

**“Decolonial Memories” podcast:**  
**Episode 18 with Dr Christian Stachelbeck and Dr Pierre Köckert**  
**Centre for Military History and Social Sciences of the Bundeswehr (ZMSBw)**  
**Potsdam, 25 March 2026**

**Question Thomas Fues (TF):**

Dr Stachelbeck, Dr Köckert, thank you very much for agreeing to speak with the “Decolonial Memories” podcast. You are researchers at the Bundeswehr Centre for Military History and Social Sciences. Please explain the remit of your centre and the relationship between your institution and the Bundeswehr.

**Answer Dr Christian Stachelbeck (CS):**

The Bundeswehr Centre for Military History and Social Sciences is a federal research institution under the Federal Ministry of Defence (BMVg). Its primary mission is to conduct research into German military history. On the one hand, we conduct military historical and social science research for the BMVg. On the other hand, as a departmental research institution, we have a mandate to communicate our research work to the public, the academic community and, of course, the armed forces.

**Question TF:**

Dr Stachelbeck, you are the head of the research project ‘The German Military in Colonial Service 1880 to 1918 – A Continuum of Violence’ at your centre. Could you say a few words about the research question and the intellectual interest that led to the establishment of this research focus?

**Answer CS:**

We have noticed that the major colonial wars have been studied comparatively thoroughly, for instance with regard to the course of events or the involvement of various actors. What is missing, however, is a systematic focus on military violence in its full range. We understand violence as a persistent feature of colonial rule, which distinguishes the situation there from that in the metropolis in Europe. We consider military violence not only in the context of so-called ‘large-scale colonial wars’ or military operations, but military violence in all its facets, ranging from everyday coercive practices to major operations and colonial wars. In between, there is a wide spectrum ranging from latent and structural violence to physical violence – in short, violence in all its possible forms.

The central question for us is: how does this military violence manifest itself within the colonial state and under colonial rule? This is at the heart of our research interest. We have found that the specific focus on the military still has a number of gaps, and we wish to devote greater attention to this.

**Answer Dr Pierre Köckert (PK):**

To clarify this a little further: during the conceptual phase, we realised that only the major colonial wars had been considered so far. These include the Maji Maji War, the war against the Herero and Nama in German South-West Africa, and the ‘Boxer Rebellion’ in China. However, whilst developing the concept, we realised that a list of various military operations could be compiled using battle medals and battle bars. This yields roughly 300 identifiable events. Even a preliminary survey of the sources suggests that this is far from the full number. We can assume that we will be able to record an estimated – though at present it is not yet possible to say exactly – 700 to 1,000 different military operations.

We refer to such military operations as ‘deployments’. This is a modern term that did not exist at the time. The scope at the time was much broader. As mentioned, it ranged from military operations to so-called punitive expeditions or research expeditions. We noticed that the military was involved across the colonial sphere. That is the actual focus of our work. We examine military action at various levels within the colonies. This remains an understudied field.

**Question TF:**

Can you say anything more about the specific impetus that led to the establishment of this research focus? Why not ten years ago? Or why not as late as 2036?

**Answer CS:**

We are not starting from scratch. We have worked on colonial history before. It is not a priority area for our institute. But we have always taken this field into account. One example is that in 2009 we organised a major international conference on military history, as we do every year. At that time, the theme was imperial wars. We have always kept colonialism in mind, but it was never a research perspective or a research focus.

Some time ago, we underwent an evaluation by the German Research Council. And it was noted that this was an area in which we could do more. That was a driving force behind the decision to take the rather incidental observations and research work we’d had up to that point and consolidate them a little, so that we could generate more sustained research in this field. That was the decisive turning point. We then sat down together and tried to establish a link, via the concept of military deployment, between acts of military violence and broader military history – that is, between colonial history and the history of violence. This concept forms the basis of our project.

Next, we considered which heuristic approaches might be most useful. For us, that is the concept of ‘deployment’. It is very modern, but we have not yet encountered it in a colonial context. The term also seemed appropriate in light of contemporary usage, such as the Bundeswehr on deployment. We have defined the concept of ‘deployment’ as the deployment of military personnel in pursuit of state or sovereign mandates. In other words, it is a relatively broad definition that allows us to approach the sources effectively, one we can work with productively and that guides our research.

**Question TF:**

You are looking at the period from 1880 to 1918 for the deployment of German military forces in the colonies. Why do you start in 1880, when formal German colonial rule did not begin until 1884?

