

Tropenkoller

States of agitation and mood swings in colonial jurisdiction in the German colonies

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That these circumstances and the burdensome, muggy climate affect the reasoning and the feelings of Europeans who come from different zones is a fact well recognized by medical experts, which in my disciplinary procedure should have received the same consideration it has always received in the Foreign Office, without thereby creating [...] a thorough easing of state-officers' discipline. (Leist 1896, 270)¹

With these words the former vice-governor and chancellor of the German colony Cameroon, Heinrich Leist, commented on a disciplinary procedure in which he was accused of »having ordered disobedient negro women to be chastised with a whip and, secondly, to having mingled closely with so-called deposit-women« (Leist 1896, 259)—in other words, of having raped detained African women.

The corporal punishment ordered by Leist in 1893 was part of a wider trend of physical violence directed against the colonized population. Such violence was executed not exclusively, but to a large extent, by colonial officials. However, in this specific case, the German public reacted with indignation, not least because the punishment Leist had imposed resulted in a rebellion led by a group of African police soldiers married to the beaten women. Though Leist was not prosecuted, he was transferred for disciplinary reasons, and later, in 1895, dismissed from civil service

1 All translations by the author unless otherwise noted.

altogether by the higher court.² In his commentary on the trial, cited in part above, Leist first attacked flaws in disciplinary procedure. He argued that the experts consulted lacked the necessary knowledge of the situation in the colonies. Secondly, in conclusion he emphasized the personal sacrifices he had made in the colonies and apologetically added »that under the tropical sun, one is inclined to take actions that one abstains from at home« (Leist 1896, 270).

Leist's argumentation was part of a wider discussion on the effects of the climate in the colonies, in which the term *Tropenkoller* (roughly translated as colonial frenzy or madness) played a central, often legitimizing role. *Tropenkoller* and its relation to other tropical diseases was discussed by medical experts.³ It featured in literary and satirical texts and was invoked by the press when commenting colonial officials' wrongdoings. Research has tackled the different contexts in which the phenomenon of *Tropenkoller* has been discussed, contexts that tended to foster and shape one another. In this way we have learned much about the extent to which *Tropenkoller* was used as a form of apology for violence as well as about the gender and sexual implications of *Tropenkoller*—for example its close links to concepts of masculinity and the ways in which it was associated with both perversion and sexual relations between the colonizers and the colonized (Schwarz 2002; Besser 2003; Besser 2004; Besser 2013; Bischoff 2013; Maß 2013).

This article draws upon and extends this research, analyzing the functions of *Tropenkoller* within a wider discussion on colonial jurisdiction and associated questions of how the colonial state was to function and

2 Discontent with their wages was a further motivation for the rebellion. The police soldiers were ex-slaves who had been purchased by the German government in the West African kingdom of Dahomey and had been obliged to work off their purchase price (see Rüger 1960). On the scandal surrounding Leist, see also Walz (1981, 59–75).

3 For the colonial genesis and racist implications of the concept »tropical diseases,« which uses a geographical marker to differentiate a complex of disorders from other illnesses that remain geographically unmarked, see Gerlach and Hornscheidt (2010).

how colonial law was to be administered. In seeking to complexify the understanding of Tropenkoller as an apologetic concept that served to downplay violence in the colonies, I am predominantly interested in the problem that the actions of certain colonial officials—actions linked to Tropenkoller—posed for the colonial power apparatus. Consequently, medical discussions on different causes for Tropenkoller remain as secondary to my argument as discussions on the relation between Tropenkoller as used colloquially and diagnoses of tropical neurasthenia or of aberrations as a result of malaria, which, in contrast to Tropenkoller, were at the time perceived as medically sound.⁴ My analysis includes the discussion on different forms of states of agitation, even if the term Tropenkoller was not used in the particular situation and the coeval medical literature referred to malaria or tropical neurasthenia rather than Tropenkoller.

