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Hille Haker

Loyola University Chicago, hhaker@luc.edu

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Article

Towards a Decolonial Narrative Ethics

Hille Haker

Department of Theology, Loyola University Chicago, Chicago, IL 60660, USA; hhaker@luc.edu;
Tel.: +1-773-508-2368

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Abstract: This essay explores the contribution of two works of German literature to a decolonial narrative ethics. It analyzes the structures of colonialism, taking narratives as a medium of and for ethical reflection, and reinterprets the ethical concepts of recognition and responsibility. This essay examines two stories. Franz Kafka's *Report to an Academy* (1917) addresses the biological racism of the German scientists around 1900, unmasking the racism that renders apes (or particular people) the pre-life of human beings (or particular human beings). It also demonstrates that the politics of recognition, based on conditional (mis-)recognition, must be replaced by an ethics of mutual recognition. Uwe Timm's *Morenga* (1978) uses the cross-reference of history and fiction as an aesthetic principle, narrating the history of the German genocide of the Nama and Herero people at the beginning of the 20th century. Intercultural understanding, the novel shows, is impossible when it is based on the conditional, colonial (mis-)recognition that echoes Kafka's unmasking; furthermore, the novel illuminates the interrelation of recognition and responsibility that requires not only an aesthetic ethics of reading based on attentiveness and response but also a political ethics that confronts the (German) readers as historically situated agents who must take responsibility for their past.

Keywords: narrative ethics; recognition; responsibility; decoloniality; Kafka; Timm; racism; genocide; German Empire

1. Introduction

Human beings, the “language animals”, as Charles Taylor argues alongside Aristotle and modern Western hermeneutics, receive symbolic codes of meaning from the traditions they are born into as much as they actively give meaning to their lives (Taylor 2016). By telling the stories of their tradition in their own way and telling their own stories, they also change the codes and the narratives that shape the traditions to which they belong. We end up in the infinite hermeneutic endeavor that we call history: the interpretation of experiences and events over time in and through stories and histories. Stories, narratives, and/or histories have been examined in view of what they represent, how they represent it, in which medium and with what forms, and how they are received by readers.¹ Because narratives are the medium of giving meaning to experiences as well as the medium to explore the past and the future using historical analyses as well as imagination, narrative theories intersect implicitly or explicitly with other disciplines: history, philosophy, cultural theory, art theory, and aesthetics are closest to narrative theory but it also intersects with ethical theories. Ethical theory addresses questions of moral identity, character formation, moral conflicts, the actualization of social and/or moral values and norms in concrete contexts, and institutions that establish the normative structures of actions; narrative theory informs it how to analyze narratives in light of the scholarly works.

¹ Several overviews and analyses are available that discern the different approaches to narrative theory in the 20th century. For my interest, the more recent trends of the pragmatic turn in narrative theory over the last decades is most important, especially feminist or postcolonial narrative theories. Cf. (Herman et al. 2012; Phelan and Rabinowitz 2008).

In this essay, I will take up a specific task that complements that of critical postcolonial narrative theory, as an effort of decolonizing patterns of thinking and acting. Ultimately, this is an ethical endeavor, seeking to transform habits and structures of coloniality, but here, I want to show how literature is a medium that may contribute to such a transformation by way of storytelling. In other words, I want to inquire into the resistance of literature to the racism and depiction of racial superiority that has dominated European modernity's account of themselves. How has Western literature, and works in German literature in particular, dealt with the colonial history? From a critical, pragmatic rather than a narratological, structuralist, or poststructuralist perspective, power is the currency that defines whose stories and what stories are being told, heard, read, and shared publicly. For instance, what becomes part of a particular tradition is not merely limited by the finite perspective of any of the narrators (historians and authors of fiction alike),² but it is also a reflection of their position within the social, political, and cultural reality from which they speak or write. Works of fiction often play with social expectations and norms, revealing but also potentially disorienting unquestioned power systems and/or epistemologies that are reflected in social orders, even though no storyteller can entirely transcend their own position and perspective that is shaped by the multiple factors that constitute their identity. Power is an intrinsic part of any story as well as extrinsic to it, because to be completely transparent about the choices, selections, perspectives, or positions a storyteller may take would undermine the narrative pact that readers make with narrators: reading means to follow a story's interest and partiality, albeit not uncritically.

Obviously, it is impossible in one essay to even attempt to grapple with the complexities of narrative theory, aesthetics, and ethics; my contribution therefore takes up only one particular question that is highly contested in current debates, namely the relationship of literature and historical events. I will limit my inquiry to literary ethics rather than narrative ethics, because my interest concerns the way literature may contribute to the knowledge, the self-understanding, and the critique of a particular historical tradition. In this essay, I will address the colonial history of Germany. First, I will analyze the habitus (Bourdieu 1990) of coloniality (Mignolo 2018) that guides the racial epistemology of superiority and inferiority in Germany at the beginning of the 20th century, and second, I will analyze the elements of German colonialism over the course of the 19th and 20th century, as depicted in a novel that also attends to the German genocide of the Nama and Herero at the beginning of the 20th century. Overshadowed by the Shoah, it has only recently become the topic of public reckoning.

Literary narratives have sparked renewed interest over the last decades in trans- and interdisciplinary studies, and narrative ethics has emerged as an umbrella term that is used in literary narrative studies as well as in ethics, albeit with different meanings. On the one hand, scholars of literature and/or narratology inquire about basic ethical concepts as they are constructed in art (using the term "narrative" loosely), such as personal and moral identity, social values and norms, agency and virtues, and the reflection of moral conflicts and moral imagination; they examine narratives and factual or fictional literature—from everyday storytelling to narratives used in medical deliberations or in novels, yet often without extended reception of ethical theory. Others have reflected upon the pedagogical and public function of moral affects and emotions or the shifts and changes of the modes of communication over time. Ethicists often use narratives as complements or counterpoints to philosophical arguments, and they reflect especially upon unique personal experiential reflections as corrective to the norms that orient judgments and actions. Narrative ethics has become an important conversation partner for hermeneutics, too, and within ethical theory, I see it as part of the hermeneutical ethics that complements normative judgments.³ With a new interest in phenomenology and hermeneutics, the ethics of reading has become a part of reception aesthetics or, for example, is

² For the relationship of history and fiction cf. (Ricoeur 1988).

³ Cf. (Meretoja 2018), whom I follow in many ways, for a good overview of narrative ethics approaches. Her own approach seeks to connect literary narrative studies with the hermeneutical and ethical endeavor to engage with one's "being in the world" through storytelling. Cf. also the works in ethical theory on a hermeneutical ethics in (Haker 2010; Wils 2001).

further explored in a deconstructive literary theory that focuses on responsibility.⁴ In this essay that explores the relationship of history and literature, I will use Ricœur's concept of the "crossed reference" of empirical and narrative truth. I will explore how fictional narratives may generate concepts central not only for a decolonial narrative theory but also for a decolonial narrative ethics.⁵

In the first part, I will read Franz Kafka's short story *A Report to an Academy*, written in 1917 (Kafka 1971), followed in the second part by a reading of Uwe Timm's novel *Morenga*, from 1978 (Timm 2003).⁶ I will discuss how Kafka responds to the scientific theory of race at the beginning of the 20th century, and analyze the elements of German colonialism that Timm illuminates in a complex narrative that assembles documentary and fiction. The interweaving of history and fiction in narrative, which Ricœur coined as crossed reference, serves as my guide in this essay. David Walter Price provides a good summary of Ricœur's hermeneutics and the way how literature is linked to the "real world of action," the area of ethical reflection:

Ricœur's hermeneutic approach emerges, in part, from the philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer, who acknowledges 'the universal linguality of behavior relative to the world' (Hermeneutics, p. 65). Ricœur stresses the narrative function of *all* historical explanations. In doing so, he develops a three-part argument in opposition to positivist interpretations of history. First, 'there is more fiction in history' than positivists care to admit. Second, narrative fiction is more mimetic than positivists will allow. And third, there is the concept of 'crossed reference' (reference croisée), by which Ricœur means that the references of fiction and history "cross upon the basic historicity of human experience" (Hermeneutics, pp. 293–94). In other words, Ricœur sees the two narrative modes of fiction and history as interweaving and thereby bringing historicity to language. The tripartite argument leads Ricœur to conclude that "the world of fiction leads us to the heart of the real world of action". (Hermeneutics, p. 296). (Price 1999, p. 24).⁷

2. Franz Kafka: A Report to an Academy

2.1. German Colonialism and Carl Hagenbeck's Zoo

At the end of the 19th century, the German zoo and circus company of Carl Hagenbeck became famous. Its zoo exhibited many animals, including never seen wild animals from non-European continents that captured the imagination of the German citizens, especially the bourgeois class. At the turn of the century, colonialism had become part of the cultural context and cultural life in Germany. The scientific landscape had changed, too: biology, anthropology, and sociology developed as new disciplines, often intertwining in language and concepts. Academies were established as scientific societies in late 19th century, and members discussed current affairs of their disciplines. Both biology and sociology had embraced the new evolution theory, for which Darwin on the one hand, and Malthus on the other, had become the most popular figures (Kjaergaard 2011).

Zoos and circuses function as mediator between the sciences and (popular) culture; they stir curiosity of the "exotic" other by entertaining people, thereby blending societal education (of race theory) and cultural entertainment (Anhalt 2007). Carl Hagenbeck is the only historical name that is

⁴ For the reader-response theory cf. (Iser 1979; Jauss 1982).

⁵ In this essay, I understand decolonial theory in line with Walter D. Mignolo's and Catherine Walsh's analyses of "decoloniality" (Mignolo 2018). My own approach is informed by the early Frankfurt School and their critical theory, especially M. Horkheimer, Th. W. Adorno, W. Benjamin, and by E. Fromm's studies on the authoritarian character. This essay is part of a larger project that tries to develop a decolonial ethics through the lens of recognition and responsibility, which also serve as my lens here. For the connection of critical theory and decolonial theory cf. (Mignolo 2007).

⁶ Quotes in this essay are from the English translations of both texts.

⁷ Ricœur put that first forward in (Ricœur 1981) In *Time and Narrative* and his later works, Paul Ricœur spells out the relation of historical and literary narrative more extensively, but the basic idea of crossed reference remains the same. Cf. especially (Ricœur 1983 and Ricœur 1992) For a broader discussion, in view of the question of moral identity and literary life stories cf. (Haker 1999).

presented in Kafka's story, but his name is telling in the German colonial history. Hagenbeck was an honorable member of the Berlin "Society of Anthropology, Ethnology, and Prehistory", and he was well connected to the most famous evolutionary scientist and theorist of race in Germany, Ernst Haeckel (Weikart 2003).⁸ The epistemological overlap between biology, sociology, anthropology, and ethnology created an opportunity for the German Academy of Science to pursue multiple inter-disciplinary studies. Many scholars shared Haeckel's view that "negroes" are "savages" and close kin to apes.⁹ Hierarchies are not only established between animals and humans but also among human peoples, informed not to the least by Haeckel's and his students' regular interactions with Carl Hagenbeck who let them use his "exhibits" for their studies.

Africa was only one of the continents Hagenbeck chose for his expeditions; peoples and animals were exhibited either in the peoples shows, in the zoo in Hamburg, or in his traveling circus.¹⁰ Hagenbeck invested a lot of energy and money in his hunting expeditions, intended for the exhibitions in Hamburg. His role in modern German culture at the turn of the century can hardly be underestimated: he introduced a "new aesthetic experience" to the general audience, a new gaze at the animal as well as other peoples who were categorized along the lines of the Darwinist theory of species, promoted by Haeckel and others. Darwinism, race theory, and anthropology thereby shape the gaze at the other as an othering: an exotic projection of one's own fantasies. Apes play a particular role in this gaze, because they are seen as the transitional species between animals and humans, the "missing link" between animals and humans. The ape-human relationship is fascinating and "uncanny" at the same time, because for the evolution theorists, it is in this relationship that the otherness and the sameness of the alien, almost human animal is negotiated. Hagenbeck experimented with the humanization of apes; for example, he let Orangutans eat at his table. A chimpanzee called "Moritz" traveled with him all over Europe, performing in zoos, circuses, and European royal courts. Dressed in a tailcoat,

"... Moritz is always completely dressed (...) he sleeps in his bed, smokes his cigars, drinks his wine, and when he travels, he travels in 2nd class cabin (...) right now, he is again gone for a trip, because he has engagements in several European cities."¹¹

This is the historical context of Kafka's story. Like millions of others in Europe and North America, Kafka had visited a peoples show, in his case in Prague in 1911, and the famous ape Moritz is echoed in the story's narrator Red Peter.¹² In Kafka's story, "an Academy" has invited an ape to report (*berichten*) about his former life (literally: pre-life or *Vorleben*) as an ape. In the short story, Kafka constructs an artistic double-speak that undermines the history of evolutionary biology by "deconstructing" the linear hi-story¹³ within the report, at the same time fulfilling and ridiculing the task the Academy has set for him. The ape thereby demonstrates his mastery of language and the poetic art of the storyteller. He not only tells the history of his humanization as a history of subjugation but also destroys the "missing link" theory, pointing to the epistemological faults and the moral failures engrained in colonial-evolutionary theory and the colonizing practices of the European men.¹⁴

⁸ Weikart shows that Haeckel was one of the first who argued that "extermination" of several "races" was inevitable, thus paving the way for the genocidal racism of German colonialism (and National Socialism).

