

The ‘Golden Fifties’ and the ‘tide of immorality’: Wolfgang Koeppen’s *Tauben im Gras*

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The struggles West Germans and African-Americans faced during the early post-World War II years of economic prosperity (the “Golden Fifties”)¹ were compounded by confused ideologies concerning morality, sexuality and racism (“the tide of immorality”).² This article provides an overview of the socio-historical background of the setting of Wolfgang Koeppen’s novel, in order to illustrate the findings with regard to the social and moral difficulties that arose from the American occupation of West Germany.

Die ‘Goue Vyftigs’ en die ‘vloedgolf van sedeloosheid’: Wolfgang Koeppen se *Tauben im Gras*

Die moeilikhede ondervind deur Wes-Duitsers en Afro-Amerikaners gedurende die vroeë jare van ekonomiese vooruitgang na die Tweede Wêreldoorlog (die “Goue Vyftigs”) was vererger deur ideologiese verwarring met betrekking tot moraliteit, seksualiteit en rassisme (die “vloedgolf van sedeloosheid”). ’n Oorsig van die sosio-historiese agtergrond van die milieu van Wolfgang Koeppen se roman word gegee om bevindings te illustreer met betrekking tot die sosiale en morele struikelblokke wat ontstaan het as gevolg van die Amerikaanse besetting van Wes-Duitsland.

- 1 Höhn 2001: 146. The “Golden Fifties” were so called because of the economic prosperity West Germany experienced as a result of extended American occupation in the wake of the outbreak of the Korean War and the fight against communism.
- 2 Höhn 2001: 148. The “tide of immorality” was the term used by church leaders and law enforcers when describing the growing number of white German women in relationships with African-American men. These women were almost always condemned as prostitutes and labelled morally bankrupt.

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BLOEMFONTEIN

T*auben im Gras* is the first novel of Koeppen's post-war 'trilogy' in which he introduces, by using multiple perspectives, several characters who offer fascinating insights into 1950s Germany, from the fallen aristocracy (Emilia) to free men (Josef), from Nazi sympathisers and intense conservatives (Frau Behrend) to the victorious freedom fighters (Washington and Odysseus), and from true victims (Emmi and Carla) to the new world visitors ignorant of the continuing struggles of a recovering nation (the American tourists).³ Koeppen's novels provide a rich source of information for anyone seeking to understand post-war society, Germany, the USA and the 1950s in general. This article examines three characters and what their actions over the period of a single day tell the reader about the situation in West Germany in the 1950s, and thus only touches the tip of the iceberg that is Wolfgang Koeppen's *Tauben im Gras*.

In order to ascertain how already existing racial tensions between blacks and Germans prior to the post-World War II occupation by African-American troops differed over time, and what the motivation behind these changes were, this article will examine the following significant questions in order to provide a socio-historical background and place Koeppen's novel in context. What was the history of anti-black racism in Germany? How did the Weimar republic and the Nazi regime change or develop existing views on blacks in Germany? What was the German reaction to a second occupation of West Germany by black troops (the first being French colonial troops after World War I)? What was the role of women in West Germany of the 1950s, in particular women consorting with black soldiers?

Once this context has been established, this article will show how this particular background informs the setting of Wolfgang Koeppen's novel *Tauben im Gras*, his style and techniques, and why this is particularly significant for the development of a greater understanding of his novel and its subject matter. As an understanding of the forced relationship between two cultural polar opposites (the USA

3 The authors wish to thank Lily Klopsch, Rhodes University, for her kind and extensive research assistance, and Rebecca French, Rhodes University, for translating the abstract into Afrikaans.

and West Germany) as motivated by a perceived common threat (communism and the outbreak of the Korean War) is of interest with regard to most of West German fiction of the 1950s, this article will offer some insight into the socio-political situation in post-World War II Germany and how it is mirrored in Wolfgang Koeppen’s novel.

1. Anti-black racism in Germany: 1918-1945

Anti-black racism was not a new phenomenon in Germany and can be traced throughout the period from 1885 to 1945 and beyond (Kestling 1998: 85). This racism was, at the beginning of the twentieth century, emphasised by colonial activities and learned by the educated upper class from the writings of social Darwinists advocating race hygiene (cf, for example, Gann & Duignan 1977: 216-38).

After World War I, between 14 000 and 25 000 French-African colonial troops mainly from Algeria, Senegal and Morocco entered the French occupied areas of Germany (Kestling 1998: 89, Höhn 2001: 150). Initially there was a mixed reaction to the presence of colonial troops. On the one hand, there was little antagonism between the black African troops and their German “hosts”, as the colonial forces generally treated the defeated population less harshly than their European French counterparts. However, the presence of “coloured” troops at the very moment when Germany suffered a humiliating defeat and lost its colonial power caused considerable hostility. These aggressive sentiments were fostered by the political ideals of both the Weimar government and later, Hitler’s National Socialists. These included political campaigns against the occupiers who were intent on destroying the German race: the *Schwarze Schmach*⁴ and the “Black horror on the Rhine” (Höhn 2001: 150, cf also Lebzelter 1985, Nelson 1970).

The *Schwarze Schmach* was a Weimar election campaign against blacks in Europe after World War I, which made use of the racial stereotyping of sexual aggressiveness to claim that blacks were intent on raping German women and ultimately intent on diluting the purity of the German (later: Aryan) race. Blacks were unrelentingly

4 “The black disgrace”.

demonised by political propaganda as savage predators bent on wreaking havoc on a defeated Germany (Höhn 2001: 150).

