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Cover Page Footnote

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Frieda von Bülow's Construct of Imperial Feminism in her Colonial
Novel *Tropenkoller* (1896)

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Abstract

The German colonial project was supported by various groups of socially elite, politically active women starting in the early 1880s, shortly after the German government made the decision to colonize Africa. Frieda von Bülow, who is considered to be the founder of the German colonial novel, actively supported German colonialism as she saw it as a means by which women could achieve greater power in society. In her novel *Tropenkoller*, Bülow is primarily concerned with these ideas of power and control. However, this control is only described as possible through female conformity to the male, nationalistic ideal. Von Bülow is not concerned with transforming the patriarchal societal standard, but instead promotes conformity. White women, however, differ from white men in one vital way: Bülow's ideal white man exercises a limited form of violence, in order to achieve this control, whereas the ideal white woman apathetically looks on, thus exercising her own form of control in a situation she has no choice in. Von Bülow's Feminism, therefore, mirrors problematic German imperialism of the time: Only those who possess power over others in society are able to advance.

Keywords: Colonialism, Nationalism, White Feminism, Imperialism, Apathy

Content Warning (CW): Rape and Racial Violence

Introduction

“Daß ist mal so auf dieser Erde. Alle sündigen, alle wissen, daß sie sündigen, und kennen und wollen es im Grunde gar nicht anders; aber immer von Zeit zu Zeit muß mal einer für die vielen büßen. Es ist das bewährte System des Sündenbocks.’

[‘It’s just like that on this earth. All people sin, all people know that they sin, and recognize and don’t want it any different; but from time to time, someone has to pay the price for many. It’s the perpetuated system of the scapegoat.’]” (Albert Waldemar in *Tropenkoller*, 285-6, my translation)

The question of morality and the apathetic outlook on morality that many Germans in the colony possessed is an extremely important theme in Frieda von Bülow’s (born October 12, 1857 in Berlin, died March 12, 1909 in Dornburg) colonial novel *Tropenkoller* (1896), the analysis of which will make up the majority of this discussion. The fate of Udo Biron, one of the main characters in the novel, is being considered in this quote. This excerpt is from a short conversation between two men living in the fictional colony of Satuta, where the novel takes place; namely, Ludwig von Rosen, a soldier, and Albert Waldemar, a government official. Udo, who was charged with violent actions against native African women, died of a deadly fever before he could experience the legal repercussions of his actions. Although it is strongly suggested that he raped these women, the novel doesn’t go into detail about his actions. Whether or not Udo did in fact rape native women is not the main point of the discussion between these two men. As is evidenced through the above quote, Waldemar and Rosen were of the opinion that Udo was unjustly accused. Through this apathetic perspective, violence and rape are made

an everyday colonial norm. This all too forgiving outlook on violence against African women in the colony is highly problematic and actively questions what role morality and law play within the colony.

The colonial situation in the late 19th century urged this discussion of morality relatively early on: How various European countries dealt with the native peoples in their respective colonies was a primary form of colonial discourse in Europe (Conrad 2-3). But for colonists in the 19th century, the question of morality in general wasn't the only question at the forefront of their minds; violence was implemented frequently against natives in the colonies, and as such, demanded a moral stance (Conrad 11). Colonial power, in general, was won and maintained through violence. In *Tropenkoller*, a pseudo-autobiographical novel, these same themes of violence, control, and power are ever-present. Other, women-specific topics like personal freedom, feminine and masculine power dynamics, the societal expectations that develop out of said dynamics, and a woman's freedom to choose who to love are also common. These topics were very relevant for many German women who began to desire increased freedom and rights in the 19th century. For Bülow, who was also strongly influenced by feminist themes, these topics were just as relevant (Czernin 45). Although Bülow's stake in both themes involving imperialism and feminism is, at a surface level, confusing, through further inspection of the novel, one begins to notice that Bülow's entire construct of feminism is strongly influenced by imperialist themes.

Bülow's belief in imperialist feminism and her utilization of it in *Tropenkoller* mirrors the beliefs of many women in Europe at this time. As Lora Wildenthal illustrates, it is important in the context of this work, "... to appreciate how prominently racial paranoia and hatred, on the one hand, and feminist concerns, on the other, inform her [Bülow's] writing..." ("When Men Are

Weak,' 53). Bülow's life and her work were, in a sense, a connection between these two ideologies, that, seen from a post-colonial perspective, are opposed to each other. Her construct of feminism was concerned with making a place for German women in the colonial setting ('When Men Are Weak,' 54). Taking this into account, throughout this article, I will be referring to Bülow's construct of feminism as imperial feminism in order to highlight the extremely problematic aspects of her ideological thinking.