The problems Tropenkoller caused for colonial authorities had much to do with its close connection to emotionality. Examining how Tropenkoller was situated within the colonial legal and political order thus also aids the systematic exploration of the role allotted to the emotions connected with Tropenkoller in colonial jurisdiction. My analysis is centered on a discussion of the causes and legitimacy of emotions such as anger and feelings of mental overload, the expression of these emotions as well as their respective characterizations and valuations, and, finally, the role attributed to these emotions in relation to law and the exercise of colonial jurisdiction. On this basis, I seek to demonstrate why colonial authorities perceived these emotions—or more importantly the uninhibited expression of these emotions—as a danger to jurisdiction. My analysis thus contributes

4 In the context of a general discourse on neurasthenia as a nerve related condition, tropical neurasthenia was constructed as a weakness of the nerves that occurred almost inevitably when Europeans stayed in the tropics for a longer period of time, a weakness that often lead to insanity (Besser 2013, 68). Besser interprets the wide conviction that tropical neurasthenia was medical truth as an effect of the ambivalence of Tropenkoller. He argues that the emergence of the frowned-upon term Tropenkoller and its exclusion from medical knowledge helped to substantiate tropical neurasthenia (Besser 2013, 65).

to research on Tropenkoller as a concept in colonial discourse as well as to the history of emotions, more specific the relation between law and emotions. It seeks to demonstrate how emotionality was constructed as the opposite of reason and rational action in a specific historical situation.

To explain my usage of the term »law« and the background of the debates on Tropenkoller, I shall first sketch the legal situation in the colonies. From the mid-1880s, the German Empire had claimed protective sovereignty (*Schutzherrschaft*) over different territories in Africa and Asia and in so doing entered the circle of European colonial powers. At first, the German government modelled their colonial administrations after the British governance of India—favoring to transfer political and administrative authority to trade organizations. Yet as time passed, the Germans began building up a state administration in the colonies that was also increasingly responsible for jurisdiction over the colonized population. Whereas in 1886 the Law Concerning Legal Relations in the German Colonial Protectorates (*Gesetz betreffend die Rechtsverhältnisse der deutschen Schutzgebiete*) introduced German law for Europeans living in the colonies, no such law was put into effect for the colonies' indigenous populations until the end of German rule.⁵ After the turn of the century, the colonial administration in Berlin tried to tie colonial penal jurisdiction more closely to the German criminal code and even initiated the drafting of a colonial criminal code. But they did not succeed in their attempts (Schaper 2012, 138–40). Thus, in colonial criminal jurisdiction, administrative officials had great leeway. They often imposed severe sentences—particularly in the form of forced labor in connection with corporal punishment—which were justified by racist arguments. Officials had to decide cases that in German law were considered civil law cases on the

5 Riebow and Zimmermann (1892, no. 15). The Law Concerning Consular Jurisdiction (*Gesetz über die Konsulargerichtsbarkeit*) from 1879 provided German consuls with jurisdiction over Germans abroad under certain conditions. The law concerning legal relations in the protectorates extended the regulations for consular jurisdiction to the colonies, stating they should be maintained for all Europeans. Thus German civil law, criminal law, procedural law, and the constitution of the courts were also to be applied to the colonies as far as they were relevant for consular jurisdiction.

basis of local laws—however in doing so they were admonished not to apply uncivilized legal practices. Therefore, the legal basis on which officials were forced to base their decisions was never more than vaguely defined.

In addition, jurisprudence often merged into administrative decisions. Officials themselves did not always have a clear understanding of whether their decisions were to be made in their role as an administrative official or in their role as a judge, as they assumed both offices in one person (Schaper 2012, 136). In the inner territories of the colonies, which had rarely been developed by the colonial administration, outposts were often manned by military personnel without legal training (Hausen 1970, 97, 124).

Thus law as a normative structure bound to formalized procedures and its enforcement with the help of government coercion is less important for my analysis. Similarly, the instances of conflict resolution and punishment that form the background of this discussion seldom resembled classical conceptions of formalized court procedures. Rather, drawing on approaches from the sociology of law, I refer to law as the product of those individuals who were occupied with enacting legal regulations and exercising jurisdiction, as well as the sum of all effects these actions produced (Rehbinder 2000, no. 43). Law is therefore a changing, culturally-specific, manmade construction that develops in relation to social power structures and interests. In my analysis, law is relevant above all as a specific institutional practice and its importance is in relation to its ascribed authority. From the perspective of the colonial power, this authority was based on institutional preconditions and on its execution by people commissioned by the state. Under the term court decision I therefore include all arbitrations presided over and punitive measures commanded by colonial officials in the name of the law.

In the following article, I will first trace the emergence of the term Tropenkoller and the discussion of its possible causes in order to then examine how the relationship between Tropenkoller and emotions was conceptualized. Subsequently, I will examine the extent to which associations with emotions or uncontrolled expressions of emotion made Tropenkoller a problem for the conception of colonial rule. I will demonstrate that through Tropenkoller, individual misconduct was perceived to

coincide with the constitution of the colonial state. Finally, I will analyze the measures proposed by colonial authorities to eliminate Tropenkoller from colonial jurisdiction and, in doing so will argue that these measures constituted a form of institutional tropical hygiene.

