

# “Dangerous Liaisons”: Whiteness and Private Relations between German Colonial Officials and Indigenous Women in German Togo and Their Political Consequences

## Abstract

The article addresses the topic of intimate relationships between colonial officials and indigenous women in German Togo (1884–1914), which occurred in the ideological context stimulated by Cultural Darwinism, and the issue of socio-political consequences of such relations, both in the colony and in the homeland. In its analytical part, I draw on the conceptual distinction between “whiteness” and “blackness” – understood as biological phenotypes – as well as between “whiteness” and “Whiteness” – the latter term denoting a sociocultural system in which people of white complexion are more likely to experience privilege and preferential treatment in comparison with their dark-skinned counterparts. The fact that “Whiteness” has been historically “porous” and Western imagines about Africans “flexible” – ranging from brutal racism to romanticization – presented numerous possibilities for certain individuals to “become white” by “acting White”, including the sphere of intimate relationships. In the context of the dominant Darwinian discourse – namely, the perceived threat of racial “degeneration” – the mixed marriages and their offspring became politicized in Germany, and a series of – largely ineffective – legal measures were taken to impose a stricter metropolitan control over the conduct of German colonial officials.

**Keywords:** colonialism, German Togo, racism, “Whiteness”, intimate relationships, mixed marriages

## Introduction

As I argued elsewhere (Piwowarczyk 2017), the modern colonial polity could be understood as a socio-political mechanism that shaped the colonial subject through a permanent interaction between holders of political / economic capital at one extreme of social space, and of the cultural/symbolic capital, at the other. It was accomplished by the imposition of a particular symbolic/ideological blueprint for socio-economic arrangements that consisted of positivist, national, and Christian components. Such inculcation occurred through polities' appropriation and transformation of local production, space, time, cultural expressions, and bodies - the last one having been effectuated, among other things, by means of multiple "microtechniques of the body" aiming at dissemination and infixing of certain working, hygienic and clothing habits, as well as particular physical postures and behavioral patterns (cf. Piwowarczyk 2017: 42-49). What is missing from this picture is the whole area of racialized sexuality which - as Ann L. Stoler (1995: 6-9) in her critique of Foucault's account of modern power observed - constituted an important element in the process of emergence of the modern Western Self, including the colonial frontiersman / woman.<sup>1</sup> Drawing on my previous research, I address in this article the question of intimate relationships between colonial officials and indigenous women in German Togo - which occurred in the ideological context stimulated by Cultural Darwinism - as well as the issue of practical, socio-political consequences of such relations, both in the colony and in the homeland.

## "Whiteness" vs. "Blackness" – A Conceptual Conundrum?

At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the conceptual relation between "whiteness" and "blackness" - and its practical effects experienced at multiple points of contact between the West (by which I mean the parts of the globe culturally rooted in Western Christianity) and the colonial world - were by no means straightforward. A useful analytical device to comprehend that complex relation is the distinction between "whiteness" as a phenotype, or observable corporeal

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<sup>1</sup> In Spanish America, the multilayered dynamic of "acting and being acted upon" conducted on the colonial frontier eventually produced a third value - a biological and cultural synthesis of both the colonist and the colonizer - whose political consequence was the emergence of independent Latin American states, the offspring of mixed unions and marriages having played a crucial role in this process. A similar mechanism could be also observed in the case of the modern colonies in Africa, where many descendants of the so-called "mixed marriages" became active in the post-WWII anti-colonial movement.

traits of an individual (including the fair skin complexion), on the one hand, and “Whiteness” as “the system of privilege that has historically made some people of a phenotypical white presentation more likely to experience social and economic upliftment than their non-white, or non-white enough counterparts,” on the other (Gabay 2018: 9). As such, “Whiteness,” as a set of cultural and political practices that are “usually unmarked and unnamed,” could be also conceptualized as a component of the hegemonic *doxa* – an assembly of representations that are considered “natural,” “obvious,” or “self-evident” (Bourdieu 1977: 164) – that causes some people who are phenotypically white “automatically” identify with others who are politically and culturally also classified as such, while excluding those who are culturally and/or politically marked as not belonging to this category;<sup>2</sup> one can therefore distinguish “being white” from “being White”. Being an integral part of *doxa*, the codes of Whiteness range across multiple areas of social life, including cultural stereotypes, historical memory, hygiene, fashion, monogamy, individualism, Christian religion, Western democracy, entrepreneurialism, etc. (Gabay 2018: 16 and 20).

Race as a social construct is, therefore, based on stereotypes – sets of simplified and generalized (and hence disregarding people’s individuality) representations that play part in cognition and communication, and have social consequences with regard to the allocation of individuals and groups in a particular section of social space. It is because – as parts of the dominant *doxa* and of a “vision of polity” – they “tend to function as self-fulfilling prophecies”: social representations reflect social structure which are, in turn, modeled upon those representations. Yet the existence of stereotypes as markers of social boundaries is often unperceived because, as stated above, they appear to be “natural” and “normal”, and the resistance to them is labeled as “abnormal” and/or “heterodox” (Pieterse 1992: 11f.).

