



The Images of Blackness: Savages, Workers and the Emergence of the Counterimagination in Germany (1884-1925)

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AGNIESZKA WIĘCKIEWICZ

The Images of Blackness: Savages,
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The author interprets the figures of European workers and colonized Africans presented as slaves of capitalism and imperialism, the image that circulated in the social and cultural imagination in Germany after the Berlin Conference (1884-1885). The aim of the article is to introduce the concept of “counterimagination” and show how the image of the rabble became juxtaposed with a visualization of the black slave. The author argues that both figures were considered to be a real threat to the German social order and to German Kultur, and concentrates on the popular images of the “other” circulating in the German visual culture after 1880. The first part of the article is devoted to the aesthetics of the weekly satirical magazine *Simplicissimus* founded in April 1896. In the second part, the aggressive propaganda campaign against the Occupation of the Rhineland by French colonial troops is discussed. The author describes the mechanisms of envisioning black soldiers and points out the anticolonial reactions to the “Black Shame” campaign.

Keywords: countervisuality, visibility, colonialism, race, propaganda, racism

Although the question of imperial politics and pro-colonial propaganda after 1871 became a subject of many analyses in the past twenty years, the history of German colonialism still remains marginal in the works devoted to Western imperialism (Blackshire-Belay 1996; Friedrichsmeyer et al. 2011; Naranch et al. 2014; Gründer et al. 2017). The question of the colonial imagination, as well as the images of blackness in German culture are often treated as unimportant (Camp 2013; 2008, 1-9). The popular view that colonial rule in Africa and China did not leave its mark on German society became one of the main arguments used to prove that the period 1884-1914 had no further impact on German history (Friedrichsmeyer et al. 2011, 3-7). Thus, I propose to look at German colonialism through political and colonial aesthetic discourses, where the (anti)colonial imagination emerges for the first time.

By the concept of “colonial imagination,” I understand the capacity to create stereotypical images that reflect social experiences, anxieties, and expectations related to colonialism. Deeply rooted in the socio-political context of Germany between the 19th and 20th centuries, they reveal authority’s attempt to gain colonial territories and, at the same time, to strengthen the symbolic disjunction between “self” and “other.” The colonial imagination has become a powerful source of pictures and illustrations that used the “savage” figure to fix racist optics. My aim is to show that the visual and discursive practices of German imperial imagination elicited counterimages that questioned the established meanings of the “other.” The stereotypes circulating in German culture gained public support, but the acts of explicit critique formed a model of counter-attitude towards colonialism and racism. To understand how the colonial and anticolonial imaginations functioned in German culture in the late 19th and the first half of the 20th century, I propose an analysis of selected illustrations published in the German weekly satirical magazine *Simplicissimus*.

Most issues either criticized Bismarckian politics or articulated a strong anticolonial voice. The fourth issue from 1904, entitled *Die afrikanische Gefahr* (“The African Danger”), will be closely examined. It was published only a few months after the breakout of the colonial war in today’s Namibia. The illustration of the solidarity between black slaves and “white slaves” presented on the front cover will be treated as an example of an attempt to change the way of perceiving not only colonial subjects but also lower-class workers in the German cultural imagination before WWI. In the second part of the article, I raise the issue of the “colonial complex,” emerging after 1919, which evoked an aggressive campaign against the occupation of the Rhineland. The black

soldiers were envisioned as depraved animals seeking to destroy German morality (Wigger 2017, 12-23). Though the campaign had great success and provoked innumerable racist illustrations, posters, articles, novels, and plays, it also met with resistance — above all in the works of the German Dada artist Hannah Höch (Van Hoesen 2011, 320-324; Burmeister 2007, 26-31). Her photomontages problematized women's emancipation, as well as the image of the black body.

Images and imagination — the German empire visualized

The question of “race” becomes central for any attempt to theorize the colonial imagination. Nevertheless, the category itself seems to be problematic. Is it possible to totalize the concept of race as a product of racist discourses and race-thinking? What we miss, in this case, is that a critical response to the reality of racism and the racist imagination engages with the “race” category. As W.J.T. Mitchell argued:

My solution is to understand race as a concept that is traversed by four different moments of force [...]. Two of these we have already identified in the dialectic of bodies and bloodlines, bodily “schematism,” to use Fanon's terms, and historical genealogies. But these terms operate within a conceptual force field defined by the intersection of two axes, the biopolitical and the sociopolitical, or what Donna Haraway calls “nature-culture.” On the nature axis, we find the biopolitical tendency to naturalize human relations as elaborate forms of animal behavior defined by categories of culture (including language, religion, and customs) and class (including the power relations of colonialisms and slavery). Race, then, instead of being regarded as a univocal or essential concept with a fixed definition, becomes a complex or (to recall the premodern language of race) a complexion of these forces (Mitchell 2012, 33).

According to Mitchell race has no fixed definition, but is considered a complex concept that enables a more profound reflection on how we perceive ourselves and others. The “complexion” of different forces (biopolitical and sociopolitical), evoked by Mitchell, orients us towards the force of the visual in social images of “race.”

In Charles Taylor's social theory, individuals, brought together in order to form a political entity, are responsible for the formation of the visual projection of society (Taylor 2004, 5-11). The late 19th-century notion of imperialism, developed in close relation to the nationalist discourse, formed the image of germane as representing a white, male

and not-Jewish community. German colonialism took place not only in real activities in colonies but was also important for shaping a national imaginary homeland. As Taylor remarked, the analysis of imaginaries reveals a broad semantic field, not limited to the intellectual schemes examined in a “disengaged mode,” as a reflection of social reality. In the German context, imperialism, colonialism, and nationalism emerged together, determining the image of race, class, and gender (Bowersox 2014, 170-184). I argue that it is possible to reconstruct the notion of Germanness from the analysis of cultural imaginary, defined by Taylor as:

The ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations. [...] the term imaginary [...] is the way ordinary people “imagine” their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms but is carried in images, stories, and legends (Taylor 2004: 10).

Using Taylor’s theory, we can examine German imperialism through a social imaginary, as well as through heterogeneous reactions to actual colonialism, which functioned as a platform for the emergence of contradictory images.

The German claim to imperial power can be understood as constant visualization of the history of European civilization distinguished from other cultures, treated as primitive. In this case, visibility is not the visible or the “social fact of the visible,” as Nicholas Mirzoeff would say, but a discursive practice used by the authority to create a meaning. Therefore, it has material effects — it structures the reality determining what can and what cannot be perceived. In *The Right to Look*, Mirzoeff proposed thinking about visibility as:

an old word for an old project. It is not a trendy theory word meaning the totality of visual images and devices but is, in fact, an early-nineteenth-century term meaning the visualization of history. This practice must be imaginary, rather than perceptual, because what is being visualized is too substantial for any one person to see and is created from information, images and ideas. This ability to assemble a visualization manifests the authority of the visualizer. In turn, the authorizing of authority requires permanent renewal in order to win consent as the “normal” [...]. The autonomy claimed by the right to look is thus opposed by the authority of visibility (Mirzoeff 2011, 2-3).

