

Carefully read the following sources on German women in Southwest Africa. How do they relate to migration, definitions of what German means, race during the era of high imperialism?

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114. Women and German Colonialism in Southern Africa

Germany first took formal control of colonial territories in Africa and Asia in 1884–1885, much later than the empires of England, France, Portugal, and Spain. By the 1890s the German government was eager to increase European settlement and economic activity in its most important colony, Southwest Africa (Namibia). The German Colonial Society, an association of influential men interested in promoting imperialist causes, agreed to subsidize the travel of German women to the colony as brides and servants. The Women's League of the German Colonial Society was formed in 1907. It selected applicants for emigration subsidies and arranged for their transportation. The League's biweekly magazine, *Kolonie und Heimat* (*Colony and Home*), published news and stories about German colonialism, including reports from women colonists. Several schools were also established in Germany to prepare middle-class women for the new demands of colonial farm life. The most important of these was the Colonial Women's School which opened in 1908 in Bad Weilbach in Wiesbaden. Less rigorous in its curriculum than the academic men's German Colonial School, it provided training in practical home economics, gardening, and animal care as well as an orientation to geography and ethnography. Many supporters of women's colonization believed that emigration would help some of the many unmarried, or "surplus," German women to find husbands. Some also thought that the presence of female colonists would discourage sexual unions between male settlers and African subjects, whose children they viewed as racially inferior to Europeans. During the decades of German colonization, a period that included terrible German brutalities against the territory's African population, imperialists and feminists publicly debated what roles German women should play in the empire and how to select the best potential women settlers to transport to the colonies.

A. Minna Cauer, "The Women's Colonization Question," *The Women's Movement: Review for the Interests of Women* (April 1, 1898)

Alerted by a reader's inquiry, feminist Minna Cauer's newsletter, *The Women's Movement*,¹ published a call for more information on a rumored plan to settle German women in Southwest Africa. The promoters of women's colonization, including the missionaries of the Protestant Africa Society² responded to her call for information. Cauer published her reaction to the scheme, demanding greater involvement and oversight by her organization. The German governor of Southwest Africa, Theodor Leutwein,³ successfully demanded that Cauer's journal publish his rebuttal, which follows her remarks.

The editors have received the following notice from [the Protestant Africa Society] regarding the "Women's Question in Southwest Africa." ...

"We desire the assistance and participation of women in this field, but we have not yet

been successful in enlisting the various Protestant women's associations, such as the Women's Society for Nursing in the Colonies.⁴ The Protestant Africa Society (a men's organization) is working with the knowledge of the government in order to offer individual reputable girls the possibility of emigrating to Southwest Africa. They provide the girls with funding for transportation (the cost is approximately 500 marks per person) and shelter with a missionary family, since these are the only completely reliable families over there."⁵

So much for our inquiries. Here lies before us a field of activity for women, which, however, can only be initiated if women occupy the same position as men in the new colonies, which truly have no need to reckon with traditions and antiquated prejudices. The churches, schools, and communities there, which are only making their smallest beginnings, must immediately count women as members who are born equal to men and with equal rights. We surely should not condemn the introduction of individual girls for the purpose of their foreseeable marriages, for that is the dubious aim of their settlement (as the proceedings of the Protestant Africa Society reveal). Women can only exercise a moral influence over there, if they are given a place and a voice in all activities and enterprises from the very beginning. The women who believe in the principles of the women's movement and pursue its goals would certainly be ready to assist in such an important endeavor, if only they could be convinced that it was not solely a response to the marriage question, but rather that women's contributions to solving the cultural problems of the colonies would be valued from the beginning.

¹Minna Cauer (1841–1922), a leading liberal bourgeois feminist and head of the Berlin Women's Welfare Association, was active in promoting women's suffrage, professional education, and employment. She edited *The Women's Movement: Review for the Interests of Women*, the newsletter of the Women's Welfare Association, and numerous regional middle-class feminist organizations. The newsletter discussed women's colonization in several issues between 1898 and 1899.

²The Protestant Africa Society was a private Lutheran missionary society which aimed to spread Christianity throughout Africa. In 1896, one of its missionaries in Southwest Africa proposed new measures to settle German women in the region in order to provide eligible brides for male colonists and deter them from cohabiting with African women.

³Theodor Leutwein (1849–1921) served as commander of the colonial army and governor of Southwest Africa from 1893–1905, where he did much to promote German economic development and settlement in the region. His appointment ended during the brutal German suppression of the Herero rebellion. The Herero, a Bantu population distinguished for its cattle-herding culture, was the largest of several ethnic groups in German Southwest Africa, but German atrocities decimated their numbers.

