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# Brewing Tensions: The Colonial Gaze of the German–Namibian Publishing Industry

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## Abstract

The call to decolonize African Studies has a profound influence on the field, with varying degrees of success. This article addresses this topic in relation to the author's personal experiences in the publishing industry in Namibia. By describing the attempt to publish a historical book about Namibian beer with a well-known German–Namibian publishing house, the lingering power of German–Namibian settler colonialism becomes clear. This article renders visible the power structures within the Namibian book market that perpetuates a whitewashed version of Namibian history and argues that decolonizing knowledge cannot succeed without paying attention to the (private) publishing industry.

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## Keywords

Namibia, history, publishing industry, decolonization, genocide

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The tense relations between Germany and Namibia entered a new era when in May 2021 the German government officially acknowledged the 1904–1908 violence in German South West Africa as genocide. As a result of years of negotiations, the agreement stipulated that Germany would pay a sizeable sum of money through development aid, but this failed to impress representatives of the affected communities in Namibia, the Nama and Herero. The issue of the genocide remains sensitive, not only in international relations but also with regard to the production of knowledge about this contested history. The dictum that “dominant groups produce subjective knowledge to instantiate and reinstantiate socioeconomic and political perspectives” is evidently the case in Namibia (*African Studies Review*, 2018: 2). The German occupation of Namibia (1884–1915) and the subsequently maintained German settler society continue to cast a shadow over the national publishing industry. This paper examines the influence that German–Namibian presses yield on the national memorial landscape in Namibia.

As Martin Kalb (2018) has argued, Namibia was “indeed the only true German settler colony” in the world. German rule over its colonies ended with World War I, meaning that Germany, unlike its European rivals, “did not experience decolonization in the post-World War II period.” This has resulted in a peculiar yet persistent presence of a German–Namibian nationalistic settler-colonial nostalgia. In the year 1920, South West Africa became a League of Nations mandate territory and was formally administered by, and later incorporated into, South Africa. No other mandate territory in the world has such a “sizeable group of Germans because the other mandatory powers sent them packing.” For decades, Germans lived a “rather privileged life” under the apartheid rule of South Africa (Dale, 2001: 76). Namibia became independent only in 1990 and today the German–Namibian community constitutes a small but tight-knit and economically powerful minority in the country (Armbruster, 2008).

The era of German colonialism has left an indelible mark on Namibian society at large. While the burgeoning stream of international tourists tends to enjoy the German street names, colonial buildings, and the serving of *bier und bratwurst*, the indigenous population continues to grapple with the profound inequalities caused by German rule. In particular, the genocide from 1904 to 1908, when the colonial *Schutztruppe* (German military) decimated roughly 50% of the Nama and 80% of the Herero populations in an effort to gain control of the territory, haunts an independent Namibia (Zimmerer and Zeller, 2008). Up until this day, there is tension between the global postcolonial present and the lingering power of *Siedlungskolonialismus* (German settler colonialism) (Kalb, 2018: 221). This tension has survived the decades of apartheid rule (1948–1990) that have defined modern-day Namibia to a large extent, mostly because of a persistent and sustainable presence of a German-speaking white population.

One area where this tension becomes apparent is the Namibian book market. Dominated by private publishing houses and institutions, this industry is characterized by a distinct German–Namibian heritage, as the names of major players indicate. This includes organizations such as Glanz und Gloria Verlag, Klaus Hess Verlag, Kuiseb Verlag, Padlang's Verlag, Melchior Verlag, and the Namibiana Buchdepot (Kalb, 2018:

2; 23–225; 230). As a result, the market is in part defined by a distinct genre of historical works (often written in German, but sometimes also available in English or Afrikaans) that question or even deny the genocide of 1904–1908, and thus present a rosy – and sometimes nostalgic – view of the era of German colonialism.

This paper argues that the colonial gaze of the Namibian publishing industry affects the broader production and consumption of Namibian history and that this gaze does not only concern books that solely focus on the genocide itself. Elizabeth Baer noted that the concept of colonial (or imperial) gaze is “key to many postcolonial texts.” Introduced by E. Ann Kaplan (1997) and influenced by feminist theory, the colonial gaze “describes the dominating look of the imperialist” and is used in different contexts “to describe a negative gesture occurring in and defining an oppressive relationship” (Baer, 2017: 6). For the purpose of this paper, the colonial gaze is used as a concept to describe a persistent pattern in the Namibian book industry in which certain historical themes remain taboo.

In an attempt to demonstrate that the colonial gaze of the Namibian book market extends beyond books that solely deal with the genocide, this paper traces the treacherous journey to get my book about the Namibian beer industry published with a German–Namibian publishing house. The failed attempt to publish *Breweries, Politics and Identity: The History Behind Namibian Beer* (Van der Hoog, 2019) with a local press was fraught with issues that speak to the debate about the colonial legacies of the African publishing industry. This unusual example has been anonymized to a considerable extent in order to protect the involved publishing houses and their employees. The purpose of this paper is to illuminate the underlying structures of the Namibian book market at large, instead of specific individuals or institutions that happened to be involved in this particular case.

