

**Redefining Heimat: Exploring the Self, Culture, and Space in Elliot Blue's *Home? and Mo*
Asumang's *Roots Germania*.**

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ABSTRACT

Heimat has, over the last several centuries, been used in different contexts to relate to culture, geography, identity, and belonging, among others. The contexts that this term has been used in have, in turn, spawned numerous definitions, but the term remains difficult to define, especially as it deals with the Afrogerman community and their understanding of *Heimat*. In a bit to investigate *Heimat* from an Afrogerman point of view, Elliot Blue's experimental documentary *Home?* and Mo Asumang's full-length documentary *Roots Germania* are analyzed. I offer a new definition of *Heimat*, derived from the daily lives of the protagonists as well as their relationship with their environment. This new definition combines the Afrogerman understanding of the Self, Culture as a form of *Heimat*, and an understanding of urban and rural spaces as representations of the German idea of Home. Using Homi Bhabha's redefinition of Freud's *Unheimlich* theory, I explore the uncanniness of *Heimat* for these people who find themselves torn between two Homes: Germany and the African country that contributes to their Afrogerman heritage. This thesis argues that *Heimat* is not rooted in a fixed location but created by concepts determining its mobility. *Heimat* is a redistribution of territorial concepts of Home as mobile and portable yet always present.

Keywords: *Heimat*, Afrogermans, Identity, Space, Self, Culture.

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Introduction

The definition of *Heimat* is as diverse as the number of people who will ask to define it. Peter Blickle likened a definition of the term to an anecdote about Saint Augustine by the German cultural Anthropologist Hermann Bausinger. St. Augustine was wondering about the nature of time, and he concluded that he knew what it was as long as no one asked him (Blickle, 2002:1). The term *Heimat* has, over the last several centuries, been used in different contexts to relate to culture, geography, identity, and belonging among others. Celia Applegate (1990) writes that the very ordinariness of the contexts in which it pops up has obscured the richness of what it can tell about “peculiarities of German History “(4). These connotations do not limit the uniqueness of the term but simply demonstrate the far-reaching concepts that the term covers.

The idea behind *Heimat* is encoded in attempting to figure out an exact meaning. In attempting to discuss this, Blickle compares the words in different languages and attempts to find a term that would cover it. He compared the term to the Russian word *Rodina*, which meant motherland. However, the comparison of *Heimat* to *Rodina* fell flat in the fact that although the two terms conceptualized the idea of a place of refuge, *Heimat* also covers the concept of origin. *Heimat* covers a lot of spheres, although various scholars have associated the term with different ideas, literary scholars with notions of belonging, and other philosophical concepts. Historians link the term with the progressions of the German nation (Blickle 5). The term was bastardized by the National socialists in the Third Reich, and misappropriated to eliminate people from most communities, while associating it with their notions of Germanness. Christopher J. Wickham (1999) wrote of the association of *Heimat* with “Blut” and “Boden” (blood and soil) and how these two components created a boundary of exclusion for those that were seen as others (7).

This exclusivity then changes in the postwar years, as the two German states coped with the concept in different ways. In the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the term became associated with socialist ideals, and focused on a “Weltsystem des Sozialismus”. In the West, the term was *verbum non gratum*, in political discourse, except in the sense of political expellees (Wickham 7-8).

In the last two decades, developments have made the term gain new depth as events such as the rise of PEGIDA, the Eurozone Conflict, the rise of the AfD, and the European migrant crisis among others (Cagle, 231). Friederike Eigler (2012) sees it in recent times as something that transcends a fixed location and a fixed point in time. The meaning of Heimat and its connotation to people are malleable. Michael Giesler quotes Edgar Reitz as saying, “It is a past in the future tense: an imaginary place struggling to assume material shape, work-in-progress in the guise of a report on lost or stolen property” (48). This thesis investigates the concept of Heimat in two recent German documentaries that develop and navigate new concepts of belonging and place.

Root Germania was a project that began as a result of a death threat against the TV presenter Mo Asumang by Neo-Nazis. The threats directed at her and several other prominent personalities led her on a journey of self-discovery as she attempted to listen to the Neo-Nazi’s side of the story. She interviewed several people, including a member of the organization that threatened her, a lawyer who was concerned with maintaining racial purity, her birth father in Ghana, and several religious leaders in Ghana, Germany, and Scotland. The 2007 documentary switches between two continents, and three countries and moves between urban and rural spaces to find an answer to the questions that plagued her.

Elliot Blue's short film *Home?* (2018) also addresses a search for identity and community. The 2018 documentary addresses an Afrogerman youth's journey to find a Home in the country where they grew up, and where they look different. As a person of color in a predominantly white space, they strive to find a community that they can relate to, as well as one where they would belong. They journey through different spaces as they look for their community and confront the established notion of Germanness in search of their definitions of Heimat. Their journey leads to displacement and a form of othering that gets resolved as they are returned to their roots, which are present in their original place of displacement. The journey teaches them to embrace their identity by confronting society's perceptions of them as well as their established preconceptions. The documentaries take cinematic techniques into account by examining themes of belonging and identity as Black Germans, and in Blue's case as a queer person of color. There is an obscurity in Blue's depiction that fully highlights their search for Belonging. The documentary has an experimental form to it revealed by the three-year temporal lapse between the first part and the second part, as well as its form (animated caricature, and the fragmented feel that it has). There is also the fact that Blue has no visible presence in the documentary with the exception of their narration behind the scenes. This is reminiscent of their life, as their internet presence is also hidden behind a veil. This form of obscurity summarizes Blue's experience and is representative of the marginalized communities that this thesis will address.

Building upon these themes and cinematic representations, this thesis seeks to explore interconnected theories of home and identity that build on Freud's theory of the *das Unheimliche*, the uncanny. Bettina Stoetzer (2022) draws upon postcolonial theories from scholars such as Homi Bhabha who points to the displacements and ambiguities of that which

cannot be easily accommodated: like the word *unheimlich*, the unhomely blurs the borders between home and the world, in which the domestic and the home “become sites for history’s most intricate invasions” (176). Homi Bhabha said of the uncanny:

To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the "unhomely" be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres. The unhomely moment creeps up on you stealthily as your own shadow, and suddenly you find yourself with Henry James's Isabel Archer "taking the measure of your dwelling" in a state of "incredulous terror." (141)

This feeling summarizes Mo Asumang’s terror upon the receipt of the death threat and drives her search for identity in her documentary. As Julia Wardhaugh (1998) writes, “the concept of home, as opposed to the physical reality of a house, could not exist without homelessness, just as – in a Durkheimian sense – conformity cannot exist without deviance” (93). Her reality is suddenly changed, and this makes her question her reality. The idea that her sense of security could suddenly be challenged triggers her fear and search. Questions such as “Who are you?” or “Where are you from?” directly influence this feeling of displacement and create conditions that stimulate the uncanny.

This dissonance, which comes as a result of the identity question, forms the basis of the stranger syndrome. As Asumang and Blue attempt to find their place in society, as their appearance marks them as other and creates an imposition of a stranger in the minds of the other, instantly creating an “us” vs. “them” mentality, which further drives their alienation. Zygmunt Bauman in his essay on the *Making and Unmaking of Strangers*, describes this as the consequence of an invisible boundary. In the 21st century, questions of Identity have become concerned with boundary lines, which has made the topic a very important one.

In this thesis, I analyze key scenes from the two documentaries that examine the notion of *Heimat* and its relationship with the self, Nature as *Heimat*, and culture as *Heimat*. The two films present journeys of self-discovery that cross urban and rural spaces and investigate the cultural aspects and phenomena that are present in these spaces. Nora Rathzel's (1994) research in Germany shows that the very presence of *Ausländer* is felt by some people to deprive them of the assumed naturalness of their taken-for-granted identities. Likewise, in a further analysis of the dynamics of forms of "homely racism" in the UK, Phil Cohen (1996: 75) argues that we see a fearful response to destabilization, through new patterns of migration, of the privileged link between habit and habitat – the basis on which the racialized myth of Indigenous origins rests. My cross-examination of these spaces will address the present-day issue of belonging that arises as a result of the current sociopolitical climate. The thesis will intervene in understanding the ways that established spaces reflect the identities of Black Germans, their sense of self, and also their homes, their *Heimat*.

