Naming the Other: Race, Language, and Black Identity in 18th-Century Germany

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Abstract

This thesis examines the history and functions of the terms “Mohr” and “Neger” in German-speaking regions during the long eighteenth century. Using a dual analytical approach, it explores both the semantic development of these terms in scholarly, economic, and cultural contexts and their influence on the formation of Black identity. Drawing on a variety of sources, including lexica, court records, sermons, baptismal registers, newspapers, and private correspondence, the analysis shows how language both mirrored and helped create racial realities. It demonstrates how these terms shaped identities by placing Black individuals within systems of dependency, servitude, and commodification, while limiting their agency. By situating German-speaking lands within Atlantic and global contexts, the study challenges narratives that see Central Europe as a marginal player in racialization processes, highlighting its active role in shaping modern racial ideas. Ultimately, the research underscores how language not only reflects but also actively constructs racialized realities, embedding structural violence within seemingly neutral terminology.

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Content

Notes on Terminology

The topic of this thesis is racial language. I follow the spelling conventions endorsed by anti-Black racism organizations. When referring to the historical context or its use in primary sources, terms are written out in quotation marks; otherwise, abbreviations are used. The spelling “Black” and “Blackness” with a capital „B“ follows the call by Kwame Anthony Appiah.[1] When speaking of white people or whiteness, I decided to use lower cases inspired by the poem “Dear White People” by FreeQuency where they state that “every time we have written white people, we have written it in lower cases because we are tired of you capitalizing our pain".[2]

[1] Kwame Anthony Appiah, “The Case for Capitalizing the B in Black,” *The Atlantic*, 18 June 2020, available via: https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/06/time-to-capitalize-blackand-white/613159/. [Accessed 29 July 2025].

[2] FreeQuency, *Dear White People*, Individual World Poetry Slam, 2015, available via: https://www.freequencyspeaks.com/media [last accessed 23.09.2025].

1. Introduction

"Sieg der Redefreiheit".[3] With these words, AfD politician Nikolas Krammer celebrated the rejection of a call to order against him in October 2018.[4] During a speech by Karen Larisch (Die Linke), Krammer repeatedly used the N-word.[5] A complaint followed, as the term is recognized as racist. Krammer defended himself by claiming that it had historically been a standard and non-controversial term for Black people. Historian Götz Aly offers a similar argument regarding the renaming of the M-Street.[6] In August 2020, the Berlin-Mitte district assembly approved renaming the street to *Anton-Wilhelm-Amo-Straße* in honor of the Ghanaian-born philosopher and the first Black scholar in Germany.[7] The plaintiffs, on the other hand, argued that the word M-word, as a historical term, only denoted Black presence in Berlin and lacked discriminatory meaning. After years of campaigning by anti-racist initiatives, the street was ceremoniously renamed at the end of August 2025. But these examples only show how present the debate about racial language is in Germany.

Furthermore, the appeals to the historical legitimacy of racialized terms are part of a rhetorical pattern that conceals the structural nature of racism by instrumentalizing historical knowledge. This thesis challenges such narratives by tracing the historical semantics of the German terms "Mohr" and "Neger" and examining how they shaped both the perception and identity of Black individuals in the long eighteenth century.

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[3] As this work deals with language, quotations from sources are reproduced in the original with translations in the footnotes. All translations are my own. For the case see LVerfG Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Urteil vom 24.10.2019, 1/19, available via https://openjur.de/u/2209470.html [last accessed 21.07.2025].

[4] The *Alternative for Germany* (AfD) became the second strongest party following the February 2025 election and has been classified by the *Verfassungsschutz* (Office for the Protection of the Constitution) as a confirmed right-wing extremist organization. For an overview of the case see Anna Katharina Mangold and Synthi Buszewski, "Worüber man nichts sagen kann, darüber soll man schweigen", *VerfBlog,* 2019/12/23, available via: https://verfassungsblog.de/worueber-man-nichts-sagen-kann-darueber-soll-man-schweigen/ [last accessed 21.07.2025].

[5] The parliamentary debate took place on October 25, 2018, during a session of the Landtag of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. The discussion focused on an AfD motion titled "Leistungsmissbrauch verhindern: Sachleistungen für Asylbewerber und Ausreisepflichtige (Preventing Abuse of Benefits: In-kind Services for Asylum Seekers and Deportable Individuals)".

[6] Cf. Bezirksamt Mitte von Berlin, "Anton-Wilhelm-Amo-Straße: Feierliche Umbenennung der Mohrenstraße am 23. August 2025." *Berlin.de,* 18 July 2025, available via: https://www.berlin.de/ba-mitte/aktuelles/pressemitteilungen/2025/pressemitteilung.1579051.php [Accessed 22 July 2025].

[7] Their appeal was rejected on July 8, 2025, by the Higher Administrative Court of Berlin-Brandenburg, making the decision legally binding. The name change took legal effect on July 18, 2025, and a public ceremony was held on August 23, 2025.

The academic debate on discriminatory language received significant impetus over the last two decades in German scholarship.[8] Cultural scholar Susan Arndt argues that "Neger" and "Mohr" cannot be understood as neutral or descriptive, but are historically evolved carriers of colonial-racist semantics.[9] Her criticism is directed both against the lexicographical tradition and against the social normalization of discriminatory terms.[10] German lexicographical sources indicate that the evaluation of these terms remains characterized by ambivalence and relativization. *Duden*, for example, marks "Neger" as discriminatory today, but refers to its historical use.[11] The *Digitale Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache* (DWDS) emphasizes that "ältere Verwendungen des Wortes zeigen häufig keine abwertende Absicht", a perspective that Arndt criticizes as part of white defensive strategies.[12] To understand this ambivalence, we must first ask: where do these words come from?

The term "Mohr" likely derives from the Castilian/Spanish *moro*, and/or Portuguese *mouro*, which etymologically originates from the Latin *maurus*, and/or the Greek *máuros*.[13] The Moors political and cultural presence in Al-Andalus profoundly shaped European history and imagination over centuries.[14] In a first conceptual-historical study, Wolf-Dieter Hund and Malte Hinrichsen identified three phases of meaning: Before the 13th century, it primarily denoted geographic origin, but also carried military and regional connotations. After the 13th century, events like the Crusades deepened European interaction with Africa, influencing the term's use. From around 1800, with the rise of racial theories, the authors argue that the term took on

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[8] Central to this discourse are the volumes by Susan Arndt and Nana Ofuatey-Alazard (eds.), *Wie Rassismus aus Wörtern spricht: (K)Erben des Kolonialismus im Wissensarchiv deutsche Sprache. Ein kritisches Nachschlagewerk*,(Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2011); Susan Arndt and Antje Hornscheidt (eds.), *Afrika Und Die Deutsche Sprache Ein Kritisches Nachschlagewerk*. 3rd ed. (Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2018).

[9] Susan Arndt and Ulrike Hamann, "Mohr_in," in *Wie Rassismus aus Wörtern spricht: (K)Erben des Kolonialismus im Wissensarchiv deutsche Sprache. Ein kritisches Nachschlagewerk*, (eds.) Susan Arndt and Nadja Ofuatey-Alazard (Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2011), pp. 649–653; Susan Arndt, "Neger_in," in *Wie Rassismus aus Wörtern spricht*, (eds.) Susan Arndt and Nana Ofuatey-Alazard, pp. 653-r.

[10] Cf. Arndt 2011, p. 653.

[11] "Neger", *Duden Online*, available via: https://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Neger, [last accessed 21.07.2025]. Recently, a notice has been added indicating the discriminatory nature of the word and offering alternative self-designations.

[12] Arndt 2011, p. 653; „Neger", *bereitgestellt durch das Digitale Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, available via: https://www.dwds.de/wb/Neger [last accessed 21.07.2025]. Translation: "older usages often do not reveal any pejorative intent".

[13] Arndt and Hamann 2011, p. 649.

[14] Moors refers here to the English translation used for the Muslim rulers of Al-Andalus, see e.g., Ivan Van Sertima, (ed.), *Golden Age of the Moor*, 2nd printing (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1993); Javier García Irigoyen, *Moors Dressed as Moors: Clothing, Social Distinction and Ethnicity in Early Modern Iberia*, *Toronto Iberic* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018); Josiah Blackmore, *Moorings: Portuguese Expansion and the Writing of Africa* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

increasingly negative, racist connotations.[15] In contrast, Arndt and Hamann see the term "Mohr" as fundamentally racist, as it is based on colonial-racist semantics and reproduces discriminatory ideas about Black people.[16]

The origin of "Neger" lies in the Latin word *niger*, which was adopted in Spanish and Portuguese as *negro* and in French as *nègre*. According to Arndt, it emerged in the 16th century to distinguish between Egyptians and Ethiopians.[17] However, a detailed semantic analysis of the terms "Mohr" and "Neger" in pre-modern German-speaking countries has been lacking to date. Moreover, the impact of these terms on Black identity formation in the Holy Roman Empire has received little attention. Thus, this study addresses these gaps by asking: How did the semantics of Mohr and Neger develop in the long eighteenth century, and how did they influence the identity of Black individuals in German-speaking territories?

By focusing on German-speaking territories, this study highlights the region's integration into global systems, including its role in slavery and racialized practices. In this study, 'Germany' refers to the territory of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. While the absence of a unified nation-state is often cited as an argument against the existence of a German colonial history in the early modern period, multiple scholars demonstrate its involvement.[18] Examining the historical usage of "Mohr" and "Neger" offers a valuable entry point into understanding how German-speaking territories were embedded in global processes of racialization, exchange, and exploitation. By tracing the semantic development and contextual application of these terms, this study explores how linguistic practices intersected with broader global currents to shape local perceptions and social structures, thereby positioning Germany as an active participant rather than a peripheral observer in the formation of racial ideologies. Additionally, by analyzing the experiences and identities of Black individuals in 18th-century German territories, this research contributes to making previously hidden perspectives visible. To understand

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[15] Wolff Hund and Malte Hinrichsen, "Metamorphosen des ‚Mohren': Rassistische Sprache und historischer Wandel" in *Sprache–Macht–Rassismus,* (eds.) Gudrun Hentges et al., (Berlin: Unrast Verlag 2014), pp. 69-97.
[16] Arndt and Hamann 2011, p. 650f.
[17] Arndt 2011, p. 654.
[18] In 2001, Jürgen Osterhammel claimed that "in die Versuchung, Kolonialisten und Sklavenhalter zu werden, kamen die Deutschen nicht (the Germans were not tempted to become colonialists and slave owners)" see idem. „Aufstieg und Fall der neuzeitlichen Sklaverei", in *Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Nationalstaats: Studien zu Beziehungsgeschichte und Zivilisationsvergleich* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2001), pp. 342-369, here p. 368. However, the consensus now is that they were both German colonists and slave owners, see e.g. Heinz Duchhardt, "Afrika Und Die Deutschen Kolonialprojekte Der 2. Hälfte Des 17. Jahrhunderts," *Archiv Für Kulturgeschichte* 68 (1986), pp. 119–34; Andrea Weindl, "The Slave Trade of Northern Germany from the Seventeenth to the Nineteenth Centuries," in *Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*, (eds.) David Eltis and David Richardson (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2008), pp. 250–267.

how racialized language functioned as a tool of social ordering in early modern Germany, this study draws on theoretical frameworks from Critical Race Theory (CRT), Whiteness studies, and postcolonial scholarship that have fundamentally transformed how scholars analyze the construction of racial difference.

It's Not a Bug, It's a Feature: Race, Whiteness, and the Construction of the Other

This study builds on the foundational shift in international scholarship on race, which moved from understanding "race" as a biological fact to analyzing it as a social construct.[19] Scholars have long debated whether terms and practices from early modern Europe can be labeled "racist" before the emergence of modern racial theories.[20] This discourse shaped early scholarship, as the minimal Black presence in northern Europe has been applied as a paradigm leading to a focus primarily on symbolic representation in art and literature. As a result, iconographic methods were developed for reading racial difference as a cultural construct.[21]

Internationally, Edward Said's *Orientalism* introduced a postcolonial shift, revealing how representations of non-European Others, particularly Africans and Muslims, were not neutral but racially and politically charged.[22] From the mid-1980s onward, African American scholars deepened this critique by analyzing race in intersection with gender, religion, and class, revealing how racial categories were tied to broader structures of power.[23] In the 1990s, Kim Hall demonstrated how Blackness functioned as a constitutive element of white English identity, even in texts where race was not explicitly named.[24] This intuition enabled scholars to trace racial meaning in seemingly race-neutral discourse. In the 21st century, Whiteness studies and

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[19] Fundamental for this shift were Critical Race Theory (CRT) approaches emerging in the 1960s and 1970s, see e.g., Derrick Bell, *Race, Racism and American Law* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973). See also Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2017). I placed Race in quotation marks following the nomenclature developed by Susan Arndt to differentiate between race as a social construct, and "Race" as the biological category, see Susan Arndt, "Racial Turn", in *Wie Rassismus aus Wörtern spricht*: *(K)Erben des Kolonialismus im Wissensarchiv deutsche Sprache. Ein kritisches Nachschlagewerk*, 4.ed. (Münster: Unrast Verlag, 2021); pp. 185-189.

[20] The field of Premodern Race Studies has provided multiple examples, see e.g., Geraldine Heng, *The Invention of Race in the European Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Dorothy Kim (ed.), *Race Before Race: Premodern Critical Race Studies*, vol. 18, 2021.

[21] Cf. Hans Werner Debrunner, *Presence and Prestige: Africans in Europe, a History of Africans in Europe before 1918* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 1979).

[22] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

[23] Cf. Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989, no. 1, article 8.

[24] Kim F. Hall, *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

CRT reframed race from a reflection of difference to a tool of hierarchy that organizes inclusion and exclusion.[25] This shift gave rise to premodern critical race studies, revealing how race transitioned from symbolic representation to material consequences.[26] Noémie Ndiaye conceptualizes this as the "racial matrix": a flexible system that maintains power by marking groups as inherently different through supposedly natural traits.[27]

Building on this framework, I understand race as what medievalist Geraldine Heng calls "a structural relationship for the articulation and management of human differences".[28] This definition emphasizes analyzing both those who are racialized and the racializing subject. In this study, race functions as a tool of white supremacy, where "white" refers not to skin tone but to an ideological category rooted in Western European traditions that positions itself as the unmarked norm.

Through this lens, the historical terms "Mohr" and "Neger" can be understood not merely as descriptors of physical difference but as categories that actively produced racial meaning. While previous research has made significant contributions to understanding racist language in historical contexts, this study extends that scholarship by examining how these specific German terms functioned as performative forces in the construction of identity. To analyze this process, it is essential to understand how language operates as a mechanism of power and social ordering.

Language and Identity

Language shapes reality. By producing and reinforcing power structures, naming is not a neutral act; it shapes perceptions, identities, and social orders. As Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *symbolic power* illustrates, influence extends beyond power to encompass language, education, and classification.[29] Similarly, Michael Foucault's concept of *power/knowledge* reveals that language

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[25] For Whiteness studies in Germany, see Maureen Maisha Eggers, Gloria Kilomba, Petra Piesche, and Susan Arndt (eds.), *Mythen, Masken und Subjekte:kritische Weissseinsforschung in Deutschland*, (Münster: Unrast, 2005).
[26] See e.g., Nicolas R. Jones, *Staging Habla de Negros: Radical Performances of the African Diaspora in Early Modern Spain*, *Iberian Encounter and Exchange, 475–1755* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2021); Cord J. Whitaker, Nahir I. Otaño Gracia, and François-Xavier Fauvelle, "Speculum Themed Issue: 'Race, Race-Thinking, and Identity in the Global Middle Ages,'" *Speculum*, vol. 99, no. 2, 2024, pp. 321–330.
[27] Noémie Ndiaye, *Scripts of Blackness: Early Modern Performance Culture and the Making of Race*, *Raceb4race* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2022).
[28] Heng 2018, p. 3.
[29] The concept was first introduced in the book *La Distinction: Critique sociale du jugement* (1979), but I found this lecture as a concise summary helpful, Pierre Bourdieu, "Social Space and Symbolic Power," *Sociological Theory*, vol. 7, no. 1, 1989, pp. 14–25. See also Martti Siisiäinen, "Symbolic Power as a Critical Concept" in

constructs what we accept as truth/Truth by shaping how people and societies are understood.[30] Thus, drawing from CRT, postcolonial studies, and post-structuralism, this study employs several complementary theoretical frameworks. Butler's theory of performativity, while primarily applied to gender, offers valuable insights for understanding racial formation through language.[31] Just as gender is constituted through repeated stylization of the body, racial categories, I argue, are produced through repeated acts of naming, describing, and categorizing bodies.[32]

Moreover, in his influential essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Stuart Hall explores the topic of cultural identity and representation.[33] He describes cultural identity as a process of "becoming" as well as "being". Therefore, identity is not fixed or static but dynamic; a construction shaped by "memory, fantasy, narration and myth" within the discourses of history and culture.[34] In doing so, Hall draws on the ideas of Foucault and Jacques Derrida, specifically the concept of *différance*.[35] In addition, he refers to Frantz Fanon's findings from *Black Skin and White Masks*, particularly the inner effects of colonial power.[36] According to Fanon, Otherness is not only imposed from the outside but also internalized as the subject perceives itself through its constructed knowledge. This idea builds on what W.E.B. DuBois coined as *double consciousness*.[37] It articulates the fundamental tension of Black subjectivity in a racially structured society: the struggle to reconcile contradictory identities while facing constant discrimination and external categorization. Therefore, when early modern German texts labeled individuals as

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Symbolic Power in Cultural Contexts: Uncovering Social Reality, (eds.) Jarmo Houtsonen and Ari Antikainen (Sense Publishers, 2008), pp. 21–30.

[30] Cf. Joseph Rouse, "Power/Knowledge," in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, (ed.) Gary Gutting (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 95–122. See also Diana Taylor, "Introduction: Power, Freedom and Subjectivity," in *Michel Foucault: Key Concepts*, (ed.) Diana Taylor (Acumen Publishing Ltd., 2011), pp. 1–9. Debates about historical truth are ongoing in historical theory hence the different spellings, cf. Jouni-Matti Kuukkanen, "Truth," in *The Routledge Companion to Historical Theory*, (ed.) Chiel van den Akker (London: Routledge, 2022), pp. 316-331; Martin Jay, "Historical Truth and the Truthfulness of Historians," in *Integrity, Honesty, and Truth Seeking*, (eds.) Christian B. Miller and Ryan West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), pp. 240-227.

[31] Cf. Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1988, pp. 519–531.

[32] Butler 1988, p. 521-524.

[33] Stuart Hall, "thirteen Cultural Identity and Diaspora [1990]", in *Selected Writings on Race and Difference*, (eds.) Paul Gilroy and Ruth Wilson Gilmore, (New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2021), pp. 257-271.

[34] Hall 2021, p. 226.

[35] Cf. Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 17.

[36] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, (New York: Grove Press, 2008). Original work published in 1952.

[37] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (New York: Fawcett, 1903). See also T. Owens Moore, "A Fanonian Perspective on Double Consciousness," *Journal of Black Studies*, vol 35, no. 6, 2005, pp. 751–762; John P. Pittman, "Double Consciousness", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* (eds.) Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman (Summer 2024 Edition), available via: https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2024/entries/double-consciousness/ [last accessed 29.07.2025].

"Mohr" or "Neger", they were not merely describing a pre-existing reality but participating in the construction of racial difference itself. This performative understanding enables us to analyze historical terms not as neutral descriptors, but as active components in the production of racialized subjects. However, how Germans labeled and racialized individuals cannot be fully understood without considering the historical context.

Early Modern Germany and Its Global Entanglements

The historiography of German involvement in Atlantic and global systems of colonialism and slavery has undergone a significant transformation, moving from narratives of German exceptionalism to comprehensive analyses of entanglement and participation.[38] This evolution reflects broader methodological shifts in how scholars approach transnational history, moving from scattered documentation of specific incidents to systematic analysis of sustained involvement across multiple forms of participation.[39]

Early foundational works demonstrated direct German participation, providing empirical foundations that challenged exceptionalist narratives.[40] However, it was not until the 21st century that German scholarship underwent a decisive global shift, fundamentally reorienting how scholars conceptualize German historical experiences within broader Atlantic and global contexts.[41] This turn represents more than simply expanding geographical scope; it reflects a methodological transformation toward network-based analysis that traces connections across multiple locations and extended time periods.[42] Rather than treating German territories as isolated units occasionally intersecting with global systems, contemporary scholarship examines

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[38] For a general overview, see Philip Otterness, "Germans in the Atlantic World",in *obo in Atlantic History. 22 Jul. 2025* https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199730414/obo-9780199730414-0111.xml [last accessed 29.07.2025].

