

Colonial Intimacies: Constellations of Property and Kinship in German Colonial (After)Lives

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Abstract

This paper contends that relations of property and propriety of “western modernity” engender and articulate different forms of violence, crucially including sexualised violence. Upholding anti-colonial feminist approaches, this paper takes seriously the need to trace how modern ways of relating are intimately connected to colonial modes of dispossession and propertisation. Therefore, I draw on historical resources and present a constellation history with fragments from relations of intimacy in German colonial rule. This shows how hegemonic family relations and marriage laws were used to control access to land and resources, as well as workers and their bodies. Logics of imperial intervention in sexuality and the use of sexualised violence extend beyond this specific spatio-temporal context into the present. This highlights how categories of race, gender and sexuality develop with, through and for proprietary relations. The ambiguous role of white women vis-à-vis colonial relations of ownership reinforces a critique of limited approaches of liberal feminism and stresses the importance of anti-colonial organizing against violence.

KEYWORDS: modern property, German colonialism, family relations, gendered violence, racialised sexualities, propriety

On March 8, 2021, international women's day, or feminist fight/strike day as some activists have recently called it, about 15 000 – 20 000 women (cis and trans), non-binary and gender non-conforming people and trans men, marched through the streets of central Berlin. The protest had been organized by the *alliance of internationalist feminist*s*, an alliance of explicitly anti-racist and anti-colonial feminist groups and individuals. The route through the centre of Berlin had been carefully chosen. Starting at the European Commission, it also stopped at the Pergamon Museum, the newly built Humboldt Forum and the Foreign Office. The visit to the European Commission, for example, served to highlight Europe's violent border regime. Activists point to the concurrence of that violence with the European Union's proclaimed values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, rule of law and human rights. The Humboldt Forum within the reconstructed *Berliner Stadtschloss*, the old Prussian Palace, now hosts ethnological collections plundered by European empires. According to official statements, it is supposed to 'present the cultures of the world', to 'help better understand the world of yesterday, today and tomorrow'¹. Only completed and opened in 2021, it carries a huge cross on its dome with the large golden inscription 'that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth'². Against this backdrop, the feminist demonstration moved determinedly from one place to the next linking histories and presents of state, economic, scientific, and cultural violence to gender violence, and the fight for gender and sexual liberation.

I want to unpack the intimate connections brought out by this kind of feminist organizing against gendered violence. Anti-/decolonial feminist theory and practice emphasises the continuity between different forms of violence including capitalist expropriation, militarisation and coloniality. 'What do discussions about abuse, rape or femicides today have to do with reinvigorated representations of Germany's imperial past?', one might ask. To me, this functions as more of a rhetorical question. Yet, within much of dominant discourse, such questions are often

asked not only out of honest curiosity, but to cast doubt on the connections that are being made. Common responses to gender violence often shy away from bringing together different transnational and historical social structures. Instead, they separate and individualize the issue, seeking solutions within the bounds of the current political and legal system. Prevailing responses stress individualized responsibility, the safety of the private, salvation through progress with and by the criminal justice system and bordering practices.³ Whilst motivated by a frustration with these dominant contemporary approaches, for this paper, I am not so interested in another in-depth critique of their dynamics. Rather, I gather a specific constellation history of emerging violent relations. This shows the specific backdrop against which different mobilisations against violence exist today. This configuration is built from stories from the context of intimate and familial life in German colonialism. Together, they portray the racialising, gendering and sexualising processes of dispossession and propertisation of land and people(s). The stories illuminate how property, more precisely the specific way property functions in "modern" societies, ties issues together over time and space, and thereby also enables, and congeals, certain forms of violent continuities. Put differently, I highlight the relevance of the colonial context for the co-emergence of capitalist property relations and social and intimate relations that are racialised, gendered and sexualised in a particular way. These excursions also showcase the harm of white and liberal feminisms and add to anti- and decolonial feminist critiques.

I join anti- and decolonial scholars in stressing the colonial relations underpinning capitalist development and the continuity of coloniality.⁴ In the context of colonial dispossession and propertisation we can see the far-reaching impact of the constitution of specific ownership relations on all social relations. At the same time, long-term appropriation of land and bodies is only made possible by manifesting specific exclusive relations of gender, race, and sexuality (as well as other categories of exclusion, separation

and exploitation). More specifically, this project follows Brenna Bhandar's (2018) work on the racialising properties of British colonial (property) law. Her research shows how the colonial appropriation of land has been dependent on the marking of certain ontological qualities of the human and vice versa (ibid, 171). In other words, under the framework of liberal modernity, capitalist property relations co-emerge with specific subjectivities ordered according to racial (and other) categories. I explicate this further with a focus on gendered and sexualised relations and the forming role of legal and social interventions in kinship relations, sexualised violence and the patriarchal family. In settler colonial contexts, marriage, inheritance and guardianship laws were used to control access to land and resources, as well as workers and their bodies. These practices and laws constituting ownership were not only racial but racialising, not only gendered but gendering.

While there is a general argument to be made about how modern property's specific characteristics of right to exclusion, disposability and destruction cannot but imply violent relations, my argument here is first and foremost one of historical specificity. I politicise and historicise property and intimacy from the perspective of German colonial interventions in sexuality and family relations. When I make (generalising) assertions of dominant notions, such as of the institution of the family, I speak from the specific social context of Germany, embedded in discourses from Europe and North America. I present a configuration of stories around hegemonic relations of ownership, (inter)marriage, the role of white women and (hetero)sexuality in German empire, especially zooming in on moments in German South West Africa, German Samoa and German East Africa around the turn of the 20th century, and relate them to the metropole and the world at large. Illuminating the function of intimacy in colonisation and the colonial impact on intimate relations finally underlines why the fight for gender and sexual liberation today has everything to do with pasts, presents and futures of imperial land thefts, dispossession, settlements or plunder.

