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This is not about cannibals

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Angi has childhood memories of cannibals, which are disturbing for their uncertainty. What she remembers is not remembered by others. Like memories of party nights, these reminiscences are not shared or supported by others. They have something to do with a taboo, and remembering here might also be a taboo.

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`When I was a child, my family and I lived in a very small town in Upper Palatinate, a faraway place in Germany with a really crude dialect. Since our village was so small that there wasn't even a shop or a restaurant, my parents built themselves a party location in our basement, where they could party with their friends until morning. My father designed a postcard wall, where he glued all the postcards that he had received and collected over the years.`

`When I was talking to him in August 2018, we incidentally came across exactly this topic and he told me about the postcards. I was really astonished, because I don't remember that wall at all. Postcards? Hm. No. What I remember was a huge painting on the other wall. A painting with a big green cooking pot in which a person with black skin was boiling. I don't remember the details around the cooking pot. When I told my father this, he was astonished and said, that there was no painting and how I think that he could draw something on the wall which` is against his inner attitude. So I asked my mother and my sister in our WhatsApp group if they remember a painting on the wall (not mentioning, what this painting was showing) and my sister wrote that something, deeply hidden in her memory tells her, that one wall was painted, not remembering what the painting was about. My mother wrote that there were postcards. When I sadly answered that I remember a cannibal painting but nobody else seems to remember, my mother wrote "Angi!!!!! I really cannot remember cannibalism being present in our house".[1]

What has happened to my memory?

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As if a *damnatio memoriae* was imposed on the person in the pot. A decision not to remember such images and the hilarity that went with them, a kind of erasure and of colonial amnesia, which makes it difficult to talk about childhood memories that are about what then, some forty years ago, would have been a matter of tradition and local custom. The cannibalising practices of othering, the parody of mimesis, are practices of others, not of one's own immediate environment. Anne has childhood memories on devouring letter-shaped biscuits.

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My grandparents lived in a small town near Frankfurt, and I often visited them over a weekend. One of the nicest things was to walk over to a little shop with my grandmother in order to buy a few things that would be needed to prepare pancakes and a soup only she would prepare properly. She always bought me a packet of letter-shaped biscuits, which were called *Russisch Brot* 'Russian bread',[2] and a bottle of *Multivitaminsaft*, which is a juice made from all kinds of tropical fruit. The German terms do not sound very exotic, because they denote common commodities; translated into English, they resonate colonised spaces and connections. What I remember as well and my family deems really banal is that the shop sign for a long time, until the nineties perhaps, said *Südfrüchte und Kolonialwaren* – 'Tropical fruit and colonial groceries'. The shop as well as my grandparent's house and all the houses in-between them were certainly built in the 1920s and 1930s, and by the time I spent weekends with my grandparents, in the 1970s and 1980s, most of the formerly colonised parts of the world had become independent. Yet, the anachronistic shop sign was deemed appropriate. I think it oozed solidity: then, *Kolonialwaren* had a strange connotation; they meant quality food in contrast to supermarket fare, freshly roasted coffee and organic fruit – a conceptualisation of the colonial as a remnant of a past that was good and authentic. When I think of it today, I cringe. But then, I happily went back home, led a charmed life and devoured my letter-shaped biscuits.

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[1] Original: *Angi!!!!! Ich kann mich an cannibalism bei uns wirklich nicht erinnern.*

[2] Etymologically, *Russisch* most likely derives from *rösch* 'crisp', not 'Russian'.

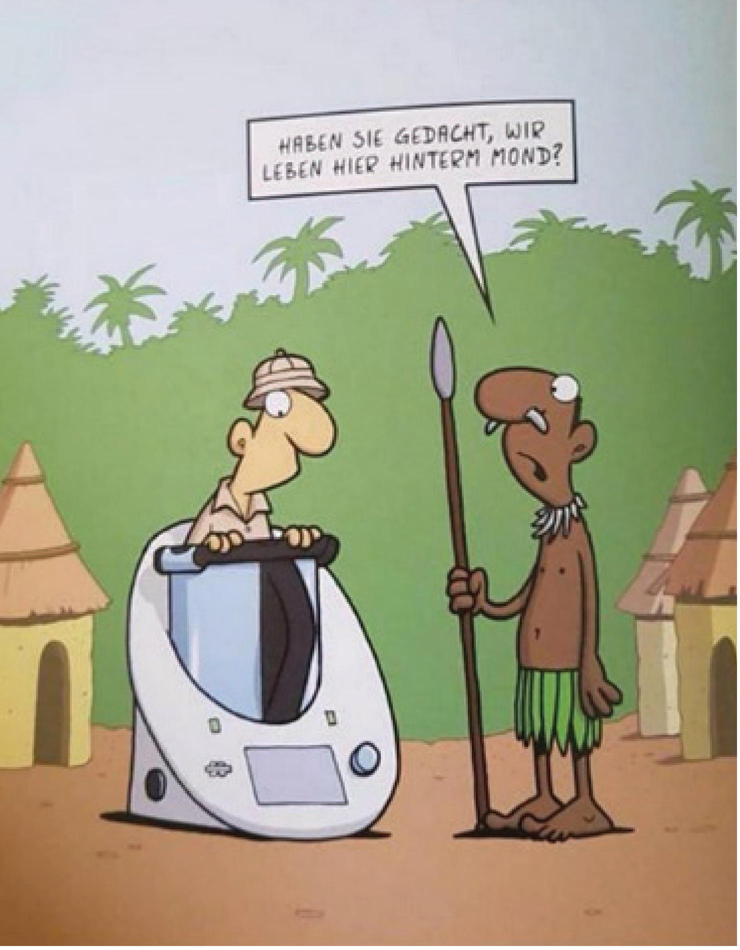
HABEN SIE GEDACHT, WIR LEBEN HIER HINTERM MOND?

