

COLONIAL FANTASIES, NARRATIVE BORDERS, AND THE CANADIAN NORTH IN THE WORKS OF GERMANY'S COLIN ROSS (1885-1945)

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Introduction

The Canadian North is a canvas onto which explorers, travelers, artists, and writers project their imaginations. From the paintings of The Group of Seven to the prose of Margaret Atwood, the Canadian North has been constructed, represented, and articulated by many Canadian artists and authors. It has been conceptualized in a number of different ways indicating a “plurality of ideas of North that are in constant flux yet are persistent over time” (Grace 2007, xii).

Numerous Canadian scholars have contributed to the understanding of the North as a discursive construction. Rob Shields writes, “the ‘North’ is not just a factual geographical region but also an imaginary zone: a frontier, a wilderness, and empty ‘space’ which, seen from southern Canada, is white, blank” (1991, 165). The various images associated with the North “constitute a system of signification, a discursive representation.” In this system, Shields claims, “places or regions mean something only in relation to other places as a constellation of meanings, that is, the North makes sense only with reference to other regions” (1991, 199). Bruce W. Hodgins and Margaret Hobbs also define the North in its “broadest sense,” regarding it as a “territoriality shifting entity and an imaginative construct” (1985, 3).

Not only Canadians have been intrigued by the idea of the North. Germans, too, have been fascinated with the Canadian North for more than three centuries. Depictions of it can be found in diaries and travelogues from German voyagers as well as in novels of German authors who never left home. Scholarly research, however, has so far paid little attention to representations of the Canadian North in German literature.

Objectives

This paper argues that the Canadian North is a discursive construction, within which German colonial fantasies emerge. In particular, I argue that it is through bordering that colonial fantasies of German *Lebensraum* ("living space") in the Canadian North are brought into being. I further argue that the German biologist and geographer Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904), with his view of the "organic state," provides the ideological framework for colonial fantasies in the travel writings of Colin Ross.

I focus on the writer's colonial imagination and his perception of borders, and on how both relate to the Canadian North.¹ I show that seemingly bare geographical information and demographical data, provided in Ross' travelogues, carry colonial fantasies of German spaces in the Canadian North. Those spaces are bordered by "shared histories" and "narrative boundaries," thus constructing a collective German colonial identity (cf. Eder 2006, 255-257).²

Methodology

In the following contrapuntal reading, I analyze two of Ross' travel narratives against the backdrop of Ratzel's seminal works *Politische Geographie* ("Political Geography" [1897]) and *Der Lebensraum* ("The Living Space" [1901]). In doing so, colonial fantasies embedded in Ross' narrative are brought to the surface. A productive strategy in this context is "border poetics," which Johan Schimanski defines as "any approach to texts which connect borders on the levels of *histoire*, the wor[l]d the text presents to the reader, and of *récit*, the text itself, a weave of rhetorical figures and narrative structures" (2006, 51).

Within this framework, my article investigates how colonial spaces and fantasies are created through the process of bordering (e.g. the construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of borders), how bordering, and thus the claiming of space, construct collective identities, and how German border-thinking fosters colonization, decolonization, and re-colonization of the Canadian North, inside and outside the text. Bordering occurs on two planes that are intimately connected: on the level of the world or space presented (*histoire*) and on the level or space of presentation (*récit*), the focus of this paper (cf. Schimanski & Wolfe 2007, 16).

On the first plane, the level of the world presented, Ross and his family physically cross the Canadian national border as well as numerous provincial borders. Those borders had already been crossed by thousands of German immigrants who sought to claim space for settlement and to secure their own borders in the Canadian North. Ross' border crossings follow the German immigrants' paths and enable the writer to connect past, present, and future, as well as Southern Canada and the North.³ In doing so, he re-discovers the Canadian North as German living space. This happens both inside and outside the text, thus interweaving *histoire* and *récit*.

On the second plane, at the level of presentation, borders function as "forms of representation" and as "rhetorical strategies" used by the author to "regulate" the narrative and its organization (cf. Newman in Schimanski & Wolfe 2007, 10-14). Depending on how information is presented and organized in the text, colonial fantasies of German living spaces in the Canadian North are evoked. Put into a meaningful narrative sequence, these colonial fantasies provide "narrative fidelity and narrative resonance" for the reader (cf. Eder 2006, 256-257).

