V. The Civilizing Mission: A Comparison

Maleen’s “civilizing mission” in the colony, and specifically her relationship with Maria, can be compared to Germany’s “civilizing mission” with Maleen representing the motherland and Maria representing Africa. Just as Maleen wanted to “civilize” Maria, Germany wanted to “civilize” its seized lands, making them part of the motherland. Germany’s colonies and protectorates were to be part of the empire which could serve as a home to the German population overseas. German culture and traditions were to be transplanted to these territories. These colonies would even be referred to as the new Germany (Mamozai 140).

Marcia Klotz provides the analogy of Germany as an imperial mother – Germania being the mother (thus the term ‘motherland’ has been used throughout this thesis) and her colonies and protectorates being her daughters (White Women 5-7). “The heroine is converted into a motherly Germania […], and racial others are also molded into particular roles…” (Shumannfang 70). Bülow herself uses this analogy in the novel. Maleen rebukes Krome for having turned his back on his motherland: “Sie sollten trotz allem und allem Ihr Vaterland nicht beschimpfen! Es ist, wie wenn einer seinen Vater und seine Mutter beschimpft! Vater und Mutter können uns das grausamste Unrecht thun; dennoch sollte uns auch in diesem Fall noch ihr Name heilig sein” (Bülow, Verheißung 436). Even though the German language tends to use “fatherland” to refer to Germany, Bülow herself opens up the possibility of referring to Germany as the “motherland” in Maleen’s remarks. Russell A. Berman also touches briefly on the “gendered personification” of Germany, the “motherland”, and its colonies, the “daughter states” (141). These daughters need to be cared for and nurtured by one who provides an exemplary presence.
They need to be educated. They need to be brought into “civilization”. Similar to Maleen’s hopes for Maria, Germania wanted her daughters to come as close to being German as possible.

German colonial literature was to justify these territorial claims of the empire. Bülow’s novel did just that as this comment by Krome shows: “Wenn das Deutsche Reich nicht aus der Zahl der Großmächte ausscheiden will, so muß es sich Kolonien schaffen, und wenn es Kolonien will, muß es sie nehmen und behaupten“ (Bülow, Verheißung 71). The relationship between colonial literature and colonial politics becomes obvious by the choice of themes in these works (Warmbold 141). In the mind of German nationalists like Bülow, colonial literature had but one purpose:

Exemplary colonial writings should above all serve to give the German a clear, true picture of the foreign colonies and lands wrested from us, that he may learn to think all the more proudly and nationalistically the more his outlook for world history and international politics expands … (qtd. in Warmbold 141).

Nationalism and the idea of the white man’s “civilizing mission” go hand in hand. A nationalistic ideology is not only found in Bülow’s Im Lande der Verheißung but is found in German colonial literature from the very start.

The rhetoric of the “civilizing mission” can be found in many writings from the age of colonial rule. “The authors of colonial fiction, […] presented colonization as a humanitarian task which sought to extend the benefits of civilization to the black people of Africa” (Nwezeh 91). These authors wanted to express to their readers the need for and benefit of colonial expansion and rule over native people. Ulrike Kistner provides the following quote in her article The Growth of the Mind and the Body in the South African Climate, which also supports this fact: “During the time period 1910-1930 we find
colonial reports, elaborating on the claim that ‘Germans’ have to fulfill a mission in South Africa. In the writings from the beginning of the 20th century onwards, German-speakers are being admonished to maintain and cultivate their “Deutschtum” (qtd. in 62). Bülow seems to have anticipated this trend, since *Im Lande der Verheißung* was published a year before the turn of the century.

However, the “civilizing mission” was an illusion, as will be further discussed below. Nwezeh points out that colonial writers distorted facts about the white man’s activity in Africa in order to paint a glorious picture of success for their readers (93). In actuality, the “civilizing mission” which colonial writers tried to convey in their works, was just a myth and an excuse for the true purpose of colonization: “Today, the economic motives of colonial undertakings are revealed by every historian of colonialism. The cultural and moral mission of a colonizer, even in the beginning, is no longer tenable” (Memmi 3). Kistner also explains: “The positive evaluation of “civilization” can also be seen in the light of the attempts to maintain economic, political, and ideological dominance” (66).

