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THE FIRST *BESATZUNGSKINDER*

AFRO-GERMAN CHILDREN, COLONIAL CHILDREARING PRACTICES, AND RACIAL POLICY IN GERMAN SOUTHWEST AFRICA, 1890–1914

Krista Molly O'Donnell

Germany has forgotten the origins of its first generation of Afro-German children. In the years following the German military suppression and occupation of Namibia, then called German Southwest Africa, following the Herero and Khoi (Nama) uprisings of 1904 to 1907, an upsurge in miscegenation entailing several hundred births each year took place in the colony until 1914 and likely continued even afterwards. Germans in the metropole and especially German settlers in German Southwest Africa fretted anxiously over the citizenship, welfare, and upbringing of Afro-German children abandoned by their soldier fathers and in some cases their mothers as well. Like the Afro-German children born in the wake of the post-World War II U.S. occupation of West Germany, the problematic "fatherless" biracial children of German Southwest Africa were a powerful and highly visible symbol for Germans attempting to come to grips with their national identity as well as racial and gender ideologies, and therefore the source of significant discussion and policymaking. Unlike the Afro-Germans of the 1950s, however, the earlier generation of occupation children (*Besatzungskinder*) experienced racial segregation and suppression of their ties to German culture and identity, and in some cases of their African heritage as well. Unable to resolve the ambiguities of these children's identity, Germans instead erased the

Afro-German population in the colony from their consciousness and their categories of citizenship.

From the very inception of German rule in 1884, the German colonial population in German Southwest Africa included large numbers of Afro-Europeans whose genealogy traced back over centuries of interracial contacts throughout Southern Africa. The most prominent of these belonged to a group known as the Rehoboth Basters, who possessed a fused Anglo-Dutch-African culture and accumulated wealth from agriculture and trade that made them attractive marriage partners to hardscrabble German settler artisans, traders, and ranchers on the colonial frontier. The Baster population, as well as Afro-European individuals of other ethnicities, held an ambiguous position somewhere between the two starkly defined legal categories of privileged "whites" and subordinate "natives" in the colony. Throughout the early nineteenth century, European men in German Southwest Africa and neighboring regions had intermarried with Afro-Europeans and Africans. By 1891, the first date for which we have colonial census figures, records indicate that 41 of the 246 male colonists (16.7 percent) in German Southwest Africa were wed to women labeled "African," many of whom were Baster or of other biracial heritage. The number of Afro-European marriages in the colony remained nearly constant at around 40 during the era of German rule, although the European settler population surged to over 14,000 by 1914. Soon after, Germans lost possession of the colony permanently in the wake of World War I.¹

At first, the legal Afro-European unions proved most controversial in pre-World War I German Southwest Africa because their offspring appeared to have airtight claims to a European nationality and thus "white" legal status. Nonetheless, German officials in the colony, and many Germans in the metropole as well, were especially reluctant to recognize legitimate Afro-German colonials' citizenship as German and thereby accord them and their offspring the full status and rights of other Germans. To recognize Afro-Germans, even in far-off German Southwest Africa, it seemed, would cast doubt on the "whiteness" of the German nation as a whole. Nonetheless, as the settler population grew, the numbers of Afro-German children born out of wedlock eclipsed the numbers of legitimate offspring. Although illegitimate children also had legal claims to German citizenship, their "fatherless" status quickly became a convenient excuse for denying their German identity and indeed that of all Afro-Germans.

In 1905 at the height of the colonial wars with the Herero, the governor of German Southwest Africa, Friedrich von Lindequist, decreed that marriages between colonists and persons with any African heritage

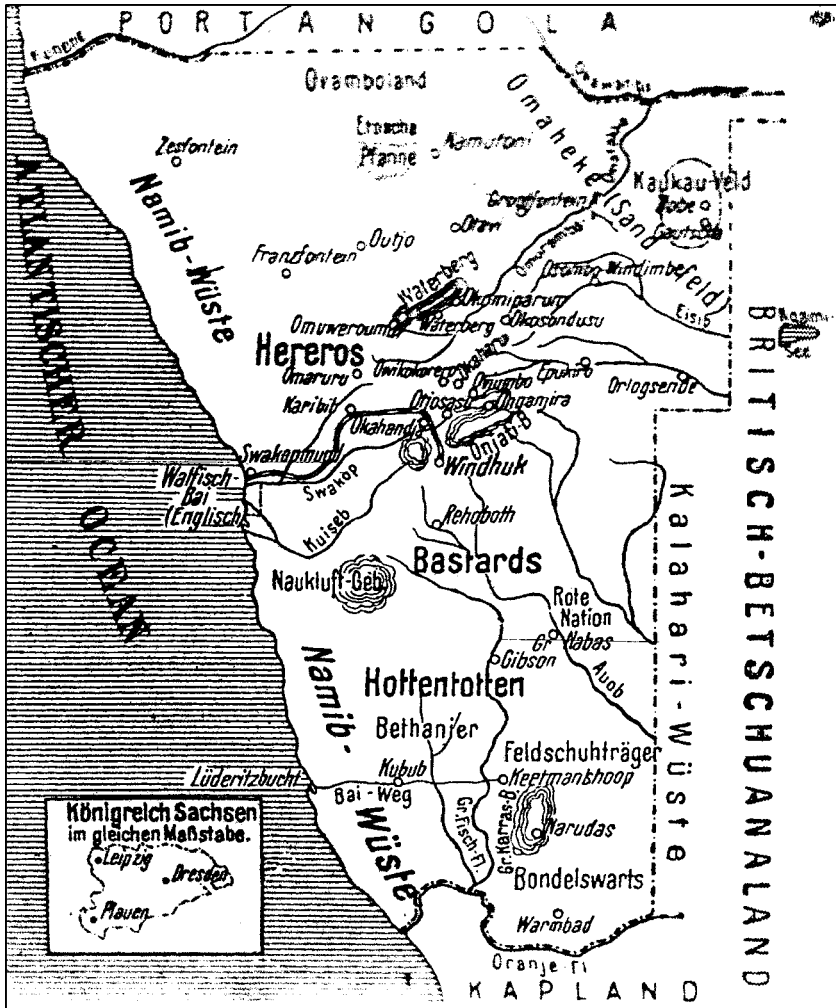


Figure 2.1. “Karte des Kriegsschauplatzes.” This map indicates the major battle sites of the Herero-Nama Wars as well as the locations of key German communities. German settlers in outlying areas accused the Herero of staging treacherous surprise attacks on isolated homesteads early in the conflict, and German countermeasures grew steadily harsher as the war dragged on, culminating in the infamous Battle of Waterberg.