Constellation History of Intimacy and Ownership

Several notions of intimacy emerge from the 8th of March protest that point beyond its immediate set up. The protest did not only create intimacies of bodies assembled for a common purpose. This is not to dismiss the relevance of such a distinctive collective affective experience - especially in times of a global pandemic and its individualised management of control and privatized intimacy. But the protest also pierced the notion of separate, exclusive and enclosed periods of time and space. It connected places and issues that are usually kept at a safe distance from one another. I am interested in this analytical function of the concept of intimacy that stresses proximity and refuses to accept isolated theoretical constructions and abstractions. Intimacy becomes a form of spatio-temporal and conceptual method of bringing things close together that are positioned as far apart in dominant narratives. Thereby, it reveals how the emergence of one concept or institution, in fact, depends on the constitution of another. At the same time, as a thematic focus it highlights dominant limited notions of intimacy as private family and romantic coupledness. Thereby, we can ask about the role of family and kinship relations as a regulative ideal for political economic orders. Following Lisa Lowe, I unpack multiple meanings of intimacy. In *Intimacies of Four Continents*, Lowe (2015), explicitly takes up supposedly distant global historical and social processes. She shows how emerging notions of freedom and liberal modernity went hand in hand with the colonial appropriation of wealth by the European bourgeoisie. When activists use protests to stress that European values of human dignity or democracy concur with its violent border regime, Lisa Lowe shows these values to emerge from within not contrary to transnational processes of violence. Similarly, Christina Sharpe (2010, 3) moves beyond common individualized understandings of intimacy 'to think through configurations of relations of domination' across different categories of time and space.⁵ Intimacy becomes a heuristic that shows the proximity and relatedness of phenomena,

people and subjectivities. By way of doing that it also challenges dominant European notions of intimacy, or rather, shows their dependency on other forms of social relations and work, as well as the need to keep other (potentially dangerous) intimacies in check. For Lowe, bourgeois intimacy functions as a 'socio-spatial medium for metropolitan and colonial hegemony' (ibid, 30). Combining analytical tool and focus, I highlight how familial policies work to establish and sustain ownership, through racial separation, sexual propriety and white hegemony, all whilst keeping a veneer of private and individual success supposedly separate from structures of violence.

Starting from the here and now, I locate that present moment in a constellation of global presents, pasts and futures. Thinking with and beyond Walther Benjamin (1980 [1940], 693), I map a constellation history of intimacy, property and violence, not to present a full image of history 'how it really was' but rather to illuminate certain aspects and conjunctions within it. The point is not to recover an ultimate historical origin point or the single most important causal connection that would ultimately lead the way to (continuous or future) progress. Other than Benjamin, I am also not interested in grand messianic salvation. Rather, I focus on the order and disorder of ordinary things and relations. With Elsa Dorlin (2019, 8), I see the mapping of a constellation history as 'exploring the memory of struggle' instead of necessarily 'rounding up the most illustrative examples.' The structure of ordinary everyday life and social and intimate relations with others produce the transnational horizon of possibility for local events (Zimmerman 2012, 247–48). While most literature thinks from the context of British Empire and North America, I link this transnational image to the less scrutinized historical material of German imperial rule. Stitching together intimate moments, I jump back and forth and in between places and times. Coalescing around the household, this explicitly brings out social, moral and legal protections of the white bourgeois, heterosexual, monogamous family in preserving the colonies and white hegemony. It also especially illuminates white women's central role in this struggle for hegemony. This is

not to say that this is the only possible or most important configuration of historical fragments. But it is one crucial way of making the development of proprietary intimate relations visible against the backdrop of other relations in time and space.

(Flashes of) Intimacies in Proprietary Orders

The family and romantic (mostly heterosexual) relationships represent the most common association with intimacy. This dominant notion developed with, and remains wedded to, the private home, marriage, property and reproduction. Yet this formulation of romantic and familial intimacy hides both its conditions of emergence and preservation and its constituting social character. It isolates the bourgeois family, and the individual emerging from it, by keeping them apart from all the people and laboring processes sustaining them. At the same time, it manifests a distinct understanding of privacy and self-actualization. When we look at the processes and relations that built the walls of the bourgeois home and the objects in it, that cleaned and cared for its members and at the same time enabled a formation of subject and family that understood itself separate to these processes, we see both intimate relations and subject formation in a different light. David Eng (2010, 10) describes as the 'racialization of intimacy' the ways in which the boundaries around the private serve to hide its racial underpinnings. It is precisely the 'labor of enslaved and indentured domestic workers [that] furnished the material comforts of the bourgeois home', as Lisa Lowe (2015, 196) reminds us. Privacy, family, marriage, property and right appear as fundamental building blocks for liberal subject formation, that is, for the development of individual will and moral action, as well as for the formation of the nation state.⁶ The importance of the private bourgeois family – as well as the contortions necessary to pretend an independency of this structure from global extractions of wealth – persist today.

Building on a long history of especially Black and Indigenous feminist theorisations of

proprietary intimacies in slavery, colonialism and their afterlives, I trace when certain intimacies appear as so threatening that they are suppressed. This is not to locate specific liberatory potential in intimate or explicitly sexual practices beyond the norm. Rather, I want to work out the conditions of possibility of dominant notions of intimacy and their specific role in stabilizing and reproducing hegemony. For white bourgeois European forms of intimacy to prevail and ensure the survival of European hegemony, other intimate relations had to be controlled or destroyed based on emerging categories of difference. Empire, as Anne McClintock (1995, 16) describes it, 'was intimately wedded to the Western reinvention of domesticity.' For domesticity to exist for some, others had to do the hard work to provide for it and be kept in their place to do so. Kinship ties present a danger to property relations when kinship persists or develops where property should prevail. The struggle over kinship reveals itself as simultaneously a struggle over property and hegemonic social relations. In and around processes of colonisation and enslavement, propertied white people, predominantly but not exclusively men, wanted to uphold a regime of property that enabled the dispossession of peoples as well as guaranteed property in persons (see also Harris, 1993). Dispossessed, enslaved and colonised people desired to establish kinship relations against and beyond this violence. Turning non-proprietary relations into relations of property is not an easy, natural or unresisted process – be it relations between people, land or other non-human relations.