The emergence of Tropenkoller

The discussion on the effects of the climate in the colonies on Europeans came to gain new meaning in the context of various colonial scandals that occupied the German public between the mid-1880s and the mid-1900s. The scandals concerned acts of violence committed by individual colonial officials. In the mid-1890s, in the context of these scandals, the term Tropenkoller emerged (Besser 2013, 49). The term took up older notions that a foreign environment and climate could influence both the body and the psyche (Frank 2006, 173), and as a disarray of mind and emotions, the idea of Tropenkoller served as a justification for excessive violence committed under its alleged influence.

Leist's case was but the first of many similar scandals that were to plague German authorities and that were widely discussed, both in the German public and in the Reichstag.⁶ Within these debates, Tropenkoller remained an unspecific concept characterized primarily by states of agitation caused by »hygienically harmful moments, which are active in the tropics« (Werner 1920, 689). Medical literature contributed to this discussion with descriptions of possible causes and symptoms as well as with general reflections on the effect of tropical climates on Europeans.⁷ The classification of Tropenkoller as a disease was contested from the term's

6 On colonial scandals, see Bösch (2011, 142–46); on scandals as an object of an entangled history of colony and metropole, see Habermas (2013).

7 Fears that Europeans in the tropics degenerated culturally and socially and medical reflections on the effects of tropical climates on the nerves were not unique to the German context. Similar concepts such as »going native« and »soudanite« existed in Great Britain and France as well. For a comparison of British and German discourses, see Bischoff (2010, 63); on the different medical concepts of nervous conditions in the tropics, see Neill (2012, 67–68).

conception, with most medical experts remaining skeptical on the question (Brero 1905, 211; Mense 1902, 22–23; Besser 2004, 303). They mostly understood Tropenkoller—if in a given case it did have medical dimension after all—as a colloquial term for the state of agitation that occurred as a consequence of neurasthenic illness (tropical neurasthenia) or as a symptom of another disease such as malaria (Plehn 1906, 250–51; Scheube 1900, 649–50).

In those scandals in which colonial officials or members of the *Schutztruppe* (colonial military) had perpetrated violence in connection with trials or punishment, discussions centered on the extent to which the deed was connected with the perpetrator's mental state in the climatically and socially unique situation. This was for example the case with the last scandal discussed in reference to Tropenkoller during this time. It centered around the actions of Prince Prosper von Arenberg, lieutenant of the *Schutztruppe*. Arenberg had tortured a so-called *Mischling* (a descendant of a white and a non-white parent) and, on the basis of an alleged confession, had him brutally murdered. In his retrial at a military court in 1904, the main focus of the investigation was Arenberg's mental state—most notably the possibility of medical side effects caused by malaria and his consumption of alcohol in connection with the climate—both factors which were also often discussed as possible causes of Tropenkoller. Arenberg was ultimately discharged on the basis of insanity and referred to a psychiatric hospital as a patient with a curable mental illness. The question of the extent to which Tropenkoller eroded sanity, diminishing accountability, added a juridical dimension to the discussion on Tropenkoller. Most medical experts negated the question. However in cases of extreme acts of violence perpetrated under the influence of tropical neurasthenia or malaria, which in their perspective had physical or nerve-related causes, they referred the question of juridical consequences to legal experts.⁸

8 Brero (1905, 211); Alsberg (1913). However, Plehn argued that penalties should be slighter for deeds committed under circumstances related to what was known as *Tropenkoller* (Plehn 1906, 251).

A second, less medical and more socio-emotional explanation attributed the occurrence of Tropenkoller not to climactic conditions, but to unsuitability for ruling in connection with the specific situation in the colonial territory. Lack of social controls and an inheritable predisposition towards power abuse were seen as the main causes. »So came the era of Tropenkoller. What this newly-invented word sought to defend and disguise were the bad manners made to cower back home, only to erupt unfettered outside in freedom« (Buchner 1914, 338). With these words the former imperial commissioner (*Reichskommissar*) in Cameroon, Max Buchner, articulated his attitude towards the rebellion caused by Leist in Cameroon. Similarly, a prominent literary interpretation of Tropenkoller, Frieda von Bülow's novel of the same name, dealt with the motif that the position of ruler overstrained certain individuals (Bülow 1905, 64). Bülow distinguished between those who were not used to and not suited for domination (Bülow 1905, 64), because they became overpowered by their plenitude of power, and those who suffered from the climate's influence on their nerves. In her novel, two protagonists embodied these different causes of Tropenkoller.⁹

