

Billy Wilder whose wit would become such a staple in Hollywood. Both film scholars and more casual fans of twentieth-century American film should find something of value in this book, as well as readers who are interested in the social life of interwar Central Europe.

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Walter Sauer, *Jenseits von Soliman: Afrikanische Migration und Communitybuilding in Österreich—Eine Geschichte*. Mit einem Beitrag von Vanessa Spanbauer. Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2022. 272 pp.

June 4, 2020, was a watershed moment in recent Austrian history, as an estimated fifty thousand Viennese citizens of all backgrounds took to the streets to demonstrate against racism under the banner of the “Black Lives Matter” movement. Walter Sauer’s new monograph, *Jenseits von Soliman*, is thus a timely contribution. Commissioned by the Verein für Geschichte der Stadt Wien, it offers a comprehensive overview of the history of people of African descent in the territory of present-day Austria, thereby making a substantial contribution to increasing the visibility of black histories in Austria and integrating them into mainstream historiography.

Sauer’s work is remarkable for both its thoroughness and its brevity. While the author manages to cover the topic in remarkable detail in only two hundred pages of analysis, the fifty-page bibliography attests to the profound depth of his research on the topic in both its theoretical and empirical dimensions—notably, this is not his first venture into the field, as Sauer already made a name for himself as a pioneer in the study of Austrian colonialism and black Austrian history beginning in the 1990s. His findings will presumably strike most readers as nothing short of astounding, beginning with the fact that the first people of African descent to make their way to the present-day territory of Austria did so already in the era of classical antiquity. They moreover did not come as slaves, servants, or otherwise “racially” subjugated individuals but as elite soldiers of the Roman Empire, tasked, ironically, with defending the imperial borderlands against invaders who in modern terms would be classified as “white.”

Indeed, Sauer’s account of black history in Austria proceeds from the

insightful premise—echoing the views of black scholars in Europe and Africa—that present-day discourses on global black histories are problematically dominated by African American narratives, which do not necessarily or readily translate to other contexts. This premise is distinctly borne out in the analysis of black histories in Austria from antiquity to the present day that follow. This point is especially pertinent for US readers in Austrian studies, who are thereby exhorted to reappraise their assumptions about the appertaining debates and to receive this in many respects Austria-specific history with fresh eyes.

The work is divided into seven chronologically arranged chapters plus a theoretical introduction. Sauer begins by emphasizing the constructed nature and mutability of conceptions of “races” and “racisms” in modern European history, leading to the critical conclusion that racism is not an intractable evil but an utterly modern, inculcated prejudice that can therefore be deconstructed and unlearned. By reference to Adorno and Horkheimer, Sauer reflects on the inherent paradox, familiar already from debates about the Holocaust, that the general historical development in modern Europe toward democratization, enfranchisement, and the elaboration of human rights went hand in hand with the birth of biological racism and, consequently, with unprecedented projects of collective violence and oppression such as slavery, colonialism, and genocide. This paradox presents a challenge in the present day concerning how to redress historically conditioned asymmetries and ensure that all people share in the benefits originally promised by the Enlightenment projects of liberty and enfranchisement.

One of the most important takeaways from this dense and impressive piece of scholarship is that mobility between Europe and Africa (as well as the Middle East) used to be reciprocal, with group-based conflicts (where they did occur) deriving rather from dynastic loyalties or religious doctrine than any physical characteristic like skin color (which has itself never been an objectively definable characteristic, as Sauer also shows).

This only changed gradually in the context of early modern European expansionism overseas, in which Austria readily participated, with “races” and “racisms,” it bears repeating, being of remarkably recent provenance when viewed against the *longue durée* of European (and global) history. The gradual construction of “racialized” classifications of human beings in modernity explains why, for example, Christian clerics from Ethiopia could be received as honored dignitaries in late medieval Austrian monasteries, whereas people

of African descent walking the streets of Vienna in the nineteenth century were in danger of being reported to the police as a perceived “menace” or “threat”—a racist practice still disturbingly prevalent today.

A related—and equally disturbing—finding following from this long-term perspective is that recent drives by successive right-wing governments to erect artificial legal boundaries with regard to immigration, naturalization, asylum, access to the labor market, and so forth actually constitute seamless continuations of “racialized” colonial-era practices designed to uphold the artificially constructed distinctions between “racially” defined groups both domestically and globally. These findings critically disrupt teleological Enlightenment-era notions of historical progress.

An especially moving facet of Sauer’s work is the painstaking effort (with astonishing results) he invests into identifying, naming, locating, and humanizing a whole swath of individuals who would otherwise appear as anonymous “black subjects” in various contexts in Austrian history, for example manservants depicted in deferential poses in the portraits of the ruling classes since the early modern period. Sauer’s entire work exhibits a profound sensitivity toward the subjectivity and humanity of the historical actors he has researched, which serves as an important counterbalance to the collective categorizations that otherwise threaten to dominate such “racially” defined histories.

