

# SWITZERLAND AND 'COLONIALISM WITHOUT COLONIES'

Reflections on the Status of Colonial Outsiders

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**colonial outsider**  
**colonialism**  
**commodity**  
**racism**  
**postcolonial**  
**studies**  
**Switzerland**  
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*In this essay the theoretical focus of postcolonial theory has been shifted from the cultures and societies of former formal colonies to those countries that have an explicit self-understanding as an outsider within the European colonial power constellation. Using the example of Switzerland, it analyses the presence and perseverance of colonial structures and power relations in a country that has never been regarded as or understood itself as an official colonial power. In a first step, we compare present debates on colonialism in Switzerland with those in neighbouring countries, i.e. France, Germany, Italy and Austria. In a second step, we trace previous research that postulates a link between Switzerland and colonialism, and apply the concept of 'colonialism without colonies', which, in contrast, engages with methods and themes that have emerged from postcolonial studies. Finally, we present a specific case study on 'Swiss commodity racism' in order to elucidate the concept 'colonialism without colonies'.*

In 2007 the right-wing populist Swiss People's Party (SVP) launched a campaign in support of the so-called deportation initiative (*Ausschaffungsinitiative*). The initiative demanded that foreign nationals with a specific kind of



*interventions*, 2015

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2015.1042395>

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This article is based on thoughts that we developed in our introduction to the anthology *Postkoloniale Schweiz. Formen und Folgen eines Kolonialismus ohne Kolonien* (Purtschert, Lüthi, and Falk 2012). This research has been generously supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation. We would like to thank Marina Lienhard, Jovita dos Santos Pinto, Lina Walti and Risto Lenz for their research contributions and their help with the preparation of the manuscript. For their help with the translation we thank Erika Doucette and Sam Osborn. Finally, we thank an anonymous reviewer for the valuable comments.

criminal record be automatically deported, and it was adopted into law on 28 November 2010, with 52.9 per cent of votes in its favour. The poster advertising the initiative stimulated debates far beyond Switzerland. On 7 September 2007 the British *Independent* newspaper provocatively posed the question if Switzerland was now ‘Europe’s heart of darkness?’ The campaign poster shows a black sheep being kicked out of ‘Switzerland’ by a white sheep – with Switzerland symbolized by a red flag with a Swiss cross on it. Because the poster can be read as stating that dark-skinned people are the black sheep of Switzerland, it plays with the multiple meanings of the metaphor (Michel 2014). On the one hand, it has clear and unmistakably racist components, and on the other, the SVP could claim it was merely a figure of speech. Such images are political in the sense that they push the boundaries of what can be said and, in this case, of what can be shown (Bischoff, Falk, and Kafeshy 2010). Within the context of postcolonial Switzerland this raises the question as to whether the most powerful party in the Swiss government can resort to using such racial imagery because Switzerland is considered to be situated outside colonial constellations and not historically laden with racism.<sup>1</sup>

In this essay we apply the concept ‘colonialism without colonies’ in order to point out the specific postcolonial constellation of places like Switzerland, which were highly involved in and affected by colonialism without having developed a respective self-conceptualization.<sup>2</sup> Over the past few years, parallel to this refusal to reconsider Switzerland’s possible connections with colonialism, important research contributions have been made, which bear witness to Swiss colonial entanglements and demand that they be reexamined. Some of the first key impulses of this emerging debate are based on studies in economic history, which deal with the multifaceted involvement of Swiss actors in the transatlantic slave and colonial trades (e.g. David, Etemad, and Schaufelbuehl 2005; Fässler 2005; Stettler, Haenger, and Labhardt 2004; Zangger 2011; Dejung 2013), as well as studies on colonial knowledge production in Switzerland (Keller 1995; Harries 2007; Schneider and Lüthi 2007; Zangger 2011; Schär, 2015). More recently, the employment of approaches from postcolonial studies has increased, which has brought up the issue of how colonial and postcolonial constellations are currently negotiated, reproduced and re-encoded, and how these are related to contemporary forms of racism. This research attests to the tremendous presence of colonial elements in Swiss everyday life, politics and scholarship. It also sheds light on the paradox that, while postcolonial notions pervade Swiss society, they are only rarely reflected upon (see Purtschert, Lüthi, and Falk 2012; Purtschert and Fischer-Tinè, 2015).

