

REMEMBERING AFRICA

*The Rediscovery of Colonialism
in Contemporary German Literature*

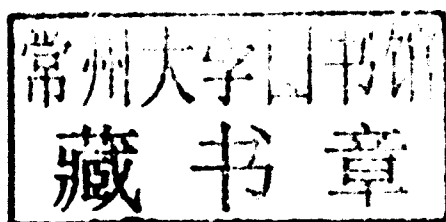


DIRK GÖTTSCHE

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The Rediscovery of Colonialism in
Contemporary German Literature

Dirk Göttsche



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- “Vereinnahmung oder postkoloniale Bewusstseinsbildung? Beobachtungen zur Darstellung afrikanischer Perspektiven auf die Kolonialgeschichte in neuen historischen Afrika-Romanen.” *Literatur für Leser* 33, no. 4 (2010): 211–31.

- “Rekonstruktion und Remythisierung der kolonialen Welt: Neue historische Romane über den deutschen Kolonialismus in Afrika.” In *Deutsch-afrikanische Diskurse in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Literatur- und kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektiven*, edited by Michael Hofmann and Rita Morrien, 171–95. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012.
- “Hans Christoph Buch’s *Sansibar Blues* and the Fascination of Cross-Cultural Experience in Contemporary German Historical Novels about Colonialism.” *German Life and Letters* 65 (2012): 127–46.

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Introduction

IN THE PREFACE to a recent interdisciplinary volume about “colonial pasts” and the “(post-) colonial present” the editors note that “empires are in vogue” in the arts and humanities (“Imperien haben Konjunktur”).¹ This new curiosity with imperial and colonial history extends well beyond academia, indicating that imperialism and colonialism resonate with the political, economic, and cultural challenges of a globalizing world. In Germany this new fascination with the colonial past can be traced back to the 1990s, when for example cities such as Hamburg and Berlin began to explore their colonial histories,² building on changes in cultural awareness that began with the “discovery” of the so-called Third World as the subject of German intellectual debates during the 1960s and 1970s and the countercultural One World movement of the 1980s.³ The fact that

¹ Jörn Leonard and Rolf G. Renner, “Koloniale Vergangenheiten — (post) imperiale Gegenwart: Prozesse und Repräsentationen im Aufriss,” in *Koloniale Vergangenheiten — (post-) imperiale Gegenwart; Vortragsreihe im Rahmen des Jubiläums “550 Jahre Albert-Ludwigs-Universität” Sommersemester 2007 und Wintersemester 2007/08*, ed. Jörn Leonard and Rolf G. Renner in Kooperation mit dem Historischen Seminar und dem Romanischen Seminar der Universität (Berlin: BWV, 2010), 7.

² See for example Heiko Möhle, ed., *Branntwein, Bibeln und Bananen: Der deutsche Kolonialismus in Afrika — eine Spurensuche in Hamburg* (Hamburg: Verlag Libertäre Assoziation, 1999); Ulrich van der Heyden and Joachim Zeller, eds., *Kolonialmetropole Berlin: Eine Spurensuche* (Berlin: Berlin Edition, 2002); and Ulrich van der Heyden and Joachim Zeller, eds., *Kolonialismus hierzulande: Eine Spurensuche in Deutschland* (Erfurt: Sutton, 2007). This last includes a whole range of other cities and places.

³ See Rüdiger Sareika, *Die Dritte Welt in der westdeutschen Literatur der sechziger Jahre* (Frankfurt am Main: R. G. Fischer, 1980); Claudia Olejniczak, *Die Dritte-Welt-Bewegung in Deutschland: Konzeptionelle und organisatorische Strukturmerkmale der neuen sozialen Bewegung* (Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitäts-Verlag, 1999); Petra Leber, ed., *Eine-Welt-Gruppen in NRW — streitbar für soziale Gerechtigkeit*, ed. for the Landesarbeitsgemeinschaft von Dritte-Welt-Zentren und -Koordinationsstellen in NRW (Münster: LIT, 2000); and Konrad J. Kuhn, *Entwicklungspolitische Solidarität: Die Dritte-Welt-Bewegung in der Schweiz zwischen Kritik und Politik (1975–1992)* (Zurich: Chronos, 2011); see also the website of the pioneering “Welthaus Bielefeld,” established in 1980 as “Dritte-Welt-Haus” and renamed in 1999/2000, <http://www.welthaus.de> (accessed 12 Feb. 2012).

