Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Immigrants & Minorities
Historical Studies in Ethnicity, Migration and Diaspora

ISSN: 0261-9288 (Print) 1744-0521 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/fimm20

The multi-ethnic family connections of Rosa Clay, the first Finn of African descent, in late nineteenth-century South West Africa

Raita Merivirta

To cite this article: Raita Merivirta (15 Dec 2025): The multi-ethnic family connections of Rosa Clay, the first Finn of African descent, in late nineteenth-century South West Africa, Immigrants & Minorities, DOI: 10.1080/02619288.2025.2596163

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/02619288.2025.2596163

Published online: 15 Dec 2025.

IMMIGRANTS & MINORITIES
https://doi.org/10.1080/02619288.2025.2596163

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

The multi-ethnic family connections of Rosa Clay, the first Finn of African descent, in late nineteenth-century South West Africa

Raita Merivirta

Department of European and World History, University of Turku, Turku, Finland

ABSTRACT

This article takes a biographical approach to examine the story of Rosa Emilia Clay (1875–1959), later Lemberg, the first Finn of African descent, and Afro-European transnational and transcultural relations in Omaruru, South West Africa, in the 1870s and 1880s. In this article, the beginnings of Rosa's 'global life', her biological parents and the placing of Rosa with a Finnish missionary couple are examined with the help of archival research, digitised newspapers and periodicals and some detective work online, especially exploration of genealogical websites and digitised census data, as well as baptism, marriage and death records.

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 6 June 2025; Accepted 20 November 2025

KEYWORDS Rosa Clay; Finland; South West Africa; missionaries; European traders

Rosa Emilia Clay (1875–1959), later Lemberg, was the first person of African descent to receive Finnish citizenship, when it was granted to her in 1899.[1] She was born in Omaruru, South West Africa, to a Damara mother and an English father, and was raised by Finnish missionaries, the Weikkolins, who brought her to Finland in 1888, and educated as a teacher in the Sortavala seminary. She worked as a teacher and occasionally performed in choir concerts until her departure from Finland to the United States (USA) in June 1904. In the USA, she socialised with the Finnish-American community, married playwright Lauri Lemberg, had two children and divorced, performed with the theatre Finns and worked as a cleaner, teacher, singer and theatre director. She passed away in Covington, Michigan in 1959.

CONTACT Raita Merivirta raimer@utu.fi

Rosa Clay/Lemberg has been the subject of two biographies in the twentieth century, the first, *Rosalia* (1942), a somewhat fictionalised account by Finnish-American author Arvo Lindewall and the second, *The Rosa Lemberg Story* (1993), an illustrated book written by Finnish-American Eva Erickson. The latter briefly summarises Rosa Lemberg's story as narrated in *Rosalia* and confirms the fictionality of some of the most romanticised aspects of her early life, and then proceeds to focus on Rosa Lemberg's life in the USA. In 2010, Rosa Lemberg's story was discussed on radio programmes and a television documentary series on the history of Afro-Finns.[2] Her story was also included in an exhibition on Africa in Finland in the city of Tampere in 2015.[3] A novel by Vappu Kannas bearing Rosa Clay's name as its title was published in 2020.[4] The documentaries, programmes, the exhibition, the novel and the newspaper articles that followed made Rosa Clay/Lemberg's story widely known in Finland and generated new meanings for the African diaspora in the country.[5] Social anthropologist Anna Rastas has noted that Rosa Clay's 'story seems to be particularly inspirational to artists and activists of African descent' as it testifies to a long history of Finns of African descent.[6] Rosa's story has inspired many artists of the African diaspora in Finland and there have been plans to write a play and make a film about her.[7] Her life as a girl of mixed ethnic heritage fostered by a European family and taken from Africa to Europe as a child in the late nineteenth century and then deciding to immigrate to the USA as an adult is also of larger interest. Her tricontinental experiences have gained new historical importance and wider interest in the world of the 2020s, where questions of race, rights and representation are once again in the spotlight.

Despite the two biographies on Rosa Clay/Lemberg and Eva Erickson's attempt in the late 1980s and early 1990s as well as Simo Heininen's and Harri Englund's more recent (2025) endeavours to learn more about the young Rosa's life with the Weikkolins in Owambo and Finland and to examine the truthfulness of the description of her early life in *Rosalia*, many questions and gaps have remained. In this article, I examine the beginnings of Rosa's 'global life', her biological parents and the placing of Rosa with the Finnish missionary couple. I do this with the help of archival research, searches in the digitised collections of Finnish newspapers and periodicals, reading of printed sources from the nineteenth century and some detective work online. I will also reflect on racial relations among Afro-European communities in the region and on the role Rosa's race and ethnicity played in her placement with the Finnish family that eventually

migrated from South West Africa to Finland with her. This article provides new knowledge on the origins of the person, whose transnational journeys are well known but on whose parents and circumstances prior to the first journey little has been published previously.

In addition to providing more information about one particular person of interest, this article sheds light on ethnic and racial relations and relationships in central South West Africa in the 1870s and 1880s, before the German colonisation of the region in 1884. I argue that a biographical approach on an individual whose parents came from a local African community and from the hunting and trading European community but who was brought up by members of the European missionary community has the potential to reveal a lot about transnational Euro-African networks and intimate relationships in central and northern South West Africa in the 1870s and 1880s, when European hunters, traders and missionaries were active in the region. The biographical approach can also broaden our understanding of early international foster care arrangements and child migration from Africa to Europe.

In the writing of global histories, taking a biographical approach, as Natalie Zemon Davis does in her *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim between Worlds* (2006) or Sanjay Subrahmanyam in his *The Career and Legend of Vasco da Gama* (1997), and applying micro-analysis on individual lives, can offer an alternative methodology, even if/when they do not make global macro-narratives or large models of causality redundant.[8] While Davis and Subrahmanyam focused on well-known figures of global history, a similar approach can be applied to 'ordinary people' as exemplified by Linda Colley's study of Elizabeth Marsh's transnational or global life in *The Ordeal of Elizabeth Marsh* (2007). Scholarship on 'transnational' or 'global' lives currently draws heavily on biographical approaches. Mark Gamsa attributes this new approach to the confluence of 'unease with the national prism in history writing' with 'the fashion for transnational history' and 'the flowering of microhistory'.[9] A biographical approach can be fruitfully applied in the study of 'transnational' lives to produce knowledge about mobile, 'global' lives on a more general rather than just on individual level. Although not quite taking the analysis to a 'global' pitch, examining the birth and early years of Rosa in her home town, Omaruru, allows one to interrogate the trading stations as a 'hub [. . .] of multiple networks'[10] in a pre-colonial region of South West Africa, a hub that brought various groups of both Africans and Europeans together. These networks can be 'revealed in

a patchwork of information patiently retrieved across multiple archives'[11] as well as various periodicals, newspapers and other, sometimes seemingly disconnected sources.

This article also foregrounds the research process and tracks earlier attempts, mainly by Eva Erickson, to uncover the truths behind Arvo Lindewall's somewhat fictionalised biography *Rosalia*. It further explains how my own research has added new dimensions to the story with the help of modern technology, such as internet, genealogical websites and digitised newspapers. Throughout this article, I use, like Natalie Zemon Davis in her *Trickster Travels*, 'the conditional – "would have", "may have", "was likely to have" – and the speculative "perhaps", "maybe"'. Davis explains that these are her 'invitations to the reader to follow a plausible life story from materials of the time'[12] and I put them to the same use. There are no letters, diaries or other materials left either by Rosa or her biological father, so their life stories have to be constructed using other documents, educated guesses and probabilities.

Facts, fabrication and fiction

The most comprehensive account of Rosa Clay's life, *Rosalia*, written in Finnish by the Finnish-American socialist Arvo Lindewall (1895–1974) and published in the United States, has served as a source for many articles on Rosa Clay.[13] Lindewall wrote *Rosalia* with Rosa Lemberg's collaboration and states that some of the chapters describing Rosa's early life are taken from her notebooks. While *Rosalia* on the whole is fact-based, it contains many fictions and fabrications. The educationalist Eva Erickson[14] translated *Rosalia* into English in the 1980s.[15] Erickson pondered as follows:

> Perhaps Lindewall embellished, romanticized, and exaggerated Rosa's activities. Perhaps Rosa's sixty-year old memory was becoming dulled in relation to specific times in her life. Study indicates that not all that is included in *Rosalia* can be specifically verified but, in general, it seems to be true.[16]

Rosalia uses many (weak) pseudonyms, for instance Rosalia for Rosa and Gray for Clay and, what is a significant omission for a biography, does not provide any dates. The many fictionalisations and romanticisations have puzzled readers for decades as it has been difficult to determine how much of the story is true and to what extent the fabrications – or indeed any of the text ascribed to Rosa – are the work of Rosa Lemberg herself or Arvo Lindewall.