The structure of German colonial visibility corresponds with the visualization of the slave plantation, which succeeded the image of the battlefield as a “hallmark of the modern general” (Mirzoeff 2011, 3-5). What Michel Foucault called the process of the “nomination of the visible,” Mirzoeff has named the “complex of visibility,” formed as a result of classifying (imposing a hierarchy), separating (the segregation of all the visualized, to make becoming a political subject impossible) and aestheticizing (authority seen as a natural power and not the changeable status quo) decreed by authority (Mirzoeff 2011, 5-10). He distinguished visual complexes typical for different periods of European imperialism. The first stage was formed in the plantation practice. For Mirzoeff slavery was an essential part of the “plantation complex,” defined as a removal of the right to look and the total subordination of the colonized (Mirzoeff 2011, 7). The others were the “imperial complex” (from 1860 to 1945) and the “military-industrial complex” (1945 — present) which marked the end of the 19th century and developed in the 20th century (Mirzoeff 2011, 35). It should be noted that the role models for his analysis were French and British imperialism, thus he does not mention the German case. In the Bismarck’s colonies at the end of the 19th century, the “plantation complex” interfered with the “imperial complex,” although slavery at that time had been formally abolished.

The domination of visualization was not immutable but, in fact, constantly undermined. Whereas visibility articulates itself in imperial, colonial and capitalistic politics and practices, the claim to the right to look becomes a field of potential subversion, expressed by social movements or articulated in the criticism of authoritarian domination. In this case, seeing is understood as the “right to the real” that is equivalent to an act of disobedience to authority (Mirzoeff 2011, 24-26). The idea of democracy emerges from the opposition to capitalist exploitation, as well as from criticism of imperial discourses concerning not only non-European subjects but also European workers or women, as well as other excluded groups. Mirzoeff emphasizes that the authority manifests power as indisputable, and hence naturalizes class, race and gender classifications (Mirzoeff 2011, 4). After Jacques Rancière, he highlights the close relationship between politics and aesthetics, arguing that the first function of visibility is to aestheticize, that is to say, to show the reality as an unchangeable *status quo*. While in imperial Germany visibility acts through colonial and capitalist politics, emancipation became a claim to the right to look and to be seen — not through categories such as class or race, which are constructed and projected by authority — but precisely against them. In this light, disobedience to authority

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is a politically radical attempt to reconfigure visibility as a whole, in order to form a “countervisuality.” Mirzoeff defines it as:

the claim for the right to look. It is the dissensus with visibility [...]. The performative claim of a right to look where none exists puts a counter visibility into play. [...] The “right” in the right to look contests the first the “right” to property in another person by insisting on the irreducible autonomy of all citizens (Mirzoeff 2011, 25).

In the colonial context, countervisuality is a refusal to segregate, it creates its own “grammar of nonviolence” (Mirzoeff 2011, 26). If the battlefield was a domain of visibility, then the revolution and its visual archive manifest the “other” way of perceiving the self and other, countering imperial visibility. For Mirzoeff the breaking point of the “plantation complex,” was the “abolition realism” — the visibility of the Haitian Revolution — the anarchy at Saint-Domingue, as Thomas Carlyle put it. (Mirzoeff 2011, 13; 24-26). Thus countervisuality becomes a collective activism that attempts to change the system as a whole.

Paraphrasing the author of *The Right to Look*, we can say that the countervisuality resignifies phantasms and beliefs rooted in the social imaginary. In the German context, the imperial complex linked centralized authority to the hierarchy of the German culture (*Kultur*), while countervisuality outlined a subversive strategy of seeing the social and political contemporary situation experienced from the perspective of the “other” — woman, Jew, homosexual, lower-class worker or colonized subject. The authority of colonialism always engages with the racist imagination (animated by different mediums, such as literature, historical discourses, art, advertisement) and forms visual complexes. In this context the author emphasizes:

The authority of coloniality has consistently required visibility to supplement its deployment of force. Visibility sutures authority to power and renders this association “natural.” [...] In order to challenge the claimed inevitability of this history and its hegemonic means to frame the present, any engagements with visibility in the present or the past requires establishing its counterhistory. In fact, I suggest that one of the very constitutive forms of visibility is the knowledge that it is always already opposed and in struggle. To coin a phrase, visibility is not war by other means: it is war (Mirzoeff 2010, 6).

By defining visibility as always in a struggle, captured in a conflict zone, Mirzoeff suggests that the potentiality of resistance comes with authority. In the plantation experience, visibility constitutes “the foundational

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moment of visibility and the right to look” (Mirzoeff 2010, 6) and, at the same time, provokes an emergence of different counterhistories. Thus, the necessity and inevitability of subversive acts create a space where countervisuality emerges as a response to oppressive visual complexes. They are “divided against themselves first as configurations of visibility against countervisuality and then as material systems of administering authority interfaced with mental means of authorizing” (Mirzoeff 2010, 8).

For Mirzoeff the three complexes: the “plantation complex,” the “imperial complex”, and the “military-industrial complex” co-exist in reality, where race, class, gender, sexuality all together orientate social imagination and influence social relations. In this context the author adds: “The clash of visibility and countervisuality produced not just imagined relations but materialized visualizations as images of all kinds, like natural history, law, politics, and so on” (Mirzoeff 2010, 8). Although Mirzoeff’s understanding of the struggle between visibility and countervisuality is helpful for theorizing collective acts of resistance towards colonial authority, the very concept of countervisuality — as the imaginative space of potential revolution, as well as a reality of revolutionary events — seems to be problematic. I suggest thinking about (counter)visibility as related to a community, rather than to individuals. Mirzoeff’s countervisuality is already “collective,” which seems to be too general for any attempt to interpret individual acts of rebellion. I propose, thus, to understand them as examples of counterimagination, in other words, as isolated attempts to reimagine and reorganize the socio-political order. As we will see in the case of the satirical paper “Simplicissimus” or in Hannah Höch’s photo-montages, the critique of colonialism does not always take the form of countervisuality, although it creates a possibility to counterimagine — to project a non-authoritarian social order.

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The “colonial question”

At the Berlin/Congo Conference (1884-1885) Germany emerged as a newly established colonial power. *Kongokonferenz* was convened on November 1884 in Berlin. As a result of the new arrangements, known as the “Scramble for Africa,” Germany gained territories in Africa (German South West Africa, German East Africa, Togo, and Cameroon) and thereby created the third largest colonial empire, after Great Britain and France (Friedrichsmeyer et al. 2011, 10). Although the German explo-

itation of Africa begun in the late 19th century, the history of the imperialistic and colonial imagination dates back to 17th and 18th century literature. It became a platform for the emergence of an image of a “good” German and his peaceful relations with the indigenous peoples (Gründer et al. 2017, 12). Works such as *Die Insel Felsenburg*, written by Johann Gottfried Schnabel (1745), *Robinson der Jungere* by Joachim Heinrich Campe (1779), or *Die Kolonie* by Johann Friedrich Albrecht (1792), created an idealistic vision of a pure and almost inhabited colonial territory. The late 18th century also brought another phantasy: the image of two different — and hitherto separate — cultures peacefully brought together. However, after the anti-slavery Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) it was transfigured into the image of an intransgressible separation, as described in *William der Neger* by Caroline Auguste Fischer. In the 19th century, colonial literature proper, such as Frieda von Bülow’s novels, fueled the colonial imagination in Germany.