Indigenous scholars have long stressed the social, juridical, economic and cultural interventions in relationships and the concurring normalisation of violence necessary to enable and secure appropriation of land, resources and bodies. Nishnaabeg writer and artist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson makes clear the connection between gendered and intimate violence and dispossession. She explains how, '[t]he more destruction our intimate relationships carry, the more destruction our political systems carry, and the less we are able to defend and protect our lands, and the easier it is to dispossess' (2021, 123).

Colonialisation as a civilising project imposed the heteropatriarchal nuclear family as the dominant social unit and destroyed alternate ecologies of intimacy and relationships of reciprocity. This helped break up collectively held Indigenous lands and transform land into private property of men as head of household, then mainly the property of settler men, corporations and the state. Stable (patrilinear) inheritance of property establishes continuous ownership over time and is central to nation-building and the reproduction of a hegemonic population, such as white settler society. Indigenous people were forced into this amongst other by social and legal means, such as 'tying land tenure rights to heterosexual, one-on-one, lifelong marriages, thus tying women's economic well being to men who legally controlled the property' (TallBear 2018, 147). Land allotment policies, relocation programs, compulsory conversion to Christianity and residential schools severed relationships to land and human and non-human kin, as well as disciplined non-conforming gender and sexuality (TallBear 2021, 473). Settler sexuality, that is, dominant monogamous heterosexual marriage relations, continues to prop up privatized relations of property to land (ibid; Morgensen, 2011). Settler practices and policies categorize nonproprietary relations and relations in excess of notions of exclusivity, productivity and exploitability as noncivilised to legitimate exclusion from citizenship, the right to care for children, to hold land or move freely on it. This way, the privatization of property goes hand in hand with the racialisation of intimacy. Hegemony continues to be secured through social and legal techniques, if differentially articulated in different moments of time.

The proprietary order built with transatlantic slavery required those deemed as property to be separated from their relations of kinship, or at least for their kinship relations to be ever threatened. Hortense Spillers (1987) extorts us to better understand what enslavement meant by connecting kinlessness with the requirements of property. To uphold someone's status as property they need to be isolated from strong bonds that might defy propertisation. The bourgeois patriarchal notion of the family based on 'the vertical transfer

of a bloodline, of a patronymic, of titles and entitlements, of real estate and the prerogative of “cold cash,” from fathers to sons’ was limited to ‘the mythically revered privilege of a free and freed community’ (ibid, 74). Whilst this dominant family structure maintains racial supremacy, excess forms of kinship, intimacy and connectedness are not allowed to thrive. Especially enslaved women were forced to reproduce kinlessness (Angela Davis 1972; 1981). Colonial legislatures realised the inherent dangers of kinship for a system premised on race fixing humans as property. The legislative intervention of *partus sequitur ventrum* served to install heritability of enslavement.⁷ Bearing children meant the forced reproduction of property (relations). As Jennifer Morgan finds, this was crucial in the ‘context of a labor system wherein white men routinely and possibly systematically raped the women they claimed as property, [but] their own paternity could not devolve to their children’ (Morgan 2021, 5). Importantly this legal intervention into kinship ties not only secured white men’s property rights, but also legitimated white women’s kinship ties (ibid). This manifests not only race relations but also narrow relations of gender and sexuality. Meanings of gender, sex and sexuality emerge as primary rather than secondary to the development of racial formations in slavery and colonial capitalism.

Property relations of political economic systems such as colonial capitalism necessitate attempts of creating seemingly stable hierarchical categories of relating. These (violent) social and intimate relations do not emerge in fixed ways and their creation remains incomplete and fragile. In fact, the fragility of supposedly stable categories requires continuous violence for their upkeep. Catherine Hall (2014), for example, describes the risk of particular intimacies to colonial orders by way of her investigation of British slave-owners in the Caribbean and their legacies. Her archival work shows that while the status property of enslavement vs. the status property of whiteness as freedom was juridically determined and structured into the plantation system in the Caribbean, this system was repeatedly ‘fractured by sexual relations which characterized colonial society’

(ibid, 29). Within plantation colonies, colonial businesses built on kin connections, marriage and inheritance to ensure transmission of property to other propertied white people. Investigations however show the existence of propertied women of colour in the Caribbean. They inherited wealth as well as enslaved people from their white fathers or partners (ibid, 34). The colonial anxiety towards the consequences of intimacies between different colonial subjects and especially towards non-white inheritance stresses the fragility of the white family, needed for the survival of white patriarchal domination.⁸ The status property of whiteness reveals itself as a slippery concept consistently posing the question of how to secure itself while simultaneously struggling with clear legibility.

Struggles Over Property and Kinship in German Empire

In Germany, aspirations to build an empire, by land and by sea, coincided with nation state building in the late 19th century. At the same time, feminism emerged as a social force to be reckoned with, though starkly divided between bourgeois and proletarian women.⁹ This makes a constellation of property and kinship in German colonial rule interesting beyond the fact that German empire has been much less regarded in the literature. At the turn of the century, Germany was rife with social tensions during economic and social change. Rapid industrialisation, urbanisation, the rise of the bourgeoisie and empire led to profound social questions, class conflict as well as a crisis of masculinity. Women’s organizations proliferated and did not take a back seat on national issues. German expansionist relations, of course, began much earlier and exceed formal imperial rule with global German settlements, trade and corporate investments. Within such ‘pan-german racialised biopolitical ambitions’, family relations and sexuality were already central not only for colonial hierarchies and the creation of difference but also for settlement policies and property regimes in the ‘colonial ordering of the world’ (Eley 2014, 35). This only intensified with the formal establishment

of the colonies. Gender appears as a central factor in the historical literature.¹⁰ Engaging with brief glimpses of struggles over property and intimate relations in German empire presents a case of how and when racialised and gendered relationality undergird or appear to threaten the stability of political-economic orders.