In a first step we take a look at postcolonial discussions in neighbouring countries as well as in the Nordic context, whose relations to colonialism

1 The UN Special Rapporteur’s report on racism found the prevalence of racist ideas within democratic parties in Switzerland alarming. The report also expressed concern that this racist mindset is conveyed during election campaigns and various referenda (UNHRC 2007). For more on the connection between right-wing populism and migration policy, see Skenderovic and D’Amato (2008).

2 For an elaborated version of this concept, see Lüthi, Falk, and Purtschert (forthcoming).

are in some ways comparable to that of Switzerland. Secondly, we look at the existing body of work that scrutinizes the relation between Switzerland and colonialism. Thirdly, we make use of the concept 'colonialism without colonies' in order to capture the postcolonial situation of Switzerland and other places that have been viewed – and saw themselves – as colonial outsiders. With the help of a specific example situated at the intersection of culture and economy, Swiss 'colonialism without colonies' is investigated. Finally, we discuss possible insights that this concept might bring in relation to other places viewed as being located outside the colonial project.

### European Dimension of Colonialism: Switzerland's Neighbours and the Nordic Countries

Debates around colonial legacies have gripped many European countries, although the terms in which these are conducted vary widely according to context. A notion that is characteristic of the Swiss debate is that, as a nation-state, it was never officially regarded as or understood itself as a colonial power. For this reason, the starting point for discussion in Switzerland is different to that of neighbouring countries. For instance, the political climate of the debates on postcolonial issues in France is paradoxical, where demands to close the chapter on colonialism – and on France's guilty conscience – for good appeals to the majority. A law passed in 2005, which explicitly pointed out the positive effects of French colonial activity, was the source of a great deal of controversy (Bancel 2010; Michel 2014).<sup>3</sup> Shortly thereafter, with President Nicolas Sarkozy, a representative of this new self-image came to power. He became notorious for his Dakar speech in July 2007, where he described Africa as having no history and offered to help the continent enter modernity (Mbembe 2007; Gassama et al. 2008). Debates about France's colonial legacy and neocolonial interests did not cease under the socialist president François Hollande, who quickly lost his image as an anti-war monger after his intervention in Mali in 2013. In comparison, in German and Italian politics and media, the dominant trend is to downplay their own colonial past as an insignificant note on the margins of history. According to Steyerl and Rodríguez (2003), in line with Germany's amnesia regarding its own colonial past, it is widely assumed that postcolonial power relations 'in Germany never existed, are irrelevant, or that they describe processes that took place elsewhere' (8).<sup>4</sup> Still, there is belated and increasing reception of both colonial history and postcolonial and whiteness studies at universities in Germany and France.<sup>5</sup> In Italy, another of Switzerland's neighbouring countries, there is also a palpable and sustained lack of postcolonial perspective on its own history, which has only

3 Soon afterwards, in response to harsh criticism, Jacques Chirac, president at the time, decided to remove the passage from the law altogether.

4 All citations not originally in English are the authors' translations.

5 For more on the reception within the German context, see Conrad (2008); Friedrichsmeyer, Lennox, and Zantop (1998); Eggers et al. (2005); Kundrus (2003); Steyerl and Rodríguez (2003); Ha, al-Samarai, and Mysorekar (2007). For the French context, see Bancel et al. (2010); Blanchard, Bancel, and Lemaire (2008); Mollenhauer (2010); Fassin (2006); Dorlin (2009).

6 Italy primarily had colonies in North and East Africa, including colonies in Libya and Ethiopia.

7 Other examples of postcolonial approaches in Italian research currently can be found in Amodeo (2009) and Triulzi (2006).

8 For more information on reception within the Austrian context, see Unterweger (2005); Bakondy and Winter (2007); Kazeem, Martinz-Turek, and Sternfeld (2009); Pfeffer (2012).

9 Loftsdóttir (2010) develops a similar view in her analysis of Iceland. For Norway, see Gullestad (2005).

recently been addressed by a new kind of scholarship.<sup>6</sup> Lombardi-Diop and Romeo (2012) emphasize this when they write that ‘the colonial archive, hidden and invisible for years, is just beginning to open up to the general view’ (8).<sup>7</sup> Mezzadra (2011) also speaks of belated reception of postcolonial studies in Italy.

