

Urges in the colony. Men and women in colonial Windhoek, 1890 – 1905¹

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Abstract

This paper explores the sexual economy of the quasi-urban context of early colonial Windhoek – a settlement characterised by the dominating presence of the German colonial military – and elsewhere during the first two to three decades of colonial control in Hereroland. Colonising men's and colonised women's sexual interaction is explored in the different spatial and social settings of an incipient colonial settlement. This encounter was characterised by violence and consent, mainly transient, yet sometimes permanent and in manifold commercial and other arrangements, at times even offering an economic niche for enterprising women.

Introduction

Colonialism is often understood as a violent and rapacious penetration of territories and populations. In German South West Africa this sexual metaphor had a very real side to it, as colonial conquest and military conflict were indeed accompanied by highly predatory sexual behaviour of German troops. Local women were the mainstay of this particular sexual economy. Though largely undocumented, this predacious behaviour can be traced to having occurred nocturnally in the few colonial settlements' agglomerations of indigenes, living spaces usually referred to as *Werften* or locations, and around the clock in the encampments of prisoners of war and other labour compounds. Most of the evidence available on this aspect of the colony relates to Windhoek only. Evidence from outside Windhoek, from farms, police stations and military posts, will be woven into the narrative of this paper to the extent that material was traced.

Relatively ordered, even consensual sexual interaction between local women and colonial men happened mainly in two related, yet somehow indistinguishable arenas: prostitution and concubinage. Prostitution is mainly traceable in the evidence about bordellos. Concubinage is treated as a form of temporary monogamy, in a few cases even leading to full conjugal pairing, i.e. legally validated marriages between German men and indigenous women. Concubinage and marriage will be treated, accordingly, as conjugality in this paper. The third, violent option of procuring sexual relief, rape, can be mainly traced in the many prisoner-of-war camps and compounds of Windhoek, and, at

¹ This paper is based on a chapter of Wolfram Hartmann, *Intimate Matters. Men and Women in Hereroland, 1830s to 1905*, Essen, Otjivanda Presse, forthcoming.

times, of Swakopmund. Given the highly (and generally) violent nature of the colonial situation and the specific sociology of violence and sex in such situations, prostitutive, that is profit-oriented forms of libidinous / erotic interaction often cannot be clearly separated from coercive impositions of male sexual desire.

Camps and compounds

As a consequence of at least three military campaigns against Hendrik Witbooi before 1900, and later the large-scale German Colonial Wars of 1904 – 1907, Windhoek had substantial prisoner-of-war populations. Imprisoned men and women were confined under the control of the German colonial military and used as labourers as needed by both the civilian and the military sector.² While the loss of almost all documentary evidence for the military during the German period makes it extremely difficult to prove a systematic arrangement of the sexual economy, it seems clear that the women in the encampments of Windhoek were clear targets of male sexual ‘needs’³. After the wars of 1904 – 1907 had broken out, such arrangements are documented in missionary source materials. Scarce, yet quite illustrative evidence from the civilian sphere allows glimpses into aspects of sexual relations among Windhoek’s inhabitants for the 1890s, as will be demonstrated now.

Paul Pierstorf had come to the territory as a member of Curt von François’ first protection troops and had been decommissioned by 1893.⁴ As a so-called *Ansiedler*, a settler, he made his life in Windhoek. Three court cases throw some light on the sexual conduct of this individual and the possibilities of procuring sexual services in early colonial Windhoek; this material also demonstrates the way in which these issues were prosecuted and –quite high-handedly - judged.⁵ Elaboration upon these court cases is further warranted, as they illustrate the violence inherent in the everyday sexual / erotic interaction between men and women. At the same time they make evident the conditions under which such violence was possible and why such behaviour was, more often than not, swept under the carpet of male complicity.

The following occurred on 30 April 1893, as described by Paul Pierstorf himself when questioned by the judge on 9 May 1893 and as evidenced in the court record.⁶ While on his way home, around nine in the evening, he passed the hovel of the Nama woman, Elisabeth, presumably in the prisoner-of-war camp of the Witbooi. He struck up a conversation, but when she refused to continue the conversation, returning to her hovel

² This situation needs more research, as the evidence also suggests that among these groups larger sections existed, which had chosen to be in Windhoek to utilise the economic opportunities offered by the ever growing settlement.

³ The question remains, whether such evidence was actually – systematically or haphazardly – ever created.

⁴ NAN A 547 A. Henker.

⁵ NAN-GWI 3, 4/93 Pierstorf; NAN-GWI 3, 5/93 and NAN-GWI 7, B. 32/96-C.11/96.

⁶ NAN-GWI 3, 4/93 Pierstorf.

instead, he grabbed her, in jest as he said. Her frock tore. He agreed to reimburse her for the torn piece, but she went inside and when she returned she was carrying the frock, ripping it to pieces. Pierstorf told her that now he would not pay up, whereupon Elisabeth said that she would take the case to the *Hauptmann*, most probably von François himself. Pierstorf then slapped her a couple of times in her face. She tried to retaliate by picking up a stone to throw at him. He again slapped her and then wrestled her to the ground. Whether she got hurt he could not say. So far the evidence as collected from Pierstorf himself. A week later, in a proper hearing, he admitted that he had physically harmed the woman. The court agreed that this was consistent with the evidence collected from Elisabeth.⁷ Pierstorf was sentenced to a fine of 10 Reichsmark or two days imprisonment for bodily injury, plus the costs of the case. According to the preserved documents, he paid the fine on 3 June 1893.

One day later Paul Pierstorf had another brush with the authorities. About half an hour after midnight loud cries for help were heard from amidst the hovels of the Witbooi women. The military guard reported this for investigation. It transpired that the "settler Pierstorf had been the originator of these cries for help, as he was looking for wenches for sexual intercourse."⁸ Another case was brought against Pierstorf. When giving evidence before the court he was evasive, twisting the truth: he had merely been looking for a woman with the name Maria among the imprisoned Witbooi women. When he had found her, he reached out to her, taking her hand, whereupon she started to scream and all the other women with her. Curt von François himself suggested that the men who had recognised Pierstorf at the scene be interviewed. This happened, and on the strength of this evidence, Pierstorf was sentenced to 120 Reichsmark or 21 days imprisonment plus 30 Reichsmark for the court costs. His infraction was nocturnal breach of the peace, *nächtliche Ruhestörung* and the rather strict ruling suggests that the court wanted to set an example, demonstrating that such behaviour was not acceptable for a German man, much rather than restoring Maria's violated dignity.

As the second court case was more thoroughly conducted, it also provides some background to the first court case. Accordingly, Pierstorf had a history of repeatedly trying to obtain sexual services from Witbooi women by violent means. These were imprisoned Nama women, who had been deported to Windhoek as prisoners of war after the first military engagement between German colonial forces and Hendrik Witbooi's Nama in April 1893. The third court case in which Pierstorf was involved was heard in 1896. This time he was accused of sexually molesting a white woman. In this context he revealed that he had had to pay another fine because he had, yet again, "used" a

⁷ The minutes of the court hearing just say that her evidence was heard, though it was not written down.

⁸ NAN-GWI 3, 5/93 P. Pierstorf, as recorded in the German officialese of the time: "Es stellte sich heraus, daß der Ansiedler Pierstorf der Urheber jener Hilferufe war, indem er nach Frauenzimmern zum Beischlaf suchte."

Witbooi woman in 1894.⁹ Pierstorf's offence in both cases, attempted rape, was prosecuted as bodily injury and breach of the peace respectively.¹⁰

Consider the following. Victor Franke, the highest German official at Otjimbingue, allegedly violated a young female of the mission parish in the latter half of the 1890s, dishonouring her and leaving her with an illegitimate child.¹¹ The woman had been working as a launderer for the official and it was in this work environment that she was raped by her employer. He paid her ten Marks for this forced intercourse.

A Swiss national, who had taken on work as a labourer on the railway construction site in Swakopmund around 1901 was driven in the spirit of class solidarity to write a letter to the editor of the *Berner Tagwacht*, the Social Democratic newspaper of his home canton Berne, attesting to similar conditions elsewhere in the colony. In it he argued that, despite the propaganda of colonial circles in Germany, it was not advisable for members of the working class to emigrate to the German colonies, as, indeed, the conditions for them here were even worse than at home. To illustrate this, he described how an indigenous man, a fellow labourer, had been mistreated after he had objected to the gang rape of his wife by the supervisor of the Swakopmund labour encampment and his friends. The woman had been made pliant to the men's intentions with alcohol.¹²

⁹ NAN-GWI 7, B.32/96-C.11/96 Ansiedler Paul Pierstorf, 6, when asked about previous fines he said: "Im Jahre 1894 von Major von François mit einer Geldstrafe bestraft, weil ich eine Wittbooi-Frau gebraucht habe." The second court case in particular reveals the general culture of male complicity, allowing such behaviour to go legally unchallenged. The soldiers who had been summoned for eyewitness reports avoided giving clear answers and obviously tried not to incriminate Pierstorf; one soldier suddenly could not even remember Pierstorf's name. This indicates male conspiracy in defence of the *status quo* and borne out, i.a. by the following (coincidental) evidence. The court's scribe for instance, Hugo von Goldammer, had himself fathered an illegitimate child while still based as a colonial administrator in Otjimbingue in the late 1880s. Much to the consternation of the missionary, Karoline Gertze had borne a child in 1888; she admitted that it had been fathered by von Goldammer in 1888, cf. VEM-RMG 2, 613, Teil 3: 3. Protokoll Hererokonferenz 1888. Karoline Gertze was one of the daughters of the first Herero convert, Johann Urieta Gertze.

¹⁰ The German criminal code, the *Strafgesetzbuch für das Deutsche Reich* provided for the eventuality of rape and attempted rape in clauses 176 and 177, cf. Reichs-Gesetzblatt, 24/1871: 160f. How such transgression was prosecuted among military personnel has to remain unanswered until more evidence has been found; circumstantial evidence suggests that this material must have been generated.

¹¹ ELCIRN I 1. 21 letter Olpp to Viehe, dated 1.6.1898, Otjimbingue: "Endlich drittens hat Fr. eines meiner erstgetauften Christenmädchen gewaltsam verführt. Kein Mensch wußte es, aber als das Kind geboren war, hatten die Eingeborenen es gleich heraus, es ist Franckes Kind, es trägt ganz seine Züge. [...] Sie [die Vergewaltigte, W.H.] sei drüben bei den Soldaten u. beim Ltntant Wäscherin gewesen, sei aber in letzter Zeit nicht mehr ausbezahlt worden, weswegen sie den Dienst habe kündigen wollen. Bei einer derartigen Äußerung habe aber der Leutnant einmal gedroht, sie zu erstechen, wenn sie nicht wiederkomme. Als sie das letzte Mal dem Ltnt d. Wäsche in sein Zimmer gebracht habe, habe er die Thür verschlossen, die Sünde begangen und ihr 10 Mark dafür ausgezahlt. Seitdem habe sie weder den Ltnt noch er sie wiedergesehen." Victor Franke kept a diary, according to which missionary Olpp's depiction of Franke's comportment is corroborated. Cf. NAN A 560 Tagebuch Viktor Franke.

¹² *Berner Tagwacht*, *Organ der sozialdemokratischen Partei des Kantons Bern*, 18.9.1901, clipping of article found in NAN-ZBU 204, A IV w 2, Bd 1; it is unclear how this clipping found its way into the colonial archive. The man's depiction warrants lengthy citation as it is a prime example of how, despite the politically

The outbreak of the German - Herero War in January 1904 did not substantially change this quality of the sexual situation in the colony. Only in terms of quantity did things change drastically. And even though it is difficult to cull exact figures from official statistical material, one can safely estimate the figure of German troops skyrocketing to around 12 000 men in 1904.¹³ The total of German soldiers for the years of conflict following January 1904 is around 17 000. Evidence about the sexual interaction with, i.e. rape of, the enemy's women during military operations has not survived, in spite of recent assertions.¹⁴ However, if we do not have detailed information about the sexual side of the war itself, we have comparatively detailed knowledge about sexual life in the wake of the war in the military barracks and near the larger prisoner-of-war camps.