**Answer CS:**

Yes, that is correct. Germany’s formal rule began in the mid-1880s. But even before that, we had certain colonial expeditions. We did not want to completely ignore those. Of course, we could also have taken 1884 or 1885 as the starting point. But we chose 1880 in order to include a lead-up period, rather than beginning directly with the Congo Conference. The year 1918 is clear; that is the end of formal German rule. But that doesn’t mean we don’t want to consider the period that followed; that is explicitly part of our approach. German colonial possession ended with the end of the First World War. But of course we look at memories, transformations, continuities and discontinuities. I think that goes without saying in a research project of this kind.

**Question TF:**

When was the research focus established, and how long will it run?

**Answer CS:**

We began the planning phase in 2024. We sat down together to evaluate the research literature, draft a concept and consider where we could make specific contributions. As I said, the core remit of our institute is the study of German military history. The project is scheduled to run until 2028, so it spans a period of four years – a relatively limited time frame, and one with limited funding. Two members of staff are sitting here in front of you, Pierre Köckert and myself. Another colleague will be joining us shortly; he is currently writing his doctoral thesis. Another colleague, Frank Reichherzer, who is responsible for the ‘Military and Violence’ research focus here at our institute, is working with us but is not part of the core team. This is a perfectly standard way of working for us, where we draw on the expertise of colleagues for our own projects. When it comes to the perspective of violence, Frank Reichherzer is an expert. Pierre Köckert is also an expert, not least through his doctoral thesis. This demonstrates the interconnected nature of research within our organisation. We look beyond our own horizons when it comes to expertise, naturally also in cooperation with partners in the academic community, both nationally and internationally.

**Question TF:**

You are examining the presence or actions of the German military in all German colonies. Is that correct?

**Answer PK:**

Yes, exactly, that is what we do. However, this needs to be qualified, as there was not a German military presence in all German colonies. In some colonies, there was a Schutztruppe (colonial protection force). This was the case in Cameroon, German South-West Africa and German East Africa. With the other colonies, it becomes more complicated. In Togo, by contrast, we find a police force rather than a Schutztruppe, as in German New Guinea and on the Pacific islands. And in Tsingtao, it is an expeditionary corps and the German Navy that are active there. The decisive factor in all cases, the common denominator is the use of military force. And we do not define military force as such; for us, it is not synonymous with military power.

Military force is a broader category; other actors, such as police forces, were also capable of employing military force. It depends on the training and the armament. And what is the *modus operandi*? We then very quickly arrive at the conclusion that even a police unit in Togo can use military force. Especially since they are referred to as ‘police soldiers’ even in the contemporary sources, which is quite telling in itself.

**Answer CS:**

Firstly, that, and secondly, some of them are former soldiers themselves. It’s a kind of hybrid situation, a grey area, so to speak. Some are former soldiers taking on police duties, or vice versa. And that creates a close connection. In my view, particularly in a colonial context, the police and the military can ultimately hardly be separated from one another.

**Answer PK:**

It goes even further if we take a closer look at a region in Togo, for example. There is an example that illustrates this well, namely the expedition of a station manager, the botanist Baumann. He personally led a police unit during a larger police operation and burned down several villages, effectively acting as a civilian botanist exercising coercive power. That is highly revealing.

**Answer CS:**

But the example also shows us how closely military action and the use of force are linked to researchers, adventurism, and the thirst for discovery. Some of these actors were researchers operating in unfamiliar environments. This awakens the spirit of discovery in some of them, sometimes even out of boredom. We see that such processes are very closely intertwined. People describe this using the term 'expedition' or 'punitive expedition'. The terminology used in the sources can at times appear striking. In fact, it is partly a research expedition, but one that is usually linked to military force or even police force. As I said, I see hardly any difference in the colonial context. That's what makes the whole thing so fascinating to look at more closely.

**Answer PK:**

So, to summarise, we are indeed looking at all German colonies.

**Question TF:**

To what extent does your research focus on the involvement of indigenous or, shall we say, non-German agents of violence by the German military, for example the Askari in East Africa?

**Answer PK:**

That is indeed a crucial point that must always be taken into account. With one exception, namely German South-West Africa. Here, it is mainly German colonial troops. In the other colonies, and indeed with the police force as well, the following applies: when we speak of the police and colonial troops, the vast majority are in fact non-German, local police staff or soldiers. And we naturally take them into account as well. However, we run into source problems relatively quickly. This is because, in most cases, we have German officers – whether police or military – leading the operations, and they naturally write their own reports. Reports from Askari in German East Africa, for example, are rather scarce.