Even before 1884, Brandenburg-Prussia had created a colony in overseas territories, known as the Groß Friedrichsburg in West Africa, a part of today’s Ghana (Gründer et al. 2017, 20-25). With its formation Frederick William joined the international transatlantic slave trade. As Horst Gründer pointed out, the Elector of Brandenburg became the “spiritual father” of German colonialism, which developed years later (Gründer et al. 2017, 21). The Berlin Conference legitimized the Bismarckian imperial project, although the German rule in Africa started a few months earlier, with the acquisition of territories in South-West Africa by Adolf Lüderitz. He was, similarly to the famous Carl Peters and Bernhard Förster (Friedrich Nietzsche’s brother-in-law), one of the first self-fashioned colonialists. German imperialism, interposed by Wilhelm II, formed a new model of perceiving non-European territories and their inhabitants. Procolonial propaganda in Germany formed a visual sphere for the constant projection of phantasies, which strengthened the division between self (white) and other (black). While the population of Africa became a symbolic object of the German cultural mission — understood as a duty to bring Western civilization to the “savages,” the occupation of land became a manifestation of economic conquest. Lands and people needed to be constantly monitored in order to exploit them as raw material and cheap labor. It created a particular and sustainable way of perceiving reality in the colonies.

The principal method of governance in the colonies consisted of collecting lands from Africans and creating profitable plantations (Gründer et al. 2017, 28-35). Yet the “Scramble for Africa” turned out to be less efficient than predicted, and thus disturbed the idealistic phantasy

of imperial success. The territories in the German South West and German East Africa were hostile to inhabit and therefore to exploit. Nevertheless, the colonizers' efforts to subjugate lands and peoples persisted. The formation of South and West German Africa, similarly to efforts in Togo and Cameroon, brought up the question of how to rule effectively (Mühlhahn 2014, Denzel 2017, 144-158). However, it is striking that between 1884 and 1918 there were less than twenty thousand German men in Africa (Friedrichsmeyer, Lennox, Zantop 2011, 13). In other words, the German presence in the colonies was not so visible, as we are apt to think. Nevertheless, the authority's claim to have imposed total subordination met with resistance from the colonized. The tensions in German East Africa were caused by Carl Peters' authoritarian politics. The colonized did not have a right to possess the land, so they could only work on settlers' plantations. Rebellions among Africans arose, above all the Maji Maji Rebellion in German East Africa (Tanzania) between 1905 and 1907. It should be noted that after 1907 the legal system was changed: black farmers were encouraged to work on plantations without the strict observation of the colonizers.

German Southwest Africa, on the other hand, encouraged more German settlers than today's Tanzania, Rwanda, Kenya, or Burundi. In 1911 more than sixteen thousand colonizers lived in these territories. Their politics of governance consisted mainly of two significant, conflicting communities — Herero and Nama. The Herero Revolt in 1904-1907 resulted in the first genocide in the history of the 20th century (Friedrichsmeyer et al. 2011, 7-25; Schneider-Waterberg 2005, 164-247). Only six years later, with the outbreak of the First World War, the German colonial empire became a target for western rivals, and lost all overseas territories in 1918 to Great Britain, France, Belgium, and Portugal. WWI did not end the German colonial project but opened a possibility to imaginary recolonization.

Shortly after the Berlin Conference (1884-1885), German political thought, as well as art, literature, and cinema became strongly influenced by colonial fantasies. The image of an "uncivilized other" was used in order to strengthen German imperialist propaganda. In the Bismarckian era, conservatives and liberals became united in a strong pro-colonial voice, which resulted both in the growth of negrophobia and also in the emergence of anticolonial discourse (Eley 2014, 19-25). First, it found its articulations in leftist critical thought, then in the German Dada movement. While the image of the "savage" was often considered a threat to German culture and to Western civilization, the figure of the worker became interlinked with a possible subversion of the established

social order in pre-war Germany. European workers and colonized Africans started to be perceived as an uncontrolled mass that was about to start a revolution. The suppression of potential subversion became possible by enforcing the image of the internal “enemy.” The image of rubble (in this case a result of the association of two figures — the African and the worker) was visualized as an uneducated and dangerous mass, thus became a collective “other” in the German social and cultural imaginary after 1885.

The legacy of German colonialism has been long overlooked in historical and theoretical debates. Whereas British and French imperialism quickly became role models for postcolonial theory, the history of the German presence in Africa and China has been treated as less significant. This situation resulted in the almost complete ignorance of colonial images in German culture. It is important to note that not only racial stereotypes, but also image of class, nation, and gender reinforced one another and created a complex image of the “Black worker.” As Iris Wigger remarked:

The degree to which race, class, national and gender stereotypes combine to reinforce one another is a subject of controversial theoretical debate in the contemporary social sciences, where a growing body of research emphasizes structural links between these categories (Wigger 2010, 34).

We need to ask, however, in what ways those “structural links” formed themselves. How could categories such as class, race, and gender create “interlinked discriminations”? The visual sphere seems to be an adequate platform for the formation of complex images that structure collective understandings of what is “national,” “foreign,” “civilized” or “indigenous.” Addressing the issue of 20th-century nationalism, Benedict Anderson correctly pointed out that national and patriotic discourses, which arise from a binary division between self and other, were strengthened by the incorporation of images affecting the lives of a community, even before the rise of the nation (Anderson 1996, 7-20). In the German context, the imperial imagination and colonial conquest started as early as in the 17th century — long before the Unification of Germany in 1871 (Gründer et al. 2017, 9-24). Later, in the Bismarckian era, the figure of the colonizer who brings his culture (*Kultur*) to all the “uncivilized” circulated enhanced, as Anderson would say, the German “imagined community” (Baumgart 2017, 45-52).