German Travel Literature and the Colonial Imagination between the World Wars

Ross was a student of geopolitics, a journalist, and a travel writer who "does not only write what he sees, but also thinks through the encountered facts, finds connections, sees trends, and follows the threads that are leading from the present to the past."⁴ On behalf of the German Museum of Natural Sciences and Technology, he went to North America in 1912. After World War I, he traveled the world extensively with his family. As a result of his impressions of Canada and the USA, he published the two autobiographical travel books treated here: *Zwischen USA und dem Pol* ("Between USA and the [North] Pole") in 1934 and *Mit Kind und Kegel in die Arktis* ("With Bag and Baggage into the Arctic") in 1935. He took another trip to Canada and the USA in 1938/39. He died in 1945 as one of Germany's most popular travel writers of the interwar-period.

Travel narratives of the Canadian North have been the literary playgrounds for Germany's "imaginary colonialism." This imaginary colonialism is a surrogate experience of real colonial expansionism

and a chance for Germany to prove, at least theoretically (e.g. in literature), its potential as a successful colonial power. I therefore speak of German literature on the Canadian North as “colonial literature without colonies.” I use “colonial” instead of “imperial” as a label for the literature under consideration, since it engages predominantly in fantasies as opposed to actual practice (cf. Zantop 1997, 99). Moreover, the colonial fantasies analyzed here are informed by a settlement ideology--rather than by economic exploitation--and based on Ratzel's theory of colonization.

Germany's imaginary colonialism gained popularity between 1919 and 1945. It can be seen as compensation for the sense of insufficient space that had been reinforced with the enactment of the Peace Treaty of Versailles in 1920.⁵ Instead of gaining territory in Belgium, Northern France, and North-Eastern Europe, the German “Empire” lost 13 percent of its territory as well as its overseas colonies, most of which had been acquired under Chancellor Otto von Bismarck during the 1880s. Consequently, fantastical colonial narratives, picturing the Canadian North as German living space, helped to construct what 19th century imperialism had hoped to create: a distinct German national identity and community with the power to counteract economic distress and overpopulation, by colonizing foreign territories and directing “human overflow” overseas (Ratzel, 1903, 133).

The “Struggle for Space” and the Concept of Colonization in 19th Century German Political Geography

The idea of insufficient space and overpopulation had been a recurring European fear since the publication of Malthus' *Essay on Population* in 1789, and this notion fueled debates about expansionism. In chapter three of *The Origin of Species* (1859), Darwin follows the Malthusian theory, claiming that in less than 1000 years the earth will have become saturated with people and will no longer be able to provide food for all, resulting in a “struggle for life” (in Ratzel 1901, 51). Four decades after Darwin, Ratzel maintains that the so-called struggle for life is, in fact, a “struggle for space” among the organisms on earth (1901, 52). If a region is overpopulated, he explains, the living conditions of that region worsen. The organisms of that region seek to extend their territory, regardless of the possibility that the neighboring territories

might be inhabited by others having the same intentions. To avoid having others occupy one's own territory, all organisms continue to extend their borders as soon as they have completed occupying and securing their previous territorial acquisitions (1901, 52). This process follows a universal pattern of "conquest, fortification, and colonization," and repeats itself for the purpose of creating enough empty space between organisms (1903, 124).

Ratzel was probably the most influential thinker in the development of political geography, and is considered the founder of its German variant. His key contribution is the "organic state" conception, according to which states are conceived of as organisms that need territorial expansion to sustain themselves.⁶ This expansion is comparable, Ratzel contends, to the movement of a human body with its forward and backwards moves (1903, 1). As a result of these movements, the state's borders come into existence (1903, 4). Being the "peripheral organs" of the state (1903, 134), the borders ensure the state's fortification and accommodate its growth (1903, 123). They are flexible, shifting with changing living conditions, and, most importantly, determined by the size of the population group and not by arbitrary political parameters (1901, 12, 38, 72). The so-called drive for colonization is a reaction to outside influences, according to Ratzel, and not an inner drive as commonly assumed (1903, 17). In fact, all organisms are driven to expansion and colonization of new land, whenever the living conditions in their territories are "worse than elsewhere"; in other words, organisms tend to move away from less favorable living conditions to better ones (1901, 28).