Chapter 1

The Self in *Home?* And *Roots Germania*

The link between the Self and the concept of Heimat can be approached from multiple angles. In the previous chapter, I introduced Heimat as a concept not rooted in a spatial location but in several ideological frameworks that make it a dynamic mishmash resulting in one central theme. The self, as one of these frameworks, refers to everything that makes up a being- the origin of their essence- their personalities, and the physical manifestation of their emotional acuity and intellect as seen by other people. Historically, the definitions of the self that existed pre-21st century focus more on wealthy white males, which makes the scope of the definitions limited. Jonathan Brown credits William James (1890) as one of the first psychologists who saw the Duality of the ‘I’ and the “Me”. According to Brown,

the self has a unique quality, a quality we will refer to as a reflexive property. Consider the statement, “I see Pat.” The self is implicated in this statement by the use of the personal pronoun I. I am doing the seeing. Now consider the statement “I see.” Here, the self is implicated in two ways. I am still the one doing the seeing, and the thing I am seeing is ME. In more formal terms, we can say that people can take themselves as an object of their attention. They look back on themselves, much as when they see their reflection in a mirror (hence the use of the word reflexive) (2),

His way of seeing the self analyzes the foundations of the self as they introduce the different forms of the self that will be essential in constituting Heimat. William James identifies the duality that comes from seeing the self from a personal point of view and another person’s gaze.

This gaze unlocks a feeling of retrospection that allows for thematic issues to be addressed. These issues require thinking faculties that have emboldened Descartes's claims of the self as *res cogitans*- *a thinking being, a substance of the soul that is the basis of all consciousness* (Blickle, 64). Kant and Freud, in their analysis of the self, also described a form of duality in the way that one sees himself and the way that others see the individual. These external perceptions conceptualize a form of Other that is a double of the thinking self. Thus, the self as a thinking being sees itself in one way- building the perception of the I- and the way others see the self – building the perception of the Me.

Although the exact origin of the concept of the self remains mysterious, according to Blickle, the indisputable fact remains that there is a thinking being present in everyone that makes conscious decisions and represents internal and external perceptions of any living person. This living person is the self who is then regarded by other people, who form their opinions. James believes that the self can be categorized into three: (1) The material self, which encompasses the corporeal and the non-corporeal part of him. This part deals with all that a person calls mine, but also all that the person can accumulate in the quest to establish an identity. (2) The social self: this category of the self deals with the way that a person is regarded and recognized by others. This category involves the perception that comes from impressions that are formed as a result of the material self. (3). The spiritual self: The spiritual self is our inner self or our psychological self. It is comprised of everything we call my or mine that is not a tangible object, person, or place, or a social role.

These three categories of the self reflect the forms of the self that people see and also shed more light on the origins of the self, at least in a way that is not contained in Blickle's analysis. In relating it to the Heimat concept, which underlies this work, all three categories

come together to provide an answer to the question “Who are you” or “Where are you from?”.

The material self that deals with the corporeal aspect shows how not only the physical possessions but also the noncorporeal aspects of the material world reflect in defining the self. Their professional achievements include Mo as a Journalist and Elliot as a filmmaker. James believed that these and many more were a part of the fluidity that made up the self. In his opinion:

... a man's Self the sum total of all that he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friends, his reputation and works, his lands and horses, and yacht and bank-account. All the things give him the Same emotions. If they wax and prosper, he feels triumphant; if they dwindle and die away, he feels cast down- not necessarily in the same degree for each thing, but in much the same way for all (291-292).

James's claims introduce the self as an amalgamation of several parts that appear to cover different aspects but are linked. The material self, which covers the physical self, then introduces the social self to the world. The social self represents the other modes and interposes all others to create a fully functional being. John Randolph Leblanc articulates this by defining the self as “a being who can articulate a sense of identity—in other words, one who can narrate self-consciousness -within a set of ideas, moral and ethical, that locate that self in the larger human endeavor of community or culture (15). Leblanc's definition of the self encapsulates the other definitions of the term and encompasses them in a new phrase: Identity. Identity is, in this sense, the finished product that the world relates to and not the more primal self.

Other scholars who approach the self in this manner include Stets and Burke (2000), who believe that the self is seen as the conscious essence that has a meaningful and effective

relationship with other social entities. Cinoglu and Arikan then build on this by claiming “the self is a dynamic entity with the ability to interpret and reinterpret the environment and eventually transform itself into something that we could identify as the next step: identity (1115).” The transition from the self to identity occurs as a result of the societal constructs as well as others, which include a sense of place and belonging, a sense of Heimat. Heimat transposes Identity from a state of self to a construct that is interwoven with origin, social identity, space, and race. Leblanc views this as transitive identity as it is not dependent on fixed factors, but it analyzes an individual against a defined other in the quest to establish a definite identity. Identity becomes a point of negotiation for the self as well as the society. This point of negotiation examines the fluidity through which the external factors affect the determined other. Leblanc sees this as a site of liminality where identity and the self converge. This site then reverts to the “duality” or “hybridity” that was mentioned earlier as a definition of the self.

In *Home?* and *Roots Germania*, the aforementioned negotiations take place in two protagonists who identify as Afro-Germans: Mo Asumang, with Ghanaian and German roots, and Elliot Blue with an Afro heritage stemming from their father. Their hybridized identities contain W.E.B. Du Bois’s notion of double consciousness. This double consciousness is built on his contextualization that each part of their being contains a self; therefore, they have two for each part of their identities. He believed that;

One ever feels his twoness,—An American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts,
two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose
dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (45).

The double consciousness that he emphasized described a Self that saw itself differently from the self that was seen by society. Du Bois’s notion of hybridity is interesting, as it relates to people

who have their ancestry from two geographical communities (like Mo with Ghana and Germany) or in Elliots' case (they have a black father and a German mother). Elliot's case then poses the question of how many souls they can possess in this situation according to Du Bois's theory. I posit that the hybridity that Du Bois is referring to here is not going to be found in Elliot and Mo's souls. Rather, their sense of self conceptualizes this hybridity as a longing for a specific identity that is not found in one community but in both communities. This includes Elliot as well, because their Black self is not made of two separate identities but a single one. Marcus Stoezler explains Du Bois's focus as an examination into the merging of the double self (168). Both parts cannot overcome one another, and the influences of their roots cannot be wiped away. Du Bois's theory is a foundation for an inquiry into the union of the two selves and the creation of a new identity.

Homi Bhabha speaks of this in his chapter on *Interrogating Identity*. He believes that Identity is "a demand that reaches outward to an external object and as Jacqueline Rose writes, 'It is the relation of this demand to the place of the object it claims that becomes the basis for identification (63).'" Bhabha conceptualizes Identity as a function of an external stimuli – Heimat- which leaves room for the self to create a persona that is acceptable in that established space. This personae then brings us to the **two** questions which this chapter aims to address- Who are You? and Where do you come from? These answers to these questions bridge the link between the Self, identity, and Heimat.

The Self in *Home*?

Identifying the various means through which the self is expressed in *Home*? is an enlightening part, as Blue journeys through confronting misconceptions about themselves as a result of their skin color and the community in which they grew up. They also confront their own

idealized identity because they conform to their environment in order to manifest a sense of self that is acceptable.

