Chapter 4: Frauenstein: The 'Sinister Resonances' of a Place and its Inhabitants[1]

> "How much can we reduce what happened to what is said to have happened? Does it matter whether events are fact or fiction? […] What does it mean for our collective experiences? Do we even wish for a common history?"
> — *Raoul Peck*[2]

> "Something may in fact have happened, but […] we can never be sure of it or gain access to it, […] the best we can do is to fabricate metaphors – that is, tell stories – in which, not history, but imaginings of history are invented. Myth may have preceded history, but in the long run it may well be the only guarantee for the survival of history."
> — *André Brink*[3]

There are about 100 personal letters, 200 photographs and numerous postcards, papers and other snippets in a family estate (as well as many more documents in public archives) that offer insight into the life of Lisbeth Dömski, a woman from Berlin who emigrated to German South-West Africa (GSWA) in 1898 and who settled on a farm named Frauenstein near Windhoek. Only six years later, this place – her home – would become a central setting in the very early days of the war between the Herero (and later Nama) and German colonial occupiers, beginning in January 1904. Then, there is another narrative – a fictional (or *fictionalised*) account of a character named Hanna X. She is the protagonist of André Brink's novel *The Other Side of Silence* (2001), who travelled to the colony in the early 20th century and resided

1 I would like to thank the group of the research colloquium "Aktuelle Forschungen zur Geschichte Afrikas" by Julia Tischler and the participants in the workshop "Knowledge Re-Creation" 2022 in Windhoek for the helpful feedback on this chapter.

2 *Exterminate All the Brutes*, season 1, episode 2, "Who the F*** Is Columbus," dir. Raoul Peck, aired 2021 on HBO; see also page 210 and 284 in this book.

3 André Brink, "Stories of History: Reimagining the Past in Post-Apartheid Narrative," in *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Memory in South Africa*, eds. Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1998), 42; see also pages 210, 270 and 290 in this book.

at a place called Frauenstein. In the author's words, the place in his book is an "asylum to those women transported to the colony for the support or delectation of its menfolk, and then turned down. […] Prison, convent, madhouse, poorhouse, brothel, ossuary, a promontory of hell; but also asylum, retreat and final haven."[4]

My encounter with the biographical fragments, as they emerge from the private archive of Lisbeth Dömski, was a lucky coincidence because I was entrusted with her family estate through a distant relative of hers and the friend of my former employer and professor at the University of Freiburg. The first tentative viewing of the historical material already resonated strongly with me. With the predominance of the name Frauenstein as a recurring address or topic of concern in the letters and documents, I immediately drew a connection to the story by South African author Brink in his dark and brutal book. This chapter is an attempt to find answers to the question of how we can read, engage with or understand *both* stories of this mysterious, fictionalised and yet existing place, Frauenstein, and the women who lived (or who were imagined to have lived) there. My point of entry is a set of questions: is one place factual and the other not? Is one biography 'true'? Can it be reconstructed based on archival research, while the other cannot be historically grounded?

I will argue that reading both stories in conjunction with one another offers access to the construction of history as such and to the blending of fact and fiction, to which Haitian filmmaker Raoul Peck and author Brink have pointed in the epigraphs. This case study is an attempt to reconstruct the history of a place and its inhabitants based on what research can bring to the surface, thereby highlighting how these excavated elements are multifaceted: they vary from mythical and propaganda stories to oral narratives and diverse archival fragments that circulated – and continue to circulate – in relation to Frauenstein.

As the conceptual approach to cross-examine the lives of Lisbeth Dömski and Hanna X, I will gear my analysis to their stories' *resonances*. For my interrogation of the various relations, tensions and interconnections between both narratives, I take my cue from Julie Beth Napolin's book, *The Fact of Resonance: Modernist Acoustics and Narrative Form*, in which she proposes a study of the sonic materiality of resonance in modernist novels. Napolin's practice of "writing of, thinking with, and listening to resonance" elucidates the affective dimension of literature that may be sensed, but which cannot always be readily localised.[5] Resonances, thus, are the clues, feelings and thoughts that puzzle us, touch and stay with us after reading a novel or after hearing a story. They are the connections that we make to lived experiences, to happenings which we remember or to other stories that we know about. Interrogating such resonances in greater depth serves to elucidate the relation between things, worlds, literary passages, historical events et cetera. Napolin explains:

4 André Brink, *The Other Side of Silence* (London: Vintage, 2003), 11–12. First published 2001.

5 Napolin, *The Fact of Resonance*, 4, 12.

> Resonance would seem to be the primary basis of comparatism, of the comparatist impulse – what it means to say that one passage relates to another. We lack a critical vocabulary for the affective substance of that experience. We say that passages or works 'resonate' when the reasons for their return or hold on us and on each other are difficult to demonstrate.[6]

For my analysis of Dömski's and Hanna X's stories, I follow this comparatist impulse – like Napolin, I am interested in the "modality of [their] relation."[7] Resonance is more than mere association, given that it is based on affect and in a way imposes itself on us. Perhaps we may understand resonance in a fashion similar to Barthes' *punctum* – as that element "which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)," as a notion we see, perceive, or sense strongly.[8] In my reading, I understand it to be a connection that cannot be easily named – a material or concrete relation that strikes us as unexpected, illogical but powerful. Resonances may be unlikely, delightful connections, but they can also be sombre. In this respect, the concept of "sinister resonance" that Napolin introduces is particularly relevant for the purpose of this chapter.[9] It helps me to access both the uncomfortable echoes of colonialism and the eerie reverberations of history that resound in the present – both in relation to painful chapters in the life of Lisbeth Dömski as well as in the dark narrative of Hanna X and Frauenstein.

My structure for cross-examining the resonances between Lisbeth Dömski's and Hanna X's narratives in this chapter is as follows: first, a brief summary introduces the gist of Brink's *The Other Side of Silence* with a focus on the biography of Hanna X. This is followed by an account of my contact with and the travels of Lisbeth Dömski's family estate. In the subsequent case study, I retrace the various surfacings of Dömski's life and of her home, Frauenstein, as they emerge from diverse archives, including from her own private collections and from public archives in South Africa, Namibia and Switzerland as well as alternative sources that I encountered during my research. My interest in this project of recuperation lies less in writing a 'colonial biography,' but instead in understanding the role of the archive and historical research in constructing a narrative of life and place. However, at the level of content, following Dömski's and Frauenstein's traces in resonance with Brink's book also teaches us about the lives of two individuals (Dömski and Hanna X) and the ways in which they were implicated in complex racialised, gendered and class-determined social formations and political landscapes in Germany and (G)SWA.

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6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1980), 27.

9 Julie Beth Napolin, "'A Sinister Resonance': Vibration, Sound, and the Birth of Conrad's Marlow" *Qui Parle* 21, no. 2 (Spring/Summer 2013): 69–100.

In my presentation of the research, the 'historical' accounts and oral narratives evolving around Dömski are interspersed with passages from *The Other Side of Silence* to explore their sinister connections and raise questions about the nature of their resonances. My analysis then moves to a final subchapter that assesses Brink's practice of literary writing, based on archival research and fictionalisation as potential acts of contestation. I close this case study by revisiting the most vibrant echoes between the women's lives and the multifaceted traces of a fictional, and yet existing, place. This permits me to distil the lessons that resonances teach us about the construction of colonial 'history' and opens new paths for knowledge production at the intersection of literature, cultural studies and historical research.

4.1: Brink's Frauenstein and The Protagonist Hanna X

The Other Side of Silence recounts the tragic story of Hanna X, an orphan girl born in Germany who, in 1902 (approximately in her early 20s), emigrates to GSWA.[10] She is in search of a place for herself in a hostile, patriarchal world. At the orphanage 'Kinder Jesu' in Bremen, and while working as a maid in numerous families in Germany thereafter, Hanna X experiences sexualised violence, injustice and exploitation. Some of these stations would become the first of Hanna X's so-called "several deaths."[11] However, the climax of violence awaits her in the German colony, as well as in the interim. It is particularly in the in-between worlds – on the ship from Bremen to Swakopmund and on the train from Swakopmund to Windhoek – where men's brutality knows no boundaries. German soldiers 'use' and approach women's bodies as if they are commodities. Resistance is hardly possible, or only at great cost, as the fate of Hanna X shows. On the train to Windhoek, she meets Hauptmann Heinrich Böhlke, who attempts to rape her. Hanna fights back, struggling to escape, and eventually she bites into her violator's genitals. In response to this act of resistance, the men's revenge is merciless: Hanna is abused, mutilated, her body is desecrated. She is muzzled, silenced: her tongue is cut out.

Hanna X survives, but is forever incapable of speaking for herself and of telling her story. Her name and the ways in which her fate unfolds are nods to the historical and structural discrimination of women – the silencing of women's voices. The consequence for Hanna is that her story must be told *for* her. At the level of the plot, this is being performed by her young friend Katja, who becomes her translator and soulmate. However, hovering over this is the voice of the narrator, who encounters the fragments of Hanna's story in archival repositories and who takes responsibility

10 Brink's narrator estimates Hanna at around 20–25 years old or maximum 30 at her time of departure (Brink, *The Other Side of Silence*, 6).

11 Brink, *The Other Side of Silence*, 8.

for recounting her experiences in order to trace her life as far as possible so as to give her an air of justice or recognition. According to him (we know that it is a male narrator), the larger silences of the archive make the imagination of the rest of her life inevitable, suggesting that, within his fictional narrative, there are fragments of 'truths' and facts the readers encounter.

After her martyrdom, Hanna is dumped on an ox wagon and transported to Frauenstein, "that out-of-reach place everyone has heard about but no one wants to see, the prison, the nunnery, the brothel, the shithouse, Frauenstein."[12] This is the place where the unwanted women, "the ultimately rejected, found unworthy by even the most disreputable of men," wound up.[13] Again, Hanna survives. Her fate in Frauenstein seems sealed. She tries to leave several times, but always returns; there is no place for her in the desert colony. However, once her newfound friend Katja is harassed by one of the visiting soldiers, Hanna's urge to resist and her desire for revenge flare up. Hanna X herself becomes a perpetrator in order to protect Katja. She kills Katja's violator, and this act heralds her revenge mission. Together, Katja and Hanna set off through the desert and on to Windhoek. On the journey, their army grows as they meet other marginalised, oppressed and violated people – Herero, Khoekhoegowab and Oshiwambo speakers along with a German woman – who suffered under the German colonial and patriarchal regime. However, despite their joint forces, the army's power remains only symbolic in the face of colonialism's oppressive apparatus.

In the end, Hanna faces her tormentor, Böhlke, alone. After the years of humiliation, in which her body was abused and in which she was constantly looked at with disgust and shock by everyone whom she met, Hanna reverses her gaze to her nemesis. In an act of triumph, she forces him to wander naked through the streets of Windhoek under the eyes of colonial officials and the city's inhabitants (whether this is a dream or 'reality,' we do not know). With this act, Hanna reclaims a sense of power; however, there is no final consolation. How her story ends in the colonial world is left untold and remains uncertain.

How can we set this fictional story in relation to the fragmented, reconstructed biography of another woman who happened to live in a place that was equally named Frauenstein? We might begin by directing our attention to a resonance that prompted André Brink to construct his story. In the article, "In Search of Frauenstein," Brink speaks about the background of *The Other Side of Silence*:

> Somewhere in the eighties, if not in the seventies already, George Weideman sent me a cutting from the Namibian newspaper, *Die Republikein*, in which Jan Spies wrote about the women who were shipped from Germany to Duitswes in the late

12 Ibid., 283.

13 Ibid., 12.

> 19th century and early in the 20th, to fulfil the carnal needs of the Schutztruppe and a handful of early colonists. I was particularly moved by the part of the story dealing with the transport of the women from Swakopmund to Windhoek, and the fate of the few unfortunates who were rejected by all the men.[14]

Studying the vast archival material that Brink consulted for his book for many months, I was able to locate the exact newspaper article written by Spies (figure 1). The Afrikaans text translates as follows:

> Clean Cargo to the land of soldiers
> [...] A soldier needed more than a gun and dry rusks, it was decided one day and shiploads of women were brought from Germany to this unknown African country as young girls to tame a country at the side of Schutztruppe-men.
> One after another steamship's human cargo was brought to the pier where lonely soldiers gathered in anticipation of a woman companion that could help share the heat.
> The official meeting place for man and woman was at the old station and from there they could find, exchange and try out each other. They had time for this for over five days because that is the duration of the train journey from Swakopmund to Windhoek at that time.
> Women who were still without a soldier after the five days were brought to the farm Frauenstein outside of Windhoek where they waited for their knight on a white horse.[15]

Again, this newspaper article conjures up more questions than it answers. As a work of non-fiction, can the journalistic text automatically be conceived of as factual? In my discussion on narrative construction towards the end of this chapter, we will explore this and related questions in connection with Brink's mode of knowledge production in greater depth. This alleged "fact of resonance" – to use Napolin's words – prompted me to think more deeply about the practice of historical research, the labour of fiction writing and the suggestive nature of archives.[16] With these thoughts in mind, following the traces of Lisbeth Dömski and studying the 449 archival units that make up the family estate, pushed me to critically interrogate the potentials and pitfalls of (re)writing a life narrative based on archival research.

14 André Brink, "In Search of Frauenstein," *By*, archived copy of the article (26 April 2008), 14–15.

15 Jan Spies, "Skone Vragte Na Land van Soldaat," *Die Republikein*, 7 March 1984, trans. Dominique Wnuczek-Lobaczewski.

16 Napolin, *The Fact of Resonance.*

Skone vragte na land van soldaat

DIE REPUBLIKEIN, 9/3/84

DIT was in die tyd van die Schutztruppe rondom die laaste eeuwisseling dat die Swakopmundse pier 'n ankerplek vir 'n nuwe geslag geword het — en die begin van romanse in die barre woestyn.

'n Soldaat het meer as net 'n geweer en droë beskuit nodig, is op 'n dag besluit en skeepsvragte vol vroue is van Duitsland na hierdie onbekende Afrikaland gebring om as jong meisies aan die sy van Schutztruppe-mans 'n land te tem.

Een ná die ander stoomskip se mensevrag is na die pier gebring waar eensame soldate saamgedrom het in afwagting op 'n vrou-dingetjie wat die hitte kon help deel.

Die amptelike ontmoetingsplek vir man en vrou was die ou stasie en daarvandaan kon hulle mekaar vind, omruil en uitprobeer. Vyf dae het hulle hiervoor tyd gehad, want dit is hoe lank die treinreis destyds van Swakopmund na Windhoek geduur het.

Vroue wat ná die vyf dae nog sonder 'n soldateman was, is na die plaas Frauenstein buite Windhoek gebring waar hulle op ridders van die wit perde gewag het.

Dit was egter nie net op Swakopmund waar vroue aan land gebring is nie; dit het ook in Lüderitzbucht gebeur, waar 'n groot verrassing op die skoonhede gewag het.

Hierdie vroue was meestal onder die indruk dat Suidwes 'n woestynland is met pragtige palmbome om lawende oases.

Gewoonlik het hulle met die afklim in Lüderitz al gevra waar die palmbome dan is. Maar die vrae is netjies deur die manne omseil.

"'n Entjie verder," was die standaard-antwoord.

Op Kolmanskop waar die eerste uitspanplek was, wou die vroue weer weet waar die groenigheid dan is.

"Steeds 'n ent verder. Ons woon nie hier nie," het die manne geantwoord.

Op Pomona is dieselfde vraag gevra, maar die manne het ook nie daar gewoon nie.

Op Elizabethbucht, die eindpunt van alle eindes, was dit afklim en voor die vroue weer oor palmbome kon uitvra, is hulle die koel huise binnegelei.

Op die mure van die slaapkamers is groot, geil, groen palmbome geskilder.

Presopis se herkoms

DIE indringer-presopisbome wat deur baie Suidwesters verfoei word, se geskiedenis loop saam met dié van Swakopmund. sê oom Charlie Gürtel.

Saam met die perde en muile wat vir die Schutztruppe op die kusdorp aan wal gebring is, het ook hul voer gekom en dis waar die presopis-saadjies geskuil het — 'n euwel wat saam met die perde en muile uit Argentinië ingevoer is.

Figure 1: Jan Spies, "Skone Vragte Na Land van Soldaat," Die Republikein, *7 March 1984, mss_2006_21_1_2_9. Courtesy of Amazwi, South African Museum of Literature and Karina Brink.*

4.2: Background: The Journey of an Archive

My point of contact with the family estate came through an unlikely inquiry by Allan Williams, who reached out to my former doctoral supervisor at the University of Freiburg, Germany. At that time (2018), Williams, an Anglican priest, was about to move to the small island of St. Helena to work there in St. Matthew's Parish. Aged 65 at that time, he had been in the possession of an army trunk with family memorabilia, letters, documents and photographs that he had inherited from his mother and that he had safeguarded for almost 50 years. He was searching for a solution on what to do with the material. When he learnt from his friend Prof. Dr. Hochbruck that I was doing research on German-Namibian history in the framework of my dissertation, they agreed that sending the historical material to me would be a reasonable alternative to disposing of it, mindful of its possible value to others. Williams described to me how the letters, photographs and documents "by and large mean nothing to us," referring to himself and his sister.[17] This was because the siblings had lost their parents at an early age. Their death left them in the possession of relics attesting to a family history of which both had little understanding. William's mother, Erika Flora Wöhler, had been the one archiving, documenting and storing the material in the army trunk. She died in a tragic car accident in 1970. Due to this unforeseeable event, the material was in disorder and was almost impossible for her orphaned children to decipher.[18] Nevertheless, when they were young, Williams and his sister would sometimes explore the trunk's content, aiming to reconnect with the deceased. In this act, they would add to the disorder of the material. In an interview via Zoom, Williams explained, while switching between English and German, that:

> From time to time, we would go through the trunk just looking for family artefacts. Asking, you know, who are we? Where did we come from? What did mummy do? Wo sind Mammis Freunde? Wer sind sie? Wo sind sie? Wie heißen sie?[19]

His words resonate with Teju Cole's contemplation on the functions of objects in relation to memory and their potential to "remind us of what was and no longer is" as well as to grant "some kind of solace."[20] While the material might have provided an air of reconnection with the past as children, Williams lost this sense of attachment

17 Allan Williams, pers. comm. via Zoom, 19 October 2020.

18 This is additionally complicated by the fact that a large bulk of the letters are written in the German 'Kurrentschrift.'

19 Williams, pers. comm. via Zoom, 19 October 2020.

20 Cole, *Known and Strange Things*, 143.

to the material in later years. Realising that he neither knew the names nor recognised the faces in the estate, he was ready to pass the material on to me when his move was imminent. The transfer occurred in different batches. The first two convolutes of letters and photographs arrived in October 2018. Months later, single scans of temporarily 'lost' letters and photographs would resurface either in St. Helena or Cape Town and were sent as digital copies to me over the course of 4 years. The dispersed and reassembled character of this private archive is a central characteristic of all archives. As critical archival studies have shown, the idea of archives consisting of organised, structured and enclosed repositories of knowledge prevails, while the opposite is the case.[21]

Disorder and arbitrariness also struck me as defining notions of this particular private archive. The estate is comprised of a multitude of personal documents from Erika Wöhler such as ID cards, graduation certificates, passport photographs, etc – all of them entirely unordered. However, the bulk of material includes the private possessions of Lisbeth Dömski, which had been passed on to Wöhler after her death. For many months of my research, the women's connection remained opaque to me and Williams was also unable to retrace it. In our conversations, he often stressed how knowledge of family history was largely inaccessible to him, having lost his mother at the age of 17, at a time when details about family genealogy had not yet been shared.[22] However, he could recall vague memories about a great aunt from South-West Africa (SWA), whom his mother had visited – a trip that would partially become Wöhler's motivation to migrate to South Africa.

Born in 1920 in Neu-Haldesleben near Magdeburg, Wöhler's family ran a lucrative food import-export business, which offered opportunities for her to travel abroad. After her graduation, the family encouraged Wöhler to visit a great-aunt in SWA in 1939, at the young age of 19.[23] The experience would leave a lasting impression on her, as Williams recounts, knowing that his mother always loved SWA. Wöhler had to return home after the outbreak of the Second World War; the exact circumstances and travel routes she took remain unknown. Back in Germany, Wöhler studied medicine and later worked in the Russian Zone as a nurse.[24] After the war, in 1950, she replied to an advertisement for nurses placed by the South African Union government, got accepted and moved to Pretoria, where she would eventually settle, marry and start her family.[25] Wöhler upheld her connection to SWA and visited a few times. In relation to narratives around these travels, Williams recalls overhearing the name "Frau Otto" (and Lisbeth Dömski would later be called Lisbeth

21 Hamilton, "Archive and Public Life," 129.

22 Williams, pers. comm. via email, 22 October 2018.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_402.

Otto) as a child, remembering that it was said that she had survived the war from 1904 to 1908.[26]

The only surfacing in the estate that directly speaks to this connection is a letter by a woman called "Käte," who writes to Wöhler that Mrs. Otto had been to a hospital, is growing tired of life and wishes to die.[27] With joint efforts, Käte and other actors from Swakopmund and Windhoek were helping Mrs. Otto to relocate to a renovated retirement home in Windhoek (presumably the Susanne Grau Heim).[28] As part of the relocation process, Käte had taken it upon herself to ensure that Mrs. Otto's personal belongings – diaries, photos and old records – were kept safe, with the effect that today, more than 60 years after her death, the (partially over) 120-year-old documents are still preserved.[29] The circumstances under which the material finally came to Wöhler in Pretoria remain unclear. However, on the basis of research into different archives, genealogical platforms and forums, I was able to retrace the family tree of both families and this helped to identify their connection. The point of contact between Erika Wöhler and Lisbeth Otto was through Otto's first husband, Moritz Pilet, who had died during the outbreak of the genocidal war, as we will learn in more detail in the following subchapter. Wöhler's great-grandmother (Sophie Erika Freytag née Hartje, 1870–1922) was the daughter of Moritz Pilet's uncle (Ernst Wilhelm Hartje, 1840–1917).[30] Presumably, Wöhler used these (rather distant) family contacts to help to facilitate her journey abroad. There is only little direct 'evidence' (in the form of correspondences, for instance) of a strong bond between the women; however, the fact that Wöhler was contacted at a time of crisis indicates that she took responsibility for her distant relative, which is again emphasised by the fact that she kept Mrs. Otto's private belongings.

