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Unpacking colonialist and racist ideologies in historical German lexicons: A critical analysis of the *Afrika Hand-Lexikon* (1885) and similar reference books

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Abstract: This article delves into the impact of colonialist and racist ideologies as manifested in lexicons, with a special focus on the *Afrika Hand-Lexikon* (1885) and other lexicons from the German colonialist period (1884–1914). By examining the front matter and selected entries from these lexicons, the article uncovers the origins of racial hierarchies and scrutinizes dehumanization tactics, including the use of animal metaphors. Moreover, the article provides historical context to understand the language and rhetorical devices employed by lexicographers such as Paul Heichen in the *Afrika Hand-Lexikon*. Additionally, it emphasizes the pivotal role that colonialist ideologies played in influencing the ideologies embraced by the Nazi regime in its war of extermination. Through this analysis, the article sheds light on the historical significance of lexicons in perpetuating and legitimizing derogatory language, while also underscoring their relevance in comprehending the broader socio-political impact of colonialism and racism.

Keywords: German colonialism, historical lexicography, dehumanization, scientific racism, derogatory language

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1 Introduction and historical context

The origins of colonialist ideologies\(^2\) cannot be traced back solely to Otto von Bismarck’s decision in the summer of 1884 to bring overseas territories under the “care” of the German Empire’s “protection.” Furthermore, racism, which from a contemporary standpoint was entrenched in Germany’s “civilizing mission,” had not been devised by Bismarck and his government. Instead, their policies were predicated on foundational assumptions and convictions that had taken root during and subsequent to the Age of Enlightenment, a period marked by the division of the world according to scientific classification.\(^3\) This process also applied to people, who were then classified by “race” according to collective and individual characteristics, thereby establishing a hierarchy Europeans leveraged to set themselves apart from other groups.\(^4\) Assertions pertaining to the origins of race and racism have been posited to span from antiquity to the modern era.\(^5\) That said, it can be argued that race as it is referred to in this article is chiefly a modern idea. As philosopher Paul C. Taylor articulated, “the idea that something called blackness could interestingly distinguish some people from others in multiple dimensions made little sense before the fifteenth century or so.”\(^6\) The cultural chauvinism emblematic of Germany’s colonial mission appears to have coalesced around intellectual thought in the eighteenth century.

Although intrinsically imbued with racism, as will be discussed in much further detail in the following sections, Germany’s colonial aspirations were largely propelled by economic, political, and social factors, including the need to secure markets and raw materials for industrialization after periods of economic depression – an aspect that elicited opposition from many liberal ideologues due to the inexorable negative impact this would have on the working and middle classes.\(^7\) At that time, the newly formed

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\(^2\) Much of the language used in the examples of this article is derogatory and offensive. Its use is strictly for academic and scholarly purposes. It is essential to examine and understand historical texts and lexicons in their original form to fully comprehend and explore the discriminatory ideologies and biases prevalent during the time of their publication. By including offensive language, the author aims to provide an accurate representation of the derogatory terms and descriptions used by lexicographers, highlighting the harmful stereotypes faced by indigenous populations. It is crucial to recognize that the use of offensive language does not express views of the author nor advocate for the use of such language. Instead, it serves as a means to critically examine the impact of such language and to shed light on the historical context in which it was employed. The author’s intent is to foster understanding of and regard for the historical implications of using dehumanizing language at the end of the nineteenth century during the German colonialist period.

\(^3\) Cf. Geulen (2021: 47).

\(^4\) Ibid.


\(^6\) Taylor (2016: 2i).

German Empire was dealing with the aftermath of a financial crisis in the 1870s, as well as the challenges posed by rapid population growth and mass emigration to the Americas.

Between 1884 and 1899 Germany established colonies in several regions of the world, including Africa, northeastern China, and the Pacific. In Africa, Germany’s main colonies were German East Africa (present-day Tanzania, Rwanda, and Burundi), German Southwest Africa (present-day Namibia), Togo, and Cameroon. By the turn of the century, Germany was the fourth largest colonial power after Great Britain, France, and the Netherlands. The Empire saw a need to compete for prestige and influence on the international stage, and their rule was marked by violent repression of local populations, forced labor (“vocational training”), and the imposition of German culture and language, e.g. by opening schools and carrying out Christian missions, claiming to be guided by the “civilizing mission” to bring European culture to other parts of the world. The Germans implemented policies to exploit resources and maximize profits, such as the extraction of rubber and ivory in Africa. Furthermore, they engaged in military campaigns to subjugate and control local populations using brutal tactics, e.g. forced resettlement and the genocide against the Herero people in present-day Namibia (1904–1905). Germany’s colonial ambitions were diminished after being defeated in World War I, which led to the gradual loss of all its overseas territories, mostly to Great Britain and other colonial powers. Ultimately, Germany relinquished everything under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles.

