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"SHE IS THE VICTOR": Bourgeois Women, Nationalist Identities and the Ideal of the Independent Woman Farmer in German Southwest Africa

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In 1907, Clara Brockmann declared her intention first to live a colonial novel and then to write it (Hintrager 1955:78). She departed Germany for Southwest Africa (Namibia), where she worked as a secretarial civil servant for four years. As it turned out, Brockmann wrote no novels, but rather two travel books meant to attract German settlers to Southwest Africa: *The German Woman in Southwest Africa, A Contribution to the Woman Question in Our Colonies* (1910), and *Letters from a German Girl in Southwest* (1912). The books attracted favorable press notice and were recommended to both male and female prospective settlers. In them, she encouraged women to settle in Southwest Africa, asserting that the woman settler made a unique and necessary contribution to the German nation. In her view, the farmer or farmer's wife (*Farmersfrau*) and the female agricultural intern (*weibliche Farmvolontär*) took a special place among the possible callings for women in the colony. As Brockmann described what kind of woman Southwest Africa needed, she evoked an ideal of the independent woman farmer.

Clara Brockmann's open enthusiasm for the life of an unmarried, economically independent woman in Southwest Africa was unusual among women authors who wrote about the German colonies. She embedded her surprising visions of feminine independence within widely-held views on the importance of social divisions based on "race" and on the virtues of bourgeois womanhood. While Brockmann was not entirely typical, her books reveal underlying tensions within bourgeois, nationalist German society.¹

This article will suggest two contexts for Brockmann's ideas, contexts which helped shape German politics and society over the decade preceding the First World War: the formation of German national identity, and the bourgeois (*bürgerlich*) women's movement. Although the background of the First World War and *Weltpolitik* (Germany's assertion of a new international role in diplomacy and politics) are among the best-researched themes in modern German history, little is known about the formation of national identity in those years with respect to Germany's

colonies. Yet, as contemporary literature makes evident, Germans believed that their state's status as a colonizing power helped make Germany the political and cultural equal of the other European great powers. The fact that the Allies conquered Germany's colonies soon after World War One began should not obscure the colonies' significance in forming imperialist German identity before 1914. It was the Southwest African anti-colonial war of 1904-1907, hailed at the [End Page 68] time as the "first war of Wilhelmine Germany," which unleashed a crisis in the national identity of Germans. The brutal military repression there, as well as in Cameroon and German East Africa during the same period, shook Germans' confidence in their "cultural achievements" as colonizers. After domestic political battles over colonial policy culminated in the dissolution of the *Reichstag* in December 1906, the government pronounced a new era of reform. Brockmann's books are two examples of the hundreds of essays and books that appeared between 1907 and 1914 and offered suggestions for how the colonial order ought to be rebuilt in the aftermath of war. Such literature reveals much about nationalist German thought.

The second context-- the bourgeois women's movement-- is key because it was the venue through which women of various political persuasions defined their involvement in the colonial enterprise. By looking directly at colonialist women's literature, journalism and speech-making, we may see more clearly how patriotic German-ness was constructed differently by men and women, each of whom attached gendered qualities to true German-ness and citizenship.² In the four sections that follow, the issue of white German women's settlement in Southwest Africa serves to throw into relief conflicting views within bourgeois society of what it meant to be German.

First, I introduce the issue: why were white German women thought necessary for Southwest Africa, and what role were they to take up there? This was the "woman question in our colonies" to which Brockmann's 1910 title referred. When colonial women activists joined the discussion, they introduced issues from the bourgeois women's movement and added a new nationalist aspect to women's social role in Germany. In the second section, I situate the German woman settler within ideas about what German qualities were thought to be, and suggest how the colonial context helped shape those ideas. In the third section, we will see how internal contradictions plagued an apparently straightforward attempt on the part of the colonial administration and the German Colonial Society (*Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft*, a private colonialist organization with mostly male membership) to sponsor unmarried women's emigration from Germany to Southwest Africa. Disagreements arose when bourgeois women attempted to take their place alongside men of their own class in addressing "the woman question in the colonies."

In the fourth and final section, we will see how Brockmann's version of emancipation implicitly responded to the issues of the first three sections. Hers was a vision of highly personal, yet also impeccably patriotic, emancipation for a few unmarried German women. She placed her vision in a colonial landscape of complete freedom, where not only the ills of modern German society were absent, but also German men.

Brockmann's virulent racism has been frequently noted, but has not been considered in relation to the independent role for women she evoked.³ Powerful divisions based on the category of race were integral to her notion of white, bourgeois, German women's independence, as well as to the possibility of defining the essence of German-ness. As Brockmann situated the ideology of national identity within the colonial setting, she reworked the notion of the German woman citizen, lending it new meaning and value in the eyes of her contemporaries.

I. "The Woman Question in the Colonies"

In its earliest and simplest form, the "woman question in the colonies" was a matter of numbers of German women, and "woman" was synonymous with wife and mother. There were not enough German women in Southwest Africa to marry each German male settler. As early as 1896, men proclaimed the need for German women in the colonies. They referred to the scandalous number of German men cohabiting with African women and to the much smaller number of men who had married their African partners (Schulte-Althoff 1985:62). In 1901 the unmarried adult "white" population of Southwest Africa consisted of 1,763 men and 100 women (DKB 1902:143). Although great disparities existed in other German colonies, Southwest Africa's "woman question" was considered the most pressing case. In contrast to the trade colonies, where no lasting settlement was anticipated, colonialists wanted Southwest Africa to absorb German emigration and become "our new Germany on African soil" (Brockmann 1910:iv).

If the transplanted German society of Southwest Africa was to be *volkstümlich* (Brockmann 1912:v), i.e. a colony truly of the (German) people, then colonial Germans had to successfully prevail "racially," politically and economically over the other inhabitants. In the view of many colonialists, the German nation was fighting a two-front war for genuine mastery in Southwest Africa: against colonized Africans, as well as against other white colonizers. German women were useful, even necessary, for fighting on both fronts.