[39] See e.g. Jutta Wimmler and Klaus Weber (eds.*), Globalized Peripheries: Central Europe and the Atlantic World, 1680-1860*. 1st ed., vol. 16 (United Kingdom: Boydell & Brewer, 2020).

[40] See e.g. the works by Hermann Kellenbenz, *Die Brandenburger auf St. Thomas*, *Jahrbuch für Geschichte Lateinamerikas* 2, no. 1 (1965); idem, "Deutsche Plantagenbesitzer und Kaufleute in Surinam vom Ende des 18. bis zur Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts," *Jahrbuch für Geschichte Lateinamerikas*, vol. 3, no. 1, 1966, pp. 141–63; idem, "Phasen des hanseatisch-nordeuropäischen Südamerikahandels," *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*, vol. 78, 1960, pp. 87–120, Hans Pohl, *Die Beziehungen Hamburgs zu Spanien und dem spanischen Amerika in der Zeit von 1740 bis 1806* (Wiesbaden, 1963), pp. 232–65; and Percy Ernst Schramm, *Gewinn und Verlust: Die Geschichte der Hamburger Senatorenfamilien Jencquel und Luis (16. bis 19. Jahrhundert). Zwei Beispiele für den wirtschaftlichen und sozialen Wandel in Norddeutschland*, *Veröffentlichungen des Vereins für Hamburgische Geschichte*, vol. 24 (Hamburg: Christians, 1969).

[41] A seminal contribution was Klaus Weber*, Deutsche Kaufleute im Atlantikhandel 1680 - 1830: Unternehmen und Familien in Hamburg, Cádiz und Bordeaux*, Schriftenreihe zur Zeitschrift für Unternehmensgeschichte 12 (München: Beck, 2004).

[42] Cf. Margrit Schulte Beerbühl, *Deutsche Kaufleute in London: Welthandel und Einbürgerung* (1660-1818) (München: Oldenbourg, 2007).

how German actors, institutions, and regions were systematically integrated into transnational networks of commerce, culture, and power.

Within this change, the development of "hinterland" analysis examines how European interior regions participated in Atlantic systems through financial relationships, commodity processing, and cultural exchange. This paradigm, crystallized in Felix Brahm and Eve Rosenhaft's influential collection, fundamentally reframes how scholars understand European involvement in Atlantic slavery systems by demonstrating how inland territories were economically and socially integrated into slavery-based Atlantic economies.[43] This approach traces capital flows, commodity chains, and social relationships that connected continental European regions to the Atlantic slavery system, revealing forms of involvement that traditional maritime-centered analyses have overlooked.

Moreover, the systematic challenge to German exceptionalism represents a third major trend that has fundamentally reshaped the field's analytical foundations. This movement, most comprehensively exemplified in the volume *Beyond Exceptionalism* provides methodological frameworks for examining traces and indirect forms of involvement that traditional approaches might overlook.[44] This methodological innovation has enabled scholars to move beyond defensive arguments about whether German involvement existed to analytical examinations of how different forms of participation operated and what their long-term effects were on German society and Atlantic systems more broadly.

In addition, recent developments in the field have increasingly integrated cultural and representational analysis with economic and political approaches, reflecting broader interdisciplinary trends in historical scholarship.[45] This integration examines how visual and performative practices contributed to racial formation and global positioning, revealing dimensions of German Atlantic involvement that purely economic analyses might miss.

Building upon these findings, this research extends scholarly discourse by examining how racialized language intersected with the lived experiences of Black individuals in German-

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[43] Felix Brahm and Eve Rosenhaft (eds.) *Slavery Hinterland: Transatlantic Slavery and Continental Europe, 1680-1850* (United Kingdom: Boydell & Brewer, 2016).

[44] Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, Josef Köstlbauer, and Sarah Lentz (eds.), *Beyond Exceptionalism: Traces of Slavery and the Slave Trade in Early Modern Germany, 1650–1850* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021). See also Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Pia Wiegmink (eds.), *German Entanglements in Transatlantic Slavery* (Milton Park, New York, N.Y.: Routledge, 2019).

[45] See e.g. Wendy Sutherland, *Staging Blackness and Performing Whiteness in Eighteenth-Century German Drama* (London: Routledge, 2016); Arne Spohr, "'Mohr und Trompeter': Blackness and Social Status in Early Modern Germany", *Journal of the American Musicological* Society, vol 72, no. 3, 2019, pp. 613–663; Alexander Bevilacqua, "Race-Making Festivities in Brandenburg-Prussia, 1652–1750," *Past & Present*, vol. 265, no. 1, November 2024, pp. 3–56.

speaking territories. However, scholarship on Black presence in Germany remains underdeveloped compared to international literature.[46] Historian Allison Blakely's observation that colorism can exist without large Black populations or racial conflict is crucial for understanding German contexts, especially given Sander Gilman's claim that "virtually no Blacks" were present.[47] While Germany's formal colonial period began in the late 19th century, scholars have demonstrated that informal colonial practices date back to the Renaissance.[48]

Furthermore, German historiography has evolved from isolated regional studies to more comprehensive inquiry, though gaps remain.[49] Early works focused on court contexts, with Peter Martin's *Schwarze Teufel, Edle Mohren* expanding the scope but introducing limiting binary frameworks.[50] Anne Kuhlmann-Smirnov's seminal study analyzed 380 cases of African descent (1600–1800), arguing that some individuals held privileged positions due to elite status and

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[46] For comprehensive studies of Black experiences across European contexts, see T.F. Earle and K.J.P. Lowe (eds.), *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For broader European diaspora contexts, Leigh Raiford and Heike Raphael-Hernandez (eds.), *Migrating the Black Body: The African Diaspora and Visual Culture* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017), pp. 79–94. On early modern Iberia, William D. Phillips, *Slavery in Medieval and Early Modern Iberia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013). On early modern Portugal specifically, Timothy Walker, "Sorcerers and Folkhealers: Africans and the Inquisition in Portugal, 1680–1800," *Revista Lusófona de Ciência das Religiões*, vol. 3, no. 5, 2004, pp. 83–98, and Rocío Periáñez Gómez, *Negros, mulatos y blancos: Los esclavos en Extremadura durante la edad moderna* (Badajoz: Diputación de Badajoz, 2010); on England see e.g., James Walvin, *Black and White; the Negro and English Society, 1555-1945* (Allen Lane the Penguin Press, 1973); on the Dutch context, Allison Blakely, *Blacks in the Dutch World: The Evolution of Racial Imagery in a Modern Society* (Indiana University Press, 1993); on Scandinavia, Anne K. Bang and Kirsten Alsaker Kjerland (eds.), *Nordmenn i Afrika—Afrikanere i Norge* (Bergen, Norway: Vigmostad & Bjørke, 2002); Per Nielsen, "Enslaved Africans in Denmark and the Quest for Freedom," in *Negotiating Enslavement: Perspectives on Slavery in the Danish West Indies*, (eds.) Arnold R. Highfield and George F. Tyson (St. Croix, US Virgin Islands: Antilles Press, 2009), pp. 119-128. On France, Trica Danielle Keaton, et al., *Black France* (Duke University Press, 2012).

[47] Sander L. Gilman, *On Blackness without Blacks: Essays on the Image of Black in Germany* (Boston, MA: G. K. Hall, 1982), p. xi; Allison Blakely, "Problems in Studying the Role of Blacks in Europe," *Perspectives: American Historical Association Newsletter* 35, May 1997, available via: https://www.historians.org/perspectives-article/problems-in-studying-the-role-of-blacks-in-europe-may-1997/ [last accessed 29.07.2025].

[48] Cf. Mark Häberlein, *Aufbruch Ins Globale Zeitalter: Die Handelswelt Der Fugger und Welser* (Darmstadt: Theiss, 2016). See also Mischa Honeck, Martin Klimke, and Anne Kuhlmann, (eds.), *Germany and the Black Diaspora: Points of Contact 1250–1914* (New York: Berghahn, 2013); Doris Bulach and Juliane Schiel (eds.), *Europas Sklaven*, Special Issue Werkstatt Geschichte nos. 66–67, 2014.

[49] For a bibliographic overview, see: Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, Annika Bärwald, and Josef Köstlbauer, *People of African Descent on Early Modern Europe,Oxford Bibliographies Online: Atlantic History*, ed. Trevor Burnard, last modified 15 January 2020, available via https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199730414/obo-9780199730414-0326.xml [last accessed 29.09.2025]. Early works include M. Rischmann, "Mohren als Spielleute und Musiker in der preußischen Armee," *Zeitschrift für Heereskunde und Uniformkunde*, July-August-September 1936, pp. 82-84; Peter Mark, *Africans in European Eyes: The Portrayal of Black Africans in Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century Europe* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1974); Urs Bitterli, *Die Entdeckung des schwarzen Afrikaners: Versuch einer Geistesgeschichte der europäisch-afrikanischen Beziehungen an der Guineaküste im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Zürich: Atlantis, 1970); Wolfram Schäfer, "Von 'Kammermohren', 'Mohren'-Tambouren und 'Ost-Indianern': Anmerkungen zu Existenzbedingungen und Lebensformen einer Minderheit im 18. Jahrhundert unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Residenzstadt Kassel," *Fremdsein: Hessische Blätter für Volks- und Kulturforschung*, vol. 23, 1988, pp. 35-80; Bernd Roeck, *Außenseiter, Randgruppen, Minderheiten: Fremde im Deutschland der frühen Neuzeit* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993).

[50] Peter Martin, *Schwarze Teufel, edle Mohren* (Hamburg: Janus 1993).

guild membership.[51] This connects to a primary debate: while some scholars, such as Kuhlmann-Smirnov, emphasize the integration potential at German courts, critics like Arne Spohr highlight the persistent racialization and objectification, regardless of position.[52]

Moreover, Von Mallinckrodt's reassessment of the "Free Soil Paradigm" provides a nuanced perspective that reconceptualizes slavery as existing along a spectrum of dependency rather than as a binary status.[53] Her work highlights the legal practices that facilitated various forms of unfreedom within the Holy Roman Empire despite the absence of formal slave codes. By examining these ambiguous legal conditions, she demonstrates how slavery could persist in German territories while remaining nominally distinct from colonial plantation slavery.[54] This intervention is particularly significant as it challenges longstanding assumptions about Central European exceptionalism regarding slavery and connects German societies more directly to global systems of human commodification and racialized labor. Ultimately, historiography remains heavily influenced by courtly contexts.[55] Annika Bärwald's work represents a significant

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[51] Anne Kuhlmann-Smirnov, *Schwarze Europäer im Alten Reich: Handel, Migration, Hof* (Transkulturelle Perspektiven, Bd. 11, V&R Unipress 2014).

[52] Monika Firla, "'Hof-' und andere 'Mohren' als früheste Schicht des Eintreffens von Afrikanern in Deutschland," in *Neue Heimat Deutschland: Aspekte der Zuwanderung, Akkulturation und emotionalen Bindung*, (ed.) Hartmut Heller (Erlangen: Universitätsbund Erlangen-Nürnberg, 2002), pp. 157-176; Vera Lind, "Privileged Dependency on the Edge of the Atlantic World: Africans and Germans in the Eighteenth Century," in *Interpreting Colonialism*, (eds.) Byron R. Wells and Philip Stewart (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2004), pp. 369-391; Arne Spohr, "Zunftmitgliedschaft als Weg zur Freiheit? Zur rechtlichen und sozialen Position schwarzer Hoftrompeter und -pauker im Alten Reich." In *Wege: Festschrift für Susanne Rode- Breymann*, (eds.) Annette Kreutziger-Herr et al., (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2018), pp. 357 –366. For a detailed discussion of the debate see chapter 2.

[53] By the "free soil paradigm," I refer to the legal and philosophical framework introduced by Sue Peabody, see *"There Are No Slaves in France": The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien* Régime (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) and idem. Barriers to Accessing France's Sol Libre in Early Modern France, in *The European Experience in Slavery, 1650-1850*, (ed.) Rebekka von Mallinckrodt (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2024), pp. 23-46.

[54] Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, ""There Are No Slaves in Prussia?", " in *Slavery Hinterland: Transatlantic Slavery and Continental Europe, 1680-1850*, (eds.) Felix Brahm and Eve Rosenhaft (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2016), pp. 109-131; idem, "Verhandelte (Un-)Freiheit: Sklaverei, Leibeigenschaft und innereuropäischer Wissenstransfer am Ausgang des 18. Jahrhunderts," *Geschichte & Gesellschaft*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2017, pp. 347-380; idem, "Sklaverei und Recht im Alten Reich," in *Das Meer: Maritime Welten in der Frühen Neuzeit*, (eds.) Peter Burschel and Sünne Juterczenka (Köln: Böhlau, 2021), pp. 29-42; idem, "Return of a Ghost: Slavery and the Law in Early Modern Saxony: Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries," *Journal of Global Slavery*, vol. 8, 2023, pp. 145-177; idem, "Die lichtabgewandte Seite der Freiheit: Sklaverei im frühneuzeitlichen Sachsen," in *Die Idee der Freiheit und ihre Semantiken: Zum Spannungsverhältnis von Freiheit und Sicherheit*, (eds.) Nicole J. Saam and Heiner Bielefeld (Bielefeld: transcript, 2023), pp. 239-250; and most recently: idem, "Zwischen Sklaverei und Exotismus: People of Colour am Hof Augusts des Starken (r. 1694-1733) und Christiane Eberhardines (r. 1694-1727)," in *Im Schatten der Macht: Subalterne Körper am Fürstenhof*, (eds.) Nadine Amsler and Nadir Weber, Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung, Beihefte (2024), pp. 31-65.

[55] Jasper Hagedorns dissertation is a successful expansion, see Jasper Henning Hagedorn, *Bremen und die atlantische Sklaverei. Waren, Wissen und Personen, 1780–1860* (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft mbH & Co. KG, 2023).

shift toward examining Black lives beyond courts, revealing greater social complexity.[56]

Despite these advances, scholarship on Black presence in early modern German-speaking lands remains marginal, with Germany primarily associated with Nazi-era racism rather than earlier racial formations.[57] Crucially, no dedicated analysis exists of how the terms "Mohr" and "Neger" functioned semantically and socially. This study fills this gap by investigating how these racialized categories both reflected and shaped social relations in early modern Germany. By tracing the semantic evolution of racial language and examining its impact on Black self-perception, this research reveals how racial language operated as both a discursive tool and an embodied experience, thereby illuminating the historical roots of contemporary anti-Black racism and challenging narratives of German exceptionalism in racial formation.

Methodology, Sources, and Limitations

The following sub-questions are guiding this analysis:

- What terms are used in the sources to refer to Black people, and what meanings and contexts are associated with their use?
- How do these terms change in the course of the late 18th century, and can semantic shifts or new connotations be identified?
- To what extent do the terms used function as markers of social belonging or exclusion?
- What colonial, racializing or power-political structures are reflected in the choice of words and their usage?

To answer these questions, I draw on a variety of sources and analyze them using the methodology of conceptual history, significantly influenced by Reinhart Koselleck.[58] This approach treats concepts not as static definitions but as historically changeable patterns that structure

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[56] Annika Bärwald, "Black Hamburg: People of Asian and African Descent Navigating a Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Job Market," in *Beyond Exceptionalism: Traces of Slavery and the Slave Trade in Early Modern Germany, 1650-1850*, (eds.) Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, Josef Köstlbauer, and Sarah Lentz (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), pp. 189-214. See also her dissertation project “Arbeit transkontinental: Nicht-Europäische ArbeiterInnen in der Region Hamburg, 1750-1840”.

[57] See e.g., Imanuel Geiss, *Geschichte des Rassismus*, Neue Historische Bibliothek 1530 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988); Christian Geulen, *Geschichte des Rassismus*, Sonderausgabe für die Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, vol. 2424 (München: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2021).

[58] Werner Conze and Reinhart Koselleck *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*, 8 vols. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1972-1997); Ernst Müller and Falko Schmieder, *Begriffsgeschichte und historische Semantik: Ein kritisches Kompendium* (Frankfurt am Main, 2016).

social experiences. It involves historicizing terms, analyzing their use across various contexts and time periods, and examining the conflict lines and power structures embedded in language. Central to the method is the triadic distinction between word, concept, and referent (Wort–Begriff–Sache), which allows for precise differentiation between linguistic form, conceptual content, and the real-world object or person. This model helps identify semantic shifts that may not be visible in the wording itself but appear in patterns of social usage. Following the global turn, conceptual history has expanded beyond Eurocentrism, enabling a transnational perspective that situates German history within broader contexts.[59] Thus, this approach is particularly suited to tracing the evolution of "Mohr" and "Neger," revealing how these terms actively constructed and maintained racial hierarchies rather than merely describing them.

In addition, building on postcolonial theory, the study recognizes that archival sources reflect epistemic violence.[60] In *Can the Subaltern Speak*, Gayatri C. Spivak examines how colonized subjects are systematically denied the ability to represent themselves in knowledge systems controlled by dominant powers. The archive itself, which preserves, categorizes, and deems worthy of historical memory, reflects and perpetuates this violence. This concept is particularly relevant regarding the categorization of Black individuals as "Neger," "Mohr," or "Schwarze" in archival sources, which constitutes a form of epistemic violence. These labels reflect taxonomies of difference rather than self-identification. The absence of first-person accounts represents another dimension of this violence; their perspectives are mediated through white observers' accounts. However, Spivak suggests that careful reading can reveal instances where subaltern consciousness briefly emerges despite archival silences.[61] Central to this approach is the deconstruction of the "white gaze" to render Black perspectives legible within sources that were not produced by the subjects themselves.[62] A deconstructive reading of colonial and racialized categories enables an analysis of how these labels reflect white systems of classification rather than the self-understandings of the individuals they were meant to represent.

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[59] See e.g., Margrit Pernau, Einführung: Neue Wege der Begriffsgeschichte, *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2018, pp. 5–28; Willibald Steinmetz, Vierzig Jahre Begriffsgeschichte. The State of the Art, in *Sprache - Kognition - Kultur. Sprache zwischen mentaler Struktur und kultureller Prägung*, (eds.) Heidrun Kämper and. Ludwig M. Eichinger (Berlin 2008), pp. 174-197.

[60] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, (eds.) Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313.

[61] Cf. Spivak 1988, pp. 305ff.

[62] An example of this reading provides Marie Dierich, "From American Slaves to Hessian Subjects: Silenced Black Narratives of the American Revolution," in *Germany and the Black Diaspora, Points of Contact, 1250–1914*, (eds.) Mischa Honeck, Martin Klimke, and Anne Kuhlmann-Smirnov, *Studies in German History* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), pp. 92-115.

This multi-layered methodology is essential for understanding the fluidity of racial categories in 18th-century Germany, where legal slavery was ambiguous and social hierarchies were negotiated. It enables a nuanced analysis of the relationship between language, power, and identity, showing how racialized terms functioned as active forces in constructing social hierarchies. By clarifying conceptual and historical dimensions of racial terminology, the study illuminates processes of racial categorization and Black identity formation in a context connected to, but not entirely defined by, global slavery. The goal is not merely to catalog linguistic usage, but to understand how these terms functioned as active forces in constructing racial identities and social hierarchies.

Sources

To establish the semantic fields and social connotations of "Mohr" and "Neger," I analyze multiple source types across different contexts. Contemporary lexicographical works reveal prescriptive definitions and elite classifications, while church registers, baptismal entries, and Moravian correspondence provide religious documentation. Central to the linguistic investigation are contemporary reference works that reflect historical usage. The lexicographical sources provide normative definitions and reveal how intellectual elites sought to categorize and hierarchize racial difference. These sources are biased toward prescriptive usage and elite perspectives but allow the extraction of intended semantic hierarchies and official classifications that shaped social expectations. Church registers, baptismal entries, and correspondence between members of the Moravian mission offer insights into religious documentation. While biased toward formal procedures, they reveal how racial terminology functioned in religious contexts. Furthermore, the legal interrogation protocol from an assault case in the 1660s of a Black court employee serves as an example of an administrative document that illuminates the connection between German courts and the Atlantic slave trade. Lastly, correspondence concerning enslaved teenagers offers another layer of administrative documentation that sheds light on the economic context and the functioning of racial categorization. Thus, for my analysis, I will first determine the conceptual history of the terms before moving to the second part of the research question that addresses the influence of the term on Black people. This second parts builds on the database provided by Annika Bärwald. Compiled initially as part of her dissertation in the ERC-funded project “German Slavery”, the database aimed to document the presence of people

of non-European origin in the Hamburg region between 1752 and 1834.[63] The database comprises 251 entries and is structured prosopographically, with categories such as name, gender, age, place of origin, legal status, occupation, relationships and source information. A preliminary analysis of her data shows that of the racially connoted source names, 111 entries are blank, 23 mention only “Negro” and 21 only “Moor”. However, both terms also appear simultaneously, suggesting that they were used as synonyms. In a first study, using advertisements, Bärwald illuminates how racial terminology functioned in Hamburg's labor market, where both Black job seekers and employers operated within a racially structured economic network. Though this study draws on sources identified through Bärwald's archival research, it pursues a different analytical objective. Thus, by utilizing her archival sources while pursuing a distinct analytical focus, I demonstrate how the same sources can be read not only as evidence of Black presence but also as sites where racial terminology actively structured economic opportunities. The analysis first traces how "Mohr" and "Neger" operated as both elite categories of racial classification and as terms that structured the lived realities of Black individuals in German-speaking territories. Each chapter layers semantic analysis with social history, progressing from prescriptive definitions to institutional documentation and finally to everyday negotiation in labor markets.