Simplicissimus and politics of aesthetic

Albert Langen and Thomas Theodor, who founded the German satirical weekly magazine *Simplicissimus* in 1896, must have known that the questioning of visual hegemony is possible through aesthetics. The magazine was a product of left-leaning intellectuals, strongly influenced by the emerging aesthetic style of the Jugendstil movement (closely related to the French Art Nouveau movement) and was published from 1896 until 1967, although with considerable breaks (Garsha 2014, 190-192). The first issues appeared between 1944-1946, and were continued from 1950 until 1954. Langen and Theodor decided to name the magazine after the 17th-century novel entitled *Der abenteuerlich Simplicissimus Teutsch* ("Adventures of German *Simplicissimus*") written by Hans Jakob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen. The novel, published in 1669, became a satire on the corrupt higher social classes, where lower-class workers were depicted as victims of a depraved society. As Jeremiah Garsha points out:

With its allusion to Grimmelshausen, Langen and Heine's magazine underscore its direct connection to a Germanic legacy of satirical social commentary. In naming the publication after a working-class hero, the title *Simplicissimus* implies [...] the authors and artists were in favor, theoretically, of the lower-class masses and directly opposed to the traditional oligarchy of right-wing conservatism (Garsha 2014, 191).

The main idea of the magazine's editors was to create a critical discourse comprehensible to the lower-class masses. Most issues either mocked Bismarckian internal policy or discredited colonialism. The criticism in *Simplicissimus* usually took the form of caricatures, and an essential part of every issue was the cover illustration, reflecting the current political and social situation. *Simplicissimus* thereby traced the colonial progress in Africa, giving one of the earliest critical responses to The South African War (1899-1902), as well as later to the German genocide of the Herero and Nama in South West Africa (1904-1908) (*Simplicissimus* 1900, no. 15, 25, 41; 1904, no. 4, 6). After 1900, almost every issue of *Simplicissimus* demystified the weakness of colonialism. Bismarckian Germany was presented as entangled in inner conflicts and ruined by colonial expansion.

On the front cover of issue no. 38 from 1900 (il. 1) we can see a famished dog pulling a heavy wagon — a symbol of imperial Germany. Inside the car, there are: Germany's flag, busts of Wilhelm II and his



Il. 1. *Simplicissimus* 1900, no. 38.

wife, cannon and guns, as well as the corpses of two Chinese children. The illustration points to the impracticability of the colonial project, in a great part responsible for the economic instability of the empire, and to the cruelty brought about by colonial expansion. By juxtaposing objects related to authority and imperial power with massacred bodies, the editors depict Bismarckian policy as resulting in a reification of

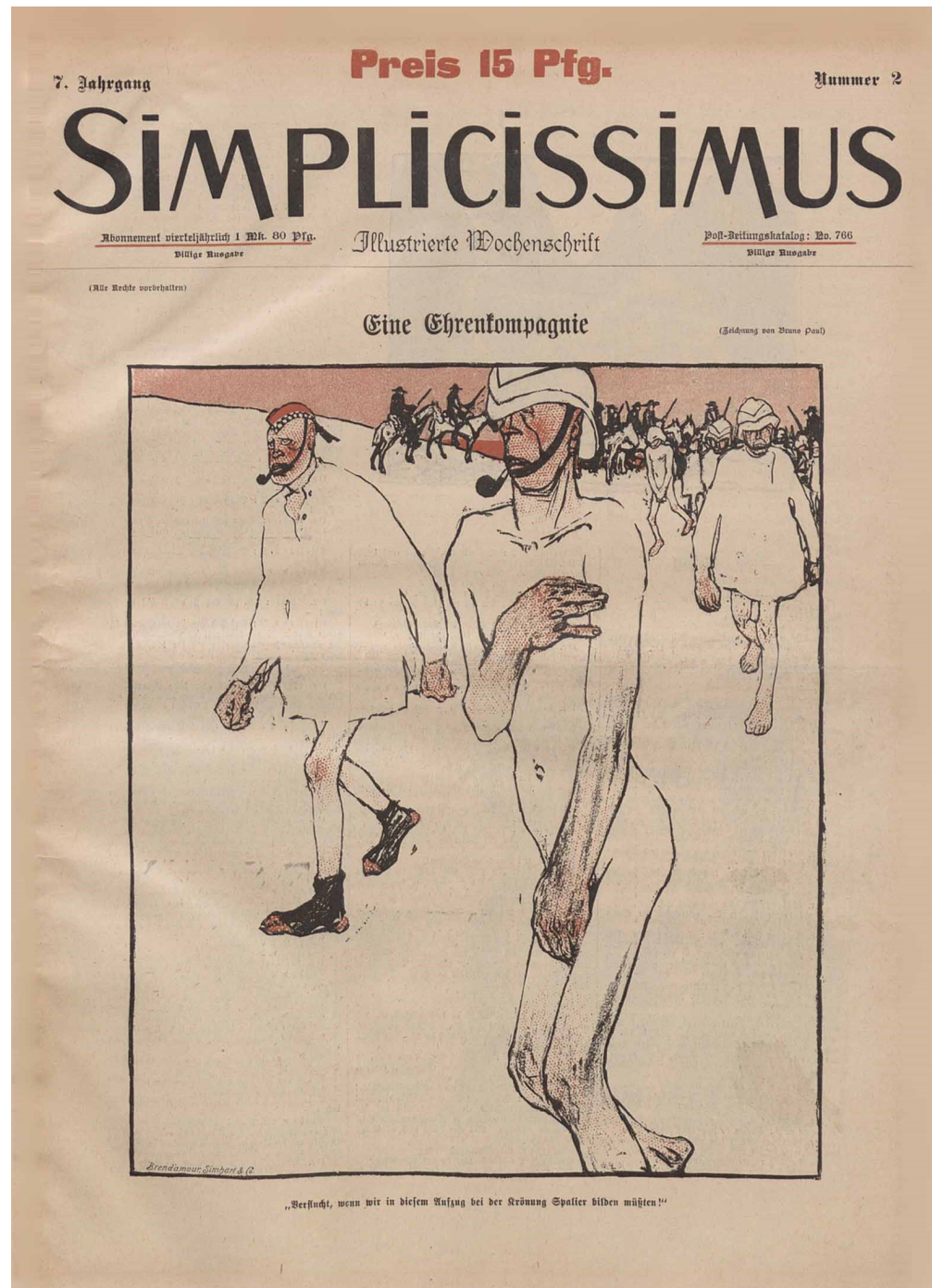


Il. 2. *Simplicissimus* 1900, no. 41.

colonized peoples treated as objects, and not as humans. Only a few months later, in issue no. 41 (il. 2), the animal metaphor is used again.

On the front-cover illustration, one finds an exhausted lion — a symbol of royalty — in this case, a sign of a dying empire. The editors underline the financial difficulties resulting from Wilhelm's colonial dream. Both covers reveal the imagined and wishful character of the

German Empire to be in fact without real economic or military power. This particular problem becomes the main topic two years later. The 8 April 1902 copy (il. 3) greeted readers with the caption: *Eine Ehrenkompagnie* ("The real Compagnie"). The cover-illustration was a typical mockery of Prussian militarism and Wilhelmine conservatism, where the German Empire is compared to the naked and scared soldiers.



Il. 3. *Simplicissimus* 1902, no. 2.