Source: *Kolonie und Heimat*, no. 38, v. 3 (1909–1910).

would henceforth be illegal and, in 1907, the administration ruled that existing unions also were invalid. Although this act contradicted German civil and constitutional law, it effectively rendered Afro-Germans “illegitimate.” Nonetheless, in many instances, the formerly legitimate Afro-German individuals and families continued to exercise their previous rights without challenge. Those individuals who took their claims to court could find their legal status as whites in the colony stripped from them. The absolute question of the legitimacy of these marriages and those of their progeny was by no means ever fully resolved in the courts or the German administration; however, the marriage ban, as it has come to be known, drew attention to what for many was the even more insidious problem of illegitimate Afro-German births. These births were more numerous and more worrisome because they represented allegedly fatherless children whose upbringing and racial heredity undermined their ethnic ties to Germany, but whose legal claims to German citizenship were significant. In the homeland, a number of Germans of varying political backgrounds argued that the marriage bans were hypocritical because they would have little effect on reducing the overall number of mixed-race children in the colony. Some critics feared the bans might actually increase Afro-German births by minimizing paternal responsibility for them. This concern was one of the reasons why the German Reichstag voted to end all German colonial interracial marriage bans in May 1912. The German administration did not choose to enforce the decision and continued the ban’s effects until the end of colonial rule in 1915.²

As the resident German population grew in German Southwest Africa, the settler population itself became more and more agitated about the “question of racial mixing” (*Mischrassefrage*), although their concerns did not always coincide with those of the German public in the metropole. The immense violence of the German wars of 1904 to 1907 in German Southwest Africa provoked settlers’ fears of and demands for the suppression of the African population, and brought the perceived problem of miscegenation to new consequence. Unified settler concern over the racial dimensions of reproduction in German Southwest Africa first became apparent within the colonial community in its associational and institutional life, particularly those realms controlled by prominent middle-class settler men. Colonial social clubs, an important arena of male-dominated bourgeois sociability in German Southwest Africa, as in Germany, took the lead in expressing community censure against mixed-race marriages. In 1906 a territorial newspaper, the *Deutsch-Südwestafrikanische Zeitung*, reported that the Windhoek gymnastic society (*Turnverein*) and district farmers’ association (*Verein der Farmer*) had begun to deny new memberships to colonists

married to persons of color. According to the piece, the local Gibeon District Settler Society (*Bezirksverein*) went still further, barring the membership of settler men who “appeared to have sexual relations with native women.” Since the German colonial administration already had banned mixed-race marriages and police aggressively separated mixed-race couples who were unmarried, these measures likely had little practical application for current or even potential members. Still, these public displays offered a significant symbolic demonstration of united settler support for the 1905 marriage ban, however meaningless the provision proved in actual social practice.³

Beneath the apparent popular drive toward social conformity displayed through such measures, strong factions of dissenting colonists continued to voice opposition. The establishment of the controversial paragraph 17f in the 1909 charter for limited settler self-rule in German Southwest Africa, which excluded German men married to or cohabiting with women of color from suffrage, quickly led other organizations to impose similar membership restrictions in their own constitutions. This new attack on German men’s traditional patriarchal rights underscored the seriousness of racial anxiety in the colony. Carl Becker, a German farmer married to a Baster wife, commented on the peer pressure exerted within these clubs that compelled their membership to ratify the restrictions unequivocally, despite lingering individual misgivings:

Soon the veterans’, district, rifle, and gymnastic societies hurried to take up this paragraph [§17f] in their charters as the highest moral achievement [*höchste sittliche Errungenschaft*]. The adoption invariably took place, according to newspaper reports, unanimously, although many members scarcely were able to take part in such a vote due to their absences. Thereby, the following occurrence took place: a man married to a Baster wife (A) meets a friend (B): A: “So, you also voted for this fine paragraph!” B: “Yes, but you should not take offense with me. I know your wife to be a very upstanding woman. But they all stood up, so I did too.” The case is typical.⁴

Becker’s descriptions serve to reinforce the conclusion that the general impulse toward establishing rigid racial boundaries within the German settlers’ associations still posed great complications within settler society in the colony as a whole, even though these institutions claimed unanimous support for community enforcement of racial segregation. The new club membership restrictions gradually took on more bite for prominent propertied colonists like Becker, particularly as the more stringent rules now singled out mixed-race couples and families who, until this point, had participated as “respectable,” if lesser, members of the European social

order in German Southwest Africa. Afro-German children arguably suffered more immediate and more practically from the segregation of private institutions in the colony. In 1906, Windhoek's Lutheran parish expelled "half-white" children from the parish kindergarten, as did the local private school. The state obligation to educate legitimate Afro-German children remained in force. As we shall see, however, many settlers demanded their segregation from white classrooms. Illegitimate children enjoyed no such claims to a public education.⁵