most of Germany's former colonies were located in Africa — roughly corresponding to today's states of Togo, Cameroon, Namibia, Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi⁴ — means that the reappraisal and reassessment of colonial history since the 1990s overlaps with a focus on Africa, which has also been attracting renewed attention since the mid-1990s. Indeed, the editor of a recent volume on German literary and cultural discourses about Africa complements the earlier statement about the topicality of colonialism by summarizing: "In recent years there was increasing interest in Africa in 'low' as well as 'high' culture and literature — a fascination which vacillates between the renewal of clichéd images and unprejudiced interest in the African 'other' [dem Fremden]." ⁵

The present study explores the highly productive interaction in contemporary German literature between the rediscovery of colonialism as an integral part of German history and renewed fascination with Africa. It examines the connections and tensions between German literature embracing the "postcolonial project"⁶ of "the rereading and the rewriting" of colonialism⁷ and the continuing discourse of exoticism, between the emergence of postcolonial awareness and memory in German literature aiming to "decolonise the mind"⁸ and literary engagement with the promises and challenges of cross-cultural experience at the crossroads of German and African lives. It offers a comprehensive account of how contemporary German literature represents, reflects, and redefines the relationship between the colonial past and the postcolonial present. The theme has repercussions well beyond the substantial body of historical novels about Africa which are at the center of my literary analysis. The rediscovery of colonialism and the literary critique of its continuing legacies, the exploration of cross-cultural experience and transcultural lives in

⁴ Germany's other formal colonies were located in the Pacific and in China; for an overview see Horst Gründer, *Geschichte der deutschen Kolonien*, 4th ed. (Paderborn, Germany: Schöningh, 2000); Gisela Graichen and Horst Gründer, *Deutsche Kolonien: Traum und Trauma* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2005); and Hermann Joseph Hiery, ed., *Die deutsche Südsee, 1884–1914: Ein Handbuch*, 2nd ed. (Paderborn, Germany: Schöningh, 2002).

⁵ Michael Hofmann, "Einführung: Deutsch-afrikanische Diskurse in Geschichte und Gegenwart; Literatur- und kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektiven," in *Deutsch-afrikanische Diskurse in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Literatur- und kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektiven*, ed. Michael Hofmann and Rita Morrien (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), 7.

⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 171.

⁷ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 221.

⁸ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (London: James Currey; Nairobi: EAEP; Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994).

colonial Africa as well as in Europe, and the cultural critique associated with such postcolonial memory indicate significant shifts in contemporary German culture at the crossroads of recent German history and processes of globalization and of national and transnational discourse. Most contemporary German novels about colonialism in Africa respond to these historical shifts, even if some writers continue to draw on established stereotypes about Africa and Africans.

The mid-1990s saw in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland the beginning of a surge of literary interest in Africa, which was marked from the onset by the tension between critical engagement with cross-cultural experience and continuing exoticist fascination with Africa as the largely imaginary stage of escapist European adventures overseas, between the use of "Africa" as a foil of cultural criticism and literary inquiry into the legacies of colonial history both in Africa and in German-speaking Europe. In the late 1990s and early 2000s autobiographies and novels largely, though not exclusively, set in contemporary Africa and involving the cross-cultural encounters of mostly female protagonists with the exotic world of local Africans were the most visible evidence of this new popular fascination with Africa. Bestsellers such as Stefanie Zweig's *Nirgendwo in Afrika* (*Nowhere in Africa*, 1995), Stefanie Gercke's *Ich kehre zurück nach Afrika* (*My return to Africa*, 1998), Corinne Hofmann's *Die weiße Massai* (*The White Masai*, 1999), and Ilona Maria Hilliges's *Die weiße Hexe* (*The white witch*, 2000)⁹ caused critics and publishers alike to note the "Africa boom" ("Afrika-Boom") in German literature¹⁰ and to claim: "Books about Africa are in vogue" ("Bücher über Afrika haben Konjunktur").¹¹ Indeed, a reader paying a visit to any reasonably sized German bookshop could hardly help noticing the prominence of the African theme in those years, which went along with instantly recognizable book cover designs suggesting African exoticism: typically the black silhouettes of African trees and animals set against the rising or sinking sun in hues of brown, beige, and red, perhaps adding a note of blue as the symbolic color of hope and transcendence, or including a montage of

