

Bernhard Nocht as the namesake of the Institute of Tropical Medicine?

Expert opinion on the tropical medicine specialist's attitude towards racism and National Socialism

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English translation of the German original. If there are discrepancies between the German and English versions, the German version shall prevail.

Table of contents

1. Bernhard Nocht as the namesake of the Tropical Institute – Occasion and contexts of the discussion.....	3
1.1. "Honor regime" and scope for action: approaches to individual burden under National Socialism and racist colonialism.....	9
1.2. How can Nazi incrimination be investigated biographically?.....	10
1.3. How can racism be examined biographically?	14
2. Nocht's childhood, youth and first career steps - a biographical introduction	17
3. Bernhard Nocht and racism	22
3.1. From therapeutic trials to a human experiment? Research into sleeping sickness and malaria at the Hamburg Institute for Maritime and Tropical Diseases	22
3.2. The Tropical Institute and colonial medicine under National Socialism: upheaval, acclamation and colonial revisionism	28
3.3. The colonial movement and colonial medicine under National Socialism	30
4. Bernhard Nocht in National Socialism.....	31
4.1. Bernhard Nocht and the professors' commitment to Adolf Hitler	32
4.2. Bernhard Nocht in the public eye as a protagonist and as a public figure	34
4.3. Bernhard Nocht and the dispute over the appointment of the management of the Tropical Institute	37
4.4. The wife of Bernhard Nocht as a "Jewish half-breed of the 2nd degree"	38
4.5. Nocht's suicide in May 1945.....	38
5. Summary: How to deal with the name Bernhard Nocht?.....	40
Appendix.....	44
<i>Archives</i>	44
<i>List of printed sources and research literature</i>	44

1. Bernhard Nocht as the namesake of the Tropical Institute – Occasion and contexts of the discussion

Bernhard Nocht was a port physician and organizer of the municipal medical system in Hamburg, a tropical physician, university rector and founder of the Institute of Tropical Medicine, which was later named after him – the scientist and science manager, who was born on 4 November 1857 in Silesia and died on 5 June 1945 in Wiesbaden, took on numerous tasks and functions during his active professional life and after his retirement. He was one of the most important protagonists in the field of public medicine in Germany in the first half of the 20th century. In particular, he was honored many times for his organizational activities and management in science and tropical medicine. Even long after his retirement, he was honored by colleagues, representatives of the city, as well as national and international officials with commemorative publications, laudatory articles, medals and other honors.

"In the desire to honor the founder and 30-year director of the Hamburg Institute of Maritime and Tropical Diseases and one of the oldest pioneers in the field of German tropical medical science on his 85th birthday on 4 November 1942, I decree that the Hamburg Institute of Maritime and Tropical Diseases shall henceforth bear the name: Bernhard Nocht Institute for Maritime and Tropical Diseases."¹

This decree was signed by the Nazi Gauleiter and Reich Governor Karl Kaufmann on 3 November 1942; the renaming was then swiftly implemented. Like no other honor, this gesture of Hamburg politics stands for the great esteem in which Bernhard Nocht was held throughout his life.¹

Eighty years later, it was precisely this public presence of Bernhard Nocht in the city and in science that became the bone of contention: Initial internal deliberations at the institute about how to deal with the man who gave it his name were followed in 2022 by a public debate about the naming of Germany's largest institute of tropical medicine, which now operates in the form of a non-profit and independent foundation under public law and as a member of the Leibniz Association. At the heart of the debate is the question of whether Nocht, who is so highly regarded and revered as a science manager, is acceptable as a namesake from a current perspective. The discussion, which initially took place in various newspaper articles, focuses on two questions: Was Bernhard Nocht racist? And: Was Nocht national socialist?

¹ Hamburg State Archives (StA HH) 131-4, 1942 A IV/44, Erlaß über die Neubennung des Hamburger Instituts für Schiffs- und Tropenkrankheiten. October 24, 1942. Also see *Hedrich, Nocht*, p. 303

The question of Nocht's racism was prompted by statements he made during one of his research trips to Dar es Salaam. The city, which is now home to millions of people, was the seat of the German colonial administration in East African Tanzania between 1891 and 1916. According to medical historian Philipp Osten, Nocht was primarily oriented towards the economic and political interests of the German Empire and its colonial policy. Based on this attitude, he criticized in a "Report on his journey to German East Africa" from 1912 that the malaria drug quinine had been distributed to European colonial officials and their relatives, but also to the local population - and that in a naive belief in the "malaria control through quinine treatment" developed by Robert Koch "the greatest possible separation of the European dwellings from those of the colored people was not sufficiently observed everywhere".² The Hamburg tropical doctor believed that the best way to combat malaria was strict segregation of people of European and African origin.

"Unfortunately, the governorate's medical advisors were not even able to get the school for Negro children, who are known to be the best suppliers of malaria parasites for the Anopheles mosquitoes in the area, located in the European quarter to be relocated."³

In describing his travel impressions from Dar es Salaam, Nocht emphasized the lack of strict separation between the "races" as a lack of hygiene and, in contrast, praised the organization of the British settlements such as Port Florence/Kisumu, where this was practiced.⁴ From today's perspective, such statements, including the N-word, are difficult to bear - and therefore require a precise classification in the following in order to break down the background to these statements. More important than his personal attitude, however, is his work as an organizer of science in general and tropical medicine in particular: In his research as well as

² Archive of the Bernhard Nocht Institute of Tropical Medicine, Hamburg (ABNIT), 2-8, Section VII, Reiseberichte Daressalam: Bernhard Nocht, Reise nach Deutsch-Ostafrika, p. 23.

³ Quoted from *Rybarczyk*, Hafenaarzt. In the original ABNIT, 2-8, section VII, pp. 22-23. The N-word is mentioned in full in the source, so that I also reproduce this term here in the quotation without adopting the derogatory meaning of the word. For a discussion of this approach, cf. *Dehlf's/Yazdani*, Notes.

⁴ *Ibid.*

in his work as a doctor, he not only recommended the separation of members of different "races" in order to prevent or contain infections. At the same time, as the "organizer of tropical medicine", he stood for a branch of medicine and its management that was closely linked to the colonial power politics emanating from the German Reich and the associated injustice. His position as director in Hamburg alone made him a particularly prominent figure in this field, as the institute he headed was the leading institution in German tropical medicine.⁵ Beyond his personal actions as a medical scientist, it is therefore necessary to ask whether and to what extent he promoted racism in his various offices and functions in the field of tropical medicine, and perhaps even actively sought to promote it himself.

There is also a second concern, which has already been alluded to in the description of the circumstances surrounding the naming of the institute after Bernhard Nocht in 1942: The signatory of the decree naming the Tropical Institute after Bernhard Nocht was the Reich Governor Karl Kaufmann, the most powerful Nazi functionary in Hamburg. Not only on the occasion of his 85th birthday, but also on many other occasions, Nocht was courted by the National Socialist politics from 1933 onwards. Even though he already ended his professional career when Hitler's government took office, Nocht remained active, took on appointments for his successors, was asked for advice as an 'eminence grise' - and was thus also in the public and political spotlight. Was Bernhard Nocht a supporter of National Socialism? Even if he was not a member of the NSDAP, he was a member of the NS Reichskolonialbund. In addition, his signature appears under a "*Declaration of support for Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist state by professors at German universities and colleges*", which was written and later published on the occasion of a rally organized by the Saxon Nazi Teachers' Association on 11 November 1933. The title of the document was probably only added to it afterwards. Nocht's name thus appears in a list of 900 other names, mostly professors, but also private lecturers and other teaching assistants as well as students. The list also includes prominent scientists such as the neurologist Heinrich Pette, the surgeon Ferdinand Sauerbruch or the philosopher Martin Heidegger⁶. The circumstances and interpretation of this signature will be examined below.

Politically, Nocht was socialized in the German Empire and had spent his military service in the navy. In many respects, he was strongly nationalist or even nationalistic and remained so until the

⁵ Cf. Hedrich, Spitzenforschung.

⁶ Cf. Grüttner, Talar, pp. 83-86.

end of his life, as will be shown below. On the one hand, this means that his political convictions overlapped with Nazi ideology, as was the case with many monarchist or even nationalist-conservative contemporaries. On the other hand, it also makes plausible what a reading of the few writings and speeches in which Nocht commented on the political developments of the time reveals: Nocht did not tie in directly with the political content that National Socialism then emphasized even more strongly. As far as is known, he did not express anti-Semitic views and did not advocate political violence within Germany. His racism continued along the lines of the colonial racism of the pre-war years, but did not become more radicalized than that of more Darwinian, "racial-hygienic" or territorial-expansive racial theorists under National Socialism. Nocht did not share the idea and practice of eliminating members of "races" deemed to be inferior, the demand for 'living space in the East' or the anti-Semitism implemented by the state. On June 5, 1945, Bernhard Nocht and his wife committed suicide in Wiesbaden. In the public debate about Nocht's person, the circumstances of his death were recently questioned with regard to possible political implications: did he and his wife take their own lives because they were overwhelmed by the reconstruction and reorientation? Or did they want to escape "uncomfortable questions"?⁷

The discussion about the naming of the Institute of Tropical Medicine is significant for current-pragmatic reasons: Especially in an increasingly internationalized scientific scene, which the Bernhard Nocht Institute undoubtedly represents, naming it after a dubious role model could have a negative impact, argues Hamburg medical historian Philipp Osten, for example. "Many scientists are mobile. They often know the consequences of racism very well. Tainted names could be interpreted as unscrupulousness"⁸. Osten makes a point that the Board of Directors of the Bernhard Nocht Institute has also adopted by taking a proactive approach to the naming of its institution.

The questions associated with Nocht and the Institute's name take on an additional virulence because they do not stand alone, but are integrated into a larger current debate: with the questions raised about his attitude towards racism and National Socialism, the person of Bernhard Nocht touches on a dynamic that has been moving the discussion about the cultural lines of memory in Germany for several years. Under the headings of "post-colonialism" and

⁷ Rybarczyk, Hafenaarzt

⁸ *Ibid.*

"Historikerstreit 2.0" (historians' dispute 2.0), historians and the public have for some time been negotiating questions relating to the culture of remembrance and the politics of history. In particular, the debate is about whether and how the remembrance of the Nazi dictatorship and especially the Holocaust and the remembrance of colonial crimes should be placed in relation to each other. While the desire to overcome the widespread absence of the German colonial past in the German culture of remembrance has met with widespread approval, the broader implications of this discussion are highly controversial. Did the colonial crimes precede the Holocaust not only in terms of time but also logically? Did the National Socialists adopt not only the racist ideology, but also the *modus operandi* of concentration camps, human experiments and more from colonialism? Are there perhaps even personal overlaps between perpetrators of colonial crimes and perpetrators of the persecution and extermination of Jews in Europe? Or is there no evidence of such a thing, so that comparisons or at least references to it primarily advance research, but less so memory? The Holocaust was unique in its dimensions, in its ideological projections, in its spatial boundlessness, in its character as a state-sponsored crime and in its reference to a specifically German "völkisch" (nationalistic) nationalism at the end of the 19th century. The conviction of the singularity of the Holocaust formulated in the first historians' dispute stands for this, which is currently being rejected with dubious arguments and questioned and readjusted in its absoluteness with good arguments⁹.