The so-called “*Ehrencompagnie*” appears to be frightened and insecure. The naked, twisted bodies echoed a lost colonial battle in Africa. The bodily expression of the first soldier indicates a lack of power. As in Egon Schiele’s expressive paintings, his body is feminized in order to reveal the instability of authority on the one hand, and the dread of individual soldiers sent to colonial territories on the other. This way the editors used the front-covers to mock the German colonial dream, arguing that the reality is becoming a pure caricature of the African fantasy.

In the editor’s view, the economic progress did not entail a wider change, especially regarding social awareness — the evidence for this was, for instance, the success of German colonial propaganda in the 1880s and 1890s, as well as the imperialism rooted in Prussian militarism. While the aim of German colonialism was often presented as the inevitable part of civilization, the very concept of “civilization” became an issue discussed in *Simplicissimus*. As Norbert Elias pointed out, the idea of German supremacy was propped up by the supposed preponderance of its culture, constituted on language (Elias 1969, 12-24). The division *Kultur/Zivilization* was the first problem addressed by Elias in *The Civilizing Process*. Taking French culture as a role model for the history of western civilization, he criticized Germany. Elias reminded readers that as late as the first decades of the 18th-century the German language had been regarded as “uncivilized.” Although he deconstructed concepts of Germanness — by showing its rather late development — the civilization as a process of exploration was not addressed. For intellectuals related to *Simplicissimus*, the colonial propaganda needed to be discussed together with the rising internal conflicts.

During the time of German colonialism, the images of Africans appear regularly in *Simplicissimus*. In 1904 the editors prepared a special issue devoted to the colonial project in Africa (il. 4). The title — *Der Ziel der Civilization* (“The aim of civilization”) — appears to be crucial and orients our perception of the front-cover illustration. Africans, depicted in bamboo skirts, are considered “uncivilized” and, like their “savage” soil, they wait for European cultivation. What is striking is the notion of “civilization” used by the editors. In the picture, three Africans observe blocks of gold not only with a concern, but also with a bit of surprise; they appear to find the treasure only now. In other words, before the process of colonization they had ignored all the gold. Under the illustration there is a caption: “*Bergraben wir rasch das Gold wieder, sonst bringen und die Europäer ihre Kultur*” (“We will take the gold in a hurry, otherwise the Europeans will bring us their culture”). The aim of colonization is thus to enrich the empire’s budget. The German *Kultur* appe-

ars to be a part of a desire to govern and grow wealthy. "Civilization" thereby becomes a negative of colonization, where both were understood as the exploitation of the "savages" and of German lower-class workers, who were building the imperial Germany with their own hands.



Il. 4. *Simplicissimus* 1904, no. 6.

The rise and fall of Great Germany

The front-page illustration of the 2 April 1898 copy of *Simplicissimus* (il. 5) showed a caricature of Germania standing on the line on her way to China. Her posture is unstable, her leg twisted. Nevertheless,

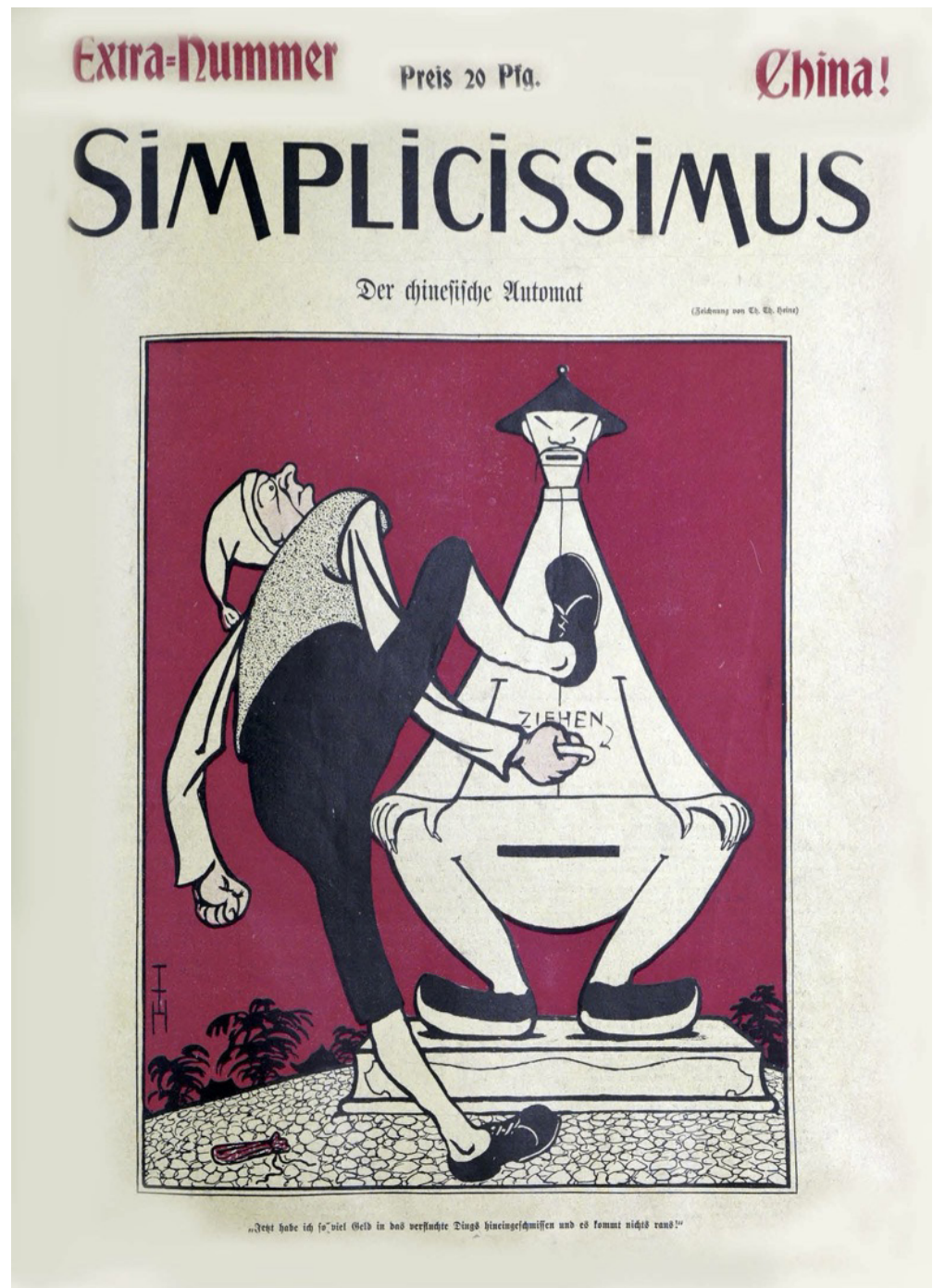


Il. 5. *Simplicissimus* 1898, no. 1.