On one front, the presence of white German women was thought necessary to counteract marriages and sexual relations between German men and African women. Such familial relations posed a threat to political categories of rule in the colonies, and constituted an important aspect of the so-called "race question," i.e., the question of which form legal and other relations between colonizers and the colonized ought to take. Children of Afro-German descent represented a "danger" which had to be eradicated by leveling their legal and social status with that of "pure" Africans (Schulte-Althoff 1985:62). Because the children might occasionally claim or receive support from a German father, property and prosperity that were once purely "German" might be "lost" to a person of African ancestry. If German men married their African partners, the "loss" was even further-reaching: those women became German citizens and technically enjoyed the rights accorded to German women citizens (Fuchs 1909:40). White German women, whose rights and property were likewise mediated through German husbands (Gerhard 1988), found the possibility profoundly disturbing.

The debate in Germany over German-African marriage and family had two outcomes that are important for the discussion here. Colonialist women reinforced their ties with the bourgeois women's movement as they appealed to the rights of the white German woman citizen. Moreover, all parties in Germany who joined the **[End Page 70]** debate about the colonial sexual order consciously drew upon the notion of a racial basis of German citizenship, making manifest a concept that was usually implicit (Fuchs 1909:40; Schulte-Althoff 1985:67-68). Both men and women agreed on the "solution" of sending a larger supply of German women to Southwest Africa. Their presence, it was believed, would make German men's sexual relationships with African women "unnecessary," and would restore color as a unquestioned category of colonial rule.

On the second front of the struggle for German colonial mastery, Germans faced competition from the other colonizers of European descent in Southwest Africa. Most of these

were Boer and British settlers who had immigrated from neighboring South Africa. Each Boer- or British-owned farm or business that prospered in Southwest Africa made inroads into German culture and economic life, threatening the colony's very "German" nature (Brockmann 1910:63-64). In particular, German colonialists fretted over the influence of the Boers, whose language, customs and race, it was asserted, had a degrading effect on the cultural level of white colonizers. The permanent settlement of German women, and by implication of entire German families, was suggested as an antidote to prolific Boer families. Although opposition to British and Boer influence sought different ends than did that against Africans (i.e. Germans did not expect to turn the British or Boers into colonial subjects), the categories used to define the situation were the same: people of another culture (or race or nation--the terms were often used interchangeably) threatened the integrity of the productive, colonizing German.

The German wife's purported ability to preserve and strengthen the German race along with its language, ways and prosperity meant that she was uniquely placed to keep Southwest Africa and its property German. Clara Brockmann called on German women to join the struggle for

the prevention of mixed marriages, which spell the spiritual and economic ruin of the settler, the attainment of a profitable farming operation, which cannot reach full flourishing development without the cooperation of the housewife, and in general the incorporation (*Heimischwerden*) of German ways and customs, of German family life ... (Brockmann 1910:3)

However, not only wives and mothers were called for. Even before she married, the German woman could fill another proclaimed need in Southwest Africa, namely for servants of like "race" who could relieve German wives from the domestic grind:

[O]n isolated farms, it is undesirable that the housewife, who is needed everywhere, be hobbled to the nursery ... [That would lead to] a one-dimensional overburdening and narrow her horizons at the expense of the whole family's spiritual-intellectual (*geistige*) life. Here the dependable white female servant must assume a role. (Niessen-Deiters 1913:61-62)

The assistance of the "white female servant," it was argued, helped protect the German domestic sphere from "racial" or "cultural" contamination (Brockmann 1910:23). Colonialist women argued that if possible, Africans and above all African women ought not to work in the household. They persisted in this view even in the **[End Page 71]** face of resistance from German colonists who were unwilling to renounce the services of their African servants (Brockmann 1910:21-31 and below).

Two classes of white German woman were actually needed to establish permanent settler families: the middle-class *Farmersfrau*, and the white domestic servant who was to care for children, cook and perform other intimate domestic tasks. African servants could then be excluded from the family circle and carry out heavy housework and field labor. Brockmann and other women authors enthusiastically welcomed both groups of German woman settlers, insisting that patriotism ought to know no class bounds. The elision of the German woman-as-farmer-and-owner with the German woman-as-waged-worker remained unproblematic for women colonial activists until practical steps were taken to supply Southwest Africa with "the" German woman.

The class distinctions that were built into colonial "women's tasks" (marriage and motherhood on the one hand, paid domestic work on the other) existed in Germany too, of course. The connections women colonial activists made between colonial life and their own emancipation suggest that a key context for women's settlement in the colonies was the so-called

"woman question" in Germany. By the time of Brockmann's writing, the controversy over women's position in the family, workplace and state had led to a major debate throughout Germany and to the extensive voluntary organization of women. That organization proceeded along sharply defined class lines, and unity over issues was rare in practice. Sometimes in alliance with the Social Democratic working-class women's movement, more often in opposition to it, middle-class women activists fought for the social and political rights that spoke to their condition (Frevert 1989; Evans 1976).⁴ The relationship between the "woman question" in Germany and the "woman question in the colonies" is complex and cannot be explored fully here. It appears, however, that as middle-class women in Germany became active in the colonial movement, they reshaped colonialist men's conceptions of the "woman question in the colonies" to develop a kind of emancipating, if reactionary, vision for German women. Women authors and activists widened the scope of the "woman question in the colonies" from mundane motherhood to a cultural, social and national mission.

The way in which colonialist women envisioned that emancipation owed much to notions of gender difference current in the bourgeois women's movement. Rather than insist upon overall equality with men, the bourgeois women's movement sought to lend new social importance to commonly-accepted bourgeois feminine qualities. German feminists transposed their own "domestic" realm onto the "social" realm and claimed a special ability in fields which seemed amenable to feminine empathy, such as social work, the teaching of girls, and medical care for women.