## Colonial Legacies in the Publishing Industry

Throughout Africa, the legacies of colonialism affect the control of historical narratives. Scholarship has engaged with this phenomenon in different ways, for example, by examining the intersection between colonialism, literature, and the formation of ideas on history and identity (Omri, 2005). In terms of novels, scholars have critiqued settler literature that has popularized a romanticized and exotic image of Africa (Lewis, 2000). A fruitful area of research is the role of print culture in colonial Africa and in particular the relationship between newspapers and nationalism (Krautwald, 2021; Marsh, 2017). Another perspective is the burgeoning interest in the rise of patriotic history by post-independence governments, whose legitimacy is derived from a specific narrative of the liberation struggle. This area of contestation is, for example, exemplified through the politics of school books and their contents (Ranger, 2004).

The contemporary role of publishing houses that are rooted in settler communities has received considerably less attention. Book markets, as such, are an easily overlooked aspect within the wider debate about the decolonization of African Studies. Scholars are usually more aware of power structures within the academy – meaning

universities – with heated debates about the curricula of university courses or structural inequalities in the publication systems of academic journals. While this focus is important and justified, the book market is more easily overlooked. Yet, book markets – that are often characterized by private publishing houses – have similarly been important in the production and consumption of the interpretations of our past. For the purpose of this paper, book markets are defined as the constellation of private presses that publish (popular or academic) history works, independently of university presses or other publicly funded institutions. A considerable amount of the general public consumes history in this way, and presses – as gatekeepers – thus shape to some extent the marketplace of ideas.

Namibia is a peculiar case study because of its prominent community of descendants of German settlers. Germany lost its colonies decades before the imperial structures of British indirect rule and French direct rule began to crumble, but a defiant community of people from German descent remained in South West Africa/Namibia. The very first book publications in the territory were often written in German because of the influence of German Lutheran missions, and in subsequent years local publishers printed “pamphlets, booklets, and self-help brochures in German, aimed at guiding new settlers in their conquest of land” (Katjavivi, 2018: 348). The book market that was established was imperative for the development of discourse about a “distinctly Southwest African fatherland” (Gilman, 2001; Schäfer, 2017) and has largely survived until this day. In recent years, contested progress has been made in negotiations over reparations and apologies between the German and Namibian national governments. But as Henning Melber (2020) wrote for the newspaper *The Namibian*, “For far too long and with only minor exceptions, members of the German-speaking white community in Namibia have remained silent and in denial” about the structural inequalities that were caused by German colonialism. Today, large swaths of land, important businesses, and scientific organizations are owned or controlled by German–Namibians, who “abstained from the nation-building project by retreating into South-Western Germanness.”

The Namibian book publishing industry is a prime example of Melber’s observation. For instance, Reinhart Kössler (2015: 9) noted that the “denialism” of the German–Namibian community about sensitive historical issues is present in the work of Hinrich Schneider-Waterberg, a popular author who, according to Kössler, “is shown to treat his sources highly selectively to suit his purposes.” Originally a farmer and a politician, Schneider-Waterberg (2004) denied that the colonial warfare of the German army was genocide in his book *Der Wahrheit eine Gasse. Anmerkungen zum Kolonialkrieg in Deutsch-Südwestafrika 1904*. Baer rightly notes that there is “general agreement among historians” that the atrocities between 1904 and 1908 constitute the first genocide of the twentieth century (Baer, 2017: 11). It is evident that Schneider-Waterberg’s work differs considerably from mainstream historical work that utilizes academic methods (Rash, 2017: 161–162). Academic historical work is based on a set of well-defined methodologies, uses a careful annotation system, engages with other authors and schools of thought, and is subject to peer review. Monographs published by private publishing houses do not necessarily follow the same guidelines. Yet, Schneider-Waterberg’s

opposing views are clearly in demand, considering the fact that his book has so far appeared in five different editions and continues to be popular with the public.

To commemorate the centenary of the First World War, in 2014, a number of Namibian publishers decided to launch new books dedicated to the war. The First World War practically resulted in the end of the German Protectorate in 1915, when German South West Africa was overrun by South African forces. Zollmann (2016: 80–82) noted the “strong endorsement of (not to speak of enthusiasm for) German colonialism” in the narratives that appeared on the market for this special occasion. Written from a purely German perspective, the language in many texts resembled the “old-fashioned colonial narratives of the 1920s and 1930s” while celebrating the defence of the German colony. Zollmann claimed that such titles “remain within the bounds of traditional colonial hagiography.”