Settler newspapers evinced even more acute anxiety toward the many new births of illegitimate Afro-German children in the wake of the colonial occupation force. After the bloody wars with Herero and Khoi insurgents, some settlers feared discontented biracial individuals would sow the seeds for future uprisings and the potential loss of the colony. Metaphorically, the children's very existence was a betrayal of their fathers' intentions as well as a condemnation of their fathers' moral and sexual conduct, so the children's potential for instigating disorder in the colony was innate. Some German newspapers apparently confused the much larger number of Baster children in German Southwest Africa with the numbers of Afro-German births. As one German newspaper exclaimed, the eight hundred Basters born in 1909 represented "considerably more births of mixed-race children [*Mischlingskinder*] than those of German parents [in the colony]." The colonial newspaper, *Südwest*, however, responded that Basters should not be "thoughtlessly confused with the genuine progeny of a white father and colored mother, the *real Mischlingen* [half-breeds]."⁶ The German term "*Mischling*" (someone of mixed ancestry) was racially pejorative, as witnessed by its later use in the Nazi era to delegitimize individuals of combined Jewish and non-Jewish heritages. Thus the statement, with its peculiar emphasis on the new population of Afro-German individuals as distinctly anomalous and threatening to the social order, underscores how the births resulting from the colonial wartime occupation exacerbated the already heightened concern of German settlers over miscegenation. The newspaper went on to cite Professor D. Haußleiter of Halle of the German missionary movement, who identified Basters as loyal to the colonists and opposed to insurrection. By contrast, he estimated only three to four hundred "half-white children to speak of, who run around in the colony fatherless." Of these, he reported that the Protestant Rhenish Mission cared for eighty-four. The problematic "fatherless" Afro-German children of this occupation, ready to betray and destroy their paternity, bear much comparison in both symbolism and fact with the prominent concern over Afro-German children born almost

a half-century later during the American occupation following World War II.

There are many similarities between the origins of these two Afro-German populations. In the final years of German colonial rule in German Southwest Africa, from 1908 to 1914, roughly two thousand German troops were garrisoned in the colony, especially around Windhoek and the other larger towns. There, the German occupational force supposedly was forbidden access to the indigenous ethnic populations, housed in native districts known as *werfs*, which fell under police control. We have anecdotal evidence, however, that sexual contact was frequent between German forces and African women. For example, colonial health officials noted an epidemic of sexual infections among colonial soldiers, which they attributed to sexual intercourse with African women. Likewise, the Otavi Mine in Tsumeb, with another largely male population, reported comparable rates of infection among their European mineworkers, which bureaucrats also ascribed to their sexual relations with African women in the bush and to those working in single male colonists' households as domestics. The officials asserted that the African women who engaged in sex with German men were prostitutes, and the authorities hoped to prohibit the women's employment in bachelor men's houses and to increase police oversight of them with curfews and punishment. The *werf* system and other forms of repression, however strictly applied, appear to have failed miserably to prevent German men's sexual unions with African women and subsequent Afro-German births. German men seemingly acted with impunity. By contrast, it is notable that German administrators strictly and seemingly successfully forbade European prostitutes' clientage with African and Baster men under threat of deportation. No German woman was ever reported to have given birth to an Afro-German child in the colony.⁷

Rape and coercion of African women were rarely acknowledged to be a significant cause of interracial births. Nonetheless, the violent sexual climate was such that African women had little or no recourse against German men's predations. In one of the rarely reported instances of colonial rapes, 1912 settler newspapers related how two fugitive German murderers named Sommer and Falk captured and subsequently bludgeoned to death a fifty-year-old Herero woman and her nine-year-old granddaughter in the bush, allegedly while in search of "concubines." Only a few months prior, drunken German policeman Sergeant Odenwald in the city of Keetmanshoop invaded the local *werft*, abducted and raped an eleven-year-old Khoi girl from her sickbed, who then died from the assault. A second police sergeant was convicted of conspiracy in the attack. Disturbingly, the

Lüderitzbuchter Zeitung commented in light of the incident that African women commonly experienced unwanted sexual approaches from German men:

The population has already complained for a long time that their female domestic employees have been seized and pestered by soldiers in the evenings on their way home. On more than one occasion, some employers have felt compelled to accompany their female servants, who did not want to go home without protection, to the *werf*.⁸

The report went on to assert that the understaffed German police patrols were needed elsewhere for more pressing matters! Under such circumstances, the inevitable conclusion is that German men's rape of African women was largely ignored and likely a frequent cause of Afro-German births. I have argued elsewhere that German settler mistreatment and sexual assault of African women was pervasive in the wake of the uprisings in German Southwest Africa; the level of such violence seems to have outstripped the deplorable tolerance for rape of women of color that typically characterized colonial societies at this time.⁹

Although rape likely accounted for the origins of many Afro-German children, Germans were remarkably unsympathetic toward the mothers of these children. Unlike the immediate post-World War II relaxation of abortion laws in Germany, especially in cases involving African American soldiers, Germans in the colony more strictly repressed abortion during the occupation.¹⁰ Indeed, because of the trauma such rapes would have produced, many of the pregnancies that stemmed from African-German intercourse may well have been terminated before birth. Colonial administrators publicly fretted over African women's extensive knowledge of and easy access to indigenous herbal abortifacients. Although abortion was illegal under German colonial law, African birthrates declined precipitously during the postwar German military occupation. African women's alleged "birth strike" worried German administrators so much that they blamed interracial sexual unions in part for the population decline, although without citing rape as a factor. The governor of German Southwest Africa, Theodor Seitz, speculated that added restrictions against miscegenation inevitably would restore the African birth rate:

The disorder of concubinage between white men and black women, too, has an unhealthy effect over the increase of the natives. A black woman, who in the course of a year has not one, but many white "lovers," naturally is not inclined to allow the embryo to develop, and instead eliminates the

fetus through abortion. Here, the measures with regard to combating the problem of miscegenation undoubtedly will have a beneficial effect.¹¹

While Seitz sarcastically refers to African women's "many white 'lovers,'" he portrays their unwanted pregnancies as the result of female promiscuity rather than rape. The difficulties in assessing with any accuracy how the rape and coercion of African women by German men figured into the interracial birth rate under German military occupation are insurmountable. Nor can scholars easily ascertain how African women and local communities perceived these Afro-German births. What is more certain is that German policies sought to make absolute social chaos of indigenous African societies, first through military atrocities and subsequently through harsh postwar occupation. German sources suggest the rate of abandonment of these children to the care of the colonial state was perhaps as high as one in four.¹² The German colonists were responsible for creating an increasingly hostile environment into which new Afro-German children were born.

