



Research Article

Transnational Colonial Fantasies: Ambivalence, Identity, and the 'Exotic Other' in German, African, and American Contexts in, “Geschichte eines Hottentotten von ihm selbst erzählt” (1773) by Christian Ludwig Willebrand

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ABSTRACT



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This paper explores Christian Ludwig Willebrand's *Geschichte eines Hottentotten, von ihm selbst erzählt* (1773) within the transnational colonial context of 18th-century German and African and American relations. The analysis uses Homi Bhabha's theories of mimicry and ambivalence and Susanne Zantop's concept of "colonial fantasies" to interrogate the portrayal of Kori, a biracial protagonist, as an emblem of colonial tensions between identity, power, and race. This essay shows how internalized colonial ideologies and mimicry establish hierarchies among the colonized while disrupting colonial binaries. Moreover, it positions Willebrand's novel an important but complicit text in the colonial imagination while simultaneously offering a structural and psychological dynamic of the 18th-century colonial discourse. In sum, the essay engages with the German colonial ambitions toward Africa and the racial dynamics of the Americas, while reflecting a broader colonial ideology.

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Introduction

This essay examines Christian Ludwig Willebrand's anonymously published novel, “Geschichte eines Hottentotten, von ihm selbst erzählt” (1773), the first German novel set in southern Africa, which has received relatively little scholarly attention. The analysis focuses on the ambivalent portrayal of its protagonist, Kori, through the theoretical frameworks of Homi Bhabha's concepts of mimicry and colonial discourse, and Susanne Zantop's “Colonial Fantasies”.

This article analyzes the ambivalent presentation of Kori, a biracial protagonist, as a prism through which to interrogate the colonial fantasies and mimicry. Drawing on Zantop's framework and Bhabha's theoretical insights, this piece argues that Kori's story reflects the dual forces of attraction and marginalization at work in 18th-century colonial discourse. The historical context is crucial: during the early colonial era, European powers—Britain, France, Portugal, and Spain—established colonies and trading posts globally, seeking economic benefits through resource exploitation and forced labor. In the novel's setting, the Dutch held colonial power in 17th-century Africa, particularly in present-day South Africa.

I analyze two crucial aspects of his identity: how does Kori's character offer insights into Willebrand's idea of colonial fantasy?

Two, how does Kori's ambivalent portrayal crystallize his desire to mimic his colonizers, which invariably reinforces the notion of the inferiority of the Indigenous people and white supremacy?

While the novel reinforces colonial stereotypes through its romanticized perception of the colonial era, Kori's character simultaneously challenges simplistic views of African people in pre-18th century colonial history. The concept of “contact zone” by Mary Louise Mary proves helpful in this regard. This concept explains that colonial portrayal is a ripple effect of a culture strongly influenced by power imbalances. As a result, this essay also touches on how Kori's character reflects this idea.

While the novel does not comment on German colonialism, it is evident that it advances the discourse on how Germany had imagined the potential colonial governance acquisition of one. This framing intersects with German literary traditions and American imagination of Africa as usually “primitive”- needing western “civilization.” By juxtaposing this perspective, the essay will crystallize more expansive transatlantic fantasies about Africa and its people, examining German colonialism, African subjugation, and American race relations in Willebrand's work.

Historical Context

The historical context of Christian Ludwig Willebrand's “*Geschichte eines Hottentotten von ihm selbst erzählt*” (1773) is

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crucial for understanding both its creation and significance. When the novel was published, Germany existed not as a unified nation but as a collection of independent states and territories. Although these states-maintained trading posts across Africa, Asia, and the Americas (Henderson 1935), Germany would not emerge as a major colonial power until the late 19th century.

Despite this lack of formal colonial involvement, German society was deeply engaged with and influenced by European colonial enterprises. As Biskup (2016) notes, there were strong advocates for colonial expansion who viewed it as essential for competing with other European powers and achieving economic and political supremacy. This tension between colonial ambition and political reality shaped what Susanne Zantop (1997) terms Germany's "colonial fantasy." Zantop argues that "the lack of actual colonialism created a pervasive desire for colonial possession and sense of entitlement to such possessions in the mind of many Germans" (p. 7). Paradoxically, this absence of direct colonial engagement made "German colonialist discourse more abstract, scholarly, and by implication, less powerful" (p. 7). This abstraction, suggested by Zantop's framework as such, reveals a 'colonial fantasy' merging imaginative dominion with the historic longing for identity formation through other subjugation.