⁹ For the connection of simianization and race theory cf. (Hund et al. 2015).

¹⁰ Peoples shows in which the "authentic life" of indigenous groups were to be represented are to be distinguished from so-called "freak-shows". Focusing on the "otherness" in form of disabilities or deviations from the norm of normality, these shows were much more the topic of festivals.

¹¹ Carl Hagenbeck records this in his book *Von Tieren und Menschen*, p. 220, published in 1908. Quoted in: (Anhalt 2007, p. 191) (translation: HH).

¹² Another context is the literary history of the early 19th century, especially E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Kreiseriana* from 1804 that entails a letter that an ape named Milo writes to his girlfriend Pipi from North America. In this essay, I only attend to the German scientific context of race theory and colonialism; many interpretations point to the racialized antisemitism that Kafka was very aware of and often addressed, ignoring, however, the connection of the German colonialism and race theory.

¹³ The hyphen marks the crossed reference of history and story that I am using throughout this essay.

¹⁴ Margot Norris has read the story in view of Darwin's and Nietzsche's theory of mimesis, which is not at the center of my essay. Still, for the narrative strategy of the text her analysis is very helpful. Cf. (Norris 1980).

2.2. The Ape's Report

The "report" that Red Peter submits is a performative enactment that is correlated to the ape's performances in the vaudevilles. Red Peter demonstrates his mastery of language, which according to Darwin, qualifies him as a human being and which is at the same time the symbol of intellectual education, through multiple rhetorical techniques: he takes metaphors literally and uses them against his audience; he comments and judges in sentences that appear to be descriptive; he hides behind the veil of innocence while unmasking the contradictions of the linear progress culminating in the white race; he speaks about the cruelties he has been subjected to, with calculated glimpses of repressed anger inserted into the descriptive form of the report. The reader must imitate the narrator's double-speak in a double-reading: on the one hand, they must imagine themselves as part of the Academy-audience who separates between the animal and the human, while on the other hand attending to the critique that undermines the whole construct of race theory.¹⁵

Bowing to the academic customs, Red Peter thanks the Academy for the opportunity to report to them: "You have honored me with the invitation to submit a report about my former life as an ape." (Kafka 1971, p. 81) This introduction entails multiple presuppositions regarding the origin of the human: the Academy, Red Peter must assume from this invitation, presupposes that the origin of human beings can be traced back to their past as animals, which humans have by now surpassed. Asking for the "report", Red Peter is once more exhibited as an exemplar of this pre-human past.

Red Peter's narrated life story begins with his capture by Hagenbeck's hunters at the Gold Coast of Africa, historically the coast of the big human slave trade. Constantly correlating the origins of humans (phylogenesis) with child development and formation through education (ontogenesis), Red Peter expresses the dilemma of memory: the "former life" cannot be remembered; it is forgotten and inaccessible for self-consciousness, sensed rather than known (I will return to this shortly). Red Peter does not have the insights that the Academy has asked for: for that, "if I ever had the desire to run all the way back there, I would have to scrape the hide off my body" (Kafka 1971, p. 81).

The "wild animals" are transported to Europe in cages on a ship, leaving Red Peter "sobbing" and in constant pain. He remembers the torture, although he "can only sketch from hindsight and in human words, what I then felt as an ape" (Kafka 1971, p. 83).¹⁶ As a "civilized" European human being who will justify the torture as the price of civilization and forgive the torturers, he nods to the Academy: "They're good sorts, despite everything" (Kafka 1971, p. 84). Blending his "humanization" with enslavement, coercion, and being dominated ("determined") by others, as a *rite de passage* from Africa to Europe (both geographical and symbolic), the "ape" reverses the trajectory from nature to freedom: "avoidance of all willfulness", i.e., any free will, in order "to move forward, to move forward! Anything but standing still with raised arms, flattened against the sides of a crate." (Kafka 1971, p. 84). Mimesis, or imitation, and mimicry, or camouflage, two central concepts of evolution theory, become Red Peter's strategies of survival: survival is linked to imitation, the "otherness" transformed into the "same". "Nobody promised me that, if I became like them, the bars would be removed." (Kafka 1971, p. 85); "I was looking for a way out" (Kafka 1971, p. 87). Humanization is a far cry from individuation as a unique human being; rather, it is a process of becoming like everybody else:

I watched those human beings walk back and forth, always the same faces, the same motions; it often seemed to me as if it was just a single person. Well, that person or those persons were walking around unmolested. (Kafka 1971, p. 85)

¹⁵ Posthumanist approaches and animal studies both provide valuable insights for ethics; for an overview of the current discussion of the human-animal relation cf., for example, (Creedon 2014).

¹⁶ Cf. (Coetzee 2004) who, in the "lesson" *The Rights of Animals*, offers an intertextual commentary of Kafka's story, reflecting the ethical questions of torture in the context of the Shoah. There, Elisabeth Costello shocks her audience with the comparison of treatment of animals and human beings.

The ape, Red Peter interprets this transition, must become human because he cannot otherwise survive. He therefore learns to shake hands—“shaking hands indicates candidness” (Kafka 1971, p. 82); he learns to spit, “within the first few days” (Kafka 1971, p. 86), observing that these human beings “mutually spit in each other’s faces; the only difference being that I licked my face clean afterwards, and they didn’t.” (Kafka 1971, p. 86) He learns to smoke the pipe, to drink liquor from a bottle, and finally, he utters his first word in human language.¹⁷ Following the aesthetic theory of Aristotle, the peripeteia of his transformation is carefully prepared for and then staged as the performance of an artist: “one evening, before a large group of spectators” Red Peter empties a bottle of the liquor as he has learned, and then, intoxicated and not being himself, “no longer like someone in despair, but like an artist . . . because I had to, because I had the urge to, because my senses were in an uproar”, he utters his first word—“Hello”, the greeting formula of every “civilized” culture.¹⁸

Red Peter applies the same categories that the Academy uses in its scientific studies of race and European civilization, i.e., the colonization of what they consider the un-civilized lands and cultures they invade: ape and human, savages and Europeans, nature and history, forgetting and remembering, freedom and necessity, sameness and difference etc. are all categories that shape Western (modern) philosophy. Red Peter’s metamorphosis entails all elements of this process of civilization, and they are listed meticulously. The result is the formation of an “average person”, an artist who becomes his own persona, literally a mask, performing on the stages of European vaudevilles. Yet, the story constantly disrupts and displaces the categories: at one time, the animal is free and the humans are unfree; at another time, all differences are cancelled out; the speaking ape is indeed a human being, but the human beings he speaks to act like apes; he is speaking as a human being and an ape; to become a human being, he has to imitate the actions of humans, yet, as agents, humans seem to merely imitate the life of apes. In short: the neat categories that separate the animal from the human collapse.

2.3. The Paradox of Recognition

Irony allows literature to subvert the categories of Western philosophy of history as well as the categories of self-constitution as emergence of the sovereign self. Both categories are at the same time deconstructed and newly constructed in Kafka’s story, to wit, in the visibility and audibility of the story’s other, resting on the “double-speak” as the code of irony. Kafka does not merely reverse the judgment: the animal nature, associated with power, force, and instinct is not an end that the self can strive for to regain a “natural instinct”. Red Peter reminds the Academy: the “great past” is immemorable and “forgotten”. Kafka, who was largely influenced by Freud’s writings on the subconscious, has Red Peter demonstrate the hopelessness of reaching one’s “pre-history”: all that is left is the “cool breeze” that once was a “storm that blew out of my past”.¹⁹ It is a remote memory that every “wanderer on earth” feels as a “tickling in his heels: the little chimpanzee and the great Achilles”. Whereas the Greek hero, who is echoed in the imagery of heroic masculinity of the white man, is ultimately brought down because of this spot of his body, Red Peter interprets it as the drive that is a trace of freedom and pleasure.²⁰ The alternative humanism must therefore integrate both dimensions: “speaking frankly: your own apehood, gentlemen, to the extent that there is anything like that in your past, cannot be more remote from you than mine is from me.” (Kafka 1971, p. 81).

With this, Kafka acknowledges the intertwining of the “natural” and the “spiritual” dimension of the self, unmasking the grand narrative of evolution as the myth of the European man; instead, he

¹⁷ In the theory of evolution, but also in the older approaches to natural history, language marks the decisive step in human development. Its origin, however, had long been a riddle and the topic of many treatises. Cf., for example, Herder’s *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (Herder 2002). Ethnologists such as Alexander von Humboldt took it as their task to explore the languages of indigenous peoples.

¹⁸ Ironically, in the 18th century aesthetics of the artist as genius, this loss of control is a requisite of “authentic” art.

¹⁹ Walter Benjamin uses this formulation in his “Thesis” on the philosophy of history, clearly echoing the critical interpretation of the philosophy of progress (Benjamin 2003).

²⁰ The German term *kitzeln* can also refer to something that makes one curious.

is violent, cruel, and detached from any moral sense. In this myth of European civilization, it serves the Europeans well to call the enslavement of other people liberation, and oppression a necessary phase in the process of civilization. The construction of a teleological narrative of progress in history requires a narrator, Red Peter reminds us, who constructs rather than discovers the “promises” of history in the past. It presupposes that the “African” history is merely a pre-history. When history is told from the perspective of the “other”, however, this narrative is debunked. The art of performance (in the double sense of performance and performativity) enables Red Peter to “survive”, to wit, to be socially recognized, but at the same time, it enables him to unmask the “figure” of Red Peter that the Academy recognizes. Red Peter may not remember his “origins”, but he does remember who inflicted upon him the wounds of the shotgun and torture, and it is no coincidence that Hagenbeck is identified by name, as a historical figure of German colonial history. Early 20th century race theory did not embrace the dialectic of nature and spirit that German idealism grappled with and saw as necessarily intertwined dimensions of human nature. This is not to say that Kant, Hegel, or Schelling, did not reiterate the well-known hierarchies of Western philosophy, associating “nature” with women and non-Europeans, and “spirit” with maleness and the European culture. Kafka demonstrates, however, how different the philosophy of history becomes when the story is told from the perspective of those who are dehumanized as animals or “sub-humans”. In the reception history of the short story in Germany, it was mostly read in light of Kafka’s Jewishness and the racialized antisemitism that had emerged together with the reception of Darwin and social Darwinism since the late 19th century, and after the Shoah, the animal metaphors seemed to support this allegorical reading. While this is certainly an obvious reading of the text, it forgets the intertwining of racialized antisemitism and racialized colonialism.

Once in Europe, Kafka’s ape becomes a true follower of the enlightened, European culture: “That progress! That penetration of rays of knowledge from all sides into my awakening brain! I won’t deny it: it made me happy!” (Kafka 1971, p. 87) But he also internalizes the habitual attitude of the European master: “Through an effort that hasn’t found its match on earth to the present day, I have attained the educational level of an average European.” (Kafka 1971, p. 87) Now, at “the pinnacle of my career”, (Kafka 1971, p. 82) a point at which his “success probably can’t get much greater”, (Kafka 1971, p. 88) he is one of the honorable members of society, receiving invitations to banquets, to academic societies, living a life in prosperity, in short: he is recognized in the bourgeois society of early 20th century. Kafka makes sure the reader notices that the ape who is “honored” to speak to the Academy is morally corrupt. Looking back at the many incidents of having “drained many a fine bottle of red wine” with Carl Hagenbeck (Kafka 1971, p. 82), Red Peter is proud of the social recognition he has gained. He echoes the European judgment that this was “worth the trouble” (Kafka 1971, p. 88). He does not seek anybody’s “opinion”, merely wishes to “disseminate information”, merely “making a report” (ibid.). When he comes back from *his public engagement*, in *his private* life he engages in “ape” acts, sexuality that seems to be exempt from being “humanized” and must therefore be tabooed. Red Peter “has a good time” with his female companion, in an “ape fashion”:

“When I come home late at night from banquets, learned societies or friendly gatherings, a little half-trained female chimpanzee is waiting for me and I have a good time with her, ape fashion; in the daytime I don’t want to see her, because her eyes have that deranged look which bewildered trained animals have; I’m the only one who recognizes it, and I can’t stand it.” (Kafka 1971, p. 87)

The woman’s gaze is “deranged” and “bewildered”, which only he recognizes. For both, the male and the female human, social recognition is a granted gesture that can be withdrawn at any time—a conditional status that conceals the humiliation and the habitual effects of moral misrecognition. Fanon saw the paradox of recognition clearly:

“The Negro is a slave who has been allowed to assume the attitude of a master. The white man is a master who has allowed his slaves to eat at his table.” (Fanon 1967, p. 219)

This gaze of the tortured, captured, and raped human being entails the moral verdict over the European, repressive, violent “humanism”. The “sub-human’s” rise to humanity does indeed entail a limited social recognition, but it does not transcend the structure of power that justifies moral harm and the damage of a person’s identity as “collateral damage” of historical progress—in other words, it does not change the underlying biological racism but merely allows for the “survival” of the one who adapts to the “superior” human behavior (Bernstein 2015; Mills 2015). An ethically valid concept of recognition must therefore not only critically attend to these structures of domination and coerced submissions, but it must break entirely with them.

