The relationship between concepts of home, colonialism and exoticism in the works of Gustav Frenssen and Hans Grimm

Rolf Parr*

Abstract
This article traces the reciprocal facilitation of colonialism and the ideology of regional art based on two examples: Gustav Frenssen’s Peter Moor’s Journey to Southwest (1906), addressing the topic of the German war of extermination against the Herero and the Nama 1904-1908, and Hans Grimm’s Südafrikanische Novellen (1913), with their many scenarios on the inextricable aporia of making the colonies a place of home and belonging on the one hand, and exoticistic fascination on the other hand. The focus is not merely on semantic situations of encounter between ‘black’ and ‘white’, which here and there appear to succeed, however only temporarily before they too fall victim to the inescapable aporia of the German imperial construct of a colonial home. For when the aim is not only the colonial or imperial-military annexation of the outland, but making it one’s home in the sense of successful ‘cultural border work’ (Homi K. Bhabha), it becomes imperative for the encounter with the ‘other’ that it not to be allowed to partake in the ‘continuum of past and present’. German imperialism’s construction of home, with its projection of an anachronistic image of home onto the colonies, however, prevented exactly that.

Home, colonialism, exoticism
In the sense of it being a political life reform movement for the realization or salvation of a threatened environment, there was no longer any real chance of the German regional art movement materializing on native terrain around the turn of the century since the rapidly advancing industrialization and its ubiquitous ramifications had become irreversible.1 Friedrich Lienhard’s rallying cry ‘Off Berlin!’2 therefore corresponding to

---

1 This article is based on the chapter “Kolonialismus. Imperiale Verheimatung der Fremde” of my book Die Fremde als Heimat. Heimatkunst, Kolonialismus, Expeditionen, Konstanz, Konstanz University Press, 2014: 133-168. I would like to express my gratitude to the publisher for the permission to reuse the findings in this revised English-language edition. I am grateful to Martin Henrich for the translation into English.

the semantic opposition of ‘idealism’ versus ‘materialism’ diverted attention from the centers to such peripheral regions as Weimar and the Wasgau which appeared to still be in keeping with the regional art and homeland protection movement’s traditional conceptions of authenticity, personhood, national customs and traditions, and cyclically sustainable agricultural ways of life.³

At the same time, German colonialism was facing the task of turning the unknown into home, of striking roots into the newly leased protectorates and colonial territories, and of assimilating the colonies into the German Empire; politically through military and paramilitary occupation, discursively through ‘cultivation’: the Bismarck Archipelago with the islands New Pomerania, New Mecklenburg and New Hanover in today’s Papua New Guinea; the Waldersee Highlands and the Prinz-Heinrich-Berge in the Chinese leased territory Qingdao; Kaiser-Wilhelmsland in Melanesia; Bismarckburg in Togo; farms with names like ‘Deutsche Erde’ in German South West Africa, today’s Namibia. When the outland as a place of belonging, living and agronomy serves as a ‘new home’ for the colonists (supported by the image of rootedness in one’s own soil, constitutive of the colonial as well as the regional art movement), the old ‘home’ is in latent opposition to that, as due to the irreversible industrial developments it is looked upon from a distance which constitutes estrangement.⁴

Against this backdrop, regional art and colonial movements, particularly their respective literatures, had to develop reciprocal affinities at the time between 1885 and the start World War I, as the not yet industrialized colonial territories constituted a second chance for the regional art movement to realize its program if not in the German homeland, then at least in the colonies.⁵ The search for native ‘autochthony’ could be (re-)directed towards the colonies. As a first step, one could (re-)discover what in Europe had to be considered obsolete, and, as a second, re-import it into the native land through colonial literature.

Conversely, the regional art movement, which expressed itself above all through imagery of ‘regionalization’ and ‘soil’, provided the colonies not only with the model of an attractive discursive position for the conjunction of home and outland, but also with a discursive foundation for a self-conception as a ‘better Germany beyond the sea’, thus valorizing colonial efforts. Within the terminology of the more recent theory of space one might say that, within the colonial construct of home, ‘space’ and ‘place’ are short-circuited: “The German concept of Heimat carries a rich set of cultural and ideological connotations that combine notions of belonging and identity with affective attachment to a specific place or region.”⁶

⁴ Cf. e.g. Paul Kollmann, Auf deutschem Boden in Afrika. Ernst und heitere Erlebnisse, Berlin, Schall, [1900].
The realization that each such construction of home — as Bernhard Schlink writes in his essay *Heimat als Utopie* — is based on remembering something which is to become present again but cannot do so and is therefore projected into the future or physical distance as a utopia denaturing the conception of home\(^7\), but which is actually a “nostalgic phantasm promising to deliver on desires projected onto the past”\(^8\), results in the recognition that for a brief moment the interplay of regional art and colonial movement around the turn of the century opened a chance to synchronize the diachrony of ‘memory’, ‘status quo’ and ‘utopia’. That which in the native land could only be remembered was to be regained in the colonies; with the retrospective view of the regional art movement and the prospective view of the colonial utopia consequently tending to coincide.