The first attempts to unravel the truth about *Rosalia* took place in the 1950s, when Armas Holmio, a minister and professor at Suomi College in the United States, having met 80-year-old Rosa Lemberg in a nursing home, wrote to Tuure Vapaavuori, who was working for the Finnish Missionary Society at the time, to find out if there was any basis for Lindewall's description of Rosa's childhood and youth. Holmio felt that the fact that Lindewall was a socialist explained 'his grossly distorted information about missionary work'. Furthermore, as he got to know Rosa Lemberg, he found it hard to believe that she had provided all the information that Lindewall cited.[17] Interestingly, although Rosa Lemberg collaborated with Lindewall on *Rosalia*, she destroyed all her papers towards the end of her life 'as she didn't want them to be left for people to read'.[18] Furthermore, her children Arvo and Irja were either cautious about or even hostile towards Erickson's attempts to interview them for her own work on Rosa, published as *The Rosa Lemberg Story* in 1993.[19] Lindewall's papers cannot be consulted, as their whereabouts are not known – perhaps they do not exist anymore. Erickson explains that Lindewall's second wife had kept many of his belongings, some of which she had given to a Finnish minister she had befriended. What happened to Arvo Lindewall's papers after his second wife passed away in 1986 is uncertain.[20]

One of the significant fictions in *Rosalia* concern her birth parents who are described in the biography as Vice Governor Baron Charles Gray from England and a 17–18-year-old girl in Omaruru, who was supposedly a Muslim, her mother being Arabian and father a Damara.[21] Rosa's mother is not named in *Rosalia*, yet a source published two years earlier, in 1940, names both of Rosa's parents. That source is a sixtieth-anniversary commemorative publication, *Sortavalan seminaari, 1880–1940: Muistojulkaisu,* of the teacher's seminary Rosa attended in her youth in Sortavla, Finland. Rosa's mother, Feroza Sabina Hazara, is named for the first time in this bibliographic entry for Rosa Emilia Lemberg (Clay); later mentions refer back to this publication. Rosa's father's name reads as colonial official Charls Wiljam Clay. It is unclear where the names are taken from – perhaps and most likely they had been provided by Rosa herself. There is also a contemporary photograph of Rosa Lemberg with grey in her hair, so it is possible that the editors had been in touch with her.[22] It is also conceivable that Rosa had provided this information to the seminary when she was studying there as a young woman.

Wherever these two names originally came from, they stuck and are used in many articles on Rosa Clay.[23] Eva Erickson added Rosa's mother's name in her translation of *Rosalia*. The name Feroza Sabina Hazara reads like Rosa's attempt to refer to a mixed-race (rather than a black) parent, whose mother was Arabian and father a Damara. Yet Namibian scholars Ellen Ndeshi Namhila and Werner Hillebrecht note that 'it was virtually impossible for an Arabian Muslim woman to come to Namibia, and for a local black man to be converted to Islam in the 1850s'.[24] Therefore, not only is the story about Rosa's mother in *Rosalia* most likely untrue but the name of the mother is probably also invented. Social anthropologist Harri Englund argues that many of the fictional details of *Rosalia*, such as the noble status of her father and her mother's half-Arabian background so consistently create a certain kind of image of Rosa that they cannot be explained by the faltering memory of the ageing Rosa Lemberg. Englund suggests that the reason behind Rosa's active fictionalisation of her story can be located in an attempt to increase her status and value in circumstances where she, as a mixed-race person from Africa, had suffered from others' prejudiced views of her. Her fictionalising of her own origins and parentage could thus be interpreted as demanding the kind of respect she had lacked in Finland and later in the USA. Rosa Clay, racialised as she was in Finland and the United States, took an active role in constructing her own story rather than passively succumbing to the perceptions others, mainly whites, (may have) had of her.[25]

While Englund interprets Rosa's parentage as it is presented in *Rosalia* as Rosa's endeavour to give herself a background of her own choosing, American Studies scholar Tanja N. Aho reads *Rosalia* as Arvo Lindewall's handiwork, underlining 'the male, authoritative voice of her biography' in which 'Rosa Lemberg is repeatedly exoticized, eroticized, and othered'.[26] She also wonders how 'Lemberg must have overlooked, misunderstood, or maybe assimilated these denigrating tendencies in the text'.[27] It is not known how much agency Rosa Lemberg had in the writing process of *Rosalia* and whether she invented her biological parents' story and their heritage or whether Lindewall took liberties as the author of the biography. It is noteworthy, however, that the first chapters in which Rosa's parents are described are not attributed directly to Rosa; rather, the pages allegedly from her notebook begin from her time as a fostered child placed with the Weikkolins in Owambo. This article pays less attention to the question of to whom these fabrications in *Rosalia* should be attributed, to Rosa or to Lindewall, and focuses instead on the stories

and clues the biography offers of Rosa Clay's parents and early life and on finding out more about them by using other sources.

Lindewall describes at some length how the man, who he says was to become Rosa's father, came to South West Africa. The description has numerous faults, including calling the area British territory until German rule in 1884 – in fact, it was not colonised before the Germans – and the chief officer of the British administration 'the Cape Colony Governor's assistant, whose title was Vice Governor'.[28] Lindewall also claims that Baron Charles Gray was appointed as Vice Governor in the 1870s and that he fell madly in love when he met a 17–18-year-old girl in Omaruru during his official travels. Less than a year later, the beautiful girl gave birth to a baby named Rosalia. At two-months old, the baby was given to an English family to be taken care of and with whom she stayed for three years. Her father then gave her to the care of the Finnish missionary couple Heikkolin, whom he had met on the ship on his way from London to South West Africa.[29]

The story of Rosa Clay's parents in *Rosalia* has been deemed fictional at the latest since Eva Erickson's *The Rosa Lemberg Story* (1993), where Erickson explains the difficulties she had experienced in trying to verify Rosa's parentage. Erickson had contacted the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as well as the Public Record Office (today The National Archives) in London to inquire about the Vice Governor of South West Africa.[30] She was subsequently informed that 'The Post of Vice Governor does not appear to have existed, and is either a factual error or an invention of the author's'.[31] A researcher recommended by the Public Record Office was able to tell Erickson that Lindewall's account of South West Africa was 'extremely shaky', including the error of South West Africa having been governed by the British. Erickson was advised that pursuing this line of inquiry in the Public Record Office would be pointless.[32] Three years later, the discussion with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London continued, as Erickson inquired about Charles Wiljam Clay, whose name she had found in the Sortavala Seminary commemorative publication.[33] She was told in a reply that Charles Wiljam Clay cannot be found 'in Colonial Office Lists for the 1870's' or 'in the earliest "Cape Civil List" (1885) in the ECO Library'.[34] These clarifications made Erickson wonder if Rosa's father was 'a minor governmental official, a tradesman, a hunter, or just an adventurer'.[35] The significant clue to Rosa's paternity that Erickson was able to find through her contacts in Finland was a memoir by Rosa's foster mother Ida

Weikkolin, in which she briefly mentions Rosa's father Mr. Clay and her father's wife (not named). Furthermore, Ida Weikkolin explains that 'Rosa's mother was a wild black unhappy mountain Damara'.[36] Although Erickson did not have this information, missionary Tobias Reijonen's report in *Suomen Lähetyssanomia* confirms Rosa's parentage: 'Roosa's father is white (an Englishman) and mother black, a Bergdamara', i.e., a member of one of the local ethnic communities in that part of South West Africa.[37]

The interracial relationships and offspring of European hunters and traders in Omaruru

While Portuguese explorers had visited the coast of South West Africa on their search for a route to India via the Cape of Good Hope in the late fifteenth century, Europeans did not venture inland from the coast until the late eighteenth century. Some explorations of southern South West Africa by Europeans took place in the seventeenth century and in the latter half of the eighteenth century, but it was from the middle of the nineteenth century that Europeans – explorers, natural scientists, hunters, traders and missionaries – started to have a stronger presence in the area.[38] Early European explorers inland included Sir Francis Galton and the half-Swedish, half-British Charles John Andersson, whose journeys became known worldwide through their publications in the 1850s. While Galton returned to Europe, Andersson stayed in the area until his death in 1867. During the last two years of his life he worked together with the Swedish trader Axel Eriksson, who was born in the same place in Sweden, Vänersborg, as Andersson, and arrived in Africa in 1865. After his mentor and employer's death, Eriksson became a trader in middle and northern South West Africa, with a base in Omaruru from 1870 onwards.[39] Before the hunters, traders and explorers, South West Africa had started receiving European missionaries from the 1810s onwards. German missionary Heinrich Schmelen worked under the London Missionary Society among the Nama from 1812 and when the Society wanted to retreat from the area, Schmelen, who had married Zara, a Nama woman acting as his language guide, approached the Rhenish Missionary Society for help.[40] The Rhenish Missionary Society sent the Germans Heinrich Kleinschmidt and Carl Hugo Hahn to work among the Hereros in the early 1840s and the Finnish Missionary Society began its operations in Owambo in 1870, at the request of Aawambo King Shikongo of Ondonga, King Shipandeka of Oukwanyama and King Nuujoma of Uukwambi - all via the mediation of Carl Hugo Hahn.[41] North American and European hunters, traders and

missionaries worked and formed networks in the area where Rosa Clay was born. They also interacted extensively with the local population. In this section, I will focus on the mutually entwined although somewhat separate European communities of hunters/traders and missionaries among whom Rosa was raised.