⁹ Stefanie Zweig, *Nirgendwo in Afrika: Roman* (Munich: Langen Müller, 1995); in English, *Nowhere in Africa: An Autobiographical Novel*, trans. Marlies Comjean (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004); Stefanie Gercke, *Ich kehre zurück nach Afrika: Roman* (Munich: Droemer Knaur, 1998); Corinne Hofmann, *Die weiße Massai* (Munich: Al, 1999); in English, *The White Masai*, trans. Peter Millar (London: Bliss, 2005); and Ilona Maria Hilliges (with Peter Hilliges), *Die weiße Hexe: Meine Abenteuer in Afrika* (Munich: Ullstein, 2000).

¹⁰ Jürgen Zimmerer, [Review of] "Das Afrika-Lexikon [Stuttgart: Metzler, 2001]," *Literaturen* (Jun. 2002): 92.

¹¹ See the publisher Piper's prospectus *Programm Frühjahr 2000*, p. 26, with reference to Michael Birnbaum, *Die schwarze Sonne Afrikas* (Munich: Piper, 2000).

photographs or human silhouettes which suggest the popular theme of cross-cultural encounters.

Publications such as these, aimed at the popular bestseller market and often written by authors who specialize in the African theme (such as Zweig, Gereke, Hofmann, or Hilliges), raise questions about contemporary Germany's awareness of colonial history, the often hidden legacies of racist "othering," and Germany's place in the postcolonial world of increasingly global migration and exchange. In a polemical essay in 2003 one critic argued pointedly that Germany had failed to cope with her colonial history and that the resulting "lack of knowledge about Africa" meant that the image which Germans had of Africa and Africans had been "frozen in 1918," at the end of the First World War and Germany's short-lived colonial empire (1884–1918).¹² While this was clearly an overstatement, the polemic did have a point. A special issue of the literary journal *Literaturen* similarly suggested in 2002 that the wave of German literature about (German experiences of) Africa continued to be marked by the obsession with "our Africa," the Africa of the European imagination, rather than addressing the complex reality of life in the different parts of this vast continent and the neglected history of German involvement there since the days of colonial expansion and rule.¹³ Sceptics can point to the rise only a few years later of popular television features and documentary dramas with telling titles such as *Afrika, mon amour* (2007) or *Mein Traum von Afrika* (My dream of Africa, 2007), set in either contemporary or colonial Africa and continuing to construe the "dark continent" as the object of escapist desire and *Sehnsucht* — the yearning for freedom, adventure, and excitement in a supposedly natural world beyond the reach of Western modernity, the desire for "more intense, more authentic experience, more acute suffering and more ecstatic joy."¹⁴

¹² Manfred Loimeier, "Ein Bild von Afrika: In Deutschland steht die öffentliche Debatte über seine Kolonialvergangenheit an," *Entwicklungspolitik* 18 (2003): 27.

¹³ See "Unser Afrika," special issue of *Literaturen* (issue 6, June 2002), ed. Jan Bürger, Hanna Leitgeb, Sigrid Löffler, and for an example see the anthology with the telling title *Afrika, meine Liebe* [Africa, my love]: *Ein Lesebuch*, ed. Moritz Volk (Munich: Droemer Knauer, 2002).

¹⁴ Wolfgang Struck, *Die Eroberung der Phantasie: Kolonialismus, Literatur und Film zwischen deutschem Kaiserreich und Weimarer Republik* (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2010), 272; Wolfgang Struck, "Reenacting Colonialism: Germany and Its Former Colonies in Recent TV Productions," in *German Colonialism, Visual Culture, and Modern Memory*, ed. Volker M. Langbehn (New York: Routledge, 2010), 260–77; Rita Morrien, "'Afrika mon amour'? — Der Afrika-Diskurs im populären deutschen Spielfilm," in *Deutsch-afrikanische Diskurse in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Hofmann and Morrien, 285–317.