[German Samoa] We Ketch That Damned Fellow

'[W]e ketch that damned fellow.'¹¹ Under the sound of cries like these, Carl Eduard Michaelis, self-professed German hygienist, was forced to flee German Samoa in 1911. Samoan women rioted against his racial thinking and drove him out of the German colony. Even among German colonialists his views were not well received. He had arrived only shortly before and, appalled by the 'racial corruption' in the colony, quickly published a racist open letter against interracial relationships. Maintaining that he was 'above all white and only secondarily German', Michaelis (1911, 38-40) praised the US as better fulfilling the imperative of colonialism, identified by him as the advancement of the white race by way of a strong racialised order. Such a racial order was neither the case nor the consensus at the time in Samoa. There were less settlers on the island than in other (German) colonies but more mixed marriages and interracial families with children (Walgenbach 2005, 77). Many German settlers had been afforded access to wealth and social mobility by marriages with relatively elite local women (Fitzpatrick 2017, 214). In Samoa, different actors struggled over the specific political economic model for the colony.¹² Colonialists disagreed on the establishment of a settler vs. a plantation colony whilst confronted with anti-colonial resistance. Within these struggles over different models of using colonial possessions and extracting wealth in 1911, Samoan society was still less strictly ordered around emerging categories of race. For example, citizenship designations were organized along binaries, but the privilege of being classified 'foreigner' instead of 'native' was not only extended to children of married mixed

couples but also to children of non-married mixed parentage. Within this political situation different to other colonies racial hygienists like Michaelis were happy to escape unscathed from the island, considering the 'threatening lynch justice of the fair sex'¹³ as some newspapers termed the women's uprising.

[German South West Africa] Mädchenfuhren

In contrast, in German South West Africa, Germany's first and foremost settler colony, interracial marriage bans had already been instituted shortly after the turn of the century and the genocidal wars against the Herero and Nama peoples.¹⁴ At the beginning of colonisation it was custom for German men to gain access to property and trading connections through so-called intermarriage (Wildenthal 2001, 128). This changed with the further establishment of settler society against strong anti-colonial resistance, with German women playing a significant social role.

And so, in December 1898, a "christmas present" arrived in Swakopmund, German South West Africa. This so called '*Weihnachtskiste*' from colonial Germany entailed a shipment of white women, or "girls" ('*Mädchenfuhre*'), ready to be wed (Mamozai 1989, 139). This was not the first shipment, nor would it be the last. White women would continue to be sent to settlers in the colony 'deprived of women' (Jenny 1966, 66; own translation). From the 20th century onward, this was organized as an established programme of the *Frauenbund der deutschen Kolonialgesellschaft* (German Colonial Women's League) outlasting the status of today's Namibia as a German colony.¹⁵ Not (yet) awarded political rights of their own, white bourgeois women still presented the backbone of white propertied society. Whilst the Women's League members were part of the ruling class, wives of high-level officials and owners of colonial companies, the women who were shipped off to the colonies came mainly from lower classes.¹⁶ This program of white women's emigration to the colonies shows a lot of the ambiguities

of propertied women seeking to keep class and race hegemony. This also alludes to the complex relationship between white women, property and self-ownership. In the words of colonialist Klara Brockmann (1910, 3), the first purpose of white female emigration was 'to prevent intermarriage, which would mean the spiritual and economic ruin of the settler.' The Colonial Society and first and foremost the Colonial Women's League made sure that 'there is quite excellent, nice and pretty material of German girls coming' (Verhandlungen des Reichstags 1909, 7279), to avert threatening economic and legal consequences of long term 'interracial' relationships. The purpose of these emigrations, performed in the language and imaginary of the commodity, was to support the efforts of building and cementing white settler society in sole possession of land as well as economic, social and political resources.

More than just an absurd anecdote of the past, this specifically gendered settlement program and its role in the struggle over colonial ownership of power and resources shows how social and intimate relations are formed and sedimented (or potentially modified). Even if these 'shipments'¹⁷ of white women were not the biggest, or most defining, element of colonial power and land grabs, they bring together a set of important processes. Their relevance is not limited to the context of the colonies alone. The interracial marriage debate, for example, became central to discussions about citizenship and German-ness that live on today.¹⁸ We see the lineages of different contemporary feminisms in the different political mobilizations of white bourgeois, proletarian and colonised women – depending on their relation to the white family, racial separation, sexualised violence and the ownership of bodies and land.

Interracial Marriage Bans and White Women's Relationship to Property

"Interracial" marriage bans were instituted in German South West Africa in 1905 and hereafter enforced in the other colonies, if to different degrees.¹⁹ Among other things, marriage bans

meant that property settlements were refused to colonised women previously married to white German settlers. In the end, while legalized relationship and familial arrangements were purged, the importance of sexual access to colonised women did not disappear. As Lora Wildenthal (2001, 105-106) describes, '[t]he older pattern of marriage, long-term cohabitation, public liaisons, and rape was replaced by the new system of prostitution, secret liaisons, and rape'.²⁰ The race mixing debate became such a strong contestation precisely because of 'the fundamentality of propertied male citizens' rights' (ibid, 80). Tensions between different forms of masculinity derived from different ways of appropriating colonial wealth. As per Wildenthal, liberal nationalist colonists 'generally arrived too late for the military glory and land grabs of the early years. Their hopes for land and a compliant, cheap labor force depended on state-ordered expropriation of colonial subjects, not on political alliances and intermarriage with them.'²¹ Liberal nationalist colonists needed to strictly demarcate the owners of political rights which meant unprecedented interventions in social and intimate relationships, destroying sexual, familial and political ties. In German South West Africa, the inscription of white supremacy through legalized property relations intensified amongst others with the so called Native Regulations (*Eingeborenengesetze*) after the war. These made ownership of cattle and land mostly impossible for colonised subjects and obligated them to work for white settlers, register themselves with the colonial administration and carry passes. The impact of liberal nationalism - and its categorization of rights - on colonial societies was at once 'equalizing for some and racializing for all' (ibid, 84). While colonised subjects were denied the ability to own and be an owner, colonisers were confirmed not only as owners of land and resources but owners of others, their productive and reproductive capabilities.