Racism is also a clear part of her imperialist thinking and cannot go unmentioned in the course of this essay. In the history of colonialism, whiteness was often connected with womanliness in order to promote a sense of nationalism: Proponents of colonialism often considered white women to be symbols of racial purity as well as protectorates of the nation, which was, in an imperial European context, often equated with whiteness (Gallagher 117-118). Bülow's construct of imperial feminism is without a doubt built upon the basis of racial hierarchy and white nationalist thinking. Bülow is, in general, concerned with a feminine adaptation to the ideal white man, because whiteness represents a coveted system of privilege, that is "... not the output of personal effort, but more... the representation of a practice of systematic preference of a collective" (Walgenbach 40-1). In order to gain benefit from this system of privilege, Bülow asserts that white women have to adapt themselves to match the ideal white man. When white German women center their identity around this ideal white man, they gain the privilege that comes with whiteness while minimizing the "burden" of their femininity.

Although there are multiple instances in the novel of blatant racism, I will be concentrating on the forms of racism present within the novel that occur through the construct of the imperialist feminist politics of apathy. Apathy, as I will make clear, is an even more deadly form of racism that has horrific consequences in an imperialist society. The multiple instances in

the novel of women's adaptation to racist, imperialist ideals implies that colonial whiteness is inherently bound to violence and apathy. In *Tropenkoller*, Bülow is not at all concerned with a radical feminist uprooting of the patriarchal social system; rather, as Wildenthal asserts in her article "When Men Are Weak," she emphasizes through the actions of the protagonist the importance of this womanly adaptation to a (white) male norm. However, women differ from men on one, very important, count: The ideal white man uses limited violence, in order to achieve control, whereas the ideal white woman apathetically looks on. Thus, the ideal white woman can exercise her own form of control in a situation where she, herself, does not have real form of power. This apathy towards violence in the novel has problematic consequences in German-speaking society; it normalizes looking away when the action of looking away, and the ignorance that comes with it, is self-beneficial. Bülow's feminism is thus another form of white feminism, as it only benefits those that already find themselves in a position of privilege.

Bülow saw her novels as an unobtrusive way to illustrate day to day life in the colony from her perspective, as well as a way to make her own political ideas clear to the average German reader of the time (Wildenthal, *German Women* 54-55). Her novels, especially *Tropenkoller*, allow for a view into the colonial, imperialist feminist of the time, and provide the opportunity for a better understanding of this strain of feminism. With increased interest in colonialism in recent years, it is vitally important to understand Bülow's role and the role her literary works played in the German colonial scene: Her literature and its multifaceted, problematic views was influential on an entire generation of German readers. Her novels point out that control, as well as the power that comes with the acknowledgement of this control, are of great importance within the colony; one who can gain power in the colony immediately has respect. Because Bülow structured her writing so politically, these themes have an added

importance and meaning beyond the context of the novel. Colonialism and imperialism have political effects that are relevant even today (Conrad 4). As such, Bülow's ideas have had and continue to have the power to have negative consequences, as not enough has been done to acknowledge the danger they pose.

In order to understand Bülow, her literature, and her connection to German colonial history, a short biography that concentrates on her connection to colonial history will be presented, and a brief summary of the novel *Tropenkoller* will be given. The themes of feminine control, masculine control, as well as feminine adaptation and apathy will then be discussed. Bülow's novels may be fictional, but they allow her readers many glimpses of truth. As such, it's imperative to take historical context into account.

Bülow's Connection to Colonialism

The relatively late unification of the German state in 1871 made it so that Germany started accumulating colonies later in comparison to other colonial powers, such as England and France (Conrad 1). The colony of German East Africa, to which Bülow would eventually travel and where the majority of her colonial novels take place, was not considered an official German colony until the 1880s. Carl Peters¹, a German historian who traveled to Africa on his own accord, forged illegitimate "contracts" with the native Africans on an expedition in 1883 to eastern Africa (Smith 33). In essence, Peters coerced the native peoples into signing away their land, without having knowledge of what they were agreeing to. When Peters returned to Germany in 1885, he presented the Kaiser with these contracts, which led to Bismarck

