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**Post-imperialism, Postcolonialism and Beyond:  
Towards a Periodisation of Cultural Discourse about Colonial Legacies**

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**Abstract**

Taking German history and culture as a starting point, this essay suggests a historical approach to reconceptualising different forms of literary engagement with colonial discourse, colonial legacies and (post-) colonial memory in the context of Comparative Postcolonial Studies. The deliberate blending of a historical, a conceptual and a political understanding of the ‘postcolonial’ in postcolonial scholarship raises problems of periodisation and historical terminology when, for example, anti-colonial discourse from the colonial period or colonialist discourse in Weimar Germany are labelled ‘postcolonial’. The colonial revisionism of Germany’s interwar period is more usefully classed as post-imperial, as are particular strands of retrospective engagement with colonial history and legacy in British, French and other European literatures and cultures after 1945. At the same time, some recent developments in Francophone, Anglophone and German literature, e.g. Afropolitan writing, move beyond defining features of postcolonial discourse and raise the question of the post-postcolonial.

**Keywords**

Colonialism, Imperialism, Postcolonialism, Comparative postcolonial studies, Memory, Afropolitanism.

Fifteen years after Stuart Hall’s seminal essay ‘When was “the post-colonial”?’ (Hall, 1996) it is time to ask his question again, albeit from a historical and literary-historical perspective. The rise of postcolonial theory and research has been characterised by the deliberate blending of a historical, a political and a conceptual understanding of the postcolonial, understood as a socio-cultural condition as well as a critical and cultural discourse. Defined by the struggle and ambition to move *beyond* colonialism and its continuing legacies, this discourse emerged *after* colonialism and is decidedly *anti*-colonial in its outlook. Citing Peter Hulme (1995: 121), Hall speaks of ‘the tension between the epistemological and the chronological’, the ‘critical’ and the ‘temporal dimension’ in the postcolonial and, in his response to early critics of postcolonial theory, insists that this tension is ‘not disabling but productive’ (Hall, 1996: 253-254). Homi Bhabha emphasises the ‘insistent[] gesture to the beyond’ in the prefix ‘post-’, and conceives of postcolonialism as an ongoing ‘project’. Prioritising the conceptual meaning of the prefix over ‘sequentiality’ (‘after’) and ‘polarity’ (‘anti-’) (Bhabha, 1994: 4, 171), he also acknowledges the chronological and political underpinnings of the postcolonial.

There is broad consensus that the transformative conceptual core of postcolonial theory and research is defined by the critical ‘re-reading and re-writing’ (Ashcroft et al., 2002: 221) of colonial history and culture, including their present-day extensions. This is done with a view to eventually overcoming the tenacious legacies and recurring transformations of European colonialism and imperialism both in the global South, the worlds of the formerly colonised, and the societies once involved in Europe’s colonial expansion, regardless of whether they had overseas empires of their own or simply participated in the colonial system. Hall famously extended this conceptual dimension of postcolonial research to include ‘the retrospective re-phrasing of Modernity within the framework of “globalisation” in all its various ruptural forms and moments’, promoting ‘a decentred, diasporic or “global” rewriting of earlier, nation-centred imperial grand narratives’ (Hall, 1996: 250, 247).

The ‘postcolonial project’, as Bhabha calls it, is thus clearly a highly ambitious and far-ranging undertaking and one that is aligned with the protracted ‘process of decolonisation’ (Hall, 1996: 246) also envisaged by Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1994) in his vision of ‘decolonising the mind’ – both in the South and in the North. In other words, not only does the conceptual dimension of postcolonial theory enable a particular (re-)reading of history that has substantially revised our understanding of world history, it also produces its own history. If “‘post-colonial” [...] refers to a *process* of disengagement from the whole colonial syndrome’ (Hulme 1995: 120), then the descriptive and analytical merit of postcolonial research will require distinction between different trajectories and phases in this process, even though the postcolonial was not meant to be ‘one of those periodisations based on epochal “stages”’ (Hall, 1996: 247). The longer the process of decolonisation lasts that postcolonial research promotes, the more it will generate its own historicity. If ‘[w]e use the term “post-colonial” [...] to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day’ (Ashcroft et al., 2002: 2), i.e. if the term refers to the early-modern first age of discovery as much as to the twenty-first century, to Germany after World War I as much as to the UK today, to the nineteenth-century critics of European imperialism as much as to the memory of colonialism in present-day Namibia, then it risks losing its conceptual merit and analytical potential. Furthermore, it fails to provide the degree of historical specificity and terminological clarity required in historical and literary studies.

In one sense, the problem is the result of the success of Postcolonial Studies. The innovative potential of postcolonial theory has resulted in a wealth of new research and insight into all phases and aspects of both the ‘imperial process’ and the ‘process of decolonisation’, not to

mention the wide range of different colonial and postcolonial histories in the various countries and language areas affected across the globe. Indeed, such is the wealth of new research that critical terminology needs to be rethought and adjusted in order to accurately represent the range of historical conditions and cultural phenomena in question as well as to ensure that postcolonial research continues to be relevant and productive. It goes without saying that excessive historical micro-differentiation would be as unhelpful as a usage that tries to cover all phases of cultural production since (the beginning of) colonisation and also assumes that the postcolonial will last forever. Research into the history of colonial, anti-colonial and postcolonial thought and culture needs to differentiate between different stages of colonial and postcolonial processes, taking due account of shifting socio-historical and political contexts, along with regional and national variety. Such historical differentiation will then raise new questions regarding the interconnections between colonial and postcolonial histories in various countries, cultures and literatures (see Göttsche and Dunker, 2014; Lindner et al., 2010; Bosma et al., 2012; Naum and Nordin 2013; Beschnitt et al., 2013; Aubès et al., 2014; Schulze-Engler, 2013).

