Exterritorialized Heritage in Caroline Link's Nirgendwo in Afrika

Kristin Kopp

Using discussions about the British heritage cinema of the 1980s and 1990s as a point of departure, Lutz Koepnick has identified a similar phenomenon in a set of postwall films that he refers to collectively as "German heritage cinema." Against the backdrop of a memory culture focusing on the unrepresentability of National Socialist atrocities, these films offer "forms of German-Jewish solidarity that surpass public history and serve contemporary viewers as an object of emotional identification."¹ German heritage cinema looks back to the Nazi period, and locates spaces, however small or marginal, onto which instances of positive German practice can be projected and positive German identity imagined.

Caroline Link's third feature-length film, Nirgendwo in Afrika (Nowhere in Africa, 2001) surely stands out as one of the most successful German heritage films. It presents the story of the Redlichs, a bourgeois family of assimilated Jewish-Germans from Breslau, who escape the Nazi order in 1938 and emigrate to Kenya. The shift in continental setting alleviates certain historical contingencies while introducing different constellations of power and conflict in colonial Africa. The change in location also grants the heritage film a new site of operations. Extracted from a European context, "German-Jewish solidarity" becomes transferred to the German-Jewish protagonists. In Nazi Germany, one could not be both German and Jewish; Link's film presents exile as the space in which this disjuncture can be ameliorated and a hyphenated, hybrid

¹ Lutz Koepnick, "Reframing the Past: Heritage Cinema and the Holocaust in the 1990s," in this issue.
identity realized. Such a renegotiation of Jewish-German identity necessarily entails a re-definition of previously incommensurate elements, a process that has implications for race, class, and gender. These re-definitions bring about a positive transformation: Germanness and Jewishness are reconciled within broader processes of personal maturation, which in turn appeal to spectators as sites of "emotional identification."

This validated hyphen becomes the precondition for rapprochement. With their transformation in Africa complete, the Redlichs return to post-war West Germany, where they plan to play an active role in that society's reconstruction. The film ends with the family on a train leaving Kenya. The camera reflects their view out of the window, but then loosens itself from the trajectory of the journey, lingering instead on the broad expanse of the African landscape as the train continues its progress into the horizon. We will in fact not accompany the Redlichs back to Europe. The new regime of identity, one in which Jewishness and Germanness are both transformed and reconciled, is the telos of the filmic narrative. Yet it is a hidden telos, because the successful German-Jewish solidarity is only implied, relocated to a postwar Germany that is not presented by the film.

Displacing the heritage film to the exotic landscape of Kenya, *Nirgendwo in Afrika* fuses the difficult task of remembering the German past with a new and equally complicated responsibility to adequately represent colonial Africa. I will investigate how the film cuts a path through this precarious discursive terrain and question how these two contextual frames — Jewish exile and African colonialism — come into play. In this narrative of metamorphosis, Africa functions primarily as an "other space" where previously entrenched identities become malleable and negotiable, a space that not only necessitates but, more importantly, facilitates the process of individual reinvention.

In rendering Africa as a liminal space, *Nirgendwo in Afrika* employs familiar colonial tropes that foster ontological asymmetries between Europeans and Africans. If Africa becomes a mystical locus of European transformation, the Africans represent at best eager guides along this path. They remain confined within a realm of developmental stasis, lacking the capacity to affect change or progress. Is Jewish-German reconciliation only to be seen as possible against such a backdrop of absolute otherness? I want to look at the film's strategy of presenting this "other" Africa from the point of view of the Redlichs. What does it mean to gaze upon the colonial situation from the experience of exile?
Postwall Memory Debates

The combination of Holocaust survival narrative and the exotic landscape of Africa struck a nerve in Germany, where the film has been extremely successful with both audiences and prize committees. Released on December 17, 2001, it sold over 1.2 million tickets by October 2002, and dominated that year’s German Film Award ceremonies. *Nirgendwo in Afrika* won the Film Award in Gold (the “Lola”) for best German feature film, and walked away with a full half of the prizes designated for individual accomplishment. In the hope that this success would continue abroad, the German Film Export-Union met in October 2002 and selected *Nirgendwo in Afrika* to represent Germany in the Academy Award’s competition for Best Foreign Language Film.

In their attempts to account for the film’s remarkable success, participants stressed the universal significance of the central themes. The actor Matthias Habich (who plays a fellow Jewish-German refugee in Kenya) explained in an interview that *Nirgendwo in Afrika* tells a timeless tale of exile and cultural dislocation. He rejected the notion that the project treats a specifically Jewish problem, claiming that the Jewish element merely provided a convenient stage setting for a narrative of personal transformation. This particular angle dominated both the advertising as well as the public reception of the film. In the speech and introductions following the premiere screening (an event staged with burning torches, hanging animal prints, and live African drumming), no one mentioned that the film’s protagonists were Jewish. Similarly, in the video “The Making of *Nirgendwo in Afrika*,” the Redlichs are referred to as “refugees” [*Flüchtlinge*], but not once identified as Jewish. At issue is not only the question of why the film team would have desired to deflect


3. Awarded a Film Award in Gold were: Niki Reiser for soundtrack, Gernot Roll for cinematography, Matthias Habich for best supporting actor, and Caroline Link for direction. Additional Prizes include the FIPRESCI Awards well as the Special Prize of the Jury at the 2002 Charley Vary International Film Festival; the Bavarian Film Award for Best Production (Peter Hermann, the film’s producer from MTM), the 2003 Audience Award of the Bavarian Film Prize, and a nomination for the Best Foreign Language Film at the 2003 Golden Globe Awards.

4. “Constantin Film Co-Produktion ‘Nirgendwo in Afrika’ vertritt Deutschland im Rennen um den OSCAR.”

5. Interview with Matthias Habich on the German DVD release of the film.

6. The “Premiere” and “The Making of *Nirgendwo in Afrika*” are both from the German DVD release of the film.
attention away from the protagonists’ identities, but also the question as to how this was apparently so easily accomplished.

The fact that the film’s protagonists are Jewish exiles from Nazi Germany is of central importance to the telos of the film, as is the choice of colonial Africa as their site of refuge. Within German “memory culture” – the debates about what should be remembered about the Nazi era, and how it should be remembered – Africa offers a terra incognita for the recollections of this period. Abandoning a European continent blanketed in a tightly woven tapestry of Holocaust discourse allows for dramatic shifts in the representation of Jewish-German wartime experience. So powerful are the effects of this exterritorialization that it becomes possible to obscure the fact that the protagonists are Jewish.

