Figures of disintegration. 'Half-castes' and 'frontiersmen' in German colonial literature on South West Africa

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Abstract

Processes of collective identity formation, its establishment, endangerment and possible destruction can not only be described as a common pattern of German colonial literature on South West Africa, but rather must be seen as one of its main subjects. As a precondition for community and identity a radical discretion or exclusivity is drawn up between antagonists in colonial literature whereby any comprehension, any mutual understanding is impossible. All contact between ‘black’ and ‘white’ is presented as an existential and fatal indiscretion, which – for both sides – leads to bastardization, identity loss, ‘Verkafferung’ and, ultimately, to decline. In the context of these virulent problems of construction of, threats to and preservation of collective identity in an environment coded fundamentally as alien, which affect colonial discourse projections, the marking of a border as the demarcation line, as the point of no return, but also the crossing of that border as a challenge or threat, constitute only apparently diametrically opposed forms, which are compressed into the figures of the ‘border runner’ on the one hand and the ‘hybrid’ on the other. This essay traces back these constructions through a broad range of material and by means of examples of German colonial literature on South West Africa and locates them in the literary historical, historical discourse and historically-epistemologically contexts of the 19th to early 20th centuries.

Places of the self

In the preface of his Deutsches Südwester-Buch published in 1929 Hans Grimm states that there is no such thing as “a non-political colonial book.” Grimm probably did not have the same definition of ‘the political’ in mind as Carl Schmitt a few years later, declaring a discrete distinction between friend and foe, between the self and the other.2

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In colonial literatures processes of collective identity formation, of its establishment, endangerment and possible eradication are in a sense paradigmatically simulated in a laboratory situation, with the colony itself as a stage for the mise-en-scène of the play of identities. The encounter with the ‘other’ and the disconcertment with this encounter are central motifs in these literatures. Borders, demarcation, delimitation and the dissolution of the boundaries of the self and the other permeate and define these literatures, indeed, they are their essential theme. Various German colonial literature texts, one might say, draw on the colonies as a setting and may even develop their story on the basis of matters of colonial policy or colonial affairs, but refer to something entirely different: they speak about finding oneself as an individual and as a people through the confrontation with and the struggle against a bleak landscape and insubordinate ‘indigenes’. They speak about what is ‘German’, or that which is to become ‘German’. At the same time the portrayal of the ‘wilderness’ and the ‘savage’ generates the counter-image of the ‘German’, who creates the landscape as well as himself. The texts operate with constructions of difference based on discrete in- and exclusion. The marking of boundaries as a demarcation line, as point of no return, but also the crossing of that line as a challenge or threat are two only seemingly opposing variations (in this context), which manifest themselves in the characters of the ‘frontiersman’ (Grenzläufer) and the ‘half-caste’ (Mischling).

Thus, the focus here is not on the imagery of ‘frontiersmen’ or of ‘half-castes’ found in colonial literature, but on the structure of the discursive field into which these concepts are imagined — sometimes as actual characters within a plot, in the case of the ‘half-castes’, however, often as a significant gap in the literary constructions of colonial reality.

For a long time scholars saw Kolonialliteratur merely as trivial fiction and propaganda, located on the margins of German intellectual and discursive history. Reading German colonial literature with a focus on aspects of the construction of identity, however, might not only be useful for the colonial context, but may allow conclusions about the processes of constructing, distributing and perpetuating conceptions of individual and collective identity in the first third of the 20th century to be drawn. Examining the postulate of a discrete association between races as portrayed in colonial literature it becomes clear that the idea of exclusive societies formed a basic pattern within the quest for Germany’s cultural and political present as well as for its future and that it was functionally inscribed and accepted as known reality within the process of producing collective identity. It must be assumed that the practices of re-presenting the ‘half-caste’ in German colonial literature are connected with a specific knowledge of collective identity and that they have been generated within the conventions of collective speech about them.3

Even a cursory reading of colonial texts reveals how consistently patterns of discourse on individual and collective identity are interconnected. The colonies are even portrayed repeatedly as an ideal framework for the realisation of collective identity. What is meant by this is demonstrated in the following paragraph:

A dismal and foggy November morning of 1892 was hanging over the port of Hamburg. Fine showers of rain would come down upon the storage sheds along the quays and the considerable number of unrigged for-and-aft schooners and barques discharging their shipments. The workers were swearing morosely, throwing canvases over the bales and sacks, the supercargoes stood on the deck-planks and next to the loading carts and were annoyed.4

This is the opening passage of Sofie von Uhde’s novel *Die Rieders. Geschichte einer deutschen Familie in Südwest*. The initial situation, in which “‘Ella Woermann’ of the African Steamship Company” sets about “leaving Hamburg for the new German colony Southwest on one of her unscheduled journeys”5 is hardly original in the context of German colonial novels. The exposition and the plot development of this novel are in keeping with the widely standardized model of German colonial novels since the 1890s: most of the narrative literature begins with the protagonist embarking in Hamburg. Rather stereotypical is the description of certain occurrences and locations during the passage: seasickness, a stopover on Madeira or one of the Canary Islands, crossing-the-equator ceremony, first contact with the ‘coloureds’ and the sense of alienation. A guiding theme is the protagonist’s disillusionment with the barrenness of the South West African landscape on arrival in Swakopmund.

In most of these narratives, however, this disillusionment is soon reinterpreted as a challenge and an opportunity to prove oneself. Thus, at first sight of the bleak shores of South West Africa, the protagonists in von Uhde’s novel have the following impression:

From the wastelands yonder something fateful was blowing across to them so powerfully that every resistance ceased. The age-old ancient German destiny to break water out of the stones and to fertilize the soil with pain, blood and sweat – here it was waiting again with merciless eyes along the German path. The ancient hardship and the age-old shining crown of the German man – here too, they were waiting both to burden and to crown.6

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5 Ibid. (“Unter ihnen schickte die ‘Ella Woermann’ der Afrikanischen Dampfschifffahrts-Aktiengesellschaft sich an, Hamburg zu verlassen und zu einer ihrer außerplanmäßigen Fahrten nach der neuen deutschen Kolonie Südwest auszureisen.”)