Both Windhoek and Swakopmund, among other settlements, saw the construction of large-scale prisoner-of-war camps after the fighting had been terminated. The missionaries Heinrich Vedder of Swakopmund and Carl Wandres of Windhoek reported repeatedly to the authorities on gross and rapacious behaviour – by German military men and civilians alike – against the women imprisoned in these camps.¹⁵ The total destruction brought down on first Ovaherero and then Nama, their subsequent imprisonment and the presence of a large number of military men, encouraged the development of a sexual situation in which a particularly hideous form of exploitative interaction developed.

In an apparent attempt to better control the situation after soldiers had started to coerce sexual services on a large scale from the women in the different locations, the military authorities in Windhoek established the so-called *Bordell-Kraal*, a bordello

progressive agenda of this man, the injustice committed against the woman is not really his concern. "Der Aufseher des Eingeborenenkraals, ein Deutscher, hatte sich mit noch zwei andern Kumpanen und dem Weibe eines Eingebornen, welches wahrscheinlich erst durch Schnaps ihren Zwecken gefügig gemacht worden war, in ihre Wohnung eingeschlossen. Der Mann, welcher aber davon Wind bekommen hatte, verlangte nun unter heftigem Klopfen, daß sie sein Weib herausgeben sollten. Darauf erschien einer dieser Helden, um den Schwarzen wegen seiner Frechheit durchzuprügeln, was hier, trotzdem es verboten, so ziemlich Mode ist. Der Schwarze widersetzte sich aber, und nachdem er dem Weißen auch einen Schlag versetzt, floh in seine Hütte. Von dort aber bald unter Wutgeschrei herausgerissen und mißhandelt, wurde er nachher noch auf die Polizei geschleppt, wo er noch 50 Schambockkiebe erhielt, weil er sich an einem Weißen vergriffen hatte!"

¹³ Kurd Schwabe, *Der Krieg in Deutsch-Südwestafrika*, Berlin, Mittler, 1907: Anlage 2 has a table listing all military transports during 1904. Accordingly 1904 saw the arrival of 11 552 troops including officers and other persons of leadership rank in GSWA.

¹⁴ Cf. Wolfgang U. Eckart, "Medizin und kolonialer Krieg: Die Niederschlagung der Herero-Nama-Erhebung im Schutzgebiet Deutsch-Südwestafrika, 1904-1907", in: Peter Heine/Ulrich van der Heyden, *Studien zur Geschichte des deutschen Kolonialismus in Afrika. Festschrift zum 60. Geburtstag von Peter Sebald*, Pfaffenweiler, Centaurus, 1996: 227, alleges this, but an investigation of his sources does not allow his conclusions; cf. Heinz von Ortenberg, *Aus dem Tagebuch eines Arztes. Feldzugsskizzen aus Südwest-Afrika*, Berlin, Schwetschke, 1907: 113.

¹⁵ Cf. e.g. files VEM-RMG 2.657 - Deutsche Kolonialbehörden in Südwestafrika 1895-1914 and VEM-RMG 2.659 - Deutsche Kolonialbehörden in Südwestafrika 1893-1906.

enclosure¹⁶. A section along-side the Windhoek prisoner-of-war camp was reserved for the provision of sexual services to soldiers by Ovaherero women from the camp. There was no conclusive evidence available in the existing record as to the definite reasons for this development. It seems safe to assume, however, that it represented an attempt by the authorities to regulate a situation that was prone to create conflict among the German soldiery of Windhoek as clearly there were never enough women available for sexual services in the barracks. Particularly with regard to sanitary and health concerns this would have made sense, as venereal disease was rampant. The bordello in question existed only for a short while though.

A conflict over the sexual exploits of the camp supervisor fuelled an acrimonious dispute between the two Windhoek missionaries, Carl Wandres and Freerk Meier, and the colonial government for the better part of 1905 and into 1906.¹⁷ The visit of the head of the Rhenish Mission Society, Johannes Spiecker, in 1906 was in part taken up by attempts to heal this breach of confidence between the missionaries and the colonial government, as the success of the mission work was seen to be resting on this confidence. This issue at the same time throws into sharp relief the centrality of sexual behaviour to the mission society's work in the colony. The conflict's context was an ongoing argument between the missionaries and the authorities over VD inspections and whether the Christianised female African population of Windhoek should also be subjected to this degrading treatment. More about this elsewhere.¹⁸

The situation in Swakopmund was no better. Here, as in Windhoek, the camp's women were procured as insidiously, yet seemingly far less systematically, for sexual gratification of the military and the civilian male population. The character of Swakopmund as the colonies' main entrepôt, with its military hospital and recuperative

¹⁶ Cf. VEM-RMG 1.623d: 006 Wandres to RMS management September 1908: "...hatte die Militärbehörde hinter der Feste einen Bordell-Kraal machen lassen, in dem eine Anzahl Hütten standen. Von den freien Eingeborenen ging kein Mädchen dort hin, man griff deshalb auf kriegsgefangene Herero-Mädchen zurück, die sich freiwillig dem schmutzigen Geschäft opferten. Ich persönlich bezweifle diese Freiwilligkeit. Lange bestand diese Einrichtung jedoch nicht." For images of the main prisoner-of-war camp in Windhoek see Wolfram Hartmann, (ed.), *Hues between black and white. Historical photography from colonial Namibia, 1860s to 1915*, Windhoek, Out of Africa, 2004: 34f.

¹⁷ In one instance the commander in charge of the camp even tried to solicit the assistance of the missionary to procure women for the bordello from outside, since too few women prisoners made themselves available. Cf. VEM-RMG 1.623d: 006 Wandres to RMS management September 1908: "Kürzlich sagte mir Herr Reg. Rat Bezirksamtman Narcib, daß die Militärbehörde wieder etwas ähnliches plant und frug mich, ob eine Umfrage bei den Eingeborenen, zwecks Erlangung von Dirnen, angebracht sei. Ich sagte ihm klipp und klar, daß wir uns [...] dadurch bei den Eingeborenen blamieren würden und freiwillig wohl keines der liederlichen Frauenzimmer in eine solche Einrichtung eintreten würde. Das Militär solle schärfere Kontrolle in den Kasernements ausüben und die Polizei jedes zur Unzeit herumstreifende Frauenzimmer aufgreifen. Herr Narcib scheint sich dieses ad notam genommen zu haben, denn er sagte mir kürzlich, daß er die Concession zu einem Bordelle mit weißen Dirnen gegeben habe." This rancor and its documentation in fact only created the evidence. Cf. -RMG 1.623d: 006 Wandres to RMS management September 1908.

¹⁸ Cf. -RMG 1.623d; also Hartmann, *Matters*, forthcoming.

barracks, lent a distinctness to prostitution there. It was here that the call for the establishment of professionally run whorehouses first arose.

More disturbing is information about African women who supposedly offered themselves up for paid sexual services on a large scale and seemingly of their own accord, as missionary Heinrich Vedder and the visiting mission director, Johannes Spiecker from Germany in 1906 reported.¹⁹ Moral outrage and disgust, not at the behaviour of German males, but at the women's conduct dictated the reporting of the missionaries, reflecting their own specific moral-religious outlook, and maybe even sexual inexperience. Heinrich Vedder in particular was disgusted by the explicitness of what he saw; his words, however, are also testament to the fact that it was most often impossible to draw the line between rape and prostitution in this situation.

Missionary Johann Irle, in summing up the situation on the eve of the German-Herero War, complained that the arrival of German men, both soldiers and civilians, since 1885 had resulted in the demise of what little moral code among Herero had existed.²⁰ Rape, he asserts had been the order of the day. As marriages between white men and Herero women - though legally possible, yet socially heavily sanctioned – were not an option, *Hurerei*, whoredom had prevailed. This German term carries notions of both immoral sexual behaviour outside wedlock and prostitution. For the argument here it is important to see that with this terminology he also described a situation that could not have been completely violent and coercive on the side of German men, but that may have included elements of 'traditional' *oupanga* – an Otjiherero term that describes, among others, reciprocity and hospitality, including the sharing of women for sexual comfort in the context of age-group male friendship – and women's willingness to voluntarily engage in such behaviour.²¹ Finally he informed his readers that German misdeeds had brought shame on some Ovaherero families, forcing them to move away from German settlements in order to shield their daughters from German men's sexual demands.

The following vignette was written by missionary Carl Wandres, one of the Rhenish Mission Society's longest serving and most experienced men in the field, from Windhoek to the mission's management committee back home in Barmen in 1902. It continues missionary Johann Irle's comment on the situation.

¹⁹ VEM-RMG 2.528a, letter Vedder to Inspector 23.2.1905; VEM-RMG 1.660a, Bl 15ff, Vedder to Inspector, 9.8.1904; VEM-RMG 2.697e 1906, Report of mission director Spiecker's visit to the Swakopmund mission parish.

²⁰ Johann J. Irle, *Die Herero. Ein Beitrag zur Landes-, Volks- und Missionskunde*, Gütersloh, Bertelsmann, 1906: 142: "Die alten Herero kannten trotz ihres zerrütteten Ehelebens doch noch Schranken der Sitte und der Ehre. Leider sanken diese seit 1885 mit dem Hereinkommen der Deutschen fast ganz dahin. Vergewaltigungen aller Art kamen seitens mancher Soldaten und Weißen vor. Ehen mit Hereromädchen durften jene nicht eingehen, dafür ging die Hurerei im Schwange, ohne irgendwelche Bestrafung zu erfahren. [...] Die Männer aus der Missionsgemeinde zogen mit ihren Frauen und Töchtern ins Feld, um diese, wie sie sagten, gegen solche Verbrechen zu schützen."

²¹ Cf. chapter 6 in Hartmann, *Matters*, forthcoming.

War – pebbles were hurled at my windows and all kinds of lewd songs were bawled out in front of the house – of course Whites did this, as the Coloureds [Africans, WH] are not yet that civilised – the motive for such behaviour was contained in the accusation: "This missionary says the kaffir maids should not deal with us". The lecherous of course cannot get what they want as easily as they used to, because the Word of God has started to act as a warning against such behaviour. Alas, this hostility...²²

Military men, young, ribald and obviously drunk, had expressed their libidinal, nocturnal, probably alcohol-induced frustration in front of the missionary's house by throwing pebbles and being obnoxious. Obviously it had become more difficult to obtain sexual services and thus relief from libidinous tension from the women living in the native quarters of Windhoek, because the missionary had been able to instil – quite effectively – the values of sexual restraint and Christian respectability. Black women were no longer readily available to be fucked by white men.

The complaint is a nutshell description of, by and large, the sexual environment as it had developed in Windhoek in particular, but also the colony at large, since the inception of German colonial intervention and until 1902. Prostitution in the colony, formal and informal, was by that time, an important feature of its social geography and everyday life. Wandres' words contain, directly and implicitly, all the ingredients that made for the particularities of the sexual situation in the protectorate. The missionary, writing as if besieged, conveys the importance of sexual intercourse for the German male inhabitants of single-sex, white, colonial Windhoek. He was concerned with white colonising men's sexual urges and black colonised women's sexual services; further maintaining his successes amongst the latter in curbing this immorality; and the women's availability to German men, which mirrors both his accomplishment in instilling Christian morals among his parishioners and the missionaries' unabated preoccupation with the sexuality of their converts. Finally, there are faint echoes in his words of the undesirability of sexual interaction between racially different groups, but that is difficult to describe since these echoes may also be the expression of disgust at his compatriots' un-Christian behaviour. The journalist Franz Seiner commented, in 1903, that if Windhoek continued growing as it had until then, it would soon be "half a town of villas and half a native village".²³ His choice of words obviously mirror discussions he had had with some of the German inhabitants of the settlement and reflect some anxiety about the close proximity of the two groups, ruling Europeans and ruled Africans, and possible mixing, contamination and subsequently racial pollution attendant in the close proximity of European houses

²² "Krieg – denn man hat mir Steine gegen die Fenster geworfen allerhand schmutzige Lieder vor meinem Hause gesungen – natürlich ist dies von Weißen geschehen, denn die Farbigen sind noch nicht so weit in der Cultur – den Antrieb zu solchem Thun aber hat man selbst verraten durch das Geschimpfe: "Dieser Missionar sagt die Kaffernweiber sollen nichts mit uns zu thun haben." Die Lüstlinge erreichen aber jetzt nicht mehr so leicht ihr Ziel wie früher da Gottes Wort nicht warnend dazwischen trat. Diese Feindschaft..." Cf. VEM/RMG 2.533 Bd 1/Bd 2 Windhoek: 287.