**Question TF:**

Could you say a little more about your methodological approach? You mentioned that the term 'deployment' is a central analytical category for you. Could you describe your approach in a bit more vivid terms?

**Answer CS:**

As I said, 'deployment' is a relatively broad term. We have a definition of the term in which the mission is central. As we've already mentioned, this could be a punitive expedition, an undertaking of whatever kind. Conceptually, this this would be framed quite differently in contemporary terms. However, we do not have a specific, fixed method or theory. If someone says, 'I am analysing military operations through a particular theory of violence', then they are welcome to do so. We have a doctoral thesis project here by our colleague Martin Schulz, who is looking at the East Asian Expeditionary Corps in the 'Boxer Rebellion'. He also works with the concept of deployment and examines acts of violence from different perspectives, drawing on a range of conceptual approaches.

Situational factors also play an important role. There are certain notions of masculinity; here we are already in the realm of gender history. The German military of that period was overwhelmingly male. After all, it was mainly men who pursued a military career there. In the settler colonies, German women were sometimes present as well, that is, European women. Apart from that, the soldiers naturally also had contact with the civilian population, with women in the local population. Gender aspects also play a role in military operations and acts of military violence.

We keep our methodological approach relatively open. It is usually very useful to approach the subject of military deployment through several methodological perspectives. I have already mentioned one aspect: the gender-specific perspective. Then there are many other possibilities, for example numerous theories of violence. These approaches can be applied in concrete ways. How can violence be explained? There is a major disagreement: some say it was situational violence. Was it primarily situational violence, or did cultural factors perhaps play a role? And so we find ourselves in cultural history.

As you can see, we are relatively open to different methods. It depends on which particular essay or research project addresses the subject of deployment and fits our definition. We had a Master's thesis that I co-supervised as a second supervisor. The author took the military concept of 'deployment' as applied to German South-West Africa and approached the topic using a specific political science theory. It essentially dealt with fear. What role did fear play in politics? How did fear then affect the military? It is an excellent piece of work that produced genuinely new findings. For a Master's thesis, I must say, that was quite remarkable.

The opportunity lies in interdisciplinarity – for example, combining political science with history – but also in a multi-perspective approach. One can view history from the perspective of the officers, so to speak from the top, but also the everyday history of the soldiers or participants from the bottom.

**Answer PK:**

But of course we cannot do all of this ourselves. That is the sad thing about the whole affair. The project is deliberately structured to allow space for such approaches and perspectives. Fundamentally, one can say that the entire research project is characterised by various iterative research processes. Various workshops structure the core phases of the project. We don't all have to agree. For example, I'm more of a praxeologist and have a somewhat broader concept of violence.

**Question TF:**

You have already mentioned that, insofar as the archives here are accessible to you, everything is described from the perpetrator's perspective. To what extent are you able to take other perspectives into account – such as those of the victims – for example through oral history, the passing on of experiences across generations?

**Answer CS:**

You're raising a major core issue. We also identified this during our first workshop, which focused on methods and approaches. What opportunities can military history offer colonial history, and vice versa? It is always mentioned – and I have noticed this on several occasions – that we invariably adopt this Eurocentric view, the perspective of the colonial rulers. This is because we have much better access to the sources of the Reich Colonial Office or the imperial biographies of colonial officers. But of course we try to incorporate local sources – that is, precisely the victims' perspective of those under colonial rule – despite these difficulties.

We have someone from Cameroon who will be speaking at our next workshop. We have written to archives in Namibia and throughout the former German colonies. The response was rather poor. We are taking steps in this direction because it is only by always considering and incorporating the other side that one can develop a much greater understanding of the German military's acts of violence. Otherwise, it really is one-sided.

We're trying to do this despite all the difficulties. It starts with written sources. You mentioned oral history. For example, there was a project at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania in the 1960s on the Maji Maji War. Oral history captures events retrospectively, often after a considerable lapse of time, sometimes spanning several decades, and this creates difficulties. It is a source, similar to how we use memoirs. But we must contextualise it properly. When those affected recount their experiences 20 or 30 years later, which is of course entirely human, the picture often appears different. This is a familiar problem in historical scholarship. But of course, oral tradition is a source that can be taken into account here.

**Answer PK:**

As regards oral history sources as such, that is entirely correct. However, we also conduct basic research. Naturally, we try to consider all sources. We are certainly aware of the one-sided perspective, which we nevertheless try to address through a plurality of sources, by focusing not just on one source but on several. But written and verifiable sources must surely be given greater evidentiary weight than a purely oral history account, which may reflect multiple stages of transmission.