Many of the conditions African women experienced closely resemble and even surpass the difficulties of life for women in Germany after World War II and contributed to fraternization with occupying forces.¹³ Just as postwar Germany was predominantly a society of the elderly and women, the same population distortions characterized the Africans in German Southwest Africa after the Herero and Khoi insurgencies of 1904 through 1907. Only about 30 percent of the prewar male population remained in the colony after wartime German atrocities, and many of the men who surrendered after the ceasefire subsequently died in the intolerable suffering of German prison camps. During much of the brutal campaign, Germans actually took no prisoners and even shot women and children refugees on sight. In the ensuing civilian flight from the German forces, couples and families were separated, some never to regroup or even to learn each other's fates. Noninsurgent ethnic groups including the San (Bushmen) and Damara suffered great casualties as well, with only the remote northern Ovambo and more recognizably Europeanized Basters escaping massive depopulation. Moreover, African combatants lost all traditional tribal lands and their herds, which not only represented the basis for all traditional economic life but also for their social organization and practices, and thus served further to undermine indigenous culture and identity. Africans now submitted to relocation and forced labor in German enterprises, particularly mines, railroads, and farms. Pass controls that compelled these laborers to reside in *werfs* local to their employment further separated some of the families of mines and railroad workers. Adding

to the social disruption, the shortage of African men workers led German employers to demand that African women now assume the burden of traditional men's work, thus preventing many female workers who were also mothers from caring for their children during the day. The contract labor system also set minimal dietary provisions and pay scales for workers and their families, making hunger and malnutrition pervasive and compelling the theft of German foodstuffs and livestock.¹⁴

African women's paid work led them to enter German cities, residential areas, and homesteads and brought them into greater contact with German men as employers and overseers, as well as making possible more casual contacts in the streets and public places. Not only rapes resulted. Hunger and powerlessness apparently forced some African women into relations of concubinage, regular prostitution, or more informal or infrequent sexual relations with settler men and soldiers, sexual connections that relied on ambiguous degrees of female consent. Still worse, German officials and settlers blamed and punished African women caught in such situations for their alleged seduction of white men and took the subsequent births of biracial children as evidence against them. It is little surprise then, that these women chose to abandon their Afro-German children in growing numbers. The unfortunate result of this trend could only be deprivation and neglect for the children and lack of identification with their mothers' cultures. Indeed, historian Gesine Krüger documents that in general, African children in the colony suffered from high rates of parental death, abandonment, dislocation from families, and forced labor in the years of occupation.¹⁵

German authorities now began to debate the appropriate social policies to handle the growing orphaned Afro-German population. In Germany, for example, the Central Assembly for Domestic Missions in the German Territories (*Zentral-Ausschuß für Innere Mission in den deutschen Schutzgebieten*) publicly advocated that the colonial authorities forcibly remove illegitimate biracial children from their African mothers and fund an expensive Christian orphanage system to raise the unwanted and potentially subversive offspring. Other critics feared that this system of European orphanages would only serve to undermine Afro-Germans' association with Africans, suggesting their Africanness was their more definitive genetic heritage and more innate cultural identity. Some suggested the newborns could be given over to the Baster population to raise as their own.¹⁶

Increasingly the costly care for the illegitimate Afro-German children became a public policy issue for the colonial state in German Southwest Africa with broad implications for legitimate Afro-European children and adults in the colony. One popular colonial newspaper's



Figure 2.2. “Nun setzen die Herero zum Sturme an.” Postwar German representations of colonial warfare highlighted the animal ferocity and base betrayal of the Herero troops and served to justify the heavy suspicion, repression, and mistreatment that colonial Germans continued to heap on the African population in German Southwest Africa long after formal hostilities had ended.

Source: *Kolonie und Heimat*, no. 44, v. 4, (1910–1911).

article describing Afro-German orphanages readily blamed the German fathers for their neglect of the children and failure to provide for them or give them an upstanding education (*regelrechte Erziehung*). The article, presented with a highly critical disclaimer by the editorial staff to the effect

that “*Mischlinge* should be brought no closer to the whites than absolutely necessary,” depicted the controversial Rhenish mission orphanages for Afro-German children in Okahandja and Keetmanshoop. The Okahandja installation was headed by a German schoolteacher and his wife who acted “in place of parents to the children” and gave them elementary education instruction in German. The author represented the Afro-German children as hereditarily unsuited to a European education:

It is an arduous labor undertaken there, and it means much patience with the weak little heads and the inborn mediocrity of character. Yet the thought of giving these poor abandoned children a home spurs those involved forward and gives them the courage to carry on and to fight against the lies and the laziness that infects these children’s blood only too greatly.¹⁷

Despite the emphasis on instruction in German, Afro-German mission schools appear to have been trade schools, their focus on imparting carpentry and other craft skills, which raised the specter of competition with local German workers. Nonetheless, by producing furniture and other goods for sale to settlers, the schools could defray some if not all of their expenses.