²³ Franz Seiner, *Bergtouren und Steppenfahrten im Hererolande*, Berlin, Süsserorth, 1904: 25: "...halb Villenstadt und halb Kafferndorf..."

and African hovels. As a result of the German Colonial Wars the population of Windhoek rose exponentially, and with it the number of informally settled *Werften*, urban agglomerations of newly arrived Africans²⁴. The different military contingents had their servants' settlements immediately adjacent to their quarters, and there was an *Eisenbahnwerft* and a *Polizeiwerft*, unplanned accumulations of hovels no more, for the indigenous employees of the railways and the police respectively²⁵. These offered, aside from being the accommodation for the labourers of the different employers, more and more chances for nocturnal, sexual interaction. A *Polizeiverordnung*, or police decree, was issued as early as 25 March 1905 to restrict the white population from entering the native locations between 18h00 and 06h00.²⁶ This order was clearly directed against men in search of women for sexual intercourse, an anti-vice measure that was extended to other settlements as well. It was also a measure that must have been borne out by the presence of Windhoek's prisoner-of-war camps. As this situation developed over the years, it provided more and more niches for commercial prostitution. Yet, one has to point out here that the boundary between forms of rapacious modes of sex procurement and prostittutive sex, with its clear commercial *modus operandi*, is rather fluid.

Bordellos

Bordellos as institutions where sex was offered in its commoditised form, were operated informally and formally. Women could be visited – informally – in their places of abode, the so-called *Werften*. Every settlement in the beginning of colonial urbanisation had several of these. As explained above, these usually took the form of a grouping of shacks and hovels around the larger employers such as government, police, military, breweries and hotels – the latter almost automatically creating the clientele for this sort of enterprise. Accordingly, the *Werften* were considered one huge whorehouse, ransacked nocturnally by drunken men, soldiers and settlers alike, in pursuit of sexual relief, ever growing over the years as German colonial soldiers and settlers increased in

²⁴ For images of these *Werften*, cf. Hartmann, (ed.) *Hues*, in the chapter on Windhoek, p 27f., *passim*.

²⁵ VEM-RMG 1.623 has a list *Zählung der Eingeborenen Windhoeks, März 1903*, which backs this evaluation; it lists five different *Werften*. When the director of the RMS travelled and visited the mission field in GSWA in 1906 he inspected the Windhoek missionary parish, the parishioners of which were living in these locations: the *Bastardwerft Lehmkuhle* with c. 150 Bastards and 100-200 Bergdamaras and Hereros; the *Werft der Franzfonteiner Zwartboois*, settled here since the war of 1898 with a few hundred inhabitants; the *Werft der !Khaus Hottentotten*, large enough to provide work for an own missionary; John Ludwig of Klein Windhuk had a location with c. 150 Damara labourers, incl. their dependents; the *Bergdamarawerft*, with about 2000 souls; a smaller location of Bastards and Hereros under a white man, and on a government labour site; he mentions expressly that such smaller locations are numerous in Windhoek; further he mentions prisoner camps: the *Hottentottenkra* with imprisoned Witboois and Namas of other groups, around 1200 in number living in larger huts; the *Hererogefangenenkral*. Cf. VEM-RMG, 2.533a, Bl. 223f, Visitationsbericht Spiecker's über die Station Windhuk, 1906.

²⁶ NAN-ZBU 846 H II h 1: 53 *Polizeiverordnung*. NAN-BWI 36, E I f 133ff provides a glimpse here by evidencing how one soldier, a certain Reiter Popp was found drunken around 9 one September evening of 1907 in the *Polizeiwerft*. He was punished with 5 days of close arrest (*strenger Arrest*).

numbers.²⁷ Official manifestation of such prostitution as an everyday phenomenon is contained in the first medical report to be put together for Windhoek as early as 1893. In it the regular sanitary examination of such women as were working as prostitutes was said to have resulted in a substantial decline of venereal disease in Windhoek.²⁸

This informal, to a large extent situational prostitution was facilitated and stimulated by employment structures and the working everyday. African women, who during the day worked as domestics, bar maids, washer women and in other occupations, were often visited at night or asked to stay over, by white men, often their employers, as can be glimpsed from some court records. These visits were often the result of some day-time, innuenduous interaction. One illustrative depiction of the social locus of such sexual interaction was found in the published diary of Herrmann Alverdes, a former soldier of the Imperial Protection Troop (*Schutztruppe*). In some of the stores of Windhoek, he writes, there was still frolicking and jolliness long after closing hours; soldiers, who had not had a chance to spend some money while on duty on the battle field, were using their leisure time in Windhoek to treat themselves, after months full of deprivation and sexual abstention.²⁹

Individually organised bordello-type establishments in the *Werften* can be glimpsed in the record as well. Missionary Wandres reported, in passing, on a specific settlement of African women in the local location, where “women of ill repute” lived.³⁰ Such sexual traffic was also going on in the other settlements of the colony. At Okahandja for example there was something called the *Eingeborenen Bordell*, the native bordello, which was certainly visited by white men.³¹ Interestingly, missionary Wandres also reported in 1908 that it was on account of this sexual traffic between the white and black living quarters that the latter were finally consolidated and moved away from the

²⁷ VEM-RMG, 2.533a, Bl. 246, Wandres an Heimatleitung, 13.4.1905: “Zu den Schattenseiten [der hiesigen Arbeit] gehört der Krieg. [...] das viele, hier durchziehende Militär hat uns des öfteren Ursache zu Klagen gegeben. Trotz Zapfenstreich trieben sich die Soldaten nächtlicher Weile auf den Eingeborenenwerften herum. Durch Polizeiposten und Patrouillen ist dem Unwesen etwas Einhalt geboten.” VEM-RMG, 2.533a, Bl. 223f, Visitationsbericht Spieckers über die Station Windhuk, 1906: “In der letzten Nacht hatte er [Missionar Wandres, W.H.] wieder wie schon öfter einen Soldaten aus der Werft ausweisen müssen, der mit unsittlichen Absichten in einen Pontock eingebrochen war. Derartige Erfahrungen, die leider oft vorkommen, schädigen das Ansehen des deutschen Mannes und geben den Eingeborenen viel Ärgernis.”

²⁸ NAN-ZBU 145 A IV a 3 Bd. 1 *Jahresberichte 1891/95*: 34.

²⁹ Herrmann Alverdes, *Mein Tagebuch aus Südwest. Erinnerungen aus dem Feldzuge gegen die Hottentotten*, Oldenburg, Stalling, 1908: 56: “Beim Heimwege schallt aus den noch grösstenteils erleuchteten Stores lebhaftes Treiben. Unsere aus dem Felde gekommenen Reiter, die monatelang keine Gelegenheit zum Ankauf irgendwelcher Bedürfnisse gehabt haben, benutzen die Ruhepause beim Durchmarsch durch Windhuk, um sich einmal etwas zugute zu tun. Der Kostenpunkt spielt keine Rolle. Es ist den braven Leuten, die schwere, entbehrungsvolle Tage hinter sich haben, nicht zu verdenken, wenn sie einmal ausgelassen fröhlich werden. Das “Heute rot, morgen tot”, gilt jeden Tag im Felde.”

³⁰ VEM-RMG 1.623d, letter Wandres to Spiecker, 9.2.1906: 003 “...die schlechten Frauenzimmer.” In the same letter he mentioned in passing the existence of 15 houses, situated separately, where these women lived, attesting to some spatial arrangement of this sector of the colonial sexual economy.

³¹ NAN-GWI 587- D 10/06: *passim*.

European settlement; this is the earliest traceable example of German colonial town planning influenced by sexual anxiety.³²

Regarding the more formally operated and organised prostitution in bordello-like establishments in the early urban centres – most prominently Windhoek and Swakopmund – the sources create the impression of a certain *laissez-faire* approach – in the beginning at least; these were, if not officially, sanctioned along the lines of a German colonial male sexual mentality.³³

The above-mentioned Franz Seiner, an Austrian publicist and journalist, travelled in Hereroland in 1903. He subsequently wrote up this trip as *Bergtouren und Steppenfahrten im Hererolande*. It is a travelogue that combined close social observation, minute details of everyday travel and political analysis of Windhoek and the countryside in the year immediately preceding the German-Herero War.³⁴ When Seiner arrived in Windhoek on the second last day of December 1902, his first night in his lodgings turned out to be less than pleasurable and restful. He could not sleep because, as it turned out, his hotel was also a bordello, obviously very busy during the last nights of the year. Sadly he did not record which hotel he had chosen, nor who the prostitutes of the establishment were.³⁵ It is reasonable to assume that the prostitutes employed in this establishment were indigenous women, as the employment of European women would undoubtedly have scandalised Seiner; it also would have left traces in the archival record in the form of regular medical control etc, evidence that could not be traced for the time before the German Colonial Wars. The authorities tried only as from around 1906 to establish and regulate prostitution with European women, a phenomenon attributable to the deluge-like arrival of thousands of German soldiers in the Protectorate after the outbreak of the war in 1904.

As pointed out earlier, some 17 000 German military personnel, unmarried and in the prime of their lives, arrived in the territory in successive waves as a result of the German Colonial Wars of 1904-1907. The presence of such large numbers of sexually active men called for a more structured approach, not only to control the urges of such large numbers of sexually quite hungry men, but obviously also because the situation as it arose was taken advantage of; this is evidenced in the words of one Otto Reiner, who reminisced about his first year in the colony, where he had started eking out an

³² VEM-RMG 1.623d, letter Wandres to Spiecker, 9.2.1906: 003.

³³ I have written extensively on this mentality in Hartmann, *Matters*, forthcoming: chapter 7 and *passim*.

³⁴ Seiner, *Bergtouren*, see his foreword dated March 1904. Seiner had left the colony by the time that the German-Herero War broke out, but from its publication date and the foreword it can be gathered that the book was published hastily to meet heightened interest in the wake of that war.

³⁵ Seiner, *Bergtouren* : 23: "In dem geräumigen und nett eingerichteten Gasthause mietete ich mir für täglich 10 Mark ein Zimmer mit Verpflegung und hoffte, von den Strapazen der Reise mich erholen zu können. Allein ich konnte den größten Teil der Nacht kein Auge schließen, denn ich hatte die Rechnung ohne den Wirt gemacht, der hier, wie ich erst am nächsten Morgen erfuhr, eine – Dirnenwirtschaft hielt." Interestingly he explains this hotelier's resort to prostitution as an attempt to make ends meet in an economically very tight situation, one that was successful in the end.

existence in Swakopmund. He observed that French madams had come to Swakopmund to establish their brothels in corrugated iron shacks.³⁶

Organised, licensed prostitution offered policeable control, primarily through the medium of forced medical examination and intervention. Although haphazardly documented, there is enough evidence to prove that in the context of the sudden and colossal upsurge in numbers of men in Windhoek, municipal provisions were devised for professionally run bordellos, supervised and controlled by the district physician (*Amtsarzt*). The war therefore occasioned the, albeit hesitant, introduction of European-type brothels with the express aim of satisfying soldiers' sexual appetites. Swakopmund and Windhoek, as the two largest urban concentrations by late 1904, had professionally run bordellos. Again Wandres sarcastically described the situation like this:

Windhoek turns more and more into a big city and starts to show a grave shady side. For some time there has existed in the northern part of town a real 'bordello' with white pleasure girls, which have come here for business. We have come so far already. Not even murder and homicide are lacking. And that's called culture!³⁷

From about the second half of 1904 professionally run brothels existed in the northern part of colonial Windhoek.³⁸ It is impossible to reconstruct this development chronologically, but it is safe to argue that at least two brothels were run by and with white women, who, remarkably, were predominantly non-German. Most of these women were of eastern European Jewish origin and had come to Windhoek from places as far away as Lodz and St. Petersburg via Cape Town, New York and London. There is no direct evidence of male pimps in the documents, but circumstantial evidence suggests that some of the women may have belonged to the world of Johannesburg's and Cape Town's criminal and prostitution scene.³⁹ Who exactly established these bordellos is not

³⁶ Otto Reiner, *Achtzehn Jahre Farmer in Afrika*, Leipzig, List, n.d., c. 1922: 41: "In dieser Zeit [nach 1904, WH] strömte in Swakopmund eine Menge internationales Gaunervolk zusammen, wie es in Hafenplätzen in Kriegszeiten immer ist. Die Welt war ausnahmsweise ruhig und die Weltenbummler, die gern im trüben fischen, suchten nach Gelegenheiten. Einbruchdiebstähle und Ermordungen kamen beinahe täglich vor; Spielhöhlen wuchsen wie Pilze aus der Erde, totsichtige Französinen kamen, um sich unter einem Wellblechdach ihre Salons einzurichten und den biedereren Germanen, die aus dem Felde kamen, ihre Spargroschen abzunehmen, was ihnen leider nur allzuoft gelang."