6 Ibid.: 27. (“Aus den Wüsten dort drüben wehte Schicksalhaftes so stark über sie hin, dass alle Abwehr schwie. Die uralte, deutsche Schicksal, Wasser zu schlagen aus den Steinen und mit Schmerzen und Blut und Schwier zu düngen, dies war es was auch hier wieder mit unerbittlichen Augen am deutschen Wege stand. Die uralte Not und die uralte leuchtende Krone des deutschen Menschen – auch hier warteten sie, um zu beladen und um zu krönen, gleichermaßen.”)
What is pictured so dramatically here is the interconnection of space, self-conception and Germanness, the conception of colonial expansion as necessary prerequisite for the individual as well as for the collective German identity. However, Sofie von Uhde is hardly alone in doing this in the context of German colonial literature, nor is she the first to state this connection. It is not economic reasons that are given to justify the colonial project, but issues of finding oneself, of self realisation and identity – with the colonies as ideal framework of realising individual and collective identity.

This becomes particularly clear in the literature on the Schutzgebiet (protectorate) German South West Africa, where one notices a significant shift between the discourses of politics and colonial literature: Since the South West African landscape turned out to be neither blessed with natural resources, nor completely uninhabited as foreseen in the plan for extensive colonisation, voices were repeatedly raised against the project, especially in the early 1890s, demanding withdrawal from the colony altogether. In German colonial literature, however, this reasoning underwent a crucial reframing: It was exactly this perceived ‘barrenness’ that was interpreted as ideal conditions for German cultural and colonial work, as a possibility of proving and fulfilling oneself, as well as providing a framework for establishing and realising identity.

Another text, Wilhelm Volz’ poem Mein liebes Land Südwest, published in 1911 in Emil Sembritzki’s Kolonial-Gedicht- und Liederbuch, articulates this programme along these lines:

I love you, you much maligned country / and let others speak ill of you; / I love you in spite of thorns and sand, / with those immeasurable plains of yours! // The heart in my chest is stretching ever so far / and dares to spread its wings; / alone with itself in deepest solitude / it can embellish its own world. // And how the finest force gains strength in you / when someone dares to struggle with you; / and how he proudly delights at his feat, / when he succeeded in conquering your soil. […]

This aesthetically rather modest poem, displays patterns of a line of argumentation that are typical of colonial discourses: First, a common, economic objection (bleakness and infertility of the land) is cited. Thus, the debate on the legitimacy and sense of the colonial project is seemingly integrated into the colonial discourse itself. However, this objection is not there to be debated but simply to be invalidated. At the same time it is

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9 Wilhelm Volz, “Mein liebes Land Südwest”, in: Emil Sembritzki, (ed.), Kolonial-Gedicht- und Liederbuch, Berlin, Deutscher Kolonial-Verlag, 1911: 23f. (“Ich liebe dich, du vielgeschmähtes Land / Und lasse andere Übles von dir sprechen; / Ich liebe dich trotz Dornen und trotz Sand, / Mit deinen unansehbar weiter Flächen! // Da dehnt sich in der Brust das Herz so weit / Und wagt es, seine Schweigen zu entfalten; / Mit sich allein in tiefer Einsamkeit / Kann sein eigne Welt es ausgestalten. // Und wie erstarkt an dir die beste Kraft / Wenn einer wagt, mit Dir im Kampf zu ringen; / Und wie genießt er stolz, was er geschafft, / Wenn’s ihm gelang, dein Erdreich zu bezwingen. […]”)
striking that the pro-colonial discourse does not take up the economic arguments to
develop an appropriate counterargument. Instead, it switches to an entirely different
field of discourse to weaken the economic point. The argument against the colonization
of Deutsch-Südwest on economic grounds is countered with identity philosophy: even in
barren South West Africa the individual is still able to achieve ‘great works’, to shape his
“own world” and, finally, to summon forth his best qualities in the “struggle” with the
wilderness and thus to find himself.

The text ties in with a central and, for the colonial discourse — especially for colonial
literature —, defining aspect of the critical discourse on modernisation around 1900.
Whereas ‘at home’ (Heimat) space is stated to be growing increasingly scarce, in South
West Africa the text discovers “inmeasurable plains” allowing one to be one’s own
master. The objectives of an identity philosophical or even a (proto)existentialist
programme emanating from these expressions can be substantiated in numerous
examples of colonial literature, where the difficulties posed by the geographical and
meteorological conditions in South West Africa are stylised as a catalyst for self-
realisation and identity.

Thus, in his depiction of the persecution of the Herero Philalethes Kuhn, surgeon major
of the so-called Schutztruppe (colonial army) during the Herero War, quotes from the
“posthumous fragments” of a book which a colonial soldier named Otto Eggers
purportedly intended to write: “Each country has its own special energy that shapes
man. Harsh countries form vigorous, capable inhabitants, they force the man who is to
to live there to apply all his force, to bring it to life, in order to make a living.”10 Here,
existence is directly linked to a ‘struggle for life’ which is regarded as more effective the
harder the conditions are. In barren South West Africa, the text continues, is therefore
said to lie “a tremendous energy” rooted “in its inhospitality”, since it provides “the soil
for sound, vigorous Volkstum [nation-hood]”. Struggle for existence and perseverance
in this struggle for existence are seen as a prerequisite for realizing and retaining
collective identity: the land is “bad enough for the Germans to be able to stay
German.”11

This aphorism from Otto Eggers’ “posthumous fragments” not only expresses the
programme of colonial identity conception concisely, but it can also be understood as a
theme and paradigm of colonial discourse per se, with Otto Eggers’ authority at times
assuming the status of a prototypical conception of colonial life and existence. In the

10 Philalethes Kuhn, “Ein Ritt ins Sandfeld von Südwestafrika”, in: Margarete von Eckenbrecher et al.,
Deutsch-Südwestafrika – Kriegs- und Friedensbilder. Selbsterlebnisse geschildert von Frau Frau Helene von
Falkenhausen, Stabsarzt Dr. Kuhn, Oberleutnant Stuhlmann, Leipzig, Weicher, 1907: 34-46 (34). (“Jedes
Land hat seine besondere menschenbildende Energie. Rauhe Länder bilden energische, tüchtige Bewohner,
sie zwingen den Menschen, der in ihnen zu leben hat, alle ihm innewohnende Spannkraft in Anwendung zu
bringen, lebendig werden zu lassen, damit er seinen Lebensunterhalt finde.”)