The fact that colonial nostalgia is an ongoing phenomenon is illustrated by the work of Hans Hilpisch, a German author who published four books with the Namibian publishing house Kuiseb Verlag in 2018 and 2019. In his *Kolonialkriege in Deutsch-Südwestafrika* the author disputes the “inconsistencies, incorrect results and unsustainable conclusions” of established historical research on the genocide (Hilpisch 2018). This theme is further developed in subsequent works, such as the book *Wo sind die Herero geblieben?*, which questions the starvation of the Herero by German troops: “Was that really the case? Or were things possibly completely different?” (Hilpisch, 2019). Hilpisch and other published authors in the Namibian book market firmly believe that the brutal dimensions of German colonialism are exaggerated by “progressive historians” and descendants of the indigenous population with the aim to increase German guilt and extract reparations.

This paper seeks to shift the focus away from individual authors to the structural conditions imposed by local presses. The colonial gaze of the German–Namibian publishing industry does not only affect the content of books that are published (such as genocide-denying literature) but, importantly, also the books that were never published. Lewis Coser (1975) underlines that publishing houses are essentially gatekeepers of knowledge, with the power to decide “what is ‘in’ and what is ‘out’ of the marketplace of ideas.” These organizations thus have a large impact on what is written into the public memory and have subsequently the power to keep certain ideas out of the public sphere.

## **A Book about Beer**

The history of Namibian beer is an intriguing paradox. Locally brewed beer is widely celebrated as a cornerstone of an independent Namibia. It is a source of pride for the local population, a tremendous economic success, and a key part of Namibia’s international image. At the same time, the brewing industry is deeply rooted in the history of German colonialism. German brewers were the first to establish formal breweries and a number of those companies merged into what is today Namibia Breweries Limited, the number one brewing conglomerate in the country. This company proudly advertises the fact that its beers are brewed according to the German *Reinheitsgebot* and the lingua franca among its personnel in Windhoek remains German. Less well

known is the fact that for decades the same product from the same brewery was not available to the black population as a result of colonial policies that prohibited the sale of “European” style alcoholic beverages to black people.

Between 2015 and 2016, I researched this history in order to explain the unusual transformation of beer as an icon of Southwestern Germanness to a symbol of an independent Namibia. I conducted extensive archival research in Namibia and South Africa and interviewed a wide range of key players in the industry, from brew masters and retired directors, to the grandchildren of famous brewers. This study is part of the resurgence of interest in African economic history since the start of the twenty-first century (Hope, 2020: 10–11) but instead of applying a macroeconomic perspective I aimed to singularize one economic sector, the beer industry, with an additional further focus on the largest company, Namibia Breweries Limited. During the course of my fieldwork in Namibia, public interest in my project grew considerably. I was invited to give a series of public presentations and interviews in various places in the country and was awarded as “Brewer of Honour” by Namibia Breweries during a beer-themed gala evening in Windhoek and became their advisor for a pop-up museum about the history of beer. As a result, two German–Namibian publishing houses expressed interest in publishing the results of the research as a book. Thrilled, I signed a contract and wrote the manuscript for *Breweries, Politics and Identity: The History Behind Namibian Beer* (Van der Hoog, 2019). But the next 3 years saw a succession of problems that illustrate the larger structural issues within the Namibian book market. Ultimately, my book was not published in Namibia, but in Switzerland.

For a time I assumed that this experience was to a considerable degree unprecedented and atypical in Namibia. But since the publication of my book in Switzerland, I have encountered similar stories of failed or thwarted attempts from other academics who tried to publish or present critical history books with local publishing houses. The gate-keeping of German–Namibian presses is something that might be called characteristic of the field of Namibian studies, and yet, it has largely remained under the radar because few people decided to write about this. Existing scholarship has dealt with the effect of genocide and genocide-deniers on the memorial landscape of Namibia but has generally ignored the publishing market.<sup>1</sup> An important exception is an excellent book chapter by Kalb, who shows how reprints of colonial texts “actively and metaphorically try to recolonize and resettle” the Namibian “memory landscape” (Kalb, 2018: 222; 233). Kalb’s work focuses however on *reprints* and not on new titles. The latter is the point of this article: in addition to the reproduction of older texts, the production of new texts significantly reinforces the continued presence of imperialist nostalgia in Namibia.

In terms of new titles (as opposed to reprints) an interesting analogy can be made with the production of German–Namibian fictional literature. Sylvia Schlettwein showed that the German language production of fiction in Namibia is disproportionately large in the Namibian context. German speakers had always produced literature (Schlettwein, 2018), a vast collection of texts that mostly provided “apologetic, settler and colonial army perspectives on events” (Becker, 2018: 363). Today, however, a new generation of German–Namibian writers are “tapping into this tradition of *Südwest* storytelling,

but are venturing into deconstructing, ironically breaking and reinventing it.” She tentatively describes this new genre as *Namdeutsch* fiction (Schlettwein, 2018). Yet it should also be noted that this entails developments in fiction writing and not in non-fiction books, which is the main focus of this article. Kalb’s (2018: 222) assertion that the dominance of German–Namibian publishers is beginning to change as young scholars are emerging from Namibian universities, is in my view too optimistic because of structural inequalities in the publishing industry. The Namibian book market is for a large part shaped by private publishing houses, which exercise considerable power over what gets published and what does not. This is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future.