³⁷ VEM-RMG, 2.533a, p 238, Wandres to RMS management, 4.7.1905: "Windhuk wird immer mehr zur Grossstadt und zeigt schon sehr bedenkliche Schattenseiten. Seit einiger Zeit besteht im nördlichen Teil der Stadt ein richtiges 'Bordell' mit weißen Freudenmädchen, die geschäftshalber hierhergekommen sind. Also so weit wären wir schon. Auch an Mord und Totschlag fehlt es nicht. Das ist Cultur!" Cf. also Wandres'evidence cited in footnote 16.

³⁸ NAN-BWI 207 O 1 d 1, Ordnungs- und Sittenpolizei. Maßregeln gegen geschlechtliche Ausschweifungen. generalia; BWI 207/8 O 1 d 2 Bd 1-2, Ordnungs- und Sittenpolizei. Maßregeln gegen geschlechtliche Ausschweifungen. Specialia. These files contain a wide variety of very disparate documents: letters, affidavits, medical certifications of prostitutes' health, memoranda etc from which I have computed the information for this section.

³⁹ Charles van Onselen, "Jewish Marginality in the Atlantic world: Organised Crime in the Era of the Great Migrations, 1880-1914", unpubl. paper.

clearly traceable, but the sources suggest that the war situation was cleverly exploited. Local residents of Windhoek rented out the space to at least two madams, women who seem to have decided to work in war-time German South West Africa for a few years, to earn money in a favourable market and then to return to wherever they came from to set themselves up in more respectable circumstances, marry, establish families etc.⁴⁰

Complaints by neighbours of the brothels who feared for their own businesses' reputation and who were disturbed by the nocturnal goings-on at the houses were told by the officials in charge that closing them would drive the prostitutes' clients into the native quarters, where riots (*größere Ausschreitungen*) by white men against the local populace were feared. This formulation is euphemistic officialese for the expected rape of black women on a large scale. Also, they went on, this would certainly result in the harassment of white women.⁴¹

The military authorities of Windhoek engaged in these deliberations, as they were concerned about the problem of soldier's sexual desires and were actively involved in regulating the sexual pressure among the soldiers. A military patrol of five soldiers was dispatched to maintain law and order in the street and in front of the establishments. When military action had subsided in 1907 and most of the soldiers had been sent back to Germany, it became clear, however, that it was impossible to close down the brothels, as they were still heavily frequented by clients. The latter may well have been the same men that hitherto had exploited black women's sexual services, but now preferred the services of white prostitutes because they were much more regularly checked for venereal disease. In the light of the rising clamour about the dangers of racial miscegenation and the ban on racially mixed marriages, an argument became more and more common – that it was better to have white prostitutes since that would keep white men from cohabiting with black women.⁴² Despite rumours, I could not locate in any record the establishment of any type of war bordello (*Kriegsbordell*). Such institutions, characteristic of European wars and present as literary *topoi* (e.g. Bertolt Brecht's

⁴⁰ For the first years of the century there is evidence of *Boer* women engaged in this economic sector in the colony. This I gather from a number of Cape Dutch names of prostitutes found in randomly collected court evidence. The pejorative term *Burenhure* was obviously coined in this context. It seems plausible to argue that these women were displaced by the reverberations, political and economic, of the South African War of 1899-1902. *Burenhure* is best translated as boer whore, cf. court case NAN-GWI 3F42/13 where the piece of a whip has remained as evidence for a fight between a German man and a woman who felt offended, when this term was applied to her.

⁴¹ NAN-BWI 207 O I d 2, Bd 1: 46: "Das Weiterbestehen des Bordells ist diesseits im Interesse der Soldaten erwünscht, da sonst größere Ausschreitungen in den Eingeborenen Werften stattfinden könnten." Here also the information about the involvement of the military authority.

⁴² NAN-BWI 207 O I d 1 letter of 12. 4. 1907: "Nachdem sich die weitere Duldung des Dirnenwesens trotz der eingetretenen Truppenverminderung nicht wohl wird umgehen lassen, da hierdurch allein die vielen im Schutzgebiet wohnenden jungen Leute bis zu einem gewissen Grad von dem geschlechtlichen Umgang mit eingeborenen Weibern abgehalten werden können, empfehle ich von jeder Dirne als Krankengeld wöchentlich 10M zu erheben und eine eigene Kasse zu führen." Cf. also chapter 9 of Hartmann, *Matters*, forthcoming.

Mutter Courage und ihre Kinder) would only be institutionalised as part of the war effort in the Great War.

Away from Windhoek

Outside the contexts of colonial Windhoek, Swakopmund and other incipient colonial settlements, the situation with regard to sexual interaction between German men and indigenous women was much less determined by the existing class, urban and military power differentials. An increasing number of predominantly German men had been setting themselves up as farmers and traders since the 1880s. This, together with soldiers posted to a growing number of police stations, had a sexual impact locally. There is no information about clear-cut pre-colonial forms of prostitution among the people living in southwestern Africa. It can, however, be assumed that the sexual and erotic interaction between European traders, hunters and adventurers and local women, as described elsewhere, may have been the precedent for prostitutive sex between the newly arrived German men and indigenous women.⁴³ Likewise, when and where the first instances of prostitutive sex after 1884 happened is impossible to locate precisely, but it would surely have happened at outposts, mission stations, trading posts, garrisons and police stations. For instance in 1893/4, Rehoboth and Otjimbingue each had garrisons manned with troops of 21 and 23 unmarried German soldiers respectively.⁴⁴ Such single-male presence constituted obviously a higher than usual general sex drive potential. Ways and means had to be sought and found for the release of these 'free floating' sexual urges. A few qualified observations and descriptions of this specific situation are possible.

Hugo von François, the brother of the erstwhile *Landeshauptmann* Curt von François, observed in the early 1890s that Ovaherero women were offered to European men for sexual congress in a context of exchange and reciprocity. It is clear from his words that the afore-mentioned *oupanga* arrangements formed at least a behavioural background, their reciprocity and friendship elements structuring these encounters.⁴⁵ This seems to be evident in the case of the von François brothers themselves as the Windhoek Rhenish

⁴³ Cf. relevant chapter in Hartmann, *Matters*, forthcoming. To what degree *oupanga* arrangements between Ovaherero and traders played a role in the formation and negotiation of sexual relations is open to conjecture.

⁴⁴ *Beilage zum Deutschen Kolonialblatt*, 1894: 110.

⁴⁵ Hugo von François, *Nama und Damara. Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika*, Magdeburg, Baensch, 1895: 178: "...um ein Stück Tabak oder sonst ein kleines Geschenk stellt jeder Vater die Tochter, der Mann die Frau zur Verfügung;..."; *ibid.*: 199 "Diesem [dem Weißen] werden Frauen und Töchter zum intimen Verkehr stets angeboten, fast aufgedrängt, ja eine Zurückweisung wird übelgenommen, vielleicht auch nur um des fortfallenden Gegengeschenkes willen."

mission parish baptismal register recorded a child fathered by the *Hauptmann*, Curt von François in the early 1890s.⁴⁶

The afore-mentioned Seiner travelled less than ten years after Hugo von François. He related similar instances of sexual behaviour and some of his observations suggest that an initial element in these transactions, namely the offering of women to men (to prevent sexual violence), was part of the proceedings. However, he also suggests that Ovaherero had started to conduct such sexual encounters along business lines of profit and loss, exploiting a market niche created by the sexual desire of larger numbers of predominantly traders, settlers and soldiers. German men's sexual lusts had created a new 'market', one that was quickly taken advantage of. Seiner formulated his observations in the context of a situation of sexual accosting by Ovaherero.

From what I had read in travelogues and been told by traders and farmers I knew [...] that travellers were offered women against payment. Now I myself was introduced to some Herero morals. [] As soon as it had turned dark, one old and four young Herero offered us an 'omakeintu' (woman, girl). Price 5 marks. Soon thereafter a young Herero appeared with his sister, a 17 year old buxom girl, offering her to us and asked for that service half a plug of tobacco. We told him off and he left. The girl, however remained behind and would not leave, despite our reprimands in no uncertain terms. First she offered herself for 5 marks, lowering the amount to 4 marks. Because she thought that we thought the price too high, she fetched Jakob [a servant in the travelling party] from the fire to have him translate to us that she could not lower her price even more, because of the danger of being discovered by the mission teacher and the subsequent exclusion from Divine Service and Sacrament, which should mean disgrace for her. [...] It is thus not true what S c h i n z maintains in his travelogue: that Herero and Ovambo chiefs offer women to travellers to guard their own women against white's improper advances. Offering women, instead is purely business among the natives.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ A child of Major Curt von Francois was baptised sometime in the 1890s by Pastor Siebe. Missionary Wandres, who recorded all baptisms for Windhoek retroactively after he had taken up his position in Windhoek in 1900 reports this baptism for 1898 but adds that the child, Emma Josefina, was now at Okombahe. Both dates suggest that Amalia /Gereses had von François' lovechild in the early 1890s.

⁴⁷ Seiner, *Bergtouren*: 165f: "Nach Reiseberichten und Erzählungen der Händler und Farmer war mir bekannt, [. . .], daß dem Reisenden gegen Entgelt Frauen zugeführt werden. Nun sollte ich selbst ein Stückchen Hereromoral kennen lernen. [] Sobald es dunkel geworden war, kamen ein alter und vier junge Herero und offerierten uns eine Omakeintu (Frau, Mädchen). Preis 5 Mark. Bald darauf erschien ein junger Herero mit seiner Schwester, einem 17 jährigen üppig entwickelten Mädchen, bot sie uns an und verlangte für die Vermittlung eine halbe Platte Tabak. Wir schnauzten ihn an und er entfernte sich. Das Mädchen aber blieb beim Wagen und ließ sich trotz schroffer Zurückweisung nicht abschütteln. Zuerst bot sie sich für 5 Mark an, ging dann auf 4 Mark herab und holte in der Meinung, daß uns nur der Preis zu hoch sei, Jakob vom Lagerfeuer herbei und ließ uns durch ihn sagen, sie könne den Preis nicht mehr ermäßigen, da sie der Gefahr einer Entdeckung durch den schwarzen Missionslehrer und der dann folgenden Ausschließung von Gottesdienst und Abendmahl ausgesetzt sei, was für sie eine Schande bedeute. [...] Es ist also nicht richtig, was S c h i n z in seinem Reisewerke erzählt, daß die Herero- und Ovambokapitäne dem Reisenden Weiber anbieten, um ihre Frauen und Mädchen vor Zudringlichkeiten des Weißen zu schützen, sondern das Frauenanbieten ist bei den Eingeborenen reine Geschäftssache."

Interestingly, after 50 to 60 years of missionary ideological influence in southwestern Africa, Christian sexual ethics as represented and exemplified by the missionaries, played an important role in the negotiation of sexual services. It seems that the danger of being found out by the missionary formed a part of the economics of this sex business. Particularly striking is Seiner's description of female economic agency and self-assertion.