Figure 1. Cannibal caricature post (Facebook)

The cannibal image has been removed from the walls of party rooms as well as anachronistic shop signs have been exchanged for the signs of brands and chains. In their work on *Forbidden Words*, Keith Allan and Kate Burridge think about the cannibal as a subject of linguistic taboo and censorship. Not only in colonial and post-colonial contexts, but generally: "Behind every rule of table etiquette lurks the determination of each person present to be a diner, not a dish" (Allan & Burridge 2006: 187). The overwhelming presence of the inherent violence in turning animals and plants into food is, the authors suggest, the motivation for the taboo itself, which of course did not prevent people from turning other people into food throughout history (see Dixon 2017 for a different approach to linguistic memory). But not speaking about cannibalism and making images of the cannibal and of the pot is something else; not a taboo at all it seems, but a matter of censorship:

> These days the expression cannibal, like primitive and savage, tends to be avoided because of its racist overtones. The highly coloured cannibal narratives of the early chroniclers were an effective way of justifying the activities of the 'civilized' colonizers – human sacrifice and flesh-eating are 'savage' practices, and people who eat other people are not quite human. European invaders either converted them to Christianity or had few qualms about wiping them out entirely. Perhaps knowing these details makes many guilty westerners reluctant to believe accounts of cannibalism. They are the stuff of folklore, literature and racist jokes. Cartoons of painted natives stewing their victims (missionaries or big game hunters with pith helmets intact) in large pots over open fires persisted into the 1960s. (Allan & Burridge 2006: 187 f.)

They persist until now. A post of a cartoon by a German cooking class participant shows that the pot has been upgraded, but the motif remains the same. "Did you think we live on the other side of the moon?", the tribal-looking man on the right asks and hence states that he as the cannibal is up-to-date with modern kitchen accessories.

Censorship and political correctness are mocked in a very revealing way here. Even though the motif is no longer considered appropriate, it remains present, as a reminder of the colonial unconscious that bears no allochronic shop sign, but translates fluently into hypermodern kitchen gear and fusion cuisine. Making erasure visible and throwing the hidden back into people's faces, caricatures have the possibility to tell multiple stories – about the continuity of colonial images, and how the unconscious speaks back, the incapability to address colonial experiences and legacies in an appropriate self-critical way, and – importantly – about the materiality of colonialism. There is the notion of the pot that continues to exist, and then the image itself, which as such forms part of a large mass of images that all show the monstrous other. In her book on *The Colonial Art of Demonizing Others*, Esther Lezra (2014) shows how patterns of the past persist in the present in complex ways. These images, like all images and texts, are intertextual and show that what can be seen as well as that what cannot be seen. Lezra therefore argues that they do not only depict colonised people as counter-images – monstrous and savage – but also depict the violent, monstrous self.

At this point, the little cartoon has an uncanny connotation. Consider the consequences it has for our thought about our traditions and customs: in order to know who we are, to see ourselves, we are always in need of the other, the mirror through which our nervous system receives proof that we are really there. Identity and face are relational concepts, the other is always already there. Intertextuality again – that what we read in the other and in our own appearances belongs together as threads that make a complex tapestry. And here, that what is seen as a reflection of the self is a funny little cannibal. George Lipsitz, in his introduction to Lezra's work, argues that all these images of the other – evil, distorted and foreign – ultimately construct the evil through a gaze that perceives the other as evil. And through the evil other, knowledge of the evil done by the Self shines through:

> Europeans fashioned images of monstrous Blackness as projections of their own guilt and as justifications for the brutality that conquest and colonization required. These images then became crucial to European and North American self-identity, portraying themselves as defenders of civilization rather than predatory conquerors and explorers. (Lipsitz 2014: ix)

Images interfere with knowledge, and vice versa. Colonial art depicts and illustrates, it ascribes and serves as proof. The monstrous other who is also the violent self in a contradictory way is both phantasy and evidence. The cannibal, either in the pot (as in Angi's childhood memory), or next to it, is, according to Heike Behrend (2011: 44) "the radical Other of Victorian science". Through practices and performances of the carnivalesque, she writes, the cannibal endures. Party rooms, cartoons, food, drinks, transgressions. To Behrend, these are never banal concepts, objects and practices, but symbols of the possibility of an utopia that is about regaining completeness:

> It is the inversion of the social order that unites the carnivalesque, (cannibal) ethnographies and utopian hope. Thus, cannibalism in the Western world forms a continuum of positive as well as negative meanings and practices: at one extreme, cannibalism is a somewhat suspicious figure of transcendence, an act of union and love, an utopian yearning for a lost unity and oneness, thereby bridging even the divide between eating and being eaten; at the other side of the continuum, cannibalism is an abominable

> act that not only attempts to kill but also to annihilate its victim. The two extremes are mediated by carnivalesque transgressions and laughter. (Behrend 2011: 44)

There are different ways to laugh, we suppose, amused or bitter, depending on how mediation works. Cartoons, in their flatness and precarious duration, might invite a chuckle. Other carnivalesque representations elicit different emotions, such as surprise or anger. What, for example, if the other, the object of Victorian science, the reflection of the self, does not wish to stand next to the pot any longer, but flatly rejects the image and trope?

Angi has had other experiences with cannibalism, this time at a Kenyan beach.