The neologism Tropenkoller and the discussion on states of agitation occurred in different areas of German Imperial society. They are significant as an indicator that individuals' (illegitimate) outbursts of violence against the colonized population were common and perceived as a problem in the metropole. One example of critique on the apologetic function of Tropenkoller is a poem from the popular satirical magazine *Simplicissimus*. The poem commented on a scandal concerning bribery revolving around clothing supplied to the Schutztruppe in German South-West Africa. The poem asserts that the »smack of the hippopotamus-hide whip« is always dismissed as an isolated case and thus ignored. It also referenced Tropenkoller directly:

9 On the motif of personal suitability for ruling as a character trait, see also Besser (2004, 302, 305).

It's so very hot in Africa—
 Even the eagle of Hohenzoller
 Barely cried as he should his first »Hurra«
 Before starting to tropenkoller. (Steiger 1906)

Tropenkoller as a state of emotion and agitation

The precise ways in which excessive violence—especially in the context of jurisdiction—was perceived, classified, and problematized, sheds light on the self-conception of the German colonial power. Within this self-conception, I argue, the ways in which emotions were addressed played a central role. In the following, I will examine the role ascribed to emotions in the emergence of Tropenkoller and its consequences. In a second step, I will show the extent to which Tropenkoller's close connection to emotions made the condition problematic for colonial jurisdiction and the concept of colonial rule it was based upon.

Tropenkoller was connected to emotions in various ways. Feelings of overexertion and loneliness, on the one hand, and feelings of superiority, a plenitude of power, and a certain lust for violence, on the other hand, were seen as causes for the states of agitation typical of Tropenkoller. The symptoms listed in medical literature include emotional phenomena such as mood swings, irritation, an increased propensity for violence, and a heightened sex drive (Tropenkoller 1908; Scheube 1900, 649).¹⁰ Extreme emotionality was thus a central element of Tropenkoller. Two aspects of its connection to emotions in particular were problematized:

First, Tropenkoller was at the time perceived as an (at least pseudo-)pathological state because it directly affected the power of judgment. The state of excitement was perceived to have the consequence of »inconsiderate actions« (Scheube 1900, 649–50; see also Werner 1920, 689) affected by emotions overtaking rational behavior.¹¹

10 For an analysis of medical literature, see also Bischoff (2013, 121).

11 Recent studies on emotions have challenged the binary juxtaposition of emotions and the rational that underlies this notion. They emphasize that

This loss of rationality also included a gender dimension: In German Imperial society, emotionality was strongly associated with femininity. That is not to say that men were not allowed or supposed to have feelings. On the contrary, certain feelings, such as courage, anger, and aggressiveness, were connoted as masculine (Newmark 2010, 51).¹² However it was regarded as particularly unmanly to express emotions in an uncontrolled manner or to be dominated by one's own feelings. In this view, men had strong feelings, but also possessed the ability to control them (Newark 2010, 49–52). Women—constructed as the irrational Other of the male subject—were at the mercy of their emotions and dominated by their emotionality (Hausen 1976, 385; Weickmann 1997, 94; Mosse 1996, 39, 94). With regard to the relation of masculinity and emotions, it is interesting that the discussion of Tropenkoller or nerve-related states of agitation in the tropics identified and pathologized strong states of emotions and the actions they induced in men. Climatic and social conditions in the colonies were thought to produce circumstances that intensified nervousness and irritability. Features assigned to the tropical climate and surroundings included heat and sun exposure (which strained the nerves and blood, especially when it decreased the quality or amount of sleep), strong sensual impressions, or the contraction of tropical diseases like malaria, which physically inhibited the reasoning of the brain (Kohlstock 1905, 3; Nocht 1908, 69; Plehn 1906, 250–51). Among the psychological consequences of the situation in the colonies ranked frustration due to the colonized population's behavior, stress caused by responsibilities, and an eclipse of education and morals due to the lack of social controls (Schütze 1904, 208; Mense 1902, 23; Nocht 1908, 69).

emotions are not indeed the opposite of the rational, but have a cognitive dimension (Bandes and Blumenthal 2012, 164).

- 12 In regard to the historical relationship between masculinity and emotions, Newmark has convincingly pointed out that there was often a tension between images of male intensity of emotions and of male lack of emotions. Simplified narratives of phases of emotive and emotionless masculinity should be made more complex and hegemonic concepts in particular should be questioned in reference to their social reach (Borutta and Verheyen 2010, 21–22).