The line “I know I am not welcome” introduces Blue’s self to the audience and elevates their sense of self to that of a Guest- why? Because they are black. This would have led to them seeing things differently. Although they were black, their identity as a child would have made for an interesting dynamic. They began to see themselves as other. So on one side, there is the child who is simply growing up: the child of an Afro-American father (who they said was. Cooking in the kitchen when they met them. On the other hand, they existed as an Afrogerman child in a small and slightly racist neighborhood. In their opinion, “country people are racist-, but that’s okay. Once you figure out this thing; that you are black in Germany. You rock this thing like a f***king professional” (3: 58- 4:08). This scene identifies an acceptance for the self in a way that shows how the societal self has been made to feel others. Their skin color makes them something of an oddity in their neighborhood, but that is seemingly acceptable because of the small and confined space in which they grew up. As Jean M. Twenge alludes to this in her chapter on the socially excluded individual: “In previous eras, people often grew up in small towns or insular neighborhoods and knew the same small set of people all of their lives. Modern citizens, in contrast, often move to new cities for school or jobs, and must make new friends every place they go (311)”. Growing up in the country, Elliot was in this situation. Their predominantly white community would have been like a small community so the uncanniness that comes from seeing aspects of their self-reflected in a larger urban community is understandable in light of it being strange but familiar because of her genetic disposition. The genetic disposition that they refer to, is not a fact but rather a made-up fact to justify the *unheimlich*. Their reference to not being welcome is related to the physical difference from the other members of their small community.

which makes it difficult to promote their social self. Their identity as Afrogerman is also tied to several misconceptions about their ancestry, as most people mistakenly believe that Elliot's father is a dead African American soldier. This misconception is based on racial assumptions, as Elliot notes, but it also ties their identity to their social self.

The duality of the self is established in 8:38- 8:59. They are confronted with vestiges of their African heritage around them, and they begin to understand a part of their culture that they had kept hidden. As they say in

I never realized to what extent being other was an essential part of my self-understanding and I would never deny the violence of growing up black in an all-white surrounding. But I also have to acknowledge certain privileges that come with it. For example: I never had to fight for my right to come. I never had to fight for my right to stay (8:38-9:00).

In the monologue above, they examine the difference between them and members of the African diaspora, who are present and a part of their heritage. Their identity as Afrogerman is tied to being a part of that African community of which they had been deprived. On the one hand, their duality comes into play in the fact that their social self is perceived to be a part of the diasporic community. On the other hand, they have no claim to this part of their heritage, and it shows in their amazement.

The scene depicts African foods that are meant to be familiar to Blue but seem strange due to their lack of previous contact with this aspect of their heritage. They express the peculiarity of trying to reconnect with a culture that has been absent from their immediate family for a long time. The assumption of their identity as a member of the diasporic community is intriguing for several reasons connected to their social self. Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned that members of

their community mistakenly believed that Elliot's father was a deceased African American soldier. Her father, as an African American, differed from a migrant who moved to Germany from Africa. The former's presence in a white community was likely established centuries ago due to colonial efforts to transport slaves to the New World—North America and Europe. In contrast, the latter was a more recent migrant from an African country, living in Germany of their own free will. This misconception about their origin—held by their neighbors—along with how it relates to their self-understanding raises an interesting notion of Heimat. As a member of the African Diaspora, albeit through an extended connection, their heritage and understanding of Heimat are inextricably linked to Africa in one way or another. Except for their genetic predisposition toward curly hair, Blue is several generations removed from their African heritage, which renders claims about their sense of self and connections to Africa as their Heimat quite expansive.

Their identity and connection to Heimat is not tied to a place. The misconceptions are reflected in the scene from Robert Stemmle's *Toxi*, where Dr. Rose fixes Toxi's identity with the African continent. Blue is Afrogerman, and their sense of self, identity, and Heimat is not fixed towards a place because of their genetic presupposition of being colored, indicating African Heritage. Rather, their sense of self is tied to a community that accepts them for who they are. As they sit in the barber's shop in 12:10, they are confronted with a care that they had not been used to. They had been so used to their material and social self-being seen as other- their identity as the black child- set in stone. The treatment in the barber's shop felt strange. They said, "When I see all this care and self-care, it makes me happy and strong. A little bit like I belong". Their sense of Self and identity begins to evolve at this moment as they begin to see themselves not as other but as part of something greater- a community.

Their sense of Identity begins to evolve in a new concept of Heimat, where their identity and sense of self manifests as a safe place. This safe place that is both familiar and strange is a community. In 14:53 they begin the last part of the documentary with diegetic text which reads: “3. Community: and then I met them”. The phrase that began the last segment of Elliot Blue’s mockumentary raises questions and answers them in the same vein. The statement had a phrase of finality to it in a mockumentary that had been presented in perpetual motion – a moment of realization. Who does Blue refer to as THEM? For a filmmaker who identifies as nonbinary- they entwined their sense of self, their duality, and their heritage in a transitive identifier, they could have been referring to several persons or a single person. This dynamic is interesting if one examines the accompanying sequences. These sequences display several Afrogerman people, each more confident than the last in their sense of self and in their identity as they dance. Was Blue referring to a single person or the community? The phrase and the accompanying music that introduces the community members highlight their importance. The soundtrack is peppy, the visuals are bright. Novelists of the flowery persuasion would probably say something about flowers being in bloom and life having a buttery taste. The finality of the sequence opening part indicates a full circle moment that has become closed. The duality and the uncanniness that accompanied their life are now dispersed after meeting THEM.

In 12:52-13:12, Blue propounds the problems of being other in German society as they reflect on the duality of their Identity. They ask: “What is it like to go through the world without encountering various levels of animosity on a daily basis? What is it like to feel so painfully inadequate, so deeply flawed?”. Their questions, which are reflected in their diary entry, address how their identity and self are being attacked for their duality. Their material self and their social self identify as others and subject them to societal animosity as one who doesn’t belong in

society. Their lack of conformity to the whiteness of their environment subjects them to a future where they exist outside of the community. Their worry about feeling flawed is a worry that originates from an uncanny place where Germany is familiar but strange.

This feeling of being flawed begs the question: who determines the sense of being incomplete? Under whose standards are the domains of identity constructed in order to create a feeling of belonging? These questions are questions that manifests in Mo Asumang's *Roots Germania* as well as she seeks to find her identity in Ghana and Germany.

The Self in *Roots Germania*

The self is reflected both similarly and differently in Mo Asumang's *Roots Germania*. Unlike Blue, whose Afro heritage is American, her Afro heritage is closer as her father is Ghanaian. This makes her quest for Identity and self in Germany and Ghana different. The presence of a living relative in Ghana makes her battles different from Blue. Her journey to find herself begins after Neo-Nazis threaten her. So she begins to search from Germany to locate the reason for the threats as well as situate herself better in a fixed identity.

In 1:30-32, Mo introduces herself and situates herself within Germany by saying "Es leben hier 9 % Ausländer und Migranten. Eine davon bin ich." This claim, as regards her nationality, serves as a mirror of Mo's sense of self from the outside. Her statement about being a foreigner rings true because of her paternal origin. She was born to a German mother and a Ghanaian father who met in Berlin while her mother was 21 and her father was in Germany on a study visa. She was born in Germany, but she regards herself as a foreigner because of how she was seen. Her mother spoke about not understanding the ramifications of bringing a colored child into the world. Still, her existence could not be denied in that her identity as a child with two parents comes before her skin color. Her skin color made it difficult for her to grow a fully

established sense of self in the 60's as it was a time when the nation still didn't know what to do about biracial children and they were subtly being separated to preserve societal norms.

As Mo talks about her upbringing as a child, her words raise a sense of unease as well as sympathy for the child that she was as she describes her experience growing up. She says:

Ich hab' mich immer so heimatlos gefühlt. Heimatlos, weil ich anders aussehe.

Ein Bisschen kommt die Heimatlosigkeit, weil es bei mir ein standiges Hin und

Her gab zwischen Kinderheim, Pflegeeltern, Oma, Mutter (4:21- 4:22).

A child growing up in the situation described above would be hard pressed to situate her identity without stability to influence her development as well as a nurturing environment to support herself as a result of the motion. Although Mo's case is a bit different as in the constant transfer between buildings, her grandmother and mother are there, her sense of self is shaped in that way. She describes the one thing that she is jealous of as a family. The love of her mother and her grandmother which should have informed her identity as a child before her skin color, is repressed in this case. She is jealous of a family structure that she is denied because of the societal self - the child that society sees as an intruder in the whiteness of it all.