The occasionally extremely heated dispute conceals the fact that the protagonists on both sides are pursuing goals in the culture of remembrance that are not mutually exclusive, on the contrary: the establishment of a permanent and ultimately global

⁹ Cf. highly convincing *Wildt, Singularität*, pp. 128-147.

Holocaust remembrance is a success story that has developed over decades of debate. Since remembrance is not a zero-sum game in which attention to one diminishes the perception of the other, Holocaust remembrance does not stand in the way of a strong and adequate memory of colonialism and imperialism, but on the contrary can promote it.¹⁰ In research to this day, there are numerous efforts to compare the anti-Semitic violence of the Holocaust with the racist violence of colonialism with precisely this aim, as well as to work out similarities and differences.¹¹ According to Frank Bajohr and Rachel O'Sullivan, it can hardly be denied "that Nazi imperialism and the broad field of National Socialist mass violence virtually impose themselves to be researched and analyzed comparatively and thus also under colonial premises."¹² Unfortunately, such attempts often fail in public. "A rapidly spreading lack of historical orientation" was recently stated by Andreas Wirsching, for example, in an article on current discussions about references to the past and attested that the corresponding debate is "without a compass".¹³

Even if the following considerations do not answer the questions raised by the empirical study of Bernhard Nocht, it is precisely these two strands of collective memory that intersect in the person of the port doctor and the associated discussions and emotions. The demands for the renaming of the Tropical Institute can also be seen in this context and are interpreted accordingly in the summary. In contrast to the observable tendency towards a highly agitated debate, the following descriptions and considerations are based on objectivity: the questions raised above about Bernhard Nocht's attitude and practice towards racism/colonialism and National Socialism will be approached empirically and supported by sources. The results of research and interpretation will then be condensed into arguments for the discussion about Nocht as the namesake of the Institute of Tropical Medicine.

The report begins with a methodological consideration of how the two central concepts of racism and National Socialism can be used to interpret the biographical sources. on Bernhard Nocht can be made fruitful (Chapter I). With the perspectives thus established, Bernhard Nocht and his actions are examined chronologically, especially between the turn of the century and his death in 1945: What do we know about Bernhard Nocht's political stance and practice and how did

¹⁰ Cf. decisive for the current debate *Rothberg*, *Erinnerung*.

¹¹ Cf. the lucid study by Bajohr/O'Sullivan, *Holocaust*, pp. 191-202.

¹² Bajohr/O'Sullivan, *Holocaust*, p. 202.

¹³ *Wirsching*, *Kompass*, p. 6.

he behave towards National Socialism? How can his actions be placed in the context of the colonial enthusiasm and politics of the German Empire, the Weimar Republic and National Socialism? (Chapters II and III). Finally, the results are recapitulated and discussed with regard to the question of the naming of the Bernhard Nocht Institute (Summary).

The following report thus develops a thematic biography of the port doctor and tropical medicine specialist. With this orientation, the present text is based chronologically on the life of Bernhard Nocht, but does not claim to be a classic biography, which derives the development of a person from the successive stages of their existence. Markus Hedrich has written such a book, in which he describes Nocht's life and work.¹⁴ I am grateful that we were able to support each other in our source research and discuss our findings. This exchange was a pleasure for me - the fact that we came to partially different conclusions despite (or perhaps because of) this cooperation can be an intellectual gain for the reader if both texts are read side by side. Such a comparison offers not only comprehensive knowledge about Nocht, but also an excellent lesson about the past and our attempts today to orient ourselves in it.

1.1. "Honor regime" and scope for action: approaches to individual burden under National Socialism and racist colonialism

The following analyses discuss Nocht as a person, his attitude and his behavior towards racism and National Socialism, especially with regard to the naming of the tropical institute he founded. The central focus is on the act of paying homage to Nocht. Naming a public institution, a building, a traffic area or a street after a person is not a politically neutral act, to give a name to a place and thus mark it; on the contrary: such designations are meaningful acts that initially serve to highlight the achievements of the person in question, to declare them exemplary for the present and worthy of remembrance for the future. Dietmar von Reeken and Malte Thießen have proposed the concept of the "regime of honour" to analyze such processes: The focus is on the actors, their motives and goals, the associated negotiation processes, the persons to be honoured as well as the practices of honouring and the corresponding receptions.¹⁵

This analytical approach already indicates that the scope of honors goes far beyond the individual person being honored. Society uses this medium to negotiate its own systems of values

¹⁴ Cf. *Hedrich*, Nocht

¹⁵ *Von Reeken/Thießen*, *Ehrregime*, pp. 17-18.

and norms and can promote "the cohesion of modern societies through the interplay of differentiation and integration".¹⁶ However, it is just as possible for honors to divide the public - the debate surrounding Bernhard Nocht is just one example of this.

"Honor is a chameleon" is a summary that Winfried Speitkamp draws from his large-scale study of honor practices in the 19th and 20th centuries:¹⁷ What was considered exemplary yesterday and worth remembering for the future is no longer necessarily so today. Honors are not static moments, but dynamic processes. The debates surrounding them allow a deep insight into the changing values and practices of the society involved.

What qualifies a person for their name to be used to designate a public facility, a traffic area or a square? Conversely, what are the criteria that discredit a person for an honor and therefore argue for a de-honor, such as a renaming?¹⁸ The changing conjunctures of the memory of Bernhard Nocht are an eloquent example of this: What were the motives and criteria for naming the Institute of Tropical Medicine after Bernhard Nocht in 1943? How did the specialist community and urban society deal with this in the following decades? What validity can these considerations still have today? To what extent do they prove to be 'fit for the future'?

To answer these questions, we must first ask about Nocht's individual incrimination to political ideologies and world views. To this end, we differentiate between various levels and develop criteria with which to approach his biography. The present report finds models for this above all in the discussion about biographical involvement in National Socialism, while questions about racism and the associated racist colonialism have so far received less attention.¹⁹

1.2. How can Nazi incrimination be investigated biographically?

A first approach to the question of Nazi incrimination focuses on organizational behaviour and the personal political practice derived from it. This approach is modeled on what was probably

¹⁶ *Vogt*, *Logik*, p. 12.

¹⁷ *Speitkamp*, *Ohrfeige*, p. 319.

¹⁸ Cf. on this aspect *Vogt*, *Logik*, pp. 338-369.

¹⁹ An overview of various attempts to classify NS exposure as of 2017 can be found at *Templin*, *Untersuchung*, pp. 7-13.

the largest and most far-reaching attempt to clarify who was a National Socialist or who was considered to be a National Socialist - the various phases of denazification in the immediate post-war period. The guiding principle of these interrogations and procedures, which were initially carried out by the Allied occupation administrations and then by the Germans, was to use a grid of categories to determine the degree of incrimination of an individual. "Main culprits", "Incriminated", "Less Incriminated", "Followers" and "Exonerated" – the Germans questioned about their memberships in Nazi organizations, affiliated organizations, positions in the state, party or other power apparatus, but also about their professional careers and personal income during the years of the dictatorship were divided into these groups²⁰.

In these proceedings, the concept of Nazi incrimination was not a matter of "scientific-analytical term, but initially one of political justice, with which the political guilt of individuals was to be determined on the basis of certain criteria."²¹ Parallel to the denazification process, which affected large parts of the German population, the Nuremberg trial against the main war criminals and later court proceedings aimed to enforce a legal judgment and conviction with regard to the main culprits as well as the institutions involved. The denazification proceedings had thus developed a highly formalized notion of incrimination which sought to locate the individual in the institutional structure of the Nazi regime and passed judgment on them on that basis. For our project with regard to Bernhard Nocht, memberships are an important indicator. However, they can "only be a first starting point for examining the concrete behavior of the individual person under National Socialism, on the basis of which forms of individual stress are examined."²²

A second approach, which allows political convictions to be examined from a different perspective, is offered by first-person documents of all kinds, which are particularly important in biographical work and its proximity to the individual person: In addition to self-disclosures in denazification proceedings, these also include (in the classic manner) diaries, letter literature, documented statements to third parties in the family, to friends and in other, mostly private contexts. The expectation associated with this group of sources is that personal motives for certain actions or a general attitude, for example towards dictatorships and their ideologies, can be identified. As a rule, however, such statements are rare and, if they exist, are usually not very

²⁰ Cf. *Leßau/Steuer*, Nazi, p. 45.

²¹ *Templin*, Untersuchung, p. 7.

²² *Bösch/Wirsching*, Einleitung, p. 21.

reliable and should therefore be treated with caution in terms of source criticism. In the case of contemporary statements, the question arises as to the extent to which they arose from personal convictions, were due to social desirability or are above all to be seen as opportunism.²³ In the case of *ex post* statements, the suspicion is obvious that in retrospect the past was remembered differently or deliberately falsified. In addition to travel reports, which in the case of the tropical physician were mostly of professional origin, and representative speeches, which can hardly be regarded as ego documents in the narrower sense, one document in particular stands in the case of Bernhard Nocht, which has already received special attention in the evaluation of his person: In a letter written by him, he and his wife bid farewell to their children shortly before their suicide in 1945. This document plays an important role in the question of Nocht's attitude towards National Socialism.²⁴

With the transfer of power to the National Socialists, the political constellation in Germany changed fundamentally: the commitment to National Socialism, the affiliation to the various organizations up to the Hitler salute - all of these practices were demanded by the state and thus normatively inclusive.²⁵ With the dictatorial narrowing of society and politics, "a fundamentally homogenized political and public order was enforced, in which police violence and political control ensured that no one could publicly claim to represent a point of view other than that of National Socialism."²⁶

In the years 1933, 1934 and 1935 in particular - the phase of the so-called National Revolution - large sections of the population set about "working towards the orientation of the Führer", according to a formulation borrowed from the language of the sources by Ian Kershaw.²⁷ What had functioned before 1933 primarily through the demarcation from competing political worldviews was now broadly shaped when it was formulated or negotiated for the various areas of life what National Socialism meant or should mean in each case. In this way, ideology developed into a "politically controlled but intellectually open field of opinion", which was binding above all in its recourse to "a few conceptual shells".²⁸ As long as the positions expressed were compatible with "guiding concepts of the Nazi world view such as people,

²³ Cf. *Kemper/Rentschler Handlungsspielräume*, p. 37.

²⁴ Cf. ABNIT, 1-67: Bernhard Nocht, Abschiedsbrief.

²⁵ Cf. the excellent study by *Allert, Gruß*.

²⁶ *Leßau/Steuer, Nazi*, p. 34.

²⁷ Cf. *Kershaw, Hitler*, pp. 7-9, 663-744.

²⁸ *Raphael, Ordnungsdenken*, p. 27.

community, leader and race", a "broad spectrum of political, philosophical and scientific ideas" could be formulated, as long as the vocabulary and imagination of Nazi ideology were used.²⁹ National Socialism found its particular form not so much in a strongly developed ideology, but above all in political practice and the use of violence. In contrast to communist ideology and its various branches, in which a systematic world view was developed with the aim of profoundly shaping society and politics, the National Socialist world view between 1933 and 1945 did not represent a comprehensive system of political conviction. Rather, it "defined the framework of what could be (publicly) thought and said, within which heterogeneous opinions and attitudes were permissible."³⁰ With regard to Nocht, these considerations are particularly important regarding his public writings and speeches.

