Kafka's Human Zoo

Colonialism, Resentment, and Violence in Kafka's "A Report to an Academy" and "In the Penal Colony"

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In recent Kafka scholarship, there has been a tendency to regard the more or less satiric depictions of racism, anti-Semitism, and colonial violence in Kafka's writings as mere allegories on eternal questions, such as guilt, punishment, truth, God, and the Law. This chapter suggests a non-allegorical reading (de-allegorization) of colonialism, anti-Semitism, and assimilation in Kafka's short stories "A Report to an Academy" and "In the Penal Colony," focusing on the questions of resentment and violence. In Kafka's fiction, violence sometimes runs out of nature itself, but more often, it is a product of acculturation processes, for

instance, in terms of colonialism, assimilation, or media technologies, in most cases involving a displacement of the borders of humanity. In her major work *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Hannah Arendt points at the intersections between colonial and anti-Semitic violence and, in some early writings, at the pariah/parvenu dilemma of the assimilated European Jews. While the Jewish pariah recognizes his or her status as an outcast in the Christian society, the Jewish parvenu (startup) tries to advance in the majority culture, only accepted as an exception from the ani-Semite rule, at the cost of resentment in the sense of suppressed anger and feelings of inferiority, victimization, and revengefulness. Of course, these are not the only possible modes of acculturation, neither in real life nor in Kafka's fiction. In the two mentioned short stories, two forms of mimicry—mimicking behavior—are depicted as alternative strategies of acculturation. In all cases, however, the characters are dependent on the spectator's response to and recognition or non-recognition of their performance, be it as a humanized ape at a Human Zoo or as a defender of the old commander of a penal colony and his marvelous execution device. In both cases, lack of recognition leads to resentment. Hence, this article will investigate different ways in which Kafka's fiction explores such mechanisms of domination, hegemony, violence, and resentment, advocating a partial de-allegorization of colonialism and colonial violence in Kafka's fiction.

Mimicry and Resentment in Kafka's Human Menageries

During the last decade, some attention has been paid to the motif of the Hagenbeck Zoo, which Kafka visited in Prague in 1911, focusing on Hagenbeck's method of concealing the violence

used in the process of taming the exotic animals. However, I think there is much more to be said about the practices of this zoo and its impact on Kafka's anthropology and concepts of colonialism, racism, writing, and violence.

The zookeeper Hagenbeck was not only famous for his innovative way of reconstructing the natural habitats of the animals in terms of artificial cliffs or deserts. He also developed a new practice of displaying so-called exotic humans in their natural environments. Starting with Norwegian Samis and reindeers, Hagenbeck later exhibited Native Americans, Indians, and Africans from the German colonies, which Germany had to surrender in 1918. At the outbreak of World War II, however, the heydays of Hagenbeck's and other so-called human zoos had come to an end.[1] At their zenith, they attracted millions of spectators and played a significant role in mediating and distributing the messages of colonialism, Darwinist evolution theories, and racial pseudo-science to a broader European audience.

As several scholars, like Marthe Robert and Naama Harel, have pointed out, Kafka normally uses anonymity to give his fictions their transcendent character.[2] Hence, the traveler, the officer, the prisoner, and the penal colony itself are mentioned without any further significant information that could help the reader identify the persons or places. In "A Report to an Academy," however, the reader is exposed to referential information like the name of the Hagenbeck Zoo, which captivated and abducted the chimpanzee Red Peter (Rotpeter) from his home country the Gold Coast. Red Peter tells that he was brought to Hamburg, where the Hagenbeck Tierpark was situated (although sometimes making tours to cities like Prague or Paris), after his captivation and deportation to Europe. Hence, this writing style could be interpreted as a slightly different poetics than the more or less allegorical writing style that is attributed to many other Kafka texts.

This short story was first published in 1917, as one of three "Tiergeschichten" ("animal stories") in Martin Buber's journal *Der Jude*. In his correspondence with his editor, Kafka (who later rejected Max Brod's suggestion that he should follow Buber as the new editor of the journal) insisted on the term "animal stories" (*Tiergeschichten*) instead of the suggested term "parables."[3] In Kafka's "A Report to an Academy" the humanized chimpanzee Red Peter explains to a scientific academy how he was first captured in the Gold Coast, shipped to Europe, and then raised and disciplined to become a human. During his capture, Red Peter is shot twice and hit in the cheek, leaving a red scar. The second bullet hits him below his hip, possibly an allusion to the Jewish circumcision tradition. The first step toward becoming human, however, is learning to shake hands and drink and smoke heavily. To Red Peter, who is now an entertainer at a burlesque theater, this was the only possible escape from his captivity. However, Red Peter cannot resist the urge to lower his panties and show his scar to the audience. Still, he is very angry with the journalists in the newspapers, who are using his exhibitionism as evidence for their assertion that he has not overcome his chimpanzee nature after all:

> The second shot struck me below the hip. It was serious, and as a result I still walk with a slight limp. Recently I read an article by one of the ten thousand windbags [Windhunde] who vent their views about me in the newspapers: they say that my ape nature has not yet been entirely repressed; the proof is supposed to be that whenever I have company, I am inclined to lower my pants to show the bullet's path of entry. Every tiny finger of that guy's writing hand ought to be blown off, one by one. I, I have the right to lower my pants in front of anyone I like; there is nothing to see there other than a well-groomed pelt and the scar left by a profligate shot.[4]

By night, Red Peter takes his pleasure in secret meetings with a small half-trained female chimpanzee, of whom he cannot stand the sight by day due to the wild gaze in her eyes:

> When I review my evolution and its goal so far, I can't complain, but neither am I satisfied. My hands in my panty pockets, the wine bottle on the table, I half-lie, half-sit in my rocking chair and look out the window. When company comes, I play host as is proper. My manager sits in the anteroom; when I ring, he comes and listens to what I have to say. In the evening there is almost always a performance, and I enjoy successes that can scarcely be surpassed. If I return late at night from banquets, from learned societies, from convivial occasions, a little half-trained chimpanzee is waiting for me, and I have my pleasure of her in the way of all apes. In the daytime I do not want to see her, she has the lunatic look of the bewildered trained animal: I am the only one who recognizes it, and I can't stand it.[5]