Mo talks about growing up in Germany as a migrant. Her description of herself as a migrant raises the question that was raised earlier in this chapter with Elliot Blue. Who defines Germanness as it relates to a sense of identity and the self? Mo, as a woman of color was at the time of the film's release, a well-known tv presenter and moderator, but her professional success is colored by the phrase "eine der ersten farbigen Moderatorin in Deutschland". There her success as a moderator is highlighted by her skin color. The uncanniness and duality that can arise here indicate an identity that's not just based on her achievements but rather the color of her skin dictates her achievement. There is a duality expressed in the way she defines this

achievement as though there is a different way in which she sees her achievements and the way that it is seen by the others.

Here, Heimat is not determined for Mo through her sense of self, as it is in question. Her identity, which should be rooted in her birthright and her origin are called into question. As she navigates her life after the death threats in “Noten des Hasses” – The lyrical death threat released by the musical group “ White Aryan Rebels- , she arranges a meeting with a member of the group, who finds humor in the situation. As he explains:

Die Frage ist, ob sie Mo zuhören wurden. Das kann man wirklich nicht beurteilen.

Aber bei Mo ist die Hautfarbe entsprechend, auch wenn sie in Deutschland geboren ist. Aber die Hautfarbe macht ein Effekt; Ausländer in Deutschland geborene (10:21-10:40).

The conversation dissolves into a rally where the Neonazi activist and lawyer, Jürgen Rieger is giving a speech. The speech is not shown, but the brief glance at the rally shows Rieger standing before a crowd, while the crowd chants: *Ausländer Raus! Deutschland der Deutschen!* (10:49-10:55). The scene cuts to Mo, as she introduces Rieger as a leading lawyer for the right-wing scene and describes him. She highlights her reservations about meeting him as she only gave him her name and said nothing about her ethnicity. Her introduction to the lawyer is pleasant, and they move the discussion out of his office. The conversation starts with discussions on Rieger’s unactualized project to relocate willing Germans to an Island. As they discuss the polemics of this plan, Rieger corrects misconceptions and states that it was meant to allow the potential candidates to leave behind technology and global warming usw. This leads to an interesting exchange:

Mo: Soll ich mich auch melden?

Rieger: Nee.

Mo: Warum nicht?

Rieger: Weil Sie also wie gesagt nicht germanischen Ursprung sind.

Mo: Wieso?

Rieger: Gucken Sie mal in Spiegel dann! (13:09-13:20)

This fascinating exchange illustrates Rieger's view on biracial people's claims to home and also to Germanness. Here, his not-so-subtle jab at her skin introduces the same duality that has been experienced but perhaps in clearer light than has been stated before. Mo's social self is not seen as German because of her origin. Her bronze skin marks her as other, so if she sees herself as German, it would be in a different light from Rieger. This experience is then reversed in Ghana where she heads to find herself.

In Ghana, she notices a signpost for a small shop that displays her name – Asumang (18:09). This encounter exhilarates her, as it introduces a sense of belonging that was absent after her experience with the right-wing activists and believers. She feels excited about this and embraces her identity as a Ghanaian. While this acceptance offers a subtle resolution to the question of her origins and connects her to her roots, there is a slight difference from what occurred in Germany. Her meeting with Rieger unfolded the way it did because she only provided her name, not her ethnicity. Thus, it would be fair to assume that "Mo" is a common name that raised no eyebrows. In Ghana, her native name—Yaa Akoma—not only identifies her but also signifies that she is one of them. Her following conversation with her father about the joy of seeing her name on the post clarifies the otherness that she had lived under as a result of her name. She introduces herself to an older woman as Monika Yaa Akoma, and in 19:28 tells the woman of her purpose in Ghana; "to bring the souls together." She means her German and her

Ghanaian souls as he punctuates this statement with pictures of her grandmother in Ghana and her grandmother in Germany. The Ghanaians ignore this duality and welcome her as one of their own. The migrant in her has found a place to establish her roots.

She celebrates with this new family and embraces a new dimension of Heimat that she didn't experience in Germany- a Heimat that was rooted in shared heritage and identity. As Mo dances with the kids, she tells her father to ask the kids if she is white or black (24: 32- 24:40). The kids reply that she is white. These children do not base their response on her skin color but rather they base their evaluation on her mannerisms as well as her ignorance of the local culture and the language as she spoke English and required a translator to communicate with the children. In coming to Ghana, she has actualized an identity that she is confident in and can find a community that accepts her. Her sole surmountable hindrance to this community is a slight ignorance of the local culture, and Language. They embrace her as one of them, but her ignorance of the culture and the language barrier create a situation where she still has a foot out the door.

Chapter 2

Culture(s) as Heimat in Home? And Roots Germania

The existence of culture as a part of Heimat is grounded in the mobility of Heimat and its entanglement with cultural ideas. Heimat is rooted in several spaces, and in the last chapter, I examined selfhood and identity formation as a part of it. Heimat intertwines itself with cultural identity, representation, and linguistic expression to prescribe another area of the discourse that I will examine in this chapter. As a child in Nigeria, the constantly repeated rhetoric became a rudimentary definition of culture that might work in this aspect. This rhetoric identified culture as the total way of life of a people. The keyword “People” idealizes the members belonging to a particular group and fixates their cultural idea of Heimat as belonging only to that group without leaving room for intrusion by others. However, modern day factors are disproving this understanding and paving the way for constant evolution in this area.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines culture as “the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group”. It further describes it as the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time. Culture in its various forms is essential to a new and improved concept of Heimat in that cultural spaces become mediums of conversation to create a new discourse. This discourse informed Thomas Lekan’s idea of Heimat having several features that relate it to a transcultural domain that synthesizes national border, identity, and the notion of home into a single word: Culture. He referenced the words of Cornell University’s cofounder A.D. White who said; “[t]hat the ultimate end of a great modern nation is something besides manufacturing, or carrying, or buying or selling products; that art, literature, science, and thought, in its highest flights and widest ranges, are greater and more important.”(145).

Among the representations of Heimat that serve as a tool of cultural representation is Language. As an identifying factor, language is essential in demonstrating ties to culture and in some way inseparable. Yasmin Yildiz referenced Gilman Sander who described Language as a tool for identifying culture (22). "Although the model of language appropriation redefines which identities are produced and mediated through a given language and thereby undermines the notion of a simple homology between one language and one identity, it continues to rest on a fundamental assumption of language as property" (40). While Language is one of the major identifying factors in cultural representations of Heimat, Heimat also encompasses several other aspects that contribute to its conceptual makeup. Lekan identified these other representations as a Kulturlandschaft. He believed that "the Kulturlandschaft did not serve merely material needs but instead was an ideal form that dispensed moral lessons and legitimated historical claims to a particular territory" (142).

Lekan's Kulturlandschaft does not refer only to fixed cultural landscapes but also to places of memory. These places do not have to be associated with specific memories, but the cultural representations that they stand for become associated with these memories. As Eric Hobsbawm observes, "Heimat is almost always a social construction rather than a real memory ... At the limit, as when we look back across oceans or generations ... it becomes an imagined community (32)." This imagined community that Hobsbawm mentions draws a sort of narrativity from the fact that it is not somewhere that is fixed, but rather it is a mobile place where the foreign becomes the familiar, the unhomely becomes homely. These communities might not be limited to people but involve places of cultural acceptance, where there is a stirring in the self to feel at home. David Morel gives an example of Abigail Ramsey, an African-American student at Brown University in the USA, interviewed on her decision, after a year of living in a mixed-race

student house, to move to the college's Harambee House, specifically set aside for African-Americans, explained her relief in her new home thus: "all of a sudden, I can talk to people going through the same things ... It feels more like home" (18). Communities such as the one that Morley describes utilize items of cultural representation, such as language, food, art, and religion, to serve as cultural ambassadors, and their storage places as embassies for the negotiation of Heimat. In the following sections of these place, I will examine these items as they are presented in *Home?* and *Roots Germania* to further my discussion of culture as a representative function of Heimat.