While increasing interest in Africa is in itself a welcome development in the light of traditional ignorance and arrogance, there are indeed good reasons for a critical assessment of the discourse about Africa in the new wave of popular German fiction and life-writing; this study will examine a whole range of uncanny legacies of colonial thought and both obvious and subtle instances of continuities between colonial discourse about Africa and Africans, and supposedly postcolonial representations. There is often a fine line between well-meaning curiosity and condescending paternalism, between empathy and victimization, and between solidarity with the colonized and disadvantaged populations in Third World countries and their appropriation for domestic agendas and concerns. However, from the start the surge of literary engagement with Africa also included ambitious works by established and critical authors who challenge precisely the type of exoticist discourse seen in much popular fiction and develop new ways of writing about Africa, promoting the kind of critical postcolonial awareness which Paul Michael Lützeler, echoing Homi Bhabha's notion of a "postcolonial perspective,"¹⁵ calls the "postcolonial gaze" ("der postkoloniale Blick").¹⁶ This postcolonial challenge to the global and domestic legacy of colonialism requires knowledge and awareness of the political and cultural history of colonialism in the former imperial centers as well as in the former colonies; in the tradition of post-1960s anticolonialism such historical "rereading" of colonial history also involves the "rewriting" of Western colonial narratives along with the deconstruction of colonial discourses and attitudes toward Africans as the perceived "Other."

Raising the question of a "postcolonial aesthetic" in the "mainstream" of contemporary German literature, this new approach to writing about cultural difference is not restricted to novels with colonial themes but is reflected more widely in texts exploring cross-cultural experience critically in the context of a world of increasingly global interaction and continuing (often neocolonial) imbalances in power, wealth, and participation.¹⁷ Examples set in postwar or present-day Africa include Urs Widmer's *Im Kongo* (In the Congo, 1996), Sabine Reber's *Die Schwester des Schattenkönigs* (The shadow king's sister, 1998), Hans Christoph Buch's *Kain und Abel in Afrika* (Cain and Abel in Africa, 2001), Hilliges's *Auf den Schwingen des Marabu* (On the wings of the Marabu, 2002), Christof Hamann's *Fester* (2003), Arnold Stadler's *Ausflug nach Afrika*

¹⁵ Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 173.

¹⁶ Paul Michael Lützeler, ed., *Der postkoloniale Blick: Deutsche Schriftsteller berichten aus der Dritten Welt* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997).

¹⁷ See Paul Michael Lützeler, ed., *Schriftsteller und "Dritte Welt": Studien zum postkolonialen Blick* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 1998), and M. Moustapha Diallo and Dirk Götsche, eds., *Interkulturelle Texturen: Afrika und Deutschland im Reflexionsmedium der Literatur* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2003).

(A trip to Africa, 2006), Barbara Frischmuth's *Vergiss Ägypten* (Forget about Egypt, 2008), and Lukas Bärfuss's *Hundert Tage* (One hundred days, 2008)¹⁸ — to name but a few texts which engage with a range of significant themes such as colonial legacies in both Africa and Europe, neocolonialism in Africa, the critique of exoticist clichés about Africa and Africans, unwitting European complicity in the Rwandan genocide, the complex reality of individual countries in postcolonial Africa, and transnational multiculturalism and the emergence of transcultural family networks between Africans and Germans. Some of these (and other related) novels explore new ways of representing African reality and transcultural experience, collapsing the entrenched tropes of African-European antithesis; others take the opposite approach of defying “realistic” representation in favor of the meta-critical staging and literary deconstruction of European discourses about Africa. Widmer's and Hamann's novels even made the tropes of postcolonial theory the subject of literary parody and critique at a time when German scholars were only just beginning to embrace this new critical approach to cultural theory.¹⁹ As an example of how contemporary authors, most of them academically trained, participate in the same critical debates as the critics and scholars who review or research their works, these novels draw attention to the close relationship between the new literary interest in Africa and parallel academic developments, such as the rise of postcolonial studies and increased historical research into the colonial era — with regard both to Africa and to colonialism at home, in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland.²⁰

¹⁸ Urs Widmer, *Im Kongo: Roman* (Zurich: Diogenes, 1996); Sabine Reber, *Die Schwester des Schattenkönigs: Roman* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1998); Hans Christoph Buch, *Kain und Abel in Afrika: Roman* (Berlin: Volk & Welt, 2001); Ilona Maria Hilliges, *Auf den Schwingen des Marabu: Roman* (Munich: List, 2002); Christof Hamann, *Fester: Roman* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2003); Arnold Stadler, *Ausflug nach Afrika: Eine Geschichte mit Vorgeschichte* (1997; repr., Cologne: DuMont, 2006); Barbara Frischmuth, *Vergiss Ägypten: Ein Reiseroman* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2008); Lukas Bärfuss, *Hundert Tage: Roman* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008).