In all these countries, a discourse of denial is prevalent. Following this pattern, it is no surprise that certain similarities can be detected between Austria and Switzerland. Both subscribe to a politics of neutrality, which is also claimed in relation to colonialism, and none of them has been an official colonial power. Similarly to Switzerland, a strong amnesia surrounding colonialism, the slave trade and racism determines discussions in Austria. For the black diaspora this means that the ‘dominant parameters of our history’, namely displacement, slavery and reification (*Verschleppung*, *Versklavung*, *Verdinglichung*), are non-existent in the hegemonic Austrian context, as Johnston-Arthur notes (2007, 425). In recent years, this silence around Austria’s colonial involvement has been challenged by a research group on Black Austrian history and, more recently, by postcolonial scholarship.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, there have been attempts to apply postcolonial approaches to the Habsburg multi-ethnic state (Feichtinger, Prutsch, and Csaky 2003).

Thus, approaches from countries that claim an outsider status in relation to colonialism are of particular interest for analysing the Swiss case. Such scholarship has particularly been developed in the Nordic countries. The application of a postcolonial perspective has enabled a theoretical shift in the focus of postcolonial theory, away from cultures and societies with formal colonies and towards countries that explicitly think of themselves as outsiders within the European colonial constellation of power. With this context in mind, a group of feminist researchers developed the concept of colonial complicity (Keskinen et al. 2009). They demonstrate how Scandinavian countries ‘ha[ve] neither been historically situated as one of the colonial centres in Europe nor ha[ve they] been an “innocent victim” or mere outsider of the colonial projects’ (Vuorela 2009, 19).<sup>9</sup> Through the lens of postcolonial analysis, the term ‘complicity’ implies participation in hegemonic western discourses and their universalistic modes of thought and practices of dominance. As Ulla Vuorela (2009) states, especially for countries outside western centres, complicity presents a means of approaching the ideal set by these centres of powers and a desire to ‘belong’. In the Finnish case, for instance, this meant forcefully displacing the indigenous Sami population and driving them away from the places they once inhabited, thereby engaging in a process of ‘internal colonization’. By the same token, in the early twentieth century, Finland played with the idea of colonizing present-day Namibia, where Finnish missionary societies had been active, but ultimately decided against it. Instantiating knowledge orders that rely on a Eurocentric ‘universal truth’ has effects that reach beyond these concrete

colonial conquests and forced displacements, and serves to legitimize expansions or justify certain lifestyles (Vuorela 2009, 21). As these authors conclude, many Scandinavian countries benefited economically from the slave trade, used missionary activities to spread the idea that Christianity and the West were superior, and were directly or indirectly involved in colonial enterprises. This is strikingly similar to Switzerland's experience.<sup>10</sup>

10 For more on Swiss missionary activities and their role in the field of anthropology, see Harries (2007).

Another example of how useful the postcolonial framework developed in the Nordic context proves to be for the Swiss case is the recent application of the term 'exceptionalism' by Loftsdóttir and Jensen (2012). They point out two notions of a Nordic exceptionalism that seem unrelated at first glance: on the one hand, it expresses the 'idea about the Nordic countries' peripheral status in relation to the broader European colonialism' (2). A second notion captures the claim of the Nordic countries being role models of modern nation-states, 'global "good citizens", peace-loving, conflict-resolution oriented' (2). However, once the first notion of exceptionalism is deconstructed – by way of showing how Nordic countries were indeed involved in the colonial project – the second notion of exceptionalism undergoes a complete change. The postcolonial critique of exceptionalism makes apparent how often the perception of being a colonial outsider has been used as a means to (a) effectively conceal one's colonial entanglement and (b) capitalize on one's non-involvement after decolonization, i.e. after colonialism has become a relationship that is commonly understood to be economically and politically problematic as well as morally wrong. These strategic uses of exceptionalism can also be detected in the Swiss case.

### Switzerland as an Example of 'Colonialism without Colonies'

Today is it taken for granted, both by the government and in public debates, that Switzerland had nothing to do with colonialism or the transatlantic slave trade (Purtschert 2011). It is this 'outside perspective' on colonialism, according to popular opinion, that makes Switzerland predestined to act as a mediator in dealing with the aftermath of colonialism. The Swiss government stood by this view in 2003 when confronted with the fact that Switzerland's participation in the transatlantic slave trade had been much more extensive than had commonly been believed. The Swiss Federal Council responded to an inquiry on the subject by stating that the legacy of the slave trade was something that needed to be dealt with on an international level. Within this process, Switzerland aimed 'to play a *mediating* role between African states and former colonizing powers' (cited in David and Schaufelbuehl 2005, 188; authors' emphasis). Instead of addressing the entanglements of Swiss actors

in colonial endeavours, the Swiss Federal Council assumed a ‘neutral’ position *between* the former metropolises and colonies.