These experiences in and influences of the colonies were thought to make individuals more prone to feelings in general—to joy and gloom (Scheube 1900, 650), to megalomania and disputatiousness (Kohlstock 1905, 3–4), and countless other affects of the mind (Rasch 1898, 748).

At the same time, Tropenkoller was primarily perceived as a danger to men—as a condition in which masculinity was lost or had already been lost (Bischoff 2013, 123). Admittedly, Tropenkoller resulted in the expression of emotions most commonly associated with masculinity—including anger and lust—and the expression of emotions through aggression, violence, and sexual actions were also perceived and constructed as masculine (Borutta and Verheyen 2010; Newmark 2010, 51). Nevertheless, the emotions that accompanied Tropenkoller were equally perceived as the cause and the expression of a loss of masculinity. Mostly, the (uncontrolled) expression of emotions was pathologized in the discussion on Tropenkoller and nervous illnesses in the tropics. Men were no longer capable of controlling their tears (Rasch 1898, 248), they lost command of themselves (Kohlstock 1905, 55), and often got carried away, acting inconsiderately against their own will, and without the cerebral cortex being able to intervene and inhibit violent actions (Schütze 1904, 208; Nocht 1908, 69; Rasch 1898, 772; Plehn 1906, 250–51).

The second aspect through which Tropenkoller was problematized as an emotional state of mind is also closely connected to the conception of rationality and masculinity: its eruptive and excessive character. Tropenkoller was conceptualized as an excess of emotion and violence that exceeded what was considered to be an even and controlled temper.¹³ Tropenkoller manifested itself above all in impulsive reactions. Impulsiveness was seen as cause and symptom at the same time, as can be seen in the advice given by medical experts on adequate behavior in the tropics.

Measures meant to prevent so-called tropical diseases while also reducing the effect of the tropical climate on Europeans living in the tropics were classified as tropical hygiene (Nocht 1920, 726). Rules of conduct dictated

13 The medical expert B. Scheube wrote of »explosions« (Scheube 1900, 649).

by tropical hygiene ranged from medical prophylaxis (e.g. the intake of quinine to prevent malaria) to dietary advice, to recommendations on how to best organize one's day in accordance with the climate.¹⁴ In addition to proper equipment, tropical hygiene also involved self-discipline and behavioral adjustments based on the surroundings (Frank 2006, 177). Tropical hygiene was seen as both an instrument to confront real and imagined health risks in the colonies as well as a means of evading the influences of the surroundings. Apart from keeping the body healthy, the rigid regiment of behavioral rules was also meant to preserve a balanced state of mind—central to which was the demand for moderate behavior. »In the tropics one must neither starve nor feast« (Nocht 1908, 71), as medical expert Bernhard Nocht formulated the demand for moderation in diet. Similarly, moderation was suggested for intake of fluids, consumption of alcohol, length of sleep, as well as sexual relations (Kohlstock 1905, 76, 78, 95, 229; Nocht 1908, 71, 75).

Tropenkoller as a danger to colonial self-conception and state rule

Tropical hygiene in a broader sense was also always meant to secure the self-control of individuals exposed to alien climate conditions. Johannes Fabian understands measures of tropical hygiene in this sense as techniques of self-preservation. They were meant to stabilize the male subject in the colonial surroundings through a corset of behavioral regulations and thus save them from adapting to the life of the colonized and in this »*Verkafferung*« (going native) lose their masculinity (Fabian 2001, 87–90).¹⁵ Self-control was seen as a necessary precondition for colonization: »Neurasthenics are bad colonizers« (Kohlstock 1905, 264), Paul Kohlstock asserted in his advice book for the tropics.

The irrationality and impulsivity associated with Tropenkoller strongly contradicted the self-image of the German colonial power. Rationality

14 See e.g. the respective passages in Nocht (1908) and Kohlstock (1905).

15 On »*Verkafferung*«, see Axster (2005).

was a central element of the German utopia of rule.¹⁶ It was understood both as the controlled and reason-dominated behavior of those subjects who embodied colonial power and, in a broader sense, a colonial state apparatus' manner of functioning, characterized by ordered procedures. Importantly, rationality was used to justify the claim to colonial power, which was based on its opposition to the alleged arbitrariness and despotism of traditional rulers and to a legal order that colonial authorities perceived to be based on superstition and brutality (Schaper 2012, 128, 272–73).