In 1885, the year the *Afrika-Hand Lexikon* was published, Bismarck’s colonial agenda in Africa was fully underway. However, interest in the continent had been sparked almost half a century earlier when in 1849 Heinrich Barth, a geographer and classicist, became the first prominent German to travel to Africa and provide detailed and widely circulated accounts of his time there. Following in Barth’s footsteps a few decades later, physician Gustav Nachtigal chronicled his travels around the continent from 1869 to 1875. These European adventurers played a crucial role in fostering the desire to explore and discover exotic and far-off places, as well as untold treasures. Works such as the *Afrika Hand-Lexikon* catered to this awakening desire and helped to give it purpose.

This article will analyze the *Afrika Hand-Lexikon* and other historical German lexicons as products of their time, reflecting and perpetuating the colonialist ideologies and racial hierarchies based on modern racial classifications that characterized German colonialism in the late nineteenth century. The following sections will delve into the origins and historical context of German colonialist thought, explore socio-political factors that

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10 Ibid.
shaped its development, and analyze representations of ideology in the Afrika Hand-Lexikon and similar works. This analysis seeks to illuminate the lasting influence of these ideologies on German history, highlighting a key historical period between the pervasive acceptance of scientific racism and the emergence of the Nazi regime.

![Figure 1: Front cover: Afrika Hand-Lexikon: Ein Nachschlagebuch für Jedermann.](image)

2 Afrika Hand-Lexikon: Ein Nachschlagebuch für Jedermann: Dissecting the front matter

The Afrika Hand-Lexikon (AHL) is a printed monolingual lexicon\(^\text{12}\) which includes several hand-drawn images and maps describing all of Africa (and not exclusively where Germany had colonies). First published in 1885 by Gressner & Schramm in Leipzig, it was written by Paul Hermann Heichen. Other known printings include those by hansebooks (2016), Inktank Publishing (2019), and Literaricon (2019). Three alphabetical volumes have survived with no information to the whereabouts of the fourth or whether it was

\(^{12}\) Cf. Hoffmann et al. (1999: 1730).
ever even printed. These include: A’amer–Ghebeilat (vol. 1), Ghedaref–Mzabiten (vol. 2), and Nabal–Tetawin (vol. 3). For this article, excerpts were taken from the digitized electronic edition (2017) available from the State and University Library Bremen.\(^\text{13}\)

The front matter, written by Hermann Roskoschny (1845–1898?), a prolific writer on Russian and German colonial conquests,\(^\text{14}\) is atypical for front matter in that it is largely a political essay rather than a traditional introduction that explains the contents of the reference work or provides usage guidance. In the essay, Roskoschny briefly touches on the lexicon's contents (“die Zahl der Namen der Völker, Niederlassungen, Gebirge, Flüsse, u. s. w.”) towards the end. He also clarifies how the title's *jedermann* might be interpreted: “Jedermann (“... über den engen Kreis der Geographen hinaus ...”) sucht sich aufzuklären über die dortigen [=the areas in Africa under German ‘protection’] Verhältnisse.”, implying that the target audience includes non-experts, or at least those outside the ‘narrow circle of geographers’ familiar with the lexicon’s contents.

Roskoschny’s essay takes a dramatic and euphoric tone in its description of the sociopolitical environment of the time. In 1885, Germany had just begun its conquest of Africa, and Roskoschny’s remark on “England’s egoism” aligns with Germany’s aim to catch up with other great colonial powers of the time, notably Great Britain. One theory suggests that Bismarck’s willingness to engage with colonial politics in the first place was that his government wished to both appease anti-British sentiments, as reflected by Roskoschny, and to instigate conflict with Britain to subvert the pro-British politics of Emperor Frederick III, Queen Victoria’s grandson and heir apparent.\(^\text{15}\)

\(^{13}\) Full digital access to electronic edition available at [https://brema.suub.uni-bremen.de/dsdk/content/titleinfo/1884410?query=Afrika%20Hand-Lexikon]; last access: April 12, 2023.

\(^{14}\) A list of known works attributed to Roskoschny can be found at [https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/lookupname?key=Roskoschny%2C%20Hermann%2C%201845%201898]; last access: April 12, 2023.

\(^{15}\) Cf. Speitkamp (2021: 24).
Figure 3: Translation of excerpt from AHL: ‘Already we find ourselves in the midst of the upheavals for which Africa is called upon to bring about in our political, commercial and social relations. The completely new grouping of powers, the awakening of the continent, which for so long stood powerless in the face of England’s egoism — the tremendous colonial movement passing through all the countries of Europe, which has opened up a new field for the competition of peoples and pushed all the old “questions” which have moved Europe up to now into the background, and which also seems to want to completely transform the party system and to put new interest groups in the place of the old ones – all these are already consequences of the influence of the newly risen star, which irresistibly draws Europe into its orbit as a satellite. The mighty flutter of wings of a new age rushes around us, and a dark foreboding of great events trembles through the world.’.