These considerations show how productive it can be to apply terms like ‘colonial complicity’ or ‘colonial exceptionalism’ to the Swiss context. They capture features of a constellation that we would like to describe as colonialism without colonies, i.e. as the presence and perseverance of colonial structures and power relations in countries that, according to the dominant (self-)perception, have neither been a colonial power nor a colony.

At this point, it is necessary to draw attention to the research that has challenged this dominant perspective within Switzerland and has dealt with Switzerland’s colonial entanglements (although not specifically within the field of postcolonial studies). In the 1930s, Richard Fritz Behrendt (1932) wrote that Switzerland reaped the benefits of colonial constellations without having to shoulder military responsibility. The fact that Switzerland assumed the position of a country that backed imperial powers while representing its own interests was completely consistent with the country’s own self-image. In line with this, in July 1847, only a few months after the Sonderbund War broke out, the president of the Federal Diet (Tagsatzung) at the time and later Federal Council member Ulrich Ochsenbein remarked that ‘the world over, wherever the venturesome and dogged British have gained a foothold, you will find the Swiss as loyal companions by their side, looking for a place to distribute the products made with the skill and industriousness of their fatherland’ (Ochsenbein 1948, 216). Following decolonization, precisely because Switzerland had not formally been a colonial power, Swiss companies were able to secure their position and pass themselves off as ‘unsuspicious’ partners when dealing with former colonies. In this context, Behrendt calls Switzerland a *tertius gaudens* (the third who benefits, or literally ‘the third who rejoices’) (1932, 46). This favourable position could also be one reason for Switzerland’s economic upswing after the Second World War. The convergence of being spared from war damages after 1945, profitable large-scale projects, technical know-how and development aid during this time was certainly also beneficial (Elmer, Kuhn, and Speich Chassé 2014).

Other historical studies have also established links between Switzerland and imperialism. For example, Witschi’s (1987) study on Swiss trade relations with the Levant, like Behrendt, also considers Switzerland the *tertius gaudens* of imperialism. Lorenz Stucki (1968) goes a step further and calls Switzerland an empire, albeit a ‘secret empire’ ‘where no Swiss flags’ fly (10). Ruffieux (1986) concludes that in the nineteenth century, Switzerland developed a ‘bank and stock exchange imperium’ in the wake of the colonial powers, thereby attesting to Switzerland’s involvement in international capitalist enterprises as having the ‘character of covert colonialism’ (712; see also Ziegler 1982). Put another way and in reference to Herbert Lüthy’s

analysis of the ways in which Swiss businesses were involved in the transatlantic slave trade, Fässler (2005) has called Switzerland a 'part-time colonial power' (288). David and Etemad (1998) also outline the contours of 'Swiss imperialism'. Like most of these other authors, they emphasize its 'ambiguity' (25). From this perspective, Switzerland's self-presentation as neutral and humanitarian does not stand in contradiction to its imperial demeanour (although this could be argued in certain cases); rather, these traits stand in a constitutive relation. According to David and Etemad, 'the humanitarian efforts yielded immaterial profits: moral prestige and international repute' (24).

Our attempt to outline the concept of 'colonialism without colonies' can be seen as standing for both a continuation of these studies and a specifically cultural studies based approach, distinguishing our methods from those just mentioned.<sup>11</sup> We suggest relying on the insights and interdisciplinary approaches of postcolonial studies in order to investigate Switzerland as a case in point of 'colonialism without colonies'. This implies the following: from a historical perspective, the concept points to the fact that the present cannot be analysed without taking colonialism and its enduring impact into consideration (Bachmann-Medick 2009, 184ff.). Furthermore, the implicit relation of postcolonial studies to cultural studies allows for connections which go beyond economic and political entanglements and are linked to everyday culture by paying special attention to representation, imagination, the discursive and the visual. While mainstream scientific, economic, social and political spheres sometimes create their own logics, which cannot simply be applied to another sphere, we see much potential in examining the relations, connections and correlations *between* these different realms.