During the Weimar period (1919 to 1933) Germany began feeling the economic impact of the loss of its colonies coupled with the humiliating occupation of the Ruhrgebiet by French colonial troops. Many of the French-African troops stationed in Germany from 1923 to 1930 developed relationships with German women and many of these women had children of mixed parentage who became known as the “Rhineland bastards” (Kestling 1998: 87) or *Negermischlingskinder*⁵ (Fehrenbach 2001: 164), an entirely new section of the German population which seemed to prove eugenicists right: the German population was apparently being purposefully diluted (Kestling 1998: 87, Fehrenbach 2001: 166). After much debate surrounding this new sub-division of the German population, many of these children were sterilised so that their “confused” status could be remedied and further prevented (Fehrenbach 2001: 167).

Added to the presence of French colonial troops in Germany, many black artists, authors, musicians and entertainers fled to Europe before and after World War I to escape growing racial segregation and violence in the USA. Furthermore, some of the African royalty and elite had moved to Europe to provide themselves and their children with better education and living conditions (Kestling 1998: 88). The fact that black Africans and their offspring were increasing in number and had become a more obvious and influential presence in Germany began to worry many conservative and traditional Germans. Campaigns against black Africans and African-Americans increased (Höhn 2001: 150, Fehrenbach 2001: 166), while at the same time, from the beginning of the twentieth century into the 1920s, we find a surfacing of exoticism in art or, in more modern terms, Orientalism. As Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) hardly concerns itself with German art and culture (with the exception of Goethe’s *West-östlicher Divan* (1819)), this article will recur to similar theories on the racial and cultural Other, although many of Said’s findings are helpful when dealing with the Modernist view of the racial Other

5 Literally: “Negro-mixed children”.

(Gates 1996: 62). This article will examine precisely this coincidental clash of vilification of the historical and glorification of the physical Other in Koeppen’s novel.

Hitler’s anti-black campaigns followed and intensified those of the Weimar government. In his book *Mein Kampf*, Hitler links the presence of black soldiers on German soil to a Jewish conspiracy aimed at destroying the Aryan race and German morality: “Jews brought the Negroes into Germany with the clear aim of ruining the hated white race” (Kestling 1998: 87).

After 1949, which marked the division of Germany into East and West, along with the Americanisation of West Germany and the official end of Hitler’s racial utopia, West Germans now faced the challenge of integrating a new wave of former foreign enemies into their society. Immediately after World War II, when the rape and pillaging by black soldiers predicted by political propaganda did not materialise, the German population re-evaluated their relationship with African-American occupation troops (Höhn 2001: 150).

2. West Germany in the 1950s

2.1 Americanisation of post-World War II West Germany

Since 1945, more than 15 million Americans have lived and worked in West Germany, and the great majority of those individuals have spent their time in Germany as members of the American military (Höhn 2002: introduction online).

West German attitudes towards the American occupation were not consistent over the decade that followed the end of World War II. The five-year period from 1945 to 1950 was known as the “miracle years” as a result of the so-called *Wirtschaftswunder* (Höhn 2001: 145). Under the so-called Marshall Plan (actually: European Recovery Programme) the USA allocated massive funding to European areas of interest in order to foster economic and political stability. This was an attempt to cultivate a democratic “buffer” to contain the creeping threat of communism from the East (Kinder & Hilgemann 1995: 245). At the same time the USA needed a European base of operations

in the face of the 1950 outbreak of the Korean War. The USA increased its military presence in West Germany and boosted this country's industries, specifically those necessary for equipping an army. This resulted in the large-scale economic boom dubbed the "Golden Fifties", and the USA became synonymous with consumerism (Höhn 2001: 148). The American military was perceived as the agent that brought prosperity to West Germany and American culture was "the admirable new world of rock 'n roll, flashy cars and consumer riches" that the Americans offered. However, they brought more than that, it seems:

The American troop deployment instead of creating a bulwark against Soviet expansionism, had brought striptease parlours, prostitution, common-law marriages and unprecedented levels of illegitimacy (Höhn 2002: online).

2.2 African-Americans in post-World War II West Germany

During this period African-American troops were considered the most friendly and generous of the post-war occupation forces; the image of the black GI handing out CARE-packages and chocolate bars was everywhere. Many of the African-Americans found Germany to be a more hospitable home than the USA had been, as at the time the States were experiencing the most intense racial violence and segregation. An interview with a black soldier in *Ebony* magazine shows:

Strangely enough, here where Aryanism ruled supreme, Negroes are finding more friendship, more respect, and more equality than they were back home. Many of the GIs find that democracy has more meaning on Wilhelmstraße than in [...] Memphis (Schmundt-Thomas 1992: 73, Höhn 2001: 150).