Namhila and Hillebrecht point out the prevalence of European adventurers, traders and hunters in South West Africa in the latter half of the nineteenth century. These included two men called Clay: Charles John Clay and William Clay.[42] Edward C. Tabler's *Pioneers of South West Africa & Ngamiland* provides some information on them. The former is only mentioned in an addendum of Tabler's book, where it says that Charles John Clay was at Omaruru in December 1876.[43] There is not significantly more on William Clay but he is confirmed to have been a trader and hunter and is known to have lived in Okahandja in 1876 and in Leeupan in 1878.[44] The American trader and hunter Gerald McKiernan mentions William Clay in his diary from 1878 as a trader and hunter from Damaraland. William Clay is also noted to have been present in a meeting between Palgrave and Kamaherero at Okahandja on 29 July 1876.[45] Englund claims that Rosa's father, William Clay, was mentioned in McKiernan's diary and involved in some violent encounters.[46] However, this article shows that this man was not Rosa's father. Namhila and Hillebrecht note that William and Charles John Clay may have been brothers but no evidence has so far been found to explain their relationship.[47] Rosa's foster mother Ida Weikkolin appears to have confirmed *William* Clay as Rosa's father when she wrote in a newspaper in 1896:

> Rosa Eemelia Clay has been our foster daughter since the age of four. My late husband wanted her to have a proper education. To honour the wish of the beloved deceased, I have now educated Rosa using my own means, so that she is now in the third year of Sortavala seminary. God has granted her success and health thus far. But in July this year, her father, trader Wiljam Clay passed away, and news of his death seems to have affected Rosa health. She has had to turn to a doctor.[48]

Ida Weikkolin's published letter also confirms that Rosa Clay's father was a trader by occupation. However, Ida must have confused the first names of the two trading Clays, William and Charles John, as a documentary record find in Windhoek was to prove.

The aforementioned significant step forward in finding out more about Rosa's biological father took place in Windhoek in the late 2010s. Searching through the baptism register of the Rhenish Mission at

Omaruru, Ellen Namhila and Werner Hillebrecht found a record of Rosa's birth. Charles John Clay is recorded as the father of one 'Emily Rose' born in August 1875, while the child's mother is not mentioned. 'Emily Rose' was baptised on 17 June 1877. The writers point out that a child by a European father and an unnamed local woman is not a rare occurrence in the records but underlines 'the harsh reality of a semi-colonial frontier society' in which black women were impregnated by white men without caring about the consequences.[49] The great Herero leader Kamaherero complained about the situation of concubinal interracial relations to the British envoy William Coates Palgrave in 1876, objecting 'to the practice of Europeans "marrying" Damara women and, on their departure from the country, taking with them the children of these "marriages" after paying the women something by way of compensation'.[50] Rosa Clay's father may have been one of these European men 'marrying' Damara women and then taking the child, born a year before Kamaherero made his complaint, away from her mother and placing her in the care of a European couple. Yet, although this seems like a brutal act towards the mother, some of these men probably thought that they were acting in the best interest of the child, making sure the child survived.

Interracial sexual relations and marriages between European men and local women were a common phenomenon in many precolonial and colonial settings across the globe. In British India, having a Hindu or Anglo-Indian wife or mistress was common for British men until the Indian Rebellion of 1857 and the increasing numbers of British memsahibs arriving in India. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the British Raj widened the gap between the coloniser and the colonised and interracial relations were viewed less favourably. However, 'although concubinage was no longer the custom in India and the white dominions, it was still widely practised in certain parts of the empire' at the beginning of the twentieth century 'by members of the British colonial services, as well as by white traders, railway engineers and unmarried settlers'.[51] In the Dutch West Indies, mixed marriages between Christians and non-Christians were forbidden between 1617 and 1848, after which the new Civil Code allowed European men who were already in a relationship with non-Christian native women to legalise their relationships and children, whereby native women would become subject to European law. The mixed-marriage act of 1898 allowed for legal marriage for mixed couples – by this time there were also

women classified as European who were entering into relationships with non-Europeans – but made European women wanting to marry native men subject to their husband's law.[52] In coastal West Africa, interracial marriages were common before the twentieth century. In addition, concubinage, prostitution and coercion were also characteristic of some interracial relationships in the region.[53] However, in mid eighteenth-century Elmina in Ghana, Dutch fathers generally took responsibility for their children born from interracial relations and sending them to school in Europe was the ideal, if the father had the means to do so. For the mother, the separation must have been difficult and felt like a sacrifice, especially as matrilineage among the Akan was more important than the marriage connection.[54]

In South West Africa, the Omaruru baptism records contain the names of other children fathered by European men with (presumably) local women. The fathers are named, but the mothers are unnamed.[55] The Finnish missionaries also mention such children in their letters and reports. Mary (or Maria) Todd, who was first fostered by Juho Heinonen and then by Antti Piirainen, both lay brothers of the Finnish Missionary Society, would be an example. Mary Todd's father was an Englishman, and her mother a Herero woman who is not named by the missionaries. After baptism, Mary was called Josefina Natalia Todd.[56] Perhaps unexpectedly, at least one European woman is also known to have had a relationship with an African man in Omaruru. The Swedish trader Axel Eriksson's divorced wife Fanny Eriksson supposedly had a relationship with Eriksson's cook Jonathan, a Damara man. Fanny and Jonathan had two daughters, Elisabeth Johanna in 1885 and Catharina Isabella in 1887.[57] Axel Eriksson also had a child with a local woman after he was divorced from Fanny, sometime in 1883 or 1884. Eriksson's son Jacob was born from a relationship with the daughter of the Herero chief Kambazembi. The name of Kambazembi's daughter is not known, nor is the length of the relationship between Eriksson and her.[58] Like both Eriksson and Mary Todd's father, Charles John Clay acknowledged paternity of the child born from a relationship with a local woman. It seems likely that Rosa's mother was not a Christian and therefore her name has not been recorded in the baptism register. On the other hand, leaving out the mother's name seems to have been quite common and may have happened for other reasons as well.

Situating Charles John Clay in Omaruru, a hub of European trade in the 1870s

Using the evidence provided by Ida Weikkolin's published letter that Rosa's father had passed away in the summer of 1896, I started searching for information about Charles John Clay online. These searches yielded results after some detective work. I first found Charles John Clay's marriage certificate online. At the time, I could not be sure if this was the same man, but the certificate recorded the marriage of one Charles John Clay to one Caroline Smith in Hondeklip Bay, South Africa on 24 July 1865.[59] They were, respectively, 24 and 23 years old at the time. I then began to search for more information on this man and eventually found his baptism record and two census reports online. They tell us that Charles John Clay was born on 9 April 1840 in Portsea Island, Portsmouth, England, to Charles and Mary Ann Clay. He had at least seven siblings: older siblings Mary Ann, Elizabeth and Amelia, and younger siblings Emma, William, Alice and Alfred, according to the 1861 census.[60] At the age of 21 he was still living in Portsmouth. I have no knowledge of when he took the journey to South Africa, but four years after the 1861 census he married Caroline Smith in Hondeklip Bay.

Continued detective work online produced more results and baptism certificates. Charles John Clay appears to have lived in Hondeklip Bay for some years at least. He had four children with Caroline Clay in the 1860s and 1870s. Charles John Ernest (1865–1944),[61] Caroline Annie (1867),[62] William Henry (1871)[63] and Emma Isabella (1873).[64] The death notice of Charles John Ernest Clay marks his race as mixed,[65] which seems to indicate that Caroline Clay was mixed-race or black. This, in turn, would seem to render Lindewall's suggestions about Charles John Clay finding it degrading to have Rosa brought up by a black woman implausible.[66] The suggestion may have grown from the circumstances in the United States at the time of the writing of *Rosalia*, but does not seem to hold any truth in the circumstances where Rosa was born, in the Omaruru of the 1870s.

The two older children of Caroline and Charles John Clay were born in Hondeklip Bay, the two younger ones in Cape Town. At the time of his wedding and the baptism of the first three children, Charles John Clay's occupation is marked as constable or policeman, showing that he worked as a police officer both in Hondeklip Bay and in Cape Town. In the baptism record of his fourth child in 1873, Charles John Clay's occupation has changed to trader. The peace treaty signed in Okahandja in 1870 by the Oorlam Captain Jan Jonker Afrikaner and the Herero chief Kamaherero concluded the decade-long fighting between Herero and Nama against Oorlam and

Nama. The improved political situation and the greatly increased price of ivory and ostrich feathers enticed traders from the Cape to South West Africa in the early 1870s, Charles John Clay among them.[67] It is uncertain what happened to Caroline Clay, Charles John's first wife, but perhaps she died in the 1870s either before Charles John moved to the Omaruru region or during the time he was making trading trips in the area to earn a living. Rosa Clay was born in August 1875, so Charles John was in the Omaruru region in late 1874 and had a relationship with Rosa's Damara mother. Charles John and Caroline's children's whereabouts at the time are not known either but what is known, based on Charles John Clay's death certificate,[68] is that he did not have any more children (at least children that survived) with Caroline Clay after Emma Isabella, who was born in 1873.