¹⁹ Hamann's historical novel *Usambara* will be discussed at the end of this study (see chapter 5.4), while Widmer's *Im Kongo*, effectively not a historical novel and set in an extended present, will only be used for comparative reference as a highly significant contribution to the wider literary discourse about Africa in contemporary German literature. For a fuller analysis of *Im Kongo* see Dirk Göttsche, “Zwischen Exotismus und Postkolonialismus: Der Afrika-Diskurs in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur,” in Diallo and Göttsche, *Interkulturelle Texturen*, 161–244.

²⁰ Unless discussing colonial imperialism overseas and other aspects of colonial history specific to the German Reich and its impact on contemporary Germany as a state, the adjective “German” in this study relates to the German language area in Europe and to writers of literature in German, i.e., including Austria and

The new literary interest in Africa has not abated since the mid-1990s,²¹ but during the past ten years the focus of literary engagement has clearly shifted from contemporary settings to colonial Africa and the history of German and European colonialism. The first wave of novels about Africa from the later 1990s already included significant historical novels, such as Alex Capus's *Munzinger Pascha* (1997), Hermann Schulz's *Auf dem Strom* (On the river, 1998) or Jens Johannes Kramer's *Die Stadt unter den Steinen* (The city below the rocks, 2000). Uwe Timm's semi-documentary historical novel *Morenga* (1978), about Germany's colonial war in South-West Africa (1904–8), a pioneering work in the critical memorialization of German colonialism, continues to act as a benchmark for the poetics and politics of postcolonial memory in German literature. But it took another twenty years, the emergence of modern multiculturalism, and the reassessment of German history in the wake of German unification, for the literary rediscovery of colonialism to gain full momentum. Booming literary interest in Africa since the mid-1990s, unified Germany's poignant culture of memory, rising public interest in colonial history, and the centenary of the colonial war and the Herero genocide in 2004, which gave the colonial theme unprecedented public prominence (also because of its resonance with the dominant theme in contemporary Germany's cultural memory, National Socialism and the Holocaust)²² — these factors all play a part in explaining the surge since

Switzerland, who did not have overseas colonies of their own. Nevertheless, several writers have recently explored Austrian and Swiss involvement in European colonial history, as the main body of this study will show. The debate about a postcolonial rereading of the history of the Austrian (Habsburg) Empire is outside the scope of this investigation; see Johannes Feichtinger, Ursula Prutsch, and Moritz Csáky, eds., *Habsburg postcolonial: Machtstrukturen und kollektives Gedächtnis* (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2003), and Anna Veronika Wendland, "Imperiale, koloniale und postkoloniale Blicke auf die Peripherien des Habsburgerreiches," in *Kolonialgeschichten: Regionale Perspektiven auf ein globales Phänomen*, ed. Claudia Kraft, Alf Lüdtke, and Jürgen Martschukat (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2010), 211–35.

²¹ For an overview and analysis of novels and autobiographies with contemporary settings see Götsche, "Zwischen Exotismus und Postkolonialismus."

²² See for example Larissa Förster, Dag Henrichsen, and Michael Bollig, eds., *Namibia — Deutschland: Eine geteilte Geschichte; Widerstand — Gewalt — Erinnerung*, Ethnologica, new series, 24 (Cologne: Edition Minerva, 2004); Henning Melber, ed., *Genozid und Gedenken: Namibisch-deutsche Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Frankfurt am Main: Brandes & Apsel, 2005); Christof Hamann, ed., *Afrika — Kultur und Gewalt: Hintergründe und Aktualität des Kolonialkriegs in Deutsch-Südwestafrika; Seine Rezeption in Literatur, Wissenschaft und Populärkultur (1904–2004)* (Iserlohn: Institut für Kirche und Gesellschaft, 2005); and Steffi Hobuß and Ulrich Lölke, eds., *Erinnern verhandeln: Kolonialismus im kollektiven Gedächtnis Afrikas und Europas* (Münster: Verlag Westfälisches