I would recommend Johannes Fried's work 'Schleier der Erinnerung' (Veil of Memory) to your listeners; he is actually a medievalist who attempts to address this topic and view it in a slightly more nuanced way. From a historical perspective, purely oral history sources are difficult to use as the sole basis. They must be validated, and that is what we strive to do.

**Answer CS:**

However, we are also working innovatively in the sense that we have just completed a photo essay. It deals with the power of the image – specifically, how colonial violence is depicted in photographs. We have put this into writing across 60 pages featuring individual images. Following in-house editing – which is standard practice for us as part of quality assurance – the work will be posted on our website shortly. Highly interesting, I can only recommend it; Pierre Köckert played a key role in its creation. My intention is to add this photo essay as an innovative element to a product we plan to publish following our three workshops. In other words, to show the layman how to use image sources in a small-scale yet highly innovative way to present the results of our research.

**Question TF:**

You mentioned that your research project began in 2024 and is due to run until 2028. You have therefore almost reached the halfway point of the project. What can you say about the preliminary results or findings?

**Answer CS:**

Our first workshop last October focused primarily on methodological questions. How can we – that was the first question we asked ourselves – link the German military in colonial operations with the history of colonialism and violence? We received a great deal of agreement from our colleagues, particularly those specialising in colonial history. And we arrived at a simple realisation, though it needed to be reaffirmed: German colonial history cannot be conceived of without the military. It is a central actor, a central agent of violence within the colonial state, and without this central agent of violence, colonial history cannot function.

That was a crucial realisation, where we said we had hit upon the key point. And regarding the methodological approach, as already discussed, the perspective of the local population must also be incorporated. These are all demands we have taken on board. This is now our initial basis for discussion; these are the findings on which we will now continue our work. The next workshop,

which will take place shortly, will focus on colonial operational practice. By then, we expect the first substantial results regarding this aspect. This will, of course, take place through academic networks. Colleagues will present and contextualise their research findings there, in response to questions we have formulated.

We expect concrete results. For example, from a colleague with whom we have already recorded a podcast. He has presented a biography of Curt von Morgen, a colonial officer in Cameroon. The biographical approach is a method I had just forgotten. For me, it is a key method, because history is shaped by people, and looking at individual people is absolutely central to my approach. Biographies are an excellent way of demonstrating how continuities and discontinuities have operated. People who were in the colonies, who returned to the German Empire – Curt von Morgen went to Europe – and continued working in the military there as normal. He then held a post as an attaché and was a divisional commander and commanding general during the First World War. I believe he was also a regimental commander.

This is an imperial biography with a colonial backdrop. He, of course, went on to live his life afterwards. I believe he was on the far-right of the political spectrum. That was certainly the case for some, not for all, but for some. There you can see what continuities existed. You can also examine whether these acts of violence, these colonial experiences, were brought back to Europe. In this regard, we are awaiting findings from those who have already completed extensive research, such as the aforementioned dissertation. We'll then compile that. For now, this is just a starting point on our part. We've just mentioned the photo essay. That is one result that shows how colonial violence has been depicted in images. Not a 500-page monograph, but 60 pages which also present research findings.

We try to use various formats. One is the podcast, which we produce ourselves. We go to the university and teach there. We try to discuss our concept and our ideas with the students. In the summer term – which is currently being planned – here in Potsdam at Sönke Neitzel's chair, the only one for military history in Germany. We have many interns from different universities, from different backgrounds, who come here and also work with us in the colonial field. They work on individual smaller tasks, carry out research assignments or write conference reports. We supervise students, as I just mentioned regarding the Master's thesis. And so we are making progress in many small steps, with many small outputs and ultimately also with a larger output. With the staff we have available. Ultimately, that's just the two of us plus the aforementioned Martin Schulz with his PhD thesis. And so we are trying to present results bit by bit through various outputs.

**Question TF:**

Can you elaborate on the studies you have commissioned or are using for your research project? For example, Tanja Bühler's book on colonial wars in East Africa or the study on the significance of the navy for German colonial rule.

**Answer CS:**

I have known Tanja Bühler since we worked together on the volume on the imperial wars in 2009. She is involved in our project by supervising a doctoral thesis and producing the study on colonial wars in East Africa for our series 'Wars of Modernity', which is overseen by our Education Department. This format involves summarising academic findings for a broad audience without many footnotes. Nevertheless, it is an academic book. That is also one of our key tasks here at the institute: to cater to a broad audience.

