



## **BESONDERS/EXEMPLARISCH** **Morphomatische Fallstudien zu Biographie und Portrait**

### **Abstract**

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### **The Exemplary as a Lens to Understand the Ambiguities of the Colonial Situation – the Biographical Sketch of a “Mixed-Race” Woman in a German Colony**

The paper argues that a biographical approach can be used as a kaleidoscope for the interpretation of colonial societies in general. Such an approach can help to understand how people dealt with complex colonial settings and with multiple spaces of empire; it can shed a light on various aspects of colonial life through the experiences of one person. By using a non-prominent person as an example, who would be rather seen as a ‘minority subject’ by colonial biographers, the paper tries to show the insights that can be gained by tracing the lives of obscure individuals in colonial societies who often remain hidden and do not leave private correspondence or personal papers. It addresses the life of Agnes Hill, the unmarried daughter of a British farmer and his mixed-race wife who was living a ‘white’ farmer’s life in the colony German South West Africa. In 1908, she was suddenly classified as ‘native’, due to the enforcement of radical racial legislation in the German colony degrading the offspring of mixed-race people as ‘bastards’. The new classification would have had dire consequences for the whole family especially in respect to their landownership. Agnes Hill fought for her family and succeeded in securing their estate, even if she was an unmarried woman in a predominantly patriarchal settler society and her standing was questioned by German racial decrees. By addressing Agnes Hill with her liminal position – fully belonging neither to the colonisers nor to the colonised – as exemplary, the paper shows how such a particular case can explain the ambiguities of racial classifications and gender-role boundaries in colonial societies.