Germany’s “civilizing mission” to bring European culture and technological advancements to its colonies is also reflected in Roskoschny’s essay. The “mission” had little to do with colonialism in the sense of imposing European culture and values systems – it was about power and political gain. His disregard for the presence of indigenous cultures is therefore justified in ‘Where a hundred years ago there was only dense jungle or mangrove-covered swampland.’ At the same time, he praises the efficiency of nineteenth-century European technologies and the advantages these brought, such as ‘locomotive travel within a few hours’. These comments suggest that Africa would not have progressed without the presence of Europeans and their advancements, implying a lasting and positive impact.

Figure 4: Translation of excerpt from AHL: ‘Over there, on the other side of the Mediterranean, lies the continent of plantations. Where a hundred years ago there was only dense jungle or mangrove-covered swampland, there are now well-tilled fields on which all the products of the tropics flourish in lush abundance. Steamships cruise along the giant rivers, and locomotives travel within a few hours the routes on which, at the end of the nineteenth century, trade caravans trudged along in sluggish trains that took months to complete.’.
Immigration was another significant factor which greatly affected the times in which Roskoschny lived. In 1880, just five years before the publication of AHL, the third wave of German immigration affected over two million people. In his essay, Roskoschny employs tactics similar to those of Bismarck’s government to promote the idea of a “New Germany” in Africa. He argues that this initiative would ensure the ‘powerful protection of the German Empire’, preserve national characteristics, and maintain a close connection with the motherland. Roskoschny’s argument essentially amounts to a sales pitch, aimed at deterring even more Germans from emigrating and “being lost” to the Americas.

**Figure 5:** Translation of excerpt from AHL: ‘No other people is so powerfully driven out into the world; in none, in spite of all love for the homeland, is the feeling of wanderlust so great as among the German people. The enormous surplus of our national strength which is absorbed annually by the countries on the other side of the Great Ocean is proof of this. Of the many hundreds of thousands who have crossed over in the last decades, however, a significant part disappears without a trace in the great Germanic sea, and loses its language and nationality. This is the reason for the eager, longing expectation with which our people await all news from the new German colonies. There they hope to find a place where, after satisfying their wanderlust, they can found a new home, under conditions as favorable as those in distant America, but under the powerful protection of the German Empire, which offers them a guarantee for the preservation of their national characteristics and for the maintenance of a close connection with the motherland.’

Roskoschny’s essay leaves many questions unanswered for the reader. He provides little information on the usage or the contents of the AHL, which he describes as offering ‘an easy overview of everything that is known so far about our African possessions’, which have been ‘scattered in the individual travel descriptions’ until now. However, the inclu-
sion of many geographic locations and cities, such as those in Egypt that were never under German possession raises doubts about Roskoschny’s familiarity with Germany’s colonial possessions or the contents of the lexicon, or both. This discrepancy raises questions about the intended audience for the lexicon, particularly given his implicit emphasis on catering to non-experts. From a political standpoint, the Empire was substantially divided concerning socioeconomic repercussions that Germany’s colonial endeavors would ultimately bring about. It is therefore plausible that Roskoschny felt justified in presenting a sanitized perspective to persuade the addressee of the positive ramifications of colonialism and in doing so divulging his own personal politics on the matter. Additionally, it may have been his assumption that the lexicon’s “wide circles” of non-expert target audience would not be discerning enough to notice such inconsistencies.

Figure 6: Translation of excerpt from AHL: ‘It is precisely the limitation in the selection that seems to be a good choice, since in a book of this kind intended for wide circles, the myriad of names that an all-encompassing geographical encyclopedia must include would only be useless ballast. However, such a book seems particularly welcome if it summarizes lexically in such a way that it allows for an easy overview of everything that is known so far about our African possessions, but is scattered in the individual travel descriptions.’

The AHL’s lemma selection consists exclusively of an alphabetical listing of noun and noun phrases, some of which are transliterated from local languages, e.g. Arabic. The individual entries include encyclopedic information ranging from biographical to geographical and anthropological, and is largely from a Eurocentric or German-centric perspective. Many places and people are mentioned solely for their relevance to the European mission. Moreover, some entries refer to other sources, including descriptions by well-known travel writers. Examples of types of lemmata included in the lexicon are as follows:

1) People: indigenous groups (Duallas, Ewe); colonizers and travel writers (Barth, Nachtigal, Stanley)
2) Settlements (Agadir, Casablanca, Gold Coast, Stellenbosch) and including alternate spellings with reference entries (A’bunda, s. Am’bunda.)
3) Mountains, rivers, local flora and fauna (including scientific classifications)
4) “Site-specific items,” e.g.: facilities and products (Faktorei, Schwefel, Salz); institutions and organizations (Missionstätigkeit am Kongo, British African Association, Baptist Missionary Society)

Figure 7: AHL Entry for Casablanca – an example of a city mentioned only for its relevance to German mission.

Figure 8: AHL Entry for Faktorei – an example of a site-specific, narrowed sense of a known etymon.