This model of colonial annexation of the outland into the homeland by making the colony one’s pre-industrial home, however, became unsettled whenever the colonialists were exotistically affected and conflicts between and exotic (and at times exoticistic-erotic) fascination for the other on the one hand, and the colonial dictate of making the outland a place of home on the other arose.\(^9\) Whereas those who resided in the European nation states were allowed to yearn for palm trees, deserts, beaches and dark-skinned beauties, in the colonies any form of ‘lived exoticism’ could only endanger the mission to transform the unknown into ‘home’. For even if colonial and exoticistic desire both point to something spatially distant, temporally speaking they remained dissimilar, as exoticism is temporally directed backwards, and colonialism forward into the future. ‘Exoticism’ might therefore be defined as a discourse with the ‘exotic-unknown’ as a projection surface for one’s own ideas, wishes and fantasies.\(^10\) A spatiotemporal axis of ‘then/now’ and ‘there/here’ is in this definition constitutive and can be paradigmatically expanded by such binarisms as ‘wild/civilized’, ‘bad/good’, ‘dangerous/safe’ and ‘female/male’.

Exotistic discourses are hence not merely ‘journeys to distant lands’ but also time travels, i.e. synchronic spatiotemporal transitions between cultural diachronies, which are imagined as asynchronous, shifted, yet still pertaining to a common temporal continuum. Spatiotemporally looking (back) from the allegedly more ‘advanced’ places, the exoticistic idea of ‘nativeness’ or the positively connoted ‘past’ purportedly comes to life in the colonies: looking back and heading yonder tend to coincide; leaving for Africa


\(^9\) If Schlink (*Heimat*: 8) interprets ‘exile’ as corresponding to ‘home’, this holds certainly true for the ‘loss’-of-home variety; for the variety focusing on a differentiating ‘(pleasure) gain’ one would have to add the opposition of ‘home’ versus ‘exoticism’.

can be imagined as a journey ‘back’ to “virgin” “unspoiled lands”;
however, from a colonial perspective it must be conceived as journey ‘forward’ into a prosperous future. Exoticism and the construction of home, together with their common “affective spatial relatedness”, are hence two sides of the same ‘colonial’ coin.

In the following the connection between military-imperial colonialism and regional art ideology will be examined using the example of Gustav Frenssen’s Feldzugsbericht ("campaign report") Peter Moor’s Journey to Southwest on the German war of extermination against the Herero and Nama between 1904 and 1908. In addition, the inextricable aporia of making the colonies a place of home and belonging on the one hand, and their exoticistic endangerment on the other, will be explored on the basis of Hans Grimm’s Südafrikanische Novellen (South African Novellas, 1913), which reiterate this conflict in a multitude of only slightly modified (and thus almost experimental) scenarios. It is an attempt at finding (not merely semantic) situations of encounter between ‘black’ and ‘white’, which here and there appear to succeed, however only temporarily before they, too, fall victim to the inescapable aporia of the German imperial construct of a colonial home. For when the aim is not only the colonial or imperial-military annexation of the outland, but also to make it one’s home in the sense of successful ‘border work’ (Homi K. Bhabha), it becomes imperative for the encounter with the ‘other’ that it not be allowed to partake in the “continuum of past and present”. German imperialism’s construction of home of, with its projection of an anachronistic image of home onto the colonies, however, prevented exactly that.

The intersection of regional art and colonialism: Gustav Frenssen’s Peter Moor’s Journey to Southwest

Thematically, Gustav Frenssen also located his novel Peter Moor’s Journey to Southwest (1906) at the intersection of regional and colonial literature long before writer Friederike Henriette Kraze compared both ‘homelands’ in the title of her novel Heim

---

Neuland. Ein Roman von der Wasserkante und aus Deutsch-Südwest (1909). A writer from the Low German countryside, who acquired renown as a proponent of a Northern German regional art literature through novels such as Jörn Uhl (1901) and Hilligenlei (1905), began writing about the colonies all of a sudden in 1906, more precisely about a young man of Northern German background who goes to German South West Africa as a Marine. He is deployed in the war of extermination against the Herero and the Nama and returns home after countless encounters with the other and physical exertions. The reception of this “campaign report” was almost unanimously favorable in Germany at the time. The success was often attributed to its “popular tone” or its “chapbook”like qualities, with the “coarse, aromatic rye bread” of regional artistic narration set against the negatively connoted impending “machine age” with the city as its symbol — well within the understanding of the regional art movement.

A problem for writers of the regional art movement was, however, that being perceived as a regional writer — which would have been consistent with the regional art program — meant also running the risk of being received only regionally. Hence, from an economic perspective they had to turn the attachment to the per se regional (if not local) ‘soil’ into something ‘universally German’, which around 1900 also meant ‘colonial’. Whereas Frenssen had attempted to solve this problem more or less indirectly by occasionally making knowledge from and about the colonies available in the Northern German homeland through his novel Jörn Uhl (1901), the regional writer succeeded in rising to the status of a pan-German one with Peter Moor’s Journey. For the colonies, which were the subject of Peter Moor, it made it possible for the underlying ideologemes and options of the regional art movement to be directly effectuated from a global and not merely regional perspective. The interest in South Africa, at the time only at first glance a surprising topic, was hence also furthered by the logic inherent in the regional art movement; however, at all times dependent on the native country.


18 Gustav Frenssen, Jörn Uhl. Roman, Berlin, Grote’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1901; Gustav Frenssen, Hilligenlei, Berlin, Grote’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1905.