Kenya has often been chosen as the landscape upon which to stage such epic narratives of “arrival, transformation, and return.” One factor accounting for Nirgendwo in Afrika’s great success was a marketing strategy that positioned it within a venerable generic legacy. The official press release recalls the most celebrated of the forerunners: The Snows of Kilimanjaro with Gregory Peck and Ava Gardner (Henry King, 1952), John Wayne in Hatari! (Howard Hawks, 1962), and Out of Africa starring Meryl Streep and Robert Redford (Sidney Pollack, 1985). Nirgendwo in Afrika appeared as a long awaited and eagerly anticipated continuation of a filmic tradition – and it sought to bring a new and uniquely German approach to the material.

Nirgendwo in Afrika was for this reason received by many journalists as a model for German film and even as an answer to the often bemoaned identity crisis that has plagued this film nation since the decline of New German Cinema. Nirgendwo in Afrika became the “next big thing,” the new German alternative to Hollywood. Margret Köhler of Berliner Morgenpost announced a new “Big German Cinema”:

“Großes Kino, made in Germany,” an appellation echoed by Simone Mahrenholz in the Tagesspiegel: “Großes deutsches Kino . . . the kind that is entertaining while still maintaining political pretensions.”

Yet even the critics who received this film most favorably were curiously reluctant to address the film’s politics. Instead, as they looked more carefully at the film’s visual surface and narrative content, reviewers tended to follow the formula of negation articulated by Jan Schulz-Ojala in the Tagesspiegel: “Perhaps one can best approach this enchantingly inapprehendable film via that which it is not.” The Frankfurter Rundschau’s Rüdiger Suchsland was typical in his relief that, unlike Out of Africa, Link’s film contains “no safari images, no wild animals, and no natives rattling at their chains.”

Indeed, this strategy of negation was primarily deployed to differentiate Nirgendwo in Afrika from its famed forerunner, Out of Africa. Caroline Link adamantly positioned her film as a German alternative to an American aesthetic, stressing that her film did not aim to depict “adventure in paradise” so characteristic of its Hollywood precursors. This was largely a question of economics. Not only did Link work with a much lower production budget than Pollack, the modest means of her protagonists preempted the opulent displays of aristocratic wealth found in Out of Africa.

Link’s cinematographer, Gernot Roll, shot most of the film with a hand-held Steadicam instead of a dolly-operated camera. The resulting effect is a closer, more intimate image that is directly aligned with the protagonists’ lines of gaze. While the film does not entirely avoid landscape panoramas, the unsteadiness of the camera adds a vulnerable human perspective to the visual spectacle. In Out of Africa, sophisticated equipment was used to capture the majestic landscape from Karen Blixen’s socially elevated point of view – as seen both from the cockpit of an airplane as well as from the grand porch surrounding her elegant estate home. In Nirgendwo in Afrika, the Steadicam reflects a less privileged and less mobile point of view.

Despite this crucial difference in scale, Link’s film closely follows the narrative logic of Pollack’s *Out of Africa*. Much of the rhetoric of negation may thus simply have been used to divert attention from fundamental similarities between the two films. However, the strategy of negation was also deployed vis-à-vis that aspect of the film which most obviously differentiated it from its famed Hollywood precursors. For while *Nirgendwo in Afrika* introduces a new protagonist to the landscape of the Kenya Colony in its narration of the experience of Jewish exiles, critics were conspicuously disinterested in the ramifications of this novel point of view. Instead, they expressed relief that the film was able to treat this material in a way that successfully spared the viewer any “pathos of affliction” [*Betroffenheitspathos*] while also avoiding a heavy-handed “moral message” [*Moral von der Geschichte*].

The film was valued, in other words, for its depoliticized and non-moralizing representation of Jewish-German wartime experience. In *Nirgendwo in Afrika* the trauma of the Holocaust takes the backseat in a narrative vehicle about personal challenge and development. Understood as such, the project is politically precarious, for it aims to subvert the paradigmatic treatment of the Holocaust in postwar German art. Even as the film team and the supportive reviewers sought to divert attention away from this aspect of the film, the success of *Nirgendwo in Afrika* is at least partially attributable to this quiet violation of the cultural-political taboos of the recent past.

Since Adorno’s dictate that the “authentic artists of today are those in whose works the most extreme horror continues to tremble,” an unwritten contract linking aesthetics and politics had united Germany’s artists and critics. It served as the basis for a consensus among the cultural left regarding the necessity of addressing the Holocaust as well as the aesthetic means deemed appropriate for the task. With the *Wende* the cultural authority of this agreement came into question. Andreas Huyssen recognizes an early dismantling of the consensus in Ulrich Greiner’s 1990 call for the end of the German “aesthetic of convictions” [*Gesinnungsästhetik*]. Huyssen lamented German intellectuals’ failure to fill the resulting void, for it would become the...

locus of formidable reactionary opposition.

As the consensus became destabilized, various voices claimed that the cultural left had maintained a stifling postwar censorship, monitoring what could and could not be said about Jewish-Germans and the Holocaust. The German fascination with – and frequent ridicule of – the American “political correctness” debates of the 1990s reflected the desire to disarm such moral constraints on German speech.¹⁷ In his Friedenspreisrede of 1998, Martin Walser voiced these sentiments forthrightly, arguing that Auschwitz should not be misused as “a publicly forced routine, a means of intimidation to be employed at will, a moral cudgel, or even a compulsory exercise.”¹⁸ At stake was the ability to develop new idioms through which the German-Jewish past could be represented, and to find alternatives to New German Cinema’s project that had “militated against collective forgetting, taking leave of a problematic national past by constantly problematizing that past’s presence.”¹⁹

Nirgendwo in Afrika does not, however, abandon the question of Germany’s past altogether. Instead, the film wants to have it both ways – to both claim and deny its “political pretensions.” In the process, Link nimbly evades potential sources of criticism on both sides of the representability debate. She is successful because the film integrates the Holocaust, but accomplishes this through a mediation that is itself a representation. In Africa, the Redlichs learn of the events in Germany through letters from the family members they have left behind, and from the radio broadcasts they are occasionally able to receive. These textual signs of life are questioned and interpreted by the Redlichs who strive to make sense of what is taking place in Germany. It is an aesthetically and politically reflexive solution. To question the representability of the Holocaust, however, does not guarantee that its memory receives adequate treatment. Indeed, this reflexive dimension obscures the extent to which the film revises the Holocaust.

Deflecting and Recoding Holocaust Iconography

Nirgendwo in Afrika channels visual and narrative attention away from the traumatic moments of German-Jewish history through a two-fold approach of deflection and deflation. First, instead of the Germans, it is the British in Africa who become the agents of anti-Semitic practice. Once moral transgressions are displaced from the arena of German responsibility, they are resignified and rendered innocuous. The visual iconography of the Holocaust resurfaces in a new visage, now divested of its horror.