The compulsion to show his scar by pulling his panties down and the secret rendezvous with the female chimpanzee could, in both cases, be interpreted as expressions of the resentment of an assimilated Jew, unable to hide and suppress his Jewish origin completely.[6] At the same time, the story of Red Peter has several features applying to racist stereotypes, such as comparisons between Africans and apes and between assimilated Jews and apes, while the two gunshot wounds may be interpreted in terms of both the Jewish circumcision (the shot below the hips) and the supposedly red skin color of Native Americans (the red scar on his cheek). By connecting these diverse ethnical hallmarks to the same body, however, the short story also deconstructs racial classification, showing it as a part of a colonial practice of discipline and domination. The African origin of Red Peter also supports the associative connection between

apes and the kidnapping of Africans as a part of the slave trade. Hence the story of Red Peter could be read as a parody of the many slave biographies, which were published before and after the abolition of slavery in the US, such as *The Narrative of the Life of Frederic Douglass, an American Slave*.[7]

To Red Peter himself, the alleged transformation from ape to human represents "a way out" of his cage captivity. However, his new freedom consists of repressing his ape past and performing at a burlesque theater. In such ethnographic exhibitions, Africans, native people, and colonial subjects were instructed to act according to European stereotypes of primitive humans or noble savages, thus confirming the colonial notions of hegemony. This tradition of ethnographic exhibitions could be traced back to Columbus, bringing groups of Native Americans from his expedition as proof of their colonization and his own achievements. Later on, such captives would be exploited as slaves or as subjects for public curiosity. After the French Revolution, a new concept of zoological and ethnographic exhibitions—most famously the Jardin des Plants—revolted against the older tradition associated with the ancient regime and its Christian idea of animal exhibitions reflecting Noah's ark. These exhibitions sometimes also included living non-Europeans or so-called "exotic" humans, who, in return, were granted a certain social recognition in their lifetime. Normally these humans were exhibited at zoos, market places, carnivals, or vaudeville theaters, as in the case of Red Peter in Kafka's short story. Later, such exhibitions of dead animals, and even humans, would apply Darwinian evolutionary theory, arranging different species of animals in an evolutionary chain from the lowest animals up to humans. Accordingly, under the influence of colonialism, the guiding purpose of these modern zoos was to demonstrate Darwinian theory together with ideas of cultural hegemony and pseudo-scientific ideas of

racial inferiority and superiority.[8] Thus, Red Peter in Kafka's fiction repeatedly refers to his successful evolution from ape to human, as in the above-cited quotation.

The founder of the first ethnographic exhibitions in Germany was the abovementioned zookeeper Carl Hagenbeck, who soon earned himself a reputation for his methods of taming lions, tigers, and other wild animals, veiling the actual use of violence that these animals had been subjected to.[9] The exhibited humans, however, were mostly instructed to act in a savage manner, confirming the racist imaginaries of their European spectators, finding themselves confronted with "noble savages," supposedly not yet subjected to the violence of writing and other media technologies. In reality, this is precisely what they were subjected to since the stereotypes and power relations had already been prescribed by Western science and popular culture. It was also Western civilization that had invented the railways and other logistic technologies that had brought the exhibited humans to Europe, thus confirming the spectator's notion of racial and cultural superiority.

This power relation was also installed between observers and observed, between audience and performers. Normally the exhibited humans were paid off and not subjected to any kind of physical violence or abuse; although many of them died from diseases and travels in unfamiliar climate conditions and a situation they could only partly understand. Hence, the real violence of the human zoos was not brute physical violence, but symbolic violence exerted by way of books and media technologies constructing them as primitive and inferior in contrast with their Western spectators. For Hagenbeck himself, Kaiser Wilhelm IIs visit to his zoo was the peak of his entire career.[10]

Acculturation, Sadomasochism, and Resentment in the Wilhelmian Epoch

The Wilhelmian epoch is not only associated with colonialism and "völkisch" anti-Semitism and racism but also with militarism and sexual anxiety as integral parts of children's education and upbringing. This combination of militarism and sexual repression and anxiety has been vividly described by Stefan Zweig—a Freudian from the first moment—in his memoir *The World of Yesterday*. This also created a culture where children and citizens were deprived of much of their individuality and forcibly adapted to a culture of authoritarian structures. Accordingly, Red Peter in Kafka's fiction reports how he learned to spit, smoke a pipe, drink brandy, shake hands, and speak human language, thereby reaching "the education of an average European" [*europäische Durchschnittsbildung*]. In this atmosphere, resentment and sadomasochistic tendencies and impulses seem to have flourished and may also have influenced some of Kafka's fictions, as we shall see.

Kafka has described the child-raising methods of his father Hermann Kafka as rather brute and insensitive, depriving him of his particularity and individuality, for instance, by repressing his love for reading novels. Hermann Kafka, a former officer, forced his son to learn how to march and become a heavy beer drinker (Kafka would later become an abstainer and vegetarian). In one case, Hermann threatened his son by saying that he would "tear him apart like a fish."[11] The brutality of such utterances and the fear they evoke in a child represent a form of symbolic violence, which Kafka later would elaborate on in pieces like "In the Penal Colony." Accordingly, the staged battles between noble and evil savages or between Native Americans and Europeans in Hagenbeck's human zoo could give an outlet to sadomasochistic phantasies. In the wake of the financial crisis

in Germany in the 1870s—the so-called *Gründerkrach*—sadism and resentments were also projected upon the Jewish minorities in Germany and the Habsburg Monarchy.