By equating state and organism with expansion and human body movement, Ratzel stresses the necessity of migration, or rather "colonization" as he prefers to call "human migration" movements. Colonization refers to a group's (multi-dimensional) extension of living space beyond its borders in order to avoid its extinction (1901, 26). "Migration," on the other hand, is understood as a linear movement, typically found among single plants or single animals (1901, 26). Colonization always implies bonding with the land; anything else falls under "exploitation" and "conquest" (1903, 141). Conquest is seen as "a state's militant expansion into the territory of another state," and does not necessarily result in its growth, unless it is followed by the cultivation of the conquered land (1903, 132). In the latter case, conquest

turns into colonization. Colonization for plants means “to strike roots, to bud, and to branch out” (1901, 16). Applied to human beings, colonization is the cultivation of land, since “colonization without agriculture is provisional; agriculture makes it irrevocable” (1903, 69). Ratzel considers agricultural colonies, which are characterized by numerous small settlements that progressively cultivate the land for family sustenance, as the most productive form of colonization:

A population grows beyond its borders into a sparsely inhabited yet suitable territory. This is the basis of all colonization (...). It applies best to agricultural and cattle colonies whose bond with the land is most intimate and lasting. (141)

With regard to German colonial history--in the context of 19th century political geography--Ratzel observed that German colonization in the American West followed the same universal pattern of “conquest, fortification, and colonization.” Compared to (Western) Europe, the American West was relatively sparsely populated and thus promised those fleeing overpopulated countries a better life (1901, 100). This universal pattern, as well as the attraction to better living conditions (*Völkergefäll*), and the important role of the family for colonization are exemplified in the German colonization of the sparsely populated Canadian Northwest depicted in Ross’ travel literature.

Borders and Bordering on the Plane of the World Presented (*Histoire*)

One of the German immigrants who settled in Canada’s Northwest was Hermann Trelle, whom Ross met on his travels. As a pioneer of Manitoba’s Peace River Valley which consists of 73000 square kilometers of “first-class” wheat land, Trelle contributed to its development (Ross 1941, 256). Counting 2000 inhabitants in 1911, the valley had a population of 60000 by 1931 (256). Although the valley was relatively sparsely populated, the German pioneer still sought to find and develop new land for growing wheat north of the Peace River, an area he suspected to be full of suitable land (1941, 256).

This process of finding and developing new land follows a universal pattern of acquisition of land, fortification of borders, and colonization (i.e. cultivation) of soil, well theorized in Ratzel's political geography. The "drive" to move forward, to found states and settlements--in other words to colonize--had already been found in Greek history and is, according to Ratzel, characteristic for the Indo-Germanic population because of their strong bond with the land (i.e. through agriculture) (1903, 16-17). The physical occupation of land is the first step in the establishment of a new settlement or "state" (1903, 5). The second condition is a people (*Volk*) capable of bonding with the land to form a colony (1903, 136). Those who own and cultivate the land are local communities, groups of immigrants, or families, among which the nuclear family is the most important group (1903, 17).

Another German pioneer of the Canadian Northwest who exemplifies Ratzel's colonization model is Oskar Wirsig of Lower Silesia. Together with his wife and two small children, the German farmer immigrated to Canada in the 1920s. He bought machinery and rented a farm in the Prairies to earn his living as a wheat farmer (Ross, 1941, 268). Then wheat prices dropped drastically, rendering wheat production uneconomical. Forced to cut his losses, Wirsig sold everything and moved with his family to The Pas, in the northern bush land of Manitoba. This time, they started from scratch, building their own house in just two days. Only 18 months later, when Ross visits the family, its property comprised a farm with a number of adjacent buildings, including stalls for cows and horses, as well as vegetable gardens and flower beds (1941, 169). In short, the Wirsigs had constructed everything a family--and, by extension, a settlement or a state--needed to sustain itself.

