

Remembering and Reinscribing Colonialism in Brink, Kubuitsile and Mannel

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Beginning in the 1990s, Germany's colonial past was reassessed politically, socially, and culturally, which included a diverse body of literary production.¹ Uwe Timm's *Morenga* (1978) marked the beginning of a variety of postcolonial literature, but until recently, works that have taken place in colonial German South-West Africa (GSWA) were dominated by male protagonists.² While there have been a large number of autobiographical and generational narratives about and by women, they tend to occur in eastern Africa.³ Dirk Götsche suggests that this literary gap is likely due to the genocide of the Herero and Nama (1904–1907), as well as a German minority residing in Namibia today. Often, as is true with Timm's seminal novel, texts about GSWA focus on the military conflict and consequent genocide, thus the foregrounding of male figures. Here I will discuss André Brink's *The Other Side of Silence* (2002), Lauri Kubuitsile's *The Scattering* (2016), and Beatrix Mannel's *Der Duft der Wüstenrose* (2012), which give voices to female figures who have traditionally been silenced in postcolonial narratives.⁴ Written by a (white) South African man, (white) Motswana woman, and German woman respectively, these three novels take a necessary step identified by authors⁵ and critics⁶ alike in the process of remembering Germany's violent co-

1 | Dirk Götsche suggests that this is tied to intellectual debates about the Third World during the 1960s and 1970s, and the »countercultural One World movement of the 1980s« (cf. Dirk Götsche: *Remembering Africa. The Rediscovery of Colonialism in Contemporary German Literature*. Rochester [NY] 2013, p. 1).

2 | Uwe Timm: *Morenga*. Roman. Gütersloh 1978.

3 | See especially the introduction and chapter 5 in Götsche's recent comprehensive analysis for more on German literature set in contemporary Africa (Götsche: *Remembering Africa*).

4 | André Brink: *The Other Side of Silence*. Orlando 2002; Lauri Kubuitsile: *The Scattering*. Cape Town 2016; Beatrix Mannel: *Der Duft der Wüstenros*. Munich 2012.

5 | André Brink: *Interrogating silence: new possibilities faced by South African Literature*. In *Writing South Africa: Literature, Apartheid, and Democracy 1970–1995*. Ed. by Derek Attridge and Rosemary Jolly. Cambridge 1998, p. 24.

6 | Dirk Götsche: *Der neue historische Afrika-Roman: Kolonialismus aus Postkolonialer Sicht*. In: *German Life and Letters* 56 (2003), No. 3, p. 280.

lonial undertakings.⁷ These novels do not focus on well-known figures or events, rather reflect on the everyday role of women during colonialism in southern Africa. Here I will demonstrate how key plot and structural elements in these three novels permit the rejected figures to carve out a position for themselves by learning to remember and re-inscribing painful places with comfort and solace.

German South-West Africa (GSWA), now Namibia, was colonized in 1884 and throughout its roughly thirty-year existence the colonists who settled it were primarily single men: farmers, bureaucrats, and later soldiers.⁸ The paucity of potential German wives was viewed with increasing concern around the turn of the twentieth century, as nationalist and racist rhetoric spread and Germanizing the land gained urgency.⁹ German women were given and accepted the task of continuing the »civilizing mission« that the men began through colonization, by marrying and establishing households and families with them. As Daniel Walther notes, »the notion of women as carriers of culture was not limited to the colonial endeavor, and did not originate in it,« however colonization amplified »fears of degeneracy«¹⁰. Creating German homes came to stand for much more than providing nourishment and shelter. According to Roger Chickering, »the domestic sphere was but a metaphor for German culture; it stood for order, discipline and cleanliness - for civilization in the highest sense«¹¹. By attempting to replicate German domestic order in Africa, women occupied a far-reaching role in the process of colonization that extended beyond the confines of the home. Most women were unable to fulfill this complex and onerous position, however, and in fact stern warnings accompany calls to aid the young nation.

The colonies were full of ideological, physical, and social contradictions, and for female settlers, Africa meant both new freedoms as well as additional

7 | Lauri Kubuitsile was born in the United States, but according to her blog is a citizen of Botswana. Thus far most of her works have been for younger readers, cf. *Thoughts from Botswana* by Lauri Kubuitsile. Writings and thoughts from Motswana writer, Lauri Kubuitsile (blog), online <http://thoughtsfrombotswana.blogspot.com>.

8 | In 1915 the British occupied the colony, and with the Treaty of Versailles (1919) the area came under South African control. Not until 1990 did South African forces finally leave Namibia, making it the last African nation to gain independence.

9 | Marcia Klotz states that most German women went to GSWA »because it was the only German protectorate in which malaria was not a major threat« (Marcia Klotz: *Memoirs from a German Colony: What Do White Women Want?* In: *Genders* 20 (1994), p. 155). In 1901, there were 2 185 German men in GSWA and 1 772 of them were single; however there were only 100 single German women in the colony (Karl Dove: *Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika*. Berlin 1902, p. 205).