Chapter 2 traces the conceptual history of “Mohr”, drawing on contemporary lexicographical works that provided prescriptive definitions and elite classifications. These sources show how “Mohr” functioned as a flexible category of Otherness, masking enslavement while reinforcing hierarchies.

Chapter 3 examines “Neger”, situating its rise in Enlightenment scholarship and administrative correspondence, including letters from plantation owner Heinrich Carl von Schimmelmann, as well as church registers, baptismal entries, and Moravian mission correspondence. Together, these sources reveal how racial terminology operated in religious and bureaucratic contexts and how it became tied to processes of categorization within expanding colonial and economic networks.

Chapter 4 turns to newspaper advertisements from Hamburg and Altona in the second half of the 18th century. These materials demonstrate how racial terminology influenced labor markets and social relationships, while also highlighting instances where Black individuals navigated, negotiated, and even reshaped imposed categories.

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[63] Annika Bärwald, Menschen afrikanischer, asiatischer sowie indigen- und afrikanisch-amerikanischer Herkunft im Hamburger Raum, 1760 bis 1840 (1.0) [Data set] Zenodo 2024, availbe via: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13318708 [last accssed 29.09.2025].

Chapter 5 summarizes the analysis results and addresses the research questions, highlighting the study's contributions and its limitations. Taken together, the chapters combine semantic analysis with social history, moving from prescriptive definitions to administrative and religious documentation, and finally to the everyday practices of the labor market. This layered approach illuminates both the discursive frameworks of racial terminology and the ways Black individuals engaged with, and sometimes resisted, these imposed identities. The study concludes by situating these findings within wider scholarship and pointing to future research directions.

2. The Racial Politics of "Mohr"

„Besonders pflegt man einen solchen ganz schwarzen Afrikaner, welchen vornehme Herren zu ihrer Bedienung halten, einen Mohren zu nennen".[64] With this definition, Johann Christoph Adelung sought to capture the meaning of the word "Mohr" in his *Wörterbuch der hochdeutschen Mundart*, the first major dictionary of the German language, first published in 1774. Conceived as a reference work, the dictionary describes the origin, meaning, and use of German vocabulary, thus documenting the language at the beginning of the classical age of German literature. Adelung's entry, however, is ambiguous, offering two definitions that reveal the instability of the term and reflect its entanglement with lived realities.[65] His emphasis on Black servants at court demonstrates how lexicographical knowledge drew directly on the visible presence of so-called "Hofmohren," who, by the 17th and 18th centuries, had become objects of courtly display and prestige.[66]

This chapter will show that referring to them as "Mohr" renders the reality of their lives as enslaved and coerced laborers invisible. This erasure stems from the traditional understanding of the term "Mohr", which originated in medieval times, thereby obscuring its connection to the Atlantic slave trade.[67] This chapter first traces the discursive construction of "Mohr" in dictionaries, encyclopedias, and Christian iconography, demonstrating how knowledge production in Enlightenment Europe endowed the term with an "official" meaning. Second, it turns to practice by analyzing the case of Christian Real, a court trumpeter in the service of the Duchy of Württemberg in the 1660s, to show how the term functioned as a racial label in everyday interactions. Together, these perspectives demonstrate how "Mohr" operated not merely as a descriptive label, but as a durable social category that obscured the realities of enslavement while fixing Black people in a position of racialized Otherness.

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[64] There are multiple reprint editions of his work, however I had accsses to the 1793 version, see Johann Christoph Adelung, *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart, mit beständiger Vergleichung der übrigen Mundarten, besonders aber des Oberdeutschen*. Volume 3 M-Scr, (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1793), pp. 261-62. There are a total of five parts in four volumes, which were published in Leipzig from 1774 to 1786, as well as a second edition of four volumes from 1793 to 1801. The entry on Mohr remains the same in all editions

[65] Adelung 1793, pp. 261.

[66] Throughout this text, I refer collectively to "Hofmohren", meaning all Black servants and enslaved who served at courts in the early modern period. Not all of them were employed as servants, but performed a variety of tasks.

[67] The term first appears around 1160 in the *Kaiserchronik,* written by a cleric from Regensburg, see *MGH Deutsche Chroniken*, vol. 1, pt. 1, 1892, p. 200, l. 6503 and p. 201, l. 6562. Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival is also considered one of the early sources for the term's etymology; cf. Arndt and Hammann 2011, p. 649.

The "Universal" meaning of "Mohr": Zelder's encyclopedia and Adelung's *Wörterbuch*

In the preface to the 11th edition of the best-known German encyclopaedia, *Brockhaus*, the editors define their aim as providing readers with an orderly overview of intellectual, historical, and natural contexts.[68] The first edition of the *Brockhaus* was based on a conversational lexicon by two German scholars and published in 1808 by Friedrich Arnold Brockhaus (1772-1823), who secured the rights to their work.[69] A century earlier, what was known as *Hübner's Lexicon* became the first of this genre.[70] Such publications aimed to provide readers with the knowledge necessary for conversation and were particularly popular in France, culminating in the *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*.[71]

In Hübner's *Reales Staats- und Zeitungslexicon* (first edition published in 1704), there is no entry for the term "Mohr". The earliest I located appears in Zedler's *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschafften und Künste* (1732–1754), edited by Johann Heinrich Zedler (1706–1751).[72] Subject to contemporary criticism, the volumes nevertheless impressed readers due to their sheer breadth of contributions, combining specialist knowledge with non-scientific areas.[73] Little is known about the contributors, but the structure and objectives of the work suggest that the content reflects the general state of knowledge in contemporary scholarly

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[68] *Allgemeine deutsche Real-Encyklopädie für die gebildeten Stände. Conversations-Lexikon,* 11th ed., vol. 15, (F. A. Brockhaus, 1868).

[69] For an overview of the history of Brockhaus, see Anja zum Hingst, *Die Geschichte des Großen Brockhaus: vom Conversationslexikon zur Enzyklopädie*, (Wiesbaden, 1995), pp. 78-91. On Brockhaus as a person, see Annemarie Meiner, "Friedrich Arnold Brockhaus," *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 2 (Duncker & Humblot, 1955), pp. 623-624.

[70] The first editon has an aweful long title: Reales Staats- und Zeitungs-LEXICON Worinnen sowohl die Religionen und Orden, die Reiche und Staaten, Meere, Seen, Flüsse, Städte, Vestungen, Schlösser, Häfen, Berge, Vorgebürge, Pässe, Wälder und Unterschieder der Meilen, die Linien deutscher Häuser, die in verschiedenen Ländern üblichen Ritter-Orden, Reichs-Täge, Gerichte Civil und Militair-Char-gen zu Wasser und Lande, Müntzen, Maß und Gewichte, die zu der Kriegs-Bau-Kunst, Artillerie, Feld Lägern, Schlacht-Ordnungen, Schiffahrten, Unterschied der Schiffe, und derer darzu gehörigen Sachen gebräuchlichen Benennungen, als auch Andere in Zeitungen und taglicher Conversation aus allerhand Sprachen bestehende Termini Artis, denen Gelehrten und Ungelehrten zu sonderbarem Nutzen klar und deutlich beschrieben werden, Nebst einem zweyfachen Register und Vorrede Herrn Johann Hübners, Rectoris des Fürstl. Gymnasii zu Merseburg [Zierlinie] Verlegts Johann Friedrich Gleditsch, Buchhändl. In Leipzig, Anno 1704. [Linie] Mit allergnädigsten Freyheiten. For terminological distinctions, see Georg Meyer, *Das Konversations-Lexikon, eine Sonderform der Enzyklopädie: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Bildungsverbreitung in Deutschland,"*PhD diss. (Universität Göttingen, 1966), pp. 30ff.

[71] For the French publication, see Ulrich Hoinkes, "Die große französische Enzyklopädie von Diderot und d'Alembert," in *Große Lexika und Wörterbücher Europas*, (ed.) Ulrike Haß (De Gruyter, 2012), pp. 117-136. On the history of encyclopedias and their significance, see Robert Darnton, *The Business of Enlightenment: A Publishing History of the Encyclopédie, 1775-1800* (Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987).

[72] Johann Heinrich Zedler, *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschafften und Künste*, vol. 21, (Halle und Leipzig, 1747), pp. 864-865.

[73] On the person, see Werner Raupp, "Zedler, Johann Heinrich," *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, vol. 26, 2006, pp. 1576-1588. For an overview of the publication, see Andreas Müller, "Vom Konversationslexikon zur Enzyklopädie: Das Zedlersche Universal-Lexicon im Wandel seiner Druckgeschichte," *Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2019, pp. 73-90.

circles.[74] Its entry on “Mohr” therefore provides insight into the conceptualization of the term in the 18th century.

In Zelders' 21st volume, published in 1747, the word “Mohr” is derived from geographical and religious usages.[75] First, “Mohr” is equated with “Aethiopier”, derived from Latin *Aethiops*, and Greek roots “ἔθω” (“ich brenne”) and ‘ὄψ’ (“Gesicht”), meaning“der Verbrannte”, as most of the so-called “Mohrenland” is located in the “zona torrida”.[76] This is followed by a detailed derivation based on ancient texts as well as the Old Testament and the Luther Bible, in which “Mohr” is equated with “Kush”.[77] The author then discusses which people can be subsumed under this term, mentioning various ethnic groups.[78] However, scholarship traces “Mohr” to the Latin *Maurus*, which designated inhabitants of the Roman province of Mauretania, and ultimately to the Greek *Máuros* (Μαῦρος). This lineage continued through Old High German (*mōr*, 8th c.) and Middle High German (*mōr(e)*).[79] Yet the geographical referent remained unstable: depending on the source, Mauretania could signify all of North Africa or even the entire sub-Saharan continent. Classical authors such as Pliny the Elder employed “maurus” alongside other terms to designate African peoples.[80] In medieval Iberia, as Neville Barbour demonstrates, the meaning of “maurus” shifted in relation to concurrent terms such as “sarraceni” and “arabes”, with "Mauritania" functioning as a flexible concept whose geographical and cultural boundaries varied according to context and perspective.[81] Therefore, rather than denoting a fixed location, the term constituted a constructed, mobile zone of religious, linguistic, and racial difference, with its boundaries determined mainly by the observer's standpoint. It is unclear why Zedler omits reference to “maurus”. His entry focuses instead on the religious associations of the Cushites and questions of geographical location. Nevertheless, the

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[74] Ulrike Haß, "Verfahren der Quellenverarbeitung in Zedlers Universal-Lexicon Aller Wissenschaften und Künste (1732-1754)," in *Vernakuläre Wissenschaftskommunikation*, eds. Michael Prinz and Jürgen Schiewe, De Gruyter, 2018, pp. 169-188; Martin Gierl, "Kompilation und die Produktion von Wissen im 18. Jahrhundert," in *Die Praktiken der Gelehrsamkeit in der Frühen Neuzeit*, (eds.) Helmut Zedelmaier and Martin Mulsow (Niemeyer, 2001), pp. 63-94.
[75] Zelder 1747, p. 864.
[76] Ibid.. The German terms refer to the original citation in the source.
[77] On Bible translation and the M-word, see "No Mohr! Rassismus und Bibel," narrt, 9 Dec. 2021, available via: https://narrt.de/theo-politische-implikationen-christlicher-bildungspraxis/ [last accessed 28.07.2025], and "Kritik am Begriff 'Mohr' in der Lutherbibel," *evangelisch.de*, 21 Mar. 2018, available via: https://www.evangelisch.de/inhalte/149250/21-03-2018/kritik-begriff-mohr-lutherbibel [last accessed 28.07.2025].
[78] Zelder 1747, p. 865f.
[79] Cf. Arndt and Hamann 2011, p. 649.
[80] Cf. Blackmore 2006, p. 5.
[81] Neville Barbour, “The Significance of the Word Maurus, with its Derivatives Moro and Moor, and of Other Terms Used by Medieval Writers in Latin to Describe the Inhabitants of Muslim Spain.” *Actas IV Congresso de Estudos Árabes e Islâmicos, Coimbra—Lisboa, 1 a 8 de Setembro de 1968* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), pp. 253–266, here p. 258.

geographical origin remains imprecise even in his account, mirroring the vagueness found in other contemporary definitions. This pattern establishes "Mohr" as a capacious umbrella term through which European writers marked and consolidated Otherness.

Moreover, the link between the term and skin color is omnipresent. The entry states: "Die Vorstellung, dass Mohren schwarz sind, fand sich bereits in antiken Sprichwörtern".[82] It is also noted that the term was "allgemein auf alle Schwarzen, insbesondere Neger und andere afrikanische Völker dieser Hautfarbe, ausgedehnt".[83] Two explanations for the dark skin color are given: on the one hand, as a result of climatic conditions, and on the other, as the result of a divine curse.[84] Both interpretations correspond to the racial theories prevalent in the early modern period.[85] By drawing on ancient and biblical sources alongside Renaissance interpretations, Zedler's lexicon harmonizes classical, biblical, and contemporary categories. The entry thus justifies applying the term broadly to dark-skinned people, combining genealogical legitimacy with naturalistic reasoning. This dual movement demonstrates how Enlightenment scholarship managed the potential instability of racial categories by providing both genealogical legitimacy and scientific rationalization while embedding them in Eurocentric frameworks of "universal knowledge".[86]

By contrast, Adelung's *Wörterbuch der deutschen Mundart*, which aimed to present High German as then in use, reflects contemporary language "wie sie noch jetzt in Schriften üblich ist".[87] Adelung, who studied theology, initially worked as a translator and editor in Leipzig before working as a librarian for the Elector in Dresden.[88] With the publication of the first edition of

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[82] Zelder 1747, p. 865.
[83] Ibid., p. 864. The usage of the term "Neger" will be discussed in chapter 3.
[84] Ibid.. For an overview of the relationship between religion and anti-Black racism, as well as the narrative of Ham's curse, see David M. Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).
[85] While climate theories had existed since antiquity, they were not abandoned until the Enlightenment, when colonialism brought various ethnic groups to live in different climate zones, thus providing empirical evidence that phenotypes must have had other causes. However, historical determinism remained popular, see Sarah Reimann, *Die Entstehung des wissenschaftlichen Rassismus im 18. Jahrhundert*, Beiträge zur Europäischen Überseegeschichte, vol. 104, (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2017). For a discussion on early modern theories for skin colour, see Craig Koslofsky, "Superficial Blackness? Johann Nicolas Pechlin's De Habitu et Colore Aethiopum Qui Vulgo Nigritae (1677)", *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2018, pp. 140-158.
[86] Seminal works in the field of postcolonial studies shed light on this; see, e.g., Said 1978; or authors from the Subaltern Studies group like Gayatri Spivak and, most notably, Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2000). Besides, in Latin America, the discourse around the postcolonial dilemma provides additional alternatives. See, e.g., Barbara Weinstein, "History Without a Cause? Grand Narratives, World History, and the Postcolonial Dilemma," *International Review of Social History*, vol. 50, 2005, pp. 71-93.
[87] Adelung 1793, p. 261.
[88] For Adelung's biography see Ulrich-Dieter Oppitz,"Johann Christoph Adelung", in *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon* (BBKL). Band 41, (Bautz: Nordhausen, 2020), pp. 2–24.

his dictionary, he established a reputation in scholarly circles.[89]

Across editions, Adelung's entry on "Mohr" remains unchanged. He gives two definitions. Firstly, the term derives from Latin *maurus* and originally referred to people from Mauritania. He explains that not only the "Mohammedans" could be alluded to in this way, but also people "südlichen Teils Asiens und von den Küsten und Inseln des Indischen Meeres" as well as "die braunen Äthiopier".[90] All of these could be described as "Mohren" due to their "Gesichtsfarbe".[91] However, Adelung differentiates here: people of the Muslim faith in South Asia should be characterized as "Mohammedaner" and he explicitly criticizes travel descriptions that refer to these groups as "Mohren".[92]

Why does Zedler not mention the Moors? Perhaps his focus on "Mohr" is primarily structured around philological, biblical, and classical sources, rather than ethnographic accuracy or distinctions based on religion. Zedler's goal is to establish a universal, historically grounded definition by linking "Mohr" to terms like *Aethiops* and *Kush*, drawing heavily on Greco-Roman texts, the Old Testament, and Renaissance interpretations. His emphasis is on harmonizing these traditions to justify the broad application of the term to people of dark skin. In contrast, Adelung is concerned with contemporary language use, and he attempts to impose more precise distinctions based on religion and geography. This could be an explanation why he criticizes the labeling of South Asian Muslims as "Mohren", preferring the term "Mohammedaner" to reflect their religious identity rather than racialize them based on skin tone alone. Thus, Zedler's omission of South Asian Muslims, therefore, reflects his reliance on older Western sources and his objective of creating a timeless, encyclopedic definition. Adelung, working later and with a more descriptive linguistic focus, engages more directly with the ambiguities and misapplications of the term in contemporary contexts. This is also highlighted by Adelung's second definition of the term "Mohr". Here, Adelung refers to people:

> " […] von ganz schwarzer Gesichtsfarbe mit krausem, wolligem Haar und dicken, aufgeworfenen Lippen – desgleichen die Bewohner des südlichen Afrika: am Senegal, in Neu-Guinea und

[89] For an overview of the publication and its impact, see Helmut Henne, "Einführung und Bibliographie zu Johann Christoph Adelung, Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart (1793-1801)," in *Deutsche Wörterbücher des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts. Einführung und Bibliographie*, (eds.) Helmut Henne and Georg Olms, (Hildesheim: G.Olms,1975), pp. 109-142.
[90] Ibid. p. 261.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.

> Kongo, die Einwohner von Monomotapa, Malabar, Malakka und einiger südlicher Inseln – welche auch unter dem Namen der Schwarzen oder Neger bekannt sind".[93]

He further notes that such "ganz schwarze Afrikaner" working as servants could be called "Mohren."[94] Thus, Adelung links the term not only to skin color but also to a social role, showcasing how racial and social categories are intertwined in linguistic practice. Interestingly, he mentions certain regions in West Africa and Southeast Asia and associates them with the terms "Schwarze" and "Neger". This strengthened the definition of "Neger" as tied to sub-Saharan regions, whereas more can be seen as a broader geographical term. Moreover, the same description of phenotypic characteristics, such as curly hair and thick lips, echoes the "stereotypical" perception of dark-skinned Africans. This can be traced back to ancient texts and Christian iconography.

One of the earliest representations of an African in the German-speaking world is the statue of Saint Maurice in Magdeburg.[95] Depicted in warrior attire, this sandstone figure represents the North African Christian martyr Maurice, who became a symbol of fidelity to God and, by extension, of the alliance between spiritual and secular power.[96] Commissioned under Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, the statue served both devotional and political purposes. By depicting

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[93] Ibid., p. 262. „ […] with completely black skin, frizzy, woolly hair, and thick, protruding lips — as do the inhabitants of southern Africa: in Senegal, New Guinea, and Congo, the inhabitants of Monomotapa, Malabar, Malacca, and some southern islands — who are also known by the name of Blacks or Negroes."

[94] Ibid. „completely black African."