Culture Sites and Cultural Representations in *Home?*

Culture in *Home?* is represented in multiple ways as Blue takes the audience on a journey guided by their voice as a narrative and drawing the audience into their narrative as they investigate. Language is the first representation of Culture for Blue. The documentary is narrated fully in English, except for a scene in the Barbershop where the audience is treated to a conversation between the barber and a client in German, however, it switches back to English when it's Blues turn to get their hair cut.

The choice of English as the language of narration is an interesting one for several reasons. At the time of the narrative's beginning, Blue's choice of English appears to be a deliberate attempt to help further the misconception about their African origins, as most people erroneously assumed that their father was a dead African- American soldier, an assumption to which Blue laughed and remarked that that it was 2018 (3:04). This reference to 2018, could also be a reference to the fact that Germany at the time was becoming more diverse. A Deutsch Welle article from early 2018 made reference to Germany's increasingly diverse population in a micro census that identified the number of people with migrant backgrounds and other immigrants.

Another possible reason for English as the narrative choice could also be the fact that they believe themselves to be a guest in Germany. They do not see themselves as welcome; even in places where they are welcomed, it is only as guests. This fact is unsurprising because the first three minutes of *Home?* are narrated with a view of the outdoors, but the narrative suggests that there is a missing cultural gap in Blue's life because of their biracial origins. While their use of English might be a satirical revolt against those they grew up with, assuming that Blue's father was African-American, I opine that they used English as a negotiating medium between their two cultures because of its role in the wider world. Yildiz believes that "the 'mother tongue' was the medium through which one was tied organically to one's nation as well as the only basis of access to proper subjectivity and legitimacy (31)." The debate on the mother tongue here is quite interesting, as Blue, in the early scenes of the narrative, described growing up in a German community. The question remains: why choose English rather than German, which they grew up speaking? One could argue that they chose English as the narrative language because they grew up biracial and they chose English because they were more comfortable with it. While that assumption might be plausible, it can also be considered that English is a satirical choice, chosen to give credence to an earlier remark about growing up as a guest in the community (their own home). To emend Friedrich Schleiermacher who once wrote; An Artist can only provide written work in his mother tongue. Schleiermacher's assumption was based on an antisemitic treatise which I would appropriate in this case because of its similarities. Their first language is the language they grew up with, and in 2018 they grew up in a global community that had people of different backgrounds and although English is regarded the world over as an important language for communication, in a narrative about home, it introduces an uncanny narrative that emphasizes the alienation from society and makes it obvious that they are not welcome. If it

were a documentary about an American attempting to find their roots, then English would be understandable, but for someone born in Germany, English as a narrative choice doesn't give credence to the roots of Germany as home. Although I have proposed various reasons for English as the narrative choice, the best and most plausible one extends the fact that Germany, and in particular Berlin, has in recent years become multicultural, and so English is used as an acceptable tool in negotiating the different cultures.

A shift in the timeframe of the narrative puts the audience three years into the future, and they are introduced to the bubbling metropolis that is multicultural Berlin. The camera pans from the moving traffic across the various landmarks in the city and ends with the audience returning to a role in the driver's seat. Blue launches into a little bit of a cultural lesson on German colonial history. They examine the importance of the monuments of colonial overloads that had, in Blue's opinion, been monumental to German ideas of black people. They examine the site of the Congo Conference of 1884 in its current reincarnation, as well as statues dedicated to historical figures who had been instrumental in the expansion of the German empire. They attempt to identify the various spaces that serve as cultural sites of Germany's colonial past, but most of these sites do not exist any longer. The links to these historical events lie in the statues as well as in the names of streets that were dedicated to these colonial patriarchal figures. Blue laments about colonial history and its absence in mainstream German cultural history. This absence makes native Germans unable to understand the impact that Germany's colonial history has on the people from the affected regions and members, especially at the time of this narrative, the Herero and Nama genocides had not fully been acknowledged (The incident has now been acknowledged). The only evidence of this part of German history was in the names on the street signs, such as Mohrenstraße, Petersallee, Nachtigal Platz, etc. (The street signs have also been

changed and replaced with names of liberation fighters). The street signs that were changed invoke a nuanced concept of culture as memory. Jenny Engler references Rothberg's essay on Multidirectional memory and sees these signs as the Past made present (*Renaming Streets, Inverting Perspectives: Acts Of Postcolonial Memory Citizenship In Berlin*; 43). These historical places and events are fixed mediums of cultural transference, but there are also portable mediums.

These portable, transferable mediums of culture involve food items, clothing and other easily identifiable aspects. As Blue explores a neighborhood in Berlin, they go into the International Afro Shop, a grocery store containing food items from multiple African countries. The camera pans over the various items in the store. These food items are portable representations of a culture that Blue is unfamiliar with, as they had been used to keeping things about their blackness private. The sight of these African items, as Blue says, "chilling on every street corner" (min 8:20-8:39) is uncanny as they are cultural ambassadors, and based on Blue's heritage, should not be strange, but they are a bit, especially as Blue sees them displayed for perusal by those that want them. There is a barbershop adjoining the Afroshop, where customers are able to step in from the Afro shop. The barber speaks in German to a person and the viewers are able to listen to the conversation until it is time for the next customer. Then the Barber begins to speak in English. It is unknown if the second person requested to be spoken to in English beforehand but there is a shift in this moment, that has an uncanny feeling to it. Language is a medium of culture for the barber and these two people, and they express themselves in the language that they want, while also engaging with culture on two fronts. The location of this shop in itself is special, as small businesses like this serve as places for those who are feeling the stirrings of home sickness to come and be reminded of their culture. For Blue, this shop and the

surroundings are a portal of negotiation for them to be faced with their Afro culture and heritage in a neutral location. Locations such as the afro shop and the hair salon allow them to feel at home and create a safe space from racial prejudice. Although this space is physically present in Germany, it offers a multi-sensory experience where each person who comes in is immersed in the comfort of home while remaining physically present.

Culture and Cultural sites in Roots Germania

Unlike the depiction of culture and Cultural sites in *Home?* which allowed Blue to negotiate African Culture in Germany, Mo grapples with the topic by taking a trip to Ghana in a bid to find her culture. In the documentary's opening scenes, Mo introduces herself as a guest in Germany, despite her migrant roots. This unusual self-identification may be an attempt to preemptively address the perceptions of those who view her as an outsider due to her skin color and mixed ethnicity. Mo's cultural identity appears to be in a state of flux, shaped by her ongoing interactions with German society. This contrasts with Blue's seemingly more stable cultural root, Mo is treated as a foreigner because of her skin color and her mixed ethnicity. Although she also sees herself as a guest in Germany as a result of her migrant roots, she uses the German language as the language of communication with the people that she interviewed in Germany. In an obvious rebuttal of Schleimacher's hypothesis, her German identifies her as a native German, but the people she meets don't see her as one because of her skin. Thus, the question that she asks these people is; "Wo soll ich denn hin?" sends her on a cultural quest. However, it also raises the question of the importance and visibility of German culture as an identifying factor for Afrogermans.

Mo's arrival in Ghana in search of her roots and cultural identity highlights the significance of language, as her introduction to Ghanaian culture is not fully realized due to the

language barrier. She navigates this barrier with English, along with the assistance of her father and a few others who translate into the native dialect for her. She meets the older members of the community, who welcome her warmly as she shares her familial ancestry, though they still perceive her as white. When she asks her interpreter to inquire if the children she is dancing with see her as white or Ghanaian, they respond that they view her as Ghanaian. She anticipated this answer, having conversed with them mainly in English and being unable to engage in deeper discussions in the local dialect. While this could indicate a childhood distant from the Ghanaian aspect of her culture, she longs for more than just recognizing her name on a signboard to feel a true sense of belonging. Her meeting with the elders of the community to learn about the culture is enlightening; they embrace her as one of their own and proceed to teach her about their traditions. Just like in Blue's case, a part of her that should feel familiar is instead unfamiliar, and she approaches her own culture as a stranger.