10 | Daniel J. Walther: *Creating Germans Abroad. Cultural Policies and National Identity in Namibia*. Athens 2002, p. 46 f.

11 | Roger Chickering: *Casting Their Gaze More Broadly: Women's Patriotic Activism in Imperial Germany*. In: *Past and Present* 118 (1998), No. 1 (February), p. 179.

constraints.¹² The continent held the potential of increased independence and greater equality, but in return for a high physical and material price. Some proponents of the nation's expansion, like Wilhelm Föllmer, used forums such as colonial magazines to convince women that they would have more liberties outside of Germany. »Der Einfluß auf den Mann ist in Afrika bedeutend größer [...] die Frau ist hier mehr Genossin und Helferin des Mannes und wird bei allem Tun und Treiben zu Rate gezogen«¹³. Geographic seclusion meant that husbands depended on their wives more, by confiding in them and employing them as advisors. Female colonists were permitted, and at the same time required to become more knowledgeable about farming, local crops, weather patterns, and trade. However, the impending rewards did not lure many to the colonies. Not only were the financial costs often prohibitive, but many were not prepared to live in such a harsh, rural climate. Experienced colonists, such as Maria Karow, provide practical knowledge in their writings with the intention of properly preparing young women. To this end, Karow warns readers of her autobiography that they cannot simply play a lady while in Africa.

Der ehrliche Wille, dem Manne eine treue Mitarbeiterin zu sein, sein arbeitsreiches Dasein freundlich zu gestalten und die Kinder zu tüchtigen Menschen und guten Deutschen zu erziehen, wird der Frau über die mannigfachen Fährlichkeiten und Mühen hinweghelfen und der Familie um so rascher eine sorgenfreie Existenz schaffen [...].¹⁴

A wife must be morally and mentally prepared in order to properly support her family, and direct her husband's actions.

A primary motivation to recruit German women to aid in the colonization efforts stemmed from the behavior of the male colonists. As scholars such as Lora Wildenthal argue, women had to »save« the men in the colonies who seemed unable to resist African women.¹⁵ The intimate nature of a servant's duties require that she have almost unlimited access to her employer's reputation, possessions, and relationships, which created a fissure in the familial institution

12 | For a detailed discussion of the various types of roles women played in the colonial effort, see Lora Wildenthal: *German Women for Empire, 1884–1945*. Durham 2001.

13 | Wilhelm Föllmer: *Die deutsche Frau in Neudeutschland*. In: *Koloniale Zeitschrift*, 27 Jun. 1913, p. 402.

14 | Maria Karow: *Wo sonst der Fuß des Kriegers trat. Farmerleben in Südwest nach dem Kriege*. Berlin 1911, p. 143.

15 | Wildenthal: *German Women for Empire*, p. 121. African women have been coded as hypersexual for centuries, and these stereotypes existed in GSWA as well. For an exploration of how African women came to be equated with prostitutes, as well as corruption and physical degeneration, see Sander Gilman: *Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature*. In: *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985), No. 1 (Autumn), p. 204–242.

that the servant could easily exploit. The African servant threatened, through her sexuality, to displace the wife in both her marital and maternal role, destroy the family, and thereby dismantle society's very foundation.¹⁶ It is solely the figure of the German wife who can mediate between husband and employee, and keep each properly contained in his or her appropriate role and within the household.¹⁷ The behavior of unmonitored men not only led to the perceived degeneration of the individual, but to the potential disintegration of the entire colony. These prescribed familial roles exposed an imperfect and fantastic social framework.

VOICES IN THE SILENCE

Several years before *The Other Side of Silence* was published, prolific writer André Brink suggested that two silences remained in South African literature

that created by the marginalization of women, and that effected by a (white-dominated) master-narrative of history. In both respects [...] the crucial new dimension is not the presentation of new historical ›evidence‹, however important that in itself may be, but the leap of the imagination towards grasping the larger implications of our silences.¹⁸

His 2002 novel is an attempt to break the first silence and chip away at the second. The central figure, Hanna X, is an abused orphan who, when she is 30, moves to GSWA through the German Colonial Society's program to import domestic servants, and thereby future wives, around the turn of the twentieth century. Similarly, Beatrix Mannel's *Der Duft der Wüstenrose* follows Fanny, also orphaned, on her voyage to discover who her family is while making a living

16 | Walther details the interrelatedness between male heterosexuality and conquering new territories: »The act of conquering entailed not just the penetration of indigenous women by white men, but also the penetration of the land. Both actions brought about the subjugation of land and people.« (Daniel J. Walther: Sex, Race and Empire: White Male Sexuality and the »Other« in Germany's Colonies, 1894–1914. In: German Studies Review 33 (2010), No. 1 [February], p. 49)

17 | In Mannel's *Der Duft der Wüstenrose*, Maria von Imkeller's husband leaves for New Guinea with a 17-year-old Ovambo girl while she is visiting family in Germany for a few months. She is left with three boys, no money, and no way to earn a living. Fanny's husband, Ludwig, agrees to pay for their passage back to Germany in exchange for help watching Fanny and with the birth of their child. In Kubuitsile's *The Scattering* many in Lüderitz talk about Tjipuka's presumed sexual relationship with Ludwig, the storeowner, and it forces her to eventually leave her husband.