As Zantop (1997) explains in her work, colonial fantasies had a profound purpose in German society. She notes: "Colonial fantasies provided an arena for creating an imaginary community and constructing a national identity in opposition to the perceived racial, sexual, ethnic, or national characteristics of others, Europeans and non-Europeans alike" (p. 7) This framework helps illuminate Willebrand's literary choices in his novel.

The German colonial imagination found parallels in American society, where similar attitudes toward Africa as an "uncivilized" and mysterious land prevailed. Edward Said's theory of "othering" in *Orientalism* (1978) explains how Western nations, including both Germany and America, constructed non-European societies as exotic and inferior, thereby justifying their "civilizing mission" and colonial dominance.

The 1770s marked a pivotal moment in American racial discourse, coinciding with the novel's publication. The emergence of African American writers like Phillis Wheatley, who published her poetry in 1773—the same year as Willebrand's novel—challenged prevailing assumptions about race and intellectual capability. The parallel developments in American and German society reveal similar mechanisms of racial hierarchy construction through exclusion and conditional acceptance.

These transatlantic colonial attitudes manifested differently: Germany's "colonial fantasy" found its American counterpart in concepts like "manifest destiny" and the "civilizing mission" directed at Native Americans and enslaved Africans. The rationale offered by Bhabha and Zantop here is going to frame the dual nature of ambivalence and mimicry, which are going to serve as a prism through which to explore the psychological and structural contradictions of colonial fantasies emerging in Kori's story.

As Bhabha's concept of mimicry indicates, colonial discourses tend to see the colonized as 'almost the same, but not quite,' a phenomenon that mirrors Germany's abstract engagement with colonialism. This theoretical ambivalence—longing for colonial control but not territorial possession—resounds through Willebrand's vision of Kori, who embodies the tensions and contradictions of those desires.

Within the German historical framework, Kori's character does not serve as an ideal figure of German national identity. Still, it is a vehicle through which Willebrand examines the exploits and potentially exploits the colonial fascination with "the other." His experiences must be understood within the context of colonial

narratives, which were generally embodying European powers and notions indicative of the then recent European mind-sets of the 18th century. This historical backdrop prepared Kori for the narration that embodies the ambivalence and contradictions of mimicry.

Plot

Geschichte eines Hottentotten von ihm selbst erzählt centers on Kori, a young man of mixed heritage on his rise and marginalization within Dutch colonial society, which reflects the racial hierarchies and colonial power structures of 18th-century Africa. His position as a tutor and his forbidden love with the Governor's daughter and his eventual exile exemplify the mechanisms of control that sustain colonial dominance while exposing the ambivalence of mimicry as a dual-faced weapon of resistance and means to consolidate European superiority.

While Kori's privileged position within the Governor's household aligns with Bhabha's notion of mimicry, with the colonized subject adopting the cultural norms of the colonizer with a view to securing acceptance, yet this mimicry is ambivalent since Kori's partial assimilation makes manifest the boundaries of this acceptance and thereby reasserts the hierarchy it attempts to dismantle.

Unraveling the Influence of Ethnographic Narratives on European Perspectives

"Geschichte eines Hottentotten" occupies a unique position in literary history, as Halle (2007) observes: "Considered as a literary historical document, *Geschichte eines Hottentotten* is an engaging and illuminating text, despite its obvious aesthetic flaws. It illustrates how non-fictional ethnographic information, much of it unreliable, stemming from recent and contemporary *Reiseliteratur*, about the Khoi Khoi and the Dutch at the Cape of Good Hope was disseminated in Germany and made a broader impact on European perceptions of southern Africa and its evolving ethnic kaleidoscope" (p. 161).

This assessment highlights a common practice among 18th-century German authors: writing authoritatively about places and cultures they had never directly experienced. A parallel example is Sophie von La Roche's *Geschichte des Fräuleins von Sternheim* (1771), which depicted British society sixteen years before the author's first visit to Britain. La Roche constructed her understanding entirely through travelogues (Umbach, 1999), demonstrating how *Reiseliteratur* (travel literature) shaped literary representations of foreign lands and peoples.