her longing for the overseas territories is stronger than the risk of falling down. After 1900, the caricatures in the magazine focused on the weakness and instability of imperial Germany. The cover illustrations linked economic crises with the excessive costs incurred for the sake of colonial progress. Two issues, from 17th and 31st December 1900, were entirely devoted to internal financial difficulties, where the colonization of China was discussed as a cause of imbalances. From the very beginning, the editors openly criticized colonial expeditions in China. Two arguments emerge from the mentioned issues: the financial instability caused by overinvestment and the cruelty of colonizers. The images of massacred bodies interweave with the figure of the defeated soldier. Issue no. 13 from 1901 (il. 6) depicts a colonizer returning from the colonies. He is frightened and in despair. Behind his back, we are able to see three Chinese men laughing and mocking the colonizer, who sails away in a hurry. His misfortune strongly contrasts with the amusement of the colonized. In the end, it is they who triumph. Their celebratory behavior points to the failure of the German colonial project in China. On the front cover of the special issue from 1901 entirely devoted to the “Chinese problem” (il. 7) one finds *Der chinesische Automat* (“the Chinese machine”) — a human-like dispenser with a big caption: “Ziehen” (“pull”). The machine appears to be a sort of coin bank which is full of German money. The tight posture of the man depicted induces his aim to open the apparently unopenable dispenser. This illustration is a perfect example of the editor’s use of satire as a critical tool in the reflection on the colonial expansion. The machine is stuck with the invested money, which is a clear sign of the colonies’ insolvency.

Shortly after the foundation of *Simplicissimus*, Germany took over Kiaochow (1897) and Jiao’ao Bay (1898), in the eastern part of Shandong province (Mühlhahn 2019, 178). The magazine’s illustrators, focused mostly on financial costs, did not tackle the question of various colonial formations in the German overseas empire. Klaus Mühlhahn pointed out that: “Differentiation, particular forms and blurred categories resulted from efforts of active realignment and attempts of continuous reformation and adaptation” (Mühlhahn 2014, 129). The case of Kiaochow demonstrates, for instance, that modern empires were nonstable state formations, which were constantly susceptible to variation and flexible adaptation. The colonial process was:

based on ongoing transfers of ideas, practices, and technologies between the metropolitan regions and their far-flung colonies across fixed boundaries and political forms. Colonies were terrains where projects of power and concept of



Il. 7. *Simplicissimus* 1901.

of the 17 April 1900 issue. It depicted the immoral conduct of German soldiers who had been sent to the colony to keep order. The newly established colonial relations in China were seen in Germany as a “clash of civilizations.” It is important that, after 1898, the colonized constantly resisted German occupation, for example around Gaomi — the wealthy city where the local magistrate was located — the peasants

of capitalism in Germany. From that perspective, the situation of white workers was compared with the living conditions of the colonized, especially in Africa. They were both the slaves of Western capitalism, affecting the appearance of the colonial conquest in Germany in the first place. The editors sought to create a strong anti-government voice, where the critique of capitalism and colonialism would be seen as a chance for a dialogue between different social classes.

Although in the 1880s and 1890s colonial propaganda was implemented under the name of “civilization,” as a part of Bismarckian *Weltpolitik*, the beginning of the 20th century was marked by a noticeable change in visuality concerning the German “mission” in Africa. The image of the black “other” started to be used in order to emphasize the racial difference between Jews and (white) Germans (Davis 2014, 230-232). After the beginning of the colonial war in today’s Namibia, Africans were depicted as the uncivilized with no possibility of assimilating with European culture. The same argument was also used to exclude Jews from political, social, and cultural activity (Short 2014, 210-216). For folkish ideologues, both Jews and Africans were foreign elements for the German “race.” Although the magazine’s editors were concerned by virulent antisemitism, they did not explicitly connect the stereotypical image of a Jew with the visualization of the colonized in *Simplicissimus*. The 26th copy of the journal from 1902 (il. 8) is a good example of how the editors used the stereotypical image of Jew to reveal the irrationality of the collective fear of the “Jewish plot.” On the front-cover illustration, we can see three arguing men drowning in a sea of white rabbits. Their appearance — long beards, side curls, black gabardines and overdrawn “Jewish noses,” that is, the racial stereotypical visualization of a hooked nose. The three men represent the idea of possible Jewish supremacy over the world. The rabbits indicate the uncontrolled expansion of Jews from the East (so-called *Ostjude*) in Germany. In the illustration, they are compared to colonizers, in this case of the Western world. Thus, like the Africans, they are foreign and alienated from the very idea of *Kultur*. *Simplicissimus* played with the stereotypical image of a Jew, which makes the contemporary reading of these illustrations more demanding. It is important to ask how can we understand the editor’s strategy, which is based on repeating the racial imaginary? Does repetition allow a reinterpretation? How to make repetition fertile and critical? In the case of *Simplicissimus*, while the image usually reenacts stereotypical picturing of socially excluded groups, the descriptions of the images introduce an important change in our understanding of the front-cover illustrations. I would argue that in this



Il. 8. *Simplicissimus* 1902, no. 26.

case it is a written word — not the picture — that orients and constitutes the critical gaze of the actual viewer. The ironic description, which accompanies every issue's front-cover picture, grasps our attention and determines the interpretation of the visual.

As the cover of the fourth copy of the journal from 1904 issue (il. 9) shows, the editors decided to emphasize the relation between



Il. 9. *Simplicissimus* 1904, no. 4.

workers and Africans, rather than between antisemitic and negrophobic discourses. Racial difference is, according to the editors, a product of heterogeneous mechanisms of exploitation. The illustration showed workers' protests as an aftereffect of the Herero's rebellion in Namibia. Thus not discursive form or racism, but the social mechanisms of exclusion became the focal point, because they caused and acted on the

racial differentiation. The 19 April 1904 copy cover-illustration presents a remarkable scene — the Herero have come to Germany in order to liberate white workers from the factory. The black slaves did not join the ongoing workers' rebellion, but in fact, invoked it. The uprising of Herero and Nama in German Southwest Africa is presented as a part of a revolution and a subversive change of the established order. The title of this particular issue was *Die afrikanische Gefahr* ("The African Danger") and the caption on the front-page illustration claimed: "*Es ist höchste Zeit, dass die Regierung mit aller Macht gegen die Hereros vorgeht, sonst kommen die schwarzen Bestien schließlich noch nach Deutschland und heben bei uns die Sklaverei auf*" ("It is about time for the government to react with all its force to Herero, otherwise the black beasts will come to Germany and liberate our slaves"). For leftleaning intellectuals, Herero and Nama's rebellion was an understandable reaction to the colonizer's exploitation and violence. Both the black slaves and the white workers had a common enemy, namely capitalism. They were treated as cheap labor and became alienated from the products of their work. That way *Simplicissimus* introduces a new order of seeing and understanding the condition of a white worker in Europe through colonial exploitation. The illustration focuses on the condition of the workers, rather than on the actual condition of the Hereros who were massacred by the German colonizers. Nevertheless, the image of a revolution bears the mask of a black colonized subject, rather than that of white workers. It is striking that Africans not only invoke revolution but they also aim to fight capitalism under the red flag (Sobich 2006, 108-110). The front-cover illustration's message echoes the anti-colonial attitude inscribed in socialist politics.