The process of researching the women's connection has been insightful with regards to questions about how biographical reconstruction is affected by both gender and archival practices. One challenge that I faced during my investigations was how name changes and spellings complicate the retrieval of information. Archival practices of categorisation and indexing make it difficult to anticipate the different ways in which a person's life is attested in the repositories. There are a myriad versions of Lisbeth Otto's name, for instance: I found entries in archival lists with her maiden name, varying from Liesbeth Dömsky, Elisabeth Doemski, Lisbeth Dömski, to Doemsky or Dörnsky and it is most likely that numerous additional versions have

26 Williams, pers. comm. via email, 22 October 2018.

27 It is likely that the author is Käte B.von Quitzow (born Katharina Bertha Schultheiss), one of his mother's only close friends from Windhoek, whose name Allan Williams remembered.

28 StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_047.

29 Ibid.

30 Heiratseintrag vom Standesamt Magdeburg-Altstadt, Reg.-Nr. 1034/1889; Williams, pers. comm. via email, 20 April 2020; shared scan "family tree;" Stadtarchiv Magdeburg, Sterbereg., 1874–1950.

slipped by undetected. After 1899, we then find other combinations of Lisbeth, Elisabeth or Liesbeth with the newly acquired surname Pilet. The same occurred after her second marriage in 1910, when she assumed the surname Otto. Following the most frequent spellings in the sources, I will refer to her as Lisbeth Dömski when speaking about her life from 1878 to 1899, then to Lisbeth Pilet for the period between 1899 to 1904 and, finally, will refer to her as Lisbeth Otto for the time frame from 1910 onwards.

Retracing the family lines to identify the intersection of Wöhler and Otto similarly implied retrieving the maiden names of their aunts, mothers and grandmothers. This hurdle elucidates the ways in which societies' gender norms impact on how subjectivity is attended to in state records as well as in broader archival repositories. In Germany, the Civil Code of 1896 stipulated that women had to take their husband's name when they married; this rule was only revoked with the marriage reform of 1976.[31] Having been socialised in Germany, Wöhler, Otto and their relatives followed this model. This norm has implications with regards to claims to and the traceability of a person's identity, experiences and history.[32] In the archives, this translates to the loss of women's biographical traces, impacting heavily on how archival documents can function as sources to learn about their lives.

To counteract this, I followed diverse routes and sources while delving deep into Wöhler's and Otto's private material. In fact, it was spread all over my bedroom, and I started designing a family tree that covered my wall in order to structure and to understand the biographical details that surfaced from the archives. This entangling of private, public and professional realms would continue further. Many of the letters addressed to Mrs. Otto were written in the old German script ("deutsche Kurrentschrift") that I was largely unable to read. A former librarian from the University of Freiburg, Frauke Vrba, volunteered to help me. For months, we would meet weekly and Vrba would read the letters while I transcribed the text simultaneously. We were often constructing 'knowledge' by filtering and selecting information through our limited and subjective perspectives while trying to understand the histories hidden in the documents.

During my engagement with the material, I grew more wary of the labour that I was conducting, playing detective in somebody else's history, filing, ordering and restructuring the delicate material and documents that were (at times) so fragile that they would nearly break apart in my hands. In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Paul Ricœur writes: "The document sleeping in the archives is not just silent, it is an orphan. The testimonies it contains are detached from the authors who 'gave birth' to

31 Mareike Nieberding, "Heiraten: Behaltet eure Namen," *Die Zeit*, 12 February 2018, https://www.zeit.de/zeit-magazin/leben/2018-01/hochzeit-frauen-nachname-ehepartner-metoo.

32 Ibid.

them."[33] For those who work with archival material, this statement might offer a form of absolution: once files, photos and documents are no longer in the possession of their original creator, they are free to be 'taken care of' by others. As orphans, they need to be embedded into larger structures to be made to speak and to signify. We have seen how the travelling of archival material is a common feature of archival dynamics. The corpuses trespass country borders and continents; they can be passed on between generations of families, between strangers and institutions and between acquaintances and travellers for transport or safe-keeping in unstable times. And yet, the question remains: did the material's floating status between various times and spaces justify my free engagement with it, as Ricœur suggests?

A sense of intrusion remained. Those whose lives I retraced were neither able to reject or accept my research, nor did they have a say in the decisions about the future usage of the material. My research happened at a time in which the German and Namibian governments made increasing efforts to address the issues of genocide, reparation, restitution and reconciliation, as mentioned in the introduction. In the spirit of these developments, the State Archives of Freiburg expressed an interest in the Wöhler estate. Williams was so kind to donate his estate to the State Archives of Baden-Württemberg, Department of State Archives Freiburg. With the institution, we agreed on a freelance contract which foresaw that I would index and archive the material for their repositories. Thus, again, I would be enforcing and reproducing my perspective on the material, translating it into the ways in which the repository would be both structured and catalogued. It was only later in the course of this task that I felt increasingly uneasy about this decision. At that time, I considered the public archive to be an appropriate space for the material; it implied a professional preservation and digitisation of the old letters and photographs, with the outcome that the material would be accessible to a larger public. This measure felt important, because it would ensure that Williams and his sister received digitised files of their mother's estate. As I reflect on this process while writing this book some years later, however, other pressing questions arise: what about those people whose photographs were kept in the estate, but whose names have never been secured? I am thinking here particularly of several pictures of African farm, road and domestic workers or about people from the rural villages whom the photographers seemingly visited during a tourist outing. I am also thinking of the affectionate letters written by Rosine Rooi, the daughter of a former employee who worked for Lisbeth Otto. We will learn more about her story in a later subchapter. Introducing her at this point is important, because our encounter would form a crucial reminder to questions that are central to this book, such as: who can lay claims to historical material that ends up in public archives? Who holds and safeguards a family estate? Whose perspectives on the past surface in a Namibian archive?

33 Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 169.

4.3: Frauenstein: A Place Between Fact and Fiction

How and where might we begin to write a study on both a historical and imagined place and its inhabitants? Mindful of how documented sources and narratives on Namibia's colonial history are often those recorded and transmitted by 'white' settlers, missionaries and travellers, it seems inadequate to start with alleged 'origins.' And yet, for the sake of comprehensibility, we may first address what is most striking for those who encounter the place – its name, Frauenstein.

According to oral narratives that have been passed down through generations of the Stöck family, who still own the farm, and as documented by ornithologist researcher H. Kolberg, the term *Frauenstein* is a translation from Otjiherero "okaue mukaendu," which more literally can be understood as "memorial stone to the women," as "okaue" means memorial or gravestone, and "mukaendu" translates to "the women."[34] The tale goes that, before 'white' farmers settled on the land, Frauenstein functioned as a buffer zone between Nama and Herero people, who were in a near-permanent state of war in the region.[35] Approximately 50 women escaped and fled to hide in the massive rock at the place that would later be called Frauenstein when Hereros attacked and looted a Nama *Werft* (homestead). According to the myth, a barking dog revealed their hiding place. The oral narrative, as reported by Heinz Stöck to André Brink upon his visit to the farm in 2008 (after his novel had been published) is even more gruesome than the rather brief account provided by the ornithologist Kolberg. With reference to Stöck, Brink recounts: "Pandemonium ensued. The Hereros shouted at the women to come out of the cave. Those who did venture outside were killed on the spot. Then the men closed the mouth of the cave with wood and lit a fire."[36]

While Kolberg claims that he fact-checked the oral narratives with Herero people, Brink learnt the following during his visit:

> To this day, apparently, the Hereros refuse to speak about the incident: because [...] sparing the lives of women and children in a war was a matter of honour for the Herero. The only way that Herr Stöck could ever confirm the truth from Herero spokesmen, was to tell the story and then to say: 'This is how I heard it. Is it true?' They would then say: 'Yes, it is.' But they would never retell the story themselves.[37]

I was unable to retrieve counter-narratives that oppose these accounts, but this should not be mistaken as evidence that other versions or rejections do not exist.

34 H. Kolberg, "'Frauenstein': Eine Deutung Des Farmnamens," in *Mitteilungen* vol. 12, IX (Windhoek: SWA Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft, 1969), 5.

35 Christian Stöck, pers. comm., 17 August 2019; Kolberg, "'Frauenstein,'" 5.

36 Brink, "In Search of Frauenstein," 14–15.

37 Ibid.

Kolberg's problematic language and framing of the story, indicating that the allegedly violent relation between Herero and Nama people, offers a "deep insight into the psychological behaviour of our native people in their early, precolonial times" and this must be critically considered here.[38] It reminds us of how stories of violence amongst African people functioned with regards to pro-colonial propaganda, racist stereotypes and in terms of the myth of colonial civilisation.

How does Brink engage such fragments that revolve around the historical place Frauenstein? From here onwards, excerpts from the book that resonate with Dömski's life, and the historical context in which her life was embedded, will be inserted in italics to reflect on their relations.

> *The house. More an outcrop of the earth than a house. Set in an Old Testament landscape, a moonscape, a dreamscape. […]*
> *Then the gradual sloping upward to the high tumulus of eroded rocks which especially at sunset or by moonlight would appear like a congregation of petrified figures […]*
> *Dominated by what to half-crazed sex-starved men from the desert might seem like a giant woman, a figurehead on grotesque parody perhaps of the Victory of Samothrace. The strayed wife of a Biblical Lot. The Frauenstein, the Woman Rock."*
> *Just beyond the Woman looms the house, improbable even in the full glare of daylight. No one knows its origins. 'It's always been there,' people say if you ask.*[39]

The settler history of the farm Frauenstein (approximately 45 kilometres northeast of Windhoek), as it emerges in documented archival sources, begins in 1895, when settler Max Bremen bought the farm and surrounding land, a total of 5,000 hectares, including the notorious rock formation.[40] His successor was Moritz Pilet, who bought the property from Bremen two years later.[41] These archival clues establish and construct the place as a farm, thereby following and maintaining 'white' logics of possession and private property. The files and documents in the archives related to Frauenstein strictly follow this logic and negotiate issues around farming and the financing of private land. Reflecting on this, together with the settler narratives around the name, I was curious to see whether my focus on the history of a place would allow me to break free from these limitations. The approach to juxtapose the resonances of a specific and fictional site appeared as a chance to move beyond rigid debates around private property, identity politics and subjectivity – but whether this promise proved true needs to be assessed elsewhere.

On the passenger lists of the Woermann-line located in the archive of Hamburg, Pilet is said to have been a merchant, arriving in GSWA in 1896 and then stayed and

38 Kolberg, "'Frauenstein,'" 6.
39 Brink, *The Other Side of Silence*, 10.
40 ZBU 1901 U.V. f.11.
41 Ibid.

settled there.[42] Interrogating how Dömski's and Pilet's paths crossed, I came across a book on events and happenings during German colonial rule from 1883–1915. The author H.E. Lenssen lists the new settlers and arrivals for the year 1898 and indicates that Lisbeth Dömski and Moritz Pilet were on the same ship travelling to the colony.[43] He further argues that "the ship also brought twelve young girls who had been sent out through the mediation of the Women's League of the German Colonial Society."[44] While the Women's League was only founded in 1907, joining the German Colonial Society (GCS) in 1908, what is interesting about this assertion is that indeed, the first selected and single German women migrated to GSWA in 1898 on funding by the GCS and this prompted me to speculate that Dömski could have been one of them.[45] Her journey – just like Hanna X's – coincided with the third phase of organised women's settlement in GSWA, which stretched from 1898 to 1907.

> *At the time of her passage to Africa on the Hans Woermann in January 1902 she might have been twenty or twenty-five, or even thirty (presumably not older, as one of the prerequisites for selection was to be of child-bearing age in order to be of use to the Colony).*[46]

In the first phase (1884–1892), missionary wives and fiancés in particular were sent to GSWA to join their partners in the colony.[47] Phase two (1892 to 1898) saw the beginning of settlement politics by the GCS in response to emerging debates on 'the colonial woman question,' referring to the perceived threat posed by the rapidly growing 'mixed-race' population to the power of the German colonial regime.[48] Thus, German settler wives and fiancés as well as women who would support the health care system

42 StAHH; Hamburger Passagierlisten; Band: 373–7 I, VIII A 1 Band 092 B; p. 249; Mikrofilmnr K_1754.

43 H. E. Lenssen, *Chronik von Deutsch-Südwestafrika: Eine Kurzgefaßte Aufzählung Geschichtlicher Ereignisse Aus Der Deutschen Kolonialzeit von 1883–1915* (Windhoek: Verlag der Namibia Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft, 1994), 94.

44 Lenssen, *Chronik von Deutsch-Südwestafrika*, 94, my translation.

45 K. Walgenbach, "*Die weisse Frau als Trägerin deutscher Kultur*": *Koloniale Diskurse über Geschlecht, "Rasse" und Klasse im Kaiserreich* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2005), 165; W.Gippert and E. Kleinau, *Bildungsreisende und Arbeitsmigrantinnen: Auslanderfahrungen deutscher Lehrerinnen zwischen Nationaler und Internationaler Orientierung (1850–1920)* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2014), 226–227.

46 Brink, *The Other Side of Silence*, 6.

47 K. Smidt, *Germania führt die deutsche Frau nach Südwest: Auswanderung, Leben und soziale Konflikte deutscher Frauen in der ehemaligen Kolonie Deutsch-Spdwestafrika 1884–1920; Eine sozial- und frauengeschichtliche Studie* (PhD diss., Universität Magdeburg, 1995, 1997), 26–28; A. Dietrich, *Weisse Weiblichkeiten: Konstruktionen von "Rasse" und Geschlecht im deutschen Kolonialismus* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2007), 253–254; Gippert and Kleinau, *Bildungsreisende und Arbeitsmigrantinnen*, 222–223.

48 Smidt, *Germania führt die deutsche Frau nach Südwest*, 26–27; For an in-depth study of the 'woman question', see: Birthe Kundrus, *Moderne Imperialisten: Das Kaiserreich Im Spiegel seiner Kolonien* (Köln: Böhlau, 2003), 77–95.

in the colony increasingly travelled to GSWA.[49] For the first time, the GCS sent unmarried women to the colony who were willing to work as servants, aspired to marry and did not yet have established family relations in GSWA with the third wave.[50] In this period (from 1898 to 1907), a total of 501 women were accompanied in the settlement process by the GCS.[51] The first group of selected women embarked on their journey to the colony in November 1898 on the ship *Marie Woermann*.[52] 13 women received funding for their journey from the GCS, which means that they were granted free passage from Hamburg to Swakopmund in the third class including landing fees; however, in some cases, women received a travel allowance of 150 Mark for the second class.[53] The passenger list reveals that Dömski was with these women on the ship.[54] Studying the GCS files shows that she was *not part* of the *funded* group; however, their proximity, as well as the cross-examination of her life in relation to the story of Hanna X, raises a number of questions about her motivations and about her biographical background. How did *she* – also a single woman of 20 – end up on the ship amongst the first dispatched women by the GCS to migrate to the colony? What pushed her to leave Germany and what encouraged her to settle in GSWA?

> *'You are aware of the kind of person we are looking for?' 'I have read the notices, Frau Sprandel.' 'All the applicants – and there are many of them – are evaluated on the basis of their merit and health.' She places great emphasis on the impressive-sounding words Würdigkeit und Gesundheit.*

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49 Gippert and Kleinau, *Bildungsreisende und Arbeitsmigrantinnen*, 223; Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire, 1884–1945*, 53; Smidt, *Germania führt die deutsche Frau*, 28, 42.

50 Ibid., 43–45.

51 Dietrich, *Weisse Weiblichkeiten*, 259.

52 Archival sources and Smidt list either the 25th or 26th of November (or some time before the 25th, see: Lenssen, *Chronik von Deutsch-Südwestafrika*, pp. 93–94) as the day of departure, see: StAHH, Hamburger Passagierlisten; Band: 373–7 I, VIII A 1 Band 100; p. 1109; Mikrofilmnr: K_1759; Smidt, *Germania führt die deutsche Frau*, 45.

53 *Lenssen, Chronik von Deutsch-Südwestafrika, p.* 94; *Wildenthal, German Women for Empire, 1884–1945 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001),* 91; Smidt, *Germania führt die deutsche Frau*, 45. The selected women's names were Therese Lange, Luise Schrader, Lina Jung, Wilhelmine Litfinski, Hedrig Geyh, Julie Kuhn, Helene Wolff, Paula Starnitzki, Hildegard Parche, Marie Zülchner, Elise Vormschlag, Lida Blohm and Aline Kriess; BArch R 8023_172_0395 and BArch R 8023_172_0439). Wildenthal indicates, as her source for the departing women, an entry by Winkler in *Deutsche Kolonialzeitung* 29, no. 16 (20 April 1912): 268. Winkler lists 12 women as departing domestic servants and an additional seven women as wives, daughters or as 'other relatives.' However, the names listed in the archival files of the German Colonial Society count 13. Since Aline Kriess had a brother in GSWA, this might be the reason why she had not been considered as part of the chosen women that came to the colony through the funding by the German Colonial Society, but the records indicate that she did receive funding.

54 StAHH; Hamburger Passagierlisten; Band: 373–7, VIII A 1 Band 100; Seite 1109; Mikrofilmnr K_1759.

[…] 'You are interested in going to South-West Africa. Is that not running away?'
'It is not Germany I want to get away from, Frau Sprandel. It is Africa I want to go to.'
This prompts much whispering all the way down the long jury table, while Frau Sprandel sits studying Hanna with narrowed eyes. It takes quite a while before she returns to her notes. 'Would you describe yourself as a city girl?'
'No, Frau Sprandel. Bremen is not a big city. And for the last few years I have been working on a farm.'
'Hm.' She nods and looks sideways a [sic] her co-adjudicators. 'The one requirement we are very strict about is that our recruits must be vom Lande und nicht von der Stadt."[55]

Shifting the attention to the resonances between Dömski's and Hanna X's stories reveals how both had similar profiles that 'qualified' them as candidates for the early migrations to GSWA as envisioned by the GCS. As noted previously and as summarised by Smidt: "applicants were supposed to be healthy, strong, modest and 'frugal' and of 'impeccable reputation.'"[56] Further, the targeted age would have been below 26 years; the young women were expected to be "skilled in all household chores" and should not have been afraid of "rough work."[57] Moreover, as indicated in Hanna X's application interview, the German Colonial Society preferred women who were from the countryside or small towns, were experienced in gardening and farming and who were ideally of 'low origin.'[58]

The establishment of the Women's League in 1907 ushered in the fourth phase of organised German women's emigration.[59] While Hanna X's and Elisabeth Dömski's departures were part of the third phase, this phase plays a crucial role for Brink's interest in women's involvement in the organisation of women's settlement. In 1908, the Frauenbund merged with the GCS, becoming the Women's League of the German Colonial Society.[60] Charlotte Sprandel, whom we know from Hanna X's appli-

55 Brink, *The Other Side of Silence*, 133–134, emphasis in original.

56 Smidt, *Germania führt die deutsche Frau nach Südwest*, 45, my translation.

57 Ibid., my translation.

58 Brink, *The Other Side of Silence*, 133–134; Smidt, *Germania führt die deutsche Frau nach Südwest*, 45. However, in the later following fourth phase of women's migration, there had been increasing aspirations to also send women of middle or upper-class backgrounds to the colonies – especially when the Women's League was entrusted with the selection of candidates. (Dörte Lerp, *Die Kolonialfrauenschulen in Witzenhausen und Bad Weilbach* (Master's thesis, unpublished, Freie Universität Berlin, 2006), 100–102; Gippert and Kleinau, *Bildungsreisende und Arbeitsmigrantinnen*, 227; Smidt, *Germania führt die deutsche Frau nach Südwest*, 55.) These endeavours remained rather unsuccessful because colonial officials in the colony, as well as members of the GCS, criticised the fact that middle and upper-class women were not suitable for rural life in Southern Africa (Smidt, *Germania führt die deutsche Frau nach Südwest*, 66–69.)

59 Smidt, *Germania führt die deutsche Frau nach Südwest*, 55.

60 Walgenbach, *Die weisse Frau als Trägerin deutscher Kultur*, 166; Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire, 1884–1945*, 145.

cation interview, joined the Stuttgart branch of the GCS in 1910 and was commissioned by the society to set up the regional Women's League of the German Colonial Society.[61] We can see how Brink appropriated figures and timelines according to the needs of his narrative, considering that Hanna X's application interview must has taken place in late 1901, but Sprandel was only active in her role in the Women's League (and later as Chairwoman of the Württemberg Gauverband of the Women's League) from 1910 onwards. While these are elements of fictionalisation, and the Women's League does not play a central role in Lisbeth Dömski's migration process, let us take a closer look at the organisation's mode of operation in order to better assess why it was so central in Brink's book.

The Women's League was responsible for the recruitment and selection processes; they interviewed and appointed German women who would qualify for emigration and who wanted to settle in the colony as maids, housekeepers or teachers. The GCS would then support chosen candidates with financing and with organising their migration.[62] Despite this arrangement, there were conflicts between the parties, one issue of debate being that the Women's League pushed the GCS, and particularly president Johann Albrecht zu Mecklenburg, to also send educated women ("gebildete Frauen") to GSWA.[63] These women could not, however, be easily allocated, since requests from GSWA were instead targeted at ordinary women. Moreover, the Women's League had agreed to prioritise students from the colonial women's schools as candidates for CGS funding and to promote the schools among German applicants for settlement. Sprandel worked around this agreement, convincing zu Mecklenburg to send women of higher social ranks directly to German settler woman Helene von Falkenhausen's teaching farm in Brakwater, which again caused disputes amongst members of both societies.[64] Brink's research was strongly based on correspondences between Sprandel and zu Mecklenburg, as interrogation of his sources shows.[65] However, as seen previously, he made several adjustments in translating her to a character in the novel.[66]

For the sake of comprehensiveness on the chapter of organised women's migration: The final, fifth phase stretched from 1914 to 1920, when the First World War

61 Heiko Wegmann, 'Charlotte Sprandel (1864–1941)', Stadtarchiv Stuttgart, 1 September 2022, https://www.stadtlexikon-stuttgart.de/article/674bc14c-c4bd-48e8-a1b4-c37cc22a7c18/Charlotte_Sprandel_%281864-1941%29.html.