Nevertheless, as “race” is also a social construct – a product and an ideological enforcer of relations of domination (Pieterse 1992: 9f.) – “Whiteness” often goes beyond the phenotype and embraces some non-white people who adopted (or intend to adopt) the *habitus* (system of embodied dispositions) structured by Western *doxas*. This is how, Gabay says, some people, or groups of people, can “become” white by acting White (2018: 14). In German Togo, and elsewhere on the colonial frontier, this category also included women who lived in semi-official relationships with colonial officials. To be sure, the ways in which the dark-skinned people adopt “White” norms of behavior have frequently been ridiculed as kitschy or grotesque by those who set these standards. German missionaries in Togo, for instance, often spoke with derision about Africans who wore European garments, and pointed to

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<sup>2</sup> Such exclusionary thinking and practice may also be directed against those who are phenotypically “white” but who fail to live up to the standards of “civilization”, “political correctness”, or indeed “racial purity” determined by “Whiteness”. This category included (and frequently still includes) i.a. Jews, Roma, Catholic Irish, Poles in the German *Kaiserreich*, or “East Europeans” in general as opposed to “West Europeans” in the EU, etc.

their lack of the necessary bodily demeanor considered appropriate for those who dress like Europeans (Piwowarczyk 2017: 608f.).<sup>3</sup>

There existed also interesting differences in how “Whiteness” was then conceptualized in Anglo-America and in Europe. In the USA and in the Caribbean, the relation toward Africans and Africa was shaped by slavery, and specifically the ubiquitous presence of black slave minority in the American colonies and – later – in the USA. In Anglo-America, the slavery was made legal in 1661, and the so-called Black Code, which defined the social status of people of African origin, in fact restricted the sexual choices of only black males and white females, thus reinforcing the slavery-based social order.<sup>4</sup> On the ideological level, these restrictions were also supported by certain myths, such as that of the “black hypersexed rapist” as well as through the idealization of the white “belle” in the American South (cf. Farnham 1995). This double myth was occasionally upheld by force in the form of lynching (sometimes coupled with castration of the victim), especially in the southern states of the USA in the period between 1884 and 1900 (Pieterse 1992: 174-176).

In Europe, by contrast, it was not slavery but colonialism that fed the imaginary concerning Africa and Africans, and the equivalent of the “black brute” of the American South was the “primitive savage” from the “impenetrable jungles of the Dark Continent.” In this context, Africans were often presented alongside apes and criminals in scientific publications and popular imaginary. “Whether we are considering the iconography or criminology, anthropology or biology, mass psychology or depth psychology of this period”, Pieterse says, “time and again the discourse converge: the profiles of savages, the primitives, blacks match those of animals, criminals, mad people, degenerates, lower class persons, crowds, and so on”. The African woman was overridingly presented as a sexualized being, and early criminologists even drew analogy between the prostitute and the Nama (“Hottentot”) woman (usually depicted in the contemporary press or books with a pronounced steatopygia) – both associated with unrestrained sexuality (Pieterse 1992: 180f.).

On the other hand, there is a European, particularly French ambiguous tradition of admiration for the African (cf. Mitchell 2020), especially strong at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries,<sup>5</sup> although Picasso, in his famous “Les demoiselles d’Avignon” (1907), still linked prostitutes with the negritude by using the motif of African masks to convey their appearance (Pieterse 1992: 183). Indeed, although

<sup>3</sup> *Allerlei vom Togoneger*, ArchSVD, Rome; Presse Togo – 45.536, p. 66.

<sup>4</sup> Persons born of a union between a black man and a white woman who remained with their mother were potentially threatening to the status quo because they could be given access to social opportunities, which, in turn, could disrupt the existing color-based social hierarchy (Pieterse 1992: 174).

<sup>5</sup> Examples are Manet’s painting *Olympia* (1863), in which the feminine and the black mystique merge; Baudelaire’s poem “À une dame créole” (1841) – an example of a classical sonnet, in which the conventions of courtly love are mixed with a rather superficial exoticism –, or Picasso’s parody of Manet’s *Olympia* (1901).

in the period under consideration here Westerners generally imagined Africa as "being out-of-time" and Africans as "savage and/or childlike" (Gabay 2018: 1), there were – rather rare – instances of what Toni Morrison terms "Africanism" – a word reminiscent of Said's (1979) "Orientalism", Ramos' (1998) "Indigenism", or Cannadine's (2002) "Ornamentalism" – namely, the phenomenon of re-defining one's Self (affected by rapid processes of modernization) by reference to the exotic African "Other" or, as Morrison put it, "a way of contemplating chaos and civilization, desire and fear, and a mechanism for testing the problems and blessings of freedom" (1992: 6). Thus, people who volunteered for service in the German colonies, including missionaries, were by and large individuals who socially belonged to the petty bourgeoisie of smaller cities and rural townships located in semi-industrialized areas (cf. Piwowarczyk 2004: 503f.). They were usually raised within a strong moral code and norms of social behavior, supported by their religious institutions and the sanction of public opinion. Moreover, apart from financial perks, the hope of social advancement, or the sense of mission, a number of those agents cultivated a romanticized image of colonial life in Africa that included the notion of untamed nature and the feelings of freedom (Natermann 2018: 76), which, in some instances, resulted in the experience of personal "rebirth" and the partial reversal of one's own, Western cognitive categories. One of a number of Europeans who gained such awareness in his contact with Africa was the German explorer Leo Frobenius (1873–1938), who made an experience of personal liberation in the "exotic" African environment by distancing himself mentally from the modern context in which he had been raised and discovering the supposed authenticity of indigenous cultures (Piwowarczyk 2017: 272f.).<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, Western attitudes toward Africa, and non-Western world in general, have often been ambivalent. This ambiguity was reflected, among other things, in the area of sexuality, in the sense that the "exotic" South or the sensual "Orient" have either been idealized and eroticized as "paradise on earth" or feared as a "dark labyrinth" (Park 2021; Conrad 2021), and associated with "wild", uncontrolled (and uncontrollable) carnal drive, promiscuity, and debauchery. To put it differently, the African "Other" have been sensualized (and sexualized), on the one hand, and declared taboo, on the other (Pieterse 1992: 172f.). Moreover, it was a dynamic process, in the sense that the imaginaries of Africans have been in a constant flux – even in the era of imperialism and Cultural Darwinism under consideration here – shifting from negative to positive, although the positive projections were limited to certain individuals or social niches. Consequently, the

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<sup>6</sup> The way in which Frobenius experienced African cultures on personal level also determined the manner in which he described them as a researcher: for him, an ideal ethnography was an exhaustive study of what is "original" and "authentic" in a culture – that is, not affected by European influences (Hahn 2002: 24) – a Rousseauian approach that went against the grain of the then dominant discourse of progress.

hegemonic “Whiteness” should also be viewed as an ongoing social process rather than “a purely ontological category linked to skin colour” (Gabay 2018: 17).