3 Dehumanization tactics in lexicon entries for Buschmänner and Hottentotten

The use of racist and harmful language in Afrika Hand-Lexikon is undeniable. However, it is essential to recognize that what is currently considered derogatory was entirely consistent with the European values and worldviews of the nineteenth century. Racism is a historical phenomenon\(^{17}\) – it has been influenced and informed by a sequence of events and ideas that span from the Roman period to the Age of Enlightenment. The fact which remains nebulous is whether the language used in AHL and other similar works

can be labeled as racist, given the theoretical framework employed in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries had not yet been established.\(^\text{18}\) By the end of the nineteenth century, concepts of collective belonging (“us” vs. “them”, “Christian” vs. “non-Christian”, “European” vs. “non-European”) combined with the growing reliance on scientific advancements, informed writers and thinkers like Roskoschny and Heichen. Contemporary thinkers such as Joseph Arthur de Gobineau (1816–1882) in his *Essai sur l’inégalité des races humaines* would have been highly influential for them as he was for much of the educated classes during this period. He established a norm of dehumanizing others by employing bestial and demonizing metaphors when describing racial groups,\(^\text{19}\) a tactic which will be explored in further detail in the next section. What remains is crucial is that aspects of race extended beyond notions of skin color, including distinguishing physical characteristics – e.g. those between the biological masculine and feminine –, nationality, regional groups, cultures, social class, and language.\(^\text{20}\)

The linguistic examples in the entries for *Buschmänner* and *Hottentotten* illustrate how Heichen aimed to create a sense of inclusive European “normalcy” and to distinguish “us” (the Europeans/the Colonizers) from “them” (the non-Europeans/the colonized). Through pronominalization, he insinuates that Europeans are more advanced, civilized, and (linguistically) cultivated. These dichotomies, which serve as the backdrop for Heichen’s descriptions, justified the inhumane treatment of non-whites, and, more specifically, non-white Africans.\(^\text{21}\) Dehumanization strategies were not new tactics engineered in the nineteenth century, but rather they draw a direct link to the Age of Enlightenment thought that “othered” non-Europeans to a lower, previous stage of human development and existence, which was in line with the zeitgeist of their time.\(^\text{22}\) By including and examining entries from sources published around the same time as the AHL, it is evident that Heichen’s language and that of his contemporaries were not isolated examples. Heichen was not a rogue racist, as he would be labeled today, but wrote in accordance with the contemporary views of society in his time. The following examples, while overtly and categorically racist to a twenty-first century readership, reflect the prevalent assumptions the perpetuated the systematic racial classification, denigration and mistreatment of indigenous Africans in the colonialist period.

Drawing comparisons and using metaphors are two examples which have been identified as strategies employed in racist exclusionary language. Other methods include objectification, criminalization, demonization, and pathologization.\(^\text{23}\) Historical lexicons contain repeated examples of bestialization or bestializing, which involves degrading and comparing humans to animals, both explicitly and implicitly. While some bestial-

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\(^{18}\) Ibid.

\(^{19}\) Cf. Lobenstein-Reichmann (2007: 17).

\(^{20}\) Ibid.


Unpacking colonialist and racist ideologies in historical German lexicons

A. Unpacking colonialist and racist ideologies in historical German lexicons

1. The example

*“Familienbande kennt er [der Buschmann] so gut wie gar nicht; die Kinder zieht er instinktiv auf, wie das Tier seine Jungen.”* (AHL, vol. 1, 1885: 277; highlighted by AK)

*“Buschmänner... werden aber immer weniger, indem sie von den Kolonisten wie von den Kaffern gleich wilden Thieren erlegt werden.”* (Herders Conversations-Lexikon (HCL), 1st edn., vol. 1, 1854–1857: 731; highlighted by AK)

*“Die H.[ottentotten] sind weder Nigriter noch Neger, sondern bilden eine von diesen verschiedene selbständige Rasse, die höchst wahrscheinlich durch Kreuzung in verschiedenen Grad en zwischen Neger und der heut durch die Buschmänner (s. d.) vertretenen inferioren Zwergasse hervorgegangen ist.”* (AHL, vol. 2, 1885: 560; highlighted by AK)

*“... ihre Lebensweise ist überhaupt einer starken Vermehrung not zuträglich...”* (ibid.: 561; highlighted by AK)


The subsequent section provides a more detailed scrutiny of these examples, demonstrating their connection to the broader “hierarchy or races.”

### 3.1 Racial and social hierarchies

In HCL from the preceding examples, it is presumed that both Kolonisten and Kaffer harbored a comparable level of disdain towards Buschmänner, thereby introducing another dimension to the discourse. This notion aligns with the then-prevalent pseudoscientific belief in a “hierarchy of races,” which was propagated by notable figures such as Linnaeus, Gobineau, Cuvier, Lyell, and Blumenbach. In this context, Kaffer was a derogatory exonym borrowed from Afrikaans predominantly used to offensively describe Black individuals, especially those from southern Africa. Etymologically, this sense of Kaffer stems from the Arabic KĀFIＲ (‘non-believer’) and was initially employed by Arabic-speaking slave traders to refer to non-Muslims. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, the sense meaning among Europeans had narrowed significantly to refer almost exclusively to Black Sub-Saharan Africans.