¹ Carl Peters' problematic actions in German East-Africa, although he is not the main focus of this work, need to be addressed. He was sent back to Germany from Africa in 1897 on an accusation that he murdered his African "wife" and her husband; he attested to the fact that he had murdered them, but claimed he should not suffer any consequences as he had married her under "Muslim law" and therefore had full control over her life (Conrad 32; Perras 215-216). Despite this, Bülow supported him until the end of her life. She disregarded his problematic actions and always reasserted that he had acted justly in the given situation (Hoechstetter 163).

designating German East Africa, composed of parts of Tanzania, Burundi, and Rwanda, as an official protectorate of the German Empire (Conrad 50; Wildenthal 'When Men Are Weak' 56). From the first moment of the unjust acquisition of these territories onward, a fascination with "exotic Africa" began in Germany. Bülow's writing helped to transform this fascination into an obsession with the relatively unknown continent.

As the average German did not have the opportunity to undertake the long, arduous, and expensive journey to Africa themselves, the majority of the German population in the late 19th and early 20th centuries relied on written descriptions, either in the form of diary entries or official reports to find out more about the new German colony. Bülow herself is considered the founder of the genre of the German colonial novel and thus played a major role in the construction of the colonial project (Warmbold 311). Her novels were new for her time: She was, in fact, the first person to use the German colonies as a setting for a fictional story (Wildenthal, *German Women* 54). Although she was an incredibly successful and popular writer in her time, she and her work are relatively unknown; her books are not easy to find, and the majority of them are written in old German script. During and after the Second World War, her writing and popularity also suffered. However, with the increased study of women writers and more interest in the history of German colonialism, Bülow's work found a second wind of readership in German studies' circles.

Bülow spent many of her early years (1863-66) in Smyrna, Turkey, where her father worked as a councilmember for Prussia (Warmbold 312). The foreignness and the freedom that foreign countries provided for wealthy Germans became apparent to her at a young age. After her father died the family moved to Neudietendorf in Thüringen (312). She and her sister, Margarethe, herself a budding young author, became increasingly close during this time. She and

Margarethe moved to Berlin in 1881, where Bülow was educated as a teacher. It was here that Bülow was first introduced to feminist ideas (Czernin 79). After her sister's death in 1884, Bülow was heartbroken and spent multiple months in Italy in order to subdue her feelings of grief (Wildenthal, 'When Men Are Weak' 57). Even after her return to Germany, she continued to search for newness in order to forget her sadness. On this search for novelty, she read an article about Carl Peters in the newspaper *Täglichen Rundschau* (Wildenthal, *German Women* 18). She knew the editor of the paper, Friedrich Lange, and had herself introduced to Peters through Lange's connection to him (Wildenthal, *German Women* 19). After this moment in 1885, her life became a part of German colonial history forever.

In this first meeting between the two in 1885, Peters made clear to her that German East Africa had need of German women. Peters' plans to acquire more colonies for Germany and to place the entire German colonial project in a positive light² became a lifelong passion for Bülow. Shortly thereafter, Bülow founded the German national women's association for nursing in the colonies with the future goal of opening the first German hospital in east Africa (Wildenthal, *German Women* 21). Nursing, at its origin, was styled as a female profession and was commonly viewed as a form of female self-sacrifice (Wildenthal, *German Women* 26). As such, it often led to the abuse of young women through the forms of limited hygienic materials, long hours, and low wages (Wildenthal, *German Women* 26). In the colonial context, Bülow saw nursing as a way to patriotically serve, but also as a means by which to obtain access to the colonies, where, in her eyes, the traditional rules of the German regime could be bent (Berman 173). The

² The fact that this meeting between Bülow and Peters took place in 1885 is very significant. The Berlin conference, where Africa, without the presence of African representatives, was divided up between various European nations, took place from 1884 to 1885 (Conrad 36; Harlow 1). Germany wanted to be a part of the "scramble for Africa" (Conrad 36). German enthusiasm for colonial expansion had thus reached a peak in 1885, and enveloped many, including Bülow and Peters, into this excitement.

geographic distance from the strict societal gender roles together with the rather relaxed lifestyle in the colonies led to Bülow's firm belief in the gender emancipation that a colony could provide (Czernin 97). After Bülow received financial support, she immediately traveled to German East Africa as a nurse.