Since it is known that Charles John Clay worked as a trader in 1873 and at least some years thereafter, and that his daughter Rosa was born in Omaruru, it is possible that he worked under or alongside the Swedish 'trader king of Damaraland' Axel Eriksson (1846–1901),[69] who had established a trading centre in Omaruru in 1870 and whom Finnish missionary Tobias Reijonen in 1881 called 'the chief trader in these lands'. Among other things, Eriksson was notable for his good relations with the missionaries.[70] His trading activities included hunting, mainly elephant and ostrich for ivory and feathers. These were shipped to Cape Town, while guns, gun powder and other merchandise were hauled to Omaruru for trade in Damaraland and Owambo. The British Special Commissioner to Damaraland William Coates Palgrave wrote in his report in 1876 that Eriksson & Co.'s trading establishment 'is perhaps the largest in the country, as from its situation it has been enabled to monopolise almost the whole of the trade with the northern part of the country [. . .] More than 20 European traders are in the employ of this establishment'.[71] According to Johansson, the number of European hunters at the employ of Eriksson had doubled in the following few years, which means that 'one-third of all white men in Damaraland and Ovamboland at that time [i.e., in the 1870s] were in Eriksson's service'.[72]

It is quite possible that Charles John Clay worked for or with Eriksson. Charles John Clay's name appears on the list of 38 'undersigned hunters and traders in Damaraland' drawn up in Omaruru on 11 December 1876. These men, Clay included, were requesting Palgrave to influence the Colonial Government in Cape Town to place Damaraland 'under British Rule and Protection'. The first signatory on the list is A[xel] W[ilhelm] Eriksson. The other signatories include a number of Swedes, O[scar] Lindholm among others.[73] Lindholm was a Swede who had come to Cape Town in 1854 and

had assisted the natural scientist Johan August Wahlberg's expedition to Ngamiland for a year. Lindholm had also spent some time as the manager of the Swedish Charles John Andersson's store in Otjimbingue in the 1860s, as well as working as a smith and waggon-maker. Together with his business partner Thure Een, Oscar Lindholm and another Swede, B. Bernhardt, Eriksson settled in Omaruru, the site of a Herero village, in November 1869, having been given a permission to do so by the Herero Chief Wilhelm Zeraua. The Swedes settled on the south bank of the Omaruru River, while the Hereros were living on the north bank. In the following weeks, Lindholm built a house, which comprised both the store for the company and living quarters for Eriksson and Een.[74] Eriksson's and his partner's company's headquarters were in Cape Town and perhaps Charles John Clay had become acquainted with the Swedes already there.

During 1870, the pioneer settlement of Omaruru grew in size, with storage and residential buildings sprouting up on the south bank. Cederberg, one of the Swedish signatories of the petition to the Colonial Government of the Cape Colony, joined the other Swedes in the village, as well as Fanny Stewardson, widow of a Scottish hunter and trader. Fanny Stewardson moved with her children to Omaruru after the death of her husband, probably because her daughter Elizabeth was married to Oscar Lindholm and her daughter Catherine to the Canadian hunter and trader Frederick Thomas Green, who had also moved to Omaruru. The trader John Gunning married Fanny Stewardson's daughter Charlotte in Omaruru in 1875 and Axel Eriksson married the fourth daughter, also named Fanny like her mother.[75] Through this marriage, the elder Fanny Stewardson's sons William and Charles Stewardson, also signatories of the petition, became Eriksson's brothers-in-law. The Stewardson brothers joined expeditions equipped by Eriksson from Omaruru in the 1870s.[76] Many of the other signatories were Eriksson's business partners and/or relatives and therefore, it is highly likely that Charles John Clay also had some business dealings with Eriksson, since he was one among this group in Omaruru in 1876 and had presumably spent time there even before, when he had a relationship with Rosa's mother.

The European settlement in Omaruru kept growing from 1870 onwards. Eriksson & Co.'s trading company's needs were expanding but there were also other reasons behind the growth: 'the aim of this expansion was to turn Omaruru into a meeting place and refuge for white hunters and traders in the area'.[77] According to Een, Omaruru would provide 'a place where they could rest after their strenuous trips and socialise pleasantly with each other'.[78] Thure Een returned to Sweden in 1871 and sold his house to Oscar Lindholm

and his share in the trading company to Eriksson, which made the latter alone the leading trader in Omaruru. His partner Ohlsson was based in Cape Town and handled matters in the city and the office. The Rhenish Missionary Society had had a mission house in Omaruru, built by Daniel Cloete, but it had been abandoned before the Swedes arrived there in 1869. When Omaruru started growing, Gottlieb Viehe of the Rhenish Missionary Society was sent there in the summer of 1870. A new mission building was constructed and it also housed a school and a post office. Just as Eriksson was the master of trading in the area, Viehe was the leader of the church and the mission in Omaruru.[79]

Rosa Clay was born in August 1875 and baptised in 1877 by Gottlieb Viehe. If Caroline Clay had passed away after the birth of her and Charles John's youngest child in 1873 or just stayed behind in Cape Town with the children, perhaps Charles John Clay had either moved to the now bustling Omaruru to work as a trader and hunter or spend time there whilst on his trading tours. Since Eriksson was the lead trader and also equipped hunting expeditions in the area, it is highly likely that there was at least some collaboration between these two men. Perhaps Clay bought Eriksson's goods to do trade farther away from Omaruru as some of the other European hunter-traders did. Eriksson also dominated the trade in the north, in Owambo, as the citation above from Palgrave shows. The Finnish missionaries mention Eriksson and Gunning, among others, in their letters, so it is possible that this is also how Clay formed his connection with the Weikkolins. Ida and Karl Weikkolin arrived in Omaruru in early 1880, but Clay may have known Karl from earlier, during his first stint in South West Africa from 1869 to 1878. The Weikkolins spent some weeks in Omaruru in early 1880, as Ida Weikkolin gave birth to their son Johannes, who was also baptised there by Gottlieb Viehe.[80]

Why was Rosa placed in foster care?

Charles John Clay took an interest in his daughter's life and placed her, according to Lindewall's *Rosalia*, in the care of an English couple when she was two months old. It is not known who this couple was but one possibility is the Irishman John Hickey and 'his "Baster" wife who was named as Rosa's godmother at her baptism'.[81] Rosa was baptised in June 1877, meaning that she would have been living with the English family at the time. Was her godmother also her foster mother? John Hickey died in 1878, so if it was the Hickeys who were raising Rosa, perhaps John Hickey's passing was the reason she needed to be placed in yet another family. Lindewall ponders in *Rosalia* the reason why Rosa's father gave her to an English couple and suggests that

perhaps 'the baron', Rosa's supposed father, felt it was degrading to have his child grow up with her black mother, even if he had not cared about this when he had a relationship with her.[82] Based on the missionary letters I have read and especially on Ida Weikkolin's letter from 1885 – 'I saw [Rosa's] mother and two sisters in Omaruru black and naked. How it hurt me to see her naked black sisters; every day Rosa brought food for her ill mother'[83] – I venture to guess that food, and especially the scarcity of it, was a central reason why Rosa was given first to an English family and then to the Weikkolins, who lived in Owambo. If Clay himself travelled a lot, as he would have done as a trader and hunter, he would have been unable to take care of an infant himself and in all likelihood that was not something fathers did in that time and place. Rosa's mother seems to have been poor and there may have been a shortage of food, as many parents were willing to give up their children to be fostered by missionaries in exchange for food and board. In a letter dated in September 1880, Karl Weikkolin expressed his sorrow at not having been able to take on the little sister of the baptised Namaqua girls they had adopted in March 1880 in Omaruru (they had to limit the numbers of children they could look after), for he had now heard that the little girl had died. Weikkolin surmises that she died of hunger and misery, which greatly saddened him.[84]

Why Charles John Clay chose not to give money to enable and support Rosa growing up with her own mother remains a mystery. Perhaps Clay did not have sufficient funds to support Rosa, her mother and possible siblings. Yet, Lindewall recounts – this information is not ascribed to Rosa's own notebook writings – that Charles John Clay had informed Rosa of her mother's passing, when Rosa was living in Finland, and mentioned in the letter that he had provided for her mother since Rosa's birth and now seen to her burial. He had supposedly stayed in touch with her all these years.[85] There is no way to verify this information but perhaps he did provide a basic income to Rosa's mother but wanted Rosa to grow up in different circumstances. Perhaps Clay thought that his daughter would have a better future and be safer in a European family, as Damaraland had been a conflict-ridden area.

