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The Genocidal Gaze

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Published by Wayne State University Press

Baer, Elizabeth R.

The Genocidal Gaze: From German Southwest Africa to the Third Reich.

Wayne State University Press, 2017.

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The Genocidal Gaze in Gustav Frenssen's *Peter Moor's Journey to Southwest Africa*



Those literary texts which appear before the First World War, concerning the events of January 1904–1908, end with the annihilation of the Herero. . . . The murder of the “natives” is seen as a necessary aim of the civilizing colonial mission, and the way this is carried out is even sometimes described as a “work of art.”

MEDARDUS BREHL

Gustav Frenssen's *Peter Moor's Journey to Southwest Africa* (1906, translated into English in 1908) is often described as the quintessential German colonial novel by readers and critics. Sander Gilman, in an early (1978) article on German colonial literature, noted that *Peter Moor* is the “most typical of the German colonial historical novels, and the one work cited in all the critical literature on this topic.”¹ Identification of *Peter Moor* as a touchstone of German colonial attitudes has continued in the intervening four decades since Gilman's pronouncement. Purporting to be a memoir by a German soldier sent out in 1904 to German Southwest Africa, the novel is based on the memoirs and reminiscences of German men who had done just that; Frenssen himself, never having traveled to Africa, relied on these accounts for his work of imagination. In its review, just after the German release and before the English translation was made available the following year, the *New York Times* described the text as “the depicting of conditions brought about by nature and made worse by *vengeful barbarians* which no *civilized* or highly trained army could be expected to combat” (emphasis mine).² While this language is likely to offend readers in the twenty-first century, it is nonetheless an accurate account of the *representation* of indigenous people by Europeans in the nineteenth century. The Germans were no exception: their

perception of the Herero and Nama in their colony in Southwest Africa was reductive and unforgiving.

In this chapter, I will be reading *Peter Moor* as a paradigm of the evolution of an imperial gaze into a genocidal gaze. In the last chapter, we explored the resisting gaze of Hendrik Witbooi, a Nama leader and revolutionary against German rule in Southwest Africa. Gustav Frenssen's novel enables us to look in the other direction: to "see" the inhabitants of this rather desolate land as the Germans saw them. The novel is focalized through the eyes of fictional character Peter Moor, who joins the naval corps shortly after finishing high school. When he learns that "in southwest Africa the blacks, like cowards, have treacherously murdered all the farmers and their wives and children," he volunteers to be sent out to GSWA to fight.³ "I was glad," he tells the reader, "to be revenged on a heathen people for the German blood that had been spilled" (7). In his account of his subsequent travel to Africa, he consistently depicts the Herero and Nama through an imperial lens: as barbaric, as uncivilized, as subhuman. Then, as he engages in battle and listens to the ideology of his officers and chaplain, his gaze becomes genocidal.

Gustav Frenssen's novel reveals much about how the Germans perceived the Herero and Nama whom they slaughtered between 1904 and 1907, as well as how they envisioned the German colony that would follow the "cleansing" of the land of "inconvenient" and "uncivilized" indigenous people. Specifically, they would impose notions of German statehood; those Herero and Nama who survived the genocide, many of whom were incarcerated in camps, would serve as forced laborers to build the new society. This vision of a German community was foreclosed by World War I, during which the Germans lost control of Southwest Africa; the genocidal gaze then becomes the blueprint for Nazi predations against Europe, and against the Jews and others deemed "biologically inferior."

Gustav Frenssen: Lutheran Pastor, Author, Nazi

Gustav Frenssen was born in the small town of Barlt, about fifty miles northwest of Hamburg in Holstein, Germany, on 19 October 1863. While early biographers Wilhelm Alberts (1922) and Numme Numsen (1933 and 1938) described his childhood as happy, even idyllic,⁴ more recent accounts point to problematic relationships with both parents. His mother "hovered throughout her life on the psychotic boundary," often contemplating suicide, and his father, a cabinet maker, was "carefree and optimistic, but impractical and economically untalented" (Braun, 456n28). An introverted and highly sensitive child, Frenssen did not

thrive in his *Volkschule*, nor when he transferred to the *Lateinschule* in a neighboring town where “he was three years older than his classmates and for eight years he was subjected . . . to the humiliating experience of ‘*Freitische*’” (Braun, 456).⁵

Between 1886 and 1890, Frenssen studied theology at universities in Tübingen, Berlin, and Kiel, and in 1890, he married Anna Walter, the daughter of a teacher. He devoted twelve years to serving as a Lutheran pastor in rural congregations in Hennstedt and Hemme. During this period (1890–1902), he began to write, publishing both fiction and a collection of “village sermons.” His breakthrough as a writer came in 1901 when he published *Jörn Uhl*, an *Entwicklungsroman*, or novel of personal development. Most of his subsequent fiction can be thus categorized; he is also considered to be a writer of *Heimatkunst* or regional literature.⁶ By 1911, *Jörn Uhl* had sold a quarter of a million copies.⁷ His earnings and fame enabled him to resign from his pastorate and write full-time. “He is now the admired and much loved preacher-poet of Germany,” declared Effie Louise Pratt in her 1925 book.⁸