the late 1990s of historical novels about colonialism in Africa and about its previously neglected legacies. This broader context played a crucial role in inspiring German, Austrian, and Swiss authors to engage more extensively with Germany's colonial history and the wider involvement of Germans in the political and cultural history of European colonialism. Coming almost ninety years after the end of Germany's colonial empire and well after the demise of the victims and perpetrators of colonial rule and violence, the literary rediscovery of German colonialism helps to place colonial history on the map of Germany's *lieux de mémoire* (Pierre Nora),²³ in particular with respect to the role of the genocidal war in South-West Africa. The new historical novels about Africa thus also work toward an appreciation of the "shared histories" of Africans and Germans, since German colonial rule and German atrocities are already established *lieux de mémoire* in the African societies affected, where the memories of increasingly distant German imperialism have developed their own local dynamics.²⁴

Dampfboot, 2007). As examples of press coverage at the time see Jochen Bölsche, "Die Peitsche des Bändigers. Nach Luftkrieg und Vertreibung wird ein drittes Tabuthema virulent: die Kolonien der Deutschen. Vor 100 Jahren trieben kaiserliche Truppen in Deutsch-Südwestafrika Zehntausende Herero in den Tod. Jetzt verlangen die Nachfahren Entschädigung für den Völkermord," *Der Spiegel*, 12 Jan. 2004, 102–9; Bartholomäus Grill, "Aufräumen, aufhängen, niederknallen! Vor hundert Jahren vernichteten deutsche Kolonialtruppen das Volk der Herero. Es war der erste Genozid des 20. Jahrhunderts . . .," *Die Zeit*, 5 Aug. 2004, 10; and Medardus Brehl, "'Diese Schwarzen haben den Tod verdient': Der Genozid am Volk der Herero in Deutsch-Südwestafrika vor hundert Jahren im Spiegel der zeitgenössischen Literatur," *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 10 Aug. 2004, 7.

²³ Pierre Nora, ed., *Les lieux de mémoire*, 7 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984–92); see also Etienne François and Hagen Schulze, eds., *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, 3 vols. (Munich: Beck, 2001).

²⁴ For a general overview see Winfried Speitkamp, ed., *Kommunikationsräume — Erinnerungsräume: Beiträge zur transkulturellen Begegnung in Afrika* (Munich: Meidenbauer, 2005). For specific regional examples see Gesine Krüger, *Kriegsbewältigung und Geschichtsbewusstsein: Realität, Deutung und Verarbeitung des deutschen Kolonialkriegs in Namibia, 1904 bis 1907* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999); Melber, *Genozid und Gedenken*; Hobuß and Lölke, *Erinnern verhandeln*; Kai Schmidt-Soltau, "Postkoloniale Konstruktionen der kolonialen Begegnung: Die deutsche Kolonialzeit im Blick des anglophonen Kamerun," in *Die (koloniale) Begegnung: AfrikanerInnen in Deutschland, 1880–1945, Deutsche in Afrika, 1880–1918*, ed. Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst and Reinhard Klein-Arendt (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2003), 269–82; Reinhart Kößler, "Communal Memory Events and the Heritage of the Victims: The Persistence of the Theme of Genocide in Namibia," in *German Colonialism and National Identity*, ed. Michael Perraudin and Jürgen Zimmerer (New York: Routledge, 2011), 235–50; and Dennis Laumann, "Narratives of a 'Model Colony': German Togoland in Written and Oral Histories," in Perraudin and Zimmerer, *German Colonialism*, 278–92.

There is still a continuing stream of novels about contemporary Africa,²⁵ but it is the literary rediscovery of Germany's previously neglected colonial history which ambitious authors have focused on during the past twelve years and which is at the center of this study. (Germany's colonial adventures in the Pacific and in China have also attracted literary interest, albeit so far on a much smaller scale.)²⁶ The surge of literary interest in Africa during the 1990s has been followed since the early 2000s by a wave of historical novels about German colonial involvement in Africa, Germany's role in European imperialism, and the continuing legacies of this colonial history in the twenty-first century. The number of new historical novels published in 2011/12 suggests that the theme continues to capture the imagination of German authors and readers.²⁷ Some writers, such as Stephan Wackwitz in *Ein unsichtbares Land* (*An Invisible Country*, 2003),²⁸ use the new format of the transgenerational family novel to link the colonial past explicitly to the postcolonial present and emphatically reenter colonialism onto the map of German history and memory. Widely discussed historical novels by prominent writers — such as Gerhard Seyfried's *Herero* (2003), Thomas Stangl's *Der einzige Ort* (The one and only place, 2004), Ilija Trojanow's *Der Weltensammler* (*The collector of worlds*, 2006), and Hans