The opening of the film is set in Breslau during the winter of 1938. Jettel Redlich (Juliane Köhler) is on a sledding outing with her five-year-old daughter Regina (Lea Kurka). Jettel’s husband, Walter (Merab Ninidze), is already in Kenya. From off-camera, a voice that will later be identified as the teen-aged Regina (Karoline Eckertz) tells of the course of events that led her family into exile. Her narrative has no direct relationship to the events on screen, but instead brings an element of foreboding to this seemingly joyful moment. The scene catalyzes uneasiness through compositions in which the integrity of the visual frame is violated from offscreen without identifying the source of these violations. Regina is hit unexpectedly by a snowball, but we do not see who threw it; a rapid montage depicts shots of Jettel violently pitching forward, but we do not see who knocked her down. The invisible agent of violence haunts the remainder of the scene, until Jettel falls from her sled at the bottom of the hill. As she lies motionless on the snow, the camera slowly spirals into a close-up of her face to show her eyes open but empty. “When I asked my parents,” Regina’s older voice says offscreen, “why our family’s situation was so bad, I always received the same answer: ‘Because we are Jews, Regina, that’s why.’”

In identifying Jettel as a Jew as she lies seemingly lifeless on the ground, the film intimates the Holocaust without naming it directly. The specter of violence thus remains disembodied and not visualized.

In its search for sites of Jewish-German solidarity, the heritage film insists on the lack of homogenous anti-Semitic convictions amongst the German populace. The sole incident of overt German anti-Semitism in Nirgendwo in Afrika occurs in a subsequent sequence, and serves to differentiate the character of two boys who had been present at the sledding hill. Meeting Jettel on the staircase of her house, one of them greets her respectfully, in contrast to the other, who reprimands the first for talking to a Jew. Given the array of possibilities, it represents a
minor event. While the reprimand certainly reflects adult influence, it is perpetrated by a child, and the responsible adults are themselves entirely absent. Indeed, in the German scenes, we see no adults beyond the Redlichs and their houseguests, who are all understood to be Jewish-Germans. Nazi adherence is relegated to the province of children, thereby begging the question of adult responsibility.

Displacing anti-Semitism to the African colony allows the process of deflection (as seen above from adult to child) to proceed from the Germans onto the British. In Kenya, anti-Jewish behavior is solely perpetrated by the British and only targeted at children. When Regina is called into the office of the school headmaster, he greets her with disdain: “So, you’re the little Jewish girl.” He expresses irritation regarding her success at school, employing anti-Semitic stereotypes in his accusations that Regina is obsessed with money and success. This scene is the most explicitly anti-Semitic of the entire film and bears out the strategy of deflationary resignification, for it ends with the headmaster finding himself charmed by Regina and offering to lend her books as a sign of his affection.

With the exception of this encounter with the school headmaster, all other anti-Jewish discriminations involve separating out Jewish children on religious grounds, for example, asking them to leave their seats while the other children recite the Lord’s Prayer. Instead of the political and racial antisemitism sweeping the European continent, antisemitism in Africa is rendered in the much more innocuous practice of religious segregation.

The most extreme resignification in the film involves the non-ironic transformation of the World War II concentration camp into the site of a bourgeois holiday. After the outbreak of war, Germans in Kenya are interned as enemies of the state. English soldiers drive from farm to farm, rounding up first the men, and then the women and children. As Walter is herded onto the back of a truck full of men, the resonance with scenes of Holocaust transports is evident, an allusion returned to throughout the internment episode. Jettel and Regina share a truck with women and children wearing the headscarves of Eastern Jews, and Walter will later be seen standing behind barbed wire in a camp uniform.

However, the expectations evoked by these visual citations are subsequently undermined, when the internment camp for women and children turns out to be a luxurious colonial hotel. Here Jettel and Regina enjoy the company of other Jewish-Germans. It is a time of lounging on the grassy lawn and formal buffet dinners prepared by a uniformed
hotel staff. As an iconographic inversion of the Nazi concentration camp, this hotel setting could hardly be more complete. While the former were the site of barbaric practices of dehumanization and deinvidualization, the hotel allows Jettel space for personal growth and liberation. For the first time, she will come to see her Jewish identity as an asset in its difference, because the female internees are able to secure the release of themselves and their families by actively claiming this Jewishness and insisting that it can safely be trusted to preclude their involvement with the German Nazis.

The “Magical Negro”

Common to the films set in colonial Kenya is the stereotypical figure of the African house servant. From Molo (Emmett Smith, uncredited) in The Snows of Kilimanjaro, to Juma (Paul Onsongo) and Njombo (Mick Chege) in The Flame Trees of Thika (Roy Ward Baker, 1981), and Farah in Out of Africa, these African men attend to the needs of their European “bwanas” with steadfast devotion, protecting their masters from the dangers of the surrounding area and alleviating the hardships of acclimatization. Their unflinching dedication and warm affection enact European fantasies of a harmonious feudal order, in which childlike serfs valued the guardianship and protection of their paternalistic landowners.\(^\text{20}\) Representations of life in the colonies introduce the possibility of re-imagining this pre-modern order, and the African servant functions to validate this fantasy, facilitating and affirming the presence of the Europeans and the colonial regime they represent.

With Walter and Jettel preoccupied with the emotional burden of exile, the Redlichs’ house servant Owuor (Sidede Onyulo) takes on the role of ersatz parent for Regina. Charmingly portrayed by Lea Kurka, Regina responds to her new environment with curiosity and joy, and is the source of much of the film’s visceral pleasure. The bond Regina forges with Owuor is strong, and with him at her side, Africa becomes a landscape of wonder and play, her youthful antics offering the viewer respite from the simmering emotional tension between the parents.

The character played by Sidede Onyulo in Nirgendwo in Afrika has developed much since the degrading, wide-eyed, “yes-massa” subservience of Emmett Smith as Molo in The Snows of Kilimanjaro. Onyulo

---

portrays Owuor as a man of radiant charisma and assured self-respect in a performance at odds with the stereotype. The decision to grant this character a central role would seem to signal a break with the earlier films. Yet the reworking does not allow Owuor a three-dimensional presence. Indeed, Owuor’s increased agency only allows him to better serve and more strongly affirm his European “bwanas.”

In Kenyan “transformation” dramas, the house servant is never introduced as an autonomous individual who must be sought out and hired. This figure is always already present, a genie in the bottle waiting for the arrival of the “bwana.” In I Dreamed of Africa, Kuki Gallmann arrives with her husband and son at the desolate, abandoned farmhouse where they intend to live. It initially appears completely devoid of human presence. As they explore the dusty, cobweb-covered rooms, Kuki looks up to see an African man standing in the doorway and staring at her intently. His labor seems to comprise a natural resource, for the next time we see this figure, he is dressed in servant’s attire and pouring coffee in the background of the scene. “You’re lucky to have Simon,” a neighboring rancher remarks. “He turned up four years ago out of the blue, and something makes him stay.”