## Racial Ideology in the Colonial Practice

A component of the *doxa* prevailing at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was, therefore, the sentiment that “Whiteness” was endowed with inherent authority based on the perceived superiority of the Western industrial civilization and its material progress. Concurrently, Africans, and other dark-skinned people for that matter, were regarded as lacking full human complexity and frequently compared with children who should be “educated” (civilized) or with animals, either dogs – if they were submissive – or apes, “when colonizers were unhappy with their colonised subjects’ deeds” (Natermann 2018: 79). Such categorizations perpetuated, in general, the marginalization of the dark-skinned colonial subject, although there existed also certain “points of entry” where this cognitive barrier was being challenged – intimate liaisons having been one instance of them; as Hyam put it – “empire was inconsistent with morality” (1990: 91). Another example of such “racial turn” (cf. Arndt 2007), and the related “emotional stress” on the part of the colonizer (Natermann 2018: 82; Hyam 1990: 89f.), presented the colonial military in which, in spite of the frequent, racially motivated abuse, there also developed relatively friendly connections – camaraderie based on common experience and recognition of professionalism of African foot soldiers by white officers (Fonck 2011: 57f.; Lettow-Vorbeck 2016: 261).

The everyday practice of an absolute majority of German colonial functionaries in relation to the indigenous population of Togo and other colonies was frequently shaped by those commonsensical ideas rooted in the national discourse and in the then dominant – and deemed scientific – conceptions of Cultural Darwinism that were, in turn, combined with the positivist notion of progress understood as the closing of a technological gap between the “civilized” Europeans and the “savage” *Naturvölker*.

Indeed, as stated above, respected anthropologists, biologists, physicians, and jurists of that era wrote their works, taught, and acted on the assumption of the supposed “natural” and cultural superiority of Westerners. Thus, Ludwig Külz (1875–1938), the director of the government hospital in Anecho (Aného), in German Togo, stated bluntly: “The legitimization of our colonial policy rests precisely on the strong conviction about the innate differences among races and the superiority of white people” (Külz 1910: 76).<sup>7</sup> In his function as a government physician, Külz was even professionally involved with the task of using medical

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<sup>7</sup> “Gerade auf der Überzeugung von der Verschiedenwertigkeit der Rassen, von dem Höherstehen der weißen, baut sich im letzten Grunde die ganze Berechtigung unserer Kolonialpolitik”.

arguments, such as malaria prevention, to justify the politically desired segregation between black and white patients in the German colonies as "hygienically necessary". Similarly, the geographer and author of school books, Alfred Kirchoff (1838–1907), a member of the directorate of the German Colonial Society,<sup>8</sup> argued that peoples of the colonized territories, being "naturally unfit for life", have only one alternative left: either to become "helots" of the "civilized European nations" or to disappear (Gründer 1999: 252f.; Längin 2005: 40). In order to make people in the West realize how broad that supposed ontological gap was, apostles of Cultural Darwinism and colonial enthusiasts pointed to the so-called "human zoos" (cf. Bancel et al. 2004), where citizens of the leading colonial nations could exercise their positivist gaze and acquire practical "proofs" of their "dominant position" in the hierarchy of beings. The main attraction of those events were "living specimens" – groups of "savage" natives brought from other continents – whose task was to demonstrate certain de-contextualized elements of their "primitive" cultures, along with their "animal-like" bodies, usually against an artificial background that recreated the landscape, flora, and fauna of their lands of origin. Another purpose of those exhibits was to testify to the perceived "civilizing" and "beneficial" impact of European colonization on colonized peoples.

Still, there were few exceptions as well, including Robert Hartmann (1831–1893) and Hans Paasche (1881–1920). The first of them was a professor at the University of Berlin and the author of the concise work *Die Völker Afrikas*, published in 1879, in which he draw attention to the fact that the word "Negro" (*Neger*) "has been commonly used in an abusive way" (Hartmann 1879: 3).<sup>9</sup> Paasche, in turn, a member of the *Schutztruppe* (colonial military force) in German East Africa (today Tanzania, Burundi, and Rwanda), wrote a remarkable book about his experiences from the colony that was published in 1912. It is a fictional travelogue composed from the perspective of an African man who travels through the German empire as an emissary of his king. In the book, titled "The Exploratory Journey of the African Lukanga Mukara into the Innermost Germany",<sup>10</sup> a certain Lukanga Mukara reports to the king about his voyage of discovery to Germany, an "undeveloped country". In this ironic account, Paasche simply turns the usual colonial scheme around: the Germans are now "natives" whose culture is presented from a sarcastic point of view. Already in Lukanga Mukara's first letter from Berlin, the king is instructed not to be surprised by the "whole nonsense" that "the natives of this country take for granted." Subsequently, the African "explorer" has

<sup>8</sup> The German Colonial Society (*Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft – DKG*) was an organization established on 19 December 1887 with the purpose of promoting German colonialism. It was disbanded in 1936. The Society was headquartered in Berlin and published *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung* (1884–1922).