The women prefer that their men and relatives do not know about this supplemental income, so that they need not share the profits. Earlier, the Herero offered their women and daughters to whites in the bright light of day and publicly; however, the mission's influence has made this happen less publicly and during the night; despite this the kaffirs have not been morally uplifted through Christianity.⁴⁸

A very frank autobiographical adventure book by the son of Governor Leutwein gives us a rare and striking glimpse of everyday erotic situations as experienced by Leutwein jnr. Certainly these situations would also have played out in other situations of encounter between rank-and-file soldiers and settlers outside the urban setting.⁴⁹ In rhymed verses and jokingly, Leutwein jnr. related experiences of an erotic nature with local women, playfully observing that "even a black lass is desirable if one is far away from any culture".⁵⁰ Despite its rather frivolous character and specifically male perspective, Leutwein's writing contains substantial information. Thus, the erotic situation certainly existed, even without coercion on the part of German men; women as well as men acted on their erotic impulses; German men were tempted and eroticised in the encounter with black women; women were sometimes offered by their village elders for sexual pleasure to travellers. Leutwein may, of course have been treated with particular reverence as the son of the governor; maybe we have here an example of how *oupanga* arrangements were applied to a situation where the son of the highest German authority was treated as a man of high social standing among Ovaherero of elevated rank.⁵¹ Leutwein's

⁴⁸ Seiner, *Bergtouren*. 165f: "Am liebsten haben es die Weiber, wenn ihre Männer und Verwandten von dem Nebenerwerb nichts wissen, damit sie nicht den Gewinn zu teilen brauchen. Früher boten die Herero ihre Frauen, Töchter und Schwestern den Weißen am hellen Tage und vor allen Leuten an, der Einfluß der Mission hat es jetzt bewirkt, das dies minder öffentlich und nachts geschieht, sittlich gehoben sind die Kaffern durch das Christentum aber noch nicht geworden." Another telling example of Seiner's experience in sexual regard reads as follows: 194 "An einem Teiche traf ich zwei Hererofrauen mit ihrer Dienerin, deren jede mich gegen Entschädigung von einer Platte Tabak zu einem delikaten Stelldichein einlud, [] "Injo! Injo! Komm, komm!, zupfte mich die Zudringlichste am Ärmel. Sie kauerte vor mir, auf ihrem Schenkel saß rittlings ein splitternackter Knabe und sog an der Brust, zwei andere Knaben im Alter von sieben und acht Jahren lagen daneben im Grase, den Kopf auf die Hände gestützt, und hörten mit verständnisvollen Mienen zu, wie ihre Mutter sich feilbot. Ein recht erfreuliches Sittenbild!"

⁴⁹ Leutwein, *Brust*: 19ff, 29f; his observations are all pre-Herero-German war, but were only published in 1909.

⁵⁰ Ibid.: 29f: "Auch ein schwarzes Kind ist lieblich, weilt man ferne der Kultur."

⁵¹ Leutwein, *Brust*: 22f, while he travelled around the country, one evening at the campfire, he was visited by three Herero girls: "Schade, wirklich schade. Die Anwesenheit der drei Fräuleins bedeutet nämlich eine besondere Aufmerksamkeit von seiten der Dorfbehörde, indem sie die Zuweisung eines kleinen, aber ausgewählten Harems entspricht. Quid nunc? Ob ich wohl im Hinblick auf das Fett meine Tugend bewahre?"

observations describe an undoubtedly existing erotic situation, a reality that was and must have been saturated with sexual tension, libidinous desire, infused with opportunities of cutting a profit on the side of the women..

Conjugality I: Concubinage

One more way of personally coping with the problem of (unfulfilled) sexual desire in a situation in which marriage was considered, for several reasons, not an option, was to resort to concubinage. The German term to describe such sexual non-fulfilment is *demoralisieren*, a term that clearly connected libidinous frustration to immoral behaviour, i.e. inappropriate sexual behaviour such as prostitution or concubinage.⁵² The latter term classified monogamous, stable relationships between German men and indigenous women as temporary only. As in the case of prostitution, concubinage was subject to certain generally held beliefs about the sexual impropriety of such unions. Concubinage was not really accepted behaviour and rather considered a *Notbehelf*, an emergency measure to alleviate persisting sexual needs and therefore the next best thing to a real pairing with a woman of equal social, cultural and ethnic standing. In fact, both terms, concubine and concubinage, in German *Konkubine* and *Konkubinat*, carry notions of socially sanctioned sexual licentiousness and convey a sense of moral piquancy, both then and now. Such unions were considered temporary and a stopgap.

An important reason to enter a concubinage agreement for both men and women was sanitary. It was the best precautionary measure against contraction of venereal disease.⁵³ Understandably, this situation did not produce a substantial and useful body of evidence from which one could describe and theorise this phenomenon. A few impressions gathered from contemporary travelogues will provide a picture. Settlement Commissioner Rohrbach, who travelled around the Grootfontein district on an inspection tour to determine a future policy of settlement immediately before the German-Herero war broke out in January 1904, related the normalcy of concubinage on the farms in the area he was visiting. Each and every non-married farmer, as well as the white itinerant traders and soldiers on the large and small stations, had an Ovaherero woman as companion for bed and table, he explained, adding that this was considered as normal as eating and drinking.⁵⁴ In the isolated settings of the police stations and the farms in

Die Eingeborenen sollen es einem sogar hoch anrechnen, wenn man von ihrem liebenswürdigen Anerbieten keinen Gebrauch macht. Ja, ja...Hm, hm...".

⁵² Cf. Seiner, *Bergtouren*: 29: "Sehr demoralisierend auf die weiße Bevölkerung wirkt der Mangel an weißen Frauen und Mädchen, weshalb die Weißen in den meisten Fällen mit Eingeborenenweibern in Verkehr treten, ...".

⁵³ Ibid.: 29f: "Ein jeder isolierter Weiße sucht sich eine Wirtschafterin zu verschaffen, um der Gefahr ansteckender Krankheiten vorzubeugen."

⁵⁴ Paul Rohrbach, *Aus Südwest-Afrikas schweren Tagen. Blätter von Arbeit und Abschied*, Berlin, Weicher, 1909: 65: "Wie alle unverheirateten Ansiedler hat er [Farmer Wittmer, W.H.] natürlich sein Hereroweib als Tisch- und Bettgenossin. Das ist hier so selbstverständlich wie Essen und Trinken; die weißen Wanderhändler machen es ebenso, die Soldaten auf den großen und kleinen Stationen nicht minder, nur

the countryside the erotic situation was quite different. Away from the constraints of urban barracks life and social control, relatively stable and monogamous sexual liaisons seem to have been rather the rule than the exception.

Franz Seiner described the same in similar words, when he toured Hereroland in 1903.⁵⁵ He used the contemporary German colloquial term *Wirtschafterin*, which carries notions of homemaker, charwoman and cook alike, to metaphorically evade the sexual explicitness and piquancy of the term *Konkubine*. As such the term also carried a notion that such a relationship was temporary in nature, as it basically described an employment relationship. However, by trying to avoid the word concubine, the men who had a *Wirtschafterin* also tried to express that these relationships were more than just sexual relationships, even though they would not or could not consider marriage. What is more important here, is that the term was an attempt to euphemistically counter alleged notions that such relationships were sexual relationships only. Seiner actually made this point beautifully clear when he described the everyday reality of such unions, admitting that “often the white man has a real liking for his black companion”, adding a few examples of such monogamous unions based on mutual respect and shared responsibility for the relationship and its children.⁵⁶

He related the woes of one such German having to deal with the consequences of living in an extra-marital arrangement with a Christian Ovaherero woman, whose parents the local missionary threatened to excommunicate in order to boycott the union. In this context parental love for the girl, as well as the adoration of the man for his companion whom he spoiled and allowed to concern herself only with the well-being of their daughter, was emphasised by Seiner. One other man got involved in a fight with a colleague of his who had spread the rumour that the companion of the former had been a well-known prostitute in Windhoek before she joined her present partner in a monogamous set-up.⁵⁷

The fact that substantial numbers of local women agreed to live with German men in monogamously oriented relationships considered illegitimate and transitory begs the question of their motivation to enter such alliances. This aspect will be dealt with further

daß es dort (NB, soweit die Kontrolle der Vorgesetzten reicht!) verboten ist, die eingeborenen Weiber ins Mannschaftslogis mitzunehmen.” Cf. also Helene von Falkenhausen, *Ansiedlerschicksale. 11 Jahre in Deutsch-Südwestafrika, 1893-1904*, Berlin, Reimer, 1905: 188 for an implicit explanation for this phenomenon in the context of the loneliness of single German men on far away farms.

⁵⁵ Seiner, *Bergtouren*: 29: “Es ist eine in der ganzen Kolonie verbreitete Sitte, sich schwarze oder gelbe Wirtschafterinnen zu nehmen, und man geht beiderseits ein solches Verhältnis mit dem Bewußtsein ein, daß es nur von vorübergehender Dauer sein werde.”

⁵⁶ Ibid.: 30: “Oft ist der Weiße seiner schwarzen Gefährtin aufrichtig zugetan. So traf ich im Hererolande einen Händler, der im glücklichsten Verhältnisse mit einem schwarzen Mädchen lebte, dessen er sich, da dies landesüblich, vor niemandem schämte.” This is not the only example he talked about.

⁵⁷ Ibid.: 31. These deliberations are indeed quite exceptional and must be attributed to the fact that Seiner was a professionally trained journalist, who took pride in relating what he saw in a balanced way. Despite this, his, Seiner’s German nationalism got the better of him, when he described the second man’s brawl in defense of his companion’s honour as an insult to being German, implying the inferiority of his companion.

down. Some of the men and women who were living in close and mutual proximity decided to marry.

Conjugality II: Marriage

The number of marriages between German, colonising men and indigenous, colonised women in German South West Africa remained remarkably low over the years. A very thorough statistical table, hand-written and never published, compiled by Curt von François for 1892-3, included the marriage status of all known and named Europeans in GSWA. From this information I have computed the following numbers for Hereroland. Not surprisingly it reflects, with regard to pairing patterns, a situation not substantially changed from pre-German times.⁵⁸ Excluding the missionaries, there were exactly 37 married men in the area, representing about 34% of all civilian European men, most of whose names belonged to well-established families in the region. Of the 37 men, 22 or 59.5% had married local women, whereas 15 or 40.5% were married to women of European background. Of the 22 men married to indigenous women, 5 or 23% were listed as German nationals, whereas 17 or 77% percent were categorised as non-German. Of the five Germans who had married locally, two had been in the country long before the advent of German colonialism, one was from the very first troops sent in 1889 and two were from a recent group of civilian settlers who had arrived from Germany in a settlement scheme.⁵⁹ All other mixed marriages had taken place in the non-German trading community, and can be identified by the names of the parties as being from before German times. Only a handful of German traders had joined the mostly English-speaking group of traders in Hereroland and only a few of these had taken indigenous wives, most probably joined in matrimony by the missionaries of the Rhenish Mission Society, as had been the practice for the preceding decades in the region.

The arrival of German men as soldiers, in the 1890s, did not change this situation substantially. As a rule members of the *Kaiserliche Schutztruppe* were usually contracted to serve for three years. After decommission there was assistance available in the form of land grants and some financial subsidies to induce these men to stay on as colonists and settlers. With a more permanent outlook, the question of a conjugal companion, considered a corner stone, if not instrumental in some ways for a successful domestic

⁵⁸ NAN-ZBU 168 A VI c 4 *Übersicht der im südwestafrikanischen Schutzgebiete ansässigen Europäer*. 1892/3.

⁵⁹ Bremen was an ex-soldier, Körner had traded in the region since at least the 1870s, when he was first mentioned by William C. Chapman, *Notes on my life*. 81 in NAN A 233. Another source, NAN-ZBU 1011, F XIII b 6, Bd 1: 44 mentions him as a German-American, who had come in a mission context; the same holds true for Bam. As to when the Windhoek settlers Ludwig and Otto arrived could not be ascertained. A picture in von François, *Namā*: 120f celebrates Bremen as one of the first settlers in the protectorate. Cf. also Hartmann, (ed.), *Hues*: 82, for an image of Körner's family.

economy, arose for these men.⁶⁰ As there were almost no marriageable German or other European women around, indigenous women were, obviously, one possible option available to these men. The few women eventually married were, according to what little evidence there is, exclusively from a Christian, culturally mixed background, particularly from Baster families and the marriages were, as a rule, solemnised by the missionaries.