Because of the absence of an educational background in nursing and supposed rumors of an affair with Carl Peters, Bülow soon ran into difficulties setting up the hospital (Wildenthal, *German Women* 34; Hoechstetter 157-8; Warmbold 313-4). As such, she was forced to return to Germany. Hindered by a lack of financial support from the women's association and simultaneously having an increased desire to return to the colonies, Bülow published her journal in the form of a collection called *Reiseskizzen und Tagebucheinträge* (translated as *Travel Sketches and Journal Entries*) (Hammerstein 41). The publication of her journal was so successful that Bülow began to write novels, using the colonies as a fictional backdrop. Fiction provided her a means by which to express her personal opinions and ideas to a German-speaking audience in a more covert (*unaufdringlich*) way (Hoechstetter 182). Bülow, therefore, was not concerned with describing the colonies in perfect accuracy; instead, she was occupied with the construction of an "...aesthetic, central image-arrangement from the perspective of a white, German colonist..." (Hammerstein 58, translation is mine). In the name of a false "feminism," (i.e. white, imperial feminism) Bülow depicted the colonies as a place, where German women could go, in order to feel freer; she envisioned "...an Africa that welcomed German women" (Romuald Valentin 95, translation is mine). The construct of this imperial feminist colonial fantasy depends wholly on the repression of the native African population as it centers only on the experience of white women within the colony.

Bülow's insistence that the colonies provided only positive experiences (i.e., freedom and independence) for white women cements her normalization and internalization of apathy, violence, and repression of the native populations as viable tactics used to attain liberation for white women. In order to fully understand the role of the characters in the construct of these ideas as well as the varying themes within the novel, a short summary will be presented.

Tropenkoller Summary

Tropenkoller functions as a sequel of the story of Bülow's earlier book, *Ludwig von Rosen* (1892). Unlike this earlier book, however, a woman, Eva Biron, plays the role of protagonist. Eva, a 26-year-old single woman, like Bülow herself at the time, lives together with her step-brother, Udo Biron, who was sent by his company to the German colony Satuta on the east coast of Africa in order to study the forest practices of the native population (Bülow, *Tropenkoller* 11). Satuta primarily functions as a plantation colony, where the white Germans are tasked with overseeing while the native population is forced to work on the plantation. Although much of the novel is devoted towards describing colonial life (that is, the life of white Germans within the colony), a significant amount of time is spent discussing Eva Biron and her search for personal independence and freedom in the colony.

Eva, unlike the other white German women in the colony, can spend the majority of her time working as a nurse in the colony, as she is young and unmarried. The worst, and most important, sickness that Eva encounters in her work is the deadly fever *Tropenkoller* (directly transliterated as tropical rage), for which the book is named. Individuals afflicted with this fever lose all sense of self control and often resort to violence. Most of the men within the novel fall victim to the disease, with the exception of Ludwig von Rosen, the brave soldier, who comes to Satuta with the goal of immediately trying to restore order to the colony. Eva, deeply impressed

by his decisiveness and confidence, falls in love with him over the course of the novel. Rosen establishes a reputation in the colony as the nationalistic idealist, who does not waver, as opposed to Albert Waldemar, the manager of the colony, to exercise violence against the native population in order to achieve “positive” results later on. This contrast between the supposedly “weak” Waldemar, who cannot control the native population, and the “strong” Rosen, who can very clearly gain control through violence, emphasizes the novel’s positive opinion of the use of controlled violence; that is, violence exercised with self-control and with the intent of achieving order.

Perhaps the most important scene that illustrates this use of “controlled” violence is the party scene. Eva, concerned for the health of her patients, complains to Rosen about the loud drumming at an African party, as Waldemar, convinced that the native population should be allowed to have this party, refuses to take action (53-4). Rosen immediately goes to the party and within ten minutes, everything is quiet. The next day, it is revealed that he threatened the native Africans with a weapon until they stopped drumming (77). Eva immediately reveres him and vows to respect him (54). As such, Rosen becomes the ideal man in the colony. As the ideal colonial woman, Eva, strives to be just like him.

In the novel, Udo is the one man who commits the most violent acts against the native population. As such, it comes as no surprise that he is eventually accused of violent acts against the native African women. Sick with fever and worry, Udo dies, and Eva is left alone in the colony. At his gravesite, Eva sits alone contemplating her fate, Rosen approaches and comforts her, and he carries her to his boat where the story ends. With knowledge of historical and novel context in mind, the means by which Bülow builds up her imperialist feminist ideology will be discussed.