[95] As the best-known example, there is various literature on this; see, e.g., "St. Maurice in Magdeburg (ca. 1240)," Black Central Europe, https://blackcentraleurope.com/sources/1000-1500/st-maurice-in-magdeburg-ca-1240/, [last accessed 21.07.2025]. Central to this field is the series *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, as well as Paul Kaplan's work, particularly *The Rise of the Black Magus in Western Art*, (UMI Research Press, 1985). Peter Erickson summarized the field and its developments in "Review: Picturing Race: Early Modern Constructions," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, vol. 13, no. 1, Winter 2013, pp. 151-168 (having already shown in 1993 that representations of Blacks in Renaissance art served complex symbolic functions). Kaplan dates the first depiction of Blacks by German artists to the 13th century and the court of Frederick II of Hohenstaufen (1220-1250). An early depiction is the Queen of Sheba by Nicholas of Verdun for the Klosterneuburg Altarpiece (1181). The topic of the Black African magus emerged as a prominent feature in German art, mostly depicted with stereotypical physiognomy as understood by Europeans: dark complexion, full lips, wide nose, and tightly curled hair (cf. p. 25). The first study was done by Ruth Mellinkoff, who according to Kaplan detects pejorative meaning in the visual images, whereas Kaplan states that the figures are "projections rather than reflections" (p. 23). In his study on the Calenberg Altarpiece and other arts and iconography, he argues that Black figures, such as saints and executioners, are depicted in ways that project societal attitudes rather than accurately represent the lived experiences of black Africans, with many images serving as symbols of piety or moral lessons. However, contributions by Lowe and Kaplan question whether depictions of black individuals related to real people living in German-speaking lands or to fictive, imagined exotic figures placed in paintings to emphasize the whiteness and status of the central figures. See Paul H. D. Kaplan, "The Calenberg Altarpiece: Black African Christians in Renaissance Germany," in *Germany and the Black Diaspora: Points of Contact, 1250-1914*, (eds). Mischa Honeck, Martin Klimke, and Anne Kuhlmann (Berghahn Books, 2013), pp. 21-37; and Kate Lowe, "The Black Diaspora in Europe in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries, with Special Reference to German-Speaking Areas," in *Germany and the Black Diaspora*, (eds). Mischa Honeck, Martin Klimke, and Anne Kuhlmann (Berghahn Books, 2013), pp. 38-56.

[96] Cf. Gude Suckale-Redlefsen*, Mauritius, der heilige Mohr [Maurice, the Holy Moor*], with the collaboration of Robert Suckale, foreword by Ladislas Bugner (Menil Foundation/Verlag Schnell & Steiner, 1987).

Maurice as Black, Frederick emphasized both the universal reach of Christianity and his own imperial authority.[97]

Another Christian representation of a Black figure can be found in the iconography of the Black Magus. Building on patristic texts and medieval mystery plays, European artists increasingly depicted one of the Magi, typically Balthazar, though in some instances Caspar, as Black, symbolizing Africa.[98] This tradition reinforced associations between Blackness, geography, and biblical authority. Renaissance heraldry and commerce extended these associations: for instance, the Nuremberg patrician family Tucher displayed a "Mohr's head" on their coat of arms, and numerous "Mohren-Apotheken" used the figure symbolically in branding.[99]

Fig. 1: The Tucher family coat of arms (1590/98).

Fig. 2: Logo of a pharmacy in Nuremberg.

[97] Knut Görich, *Die Staufer. Herrscher und Reich,* 4th ed., (Beck, 2019); Bodo Hechelhammer, *Kreuzzug und Herrschaft unter Friedrich II. Handlungsspielräume von Kreuzzugspolitik (1215-1230),* Mittelalter-Forschungen, vol. 13 (Thorbecke, 2004). On the Black servants at the court in Palermo, see Bevilacqua 2024, p. 48: "As early as the thirteenth century, the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II (Hohenstaufen) had kept five Black trumpeters at his court in Palermo".

[98] Cf. Rainer Budde, Frank Günter Zehnder, and Wallraf-Richartz-Museum. *Die Heiligen Drei Könige: Darstellung und Verehrung* (Köln: Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, 1982); Stephan Waetzoldt, "Drei Könige," *Reallexikon zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 4, (C. H. Beck, München, 1955), pp. 476–501.

[99] A few such pharmacies or shops still exist today and are at the center of the debate on discriminatory language. In their analysis, Hund and Hinrichsen show that business owners feel justified in using the word in their names because of the tradition it conveys, see Hund and Hinrichsen 2014, p. 70f.


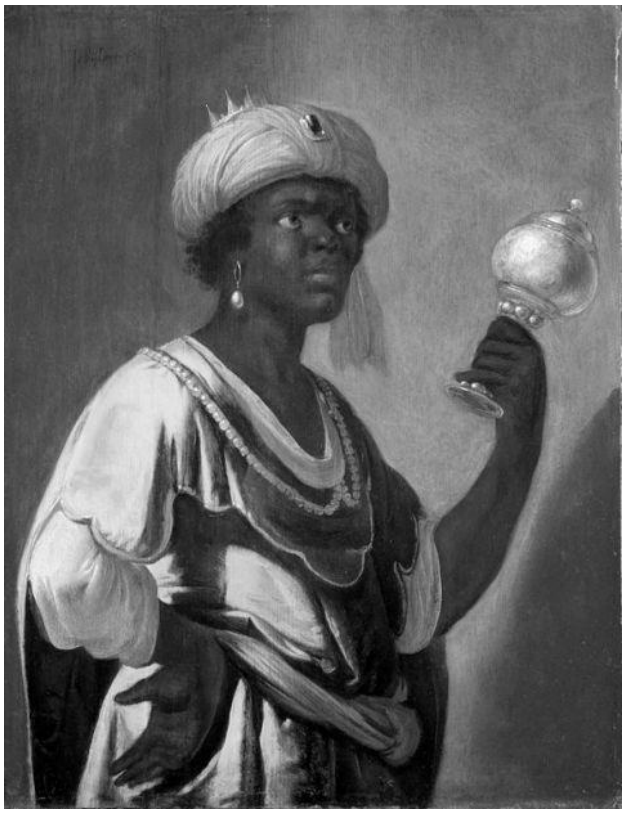

Fig.3 and 4: On the left is the statue of St. Mauritius in Magdeburg. On the right, Casper as Black Magi by Jan van Bijlert, ca. 1640.1650.

Thus, the statue of Saint Maurice and depictions of the Black Magus reveal a complex interplay of religious symbolism, political ideology, and racial imagination. These portrayals not only reflect the Christian valorization of African figures but also instrumentalize Blackness to convey power, piety, and global reach within a European framework. Through these images, the "Mohr" becomes both a spiritual icon and a vehicle for asserting cultural and political identity. This was not a unique German understanding but a transnational notion, as scholarship shows. For example, for the Iberian context, Josiah Blackmore explores the figure of the Moor in various medieval Portuguese literature and historiography. His analysis shows that the Moor in medieval texts is not a fixed ethnic or religious concept, but a variable marker of alterity that is filled differently and ideologically instrumentalized in different genres and contexts, genealogical, satirical, geographical or philosophical.[100]

In the Italian Renaissance, Lisa Lowe is a prominent scholar examining the construction of Blackness. Her work explores how ideas of race, difference, and colonial desire were embedded in early modern European cultural productions, including those of Italy. Lowe

[100] Josiah Blackmore, "Imagining the Moor in Medieval Portugal," *Diacritics* 36, no. 3, 2006, pp. 27–43.

demonstrates how Renaissance humanism intersected with emerging imperial economies, shaping racialized understandings of identity and otherness.[101]

In the English context, the word "Blackamoor" emerged as a descriptor that placed skin color at the center of identity formation. Mediterranean contexts heavily influenced this usage of terms describing Black individuals.[102] As English encounters with African people increased during the early modern period, metaphorical and symbolic conceptions of Blackness became more prevalent. This is reflected in the growing presence of Black figures in literature and drama, most famously Shakespeare's *Othello*.[103] The English actively contributed to the ambiguity surrounding the legal and social status of Blackamoors, maintaining a degree of vagueness that allowed for flexible, often exploitative, positioning of Black individuals within English society.[104]

Therefore, by tracing the historical meanings and uses of the term "Mohr" in German encyclopedias and dictionaries, the analysis shows that the term evolved from geographic and religious origins into a racialized category centered on skin color. Both Zedler and Adelung detach the term from its geographic connotations, emphasizing skin color as the primary marker and subsuming diverse peoples under a single racialized label. Zedler does so through philological and biblical authority, while Adelung emphasizes language use and social context. In both cases, "Mohr" becomes a Eurocentric category that naturalizes racial difference. Thus, "Mohr" was understood as a broad term for dark-skinned people and was applied synonymously to individuals from Africa, as well as in the broader sense, from Southeast Asia. Across European contexts, the term was a flexible marker of alterity. At the same time, its meaning shifted depending on cultural, political, or symbolic needs. The following section will investigate how, in the German context, Black court servants influenced the conceptualization of the term.

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[101] See Lisa Lowe, "'Representing' Africa: Ambassadors and Princes from Christian Africa to Renaissance Italy and Portugal, 1402–1608," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol. 17, 2007, pp. 101–28; idem, "Black Africans' Religious and Cultural Assimilation to, or Appropriation of, Catholicism in Italy, 1470–1520," *Renaissance and Reformation/Renaissance et Réforme*, vol. 31, no. 2, 2008, pp. 67–86; idem, "Africa in the News in Renaissance Italy: News Extracts from Portugal about Western Africa Circulating in Northern and Central Italy in the 1480s and 1490s," *Italian Studies*, vol. 65, no. 3, 2010, pp. 310–28; idem, "Visible Lives: Black Gondoliers and Other Black Africans in Renaissance Venice," *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 66, no. 2, 2013.

[102] Cf. Nandini Das, Lauren Working, Haig Z. Smith, and João Vicente Melo (eds.), "Blackamoor/Moor", in *Keywords of Identity, Race, and Human Mobility in Early Modern England*, Connected Histories in the Early Modern World (Amsterdam University Press, 2021), pp. 40-50.

[103] There is an entire subfield dedicated to the study of race in Shakespeare's works, for an overview see Ayanna Thompson (ed*.), The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*. Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

[104] Das et al. 2021, p. 46.

It is not clear which German court was able to obtain the first "Hofmohr".[105] However, what is clearly recognizable is the increase in the presence of Black people in the 17th and 18th centuries, driven by the demand for "Kammermohren." Many likely originated from the Atlantic world, whereas the so-called “Kammertürken” were acquired through war or purchase.[106] The connection between “Hofmohren” and the Atlantic slave trade is confirmed by sources such as the *Brandenburg-African Company's* (BAC) instructions. On the first voyage to West Africa for the BAC, Elector Frederick William instructed his captain to bring "ein halb Dutzend junge Sklaven von 14, 15 und 16 Jahren, welche schön und wohlgestaltet seien, um selbige an unsern Hof zu übersenden”.[107] Although no enslaved person can be seen on the ship lists, there were several servants in the employ of the electoral family. Bevilacqua was able to demonstrate that the Prussian court employed Black servants for over 40 years.[108]

Furthermore, in her 2014 dissertation, Anne Kuhlmann-Smirnov presents a database of over 350 individuals of African descent from the early modern period. She argues that “Mohr” as the most important source term “vor allem [für] Menschen islamischer Religionszugehörigkeit und wurde nicht immer mit Afrika in Verbindung gebracht”.[109] She also points out that the term lacks a clear definition in relation to skin color.[110] However, the above analysis clearly shows that “Mohr” was closely associated with Africa and that skin color is a central theme.

In addition, the historiographical debate focuses on the social status of Black individuals as marginalized "toy things" or as beneficiaries of "privileged dependencies."[111] Scholars such

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[105] For the history of Black court servants in Germany, see Weygo Comte and Rudt de Collenberg, “Haus- und Hofmohren des 18. Jahrhunderts in Europa,” in *Gesinde im 18. Jahrhundert*, (eds.) Gotthardt Frühsorge, Rainer Gruenter, and Beatrix Freifrau Wolff Metternich (Hamburg: Meiner, 1995), pp. 265–280; Ute Küppers-Braun, “Kammermohren: Ignatius Fortuna am Essener Hof und andere farbige Hofdiener,” *Das Münster am Hellweg: Mitteilungsblatt des Vereins für die Erhaltung des Essener Münsters* 54 (2001), pp. 17–50; Gerhard Petrat, “Zwerge, Riesen, Mohren,” in *Hof und Residenz im spätmittelalterlichen Reich*, (ed.) Werner Paravicini, vol. 2, (Ostfildern: Jan Thorbecke, 2005), pp. 69–74; Sünne Juterczenka, “Chamber Moors and Court Physicians: On the Convergence of Aesthetic Consumption and Racial Anthropology at Eighteenth-Century Courts in Germany,” in *Entangled Knowledge: Scientific Discourses and Cultural Difference*, (eds.) Klaus Hock and Gesa Mackenthun (Münster, 2012), pp. 165–182.

[106] Similar to “Mohr”, “Türk” functions in the German context as a broad term referring to people from the Ottoman Empire or, more generally, to Muslims from various regions, see Manja Quakatz, *Osmanische Kriegsgefangene im Römisch-deutschen Reich im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2023).

[107] “Half a dozen young slaves aged 14, 15, and 16, who are beautiful and well-built, to be sent to our court”. GstrA R 65. 7: *Schiffskommission für den Kapitän Joris Bartelsen nach Guinea und Angola*. See also Richard Schück, *Brandenburg-Preussens Kolonial-Politik Unter Dem Grossen Kurfürsten Und Seinen Nachfolgern (1647–1721),* Mit Einer Vorr. von Paul Kayser, 2 vols. (Leipzig: W. Grunow, 1889), #47, p. 96.

[108] Bevilacqua 2024, p. 53f.

[109] Kuhlmann 2014, p. 17: “[…] primarily referred to people of Islamic faith and was not always associated with Africa”.

[110] Ibid., p. 18.

[111] Cf. Kuhlmann 2014, p. 62; Lind 2004, p. 81.

as Monika Firla, Vera Lind, and Kuhlmann-Smirnov emphasize the potential for social mobility and integration of Black individuals in German courts, arguing that proximity to power and elite status afforded them certain privileges and opportunities for advancement.[112] In Mark Häberlein's widely cited chapter, he uses case studies to demonstrate the successful integration of Black people in Germany.[113] However, he constructs "German" and "Black" as opposites, implying that a German identity is incompatible with a Black identity, which can be seen as inherent racist logic in the semantic juxtaposition. Arne Spohr challenges the claim that Black servants were privileged and integrated smoothly, arguing that this view overlooks individual experiences of discrimination, ignores premodern racism and theological views on Blackness, and downplays the exoticization of Black individuals by early modern elites.[114] While I agree that the ancient régime court represents a unique, spatially specific social model, Spohr's interventions highlight the oppressive structures of early modern courtly spheres.

Moreover, Kuhlmann notes that Black individuals were not the only ones moved involuntarily between courts as royal children and others were also transferred without consent as part of dynastic politics.[115] From this, she argues that forced mobility was not uniquely oppressive for Black individuals. However, while it is true that early modern courts imposed limits on many people's agency, equating these experiences with the forced migration of Africans overlooks the specific racialized dynamics at play. Black individuals were there *because* of their Blackness. Eva Seemann, for example, shows in her dissertation on "Hofzwerge" the differences towards "Hofmohren".[116] While people of small stature were mainly Christians and remained embedded in their social structures of origin, many Black servants were forcibly torn from their families of origin and only integrated into courtly society through baptism. In addition, "Hofzwerge" were challenging to find, could not be traded, and were considered particularly valuable due to their rarity. Besides, they were not bought or inherited, but rather given as gifts, often with the consent of the families.[117]

Furthermore, from a legal perspective, "Hofmohren" occupied ambiguous statuses as

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[112] Ibid.; Monika Firla, "AfrikanerInnen und ihre Nachkommen im deutschsprachigen Raum vor der Zeit der Kongokonferenz und ihrer Folgen: Bemerkungen zur Forschungsproblematik," in *AfrikanerInnen in Deutschland und schwarze Deutsche - Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst and Reinhard Klein-Arendt (Köln: Böhlau, 2004), 9-24.
[113] Cf. Häberlein 2013, p. 88.
[114] Cf. Spohr 2019, p. 615ff.
[115] Cf. Kuhlmann 2014, p. 63ff.
[116] Eva Seemann*, Hofzwerge. Kleinwüchsige Menschen an deutschsprachigen Fürstenhöfen der Frühen Neuzeit, rühneuzeit-Forschungen* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2023).
[117] Ibid., p. 90.

Rebekka von Mallinckrodt demonstrates.[118] In addition, Julia Holzmann's study, regarding the Dutch context, illustrates that contemporaries developed practices to circumvent existing laws according to the principle of "free soil".[119] Consequently, many Black individuals were involuntarily transferred and sometimes enslaved, situating them within broader frameworks of dependency and servitude rather than a simple free/unfree binary.[120] The following case study of Christian Real exemplifies these dynamics, showing how the designation of individuals as "Mohren" obscures the reality of their racialized lives. The case is known through the numerous publications by Spohr.[121] Additionally, it sheds light on both the coercive circumstances that led Black individuals to Germany and their subsequent integration into local communities.

Christian Real: A Case Study in Courtly Racialization

Purchased by Joß Kramer between 1652 and 1656, Real was brought via São Tomé to Lindau in 1657.[122] Kramer gifted him to his godfather, Valentin Heider, who brought him to Stuttgart and gave him to Duke Eberhard III. Real entered the service of Duchess Maria Dorothea Sophia, briefly escaped, then re-entered her service in the 1660s. In 1668, he was appointed court trumpeter and held this position until 1674, after which he disappears from the records.[123] Real's escape underscores the tension between forced integration and resistance.

The baptismal sermon by the Protestant preacher Jacob Fussenegger was published in 1660, three years after the baptism of Christian Real.[124] At Kramer's request, the sermon was recorded and printed before he departed for Holland. Fussenegger dedicated the text to Kramer

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[118] Cf. von Mallinckrodt 2024, p. 31ff; See also idem., "Iconography and the Law: Slaves at the Dresden Court". *The European Experience in Slavery, 1650–1850*, (ed.) Rebekka Mallinckrodt, (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2024), 151-182.

[119] Julia Holzmann, *Geschichte der Sklaverei in der niederländischen Republik: Recht, Rassismus und die Handlungsmacht Schwarzer Menschen und People of Color, 1680–1863* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2022).

[120] Cf. e.g., Jeannine Bischoff, Marion Gymnich, and Stephan Conermann (eds.), *Naming, Defining, Phrasing Strong Asymmetrical Dependencies: A Textual Approach*. vol. 8 (Berlin, Bosten: De Gruyter, 2023).

[121] See Spohr 2018; Arne Spohr, "Mohr und Trompeter": Blackness and Social Status in Early Modern Germany", *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, vol. 72, no. 3, 2019, pp. 613–663; idem., Violence, Social Status, and Blackness in Early Modern Germany: The Case of the Black Trumpeter Christian Real (ca. 1643–after 1674)", in *Beyond Exceptionalism: Traces of Slavery and the Slave Trade in Early Modern Germany, 1650–1850*, (eds.) Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, Josef Köstlbauer and Sarah Lentz, Berlin, Boston: (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021), pp. 56-80.

[122] His original name is not known.

[123] See Spohr 2019, p. 634.

[124] Jacob Fussenegger, *Mohren Tauff / das ist: Christliche Tauffpredigt Aus der ordentlichen und gewöhnliche Fussen Epistel des heiligen Pfingsttags / Actor. II, 11–13 bey der Tauff eines bekehrten Mohren [...] gehalten [...]* (Nürnberg: Endter, 1660) available via https://rosdok.uni-rostock.de/resolve/id/rosdok_document_0000005265 [last accessed 23.09.2025]. Spohr, in his 2021 paper, gives 1658 as the publication date. In my 1660 version, however, there is no indication that it is a reprint. However, the preface there is dated 1657.

as a gesture of gratitude and a symbol of their long-standing friendship. Besides, Fussenegger explains that the sermon aimed not only to praise the conversion but also to strengthen the baptized in his new faith by publicly reiterating what he had learned privately.[125] The structure of the sermon includes a theological explanation, practical application, and a record of the baptism, including a dialogue between Real and Fussenegger. By examining the baptism from the end of the 17th century, the usage of terminology referring to Black people in a religious context becomes visible.

Fussenegger explicitly addresses his terminology, writing:

> "Die Einwohner des Königreichs Guinea möchten eigentlich nicht 'Mohren' genannt werden, sondern 'Nigriten', nach dem schwarzen Fluss 'Nigro' […] Dennoch nennt man sie ihrer schwarzen Körpergestalt und Hautfarbe wegen zu Recht […] 'Mohren' – und aus ebendiesem Grund nennen wir auch diesen schwarzen Knaben einen 'Mohren' und seine Taufe eine 'Mohrentaufe.'"[126]

He thus justifies the term "Mohr" based on physical features. Elsewhere, however, he uses paired terms like "Negrit and Moor" or "Heathen and Moor," and refers to the people of Guinea as "homines non homines", reflecting the dehumanizing and racialized thinking of the period.[127] Fussenegger also invokes the biblical curse of Ham to argue for Black inferiority, using religious narratives to legitimize racial subjugation.[128] The term "Mohr" thus functions as a theological and social marker of racial Otherness.