This explicit postcolonial approach distinguishes our use of the term from that of Jürgen Osterhammel, who understands 'colonialism without colonies' as 'situations in which dependencies of the "colonialist" type appear, not between a "mother country" and a geographically remote colony, but between dominant "centers" and dependent "peripheries" within *national* states or regionally integrated land empires. The theoretical construction "internal colonialism" was developed to categorize such cases' (Osterhammel 2010, 17). Therefore, Osterhammel moves away from the traditional definition of colonialism as a relationship of domination between 'metropolises' and 'colonies' by referring to the spatial and power dimension of colonialism as also taking place within a nation-state or regionally integrated land empires. Also in a legal sense, the colonial history of extraterritorial jurisdiction – for example, of the history of the US Court for China – has been understood as a type of 'colonialism without colonies' (Ruskola 2008).

In contrast, we accentuate the cultural effects of colonialism by examining the ways in which colonial images and perspectives influenced and still do affect political, popular and scientific discourses in countries without formal

11 Recently, two historical studies introduced the terms *Suisse coloniale* and *koloniale Schweiz* into the debate. In contrast to the studies conducted by Minder (2009) and Zangger (2011), which do not focus on (dis)continuities up to the present, these are precisely the aspects that the concept of 'colonialism without colonies' addresses.

colonies – or countries which have not been formally colonized. In unearthing the cultural components of colonialism and according them a formative role in the construction of identities, postcolonial studies proves to be an important point of reference for our argument. By pointing to the epistemological dimensions of colonialism, postcolonial studies has shown how the justification, the embodiment and the perpetuation of colonialism have been structured and supported by specific European systems of knowledge which have had a long-lasting effect, and not just on European societies. ‘Colonialism without colonies’ thus addresses two aspects: first, the striking *continuities* that can be detected between colonial powers and so-called colonial outsiders in view of cultural, economic and epistemic aspects of colonialism. Having said that, we don’t mean to downplay the significant differences between former colonial powers and countries that have not been in possession of colonies. However, we need a better understanding of how knowledge, images, attitudes, practices and commodities circulated in the colonial context *across* national borders and how some colonial elements originated or were significantly shaped in places that appeared to be exterior to colonialism. Second, ‘colonialism without colonies’ helps us to investigate the peculiarities of nations that have built their self-perception on the idea of having been a ‘colonial outsider’. As mentioned above, concepts like ‘colonial complicity’ or ‘exceptionalism’ turn out to be helpful to describe the specific logics that dominate discourses in respective countries. One might point to notions like ‘neutrality’ (for Switzerland, see Speich Chassé 2012), ‘colonial amnesia’, ‘colonial innocence’ (Wekker 2004) or ‘colonial outsider’.<sup>12</sup>

12 Gloria Wekker coined the term ‘innocence unlimited’ to describe the

### Swiss Commodity Racism: The ‘White Negro’

situation in postcolonial Netherlands. The term seems especially helpful in view of the self-perception of those countries that claim to have been outside the colonial project.

13 The example of the ‘white negro’ draws on an analysis developed in Purtschert and Krüger (2012).

In what follows, the cultural and epistemic reach of colonialism to countries that are understood as outsiders will be illustrated using the example of ‘Swiss commodity racism’.<sup>13</sup> We analyse ways in which coloniality as an enduring racialized and racializing knowledge production shapes historical subjects in postcolonial Switzerland.

Anne McClintock’s concept of commodity racism enables us to grasp how racism diffused into everyday life in Switzerland from the late nineteenth century and has proverbially become so commonplace that it is hardly recognized as such (McClintock 1995, 31–36, particularly 33). McClintock assumes the racism that developed in scientific research was confined to a small, influential elite. However, part and parcel of the development of capitalism, which led to an increase in the circulation of commodities and reached a broader social range of consumers in Western Europe, was a new



and extremely effective form of racism that was inherent to and disseminated through the purchase and use of consumer goods (209). In her study on Victorian colonialism, McClintock coined the term 'commodity racism' to capture this specific type of racism – as distinct from scientific racism. As we will show, the term can aptly be applied to Swiss society, where such a new form of imperial culture emerged in the course of the formation of a consumer society.