If one summarizes the considerations made, then the question of the personal incrimination of individual persons can probably be answered above all by "what they did and less by what they were".³¹ Biographical studies in particular offer the opportunity to ask not only about organizational affiliations and (auto)biographical self-positioning in the system, but also about the "what" and the "how" of individual involvement in the system.³² With this guiding perspective, Claudia Kemper, for example, has developed a model with which she analyses the actors of the Hamburg business elite with regard to their respective "scope for action". In doing so, she examines the incrimination of individual actors as well as the collective by taking an empirical look at what the respective individuals did, to what extent they were useful for establishing and maintaining the dictatorship and how they used the scope for action available to them. With this orientation, the term integrates "personal circumstances and imprints, ego-tactical statements as well as political and social contexts and structures and shows which individual behavior was possible and ultimately displayed."³³ The following considerations on Bernhard Nocht will also be based on this methodological guideline in order to reconstruct the involvement in National Socialism that can be observed.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Leßau/Steuer, Nazi*, p. 35.

³¹ *Herbert, Nationalsozialisten*, p. 39.

³² Cf. *Kemper/Rentschler, Handlungsspielräume*, p. 39.

³³ *Ibid.*

1.3. How can racism be examined biographically?

What has been developed above for the question of the Nazi incrimination in discussion previous research can be applied in a second respect to Nocht's attitude and practice with regard to colonialism and the racism associated with it. As a tropical physician, but above all as a manager of tropical medicine, he stood for a functional system that was an important pillar of colonialism and the racism associated with it.³⁴ His individual organizational ties, personal statements and positionings in his scientific work as well as in the public and private sphere, his professional activities as a tropical physician, scientist and director of the Tropical Institute, the room for maneuver - similar to Nocht's position on National Socialism, these questions about his stance on colonialism and racism must also be asked.

Despite an intensive preoccupation with colonial history, eugenics, racially motivated extermination under National Socialism and the spread and implementation of other racist policies, research on "race" as one of the most important aspects of the history of the world has not yet been fully developed. The critical study of racism, which is thought to be 'natural' and owed to racism, is still in its infancy.³⁵ According to Maria Alexopoulou, especially with regard to contemporary history, the critical study of racism remains a "blank space", which results above all from the self-image of the Federal Republic that the phenomenon has no longer played a role since 1945 at the latest.³⁶

Doing racism - how relations of inequality were created and consolidated on the basis of origin - is tied to specific times and places.³⁷ For this reason, racism is not understood below as a timeless and omnipresent form of discrimination, but rather as a historically developed phenomenon of modern knowledge of domination and a practice derived from it.³⁸

For the question of Nocht's attitude towards racism, the specific section of the mutable concept of "race" and racism that developed with High Imperialism is of particular importance: from the 1880s onwards, physicians took up the impulses of scientists as diverse as Carl von Linné,

³⁴ Cf. Eckart, Medizin, pp. 541-550.

³⁵ On the state of research, see Alexopoulou, Rasse/race.

³⁶ Alexopoulou, Wissen, pp. 18-43.

³⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 46 f.

³⁸ For an introduction, see Geulen, Geschichte.

Charles Darwin and others and dynamized the already existing system of hierarchizing people with the evolutionist assumption according to which "races" changed for the better or worse in the sense of natural selection. This was associated with a momentous structural change, as it not only meant that the "supposedly natural 'racial order' of the world (acquired) a natural status, but the racist practice of exclusion itself."³⁹

The concept of "race" was thus extremely present and shaped scientific work in the disciplines that today are summarized as life sciences.⁴⁰ For the expansive and intensive colonial policy of High Imperialism, colonial medicine in particular, which was closely linked to Nocht, offered a starting point for the domination of nature and people in the colonies by providing practical medical tools as well as legitimizing the colonizers' claims to power over the natives.⁴¹

The rise of National Socialism then brought a renewed radicalization of racial thinking and the policies derived from it, which then translated into state policy with the transfer of power to Hitler. The war declared and waged since 1939 as the "conquest of living space" then unleashed genocidal violence once again in a special way.⁴² The connection between racism and National Socialism is multifaceted and is not limited to biological racism alone and certainly not to the lines of development that colonial racism laid down: although scientists from the field of disciplines that are now grouped together as life sciences provided decisive blueprints for the National Socialists' policy of extermination, racism in the years 1933 to 1945 (and presumably beyond) was also characterized by diverse cultural definitions of difference and perspectives of discrimination.⁴³

Although the biological anchoring of "race" in medicine was taken for granted for many decades, this idea was fundamentally refuted in a narrower scientific sense at the beginning of the second millennium thanks to the genetic analyses that had then become possible. In Germany, the Jena Declaration of the German Zoological Society in September 2019 called attention to the fact that the category of "race" has no biological or genetic basis. "There is - to put it explicitly - not a single

³⁹ *Geulen*, *Geschichte*, p. 4 f.

⁴⁰ Cf. *Plümecke*, *Rasse*.

⁴¹ *Eckart*, *Medizin*, pp. 57-59.

⁴² Cf. *Wildt*, *Singularität*, p. 136.

⁴³ *Burleigh*, *Wippermann*, *Racial State*, p. 51. Cf. on the discussion *Pendas et al*, *Racial State*.

human gene that establishes racial differences, nor even a single base pair."⁴⁴ External factors such as skin color, which before the possibility of genetic analyses were often used as the basis for a taxonomy in "races", on the other hand, are "a highly superficial and easily changeable biological adaptation to the respective local conditions."⁴⁵ "The concept of race", the authors conclude, "is the result of racism and not its prerequisite."⁴⁶

In everyday life and in politics, however, it is not genetic analyses and medical expertise, but precisely the mixture of (pseudo)medical research and socio-culturally based *othering* that makes racism widespread and still effective. The most powerful taxonomy in the past and to this day is that of "white" European and "black" African people.⁴⁷ In this form, racism is a system of order and knowledge that has become highly standardized, creating and supporting power disparities. This pattern of thought adapts highly flexibly to political and social conditions - "from the justification of inequality in the horizon of universalism, through its biopolitical functioning in the first half of the 20th century, to the most recent forms of racism without 'races'".⁴⁸

This current knowledge of the solely cultural conditionality of the notion of "races" stands in contrast to the scientific convictions of the 19th and early 20th century: Bernhard Nocht worked as a medical researcher and scientific manager on the foundation of a world view that understood "race" as the basis for a biologically based distinction between groups of people. He was thus operating within a framework that science in general and medicine in particular had developed for themselves and then continued to advance on a 'scientific' basis, especially in the latter third of the 19th century, in parallel with colonialism. "Racism is a system, and individuals share responsibility in this system, but they cannot simply leave it.", states Susan Arndt, one of the most critical racism researchers in Germany.⁴⁹ From a historical point of view, it is important to consider this contemporary context and to embed both the texts and the practice of Nocht in it.

⁴⁴ Fischer et al., Jena Declaration.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Cf. Arndt, Rassismus, p. 18 and passim. See, for example, the debate on the concept of race in the Grundgesetz: German Bundestag, experts

⁴⁸ Geulen, Geschichte, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Arndt, Rassismus, p. 418.

2. Nocht's childhood, youth and first career steps - a biographical introduction

It was the consequences of the Hamburg cholera epidemic of 1892 that made Bernhard Nocht not only a prominent figure in the health service, but also in the city's public eye: When the number of people dying of cholera skyrocketed in the summer of that year - a total of more than 8,600 people fell victim to the epidemic that year - the Hamburg Medicinalkollegium called the Imperial Health Institute in Berlin for help on August 23, 1892. The head of the institute, Robert Koch, and his staff had already set off from there to the Hanseatic city the day before to investigate the situation on site. They found a massive outbreak of cholera, the rapid spread of which they attributed to Hamburg's poor water supply and its special sewer system, which - unlike in neighboring Prussian Altona, which was hardly affected by cholera - transmitted the pathogen unfiltered into households.

As a member of Robert Koch's Berlin team, Bernhard Nocht was not only involved in the fight against the epidemic itself, but also made an important career leap as a result. As a consequence of the catastrophe, the Hamburg Senate established the "Hygienic State Institute" and also envisaged the establishment of the new office of port physician: together with several "assistant physicians and health inspectors", he was to be responsible for monitoring, comprehensively inspecting and advising on the state of health "on all ships lying in the port of Hamburg" as well as the Elbe skippers. On Robert Koch's recommendation, Bernhard Nocht was the one who considered for this position and was appointed port physician on April 1.⁵⁰

Nocht's experience as a naval surgeon, his work at Robert Koch's institute and, above all, his involvement in combating the cholera epidemic in Hamburg itself qualified him to do so, according to contemporary accounts.⁵¹

"He was an assistant to Koch in Berlin for 2 ½ years and has also made a name for himself in wide circles through several scientific papers. In connection with this, he also enjoys great confidence in the Imperial Health Office, which confirmed by the fact that he was sent to the most dangerous place in Hamburg last year. The fortunate combination of efficiency with seafaring experience, of a fine nature with military breeding makes him appear particularly suitable for the position of harbor doctor."⁵²

⁵⁰ Cf. *Hedrich*, Nocht, pp. 87-92.

⁵¹ Cf. *Mannweiler*, *Geschichte*, p. 11.

⁵² StA HH, 361-6-I, 0094, p. 18.

On 1 April 1893, Nocht resigned from military service to take up the civil office of the City of Hamburg, which he held until 1906.

In retrospect at least, many of Nocht's school, university and professional stations lead to this position, as he developed as a pupil, student and with his first professional steps around the poles of military and medicine: born in 1857 in Landeshut in Lower Silesia, Nocht followed his graduation from the Realgymnasium there with the Abitur at the humanistic grammar school in Waldenburg, now Wałbrzych. This laid the foundations for him to become a military doctor - a desire that may have been reinforced by the general esteem in which the military was held at the time, as well as the career prospects, which combined a quick income with the professional opportunities of studying medicine. Nocht not only had role models for a military career among his relatives, but had also experienced the German-Austrian War of 1866 himself as a child and teenager, when soldiers were quartered in his home.⁵³

Nocht enrolled at the Königlich Medizinisch-Chirurgisches (Royal Medical and Surgical) Friedrich-Wilhelm-Institut in Berlin in 1876. Markus Hedrich rightly described this institution as the "medical West Point" of the German Empire.⁵⁴ Almost all the renowned representatives of military and tropical medicine of the time completed their studies here: the later Nobel Prize winner Emil von Behring, for example, was a fellow student of Nocht, as was the bacteriologist and probably Robert Koch's most important student, Georg Gaffky - who recommended his fellow student Nocht later also for the post of port doctor.⁵⁵ In addition to the Friedrich Wilhelm Institute and the associated teaching hospital, the students were also taught at the Medical Faculty of Berlin University. Medical teaching and patient care were combined with six months of military service and various other military instructions.