The spokesperson for the elders tells Mo that to know a people is to know their culture (min 26:24). They give her two bottles of Schnapps and tell her to pour a little on the ground before pouring a glass for the seated people. They tell her that the reason for this is to give thanks to the mother earth and that all that visit do this as a part of their culture. As the seated elders tell Mo more about the culture, the next couple of scenes show a celebration and ritual of sorts, where the people dance in a circle as they communicate with the ancestors. The dancing and the ritual movements are supposedly a way to communicate with the ancestors, and they involve an animal sacrifice. This cultural ritual reminds her of a pagan priest and witch she knows in Germany who have a similar ritual. There is a dissolve between the scene in Ghana and the scene in the forest in Germany where she meets the priest in Germany. This dissolve shows the uncanniness of the ritual as it allows her to begin to draw similarities between the two.

The Pagan priest in Germany tells her about the similarities between pagan ceremonies in Africa and the ones in Germany. The two ceremonies both honor the earth and the spirits of the ancestors. The ceremonies also highlight a similarity in both cultures: the use of Forests as holy places. These holy places hold ancient beliefs that are thousands of years old and predate the existence of Christianity. Another dissolve brings the viewer back to the elders in Ghana, who explain the importance of the forests as well as the existence of an oracle who is an intermediary for the spirits, essentially the African Pagan Priest/priestess.

The oracle narrates her function to Mo as a guide for people who seek divine assistance in their daily activities. The oracle shows Mo the divination stones that she uses in her divinations. Interestingly, the divination stones have Nordic runes on them. These runes depict a tie between Germany and Africa that belies the previous assumptions of Neo-Nazis about German origins. Upon returning to Germany, she travels to Wewelsburg, the place that would have been the ideological headquarters of the Third Reich. She chooses Wewelsburg because of its association with spiritual connotations of Heimat and what it means to be German. Although she is not able to find much except the cultural sites that stand resplendent on Neo-Nazi merchandise because of the black sun depicted. She travels to the Oerlingshausen Museum, an open-air archeological museum that shows the progression of the Germanic people from neolithic times up to medieval times. There she learns more about German culture and roots, especially as it relates to aspects of the culture that was misappropriated as part of Nazi Propaganda. She learns more about Germanic mythology, which has similar ties with African mythology. As she learns more about this topic, several scenes are shown that depict the multiculturalism of these roots. Multiple people are gathered there to take part in the rituals creating something more than the neo-Nazi definition of culture. There is a stark contrast to prior

neo-Nazi ideas about the supremacy of the German culture that had foreshadowed Mo's quest. The previous ideas about Germany being only for the Germans are disproved as she finds roots of a joint cultural history in the cultural spaces of both countries. The forests, religions, and the people she encounters in these spaces introduce and reinforce a transcultural idea of Heimat. Some of the people that she meets at the festivals talk about the festivals as an energy point for different people. As she watches, she begins to make connections to other places and people.

The notion of a multicultural Germany in defiance of neo-Nazi Germany is further expanded when she visits the scene of a demonstration (41:21- 43:23) on the 8th of May. The day's significance makes the event itself significant as the demonstrators claimed they were gathered to celebrate Germany and revel in their pride as German citizens. Mo asks several people for an interview before being granted one with a man who airs his opinion on what it means to be German and proud of it. Mo inquires if she is allowed to display her pride as a black person, and the man responds that if that would be all that she wants to do, she is free to do so. He is not against other Europeans moving into Germany and staying there, but he takes offense at other races, especially "Asians." Interestingly, he claims this as he expresses his wishes for ethnic cleansing to keep Germany for the Germans and ensure that they are not separated from their roots. Although the demonstrator's worries are quite understandable, they are also limited in scope, especially considering Berlin's multiculturalism. As Mo notes, for every demonstration, there are two counter-demonstrations. In Min 50:01- 09, there is a rapid panorama of items of Germanness, a build with the words *Dem Deutschen Volke*, the German flag, and then settles on the scene of a counter-protest. There are a lot of multicultural people present here, and the first face that the viewers see of the protesters is a multiracial boy holding a ballon saying No to Neo-Nazis. This counter-demonstration represents the multiversity of the people living in the city,

who came out to show their solidarity and defend their Germanness. The crowd responds with the refrain, “Yes, I am,” to the hip-hop artist who entertains the crowd. This sequence itself explores solidarity and a desire to stand against neo-Nazi violence and oppression. Germanness, in this instance, is no longer a white cultural production, as described by neo-Nazi sentiments. The cultural representation shown at the protests depicts Germanness as a cultural identity that is not based on skin color but rather a sense of solidarity exhibited through a common sense of togetherness and certainty in the feeling that they belong and that they are at home.

The cultural spaces depicted in *Roots Germania* differ significantly from those in *Home?* Mo’s experience in seeking out culture introduces her to a depiction of Heimat that Blue did not have because of the form in which they approach the subject matter. As Blue’s experience with cultural spaces is limited to the Afro Shop in Berlin, they are presented with a carefully curated cultural space that is designed to remind those who see them of their roots and also bring them closer to their culture. However, Mo can explore African culture at the root and find similarities with the German culture that she grew up with. Although language is an important part of the culture that marks them as other, Blue and Mo can navigate it as a medium to bridging the aspects of their heritage that had remained separate. The uncanny depiction of the forests of Ghana and Germany shown in *Roots Germania*, as well as images of the countryside and panoramic views from the parks in *Home?* showcase a culture of home that differs from each other, but both showcase a sense of belonging. The sites of cultural representation in both mediums take place in rural and urban spaces that introduce Heimat in another form and invite further communication with the space around them.

Chapter 3

Nature spaces in *Home?* and *Roots Germania*

In the last two sections of this essay, I have examined the self and culture as representations of Heimat, and both concepts have proven thus far that in a critical reevaluation of Heimat, one has to look beyond what is on the surface to what lies underneath. The investigation of space as a feature of Heimat has introduced several opinions on the discourse, with multiple scholars investigating the different connotations of space as a representation of Heimat. In her article on the spatial turn in Heimat studies, Frederike Eigler observed that “Heimat as a particular manifestation or imagining of place has at times carried highly conservative and static features, similar to those Massey rejects as dominant notions of place among geographers” (37). Eigler’s observations were based on a critical analysis of three works on the subject: “Elizabeth Boa and Rachel Palfreyman’s coauthored *Heimat: A German Dream; Regional Loyalties and National Identity in German Culture, 1890-1990* (2000); Peter Blickle’s *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland* (2002); and Johannes von Moltke’s *No Place like Home: Locations of Heimat in German Cinema* (2005). (29)”. The three books offered different notions of Heimat from a spatial point of view, however, one thing they had in common was their investigation of humans within the natural spaces surrounding him. Space as a component has been explored to identify the marks that link it to geographical notions of Heimat. These explorations have introduced several interesting factors to this concept, and how the best parts of Heimat are beneath the surface. Blickle, as well as Boa and Palfreyman, investigate this concept as a way of placemaking and how it negotiates identity and gender. Von Moltke on the other hand investigates it from a literary perspective as he analyzes the visual representations of Heimat as an instance of place making.

The investigation into the geographical notions of Space as Heimat introduces an emotional aspect to space that draws attention to the liminality of space as a hybrid medium of place making. This emotional aspect is best described by Stephanie Donald in her book *There is No Place Like Home: The Migrant Child in World Cinema* (2018). While her work doesn't exactly negotiate Heimat, it negotiates belonging and the intrusiveness of modernity in spatial locations. She introduces something that she calls "The Dorothy Complex"; a complex that arises when a child finds themselves in a strange place and they attempt to remind themselves of their home (1-6). While the protagonists in *Home?* and *Roots Germania* cannot be considered as children in the temporal sense of the word, they are still children attempting to negotiate their belonging and their relationship with their surroundings and so space; both rural and urban spaces play a good part in this. In their quest to find their place, they engage in fantasies of escape which emboldens them.