⁴The German Women's Society for Nursing in the Colonies was a charitable association of women that organized travel subsidies and employment for nurses to serve the German empire's settler population, bureaucrats, and armed forces. Conservative, nationalist, and militarist, the association overtly rejected feminist views.

⁵Typical urban maids, who generally earned 20–50 marks per month, with room and board, would find the fare to Southwest Africa far beyond their means.

This, first of all, requires an organization from which these virtuous and self-sacrificing women would go forth, possessed with the strength, courage, and resolve to assume so great a work—women of equal rights assisting in carrying forth the civilization and human development of the colonies in every area. Unfortunately, experience, until now, has demonstrated that savagery, special interests, and outdated viewpoints have led to the shocking descent to barbarism there. Can we, as things now stand, permit women to emigrate? This is a genuine and important problem. Women may engage it by promising or withholding their cooperation in given cases.

B. Governor Theodor Leutwein, "A Public Letter to Minna Cauer," *The Women's Movement* (May 1, 1898)

To Minna Cauer, Berlin,
My most worthy, honored lady

A copy of number 7 of your newspaper, *The Women's Movement*, was sent to me here, containing an article on the women's colonization question. This deliberate contact forced me to take a position on the article, and I will loyally provide one to you with the hope that you will be equally loyal in making room for the piece in your paper.

The article demanded that women in the colonies occupy the same position as that of men. In the church, school and community women must immediately count as equal members. Regarding these statements, I must reply that we have carried on our affairs in church, school, and community quite well alone and hope to do the same in the future. What we cannot achieve alone, however, is to create a German household, where the German housewife lives and strives for her husband and her children according to what until now has been a good custom. This household establishes German family life in the colonies and offers the assurance that German children will grow into good German citizens and wives. The women who wish to do this may

come to us. They will be received with open arms and constant esteem. Others may stay far away.

You state in your article that women can *only* exercise a moral influence when, "They are given a place and a voice in all public activities and enterprises." This, we do not understand at all out here. Women can achieve this completely in their work in the circle of their families as well. As it further states in the article, "Unfortunately, experience, until now, has demonstrated that savagery, special interests, and outdated viewpoints have led to a shocking descent to barbarism there. Can we, as things now stand, permit women to emigrate?" This could only have been written by someone who has never been here, since we have never noticed such things.

The so-called "Women's Movement" may have a large core of justification in the old Fatherland, with its surplus of women. But women will only harm themselves if they bring their movement over to the colonies, where the powerful minority of women are sought after and valued as wives and only as wives. There is the danger that the men there will respond by becoming marriage-shy and do just what we hope to prevent, namely tie themselves to native women, who do not raise these types of demands.

The Imperial Governor
Theodor Leutwein
April 6, 1898

C. Frieda Dahl, "Letter from a Potential Emigrant" (1906)

Ordinary women, excited by newspaper reports that described the German government's support for subsidizing female emigration to German Southwest Africa, wrote letters to German officials requesting travel funds. The German emperor, his colonial administration, the Colonial Society, and Southwest African officials, received hundreds of letters like the following from

women seeking free passage and employment in the colony.

Dear Imperial Governor of Windhoek, Southwest Africa:

Inspired by a newspaper notice that women or girls who wish to enter into servant contracts in Southwest Africa can travel cost-free from Germany, I introduced myself at the German Colonial Society headquarters at Schilling Street [Berlin]. There, I requested more information and sought perhaps to fulfill my long-held wish to take a position in the German colonies. I was told to direct my request to you, and I have not hesitated to follow this instruction.

I was born in 1876 in the village of Kroepetin in Mecklenburg. I am 1.65 meters tall, healthy and strong. Experienced in all aspects of housework, I have a practical nature, learn easily, and do not shy away from any kind of work. I am especially adept in sewing, which I carry out to perfection, as well as all kinds of handiwork, fine ironing, hairdressing, cooking, etc. I would like to work as a housekeeper for a fine German employer or master. I would like to be of service and hope that my many abilities and skills will be better utilized there than here in Germany.

Unfortunately, I must inform you that I am married, but therein lies absolutely no impediment to my leaving, since my husband abandoned me years ago because he was not in a position to support me. I have lived for a long time on my own two feet. After my education in Rostock, I served for several years in the home of the Master builder Vogel in Rostock, and for Mayor Fink in Plan as a housekeeper's assistant. After the break-up with my husband, I supported myself as a seamstress, but gave it up three years ago to take up my current position, and I moved last summer with Mr. Vogel's family from Rostock to Berlin.