In this respect, the German ideal of masculinity and the conception of law and rule were also constructed in opposition to what was seen as the emotional culture of the colonized population. Colonial discourse meant to justify colonial conquest included motifs of non-Europeans' stronger and less controlled emotionality, which went hand in hand with feminization and used both racist and evolutionist concepts to explain this difference (Gilman 1985, 229–31; Sinha 1995; Pernau 2011, 258–59; Maß 2013, 94). Colonial powers ascribed to their subjects a wildness characterized by lack of restraint and closeness to raw origins in harmony with nature (Schaper 2010).¹⁷ In regard to their emotions, they were also seen as uncultivated and dominated by sexuality, revenge, and fear, and irrationally loyal witnesses dominated their legal order (Kohler 1898, 161; Schaper 2012, 272–73, 342).¹⁸

Through the concept of Tropenkoller, the climatic and social conditions of colonial space were blamed for the emotionally-charged actions of colonial officials. At the same time, Tropenkoller, as a consequence of

16 I use the term utopia of rule (*Herrschaftsutopie*) in reference to Trutz von Trotha's understanding of the ideal of insitutionalizing state power in the colonies (Trotha 1994, 12–15). For the creation of a blueprint for the self-controlled, rational colonial master, see also Maß (2013).

17 On the role of emotions in the British and French discourse on civility, see Pernau (2011).

18 On the link of emotions and the body in the context of British and French race theory, see Pernau (2011, 251–54).

the influences of colonial space and colonial officials' close, often sexual, relations with the colonized population, was interpreted as a regression to an uncultivated state of emotions. The officials showed a dangerous emotional structure which resembled that of the »savages.« The medical and advice literature used similar words to describe the behavior of the colonized population and of men affected by Tropenkoller: cruel, temperamental, and inconsiderate (Kohlstock 1905, 108). While this behavior was seen as consistent with the evolutionary state or race of the colonized population, for colonizers, it was unsuitable and stood in opposition to the ideal of a representative of state jurisdiction who behaved both objectively and impersonally.

Researchers have pointed out that the people who were allegedly afflicted by Tropenkoller were simply exercising, on an individual basis, violence that—structurally—was an essential element of the process of colonization (Schwarz 2002, 90). The concept of Tropenkoller thus served above all as a rhetorical figure that disguised the violence inherent in colonial rule by conceptualizing acts of violence as the deviant behavior of pathologized individuals under the influence of the colonial space (Bischoff 2013, 119). In general, I agree with this interpretation of structural violence and the masking thereof via individualized blame. However, I believe that two modifications to this hypothesis are necessary: First, Tropenkoller was not only used as an apologetic instrument, but from the beginning was exposed as an ostensive phenomenon in order to criticize this rhetorical strategy—as in the poem quoted above (see also Rasch 1898, 752; Besser 2013, 53).

Second, in dealing with cases of Tropenkoller, colonial authorities did not take up the concept as a justification. On the contrary, as I will show in the following, Tropenkoller was a latent threat to their institutional logic, which they sought to retain through various measures. Although violence against the colonized population was an everyday phenomenon, acts of excessive violence that reached a broader national or international audience had the potential of becoming a political problem. Likewise, Tropenkoller endangered the colonial position of power, as the loss of self-control and the institutional lability evident in cases of Tropenkoller

undermined the authority of colonial officials. Rampant violence, for example, could be read as weakness: »To swat blindly only makes the white man more laughable in the eyes of the negro« (Stetten 1898, 109; see also Schütze 1904, 208), a reminder for controlled beatings read. Dealings with Tropenkoller can thus also illustrate a tension between everyday structural violence and the scandalization of individual excesses. In light of the everyday execution of violence against the colonized population, the violence itself was not particularly problematic. What posed a problem was that men—representatives of the colonial state and legal order no less—were overpowered by their emotions and consequently acted disproportionately violent in relation to the occasion.¹⁹ Beyond its apologetic structure, Tropenkoller remained a concept used to differentiate legitimate from illegitimate violence (see Besser 2004, 302). As a manifestation of excessive violence, Tropenkoller had no place in the bureaucratic utopia of rule (Trotha 1995, 531). It unsettled the colonizers' self-image as controlled and rational rulers—and in doing so, pathologized emotionality and lack of self-control, which proved detrimental to the authority possessed by colonial officials.

From the perspective of the colonizers, colonial officials represented or even embodied for the colonized population not only the colonial state but also its legal order (Schaper 2012, 134). Hence, the central authorities imparted institutional significance to individual cases of *Tropenkoller*. If state representatives took actions that were characterized by Tropenkoller, they were not only dominated by their emotions rather than rational considerations, but they also often neglected all existing bureaucratic-legal standards. They undermined the understanding of rule as oriented towards an ideal of the rational, legitimate state: For in spite of a calculated legal insecurity for the colonized population and in spite of structural leeway for the officials acting as judges, surprisingly attempts were made in the colonial administration to bind officials' actions closer to existing legal regulations.²⁰ These attempts originated mostly from Berlin.