62 Gippert and Kleinau, *Bildungsreisende und Arbeitsmigrantinnen*, 227.

63 Smidt, *Germania führt die deutsche Frau nach Südwest*, 66; Lerp, *Die Kolonialfrauenschulen in Witzenhausen und Bad Weilbach*, 99–100; Dietrich, *Weisse Weiblichkeiten*, 242.

64 Lerp, *Die Kolonialfrauenschulen in Witzenhausen Und Bad Weilbach*, 99–101.

65 See: Amazwi South African Museum of Literature, mss_2006_1_2_12.

66 For example, Sprandel, based in Stuttgart, was not from the 'Deutsche Kolonialgesellschaft' working in Berlin, as depicted in the novel; and, as indicated previously, she assumed her roles and responsibilities some years later than envisioned by Brink.

brought the project to an end – many women either returned to Germany voluntarily or were repatriated.[67] The last steamer with a group of women on board left Germany on 26 July 1914.[68] However, due to the outbreak of the war, the women did not reach their destination; they returned to Germany.[69]

This background information on the developments of settler women migration is useful to distil central common features in Dömski's and Hanna X's stories: Both were born in the 1870s and travelled to GSWA at around the age of 20. Both became orphans at an early age. Hanna X was left at the doorsteps of the orphanage Kinder Jesus; further details that pertain to the event and her biological parents seem nonexistent, as Brink's narrator suggests. Dömski was born on 15 March 1878 in Berlin, as one of five siblings.[70] Their mother died when Lisbeth was six years old, just days after the birth of their fifth child, who then also died in 1884, two months after the mother's death.[71] The father, Friedrich Rudolf Dömski, a baker, passed away just briefly after he remarried and lost yet another child with his new wife, leaving all of his children as orphans in 1889.[72] How Dömski's childhood looked from the age of 11 until the age of 20 can only be speculated; the estate solely speaks to her life after her arrival in the colony. The only archival clue that I could find that pertains to her childhood was a letter from her sister, Helene Dömski, which is held in her estate. Helene mentions visiting 'her' foster family which suggests that the siblings grew up in separate households.[73]

All of Lisbeth's brothers and sisters had either travelled to GSWA regularly for extended periods or migrated to Southern Africa as well.[74] The propaganda that circulated at the time promoted the possibilities of social advancement in the colonies in order to encourage willing Germans to emigrate. Several promises were made to German women to improve their social position and to be liberated from political, social and juridical power relations.[75] The colonial and racial empowerment lent

67 Smidt, *Germania führt die deutsche Frau nach Südwest*, 28.

68 Ibid., 54.

69 Despite the Women's Leagues and the GCS's efforts, the 'woman question' could not be solved, as numerical discrepancies between White men and women persisted (Ibid.)

70 StAHH; Hamburger Passagierlisten; Band: 373–7 I, VIII A 1 Band 294; Seite: 566; Mikrofilmnr: K_1847; Landesarchiv Berlin (hereafter LAB), Personenstandsreg. Heiratsreg.; Laufendenr: 126; LAB, Personenstandsreg. Geburtsreg.; Laufendenr: 124; LAB, Personenstandsreg. Geburtsreg.; Laufendenr: 791.

71 LAB, Personenstandsreg. Sterbereg.r; Laufendenr: 662; LAB, Personenstandsreg. Geburtsreg.; Laufendenr: 124.

72 LAB, Personenstandsreg. Heiratsreg.; Laufendenr: 377; LAB, Personenstandsreg. Sterbereg.; Laufendenr: 126.

73 StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_009.

74 The brother, Friedrich Dömski, moved to South Africa, while Helene and Max Dömski often visited their sister in GSWA. Helene also lived there at various times and for differing periods.

75 Dietrich, *Weisse Weiblichkeiten*, 371.

them new privileges – German women in the colonies became the "inferior gender of a superior race."[76] Through the words of Dömski's father-in-law, we learn from archival sources that she had been rather poor before 1899: "I don't need […] to tell you that my son's widow was completely penniless before she married him."[77] From this, we may deduce that it might have been the appeal of advancement (or the lack of prospectives in Germany) that encouraged her to leave her position as a saleswoman in search of a better life.[78] Considering her economic background and the fact that her future husband Pilet had been in Magdeburg in 1898 travelling back to his new home in GSWA in July, with Lisbeth leaving Berlin four months later, it seems possible that they had met during his visit to Germany and that he had arranged (and paid for?) her journey to follow him to the colony.

Being left with assumptions here emphasises how Dömski's private estate is largely silent about her life before emigration. Surely, the travelling conditions and dynamics of migration play into this, imposing heavy constraints on which and how many possessions an individual can carry along. However, the practice of documenting one's story *after* the settlement in a colony may also follow an impulse to construct a sense of belonging in a new place.

How is it possible to respond to these archival voids, for those working with archives, in the endeavour to understand and negotiate the past? As we will later explore in further depth, despite the plethora of archival sources with which Brink worked, gaps remained which the author actively fills. Such is the case with the brutal depictions of the violence that Hanna X endures on the ship to Swakopmund and, worse, on the train from Swakopmund to Windhoek where she meets her abuser Hauptmann Böhlke. In other instances, Brink directly addresses archival omissions as a way to make them visible:

> *There are a hundred and ten women on the Hans Woermann which leaves Hamburg harbour on a miserable dark day in mid-January. […] It is on the list supplied by Frau Charlotte Sprandel of the Kolonialgesellschaft in Berlin, on behalf of Johann Albrecht, Herzog zu Mecklenburg, that an unfortunate spattering of black ink first designates one of the passengers as Hanna X."*[79]

> *"Initially, it seems, the mystery might have been caused quite simply by a blotted scrawl in one of the lists compiled by Frau Charlotte Sprandel's secretary which her correspondents,*

76 Frances Gouda, 'Das "Unterlegene" Geschlecht Der "Überlegenen" Rasse : Kolonialgeschichte und Geschlechterverhältnisse', in *Geschlechterverhältnisse Im Historischen Wandel*, by Hanna Schissler (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verl, 1993), 185–204, my translation.

77 My translation, NAN NLA 100, 11.

78 StAHH, Hamburger Passagierlisten; Band: 373 I, VIII A1 Band 100; Seite 1109; Mikrofilmnr: K_1759.

79 Brink, *The Other Side of Silence*, 77.

> *either unable or too hurried and harried to decipher, replaced with the provisional, convenient, all-purpose X. And after that, most likely, no one could be bothered. Why should they be? What's in a name?*[80]

What resonates from the symbol of the "X" are the histories of discrimination based on gender and race, the histories of colonial expansion and slavery as well as the exploitation and submission of those who were historically 'othered.' It brings to mind Malcolm X, who rejected his official surname because it was a 'slave-owner's name.' Like all members of the Nation of Islam, he would replace it with an "X" as a symbol for his lost, original African family name.[81] In the case of *The Other Side of Silence*, the X similarly symbolises an irrevocable loss of information about Hanna X's roots; however, it also speaks to practices of submission and oppression by a patriarchal, colonial society. As a 'reject' in the colony, her personal details and her story were only documented carelessly. Her name was nearly erased by the black ink in the archival papers and, with it, her identity and integrity.

If we continue interrogating the politics of gender, identity and naming, then we can come to see how matrimony emerges as a central motif in much of the colonial propaganda that circulated in relation to discourses on women's settlement in GSWA. As mentioned previously, the traditional changing of women's surnames after marriage complicates efforts to retrace their lives. Considering the role of matrimony against the background of German women's emigration to the colony uncovers its deeper layers of significance. In an archived newspaper article from the *Friedenauer Lokal-Anzeiger* from 1899, we read:

> German West Africa [sic] – an El Dorado for ladies eager to get married. The 'Windhoeker Anzeiger' writes: of our new fellow citizens who register here on 10 January, two have already become engaged. […] Moritz Pilet, a farmer born in Magdeburg, intends to marry Elisabeth Doemski, resident in Klein-Windhoek, born in Berlin, in Frauenstein near Windhoek.[82]

A photo taken by Brink from an archived newspaper article upon his visit to farm Frauenstein in 2008 (figure 2) additionally confirms how Pilet and Dömski's engagement was publicly announced only a few weeks after her arrival in Windhoek.

80 Ibid., 6.

81 Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, "Vor 53 Jahren: Ermordung von Malcolm X | bpb," *bpb.de*, accessed 4 February 2022, https://www.bpb.de/politik/hintergrund-aktuell/201549/1965-ermordung-von-malcolm-x.

82 ZLB, *Friedenauer Lokal-Anzeiger*, 18 March 1899, Nr. 41, my translation.

Aufgebot.

Auf Grund des § 4 des Bundesgesetzes vom 4. Mai 1870 wird hiermit bekannt gemacht, dass

der Farmer **Moritz Pilet,** wohnhaft in Frauenstein bei Windhoek, geboren in Magdeburg,

und

die **Elisabeth Doemski,** wohnhaft in Klein-Windhoek, geboren in Berlin,

beabsichtigen, sich miteinander zu verheirathen und diese Ehe in Gemässheit des Gesetzes vom 4. Mai 1870 vor dem unterzeichneten Beamten abzuschliessen.

Windhoek, den 21. Januar 1899.

gez. **Richter,**
Gerichtsassor.

Figure 2: André Brink, private photograph, n.d. Source unknown. Courtesy of Karina Brink.

The framing of GSWA as an "El Dorado" for marriages resonates strongly from the *Friedenauer Lokal-Anzeiger* article – as it does with many other journalistic publications reporting on life in the colony.[83] Interestingly, not only was Dömski and Pilet's wedding celebrated as a colonial success story, but so too was her future home, farm Frauenstein, which was referenced in the advertising for women's emigration. From my visit to the farm, I learnt that the owners today keep an old, printed photograph of the farmhouse amongst their collection of material on the family and farm history (figure 3). It shows a small group of unrecognisable people dressed in white, sitting on horses and standing in front of and inside of the building. A fading inscription in the top left corner indicates the year 1897 – possibly the date of origin. According to the Stöck family, the photograph was reprinted in a German publication, something Brink also learnt during his visit to the farm. With reference to *The Other Side of Silence*, he reminisces:

> There is a surprising point of contact: Herr Stöck showed me a yellowed cutting from an early edition of a Duitswes newspaper: a report in which young women from Germany are invited to seek a new life here in the colony. And together with the report … a photograph of the farmhouse on Frauenstein.[84]

83 See, for example: "Heiratsgelegenheit für junge Mädchen." *Oldesloer Landbote,* no. 102, 30 August 1898, BArch R 8023_172_0047.

84 Brink, "In Search of Frauenstein."

Figure 3: photograph by André Bink, 2008. Courtesy of Karina Brink and the Stöck family.

We cannot be certain which *Duitswes* newspaper Brink spoke about, since Mrs. Stöck could not confirm the issue. However, she showed me the text "Skizzen aus dem Leben einer Farmerfrau in Deutsch – Südwestafrika," written by Else Büchner, in which the very same photograph appears.[85] It is tempting to assume that this was *the* paper that Brink had seen. However, as we will see throughout this chapter, photographs, trading cards or *cartes-de-visite* circulated extensively amongst the German settler society, as well as between the colony and the German 'metropole,' and were often used arbitrarily, which is also the case with this particular photograph.[86] Let us look closer at the gendered aspects of knowledge production *of* and *with* Frauenstein. Büchner's chapter is a report about the hardships and beauties of farm life in the colony. By means of visualising settler life, her text is accompanied by two other farm photographs (in addition to the one of Frauenstein). Chapter 3 of this book has explored the dynamics of appropriating photographs as material to 'stand in' for certain claims and to underscore specific ideologies. Questions around photography's 'applicability' and arbitrariness are also central to this study, but with

85 Published in: *Süsseroths illustriertem Kolonial-Kalender*, 1914.

86 Throughout the later course of my research, I encountered it again in another publication, Walter Peters, in which the photograph reappears as an example of German craftmanship and architectural skills, see: *Baukunst in Südwestafrika 1884–1914: die Rezeption deutscher Architektur in der Zeit von 1884 bis 1914 im ehemaligen Deutsch-Südwestafrika (Namibia)* (Windhoek: SWA Wissenschaftliche Ges, 1981), 108–111.

a particular focus on the trope of matrimony in relation to Frauenstein: Büchner's text ends with the words: "And once you are in Southwest-Africa, you will rightly recognise it as your second home." [87] Potentially, her words and the visual teaser to farm life were meant to encourage women's settlement in the colony. However, her framing appears in stark contrast to other (oral) narratives surrounding women's emigration which circulated in GSWA. Smidt writes:

> It is striking that both women and men used the same derogatory language towards the women who were sent. The women who arrived in Southwest Africa with the first two steamships in 1899 were referred to by the German settlers as 'Mädchenfuhre' [girls load] or 'first and second Christmas boxes,' as it were, as Christmas presents for the unmarried settlers. There was talk of 'sending out' or 'transport.' Women constituted a 'much sought-after product.' [...] 'Marriageable' women were, in Clara Brockmann's view, a 'particularly sought-after article.'[88]

The tone resonates strongly with Jan Spies' headline, the "[c]lean cargo to the land of soldiers," which inspired Brink to write his book.[89] In the article (figure 1), Spies also gestures to the illusions and expectations that brought women to the colonies, which had given way to a harsh reality:

> It was not only in Swakopmund where women were brought ashore; it also happened in Lüderitzbucht, where a big surprise awaited the beauties. These women were mostly under the impression that Suidwes was a desert country with beautiful palm trees around lush oases.
> On arrival in Lüderitz, they had already asked where the palm trees were. The questions were however neatly bypassed by the men.
> 'A little further,' was the standard answer.
> At Kolmanskop where the first halting place was, the women wanted to once again know where the greenery was.
> 'Still some distance away. We do not live here,' the men replied.
> At Pomona the same question was asked, but the men did not live there either.
> At Elisabeth Bay, the end of all ends, it was time to disembark and before the women could ask about palm trees again, they were led into the cool houses.
> Large, lush, green palm trees were painted on the walls of the bedrooms.[90]

The palm trees emerge as a symbol for a distant paradise, the German "Platz an der Sonne," to reference a famous line from Bernhard von Bülow's speech in a Reich-

87 Else Büchner, "Skizzen Aus Dem Leben Einer Farmerfrau in Deutsch – Südwestafrika," in *Süsseroths Illustrierter Kolonial-Kalender* (Berlin: Wilhelm Süsseroth, 1914), 81, my translation.

88 Smidt, *Germania führt die deutsche Frau nach Südwest*, 46.

89 Spies, "Skone Vragte Na Land van Soldaat." trans. Wnuczek-Lobaczewski.

90 Ibid.

stag debate on 6 December 1897. The palm tree was also a popular and often-deployed element used to craft a sense of exoticism in pictorial documents, such as postcards, advertising pictures and collector's images (*Sammelbilder*), which circulated during colonial times.[91] The created image-worlds were products of European imaginations, projections and fantasies, shaped by clichés and these functioned to excite potential German settlers about the colonies – for many, a promise that was broken.[92]

> *'You realise some of the men offering work to immigrant women may also have an interest in…finding a companion, a spouse.'*
> *Hanna swallows but keeps her face straight. 'If it is a good man I will not have any objection, Frau Sprandel.'*
> *'And what, in your eyes, is a good man?'*
> *'Someone, I hope, who will have some respect for me.' […]*
> *There follows a long whispered consultation along the table. Then Frau Sprandel turns back to Hanna. 'Now that you have heard our questions, is there anything you would like to ask of us?'*
> *Hanna pauses. Then she asks very calmly and seriously, 'Please, Frau Sprandel, will there be palm trees in South-West Africa?'*
> *This time the laughter is more generous.*
> *'I have told you that it is a desert land, Fraulein,' replies the regal lady in the middle of the table. 'I think we can safely assume that there will be the odd oasis with palm trees.'*
> *'In that case I shall go,' says Hanna.*[93]

Hanna X's search for palm trees weaves through the book like a golden thread. Ever since her arrival in the colony, its men, the colonial society and the aspired social uplift have all turned out disappointingly. Yet, Brink's protagonist would hold on to her palm trees in search of some beauty to make life in GSWA bearable. Which imaginations, motivations or promises guided Dömski to the colony, we can never know. However, from archival sources we learn that some life-changing events played out on Frauenstein only five years after moving in with Pilet. On 13 January 1904, the farm would become one of the central settings where the first battles between the Hereros and the German settlers took place, which ultimately culminated in the German Colonial Genocide.

91 Joachim Zeller, *Bilderschule der Herrenmenschen: koloniale Reklamesammelbilder* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2008), 165.

92 Ibid., 7, 82.

93 Brink, *The Other Side of Silence*, 136–137.

4.4: Narratives and Depictions of War Events on Frauenstein

Ever since the German colonial occupation officially began in 1884, tensions between the African population and the German settlers and soldiers in GSWA periodically exploded into violence. One of the early, brutal attacks by the Germans against African resistance was the massacre of Hornkranz in 1893. Nama leader Hendrik Witbooi had vehemently resisted signing a "Schutzvertrag" (protection treaty) with the Germans for a decade, which would have stripped him of sovereignty over his regional claims and would have placed him under the German Empire's ultimate authority.[94] The surprise attack was designed to force Witbooi into submission. While Witbooi was able to escape, more than 80 women and children from his community fell victim to the attack. He capitulated and signed the treaty in 1894.[95] Within this same period of 1884–1894 other African leaders had agreed to enter into alliances with the Germans. Although there had been phases of relatively amicable cohabitation, African mistrust toward the Germans grew throughout the broader region after the Hornkranz massacre.[96]

Historians have had difficulty pinpointing the exact circumstances around 1904 that led from local skirmishes, to the first shots being fired on 12 January 1904 in Okahandja and to the outbreak of full-fledged war by the German state that would engulf large sections of Herero and, later, Nama communities.[97] Many view the Rinderpest epidemic of 1896–1897 as a key factor that brought about a rupture in the tenuous relationship between the Herero and the German settlers.[98] The plague wiped out large parts of Herero-owned livestock and wealth. The related collapse of their political and social structures increasingly forced them to sell their labour to 'white' farmers and entrepreneurs as well as to the colonial administration.[99] However, reasons for

94 Reinhart Kößler, 'Die Bibel und die Peitsche: Verwicklungen um die Rückgabe geraubter Güter', *PERIPHERIE – Politik · Ökonomie · Kultur* 39, no. 1–2019 (30 April 2019): 79.

95 Ibid., 80.

96 Jeremy Silvester and Jan-Bart Gewald, eds., *Words Cannot Be Found: German Colonial Rule in Namibia: An Annotated Reprint of the 1918 Blue Book*, Sources for African History, v. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 50.

97 Häussler, *Der Genozid an Den Herero*, 7.

98 Jan-Bart Gewald, "Kolonisierung, Völkermord Und Wiederkehr: Die Herero von Namibia 1890–1923," in *Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika: Der Kolonialkrieg (1904–1908) in Namibia und seine Folgen*, ed. Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2016), 108–111; Häussler, *Der Genozid an Den Herero*, 56–57; Gippert and Kleinau, *Bildungsreisende und Arbeitsmigrantinnen*, 18; Kaya de Wolff, *Post-/koloniale Erinnerungsdiskurse in der Medienkultur: der Genozid an den Ovaherero und Nama in der deutschsprachigen Presse von 2001 bis 2016* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2021), 384.

99 Jürgen Zimmerer, "Krieg, KZ Und Völkermord in Südwestafrika: Der Erste Deutsche Genozid," in *Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika: Der Kolonialkrieg (1904–1908) in Namibia und Seine Folgen*, ed. Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2016), 46.

the Herero opposition to the colonial regime were multiple and also reflected internal diversity within this community. Matthias Häussler speaks of "a general mood of crisis" amongst the people and underlines the social consequences of the economic disruption of European settler expansion into GSWA that led the Hereros to take up arms in January 1904.[100]

There are numerous publications by settlers, German newspaper articles and oral narratives in Namibia, all of which describe different versions of the day of the incident at Frauenstein. The accounts that circulated amongst 'white' publics in GSWA and Germany revolve around the German men Max Vorberg, Hermann Finster, Mr. Dames and Pilet. However, perspectives on the events differ in various instances. My aim here is less to verify or dispute the truth claims of these reports and more to explore what the narratives about Frauenstein (and about the life of Dömski) do in terms of knowledge production about the war. Published sources, such as those by well-known members of the settler or missionary society and by German travellers (i.e., Conrad Rust, Wilhelm Vorberg, Heinrich Brockmann, Helene von Falkenhausen or Max Belwe), as well as the oral narratives that the Stöck family passes on, mainly argue the following: Pilet learnt about approaching Hereros on the morning of 13 January 1904, and his farm manager, Dames, rode to the neighbouring farm at Ongeama to get help, hoping to return with owners Vorberg and Finster to Frauenstein.[101] However, on their way to the farm, a group of Herero fighters opened fire.[102] Dames and Vorberg were hit by bullets and would eventually succumb to their injuries.[103] Finster managed to escape to Windhoek – how he succeeded in making his way past the Herero fighters is described in highly embellished accounts.[104]

From the report by missionary Brockmann, we learn that, at the time of the event, Helene Dömski had just come from Germany to Frauenstein to be with her

100 Häussler, *Der Genozid an Den Herero*, 70; Helmut Bley, *Kolonialherrschaft und Sozialstruktur in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1894–1914* (Hamburg: Leipniz-Verlag, 1968), 176.

101 Max Belwe, *Gegen Die Herero, 1904/1905: Tagebuchaufzeichnungen von Max Belwe* (Berlin: Ernst Siegfried Mittler und Sohn Königliche Hofbuchhandlung, 1906), 24–25; Conrad Rust, *Krieg Und Frieden Im Hererolande: Aufzeichnungen Aus Dem Kriegsjahre 1904* (Leipzig: Kittler, 1905), 76.

102 Different accounts speak about either 200 Hereros (Rust, *Krieg Und Frieden Im Hererolande*, 76) or 40 Hereros (Mannfred Goldbeck and Sven E. Kanzler (eds.), *Gondwana history III: Momentaufnahmen aus der Vergangenheit Namibias* (Göttingen: Klaus Hess Verlag, 2012), 10).