Between 1904 and 1907 the German colonial policy made headlines, there were articles in the newspapers and public meetings. As John Phillip Short suggested, the sudden visibility of colonialism in the everyday life in Germany "pulled thousands of new working-class voters into the electoral process" (Short 2014, 213). The SPD, like *Simplicissimus*, created a broadly based critique of an imperial project (Weir 2010, 143-166). Short argued:

Working-class responses to the war in Southwest Africa evolved out of this older, broader discourse on imperialist violence and exploitation, provoked especially at the turn of the century by the Boer War and the Boxer Rebellion. In the multiple forms of working-class engagement in early 1907 — through local party institutions and in the language of local party organs — we observe the fruition of this strong countervailing force (Short 2014, 213).

The emergence of anticolonial discourse in 1907 had in fact been prepared earlier with the outbreak of Maji Maji Rebellion and the Morocco Crisis. The press reported about corruption, brutality and sexual assaults in the colonies (Short 2014, 213-214; Sobich 2006, 273-298).

Using the image of the colonized, *Simplicissimus* related not only to the visual archive of colonization but also to revolution. In the western imaginary, revolution was related to the figure of the Black. Blackness was the sign of anarchy, especially after the revolt in Haiti. Considering the enunciation “black beasts,” it constituted a legible reference to the political discourse and discussions in Parliament after the breakout of the colonial war in Namibia (Short 2014, 210-214). The conservationist Ernst Graf Ludwig zu Reventlow (1869-1943) expressed the voice of the majority when he called the Herero “wild beasts,” to whom the humanitarian codex should not be applied. His antagonist, the socialist August Bebel (1840-1913), although he suggested that the Herero were “lower in culture,” located their revolt in the long history of European revolutions, going back to 1789 (Short 2014, 223). Thus, the reaction of Africans in colonies should be considered as part of a long and non-linear process of becoming a political subject — a view that was close to the meaning of the copy of *Simplicissimus* from 4 April 1904. The question remains, however, of whether the “aesthetic activism” practiced by *Simplicissimus* can be understood as countervisual? If the previous issues formed a critique of German *Weltpolitik*, the image of Blackness used on the 4 April 1904 copy not only recalled the popular perception of Africans in German culture but created a counterintuitive meaning. The editors argued that although they were half-naked and “uncivilized,” the mechanism of their submission was in fact similar to the situation of the German workers.

The educational strategy of the magazine consisted of playing with the images circulating in mass media. After the 1890s, Africa and its population became a subject of virulent pro-colonial propaganda. However, this was not the only platform where the imperialistic imagination acted. Blackness started to be used as a persuasion tactic in advertisements, where the image of the “savage” and the ideology of the German cultural “mission” were juxtaposed. Although the image of blackness used in advertisements must be considered as “racist,” the relation between imperial ideology and advertisements, in general, seems to be much more complex. While in the imperialist imagination Germany was visualized as an established colonial empire, colonial politics was a “great improvisation,” rather than the accomplishment of a well-thought out colonial strategy. Blackness occupied a counterintuitive place

in the visibility of the Bismarckian era. As David Ciarlo pointed out:

At first glance, the congruence of this visual commercial motif with those ideological constructions of the civilizing mission or of ineluctable racial difference found in colonialist writings appears to offer a compelling argument that colonialism — and those who advocated it — had begun to penetrate the world business. The history of visibility follows a trajectory different from the history of ideology, and they cannot be so casually coupled together. In fact, the deeper look into the intersections of colonialist advocacy and the broader world of advertising suggests a different relationship: not an established political ideology ultimately penetrating the commercial world but rather the new practices of commerce reconfiguring a traditional sphere of political ideology (Ciarlo 2014, 188).

The cover-illustrations of *Simplicissimus* followed the popular image of Blackness in order to give a different meaning to the figure of the “savage.” Using aesthetics as an anticolonial message to the wider German public, the editors aimed to destabilize the hegemonic visibility. Although they understood the resignification of racist and stereotypical images as a contestation of the established social, political, and cultural order, their anticolonial aesthetic activism did not create a platform for a dialogue between left-leaning intellectuals, such as the editors, and lower-classes workers. If the strategies of *Simplicissimus* cannot be considered as countervisual, they can be understood as an attempt to counterimage — to design new possibilities for social relations and solidarity. The editors accurately recognized the racist and nationalist inclinations of German colonial propaganda, although they did not create an alternative visibility which would change a system as a whole. Furthermore, the articulation of criticism remained limited to their own social class. In other words, they gave no voice to the groups they wanted to represent, such as workers. The countervisuality is a claim to the right to look, thus to act countervisually does not mean resigning from seeing, but seeing differently — not with, but against visibility. In its criticism, *Simplicissimus* looked through racial visibility, thereby contesting and resignifying it. Therefore, by using stereotypical images and juxtaposing them with a radical anti-authoritarian policy, the magazine created a space for counterimaginative practices.

“Schwarze Schmach” – black bodies and white bodies

If the second half of the 19th century in the history of Germany was marked by a spectacular technological and scientific progress, the years following the end of the First World War brought economic and moral crises. In 1919, the German colonial empire ceased to exist and the presence of German colonizers in Africa came to the end. Nevertheless, racial difference was crucial to the cultural imagination of the Weimar Republic, which gave an ambivalent postcolonial character to the inter-war period. Although the outbreak of the First World War started the process of taking over German overseas territories, the imperialist imagination survived, as did colonial phantasies. Between 1919 and 1921, the most influential figure of the “Other” that emerged was the black male soldier (Wigger 2010). Racialized and sexualized images of French colonial troops became known in Germany via the “Black Shame” (*Schwarze Schmach*) campaign. Shortly after 1918, the first French colonial troops were sent to the Rhineland. In this way, in 1919, as a consequence of the Treaty of Versailles, between 25,000 and 40,000 black soldiers occupied German territories (Wigger 2010, 34-35).

While the after-war political situation reinforced the anti-French and the anti-Versailles sentiment, the most significant propaganda campaign of that time was concentrated on the stationing of the colonial troops. The “Black Shame” campaign reenacted the 19th-century German colonial archive, that is to say, a particular vision of Blackness as evidence of a racial difference. The Black soldiers were depicted as morally depraved and were defined by animalistic sexual instincts (Wigger 2017, 10-33). Their presence on German soil needed to be seen as a threat to the social order. The most popular images created in the propaganda campaign juxtaposed the black soldier and the white German woman (Wigger 2017, 45-61). While Blackness became visually connected with the alleged cultural inferiority of colonial troops, women were supposed to be seen as victims. The bodies of soldiers and women were racialized and sexualized in visual discourse. Iris Wigger correctly pointed out that the campaign aimed to create a national panic over the Rhineland occupation (Wigger 2010, 35-36). The images of the white female body and black male body, when presented together, actualized racial and gender stereotypes, and strengthened social and cultural imaginaries, long before the actual stationing of colonial troops.