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It is a sunny, but an acceptable and not too hot day in a September in Diani Beach, Kenya. I am out on the beach, walking like a tourist who has a lot of time, enjoying the holiday. But I am not a tourist. I am on research, a word that might sound wrong in the ears of my linguist colleagues for a research place like that. I am working on language, discourse and styles among the 'beach boys' as well as on language and ideologies among the tourists, which means, that my "field" is the beach and my uniform is a bathing suit. I amble together with three, four, sometimes five young men, who are accompanying my steps, thoughts, movements. It is hard work to listen carefully to their language and to remember what they tell, ask and show me. An hour of walk is hard work and so I excuse myself after that time, turn round and head back towards my hotel in order to write down the experiences and data. A man approaches me, on his hand a little girl, maybe 5 years old, on her face a painted green butterfly, which matches the wonderful green dress that she is wearing. I smile, but not too loud, because I don't want to talk anymore. "Hello, how are you", I am greeted and I greet back, but still not too friendly.

"You don't have to be scared of my dark skin. I won't do you any harm. I am not a cannibal!"

What am I supposed to say to an address of welcome of that kind? I stammer words like "no no" and "I am not scared" and am scared like hell as I am trying to imagine how to present this meeting in a talk. We continue talking and the man is trying to sell aloe vera juice to me, which I don't need and thus reject the business. The man looks miserable, as he becomes aware that he is not going to earn money this time and he tells me, that it's his daughter's birthday today and that they have no money to celebrate. I leave them with a little less money than I had before and with a feeling that I have to sort out my experiences anew and include the forgotten cannibalism in them.

The conversation was held in English, the official language of Kenya besides Swahili. But the cannibal strategy was possible in German as well, since the Beach Boys are multilingual and adapt repertoires of European languages to `their varying working spaces on the beach. In a beach area where mostly Germans, British and Polish tourists have their favourite hotels, the Beach Boys are able to use the same phrases in the respective European languages.`

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As our project continued and we spent more time at beaches, especially those right in front of hotels that catered to northern package tourists, we understood that the man employed a strategy that was common. In order to enhance one's chances in selling what one was supposed to sell, it was necessary to create attention and some kind of emotional investment. Declining numbers of tourists had resulted in a dramatic situation for the beach vendors, who found it increasingly difficult to sell – nobody there to sell things to – and who said that most visitors took to passing them by without even a greeting or a nod. *Du brauchst dich nicht zu fürchten, ich tu dir nichts! Ich bin kein Kannibale!* 'Don't be afraid, I will not harm you. I am no cannibal,' was a frequent reply to denial, refusal and ignorance: in German, the language mostly spoken by the tourists around. The 'beach boys', as the vendors are called, invest into language as well as into skills of emotional manipulation, and this results in encounters at the beach that bring out that what might be hidden behind the obscene and hilarious performances of the carnivalesque: that the carnival does not erase social inequalities and injustice. And if tourists would not respond adequately, for example by giving a tip or buying something, the performance would change:

Ihr mögt keine Menschen, ihr mögt nur Tiere!
'You don't like humans, you only love animals!'

And then some swear words. The vendors here comment on colonially established practices, such as the safari and the construction of "Africa" as a space of otherness, in which wilderness and animals are used to construct an image of alterity and allochrony (Wainaina 2006, Fabian 1983). Speaking back, in a mocking, bitter way. Ana Deumert (2014: 154), referring to Bakhtin's understanding of the carnival, writes that "without laughter, there cannot be carnival". Laughter at this beach is short-lived; it has a bitter sound and does not "purify[y] from dogmatism, from the intolerant and petrified; [it does not] liberate[…] from fanatism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didactism, naïveté and illusion, from the single meaning, the single level, from sentimentality" (Bakhtin 1984: 23, cited in Deumert 2014: 154). It brings all this to attention, makes clear that no carnival of laughter will be possible at this beach, in such neocolonial settings.

Yet, there is a play with hilarity. We were thinking about the possibilities of mock language at one point. There are some good arguments for this. Mock language has been in the focus of sociolinguistic research for some time now, directly or indirectly feeding into debates on the linguistic effects of globalization and the diversification of speaker communities. Mostly, practices of mocking the language of others have been analyzed as forms of linguistic hostility and as genres of impoliteness, with a salient connotation of racist exclusion. This is largely due to the impact of Jane Hill's important work on Mock Spanish and racism in everyday language practices (Hill 1998). Hill described mocking imitations of Spanish aimed at, or referring to, historically Spanish-speaking people in anglophone Northern America. Her work has contributed substantially to a better understanding of how mock language is used in order to stigmatise particular social groups. Inserting imitated Spanish linguistic material – such as phonological features and prosodic markers, lexical material, syntactic features – into English is, according to Hill's analysis a salient part of the strategies that help to discursively construct racialised Others. An example would be the affixation of Spanish grammatical elements to non-Spanish words, as in *no problem-o* 'no problem', or *el cheap-o* 'low quality product' (Hill 1998: 682). There also is a jocular element in all this, something playful, which contributes to the indirectness of mocking as racialised and pejorative discourse, as in German constructions that mimic American English-based Mock Spanish such as *el Blond-o* 'blonde-haired male' (referring to an actually brown-haired member of an all-male gang in the sitcom *Tatortreiniger*, Feldhusen 2015). In spite of its playfulness in certain contexts, its major function, Hill suggests, remains "the elevation of Whiteness" (1998: 682).