21 Frenssen, Jörn Uhl: 231-242.

The German Schutztruppe (colonial army) in South West Africa and the fight against the Herero and the Nama, however, did not at first attract the attention of the German public, let alone that of writers. It was the contemporaneous Russo-Japanese War rather than events in southern Africa that was the primary topic of interest, before German South West Africa eventually became a subject of popular discussion; at the latest from 1904 and the ‘Battle of Waterberg’ onwards. Being indifferent to the fate of those people in South Africa from the same native soil was inconsistent with the ideal of the working national and native collective, as well as with the objectives of the regional art movement. Looking back Frenssen wrote in 1928 that he was hurt by the fact that while “so much blood was being shed in this campaign in South West Africa, almost our entire people was” gazing at “Mongolia, without any sympathy for the ardent valor of our own people”. Frenssen derived the material for his text from letters, diaries, pictures, literature on military history and not least from soldiers returning home with whom he conducted extensive interviews — from the aesthetic perspective of the regional art movement a rather questionable procedure of information procurement, bordering on that of a “report novel”. This in turn raised the issue of endangering the connection to the soil, without which any writer of the regional art movement would not have been able to write, according to its objectives. Frenssen’s solution, which he explicitly stated as justification: “After all this reading, thinking, and seeing things in my mind’s eye; after inquiring so much, I did no longer feel that I was describing something I had not seen or experienced."


24 Gustav Frenssen, “Wie ‘Peter Moor’ entstanden ist”, G. Grotes Weihnachts-Almanach, Berlin, Grote’sche Verlagbuchhandlung, 1909: 1-5 (4); cf. also Warmbold, Kolonialliteratur: 99f. Original: “dass fast unser ganzes Volk nach der Mongolei” [gestarrt] “und für die heiße Tapferkeit unserer eigene Leute kein Herz” [gehabt habe].— Cf. also Frenssen, Peter Moor: 105: “One night […] someone had gotten a letter, I believe from Swakopmund, saying among other things that in Germany everyone was talking about the war between Russia and Japan, without any thought about us being spared […]” (“Eines Abends […] hatte jemand einen Brief bekommen, ich glaube aus Swakopmund, darin stand unter anderem, daß in Deutschland jedermann von dem Krieg zwischen Rußland und Japan spräche, von uns aber spräche kein Mensch […]”.


66
myself. I could feel the sand between my own teeth.”27 Someone else’s experience is translated into a quasi-authentic experience of one’s own, distant Africa becomes an immediacy in accordance with the perspective of the regional art movement.

It is clear that Frenssen did not intend to write an exoticistic “travel novel”;28 he did not seek to provide exact information, based on which the reader could retrace the locations. He aimed rather at aesthetic-ideological options concerning the German native land (and its regional art movement). This particular focus is primarily effectuated through the protagonist’s perspective: the novel is about a “Holsteinian lad from the artisan class fighting for” and at least partially achieving “pan-German ideals” and not only those of German regional art “on German colonial soil”.29 How, then, does Frenssen solve his key problem of not having been to German South West Africa on a narrative level? The subtitle of his novel (“a campaign report”) makes the reader expect factual information from the perspective of someone directly involved or affected. This is further supported by the first person narrative maintained consistently throughout the whole novel. The final paragraph, however, breaks this pattern and devolves the narration unto somebody not further determined, however a different conceivable narrative instance:

When I was sauntering along the Jungfernstieg in my worn-out, dirty cord uniform, with dark, sunburned face, a middle-aged man came up and joined me, and asked me all sorts of questions as we went along. In the course of the conversation it came out that I had heard of him in my father’s house; for he had known my father from childhood. I related to him all that I had seen and experienced, and what I had thought of it all. And he has made this book out of it.30

Also, Frenssen refrains from providing any precise geographical descriptions, proper naming of landmarks, distances, descriptions of plants etc. The necessity for this decision can be seen in the reaction of contemporary critics and experts on colonial literature to a mistake he had made — he had included Tenerife with the Cape Verde Islands instead of the Canary Islands.31 He also employed the strategy of vagueness in his description of the German troops by not giving any specific names (e.g. of generals), troop designations, units etc. Apart from the few characters that are introduced, all


others are merely standardized, either through their military rank (‘private’, ‘colonel’, ‘captain’, ‘corporal’, ‘lieutenant’) or by means of descriptions that point to their respective regional backgrounds (‘Bavarians’, ‘ein Schleswiger’, ‘a tall Rhinelander’, ‘a Berlin cab driver’, ‘a fellow from Hamburg’). It is noticeable that in its enumerations the text lists representatives of all territorial associations to be found in Germany: “Silesians and Bavarians and all the other German peoples, and three or four from Holstein, too.” Hence, we are dealing with a realistic façade at best, not with a factually realistic or naturalistic depiction.

Regional art (ideology) in South Africa

When it comes to describing German farms or settlements, however, Frenssen employs the full range of the soil, garden, peasant and not least family ideology of the regional art movement. Even in the ravaged “meager little garden” of one of the settlements “the care with which German hands had tended it” can be seen. Farmhouses are always described as “fine” and “stately”, white cleanly women appear as German Madonnas:

> With wide-open eyes we gazed into the garden, which in former years the colonist had laid out with great care. There were really the palms and arbors of which we had dreamed and talked in Kiel and on the water, and there was a pond! Oh, if only we could ride into it! And there in the shade of the veranda stood a German woman, and she held a little child on her arm. How we looked! How we rejoiced over the light clean dress she wore, and her friendly face, and the little white child! We gazed as though at a miracle from heaven at a sight any one could see every day in Germany, – just like the three holy kings who came out of the desert and looked from their horses upon Mary and her child. She looked at us, ragged, dirty, hungry fellows, and bowed in a friendly way, with big sympathetic eyes, when we all, as though at a command, raised our hand to our caps.

