

**From 'Ex-Kolonie' to producer of green energy:
Representations of Namibia in German media**

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1 Introduction

Germany's forgotten genocide. This is what the crimes committed by the German Empire in what is now Namibia are sometimes called.

Germany is world-famous for dealing with its National Socialist past, but its colonial history in the southwestern part of Africa a few decades earlier remained relatively neglected for a long time.

Similarly, the history of the Finnish missionaries who worked in what is now Namibia and cooperated with the German colonial authorities has received relatively little public attention.

It was this connection between Finland and Germany that got me interested in the subject. German colonial history in Namibia is also a piece of Finnish history, whether you call the latter colonial history or not.

As a journalist, I've been closely following the process in which many West African countries have been distancing themselves from their former colonial ruler France in recent years.

I have also followed the Namibian debate on colonialism and decolonization.

From what I understand from interviewing Namibian experts, the debate in Namibia has mainly been about the legacy of the German and later South African colonial regimes. There is hardly any mention of Finns in this context – just as there is hardly any mention of us in any other context.

In Finland, Namibia is often spoken of in a very specific way: there has long been a catchphrase of 'a special relationship' with Namibia.

The expression typically refers to the long-term presence of Finnish missionaries in Namibia. Their impact in Namibia has long been perceived by many Finns as mostly positive.

In recent years, however, the question of Finnish involvement in colonialism has become more prominent. The issue has been addressed in academic research and, to some extent, in public debate.

Many Finns seem annoyed about the debate, claiming that Finland never had anything to do with colonialism, because Finland itself was colonized by Sweden and Russia and only became independent from the Russian Empire in 1917.

It is of course true that as a state, Finland did not colonize other countries. At the same time, Finland was not isolated from the colonial world economy. Finnish tar and timber were used, for example, for European merchant and naval fleets. Finnish adventurers, soldiers and

missionaries were involved in colonial projects on other continents. Then there is the internal colonization of the Sámi minority in Finland, which is why some Finnish researchers characterize Finland as a settler colonial society.

In the north of Namibia, the Finnish Missionary Society's arrival in 1870 transformed the local peoples' ways of being in the world, according to a recent book, *Colonial Aspects of Finnish-Namibian Relations, 1870–1990: Cultural Change, Endurance and Resistance* (edited by Leila Koivunen and Raita Merivirta).

What the Finns did was introduce Christianity and European modes of education, medicine, material culture and social practices to the region, supplanting many features of the local cultures. In Finland, Namibia was treated in the areas of culture and knowledge formation in a manner that is now recognized as colonial.

Another topic is how the missionaries in the northernmost part of Namibia acted as intermediaries between the local authorities and the German colonial rulers further south. This was demonstrated by Dr Martti Eirola in his doctoral thesis *The Ovambofahrt: The Ovamboland reservation in the making: political responses of the Kingdom of Ondonga to the German colonial power 1884–1910*.

Finnish missionaries did not carry weapons, but they acted as interpreters, guides and advisors to both the local rulers and the German colonial administration.

Germany's colonial history is relatively short, officially from the mid-1880s to World War I. After the defeat Germany lost its colonies, one of which was 'Deutsch-Südwestafrika', or present-day Namibia.

German colonialism, and in particular the German colonial rule in what is now Namibia, was characterized by brutality. One of these crimes is known as the Ovaherero and Nama genocide. It was a campaign of ethnic extermination and collective punishment in revenge for a rebellion against the colonial administration. At least tens of thousands of people died.

According to many historians, it was the first genocide of the 20th century. Some, such as German historian Jürgen Zimmerer, have interpreted the crimes committed in Namibia as precursors to the Holocaust.

In the German context, this is a controversial idea, and has caused disputes among historians. To summarize roughly: according to one school of thought, when the Holocaust is discussed in relation to another historical event, there is a danger that the significance or the singularity of the Holocaust is relativized or downplayed.

Another school of thought is that Germany has failed to address the violent crimes of its colonial rule in part because former colonial powers continue to benefit from a global system of exploitation and oppression.

The German government officially started to address the Ovaherero and Nama genocide in the 2010s. In May 2021, Germany announced that a so-called reconciliation agreement had been reached with the Namibian government. Germany called the events a genocide and promised to pay the descendants of the Ovaherero and Nama people around a billion euros in development aid-type money over several years.

The negotiations between Germany and Namibia are an example of a wider phenomenon in which European former colonial powers have increasingly sought to come to terms with their colonial history – or have sought to appear to do so. Rather, according to critics, governments have felt the need to give the public the impression that the demands of former colonies are being listened to. Apologetic statements have been made, some objects have been returned by European museums, and so on.

In Namibia, the so-called reconciliation agreement was criticized, especially by many Ovaherero organisations. Many felt excluded from the negotiations. Many considered the money promised by Germany to be totally inadequate. For some, Germany's attitude was downright racist.

The agreement has still not been finalized.

In this project, I approach the subject as follows: taking all of the above into account, I was curious to see how the media today cover this particular period of colonial history.

The Finnish media do not report much on Namibia, despite Finland's supposed 'special relationship with Namibia'. Therefore, for this project at the Freie Universität Berlin, it seemed logical to me to explore the work of my German colleagues.

I was hoping to get a glimpse of the German public debate on German colonialism, especially after the so-called reconciliation agreement with Namibia was announced and ran into difficulties.

I wanted to find out from which perspectives the German media was approaching the subject. Moreover, as I am interested in the representations of African countries in the so-called Global North, I was curious to know *what else* was being said about Namibia. What kind of representations of Namibia were being constructed and conveyed in the German media? What kind of image of Namibia was created?

I chose to look at the two largest quality daily newspapers in terms of circulation and reach: the Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ) and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ). I also included the Bild, Germany's best-selling daily newspaper.

All three papers are influential in many ways. In addition to their circulation and reach, all three are read by opinion leaders and can be argued to have a certain agenda-setting power. In addition, the choice of these three newspapers is aimed at a certain diversity of political orientation.

I decided to look at all of the articles that could be found on the newspapers' website using the search term 'Namibia'. The result was a wide range of articles: pieces from different sections of the newspapers and articles of different types. The first articles I included in my database are from May 2021, when the so-called reconciliation agreement was announced, and the last from May 2024.

In total, there are 322 articles on Namibia in my database. I placed them in one of these two categories, based on the topic of the article and the way it was dealt with: 1) Articles about Namibia in the context of German colonialism and 2) articles about Namibia in a non-colonial context.

What I found was that the majority of articles presented Namibia in one way or another in the context of German colonialism. In the SZ, the vast majority of articles had this context. The Bild was the only one of the three papers where the majority of articles were in a non-colonial context. On the other hand, it often frames Namibia as a former colony, regardless of the subject of the article.

It is therefore possible to argue that in the online editions of two major German quality newspapers, the Süddeutsche Zeitung and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, and also in the tabloid Bild, the image of Namibia is still partly filtered through the German colonial period.

As this project is not an academic study, I have not attempted to follow formal scientific citation conventions. However, I have tried to indicate in each paragraph whose text the information is based on, with a date referring to the edition I have used. The exception to this is general information that can be found in a number of sources, such as undisputed historical events in the German colonial period.

A detailed list of sources can be found at the very end of this paper.

For this project, I have chosen to use the name 'Ovaherero' instead of 'Herero'. My choice is due to previous interviews I have conducted with experts on the subject. Ovaherero is the name used by, for instance, Nandiasora Mazeingo, the director of the Ovaherero Genocide Foundation, whom I interviewed in 2022.

Finally, the scope of this work had to be limited because of time constraints. Therefore, I finally, and reluctantly, decided to exclude from this project the Namibian media and, for the most part, the question of how German colonialism has been addressed in Namibia.

The subject is far too important to be dealt with in just one chapter, as a small part of this paper. It deserves its own projects, with a more scholarly and systematic approach.