Taking German colonial and postcolonial history as well as German literary history as a starting point, while also including comparative considerations from other literatures and cultures, this essay suggests a historical approach to reconceptualising different forms of engagement with colonial discourse, colonial legacies and (post-) colonial memory in the context of Comparative Postcolonial Studies. It seeks to develop a critical terminology that enables distinctions between different phases and strands in the complex, typically multi-stage historical and cultural processes that lead from Europe's colonial imperialism around 1900 to twenty-first century discourses about the colonial past and its continuing legacies. These phases are of course not conceived, in out-dated historicist fashion, as self-contained and homogeneous 'epochs'. They are conceived, rather, as particular socio-cultural and discursive constellations that emerge in certain historical moments, may become dominant for a period (across one or more language areas), but are never uncontested and eventually give way to new configurations. Comparative evidence suggests that these phases and strands, while developed here from a German Studies perspective, are also relevant for other colonial and postcolonial histories, although they may occur there at other times and in partially different shapes and contexts. As Europe's colonial expansion during the fifteenth- to twentieth century was a transnational process and the reach of European colonial imperialism near-global, it is unsurprising that an evidence-based periodisation of the various

roads from the colonial period to the postcolonial world of recent decades should also find significant shared features.

Within this wider objective, this study focuses on three distinctions that enable critical analysis of different phases and strands in the literary and cultural engagement with European colonialism and imperialism from the early twentieth century to the present day: the distinction between postcolonialism and post-imperialism; careful historical reconsideration of the relationship between postcolonialism and anti-colonialism; and evidence suggesting the emergence of post-postcolonial discourse (illustrated by recent Afropolitan writing), for which there is as yet no terminological solution. Given the growing historical distance between the end of Germany's colonial empire in World War I and the present, starting the inquiry from the perspective of the German case also opens up cross-connections to defining changes in national and world history. These defining changes encompass the rise and fall of the Third Reich, the gradual end of Europe's empires during the 1950s to 1970s (decolonisation in the formal sense), the cultural impact of the '1968' student revolution and the 'discovery' of the 'Third World' during the 1960s as an intellectual European concern (see Sareika, 1980; Gomsu, 1998), the dissolution of the Soviet block and German reunification, and finally, significant generational changes that inform the memory of the colonial past along with political and cultural factors. The latter suggests the use of Memory Studies theory alongside postcolonial theory in postcolonial historical inquiry.

### **Postcolonialism and Post-Imperialism**

Germany acquired its overseas colonies in the context of the 'scramble for Africa' and the Congo Conference in Berlin from 1884 onwards. Less than thirty-five years later during the course of World War I Germany subsequently lost its colonies, much earlier than the other major players in Europe's colonial imperialism, as a result of traumatic defeat in Europe rather than anti-colonial independence wars or negotiation with the formerly colonised. This loss was confirmed by the Versailles treaty of 1919, some forty years before the majority of Europe's overseas colonies became independent – Germany's former colony South-West Africa achieved independence as late as 1990, coinciding with German reunification – and some eighty years before Anglophone postcolonial theory and research began to make an impact on German scholarship, public discourse and literature during the later 1990s (see Göttsche, 2013; Dürbeck and Dunker, 2014). Britta Schilling's historical study (2014) has recently shed new light on the long road from the early end of Germany's empire to German

reunification. However, it stops just before the rise of a German postcolonial memory discourse during the later 1990s, for which the centenary in 2004 of Germany's colonial war in South-West Africa and the genocide of the Herero acted as a catalyst. The centenary also linked newly emerging postcolonial memory within Germany to Germany's dominant memory discourse concerned with the Nazi period and the Holocaust (Göttsche, 2013: 63; Förster et al., 2004; Hobuß and Lölke, 2007).<sup>1</sup>

Focusing on the successive phases of Germany's attempts to come to terms with its colonial history from 1918 to 1990, Schilling considers a wide range of sources: the popular *Afrika-Buch* (novels, autobiographies and travel writing about Germany's experience of Africa published in the wake of defeat in World War I), the Weimar period's fascination with colonial and 'Black' culture, the representation of German colonialism in school books of the Nazi period, the official gifts with which both West and East Germany, acting as rivals within the East-West conflict, marked the independence of Germany's former colonies in Africa during the 1960s, the anti-imperialist turn of Germany's memory of colonialism after '1968', epitomized by the student protests in West Germany against surviving colonial monuments, and generational and discursive changes in the memory of colonialism amongst the families of 'colonial actors' both in Germany and in the surviving German minority in Namibia during the post-war decades. The historical picture that emerges, one that is supported by other research in the field (Conrad, 2008: 116-122; Albrecht, 2008; Hermes, 2009; Lusane, 2002), is that of a multi-stage and multi-stranded historical process of connected but distinct discursive formations that structure Germany's path from colonial imperialism to the postcolonial present. The study also hints at the 'memory contests' (Fuchs et al., 2006)<sup>2</sup> that characterised each of these stages. Schilling's overarching historical analysis, however, suffers from a problematic retrospective extension of the 'postcolonial' that confuses post-imperial and postcolonial discourse. As indicated by the title of her study, *Postcolonial Germany: Memories of Empire in a Decolonized Nation*, Schilling – in common with others (e.g. Klotz, 2005; Friedrichsmeyer et al., 1998) – believes that the loss of Germany's colonies during World War I made the country 'the first European nation [...] to be decolonized', and she regards the Weimar Republic as 'Germany's original postcolonial period' (Schilling, 2014: 203). There is no discussion of how the notion of decolonisation, traditionally reserved for the independence of Europe's former colonies and their subsequent struggle against neo-colonialism,<sup>3</sup> can usefully be applied to the former colonisers.<sup>4</sup> Although Schilling references Elizabeth Buettner's research into British colonial and postcolonial history, there is also no