This paper discusses two problems that occurred during and after the publishing trajectory of *Breweries, Politics and Identity*. The first problem is the issue of gatekeeping and is illustrated through a description of the editorial process of my book with a local publishing house. For over a year the editing process ran smoothly, but shortly before the publication deadline my editor raised significant problems with the narrative of the book manuscript. I was asked to tone down the language on sensitive issues such as the genocide and colonialism, and was requested to exclude certain academic authors that the publisher disliked. My refusal to implement such far-reaching changes to the manuscript resulted in the dissolution of our book contract. The second problem concerns the whitewashing of history and is illustrated by the recent publication of a similar book about beer by another local publishing house. This book used parts of my research without proper acknowledgments, all the while excluding the history of genocide and colonialism that is deemed controversial by parts of the German–Namibian community.

## Gatekeeping

In early 2016, during the last stretch of archival research in Namibia for my project about Namibian beer I signed a book contract with a major German–Namibian publishing house to publish the findings. The contract was the result of a public presentation I had given earlier at this institution, which was well attended by the German–Namibian community in Windhoek. The publisher plays a central role in Namibia’s knowledge landscape and has a loyal following among this community. For the next one and a half years, the editing process was business as usual and ran relatively smoothly. The book manuscript was reviewed by the publishing house and subsequently improved by me, following their insightful suggestions. The text was copyedited, a book cover was designed, and in October 2017 I received the final proofs from the editor. A deadline for printing was already set and we began preparing for a book launch in Windhoek to celebrate the end result.

But right before the final deadline, something strange and unexpected happened. My editor sent out a distressed e-mail highlighting serious problems with the narrative of the book. Three points were raised: I was too critical of a revered colonial missionary, the book included a section on the genocide, and I had referenced scholarship that was deemed unfavorable by the publisher. In a succession of lengthy, often emotional and



sometimes personal e-mails, strong suggestions were made to refrain from a critical assessment of the German colonial regime.

Considering that the contents of the book were long known by this institution – both through the public presentation and the lengthy review and editing process that followed – the only explanation that I can think of for their sudden change of heart is a strategic motive. With the print deadline only five days away (including a weekend), the editor could force my hand with a classic ‘take it or leave it’ offer. I was instructed to revise my statements or otherwise the book would not be published – years of work would effectively be wasted and finding another publisher would be hard, if not impossible. This is a hefty burden for a junior scholar who is on the verge of publishing his first monograph. In order to provide a better picture of the sensitivities of the German–Namibian community that this incident highlights, the three main points of contention will be introduced below.

### *Heinrich Vedder*

Heinrich Vedder (1876–1972) was a German missionary who arrived in German South West Africa in 1905. He is the author of several works detailing the languages, histories, and rituals of the “native tribes” of German South West Africa, and thereby made a significant contribution to the early ethnography of Namibia. His work was nonetheless ridden with colonial prejudice and he was an avid defender of the apartheid rule that succeeded German occupation. The prelude of my book manuscript dealt with the centuries-long tradition of homebrewing in the territory and utilizes some of Vedder’s ethnographic descriptions of pre-colonial brewing traditions among various ethnic groups, with the warning that “historians need to treat his work with care.” While arguing that his writings “contain rare and valuable pieces of information”, I also stressed that his work is “loaded with colonial prejudice” (Van der Hoog, 2019: 10).

Shortly before the printing deadline, my editor took offence at my treatment of Vedder. In an extensive e-mail, the editor asked me to look into my statements and subsequently smoothen the perceived harshness about him. The editor claimed that Vedder was one of their best missionaries and historians and therefore certainly did not deserve my criticism. It was further impressed upon me that, in the view of the publishing house, critical comments about this German icon did not fit into my book, which should strive to be a pleasant read. The editor explained that thus the issue of genocide could not be mentioned either – it had nothing to do with my history about beer brewing.<sup>2</sup>

The passionate defence of Vedder can be explained through the central role that Vedder had played in the history of this particular publishing house. The missionary and self-taught ethnographer was one of the driving forces behind the early years of this institution, where he also presented his ethnographical findings. Later on, to commemorate his life and legacy, this organization made him an honorary member for life and republished his work so that it would remain available in Namibia. Today, his stern facial expression overlooks the current employees of the publishing house, as his portrait adorns their offices in Windhoek. It is clear that the editor felt a need to

protect Vedder's reputation. Another reason for the request to exclude adverse comments about his life and work might be his larger role as an advocate for the German–Namibian people. The end of German occupation in 1915 and the decision by the League of Nations to award the land as a mandate territory to South Africa strengthened a division of the white settler population between German and Afrikaner factions. The Germans felt marginalized and feared for their position in a fast-changing environment, so Vedder was chosen to lead delegations to the South African government to argue on their behalf (Lau, 1995).