Alternately, Governor Seitz suggested collecting alimony from the culpable fathers, as a form of punitive tax at the very high rate of one thousand marks per child. These moneys could then fund the costs of raising the children as befitted their anomalous position in colonial society. As part of their consideration of Seitz’s proposal, settler representatives debated whether the children should be raised to identify as Africans or Europeans. Attendance in the German school system was crucial in developing children’s Germanness, especially because sharp colonial restrictions on African access to vocational training and literacy were intended to instill permanent subordination. Establishing new legal provisions to provide for the colony’s growing young African-German population raised other ticklish issues as well. For instance, the governor’s plan could give rise to criminal proceedings in which indigenous women accused settler men of paternity, an impermissible arrangement within the confines of the racist colonial judicial system.¹⁸ In 1912, the settlers’ elected colonial council unanimously upheld in principle the notion of establishing such a fund to be collected from all German men found to be engaging in sexual relations with women of color, to be used to raise the territory’s mixed-race children to identify with indigenous, non-European cultures.¹⁹ Nonetheless, the decision effectively and permanently relegated Afro-German children to non-German status in German Southwest Africa because it kept them at the very least from German language instruction.

Part and parcel of the shift in official thinking was the reworking of colonial census practices to register racial categories more exactly. In accordance with this newly recognized necessity, in June 1912, the governor for the first time ordered the listing of all future births involving a European father and indigenous or mixed-race mother in a separate registry. For the first time, illegitimate and legitimate Afro-European births in German Southwest Africa were to be recorded together in their own ledger. Such a comprehensive listing naturally would have enabled administrators to keep Afro-German children born after 1912 from entering the schools.²⁰ The decree made no explicit demand that paternity be established in such incidences, which indicates the new registry was intended to distinguish the separate racial identity and citizenship of persons of mixed-race descent and provide for the government's capacity to identify these individuals. In this manner, colonial authorities could trace the incidence of miscegenation regionally over time, punish the offending mothers, and permanently record the ancestry of persons of partial-African descent. Because Governor Seitz and his underlings viewed the reproduction of white, indigenous, and mixed-race children as interrelated, official accountings of these births would allow the government to trace the effects of their anti-miscegenation policies on the growth of the ethnic African and European populations.

Certainly the records might have allowed officials to take custody of all Afro-German children in the colony, but such a campaign did not take place before the end of German rule in the territory in 1915. Had Germany not lost German Southwest Africa, eventually such records might have provided the basis for determining the legal rights of future generations, allowing the government to research the racial background of all territorial residents as necessary and ascertain the degree of their African ancestry, perhaps according some of them naturalized German citizenship.²¹ Still, the decree also reflected the colonial state's recognition of the growing consensus among extreme racial separatists in the colony who urged their government to establish boundaries for the upbringing of the young generation of German-African children, which physically and culturally distanced them from "white" children.

Indeed, as we have already seen, the education of children stemming from mixed-race marriages throughout German Southwest Africa had begun to pose a vexing ideological problem for the settler community. Although some colonists still openly protested the validity of mixed-race marital unions in the colony, their logic had always rested on the cultural attainments of such households, that is, their "European-" or "Germanness." As late as 1912, one individual employing the pseudonym "Justice" insisted

of a mixed-race family reclassified by the German court system as native that “[t]hese people have enjoyed a very good school education and are married to white, pure-blooded women; their conduct of life is absolutely at the same height as that of a white . . .”²² By this point in time, however, vocal settler demand for strict segregation within the German colonial public school system threatened to undermine permanently the educational opportunities for young children of partial African descent whose families could not afford to pay for private schooling. The movement to bar mixed-race children from German schools seemed to recognize that failing the continuation of past provisions for their co-education as Germans, these young mixed-race children’s cultural upbringing would forge their permanent identification with the indigenous population, eliminating all possibility of naturalization as Germans.

At the turn of the decade, a number of outspoken settlers, shored up by German popular sentiment at home, had begun to object to the presence of mixed-race students in their children’s classrooms. In November 1910, the manager of a business in Swakopmund named Behncke was charged with insulting an official, the head teacher of the Swakopmund district school (*Realschule*). Behncke alleged in self-justification that a pupil at the school named Fritz Krenz had sent his daughter a note containing “lewd remarks” (*unzüchten Bemerkungen*). The accused particularly stressed his concern that Fritz Krenz had some African blood; his father was German and his mother Baster. After some delay, the district court (*Bezirksgericht*) ruled for the defendant:

The person administrating the school was responsible to see to the removal of the student Krenz, after receiving word of his ancestry. It cannot be expected of the citizens of Swakopmund, that they allow their children to go to the same school with not-purely white offspring of a mixed marriage. The danger for the moral well-being of the children is too great, as it is known that children from mixed marriages inherit the bad traits of the natives and especially their lax understanding of sexual matters.²³

The judicial decision employs language strikingly similar to the rationales that former Governor Theodor Leutwein originally presented for constructing a kindergarten in Windhoek, which would distance “white” children from the sexual contamination of African youths. Again, the expression of the “moral danger” seems linked to anxiety over African heritage itself, as a signifier of immorality. Surprisingly enough, the higher court (*Obergericht*) overturned this ruling on appeal, upon documentary evidence that Frau Krenz and her children had obtained naturalized German citizenship in

1900, subsequently reaffirmed by governor's order in 1909. Furthermore, the school dormitory head presented a testimonial of the youth's good conduct, whereupon the Swakopmund elected parish council and District Officer Weber recommended leaving the boy in school and hushing up the affair.²⁴ Nonetheless, the case is strong evidence a few extremists had begun to exploit community concern for the chastity of "white" children to resolve all future questions of racial citizenship.

The ongoing debate over the legitimacy and citizenship of German-African youths resurfaced even more strongly in the wake of the Reichstag vote in May 1912 to again legalize mixed-race marriages in the German colonies. The question of mixed-race children's upbringing became an important weapon for winning popular consensus in favor of the continued prohibition against these marriages, because it invariably reinforced the need for continued state- and community-enforced racial segregation in the interests of protecting the chastity of German girls.²⁵ This anxiety was particularly pronounced in German Southwest Africa in the spring of 1912, following an infamous court case, the subject of numerous conflicting rumors in the colony between February and July 1912.