103 Goldbeck and Kanzler, *Gondwana History III*, 10; Hanna Schele, *Immotavirtus: Erinnerungen an Südwest-Afrika 1907–1909. Teilausgabe Der Erinnerungen 1878–1919 Wilhelm Vorberg* (Diepholz: Selbstverlag, 1971), 219.

104 Various reports attest to how Finster received help from a Nama woman or that he himself has been disguised as a Nama woman during his escape. See: Belwe, *Gegen Die Herero.*, 28; Goldbeck and Kanzler, *Gondwana History III*, 10.

sister Lisbeth.[105] When the group of Hereros approached the farm, Pilet sent both women into the house, facing the group alone on his veranda.[106] He was then caught, gagged and dragged into the nearest cattle kraal where he was killed by a gunshot.[107] The three men were buried on the farm Frauenstein; to this day their gravestones commemorate the events and mark their final resting place. Following the surfacings that attend to the fate of Lisbeth and her sister Helene brings to light a plethora of conflicting depictions.

As published by Belwe, Finster recounted: "His [Pilet's] wife and sister-in-law, stripped of all their clothes, were dragged along for a day and were only able to escape to Okahandja about three weeks later, with great effort and agony."[108] Today's inhabitant of Frauenstein, Jutta Stöck, re-narrates the events similarly. According to her, at the beginning of the attack, both women ran to their domestic servants for help but, instead of coming for their rescue, the Herero women allegedly made them take off and hand over their clothes.[109] Conrad Rust's publication recounts how Mrs. Pilet and Ms. Dömski were only left with old sacks and rags to clothe themselves, attempting to hide in a Pontok on the farm.[110] Both attest that the women were subsequently taken along by a group of Hereros – the duration of their travel, however, differs starkly in the accounts. As indicated in the quote above, Finster claims the women were only rescued after three weeks and, in a similar vein, Stöck's account suggests that Pilet and Dömski were made to 'live' with and 'slave' for the Hereros for a longer period of time.[111] However, in Belwe's publication, we further learn that the women arrived at a missionary station in Otjisazu as early as on 17 January.[112] This is similarly reflected in Rust's report: on the journey with the Hereros, the group would soon encounter the boer Keet who negotiated with the Herero to take the women with him.[113] With a *Schutzbrief* – a letter issued by the Hereros to grant the women's protection – Keet would then bring the women to Heinrich Brockmann's mission in Otjisazu.[114]

Following the diverse accounts, and other forms of media representation relating to the events, elucidates how the experiences of Lisbeth and Helene became a

105 Heinrich Brockmann, *Haba Du Ta Gob: Lebenserinnerungen von Missionar Johann Heinrich Brockmann* (Berlin: Verlag Klaus Guhl, 1992), 58.

106 Rust, *Krieg Und Frieden Im Hererolande*, 76; Belwe, *Gegen Die Herero.*, 24.

107 Ibid.; Ibid.

108 Belwe, *Gegen Die Herero*, 24.

109 Jutta Stöck, pers. comm., 17 August 2019.

110 Rust, *Krieg Und Frieden Im Hererolande*, 76–77.

111 Stöck, pers. comm., 17 August 2019; Belwe, *Gegen Die Herero*, 24.

112 Belwe, *Gegen Die Herero*, 46.

113 Rust, *Krieg Und Frieden Im Hererolande*, 77–78.

114 Brockmann, *Haba Du Ta Gob*, 58; Belwe, *Gegen Die Herero*, 46.

heated topic of debate that circulated widely both in and beyond GSWA. In exploring these narratives, however, we must not only ask *what* is being sad about the women, but also *to what ends* certain stories were being constructed and spread. A crucial archival finding to be interrogated in this respect is figure 4. The detail from an article in *Die Woche: Moderne Illustrierte Zeitschrift* that shows one of only three photographs of Lisbeth Pilet that directly connects her name to an image.

Figure 4: detail, "Zum Aufstand in Deutsch-Südwestafrika: Unsere Bedrängten Landsleute in Windhoek," Die Woche: Moderne Illustrierte Zeitschrift, *6 February 1904, August Scherl, Nr. 6, 241.*

On the pages preceding the photographs, the author reports on the outbreak of the war and introduces a rumour that recurrently surfaced with regards to the sisters' fate on 13 January, namely that both women, like other settlers "have fallen victim to the fury of the natives." [115] Their deaths, however, had not yet been ascertained at the point of publication. The inscription of the photographs is also noteworthy with a view to practices of knowledge production: "Our harassed compatriots in Windhoek," perpetuates ideas promoted prominently at the time of the war, that is, the representation of German settlers as innocent victims unjustly attacked by Black aggressors.[116] Gesine Krüger looks closely at the media coverage of the war and assesses the circulating accounts on Lisbeth's and Helene's alleged death as particularly "bloodthirsty, disproportionate and implausible."[117] With regards to the background of these narratives, she explains:

115 *Die Woche: Moderne Illustrierte Zeitschrift*, 6 February 1904, August Scherl, Nr. 6, 237.

116 Ibid., my translation.

117 Gesine Krüger, *Kriegsbewältigung Und Geschichtsbewußtsein: Realität, Deutung Und Verarbeitung Des Deutschen Kolonialkriegs in Namibia, 1904 Bis 1907* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht Verlag, 1999), 108.

> Captain Franke reported in his estate how the story about the alleged murder spread. A rider told him about the destroyed Frauenstein farm in January 1904. 'The man gave a gruesome account because he had seen the dismembered bodies of the women. For example, he claimed to have seen the cut breasts of the women hanging from the thorn bushes in front of the house… A story, perfectly usable and similar to the newspaper reports that caused horror and indignation against the "black beasts" in Germany at that time. Indicative of the value of these rumours is the fact that a few days later I found those two women unharmed at Okahandja's feast.' Elsewhere there is even the claim that the women had been quartered.[118]

Krüger describes how the (often dramatised or even fictional) stories about the brutal murder and sexual assaults of women were instrumentalised to provoke public outrage about the war, despite the fact that it was known how the Herero's conduct of warfare foresaw to protect instead of harm settler women and children.[119] As we have seen in the case of Lisbeth Pilet and her sister, who were taken to a mission station and then eventually to Windhoek – despite all hardship and losses – the lives of German women were relatively 'safe,' as Samuel Maharero had ordered that women, children and missionaries be spared from Herero attacks as part of his rules of engagement for civilised warfare.[120]

Myth-making and propaganda about the war also spread through visual representations. Since there were no photographs taken at the outbreak of the war, "artistic inventions" would fill this void and came in forms such as sketches, aquarelles, little tobacco images (Tabakbildchen) or collector's images.[121] They depicted the stereotype of the Hereros as murderous 'black beasts' who unjustifiably rose up against the 'white', innocent authority and were designed and circulated by the German side to sway a negative image of the 'attacking enemy.'[122] The events on Frauenstein were also portrayed along such narrative lines. A collector's image printed by the chocolate company Riedel & Engelmann titled, "Herero-Uprising in German-South-West-Africa," and subtitled "attack on a German farm" shows the chaos of the war, burning

118 Ibid., my translation.

119 Gesine Krüger, "Bestien und Opfer: Frauen im Kolonialkrieg," in *Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika: Der Kolonialkrieg (1904–1908) in Namibia und seine Folgen*, eds. Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2016), 143–47.

120 Eric D. Weitz, *A World Divided: The Global Struggle for Human Rights in the Age of Nation-States* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 218; Casper W. Erichsen, "German-Herero Conflict of 1904–07," *Britannica*, 17 February 2023, https://www.britannica.com/topic/German-Herero-conflict-of-1904-1907.

121 Wolfram Hartmann, "Pictures Explored," in *Hues Between Black and White: Historical Photography from Colonial Namibia: 1860s to 1915* (Windhoek: Out of Africa Publishers, 2004), 56.

122 See, for example: J. Zeller, *Bilderschule der Herrenmenschen: Koloniale Reklamesammelbilder* (Berlin: Christoph Links Verlag, 2008), p. 16.

farmhouses, a corpse on the ground and a 'white' woman on her knees on the verge of being attacked by a half-naked Black man while a child is clinging to her legs.[123] On the back of the card, a text guides the reading of the image:

> The atrocities, the destruction and devastation increased more and more, and the Herero activity was no longer limited to theft. On 6 January 1904, they attacked a farm called 'Frauenstein,' murdered the farmer, his wife and child, his sister-in-law and the black servants. But it was not only this farm that was sworn to ruin, there were many more.[124]

The false information on the alleged death of Pilet, her sister and the child that never existed in addition to the wrong date (the war had not even begun on 6 January) indicate how the pictorial document barely served to inform readers about war developments; rather, it portrayed the German settlers as victims of Black violence.[125] Additionally, the image conveyed ideologically-charged political messages (promoting the need to fight the seemingly brutal and merciless Hereros) and racist stereotypes ('white' innocence vs. Black brutality).

Figure 5: Sammlung Bernhard Gardi, FGA 1–556, Ankauf mit anonymen Mitteln, Museum Rietberg, Zurich.

123 My translation. See for the collector's image: Inventarnr Do 2005/51, Bildarchiv, Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin, or: Zeller, Bilderschule der Herrenmenschen, p. 183.

124 Back side of the card; Ibid.

125 Zeller, *Bilderschule der Herrenmenschen*, p. 182.

Interestingly, the very same image can be found on different collector's images that were circulated by various companies. Figure 5 shows the same motif printed by the coffee-supplement company Voelcker-Cichorien from Baden-Wuerttemberg.[126] The visual worlds depicted were fed by the (fear-)fantasies of the Germans: For soldiers who fought in the war, they served as channels to process their own experience of helplessness which they projected onto the figure of vulnerable and wounded 'white' woman.[127]

While it remains important to unpack these mechanisms of narrative construction, we must also consider: what is it that is being glossed over by these depictions? We must ask, as Yvette Christiansë does, "What is dis-appearing?" What is it that can barely surface from the depth of history and archival repositories?[128] Pointing to the limits of biographical reconstruction through archival research, Christiansë laments how the experiences and perspectives of the 'subaltern' are subdued, uncovered, unheard.[129] Attuning our reading to the more hidden resonances of indigenous perspectives in archival repositories, we come to see how the archival findings and sources that we have gathered so far appear one-sided and inherently problematic. I was not able to collect oral narratives of Herero and Nama people about the history of Frauenstein and I was unable to access counter-narratives, besides the German settler and soldier versions, concerning the events of the war on the farm. However, as Christiansë tells us, the archive remains the "place of possible appearance."[130] Figure 6 is one example of this. The photograph powerfully evokes the experiences of those who were structurally muted by colonial discourse – African women whose perspectives, voices and narratives were largely dislodged and overwritten by propaganda disseminated by the colonial regime.

126 FGA 1–557, Museum Rietberg, Zurich.

127 Krüger, 'Bestien und Opfer,' pp. 149–150.

128 Yvette Christiansë, "'Heartsore:' The Melancholy Archive of Cape Colony Slavery," *The Scholar and Feminist Online* 7, no. 2 (Spring 2009), https://sfonline.barnard.edu/africana/print_christianse.htm.

129 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Colombia University Press, 1994), 66–111.

130 Ibid.

Figure 6: BAB, A03.

The blurry photograph is part of an album titled "Album of a German Farmer from South-West Africa, 1906–1915," today stored in the Basler Afrika Bibliographien (BAB). Its direct link to the place Frauenstein is the handwritten inscription of the name on the back. Information about the previous owner, the photographs' origin or the circulation of the album are largely unknown, given that the BAB purchased the album at an auction. From legends, captions and notes on the photos and the album pages, it can be assumed that it covers the years 1906 to 1915.[131] Studying the album, with its 213 pasted and loose photographs, is an uncomfortable task. It consists of numerous pornographic images of naked African women, posing (or made to pose) for the camera. We see groups of Africans lined up or grouped together for the photograph, pictures of landscapes, farms, homesteads, colonial buildings with settlers and colonial officials or 'white' men in sexually suggestive postures and interactions with African women.

The resonances of the specific image are unsettling, its *punctum* being the three women couched on the ground, seemingly positioned in the middle of the lined-up Schutztruppen-men (as we can detect from their hats).[132] How might we interpret the photograph? How can we make sense of its resonances and possible meaning? In *Listening to Images*, Tina Campt argues that, instead of only 'looking at' photographs,

131 BAB, A03.

132 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 27.

we should direct our attention to what they emanate beyond what is merely visible.[133] She proposes the practice of *listening* to them as a way of "attuning our senses to the other affective frequencies through which photographs register."[134] Such a mode of reading implies focusing our senses on the (often extremely limited) possibilities for self-expression reflected in mimics, gestures and postures and on the affective resonances thereof.[135] In this vein, we notice how the men seemingly sit for the photograph with ease, some of them directing a smile towards the camera or an unidentifiable point in the background, while two of the women shield their faces with their hands as a (possibly) protective gesture. With what appears to be discomfort in her eyes, the woman to the right wearily directs her gaze towards the photographer. And yet, this reading does not allow us to retrieve the 'truth' of a photograph – other forms of interaction and relations are possible and can hardly be substantiated based on research. Thus, while attuning our reading to affect and to the multifaceted resonances of photographs is important, it remains an imperative to contextualise their origin as much as possible.

The high concentration of men – soldiers – visually subordinating the women by literally positioning them at their feet conjures up all kinds of questions concerning the exploitation of women in the colony and in the area of Frauenstein in particular. Judging by the Schutztruppen uniforms, it is possible that the photograph might have been taken during the war between 1906 and 1908 (given that the album likely dates from 1906–1915).[136] Prisoners of war were often made to pose with soldiers in a similar fashion to the one above, and these photographs exist in abundance from the genocidal phase. Quite contrary to the Herero warfare, as portrayed in the narratives spurred by Germans, it was German colonial officials and soldiers who regarded African women as the 'loot' of the war, which has, in many instances, been staged for the camera.[137]

What is troubling about figure 6 is how the photographed women remain anonymous, without names, exact dates or any further information, and it appears impossible to reconstruct the specific conditions under which the image was taken. However, relegating our view to the broader historical context in which the image production was embedded, we learn that the German colonial regime erected prisoners-of-war and internments camps to organise the custody of the prisoners all

133 Campt, *Listening to Images*, 50.

134 Ibid., 9.

135 Ibid. 51, 59.

136 Yet, the position of the women remains unclear. We cannot ascertain whether they were Herero or Nama or even how or if they were involved in the war.

137 Jürgen Zimmerer, *Deutsche Herrschaft über Afrikaner: staatlicher Machtanspruch und Wirklichkeit im kolonialen Namibia* (Münster, Hamburg, Berlin: Lit, 2002), 45; Krüger, "Bestien und Opfer," 149.

throughout the 'Schutzgebiet.'[138] From these camps, captives were sent to conduct forced labour for the military, the construction of the railway or for companies such as the Woermann shipping line.[139] Since 1905, civilians were legally allowed to "rent out" prisoners to work in their private businesses, households and on farms.[140] Thus, it is conceivable that prisoners of war were also forced to labour on Frauenstein; however, this could neither be confirmed nor refuted through my oral and archival research.

African women were in a particularly vulnerable position at the time of the war, in terms of gender relations, the racial discrimination that they experienced and due to their role as an important work force of the agricultural sector (due to the shortage of 'manpower').[141] Casper W. Erichsen writes that "there was a *de facto* state of lawlessness, a situation that many settlers and soldiers quickly succumbed to," implying that African women were forced into prostitution; they were raped, largely without consequences for the perpetrator or they experienced other forms of gender-based violence.[142] This state of lawlessness and social hierarchy largely continued beyond the genocidal period. While the prisoner-of-war status was formally lifted in April 1908, with the end of the war, many Africans still found themselves forced to remain in their previous labour positions and a state of coercion and exploitation prevailed.[143]

Shifting our attention to the position of women in the colonial society at large reveals how, despite structural differences, the patriarchal, capitalist structures also imposed a threat to German women.

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138 Zimmerer, *Deutsche Herrschaft über Afrikaner*, 45.

139 Erichsen, *The Angel of Death*, 59; Krüger, "Bestien und Opfer," 154.

140 Erichsen, *The Angel of Death*, 47; Krüger, "Bestien und Opfer," 154; Zimmerer, *Deutsche Herrschaft über Afrikaner*, 45.

141 Ingrid Grienig, "Von 'Melkweibern,' 'Hirtenweibern,' 'Küchenweibern' in Deutsch-Südwestafrika Zu Landarbeiterfrauen in Namibia: Eine Historische Betrachtung," *Forschungsinstitut Der Internationalen Wissenschaftlichen Vereinigung Weltwirtschaft Und Weltpolitik (IWVWW) Berichte* 88 (1999): 61–71, my translation.

142 Erichsen, *The Angel of Death*, 86.; However, Hartman reminds us to bear in mind that even within these social hierarchies, "consensual sexual interaction" was possible (Hartmann, "Pictures Explored," 76). He explains how besides "the highly predatory sexual behaviour of German troops, [...] a rather unknown and deep history of consensual romantic, erotic and conjugal relationships also existed between immigrant European men and local women since the 1850s." (Ibid.). While it is important to acknowledge that African women claimed such loopholes for the exertion of agency, on a structural level, they remained the "weakest link in the social hierarchy" of the colony (Grienig, "Von 'Melkweibern,' 'Hirtenweibern,' 'Küchenweibern' in Deutsch-Südwestafrika," 71, my translation).

143 Erichsen, *The Angel of Death*, 119; Zimmerer, *Deutsche Herrschaft über Afrikaner*, 183.

> *All these military men – they cannot be up to any good. Such visits in the past have been restricted to small patrols of two or three or half a dozen soldiers at a time; and God knows what havoc they left behind. What lies ahead today cannot be imagined.*[144]

Brink's suggestive writing of 'visiting men' at Frauenstein prompts us to reflect: What did it mean for a young German woman to live in the colony – and on the farm – in a time of conflict, aggression, chaos, war and in its aftermath? From the debate on women's roles in warfare and academic controversy about settler women's complicity in patriarchal, colonialist social relations, we learn how 'white' women were implicated in colonial politics and discourse.[145] However, I do not intend to further unpack the exact levels of their implication in general or Pilet's role in particular, but instead will explore how engaging the archive can cater to an understanding of a life – and where the limits of this practice are.

4.5: Gender Roles and Relations on Frauenstein After the War

From archival files we learn that Lisbet was 27 when she became a widow. She returned to Germany for about a year after the traumatic events at Frauenstein, as documented in Moritz Pilet's estate files kept in the National Archives of Namibia (NAN) and as outlined in a letter by his father, addressed to the Imperial German Colonial Office:

> Since the necessity of my son's widow's journey home has been certified by a doctor, I have no doubt that her health has suffered considerably as a result of the mental excitement and the physical strain she endured during her imprisonment, as one can imagine. For this reason, it is probably best if she returns to Germany for the time being and recovers mentally and physically from all the terrible things.[146]

From an exchange of letters between Lisbeth Pilet and Helene von Falkenhausen, the well-known headmistress of the colonial school in Witzenhausen and, later, the teaching farm in Brakwater, it becomes visible that, with the deaths of their husbands (Friedrich von Falkenhausen perished during the early days of the war, too), both widows were in a precarious situation. Uncertain about where to go and how to sustain themselves, von Falkenhaus reached out to Pilet:

144 Brink, *The Other Side of Silence*, 27.

145 For a more detailed account on "the complicity thesis," see: Dietrich, *Weisse Weiblichkeiten*, 283–294.

146 My translation, NAN, NLA 100, P.11.

> Major von Francois wrote to my parents-in-law to ask for provisional support of 3,000 M – from this I conclude that Mrs von Francois received this. I only received 600 M. Have you already received a sum of money from somewhere? I would never beg for myself, but I must think of the children. […] What am I to do now! Could you, dear Mrs. Pilet, give me some advice?[147]

In another letter, von Falkenhausen wrote:

> I would also appreciate it if you could tell me what your father-in-law thinks about the compensation issue. And whether he thinks that it would be diplomatically correct if we now published some things that we would not like to conceal. For example, the support of the government now etc.[148]

In her desperate need for financial support, von Falkenhausen was willing to exert public pressure against the colonial offices and to speak out publicly about the lack of support that she experienced – but her letter remains vague about her exact criticism. The compensation commission did eventually reimburse both women for the 'damages' of the war.[149] Lisbeth received a payment in 1906 but, one year prior, her economic insecurity and her father-in-law's coercion pushed her to return to Frauenstein, as we learn from Otto Pilet's statement archived in the NAN estate files:[150]

> I have a determined hope and intend to persuade my son's widow by all means that, as soon as her state of health is satisfactory again, she will return to the Schutzgebiet in order to take charge of the reconstruction of everything that has been destroyed there.[151]

Through the perspective of a German man by the name of DM Quaas, we find out more about the pressure that Otto Pilet exerted onto his daughter-in-law:

> I also know that you are not on good terms with your husband's relatives; that your father-in-law almost literally forced you to go back to Südwest to save some of the capital. I also know that some of your husband's debts from the past have been added to your load. You are expected to get out what is possible from the farm and in doing so you poor woman will accomplish nothing. You will never get out

147 My translation, StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_013.

148 My translation, StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_014.

149 According to Kleinau and Gippert, von Falkenhausen used a part of her compensation money, which she received after the war, to build the teaching farm Brakwater. See: Gippert and Kleinau, *Bildungsreisende und Arbeitsmigrantinnen*, 233.

150 StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_058.

151 My translation, NAN, NLA 100, P.11.

> the money that had once been invested. Even more so as a single woman, without support.[152]

The letter by Quaas deserves closer attention. It is revealing with regards to Lisbeth's economic situation as well as the paternalism and patriarchal pressure to which she was subjected. Quaas chummed up to her upon learning about Pilet's return to the colony. In response to her rejection, he writes in an aggressive and offended tone on 2 September 1905:

> My dear Mrs Pilet,
> I hurry to answer your letter. Your lines have simply left me gobsmacked. First of all, that I can obey, you can see from the way you express yourself – poor little woman, do you think that I beg for your friendship? I am neither used to running after women nor to molest women. The best instincts motivated me to offer my friendship and support to the little madame that I simply liked since I saw her for the first time. I know which sorrow you have! Everywhere I asked about you because I was interested in you [...] – These were my impulses that encouraged me to ask for your friendship, then came your [indecipherable] perhaps beautiful [indecipherable] qualities. But as I said before, I don't beg for it, have unfortunately been spoiled far too much. So you are pushing me back. – Very well, you little foolish woman; you will have to regret it, I promise you! So I will not torment you any longer. [...]
> So you deceived me and played with me. Women love to play. Dear little woman, I will give you one more piece of advice. Be careful at the game. If you meet a man who does not have my character, you could lose your game thoroughly.[153]

While we have no access to Pilet's initial letter, we learn from Quaas' reply that she resolutely rejected him, to which he responded aggressively. In the letters of the estate, we find further instances in which women had to push back against obtrusive men. There were others who reached out to Pilet shortly after her return, expressing their interest in the widow and, additionally, in Pilet's female friends and family members report in letters how they were struggling to reject unwanted suitors.[154]

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152 My translation, StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_072_01-03.