Vedder became an important figure in the community and his writings contained an “implicit glorification of German colonialism” (Lau, 1988: 93–94) and thus bolstered “growing military-nationalist feelings” among the German population (Silvester et al., 1998: 44). Conveniently, the reprints of his best-known work do not discuss the famous extermination order given by General Lothar von Trotha, which announced that “Every male Herero, armed or unarmed, with or without cattle, will be shot death. I will no longer receive women or children but will drive them back to their people or have them shot at” (Hull, 2005: 56). Thus, reprints of his work “make convenient materials and do not have to address claims of genocide” (Kalb, 2018: 231). With his books, lectures and political positions, Vedder became instrumental in the development of a narrative in which the German–Namibians could look back on German rule with a certain amount of nostalgia and pride.

### *Don't Mention the War*

The main bone of contention, which runs like a silver thread throughout the last-minute critique I received from my editor, was the mention of genocide in the book. The German military campaign, which involved the use of concentration camps and thereby directly preceded the Holocaust in the 1940s (Baer, 2017; Olusoga and Erichsen, 2011; Silvester and Gewald, 2003), was essential for the German administration in their quest to assume control of the land and its peoples. It was only after the establishment of a firm command that a whole host of industries were able to thrive, including the beer industry. I made this point based on the work of Marion Wallace (2011), a respected authority on Namibian history and the author of, among other publications, the standard work *A History of Namibia: From the Beginning to 1990*. The latter title is widely cited in books about all facets of Namibian history.

Yet, shortly before the printing deadline the publishing house requested me to not mention the genocide in general, and Wallace in particular. It was argued that if I would acknowledge Wallace, I would lose all credibility as an author because she presented a biased perspective on Namibian history. Especially her foreign descent was declared a problem, as this implicated that – in contrast to proper German–Namibians – she did not personally experience the history that she described. The strong language of this request is telling. This respected academic was compared to garbage and denoted as biased, simply because her research does not fit within the German–Namibian myth of harmonious conquest. With regard to the genocide as a historical event, Melber (2005: 140) similarly

observed that the local public perception and the scholarly consensus can “differ fundamentally.”

Furthermore, the editor’s comments revealed to me the opinion that genocide had in essence nothing to do with my history of beer. The editor’s plea clarified that for the German–Namibian group, the history of beer is a source of pride and fun, and thus unconnected to political developments. Yet, the whole point of my book is the exact opposite: the brewing industry is directly influenced by political developments. The genocide “permitted the Germans to achieve their goal of domination and exclusive possession of the land” (Baer, 2017) and is therefore inextricably linked to any German industries that emerged shortly thereafter, including the production of beer. Although the era of German colonialism ended more than a century ago, the editor’s comments came to me across as quite emotional.<sup>3</sup> This defensive stance was already recognized by Kalb (2018: 230), who pointed out that it is vital for German–Namibians to “defend the *Südwester* community, a community tied together by a shared language, history and whiteness.”

### *Controversial Monument*

In 1912 the German colonial administration inaugurated a monument in Windhoek to commemorate the German soldiers that had died during the genocidal campaign a few years prior. The *Reiterdenkmal*, as the monument is commonly known, is a large, bronze statue of a soldier on horseback, and was ominously placed at the site of a former concentration camp where the local Nama and Herero had perished. Governor Theodor Seitz announced during the inauguration that “The bronze horseman of the colonial forces surveys the land from this place and proclaims to the world that we are here and shall remain masters here” (Van der Hoog, 2019: 70; Original quote). The *Reiter* has thus become one of the most straightforward symbols of colonial rule. It was for decades also the logo of the main brewing company in the territory, the company that is today Namibia Breweries Limited. Up until the 1970s, the *Reiter* decorated each and every beer bottle, poster, coaster, and letterhead of the brewery. Since independence this reminder of a painful past has become increasingly controversial, and in 2013 the Namibian government removed the statue to make place for the Independence Memorial Museum.