---

32 Ibid.
33 Frenssen, Peter Moor (Engl. edition): 42; Frenssen, Peter Moor (German edition): 5 (not translated); Frenssen, Peter Moor (Engl. edition): 126f.; ibid.: 156; ibid.: 174.
Halfway into the novel the regional art idea is given complete expression in form of something which in industrialized Germany even at the time of the publication of Frenssen’s novel would not have been practicable. Peter Moor asks an older gang leader how to start a farm. His answer gives a summary of the image (made popular by the regional art movement) of a ‘better’ Germany (without lodgers, day laborers, pressure to perform and lack of space):

“I hunt out a place with good pasturage and good water,” he replied; “then I get the government to allot me about five thousand hectares. It is not as exact as in Germany; the line would go from tree to the water-hole, and then to the path, and so on. Then I let the few cattle that I own graze there, and they feed and water themselves and multiply just as in the time of Abraham and Jacob. After two or three years I have already a whole herd. Meanwhile I build myself a little stone house. When I begin by degrees to sell off a few cattle, I get a better house.” I asked him if in spite of the revolt and all the devastations he would stay in the country. “See!” he said, “here you can go and stay and rest and trek a hundred miles and no one tells you what you are to do or not to do, and you have no anxiety about your neighbor in the next floor or across the hall, or about the paper in the living-room, or your daily bread. When you have eaten one calf, you kill another. If you don’t care for veal any longer, you kill a goat. Or you go on a hunt [...].” I asked if he would probably marry. He looked sidelong at me and said: “When the war is over, a girl with whom I have entered into an understanding by correspondence is coming out. I know her parents and I know her a little, too. The farmers’ wives here have a good time out of it, you can believe, — little work, no envy and quarreling, plenty of land, cows, and oxen, a horse to ride, and no anxiety about getting enough to live on.” So he told me, and I was glad to hear it all; and I could perfectly understand all he said.38

Palmen und Weinlauben, von denen wir in Kiel und auf dem Meere geträumt und geredet hatten; und da war ein Teich! O, wenn man da hineinreiten dürfte! Und da, im Schatten einer Veranda, stand eine deutsche Frau; sie hatte ein kleines Kind auf dem Arm. Wie wir hinsahen! Wie wir uns über das helle, saubere Kleid freuten und über das reine, freundliche Gesicht und über das kleine weiße Kind. Wie auf ein Himmelswunder starrten wir auf das, was man in Deutschland alle Tage sehn konnte. Wie die heiligen drei Könige, die auch aus der Wüste kamen und vom Pferd herab Maria mit ihrem Kinde sahen. Sie sah uns hungrige, ganz verlumpte und schmutzige Gesellen mit großen, mitleidigen Augen an und neigte sich freundlich, als wir alle wie auf Befehl die Hand an die Feldmütze legten” (Frenssen, Peter Moor [German edition]: 111).

Starting from this premise, there appears to be only one thing interfering with the realization of the regional art program in Africa: the Africans, who are consequently exterminated not only for military reasons but also in accordance with the regional art movement. Without the African, Warmbold sums up, “there would not be any border conflicts, no quarrels over pasture lands, no raids into German farms and no potential English allies. Without the African, German South West Africa would be ‘cleaner and safer’, and hence much closer to the ‘better Germany’ envisioned by Frenssen.”

The ‘blacks’ are thus portrayed as the antithesis of the settlers and soldiers. They are even less individualized than the German troops; they appear only as a crowd without any individual being singled out through, for instance, proper naming. This accentuates the threat constituted by this anonymous, often invisible yet constantly present mass (“Now I saw something strange coming at us. In a mass it lay and kneeled and slipped through the bushes. I saw no single individual, only a group.”40) and allows for their equalization with other ‘mass-’ or ‘natural hazards’, such as a swarm of locusts flying over a patrol.41

The Herero, as well as all other ‘blacks’ are depicted as something fundamentally ‘other’ in Frenssen’s work, something separated by an unbridgeable chasm. The expedition of the Kiel marines on the Woermann steamboat is accordingly staged as a transgressive act. Consequently, the island of Madeira — and with it the Portuguese people — can be seen as ‘akin’ despite all established gradual though not fundamental otherness, whereas all ‘blacks’ are located on the far side of this dividing line. The emphasis on fundamental, insurmountable otherness substantiates Frenssen’s trivial-Darwinian (cultural) racism:

> In my free time I used often to watch the black men, and I noticed how peace-fully they sat together and talked in gurgling tones, and how they squatted around the great pots of food, stuffing quantities of rice into their mouths with their fingers, and devouring with their great, beast-like, crunching teeth their meat, bones, and all indiscriminately. It did not seem to occur to them to eat anything on account of the taste, but merely to fill their stomachs. It seemed to me like


40 Frenssen, Peter Moor (Engl. edition): 96. Original: “Nun sah ich auch etwas Fremdes herankommen. In Klumpen lag und kniete und schlich es zwischen den Büschen. Ich sah keinen einzelnen; nur eine Masse” (Frenssen: Peter Moor [German edition]: 83f.). In his novel Morenga, which could be seen as a rebuttal of Peter Moor’s Journey to Southwest, Uwe Timm radically overturns this perspective and makes ingenious leader ‘Morenga’ the eponymous hero, who is present during all narrative strands at least in the background (Uwe Timm, Morenga. Roman, München, AutorenEdition, 1978).