Adaptation

Bülow's imperial feminism is more concerned with a female adaptation to the male ideal than social change. Through Eva's character, Bülow makes clear that it is the duty of a nationalistic woman to conform to a nationalistic man in order to feel free and powerful. Eva continually distances herself from typical "feminine" interests and, notably, pledges to fully devote herself to Rosen. This desire to be as masculine as possible in an attempt to gain power underscores the already existing and problematic gender norms of the time. However, Eva does not desire to be the typical, white, blonde Germanic man of the time; men, for example, like her brother or Waldemar (*Tropenkoller* 18-9). She desires to be like Rosen, who, like Eva, possesses physical characteristics that help him adapt to the African climate and not fall victim to the Tropenkoller fever. Both Eva and Rosen are outfitted with the ability to "socially mimic," which is the process of adapting to meet the expectations of whichever society one is currently in (Gutjahr 53). By being able to socially mimic, both are able to achieve more power in various situations. In order to achieve the most power possible, Eva mimics the colonial ideal himself: Rosen.

The desire for ideal masculinity and the rejection of the feminine is visible in *Tropenkoller*, as Bülow posits the feminine to mean weakness through description and the character of Eva. Albert Waldemar is often described using feminine phrases and descriptions in order to underscore his inability to make decisions and his dislike of the use of violence. In a conversation between Rosen and Waldemar, after Rosen breaks up the party, Waldemar's eyes are described as "having long lashes," and it is said that, in the course of the conversation, "he crossed one leg over the other" (74). This moment, where it becomes clear that Eva agrees with Rosen in his use of force to keep the native peoples under control, is crucial. Because Waldemar

does not use any violence in order to achieve control and power, he automatically loses respect in Eva's eyes; by refusing violence, he is refusing to conform to the imperial societal structure. By refusing to conform he loses power within that society and is thus situated as weak and feminine.

Bülow's decision to categorize femininity as a bodily weakness is a literary utilization of the theories of physiognomy, the use of which fascinated German-speaking society since the publishing of Lavater's *Physiognomische Fragmente* in 1775 (Gray xix). In a short excerpt of this book, where the "Male and Female Sexes" are discussed, Lavater describes women as:

Made ... for motherly mildness and tenderness! All' their limbs tender, flexible, easily wounded, sensual, and receptive. –

Under a thousand feminine beings rarely one without the characteristics of femininity-

Softness, roundness, excitability.

They are second after men... taken from men, serving under men, meant to comfort him, to ease his burdens... (Frauenpersonen, 295, translation is mine)

The broad characterization of women as possessing weakness due to their physical traits was used to posit women as vital supporters of men but simultaneously weak. This theory was often used to justify the place of women in society, and, at times, still is used to do the same today.

With the popularity of Lavater's book and physiognomy in Bülow's lifetime, this view of women was even more common. Bülow's literary decision to categorize feminine characteristics as weak is, therefore, not at all abnormal. In fact, her own problematic version of feminism fits neatly within the structure of imperial society: She

utilized the typical, sexist theories of physiognomy in order to depict women and feminine characteristics as weak. Thus, Bülow's imperial "feminism," is merely a method meant to grant women more "masculine" power and control. In her view, women can only become strong by escaping the feminine, and all of the traits and characteristics that, in a stereotypical, physiognomic view, come with being feminine.

In other places of the novel, femininity is ascribed as weakness even without the use of physiognomic descriptions to designate feminine characteristics as weak. As soon as the African party begins, Eva immediately thinks of Udo, who is currently suffering from illness, and wishes that she could help him in some way. She feels "faint... to help him – powerless! Powerless!" and describes herself as "with a strong will / a powerless nothing!" (Bülow, *Tropenkoller* 53). The multiple repetitions of "powerless," shortly thereafter followed by Rosen's appearance and immediate intervention in the situation highlight the powerlessness of the feminine. Eva can't do anything, because she is a woman; Rosen, on the other hand, has the power to immediately act in the situation. Although Eva has, in contrast to the other women of the novel, more decision-making and personal freedoms, she is still held back by her "feminine nature." In order to rid herself of this weakness, she adapts to the white ideal man by going along with what Rosen says and does, as well as trying to distance herself from stereotypically feminine actions. This desire for masculinity is especially prominent when analyzing her personal thoughts about nursing.