Additional archival material further documents Real's life and reveals the persistent racialized dimensions of his experience. In early November 1669, he was attacked and stabbed by four men, surviving with serious injuries.[129] Interpretations of this incident vary. Monika Firla and Hermann Forkl see Real's testimony as expressing pride in his social status and do not view the attack as racially motivated, emphasizing instead his integration.[130] Spohr, by contrast, stresses the racial dimension. He argues that the attackers deliberately disfigured Real's face in an attempt to dishonor and dehumanize him.[131] Notably, in the interrogation record, Real is

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[125] Fussenegger 1660, Vorrede.
[126] Ibid., p. 3: "The inhabitants of the Kingdom of Guinea do not actually want to be called 'Moors', but rather 'Nigrites', after the black river 'Nigro' […] Nevertheless, because of their black physique and skin color, they are rightly called […] 'Moors' – and for this very reason we also call this black boy a 'Moor' and his baptism a 'Moorish baptism'."
[127] Ibid., p. 18, 45.
[128] Ibid., p. 10f.
[129] Cf. Spohr 2019, p. 652-656.
[130] Monika Firla and Hermann Forkl. "Afrikaner und Africana am württembergischen Herzogshof im 17. Jahrhundert", *Tribus*, vol. 44, 1995, pp. 149–193, here 153-57.
[131] See Spohr 2019, p. 641f.

introduced not by his court position, but as "der tödlich verwundete Mohr Christian."[132] The attackers reportedly did not recognize him by sight, it was night, and they asked how he was identified. Real believed it was his voice.[133] This raises the question: if not skin color, what did "Mohr" signify? Moreover, if Real was fully integrated as Firla and Forkl claim, why was he not addressed by his job title or full name in the protocol?

In this context, “Mohr” appears not merely as a synonym for "Black," but as a label of foreignness, marking the bearer as an outsider, based on perceived African origin due to his darker skin. The continued use of the term "Mohr" even when physical markers were absent suggests that it signified a broader, symbolic category of foreignness and inferiority. The divergence between Fussenegger’s stated rationale and the term’s actual application reveals the extent to which “Mohr” had become a fixed category of exclusion, extending far beyond its purported descriptive function. Real's trajectory from enslaved person to court trumpeter, and ultimately a victim of violent assault, highlights the complex interplay of racialization, marginalization, and partial social integration experienced by Black individuals in 17th-century Europe. The sermon reveals how religious discourse justified slavery and framed African people within racial categories, while the attack demonstrates how these categories persisted as markers of Otherness regardless of individual achievement or integration.

Conclusion

In early modern German discourse, the term “Mohr” functioned as a fluid but powerful marker of racial difference, shaping both knowledge and lived experience. This chapter has shown that the term “Mohr” was not a neutral descriptor but a flexible, ideologically charged category. This linguistic flexibility enabled "Mohr" to function as a tool of Othering, marking individuals as fundamentally "foreign" regardless of their social status, religious conversion, or level of integration. By examining “Mohr” across religious, legal, and social contexts, this analysis demonstrates that the designation both naturalized racial hierarchies and concealed the links to the Atlantic slave trade that brought many Black individuals to German courts. The religious framing of enslavement as Christian salvation, combined with the term’s discursive flexibility, created a system that justified and reinforced racialized subordination.

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[132] Ibid., p. 655.Translation: “the mortally wounded Moor Christian”.
[133] Ibid.

By tracing the term across texts, institutions, and individual lives, this chapter shows how early modern Germany produced and maintained racial categories that would influence European thought well into the Enlightenment and beyond. In this context, the term "Neger," analyzed in the following chapter, should be understood as an additional step in racist classification systems that grew alongside the increase of the Atlantic slave trade and the rise of modern racial theories.

3. Implementing “Neger”: Race, Science, and the Atlantic System

In 1785, a revised edition of Samuel Thomas Soemmering’s (1755-1830) anatomical study appeared.[134] Aside from a few clarifications, the content remained essentially unchanged.[135] The title, however, was altered: the original *Über die körperliche Verschiedenheit des Mohren vom Europäer* became […] *der Neger vom Europäer*.[136] At first glance, this change may seem unnecessary, as the study's core arguments remain intact. Besides, within the text, it quickly becomes clear that Soemmering used the terms "Mohr" and "Neger" interchangeably. Only in his preface did he attempt a more precise differentiation, stating that “Neger” referred specifically to individuals from the region between Loango and Sierra Leone.[137]

This usage pattern reflects the broader terminological flexibility shown in the previous chapter, where "Mohr" served as a general category of racial Otherness rather than an exact descriptor. Soemmering's interchangeable use of "Mohr" and "Neger" suggests that he initially employed "Mohr" in this broad sense before attempting to establish "Neger" as a more geographically specific subcategory within this larger framework. The fact that both terms are used interchangeably in a single scholarly work demonstrates how racial categories were not fixed, but rather part of ongoing efforts to organize and naturalize human differences. This attempt at differentiation underscores the continuing evolution of racial terminology in German scholarship discourse. Soemmering's work serves as an example that refines the taxonomy by developing more precise distinctions, moving beyond “Mohr” as the primary term for categorizing Black individuals.

Like the term “Mohr,” this chapter investigates the meaning of “Neger” in the German-speaking regions during the long 18th century. To achieve this, it first defines its usage in scholarly discourse and compares it to its use in an economic context, drawing on correspondence from one of the most prominent German-speaking slave owners Heinrich Carl Schimmelmann (1724-1782). The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings and their interpretation in relation

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[134] Samuel Thomas Soemmerring, *Ueber die körperliche Verschiedenheit des Negers vom Europäer* (Frankfurt und Mainz: Varrentrapp Sohn und Wenner, 1785).
[135] Apart from the title, the changes only relate to the dedication, the preface and minor clarification in the text.
[136] Samuel Thomas Soemmerring, *Ueber die körperliche Verschiedenheit des Mohren vom Europäer* (Mainz, 1784). Translation: “On the physical differences between Moors and Europeans”.
[137] Cf. Soemmering 1785, p. xiii.

to the existing literature before moving to the second part of this thesis, which discusses the racist language in regards to Black identity.

The emergence of "Neger"

Both Zelder and Adelung mention "Neger" in their explanations for "Mohr", but only Adelung has a separate entry on the term.[138] As well as naming various grammatical forms, he defines the term derived from the French *negre* and based on the Latin word *niger* for "Einwohner des südlichen Afrika wegen ihrer völlig schwarzen Gesichtsfarbe zu geben pflegt, und die daher auch wohl die Schwarzen genannt werden".[139] Thus, in addition to skin color, there is clearly a geographical association. This also coincides with the use of the word in the entries on "Mohr".

In contrast to the term "Mohr", I was unable to find an entry in a German encyclopedia for my period of investigation. The first recorded use of the term in an encyclopedia dates back to the early 19th century. In the *Brockhaus* of 1839, "Neger" is used to describe population groups of the "Ethiopian human race" who originate from central and northwestern Africa and are characterized by black oily skin, woolly hair, a flat skull, protruding cheekbones, and a raised lip.[140] In addition to these phenotypic markers, there are descriptions of political, economic, and social structures that correspond to contemporary racial stereotypes.[141] The *Damen Conversations Lexicon* of 1836 follows similar rhetoric.[142] In particular, it refers to female "Negerin" and emphasizes that their mixture with the European population, as in America, produces "schöne, edelgebaute, geistvolle" people.[143]

However, the absence in (earlier) encyclopedia does not mean that the word was not used. Instead, the omission suggests that the editors and authors of the encyclopedias did not consider the word widespread or significant enough to include it. The fact that Germans knew and used the word can be demonstrated by travel literature from the late 17th century. For

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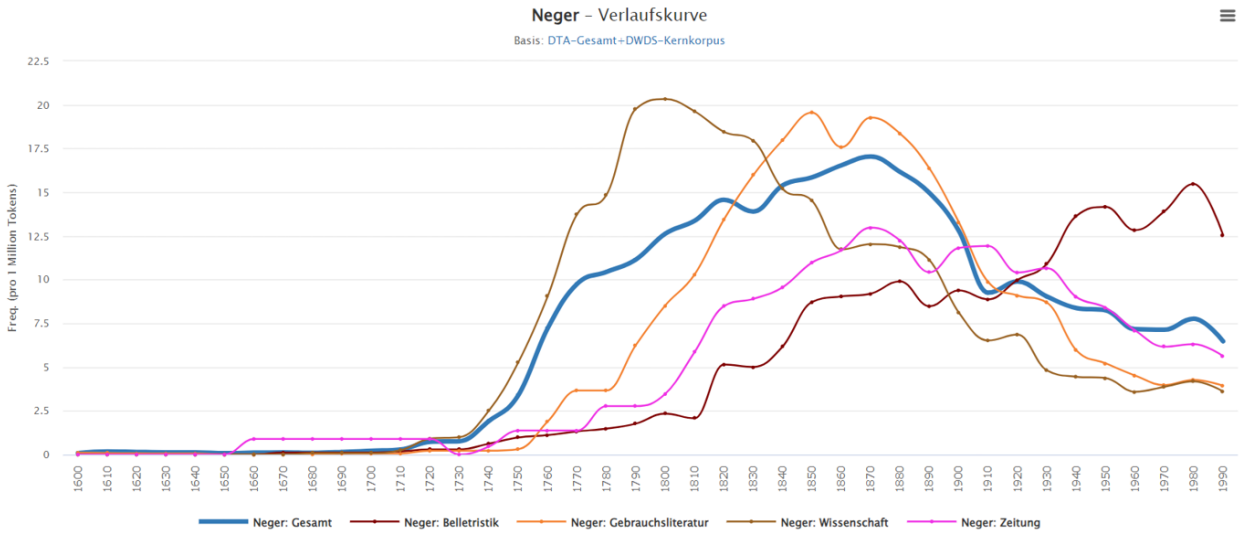
[138] Johan Christan Adelung , *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart*, vol. 3. (Leipzig, 1798), p. 457.
[139] Translation: "Residents of southern Africa tend to give them because of their completely black complexion, and who are therefore also called Blacks." Spanish and French dictionaries from the early 17th century contain entries in which 'Negres' is associated with various African ethnic groups and regions. The term was also used ambiguously, for example, in a geographical sense, in connection with the Niger River, see e.g., Sebastián de Covarrubias Orozco, *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* (Madrid: Luis Sanchez, 1611), fol. 562r; Monet, *Invantaire des deux langues françoise et latine, assorti des plus utiles curiositez de l'un et de l'autre idiome* (Lyon: chez Claude Obert, 1636), p. 589.
[140] „Neger", *Brockhaus Bilder-Conversations-Lexikon*, vol. 3 (Leipzig, 1839), pp. 256-257.
[141] Ibid.
[142] *Damen Conversations Lexikon*, vol. 7 ([o.O.], 1836), p. 390.
[143] Ibid.

example, the German ship surgeon Johann Oettinger wrote about “Neger und Mohren” during his years as a journeyman on board of slaving vessels.[144] Otto Friedrich von der Gröben, who Elector Friedrich Wilhelm commissioned to explore a suitable location for the construction of a fort for the BAC on the West African coast, also wrote about “Neger” in his travelogue, published in 1695.[145] Thus, the early usage of the world is tied to direct German participation in the Atlantic slave trade.

Fig. 5: A Corpus-Based Analysis of Historical Frequency and Usage Patterns of the Term 'Neger' in German Texts (1600–1999).



The x-axis shows the years from 1600 to 1999. The y-axis displays the frequency of the term „Neger“ per one million words (tokens) in the corpus, allowing comparison across different time periods. The frequency is normalized to account for varying text lengths in each period. The graph uses smoothing to show overall trends more clearly.[146]

To complement Adelung's entry, I relied on the word usage curve created by the *Digitales Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache* (*DWDS)*, which identifies a different type of text for the introduction of the word. The *DWDS* data (Fig. 5) reveals the diachronic evolution of the term "Neger" across German-speaking territories from 1600 to 1990, based on a metacorpus

[144] Craig Koslofsky, and Roberto Zaugg (eds.), *A German Barber-Surgeon in the Atlantic Slave Trade: The Seventeenth-Century Journal of Johann Peter Oettinger* (University of Virginia Press, 2020). When describing Black people, Oettinger predominantly refers to them as “Mohr.” He uses the term “Neger” only sporadically and usually together with “Mohr”, like when he describes the purchase of 320 enslaved individuals in Curaçao as “Neger oder Mohren”, see p. 69.

[145] Otto Friedrich von der Gröben, *Orientalische Reise Beschreibung, des brandenburgischen Pilgers Otto Friedrich von der Gröben: Nebst d. Brandenburgischen Schifffahrt nach Guinea und der Verrichtung zu Morea* (Simon Reinigern, 1694).

[146] “DWDS-Verlaufskurve für ‘Neger’.” *Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, available via https://www.dwds.de/r/plot/?view=1&corpus=dta%2Bdwds&norm=date%2Bclass&smooth=spline&genres=1&grand=1&slice=10&prune=0.05&window=3&wbase=0&logavg=0&logscale=0&xrange=1600%3A1999&q1=Neger [Last accessed 28.07.2025].

encompassing the *DTA-Gesamt* and *DWDS-Kernkorpus* 1600-1999 collections. This dataset comprises over 80,000 documentary sources stratified across multiple textual genres, including fiction, scientific discourse, journalism, and commercial literature. Initial documented usage appears in newspaper publications circa 1650, followed by a marked proliferation in literary contexts during the eighteenth century. A significant frequency spike emerges in the 1790s, correlating with the proliferation of scientific treatises. This category of scholarly publication accounts for the sustained increase observed from the 1750s onward, as the majority of documented occurrences derive from such academic works.[147] However, the dataset has specific methodological issues, such as false positives where words like "Nicero" or the surname "Nerger" were mistakenly identified as target cases. Moreover, the results of frequency-based corpus data reflect the usage of the word in the same publications, including their different editions. This may artificially increase the number of hits, making it appear more frequent than it truly was across the broader literary landscape of a given time.

Although the highest frequency occurs in the 1870s, which falls beyond the timeframe of this thesis, the pattern within the study period shows the term's growing use in academic and literary contexts during the second half of the eighteenth century. For the decade 1790–1799, the *DWDS* corpus reports the highest frequency in the category “Wissenschaft” of 19.30 occurrences of the term „Neger“ per one million tokens, with an absolute count of 285 hits. The majority refer to works by Johann Friedrich Blumenbach (1752-1840).[148] In 1778, Blumenbach was appointed professor of medicine in Göttingen, and from 1816 he was *professor primarius* of the medical faculty. His long life and academic activities made him a hub of the European scholarly network and enabled him to influence natural science research on humans in a paradigmatic way.[149] In the 1780s, Blumenbach employed cranial measurements to categorize humanity into five races and coined the term "Caucasian".[150] Moreover, Blumenbach's third edition of his dissertation*, De generis humani varietate nativa liber, from 1795,* is considered the

[147] Most entries refer to Blumenbach's works, in particular his *Handbook of Natural History*.
[148] Out of the 285 results, 225 are connected to Blumenbach. A detailed overview can be found in the appendix.
[149] Mario Marino, Naturgeschichte und Rassenklassifikation: Zu Blumenbachs Anthropologie und ihrer Rezeption, in: *Bilddenken und Morphologie. Interdisziplinäre Studien über Form und Bilder im philosophischen und wissenschaftlichen Denken*, (eds.) Laura Follesa and Federico Vercellone (Berlin; Boston, 2021), pp. 73–98; Céline Trautmann-Waller, Die Werkstatt Johann Friedrich Blumenbachs (1752-1840), in: *Die Wissenschaft vom Menschen in Göttingen um 1800. Wissenschaftliche Praktiken, institutionelle Geographie, europäische Netzwerke*, (eds.) Hans E.; Bödeker, Philippe Büttgen, and, Michel Espagne (Göttingen 2008), pp. 231- 251.
[150] See e.g. Wolfgang Böker, „Zur Geschichte der Schädelsammlung Johann Friedrich Blumenbachs“, in *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Geschichte und Theorie der Biologie* (ed.): Annals of the History and Philosophy of Biology 23 (2018), pp. 3–29.

standard work on physical anthropology and makes him the "father" of this new discipline.[151]

Even though the apex of scientific racism developed in the nineteenth century, extensive research has traced the roots of racial theory back to the seventeenth century.[152] According to the prevailing scholarly narrative, systematic scientific engagement with human diversity began with François Bernier's foundational work in 1684.[153] Subsequent scholars, such as Carl Linnaeus and Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon, developed key taxonomic frameworks.[154] Natural history developed as a discipline through the separation of empirical investigation from theological doctrine. Motivated by the Enlightenment's emphasis on naturalistic explanations over theological constructs, such as the *Great Chain of Being*, racial theorists increasingly turned to the human body for evidence. Consequently, anatomical investigations became central to the emerging field of study. Simultaneously, the Age of Exploration facilitated the systematic collection and transportation of botanical and zoological specimens to European centers of learning, fundamentally reshaping scholarly inquiry. This material foundation enabled the development of comparative methodologies that extended from plant and animal classification to human categorization. The same networks that supplied European institutions with objects also provided the human specimens that became the empirical basis for racial classification systems.[155] Notably, two of the five skulls Blumenbach used to develop his racial classification system were gifts from his friend Joseph Banks in London.[156] This exchange illustrates that, despite lacking direct colonial possessions, German scholars and institutions were nevertheless integrated into and benefited from the broader European colonial framework. This convergence of institutional autonomy, empirical methodology, and colonial material culture created the

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[151] Thomas Nutz, Wissen aus Objekten. Naturgeschichte des Menschen und Menschheitsgeschichte, in*: Kulturen des Wissens im 18. Jahrhundert*, (ed.) Ulrich J. Schneider (Berlin, New Yor,k 2008), pp. 599–606.

[152] See e.g., Sara Eigen and Mark J. Larrimore (eds.), *The German invention of race* (Albany, NY, 2006); Miriam Eliav-Feldon, Benjamin Isaac, and Joseph Ziegler (eds.), *The Origins of Racism in the West*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[153] Cf. Pierre H. Boulle, "François Bernier and the Origins of the Modern Concept of Race", in *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France*, (eds.) Sue Peabody and Tyler Stovall, (New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 11-27.

[154] Linnaeus is considered the father of taxonomy, as he laid the foundations for modern classification with his Systema Naturae (1735, later expanded several times). Buffon published a comprehensive natural history in the 36 volumes of his *Histoire naturelle (*published between 1749 and 1788).

[155] Cf. Sonja Malin Wilckens, "Racializing, Comparing and Theorizing Skulls – Johann Friedrich Blumenbach's and Anders Retzius' Practices of Ordering Humankind", in Racializing Humankind: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Practices of 'Race' and Racism, (eds.) Julian T. D. Gärtner and Malin S. Wilckens (Böhlau: Wien/Köln, 2022), pp. 91–110.

[156] On the relationship between Banks and Blumenbach, see John Gascoigne, "Blumenbach, Banks, and the Beginnings of Anthropology at Göttingen", in *Göttingen and the development of the natural sciences*, (ed.) Nicolaas A.Rupke (Göttingen 2002), pp. 86–98; Thomas Biskup, "Sammeln und Reisen in deutsch-englischen Gelehrtennetzwerken im späten 18. Jahrhundert", in *Kulturen des Wissens im 18. Jahrhundert*, (ed.) Ulrich J. Schneider, (Berlin, New York, 2008), pp. 607–614.

conditions under which racial terminology could gain academic legitimacy and subsequently enter broader linguistic circulation.

Based on this data, it can therefore be assumed that “Neger” was introduced primarily through scholarly documents. These texts were embedded within the legitimate academic discourse of their time, which is crucial for understanding how racial terminology, such as “Neger”, gained scholarly currency. They were not fringe publications but rather represented mainstream scientific thought, which explains their influence on language and social concepts. Moreover, I argue they do not count as pseudo-scientific, as they are often labeled in secondary literature on Enlightenment scientific racism. Instead, they represent the evolution of methodologies in fields such as anthropology and biology. The Enlightenment's emphasis on empirical observation and rational categorization provided a methodological veneer that obscured the predetermined conclusions of racial hierarchies. The shift from theological to scientific explanations did not eliminate hierarchical thinking but instead relocated it within secular frameworks that claimed greater objectivity. The very categories employed reflected European assumptions about which differences were significant and how they should be interpreted.

Therefore, Soemmering's titular revision can be seen as a strategic move within racial discourse, aligning with his stated goal of addressing current debates and clarifying concepts. As an anatomist, Soemmering argued that inter-group human differences could not be sufficiently explained by skin color alone, as this marker is not precise enough. Instead, he sought explanations through physical examination. Based on extensive skeletal analysis and direct observation of individuals he classified as "Mohren" and "Neger," he concluded these individuals showed greater anatomical similarity to apes than to white Europeans.[157] However, he maintained their fundamental humanity and called for proper treatment, supporting the ideas of contemporary abolitionists. Abolitionist debates were conducted within German intellectual circles, as Sarah Lentz demonstrates in her dissertation.[158] Consequently, it is unsurprising that both Soemmering and Blumenbach positioned themselves on this issue in the prefaces to their respective works. However, their statements and contextualization of research findings should not be interpreted as genuine anti-slavery positions.[159] As evidenced by their deployment of racial terminology, these works remained foundational to racial science that, despite acknowledging the humanity of “Neger”, nevertheless positioned them hierarchically beneath

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[157] Cf Soemmering 1785, pp.77f.
[158] Sarah Lentz, „Wer helfen kann, der helfe!“ *Deutsche SklavereigegnerInnen und die atlantische Abolitionsbewegung*, 1780–1860 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020).
[159] Cf. David Bindman, *Ape to Apollo: Aesthetics and the idea of race in the 18th century* (London: Reaktion Books, 2002), p. 12.