Using the scholarship of Joachim Zeller, an expert on the politics of remembrance in Namibia, this story was included in my book manuscript. It never led to a problem during the lengthy review and editing process, up until the very end. Even though Zeller was the co-author of a “pioneering anthology” of the genocide and much respected among scholars of Namibia (Baer, 2017: 3), the editor impressed upon me that Zeller was famous among the local white population for being wrong, unfair and biased. It was alleged that the controversy around the monument came from disgruntled Herero descendants who used the genocide claim to extract money from the Namibian and German governments. Similar to the example of Wallace, the expertise of Zeller was drawn into doubt because his scholarship does not fit into the *Südwester* narrative of the German–

Namibian community. Again, the personal perspectives from the white community trump rigorous academic research. The editor assured me that the monument was not controversial, based on personal experiences.<sup>4</sup> The hostile attitude from German–Namibian institutions toward global scholarship is also recognized by Kalb (2018: 230), who notes that this tendency is especially visible in relation to the genocide. “Editors dismiss criticisms from outside the *Südwester* community as irrelevant and false”, writes Kalb, “especially when these perceived outsiders are scholars or academics.”

These last-minute but significant requests for changes to my book manuscript pushed the project into uncertain territory, as the printing deadline was only 5 days away. After a few lengthy e-mail exchanges the publishing house concluded that my work indeed followed an alleged political bias. The editor argued that the reputation of the publishing house must be defended and that therefore major changes were necessary to neutralize the book and make it acceptable to the public. There was much pressure on me to concede and tone down the language on sensitive issues such as Heinrich Vedder and the *Reiterdenkmal*, to ignore the genocide altogether, and to delete references of esteemed colleagues in the field of African history and Namibian studies. After a few days of deliberation, I decided I could not justify these changes. I subsequently informed the publishing house of my decision, after which they promptly pulled the book project and dissolved our contract.

## Whitewashing History

By then it was 2017, the book contract was annulled and it seemed that *Breweries, Politics and Identity* would never see the light of day. Fortunately, an unexpected turn of events prevented this outcome and in 2019 the book was published by Basler Afrika Bibliographien (BAB). Based in Switzerland, BAB has since 1971 been developed into the largest Namibian documentation center outside Namibia. It maintains an important archive and library and also publishes a wide range of books in Namibian Studies and Southern African Studies. The titles published by BAB are readily available in book shops in Namibia and South Africa and marketed across the African continent through the African Books Collective. In early 2020, I traveled to Namibia to promote *Breweries, Politics and Identity* and made an interesting discovery: another local German–Namibian publishing house had recently published a German-language book on exactly the same topic. Carrying the patriotic title *Namibia: unser Land, unser Bier* (Namibia: our Country, our Beer) this book conveniently left out any controversial historical aspects such as the genocide while appearing to replicate parts of my research findings without proper acknowledgment (Masche, 2019).

This publication was written by Bernd Masche, a kind and retired former director of Namibia Breweries Limited whom I had interviewed a couple of times. His insight into modern developments of the local brewing industry is unparalleled and certainly of great value, but his description of the historical events that preceded his tenure was clearly derived from my research and conveniently left out all of the issues that my previous publisher had deemed offensive to the German–Namibian community. *Unser Land, unser*

*Bier* included several stories about breweries that had only appeared in my book and were uncovered after extensive research, and the text was adorned with photographs that originated from the personal archives of my informants, or that I had made myself. Yet, the book did not clearly acknowledge this. On the contrary, the author stated in his introduction that “The fact that hardly anything has been written about the history of the breweries encouraged me to write this book” (Masche, 2019: 12).

Furthermore, *Namibia: unser Land, unser Bier* was marketed through the social media account of its German–Namibian publishing house with descriptions that appeared to be copied from *Breweries, Politics and Identity*. The accompanying photos that were used were either results from my archival research (but no archives or sources were mentioned) or from the personal papers of my informants (who were not approached or acknowledged). Copied below is an example of an excerpt of the book to illustrate the uncanny similarities. The following paragraph details a story about one of the early breweries from German South West Africa and was advertised on Facebook:

“In 1902, a man named Friedrich Schmidt opened a brewery in Klein Windhoek. Schmidt was born in 1867 in a little town in Germany called Nähermemmingen. (...) In search of adventure he arrived in Swakopmund in 1901, and he established his new brewery in Klein Windhoek a year later. (...) One of the photographs shows employees of the Schmidt Brewery, enjoying some of their creations, with a banner showing “Article 11 Schmidt Bier” on it. Article 11 of the company’s Articles of Association meant that whenever Mr Schmidt was in town his employees could enjoy the beer free of charge. Needless to say Mr Schmidt had very happy employees. (...) After a few years of brewing, Mr Schmidt became ill and was not allowed to drink alcohol anymore. He saw no purpose in being a brewer who could not taste his product, so he left the brewery. (...) After the influenza epidemic in 1918, many brewers had been affected and Mr Schmidt was asked to supervise the brewing process, which he did every day. He remained in South West Africa for another 40 years before returning to Germany, where he passed away” (Facebook post, 20 January 2020).