My long-cherished wish is to take a job overseas, and I gave my notice on April 5 with this intention. My most humble plea to Your

Honor is that you will have the kindness to inform me of the steps that I must take to find a suitable (well-paid) position in your territory. Is your Honor acquainted with an appropriate employer? If so, I am quite ready to immediately accept a firm offer which includes all details about pay and duties. Regardless of employer, please let me know what equipment is necessary and anything else I need to know, as well as if I may receive an advance on my salary to outfit myself.

If there are any newspapers there where a person can find such employment by advertising, I humbly ask you to forward them my request, and I will gladly assume the cost.

In the hope that you will excuse my many demands and not take them amiss, since I want so badly to go there, and await your answer with great anticipation, I enclose my photograph and references. Hoping not to have made a useless inquiry, I sign in the greatest respect, most humbly,

Frieda Dahl, née Küchenmeister, Charlottenburg, Berlin (1906).

D. Hedwig Pohl,¹ "A Thank-You Letter from a Nurserymaid in Southwest Africa," *Colony and Home* (August 1, 1909)

Very honored Baroness von Liliencron,

I send you from Africa, as I promised, a small description of our life and affairs here. It is already ten weeks since I left our Fatherland. I have seen so much that is new and beautiful in this short time. Stood on Belgian soil, seen Britons in their homeland, and traded fruit and blankets with

¹Hedwig Pohl received a travel subsidy to emigrate from the Women's League of the German Colonial Society and wrote to thank the Baroness von Liliencron, the head of the organization, and to describe her experiences on a farm in Southwest Africa. Her letter was published in *Colony and Home* as a sample of letters sent to the Women's League by women whom it had helped to find employment in the colonies.

Spaniards on Tenerife. And then Africa! A couple of hours before we arrived in Swakopmund, our new home came into sight in bright tones. . . .

I won't hide it. I was soon homesick. Now that I am better accustomed, I find it pleasing to be here in Windhoek. I live with the children in a little house, five minutes from the hotel. The four older children go to school from 7:00–11:00 and from 3:00–5:00 in the afternoon in the Catholic mission school. Then, I am alone with my little darling, Bertha, whose funny faces and babbling cheer me up. It is pretty in Klein-Windhoek, two kilometers from here. Mr. and Mrs. S., the children and I went there one Sunday. There, everything is always green: grapevines, spinach, herbs, and much more thrive there. We picked carnations in the churchyard and made a pretty bouquet to take home. There are many birds here. We saw one tree along our journey with about 50 nests in it. A pair of hens has nested under my roof, and a hen once laid an egg in the yard. The children saw it and they came to me laughing and jubilant about this small miracle. Our children have already made friends with the blacks and use many of their expressions. So, they are always *steeve* (hungry), and then eat *moy* (food). They click with their tongues, just like the natives do. Many of the *Kaffirs*² here speak and understand German well. Once I asked a little one, "Do you go to school?"

"Yes, Miss."

"What do you learn there?"

"About our dear Lord."

"Anything else?"

"About Master Jesus."

As I gave him a piece of bread, he sprang up in delight, and shared it with the others, who stood a ways off.

Behind our house, we have a beautiful view. There, over on a mountain, stands the maternity hospital, a pretty building. It lies in the West, and when the sun goes down it is so

lovely. One sees the "mowing sheep," as our children call them, return home and hurry to drink, oxen and horses herded together.

We go to bed early and at about 9:00 p.m. everything is peaceful.

So, one day turns into another and the favorite days are always when the post arrives from Germany: Hurrah, a letter from home. Now it is cold in dear Germany and in Hamburg the citizenry complain about the rain. Here, it gets hotter every day. Hopefully, we will stay healthy, then we can gladly suffer every hardship.

Now, I send you many greetings to the dear German Fatherland, and also to you, dear Baroness von Liliencron. I remain, with all respect, your humble Hedwig Pohl, nursery maid with Mr. S. in Windhoek.

E. Anonymous, "Letters from Our Readers," *Swakopmund Newspaper* (April 3, 1912)

After the colonial troops in Southwest Africa murdered or drove out the majority of the African population during the armed African uprisings of 1904–1907, colonists had difficulty hiring enough servants and farm workers. Native Ordinances were then decreed which prohibited free movement, mandated employment, and established uniform wages and working conditions. The indigenous population resisted these measures whenever possible. Colonial officials, who were alarmed at the low African population figures, forbade the physical punishment of African women and excused many African wives from paid labor because they wanted these women to concentrate on being mothers. German colonial wives, who generally managed household labor, reacted negatively to these restrictions on their power over indigenous women.