11 Ibid.: 35. (“In Südwestafrika steckt eine gewaltige Energie. Sie liegt in seiner Unwürlichkeit. Diese ist das
beste an dem Gebiet. Sie gibt den Boden für ein tüchtiges, starkes Volkstum. Das Land ist schlecht genug,
dass die Deutschen darin deutsch bleiben können.”)
preface of his essay *Menschen und Tiere in Deutsch-Südwest*12 (Men and Beast in German South West Africa), first published 1914, the author “Adolf Fischer”, for example, puts himself in the discursive shade of “Otto Eggers”:

> Otto Eggers should have written this book. He seemed to have something like this in mind. It would have become something great, for he is said to have had formidable skills: diligence and prowess and a great love for the country.13

It seems remarkable that in this passage the ‘author’ steps back behind an authority he believes more capable of authoring the ‘work’. What is interesting is that these qualifications, the ‘skills’ of authorship, are attributed to qualities such as “diligence and prowess” on the one hand, but also to a “love for the country” that “did not set any visible limits to these skills”.14 And it is exactly this aspect in which the actual potential of South West Africa lies. For according to Adolf Fischer, he who wanted to survive had to be many things at once: “Lawmaker, judge, caretaker, hunter, explorer, soldier […].”15 Again quoting colonial criticism of modernisation, Fischer goes on to state that it is exactly this “multitude of tasks” which challenged all the individual’s talents, “which otherwise would remain unexploited and suffocate in the narrowness of a profession”.16 While in the modern, functionally differentiated society, where the many skills of the individual are limited by choice of profession, specialisation and role requirement, the texts find that in unexplored and sparsely peopled South West Africa the realisation of a holistic existence and identity is still feasible.

Parallels to Sofie von Uhde’s novel as well as to Wilhelm Volz’ poem are obvious. By reference to the authority of “Otto Eggers” the author “Adolf Fischer” explicates a basal pattern of colonial conceptions of identity. Otto Eggers’ ‘work’, however, is said to have remained unfinished: It is said to have been “extinguished” during the “Great Revolts”, when his life, too, was extinguished. Eggers himself is said to have quickly faded into obscurity, “like many others who had been a hope but did not have time to bring it to fruition.”17 Fischer subsequently quotes the same sentences by Otto Eggers’ which Kuhn quoted before him, placing himself in the succession of the colonial soldiers who became the messianic figure of the colonial project: He who, like Eggers, recognises the

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14 Ibid. (”[…] man sagte ihm ein starkes Rüstzeug nach: Fleiß und Können und die große Liebe zum Land […] das den Fähigkeiten noch keine sichtbaren Grenzen zog.”)
15 Ibid. (“Der Offizier der Schutztruppe von damals war vieles in einem: Gesetzgeber, Richter, Verwalter, Jäger, Forscher, Soldat […]”)
16 Ibid. (“Die Vielheit der Aufgaben belebte Anlagen, die sonst ungenutzt bleiben und in der Enge des Berufs erstickten.”)
tremendous energy of the colony in its inhospitableness is “on the right track” — on the same track, that is, Fischer was on when he wrote his first book — the same book whose authorship he ultimately attributes to Eggers.18

Delegating authorship and fashioning oneself as a successor is a defining procedure of all of Fischer’s published works. The attempt to realise one’s own identity in an ‘opus’, indeed to create a ‘biography’ identical with the ‘opus’, makes Fischer one of the most enigmatic and interesting writers — possibly even one of the most interesting literary characters — in the context of colonial literature; the objectives of colonial conceptions of identity are presented in a radical way based on the emerging configuration of the time.

Hardly anything is known about the ‘author’ himself, aside from what the narrator of his texts has to say about him. 19 This means that knowledge of the ‘real’ Adolf Fischer derives from his texts, Fischer’s ‘biography’ is read in his books, the paratext ‘author’ and the text itself are — at least in this regard — consistent.

What do these texts say about their author? — Strictly speaking, we are dealing with one text in which the narrator Fischer talks about the author Fischer, namely the revised 1930 edition of the text in which he pays tribute to Otto Eggers. At the age of 27 he reputedly participated as an army officer in the war against the Herero, their persecution and expulsion into the Omaheke desert and the subsequent operations to keep them in the desert until most of them died. He also fought in the Nama War and was part of Captain Erckert’s platoon. In 1906 “Fischer” became district chief in the north of the protectorate and commander of Namutoni at age 29.20 He is said to have taken over the station at Koes at the border of the Kalahari Desert in 1910 and to have finally returned to Germany in 1912.21 All that is known about Fischer after the year 1912 are the dates of the publications and reprints of his works.22 Fischer purportedly died in 1946 — this, of course, is not reported by the narrator of Fischer’s texts, but by Werner Tabel, who

18 Ibid. ("Wer dies erkannt hat, ist, glaube ich, auf dem rechten Weg. Ich ging ihn, als ich dieses Buch schrieb, das sonst niemand schreiben wollte.")


20 This suggests 1877 as the year of birth.


22 His first book Menschen und Tiere in Deutsch-Südwest was published 1914 by the Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt. A second book titled Orient was published six years later, viz. 1920, also by the Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt. It took no less than fifteen years for Fischer’s next publication after Orient to be released: Südwester Offiziere was published by the Safari publishing company in 1935. Apart from these three published works only one additional text came out under the author’s name Adolf Fischer: a 45-page essay titled Südwester Phantasie, published 1938 in the book Afrika spricht zu Dir. Selbsterlebnisse deutscher Kolonialpioniere, edited by Paul Ritter. This South West African fantasy is a fanciful work of prose, in which Leo Frobenius’ Kulturkreis theory merges with a Pleiadian episteme and in which the narrator conjectures Atlantis to have been located off the coast of modern-day Namibia and the San to be descendants of the survivors of the sinking of Atlantis.
refers to a certain Dr. Schmiedel from Dortmund-Hörde. Schmiedel in turn does not seem to remember who reported that date to him.  

So much for the ‘biographical’ context which might not be biographical after all. But it is this aporia that seems so remarkable: for it is significant in this context that the author’s ‘biography’ should seem to merge entirely into the ‘opus’ supplied by “a thousand sources”, which the bleak field of South West Africa holds for the colonist, with the “field” eventually being utterly internalised by the colonist: “The field begins”, the narrator sums up at the end of the essay,

where the plaster ends. There nature grows large and man diminishes in size.  
There is silence, and man’s desires grow silent. There is plainness, and this relieves man’s doubt and trepidation. There, nothing is good or bad. Everything is, and everything is under the same law. But the field is everywhere where there is room for awe in the hearts […]  

And in another passage he states: “The Kalahari Desert made up for everything. It showed him the way to himself and to a strong life.”

In colonial conceptions life, biography and existence ideally merge in the ‘work’ to be accomplished in the struggle for existence in a bleak landscape. Here, work and life are considered coextensive or identical in the tradition of Idealism: work becomes a generator of identity or is at least presented as such.

