



European
University
Institute

ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES

EUI Working Papers

RSCAS 2009/40

ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES

TRANSNATIONAL MOVEMENTS BETWEEN COLONIAL EMPIRES:
MIGRANT WORKERS FROM THE BRITISH CAPE COLONY IN THE
GERMAN DIAMOND TOWN LÜDERITZBUCHT

Ulrike Lindner

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE
ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES

*Transnational movements between colonial empires:
Migrant workers from the British Cape Colony in the German diamond town
Lüderitzbucht*

ULRIKE LINDNER

This text may be downloaded only for personal research purposes. Additional reproduction for other purposes, whether in hard copies or electronically, requires the consent of the author(s), editor(s). If cited or quoted, reference should be made to the full name of the author(s), editor(s), the title, the working paper, or other series, the year and the publisher.

The author(s)/editor(s) should inform the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies at the EUI if the paper will be published elsewhere and also take responsibility for any consequential obligation(s).

ISSN 1028-3625

© 2009 Ulrike Lindner

Printed in Italy, August 2009
European University Institute
Badia Fiesolana
I – 50014 San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)
Italy
www.eui.eu/RSCAS/Publications/
www.eui.eu
cadmus.eui.eu

Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

The Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (RSCAS), directed by Stefano Bartolini since September 2006, is home to a large post-doctoral programme. Created in 1992, it aims to develop inter-disciplinary and comparative research and to promote work on the major issues facing the process of integration and European society.

The Centre hosts major research programmes and projects, and a range of working groups and ad hoc initiatives. The research agenda is organised around a set of core themes and is continuously evolving, reflecting the changing agenda of European integration and the expanding membership of the European Union.

Details of this and the other research of the Centre can be found on:
<http://www.eui.eu/RSCAS/Research/>

Research publications take the form of Working Papers, Policy Papers, Distinguished Lectures and books. Most of these are also available on the RSCAS website:
<http://www.eui.eu/RSCAS/Publications/>

The EUI and the RSCAS are not responsible for the opinion expressed by the author(s).

Abstract

Before World War I, there were significant transnational movements and interactions between colonies of different European powers in imperial Africa, a fact that is often neglected in research on imperial and colonial history. The paper addresses such movements taking the town Lüderitzbucht in the German colony South West Africa as an example. Here, from 1908 onwards, a diamond boom attracted migrant workers from other colonies on a great scale, especially from the neighbouring British Cape. Lüderitzbucht is thus identified as a “transnational space”, where interactions between colonial states, conflicting interests of the German colonial administration and German business as well as the life and environment of African migrant workers can be investigated. The developments in Lüderitzbucht point to a growing interconnectedness during a period of worldwide globalisation that also reached the African colonies. Especially German companies were keen to explore the opportunities of a new migrant workforce. Conversely, the paper also stresses that such closer interactions led to a desire to demarcate a national style of colonial rule, especially in case of the German colonial administration. The growing mixed society developing in Lüderitzbucht was obviously highly disturbing for the South West African government. The move of African workers from a British colony to a German colony also entailed a clash of different colonial cultures. As a further point, the focus on transnational connections highlights the otherwise hidden agency of African workers. Individual fates become visible through the use of new sources that would not be of interest to a history solely concentrating on the German or the British colony.

Keywords

transcolonial movements, migration, African workers, colonial rule, southern Africa

Transnational movements between colonial empires: Migrant workers from the British Cape Colony in the German diamond town Lüderitzbuch*

Research on global and transnational phenomena has recently begun to focus on movements between colonial empires.¹ In my article, I would like to concentrate on Lüderitzbucht, a small town in the German colony of South West Africa, shortly before WWI – a “transnational space” in the imperial world of Africa. The town already experienced significant growth as a supply base during the last years of the Herero and Nama war, not to mention the construction of the Southern railway from Lüderitzbucht to Keetmanshoop. But the real boom started after diamonds were discovered there in 1908. Economically, these diamonds became the most important source of income for the German colony during the last years of German colonial rule. The boom attracted migrants from many countries, but especially from the neighbouring Cape Colony. In the process, various interconnections between the colonies emerged and can be explored in an exemplary manner using the particular environment of Lüderitzbucht. Strong connections and significant dependencies between colonies of different European motherlands can be highlighted, thus uncovering a field that is often ignored in the history of colonialism as well as in the international history of the rivalling European empires before World War I.² Such a perspective on transnational movements and interactions is also in line with recent research on the British Empire that emphasises the network characteristic of the empire. Andrew Thompson especially has stressed the fact that growing networks and knowledge systems considerably changed the nature of the British Empire at the end of the 19th century.³

In the context of this article, the term transnational history is used pragmatically in order to focus on connections and constellations that transcend borders and on people who cross borders, such as the migrant workers discussed here.⁴ Or, as David Thelen, one of the first researchers using transnational approaches, said: “We wanted to observe how people moving through time and space according to rhythms and relationships of their own, drew from ignored, constructed and defied claims of the nation state”.⁵ Strictly speaking, the movements analysed took place between colonies of two nations and not between two nation states. One could therefore question to what extent a colonial border can represent a demarcation line between nation states and whether the phenomenon of migrants crossing colonial borders can be described as transnational. Jürgen Osterhammel contributed to that discussion by asking whether transnational history indeed requires an imperial perspective. He came to the

* Workshop: Transnational Spaces in History: European University Institute, Nov. 12, 2008

¹ Cf. Antoinette Burton. “Getting Outside of the Global: Re-Positioning British Imperialism in World History.” Paper presented at the Neale Colloquium: Race, Nation and Empire: the Writing of Modern British Histories, London, April 2008; Kevin Grant, Philippa Levine, and Frank Trentmann, eds. *Beyond Sovereignty: Britain, Empire and Transnationalism c. 1880-1950* Palgrave, 2007; David Lambert and Alan Lester. *Colonial Lives Across the British Empire: Imperial Careering in the Long Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

² Jürgen Osterhammel. *Die Verwandlung der Welt. Eine Geschichte des 19. Jahrhunderts*. München: Beck 2009: 578-579.

³ Andrew Thompson. “The Power and Privileges of Association: Co-Ethnic Entworks and Economic Life of the British Imperial World.” *South African Historical Journal* 56 (2006): 43-59, 58; see also Alan Lester. *Imperial Networks: Creating Identities in Nineteenth-Century South Africa and Britain*. London, New York: Routledge, 2001: 5.

⁴ Jürgen Osterhammel and Sebastian Conrad. “Einleitung”. In *Das Kaiserreich transnational*, edited by Sebastian Conrad and Jürgen Osterhammel. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 2004: 7-28, 14; Johannes Paulmann. “Grenzüberschreitungen und Grenzräume: Überlegungen zur Geschichte transnationaler Beziehungen von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis in die Zeitgeschichte”. In *Geschichte der internationalen Beziehungen. Erneuerung und Erweiterung einer historischen Disziplin*, edited by Eckart Conze, Ulrich Lappenküper und Guido Müller, Köln 2004: 169-196, 179. See for a recent broad discussion of the term transnational history Pierre-Yves Saunier. “Learning by Doing: Notes About the Making of the Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History.” *Journal of Modern European History* 6 (2008): 159-180.