The novel's significance extends beyond its aesthetic merits or flaws. As a historical document, it reveals how ethnographic information—often unreliable and filtered through colonial perspectives—circulated in German intellectual circles and influenced broader European perceptions of southern Africa, particularly regarding the Khoi Khoi people and Dutch colonial presence at the Cape of Good Hope.

The approach of depicting Native Americans and Africans by American colonial writers is evidence of a reliance on travel literature and secondhand accounts. Writers imagine narratives about non-European people without directly experiencing the culture. As a result, unreliable sources shape their understanding of the "other." There are two purposes of such literary production. First, they open the discussion of how literary representation contributes to the larger discourse on both sides of the Atlantic. Two, they reinforce existing colonial power structures while claiming ethnographic authority.

Kori's Journey Through Ambivalence, belonging, and Identity

In addition, the relationship between Kori and Leonore brings to light another dimension of complexity involved in the tale: that

the human experience of relationship and empathy can transcend that of race and class differences. Despite the awareness of the obstacle of race and class division hindering their relationship, Kori still holds optimism about its feasibility:

Die Erfüllung unsrer Wünsche wurde durch eine Menge grosser und fast unübersteiglicher Hindernisse schwer gemacht. Aber wo findet die Liebe Schwierigkeiten, die sie nicht zu überwinden hofft! Glänzende Hoffnungen, warum habt ihr doch nicht mehr Wirklichkeit, als ein Traum, oder eine Erscheinung aus leichten Dünsten gewebt, die bey jedem leisen Hauche der Luft zerflattert. (S. 28)

Kori's story reflects themes present in American narratives of mixed-race individuals or "civilized" non-Europeans, paralleling the lives of educated Indigenous peoples and African American intellectuals in colonial America. His forbidden relationship with Leonore echoes the regulated interracial relationships of that era, underscoring shared colonial anxieties about racial mixing. Kori's ambivalent identity, spanning Dutch and African cultures, aligns with Homi Bhabha's concept of "mimicry," where colonized individuals adopt traits of their colonizers to gain acceptance but remain outsiders (Bhabha, 1984). Similarly, W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness" explains the inner conflict of navigating both heritage and a dominant culture that views them as "other" (Du Bois 1903). Kori's "double consciousness" embodies his role as a European subject with African roots, mirroring the transatlantic experiences of many African-descendant individuals facing divided identities. The novel parallels Kori's racial ambiguity with American debates on racial classification, revealing attempts in German colonial imagination to categorize racial differences.

Upon discovering Kori's relationship with Leonore, the Governor, enraged, storms into the room, sword drawn, intending to harm Kori. Leonore's intervention stops her father, as she declares her deep love for Kori and admits her guilt in defiance, supported by others who prevent the Governor from acting violently:

Elender!" rief der Gouverneur, und drang mit entblößtem Degen auf mich ein, "du missbrauchst also meine Güte, um Schande über mein Haus zu bringen, empfangen den Lohn deines Undanks." Mit diesen Worten erhob er den Arm, mir den tödlichen Stoß zu geben, aber Leonore stürzte in seine Arme: "Halten Sie ein, mein Vater!" rief sie mit ängstlichem Geschrei, "ich allein bin schuldig!" Zugleich drangen einige Offiziere, Babet und die Gemahlin des Gouverneurs ins Zimmer und verhinderten ihn, seiner Wut zu gehorchen. (S. 35)

As the story progresses, the themes of identity and belonging fully unfold, as Kori's background is visited, revealing his father's identity as French and his mother as a princess in Cape Coast. Kori oscillates between his identity as a European and African, which brings to the surface the questions of social and racial identity. Willebrand portrays how Kori struggles with acceptance in these two contexts. His situation resonates perfectly with the ambivalence of mimicry propounded by Bhabha, where he mimics European traits to gain acceptance but is rejected as the "other" and Africans who see him as different due to his European heritage.

Through Kori's ambivalent identity, the novel amplifies some stereotypes attached to African natives and the notion of European superiority over African cultures. These stereotypes include derogatory terms such as "savage," "wild beast," "primitive," and "barbarian" were frequently used to describe African characters. One of the stereotypes reflects at the beginning of the novel, where Kori describes African natives as "barbaric."