A similar interpretation is suggested by John M. Lipski, who, in a contribution on foreigner talk or "Tarzanic", suggests that these language practices in their perfect imperfectness exaggerate the comic element of the inferior Other: they express ideas about the black Other who mimes Whiteness and reproduces concepts of alterity. Lipski demonstrates that stereotyped foreigner talk expresses "emotions and attitudes [that] have ranged from racism to surreal humor, but a common denominator is the inferiority of the 'other' as 'demonstrated' by the inability to use language properly" (Lipski n.d.: 32).

Jonathan Culpeper's work on the language of impoliteness highlights the mimetic character of such practices: Self and Other belong together in what he calls "implicational impoliteness [through] mimicry and echoic mention" (Culpeper 2011: 161). The pejoratively racialised and stigmatised Other here is an echo of the Self, an imitation of hegemonic evaluations of Otherness. Such "caricatured re-presentation", Culpeper writes,

> involves quoting someone, and a quotation in spoken face-to-face interaction will involve features of the original accent and gestural behaviour as well. But if one quotes 'too much' (e.g. all the original speaker's prosodic features) the quoter becomes 'suspect'. [… But] [w]hat exactly counts as 'too much'? To recognise a 'quotation' as such and to infer the speaker's meaning requires inferential work. (2011: 161)

The 'too much' in mock language as echoic irony seems to be not only a 'too much' of mimicked linguistic features or of performativity, but also a 'too much' of the echoed: not a single person, but an entire category of people who are constructed as a coherent grouping along racial and social parameters.

Samy Alim, in a programmatic contribution to the newly-emerging field of raciolinguistics, suggests that such phenomena are at the core of "the increasingly vexed relationships between race, ethnicity, and language in a rapidly changing world" (2016: 5) and consequently deserve particular attention as language practices that consistently seem to characterise sociolinguistic contexts in globalised settings. In a case study on "inverted Spanglish", Jonathan Rosa (2016) exemplifies what this might look like: even though mock language stigmatises groups racialised as marginal, foreign, and so on, it is, in an accelerated way, used in an inverted form by those who are originally mocked – as a way of speaking back, of gaining access to strategies of self-authorship, and of performing language rights.

As a messy picture emerges, we seem to reach a point where things are less clear. Who speaks, after all, and to whom? We might no longer simply ask about the meaning of words and the identity of speaker and audience, but questions such as the following:

> What was the situation? Who was present? What kind of person said it? What was intended? […] [W]hile my own perspective recognizes that language meaning is always shaped by the context of use and that it may often take unpredictable paths, diverse public understandings of racist words, including both "folk" and "scholarly" theories of language (Hill 2008), are important to acknowledge. In addition, by evaluating anti-racist strategies in terms of how they engage with these language ideologies, we can explore why certain strategies, such as satire, carry a potential to significantly shift public consciousness […]. (Chun 2016: 82)

While most of the influential work on mock language has focused on English-speaking societies of the global north, or almost entirely on anglophone North America, it might be a timely task to enquire about the practices and meanings of mock language elsewhere (e.g. Nassenstein in print). What about other contexts where imbalanced heteroglossia is an important aspect of everyday experiences of speakers? What about other language ideologies coming into play? Alexandra Aikhenvald (2003) describes the performance and evaluation of mock speech in a multilingual setting in the Amazon. Among speakers of Tariana, linguistic exogamism is rationalised as a means to distinguish one's own group from others. The use of languages other than Tariana in a mocking way indexicalises not simply otherness, Aikhenvald suggests, but differences in being Other:

> Those who use Portuguese words to "show off" their knowledge, or use them when a Tariana equivalent is readily available, get ridiculed, albeit behind their back: They are nicknamed "white people" who "have no language at all." […] "Mock Baniwa" has over- tones of friendly teasing. In contrast, mixing elements of the few surviving Tariana dialects is almost as bad and as dangerous as using the Tucano languages in inappropriate circumstances. Inserting Portuguese into one's Tariana, beyond in- evitable necessity, implies that one intends to break with being Indian and to acquire power in the greedy and negative (though coveted) white man's world. "Mock Portuguese" is a semiotic index used to condemn this ethnic stereotype. (Aikhenvald 2003: 15-17)

Aikhenvald describes a situation in which mock language practices reflect experiences of formerly balanced multilingualism turning into imbalanced communicative practices, whereby Tariana slowly disappears from the repertoire. More or less clear power-based binarities, as in Hill's work, do not seem to make sense here; mock language does other things than enhance hegemonic relations. This is an important for finding an approach to mock language elsewhere, in other settings shaped by colonialism. Let us travel. "Travelling is so important! Seeing new things!" (Deumert p.c. 2018). Angi and Anne have traveled indeed, to a carnivalesque paradise. While Angi is elsewhere for a moment, Anne reminiscenses.

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NOTE BOOK, DAY 1. We arrive early. Three forms to fill, questions nearly the same in all of them, and visa issued quickly. Outside payment to the shuttle bus driver, and an hour of waiting in his minibus for just one more guest. Finally, a man approaches us, asks nothing, says nothing, greets not. Leaves his baggage to the bus driver to be stowed away, watching him suspiciously. A wall close to the airport road is decorated with murals of postcolonial heroes. I can read 'Frants Fanon' written below a large portrait. Mombasa's periphery in the early morning: an enclave between places where life might be easier; cosmopolitan tristesse, groups of migrants from Somalia and elsewhere who seek work that is not easy to find. A ferry crowded by people hurrying to town, Chinese ships anchored in the roadstead. Markets, then farmland and in-between villages. In Diani shop signs that promise souvenirs and safari trips and the pompous gateways of hotels that tell tales of the paradise, but all closed down. Finally, our hotel, which is one of very few that still have guests and operate normally. Its architecture elicits Africa in many ways: imitations of elephant tusks, imitations of palm trees, imitations of buildings, streams, waterfalls, architecture. All is included in what we paid, a non-place *de luxe* where one will spend happy times, free, relaxed and grounded. A paradise.