19 Kohlstock for example demanded that a European should not chastise in a fit of violent temper (*Jähzorn*) (Kohlstock 1905, 108).

20 On the following, see Schaper (2012, 144–48).

Admittedly, stipulations such as extensive duties to report to Berlin, regulated documentation of legal decisions and the execution of punishments, as well as repeated corrections to the lists of punishments handed to the colonial administration rarely changed the exercise of rule in the colonies. Indeed, they were not meant to restrict independent, situational opportunities for officials to act on the spot, but were primarily directed at creating a semblance of lawful behavior. And yet, on a formal level, the degree to which bureaucratic procedures and the means of their documentation were legally defined stood in latent contradiction to officials' actual arbitrary and autonomous decision-making in colonial jurisdiction.

Tropenkoller not only proved that colonial officials did not always demonstrate rationality and discipline, it also called attention to the lability of the colonial state. Tropenkoller—I argue—was seen as a coming together of two things. Personal tropical hygiene measures failed to help state representatives to maintain self-control and the colonial state lacked procedural standards. An individual, pathologized emotionality coincided with the institutional weaknesses of the colonial state and a colonial jurisdiction that was only rarely regulated. Together, they made possible acts of excessive violence committed by officials and thus proved that the state they sought to represent was only imagined to be a rational-legal state.²¹

Institutional reactions to Tropenkoller

The colonial administration reacted to the problem of excessive violence in colonial jurisdiction in two ways. First, as a consequence of the scandals concerning Leist and Wehlan, it enacted a decree that regulated criminal jurisdiction in Cameroon, Togo, and German East Africa.²² In creating a

21 On questions of the colonial state's »strength« or »weakness,« in particular with regards to state violence, see Pesek (2006, 117, 138); Herbst (2000, 91); Lawrance, Osborn, and Roberts (2006).

22 *Verfügung des Reichskanzlers wegen Ausübung der Strafgerichtsbarkeit und der Disziplinargewalt gegenüber den Eingeborenen in den deutschen Schutzgebieten von Ostafrika, Kamerun und Togo*, April 22, 1896, in Ruppel (1912, no. 401).

rudimentary legal framework, criminal prosecution of colonial officials in future cases became theoretically possible. Aside from these rather reactive measures, preventive strategies were also designed to exclude Tropenkoller from the colonial bureaucracy in general and from the colonial court system in particular.

One preventive strategy addressed the individual preconditions of Tropenkoller, concentrating on the suitability of officials who suffered from Tropenkoller for certain tasks in the colonies. Instead of focusing on the ineptitudes of those individuals already in office, the administration instead pinpointed shortcomings in the selection process (Schwarz 2002, 89). In this way, the extensive debate about the type of individual fit for office in the tropics and the criteria for the selection of future officials aimed at excluding people who were not sufficiently fit for certain position from the outset. Individuals who had a predisposition for excess and nervousness, who could not control their emotional expressions, and would turn aggressive and violent once »the straitjacket of culture« (Mense 1902, 23) was loosened were to be rejected (Nocht 1908, 85). They were to remain in social and climatic surroundings that would prevent this penchant from emerging. Tropenkoller was not primarily seen as a specific pathological emotional condition. Rather conditions in the colonies impeded those mechanisms—be they social, moral, or physical—that in more »civilized« and temperate areas made men refrain from inconsiderate, irrational, brutal, and excessive reactions. A strict selection of officials in order to identify individuals with a certain disposition was meant to keep this pathologized emotionality and states of agitation out of the colonial bureaucratic and legal apparatus.

Since impulsivity and irritability were seen as the main dangers of Tropenkoller, a balanced, even-tempered character and a degree of neurasthenic stability were thought to be the central features that made one fit for the tropics. Heredity and prior incidences of certain illnesses reduced suitability for a position in the tropics (Scheube 1900, 650; Steudel 1920, 537–38).

However, even in the debate on personal fitness for the tropics, the individual and the institutional level overlapped at the juncture of the

individual official's ineptitude for ruling and the German state's perceived lack of colonial experience (Besser 2004, 307; Schwarz 2002, 87). In this perspective, the relatively young colonial power lacked the necessary routine and experience needed to prevent emotional eruptions—or at the very least channel such emotions in a manner compatible with colonial rule.