The number of such unions remained very small, contrary to the above-alluded to prominence of this issue in contemporary German and colonial debates, but also contrary to similar suggestions in much recent writing about German colonialism.⁶¹ Franz Seiner reports a known number of 39 such unions between German men and indigenous women in 1902 for the whole territory. Broken down, this figure represents 6.75% of all existing marriages of colonial men in the colony as a whole and for Windhoek the respective figure is 8.3% 'mixed' marriages.⁶² A computation from material found in the civil registry files for Windhoek, starting in August 1898, and from information in the marriage ban deliberations after September 1905 finds fifteen married couples by name in the Windhoek district.⁶³ Of the 56 known first soldiers that were sent with von François in 1890, exactly five or 9% ended up with a local woman until 1905 in a legally sanctioned union.⁶⁴ Strong politico-legal forces were brought to bear against the realisation of such unions, after a change in policy with regard to these unions was effected, amongst which the enactment of proper civil registry legislation in 1893 has to be counted.⁶⁵ However, not even the argument made by the most vociferous proponent of the eventual marriage ban in 1905, Friedrich von Lindequist, namely that men would prefer local women over German women, because the former would provide the necessary land and cattle to start a farm, was borne out by the reality on the ground.⁶⁶

Over all, marriage does not really seem to have been an option for most settling men during the formative years of German colonial control between 1884 and about 1903.

⁶⁰ Initially it was thought natural, if not beneficial, for decommissioned soldiers to find 'daughters of the soil' as wives. Cf. the last chapter of Hartmann, *Matters*, forthcoming.

⁶¹ Cf. the last chapter of Hartmann, *Matters*, forthcoming.

⁶² Seiner, *Bergtouren*: 33 and corroborated in *Jahresbericht über die Entwicklung der Deutschen Schutzgebiete im Jahre 1903/1904*: 256.

⁶³ See my deliberations about these marriages in the Hartmann, *Matters*, forthcoming, last chapter. The official statistic here is 14 marriages for 1903 in Windhoek, cf. *Jahresbericht 1903/1904*: 256.

⁶⁴ Cf. NAN-A 547 Accession Henker, which has the individual names of the military contingent entering the protectorate until 1890. Also cf. the last chapter of Hartmann, *Matters*, forthcoming.

⁶⁵ Plenipotentiary Ordinance regarding Marriages and Civil Registry Registration for the South West African Protectorate (*Allerhöchste Verordnung, betreffend die Eheschließung und die Beurkundung des Personenstandes für das südwestafrikanische Schutzgebiet vom 1. Januar 1893*). Cf. the last chapter of Hartmann, *Matters*, forthcoming.

⁶⁶ NAN-ZBU 666 F IV r 1 generalia: 34r: "Zudem ist [...] der Unterhalt einer weißen Frau hier kostspielig und die Versuchung für einen Ansiedler sehr groß, sich ein eingeborenes Weib, die von der hiesigen Viehwirtschaft etwas versteht, womöglich ein Bastardmädchen mit Farm und Viehbestand zu erheiraten, anstatt eine Weiße zur Frau zu nehmen, die als einfaches Koch- oder Hausmädchen herausgekommen ist oder anstatt selbst zur Brautschau nach Dtschld zu reisen".

The ample availability of local women for company, emotional and sexual, in concubinage arrangements made the need for a marriage partner less pressing. This informality combined with the rather inefficient control the colonial state was able to exercise vis-à-vis its colonising subjects. Men were more or less left to do whatever they wanted in terms of conjugal questions. This is reflected in the missionaries' reports about such men's refusal to have their unions solemnified and be integrated into regular parish life. A more general dislike for the strictures of marriage also seems to have played a not inconsiderable role on the part of German men. Although Seiner reported in 1904 that some settlers did indeed try to find German women through advertising in German newspapers, the uncertainties of marrying an unknown person kept many men from pursuing this as an option.⁶⁷ The direct attempts of the *Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft* to provide women for marriage to German colonial men met the same kind of reservation in terms of marriage.⁶⁸

At the same time a certain socially accepted *modus vivendi* of mixed conjugal and marriage relationships prevailed in the colony. There is little evidence, if any, to give a richer depiction for the years immediately preceding the German-Herero War. The reason for this has to be sought in the fact that nearly all of these relations ended with the onset of the German-Herero War in which almost all German men outside the urban settlements perished. Nothing has been traced about the fate of women and children from such mixed unions: presumably most also perished. Such an example is Mr. Bremen who had come to the territory with the first group of soldiers and was farming near Otjosazu in 1903. Franz Seiner, on his tour through Hereroland was treated to a meal at his house and observed regular domestic matrimonial life while there, however, without giving any details about Mrs Bremen, other than that she was Rehoboth Bastard. His rendering of this situation is without any judgmental opinion about such unions.⁶⁹ Bremen was killed in the first days of the war.⁷⁰ And Mrs. von Falkenhausen,

⁶⁷ Seiner *Bergtouren* : 29: "Manche Ansiedler suchen durch Annoncen in deutschen Zeitungen nach Frauen, was aber für beide Teile immer ein Risiko ist. Ein Händler zeigte mir dreizehn Briefe, die er auf eine Annonce in einem Tagblatte erhalten, unter ihnen war aber einer mit der Bitte um eine Ansichtspostkarte. Von den zwölf Anträgen sagte ihm nur derjenige einer 28 jährigen Kontoristin zu, weil er einen entschiedenen Charakter verriet, jedoch befürchtete der Händler, daß die Dame später als seine Gattin vielleicht mehr Energie entwickeln könne als ihm lieb sei, und so blieb er bei seiner schwarzen Wirtschafterin."

⁶⁸ Krista E. O'Donnell, *The colonial woman question: gender, national identity and empire in the German colonial society emigration program, 1896-1914*, unpubl. PhD, SUNY-Binghamton, 1996, UMI; Lora Wildenthal, *Colonizers and citizens: bourgeois women and the woman question in the German colonial movement, 1886-1914*, unpubl. PhD, University of Michigan, 1994, UMI; Karen Smidt, "Germania führt die deutsche Frau nach Südwest": *Auswanderung, Leben und soziale Konflikte deutscher Frauen in der ehemaligen Kolonie Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1884-1920; eine sozial-und frauengeschichtliche Studie*, Münster, Lit, 1998.

⁶⁹ Seiner, *Bergtouren* : 104f: "Während des Essens kam Bremens Gattin, eine Eingeborene vom Volke der Bastards, in das Zimmer und setzte sich an den Tisch. Sie hatte hübsche, ausdrucksvolle Gesichtszüge und konnte ihrer braunen Hautfarbe wegen für ein Portugiesin oder Sizilianerin gehalten werde. Bei Tische war sie sehr zurückhaltend und sprach nur zeitweise... Auch ein Knabe und ein Mädchen tauchten auf, die den Typus der Mutter zeigten und sich sehr gesittet benahmen."

who was a farmer's wife in the same area of Hereroland, described the normality of her servant falling in love with a white man, which disturbed her not on any racial grounds, but mainly because it meant losing a valued servant.⁷¹ Another indicator of this normality is the fact that among those who were called by the incipient colonial judiciary from the early 1890s as lay assessors, were men who either lived or had lived in such relations.⁷² Even among the group of men who established the German Lutheran Congregation of Windhoek in 1896 are several men, who had lived in cohabitative relations with local women. Cohabitation with an indigenous woman in stable monogamy, whether with the blessings of religious and state authority or not, was the rule rather than the exception.

Women's experience

The evidence shows clearly that there were African women who, with an economic aim rather assertively took advantage of the presence of substantial numbers of unmarried white men. As I have tentatively indicated above, the chances of economic self determination for some Ovaherero women by offering sexual services to itinerant men had been constrained in the decades after the 1840s. Solicitation, however, increased over time and presumably fastest in the urban, more cosmopolitan settings. In due course, the structures of concubinage both in town and on the farms, must have offered some advantages for the women in these relationships. Such bonds surely involved a considerable degree of choice and voluntary decision making. Listen to Franz Seiner again, railing against concubinage in general and the concubines in particular, with the argument that "these women pocket for themselves what they can, and steal and cheat their masters in all directions".⁷³ There were clear economic benefits to being a white man's consort, one of which certainly included the appropriation of whatever was deemed necessary by whatever means.

It is in the same way that I want to explain and evaluate some pictorial evidence. Pictures of friendly intimacy between indigenous women and German soldiers exist to a larger degree than anticipated. As a genre of intimacy it is, however, not as prominent in the colonial pictorial archive as other photography and for this reason far less well known. Navyman G. Auer reported in the context of his published diary notes, accompanied by images, that "since navy troops arrived in Swakopmund it has become

⁷⁰ Max Belwe, *Gegen die Herero 1904/1905. Tagebuchaufzeichnungen*, Berlin, Mittler, 1906: 46.

⁷¹ Falkenhausen, *Ansiedlerschicksale*: 100: "...in der Beziehung tat es mir leid, meine Herero-Anna von Farm VII nicht mehr zu haben. Diese hatte leider ihr Herz einem Weißen geschenkt, und als die Folgen dieser Liebe nicht ausblieben [...], mußten wir sie entlassen."

⁷² NAN-ZBU 607 F I e 4 contains the annual lists of lay assessors. John Ludwig, Hugo von François; von Broen (1904), Dunaisky (1904), Krabbenhöft (1904), Brüsshaber (1907), Karl Becker (1907), Herpolsheimer (1907).

⁷³ Seiner, *Bergtouren*: 29: "Diese Weiber [die Konkubinen, W.H.] suchen daher für sich auf die Seite zu schaffen, was sie nur immer können, und bestehlen und betrügen ihre Herren nach jeder Richtung hin."

quite lively; all fellow-soldiers had teamed up with black sweethearts, with whom we walked the town arms linked, having a good time.” And when some days later he and his comrades boarded a ship that took them away from the war and back to Germany, he admits that there was some parting grief, which he ascribed to either the friendly African girls or the easy, uncomplicated life of the settlers. Marching in rows to the harbour to embark, the departing soldiers were not only accompanied by many colleagues who were envious because they also wanted to leave for home, but also by “our girlfriends, the young and buxom Damara girls, who had tears in their eyes and whom we promised to return to as soon as possible.”⁷⁴ Two photographs, showing German soldiers and indigenous women in close physical proximity, even endearing poses, accompany Auer’s musings.⁷⁵

The messages in his text regarding the girls that German soldiers were obviously cohabiting with are multilayered. Despite the obvious and quite steep differences in terms of power and access, these liaisons could not have been forced. There must have been some real advantages in teaming up with a German for the duration of his posting in German South West Africa. One may have been the unfulfillable hope that these men might stay on after the war, keep or even marry the women they were courting and set up families. The women’s farewell tears, however, may have had more to do with the fact that some of them would have been left behind pregnant; indeed, in both pictures there is at least one visibly pregnant woman. Whether the transitory nature of these relationships had been factored in by the women is impossible to argue. On the side of the soldiers, the transitory character of these relationships was a behavioural given. A *Soldatenliebschaft*, a fling with a local woman while stationed in the barracks either for military training or duty, was part of the behavioural pattern of German conscripts and soldiers. It was, despite its illegitimate character and overt sexual notions, an accepted behaviour, first and foremost because it was understood to be necessary, as it contributed positively to individual soldiers’ mental health. Transitory and temporary monogamy, as one may best describe this phenomenon, also slowed down, if not prevented, the spread of venereal disease. Moreover, allowing soldiers this sexual outlet

⁷⁴ G. Auer, *In Südwestafrika gegen die Hereros*. Nach den Kriegs-Tagebüchern des Obermatrosen G. Auer bearbeitet von M. Unterbeck, Berlin, Hofmann, 1911: 208: “Seit die Marine in Swakopmund war, herrschte dort reges Leben; alle Kameraden hatten sich schwarze Liebchen angeschafft, mit denen wir Arm in Arm durch den Ort spazierten und manche vergnügte Stunde verlebten.” Ibid.: 211: “Waren es die freundlichen, afrikanischen Mädchen, oder zog uns das ungezwungene Leben, wie es die dortigen Ansiedler führten, so mächtig an – wir wußten es nicht zu erklären.” Ibid.: 212: “[. . .] so marschierten wir denn in Reih und Glied mit unseren Habseligkeiten auf, begleitet von vielen Soldaten, die uns wegen unserer Heimreise beneideten, und von einer Menge Schwarzer, hauptsächlich unseren Freundinnen, den jungen, drallen Klippkaffernmädchen, die Tränen in den Augen hatten, und denen wir fest versprochen, ‘recht bald wiederzukommen’”. It is impossible to say why this book so frankly admits these erotic undersides to soldierly life in the colony, particularly as it was published when such intermixing had come under critical public consideration, even more so as the book was edited by somebody else and provided with an imprimatur-like authorisation by the highest military authority in the colonial Imperial Colonial Office in Berlin, Oberst von Glasenapp.