Ich bin mitten unter einem der wildesten und barbarischen Völkern geboren, die nur irgendwo einen Winkel des Erdbodens bewohnen, mitten unter einem Volke, welches von anderen gesitteten Nationen kaum der Ehre gewürdigt wird, zu den Menschen gezählt zu werden, nämlich unter den Saldanaharen, oder wie man sie in der Sprache meines Vaterlandes nennt, unter den Kochackern; ein cafrisches Volk, welches die südliche Spitze von Afrika bewohnt, und deren Gebiet nur wenige Tagereisen von der Bucht der guten Hoffnung entfernt liegt. (S. 9)

When Kori's father first encounters an African native woman who rescues him, he describes her actions in a patronizing manner, implying that he must use her affection to avoid becoming a "prey to the wild" natives:

Ich war voller Schrecken und wollte mich losreißen, sie aber hielt mich beim Zipfel meines Kleides zurück und machte mir allerlei Liebkosungen; ich begriff bald, daß ich mich in ihrer Gewalt befand und daß ich ihre Zuneigung nützen mußte, um nicht ein Raub der Wilden zu werden. (S. 71).

Similarly, reflecting on surviving a shipwreck, Kori's father further dehumanizes African natives, referring to them as "wild beasts":

Die Betrachtung, daß das Schiff mit allen seinen Reichtümern und mit allen Reisenden vom Abgrund verschlungen, und nur mich dem Verderben entrissen und an diese wüste und unbekannte Küste geworfen worden, um vielleicht wilden Tieren oder unmenschlichen Barbaren zum Raube zu werden: erschreckte mich...(S. 72).

The novel's portrayal of Kori, the Hottentot protagonist, as grateful to his European "benefactors" reinforces colonialist views of European cultural superiority. After Frau von Marwyck asks the Governor to grant Kori a company position, Kori expresses deep gratitude, throwing himself at her feet:

Die Freude war allgemein; ich aber sehnte mich nach dem Augenblick, wo ich der Frau von Marwyck meine lebhafteste Dankbarkeit bezeugen könnte. Dieser fand sich bald nach Tische; ich wartete ihr in ihrem Zimmer auf, und warf mich zu ihren Füßen. Sie hob mich gütigst auf, und versicherte mich ihres Schutzes. Gerne hätte ich gefürchtet, sie durch diese Anerbietung zu beleidigen. (S. 26)

The Governor's wife responds by promising continued generosity if Kori maintains "good behavior":

Leben Sie glücklich, Herr Kapitain," sprach diese großmütige Frau, "wenn Sie fortfahren werden, wie bisher, meine Wahl und meine Freundschaft durch ein gutes Betragen zu rechtfertigen, so wird mir dieses der angenehmste Dank sein, ich werde mich freuen, ihnen ein kleines Glück, und der Kompagnie einen nützlichen Mann verschafft zu haben. (S. 26).

Revealing Ambivalence: Kori's Mimicry, Cultural Superiority, and Identity Formation

At the core of the novel is the influence of European colonialism on Kori's identity and self-perception. In the pursuit of "enlightenment" and social acceptance, Kori displays the willingness to adopt European culture. Homi Bhabha (1984) explains this in his analysis of mimicry as discussed in "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" where Bhabha describes the colonial subject's ambivalence—an urge to imitate the colonizer to gain acceptance, while maintaining a sense of unique identity. According to Bhabha, mimicry is infused with slippage, excess, and difference, preventing full assimilation and sustaining the subject's own identity and culture. These elements—*slippage*, the deviations from exact imitation; *excess*, the overflows of cultural difference; and *difference*, the colonized subject's inherent distinctiveness—

transform mimicry into a subtle negotiation and resistance to colonial domination. In his words, Bhabha (1984) explains that: "If I may adapt Samuel Weber's formulation of the marginalizing vision of castration, then colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same but not quite. To be effective, mimicry must continually produce its slippage, excess, and difference" (p. 122). This nuanced mimicry serves as a tactic within colonial discourse, as the colonizers aim to discipline the colonized, controlling them under the guise of inclusion.

This insight into Bhabha's ambivalence in mimicry helps illuminate the question raised earlier in the essay: how does Kori's character portrayal embody a colonial fantasy that reinforces racial hierarchies and the supposed civilizing role of Europeans? First, the ambivalent nature of Kori's character will be analyzed.