2 German colonial rule in Namibia

In this chapter, I will briefly describe how Europeans came to what is now Namibia, and present an overview of German colonial history, both in general and in Namibia. At the end, I will briefly explain why Germany largely left the northernmost part of Namibia alone and how this relates to the presence of Finnish missionaries. The nature of the Finnish-German cooperation will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

For the sake of clarity, I will mostly refer to the areas of present-day Namibia as 'Namibia', although names for the region were different in the colonial era. In the same spirit, I usually refer to the German Empire simply as 'Germany' and to the Grand Duchy of Finland as 'Finland'.

Europeans came 'late' to Namibia

For Namibia, the period of European rule came later than for many other regions in Africa. For a long time, the dry desert land of the coast was not attractive for Europeans. The first missionaries arrived from Switzerland and England in the beginning of the 19th century. Traders from the Cape Colony (ruled by the 'Boers' and later by Britain) also came to the region to exchange goods, such as arms and spirits, to cattle.

At the time, Namibia was home to the Ovaherero, the Nama, the Ovambo, the Khoi, the San and the Damara. The central and southern parts of Namibia were the Ovaherero and Nama regions, and the Ovambo ruled in the north.

The German Rhenish Missionary Society (Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft) came to Namibia in the 1840s, expanding their activities from what is now South Africa. In the 1860s, the missionaries asked the King of Prussia for protection, as they faced resistance from Africans. However, the war between France and Prussia hindered these efforts.

The German colonial era: short-lived but marked by brutality

Germany came onto the stage of formal colonial rule quite late. It was only after 1871 that the German Empire was able to assume the role of a colonial power.

After 1871, powerful pressure groups as well as colonial pioneers in Africa practically forced Otto von Bismarck into government support for the occupation of the first colonial territories in 1884. Bismarck was initially sceptical, as he felt the acquisition of colonies involved great risks for Germany's foreign policy and finances (Zimmerer 2012, Conrad 2011).

However, there were several motives for the acquisition of colonies. After the national unification of Germany, there were high hopes for the global reach of German culture and

German political influence. There were trade interests: colonies were seen as providing resources and acting as a market for German-made products. There was also a need to find suitable locations for new German settlements abroad, to prevent people from leaving for the United States and to make sure they would remain Germans when settling in a colonial 'New Germany'. There was also a need to get rid of internal demographic tensions: the settlements were to be used as a valve to defuse conflicts. And there was the ideological legitimation: Germany had a 'civilizing mission', meaning educating and Christianizing (Conrad 2011).

In 1884, Bismarck invited the European powers to the Berlin Conference, which formalized 'the scramble for Africa'. In a few years, Germany amassed the fourth largest colonial empire of the era. The present-day African states of Togo, Cameroon, Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi and Namibia were declared German protectorates or 'Schutzgebiete'. In the 1890s, smaller possessions in East Asia and the Pacific were added.

Germany's expansion was an integral part of the 'scramble for Africa' that substituted the 'informal imperialism' of control through military influence and economic dominance by that of direct rule (Conrad 2011).

According to Conrad, the German empire resembled the other empires of the time in its basic structures. All were built on the same ideological foundations: the civilizing mission promising modernization to the colonized populations, the general assumption that the world was ordered along racial lines, and the belief in colonies as an outward proof of the power of the nation-state (Conrad 2011).

However, historians have also suggested that German colonialism was in some ways unique (Conrad 2011). For example, racial segregation was a feature in all colonial systems, but legal prohibitions of intermarriage existed in the German empire only.

Whereas France, Britain, and the Netherlands had established modes of taking into account local structures of political negotiation that had emerged over centuries in their colonies, German colonial policy aimed at a more rigid penetration of the colonized territories and population (Conrad 2011). The German colonial empire was founded on the outdated 'company model' (Zimmerer 2012).

Moreover, German colonialism, and colonial rule in German South West Africa in particular, was marked by brutality. Today, it may be surprising to know that this was in fact widely known in Germany at the time. For instance, nobody sought to conceal the violence against the Ovaherero and Nama. On the contrary, the events were popularized in memoirs, official reports and novels, and presented quite openly in the official German military chronicle (Zimmerer 2023).

German colonial dreams unfulfilled

According to Zimmerer (2012), German colonial dreams were not fulfilled in the sense that almost all colonies had to be financially supported. This was partly due to the huge costs of the conquest, so-called 'pacification' and administration. The German colonial rulers faced a great amount of resistance in almost all of the colonies.

During the first months of World War I, Germany had to cede most of its colonies. In July 1915, the German colonial troops in what is now Namibia surrendered to South Africa. After the war, the colonies were incorporated into the mandate system created within the League of Nations, in accordance with the Versailles Peace Treaty. In 1920, South Africa undertook administration of present-day Namibia on a mandate agreement with the League of Nations.

However, German colonialism did not end with the Treaty of Versailles ending formal territorial rule. This is true for the colonies that continued to be shaped by decisions taken in colonial times. According to Conrad (2011), it also applies to Germany: The Nazi empire in eastern Europe, for example, needs to be placed within a history of German colonialism broadly defined.

Conrad refers to the scholarly debate on the extent to which the origins of the genocidal politics of the Nazis has its roots in the brutal colonial wars in Africa. According to Zimmerer (2023), German South West Africa was Germany's first attempt to establish a racist state, and 35 years later a similar attempt was made in Europe. Here, the context was again a colonial one, as the aim was to settle territory with Germans forming the 'master race', to use an expression of the German colonial officer and criminal Carl Peters.

The German plan for Deutsch-Südwestafrika

In 1884, present-day Namibia became the first German 'Schutzgebiet' or 'protectorate' called German South West Africa, Deutsch-Südwestafrika.

Zimmerer (2023) argues that despite the relative brevity of the German colonial rule, Namibia went through deeper and more rapid change than most other colonies, whether German ones or those of other colonial powers.

In 30 years, the 'tribes' in the south and center of Namibia had been dissolved, the traditional economic and social structures of society had largely been destroyed and the property of Africans transferred, to a great extent, into the possession of white farmers, mining companies or the colonial state.

German South West Africa was large and, with an estimated 200,000 to 250,000 inhabitants towards the end of the 19th century, sparsely populated (Conrad 2011). In the 1910s, the colony covered an area of 835 000 km², about 1.5 times the size of the German Empire.

The colony was initiated by a Bremen-based tobacco merchant, Adolf Lüderitz, who was involved in illegal trading of arms on the coast. According to Conrad (2011), tensions between the two largest peoples in the central and southern regions, the Ovaherero and

Nama, made it easier for the Germans to establish power there. The leaders of both groups, Samuel Maharero and Hendrik Witbooi, attempted to make use of the German presence for their own purposes.

The systematic establishment of German rule began after 1893, as the first governor, Theodor Leutwein, took office. A crucial aim of Leutwein's politics was to turn South West Africa into Germany's only settler colony. Because of the climatic conditions, it was the only German colony that was considered suitable for a permanent occupation by German settlers (Conrad 2011).

In the following years, the German state actively promoted German settlement in the area. In order to make the colony self-sufficient and profitable for settlers and merchants, Leutwein began expanding the colonial bureaucracy to ensure the rule of law and to facilitate a systematic economic exploitation of the territory (Conrad 2011).

By World War I, there were about 14,000 European settlers living in South West Africa, 12,000 of them German (Conrad 2011). The consequences are still visible in Namibia today: Namibia is the only former German colony with a German-speaking minority.

The German vision at the time was to build a model colonial state based on a racial ideology. The goal was to convert the African societies into a 'black working class', with white Germans being the upper class. The term 'native' was defined through biology: 'natives' were members of a 'primitive people', including the descendants of 'native' women and European men (Zimmerer 2023).

The influx of settlers led to the expulsion of Africans from their land. The colonial government confiscated 70 per cent of the country's land and gave it to German farmers. There were only a few restraints to prevent an almost complete expropriation of the Nama and Ovaherero peoples. Regulations were issued to control Africans, and to enable the seizure of their land and cattle. The new rules destroyed the economic independence of the local peasants and made them dependent on European employers (Conrad 2011).

Leutwein strengthened the local rulers in their positions and used a strategy of divide and rule, to prevent people from uniting against their conqueror. Securing power required numerous military expeditions.