In his memoir *Von Menschen und Tieren,* Hagenbeck describes how the chimpanzee Moritz learned to ride a bicycle: "The latest achievement of his education is learning how to ride a bike. Moritz has learned it within a few weeks and is now riding in a strikingly confident manner. He seems to get a lot of fun out of it, as he eagerly pumps the pedals ..."[12] In his book, Hagenbeck also describes the behavior and relationships between Moritz, the orangutan Jakob, and Moritz's girlfriend Rosa, including their attempted escapes and their taste for red wine:

> Occasionally they are also served red wine with water during their meals. On these occasions, Jakob turns out to have a special taste for wine, while Rosa, being a female ape, seems to find alcohol less agreeable. The keeper has taught the three monkeys such good manners, that it is a pleasure to watch them. On these occasions, Moritz serves as a "butler"![13]

Kafka elaborates on this motif when describing the process of Red Peter's domestication. In his report, Red Peter tells how he first learned to spit, rub his belly, smoke a pipe, and then drink brandy:

> It was the brandy bottle that gave me the greatest trouble. The smell was torture for me; I forced myself with all my might; but weeks went by before I overcame my revulsion. Curiously, the men took these inner struggles more seriously than anything else about me... . Nonetheless, I reach for the bottle that is held out to me; trembling, uncork it; with this success my strength gradually returns. Already barely different from my model, I lift the

> bottle, put it to my lips, and – and with revulsion, even though it is empty and filled only with the smell – throw it on the ground with disgust.[14]

Finally, Red Peter learns how to shake hands and make conversation and finally reaches the abovementioned education of an "average European." Only through these achievements and disciplinary measures can Red Peter find "his way out" of captivity and attend his position as a performer at a vaudeville theatre. Hence Red Peter's transformation is a result of both bodily discipline, the repression of natural bodily impulses and emotions, and the annihilation of native cultures and the violence of media technologies, which Red Peter has almost wholly internalized, but not quite.

Mimicry and Forms of Violence in Kafka

In Kafka's fictions, violence plays an important part, not only in the sense of brute force, as in the case of Red Peter, who was twice shot by a gun and wounded by a smoking pipe. Often the violence in Kafka's fiction is carried out with simple, almost archaic tools like knives, as in the case of Josef K in *The Trial*. In some cases, the violence arises from nature itself, but in most cases, the violence is a product of culture and the acculturation process. In these violent processes of acculturation and disciplining, Kafka's figures are often treated as animals, as in the case of Josef K, who is slaughtered "like a dog," or more or less like inanimate objects. In some cases, natural phenomena are depicted with the qualities of cultural phenomena and the other way around. As in the case of the execution machine in "In the Penal Colony," cultural artifacts are sometimes described as if they had a life and will of their own. In the famous scene, where the young officer puts

himself under the "scriber" the machine starts working without any human manipulation. In other cases, Kafka depicts the inner life of humans with machine-like features.

In this way, natural phenomena, mechanical objects, and humans seem to be mutually replaceable as parts of a continuity.[15] Accordingly, mechanical objects, made by human hand, could replace the human hand itself, colonizing the human world or taking their revenge on it and turning the humans into animals or mechanical objects themselves. Similarly, the culturally subjugated nature itself takes its revenge on man as its enemy.

Accordingly, animals are sometimes turned into humans and humans into animals, as in the case of Gregor Samsa, through a poetics of inversion. In all cases, violence and instruments of violence play an important role in the ontological transgression from one state to another, as in the case of Red Peter's humanization. Hence Red Peter's way out does not mean emancipation from violence but rather internalization of violence.[16] Accordingly, the domestication and de-exotifying of apes into bourgeois culture is seemingly depicted in the story of Red Peter's transformation. Still, the fact that Red Peter is able to give lectures and reflect upon his life story and current situation breaks the illusion of a domesticated ape. Red Peter's story shows, rather, a number of striking parallels to slave biographies and colonialism, as mentioned previously. Also, his performances at a vaudeville theatre rather apply to the tradition of ethnographic exhibitions. Hence, a crucial motif in Kafka's work is the displacement of the borders of humanity, which is not only associated with the practices of human zoos but also with colonialism and with modernity as such. Inverting the actual process of exotifying humans through the story of the humanized ape Red Peter, Kafka depicts such a displacement of the borders of humanity through colonialism and racism. Hence, in the figure of Moritz, the colonized is looking back at his colonizers.

Still, through the satirical and carnivalesque elements of Kafka's narrative (violence, drinking, pulling down the trousers, sleeping with a female chimpanzee, etc.), the story of Red Peter does not apply to the colonial essentialist desire of undisrupted difference between the colonizers and the colonized "Other." In a postcolonial context, mimicry could refer to a kind of mimicking behavior among human beings, copying the persons in power because one hopes to have access to the same power oneself. According to Homi Bhabha, this mimicking behavior could have an unintentionally subversive effect, exposing the artificiality of all kinds of symbolic expressions of power. For instance, an Indian trying too hard to mimic European customs like shaking hands, sometimes shows through his or her performance how hollow these codes really are. To Bhabha, mimicry is signified by a metonymic resemblance between the colonizers and the colonized, that is, "almost the same, but not quite":

> If I may adapt Samuel Weber's formulation of the marginalizing vision of castration, the colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, *as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite.* Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry must continually produce its slippage, its excess, its difference.[17]

As in Bhabha's concept of subversive mimicry, Red Peter's transformation into something human-like is "almost the same, but not quite." Both his exhibitionism and his secret female chimpanzee represent carnivalesque subversions of discipline. Eagerly trying to convince his academic audience about his repressed ape nature and transformation into a human, Red Peter appears to be very touchy about any sign of disavowal and is unable to hide his suppressed anger in terms of *resentment*:

> If, on the other hand, that scribbler were to lower his pants whenever he has company, things, I assure you, would look very different, and I will let it stand as a sign of his good sense that he does not do so. But that being so, let him keep his delicate sensibility off my back![18]

Like Kafka's "Hungerkünstler" and the young officer in "In the Penal Colony," Red Peter insists on playing his role to its extreme and reacts with disappointment, anger, and resentment when he is denied the unconditional recognition he is longing for.