Time is absent here. The only greeting one hears is *jambo*[3], no good mornings good evenings good nights, and no pragmatically complex language, no expressions of politeness that would convey status and hierarchy. The place is designed in ways that shut anything unexpected and surprising out – a normed pool and standard room guarantee a steady flow of daily routines. Outside, on the beach this might be different, but we are not yet there. Wearing a pink plastic bracelet, I am entitled to all this, the *jambo* and the coffee and the clear water of the pool. Other guests are like me, pink plastic around their wrists, sitting together in small groups and talking in German about a recent trip to Mallorca or last night's supper. Couples of elderly white men and young women who are not white. An Indian family with cell phones that play Bollywood songs. Almost any interaction with the staff of the hotel produces exclamations of *hakuna matata*, no problem.

And there are no problems. Everything is provided for – the safari trip for those who have not yet had the opportunity, an ego boost for those who look worn out from a cold northern summer, and attention for those who seem lonely:

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[3] *Jambo* is the typical Swahili greeting in the tourist areas of Kenya. It is a short form of *hujambo* 'how are you (sg.)' which has to follow the rules of conjugation according to the person addressed (e.g. *hamjambo* 'how are you (pl.)').

> Safari ham wa schon?
> 'Safari done already?'
>
> Du bist ja Schokolade, du bist nicht Käse.
> 'You are chocolate, not cheese.'
>
> Wo ist der Papa? [Nicht da.] Ah. Aber du bist gut, noch gesund, du kannst noch Liebe. Du musst nicht alleine sein. Ich bin Papa Afrika. Nikolaus! Ich mach es dir schön!
> 'Where is daddy? [Not around.] Ah. But you are good, still healthy, you still can make love. You don't need to be lonely. I am Daddy Africa. Santa Claus! I let you have a good time!'

The man who makes this generous offer stands on the other side of the little hedge that demarcates the border between the hotel grounds and the beach and waves at me as I stand on the veranda of my room. He wears a red bonnet over his dreadlocks: Santa Claus, performed as an upgraded version that even has a sexuality. He uses colloquial German that he has learned from the tourists over the years, with no salient trace of the transgressive language of the beach.[4]

There are no strangers in this hotel, but people who form separate units: the old-young German-Kenyan couple, the group of Germans who have been here before and now greet the animator at the pool like an old dear friend. He announces that water gymnastics will start just now and turns on the music. A small group of shyly smiling women assembles in the pool. Each exercise is performed ten times: "raise your left arm, one two three, now the right arm, can you count?" A woman counts in Gujarati, and the others repeat what she says. Then there is counting in German, Swahili, and then they run out of language. The animator steps in: "Do you have your *nabo are uni*? Let's count in Maasai." And they count in Maa, which they perhaps have done before in their safari camps, a week ago. And again, they run out of language. "Now let us count in Cameroonian, in my language", the animator says. And counts, and I begin to wonder. As they repeat what he says I keep on making notes and recordings of this multilingual pool party. How wonderful: a daily ritual (always at three pm) of linguistic diversity, counting in order to count the languages that come together here. A paradise. And so diverse. The animator is even from Cameroon.

Later, I asked one of his colleagues why he had come from West Africa to work precisely here. Were there more people from outside Kenya? This was really about the sociolinguistics of globalization: how tourism brought all this together, even here, even in the crisis.

"He is also from Kenya, he is just pretending", the colleague said. And why?

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[4] (Nassenstein 2016, Mietzner 2018)

`“Because the Cameroonian footballers are good. It is fun.”`

`Throughout my stay, there would be joking about Cameroon and Kenya, counting in tongues, and performances of being foreign. Stereotypes of the exotic and strange were played out in evening entertainment shows and morning gymnastics, guarded beach walks and glocalised birthday parties. Because the Cameroonian numbers had been so good, reminiscent of my former experiences with West African Benue-Congo, I googled “Cameroonian counting”, and quickly found a YouTube clip on the numbers in Ewondo`[5]`. This tutorial, targeted at those who enjoy – or need – language, made its way into the pool, as a strategically used resource in order to broaden a repertoire.`

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Counting makes sense in multilingual settings that involve trade. However, the counting game at the pool seems to fit so nicely into Jan Blommaert’s understanding of truncated multilingualism and the use of the Internet (among other resources) as an instrument that offers “opportunities for homogenization and uniformization at one level of communicative structuring […]” (2010: 133). The messy and diverse make-up of such repertoires reveals differences and structural inequalities, Blommaert suggests, that

> are fundamental to an understanding of sociolinguistic reality, because a repertoire is never ‘flat’ and smooth, but always chequered and truncated, and thus reflective of the lives of real people in real social environments. The mobility of people increases the visibility of the differences between repertoires. (ibid.)

Language “distorted by processes of mobility” (Blommaert 2010: 197), such as in the example of Ewondo, gets dislodged from imposed forms of representation, such as the language documentation archive it comes from here. And because Blommaert asks us to historicise these processes, as “contemporary sociolinguistic realities of globalization [that] articulate old and new patterns of inequality” (Blommaert 2010: 197), it is obvious to conclude that the colonial past that has not passed in sociolinguistic environments such as the Kenyan all-inclusive hotel plays a role here: ethnicist stereotypes (safari and the Maasai), ideologies about national languages (“Cameroonian”) and the commodification of language (counting language in the pool) clearly were in the center of the performance.