Borders and Bordering on the Plane of Presentation (*Récit*)

The Scramble for Canada?

The idea of insufficient space or, more precisely, "overpopulation on one side" and "saturation with space on the other" is a major topic in Ross' works on Canada (1941, 250). The author describes Canada as "one of the last available empty spaces on earth"; "Who will occupy the free space?" he asks, as if the history of settlement in Canada could still be written. "Nothing on earth is written in stone, neither the living conditions and power relations, nor the territorial possessions" (1941,

3). Ross characterizes distribution of space on earth as unfair, insinuating that redistribution is necessary and action needs to be taken: "it is questionable," Ross writes, "whether people suffering from enormous overpopulation, are going to tolerate the fact that a few million people occupy certain territories, only because they were the first who arrived there" (1941, 3).

"To Whom will the Prairies belong?"

Narrowing his geographical focus, the author concerns himself with the future of the Prairies. He inquires, "To whom will the Prairies belong?" (1941, 215) If ownership rights were determined according to who first laid eyes on the land, the Prairies would belong to the French, even though they had no interest in settling there; the land appeared to them "hostile" and "uncanny." The first people, however, who discovered the Prairies as a space for settlement and who "colonized" the land--by Ratzel's standards--were Germans (1941, 204-205). They contributed much to the development of the region that subsequently became the main destination for new immigrants. The Prairies rapidly evolved as a major agrarian hub that was, economically and demographically, as important as Québec and Ontario (1941, 222). Ross actually considered the Prairies to be even more important than Ontario, because their wheat production generated the country's biggest profits (1941, 204). Recapitulating this remarkable development of the Prairie Provinces--from being "uninhabitable" (1941, 257) to becoming the "wheat chamber of the world" (1941, 204)--the author begins to fantasize: "When Manitoba and Saskatchewan developed like that, what possibilities may be hidden in this huge area in the Northwest?" (1941, 257)

The growth of the Prairies does not just hint at the potential of regions north of the Prairies; it also shows that a spatial and demographical periphery can become a strong rival of the center of the country. When a German minority began to settle in the Prairies in the mid-nineteenth century, those regions constituted the peripheries of the country. Seen from Ontario, the Prairie Provinces were separated from the center of Canada by a "three-dimensional" border: geographically, the Prairies and the center were divided by the Canadian Shield; ideologically, they failed to adopt the desired British-Canadian

spirit of Ontario; and economically, they pursued a different policy than Central Canada. Ontario became the country's "industrial center" that imposed high customs duties, whereas the agricultural West advocated free trade or, at least, lower duties in order to sell its wheat and buy industrial products at lower prices (1941, 193).

Making a case for the Prairie Provinces, Ross claims that the central province of Ontario, "which was supposed to become the heart of the new country," is actually bordered off from the rest of the country, and not vice versa (1941, 193). "From the East," the author explains, "[Ontario] was separated by language barriers and religious boundaries of the French and catholic Canadians; from the West, by economical differences and the Canadian Shield" (1941, 193-194). To further show that (British-) Ontario does not necessarily deserve to be the official center of power in the country, Ross draws upon Ratzel's analogy of states as aggregate organisms. By using bio-geographical jargon, he conjures up the image of Canada as a human body, in which Ontario--with its capital Ottawa--is supposed to function as its "heart". The country's provinces, however, have not yet grown together; Canada, according to Ross, "does not exist so far, at least not as a nation or a people." Ottawa can thus not be performing as Canada's "heart" that "perfuses the young country with a strong and common idea." As a result, the capital's role is limited to administrative tasks (1941, 192).

In order to suggest that the Prairies take on the role of the "heart"--once all provinces have grown together and Canada has come into existence--the author re-draws the (internal) borders. In doing so, he strengthens the Prairies' position, as well as the position of the Germans there. Ross' re-bordering happens in two stages: In the first stage, the author de-borders the Prairies by calling into question the usefulness of having legal borders separating the three Provinces. In accordance with Ratzel's view of borders between people as "natural placements," Ross points out the mere administrative character of the Provincial borders. He notes that the borders separating the Prairies politically only exist "on paper" and "in the minds of profit-oriented senators." The three Prairie Provinces, economically and socially, are actually "one single unit" (1941, 223).