consideration in her overarching historical argument of Buettner's finding – equally true for Germany – that 'decolonizing the colonizer proved an extremely protracted process' which lasted well into the 1980s (Buettner, 2010: 91). In her analysis of colonial culture during Germany's interwar period Schilling argues quite convincingly that 'the possibilities of moving beyond a "colonial situation" were unimaginable' at the time (Schilling, 2014: 61), thereby supporting Buettner's analysis of post-war British discourse that '[c]olonial mind-sets remained powerful within ex-colonizing nations well beyond formal transfers of power overseas' (Buettner, 2010: 91). The Weimar Republic may have been 'a postcolonial state in a still-colonial world' (Klotz, 2005: 145) in the literal chronological sense of the post-colonial, but internal Weimar politics, public discourse, culture and literature continued, indeed in some respects intensified colonialist fascinations that can hardly be analysed as 'postcolonial' in any meaningful way. This heightened fascination with colonialism and Germany's lost empire during the interwar period is only the first step on the long road towards a 'postcolonial Germany'. It is a period marked by a discursive formation that can more appropriately be called 'post-imperial', since it remains obsessed with 'colonial fantasies' (Zantop, 1997), colonial culture and the restitution of Germany's lost empire.<sup>5</sup>

Recent postcolonial research has given a fuller account of the specific 'coloniality in post-imperial culture' (Krobb and Martin, 2014: 9) that defined Weimar colonialism: in a nation that had made the sudden and involuntary transition from empire to remembering and once more 'imagining empire' (Krobb and Martin, 2014: 11), the restitution of Germany's overseas colonies promoted by the revisionist movement became emblematic of shedding the humiliation of defeat in World War I and regaining the status of an equal player on the world stage. Along with the ongoing processes of globalisation this gave the 'colonial question' and the colonial politics of memory much wider reach throughout society than the imperial project had enjoyed before 1918. As a result, the 'discourse of coloniality unfolded in all media and genres, and in all forums of the public domain' (Krobb and Martin, 2014: 33), in literature, film, music, entertainment, commerce and advertising. Colonialist mentality and discourse continued after 1918, while at the same time the transformed political situation, the retrospective glorification of Germany's colonial achievements, and the internal tensions epitomized by the hate-campaign against the so-called 'Rhineland Bastards' (the children of French colonial soldiers and German women born during the French occupation of the Rhineland in the early 1920s), indicate the specific historical profile of German post-

imperialism at the time. The increased popularity of the colonial novel during the 1920s to 1940s is evidence of this condition and discourse (Warmbold, 1989; Hermes 2009: 97-157). Critics have often pointed out the obvious differences between Germany's colonial history and other European nations, in particular Britain and France: the early loss of Germany's colonies, the resulting lack of immediate postcolonial immigration, the limited global status of the German language, and the lack of experience in the politics of decolonisation and colonial independence wars. There are nevertheless good reasons to ask 'to what extent [...] a persistence of "colonial-like" behaviours after a formal end to colonialism' might not also be seen in other European countries (Schilling, 2014: 199). Furthermore, the question can be raised as to whether 'a desire to preserve or return to the practice of informal influence' in the former colonies (Schilling, 2014: 201), along with particular patterns of remembering and 'forgetting', might be more widely typical of the first stage in the long transition from empire to postcoloniality in Europe (Jansen and Osterhammel, 2013: 124-125). Unlike in Germany, post-imperial discourse may not have dominated an entire period in the history of those nations which lost their empires after World War II, but post-imperial networks, concerns and voices arguably played a role in the European response to the conflicts and politics of decolonisation during the 1950s to 1970s. From the perspective of Comparative Postcolonial Studies it would therefore seem useful to conceive of post-imperialism not simply as a particular phase on the road from empire to specifically postcolonial (memory) discourses, but rather to look more closely at the drivers of post-imperial discourse and investigate the role of post-imperial voices in the protracted process of 'decolonizing the colonizer' (Buettner).