In other words, mimicry could mean an ironical disruption of the colonial desire to establish a stereotype image of the colonized as the essential "Other" and instead emerge as a metonymic repetition, which is, therefore, subversive: "A desire that, through the repetition of partial presence, which is the basis of mimicry, articulate those disturbances of cultural, racial and historical difference that menace the narcissistic demand of colonial authority."[19] Bhabha's concept of the subversive mimicry is partly inspired by Frantz Fanon's reflections on the "Black Man," and partly a response to Fanon. According to Fanon, the "Black Man" is not really a man, since he is prevented from representing himself due to the cultural hegemony of the colonizers. As represented by the white, the "Black Man" is forced to see himself through the gaze of the white colonizers. Similarly, Red Peter finds himself dependent on the recognition of his European audience, who decides whether his metamorphosis has been successful or not. However, the carnivalesque and hyperbolic elements of Kafka's short story contribute to the satiric dimension of what I suggest calling Kafkaesque mimicry. This kind of satiric mimicry depicts the mechanisms of domination, discipline, assimilation, violence, and resentment in both a hyperbolic, metonymical, and carnivalesque fashion. Although partly staged in colonial settings, this mimicry applies

both to the experience of colonized non-Europeans and to the situation of the Jews and other more or less oppressed minorities within Europe and the Austrian-Hungarian Empire itself. It also applies to domination, violence, and how they affect the dominated and their responses in terms of resentment, as more or less universal phenomena.

According to Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, the black man yearns to be recognized as a human among humans but finds himself overdetermined by the gaze of the white man, imposing a sense of inferiority upon him. Being denied this kind of recognition, the black man could respond by trying to become white. Or he could turn to a kind of regressive Black nationalism or racist folklore (which would apply to Bhabha's negative concept of political mimicry). But in both cases, the dependency on the white gaze preserves a feeling of dependence in the black man and imposes a neurosis on him with elements of resentment:

> What does the black man want? At the risk of arousing the resentment of my black brothers, I will say that the black man is not a man. There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born. In most cases, the black man lacks the advantage of being able to accomplish the descent into a real hell … We shall have no mercy for the former governors, the former missionaries. To us, the man who adores the Negro is as "sick" as the man who abominates him. Conversely, the black man who wants to turn his race white is as miserable as the man who abominates him.[20]

In this way, colonialism is not just imposed as a political, military, and economic condition on the black man; it is also a psychological condition that continues after the political decolonization. Overdetermined through the gaze of the white

man, the black man forgets his own longing for being recognized as an individual with a hybrid identity.

Hegemony, Anti-Semitism, and Resentment

The concept of resentment, or *ressentiment,* as Nietzsche phrased it, was well known to Kafka's generation of writers and intellectuals, embracing the philosophies of Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche. Although the Austrian Jews had received extensive civil liberties and rights under the reign of the enlightened Emperor Joseph II at the end of the eighteenth century and were fully emancipated between 1848 and 1867, they were dominated by the German-speaking non-Jewish population. As far as the Jewish minority in Prague is concerned, they were gradually dominated by the Czech-speaking non-Jewish population in the wake of Czech nationalism before and after the collapse of the Habsburg Empire in 1918. A vast majority chose an assimilationist strategy, claiming to be as German as the Germans, subscribing to the values of the liberal Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, to which they owed their emancipation. Later, many of them chose to adapt to emerging Czech nationalism and become as Czech as the Czechs.[21]

Many of these political processes were associated with a considerable level of open and invisible violence against both the German and the Jewish minorities, which sometimes erupted in pogroms and riots like the anti-German *Dezembersturm* in 1897, where buildings and businesses identified as German were attacked or looted. On such occasions, there were numerous street fights between Czech and German primary school children and students, and one of Kafka's friends, Oskar Baum, even lost his sight in one of these riots.[22] Although assimilation in most cases was a free choice, many

Jews experienced considerable assimilationist pressure from the emerging Czech and German nationalist movements. On the other hand, they experienced an opposite pressure from the emerging anti-Semitic movement, which, after the accusation of Jewish ritual murders, organized violent riots, molested Jewish shopkeepers, looted their shops, and burnt synagogues. In 1897, referring to the riots of the *Dezembersturm*, Theodor Herzl wrote:

> What had they done, the little Jews of Prague? At Prague they were criticized for not being Czechs, at Saaz and Eger for not being German ... What attitude could they adopt? Those who wanted to be German were attacked by the Czechs (*sic*) and, at the same time, by the Germans.[23]

Both Kafka and his friend Brod were studying the anti-Semitic articles of the Czech newspaper *Venkov* and were all too familiar with the everyday insults against Jews. When Kafka once was invited as a guest in the salons of Emilie Marschner, the wife of Kafka's superior, one of the present ladies remarked: "I see you have even invited a Mr. Jew." ["Da haben Sie ja auch einen Herrn Juden eingeladen"].[24]

In her biography on the Jewish writer and salon intellectual Rahel Varnhagen, from 1958, Arendt basically describes the Jews as outcasts in Western Europe after the emancipation because they were never really accepted as equal citizens. Among these Jewish outcasts, Arendt makes a distinction between the social status of the pariah and parvenu. While the pariahs accepted their social status as outcasts but remained true to their Jewish heritage, "the parvenus tried to succeed in the world of the gentiles by using their elbows to raise themselves above their fellow Jews into the respectable world."[25] And yet, they could never escape their Jewish roots and were accepted only

as exceptions from the stereotype of the uneducated, backward ghetto Jew.

Hence the pariah and parvenu represent two opposite attitudes and adaptions to the European majority culture and society: While the pariah recognizes his subordinate position in the European society without any illusions of being recognized as an equal citizen, the parvenu longs for recognition at the cost of being assimilated into the European majority society. Still, the parvenu is unable to get rid of the old feeling of inferiority and resentment in his new and unfamiliar social world. In other words, the social advancement of the Jewish upstarts is paid for with resentment:

> Varnhagens Trieb kennen alle Parvenus, alle, die sich in eine Gesellschaft, in einen Stand eine Klasse hinausschwindeln müssen, zu der sie nicht gehören. Der angestrengte Versuch zu lieben, wo einem nur das Gehorchen übrigbleibt, führt meistens weiter als die einfache und ungekünstelte Subalternität. Indem man den ‚guten Eigenschaften' der Vorgesetzten auf die Spur kommt', hofft man das unendliche und unausweichliche Ressentiment loszuwerden.
>
> All parvenus are familiar with Varnhagen's drive, all who have had to fake their way into a social class where they did not belong. The tense attempt to love, where obeying is the only real option, mostly leads to simple and straight forward subalternity. In search of the "good qualities" of the superiors, one really tries to get rid of the endless and unavoidable resentment.[26]