The exact content of women's special qualities was apparently difficult to define. Summing up texts from the bourgeois women's movement, one historian has concluded:

The concept of feminine culture was not defined in terms of ends that were fundamentally different from men's. It was not what was done that was decisive, but rather how something was done. The feminine [End Page 72] principle was realized in a unique attitude toward things (Greven-Aschoff 1981:42).

The same could be said for colonialists' efforts to define the content of German-ness. Brockmann and other colonialist authors insisted that true Germans embodied certain qualities or attitudes which permeated all realms of activity, however mundane. Colonialist women authors made use of both femininity and German-ness as they defined their own unique niche in strengthening *Deutschtum* (a word signifying both the quality of being German, and the German community in any region of multiple nationalities). Life in Southwest Africa, away from the petty class and party enmities of Germany, permitted that essence of German-ness to be lived to the fullest.

II. Nationalist Identities and Southwest Africa: Pure German-ness in Pure Colonial Space

After four years in the colony Brockmann returned to Germany. There, she felt "a deep longing for Southwest Africa, for the land of purity, peace, and strength" (Brockmann 1910:65, emphasis in original). In her view, even Southwest Africa's reputation as a gathering place for swindlers and other unsavory types could never taint its purity. "The land is not at fault. It is only the people who go there, who bring their sin and guilt with them" (Brockmann 1910:53, emphasis in original). What difference did the setting of a "pure" Southwest Africa make to definitions of German nationalist identity?

Frequent references to the purity and freedom of Southwest Africa helped support a number of colonialist claims: that economic performance was a direct measure of one's labor and

virtue; that social ills had no place in the colony; and that a strong community of purpose among true Germans occurred naturally there. The colonial German community could develop in clear contradistinction to others whose "natural" differences were described as racial and moral. The pure and free colonial landscape was a perfect ideological backdrop for elaborating upon "German" virtues of hard work and thoroughness.

The principle that prosperity and success evinced true German-ness worked not only as a positive colonial dream, but also as an exclusive strategy which defined failure as outside the true German community. Colonialists constantly reiterated distinctions of class and race not only with respect to the colonized Africans but also with respect to German colonizers. The imperial and colonial governments as well as private colonialist groups wished to prevent the formation of a colonial white proletariat. To this end, the state discriminated among potential German settlers on the basis of personal wealth: Togo, Cameroon, Samoa and Southwest Africa required proof of a job contract or cash in escrow from Germans entering those colonies. Destitute Germans risked expulsion back to Germany (DKH:10-11, 18-19, 34, 39).⁵ In contemporary Germany, labor and class injustices had become such highly-charged issues that pre-World War I Europe's largest Marxist working-class movement formed there. Yet in the far-away context of Southwest Africa, colonialists were able to argue that social discrimination among Germans was [End Page 73] necessary, both to preserve Africans' "respect" for the colonizers and to ensure the colony's economic future.

Colonialists frequently used the racial expressions *verburen* and *verkaffern* to describe German farmers who failed in various ways to embody the ideal colonizer and culture-bearer. The expressions may be translated as "to degenerate into a Boer" or "into an African" and are analogous to the English phrase "going native." The "degeneration" could reveal itself through social choices, for example if a German neglected to socialize with other Germans or lived with an African woman. Some fell prey to economic "degeneration," for example by adopting extensive, low capital-intensive cattle ranching (known as Boer ranching, it was originally an African method). Such cattle operations offended colonialists' notions of a properly bounded, neatly kept and bustling German farm. The expressions *verburen* and *verkaffern* typify colonialists' attempts to align economic characteristics with a person's color, culture, race, or nation--the categories with which colonialists defined the individual. In contrast to such "degenerate" Germans, those farmers who combined economic prosperity and cultural self-consciousness could be defined as truer or purer Germans.

Just as the colonial setting threw into relief "true" German virtues, so did it also emphasize "true" German feminine virtues in colonialist women's writings. Given the history of German women's scarcity in Southwest Africa, women authors were able to depict the impact of German women's arrival in dramatic fashion. A ubiquitous anecdote was the transformation of a messy bachelor farmer's house into a thrifty, spotless home, at the hands of his newly-arrived German bride (e.g. Brockmann 1910:5-6). "Natural" differences between German men and women, such as housekeeping ability, emerged sharply in the women's writings. Colonialist women authors assigned the German woman settler a key role in the creation of postwar colonial prosperity and success.

In defining a certain irreplaceable quality of German women's work, the women authors created a new colonial niche for unmarried as well as married German women. "Pure" colonial space focused attention on the essential qualities of German women's work, whether it was done for a husband or for an employer. The attention to both groups of women *qua* women and not as potential wives or mothers lay the basis for a redefinition of the "woman question in the

colonies." By placing such high value on women's work, women authors assigned cultural and national, rather than just sexual or maternal, importance to women's presence in Southwest Africa.

The praise colonialist women lavished on women's colonial work contrasted sharply with their descriptions of African women's work. Indeed, the German woman's arrival meant the exclusion of the African woman from the household's most intimate spheres - a basic part of putting the bachelor's house "in order." Both German women and men attempted to exclude African women from familial and near-familial positions. The ideological process behind those attempts was far more knotty for German women than for German men, however. German women settlers confronted colonial households in which African women were already performing German women's usual productive and reproductive tasks, as servants, concubines and (rarely) wives. Unlike German men, colonialist women felt they had **[End Page 74]** to justify their presence in the colony, and they did so by opposing their own domestic and feminine qualities to those of "the native woman." This took extreme and caricatured forms: where German women were presented as cultured, thorough at work, and as raising healthy families, African women were depicted as barbaric, careless, and the mothers of flawed children. Although the African women whom Brockmann encountered came from a wide variety of class backgrounds and language-groups, she represented them all as uniformly undependable and ineducable (Brockmann 1910:25-27; Brockmann 1912:102-114).