Buettner's research shows that in Britain 'ageing ex-colonizers [...] as well as their descendants have been decisive players in the production of accounts that defend and revalidate both the empire and those Britons who experienced it personally'; she identifies a range of what I would call post-imperial strategies in 'returned colonials' as well as historians with personal links to imperial actors (Buettner, 2010: 92-93). The resurgence of such a memory discourse '[f]rom the late 1970s on' (Buettner, 2010: 93) reverses the order of interwar post-imperial and 1960s anti-colonial discourse in Germany, bringing British post-imperial and postcolonial voices in direct conflict with one another. In the French context the role of the 'pieds noirs' comes to mind, the repatriates from Algeria and from France's other African colonies, and their role in the 'memory battle' (Jansen and Osterhammel, 2013: 125: 'Erinnerungskrieg') between post-imperial and anti-colonial or postcolonial accounts that



came to a head in the colonial law debate of 2005 (Bertrand, 2006; Blanchard et al., 2006). Portugal's 'retornados' are similarly significant for this country's memory work with regard to its African colonies and their late and violent independence (de Medeiros, 2014: 158-162). In the case of Italy, however, there seems to have been a similar, although much more muted phase of post-imperial discourse than in Germany when Italy was dispossessed of its African colonies by the Allied Forces in 1947: while, after an initial 'nostalgia for the colonies in the immediate post-war period' (Andall and Duncan, 2005: 18), Italy's colonial past disappeared from public awareness for most of the 1950s to 1970s, those involved in Italy's short-lived empire, including a small number of returnees and veterans' associations, sought to keep post-imperial memory of colonialism alive in the face of the transformation of public opinion on account of the rise of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism during the 1960s (Labanca, 2005). Thus, the 1960s and 1970s were decades in which 'memory contest' between post-imperialism and anti-colonialism stretched across Europe.

In the German case a comparative analysis of the 1984 centenary of the Congo conference and the 2004 centenary of Germany's colonial war against the Herero and Nama (Göttsche, 2013: 59-60) reveals a clear shift in the profile of the memory discourses associated with Germany's colonial past. In West Germany in 1984, those involved in Germany's empire or in the colonialist revisionism of the Weimar period raised their voices one last time along post-imperial lines, although most of the commemoration was dominated by liberal and left-wing anti-imperialism, making the memory of Germany's 'forgotten' colonialism a theatre of general political debate between the left and the right. By contrast, in 2004 the post-imperial voices had passed away. Anti-imperialist agitation had been superseded by a postcolonial memory discourse which gained unprecedented public resonance at this point and was supported by the wider 'normalization' (Link 2006) of the 'postcolonial gaze' since the 1990s, to use Paul Michael Lützeler's term (1997). Schilling's analysis of the transgenerational memory of German colonialism in the families of German colonial actors (both in Germany and in Namibia)<sup>6</sup> could be rephrased to underscore the survival and gradual transformation of a post-imperial discourse that begins in the 1920s with the 'memory of loss' and the validation of 'resilience, patriotism, and bravery' (Schilling, 2014: 172) by those involved in Germany's empire or in the colonial revisionism of the inter-war period. This transformation continues after 1945 with apologetic stories about the former colonies as 'sites of freedom, adventure, and self-sufficiency' as well as 'benign relations with indigenous communities' (Schilling, 2014: 177, 179), until the paradigm shift marked by the left-liberal

‘discovery of the Third World’ during the 1960s, along with 1960s/70s anti-imperialist and anti-colonial discourse forced the post-war children and grandchildren of those colonialist actors to make decisions about departing from the positive family narrative or contesting the emerging new anti-colonial consensus (Schilling, 2014: 180).

In contemporary German literary discourse about Africa, Maria Bossen’s autobiography *Lalabo Afrika* (2001), which tells the story of a German settlers’ family in Angola from 1923 through to independence in 1975, appears to be one of the last examples of an apologetic account that works along post-imperial lines, in this case of course as a result of the late end of Portuguese colonial rule (Göttsche, 2013: 324-327). (German-language publications in Namibia warrant a separate analysis.) Contemporary German historical and family novels about colonialism in Africa tend to integrate post-imperial positions – if they are represented at all – in broader outlines of German colonial involvement in Africa since the late nineteenth century, often associating them with the narrators’ grandparents and with transgenerational memory narratives (Göttsche, 2014). Examples include Stephan Wackwitz’s *Ein unsichtbares Land* (*An Invisible Country*, 2003) with its critical representation of 1930s South-West Africa and colonial revisionism both there and in interwar Germany, Brigitte Beil’s *Maskal oder Das Ende der Regenzeit* (*Maskal or the end of the rainy season*, 2003) about a German family’s involvement in the modernisation of Ethiopia between 1906 and 1942, and Andrea Paluch and Robert Habeck’s *Der Schrei der Hyänen* (*The cry of the hyenas*, 2004) about a German family’s ties with Namibia from the 1890s onwards (Göttsche, 2013: 344-363, 364-370, 370-375).

The more recent dissolution of the British and French empires, and the late end of Portuguese colonial rule, cannot fail to produce different discursive formations in which post-imperial and postcolonial voices meet and clash, rather than being separated by generational change and intervening history. Paul Gilroy’s critical engagement with ‘postimperial’ legacies in contemporary Britain (Gilroy, 2005: 12) is a case in point.