The “Black Shame” campaign played on the convergence of different categories and formed “interlinked discriminations.” It is important to note that not only race and gender were used in the anti-occupation



Il. 11. *Le Rire*, 1920, no. 75.

posture indicates fear and hostility towards the man who had attacked her. In this case, blackness becomes a synonym of aggressiveness and rapacity, while whiteness represents innocence and vulnerability. The second — popular in the French press — inverts the latter and shows German women as greedy and sexually aggressive towards the black soldier. If the “Black Shame” campaign aimed to present Germany as a victim of aggressive and “uncivilized” French politics, the French press counter this with a stereotypical visualization of the occupation in Rhineland. In issue no. 75 of *Le Rire* (“Laughter”) from 1920 (il. 11) we find an illustration presenting a German woman as a sow. She welcomes a black soldier with flowers and tears. It is interesting to note that in this case, it is a white woman, not a black man, who is animalized and presented as greedy. In the “Black shame” campaign, working-class German women became closely related to the black “uncivilized other.” Wigger noted that: “Based on stereotypes of female and black ‘lecherous-

of the body as the raw material for her famous 1925's photomontages. By reshaping them, she gave her own response not only to the anti-feminism of the Weimar Republic but also to the racial discourses of that time. Through her art, Höch argued that nationalism was interlinked with the postcolonial imagination. The photomontages, such as *Die Kokette II*, *Entführung*, *Liebe im Busch*, or *Mischling*, all made between 1924 and 1925, resignify the image of black and white bodies strongly present in racist discourses in Post-war Germany.

In 1929 Höch worked on the series of photo-montages she called *Aus einem ethnographischen Museum*. In one of them, called *Ohne Titel* ("without a title"), the artist juxtaposed an exotic African mask with two strong, muscular black legs (il. 12). This way, she played with a stereotypical belief that Africans possess unusual strength that is unnatural for European men. The physical superiority is in this case linked to the supposed irrationality of Black men — a belief inscribed in the European notion of "exotic." In her future work, also called *Ohne Titel*, from 1930



Il. 12. Hannah Höch, *Ohne Titel*, *Aus einem ethnographischen Museum* 1929. Whitechapel Gallery.

(il. 13), the artist mixed photographs of a white women's face with the body of an ancient sculpture in order to reveal the constructive character of beauty in European culture. Höch consciously experimented with the canons of female beauty fixed in the history of Western painting. Through the representation of a white body, fragmented and folded



Il. 13. *Ohne Titel* 1930. Whitechapel Gallery.

from many elements, the artist pointed to falseness of the “femininity” figure. In *Mischling* (il. 14), Höch juxtaposed the images of a white woman and a black woman in order to unveil the mechanisms constructing the cultural difference acting on Blackness and Whiteness. On the face of the portrayed women, “European” soft lips became one with black skin, thereby criticizing the victimization of German women in



Il. 14. *Mischling* 1924. Whitechapel Gallery.

the racist anti-stationing campaign. On the other hand, the photo-montages entitled *Entführung* presented the abduction of a woman by “savages,” who were transformed into primitive tribal figures.

Höch reenacted the images circulating in the “Black Shame” propaganda campaign and reconfigured them. Since the black men turned out to be imagined figures, the alleged violence of black men towards German women must have been contested as unreal. Höch argued that

Blackness (cultural inferiority), as well as Whiteness (interlinked with women's feebleness), are constructed discursively and can be discovered in modern anthropology, as well as in medicine — both founded on racial stereotypes. With her photomontages, Höch introduced an anti-colonial voice to the German Dada movement. Although her art can be read as a stand against racism and antifeminism in the Weimar Republic, are her photomontages countervisual? The case of the German artist is in fact close to the aesthetic strategy of the *Simplicissimus* magazine. Both the satirical weekly magazine and Höch used stereotypical images of racialized and sexualized subjects in order to criticize the established social and cultural system, which was based on exclusion. Aesthetic activism was, in this light expression of their critical thought, used to destabilize visuality and its hegemony. The strategy of the resignification of the images that shape the cultural imagination creates new meanings. As the forms of counterimagination — the imaginative and creative force — merge images and notions considered separate and distant, such as the white and black body, and “exotic” cultures and Western civilization. Höch's photo-montages, like the illustrations essential to *Simplicissimus*, are marvelous examples of counterimaginative practices that result in the creation of counterintuitive links and associations, where interlinked discriminations are used to think the world without inequalities, aggression, hate, or cruelty.

Unlike Mirzoeff's countervisuality, counterimagination is founded on a critical observation of social, political, and cultural reality. It uses ready-made images and phantasms so that subversive play with visuality becomes possible. The subversiveness of counterimagination lies in a constant contestation of established meanings. If they determine the subject's place in society, the only possibility to change it lies in re-signification, in giving them new meanings. In contrast, countervisuality (the claim to the right to look) is related to anti-hegemonic activism. Although a critical attitude is important, it is only the first step to overcome visuality. As Mirzoeff suggested, the right to look not only theorizes, but also introduces a radical change in social reality. The change that comes with countervisuality does not only emerge in scientific, critical or artistic activity. Thus, it is produced not only by intellectuals or educated artists. Countervisuality can emerge in a dialogue between various excluded groups, who search to find a common language for mutual comprehension. In that sense, the history of counterimagination in the German cultural imagination can be described and analyzed, whereas countervisuality is yet to be imagined.

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Tytuł: Obrazy czarności. Dzicy, robotnicy i kształtowanie się kontrwyobraźni w Niemczech (1884-1925)

Abstrakt: Autorka analizuje obrazy kolonizowanych Afrykanów i europejskich robotników przedstawianych jako grupy zniewolone zarówno przez kapitalizm, jak i imperializm — wyobrażenia zasilające społeczną wyobraźnię w Niemczech po Konferencji Berlińskiej (1884-1885). Celem artykułu jest wprowadzenie koncepcji „kontrwyobraźni” i ukazanie, w jej świetle, w jaki sposób obrazy motłochu mogły łączyć się z wizualizacjami czarnych niewolników. Autorka dowodzi, że obie grupy były traktowane jako realne zagrożenie dla porządku społecznego w Niemczech oraz dla niemieckiej Kultury na przełomie XIX i XX wieku. Pierwsza część artykułu została poświęcona wizualnej warstwie czasopisma satyrycznego *Simplicissimus*. W drugiej części podjęto zaś namysł nad agresywną propagandą przeciwko okupacji Nadrenii przez kolonialne wojska francuskie. Autorka opisuje mechanizmy przedstawiania czarnych żołnierzy oraz wskazuje na antykolonialne reakcje na kampanię przeciw „Czarnej hańbie”.

Słowa kluczowe: kontrwizualność, wizualność, kolonializm, rasa, propaganda, rasizm

Review