Important turning points were the cattle epidemic (Rinderpest) of 1897, which deprived many Ovaherero of their economic base and forced them to depend on German settlers, and the war against the Ovaherero and Nama in 1904–07 (Conrad 2019).

The war that lead to the annihilation order

Within the borders of German territory, any Herero, with or without a firearm, with or without livestock, will be shot; nor will I give refuge to women or children any more. I will drive them back to their people or have them fired upon.

This is what the German commander Lothar von Trotha wrote on October 2, 1904. It is known as the annihilation order for the Ovaherero. No explicit annihilation proclamation exists for the Nama, but they too were killed systematically between 1904 and 1908.

War had broken out in January 1904 between the Ovaherero and the colonial power protecting the settlers in the country. For the Ovaherero, it was an anticolonial war of resistance, triggered by economic hardship. The Nama and other groups were later drawn into the conflict (Conrad 2011).

The Ovaherero launched attacks on German farmers that took both the settlers and the German colonial administration by surprise (Conrad 2011). Rumour had it that the Ovaherero had murdered and mutilated hundreds of German men, women and children. This contributed to the radicalization of the war. Later it was established that the Ovaherero had in fact spared women and children as well as missionaries (Zimmerer 2023).

The German imperial government decided that the conflict could only end with the unconditional surrender of the Ovaherero. The command was transferred to Lothar von Trotha.

Von Trotha had gained experience in colonial wars in East Africa and China. He declared open war on the Ovaherero and, according to Conrad (2011), developed a strategy that interpreted the war as a racial war. He believed the Africans would 'yield only to force', and he was willing to exercise such force 'with blatant terrorism and even with cruelty' and to 'annihilate the rebellious tribes with rivers of blood' (Zimmerer 2023).

After the battle at Waterberg in August 1904, it was militarily clear that the Germans were winning the war. The German troops drove the Ovaherero ahead of them in the direction of the Omaheke semidesert and systematically occupied all the known watering holes along the edges of the desert. Von Trotha gave his annihilation proclamation, ordering every returning Ovaherero to be shot.

According to Zimmerer, von Trotha clarified that, for the sake of the reputation of the German soldiers, this order to fire upon women and children was 'to be understood in such a way that shots are to be fired over their heads, in order to force them to run away.' However, there was nowhere they could run except into the desert. Thousands died of thirst as a consequence of this order.

The war officially ended in March 1907. Imprisonment of the Ovaherero and Nama in concentration camps continued until 1908.

The first genocide of the 20th century

Many modern historians view the war as a war of annihilation due to the extermination order, the introduction of prison camps, and the forcing of the Ovaherero into the Omaheke desert.

There is no doubt about the intention to destroy, says historian Reinhard Kößler, among others. The term 'race war' was used repeatedly. According to Kößler, it means the intention was to enforce the interests of the white race, implicitly the Germans (Kößler 2017).

According to Zimmerer, considering the military situation and the geographical location where von Trotha's proclamation was issued, it is obvious that genocide was the objective. The talk was of 'driving out' or 'expelling' the people, but the only possible escape was into a waterless area. The intention of the annihilation proclamation is even clearer if read together with a letter von Trotha wrote to the General Staff in Berlin:

I believe that the nation as such must be destroyed, or, if that should prove not to be possible by tactical actions, they must be expelled from the country operationally and by means of further individual actions. With the watering holes from Grootfontein to Gobabis having been occupied and the military convoys being constantly on the move, it is bound to be possible to track down those small groups of people who have begun moving back westwards and gradually finish them off.

Moreover, according to Zimmerer (2023), in his proclamation, von Trotha referred specifically to the accusation that the Ovaherero had murdered German women and children, to justify his policy. According to this logic, the Ovaherero were responsible for what was happening to them. They were 'savages' in contrast to the 'civilised' Germans.

The genocide was already in progress at the time of the annihilation proclamation. But the proclamation helped to legitimize it, and it provides proof that genocide was the intention of the German colonial forces, according to Zimmerer.

Zimmerer (2023) bases his definition of genocide on that of the UN Convention. For him, the decisive factor is the intention of the perpetrators. There needs to be a will to 'exterminate' a certain group defined by the perpetrators. Equally, there needs to be actual action, i.e. the initiation of the genocidal process, but not necessarily its completion.

As a result, it is not the number of victims that determines whether genocide has taken place. Here, Zimmerer refers to 'revisionists' who try to demonstrate lower numbers of victims in order to refute allegations that genocide was committed against the Ovaherero and Nama.

It is true that estimates of the number of deaths vary. In any case, the wars resulted in large numbers of casualties, nearly decimating the Ovaherero. The census of 1911 reports a total of 15,000 Ovaherero, compared to around 80,000 before the war (Conrad 2011).

The Nama population, around 20,000 before the war, was roughly halved. The Nama waged a guerrilla war against the Germans. The Germans adopted a strategy of annihilation against the Nama as they did in the war against the Ovaherero, systematically occupying watering holes in order to kill their opponents by thirst. They also destroyed the livelihoods of those who were suspected of supporting the guerrillas (Zimmerer 2023).

The figures cited by most reparations activists, which correspond to middle-range academic estimates, indicate that around 80% of the Ovaherero and 60% of the Nama were killed in the genocide (Köβler 2015).

Thousands died of hunger and thirst. Survivors – including women, children and the elderly – were imprisoned in camps, where mortality was high, partly due to neglect, partly due to labour (Köβler 2015).

The system of camps was established across the whole Schutzgebiet. The system included 'collection camps' that were operated by missionaries and used to bring geographically scattered Ovaherero under control, and concentration camps that were established and operated by the military administration (Zimmerer 2023).

The conditions in the camps were poor: diseases were widespread and food was scarce or inedible. Prisoners died in massive numbers. According to statistics collected by the colonial forces, between October 1904 and March 1907, a total of 7 682 prisoners died, representing 30-50% of all internees.

Conditions were particularly terrible at the Shark Island concentration camp in Lüderitz. According to Zimmerer, murder was committed through deliberate neglect.

Deprived of the conditions for development

In addition to the killings, the Germans systematically used expropriation, deportation and resettlement to strip the Ovaherero and the Nama of all prerequisites for rebuilding their political, social and cultural lives (Köβler 2015).

The expropriation of land was further sped up in the wake of the war. Only in the northern part of the colony, in the Ovambo kingdoms, where German control barely extended, were large groups of people able to hold on to their land. This was the area where Finnish missionaries had been acting as consultants between the Germans and the local rulers.

In the years after the war, African cultivators were forced into small and unprofitable plots. Germans no longer deemed necessary to make political arrangements with local groups (Conrad 2011).

The majority of adult men were subjected to forced labour, rigid working regulations and identity controls. The attempt was to create a racially segregated, exploitative state that in some of its measures bordered on the totalitarian, according to Conrad and Zimmerer. The war accelerated the development of 'a Big Brother type surveillance state' (Zimmerer 2023).

Commercially, the colony was of almost no importance to the German economy. As the land was infertile and unsuitable for tillage, the only profitable activity for the settlers was cattle-raising. Only the mining of copper (since 1907) and diamonds was lucrative. The

discovery of diamonds in 1908 led to South West Africa yielding the biggest private profits of any colony – while causing the biggest losses to the imperial government, due to the high costs of railroad construction and military operations (Conrad 2011 and 2019).

The exception: Northern Namibia

Unlike all other regions in German South West Africa, the northernmost part was never really colonized by the Germans in practical terms.

The northern region was the home of the Ovambo, the largest population group in German South West Africa.

In 1886, Germany signed a treaty with Portugal, defining the northern borders of the German colony. The Germans wanted to stop the Portuguese and to subdue the local communities 'on their side' of the border. At the same time, however, they tried to beware of provoking the Ovambo with military actions.

For the German colonial administration, the remoteness of the region presented a problem. Over time, the northern area was deemed to be of low economic value, with little mineral riches, and it was not considered suitable for European settlement (Eirola 1992).