For Darwin—as for Kafka—humanity is not only tied to language but also to the moral sense of shame. Shame is the opposite of the master’s gaze, and it starkly contrasts with the voyeurism of exotic animals and peoples that Hagenbeck’s exhibitions wanted the audience to adopt.²¹ Shame, in contrast to the self-distancing, aesthetic experience of the voyeur, means to see oneself from the perspective of the other or from an internalized moral perspective. Red Peter, who has done everything to prove that he is not the “former ape” as the Academy will always see him, but a “human being” just like the Europeans, has so internalized the habitus of coloniality that he interacts with his companion with the violence and domination he has been taught. On the other hand, he remains ambiguous towards her, appalled by the humiliation he has experienced himself, too. Repressing this connection between himself and the female other, he demonstrates the “success” of his education; his apparent discomfort, ethically termed “bad conscience,” however, remains as the potential to be or become a different kind of a moral self, namely one that would indeed be challenged by the other (cf. Derrida 2002).

2.4. Decolonizing Recognition: Critique and Renewal

Over the last decades, recognition theory has emerged as an important normative concept of personal and social relations as well as political or legal equality. Featured as a central concept in the works of Western modern philosophers such as Rousseau, Fichte, and Hegel, recognition theory has been taken up in multiple contemporary works, most famously by Axel Honneth (Honneth 1995) who argues for recognition as a normative concept of social theory, but also by Charles Taylor (Taylor 1992) who argues for a politics of recognition in multicultural societies, and more recently by Paul Ricœur who develops an ethics of recognition (Ricœur 2005).²² In the US, recognition theory is predominantly discussed as a strand of the politics of recognition, multiculturalism, and identity politics, often centered on how Charles Taylor framed it.²³ In this, postcolonial studies are no different (Balaton-Chrimes and Stead 2017; Markell 2003). In these studies, Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* is a prominent reference text for critique because the politics of recognition is seen as one element of colonial power, concealing the well-known colonial gaze of misrecognition by framing it as the paternalistic generosity of the colonial and neocolonial powers. And indeed: as long as recognition is only expanded to “other”, “different”, or “alien” cultures, it does not change the position or question the underlying Western, European, or Anglo-American identity as superior to the “other” cultures.

Coloniality is constituted by an ethical structure that I call conditional recognition or recognition under the condition of terms set by only one party, in contrast to mutual or moral recognition. A critique of the concept of recognition is therefore necessary when it conceals an underlying misrecognition, disrespect, and humiliation, grounded in an epistemology of superiority and inferiority. In contrast to this concept that is often associated with a Western “politics of recognition”, an ethically sound

²¹ As noted above, John Coetzee addresses shame and voyeurism in *The Problem of Evil*, a staged intervention by the writer Costello that emphasizes the intertwining of racialized colonialism, racialized antisemitism, and all kinds of (sexual) violence based on power asymmetries among humans. Cf. (Coetzee 2004; Haker 2003).

²² Feminist philosopher Margaret Urban Walker analyzed different forms of moral recognition in the context of Strawson’s reactive feelings, thereby departing from the Hegelian reading that is the dominant lens of continental philosophy’s recognition theory. Cf. (Walker 1998).

²³ Honneth’s reinterpretation of Hegel’s theory of recognition is therefore also mostly read with this lens, causing many misunderstandings but also fruitful debates. Cf. (Honneth 1995; Fraser and Honneth 2003; Honneth et al. 2010).

concept of recognition must be grounded in a radically different phenomenological and hermeneutical understanding of encounters and interactions. The colonial epistemology and social, ethical, and cultural hierarchy of superiority and inferiority generates patterns and structures of domination, in which only one party has the power of defining the constitutive rules of practices, with multiple ramifications for the religious, cultural, social, economic, and political structures of pluralistic and globalized societies. Ethics provides the necessary conceptual tools for a structural and social–ethical critique of misrecognition or disrespect that renders even instrumental hierarchies (in companies, social institutions, or bureaucracies) prone to harm and injustice and therefore in need of procedures that protect the moral equality of all, and that protect, for example, critics of violence and injustices. This means, furthermore, that recognition concepts that are grounded in value judgments about one’s own and the other’s worth, one’s merit or one’s contribution to society, for example, are also misleading—such concepts presuppose that persons, social groups, religions, or cultures could be weighed on a scale of value.

Moral recognition must mean something else. In a phenomenological approach, Bernhard Waldenfels, among others, has argued that recognition requires a particular response, namely one that is attentive and respectful of the other (Waldenfels 1994, 2002, 2006, 2011). Since any perception is concrete, another (animal and/or human) being is perceived as welcoming or threatening, invitation or intrusion etc.; responses, too, cannot be abstracted from the address (and encounter) of the other—both are like rolled-up stories that need to be unrolled or unfolded, as Husserl’s student Wilhelm Schapp argued (Schapp 1953). Yet, since perceptions are learned and habituated, shaped by the social norms to which one is adapted, phenomenology alone does not necessarily break the spell of misrecognition. An ethically grounded concept of recognition must be understood as an encounter in which both parties are open to each other and willing to be transformed. In contrast, in Kafka’s story the colonial premise renders only the ape in need of being transformed or “lifted up” to the level of the “humans” while his counterparts cannot even think they, too, could be transformed by the encounter with the ape. Reciprocity is not necessarily mutuality. Misrecognition may function differently in different spheres, but its premise is always the same, namely that one party is convinced that their mere presence to the other is a “gift” that carries with it a sense of entitlement, often spelled out as the other’s work, property, freedom, or body.

Not every asymmetry, however, is an expression of conditional recognition, as psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin has shown convincingly: in her example of breastfeeding, inter-action is seen as “attunement” between mother and child that transforms both in the attentiveness to the respective other without denying the asymmetry of the relation. Recently, Jessica Benjamin has sharpened her previous works and reinterpreted recognition as a broader concept (Benjamin 2017) that goes “beyond the doer and done-to” understanding. My understanding of ethical recognition is informed by her work, especially by her emphasis of the commitment to act together and be transformed together in and through interactions, in order to create something new.

Waldenfels’ work is a similarly promising step to reinterpret the perception, experience, and encounter of the “alien” within oneself and the “alien” other. In contrast to Benjamin’s concept that emphasizes the shared space of interaction, Waldenfels emphasizes the passive *Widerfahrnis* or pathos of experience as address followed by the active re-action as response, however this may look like. Waldenfels’ “responsoric” phenomenology describes the “pause”, the “diastasis” between the passive experience and the re-action as creating a deferment that cannot be overcome: address and response cannot completely overlap, as Benjamin’s “attunement” seems to suggest, and hence it creates an infinite process of understanding and acting, and acting together. With respect to reflective responses, Waldenfels, like Benjamin, stresses the necessity of attentiveness (*Aufmerksamkeit*, *Achtsamkeit*), which adds a sensual layer to the concept of respect (*Achtung*), and Benjamin adds the necessity of witnessing in the case of past injuries that have been inflicted upon the other, which creates several overlaps of practical–ethical and therapeutic work. Waldenfels’ approach gives the ethical concept of recognition a phenomenological foundation that complements the insights from psychoanalysis.

Paul Ricœur who is closest to my interest in an ethical interpretation of the self-other encounters, acknowledges the effects of coloniality (though not in these terms) by emphasizing the negative effects of misrecognition. Ricœur insists on the difference between reciprocity and mutuality, examining the epistemological and social roots of the concept of recognition and misrecognition. In the encounter of the European settlers with the colonies, a “grand narrative” (Lyotard 1984) was constructed around the concept of “aid” of development and civilization as the gift of progress that the colonizers bring to the “undeveloped” countries they politically claim to be the “colonies” of their empires. In return of this original “gift”, the colonies owe the colonizers gratitude, land, labor, or their bodies, if not their lives. The Europeans never asked whether their presence was even welcomed. Moreover, they chose the “return gifts” themselves, and when these were not given voluntarily, they declared them a debt. In effect, land grabs were called “protection treaties”, physical violence and brutality were called disciplinary punishment or “educational” measures, sexual abuse and rape were considered an entitlement that did not affect the victims. Resistance was considered illegitimate, ungrateful, and ultimately a crime. This understanding of recognition as the givers’ claim on a return of their “gift,” in “gratitude” and submission to one’s oppression, creates the double consciousness that is reiterated in the double-speech of the artist; to agree to the moral misrecognition is the only way out when faced with the alternative of death or suicide. The “Academy” expects the “former ape” to be thankful for his humanization; having become a master in his own right, Red Peter believes he, too, is now entitled to the services of the “half-tamed” chimpanzee. In both relationships, the former ape and the female chimpanzee are not free, and certainly not recognized in an ethical understanding of the term: entitlement, the posture as the “giver”, and the expectation of gratitude is the condition that defines the relationships. Misrecognition is therefore not merely reification or dehumanization; it is a radical self-centeredness of the party that sets the rules and upholds their unchangeable indifference towards the other, while at the same time utilizing them for their own ends. Being misrecognized therefore means that one’s identity is pre-defined and ascribed; to actively misrecognize means to create a “reciprocity” that is based upon this predefined hierarchical relation.

In contrast, the mutual work of recognition and the transformation of both parties’ understanding of each other as a result of it can be compared to a two-way translation. Ricœur’s works on translation as a hermeneutic and ethical concept, first developed in view of the translation of texts and in his later works used to interpret the possibility of understanding among strangers in pluralistic and multicultural societies, is especially instructive for the further development of a decolonial narrative ethics. I follow Alison Scott-Baumann who has shown in her comprehensive works on Ricœur how hermeneutics and ethics are interwoven (Scott-Baumann 2009, 2013). In an essay on Ricœur’s take on translation she writes:

Translation from one language to another provides both a metaphor and a real mechanism for tolerance, for ‘gifting’ oneself to the other. Ricœur presents the act of translating languages as a two-way ethical paradigm for action, in which the existence of the other must be acknowledged in the form of respect for the ways in which the other expresses him/herself. (Scott-Baumann 2010, p. 72)

Ricœur accepts the imperfection, finitude, and the “unrecognizable” otherness in this mutual work of understanding that is, I hold, at the same time the mutual work of recognition. The “unbridgeable gap” should exactly not, following Ricœur’s understanding, impede but rather enable a “humane” way of agency, to wit, the capability to act and the acknowledgment of one’s—and the other’s—fallibility: the translator, Ricœur holds, unable to find the “perfect translation”, “instead tries and tries again, accepting partial success in the ultimate untranslatability of some of the meaning.” (Scott-Baumann 2010, p. 80). The same is true, I hold, for the work of recognition as interaction and mutual transformation of the interacting agents or groups.

Listening to stories, for example in testimonies or in oral history, or reading historical documents, reports, letters, diaries, short stories, or novels certainly requires a responsiveness that can be schooled in the practice of reading (Gadamer 1975; Derrida 2004; Attridge 2010, 2017). Literature offers an

indispensable way to understand, interpret, and practice the encounter with the other (the foreign, the alien) in an aesthetic, i.e., experimental fashion, that in a way explores as much one's own alienness as the alienness of others. With respect to exploring the past, cultural memory, too, requires hermeneutical work, enabling the infinite process of understanding through the process of being addressed by the narratives of the past and the attentiveness in the response through a "responsonic" reading. In the context of narrative ethics, reading has indeed been interpreted as responsibility to and for the "other" (Attridge 2004, 2010). Ethically speaking, this is indispensable especially as part of a decolonizing virtue ethics that is aimed to transform the habitual formations of the normative order of whiteness, racism, and coloniality that is so deeply ingrained in the cultures shaped by the structures of conditional recognition, which has turned out to be just another way of misrecognition. As postcolonial writers from Fanon (Fanon 1967), Appiah (Appiah 2008) to Mbembe (Mbembe 2017) and African-American writers like Patricia Williams (Williams 1991) show, racial and colonial thinking shapes both those who remain structurally privileged and those who are always seen as inferior, in need to be "lifted up" before they are regarded as equal. But equality is impossible when it is based on the "inclusion" of others or the "expansion" of rights without changing the underlying epistemology and ethics; change will not happen, because the colonial past is habitually present in both parties and not addressed as such. This is the lesson of Red Peter who will always be the "former" ape.

In the next section, I will turn to a novel that was written in the midst of the radical questioning of the Nazi generation in Germany, culminating in the student revolts in the late 1960s. Uwe Timm's novel, published in 1978, must be seen in this context: it wrestles with the unspeakable cruelty that was committed by Germans who after World War II were often seen as "honorable people" of the German society, maintaining their positions as judges, scientists, engineers, bankers, or entrepreneurs after having quickly put to rest the crimes against humanity which they committed or were complicit with during Hitler's dictatorship. The Nazi ideology is present everywhere in the novel *Morenga*, raising the question whether Germany's colonial genocide in the early 20th century was a harbinger of the Nazi crimes and which therefore must be seen in continuity with their antisemitism and the Nazi ideology. Explicitly, however, Timm tells the almost-forgotten history of the genocide itself. Timm's novel represents the radical shift of political ethics that had taken place between 1945 and 1978. But at the same time, it is a cautionary tale with respect to Germany's history and the dangers of selective historical memory. Timm uses the metaphors of animals and humans as the dividing line between the Germans/Europeans and the Nama and Herero, and similar to Kafka's story, he undermines the colonial and racial distinction utilizing multiple rhetorical strategies. Overwriting the colonial with a critical perspectives in the novel, Timm echoes the critique of European civilization and the underlying development theory that guided Kafka's story, too. In Timm's novel, however, the colonial habitus is spelled out on multiple levels, unmasking the structures of misrecognition in the religious, social, economic, and political elements of coloniality.

