

The Research Journey of the African Lukanga Mukara into the Innermost Part of Germany

Die Forschungsreise des Afrikaners Lukanga Mukara ins innerste Deutschland

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Die Forschungsreise des Afrikaners ins innerste Deutschland is an epistolary satirical novel by the German naval officer and later pacifist Hans Paasche (1881–1920). Written on the eve of the First World War, the novel turns the seemingly simple device of a foreign traveller's account into a sustained political critique of German society. Its fictional protagonist travels through Germany and reports on what he encounters in a series of letters. In the novel, Paasche relativizes various aspects of German cultural practices; From money to clothing, education, work, capitalism, militarism, environmental destruction, and the German cultural identity itself. Each letter depicts German culture as strange, contradictory, and even absurd. By reversing the colonial gaze and making Germany itself the object of ethnographic observation, Paasche uses the conventions of travel writing and satire to defamiliarize the social norms and political structures of his own society. The political substance of the novel is not only because it addresses contemporary political events, but also because it turns everyday German life into an object of critical scrutiny and asks what kind of social order lies behind its seemingly self-evident institutions, values, and hierarchies.

The fictional letters were originally published under a different title between 1912 and 1913 in the magazine *Der Vortruppe*. Their publication was interrupted by censorship during the First World War, and the letters were eventually compiled and published in book form in 1921 (Hähnel 9). In a manner similar to Montesquieu's approach in the *Persian Letters*, Paasche introduces a fictive African court officer, Lukanga Mukara, who observes German culture through a lens of civilizational critique. Paasche claimed to have met Lukanga at the court of King Ruoma of Kitara near Lake Victoria and presents himself simply as the collector and editor of Lukanga's letters. Lukanga, whose name indicates his origin on the island of Ukerewe in Lake Victoria, is described as having been taught to read and write by White missionaries. He deserted the missionaries during a trip and became an interpreter and adviser at the royal court in Kitara.

The letters collectively construct a comprehensive critique that operates cumulatively. Each letter addresses a specific facet of German society and Lukanga reports on German customs and habits that strike him as peculiar and absurd: the first letter examines German economic systems and the

arbitrary concept of money; the second one looks into German sartorial norms and the deformation of German body; the third letter focuses on the paradoxes of literacy; the fourth, the facade of productivity; the fifth letter offers a critique of German cultural identity; the sixth letter looks into German political economy and capitalism, the seventh letter is on ritualized violence behind Prussian honor codes; the eighth, the German use of tobacco and environmental pollution; and in the ninth letter, Lukanga joins the youths at the *Hoher Meißner* and discusses the possibility of German cultural redemption through the *Lebensreform* movement.

Understanding Paasche's biographical trajectory is necessary to grasp the political undertone of the novel and the thematic focus. Paasche was a former colonial officer who underwent a transformation after witnessing the brutality of the *Maji Maji* uprising in German East Africa (Morlang 4). His experiences in Africa led him to resign from his military career in 1909, and he devoted his post-military life to the *Lebensreform* and conservation movements (Morlang 9). He used his writing to criticize German militarism and earned many enemies in national conservative circles. In a later confession, he openly condemned his own participation in colonial violence, admitting in one case that he had allowed a "ringleader" to be hanged because he lacked the courage to be seen as humane and un-military (Fetscher 97). In *Die Forschungsreise des Afrikaners ins innerste Deutschland*, Paasche puts on a mask to voice his critique of German society and develops arguments he had already articulated. While the letters do not offer a direct critique of colonialism per se, their anti-colonial dimension lies in their method of defamiliarization. By masquerading as an African protagonist endowed with intelligence, humour, and moral clarity, Paasche implicitly challenges the ideological justifications of the colonial project and its claim to be a civilizing mission directed at supposedly unrefined Africans. His writing instead posits that Europeans could learn from African societies. Lukanga's perspective defamiliarizes what was taken for granted by Paasche's contemporaries and renders visible the contradictions and hypocrisies of modern industrial German society.

Paasche wrote the novel in a time of intense sociopolitical struggle, and these struggles influenced the themes of the letters. As a *Lebensreformist* and pacifist, antiwar sentiments, a return to nature, and abstinence from alcohol and smoking were important political values for Paasche, and these themes appear throughout the novel. His tragic murder illustrates the violent stakes of his critique. His political campaigning, public condemnation of colonial warfare, and opposition to the First World War made him an intolerable figure to nationalist and conservative forces in the postwar years. After the war, he continued to denounce the paternalistic militarism that had contributed to German involvement in the war (Paasche, *Meine Mitschuld* 4). On May 21, 1920, members of a *Reichswehr* regiment shot him on his estate under the pretext of a weapons search. The concocted evidence was dismissed by the courts (Morlang 9). His assassination exposed the violent underbelly of the culture he criticized, while the subsequent rise of Nazism after his death gave further historical resonance to his warnings.

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