### **Postcolonialism and Anti-Colonialism**

Moving beyond Germany’s post-imperial phase, the historical terminology suggested here raises the question of how to tell the story of Germany’s road from the end of dominant post-imperialism in 1945 to the rise of postcolonial discourse during the 1990s. Recent research has established that there was no ‘colonial amnesia’ after 1945 (Albrecht, 2008). Even though post-imperial discourse and colonial racism were discredited through their association with

Hitler's regime and although the colonial theme was pushed into the background by more pressing concerns, post-imperial views of German colonial history and colonialist notions of cultural difference remained prominent in West Germany, while on the left (and in the German Democratic Republic) fascination with the independence movements in Europe's overseas colonies helped to keep critical interest in colonialism alive *ex negativo*. Colonial and racist tropes continued to dominate the representation of Africa and Africans, for example in popular fiction and the mass media, well into the 1970s (Lester, 1982; Poenicke, 2001; Menrath, 2012). At the same time, however, there is ample evidence, both in journalism and in literature, that critical and anti-colonial perspectives became significantly more prominent after 1945 than they had been during the Weimar and Nazi periods, preparing the ground for anti-imperialist and anti-colonial writing and activism from the mid-1960s onwards. Literary works by authors such as Max Frisch and Alfred Andersch, and later Peter Weiss and Hubert Fichte, the reception of Frantz Fanon's anti-colonial theory from 1965 onwards, and most forcefully Uwe Timm's seminal novel *Morenga* (1978) about the defeat of the Nama uprising in German South-West Africa more than seventy years earlier indicate the increasing reach of anti-colonial discourse that begins to redefine the public perception of Germany's colonial history, and of colonialism more widely, during the course of the 1960s. Supported during the later 1970s and 1980s by broader socio-cultural shifts epitomized by the Green and One World movements, by West Germany's multicultural diversification and by grass-roots activism, such as the Black German movement, this slow transformation enabled the breakthrough of critical intercultural and postcolonial awareness during the 1990s. At the same time, East Germany's politics of memory with regard to German colonial history, its support for Marxist independence movements in the 'Third World', and the Socialist Realism of East German historical fiction about German colonial history (Hermes, 2009: 159-178, 202-217) also promoted an anti-imperialist rejection of colonialism. This official memory discourse proved to be at odds, however, with the continuation of colonial perceptions of cultural difference in the mentality of a population unable to engage with the segregated groups of overseas citizens whom the GDR hosted as part of their politics of 'international solidarity' (Piesche, 2002; Göttsche, 2012a).

Germany's post-war decades are thus a transitional phase between the post-imperial culture of the Weimar and Nazi periods and the postcolonial discourse of contemporary Germany since the 1990s, marked by the antithesis of official anti-imperialism and residual colonial perceptions in the East, and the struggle between post-imperial and anti-colonial / anti-

imperialist voices in the West. The latter came to the forefront of West German politics during the later 1960s and fed into the cultural revolution of '1968' that redefined the terms of engagement with cross-cultural and colonial issues. My earlier research on German literary discourses about Africa from 1945 to the present suggests a relationship of continuity and change between the anti-colonial discourse of these decades and more recent postcolonialism. This relationship bears similarities with the transition from the (mostly Francophone) anti-colonial theory of Aimé Césaire, Albert Memmi, Frantz Fanon and others to the (mostly Anglophone) postcolonial theory established in the wake of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978). Novels written since the 1990s build on the anti-colonial discourse of the post-war decades but typically transcend the clear-cut oppositions between 'North' and 'South', victims and perpetrators, villainous (neo-) colonialists and heroic anti-imperialists that often haunted historical fiction about the colonial theme during the 1960s to 1980s, both in the East and in the West (Göttsche, 2003).

In a different, international perspective Neil Lazarus has argued the historical significance of the fact that Postcolonial Studies emerged during the 1970s 'in close chronological proximity to the end of the era of decolonization' (Lazarus, 2004: 4-5). He argues that it emerged at a time when 'the globally popular and uplifting "Third Worldist" narrative of self-determination [...] began to founder in the face of complementary and powerful counter-offensives' that included 'the global re-imposition and re-consolidation' of now US-centred economical and political neo-imperialism (Lazarus, 2013: 327). Emerging from the end of the visions associated with the era of liberation and decolonisation during the 1940s to 1970s, postcolonial discourse builds on the anti-colonial discourse of the preceding decades, but is nevertheless distinct both in its socio-cultural context and in its discursive formation. From the perspective of international historiography Jansen and Osterhammel point out that postcolonial criticism, unlike its anti-colonial antecedent, works with the epistemology of poststructuralism and discourse analysis, rejecting the 'essentialist' tropes that often defined anti-colonial sentiment and focusing on the cultural and epistemological rather than the political, social and economic dimensions of colonialism (Jansen and Osterhammel, 2013: 115-116). It is therefore not only the German road from empire to postcolonialism that makes distinctions useful between the post-war decades and the contemporary period.

It would certainly not be helpful to subsume all anti-colonial discourse, which stretches well back to the beginnings of Europe's colonial expansion, and in German literary history at least to the late eighteenth-century, under the notion of the 'postcolonial'. Bartolomé de las Casas,

German nineteenth-century authors such as Karl Gutzkow and Wilhelm Raabe, twentieth-century critics such as Hans Paasche, Maximilian Scheer and Jean-Paul Sartre all represent particular phases, facets and strands of anti-colonialism. Their critical interventions, however, are historically specific and often tinged, as postcolonial (literary) research has shown in the wake of Edward Said's methodology of 'contrapuntal reading' (Said, 1994: 78), by particular aspects of the colonial discourse and imagination of their times. Anti-colonialism takes different shapes and operates in different ways in different historical periods. The literary history of anti-colonialism across Europe has yet to be written; it would eventually complement the more obvious intellectual ancestry of postcolonial criticism in the anti-colonial thought developed by the (formerly) colonised, from the Haitian revolution and abolitionism, through African-American critics such as W.E.B. Dubois, to those Francophone classics of anti-colonial liberation theory now often presented as 'postcolonial thought in the French-speaking world' (Forsdick and Murphy, 2009).