In 1906, Frenssen published *Peter Moors Fahrt nach Südwest*. Like his earlier works such as *Jörn Uhl*, which sold 130,000 copies in its first year (compared with Thomas Mann’s *Buddenbrooks*, also published in 1901 and selling fewer than 1,000 copies), this new novel was guaranteed success (Brehl, 104). *Peter Moor* joined a growing number of such books, “portrayals and interpretations of the events of 1904–1908 . . . aimed at a broad middle-class audience. . . . [*Peter Moor*] was the most successful contemporary publication on the Herero uprising and the text can therefore serve as representative” (Brehl, 102). The novel was also published in Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands.⁹

A contemporary of Frenssen, Herman Babson, an American professor at Purdue University who edited an abridged version of *Peter Moor* in 1914, had access to a statement Frenssen produced at the request of his publisher, Dr. G. Grote of Berlin. The statement details his motive for writing *Peter Moor* and his manner of accumulating accurate information for the book. I include here Babson’s summary, published in his introduction, of Frenssen’s document:

During the Herero Rebellion Frenssen had followed the campaign with the greatest possible interest and sympathy; and aggrieved that his countrymen at home, while looking “with fixed eyes at the happenings in the Far east” (the Russo-Japanese War was then in progress) should be heartlessly indifferent toward the fighting and suffering of soldiers in Southwest Africa, he set himself the task and duty of writing for the German people an account which when read as an artistic whole would arouse patriotism and awaken a feeling of heartfelt thanks for those who

served their country so well. Frenssen had never been to South Africa, consequently it was necessary for him thoroughly to acquaint himself not only with the country, its physical features, its fauna and flora, its native inhabitants etc., but also with the life of the German soldier in the field. Complying with the author's request three men willingly offered their services in the way of giving for days at a time exhaustive answers to questions and of permitting him to read journals and letters. The three who aided Frenssen thus were: *Generaloberst* Dr. Schian, *Leutnant* Klinger, and a student named Michaelsen. Each of these men was embodied in the story, the *Generaloberst* exactly as he was in real life, *Leutnant* Klinger as a world-wide rover, who during the campaign fights with the Germans, and the student Michaelsen as *Der Einjährige* Heinrich Gelsen. Two or three non-commissioned officers were also questioned; and the information obtained in this way, coupled with the results of exhaustive reading of reports, newspaper items, and the study of illustrations, gave Frenssen the right to say: "I no longer felt that I was relating things I had not myself seen and experienced." (Babson introduction, xii–xiii)

Frenssen's effort to present an accurate account from the military perspective and to valorize the German soldier in GSWA met with critical acclaim and enormous popular success. "It would therefore be difficult to exaggerate the significance of this text for creating a widely-shared view of the events of 1904 in the conservative middle class and liberal circles" (Brehl, 104). Frenssen's depiction of Peter Moor and his fellow soldiers was thus highly influential on the German population; it suggested an acceptance of racist hierarchies that could ultimately lead to genocide. In 1912, Frenssen was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

A glance at reviews of *Peter Moor* when it was initially released reveals, however, that praise was not unanimous. That of the *New York Times*, which hails the novel, has already been mentioned. The April 1907 issue of *Journal of the Royal African Society* is also enthusiastic: "It is not often that fiction is reviewed in our pages, but the latest production of the popular Holstein novelist calls for notice on account of its subject." Describing the book as a "plain unvarnished narrative of a young man . . . who volunteered for service in Hereroland" and spent "nine months of privation and suffering in desert marches and typhus camps," the review goes on to declare that "bald simplicity . . . characterises the book all through; there are passages where it becomes epic by sheer force of truth and sincerity."¹⁰ As one might expect, however, the review that appeared in the 1908 issue of the *Advocate of Peace* has a quite different take: "This book might well have been entitled 'The Story of the German Madness in Southwest Africa.'" The anonymous reviewer states that a reading will lead one to question how a

supposedly smart and humane nation such as Germany could have “gone into an enterprise so full of insaneness, injustice, cruelty and loathsomeness as this.” Reading the text from the perspective of advocating peace, and against the grain of Frenssen’s intention, the reviewer concludes: “Whether intended to be so or not, the story is a scathing arraignment of the iniquity and moral loathsomeness of war, and particularly of ‘civilized war’ against native peoples.”¹¹ Frenssen has failed to convince this reviewer of the justification of German aggression on the basis of racial superiority.

Peter Moors Fahrt nach Südwest

Peter Moor appeared in 1908 in the English translation as *Peter Moor’s Journey to Southwest Africa*. The translator, Margaret May Ward, provides a “Translator’s Preface” to the text that reads as follows:

I have always felt that all war stories dwell too much on the glory and glamour of war, and too little on the hardships and horrors and the unnecessary cruelty of it; and so when I read a little German book about the Southwest African war of 1903–04, I wished that every one else might read it. To me it was absorbingly interesting and beautifully told. This summer I have translated it in the hope that it will affect other people as it affected me.