The notorious affair, which German language newspapers labeled simply the "Omaruru Case," in reference to the city where it occurred, involved a fifteen- or sixteen-year-old Herero servant named "Friedrich" employed by a city official and an unnamed four- to five-year-old German girl living under local guardianship in the wake of her mother's death. The Herero youth reportedly molested the girl sexually, thereby infecting her with gonorrhea. The local district officer and two of his assistants handled the investigation quietly, giving rise to a variety of wild rumors and obscuring the material evidence behind the charges. Unsubstantiated rumors at first led one newspaper account to misreport the age of the purported victim as twelve. Other unreliable allegations also surfaced, including charges that other perpetrators may have been involved and that similar incidents had occurred in other locales, that continually marred newspaper coverage of the facts, and demonstrate the considerable public discussion which surrounded the case.²⁶

Published opinions on the affair shifted perceptibly over time. Initially, general reactions addressed the need for settler men to protect their wives and children from lascivious African servants. One paper even remarked that the sullied girl would have to leave the territory because she could no longer be permitted in the company of other settler children as classmates, but recanted this notion when apprised of her true age.²⁷ After several weeks, public concern began to center on the community's responsibility

for preventing such incidents. Published remarks now expressed regret over the girl's orphaned status, which had robbed her of fatherly protection, chastised the poor supervision of the foster system, and regretted the tendency of lax settler parents who seemed to allow their children too much unsupervised contact with African retainers.²⁸ As public reflection over the Omaruru case broadened, the topic offered a discursive arena for troubled members of the German settler community to debate their recommendations for resolving a number of interrelated racial and sexual concerns. The state's handling of the sordid affair, however, also established the administration's sensitivity to extremists' pressures, when these took the form of exaggerated concern for "white" children's welfare. In the wake of the case, the colonial public continued to employ its reading of the events in Omaruru to establish subsequent demands on the imperial state to enact policies ensuring the strict racial segregation of "white" children in the interests of the public good. The ensuing debate over mixed-race boys' presence in the German colonial school system thus reflected the evocative power of the Omaruru "scare" to reshape the imperial state's racial-reproductive policies suddenly and dramatically in the final years of German rule in German Southwest Africa.

Less than a year after this first affair finally was settled by permitting an Afro-German boy to remain in the Swakopmund schools, two months after the infamous Omaruru case, other colonists began voicing objections to biracial children's presence in another colonial school. A letter to the editor of the territorial newspaper *Südwest* from a southern region of the colony now evoked concern as far away as Germany, where the *Staatsbürger Zeitung* reprinted excerpts from the original newspaper piece.²⁹ Again, the charges served as part of a larger condemnation of miscegenation in the colony. Now, however, the moral danger to children appeared too great to ignore:

It likely is not known to you that the [name deleted] school is visited by several mixed-race children, who also receive government stipends, just as the children of pure white parents. That the mothers of the white children now are seeking out other instructional options, is completely understandable. . . . Among the mixed-race children found visiting the school, some are even *illegitimate*! They are, like their fathers, well known to me. . . . Now, the apple does not fall far from the tree [*Nun, wie die Alten sunen, so zwitschern ja bekanntlich auch die Jungen*], and one can only think that this coeducation of mixed-race children with the whites in the given school poses a moral danger to the children of white mothers. I myself often have heard white women complain about it.³⁰

Although the angry letter places the concern for the “white” students’ moral well-being on women colonists’ shoulders, the author appears to have been male, and his outrage centers on protecting “white” children from sexual contamination, while also implying that the current situation represented a dishonor to German motherhood. Furthermore, the text seeks to establish the flawed paternity of the mixed-race children, particularly illegitimate children at that, undermining their legal claims to state-funded education or admission to German schooling.

The newspaper report prompted an official investigation from the governor’s office in Windhoek. Bethanien Regional Officer Böhmer reported on the situation at the school in question, in Aus (Lüderitzbucht District). Three “not pure white” children received five-hundred-mark stipends from the district council (*Bezirksrat*) to cover the cost of their room and board. Böhmer explained that the parents of one of the children in question “are regarded here as white” (*gelten hier als Weisse*). Furthermore, he described making scrupulous prearrangements before permitting the child’s residence in the school dormitory:

Before I took the son of Colemann in the dormitory in Aus, I personally ascertained quite carefully that the residents of Aus took not the slightest objection to this. In this case, personally handled by me, I made an exception in full awareness to the principle of the admission of white children, in accordance with the provisions of the government and colonial council.³¹

Böhmer’s justification also suggests that the accusations were raised by a local enemy of one of the families, who was known for prevarication. Böhmer’s depictions serve to demonstrate how legal exceptions that rested upon the personal reputations of well-regarded members of the settler community, when viewed outside the intimate setting of Aus, became the subject of great concern for settlers in other areas and outraged readers in Germany as well.

Bourgeois opponents to the joint education of mixed-race children formulated their challenges in terms of national and class pride. A letter to the editor of the Swakopmund newspaper circulated the story of an unnamed, lowly Afrikaner who refused to enroll his thirteen-year-old daughter in the new government school out of concerns for her welfare:

When asked for the reason, he replied, “I shall *not* have my daughter brought among all these *Baster boys*.”—Even this simple peasant saw the shame immediately, while many of us Germans pass this by without concern.³²

The general tale, perhaps even untrue, craftily invokes the subordinate social position of Afrikaners in the German colony, which served to inflame the matter further, as well as hinting at the dangers of biracial youths' attentions to a young and presumably sexually inexperienced adolescent German girl. Such passionate appeals to readers' emotions no doubt did much to coerce state officials to reconsider their handling of mixed-race school attendance.