More importantly, the decision was that no action should be taken against the Ovambo until the Ovaherero and Nama were under control. This meant that the expansion of German rule into the northernmost part of Namibia was postponed.

What the Germans did want from the north was manpower to the south, especially after the war against the Ovaherero and the Nama. This was to be obtained from Ovamboland by building relationships rather than by military expeditions. A war with the biggest group of people of South West Africa would have been beyond the resources of the German colonial troops (Miettinen 2005).

Germany finally annexed Ovamboland in 1908, signing protection agreements with the rulers of several northern kingdoms, as the Portuguese colonial power was pushing southwards from present-day Angola. However, Germany did not station troops or administrators in Ovamboland, but controlled it from military posts on the southern border (Eirola 2008).

Nevertheless, this did not mean the Germans were not interested in the development of affairs in the northern region.

On the contrary, according to Eirola, they took every opportunity to gain information about it.

For this they also used the Finnish missionaries, who were the best experts on the area. I will describe this in more detail in the next chapter.

3 Finnish cooperation with the German colonial authorities

The Finnish missionaries played a key role in shaping the Ovambo policy of Germany. They operated as middle-men and mediators between the local rulers and the Germans and were involved in politics (Eirola 2008).

Despite this, as far as I know, there is relatively little research on the subject, i.e. on the cooperation between Finns and Germans in Africa during the German colonial period. Perhaps one reason for this is that the events of the late 19th and early 20th centuries have been overshadowed in historical research by later upheavals in both Germany and Finland.

There is, however, a fundamental piece of research carried out by a Finnish scholar, Dr Martti Eirola. For his 1992 doctoral thesis *The Ovambofahrt: The Ovamboland Reservation in the Making. Political Responses of the Kingdom of Ondonga to the German Colonial Power 1884–1910*, Eirola went through Finnish and German archives. Along with the documents of the German colonial administration, it is the documents of the Finnish missionaries that are the most important written sources for the study of the German colonial period in the north of present-day Namibia.

According to Eirola, by assisting the German colonial power, the missionaries reduced the need for Germans to occupy the northern part of Namibia.

The Germans considered a military campaign to the north too expensive and the economic return of the region too low. Ovamboland was demographically and militarily the strongest part of German South West Africa, especially after the German war against the Ovaherero and Nama. Therefore, contact with the rulers of the region was ordered to be maintained through missionaries and visiting officials from time to time.

This chapter relies heavily on the research of Eirola and a few scientific articles by other researchers. I myself have not gone through archives for this project. Nor have I travelled to Namibia to collect, for example, oral history on the subject. This was not possible within the scope of my project, nor was it the focus of my work.

The Finns were invited by Germany

There have been close political, economic, cultural and religious ties between Germany and Finland since the Hanseatic League era. For centuries, many Finnish intellectuals have been educated in German universities. With the Reformation, Sweden, and Finland as part of it, became increasingly influenced by German culture.

In colonial South West Africa, a common confessional basis probably brought the Finnish missionaries and the German colonial authorities closer together (Eirola 2008).

The Lutheran Church of Finland sent its first missionaries to what is now Namibia in 1870 at the invitation of the Rheinische Missionsgesellschaft, the German Rhenish Missionary Society.

At the time, Finland was not an independent country but a part of the Russian Empire with the status of an autonomous Grand Duchy. Russia had an interest to maintain law and order on its new western frontier, which it had conquered from Sweden in 1809. Finland was therefore allowed to retain Swedish legislation and later to form its own institutions (Rantanen, Ruuska, Särkkä 2021). In the latter half of the 19th century, many elements of a modern nation-state emerged in Finland. The Emperor of Russia gave permission for the establishment of the Finnish Missionary Society in 1858.

The Rhenish Missionary Society invited the Finns to Namibia as it did not have the resources to extend its work to the north. It is claimed to have forwarded an invitation from a local ruler to the Finnish Missionary Society, which was looking for a suitable area for its missionaries (Hovila-Helminen 2008).

Particularly in the early years, the work of the Finnish Mission in Namibia was very closely linked to the Rhenish Missionary Society and in particular to the German missionary Carl Hugo Hahn, who convinced the Finns to come to the region.

In the beginning, the Finns were the only people of European origin living in the northern part of Namibia (Merivirta, Koivunen, Särkkä 2021). At the time, the German missionaries were mainly active further south, in the Ovaherero region. It was not until the 1890s that they ventured north. From then on, they also influenced the German Ovambo policy, along with the Finns (Eirola 2008).

The strongest Finnish link with the Germans was Martti Rautanen, a long-time mission director. Rautanen can be said to have been part of the establishment in the colony through his German wife Frieda and the Rhenish Missionary Society. Frieda Rautanen was the daughter of Heinrich Kleinschmidt, an employee of the Rhenish Missionary Society.

Rautanen's daughter Anna married the German missionary Hermann Tönjes, who later became a 'native commissioner' in the German colonial administration.

Finns as part of the ruling elite in Ovambo society

When the Finnish missionaries arrived in what is now Namibia, it was still outside European colonial rule. In Ovamboland, there were 11 kingdoms, headed by a ruler or a council of chiefs. According to various estimates, the Ovambo would have numbered between 50,000 and 100,000 when the Finns arrived (Eirola 1985). Finnish missionaries, on the other hand, were only a handful in the beginning.

The reception of the missionaries was initially favourable, and mission stations were established in several areas. Conflicts arose as the expectations of the local rulers and the

missionaries' intentions were wide apart (Hovila-Helminen 2008). The kings wanted the Finns to act as their advisors and to promote trade. The Finns, on the other hand, insisted on evangelism, i.e. spreading their faith with the intention of converting people to Christianity, and were more reluctant to trade than the Germans. They were also reluctant to trade in arms, but eventually relented in order to exchange cattle and grain for firearms.

According to Eirola, the Finnish missionaries eventually became part of the ruling elite in Ovambo society. They were engaged in administration at both the local and the central level. In the central administration they rose to the position of personal assistants and advisors to the king, corresponding to counselors. They played a special role particularly with regard to issues concerning the kingdom's relations with Europeans. In addition, they also participated in the internal affairs of the polity.

The most influential counselor in both the external and the internal politics of the Ovambo Kingdom of Ondonga was Martti Rautanen, the Finnish missionary leader mentioned above. He had a broad knowledge of languages: according to Eirola, he spoke Finnish, German, Ndonga, Ovaherero, Nama, Afrikaans, English, and a few other European languages (Eirola 1992).

The missionaries also traded directly with the local population. In fact, commercial expectations were one of the main motives of the rulers in accepting the missionaries. For safety reasons, outside traders would head for areas where there were missionaries, as the areas around the mission stations were generally quieter (Hovila-Helminen 2008).

Interpreters and advisors to the Germans

The role of the Finnish missionaries in the making of the German Ovamboland Reservation was highly crucial, according to Eirola. From the Finns, the German colonial administration obtained a lot of knowledge about the movements and thinking of the Ovambo leaders and people.

For a long period of time, there was no representation from the colonial administration in Ovamboland. Therefore, communication between the administration and the rulers of the Ovambo communities was through correspondence, which was taken care of by the missionaries (Eirola 1985).

When German administration representatives visited the Ovambo rulers, the missionaries acted as interpreters and guides. During their travels, the colonial officials often stayed at mission stations (Eirola 2008).

The primary goal of the missionaries was to safeguard the interests of their mission work. To promote their interests, the Finns had to make tactical choices. It was a balancing act: they had to serve the local rulers, on whose goodwill they depended for being able to stay in the region. However, if they sympathized with the rulers too much, they could have fallen out

of favor with the colonial administration, as the Germans ultimately decided which missionary society was allowed to operate in which part of the colony.

According to Eirola, for the most part, the Finnish missionaries supported both sides by communicating information from one to the other.

For the local rulers, the Finns acted as scribes, interpreters and agents for dealing with colonial administration. In addition, the rulers received information about the actions of the Germans from the Finns (Eirola 2008). In some cases, the Finns took a stand against the Germans and in support of the local people.