The observable interconnection between territory, struggle for existence and identity can be seen as a basic pattern of colonial discourse. In Fischer’s 1935 book Südwester Offiziere, in which Otto Eggers is conspicuously mentioned without, however, receiving explicit attention, this pattern undergoes a programmatic narrowing with a downright existential connotation. He writes of the colonial soldier Heinrich Georg Kirchheim:

Commitment without reservation, looking to absorb the experience with every pore, made him an object for the potential of Africa to show its many sides. He became a token in a game, which required nothing more of him than the talent to remain himself with every change of scenery.

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24 Fischer, Menschen: not paginated (“Preface”). (“Aber diese Alten waren Sammelbecken, die aus tausend Quellen gespeist wurden.”)
26 Ibid.: 64. (“Die Kalahari entschädigte ihn. Sie wies ihm den Weg zu sich und zu einem starken Leben.”)
27 Fischer, Offiziere: 151. (“Hingabe ohne Vorbehalten, die mit jeder Pore das Erlebnis in sich aufzunehmen trachtete, machte ihn zu einem Objekt, an dem die Möglichkeiten Afrikas ihre Vielheit zeigen konnten. Er wurde zur Figur in einem Spiel, das von ihm nichts anderes forderte als das Talent, bei Szenenwechsel stets er selbst zu bleiben”).
For that reason, Fischer argues, no-one is more deserving of the “honorary title ‘Afrikaner’” than Kirchheim — an award which honours an “accordance of self and environment”.28

This seemingly paradoxical construction — to see unison of self and environment, while being challenged in different ways which question one’s own existence, in finding oneself and becoming as well as maintaining identical with oneself — is paradigmatic of colonial conceptions of individual and collective identity.29 Furthermore the programme formulated in this construction becomes a narrative motive in many colonial novels published between 1905 and 1945. I seek to demonstrate this based on a cursory reading of two very successful colonial Entwicklungsromane: Gustav Frenssen’s Peter Moors Fahrt nach Südwest (Peter Moor’s Journey to Southwest) and the trilogy of novels Der Südafrikanische Lederstrumpf (The South African Leatherstocking) by Bernhard Voigt.30

Leatherstocking in German South West Africa

In Voigt’s cycle of novels questions of ‘existence’ and ‘identity’ are part of the plot as such but rather are elucidated through the macrostructure of the narration and the depiction of the characters.31 It is the story of the colonisation of southern Africa from

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28 Ibid. (“Keinem Offizier gebührt der Ehrentitel Afrikaner mehr als ihm.”). It must be noted that in colonial discourse the term ‘Afrikaner’, often used in the phrase ‘Alter Afrikaner’ (old, real African), is a title bestowed to ‘white’ colonialists only and never used in reference to the indigenous population of the African colonies.

29 For aspects of the earlier European colonial discourse on landscape and the national self see e.g.: Jason J. Lindquist, “‘Under the influence of an exotic nature... national remembrances are insensibly effaced’. Threats to the European Subject in Humboldt’s Personal Narrative of Travels to the Equinoctial Regions of the New Continent”, Humboldt im Netz, V, 9, 2004: 49-64. URL: http://www.uni-potsdam.de/u/romanistik/humboldt/hin/pdf/hin9/komplett/hin9_komplett.pdf (accessed 2013-06-05). Here, the European spectator sees a wild and exotic nature which threatens the integrity of European identity. The colonial discourse of the early 20th century can be read as a continuity of or even an answer to this stated challenge: While Humboldt’s South American wilderness of abundance is a threat to European national discretion, Fischer’s and others’ [Deutsch-Südwest] Africa in its scarcity and hardship reconciles the individual with their national self.

30 Gustav Frenssen, Peter Moors Fahrt nach Südwest. Ein Feldzugsbericht, Berlin, Grote, 1906; Bernhard Voigt’s Südafrikanischer Lederstrumpf includes the volumes Die Vortrecker (Potsdam 1934), Die Deutsche Landnahme (Potsdam 1936) and Die Farmer vom Sensrevier (Potsdam 1936). Excerpts from the first volume were published 1942 as field post bag booklet, sections of the third volume were later revised by Voigt for a juvenile book edition, published 1943 under the title Im Schülerheim zu Windhuk. Deutsche Jungen in Steppe und Busch by the Safari publishing company.

31 Bernhard Voigt (1878-1945) was a teacher between the years 1908 and 1921, for a while also imperial school inspector, in South West Africa. During this time he compiled and edited the book Deutsch-Südwestafrika – Land und Leute. Eine Heimatkunde für Deutschlands Jugend und Volk (Stuttgart 1913) at the behest of the Imperial Government of German South West Africa. After his return to Germany he also wrote numerous novels, novellas and non-fiction books on colonial themes. Apart from the Südafrikanischer Lederstrumpf, especially his novels Bahnbrecher der Wildnis (1929), Die Buren. Südafrikanisches Grenzerbuch (1930, five reprints in the same year), Das Herz der Wildnis. Roman aus Deutsch-Südwest-
the first treks of the Boers in the 1830s, to the “German settlement” (the title of the second part of the novel) in South West Africa, the revolts of the natives in the 1890s and from 1904 to 1907, the loss of the German colonies in the course of World War I, to the depiction of the lives of German farmers in the 1930s under the mandate of the Union of South Africa. The narrative structure is episodic in nature throughout but especially in the first two volumes, with little to connect the individual episodes. The agents come and go; the reader is introduced to a multitude of characters, places and names which are soon forgotten again.

The narrative of the first two volumes is held together by the character of the German frontiersman Fritz Heller — later called “Starkherz” (Strongheart) or, in a not-so-subtle reference to James F. Cooper’s cycle of novels, “Lederstrumpf” (Leatherstocking): the first volume begins with the arrival of twenty-year-old Fritz Heller in southern Africa; his death at the age of almost 90 marks the end of the second volume. However, this character actually only fulfills the function of a protagonist in the first 110 pages of the first volume. After that (i.e. in over 600 additional pages until the end of the second volume) the character is a mere observer, companion and often only by accident a participant. The frame story of both these volumes, which cover a period of 70 years, features a multitude of events and even developments and changes, while the character of Fritz Heller remains conspicuously static throughout. Heller’s progression from “Fritz” to “Starkherz”, from ‘greenhorn’ to “Lederstrumpf”, or — to express it in the terms of the colonial discourse — from the ‘inexperienced European’ to the ‘old African’ takes place at a spectacular rate: Heller, who has just arrived in Africa, is characterised through a reference to Eichendorff’s Taugenichts (Good-for-Nothing): a romantic ne’er-do-well, who, with a fiddle in his hand, sets out into the world. Before Heller even arrives at the Protestant missionary family, where he was sent by his parents to have “his main vice” — his romantic reverie — cast out32, the missionary receives a letter in which his prospective pupil is described as a “veritable good-for-nothing33”, who only treasures one book, which he “constantly carries with him” and which contains the “songs of a Catholic poet named Eichendorff.”34