However, this hospitality and sociability was short-lived: the shift in attitude toward black GIs could be attributed to the improving economic situation for West Germans after the intense suffering of the immediate post-war years. This improvement was attributed entirely to the intercession of the USA in German affairs, yet, an often neglected aspect of the improving economy was that the need to rebuild the entire infrastructure and to house millions of refugees created thousands of jobs and thus supported the boom. However, the new

German administration was eager to show support for the American government which was not only heavily funding reconstruction and ensuring a revived economy, but also deeply involved in West German politics and the establishment of new West German rights. As a result, the West German population was encouraged to adopt the behaviour and attitudes of Americans as a gesture of good faith attesting to a new co-operation between the two nations. Unfortunately, as Fehrenbach (2001: 168) explains, America’s official treatment of its black troops did not serve as a positive example for re-educating Germans in liberal race relations, and the occupying force’s attitudes influenced German racial hierarchies substantially (Poiger 1995: 93-124).

Among these attitudes were those of the white American military towards their fellow African-American GIs. The American occupation forces were segregated along racial lines, and in fact a distinction was made, by the USA military, between “American soldiers” and “Negro soldiers”, which even Truman’s 1948 desegregation order for the USA military did not really change (Höhn 2001: 152). There were also designated bars where African-Americans could find entertainment. Much of the thinking behind this segregation was that the threat posed by the “coloured” forces was thereby localised and therefore easier to restrain. This example was to some extent adopted by the German population and informed the emergence of a revived anti-black sentiment (Höhn 2001: 153).

This added to opinions held by some Germans who had fought for racial purity under the Nazi regime that being controlled by black occupation forces was further humiliation and added insult to the injury of defeat. The presence of black American troops only five years after National Socialist racial utopia was demeaning: “[L]arge strata of the German population experienced the Americans as an occupying power that injected an alien culture and a racial ‘other’ into the *Heimat*” (Höhn 2001: 145).

Single, comparatively wealthy African-American GIs were a prominent public presence which fostered a growing sense of xenophobia, a fear of what the Other might do. At the time remnants of Nazi propaganda and racial stereotypes were still fresh in the minds of the German population, especially those regarding the supposed sexual

predation of black invaders. This went one step further with the association that African-American sexual aggression and promiscuity was fostering a moral degradation, which earned the name the “tide of immorality”.

Conservatives were also convinced that restraining women’s sexuality was imperative to undo the humiliating defeat that German manhood had suffered, both at the front and at home. Thus, the sexual liberation that many women experienced in the last few years of the war was to be overcome, as was the widespread fraternisation between German women and allied soldiers in the Western zones (Höhn 2002: online).

During the 1950s resentment over the American presence was nearly completely displaced onto a discussion of morality (Höhn 2001: 145). Alleged moral deterioration accompanied the explosion of the entertainment industry. Music, bars, sensual music, sexual excess and unrestrained violence were traditional stereotypes of African Americans, and this was further associated with a rise in prostitution and perceived prostitution.

2.3 Black soldiers and white women in West Germany of the 1950s

After passing through three different forms of government within the past sixty years (a monarchy before the end of World War I, a democracy of sorts during the Weimar Republic, and a dictatorship under Adolf Hitler), West Germans in the 1950s were looking for new or old lasting values. The family was again considered the traditional structure which could return stability to disrupted lives (Niemayer 2000: 8), with the natural function of women to maintain the home, care for their husbands and raise children to be good citizens. The West German ruling party of the 1950s, the Christian Democrats (CDU), in accordance with this ideal, opposed an egalitarian family law, fought the legislation of abortion and tightened divorce laws (Harsch 1993: 32). Women were encouraged to be housewives to the extent of receiving financial benefits should they comply (Niemayer 2000: 3), yet already the fact that incentives were required is telling: due to the numbers of men killed in World War II as well as those German soldiers still held captive as POWs, West German women outnumbered men

by approximately seven million, which particularly affected the age group between twenty and forty, making it difficult to find husbands, which in turn made it almost impossible to be the type of woman promoted as the ideal (Niemayer 2000: 2). Whether they wanted to or not, women were forced to go out to work to support themselves, and the government’s incentives were for the most part too small to make much of a difference. In 1950, women headed up to a third of households in the Federal Republic of Germany, and women made up over a third of the labour force (Heinemann 2000: 154). Despite their public policy, the CDU could not afford to have a large percentage of their labour disappear into the kitchen in the middle of the economic boom — women had to work. This resulted in the portrayal of working women as merely fulfilling their caring, motherly role in a slightly different fashion by looking after the nation.

Another aspect of women’s lives (yet related to this first one) which underwent change was the question of morality, specifically sexual morality. Due to the aforementioned shortage of men, women who wanted a relationship were forced to broaden their definition of who constituted an acceptable partner (Harsch 1993: 37). This meant that many turned to the American GIs who were pouring into the country, available and well-to-do thanks to the favourable exchange rate. Some West German women entered into stable relationships with these GIs, or found work on the American military bases. Others had a more informal relationship with the American soldiery. In fact, prostitutes from across Germany and even Europe would arrive at the army bases around payday to take advantage of such a large new clientele (Höhn 2001: 146).