153 Ibid.

154 See, for example, the letter by a certain Mr. Ohmstede who expresses his wish to meet Pilet (StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_064). We then learn from von Falkenhausen about Helene Dömski who rejected her suitor G. Paarschen which seemingly left her future uncertain; other examples are letters by Ms. Brandenburg who asks Ms. Pilet directly to help her fend off a wooer by the name of Pogel/Pagel (StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_006) or by Liese Töpfer who writes about her discomfort being under pressure to be with a rich man by the name of Werder whom she decides to leave. See: StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_411.

In *The Other Side of Silence,* the theme of encroaching men, threatening the physical and mental integrity of women, emerges as a central trope:[155]

> *And so to Frauenstein, colossal against the shimmering black sky (arrival always seemed to occur at night). […] Into which, at long intervals, bedraggled individuals or bands of marauding soldiers, hunters, smouse or remittance men from distant mines would stumble in search of shelter or refreshment. And under cover of darkness the most intrepid, or drunk, or desperate of these would find among the inmates some not too utterly irredeemable with whom to disport themselves; and if even then a face would appear too repulsive the act could be performed from behind, as must be the wont of men more used to quadrupeds anyway.*[156]

> *He pushes out his chair, takes a moment to steady himself with his hands on the high back, and begins to move in slow measured strides towards the nearest cluster of women against the wall. He stops to wipe his perspiring forehead with a large kerchief drawn, not without effort, from his pocket. Beaming the goodwill of the conqueror, he raises the chin of the first woman, briefly studies her face, moves on to the next. […] By the time he reaches the fifth or sixth woman his comportment has become more brazen. He no longer merely lifts a head or a hand or pinches an earlobe but palpates a breast, tweaks a nipple, forces a knuckle between the lips of the woman in front of him. The tweaks become fiercer as he moves on. One woman moans lightly in pain. He raises his other hand to pinch both nipples. This time she makes no sound, but her face grows very white. When he comes to the twelfth woman he orders her to turn round and fondles her buttocks, grunts, moves on. At the next he grips with both hands the high collar of her dark dress and rips it open, exposing her breasts. In a reflex movement the woman tries to cover them with her hands. Von Blixen slaps her very hard across the face.*[157]

The numerous sexual assaults that Brink imagines in his novel are appalling. Frauenstein, the asylum for the most destitute of the colonial society is also their prison in which no protection is given when, on frequent visits, soldiers rape the inhabitants.[158]

Studying Pilet's estate with a view to passages such as the one above illuminates the most sinister – albeit elusive – resonances between Brink's fiction and the archival documents on Frauenstein. In various notes and letters, we find clues about (groups of) men residing at Frauenstein. Possible reasons for this could be the long

155 This refers to Black and 'white' women alike. While this passage here speaks more directly to the danger of men for German women at Frauenstein, *The Other Side of Silence* also attends to the abuse and violence that African women endured during colonial rule (cf. the fate of Kahapa's wife or Himba's wife and children).

156 Brink, *The Other Side of Silence*, 12, emphasis in original.

157 Ibid., 31.

158 Ibid.

distances between settlements with little infrastructure in the arid landscape, where stops and overnight stays on settler farms were common. Additionally, there was a police station in Neudamm, close to Frauenstein, which might have been an important destination for travelling soldiers. However, many clues are suggestive with regards to the nature of the visits on the farm. One example is a letter by First Lieutenant and Adjutant of the Commandery Hans Richter, written in 1905:

> Dear Mrs Pilet,
> In reply to your very kind letter, I take the liberty of informing you of the following: I have just 'flashed' to Ongeama that on 10 August 9 men have to go to Frauenstein as a crew. If you later wish to have all 16 men as a crew, please let me know. For the time being, I have not transferred all the people to Frauenstein, because I believe it would cause you too much inconvenience with the space.
> At the next opportunity I will send you another beautiful woman, please let me know when a wagon is coming to Windhoek. I am delighted with Bertha's behaviour.[159]

Richter's writing raises a plethora of questions: how and why did Pilet attend to this number of men lodging at Frauenstein? Were other women there with her and, if yes, why? What is the story of the "beautiful woman" that was being sent to Frauenstein and why does a man judge another woman's behaviour (Bertha) in his letter to Pilet? Further clues in the estate prompt similar questions. A woman by the name of Anna Schlitzing recurrently enquired about women who were sent to Frauenstein – one being Vera von Werthern (born von Cleve) who apparently grew up in difficult circumstances and to whom Frauenstein became a temporary parental home.[160] In another letter, Schlitzing speaks about Pilet's role in offering refuge for German women while they were searching for stable workplaces. One example is the case of Fräulein Gerdes who is said to have had a bad experience (the "affair Voigts"), did not get any help by the Women's League and eventually found asylum at Frauenstein.[161] We also encounter the writing of a man by the name of Rühtekrüger who seeks accommodation for his bride:

> As far as my bride's apprenticeship is concerned, [...] it is very important to me that my bride is well accommodated for a few months and therefore I would be very grateful to you if Fräulein could be in your house [...] In my opinion, it is precisely this, the simple and practical running of a household, that is important for a housewife.[162]

159 My translation, StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_075.
160 StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_080.
161 StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_081.
162 My translation, StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_078.

My attempts to clarify the nature of the women's visit at Frauenstein have remained largely unsuccessful. The present owner, Stöck, was not able to shed light on the significance of their stays either, but she recalled a rumour that the neighbours on farm Ongeama were running an "Elevenschule" (teaching farm) where new, young settlers were taught how to farm and how to run the household in the colony. This information cannot be ascertained and the connection between this farm school and Frauenstein remains opaque. We are left with these suggestive clues in the estate; the traces of nebulous residencies (of both men and women) on Frauenstein reoccur in a time span of about 20 years.

How did Pilet re-establish her life at the farm after the traumatic death of her husband? From the social structures and the conditions of farm life in the colony, we can deduce that the return to the isolated farm would have hardly been possible for her alone. In 1906, she was engaged again, and her future husband was the previous farm owner of Oruhungu and the temporary farm manager of Frauenstein, Arthur Otto, born in Pirna an der Elbe.[163] While I was unable to trace photographs of Lisbeth and her first husband Moritz, Allan Williams was in possession of two pictures that showed Lisbeth and her new partner – the only two images, apart from the newspaper article we saw previously, that showed her face and gave her name.

Figure 7: Scan of photograph, courtesy of Allan Williams.

163 NAN, BWI 175 L5DA65; Stöck, pers. comm. 17 August 2019. We can deduce that the couple had already been engaged in 1906 from Schultze-Moderow's caption for the images taken at Frauenstein, in which he writes: "Frau Lisbeth Pilet [jetzt Frau Otto] Herr Otto und ich. August 1906."

Figure 8: Scan of photograph, courtesy of Allan Williams.

The scans of these two photographs (figure 7 and figure 8) came to me via detours. I have spent months studying the 200 photographs from Pilet's estate, trying to identify which one of the faces is hers until I learnt from Williams that, while he was moving homes, two images had escaped his attention and did not make it into the package that he had shipped to Germany. On the back of one of these pictures (figure 8), we see an inscription written in pencil, "Herr u. Frau Otto." It shows the couple on a coach, seemingly leaving farm Frauenstein. With the saluting men in the background in figure 7 and their neat clothing, I am inclined to speculate that this might have been their wedding day, which was held in March 1910.[164] Lisbeth appears rather young and, in the estate, photographs of younger women in the early 1900s are rare. The wedding could have been a special moment worth capturing with the camera. However, the images do not provide any context or additional information.

164 This we can glean from greeting cards and other letters that had been sent to congratulate the newly married couple. See: StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040.

In the BAB, I encountered two further photographs that also offer a glimpse into the lives of Lisbeth and Arthur Otto. Yet again, the lighting and quality of the photographs do not allow me to recognise them fully.

Figure 9: BAB, A03.

Figure 9 is part of the photo album A03, positioned a couple of pages before the image of 'white' soldiers posing with the three African women (figure 6). We see a group of men and Lisbeth as the only woman at a dining table in front of the farmhouse. However, being overexposed and without a caption, it is only through comparative reading that we can discern the place as Frauenstein, possibly with its inhabitants. The BAB offers another reference point for this. In album M02 by Kurt Schultze-Moderow, a military officer in the 4th Battalion, we find another blurry photograph shot from a distance. It shows the farmhouse and the album owner posing on the veranda with Lisbeth and Arthur Otto. The captions read "August 1906. 1. Reise mit Papa," "Farm Frauenstein" and "Frau Lisbeth Pilet [jetzt Otto] Arthur Otto und ich! August 1906" (figure 10).

Schultze-Moderow was a military officer in GSWA from 1904 to 1910.[165] The BAB is in possession of 8 photo albums with around 310 photographs, postcards and additional printed and handwritten documents, both on and about GSWA, as well as photographs and postcards on German East-Africa, Aden, the Suez Canal and life

165 BAB, PA.52.

in Germany.[166] What strikes the eye when studying the albums is their careful compilation: the neatly pasted and arranged photographs are often accompanied with captions, names, comments and dates, all of them underlined in altering colours. The album assembles single portrait photographs of Africans, German soldiers (including Schultze-Moderow and his father) posing with lined-up Africans, settlers and soldiers on farms or in front of colonial houses and, again, many photographs with what appears to be pornographic or ethnographic aesthetics. What does the meticulous fabrication of this private album tell us about the significance and function of archived photography from the colonial era?

Figure 10: BAB, M02.

We have explored how the practice of designing a photo album is traditionally a gendered undertaking in earlier chapters. It is often the mother who is intuitively identified as the compiler of family photo albums.[167] The act of crafting a family photo album is a way for mothers to construct a family identity, a sense of belonging and togetherness that is expected to prevail. However, Martha Langford indicates

166 Ibid., inventory description.

167 Langford, *Suspended Conversations*, 26–27.

that the act of photographing is usually "assigned to the head of the nuclear family" – the father – whom Pierre Bourdieu identifies as "the children's historian."[168] This aspect warrants further attention with regards to Schultze-Moderow.

The captions in figure 10 indicate that major Friedrich Schultze-Moderow was with his son during the journey to Frauenstein, prompting the assumption that he might have been the photographer. Kurt Schultze-Moderow continued the visual documentation of the father-son journey and his further travels as a soldier in the colony. Developing the images afterwards, assembling, pasting and inscribing them appears to be a practice to both craft and safeguard his personal adventure narrative. Langford perceives of the act of composing a photo album as memory work, with the album functioning as the "mnemonic framework" that keeps memories alive and accessible.[169] Furthermore, it preserves the structures of oral tradition: compilers curate and select photographs to "use them figuratively to emblematize the stories of their lives."[170] In this vein, Schultze-Moderow's photographic practice and memory work allow him to claim author- and ownership over his service in the colonies. It might function as a tool to pass on these narratives to viewers and listeners, to produce knowledge of the past and construct a sense of identity as a soldier. However, the sexually suggestive photos raise the question of how *private* the private album was intended to be. Who were these albums for? Family members and friends? The public eye? Or was it a purely private mnemonic book for self-affirmation, pleasure and entertainment?

While the original significances of Schultze-Moderow's photographs and his album cannot be retrieved, they can bear new meaning for viewers today. In this study, figure 10 allows for contemplation on the life of Lisbeth Otto. From the frequent visits of soldiers such as Schultze-Moderow,[171] we can glean that Otto regularly socialised and was closely entangled with the colonial settler society. Her home Frauenstein emerges as a place of heightened mobility for various members of this community.

> *From the early days of German settlement, over a period of several decades, that much we know, it was extensively rebuilt into its present shape; but its purpose has remained obscure. A country residence for some fabulously rich retired dignitary or general from Bismarck's army (or even the Iron Chancellor himself!)? A grandiose fortress against enemies real or imaginary? A vast prison for Hereros, Ovambos, Damars or Namas captured in the colony's neverending wars and raids, or even for invaders from elsewhere in Africa or abroad? A hunting lodge for huge parties disembarking from the Reich to decimate the*

168 Ibid., 26.

169 Ibid., 21.

170 Ibid., 20–21.

171 Or the many other colonial officials who left their carte-de-visite or thanked Otto for her hospitality in their letters.

> *fauna of the interior on a scale not even the British could match? A religious retreat and sanctuary? A house of sexual extravagance? Or did whoever embarked upon it simply lose himself (it could only have been a 'he') in the crazy excess of the act of building it for its own sake?*[172]

In Brink's imagination, "Frauenstein was too vast for its inhabitants" – the huge "ship stranded in the desert" from his novel differs starkly from the rather simple farmhouse that it was during Otto's days.[173] We learn from the estate that it had 6 rooms: a kitchen, a store, a farm building, a cattle barn and additional farm facilities.[174] After the wedding in 1910, according to a family friend, Major General Beukes, "Mr. Otto has brilliantly restored the farm that was devastated by the Herero uprising; the domesticity there is exemplary."[175] In addition to the regular visits from soldiers and settlers, Lisbeth's siblings Max and Helene Dömski repeatedly resided on Frauenstein for lengthier stays. From comments in letters and shadowy presences on a number of photographs, we learn about farm workers, whose perspectives remain largely obscured and undocumented. However, we will see how the archive can be activated and made to speak to their experiences later.

There is another kind of void in the life of Otto that matters in terms of preserving her legacy: a recommendation letter in support of the couple's aspirations to adopt a child from Germany reveals that they had no children of their own.[176] However, for reasons that remain unclear, the adoption did not materialise, and with no direct heir, both the Frauenstein house and the private family archive could not be passed on to the next generation. In 1926, Arthur and Lisbeth Otto sold Frauenstein to their neighbours Lossen/Stöck. The couple, in their 40s and 50s, moved to Windhoek where they would make a living from gardening in their backyard, according to oral sources.[177] The resonances between Brink's fiction and Otto's life do not end, even in spite of their leaving Frauenstein.

4.6: Living Archives

Both, Brink's novel and the estate incline us to think about the power dynamics to which Black and 'white' women were subjected – questions which remain relevant beyond the official end of German colonial rule in Namibia. Moreover, *The Other Side*

172 Brink, *The Other Side of Silence*, 11.
173 Ibid., 283.
174 NAN, NLA 100. P.11.
175 StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_004.
176 Ibid.
177 Stöck, pers. comm., 17 August 2019; Rooi, pers. comm., 7 February 2020.

of Silences opens up avenues for the reflection on the moral responsibilities of archival and biographical work:

> *All those documents, the old copies of Afrika Post, the correspondence, the registers from Frauenstein, the police records; and yet armed with no more than a name only half released by history – Hanna X – what is there to conclude? […] all my enquiries – begun in Windhoek, pursued in Bremen and Hamburg, afterwards resumed in Namibia – could only end in conjecture. But having come so far, I cannot now turn back or abandon the quest. […] I have little choice but to imagine the rest. A narrative accumulates its own weight and demands its own conclusion. […] Before Hanna X is restored to the silence from which she emerged, there has to be a final chapter.*[178]

As is the case in this paragraph, Brink's narrator recurrently interrupts his recount on Hanna X's life with parentheses in which he reflects upon his role as researcher and storyteller. Exploring the archives, following her traces across continents and recounting her narrative *for* her – all of these engagements come with an emotional charge. They generate an urge to know the end, to complete the story and to provide closure for both narrator and protagonist. As a scholar working on the Dömski family archive, the narrator's thoughts resonate with me, prompting me to reconsider my own position as a researcher studying a life: what are the ethical duties entailed in this kind of work?

Similar to Brink's narrator, we have been following Lisbeth Dömski/Pilet/Otto's traces for many years of her life and this calls for a completion of the biographical circle. While many voids remain, it is death that figures most prominently in archival sources, and it is death that changes the lives of those who prevail. Such is the case when Lisbeth's sister Helene took her own life in 1936. Her state files indicate that she died by gunshot and, in a correspondence between her brothers, Max and Friedrich Dömski, we learn that it was suicide.[179] Records in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia in Windhoek reveal that she was depressed (*Trübsinn*) and the NAN's archival files indicate that she died without many assets, a family or even home of her own (she was living and travelling between Germany, SWA, the US and South Africa).[180] These factors offer food for thought with regards to the situation that brought her to end her life; again, though, the archival fragments do not provide many answers.

There are a number of portrait and studio photographs of Helene from the early 1900s, such as figure 11, which is inscribed with her name and the date 1904. Study-

178 Brink, *The Other Side of Silence*, 301.

179 Letters from Evan Dembskey's family estate.

180 Church records, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Namibia, Windhoek, Sterbereg. 22 January 1896–19 May 1940; SWAA 0614, A68.5.1.557; EST 824, 1928.

ing her face closely helps to identify Helene again in another photo from later years, as seen in figure 12.

Figure 11 (left): StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_176.
Figure 12 (right): StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_261.

Helene's death put unexpected forces in motion for those she left behind. As colonial bureaucracy mandated, all siblings had to be contacted to settle inheritance matters. Her modest remaining assets had to be distributed. In the estate files, Lisbeth notes that her brother, Friedrich Dömski, had disappeared in 1903 and was considered dead.[181] However, after being contacted by the magistrate office, Friedrich Dömski responds, accepting his part of the inheritance and informing the office about his place of residence, Johannesburg.[182] While the public archive allows us to retrace this point of reconnection, it is the private archive that illuminates the emotional significance of the siblings' reunion after many years of separation. In their letters to Friedrich Dömski, Lisbeth and Max write:

> 'With mighty fate supernal Man can weave no bond eternal'! The old word says so, and yet a strange twist of fate has made it so that, even though it was a very sad event, the suicide of our good Lene, we were able to seal our brotherly bond anew.[183]

181 NAN, EST 824_1928.

182 NAN, EST 824.

183 Max Dömski's letter from Evan Dembskey's family estate, my translation (and translation of a quote by W.H. Furness 1882).

> "The experience with you was certainly the greatest and most beautiful in all these years. I thought you were in Australia, when I used to rave or [indecipherable] not to think that the thought never came to you to give us a sign of life. […]
> You can't believe how happy Max was when he finally found you. He of all people wailed for you, while I was reassured, as I was accustomed to how you always went your own way and after all, our family circumstances were not least to blame for our being torn apart."[184]

The latter text is important because it is one of only two sources from the estate that make it possible to access Lisbeth Otto's perspective. Most of the letters are addressed *to* her; hence, her view or her own words remain largely inaccessible. To counteract this, it is vital to explore alternative sources. Through platforms for genealogical research, I learnt that Evan Dembskey, a descendant of Lisbeth's brother Friedrich Dömski, has been studying his family history for many years. While he was able to reconstruct the ancestry for those located in South Africa today, he had almost no information about his great-great-grandfather's siblings. In return for the biographical details on Lisbeth, Helene and Max that I provided, Dembskey forwarded scans of the only relicts in his possession: three photographs of Helene and Max, as well as letters by Lisbeth and Max as shown in the excerpts above.

Our sharing of information, and our joint effort at historical recuperation, prompted me to question the nature of our interest in the past and our impulses for engaging with individual biographies. Facing gaps and silences in transmitted family history, descendants may be tempted to follow the quest for an understanding of one's own identity and positionality. Why am I here, who were *my people*? (And what does this even mean?) How does their story impact on my own identity and where I am today? Eelco Runia writes about our lack of knowledge about the past and the transgenerational memory that calls out to be filled: "'Commemoration from scarcity' is the prime symptom of a 'desire for reality,' of an ontological homesickness (*Heimweh*), of a wish to commune with the numinosity of history."[185] Perhaps this "wish to commune with the numinosity of history," this fascination with the past, is not only a personal response in the face of unknown family history; perhaps it says something about our human condition. Being "moved by the past," as Runia terms it, may be a human desire for an understanding of what has shaped our entangled worlds and the lives of individuals who are implicated in the politics of these worlds.[186] Archives seem to remain prevalent as ever-emerging repositories of knowledge in this active engagement with the past to reckon with history. Stuart Hall's concept of "living archives" is once again helpful here. He understands living

184 Lisbeth Otto's letter from Evan Dembskey's family estate, my translation.

185 Runia, *Moved by the Past*, 13, emphasis in original.

186 Reference to Runia's title: *Moved by the Past*.

archives as unfinished and open-ended and argues that their meanings are in constant transition, depending on their usability in the future.[187]

In joining our forces in biographical research, Dembskey and I also actively engaged and expanded the archives to which we had access. Sending notes, information and scans across continents, we extended the itineraries of the archival material. We contemplated the potential 'facts' and fictions that it hosted, speculating on what separated the siblings, what their ideological stances were and how they renegotiated their different realities and positionalities as a dispersed family.[188] In many regards, our work resonates with Brink's practice of narrative production based on archival research. As descendants, authors and academics, we are lured by the archive's promise to harbour hidden stories waiting to be unearthed (and told).