Europeans. While Blumenbach's presentation of cranial specimens appears to follow a linear arrangement, his interpretive framework reveals distinct evaluative judgments.[160] This apparent contradiction illuminates a crucial characteristic of Enlightenment racial discourse: the simultaneous assertion of universal humanity and the maintenance of hierarchical difference. Such positioning allowed scholars to align themselves with humanitarian sentiments while preserving the theoretical foundations that justified colonial exploitation and social stratification. The performative nature of these humanitarian declarations becomes evident when examined alongside the scholars' classificatory practices. Despite professing human equality in principle, their taxonomic systems invariably positioned European populations as the standard against which all others were measured and found deficient. The persistence of hierarchical thinking within supposedly humanitarian frameworks reveals the limitations of anti-slavery positioning when underlying epistemological structures remain unchanged. These scholars' work thus exemplifies how racial science could adapt to changing moral sensibilities without fundamentally challenging the systems of classification that underpinned European supremacy.

Thus, based on this analysis, in late 18th-century Germany, “Neger” mainly circulated within scholarly circles as a classificatory term and was rarely found in general reference works. The continued use of “Mohr” in broader contexts, even though academics favored “Neger,” shows how the latter's colonial ties and its direct link to enslaved Africans set it apart from earlier terms that originated in different historical settings. However, the term was not limited to academic discussions alone. In the next section, I will explore its usage in letters from plantation owner Heinrich Carl Schimmelmann. This analysis goes beyond scholarly texts to consider how the word was used in everyday language, revealing an additional layer of reality where white Europeans applied this term to describe Black people in their daily interactions.

Atlantic Trade and Elite Display: Enslaved Youths in the Schimmelmann Household

One of the earliest records in Bärwald's database refers to a group of enslaved individuals who were brought to northern Germany in 1765 to learn various trades.[161] This initiative was led by Baron Heinrich Carl von Schimmelmann, a Danish finance minister, merchant, and plantation owner, who intended to apply the knowledge of his slaves on his plantations.

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[160] Cf Johann F. Blumenbach, *Joh. Friedr. Blumenbach königl. grosbrittannischer Hofrath und Prof. zu Göttingen über die natürlichen Verschiedenheiten im Menschengeschlechte*. Mit Kupfern (Leipzig: Johann G. Gruber,1798), p. 205.

[161] These include entries: 001_1765, 002_1765, 003_1765, 004_1765, 005_1765, 006_1765, 007_1765.

In 1974, Christian Degn published what remains the most comprehensive monograph on the Schimmelmanns' role in Atlantic trade.[162] That this popular-scientific work, written during Germany's and Denmark's growing interest in Atlantic and global history, continues to serve as the principal source on the subject reveals the limited research conducted on Central European involvement in the Atlantic slave trade.[163]

Born in 1724 in Demmin, Prussia, as the youngest son of Jacob Diedrik Schimmelmann, merchant and councillor, and Esther Elisabeth, daughter of Johann Ludendorff, Heinrich Carl became heir to his father's trading business. As an entrepreneur of his time, Schimmelmann made substantial profits during the war between Prussia and Saxony. He became involved in the Jewish-dominated coinage business, which not only brought him valuable trade contacts and high profits but also established his reputation as a skilled merchant and businessman.[164] Schimmelmann had been a Danish citizen since 1759, after he had acquired the Ahrensburg estate. The town lies to the northeast of Hamburg and was one of the Schimmelmann family's most prestigious estates, alongside the Lindenborg estate in Jutland and city palaces in Copenhagen and Hamburg. According to Degn, the kings of Prussia, Poland, and Denmark courted Schimmelmann, who then entered the service of the Danish king as general merchant and financial minister.[165]

Although Denmark played only a minor role in the overall volume of the Atlantic human trade, the Danish kingdom nevertheless developed an independent and complex colonial trading system. The main hubs for these transactions were the Danish forts and trading posts on the Gold Coast, above all Fort Christiansborg near Accra and Fort Fredensborg in Ningo. The slaves were then transported across the Atlantic to the Danish West Indies, today's US Virgin Islands, where they were put to work on the sugar plantations. Furthermore, Denmark was an "integrated state" - the Kingdom of Denmark itself, but comprised Norway and the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. As early as the 1640s, Glückstadt was a starting point for Danish overseas

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[162] Christian Degn, *Die Schimmelmanns im atlantischen Dreieckshandel: Gewinn und Gewissen*. 2. Unveränd. Auflage (Neumünster: Wachholtz, 1984). For recent contribution see Angela Behrens, "Vom Kaufmann und Sklavenhalter zum dänischen Lehnsgrafen: Heinrich Carl Schimmelmann als Ahrensburger Gutsherr," in *Adel und Umwelt: Horizonte adeliger Existenz in der Frühen Neuzeit*, (eds.) Heike Düselder, Olga Weckenbrock, and Siegrid Westphal, (Köln,Weimar,Wien: Böhlau, 2008), pp. 261–286; Martin Krieger, "Heinrich Carl von Schimmelmann," in *Kein Platz an der Sonne: Erinnerungsorte der deutschen Kolonialgeschichte*, (ed.) Jürgen Zimmerer, (Hamburg: Campus, 2013), pp. 311–322; Julian zur Lage, "Heinrich Carl von Schimmelmann: Transatlantischer Kolonialunternehmer und Symbolfigur des Versklavungshandels," in *Hamburg: Tor zur kolonialen Welt. Erinnerungsorte der (post-)kolonialen Globalisierung*, (eds.) Kim Sebastian Todzi and Jürgen Zimmerer, (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2021), pp. 503–516.

[163] Although recent contributions focus on Schimmelmann's slave trade activities, a systematic analysis of the company's activities is still lacking.

[164] Degn 1984, pp. 2-10.

[165] Ibid., p. 26.

expeditions.[166] In the 18th century, the transatlantic slave trade reached its historical peak and was the central element of the Atlantic economic system. The slave trade was therefore not just an accompanying phenomenon of colonial expansion, but a structural element of capitalist accumulation in the Atlantic world.[167] The trade was organized along market lines, characterized by high logistical efficiency and capitalist rationality. At the same time, slavery was deeply embedded in colonial production systems, particularly on sugar, tobacco, and cotton plantations. The demand for cheap labor could only be met by continuous imports from Africa. This led to a further expansion of slave hunting, often supported by European arms shipments. Planters increasingly developed a quasi-capitalist method of calculation in which labor was treated as a factor of production. The slave trade was professionalized through the use of insurance, credit systems, and standardized logistics. At the same time, the prices for slaves rose significantly, an expression of growing demand, but also of growing risks and increasing resistance to enslavement.

In 1754, the Danish crown transferred significant parts of the trade to a private company, known as the Guinean Company (Det guineiske Kompagni), also referred to as the Slave Trade Company (Slavehandelskompagniet). The aim was to enhance the economic efficiency of the slave trade through private-sector dynamism, particularly in the face of increasing international competition and growing labor demand in the Danish West Indian colonies.[168]

In 1763, during the course of the restructuring, Carl von Schimmelmann acquired an extensive colonial package from the Danish king, which included a sugar refinery with a packing house in Copenhagen, as well as four plantations in the Caribbean.[169] As early as 1767, a total of 930 enslaved people were registered on Schimmelmann's three active plantations. Massive purchases significantly increased the workforce, making Schimmelmann the largest slave owner in the Danish West Indies. Moreover, Schimmelmann was considered an "absentee

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[166] Cf. Julian zur Lage, *Hamburg und die Sklaverei (2): „Unter fremden Flaggen," Hamburgs (post-)koloniales Erbe*, Universität Hamburg, 27 Mar. 2024, available via kolonialismus.blogs.uni-hamburg.de/2024/03/27/hamburg-und-die-sklaverei-2-unter-fremden-flaggen/ [last accessed 17.09.2025].

[167] Cf. Robin Blackburn, *The Making of New World Slavery: From the Baroque to the Modern, 1492–1800* (London: Verso, 2010); early studies, see e.g., Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[168] For the Danish entanglements in the Atlantic slave system see Ole Feldbæk, *Danske Handelskompagnier 1616–1843. Oktrojer og interne Ledelsesregler* (Copenhagen: Selskabet for Udgivelse af Kilder til Dansk Historie, 1986).

[169] Degn 1984, p. 59-89. These were: La Grande Princesse and La Grange on St. Croix, as well as Carolina on St. Jan and Thomas on St. Thomas. Schimmelmann paid 400,000 Reichstaler for this purchase, payable in eight annual installments of Rt. 50,000 each. The purchase price included all buildings, machinery, sugar stocks worth around Rt 4,435, the entire slave population of the plantations - regardless of age, gender, or function - as well as the entire livestock, including horses, mules, cattle, and sheep. The only exceptions were those enslaved persons who belonged to royal institutions such as packing houses or hospitals.

owner", a plantation owner who did not reside on site. Nevertheless, as an experienced businessman, Schimmelmann remained in close contact with his employees in the West Indies as well as in Holstein, as the following analysis will demonstrate.

Overall, I based my analysis of the word "Neger" in an economic context on five letters between Schimmelmann and his employees. The earliest reference is to a reply from plantation inspector Johann Jacob Lobeck to Schimmelmann, dated May 22, 1765. In this letter, the Plantation manager Lobeck reported from St. Croix that the plan to train young "Neger" in various crafts had met some difficulties, but Captain Schopen would nevertheless bring back eight "stück", as well as another "hübschen Neger-Jungen" intended for Charlotte von Schimmelmann, Carl's wife.[170] Lobeck's use of the term "pieces" to describe these individuals is not surprising. Since the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade in the 17th century, enslaved people had been dehumanized and treated as commodities. The mention of the enslaved boy selected for the baroness being "handsome" also reflects the contemporary practice of choosing attractive individuals to live and work in the households of slave owners as symbols of prestige. They were expected to be visually appealing, as they served as living display objects. Significantly, in later correspondence, the Baroness consistently uses "Mohr" rather than "Neger" when mentioning her Black servant, which supports my argument from the previous chapter regarding how the social roles of Black court servants influenced the usage of racial terminology.[171]

The four other letters refer to correspondence between Schimmelmann and Heydrich, who lived in Ahrensburg and was responsible for the boys' education there.[172] The letters, therefore, serve as evidence of how enslaved people in Germany were communicated with on the ground. They show that the term "Neger" was not just an abstract expression of colonial ideology, but was actively used in everyday administrative and property relations. The term functioned as part of the discourse of the slave economy and was closely linked to property relations and the economic classification of enslaved people as commodities. In administrative contexts, it is possible to trace how the term was used to describe and categorize people whose status was understood as property. Records from such contexts indicate that "Neger" was used in functional language that emphasized the economic role and legal status of those affected. Even

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[170] Abt. 127.3 Schimmelmann, Nr. 39 *Plantageninspektor Lobeck an Baron v. Schimmelmann, Princesse, St. Croix, 22. Mai 1765*. Lobeck probably also came from Demmin and had long been in Schimmelmann's service, for example as an employee in Hamburg or previously as a coin manager.

[171] In 1781, Lady Caroline reported to her husband from Wandsbek that 'her Mohr,' a protégé named Peter, had armed himself with a knife to protect her. Cf. Degn 1984, p. 115.

[172] LASH, Abt. 127.3 Schimmelmann, Nr. 39, *Schimmelmann an Heydrich, 11. Januar 1766*; *Schimmelmann an Heydrich, Kopenhagen, 15. März 1766*; LAS 127.3 Ahrensburg 393: Anfragen nach Kopenhagen 1762-1855, fol 69-71.

though these records primarily document individual perspectives and do not necessarily represent a general German attitude, they nevertheless make clear the role the term played in connection with colonial practice and the organization of slavery.

Additionally, a report in the *Altonaischer Mercurius* mentions the group's arrival and lists nine "Neger".[173] However, the correspondence between Schimmelmann and his inspector mentions only seven boys.[174] Since one was intended for the baroness, I assume that one must have died, though no clear evidence of this is found in the sources.

The Black Individuals

A close reading of the source material reveals that the Black individuals were referred to either by their slave names or collectively as "Schwarze" or "Neger", the latter often used in combination with descriptors such as "Burschen" or "Jungen". The boys were named for the first time in a letter dated January 1766.[175] Of the original eight young men who were brought to Europe in 1765, three died early: Heinrich Carl Adam, born in 1746, died as early as 1766.[176] Friedrich Ernst Coffe, also known as Caffé, was born in 1745 and died in 1768. The third, Jantje, also died in 1766.[177] The remaining four - Apollo, Johannes, Thomas, and Carolus - survived and continue to appear in later sources. Thomas would become a carpenter, Johannes a cooper's apprentice, Apollo a mason, and Carlus a smith, but he died in a hospital in Copenhagen in 1767.[178] Johannes had also fallen ill in the meantime, but was able to recover and participate in a choir celebration in Copenhagen that same year.[179] Two of the men returned to St. Croix in 1772, where they arrived in March 1773 together with the plantation clerk Christiansen.[180] It has not been possible to determine which two of these were.

Adam and Coffes' names show that they were named after their godparents at their baptism in Ahrensburg in 1766.[181] This is in line with contemporary practices in which the baptism of non-white people became a symbolically significant event, as had already been the case with

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[173] *Altonaischer Mercuris*, 5.09.1765, p. 2.
[174] LASH, Abt. 127.3 Schimmelmann, Nr. 39, #166*, Schimmelmann an Heydrich, 11. Januar 1766*.
[175]Ibid. See also Wilhelm Albers und Armin Clasen: „Mohren im Kirchspiel Eppendorf und im Gute Ahrensburg", in: *Zeitschrift für Niederdeutsche Familienkunde*, Vol. 41, Band 1, (Hamburg 1966), 4. A detailed description of the lives of the boys will appear in Bärwalds dissertation.
[176] Degn 1984, p. 110.
[177] Ibid.
[178] ABUH, R 19 E Nr.10a, *Briants Briefe von 28.4. und 5.9. 1767*
[179] Ibid.
[180] Degn 1984, p. 113.
[181] KKRA HHO Mischbücher Woldenhorn, 1722-1766, fol. 339.

Christian Real a hundred years earlier. It is striking here that even in a religious context, the term “Neger” is used rather than “Mohren”.[182]

Moreover, the religious dimension reveals particularly complex identity negotiations. According to a letter from Baron von Watteville, Zinzendorf's son-in-law, to the Moravians in Copenhagen, the boys at St. Croix had been part of the Brethren congregation.[183] Upon their arrival in Europe, however, they attended not the Moravian Church but the Lutheran regional church in Ahrensburg. When Moravian Pastor Engelbach from Altona made several visits to Ahrensburg, he reported to the Herrnhut congregation that the enslaved individuals were not receiving pastoral care from the Brethren church. Watteville subsequently attempted to remedy this situation by requesting that the Copenhagen congregation speak to Schimmelmann about establishing contact with the Brethren congregation.[184] However, according to the regulations of the regional church, the men had to be members of the Lutheran faith. The subsequent establishment of a Herrnhut branch in Christiansdorf in 1773, founded by Johann Briant, suggests ongoing efforts to maintain these religious connections. Briant's acquaintance with four of the men, Thomas, Apollo, Carolus, and Johannes, from a choir celebration in Copenhagen in 1767, indicates that religious identity remained important to them despite institutional pressures.[185] Briant's letter also contains some more detailed information about the men. For example, the mason's apprentice Apollo seems to have been very devout, as he visited the Herrnhut congregation in Copenhagen of his own accord. Briant also emphasizes Apollo's musical talent, as he participated in central liturgical celebrations.[186] This suggests an integration into the religious community and that Black men had opportunities to pursue their personal interests.

Furthermore, the absence of documented escape attempts or open resistance might indicate either effective control mechanisms or comparatively favorable treatment that made resistance less attractive. The educational component of their European sojourn created a unique position distinct from both field laborers and decorative court servants.

The Schimmelmann correspondence provides vital evidence of how “Neger” operated within economic contexts. The letters reveal how the term operated within the practical realities of slavery, serving as part of the discourse that treated enslaved individuals as commodities while facilitating their management as property. This usage demonstrates how racial terminology

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[182] KKRA HHO Mischbücher Woldenhorn, 1722-1766. fol. 16: “3 Neger, die ersten 2 sind auf der Insel St. Croix in der mährischen Brudergemeine, der dritte hier getauft”. I thank Annika Bärwald for this source.
[183] Degn 1976, p. 110.
[184] Ibid.
[185] ABUH R 19 E Nr.10a, Briants Briefe von 28.4. und 5.9. 1767.
[186] Ibid.

bridged the gap between scholarly classification and colonial practice. Moreover, the religious dimension of the enslaved youths' experiences in Ahrensburg illuminates the complex identity negotiations that occurred when individuals navigated between different institutional frameworks. Their transition from Moravian to Lutheran affiliation, while maintaining personal religious connections, reveals how racial categories intersected with other forms of social organization and identity formation.

Conclusion

This analysis of racial terminology in German-speaking territories during the long eighteenth century reveals the complex evolution of language as both a reflection of and contributor to racial thinking. The examination of "Mohr" and "Neger" demonstrates how seemingly academic linguistic choices were deeply embedded in colonial networks, scientific discourse, and economic systems of exploitation.

"Neger" was more than just a term; it served as a tool for racial classification, dehumanization, and control. While not always directly equated with "slave" in German contexts, the term was deeply connected to the Atlantic slave trade and colonial exploitation. Importantly, "Neger" did not replace "Mohr," nor was there a simple transition from one term to the other. Instead, both words coexisted throughout the eighteenth century. "Mohr" remained a more common, broader, and older category of racial otherness with medieval and religious meanings. Meanwhile, "Neger" specifically arose within the context of the slave trade and scientific racial classification. As this analysis shows, "Neger" was closely linked to scientific racial discourse that aimed to classify human differences. This scientific perspective justified the use of terminology that originated in colonial practices, providing an intellectual cover that masked its roots in exploitation while allowing it to become part of public education and speech. In addition, the coexistence of "Mohr" and "Neger" shows the flexibility of racial categories and their deployment to maintain systems of domination. Overall, the chapter's findings emphasize that racial terminology in eighteenth-century German discourse was neither neutral nor purely linguistic, but was deeply intertwined with scientific authority, colonial economies, and social hierarchies.

As outlined in the introduction, the aim of this study was not only to investigate the conceptual history of these terms but also their effects on the people they designated. The following chapter, therefore, presents a necessary shift in perspective, complementing the historical analysis by moving from viewing individuals as racializing subjects to seeing the racialized objects, as

introduced via the racial turn in historical scholarship. However, breaking the racial conceptualization, I focus on their experiences as subjects rather than objects, challenging racializing practices by adopting a framework that emphasizes their agency, resistance, and lived realities. This approach aims to dismantle the dehumanizing logic embedded in racial terminology by exploring how individuals navigated, challenged, and transformed the categories imposed upon them.

4. Racial Semantics in Print: The Use of ‘Mohr’ and ‘Neger’ in German Ads

The preceding chapters examined "Mohr" and "Neger", demonstrating their construction as categories of racial Otherness. These chapters have necessarily focused on how European elites created, stabilized, and applied racial terminology. Yet this approach reveals only one dimension of how these terms operated in social reality. The terms imposed were not simply received passively by those they purported to describe. This chapter, therefore, shifts analytical perspective and investigates their application by those they purported to describe. Thus, rather than examining how Black individuals were labeled, it explores how these imposed designations functioned. This is demonstrated through a case study of newspaper advertisements from the late 18th-century Hamburg region, showing how "Mohr" and "Neger" structured employment opportunities and shaped the terms through which Black individuals could present themselves publicly.