<sup>9</sup> „Mehr und mehr lernte ich einsehen, dass die Bezeichnung Neger...sehr häufig in missbräuchliche Anwendung gezogen werde“.

<sup>10</sup> Die Forschungsreise des Afrikaners Lukanga Mukara ins innerste Deutschland, 2020 [1920].



many impressive things to report. He writes, for example, about corsets that turn women into “upright walking turtles”, and describes the way Germans greet each other by raising their hats, which seems quite amusing to him. Mukara finds European schools particularly strange: these are, he continues, “houses where a man strikes the children until they can read and count properly” (Paasche 2020: 24, 28f., 35f.).

Furthermore, according to the nineteenth-century cognitive principles of “vision and division,” humanity was not only divided into two opposing categories “white men” vs. “men of color” but also arranged into a neat racial hierarchy. This had practical consequences on the colonial frontier. American Protestant missionaries who worked in the Philippines in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for instance, produced their classifications of indigenous peoples of the archipelago according to these principles. Thus, they regarded the dark-skinned “Negritos”<sup>11</sup> as “near in life and habit to the monkeys,” the Igorots as “stolid, filthy [...] savages”, and the Tagalogs as “the most highly cultured and most Spanishized” (Clymer 1986: 66ff.). The logic behind those classification was that the closer a native group was to the Western observer’s culture – or even spatially closer to the local center of colonial power – the more favorably it was valued and described.

The established “black-white” cognitive categories and hierarchies, communicated through popular press, academic lectures, journals, and exhibits (including “human zoos”), translated into ideologies that legitimized a whole range of everyday practices in the colonies, extending from the “rigorous but fair” paternalism to an outright ethnocide. The paternalistic attitude was itself a function of the evolutionist conviction that the dark-skinned, “savage” peoples of the world were still at the stage of “childhood” in the evolutionary process of humanization. As such, they were supposedly characterized by certain infantile personality deficits that could be, nonetheless, corrected by the Western-style education and disciplinary measures aimed at developing “wild man’s” natural capacities (cf. Ramos 1998: 15-24; Pieterse 1992: 173). Friedrich Hay, a medical doctor active in the Gold Coast (today Ghana) and in Cameroon, in his article concerning “personality of West African Negroes” (published in 1907), provided the following list of what he viewed as psychological traits characteristic of peoples inhabiting those parts of Africa: “careless laziness, raw sensuality, vanity, gaudiness, impulsiveness, sometimes even cruelty, but also good humor and animal-like loyalty and – to some extent – submissiveness as well as inclination to performance, noise and music (if the latter can be called that)”. Moreover, Hay continued:

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<sup>11</sup> The term Negrito refers to several diverse ethnic groups who inhabit isolated parts of Southern and Southeast Asia and the Andaman Islands. They form the oldest stratum of the population of those parts of the Asian continent, but they were displaced and largely absorbed into the more recent Austronesian peoples. In recent decades, the appropriateness of using the racially tinged designation “Negrito” has been challenged.



(Africans from the Gold Coast and Cameroon) have no spiritual needs and a genuine thirst for knowledge is unknown to them. As long as they have enough to eat and a pipe full of tobacco, they are completely satisfied. [...] However, in spite of all psychological deficiencies, they have certain intellectual capacities that – given a proper guidance – can produce remarkable effects. For instance, music and art, although primitive according to our standards, are not unfamiliar to them (Gründer 1999: 251f.).<sup>12</sup>

The paternalism of Hay was an example of a rather benign form of the nineteenth-century Cultural Darwinism in practice. The other extreme was represented by the conceptions of those who refused to see any human qualities in Africans, and whose programs even envisioned their physical extermination. In 1889, for instance, Julius Scharlach (1842–1908), a lawyer and colonial entrepreneur, wrote the following in *Hamburger Nachrichten*:

As the history of all colonies clearly demonstrates, to colonize does not mean to civilize natives. On the contrary, it means to make them step aside, with the ultimate purpose of their extermination. A savage is unable to accept civilization, or rather he accepts only its dark side; and civilization destroys without mercy everything that opposes it or that is too weak (Adja 2009: 157).<sup>13</sup>

To summarize, the sharp differentiation between the “white” and the “dark-skinned” was rooted in the assumption that races, classes, as well as gender hierarchies were products of a long evolutionary process whose mechanism remained beyond human influence; this in turn implied compliance with “facts of nature” on individual and social levels (El-Tayeb 2003: 86f.). As Hans Ziemann (1865–1939), a doctor for tropical medicine, put it: “Our historical mission in Africa is to rule not over black brothers but over black subjects” (Ziemann 1939: 27; Gründer 1999: 284).

<sup>12</sup> “Sorglose Trägheit, rohe Sinnlichkeit, Eitelkeit, Prunkliebe, Leidenschaftlichkeit, Rücksichtslosigkeit, ja Grausamkeit; daneben auch Gutmütigkeit und tierische Anhänglichkeit und teilweise Unterwürfigkeit; Liebe zum Lärm, zur Musik – soweit sie diesen Namen verdient – und Spiel. Geistige Bedürfnisse hat der Neger nicht, Wissensdurst ist ihm fremd, hat er hinreichend zu essen und eine Pfeife Tabak, dann fehlt ihm nichts mehr [...] Aber trotz dem Fehlen der geistigen Bedürfnisse schlummern in ihnen die geistigen Fähigkeiten und unter zweckmäßiger Leitung können sie ganz erkleckliches leisten“.