Willebrand's depiction of Kori as an "exotic other" aligns with colonial portrayals of indigenous people as potential "civilized" subjects. This idea resonates with Chinua Achebe's critique of "Heart of Darkness", where Joseph Conrad uses Africa as a mere backdrop for European characters to showcase moral superiority (Achebe, 1977). This shared colonial lens between German and American depictions of Africa reveals a Western preoccupation with reshaping Africans according to European ideals, rationalizing their "civilizing mission."

Kori's pull between his two worlds shapes his identity as he feels disdain for the native South for his "white" skin— a physical feature that points him out as an outsider. Kori narrates how his mother was scared that he would be killed because of his racial difference:

Sie fürchtete alles für sich von der Wuth des Volkes, wenn ihr Vater der König gestorben seyn würde, aber mit noch mehrerm Rechte fürchtete sie mein Verderben, denn die Kochacker bezeugten einen geheimen, unüberwindlichen Abscheu gegen mich; sie betrachteten mich als den Sohn eines Barbaren. Die Weisse meiner Haut war ihnen ein ekelhafter Anblick, und auch auf meiner Mutter warfen sie einen Verdacht, als ob sie die Sitten ihres Vaterlandes verschmähete. (S. 11)

In contrast, when captured and forced to entertain the Governor, Kori is objectified as a curiosity for his lighter skin. The Governor's wife singles him out:

Ich stand da, ohne bemerkt zu werden, und ein Bedienter war eben im Begriff, mich vor sich wegzunehmen, als die Gemahlin des Gouverneurs einen Blick auf mich warf. Sie betrachtete mich über den ganzen Lieb und bewunderte die ungewöhnliche Weisse und Zärte meiner Haut, und schien einiges Wohlgefallen an mich zu finden. (S. 17)

Here, Kori embodies "mimicry" by embodying both European and African traits. His "white" side, perceived with disgust by natives yet fascination by Europeans, complicates any singular racial identity. Willebrand's portrayal extends this theme of ambivalence by showing Kori's internalization of European superiority. Reflecting on his hopes to be treated better as the son of a European, Kori notes:

Jetzt erst fieng ich an, über meinen Zustand nachzusinnen, und bey dem ersten Anblick fand ich ihn so traurig, daß ich bitterlich weinte; bald aber tröstete ich mich, ich hoffte, man würde mir besser begegnen, wenn man nur erst erfahren würde, daß ich der Sohn eines Weissen wäre. (S. 16)

This internal conflict exemplifies Bhabha's idea of slippage—a constant, subtle failure to fully embody either culture. Kori's wish to identify as the son of a white man underscores the ingrained colonial mindset that views whiteness as a source of privilege and acceptance.

The portrayal of Kori's "wild" nature serves as a counterpoint to his European side. Forced into servitude, Kori states:

Wir sollten den Gouverneur und seine Gemahlin mit unsern Landesgebräuchen belustigen. Auf mich gab niemand Achtung, und es war mir angenehm, denn ich schämte mich, meine an gebohrne Wildheit zu zeigen. (S. 16-17)

By representing the colonial gaze toward Kori as both exotic and servile, Willebrand is able to critique colonial binaries, with Kori representing a middle ground between African "primitiveness" and European "civility."

Kori's Life From "Primitive" to "Enlightened"

Another significant theme in the novel is the colonial fantasy of "civilizing" the African people. Kori is presented as a "wild" native African, who through his colonial master has been transformed into an enlightened being. This process seeks to reflect the gracious gesture of the colonizer, thereby improving their image while undermining native cultures. The change here, for Kori, is a loss of identity and an internalization of colonial hierarchies, which does reveal the dehumanizing effects that such fantasies have, as Zantop portrayed.

Kori is handpicked as suitable for "refinement" and positioned as object evidence of European ability to "refine" native Africans to their standards of civility and knowledge. Upon his abduction, Kori's value is immediately tied to his potential for transformation. As the Governor's wife notes upon discovering that Kori can speak broken Dutch:

Sie freuete sich, da sie bemerkte, daß ich einige Worte gebrochen holländisch redete, und trug Blinck auf, mich in allem zu unterrichten; sie versprach ihm große Belohnungen, wenn er mich bilden und von allen rauhen Sitten entwöhnen könnte. Sie wollte mich alle Tage sehen, um sich selbst von meinem Fortgange zu überzeugen und so bald ich fähig dazu wäre, sollte ich ein Gespieler ihrer Tochter, eines Kindes von sieben Jahren seyn. Bis dahin war meine Bestimmung, bey Tische hinter ihrem Stuhle stehen, sie zu bedienen, auch zuweilen in ihrem Gefolge sie zu begleiten, wenn sie Besuch ablegte oder spazieren gieng. (S. 19)