The uncanniness of Blue and Mo's relationship to the space around them is further demonstrated in the events that preclude their quest. They both undergo a feeling of alienation separating them from other members of society, and in their alienation embrace solitariness that invites constant sojourns in Nature spaces. These spaces allow them to come to terms with themselves as well as bridge their duality and embrace a new definition of Heimat.

Nature Spaces in *Home?*

The introductory sequence of *Home?* depicts space in a way that is guaranteed to bring to the foreground an uncanny feeling because of the interesting contradiction between what the eyes are seeing and what the ears can hear. The buildings that are shown look dilapidated and abandoned, but they have not been abandoned so long that they have fully returned to nature. The space itself is in conversation with nature in the sense that it inhabits the hybrid space where

urban and rural spaces meet; it is far from the populated area, where there is no one around, but also close enough to the city to be affected by the ravages of modernity. The buzzing of a mosquito that introduces the viewer to the sequence is accented by the low sound of running water, close enough to be heard but far enough to be out of sight. I would call it a wild place for the dead trees that are sparse in the shots that are shown, but nature has not been able to break through the concrete wall. The unseen narrator saying, “This place is okay. No, I mean. Really!” (0:00-0- 28) has their words punctuated by the buzzing of the mosquito. This sound, coupled with the scenery and the unseen narrator trying to convince the viewer, introduces an uncanny narrative that describes the location as a place of refuge. This part of town has an abandoned look to it and makes one ask why the unseen narrator is showing the place and trying to convince the viewer of the suitability of the location. Like a real estate agent about to make a sale, Blue’s words are ambiguous in what they refer to; are they talking about this abandoned location or the city in general? Their words don’t exactly inspire confidence in how okay the environment is.

The fact that the place is remote, brings to mind Bettina Stoetzer’s research on the refugee housing situation in Zarin. Stoetzer describes these refugees homes as places that are situated in No- go area. Although they are not labeled like that because of the refugees, the homes are located there. One has to travel past civilization and go into the other part of town to arrive at the home. She exemplifies Virginia, a Kenyan refugee and writes;

When I first came here, I thought this was a farm, and we were just making a stop on the way to our final destination,” Virginia recalled of her arrival in Zarin.

Indeed, arriving at an old train station (fig. 5.3) and walking toward the refugee home, you encountered a landscape that clashed with the image of an urban,

modern, and cosmopolitan Europe—the image familiar to Virginia and other asylum seekers from popular media culture (183).

The refugee home that Stoetzer describes is located about 2 miles from the village proper in an old military installation. Blue's current place of refuge is just like this place, far from the rest of society, but still close enough. They are surrounded by sounds of nature that allow them to be alone with their thoughts, even though the mosquitoes' buzzing will intrude on their stream of thought. There is a quiet communion between man and nature in this abandoned fortress of concrete and steel, surrounded by dead trees. The question of *Heimat* is fully heightened because of the solitude of the place. *Heimat* as a place is meant to be a place of tranquility in the way one relates to it, but the absence of people and identifying marks makes it a dubious place of refuge.

Johanes von Moltke identifies this place of refuge in his chapter on therapeutic topographies. There he identifies depictions of *Heimat* in the highlands as a way to escape the ravages of modernity. Given the ethical valorization of the mountains over the depravity of city life in the context of the novels as well as in Ganghofer's copious autobiographical writings, *Hochland* and *Heimat* come to stand for a "retrospective utopia," an ahistorical place that provides refuge from the spaces of history below (39).

Von Moltke's argument is more closely related to the older idea of *Heimat* as a part of the highlands. However, the location is certainly not the highlands, and it is closer to the populated part of town. Evidence of the uncanny is in the closeness of nature, even though the concrete is more prevalent. The next scene is a transitory one that shows a bike path through a park. This transitory ride is calming as it allows the rider to take the rider's seat as they move through the park. The destination is at the end is a riverbank, where the viewer is able to look across the river and see the wild spaces. In Min 1:17- 1:43 Blue explains that they spend most of their life

outside because it's chillier and because of the endless vegetation. They examine the scale of human existence in relation to the other aspects of nature and the living things that call nature home. They call human beings' guests in nature and emphasize the importance of the other aspects of nature. They call humans "rude guests", a fact that is emphasized by the shots of the dry leaves and the crunchy footsteps in the background.

Blue speaks of their dreams of plants and how much they prefer the company of plants to people because trees don't ask well-intentioned questions. This statement in itself is hilarious as the trees talk, but in their way. The trees tell a story of the influx of modernity, made more obvious by the color of the trees and the fact that the swampy undertones of the trees speak of climate change, and how much the damage to the ecosystem has made what should be hidden open. The way that Blue speaks of these plants, it creates an image of a thriving ecosystem where the leaves are green. Therefore, it invites several questions when one considers the fact that the nature is not particularly welcoming in appearance. So why do they prefer this scenery to being surrounded by people? They answer this question sarcastically by blaming their genetic pedigree. While it can be assumed that their reference to their genetic pedigree is in reference to their African roots. There is also the matter of their German half with its Nordic heritage. Although not much is shown here in terms of German history, the fact that they are outside makes it worth mentioning.

The next series of shots offer a panoramic view of the natural space that Blue shows. They discuss their fear of missing a whole other heritage, but then dispute this as a longing for elsewhere, "like white people do". The question of Home is raised in Blue's description of the elsewhere. Here, elsewhere has a distinct reference to a Heimat that is not expressly depicted but is referenced. The therapeutic features of Heimat are shown here, as the space that surrounds

Blue offers their comfort and solace from the rest of the world. They have found their highlands surrounded by the sound of running water, leaves, and a panoramic view of nature. Although they are comfortable in the space that they are, the elsewhere is a longing that they cannot justify because of their roots. It is also noteworthy that there are depictions of bugs crawling around on the screen, that are interesting to observe. The fact that these animals are just like stick figures makes them uncanny since the real animals are not there but they are there, drawing a parallel between what is present and what should be present.

There is a certain tranquility that Blue finds in these natural spaces that is uncanny in the way that they allow them to leave their worries about fitting in and allow the tranquility of natural spaces to draw them in. As Blue speaks about finding community, a series of shots show them as part of the members of his community in their element. These shots involve one where someone, either Blue or one of their community members, is walking on a path between the trees. A childlike joy is on their face as they skip along the path and run their hands over the leaves. This is a stark contrast to the beginning of the narrative where the leaves are nonexistent and penciled in. As they ride forward, there is an aura of contentment transferred to the viewers. The next shot also shows another person doing yoga in a garden. This person's actions are peaceful, but more noteworthy is the framing of these people against the nature space. Their individuality against the green natural background sends a message: We are home. I felt a sense of relief that made me realize there was an us.

Nature Spaces in *Roots Germania*

The nature spaces in *Roots Germania* differ from the depictions in *Home?* Especially because of their depictions and the wildness that is shown. Unlike the careful curation of *Home?*, Mo shows the wild spaces as they are, untouched by the influences of modernity, and the spaces

that had these aspects of modernity show them as in a separate space as though they exist in another dimension and remain separated by an invisible wall. Mo's presence in these spaces is also quite interesting as some of the scenes with profound revelations and observations happen when she is alone.