Once colonialist women had "proven" that African women could not be "real" housewives or mothers for German men, nor "dependable" servants for German households, they had created a niche for both classes of German woman settler: the unmarried servant as well as the married Farmersfrau. By claiming that African woman lacked true affect and culture, German women lent their own work, paid or unpaid, new cultural and patriotic importance.

The unmarried German woman nevertheless occupied an odd place in the colonial hierarchy of property and authority, especially given the contemporary bourgeois ideology which defined women in terms of their relations to men. Yet the category of race and an unimpeachable nationalist mission smoothed over the awkwardness. In the following example the reader can see what difference the colonial setting made in defining German women's paid work.

... the position [of the women servants] is more privileged in every way over the one they held in Germany; due to having the same race, the employer holds the German girl above the native servants. Indeed, tact and skill is necessary to place oneself at the proper level, one which signifies on the one hand dependence on the family and on the other, superiority over the colored subordinates. (Brockmann 1910:30)

Difference from and superiority to the other working women in the household, defined in terms of race, elevated the German woman servant's status. At the same time, "having the same [German] race" helped resolve the white female servant's ambivalent position into one of friendship and a kind of equality with her middleclass employers:

If a maid or housekeeper comes to a farm ... it is her responsibility to make herself indispensable to the young farmer's wife and to move from the status of paid worker to that of a friend and companion [for the farmer's wife]. (Brockmann 1910:30-31)

In the colonial setting, the idea of a common German race (or culture or nation) served to blur class boundaries between women workers and women employers: both were colonizers. By presenting the running of a household and child care as matters of an exclusive German women's

culture, Brockmann elided paid with unpaid "women's work." In a quite subtle way, such writings by German women moved German men off the nationalist center stage: German women performed invaluable cultural tasks, regardless of the position they held with respect to German men.

Colonialist women combined their claims to "racial" and class superiority with current notions of women's especially close bonds to culture. It was German women [End Page 75] who were necessary for the building of truly German families, "German" not only by color but also by the supposed marks of thrift and energy (Brockmann 1910:3-6). In so describing the irreplaceable cultural role of women, colonialist authors such as Brockmann cast women as the saviors of *Deutschtum*. In their writings, German women became self-sufficient cultural actors, uniquely able both to embody and to perpetuate German-ness.

The set of feminine national virtues outlined above had both repressive and emancipatory aspects. In Brockmann's hands, feminine cultural self-sufficiency was the key to complete personal emancipation. She did not reach that conclusion by a direct path, however. The ideal of a patriotic colonialist woman bore elements of bourgeois ideology which simultaneously attracted and constricted colonialist women: for example, the premises of economic independence and sexual virtue. If a woman was not financially secure, she was sexually vulnerable. The German woman's sexual virtue constituted her racial and therefore national value, in a quite gender-specific manner. A German woman who betrayed her "race" was useless to her nation, to the colony, and to German men. The colonial woman was held to a standard of "race purity" (Niessen-Deiters 1912: 1) which, as everyone knew, German men had failed to meet from the beginning.

Lurking beneath the discussion's surface was the knowledge-- troubling for German women-- that it was actually German men's sexual behavior which constituted the "woman question in the colonies." Colonialist women authors, including Brockmann, negotiated the emancipatory and repressive aspects of the colonialist woman's situation by evading the issue of German men and their sexual behavior. Instead, they focused on the economic and patriotic (not just sexual) importance of German women in Southwest Africa, and placed women at the center of the "woman question in the colonies." Colonialist women authors used the colonial context to reformulate women's place in German society at one remove from reality, just as colonialist authors in general constructed fables of a truer German-ness against the backdrop of putative colonial freedom. The figure of the productive nationalist colonial woman was capable of negotiating the contradictions between the bourgeois woman and work, marriage and independence, private family life and public patriotic citizen. Let us see how the conceptions outlined so far were first put into practice.

III. A Practical "Solution" to the "Woman Question in the Colonies"

Alone among the German colonies, Southwest Africa was the object of a specific program to send single German women to marry German settlers. The German Colonial Society and Southwest Africa's Governor Theodor Leutwein organized the program in 1897, and sent the first sixteen sponsored women in 1898 (VR 899:1471,1473). The women received free passage to Southwest Africa, where they took arranged contractual jobs as domestic servants. When the German Colonial Society requested a state subsidy for the program in 1899, the whole undertaking came under the scrutiny of the *Reichstag*. In the plenary discussion, objections [End

Page 76] focused on the contract's draconian provisions: a woman had to perform whatever tasks her employer assigned, whether they were normally seen as servant's duties or not, and if she were able to convince the colonial governor to terminate her position with her employer, she was then obliged to accept whatever work the governor saw fit to offer her (RKA 1907-1930:6). *Reichstag* members were especially disturbed that no arrangements had been made for a paid return trip to Germany if she decided not to stay. As the leading Social Democrat August Bebel exclaimed, even contracts for "coolie" labor required money to be placed in escrow for the worker's return trip (VR 1899:1475). The *Reichstag* refused the subsidy.

The Colonial Society, which had drafted the contract, saw things quite differently. The premises underlying their effort to solve the "woman question in the colonies" became clear in the *Reichstag* debate. One defender of the scheme retorted: "The guarantee of a return trip was left out of the contract on purpose, in order to avoid abetting the fickleness (Wankelmuth) of the women" (VR 1899:1473). Another protested against taking the contract too seriously:

Gentlemen, the point of the whole matter is not to send servant girls to Southwest Africa, but rather to found German families there, and this whole contractual relationship is just a transitional stage. (VR 1899:1476)

Clearly, the women were to be kept under pressure to marry. The Colonial Society and Governor Leutwein were not interested in improving the conditions of women's employment. In fact, they had firmly opposed the suggestions of certain educated, middle-class Berlin women who had also shown interest in solving the "woman question in the colonies" (VR 1899:1471,1473).

