on display for decades before being removed to a storage room, where it burned with the rest of the building during revolutionary unrest in 1848. Soliman embodied the paradoxical nature of being black as Europe crossed into a new era. His life demonstrates the possibility of integration and achievement, pointing more generally to the mobility and inter-cultural contact that have been a constant part of European history. At the same time, his posthumous treatment demonstrates a shift to a new age of racialized degradation as black bodies became objects of a spectacular gaze wrapped up in scientific pretensions and sold as entertainment. Moor pharmacies did not cause this shift, but they have enthusiastically taken up its products to sell their wares.

Over the course of the nineteenth century, scientific racism rose to the status of an ideological orthodoxy. There were many overlapping contexts for this, including debates over how best to manage "free" black labour after emancipation, the need to justify the violent expansion of European colonial empires, the rise of nationalist ideologies premised on homogeneity in fundamentally heterogenous states, and mass migration that tested the boundaries of nations and nation-states. The production and reification of ideas about racial

differences and hierarchies took place through an international conversation in a wide range of media, including the products of a burgeoning consumer culture.

[ILLUSTRATION-PALM, SAROTTI]

Advertisements in particular were particularly important for setting the rules of visual culture, and they proved to be a powerful tool for constructing and disseminating the idea of absolute racial hierarchies. They linked whiteness with the nation and progress, and they linked blackness with foreignness and backwardness. As David Ciarlo has suggested, such images attained the status of stereotype not least because of their striking, even innocuous designs. They represented black people as infantilized, comical, non-threatening consumables, reducing them to an iconic set of racial markers that evoked distant lands, flattered white German audiences, and hid the violence of colonial relations.³³ As paradigmatic types with profound influence, we can hold up the smoking “native” of Palm Cigars, which survives in a tobacconist in Fulda, or the exoticized Sarotti Moor, which is still the company logo in a slightly modified form. These stripped-down icons highlight racial difference through a play of contrasts: dark brown or jet black skin, exaggerated red lips, exotic outfits. It was – and, surprisingly, still is – conventional for Moor pharmacies to adopt this demeaning colonial-era imagery in their branding and decorations. Contrary to the arguments of the Moor pharmacy’s defenders, these images were not incidental and harmless by-products of the age, much less a continuation of earlier conventions, but rather helped to constitute a new colonial worldview based on racial hierarchies. The persistence of so many of these images into the present and the resistance to

³³ David Ciarlo, *Advertising Empire: Race and Visual Culture in Imperial Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011).

giving them up is a testament to their effectiveness in naturalizing images of racial hierarchy as a constituent part of consumer culture.

[ILLUSTRATION - EL CHER AND BRUCE]

The ideological operations of these images become clearer when juxtaposed with photographs of Black Germans like Gustav Sabac el Cher in Prussian military dress and Kwassi Bruce with other schoolboys. Gustav Sabac el Cher was born in Berlin in 1868, the son of a latter-day “courtly Moor” who made his name with the royal family. Gustav joined the Prussian army, serving in the music corps, and later made a successful private career as a musician, conductor, and café owner. He and his white wife were patriotic Germans, members of the *Stahlhelm* whose two sons went on to fight for the Wehrmacht. They were thus deeply disappointed when the national revival promised by the Nazis had no room for them. They were forced to close their café shortly before they died in 1934 and 1935 respectively.³⁴ Kwassi Bruce was brought to Germany from Togo as a child to take part in the 1896 Berlin colonial exhibition. His father, hoping to cultivate connections in the metropole, left his son with a department store owner who educated Bruce and also used him as an exotic mascot. His successful career as a bandleader was briefly interrupted by service in Togo during the First World War, but he, like many Black Germans, faced growing difficulties in the economic and political instability of the Weimar era. When the Nazis came to power and it became nearly impossible for Black Germans to find work, he co-organized a travelling “people show” (*Völkerschau*) to employ Black performers. The show both romanticized and parodied

³⁴ Gorch Pieken and Cornelia Kruse, *Preussisches Liebesglück. Eine deutsche Familie aus Afrika* (Berlin: List Taschenbuch, 2008).