18 | Brink: Interrogating silence, p. 24.

in GSWA about a decade earlier. Lauri Kubuitsile's *The Scattering* takes place during the period leading up to and including the war with the Herero from 1904 to 1907, oscillating between three intertwined tales of Tjipuka, a Herero woman, her husband Ruhapo, and Riette, the daughter of Afrikaner colonists, all of whom come to reside in the British protectorate of Bechuanaland, now Botswana. Tjipuka and Ruhapo's relationship is depicted as a happy and successful, until the war separates them.¹⁹ All of the women are rejected by their own families, and forced to adapt in order to survive.

These novels give voices to traditionally silenced figures, inviting the contemporary reader to see how these lost narratives resonate with existing colonial memory and history. None of these are instances of the colony writing back, as these authors do not reside in Namibia; however, they do supply a version of the experiences of the many who migrated, in some cases forcefully, during southern Africa's colonial period. As Birgit Neumann states in her discussion of memory in literature:

By giving voice to those previously silenced fictions of memory, they [fictional texts] constitute an imaginative counter-memory, thereby challenging the hegemonic memory culture and questioning the socially established boundary between remembering and forgetting [...]. Shared interpretations of the past, but also incompatible memories of the shared collective past, become visible.²⁰

No single literary work can correct decades of absence, but each of these novels takes a unique approach to voicing the challenges women faced.

Despite unique locations and years, the female figures have analogous experiences. Each is forced to leave her family, must trek through the desert to survive, finds a group of similarly abused people to form a temporary family with, and is unsuccessful from the colony's viewpoint, though successful in forging her own path. In these three novels, previously unnamed women share a common path of abuse but eventually find healing.²¹ In Brink's *The Other Side*

19 | Kubuitsile's *The Scattering* is the only novel I was able to find in which a Herero/Namibian woman is a key figure. Presumably some of this is due to the danger I will address later in the context of Brink's novel, of the difficulties of escaping history's white master narrative. There are peripheral Herero and Nama figures in Brink's story who join Hanna's army to avenge themselves on the male colonizers. Mannel's narrative includes two domestic servants who Ludwig bought out of slavery, as well as John's mother, Zahaboo, a Zulu sorceress; Fanny befriends them all, as is characteristic of this novel, which simplifies interracial relationships.

20 | Birgit Neumann: *The Literary Representation of Memory*. In: *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. Ed. by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning. Berlin 2008, p. 339.

21 | None of these authors shy away from transmitting the violence the women experienced, and in fact Brink's *The Other Side of Silence* has often been criticized for its

of *Silence*, Hanna is an orphan who has been abused before she arrives in the colony. She rejects the men who court her upon arrival, and is put on a train with other women, where she is raped and mutilated by a German officer, violently losing her tongue, nipples, and labia. She spends most of her years in GSWA at Frauenstein, a home for rejected, single women that is described as »prison, convent, madhouse, poorhouse, brothel, ossuary, a promontory of hell; but also asylum, retreat and final haven«²². After killing a soldier in order to prevent a fellow resident from being raped, Hanna gathers an army of Africans and abused German women who, one battle at a time, defeat the military. The story concludes when Hanna confronts the officer who disfigured her, choosing not to kill him, and is consequently taken into custody. Kubuitsile's *The Scattering* tells of two women, Riette and Tjipuka. Riette is forced to give up her job and marry, then is widowed by the second Anglo-Boer War in 1901. She is held in the Pietersburg concentration camp, where her two stepdaughters die, but where she also falls in love with an Irishman who helps her escape. She later goes through the Kalahari to live in Bechuanaland, and she opens a store in Tsau. Tjipuka is not yet rejected by her family, but loses most of them in the Herero War and is forced into the Omeheke Desert by the German military. She is eventually taken to the infamous Shark Island, bought out to serve as a saleswoman and servant for a German storeowner, and eventually goes to Tsau, where she meets Riette. In the last few pages, Tjipuka leaves her newborn mixed-race daughter with Riette and contentedly returns to the desert. Mannel's *Der Duft der Wüstenrose* follows Franziska Reutberg, an orphan whose only clue to her identity is a bracelet she wears. It leads her to GSWA, where she marries her deceased friend Charlotte's fiancé Ludwig. After a disappointing marriage, the birth of her bi-racial child forces her to flee and leads her into the desert, where she later discovers that her daughter has brown skin because her father was Herero. She is eventually able to find the man who loves her, John, the former caretaker of her husband's farm, but they will have to leave GSWA to escape Ludwig's wrath.