²⁵ The shift of focus from the present to the colonial past is reflected in the fact that virtually no new authors specializing in novels or life-writing about contemporary Africa have emerged since the early 2000s, while authors well established in the field, such as Gercke and Hilliges, have extended their production to historical novels; and that quite a few recent texts about contemporary experiences in Africa have been published in niche publishing houses or effectively in the format of self-publishing without the backing of an established publishing house. Conversely, prominent German and Swiss writers of the younger generation, such as Thomas von Steinaecker, Alex Capus, Ilija Trojanow, and Christian Kracht, have engaged with the colonial theme rather than with contemporary African settings.

²⁶ See Gerhard Seyfried, *Gelber Wind oder Der Aufstand der Boxer* (Berlin: Eichborn, 2008); Jürgen Petschull, *Der letzte Tanz im Paradies: Ein historischer Thriller aus der deutschen Südsee* (Berlin: Osburg, 2009); Marc Buhl, *Das Paradies des August Engelhardt: Roman* (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn, 2011); and Christian Kracht, *Imperium: Roman* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2012), awarded a highly regarded literary prize, the "Wilhelm Raabe Literaturpreis," in October 2012, which is in itself another indication of the prominence of the colonial theme in contemporary Germany.

²⁷ See for example the relevant novels by Patricia Mennen, Karen Winter, Leah Bach, and Micaela Jary in the bibliography and index.

²⁸ Stephan Wackwitz, *Ein unsichtbares Land: Familienroman* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2003); in English, *An Invisible Country*, trans. Stephen Lehmann (Philadelphia: Paul Dry Books, 2005).

Christoph Buch's *Sansibar Blues* (2008)²⁹ — as well as the sheer number of novels produced over the past fifteen years (some fifty) indicate that colonialism in Africa has become a major theme in contemporary German literature, reflecting a significant development in German historical and cross-cultural awareness. The centenary of the colonial war effectively acted as a catalyst for the emergence of a postcolonial memory discourse in German literature, which now complements the dominant German memory discourses concerned with National Socialism and the Holocaust, the German Democratic Republic and its demise (the *Wende*), and more recently “memory contests”³⁰ about the cultural revolution of “1968.” Indeed, quite a few of the new historical novels about colonialism engage explicitly with contemporary Germany’s poignant culture of memory by cross-mapping the critical memory of colonialism with the memories of National Socialism, the *Wende*, and other memory discourses.

A less prominent but equally significant strand of postcolonial memory in contemporary German literature complements the rediscovery of German colonial history in Africa with the exploration of the forgotten history of Africans and Black Europeans in Europe: in Germany, Austria, and even Switzerland from the early-modern trade in Moorish slaves and colonial migration during imperial times to the persecution of People of Color during the Third Reich and the challenges facing Black Germans during the postwar period. Working hand in hand with postcolonial and diasporic historiography, these texts also underline another aspect of this new literary development: the fascination with cross-cultural and transcultural experience in contemporary historical novels about Africa and Africans, also seen for example in Trojanow’s *Der Weltensammler* and Buch’s *Sansibar Blues*. Resonating with today’s experience of international mobility and global migration, they reflect the cultural shifts resulting from the multicultural diversification of German society since the 1980s, which played a significant part in the emergence of the new literary discourse about Africa and Africans. At the same time, the literary exploration of African diasporic history in the Germanophone countries of Europe builds on the memory work of the Black German minority. Black German writing, which emerged during

²⁹ Gerhard Seyfried, *Herero: Roman* (Berlin: Eichborn, 2003); Thomas Stangl, *Der einzige Ort: Roman* (Graz, Austria: Droschl, 2004); Ilija Trojanow, *Der Weltensammler: Roman* (Munich: Hanser, 2006); in English, *The Collector of Worlds*, trans. William Hobson (London: Faber & Faber, 2008); and Hans Christoph Buch, *Sansibar Blues oder Wie ich Livingstone fand: Roman* (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn, 2008).

³⁰ Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove, and Georg Grote, eds., *German Memory Contests: The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006).