This is the original text from *Breweries, Politics and Identity*:

“In Klein Windhoek, a brewery was opened by Friedrich Schmidt in 1902. (...) Schmidt was born in 1867 in Nähermemmingen, a small village in Germany (...) In search of adventure, he made the long journey to Africa and arrived in Swakopmund in the year 1901. Schmidt travelled further into the interior of the Protectorate and a year later he established a brewery in Klein Windhoek. One particular photo shows the crew of the Klein Windhoek brewery and a banner with “Article 11 Schmidt Bier” written on it. Article 11 of the company’s Articles of Association meant that whenever Mr Schmidt was in town, the beer was free of charge for his employees. Needless to say, Schmidt had happy co-workers. A few years later, he stopped working as a brewer due to health reasons: Schmidt was no longer allowed to drink alcohol and therefore saw no use in being a brewer who cannot drink. After Schmidt stopped working as a brewer, a heavy influenza killed many brewers in the

territory in 1918. This caused Schmidt to come back to the brewery every day to supervise the brewing procedures. (...) After forty years of living and working in South West Africa, Schmidt returned to Germany, where he died and is buried” (Van der Hoog 2019: 28).

While this affair was generally unpleasant<sup>5</sup> (but ultimately resolved), there is a bigger issue at stake. The book was in some cases similar to my own, but it in many aspects very different because it neglected key historical events. It did not mention how the genocide of 1904–1908 was a prerequisite for the establishment of industrial beer production, nor the racist laws from the South African apartheid government that prohibited non-white people from consuming beer, or the controversial *Reiter* monument that adorned all beer advertising for decades, or references to critical academic authors. Instead, the narrative was devoid of racial tension but very proud of German heritage and thus contained no reflections about the past. It is not a coincidence that this publisher is widely popular among the local white population and foreign travelers, as they “blur lines between actual historical work, colonial nostalgia, and souvenirs for tourists” (Kalb, 2018: 224). The newest addition to their stock fitted this description admirably.

*Namibia: unser Land, unser Bier* is therefore the kind of monograph that my original publisher had desired to publish: a happy-go-lucky book about the history of Namibian beer, without any aspects that are disputed among the German–Namibian community. The current narrative is appropriate literature for the German–Namibian population to feel proud of their heritage, and for tourists a pleasant reminder of their journey through the “land of the brave.” This publication fits neatly in the tradition of African *Heimatgeschichte*, a strand of literature meant for “easy consumption” (Kalb, 2018: 232–233). The book is available across Namibia and sells well. Were my book not published by Basler Afrika Bibliographien, there would be no counter-argument against the historical interpretation of *Namibia: unser Land, unser Bier*.

## A Bitter Aftertaste

The power of private presses in the production and dissemination of knowledge should not be underestimated, especially in Namibia, where publishing a book is expensive because of high production costs, a relatively small book market, and large distances between a scattered population. While the need to decolonize the Namibian book market is clear, it is not simple. German–Namibian private organizations have a substantial influence on the production of Namibian knowledge, because of their historically grown position and the general underfunding of higher education by the Namibian government. This combination results in a skewed book market that does not only affect studies of the genocide but also influences books about other issues in Namibian history. The example of *Breweries, Politics and Identity* draws attention to a bias in the Namibian publishing industry, where gatekeeping and cherry-picking sustains a peculiar genre of whitewashed literature.

During the hundred years of colonial rule in Namibia, the publication system was designed to publish ideas propagated by the prevailing regime. “New truths emerged

during the course of the liberation struggle,” argues Jane Katjavivi, when SWAPO and other nationalist movements developed new interpretations of the past (Katjavivi, 2018: 347; see also SWAPO of Namibia 1981 for an example). Political independence in 1990 was a stimulus for local book production and “Namibian views of the country’s history and society were expressed in book form.” Thus, in practice, the independent Namibian book market is fairly young. In the years following independence several new commercial publishing companies were founded but soon faced difficulties. The story of one of these independent publishing houses, New Namibia Books, provides an insightful case study of the trials and tribulations of literary start-ups in a challenging market (Katjavivi, 2018: 347–348).

Established in 1990, New Namibia Books published a wide range of titles (including academic titles) but quickly “faced constraints in the areas of capital and capacity.” The returns were limited and promoting sales “in a country with literally a handful of bookshops” proved to be difficult. Its founder, Katjavivi, nevertheless argued that New Namibia Books “played an important role in remembering, naming and dealing with the painful past of colonial rule and the political struggle against it.” A case in point is that the company’s titles provided the backbone for the first Namibian literature course at the University of Namibia. Unfortunately, practical constraints limited its operations (Katjavivi, 2002: 2018). In 2000, its publishing imprint and list were sold, which signaled the end of New Namibia Books.