<sup>13</sup> “Comme le montre l’histoire de toutes les colonies, coloniser ne veut pas dire civiliser les indigènes, mais au contraire, les faire reculer, pour enfin les exterminer. Le sauvage ne supporte pas la civilisation; il n’est réceptif qu’à ces mauvais côtés. Elle détruit sans pitié celui que résiste ou celui que est faible [...]. Cette réalité, certes triste en soi, doit être reconnue comme une nécessité historique démontrée. [...] Ce qui est décisive, c’est l’appartenance raciale. Par sa nature, le nègre est un esclave, comme l’Européen est, par sa nature, un homme libre”.

## People of Mixed Ancestry in Togo and in the German Public Debate before WWI

However, there existed multiple points of contact between white colonizers and dark-skinned colonized that presented a challenge to the clear-cut racial categories. One of them was sexuality – the area of cultural practice that was viewed as essential for the nineteenth-century Western distinction between the “internal” (or domestic) order and the “external” chaos of nature. Even before the establishment of the direct colonial rule on what was then known as the “Slave Coast”,<sup>14</sup> not a few European traders active in that part of Africa maintained relationships with local women that were, nonetheless, regulated by indigenous customary laws, including the obligation to provide for the offspring under the penalty of losing their African trading partners and protectors. The consolidation of the colonial polities in the course of the 1890s, however, altered radically the interracial relations that now began to be increasingly shaped by the factor of force: cases of rape multiplied and obligations towards the begotten children were seldom (if ever) fulfilled, as they were not regulated by the legislation of the colonial state. “The sums paid by particular men involved,” August Wilhelm Schreiber from the North German Mission wrote in this regard, “were usually very low or they were not paid at all” (Sebald 1988: 266f.).<sup>15</sup>

Not surprisingly perhaps, such practices were indirectly legitimized by the nineteenth-century discourse on sexuality: the white man – deemed “rational”, “moral”, and “constrained” – was “naturally” destined to establish the “civilized” social order based on clear-cut, “black and white”, distinctions. By contrast, the dark-skinned woman was imputed with purely “natural instincts” and with the lack of morality, including sexual profligacy. An anonymous German Catholic missionary, for instance, while praising, “in general”, the diligence and industriousness of native women from the area of Porto Seguro, regarded them at the same time as “driven by natural instincts” and “wild”, and hence barely capable of starting a family characterized by “Christian values and probity”.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the entire “wild” and “uncivilized” Dark Continent was associated with the uncontrolled sexuality (just like the Islamic “Orient” – including North Africa – was for

<sup>14</sup> The Slave Coast is a historical name used for the coast of West Africa located between the estuary of the Volta River and the Lagos Lagoon. The area was a major source of people sold into slavery from the early 16<sup>th</sup> century to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Porto Seguro (now Agbodrafo), in present-day Togo, for instance, was originally a Portuguese fort and slave market.

<sup>15</sup> “Leider fehlt es nicht an Fällen, wo seitens der Väter unzureichend oder gar nicht gesorgt wird”.

<sup>16</sup> “(Wohl) sind die hiesigen Frauen wegen ihres Fleißes und ihrer Emsigkeit im Großen und Ganzem zu loben, aber sie sind noch sehr naturwüchsig und ausgelassen, und sehr ungeschmeidig zu Erschaffen des christlichen Lehrinhaltes und Ernstes“ (*Die Missionsstation von Porto Seguro*, ArchSVD, Rome; Presse Togo – 45.536, p. 83).

the European elites in the eighteenth century).<sup>17</sup> These associations reflected the deeply set angst of the nineteenth-century bourgeois "Self" – the fear of possible destruction of the established cognitive and social order by the "wild" and unpredictable "Other" from the periphery. To fend off this perceived threat, administrations and missions active in Africa, and elsewhere on the colonial frontier, introduced and carried out multiple disciplinary measures whose purpose was to produce a "childish, submissive, asexual, and unthreatening" colonial body-subject (cf. Stoler 1995: 193; El-Tayeb 2003: 91).

The vision of a "tamed" African concurred with the bourgeois norms for female behavior valid in imperial Germany and in other parts of the industrializing world, and specifically with the notion of white woman as a doll-like, "domesticated" being. Moreover, any rebellion against the rule of "domesticity" and submission – including rare cases of liaisons between Africans and white women – were regarded as a serious threat to the male-dominated social order, and as such they were regulated not only by public ostracism but also by restrictive legislation whose purpose was to marginalize the offenders. In 1912, for instance, a national-liberal deputy, drawing on the stereotype of a "black rapist," expressed his concern about the fact that "sometimes the German woman demonstrates not so reasonable attraction toward the exotic" (El-Tayeb 2003: 92 n. 17). The statement uttered during a public debate in Germany in the beginning of the 20th century, namely: "But once the Negro gets the idea that the white race is his equal, respect for the German woman dwindles"<sup>18</sup> conveys well the then common racial discourse (Roller 2002: 79).

Still, some few cases of official marriages between white women and African men did occur – one instance having been the marriage between Sabac el Cher, the dark-skinned Kapellmeister of the Prussian army, and Gertrud Perling, "a pretty teacher's daughter" that took place in 1901, in Königsberg (Pieken, Kruse 2007: 106-109). Another woman who went against the grain of the official racial discourse was the actress Meg Gehrts (1891–1966) who visited Togo in 1913. In her book that recounts that journey, Gehrts expresses, perhaps even a little bit provocatively, her fascination with the corporeality of African men. She writes: "The Kabyé live in the Transkara region and they are, in general, handsome, strong men... (Those who worked as our porters) were all practically nude – none of them even wore a loincloth". Similarly, describing her visit to Uro Djabo, the ruler of the Chauch (Tschaudjo), she characterizes one of king's ministers, Mama-Sugu, as

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 1979, passim. On the other hand, in the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Orient, especially the Ottoman Empire, exerted a certain fascination on European elites, as the longstanding fear of the Turkish invasion subsided after the Vienna victory of 1683. This transition inspired the creation of European fantasy of the Oriental (Ottoman) world for the delight of the elites, expressed in paintings, ceramic figures, fashion, opera works (e.g., "The Abduction from the Seraglio" of Mozart), etc. (cf. Williams 2014).