41 Cf. Frenssen, Peter Moor (German edition): 169.
this: that the people of Madeira, although they are strangers to us, are like
cousins whom we seldom see; but that these blacks are quite, quite different
from us, so that there could be no possible understanding or relationship of the
heart between us. There must always be misunderstandings instead.42

Even though Christianity with its basic assumption that ‘all men are brethren’ was at first
glance problematic for the colonialists, this racism could nonetheless be brought into
accordance with the regional art ideology on the religious level. At the end of Frenssen’s
novel a camp service is held, offering the opportunity for an interpretation of the Christian
confraternity in a racist way on the one hand, yet in keeping with the basic assumptions
of the regional art movement on the other. For one thing this serves the purpose of a
trivial-Darwinian-racist legitimation of the genocide of the Herero and Nama:

“What we sang the day before yesterday in the service, ‘We come to pray
before God the just.’ I understood in this way: God has let us conquer here
because we are the nobler and more advanced people. That is not saying much
in comparison with this black nation, but we must see to it that we become
better and braver before all nations of the earth. To the nobler and more
vigorous belongs the world. That is the justice of God.”43

For another thing this justification is given in reference to the ideologemes of the
regional art movement: “These blacks have deserved death before God and man, not
because they have murdered two hundred farmers and have revolted against us, but
because they have built no houses and dug no wells.”44 Consistently the last chapter of

und beobachtete sie, wie sie friedlich beieinander saßen und in gurgelnden Tönen miteinander schwatzten
und wie sie um die großen Eßtöpfe hockten, mit den Fingern eine Unmenge Reis zum Munde führten, und
mit ihren großen knarrenden Tiergebissen Beine, Gehörte und Eingeweide ungereinigt fraßen; es schien
ihnen gar nicht drauf anzukommen, etwas Schmackhaftes zu essen, sondern nur, ihren Bauch zu füllen. Und
es schien mir, daß es so stand, nämlich, daß die Leute von Madeira zwar Fremde für uns sind, aber wie
Vettern, die man selten sieht, daß diese Schwarzen aber, ganz ganz anders sind als wir. Mir schien, als
wenn zwischen uns und ihnen gar kein Verständnis und Verhältnis des Herzens möglich wäre. Es müßte
lauter Mißverständnisse geben” (Frenssen, Peter Moor [German edition]: 169). On the contemporary
image of the natives, cf. also Peter Scheulen, Die “Eingeborenen” Deutsch-Südwestafrikas. Ihr Bild in

43 Frenssen, Peter Moor (Engl. edition.): 233f. Original: “’Was wir vorgestern beim Gottesdienst gesungen
haben […], das verstehe ich so: Gott hat uns hier siegen lassen, weil wir die Edleren und Vorwärtsstrebenden
sind. Das will aber nicht viel sagen gegenüber diesem schwarzen Volk; sondern wir müssen sorgen, daß
wir vor allen Völkern der Erde die Besseren und Wacheren werden. Den Tüchtigeren, den Frischeren gehört
die Welt. Das ist Gottes Gerechtigkeit’” (Frenssen, Peter Moor [German edition]: 200). 

44 Frenssen, Peter Moor (Engl. edition.): 233. Original: “’Diese Schwarzen haben vor Gott und Menschen
den Tod verdient, nicht weil sie die zweihundert Farmer ermordet haben und gegen uns aufgestanden sind,
sondern weil sie keine Häuser gebaut und keine Brunnen gegraben haben.’” (Frenssen, Peter Moor
Not even those who had become Christians. They had only permitted to be baptized because of their
imitative instinct. The concept of Christianity was utterly foreign to them. […] They weren’t human yet.
Maybe they would be one day, but maybe not for centuries. At this point, they were not much different from
beasts on the field.” (Original: “Waren jene überhaupt Menschen? […] Nein – noch waren sie nicht
Menschen. Auch die nicht, die Christen geworden waren. Sie ließen sich taufen aus Nachahmungsstreben. Die
Idee des Christentums lag ihnen völlig fern. […] Noch waren sie nicht Menschen. Vielleicht würden sie es
einmal werden, aber Jahrhunderte mochten darüber vergehen. Noch waren sie nicht viel anderes als die
the novel starts with an account of how immediately after the Herero have been vanquished and South West Africa has fallen into German hands it starts to rain, turning the now sprouting, growing and blossoming outland into native soil. The objectives of the regional art movement are thus attained in Frenssen’s work through the war against the Herero in South West Africa – which means ‘out-of-area’, so to speak.

Peter Moor himself, however, “does not return as triumphant winner by any means, but as a marked man suffering from a heart condition, not at all in control of his own destiny.” By linking the ideologemes and options of the regional art movement with an ultimately biologically substantiated racism and the ideal of a nationalistic heroism, Frenssen offers exactly the blend that would later become characteristic of National Socialism. This explains the high regard for Frenssen as an author even after 1933, and he would go on to be used frequently as an example of nationalistic attachment to the native country and respond to this offer of subjectivity.