However, not only these women were stigmatised as prostitutes, but also those in stable relationships. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that American GIs could not marry their fiancées until shortly before they were due to return to the States (Höhn 2001: 146), and the German women with whom they were involved had to follow them from post to post and live in town in rented rooms — it is easy to see what kind of impression this would give the (petty) bourgeois neighbours. These women were perceived as a threat by seeming to reject traditional gender roles (by supposedly pursuing the soldiers) as well as confusing established class boundaries, as

class allocation became impossible with most of them rapidly becoming Americanised (Höhn 2001: 148). As time progressed, however, people seemed to adjust to the idea of West German women dating American soldiers, as long as they were discreet (Höhn 2001: 149). Nonetheless, this circumspection seems only to have applied to those women who were involved with white American GIs, and the idea of a white woman being in a relationship with a black man was distasteful to both the West Germans and the American military structure (Höhn 2001: 151-3). White West German women frequenting 'black' bars were consistently constructed as "willing and wilful fraternisers, who perpetrated a national betrayal of missing or maimed German men in order to indulge their 'craving' for material goods or sexual pleasures" (Fehrenbach 2001: 167). It seems almost bizarre nowadays that during its session on 15 April 1953, the West German parliament declared the federal state of Rhineland-Palatinate a "'moral disaster area' because of the dangers posed to the local young by the American military presence" (Höhn 2001: 159).

A related aspect of this kind of racism was the way in which children of these relationships were viewed. The mothers of such children were regarded as deplorably abnormal, mainly because the behaviour required to produce such a child was viewed as "undermining both the principle of German paternity and post-war efforts to reconstitute viable post-war German masculine and national identities" (Fehrenbach 2001: 168, cf also Dunker 2005: 29).

Although the *Negermischlingskinder* were held by most liberals to be innocent of these "crimes" committed by their mothers, they were still not regarded as being a true part of West German society, and many perceived them as a "*German problem* that required sustained domestic attention and solutions" (Fehrenbach 2001: 170, original emphasis). The difficulties arising for mothers probably contributed to the fact that abortion levels remained substantially higher than the pre-1933 levels well into the 1950s (Harsch 1993: 36).

A final aspect of life for these West German women with relevance to Wolfgang Koeppen's work is the emergence of what Höhn (2002: online) calls "the girl", who tended to appear in the magazines and tabloids. In contrast to the worn Hausfrau who had sacrificed

femininity and happiness for the good of the destroyed fatherland, “the girl” represented the “sexy consumer-citizen of the future Germany”, being playful and rather Americanised. Although this icon seemed to offer a fresh, possibly better type of life for some women, it was in reality just as constrained as that of the *Hausfrau*. It is to this new image that the emergence of the body cult in the 1950s can be linked. With its obsessions with the perfect measurements and eternal youth, it can be seen to express the new anxieties which were created with the emergence of this ideal. Of interest also is the fact that, despite being portrayed as sexy, there is a total lack in the publications in which she most frequently featured of any coverage of issues such as abortion, contraception or women’s reproductive rights. Thus the idea of women having sex appeal seems to have been kept completely separate to that of women as sexual beings (Höhn 2002: online).

3. Koeppen

3.1 Koeppen’s style and technique

[T]he earlier but far less well known trilogy of novels by Wolfgang Koeppen, *Tauben im Gras*, *Das Treibhaus* and *Der Tod in Rom*, had in a quieter and subtler fashion initiated a truly serious probing of the social and political legacy of the Hitler era (Bartram 2004: 11).

Marcel Reich-Ranicki, in his interview with Uwe Wittstock on the one hundredth birthday of Wolfgang Koeppen, hails Koeppen as one of the most important writers of post-war German literature (Wittstock 2006). The key question when analysing Wolfgang Koeppen’s writing style with respect to *Tauben im Gras* is not simply what techniques he used, but why he chose to use them. Koeppen’s post-World War II trilogy was written in the convention of post-World War I literature when modernism was reaching its literary zenith. Interestingly, though, he was writing some thirty years later when the rest of the literary world was advancing into post-modernism.

Koeppen’s writing is reminiscent of Joyce, Dos Passos, Faulkner, Proust and Döblin (Wittstock 2006). Heinrich Böll portrayed Germany after World War II with a deep moral vision and attacked the

materialistic values of the post-war society. He famously claimed during his Nobel lecture in 1972: “art is always a good hiding place for intellectual explosives and social time bombs” (Böll 1977). In a vein similar to Koeppen’s *Tauben im Gras*, Böll set his novel *Billiard um halb zehn* (1959) over a single day in West Germany, where his protagonists come to terms with their families’ history from Wilhelm II to Hitler. Böll saw his role as a writer to act as the social conscience of his age, possibly driven by his fervent Catholicism. Koeppen, too, was concerned with producing pertinent social commentaries; however, he made use specifically of the modernist technique to emphasise the points he was trying to convey through his writing, which set him apart from the prominent “realistic” writers of the time such as Andersch, Nossack, Hildesheimer and Frisch. While Frisch and Nossack, in particular, deal with the fragmentation of the modern world and the search for a sustainable role and identity of the individual, the belief that the individual may choose his/her role in life is, particularly in Frisch, unbroken (Trommler 1971: 200). Contrary to Nossack, there is no quasi-magic in Koeppen; contrary to Broch, he exposes the surface on which society operates (Trommler 1971: 202).

Modernism itself was severely affected by Hitler’s rise to power, as this style of writing was perceived as a threat to National Socialist ideals (Goldman 2004: 212). Modernism encouraged the kind of retrospection, free thought and reflection of contemporary social and political issues that would have been anathema to Nazi doctrine.