Through the rising consumerism that began around 1900, colonial goods started to reach a much larger part of the population. By means of advertisements, packaging, photography, film, literature (including children's stories), exhibitions and museums, colonial views and images began to disperse into Swiss society at large. In what follows, we look at one specific instance of Swiss commodity racism in the mid-1930s. In addition to revealing the circulation of colonial images in Switzerland, the example elucidates how processes of racialization are interconnected with sexuality and gender.

According to McClintock, consumer racism is deeply intertwined with the dissemination of bourgeois gender norms into broader society. She writes that 'the Victorian middle-class home became a space for the display of imperial spectacle and the reinvention of race, while the colonies – in particular Africa – became a theatre for exhibiting the Victorian cult of domesticity and the reinvention of gender' (1995, 34). This intersection of gender, colonialism and commodity racism in Switzerland can be exemplified by an advertising campaign for the department store Globus in 1933. Moreover, the example shows how Africa served as a stage for the incorporation and negotiation of norms that are attached to the bourgeois-capitalist ideas of privacy, home and domesticity in Switzerland. In 1932 the department store Globus invented 'Globi', a blue parrot with red-and-black checkered pants, who, in his stories, often carried children off to exotic, faraway places chock-full of colonial images.<sup>14</sup> He soon became a well-known character in children's books and remains famous to this day. His name – Globi – as well as that of the store in question – Globus – point to the 'globalization' of trade and to the endeavour to market products from the colonies to a broader consumer segment.

In addition to Globi, the figure of the 'white negro' (*weisser Neger*) was introduced in 1933. It emerged in an advertising campaign initiated to help sell white linens, so-called 'white goods' (*Weisswaren*). In April 1933 a series of advertisements was published in the *Tages-Anzeiger für Stadt und Kanton Zürich*, a widely read Zurich newspaper. These advertisements documented the search for a suitable figure for the so-called 'promotion week' (*Aktionswoche*) of the Globus department store. The first ad appeared on 18 April 1933 and showed a desperate advertising director looking for an appealing idea to announce the upcoming promotion of white linens. In the

14 On the colonial and postcolonial images concerning Globi, see Purtschert and Krüger (2012).

second ad he is seen on the phone. The telephone cable leads from his office directly to a lonely palm tree in the desert. The caption beneath the image tells us that, luckily, someone in an ‘African holiday-country’ came up with a brilliant idea. A third ad reveals whom it was lingering on in the ‘holiday-country’ – it is Globi, the department store mascot. While he calls the advertising director, a black person marvels at him and his technical device. On the following day, 20 April 1933, the ‘great advertising idea’ was finally released in a concluding advertisement. This time there is a stage on which two persons stand: in the right-hand corner is the advertising director, reading something from a paper into the microphone, pointing with his right hand towards the centre of the stage.

He points in fact to an African person standing on a chair. His feet and hands are black, his face is white. Replicating a small child, his toes are turned inward and his head oversized. He wears a white child’s dress, looks timidly towards the public and sticks one finger into his mouth. The stage setting behind him shows a desert landscape. The prompter’s box is occupied by a smiling Globi. The caption beneath the image indicates the advertising director’s speech. He announces Globi’s unique advertisement idea, namely the ‘white negro’. He claims the ‘unique and highly original example is as much unusual and above the ordinary to the African tribes as the “white linen” events are to all economical housewives’.

In this scenery, the nexus of mass consumerism, capitalism, bourgeois domesticity and colonialism becomes evident. The campaign even takes up the stage metaphor that McClintock uses when she calls Africa ‘a theatre for exhibiting the Victorian cult of domesticity’ (1995, 34). The stereotypical equation of Africa with deserts, palms, nature and holidays, as well as African people with a life completely remote from modernity, is used as a background for the orchestration of a perfect Swiss household. At first glance, a very loose connection between the ‘white negro’ and the promotion of white linen seems to exist; according to the ad, it is only their uniqueness that connects them. What is remarkable, however, is the use of the colour white. Within the cult of domesticity, white linen stands for hygiene and, more generally, for the successful work of the housewife. Moreover, it connects to the purity and enlightenment of Europe in contrast to the colonies (Opitz 1986, 43). Thus, based on a colonial matrix, this Swiss campaign plays with images of whiteness, purity, cleanliness, modernity and their counterparts, namely blackness, impurity, and the seemingly backward and remote life in Africa. The ‘white negro’ is invented to promote colonial goods – among them the products of the cotton trade – to white Swiss women. Africa becomes the stage setting for a cult of domesticity, which serves to exoticize the desired goods and at the same time work as a blueprint against which Swiss everyday life seem modern and desirable.