But then there were other performances, later at the poolside: mocking local (Kenyan) ways of speaking while even more mockingly in excessive inversion performing Cameroonian ways of speaking. A hilarious mock French call for applause: *biga biga biga biga biga plause!* [biga biga biga biga biga plO:z]. Counting in “Chinese”, using invented numbers, mimicking prosody and voice: *yi – cher – ling – chang – ching – tsim – sung – er – tsi – chu*. “We have many Chinese in Kenya, that’s why”, he said. It was reminiscent of all the mocking and imitating that took place at the beach, just outside the hotel premises, which never felt so funny but rather difficult. After all, there, where the hotel now stands used to be a sacred forest and a fishermen's village, which were all removed in order to make way for a tourism industry that has now ceased to be profitable. This phantasmatic return of the sea (Taussig 2018) leaves us with ambiguous feelings.

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[5] A Bantu language of Cameroon; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ypbUOrtZiFg

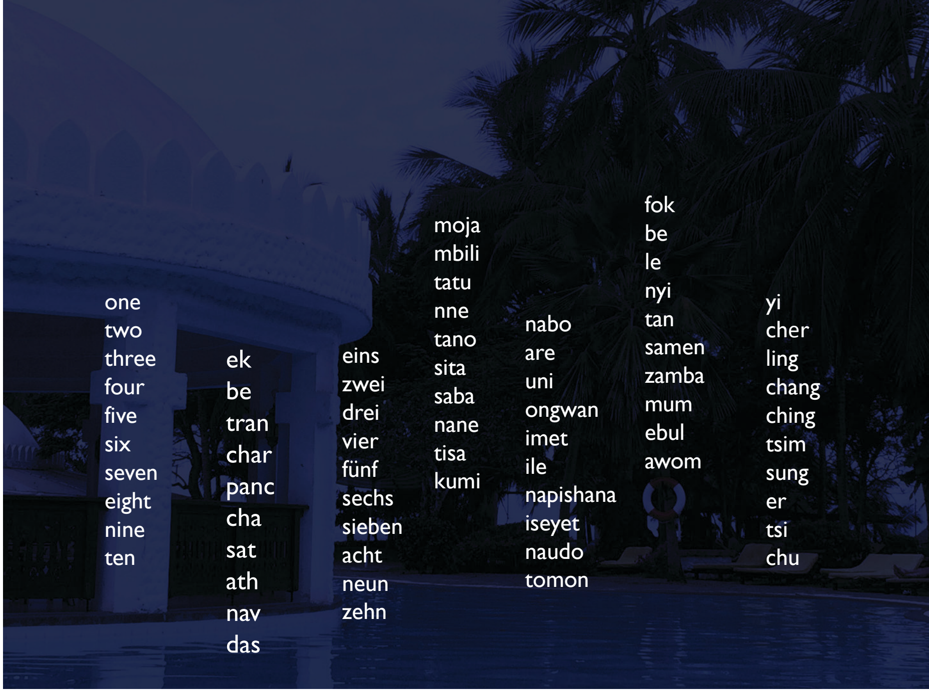
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Figure 2. Pool numbers (photo AS)

Even though the linguistic othering that happened at the poolside was more a bit different – by any means it was a strategy to bring people together, for example in order to participate in water gymnastics – it was unsettling too: how could one estimate the degree of hilarity it might be able to reach, and how could one ever be sure whether the animator would not change his strategy and make others the subject of mirth. And then the tourists who usually all remained unscathed rose from the pool waters, chatting and smiling and joking, and continued to greet each other and differed from those who had not been in these seemingly magical waters, by waving at each other again when they met once more during the evening shows. While the other guests tended to remain amongst themselves, unapproachable like passengers in a German suburb train, the 'counters' had changed: they now were connected to each other and to the animator and even to those who made fun of him. Pleasant events, good food, cool drinks and so on would now be commented by shouting *biga biga biga biga biga plause* (or simply *biga biga biga biga biga*), and in the end some of those who did water gymnastics again contributed to the invention of new numbers, in languages we had never heard of.

What kind of mimicry and mock echoing was going on here? What kind of shared group identity was constructed by this diverse, inconsistent and divergent group? What could be gained through mocking whatever language practice possible? And why was it so likable? And why was any other practice similar to this one likable and not offending in the first place? What about Santa Claus? And cannibals?

We have been thinking much about these contradictory impressions. Even though we felt deeply disturbed about the ubiquitous commodification of all there is – bodies, emotions, identity, language, taste, the sun, the water, the beach – we much liked Nikolaus Papa Afrika and the animator: there was irony, and distance, in spite of transgression and objectification. After a while we saw how relationships were established that could have been meaningful in many different ways. So, what about connectedness then? These mocking practices at the pool and even the beach seem to be different from what we first thought they were, namely hostile language and stigmatizing performance. Obviously, the questions asked by Elaine W. Chun make a lot of sense, especially this one: What was intended? But how could we know?

Perhaps one needs to turn the gaze not at structure (not at the hotel buildings and terraces and pools; not at truncated multilingualism – what an inconsistent term), but at fluidity, at the beach and at language that is overflowing there, that is too much for just a single body. For this beach, among others, has been and still is a site of connectedness. Elder men we talked to said that certain stretches of the beach are inhabited by spirits, who also have villages, but under water. Some spirits can mount the *ngalawa* and make them sink. One needs to be attentive. The beach is a liminal space that connects people, spirits, places, and so on.