Koeppen’s stream-of-consciousness-style writing makes use of the characters’ inner monologue to construct an insight into life in West German society. He returns to modernism to show that its development was not yet complete, just as Germany’s creative development was stalled during the war.⁶ Koeppen was looking to the

6 The influence of modernist William Faulkner on post-war West German literature is well documented in Ute Müller’s study, *William Faulkner und die deutsche Nachkriegsliteratur* (2005). Sabina Becker (2005) claims that Koeppen was mainly modernist in making use of the movement’s forms, yet did otherwise not employ the poetic aestheticism of German modernism in his novels. She only relates her findings to German modernism, especially the *Neue Sachlichkeit*, though, and does analyse the anglo-American modernism — this is worth a separate analysis.

past for a writing style effectively equipped to deal with the present, to critically examine contemporary German society (Ward 1988: ix, Kappler 1996: 53), at a time in West Germany when most writers wrote concise accounts of the reality of post-war life.

3.2 Koeppen's *Tauben im Gras*

Erst mit *Tauben im Gras* machte Koeppen den Versuch, ein ähnlich komplexes, der Tradition der Moderne und den veränderten Bedingungen der Darstellung von Wirklichkeit angemessenes Werk zu schreiben. Wie Joyce' [sic] und Dos Passos' Romane, wie Döblins *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929), ist [das Buch] ein Großstadtroman, der mit einem Simultanstil, durch Montage, durch Vielperspektivität, Zitate, mythologische Verweise und die Integration von sprachlichem Material aller Art den Weltalltag einer Epoche schildert oder zu schildern anhebt (Hielscher 1988: 75).⁷

All these techniques, used to depict a single day in February 1950, combine to give the reader a sense of chaos, discomfort, uncertainty and suspicion, emotions that most efficiently reflect those felt by the fractured and defeated German nation. With several characters and events intermingling, there are no certainties or feelings of security when reading this novel. It is Koeppen's extremely effective usage of the modernist techniques coupled with accurate historical and politically true characters that produces this post-war masterpiece.

Indeed, Reich-Ranicki (Wittstock 2006) felt that Koeppen's novel *Tauben im Gras* was ahead of its time, and that the readership lacked the capacity in the light of recent historical, social and political events to fully understand and appreciate this literary commentary:

Sein entscheidendes Buch, 'Tauben im Gras', war im falschen Augenblick erschienen. Es kam 1951 viel zu früh. Das Publikum was weder bereit noch fähig, diese Literatur zu akzeptieren. Die Deutschen waren durch die Nazis zwölf Jahre lang von der

7 “Only with *Pigeons on the grass* did Koeppen attempt to write a similarly complex work, befitting the traditions of modernism and the different conditions for the portrayal of reality. [His novel is], like Joyce and Dos Passos' novels, like Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929), a city novel, depicting, or beginning to depict, the world's everyday life, of a particular epoch, by using simultaneousness, montage, multiple perspectives, quotations, mythological allusions and the integration of linguistic material of all kinds” (Hielscher 1988: 75; authors' translation).

modernen Literatur abgeschnitten gewesen. Die Leser hatten kein Verständnis für Koeppen, er wirkte allzu avantgardistisch auf sie (Wittstock 2006).⁸

Reich-Ranicki goes on to say that Koeppen achieved a great literary triumph with this first book: he openly dealt with the fear, suffering and general post-war existence that the German public all experienced but did not discuss. In addition to being an intense and accurate social commentary and historical observation, *Tauben im Gras* is also a novel that was directly applicable to the 1950s generations.

4. *Tauben im Gras*

The core of this study is: how does Koeppen's novel *Tauben im Gras* provide insight into the treatment of African-Americans occupying post-World War II West Germany? Having the relevant background of the historical situation in West Germany during the 1950s, and an idea of Koeppen's writing style and techniques, one can now effectively consider some of the key characters in Koeppen's narrative and determine what insights into the society of the time they might provide. This section will address descriptions of Washington, Carla and Odysseus, their actions throughout the novel and discuss what they might represent in West German society during the 1950s. In this analysis, four central themes will be identified: racial segregation and stereotyping, German and American materialism, African-American and white German fraternisation and, finally, the mixed race generation borne of these relationships.

4.1 Washington and Carla

At the heart of German concerns were relationships between German women and American GIs, and especially African-American soldiers. To conservative onlookers, the women who embraced not simply

8 "His decisive book, *Pigeons on the Grass*, was published at the wrong time. 1951 was far too early. The public was neither ready nor able to accept this kind of literature. The Germans had been cut off by the Nazis from modern literature for 12 years. The readers had no sympathy for Koeppen; he seemed too avant-garde to them" (Reich-Ranicki 2006; authors' translation).

African-American soldiers, but equally the consumer goods they could provide, amounted to no better than prostitutes (Höhn 2002).