In the summer of 1880, Bernhard Nocht passed his viva in human medicine with the top grade of "summa cum laude", was assigned to the Pomeranian Jäger Battalion No. 2 as a junior doctor on 1 October 1880, and was in turn assigned to the Berlin Charité, where he was able to write his medical dissertation in the field of neurology.⁵⁶ On 16 November 1881, Nocht was able to finalize the proceedings and completed his doctorate with a statistical evaluation of applications of "nerve stretching". This was followed by assignments in various military units. Two strands

⁵³ Hedrich, Nocht, pp. 30-33.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁵⁵ For this and other examples, see Hedrich, Nocht, p. 41.

⁵⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

of his professional and personal orientation are thus clearly laid out: Military and medicine - professionally, Nocht devoted himself to medicine and learned and practiced it in the military structures of the German Empire. A few years later, another moment occurred that would shape Nocht's professional development: on 2 February 1883, Nocht was commissioned into the navy, initially working for a few months as an assistant doctor on two training ships, and came into direct contact with the colonial policy of the German Empire. Nocht's lifelong involvement with the colonies and tropical medicine began with his first military command, which the young naval doctor received on 19 July 1884 on the gunboat SMS *ILTIS*. On this ship, he was responsible for the health of the 70 crew members.

Like her sister ships, the *ILTIS* was also an important instrument of the empire's colonial policy. Territorial domination was initially achieved primarily through the "planned construction of militarily protected trading factories", before moving later to more invasive forms.⁵⁷ Like other gunboats, the *ILTIS* was also deployed for so-called punitive missions against natives, for example in 1883 at the Pescadores Islands.⁵⁸ Markus Hedrich was also able to show empirically that Nocht experienced a spectacular deployment of the *ILTIS* as a ship's doctor on August 25, 1885: The captain of the ship hoisted the German flag on the Yap Islands, colonial German "Jap Islands", part of the Caroline Islands in the Western Pacific, in front of two Spanish ships anchored before him and claimed the archipelago as a German protectorate.⁵⁹

Nocht's own career can no longer be reconstructed in detail from this point onwards: Even before the *ILTIS* was ordered back to the port of Wilhelmshaven in February 1886 after a six-year voyage, Nocht had left the command and - according to subsequent information - remained in East Asia for studies on cholera.⁶⁰ Only for the period from 3 May 1887 is it verifiable that Nocht was back in the German Empire: Until 21 October 1887, he was ship's doctor on the ironclad *Oldenburg*.

More decisive for him was his appointment in the winter semester of 1887/88 to the Institute of Hygiene in Berlin, where Robert Koch, one of the leading bacteriologists, was teaching and researching at the time. Among other things, a groundbreaking paradigm shift in infectious medicine was initiated here: whereas until the 19th century it was assumed that diseases spread through so-

⁵⁷ *Osterhammel/Jansen*, *Kolonialismus*, p. 16; cf. *Hedrich*, *Nocht*, pp. 52-53.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Hedrich*, *Nocht*, p. 61.

⁵⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 62.

⁶⁰ Cf. *ibid.* pp. 63-64.

called miasmas, simply put: through impurities in water or air, for example, Louis Pasteur and Robert Koch began to prove and research the role of bacteria and viruses in the spread of diseases. With the discovery of anthrax spores in 1876, but above all with the detection of the tuberculosis pathogen in 1882, Koch was not only able to trace infection pathways, but also put further research on a new footing: around a seventh of the population in the German Empire died from the so-called "white plague", tuberculosis. The cause of the infection and the infection pathways were unknown for a long time. Using special culture media and specific staining techniques, Koch succeeded in identifying pathogens and transmission routes. This marked the take-off of modern bacteriology - the Institute of Hygiene attracted doctors from all over the world. His successes quickly carried him up the career ladder: from 1880, Koch worked at the Imperial Health Department in Berlin, and in 1885 he was appointed head of the newly established Institute of Hygiene at the University of Berlin. In 1891, he then took over the position of Director of the Royal Prussian Institute for Infectious Diseases.

Bernhard Nocht found himself in a highly productive scientific working environment and research hotspot in Berlin, particularly at the Institute of Hygiene, but without having been involved in infection research or bacteriology himself during these years. During these two years or so, he personally worked in marine and maritime medicine: what material should marine uniforms and work clothing for seafarers be made of so that they are functional for work on the one hand and water-resistant on the other? This was the basic question of his research, on which he also published.⁶¹ When Koch took up the directorship of the Prussian Institute for Infectious Diseases, he did not take Nocht with him, so his time in Berlin ended in 1890. Another post awaited him as ship's doctor and later as garrison doctor in Wilhelmshaven. It was the outbreak of cholera in Hamburg that brought Nocht back into cooperation with Koch and into the public eye.

Bernhard Nocht's childhood and youth, his school career, his studies and his first professional steps developed in a highly dynamic period - both academically as well as politically and socially. This statement applies even more strongly to the social, political and medical professional areas in which Nocht himself was active: the last third of the 19th century in particular was a peak phase of nationalism, which reached a temporary climax with the founding of the German Empire in

⁶¹ Cf. *Nocht*, Untersuchungen, pp. 80-82.

1871 and led to the formation of internal nation-building. Nationalism was, according to Norbert Elias, "one of the most powerful, if not the most powerful, social belief systems of the 19th and 20th century."⁶² To put it bluntly: the fact that East Frisians and Franconians, Saxons and Saarlanders, but also rich and poor, Protestants and Catholics, and not least men and women became people who tied part of their identity to being German (or French, Italian or Polish) was a profound process. The formation of the national state in Germany was linked to the military in a special way. The wars of unification and the general esteem in which military culture, ideas of honor and values were held stand for this.

The same applies to science and medicine in particular: until the middle of the 19th century, (natural) philosophical knowledge was part of a canon within medicine, which was then increasingly called into question in the second half of the century. More and more, medical research and the patient care derived from it was oriented towards the natural sciences and their findings. The paradigm shift from miasm theory to research into bacteria and viruses is an example of this dynamic development.

Nation, military and medicine converged in another highly dynamic field, colonialism - a political issue whose significance extended far beyond the relatively short phase of active German colonialism between 1884 and 1918: the colonies were not only fields of action, but also projection surfaces and experimental fields for social developments in the empire itself.⁶³ Previous research on colonial history and its wider implications has highlighted the special role that medicine played in this process - far beyond its pragmatic and practical benefits: not only in Germany itself, but also in the colonies, medicine made a decisive contribution to statehood and the assertion of power by enabling and legitimizing the exercise of power.⁶⁴ For many scientists, the experience in the colonies was "a model for cooperation between state, economy and science in the sense of German 'world politics'".⁶⁵

In this sense, the phase of active German colonialism can be qualified as a decisive stage in the establishment of a racist order, among other things, which had a strong impact on the Reich itself during and after the loss of the colonies after the First World War. According to Pascal Grosse, the experiences made in the colonies represented "the drawing board on which the

⁶² *Elias*, Studien, p. 194.

⁶³ Cf. fundamentally *Van Laak*, Infrastruktur.

⁶⁴ *Thießen*, Gesellschaft, pp. 21-132, *Eckart*, Medizin, especially pp. 541-550.

⁶⁵ *Van Laak*, review of: Grosse, Kolonialismus.

German bourgeois nation state designed a new form of rule based on a 'modern' biologicistic understanding of society."⁶⁶

Nation and nationalism, military and militarism, colonies and racism - as a Silesian youth, as a student of military medicine, as a member of the navy and as a participant in colonial expeditions - the biography of the adolescent and young adult had frequent contact with these developments. An expert assessment must take these social developments into account as a context and at the same time embed them in Nocht's own biography. Therefore, the next two chapters ask on various levels how Nocht positioned himself in relation to colonialism and the associated racism as well as National Socialism and how he acted accordingly in these reference systems.

3. Bernhard Nocht and racism

The preceding methodological considerations guide the presentation of Nocht's professional activities as well as his private life. When his references to racism are examined below, this is done roughly chronologically, but is primarily oriented towards Nocht's activities as a physician and "organizer of tropical medicine" (Hedrich). These are broadly contextualized in the development of colonialism and tropical medicine as a whole.

3.1. From therapeutic trials to a human experiment? Research into sleeping sickness and malaria at the Hamburg Institute for Maritime and Tropical Diseases

Tropical medicine has also attracted particular attention in the history of science because the bridge between the inhumane medical experiments under National Socialism and those before was particularly wide in this segment. It was the colonies that provided a space for human experimentation that was closed to medical scientists in Germany. And there was a continuity between the research carried out on humans at the beginning of the 20th century and the human experiments in the Nazi concentration camps, for example. The question is therefore to what extent the Hamburg Tropical Institute was involved in these connections under the aegis of Nocht and afterwards.

The fight against sleeping sickness, which was rampant in what was then German East Africa,

⁶⁶ Grosse, Colonialism, p. 10.

now Tanzania, Burundi and Rwanda, developed into the leading project of tropical medicine practiced in the German Reich.⁶⁷ The disease, known by the technical term trypanosomiasis, according to current knowledge, is transmitted by the tsetse fly and causes symptoms ranging from fever to drowsiness and death.

As with malaria, there were no immunizing drugs or procedures available, so the search for a chemical means of prevention and treatment was particularly intense.⁶⁸ In order to make progress in this field, infected or supposedly infected Africans were concentrated in camps and treated with agents containing high levels of arsenic. Probably the most prominent representative of this research was Robert Koch, who relied on comprehensive Atoxyl therapy to research and combat sleeping sickness and used this acid in high doses. "He apparently accepted the severe side effects. They were not only extremely painful, but also led to the blindness of patients and in some cases even to death."⁶⁹ These severe impairments that could be caused by the administration of the medication were well known. As Wolfgang Eckart has pointed out, these experiments were in clear contrast to "in part already codified views regarding human experimentation procedures at home."⁷⁰ In Berlin or Munich, these experiments would not have been feasible due to professional rules and regulations, and in Togo, which was considered a model colony, only until 1913/14, when the colonial administration prohibited this procedure.⁷¹ In so-called German East Africa, "drugs for the pharmaceutical industry of the metropolis were ruthlessly researched on supposedly inferior people from the colonial periphery who were under the unrestricted control of the administrative authorities."⁷²

Nocht himself was not directly involved in this research. However, it can be assumed that he was at least informed: according to a report he wrote, he traveled to Africa in 1911 and 1912. One of his first stops took him to the sleeping sick camp near Utegi. He later traveled to Shirati in the German colonial territory and visited a center of sleeping sickness. From his observations, he recommended the clearing of forests and thickets where the vector fly developed, the maintenance of medical services (an "extended and repeated medical activity" was "of the greatest benefit to the natives" at low cost)⁷³, as well as the spatial separation of people from

⁶⁷ Cf. *Hedrich*, Nocht, p. 161.

⁶⁸ Cf. *Eckart*, *Medicine*, p. 544.

⁶⁹ *Carpenter*, Koch.

⁷⁰ *Eckart*, *Medizin*, p. 544.