No documentary evidence has been found to explain the decisions Charles John Clay made regarding his daughter Rosa, so *Rosalia* remains the sole source on this question. Lindewall recounts that 'the baron' took Rosa to the Weikkolins after three years with the English family. He had allegedly visited the Weikkolins a few times and noticed that Rosa would get a good home and be raised in the Christian faith.[86] Missionary Tobias Reijonen's account confirms Lindewall's description of Charles John Clay himself bringing Rosa to the

Weikkolins. Reijonen notes that a girl named Rosa was brought to the Weikkolins by her English father. He does not specify when, nor does he mention the father's name.[87] Due to the lack of documentary evidence, we can only guess why Rosa's father decided to place Rosa with the Weikkolins in 1879 or 1880. Sustenance may have been the reason behind this decision, too. In the last few years of the 1870s, Omaruru and the surrounding areas were hit by a severe drought, which caused starvation and worsened relations between the Hereros and white hunters. Hans-Martin Milk suggests that '[a]lthough the Damara were not a homogeneous group entity at the time and various groups of them lived under difficult conditions, [the Bergdamara] were the ones who suffered most under the extreme drought of the 1870s'.[88] Peter Johansson describes 'a devastating famine in Damaraland' in 1879, which made Axel Eriksson write to William Coates Palgrave at the British Colonial Authority in Cape Town: 'Mountain Damaras are starving, my shop is filled from morning till night by living skeletons. Can nothing be done for them? I am doing everything in my power to stop them from dying of hunger'.[89] Another Swede, Thure Een, described in his 1872 book how Aawambos did not suffer from poverty or starvation, since the fertile earth in Owambo made farming and cattle-rearing possible, whereas Damaraland was considerably drier.[90] Drought and consequent food scarcity in Omaruru may have been the factor that led Charles John Clay to place his daughter in a white missionary family living in Owambo. Clay met the Weikkolins in Omaruru in early 1880, when they first arrived there as a couple and where Ida gave birth to their son Johannes before they headed towards Owambo.

Rosa herself remembers meeting her mother only twice during one trip to Omaruru since she was given away. In *Rosalia*, she describes a trip to Omaruru with the Weikkolins and more than a dozen other foster children, to attend a mission event. One day before returning to Owambo, Rosa, who was playing with her friends under a tree, was approached by a 24–25-year-old beautiful black woman. She had embraced Rosa and referred to her as her child. Crying, the woman had told Rosa that she was her 'unhappy, forsaken mother'. It had been difficult for Rosa to take in for she had never thought about her mother and had never been told about her. Afterwards, Rosa writes, she became convinced that that woman had really been her mother as she had known her name and been so desperate and had cried so much that the reaction could only have been caused by being reunited with her long-lost child. When the Weikkolins and the foster children left for Owambo again in an ox waggon, the woman had followed the waggon for some way, crying and yelling hysterically: 'Don't take my Rosa away!'.[91] This description in *Rosalia* is

supposedly based on Rosa's own notebook text and it was repeated in a newspaper article in 1957 as something Rosa had told the writer of the article three years previously.[92] At the time, Rosa had been nearing 80 and the years had weakened her memory. The article must therefore have been largely based on *Rosalia*, which does not mean it is not true, even if details of it have been modified. Rosa did take a trip to Omaruru with the Weikkolins and the other foster children at least once. Missionary Reijonen writes about this health and recreation trip and has included a picture taken of the foster girls at the time. Rosa is ten years old in the picture.[93]

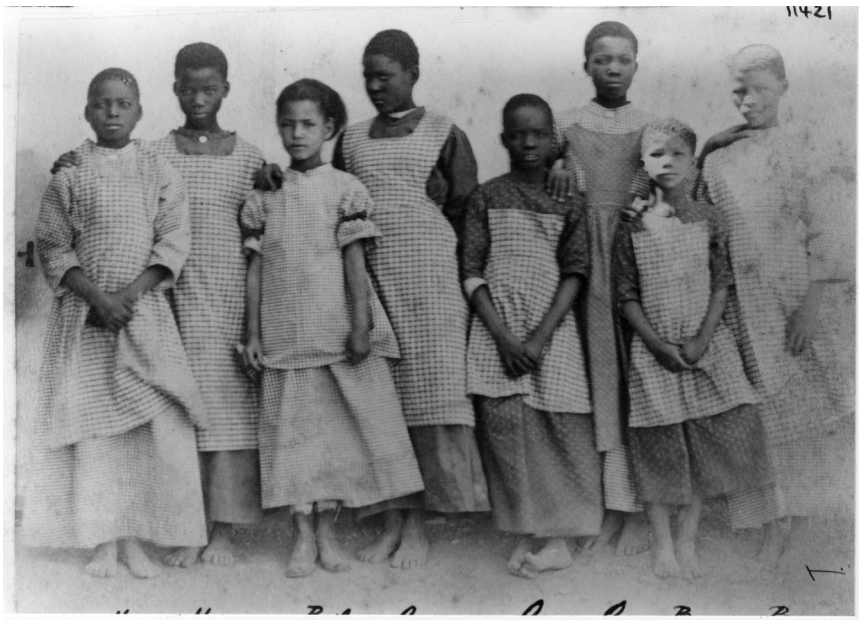


Figure 1. 'Girls school of the Finnish mission in Ovamboland, led by Mrs Weikkolin', image 11,421, National Archives of Namibia. Photographer unknown. Rosa is the third from the left.

Rosa stands out in the group photo, not only because of her lighter skin tone but because she is the only one wearing shoes and the only one allowed to have long hair. Furthermore, the sleeves of her top are more decorative than those of the other girls and unlike them, she does not wear an apron. This suggests that Rosa received special attention and perhaps even money was sent to the Weikkolins for her upkeep by her father. While there is no record of this arrangement, it would not have been out of the ordinary in the Weikkolin household, as Karl Weikkolin wrote to mission director Tötterman

that if missionary friends were willing to pay for an African child's upkeep, they could take in more children in the station.[94]

Rastas and Peltokangas ask whether a white child would have been taken from a white mother and reflect that an African mother most likely had limited or no say in a decision taken by a European father.[95] It seems that African mothers were powerless in such matters. On the other hand, this powerlessness may have extended to white mothers as well. When Axel and Fanny Eriksson divorced, Axel decided to send three of their children to Sweden and one of them to Cape Town, thus taking them away from their European mother. Eriksson hoped that the children would have 'a peaceful and secure upbringing' and 'the opportunity for a good education' in Sweden.[96] Eriksson's mixed-race son Jacob, the grandchild of the Herero chief Kambazembi, was in time sent to school in Cape Town, from where he returned at the age of 16.[97] We can surmise that Kambazembi would have been able to prevent this had he been so inclined. Furthermore, Eriksson and Kambazembi remained great friends, so this arrangement was acceptable to him and therefore at least some African men as well. Women's, and especially African women's opinions and possibilities to act were curtailed by men at the time.

The later life of Charles John Clay

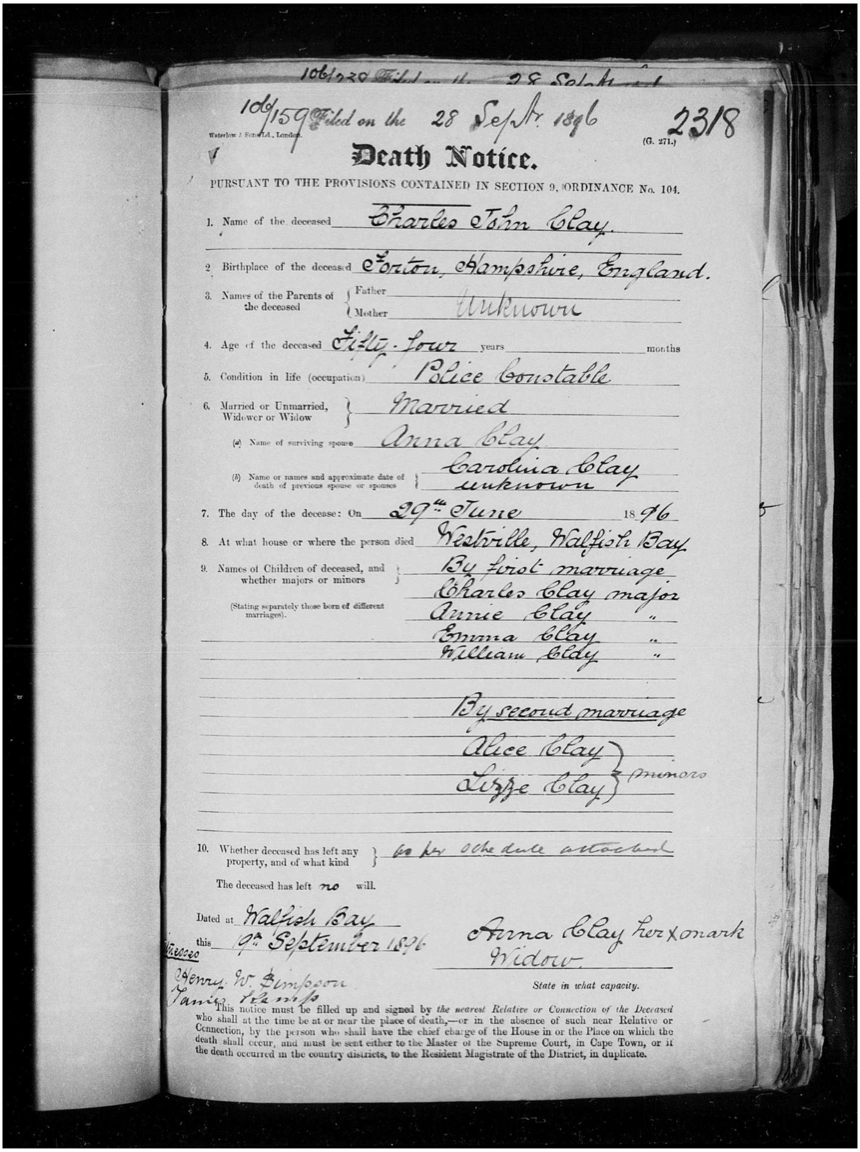
While a marriage certificate has not yet been located by myself or by other researchers, it seems certain that Charles John Clay remarried at some point, probably in the late 1870s or early 1880s. What Rosa tells in *Rosalia* appears to confirm this: Rosa describes how her father had married soon after Rosa had come to Owambo (probably in 1880) and had settled in Omaruru.[98] Charles John Clay's death notice testifies that he had two daughters, Alice and Lizze, with his second wife Anna Clay.[99] Lizze's full name was Helene Elisabeth Caroline, as shown by the baptism register of the Rhenish Mission at Omaruru. She was born in March 1886 and baptised in April 1886 with Ida and Karl Weikkolin, Rosa's foster parents, acting as godparents. Interestingly, the child's mother is unnamed, although Charles John and Anna Clay were presumably married.[100] Ida Weikkolin mentions meeting Rosa Clay's stepmother and her five-year-old daughter 'Liisi', whose godmother she remarks she was, on her way to Owambo when she returned to Africa in 1890, while Rosa stayed in Finland. Ida Weikkolin notes in brackets that Rosa's stepmother is a 'Bastard' or Baster, that is, from the Baster community, who are descendants of Europeans and Namas. Rosa's half-sister 'Liisi' [Lizze] is described as having 'blonde, curly but woollen hair'.[101] This for its part confirms Rosa's