Washington Price is the only African-American GI whose character Koeppen develops fully in *Tauben im Gras*, and as such he is symbolic of how the majority of USA black troops were viewed and treated by German society at the time. Washington exemplifies the comparatively wealthy, friendly and generous African-American of the consumerist stereotype. He is in fact representative of the USA itself (bearing the name of the USA capital and the first American president), and how Germans felt about the USA’s materialist ideals and financial involvement in Europe, as his surname may indicate. Washington embodies all stereotypes about black occupation troops: physical vitality (his sporting achievements back in America), wealth (his car, chocolates and gift giving), and his virility and sexuality (he is in a relationship with a white German woman who is already pregnant by him):

Er war freundlich, er war freigebig, er strafte nicht, er war ein bekannter Sportler, er trug eine Uniform, er gehörte zu den Siegern, er war für Heinz reich und fuhr einen großen horizontblauen Wagen. Aber gegen Washington sprach die schwarze Haut, das auffallende Zeichen des Andersseins. Washington war nicht überall anerkannt (Koeppen 2003: 75).⁹

The very first description of Washington is of him driving a flashy American car, the stereotypical wealthy American appendage. He is in the process of buying a gift for Carla to make her happy, and to help her accept the child he wants, but she is reluctant to keep:

Washington mußte reich sein. Er mußte wenigstens vorübergehend reich sein; hier und heute mußte er reich sein. Dem Reichtum würde Carla vertrauen. Sie würde dem Geld eher vertrauen als seinen Worten (Koeppen 2003: 47).¹⁰

9 “He was friendly, he was generous, he didn’t punish, he was a well-known athlete, he wore a uniform, he was one of the victors, to Heinz he was rich and drove a big, horizonblue car. But Washington’s black skin spoke against him, the obvious sign of being different” (Koeppen 1991, translated by David Ward 1988: 64).

10 “Washington had to be rich. He had to be rich at least for a while; right here and now he had to be rich. She would trust wealth. She would sooner trust the money than his words” (Koeppen 1991, translated by David Ward 1988: 36).

Washington is portrayed as a loving, respectable and successful African-American who has fallen for a white German woman. Unfortunately Carla falls not for Washington, but for what he represents for her: a way of improving her life and finding wealth and freedom in America. This relationship is doomed for both of them and the passage that follows Washington's introduction is contrasted with the introduction of Carla to the novel.

Carla seems to be the archetypal young German woman in the early 1950s. She is a single mother whose German husband went missing in action on the Volga, and who seeks to improve her circumstances by entering into a relationship with a generous American soldier. She is the daughter of conservative, traditional and prominent German parents, whose mother so intensely disapproves of her relationship with a 'Negro' that she entirely rejects Carla out of embarrassment: "[Carla] war für die wohlstandigen Kreise der Mutter verloren" (Koeppen 2003: 110).¹¹ Carla dreams of the American life of freedom and luxury she sees in magazines, but having discovered that she is pregnant with a child that will not be welcome in either Germany or severely segregated America, Carla is forced to reassess her situation:

Carla zweifelte jetzt, ob sie die schöne Traumwelt der amerikanischen Magazine jemals erreichen würde. Es war ein Fehler gewesen, sich mit Washington zu vereinen. Carla war in den falschen Zug gestiegen. Washington war ein guter Kerl, aber er saß leider im falschen Zug. [...] Alle Neger saßen im falschen Zug [...] Carla hätte in den richtigen Zug steigen können. [...] Nur der Zug der weißen Amerikaner führte in die Traumwelt der Magazinbilder, in die Welt des Wohlstandes, der Sicherheit und des Behagens (Koeppen 2003: 123).¹²

As the above quote indicates, Carla never loved Washington Price, and she confesses that her plans may have worked had she

11 "[Carla] was lost to her mother's thoroughly respectable circles" (Koeppen 1991, translated by David Ward 1988: 97).

12 "Carla doubted now that she would ever get to the beautiful dreamworld of the American magazines. It had been a mistake to move in with Washington. Carla had gotten on the wrong train. Washington was a good fellow, but unfortunately he was on the wrong train. [...] All negroes were on the wrong train. [...] Carla could have gotten on the right train. [...] Only the train of the white Americans led into the dreamworld of the magazine pictures, the world of affluence, of security, of comfort" (Koeppen 1991, translated by David Ward 1988: 110).

waited for a white American. She accepts the gifts Washington gives her as a justification for their relationship, and Washington is fully aware that should he wish to continue his relationship with Carla, he will need to maintain his material incentives.

Auch Carla litt unter der Wohnung, aber sie litt weniger unter ihr als Washington, dem sie unermüdlich versicherte, wie sehr sie leide, wie unwürdig das alles für sie sei, wie sehr sie sich verschenke, wie tief sie sich herablasse, tief zu ihm, und daß er durch immer neue Liebe, neue Geschenke, neue Aufopferung es ein wenig gut-machen müsse, ein ganz klein wenig nur (Koeppen 2003: 84).¹³

As shown in 2.2 and 2.3 above, Carla’s life is exemplary of that of many young West German women of the time: her consumerism (to some extent an escape from the harsh past and present of a broken nation), her liaison with an American GI who wants to marry her, the realisation that through this relationship she will be ousted by not only her own compatriots, but by white Americans as well, are all representative of a particular stratum of West German society.

Thus with a brief and simple introduction of two characters, Koeppen has already graphically and accurately described the prevailing situation in West Germany regarding racial stereotypes and opinions of African-Americans. They were regarded as materialistic, hypersexual and most of all, inferior in every way to white Americans and Germans — yet it is a white German woman that makes the black soldier behave this way. The proclivity of racial segregation in the American army (the democratic, capitalist ideal model on which West Germany was basing itself) had pervaded the mindset of the recovering German nation.