This passage exemplifies the colonial viewpoint that education could strip away Kori's "rough manners" and reshape him into a more "civilized" figure. The Governor's wife envisions Kori's reformation as an experiment, aiming to demonstrate that an African's mind is as capable of refinement as a European's, provided they are exposed to European culture early enough:

Ich will einen Versuch wagen, ob es nicht möglich ist, einen Hottentotten eben so gesittet und gelehrt zu machen, als den besten Europäer, damit ich ihn unsern vaterländischen Philosophen entgegen stellen kann, zum Beweise, daß die Seele eines Hottentotten eben der Feinheit fähig ist, als die Ihrige, wenn sie nur zeitig genug eben dieselbe Culture erhalten hat. (S. 21)

Kori is meant to be used as evidence of the intellectual capacity of Africans when molded by European culture. The process of "civilizing" through education plays into the contemporary colonial narrative, which captures assimilation as an act of benevolence while disregarding the native culture and identity of the colonized. The process implies that without European intervention, Africans remain fundamentally "other" or "inferior," which reveals the underlying prejudice within these so-called acts of enlightenment.

As Kori adopts European education, he internalizes these colonial views, beginning to view himself as intellectually distinct from and superior to his African origins. By the first chapter, Kori's narration reflects this transformation as he distances himself from his "primitive" roots, describing his birthplace

among the Saldanha (Kochackrn) people in deeply negative terms:

Ich bin mitten unter einem der wildesten und barbarischsten Völkern geboren, die nur irgendwo einen Winkel des Erdbodens bewohnen, mitten unter einem Volke, welches von anderen gesitteten Nationen kaum der Ehre gewürdigt wird, zu den Menschen gezählet zu werden, nemlich unter den Saldanharen, oder wie man sie in der Sprache meines Vaterlandes nennt, unter den Kochackrn; ein cafrisches Volk, welche die südliche Spitze von Africa bewohnt, und deren Gebiet nur wenige Tagereisen von den Kolonien entfernt ist, welche die Holländer auf dem Vorgebürge der guten Hofnung angelegt haben. (S. 9)

Kori displays colonial prejudice in this description. He labels the African natives "wild" and "primitives." Kori talked about the unworthiness of the Saldanha people of being counted among "civilized" nations. This buttresses his complete submission to the European systems of superiority and power. Thus, going from "primitive" to "civilized" is an indication that colonial enlightenment operates as a device to institutionalize inequality between the colonized and the colonizers.

Kori's biracial background complicates this narrative further. He experiences an inner conflict between superiority and inferiority, his "civilized" European side juxtaposed with the perceived "savagery" of his African heritage. His dual identity heightens his marginalization, as he is neither fully accepted among Africans nor among Europeans, embodying Bhabha's notion of the "mimic man"—struggling to fit into both worlds but never fully belonging to either.

Moreover, Kori's transformation parallels contemporary narratives of African "enlightenment" in American and European literature. Phillis Wheatley's 1773 poetry publication, for example, similarly demonstrates how African achievements through European education were celebrated to prove the success of "civilizing" efforts while denying full equality to these figures. The same way Wheatley was considered an example of African intellectual potential is how Kori's education is seen as proof of enlightenment when guided by European discipline. Yet, the intellectual potential and capabilities do not equate to acceptance as the colonial institutional structure that maintains the superiority of European culture.

To sum it up, the portrayal of Kori as someone who is now "civilized" demonstrates the idea of colonial fantasy whereby indigenous people are educated to fit European ideals. Kori's cultural identity is thereby fading and positioning him as an eternal "other" in both African and European social contexts. Through Kori's ambivalent transformation, Willebrand critiques the dehumanizing aspects of the colonial endeavor, revealing the hollow promise of equality and the ongoing marginalization embedded within this "civilizing mission."

Kori's Journey: From Marginalization to Complicity in Colonialism

The portrayal of Kori as a poor, helpless, and marginalized slave captured by the Dutch shows the potential of colonialism to economically disempower and dehumanize the colonized. Kori's mother gifted him a book that offers him a glimpse into his intellectual and cultural heritage. The book is his only property, even as the son of a royal family. This emphasizes the narrative of African societies as devoid of material wealth or "enlightened" culture worth acknowledging.