### **Beyond the Postcolonial?**

Unless we assume history moving in circles, a simplistic chronological understanding of the 'postcolonial' would have to accept that postcoloniality is a condition that can never end. A considered conceptual understanding of the postcolonial along the lines of Bhabha and Hall will instead need to concede that postcolonial conditions and postcolonial discourses will eventually give way to other social and cultural formations. This does not mean that the 'postcolonial project' (Bhabha) is anywhere near satisfactory completion, far from it: new tensions in European multiculturalism and violent conflicts across the world, often linked to the geopolitical legacy of European colonial rule, indicate the opposite. Even within the small field of German literary discourses about Africa and Africans, the persistence of old stereotypes, the continuing lure of exoticism, and the return of some colonial myths in popular historical fiction (Göttsche, 2012b) suggest that the normalization of the 'postcolonial gaze' and the emergence of a postcolonial memory discourse provide no safeguard against the survival of some aspects of the cultural history of colonialism, or indeed against the danger of retrograde developments. Nevertheless, postcolonialism, like any other cultural formation, is in the process of developing its own historicity. Generational change in conjunction with socio-political and cultural shifts along with the ongoing history of literary poetics eventually produce new discursive formations which, from the perspective of literary and cultural history, are, or will be, too distinct to still be usefully subsumed under

the ‘postcolonial’. It may not be easy to agree at which point existing literary and cultural trends in the European languages make the transition to the post-postcolonial, but there are some potential instances of such departures.

It is in particular the recent preoccupation with transnationalism, i.e. with transnational and transcultural lives, translations between cultures, diasporic connectivities and other cultural extensions of international mobility, migration and globalisation that point to literary developments beyond the postcolonial paradigm. Unsurprisingly, this is primarily the case in Anglophone and Francophone literatures, the prominent postcolonial writing of which takes centre-stage in the new ‘world literature’ and where there exists a long, multi-generational record of literary engagement with colonial and postcolonial history, both in the metropolis and in the former colonies. For example: in Francophone African writing since the later 1990s by authors such as Sami Tchak, Kangni Alem, Kossi Efovis and Alain Mabanckou, whom he calls the ‘children of the postcolony’, Thorsten Schüller has identified an innovative ‘paratopical’ aesthetic which is marked ‘by the phenomena of globalisation’ but remains ‘free of colonial or postcolonial implications’; this is a highly self-reflexive type of postmodern writing that works with ‘global intertextual references’ and breaks with the postcolonial politics of decolonisation and its socio-historical outlook (Schüller, 2008: 7). Other prominent French authors with a background in African migration, such as Wilfried N’Sondé (born in Brazzaville in 1968, raised in France but living in Berlin) or Marie Ndiaye (born in France in 1967 and now also living in Berlin after residences in Spain and the Netherlands) could be cited as further examples. Both write in French for a global Francophone audience and exemplify ‘littérature monde’ moving beyond the Francocentric discourse of ‘francophonie’ (Clavaron, 2014).

In the Anglophone context the transatlantic movement of Afropolitanism comes to mind. The Black British author Taiye Selasi, who coined the term, defined Afropolitanism in a landmark essay of 2005 as ‘the newest generation of African emigrants’ (Selasi, 2005), united by a high level of education, multilingualism and the experience of cultural hybridisation in multiple transnational and geographical frames of reference. Combining the idea of cosmopolitanism with an insistence on African perspectives and multi-layered diasporic connectivity, ‘Afropolitanism’ includes the ‘willingness to complicate Africa’, to move beyond cultural essentialism and facile antagonisms, to ‘comprehend cultural complexity’ and to give personal life choices a political edge in terms of identity and race (Selasi, 2005). In her novel *Ghana Must Go* (2013) Selasi, whose family came to the UK from Ghana and who studied in

the USA and Britain but now lives in Rome, portrays two generations of a cosmopolitan African family, 'scattered' across Ghana, the USA and at times Nigeria and the UK (Selasi, 2013: 314). The novel unfolds an elaborate multiperspectival narrative that uses shifting internal focalisation for a kaleidoscope of interlinked experiences, anxieties and hopes condensed around the death of the father, after sixteen years of separation from his wife and children, and their reunion in Ghana for his burial. The parents, from Ghana and Nigeria respectively, are both 'bright fugitive immigrants' (197) in 1970s North America, arriving with scholarships to escape civil war and poverty. He becomes an 'exceptional surgeon' (7) who nonetheless returns to Ghana after separation from his wife with a vision of 'homeland reimagined' (5) to establish a 'bridge [...] between worlds' (52); she gives up a career in law to raise their children and finds her separate way to Ghana once the children are adults. The four children are cast as Americans with their own individual burdens of 'postcolonial angst' (233), ranging from the performative normality of 'New Immigrant Perfection' (127) 'with none of the comforts of in-group belonging' (221), through different and conflicted individual strategies of self-assertion, to an 'aching [...] for *lineage*' (251) and the discovery, on arrival in Ghana, of the African 'stranger inside' themselves (270). While the parents try to break loose from the stranglehold of colonial legacies, their children attempt to fill the silence left by violent African history. They search for African identities beyond the stereotypes surviving from colonial times or the politics of diaspora. The novel thus clearly engages with postcolonial concerns, but it does so in ways which move beyond established patterns of postcolonial writing.