description of her half-sisters in *Rosalia*. Rosa notes that she met her father's new family in Omaruru when she was visiting the town with the Weikkolins and their foster children. She did not know what nationality her father's wife was but was sure that she was not wholly European, even though she was lighter than her mother. Rosa describes her father and his new wife as having two blonde and beautiful daughters.[102]

I have been in email contact with two of Charles John and Anna Clay's descendants and they have confirmed that Anna Clay was part Nama. Some genealogical websites name Charles John Clay's second wife as Anna Clay, née Cloete. It is possible that Charles John Clay married Anna Cloete, the eldest daughter of the Rhenish Missionary Society's Daniel Cloete. Anna Cloete According to Ida Weikkolin (and Rosa herself in *Rosalia*), Charles John Clay's second wife was a Baster, so it is possible that Anna Clay was Daniel Cloete's daughter.[103] As discussed above, relationships and marriages between people from different ethnic groups were not unusual in South West Africa before German colonisation. When Peter Johansson, Axel Eriksson's biographer, interviewed the Herero Chief Christian Zeraua, descendant of Wilhelm Zeraua, in Omaruru in 1998, Zeraua related how Eriksson and the other Swedes had established good relations and cooperation with the Hereros. Europeans socialised and also had intimate relations with the locals, and many children were born out of these relationships. The situation changed only with the coming of the Germans in 1884 and especially after the Herero uprising in 1904. By then, the locals were clearly separated from the European colonisers.[104]

At the time of his death on 29 June 1896 Charles John Clay was 54 years old and again working as a police constable, now in Walvis Bay, which had been annexed by the British Cape Colony in 1878. The growth in trade that had started in the early 1870s had stopped and trade had declined towards the end of the decade with the fall in world market prices and the overhunting and consequent scarcity of big game in the region. Most European traders left Hereroland at the time. In Omaruru, only one trader, the Finnish Missionary Society's agent Antti Piirainen, was left in August 1881.[105] Charles John Clay moved to Walvis Bay some years after its annexation by the Cape Colony and took up his old occupation as a police constable. Antti Piirainen mentions Mr Clay loaning waggons to him and offering a ride in his waggons to another missionary centre close to the Omaruru area in February 1886 and July 1887.[106] Ida Weikkolin tells of her encounter with Mr Clay, his wife and child Lizze/Liisi in Usakos in 1890 but she does not specify what he was doing there.[107] In 1896, Clay died of an illness caused by heart disease that had

lasted for six weeks according to the death certificate. He was survived by the four children, now adults, from his first marriage to Caroline Clay, his widow Anna Clay and their two underage daughters Alice and Lizze,[108] as well as Rosa Clay, who at the time of his death was living in Finland and, as reported by Ida Weikkolin, was severely affected by the passing away of her father.



106/159 Filed on the 28 Sept. 1896 2318

Waterlow & Sons Ld., London. (G. 271.)

Death Notice.

PURSUANT TO THE PROVISIONS CONTAINED IN SECTION 9, ORDINANCE No. 104.

1. Name of the deceased Charles John Clay.
2. Birthplace of the deceased Forton, Hampshire, England.
3. Names of the Parents of the deceased Father / Mother Unknown
4. Age of the deceased Fifty-four years months
5. Condition in life (occupation) Police Constable
6. Married or Unmarried, Widower or Widow Married
   (a) Name of surviving spouse Anna Clay
   (b) Name or names and approximate date of death of previous spouse or spouses Carolina Clay unknown
7. The day of the decease: On 29th June 1896
8. At what house or where the person died Westville, Walfish Bay
9. Names of Children of deceased, and whether majors or minors (Stating separately those born of different marriages).
   By first marriage
   Charles Clay major
   Annie Clay "
   Emma Clay "
   William Clay "
   By second marriage
   Alice Clay } minors
   Lizze Clay }
10. Whether deceased has left any property, and of what kind [illegible]

The deceased has left no will.

Dated at Walfish Bay this 19th September 1896

Witnesses Henry W. Simpson, James [illegible]

Anna Clay her X mark
Widow
State in what capacity.

This notice must be filled up and signed by *the nearest Relative or Connection of the Deceased* who shall at the time be at or near the place of death,—or in the absence of such near Relative or Connection, by the person who shall have the chief charge of the House in or the Place on which the death shall occur, and must be sent either to the Master of the Supreme Court, in Cape Town, or if the death occurred in the country districts, to the Resident Magistrate of the District, in duplicate.

Figure 2. Charles John Clay's death notice lists the names of his four children born in marriages first to Carolina Clay and then to Anna Clay. South Africa, Cape Province, Civil Records, 1840–1972.

According to *Rosalia*, Charles John Clay sent at least some letters to Rosa while she was in Finland, including the one in which he informed Rosa of her mother's death. This was in October and while no year is mentioned, except that Rosa was studying in the Sortavala seminary at the time, it must have been in 1895, since this was the last letter sent by her father, who, Lindewall stated, passed away some months later, which we know to have happened in June 1896. Rosa was informed of her father's passing by her half-siblings,[109] presumably one of the four grown-up children from Charles John's first marriage. Rosa did not see her biological parents or half-siblings again after she left Africa in 1888 at the age of 13, but if Lindewall is correct, Rosa's father kept in touch with her and after his passing, her half-siblings notified her or at least Ida Weikkolin of what had happened. Rosa's father probably also expected her to return to South West Africa after she had received an education in Finland and Rosa had plans to return, as the records of the Finnish Missionary Society prove, but she changed her mind for some reason, possibly because she became disillusioned by the missionary cause. The change of circumstances in South West Africa since her departure may also have been a factor, as the region had become a German colony in 1884, which had affected racial relations on the ground.

Conclusion

Focusing on the 'global' or 'transnational life' of an individual, in this case Rosa Clay, allows us to examine the circumstances in which a mobile individual forms their identity and to understand the identity they perform. Exploring the childhood of Rosa Clay provides knowledge about factors which contributed towards her identity and actions as someone who belonged to an ethnic minority both in Finland and the USA. Rosa's self-fashioning, which we catch glimpses of in *Rosalia*, is rooted in her experiences of childhood both in South West Africa and in Finland. Her life was transnational and mobile from the beginning and investigating the circumstances of her birth and the racial and ethnic dimensions of her childhood homeland(s) sheds light on her future identity performances and her contestation of the racial minority status imposed on her in Finland and the United States. Rosa's childhood home and homeland, like that of other people with 'global lives', was closely related to her life. As Mark Gamsa has put it: 'Everybody comes from somewhere and one's place of origin is seldom

irrelevant, or put out of mind, however cosmopolitan, global or transnational a life one later leads'.[110] Using a biographical method to trace the early life of a global individual has enabled me to also examine the context within which this individual grew up and which formed her during her early years. This most likely had a bearing on her minority identity and her rejection of it. This approach also reveals the transnational and transcultural networks and interconnections between various European and African groups in central and northern South West Africa in the 1870s and 1880s. Among other things, it demonstrates that interracial relations between European trader-hunters and African women were common in Omaruru and elsewhere in central and southern South West Africa until the German colonisation of the country in 1884.

Adopting a biographical approach to 'global' or 'transnational' lives has been made easier and quicker by the development of accessible online resources, such as digitised archival material, newspapers and periodicals as well as digitised baptism and marriage registers, census records and genealogical websites. Digital research can in some cases make travelling to archives redundant, even if digital archives can never fully replace physical archives. Whereas Eva Erickson had to send letters and wait for answers to conduct her research on Rosa Clay, I was able to achieve results through some online searches – which can, nonetheless, be time-consuming as well. Genealogical websites in particular can prove very useful in tracing histories of individuals and their family connections, while focusing on the latter can help illuminate the ground-level personal experiences of those whose lives were closely entangled with the processes of global history.