3. Uwe Timm: *Morenga*

The German post-Holocaust "memory culture" that emerged since the 1970s, in stark contrast to the silence after World War II, is often quoted as an exemplary, collective, and national effort of dealing with the atrocities of the past. With respect to Germany's history of colonialism, however, amnesia and aphasia dominate up to today. The "forgotten" history includes the first genocide of the 20th century: between 1904 and 1908,²⁴ German soldiers destroyed the Herero and Nama cultures almost completely in a colonial war,²⁵ detaining the surviving people in concentration camps, and starving them to death on Shark Island, all this as a declared policy of the German Empire that had been instated in 1871.

²⁴ Some older studies state the period as ending in 1907, but I follow the thorough analysis provided by (Kossler 2015).

²⁵ The Herero population of 80,000 was decimated to 15,000; and the Nama population was reduced from 20,000 to 10,000. Figures from <https://ahrp.org/germanys-colonial-genocide-in-namibia/>.

The German government did not recognize the genocide of the Nama and Herero until 2016, and notwithstanding multiple other efforts to rectify its colonial history, Germany has been sued by the descendants of the Nama and Ovaherero over reparations.²⁶

From a historical perspective, this genocide precedes the racial politics of the National Socialists that unfolded under Hitler a few decades later, yet the underlying habitus is intertwined in many ways. For example, during and after the colonial genocide, thousands of human body parts, including decapitated heads of Nama and Herero, were transported from the colony of German South West Africa (GSWA) to Berlin, becoming part of the race and eugenics studies of German scientists. Eugen Fischer, then director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology, who in the 1930s became Hitler's chief "racial hygienist", wrote his dissertation on the Rehobot "Bastards" in 1908 with the support of the Prussian Academy of Science (Fischer 1913).²⁷ It took the German government a century to return the human remains to Namibia, and the German museums have only recently begun negotiations about the return of artifacts the Prussians often bought from the other colonial powers. Without a doubt, responsibility for the past that is at the center of Germany's memory culture, and a politics and ethics of remembrance requires the acknowledgment, apologies, and reparations on the side of the German state. But there is no memory or remembrance without a historical narrative, or more precisely, multiple narratives that must be told from different perspectives.²⁸

Literature plays an important role as a medium to shape and promote a nation's cultural imagination, both as national ideology or as its critique. In Germany, colonial stories such as *Peter Moor's Travels to the Southwest*, a bestselling novel written in 1906, were part of the German colonial narrative of supremacy that reflected the "imperial" and "genocidal gaze" of German colonialism, as Elisabeth Baer has coined it (Baer 2017).²⁹ Unsurprisingly, in postwar German literature theory and works of German literature, biological racism and white supremacy was debunked as ideology. Culturally, it was supposed to disappear as habitus (Bourdieu 1994; Celikates 2012) through strong humanistic education programs.³⁰ All the more surprising is the fact that Germany's colonial history never played a big role in these reflections. Narrative Ethics as a literary and ethical approach must therefore be reflective and critical on both levels, i.e., in the aesthetic analysis of literature and in the ethical analysis of the values and/or convictions underlying a literary work.

Morenga is a documentary novel that entails multiple narrative forms and multiple narrative voices. It can be read as the story of the (fictional) German Veterinary Lieutenant Gottschalk's military placement in the German colony of South West Africa (GSWA) from October 1904 to September 1907.³¹ As such, the novel is a counter-story to the colonial novel *Peter Moor's Travel to South West Africa*, exploring the history of the Nama leader Morenga.³² Apart from the two juxtaposed figures, Morenga and Gottschalk, the novel entails two different approaches to history, which are offered in numerous stories, told without guidance from the assumed narrator how to read them. The narrator broadly follows Gottschalk's time in the colony and the places of his deployment, but the chronology and topology is disrupted by multiple side-stories that the reconstruction requires an extraordinary effort. With this strategy, the reader's assumptions are constantly disoriented, to the effect that the

²⁶ Unfortunately, the Nama and Ovaherero also fight against the obliteration in Namibia itself, where their history is being "overwritten" by the official memory of the liberation struggle from South Africa in the 1980s. Cf. (Hamrick and Duschinski 2018).

²⁷ Cf. For a concise overview of the history: <http://ahrp.org/germanys-colonial-genocide-in-namibia/>.

²⁸ In this, I follow the diatopical hermeneutics that has been introduced by (de Sousa Santos 2014).

²⁹ Baer's study examines the ties of the GSWA genocide to the Shoah through the lens of literature. She dedicates a chapter to "Peter Moor" and reads Timm's novel as an intertextual commentary to this early colonial novel.

³⁰ In West-Germany, the new habitus was tied to human dignity and human rights while in East-Germany, it was depicted as the Socialist identity. In contrast to the mid-19th century to the mid-20th century, biological racism had no place in either part of the country.

³¹ Gottschalk, like all other German figures, is not granted a first name in the novel, while many Herero and Nama have Christian first names. Gottschalk is a common German name and literally means "God's joke".

³² Cf. for the overall context and the focus on intertextuality: (Baer 2017).

cohesion of the plot, the authenticity of characters, the linearity of time, the perception of space, and the meaning of words all lose their narrative function of orientating the reader. On the one hand, the novel resembles a *Bildungsroman*, a formation story of Gottschalk. As a young German man, he imagines Africa as an exotic world that he experiences, for example, in form of the spices sold in his father's colonial store, sparking his interest in this "foreign" world. Over the course of the novel, however, he transforms from a naïve, adventure-seeking man to a deeply disillusioned soldier who sees the German war against the Herero and Nama as a crime against humanity. Observing the starving Nama in the concentration camps and the arbitrary killings, trying to stand at the margins of the battles, Gottschalk is paralyzed in indecision and inaction. With respect to the history of German colonialism, the novel entails, on the other hand, several historical documents and multiple stories depicting the interactions of European colonizers with the different tribes, strictly told from a European perspective. These stories trace the main elements of German colonialism from the early 19th century until 1918, when Germany loses its colonies after World War I. The novel therefore entails a chronicle of the German history of colonialization, told in fragments, in which fiction and historical documents constantly intersect. It reflects the underlying religious, economic, and political epistemologies of colonialism. This epistemology is challenged repeatedly, with inserted testimonies to the Nama and Herero narratives of their history.

Gottschalk's story, which structures the main timeline and spatial sites of the novel, is therefore interrupted by multiple stories from different perspectives, assembled by the narrator without a strict order, contradicting in the narrative style the German obsession with "order", which is the topic of several conversations and reflections in the novel. While Gottschalk's story certainly provides a thread through the novel, it intersects constantly with the title figure Morenga who is implicitly present throughout the novel, appearing and disappearing just like the historical leader of the Nama guerilla war appears and disappears in the war. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator points the reader to the difficulty of finding historical sources of Morenga's life, thereby revealing that historiography cross-reference with fiction in any narrative, as Ricœur had argued (Ricœur 1988); the answer to his question "Who was Morenga?" is given by a "District officer of Gibeon": Morenga's life story is largely unknown—or unknown to the German sources. What is known seems fragmentary and sparse: there are rumors about the legendary status he has gained in GSWA, that people associate superhuman powers with him, that he is also called Marengo, that he is the son of a Herero father and Nama mother, a Christian who may have been educated in a missionary school. A little later, more information is added: Morenga, the reader now learns, has indeed been educated in a missionary school, he speaks two colonial languages fluently, English and Dutch, and he also understands German, contradicting the imagery of the uneducated "savage" that is spread in Germany (Timm 2003, p. 28). Like Red Peter, Morenga masters language well, using irony and sarcasm in letters he writes to the military (ibid.), and like Gottschalk, he keeps a diary that is, however, preserved only in fragments. Since central elements of colonialism are depicted in the novel, I will give some examples of how the novel tells the history of coloniality as the German habitus of misrecognition, before turning to Morenga' and Gottschalk's intersecting story.

3.1. Colonial Life I: Religion

Missionaries from the Lutheran Rhenish Mission begin their missionary work on the African continent in the early 1800s, and the novel painfully describes the priests' ignorance and indifference towards the Herero and Nama, contradicting their self-perception as the saviors of their souls. The novel therefore calls for the analysis of theology's own history that often conceals its complicity and role in colonialism, and rarely reflects its theological racism.³³

³³ Mills rightly explains that theological racism is one important element of the different facets of racism. Cf. (Mills 2015).

The story of the (fictional) missionary Gorth is a cautionary tale of the German mission in Africa. Ironically, the Nama compare his physiognomy to a Merino sheep and a “friendly and undemanding animal” (Timm 2003, p. 89); unlike the “savages”, he never learns to speak or understand the Nama language. He is drawn to “Africa” as a young boy when he sees “three naked little black children [who] were sitting around a nest containing three ostrich eggs” (Timm 2003, p. 93) in the Missionary newspaper that his father subscribed to at his home in Heddersheim. The Church’s gaze on the “Africans” is paternalistic, infantilizing, and dehumanizing: “At the entrance to the church stood a small metal statue of a nodding black boy, with a slot for coins in his head” (ibid.). Gorth, who arrives at the English Missionary Bethany in 1852, has his own ideas of civilization, which are told with scathing irony, contradicting the “humanist” mission: he has brought a piano and some pigs, the latter aimed at countering the Islamic missionary by introducing pork to the “Hottentots”.³⁴ He is disappointed that the “Africans” do not live up to his exotic imaginations, the women in particular, and he imagines to take a Nama called Lukas to Germany for a fundraising campaign on behalf of the African “savage”, which resembles the peoples shows’ voyeurism, sublimated by the religious charity work:

“tall and well built, with a high, broad forehead, and a calm, direct gaze. This figure demonstrated, so Gorth felt, the ennobling and formative effect of Christianity, how it could turn a savage into an upright human being. With a Lukas like this, he could tour German cities and missionary societies.” (Timm 2003, p. 95)

The religious education has not always the intended effect, as an English missionary, ironically called Rumbottle, observes, unmasking the Church’s education program as theological racism:

“natives, once they could read the holy scriptures, always picked out those passages that were aimed against the rich, the authorities, and in the end against even the missionary church itself. So sects kept arising. The only way to avoid this problem was not to teach the natives to read and write in the first place. And this in fact was Rumbottle’s approach.” (Timm 2003, p. 100)

Missionaries shape the way Germans see the “Africans” in many ways. Gorth writes letters to his fiancée, depicting the way the Nama raise their children (without the disciplining violence known in Prussian Germany), how they go about their life, and have their own tradition transmitted in the history of their cattle. In this history, the lines between humans and animals are blurred, oxen can speak, remember, and narrate the story of the tribes who are traditionally cattle traders, and these stories entail the genealogy of the Nama people that the Germans are ignorant of because they do not understand their language.³⁵ The traditional wisdom of the Nama cultural history is thereby juxtaposed to the paternalistic gaze of the missionaries, just as the earnest study of the bible by the newly-baptized is juxtaposed to the colonial racist theology of the missionaries. Ultimately, the intercultural encounter is shaped by misunderstandings and the lack of effort on the part of the German missionaries to change or correct their own pre-judgments through the experiences with the Nama and Herero. While the life of the latter is changed radically, it never occurs to the missionaries that they, too, could learn from their African counterparts. The oppressive colonial missionary hermeneutics prevents a “diatopical” (de Sousa Santos 2014 hermeneutics to emerge, thereby also preventing an intercultural theology based on moral recognition and responsorial encounters of alienness in the context of the missionary work.

³⁴ The denigrative term of the Nama is used in the German protocols of the army, in politics, the writings of colonial business, the missionaries, and in German culture. I still heard it as a child in the 1970s, albeit without understanding the connection to the history of Germany. I will use it here when the novel does that, too. The narrator points to the fact that the “Hottentot” are the Nama right at the beginning of the novel (3).

³⁵ Interestingly, Timm’s text could be easily read as a commentary to Nietzsche’s concept of memory and history, e.g., regarding the “ruminating” memory, the human exposure to the documents of the past and the alien, and the tricks of the historian to pretend his mastery of the material. Cf. for an analysis of Nietzsche’s concept (Meyer 1998).

3.2. Colonial Life II: Trade and Capitalism

Morenga entails multiple intersecting narratives of the missionary work in the colonies with the trading of colonial goods in European countries. Timm's narrative strategy is to bring together multiple stories from different places and times in the nonlinear, associative way of memory. Often, they are initiated by Gottschalk who hears names or fragments of stories that are then unfolded in relative independence of his consciousness, or they are stories associated with the places he visits, the people he encounters, all told by the narrator who assembles them as a historian. One of these stories concerns the development of the colonial trade in the 19th century in accordance with the economic theory of Adam Smith. The "end" of biological race theory, generally dismissed as scientific theory after the Shoah, is thereby contrasted with the continuity of an economic theory that still shapes, at least in general, the rules of capitalism; neocolonial exploitation still defines much of late 20th century's capitalist economies, raising the question, of course, how post-racial Western societies can even be in theory if they still function under an economic theory that intersects so closely with colonialism.