⁵ David Thelen. “The Nation and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives on United States History.” *The Journal of American History* 86 (1999): 965-975, 967.

conclusion that imperial history in a transnational perspective tends to dissolve into forms of global history.⁶ However, in the case discussed here, the transnational movements took place between regions in Southern Africa that were markedly shaped by British and German colonial administrations and by different national concepts and practices of colonialism.⁷ Kiran Klaus Patel has also emphasised that not only the nation state itself, but also a national consciousness could have a defining effect on a transnational history.⁸ Insofar, the movements between colonies of different European empires will be described as transnational in the following pages, even if some researchers may prefer the terms transcolonial or transterritorial.⁹ Analysing such transnational activities between the Cape Colony and German-South-West Africa that culminated in the town of Lüderitzbucht with its sudden industrial expansion opens up a range of novel opportunities to understand colonial constellations during European imperialism. Furthermore, the example of Lüderitzbucht in its “transnational setting” also hints at the simultaneousness of two processes: on the one hand at a desire to define national colonial styles and demarcate colonial territories in a period of excessive nationalism and on the other hand at processes of globalisation that influenced businesses and entrepreneurs as well as the movements of a migrant workforce between colonies, contradicting in many ways the wishes for national demarcations.¹⁰

On the following pages, I would firstly like to show that these transnational movements and interactions between colonies were characterised by a considerable scope. Many colonial states had close connections with neighbouring regions and were often economically dependent on adjacent colonies even if these colonies were under the rule of a different European power. Secondly, the focus on transnational movements opens up new perspectives not only on colonial environments at the beginning of the 20th century with a co-occurrence of imperial rivalries and processes of globalisation, but also on the policies and structures of each colony. The move of African workers from a British colony to a German colony entailed a clash of different colonial cultures, which can thus be analysed in a new light. Finally, this type of analysis enables one to assess the room for manoeuvre of African and mixed-race people. British authorities installed a consul in Lüderitzbucht who was in charge of the European and African migrants from the British Empire.¹¹ The files of the consulate provide a crucial vista on the life and the environment of migrant workers in the German colony and on the problems that emerged between the latter and the German administration.¹² Therefore, such a transnational approach uses new sources that would not be of interest to a history solely concentrating on the

⁶ Jürgen Osterhammel. “Imperien.” In *Transnationale Geschichte: Themen Tendenzen und Theorien*, edited by Gunilla Budde, Sebastian Conrad, and Oliver Janz. Bonn: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005: 56-67, 62; see also the publications of Christopher Bayly who uses rather the term of world history to describe the connections within and between empires. Christopher Bayly. *The Birth of the Modern World 1780-1914*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2004.

⁷ See for a discussion of British and German concepts of colonial rule in Africa Ulrike Lindner. “Colonialism as a European Project in Africa Before 1914? British and German Concepts of Colonial Rule in Sub-Saharan Africa”, forthcoming in *Comparativ* 2009.

⁸ Kiran Klaus Patel. “Transnationale Geschichte: Ein neues Paradigma?” <http://geschichte-transnational.clio-online.net/forum/id=573&type=diskussionen/> (accessed 22 January 2009).

⁹ The use of “transterritorial” is in itself less connected with the borders of nation states and would be thus very appropriate for describing movements between colonial spaces. See for the use of the term “transterritorial” in political sciences, especially with regard to regions in Africa Robert Latham. “Identifying the Contours of Transboundary Political Life.” In *Intervention and Transnationalism in Africa: Global-local Networks of Power*, edited by Thomas M. Callaghy, Ronald Kassimir, and Robert Latham. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001: 69-92, 75.

¹⁰ Michael Geyer and Charles Bright also asked for studies on movements in local settings to analyse processes of globalization, see Michael Geyer and Charles Bright. “World History in a Global Age” *The American Historical Review* 100 (1995): 1034-1060, 1054.

¹¹ National Archives of Namibia (NAN), ZBU 136 A IV B 3, Kaiserliches Gouvernement für Deutsch-Südwestafrika, Britisches Konsulat in Lüderitzbucht, 1911-1914, passim.

¹² Cf. NAN, BCL 13, BCL 14, BCL 17, BCL 25.

German or the British colony. These new sources point at the opportunities that opened up in transnational constellations and were used by the colonized.¹³

The Cape Colony and German South West Africa

The Cape Colony (resp. the Cape province of the Union of South Africa after 1910) had been under British rule since the beginning of the 19th century and was an established settler colony with a significant white population consisting mostly of Boer and English people. The Cape reached representative government in 1853 and, from then on, it had a two-chamber parliament in Cape Town. With the discovery of diamonds in the protectorate of Griqualand West, which was later annexed by the Cape, the colony also developed a high economic significance within the British Empire.¹⁴ The German colony had a markedly different development: Germans only came to South West Africa in 1884. After 1900, the German protectorate developed into the only settler colony of the German Empire. However, even in 1913, there were only around 14 000 white people living in the colony. South West Africa was mainly a desert-like country and less fertile than the Cape. It was only with the discovery of diamonds in 1908 that it began to prosper.¹⁵ The Cape Colony owned an enclave in German South West Africa called Walfish Bay. The bay was not given to the Germans since it was judged a strategically important harbour by British and Cape politicians.¹⁶ The British Resident Magistrate in Walfish Bay was a shrewd observer of German colonial politics in the surrounding colony and was in contact with the German administration.¹⁷ The two colonies had a common border, the Orange River. Nama people lived north and south of the Orange river, the border between the two colonies interfering with their long-established routes. Later, African workers came from the Cape to German South West Africa, especially during the years of depression in the Cape after the South African War.¹⁸ Reversely, after the Herero and Nama war in the German colony, Hereros tried to escape their prosecution in the German colony by migrating to Walfish Bay and then to the gold mines in Southern Africa.¹⁹ Trading across the border was significant since German South West Africa had to import many goods from the Cape. These transfers of goods from the Cape to German South West Africa became particularly crucial during the Herero and Nama war, when the Germans had to rely

¹³ The research in South Africa, Namibia and the UK was conducted with help of the Alexander von Humboldt foundation. I would like to thank for the support.

¹⁴ See for the history of the Cape Colony: T. Rodney H. Davenport and Christopher Saunders. *South Africa*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000: 101-106.

¹⁵ Walther Hubatsch, Ute Hagen, and Helge bei der Wieden. "Die Schutzgebiete des Deutschen Reiches." In *Grundriß zur deutschen Verwaltungsgeschichte 1815-1945: Band 22: Bund- und Reichsbehörden*, edited by Walther Hubatsch. Marburg: Herder-Institut 1983: 352-570, 424-430; Horst Gründer. *Geschichte der deutschen Kolonien*. Paderborn: UTB, 2004: 111-127.