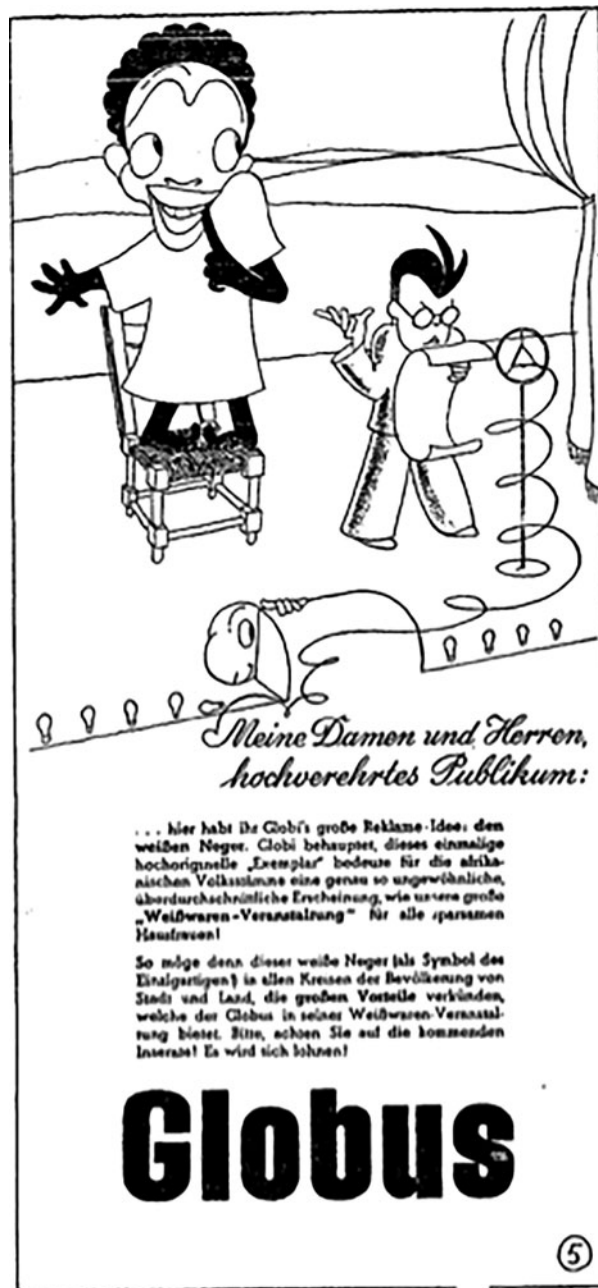


Figure 1 The 'white negro' making its appearance to the Swiss public in 1933.

The nexus between whiteness and its colonial Other is particularly apparent in the figure of the 'white negro'. One of his remarkable features is that his arms and legs are black. This evokes the association that the 'white

negro' is a black person whose face has been scrubbed white. Badenberg (2004) has shown how, at the end of the nineteenth century, the figure of the so-called 'blackamoor washed white' had an established place in everyday culture. There were several well-known and popular stories of 'blackamoors' who had turned white because they had a kind heart, or, inversely, of children who had turned black because they had eaten too much chocolate (177). Things that are black are believed to be dirty; furthermore, the figure of speech 'to wash a blackamoor white' (*einen Mohren weiß waschen*) refers to the futile attempt to prove the innocence of someone who is guilty (174). Its linguistic counterpart is 'to blacken' (*das Anschwärzen*). The connection between white linens, a 'white-washed' African (whose black colour has been washed off) and the advertisement points to the transnational context in which commodity racism is embedded.

In addition, the 'white negro' establishes a link to human zoos and people's exhibitions (*Völkerschauen*). The Swiss audience was familiar with the sight of 'white' Africans, since black albinos were displayed as 'special attractions' in people's shows that were especially popular between 1870 and 1930 (Brändle 2013, 13). In this manner, Amanoua Kpapo from Accra was advertised as a 'black negro woman', touring in the context of a 'Togo troupe' through several Swiss cities in 1903 (Brändle 2007, 49, 59). It is noteworthy that in Switzerland, as in other Western European countries, especially France and Germany, the exhibition of exoticized people marked a crucial interface of scientific and commodity racism, while simultaneously demarcating a starting point for the latter. The German merchant and impresario Carl Hagenbeck, the 'inventor' of the modern people exhibitions, regularly led his troupe to Swiss cities, where they attracted huge audiences (Thode-Arora 1989; Rothfels 2002). Between 1879 and 1939, about a hundred people shows were organized in Switzerland. They were staged in zoos, big restaurants and parks, but also on stage in theatres and variety (Dejung 2012, 350). Furthermore, Hagenbeck's cooperation with scientists involved in the study of race, notably with the famous German physician Rudolf Virchow, also extended into Switzerland (Stahelin 1993; Brändle 2013).