In addition, preventive strategies were ordered that were designed to impose strict controls on high-risk officials when they issued or executed court-imposed corporal punishments (Hermann 1908, 82). In addition, a decree from 1907 ruled that officials responsible for deciding criminal law cases concerning the colonized population were not permitted to execute punishments themselves.²³ This separation of jurisdiction from penal execution was meant to prevent officials from acting »rushed and under the influence of a momentary excitement« (Ruppel 1912, no. 414). In cases in which individual tropical hygiene measures were on the verge of failing, the corset of institutional constraints had to be tightened in order to prevent the individual from undermining the rational functioning of the administration and from provoking resistance from the colonized population through their own acts of violence.

The reinforcement of bureaucratic and legally regulated procedures can thus, in a figurative sense, be understood as a kind of institutional tropical hygiene. Here I use the term tropical hygiene—under which contemporaries understood behavioral rules for individuals—to explore the function such procedures had for the consolidation of colonial state power. This figurative meaning can help delineate the interface between individual actions and the structure of the colonial state, which came to the fore in instances of Tropenkoller among state representatives.

First, colonial officials' formal compliance with the rules and procedures of the colonial state was meant to be an antidote for the imagined chaos of the colonized world and the uncontrollability of the colonial order,

23 *Verfügung des Staatssekretärs des Reichskolonialamts, betreffend die Anordnung körperlicher Züchtigung als Strafmittel gegen Eingeborene der afrikanischen Schutzgebiete*, July 12, 1907, in Ruppel (1912, no. 413, II).

which had to rely on semi-autonomous colonial officials as well as on local authorities.²⁴ Similar to the self-controlling function of individual tropical hygiene, I read formal compliance as an instrument meant to tie the officials in the colonies into the bureaucratic order, to discipline them, and to minimize leeway for reckless or irrational actions.²⁵ Such rules and procedures were meant to ensure behavior was unaffected by the possible overextension, aggression or irascibility of the individual official.

Second, these behavioral rules for state representatives—like the daily routines prescribed by tropical hygiene—formed a figurative corset of adequate behavior. This was intended to convey to officials the trust being invested in their ability to govern the colony and to reassure the German and broader international public of the capability of these officials. Anthony H. M. Kirk-Green saw »confidence in performance« as central for keeping up the »white man’s bluff« (Kirk-Greene 1980, 44) within a functioning colonial administration. Compliance with these formally lawful procedures was part of this bluff.

Third, the pressure exerted by the administration in Berlin upon officials in the colonies to write reports, comply with administrative regulations, and correctly classify their legal decisions can be seen as an attempt to stage functioning statehood both internally and externally and, moreover, to function as a performative act of constructing statehood.²⁶ Similar to the function tropical hygiene had for the constitution of the male subject, the reference to law contributed to producing the colonial state in the execution of legally regulated procedures. It also served to formally

24 On the intermediary structure of the colonial order, see Trotha (1994, in particular 278).

25 Not surprisingly, officials in the colonies struggled against this bureaucratization (Zurstrassen 2008, 139).

26 With the term »performative act« I am referring to symbolic actions that in their execution create social facts and meanings, which at the same time are ascribed to, and deduced from, these actions. The meaning is thus exposed in the action itself (Wirth 2007).

legitimate the actions of its representatives and to assert colonial rule as rational and state-dictated. The various administrative requirements and the demands to comply with lawful procedures can thus be understood as a kind of tropical hygiene for the entire colonial power apparatus.

Conclusion

Unsurprisingly, the structural violence inherent in the colonial system of domination was more powerful than these strategies to counter-Tropenkoller, particularly because the latter aimed primarily at the individual impulsivity, emotionality, and lack of inhibition that most commonly resulted in excessive violence. It was not so much violence itself that was problematized in debates within the colonial administration. Violence was seen as a practice central to the daily realization of colonial rule. But the violence of state representatives—executed under the influence of excitement and emotions, and uncontrolled—posed a threat to colonial order, because it contradicted the colonial utopia of rule.

The emotionality associated with Tropenkoller was understood as a loss of rationality and control produced by the specific situation in the colonies. It resulted in reckless behavior and a loss of self-control among colonial officials, and constituted an individual as much as an institutional failure. The emotionality as well as the actual emotions and actions associated with Tropenkoller—such as anger, aggression, furor, and violence—were conceptualized as irrational and unpredictable elements. As such, they impeded the functioning of the colonial power apparatus. Interpreted as the Other of law, emotion was to be kept out of colonial jurisdiction.

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