Having eliminated the provincial borders, Ross proceeds to the second stage of his narrative re-bordering of the Prairies. He expresses

doubts about their national affiliation: "The Prairies are neither French nor British, they are--what should one say?" (1941, 223) If the Prairies are not genuinely British or French--in terms of national integrity (cf. Ratzel 1903, 133-134)--Germans could continue to write the Provinces' (colonial) history. If Ross follows Ratzel's line of thought when questioning the national affiliation of the Prairies, he is implying that lack of national integrity would facilitate the Prairies' (further) colonization (cf. 1903, 133-134). To show that neither the French nor the British held dominance in the Prairies, the author re-borders the Provinces ethnically; he illustrates their heterogeneity by listing the various ethnic groups in the Prairies: "the Germans, the Ukrainians, the Poles, the Swedes." Among those groups, the Germans constitute the highest population (1903, 223).

Given that borders define a collective identity, Ross creates a collective German colonial identity by drawing German borders in the Prairies (cf. Eder 2006, 259). The bordered space--the German community in the Prairies--embodies Ratzel's notion of *Volk* ("a people"), one of the cornerstones of colonization. *Volk*, accordingly, is a group of people who are spatially united through a common territory and a common goal. These people do not have to be of the same origin or share a common language (Ratzel 1903, 5). Germans of "different origins, dialects, and religious beliefs" are united in the Prairies, as Ross states (1941, 215):

(...) the different groups of German speaking people from different countries actively formed a new unity on foreign soil. Nowhere in Germany was the rising of the national spirit more celebrated and were German songs sung more frenetically than in the remote, sunny Canadian Prairies. (215)

In comparison to the overwhelming national spirit of the local German settlers, Ross does not make much mention of a strong national consciousness of the British in the Prairies. Only as an afterthought, does he mention that the population of the Prairies is actually 50 percent British. As if the British majority only existed on paper, the author provocatively, though rhetorically, inquires again, "What is going to happen with the Prairies?" (1941, 224) Given the Prairies' lack of

British or French national unity, their German colonial history, and their relatively high German population, it seems possible that the Prairies become a “German province,” as Ross is implying. Just as he (figuratively) re-borders the Prairies as “German Prairies” by interweaving past, present, and future, as well as *histoire* and *récit*, he rewrites and Germanizes British-Canadian imperial history. His seemingly futile question about the Prairies’ future corresponds with the author’s inquiry about the ownership rights of the Arctic.

“To Whom does the Arctic belong?”

On the level of both *récit* and *histoire*, Ross links the Prairies with the Arctic. On the former plane--the level of presentation--the Prairies and the Arctic occupy separate spaces in the text that are connected through headings. While one heading inquires about the future of the Prairies (1941, 215), the other (“To whom does the Arctic belong?”) seems to investigate the ownership rights of the Arctic (1941, 295). On the latter plane--the level of the world presented--the author links the actual places by drawing on their shared history. When the Prairies and the Arctic were discovered, they seemed “hostile” and “uncanny,” not fit for humans--except for “Natives, fur traders, and missionaries”--according to the Royal British Scientific Commission of 1850 (1941, 257). Precisely because of those hard living conditions and the scarcity of settlement, both the Prairies and the Arctic were considered to be “empty” (cf. 1941, 257; 1935, 5). Ross is not only referring to the spatial and demographical emptiness of the two places; his comment on the Prairies reveals that emptiness refers also to a lack of history: “There was no ancestral Canadian population, no Canadian history. Even though many old Canadians immigrated to the Prairies, especially from Ontario, they also came as foreigners, so to speak” (1935, 222). This shared history, or rather common lack of history, offers the author “a plausible way of telling the past” on which to build the future. It creates a “space of narrative fidelity” (cf. Eder, 2006, 257), according to which the future of the Germans lies in the Arctic:⁷

German citizens of our German fatherland, who in Europe would live apart from each other because of dozens of (political) borders, have been united in the Prairies as a people that preserves its old language and culture and helps to build this new, wide country that progressively

extends its borders towards the arctic North. (Ross 1941, 215)