⁷⁵ Auer, *Südwestafrika*: 208f: “Ein vergnügtes Ständchen in Swakopmund (a. Tage unserer Heimreise)” and 212f “Unsere Schutztruppe nimmt Abschied von den Klippkaffernmädchen in Aredareigas bei Windhuk”.

made them more content and inhibited more violent forms of sexual interaction with local females.

Issues of sexual attraction between European men and African women, and erotic tension derived from cultural, if not racial differences and otherness cannot be raised here, either theoretically or practically, as I have not found any evidence to argue such points. From Auer's formulations one could possibly glean such modes of attraction. A clear indication in this regard is documented by series of pornographic postcards, produced and distributed by one Wywias in Windhoek. They do, indeed portray African women in gradations of orientalist and othered nudity⁷⁶.

The evidence strongly suggests that some advantage was to be had from a liaison with a German soldier. It might have been no more than the promise of regular nutrition, a piece of much needed clothing, maybe some money, a piece of tobacco and shelter. Given the overall and very high general insecurity in war-torn German South West Africa, these women may have had more than one good reason to team up with a German man. It is in this light that the evidence suggesting that imprisoned women in the camps voluntarily engaged in prostitution makes some sense. Johannes Spiecker, the Rhenish mission director summed up his observations after touring the Swakopmund mission parish thus:

Really sad are the moral conditions around here among imprisoned Herero as well as Damara. Although there are many more women and girls than men, the latter very often cannot find wives, because, as the latter explain, it is more advantageous for them, to take one mark [German coin, WH] from a [European, WH] man with whom they have intercourse, than to tie themselves to one particular husband. Among Damara it does not look any better.⁷⁷

By prostituting oneself, even if it was under the most degrading conditions, women actually could earn something and the etiquette of remuneration which seems to have been observed – irking the missionary to quite some degree – perhaps provided a sense of agency, maybe respectability among some of the female incarcerated.

Some women pursued the chances offered by a burgeoning sex market more aggressively than others. A particularly practical pattern was offered, again by the labour structures of colonial Windhoek. Women, employed as housekeepers would take advantage of their daily presence in the dwellings of their employers and offer themselves for sexual gratification. Sometimes this would happen spontaneously, at other times sexual services were considered part and parcel of the labour contract. The

⁷⁶ Evidence for this is available in numerous private photo albums this author was able to inspect; further in the National Archives of Namibia and the archives of the Society for Scientific Development in Swakopmund.

⁷⁷ VEM-RMG 2.697 e 1906, Report of visit to the Swakopmund mission parish: "Sehr traurig sind die sittlichen Verhältnisse hier am Platze, sowohl unter den gefangenen Herero wie auch unter den Bergdamra. Obwohl die Zahl der Frauen und Mädchen viel grösser ist als die der Männer, können die letzteren oft keine Frauen bekommen, weil ihnen dieselben erklären, daß es für sie vorteilhafter sei, eine Mark von dem Manne zu nehmen, mit dem sie verkehre, als sich dauernd an einen bestimmten Mann zu binden. Unter den Bergdamras sieht es nicht besser aus."

remuneration would consist of pieces of tobacco for either chewing or smoking, chocolate, sometimes a security pin, a piece of cloth or even small amounts of money.⁷⁸

Whereas these arrangements suggest a rather informal, individual and therefore potentially dangerous and highly exploitative situation for the women, often bordering on rape, the following situation indicates that women actively participated in this newly available segment of a market economy in colonial Windhoek or wherever unmarried German men were gathered in large numbers, whether in barracks, railway construction sites or, later, mines. Usually over weekends and other holidays, when the men were at home, women would make their rounds in the single-quarters to collect or return laundry. A woman would be accompanied by either her daughter or some other, usually younger, female relative. In this situation the older woman would start the negotiation of sexual services provided by the younger woman to her male client. The older woman's role was to initiate this interaction and to negotiate fair remuneration.⁷⁹ It remains unclear as to who received the latter, whether the older woman, who effectively acted as a female procurer or maybe as a madam, or the woman selling her body. Here money would be paid instead of remuneration in kind. Of course, the sums involved were always contested, but usually intercourse could be had for between 3 and 5 *Reichsmark*. This was at the time also the average price for intercourse in Germany.⁸⁰ Missionary Carl Wandres indicates the existence in one of the locations of a separate group of 15 houses in which only prostitutes lived.⁸¹

Given the limited evidence available about indigenous female agency in colonial Windhoek, it is difficult to describe the situation. However, one might rather define it as restrained agency only, and ranging in gradations from relatively unrestrained to highly restrained. Aside from the assertive and enterprising side that such an approach may have had for the women, there were real disadvantages. The colonial authorities, in their attempt to prevent the spread of venereal disease, subjected the women of the different *Werften* to regular gynaecological inspections. Missionary Wandres, not mincing words, described to his director in Barmen how this was effected, for instance in 1902. While his main concern in this context was that these inspections were also conducted on the women of his parish, he related how the women were driven together, usually in the very early hours of the morning, by mounted police, brutally employing a *sjambok*, the quintessential southern African instrument of coercion.⁸² An incident in February 1906

⁷⁸ It is quite an experience to find a piece of chewing tobacco from around the turn of the century before last in the court material, sequestered as evidence.

⁷⁹ NAN-GWI 696 3F-104/09 evidence in court records, also that sometimes there was conflict over payment and how this was resolved.

⁸⁰ Clearly, patterns of German prostitution were important in colonial patterns of commercialised sexual relations. Richard J. Evans, *Szenen aus der deutschen Unterwelt. Verbrechen und Strafe, 1800-1914*, Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1997: 240ff.

⁸¹ VEM-RMG 1.623 d: 002, letter Wandres to Spiecker 9.2.1906.

⁸² VEM-RMG 1.623c, Bl. 56f: letter Wandres to Spiecker, 10.9.1902. "Seit einiger Zeit entwickelt die hiesige Polizei eine rührige Thätigkeit in Bezug auf die Sittlichkeit. Die schlechten Frauenzimmer werden ab und zu

led to a (further) complaint by the missionary. This time he complained about the fact that the government had contested his list of Christian women not to be subjected to such an inspection.⁸³ The list consisted of 37 female members of his parish, whom he did not wish to be subjected to such an examination of their genitals. From remarks scribbled in the margin of the Wandres letter, it is evident that the named women had to apply for passes with which they then could prove their exempt status as the inspection raid was performed in the location. This degrading treatment led many women to flee to the surrounding countryside. These inspections were not confined to Windhoek and the years around the war, as is borne out by circumstantial evidence; the earliest official manifestation of such health measures is contained in the first medical report for Windhoek for the year 1893. In it the regular inspection of such women as were working as prostitutes was said to have resulted in a substantial decline of venereal disease in Windhoek.⁸⁴

To conclude, the women in the Swakopmund prisoner-of-war camp, who reportedly offered sexual services on their own account, may have acted exactly in this line of restrained agency. It was more advantageous to take one Mark from the man they had intercourse with, than to consort permanently with one man (of one's own group), the women in the camp at Swakopmund argued. Tentatively argued, this information suggests that even in the camps an economic etiquette was maintained and women were remunerated for sexual services; also, these facts make more sense if interpreted as an attempt by the incarcerated women to retain at least a sense of agency, if not choice and dignity, if only a most limited one, in a situation offering little opportunity for alternative earnings and occupation.

dem Lazarett zur Untersuchung vorgeführt. Leider hat sich dabei die Polizei verschiedene Male grober Übergriffe schuldig gemacht. Sie trieb zu Pferd mit dem Sambok bewaffnet alle Frauen zusammen auch Christen...".

⁸³ The letter of Wandres, dated 7.2.1906 with names of women he wanted to be exempt from these inspections was found in NAN-BWI 37 E I g and had 37 names, mostly old women and widows. Cf. VEM-RMG 1.623 d: 002, letter Wandres to Spiecker 9.2.1906. Wandres had supplied the government with a list of 51 names of women who belonged to the Windhoek mission parish and who were considered exempt from VD inspections. Of the inspected 200 to 300 women, 67 were found to be infected. He added that these women had largely come from a group of c. 15 separate houses, which housed "women of ill-repute". Obviously there existed an extra section in the location, in which women living off prostitution were staying.

⁸⁴ Cf. .NAN-ZBU 145 A IV a 3 Bd. 1 Jahresberichte 1891/95: 34ff "Dank der in regelmäßigen Zeitperioden erfolgenden Untersuchung und einer sich eventuell anschließenden Behandlung aller der Prostitution huldigen Frauenzimmer läßt sich bereits jetzt eine bedeutende Abnahme der Geschlechtskrankheiten auf Windhoek feststellen. Die Mehrzahl der augenblicklich noch mit diesem Leiden behafteten Soldaten hat diese Akquisition anderen Plätzen oder gar noch dem Abschied von Europa zu verdanken." The health report for Grootfontein in the north mentions that the women subjected to such inspections tried to evade these with whatever means possible. Cf. ZBU 823 - H I h 3 report on Grootfontein for 1.1.-31.3.1906: "Eine Abnahme haben die Geschlechtskrankheiten erfahren, insbesondere waren die Zugänge von Tripper (7 gegen 28 im vorhergehenden Quartal) geringer. Gezwungen durch die häufigen ärztlichen Untersuchungen halten sich besonders die Weiber jetzt bedeutend reinlicher, suchen sich jedoch immer noch mit allen Mitteln diesen Untersuchungen zu entziehen."

Concluding: a 1904 sexual *casus belli*?

In early January 1904, fifteen months after missionary Wandres had reported soldiers' lewd behaviour in front of his house, German military superiority would be challenged decisively, and with hitherto unparalleled intensity, as the German-Herero War broke out.⁸⁵ It was followed roughly eight months later by a second war, declared by Nama. Given the prevailing violence in sexual regard over the decades and ever since European men started to roam the region in the 1840s, it may well make sense to pause at this juncture and to ask if and how sexual interaction figures in the decision of Ovaherero to take up arms against German colonial forces. This is not to deny the many socio-economic injustices that are generally held to be accountable for the outbreak of the war, but to redirect our attention to the fact that sexual conduct surely played a critical role in this history.

About five weeks after the start of the war, missionary Wandres of Windhoek wrote a letter to his society's management in which he neatly listed all the reasons he saw for the outbreak of the Herero-German war. Highly critical of the colonial administration, but loyal to German overlordship, he wrote the letter expressly as a German with twenty years of experience in GSWA. Amongst others, he reasoned that the main issue was the way in which German soldiers had treated the indigenous population since their first arrival, part of which was "whoring around with the indigenous wenches".⁸⁶ This evaluation reflects with astounding clarity the banality and normalcy of coercive, illegitimate and violent sexual interaction in the *Alltag* of German men on the farms, police stations and barracks. It surely would have accounted for a lot of anger, frustration and the final decision to take up arms by Ovaherero. Wandres' evaluation remains the only direct evidence in the record for such causality; this should not keep us from inspecting this suggestion.

Among many commentators on the origins of the German-Herero War only one has argued explicitly in this direction. The geographer John H. Wellington offers the explanation for the declaration of war, that "[a]nother 'spark' was undoubtedly the White treatment of Native women", adding that "[i]n this, South West Africa and its German colonists were possibly no more or less guilty than colonists in other African colonies." As an "igniting flash, impelling human beings to violent action" he described the killing of an innocent Omuherero woman and her baby.⁸⁷ She was Louise Zeraua, the 24-year old daughter-in-law of the chief of Otjimbingue; we only know her name because the missionary of Omaruru reported her interment in late 1903, specifically explaining that she had been shot by a German trader, Dietrich, about one hour from Omaruru.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Cf. p 46 and footnote 22 of this article.