Exotistically threatened homelands: Hans Grimm’s Südafrikanische Novellen (1913)

Grimm’s South African tales are temporally set mostly “before and after the Boer War, as well as [...] leading up to World War I”. Whereas in Frenssen’s work the relatively
simple binarisms of ‘pure/impure’, ‘individual/collective’, ‘settled/nomadic’, ‘South/North’, ‘water/dryness’ are rarely disturbed by exoticistic fascination — which would have resulted in various frictions (only once do we read about “comrades” who “wanted Africa to look entirely different from in every particular from their native land”50), it is exactly said fascination that figures prominently in Hans Grimm’s *Südafrikanische Novellen* (1913), with particular emphasis on the semantic elements suitable to enable a coexistence of ‘native country and outland’, ‘colonialism and exoticism’. While Frenssen’s concept of a racism which is simultaneously biologically, religiously and regional-artistically founded does not allow for this kind of contact, Grimm simulates different scenarios of the failure of a long-lasting coexistence in the overlapping of the semantic paradigms of ‘black’ and ‘white’. In so doing Grimm is certainly also concerned with “conveying his conglomeration of tropical hygiene and biopolitics” as well as a “racist-nationalistic-conservative ideology” as “effectively and comprehensively” as possible.51 However, unlike a large part of colonial literature (as for example Frenssen), where such a thing would be utterly inconceivable, in Grimm’s work the moments of contact and overlapping of black and white are at least tentatively discussed, resulting in a triangle of mutual dependence of exoticism, colonialism and home of a specifically South West African, i.e. German-colonial, variety.

**Underlying configuration: ‘brown’ between ‘black’ and ‘white’ in *Dina***

Hans Grimm’s novella *Dina* is set shortly after the war against the Herero discussed in Frenssen’s work.52 An unnamed police constable in the Luderitz Bay encounters the Hottentot Dina and her companion, a slightly crooked boy, at a waterhole on one of his tours of inspection. He takes both of them back to station, where Dina makes herself useful in many respects, at the same time however arousing the constable’s erotic interest and supplying an exoticistic want that is not per se equatable with the former.

Analogously to this configuration, the semantic poles of the narration point away from the center of convergence of black and white; on the one hand markedly africawards, on the other equally distinctly towards Germany or Holstein. The resultant equally semantic and geographical axis constitutes a continuum of ‘black’ and ‘white’, of ‘Luderitz Bay’ and ‘Holstein’, on which the protagonists are placed. From this, distinct positions emerge rather quickly through their respective attributes, subsuming entire paradigms.

---


of mutually corroborating semantic features, as for example ‘black, childlike, lazy, animal, warm/arid’ versus ‘white, mature, industrious, human, orderly, cold/wet’ (see Fig.1).

Fig.1: Semantic attributes in *Dina*

Between these extremes there is an intermediate zone, where the polar attributes can occasionally and temporarily ‘change sides’, thus making it a ‘conciliatory’ or ‘negotiating space’. ‘Orderliness’, for instance, is an attribute originally reserved for German characters. The constable’s wife is described as a “Northern German woman […] endowed with the orderliness of Lower Saxony”; the Germans coat even “dead land” with an “active net of orderliness”, thus ensuring “properness”. However, orderliness is a feature also — with reservations - attributed to the Hottentot woman Dina: “[…] she does not have any lice and is altogether quite cleanly.”53 Moreover she is portrayed as “having grown straight” (thus meeting a German criterion), but “in her own way” (qualifying the statement by locating her in Africa). Hence she is able to occupy middle ground, shifting between home and outland, or colonialism and exoticism. Unlike Dina, the Hottentot boy accompanying her has a “hunchback”, almost as if it was a normal

thing; a Dina “grown straight”, on the other hand, is depicted as an exception bordering on European normalcy. Thus, Dina sporadically shifts from her middle ground to the semantic space of ‘Germany’ or, more particularly, ‘Holstein/home’.

Conversely, the German constable, ‘sun-tanned’ (brown) and “used to the outland”, constantly seeks out the ‘vast’, much like the African vagrant. This, on the other hand, is much in contrast with his white wife, who repeatedly expresses her homesickness and her longing for the ‘parochial’ homeland, and who, had already realized on the boat off the coast of Southampton “that she will never be able to strike roots away from home, whatever else may happen”. This, however, is not only tantamount to the most severe violation of the colonial mission of making the outland one’s home, by creating a difference between a geopolitical ‘German homeland’ and a geocultural or semantic experience of foreignness, but it also puts the constable at a maximum distance to his “real German wife”. “As well used to the outland as the man of Holstein had become so homesick was his wife feeling.” On the level of tertiary characters the Hottentot Willem may be ‘black’ and speak several African dialects, but he answers to the German name during the German Imperial Era, and he works for the German colonial police force wearing their uniform.

In the very first paragraph of the narrative Germany (or Holstein) and South Africa are closely correlated and tentatively associated by attributing various semantic features to both sides. The constable, for instance, is able to discern the name ‘Dina’ in the “gibberish” of the Hottentot woman. At the same time, however, he also picks it out from the Lower German: “She was not truly called Dina, but to the police constable, who had found and asked her, it sounded that way amid her gibberish, and he was used to the name from his good sister back home in Holstein.” Thus, Dina is again placed between home and outland: she is at the same time put in maximum distance and proximity. It should be added that the name ‘Dina’ evokes the connotation of Dienerin (“female servant”), and that the very act of name-giving constitutes a hierarchical differential and a typical imperial act of taking possession. Dina responds to this name-giving act by calling the constable ‘baas’ (‘master’), thus defining their relationship as a one of ‘master/servant’.