Eva initially seems to carry out typical feminine duties in her nursing. She cares for the sick and injured with no break, she "works through the night, brews tea, prepares cooling drinks and chicken soup, bandaged wounds and so forth" (Bülow, *Tropenkoller*

243). But all of this, in Eva's view, should not be misconstrued as simply feminine martyrdom. After she is praised for her deeds, she admits that: "I only do it because I like to. Am I supposed to be merciful? Truly, I don't know what that is" (243). The renunciation of this traditionally feminine character trait solidifies Eva's desire for the power that, in a racist, imperial society, is obtained through the assumption of male norms. Her rejection of mercy as a character trait to be desired strongly suggests her rejection of emotionality, kindness, and thoughtfulness in general. She wants to adapt to Rosen's white male ideal and rarely fails in her pursuit to do so.

However, at the end of the story, Eva cannot rid herself of all of her emotions or feminine characteristics. As she sits at Udo's grave and thinks about what "... will now happen," Rosen appears and sits with her (287). Only now, when she is fully alone, does she think that "her strength is at its end" (289). Rosen, evidently noticing this powerlessness, "...took the no longer reluctant woman in his arms and carried her, like one carries a child, to his boat" (289). This ending has to be seen out of the perspective of imperial power dynamics. By losing her brother, who was also her patient, Eva loses partial control over other individuals, and thus loses some of her own power within society. Solely in a power-dynamics sense, losing a patient means losing responsibility over another individual. By losing this responsibility, Eva loses control, thus further de-escalating her role in a society obsessed with the politics of control. Here, the situation with adaptation is somewhat more complicated, as the strong, rather independent woman falls in love with and can be controlled by an even stronger man only because she lost a portion of her personal power and importance within society. Although she adapted

herself to the white masculine gender expectations that Rosen created, the loss of her brother sufficed to take away a significant portion of her power and control.

Her sadness, an emotion commonly read as feminine, hinders her attempts at achieving pure masculinity. Sadness takes away her strength and, with it, a piece of her strongly sought-after masculinity. The sadness that Eva feels, allows Rosen to take control over her and carry her to his boat. Bülow positions emotions as barring the way towards complete feminine adaptation to the male ideal. In an imperial society determined by power dynamics, the person who can retain control in every situation is the person who will have the upper hand. This strong inclination on the part of Bülow towards complete, unemotional control, suggests that, first and foremost, imperial feminism deals with a sense of power and how to obtain that power.

Although this ending can easily be read as a loss of power, it can also be interpreted as working in Eva's favor. Eva adapts herself to Rosen throughout the novel, falls in love with him, and succeeds, by the end, at obtaining a close relationship with him. Her constant adaptations to him and self-presentation as a proud, free woman capable of adaptation enables her to be together with a proud, free man who is capable of the same. She can't fully change herself to be a man but achieves the next best thing: A relationship with the ideal white man in the colony. Thus, she can further use his position of power in the colony to her own advantage.

Eva succeeds in cutting off her emotions in most cases, with notable exceptions when it comes to her relationships with white German men, namely, her brother and Rosen. Eva's apathy in other circumstances is very noticeable. In situations where violence is carried out against the native population, she does not seem to care at all, despite her job as a nurse demanding she care about the health and safety of all people. This apathy plays an even larger role in the context of the novel.

Apathy

Colonial violence, whether physical or sexual, functions as a white male power demonstration and, therefore, a means by which to control the native population. Although slavery and mistreatment of the native population was officially outlawed by the German government, colonial violence was still common (Conrad 11, 30-1). As stated previously, Bülow makes clear that she believes in the necessary use of controlled physical force against the native population; Rosen, Bülow's ideal white man, is a proponent of controlled force and actively utilizes said force. Eva, Bülow's ideal white woman, does not utilize this violence herself, she merely condones the violence or looks away. Apathy therefore becomes a form of adaptation to this ideal, white, German masculinity.

An interaction between Udo, his Black servant, and Eva illustrates this act of looking away quite vividly. Udo, strongly affected by a *Tropenkoller* induced fever, picks up his servant by the ears and wipes his face in a puddle of spilled beer after the man mistakenly lets it drip onto the table (Bülow, *Tropenkoller* 16). Shortly after this incredibly violent interaction he asks his sister, unaffected, if she would like a drink. Eva, witnessing this scene unfold in front of her, simply turns around and "...looks down at the street" (16, translation is mine). If she is disturbed by her brother's violent outburst, she does not show it. Similarly, in the case of Udo committing sexual violence against native African women, Eva continues to act apathetically. After Udo is accused of sexual violence, the entire colony, Eva included, rush to defend him. Even Waldemar, a colonial authority, goes so far as to say that "his deeds... were certainly not made up out of thin air" (273, translation is mine). Eva defends her brother until his death, never pausing to acknowledge that he was, very likely, justly accused of those crimes.