Owuor’s arrival is just as inexplicable. When Walter comes down with malaria prior to Jettel’s arrival, one sends for his friend Süßkind (Matthias Habich). As the latter enters the house, the camera follows his point of view and cuts to the interior. Curiously, though, it is not Walter whom we first see, but an African man. He sits on the far side of the room at the hearth of an open fire, observing the scene with an empty stare and waiting for Süßkind to leave so that he can take over nursing Walter, this unknown white stranger. After Walter’s recovery, Owuor continues to attend to his needs (and later those of his family) with the same inexplicable dedication. When the Redlichs relocate to a distant new farm after their wartime internment, Owuor even tracks them down so that he might continue serving them.

The presence of Owuor, a man who was not brought by Süßkind, nor previously known to Walter, is never explained, but neither is it seen by anyone as a mystery – Owuor’s service is simply taken for granted. Nor does Owuor challenge these expectations in any way; he never voices any criticism of the colonial situation, never questions his inferior status in the Redlich household, and never expresses resentment at the separation from his own family and community. Owuor has been cast as a strong and
proud individual, but any agency he might possess merely serves to support the white settlers in colonial territory. He manifests what Spike Lee has acerbically identified as the “magical nigger mystique – magical Negroes who appear out of nowhere and have these great powers but who can’t use them to help themselves or their own people but only for the benefit of the white stars of the movies.” In his capacity as just such a “magical Negro,” Owuor not only provides for the physical well being of the Redlichs, but also guides each of the family members over a central symbolic threshold as they re-negotiate their identities.

In the case of Regina, this involves a border that is literally inscribed into the soil. Jettel establishes a periphery around the house and restricts Regina’s movements to its confines. For Jettel, this space represents a temporary Europe that defers her arrival in Africa. Yet Regina wants to go to the other side where children laugh and play. She repeatedly approaches the ditch marking the boundary, and toes at the red soil, yet she remains a captive in this symbolic European space (marked by a border that the curious African children also respect). While Jettel will maintain this boundary for herself until the family leaves the farm, Owuor mediates Regina’s access to the world on the other side. In this new, other space, she overcomes her childhood shyness and fearful hesitation. She also abandons bourgeois codes of play, and finds pleasure in her new access to mud and dirt.

Walter’s illness and recovery bear the signs of a mystic rite of passage. He undergoes a hallucinatory, near-death experience, and his bodily return is facilitated – indeed fought for – by Owuor. Shown at his bedside day and night, Owuor reacts with obvious joy to each successive improvement in Walter’s health. Bringing Walter out of his feverish delirium and into the world of his language, Owuor also mediates Walter’s passage into the African landscape. Unlike Regina, this space does not initially assume a positive value. In Germany, he was a successful lawyer and a man of wealth and status. In Africa, he is stripped of this profession, and finds himself ill equipped to take on the physical challenges of life on the land. Jettel responds to this change by sexually rejecting Walter. His major transformation will come in response to the resulting crisis of masculinity and will involve a painful

renegotiation of his identity as a man. Literally acting out his loss of power and authority, Walter presents Owuor with his black judicial robe upon his recovery from illness. Later in the film Owuor will return the vestment and dramatically mark the restoration of Walter’s masculinity. Until then, however, Owuor is almost always seen wearing the black robe, a constant reminder of Walter’s symbolic castration.

Africa becomes the site of a gendered transformation for Jettel as well. She arrives in Africa closed off emotionally and physically, refusing Walter’s sexual advances. At the end of the film, however, she will initiate such encounters. In an analogy that reverses Walter’s relinquishing of his robe, Jettel asks Owuor to cut her hair, a physical change that marks her passage to sexual liberation. As Owuor steps behind Jettel to take the scissors into his hands, she turns to look at him sidelong, her expression sensual and, within this context, ambiguous. No reverse shot shows Owuor’s response – and this lack of resolution carries over into the next scene. The lens opens to view Jettel sleeping in her bed, tucked into billowing white bedding. Stüsskind sneaks into her room, and gently pushes the white veil of mosquito netting aside. As she opens her eyes and meets his gaze, she awakens sexually. Jettel and Stüsskind will take a drive into the surrounding terrain, and in a moment of abandon elicited by the beauty of the African landscape, Jettel will attempt to seduce him.

Although Owuor serves as the mystical gatekeeper to the realm of the erotic as well as to the “other space” of Africa, he appears as someone living a life abstracted from these very same surroundings, and from this very element of the intimate. The Redlichs do not discover that Owuor has wives and children until after he has served them for many years. When Jettel finally asks him about his family, Owuor explains that they live far away and that he sees that they are cared for. He does not name them, or speak of them with any affection – this seems to be reserved for his “bwanas.” Distanced from any competing social or emotional connections, Owuor is able to devote all of his energy and agency to the needs of the Redlichs. This “mystical Negro” is only a three-dimensional character in his service to Europeans.

Asymmetrical Regimes of Black and White

A pattern of asymmetries abides in Link’s representation of Africans and Europeans. These are not just asymmetries of power in a colonial system, but instead those of human subject status and agency which
permeate the film at multiple levels. In order to present a situation in which diverse manifestations of whiteness are viable (as hyphenated identities), the film constructs “blackness” as the absolute Other, establishing an incommensurability so radical as to stifle all attempts and to deny any urgency of understanding the Kenyan culture.

Link’s assistant, Nikolai Semjevski, was responsible for casting Onyulo as Owuor. In an article describing his activities, he outlines the categories that distinguish a European self (white) from an African other (black):

Owuor is the figure who serves as an anchor for the other characters in the course of the story, who stands above the action and who embodies authentic Africa during the film. Owuor is the hinge upon which the whole story hangs.

Caroline imagined him to be about 40 years old, from the Luo tribe, with a face that had to be strange and foreign [seltsam und fremd]. Far from the stereotype of Uncle Tom’s Cabin or Denzel Washington’s toothpaste grin. This face should not only appear foreign [fremd] to Walter’s daughter Regina and wife Jettel when they arrive in Africa, but to the viewer as well.

Under no circumstances did she want an actor with a western air; she wanted the African original. She was convinced that she would find it sitting under some tree in a remote Kenyan village. At any rate, it would be good if “it” knew how to move in front of a camera, had gone to school, and could communicate with the director in English. But how was I supposed to find this Owuor in the Kenyan bush? 22

The extreme strategies of othering in Semjevski’s description underline the importance of “authenticity.” Two expectations for the character of Owuor are essential: first, the actor portraying him must be an “original” or “authentic” African, and second, this “authentic African” will serve as a physically “embodiment” of Africa.