Margaret May Ward
Temple, New Hampshire, 1907

Also included in the paratextual material of the 1908 translation is this further elucidation of Ward’s intention: “This book is dedicated with tender and loving memories to the cause which the translator hoped it might aid, the cause for which she was always ready to give her abounding strength, and to the service of which she brought the wisdom of a loyal nature and a noble mind,—to the cause of PEACE.” This dedication is signed A. H. W., presumably the Andrew Henshaw Ward who holds the copyright. His relationship to the translator is unspecified.¹² Despite both Wards’ hope that this novel might engender peace in the world, the *Advocate of Peace* review seems a far more accurate prophecy. Ward’s dedication supplants the dedication in the original text, which has been eliminated in the translation. That dedication reads: “Der deutschen Jugend, die in Südwestafrika gefallen ist, zu ehrendem Gedächtnis” (To the honorable memory of the German youth who fell in Southwest Africa). One can see why this dedication was quietly excised by Ward, given her focus on peace.

This paratextual material in the translation, which focuses on the hardships endured by German soldiers and the notion of peace, is a telling indicator of reader reception in the early twentieth century and gives twenty-first-century readers a kind of backhanded insight into the text they are about to read. A desire to valorize the genocidal behavior of the Germans is at the heart of Frenssen's novel. He did indeed focus on the challenges facing German soldiers: the lack of water and food, typhoid, dysentery, and the unforgiving geographical features of Southwest Africa, thus *excluding any such sympathy for the suffering of the indigenous people*. The notion of "peace" occurs in the text only to the extent that such a settlement would allow Peter Moor to leave what he viewed as a godforsaken land and return to his beloved *Heimat*. The *New York Times*, too, noted in its review that this is the focus of Frenssen's text: "The chromatic dreams . . . of [Peter Moor] vanish when he reaches the desert coast, to find himself nearly baked alive by day and frozen at night, and to wander about aimlessly without chart or vestige of a road, running the gauntlet constantly between ambushes of natives who stop at no kind of cruel and uncivilized warfare to repel the hated invaders."

A contemporary of Frenssen's declared him to be "a man standing amidst the movements of modern times [who] devotes his life to bettering the life of mankind. In his artistic work he always starts from decisive problems of German life: he recognizes those problems which demand solution, a solution which must be attempted now, in this place, in this very moment, be it an economical, a political, a social or a religious one. Thus his fundamentals are the principles of ethics" (E. Pratt, 52). If his focus is ethics, they are an ethics anathema to our twenty-first-century sensibilities. Should the contemporary reader search the text for evidence of ambivalence about the imperial presence and military mission in Southwest Africa, specifically about the genocidal gaze, that search will yield precious few passages. The one such passage, often quoted by critics to demonstrate that there *were* Germans who raised ethical questions, is *not* spoken by the fictional soldier Peter Moor, through whom the narrative is focalized, but rather by the wagoners who accompanied the military. These were a mix of "old Africans," some of whom "had been already ten years or more in the country" (76), and Boers, that is, descendants of Dutch settlers whom the German army had employed to bring provisions to the interior (53).

Sitting around the fire with Peter in the evening, they shared their doubts about the German enterprise and speculated about the causes of the uprising: "They [the indigenous people] were ranchmen and proprietors, and we [early settlers] were there to make them landless working men; and they rose up in revolt. They acted in just the same way that North Germany did in 1813. This

is their struggle for independence” (77). Such a comment would have been anathema to the German military, who refused to acknowledge any equation or common humanity between Europeans and indigenous Africans. The discussion continued as another wagoner pointed out the profound contradiction between the message of the German missionaries, “You are our brothers,” and the actions of the soldiers in stealing land and cattle: “It is a ridiculous and crazy project. Either it is right to colonize, that is, to deprive others of their rights, to rob and to make slaves, or it is just and right to Christianize, that is, to proclaim and live up to brotherly love” (78). The conversation turned to what would be required to convert the indigenous people to actual “brothers”: “They may become that after a century or two. They must first learn what we ourselves have discovered—to stem water and to make wells, to dig and plant corn, to build houses and to weave clothing” (78). This statement reveals the racist hierarchy of the imperial gaze, which often rested on the belief that indigenous people were stuck at an earlier stage of evolution and would need decades to catch up to Europeans. Finally, “one old freight-carrier, who mixed many English and Dutch words in his speech [clearly a Boer], said ‘The Germans are probably useful as soldiers and farmers but they understand nothing about the government of colonies. They want this and they want that’” (79).

Thus the conversation concludes. It is significant that these comments, raising doubt about the ethics of German colonization, come *not from the German soldiers* themselves; rather, Frenssen put them in the mouths of the “old Africans” and Boers. The Germans and Boers were often in conflict with one another in Southwest Africa, so by no means can these observations made by the Boers be taken as genuine questioning by the Germans of their imperial goals. Indeed, the Eurocentric Germans placed the Boers in a lower station of the racist hierarchy than themselves. Peter Moor makes no comment about this conversation, no acknowledgment of the validity of these ideas, no expression of ambivalence on his part. Nor does Frenssen interrogate, through other means, the imperial gaze that “justifies” German theft of the land belonging to the various tribal groups in Namibia.