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25 In present-day South Africa, the use of the k-word is an indictable offense, cf. Gouws (2022).
Nineteenth-century readers would have inferred that if even the much-scorned *Kaffer* were slaughtering the *Buschmänner* at an alarming rate, the latter must indeed be positioned very low on the metaphorical “ladder of racial progress,” which denoted the bridge between humans and apes.\(^{26}\) Furthermore, an older sense of *Kaffer* (‘idiot, simpleton, stupid person’) – borrowed in the eighteenth century from the Yiddish term for ‘farmer’ (*kafer*) – would have further influenced the understanding of a German-speaking readership during this time.\(^{27}\)

The most conspicuous and egregious example of dehumanization, represented through bestial metaphor, can be discerned in the analogy that equates the brutal killing of *Buschmänner* to the slaying of wild animals (“gleich wilden Thieren erlegt”\(^{28}\)). This was not an isolated instance of such rhetoric but was deeply embedded in theories of origin which asserted non-white races were non-human. Nearly a century prior, Carl Linnaeus, in his seminal work *Systema Naturae* (1758), described his perception of the African as *luridus, avarus, fastuosus* and *regitur opinionibus* (‘dirty [or pale yellow; sallow], greedy, boastful’ and ‘governed by opinions’). By predictable contrast, the European is described as *sanguineous, acutissimus* (‘confident, extremely sharp, brilliant’) and *regitur ritibus* (‘governed by laws’).

These assertions, postulated as both scientific and divinely ordained, were still widely accepted during the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries, hence colonialists denigrated indigenous African populations as sub-human, equated them to animals, and treated them as such.\(^{29}\) They acted under the guise of scientific legitimacy as the exclusion of certain groups, such as blacks or Jews, had become increasingly challenging to justify. This was particularly evident in the aftermath of the French Revolution, where newly-established republican regimes spread notions of *égalité* in hopes of distancing themselves from their royal, noble, aristocratic past.\(^{30}\) For instance, Georges Cuvier, an esteemed nineteenth-century naturalist and one of the founders of geology, paleontology, and modern comparative anatomy had little regard for native Africans. In 1812, he referred to black Africans as “the most degraded of human races, whose form approaches that of the beast and whose intelligence is nowhere great enough to arrive at regular government.”\(^{31}\) In 1825, J.F. Blumenbach asserted that white people set a norm from which all other races departed, referring to the “Caucasian” as the “primary or intermediate of [the] five principal Races” and claiming the Ethiopian [black African] is of the “two extremes into which [the Caucasian] has deviated.”\(^{32}\) Similarly, in 1856, Charles Lyell, geologist and friend of Darwin, wrote: “The brain of the Bushman ... leads

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\(^{27}\) Cf. DWDS, at [https://www.dwds.de/wb/Kaffer>]; last access May 10, 2023.

\(^{28}\) See above.


\(^{31}\) As cited in Gould (1996: 69; highlighted by AK).

\(^{32}\) Ibid.
towards the brain of the *Simiadae* [monkeys]. This implies a connexion between want of intelligence and structural assimilation[...]. Each race of Man has its place, like the inferior animals."³³ The lexicographers of this era thus encapsulated and recorded this prevailing intellectual discourse of their era.

The AHL’s description of the *Hottentotten*, in which states they form their own independent race positioned somewhere between *Nigriter* and *Neger*, serves as another example of upholding the scientific and philosophical beliefs at the close of the nineteenth century.

“Die Hottentotten sind weder Nigriter noch Neger, sondern bilden eine von diesen verschie- dene selbständige Rasse, die höchst wahrscheinlich durch Kreuzung in verschiedenen Graden zwischen Neger und der heut durch die Buschmänner (s. d.) vertretenen inferioren Zwerggrasse hervorgegangen ist.” (AHL, vol. 2, 1885: 560; highlighted by AK)

The AHL was published in 1885, less than two decades after zoologist Ernst Haeckel’s *Natürliche Schöpfungsgeschichte* in 1868. Drawing upon Blumenbach’s racial classification system and the nomenclature proposed by linguist Friedrich Müller, Haeckel conceived a hierarchy of human descent. In this hierarchy, *Hottentotten, Buschmänner*, *Neger*, and *Nigriter* each formed their own respective races at the lower echelons,³⁴ while Caucasians, including Germans, were positioned at the apex, or “Spitze” of human development.³⁵ The language in the entries of the AHL and similar works did not stem from fringe extremist ideology dismissed as propaganda. Instead, they referenced and carried forward highly respected and broadly disseminated mainstream scientific propositions.