<sup>18</sup> Wenn aber "der Neger einmal auf den Gedanken kommt, daß die weiße Rasse der seinen gleichgestellt sein, so schwindet der Respekt vor der deutschen Frau".

an “extraordinarily tall, athletically built, and handsome man. With his turban on, he looked pretty young; I would say (he was) about 30 years old” (Gehrts 1999: 49f., 54).<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, some contemporary connoisseurs of Africa, such as Edmund D. Morel (1873–1924), the whistleblower in the case of brutal exploitation of native rubber workers in the Congo Free State (2020 [1906]), argued – pointing to “nature” as the ultimate driver of human history – that “strong sex instinct is essential to racial survival” in tropical Africa. He wrote in this regard:

If that strong sex instinct were non-existent, the Negro-race would have long vanished from the face of the earth (due to) Nature and the abominations caused by old and modern slave-traders. [...] The sex impulse is a more instinctive impulse, and (precisely because of this) a more spontaneous, fiercer, less controllable impulse than the one that is to be found among Europeans hedged by the complicated paraphernalia of convention and laws (El-Tayeb 2003: 91).

On the other hand, certain nineteenth-century medical experts maintained that the “nature” of the Africa had a rather soporific effect upon Europeans: “Because of the heat of tropical sunshine”, it was believed, “the dormant body is not able to fulfill its obligations” (Längin 2005: 55). Contrary to that opinion, however, German colonial agents who spent some time in Togo and other colonies – and who initially were almost exclusively bachelors – fathered a considerable number of children with indigenous women. Referring to that fact, Sprigade and Moisel, the authors of the “German Colonial Atlas” published in 1912, wrote: “The growing number of people of mixed blood (*Mischlinge*) is deplorable. This phenomenon should be attributed to Europeans who have been employed at the construction of railway lines, and as such it could be perhaps viewed as an exception”. In conclusion, quoting an unidentified official report, they stated: “The times come when the number of mixed blood people will exceed the number of Europeans. (Nevertheless), the fact that the problem of mixed bloods exists, and that it may soon become quite challenging also in Togo is highly disturbing” (Sprigade, Moisel 1912: 15).<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, at the time Sprigade and Moisel wrote these words, the number of *Mischlinge* living in Togo (officially 263 but in fact about twice as high) had already exceeded the number of all Europeans in the colony (368), including the mission-

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<sup>19</sup> “Die Kabre bewohnen das Transkara-Land und sind in der Regel schöne, starke Männer, doch die Gruppe, die wir bekamen [...] waren praktisch nackt – nicht einer von ihnen trug ein Hüfttuch [...] (Mama-Sugu war) ein außerordentlich großer, gutgebauter und schöner Mann. Unter seinem Turban sah er recht jung aus und ich schätzte ihn im Stillen auf etwa dreißig”.

<sup>20</sup> “Beklagen wird eine erhebliche Zunahme der Mischlinge; sie wird zurückgeführt auf die beim Eisenbau beschäftigten Europäer und kann deshalb vielleicht als Ausnahme angesehen werden. Allerdings [...] ‘(Die) Zeit ist nicht mehr fern, wo die Zahl der Mischlinge der der Europäer gleichkommt, ja diese übertrifft’. Dass auch in Togo die Mischlingsfrage von solcher Bedeutung ist oder werden kann, erscheint doch in der höchsten Grade bedenklich”.

aries (Sebald 1988: 266; von Zech 1920: 507).<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the mixed-blood children were not only begotten by certain, nationally undefined "Europeans employed at the railway construction sites," as the authors of the "Colonial Atlas" suggested, but also (and above all) by German traders and colonial officials; it was not an exception but rather a rule. Commenting on that phenomenon, Fr. Hermann Bücking, the apostolic prefect in the Togo colony in the years 1896–1907, observed in 1899: "Wherever you go now, you can see harlots and concubines (in service of colonial officials), and the generation of mixed bloods sprouts like weeds". Similarly, Felix Bryk, a member of the Reichstag, put it frankly in the following words: "I do not know any healthy white man in the colonies who would not have any liaisons with black women; and this is valid for all social classes" (Petschull, Höpker 1984: 124).<sup>22</sup> Indeed, it was estimated that at the turn of the centuries about 90% of Europeans on the colonial frontier lived in various forms of concubinage with native women (Gründer 1999: 231). To quote Felix Bryk again, white men who arrived in the "Eldorado of their (colonial) dreamland of freedom" soon developed "a strong affection and passion for the Black Eve" (Petschull, Höpker 1984: 124). These "affection and passion" were often documented in photographs by European beholders who were allured by nude bodies of African beauties. Indeed, Karaschewski says, "the photographers, who came from a society in which nakedness was frowned upon, in fact absent, suddenly discovered a natural, casual nudity in the exotic environment" (2008: 5).<sup>23</sup> Still, as a large number of those pictures show nude models in their cultural contexts, they could have also been "legitimized" as ethnographic documents.