Hanna, Fanny, and Riette are replaceable and exchangeable, because in a colonial context, and arguably in Germany as well, they are defined by their sexual and reproductive functionality. On the trip to GSWA, Brink's Hanna befriends Lotte, one of the 110 women aboard the *Hans Woermann*. Her bunkmate is a young widow, sexually abused as a child, and though she and Hanna briefly find friends and lovers in one another, Lotte commits suicide after sailors repeatedly

intense, prolonged violent scenes; Ruth Franklin's review in *The New York Times* is characteristic (cf. Nor Tongue to Tell. In: New York Times, 3 Aug. 2003, online www.nytimes.com/2003/08/03/books/nor-tongue-to-tell.html). The commonness of these stories is also revealed in their ordinary names. Mannel and Kubuitsile's novels have male colonizers named Ludwig, and Brink and Mannel's protagonists both have close friends named Charlotte.

22 | Brink: *The Other Side of Silence*, p. 12.

rape her. When her body is buried at sea, the ship administration falsely marks the corpse as »Hanna.« Hanna confronts the captain, but is told the paperwork cannot be undone. When the ship lands in Swakopmund Hanna is called Lotte, and when she corrects the man the narrator states: »She will add the surname now lost to us.«²³ The reader never learns her family name, as it has been blotted out with other histories and memories. At the novel's onset, the narrator comments on the incomplete lists of names he finds in the colonial records of women who were sent »to assuage the need of men desperate for matrimony, procreation or an uncomplicated fuck.«²⁴ She is unidentifiable, because Hanna and Lotte are sexual objects to be exchanged between men, and names are temporary, a matter of ownership and bureaucracy.²⁵ A similar situation is found in Mannel's *Der Duft der Wüstenrose*. Fanny befriends Charlotte in classes at the *Frauenkolonialschule* in Germany and they depart for Africa together; however, Charlotte dies from food poisoning during the trip. Fanny has a teaching position and Charlotte is engaged to a man she has never met, so Charlotte makes Fanny promise that she will instead marry Ludwig so that she will have stability and a partner. Fanny agrees and though she is initially leery, when they arrive in Swakopmund she is told that the mission station she was to be sent to burned down and the teachers were murdered.²⁶ Any German woman can become Ludwig's wife, as the goal is creating a colonial family. While Kubuitsile's figure of Riette does not exchange identities, she is forced to give up her plans and take on a new role. Without her parents' full support she trains as a nurse, but before she can leave their house to practice her profession, they force her to marry the widowed neighbor. All three of these women are intended to become colonial wives and mothers, to procreate and help settle the land, but they do not succeed by these measures.

These women have failed by their society's standards, but not on an individual level. Hanna chooses not to kill her perpetrator, and is arrested. »At least, she thinks, there is nothing she regrets. No pain, no agony, no fear, no darkness, no extremity or outrage.«²⁷ A few sentences later the novel concludes: »And if she smiles, if what she shows can be interpreted as a smile, it is because now,

23 | Ibid, p. 139.

24 | Ibid, p. 5.

25 | Luce Irigaray wrote the seminal text on women as exchanged commodities: *Women on the Market*. In: *This Sex Which is Not One*. Trans. Catherine Porter. Ithaca 1985, p. 170-191.

26 | Only Hermann, a local businessman who has seen a picture of Charlotte, knows that Fanny is an imposter, though she is able to keep the secret from her husband throughout her pregnancy. Hermann also repeatedly comments that Fanny does not look as German as Charlotte, which is explained when she discovers who her father is.

27 | Brink: *The Other Side of Silence*, p. 307.

at last, Hanna X has reached the other side.«²⁸ Hanna's story has been told, she has a voice, and though it is artificial and incomplete, it is better than absence. If one believes Brink's claims, then »national healing can be effected at the level of narration itself.«²⁹ Thus telling this story at least encourages the reader to think about what has thus far not been said, and to consider how these new narratives reconcile with the existing public discourse. Neil Bernstein, in his discussion of Brink's appropriation of the Philomela myth, details how Brink succeeds in providing a model for South Africa's future, especially in light of the criticism faced by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Bernstein argues that the novel's conclusion

presents the acceptance of personal responsibility without the threat of historical amnesia. Hanna's decision to bear witness against [Hauptmann] Böhlke instead of murdering him undoes both the cycle of violence inaugurated by the imperial army as well as the ancient myth's narrative of female reprisal.³⁰

Hanna did not kill her attacker, as the reader expects given her behavior on the way to Windhoek, but her story is finally told, and it provides a model for ending the cycle of violence that continues today.

Fanny in Mannel's *Der Duft der Wüstenrose* becomes a wife and mother, but her daughter's unexpected dark skin forces her to flee and finally discover her ancestry. After some rather fantastic scenes of time travel and magic, she knows who her parents are, and she and John are again reunited. He accepts her daughter as his own, but they are unable to remain in GSWA, because Ludwig is still after her. The local judge, who in a unique twist was her mother's husband, nullifies her marriage since she is not Charlotte as she claimed, and offers to help them get to the new German colony of Samoa. Though many of the charges against her are untrue, she cannot stay, and in her own way has finally found the truth about her past and established her own family. She learns she is a product of Germany's forced expansion, and ironically, will perhaps perpetuate the nation's colonial legacy in Samoa.