### 3.2 Language and prosody

In addition to establishing hierarchies, bestial metaphors were also frequently used to describe phonological features of language. Although the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is not a German-language source, it is relevant to observe how similar rhetorical devices were employed in other languages around the same period. Furthermore, looking at an example from English further illustrates the fact that the scientific discourse between Britain and the German Empire was particularly strong at that time, as thinkers like Haeckel were thought to have spearheaded the Darwinian revolution on the European continent and beyond.³⁶

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³³ Ibid.
³⁵ Haeckel (1868: 519).
“The Hottentot language was regarded by the early travelers and colonists as an uncouth and barbarous tongue. The Portuguese called (it) stammering; the Dutch compared it to the ‘gobbling of a turkey-cock’.” (Encyclopædia Britannica (EB), 9th edn., vol. 12, 1875–1889: 312; highlighted by AK)

The metaphors employed in these examples served a crucial function in elucidating and promoting understanding of an “abstract experience,” i.e. the phonological features of languages that many of the lexicon users are unlikely to have encountered, by drawing a comparison with the more “concrete” instances of animal sounds.

As previously noted, concepts of racial hierarchy and classifications were firmly established in the intellectual discourse at the time of these volumes’ publication. Linguists such as Lakoff and Turner (1989) and Kövecses (2020) have commented how when the Great Chain of Being is accepted – with God at the uppermost level followed by complex systems (universe, society, mind, etc.), humans, animals, plants, complex physical objects, and inanimate objects – this structure can function as a system for metaphors. In this context, entities from one level are conceptualized as belonging to another level. Thus, if animals occupy a lower level than humans and if Hottentotten and Buschmänner were perceived as sub-human, that is at the level of animals, the use of animal metaphors to depict the phonological features of their languages becomes logically consistent.

### 3.3 Cultural practices

The dehumanizing tactics identified in previous sections can also be seen in the descriptions of cultural practices in the lexicon entries. These include comparisons of child-rearing and living situations to those of animals (e.g., “die Kinder zieht er instinktiv auf, wie das Tier seine Jungen”\(^37\)), and implications about the absence of principles such as marriage and law and order. An in-depth examination of these instances is warranted.

In the Deutsch-amerikanisches Conversations-Lexicon, Buschmänner are depicted as surviving on ‘the lowest level’ of all of the African people (“auf der niedersten Stufe”), ‘far removed from civilization’ (“kaum in der Nähe der Civilisation”), and residing in ‘flimsy straw huts’. They ‘sleep either naked or with, at most, a fur draped around the shoulders in burrows, abandoned ant hills, or porcupine dens’ (“dürftige Strohhüt-
ten und schlafen sonst in Höhlen, verlassenen Ameisenhaufen, oder den Gruben des Stachelschweins, ohne Kleidung, höchstens ein Fell um die Schultern geworfen”.


Furthermore, they are claimed to be unfamiliar with concepts of government, marriage, and law and order (“Die Begriffe von Regierung, Ehe, Recht und Gesetz sind ihnen fast ganz fremd”). This description presupposes that knowledge and adherence to these concepts are characteristic of virtuous, civilized individuals (=white Europeans, most likely male) and positions them as uncivilized. Consequently, this passage perpetuates Linnaeus’ notion that being “governed by laws” equates to being more highly evolved, i.e. nearer the top of the evolutionary chain. Once again, through these brief assertions, the process of dehumanizing of the Other is legitimized.

Likewise, in the entry for Hottentotten the Khoikhoi people are portrayed as possessing a higher level of physical and spiritual/mental relationship compared to other ethnic groups due to their conversion to Christianity by missionaries. However, the choice of the verb belehren (‘to instruct/teach’) also reveals the perspective of the lexicographer (and possibly the missionaries themselves) regarding the prospects. If the lexicographer had opted for the German verb bekehren (‘to convert’), it would presuppose recognition of the Khoikhoi’s pre-existing religious convictions or faith practices, but this is not the case. Instead, they are depicted as individuals who need to be taught and ‘indoctrinated’ (another possible translation of belehren) into faith, akin to instructing children.


In the second sentence, a bestial metaphor is employed to describe their living practices, comparing their huts to large beehives. The fact that the formation in which their huts are constructed is labeled as a ‘village’ or, locally, a “Kraal” (‘Dorf’) suggests that the lexicographer perceives them as having a worthy sense of structure and order, likely influenced by their adoption of Western religion and other cultural practices. This description implies the existence of and separation by a racial hierarchy, placing the Hottentotten as more evolved than the Buschmänner and the Kaffer. However, the preceding metaphor suggests that they are far from living in a civilized manner that aligns with white European standards.
3.4 Physical features: Historical stereotypes and aesthetics

“Die eigentlichen H. sind überaus häßlich, haben einen abgeplatteten Schädel, platte Nasen, aufgeworfene Lippen, grau- oder hellbraune Hautfarbe, aber kleine Hände und Füße.” (DACL, vol. 5, 1869–1874: 421; highlighted by AK)

“Häßlich von Angesicht, wollhaarig und kaum über 4 Fuß hoch, sonst aber wohlpportioniert …” (DACL, vol. 2, 1869–1874: 737; highlighted by AK)

“… in den unwirthbarsten Theilen des Caplandes wohnend, klein, häßlich …” (HCL, 1st edn., vol. 1, 1854–1857: 731; highlighted by AK)