These women, including Minna Cauer, Anna Pappritz and others from the women's organization "*Frauenwohl*," had drafted an alternative contract which provided more protection of the sponsored servants' rights and requested that job opportunities other than domestic service be developed. Female teachers, nurses and agriculturalists (*Landwirtinnen*) were surely also needed for the colony's growth (RKA 1907-1930:5). In fact, the women's suggestions led to the first confrontation between men and women over how to put into practice the "solution" of sending German women to Southwest Africa.

The Colonial Society flatly dismissed the suggestions and continued to send women under the exploitative contract. Yet the women had wedged their foot in the door. The issues they raised concerning better working conditions and career possibilities for educated (*gebildete*) women reappeared later and provided the basis for an ideal of the independent woman farmer.

Within a decade much had changed in the German colonial empire. Scandals and costly wars, above all the Southwest African war of 1904-1907, had exposed and shaken German colonialism. They caused a deadlock in the *Reichstag* over colonial budget appropriations, whereupon Chancellor Bulow dissolved parliament and called for new elections in 1907. In the election campaigns, the colonial issue symbolized "patriotic" opposition to Social Democracy and its allies. Although the "patriotic" parties and the colonialists emerged victorious, popular support for colonialism now **[End Page 77]** depended on conspicuous reform efforts. The domestication of Germany's settlement colony was in order, and in this context the "woman question" arose again. Both men and women in the colonialist movement believed that the presence of women in Southwest Africa would promote the peaceful long-term development that was to follow the era of adventure and war. Between 1907 and 1914, as in 1898, German men's "need" for German wives justified women's participation in colonial activities (insofar as they were not missionaries or nurses). Likewise, middle-class women again questioned a colonial role which limited them to marriage and motherhood.

In 1906 and 1907 a group of aristocratic army officers' wives based in Berlin convinced the German Colonial Society that women ought to be in charge of choosing suitable wives for colonists. The women referred to prevailing notions of difference to insist that women were best suited to choose and guide other women. The result was the Women's Association of the German Colonial Society (*Frauenbund der Deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft*), which officially took over the task of organizing single German women's emigration to Southwest Africa (Pierard 1971; Chickering 1988:175-177). The goal of the *Frauenbund* was "above all to preserve and strengthen the spiritual and intellectual (*geistigen*) bonds between the women in the Motherland and the women struggling for their culture (*Kulturkiimpferinnen*) in the colonies" (Brockmann 1910:29). The new organization worked to mobilize and educate women in Germany about the colonies as well as to assist German women settlers. The *Frauenbund* attracted a variety of women and men: people who had lived in the colonies and were interested in all aspects of colonial policy; the women from "*Frauenwohl*" mentioned above, who advocated suffrage and an increased public role for women; conservative middle-class women who opposed women's political emancipation but saw here a feminine patriotic duty; and eugenicists who were attracted by an organization that fought "race-mixing" with its own selection procedures.

The issue of selecting which German women ought to be sent to the colonies was central to the whole undertaking of the *Frauenbund*. In trying to define the right combination of gender and class attributes, colonialist women reflected their own social dilemmas and class origins. The applicants tended to be working-class and petite-bourgeoise women, yet the *Frauenbund* wished to sponsor women in its own bourgeois image. The *Frauenbund* eventually collided with the existing selection practices of the German Colonial Society. The Colonial Society thought that country women and seasoned servants were best suited to the physical trials of colonial life. It had gladly sponsored peasant and working-class women, who in fact were willing to emigrate, marry promptly and start families. But for the middle-class colonialist women in the *Frauenbund*, being white and eager to emigrate and marry was not sufficient to ensure that a woman was fit to represent the German nation and save the colonies. Looking back at the German Colonial Society's program, Brockmann reproached the men for their superficial selection criteria:

Due to the need for rapid settlement and the scarcity of candidates, young women were sent over who turned out not to be equal to the challenges of their new surroundings. Since they had come with the best [End Page 78] recommendations, no one had any cause to doubt that characters which had proven themselves in Germany could not also stand a trial by fire across the ocean in Africa. Nor could the German Colonial Society read the human heart (Brockmann 1910:21-22).

The problem, it seems, was that these women enjoyed too much upward mobility and became selfish. Brockmann continued:

The awareness of being joyfully awaited in the colony, where at that time [German] women were quite rare, inflated their sense of self-worth from the beginning ... simple country girls tried to play the lady; in the shortest time many became soldiers' brides and in no way served their original purpose, namely to be skillful and industrious domestic help. Some married very quickly and played the parvenu's spouse in a pushy manner, others let themselves go and worked as barmaids and in doubtful trades (Brockmann 1910:22).

According to Brockmann, the Colonial Society had created a class of nouveau-riche women in the colony who did not know their place. She and the colonialist women of the *Frauenbund* asserted that the "good woman material" (Brockmann 1910:30) Southwest Africa so badly

needed was better found among women of some education, who held fast to middle-class life and values. In order to attract such women, job opportunities such as teaching, secretarial work, nursing and certified housekeeping ought to be promoted in Southwest Africa. Even if women with certified training cost more to hire, they would repay their employers with higher quality work and provide cultured company for wives on lonely farms. Brockmann conceded that the qualities of a *gebildete* woman did not always find ready takers: "With a servant girl, one pays for physical work, as opposed to talent or intellectual and social skills; the latter are more difficult to turn into money" (Brockmann 1910:32).