However, Arendt associated herself with the "hidden tradition" of the "conscious pariah," affirming her Jewish particularity and still claiming her right to a place in general European life. However, the conscious pariah knows that he or she could never become as European as the Europeans, even without feeling

particularly Jewish either. The "conscious pariah" neither identifies with the orthodox traditions of Eastern Ashkenazi Judaism nor with the wealthy Jewish upper class that dominated Jewish-gentile relations. According to Arendt's view, Rahel Varnhagen, famous for her intellectual Berlin salons, was part of this hidden tradition of isolated "conscious pariahs," confirming their status as Jewish pariahs—like Heinrich Heine and Franz Kafka:

> ... those who really did most for the spiritual dignity of their people, who were great enough to transcend the bounds of nationality and to weave the strands of their Jewish genius into the general texture of European life ... those bold spirits who tried to make of the emancipation of the Jews that which it really should have been—an admission of Jews as *Jews* to the ranks of humanity, rather than a permit to ape the gentiles or an opportunity to play the parvenu.[27]

However, political resentment could also be provoked and projected on competing cultural and political "out-groups" by propaganda and exclusion in order to mobilize a political or cultural "in-group," like, for instance, a national community. In other words: Resentment could turn out to be a powerful political force when being instrumentalized by political leaders, be it nationalist, Islamist, or right-wing populist leaders. Resentment becomes a displaceable political or structural sentiment beyond the question of individual attitude or slave morality. In such cases, I would like to suggest the notion of "replaceable resentment" or "external resentment" in contrast to the resentment from below, which Nietzsche describes as the revolt of slave morality. Such a feeling of suppressed dislike and aggression, sometimes mixed with a sense of affront or inferiority, is referred to as *ressentiment* in Nietzsche's major

work *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887). Nietzsche describes *ressentiment* as a strategy among humans unable to embrace life and unfold their own creative potential, instead directing their hatred and revengefulness against the creative *Übermensch* in an attempt to limit its instinctive unfolding of life and creativity.

At the historical origin of both Judaism and Christianity, Nietzsche conjures up a moral upheaval of a slave people, suppressing its will to power and instincts of life while falling into a state of *ressentiment*: a self-poisoning mixture of inferiority, fear, hatred, bitterness, envy, and revengefulness against those who are strong and brave enough to embrace their lives. In ancient history, this slave people revolted against the aristocratic individualism of the nobility and launched its alternative slave morality. According to this new morality, the sound instincts of life and the will to power represented by the proud and brave should be considered as sinful and evil and restricted by religious commandments and the infliction of bad consciousness. In this process, the proud will to power was inhibited and transformed into *ressentiment*, according to Nietzsche.

To Nietzsche, slave morality means the deformation and perversion of the will to power and immediate expression of life into anger and revenge by groups of people being too weak to live out their own creativity and life instincts. The slave people, therefore, had to oppress themselves and others by the religious commandments and the morality of compassion as expressed in Judaism and Christianity. In these religions, the resentment of the slave people is elevated into a virtue of self-sacrifice and duty of compassion and neighborly love. According to Nietzsche, resentment transformed weakness into a virtue and strength into a vice. Due to these mechanisms, *ressentiment* was preserved and elevated into a cultural and religious norm, rejecting any strength or greatness of life.

The Colonial Order: The Dreyfus Affair and Colonial Sadism

The anti-assimilationist agitation of the Viennese Zionist movement was initially fueled by the Dreyfus affair. In 1894, the French-Jewish Captain Alfred Dreyfus was falsely accused of espionage for Germany and sentenced to the most severe punishment: degradation and deportation for life to the penal colony Île du Diable (Devil's Island). This was the most notorious of the three islands of the penal colony Îles de Salut on the coast of French Guyana. Normally, this sentence would mean certain death. As a successful Alsatian artillery officer in the French army, Dreyfus seemed to fulfill all criteria of an assimilated French Jew. Nonetheless, the anti-Semitic resentments of the French general staff were only waiting for an opportunity to be unleashed on a Jewish scapegoat. When the French intelligence discovered that secrets concerning a new weapon system had been leaked to the German enemy, Dreyfus became the victim of a miscarriage of justice, even though the real betrayer, the indebted general staff officer Ferdinand Walsin-Esterházy, had already been revealed. Esterházy was protected by his powerful allies and was acquitted after the trial against him in 1898.[28] A famous drawing spread in European newspapers shows the public degradation of Dreyfus in front of his soldiers, as a superior officer strips the distinctions off his uniform and breaks his saber in two pieces over his thigh. After an intense campaign carried out by European intellectuals like Emile Zola, Theodor Herzl, and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Dreyfus was finally released after miraculously having survived four years in captivity on Devil's Island. As an officer in the French army, Dreyfus may be conceived as an example of affirmative mimicry but transformed into a young French officer in one of Kafka's colonial short stories; he could also be interpreted as an example of subversive mimicry, according to Bhabha.

Hence, the Dreyfus affair is metonymically reflected in Kafka's enigmatic short story "In the Penal Colony", written in 1914. In this story, a European scientist visits a French-speaking penal colony. In the colony, he is met by a young French officer, serving both as a judge and an executioner, and the visitor is, therefore, rather upset about the failing legal protection of the prisoners. For instance, the convicts learn nothing about the charges held against them nor their sentences. But, as the young officer puts it, "Guilt is always beyond all doubt" ("die Schuld ist immer zweifellos"):

> The Officer saw that he was in danger of being held up for a long time in his explanation of the machine, he therefore went up to the traveler, put his arm through his, pointed at the condemned man, who, now that attention was so openly directed at him straightened up smartly—the soldier tugged the chain as well—and said, "The matter is as follows. Here, in the penal colony I have been appointed judge. Despite my youth. For I assisted the former commandant in all penal cases, and I also know the machine best. The principle, according to which I decide is: "Guilt is always beyond any doubt."[29]

In the present trial, the young officer is sentencing a disobeying soldier to death by a marvelous new execution apparatus, consisting of a vibrating "bed," a vibrating "drawer," and a transparent "scriber" with glass needles, where the offended "commandment" is engraved into the body of the convict. This is the only way the convict can learn about his offense.