The acclaimed novel *Open City* (2011) by Teju Cole, an American writer, photographer and art historian from Nigeria, follows an even more obviously post-postcolonial identity discourse and a 'paratopical' cultural map while also opening the perspective of the Afropolitan elite up to a range of multicultural voices. The Nigerian-American protagonist and first-person narrator's strolls around New York after the end of his working day as a clinical psychiatrist structure the novel; together with the view of the Statue of Liberty in its conclusion they make this text on one level a tribute to a multicultural New York, broken up in line with its transcultural and transnational poetics by similarly structured chapters about Brussels, where the protagonist Julius spends his winter holiday over Christmas and New Year 2006/07. In the tradition of *flâneur* writing, the narrative combines self-reflection with a multitude of observations clustered around encounters with a range of characters from different social and ethnic backgrounds, as well as dialogues and essayism on a large range of

themes: from the leitmotif of immigration and community relations, through the perceived threats of Islam and international terrorism after 9/11, to debates in critical theory and cultural criticism as reflected in names such as Roland Barthes, Fukuyama, Benedict Anderson, Edward Said and crucially Anthony Kwame Appiah, the author of *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in the World of Strangers* (2006). As a highly educated and successful academic who came to the USA on a university scholarship, the narrator defies all stereotypes by presenting himself, for example, as a connoisseur of classical European music, art aficionado and a widely-read intellectual whose thoughts cast an ever-growing net of literary and cultural references. As a Yoruba in America with a German grandmother, whose unknown life inspires engagement with the experience of World War II in Germany and Belgium<sup>7</sup> along with critical memory of National Socialism and the Holocaust, he is also conceived as ‘the unaware continuation of’ ‘an entire vanished world of people, experiences, sensations, desires’ (Cole, 2011: 80) that makes the novel a transnational kaleidoscope of twentieth and twenty first-century concerns.

Complementing such transatlantic historical and biographical connectivity, the idea of a kaleidoscope of diverse lives underpins the encounters and character portraits that open up the protagonist’s memories and self-reflections to the wider world. The series of portraits of characters such as a Japanese professor of English, a Liberian ex-child soldier, Chinese immigrants and a Nigerian investment banker in New York, and a highly intellectual Moroccan internet café attendant, Czech and Polish immigrants, Palestinian and Rwandan refugees in Brussels, defies any expectation of synthesis or obvious conclusions. The reading of the cityscapes as memoryscapes extends to colonial themes, such as the Dutch colonisation of Manhattan, slavery marked by ‘a memorial for the site of an African burial ground’ (220), orientalist stereotypes about Arab immigrants in Belgium, or the critique of the Western lack of knowledge about Africa,<sup>8</sup> but it does so as part of a wider, truly cosmopolitan universe (Göttsche, 2016). Although those whom the protagonist encounters often reference potentially postcolonial notions of African diasporic or Black American victimhood and ‘brotherhood’, the narrator rejects such typecasting and imposed bonding in favour of selected individual sympathies and ties; his journey of self-reflection (and self-assertion after suffering an assault by black youths) is concerned with the ‘performative’ ‘calibration’ of individual ‘normalcy’ (243). There is nothing in the novel’s cross-cultural poetics to question such detachment from established patterns of cultural politics.



In Selasi's and Cole's novels colonial history and legacy, while acknowledged in terms of the characters' backgrounds, their movements between America, Africa and Europe, and the histories of Ghana and Nigeria, are no longer prominent themes; they are integrated in the broader cultural frames of reference of a Black elite who make their own life choices in a globalised world of increased transnational and transcontinental mobility. Their protagonists have moved beyond the condition of migrants engaged in the 'social articulation of difference' as an 'on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities' (Bhabha, 1994: 2); postcolonial identity politics give way to a discourse of performative normality in a globalised world of multiple composite identities in diverse but interconnected multicultural societies. While issues of belonging, minority experience and race still play a part, they are refracted very differently in the various characters whose fascinations and problems are shared with individuals from other backgrounds, outweighing (post-) colonial legacies. There is also no sense of a unified African diaspora any more. There is, however, surely a social dimension to the fact that Selasi's and Cole's characters do not need the sort of 'empowerment' that Bhabha's postcolonial vision promotes (1994: 2).

In German literature there is not (yet) enough evidence for a trend or movement which takes German postcolonial writing, in particular African diasporic writing in German, to a new departure. However, some individual examples can be cited of literature moving beyond a postcolonial discourse in terms of their representations of personal identity, minority experience, German multiculturalism and its global context in works that display a historical awareness integrating postcolonial concerns within a broader political and cultural agenda. The most likely German example of Afropolitanism to date is the autobiography *Das Leben kommt immer dazwischen: Stationen einer Reise (And then life happens: a memoir, 2010)* by Barack Obama's half-sister Auma Obama from Kenya, who holds a PhD in German Studies from Bayreuth and went on to live in Berlin and Britain, before returning to Kenya in 2007 as the coordinator of a local CARE programme; it is in Germany that she discovers her 'African identity' (Obama, 2010: 179: 'die Entdeckung meiner "afrikanischen Identität"'). While she portrays her father as having been torn between cultures, between Africa and the United States, she herself embodies a confident new transnational and transcultural identity of her own making which is based on achievement and purpose beyond the legacies of colonial history. Obama is of course also a member of the new transnational African elite portrayed by Selasi and Cole.