⁷¹ Cf. *ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ ABNIT, 2-8, pp. 130-162, here p. 11: "Reise nach Deutsch-Ostafrika" by Bernhard Nocht (1912).

Africa and Europe.

Nocht was also in contact with "Dr. Scherschmidt". The physician Scherschmidt, whom he probably mistakenly spelled with a double "r", was a senior physician at the German sleeping sickness concentration camp in Uteri. In this function, he conducted extensive experiments in 1911 with "arsenolphenylglycine, which had proven itself excellently in animal experiments [...]" on interned locals. He is said to have "taken on the matter in a very special way" and increased the dose to up to 2.0 g within two days. "Severe physical damage and a very high mortality rate were the result."⁷⁴ Wolfgang Eckart compiled the results of these experiments in his studies:

"In this way, no fewer than 15 of 35 patients died in the Utegi camp under Scherschmidt's treatment within a very short time, six of them 'undoubtedly from intoxication'. In ten patients of the same group, trypanosomes reappeared after a short time, six clinical pictures worsened noticeably, while the condition of only one patient improved 'somewhat'. Three patients managed to 'evade observation by running away'.⁷⁵

Eckart categorized these observations comprehensively: it was astonishing "how little ethical sensitivity the doctors had towards their patients on the one hand, but how great their carelessness towards their own actions was on the other". According to Eckart, one indication of this was that "the senior physician of the Schutztruppen, Dr. Scherschmidt, who experimented more than he treated, even published his test results in the *Deutsche Medizinische Wochenschrift*."⁷⁶

After the events became public in this way, the Imperial Colonial Office demanded a separate report from Scherschmidt and, immediately after receiving it, prohibited any further experiments with arsenophenylglycine in German East Africa by telegraph. The Reich Health Council discussed these incidents on 15 June 1911 and confirmed the imposed ban.⁷⁷

Even if it must be assumed that Nocht was at least informed about these experiments, the Hamburg Tropical Institute was not directly involved in these experiments for a scientific and power-political reason within the discipline: after Nocht's scientific-political coup to establish the central tropical institute of the German Reich in Hamburg rather than Berlin, a pronounced competitive relationship arose between Koch and his former student. "Nocht, like many other Koch students,

⁷⁴ *Medizinal-Berichte 1910/11* (Berlin 1913), pp. 60-61; quoted from *Eckart, Medizin*, p. 347.

⁷⁵ *Eckart, Medizin*, p. 347f.

⁷⁶ Cf. *Scherschmidt*, pp. 292-294. On the whole, cf. *Eckart: Kolonie*, esp. pp. 215-227.

⁷⁷ Record (confidential) of the meeting of the Reich Health Council (Subcommittee for Sleeping Sickness), July 15, 1911, Berlin Reichsdruckerei No. 2707.11.IV., 13f. quoted from *Eckart, Medizin*, p. 348.

came under Robert Koch's scientific spell."⁷⁸ This had an impact on the Hamburg institute's activities abroad, which were particularly modest in the early days: Not only was it heavily involved in training and teaching and thus locally tied to Hamburg, but the most important protagonist of this research, Robert Koch, also blocked the involvement of the Tropical Institute in this area.⁷⁹

For Hamburg tropical medicine, the question of involvement in medical human trials therefore only arose later and in a different field, namely malaria research: after the loss of the colonies in 1918, the African and other colonial territories were no longer accessible for German research and development. If the pharmaceutical industry and German tropical medicine wanted to continue their efforts to achieve global market and world renown, they had to turn to domestic contexts. Quinine, as extracted from the bark of the quinoa tree, was the only known malaria drug and proved to be particularly difficult for prophylaxis. High doses had to be taken and considerable side effects regularly occurred.⁸⁰ This made it all the more urgent for industry and research to look for alternative options. Since the state of research offered neither information on the parasites and their biochemistry nor on possible drugs, it was unknown which substances could be used for treatment. However, human malaria could not be transferred to experimental animals, and avian malaria offered little helpful illustration, as the infected animals only reacted to quinine administration to a limited extent in a similar way to humans.⁸¹ "A way out was to resort to a relatively large group of patients who had been infected with malaria in numerous psychiatric institutions for therapeutic reasons since around 1919."⁸²

At the Hamburg Tropical Institute, it was Peter Mühlens, an employee of the institute, who gave new synthetic malaria drugs to Hamburg patients at the Langenhorn psychiatric hospital. It can be assumed that the director of the institute, Bernhard Nocht, knew about these treatments. This procedure differed from 'pure' human trials in that it was not ostensibly about testing an antimalarial drug. In fact, the "paralysis treatment with fever-inducing infections" was aimed at treating syphilis. Through inducing a "healing fever" in patients through malaria infection, it was hoped that the symptoms of the disease could be alleviated

⁷⁸ Hedrich, Nocht, p. 113.

⁷⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 161.

⁸⁰ Cf. on this and the following Weß, *Menschenversuche*, pp. 13-16.

⁸¹ Cf. *ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

or even completely suppressed.⁸³ In the articles published on the subject, the focus was on information about the treatment of paralysis itself, but at the same time information was gathered about the malaria parasites and their reactions to the treatment.⁸⁴

"Our Hamburg treatment trials (...) have been carried out in close cooperation between the Friedrichsberg State Hospital and the Institute for Maritime and Tropical Diseases from June 1919 to the present day," reported Mühlens and his co-authors in 1920. By 1924, "well over 300 paralytics" had been inoculated with malaria in Hamburg-Friedrichsberg and at the Tropical Institute.⁸⁵

"In every case to be treated, the written permission of the relatives and - as far as possible - the consent of the patients was obtained beforehand", according to the doctors' self-disclosure in 1920.⁸⁶ Did they abandon this practice in later years? The medical historian Weiß states:

"Whereas at the beginning of malaria therapy in Hamburg people were still very cautious (...), five years later this therapeutic restraint had already given way to a frightening rigorism, despite numerous deaths that were attributable to careless handling of malaria. In the meantime, the patients had also become test subjects for tropical medicine, which was also interested in the question of immunization against the parasites. There had already occurred a gradual transition from a cure to a scientific experiment."⁸⁷

Stefan Wulf, who investigated the history of the Tropical Institute in the Weimar Republic and under National Socialism, argues differently: "Particularly for the 1920s and early 1930s, the phase of the Weimar Republic, there remains a noticeable discrepancy between the scope and grip of these theses and the informative value of the source material actually presented."⁸⁸

On the basis of the few available sources - both authors refer to two essays by Mühlens - this controversy can hardly be decided. However, various references do give an initial impression of the doctors' approach:

"Treatment of artificial malaria infection: We usually had 8-12 and even more (up to 17-20) attacks (duplicate type) in strong individuals. Most patients tolerated these infections well. However, some individuals proved to be less resistant and required rapid intervention. We

⁸³ Weiß, *Menschenversuche*, p. 15.

⁸⁴ Cf. Mühlens/Weygand/Kirschbaum, *Behandlung*.

⁸⁵ Cf. Mühlens/Kirschbaum, *Betrachtungen*.

⁸⁶ Mühlens/Weygand/Kirschbaum, *Behandlung*.

⁸⁷ Weiß, *Menschenversuche*, p. 16; see also Roth, *Tropenheilkunde*, especially p. 129 f.; Mai/Pfäfflin/van den Bussche, *Fakultät*

⁸⁸ Wulf, *Tropeninstitut*, p. 117.

always interrupted the infections quickly when severe anemic symptoms with icterus and very large amounts of parasites suddenly appeared. We then used to give the first dose of quinine (1 g) intramuscularly and then continued to give 1 g daily per os for several days."⁸⁹

As late as 1924, the authors warned: "Nevertheless, one would do well to regard the artificial tropical infections as dangerous."⁹⁰ The two authors described in detail which symptoms should immediately lead to interruption of an infection. At the same time, however, they also admitted that:

"Another mistake - apart from the omission of regular blood tests (due to a leave of absence) - was that some individuals were also included in the vaccinations whose vaccination would have been better omitted due to their general condition. The mortality rate would probably not have been so high in healthy individuals."⁹¹

The Institute of Tropical Medicine continued on this path towards human experimentation after Nocht's retirement: under the directorship of Peter Mühlens, who had initially been appointed provisional director of the Institute of Tropical Medicine in September 1933 and then became its regular director in May 1934, the researchers set up a typhus research station not only in Hamburg at the Institute, but also a branch in Warsaw. The experiments on humans were continuously expanded, for example when a typhus epidemic broke out in the Neuengamme concentration camp at the end of 1941 and patients there were included. "Particularly during the war", concludes Stefan Wulf, "the focus was often no longer on healing, on providing optimal medical care for the individual, but on medical serial testing."⁹² To this end, doctors at the Tropical Institute seized people whose rights to self-determination as concentration camp inmates or prisoners of war had been completely eliminated.

If we try to categorize the observations, particularly those relating to practices involving human experimentation during Nocht's active period, it helps to make a basic distinction: "Human experimentation" refers to medical practices in which artificial reactions are induced in living people, these are evaluated and these results benefit medical research, but not the test subjects themselves. A comparative form of this are "terminal trials", in which the death of the patient was knowingly accepted or even intended.⁹³ Clinical trials or healing trials are ideally to

⁸⁹ Mühlens/Kirschbaum, *Betrachtungen*, p. 142.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁹² Wulf, *Tropeninstitut*, p. 127.

⁹³ Cf. Sabisch, *Einleitung*, p. 641.

be distinguished from this if the improvement in the condition of the person being treated is their determining focus. For the syphilis sufferers treated with malaria infections by Peter Mühlens in the early 1920s, the success of the treatment may still have been a motive for the experiments. In later years, however, this basic focus on healing was lost and increasingly shifted towards human experimentation.⁹⁴ Bernhard Nocht was not personally involved in these experiments. However, it can be assumed that, as director of the institute, he was at least aware of the activities of his colleague Mühlens.

3.2. The Tropical Institute and colonial medicine under National Socialism: upheaval, acclamation and colonial revisionism

Friedrich Fülleborn died a few months after the National Socialists came to power. The then 67-year-old professor and tropical medicine specialist succumbed to a heart attack on 9 September 1933. In 1930, he had taken over as Director of the Institute of Tropical Medicine following the retirement of Bernhard Nocht, meaning that his term of office ended during the rise to power and the takeover by the National Socialists. He had asked for his retirement due to a heart attack in 1932. But before a decision was made, the physician died.

On the occasion of the funeral of his colleague and successor Fülleborn, Nocht gave a short speech in which he reviewed not only his work at the Institute, but also the politically eventful past months: "In full creative power and full enthusiasm" Fülleborn had welcomed "the national uprising in the spring of this year", Nocht said about his colleague and his work.⁹⁵ This was not just a verbal reference to the new regime. A number of employees from the ranks of the Tropical Institute welcomed the transfer of power to the National Socialists. For example, by 11 November 1933, "almost all scientific leaders" of the Tropical Institute had signed the "Confession of the professors at German universities and colleges to Adolf Hitler", which advertised particularly intensively at the University of Hamburg.⁹⁶ Erich Martini, Walter Menk and Fritz Zumpt were employees of the Tropical Institute who were particularly outspoken National Socialists.⁹⁷ The later interim director Nauck was also a convinced National Socialist

⁹⁴ Markus Hedrich, who is working on a comprehensive history of the Hamburg Tropical Institute up to the 1960s, is researching this.