Notes

1. See, for example, *Päivälehti*, September 2, 1899.
2. Peltokangas, "Rosa Suomesta"; Peltokangas, "Afrikka Suomessa"; and Jonkka, *Afro-Suomen historia*.
3. *Afrikka Suomessa* (Africa in Finland) exhibition at the Finnish Labour Museum Werstas in 2015.
4. Kannas, *Rosa Clay*.
5. Rastas and Peltokangas, "Rosan jäljillä," 98.
6. Rastas, "Lessons to Learn," 54.
7. On artistic works on Rosa by the African diaspora in Finland, see, for instance, https://www.karjalainen.fi/uutissuomalainen/5911271.; https://www.1854.photography/2021/08/uwa-iduozee-they-walked-on-water/.; https://www.sashahuber.

com/index.php?cat=10073&lang=fi&mstr=10009.; https://koneensaatio.fi/saaren-kartanon-residenssi/residenssitaiteilijat-ja-tutkijat/rosa-clay-tyoryhma/.; https://koneensaatio.fi/apurahat-ja-residenssipaikat/sincerely-rosa/.

8. Cossart, "Global Lives," 13.
9. Gamsa, "Biography and (Global) Microhistory," 232–3.
10. Berg, "Introduction," 5.
11. Ibid.
12. Davis, *Trickster Travels*, 13.
13. Arvo Lindewall was born in Finland and emigrated as a child with his family to the United States. He became an author, musician and actor, who was active in the Finnish-American community in Chicago. Lindewall and Rosa Lemberg were both involved in the music and drama scene at the Imperial Hall in Chicago in the 1930s and probably got to know each other then. See Erickson, *The Rosa Lemberg Story*, 12.
14. Erickson's parents moved from Finland to the United States in 1904 and Erickson knew Rosa Lemberg and her children when she was a teenager.
15. The English translation was published in 1988.
16. Erickson, *The Rosa Lemberg Story*, 2.
17. Immigration Research Center Archives, University of Minnesota, Eva Helen Erickson Papers (henceforth IHRC625), Armas Holmio to Tuure Vapaavuori 28 November 1960.
18. IHRC 625, Esther Lilley to Eva Erickson 28 August 1987. Esther Lilley had received this information from her sister Elma and a lady who worked at the rest home where Rosa spent her last years.
19. Erickson's phone conversation with Orvo Lemberg on 4 May 1988 and on 3 August 1988, Orvo Lemberg's letter to Erickson 10 May 1988; Erickson to Irja Johnson on 31 July 1989 in reply to Irja Johnson's letter on 13 July 1989. Eva Helen Erickson papers (IHRC625).
20. Erickson, *The Rosa Lemberg Story*, 13.
21. Lindewall, *Rosalia*, 5, 16.
22. Härkönen and Pankakoski, *Sortavalan seminaari 1880–1940*, 430.
23. See, for instance, Erickson, *The Rosa Lemberg Story*, 19; Leitzinger, "Clay, Rosa Emilia"; and Rastas, "Lessons to Learn."
24. Namhila and Hillebrecht, "Rosa Emilia Clay," 59.
25. Englund, *Kongosta Sortavalaan*, 50–52, 77, 70–72.
26. Aho, "A 'Tragic Mulatta'," 356.
27. Ibid., 370.
28. Lindewall, *Rosalia*, 4.
29. Ibid., 5, 16.
30. IHRC625, Veasey to Erickson, June 7, 1988; and Veasey to Erickson June 23 1988.
31. IHRC625, Walton to Erickson, August 2 1988.
32. IHRC625, Roger Thomas to Erickson 18 August 1988; and Roger Thomas to Erickson September 24 1988.
33. IHRC625, Erickson to Veasey September 23, 1991.
34. IHRC625, Veasey to Erickson October 9, 1991.
35. Erickson, *The Rosa Lemberg Story*, 20.

36. Ibid. See also Weikkolin, *Lähetyssaarnaaja Weikkolinin wiimeinen matka*, 19.
37. Tobias Reijonen, "Afrikalaisia lapsia lähetysalaltamme," *Suomen Lähetyssanomia* June 1, 1886, 88.
38. Siiskonen, *Trade and Socioeconomic Change*, 92–3; Peltola, *Suomen Lähetysseuran Afrikan työn historia*, 25–7; and Johansson, *The Trader King*, 11.
39. See, for instance, Johansson, *The Trader King*, 6–10, 17–37.
40. Peltola, *Suomen Lähetysseuran Afrikan työn historia*, 25.
41. Ibid. 30.
42. Namhila and Hillebrecht, "Rosa Emilia Clay," 60.
43. Tabler, *Pioneers of South West Africa*, 125. Charles John Clay is not mentioned at all in Klaus Dierks's Biographies of Namibian Personalities.
44. Tabler, *Pioneers of South West Africa*, 25; https://www.klausdierks.com/Biographies/Biographies_C.htm.
45. Serton, *The Narrative and Journal*, 165, 228.
46. Englund, *Kongosta Sortavalaan*, 68–70.
47. Namhila and Hillebrecht, "Rosa Emilia Clay," 60.
48. Ida Weikkolin, "Lähetystyön ystäville," *Sanomia Turusta* September 30, 1896.
49. Namhila and Hillebrecht, "Rosa Emilia Clay," 60.
50. Davies, "Palgrave and Damaraland," 115.
51. Hyam, *Empire and Sexuality*, 115–20.
52. Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge*, 101–6.
53. Ray, "Decrying White Peril," 80–1.
54. Everts, "Brought Up Well according to European standards," 102.
55. Namhila and Hillebrecht, "Rosa Emilia Clay," 60.
56. Piirainen: Kertomus Piiraiselta. *Suomen Lähetyssanomia*, June 1, 1883, 86. See also Karl Weikkolin: Kirje Weikkolinilta, *Suomen Lähetyssanomia*, June 1, 1880, 86; and Collection of the Finnish Missionary Society in the Finnish National Archives, Helsinki (henceforth FMS-FNA), Eac 8, Karl Weikkolin to Tötterman 22 March 1880. James R. Todd was a hunter and trader, who hunted with Eriksson in the late 1860s and early 1870s. Todd was murdered by his own servants in 1878. (Tabler, *Pioneers of South West Africa*, 112).
57. Johansson, *The Trader King*, 40.
58. Ibid., 119.
59. "South Africa, Civil Marriage Records, 1801–1974," *FamilySearch*, Entry for Charles John Clay and Caroline Smith, July 24, 1865.
60. "England and Wales, Census, 1861," *FamilySearch*.
61. Charles John Ernest Clay's baptism record: "South Africa, Church of the Province of South Africa, Parish Registers, 1801–2004," *FamilySearch*.
62. Caroline Annie Clay's baptism certificate, "South Africa, Church of the Province of South Africa, Parish Registers, 1801–2004," *FamilySearch*.
63. "South Africa, Church of the Province of South Africa, Parish Registers, 1801–2004," *FamilySearch*.
64. "South Africa, Church of the Province of South Africa, Parish Registers, 1801–2004," *FamilySearch*.
65. Death certificate of Charles John Ernest Clay, 16 November 1944, Cape Town.
66. Lindewall, Rosalia, 24.

67. Siiskonen, *Trade and Socioeconomic Change*, 117; and Wallace, *A History of Namibia*, 110.
68. Charles John Clay's death certificate: South Africa, Cape Province, Civil Records, 1840–1972, *FamilySearch*.
69. The title of Johansson, *The Trader King*.
70. "Kertomus Reijoselta huhti- touko- kesä- ja heinäkuulta 1881," *Suomen Lähetyssanomia* no 11 1881, 165.
71. Palgrave, *Mission to Damaraland*, 24–5. There were some twenty Swedes in Omaruru in the 1870s and their number doubled later, but not all of them worked for Eriksson. Some Swedish traders only bought goods from him. (Rudner, *Axel Wilhelm Eriksson*, 68).
72. Johansson, *The Trader King*, 41. The other Clay, William, certainly seems to have known many of the Swedes. He is named as the godfather of E. Tretow's son Edward William born in July 1883. The child's mother is not named, instead, the column says "unehelich," that is "illegitimate." The following year, William Clay's daughter Alice Emma Anna was born and baptised but her mother is not named. Her godparents include Jack and Emma Janssen and Fanny Lindholm. (The baptism register of the Rhenish Mission at Omaruru. I thank Werner Hillebrecht for helping me out with this register.)
73. Palgrave, *Mission to Damaraland*, Annexure 7, xxxix.
74. Johansson, *The Trader King*, 45–7.
75. Ibid., 34, 37.
76. Ibid., 35.
77. Ibid., 36–7.
78. Een (1872), cited in ibid., 36.
79. Johansson, *The Trader King*, 38–9.
80. The baptism register of the Rhenish Mission at Omaruru.
81. Namhila and Hillebrecht, "Rosa Emilia Clay," 61. John Hickey, hunter and trader, was born in Ireland and grew up in Cape Colony and Hereroland. He operated from Omaruru in the 1870s. (Tabler, *Pioneers of South West Africa*, 56). Namhila and Hillebrecht ("Rosa Emilia Clay," 61) note that "only a few English-speaking married couples are known to have been in Omaruru at this time: Frederick and Catherine Green, James and Charlotte Gunning" and the Hickeys. Frederick Green died in 1876. In addition, some of the Swedes, including Axel Eriksson, spoke English with their English-speaking wives.
82. Lindewall, *Rosalia*, 24.
83. FMS-FNA, Eac 13, Ida Weikkolin to Tötterman in 1885.
84. FMS-FNA, Eac 8, Karl Weikkolin to Tötterman 14 September 1880.
85. Lindewall, *Rosalia*, 56–7.
86. Ibid., 25.
87. Tobias Reijonen, "Afrikalaisia lapsia lähetysalaltamme," *Suomen lähetyssanomia*, June 1, 1886, 88.
88. Milk, *God's Feet*, 39.
89. Eriksson's letter to Palgrave, October 1879, cited in Johansson, *The Trader King*, 49–50.