“Authenticity” is, to be sure, a notoriously problematic concept. Recent studies remind us that this term does not define any inherent quality of its object, but instead represents a category through which the subject attempts to secure his or her demystified relationship to this object. In her study on the commodification of indigenous culture

---

22. Abenteuer Afrika: Erlebnisse, Geschichten und Bilder, ed. Caroline Link and Peter Herrmann (Munich: Langen Müller, 2002) 94. My translation; the scare quotes appear in the original.
for western consumption, Deborah Root sees authenticity as "the
currency at play in the marketing of cultural difference," a stabilizing
power, in other words, used to legitimate the emotional and economic
value one places on an object. This helps us to understand why the
most important characteristic sought in the casting of Owuor might
have been a readily visible physiognomic difference – because this dif-
ference could be marketed as "authentically African."

Indeed, claims of the film’s authentic representations of Africa and
Africans comprised a central element in the advertising campaign. The
producers stressed that it would have been easier to shoot it in South
Africa, where the film industry and local infrastructure are better de-
veloped, but that Link’s crew instead decided to take on the added chal-
lenges of Kenya in order to ensure the “authenticity” of the film.

With all of this attention to authenticity, however, there was never an
explanation provided for its necessity in a film that was, after all, not
about the indigenous peoples and landscapes of Africa, but instead
about a Jewish-German family in exile. In this respect, the different
treatment of Jewish-Germans and Africans is telling, for the former do
not fall under the aegis of this demand for authenticity. None of the
main protagonists are played by Jewish-Germans, and the concern for
"authentic" physiognomy deemed so crucial for the African actors does
not apply to the Europeans. While Link’s agent hoped to find his actor
"under a bush," the European actors were taken from the experienced
ranks of the well recognized. Juliane Köhler (who plays Jettel) is per-
haps best known to German audiences for her role in *Aimée und Jag-
uar*, where she played Lilly Wust, the blond-haired, blue-eyed German
lover of a Jewish lesbian in Nazi Germany. Matthias Habich, mean-
while, is well known to German audiences from his extensive film and
television performances that go back to the early 1970s (including
Volker Schlöndorff’s *Der Fangschuss* [Coup de grace, 1976] and Mar-
garethe von Trotta’s *Jahrestage* [Anniversaries, 2000]), a career in
which he has played both Jewish and non-Jewish characters.

An interviewer directly questioned Link about her casting policy:
"With her blond hair and blue eyes, Juliane Köhler doesn't exactly
correspond to the image one has of a Jewish woman.” Link did not


consider this to be a problem:

You have to be very careful with the image of Jews that you have in your head. It is true – Juliane Köhler doesn’t look very Jewish, but this is irrelevant. Our first priority was to find good actors who would fit the characters they represent.\(^\text{25}\)

While Link’s move away from a “Semitic” stereotype in her casting (Köhler’s blond hair was dyed light brown for this performance, but Habich’s blond hair and blue eyes were not altered) is noteworthy, the double standard deserves further comment. Why do we find the rejection of any need for “authenticity” (however one might define this problematic term) for the European actors, but a simultaneous insistence upon this same “authenticity” for the Africans? In casting Sidede Onyulo, the primary concern with finding a man who could act the part well did not apply. Indeed, several professional Afro-German actors were denied the role due to their “inauthentic” physiognomies. “It just affects a person if he lives in Europe or in the USA or in a village in Kenya,” Link argued in an interview. “One can feel it in the way that he moves, speaks and thinks. It even communicates itself in a face.”\(^\text{26}\) Similar concerns did not affect her choice to cast Merab Ninidze as Walter Redlich, even though the Georgian actor’s accent was so strong that Herbert Knaup had to be hired to dub the character’s dialogues.

How might we best explain this asymmetrical demand for authenticity? One could imagine that it arises out of a concern for integrating an indigenous viewpoint into a film set in a colonial context. If “authentic” translated into a sense of “indigenous media” (i.e., allowing the Africans to present their own point of view through participation in scripting, filming, and/or editing), then it might offer an alternative and critical perspective.\(^\text{27}\) However, that is decidedly not the function that it performs here. Link maintains that she originally wanted to include an indigenous point of view in her film, but that she


later abandoned this idea.

While writing the script— I went to Africa to do this— I realized that I shouldn’t even begin to try to tell this story from an African perspective. When you regard them with respect, it quickly becomes clear that they think in a completely different way [dass sie völlig anders ticken].

Link’s striking formulation, even if couched in terms of respect, suggests that more than just a difference in perspective is at issue. While the point of view of the Jewish-German protagonists is deemed directly accessible to the film crew as well as to a contemporary German audience, the perspective of the Kenyans is rendered inaccessible, and their private, domestic spaces unrepresentable.

The much-touted “authenticity” figures strongly in the filming of two religious spectacles: the rain ceremony of the Kikuyu and a male initiation of the Pokot. In each instance, the camera’s primary object is the ritual sacrifice of an animal and the consumption of its blood. A visual obsession with the Africans’ devouring of the uncooked functions as a clichéd indication of their “primitivity.” From a Eurocentric point of view, animal sacrifice indicates an insufficient ability to sublime and manipulate symbols. As such, these African ceremonies stand in stark contrast to the Sabbath dinner celebrated by the Redlichs when Jettel and Regina first arrive in Africa.

Süßkind visits the family and leads them through the rites of the ceremony, reverently singing the Kiddush, and passing bread, salt, and wine. Not only are the Redlichs collectively performing their capability of intellectual abstraction, but each of them also responds to this event in a different way. Jettel looks on with an ironic smile, distancing herself with the comment that she cannot remember the last time she heard the Kiddush. Walter looks at his daughter warmly as if cherishing the passing down of tradition. She, however, seems much more interested in what Owuor is doing by the fire. Each of them thus negotiates a personal position within the context of this event in a way that transforms its meaning. The analogous African ceremonies, in contrast, lack such a personalized dimension, and are thereby rendered unchanging and timeless.

29. Shohat and Stam 202
The African cultures so “authentically” represented seem to exist in a developmental stasis, outside of the time of historical progress.

Instead of insisting upon subject status for the Africans and exploring the understandings they take to their cultural practices, Nirgendwo in Afrika puts the natives of Kenya on display for a western audience. This practice is reminiscent of the Völkerschauen popular at the turn of the 19th century, in which indigenous people were brought to Europe and publicly exhibited. For European audiences, the authenticity of the displayed people was of paramount importance.30 One reason for this concern derived from the desire to deny indigenous people the agency usually granted to entertaining performers. Seeking to exercise a certain effect upon their audience, entertainers appeal to the complicity of those for whom they are performing. One must agree to enter into the illusion and to play along with the entertainer. Because the scene at the Völkerschau is understood to be “authentic” and not a function of performance, the audience never has to relinquish their objectifying gaze.