Riette and Tjipuka are both in Tsau, Bechuanaland after the Herero War. Riette has a successful store, and though she is lonely as the sole permanent white resident, is content. Tjipuka is reunited with her husband shortly after arriving. While the reader knows that both figures are alive throughout the novel,

28 | Ibid.

29 | Sue Kossew: Giving Voice. Narrating Silence, History and Memory in André Brink's *The Other Side of Silence* and *Before I Forget*. In: *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* 42 (2005), No. 1 (January), p. 141.

30 | Neil W. Bernstein: Revisiting Ovid's *Philomela*: Silence, Revenge, and Representation in André Brink's *The Other Side of Silence*. In: *Classical and Modern Literature* 24 (2004), No. 2 (Fall), p. 15 f.

each character is told that the other has died in the fighting. They have trouble continuing their life together, as their son died from smallpox in the camp and Ruhapo knows she was Ludwig's lover, not just his servant. Once Tjipuka's daughter is born, her features reveal her to be Ludwig's child. Afraid of Ruhapo, who has already beat her several times, Tjipuka leaves the child with Riette and returns to the desert, where she knows she can survive. Consequently, Riette has the baby she always wanted, and Tjipuka feels liberated. »The blood, the cruelty, the evil, the mistakes, the guilt – all gone, left behind. Forgotten.«³¹ Like Hanna and Fanny, she has survived the brutality and hatred of colonialism, and is where she feels familiar and safe.

FICTIONS OF MEMORY

In addition to the plot similarities between these three texts, there are also structural parallels in terms of time, perspective, and space, which allow these authors to reclaim traumatic spaces and draw parallels with the readers' memories and experiences. These three novels are historical fiction, which is highlighted by a list of primary and secondary sources at the end of each. Brink uses the *Acknowledgements* to provide a detailed account of both how he was introduced to much of the material through a fellow writer, and a list of texts he consulted for various segments of the story. At the same time he writes: »In some respects I have departed from their facts to serve the needs of my story.«³² There are also several references throughout the story to information that is gone, where the records are incomplete, or false, as well as an understanding that factual documentation has fissures, through which important details escape. Mannel highlights the fictionality of her work in *Statt eines Nachworts*, which begins: »Der Duft der Wüstenrose ist ein Roman, eine von mir erfundene Geschichte«³³. However, she continues by providing pages of what inspired various portions of her story, as well as Germany's colonial history in Namibia. She intentionally set this novel »in einer relativ friedlichen Zeit« and not near the coast or one of the larger settlements.³⁴

Mein Roman spielt daher auch hauptsächlich im Süden, weil dieser Landesteil um jene Zeit, also 1893, weitaus dichter besiedelt war als der Norden, der mit der Etoscha-

31 | Kubuitsile: *The Scattering*, p. 294.

32 | Brink: *The Other Side of Silence*, p. 308.

33 | Mannel: *Der Duft der Wüstenrose*, p. 499.

34 | *Ibid*, p. 503.

Pfanne und seiner einzigartigen Tierwelt heute das Ziel der meisten Namibia-Touristen ist [...].³⁵

Similar to Götsche's speculation mentioned above about why so many contemporary novels are set in eastern Africa, nature plays a practical role here as well to lure readers. Kubuitsile uses the »Acknowledgements« also, though selectively. This section is less than a page long, and though it lists several articles and books, she prefaces it with:

I also must thank the academics who wrote books and papers that I read in order to have the background to write Tjipuka's story. So much of the history of southern Africa is unwritten, and it is through your work of discovery that it will survive.³⁶

It is curious that she cites the works as solely background for one character's story, because though a majority of the chapters do focus on Tjipuka's story, Ruhapo's is often intertwined, and once they are in Tsau, so is Riette's.³⁷ The secondary works that are listed are about Herero life and migration to Botswana during the early twentieth century. It seems that Kubuitsile sees her novel as telling the story of how the Herero came to Botswana, through Tjipuka's eyes.

These three novels all seek to remember, to fill a gap, and while they are not montages like *Morenga*, they are inspired by historical sources. Consequently, there are parallels in their use of time, perspective, and space. Each novel uses analepsis, which as a literary device serves on one level to draw the reader in, but also represents the gap in the collective memory that they fill. Additionally, the violent and traumatic nature of these women's stories is represented by a caesura in time, a rupture that changes the course of their actions. *The Other Side of Silence* begins with Hanna, who is already residing at Frauenstein, looking in the mirror at her disfigured body; the first page refers to the »Time Before« and »Time After.« Initially it is unclear what the unnamed disruption is, but it becomes obvious as one reads that the narrator is describing the time before and after her mutilation. The capitalization of these defining periods gives them weight, titling periods around a singular moment in Hanna's life. The second chapter takes place contemporary with the reader, and we discover that the narrator is a white male historian, who is telling the tale of a German woman whom he encounters in archives in Bremen. However, many of the histories are missing, lost in »the blank of the War. Almost nothing had survived that destruc-

35 | Mannel also talks about her own trip to Namibia to see the landscape and meet the people, and lists some of nature's sights that especially left an impression, such as the night sky above the desert (ibid, p. 501).