¹⁶ Cf. NAN, ZBU 3 A I B 7, Kaiserliches Gouvernement für Deutsch-Südwestafrika, Abgrenzung des Schutzgebietes. Specialia Walfischbaigebiet, 1885-1907.

¹⁷ See the many reports of the resident magistrate John Cleverly, e.g. The National Archives, Public Record Office, Kew (TNA PRO) FO 244/495, J. Cleverly Resident Magistrate Walfisch Bay to the Under-Secretary of Native Affairs, Cape Town, State of Affairs at Walfisch Bay, 18.12.1891; see generally Ronald F. Dreyer. *The Mind of Official Imperialism: British and Cape Government Perception of German Rule in Namibia From the Helgoland-Zanzibar Treaty to the Kruger Telegram (1890-1896)*. Essen: Hobbing, 1987.

¹⁸ See generally William Beinart. "'Jamani': Cape Workers in German South-West Africa 1904-1912." In *Hidden Struggles in South Africa*, edited by William Beinart and Colin Bundy, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987: 166-190.

¹⁹ NAN, BLU 174, Abschrift, Staatstelegramm von Swakopmund nach Windhuk, 4.6.1904; Cape Town Archives Repository, NA 644 Part I, Resident Magistrate Walfish Bay to the Under Secretary of Native Affairs, Cape Town, Refugees coming to Walfish Bay, 4.6.1904. See also Jan-Bart Gewald. *Herero Heroes: A Socio-political History of the Herero of Namibia, 1890-1923*. Oxford: James Currey, 1999, 214.

heavily on supplies from the Cape Colony.²⁰ Thus, interactions between the two colonies can be found on many levels.

Policies concerning the African and mixed-raced population differed significantly between the two colonies. Before 1900, the black and so-called “coloured” population had met with a relatively liberal attitude at the Cape. (The term “coloured” refers to mixed-race people in South Africa, descending from Boers, indigenous people and/or East Asian slaves). There were no open racial restrictions for the vote: franchise was open to all males of any race if they had certain possessions or a certain income. Only a few of the black people fulfilled these conditions and they never endangered the majority of the white voters. Nevertheless, during the period between 1892-1910, around 15 000 blacks/coloureds had voting rights in the Cape.²¹ At the end of the 19th century, as in many other African colonies, racial policies became more important in the Cape Colony and racial tensions grew. In 1890, several bills were passed that restricted voting rights for blacks and segregation began in many fields of everyday life.²² Mixed-race relations were still allowed but socially ostracised.²³ The trends towards segregation intensified with the creation of the Union of South Africa in 1910, however, there was still a certain amount of leeway for black African and coloured people.

On the other side of the border, a much stricter racial regime was to be found. The German South West African colony underwent a racist radicalisation during and after the Herero and Nama war (1904-1907). The native ordinances of 1907 forbade Africans or mixed race persons classified as “natives” to own land or to enjoy freedom of movement. The residency of Africans was strictly regulated; they were supposed to wear identification badges.²⁴ Living spaces were separated; the indigenous population had to live in so-called “Eingeborenenwerften” that stood apart from the houses of the European population. Furthermore, in the aftermath of the Herero and Nama war, the administrative position regarding marital as well as non-marital alliances between whites, persons of mixed race and Africans was considerably tightened: Deputy governor Tecklenburg issued a ban on mixed marriages in 1905; in 1907 even marriages recorded before the prohibition were pronounced as invalid.²⁵ Not surprisingly, the German side viewed the “native policy” in the Cape as far too lenient and misguided.²⁶ When black workers came from the Cape Colony to German South West Africa, these two systems and backgrounds came into immediate contact and many problems emerged.

²⁰ For the difficulties and the conflicts between GSWA and the Cape Colony about these transports see Tilman Dederig. “War and Mobility in the Borderlands of South Western Africa in the Early Twentieth Century.” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 39 (2006): 275-294.

²¹ David R. Edgecombe. “The Non-racial Franchise in Cape Politics 1853-1910.” *Kleio* 10 (1978): 21-37.

²² Vivian Bickford-Smith. *Ethnic Pride and Racial Prejudice in Victorian Cape Town*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

²³ George Cornwell. “George Webb Hardy's ‘The Black Peril’ and the Social Meaning of ‘Black Peril’ in Early Twentieth-century Africa.” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 22 (1996): 441-453, 443-444. Alliances between white women and black men were banned in 1903, aiming at white prostitutes and the white underclass, but there was no general ban on mixed relationships as in German South West Africa.

²⁴ Trutz von Trotha. “Zur Entstehung von Recht: Deutsche Kolonialherrschaft und Recht im Schutzgebiet ‘Togo’ 1884-1918.” *Rechtshistorisches Journal* 7 (1988): 317-346; for the native decrees of 1906/1907 in German South West Africa see Helmut Bley. *Kolonialherrschaft und Sozialstruktur in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1894-1914*. Hamburg: Leibniz, 1968: 208-212; Jürgen Zimmerer. *Deutsche Herrschaft über Afrikaner: Staatlicher Machtanspruch und Wirklichkeit im kolonialen Namibia*. Münster: Lit, 2001: 77-83.

²⁵ Cf. Birthe Kundrus. *Moderne Imperialisten: Das Kaiserreich im Spiegel seiner Kolonien*. Köln: Böhlau, 2003: 234-249; see also Ulrike Lindner “Contested concepts of ‘white’ and ‘native’: Mixed marriages in German South-West Africa and the Cape Colony,” *Basler Afrika Bibliographien Working Papers* 2008/06, http://www.baslerafrika.ch/d/bab_working_papers.php.

²⁶ See e.g. reports of the German consuls in Cape Town: Politisches Archiv des Auswärtigen Amtes Berlin (PA AA), R 14869, Deutsches Generalkonsulat Kapstadt to Reichskanzler von Bethmann Hollweg, 23.6.1913, R 14867, Schroetter, Kaiserliches Konsulat Durban, to Reichskanzler von Bethmann Hollweg, 8.2.1912.