Indeed, the actual subjects of this history reflected a remarkable diversity in background and social standing, including domestic servants, priests, students, performers, athletes, diplomats, labor migrants, refugees, and many others, hailing from all over the African and American continents, who spoke different languages, practiced different religions, pursued different goals in life, and generally lived a great variety of lifestyles. This diversity underlines the point made from the outset that black history in Austria should not be viewed according to the “universalizing narratives” derived from African American experiences (here citing Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, 14), which reflect a highly specific history (diversity in the US context notwithstanding) most notably shaped by the transatlantic slave trade and later segregation, neither of which played a dominant role in black Austrian histories.

In this respect, however, a minor criticism is also in order: Sauer uses the sweeping term “afrikanische Diaspora” throughout the work to refer to all people of African descent through all ages in Austria. As with the Denglisch word “community” also used throughout (and in the title), this tends to

generalize to the point of being an essentially meaningless (or problematically essentializing) concept. To put it simply, not all Africans were/are “black” and not all black people were/are “Africans,” as Sauer himself emphasizes throughout. This relates to a second problem with the work, namely that for entire swathes of Austrian history, there were only negligible numbers of people construed (in whatever context) as “black,” raising the question of whether one can really speak of a “black history,” never mind an “African diaspora” in the long term, as Sauer does.

Indeed, people of African descent still only number in five figures in Austria today (issues with statistical categorizations notwithstanding) and hence form a tiny minority in a country otherwise reflecting a profound demographic diversity. While this does not diminish the sociopolitical necessity or epistemic value of undertaking a study such as this, the framing does tend to obscure how marginal black histories were for long stretches of Austrian history, in marked distinction to the Americas (and not just the United States). These terminological issues presumably owe much to present-day activist discourses proliferating in media and among Austria’s black population itself, which should nevertheless be employed more carefully and critically in a scholarly study.

The book in fact closes with a twelve-page article by the journalist, historian, and activist Vanessa Spanbauer, which on the one hand serves to discuss theoretically the notion of “first” and “second generations” with specific regard to black Austrian history while on the other offering an overview of current political activism among Austria’s black population. Of particular interest here is the shift among second-generation Austrians of African descent not to define themselves so much according to their parents’ national or cultural origins (which, it bears repeating, are extremely diverse) but to conceive of themselves as one “community” in solidarity with other people self-identifying as “Black” (as the author deliberately capitalizes the term).

While Spanbauer’s discussion of ongoing systemic discrimination and acts of violence toward black people in Austria is alarming and she rightly calls for greater political, social, and scholarly attention to be paid to these issues, her contribution suffers conceptually from a dichotomous division of Austrian society into a “Black community” and a “weiße Mehrheitsgesellschaft.” This terminology misses the crucial point, as explored in manifold recent migration studies, that Austria today constitutes one of the highest per

capita migration destinations in Europe, with a remarkably diverse population: Around a fifth of the present-day population—the proportion rising to almost 50 percent in Vienna—were born abroad or do not possess Austrian citizenship.

It is thus doubtful whether questions concerning “Identität,” “Wurzeln,” “Zugehörigkeit,” and “Kultur” only affect people of “black” origin, however defined, as the author suggests, even if this demographic may understandably feel these issues all the more acutely due to ongoing color-based discrimination. Yet the diversity of Austria’s present population in terms of language, nationality, religion, class, gender, social mobility, and many other factors, especially when viewed in light of Austria’s history of inner-European imperialism, let alone its involvement in the genocidal crimes of National Socialism, serves as a reminder that privilege and prejudice in Europe cannot simply be reduced—in this case literally—to black and white. The ongoing murderous assault against Ukraine is a case in point.

These criticisms notwithstanding, this is an eminently important work, which appears at an opportune moment in terms of present developments both in international politics and societal discourses regarding the nefarious histories of “race” and “racism”—terms that should consequently be used far more cautiously in scholarly inquiry than is currently the case. The book is not only impressively and meticulously researched but is also written in an accessible and comprehensible manner, navigating expertly the tension between everyday lived experiences and sweeping historical developments in a time frame of two thousand years, all the while offering profound insights for the present day.

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Katharina Müller and Claus Philipp, eds., *Picturing Austrian Cinema: 99 Films/100 Comments*. Leipzig: Spector Books, 2022. 250 pp.

This book is a game—one hundred writers and journalists from the fields of media, film theory, literature, and science were asked to choose one frame from one postwar Austrian film and to express their feelings about what in the selected image should be regarded as particularly Austrian. However, as the