His "helpless" status is cemented by the disdain his people have for him, suggesting that even within his own culture, colonial ideas of worth and power have seeped in, influencing how natives perceive those without European education.

Kori transforms from a servant to a palace official after he spends six years receiving the "proposed enlightenment" of European education and training. This new position, supported by his benefactors, allows him to join the Governor's household, dine with officials, and even receive gifts like a military company, which the Governor's wife procures for him on her husband's birthday:

Sie gab mir den überzeugendsten Beweiß von der Wahrheit ihrer Versicherungen, da sie an dem Geburtstag ihres Gemahls denselben um eine Kompagnie für mich bat, und sie mir auch verschaffte. (S. 22)

The gifting of Kori some military personnel by the governor reflects Kori's official role in the colonial hierarchy, which also allows him some autonomy and financial independence within the colonial economy. On the other hand, this gift is not a privilege as it is contingent on power arrangements and designed to make him a loyal subject of the colonial system. In making Kori's dependence a version of loyalty, the Governor and his wife tame Kori into complicity with the reproduction of colonial power, even as he gains the illusion of autonomy.

When Kori's secret relationship with Leonore, the Governor's daughter, is discovered, the Governor banishes him to Batavia. However, the Governor offers financial support for his new life, providing him with substantial wealth, a yearly stipend, and a large estate where he and his wife Babet can live with their servants:

Für die Austrüstung zu dieser Reise dürfen Sie nicht sorgen. Sie werden alles vorräthig finden und ich werde ihnen nebst einem Beglaubigungsschreiben eine Ordre mitgeben, vermöge welcher ihnen bey ihrer Ankunft achthundert Ducaten ausgezahlt werden sollen, und die Hälfte dieser Summe wird hinfort ihr jährliches Gehalt seyn. (S. 44)

From the wealth and the property given to him by the Governor, Kori is neck-deep within the colonial framework, as he must now use these colonial tools to establish a new life for himself. His marginalization and exile birthed the tools he used to replicate colonial values and systems on his new estate, which he rules according to the European model. The development speaks to the moral ambivalence of colonial relations: how colonial power seduces those it colonizes into complicity with the structures from which they were once oppressed.

What particularly stands out about Kori's treatment of his servant is how colonial hierarchies and violence can be perpetuated from below by those it once subjugated. By internalizing colonial notions of dominance, Kori perpetrates violence against his servant, demonstrating how the cycle of victimization is reproduced within the group over which he has power, now also active members of the colonial system. This mirrors American colonial history, where some freed Black individuals in the antebellum South became slaveholders, participating in the very systems that once dehumanized them. Kori's violence against his servant thus symbolizes how individuals who have experienced oppression can adopt and enact oppressive behaviors within colonial hierarchies, embodying Fanon's notion of the colonized subject's internalized "colonial gaze."

Finally, Willebrand investigates agency within colonial power structures through Kori's transformation, demonstrating how colonialism compromises and then entraps the colonized, reshaping former victims into agents of the colonial enterprise. Readers are confronted with the ambiguities of colonial relationships, which is how the innate drive for acceptance and autonomy can potentially force marginalized subjects into

complicity, while showing how colonial power function not just as a brute external force but with seduction and complicity.

The Duality of Kori of Being Merciful and Brutality in Colonial Context

Kori's cruelty towards the servant woman after his wife's death does indeed represent a significant departure from the characterization that we are first introduced to: a gentle, kind, forgiving man. Kori is framed early on by Willebrand as a merciful character who is willing to pardon even the most grievous betrayals in the name of love and compassion. For instance, when Babet confesses to having ruined his relationship with Leonore, Kori responds not with anger but with compassion, even embracing her and voicing his love, despite the deep pain she caused:

Nein Babet! rief ich und drückte sie in meine Arme, ich hasse dich nicht, ich will dir nicht vorwerfen, daß du meinem Herzen unzählige Qualen verursacht hast, ich verzeihe dir alles, ich liebe dich, möchte doch die Allmacht des Himmels mir dein Leben erhalten, damit ich dir überzeugende Beweise geben könnte, wie sehr ich dich liebe. (S. 52)