Our analysis shows that in strong contrast to the so-called innovative character of the 'white negro' emphasized by the advertisement campaign, the figure must be read as a reassemblage of colonial elements that were familiar to the Swiss public. Another feature of this colonial imaginary is the figure of the black servant. In an advertisement in *Globi*' monthly children's magazine *Globi* from February 1935, children are urged to tell their mothers to purchase white goods because *Globi* sent 'his friend – the white negro – to supply all stores with nice and cheap white goods'. Eleven scenes depicting him presenting various children with hats, shoes, stockings, clothing and other goods frame the advertisement. For the most part, the

'white negro' is depicted as a servant; and some images show him as strikingly effeminate. While the difference between white and black men was highlighted in the first campaign through the depiction of the 'white negro' as childlike and simple-hearted, it is his display as a feminine servant figure that sets him apart from the white male consumer. Once again, it becomes apparent how colonial discourse is established and articulated through images and concepts that are simultaneously racialized and gendered.

On a final note, it is important to note that the 'white negro' also contains a message about the limits and the impermeability of whiteness in Switzerland. Despite his colour, the figure makes it apparent that, as an African, he would never be able to pass as white or belong to white Switzerland. As current research demonstrates, Swiss citizenship is still intrinsically connected to whiteness, while the foundational role of these processes of racialization is strongly negated by hegemonic discourses within Switzerland, not least due to the prevailing silence around its colonial past (Michel and Honegger 2010; Pinto 2013).

## Conclusion: Fields of Research and Urgent Issues of Everyday Politics

It can be concluded that within the Swiss context there is a blatant 'absence' when it comes to questions of racism, its colonial genealogy and its impact on society. It is precisely this apparent abstinence from the colonial project that serves as a justification for the broad acceptance and apparently unquestioned circulation of colonial images. Up to the present day, colonial and Orientalist notions have been a prominent source of inspiration for advertising and stylizing consumer products. For example, in 2004 Globus ran a full-page advertisement in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, one of the most reputable newspapers in Switzerland. The company advertised its *style colonial* with the comment: 'Dream of the good, old colonial times ...' (for an analysis, see Falk and Jenni 2012).

There are, however, voices that challenge this overall disregard of the colonial past and the postcolonial present, including Fröhlicher-Stines and Mennel (2004), who, in the introduction to their report on the situation of black people in Switzerland, write:

Most of the stereotypical images projected onto black people can be traced back to a time when relations between Europe and Africa were based on colonization and slavery. These images affect people who recently immigrated to Switzerland, as well as black people who were born and grew up in Switzerland for generations. (Fröhlicher-Stines and Mennel 2004, 9)<sup>15</sup>

15 See also Matare-Ineichen, Schneider, and Zeugin (2002).

A postcolonial perspective can destabilize such ideas, which have become common knowledge.

Furthermore, looking at Switzerland from a postcolonial perspective makes it possible to demonstrate the ways it is implicated in transnational colonial systems. Although it still may be useful to distinguish colonial powers that formally owned territories from countries otherwise involved in colonialism, a comprehensive engagement with countries that were not formally colonial powers, but still belonged to the colonial endeavour, is long overdue. As Randeria (2012) has recently pointed out, research on postcolonial Switzerland may also have an impact on the field of postcolonial studies as a whole. Thus, the evidence of Switzerland's multiple entanglements with colonialism – despite the fact that it was never formally a colonial power and may thus perhaps be considered the 'most unlikely example' (10) of a case of colonialism – gives new contours to the thesis of 'colonialism without colonies'. The Swiss example enables us to envision the possible results of this still largely unaddressed topic: a focus on marginalized areas of research and the emergence of new questions on colonialism's modes of operation, as well as on its various postcolonial trajectories.

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