Instead, Moor’s narrative is replete with numerous racist and stereotyped depictions of the Herero, the Nama, and the other indigenous people whom he encountered, as well as of Africa itself. Here I can only include a few of the most egregious examples. En route to Africa, Peter worries: “It made us angry to think that the insurrection might perhaps be subdued before we arrived. . . . We wanted at least to land, so that afterwards we could tell at home about the African forests, the herds of monkeys and antelopes, and the straw huts under

the palms” (21). As his ship neared Liberia, Peter heard a “stupid shrieking” and discovered “over both sides [of the ship] were climbing like cats and writhing like snakes, the negroes . . . tall, black, and half naked, with large exposed teeth and wild, laughing human eyes” (31). With his imperial gaze, Peter watched them in his free time and noted “how they squatted around the great pots of food, stuffing quantities of rice into their mouths with their fingers, and devouring with their great, beast-like, crunching teeth their meat, bones, and all indiscriminately” (34). Such bestial imagery is a commonplace in the text and in racial hierarchies. Moor concluded: “These blacks are quite, quite different from us, so that there could be at heart no possible understanding or relationship between us. There must always be misunderstandings instead” (34). It is with such an attitude that Peter Moor arrived in Southwest Africa.¹³ Regrettably, his encounters with Herero and Nama in the ten months he spends in the German colony do nothing to redeem his rigid attitude. He viewed the Herero and Nama as bestial, as subhuman. Gradually, his gaze turned from imperial to genocidal, of which the reader gets hints in this passage. Peter envisioned no possibility of a “relationship between us” and he developed neither sympathy nor respect for the enemy soldiers. In fact, he mentioned them very little in his narrative, as if they were beneath inclusion in his tale of German valor.

Nor are such attitudes toward Africans unique to Peter Moor and his fellow soldiers. Herman Babson, who as mentioned published an abridged version of *Peter Moor* for college students, included this description of the indigenous people of Namibia in his introduction:

The original inhabitants are the Nama and the Bushmen. The latter are, culturally speaking, the lowest of all the tribes. The Nama stand much higher in this respect, many of the blacks being clothed like Europeans[!]. Most of the Nama are well-armed, but they are of a changeable disposition, are slothful, and are given to heavy drinking. . . . The Herero . . . are big, sturdy fellows, very muscular, and excellent cattle-raisers and herders. . . . As is true of many of the uncivilized or partly civilized tribes, the Herero are greedy, cruel, and deceitful. (xxi–xxii)¹⁴

Babson’s racist commentary is an apt summary, from a century ago, of the imperial gaze: using the metaphor of hierarchy, he arrays the indigenous people along the lower rungs, assuming, of course, that the Germans always stand at the top.

Peter’s initial description of the landscape of Africa revealed his perception of it as forbidding and hostile to civilization. The surf is “surging, leaping . . . heavy, choppy,” the sun is “scorching,” and the land is “everlastingly deep, hot sand . . . nothing but barren hot sand,” with “not a single human being” on the

beach to greet them (39–40). As they moved inland by train,¹⁵ they encountered “a monstrous, horribly wild mountain range” and “oppressive heat” (41). Seeing no “shrub or even a spear of grass, and not an animal,” Peter’s impression was of an “immense, dead wonderwork” (42). Expecting to find the “groves of palms” that are part of Moor’s myth of Africa, they instead discovered that the “hot, trembling air” has yielded only mirages (45). As the soldiers neared the capital, Windhoek, the landscape became “more fruitful and attractive” (50), but Moor’s companions “didn’t like the country; I think it wasn’t strange and wonderful enough for them. They wanted Africa to look entirely different in every particular from their native land” (51). The gaze of the newly arrived Germans fell upon a land that failed to present the images of exoticism that they expected. It also bore no resemblance to their *Heimat* and will remain, paradoxically, neither exotic nor familiar enough.

While plying the reader with these racist images and stereotypes, Peter Moor is also describing regularly the physical discomforts of his life as a soldier. These discomforts are undoubtedly real, and they compose the majority of the narrative without any thought being given to the disruption of the lives of the Herero and Nama that the German presence has incurred. Moor’s gaze grows increasingly genocidal throughout the text, as if Frenssen is tracing the trajectory that led the Schutztruppe to justify the genocide to come. Moor refused to acknowledge the humanity of the “other,” or, indeed, even their presence. Instead, he focused on his own discomforts. The soldiers were undersupplied with water and food, and thus thirst and hunger were constant companions. They marched in the blistering sun toward the site of the pending battle, stopping to rest midday when the sun was at its zenith; they slept on the ground in the cold nights or stayed awake on guard duty. Food was cooked in a hole in the ground and usually consisted of a little rice, meat, flour baked unsuccessfully into pitiful bread, and coffee. As the march continued for weeks, without the opportunity to bathe or change uniforms, these rations thinned out and rice became the main staple. Increasingly, Moor and his comrades long for home; imagining themselves having won the battle, they exulted: “And then . . . we’ll travel back to the coast and we’ll start for home! What shan’t we have to tell about this monkey-land!” (74). Moor looked forward to boasting of his exploits upon his return to Germany: it was just such boasting, in newspapers, journals, and memoirs, in the Reichstag, and in fiction that conveyed the acceptance of racist ideology to his fellow citizens. In turn, this created an acceptance of such attitudes toward the “other” that informs actions during the initial months of the Third Reich. Hitler created Dachau, the first concentration camp, in 1933, almost immediately after he came

to power. Initially envisioned as a reeducation camp for communists and other political “subversives,” it was ultimately equipped with a gas chamber. As Nazi plans to send those they deemed subhuman and unfit to live with the “Master Race” to Madagascar or eastern Europe failed, Hitler moved inexorably toward embracing genocide as the “Final Solution.”