36 | Kubuitsile: *The Scattering*, p. 295.

37 | Twelve chapters are listed under Tjipuka, three under Ruhapo, and seven under Riette. Nineteen take place in Tsau, once they are in the same town and are not listed under any character's name.

tion: no records, no registers, no letters; and it was too late for the memories of survivors.«³⁸ The novel then oscillates between Hanna's time in Germany and Africa, and occasionally back to the present. The disconnect the reader initially feels while trying to piece the puzzle together replicates Hanna's confusion and the slow return of her memory, as well as our collective memory growing.

Kubuitsile titled her novel *The Scattering*, and uses this reference throughout the novel to name the forced exodus of the Herero into the desert, which results in Tjipuka's separation from Ruhapo. For Tjipuka, this time apart is also tied to memory loss, which is articulated at the novel's onset.

Things are different, and when she gets the chance, she tries to pick through the pieces to find her husband, the husband she thinks she remembers, to assure herself that he is there. She sifts and sorts the bits that are familiar, and separates them from the bits she's forgotten or were never there before. She wonders what to do with these bits, the bits that belong to a stranger.³⁹

The narrative begins in December 1907, three months after Tjipuka and Ruhapo are reunited, and the narrator begins: »It's not easy coming back from the dead.«⁴⁰ The two are having difficulty returning to a life together after believing that the other had been killed, and losing their young son to illness. While some of what she finds is comfortable, she cannot reconcile what has been lost. »Is he his familiar wrist or this stranger's mouth? He cannot be both.«⁴¹ In the end Ruhapo insists on punishing his wife for her actions, and Tjipuka returns to the desert. Kubuitsile organizes her novel by figure for the first 31 chapters (Tjipuka, Riette, and Ruhapo), and each chapter by location, month, and year; after they all reach Tsau, only the month and year is given. The first chapter takes place near the end of their time together, thus much of the novel is a flashback, elaborating on how they became lost and resolve their disconnect. Here as well, the reader is filling in the gaps as Tjipuka tries to salvage her relationship and her family.

Der Duft der Wüstenrose does not name a single traumatic point in Fanny's life, however about halfway through the narrator describes the enlightening moment when she began to uncover the meaning of the 21 beads on her bracelet, the only clue to her identity. This scene is presented as a recollection, sparked by a discussion with John about the beads. When she is 14 and still at the nunnery, she is locked in a side chapel and told to clean as punishment. Tucked away she finds a beaded rosary that shines and is similar to her bracelet. The inscription from 1699, gives her a name and Bavarian town to initiate her search. Eventually she is led to Africa, where she is able to learn who her parents are and how she

38 | Brink: *The Other Side of Silence*, p. 6.

39 | Kubuitsile: *The Scattering*, p. 7.

40 | Ibid.

41 | Ibid, p. 10.

came to be an orphan. Mannel has two epigraphs that preface this novel and the first, attributed to Sören Kierkegaard, states: »Verstehen kann man das Leben rückwärts, leben muss man es aber vorwärts«⁴². This idea is applicable to all three of these novels, in that a look backwards, helps in some cases the protagonist, but in all cases the reader, better understand the present. These authors are filling our voids, gaps, and silences with untold stories. The second quote is attributed to the Sukuma tribe in Tanzania, also a former German colony: »Ich zeigte dir den Mond, und du sahst nichts als meinen Finger«⁴³. This notion of tunnel vision represents our collective colonial memory thus far, in that while we have begun to see some parts of the past, we are far from having a broad, inclusive view.

All three of these novels are told in the third-person, largely without an »I,« providing distance from the key figures. Only Brink identifies his narrator, who briefly speaks, perhaps because he is well aware of the traps he is entering writing as a white Afrikaner man.⁴⁴ Brink repeatedly highlights the narrator's challenges: »I believe more and more that as a man I owe it to her [Hanna X] at least to try to understand what makes her a person, an individual, what defines her as a woman«.⁴⁵ He seems to expect to fail, or at best to be incomplete, which perhaps refers to the second silence he identified in the 1990s, namely »the (white-dominated) master-narrative of history«⁴⁶. Perhaps he cannot completely escape it. For some critics Brink falls short,⁴⁷ but Kossew makes a convincing argument that »Brink could indeed be said to be looking over his own shoulder while he writes, however uncomfortable a position this may be.«⁴⁸ He does not shy away from the challenging parts of our pasts, forcing us to remember, and is much more cautious and nuanced than Kubuitsile or Mannel. These two avoid confronting the question of perspective and consequently fall into some grave oversimplifications in their attempts to correct colonialism. For example in *Der Duft der Wüstenrose*, John is repeatedly described as having a Zulu leg from his mother and a European leg from his father to represent his bi-racial identity; Fanny later adapts this metaphor to describe herself and her child.⁴⁹

42 | Mannel: *Der Duft der Wüstenrose*, p. 8.