Diamonds in German South West Africa

In German South West Africa, there had always been the hope of discovering diamonds as in the neighbouring Cape Colony. Several associations had been founded in order to prospect for diamonds and gold in many areas of the colony, as e.g. the “Gibeon Schürf- und Handelsgesellschaft”. The company was founded in 1903, unsuccessfully searched for diamonds over the course of seven years and had to be liquidated in 1910.²⁷ However, in April 1908, Zacharias Lewala, a so-called “Capeboy” i.e. an African worker from the Cape Colony, unexpectedly found a diamond in the sand near Lüderitzbucht.²⁸ (See for the region Lüderitzbucht the attached map of German South West Africa) Lewala worked for the railway line Lüderitzbucht-Keetmanshoop. Since the constant winds and storms in the desert country around Lüderitzbucht regularly threatened to blow sand over the rails, linemen and workers were always busy removing sand from the rails. Lewala had worked in the mines in South Africa before coming to the German colony and obviously had some experience with gems. Lewala gave the stone to his superior, August Stauch, who also had some knowledge of mineralogy and was immediately aware of the significance of Lewala’s discovery. Stauch managed to purchase two claims and to start a mining company together with his partner, the engineer Sönke Nissen. Stauch became a millionaire within a few years but the actual finder Lewala never made any money from his discovery.²⁹

Before the discovery of diamonds, Lüderitzbucht had been a small town on the southern coastline of the German colony, surrounded by a desert. The German colonial endeavour had begun there with merchant Adolf Lüderitz, who had bought the land around the bay from the indigenous Nama who were living there. At the time, Lüderitz had already hoped for mineral resources.³⁰ However, he went bankrupt and had to sell his land to the “German Company for South West Africa”, which hardly made any profits until 1908.³¹ With the accidental discovery of diamonds, the company suddenly owned highly promising diamond fields. It was thus able to distribute high dividends during the next years, e.g. over one million Marks in 1909/10. Diamond prospecting and diamond trade were then brought under strict state regulation by colonial secretary Bernhard Dernburg. It became the object of a monopoly and remained under the control of the German company for South West Africa. New prospectors had to move to surrounding areas that were equally promising. However, Stauch and the early prospectors were able to hold on to their digging rights.³² Dernburg, who had just visited the Transvaal on an information trip in 1908, copied some of the regulations from the British colony.³³ In the Transvaal, the state retained 60% of the profits generated by diamond production and trade and Dernburg fixed a percentage of 50% in German South West Africa. Diamond production grew rapidly,

²⁷ Horst Drechsler. *Südwestafrika unter deutscher Kolonialherrschaft: Die großen Land- und Minengesellschaften*. Stuttgart: Akademie, 1996: 256-273.

²⁸ In the British colonies, black workers and servants were often called boys, denoting them thus as children, inferior to the white colonizers. In the German colonies, the migrants from the Cape Colony were addressed accordingly as Kapjungen or Kapboys. Cf. for the term “Boy” Dane Kennedy. *Islands of White: Settler Society and Culture in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia 1890-1939*. Durham: Duke University Press 1987: 153. Cf. for the use of the word “Kapjunge” Bundesarchiv Berlin (BAB), R 1002/2777, Inspektion der Landespolizei to Gouverneur Windhuk, Polizeiliche Maßnahmen am Bahnbau, 25.10.1910: 137-139; *ibid.*, Kaiserliches Bezirksamt Karibib to Kaiserliches Gouvernement Windhuk, Tote und verwundete Kapeingeborene, 13.10.1910: 170-171.

²⁹ For Stauch and Lewala cf. Olga Levinson. *Diamanten im Sand*. Detmold: Namibia Buchdepot, 2007: 40-41. Lewala later worked as a coachman for Stauch.

³⁰ Horst Gründer. *Geschichte der deutschen Kolonien*. Paderborn: UTB, 2004: 80.

³¹ Drechsler 1996, 277.

³² Paul Rohrbach. *Dernburg und die südwestafrikanische Diamantenfrage*. Berlin: Deutscher Kolonialverlag, 1911; see also Levinson 2007, 67-69.

³³ See for Dernburg’s trip in South Africa Oskar Bongard. *Staatssekretär Dernburg in Britisch- und Deutsch-Süd-Afrika*. Berlin: Süsserott 1909.

from 38 000 karat in 1908 to 4.7 Million karat in 1913.³⁴ In contrast with the economic fiasco of its early days,³⁵ the colony was able to achieve a profit with diamonds during the last years of German colonialism.

As other diamond and gold cities in South Africa, Lüderitzbucht was strongly influenced by these developments – albeit on a smaller scale. The town which had consisted of only five houses in 1905, had already grown during the Nama war in the south of the colony, since Lüderitzbucht had been used as a base by the German colonial troops.³⁶ Colonial troops lived there; the military built storehouses for supply and logistics, workers and businesses followed. Lüderitzbucht also became the starting point for the southern railway line to Keetmanshoop. The town was thus able to benefit in many ways from the war and the construction of the railway had already attracted a number of workers from the Cape.

However, with the discovery of diamonds, the town experienced a real boom. Job seekers came from South Africa to work on the diamond fields. At the same time, adventurers arrived from Europe or from neighbouring colonies and tried their luck. Merchants soon followed to provide the nouveau-riche diamond prospectors with the amenities of life.³⁷ In his book on the “atlantic life” of criminal Joseph Silver, who spent his life in Germany, England, Poland, South Africa, South West Africa, the USA and Argentina, Charles van Onselen has shown that, already during the Herero and Nama war, individuals from the criminal milieu had found their way to Swakopmund and Lüderitzbucht and had earned money with illegal trade and prostitution taking advantage of the overheated war economy. Silver himself ran a brothel in Swakopmund between 1905 und 1906.³⁸ Such demimonde characters now tried to reap profits from the new diamond boom. Therefore, a rather peculiar mixed society emerged in Lüderitzbucht that was not at all to the liking of the German administration, who tried to regulate immigration. Furthermore, in the files of the British Consul in Lüderitzbucht, one can observe a growing number of extraditions of African and European people coming from British colonies. Many of them were accused of smuggling diamonds or engaging in illegal or half-legal forms of trade. However, the German government was not very successful in its endeavours.³⁹ Furthermore, as a desert town, Lüderitzbucht had to import almost all edibles – mainly from the Cape, and water was so scarce that ships also had to convey drinking water from Cape Town.⁴⁰ These conditions already made for an enormous scope of interconnections between the two colonies and even more so with the rapid growth of the town. Hence the attempts of the German administration to regulate migration and trade more tightly were doomed to fail.

³⁴ Drechsler 1996, 281-282.

³⁵ During the Herero and Nama war the colony had needed a sum of 122 million Mark from the German state only for the year 1905.

³⁶ Cf. for the growth of Lüderitzbucht TNA PRO, WO 106/268, Colonel Trench, attached to the German Forces in SWA, Keetmanshoop, to Secretary to the War Office, London, 12.7.1905; WO 106/268, Colonel Trench, attached to the German Forces in SWA, Lüderitzbucht, to the Chief Staff Officer, Cape Colony, 14.11.1905. Also, one of the most horrible prison camps was erected on Haifish island, just in the bay of Lüderitz, where thousands of captured Nama had to live under horrid conditions and had to carry out forced labour in Lüderitzbucht.

³⁷ Cf. Levinson 2007, 102-115.

³⁸ Charles Van Onselen. *The Fox and the Flies: The Secret Life of a Grotesque Master Criminal*. New York: Walker & Company, 2007: 267-284.

³⁹ NAN, BCL 13, Kaiserliches Bezirksamt Lüderitzbucht to Britisches Konsulat, 21.7.1912.