Frenssen’s Description of the Herero Genocide

After weeks of such marching, the Germans engaged their enemy in frequent exchange of gunfire, skirmishes that will eventually lead to the decisive Battle of Waterberg on 11 August 1904. A few months earlier, at Easter, Moor provided the reader with several descriptions of the people at whom he was shooting during these skirmishes: “strange men in cord uniform rising *like snakes* out of the grass” (emphasis mine, 97); “a black, half-naked figure *like an ape*, holding his gun in his mouth and climbing with hands and feet into a tree” (emphasis mine, 98). Once again, the use of bestial imagery underscores his imperial gaze. Moor himself was shot in the arm and, as supplies dwindled and he lost comrades to wounds and death, his upbeat mood shifted: “We were getting continually dirtier, hungrier, and sicker” (111). Typhoid fever and dysentery invaded the camp. A situation of gloomy stasis prevailed as the soldiers, outnumbered by the Herero, awaited the arrival of fresh troops from Germany to launch the final siege. Moor and his fellow troops returned to the German military fort in Windhoek to restore their health through rest, better food, and the opportunity to bathe. While there, he was told in passing by another soldier that the “Hottentot women . . . were at our disposal at any time” (130).¹⁶ Such treatment of indigenous women amounted to rape or forced prostitution. Significant consternation arose in Berlin about such interracial coupling and the biracial children that sometimes resulted. Such relationships were outlawed by the German government in 1905; this control of sexuality for “racial” purposes is echoed in the Nazis’ 1935 Nuremberg laws.¹⁷

Moor’s four-week respite at the fort came to an end as new German troops arrived and he headed out on expedition again. After an eight-day march, he arrived at a camp where he encountered some of the Nama who have been forced to fight with the Germans against the Herero. As described in chapter 1, Hendrik Witbooi, after years of successfully evading German pressure to sign a hypocritically dubbed “Protection Treaty,” succumbed to this demand following severe losses in battle in 1894. Signing the dreaded “treaty” compelled

Witbooi and his troops to fight with the German soldiers against other indigenous people. Moor described them thus: “In one corner was quartered a whole troop of Wittboys, hideous-looking men with wild, yellow faces. They had come from the south of our colony to help us and wore our uniform and were commanded by German officers” (147–48). This is a callous misrepresentation of the truth surrounding the Witbooi presence, which ignores their history and the compulsion they experienced to fight with the Germans against other indigenous people. Such passages reinforced the image of the Nama as subalterns and conveyed a wrongful impression to the German reading public back home. In a subsequent chapter in the novel, titled “The Flight of the Nation,” which recounts the beginning of the Battle of Waterberg (though Frenssen does not name it as such), the Witbooi troops are sent ahead of the German soldiers as spies (173).

We know from the accounts of historians that as many as 60,000 Herero men, women, and children were massed near the site of the Battle of Waterberg. The German battle strategy included the formation of their troops in such a manner that the Herero would be forced to flee from the fighting into the Omaheke Desert; indeed, that is what occurred and the German troops pursued them and closed off any escape route. The strategy of forcing the Herero into the desert was intentional on General Lothar von Trotha’s part: it would finish the work of the genocide, assuring the death of the Herero from thirst and starvation.

As the Battle of Waterberg wanes (referred to as Hamakari in the novel), Peter Moor and his fellow soldiers “ventured to pursue the enemy” into the desert (189). And beginning with this pursuit, Peter Moor’s gaze transitions from an imperial gaze into a genocidal gaze. This shift in the narrative perspective of the novel reflects that of history. Von Trotha’s decision to funnel the Herero toward their death “marked a shift toward an explicitly genocidal strategy”; German patrols pursued the Herero for two months (Steinmetz, *The Devil’s Handwriting*, 193). While most of this portion of Moor’s narrative again focuses on his own discomfort and thirst, the loss of horses and the return of typhoid, he does describe what he saw on the route the Herero took into the desert: “In the path of their flight lay blankets, skins, ostrich feathers, household utensils, women’s ornaments, cattle, and men dead and dying and staring blankly. A shocking smell of old manure and of decaying bodies filled the hot, still air oppressively. . . . And there lay the wounded and the old, women and children. A number of babies lay helplessly languishing by mothers whose breasts hung down long and flabby. . . . Somebody sent out our black drivers and I think they helped

them to die” (189–90). One day, Moor happens upon a group of six survivors; “I indicated, by signs, [to his fellow soldiers] at which one of them each of us was to shoot” says Moor (192). All six are killed on the spot.