Of course, no colonialist man would have objected to sponsoring educated, conscientious German women as future wives for German settlers. After all, colonialists did not want "low-class" Germans in the colony, since that might call into question European cultural superiority. Yet to be the wife of a simple German settler seemed respectable enough to the men; they were blind to any finer class distinctions among German women. In the men's view, the "woman question in the colonies" was confirmed to the need for German women to marry in Southwest Africa and have children. The colonialist women's verbiage about the need to send educated women frustrated the men, and this issue as well as other rivalries strained the relationship between the two organizations (Chickering 1988:181-183).

In part, the disagreements between the men and women derived from divergent conceptions of the colonial woman: as bourgeois individual and as bourgeois wife and mother. In the colonial setting, the individual was the free and independent settler; he-- or she, as Brockmann would have it-- was one of the most powerfully attractive images of colonialism in Germany and other European states. By contrast, a wife and mother derived her status merely from assisting her husband. The women of the *Frauenbund* envisaged an independent colonial woman with her own skills [End Page 79] and education, and in so doing they developed a distinctly middle-class notion with strong moral and patriotic overtones.

One reason for the men's blindness may well have been the fact that in any dispute between colonialist women and men, an uncomfortable truth remained: German women were officially desirable in Southwest Africa not for their talents or intellect, but for their ability to supply the German settlers with "white" German babies. The patriotic and ambitious plans of a Clara Brockmann or Minna Cauer to carve out a heroic national role for women in Southwest Africa always threatened to collapse into men's ungracious version of the situation, as illustrated by a brief citation from the *Reichstag* debates:

[The German woman] is the best export item we could possibly have (Laughter.) -- not that I would want to do without the women here (Laughter.) but rather because I heartily welcome the men out there to share the pleasure. (Laughter.) I believe that it is a duty of the *Reichstag* to thank; the private men's and women's organizations in Germany that have done so much for this great task ... (Hear, hear!) ... (VR 1913:4358)

Colonialist women were vulnerable to such humor precisely because they did share the men's assumptions. They too believed that sexual relationships between African women and German men constituted a problem, and that the opportunity to marry German women would satisfy the male settlers' sexual desires. When colonialist women accepted such a supply-and-demand view of sexual unions in Southwest Africa, they in fact conceded that their bodies were their key contribution to the colony and that they were interchangeable with, and therefore in some sense equivalent to, African women. It was difficult to reconcile the acceptance of the "woman question in the colonies" as a matter of supplying German women to male settlers with the ideal

of the educated woman patriot that Brockmann and other women in the *Frauenbund* put forth. One woman at a public rally in Germany put her finger on the difficulty when she asked why a German woman of the finest patriotic and moral type should be sent off into the desert to be a "broodmare" (Niessen-Deiters 1913:24-25).

Nevertheless, putting middle-class women in charge of the emigration program resulted in a shift in emphasis from women settlers' sexual function to their qualities as citizens, patriots, and cultural and economic actors in their own right. The actual realization of the independent type of colonial woman was fraught with difficulties, above all the lack of appropriately middle-class "women's work" in Southwest Africa. Typical of the obstacles facing the *Frauenbund* was the German settlers' hasty withdrawal of employment offers after they heard that the sponsored women held certification and were therefore entitled to higher wages (RKA 1907-1930:27). The colonial government rebuked the *Frauenbund* for driving up labor prices in the colony. Another example was a kindergarten started by the *Frauenbund* and the Evangelical Church. It languished for years because German settlers preferred to leave their children with their African servants, "refusing to recognize the danger of constant contact between the children and natives" (*Kolonie und Heimal* 1911- [End Page 80] 1912:8). The ideals of the middle-class women in Germany did not necessarily correspond to the realities of life in Southwest Africa.

Given the complications of fitting the German women into the colonizing enterprise, certain aspects of Brockmann's writings take on new meaning. We have already seen how she blurred class boundaries between the unmarried working woman and the married, landowning *Farmersfrau*. The next and final section shows how Brockmann took the *Frauenbund's* ideas about sending women able to support themselves to their logical conclusion. In so doing, Brockmann implicitly contradicted the original justification for sending women: to supply German men with brides and mothers.

IV. Clara Brockmann and the Ideal of the Independent Woman Farmer

The image of the self-sufficient colonial farm held a certain mystique in colonialist politics and ideology. Thought to be a bastion of native German virtue, free of the clashes of modern industrial society, the farm symbolized German cultural renewal (Smith 1986:21-29). One material result of the nationalist fascination with the farm was the Colonial Office's practice of subsidizing settlers who wanted to establish small farms of their own. In Brockmann's interpretation of the farm's mystique, she united economic production with family reproduction, thereby dissolving the conventional boundaries between women's domestic reproduction and men's public production. She fused classical bourgeois-liberal values of freedom, prosperity, and patriotism with the domestic and reproductive spheres where contemporary German women were ideologically located. As Brockmann recounted how two women friends seized the colonial dream of becoming independent farmers, men appear increasingly superfluous to women's life in Southwest Africa.

One way Brockmann moved men off the colonial center stage was by insisting that the rigors of colonial life meant women could and indeed had to be able to do all the farming tasks a man did. By virtue of necessity, then, the traditional spheres of men's and women's activity became parallel rather than separate. For example, Brockmann had this praise for a farmer's wife:

I recall a *Farmersfrau* of whom was said that she rode with the others into the fields like a man to oversee her workers. We need such women for Southwest" (Brockmann 1910:8).

The story of a female farm worker who befriended Brockmann served as Brockmann's fable of success in Southwest Africa. Brockmann assured her audience that this woman "certainly performed as well as her [male] predecessor" at her job (Brockmann 1910:37). Brockmann observed her at work:

firing clay tiles with her own hands, and nailing corrugated tin sheets securely onto the roof of a stable she had built herself .. in time she developed considerable facility in building corrals, driving cattle and building darns (Brockmann 1910:36-37).