The local housewives complain a great deal about the shortage of colored female workers, although there are many available in this place. Few are willing to work, however, since by inquiry most "have a husband, no pass, or herd

²*Kaffir*: a demeaning term for African natives.

cattle."¹ This last claim seldom matches the truth.

The police administration may perhaps bring about a change, as they are tightening their control by conducting raids in order to seek out the lazy ones. Also, the full power of the law must be applied to native women in all cases. Declarations such as those stated above must be given absolutely no consideration.

The native women are becoming and are already much too bold and believe that they do not need to work. The majority believe that they need only to move from one group of huts to the next and to visit each other in turn [to escape forced labor].

With increased oversight from employers and the authorities, additional numbers of native women will be discovered to be without work who can be employed in households, so that the great demand can be met.

The police will surely be thanked if they announce when extra hands are available.

[signed] One for Many

F. Clara Brockmann, "The Necessity of the Immigration of German Women" (1910)

The German writer Clara Brockmann emigrated independently to Southwest Africa, which was highly unusual. She was a frequent contributor to the *Colony and Home* magazine and a strong supporter of the Women's League of the German Colonial Society. Excerpted here is the opening essay of her first book, *The German Woman in Southwest Africa* (1910), which outlines a

racial argument for increasing women's colonization in Southwest Africa.

The immigration of the German woman to our colony is much discussed and desired. The purposes stand clear before us: hindering miscegenation,¹ which results in the spiritual and economic ruin of settlers; establishing a profitable farm, which cannot grow into a thriving enterprise without a housewife's assistance; and, above all, the civilizing power of German domesticity and customs which the presence of a woman fosters. Moreover, there is the caring for the younger generation, a factor that should not be undervalued because it defines the cultural level of an expanding population. . . .

In the North, and especially the middle of the territory, the shortage of white women is now felt somewhat less. However, it is otherwise in the Southern region of the colony. Here, many a native woman occupies the position of a white wife, exercising complete authority over the home. In the North I have also seen Herero² women who were the companions of German farmers on some individual homesteads. And their bastard³ children play in the house and yard, tragic and unwanted offspring who will bear their native blood until the end of time. Neither a religious nor a civil marriage is permitted any longer and the courts have even gone so far as to declare all existing unions with native women invalid. This decision was reached concerning the case of an old Herero woman who demanded a divorce from her white husband for extreme abuse. The court's verdict has been much debated, since [annulling

¹Married African women could escape compulsory labor by claiming that they were needed at home to care for their husbands and children or to tend cattle herds while male relatives worked. Since many natives who lived outside of German settlements did not have passes or identity cards, African men and women who wanted to abandon unpleasant jobs could discard their papers and run away. Many of these escapees moved frequently and changed their names. Without any means of permanent identification, they could not be returned to their former employers.

¹Miscegenation: Interracial unions.

²African women of the Herero ethnic group.

³"Bastard" has multiple meanings here. It indicates a person who is "hybrid," or mixed-race. It also suggests a child who is illegitimate, since interracial unions had been declared illegitimate in the colonial courts. The term primarily describes the members of the Rehoboth Baster population, a centuries-old fusion group of Dutch, English, and Khoi-San ancestry and culture, who frequently intermarried with colonists in southern Africa.

longstanding interracial couple's marriages, declaring their off-spring illegitimate, and stripping them of German citizenship] resulted in a considerable hardship. Even the governor, who has been misquoted in the German press, declared his personal conviction that he could not support this decision. But this decisive measure also has brought good, for in the future, native women increasingly will be driven from these illicit unions.

It is an old and sad fact of experience that the black woman has never made the slightest advance to a higher cultural level and that her husband instead descends closer to the level of his colored living companion and, not uncom-

monly, sinks completely to her level. The bastard children comprise a dubious element, which hinders the development of the colony. Two natures fight within them. The constructive abilities and intelligence, as well as a pronounced sense of good and evil—the legacy of their white fathers—wrestles against the complete moral inferiority of the native race.

The decrease of such mixed marriages is to be greeted as a positive development. How long will it last, since before no settler would ever think to make a native woman his housewife and the mother of his children? The time is past when former officers and the sons of admirals give their names to a black.

LIVES *and* VOICES

SOURCES IN EUROPEAN
WOMEN'S HISTORY

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posing as a poet, perhaps meant to be
Sappho. Pompeian wall painting*

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