Moor and the soldiers traveled on and learned that a remnant of the Herero have successfully crossed the desert, in which “thousands of them had perished” (199). Von Trotha (never named in the novel but referred to only as “the general”) “decided to follow them thither, to attack them and *force them to go northward into thirst and death, so that the colony would be left in peace and quiet for all time*” (emphasis mine, 199). Moor never questioned von Trotha’s strategy or the underlying goal. After tracking the Herero for three weeks, two divisions of Schutztruppe met: “Combining our forces, we were now going to attack the enemy . . . and deal them a finishing blow” (219). The general ordered a military parade and religious services for the following day, prior to the planned attack. Moor recounts the words of the army chaplain: “He said that a people savage by nature had rebelled against the authorities that God had set over them and besides had stained themselves with revolting murders. Then the authorities had given the sword, which we were to use on the morrow, into our hands” (221). The genocide they are about to complete is thus deemed morally acceptable. But the expected encounter did not occur; the Herero had fled farther into the desert, indicating they “preferred to die in the desert rather than to fight any more with us” (223). But Moor and two comrades continued the pursuit. They happened upon “a boy with remarkably long, thin legs, as if they had stretched out in death. We hardly turned our horses so that they should not tread on him” (228). Musing to himself, Moor uttered words that evoke the genocidal gaze: “It is strange what a matter of indifference another man’s life is to us when he belongs to another race” (228).

Shortly thereafter, Moor and a guardsman, returning to camp after the general called an end to the pursuit, found a “thin Negro dressed in European clothing” in the bush (230). They drag him out and the guardsman began conversing with him. After a while, the guardsman has had enough and sarcastically quoted the words of a missionary: “‘Beloved, don’t forget that the blacks are our brothers.’ Now I will give my brother his reward” (231). The guardsman commanded the black man to run away, “but he had not taken five leaps before the ball hit him and he pitched forward at full length and lay still” (232). This passage is a direct refutation of the conversation, quoted earlier, between Moor and the “old Africans” and the Boers, in which the latter raised ethical questions about colonization. Such “brotherhood” does not exist; the Herero are expendable and can be exterminated at will.

Frenssen delivers the final, ringing endorsement of the ideology that constitutes the genocidal gaze in the closing pages of the novel. He puts these words in the mouth of a lieutenant, who spoke to Moor as they stood by the dark body of the man the guardsman has just shot: "*These blacks have deserved death before God and man*, not because they have murdered two hundred farmers and have revolted against us, but because they have built no houses and dug no wells." Referencing the words of the chaplain two days previous, the lieutenant continued: "God has let us conquer here because we are the nobler and more advanced people. That is not saying much in comparison with this black nation, but we must see to it that we become better and braver before all nations of the earth. To the nobler and more vigorous belongs the world. That is the justice of God" (emphasis mine, 233–34). Then the lieutenant temporarily demurs: "But the missionary was right when he said that all men are brothers" (234).

Peter Moor replies, "Then we have killed our brother." In response, the lieutenant delivers these chilling words, which could well have been spoken by one of Hitler's henchmen: "For a long time *we must be hard and kill*, but at the same time as individual men we must strive toward high thoughts and noble deeds so that we may contribute our part to mankind, our future brothers" (emphasis mine, 234). The racist hierarchy the Germans established in GSWA becomes the justification for genocide, just as it will in the Holocaust. Those unworthy of being brothers must be vanished from the earth so that the "nobler and more vigorous" can survive and prosper.

A Return to the *Heimat* and an Adventure Narrated: Critical Responses

In the final chapter, "Last Days in Africa," Moor recounts his march back to Windhoek, his growing appreciation for the African landscape, and his fervent desire to return to Germany. A fellow soldier informs him of a further conflict that will require German soldiers: "The Hottentots, who lived in the south, had risen, and that now a second campaign would begin which would probably be as hard as the one which had just ended" (238). This comment refers to the rebellion of the Nama. Hendrik Witbooi and his men turned against the Germans and, following the example of the Herero, engaged the Germans in battle. Their strategy, however, was to use guerilla warfare and thus the war dragged on for three years. But Moor is diagnosed with a weak heart and traveled back to Swakopmund where he boarded a Woerman steamer for home. Arriving in

Hamburg, he encountered a middle-aged man who asked him many questions. “I related to him all that I had seen and experienced, and what I had thought of it all. And he has made this book out of it” (244). And thus the novel ends.

John K. Noyes, in one of the few analytical articles in English about *Peter Moor*, calls this final paragraph of the text “one of the strangest moments in German colonial literature—and it has some very strange moments.”¹⁸ Noyes claims that in these closing sentences “the narrative pact we have established with Peter Moor throughout the book is shattered” (88). Essentially, the narrator is outed as Frenssen himself, the middle-aged man on the dock, rather than Peter Moor. Put another way, the concluding sentences of the novel introduce a meta level, calling to the reader’s attention the act of writing the novel. “Frenssen’s story may be set in Africa, but it is about constructing a place called home and naming it in national terms” (Noyes, 91). Such a deconstruction of the narrative by Frenssen serves the goal of establishing the theme of national identity and creating a justification for the apparent wandering of Moor and other soldiers, which must be defined over against the nomadism of the indigenous Africans. That nomadism, states Noyes, is what enables Moor to call them uncivilized: they have not built houses or dug wells but “wander” across the land, gleaning their sustenance. By contrast, Moor’s “wandering” is in the service of Germany: the colonizers intend to settle down, to start families and farms, to build houses and dig wells, to bring “civilization” to the “savages.” Noyes’s article is useful in naming the nationalist aspects of the genocidal gaze: it is informed by a supposed racial superiority tied to the industry and cultural traditions of Western Europe.