56 Ibid. Original: “daß sie außerhalb der Heimat nie werde Wurzel fassen können, was sonst immer sich ereignen möge”.
57 Ibid. Original: “richtige weiße Frau”.
58 Ibid. Original: “So stark wie in dem Holsteiner die Ferngewohnheit war, so groß war in ihr das Heimweh.”
60 Grimm, Dina: 7. Original: “Sie nannte sich gar nicht Dina, aber dem Wachtmeister der Polizeitruppe, der sie fand und frage, klang es ähnlich aus dem Kauderwelsch heraus, und von seiner Schwägerin daheim in Holstein war er an den Namen gewöhnt.”
Colonial versus exoticistic desire

As Peter Horn has convincingly shown, in Grimm’s work (as well as in a large part of colonial literature) the ‘white wife’ is portrayed as sexually more or less neutral, without being erotically charged.\(^{61}\) Thus she is in more than one aspect explicitly not her husband’s ‘servant’ but colonial ‘ruler’ at his side. As ‘white mistress’ she casts off her traditional female gender role as a servant. This role is unfilled at the beginning of Grimm’s narrative and can be assumed by Dina. This means at the same time that by shedding her gender role the white wife jeopardizes the colonial order of things and facilitates the relationship between the colonialist and the colored woman.

The German constable stands between the colored and the white woman. For him the exoticistically desired paradise develops into a tainted place, for despite his paradisical yearning for ‘freedom’ he also has to subordinate all of it to the ‘German law he has brought’, the “net of orderliness”\(^{62}\) if he wants to survive as a colonialist. This is the source of the constable’s actual conflict: Dina does not threaten his exoticistic desire (directed towards the outland), but his colonial one (directed towards the native land). The opposite is true for his white wife: she poses a threat to his exoticistic, but not his colonial-local desire. If the constable transgresses to Dina’s side, he annihilates himself as colonial master, but may remain exoticist. If he chooses to stand firm in his loyalty to the German homeland, he has to subordinate his exoticistic-sexual desire to his position as a colonial master.

This configuration of characters and their respective semantic positions is relatively stable until disrupted by two incidents: firstly, the constable’s ‘white wife’ coming to the police station, and secondly, when the constable rides a wild horse and his consequent crippling. Together the two bring about an almost experimentally simulated shift in the initially stable configuration: the constable, not being able to provide for Dina any longer, ceases to qualify as her ‘baas’, her master. Thus, one half of the conflict ceases to apply. At the same time the white wife advances into Dina’s former position of servant by caring for her severely disabled husband. Simultaneously her influence as mistress increases as well (as her husband is only ‘half-abled’). In the end all characters are out of place: the maimed constable at the police station, unfit for service; the ‘cold’ white wife and colonial mistress in the role of a nurse; the black woman at the police station without ‘baas’.

All other conceivable solutions would by way of contrast border on cheap fiction: a) the constable destroys the object of his desire, which means either his white wife (in order to remain able to maintain his exoticism), or the black woman (in order to remain a colonial master and master of his home in the colony with his white wife by his side); b) he destroys himself; c) either the white wife or the black woman dies tragically (or both,


76
e.g. in the attempt to help the constable); d) the white wife kills the black woman or vice versa; or finally e) either the white wife or the black woman kills herself.

Instead of offering such trivial solutions to the problem, the narration acts out the impossibility of a successful partway resolution, the filling of the middle space between ‘black’ and ‘white’, between ‘outland’ and ‘home’. Moments of reconciliation of the mutually antagonistic poles are only transitory without offering any lasting model between ‘Holstein’ and ‘South Africa’, a colony as home. Instead there is a constant shift from one deficient state, namely being at home in the outland that is perceived as exoticistic and has not been made home, to the other equally deficient state of being a foreigner in the Holsteinian homeland that is perceived as too parochial: “before you knew it, the constable had been in Holstein for six weeks. After these six weeks of uncertainty he realized more and more that he was a stranger in his native country.”

Now he did not talk about Africa every now and then, but on the slightest pretence his thoughts would carry him over the sea, and he would squint, like someone riding against the glaring sun or strong wind while having to scout acres and acres. His eyes thus set did not gaze out on the rich green pastures of Holstein but on the untamable wasteland of the Namib Desert.

Thus Grimm’s story aims at demystifying what magazines such as Kolonie und Heimat were elaborately staging semantically for their local and colonial-local readership. With the collision of ‘home’ and ‘exoticism’ Grimm also strips the advertising-fomenting colonial literature (complemented by elements of the regional art movement) of its much-needed discursive ‘native soil’.

**Dynamization of the configuration: How Grete Stopped Being a Child**

Grimm’s experimental take on the triangle of mutual dependence of home, colonialism and exoticism becomes particularly apparent in his story How Grete Stopped Being a Child. At first, much like in Dina, a rudimentary matrix of ‘white’, ‘brown’ and ‘black’ is established. Herein it comes to an accelerating dynamic of shifts, as Grete, daughter of farmer Karl von Troyna, becomes a woman and eventually takes over her late mother’s position as colonial mistress. In the interstages of this development the characters repeatedly experience the full range of significant ‘gender’ and ‘colonial’ functions, a process in which one character’s shift entails a disturbance of all other character positions.

---


64 Ibid. Original: “Jetzt erzählte er nicht nur dann und wann von Afrika, sondern beim kleinsten Anlasse holten ihn seine Gedanken fort über See, und dann schraubte er die Augen zusammen, ganz eng, wie einer, der bei grellem Sonnenglanze oder starkem Wind reitet und über weite Flächen scharf ausspähen muß. Die so eingestellten Augen sahen gar nicht mehr in die saftigen grünen Koppeln Holsteins hinein, die starren in die unbezähmbare Ödeheit der Namib.”