⁸⁶ VEM-RMG 1.623c: The missionary's phrase is particularly savoury, cf. 90ff: ". . . das Herumhuren mit den eingeborenen Weibern."

⁸⁷ John. H. Wellington, *South West Africa and Its Human Issues*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1967: 200.

⁸⁸ ELCRN VI. 23. 3 *Kasualien Omaruru 1870-1907*: "1903: Louise Zeraua, Frau des Omuherero Parmenas Zeraua, c. 24 Jahre erschossen. Die Verstorbene war mit ihrem Mann u. Kindchen auf der Rückreise nach

This murder created quite some upheaval among Ovaherero in the protectorate as the court acquitted Dietrich because he was able to convince the judge that he had been triggered to shoot the woman by a nightmare. On appeal, Dietrich was sentenced to three years' imprisonment and deported home to Germany. Ovaherero notions of justice had been tested heavily by the acquittal, and the second judgement did not allay emotions either, as the deportation was interpreted as sending Dietrich 'home to his mother'.⁸⁹ Leutwein elaborated on this incident in his memoirs as he had trouble containing the anger among Ovaherero and as he was unable to explain to them that as Governor he had no influence on the courts and their rulings. This latter fact he found particularly difficult to impart and it is the reason for his elaborations. He admits that the case had had a strong bearing on the declaration of war in January 1904.⁹⁰ No comment about the sexual aspect of the misdeed, however, was made by anyone until well after the war, when the ill-treatment of Ovaherero women was listed as one of the two reasons why the chiefs had decided to take up arms against the Germans.⁹¹

Explanations that Dietrich had tried to rape Louise Zeraua only surfaced long after the war and were first made public in the so-called *Bluebook* in 1918. In it, her husband, Barmenias or Parmenas, alleged that he had been made drunk by the trader. As he was sleeping off his intoxication, Dietrich propositioned his wife but was refused, whereupon "[s]he was shot by him 14 days after her baby was born because she refused to be false to Herero law and to her own husband."⁹² Certain inconsistencies and missing eye witnesses taint this account of the events in 1903. What is evident, however, is that the unjust court ruling on the event, believed to have been attempted rape with subsequent murder, was also argued to have triggered the onset of the war. Louise's husband, was quoted as having argued that:

This murder was one of the chief reasons which influenced my father Zacharias and Samuel Maharero and Michael Tjaherani (the chiefs of Okahandja and Omaruru) to go into rebellion the next year. They had many reasons for rising against the Germans, but this event decided their policy.⁹³

Interestingly, this specific sexual argument is completely ignored by Helmut Bley, who attributes the decision to take up arms only to socio-economic and political strategy. He

Otjimbingwe, wo sie wohnhaft war und wurde nachts im Wagen, etwa 1 Stunde vom Platze entfernt, während sie schlief, vom Kaufmann Dietrich erschossen. Auch ihr Kindchen wurde verwundet. Der Täter soll betrunken gewesen sein."

⁸⁹ This was offered as an additional piece of information by Wellington, *op. cit.*: 200, however, without evidence.

⁹⁰ Theodor Leutwein, *Elf Jahre Gouverneur in Deutsch-Südwestafrika*, Berlin, Mittler, 1907: 222. "In der Erregung unter den Hereros, die dem ein halbes Jahr später ausbrechenden Aufstand vorausging, hatte dieser Fall jedoch bereits seinen Teil beigetragen."

⁹¹ Union of South Africa, *Report on the Natives of South-West Africa and their treatment by Germany*, Prepared by the Administrator's Office, London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1918: 54ff. Henceforth this publication is referred to as *Bluebook*.

⁹² *Bluebook*: 54.

⁹³ *Bluebook*: 55.

may have decided to treat the case as just one of the many other legal injustices committed by the Germans.⁹⁴ Other commentators of import, Jan Bart Gewald, Peter H. Katjavivi and Karla Poewe, also ignore the evidence and the argument.⁹⁵ Only Horst Drechsler argues the case from its sexual content side. However he does so in an unacceptably, yet characteristically polemical way, and without the proper caution as regards his sources.⁹⁶

However, a few strong corroborations make the case for a sexual *casus belli* quite convincing. For one, we have the fact that Samuel Maharero expressly exempted those that did not fornicate with Ovaherero females from the killings with which the war started in January 1904: women, children, missionaries and *trekboers*. By then the latter were known for their rigidly applied endogamous marriage practice. Samuel Maharero's order was heeded with very few exceptions, and almost every commentator of the war and its origins has elaborated on this remarkable fact. One particularly strong example is the following: when the farmer Friedrich von Falkenhausen was killed in the context of the outbreak of the war, an accompanying Boer, Keet, was forced to witness this, but was spared execution himself.⁹⁷

An undated report of a visit to a group of refugee Ovaherero years later in Groenfontein/Transvaal by Berlin missionary Johannes Neitz confirms this. He wrote down what he had been told.

The worst was – which has caused a lot of discord and conflict – the rape of our women by whites. Some of the men were shot like dogs when they refused to provide their women and threatened to defend these with weapon in hand. Had such things not happened, there would not have been war, but it broke out on account of such rape. It [the war] suddenly happened, and there was no stopping it; everybody took revenge and it was as if the masses had gone mad.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ Helmut Bley, *Kolonialherrschaft und Sozialstruktur in Deutsch-Südwestafrika, 1894 bis 1914*, Hamburg, Leibniz Verlag, 1968: 185f.: "Die soziale und politische Diskriminierung stand im Vordergrund der Begründung. Samuel Maharero hat Leutwein vorgehalten, dass die von den deutschen Gerichten nicht gesühnten Todschlagsdelikte und Morde sowie die Todesfälle in den Gefängnissen einer Kriegserklärung gleichgekommen seien."

⁹⁵ Jan-Bart Gewald, *Herero Heroes. A Socio-Political History of the Herero of Namibia, 1890-1923*, Oxford, Currey, 1999; Peter H. Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia*, London, Currey, 1988; Karla Poewe, *The Namibian Herero. A History of their Psychosocial Disintegration and Survival*, Lewiston/Queenston, Edwin Mellen, 1985. Cf. also Gerhardus Pool, *Die Herero-Opstand, 1904-1907*, Cape Town, HAUM, 1979.

⁹⁶ Horst Drechsler, *Südwestafrika unter deutscher Kolonialherrschaft*, Berlin, Akademie, 1966: 135.

⁹⁷ Falkenhausen, *Ansiedlerschicksale*: 248.

⁹⁸ VEM-RMG 2.657: 1ff, undated. The missionary, Johannes Neitz also reported on the death march of the defeated Herero nation through the waterless Omahake into the Kalahari and across the border into present-day Botswana after August 1904. "Aber das schlimmste Übel ist, was viel Böses Blut und Streit hervorgerufen hat, die Vergewaltigung unser Frauen durch Weisse. Manche Männer sind totgeschossen worden wie Hunde, wenn sie sich weigerten, ihre Frauen und Töchter preiszugeben und drohten, sie mit der Waffe in der Hand zu verteidigen. Wären solche Dinge nicht geschehen, wäre kein Krieg gekommen, aber er

Contrary to popular explanations, the war did not break out spontaneously, but was preceded by strategising and planning.⁹⁹ Settlement Commissioner Paul Rohrbach backs these assumptions in terms of sex and the origins of the war when he explained the non-involvement of one Ovaherero ruler in the war by the fact that all three of his daughters were involved with German men. Echoes of *oupanga* and pre-capitalist exchange relations reverberate here. The one and only Herero chief, Josef of the Tjetjoo group, a sub section among eastern Herero which had not joined the war but had sided with the Germans, had three daughters living as quasi wives, with German farmers; these were surely relationships which I earlier described as concubinage relationships. For this reason he had been robbed of his possessions by his “fellow tribesmen”; surely the latter would have killed him had they got ahold of him, Rohrbach went on to argue.¹⁰⁰

Reported cases of castrations of German men at the outbreak of the war proved to be largely exaggerations and propagandistic.¹⁰¹ However, both these rumours and the emasculations that were confirmed, attest to such a sexually triggered *casus belli*. Why would such atrocities be committed in the first place, if not to send an explicit message of sexual revenge? The *Reichsbote*, a German newspaper, commented in this regard in March 1904, arguing that certain Ovaherero would have committed such castrations to get even with those German men that had committed grossly indecent acts on their girls and wives.¹⁰² And even if none of these castrations had ever happened, the mostly unsubstantiated rumours certainly attest to an acute consciousness of sexual injustices committed in the colony.¹⁰³

ist bei solchen Vergewaltigungen ausgebrochen. Er war mit einem Male da, und da war kein Halten mehr, jeder rächte sich und es war, als sei kein Verstand mehr unter den Massen.”

⁹⁹ Gesine Krüger, *Kriegsbewältigung und Geschichtsbewußtsein. Zur Realität, Deutung und Verarbeitung des deutschen Kolonialkrieges in Namibia*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999: 5ff.

¹⁰⁰ VEM-RMG, 2.659, Rohrbach to Missionsdirektor Spiecker May 1905: 55f: “Der einzige Hererokapitän, der den Aufstand nicht mitgemacht, Josef vom Tjetjoostamme in Gobabis, ist meines Wissens Heide, und ist bloß deshalb auf unserer Seite geblieben, weil er nicht mehr mit den Hereros, sondern mit den Deutschen fällt [word illegible]: drei seiner Töchter sind als zwar auch nicht angetraute so doch thatsächliche Frauen im Hause deutscher Farmer [emphasis in original.] Darum wurde er auch von seinen aufständischen Stammesgenossen ausgeplündert so gut wie die Deutschen, und wenn sie ihn bekommen hätten, so hätten sie ihn wohl auch getötet.”

¹⁰¹ Cf. Krüger, *Kriegsbewältigung*: 104-115.

¹⁰² *Der Reichsbote*, 69/22/3/1904; Missionary Wandres confirmed as factual one such castration in his first report on the war in April 1904; cf. VEM-RMG 2.533a: 260: “12. Januar abends: In Otjizeva wurden der Händler Korschalsky, der Civilpolizist Tausendfreund und dessen 15 jähriger Sohn ermordet, letzterer außerdem castriert, wie von dem hiesigen Arzt Dr. Bail einige Tage später festgestellt wurde.”

¹⁰³ Cf. Dag Henrichsen, “‘Adieu, du schönes Afrikal’ Koloniales Leben in den Briefen von Wilhelmine Henrichsen aus Swakopmund (DSWA), 1904-1913”, in: *Afrikanischer Heimatkalender*, 1995: 89ff, citing letters of a relative, who reported castrations: “...den Männern schneiden die Weiber oft gewisse Teile ab, dann stellen sie sich vor sie hin und sagen: Du sollst keine Herero mehr berühren...” This is a good example of such rumours, as is evidenced in the next sentence of this citation; here sexual atrocities against German women were reported, which were completely unsubstantiated as German women were spared deliberately and by order of Samuel Maharero, with a few exceptions, however.

A longer term perspective to these rather immediate aspects of sexual violence is provided by Kamaharero's observation in the mid-1870s, which argued white men's sexual conduct to be detrimental to Ovaherero society.¹⁰⁴ It seems plausible therefore, that sexuality-related issues were substantially responsible for motivating Ovaherero rulers to accept German protection treaties in the 1880s, although to no avail as the evidence shows. Missionary Irle's observation of sexually predacious behaviour against Ovaherero women was mentioned earlier and serves to back-up the argument here.

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¹⁰⁴ William Coates Palgrave, *The Commissions of W. C. Palgrave: Special Emissary to South West Africa 1876-1885*, ed. and with an introduction by E.L.P. Stals, Cape Town, Van Riebeeck Society, 199; 12: "Whites come into the country, as they represent, by consent of British government, "marry" Damara women, have children, and then leave them, taking away the children, and paying the mother something by way of compensation."

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