“Hottentotten … sind gelb, sonst mit allen Charakteren der Negerrace, unreinlich, sinnlich, aber muthig …” (HCL, 1st edn., vol. 3, 1854–1857: 352; highlighted by AK)

“Die äußere Erscheinung des H. wird von der Häßlichkeit des Gesichts beherrscht.” (Deutsches Kolonial-Lexikon, 1871–1949: 78; highlighted by AK)

“The Bushmen with whom the colonists of the south have come most in contact with are of very small stature, of a dirty yellow color, and generally repulsive countenance.” (EB, 9th edn., vol. 4, 1875–1889: 575; highlighted by AK)

The quoted passages exemplify offensive descriptions that border on grotesque for a twenty-first century readership. The lexicographers’ choice of words reflects both historical and contemporary analyses of aesthetics. In Karl Rosenkranz’s 1853 treatise, Aesthetic of Ugliness, he drew a comparison between ugliness and moral evil. Umberto Eco noted this, stating that “Just as evil and sin are the opposites of good, whose hell they represent, so is ugliness the ‘hell of beauty’. Rosenkrantz [sic] reverts to the traditional notion that ugliness is the opposite of beauty, a kind of possible error that beauty holds within itself.”38


In Friedrich Nietzsche’s Twilight of the Idols, published in 1889, only four years after the Afrika Hand-Lexikon, Nietzsche suggests that “in the beautiful, humanity posits itself as the standard of perfection; in special cases, it worships itself in the beautiful.

38 Eco (2007: 16)
A species simply cannot do anything except say yes to itself alone like this.” He continues, “At bottom, human beings mirror themselves in thing; they consider anything beautiful if it casts their image back to them: the judgement ‘beautiful’ is the vanity of their species ...”. This last statement sheds light on why Livingstone and Napier, as quoted by Heichen in the example above, found some endearing qualities in the Kaffer people, as they exhibited resemblance to familiar Caucasian features. Livingstone goes as far as to call them ‘gorgeous’ or ‘magnificent’ (“prächtig”). However, this sentiment is nullified by his referring to them as ‘savages’ (“Wilde”) in the same phrase. Similarly, Napier’s reference to bronze statues and Heichen’s use of “copper brown” suggest an aesthetic appreciation of the Other. These instances stand in stark contrast to “grey-yellow”, “light brown”, or “dirty yellow” applied in other examples. The cautious approval exhibited by Livingstone, Napier, and Heichen establishes a direct link to the “universally accepted” aesthetic principle, rooted in Aristotle’s Poetics, which states “that it is possible to make beautiful imitations of ugly things.”

“[...]it is through imitation that we learn our earliest lessons, while all take pleasure in the things imitated. Proof of this lies in practical experience. Things that we normally view with disgust we instead view with pleasure when images of them are portrayed with accuracy: such as repugnant beasts and dead bodies. The reason for this is that learning gives great pleasure[...] Hence men enjoy seeing likenesses for; on contemplating them, they learn and reason about them.” (Poetics, 1448b, Aristotle, 4th c. BCE, as cited in Eco 2007)

It is important to note that contemporary ideologies in the nineteenth century influenced all three men to view the subjects as sub-human. However, despite these ideologies, they allowed themselves to derive aesthetic pleasure from the bodies of the Other when those bodies reflected classical ideals of beauty. The bodies reflected their “likenesses”, which in this case was Whiteness.

3.5 Skin color

In his final taxonomy of 1795, Blumenbach categorized humans into five groups, defining them by both geographic location and physical features. He proposed: the “Caucasian variety” for light-skinned people of Europe and nearby areas; the “Mongolian variety” for individuals from eastern Asia, including Japan and China; the “American variety” for indigenous populations of the Americas; and the “Malay variety” for inhabitants of Oceania, including indigenous Australians, Polynesians, and Melanesians. Gould asserts that Blumenbach’s only original contribution to this racial classification system was the introduction of the fifth “Malay variety” to distinguish some Pacific groups origi-
nally included in the broader Asian category. Despite being commonly regarded as the pioneer of modern racial classification, Blumenbach in fact based his system on the one created and popularized by his mentor, Carl Linnaeus. However, Gould contends that “by moving from the Linnean four-race system to his own five-race scheme, Blumenbach radically changed the geometry of human order from a geographically based model without explicit ranking to a double hierarchy of worth, oddly based upon perceived beauty and fanning out in two directions from a Caucasian ideal.”