Dean MacCannell’s metaphorical model of the touristic stage is useful here. He envisions a space upon which natives perform to a visiting audience, enlisting these outsiders as the objects of their entertainment, but not necessarily allowing them any access to their version of “life as it is really lived.”31 Where this stage exists, the audience strives to gain “backstage” access, for here, one regains subjectivity vis-à-vis the performers, and is (or imagines oneself to be) no longer the object of their deceptions.32 With the rise of the filmic medium, early anthropologists created the illusion that the stage had been removed. Bringing the camera to the native populations, they claimed to have gained access to the world of their objects in a way unmediated by performance. Maintaining this illusion for the home audience necessitated a masking of the camera-man’s negotiated relationship with the individuals being filmed, and the settings were therefore frequently staged to indicate a hidden camera.

In the film’s first native ceremony, Link follows the tradition of this illusion. The camera adopts the point of view of Regina and Owuor as they watch a group of village elders ritually sacrifice a lamb. It is a
scene carefully staged so as to seem unstaged to the film viewer. Regina and Owuor stand hidden behind a cluster of shrubbery and the elders appear to be unaware that they are being observed. They are not dressed in ceremonial clothing, but instead in the stained and tattered shirts of everyday labor, evidence that this is not a ceremony intended for others to see – and thus truly “authentic.”

The film viewer becomes aligned with an objectifying and primitivist gaze whose voyeurism is sanctioned. After indicating that Owuor, the mystical indigenous agent, has mediated Regina’s privileged access by bringing her to this hidden lookout, the film equates the camera with her point of view. As the lamb is lowered to the ground for the knife’s final thrust, a close-up of Regina’s face registers her extreme concern for the animal. Emphasizing this reaction, an extra layer of sound is superimposed upon a background of extradiegetic African chanting; it is a foreboding melody delivered through familiar European instrumentation, and it drowns out the African sounds, marking a strong shift in the cultural frame of reception. The viewer not only watches the scene through Regina’s eyes, but is also guided by the emotions of her point of view through the ominous soundtrack.

Despite the voyeurism of Regina’s concealment, the viewer is assured that he or she need take no discomfort in following this gaze. As the daughter of Jewish refugees, she is understood to be the victim of European othering practices and not their perpetrator. She thus provides a different – perhaps even objective – view from the margins of the British colony. Regina’s refugee status serves to differentiate her gaze from the appropriating surveillance of the colonizer, to render it politically innocent, and to assert its worthiness by dint of an indigenous sanction. This privileged access to “authentic” Africa does not, however, bring understanding. In fact it furthers a denial of commensurability.

Another telling asymmetry of agency and command closely linked to the discourse of conquest involves linguistic mastery. As Tzvetan Todorov has convincingly argued, 33 asymmetries of power were most successfully established through gaining access to and manipulating the language system of the colonized. Filmic representations of empire, however, more frequently engage in the opposing practice of “ventrilo-quizing the world”: projecting the universal use of the language of the colonizer – most commonly English. 34 In this respect, Caroline Link’s

34. Shohat and Stam 191.
decision to have Sidede Onyulo speak in his mother tongue (necessitating subtitles) breaks with convention. Nonetheless, language systems still serve in hierarchically organizing the Kenya Colony into multiple language-identified communities. For newly arrived Germans, achieving competence in English was a prerequisite for negotiating status vis-à-vis the British colonial elite, while the ability to speak the African languages of the local populations — Kiswahili, Kikuyu, and Pokot — would enable unmediated communication with those providing labor. In a literal rendition of the equation of language and power, the acquisition of additional tongues conferred strategic social mobility upon the speaker.  

The film takes the issue of language acquisition one step further, presenting the ability to learn additional tongues as a privileged sign of human agency. The film questions who is capable of change and adaptation, and answers this question by reinscribing the difference between the European and the African.

Regina, Jettel and Walter all quickly learn to speak rudimentary Kiswaheli, and by the end of their sojourn in Africa, have mastered the language. In direct contact with the British through the institutions of army and school, both Walter and Regina also learn fluent English. The Redlichs’ adaptive capacity for language acquisition contrasts greatly with the static monolinguality of the Africans. Neither Owuor nor any of the other Africans working for the Redlichs learn German, nor do they come to speak the English of the British colonial elite. The film initially introduces this monolinguality as an act of anti-colonial opposition, e.g., when Owuor refuses to repeat Jettel’s German word for “dishes.” Yet the film works to undermine the agency of opposition suggested by this refusal by rendering Owuor unable to learn German.

When Walter gives Owuor his vestment, Owuor dons the black robe and, gleefully spinning with his arms outstretched, tries to master the pronunciation of the German word: “Robe.” As he struggles to reproduce these two phonemes (“Ro-be,” “Ro-be”), the scene cuts to the train station. Here, steam rises from the train’s engine and for an instant blocks our view, but slowly clears to reveal the letters on a sign, “... ROBI,” before fully receding to expose the entire word, “NAIROBI.” This visual-verbal pun clearly comes at Owuor’s expense. In our ability to read this sign, to pronounce the same two phonemes that have so

twisted Owuor’s tongue, we remain assured of our own linguistic agility against the backdrop of his incompetence. This invitation to experience our own linguistic mobility in the African landscape not only supports the asymmetric regimes of black and white, but also facilitates our direct identification with the speaking Redlichs.

**Shades of Jewish Whiteness**

Walter Redlich lives in Africa for six months before he can afford to send for his wife and daughter. As he meets Jettel again, the close-up image of her face is overposed, gleaming white against a white background. This motif of spectral whiteness also extends to Jettel’s clothing. Her white dress marks her as out of place. Not only is it impractical given the physical labor required of her on the farm; it also stands in stark visual contrast to the Africans. The grayed earth tones of their clothing appear more in harmony with the surrounding landscape. Over time Jettel will replace this white dress with her husband’s drab khakis. The frequency with which she appears in white declines and corresponds to her growing acclimatization, even if she never altogether ceases to wear it. Indeed, when she dons white clothing, it remains crisp and unsullied – even after years of labor and poverty in Africa.