Newspaper advertisements serve as proven primary sources for understanding the presence and experiences of (Black) domestic servants. As commercial documents, they reveal not only labor market dynamics but also patterns of self-presentation, geographic origins, skill sets, and linguistic abilities of individuals seeking employment. In her detailed study of servant advertisements in the 1815 editions of *The Morning Post*, Sophie Dunn finds that servants tailored their self-descriptions to align with what employers were seeking.[187] Building on recent scholarship about master-servant dynamics, she argues that servants exercised greater control and influence in this process than earlier research has recognized.[188] While these advertisements offer only a limited window into Black experiences in German territories, a close reading reveals patterns concerning both the mechanisms of racialization and the nature of social dependencies. For instance, Bärwald demonstrated the value of newspaper adverts “as a window into employment practices and the self-presentation of non-white workers”.[189] Her analysis is based on twenty-three instances of persons of non-European descent seeking employment and five instances of employers specifically seeking non-white personnel in Hamburg between 1788 and 1839. She concludes that they took part in what she named as “cosmopolitan practices”, understood as active engagement in intercultural exchanges, a high level of adaptability across

[187] Sophie Dunn, "'No objection to go abroad': Servants' Travel Advertisements in The Morning Post, London, 1815," *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies,* vol. 45, no. 4, 2022, 487-506.
[188] See e.g., Antoinette Fauve-Chamoux, “Servants in Preindustrial Europe: Gender Differences”, *Historical Social Research*, vol. 23, no.1/2, 1998,112–29.
[189] Bärwald 2021, p. 192.

cultures, and the exercise of individual choice and autonomy.[190]

. Hamburg, connected to global commerce through various pathways, held a status as a significant trading and port city. Moreover, recent studies have challenged the assumption that the Hanseatic city played only a marginal role in the slave trade, revealing a more complex reality. In 2014, Magnus Ressel emphasized that Hamburg played only a marginal role as a direct participant in the transatlantic slave trade.[191] He contends that the documented slave voyages by Hamburg ships between 1800 and 1806 should be seen as exceptions in a trade environment otherwise characterized by legal and structural exclusion.[192] This interpretation rests on the premise that early modern Atlantic colonial trade was predominantly controlled by the mercantilist monopolies of major Western European maritime powers, which effectively barred Hamburg from independent participation. It was only during the war-induced weakening of these protective systems in the 1790s that windows opened for Hamburg-flagged ships to transport slaves. For Ressel, this phase represents a historically specific exception rather than proof of Hamburg's systematic integration into the transatlantic slave trade.[193]

In contrast, Julian zur Lage argues for Hamburg's greater involvement, not only in structural terms, but also in matters of personnel.[194] The analysis of muster rolls from Hamburg and Altona shows that several specific merchants and captains were integrated into corresponding trade networks. Furthermore, Hamburg was not only the center of Central European sugar refining, but also utilized the access to new markets in West Africa and the Caribbean during the Revolutionary period due to its neutrality.[195] The fact that this involvement has so far been considered marginal is due to gaps in the research rather than actual absence. For example, he highlights the uncritical reception of data sets such as the *Slave Voyages Database*, as it does not differentiate between actual human trafficking and mere commercial voyages. He emphasizes that it is necessary to compare this data with contextual sources, such as maritime passport registers, to make a more differentiated assessment of actual involvement.[196] Nonetheless, zur Lage observes that North German merchants had long enjoyed limited access to the transatlantic slave trade.

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[190] Ibid.
[191] Magnus Ressel, "Hamburg und die Niederelbe im atlantischen Sklavenhandel der Frühen Neuzeit", *Werkstatt Geschichte*, vol. 66/67, 2014, pp. 75-96.
[192] Cf. ibid, p. 80f.
[193] Ibid., pp. 88ff.
[194] Julian zur Lage, "Die Hochphase des deutschen Versklavungshandels: Akteure aus dem Raum Hamburg und ihre globalen Netzwerke um 1800," *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung*, vol. 49, 2022, pp. 665–694.
[195] Ibid., p. 669.
[196] Zur Lage corrected the number of slave voyages and showed that the absolute number is higher, cf. ibem., p. 672.

Adding to the economic and structural historical analyses, Annika Bärwald focuses on the social reality of people of African and Asian origin in Hamburg itself. In her analysis, Hamburg is not primarily seen as a trading actor, but as an urban space in which the social, economic, and cultural consequences of the transatlantic slave trade are reflected locally. Her contribution thus shows how the global dynamics of colonialism and enslavement were reflected in the urban society.[197] Bärwald's focus thus shifts the evidentiary basis for understanding Hamburg's relationship to the Atlantic slave trade. Rather than measuring involvement solely through commercial participation, the documented presence of Black individuals in Hamburg demonstrates its embeddedness in the broader social and cultural structures of Atlantic slavery, independent of debates about the scale of its direct commercial participation.

The newspaper advertisements examined in this chapter illustrate precisely this intersection of global systems and local practice. Drawing on nine entries from Bärwald's database, this analysis examines how the racial categories "Mohr" and "Neger" operated within Hamburg's labor market. While the sample size remains limited, these advertisements offer rare first-person perspectives on Black experiences in German territories. However, I was unable to determine how the adverts were produced or the specific practices involved, so I can only assume that the text was dictated by the job seeker or at least done in consultation with them. Nonetheless, one advertisement appearing in identical form across multiple publications suggests individual rather than editorial phrasing. This consistency across different newspapers indicates that the wording originated with the job seeker, providing a basis, albeit limited, for analyzing linguistic patterns and racial markers as reflections of self-presentation rather than purely external categorization. Regarding the adverts, Bärwald suggests that “Mohr” might have been understood as a “type of occupation rather than simply a descriptor of ethnicity”.[198] As my analysis has demonstrated, “Mohr” functions as an ambiguous term, deliberately obscuring the legal and social status of the Black individual in question. Additionally, I have presented the heterogeneous nature of the term, demonstrating its conceptual flexibility. However, at the core, developed in a white context, “Mohr” is primarily a descriptor of Othering.[199]

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[197] Annika Bärwald, “Black Hamburg: People of Asian and African Descent Navigating a Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Job Market,” in *Beyond Exceptionalism: Traces of Slavery and the Slave Trade in Early Modern Germany, 1650–1850*, (eds.) Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, Josef Köstlbauer, and Sarah Lentz (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), pp. 189–214.
[198] Bärwald 2021, p. 202n62.
[199] Whether it is a question of race or ethnicity depends, in my opinion, on the respective definition and is one of the many areas of research on this topic in the literature that cannot be agreed upon. However, this does not fit the scope of my paper.

Utilizing her database, I extracted a sample of nine advertisements from the *Hamburgische Adreß-Comtoir-Nachrichten* and the *Altonaer Mercurius* between 1787 and 1799.[200] These publications reached the commercial and social networks of Hamburg's merchant community, appearing two to three times per week. Personal advertisements for buying and selling were standard features, placed at the end of each newspaper. The length varies, and advertisements published in the *Hamburgische Adreß-Comtoir-Nachrichten* are preceded by a standardized phrase: "Person, die ihre Dienste anbietet".[201]

Recovering Black voices

The first two examples refer not to job adverts but cases of Black servants who had either escaped or were reported as kidnapped. The first, from 1774, refers to the alleged "Entführung" of a 14-year-old "Neger", who is said to have disappeared on the evening of June 28.[202] The creator of the ad, who remains unknown, assures that every tip will be compensated and treated confidentially.[203] Why would someone kidnap a 14-year-old Black boy?

Assuming that young Black people were often kept as domestic servants and thus held monetary value, either as "ransom" to their original owners or for "resale" to another family, abduction becomes a plausible concern.[204] After all, in the contemporary context, kidnapping Africans was a standard method of acquiring people for enslavement.[205] In his account of the transatlantic slave trade, Alexander Falconbridge describes alleged practices by African slave traders, including the use of dogs to capture individuals and even the abduction and sale of pregnant women.[206] Such narratives were also familiar in Germany. For instance, a former ship surgeon, Adolph Friedrich Löffler, in his defense of the slave trade, published in several parts *Hamburgische Addreß-Comptoir-Nachrichten* in 1784, argued that Europeans merely bought

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[200] In the database, the person refers to the entries 002_1774, 001_1788, 005_1794, 004_1794, 002_1797, 003_1797.
[201] "Person, who offers their services".
[202] *Hamburgische Addreß-Comtoir-Nachrichten,* 30. Juni 1774, 83. Stück, p. 408.
[203] "Sollte Jemand seyn, welcher von seinem Aufenthalt einige Nachricht geben könnte, dem wird mit Verschweigung seines Namens, ein gut Recompens versprochen, und kann er sich dieserhalb auf Kaysershof melden". I could not find a name for that address. *Hamburgische Addreß-Comtoir-Nachrichten*, 30. Juni 1774, 83. Stück, p. 408.
[204] I placed the terms in quotation marks to distance myself from commodifying language.
[205] For practices relating to the acquisition of slaves, see e.g., Mariana Candido, *An African Slaving Port and the Atlantic World: Benguela and Its Hinterland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), especially chap. 4.
[206] Alexander Falconbridge*, An Account of the Slave Trade on the Coast of Africa* (London: J. Phillips, 1788), pp. 20–22.

slaves because Africans themselves supplied this commodity, hence claiming that the system was structured this way from the outset.[207] However, recent findings reveal that the reality was far more complex. The forms of slavery practiced by various African ethnic groups often reflected specific dependency relations that had little to do with the hereditary, racialized chattel slavery that emerged in the late 18th-century Atlantic world.[208] Moreover, the presence of European powers profoundly transformed internal African contexts, leading to political instability, conflicts, and the depopulation of regions.[209]

Given the small Black population in Hamburg in 1774, it is reasonable to assume that a potential kidnapper would not have remained in the city for long, since the sudden appearance of a young Black man would have attracted attention. On the other hand, because young Black people were primarily known to serve as domestic staff, the presence of such a boy in the custody of another person might not have been questioned. Since the boy is referred to as "Neger" in the advertisements, it is likely that he had not previously been employed at German courts, but may have been a servant to a merchant involved in the slave trade. Due to his young age, it is also likely that the boy might have attempted to run away. As the case of the two men aboard the *Mary* from 1795 illustrates, such an escape was conceivable.

On November 24th, Captain Samuel Parker published an ad in the *Altonaischer Mercurius* announcing that "zwei Mohren" had left the ship without authorization. The captain offers a reward to anyone who can return them safely. The only information Parker provides the reader is the name and occupation of the two men: Newport Hafard, a sailor, and William Davids, a cook.[210] In contrast to the so-called runaway ads, which often include highly detailed physical descriptions, mentioning scars or mutilations, the German adverts do not provide the reader with such descriptions.[211] Marisa J. Fuentes, for example, used such descriptions in her writings to illustrate the possibilities of Hartmann's critical fabulation method.[212] An attempted escape by the men of the *St. Mary* appears plausible, particularly given that it was prohibited to

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[207] Adolph Friedrich Löffler, "Begriff vom Sklavenhandel I," *Hamburgische Addreß-Comptoir-Nachrichten*, 23 Aug. 1784, pp. 522–529.
[208] See e.g., G. Ugo Nwokeji, "Slavery in Non-Islamic West Africa, 1420–1820," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, (eds.) David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 81–110.
[209] See e.g., Toby Green, *A Fistful of Shells: West Africa from the Rise of the Slave Trade to the Age of Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).
[210] *Altonaischer Mercurius*, 24. November 1795, Nr. 188, p. 2694.
[211] Regarding the missing boy, only his small stature is mentioned; the two runaway men are identified by name and occupation.
[212] Cf. Marisa J. Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), pp. 13-45. See also Saidiya Hartmann. "Venus in Two Acts", *Small Axe*, vol. 12 no. 2, 2008, p. 1-14, here p.11.

disembark while the ship was in port. Otherwise, why would Parker go to the expense of placing an advertisement in the local newspaper? On the other hand, why are there no more detailed physical descriptions?

Since the ad writers clearly wanted the Black employees to return, it can be assumed they believed the information provided was sufficient. Thus, in the German context, labeling someone as a “Mohr” or “Neger” may have been considered enough for identification. This suggests a small Black population with a well-defined understanding of who belonged to whom, implying that Black presence was consistently tied to dependency. This likely precludes the existence of a self-sustaining free Black community.[213] Furthermore, Samuel Parker's use of "Mohren" despite the English names (both his own and those of the Black men) might indicate that he tailored his language for his German audience, since "Negro" would have been the standard English term for Black people. However, this interpretation remains tentative, as I found no documentary evidence confirming Parker's nationality or the ship's origins beyond the English names recorded in the text. Therefore, both texts show how ownership over Black bodies was expressed through language, revealing the difference between slave societies in colonial settings and societies with slaves in European urban spaces.

The largest group of advertisements from my selection concerns job seekers, six in total, though one of them does not explicitly seek employment as a servant but instead offers musical services. The remaining five are looking for positions as domestic servants.[214] However, the terminology used to describe the applicants varies considerably.

A first case is that of a “Mohr, welcher Deutsch und Französisch spricht, auf dem Clavier und im Singen unterrichtet”, who in early September 1788 “empfiehlt sich dem geehrten Publicum”.[215] It is unclear whether he was presenting himself as a “regular” servant with additional musical skills, or rather as a musician seeking employment. The latter seems more likely, as servant advertisements typically mention references. Since he speaks both German and French, and “Hofmohren” were not an exclusively German phenomenon, it is plausible that he had previously been employed at a French court or household, or at a German court influenced by

[213] Black people in Venice could be categorized as part of the gondolier class, and were thus socially identifiable as a group, cf. Kate Lowe, “Visible Lives: Black Gondoliers and Other Black Africans in Renaissance Venice” *Renaissance Quarterly*, vol. 66, no. 2, 2013, pp. 412–52.

[214] With domestic servant, I refer to all servant-related employment that was commonly tied to the position, i.e., cooks, coachmen, or valets. Tutors or other education laborers are excluded, following the example methodology used by Dunn.

[215] *Hamburgische Addreß-Comtoir-Nachrichten*, 04.09.1788, p. 552. “A Moor who speaks German and French, teaches piano and singing, recommends himself to the esteemed public“.

French culture, either through kinship ties or through deliberate imitation of French courtly life as a cultural model.

Therefore, the musician's bilingual skills highlight the cosmopolitan nature of 18th-century elite culture. This suggests that Black individuals in courtly positions may have been part of broader networks of cultural exchange. This supports the thesis that the term "Mohr" was often used to refer to individuals who originated from, or were socialized, trained, or educated within, courtly or elite environments. Furthermore, the emphasis on musical education and language skills suggests that Black individuals could accumulate cultural capital, though within strictly defined parameters of courtly service. For instance, Degn presents one of the Schimmelmann servants, Christoph Petersen, with the nickname "Tafeldecker", as he was supposed to learn violin but had clumsy and uncoordinated fingers, which is why he became a table setter.[216] He "belonged" to Caroline Adelaide Cornelia von Baudissin (1759-1826) (also 1760 and 1761 are given as her birth years), a daughter of Schimmelman, who married Heinrich Friedrich von Baudissin in 1776. Petersen had a child, Johanna, with the chambermaid Margretha Dorothea, who was the daughter of the estate gardener, David Voß; however, she died in 1795. He remarried Marie Büring (or Buhring) from Kiel or Brunwik, and they had two sons, Hinrich and Cornelius.[217]

The next case, a 20-year-old man from Malabar, is likewise referred to as a "Mohr".[218] In this case, too, Adelung's classification is applicable, as he explicitly includes Malabar in his list of geographic regions.[219] The advert states:

> "Ein Mohr von der Küste Malabar in Asien, 18 Jahr alt, der ein gutes Attestat von dem Herrn, der ihrs mitgebracht, bei dem er 7 Jahre die Stelle eines Bedienten vertreten, aufzuweisen hat, die deutsche Sprache spricht, und auch mit Pferde umzugehen weiß, sucht eine Condition".[220]

Thus, their employer was most likely a merchant or missionary who had acquired or received them as gifts at approximately eleven years of age and retained their services throughout their youth. The economic context of the 1790s provides further support for this interpretation. Given that slave prices had risen significantly during this period, the acquisition of enslaved

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[216] Degn 1984, p. 12.
[217] Cf. "Joseph Graf von Baudissin und der 'Kammermohr' Christoph Petersen auf Gut Knoop." Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek, Schleswig-Holsteinische Landesbibliothek, available via www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/item/DNNLMA7HKUQHFXRM442YCK6OBNK46JRH [last accessed 30.09.2025].
[218] *Hamburgische Addreß-Comtoir-Nachrichten*, 17. März 1794, p. 175.
[219] Cf. Adelung 1794, p. 261.
[220] *Hamburgische Addreß-Comtoir-Nachrichten* 17. März 1794, p. 175. "A Moor from the Malabar coast in Asia, aged 18, who has a good reference from the gentleman who brought him here, where he worked as a servant for seven years, speaks German, and also knows how to handle horses, is looking for a position".

individuals became increasingly difficult and expensive. Under these circumstances, retaining existing servants for extended periods represented a rational economic strategy. The dismissal of these servants after their teenage years thus suggests a deliberate practice of maintaining their perceived youth to conform to established European expectations, specifically, the cultural ideal of the Black servant as a status symbol.

Since the advertisement says “Ein Mohr von der Küste Malabar in Asien,”, I assume that the man was born there. Of course, there is the possibility that he was born somewhere else and was brought to Malabar as a slave. One of the best-known influences of the German presence in India was the *Danish-Halle Mission*, which had been in existence since 1706 and which, under the leadership of Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg and other German missionaries from Halle, worked to spread the Protestant faith on the south-eastern coast of present-day Tamil Nadu, especially in Tranquebar (Tharangambadi).[221] Although I have not been able to find any studies on the direct involvement of the mission in the slave trade, I assume that it behaved in a similar way to its competitors. For instance, the Moravians maintained missions in both the Caribbean and West Africa, which not only offered them direct contact with the African population and thus opportunities for conversion, but were also involved in the local slave markets to maintain their presence and kept enslaved people themselves.[222] For example, Josef Köstlbauer examines the Moravian Church's involvement with slavery in the eighteenth century, highlighting the complexities of representation and the motivations behind their actions. He emphasizes the need for careful semantic analysis of the language used in Moravian records, as these documents often elide the status of enslaved individuals, referring to them with ambiguous terms like "Mohr" or "Schwarze" without explicitly acknowledging their enslaved status.[223] This suggests that such labels served to indicate the individual's social status rather than their legal condition.

However, two advertisements in my sample do not correspond to the definition of “Mohr” as *the* term for Black servants. The first reads:

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[221] On Ziegenbald and the Mission see Werner Raupp, “Ziegenbalg, Bartholomäus.” *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon (BBKL*), vol. 14, (ed.) Friedrich Wilhelm Bautz (Herzberg: Bautz, 1998), pp. 452–61; Brijraj Singh, *The First Protestant Missionary to India: Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg (1683–1710)* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[222] On the Moravians' involvement in the slave trade, see Jon F. Sensbach, *Rebecca’s Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

[223]Cf. Josef Köstlbauer, “‘I Have No Shortage of Moors’: Mission, Representation, and the Elusive Semantics of Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Moravian Sources,” in *Beyond Exceptionalism: Traces of Slavery and the Slave Trade in Early Modern Germany, 1650–1850*, (eds.) Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, Josef Köstlbauer, and Sarah Lentz (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021), pp. 108–136.

> "Ein Neger, der bereits als Kammerdiener sowohl holländisch-, englisch-, französisch und etwas deutsch spricht, sehr gut frisieren kann, die Aufwartung versteht, und Attestate seines Wohlverhaltens hat, wünscht in gleicher Qualität bey einem Herrn anzukommen, oder mit ihm auf Reisen, vorzüglich nach England, zu gehen. Er ist anzutreffen im Jungfernstieg Nr. 8".[224]

He is highly qualified: In addition to German, he speaks Dutch, English, and French, and is also skilled in hairdressing. It also states that he can be found at the address "Jungfernstieg no. 8". According to the Hamburg address book of that year, a wine merchant, J. Gaft, was registered for this address.[225] Remarkably, the advert adds that the man would prefer to work for someone who was traveling, especially to England. This raises several questions: Does he have family there? Does he possibly come from England or an English colony (perhaps also a Dutch or French one) and settled there first? Did he come to Hamburg via a German merchant, with whom he initially worked and only recently learned German, which could explain his limited command of the language?

Furthermore, the self-promotion in this advertisement is remarkable. As Dunn has shown for English advertisements, these sources provide a glimpse into the self-consciousness of servants.[226] This man was aware of his skills and the level at which he could perform them, which enabled him to position himself not only as a job seeker but also as someone seeking employment that suited his specific needs. His wish to travel to England thus stems, as suggested above, from social ties or other connections he wanted to maintain, hence his search for an employer who could provide that opportunity. This implies not only a level of agency but also room for freedom and negotiation among Black servants present in Germany.