Given such female self-sufficiency, it was a short step to a farming career without a man. Brockmann declared: **[End Page 81]**

We live in the age of progress. A few years ago it was a great and astonishing enterprise if a girl decided to follow the man of her choice to Africa ... today it hardly seems daring when a lady of mature character and some experience undertakes on her own initiative to create a position for herself there (Brockmann 1910:36).

Brockmann's own anecdotes reveal, however, that women doing farm work did astonish many people. Brockmann herself was astonished when she first discovered that her friend was a farm worker:

I made her acquaintance at a ball given by the Governor and remembered her as tender, shy creature in a white cotton dress. How surprised I was when someone later told me he had come across her wearing short riding pants and a floppy hat, smoking tobacco out of a short pipe while driving her cattle from one station to the next (Brockmann 1910:38).⁶

The friend confided to Brockmann that her choice of farm work did not find ready acceptance. She said:

I know that my relatives think I am an oddball. If I wrote home for ribbons, clothes and expensive soaps, they would send me all of it immediately. But if I ask for shovels, scales and mechanical implements, I meet resistance and prejudice .. .' (Brockmann 1910:40).

The goal of the woman's "step towards independence" was to own her own self-sufficient farm (Brockmann 1910:37). She even insisted that the state help her to achieve her dream, applying to the Colonial Office for a farm subsidy. Brockmann described the woman's reasoning:

every man who applied was sold land; often he was from the city and had no experience with agriculture. Why shouldn't the government give a woman a farm or a cottage, if she could prove that she knew rationalized agricultural methods? (Brockmann 1910:37)

She apparently hoped that in Southwest Africa, her education and ability would prevail over prejudice against single women as farmers. Brockmann noted: "In Germany people will shake their heads and say that a girl who decides to do men's work is overestimating her own abilities" (Brockmann 1912:87). Brockmann's friend sought the freedom in Southwest Africa to pursue her own career that Germany denied her. When Brockmann asked her why she came to Africa, she answered: "I just don't fit into the narrow ways of Germany, where people treat every deviation from the norm like a crazy idea. My motto is to struggle and work in Southwest, the land of freedom" (Brockmann 1910:40).

The woman fully expected to make a place for herself as a farmer without a husband, and shared her plans with another woman who had the same ambitions. Brockmann thought their dream was certain to be realized:

After some time she met her better self, her other half. It was a lady, roughly the same age as she, who had come to Africa with the same plan ... The two were united in their favorite idea: the wish to own a farm. I believe the time is not far off when the two, peacefully united, will stand on their very own jointly-owned land (Brockmann 191 0:40). **[End Page 82]**

Brockmann's friends and Brockmann herself used their middle-class status and skills to pursue farm life. All three were educated and held well-paid white-collar jobs in Windhuk, the capital of Southwest Africa. Teaching and administrative positions for educated women were a rarity in the colonies, yet they dreamed constantly of living on their own farm and producing for all their own needs. The women had only taken those positions in order to attain the goal of owning a farm . Both of Brockmann's friends preferred to work as hired farm hands, but such work was a luxury they could not always afford.

Brockmann's independent-minded friend had been a teacher back in Germany (Brockmann 1910:36). When she first arrived in Southwest Africa, she worked as an agricultural overseer to gain experience, and bought livestock and farm equipment for herself on the side. However, she was unable to save money for her farm quickly enough that way, so she reverted to teaching . After she had purchased some acreage with a house and added a barn herself, she still needed a "steady income" (Brockmann 1910:38) to run it, so she took a government position. After each day at the office, her African driver came to fetch her back to her farm in her American car. Her companion had also taken a paid agricultural position upon arriving in Southwest Africa and started buying cattle. She had likewise switched to the higher salary of an office job, and augmented her income by managing the household of a high-level civil servant. All the while, she boarded her growing livestock herd at various farms.

Brockmann appears to have been the wealthiest of the three. She worked as a civil servant in the capital, Windhuk, and lived on a "homestead" outside of town. She was proud of her little farm's capability to produce for almost all its own needs. Each year she paid more than 1200 marks for the rent alone-- as much as a housekeeper's or nanny's entire salary for the same period (Brockmann 1910:31 ,42,44). Her friends savored with her the view from the veranda, and together they rode horses across the moonlit plains. Such were Brockmann's most treasured moments in Africa (Brockmann 1912:45-46). Brockmann did not appreciate wealth for its own sake, but rather for the freedom it allowed her. Being able to ignore worldly goods meant freedom and independence to her. Upon finding diamonds in the desert sand, she imagined the scenes the gems would witness:

Struggles, tears, kisses- what else is a woman anyway? [Diamonds] leave me cold ... but my poor foolish sisters ... hurl themselves into misery and unhappiness- all for [diamonds'] sake! (Brockmann 1912:178).

She threw the diamonds back into the sand, as she proudly noted; her own security and career allowed her to escape the confines of conventional feminine dependency that came with marriage.

The dream of farm ownership in Southwest Africa became a reality for only very few women. The first real-life independent women farmers were widows whose husbands had been killed in the colonial war of 1904-1907. Brockmann cited their achievements as proof that

women were capable of running farms alone (Brockmann 1912:66-67,88). In fact, widows remained virtually the only unmarried women farmers before World War I.⁷ While colonial widows obviously did make their own choice to carry on farming after their husbands' deaths, such a choice must be seen at **[End Page 83]** least in part as a matter of following in their husbands' footsteps, rather than as the creation of a new way of life in Brockmann's sense.