In mid 19th century, colonial goods become symbols of bourgeois life in Europe. In addition to exotic spices and foods, metals that are extracted from the mines (*Morenga*, for example, is said to have worked in a mine before the rebellion), the textile industry and fashion companies are also highly dependent on the goods from the colonies. One of the stories told in the novel is emblematic of the colonial trade with the tribes of GSWA; it begins with one particular good, namely ostrich feathers, and expands to the whole system of colonial exploitation in 19th century capitalist economy. In 1859, the narrator tells us, ostrich feathers become utensils of women's hats in Paris and Berlin, the cultural centers of the day, and quickly become the "must haves" in the bourgeois circles. These hats are often depicted by the Parisian impressionists in their paintings of the city life, which Timm may presuppose as collective knowledge of his readers. They are, of course, imported from the African colonies, and function as an introduction to the world of colonial trade, exemplified by the businessman Klügge, in the German language connotated to "klug" or clever. The story of the ostrich feathers is, however, interrupted by a long detour that enables the narrator to give his account of colonial history: Klügge starts out his colonial business in Cape Town in 1842, after an apprenticeship as accountant in Düsseldorf.³⁶ He first works in an import-export business, trading colonial goods such as buttons, belts, and combs, and later goes independent, trading buttons, pots, and pans for cattle. This business does not result in the wealth he has imagined for himself, not the least because he encounters the "natives" as smart traders, "something Jewish, which was not surprising, since all the Hottentots were semitic in origin" (Timm 2003, p. 146); their economy is based on sustainable rather than throw-away consumers. This is not an attitude that capitalism welcomes: for example, Klügge complains, the natives have "the annoying tendency to search for any button they had lost—and they were constantly losing them—until they found it." (ibid.). Similar to the ostrich feather, the buttons are an allegory for the requirements of particular consumers in a capitalist economy, and this cannot function when it becomes part of a lifeform that has another purpose than consumption: Klügge is horrified to see that the search "could take hours or even days, it didn't matter, it became a form of public entertainment, turned into a sort of small-scale festival until the button was found." (ibid.). Observing this uneconomic behavior, Klügge concludes that capitalism will not work with sustainable goods: "This willingness to waste time made any long-term business plans impossible. All the natives wanted were the bare necessities and then they would laze away the day." (Timm 2003, p. 147). He therefore turns to the business idea of selling brandy, utilizing its unsustainable value:

"Ideally, sale and consumption occurred almost simultaneously, and with brandy thirst was quenched in a way that produced an even greater thirst afterward, so that the disparity

³⁶ The narrator is precise in locating the homes and towns in Germany, illuminating that the stories he tells are grounded in the German terra cognita, whereas the names of the GSWA's missionaries and towns often sound like a terra incognita to the German readers.

between drink and thirst grew increasingly greater, and the intervals of sobriety increasingly shorter, supply and demand driving each other constantly upward. Here was an economic impulse of compelling and therefore beautiful logic." (ibid.)

In Cape Town, Klügge finds an English business partner, Morris, who immediately exploits him for his own purposes and his own business of trading alcohol. But he convinces Klügge to work for him in Windhoek, because the "savages" must first learn to "think in economic terms" (Timm 2003, p. 148). The Rhenish Mission, Morris states, is helpful in this endeavor, especially in its battle against the "cattle cult"—the alternative to the Christian tradition. Christianity is not enough to educate the tribes in modern economy, the Englishman Morris lectures Klügge (and the reader). In order to build a flourishing business, the "awakening" of new needs is required, and the economy must transition to the "more highly-developed labor" that Adam Smith had introduced, i.e., the Capitalist division of labor. For this transition from subsistence economy to capitalism, the Nama need to engage in "systematic cattle theft on economic principles" instead of theft for food (ibid.). In other words, the capitalist mechanism of buying on credit had to be installed:

It was necessary, then, to awake the Hottentot's self-interest to create new needs; they were a people capable of pleasures, the wares would have to be given to them on credit to begin with, the payment would come later in the form of cattle, which, since they had so few themselves, would have to be stolen from the Hereros, for which they would in turn need powder and lead and guns, for which they would also have to pay in cattle. [. . .] Everything was in place, but how were these tired limbs to be set dancing? Brandy, said Klügge, taking his hand from his throat.

Exactly, said Morris, brandy will awaken the slumbering market. (Timm 2003, p. 149)

Citing Smith's economic mechanism, Morris ends his economic lecture with the core colonial-Capital principle: "in the end an invisible hand will create humanistic acts out of even the most selfish motives." (Timm 2003, p. 150).

Klügge and Morris begin to trade "utility" and "beauty" goods in Windhoek with the Nama in order to "awaken" both their economic and aesthetic senses, as Morris calls it.³⁷ The business thrives for quite some time, not the least because of the help of the missionary who not only preaches to his flock: "Have dominion over the earth", but also that "trade and traffic" are pleasing in the eyes of God (Timm 2003, p. 152). Alcohol becomes a defining exchange good in the colonial cattle trade, but Smith's "invisible hand" results in the alienation that German economic philosopher Marx describes around the same time in Europe and which Timm evokes indirectly, resting on instrumental rationality, the objectifying, economic gaze that measures every practice for its exchange value. In the colony, too, the Capitalist economy seeps into all practices, rendering the tribes addicted to alcohol; sugar, needed for the black-market brewing of beer, becomes the currency of social relationships (even the women, Klügge complains, now want to be paid for their sexual services, or paid more than before). After a while, however, violence breaks out between the Herero and the colonists:³⁸ public floggings, torture, and shootings of thieves demonstrate the rising tensions. On the other side, white farmers begin to complain about too many (and hence, too cheap) cattle being channeled into the market due to Morris' business, ultimately forcing the Governor to intervene. Timm thereby explains the conditions that lead to the colonial war with the Herero: the missionary work, the trade, the emerging modern

³⁷ Timm knows that readers are familiar with the exotic pictures of African woman in European dresses, hats, and other utensils, complementing other postcards that often show bare-breast women looking into the camera. Historians have proven that these women were often forced to remove their clothes and expose their breast, instilling the image of the "savage" tribes in "Africa" in the European minds.

³⁸ Morris, who has hired an African employee named Jonker, has him punish the Herero drastically. With this "division of labor", Timm alludes to the later exploitation of the Jewish Council in the deportation of Jews to the death camps, and to the perfidious system of Kapos and oversight by other inmates in the concentration camps.

capitalism, and the outright cheating of the tribes not only by the government but also by independent entrepreneurs who regard the African colonies as a space of lawlessness all contribute to the so-called “rebellion” in the colony.

With this detour that has prepared the reader for the symbolic meaning of the ostrich feather, the narrator finally tells the tale of modern capitalism as the exploitation of land, animals, and humans alike. A chief of the Bondelswarts, the same tribe that Gorth encountered in the mission of Bethany, had engaged in the trade with ostrich feathers for a while, and now trades them with Klügge who has finally departed company with Morris. After a while, however, all ostriches are killed and the tribes are left in poverty and dependency, a predictable effect of a non-sustainable economy. As the ostrich story is emblematic of the exploitation of resources and the deceit of the tribes, it is also emblematic of the narrative strategy, namely, to construct a narrative order by connecting stories that the reader only understands in hindsight. Under the surface of the title and Gottschalk’s experiences in the colony, “Morenga” emerges as the colonial destruction of the cultural, religious, and economic order long before the war completes this process with the literal destruction of the Herero and Nama people. Intertwined with the Christian mission work and the politics of the German empire, German colonialization functions as an economic order aimed at creating a transnational export–import market that is meant to resemble the British system: Germany exports industrial goods to its colonies, builds a new transportation system, and creates a “haven” for emigrants from Germany who purchase land in the “protection zone” of the German empire. Instead of creating a market for the African tribes themselves, the import of “colonial” goods to the European market is managed exclusively by the white settlers, rendering their African counterpart in complete dependence to their colonizers.

3.3. Colonial Life III: Technological and Cultural Development

Morenga depicts two different approaches to the relationship between people and peoples, clearly favoring one of them over the other: the European understanding is based on the development theory that presupposes the superiority of the white race—development means to “lift up” the uncivilized “savages”. It is therefore as unnecessary as it is futile to engage in the effort of understanding the African cultures and traditions.

In the 19th century, capitalism is complemented by a plethora of technological developments, and many German engineers engage in furthering the “development” of the continent.³⁹ These inventions play an important role in the narrative about the “development aid” the colonizers bring to the African continent. In 1885, the German Colonial Company for South West Africa is established, with the task of “the country of poets and thinkers to civilize the savages” (Timm 2003, p. 213f), but in fact as an enterprise to extract the natural resources from the resource-rich colony, especially copper and diamonds. One employee of the land company, Treptow, embodying the stereotypical German engineering ingenuity, is sent to GSWA as a land surveyor. He is an idealist who believes in progress through technological development: he is convinced that any “imperfection” of nature will be “eliminated sooner or later by technical means.” (Timm 2003, p. 219). Having thought about the “development of the earth”, he looks forward to contributing to the bright future of the land he will survey:

Deserts would be irrigated, rivers that flooded vast stretches of land would be controlled, dammed, or rechanneled. Anything could be accomplished with technology in a way that would serve mankind.

³⁹ Timm inserts several of such ideas to ridicule the colonial “business ideas” of the German technological and manufacturing genius, and the overall idea of inserting ideas into cultures one doesn’t know, beginning with the language, geography, climate, or culture. The detours that Gottschalk constructs for the Nama cows underline the blurring of humans and animals and contrast strikingly with General Trotha’s military orders given around the same time, namely to kill all “Hottentots”.

Still in Germany, Treptow dreams of an irrigation system for the Sahara desert that will change the climate of the whole region,⁴⁰ or emptying the Caspian Sea, and rerouting the Volga river—the reader is reminded of multiple so-called development projects that were pursued over the 19th century, such as the Suez Canal, that only served the Colonial interests. Treptow also imagines the construction of a “tropical car”—“a locomotive on moveable wheels with an engine fueled by coal or wood” (Timm 2003, p. 220). His partner in the mission Bethany, where he arrives some decades after Klügge, is a geologist named Hartmann who discovers the veins of ore that the Colonial Company is seeking to turn into business. Surveying the land, Treptow soon discovers that in the land-purchases to the English colonists the tribes had been tricked, which by now could only be changed by the Company, owned not only by Deutsche Bank and Dresdner Bank but behind these by their multiple shareholders. The narrator lets Treptow tell an interesting story about the clash of European and African knowledge systems: the council of elders—which is repeatedly presented in discussions about the course of action in relation with the colonists—does not reach a consensus about a contract. An elderly, “Old Salomon Matroos”, asks a wise old woman, Snuffle-Lip (who has refused to be baptized) to come to help. Snuffle-Lip sometimes “would dispose of particularly stubborn and troublesome rivals by making a doll, casting a spell, and then placing it on a termite mound.” (Timm 2003, p. 228). She prepares a voodoo doll that embodies the “Company” and waits for it to be eaten by the termites. Unfortunately, it does not happen, the termites do not touch it, and Snuffle-Lip is so undone by this that she dies immediately after her failure. Treptow, however, does not believe in any magic power and seeks an explanation for the magic of the voodoo. There is nothing he can find in the doll but keeps it anyway as a souvenir, even taking it with him when he leaves the country. And then, one day, the narrator concludes this side-story, transmitting to the reader the “folk tale” that Treptow tells his grandchildren many years later as a story from the colonies, the doll disappears from the sideboard where he has kept it—“devoured by ordinary domestic ants, which had quickly swarmed through the house and just as quickly disappeared. A few days later, in 1918, the Land Company was dissolved.” (Timm 2003, p. 229).

Treptow’s story demonstrates the narrator’s contempt, hidden in the double-speak of irony as a narrative weapon against ideology. Treptow, the narrator comments, is concerned that the mentality he encounters in the colony is so “communist” that it has become a second nature to the people, hindering them in their “development”. The land-grabbing practices, Treptow reasons, may ultimately serve them well, because it will “set in motion an evolution that will teach them to work and gradually lead them toward civilization.” (Timm 2003, p. 230). He witnesses firsthand the tricks with which land is grabbed from the Nama and corresponds with his former professor who is developing a new method to survey the land. He invents the Molotov-Cocktail and then invents the car for the second time, although he is deprived of the patents when his inventions are either dismissed or stolen by others. Like Gottschalk, Treptow is a non-political figure who contributes to the colonization of GSWA through his professional expertise and naivety. He is not interested in the culture and societal structure of the Nama; he considers them as child-like, communists, habitually lazy, and in need of the German’s development aid. He shares the sexualized and dehumanizing gaze at the Nama women but is too afraid to follow his sexual desires: intercourse with them is an animal-like endeavor, he tells his assistant Bansemer who raves about his nightly adventures. At one point, Treptow accompanies the Company’s land agent Kleinschmidt who has come to quite some wealth in Windhoek through a land purchase (or landgrab) from one of the Nama chiefs. Kleinschmidt is a realist, expecting a revolt sooner or later. “War is the father of all things”, he claims, and quoting Missionary Knudsen (whom the reader knows from an earlier story of the Missionaries): “take the land away from the natives. That’s the only way they will ever be useful members of society. Only hunger will force them to work.” (Timm 2003,

⁴⁰ Later on, the reader learns that Gottschalk spends most of his last months in the colony observing changes of the climate, as a digression from the reality that is happening around him. It repeats one of the stereotypes associated with the German culture that contrasts strikingly with the very “efficient” activities of Germany’s military in the cleansing of the colony.

p. 243). Kleinschmidt regards (the historical) Governor Leutwein's effort to acquire land peacefully as naïve yet has developed his own efficient method to get treaties signed. Treptow witnesses this on one of the trips, when Kleinschmidt cheats a chief named Klaas Hendriks into selling his land.