The concern over the education of these few part-Baster children, now redirected colonists' expressions of concern over protecting the "chastity" of their children from racial contamination, offered compelling justification for tightened state restrictions on interracial reproduction in German Southwest Africa. The Omaruru case provided incontrovertible proof of hidden sexual dangers in the colony. The incident not only served to reaffirm the demoralizing effects of mixed-race unions, but also established an increased need for community involvement in overseeing the care of "white" children for the sake of the public, imperial welfare.

The context and timing of the Omaruru case suggests its similarity to the contemporary "Black Peril" scares of neighboring British colonies in Southern Africa, yet Germans' anxieties, as evident in their descriptions of the incident, were more remarkable in their divergence from this pattern. The youthful ages of the alleged perpetrator, an adolescent, and his victim, a much younger girl, suggest settlers' concern centered most directly on preserving the morality of German settler children from contamination by their young Afro-German peers, rather than mature African men. Elsewhere, reports of racial "peril" identified the adult male subject population at large as the principle source of latent sexual danger and particularly singled out indigenous servants within European households as the greatest threats to their mistresses.³³ Nonetheless, the logic of the scare urged the separation of the races at any expense. For Germans in German Southwest Africa, this meant the permanent denial of Afro-German's identity, citizenship, and legal rights as Germans.

Moreover, the move toward the deliberate segregation of Afro-German children in specialized institutions and their agonized removal from German schools, practices consciously rejected during the 1950s and 1960s in Germany, could only create an anomalous population in German Southwest Africa that was not fully African nor permitted to be German. Indeed, these practices were so successful that a generation of Afro-German children of the German occupation of Namibia is largely forgotten in Germany. Remarkably, Brigitta Schmidt-Lauber describes even the contemporary Afro-German population in Namibia as possessing a "non-identity."³⁴ Unlike the

more liberal postwar era in which the adoption of Afro-Germans represented the rebirth of masculine responsibility, when the German authorities in German Southwest Africa took guardianship of the “fatherless” biracial children, the colonial state did not assume this role itself nor act in loco parentis for them. Instead, Germans worked to create institutions that perpetuated Afro-Germans’ isolation. Wherever possible Germans worked both actively and passively to make “fatherless” Afro-German children motherless as well, and stateless and invisible in the bargain.

Notes

1. This study is based on European published sources and archival records from Namibia and Germany. All translations from the original German are the author’s. Karen Boge Smidt, “‘Germania führt die deutsche Frau nach Südwest’: Auswanderung, Leben und soziale Konflikte deutscher Frauen in der ehemaligen Kolonie Deutsch-Südwestafrika, 1884–1920” (Ph.D. diss., Universität Magdeburg, 1995), 431 table 1b.

2. Helmut Walser Smith, “The Talk of Genocide, The Rhetoric of Miscegenation: Notes on Debates in the German Reichstag Concerning Southwest Africa, 1904–1914,” in Sara Lennox, Sara Friedrichsmeyer, and Susanne Zantop (eds.), *The Imperialist Imagination: German Colonialism and Its Legacy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 107–24; Dr. Georg Hartmann, “Die Mischrasen in unseren Kolonien, besonders in Südwestafrika,” in *Verhandlungen des Deutschen Kolonialkongresses 1910* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1910), 908–32; Lora Wildenthal, “Race, Gender and Citizenship in the German Colonial Empire,” in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler (eds.), *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 263–86.

3. “Aus Windhoek,” *Deutsch-Südwestafrikanische Zeitung* (hereafter *DSWAZ*) 8, no. 6 (7 February 1906).

4. Carl Becker, “Das Gemeindewahlrecht und die Ehe Weißer mit Eingeborenen,” *DSWAZ* 11, no. 55 (10 July 1909).

5. “Aus Windhoek,” *DSWAZ* 8, no. 6 (7 February 1906).

6. “Die Zahl der Mischlinge,” *Südwest* 2, no. 27 (4 April 1911). Emphasis in original.

7. German Federal Archives in Koblenz, Namibia Collection, Medizinangelegenheiten, Gesundheitspolizei. (H.II.H.1. Bd. 1–2). Maßregeln gegen geschlechtliche Ausschweifung, (5244.G.IV.d.2, Bl. 85).

8. “Aus Keetmanshoop—Ein Sittlichkeitsverbrechen,” *Lüderitzbucher Zeitung* (*LZ* hereafter) 4, 19 (11 May 1912); “Aus Windhuk,” *LZ* 4, 31 (3 August 1912).

9. See Krista O’Donnell, “Poisonous Women: Sexual Danger, Illicit Violence, and Domestic Work in German Southern Africa, 1904–1915,” *Journal of Women’s History* 11, no. 3 (Autumn 1999): 31–54; Pam Scully, “Rape, Race and Colonial Culture: The Politics of Sexual Identity in Nineteenth-Century Cape Colony,” *American Historical Review* 100, no. 2 (1995): 335–59.

10. Heide Fehrenbach, “Rehabilitating Fatherland: Race and German Remasculization,” *Signs* 24, no. 1 (1998): 107–28, esp. 110–13.

11. German Federal Archives in Berlin, Reichs-Kolonialamt (Collection of the Imperial Colonial Office, hereafter RKA), Akte 5423, Bl. 169, Seitz, Windhoek, March 1911.

12. "Die Versorgung der Mischlingskinder," *Kolonie und Heimat* (hereafter *KH*) 4, no. 35 (1911/2), Nachrichtenbeilage.

13. Fehrenbach, "Rehabilitating Fatherland"; Robert G. Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood: Women and the Family in the Politics of Postwar West Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

14. Helmut Bley, *Kolonialherrschaft und Sozialstruktur in Deutsch-Südwestafrika* (Hamburg: Leibniz Verlag, 1968), trans. Hugh Ridley, *South-West Africa under German Rule, 1894–1914* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1971); Tessa Cleaver and Marion Wallace, *Namibia: Women in War* (London: Zed Books, 1990).

15. Gesine Krüger, *Kriegsbewältigung und Geschichtsbewußtsein: Realität, Deutung und Verarbeitung des deutschen Kolonialkriegs in Namibia 1904 bis 1907* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 155–82.