Language that sounds like language but cannot be translated in the usual sense of the word is ubiquitous there. And as we were gazing out of a window, looking at the beach which unfolded as a theatre where players of different origins and ages performed their roles, we felt reminded of what we had read and learned about Zar and Bori, among other forms of spirit possession: performances that, as Fritz Kramer had assumed, could be understood as ethnography of the Other, knowledge from below. The use of language that was merely a mimetic interpretation of Other language could, in this sense, be read as a performance of local linguistic theory and of an attempt to theorise difference. Moreover, possession as a body technique could evoke and could shut out the spirits. And because spirits almost always have this Otherness in them, their domestication in ritual practices such as Zar also has the connotation of *inviting the Other in*. This can be for purposes of healing, increasing agency, memory, and so on, depending on context.

What the theatre at the beach continued to show was the strong connotation of connectivity that was in all these forms of mimetic language, in all these echoes of the Other's presence. Mimicking Other language certainly was ambiguous and polysemic. Yet, the notion of connectivity seemed of particular importance. The mocking interpretations of Chinese, Cameroonian, and so on, had something utterly inviting and hospitable in them: as if these performances were also meant to remind ourselves of the relationships we have with others, in the historical sense of the word (as heritage and shared experience), as well as in the sense of something that is emergent and never completed. Languages that are elicited in these settings therefore might more adequately be understood not as truncated repertoires but as performances of connectivity. These snippets of Otherness and relatedness are ambiguous metaphors that are *complete* – very abstract and very short, but highly agentive substance, which has the power to heal and to ruin. In the pool, there was healing: hospitality and a feeling of liberty, namely to use language even though one might not know much of it, and to connect to each other.

This suddenly makes these tourism spaces appear less banal and very complex instead. In her work on Zar practices across the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf, Sara Zaveree has highlighted the meanings of language performances as performances of shared connections, across time and space. Language and place in these epistemologies are multiple and not fixed. Places are mobile and so are spiritual concepts, which include language. Hence, even though the audience of the animator and of the performers down at the beach might have had a different take at the semiotics of echoed, mimicked, or invented language, there obviously was some shared knowledge about the possibilities of establishing relationships through these language practices. In other words, the opacity of other minds does not bar us from hospitality: "the world of the individual is always a social world", Alessandro Duranti (2015: 209) reminds us, where the speech (acts) of others might based on intentions that are grounded in diverse social and cultural contexts. If we want to make sense of the speech acts of those we encounter in these diverse settings, Duranti suggests, we "should be looking beyond what individual speakers might have meant, known, or understood at the time of producing those acts and focus […] on social contexts, social relations, and consequences of effects of particular acts" (2015: 210).

At the beach and the poolscape just next to it, we are faced with a multiplicity of contexts, relations, and effects. And these are evasive: the geographies of the languages that are at stake there are not fixed. Therefore we call them soft geographies here – malleable and adaptable, hospitable. Not rigid, but inviting, not alienating but open. Yet still, stigmatizing and as effects of the performance at the beach also marginalizing. Duranti, with reference to Heidegger's observation that the Other is always already there, regardless of what the focus of our intentions may be, suggests that

> [d]ifferent cultural traditions may or may not recognize or encode in their language the wide range of our human ways of being-with-others, but we know that they are there. Our intentions, together with our language, are always in a world of others. (2015: 232)

In the usual linguistic or sociolinguistic text, these worlds of others are not the worlds of the linguists' others; they are the worlds that linguists explore, as others' spaces and contexts, and the other who is in them is the others' other. Linguists, in other words, do not form part of a world of others, they are in a world apart, looking at what happens in a distance. To suggest that this might be a misconception and that they actually are also present in these worlds, already scripted by the places they choose to work at – as tourists, missionaries, development aiders, influential professors, fools – tends to elicit discourse on the OBSERVERS PARADOX. "Of course", somebody would say, "we are part of the research setting which we at the same time observe. This is such a paradox!" But is it really?

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After working on our project for two years, having spent time in the field at mass tourism destinations in the Mediterranean and in East Africa, we travel to a conference. African linguistics, dynamics, new concepts. How interesting. A brief meeting with a colleague whom we haven't seen for a while: "So you are here? Haven't you stopped doing real linguistics?", she asks. Later, we are told how, at a different meeting, other colleagues thought it was quite shocking, but also really funny how we went on holidays all the time and pretended that this was linguistic work. "They do a weird kind of linguistics there at Cologne", somebody had said. We wonder why. Haven't they had a look at our publications, which are online, open access? We also wonder what was going on there in terms of disciplining, demarcating the boundaries of the discipline. Outside the discipline, such research had been received with much interest; inside the discipline it was as if we had violated a taboo.

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At the mass tourism sites, the beaches and pools, everything seems banal. Intellectuals do not go there, they spend their leisure time at cultural sites, or hike in the hills. Linguists are not wearing beach costumes and are not approached by sex workers, and they are not supposed to be mocked at by their 'informants'. Linguists are experts, they have methodologies, wordlists and other questionnaires, and they lead semi-structured interviews. Linguists are in control. But we weren't. We stood at the beach, in a swimming costume, and we were what the place and those present there made us into. We had bodies, and we had private life experiences which all the time interfered with our research – and had to.

Our work and presentations, the images we had shown in our powerpoints and the critical questions we raised – about the 'field' and the 'informant' – must have touched upon taboos surrounding expert bodies and expert identities. And like in other contexts of taboo violation, a form of silencing and indirect punishment had been the consequence.