This is what I have just referred to as academic networking. For example, we work very closely, under a cooperation agreement, with Matthias Häussler and Andreas Eckl from the Institute for Diaspora and Genocide Research at Ruhr University Bochum. Together with them, we will publish the conference proceedings at the end of the research project. They are currently working on the diaries of Lothar von Trotha. The first series has already been published; those on China are in progress. This gives our doctoral student exclusive access to the sources. It's a mutual benefit. In this way, we are closely networked academically. We cooperate with partners, and this is a key achievement that we are trying to realise through collaborations, using the limited resources we have.

**Answer PK:**

We are no longer at the beginning, but we are in the process of working through a three-stage approach. In the first workshop, we clarified the methodological and theoretical foundations. Which theories are truly illuminating, or even the very basic question: what is military history? Our main finding so far is clear. We are convinced that colonial history cannot be studied without military history. We have now completed the first workshop; two more are to follow. At the end, the results will be summarised in an anthology, to which we will contribute our specific military-historical perspective. However, we are also bringing in external expertise, such as that of Dr Häussler with his Trotha diaries, which will then fill certain gaps. We can steer this to some extent, but not entirely. We rely on people approaching us who wish to collaborate with us. This is a call for collaboration. Anyone interested is welcome to contact me (email: [PierreKoeckert@bundeswehr.org](mailto:PierreKoeckert@bundeswehr.org)).

What we can say, however, is that military operations were far, far more frequent than initially thought. And that military force played a far, far greater role than was suspected. The enforcement of rule, or the control of spaces – or indeed the lack of control over spaces – through the military or military force in the broader sense played a significant role in the colony's control of space.

**Answer CS:**

This supports the thesis of the weak colonial state, which, in my view, has gained increasing acceptance. The colonial state acts out of a fear of being unable to control this territory. That is, of course, clear in the case of impenetrable terrain, spread across several military stations with few personnel, who then operate away from the coast, even further away from the metropolis, in some cases acting there completely independently. And there is always the fear that one cannot control this impenetrable territory. So one often responds with force to subjugate the local population to the colonial rulers. Some do so a little more, others a little less, because ultimately one knows that without the local population, one cannot manage either. The colonial state depended on local partners. This is carried out in very different ways, as research has shown. I believe that it is actually the weak colonial state that demonstrates strength to the outside world by enforcing violence. From what I have seen so far, I would strongly argue in this direction.

I can recommend a brilliant book that I reviewed for our in-house journal: Jürgen Kilian's postdoctoral thesis ('Des Kaisers Gouverneure'). He conducts a group-biographical analysis of German colonial governors, examining 25 or 26 biographies using a wide variety of approaches. Among other things, he works with Pierre Bourdieu's approach and examines where these people came from, and what social structures they were part of. And lo and behold, many were former officers or had a military background. In the end, they may have been civil servants, but the civil and military aspects are very closely intertwined, even among the governors. They come from the same social strata of the German Empire. Jürgen Kilian has brought this out very clearly using a wealth of sources. He highlights the colonial rulers' differing perspectives on the local population.

And he also discusses the ‘weak state’ thesis, which I find very convincing. Jürgen Kilian attended our first workshop and presented his work.

**Question TF:**

Could you say a few more words about your in-house journal?

**Answer CS:**

We have two in-house journals: a scholarly publication, the ‘*Militärgeschichtliche Zeitschrift*’ (Journal of Military History), which features a variety of articles and a reviews section, published twice a year, with some content available online for free. It is, of course, also available in print. We also produce special issues. I believe a special issue on gender history is currently in preparation. Then we have a second journal entitled ‘*Militärgeschichte*’ (Military History). We call this the ‘blue journal’, which is aimed at a very broad audience. So it features shorter articles, without footnotes, but written by experts and containing some images. This journal is intended to have a wide impact within the armed forces, because not everyone reads thick academic books or has the time to do so. We also have a podcast. We want to make military history accessible using modern methods. It is our task to convey valid, sometimes highly complex research findings to people who do not deal with colonial history – such as how the military functioned during the colonial period – on a daily basis.

I recently wrote an article about Verdun, Verdun 1916; now it is 2026. It is not so easy, as a scholar, to present the subject to a broad audience. But it is part of our remit to address the general public as well as the specialist community. And we achieve this primarily through the journal ‘*Militärgeschichte*’.

**Question TF:**

Dr Köckert, you mentioned the first workshop that took place as part of your research focus. Could you tell us a bit more about the second and third workshops planned for this year? What topics do you intend to cover there?