The clues brought forth by our recuperative projects elucidate once again how death figures prominently in archival documents. Arthur Otto's estate files indicate that he died in 1956 in Swakopmund as a result of colon cancer.[189] The executor of his will, guardian of the estate and trustee Toussaint states how the couple lived in a two-room flat with a kitchen. Apart from a few pieces of furniture, Arthur Otto bequeathed his wife with barely any remaining assets.[190] At the age of 78, Lisbeth Otto became a widow for the second time, staying alone in the coastal town, far away from friends and contacts in Windhoek or her few family members in South Africa and Germany. The occasional letter kept them in contact. Amongst these is a rather outstanding correspondence which is rare to find in private archives of German settlers – and rare to find in any archive really. In my hands, I held a small stack of letters, cramped into one envelope (figure 13). A correspondence between Lisbeth and the "Damara woman Rosa and Rosine Xoagus," dating back to the period between 1958 and 1959.[191]

In the envelope, I found the only letter in the estate written by Lisbeth Otto herself. From the correspondence in Afrikaans and German, we can glean that Rosa had been employed by the Otto family as a domestic worker and worked for the couple for many years. With exuberant affectation and loving words, Rosa as well as her daughter Rosine, report on their jobs in Windhoek (nursing), their health, their family and how much they miss the "nete vrou" in their lives. This term recurrently appears throughout the letters, appearing either to be a nickname or a kind of mixed translation from the German "nett" (nice) and Afrikaans "vrou" (woman). Seemingly,

187 Stuart Hall, "Constituting an Archive," 89–91

188 Friedrich Dömski's descendants speculate that, because Friedrich had helped the British during the Boer War, he was disowned by the German side of the family. Dembskey, pers. comm. via email, 7 December 2019.

189 NAN, EST 1388 357/1956.

190 Ibid.

191 StA Freiburg, T1 Zugang 2019/0040_408, my translation.

there is a strong sense of devotion in the women's writing, which emerges not only from the language, but also from the letters' content: Rosa and Rosine express their desire to see Lisbeth again; they describe having approached other German speakers to inquire about her whereabouts in the endeavour to reach out to her. ("What do I have to do to see you […] Dear nete vrou, do not think that I have forgotten you. Your words and deeds still shine in my heart like the sun. I cannot forget this. I went to Mr. Srader to get your address."[192]). However, I felt wary about taking the words at face value, mindful of the power relations between domestic workers and their employers. The sense of devotion might as well be enacted as a means to an end: we learn in the letters that Rosa and Rosine are trying to locate a "posboek" (postbook, most likely a savings account) of which they cannot get hold, as it is kept by another German-Namibian by the name of Schrader.[193]

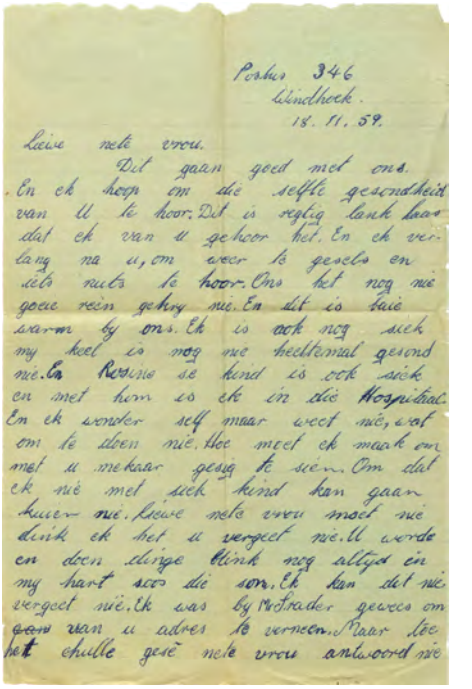
Figure 13: SA, Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_408.

While the letters initially conjured up more questions than they provided answers, this unlikely archival fragment allowed for a crucial opening in my study on Lisbeth Otto's family estate, as well as for broader issues relating to practices of knowledge production based on archival research. In an autobiographical essay interrogating his own settler family's past as reflected in archival formations, Namibian historian Dag Henrichsen asks: "Where are the full names or memories, perhaps even some of the letters of the African domestic workers societies that surrounded each of my Namibian family generations and by which they were very ob-

192 My translation, StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_407_06.

193 StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_407_01; StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_408_03.

viously shaped?"[194] Drawing attention to such voids in the private archives of settler societies, Henrichsen laments the lack of comprehensive studies with regards to the lives and biographies of domestic workers in Namibia.[195] His critique resonates with a point raised in chapter 1 in reference to Ena Jansen's observation of the "textual silence" around the lives and experiences of Black domestic workers, which she considers "proof of the silence and violence of *all* archives."[196] However, Henrichsen stresses that it is precisely the critical interrogation of structural silences that activates the archive's dynamics, as it uncovers alternative histories and counternarratives.[197]



Posbus 346
Windhoek.
18. 11. 59.

Liewe mekte vrou.

Dit gaan goed met ons. En ek hoop om die selfde gesondheid van U te hoor. Dit is regtig lank haas dat ek van u gehoor het. En ek verlang na u, om weer te gesels en iets nuts te hoor. Ons het nog nie geen rein gehoy nie. En dit is baie warm by ons. Ek is ook nog siek my keel is nog nie heeltemal gesond nie. En Rosine se kind is ook siek en met hom is ek in die Hospitaal. En ek wonder self maar weet nie, wat om te doen nie. Hoe meer ek maak om met u mekaar gesig te sien. Om dat ek nie met siek kind kan gaan huier nie. Liewe mekte vrou moet nie denk ek het u vergeet nie. U word en doen dinge klink nog altyd in my hart soos die son. Ek kan dit nie vergeet nie. Ek was by Postrader gewees om van u adres te vernem. Maar hier het skulle gese mekte vrou antwoord nie

Figure 14: StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_407_06.

194 Dag Henrichsen, "Ovandoitji – Geteilte Und Gespaltene Archive," in *Koloniale Vergangenheit-Postkoloniale Zukunft? Die Deutsch-Namibischen Beziehungen Neu Denken*, eds. Henning Melber and Kerstin Platt (Frankfurt a.M.: Brandes & Apsel, 2022), 188, my translation.

195 Ibid., 189.

196 Jansen, *Like Family*, 5, emphasis in original.

197 Henrichsen, "Ovandoitji – Geteilte Und Gespaltene Archive," 188.

Together with the Namibian historian Henrichsen, I embarked on a mission to fill these silences and find the descendants of Rosa and Rosine Xoagus. Our point of entry was the NBC radio station in Windhoek. With the help of a journalist at the Damara broadcast section, we were able to send out a call summarising what little information we had gleaned from the letters as well as our motivation for this search. Miraculously, we received several phone calls within a few hours. One of the very early responses came from Immanuel Rooi, who indeed turned out to be the son of Rosine Rooi, born Xoagus. To my great surprise, Immanuel told me that his mother was still alive, and they invited us to their home in Katutura. With copies and translations of the old letters in our hands, we arrived the following weekend and were welcomed warmly by Rosine and her son, his wife and their two children on 7 February 2020.

At the time of our encounter, Rosine Rooi was 85 years old and was seated in a wheelchair. Suffering from heavy diabetes, she lost her legs and much of her eyesight, but she spoke in a lively manner with us about the past and was curious to hear what we could report about Lisbeth Otto. For a large part of our conversation, Rooi addressed me in German, which she had learnt from the Otto family. As a group, we switched between English, German and Afrikaans, while the family conversed mainly in Damara which was then translated for us into English.

Figure 15: Rosine Rooi and Julia Rensing, February 2020 in Windhoek. Photograph by Dag Henrichsen.[198]

198 After carefully considering the ethics of reproducing images of deceased individuals, I decided not to print the photograph of the encounter between Rosine Rooi and me described above. Taking into account the moral issue of 'consent' discussed in chapter 2, I felt it was more appropriate to focus on our joint handling and reading of the scanned letters instead.

The conversation became emotional when I unpacked the copies of the letters from the late 1950s. More than 60 years after the letters were written, Rosine Rooi saw her mother's and her own texts again – and, for the first time, she would read Lisbeth Otto's response letter, which never reached her (figure 15).

Reasons for this can be found in the text: in Afrikaans, Rooi writes: "Our location is about to move. And we get written how much our house is worth. But nothing more is said."[199] In the late 1950s, the 'white' apartheid regime forcibly removed Black people from the urban spaces as part of their measures to reinforce residential segregation and to "seal off" the 'white' population.[200] Residents of the 'Old Location' in the capital Windhoek were moved to an area further to the north of the town – Katutura, which translates to "a place where we do not belong."[201]

At the sight of the texts, Rosine Rooi was reminded of the old days, reminiscing with heavy sighs how she wrote the letter at the *old locasie*, with her pens at their table in their former house.[202] As triggers of memory, the letters seem to have taken her back to a home lost, a place that is no more.[203] She sighed and laughed at the sight of Lisbeth's response, which Henrichsen translated into Afrikaans. Rosine Rooi learned about Otto's sadness and her fatigue with life at the prospect of staying alone as a widow in a small house in Swakopmund. Otto complained about her deteriorating health and her desire to find her peace, buried next to her late husband. Hearing this, Rooi nodded in apprehension and hummed with compassion. A similar notion of sympathy emanated from her letters to Mrs. Otto. Rooi's affectionate way of addressing Otto in the letters and speaking about her during my visit suggested a sense of intimacy between the women. However, lines of division run through these narratives, disclosing what was introduced in chapter 1 as a "tension between proximity and distance" that defines the relation between domestic workers and employers in Namibia.[204] In reference to Ena Jansen, we have explored previously how, in Southern Africa, the system of paid domestic work has impacted on all lives – albeit in different ways.[205] This figures either by "the *presence* of an often motherly carer and cleaner, or by the *absence* of a mother who does paid housework for others," as Jansen notes.[206] In the context of Namibia, Hildegard Titus similarly claims that "thousands of black women were responsible for raising white children while their own were left

199 StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_407_08, my translation.

200 Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 254.

201 Ibid.; Mushaandja, "Ons Dala Die Ding by Odalate Naiteke: The Curative, Performance and Publicness in Katutura," 68.

202 Rosine Rooi, pers. comm. 7 February 2020.

203 De Sas Kropiwnicki, *Exile Identity, Agency and Belonging*, 60.

204 Schmidt-Lauber, 'Die Ehemaligen Kolonialherren,' 232, my translation.

205 Jansen, *Like Family*, 2.

206 Ibid.

in the care of someone else."[207] Rosa and Rosine Xoagus had to juggle such a situation. After school, Rosine would go to the Ottos' house in Klein Windhoek and help her mother in the kitchen or with the laundry until both could go home together.[208] In our conversation, she stated how Mrs. Otto was not working, while her husband had a big garden to farm and sell vegetables and fruits – which he often shared with Rosine.[209]

With reference to Mary Louise Pratt, Jansen explores the importance of "contact zones" in the lives of domestic workers and their employers.[210] The notions of proximity and distance co-existed at the same time in such zones – in the kitchen or in the garden, for example.[211] The employer's home is an intimate space, in which conversations and negotiations can take place in close proximity, while hierarchies remain largely intact, as it seems to have been the case in Klein Windhoek. Rosine Rooi recounts how Lisbeth Otto "always made jokes," one example being that Lisbeth would point to Rosa's hands and remind her to take more toilet paper – a recurring situation that they apparently had all been laughing about, according to Rooi.[212] She would further stress that the women talked about everything, even the war in Germany, whereby Lisbeth told Rosa that she would have certainly died if she had been in the country at that time.[213] While these stories appeared as harmless memories for Rosine – judging from her laughter and joy – I could not help but wonder about the racist undertones in the statements. The stories reminded me of Schmidt-Lauber's observations that daily condescension and complaints by the employers were common, especially about their employee's cleanliness.[214]

While Rosine Rooi repeatedly stressed that both Lisbeth Otto and her husband were friendly people, we find various clues indicating the persistence of dividing lines in their relations. Shifting the view to the estate's sources elucidates how the language used in the letters perpetuates a distinct power hierarchy. In their letters, Rosa and Rosine Xoagus addressed Lisbeth Otto formally (the Afrikaans "U"), and they alternate between the seemingly devote markers "Dear Missies" or "liewe vrou." In comparison, it is noticeable that Lisbeth Otto addresses both women informally

207 Mukaiwa, "Titus' 'Without Question' Explores Intricacies of Black Servitude."

208 Rooi, pers. comm. 7 February 2020.

209 Rosine Rooi remembered – as well as Jutta Stöck did – that the garden and the Otto's house was close to the site of St. Paul's College today. I had shown the photograph to some interlocutors living in the area in Klein Windhoek today, who confirmed that the house stood close to the Am Weinberg restaurant, but that it had been torn down.

210 Jansen, *Like Family*, 269.

211 Schmidt-Lauber, "Die Ehemaligen Kolonialherren," 230, my translation.

212 Rooi, pers. comm., 7 February 2020.

213 Ibid.

214 Schmidt-Lauber, "Die Ehemaligen Kolonialherren," 230.

(the German "du"/"ihr") while repeating the prevalent conceptions of ethnic differences of the time (whether voluntarily or on the basis of the policies in force is unclear). By referring to them as "Damara-woman," she assigns them distinct positions: as representatives of a specific group, and as 'others' in comparison – and in distinction – to her 'whiteness.'[215]

The same can be observed with other fragments from the archive. In the letter to Rosa Xoagus, Otto speaks of a "young girl," a mother of two who was working for her, but who had to stop after her second pregnancy. We are given a first name – Franziska – but this remains the exception. Franziska's successor is simply referred to as "an other [girl]" with an emphasis on the fact that this employee did not work to Otto's satisfaction.[216] We encounter more clues for the presence of workers who remain anonymous when shifting the attention to the collection of photographs of the estate. We see women in aprons posing for the camera, or groups of workers with animal furs on the farm Frauenstein. At their Windhoek residency, men are constructing the roads and a pavement. Sometimes the camera captures them during the act of working; in other instances, they pause their activities for the photo.[217] In Klein Windhoek, we see a young man with a large suit standing in front of a house, next to freshly dug up fields in a garden. He faces the camera, one arm placed on his hip. As confirmed by Rosine Rooi, this was the garden of the Otto's nursery; hence, we may speculate that the man was a gardener in the family business.[218] The archive's structural silence on the employees' identities or Otto's attribution 'girl' to her former domestic worker are in line with common behaviour of 'white' employers to infantilise their employees.[219]

Another instance in which the tensions between intimacy and distance come to light is in the frictions between the memories that Rosine shared during our meeting and the content of her letters. In the texts, Rosa and Rosine Xoagus repeatedly stress that they had visited Arthur Otto's grave to decorate it with flowers, describing it as a beautiful place where Mrs. Otto would soon find eternal rest next to her late husband.[220] In one of these letters, Rosine mentioned the grave numbers – N° 1941 & 1942, which would be "mooi donker om gebou," which likely means it is bordered in a nice dark colour. She also visited grave N° 1104 – the grave of Mr. Otto's nephew, which had a nice white border.[221] In her subsequent letter a couple of weeks later,

215 Ibid., 231.

216 StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_407_03.

217 StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_114 & _115.

218 As confirmed by Rosine Rooi, pers. comm., 7 February 2020.

219 Schmidt-Lauber, "Die Ehemaligen Kolonialherren," 231; Baderoon, "The Ghost in the House," 175.

220 StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_407_01-407_08.

221 StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_407_03.

Rosine seemingly wanted to repeat the grave numbers, but only left blank spaces after indicating "dit is N° ___ en ek het ook no ___ besoek."[222] Based on the numbers given in the earlier letter, I was able to retrace the graves on the Gammams Cemetery in Windhoek, where Arthur and Lisbeth Otto's graves are still located today. Lisbeth Otto died in 1963, about 4 years after writing her letter to Rosine and Rosa Xoagus. Interestingly, however, in our conversations, Rosine vehemently stressed that she had never been to Arthur Otto's grave, which she repeated when her son approached her later again to confirm this. According to Henrichsen, this seems likely, as access to the cemeteries had been strictly regulated at the time the letters were written. It would have stood out if Black people visited the graveyard, which was conceived for 'whites' only.[223] When 'non-white' family members went to see the graves of their 'white' relatives in the 50s, they would only do so secretly and with high risks.[224] In light of this, we may assume that Rosa and Rosine Xoagus were rather careful and might have obtained the information from Black gardeners who worked on the cemetery. [225] If the latter is the case, then Henrichsen proposes understanding the discrepancies in Rosine's narratives as a leeway for actions and manoeuvres, instead of memory gaps.[226] Hence, we may speculate that Rosine and Rosa Xoagus mentioned the details about the graves to update Lisbeth Otto, showing that she cared for her and her family, and to confirm their bonds with her. Alternatively, mother and daughter used the acquired details as a reason to reach out to and reconnect with their former employer.

There were further instances in our conversation that complicate an easy understanding of the women's relationship. Rosine Rooi recounts how she visited Lisbeth Otto in Swakopmund for a month and stayed with her at the house: "I lived with her, on the stoep (veranda), she made a place for me," she explained in Afrikaans.[227] I was puzzled by the fact that Rooi spoke so fondly about this visit in Swakopmund while she was made to sleep on the veranda. Reflecting on her memories, she emphasised the good time both had, sitting in the sun, talking, having tea.[228] It was the Christmas season, and they had spent the festive days together with food and beer. Rosine Rooi remembers how she also used her time in Swakopmund to go to church and visit friends in the location.[229] Reflecting on what I had learnt from my visit, I later approached her son, again with new questions, which he addressed to his mother. Interestingly, in their conversation, Rosine Rooi stressed that she had

222 StA Freiburg, T1 2019/0040_04.
223 Dag Henrichsen, pers. comm. via email, 31 March 2020.
224 Ibid.
225 Ibid.
226 Ibid.
227 Rooi, pers. comm. 7 February 2020, translation Dag Henrichsen.
228 Ibid.
229 Ibid.

never stayed with Mrs. Otto at all. Apparently, the place had been very small, so after spending the day together, Rooi would head to the location where she slept at her friend's house.[230] By 'location,' Rooi most likely refers to the suburb Mondesa, which had been established for Black workers in the 1950s. In light of South African housing policies at the time, it seems rather unlikely that Rosine's friends had a bigger home than Mrs. Otto.

These notions are reflected in Gabeba Baderoon's claims regarding domestic work in South Africa, where she conceived of houses as "places of juncture" that were regulated to the extent that "black domestic workers lived within but at the margins of white private life."[231] In this vein, Rosine Rooi's conflicting indications about her sleeping place speak to an insurmountable barrier in inter-racial relations. During the day, spaces were shared by both Black and 'white' as part of their employment relationship. Rosine's and Lisbeth's teatime and leisure conversations on the 'stoep' appear as an exception, one that also confirms the rules that the most private realms (the sleeping room) remained strictly separate, though.

Two considerations resonated particularly strongly with me when revisiting my notes, transcriptions and follow-up conversations with the Rooi family. Firstly, both women used the leeway within the power hierarchies that defined their relations to establish (or to create) a sense of connection. Secondly, I reflected on the nuances that were lost in translation in the meeting in February 2020, which particularly manifested in the ways in which various actors claimed assertively how Rosine and Lisbeth had a friendly relationship. This aspect requires elaboration. As noted previously, we alternated between English, German, Afrikaans and Damara in our conversation. In many instances, Immanuel Rooi and his wife repeated and explained again what Rosine had said, often stressing how Rosine felt affectionately for Lisbeth Otto. However, before my visit, they knew little about the women's relationship or Rosine's connection to the Otto family. Thus, they relied mainly on Rosine's letters as a basis for their interpretation, leading me to wonder: what if Rooi's tone was suggestive? With a view to the hierarchies in place between employer and employee, both sides were likely to adapt certain registers to confirm their distinct positions. The affective tone in Rooi's letters might have been used to suggest compliance with identity politics – a sign that she "understood her place" within their hierarchies – which does not imply that this affection was genuinely felt to the same extent, though.[232] She might have done so to achieve a certain goal, for instance: to get hold of her *posboek* that was in the hold of Mr. Schrader, as explained in her letter.

I was reminded again of how power and language are entangled when Rosine Rooi addressed me. She mainly spoke in my mother tongue, German, and only re-

230 Immanuel Rooi, pers. comm. via WhatsApp, 3 April 2020.

231 Baderoon, "The Ghost in the House," 178.

232 Ibid., 175.

sorted to English or Damara when she lacked vocabulary, prompting me to consider: what narratives and memories would never be shared with me as a 'white' (German) researcher? Which aspects of the women's relationship would not be spoken about to a stranger? My status was clearly puzzling to the family. Recurrently, they suggested that the Otto family must have been my relatives, which would be the reason I was in possession of their private letters and photographs. When I clarified my intentions and the background as to how and why the estate came into my hands, they nodded, but would yet again bring up the same question a little later. These issues certainly impacted on how freely Rosine Rooi and her family would speak about a former employer.

The encounter with the Rooi family made me rethink the politics of 'possession' and 'access,' particularly in relation to an aspect that Immanuel Rooi shared about his own family archive. Together, we had studied a selection of photographs from the estate that lacked contextual information, in the hopes of identifying Rosa. Immanuel did not recognise her in any of the images and regretted not being able to show me the slim possession of photographs that Rosa and Rosine had kept. These remainders from the past had been stolen or were lost, with the result that their family archive was largely inexistent.[233] Immanuel did not have any photographs of himself or his siblings from when they were children – not to mention the generation preceding his or Rosine's. This condition again underlines the privileges connected with safeguarding, storing and possessing family photo albums and private archives in general. There are broader implications connected to this, relating to questions such as: who can tell which stories? What kind of biographical or genealogical research can be conducted on the basis of archives – or the lack thereof?

I have addressed the structural silence of both private and public archives on the lives of domestic workers previously, and I outlined how this archival silence also shrouds the biographies of Black people in Southern Africa more generally in previous chapters. With regards to Rosa and Rosine Xoagus's experiences with the Otto family, many questions also remain unanswered and this indicates some of the limits of reading archival surfacings as 'counterrecords.'[234] While stepping out of the archive and searching for other openings to attend to the past was crucial, the "status quo" largely remains intact – that is, as Hamilton writes, "the prevailing situation of a myriad of archival restrictions of various kinds."[235] This shows in the fact that, at the end of my stay, I left copies of letters and photos with the Rooi family and would later send better quality images to Rosine's son Immanuel Rooi via WhatsApp so that they could both reread and revisit the material. At that time, the original letters – as part of the whole Wöhler estate – had already been given to the State Archive in

233 Immanuel Rooi, pers. comm., via WhatsApp, 23 July 2022.

234 Loose reference to Arondekar, "Without a Trace," 12.

235 Hamilton, "Archive and Public Life," 127.

Freiburg, which stores the material as part of their repositories today, thereby regulating the access and officially 'owning' it. This situation could not be reversed and the global Coronavirus pandemic broke out shortly after our meeting in February 2020, thereby making it impossible for me to revisit Rosine Rooi. She would never get to hold the original letters in her hand, let alone keep them in her possession or her private archive. Unfortunately, she passed on in July 2021 due to her old age and her long suffering from diabetes.