The convict is offered one last meal, a kind of porridge, which he normally throws up as he is strapped to the execution device and penetrated by the transparent needles. After six hours, the convict's face shows signs of transfiguration (*Verwandlung*) and delight as he starts reading the sentence on his own body. However,

the officer shows more interest in the execution apparatus than in the prisoner, constantly trying to win the European scientist's sympathy and recognition for his method, which was initially launched by the deceased old commandant of the colony. During his reign, the executions were great spectacles, drawing a massive crowd of spectators. Under the new commandant, however, the execution ceremonies are decaying, and hardly any spectators come by to watch them anymore. It turns out that the young officer is sympathizing so strongly with the old commandant and his art of execution that he has put his own life and fate into his loyalty to and responsibility for the execution device. The division between the old and the new commandant is to a certain extent in accordance with the division between Judaism and Christianity, even though this does not quite harmonize with the end of the short story, where the old commandant is expected to return like a Messiah figure. Still, the young officer's exaggerated loyalty to the old commandant and his theatrical method of execution may be alluding to the Jewish background of Captain Dreyfus, thus representing a metonymic mimicry in Kafka's fiction.

As the European visitor declares himself in favor of the new and more humane commandant of the colony, the officer seems to overreact. After replacing the old commandment, "Ehre deinen Vorgesetzten!" ("Honor your superior!") with "Sei gerecht!" ("Be just!"), he releases the prisoner and tells the soldiers to strap him—as the commanding officer—up to the execution apparatus instead. More or less (that is: metonymically) in accordance with the famous drawing of Dreyfus being degraded by an officer in front of the soldiers, the young officer takes off his uniform, breaks his saber in pieces, and lays himself naked under the transparent scriber.

> But it hardly fitted in with the care he was taking that as soon as he had finished handling a piece of clothing, he immediately

> threw it into the pit with an indignant jerk. The last thing left to him was his short sword with his belt. He drew the sword from the sheath, broke it, then collected everything—the pieces of sword, the sheath, and the belt—and threw these things away with such a violent gesture that they clanged down in the pit below.[30]

As the young officer lays down naked under the harrow, however, the execution device seems to act on its own, almost like an android, as if it had understood the new broken command ("Be just!") as an instruction to act accordingly. Consequently, the device destroys itself and penetrates the dead body of the officer, who shows no signs of transfiguration nor delight. In this way, Kafka's text reflects the hermeneutic problems of truth, meaning, the misinterpretation, and incomprehension in the text itself. A hermeneutic key question in this context would, of course, be the meaning of the shocking violence the readers are exposed to in this text. The displayed scenario of a naked male body penetrated by the needles of a transparent scriber, which could be observed by an audience of spectators from all angles, bears all the features of a sadomasochistic pornographic tableau, as suggested in readings by scholars such as Marcel Hénaff and John Zilcosky:

> This panoptic voyeurism is, as Marcel Hénaff argues, central to Sadean pornographical form, where everything must be theatre and must be visible. Although Sade employs no unique perspectival centre (no single voyeur crouching in the shadows), there is always an implied 'master' libertine, who, like the reader, sees everything. All bodies and all points of penetration must always be exposed. As in the case in Kafka's story, there is no fussing with disrobing: Immediate nakedness is mandatory, and everything is offered to everyone's eye 'without mediation'. The old

> commandant's machinery is geared precisely to achieve such an omnivoyeurism: the harrow is made of glass so that 'everyone' can 'scrutinize the carrying out of the sentence'.[31]

Kafka and his generation of intellectuals were quite familiar with these sadomasochistic conventions. Leopold Ritter Sacher-Masoch had not only coined the concept of masochism through his portrait of a dominant woman and a dominated man in his novel *Venus im Pelz* (*Venus in Fur*). Later, he also published several volumes of popular short stories featuring Jewish *shtetl* milieus in Galicia, where he himself was born as the son of a police director. The plots of these short stories often reflect the dilemmas of segregation, assimilation, anti-Semitism, and resentment. In this way, the suppressed anger and resentments of both Jews and anti-Semites could also be related to sadomasochistic expressions.[32]

Kafka himself expressed rather mixed feelings concerning "das Peinliche" in "In the Penal Colony." His publisher Kurt Wolff had expressed some concerns about "das Peinliche" of the story in a letter to Kafka. In his reply, Kafka is playing with the ambiguity of the word "peinlich," which could mean both "embarrassing" and "painful" in German, relating the meanings to both the political and his private situation in 1916:

> Ihre freundlichen Worte über mein Manuskript sind mir sehr angenehm eingegangen. Ihr Aussetzen des Peinlichen trifft ganz mit meiner Meinung zusammen, die ich allerdings in dieser Art fast gegenüber allem habe, was bisher von mir vorliegt … Zur Erklärung dieser letzten Erzählung füge ich nur hinzu, daß nicht nur sie peinlich ist, daß vielmehr unsere allgemeine und meine besondere Zeit gleichfalls sehr peinlich war und ist und meine besondere sogar noch länger peinlich als die allgemeine.
>
> [Your friendly words concerning my manuscript have pleased

> me. Your concern about the painful [embarrassing] is in accordance with my own opinion, as in the case of almost everything I have published so far ... As an explanation for this last story, I would only like to add that not only is the story embarrassing [painful], but rather that our general times, and mine in particular, were and still are equally embarrassing, and that mine has been embarrassing even longer than the general times.][33]