More problematic than their relationship is the discovery that Carla is pregnant with Washington’s child. Frau Behrend (Carla’s mother) laments her shameful fortune: “Es war fürchterlich, daß

13 “Carla suffered because of the apartment as well, but she suffered less from it than did Washington, whom she never tired of assuring how terribly she was suffering, how degrading this all was for her, and that meant by implication how much she was giving herself away, how far she was lowering herself, down low to him, and that he would have to bring her ever new love, new presents, new sacrifices, to make up for it a little bit, just a very little bit” (Koeppen 1991, translated by David Ward 1988: 72).

[Carla] von einem Neger geschwängert war” (Koeppen 2003: 113),¹⁴ and Carla secretly plans her abortion. As shown previously, the high incidents of interracial relationships as a result of African-American GI occupation in post-World War II West Germany produced an entirely new segment of the population, the aforementioned “Negermischlingskinder”. These mixed-race children were outcasts both in Germany and America, and were subjected almost to the same discrimination as the Rhineland bastards after World War I. It is a fear of being judged and abused for producing a mixed-race child that convinces Carla to attempt to terminate her pregnancy. Through his explicit, realistic and modernist descriptions of Carla and Washington, Koeppen produced a social commentary that highlights the cracks in West German post-World War II society, and the deeply disruptive occupation by the American GIs. Washington and Carla are representative of the racial stereotyping, American materialism, anti-interracial socialisation and the development of a “problematic mixed generation” which was rife during the 1950s. Not only does Koeppen’s novel draw attention to these social and political disturbances, it is also a criticism of the conditions of that time.

4.2 Odysseus

Odysseus der Teufel, Odysseus der Freundliche, König Odysseus der freundliche Teufel, [...]. Er hielt eine Coca-Cola-Flasche wie eine wurfbereite Handgranate (Koeppen 2003: 133).¹⁵

Odysseus Cotton, as his name suggests, is an African-American of former slave stock who arrives in Germany as the land where his brethren have found more rights and freedom than back home in the USA. He undergoes a journey similar in many respects to his namesake, Homer’s Odysseus. He encounters Susanne, his “Circe, his Nausicaa”, and together they embark on an expedition: “[Odysseus] hatte

14 “[I]t was dreadful that she was pregnant by a Negro [...]” (Koeppen 1991, translated by David Ward 1988: 100).

15 “Odysseus the Devil, Odysseus the Friendly, King Odysseus the Friendly Devil [...]. He held a Coca Cola bottle like a hand grenade ready to be thrown” (Koeppen 1991, translated by David Ward 1988: 120).

Susanne Kirke die Sirenen betört, oder sie hatten ihn betört, und vielleicht hatte er Nausikaa erobert” (Koeppen 2003: 196).¹⁶

Odysseus’s first appearance in the novel is his emergence from the station carrying a radio that played songs of his country. Odysseus is immediately identified with sensual music and sexuality, as well as his slave past (Koeppen 2003: 27). His inherent “blackness” is constantly reiterated, with descriptions of his black back (though invisible under his khaki uniform), hands and face, his strong physical frame, his muscular “animal” nature, his loud and gregarious behaviour. He is also constantly associated with the “voice” that emanates from the radio: sensual, warm, lazy, deep and slow. As with Washington, Odysseus is linked to wealth and generosity, especially in the eyes of the porter Josef, but also in his encounters with the Greek gamblers (another Homeric reference) and in his excessive tipping of the waitress who serves him his beer. Never far behind the description of an African-American in Germany is the idea of the victor being served by the defeated:

Josef folgte dem schwarzen Mann, er folgte dem Befreier, dem Eroberer, folgte der Schutz- und Besatzungsmacht in die Stadt (Koeppen 2003: 33).¹⁷

All these epithets epitomise America; thus assigning these labels to Odysseus makes him representative of the USA. Most importantly for Odysseus’s character specifically is the constant reminder of his sexuality, which is almost always associated with “Negro” music:

The Eurocentric construction based on the binary oppositions of good and evil, pure and impure, rational and irrational, is [...] fundamental to establishing Western identity [...]. The West’s self-image is defined dialectically through the formulation of its others [...]; when rationality, technology, progress and civilisation were esteemed in late nineteenth-century Europe, the primitive became its opposite. [...] Mapping and defining the ‘primitive mentality’ was a

16 “[Odysseus] had beguiled Susanne Circe the Sirens, or they had beguiled him, and maybe he had conquered Nausicaa” (Koeppen 1991, translated by David Ward 1988: 179).

17 “Josef followed the black man, he followed the liberator, the conqueror, followed the protective and occupational force into the city” (Koeppen 1991, translated by David Ward 1988: 23).

subject of great intellectual concern in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Prior to the establishment of academic anthropology, psychologists, philosophers and social theorists, influenced by the Social Darwinist strand of late nineteenth-century thought, constructed from the European inventory of fragmented exotic encounters armchair theories of the primitive (Tythacott 2003: 49).