16. RKA, Akte 5423, Bl. 158–9, Dr. Spieker, Central-Ausschuß für die Innere Mission der deutschen evangelischen Kirche, Berlin-Dahlem, to Colonial Secretary Lindequist, Berlin, 28 March 1911; "Die Versorgung der Mischlingskinder"; "Die südwestafrikanischen Bastards. Betrachtungen der Rassenfrage," *KH* 4, no. 13 (1911/2).

17. "Die Versorgung der Mischlingskinder."

18. Daniel Walther, "Creating Germans Abroad: White Education in German Southwest Africa," *German Studies Review* 24, no. 2 (2001): 325–52; Cynthia Cohen, "'The Natives Must First Become Good Workmen': Formal Educational Provision in German South West Africa and East Africa Compared," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 19, no. 1 (1993): 115–34. RKA 5423, Bl. 149, Abschrift, Verordnung des Kaiserlichen Gouverneurs von Deutsch-Südwest Afrika betreffend die Mischlingsbevölkerung and Bl. 146–8, Governor Seitz, Windhoek, to the RKA, Berlin, 24 February 1911.

19. German Federal Archives in Koblenz, Namibia Collection, Personenstandssachen: Mischehen, 666.F.IV.r.1, Bd. 1, Bl. 109, Auszug aus Protokoll über die geheime Sitzung des Landesrats am 18 Mai 1911. In 1912 RKA advisors recommended waiting a year or two before implementing the fine. Bl. 126–7, Lange, Berlin, to Governor Seitz, 4 March 1912.

20. RKA, 5423, Bl. 149ff: "The birth of a child, whose father is non-indigenous and whose mother is an indigenous person, must be registered within two months at the district (or regional) office of the place of birth. The announcement must contain the place, day and time of birth, sex of the child, the given name of the child, the first and family name, tribal affiliation, status or profession, place of residence and passport number of the mother." The order contained no provision for identifying the father of the child, but further asserted the police right to order the separation of a mixed-race couple or an employment relationship in which the father of the mixed-race child is the mother's employer.

21. Namibia Collection: Personenstandssachen: Mischehen, 666.F.IV.r.1, Bd. 1, Bl. 105–7, Auszug aus Protokoll über die geheime Sitzung des Landrats am 18 Mai 1911 indicates that members of the colonial council fully expected such a provision to be forthcoming.

22. "Zum Rassenmischmasch," *Südwest* 3, no. 69 (27 August 1912). Anonymous letter to the editor.

23. Namibia Collection: Personenstandssachen: Mischehen 666.F.IV.r.2., Bd. 2, Bl. 105 ruling quoted by Bezirksamtmann Weber, Swakopmund, 12 December 1912.

24. Namibia Collection: Personenstandssachen: Mischehen, 666.F.IV.r.2., Bd. 2, Bl. 105 ruling quoted by Bezirksamtmann Weber, Swakopmund, 12 December 1912.

25. See also "Gegen die Mischehen," *Swakopmunder Zeitung* 1, no. 64 (20 June 1912), which remarked, "Und diesen ganzen Unrat will man durch Gestattung der Ehe zwischen Weißen und Eingeborenen sozusagen legitimieren, womöglich sogar rein deutschen Kindern auf dem Wege der Schulkameradschaft zuführen? Unglaublich."

26. "Aus dem Schutzgebiet—Der Omaruruer Fall," *Südwest* 3, no. 38 (10 May 1912); "Zum Omaruruer Fall," *DSWAZ* 14, no. 13 (12 February 1912); "Der Omaruruer Verbrecher benädigt," *Südwest* 3, no. 53 (2 July 1912). "Ein scheussliches Verbrechen," *Südwest* 3, no. 10 (2 February 1912) refers to two other cases in Windhoek. "Zum Omaruruer Fall," *Südwest* 3, no. 57 (11 July 1912) reports a second serving boy in the same household was arrested.

27. "Ein 'mene tekel,'" *DSWAZ* 14, no. 10 (2 February 1912). Subsequently retracted in "Zum Omaruruer Fall," *DSWAZ* 14, no. 12 (9 February 1912).

28. "Größere Schutz für unsere Minderjährigen!" *Swakopmunder Zeitung* 1, no. 23 (21 February 1912).

29. "Mischlingswesen in Deutsch-Südwestafrika," *Staatsbürger Zeitung* (14 September 1912) clipping in Namibia Collection, Personenstandssachen: Mischehen, 666.F.IV.r.2., Bd. 2, Bl. 193.

30. "Der Rassenmischmasch und seine Folgen," *Südwest* 3, no. 63 (6 August 1912).

31. Namibia Collection: Personenstandssachen: Mischehen, 666.F.IV.r.2., Bd. 2, Bl. 192 (21 December 1912).

32. "Eingesandt," *Swakopmunder Zeitung* 1, no. 50 (18 May 1912). Underlined text spaced apart in newspaper report.

33. Charles van Onselen, "Witches of Suburbia: Domestic Service on the Witwatersrand, 1890–1914," in *New Ninevah*, vol. 2 of *Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886–1914* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982), 49–60; Elizabeth Schmidt, "Race, Sex, and Domestic Labor: The Question of African Female Servants in Southern Rhodesia, 1900–1939," in *African Encounters with Domesticity*, ed. Karen Tranberg Hansen, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press), 233–34.

34. Birgitta Schmidt-Lauder, *"Die verkehrte Hautfarbe": Ethnizität deutscher Namibier als Alltagspraxis* (Berlin and Hamburg: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1998), 392.

NOT SO PLAIN AS BLACK AND WHITE

**AFRO-GERMAN CULTURE AND HISTORY,
1890–2000**

*Edited by Patricia Mazón and Reinhild Steingröver
With a Foreword by Russell Berman*



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