4.7: The Trouble with the Archive

What struck me as particularly troubling during the process of writing about my archival research and my conversations with the Rooi family was the realisation that the visibility of Black women in the Wöhler/Dömski private archive was only granted through servitude. The ways in which we encounter and read Rosine and Rosa Xoagus's letters are framed by the hierarchies of domestic work relations. Similar hierarchies and assigned subject positions constitute the framework through which we encounter the other, often singular and always uncontextualised photographs of Black gardeners, labourers and domestic workers who remain anonymous in the family archive.

Facing this impasse made me confront and acknowledge both the malaise and frustration of the archive. Despite efforts to contest its logic or to escape and undo certain narratives constructed as alleged truths, it seemed impossible to transcend the limits imposed by it as well as by those set by my own perspective. Reflecting on issues of knowledge production, archival access, restitution and justice made me think more deeply about the labour that I was undertaking – engaging and interpreting the archival findings as a scholar of African Studies in Europe. I am producing knowledge on the past that also comes with suggestive truth claims by curating and narrativising the clues that I gleaned from my research and my conversations with Namibian interlocutors. The issue at the heart of this is connected to the politics of voice and representation. The question of perspective impacts my writing about women connected to Frauenstein in general and Rosine Rooi's relationship to Lisbeth Otto in particular.

The question of who writes and speaks about whom has been – and continues to be – a heated and important topic of debate in public, cultural and academic spheres. In this respect, Tracey L. Walters laments how the intersectional oppressions of race, class and gender make it difficult for Black women to "control their own narratives."[236] This statement holds true for many Black women around the globe, across different professions and statuses. Domestic workers' claims to a

236 Walters, *Not Your Mother's Mammy*, 2.

voice and to a broader debate on their experiences remain subdued. Where these were brought to public attention, documented and narrated, it was commonly by 'white' sociologists and anthropologists who assumed the right to represent and to speak about the lives of Black domestic workers.[237] In this respect, Walters' book is a crucial addition to the study of domestic work as represented in the cultural realm because she focuses on how Black artists "reconstruct the subjectivities of domestics" through creative practices.[238] In the context of Namibia, the performances by Hildegard Titus *Without Question?* (2019) and Tuli Mekondjo *O'tee* (2021) or *Ousie Martha* (2023) are important public interventions that attempt to disrupt the ways in which domestic work as Black woman's labour is normalised.[239] Titus and Mekondjo dismantle the colonial and apartheid legacy of domestic work that continues to be racialised and exploitative to this day.

Shifting the view to the ways in which authors and artists draw on the archive is crucial to reflect on different forms of making sense of the past, and it functions as an important bridge for the subsequent analysis of Brink's strategies to 'refigure the archive' as a way to recuperate the voices of those who were marginalised.[240] At this point, however, this provokes a question that will be relevant throughout my subsequent analysis: is Brink, by resorting to fiction, able to move beyond the limits imposed by his own perspective as a 'white' writer and by the archives from which he draws? Can the potential of literature (that I was unable to exploit for my own research and writing) challenge the archive's malaise?

4.8: André Brink and The Production of Narrative

In this subchapter, we will shift our focus to André Brink's writing practice in order to explore the politics of crafting a narrative based on archival research and the impulses that drive such creative archival engagements. The questions that guide my analysis are: why excavate a subject from archival depths? Why and how might we construct a story of life from fragments? Why imagine a biography instead of writing an historical account? This latter aspect speaks to a controversy that has been fiercely debated in the humanities for many years: the divide between narrative/lit-

237 Jansen, *Like Family*, 118.

238 For this, she analyses works such as Mary Sibande's *Sophie-Ntombikayise* (2009), or Muholi's *Massa and Mina(h)* (2008). See: Walters, *Not Your Mother's Mammy*, 2.

239 Gabeba Baderoon indicates that this normalisation goes so far that the Dictionary of South African English on Historical Principles shows how in South African English the word *maid* denotes both "black woman" and "servant." See: Baderoon, "The Ghost in the House," 173.

240 Reference to Hamilton et al., *Refiguring the Archive*.

erature and historiography.[241] In the introduction to this book, I have sketched this controversy with reference to Hayden White and his argument that any kind of historical narration contains elements of fiction and different degrees of fictionalisation. In this subchapter, we will once again reflect on the relationship between history writing, narration and the archive to better understand Brink's strategies of fictionalisation. For this, I will explore the sources and archival material from which he draws. To begin our examination, we must return to those moments in *The Other Side of Silence* that speak directly to Hanna X's genesis as an 'archival figure':[242]

> *Even in well-documented accounts of the men who dominated the turn of the twentieth century in South-West Africa [...] Curt von François (1891–1894), Theodor Leutwein (1894–1904), the infamous Lothar von Trotha (November 1904–November 1905), his less bloody-minded successor Friedrich von Lindequist (1905–1907) – the individuals tend to remain shadowy figures in the background of their own story, obscured by historical facts. [...]. Which means that in all these cases documented history still has to be reconstructed, reimagined for a grasp of the identities caught up in it. How much more so the life of someone like Hanna X.*[243]

The voice of Brink's narrator echoes what scholars, artists and writers like Brink and his contemporaries lament in their critique of how the histories of colonialism and slavery are written and told. One example being J.M. Coetzee, who states that "orthodox history" is incapable "to give the kind of dense realisation of the texture of life that the novel, or certain kinds of novel, do well," arguing further that history looks at life from the outside, thereby lacking the means to attend to individual experiences, particularly experiences in times of historical crisis.[244] In a similar vein, Brink calls for "imagined rewriting of history," to reach beyond facts and to speak to the complexity of the past and the present.[245] In the passage above, his narrator specifically emphasises the need for historical reconstruction to attend to the lives of 'someone like Hanna X,' which resonates strongly with frustrations expressed by authors introduced previously – such as Saidiya Hartman and Yvette Christiansë – who search for ways to rediscover 'shadow figures' in the archive and to "represent the lives of the nameless and the forgotten."[246] Reflecting on the malaise of the archive that Chris-

241 See, for example: Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014); *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); or *The Fiction of Narrative: Essays on History, Literature, and Theory, 1957–2007* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

242 Christiansë, "Heartsore."

243 Brink, *The Other Side of Silence*, 153.

244 J. M. Coetzee, "The Novel Today," *Upstream* 6, no. 1 (1988): 2.

245 Brink, "Stories of History," 30, 37.

246 Christiansë, "Heartsore"; Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 4.

tiansë and Hartmann address, literary scholar Kuisma Korhonen concludes that, since "not all pasts have been documented […] artistic imagination is an essential supplement to historical discourse when the intention is to give voice to those who are marginalized from the centralized production of knowledge, or to those who are silenced forever."[247] Resorting to narration is necessary to transcend archival limits and silences for these scholars (or scholar-writers). In *The Other Side of Silence*, the narrator similarly works both with and against the archive.[248] We encounter him as the agent retracing Hanna X's life in the archive while, at the same time, problematising this work. The narrator lists his sources to signal the scientific depth of his work but, despite these efforts, it remains impossible to attend fully to Hanna X's life within the confinements of the archive. Hanna's biography remains ungraspable as the records and files mainly echo the voices of those in power, following colonial logics and imperial bureaucratic procedures. Stalled in this cul-de-sac, the narrator concludes, there remains "little choice but to imagine the rest" – the imperative of imagination in the face of archival voids.[249] Margaret Lenta calls this a "corrective impulse" that novels follow, meaning "the impulse imaginatively to recreate what current histories have left unrecorded."[250]

Reflecting on the scholarly discourse on literary narration, it struck me how Brink's narrator seems to fulfil this function as the voice of reflection, contemplating literature's potential to navigate archival silences and questioning the impulses that narrative production follow. The narrator emerges as Brink's alter ego, allowing the author to bring a meta-level that scrutinises practices of knowledge production into his narrative. The narrator flags Brink's awareness of the stakes and ethics of imagining a life and perhaps, in this way, offers a kind of absolution to fully break free from historical accuracies. In various passages, the narrator deviates from the main story about Hanna X's experiences in Germany and GSWA and either intersperses information about his research in Bremen, Hamburg and Windhoek, or he muses about archival gaps. While it has long been recognised that Brink's "tradition" is to mix "history and invention" and following archival traces by means of revitalising individual biographies, readers and critics nevertheless repeatedly mistake his novels for historical accounts, thereby confusing the voices of author and narrator.[251] In *The Other Side of Silence*, this proximity seems intentional, as we will see.

247 Korhonen, *Tropes for the Past*, 17–18.

248 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 12.

249 Brink, *The Other Side of Silence*, 301.

250 Margaret Lenta, "Fiction and History: Unity Dow's *Juggling Truths* and Tsitsi Dangaremgba's *Nervous Conditions*," *English Academy Review* 22, no. 1 (December 2005): 53.

251 Michael Schmitt, "Gewalt und Individuum," *Deutschlandfunk*, 9 November 2008, https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/gewalt-und-individuum-100.html, my translation; Brink, pers. comm., 7 August 2019.

Reviewers state that Brink, just like his narrator, visited various cities, institutions and places in Germany and Namibia as part of his background research for the novel about Hanna X.[252] Accessing the diverse sources that Brink gathered and engaged with brings to light an extensive archive of research material, which he handed over to Amazwi, the South African Museum of Literature in Makhanda, in 2006.[253] As noted previously, these repositories contain correspondences between Charlotte Sprandel and Johann Albrecht Herzog zu Mecklenburg, as well as copies of newspaper articles and numerous other archival files about the history of settler women in GSWA. Studying the documents shows that Brink's strategies are twofold: in many instances, the author sticks closely – almost meticulously – to the clues that he encountered during his research while, in others, he adds distortions, inventions and additional layers to the details gleaned from the historical documents.[254] An example of the former is the narrator's reflection on the women's dispatches to the colony:

> *The name was what first intrigued me. Hanna X. Again and again I worked through the documents in newspaper offices, contemporary reports, archives, all those dreary lists, all the names, each as tentative as the title of a poem, promises withheld. In typescript, shorthand, Gothic print, copperplate, italics, blotted scrawls. Crista Backmann – Rosa Fricke – Anna Köchel – Elly Freulich – Paula Plath – Johanna Koch – Olga Gessner – Elsa Maier – Dora Deutscher – Helena Hirner – Charlotte Böckmann – Marie Reissmann – Clara Gebhardt – Martha Hainbach – Christa Hofstätter – Gertrud Müller – and on and on and on, without any sense of alphabet or rhyme or reason, in that interminable shuttle of correspondence between Europe and Africa.*[255]

From the 16 names mentioned in the account, I was able to retrace 12 that figured in the vast archival files that Brink consulted, many of which he received from the National Archives of Namibia (NAN).[256] Weaving the women's names into a narrative appears as a gesture to pay tribute to their lives while, in the larger scheme of historiography, the "einfache Mädchen" (simple girls) like Hanna X appeared as lit-

252 Ulrich Lölke, "'Deutsch-Südwest' in André Brink's Roman 'The Other Side of Silence,'" in *Weltengarten: Deutsch-Afrikanisches Jahrbuch für interkulturelles Denken*, eds. Leo Kreutzer and David Simo (Hannover: Revonnah, 2005), 206.

253 Lynne Grant, pers. comm. via email, 17 December 2021.

254 One example being Brink's reference to the *Afrika Post* as the source in which Hanna's name surfaces in connection to a trial. After studying the magazines from that time frame, this seems rather unlikely, as the *Afrika Post* mainly published general articles on life abroad. Trials were mentioned nowhere. Hence, this reference appears as an example of appropriating artistic freedom to give a sense of historical depth to the story.

255 Brink, *The Other Side of Silence*, 5.

256 See, for example, Amazwi South African Museum of Literature, mss_2006_1_2_12.

tle more than items on lists.[257] In an unpublished manuscript that Brink wrote for his memoir *A Fork in the Road*, the author refers to his encounter with the historical material and how it prompted him to create his main protagonist:

> There were, among many other papers, lists of the names of the unfortunate women [...] Some names were obscured by blots or rewritings. Which gave me licence for some invention, among other things by recording Hanna's surname as 'X.' This, I believe, was necessary, not only for the sake of her anonymity, but for her representativity.
> There *was* no 'Hanna X' on the list of transported women. But she 'stands for' innumerable near-anonymous women who were dispatched to the colonies for the basest of reasons, and came to represent a shameful chapter in German colonial history.[258]

According to Brink, the omissions and uncertainties in the archive entitle him to fictionalise, bestowing him with a "licence for some invention."[259] But what does it imply to craft Hanna X as *representative* of the doomed 'white' women in Germany and the colony? How symbolic can a character be when she was conceived of historical elements, and yet remains fictional?

I was able to establish contact with some of Brink's interlocutors who assisted with the background research on Bremen in the 1900s, the cities' orphanages and the women's dispatch to GSWA. Interestingly, Günter Garbrecht, a researcher who has been studying the history of Bremen, vividly remembers how Brink approached him with quite specific inquiries. According to Garbrecht, Brink explained that he was working on a book based on the diary entries of a woman emigrating from Bremen to Southern Africa. While Brink did not give a name, he stressed that this woman grew up in a Catholic orphanage in Bremen and described how the children always went to a 'beach' in her diary. Approaching Garbrecht, Brink was hoping to find clues about where this beach could have been.[260] The specificity of his requests suggested that Brink was researching autobiographical details of a specific historical figure. However, despite my efforts of studying the files at the Amazwi Museum of Literature and other archives, I could not retrace the aforementioned orphan's diary – an

257 Brink, *The Other Side of Silence*, 6.

258 André Brink, "Stories Behind Stories: The Other Side of Silence," unpublished essay, emphasis in original.

259 Ibid.

260 This points to the accuracy with which Brink followed certain historical traces. For example, Garbrecht recalls sending him maps for Brink to reconstruct the distances in Bremen and the possible location of the orphanage or the beach, which served as settings in the book. Günter Garbrecht, pers. comm., 8 December 2021.

absence that gestures to Brink's 'anarchive:' that which remains opaque and inaccessible, but which might exist somewhere, somehow.[261] However, if the latter is *not* the case, and Hanna X remains *purely* fictitious, then it is puzzling how Brink usurps a sense of 'realness' for his protagonist in his correspondences with interlocutors.[262] In this respect, his research strategies and narrative practices may be appropriations of artistic freedom. If we consult his personal notebook, which accompanied his writing process, then we gain further insights into the ways in which the author plays with various cultural and personal references. Stored in the Amazwi archive, it attests to Hanna X's genesis and to the development of her story.

As we can glean from figure 16, for Brink, Hanna X's story also began with a list of names that he considered apt for his characters. From there, her role would be construed further to stand in for "those women transported to the colony for the support or delectation of its menfolk, and then turned down," as it reads in the book.[263] The notion of "representativity" addressed once again here prompts the question: who has the power to represent whom, and what are the politics of representation at play here? In *The Other Side of Silence,* we find clues for Brink's reflection on this, when his narrator claims:

> *She was there, that much I know. And having reached this turning point in her story I have no choice but to continue. I believe more and more that as a man I owe it to her at least to try to understand what makes her a person, an individual, what defines her as a woman.*[264]

The imperative of imagination in the face of archival constraints is here justified with a feminist sensitivity; however, ambivalences remain: While the book critically investigates the patriarchal violence exerted against women, as readers, we encounter a narrative in which men are mainly speaking – Brink and his alter ego – whereas the women who figure in the novel are silenced to the most violent degree; in Hanna's case, her tongue is cut off.

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261 By 'anarchive' I am referring here to Carine Zaayman ("Anarchive (Picturing Absence),"). However, the term 'anarchive' refigures in different forms in cultural theories. See, for example, Erin Manning's conceptualisation of an anarchive as quoted in Singh, *No Archive Will Restore You*, 113. It has also been theorised by Christoph Brunner and Michael Hiltbrunner, "Anarchive künstlerischer Forschung: Vom Umgang mit Archiven experimenteller und forschender Kunst," *Archivalische Zeitschrift* 95, no. 1 (1 May 2017): 175–190.

262 Garbrecht is not the only one to whom Brink indicated that Hanna X was a real person. See, for example: Beverley Roos-Muller who interviewed Brink and introduces her article with the words: "Based on true and terrible tale." Roos-Muller, "Brink Shows His Feminine Side," *The Cape Argus*, 11 October 2002.

263 Brink, *The Other Side of Silence*, 11.

264 Ibid., 153, emphasis in original.

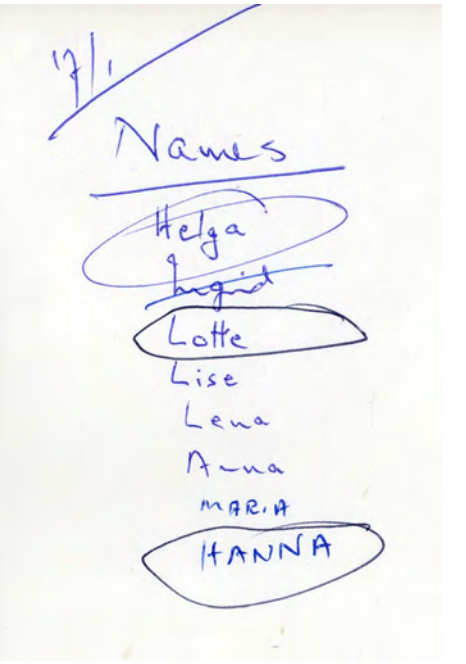

Figure 16: Notebook, mss_2006_21_2_1, page 63. Courtesy of Amazwi, South African Museum of Literature and Karina Brink.

How is Brink's role as a writer connected to this? Looking back at his career and subject matters it becomes visible how he is known as an author who is devoted to lifting the veils of silence that cover dark chapters in Southern African history. He belonged to the *Sestigers* movement, a group of 'white' South African intellectuals who used the medium of writing to work against Afrikaner nationalism and against the apartheid regime.[265] In this movement, journalism, photography and the art world at large saw an increasing commitment of creative practitioners from a similar societal milieu to address the horrors of apartheid, hoping to inform and transform South African society.[266] Throughout the course of his career, Brink engaged more

265 Including Breyten Breytenbach, Chris Barnard, Ingrid Jonker and others. See: Lindie Koorts, "Palatable and Unpalatable Leaders: Apartheid and Post-Apartheid Afrikaner Biography," in *The Biographical Turn: Lives in History*, eds. Hans Renders, Binne de Haan and Jonne Harmsma (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 151.

266 Examples include the magazine *Drum*, founded in 1951; photographers such as David Goldblatt; Ruth First's journalistic work for *The Guardian* and *Fighting Talk* or, later, Jane Alexander's famous artistic sculpture *Butcher Boys*.

and more deeply with feminist discourses and with gender studies, as his wife Karina Brink told me.[267] To shy away from telling stories of women's experiences of violence, as a gesture of political correctness, would have left colonial and patriarchal hegemony untouched.[268] Brink believed in an author's duty to both imagine and assume different perspectives that are not his own and he also saw it as his own duty – as an established writer – to promote such perspectives, especially at a time when he had a voice and others did not.[269]

However, the task of writing against sexism (and racism) remains an intricate one, as Brink expressed in an interview with the *Cape Argus*, in which he admits to the "horror of 'appropriating' the voice of women, of imposing himself."[270] For the journalist, Brink's move to focus on the life of those oppressed and violated is an act of solidarity and compassion, which is most evident in a description of the painting *Feierabend* by Max Slevogt (figure 17) to which the narrator in *The Other Silence* refers.

Figure 17: Max Slevogt, Feierabend, *1900. Oil on canvas; source: Wikimedia commons*

267 Karina Brink, pers. comm., 7 August 2019.
268 Ibid.
269 Karina Brink, pers. comm., 5 April 2022.
270 Roos-Muller, "Brink Shows His Feminine Side."

The narrator encounters the painting after his "wild-goose chase" for clues in Bremen, where the painting resonated strongly with him.[271] His interpretation of the relation between the man and woman would come to epitomise the story of Hanna X and her encounters with men throughout the course of her life. The narrator describes the man as "a mean-spirited, violent, hard-drinking, abusive loser," while the young girl, "evidently poor […] can barely contain the rage and resentment that seethe in her" when he touches her.[272] Brink weaves this imagery into Hanna X's narrative at a later point, when she arrives in Swakopmund and, for the first time on GSWA soil, is being harassed by an encroaching suitor:

> *The man sits with his back to her. A middle-aged peasant, is her first impression. His whole body, his ill-fitting jacket, the back of his narrow head, everything defines him as a loser – a mean-spirited, vicious, hard-drinking, abusive loser. He gets up to face her. She goes past him to the empty chair next to him, and sits down. He clears his throat and turns his dirty hat in his hands, then he sits down again […] Several of his teeth are missing, the rest are tobacco-stained. He has a bristly moustache. His face is a dark reddish brown; but there is a white rim around his narrow forehead where the hat has kept out the sun. He puts one large blunt paw on her thigh. He smells of beer and chicken shit. 'Well, Hanna. You are to be my wife then,' he announces.*[273]

Restaging the woman and man's constellation in the painting, the scene depicted in the book is one of looming danger. The physical proximity between Hanna and her suitor, Grossvogel, would soon evolve into an attempted sexual assault from which Hanna succeeds to escape. In line with the narrator's associations with *Feierabend*, Hanna's and Grossvogel's relation is similarly marked by disparate desires, repulsion, sexual tension and a threat to the woman's bodily integrity. Interestingly, however, the original painting depicts a married janitor couple, as Slevogt described in letters to his wife.[274] While he intentionally left room for "dark sensations," the depicted moment or their relationship is not eminently or straightforwardly menacing.[275] Other interpretations of the woman's tender gaze and mimics, for instance, are possible. Brink's refiguration of the painting, thus, is an example of the ways in which art evokes diverse subjective interpretations. Following Julie Beth Napolin, this is "the fact of resonance," which she understands as the deeply subjective nature

271 Brink, *The Other Side of Silence*, 7.

272 Ibid.

273 Ibid., 138–139.

274 Mechtild König and Sylvia Riedmaier, *Bilderbuch Neue Pinakothek München* (München: Langemann u. Langemann, 1999), 114.