As mentioned earlier, Frenssen is best known for his *Heimatkunst*, his deployment of the genre of regional fiction. Noyes’s article places *Peter Moor* in this tradition, despite its African setting: “Well before the Nazis pushed ‘degenerate’ art aside and elevated *Blut-und-Boden* kitsch to the status of official romance, the regional novel was telling tales of nation and race bonded in idyllic communion by the irrational power of the soil” (90). Noyes further points out: “The term *Heimatkunst* (regional art) had been coined in 1895 by Adolf Bartels, the literary historian whose racist polemics against Judaism would later make him one of the Nazis’ authorities on ethnic cleansing in art” (90).

Perhaps, then, it should not come as a surprise that Frenssen made, in the 1930s, what Frank Braun has erroneously called an “apparently sudden shift into the National Socialist camp,” though Braun then goes on to delineate what he sees as precursors to this “shift” in Frenssen’s earlier work (449). The journey from *Heimatkunst* to Nazi propaganda that Frenssen makes as a writer is yet another

indication of the links between the genocide of the Herero and the Nazi Holocaust. As Elizabeth Boa has noted: “At its most expansionist, *Heimat* ideology justified seizure of *Lebensraum*, strange land to be colonized and turned into homeland” (51). The paradigm for the Nazi colonization of eastern Europe has its roots firmly planted in the soil of Southwest Africa. Indeed, the very titles of the books Frenssen published in the last decade of his life, described by Braun as “of an outright propagandistic nature” (451), indicate his sympathy with Nazi ideology as they use “hot-button” Nazi terminology: for example, *Der Weg unseres Volkes* (The Way of Our Folk, 1938) and *Recht (oder Unrecht)—mein Land* (Right [or Wrong]—My Land, 1940). In April 1935, Frenssen published a brief history of Adolf Hitler in the *Schleswig-Holsteinischen Tageszeitung* in honor of Hitler’s birthday; Hitler also awarded Frenssen’s novel *Peter Moor* a medal (Griese, 215).

We will return to these links between the genocide of the Herero and the genocide of the Jews in the Third Reich. First, though, a brief glance at other critical responses to *Peter Moor* available to scholars in English. David Kenosian, comparing the work of Gustav Frenssen and German colonial novelist Hans Grimm (who, unlike Frenssen, actually lived in Africa from 1897 to 1911), poses this “crucial question for German colonial literature: How could the Germans represent themselves as culturally superior to the putatively savage. . . Africans when they themselves resorted to violent forms of domination?”¹⁹ Focusing on the “internal instability of the discourse of race in these texts which justifies violence as a political praxis” (184), Kenosian traces attitudes toward the black body from Hegel’s master/slave dialectic to Franz Fanon and then to Lacan.

Alan Bowyer draws on Homi Bhabha in his highly theoretical analysis of *Peter Moor*. His reading of the semiotics of clothing in the novel is helpful as he points out Frenssen’s attention to details such as the buttons on soldiers’ uniforms as a distinguishing sign. Similarly, he notes the emphasis in the novel on “order, discipline and labor, and the opposite thereof—a condition of chaos, non-differentiation, carelessness and sloth,” the former characterizing the Germans and the latter the black Africans.²⁰ The common German motto “Ordnung muss sein” (Order must be) is called to mind here as Bowyer reveals frequent instances in the text of the imposition of order by German military on the indigenous population.

Daniel Brückenhaus has analyzed *Peter Moor* as children’s literature, or perhaps what we would now call Young Adult (YA) literature.²¹ Writing about both British and German children’s literature, his focus is the debate among authors during this period about “the role of feelings in imperial relationships. The cen-

tral issue was whether Europeans should create an emotional connection with non-Europeans and, if so, what the effect would be on the power hierarchies between black and white people” (74). Brückenhaus quotes, as many scholars do, the passage mentioned earlier in which Peter converses with the “old Africans” and Boers about the fate of the indigenous people, likening their struggle for independence to that of the Germans in 1813. This brief passage leads Brückenhaus to erroneously conclude: “the novel seems to accept the fact that from a *moral* standpoint, the Africans are in the right” (86). Frenssen had no such aim in mind in writing the novel and no such affirmation of the African perspective occurs. What Brückenhaus has failed to consider is that the speaker of this passage is *not a German soldier*. Peter in no way agrees with or validates this sentiment.

Brückenhaus does note the *lack* of human emotion on Peter’s part toward the Herero and Nama. “However, such acknowledgments [of the just cause of the Herero] are not accompanied by any personal, empathetic connection between black and white characters, or by feelings of compassion. In fact, the protagonist repeatedly and successfully fights against his ‘over-emotional’ impulses that might diminish his skills as a tough fighter defending German imperial expansion” (86). (It would seem that the inherent contradiction between this observation and his claim about the moral center of the novel would be enough to dissuade Brückenhaus of his opinion regarding the latter.) Brückenhaus concludes, and here we can agree, that the novel “thereby becomes indicative of an especially brutal and ‘exterminationist’ form of racism” (87). From yet another perspective, then, the presence of the genocidal gaze in Frenssen’s work is affirmed.