The independent woman farmer, whether on paper or in the flesh, was certainly unusual. In fact, most women in Germany who joined the *Frauenbund* and read Brockmann's books apparently did not even consider going to Africa themselves, much less becoming women farmers. Theirs was a vicarious experience of empire. They found not only fantasies of independence and power in Brockmann's passionate descriptions, but also confirmation of ideas that were quite conventional, at least by the standards of the colonial movement. Brockmann's strong nationalism and middle-class values, even many of her turns of phrase, were part of a well-established colonialist idiom. Such qualities were apparently even more important to emphasize in the case of women than men: patriotism legitimized women's independent colonial undertakings, while financial security protected their sexual and moral integrity. Moreover, while German women's "cultural tasks on the dark continent" (Brockmann 1912:85) focused largely on their families and by extension the German community, Brockmann also cited the ubiquitous justification of colonialism: "to help raise and educate a primitive people (*Naturvolk*)" (Brockmann 1912:86).

Brockmann's latter remark brings us back to the central role of "race" in her ideal of the independent woman farmer. Whether as *Farmersfrau* or as a female agricultural intern (*weibliche Farmvolontär*), German women supervised the African women and men in their employment. The German woman settler's task was to "raise" (*erziehen*) Africans to accept orders from Europeans. Brockmann listed among the qualifications of her two friends "ability and experience in the handling of their natives" (Brockmann 1912:87). Brockmann's harsh racism helped place women in the colony's top social position of successful German farm owner and employer with broad powers over her African employees. Brockmann focused on control over African women and men workers to the exclusion of another issue: German men's marital and sexual relations with African women. The subject raised another issue whose direct discussion was even more difficult for colonialist women: the asymmetrical power relations inherent in marriage between German men and German women. Brockmann implicitly raised questions concerning women's emancipation, then offered an imaginary solution to women in Germany: to leave Germany and its internecine political battles, and to reenact in the colonies the hierarchical power relations between German men and women in terms of the "natural" divisions of "race." Women's agitation for political rights and for greater authority in social work- two preoccupations of the women's movement- - had to be elevated from the petty and divided domestic arena to the colonial realm, where a unified purpose supposedly existed. Brockmann assured her women readers that "The tasks that await you here are certainly more beautiful and noble than all the petty party bickering that some women push into, trying to force their way into illegitimate influence" (Brockmann 1910:64-65). She emphasized that women in Germany could and ought to join in the work of supporting the colonies, whether or not they would ever actually go to Africa (Brockmann 1910:63-66; Brockmann 1912:94). Through the ideological possibilities of nationalism and **[End Page 84]** colonialism, Brockmann indicated a path of public and personal fulfillment for the middle-class woman that did not necessarily rest on the mediation of a husband. Instead, "the love for her fatherland, which never disappoints" would reward her efforts (Brockmann 1912:93-94).

German women had two irreplaceable qualities that the colonial administration, the German Colonial Society, and the "Fatherland" desired: maternity and whiteness. Brockmann apparently did not find maternity liberating, but she did find her "white race" a key to freedom- a freedom that coincided with rather than opposed national goals. The tensions between the contemporary movement for middle-class women's emancipation and conservative views of women's social place shaped women's colonialist activities in Germany. In the colonies, where one's "race" proved one's membership in the nation, reconciliation was possible: there, a woman could serve herself and her nation. Whether as mother or as educated career women, she (and not the African woman, regardless of the latter's relation to a German man) was the German woman citizen. In spite of loneliness and lack of understanding from others, Brockmann saw both patriotic and liberating rewards in becoming an independent woman farmer:

To be a fighter for Germany's greatness - is there anything more brilliant (*Lichtvolleres*) than this consolation? And once she has prevailed, a new life full of beauty, work and gratitude will lie before her. She is the victor! (Brockmann 1912:94).

Back in Germany, Brockmann walked through the city of Hamburg and pondered the relationship between her life in far-away Southwest Africa and in Germany. She closed by saying of the diamonds, moonlight, and the African people: "it was a dream" (Brockmann 1912:220). Secure and proud in the knowledge of having served Germany through her travels and writings, the "dream" had made possible her invention of herself as the patriotic German woman citizen.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank the outside reader for very thoughtful comments, which I have drawn upon here.

Notes

1. In this article, I draw upon Brockmann's writings to support many of my statements. However, my theses are based on a wide reading of material on all the German colonies. For the sake of simplicity, I do not list additional sources here. A fully-referenced analysis of the issues presented here will be available in my dissertation.
2. Here I use "colonialist" to refer to persons who lived and worked in Germany, and actively promoted the colonies' development in the German public sphere. Some colonialists, like Brockmann, traveled to the colonies and even worked there; many never did. The term "colonialist" is meant to distinguish such organizers and activists from an overlapping group of "colonists," i.e. those Germans who settled permanently in the colonies and may or may not have been politically active.
3. Among recent scholarship making reference to Brockmann's books, see Sadjı 1985 and 1986, and Benninghoff-Liihl 1983.
4. Typical of the efforts of bourgeois women to distinguish their emancipatory struggle from that of "unpatriotic" Social Democratic women was the claim made by the pro-colonial journalist Leonore Niessen-Deiters: if women who were fighting for rights also demonstrated their nationalism by supporting the colonies, they could shield themselves from the common "suspicion of undermining the state (*Staatsfeindlichkeit*)" (Niessen-Deiters 1913:295). *Staatsfeindlichkeit* was the standard accusation made against Social Democrats.
5. On the question of a white proletariat in Southwest Africa, see Bley 1968:76. Stoler 1989 offers a discussion of race and class boundaries in other European colonial empires.

6. Benninghoff-Lühl's interpretation of this passage misses the mark: "The price for [women farmers'] self-confident behavior was loss of classically feminine attractiveness" (Benninghoff-Lühl 1983:278 n. 93).
7. Their number was few: in one 1913 colonial directory, only thirteen unmarried women listed themselves as "*Farmbesitzerin*" or "*Farmerin*." Twelve of the thirteen were widows (Schulze 1913:65-209).

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