44 Cf. Lobenstein-Reichmann (2021b: 11).
45 Ibid.
An even earlier reference, as cited by Eco, can be found in *The Aesop Romance*. This ancient text dates back to the first or second century CE:

“Aesop the great benefactor of humanity, the fabulist, was a slave by condition, but a Phrygian of Amorium by birth: **repugnant to the sight** [...] **disgusting**, fat belly, bulging head, pug-nose, gibbous, swarthy and short, with flat feet, short arms, bandy-legs, thick lips [...] Moreover – a disability even worse than deformity – he had not the gift of the word, stammered, and was quite unable to express himself.” (*The Aesop Romance*, I; highlighted by AK)

The popular tradition of depicting Aesop as a black African, as observed in the sixteenth-century New High German text, is likely rooted in what twentieth-century scholars such as anthropologist Richard Lobban consider convincing “circumstantial evidence” about Aesop’s life. One widely accepted belief is that he was a slave from Phrygia, although not by birth (*doulos*) but rather through being taken by force from a foreign land (*andrapodon*). The latter status implies he was subjected to further sale and displacement. While his exact place of origin and where he spent the majority of his life remain topics of debate, some arguments suggest that his name might be a corruption of *Aethiop* or “burnt-faced people,” referring to Nubians. It should be noted that “burnt-faced” does not explicitly refer to one particular shade on the color spectrum. As mentioned in the excerpt, he was regarded as “repugnant to the sight” and “disgusting.” According to Lobban, these descriptions align with European perceptions of non-Europeans.47 Citing Frank Snowden, Lobban further argues that during the Persian or Ptolemaic periods (sixth to first centuries BCE), it was not uncommon for Greeks to possess “Ethiopian” slaves, meaning African.48 This speculation contributes to the case that Aesop may indeed have been black.

4 **The legacy of nineteenth-century lexicographers**

The examples presented in the previous section reveal the prescriptive ideals that purportedly descriptive lexicographers like Heichen sought to encapsulate in their lexicons. This indicates that the aesthetic trends favoring a white or Caucasian ideal, or the association of “Blackness” with “ugliness” or “disproportion,” did not emerge from settler colonialist contact with indigenous populations at the end of the nineteenth century when the lexicons examined in this article were first published.

Rather, these trends and associations had already ingrained themselves in the zeitgeist of that time, and the colonial contact and ensuing domination only served to

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46 Eco (2007: 30).
48 Cf. ibid.
crystallize and reify these existing biases. The lexicons, then, became vehicles for the wider dissemination and consolidation of such views taken up and perpetuated by later agitators of colonialist and racist ideologies.

The implications of these lexicographers’ work were, and continue to be, undoubtedly negative. Their work perpetuated and reinforced negative stereotypes which led to stigmatization of groups like the *Buschmänner* and *Hottentotten*. Although Heichen and his contemporaries were products of their era and not solely to blame for these attitudes, their use of language and lexicographic choices contributed to the justification of mistreatment that further fostered racist ideologies.

### 5 Conclusion

The long-lasting broader societal effects of the attitudes and practices evidenced in sources like the *Afrika Hand-Lexikon*, rooted in colonialist and racist ideologies, have been profound, leading to the normalization of discriminatory attitudes and the establishment of an “us” versus “them” dichotomy. This resulted in the positioning of indigenous Africans as subjugated, dehumanized underclass.

The existence of racist and colonialist ideologies predates Bismarck’s decision to expand the German Empire’s territories in 1884, as evidenced by the widespread acceptance of similar views of society during that time. As evidenced by the language and beliefs expressed by Heichen in the *Afrika Hand-Lexikon* and other contemporary sources, lexicographers did not simply compile and record entries; they also perpetuated the prevailing socio-cultural and political ideologies of their era, reflecting and reinforcing racial classification hierarchies and the ensuing mistreatment of indigenous African populations.

The legacy of German colonialist ideologies, as documented in the *Afrika Hand-Lexikon* and similar sources, has had a deep and lasting impact on the German nation and its history. One of the most significant implications was the exploitation and oppression of the colonized peoples. The brutal policies, underpinned by the assumption of European superiority, led to the death of millions of people and the displacement of many more.

The belief in a “master race” and the idea of Germans/Europeans racial superiority, both explicit and implicit in the dehumanizing tactics used in the AHL and contemporary counterparts, reflected the colonialist ideological thinking grounded in the scientific and philosophical consensus of the era. As seen in the front matter of the AHL, rather than providing the user with information about navigating the lexicon, usage, special features, etc., Roskoschny seized the opportunity to incite feelings of nationalism and unity under the colonial ideal of the “civilizing mission.” This reasoning justified the subjugation of colonized peoples and paved the way for the development of a racist and supremacist ideology that was later embraced by fascist movements around
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As historian Claudia Bruns remarked, “Categories of colonialism were [...] increasingly transferred into inner-European processes of group formation, be it the nation as a whole or other social and ethnic groups inside the nation such as workers, anti-socials, homosexuals, or Jews.”

In summary, this analysis underlines the importance of studying lexicons like the AHL in the effort to recognize and confront the enduring effects of colonialism. Furthermore, it highlights the critical role the lexicographer plays in reflecting, recording, and perpetuating ideologies. This is not merely a historical exercise, but rather it calls for critical engagement in recognizing and addressing biased language in stereotypes which persist in lexicography.

6 Bibliography

6.1 Monographs, edited volumes and articles


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6.2 Research literature

6.3 Lexicons and Dictionaries


**DWDS** = *Digitales Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache. Das Wortauskunftssystem zur deutschen Sprache in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Ed. by Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities. [https://www.dwds.de/]; last access: April 15, 2023.