In other cases, the Finns served the interests of the colonial administration. For the Germans, the missionaries provided advice and opinions on political matters and reported on the political situation in Ovamboland and its rulers' intentions towards the Germans.

In his dissertation, Eirola provides countless examples of this from different years of German rule. One of them describes the visit of Major Mueller, the deputy commander of the Schutztruppe, in 1900.

Mueller met with the king of the Ondonga Kingdom, who asked the Finnish missionary leader Martti Rautanen to join the meeting. For the Germans, this was a military reconnaissance mission for the purpose of a possible future military operation and occupation of the region. Mueller's report contains estimates of the population and military capabilities of the Kingdom of Ondonga – estimates that Mueller made on the basis of information provided by Rautanen. Rautanen also provided Mueller with valuable information on local methods of warfare.

According to Eirola, the Germans were particularly grateful for the detailed information provided by the missionaries about the actions and plans of the northern rulers' with regard to the Ovaherero uprising.

The Ovaherero had asked their northern neighbors in Ondonga to join the war against the Germans. When the king of West Ondonga, Kambonde kaMpingana, seemed to be preparing an attack on the nearest military station, the Finns decided to inform the Germans. They justified this with the concern for their own safety and for Ondonga's chances of surviving the battle. The missionaries also advised King Kambonde not to join the war.

According to Eirola, the Finnish missionary leader Martti Rautanen wanted to prevent the German colonial power from occupying Ovamboland, not only to protect the interests of missionary work, but also to protect the people. The arrival of German soldiers would probably have led to an uprising and the destruction of the population, as in other parts of the colony.

The Finns were aware of the nature of the help they gave to the Germans. For example, in an 1898 petition to Governor Leutwein, in which the Finns asked for the customs duty imposed

on their goods to be cancelled, they referred to the indirect aid they had given the Germans and promised to do the same in the future (Eirola 1992).

Moreover, according to Eirola, the missionaries were aware of the problems associated with their political role. They decided on a case-by-case basis how to respond to the colonial administration's requests for assistance, according to what was deemed to best serve the interests of the mission in the situation. Their main interest was to ensure that their work could continue and possibly expand into new areas.

A historical detail that few Finns know about

In Finland, this colonial-era cooperation with the Germans has never come to the attention of the general public. It is safe to say that it is not part of any collective memory of the Finns, but rather a historical detail that few have heard of.

However, the work of Finnish missionaries in Namibia *in general* is a different matter. It is something that at least the older generations of Finns are well aware of.

Finnish missionary work in Namibia has continued for over 150 years, from 1870 to the 2020s, although the Finnish presence in Namibia has been very limited since Namibia gained independence in 1990.

There has been some research on how the presence of the Finns changed the culture of the Ovambo region and to what extent the work of Finnish missionaries can be described as colonial. This is a question in its own right, separate from the Finns' relationship with the German colonial administration.

I will discuss this in the next chapter, as well as how the German colonial rule in Namibia has been remembered and addressed in Germany.

4 Remembering (or forgetting) the colonial past

Finland's 'special relationship' with Namibia

Finland as a state has never had any colonies. Most of what is now known as Finland was an eastern province of Sweden from the mid-12th century, until Sweden ceded Finland to the Russian Empire after a war in 1808–1809. Finland did not gain independence from Russia until 1917.

Because of this, there has been a common perception in Finland that Finns were victims of colonization rather than colonizers or even beneficiaries of colonialism (Merivirta, Koivunen, Särkkä 2021). This view still prevails, although it is difficult to say exactly how many people support it.

The fact is, of course, that Finland was not isolated from the colonial world economy. Finnish timber products and tar were used in the navies of European colonial powers. Individual Finns were involved in colonial projects on other continents. And Finns have in many ways subjugated the Sámi, the only indigenous people in the European Union.

In the case of Africa, however, the fact that Finland had no colonies has meant that Finland and Finns have historically had relatively little contact with African countries and people. Because of this and the geographical distance, Finns may not know very much about individual African countries.

Namibia is an exception to the rule. Many Finns, at least older generations, will know at least a few things about Namibia.

In Finland, one often hears that Finland has a 'special relationship' with Namibia. For many Finns, the catchphrase, which is sometimes used in official contexts, is positive rather than negative.

The phrase is often used to refer to the long history of Finnish missionary work in Namibia. The aim of the missionaries was to spread Christianity, which many Finns today would be critical of. However, many people would have other aspects of missionary work in mind, namely the fact that the missionaries also built and ran social services. The subsequent occupier of Namibia, South Africa, failed to provide many of the basic services. Decades after German rule, Finnish missionaries still provided services such as education and health care in the northern part of Namibia.

(It should be pointed out that, according to critics, talking about such aspects can be an attempt at 'whitewashing', intended to emphasise the 'positive developments' brought about by European colonialism. The counter-argument is that colonial powers simply *had to* develop the colonies to a certain point, so that Europeans could control the people and the natural resources of the colonies.)

The 'special relationship' catchphrase may also refer to the role that [some Finns played](#) in Namibia's struggle for independence from South Africa. Older generations of Finns remember that Martti Ahtisaari, who was later elected President of Finland and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his work around the world, acted as a UN representative at various stages of Namibia's independence process.

Some argue that many Finns like to cling too much to the image of the 'good deeds' of their compatriots.

Finns may be ready to acknowledge the historical wrongs committed by other Western countries. At the same time, they may be reluctant to acknowledge that there may be a Finnish, albeit informal, tradition of colonialism in Namibia.

To what extent can it be defined as colonialism?

The discussion about Finnish colonialism in Namibia is by no means mainstream in Finland. If there is any talk at all about the Finns' relationship with colonialism, it is usually about Finland's treatment of the Sámi minority.

This debate is also politically highly charged. Many Finns reject the view of the treatment of the Sámi as colonialism for various reasons, one of which is that they define colonialism as something that states do outside their own borders, typically in other continents.

Until recently, relatively little research had been done on Finland's or Finns' links to Western colonialism in other continents. However, the debate does surface from time to time.

For instance, the recently published collection *Colonial Aspects of Finnish-Namibian Relations, 1870–1990: Cultural Change, Endurance and Resistance* (edited by Leila Koivunen and Raita Merivirta) provides interesting reflections on the topic. According to the editors, the arrival of the Finnish Missionary Society in what is now the northernmost part of Namibia transformed the local peoples' 'ways of being in the world'.

The Finns introduced Christianity and European modes of education, medicine, material culture and social practices to the region. In the process, many features of the local cultures were supplanted. Finnish missionaries sought to eradicate local customs. They even sought to change the way people looked and dressed in the name of Christianity and Western concepts of hygiene.

The school network founded by the Finns was an important agent in spreading Western knowledge and ideas, although many missionaries originally felt that spreading secular knowledge was beyond their duty. From the 1930s onwards 'civilizing' was accepted by most missionaries as an important activity alongside proselytizing (Miettinen 2005).

The long-term effects were similar to those typical of a colonial relationship (Merivirta, Koivunen, Särkkä 2021).

In Finland, Namibia was treated in the areas of culture and knowledge formation in a manner that is now recognized as colonial.

The northern region of Namibia, Ovamboland, or 'Ambomaa' in Finnish at the time, became widely known in Finland quite early on through fund-raising and information activities. In schools, Ovamboland was a standard example of a colony: a 'backward' country, to which the missionaries had been sent to preach the gospel and bring the light of God and civilization to 'the heathen' (Soiri and Peltola 1999).

It can be argued that this interpretative framework influenced the way in which the region and Africans or Africa as a whole were perceived in Finland for a long time.

Today, there is little coverage of Namibia (or Africa) in the Finnish media. When there is, the articles often mention the history of Finns in Namibia. For instance, the detail is often mentioned that many Finnish first names are still in use in Namibia as a result of the missionary work.

I myself am partly responsible for this as I have occasionally covered Namibia in my work. As a journalist, this approach can be justified by the fact that the audience is more likely to get interested in a story about a distant country if it has a connection to Finland. Trying to attract people with an element of familiarity is a common trick of the trade.