Within these struggles, white women's relationship to modern property remains complicated. Yet, once we understand this "identity" as articulating different societal structures together rather than representing any one simplified (inter) section, it becomes easier to grasp. The fact that

social reality is complex need not mean indiscernible muddiness. The commodified – and commodifying – export of white women can co-exist with the fact that white women were also seen as one of the central cultural carriers for colonialism and bourgeois society. White women appear as both potential proprietors and potentially propertised. Class differences are central as propertied women of the ruling class had a clear interest in colonial success and white hegemony. This mirrors other historical studies, such as by Stephanie Jones-Rogers (2019), that show the immense investments in slavery by wealthy white women, to hold on to their human, and landed, property – despite supposed property-lessness under the system of *couverture*. White propertied women established their political and legal subjecthood to retain exclusionary power over property, human and otherwise, both within the juridical system and through societal measures. Beyond generalized assumptions of female passivity or marginalisation, the German Colonial Women's League formulated clear colonial gender roles and responsibilities to be found in their propaganda paper, *Kolonie und Heimat*, in which man appears as conqueror, woman as preserver. Reiterations of the importance of German women and family can be found throughout the paper:

*'But if we want to preserve the colony internally as a German colony and if we want to prevent the colony from one day being lost to us externally, we must ensure that German families are founded and that the influence of the German woman comes to bear.'*²²

Kolonie und Heimat focused on stressing the responsibilities of settler women, centred around cultural colonisation and the reproduction of race hegemony. White women were to address white settler society first and foremost, cementing notions of propriety and keeping especially lower-class settlers in line (Walgenbach 2005, 119–20). Even if not legally, white women, especially ruling class white women, were granted certain forms of ownership, including self-ownership. However, this self-ownership is constantly

undermined by the conditionality of it on simultaneous self-sacrifice for the white family and race.

In contrast to white colonial women, colonised women were positioned quite differently vis-à-vis this proprietary order of colonial capitalism. Whilst denied access to ownership by colonial rule and continuously interfered with in their known ways of relating to each other and themselves, they resisted the socio-legal techniques of colonisers in their own ways. Birth strikes are but one example. Through forms of ordinary resistance colonised people refused to (re)produce more bodies for Germans to use and work to death. While white German women denounced the sexuality of Black women and helped justify their rape by white men, white women fulfilled their role as objects of reproduction and sexuality with far less resistance (Ayim 2020, 54). It was no rarity for white women to bear more than seven children. In contrast, Black women sometimes refused to bear children and the disposability of their bodies and reproductive capabilities altogether (ibid). The refusal to reproduce a colonised work force was not lost to white people. Understanding that 'the Herero, after the uprising is often on the position that he does not want to produce children. He feels like a prisoner, which is what you hear with every job that doesn't suit him, and he doesn't want to create new labour for his oppressor' (Brief eines Farmers 1912, cited in Mamozai 1982, 52, 167; own translation). Colonists tried to 'remedy this deplorable state of affairs' by offering rewards for every child born, but 'mostly in vain' (ibid). Resistance to colonial rule took many forms despite, as much as because of, extreme violence. This shows the dependency of hegemonic ownership on the reproduction of a dispossessed workforce and differential articulations of gender and sexuality depending on racial and class position in this hegemonic order.

[German Samoa & Germany] Plasticity of Race

Colonial politics do not remain in the colonies. Threats to hegemonial power and ownership over

political, economic, social and cultural resources were carried to the metropole - and so were (discussions about) mechanisms of control. By the time of the Michaelis case, and after several rebellions, wars and independent economic organizing, heightened anxieties about the colonies also affected debates in Germany.²³ In particular, the National Liberal sections of the press, painted the Samoan 'women's uprising', or even 'women's revolution', as a threat to German imperial hegemony and proof of the dangers of intermarriage, as Matthew Fitzpatrick (2017, 215) shows. The racist hygienist Carl Eduard Michaelis had not been the first to attack intermarriage in the context of German Samoa. In Germany the discussion had started to heat up since liberal politician, and previous governor of Samoa, Wilhelm Solf had published a pamphlet against intermarriage in Berlin.²⁴ His objective exceeded crude racial hygiene. The self-published *Eingeborene und Ansiedler auf Samoa* (Natives and Settlers in Samoa) was part of his effort to establish a specific political economic structure in the colony. For the upkeep of economically profitable colonies, he sought to strengthen profitable large-scale plantations and prevent large-scale settlement (especially by lower-class German farmers who he saw as culturally incapable of supporting a civilising mission). Familial relations between colonists and colonialists impact the long-term possibilities of political economic order in the colony and German empire's commercial enterprise (Fitzpatrick 2017, 221), thus the need to inhibit intimacies (and their consequences). Imposed racial categories and separation also moved to German politics. Trying to induce the German parliament to extend interracial marriage bans from colonial to national German law, Solf, then Colonial Secretary, proclaimed: 'We are Germans, we are white and we want to stay white' (Verhandlungen des Reichstags, 1912; Kundrus 2003, 18). While these interracial marriage bans never made it into national law, racialised citizenship did.

The guidelines that arrived in Samoa in 1912 instructing on how to proceed with intermarriage show the plasticity of racial citizenship, German-ness and intimate categories of race:

- (i) *'Marriages between non-natives and natives will no longer be permitted.*
- (ii) *The children of the hitherto legitimate and recognized mixed marriages are white.*
- (iii) *Providing they are included in the current list of half-castes, half-castes stemming from illegitimate relationships are to be viewed as white. This list is to be revised and the undeserving are to be struck from it.*
- (iv) *Half-castes born after the announcement of these rules are natives.*
- (v) *Those natives who speak fluent German and can prove a European education can apply to be deemed white.'*²⁵

Officially, children from intermarriages were considered "white" before 1912, while after this date they were counted as "natives". For Walgenbach (2005, 80) this means, 'belonging to the white collective was therefore not a question of pigmentation but the product of a legal decision or an arbitrarily set temporal caesura.' These guidelines and the surrounding social and political struggles make clear the impact of law on racialisation and relationship structures. But they are also about more than just an arbitrary break in the social order. In this specific case, flexibility remained around racial conceptualisations and possible kinship relations, especially surrounding the notion of "deserving vs. undeserving" of white status. Racialising laws put in place to secure hegemony show their limits, revealing both the plasticity of race (or gender) relations and the effort expended to stretch the limits to the benefit of those making them. Specific productive and *proper* members of colonial society were enabled access to the status property of whiteness.