90. Johansson, *The Trader King*, 24–5. Johansson refers to Thure Een, *Minnen från en flerårig vistelse i sydvestra Afrika*.
91. Lindewall, *Rosalia*, 31–2.
92. Pönniäinen, "Mulattityttö opettajana Suomessa," 5.
93. Tobias Reijonen, "Afrikalaisia lapsia lähetysalaltamme," *Suomen Lähetyssanomia*, June 1, 1886, 87–88.
94. FMS-FNA, Eac 8, Karl Weikkolin to Tötterman, 19 October 1880.
95. Rastas and Peltokangas, "Rosan jäljillä," 92.
96. Johansson, *The Trader King*, 52–3.
97. Ibid., 119.
98. Lindewall, *Rosalia*, 30.
99. Charles John Clay's death notice, "Cape Province, South Africa Records," images, *FamilySearch*.
100. Hillebrecht and Namhila, "Rosa Emilia Clay," 61; the baptism register of the Rhenish Mission at Omaruru.
101. Weikkolin, *Lähetyssaarnaaja Weikkolinin wiimeinen matka*, 19.
102. Lindewall, *Rosalia*, 30.
103. The last name Cloete refers to Baster descendance. Basters are descendants of Khoekhoe women and European men who became a united community with a history and identity of their own. See Vedder, *South West Africa*, 395, 400.
104. Johansson, *The Trader King*, 106.
105. Siiskonen, *Trade and Socioeconomic Change*, 136–7.
106. Piirainen, "Päiväkirja," 32, 80.
107. Weikkolin, *Lähetyssaarnaaja Weikkolinin wiimeinen matka*, 19.
108. Charles John Clay's death certificate: South Africa, Cape Province, Civil Records, 1840–1972, *FamilySearch*.
109. Lindewall, *Rosalia*, 57. Lindewall erroneously writes that Rosa's father died in the spring.
110. Gamsa, "Biography and (Global) Microhistory," 234.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

The work was supported by the Koneen Säätiö.

Bibliography

Aho, Tanja N. "A 'Tragic Mulatta' Goes Transnational." In *Transnational American Studies*, edited by Udo J. Hebel, 222 vols. 355–374. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2012.

Berg, Maxine. "Introduction: Global Microhistory of the Local and the Global." *Journal of Early Modern History* 27, no. 1–2 (2023): 1–5. doi:10.1163/15700658-bja10060.

Cossart, Brice. "'Global Lives': Writing Global History with a Biographical Approach." *Entremons: UPF Journal of World History* 5 (2013): 1–14.

Davies, John. H. "Palgrave and Damaraland." *Archives Yearbook for South African History* 1 (1942): 110–138.

Davis, Natalie Zemon. *Trickster Travels: A Sixteenth-Century Muslim Between Worlds*. London: Faber and Faber, 2008.

Dierks, Klaus. *Database of Namibian Biographies*. 2004. https://www.klausdierks.com/Biographies/.

Englund, Harri. *Kongosta Sortavalaan: Esseitä suomalais-afrikkalaisesta historiasta*. Tampere: Vastapaino, 2025.

Erickson, Eva. *The Rosa Lemberg Story*. Superior, WI: The Työmies Society, 1993.

Everts, Natalie. "'Brought Up Well According to European Standards'. Helena van der Burgh and Wilhelmina van Naarssen: Two Christian Women from Elmina." In *Merchants, Missionaries and Migrants: 300 Years of Dutch-Ghanaian Relations*, edited by W. M. J. Kessel, 101–110. Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2002.

Gamsa, Mark. "Biography and (Global) Microhistory." *New Global Studies* 11, no. 3 (2017): 231–241. doi:10.1515/ngs-2017-0024.

Härkönen, Iivo, K. H. Pankakoski and Väinö Seppä, eds. *Sortavalan seminaari, 1880-1940: Muistojulkaisu*. Helsinki: Valistus, 1940.

Heininen, Simo. *Naisen paikka: Suomalaiset Ambomaalla 1870-1900*. Rovaniemi: Väyläkirjat, 2025.

Hyam, Ronald. *Empire and Sexuality: The British Experience*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991.

Johansson, Peter. *The Trader King of Damaraland: Axel Eriksson. A Swedish Pioneer in Southern Africa. Translated into English by Frances Corry*. Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan Publishers, 2007.

Jonkka, Mia. *Afro-Suomen Historia. TV Documentary Series*. YLE Teema, 2010.

Kannas, Vappu. *Rosa Clay*. Helsinki: S&S, 2020.

Leitzinger, Antero. "Clay, Rosa Emilia." In *Kansallisbiografia-verkkojulkaisu*, 4 vols. Helsinki: Studia Biographica Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2011. https://kansallisbiografia.fi/kansallisbiografia/henkilo/9823

Lindewall, Arvo. *Rosalia*. Yonkers, NY: Kansallinen kustannuskomitea, 1942.

Milk, Hans-Martin. *God's Feet or the Mission's Pack Donkey: Evangelists of Namibia*. Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2022.

Namhila, Ellen Ndeshi, and Werner Hillebracht. "Rosa Emilia Clay: From Omaruru via Sortavala to Chicago." In *Intertwined Histories: 150 Years of Finnish-Namibian Relations*, edited by Kaartinen Marjo, Leila Koivunen, and Napandulwe Shiweda, 58–65. Turku: University of Turku, 2019.

Palgrave, W. Coates. *Mission to Damaraland and Great Namaqualand in 1876*. Cape Town: Saul Solomon & Co, 1877.

Peltokangas, Leena. "Rosa Suomesta – ensimmäisiä afrikkalaisia etsimässä." 2010a. Yle Radio 1.

Peltokangas, Leena. "Afrikka Suomessa: Rosa Clayn Tarina." 2010b. Yle Radio Suomi, Tampereen radio.

Peltola, Matti. *Suomen Lähetysseuran Afrikan työn historia*. Helsinki: Suomen Lähetysseura, 1958.

Piirainen, Antti. *Päiväkirja toukokuun 1 päivästä 1885 joulukuun 31 päivään 1889*, edited by Kari Törrönen. Helsinki: Kari Törrönen, 2010.

Rastas, Anna. "Lessons to Learn from the Story of Rosa." In *Intertwined Histories: 150 Years of Finnish-Namibian Relations*, edited by Marjo Kaartinen, Leila Koivunen, and Napandulwe Shiweda, 53–59. Turku: University of Turku, 2019.

Rastas, Anna, and Leena Peltokangas. "Rosan jäljillä kolmella mantereella: Tulkintoja ylirajaisuudesta ja muuttuvasta suomalaisuudesta." In *Satunnaisesti Suomessa: Kalevalaseuran vuosikirja 97*, edited by Marko Lamberg, Ulla Piela, and Hanna Snellman, 86–103. Helsinki: SKS, 2018.

Rudner, Ione, and Jalmar Rudner. *Axel Wilhelm Eriksson of Hereroland (1846-1901): His Life and Letters*. Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan Publishers, 2006.

Serton, P., ed. *The Narrative and Journal of Gerald McKiernan in South West Africa, 1874-1879*. Cape Town: The Van Riebeck Society, 1954.

Siiskonen, Harri. *Trade and Socioeconomic Change in Ovamboland, 1850-1906*. Helsinki: SHS, 1990.

Stoler, Ann Laura. *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010.

Tabler, Edward C. *Pioneers of South West Africa & Ngamiland, 1738-1880*. Cape Town: A. A. Balkema, 1973.

Vedder, Heinrich. *South West Africa in Early Times: Being the Story of South West Africa Up to the Date of Maharero's Death in 1890*. Translated and edited by Cyril Godfrey Hall. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1938.

Wallace, Marion. *A History of Namibia: From the Beginning to 1990*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

Weikkolin, Ida. *Lähetyssaarnaaja Weikkolinin Wiimeinen matka Afrikaan*. Helsinki: J.C. Frenckell ja Poika, 1895.