What follows the above description is probably the most important issue facing African-American soldiers in West Germany and their relationships with German women, and is also one of the most significant commentaries Koeppen makes on the issues facing society at the time:

Geld haben die, so viel Geld, ein schwarzer Soldat verdient mehr als ein Oberinspektor bei uns, US-Private, wir Mädels haben unser Englisch gelernt, Bund Deutscher Mädels, kann ein Nigger heiraten? Keine Rassengesetze in USA, Verfemung, kein Hotel nimmt einen auf, die halbschwarzen Kinder, Besatzungsbabies, arme Kleine, wissen nicht, wo sie hingehören, können nichts dafür, nein, ich tät's nicht! (Koeppen 2003: 41).¹⁸

This passage is the crux of the relations between Washington and Carla, and later between Odysseus and Susanne — the social implications were mentioned earlier. But more importantly, this is how German society views the presence of African-American soldiers. This single extract encapsulates the materialist image of America, the supposed sexual predation of blacks, the race issues both in the USA and Germany, and the increasing problem of mixed-race children in a society ill-equipped to address these complex social issues. On the page following the above quote, Koeppen juxtaposes the inner monologue of a German woman who claims sleeping with a “Nigger” is degrading, while she simultaneously offers sex to Odysseus in exchange for American dollars.

18 “[M]oney they’ve got, so much money, a black soldier earns more than our chief inspectors, US Private, we girls have learned our English, League of German Girls, can you marry a Negro? [Authors’ note: the German actually reads: “Can a Negro marry?”] No race laws in the USA, but ostracism, no hotel will let you in, the halfblack children, occupation babies, poor little ones, don’t know where they belong, not their fault, no I wouldn’t do it!” (Koeppen 1991, translated by David Ward 1988: 30).

According to Ward (1988: xxii), Odysseus Cotton’s character in Germany is much like the German soldiers returning home after the war. Odysseus has to survive in a hostile country, but unlike the German soldiers, he has no homeland to return to that will be any less hostile. The occupation forces invaded Germany in the fight against racial discrimination, while on American soil African “slaves” still labour, and American racial discrimination against “Negroes” was reaching its zenith. Indeed, the “re-education” of Germans in the ways of tolerance towards all sections of the population stood in stark contrast to the segregation of the American military. And thus the American influence spread far beyond financial aid and CARE packages, it encouraged the development of new racial prejudice, and it instilled in a recovering nation consumerism, materialism, intolerance and fear of new, communist enemies.

While the focus of this article is primarily on the historical and socio-political circumstances, this novel is more than just a fictionalised portrayal of West Germany in the 1950s, though. Koeppen does not only use the modernist devices of intertext (especially James Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Alfred Döblin’s *Berlin Alexanderplatz*), stream of consciousness and fragmentation to depict a post-war society in shambles, he also employs the images of the noble and not so noble savage to render a picture of this post-war society stuck in a pre-World War II mindset: Odysseus is the animal-like savage, Washington, in binary opposition to him, the noble savage (Ashcroft *et al* 2000: 210, Davis 1996: 9, Weber 2003: 33f), and Koeppen uses every colonial cliché imaginable in portraying these two characters (Albrecht 2003: 119). In applying those stereotypes, however, Koeppen is not merely reproducing a form of early twentieth century exoticism, but he is trying to establish two alternatives in portraying black characters in a modern novel: Cotton, the “black devil” (Koeppen 1986: 112), is immediately classified as black, contrary to Price, the “black angel” (Koeppen 1986: 74), about whose colour the reader is only informed later on in the novel (Albrecht 2003: 121).¹⁹ Furthermore, the stereotypes are made recognisable as such by

19 While Albrecht is right in stating that Price’s colour is only introduced once it is absolutely necessary, it is clear to readers familiar with American names that Washington is most likely African-American.

the narrator, and thus unmasked (Albrecht 2003: 124): a multitude of opinions and thoughts are displayed as the reader is forced to zoom in and out of various characters' minds; yet these opinions (like linking the black American soldiers with the jungle, Africa, primitivism) are often not even quite present in those minds as Albrecht demonstrates on the example of Joseph, the porter. Koeppen is thus making public the racist "collective disposition" (Albrecht 2003: 126) of the Germans in post-war Germany, culminating in a battle at the end of the novel between the African-American GIs emerging from a bar and the drunk visitors to the *Hofbräuhaus*, the brewery.

The projected clichés co-exist, any hope for unity or even communication is nipped in the bud. Klaus Scherpe (1987: 233-57) contends that the multiple perspectives in Koeppen stem from a deep-seated ideological criticism, but we believe that Koeppen goes beyond this. As Heißenbüttel (1976: 161) and Treichel (1984: 13) have shown, Koeppen also tries to describe the emotionally withdrawing characters by attempting the impossible: by describing through language a loss of control over language, and thus over communication. This can only be done by rendering everyone's train of thought, on top of a narrator's voice, attributing value and validity to none, merging these trains of thought to a stream of consciousness, which gives only the semblance of coherence.

5. Summary

This article has provided an insight into the treatment of African-Americans in 1950s West Germany as portrayed in Wolfgang Koeppen's novel *Tauben im Gras*. Although anti-black racism was not an entirely new phenomenon in Germany in the preceding decades, the American occupation presented a model on which to nurture further discrimination. Koeppen's modernist writing style at once highlights the devastation of German society (as reflected in the theme of modernism itself being subjugated under the Nazi regime) and supplies a graphic and realistic account of the social and political conditions of the time. Through Washington, Carla and Odysseus, Koeppen represents the views of Americans and Germans, and

simultaneously criticises the fragile and potentially volatile situation West Germans found themselves in during the immediate post-Second World War years. However, Koeppen goes beyond merely transposing historical facts into fiction; his use of multiple perspectives, in this particular setting, echoes Stephen Dedalus’s “History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake” (Joyce 1986: 28), and it is a discourse on art (writing, language) by creating art.

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