As a means to the end of becoming a man the novel portrays — in the context of colonial literature quite conventionally — the inhospitable African wilderness and the threat posed by the ‘natives’. “Hard work, to cultivate the scrubland35” is the first step on the way to becoming an Alter Afrikaner; the second a raid on the farm by ‘natives’, in the course of which their work is destroyed and numerous ‘whites’ are slain, among them a blonde girl with whom Heller had fallen in love. In an environment that threatens his very existence Fritz Heller becomes a different person, or, more to the point and only seemingly
paradoxically: he becomes himself. Fritz exchanges the violin — which had been smashed to pieces by the ‘blacks’ during the attack — for a rifle, sheds any outer reverie and becomes “Starkherz” / “Lederstrumpf”: a German frontiersman, who decides on a permanent existence in an environment that threatens this very existence — an environment in which he has to persevere and that eventually substantiates him.

From this moment on the character remains completely static unaffected by all the events described in the novel, even when he influences or is clearly involved in them, e.g. when loved ones perish. For “Starkherz” there is no ‘experience’ capable of compromising his ‘identity’, his ‘existence’. On the contrary: all conceivable challenges or threats described in the countless episodes of the novel are presented as mere confirmation of the self.

One could simply ascribe the episodic structure and the rigidity of the “Lederstrumpf” character to the ineptitude of the author. But this structure can also be read as an intentional narrative strategy — after all, it allows for the illustration of an aspect central to identity constructions in colonial discourse: “Fritz Heller” is outlined as a character — to pick up on Adolf Fischer again — for the potential of Africa to show its versatility; a character whose function is to remain identical with itself through every change of scenery. It is not without reason that after his death “Fritz Heller” is called “the oldest African” — well within the meaning of the abovementioned interpretation of that term.36

And it was Adolf Fischer, too, who put the conception evident throughout Voigt’s trilogy of novels in the harsh and no less melodramatic words:

Southwest was not merely a country of harshness and hardship, albeit it might have favoured the harsh and hardened. […] But Southwest was certainly no country for the weak and indecisive. They did not come to stand on this land, but to lie underneath it.37

The individual, that is the message of colonial texts, must prevail in the projected eternal struggle for the self, for one’s own identity — or perish.

Peter Moor’s journey to the Volksgemeinschaft

The question of prevailing or perishing is also a central aspect in one of the best-known, or at least the most successful texts, next to Hans Grimm’s Volk ohne Raum (A People without Space), of German colonial literature, namely Peter Moors Fahrt nach Südwest38

36 Voigt, Landnahme: 391.

37 Fischer, Menschen: 145f. (“Südwest war nicht ein Land bloß der Strenge und Härte, wenn es vielleicht auch die Strengen und Gehärteten begünstigte. […] Gewiß aber war Südwest kein Land für Schwache und Unbestimmte. Sie kamen nicht auf diesem Land zu stehen, sondern unter ihm zu liegen.”)

38 The novel was first published in 1906, in the same year its reprint reached 63,000 copies. By 1945 several new editions had been published (the complete edition accounted for more than half a million copies), among others a school edition with an introduction, illustrations and commentaries from 1915. In 1908 English editions were published in Great Britain and the USA. An annotated edition for German lessons in US-American schools was published in 1914. In addition, the novel was translated into Danish, Dutch, Afrikaans and Swedish. A Swedish school edition was published four times between 1908 and 1920. In
by Gustav Frenssen. However, while Voigt and Fischer put the existence and identity of the individual up for negotiation in Frenssen’s text it is inextricably linked to the question of the existence and identity of the collective.

Frenssen, too, uses the narrative structure to exemplify issues of existence and identity; nevertheless, unlike Voigt, he relocates this process of insight into a universal paradigm into the protagonist of his text, which, as a consequence, may be more clearly labelled an Entwicklungsroman. In his Lebensbericht from 1941 Frenssen himself characterized the macrostructure of his novel as a sequence of “two completely identical waves”, each composed of four elements: “departure, in the bush, hardship (catastrophe), rest”. What is more, the second wave exceeds “the first one in terms of force and wealth of images”. It is no coincidence that the narrative pattern Frenssen describes can be associated with the structural principle of the medieval Arthurian romance in courtly tradition (departure — first adventure cycle — crisis — second adventure cycle — successful denouement) quoting a literary tradition which describes the maturing of a character and his or her path into a community; at the same time this outlines a programmatic aspect of Peter Moors Fahrt nach Südwest.

The novel is divided into two almost equally long parts, with the first part telling the story of the protagonist’s departure as a volunteer in a marine infantry battalion to South West Africa on the occasion of the uprising of the natives. The motivation for the departure is at first described as an exclusively subjective one, as an escape from the narrowness of his father’s blacksmith workshop, where an assistant had once predicted that young Moor would work the anvil until he turned grey.

The Journey to Southwest turns out to be a torture for Peter Moor. The encounter with the foreign world is characterized as unsettling and destructive for the individual, the inhospitable wilderness and the unfamiliar climate strain the physis, the ‘mass of the blacks’ threatens the existence of the ‘isolated white man’. The end of the first part features despair and illness as central motifs, but at the same time it presents a

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39 Gustav Frenssen (1863-1945). Born in Bark (Holstein), after theological studies Protestant pastor in the Dithmarschen region (1890-1902). His first novel, Die Sandgräfin, was published in 1895. In 1901 Frenssen published the novel Jörn Uhl, which lay the groundwork for his literary success. This novel was probably the first truly German bestseller of the 20th century and sold 100,000 copies within a year. By way of comparison: Thomas Mann’s Buddenbrooks, also published in 1901, sold a mere 1,000 copies in the same period. From 1902 Frenssen was an independent writer. In the years of 1910 and 1912 Frenssen was even considered for the Nobel Prize in Literature — both times he did not win the prize, which was awarded to Paul Heyse (in 1910) and to Gerhart Hauptmann (in 1912). In the beginning his attitude towards the Weimar Republic was rather open-minded; however, later he supported the NSDAP without joining the party. After the takeover by the NSDAP he became a titular senator of the Reichsverband of German writers. In the Third Reich Frenssen received many literary prizes (e.g. the Wilhelm Raabe Prize in 1936 and in 1938 the Goethe Medal for Art and Science).