⁴⁰ Levinson 2007, 102

Migrant workers in German South West Africa

Another issue was the growing demand for labour. As in all mining businesses in African colonies, the entrepreneurs and companies in Lüderitzbucht needed cheap black labour in order to reap high profits. In contrast with underground diamond mining in Johannesburg, the diamonds in Lüderitzbucht were found in the sand so it was not complicated to extract them. Nevertheless, a huge workforce was required for the diamond fields and it could not be recruited from the indigenous population of the German colony alone. There were too few workers and most of them were needed for farm labour. The diamond companies as well as the railway and shipping firms that had offices in Lüderitzbucht were thus dependent on immigrant workers.⁴¹ Therefore to a significant extent, Lüderitzbucht was shaped by the growing numbers of immigrant Capeboys.

Already during the last years of the Herero and Nama war, the German colony had been dependent on Cape workers to support the colonial troops and build the railway. For many Africans from the Cape, this had been an opportunity to earn some money with the skills they had learned during the South African war a few years back, e.g. as transport riders or as auxiliaries to supply the troops. The German government paid relatively well but African workers were exposed to frequent harassment by their German superiors. Nevertheless, German South West Africa remained quite attractive since the Cape had been suffering from an economic depression in the wake of the South African war that made it difficult to find work.⁴² During the Herero and Nama war of 1904-1907, the Germans brutally crushed the Herero and Nama and killed a major part of the African population – between 75 and 80% of the Herero population, representing around 60.000 people. Unsurprisingly, in the aftermath of the conflict, the country suffered from an enormous shortage of labour. Therefore, the German government had to carry on employing Africans from the Cape Colony, especially for railway building projects.⁴³ The “Capeboys” were normally granted one- or two-year contracts. The British administration of the Cape and later of the Union of South Africa allowed schemes for black African workers to migrate to the German colony.⁴⁴ However, there were many protests about the behaviour of German masters. African workers tried to complain to the German authorities but they were rarely successful. They then turned to the British authorities in the Cape and, from 1909, to the British consulate in Lüderitzbucht to protest about constantly fluctuating and diminishing wages as well as bad treatment.⁴⁵

A grave incident occurred in the course of one these work conflicts between African workers from the Cape Colony and German employers at a railway construction project in Wilhelmsthal – between Swakopmund and Windhoek.⁴⁶ 80 Cape workers had complained about low wages and bad treatment from the German railway firm Bachstein and Koppel in Wilhelmsthal. The conflict escalated and the German military intervened without any orders from the civilian German authorities, killing 12

⁴¹ Cf. NAN, ZBU 2074, Woermann-Linie to Kaiserliches Gouvernement, Windhuk, 12.9.1907; NAN, BCL 12, Consul Müller to Minister for Native Affairs, Pretoria, 11.8.1911; Müller discusses the labour demand on the diamond fields in 1911/1912, he expects an intensified recruitment of Capeboys.

⁴² Beinart 1987, 167.

⁴³ Foreign Office Confidential Prints 9768, Memorandum Respecting the Affairs of German South-West Africa, 31.12.1910.

⁴⁴ See the files of the Cape administration dealing with migrant workers in German South West Africa, that contain contracts and wage disputes, e.g. Cape Town Archives Repository, BA 729, Colonial Secretary's Office, Wages due to Native Labourers who died in German South West Africa, 1907-1911.

⁴⁵ Cf. for the complaints of workers the files of the British consulate in Lüderitzbucht, e.g. NAN, BCL 12, *passim*.

⁴⁶ See generally for the incident in Wilhelmsthal Zimmerer 2001, 230-236; Beinart 1987, 180-183.

workers and wounding 10.⁴⁷ In this case, the Union of South Africa as well as the British Foreign office intervened and complained on behalf of the workers and their families. The incident was frequently discussed in the administrations in South Africa and Britain.⁴⁸ After two years, at least some compensation was paid by the Bachstein and Koppel railway firm to the families of the wounded and the dead but not by the German government, who still denied any responsibility.⁴⁹ However, even after such a serious incident, the South African government only interrupted recruiting schemes for some time but did not completely ban the migration of Cape workers to German South West Africa. In 1911, the year of the incident in Wilhelmsthal, the number of Cape workers in German South West Africa actually doubled from 3,000 to 6,000.⁵⁰ This increase may also be a result of the relatively mild report drafted by a South African committee on the occurrences in Wilhelmsthal. It conceded that the Germans had taken steps to remedy the problems of the immigrant workforce.⁵¹

Cape workers started to work on the diamond fields in Lüderitzbucht from 1908 onwards but many of them had already worked on the Lüderitzbucht railway line. This was one of the reasons for the installation of a British consul in Lüderitzbucht. Consul Müller took up his office in 1909 and played a special role in the context analysed here. He had been sent explicitly to Lüderitzbucht to defend British interests in the German colony and was responsible for both European British citizens and African subjects of the British Empire.⁵² Müller was the offspring of German missionaries and spoke German fluently. He had been raised in the Cape Colony and had worked in the rather liberal administration of the Native Department of Cape Town.⁵³ His views were influenced by the policy of John X. Merriman, prime minister of the Cape Colony, who advocated a relatively lenient treatment of the indigenous population and had been one of the few politicians who had stood up for the rights of Africans during the negotiations on the Union of South Africa.⁵⁴ Due to this background, Müller held a critical view of the severe regulations enforced in the German colony. He reported the cases he was informed about to both the Union of South Africa and the Foreign Office in London. The Foreign Office explicitly asked Müller to provide an account of problematic issues:

“Should any definite cases of injustice to British subjects in GSWA come to your knowledge you should not fail to report upon them fully to this Department.”⁵⁵

However, aside from these problems, work in Lüderitzbucht – be it at the railway construction sites or on the diamond fields – was much more attractive for Cape workers than the underground work in the Kimberley diamond mines or in the gold mines of Johannesburg. Furthermore, Cape workers were paid relatively well in the German colony. There was a significant income difference between the

⁴⁷ BAB, R 1002/2777, Niederschrift über die Beschwerden der Capeboys bei der Firma Bachstein und Koppel, 27.10.1910: 133-135; National Archives of South Africa, Pretoria, GG 275 4/14, Office of the Governor-General of South Africa, Collision between German Troops and certain Transkei Kaffirs working in GSWA, 16.10.1910.

⁴⁸ National Archives of South Africa, Pretoria, GG 276 4/26, The Union of South Africa, Prime Minister's Office, Collision between troops and Cape natives in German South West Africa, 3.1.1911; TNA PRO, FO 367/275, Collision at Wilhelmsthal between German Troops and Cape Kaffirs, 22.1.1912.

⁴⁹ TNA PRO, FO 367/275, Ambassador Goschen, Berlin, to Grey, Foreign Office, Wilhelmsthal Incident, 5.2.1912.

⁵⁰ NAN, BCL 13, Confidential, Consul Müller to Burton, Native Affairs Department, 29.4.1911.

⁵¹ PA AA, Kapstadt 49, Bd. 2, Abschrift, Bericht des Reverend Rubusana, 28.1.1911.