Treptow resembles Gottschalk in his professional interest, and like the veterinarian, he is convinced that he cannot intervene even when he has proof that the "natives" have been misled, cheated, or exploited. He is complicit with the colonial politics under Governor Leutwein, doing nothing to stop the escalating tensions that end with the shift of politics in the fall of 1904, when General von Trotha orders the German military to kill any Herero and Nama. Gottschalk differs from Treptow, however, in several ways: while he resembles Treptow in his ingenuity—after all, he engages in the most ridiculous developmental aid at the moment when the Nama tribe is exterminated, i.e., constructing dentures for the Nama cows—but like his colleague Wenstrup, he learns the Nama language and acts in small gestures of charity towards the Nama who are held in concentration camps.

The colonial voices dominate in the novel's multiple documents and stories that unfold in the intersection of religion, economics, science, anthropology, politics, and military power. Through Wenstrup, however, Gottschalk—and with him, the reader—learns about an alternative to the racist colonial theory of development. Wenstrup, who brings Kropotkin's book to the colony, gives it to Gottschalk before his desertion. It offers a vision of development that is based on "mutual aid", as the title says. Together with Gottschalk's friend's marginal notes, Kropotkin's book guides Gottschalk in the judgment of the German war, especially after Wenstrup's disappearance; it thus becomes the lens through which Gottschalk begins to see his environment. Kropotkin argues for cooperation and solidarity that will lift up everybody, and he rejects the central hypothesis of evolution theory, i.e., the survival of the fittest as the motor of development. Timm traces the two ideological systems to their origins in the 19th century, but for his own generation in the 1970s, politics and personal lives often intersect: the division line between the two worldviews runs through Germany, the divided country during the Cold War, and Timm uses the novel among other things to reflect upon the consequences of colonial capitalism over and against the anarchist socialist vision; Wenstrup is the only moral German hero: he learns the Nama language, sabotages some of the military attacks, and finally deserts from the troops in the midst of their massacres. Gottschalk, in contrast, is painted as the stereotypical obedient German soldier: doubtful and increasingly disgusted by the German soldiers' brutality, he is not able to move from contemplation of resistance to action. Early on, he begins to have doubts about the developmental enterprise lest it is based on the understanding of the other:

How can we expect to colonize a land if we don't take the trouble to understand the natives, Gottschalk once asked in Keetmanshoop. (Timm 2003, p. 82)

Politically, however, Gottschalk remains a bystander, stuck in ineffective subversive gestures. While Gottschalk cannot agree with the racist social Darwinism, he also does not have Wenstrup's courage to switch sides. He remains the "dreamer" (Timm 2003, p. 12) who in the beginning takes delight in the thought "that at some point there will be eyes in this wilderness reading Goethe, ears listening to Mozart" (Timm 2003, p. 16), and in the end is consumed by observing the "clouds". The English language speaks of the "bystander" as the person who is neither perpetrator nor victim. The German language calls this the *Mitläufer*, someone who "goes along" with events enacted by others, whether agreeing with them or not. The relationship between colonizer and colonized is a constant topic of Gottschalk's diary, but he is "stuck" in between the two sides. Sometimes he dares to apply the arguments he has learned from his Kropotkin reading and Wenstrup's marginal notes. One example is a conversation between Gottschalk and his colleague, medical lieutenant Dr. Haring. Haring argues:

The weak die off so the strong will have more room and light. That was the only way things could evolve onward and upward. The struggle for existence was the basic law of life. (Timm 2003, p. 197)

Gottschalk, in contrast, evokes Kropotkin's view: "The struggle for existence was not the only important factor, mutual aid within the species was equally important." (ibid.). When Haring responds:

“exactly, [. . .] within the species”, implying that there are different human species (in line with Haeckel’s racist polygenesis thesis that departs from Darwin’s monogenesis thesis), Gottschalk counters that even cross-species “empathy” and “solidarity” is possible. He recounts a story of a sailor who would have drowned but for the help of dolphins who carry him in turns and thereby save him.

Against Hobbes’ theory of natural rights, but also against Kant’s ethics of the “good will” or Hegel’s philosophy of consciousness, Kropotkin repeats the Marxian materialist thesis to the effect that the environment determines the behavior of animals and humans alike; Wenstrup draws the following conclusion from it, noted in one of the marginal notes of the book: “German philistines are wrong in thinking that morality is based on good intentions; it is based instead on living conditions.” (Timm 2003, p. 196). While the European worldview is centered on freedom from nature, wealth, and well-being, Kropotkin’s worldview is centered on freedom as absence of oppression and exploitation. Gottschalk reads Kropotkin who in turn is quoting Bakunin:

Man is truly free only among free men, and since he is only characteristically human when he is free, the subjugation of a single human being on earth is an injury to the principle of humanity itself, and a negation of the freedom of all men. Bakunin (Timm 2003, p. 123)

Whereas the German idea of civilization is shaped by discipline and uniformity, as seen in the military order and the assumption of the linear upward development of humans, the history of the Nama since the German colonization is narrated as the story of oppression. The Herero and Nama revolt against the German idea of freedom that they experience as force and coercion; they fight for their own understanding of freedom, because, as Wenstrup tells Gottschalk, “a man who can’t freely develop a sense of things makes no sense. That’s why the rebels seem to have so much sense on their side.” (Timm 2003, p. 47).

Gottschalk observes that Kropotkin often draws analogies between the world of animals and the world of human beings, which may especially appeal to the veterinarians Wenstrup and himself.⁴¹ Throughout the novel, the relationship between humans and animals is constantly renegotiated. Human and animal metaphors, for instance, are used interchangeably, blurring the lines of the species and thereby questioning the “humanist” anthropology and ethics. When helping the wounded soldiers after a battle, Gottschalk remembers a quote from Kropotkin: even rats are sufficiently intelligent, Kropotkin states, “not to quarrel when they plunder our larders, but to aid one another in their plundering expeditions and migrations, and even to feed their invalids.” (Timm 2003, p. 202). Claiming moral behavior as exclusive to the rational human being is unmasked as an ideology of racist superiority that reverses the criteria for moral behavior: if “good” is determined by the power of the “strong”, empathy disappears together with the notion of “mutual aid”, which is one possible translation of solidarity. Ultimately, only Wenstrup draws the conclusions from his readings in his desertion from the army while Gottschalk flees to the contemplation of “bushes, rock formations” the “landscape”, or Kant’s “starry heaven” that fills him with awe and sentimental memories, but which is also a sign that he is searching for a sense of direction at a moment of utter disorientation.

The oppression of the colonized people and peoples is symbolized by the “oxen” who are as enslaved as the tribes to whom they belong. Whoever hears their voices understands the meaning of the Nama language. In contrast to Gottschalk, the narrator seems to move swiftly between the two cultures, trans-lating (in Latin: carrying over) and trans-mitting (in Latin: sending over) elements of both to the reader. Though almost hidden in the many strata, the history of the Nama people is sedimented underneath the colonial history, retrieved by the work of the narrative archaeologist who translates the Nama genealogy from the “language of the oxen” into meaningful language when Gottschalk or others understand nothing. The novel entails two longer tales that are told by a lead ox named “Big Red”. He not only tells the story of how the first “Hottentot” named “Hurt Knee” tricked

⁴¹ The “animalization” of the Nama and Herero is made clear from the beginning, in racist jokes that often invoke the veterinarians as the specialists for the “natives”, too.

a cow into the “yoke” (Timm 2003, p. 105ff) but also how the rivalry between the Nama and Herero emerged due to their competition for land. From the perspective of the cattle the decisive shift comes, however, with the English businessmen who begin to steal cattle from the Herero. Here, the narrative of the ox and the story of Morris and Klügge intersect. Contrary to Gottschalk, the narrator also understands what the “mooring cow” says while Gottschalk operates on her using a surgical method unknown to the Herero:

[Gottschalk] understood nothing. Otherwise he could have heard all about Big-Red, who pulled Missionary Gorth’s wagon into this land, or of Christopherus, who had brought Klügge’s mighty brandy barrel to thirsty Bethany, or of the most famous pathfinder of all draft oxen, Fork-Horn, who pulled the surveyor Treptow safely and surely through the plains and deserts. Of these prodigious feats Gottschalk knew nothing. (Timm 2003, p. 127)

When Dr. Haring asks Gottschalk after the successful operation why he even bothered about one cow, he gives him an explanation that does not require much sophistication but human decency. Any medical professional ought to understand this—yet the reader also knows how decisive physicians were for the euthanasia program of the Nazis, and therefore may well associate Dr. Haring with his Nazi successors. Gottschalk, in contrast, knows what to do in his own profession: “The cow would have died” (ibid.). Obviously, his morality is not understood in the unfolding genocide.

3.4. Colonial Life IV: Biological Racism and Violence

Two thirds into the novel, the reader finds a *Report to the Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences* regarding the relationship of the “Hottentots to other races” (269)⁴² by a (fictitious) Dr. Leonhardt Brunkhorst who has undertaken an expedition to “Namaland and Kalahari” between 1903 and 1905. In this report, which may be read both as an intertextual commentary to Kafka’s *Report to an Academy* and one more intratextual commentary from yet another perspective, Brunkhorst presents the German theory of races—the voice of the Academy that we can now add to Kafka’s *Report*, because here it is explicit what Red Peter alluded to as the position of the Academy, represented, too, in Eugen Fischer’s dissertation on the Rehobot (Fischer 1913).

First, “Hottentots” are seen in relation to the Boers who are depicted with denigrating, hateful comments. The Boers, Brunkhorst states, held the Nama as slaves for centuries, and their cruelty and religious bigotry, including their supersessionism, is juxtaposed with the German missionaries who, in contrast to the Boers, granted the Nama certain rights. In the 1850s, missionaries like Gorth shared the hard life of the Nama and sometimes even “went so far as to marry a native, to achieve a deeper and more intimate empathy with them.” (Timm 2003, p. 271). Thanks to the protection treaties with the German Empire, “strongly promoted by the Missionary Society”, the Nama are by now sedentary and the mission is flourishing. In fact, it functions as a link between the two “heterogeneous races” as long as it finds an equilibrium between the interests of the native and the “invading race”. Between the two extremes of befriending the natives and eradicating them, Brunkhorst argues, the colonists’ interests must be linked with the natives’ own interests (ibid.). Realistically, this “race” is not made for work; the “Hottentots” are lazy and hedonistic, “sitting around, drinking schnapps, dancing or dreaming away beneath blue clouds of pipe smoke.” (Timm 2003, p. 273).⁴³ They select from Christianity what resembles their own “heathen past”, although their “social norms” that discourage competition clearly hinder economic development:

“brotherly love among the Hottentots in the form of mutual aid, respect for the elderly and for women, their tender affection for children, their abstemiousness with regard to the

⁴² The German is more drastic, emphasizing the objectifying tone: “Das Verhältnis der Hottentotten zu anderen Menschenrassen”.

⁴³ In a conversation with Treptow, geologist Hartmann argues that smoking the pipe is a sophisticated cultural technique that requires a fine taste, and seen in that respect, the “Hottentots have a highly developed culture”.

property of others (although limited to the property of their own tribe)—all these are such autochthonous laws.” (Timm 2003, p. 272)

Clearly, Brunkhorst wants them to adopt the Lutheran Protestantism that Weber had described as driving force of capitalism, so that the “systematic training of the natives for work” (in other words: forcing them into labor) ought to be “a religious demand of the Christian mission as well” (Timm 2003, p. 273). Brunkhorst then recommends some competition between the Catholic and Protestant mission to be stirred, in order to find out which of the two produces the more willing workers and supporters of the government.