Kafka also resisted Wolff's expressed wish to publish "In the Penal Colony" by itself. Instead, Kafka insisted on publishing it together with "Das Urteil" and "Die Verwandlung" in one volume under the title "Strafen" ("Punishments"), dealing with different aspects of the interconnected problems of guilt, transformation, and punishment.[34] At this time, Berlin was the metropolis of the third largest colonial empire of the world, encompassing Deutsch-Südwestafrika (Namibia), Deutsch-Ostafrika (Tanzania), Cameroon, Rwanda, and Togo. The German colonizers were notorious for their brutality and sadism. The governor of Deutsch-Ostafrika, Carl Peters, was particularly infamous. According to Hannah Arendt, he was most likely the model for Joseph Conrad's colonel Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness*.[35] The general lieutenant of the German troops in Deutsch-Südafrika, Lothar von Trotha, also became notorious after ordering the genocide in the so-called Herero war of 1904–1908, where almost the entire Herero and Nama people in Namibia were exterminated or deported to concentration camps on the Haifischinsel (Shark Island).[36]

In her work *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt shows how the colonies attracted both bureaucrats, adventurers, and drop-outs from the European continent, in their attempt to make a new order in the colonies, often through brutality that would have been sanctioned by moral inhibitions and democratic obstacles in Europe.[37] In the colonies, however, the

colonizers were ruling by decrees and could, therefore, impose their interests without democratic obstacles or moral hesitation. One of Kafka's favorite books was an 88-page, green juvenile book, written by Oscar Weber entitled *Der Zuckerbaron: Schicksale eines ehemaligen deutschen Offiziers in Südamerika* (*The Sugar Baron: The Adventures of a Former German Officer in South America*), published in Schaffstein's *Little Green Books* series. In the novel, a former officer (Weber) narrates how he travels to South America to try his luck and build a new career as a land surveyor. On his way, he survives natural disasters and an attempted peasant revolution before eventually making his fortune in sugar. In a postcard to Felice in 1916, Kafka describes his fascination with this popular novel:

> Among [the *Little Green Books*], for example, there is one book that affects me so deeply that I feel it is about myself or as if it were the book of rules [Vorschrift] for my life, rules I elude [entweiche] or have eluded (a feeling I often have, by the way); the book is called *The Sugar Baron*, and its final chapter is the most important.[38]

Kafka may not only have borrowed central images from this book like the land surveyor K in *The Castle* and the execution device in "In the Penal Colony," but also the transformation of an ape into a human in "A Report to an Academy." In *The Sugar Baron*, Weber recalls the human-like behavior of an ape he had shot during a pleasure-hunt:

> [The ape] I shot ... from a low palm-tree, fell, still alive, and sat exactly like a man with his back against the trunk. He pressed his left hand against the wound on his chest and looked at me almost reproachfully with big, dark eyes, which protruded from his fear-distorted face; at the same time, he screamed and whimpered

> like a child and searched with his right hand for leaves, which he picked up off the ground und stuffed in his wound.[39]

In the Belgian and German colonies, in particular, acts of sadism on an almost epidemic scale against the colonized were carried out. These excesses were referred to as *Tropenkoller* ("tropical madness") in the German public, now getting gradually more critical of the brute violence carried out against their colonial subjects.[40] Consequently, the sadism associated with the so-called Old Imperialism had to be suppressed and replaced by a new and less openly violent kind of imperialism. In his reading of "In the Penal Colony," Zilcosky relates this shift from Old to New Imperialism to the rejection of the sadism depicted in Kafka's novel. Hence the first commandment inscribed in the execution device ("Honor your superior") applies both to a colonial and a sadistic codex. As the visitor, however, rejects the role of a spectator and turns away from the execution, the officer does not experience the expected transformation and pleasure after six hours under the harrow. According to Zilcosky, the end of the sadistic codex also means the collapse of Old Imperialism:

> By tacitly rejecting the role assigned to him, the voyager also implicitly denounces the entire old colonial system and, on a metatextual level, destroys the story's sadistic structure. Despite the fact that the voyager has not yet uttered a politically critical word, the officer becomes desperate and aggressive.[41]

The German colonial empire was also very present in Berlin when Kafka visited the German capital in 1914. Both Afro-German subjects and merchandises were exhibited at the German Colonial House ("Deutsches Kolonialhaus"), and some members of the African staff had also been displayed at ethnographic

exhibitions, such as the "Kolonilal- und Transvaal-Ausstellung" in 1896/97 or at human zoos displayed at the Berlin Zoo.[42]

Deportation and internment, as metonymically presented both in "A Report to an Academy" and in "In the Penal Colony," were also highly contested issues in Kafka's Prague, where Hans Groß, one of Kafka's law professors at the university, had strongly advocated the deportation of "degenerate criminals" from the Habsburg Monarchy to penal colonies like those under French and British rule. The Habsburg authorities, therefore, decided to send the young lawyer Robert Heindl on a journey to visit famous penal colonies outside Europe to study their advantages and disadvantages regarding their organization, executions, diseases, rehabilitation, and relapses.[43] Hence all the abovementioned practices of ethnographic exhibitions, deportation, and internment were bio-political tools, displaying and affirming the hegemonic order of the Habsburg Monarchy and the colonial order of the German Reich. In a certain sense, they also represented a provisional culmination of the disciplining through the violence of media technologies and the power of the gaze. The execution device demonstrates the continuity between symbolic and physical violence and makes the invisible violence visible.

The modern taming methods of Hagenbeck in Kafka's "Report," veiling the brute force that had been used on the animals, finds a parallel in the shift to the more humane regime of the new commander in the "In the Penal Colony." The marvelous execution device displays the absurdities of modern utopias of pedagogic punishment and acculturation through the violence of media technologies and deportation. Confronted with the European visitor's lack of recognition, however, the young officer overreacts with a mixture of aggression and resentment, choosing the role of the victim instead of the executioner. However, the motif of resentment seems to play a more important role in "A Report" than in "In the Penal Colony."