**Answer PK:**

The second workshop, 7–8 May 2026, will focus on a subject that is particularly close to my own research. Here, we will turn to the practical dynamics of colonial violence. We want to examine how the various military operations in the colonies unfolded. The announcement is on our website and on the ‘Military History Portal’. This is a website we also use to disseminate our topics. It is run by the ‘Working Group on Military History’, of which many of us are members. The working group provides a forum for those interested in military history, as well as for experts. There are several colonial topics being explored by others there too.

As mentioned, the second workshop focuses on the concrete practices of violence. The third (7–8 October 2026) goes beyond the time frame we had originally set ourselves. There, we turn our attention to military violence after 1918, when the German Empire had long since collapsed and the colonies had been lost. What interests us is the lasting impact of colonial experiences. How is Germany’s specific colonial history dealt with? Where do we see continuities in personnel? How do museums deal with the past, or how do they distort it? Where does silence persist, and where is the past openly addressed? And of course, this does not end with the Weimar Republic, but extends through the Third Reich to the Federal Republic and into recent history, which can then also be examined. However, we are also limited here by the responses to the call for papers, which has already been issued.

**Question TF:**

On the subject of the aftermath of colonial military violence after 1918, I would ask you to comment on the following case study. I am active in a local history initiative in Berlin-Kreuzberg concerning the former Dragoon Barracks. An important event in the escalation of violence during the German Revolution of 1918–19 took place there in January 1919. Seven emissaries, who had occupied the Vorwärts publishing house together with others, were brought there to negotiate the terms of surrender. They were immediately murdered in the barracks on 11 January 1919. The commander of the barracks at the time was Franz von Stephani, who had previously gained experience as a colonial officer in Cameroon and German South-West Africa for ten years. How would you go about conducting a scholarly investigation into what possible links there might be between the experience of military violence from the colonial era and behaviour in the period after 1918?

**Answer CS:**

Let me introduce the topic. The real expert is sitting opposite me. Pierre Köckert wrote his doctoral thesis on acts of violence by the German military at that time, albeit not in a colonial context. But for me, your example shows how important it is to look at the individual's biography. You have someone who was in the colonies and is now carrying out acts of military violence in a different context, namely the German Revolution. The question is: did the violence he experienced as a colonial officer influence him in a completely different setting? For me, this is a key question. To get to the bottom of it, one has to look at the sources. How the man wrote about it, how he processed it.

The colonial officer Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, for example, continued to have repercussions well into the 1950s. The Lion of Africa – a myth that was woven around him. To identify these myths and present them as such – which is one of our core tasks – a biographical approach is essential. From this, we can draw conclusions regarding continuities and discontinuities. But Pierre, you're really the expert here.

**Answer PK:**

Fundamentally, the topic needs to be viewed more broadly. There are two distinct spheres: violence in the German colonies and violence at home. Violence at home is the subject of my doctoral thesis; I can say quite a bit about this with regard to the period from 1871 to 1923, when the peak of the use of violence in Germany came to an end. The use of force was quite strictly regulated in the German Empire as well as in the Weimar Republic and remained so after the First World War. Over time, it became more tightly regulated. Initially, the situation was relatively open, partly stemming from legal frameworks predating the German Imperial Code.

But the military use of force was regulated, politically controlled, and by no means as brutal as one might think. There were isolated excesses, but in the history of violence during the Weimar Republic, these were in fact limited to two phases: firstly, the period from January to March 1919, across the Reich but with a focus on Berlin. In March 1919, with around 1,200 deaths, there were far more casualties than in January 1919. And the second phase, which is usually the one people focus on, is the Kapp–Lüttwitz Putsch, which resulted in 3,500 deaths across the Reich.

One has to ask oneself why things escalated here despite these regulations. By the way, 'regulations' means there were manuals, there were instructions, there were even drills on how to deal with internal violence. The question is answered relatively quickly, because this revolutionary uprising emerged from the German Empire era; initially, it proceeded without bloodshed, for the most part at least. And suddenly, in January, it escalated – why? It escalated because the German soldier

suddenly found himself facing an armed opponent, something the theory of counter-insurgency had not previously encountered. Previously, the opponent had generally not been armed. And suddenly the opponent is armed, and the old guidelines are no longer sufficient.