Whiteness, Sexuality, Propriety and the Protection of Property

Bourgeois politics needs to reproduce and control new populations to survive. In the colonies, this included not only the colonised population but also the colonising white settlers. New forms of

the organization of social life were not accepted without resistance. The colonised population was used to a different way of relating to each other, their land and their means of (re)production and defended this against colonisation. But white settler society, too, needed to be trained to adhere and stick to the new proprietary regime. If social and legal codifications of marriage and sexuality were only later introduced to strong racial considerations, this questions any a priori sense of race or exclusive kinship structure. Racialised economies of sex that assume an always dominant notion of race as prime and prior organizing principle of colonial societies are challenged by the 'heterogeneity of colonial inter-communal relations' (Clever and Ruberg 2014). Based on the specific configurations of relations in Samoa, Matthew Fitzpatrick (2017, 227) makes the case against 'historiographical truisms' that assume colonial stability of race.²⁶ We can see how political economic circumstances and considerations shape dominant and deviant sexual relations and the conditions under which potentially antagonistic racial and gender relations develop.²⁷ By way of legal, social and cultural interventions, sexuality becomes an important part of social control. For the regulation of sexuality notions of the 'proper' are also mobilized. Propriety can function in attempts to repress or control flashes of intimacies particularly when the ownership over land, resources, people, and thereby space and time, appears on the line.

[German East Africa] Scandal

In 1910, a scandal shook the German colony of East Africa, also reverberating in the metropole. Governor Albrecht von Rechenberg was accused of homosexual relations, most scandalously with African men, amongst others his servants. The scandal was initiated and publicized by Willy Roy, editor of the main settler newspaper, the *Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Zeitung*. It was embedded in a long history of tensions between the governor and settler society, that had been fought out in the newspaper. The confrontation developed around different ideas of colonial state organization,

along the now familiar lines of a more patriarchal focus on settlements vs. a more liberal focus on trade. Within settler society, homosexuality charges were used for both intra-class competition as well as inter-class conflict. While same-sex relations were quite common in upper class culture, this conflicted with strong concerns over propriety in the colony (Schmidt 2008). White settler society was far from homogenous and social contestations around class played a significant role. Social and legal control around proper sexuality helped uphold class hegemony (Walther 2008). But additionally, the racialised and sexualised space of 'colonial intimacy' of the colonial household made it impossible to 'uphold veneer of propriety in perpetual presence of servants' and made white privacy unsustainable (Schmidt 2008, 59). The policing of interracial and homosexual transgressions functioned to keep intimacies from threatening colonial hegemony. In moments of social upheaval or crisis, (the scandal of) sex outside the household of heterosexual patriarchal monogamy exposes potential vulnerability. Thus, notions of propriety are called upon as shields for property interests of groups fighting over hegemony.

With whiteness and proper conduct closely bound together, whiteness entailed control over relationships, including one's relationship to desire and thus one's behaviour – especially in public.

White men did not want their sexual congress to threaten property interests, as in different historical conjunctures, such as during slavery and laws of *sequitur partus ventrem*. A repetition of an offense became suspect, moving the issue from slight transgression of proper conduct to a problem of fundamental character and thus ontology. White men 'were expected to possess character and moral desire to make "proper" choice' (Walther 2008, 20). This was especially pertinent against the imagined incapacity of Africans, especially Black women, to possess anything close to ownership over their bodies and sexual desires. Black women were seen as either 'exceeding practitioners of sexuality' or 'property of their husbands', both attributions serving to deny status of proper subjectivity (Schrader 2019, 140) – marking them as out of control and incapable of

self-control or self-ownership. Sexualised violence was an ordinary part of colonial life, an 'important expression of racialised and gendered nature of the colonial experience' (Schmidt 2008, 59). The ordinary violence of racialised and sexualised relations was rooted in more than simple forms of 'othering'. Different relations of violence are necessary to uphold a system based on propertisation, and its future expansion. There is more to the control of sexuality than just discrimination or exclusion of those with sexual practices and orientations outside of the norm. Rather, marriage as well as normative and disciplining reproductive family relations are central to ownership struggles and the reproduction of hegemonic white society. In German East Africa, where owning enslaved people was prohibited but slavery itself was not abolished until it became a British colony after WWI, it was common to see Africans, especially women and girls, as potential property (ibid, 54). Sexualised violence contained the potential for scandal with cases of overt and extreme, public(ised), sexualised violence, such as in the case of Carl "Hänge"-Peters.²⁸ Sexualised violence and/or transgressions were conventional until they disturbed white hegemony – a danger present in forms of intimacy, violent or not. To retain the link between whiteness, proper conduct and legitimate ownership, the potential for scandal had to be restrained. Propriety becomes a tool within struggles over hegemony.

Concluding Notes: Making Intimacies

With this constellation of stories from German colonialism, this paper joins the literature on the nexus of property and kinship from the British Empire and North America and illuminates global webs of intimate relations throughout time. Despite differences depending on local contexts, we also see profound commonalities in social and juridical techniques of dispossession and appropriation as well as direct connections of place and time in between which people, resources, policies, laws and concepts travel. This specific configuration of stories stresses how socio-legal interventions,

such as interracial marriage bans, the actions by the Colonial Women's League and the selected control and prosecution of sexualities, racialise intimacies and kinship relations whilst protecting hegemonic ownership relations. Racial relations are produced and sharpened through the inhibition of long-term intimacies and their familial and property consequences. The (mis)use of sodomy accusations and the politicization of (homo)sexuality in moments of crisis stresses the relation between sexuality and political economy. White bourgeois women's organizations' role in building up colonial ownership and white empire articulates and engenders class, race, gender and sexual relations – and presents a (violent) history of certain limited feminisms significant for today.

Germany still refuses to own up to its colonial terror or enact genuine reparations. Instead, imperial aesthetics are reinvigorated, and colonial violence continued, be it through the European border regime, global economic dispossession, war profits or so-called development aid/cooperation – often under the banner of "feminist" interior and foreign politics. At the same time, still today, white settlers in Namibia, many of which are of German descent, own most of the land while descendants of Ovaherero and Nama are continuously dispossessed and pushed into "native reserves". Violent familial ties between coloniser and colonised persist, amongst others born out of rapes, sexual exploitation and intimate violence committed by German soldiers²⁹, colonists and settlers (Kauari 2019). Societies and their systems of categorization change through struggle, but past violences rarely remain in the past, they rather live on in similar or differently articulated forms.