However, it is reasonable to ask what kind of image of contemporary Namibia is created for the Finnish public by repeating such colonial-era details over and over again.

Germany and the 'long denial'

The truth is that, when it comes to the colonial era, we Germans who are usually so historically conscious have far too many blank spaces! We have blind spots in our memory and our perception of ourselves. --

I firmly believe that we will only be able to understand and eradicate the deeper roots of everyday racism when we illuminate the blind spots of our memory, when we address our colonial history much more thoroughly than we have done to date! --

Germany's involvement in the colonial age – what better proof could there be than the example of Namibia. There, in what was then called German South West Africa, at the beginning of the 1900s, Germany's so-called 'protective troops' committed the first genocide of that blood-soaked century. It took a long time, far too long, for Germany even to acknowledge this crime – an entire century. The crimes of the past still have an effect today. --

The crimes of the colonial era, conquest, oppression, exploitation, theft, the murder of tens of thousands of people, need a suitable place in our memory. We must face up to the

responsibility created by this part of German history. Because it will determine our future, our coexistence in a country where the cultures of the world are and seek to be at home.

This was stated by German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier in his speech at the opening ceremony of the Ethnologisches Museum and Museum für Asiatische Kunst at the Humboldt Forum in Berlin in September 2021. (The Humboldt Forum itself has been a controversial project, but that is a subject for another paper.)

Germany had come a long way in acknowledging colonial crimes.

Melber (2017) talks about 'the long denial': in the Federal Republic of Germany, politicians and the wider public refused for a long time after World War II to acknowledge what had happened during Germany's colonial rule.

However, the genocide in German South West Africa was not a secret when the crimes were committed. On the contrary, as Kößler (2015) puts it, it stands out among the genocides of the twentieth century by the publicity given to it at the time.

The memory stayed alive in Germany for a long time. World War I did not end Germany's colonial ambitions: the colonial revisionist movement ensured that colonial propaganda flourished in the Weimar Republic. The National Socialists had plans for getting Africa back to the Germans. Until the collapse of the Nazi dictatorship, the 'German land in Africa' was ideologically glorified for the 'people without space', and the German 'civilizing mission' was extolled (Kößler and Melber).

After the defeat in World War II, a process of silence and memorial repression set in. Kößler and Melber (2018) as well as Zimmerer call this *colonial amnesia*.

Germany did not go through the same post World War II decolonization process as other European countries, as it had already lost its colonies in World War I. Instead, at that point Germany had to deal with the crushing legacy of the National Socialist era with its millions of victims and the crimes of the Holocaust.

In the German culture of remembrance, the Holocaust overshadowed earlier crimes against humanity. The colonial experience was seen as marginal, a footnote in history compared to the long history of the British and French colonial empires, World War I and the rise of National Socialism, the Third Reich and the Holocaust (Conrad 2011).

In East Germany, some historians addressed the topic, with state support, to 'expose the imperialism' of German history. The ideological perspective was, of course, that neither Nazis nor colonialism had anything to do with the German Democratic Republic (Kößler and Melber 2018, Melber 2017).

In the West, German colonialism remained an academic niche subject, far removed from public debate, except for the often top-down international solidarity with the liberation

struggles of the colonized (Köbler and Melber 2018). Awareness of Germany's colonial past and the crimes committed was vague at best, even among a critical public.

Holocaust commemoration entered the wider public domain in Germany from the late 1960s. The issue was brought about by the generation associated with the student movement (Melber 2017). Since then, Germany came to be regarded as a world champion of engaging with its past.

However, calls to go further back in time and place the Nazi regime into a broader historical context, relating to the colonial period, fell on deaf ears, according to Melber (2017).

Postcolonial criticism argues that European colonial powers had already established a racist and violent rule, including genocide, before the Holocaust happened. In 1951, historian and philosopher Hannah Arendt suggested that German colonial rule was a precursor to the Nazi regime. Other historians, of whom Jürgen Zimmerer is a notable example, have interpreted the crimes committed in Namibia as a precursor to the Holocaust.

In the German context, such arguments have often been criticized for relativizing or downplaying the singularity of the Holocaust, according to Melber (2024). Melber calls this 'gatekeeping' that prevents the exploration of how German colonialism marked the beginning of a trajectory of mass violence.

In Germany, for a long time it was possible to keep up a 'not formally declared, but practically officially ordained communicative silence on colonial crimes with only a few minor breaks', according to Köbler (2015).

This was partly due to relatively little pressure from civil society, partly because there have been far fewer people from former colonies living in Germany than, for example, the Netherlands, Belgium, France or Britain, all of which had colonies until the 1960s or even the 1970s.

As recently as 2018, Köbler and Melber interpreted that in Germany, colonial rule is often treated in a relativizing or even romanticizing and apologetic way. The demands of a civil society inspired by postcolonialism are often dismissed as ideological, and critical engagement with the history of colonial violence history is discredited.

For Zimmerer, European colonialism in general and German colonialism in particular continue to have about them a whiff of the exotic and the far-away. Zimmerer goes on to say that for most Germans, terms like 'Africa' or 'colonies' conjure up images of a European 'civilizing mission', of self-sacrificing missionaries, brave conquerors and fearless explorers. All of this applies especially to Namibia, a country that is still a big destination for German tourism (Zimmerer 2023, first published in 2011).

Attempts at reforms of the culture of remembrance

In recent years, public awareness has started changing, due to a new generation of scholars, the strengthening of postcolonial and anti-racist initiatives of the civil society, and an active Afro-German community (Melber 2024).

The debate on restitution of cultural heritage has gained momentum, notably with the report commissioned by the French President Emmanuel Macron and, in Germany, with the completion of the Humboldt Forum in Berlin. According to Eckert (2019), the investment of public money in research on restitution and provenance is a clear sign that those in power feel they are being called upon to do something about it.

In the past, colonial relics in public spaces, such as monuments and the names of buildings, places and streets, were rarely questioned. Today, colonial street names in German cities are being replaced by the names of Africans who resisted colonial rule.

In 2021, Germany's center-left coalition government, the 'Ampelkoalition', stated in its coalition agreement that Germany's culture of remembrance would be reformed to include colonial history and the histories of people who have migrated to Germany.

In 2024, however, the reform proposals of the Ministry of Culture were criticized, particularly by the directors of Holocaust memorial sites. According to them, the new framework would mean a 'paradigm shift that would lead to a fundamental weakening of the culture of remembrance' and that it departed from 'the long-standing consensus that National Socialist crimes must not be relativized' (DW 2024).

The so-called 'reconciliation agreement'

The Ovaherero began to demand apologies and reparations from Germany soon after Namibia's independence in 1990. Several German governments systematically avoided apologies for the genocide, especially regarding possible compensation.

In the centennial year of 2004, the genocide was commemorated by several civil society initiated memorial activities in Germany. The Minister of Economic Cooperation and Development, Heidemarie Wiczorek-Zeul, broke the taboo by recognizing the genocide and asking for forgiveness in her speech in Namibia. At the time, the German government labelled it a personal initiative (Kößler 2015). Nevertheless, German colonialism in Africa began to attract a little more public attention (Kößler and Melber 2018).

The turning point came in 2015, when the German Bundestag had recognized the Armenian genocide (Melber 2017, Eckert 2019). Not only did President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey accuse Germany of hypocrisy in the face of Germany's own colonial genocide – the German media also questioned the double standard. For the first time, the genocide in Namibia became a wider public issue.

Officials from the leading political parties realized that only the recognition of historical facts could restore some kind of moral high ground, according to Melber (2017). The social

democratic Foreign Minister Steinmeier could not escape the fact that his party, while in opposition, had tabled a parliamentary motion on Namibia with the Green party, introducing the term genocide.

In 2015, the spokesperson of the Foreign Ministry confirmed that the term genocide was now applicable to what had happened in South West Africa. By the end of the year, the German and Namibian governments had appointed special envoys for negotiations. The core issues were the form of an official apology and its consequences in terms of compensation (Melber 2022).