⁹⁵ StA HH, 352-8/9, 4412: Ansprache Prof. Nocht zum Tode von Prof. Fülleborn.

⁹⁶ Hedrich, Nocht, pp. 268-269.

⁹⁷ Cf. *ibid.*

who widely publicized his conviction of the National Socialist racial doctrine.⁹⁸

On the other hand - and Nocht did not conceal this in his speech at Fülleborn's funeral - the Nazi takeover had caused considerable internal turmoil at the institute: with regard to the deceased, Nocht mentioned "petty interventions and wild gossip from unjustified quarters that threatened to shatter the institute" and suspected these to be the main cause of Fülleborn's "mental breakdown".⁹⁹ In a letter to the retired Nocht dated 26 May 1933, his successor referenced considerable difficulties:

"As you have read in the newspapers, there are a lot of things going on here, including many that understandably cause me serious concern; it is not surprising that my old heart problems are also reacting to these exciting times [...]. According to the Civil Service Act, we will unfortunately not be able to keep Dr. Hecht, who has familiarized himself so well with his field and is therefore hardly dispensable to us; Martini and I are doing everything we can to find him a position abroad (...). As a baptized Jewess, Miss Fürth will also have to leave, but hopefully only after Mühlens return (...). I will inform you confidentially that Mr. v. Brand also has Jewish ancestry on his mother's side and that we do not yet know whether we will be able to keep him. - There are also many other things that make leading an institute today not exactly pleasant, but I'd better tell you about them personally."¹⁰⁰

The dismissals due to the Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service were particularly troubling for the director. In addition to the aforementioned employees, Martin Mayer was also later dismissed by the authorities because he was accused of being Jewish.¹⁰¹

"Hans Vogel, who served as director of the Bernhard Nocht Institute from 1963 to 1968, made little or no appearance as a National Socialist," according to Markus Hedrich.¹⁰²

The year 1933 brought many changes for the Hamburg Institute of Marine and Tropical Diseases. In addition to all the hardships for those who were defined by the dictatorship as not belonging to the national community, excluded and subjected to repression, the majority of Hamburg's scientists found themselves caught up in a general mood of optimism that moved the colonial movement as a whole and tropical medicine in particular.

⁹⁸ Cf. *Eckart*, *Medizin*, p. 518.

⁹⁹ StA HH, 352-8/9, 4412: Ansprache Prof. Nocht zum Tode von Prof. Fülleborn.

¹⁰⁰ ABNIT, 2-2: Friedrich Fülleborn an Bernhard Nocht am 26.5.1933. On Hecht, see *Hering*, *Gefühle*.

¹⁰¹ Cf. StA HH, 352-8/9, 4427, folder 2.

¹⁰² *Hedrich*, *Nocht*, p. 269.

3.3. The colonial movement and colonial medicine under National Socialism

The rise to power of the National Socialists created a highly attractive political situation for the colonial movement and thus also for colonial medicine: during the Weimar Republic, the colonial movement had gradually distanced itself from the government of the time, as they did not see their hopes for an active revisionist policy fulfilled. The Nazi movement, on the other hand, promised this by keeping the colonies present in the collective memory and making strong use of them in both propaganda and the entertainment media. Since the early 1930s, popular writings and propaganda films had served the fantasies and wishful thinking of colonial supporters.¹⁰³ This did not correspond to a real policy, because: "The regime's foreign and conquest policy was primarily directed towards territories in the European East, and the plans for acquisitions in Africa were finally abandoned in 1943."¹⁰⁴ Colonial policy was not pursued for its own sake, but either out of foreign policy calculations, for example to exert pressure on Great Britain, or used domestically to draw the supporters of the colonial movement to the side of the dictatorship.¹⁰⁵

In this process, colonial and tropical medicine occupied a special place in the propaganda and politics of National Socialism. In the lavishly produced contemporary film "Germanin", the UFA celebrated German tropical medicine and the Bayer Group for its "humanitarian commitment" in the former colonies - and at the same time set itself apart from the British, who were portrayed as inhumane, in terms of propaganda. In terms of scientific policy, tropical medicine was "more than almost any other sub-discipline of medicine (...) almost completely integrated into the political system, geared towards colonial revision and closely interwoven with the Aryan expansionist mysticism of the National Socialists."¹⁰⁶

The Hamburg Institute was the product and promoter of this development: while Hamburg's overseas interests were initially the focus, this changed by 1937 at the latest. "The Tropical Institute not only became the centerpiece of the medical faculty and the Hamburg Colonial Institute, but also an indispensable component of the colonial policy of the Third Reich."¹⁰⁷ Various developments in the work and personnel policy of the institute are evidence of this

¹⁰³ Cf. *Eckart*, *Medizin*, pp. 514-516.

¹⁰⁴ *Conrad*, *Rückkehr*, p. 29

¹⁰⁵ Cf. *Linne*, *Deutschland*, p. 165 f.

¹⁰⁶ *Eckart*, *Medizin*, p. 516.

¹⁰⁷ *Weß*, *Tropenmedizin*, p. 51.

reorientation. Under the leadership of Peter Mühlens and later, on an interim basis, Georg Nauck, the Institute increasingly shifted towards National Socialist policy: Walter Menk, the new head of the Clinical Studies Department at the Institute in 1937, was decidedly National Socialist and had a strong focus on racial hygiene and population policy.¹⁰⁸ This was the Institute management's response to previous accusations of neglecting precisely these priorities.

Mühlens himself tried to exert more and more influence to ensure that colonial revisionism was also translated into practical policy. From 1938, for example, he succeeded in taking over the leadership of the Colonial Council's Hygiene and Medical Committee and in this way worked towards ensuring that the colonies were reclaimed in the long term.¹⁰⁹ "In 1940, the Hamburg Tropical Institute was entrusted not only with the training of colonial doctors, but also with the preparatory organization of the entire health system in the future German colonies."¹¹⁰ Plans were developed by the Kriegsmarine to relocate the Naval Medical Academy to Hamburg, but these were never completed.¹¹¹ Ultimately, this connection is paradigmatic of the great hopes that the colonial revisionists placed in National Socialism, and their disappointment.

4. Bernhard Nocht in National Socialism

How do Bernhard Nocht's actions appear in light of these changes? It should be noted that he was given emeritus status in October 1930 and was dismissed with a grand farewell ceremony attended by the highest municipal and university celebrities. Thus, with regard to National Socialism, Nocht was largely granted the "grace of an early birth".¹¹² Despite an initially repeatedly postponed retirement, Nocht, who was born in 1857 and turned 76 in 1933, had long since retired by this time, meaning that he no longer held a full-time position when the National Socialists came to power. Nevertheless, he continued to be active and played a role in Hamburg as well as in the tropical medicine scene.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 53.

¹⁰⁹ Cf. *Tode*, *Forschen*, p. 16.

¹¹⁰ *Weß*, *Tropenmedizin*, p. 53; see also *Wulf*, *Tropeninstitut*, pp. 87-101.

¹¹¹ Cf. *Weß*, *Tropenmedizin*, p. 49. *Markus Hedrich* is researching the history of the Institute of Tropical Medicine and is compiling a monograph on the subject.

¹¹² *Hedrich*, *Nocht*, p. 266.

4.1. Bernhard Nocht and the professors' commitment to Adolf Hitler

Like around 960 professors and university lecturers, including many members of Hamburg's universities and a number of colleagues from the Institute of Tropical Medicine, Nocht signed the *professors' declaration of support for Adolf Hitler at German universities and colleges*.¹¹³ Although the exact circumstances of Bernhard Nocht's signature cannot be clarified, this initially appears to be a clear approval of the Nazi regime and its policies. For this declaration of loyalty published in 1934 was the "largest collection of political signatures" at the time and was often assessed in the literature as an "indicator of the considerable extent of support" for National Socialism among the teaching staff at German universities.¹¹⁴

Nevertheless, their evidential value for the political orientation of the group of university lecturers as a whole, as well as for Nocht's in particular, is far less clear on closer examination. The historian of science Michael Grüttner warned against an overly simple interpretation. Overall, the professors' confessions reveal "almost nothing" about who supported National Socialism at German universities and to what extent. "It can neither be assumed that all National Socialists signed the appeal, nor would it be justified to describe all signatories as supporters of National Socialism."¹¹⁵ There are special circumstances that lead Michael Grüttner to this assessment: On 11 November, one day before the referendum to withdraw from the League of Nations, the National Socialist Teachers' League of Saxony (NSLB) had invited people to a manifestation in Leipzig. Followed by ten speeches by prominent academics such as the surgeon Ferdinand Sauerbruch and the philosopher Martin Heidegger, six professors presented a resolution entitled "A call to the intellectual elite of this world", a text, which after invoking the unifying power of science had been translated into several European languages, promoting for the acceptance of the foreign policy pursued by the German Reich was recited:

"Based on this conviction, German science is appealing to the educated people of the whole world to show the same understanding for the struggle of the people united by Adolf Hitler for freedom,

¹¹³ Cf. *Nationalsozialistischer Lehrerbund Deutschland-Sachsen*, Bekenntnis.

¹¹⁴ For a summary of the state of research, see Grüttner, Talar, p. 83.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

justice and peace that they expect for their own people."¹¹⁶ After the event, the NSLB Saxony sent the text of the resolution and the signature sheet to all rectorates in Germany in order to collect as many signatures of approval as possible. The lists, which were displayed until 15 January 1934, were then published in a 136-page brochure. The cover of this brochure bore the title *Bekanntnis der Professoren an den deutschen Universitäten und Hochschulen zu Adolf Hitler und dem nationalsozialistischen Staat (Confession of Professors at German Universities and Colleges to Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist State)*, giving the text a political unambiguity that had not existed before.¹¹⁷ The title turned the approval of a number of foreign policy measures and their justification to foreign countries, including the declaration of Germany's desire for peace, into a comprehensive commitment to National Socialism. This fact helps to explain why decidedly non-National Socialists such as the Tropical Institute employee Martin Mayer or the Hamburg mathematician Emil Artin also signed the text. Both were later victims of National Socialist repression¹¹⁸.

For the University of Hamburg, it is no longer possible to reconstruct how the signatures had actually been obtained.¹¹⁹ What remains remarkable is the fact that the University of Hamburg, with 167 signatures, provided most of the total of around 960 declarations of consent. The relevant files only reveal that principal Schmidt supported the request of the NSLB Saxony, had the list of signatures displayed from 27 December 1933 to 15 January 1934 and made occasional enquiries.¹²⁰ On 25 January, the rector then had eight pages of signatures as well as five further letters from individual academics sent to Saxony, thus documenting which professors and lecturers had signaled their approval of the "confession". It was not until June that the printers complained that some of the signatures were illegible and requested "a new list in legible handwriting" to be sent.¹²¹ Further details about Bernhard Nocht's signature could not be determined.