However, following Babet's death, this gentleness and compassion evaporate as he turns to violence for revenge against the servant, he accuses of having poisoned her. In a rage he has the servant woman bound to a tree and beaten with thorny branches: „Ich ließ sie an einem Baum binden und mit Dornen peitschen. (S. 53)

This change is a huge contrast of his previous nature and suggests that Kori has absorbed the behaviors and mindsets of his colonizers. Reshaped by colonial standards, he now mirrors the very violence suffered by him under colonialism. His mimicry too was strikingly savage in the colonial sense and showed how colonialism could create a dualism whereby the violence once meted out was merely returned. One can, therefore, consider Kori's action as an embodiment of the colonizers' values. When the colonial system conditioned him to accept violence as a form of discipline, it was consistent with the way the colonial powers ruled over their subjects, in the case of the Dutch. Kori literally embodies this colonial paradigm by violently punishing not even his servant, just as the colonial masters inflict punishment on their subjects. His adoption of colonial cruelty suggests that Kori has come to view authority through a colonial lens, seeing violence as a tool for control and retribution rather than compassion and forgiveness.

In the episode, Kori is portrayed as morally ambiguous – a victim of colonialism and, at the same time, a colonialist. His capacity for both kindness and cruelty testify to the psychological effects of colonial power, as those oppressed by it can come to emulate its hierarchies of power and violence. Portraying Kori in that way makes readers acknowledge the troubling reality that colonialism's power in the external realm penetrates into the souls and minds of the colonized, which often sways them against their own in a cycle of internalized oppression.

Conclusion

The analysis of Kori provides an account of how Willebrand's novel portrays the transnational and psychological effects of colonial narratives. Through intersecting German colonial fantasies, African subjugation, and American racial ideologies, the novel comments on the late 18th-century colonial mindset, which transcends borders and racial contexts. By illustrating Kori's biracial identity, Willebrand gives Kori an archetypal role of the ambivalent colonial subject tugged apart by contradictory cultural expectations.

The character of Kori is an illustration of Homi Bhabha's conceptualization of mimicry in which Kori incorporates into himself the elements of Dutch culture in pursuit of becoming “civilized” under colonial standards, only to be rejected. His position as “white” in the eyes of African natives and “black” to the Dutch colonizers speaks to a racial fluidity that colonial discourse exploited but ultimately disdained. This racial uncertainty reflects colonial control and critiques Kori's failure to commit himself to any of those identities.

The Governor and his wife played out Sussane Zantop's (1997) concept of colonial fantasy when they intend to “civilize” Kori, a case in which the motives to train African natives to European standards. Such desire, however, was not only for the enlightenment of others: it was meant to reinforce the benevolent image of the colonizer. Kori's journey reflects this fantasy; a kind of transformative tale used to validate European superiority and provide a rationale for colonial control. In the end, it held more of a mirror to European self-interest and arrogance rather than any real appreciation of Kori potential as an individual.

In Kori lies the countless lessons of colonialism; the servant used to highlight his savagery has vast implications for the other individuals working under a colonial power structure. This imitation shows the psychological damage of colonialism and the entrenched structures thereof: those marginalized may themselves take the systems of oppression to be theirs and even propagate them. This very complexity corresponds to some of the many narratives in America about “civilized slaves” or American Natives, upon achieving a certain status, would replicate colonial violence and hierarchy.

Finally, one can see in Kori a part of the broader transatlantic legacy, where perceptions of Africa, as stated in Adam Hochschild's “King Leopold's Ghost” justified exploitative practices by representing the African societies as fundamentally primitivist or savage. Willebrand's reference to Kori is a telescoped snapshot of the continuum in which colonial narratives have risen to influence global perceptions of African cultures. Using the respective critical lenses of Bhabha's mimicry and Zantop's colonial fantasies allows this essay to elaborate on the connection between power, identity, and ambivalence in colonial discourse. Kori's story contests the contradictions within the colonial hierarchy but also exposes the psychological and structural mechanisms behind its perpetuation. The two-fold critique places Willebrand's novel as a significant but complicit text in the larger transatlantic colonial imagination.

In noticing these ties, we bear witness to the way in which colonial vision cast selective shadows across numerous narratives, shaping a legacy that still molds modern-day canvases for Africa and Africans. These narratives feed into pressing reminders of the relevance of deconstructing through the mirror of fiction lingering colonial ideologies in literature and media so that from a postcolonial reality, we might adjust a fair, respectful account of African identities.

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