In all of these cases, violence represents a kind of threshold experience, opening up the human body and transgressing borders of individuality and humanity. The symbolic violence of hegemony, however, seems to be more closely related to forms of mimicking behavior (mimicry) and resentment in Kafka's fiction. Accordingly, the violence represented in "In the Penal Colony" has a satirical purpose by means of carnivalesque motifs and hyperbolic effects like eating, vomiting, penetration, and burlesque slapsticks. The fact that the political satire of "In the Penal Colony" was recognizable, not only to Kafka's contemporary critics but also to the military censorship, became manifest as Kafka in 1916 was invited to read the story publicly in Munich.[44] In order to evade the German censorship and receive the required wartime passport, Kafka invented a new title for his tour: "Tropische Münchhausiade," named after the comic travel narratives of Baron Münchhausen, also known as "the baron of lies." As in an act of mimicry, Kafka decided to camouflage his political satire behind Münchhausen's inconsistent narratives, now projected into a fertile and exotic environment and yet revealing the mechanisms of domination, resentment, violence, and hegemony in Europe through a magnifying glass.

Notes

1. See Peer Zickgraf, *Völkerschau und Totentanz. Deutsches (Körper-) Weltentheater zwischen 1905 und heute* (Marburg: Jonas Verlag, 2012), 32.
2. See Naama Harel, "De-allegorizing Kafka's Ape: Two Animalistic Contexts," in *Kafka's Creatures: Animals, Hybrids, and Other Fantastic Beings*, ed. Marc Lucht and Donna Yarri (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2010), 53.
3. Benjamin Balint, *Kafkas letzter Prozess*, trans. Anne Emmert (Berlin: Berenberg Verlag, 2019), 78.
4. Franz Kafka, *Kafka's Selected Stories. New Translations,*

Backgrounds and Contexts, Criticism, trans. and ed. Stanley Corngold (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007), 78.

5. Kafka, *Selected Stories*, 83f.
6. See William C. Rubinstein, "A Report to an Academy," in *Modern Language Quarterly* 13 (1952).
7. Frederick Douglass, "Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave," in *The Classical Slave Narratives*, ed. Henry Louis Gates Jr. (New York: Signet Classics, 2012).
8. Zickgraf, *Völkerschau und Totentanz*, 32.
9. See Carl Hagenbeck, *Von Tieren und Menschen* (Hamburg: Severus 2012), 165ff.
10. Zickgraf, *Völkerschau und Totentanz*, 37.
11. Ronald Spiers, "Gewalt und poetische Gerechtigkeit bei Kafka," in *Franz Kafka: Zur ethischen und ästhetischen Rechtfertigung*, ed. Beatrice Sandberg & Jakob Lothe (Freiburg im Bresgau: Rombach Verlag, 2002), 118.
12. My trans. of Hagenbeck, *Von Tieren und Menschen*, 218.
13. My transl. of Hagenbeck, *Von Tieren und Menschen*, 217.
14. Kafka, *Selected Stories*, 81f.
15. See Spiers, "Gewalt und poetische Gerechtigkeit bei Kafka," 115ff.
16. See Spiers, "Gewalt und poetische Gerechtigkeit bei Kafka," 116f.
17. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 1994), 86.
18. Kafka, *Selected Stories*, 78.
19. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 88.
20. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 1f.
21. See Pascale Casanova, *Kafka, Angry Poet*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Seagull Books, 2015), 36–40.
22. See Casanova, *Kafka, Angry Poet*, 32; Balint, *Kafkas letzter Prozess*, 32, 72–74.
23. Casanova, *Kafka, Angry Poet*, 36.
24. Balint, *Kafkas letzter Prozess*, 72.
25. Ron H. Feldman, "Introduction," xliii.
26. Arendt, *Rahel Varnhagen*, 209 (my trans.).
27. Ron H. Feldman. "Introduction: The Jew as Pariah: The Case of Hannah Arendt (1906–1975)," in *Hannah Arendt. The Jewish*

Writings, ed. by Jerome Kohn & Ron H. Feldman, (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), xliii.

28. Wolfgang Benz, *Antisemitismus. Präsenz und Tradition eines Ressentiments* (Schwalbach: Wochenschau Verlag, 2016), 60ff.
29. Kafka, *Selected Stories*, 40.
30. Kafka, *Selected Stories*, 55.
31. John Zilcosky, *Kafka's Travels. Exoticism, Colonialism, and the Traffic of Writing* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian 2003), 112f.
32. See Leopold Ritter von Sacher-Masoch, *Polnische Judengeschichten* (Createspace Independent Pub, 2019).
33. My trans. of Auerochs, "In der Strafkolonie," *Kafka Handbuch. Leben – Werk – Wirkung*, ed. Manfred Engel/Bernd Auerochs (Stuttgart & Weimar: Verlag J.B. Metzler), 208.
34. See Auerochs, "In der Strafkolonie," 207.
35. See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York; Schocken Books, 2004), 188.
36. See Jürgen Zimmerer, "Krieg, KZ und Völkermord in Südwestafrika. Der erste deutsche Genozid," in *Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika. Der Kolonialkrieg (1904–1908) in Namibia und seine Folgen*, ed. Jürgen Zimmerer & Joachim Zeller (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2003), 45ff.
37. See Arendt, *Origins of Totalitarianism*, 186ff.
38. Zilcosky, *Kafka's Travels*, 106.
39. Zilcosky, *Kafka's Travels*, 108; see Oskar Weber, *Der Zuckerbaron. Schicksale eines ehemaligen deutschen Offiziers in Südamerika* (Köln: Hermann Schaffstein, 1914), 10f.
40. Zilcosky, *Kafka's Travels*, 109.
41. Zilcosky, *Kafka's Travels*, 113.
42. Ulrich van der Heyden & Joachim Zeller, *Kolonialmetropole Berlin. Eine Spurensuche* (Berlin: Berlin Edition, 2002), 190.
43. See Ribert Heindl, *Meine Reise nach den Strafkolonien. Mit vielen Originalaufnahmen* (Berlin & Wien: Ullstein Verlag, 1913); Walter Müller-Seider, *Die Deportation des Menschen. Kafkas Erzählung In der Strafkolonie im europäischen Kontext* (Stuttgart: Metzler Verlag, 1986), 50ff. and 80ff.; Klaus Wagenbach, *Franz Kafka: In der Strafkolonie. Eine Geschichte aus dem Jahre 1916* (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Wagenbach, 1995).
44. See Auerochs, "In der Strafkolonie," 208.

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