In contrast to *Dina*, where the previously static character configuration with its positions of ‘black’, ‘white’ and ‘brown’ gains dynamic only with the arrival of the ‘white wife’, the dynamic in *How Grete Stopped Being a Child* is brought about and maintained throughout almost the entire narration through its extension to virtually all characters on the one hand, and the quick succession of shifts in the configuration on the other. In this respect Hans Grimm’s second *Südafrikanische Novelle* (1899-1903) constitutes a parallel to and at the same time a variation on *Dina*: in the case of Karl von Troyna the longing for distant places is not rooted in his exoticistic impressionability (as it is the case with the constable in *Dina*) but in the passing away of his wife. Here the asexual, white wife does not participate in the events but is constantly present in the background with an almost Madonna-like connotation. Moreover the individual characters go through the different roles at accelerated pace; in Grete’s case from the ‘gamine child’ via the ‘pubescent girl’ to the ‘woman’ and eventually to the ‘white colonial mistress’; in the case of black Ellen from ‘servant’ to ‘sexual partner’ and ‘black mistress’; and in Karl von Troyna’s case from settledness to nomadism back to settledness. In the end the ‘cold white woman’ re-emerges in Grete, which involves a renewal of the conflicts between ‘black’ and ‘white’, without any reconciliatory solution or integrative middle ground. The latter turns out to be a “treacherous half-culture” thwarting exactly that for which the white settlers originally came to Africa: ‘striking roots’ and making the colony their home.

Lost homes

As the colony cannot become a home, the ‘regional art objective out-of-area’ associated with it also becomes incongruent, especially when it is implemented too literally (from the perspective of the colonial politics in the homeland). With the establishment of the *Bund Heimatschutz* (“Homeland Protection Association”) the evolution of the regional art movement in Germany ends 1904 in an aesthetic/landscape-preserving movement aiming to preserve regional (or figuratively: ‘autochthonous’) uniqueness. Accordingly in 1913 an article in the *Kunstwart*, which considered itself a mouthpiece of homeland protection, called for “homeland protection in the German colonies”. However, acting “appropriately and properly on the basis of autochthonism” would — as a last consequence — have meant nothing less than holding the art, way of construction,
cultivation, clothing and work of the indigenous population in higher esteem than that of the European and, more particularly, German ‘cultivation’. On the brink of World War I, however, this meant that the regional art movement contradicted the mission to make the colonies one’s home, either through discourse or through real-imperial means as presented in Peter Moor’s Journey to Southwest. Moreover, the regional art movement had partially ceased to function as a source of legitimization of colonial-imperial ambitions.⁷⁰

On the other hand, this development enabled those who adhered to the objectives of the regional art movement to charge their regressive utopian conceptions of individual German landscapes exotically at a time when it no longer posed a threat to the colonies. Friedrich Lienhard, for example, compared the peripheral, regional, un-urban forms of settlement and land forms in Wasgau to the palmy islands of the South Seas.⁷¹ Thus we are dealing with a threefold diversification of the concept of ‘home’: firstly, ‘home’ points to a regressive utopia, with the status quo of ‘home’ as something deficient (inasmuch as it is over-industrialized). This second, negatively connoted concept of ‘home’ subsumes, as Peter J. Brenner concludes from the novels and narratives of Wilhelm Raabe, “all those conditions that have been lost in one’s own, by now estranged culture”⁷², but which are believed to be existential. Thirdly, ‘home’ refers to the ‘new home’ in the colonies, which nonetheless do not necessarily correspond to the ideal codified in the second concept of ‘home’. “Home then emerges as an ideal projected onto the outland; the ideal, however, materializes neither here nor there.”⁷³

---


⁷³ Brenner, “Einheit der Welt”: 60. Original: “Heimat tritt also auf als in die Fremde projiziertes Ideal; aber das Ideal wird hier wie dort nicht eingelöst.” As Evelyn Annuß has shown, the “neo-colonial modernization of the German Heimatfilm” can be seen as modern attempt at interconnecting native land and colony, Europe and Africa, Germany and Namibia. Annuß considers the neo-colonial Heimatfilm a format found after approximately 2005 which “repeats narrative pattern and visual strategies of German Heimatfilme in an apparently postcolonial context, combining them with exoticizing shots of landscapes, animals and people” (Evelyn Annuß, “Für immer unser Afrika. Zur neokolonialen Modernisierung des deutschen Heimatfilms”, in: Ortrud Gutjahr und Stefan Hermes, (eds.), Maskeraden des (Post-) Kolonialismus. Verschattete Repräsentationen der Anderen in der deutschsprachigen Literatur und im Film, Würzburg, Königshausen & Neumann, 2011: 323-345 (324) [transl. Martin Henrich].
Bibliography


Frenssen, Gustav, Jörn Uhl. Roman, Berlin, Grote’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1901.


Frenssen, Gustav, Peter Moor’s Journey to Southwest Africa. A Narrative of the German Campaign. Translated from the Original with the Consent of the Author by Margaret May Ward, London, Constable & Co. 1908.


Grimm, Hans, Südafrikanische Novellen, Lippoldsberg, Klosterhaus, 1975 [1903].


Kollmann, Paul, Auf deutschem Boden in Afrika. Ernstte und heitere Erlebnisse, Berlin, Schall, [1900].