In May 2021, Germany and Namibia announced they had reached an agreement that was published as a joint declaration and called the 'reconciliation agreement'. In it, Germany acknowledged genocide 'from today's perspective' and promised Namibia the sum of 1.1 billion euros which was mostly earmarked for development projects over the next 30 years.

Germany strictly avoided any notions that could have had legal consequences. Famously, the term 'reparations' was deliberately avoided by Germany. Using the term would have created a far-reaching precedent. Instead, Germany stressed that the recognition of genocide does not imply any 'legal claims for compensation'.

In other words, Germany recognized the genocide politically and morally but not legally.

Reaction in Namibia: 'It is a worthless paper'

A significant proportion of the descendants of the Ovaherero and Nama genocide survivors reacted negatively to the joint declaration. Many considered the agreement an insult.

'It is a worthless paper we have flushed down the toilet,' said Nandiasora Mazeingo, whom I interviewed for a radio programme in 2022. Mazeingo headed the Ovaherero Genocide Foundation and served as an advisor to Ovaherero traditional leaders (Tolsa 2022).

Many were offended by the fact that the negotiations were held between the German and Namibian governments without the participation of representatives of all of the descendant groups and only included some of them.

In short, this is because Namibia's ruling party, SWAPO, represents a group of people who did not experience genocide. The interpretation is that the government did not have as much at stake in the negotiations as the Ovaherero.

Germany, on the other hand, approached the issue as intergovernmental. It did not wish to enter into direct negotiations with representatives of individual communities without the agreement of the Namibian government.

Moreover, there were differing opinions on the generosity of the amount of money offered by Germany to Namibia. For instance, Melber (2022) calculates that 1.1 billion euros is roughly

equivalent to the amount Germany has spent on development cooperation with Namibia over the past 30 years. The construction costs for the new Berlin airport had exceeded 7 billion by the time it opened.

For Nandiasora Mazeingo, the question of what would be the right amount is a condescending one: it is impossible to put a price on the dead, as well as on the development that failed to take place when the land and livelihoods of the Ovaherero were taken away, Mazeingo says (Tolsa 2022).

Land ownership is one of the big issues raised by the descendants. Most of the territory in the eastern, central and southern parts of Namibia is privately owned by mainly white and often German-speaking farmers.

For the Ovaherero, the distribution of land is a constant reminder that colonialism did not end with Namibia's independence.

'We have lost lives, cattle and land. What we have said we want to be returned is that which belongs to us. The land is here,' Nandiasora Mazeingo said in my interview in 2022. He pointed out that many descendants of German settlers are large landowners in Namibia, whereas many of the Ovaherero live in poverty. For Mazeingo, the solution should be for Germany to buy land from the descendants of the settlers and return it to its original owners.

Mazeingo also accused Germany of racism. Germany's approach to the Holocaust is quite different from its approach to the genocide of the Ovaherero, he said. Germany also speaks of the genocide in more vague terms, calling it a crime from today's perspective.

In Mazeingo's view, the whole thing was a German publicity stunt, and Germany had a global agenda: it wanted to be seen as a leader in finding closure to historical injustices.

No progress so far

The German-Namibian joint declaration was also criticized by a number of international organisations, including the European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights (ECCHR). According to the ECCHR,

Given the joint declaration's wording and lack of the term reparation therein, it avoids comprehensively acknowledging Germany's legal responsibility for its colonial legacy -- the gesture of an apology will remain purely symbolic if it is not connected to other means of reparations (Melber 2022).

In Namibia, the parliamentary debate on the joint declaration closed without a decision. The government announced that it would seek further negotiations with Germany. In 2023, lawyers for the Ovaherero and Nama communities called for the joint declaration to be declared invalid because it is in conflict with various articles of the Namibian Constitution.

In Germany, the Ampelkoalition was formed in December 2021 after the announcement of the German-Namibian agreement. Its coalition agreement expressed the will for a reappraisal of German colonial history and stated that reconciliation with Namibia remains an indispensable task resulting from Germany's historical and moral responsibility.

In November 2024, the Ampelkoalition collapsed.

Even if the governments of Namibia and Germany could find a way to renegotiate the agreement, it seems unlikely that some representatives of the Ovaherero and Nama communities will be willing to give up their demands. They do not acknowledge the Namibian government as the legitimate agency to negotiate on their behalf, while both the Namibian and German governments have argued the said representatives of the descendants should not have a direct say in the negotiations (Melber 2022).

A process followed closely by others

Even though the so-called reconciliation agreement fell through, many observers saw it as a turning point. For the first time, a former colonial power acknowledged a genocide in its former colony, offered an apology on a state level, and admitted that financial assistance was needed to remedy some of the consequences of the crime (Zimmerer, Melber).

For Germany, it was a step towards reducing colonial amnesia, with no turning back (Melber 2022).

Some see the declaration as a potential template for similar efforts in other countries (Melber 2022). In recent years, politicians and civil society activists in many former colonies have increasingly called on former colonial powers to take responsibility for their wrongs and possibly pay reparations. (Not to mention the demands for a complete restructuring of economic and political relations between former colonial powers and former colonies.)

In Melber's words (2022), the Namibian case could open a Pandora's box – for Germany, with regard to unresolved claims from World War II, but also for claims from other former colonies for similar crimes.

Melber assumes that other former colonial powers would have followed closely the negotiations with the Namibian government.

Other European countries would have wanted to see whether the process would set a legal precedent. And as we have seen, this is exactly what Germany seems to have wanted to avoid.

5 Methods and material

In view of the above, I was curious to find out what major German media were reporting about the former German colony. In more scientific terms: what representations of contemporary Namibia do three major German newspapers construct and convey to the public? What kind of perception of Namibia does the reader of these newspapers get from these articles?

I chose to look at the two largest quality daily newspapers in terms of circulation and reach: the Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ) and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ). I also included the Bild, Germany's best-selling daily newspaper. In some rankings, Die Welt is among the top three, but I decided to leave it out as it has the same publisher as the Bild.

It was surprisingly difficult to find up-to-date and comparable figures for the online editions of the media outlets. However, it is safe to say that the three papers are a representative sample of major German media, also in terms of their online audience.

All three papers are influential, albeit in slightly different ways. They are read by opinion leaders and can be argued to have the power to raise issues for debate and to influence their readers' perceptions.

My selection also aims at a certain diversity of political orientation. The three newspapers are often characterised in the following ways:

The Süddeutsche Zeitung is generally understood to be left-wing liberal. The Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung is said to be a mix of conservative and leftish-liberal tendencies, with different sections of the newspaper having different orientations. According to a [Deutschlandfunk description](#) from 2019, 'for decades, the FAZ was regarded as the leading conservative medium. Whether it can still be considered as such, however, is questionable. The politics section has returned to the Merkel line, the economics section has lost some of its ordoliberal edge and the features section is predominantly left-liberal'.

The Bild is understood to be a conservative or right-wing populist tabloid. Compared to the other two newspapers, it has a huge reach – and it also has agenda-setting power. The publisher-editor of Die Zeit, Josef Joffe, says in a 2020 [article in The Guardian](#) that he reads the Bild first thing in the morning as it sets the agenda, and that many politicians in Berlin probably do the same.

Selection of material: All articles about 'Namibia'

I realized quite early on that focusing on articles on colonialism would not be enough. That's why I decided to go through *all* of the articles published online by the three newspapers. I searched their article database with the search term 'Namibia'.

In this way, I got a wide range of material: articles from different sections of the newspapers, and articles of different types.

Moreover, I was striving for as much diversity as possible by deciding on a time window of three years. The first articles are from May 28, 2021, when the so-called reconciliation agreement was announced. I wanted to see how the newspapers covered the topic in the turbulent weeks that followed.

I also wanted to see what *else* was being said about Namibia and which issues were taken up in the years that followed. The last articles in my database are from May 28, 2024.

In total, there are 322 articles about Namibia in my database.