A discussion on the presence of the researcher's body that has been led in anthropology since several decades now has touched upon some of these experiences in a very critical way. Don Kulick (1995: 3) analyses the contrast between the ubiquitous, nude and sexualised 'native' bodies and the rarely visible, clad and controlled body of the anthropologist as one of the most problematic aspects of anthropological text production:

> Sex – their sex, the sex of 'the Other' – has always constituted one of the gawdiest exhibits in the anthropological sideshow. It has provided endless fodder for reflection, speculation, and flourish. In pondering what it is that anthropologists actually do, one can readily agree with Clifford Geertz that much anthropological work (and a great deal of the fun doing that work) consists of 'keep[ing] the world off balance … pulling out rugs, upsetting tea tables, setting off firecrackers' (1984: 275). But to that list of mischief, one might add a time-tested shenanigan that Geertz neglected: peeping through keyholes and broadcasting what we see there. Thus, in addition to Geertz's 'Australopithicenes, Tricksters, Clicks and Megaliths' (1984: 275), anthropologists also peddle polyandry, puberty houses, *baloma* conceptions, subincision, ghost marriage, ritual defloration, chiefly incest, homosexual insemination, and sleep crawling. Merchants of astonishment indeed.

Sex, and that includes besides that what Kulick mentions, cannibalism and carnival, is what the other does and has. The researcher – anthropologist or linguist – has no erotic subjectivity that would by any means form part of his or her writing, and has no body (unless a SUFFERING BODY): "partial selves" is what Kulick (1995: 15 f.) calls the researchers' selves in the field. Figure 3 stands in no relation to the erotic subjectivity of the researchers present in this text, but shows bodies, as they were when a painting of a cannibal might have been present in a party room, way back then. Those who look closely may spot a little black-skinned doll, which was named Molly.

And these partial selves are not only selves that lack erotic subjectivities, but also reflexivity, childhood memories, non-disciplinary textual practice, and every-day banality. Such constructions reveal continuities of coloniality that are part of power inequalities which still shape academic production of knowledge (Connell in print): the 'expert' is as strange a construction as the 'informant', and as much a commodity as the latter, or as language itself (Storch submitted). Moreover, the discipline's definition of what is 'proper' and what not here hides complex and messy experiences of ambiguity and insecurity, because the disciplining of a linguist – or of an Africanist, as in our cases – results in the construction of expert identities: images of aloof figures who spend lifetimes with the proper description of each tone, phoneme or morpheme of a word, the reconstruction of its historical development and its journey into other proper systems (as a loanword). African languages that are studied by these aloof experts preferably are no beach languages, but should be spoken in villages or in the diaspora. Other communicative practices such as tourism language practices seem to mock both the expert and his or her research as an act of moral decency; language there has the power to reveal, provoke, grab attention, shock and insult. Africanists therefore should record African languages in their villages, especially when they are about to become extinct: a stereotyped image that resembles what Wainaina (2006) ironically describes as the appropriate way in which 'Africa' should be presented anyway. The body of the linguist in turn is not a native body, but an exquisite body that flits around in the intellectual heavens. It doesn't belong to party rooms and to mass tourism sites, but to villages and baobab trees. Quite a thought to think: the beach is so improper.

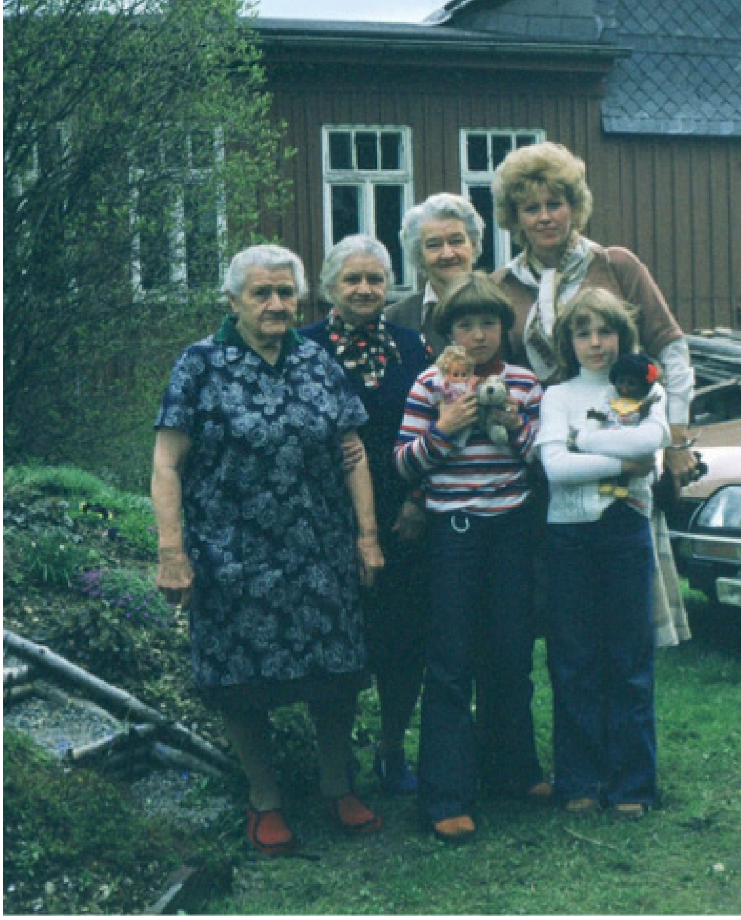

Figure 3. A researcher's body (private collection AM)

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