**The German Civilizing Mission: The White Man’s Burden**

“‘Zivilisieren’ hieß damals, fremde Menschen nach europäischen Kulturmustern zu formen” (Nestvogel 60). “According to imperialist ideology, every white man who went to the colony was a civilizing agent” (Nwezeh 90). The white race was considered the superior race which had the obligation to bring “civilization” to the “savages”. “Not only the arch-conservatives and the apologists of colonialism were convinced that one day their cultural mission would be complete and the barbarians would become civilized;
even the radical critics of Western society were convinced that colonialism was a necessary stage of maturation for some societies” (Nandy 14). Rudyard Kipling, a British author and defender of imperialism, coined the term ‘the white man’s burden’ to denote the duty that the white man has to civilize the savage (Nwezeh 90). Said also states that the colonizers had a “duty” to the natives to establish colonies for the “benefit” of the natives or for the “prestige” of the motherland (108).

At the Berlin Conference of 1884/1885, in his opening remarks Bismarck brought up the civilizing mission of the white man in Africa: “In organizing this conference, the imperial government has been guided by the conviction that all invited governments share a desire to associate the natives of Africa with civilization” (qtd. in Nwezeh 11). Nwezeh declares that this idea of the white man’s civilizing mission is prevalent in all colonial novels (11). Bülow’s Im Lande der Verheißung is no exception.

Nwezeh also analyzes French and German colonial writing and its depiction of Africa and its indigenous people. He asserts that the portrayal of savages in these works seems to justify the need for the white man’s civilizing mission (vii). Warmbold also made this assertion about (noble) savages in colonial literature being “civilized” by the white man: “Only the influence of the white man could “ennoble” him [the savage] to the extent that he adapted his thoughts, way of life and even his skin color to those of the European. Light-skinned mulattos of good manners and cultivated speech were particularly in demand” (21). Maria in Im Lande der Verheißung represents such. She is the contrasting figure to the white heroine Maleen. Nwezeh goes on to say that “coupled with the illustration of the primitive mentality of the black man in French and German colonial literature is the myth of the civilizing mission of the white hero in Africa” (11).
However, “civilizing” meant to “elevate” the savage to the level of the white man, his master. But the white man did not want to lose his superiority.

**Maleen’s Civilizing Mission: The White Woman’s Burden**

Maleen Dietlas represents the white hero, or in this case heroine, on a “civilizing mission” as discussed above. For her, a woman, whiteness means empowerment. In her article *Memoirs from a German Colony: What Do White Women Want?*, Marcia Klotz raises an interesting question and instantly provides the answer: “What do white women want? Many things – a civilizing mission, [...]. These are some of the most popular themes of colonial discourse” (182). “She [Maleen] yearns to be a full partner in the colonial mission” (Shumannsfang 165). Maleen even desires “to be a man and hence able to involve herself more actively in the colonial campaign [which] is reiterated many times throughout the novel” (Klotz, *White Women* 53). Klotz even goes so far to say that Maleen experiences her gender as a limitation when it comes to participation in the colonial cause (53). She has paid a high prize to be an active participant in the colonial cause by marrying a man she did not love in order to have the opportunity to go to the colony.

Bülow herself had been a believer in and supporter of Germany’s colonial ambitions. Eigler notes that the novel openly justifies the German colonial cause (Friedrichsmeyer, Lennox, and Zantop 73). On one hand, Bülow, like many other colonial writers, believed in the ideal of a “civilizing mission”: “In their portrait of the white colonizer, colonial writers tried to legitimize and illustrate the notion of his civilizing mission in black Africa” (Nwezeh 90). Marcia Klotz also “understands the
novel as a reflection of Bülow’s desire to further the colonial cause” (Shumannfang 162). In addition, Eigler discusses how the “colonizing mission” is justified in Bülow’s novel: “The protagonist’s [Maleen’s] romanticized vision of colonial conquest, [presents] a vision that does not merely ignore but helps to legitimize the subjugation of the indigenous” (Friedrichsmeyer, Lennox, and Zantop 71).