The boundaries (re-)drawn by Ross, in the process of his “narrative colonization” or “literal re-territorialization” (cf. Shields 1991, 198), serve to negotiate a collective German colonial identity and German possessions in the Canadian North. The “claimed space” is bordered by shared histories and narrative boundaries and functions to restore a condition beyond the border, which had previously been lost. This condition has both spatial and temporal dimensions. It lies beyond the “German-Canadian” border, as well as beyond the present time; it is located in Germany, before World War I and the Treaty of Versailles, and concerns Germany’s position as a colonial power. The condition before Germany’s territorial losses within Europe and overseas can be returned to through the action of memory. In this case, the return is imagined beyond the initial border, evoking colonial fantasies of the Canadian North. The pre-World War I situation is thus not restored within the confines of Europe, on former German territory, but in Canada, the “big and empty land of future” (1941, 8). Whereas people of German descent are spread all over Europe, separated into individual states, they form an organic German colony on Canadian soil.

This German colony is expanding its borders “towards the arctic North” (1941, 215), because in the North, Ross affirms, “there are no Natives who could claim the European’s land; at least their numbers are so small that they virtually do not matter” (1941, 253). In the South, on the other hand, there are many groups competing for the same space (1935, 5). In the past, Ross adds, other cultures such as the Egyptians, Babylonians, and Romans also concentrated their colonization on the North for security reasons, in order to arrange for spacious “buffer zones” and to avoid contact with other populations (1941, 251). Contact between different populations, as Ratzel confirms, may cause territorial conflicts and result in one group being pushed back. This can happen to both, what Ratzel calls, “weak” (*tieferstehende*) and “strong” (*höherstehende*) populations, because the “strength” of a population, in his theory, is not determined by age or anthropological “rank” but by its “bond with the land” (cf. 1901, 56). Two groups liv-

ing too close to each other may also result in overlapping territories and gene pools, which would endanger the original group. By drawing an analogy of a human population as a tree, Ratzel illustrates its need for space and individual growth: "The tree needs light and air in order to grow, (...) needs empty space for branching out. Only in wide spaces, every branch manages to preserve enough autonomy, to unfold its characteristics that guarantee its special existence" (1901, 70).

Wide spaces, which help preserve populations against foreign colonization or gene pool overlaps, can be found in abundance in the Canadian North, because the North, Ross claims, is "empty, apart from a few thousand Eskimos" (1935, 5). The "Eskimos," are not just an afterthought, as the author's syntax may suggest. In fact, they serve as a role model for Ross who is imagining German colonization in and of the "Arctic". The author sees the potential to learn from the Natives in the way they have resisted foreign influences and kept their independence:

The Eskimos, at least those in the Central Arctic, (...) have not allowed civilization to enter their life. They consider the white man as being inferior--and they are right, if one keeps in mind to what extent the white man depends upon them in the Polar Zones. (*Mit Kind* 7)

In addition, the "man of the Arctic," Ross affirms, is always accompanied by his family. In other words, he moves "with bag and baggage" (1935, 8). This aspect seems trivial, yet it is crucial given the important role of the family for colonization. It becomes even clear why the author names his 1935 travelogue after the "Eskimo's" way of moving:

In order to colonize the Arctic, the white man needs a wife and children. A man may discover and conquer. To make the conquered land his own, he needs to found a family; otherwise, the acquired land is a short-lived possession. (1935, 8)

Conclusion

The Canadian North has been shown to function as a discursive construction and literary testing ground for Germany's colonial fantasies.

Both Ross' alleged "German Prairies" and the envisioned "Arctic colony" can be mapped as (narrative) spaces that are informed by Ratzel's political geography and bordered by shared histories and narrative boundaries.

By drawing narrative boundaries in the Canadian North, Ross constructs a collective German colonial identity and community. This community undermines Canada's legal borders and re-writes British and German imperial history retrospectively. Through the image, or rather fantasy, of a "German Canadian North," Canada is not just "conquered" and "occupied" by Germans--or rather through German literature--but it becomes like Germany (cf. Berman 1998, 2).