In other words, authors with book manuscripts have few options in Namibia except for the well-established German–Namibian publishing houses. The absence of suitable alternatives is a weakness of Namibian civil society and should not be blamed on the German–Namibian community. While I criticize the gatekeeping of said organizations, there is no deliberate strategy to influence the entire Namibian book market: the German–Namibian book market is a microcosm with its own history as described in this article. It also has a future, for this is a sustainable community. Today there are arguably more German-speaking whites residing in Namibia than during the era of German colonialism. There is also small but steady immigration of German nationals to Namibia (Armbruster, 2008). The dominance of German–Namibian publishing houses is an example of how colonial structures survive in postcolonial societies. The main issue is however that, for political and economic reasons, prospective authors have few alternatives.

As a case study, this affair also speaks to the decolonization debate that slowly redefines African Studies. Much of the discussion is devoted to structural inequalities in the publication domain: the fact that “top journals” in African Studies are often located in Europe or the United States and not in Africa, open access, pay to publish quickly schemes, article processing fees, etc. (see also the collection “The ethics of studying Africa”<sup>6</sup>). We should, however, not overlook or underestimate the importance of non-academic publishing houses, especially in the field of history. Not all books are published by major university presses. In fact, many of them find a way to a bookshelf thanks to private publishing houses. In addition, this case study also underlines that there are no easily defined categories in the decolonization debate, particularly when it comes to the artificial division between the “Global South” and the “Global North.” In this case,

it is local, “indigenous” publishing houses in Africa that cling to white-settler/colonial views, while critical work on the German occupation or the modern SWAPO government is best published in Europe.

The years that I have tried to publish a book about beer have left me with a bitter after-taste. Three decades since gaining Namibian independence and more than a century after the end of German colonialism, the tradition to write and publish books that celebrate “German history, heritage, and *Heimat*” is alive and kicking in Namibia (Kalb, 2018: 226). In the ongoing effort to come to terms with their own past, I once thought that the German–Namibian community could, in a twist of irony, learn from Germany. The German state is widely recognized for its ability to confront its own painful history of the Second World War – until I realized that also in Germany, the Namibian genocide has become a chapter that is “either closed or even forgotten” (Melber, 2005: 140; see also Faber-Jonker, 2018: 143).

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### **Notes**

1. It became evident from my conversations with colleagues that the colonial gaze of German–Namibian publishing houses is common knowledge within private circles of scholars of Namibian Studies, yet few have decided to write about this. It is a well-known and distinctive, but little-talked about feature of our field. This is likely a result of dependency on said companies to make scholarship accessible to the wider audience. Researchers are in some cases also dependent on the tight-knit German–Namibian community for access to people, libraries, organisations, and so on. This might explain the hesitancy to publish about the trials and tribulations of publishing in Namibia.
2. Based on e-mail communication between me and the editor, 23 October 2017.
3. Based on e-mail communication between me and the editor, 23 October 2017.



4. Based on e-mail communication between me and the editor, 25 October 2017.
5. As a result of this advertisement, the descendants of Friedrich Schmidt contacted me to ask for clarification, as I was the only one who had spoken with them in the context of historical research. It was painful to assess what had happened. They had shared the stories, photographs, newspaper articles and the brewing diploma of their grandfather in anticipation of a comprehensive historical book, but did not anticipate that their material would end up in an entirely different story, without their consent or acknowledgement.
6. A series of essays from Democracy in Africa, the Centre for Democracy and Development-West Africa, the Georg August University of Göttingen, the Institut Supérieur Pédagogique de Bukavu, the Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies (Kenya), the German Development Institute, and the Department of Peace and Conflict Studies at Fourah Bay College at the University of Sierra Leone: <http://democracyinafrica.org/using-covid19-to-build-back-more-equitable-research-on-democracy-and-development/> (last accessed: 31 May 2022).

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## “Da braut sich was zusammen”: der koloniale Blick des deutsch-namibischen Verlagswesens

### Zusammenfassung

Der Appell, die Afrikastudien zu dekolonisieren, beeinflusst das Fachgebiet mit sehr unterschiedlichem Erfolg. Der vorliegende Artikel behandelt dieses Thema in Bezug auf die persönlichen Erfahrungen des Autors in der Verlagsbranche in Namibia. Durch die Beschreibung des Versuchs, ein historisches Buch über namibisches Bier bei einem bekannten deutsch-namibischen Verlag zu veröffentlichen, wird die anhaltende Macht des deutsch-namibischen Siedlerkolonialismus deutlich. Dieser Artikel macht die Machtstrukturen innerhalb des namibischen Buchmarktes sichtbar, die eine idealisierende Version der namibischen Geschichte fortschreiben, und argumentiert, dass die Dekolonisierung von Wissen nicht erfolgreich sein kann, ohne der (privaten) Verlagsindustrie Aufmerksamkeit zu schenken.

### Schlagwörter

Namibia, Geschichte, Verlagswesen, Entkolonialisierung, Völkermord