⁵² See NAN, ZBU 136 A IV B 3, Kaiserliches Gouvernement für Deutsch-Südwestafrika, Britisches Konsulat in Lüderitzbucht, 1911-1914.

⁵³ BAB, R 1001/2189, Reichskolonialamt, Vertretung fremder Staaten in Deutsch-Südwestafrika, 1909; Cape Town Archives Repository, GH 35/150, Consul Müller in Lüderitzbucht, December 1909.

⁵⁴ See for Merrimans policy Phyllis Lewsen. “Merriman as Last Cape Prime Minister.” *South African Historical Journal* 7 (1975): 62-87; see for Müller and Merriman the correspondence between both in the file Cape Town Archives Repository, GH 35/150.

⁵⁵ NAN, BCL 8, Langley, Foreign Office, to Consul Müller, Lüderitzbucht, 1910.

“natives” of German South West Africa and the Cape Africans. Even the British consul expressed his perplexity about these differences in a report:

“German Protectorate natives receive a maximum of 20/- per month and their food as wages. It is a puzzle to me how long they will continue to work at this rate side by side with our natives who get 60/- per month and better food.”⁵⁶

The German entrepreneurs were obviously willing to pay the migrants from the Cape more than the workers from the German colony, since they were valued as good and efficient workmen. Nevertheless, problems continued to arise between German employers, the German administration and workers from the Cape Colony. Most workers from the Cape were used to a slightly different treatment than that which they had to endure under the Germans. It was especially the indiscriminate use of flogging that led to various complaints.⁵⁷ The Cape workers wanted to have similar working standards as they had experienced in their home colony. In these cases, as opposed to the situation of the indigenous population in the German colony, the migrants were able to lodge complaints with the British consul and thus attract the attention of a third party who could support their grievances or help them with their cases.

The following example illustrates how Müller succeeded in receiving compensation for a Cape worker. In 1912, he wrote to the construction management of the Lüderitzbucht railway that they should pay more compensation to “Maxosakaffer Joseph Vena no. 1201”, whose right leg had to be amputated. In such cases in the mines of Johannesburg around 20 British pounds would have been paid as compensation, so Müller asked the German firm to pay a comparable sum to the mutilated worker.⁵⁸ Following Müller’s intervention, the consortium actually agreed to pay a higher compensation to Joseph Vena and added 300 Marks to the 100 Marks that had already been paid.⁵⁹ Müller backed his arguments with the customary standards in South Africa and the German companies did not want to lag behind too much since they were dependent on the migrant workers, whom they did not want to frighten off.

However, Müller’s interventions were not always successful, as the following case will demonstrate. The South African “Capeboy” Timothy Stevens had been a personal servant to the German businessman Schleppe in Lüderitzbucht. He had worked for two years in his service as a houseboy and before that, he had worked for the German military for seven years. Altogether, he had saved a considerable sum of money and wanted to return to South Africa as a respectable man. He therefore invested in clothes and a new suitcase and was about to enter the steamship headed towards Cape Town. He and his luggage were searched by a German policeman before entering the ship, as was the rule in the diamond city of Lüderitzbucht. The policeman did not treat his new possessions with care; hence Stevens got angry and resented the search carried out by the German official. This harmless resistance was classified as “Widerstand gegen die Staatsgewalt” (resistance against the authority of the state) and led to a sentence of nine months’ prison for obstruction against a German policeman.⁶⁰ The case is only known because the British consul tried to intervene. He asked Stevens’s

⁵⁶ NAN, BCL 12, British Consulate Lüderitzbucht to Native Affairs Department Cape Town, 29.4.1911.

⁵⁷ NAN, BCL 17, J. Abramse to Consul Müller, 25.12.1910.

⁵⁸ NAN, BCL 13, British Consulate Lüderitzbucht to Bauleitung Lüderitzbucht Eisenbahn, 7.6.1912. “Die Eingeborenen Behörde der Sued Afrikanischen Union hat mich ersucht, die Bauleitung mit der ergebenen Bitte naeher zu treten ob dort nicht veranlasst werden koennte dass der Maxosakaffer Joseph Vena No.1201, dessen rechtes Bein infolge eines Unterschenkelbruches amputiert werden musste, eine weiteren Entschaedigung erhalten koennte. Es ist ueblich, dass den Eingeborenen die in den Minen zu Johannesburg arbeiten, eine Entschaedigung in Hoehe von £ 20 in derartigen Faellen zu bekommen. Da die erwaehte Behoerde £ 20 fuer angemessen erachtet, darf ich die Bauleitung erg. bitten, die Bitte der Eingeborenen Behoerde in wohlwollender Erwaegung ziehen zu wollen”.

⁵⁹ NAN, BCK 13, Bauleitung Lüderitzbucht-Eisenbahn to British Consul, 14.6.1912.

⁶⁰ NAN, BCL 22, Kaiserlicher Bezirksamtman Lüderitzbucht to Consul Müller, 13.9.1911.

former employer for a reference, which Mr. Schleppe provided immediately.⁶¹ The consul, the former employer, as well as the government of South Africa, who was informed by Müller, hoped that the Governor would show mercy and reduce the sentence. However, Governor Seitz responded with only two short sentences and refused to make any changes.⁶² The South African government expressed regret but decided not to proceed any further.⁶³

Thus, even though Müller was not always successful, at least the daily grievances of African workers in the German colony were discussed and acquired some resonance within transnational communication.

In contrast, German indigenous workers did not enjoy such opportunities. They could not turn to a third party who might intervene on their behalf and deal with the German administration in order to restore their rights. Consequently, the German administration constantly feared that its own repressed African population might get “the wrong ideas” from Cape colleagues, and that Cape workers might incite German workers to obstruction.⁶⁴ Also, the transcolonial and transnational interactions that emerged through the influx of migrant workers were seen as critical in principle since German treatment of the indigenous population thus underwent increased surveillance. The German administration was therefore opposed to a massive immigration of Cape workers and only allowed them over for limited periods of time. These measures clashed with business interests: the diamond industry, railway firms and the shipping companies were quite keen to continue contracts and to hold the workers in German South West Africa, as they needed reliable and skilled workers.⁶⁵

As a countermeasure, the German colonial government started to recruit workers from the north of the colony, i.e. from the Ovambo people. However, since the Ovambos were usually only willing to come for six months during the winter, the mining industry was still suffering from a shortage of workers. In November 1913, 3 600 workers were missing on the diamond fields. The diamond industry constantly asked the German administration for immigration permits to “import” Cape workers.⁶⁶ Even if the number of Cape workers in the German colony generally decreased after 1912 – induced by a growing demand for labour in the gold mines on the Witwatersrand, Cape workers continued to immigrate to the diamond fields of Lüderitzbucht upon the request of the industry until 1914.⁶⁷

⁶¹ NAN, BCL 22, Schleppe to Consul Müller, Lüderitzbucht, 6.9.1911.