40 Gustav Frenssen, Lebensbericht, Berlin, Grote, 1941: 144.

solution: the individual overcomes the crisis by merging with the collective. This moment of insight is explicitly coded as an epiphany:

And there, in the shadow of a veranda, stood a German woman; she was holding a baby in her arms. How we looked at her! […] Like the Three Wise Men from the East, who came from the desert and from their horses saw Mary with her child.42

Here, in an ‘oasis of Germanness’ in the middle of the ‘desert’, the shattered protagonist recovers to “complete health”.43 The complete second part of the novel serves as a confirmation of the realisation that an individual can only then find himself if he contributes to the establishing of a Volksgemeinschaft (community of the nation).

This conception is supported by the depiction of the characters. Most of the characters remain anonymous — even the name of ‘Moor’ can be found only twice in the whole novel; instead, they are characterized by their rank, occupation or, as Frenssen puts it, ‘Stammeszugehörigkeit’ (tribal membership): the general, the senior lieutenant, the doctor, “a linen weaver from Upper Silesia”, “a chimney sweeper from Berlin”, the Swabian, the Bavarian, a Boer. Even the ones who are introduced by names are not described in more detail than their nameless allies.44

Defining the characters not by character traits, emotions or appearance (the only feature of outward appearance — as a sign of increasing maturity — is continual growth of the men’s beards ‘in the bush’), but by social classifications and regional references, makes them universally valid prototypes, open for general identification. In addition, they do not appear as individuals, but as potential elements and functionaries within a collective. The threat from the ‘existentially other’, the transformation or substitution of the class struggle into or with a struggle between races enables the Silesians, Bavarians, Holsteins, linen weavers, chimney sweepers, simple soldiers, the officers and the general to create a homogeneous Volkskörper (body of the nation).45

The novel designs this mechanism as a paradigm valid not only within colonial contexts, but as a universal truth. Near the end of the novel the protagonist gazes across the vast veldt:

During the campaign I often thought: ‘What a shame! […] This whole matter is not worth all this precious blood!’ But then I heard this great song ringing all over South Africa and throughout the whole world which made me understand this matter.46

42 Ibid.: 111. (“Und da, im Schatten einer Veranda, stand eine deutsche Frau; sie hatte ein kleines Kind auf dem Arm. Wie wir hinsahen! […] Wie die heiligen drei Könige, die aus der Wüste kamen und vom Pferd herab Maria mit ihrem Kinde sahen.”)
43 Frenssen, Peter Moors : 116.
44 Ibid.: 180.
This insight paves the way to establishing a homogeneous Volkskörper that is as one with itself and with the territory which this Volk creates as its Lebensraum. At the end of the novel the arid veldt turns suggestively into a garden, grass springs from the soil previously depicted as barren and the thorn bush sprouts “snow-white blossoms”47: As Wolfgang Struck expresses it, like the blooming thorn bush the homogeneous community of the “whites” now generates a white territory.48

In the text the essential otherness of the two races is expressed in antithetical constructions which overlap and permeate each other: A fundamental racial otherness encoded in the terms ‘black’ and ‘white’ determines an irreconcilable antagonism of ‘culture’ and ‘wilderness’ and – closely associated with it – the contrast of ‘order’ and ‘amorphous mass’. The favourably connoted positions of ‘white’, ‘culture’ and ‘order’ are constantly threatened by their pejoratively connoted antitheses, which consequently appear as their potential negations.49

Visions of disintegration

According to colonial texts Gemeinschaft (community) and identity are based primarily on the radical distinction between antagonists, antagonists between whom any understanding, any communication, is impossible. Any rapprochement between ‘black’ and ‘white’ is described as an existential and disastrous indiscretion, which leads to a loss of distinctness, order and identity, in colonial terms to ‘bastardization’ or ‘kaffirisation’, and thereby eventually to ruin.

As a consequence, the idea of ‘Rassenmischung’ (race-mixing) is a provocation to the two most regimented fields of discourse of the middle-class society — as Foucault famously put it in L’ordre du discours (1971) —, namely sexuality and politics.50 Thus, a transgression of moral-sexual taboos inevitably involves a dissolution of political integrity — it is this topic exactly that is explored in Richard Küas’ novel Vom Baum der Erkenntnis (The Tree of Knowledge), published in 1911.51 However, dangerous encounters of white men with black women — as they are depicted e.g. by Küas — are often strangely infertile, so that here as well as in many other novels on the dangers of race-mixing, the reader looks in vain for a Mischling character. Nevertheless, in the texts in which half-caste characters occupy the gap between the exclusive existences of

47 Ibid.: 203. (“Es war die Zeit des Oktobers, wo in dieser Gegend der Frühling ins Land zieht. Regen und Gewitter waren schon tüchtig über die Steppe gefahren und fuhren noch darüber; davon spritzte nun neue Kraft aus der Erde, die so unfruchtbar aussah. […] Der vehaßte Dornbusch bekam dunkelgrüne Blätter und schneeweiße Blüten; manch einer von uns trat heran und pflegte ein buntes Zweiglein von dem Verhaßten.”)
49 Brehl, Vernichtung: 203-209.
50 Michel Foucault, Die Ordnung des Diskurses; Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 1991: 11.
‘whiteness’ and ‘blackness’, they are usually depicted as the result of breaking a taboo while disdaining all social taboos themselves. Their social and political behaviour is indiscreet and they appear highly sexualized and sexually aggressive, as can be seen in the example of the character of Ellen from Hans Grimm’s story Wie Grete aufhörte ein Kind zu sein (How Grete stopped being a child). As a daughter of a ‘Hottentot’ woman and a ‘white’ man, Ellen, who is described as “beautiful and hot and hot and beautiful and false as sin”,52 crosses and violates the sanctioned rules of the discourse between races and between the sexes: as a woman of colour she becomes the subject of this discourse — she usurps the position of the speaker, she authorises herself to take part in this discourse and to conduct it —, she takes the initiative, she determines the discourse and, eventually, the action. In this context the sexual charge is probably to be seen not so much as a male projection of female availability — as it often happens in literature — but rather as a projection of male corruptibility and dependence in the sense of Klaus Theweleit’s Männerphantasien (Male Phantasies), as a provocation of the integrity of the ‘white man’ — here in the realm of morality.53 With regard to politics Ellen’s behaviour is equally discreet: she operates in the grey area between the frontlines of ‘the whites’ and ‘the blacks’, and not belonging or under obligation to any of these groups, she pits them against each other, thereby bringing about her own downfall in the end.