275 Ibid.

of resonance.[276] Resonances, as something that strikes and pricks us, seem factual because of the immediacy with which we perceive them; however, they are not objective 'facts' in the conventional sense. In *The Other Side of Silence*, the resonances of *Feierabend* are deployed to craft an imagery of destitute women at men's mercy. With a view to his larger oeuvre, it becomes visible that in most of Brink's books, gender and race-based violence, domination, injustice, sex and political power emerge as recurring concerns and these are pushed to the extreme in the story of Hanna X. Reflecting on a workshop held in 2007 (or 2008) in Windhoek, and in which scholars discussed the book, sociologist Reinhart Kößler states how participants felt that the novel was replete with Brink's "obsessions."[277] Are these obsessions simply morbid fascinations with violence, sex and death? What does the (re-)crafting of such a brutal story with the help of archival fragments do in terms of knowledge production on the colonial past?

Shifting the view to reader responses is insightful in this regard. Throughout the course of my research, I increasingly noted how these seemed to be divided into either straightforward rejections of the book as distortion of history or as empathetic readings that take Hanna X's experiences seriously, prompted to find out what 'really' happened to women in GSWA. My own grappling with the resonances of Lisbeth Dömski/Pilet/Otto's story and Hanna X's experiences is emblematic of the latter response. For readers like me, Brink's zooming in at a woman's individual experience of gender-based violence during colonial times is effectful because he introduces the discourse on colonialism on an emotive level, making us sympathise with a specific person (imagined or not). The detailed and graphic depictions of the brutal assaults that Hanna X had to endure speak to the readers' sentiments, drawing them into the story by evoking not only shock, but also empathy. Brink's play with fact and fiction and his suggestive claims to a sense of 'truthfulness' recurrently draw the reader in, prompting the question: are these narratives of horror and brutality 'real'? Is it possible that violence played out like this in both the metropole and in the colony?

I was not the only one who was preoccupied with these thoughts. A couple of years into my research, I was contacted by a woman based in New Zealand (named here T.W.), who originally was from Namibia and who found out about my work online. She had read Brink's book and was shaken and angry about it, as it touched on her own family history. Her great-grandmother's sister was said to have worked as a prostitute in Swakopmund where she also allegedly established (or ran) two brothels. Few details are known about this relative, as her business was considered a disgrace to the family. Reading Brink's narrative was upsetting for T.W., seeing how he, as a man with his sexual fantasies, claims prerogative over something that is not

276 Julie Beth Napolin, *A Sinister Resonance* (guest talk: University of Basel, English Seminar, 24 November 2021).

277 Reinhart Kößler, pers. comm. via email, 23 May 2022.

his story to tell.[278] Yet, the reconsideration of women's roles, fates and reputations that Brink's book promotes were important for her own endeavour to find an understanding of her relatives' lives. This kind of reflexive and critical re-reading of the book and Namibia's colonial history did not seem possible for many 'white' readers in Namibia, however.

Figure 18: photograph by André Bink, 2008. Courtesy of Karina Brink.[279]

During my research in the country, it was interesting to note that the great majority of my social contacts and interlocutors did not know about the novel. This impression changed drastically, however, when approaching members of the 'white' settler society with questions about Frauenstein – particularly Namibians of German descent working in public institutions such as archives and libraries. In quite a number of responses, these interlocutors strongly condemned the ethics of Brink's writing, arguing that *The Other Side of Silence* distorts history or what were their versions of 'reality.' Additionally, many expressed how Brink was doing wrong to the people whose names he appropriated for his narrative, arguing that their biographies had little to do with the lives of their namesake in the book. The reactions of those with closer relations to farm Frauenstein were similarly sharp. Today's owner,

278 T.W., pers. comm., via Zoom, 10 August 2022.

279 Reflecting on the ethical implications of photographic representation, as outlined in various instances in this book, I decided to blur and render Heinz Stöck (on the left in the image) unrecognisable. Since he passed away before I was able to visit Frauenstein, I could not obtain his consent to reproduce his image and felt this was the appropriate response.

Jutta Stöck, shared that she was shocked when reading the book after Brink's visit to the farm in 2008 (figure 18). She explained that she and her husband had spoken in detail about the farm's history with Brink and, even though the book was published before Brink's visit to the farm, she considered his twist of what they had shared with him to be "outrageous."[280] A sense of betrayal was recurrently expressed in the conversations with those who feel implicated in Brink's historical refiguration.

For a long time, the German reading public was reluctant to confront the brutality of German colonialism depicted by Brink. Even years after the book's release, not a single German publishing house was willing to print its German translation, all for the same reason, as Brink explained: "'The book is too cruel.' Even apart from the fact that the entire factual dimension of the book is historically true, it did seem mind-boggling that in post-war Germany any text should be branded as 'too cruel.'"[281] In an interview, the author again affirms: "Everything that happens in this book actually happened, in one form or another, to some historical figure back then."[282] The German publishing market's responses speak to the country's flaws when properly confront the colonial past, acknowledging their own role in the colonial enterprise and reckoning with the horrors committed, including the Herero and Nama genocide. Later, however, when the novel was finally translated and published in Germany in 2008, critics celebrated it as "[a] moving, an angry, a breath-taking novel, a fantastic story that springs from reality but rises far above it."[283] These developments correspond with a heightening attention in public and political discourse to the atrocities of German colonialism over the last 20 years. While individual research studies began to explore the interconnected themes of violence, sexual encounters and abusive relations in GSWA, many chapters in history remain unexplored, even today.[284] Thus, it is up to fiction to bring the gravitas of colonial history to public awareness – as Saidiya Hartman writes: it remains the task of narrative "to imagine what cannot be verified."[285]

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280 Stöck, pers. comm., 17 August 2019.

281 Brink, "Stories Behind Stories."

282 Lölke, "'Deutsch-Südwest,'" 208, my translation.

283 Johannes Kaiser, "Rachefeldzug der Unterdrückten," *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*, 20 November 2008, my translation, https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/rachefeldzug-der-unterdrueckten-100.html.

284 As examples for important contributions see: Wolfram Hartmann, *Sexual Encounters and Their Implication on An Open and Closing Frontier: Central Namibia From the 1840s to 1950s* (PhD diss., Colombia University, 2002); Wolfram Hartmann, "Urges in the Colony: Men and Women in Colonial Windhoek, 1890–1905," *Journal of Namibian Studies* 1 (2007): 39–71; Charles Van Onselen, *The Fox and the Flies: The Criminal Empire of the Whitechapel Murderer* (London: Vintage, 2008); Mattia Fumanti, "'A German Whore and No Money at That': Insanity and the Moral and Political Economies of German South West Africa," *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* 44, no. 3 (September 2020): 382–403.

285 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 12.

Brink shared this conviction, arguing that writers "should engage creatively with the 'archive' in order to produce a patchwork of stories that might not claim final authority, but that would be greater in the sum of their parts than any attempt at encompassing historical narrative."[286] A view to Brink's other publications mirrors his faithfulness to this claim: a large number of his works bear the signature technique of fusing archival fragments and fiction.[287] In the notes at the end of his novel *Praying Mantis*, for instance, Brink speaks about his impulses for fictionalising the biography of the first Khoi missionary ordained at the Cape of Good Hope, Kupido Kakkerlak: "Although the novel as it stands is fiction, the outline is based on a true history" – a story that he encountered in the "numerous documents of and on the London Missionary Society in South Africa" as well as in other accounts and sources.[288] Here, Brink reflects: "It is precisely the reading of such a well-documented account that makes one realise the extent to which the enigma of another's life can only be grasped through the imagination."[289]

I share grounds with Brink's conclusion. Coming to an end with my own research on Lisbeth Dömski's life, I had to realise that research can only retrieve the course of one's life so far. As a scholar, though, I lack the vocabulary or perhaps the absolution to resort to the imagination – as Brink did – and to imagine what cannot be retrieved. My exploration of the resonances between Hanna X's life and Lisbet Dömski's experiences helped, however, to contemplate how 'white' women were implicated in colonial structures and how their lives were impacted by patriarchal and colonial violence. Moreover, the cross-examination uncovered once again the predicament of the archive – while it remains an indispensable source to access the stories of those who passed on, its limits, colonial logics and blind spots are frustrating. My own conclusion was to step out of the archive, when openings presented themselves – which is how I met Rosine Rooi. However, Brink as a writer, fills archival gaps by entangling a plethora of cultural, personal and historical references, as a view to his own archive shows. Elements that resonated with him in rela-

286 Quoted in: Andrew van der Vlies, "The Archive, the Spectral, and Narrative Responsibility," 583.

287 See, for example: *An Instant in the Wind* (1976), which centres the lives of Adam Mantoor and Elisabeth Larsson, a 'run-away slave' and a White woman who trek through the South African interior together. Again, the narrator engages deeply with archival records and written accounts that grant access to their impossible love story. Here, the relation between existing accounts on these individuals and the narrator's re-narration also seems intentionally opaque. (London: Secker & Warburg, 2005). We find similar patterns in the novel *Philida* (2012), in which Brink notes: "In using historical sources it is of course necessary always to remain conscious not only of what is narrated, but also of what has been left unsaid." (London: Harvill Secker, 2012, 307).

288 André P. Brink, *Praying Mantis* (London: Secker & Warburg, 2005), 277.

289 Ibid.

tion to Hanna X and Frauenstein span from the story of Jeanne d'Arc and the Indian "Bandit Queen" to Nama and Herero myths and folk tales.[290] He further relied on the diaries of Hendrik Witbooi and the pro-colonial propaganda written by Clara Brockmann *Die Deutsche Frau in Südwestafrika: Ein Beitrag Zur Frauenfrage in Unseren Kolonien* and various other historical books that informed his studies on GSWA.[291] Particularly interesting here are the multi-faceted cultural references that he incorporated into his narrative. We have already learnt about the painting *Feierabend*; additionally, the narrator mentions Paula Modersohn-Becker's works when contemplating humanity, femininity and melancholy.[292] Other high-culture references are Dante's *La Vita Nuova*, Walter Benjamin, Gustave Flaubert and Emily Dickinson.[293] In relation to the title of the book, Brink draws on a quote from George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (figure 19).[294]

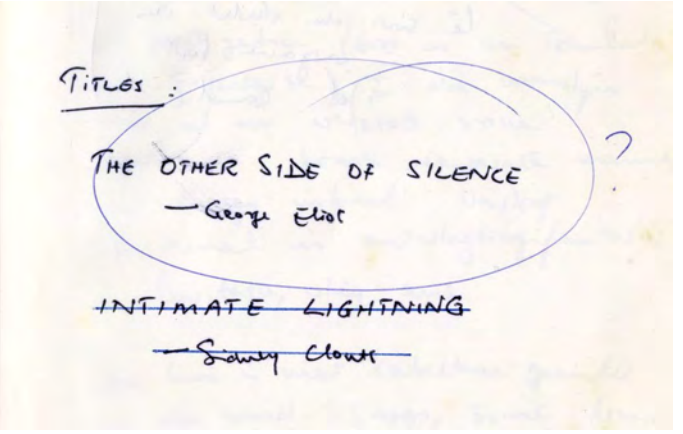

Figure 19: Notebook, mss_2006_21_2_1, page 1. Courtesy of Amazwi South African Museum of Literature and Karina Brink.

Brink's notebook, which documents his writing process, is instructive for retracing the various inspirations that inform his novel. Here, we also encounter elements

290 Brink, *The Other Side of Silence*, 308–309; Brink, "In Search of Frauenstein," 14–15.

291 Brink, *The Other Side of Silence*, 308–309. See also: Amazwi South African Museum of Literature, mss_2006_21_1_2_9; part 1.

292 Brink, *The Other Side of Silence*, 7.

293 Ibid., 309; Amazwi South African Museum of Literature, mss_2006_21_1_2_1, 25, 37, 69, 123.

294 Brink, "Stories Behind Stories." See also: Amazwi South African Museum of Literature, mss_2006_21_1_2_1, 1.

from popular and mass culture that also played into his creation of Hanna X's story and Frauenstein, such as an advertisement of Liqui Fruit, in which a blonde bikini model is tanning in the bright sun, thereafter rising and walking towards a house in the desert to escape the heat.[295] This house is in a state of severe decay: windows are broken, cracks and fractures run through the walls and sand covers the floors and fills the rooms. She would approach an old, rusty fridge on top of a large sand pile, where she'd find an ice-cold can of Liqui Fruit juice to refresh her.[296] The setting for this clip is the popular 'ghost town' of Kolmanskuppe, which was once a small German settlement in the south of GSWA with imposing stone houses according to the German model. The village was built after the discovery of diamonds in the early 1900s, but when the diamond fields were largely mined, all of the settlers left their houses – often including furniture and household items – in the late 1950s, abandoning them to time and sand. Whether Brink recognised the scenery as Kolmanskuppe or not cannot be verified; however, we find a similar aesthetic to those in the advertisement reflected in his imagination of Frauenstein:

> *"By the time Hanna X was dumped there parts of the ground floor had already been invaded by desert sand, blown in through broken shutters and shattered windows and gaping holes where doors had been hacked up for firewood; sand accumulating in corners and against walls, as very slowly the desert began to reclaim the space that once was part of it. Even the inhabited rooms were subjected to the long inexorable process of decay: erstwhile ballrooms and refectories, kitchens with gaping furnaces, cavernous halls and lobbies with ornate ceilings."*[297]

Interestingly, Brink's fascination with colonial ruins did not end after his novel was published and Frauenstein was constructed as one example of a deserted colonial mansion. His story resonates with audiences and the author alike. Reflecting on a trip that he undertook to Namibia in 2008 ("to search for the story behind the story"), Brink marvels at the imposing old buildings from colonial times that still exist as ghost houses, such as the Liebig-House, about 40 kilometres west of Windhoek.[298] The colossal former residential building impressed him particularly due to its state of ruination, which struck him as an apt setting for his story about Hanna X: "If *The Other Side of Silence* ever was filmed, I would move heaven and earth to see Frau von Knesebeck and her group of dismissed and abused women take root exactly

295 Michelle van Schalkwyk, "Liqui-Fruit Bikini ad," *YouTube*, 15 October 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UYcrDdadsRU; Amazwi South African Museum of Literature, mss_2006_21_1_2_1, 3.

296 van Schalkwyk, "Liqui-Fruit Bikini ad."

297 Brink, *The Other Side of Silence*, 15.

298 Brink, "In Search of Frauenstein," 14–15.

there."[299] A large-scale photograph that Brink took during his visit to the Liebig-House still hangs in one of the rooms in his house in Rosebank, Cape Town. The print is one of the various clues that hint at the ways in which the narratives and resonances around Hanna X and Frauenstein still figure in the present, beyond both the author's death as well as the deaths of the many individuals who were connected to the places and names found in the novel. These sinister resonances, however, remind us of the fact that, somehow, somewhere, they once existed and we are reminded about their pertinence – as ghostly presences.

4.9: Conclusion

> "Any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences. It is an exercise of power that makes some narratives possible and silences others. In this fabricated narrative, not all silences are equal. Our job as filmmakers, writers, historians, image-makers is to deconstruct these silences."
> — *Raoul Peck*[300]

Circling back to how this chapter began – with Raoul Peck's gesture to the relation between narrative and history – emphasises how both narrative and history are constructions of knowledge about the past that privilege and silence. Peck elucidates that creative practices have the potential to both deconstruct and to subvert hegemonial historiography, or one-dimensional ways, in which history is being recounted. We have found a similar line of thought in André Brink's argument for the imaginative rewriting of history.[301] With his novel *The Other Side of Silence*, the author creates a narrative that blends fact and fiction and is suggestive of certain truth claims. Replete with historical references, Brink appropriates archival fragments for his narrative that centres on the tragic figure Hanna X. In this vein, the book prompts us to reconsider what constitutes the 'truth' about the past, what "may […] have happened," in Brink's words, and what it is that we conceive as 'too cruel' to be real.[302]

My intent in bringing Brink's narrative and my own research on the private estate of Lisbeth Otto into conversation with one another was to contemplate what it means to reconstruct a person's life and to explore the intersections of archival research and narrative production. While a lot has been said about the stakes and gains of both, questions still remain, questions which Saidiya Hartman has put forth so powerfully:

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299 Ibid., emphasis in original.

300 *Exterminate All the Brutes*. season 1, episode 2.

301 Brink, "Stories of History," 37.

302 Brink, "Stories Behind Stories"; Brink, "Stories of History," 42.

> How can narrative embody life in words and at the same time respect what we cannot know? [...] Is it possible to construct a story from 'the locus of impossible speech' or resurrect lives from the ruins? [...] Or is narration its own gift and its own end, that is, all that is realizable when overcoming the past and redeeming the dead are not? And what do stories afford anyway? A way of living in the world in the aftermath of catastrophe and devastation? A home in the world for the mutilated and violated self? For whom – for us or for them?[303]

In light of Brink's engagement with the archive to craft his narrative and regarding my own biographical reconstruction of Lisbeth Otto's life, let us ask, like Hartman does: what is it that narrative affords? For creative writers as well as researchers, it might provide avenues to explore how discourses play out in the worlds of individuals whose biographies can only be found in the cracks and silences of archival records. As is the case with Brink (and other scholars/writers referenced in this book, like Hartman, Carine Zaayman and Yvette Christiansë), resorting to narrative becomes imperative in the attempt to recuperate the lives of "the nameless and the forgotten" from archival depths.[304] More crucially, Hartman prompts us to inquire about exactly *who* stands to gain from this. There are further implications to this question: can narrative production make amends for historical injustices or for the violence that the archival order perpetuates? Is it possible to fill the gaps of un- or partially recorded biographies as a potential act of restorative justice?

Reflecting on these concerns, this chapter aimed at conducting archival research with a mindfulness of the constructed character of biographical recuperation based on what the archive offers. In a similar vein, Zaayman proposes attuning one's readings of the past to that which lies outside of the archive and to approach history in the same way that we approach narrative: with "openness and uncertainty."[305] In following this method, maybe interpretations of history become less imposing and prompts us to remain conscious of the fallibility of historical reconstruction and of what is ungraspable.

While unsettling the grip and power of the archive is important, this chapter has also shown how archival repositories function as windows into the lives of individuals who have passed on. My avenue to interrogate the alluring *and* the troubling character of archives was by directing attention to the sinister resonance of the "archival figures" Hanna X and Lisbeth Otto.[306] Drawing on Julie Beth Napolin's theory on resonance helped unpack how the past lingers on, how certain historical fragments strike us and how history maintains a "hold on us."[307] The view on the res-

303 Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 3.

304 Ibid., 4.

305 Zaayman, "Anarchive (Picturing Absence)," 321.

306 Christiansë, "Heartsore"; Napolin, "'A Sinister Resonance.'"

307 Napolin, *The Fact of Resonance*, 7.

onances between Lisbeth Otto's and Hanna X's biographies helped with untangling and entangling two stories of (fictional and 'real') lives that teach us something about the experiences of women who, to different degrees, fell victim to and were implicated in the patriarchal, classist and racial structures of GSWA's settler society. Their stories offer insights into the journeys of young women who travelled to the colony in search of a better life in the late 1890s and early 1900s, instead finding a country at war and their lives at risk.

Moreover, my comparative study contemplates how Brink's and my labour, as narrative authors and as archival researchers, bear certain resemblances. In our distinct but similar practices, we are responsive to subjective resonances that archival findings conjure. The sensations that we can glean from studying the archive have guided the course of our writing. This implied intruding in private worlds in my engagement with Lisbeth Otto's family estate, delving deep into personal material and into the life of a stranger. During my research, I followed the clues from Hanna X's story to reflect on Lisbeth Otto's life challenges as an orphan, a settler wife and as a widow in GSWA. By contrast, the practice of fiction writing bestows Brink with the artistic freedom to incorporate a plethora of historical and cultural references. The format of the novel provides an endless openness to encompassing writers' fantasies and resonances. However, we may also understand Brink's appropriations of archival sources and the myriad references in *The Other Side of Silence* as ruses to violate the historical and archival order. Brink's alter ego, his narrator, is crucial in this undertaking. The narrator/researcher functions as the voice that directs the readers' attention to the flaws in historiography and the gaps in the archives that inhibit a 'proper' reconstruction of the past.

While the novel raises intricate questions about the tensions between history and fiction, the issues of voice, legitimacy and representation remain troubling. Following a gender-sensitive agenda, Brink aspires to encompass various perspectives of women suffering from the German colonial regime in GSWA – Black *and* 'white'. However, his core themes pivot around 'white' sensitivities and experiences, which remain unproblematised in the novel. However, when it comes to Brink's own subject position, it appears that he uses the reflective voice of his narrator to flag an awareness of the limits of a male 'white' writer's perspective. As a 'white' writer/researcher myself, I share this experience of grappling with the limits imposed by one's own perspective and by the archive, which, in many instances, seem impossible to transcend. While authors of fiction can complement, stretch and imagine a narrative, my response to the archive's confinements had to take a different form. In my cross-examination of the estate and of the novel, it became increasingly important to challenge the archive's logic. Stepping out of the archive helped me to understand how the content of Otto's estate speaks to the present and the future, instead of merely being a product of the past. My meeting with Rosine Rooi and with her family was a powerful reminder that the surfacings that we find in archival repositories are

not necessarily "orphaned," as Paul Ricœur suggests, but that they might continue to carry emotional and nostalgic value for people today.[308] The relations of Rosa and Rosine Xoagus to their former employer remain impossible for me to grasp fully, much like how I will never be able to access the letters' content fully.

However, in many ways, the encounter with Rosine Rooi and her family was an eye-opening point of disruption in my research – not necessarily on the level of content, but through the ways in which it powerfully evoked and visualised the malaise of the archive. The material from the Wöhler/Dömski estate does not really allow one to break free from and to move beyond 'white' settler narratives on the history of a place. Clues that attest to the colonial framework of the material and that hint at the presence of Black Namibians are there, but the frustration of an impossible recuperation of their perspectives remains. However, seeing Rosine's affective response at the sight of the documents from the Wöhler/Dömski estate elucidates how private archives resonate in the present – and with whom. The case of the letters' momentary return to their original author prompted me to reconsider questions of archival access, belonging and claims made about the material. Encounters like these and an openness to archival resonances may provide new impetus for thinking about possible future (and more than just?) itineraries and the uses of archival material.

308 Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 169.