Reading the novel as an explication of the genocidal gaze is also validated when one learns that the Nazis reprinted the text several times for adult audiences. The novel was originally printed in an edition of 25,000 in 1906. As early as 1908, the text, as Brückenhaus indicates, was required reading in German classrooms.²² Indeed, the text was so popular with youth that Pathfinder groups (German boy scouts in the early twentieth century) would carry copies of *Peter Moor* on camping trips and read aloud from the novel.²³ By 1933, 233,000 copies were in print and then the Nazis appropriated the text to inculcate the genocidal gaze in schools. The book was re-released in 1933, 1936, and 1938. In fact, the Nazis issued a special edition of *Peter Moors Fahrt nach Südwest* for Wehrmacht soldiers in 1942 and 1944, listed on abebooks.com as *Peter Moors Fahrt nach Südwest. Ein Feldzugbericht. Soldatenbücherei des Oberkommandos der Wehrmacht Abt. Inland Band 34*. This brought the total number of copies in print to 433,000 by 1944 (Warmbold, 67).

I have examined two copies of this Wehrmacht edition of *Peter Moor*, one purchased from abebooks.com and one at the Universitätsbibliothek Johann Christian Senckenberg in Frankfurt, Germany. The text is pocket size, approximately 6" x 4", and has a soft cover, ideal for carrying in a pocket or rucksack. The paper is of rather poor quality, as might be expected in the throes of World War II, and the text is printed in Fraktur. No Nazi insignia was found in either copy. Undoubtedly, *Peter Moor* becomes an instrument for transmitting the genocidal gaze: just as Peter has nothing but scorn for the "barbaric" and "expendable" Africans he encounters, so children and the Wehrmacht, as well as the general reading public, absorbed the "cult of Frenssen" as one critic has called it: the "moral justification" of genocide to acquire land and to maintain the purity of German blood and the racial superiority the Nazis claimed (Warmbold, 68).

Other editions of *Peter Moor* prove instructive as well. A contemporaneous response to Frenssen's text is provided by Herman Babson, mentioned earlier. Babson produced a 1914 edition of *Peter Moor*, in the original German Fraktur, for student use in the United States. He abridged the text by about 50 percent and added a thirty-page introduction, notes, and an appendix of vocabulary. The volume also contains a photograph of Frenssen, two painted images of Schutztruppe, and an elaborate foldout map, with geological features, of the route between Swakopmund and Windhoek. In his preface, Babson states his hope that the "comprehensive account of German colonization activity in Southwest Africa . . . will materially aid in the enjoyment of this *excellent tale of German valor*" (emphasis mine, n.p.). Yet another edition was published in Namibia as recently as 1998. This edition, which curiously has an anonymous editor and is written entirely in German, seems to be created for the significant population of German-speaking descendants of the immigrant settlers still living in Namibia today. The preface, written by Dr. Budack of Windhoek, concludes by hoping that this new edition of Frenssen's "'little book' [*Büchlein*] of which many editions are already out of print, will provide a small but very comprehensible and enthralling report" (my translation).²⁴ This 1998 edition carries footnotes, photographs, and an appendix that includes battle descriptions and maps excerpted from the 1906 reports by the general's staff and archived in Berlin. *Virtually no paratextual material provides any information about the Herero or Nama themselves.* They have been erased, just as they were almost invisible in the novel itself.

Conclusion

When we children played soldiers, the inspiration was not the war of 1870/71 and certainly not that of 1866, but rather the Herero uprising in Southwest Africa. In this there was always a long back and forth, who should be a Herero and *who was allowed to belong to the honored and idolized imperial colonial defense forces* [Schutztruppe]. (emphasis mine)²⁵

This childhood memory, recalled by Kurt Bittel, who later became an archaeology professor, demonstrates the significant impact that texts such as *Peter Moor* had on German children and the population as a whole. Toy manufacturers in Germany created sets of tin soldiers accurate to the country and ethnicity where conflicts had occurred.

To capitalize on public interest, such toys were available within weeks of the event portrayed, earning them the nickname “newspapers in tin.” Indeed, makers of tin figures stored and recycled molds for this very purpose. With a touch of paint and appropriate scenery, exotic environments and characters could be interchanged at will . . . Boers were repainted as Germans to fight against Indians, themselves repainted as Southwest African Hereros. . . . Battle sets offered explicit lessons in the inevitable and heroic progress of civilization over the less civilized. (Bowersox, 38)

Such “battle sets” also offered lessons in the genocidal gaze, which normalized the idea of mass killings as the inevitable duty of the “higher” races of the world.

Gustav Frenssen’s *Peter Moor*, like the tin soldiers, conveyed a message of German valor in the face of the “brutal” and “expedable” races in GSWA. Today, we read *Peter Moor* not only as evidence of the links between German imperialism and the Nazi Holocaust but also as having been *instrumental* in the creation of a mind-set in its German readers regarding racial hierarchies, of justification for the violence of colonialism, and for, when required, *Endlösung*. As Joachim Warmbold has written: “The *Heimatkunst* movement saw itself as an ‘educational force for a new German culture’ imbued with idealistic and nationalist features. . . . In propagating rejection of industrial urban society, inveighing against ‘modernism,’ intellectuals, and Jews while, at the same time, evoking a mystical-collective *Volkstum* (national heritage) whose origins were ‘rooted in the soil,’ the spokesmen for *Heimatkunst* became trailblazers for an ideology that led directly to the *Blut und Boden* mentality of the National Socialist dictatorship” (69).