Through this figure the colonial novel draws on patterns of popular travel, adventure or Indian (i.e. Native American) narratives of the 19th and early 20th century, whereby the discursive interconnection of basic parameters of colonial discourse and the patterns of ‘general knowledge’ around 1900 becomes apparent. Like Grimm’s Wie Grete aufhörte ein Kind zu sein, James F. Cooper’s Leatherstocking Tales is another example of how an essential discretion of the ‘races’ is constructed and how this construction is accompanied by a certain concept of having no future that is inherent in the ‘mixing of races’. Not only does the protagonist in these stories insist on his racial purity (he keeps emphasizing that he has “no cross in his blood”), but this construct becomes even more visible on the basis of the secondary characters’ behaviour and fate.54

54 The passage reads: “[…] ’tis strange that an Indian should understand white sounds better than a man who, his very enemies will own, has no cross in his blood, although he may have lived with the red skins long enough to be suspected.” (James Fenimore Cooper, The Last of the Mohicans. A Narrative of 1757, London, Colburn & Bentley, 1831: 30). Similar statements can be found in the complete cycle with ener-vating regularity. Here some more samples from the second novel of the cycle The Last of the Mohicans (they invariably concern ‘self-statements’ of Nathaniel Bampoo): “[…] As for me, who am of the whole blood of the whites […]” (p. 80); “Well done for the Delawares! Victory to the Mohicans!” cried Hawk-eye, once more elevating the butt of the long and fatal rifle; ‘a finishing blow from a man without a cross will never tell against his honour, nor rob him of his right to the scalp.” (p. 122); “Book! what have such as I, who am a warrior of the wilderness, though a man without a cross, to do with book?” (p. 126); “Forty days and forty nights did the imps crave our blood around this pile of logs, which I designed and partly reared, being, as you’ll remember, no Indian myself, but a man without a cross.” (p. 136); “Revenge is an Indian
possibility and the failure of ‘race-mixing’ between whites and Native Americans are openly discussed in the novel The Last of the Mohicans published in 1826, in which Leatherstocking and his companions, the chief of the Mohicans, Chingachgook, and his son Uncas, have to save the daughters of an English officer from the Hurons, the allies of the French.

Even the appearance of the two girls serves as a sort of phenotypical image of their social behavioural patterns and the position which they will adopt towards Native Americans: Alice, the younger of the two half-sisters, has a “dazzling complexion, fair golden hair, and bright blue eyes.” Cora, on the other hand, is described in the following manner:

The tresses of this lady were shining and black, like the plumage of the raven. Her complexion was not brown, but it rather appeared charged with the colour of the rich blood, that seemed ready to burst its bounds.

The younger of the two sisters – the blonde, reserved Alice – submits to the rules of the men’s world and fulfills the role of a woman decided for her by social conventions. It is not only by the description of her appearance that Cora is constructed as diametrically opposed to the idealized blonde and blue-eyed, radiant figure of Alice: As a daughter of a British officer and a mulatta, dark-haired Cora is herself the result of indiscretion and, like Ellen in Grimm’s story — albeit slightly less aggressively, behaves similarly indiscreetly. She, whose face “charged with the colour of the rich blood, that seemed ready to burst its bounds” already symbolizes the impulsiveness and the lack of restraint of this young woman, acts confidently in the men’s world, questions decisions and thereby is constantly pushing at the boundaries of social rules.

They also react rather differently when it comes to encounters with the other, the Indian (i.e. Native American): While at their first encounter with a Native American Alice backs away, shouts out and is filled with fear, Cora “produced no sound” but shows “an indescribable look of pity, admiration, and horror as her dark eye followed the easy motions of the savage.”

These reactions are prototypical of their overall behaviour towards the ‘savages’, which in the end will determine their fate: While Alice respects the rules of racial discretion, survives all the complications and finally — compliant to the rules of society — marries an English officer, the fate of her older half-sister symbolizes the consequences of indiscretion. For Cora not only shows compassion and admiration for the Native Americans, but also begins a romantic relationship with Uncas. Indiscretion leads to death in Cooper’s novel, too: Cora and Uncas are both killed by the Hurons. Racial feeling, and all who know me know that there is no cross in my veins” (p. 204); “Ha — as I am a man of white blood, […]” (p. 204).

55 Ibid.: 10.
56 Ibid.: 11.
57 Ibid.
discretion, conceptualised as a law of nature and additionally presented by Cooper as an ethical law, does not tolerate any violation.

The characterization of ‘half-castes’ as a threat to a biologically and ethically coded law of racial segregation can also be found in the works of arguably the most popular German author of travel literature and Native American narratives, i.e. in the novels and stories of Karl May. However, in his stories the indiscretion also has radical consequences for the personality of the ‘half-castes’, who are depicted as figures with pathological identity conflicts bordering on schizophrenia.

In a story initially published in 1896/97 under the title Der schwarze Mustang (“The Black Mustang”) in the youth magazine Der gute Kamerad (“The Good Comrade”),58 and later published in an extended form as an separate work this indispensable identity crisis of the ‘half-caste’ is already coded in the distinctly contradictory meanings of his two names: the railroad workers for whom he works as a scout call him Yato Inda, translated by the narrator as “good man”.59 His second name, the one he uses among the Comanches, to whom he betrays the railroad workers, is Ik Senanda, translated in the text as “vile snake”.60 Between these two poles — that of the “good man” and of the “vile snake” — ranges the personality of the “half-blood”, who belongs to neither side, and who eventually meets his death because he cannot decide which side he is on.

How rich and exciting the subject of ‘race-mixing’ as a threat to identity must have been for Karl May is seen in the fact that it appears repeatedly in his work, serving as the central motif for the development of the plot. His three-volume novel Old Surehand (1894-1897), written at almost the same time as Der schwarze Mustang, also revolves around the identity crisis of ‘half-blood’ characters.61 However, in this case the Mischlingsproblem (half-caste problem) depicted and the dissolution of identity associated with it, are presented on a more complex level: the problem is transferred to a family and the two personalities ascribed to the ‘half-caste’ are assigned to two brothers, who, nevertheless, still undergo an identity crisis.

The story revolves around the brothers, Leo and Fred Bender, children of a white man and a Christianised Native American woman. After the untimely and violent death of their father the brothers grow up separately, each oblivious to the existence of the other and to their own half-bloodedness. Leo Bender, from his outward appearance ‘white’, grows up among white people and as an adult becomes a famous ‘white’ hunter named Old Surehand. His younger brother Fred, who takes after his Native American mother, grows up under the name of Apanatschka as a Native American among Native Americans and

60 Ibid.: 47.
becomes their chieftain. They have in common a sense of not being wholly integrated into their social environment, even though they know nothing of their parents and their own ‘half-bloodedness’. According to the narrative, the social otherness, the feeling of not-belonging is a feature of the ‘half-blood’ even if his origins are unknown to him. The otherness and not-belonging of ‘half-bloods’ are not portrayed as effects of socialization, but as biologically coded facts.