The whiteness of her child relates directly to the question of race. When Regina plays with the local African children, high-contrast lighting accentuates the difference between dark and light skin tones. Jettel articulates the terms of this visual order when she bathes Regina and warns her of the health risks introduced by playing with “black” children. As her daughter stands up naked from her bath – a pure and innocent white body waiting to be wrapped in a white towel – Jettel’s words echo in the room: “A white child is simply not a black child.” In Africa, this claim to “whiteness” is not relativized by the family’s Jewish ethnicity as it had been in Germany. The ground of their racial and ethnic identities shifts greatly in the move away from the European continent. Vis-à-vis the African natives, the Redlichs are simply “bwanas,” i.e., white people whom the Africans are compelled to serve, and upon whom they are dependent for access to resources.

In relation to the British, the Redlichs are initially understood as poor European refugees in need of work and, as such, are relegated to a position of second rank in the colony. Mr. Morris, the ranch owner with whom Walter first finds employment, sees it as his prerogative to
bark commands at Redlich in the same harsh tone otherwise reserved for the African natives, and to curse the Jewish family as "bloody refugees." At the same time, however, the Redlichs' European status allows them certain privileges in the colonial hierarchy. The family has a house servant despite their own pennilessness. Owuor's salary is paid by Morris, a man invested in maintaining the distinction between colonizer and colonized - between those who serve and those who are served - upon which the entire colonial regime (and hence his individual status) rests. Owuor's presence facilitates the interpolation of the Redlichs into the colonial machinery as "whites."

Their Jewishness, meanwhile, appears to be irrelevant in Africa and remains so even at the outbreak of World War II. When the Redlichs are arrested and interned as potentially threatening enemy aliens, the film subtly demonstrates that all of the Germans in the internment camp share the Redlichs' Jewish-German identity. The waiters have a hard time serving a (non-kosher) lobster dinner. In conversations about the paradoxical terms of their internment (for, as "Jews," they could hardly be expected to support Hitler's war), no comment suggests that there are any non-Jewish internees. Indeed, the film does not depict any Germans in Africa who are not also Jewish. In the absence of this group - in whose presence a differentiated Jewish-German identity would become apparent - the Redlichs can be employed to represent "Germans" in the African sequences of the film.

Culturally assimilated and religiously non-practicing, the Redlichs are only "Jewish" according to Nazi doctrine. In Africa, the family initially insists upon an undifferentiated status as simply "Germans." The ways in which the film brings them to express this identity often takes the form of banal platitudes: Walter recites Heinrich Heine's "Loreley" to Regina in lieu of a bedtime story; Jettel tells a visitor that the situation in Germany can't go on for too long, "because Germany is a Kulturvolk - the land of Goethe and Schiller!" Although we hear claims like "the German language and culture was our home," we hear nothing about the family's Jewish heritage. In this regard, Regina's bewildered comment to Jettel is typical: "You aren't even really Jewish!" Nazi-German challenges to the Redlichs' Germanness cease to define their identity in British Kenya. If

36. While a critical reading of Heine's poem reveals its critique of the German Kultur nation from the point of view of a cultural minority excluded from it, the "Loreley" has subsequently been reappropriated to function as a nostalgic, apolitical cultural myth. That it is read in this latter sense is evinced in Walter's sentimental delivery.
heritage films like *Aimée & Jaguar* and *Viehhjud Levi* mark positive German characters by their ability to forge romantic bonds with Jewish-Germans, *Nirgendwo in Afrika* directly enlists Jewish-Germans to represent these “good Germans.”

The whiteness of the Redlichs is not just “European;” more specifically, it is “German.” The consequences of this designation become clearly evident in a comparison between *Nirgendwo in Afrika* and *Out of Africa*. The parallels between the two films are striking; indeed, they were significantly enhanced by changes Link made as she adapted Stefanie Zweig’s autobiographical novel for her screenplay. Zweig’s *Nirgendwo in Afrika* is told from Regina’s perspective, and is accordingly guided by her childhood interests and experiences. The film restructures Zweig’s material so that it privileges Jettel’s point of view. In so doing, Link adopted the logic of Pollack’s narrative as a model for her rearrangement of Zweig’s novel.

As the titles of the two films suggest, both *Out of Africa* and *Nirgendwo in Afrika* are conceptualized in the tension created by the simultaneous invocation and negation of African space. Pollack’s film is narrated by an aged Karen Blixen (Meryl Streep) who lies in her deathbed in Denmark. Telling the story of her difficult coming of age in Africa, of the losses of her lover and of her farm, the film explains how Blixen’s colonial failures led to her final journey “out of Africa.” *Nirgendwo in Afrika* also ends in a scene of departure, but the title’s spatial negation refers to Africa itself, rendering it as a non-place, the *nowhere* of exile. The contrasting “*somewhere*” might best be understood as a place in which one’s social identity resides in a dense network of discursive fields. Located in Africa, the social inscriptions and ascriptions that had provided the Redlichs with comprehensible identities in Europe are stripped away.

In both films, such loss of meaning is also the precondition for personal liberation. Karen Blixen and Jettel Redlich undergo processes of maturation and sexual discovery characteristic of films set in the Kenyan Central Highlands. They are located in what for them is a “non-place,” indeed a utopia, where European social constraints no longer obtain, and where they are removed from the disciplining eye of bourgeois convention. Both women take on lovers, allowing a focus on the conflict between each woman’s desire for her husband on the one hand, and for her lover on the other, and the competing masculinities each brings to the
space of the film. In each case, the husband’s identity rests upon accomplishment in the European setting. Karen marries Bror Blixen to gain his aristocratic title and become a baroness. Jettel’s position in Breslau’s upper class is similarly ensured by her marriage to a successful lawyer. Their lovers, on the other hand, introduce the rugged masculinity of the solitary adventurer, a figure who is more strongly connected to nature. With ruddy complexions and windswept hair, these men arrive on the scene as protectors and procurers, especially in times when the husbands are away. Both Bror and Walter make the decision to join the British army and leave their wives behind to manage plantations, providing ample opportunity for contact with paramours.

One could extend this comparison in much detail, noting, for example, that the china each woman brings from Europe is used to symbolize wealth and social status as well as the willingness to establish a new Heimat in a foreign landscape, and that each woman’s newly gained sense of independence is represented in scenes where they examine crops and dole out wages to their native laborers. Most relevant, however, are the strategies of discursive realignment. Each film endeavors to recuperate positive identities from historical sites of national transgression.