The “relation” of the Nama to the German “master” is mostly described in terms of punishment and disciplining, with Brunkhorst complaining about the inconsistency of the German soldiers who are “wielding a blow and then immediately apologizing for it.” Any transgression (or the assumed transgression) of a norm must be punished. While everyone is responsible for the relationships, Brunkhorst complains about the immaturity of the Germans in this respect: instead of wavering between fraternization and mastery posture, “sympathy for foreign qualities joined with a calm, firm preservation of our own superiority, does not appeal to us.” (Timm 2003, p. 275). This is misrecognition masked as recognition as described by Fanon. The reader, however, has at this point already read the (historical) instructions on “flogging” which Timm quotes, involving a discussion of which material should be used for what “crimes” and to what effect (Timm 2003, pp. 115–19). The academic language Brunkhorst uses conceals the brutality of the content of his suggestions. At the end of his report, Brunkhorst points to the “Hottentot’s” ability to imitate their masters, to the point of caricaturing them, and warns the Academy not to underestimate their capabilities in matters “that touch the core of their being”.⁴⁴

3.5. Colonial Life V: Politics and War

The encounters of human beings, and moreover between strangers, are initiated by ritualized forms of greeting and welcoming, which function as a structure of one’s recognition of the presence of the other: under military and colonial rule, greeting rituals express the power structure—hierarchical order and the relation of domination and submission. But rituals of greetings may also express the norms of hospitality, and as such, they are codified as social and ethical norms in the Jewish tradition.⁴⁵ Greeting, this means, is never ethically neutral. It plays a prominent role in *Morenga*, too. Almost at the same time as Kafka’s Red Peter is brought from the African Gold Coast to Hamburg in a cage, Veterinarian lieutenant Gottschalk travels from Hamburg to the African colony in a navy ship. While Red Peter is caged and tortured, Gottschalk is part of the “other side”, in this case the military hierarchy that entails strict rules of encounters among the German ranks, the “Regulations for Saluting”:

On ships a superior officer is saluted once a day, the first time he is encountered. A Veterinary N.C.O. salutes a Veterinary Lieutenant by touching the brim of his cap or hat. The Lieutenant gives an identical salute to a Medical Lieutenant. All three ranks, N.C.O., Veterinary Lieutenant, and Medical Lieutenant, must salute first, as indicated above when meeting a Second Lieutenant. (Timm 2003, p. 7)

This ritual of salutation actualizes the hierarchical order of the military regime on a regular basis, expressing the morality of “order” and discipline that must be followed meticulously while the moral transgressions, i.e., the humiliation, flogging, starving, and killing of thousands of Nama and Herero people, are never questioned but instead justified as necessary means to an end. The strict military

⁴⁴ The German reads: the “nerve of their life” or “Lebensnerv”, alluding to the killing order by General Trotha on 2 October 1904.

⁴⁵ J. Derrida recalls the importance of the A-Dieu as a greeting formula for E. Levinas, which entails in a nutshell the well-meaning for the other. Cf. (Derrida 1999).

hierarchy mirrors the categorization of the human “races” that underlies the legitimization of the genocide. In the fall of 1907, a few months before his return to Germany, Gottschalk notes in his diary:

The other, the new: the Jumping Bean Tree. Its exact opposite: clicking your heels. Clack. Standing at attention. The German eagle. The abstract. Asking no questions. Saying yes, sir. The love of law and order. Isn't it telling that we Germans always say: *Geht in Ordnung* when we mean that's fine. (Timm 2003, p. 288)

The other, the new, Gottschalk notes a little later, “would be a new perception of time, based on the logic of the senses. Not on the logic of ends and means. The properly hedge of meaning.” (Timm 2003, p. 289). The jumping bean tree, an old Nama has told him a few months earlier, is the tree where the wishes of the African people grow.

On 2 October 1904, General Trotha orders the killing of every “Hottentot”. In November, his military successor, Colonel Deimling, is fighting against the Herero in the North, while the Nama leader Morenga lays siege in the South, the town of Warmbad, which will be the station where Gottschalk will spend most of his time. The military leaders consider Morenga at least as great a threat as the Herero leader Hendrik Witbooi (Timm 2003, p. 27). Morenga is admirably called a “general” by German military, and the more Gottschalk doubts the justification for the colonial war, the more visible Morenga becomes in the narrative. Empirical history and narrative history “cross-reference,” and both are needed to understand the colonial war.

Not only is Morenga the topic of several consultations between General Deimling and Trotha who disagree about the strategy how to defeat him, an interview to the newspaper *Cape Time* quotes Morenga mocking the German army for not being prepared to fight a “guerilla war” (29).⁴⁶ In contrast to the Herero leader Witbooi who copies the German killing of prisoners: “The Germans take no prisoners. We will take no prisoners” (Timm 2003, p. 71), Morenga is said to treat prisoners humanely. The siege of Warmbad at the end of 1904 is told in detail, however entirely from the perspective of the German military that ultimately holds the town, “warding off a potentially serious blow to German prestige in Africa” (Timm 2003, p. 79). When Morenga reappears after almost a hundred pages, the reader has become familiarized with the facets of the colonial life, with the Nama history, and the cruelty with which the German soldiers treat the Nama and Herero in the concentration camps.

Like the Warmbad siege, the novel depicts the battle in the South of the Colony in great detail, mirroring the well-known war stories from soldiers after World War II that Timm remembers from his own childhood.⁴⁷ In contrast to the siege of Warmbad, however, the narrative shifts increasingly between the perspectives of Morenga's and the German troops, and it repeatedly refers to the admiration German officers felt for Morenga's strategic warfare, recounted in their reports. The narrator describes a photograph that shows Morenga with three other guerillas, pointing to the similarity between him and Che Guevara (a legendary revolutionary, admired in the students' movement of the early 1970s). Some entries from a fragmentary diary that Morenga is said to have written are inserted, though the narrator laments that most of it is lost, just as numerous other documents from the genocide. With this, the novel emphasizes the need for a “diatopical” method of historiography (de Sousas Santos 2014) that is impeded because the narrator has difficulties in obtaining documents after the murder of those who would have been interested in preserving them. Yet, with the fragments it has, the narrative begins the process of correcting the German military history that rests upon the “orderly” preserved empirical documents, complementing these with the fragmentary documents that represent

⁴⁶ Written in 1978, Timm who had participated in student demonstrations against the Vietnam War, alludes to a similar assessment of the US army by the Vietcong.

⁴⁷ In this autobiographical book (Timm 2005), written many years later, in 2008, Timm gives an account of his brother's diaries and the many war stories he heard from his father and his friends throughout his childhood in the late 1940s and 1950s in Hamburg (his brother, 15 years older than Timm, was a member the SS and died in the Ukraine in 1943), recalling that many of these veterans blamed Hitler's bad strategies for the loss of the war. Timm is struck by their indifference to any other perspective. These experiences may have inspired him to include the long battle stories in *Morenga*.

the Nama's own voices. Through its story-telling, literature—fictitious and documentary—thereby contributes to the process of correcting the injustice to the Nama; yet, Timm is careful to tell their stories indirectly, subversively, and without claiming that a German novel can speak in the voices of the Nama or on behalf of them. Rather, *Morenga* corrects Germany's own colonial narrative, engages in the historical work of analyzing Germany's colonial genocide in the medium of literature that plays with the cross-reference of history and fiction, and addresses the (German) reader to take responsibility for their history beginning with historical knowledge.

3.6. *Gottschalk and Morenga*

Warmbad becomes the town in which Gottschalk spends most of his time during his stay in GSWA, arriving there in January 1905 just after the siege and leaving the country about the same time of Morenga's death in the fall of 1907. This time span is told as a thorough transformation, resulting from the damage of Gottschalk's "moral equilibrium" through his new moral perception of the whites and the blacks in the colony. Upon his arrival, however, he still dreams about building a new existence here: "[i]ndependent and free, a calm, comfortable life" (Timm 2003, p. 121). He muses about building a house, a garden, a school, water pumps driven by windmills, and introducing "the nightingale to this songless country" (ibid.). Gottschalk stumbles into the war with little knowledge of the African culture, a deeply unpolitical man of 34 years who is caught in a conflict that he believes he will survive unchanged. But less than six months into his stay he senses the changes of his moral compass, especially the normalization of the "genocidal gaze" that he is adopting. He is shocked about "his own failure to be shocked" about the shooting of a rebel. Looking at himself one day, he sees a "stranger" staring at him "from the splinter of mirror" (Timm 2003, p. 125): "They shot a man, and all I thought was, I hope no one hears it." Repeatedly he thinks "one must do something", noticing how he thinks of himself in the third person, referring to himself as "one" and "he" (Timm 2003, p. 126), just like Kafka had depicted the "human" he encountered as the "civilized" Europeans. Gottschalk slowly transforms into the disillusioned soldier who is caught between the two sides of the war, the two cultures he encounters, and between the two moralities; the "civilized superiority" of the Germans turns out to be of bestial brutality that goes far beyond the violence Gottschalk knows from his studies of animals—and is therefore a moral inferiority—while the Nama and Herero value their communal solidarity, the freedom they express happily in celebrations, dances, and songs, and a sense of justice that compares their poverty and oppression to the wealth and power of the colonizers. Gottschalk, his colleagues think, is slowly losing his (European) mind, more often than not seen among the "Hottentots", and ultimately beginning to "smell like them", at least in the eyes of his fellow soldiers.

Gottschalk knows that he is not able to bridge the distance to the Nama people whom he encounters with the generous, paternalistic respect of the colonizer, depicted above as conditional recognition as one way of misrecognition. Though he tries to imitate Wenstrup in his efforts to learn the Nama language and learn about their culture, Gottschalk realizes that the German colonial and military logic of discipline, order, and instrumental rationality (that includes the legitimacy of genocide) is incompatible with the Nama logic that is based on subsistence rather than accumulation of goods, cultural rituals rooted in aesthetic, communal expression (dance, music, celebrations), decision-making upon consultation, and the social adaption to the colonial religion, colonial language, economics, and governance that has left many of the their families in dire poverty. Men are depicted as addicted to alcohol, women as prostitutes, and young men as the servants of the settlers. Gottschalk observes these structures, but he does not gain an objective view "from above" but is positioned at the margins of events. His struggle with the translation between the two languages is emblematic for his failure to remain the same, yet unable to become another: he often fails in translating the Nama terms into his own language, or vice versa, explain the meaning of German words into the Nama language. He learns to pronounce the Nama words but he often misunderstands their meaning. His dream of a bourgeois German life with a house, wife, children who together listen to and play classical European

music (Timm 2003, p. 14) in the midst of the African continent crushes when he sees his future in the face of his Nama friend's mother. While Katharina has become his companion, her attempt to introduce him into her family ends their relationship: Gottschalk sees her father, drunk in the morning, babbling in Cape Dutch, and constantly repeating the only German word he knows, namely "it's okay" or "Gehtinordnung" (Timm 2003, p. 251), and he suddenly sees the future Katharina in her mother, depicted in the stereotypical image of the colonial "savage", well known from photographs sent to Germany from the colonies:

A fat woman appeared, her breasts hanging out of her tattered dress as if these large lumps of flesh did not belong to her. Her backside was the size of a barrel. Everything small and delicate in Katharina was colossally enlarged in this woman. The frightening thing was that Gottschalk saw the mother in the daughter. (Timm 2003, p. 252)

Despite the feeling of physical intimacy, he will remember months later, he knows that their distance is "unbridgeable" (ibid.).

In mid-March 1905, Gottschalk and Morenga cross ways for the first time, albeit only indirectly, in a battle Gottschalk is partaking in. His sympathies clearly are with Morenga, although Gottschalk is disappointed when the Nama show little resistance to the German troops. In Warmbad, Gottschalk had confessed to Doctor Haring that he would not actively fight or shoot a "Hottentot" (Timm 2003, p. 253). Now, engaged (or entrapped) in the battle, he thinks about the possibility of some act of resistance: "something to break through this indifference, the internal frost in the midst of the singeing heat", shooting the colonel, taking off, joining the fleeing Nama—but in the end, he only runs "aimlessly about in the terrain" (Timm 2003, p. 203). The Nama are defeated, and Morenga only escapes with a gunshot injury. A few days later, Gottschalk obtains Morenga's white horse that had been caught running "back and forth between the front lines", just as Gottschalk had, both connected in their disorientation: the white veterinarian soldier running about the German and the Nama troops, and the white horse running about the Nama and the German front lines.