¹¹⁶ StA HH, 364-5 I, A 70.02, Vol. 1: *Bekanntnis der Professoren an den Universitäten und Hochschulen zu Adolf Hitler und dem nationalsozialistischen Staat*. p. 133-135.

¹¹⁷ On the special circumstances in Hamburg, see StA HH, 364-5 I, A 70.02, Vol. 1: *Bekanntnis der Professoren an den Universitäten und Hochschulen zu Adolf Hitler und dem nationalsozialistischen Staat*, pp. 133-135.

¹¹⁸ For numerous other examples, see *Grüttner*, Talar, p. 84.

¹¹⁹ Cf. *Vogel*, *Anpassung*, p. 47. There are speculations in the literature that the university administration, namely the legal scholar Eberhard Schmidt, compiled the signatures on his own initiative without actually asking the individuals Cf. *Giles*, *Students* pp. 128-129; *Lilge*, *Abuse*, p. 167; *Fischer*, *Völkerkunde*.

¹²⁰ Cf. StA HH, 364-5-I, A 70.02, vol. 1, p. 130, 1-31; and *ibid.*, p. 139: A letter of reminder dated 09.01.1934.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 143, 162.

4.2. Bernhard Nocht in the public eye as a protagonist and as a public figure

Only a few statements or publications are known in which Nocht commented on politics, National Socialism and especially on demands for revision with regard to the colonies.

With this restraint, the emeritus professor remained true to his style from his professional activities. However, the few statements made were not lacking in clarity. Two particularly striking examples are given below:

On the occasion of his 80th birthday on 4 November 1937, Nocht received a personal telegram from Adolf Hitler in which the German Chancellor not only congratulated him, but also awarded him "the highest honor of the Reich, the eagle shield, with the dedication: To the meritorious researcher and physician".¹²²

When Nocht returned the congratulations the next morning at the roll call of the Hamburg Tropical Institute, he not only reminisced about the beginnings of his work at the Tropical Institute and commemorated his deceased former colleagues, but concluded with an emphatic eulogy that "expressed a clear closeness to the Nazi regime like hardly anywhere else in the many sources and perhaps even more impressed by Hitler's personal letter":¹²³

"The Institute is flourishing and prospering under the energetic leadership of Prof. Mühlens and thanks to all your cooperation, but also thanks to the protection and support of the Institute by the Hamburg and Reich governments and by our glorious Führer, to whom the colonial movement so closely connected with the activities of our Institute is so dear to his heart. And so, I would like to conclude by thanking you all once again for your faithful remembrance and for your kind wishes, with the wish that the Institute may continue to flourish and prosper under the protection of our Führer, to whom we owe an enthusiastic 'Sieg Heil'. Sieg Heil our Führer and Reich Chancellor."¹²⁴

Bernhard Nocht's probably last documented public appearance took place on the occasion of the celebrations for the 40th anniversary of the Hamburg Tropical Institute on 3 October 1940. Nocht himself opened the series of lectures at this event with a short speech in the Institute's lecture hall, in which he declared the recovery of the colonies and "extensive and prosperous colonial activities" to be his goal, and at the same time linked this with a "Heil" to Hitler:

¹²² StA HH, 352-8/9, 4409, p. 27: Adolf Hitler an Tropenmedizinische Gesellschaft am 4. November 1937.

¹²³ Hedrich, Nocht, pp. 278-279.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

Goethe once said: "It is not an art to grow old, but it is an art to endure it. Well, despite all the troublesome aspects of an old age, I am grateful that I have granted the opportunity to live through the present great times and especially to observe the further prosperity and flourishing, the growth of the Institute to a development and significance that could not have been foreseen in any way when the Institute was founded, and which will present it with even greater tasks after the recovery of our colonies. [...] Not only our society and not only the old, proven tropical scientists, but the entire German people, we all expect that our Führer will soon call us to extensive and prosperous colonial activities. In proud confidence we want to thank him for this and pledge to our duty! Heil our Führer!"¹²⁵

In doing so, he echoed the tone hit by the acting director of the Tropical Institute, Peter Mühlens, in his speech "The colonial health leadership in Africa"¹²⁶. Mühlens initially stated that his thoughts were with "the man to whom all German hearts beat with ardent love today, our Führer Adolf Hitler". According to Mühlens, after the difficult years of the "system era", "all our thoughts, (...) all our work (...) was now devoted to the medical preparation of the repossession of our colonies in silent, almost uninterrupted day and night work".¹²⁷

The first substantive session of the congress was once again opened by 82-year-old Bernhard Nocht. His last major scientific lecture, as far as is known, was entitled "Native hygiene". It was not without "great misgivings" and only at great insistence that he took on this lecture, "I cannot bring anything new and original, but only the old familiar."¹²⁸ The hope "that one day a broad stream of small and medium-sized German settlers will pour into our regained (...) colonies, especially in East Africa, and find a permanent home there, must be abandoned." Instead, Nocht developed the idea of indirect rule, in which "the native will remain 'the most important asset' in the development of our African, tropical colonies"¹²⁹.

"In our old East Africa, the English introduced a regime called 'indirect rule' or 'indirect administration' in many places during their mandate administration. [...] Government and administration are left entirely to the tribal and village chiefs. [...] Under the control and instruction of prudent advisors, and occasionally under gentle coercion, the system is said to have worked well wherever it was introduced. Some of these districts are said to be in better condition than those under direct administration."¹³⁰

¹²⁵ ABNIT, 2-30: Obermedizinalrat Pr[o]f. Dr. Nocht on 3.10.1940, p. 6f.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*: Opening address by the chairman Prof. Dr. Mühlens (DTG 1940), p. 2.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*: Opening speech by Chairman Prof. Dr. Mühlens (DTG 1940), pp. 1, 2, 4. Mühlens opened his speech with the words that he thanked "our Führer", the "ingenious victorious commander", the "Restorer of Greater Germany" and the "restorer of our colonies", which shows that the Tropeninstitut was at least rhetorically aligned in an almost orthodox manner in 1940; cf. *ibid.* p. 1.

¹²⁸ Nocht, Eingeborenenhygiene, p. 17.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹³⁰ Nocht, Eingeborenenhygiene, p. 21.

For this reason, he wanted to devote himself to the areas of hygiene in which the "active, willing and reasonably understanding cooperation of our wards, at least the heads of the tribes and villages and all other natives to be involved in the administration, education and health care of their compatriots". The "habits and customs, the intelligence and mentality of the various races and tribes, their social and economic institutions and all conditions of their own environment" were to be taken into account and "respected" so as not to arouse "mistrust". Nocht then went on to talk about "birth rate, infant mortality, nutrition, housing": poor nutrition, especially for small children, unclean housing, the poor economic situation and much more. The most important remedy? "The improvement of the economic situation, the improvement of the great poverty in many areas". The explanations were highly paternalistic and focused on "educating and instructing" the - literally - "Natives" by European actors: "The Negro is sensitive to benevolent and fair treatment, he recognizes our superiority without reluctance and is willing to be taught and helped if it is done with understanding and caution."¹³¹ However, Nocht's appeal was that education and instruction must be accompanied by actual help. In addition to German health officials and nurses, the local population should therefore also be trained, "naturally also for the areas that are left more or less independently to the administration of sensible tribal chiefs." Nocht concluded his presentation with the words:

"When we have colonies again, we don't need to rebuild everything. Many good things will have been preserved from our earlier colonial period and useful things created by the British, French and Belgians will be retained and used. The tasks that lie ahead of us after taking possession of our colonies, particularly with regard to health care for the natives, are difficult and, for financial reasons, can only be solved slowly over decades, but they must and will be solved."¹³²

In many ways, this lecture is the sum of Nocht's thoughts on Africa and the relationship with its inhabitants: what is relevant here is a highly paternalistic attitude that contradicts any contemporary idea of development cooperation based on partnership. Viewed from the perspective of time, however, Nocht was not on the radical side of the colonial movement, but argued from a more moderate colonialist point of view.

¹³¹ Nocht, *Eingeborenenhygiene*, p. 21.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 22.

4.3. Bernhard Nocht and the dispute over the appointment of the management of the Tropical Institute

After Fülleborn's death in 1933, Peter Mühlens initially took over the position of director on an interim basis. Nocht campaigned for his longtime colleague to be given this position permanently and was ultimately successful with his efforts: Mühlens headed the Tropical Institute until his unexpected death on 7 June 1943. This personnel decision was associated with a fierce dispute in which various representatives of tropical medicine, including emeritus Bernhard Nocht, and other scientists with a stronger orientation towards racial medicine, as well as some party offices, opposed each other. Indeed, Mühlens behaved very much in line with the system by joining the NSDAP in 1937, aligning the Tropical Institute to the requirements of the Wehrmacht for the war in Eastern Europe and acting as "Commissioner of the Reich Governor for Disease Control in Hamburg". However, he was not the preferred candidate of the NSDAP Reich leadership in Munich's "Brown House", where they would have liked to nominate the population and racial physician Ernst Rodenwaldt head of the Hamburg institute. This was an appointment "in line with our National Socialist philosophy" - according to a letter from the NSDAP Reich leadership to the Hamburg university authorities.¹³³

The Hamburg Reich Governor Karl Kaufmann overrode this intervention, which was supported by Rudolf Hess and others, and appointed Mühlens. Nocht had pulled the strings in the background, thus averting Rodenwaldt's appointment and ensuring that the traditional focus of the institute's work on Africa and its fundamental scientific and medical orientation remained unchanged for the time being.¹³⁴

When Mühlens died in 1943, Nocht once again played an important role in the negotiations for his successor: the tropical medicine specialist Gerhard Rose, who was later sentenced to life imprisonment in the Nuremberg medical trials, mainly because of his typhus vaccine experiments in concentration camps, was under discussion. Rodenwaldt was also once again nominated as a candidate. The fact that Ernst Georg Nauck ultimately prevailed was due to assertive advocates: In addition to Kaufmann and the Commander-in-Chief of the Navy, Admiral Karl Dönitz, Bernhard Nocht also made another appearance. In this case, too, a successor was

¹³³ StA HH 361-5 II, A i 6/14: Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, Reichleitung, an die Hochschulbehörde Hamburg, 01.03.1934. See *Wulf*, Tropeninstitut, pp. 83-86.

¹³⁴ For further background see *Hedrich*, Nocht, pp. 274-275.

appointed who was quite opportune in terms of the Nazi dictatorship, but who acted less strongly in terms of racial medicine.

What Nocht defended first and foremost with his interventions was the orientation of the institute towards Africa and research that was not free of racist considerations, but less clearly focused on it. As an eminence grise, he first of all ensured that his life's work remained on the path he had set. The fact that he also prevented tropical medicine from being even more strongly appropriated by Nazi ideology was a side effect.