On the other hand, however, Bülow also conveys, through the thoughts of her heroine Maleen, her criticism towards the “civilizing” attitudes of Germans, and of German women in particular. Maleen thinks how unwise German women are to replace everything they encounter in these foreign lands with their own German customs. She points out that the indigenous people know certain things better than the newly arrived Germans. She gives the example of cooking. While the natives cook outside in open air to avoid excessive heat, German women cook inside in brutal heat because that is what they are accustomed to (Bülow, Verheißung 350ff).

Lora Wildenthal discusses in depth Bülow’s political stand among radical nationalists and the way it appears in her writings. She also points out that this nationalism was the reason why Bülow’s works were widely read during the Nazi period. Klotz also states: “Frieda von Bülow’s colonial works were rediscovered under Hitler’s rule. In the Land of Promise was republished in 1937, though with important editorial changes” (Weak 61). Bülow’s nationalism and patriotism also becomes apparent when Maleen learns that Peters has deserted the motherland and now fights for the British enemy. Maleen chooses her love for her motherland over him, and resolves to fight against him. In clear reference to the German “colonizing mission”, she exclaims: “Nun

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5 One of these editorial changes included the complete deletion of the relationship between Krome and Maria, the woman of mixed race (see footnote 57 in Klotz, White Women 61).
will ich, was er verlassen und aus seinem Herzen gerissen hat, um so heißer lieben“ (Bülow, *Verheißung* 442). Bülow, who seems to use Maleen as a vehicle to express her own ideology, conveys her own love for her motherland and its “colonizing mission” through the novel.

However, Maleen’s “civilizing mission” in particular was hypocritical from the start. She was to provide a perfect example of morality and ethics to her country men and Maria, but failed to do so because of her passion for Krome. Especially as a married woman, she should have been more concerned about her reputation, instead of worrying about Maria’s. As her “mother”, Maleen had the responsibility to provide a virtuous example to the young girl.

Maleen’s burden, as the white woman, on the one hand, was to provide a perfect example of morality and German-ness to black and white, female or male as Klotz notes: “[Maleen] was called upon to reach out to both the (male) colonizers and the (female) colonized” (Klotz, *White Women* 17). Maleen’s burden as the white woman was her responsibility to go to the colony to “civilize” the colonized lands as a mother of the race (Klotz, *White Women* 8). On the other hand, the white woman’s burden was the conflicting role she found herself in as Eigler explains:

... some postcolonial critics argue that European women in the colonies inherently occupied a double role: they were subject to the sexual/racial politics of patriarchal society that instrumentalized them for the sake of continued white male domination, while, at the same time, they were participating subjects in the colonial cause (Friedrichsmeyer, Lennox, and Zantop 74).

Based on the myth that natives and people of mixed race are indeed much lower on every scale than Europeans, “civilizing”, in *Im Lande der Verheißung* meant to
“elevate” Maria to Maleen’s level; however, Maleen was not to lose her superiority. Maleen wanted to “civilize” Maria, but not fully. She wanted her to find a suitable husband among the Europeans but could not allow her brother Rainer to marry Maria. Maleen did not believe that Maria could ever become her equal. As Shumannfand explains: “The female hero of the novel, when she gazes at the mixed race woman, sees someone who is German but not quite. This aspect of the mixed race figure horrifies the female hero, since she not only feels the undoing of the colonial mission by the elimination of racial hierarchy, but also the undoing of an obvious, essential German femininity” (151). However, Maleen’s “civilizing” efforts bring about the psychological transformation in Maria that brings her out of obscurity into womanhood and allows her to assume the role that Maleen once played. As pointed out above, in this context, the “civilizing mission” was a two-faced undertaking. “Civilization” was to be brought to the “savages”, but they were never to be allowed to be equal to the white man, or in this case, the white woman.