A parliamentary report recounts a meeting of a German officer with Morenga in April 1905, on Morenga's terrain. It mentions the colonial greeting ritual as a demonstration of power:

I seated myself and remained intentionally seated as Morenga [. . .] approached. It was not until he greeted me and I saw it was clearly difficult for him to stand that I permitted him to seat. (Timm 2003, p. 189)

The officer also reports that in his view Morenga's leadership is declining, projecting how this would happen in the German army to Morenga's people:

Such power, which only hereditary chiefs have otherwise, is shaken the moment his followers begin to lose their unconditional faith in their leader's lucky start and the certainty of victory is undermined. (ibid.).⁴⁸

Gottschalk, for his part, notes in a remark on "the gestures of masters and the facial expressions of power":

"Finer, sublimated forms one no longer notices back home, because one is used to them: [. . .] Instead of looking subordinates in the eye, one glances at the cap rim, up and slightly past it." (Timm 2003, p. 193)

Finally, when Gottschalk meets Morenga in September in 1905 (and a hundred pages later), the novel has taken so many detours that Morenga's behavior no longer comes as a surprise. The reader

⁴⁸ For the German readers, these sentences are tainted in their reminiscence of the *Führer* Hitler and his "unconditional followers".

is given a report that Gottschalk must write to his superiors, because they are suspicious that he was released by Morenga's troops unscathed after they captured him in the midst of the battle in Heirachabis. Ironically, Gottschalk describes his mental state at the time of his capture as "slightly dazed", which he relates to a fall when his camel is shot. The report itself is a masterpiece of ironic story-telling, resembling the subversive strategy that Kafka uses in his story. Unlike Kafka's story, however, it entails some comments as "marginal notes", added by the Colonial Guardian Headquarter to whom the report is addressed, complementing Gottschalk's voice with the military commentary, again reflecting the archaeological "assembly" of the sediments of history as different narrative voices. Gottschalk reports that the rebels engaged in a long conversation with him about his rank: "I tried to explain that I wasn't an officer in the true sense, but simply a veterinarian, an animal doctor." (Timm 2003, p. 300). In spite of being an animal doctor, he treats Morenga's gunshot wound, which he describes in detail. In view of the commentator, Gottschalk acts strangely and out of bound:

"I asked his conditions for peace. (Marginal note: Is he crazy?) He said his demands were quite simple: to let them live freely in their own country. [. . .] But Morenga also emphasized that he would keep fighting to the last man. And when I asked why, he offered the surprising answer: So that you and we can remain human. (Marginal note: native logic!)" (301)

Contrasting his observation with the officer's report, Gottschalk finds the Nama rebels in good morale and Morenga's leadership uncontested: "The recognition Morenga received as their leader seemed equally voluntary." (ibid.). In the evening before he is released, Gottschalk is finally immersed into the Nama culture, joining the singing and dancing (as a Prisoner of War!). Yet, even after this encounter with Morenga and his people that clearly leaves Gottschalk deeply impressed, he realizes:

These people were near to him and yet infinitely distant. Had he remained, he would have had to learn to think and feel differently. Radically change his thinking. Think with his senses. (Timm 2003, p. 321)

In the investigation against Gottschalk, another wounded soldier is questioned who reveals that this conversation between Gottschalk and Morenga was held in Nama, and apart from this, he had noticed only one more remarkable thing: "when taken to Morenga, the veterinarian held out his hand, which the other man simply ignored, which Lämmer found unbelievably impertinent" (Timm 2003, p. 302). When they left, however, "Morenga held out his hand to Gottschalk" (ibid.). Tragically, some of Gottschalk's statements about Morenga's intentions lead to some changes in the German military strategy (or so he thinks); in violation of colonial rules, they attack the Nama in British territory to where they have withdrawn in the spring of 1906; Morenga is severely wounded again, and he turns himself in to the English a little later, asking for asylum, reflecting Morenga's knowledge of his rights.

The military battles of the year 1906 until the official ending of the war in March 1907 are only summarized: after Morenga's defeat, mirrored by the Herero's defeat, it is clear that the rebels have no chance against the soldiers Germany has by then deployed to the colony. The laws become ever-more gruesome: all land and livestock is confiscated, the "natives" are forced into labor leaving them without any cultural or political organization; they have to wear a pass token around their neck; they either work as forced laborers or are held in concentration camps. Many of them die on Shark Island—in a breach of the treaty but following through the military order given by General Trotha: "a good Hottentot is a dead Hottentot"—resulting in the eradication of their culture. The narrative ends with the confirmation of the beginning: Morenga's life is surrounded by multiple legends, elevating him to mythical status. In the fall of 1907, he is killed in a united attack by German and British forces. The "end" of the war is summarized in the (fictitious) military report, reaffirming the colonial order:

The natives of South Africa will now realize they're not fighting the Germans, or the English, or the Dutch, but that now the entire white race stands united against the black. (Timm 2003, p. 337)

Throughout 1906 to the fall of 1907, the time of Morenga's death and Gottschalk's return to Germany, Gottschalk stays in Ukamas as one of three veterinarians. Having little to do, Gottschalk

becomes apathetic, spends his time mostly alone observing the clouds and the weather, absorbed by daydreams of a future that he knows will not come true; he is tormented by his bad conscience because of his complicity and complacency but remains unable to act, even hesitant in petitioning to be discharged, “as if he were waiting for something” that he cannot name. Others see him as a “sleepwalker” (Timm 2003, p. 314) and “eccentric” (Timm 2003, p. 316); they see how “he sat silently staring into the distance, surrounded by a cool reserve. It was the loneliness of total apathy” (ibid.). Finally, he submits his petition in May of 1907, but only after learning about what the Germans call Morenga’s “surrender” to the British. Asked for his reason for the petition, he says “he no longer wished to take part in the slaughter of innocent people” (Timm 2003, p. 323), which his superior repeatedly narrates to others as the unheard-of anecdote of the guy who had begun to resemble the “Hottentots” in his appearance and even his smell.

3.7. Narrative Ethics and the Responsibility for the Past

In the “time in between” the battles and his discharge Gottschalk begins to reflect upon his transformation, seeking answers in metaphors and analogies of nature and humans. He compares the geology of the land to the inner self “with its fissures, displacements, sediments, deposits, and erosions” (Timm 2003, p. 318). As for the “Gottschalkian cloud morphology”, Gottschalk’s observations are “a passionate attempt to restore to a fossilized and desensitized language an element of the spontaneity, diversity, and individuality that Gottschalk seemed to recognize in the formation of the clouds” (ibid.). Combining the sound—the Nama language is known for its “clicking sounds” that the Germans find difficult to learn, the novel repeatedly states—with meaning that one can understand is part of learning a language. Gottschalk, however, runs into multiple difficulties of translation, which becomes the symbol of bridging the “unbridgeable” alienness (Waldenfels 2011), but increasingly also between him and his fellow Germans. This is the reason why he turns to the “clouds” as well as to the sediments of history preserved in the geology of a land. Both entail Timm’s poetics, captured in these metaphors. While geology requires the work of a geologist, meteorology follows the movements of weather in real time; hence, Gottschalk interprets the events while they occur, while the narrator reconstructs the history like a geologist. Yet, like Gottschalk, the narrator seeks to bridge the empirical documentation of the movement of the clouds, i.e., the events over time, in a “constant series of new descriptions” with “at least some degree of abstraction” that allows for “conceptual generalization”. The latter are needed to enable an “intelligible transmittal” of observations. In this way, the Nama meaning of “cloud”, namely “infinite” (Timm 2003, p. 50), receives a late recognition as another metaphor of historical narratives: they, too, are indeed ever-changing and infinite, because the events cross-reference with the forms of the narrative.

Gottschalk, it is said, reinvents the mechanism of the “free balloon” around this time, invoking the metaphor for the narrator of history who is, at the same time, a participant in history: the “balloon pilot, who would be completely at the mercy of the momentary direction of the wind if he were sailing freely, is able to navigate the balloon to some degree by means of the resistance of ropes that drag along the ground.” (Timm 2003, p. 318). The metaphor of meteorology is repeated in the epilogue, with a slightly different turn, now revealing the poetics of the novel that anticipates Ricœur’s term of the crossed reference of empirical and narrative knowledge in historical and fictional narratives: observing the weather resembles the observation of historical events over time, abstracting to a certain degree is as necessary in meteorology as in historical narratives (and fiction), and constructing some conceptual generalization are the tools needed for the narrative of historical events, too. Furthermore, balloon flights, the narrator now holds, are “a work of art in which the pilot, the balloon, the wind and weather, and the landscape as well, unite” (Timm 2003, p. 338), which can also be read as an aesthetic ideal. In this utopian world, symbolized by a balloon flight, there is no exploitation, “except for the fuel”, no torment or mistreatment of people. The balloon flight is of no economic value, because it can only be navigated in limited ways; it is, as Gottschalk’s friend says, “like working with precision scales” (ibid.). But if the balloon flight is indeed a metaphor for the work of art in which the narrator

unites with the story and the events that contribute to it, it is presented as a cautionary tale: art may also be an escape, the illusion of freedom in forgetting. In the final scene, Gottschalk sees the world from above; it seems to be as it has always been, as if history could be forgotten—he sees the German landscape and culture, recognizing all the familiar sounds of life as if nothing had changed, and as if he had never been to the foreign country in which the cruelest crimes imaginable were committed: nothing, it seems, not even the genocide that he participated in and let him lose his moral compass, has motivated him to act and/or remember differently.

Years later, Timm writes in his book about his brother (Timm 2005), that one of the most shocking facts concerning the soldiers who refused to take part in the mass killings of World War II was that they did not have to fear much punishment—mostly, those who deserted or refused the orders were discharged or sent to another unit. The figure of Gottschalk can therefore also be read as the harbinger of these later soldiers. He embodies the disinterested, forgetful, and joyful postwar German soldier who continues to claim that he was no more than a bystander, while in fact he was a *Mitläufer* who did not merely stand by but who “went along” with the mass atrocities. They certainly did not live up to the concept of enlightenment that the Western world celebrated as the its biggest achievement. For one of its most prominent representatives, Immanuel Kant, enlightenment did indeed mean freedom. But he saw freedom as capability and responsibility, an autonomy that is the moral capacity to only live by that moral law that one has, at the same time, given oneself and that could be shared by all others as a universal moral law (Kant 2013). Coloniality does not only contradict human decency; it also contradicts the very tradition that it claims to adhere to.

4. Towards a Decolonial Narrative Ethics

In addition to the critique of recognition theory that requires a break with the ethically flawed concept of conditional recognition and a reinterpretation of recognition from an ethical point of view, I want to draw some conclusions from the fictional narrative of history that Kafka’s short story and Timm’s novel offer. I hope that the two examined texts in this essay can help to further develop a decolonial ethics, and as part of it, a decolonial narrative ethics.

My reading of the two stories illuminated racist coloniality as a structure of misrecognition of concrete others (animals, humans who are rendered animal-like, African cultures under colonial rule, and Europeans who are socialized to repress their drives and sensitivities). It calls, in a first step, for a hermeneutical virtue ethics that is informed by literature as a medium of and for ethics. Narrative ethics shows that this must be concrete and situated—as any storyteller and story is. As long as the “other” who speaks, who addresses the reader, and to whom the reader responds, is not concretized in historical terms, a “responsoric” recognition or recognitive responsibility remains in the aesthetic realm, without ramifications for the concrete personal, social, or political action—reading Timm’s novel does not in itself change Germany’s relation to the Nama and Ovaherero, for example. Without a doubt, unlearning of the colonial habitus, the social character that Fromm analyzed as the patterns of human destructiveness (Fromm 1973), and learning recognition as inter-action and acting together is necessary and a huge task. But it must not replace the other elements of responsibility, i.e., accountability on the one hand, and the responsibility to transform structures of injustice into justice as political practice.⁴⁹ Readers, among others, respond to narratives as moral agents who engage in an ethical deliberation how to see—and change—the world they live in. Storytelling therefore serves practical reasoning both as an aesthetic–hermeneutic responsoric ethics that aims at recognition, and as responsibility of a moral agent who is, like every other agent, “aiming for a good life with and for others in just institutions” (Ricoeur 1992). Ethics must ask who is responsible for what practices and structures, and in what way,

⁴⁹ This is the point of Ricoeur’s theory of threefold mimesis, i.e., the prefiguration of a text, the configuration in a narrative and the refiguration in the reception history. Cf. (Ricoeur 1992).

and who is most urgently in need of actions, and in what way.⁵⁰ Decolonial ethics comes with an interest that goes beyond its counterpart in literature: it does not only aim to understand the structures of colonial thinking and acting, it also aims to correct and rectify past—and present—injustices, in order to restore justice or establish justice for the first time. Ethical theory uses different terms to describe this transformation of injustice into justice, but in any case, restitutive, reparative, or restorative justice models are social–ethical and political–ethical efforts that attend to the different positions of agents in regard to justice. In the case of Germany’s history that I have examined here from a narrative ethics perspective, perpetrators of the colonial genocide—who are named in Timm’s novel just like Hagenbeck is named in Kafka’s story—have never been held accountable, just like how only a few perpetrators after the Shoah were put on trial. The present generation, even though not directly accountable, is still responsible for Germany’s past, because it is still present, independent of the outcome, for example, of a lawsuit over reparation claims.⁵¹ The present generation’s ethical duty is to engage in the work of recognition that begins indeed with re-cognition, the looking back in order to know one’s past, and acknowledge what happened in the former German colony. This engagement must be guided by respect, attention, and care for the present and future well-being of the descendants of the genocide. The descendants of the victims must not only be heard in their address, in testimonies and their accounts of the suffering and humiliation of the past and, moreover, of the effects on their life at present in Namibia. Their address must also be responded to, in the practical, imperfect and finite, yet mutual work of recognition that ultimately may result in the transformation of both parties, the goal of reconciliatory justice. Whether it is through reparations or other, necessarily imperfect, ways of recognition aimed at rectifying what cannot be rectified (Derrida 2001), mutual recognition is “accepting partial success” of reconciliation, instead of being paralyzed by the inability to reach the state of perfection, just as any storyteller accepts the partiality of the story they tell, instead of falling silent in the wake of the unspeakable cruelty that only human beings are capable to inflict upon others.

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⁵⁰ For a discussion of the difference between accountability (or liability) and social responsibility in the case nobody does anything wrong yet together creating a structure that is unjust cf. (Young 2011).

⁵¹ In March 2019, the lawsuit by the descendants of the Nama and Ovaherero tribes against the German state was rejected by a New York court. Cf. <https://www.dw.com/en/us-judge-dismisses-namibian-genocide-claims-against-germany/a-47816283>.

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