43 | Ibid.

44 | Though a white Afrikaner, in many ways Brink is exceptional as an author. Many of his books were banned for decades because he was a critical voice against apartheid; he was also vocal in the post-apartheid process of reconciliation (see Kossew: *Giving Voice*).

45 | Brink: *The Other Side of Silence*, p. 153.

46 | Brink: *Interrogating silence*, p. 24.

47 | Bruno Arich-Gerz: Postcolonial English language prose from and about Namibia. A survey of novels from 1993 to the present. In: *Journal of Namibian Studies* 7 (2010), p. 7–28.

48 | Kossew: *Giving Voice*, p. 145.

49 | Mannel: *Der Duft der Wüstenrose*, p. 121.

In addition to being an elementary and potentially dangerous generalization, it is curious that while all European colonists are grouped together (John's father is *Deutschholländer*), his mother's Zulu identity is exoticized. In *The Scattering*, both Riette and Tjipuka are outsiders in their respective communities because of the sexual partners they chose. Riette had an affair with John Reilly, a married Irishman while held at the Pietersburg camp, and Tjipuka slept with Ludwig, her employer, while she was still a prisoner and thought Ruhapo had been killed. When Tjipuka realizes this, she says:

»We're so similar, you and I. Can it be so?« Tjipuka said. Was it wrong to say such a thing? That a black person and a white person could be the same, more similar to each other than to any of their own race, their own people?⁵⁰

This reductive view of race relations is precarious, and distracts from the ability of the novel to make the reader critically reflect on how different ethnic groups interact and why, questions that if anything, are gaining relevance. While *The Scattering* and *Der Duft der Wüstenrose* have elements of exoticism, adventure, and corrective colonialism that should rightfully garnish criticism, all three novels make unique contributions to contemporary literature and at least begin a conversation.

Characters in all three of these novels reclaim the desert, once meant to punish, as a place of refuge and comfort. When the German army failed to surround a group of Herero in the battle of Mount Waterberg in August 1904, they were forced to flee into the Omaheke desert, where thousands died.⁵¹ This flight into the desert is featured prominently in Kubuitsile's novel, and in Brink and Mannel's novels, the women also escape into, instead of out of the desert as one might expect. As Neumann suggests:

Fictions of memory may exploit the representation of space as a symbolic manifestation of individual or collective memories. Space may not only provide a cue triggering individual, often repressed, past experiences; it may also conjure up innumerable echoes and undertones of a community's past.⁵²

By learning how to survive in such an isolated place from the local communities, the women are able to thrive.

In *The Other Side of Silence*, Hanna passes through the desert several times: on her way to Frauenstein, into it to commit suicide, and on her way to Windhoek to seek revenge. Her first encounter is when she falls from the wagon on her way to Frauenstein, and they do not stop to pick her up because of her poor physical state. A group of Nama find her, help her heal physically and mentally,

50 | Kubuitsile: *The Scattering*, p. 269.

51 | Götsche: *Remembering Africa*, p. 66.

52 | Neumann: *The Literary Representation of Memory*, p. 340.

then take her to Frauenstein. During the trek she learns their stories and how to survive from what nature provides. Hanna later decides to commit suicide because she is so miserable, and goes into the desert to do so. She is comfortable there: »It is Lotte she feels closest to in this infinite space. All boundaries, even of time, are quietly effaced.«⁵³ Hanna is able to feel near to one of the few friends she has had in her life, as physical and mental confines disappear. Because of all the stories the Nama told her while she was recovering, she understands her surroundings. »Story upon story, through days and nights, to while away the time, to make Hanna forget, to ease memory. For everything she sees or hears [...] there is a story.«⁵⁴ On the second day, when her thirst is immense, she finds a plant the Nama use and feels relieved, at which point she realizes this is not how she wants to die and returns to Frauenstein. Later when Hanna and her army of the rejected trek to Windhoek, she again uses what she learned from the Nama to help them survive. For Hanna, the desert is perhaps the only place where she does not feel alone and its desolation no longer threatens her life, rather provides comfort, because it is where she can remember.

In *Der Duft der Wüstenrose*, Fanny flees into the desert after her bi-racial child is born and her husband falsely assumes she had an affair. She is not simply running away, rather trying to find John's mother, Zahaboo, who will help her finally answer the question of who she is. Fanny has learned enough about the desert that surrounds her house to successfully find Zahaboo, who takes her out further into it.⁵⁵ The sorcerer leads her on a time travel back two centuries to learn about her past, and Fanny discovers that her father was Herero. Ludwig sends mercenaries after them, so they try to get the men lost in the desert. They are not successful, but a sudden downpour, which Zahaboo and Fanny create, causes them to be washed down a formerly dry riverbed.⁵⁶ When retelling the story to the judge, she calls the men »Opfer der Wüste«.⁵⁷ Fanny too learns to survive in the desert and find connections to her past, though through the aid of

53 | Brink: *The Other Side of Silence*, p. 93.