The death threat that spawns her quest at first shows her describing her fears in a space, where she is surrounded by four walls. Although there is a sort of openness to this space, being an abandoned factory, it is as though she came to let out the frustration out of fear for her life (min 7:03-7:32). Her body posture in this room is also defensive as she stays in the middle of the room with enough space around her. It is unknown whether this positionality in the room is intentional or an unconscious reaction to the death threat that made her choose the space. However, it informs her quest for a home. Her desire to find her home of course has therapeutic leanings, and she has her decision bolstered by her therapist. Min 8:00- 8:10 has her walking alone in a field surrounded by green spaces on all sides. While there is still a hesitance to her strides, there is also a noticeable swagger in her steps as she wades through the bushes. There is no set path on this field, so she is an intruder in the bushes, and her walk also shows this. The choice of this place both as a cinematic location and as a place for her therapeutic healing is very interesting. I see the bushes as a symbolic representation of the wild part of her life, which makes her difficulty wading through them understandable. Her life as a person of color is chaotic enough and wading through life without having a particular affinity for one side of her heritage or the other makes this an untamed space. Right up till the time she walks in the bushes, and meets her therapist, there is a particular heaviness to her existence that weighs her down. Her existence in this space is a bit more uncanny than it should appear for several reasons. First, here is her all-black attire that makes her stand out amidst the greenery. Then there is the way she lies

in the grass while talking to her therapist. Surrounded by the grass and the feeling of the ground under her, it is easy to feel as though she has a sense of peace, since there are no threats around her, and she can lower her defenses. Her therapist, seated beside her in the grass, is extremely strange because he kneels beside her the way a priest would kneel beside a dying person to offer them their last rites. The religious symbolism in a way is not lost in the strangeness of the whole situation. He is trying to offer her peace and clarity on her journey of self-discovery. The space and the arrangements in this manner highlight the therapeutic properties of natural spaces, but it also suggests a blank slate of sorts.

There is an imagined aspect to natural spaces that come up in Mo's discussion with Jürgen Rieger who has an idea of natural spaces but not in the heteronormative sense that it is meant to be used. In Mo's meeting with him, he suggests that they move the meeting outside. They stand outside in the park and discuss Mo's questions. Their proximity in the garden has the effect of depicting that part of nature as a manmade space where everything is carefully curated, and nature is not allowed to be overgrown. Their presence in this garden is shown as though they are guests, and standing signified an immediate departure. When Mo asks Ritter about his failed idea for a reserve that was solely for Aryans, his answer evokes feelings of nature as an imagined space where he can attempt to rebuild a German community in a way that his understanding of Germanness dictates. This space and the imagined community elude him, but the mention of it drives the notion of natural spaces as easily moldable according to the whims of the truly powerful. Although Ritter's imagined view of nature is prevalent and natural spaces are seen as controllable, certain editorial elements in the film dispel this notion in the way that the village in Africa is framed.

In 28: 20- 29:41, the Ghanaians celebrate one of their festivals in the middle of the town, however, certain shots show the framing of the houses in the town against the backdrop of the mountains and the forests. The peculiarity of the town's framing suggests it is in the middle of nature. This peculiarity evokes the use of nature as a defense mechanism, a notion that is strengthened shortly after in Mo's recollection of her encounter with her druidic acquaintance. The druidic ceremony is also framed as taking place in the middle of the forest. There is a clearing in the middle of the forest, and the trees and greens surround the three people in this ritual. The sounds of birds and other animals are prevalent in the background. The reverence that Mo, the druid, and the priestess show a particular tree in min 31: 17- 31: 57 is important in an evaluation of their sense of place-making. The choice of that specific tree is unexplained, but as they place their hands on the tree, the diegetic sound becomes reverent and sacred. Their action is further illuminated by an upward tilt of the camera to show a break in the trees. The priestess worships at the shores of the river with the sound continuing. While she cannot hear the sounds that the viewers hear, the wind and the sound of rushing water guide her actions and induce a welcoming feeling of home. Her actions are unhurried but also induce a feeling of home.

In 46:28- 46:50, natural spaces and Heimat have an interesting connotation that draws attention not only to Mo's biracial origins but also neo-Nazi opinions on Germanness and their origins. Having been told countless times that she didn't fit the mold of Germanness, and accompanied by the sounds from a neo-Nazi protest where "full-blooded Aryan people" chanted *wir sind das Volk* in the Background, she proceeds into the forest dressed like Little Red Riding Hood. For all of the haunting chants that accompany Mo's stroll into the forest, none of these people actively establish their agency and their concepts of identity and home in this space. As she strolls, in this space, she is like a ghost. The forest she walks in is haunted by the voices of

neo-Nazis and all who don't believe that she belongs there. However, the uncertainty in her steps as she walks deeper inside depicts the forest as a place of protection. The words of the protesters haunt her, but the forest embraces her and accepts her into its embrace. It nourishes her and provides her with food. The nourishing aspects of the natural spaces to the concepts of Heimat allow her to address the neo-Nazi's relationship to these spaces and how it influences their arguments. The fruits that she picks in the forest, are not just items of physical nourishment, they also allude to the spiritual nourishment of these spaces. In her visit to the Externsteine in Detmond, she sees people who prove her suspicions right about the fact that Neo-Nazis misuse their connection to the natural spaces as a way to further their propaganda. These spaces, with their historical significance, have been misused to prevent the association with these spaces by other nationalities.

Both Blue and Mo have particular moments when they drift through nature like specters. They are unable to take possession of their displacement from urban spaces because of the rhetorics that place them in the position of guests. However, in their relationship with the natural spaces, they cannot escape the uncanniness of their situation, haunted by their memories, nature allows them to experience a sense of clarity that displaces their guest status and claims ownership.

Conclusion

Attempting to define Heimat as an Afrogerman has been proven by this thesis to be a task that is both personal and communal. Mo and Blue explore this domain as individuals and realize that they are looking for answers that they already have. Heimat has previously been categorized as something that represented Germanness, and Germanness represented whiteness. Mo and Blue challenge this assumption and prove that Germanness doesn't equal whiteness, but the term, just like Heimat, is defined by the person. The world has changed, and the old borders have shifted along with old concepts. To define Heimat, not only as a German but also as a Turkish German, French German, and other forms of hybridized German identities, one has to approach it by examining the self, their definition of culture, and the space that they find themselves in. There is no place like home. This is ironic because, as this thesis has attempted to prove, there is technically no geographic association with the concept. People have tried to associate it with a place, but that place shifts, and identity shifts. Culture is ever-evolving.

There is a sort of circular motion in the concept of home that has been established in the narrative of this essay. In examining their sense of belonging and their alienation, their confrontation with their dual consciousness that puts them on this part, the two films I analyze show that duality is a self-imposed condition that is further accentuated by social and cultural conditions. The utopianist nature of Heimat, foreshadowed at the beginning of this thesis, is unfortunately both nowhere and everywhere.

The self as Heimat creates a space where they have to confront their perceptions of themselves, as well as the perception by others. This self-retrospection allows them to confront, combine, and accept the different parts of their origins, what Du Bois calls the double consciousness, and accept the hybrid identity that is forged anew. Their existence as

Afrogermans precludes them from a space where it is believed entry is based on a particular sense of identity and affinity with a culture that they somehow can't sense. This space is inaccessible to them and they want to find that space but they are unable to do so. There is an aestheticized notion that has been weaponized both by society and Afrogermans in their conviction that they don't belong.

Heimat and, by extension, Germanness is meant to be a place of acceptance, both from the self and from others. There will be acts of cultural exclusions as well as spaces that are sacred for a particular group. Forced inclusion will only promote a feeling of alienation but in the current transnational world, the current shifting borders dictate a loosening of the old borders. Peter Blicke was right when he said there is no specific definition for Heimat. It's a term that is specific to the person who attempts to define it, but the parameters established in this thesis can be useful in navigating an accepted definition even among white Germans. There is no place like Home because Home doesn't exist. The concept of Home and Heimat is a politically and socially promoted illusion of utopia that has spun out of control.

In conclusion, biracial people are a prime focus for works like this, because of the inherent multiplicity that is physically evident in their features. Still, people with a uniform background also deal with these issues because of the humanist philosophy of being that exists within them. The question of Heimat has introduced an established classification that recent generations are beginning to buck against. The two protagonists did not find their sense of Heimat in a single place like they imagined. Rather, they discovered Heimat as a liminal space for the self, culture, and nature to meet and coexist in one form.

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