Less high-profile examples from the context of African diasporic writing include the novel *Schanzen-Slam* (2009) by Victoria B. Robinson (\*1980), a journalist and writer of African-American and German parentage, the successful Black German Hip Hop artist Samy Deluxe's (Samy Sorge's) memoir *Dis wo ich herkomm: Deutschland Deluxe* (Where I come from: Germany deluxe, 2009) and the collection of small prose pieces *Das afrikanische Auge* (The African eye, 2007) by the journalist Luc Degla from Benin (Göttsche, 2012a: 83-125; Göttsche, 2010; Göttsche, 2015). It goes without saying that such new developments beyond a postcolonial literary discourse are still open to postcolonial critique. This proposal for a more differentiated historical terminology aims to enhance postcolonial literary studies rather than closing the book.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> On cross-mapping the memories of colonialism and the Holocaust transnationally see Rothberg, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> For a fuller analysis of the memory contests after 1945 relating to colonialism see Albrecht, 2011; Verber, 2014.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Jansen and Osterhammel (2013), where the use of the term for the ‘De-Kolonisation’ (p. 27) of the former colonisers and their imperial metropolis is only an occasional extension of the regular use for the former colonies, their struggle for independence and their histories of nation-building. The basis for this extended use is clearly what Jansen and Osterhammel call the ‘normative’ side of decolonisation: emerging from metropolitan politics during the mid-1950s and then embraced by the anti-colonial movements in the former colonies, by the end of the period of decolonisation, i.e. by the end of the 1970s, the term came to stand for a ‘radical transformation of the international order’ reflected in the moral and political banning of colonialism and racism (p. 15).

<sup>4</sup> If there was a competition for the first European colonial power to lose or shed its colonies, then Sweden is likely to win, having lost its colonies in West Africa, North America and the Caribbean by 1663 (see Naum and Nordin, 2013). In other words, Sweden would have been ‘postcolonial’ before the peak of colonial imperialism in the later nineteenth century and before the conflation of imperialism and nationalism that provides the context for more recent European colonialism. A purely formal understanding of ‘decolonisation’ that fails to account for economic, social and cultural history would also struggle to account for the colonial involvement of those European countries which did not have colonies of their own. For example, the recent debate about ‘postcolonial Switzerland’ would be futile (see Purtschert et al., 2012). Things become even more complicated when we turn to intra-European colonialism, for example in the Austrian/Habsburg and Russian/Soviet contexts (see Annus 2014; Feichtinger et al., 2003). Clearly a more differentiated approach is called for, one that considers cultural decolonisation alongside state politics and also distinguishes between recent postcolonial discourse and earlier forms of engaging with the colonial past and its legacies.

<sup>5</sup> The understanding of ‘post-imperialism’ suggested here is strictly historical. It references the age of European colonial imperialism at the end of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth century as the culmination point of Europe’s colonial expansion overseas since the fifteenth century, rather than, for example, Hardt and Negri’s Neo-Marxist concept of ‘empire’ as ‘a decentered and deterritorializing apparatus of rule that progressively incorporates the entire global realm’ (Hardt and Negri, 2000: xii). My usage does not relate to the persistence of those ‘informal structures of imperial rule’ after the end of Europe’s former colonies (Leonhard and Renner, 2010: 7) which were discussed at the time under the heading of neo-colonialism. Despite sharing some of the critical concerns, my usage also departs from Paul Gilroy’s critique of ‘imperialist nostalgia’ and ‘postcolonial melancholia’ in contemporary Britain, since Gilroy often uses ‘postcolonial’ and ‘post-imperial’ interchangeably (Gilroy, 2005: e.g. 121). Although in parts inspired by Paulo de Medeiros’s vision of a ‘post-imperial Europe’, the suggested historical usage also deviates from his more political and conceptual understanding of the term. His understanding takes critical debate in postcolonial theory further, and uses the history of Portugal as both the first and the last of Europe’s colonial empires to contextualize (post-) colonialism in the broader history of

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imperialism since antiquity (see de Medeiros, 2014). For a fuller discussion of current notions of ‘empire’ and ‘imperialism’ see Huggan 2013: 28-37.

<sup>6</sup> Schilling, 2014: 155-194. Schilling distinguishes four generations: ‘the original “long” generation of colonial actors, born between the 1850s and 1880s’, ‘their “decolonized” children, born between the 1890s and 1910s’, ‘the “postcolonials”, born between the 1920s and 1940s’ and ‘the “extra-colonials”, born between the 1950s and 1980s’ (p. 156). In my terminology the first two generations were actively involved in interwar post-imperialism, the third generation often perpetuated a post-imperial memory discourse after 1945 while anti-colonial voices became more prominent, and only the fourth generation moved through post-war anti-colonialism to potentially embrace a postcolonial view of German colonial history.

<sup>7</sup> The novel’s title, while clearly also resonating with its homage to New York, derives unexpectedly from a reference to Brussels as the ‘open city’ (Cole, 211: 97) that escaped bombing during World War II.

<sup>8</sup> Julius is puzzled that the British director of the film *The Last King of Scotland* (2006) about Idi Amin’s Kenya uses music from Mali for his Kenyan setting (Cole, 2011: 29), suggesting that the one, undifferentiated ‘Africa’ of the European imagination persists.

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