54 | *Ibid*, p. 55.

55 | The novel's title refers to a plant where John tells her to meet Zahaboo when she needs her. Only those with magical powers, which both Zahaboo and Fanny have, can smell its scent.

56 | Now that Fanny knows who her father is, she is able to harness the magical powers she has with Zahaboo's aid. As Götttsche notes, »It is thanks to the intervention of ›white‹ African magic (Zahaboo) that this story of ›black‹ German magic associated with [Franny] Reutberg's and [her mother] Luise's Bavarian family is finally brought to an end in the melodramatic climax of the novel.« He goes on to suggest that this novel mixes »traditional tropes of Africa exoticism with the new fascination with cross-cultural and transcultural experience in a globalizing world.« (Götttsche: *Remembering Africa*, p. 114)

57 | Mannel: *Der Duft der Wüstenrose*, p. 496.

exoticism and adventure. The desert saves her, both from her unknown past and armed men, allowing her freedom.

The Scattering contains a retelling of how the German army drove thousands into the desert and let so many die of thirst. Like Hanna and Fanny, Tjipuka learns how to survive in the Omaheke from those around her, and it is here where she too is able to remember, where the boundaries between past and present fall away. While a group of Herero, including Tjipuka, are trying to make it to safety by traversing the desert, the narrator states: »He [Ruhapo] was dead. She needed to remember that, but it was hard when he still seemed so alive to her in her mind [...]. But the dream had weakened her. The tears broke through, first slowly, then in a flood.«⁵⁸ Like Hanna and Fanny, she is able to reestablish a connection to her past in the desert, to begin to heal.⁵⁹ Several times Tjipuka is forced to cross the desert, until she is finally taken to Shark Island. When Tjipuka decides to escape Lüderitz and Ludwig's shop, she no longer fears the desert. »Now she found that she welcomed it. She would follow the cattle trails; she knew how to do that now. They would lead her to watering spots.«⁶⁰ It is only because Ludwig's men follow her that she does not succeed and must return. Her final trip through the desert ironically happens easily with Ludwig's aid. She accompanies him on a business trip to Tsau, because he knows he cannot leave her alone. Once she finds her husband is there, Ludwig agrees that she can stay. The desert begins as a place of death and uncertainty, but through the aid of those who know it, it becomes a site of comfort and solace along an unexpected path.

The importance of deserts in these novels is representative of larger similarities in terms of spaces and places. None of them focus on commemorated or famous sites; rather these are novels about the everyday. Brink's description of Frauenstein serves as a reminder that sites can have multiple meanings and functions, even to the same person. This farm that serves as »retreat and final haven« is the closest place Fanny has had to a home in many years, yet it is also a brothel, prison, and madhouse.⁶¹ In *Der Duft der Wüstenrose*, Ludwig reluctantly tells Fanny that his house, now her »Hofstaat,« was the site of a murder; thus he was able to purchase it cheaply.⁶² She later learns that her mother lived in the house, and her parents are responsible for the murder.⁶³ In *The Scattering*, both Riette and Tjipuka are able to find comfort in forbidden relationships while

58 | Kubuitsile: *The Scattering*, p. 151.

59 | In her dream, which is detailed earlier in the chapter, she is thinking about the period shortly after they got married, when they were happy and before the war began.

60 | Kubuitsile: *The Scattering*, p. 208 f.

61 | Brink: *The Other Side of Silence*, p. 12.

62 | Mannel: *Der Duft der Wüstenrose*, p. 141.

63 | Pete Random lied to her mother Luise and kept the cattle that he purchased with her money as a dowry to marry Saherero.

they are held captive. John and Ludwig show the women that sex can be pleasurable, and both men help the women escape the deadly conditions. Each of these places contains a series of contradictory associations and experiences, reflecting the need to complicate our assumptions and dig deeper.

Birgit Neumann suggests that fictions of memory »more often than not [...] turn out to be an imaginative (re)construction of the past in response to current needs.«⁶⁴ This is certainly the case with the three novels analyzed above. By telling the stories of Hanna, Fanny, Riette, and Tjipuka, a new perspective on Germany's colonial past is presented. It is important to recall that these authors are not writing from Namibia, and only Mannel from Germany. They are writing from Namibia's perimeters, about its evolving, porous, and fluid borders. The history presented here, of forced migration, a challenging landscape, and attempting to make a home, is in many ways common across southern Africa's colonial past as well as our world today. While we need to be cautious in projecting contemporary notions of identity and belonging backwards, these are topics that we must continue to explore with ever-increasing migration and interconnectedness, as well as racism, fear and hatred.

64 | Neumann: *The Literary Representation of Memory*, p. 334.