I am not familiar with the case you mentioned; I am speaking in general terms now. That people overreacted here by responding with the means immediately available to them, above all brutal force. That is, however, limited to this small context. If you look at the bigger picture, it looks different. Then, unlike Mark Jones ('Founding Weimar'), we come to the conclusion: it wasn't violence at the outset, but rather everything was regulated; not much actually happened. The best example of this is the Reichswehr deployment in Saxony in 1923. The sources situation is difficult here, but it is said that around 30,000 Reichswehr soldiers were deployed over a period of several months. If we now look at the number of deaths that occurred, the figure is 26, with the majority in Freiberg. Because there was another escalation there. But these were not mass casualties on the scale often assumed.

Now the question is: to what extent did his colonial experience play a role in the life of this colonial officer, Stephani? We need to examine this in relation to him personally. Broadly speaking, in general terms, it does not seem to have played a role. Let's take a look, for example, at Freikorps leader Georg Maercker. He was on the move a great deal in central Germany, but in a completely different way. He even wrote an unpublished, internal service directive. It states quite clearly that violence is not the solution. We must present as strongly a show of force as possible in order to spare ourselves violence. Like many officers of the period, he had colonial experience. On that point, one must ask: why do people join the colonial forces? Many saw it as a way to accelerate their careers. They go to the colonies to climb the ranks quickly. And they don't stay long. They usually stay for just two years and then returned. That isn't particularly well regarded in the officer corps, but it does speed up one's career.

To return to the subject of violence. Colonial experience is often not transferred, because using violence in the colonies is quite different from using violence at home. It has a different legal basis and also a different emotional basis, because people are valued differently in both contexts. You can see this when you look at the violent actions of German officers or former German officers serving as Freikorps officers in the Baltic states. In 1919, violence escalated there too during the major civil war, and here too they acted differently than they did at home or in the colonies. But by no means as violently as in the colonies. The level of violence in the colonies was of a different order altogether. According to the current state of research, as I can assess it at the moment – though not yet conclusively – it is far, far more violent in the colonies. The tipping point for the massive use of violence is reached much, much more quickly than at home.

**Question TF:**

When we turn to the current situation of the Bundeswehr, which findings from your research focus could be relevant to training content and the preservation of traditions within the Bundeswehr?

**Answer CS:**

First of all, we need to establish a principle. We here conduct research and deliver research findings. That is our core mission. We examine the situation and evaluate it from the perspective of scientific research, as Pierre Köckert has just said. How can I classify acts of violence? How do they arise? Are there continuities? Are there discontinuities? This yields a valid research result based on sources. One can question this; that is what science is for. If someone else has a counter-argument, then we are fully engaged in scientific debate. So that is essentially what we do.

What we do not do is shape the preservation of tradition. We can publish research findings and we also supply them to the armed forces. How the armed forces, the individual branches – the Army, the Air Force and the Navy, and others – or even the Federal Ministry of Defence ultimately deal with this is not in our hands. We do not say, ‘This is now tradition’; rather, we provide scientific findings from history. We can also provide historical examples for historical education, one of the key components of training. Our findings are evaluated in teaching and conveyed through specific methods in the classroom. We have the officer schools, we have the Command and Staff College; that is where our books go too. That is our task: to provide specific research findings for teaching and training. Once a year, we host lecturers from across the Bundeswehr here and provide them with a brief update. We also conduct training ourselves. But at its core, that is the task for others within the Bundeswehr.

Preserving tradition is a task for senior management. Ultimately, the Federal Ministry of Defence decides – as with barracks names – whether something is worthy of tradition or not. We can provide our expertise. That is also requested. We assess this scientifically for one name or another. But whether it is ultimately worthy of tradition is not something we decide here in-house. We simply provide the scientific expertise on a particular individual: what were their actions and their thinking within a specific contemporary context.

**Question TF:**

From a broader societal perspective, what insights from your research on remembrance work regarding colonialism could be, or might become, relevant for Germany?

**Answer CS:**

Our contribution is important here too. Let me give an example from a different context. Our institute’s research has made a significant contribution to debunking the legend of the ‘clean’ Wehrmacht in the Second World War as a myth. Namely, what memoir literature sought to portray, and what former generals and others who spun this myth in the 1950s did to clear their names. This was achieved through solid research, and our institute made a significant contribution to this through the series ‘Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg’ (The German Reich and the Second World War). This example shows that we can enrich public debates, such as those held in the context of the Wehrmacht exhibition, with our research findings from within the heart of the German military. In this way, we help to provide a better understanding of the German military.