As a consequence of their identity crisis, of which they become increasingly aware, Old Surehand and Apanatschka eventually set out to find their parents and to learn about their origins and identity independently of one another. However, May takes this search for identity to a higher level: the Native American mother of the two, who as a baptised Native American bore the name of Emily Bender, is also looking for her children, and she, too, has a split identity, for after losing her family she adopted a male identity and roams the country as a Native American warrior under the name of Kolma Puschi. This constellation of characters therefore allows one to interpret the violation of discretion between the races also as a challenge to conventional gender order, which has already been discussed through the character of Ellen in Grimm’s story and Cora in The Last of the Mohicans albeit on a different level.

However, from May’s point of view the problem of solidarity, already seen in Grimm’s Wie Grete auftörte ein Kind zu sein is also inherent in ‘race-mixing’. Reducing the issue to its essence May describes how a duel is agreed upon to resolve a conflict between the ‘whites’ and the ‘Indians’. The ‘whites’ designate Old Surehand as their champion, while the Native Americans – as may be expected – choose Apanatschka. Consequently, the Rassenkampf (battle between races) becomes a battle between brothers unaware of their kinship, and a conflict that cannot be resolved: since the superiority of the ‘whites’ has been undermined by ‘race mixing’, the fight ends in a draw. 62 Thereby the identity crisis of the individual ‘half-caste’ is collectivised and becomes an identity crisis of races and nations.

Nevertheless, in Old Surehand May creates a solution for this identity crisis that does not involve the death of the ‘half-castes’. While reconciliation with and a return to their (former) communities are now impossible, the ‘half-castes’ show solidarity amongst their own: the reunited Bender clan breaks away from their former communities to form its own small social and ‘racial’ unit; thereby the discreet order of exclusive existences is once again restored.

Conclusions

In colonial discourse this construction of discrete distinction is radicalised to the extent that the stated natural interest of each race to protect its own exclusivity is deduced from the presupposed necessity of discretion, establishing as a fact a fundamental hostility between mutually threatening existences. In German colonial discourse the

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maintenance of this discretion evolves into a struggle for survival, which is eventually used to justify annihilation and genocide as legitimate means during the colonial wars of the years 1904-07.

Orla Holm’s novel *Ovita* on the Herero War presents this scenario of unconditional discretion in the “struggle for […] existence”\(^6^3\). Not only does it assume irreconcilable differences between ‘blacks’ and ‘whites’, the text also portrays the mutual interest of both sides to maintain the exclusivity of their own existence. Consequently, the narrator describes how a ‘white man’ – an enthusiastic scientist critical of civilization who strives to generate sympathy for the ‘natives’ and who believes himself capable of creating a new, better race could through ‘race-mixing’ – and a ‘black woman’ who is expecting his child become the first victims of the war.\(^6^4\) Their sexually indiscreet behaviour at the same time signifies political indiscretion and leads to displacement: they move – geographically and metaphorically – between the two frontlines, where they are slain by the Herero. The construction of a discrete relationship between ‘black’ and ‘white’, between the ‘self’ and the ‘other’, and eventually between ‘friend’ and ‘foe’ does not allow for any space between the two frontlines.

What the conceptions presented have in common is the dissolution of the semantic distinction between the terms ‘other’, ‘stranger’ and ‘foe’.\(^6^5\) These terms do not serve potential differentiation, they do not even create an spectrum of comparison. Instead, they are simply used interchangeably. Thus everything not identical with the self becomes – or, more accurately the inner dynamics of this construct – is a priori an enemy. Along with the dissolution of the semantic distinction the dividing line between one’s own existence and the enemy threatening this existence becomes more unyielding and manifest: ‘position’ and ‘negation’ are conceptualised as exclusive existences between which – metaphorically speaking – the no-man’s-land of indeterminate identity stretches.

In colonial conceptions of collective identity what seems even worse than the potential menace to one’s own existence from the outside, from the ‘natives’, is the threat of corruption and destruction from within: by questioning unequivocal definitions, by hybridisation of biological and cultural legacy. Therefore, while the ‘natives’ are depicted as a possible threat, the ‘half-castes’, even when they are not represented within the plot as characters, appear as a threatening possibility. They are, in a sense, figures of disintegration in a discursively structured field of discrete differentiations.


\(^6^4\) Ibid.: 256f.

\(^6^5\) This tendency is indeed – quite explicitly – present in Carl Schmitt’s work: “The political adversary […] is the other, the stranger, and it sufficiently summarises his nature that in a particularly intensive sense he is something existentially other and strange […].” (Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff der Politischen*, Text von 1932 mit einem Vorwort und drei Corolarien, Berlin, Duncker und Humblot, 1996: 27). The German original reads: “Der politische Feind […] ist eben der andere, der Fremde, und es genügt zu seinem Wesen, dass es in einem besonders intensiven Sinne existenziell etwas anderes und Fremdes ist […]”).
The colonial identity is constituted in the awareness of the existentially ‘other’, the different, which is essentially presented in the character of the ‘native’: it serves as an identity generator and at the same time signifies a necessary constituent, a confirmation, as well as an existential threat to selfhood and identity. Therefore the prophesied threat of ‘race-mixing’ and ‘kaffirisation’ can be seen as a figure with a fixed connotation: the ‘half-caste’ acts as a destabilising influence on the identity created by antithetically structured figures of argumentation. The colonial discourse of ‘kaffirisation’ or ‘niggerisation’ thus prophesises the potential menace of ‘whites’ and ‘blacks’ assimilating, an assimilation which would result in ‘half-castes’ and inevitably leading to a loss of culture, identity and eventually to the destruction of the nation.

What is significant is the fact that the colonial discourse about the ‘other’ remains monologic and in a way self-referential; after all it is a product of discourse about the self, of one’s own identity: the existential otherness of the ‘natives’ is conditioned by European knowledge, and the colonizers’ identity is conditioned by the otherness of the colonized.

Hans Grimm’ quote that there is no such thing as an “non-political colonial book” seems particularly pertinent against the backdrop of these facts: the political dimension of colonial texts lies not least in their radical differentiation and its exclusive mechanisms of constructing collective identity — in which the ‘half-blood’ or ‘half-caste’ appears as an intolerable, unspeakable provocation to the integrity of a Volkskörper that is conceived to guarantee secure identity.

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