4.4. The wife of Bernhard Nocht as a "Jewish half-breed of the 2nd degree"

Whether Nocht himself was affected by the persecution practices of the National Socialists cannot be conclusively clarified: Markus Hedrich has been able to prove that officials from the Reich Ministry of the Interior drew the attention of the Reich Ministry of Science, Education and National Education on 25 August 1937 to the fact that Nocht's wife Maria had "a Jewish grandparent in her ancestral line".¹³⁵ This meant that she had been categorized as a "Jewish half-breed of the 2nd degree".¹³⁶ According to National Socialist policy, these people were not subject to direct persecution, and Nocht's wife also remained practically unharmed. Nevertheless, this was a marker; "from then on, the sword of Damocles of anti-Semitic persecution hovered over the Nocht family with this anti-Semitic attribution."¹³⁷ It is not known whether they even knew anything about it. Apart from the file note, no other source evidence has been found. According to the sources examined, Nocht did not comment on the dismissals of the employees.

4.5. Nocht's suicide in May 1945

On the night of 2 to 3 February 1945, the city of Wiesbaden was devastated by a bombing raid by the Allied air forces. The house in Blumenstraße, which the Nochts had lived in since moving to Hessen-Nassau at the end of July 1937, was not hit, but the windows were destroyed, so that the

¹³⁵ Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (BA B), R 4901/19919: Der Reichs- und Preußische Minister des Innern an das Reichsministerium für Wissenschaft, Erziehung und Volksbildung, 25.08.1937.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Hedrich, Nocht, p. 267.

couple now had to lead a "very difficult and more than uncomfortable life", according to their own statement¹³⁸. The liberation of Wiesbaden on 28 March 1945 was followed by a heavy blow for the couple. On 14 April, the couple had to leave their apartment in the Wiesbaden city villa and move into a room in the Nerotal sanatorium.¹³⁹ According to the farewell letter that the couple left behind, it was probably these hardships in their lives that prompted the two Nochts to commit suicide:

"To Liesel and huschi and to helmuth and Margarete,
Dear, dear children! You don't have to condemn us abandoning you during this terrible time. We have given this step a lot of thought and delayed it as long as possible. But now we are in a desperate situation and know no better way out."

The apartment in Blumenstraße had been looted and, according to his own statement, his cash was dwindling "rapidly". His wife often had to queue for food rations for a long time, had "lost over 50 pounds" and was "just a shadow". He himself was not much help, as his health had deteriorated considerably.

Next to detailed instructions from the father to his children on how the remaining money and the parents' other assets could be transferred, Nocht concluded with a farewell formula:

"We have had a rich life and have seen and experienced many beautiful and interesting things. But the best years were those in Brahmsallee with you and poor Peter [sic]. And our great pain is that we can't see and hug you again. But even if you had found us still alive here, we would not have been able to help you, or at least not significantly. And so, we die in the hope that you take our step with understanding. We wish and hope with all our hearts that you will all manage to keep your heads up in these miserable, shameful times, fight your way through and build-up a new life worth living. Give my warmest regards to Huschi and say hello to all our dear relatives and friends. And think of us sometimes.
Your father Bernhard Nocht."

The wording and circumstances of the letter suggest that the suicide of Bernhard Nocht and his wife was not primarily a political act committed because of the looming defeat of the war or the end of the Nazi dictatorship. Rather, in addition to material hardship and deteriorating health, it was probably the lack of hope of experiencing better living conditions themselves.

¹³⁸ This and the following source citations cited in: ABNIT, 1-67: Bernhard Nocht, Abschiedsbrief.

¹³⁹ Hedrich, Nocht, p. 317.

5. Summary: How to deal with the name Bernhard Nocht?

The starting point for the previous considerations was the question of the naming of the Hamburg Leibniz Institute for Tropical Medicine after Bernhard Nocht: Does the person Nocht stand for the work of the institute and its orientation? Is the associated tribute to the person appropriate? Does it trigger any productive processes of remembrance?

The concept of the "honorary regime" was used to draw attention to the person Nocht himself as well as to the criteria according to which the decision to name the Institute of Tropical and Maritime Medicine was made. Two questions stood out in particular, which today call the 1942 naming into question and make it debatable: Nocht's attitude towards colonialist racism and a practice derived from it as a physician and organizer of tropical medicine as well as his attitude towards National Socialism and his political actions in the years 1933 to 1945. Both aspects can at best be separated analytically; in Nocht's biography, they were closely linked in terms of his lifeworld.

Bernhard Nocht acted as a doctor and medical researcher, as well as a public health manager and organizer of tropical medicine, on a racist basis: in his various roles, he was convinced of the difference between different races. He ascribed different values to "white" and "black" people and was highly paternalistic towards the latter. As a harbour doctor and infectious disease specialist, for example, he recommended spatial separation between the different "races" in the colonial city of Dar es Salaam in order to prevent infection. As the "organizer of tropical medicine" in Germany, he was an important pillar of this discipline based on a colonialist-racist perspective.

In order to further classify this statement, it is important to consider the contemporary context: Nocht's statements and actions were based on a deeply rooted racist foundation of medicine. Within this spectrum of racist medicine, however, he did not excel in either scientific-medical or colonial-political terms. In particular, he did not advocate the kind of radicalization that could be observed in the 1920s, especially after the National Socialists came to power. He was not a "racial biologist in the National Socialist sense".¹⁴⁰ He worked, researched and organized science in a colonial-racist style and, for example, fought takeovers of the institute by scientists of a different persuasion within the scope of his possibilities as emeritus professor. This statement

¹⁴⁰ Cf. *Hedrich*, Nocht, p. 327.

does not excuse Nocht's behavior, but justifies it within the contemporary spectrum of knowledge and behavior.

Nocht played a similarly ambivalent role with regard to colonial revisionism: The director of the Institute of Tropical and Maritime Diseases retained the role of professional lobbyist even after the loss of the colonies. As chairman of the Tropical Medical Society, for example, he defended the German colonial policy before 1918 against accusations from the Allies. As a representative of the German Empire in commissions of the League of Nations, he stood for the demand for restitution of the colonies - and at the same time practiced a scientific and diplomatic cooperation on an international level that was a rarity in the interwar period. His political stance and his actions were particularly evident with regard to colonial revisionism. As an important representative of the German colonial movement, he spoke out in favor of reestablishing the German colonies. He went so far as to make an explicit demand to the Nazi leadership in 1940 to actively pursue the recovery of the colonies, which he expressed on the occasion of the celebration of the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the Institute. Despite a certain politicization with regard to colonial revisionism, Nocht was not on the extreme fringes of the colonial movement. In the few public statements he made on colonial policy, he primarily argued professionally, aimed less about massive colonial revisionism and more about saving the reputation of German colonial medicine.

In his actions as a physician and doctor, he differed significantly from other tropical physicians such as Robert Koch: while his academic teacher and later competitor Robert Koch carried out experiments on humans in the colonies to combat sleeping sickness, which would not have been possible in the Reich, there is no evidence of such behavior on Nocht's part. He did not go down the path of "human experimentation". During National Socialism, the institute itself was increasingly involved in human experimentation in an ethically questionable manner. This was not yet the case under Nocht's leadership: The corresponding experiments to combat malaria, which Peter Mühlens in particular carried out at the Langenhorn psychiatric clinic, were marginal, but did not cross this threshold.

Throughout his life, Bernhard Nocht was a politically minded person who also acted with some skill in the interests of himself and his institution. His relationship to National Socialism was characterized above all by his age: When Hitler's government took office in 1933, Nocht was 76 years old and had already ended his active service as director of the institute as well as a

university professor. Bernhard Nocht was not a member of the NSDAP. He belonged to the Reichskolonialbund, which remained independent of the party but definitely acted in the interests of the NSDAP and the Reich leadership. Nocht accepted numerous honors and allowed himself to be taken into the service as a public figure by the Nazi leadership, both locally and nationally.

His praise of the Führer in his public address on the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the Tropical Institute stands out just as much as his signature under the declaration of loyalty to Hitler by German professors in the fall of 1933 – both declarations of loyalty, as the analysis has shown, stand for how well Nocht adapted and how opportunistically he behaved. They conclude less that Nocht himself was a strong supporter of National Socialism. Unlike many of his medical and academic colleagues, he did not work towards the Führer's orientation", he did not make anti-Semitic statements, for example, and he did not intensify his colonial policy position in terms of gaining living space in the East.

Even the suicide that he and his wife chose after the end of the war in 1945 does not indicate a special relationship to National Socialism. He was not subject to political disappointment, but above all suffered from the hardships of the immediate post-war period. This clearly distinguishes this act from the "last battle of the old fighters", as convinced National Socialists thought they had to fight in 1945.¹⁴¹ All in all, it can be said that Nocht cultivated a perhaps tactical, but certainly open relationship with National Socialism in his public functions when he accepted its honors and publicly spoke positively about the regime.

In addition, his political convictions and interests as a bourgeois national conservative showed a great deal of overlap with National Socialism. An analysis of two of Nocht's public speeches suggests that his political background was deeply rooted in the structures and power relations of the German Empire. He grew up there, went to school and, as a soldier and member of the navy, moved and developed professionally within these structures. His few public political statements revealed a strongly rooted nationalism as well as a strong orientation towards tradition and authority, which also points to his military career. This influence made him just as compatible with National Socialism as it explains his distanced attitude towards the democratic structures of the Weimar Republic. He strongly criticized these in public in patriotic and nationalistic statements - albeit without completely rejecting them.

¹⁴¹ Cf. *Wagner, Schlacht*.

What do the above considerations mean for an assessment of Bernhard Nocht as a person and - based on this - above all for the question of the appropriateness of naming today's Leibniz Institute for Tropical Medicine after its founder? First of all, an answer to this question cannot be derived directly from the historical considerations on Nocht's biography and position. In the case of Nazi or colonial protagonists who directly committed crimes against humanity or were directly involved in war or colonial crimes, no attribution is allowed here. Unlike Robert Koch, for example, who was directly involved in human experiments as a physician and researcher, this does not apply to Bernhard Nocht.¹⁴²

Nevertheless, a great ambivalence remains, which is directly attached to the person of the tropical physician, but above all also to his function as a representative and powerful actor. The history of tropical medicine: the discipline itself stands for the support of an abusive, exploitative and violent colonial policy as well as for medical progress, which has decisively promoted the prevention and cure of tropical diseases.

Whether the name Bernhard Nocht should be retained or abandoned remains an open question based on historical analysis; the findings on Nocht and his work remain too ambivalent. Ultimately, it is a political decision to be made by the institute and the academic discipline, rather than one that can be derived scientifically. However, it does not stand alone, but is embedded in the handling of the colonial past of tropical medicine.

How the name "Nocht" works for the institute is and will be largely dependent on how this name is handled in the future: Is the name Bernhard Nocht in the designation as the leading tropical institute a reason to bring to mind the colonial past and draw consequences from it, for example for current cooperation? In this sense, deleting the name would rather mean minimizing the opportunity to come to terms with the colonial past. Or is it rather a stumbling block and at least a symbolic perpetuation of the colonial power imbalance? If so, it would seem obvious to delete the name from the institute's name.

Deciding on this will essentially be a matter for the institute, the discipline and the associated community. Today, the discipline of tropical medicine has developed both in its research and as an institution of international cooperation, also and above all with African universities and research institutions. How to deal with the name Bernhard Nocht in all its ambivalence must be agreed with these partners from the formerly colonized regions.

¹⁴² *Carpenter, Koch.*

Appendix

Archives

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