This applies just as much to the colonial context. What was the situation regarding acts of violence? What guided the soldiers – or failed to guide them? What kinds of perpetrators do we encounter? How did they act? What was their motivation, and what role did racism play? These are all questions we address through the concept of deployment, and where we can stimulate scientifically grounded debates with solid research and robust findings. That is our task, and this is how we contribute to academia, but of course also to societal and public debate.

**Answer PK:**

I see it exactly the same way. We provide the foundation. We do not conduct the debates ourselves – the restitution debates and the like. But we can certainly provide a military-historical basis for them, based on sources that are valid. And which can be used for debates. But that lies outside our sphere of influence, and as a research institute of the Federal Ministry of Defence, that is neither our mandate nor our intention.

**Question TF:**

To what extent does your research involve academic exchange with former European colonial powers?

**Answer PK:**

Tanja Bühner is the best example of this. As a Swiss national, she works at the University of Salzburg. We are trying to build networks across Europe. However, it must be made absolutely clear that our focus is on German colonial history and the German military. That is where our expertise lies. And we have to seek out other expertise. We can do that, for example, with Tom Menger, who examines 'Transimperial Clouds'.

**Answer CS:**

He is Dutch himself and works at a German university. This clearly shows that scholarship depends on international exchange. It is inherently international. Our institute collaborates with a great many other institutes across Europe and around the world. We always have a network. Even when we look at who is working on colonial history. We are in contact with colleagues in France. I recall a workshop we organised on the 'Boxer Rebellion'. That was during the Covid-19 pandemic. I had a French officer from our partner institute, the 'Service historique de la Défense' in Vincennes, as a speaker. He works there as a historian and provided the French perspective. But our focus is on the German military within the context of transnational, trans-imperial historiography; that is automatically international and cross-border. So we take that into account in our research.

**Question TF:**

What connections do you have with people and institutions in the former German colonies, also with a view to potentially publicising your research in these countries at a later date?

**Answer PK:**

We would very much like to expand this area. As I said, we have taken initial steps to establish contact, but these have met with only a modest response. We are very keen not only to reflect the German perspective, but also to incorporate a contemporary perspective – for example, from Tanzania, Namibia or other countries – and the research being carried out there. However, we are reliant on assistance in this regard. We have not yet received the response we would like from the relevant countries and researchers. And, of course, it is conceivable that we could make our research findings available there on request.

**Answer CS:**

Perhaps the volume we intend to publish could be published in English. This would help familiarise colleagues in the former colonies with our findings. We are already trying to network; we are not retreating into our ivory tower here, but are collaborating with European colleagues and would also be keen to work with people in the former German colonies, should there be interest. We now have an example in Dr Tsogang Fossi from Cameroon, who will be presenting at the next workshop. This offers an enormous broadening of the whole perspective, which is always called for. However, the old problem of a purely Eurocentric perspective often reappears, which can easily remain within familiar interpretive patterns, perhaps bringing in one or two sources from the local area. But in the end, I would cautiously say that this is not satisfactory. And I believe we really still have a lot of work to do in this regard.

**Answer PK:**

Our project concept has been published in two languages, German and English. We would certainly be open to a trip to Tanzania, perhaps not at the moment, but we would be interested in Namibia or

other countries. We are definitely interested in establishing contacts and have sufficient expertise to present ourselves in this field.

**Answer CS:**

We also have the technical means, beyond travel, for digital collaboration at conferences. You can connect people from all over the world via a small video conference, in English, which is usually not a major obstacle. It's simply part and parcel of working as a historian that you have a reasonable command of the English language. If one cannot travel or be physically present for whatever reason, participation in the discussion is at least possible in digital form. Ultimately, it is a question of interest. As I said, we are trying this. We have scheduled Tsogang Fossi from the Technical University for the next workshop. We received the tip-off from Tanja Bühner, who is quite well-connected. Yann LeGall from the same research project at TU Berlin will also be taking part.

The call for papers for our third workshop in October has been issued. We are looking forward to it and are very open to external contributions. We would actively welcome such contributions, so that we can incorporate these perspectives. We would welcome any suggestions regarding individuals and institutions in or from the former colonies who might be able to contribute here. If there are any reservations, I can assure you: whilst we are soldiers, we are also scientists. That is one of our primary tasks. Not everyone here wears a uniform, after all; we are a scientific institute.

So I would encourage anyone interested not to hesitate to engage with us. We are very open and willing to engage in dialogue. We have a very scientific, friendly and collegial atmosphere. We are concerned with science and scientific exchange. Ultimately, we want research results; we want to make progress. We want to generate knowledge across borders. It would be wonderful if we could achieve that.