⁶² NAN, BCL 22, Consul Müller to Gouverneur von DSWA, Seitz, 18.9.1911

⁶³ NAN, BCL 22, British Consul for German South West Africa to Governor General, Viscount Gladstone, 9.3.1912.

⁶⁴ NAN, ZBU 2074, Blumhagen, Bezirksamt Swakopmund, über Bezirksamt Lüderitzbucht to Kaiserliches Gouvernement Windhuk, 15.10.1907.

⁶⁵ See for example the petition of the German shipping company Woermannlinie to allow long-time immigration of Cape workers, see NAN, ZBU 2074, Woermann-Linie an das Kaiserliche Gouvernement, Windhuk. 12.9.1907

⁶⁶ NAN, BLU 25, Vermerk, Kaiserliches Bezirksamt Lüderitzbucht, 8.11.1913; NAN, BLU 25, Diamanten Gesellschaft to Bezirksamt Lüderitzbucht, 28.8.1913.

⁶⁷ Zimmerer and Beinart both argue that migration to German South West Africa stopped after the incident in Wilhelmsthal. After analysing files of the Cape government and the British consulate in Lüderitzbucht for the years after 1911 I cannot support their thesis, migration continued – on a lower scale – until WW1.

Coloured workers – changing boundaries of white and black

Many of the Capeboys were so-called Cape coloureds – they had a mixed ethnic background and the German administration labelled them as “Bastards” or “Mischlinge”. Even if there is no exact percentage to be found, the reports of the competent district officers confirm that a significant fraction of the growing number of Cape workers were coloureds.⁶⁸ It was particularly these mixed-race Cape immigrants who questioned the strict demarcation lines between white and black that official German racism was trying to establish in South West Africa. In itself, a growing “bastard” population was seen as a great danger for the colony by the German administration. So the actual presence of mixed-race workers from the Cape and the problems linked to their professional integration were perceived as an additional threat.⁶⁹ Furthermore, most of the coloured migrants were used to a different, more self-confident behaviour than the African population of the German colony. They had been raised in societies where race segregation was not foregrounded as much as in German South West Africa. And they were not as easy to intimidate as the German administration had anticipated.

Several cases in Lüderitzbucht confirmed the apprehensions of the German colonial administration. Migrants from South Africa had sought work as “Capeboys” and were treated as “natives” in the German colony; yet they had been more or less classed as white in the Cape Colony and held British citizenship. Later, some of them tried to change their status and were successful. The example of “Capeboy” William Silke convincingly illustrates this phenomenon. In 1912, he complained about the way he was treated by his foremen Rustemeyer and Ploetz. He obviously looked like a European but had been recruited as a “Capeboy” and was thus treated as a person from the indigenous population and had to wear an identification badge. At one point, he had been beaten so brutally – due to an alleged offence against his superior – that the skin on his arms and shoulders had burst and he had to be treated at the hospital. Silke then approached his former employer, Mr. Niederheitmann of the South African Territories Limited, who obviously held him in high esteem and was prepared to support him. Niederheitmann, who perceived Silke as a white man, went with him to the district court to lodge a complaint and also informed the British consul about the case.⁷⁰ However, the German court stated that Silke’s superiors had acted justly and that Silke had no reason for complaint. Furthermore, the court decided that he was non-white and native.⁷¹ William Silke then wrote to Consul Müller asking him for help to try and prove that he was of European descent.⁷² To obtain a proof of Silke’s alleged European descent, Müller wrote to the authorities of his birthplace. Finally, his Europeaness/whiteness had to be accepted by the German administration.⁷³

Other workers from the Cape Colony also turned from “coloured” into “white”. For instance, in the hope of changing his racial status, John Hawkins turned to Consul Müller in order to secure a confirmation of his status as a European person from his birthplace Worcester in the Cape Colony. Müller authenticated a document that proved Hawkins’s identity as a white man and as a son of

⁶⁸ NAN, BCL 12, British Consulate Lüderitzbucht to Native Affairs Department Cape Town, 29.4.1911. In the documents of the British consulate and in the files of the German administration of Lüderitzbucht one can find a growing number of Cape immigrants in the district of Lüderitzbucht.

⁶⁹ NAN, ZBU 2074, Blumhagen, Bezirksamt Swakopmund, über Bezirksamt Lüderitzbucht to Gouvernement Windhuk, 15.10.1907. Blumhagen wrote: “Die Capboys sind zumeist Mischlinge und es muss meines Erachtens nach den üblen Erfahrungen die fast jeder Staat mit Mischlingsbevölkerung gemacht hat, die Zunahme der Mischlingsbevölkerung möglichst verhindert werden”.

⁷⁰ NAN, BCL 14, Niederheitman, South African Territories to Consul Müller, 20.12.1912.

⁷¹ NAN, BCL 14, Abschrift, Beschluss, Kaiserliches Bezirksgericht Keetmanshoop, 16.12.1912.

⁷² NAN, BCL 14, William Silke to Consul Müller, 21.12.1912.

⁷³ NAN, BCL 14, Müller, British Consul to Niederheitmann, 31.1.1913; BCL 14, Union of South Africa, Magistrate at Mossel Bay to Müller, 23.1.1913.

parents with British citizenship.⁷⁴ The management of the Lüderitzbucht railway consortium was quite surprised by this change and wrote the following to the district office in Lüderitzbucht:

“We obediently ask you to provide information on John Hawkins, who until now was employed as a Capeboy, with identity badge No. 9046. He states that the administration now considers him a Cape Englishman and that he has been expelled from the natives’ housing space. He now came to the management and does not want to be treated and paid like a Boy.”⁷⁵

Hawkins was relatively successful: he continued to work as a heater and fireman, earned slightly more, was no longer housed in the so-called “Eingeborenenwerft” and the German administration as well as the railway management had to accept his race change.⁷⁶

Such ambiguities were seen as highly problematic on the side of the German administration, since the colonial government adhered to a strictly defined demarcation line between white and black. It tried to fight back by decreeing that Cape migrants were only allowed to stay in the German colony for one year and that their wives were not allowed to follow. With the help of these measures, the German government tried to avoid the increasing influx of “ausländische Farbige” (foreign coloureds) in its colony who might claim rights different from those of the local indigenous population. Furthermore, a potential growth of the mixed-race population would be curbed by prohibiting the immigration of coloured couples and coloured women. Such racial measures in the German colony could be linked to regulations implemented in the German Empire when dealing with Polish migrant workers in the East, as Sebastian Conrad has argued. These methods should prevent a “polonisation” of the German East, should avoid a growing influence of the allegedly racially inferior Poles. Thus, both policies followed similar aims.⁷⁷ However, the regulations in German South West Africa should also be seen in the context of the treatment of the African migrant workforce in surrounding colonies. For example, male African workers from many regions and different colonies came to the gold and diamond mines in British South Africa, mostly on short-term contracts and without their wives and families.⁷⁸ This was first of all due to the extremely bad payment that would not support accompanying families, but the short-term contracts for male workers only also aimed at preventing the growth of a new, strong immigrant community in British South Africa.