Such conduct was certainly facilitated by the fact that standards and rules that regulated social life in the social strata from which German officials originated could not be satisfactorily enforced on the colonial frontier because the metropolitan mechanisms of social control and disciplining were not sufficiently developed, or even missing. As Natermann observes, relations "that would have been undesirable due to differing social classes, educational backgrounds, or even "clashing" races, suddenly became desirable or at least a sought-after distraction" (2018: 71f.). The Protestant missionary Dr. von Schwarz expressed this phenomenon in the following words:

That a magistrate, a district administrator, or a school director in Pasewalk or in Buxtehude publicly lives in a wild marriage would not only be socially impossible, but he would also lose his position because respect is a necessary component of such social standing. Now, the position of

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<sup>21</sup> According to Steltzer, in 1913 there were 540 individuals of mixed blood and 534 whites living in German Togo (1984: 118).

<sup>22</sup> "Ich kenne keinen gesunden weißen Mann, der längere Zeit in den Kolonien gelebt hat, ohne regelmäßige Beziehungen zu schwarzen Frauen gehabt zu haben, und das betrifft Männer in allen gesellschaftlichen Schichten".

<sup>23</sup> "Aus einer Gesellschaft in der Nacktheit verpönt war, de facto nicht vorkam, trafen diese Fotografen plötzlich auf natürliche und ungezwungene Nacktheit in einer exotischen Kulisse".

a station officer in the colonies is even more elevated than that of a public official in a German small town. If he lives with a black concubine, he undermines the moral authority of the white race (K. Müller 1958: 170).<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, the social border that was rarely crossed though was the sex border between unmarried European colonial agents. Moreover, political authorities in Berlin, drawing primarily on racial argumentation, intended to enforce (largely unsuccessfully) strict regulations concerning intimate relationships with the colonial “Other”.

In this situation, people of mixed, European-African ancestry, or the so-called “mixed-bloods”, constituted a steadily growing part of the colonial society in German Togo. They also became the subject of heated political debate in pre-WWI Germany, based on the above-discussed distinction between the white and the black “races” viewed as oppositional, mutually excluding categories. Some of them later engaged in the process of decolonization, or – like Nicolas Grunitzky (1913–1969) – were politically active in the independent Republic of Togo.

How did the individuals of mixed descent experience their undefined status in the social space of colonial Togo? Petschull collected testimonies of descendants of a number of German high-ranking officials and entrepreneurs, who were still living in Togo in the beginning of the 1980s. These were: Josef Köhler – the son of August Köhler, the governor of the colony in the years 1895–1902; Luise von Döring – the daughter of Hans-Georg von Döring, the chief commanding officer of the police troop in the years 1898–1910 and later, since 1911, the Speaker (*Erster Referent*) in the colonial government; Hans Gruner – the son of his famous father of the same name who commanded the German Hinterland Expedition in the years 1896–1898 and subsequently (since 1899) governed the district of Misahöhe; Julia Pfenningweit – the daughter of a government school director; and Otto Hundt – the son of a trader from Hamburg (1984: 119). In the first place, in accordance with the regulation issued by the governor in 1913, none of those individuals could use the family name of his or her German father, and offenders were penalized with a high fine of 150 marks or a term in jail.<sup>25</sup> Secondly, individuals of mixed ancestry, including those of Afro-Brazilian descent living in the colony, were still classified as *Farbige* (“colored”) by the administration, and as such they belong to lower strata in the colonial hierarchy. Nicolas Grunitzky, for example, could use the surname of his father only after the German rule had been terminated with the outbreak of World War I (Sebald 1988: 268f.). Nonetheless,

<sup>24</sup> “Ein Amtsrichter oder Landrat oder Schuldirektor in Pasewalk oder Bauxtehude, der öffentlich in wilder Ehe lebt, wäre doch nicht bloß gesellschaftlich möglich, sondern er würde auch bald sein Amt verlieren, weil er die Achtung verscherzt, die für den Träger des Amtes nötig ist. Nun steht aber das Tun und Lassen eines Stationschefs in den Kolonien noch auf einem höheren Piedestal als das eines Beamten in einer deutschen Kleinstadt. Wann er sich da ganz öffentlich eine schwarze Konkubine hält, so untergräbt das die moralische Autorität der weißen Rasse”.

<sup>25</sup> *Amtsblatt für das Schutzgebiet Togo* 8: 1913, p. 313f.; BArch R 1001/4265.



most of those "colored" men and women spoke German fluently, preserved certain customs of the German middle class, and kept souvenirs related to German presence in Togo. Above all, they cultivated "traditional German virtues", such as "diligence, orderliness, punctuality, and cleanness". In 1934, they even founded, "according to a good German tradition", the "Club of German Mixed-Bloods" (*Club der deutschen Mischlinge*) – a private association of 153 members. By the mid-1980s, however, this number had dwindled to 15 individuals (Petschull, Höpker 1984: 119f.).

Indeed, one, frequently overlooked (or perhaps even silenced), issue in colonial history was the native collaboration, and the intimate relationships could be seen as one instance of it. Indeed, Natermann says, in spite of "the frequent assumption that colonialism came only from above, it was in fact a shared experience between the coloniser and the colonised and should be approached and studied as such". In other words, colonialism was a "middle ground" between the European and the African (or any other, for that matter) historical experience, which produced an "unavoidable in-betweenness relating to race and identity" (Natermann 2018: 89).