The native Africans, who are continually the victims of German violence, are made invisible through Eva's apathetic perspective. She shows no emotions or empathy after Udo's violent outbursts. This apathetic action of "looking through the native and denying his/her existence" was a clear theme in colonial literature and was a "necessary practice for invoking the *terra nullis*" (Chris Tifflin and Alan Lawson, cited in Eigler 72). Frantz Fanon's ideas concerning colonial violation of the humanity of the native populations and the "fact of blackness" (109), in contrast to whiteness, are important in this context. In the early stages of colonialism, colonizers began to destroy the traditions of the native populations: "The customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that imposed itself on him" (110). This occurs multiple times in *Tropenkoller*, where the festivals are stopped because they were disruptive to the German colonists. This violent action is the first step towards a complete transformation of the native African, from someone who presents a problem to the colonist, into invisible beings whose humanity has been forcefully repressed.

After the native populations are made, in effect, invisible, apathy becomes a means by which to fit into the colonial mold. Rosen, as the ideal white man, readily accepts apathetic attitudes towards the mistreatment of native Africans, as he himself defends Udo wholeheartedly, despite believing in the allegations. Thus, it must be understood that ambivalence and apathy belong to an imperialist worldview, and, therefore, must be accepted by imperial feminists if they wish to climb the rungs of the imperial social ladder. Bülow, however, takes this one step further: She does not just accept apathy, but views it as a usable way to gain power in the form of racism. Women in the novel do not exercise open forms of violent racism. Instead, they practice more covert, apathetic, forms of racism. They conform to the imperialist norm by accepting

violence and secure their place in the colony insofar as they set themselves up as powerful players in the construct of racial hierarchy. The attitudes reflected in this novel make clear that Bülow sees power as dominance over others; through apathetic racism, she means to achieve such power.

Conclusion

The themes in *Tropenkoller* are deeply rooted in German colonial history: Apathetic attitudes to the problems and pain of individuals that weren't a part of white German society were widespread in Germany at the time of colonialism. Novels like *Tropenkoller* that attempt to build a place for white women within the colonial empire, serve as an historical insight into the means by which white women sought to carve out power within imperial society. Bülow's construct of imperialist feminism in her books, on the basis of female adaptation to the male ideal and an adoption of an apathetic outlook make clear that she herself believed in an imperial racial hierarchy and that she envisioned female emancipation only within the confines of patriarchal society. Therefore, it is wrong to categorize Bülow's writing as feminist: Her theories contribute to imperialist thinking that, eventually, serves to disenfranchise all women. Her assertion of the white German male as the ideal, to whom all should adapt themselves, ends poorly as soon as the woman cannot adapt herself enough. The woman will never, regardless of how hard she tries, be able to conform exactly to the white male ideal and will thus always fail to obtain true liberation.

Dangerous forms of imperialist feminism aside, *Tropenkoller* can additionally provide insights into apathy and complicity. White women, although perhaps not always directly involved in colonial violence, share the blame insofar as they look away from the violence as it benefits them to do so. *Tropenkoller* makes clear that white women have, for many years, been

complicit in the oppression of others. The same continues even today, as is evidenced through the common occurrence and practice of white feminism, especially prominent in Europe and the United States. White women have too long been centered on their own oppression at the hands of a society controlled by white men and have disregarded (and been apathetic towards) the struggles of people of color in an attempt to get ahead themselves. As bell hooks points out “...white female racism undermines the feminist struggle. As long as these two groups [black men and white women], or any group, defines liberation as gaining social equality with ruling-class white men, they have a vested interest in the continued exploitation and oppression of others” (16). If nothing else, *Tropenkoller* should serve as a reminder that white feminism is firmly rooted in colonial, imperial thinking, as well as a reminder to look towards, and not away, from racial violence. Only by addressing racial violence and not covering it up can our deeply racist societies begin to change. In order to achieve equality, we cannot look to stay within the bounds of the imperialist, systemically racist society: We must think of a different means by which to achieve true emancipation, for all people.

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