Out of Africa recalls the “golden age” of European imperial grandeur. It is a nostalgic film made during a time when this history was coming under increased critical scrutiny. In the 1980s, decolonization processes in Africa and the increasing institutionalization of postcolonial criticism in the Anglo-European academy combined to forward a large-scale condemnation of the European colonial past. While this new critical climate forced Out of Africa to acknowledge the history of colonial misdeeds, the film nonetheless, as Laura Kipnis points out, succeeded in recuperating a positive European colonial experience. 37 It did so by mapping negative colonial practices onto the female colonist, Karen Blixen, thereby clearing a space for the positive agency of the European male. Blixen’s colonial misbehavior becomes obvious in its exaggeration; she treats her African laborers with patronizing condescension, and zealously seeks to “civilize” them. The children of “her Kikuyu” are required to attend the school she established for them, and her house servant must wear white gloves when serving her food, even if they cause him to drop things. Blixen’s lover, Denys Finch-Hatton (Robert Redford), openly indicts her

behavior, and in so doing, embodies an alternative colonial identity as the protector of Africa, its people, and its wildlife.

At first glance *Nirgendwo in Afrika* seems to manifest a similar revisionist dynamic. Jettel’s behavior in Africa is initially objectionable. She reprimands Owuor for addressing her in Kiswahili instead of German, and as she bathes Regina, she enumerates the dangers of physical contact with Africans: “They are filthy, have diseases and all have worms.” Regina sighs and rolls her eyes and we readily understand why she does so: Jettel’s racism is obvious and excessive. For this reason the audience shares a moral consensus with Regina and Owuor. Facing the camera and walking away from Jettel, Owuor defiantly repeats the word in Kiswahili which Regina refuses to utter so that only he and the film viewer can hear it. Similarly, when Regina rolls her eyes, the act is visible to the spectator but not to Jettel.

Unlike Karen Blixen, Jettel will ultimately be brought into the space of this moral consensus, because Walter will not only criticize her conduct, but also demand that she change it. In a fight that functions as an early turning point in the narrative, Walter attacks Jettel for undermining his masculinity. Before slamming the door, he offers a closing shot, likening Jettel’s treatment of Owuor to the behavior of certain Germans back home with whom she “would not want to be put in the same pot.” Jettel’s attitude to Owuor undergoes a silent yet effective conversion, and she quietly becomes a part of the moral consensus and in the process a sympathetic character with which the audience can identify. Owuor will approach Jettel with affection and devotion as if there had been no previous conflict in their master-servant relationship.

Jettel’s redemption confirms the dichotomy between the (Jewish-) Germans and the British. If she treated Owuor badly, so did she mistreat everyone else while undergoing the pain and trauma of forced displacement. Crucial is the fact that she is capable of change. The British, in contrast, live in the colony by active choice, and their behavior towards the Africans is the product of enduring racist attitudes. If *Out of Africa* uses a European woman to criticize colonial behavior, *Nirgendwo in Afrika* clearly makes the English the sole object of such criticism.

**Shades of Jewish Blackness**

Arriving at the second farm in Ol Joro Orok, Walter is approached in the fields by a defiantly silent man (Kimani, played by Kanyaman T.
Lemeiguran), who stands at a distance and scrutinizes the white man. The tension subsides when Walter explains that he is neither British nor in Africa to make money, but rather a war refugee. A bond is formed as the two men stand on top of a foothill and look out over the expanse. Kimani likens their two situations: "When someone steals your ox, they cook it and eat it: it is gone and you can forget about it. But when someone steals your land, it is always there, you can visit it, and you cannot forget it." While it is clear from the context that Kimani is looking at land that has been taken from him, Walter would only "see" Germany to the extent that he projects it onto this other landscape. But does he? Walter remains silent, and there are reasons why his response is left ambiguous.

At the end of the film, Walter receives an invitation to return to Germany and serve in the courts of the occupying military forces. Although he talks of "going home," this is true only in a very abstract sense, because Walter has been summoned to Frankfurt, not to Breslau. His former home is now a city in Poland from which Germans are being violently expelled; Frankfurt lies in the western sector of what will soon become a divided nation. Jettel refuses to accompany Walter. Although she had initially desired to leave Africa, she has reinvented herself here and now wants to stay. Walter starts to argue with her, but Jettel changes the subject and speaks of the crops, noting how it will soon be time for harvest. Walter reminds her that this land is not their own. For this reason he has no patience for her emotional investment in this land. He leaves the next morning, apparently set on making travel arrangements and leaving Jettel behind.

And then the locusts come. The African laborers rush into the fields to scare off the swarms. The epic scene of human struggle against natural disaster is accompanied by an intensely emotive soundtrack. Images of Jettel, Regina, and Owuor fighting off the locusts are captured in slow motion: grimaces of exertion, thrashing body parts in blurred focus, flying locusts, pollen and dust. Each portrait is separated from the next by black screen as if these images were slide projections and their movement only a product of our imagination.

The scene is one of the film's most aestheticized moments, but it seems to introduce a break in the logic of the narrative. Walter had indicated that he did not feel any responsibility or attachment to this land. Why, then, would he return to protect it? The enigma is best resolved when we consider how this scene functions to reinstate
Walter’s masculinity. Brandishing his shirt against the swarming vermin, he appears in slow-motion with Jettel. They make eye contact and this shared moment causes any memory of their earlier fight to evaporate. That evening the two will reunite as lovers. On the following day Jettel will announce that she has changed her mind and is prepared to return to Germany. For Jettel the decision also means leaving Süßkind, a man for whom she has had strong romantic feelings. Süßkind, however, is a man without a country. He has renounced his German identity and has no relationship either to the land or the people in Kenya. Jettel has long expressed her desire to end the nomadism of exile and Walter is the man who allows her to do this.

Ultimately the Redlichs can reassess their identities as Jewish-Germans, for in the “other space” of Africa, this identity no longer poses a threat to their well being. Indeed, in the internment camp, a differentiated German identity even proves advantageous. In Africa the disjunction between “Germanness” and “Jewishness” undergoes transformation and the Redlichs become reinstated as Jews. They ready for the trip to their homeland, knowing that they are not returning as refugees. Having recreated a positive identity in colonial Africa, Walter heads back to Germany to help rebuild the destroyed country.

_Nirgendwo in Afrika_ tells the tale of a positive exilic experience in which the Jewish-German protagonists reinvent themselves, and even become a resource for the German nation. In direct contrast to the specter of Nazi continuity that so haunted the 68ers, Link’s exemplary contribution to the heritage film establishes Jewish-Germans as the agents in Germany’s reconstruction, the wellspring of enlightened reason from which this country will draw as it recovers from civilizational collapse. The Redlichs return “home” to the Germany that they had loved, to the land of a _Kulturvolk_ and not the province of blood and soil.

By silencing indigenous Africans and establishing asymmetric regimes of cultural validity, Caroline Link’s film, like the website, allows the western spectator a journey in time, a trip to a past that is both pleasurable and edifying. _Nirgendwo in Afrika_ is truly a feel-good movie. It features beautiful actors in beautiful settings; it commingles a neocolonial fantasy with a soothing tale of German-Jewish reconciliation.