Germany's colonial past, but Nazi authorities took control of the show and finally closed it down in 1940 because it challenged their racialised worldview. With no opportunities to support himself in an increasingly hostile environment, Bruce left Germany for Togo.³⁵

As traces of their lived experiences, the photographs remind us that the Age of Empire was an age of increased mobility that produced new opportunities for interaction and integration across racialized lines. Whether through new routes of labour migration, colonial politics, or entertainment, or even through older routes by which Black people came to European courts, Black people came to central Europe in larger numbers than ever before, most just passing through and others settling down. Indeed, these photographs not only undermine the mythical notion of a unified, homogenously white German nation; they also show the tools by which that myth was constructed. Bruce's photograph was published in an article on "exotic guests" in Berlin, and the caption draws attention to the two "Negro children" (*Negerkinder*). In the process, the author explicitly equates his blackness with foreignness in order to undermine the image of inter-racial camaraderie in the photograph. In a similar manner, advertising caricatures denied the messy reality of being Black in the German lands, a reality defined both by social integration and by struggles against racist exclusion. In the process, these images and associated terminology produced and reinforced racialized definitions of the German nation with exclusionary legacies that have lasted into the present. As Michelle Wright suggests, in the postwar period these definitions have made Black Germans into "an impossible minority," hyper-visible due to a skin color that also renders their Germanness invisible.³⁶ By continuing to use these antiquated terms and images, Moor pharmacies hide these racializing tools in plain sight.

³⁵ Robbie Aitken and Eve Rosenhaft, *Black Germany: The Making and Unmaking of a Diaspora Community, 1884-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 56-7, 240-59.

³⁶ Michelle Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the African Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 184-97.

“Moor pharmacies” have been drawn into public debate primarily because Black Germans have refused to remain invisible. Although there have been many strands of Black writing and activism since 1945, undoubtedly the development of the Afro-German movement in the 1980s and 1990s facilitated the amplification of Black voices in the public sphere.³⁷ Activists, scholars, and artists associated and allied with the movement have insisted on the longstanding presence of Black people in the German lands. Further, they have proposed a new model of Germanness that has room for hybrid identities and connections with the wider world and that also forces a reckoning with histories of racist exclusion.³⁸ The media and community-building work of organizations like the Initiative of Black People in Germany (*Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland* or ISD) and Afro-German Women (*Afrodeutsche Frauen* or ADEFRA) established the legitimacy of Black German voices and helped pave the way for a wave of Black German cultural production and growing media interest in the varying experiences of Blackness in the German lands. In part this was achieved through an ongoing series of grassroots activist campaigns to highlight where public commitments to inclusion have not been borne out in practice. Building on these earlier efforts, the campaigners in Frankfurt have invited their compatriots to see the world from a perspective that is not readily apparent to the majority white population, to see the broader historical legacies of racism and colonialism and how they continue to serve as barriers to full citizenship for people of color in Germany.

³⁷ Philipp Khabo Koepsell, “Literature and Activism,” in *Arriving in the Future: Stories of Home and Exile*, ed. Asoka Esuroso and Philipp Khabo Koepsell (Berlin: epubli, 2014), 36-47.

³⁸ Katharina Oguntoye, May Ayim, and Dagmar Schultz, eds., *Farbe bekennen. Afro-deutsche Frauen auf den Spuren ihrer Geschichte* (Berlin: Orlanda Frauenverlag, 1986); Wright, *Becoming Black*, 195; El-Tayeb, *European Others*, xxxiv-xxxv.

We should take inspiration from this campaign and the broader body of activism and scholarship that has informed it. Collectively, they trouble the national myth by drawing our attention to an often unacknowledged history. They point us toward a history of Germans grappling with diversity in various circumstances and, in the modern era, to the processes by which that diversity was denied and replaced with a mythical story of national homogeneity. Rather than this mythical cohesion, they encourage us to see the national community as based on struggles over varying sorts of difference, over whom to include or exclude. Denying this constant contestation makes it easy to overlook the fact that our ostensibly egalitarian societies are organized hierarchically, by racial categories among other things.

This sort of denial is at work when the champions of Moor pharmacies insist that their embrace of these “traditional” relics is innocent, defined primarily by their desire to be inclusive rather than by two centuries of exclusionary practices. As I have tried to suggest above, this defense misses the point entirely. The Moor pharmacy and its associated imagery are not merely the artifacts of an era long past that can be divorced from any historical reality. Rather, they were the very tools that made it possible for Germans and others to conquer and to consume with less sense of responsibility. They were and remain the tools for building the common-sense notion that Germans are simply white and modern and that Black Africans and their descendants are simply foreign and backward. As such, they continue to hide the rich and troubled histories of how Germans have grappled with diversity in the past, and they make it very difficult to have conversations about how to deal with diversity in the present.