The analysis of Ross' narrative bordering furthermore reveals that the spatial borders separating the Prairies and the Arctic--on the level of *histoire*--function actually as joints or contact zones on the level of *récit*. As such they allow the author to draw analogies between both regions and, by extension, between the Germans in the Prairies and the Natives in the Central Arctic; this is done without establishing any kind of hierarchical order among them.

The aim to go north into empty or scarcely populated regions distinguishes Ross' colonial fantasies from those of earlier "armchair colonizers" who ventured south into more populated regions. His colonial fantasies also differ from European Imperialism in as far as they are not at all concerned with sexual conquest and exploitation practices but with settler colonies and the possession of land.

This article furthermore suggests that modern colonization in Ross' work starts in the imagination, resulting in a type of "colonization through narration." The established boundaries are consequently narrative constructs or, in Eder's terms, "soft facts" whose power should nonetheless not be underestimated. Upon those soft borders, "hard facts" (i.e. real borders) can be established (2006, 268). It also becomes clear that borders on the level of the world presented (*histoire*) and on the level of presentation (*récit*) are intimately connected.

"North America," Ratzel wrote in 1901, "seems to become the birth place for a new (sub-) group of the European people" (80). In the context of his study of the influence of the German population on North American communities (*Städte- und Kulturbilder*), this new

European group was probably envisioned to be of German descent, as popularly imagined in interwar German literature. Ross concludes, some thirty years later that “The march to the North has begun and it seems that enough living space for millions of people could be created” (1941, 253).

Notes

¹ This paper is part of a larger project and a work in progress. Comments and suggestions are welcome and can be sent to nicole.pissowotzki@utoronto.ca.

² In his article on Europe’s boundaries, Eder maintains, “narrative boundaries give to borders a meaning that is shifting in time” (266). He thereby distinguishes boundaries from borders in a way that “soft borders are boundaries that we draw between people. They are the images people have of their world” (255). However, I do not make a difference between borders and boundaries, defining boundaries as “soft borders.” I use them somewhat interchangeably, referring to borders as both hard and soft facts.

³ “The actual boundary of the North,” according to Hamelin, “is a fringe-zone several tens of kilometers in width” (28). This zone, also referred to as the “Near North,” forms the transition between the North proper and the more developed centers of Southern Canada and runs across the provinces (28-30). Of the Prairies (i.e. Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba), Manitoba is the most “extensive provincial northern entity” (31). The Peace River country, for example, lies within the Near North (333). The Pas, on the other hand, is an island of the Near North in the “Middle North” (28). The “Middle North” is a zone stretching from Labrador to the Yukon (333). The “Far North,” can be found predominantly in the Northwest Territories and corresponds partially to the arctic climate. Its population consists of only 20000 inhabitants, mostly Inuit (332). The geographical focus of this paper is on the Prairie Provinces, the Northwest Territories, and the Arctic. It thus includes Southern Canada as well as the Near, Middle and Far North. All four regions, however, are treated within the discourse of the North for their shared history as “marginal” yet crucial places.

⁴ Advertisement of *Zwischen USA und dem Pol*, in Colin Ross. *Unser Amerika: Der deutsche Anteil an den Vereinigten Staaten*. Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus, 1936. All translations are mine.

⁵ Zantop comes to a similar conclusion in her work on German colonial fantasies of South America. She maintains, “these fantasies are compensatory, insofar as they seem to cover up or compensate for a pervasive sense of lack: lack of national territory, unity, identity” (*Colonial Fantasies* 99).

⁶ Ratzel has often been criticized for comparing aggregate organisms with human beings (cf. Muir); however, Ratzel does acknowledge that the comparison of states to organisms is more applicable to “primitive states” than to developed ones, maintaining, the more a state develops, the more it outgrows its organic nature (*Politische Geographie* 12).

⁷ The Arctic is used here metonymously for the Canadian Arctic and Sub-Arctic regions. Hamelin’s definition of the “Far North” probably describes best Ross’

idea of the "arctic North." The "extreme North," in comparison, encompasses the Northern part of the Arctic archipelago, where glaciers, floating ice, or ground ice commonly occur (Hamelin 332).

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