Another advertisement supports this further. While this man, or boy, as the advert describes him as a "für sein Alter großgewachsener Neger", does not seem to possess the same level of skill as the previous, he is nevertheless able to present references attesting to his qualities.[227] What is particularly striking is that this advertisement appeared word for word in both the Altona and Hamburg newspapers on consecutive days.[228] The only difference between the

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[224] *Hamburgische Adreß-Comtoir-Nachrichten*, 21. Dezember 1797, p. 799. "A Negro who already speaks Dutch, English, French, and some German, is very good at hairdressing, understands etiquette, and has certificates of good conduct, wishes to find employment with a gentleman of similar standing or to travel with him, preferably to England. He can be found at Jungfernstieg No. 8."
[225] For the wine merchant Joh. Lud. Leonh. Gaft see *Neues Hamburger und Altonaer Addreß-Buch*, 1797, p. 75.
[226] Cf. Dunn 2022, p. 503.
[227] Translation: "for his age, tall-built Negro".
[228] *Altonaischer Mercurius*, 22. Dezember 1797, Nr. 204, p. 2991; *Hamburgische Adreß-Comtoir-Nachrichten*, 21. Dezember 1797, p. 799.

two advertisements is found at the end of the text, where additional information is indicated.[229] This supports the assumption that the individuals involved had some degree of influence over how they were linguistically portrayed. In addition, the variation in job descriptions ("Dienste und Geschäfte" vs. "bei irgend einer Herrschaft") may reflect different target audiences; the Hamburg version targets commercial opportunities, while the Altona version focuses on domestic service. Moreover, the choice of newspapers for both Hamburg and Altona labor markets indicates awareness of and access to different areas, suggesting the servant was not restricted to one territory.

The following advertisement also provides information about the language skills as well as an adress: “Ein Neger, welcher firsieren und rasieren kann, gut Englisch, etwas französich und deutsch spricht, auch gute Zeugnisse aufzuweisen hat, sucht hier oder in Hamburg als Bedienter Condition. Zu erfragen in der Breitenstrasse bei dem Hern. Lion, Nr. 299 in Altona”.[230] The Hamburg address book from 1799 lists an Abraham Lion as a commissioner residing at Breitenstraße 299, with the notation "BC" appearing next to his name.[231] In Hamburg, "BC" stands for “Banco Conto”, referring to a financial institution of the same name that is connected to the banker Joachim Stresow, registered at Grimm No. 19. The banking business, initially led by Meno Hermann, was later passed on to his son, Hermann Joachim. Individual tax records enable the tracing of the family's wealth and tax contributions between 1783 and 1811, indicating that the family experienced peak business profits from 1783 to 1795, with 1794 representing their most successful year.[232] It is therefore plausible that this prosperous family of moneychangers and bankers lived in considerable affluence and could afford domestic staff, including individuals from overseas. The acquisition of a “colonial servant” served not only to fulfill practical tasks but also to enhance the owners' cultural capital, symbolically echoing a trickle-down effect from the Black court servants. This suggests that men seeking employment may have deliberately used terms like "Mohr" and "Neger" to mark themselves as Others, thereby increasing their visibility and attractiveness to potential employers. This makes the final advertisement in this sample particularly relevant:

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[229] Ibid. Besides the phrasing, the nature of employment varies, HAC: "wünscht, in was für Dienste und Geschäfte es auch seyn mag, seinen Unterhalt zu finden"; AM: "wünscht bei irgend einer Herrschaft anzukommen".
[230] *Altonaischer Mercurius*, 18. Oktober 1799, p. 2615. “A Negro who can cut hair and shave, speaks good English, some French and German, and has good references, is looking for work as a servant here or in Hamburg. Enquiries to Mr. Lion, No. 299 Breitenstrasse in Altona“.
[231] *Hamburgisches Adress-Buch* 1799, pp. 524f.
[232] N.a. “Des Baniers M. H. Stresow in Hamburg's Vermögensmehrung und Steuerzahlungen 1783–1812”, *Mitteilungen des Vereins für Hamburgische Geschichte*, vol. 34, 1914, pp. 119–24.

> "Ein geborner Africaner, der 20 Jahre alt ist, 9 Jahre auf einer Stelle gedienet hat, rasieren, auch Heeren und Damen frisuren kann, die Aufwartzbg versteht, deutsch und dänisch sprucht, auch in letzrerer Sprache schreiben kann, gute Attestrate darlegen, wie auch das Zeugnis auf Ehrlichkeit und Treue von einem angesehenen Herren erwarten kann, wünscht, baldigst als Bedienter anfangen zu können".[233]

This 20-year-old man had served one employer for nine years and was trained in classic domestic duties, including shaving, styling hair for both men and women, and general service. Moreover, he spoke both Danish and German and was literate in Danish, suggesting that he likely originated from a Danish colony or had served a Danish employer. He could have held various positions, as ship crews bound for Danish outposts in West Africa included individuals of different ranks, and it was not unusual for higher-ranking crew members to travel with personal servants.[234] It is unlikely that he served as a surgeon or tradesman, as such positions typically involved apprenticeship structures rather than domestic service. The fact that this man was also trained in styling women's hair suggests he worked for someone who resided in Europe, as while some women did accompany their husbands on voyages, such cases were rare. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the advertisement appeared in the Hamburg newspaper rather than the Altona paper, despite his Danish literacy. Was this a conscious decision to distance himself from the Danish context? Or perhaps a strategic move to present himself as a mediator between German and Danish spheres, aiming to attract a merchant engaged in such cross-cultural exchanges?

Beyond these considerations, the most striking feature of this advertisement is the absence of any racialized terminology. The deliberate choice of "geborner Africaner" represents active identity construction rather than passive acceptance of imposed labels. This suggests agency in how he wanted to be perceived professionally and socially, indicating a personal identification with his geographic origin rather than racial categorization. According to Nubia's research, this pattern is not unusual. He demonstrates that "Blackamoor" was used by Black individuals themselves as a marker of heritage.[235] Thus, the case illustrates how self-designations could function as strategies of empowerment, enabling Black individuals to navigate and

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[233] *Hamburgische Adreß-Comtoir-Nachrichten*, 10. Nov. 1794, p. 703. „A native African, 20 years old, has served in one position for 9 years, can shave, cut men's and women's hair, understands etiquette, speaks German and Danish, can also write in the latter language, can provide good references, as well as a certificate of honesty and loyalty from a respected gentleman, wishes to start work as a servant as soon as possible".
[234] On the Danish in West Africa see Per Hernæs(ed.), *Vestafrika: Forterne på Guldkysten. Danmark og kolonierne* (Copenhagen: Gad, 2017).
[235] Nubia 2019, p. 24f.

subtly contest dominant classificatory regimes while asserting their own frameworks of identity.

Therefore, the analysis of newspaper advertisements clearly shows that terms such as “Mohr” and “Neger” functioned as ambiguous social markers. Rather than being passive objects, Black individuals actively navigated legal ambiguities in European urban spaces and strategically constructed their professional identities through self-representation in job advertisements. The evidence suggests that Black individuals maintained social connections and were able to negotiate working conditions that suited their personal circumstances. A random sample comparison with ads from the same years for white servants shows that the terms “Mohr” and “Neger” are clearly racialized labels. These advertisements use different identifiers. For example, the January 11, 1798, edition of the *Hamburger Correspondent* contains five advertisements from people seeking employment as servants. The first person describes herself as “junge Witwe”, the second as an “unverheirater Gärtner”, followed by a “junge Person” and “ein Bedienter”. One advertisement refers to a “junges Frauenzimmer”, a term for an unmarried young woman from middle-class circles.[236] The term “ein Mensch” is also commonly used in newspaper advertisements. This sample illustrates the diverse range of terms that job seekers use to describe themselves. Most of these are references to gender and marital status, as these factors influence people's employment conditions and mobility. Common to both source groups are references to professional competencies and experience, testimonials regarding character and ability, and attention to personal wishes and circumstances, especially the expressed desire to travel.

The existence of alternative non-racial descriptors, therefore, heightens the significance of racialized terminology. Rather than reflecting linguistic constraints, these terminological choices appear deliberate, indicating that both the imposition of racial labels and resistance to them constitute intentional strategies of identity formation and social positioning. Moreover, this raises the question of whether Black people were forced to use racialized labels or geographic alternatives that inevitably revealed their non-white phenotype. If a Black person had described himself as a "junge Person", this would suggest that as soon as the job seeker and employer met, their Otherness would become immediately apparent. Given the stigma and stereotypes attached to Black bodies, white employers might either refuse to employ a Black person or, conversely, as suggested above, deliberately seek out Black servants to enhance their social status and cultural capital. Nonetheless, race matters fundamentally. This demonstrates

[236] *Hamburgische Adreß-Comtoir-Nachrichten*, 11. 01.1798, p. 16.

that whiteness was the implicit default, hence revealing the inescapable nature of racialized identification systems, where even apparent agencies in self-presentation operated within predetermined boundaries that reinforced racial Otherness.

Conclusion

The advertisements reveal a complex interaction between externally imposed and internally constructed identity markers. The terminology used provides clues about social status, perceived origins, and the strategic identity-building employed by both employers and servants. Furthermore, the addresses, references to specific locations, and employment histories preserved in these sources illuminate the networks connecting German merchants, bankers, and households to global colonial systems. In contrast to the term “Neger,” the use of “Mohr” can be seen as an indicator that the person in question belonged to, or was associated with, higher social circles.

Furthermore, the analysis reveals that even within early modern racial hierarchies, Black individuals possessed significant agency in shaping and presenting their identities. However, this perceived agency existed within the unavoidable constraints of racialized identification systems. The presence of neutral options in other advertisements makes the continued use of racialized or geographic markers even more significant. Black individuals were effectively forced to mark themselves as Other because the social system provided no genuinely neutral space. Even seemingly strategic choices in self-presentation ultimately reinforced racial boundaries, as whiteness remained the unmarked, invisible norm against which all difference was measured. This underscores the double consciousness, as Black individuals navigated the paradox of asserting selfhood and agency while remaining compelled to view and present themselves through the distorting lens of a racial order that continually defined them as Other.

5. Results: Racial Labels and Identity Formation

Inspired by the debate on racial language, this study examined how the terms "Mohr" and "Neger" were understood during the long 18th century, focusing on their meanings and effects on the identities of the people involved. The main research question was: How did the meanings of terms like “Mohr” and “Neger” evolve, and how did these labels affect the self-image and social standing of Black individuals?

The Semantic Development of “Mohr” and “Neger”

To answer the question, I used a multi-layered approach that drew on conceptual history, critical discourse analysis, and deconstructive readings of archival sources. Applying the triadic model of Wort – Begriff – Sache shows that the terms did not simply replace each other but served as historically shaped linguistic tools whose meanings and uses diverged. As words (Wörter), both "Mohr" and "Neger" were used to refer to Black individuals. However, their conceptual meanings (Begriffe) developed along different paths, reflecting broader shifts in epistemology, power structures, and global connections. The analysis reveals that "Mohr" did not function as an objective descriptor of ethnic identity but as a culturally constructed label that signaled symbolic Otherness within German-speaking society. The term appeared in the Middle Ages and remained common in courtly and religious discourse, associated with exotic servitude, Christian redemption, and aestheticized Otherness. Instead of denoting specific geographical origins or biological features, the term acted as a social tool to define and uphold white normative boundaries while concealing the realities of those it designated. Moreover, the evidence shows that "Mohr" was not used in an ethno-geographical sense. People labeled as "Mohr" were not necessarily of African origin or dark-skinned in a literal sense. Instead, the term was a social and cultural category employed by white majority discourse to mark individuals who fell outside established norms of belonging. This conceptual framework masked the actual lived experiences of many Black individuals, often enslaved and forcibly relocated, by embedding them in a language of prestige and symbolic value. For example, "Hofmohren" were framed not as enslaved persons or dependents but as luxury status symbols and servants. Therefore, as a symbolic figure, the "Mohr" represented what was constructed as "non-white," "non-Christian," "non-European," and "non-civilized." The term acted as a cipher for Otherness, regardless of the individual's actual characteristics or origins. This symbolic use created a projection space for ideas of exoticism, threat, subjugation, and difference, defined entirely through external

attribution rather than self-identification. Importantly, the idea of "Mohr" served as a linguistic cover-up, masking the underlying coercive structures behind the presence of Black people in German-speaking lands beneath a veneer of courtly prestige and aesthetic value. This finding shows how racial terminology functioned as a tool of social positioning rather than straightforward categorization, reinforcing hierarchical structures and white hegemonic discourse through the creation of symbolic difference while hiding the violence and exploitation often underlying these relationships. In short, the term "Mohr" did not neutrally describe Black people but worked to conceal underlying exploitation and inequality by framing their presence in terms of prestige and symbolic difference.

In contrast, "Neger" developed in the 17th century as a term influenced by the growing impact of the Enlightenment and the rise of the transatlantic slave trade. As a term, "Neger" entered German usage mainly through colonial and scientific writings, rather than through religious or aristocratic sources. Conceptually, it marked a shift toward biological essentialism, defining a specific racialized group as inherently different and inferior. This term aligned with Enlightenment taxonomies that sought to systematize human diversity and justified hierarchies using anatomical and empirical language. Here, the referent is not just a person of African descent, but a body reduced to racial stereotypes.

The coexistence of both terms illustrates how different ideas can refer to similar concepts while serving distinct ideological purposes. In urban ads and court records, "Mohr" continued to carry social meaning, suggesting service and closeness to power, as well as in scientific writing and colonial correspondence. The rise of "Neger" did not replace "Mohr," but created a semantic layering where both words operated in separate yet overlapping social spaces. Analyzing "Mohr" and "Neger" thus reveals the complex role of racial terminology in shaping notions of difference. These labels were more than just descriptions; they functioned as active forces in building racialized social realities. Through their semantic, social, and political roles, these terms demonstrate how language reflects and reinforces racial hierarchies, with visible differences tied to skin color, serving as the supposed foundation for systems of categorization and exclusion.

Racialized Labels and Black Identity Formation

In her analysis of non-white job adverts in Hamburg, Bärwald doubts that the racial labels "constituted identity-shaping categories for the individuals".[237] Based on my analysis, I argue that

[237] Bärwald 2021, p. 203.

they do, as the second part of the research question focused on how racialized language affected the identity of the people involved. These racialized labels shaped Black identity formation by constraining possibilities for self-definition within dominant white frameworks. The terms functioned as identity-constituting categories that positioned Black individuals within systems of meaning they did not control. Drawing on concepts of internalized Otherness, the analysis reveals how "Mohr" and "Neger" contributed to the formation of a subordinate identity, as Black people were only recognized within frameworks that denied them complete subjectivity.

In conclusion, the thesis shows that these processes were not abstract but tangible, visible in concrete sources like baptismal records, court protocols, encyclopedias, and newspapers. In these sources, Black individuals were consistently identified primarily by their race, rather than by name, profession, or other personal details. In this context, identity was never fully autonomous but always filtered through categories imposed by the dominant white society. Therefore, in white spaces, Black individuals had to present themselves using racial labels that highlighted their race while also requiring them to conform to specific roles. However, within these limits, the thesis also highlights moments of strategic negotiation. Newspaper advertisements from late 18th-century Hamburg reveal Black individuals seeking employment under the label “Mohr,” demonstrating a practical use of available language to access social and economic opportunities. Yet, using such labels did not mean these individuals passively accepted their assigned roles. Instead, it shows the limited nature of racialized identity, where individuals navigate restricted options for self-definition while functioning within dominant racial frameworks. Black identity formation in early modern German territories therefore involved negotiating imposed categorical boundaries, revealing the complex interaction between structural forces and individual agency.

Discussion: Implications and Limitations

Furthermore, these findings directly contribute to existing scholarship on the historical construction of racial categories. Drawing upon sources from German-speaking territories during the long eighteenth century, this research illuminates a previously marginalized perspective that repositions Central Europe as an active agent in racialization processes rather than a passive peripheral observer of Atlantic developments. The integration of German territories into Atlantic and global historiographical frameworks reveals both convergences and divergences in racialization mechanisms across different European contexts. While established scholarship

traditionally privileged colonial maritime powers as the primary architects of racial discourse and hosts of Black populations, this thesis demonstrates that non-maritime and non-colonial entities developed their pathways of integration into Atlantic systems and global commercial networks.

From a methodological perspective, the dual analytical approach of examining both the racializing subjects and the racialized objects reveals the operational mechanisms of racialization, allowing for their systematic deconstruction and analysis. This framework offers critical insights into the structural foundations of racial ideology by demonstrating how racialization operates as a process, rather than merely documenting its outcomes. Additionally, the evidence shows that even in regions with small Black populations or limited participation in slave trading networks, the material effects of racial thinking appeared in visible social, legal, and cultural practices. This finding reveals that racialization operated independently of demographic density or direct colonial involvement, functioning instead as a broader European intellectual and social phenomenon. The analysis thus highlights the complex roles that racial terminology plays in constructing difference. These labels were more than simple descriptions; they acted as active agents in shaping racialized social realities. Through their semantic, social, and political uses, these terms illustrate how language serves both as a reflection of and a tool for sustaining racial hierarchies, where visible differences are employed as the purported basis for systems of categorization and exclusion.

Despite these findings, the research faces several limitations. The analysis remains necessarily fragmentary and incomplete, reflecting the inherent challenges of reconstructing racialized experiences from archival materials mainly created by dominant groups. Although this study uses diverse sources from different time periods and regions to build the broadest possible analytical framework, significant gaps still exist in the documentary record. Relying on external observations and administrative documents inevitably favors the perspectives of racializing agents over those of racialized individuals. The lack of documented self-testimonies in German from the early modern period is a major epistemological constraint, making any effort to recover subjective experiences fundamentally approximate. This absence reflects not just an archival oversight but a structural silencing built into the very systems of knowledge production being studied. Thus, while the study sheds light on the mechanisms of racialization and the role of language in shaping social hierarchies, its conclusions must be understood as provisional, highlighting patterns and possibilities rather than fully reconstructing the lived experiences of those marginalized.

In addition, the focus on German-speaking territories, while providing necessary

analytical depth, may inadvertently reproduce the bounded nature of national historiographies that recent scholarship seeks to transcend. Additionally, the focus on the long eighteenth century, although justified by source availability and historical significance, cannot capture the entire trajectory of racialization processes across longer temporal spans. These methodological boundaries create analytical blind spots that may obscure transnational connections and longer-term continuities.

However, within the context of evolving epistemological approaches to marginalized histories, studies of this nature can make meaningful, if modest, contributions to making previously hidden perspectives visible and highlighting historical gaps. The methodological challenges themselves become analytically useful, revealing how certain voices were systematically excluded from historical documentation and pointing to the structural nature of archival silences in racialized contexts. These constraints thus serve not just as limitations but as evidence of the processes under investigation.

6. Conclusion

This investigation opens several promising paths for future research. The theoretical frameworks developed in this study suggest broader methodological uses for uncovering marginalized historical narratives. An essential next step involves refining and organizing the method of analyzing white-authored sources to identify Black presence, making this approach more accessible for wider scholarly use. Such research may subsequently shed light on the existence of Black communities within German territories.

Hamburg stands out as a particularly compelling case study because of its strategic location as a major port city during the Revolutionary War period. This unique geographical and historical setting sheds light on the complex economic and cultural connections that define transatlantic commerce. The city's diverse commercial ties, including its involvement in Danish colonial trade networks, integration into German commercial hinterlands, and extensive partnerships with major European trading powers, offer multiple entry points for examining German participation in colonial and transatlantic economies.

Additionally, several specific research areas deserve focused attention. Urban social ordinances that may have regulated the treatment, movement, or appearance of "foreigners" are an underexplored source of documents. Likewise, the commercial activities and social networks of Sephardic Jewish merchant families may offer further evidence of Black presence in Germanic territories. Moreover, the Schimmelmann case study presents particularly rich opportunities for multifaceted analysis: from a business history perspective, the company's plantation economy investments provide valuable insights into the operations of absentee planters throughout Central Europe. Furthermore, significant questions remain regarding the “Hofmohren”, particularly concerning their acquisition and the networks that facilitated their presence at European courts. Were all Black servants commissioned appointments, or did some arrive as gifts from merchants and traders seeking favor with higher authorities? Understanding these procurement networks and social mechanisms represents a crucial area for future investigation. These research trajectories require both micro-historical studies of individual actors and intensive macro-structural analysis to construct a comprehensive understanding of the historical phenomena examined here, ultimately contributing to a more complete picture of Germany's role in Atlantic racialization processes.

The study of Black communities in early modern German territories is still in its early stages of development as a field. At the same time, research into how racism manifested during this period continues to raise more questions than answers. However, this study has established one

key point: Kramer's claim that the N-word was the standard term for Black people is false, and his objection to the call to order is certainly not “Sieg der Redefreiheit”, but the reproduction of structural racism. Regarding the M-word, the renaming of *Anton Wilhelm Amo Street* was long overdue, as this thesis demonstrates the racial connotations associated with the term.

Fig. 6: Photo taken at the celebratory renaming of the M-Street in Berlin, on August 23, 2025.

7. Appendix

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7.2 List of Figures

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