The racial policy of the German colonial administration was certainly not in line with the business interests of German entrepreneurs and companies. A shipping firm even proposed to the German colonial government to allow Cape workers to bring their wives to the German colony, in the interest of German business they should settle there permanently.⁷⁹

However, the government even turned down German diamond prospectors or traders’ sporadic requests to employ coloured female servants from the Cape. Indeed, many firms and private persons insisted on so-called mixed-race “Kapmädchen” as they were regarded as better-trained and more reliable housemaids than the indigenous women from the German colony.⁸⁰ I would like to provide

⁷⁴ NAN BLU 25, Müller, British Consulate Lüderitzbucht to Bezirksamt Lüderitzbucht, 17.10.1912.

⁷⁵ NAN BLU 25, Deutsche Kolonial-Eisenbahn-Bau- und Betriebsgesellschaft to Bezirksamt Lüderitzbucht, 8.11.1913. (author’s own translation)

⁷⁶ NAN, BLU 25, Vermerk, 20.10.1912.

⁷⁷ Sebastian Conrad, Sebastian. *Globalisierung und Nation im Deutschen Kaiserreich*. München: C. H. Beck 2006, S. 127-135. For example, the Polish migrant workers were forced to return to their home

⁷⁸ Martin Legassick and Francine de Clercq. “Capitalism and migrant labour in Southern Africa: The origins and nature of the system.” In *International labour migration*. Ed. Shula Marks. Hounslow, Middlesex: 1984: 140-160,147; Shula Marks and R. Rathbone. *Industrialisation and Social Change in South Africa 1870-1930*. Harlow: Institute of Commonwealth Studies 1982; A. H. Jeeves, *Migrant Labour and South Africa’s Mining Economy. The struggle for the gold mines’ labour supply*. Montreal: Mc Gill - Queens University Press 1985.

⁷⁹ NAN, ZBU 2074, Woermann-Linie to Kaiserliche Gouvernement, Windhuk, 12.9.1907.

⁸⁰ NAN, BLU 25, Pomona Diamanten-Gesellschaft to Bezirksamt Lüderitzbucht, 27.8.1913.

one example: Ernst Hänert from Lüderitzbucht indignantly addressed the district officer in June 1914. He had already recruited a “Kapmädchen” for his household but, as usual, the immigration permit had been refused. Thereupon, Hänert had contacted the women’s organisation of the German colonial society to recruit a white housemaid in order to assist his wife. However, new problems emerged as can be deduced from his correspondence with the district officer:

“Miss Stratman punctually arrived on May 30th. However both parties, employer and employee, were disappointed. Miss Stratman had been recruited as a housekeeper but refused to perform tasks such as washing, cleaning, mopping. She said that such work should be carried out by black servants. However, my income does not allow for two servants. In my household there is now a ‘changez les dames’ to be found. My wife is now doing the housemaid’s work and Miss Stratman, the housekeeper, does the cooking [...] – You will understand that such a situation is intolerable for my wife. [...] I am unwilling to take chances with another white housemaid and thus reiterate my request to allow for the immigration of a coloured housemaid.”⁸¹

The district officer replied that he was sorry Mr. Hänert had not found a good housemaid but that he was unable to authorise the immigration of a “Cape girl“. Indeed, a German colony was intended for the settlement of Germans and not for the settlement of foreign coloureds.”⁸²

In this case, conceptions of class and race quite obviously clashed: whereas Mr. Hänert wanted to have a housemaid who would take over the household drudgery and would not disrupt the social ranks in his home, the white housekeeper declined to perform tasks that were normally considered the province of black people in colonial societies. Furthermore, the district officer was not interested in the social problems inherent to Hänert’s household. He simply wanted to avoid the softening of the strict demarcation lines that the German state had introduced between “natives” or mixed-race people on the one side and white Europeans on the other. Migrant groups should not endanger the racial regime of German South West Africa and even a single coloured housemaid was obviously perceived as a problem for the colony.

Conclusion

First of all, one can conclude that transnational movements and connections had reached a level that one might not have suspected in a German colony before WW1. Even if Lüderitzbucht represented an exemption as a diamond town, these developments generally point to a growing interconnectedness during a period of worldwide globalisation that also affected African colonies. Business interests were pivotal in that context: Companies and entrepreneurs needed a migrant workforce and were quite keen to explore the new possibilities in the increasingly globalized world of the African colonies. Conversely, for the German colonial administration, the growing interconnectedness and dependence led to a desire to demarcate a national style of colonial rule, as could be observed from the reactions towards new forms of immigration and towards transnational movements in Lüderitzbucht.

When analysing the movements of migrant workers, two systems of colonial rule emerge that clearly disagree in certain areas, most significantly in the treatment of the native population. Whereas the German colony had introduced extremely strict regulation for the indigenous population after the Herero-and-Nama-war, in the Cape the liberal tradition that was formed in the second half of the 19th century still prevailed to some extent after 1900, even if racial exclusion grew. In such a context, the racial system introduced in German South West Africa was threatened by transnational migration and especially by the coloured workers from the Cape. Correspondingly, the administration reacted with overregulation and prohibitive measures. The growing mixed society developing in Lüderitzbucht was obviously highly disturbing for the self-definition of the Germans as colonizers and had to be controlled.

⁸¹ NAN, BLU 25, Hänert to Bezirksamtman Böhmer, 4.6.1914 (author’s own translation).

⁸² NAN, BLU 25, Bezirksamtman Böhmer to Hänert, 6.6.1914.

At the same time, cooperation between the two colonies existed to some extent: migration was supported or at least not obstructed by the Cape administration and German South West Africa had to rely on migrant workers from the Cape. The German administration had to concede some improvements for Cape workers – at least after the incident in Wilhelmsthal. Furthermore, the German firms located in Lüderitzbucht that were dependent on Cape workers were highly motivated to keep their employees: they were willing to pay them better wages and to allow for certain amenities. Generally, all colonial administrations in Africa were aware that they were dependent on cheap African labour. Even if the Cape was critical of German regulations the German colonizers were still seen as fellow colonialists that had to be supported to some extent. The developments also point at the fact that even a German colony in Africa could not escape the effects of a growing globalisation of industry and workforce.

Another noteworthy aspect is that a focus on transnational connections can highlight the otherwise hidden agency of African workers. The individual fates of African and coloured workers become visible through the intervention of a third institution, in this case the British consul. Workers turned to the consul to voice their grievances when the German administration did not react. This option opened up a space to manoeuvre “between the colonies”, an opportunity that could be used to strengthen their claims and to fight for their rights.

Map of German South West Africa, 1912



Author contacts:

Dr. Ulrike Lindner

Historical Institute

Faculty of Social Sciences

University BW Munich

85577 Neubiberg

Germany

Email: ulrike.lindner@unibw.de