Considering the social standing of the progenitors, it should not be surprising that the topic of children begotten by Germans in the colonies remained taboo in the Kaiserreich, as the above-quoted statement of Sprigade and Moisel indirectly suggests. In 1918, there were about 5000 mixed bloods in all German colonies worldwide, but this figure could have even been four times higher because the offspring of German fathers and indigenous women was not always officially registered. Clear policies concerning illegitimate children were introduced with the rationalization of colonial service initiated by Bernhard Dernburg (1865–1937), the Secretary of State for Colonial Affairs (1907–1910). This resulted in the tightening of metropolitan control and the subsequent enforcement of dominant values and norms that were significantly influenced by cultural evolutionism and the angst of racial "degeneration," reflected – among other things – in the concepts of *Verkafferung* and *Verniggerung* – today highly offensive. In the beginning of the twentieth century, there were 166 registered mixed marriages in German colonies worldwide – 42 of them in German South-West Africa, the colony with the largest number of German settlers. In 1909, all previously contracted mixed marriages were officially nullified in Cameroon and in South-West Africa, and German colonists living in such relationships, considered "traitors of the race," were deprived of certain civil rights. Similar measures were also considered for Togo and German East Africa (Petschull, Höpker 1984: 120f.).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Besides German South-West Africa, mixed marriages were officially banned only in Samoa (1912), although without the retroactive effect of that law. Furthermore, the offspring of such marriages in German part of the archipelago was declared as "white," and those who were raised up according to European cultural norms and spoke fluent German were eventually classified as *Kulturdeutsche* – "Germans by culture" (Gründer 1999: 232). Interestingly, according to the Article



The “problem” persisted, however. On May 2, 1912, Director of the Colonial Office, Dr. Wilhelm Solf, stated during a debate in the *Reichstag*: “Gentlemen... would you like your own sons to bring black daughters-in-law to your home? Would you like to see hairy grandsons in the cradle? No, gentlemen, the whole nation does not wish this to happen” (El-Tayeb 2003: 86).<sup>27</sup> This statement of a leading colonial politician indicates that “Germanness” had become synonymous with “whiteness” in the national discourse of the imperial era. It was even more explicitly expressed by Adolf Friedrich zu Mecklenburg during the meeting of Togo’s Government Council held on September 18, 1912:

In Togo, racial differences have been strictly maintained up to now, and to good effect. Allowing mixed marriages, even if at present, here in the protectorate, marriages between blacks and whites are out of the question, would weaken the clear race awareness that we absolutely require. The question of mixed marriages could not be answered from ethical and religious points of view; it is, in the first place, a racial-political question<sup>28</sup> (Sebald 1988: 268).

## Conclusion

The conceptual distinction between “whiteness” and “blackness” that shaped the everyday praxis on the colonial frontier at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was by no means clear-cut and straightforward. It was, in the first place, geared at promoting “Whiteness” or the system of privilege that groups of people of white complexion were more likely to experience in social space than their dark skinned, or “not white enough”, counterparts. This arrangement and the cognitive distinction on which it was based – differently framed and implemented in Anglo-America and in Europe – belonged to the then established structure of representations considered natural and self-evident (*doxa*), and as such it was enforced on multiple levels – including various “microtechniques of the body” (e.g., hygiene, clothing) – by the colonial state. On the other hand, “Whiteness” has been “porous” and Western imaginaries of Africa and Africans in flux, ranging from bru-

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122 of the Treaty of Versailles, after WWI all German settlers and entrepreneurs should be, after their expropriation, expelled from Germany’s former colonies. In Samoa, however, this was prevented by an initiative of the indigenous political elite, and consequently all Germans married to Samoan women were allowed to stay.

<sup>27</sup> “Meine Herren [...] Wünschen Sie, daß Ihnen Ihre Söhne schwarze Schwiegertöchter ins Haus bringen? Wünschen Sie, daß sie Ihnen wollhaarige Enkel in die Wiege legen? Nein, meine Herren, die ganze Nation wünscht das nicht”.

<sup>28</sup> “In Togo seien die Rassenunterschiede bisher scharf gewahrt worden, und man sei gut dabei gefahren. Die Gestattung der Mischehe würde, wenn auch zu Zeit hier im Schutzgebiet Ehen zwischen Schwarzen und Weißen nicht in Frage kommen, das scharfe Rassengefühl, welches wir unbedingt brauchen, schwächen. Die Mischehenfrage könne nicht von ethischen und religiösen Gesichtspunkten, sondern vor allem aus rassenpolitischen Gesichtspunkten beantwortet werden”.

tal racism to their romanticization, in the sense that social praxis offered several "points of entry" that made possible for certain individuals to "become white" by "acting White".

In German Togo, and elsewhere across the colonial world, this category also comprised women who lived in a semi-official or permanent relationship with colonial officials. While relationships of European traders active in what later (1884) became the German colony of Togoland with local women were regulated by customary laws, including the obligation to provide for the offspring, the consolidation of the colonial polity in the course of the 1890s brought about a radical change in interracial relations, now increasingly shaped by the factor of force, and accountability requirements towards the begotten children were seldom fulfilled – in fact not even regulated by the colonial state. Consequently, toward the end of the German rule in Togo, the number of people of mixed origin, officially 263, but in reality about twice as high, had exceeded the number of all Europeans (including the missionaries) living in the colony.

Mixed marriages and their offspring also became a political issue in the Kaiserreich, and the subject of heated debates in the Bundestag that were frequently dictated by a perceived threat of racial "degeneration". Consequently, clear regulations concerning illegitimate children of colonial officials and settlers were introduced only by Bernhard Dernburg, the Secretary of State for Colonial Affairs in the years 1907–1910. They aimed at a stricter metropolitan control and enforcement of dominant values and norms shaped, among other things, by cultural evolutionism and nationalism. In German Togo, according with the governor's regulation of 1913, individuals stemming from mixed marriages were not allowed to use the family name of their German progenitors under the penalty of a high pecuniary fine or a term in jail. After the termination of the German rule in Togo, and later – under the French administration – a number of those individuals, e.g., Nicolas Grunitzky, became involved in the political struggle for independence.

## Abbreviations

BArch – Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde, Germany

ArchSVD – Archive of the Society of the Divine Word, Rome, Italy

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