In struggles over ownership of land, people and resources, notions of race, gender and sexuality are entangled and co-constituted. Various forms of violence and their legitimization are needed to maintain and perpetuate property orders and the ways of relating that go along with them. Against the ever-present backdrop of coloniality, it is crucial to remind ourselves of the centrality of familial politics for the stability and reproduction of a proprietary order and the (political economic global) conditions of possibility for such dominant

privatized notions of intimacy and gender and sexual liberation.

I map constellations of violence to create proximity between different struggles. This is necessary to avoid isolated and limited political approaches that ultimately re-produce and enhance violent proprietary relations. We cannot find the solution for problems, such as gender violence, within the current liberal proprietary order and its isolated notions of the private family, individualized responsibility, the criminal justice system or bordering practices. Thus, the lens of intimacies serves not to complicate things to the point of confusion by stretching concepts and contexts, but rather to avoid the kinds of questions, and answers, that erase important historical and social circumstances. As a catalyst it refuses to remove complexity and fall back on easy causal explanations. But it also doesn't use complexity as an

apologetic shield which would inhibit deeper understandings of concrete and sometimes direct links between relations of violence. The connection between conceptions of identity and ownership described here suggests that dominant relations of oppression and violence based on white, racist, patriarchal, heteronormative or colonial claims to domination can only be fought together with exploitative property relations, and vice versa. By mapping intimate histories of violence, we also make it possible to imagine different constellations of struggle. From the alliance of internationalist feminist*s call for the 8th of March protests 2022, we see the importance to not only stress the intimacies of systems of violence but also the intimacies of struggle: "We are everywhere, we are resisting: in every street, in every occupied land, in the mountain, on the sea, at the border, in working places, at home, in the *lager*, and inside prisons."³⁰

Notes

- ¹ Announcements by the German government: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/bundesregierung/staats-ministerin-fuer-kultur-und-medien/kultur/humboldt-forum>; own translation.
- ² The Berliner royal palace used to serve as the main residence of the House of Hohenzollern, the King of Prussia and further German Emperors until 1918. It was demolished by the East German government and replaced with the *Palast der Republik* (Palace of the Republic). In 2002, following a long debate after reunification, the Berlin senate decided to demolish the East German Palace to rebuild the Prussian Palace. The dome, inscription and cross were rebuilt with the help of private funds and under exclusion of the public. See <https://www.katholisch.de/artikel/25630-kreuz-und-bibelspruch-das-berliner-stadtschloss-erhitzt-die-gemueter>; English translation from relevant passages from the Bible.
- ³ This is the main approach from government and international organizations through to liberal feminist scholars, activists, writers and journalists as well as NGOs. Without engaging with these approaches in too much detail here, we can refer for example to popular liberal feminist philosophers like Kate Manne (e.g. 2018, 2020) or Martha Nussbaum (e.g. 2005), celebrated authors like Rebecca Solnit, and many others. Mainstream, liberal and white feminisms have long been critiqued from post- and de-colonial, Black, socialist, Indigenous and other writers. For a recent in-depth engagement with mainstream feminism see Alison Phipps (2020); for seminal decolonial critiques and alternatives see for example (Lugones 2007; Nagel 2000; Spivak 1981)
- ⁴ See Gurminder Bhambra (2020) for an account of engagements with colonialism as the condition of capitalist-modernity.
- ⁵ Sharpe (2010, 3) especially describes the everyday sexualised violence of slavery – everyday horrors that are not acknowledged as such – as constitutive of subjectivities today. We find this 'monstrous

internalization' of violence in our bodies. While this might appear most readable on Black subjects, 'all modern subjects are post-slavery subjects.'

- ⁶ This view has a long philosophical tradition within modern European thought. For example, Hegel describes the self-development of the individual through *his* possession of privacy within the intimate sphere of the family. This property in intimacy was seen as a relevant step towards progress, freedom and self-actualization (Hegel 2013).
- ⁷ I.e., "that which is brought forth follows the womb", law to ensure child inherits the non/status of enslaved mother.
- ⁸ Within transcontinental systems of colonial dispossession, labour regimes, trade and other forms of use and abuse of bodies, 'flashes' of intimacies emerged between people living, working and surviving together, such as enslaved, indentured and mixed peoples in the Americas (Lowe 2015, 33).
- ⁹ Bourgeois and proletarian feminist movements collided strongly around different interpretations of the "woman question". When the main feminist umbrella organization *Bund der Deutschen Frauenvereine* (League of the German Women's Organizations, BDF) was founded in 1894, proletarian women and their (mostly socialist) organizations were excluded on the grounds of being "too political". The Colonial Women's League joined the BDF in 1911.
- ¹⁰ For example, Susanne Zantop (1997) has long analysed the gendered dynamics of precolonial Germany in the 18th and 19th century.
- ¹¹ Fitzpatrick 2017, 215, quoting German press *Die Post* (21 June 1911, 185): *„Der samoanische Tragikomödie zweiter Teil“*
- ¹² The controversy around plantation vs. settler colonial models is often constructed around the characters of Wilhelm Solf and Richard Deeken. The question of Chinese labour also figured into the opposition between different models of the colony. E.g. see Droessler (2015) Steinmetz (2007)..
- ¹³ German original: *„drohenden Lynchjustiz des schönen Geschlechtes“*, in Fitzpatrick 2017, 212, quoting *Fiji Times, Berlin Neueste Nachrichten* (April, July 1911)
- ¹⁴ Around the turn of the century, relations of power changed drastically in the colony. A devastating rinderpest left Herero farmer communities even more economically bereft. Within increasing settler dominance, they were ever more forced to sell their labour to Germans, further entrenching economic dependency and vulnerability to violence. This, among other aggressions by the Germans, led to overall resistance in 1904. Germans engaged in genocidal war culminating in Lothar von Trotha's (in) famous extermination order. Forced labour accompanied the war and the period after (Hervé 1993). Only in the 2000s did Germany recognize the genocide on the Herero and Nama (who later joined the war) but until now is refusing to enact proper reparations.
- ¹⁵ Whilst its name may at least imply a certain focus on women's emancipation, its main foundational purpose had always been to support settler efforts, to protect men from the supposed sins of the colonised lands and to, explicitly, fight against interracial marriage and for the white collective. The Women's League played a significant role in ensuring that German South West African settler society was and remained white in the beginning of the 20th century and onwards. The first world war, and the subsequent loss of the colonies, at first thwarted plans to expand the program of exporting white women to the colonies to German East Africa. Still, in 1914 the *Frauenbund* counted almost 19,000 members, mostly ruling class women with direct colonial interests (Hervé 1993, 29). From 1924 onwards the *Frauenbund* continued its work in the colonies to support efforts to "strengthen Germanness" (*Erstarkung des Deutschtums*) (Walgenbach 2005, 106).
- ¹⁶ In literary form, South African novelist/writer, André Brink in *The Other Side of Silence*, follows the journey of a poor orphaned girl from Germany to Namibia through the program of the Women's League, her abuse by German soldiers and final vigilante coalition with other violated German girls as well as colonised subjects.

- ¹⁷ Within this commodified language, another term was *Probesendungen*, ‘trial shipments’. Until 1913, about 1500 (1468) women emigrated to German South West Africa/Namibia with the help/sent by *Frauenbund* (Hervé 1993, 30).
- ¹⁸ For example, Pascal Grosse (2000, 153, 168) explains how the interracial marriage debate in Germany was central to amendments of the German Nationality Law in 1912/13 that led to further ethnicization of citizenship issues. Only in 2000 was the principle of place of birth (*ius soli*) introduced in German citizenship law in addition to the principle of descent (*ius sanguinis*), which had been the only principle applicable until then. But *ius soli* is still only applicable under very specific circumstances. See information by the Home Office (*Bundesinnenministerium*) <https://www.bmi.bund.de/DE/themen/verfassung/staatsangehoerigkeit/staatsangehoerigkeitsrecht/staatsangehoerigkeitsrecht.html>
- ¹⁹ In European empires, these were quite drastic measures, but a lot of similarity can be found to “miscegenation” bans in the US. After German South West Africa, the bans were also instituted in most other German colonies. German racial anxieties over “miscenegation” ran highest for the African colonies, even though interracial marriage was much more common in Samoa (El-Tayeb 2001, 128).
- ²⁰ This just prevented any troubling consequences of long-term sexual relations. Karl Oetker, a medical doctor in German East Africa and a strong opponent of race mixing, makes this point of a racialised and gendered order of property and propriety, of describing how despite the ban men could roam freely in 1907: “I can very well imagine for myself the situation of an unmarried man who buys himself a negro girl for a shorter or longer period of time”(Oetker 1907, own translation).
- ²¹ For example, Governor von Schuckmann explained the reasons for interracial relationships to the German Women’s League not only on the basis of supposed sexual or domestic needs of the settler but also by way of their economic benefits: ‘Since there are no German girls here, he [the settler] often falls back on the solution of taking a girl of mixed blood or even a native as his wife. The fact that the mixed girls are often wealthy and bring a herd of cattle into the marriage is sometimes tempting’ (Schreiber 1909, 95).
- ²² From *Kolonie und Heimat*, in Niessen-Deiters 1913, 7, own translation. In another edition, this is reiterated in similar ways: ‘The German soldier has conquered the land with the sword, the German farmer and merchant seeks its economic exploitation, but the German woman alone is called and capable of keeping it German.’ From *Kolonie und Heimat* Jg. II, Nr. 4, S. 8. in Walgenbach 2005, 119–20, own translation.
- ²³ As Holger Droessler (2022) describes, Samoans refused and contested colonial wage labour and organized cooperative farming. They also subverted colonial practices such as ethnographic shows and built alliances with other colonised people.
- ²⁴ Racial hygienists, like Michaelis or Solf, found a more appreciative audience in Germany than in Samoa. At that time, most other prominent German officials in Samoa did not care much for reinforcing strict racial separation, seeing it as ‘imported racial thinking’ from the African colonies or unnecessary interference from Berlin (Fitzpatrick 2017, 221). Michaelis repeated and expanded his attack on miscegenation in a 1911 book written from the safety of Canada.
- ²⁵ Quoted in Fitzpatrick 2017, 225: Solf to Schultz, 17 Jan. 1912, in BA Berlin, R1004F/75489, pp. 134–5. See also R1004F/75490, pp. 41–4; Verhandlungen des Reichstages, 1912, p. 1725.
- ²⁶ For example, Christine Winter (2012) also warns how the analysis of past racialisations can easily lead to assumptions of stability and coherency around concepts of race that avert clearer understandings of how and why these concepts emerge and live on in the specific context of the German colony New Guinea.
- ²⁷ See Chris Chitty’s ‘Sexual Hegemony’ (2020, 34–35), where he wants to return ‘the history of sexuality to a history of property.’ Tracing the connections between social form and sexuality and the relation between the origins of capitalism and sexual repression, he asks, ‘whether and how sexuality outside

marriage and property relations congealed into opposition, defiance, or open antagonism toward socially dominant groups and their institutions' (ibid, 25).

- ²⁸ The excessive use of violence of colonial official Carl Peters that gave him his nickname, became too much when he killed the lover of the African woman he had held for his sexual congress. Public outrage in Germany was so great in 1896 that Peters could no longer be retained and he was dismissed from his post in 1897. How little lasting such warnings were, however, is shown by the fact that Peters was rehabilitated again as early as 1905 and later honoured with statues and street names in Germany (Grill 2019).
- ²⁹ German soldiers of the so-called "Schutztruppe" ("protection troops").
- ³⁰ "Lager" is the German word for "camp", that is, refugee/detention/deportation camps. The sentence can be found on the call for the protest on leaflets, posters and sharepics by the alliance.

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