Most of the FAZ and SZ articles are behind a paywall. The Bild articles are free to read, except for a few Bild Plus ones. In the case of the SZ and Bild, I paid for a subscription to access all of the articles. At the FAZ, a standard subscription for the website only gives access to a handful of archive material. I therefore retrieved almost all of the FAZ articles from a database that was accessible through the Freie Universität library.

What I did not include in my database were articles where Namibia was nothing more than a one-off mention in a list of countries, or only mentioned as a neighbouring country of another country that was the actual topic of the article, or only referred to as a place an interviewee had visited at some point, et cetera. I concluded that such articles would not have much impact on readers' perception of Namibia.

Among the articles I left out is a story about the performance of the South African-British De Beers diamond company, a story about a teacher who once did an internship in Namibia, a story about a pop star who, among other things, is planning a trip to Namibia, a story in which Germany and Botswana are arguing over elephants, and articles on the results of international sports events.

As an exception to the rule, I did include a few articles on the COVID-19 pandemic as well as green hydrogen, even though Namibia did not play the main role in the articles but was rather referred to as part of a larger phenomenon.

For practical reasons, I only chose articles from the online editions of the newspapers. It is possible that the selection of articles online is different from the print edition. However, at least in the case of the FAZ, the only difference between the two seemed to be that a handful of short news stories that appeared in the print edition had not been published online. I know this as I went through the whole of the FAZ archive, which included the articles from the print edition and the online edition of the newspaper.

It is also possible that the online version of an article differs from what is published in the print edition. For the purposes of this project, I did not compare individual texts to check. This project is therefore specifically concerned with representations of Namibia on newspaper websites.

Some articles about Namibia might have escaped my radar. The search engine of the newspaper websites does not necessarily work in a foolproof way. At least this seems to be the case with the Bild: I repeated the search in May and June 2024, and not all articles appeared in the search results each time.

Therefore, any figures I present in this project should not be taken as the final exact truth about how many individual articles there were. This is not the goal of this work.

One should also bear in mind what I explained above: I have used editorial discretion, i.e. I have not included every article with a single mention of Namibia, but I have included *some* of them as representatives of their kind.

Classification of material: What is the context?

The way I approach the data can be described as a cross between qualitative and quantitative.

The large number of articles did not allow for a systematic analysis of linguistic features. However, I have carefully read through the articles to get an idea of the subject and its treatment. I will use examples from the texts when necessary to illustrate my point and to justify the classification of an article.

I placed each of the articles in one of two categories based on the topic and its treatment: 1) Articles about Namibia in the context of German colonialism and 2) other articles about Namibia – that is: in a non-colonial context.

Within these two categories, I outlined several thematic subgroups. I placed each of the 322 articles into one of these groups, based again on the topic and its treatment.

Of course, such a classification is not purely objective, as it inevitably reflects my own preconceptions. Someone else might have drawn different conclusions from the same data. There were also articles that might have fitted into two different categories or subgroups.

It should also be noted that my arguments are based on the database I created. Had I included, for instance, all COVID-19 articles that mentioned Namibia once, my database would have more articles with no colonial context, which might make the non-colonial category the largest one.

My conclusion is that the majority (171) of the 322 articles falls into the category of colonial context. In the SZ and the FAZ, most of the articles fall into this category.

The Bild was the only one of the three newspapers where less than half of the articles belonged to this category.

Namibia in the context of German colonialism: Thematic subgroups

In the category 'Namibia in the context of German colonialism', I divided the articles into the following thematic subgroups:

1. Germany's dealing with its colonial history
2. Germany's reconciliation process with Namibia
3. Museums and return of objects to former colonies
4. The colonial past in contemporary German-Namibian relations and in German foreign relations
5. In the footsteps of Germans in present-day Namibia

The first group has the highest number of articles, the second group the next highest, etc.

Group 1 contains articles on how the colonial period is dealt with in German media, films, theater, and politics. It also includes articles on new research on German colonialism, changes in German school curricula and changes in colonial street names.

Group 2 contains articles on the so-called reconciliation agreement announced in May 2021 and its subsequent stages in Namibia.

Group 3 articles deal with German museums and foundations that have started to research their colonial collections and/or are returning objects to the former colonies.

Group 4 articles discuss how Germany's colonial past comes up, for example, in the context of (future) energy partnerships with former colonies. This group also includes articles on the desire of some Namibian politicians to maintain good relations with Germany.

Group 5 articles are about German influence in present-day Namibia, such as colonial monuments and people and places of German origin.

Namibia in a non-colonial context: Thematic subgroups

The thematic subgroups for the articles on Namibia in a non-colonial context are as follows:

1. Modern Africa
2. Exotic Africa
3. African country in trouble
4. Accidents and crimes
5. COVID-19
6. Dangerous country for Europeans
7. Paradise for Europeans
8. Land of skilled workers

The articles in group 1 describe Namibia as a country with potential for renewable energy and scientific research. There are also articles on topics such as gender equality and Pride parades.

Group 2 articles are about Namibia's wildlife and people living in harmony with nature. In this group, I have also placed articles on wildlife conservation and hunting that do not fall into the colonialism category.

In the articles in group 3, Namibia is described as a developing country in Africa that does not really have any agency of its own, but is rather at the mercy of natural disasters and sometimes targeted by non-Western (hostile) foreign powers.

Group 4 includes articles on, for example, a plane crash in Namibia and animal parts illegally imported to Germany from Namibia.

Group 5 contains articles on the COVID-19 pandemic, mainly from the perspective of travel restrictions, as Namibia is a popular holiday destination for Germans.

The articles in group 6 are mainly about different encounters with wildlife and the challenges faced by German TV celebrities in Namibia.

Group 7 articles are about Germans who spend their holidays in Namibia or whose lives have changed in one way or another in Namibia.

Group 8 is related to group 1 ('modern Africa'), but I decided to separate it. The articles in this group are about educated Namibians who have come to work in Germany to ease the labour shortage.

Many of the articles that fall into the non-colonial context could be said to deal with Namibia in a *neocolonial context*.

In these articles, Namibia is often portrayed as a source of raw materials, energy or labour for Germany or for Europe – or as a destination for European tourism or investment.

6 Representations of Namibia in German media

Süddeutsche Zeitung: Most of the articles present Namibia in a colonial context

Erster Glaubenssatz: Deutschland war immer der niedliche Zwerg unter den Kolonialmächten, kein Vergleich zu Frankreich, Belgien oder Großbritannien. Zweiter Glaubenssatz: Deutschland hat die Afrikaner, die in seinen 'Protektoraten' lebten, nicht als Sklaven zugrunde gerichtet, sondern höchstens als Untertanen geknechtet. Dritter Glaubenssatz: Deutschland hat – Erinnerungsweltmeister, der es ist – die Opfer seines Kolonialismus jetzt immerhin so großzügig entschädigt wie kein Staat je zuvor.

Das sind drei Axiome deutscher Vergangenheitspolitik – Es sind dies drei gemütliche Lebenslügen dieses politischen Gemeinwesens. Drei Fälle von Selbsttäuschung, die nicht besser werden dadurch, dass Deutschland jüngst rund 30 Millionen Euro pro Jahr zur 'Versöhnung' an Namibia zugesagt hat.

This is what readers of the Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ) learned from an article that was published online under the headline [Lebenslügen einer Kolonialmacht](#) (Life lies of a colonial power) on September 16, 2021, some three months after the so-called reconciliation agreement between the governments of Germany and Namibia had been made public.

The article in question is a good example of the way the SZ reported on Namibia between 2021 and 2024. It explains how Germany is now returning objects of art to African countries but avoids paying reparations for colonial-era murders. The article opens with a list of three 'tenets of faith' that Germany has sought to hold on to in connection with its colonial past, even though they are not true.

The impression that emerges from the SZ articles is that the issue of colonial crimes is now being addressed more actively than before and that this is taking place at different levels of society. The articles typically describe in great detail the atrocities committed by the German colonial administration in Namibia. In many cases, the journalist calls for a more critical approach or a more comprehensive response to the past from the various actors involved.

Of the three newspapers, the SZ has the biggest number of articles that are more or less about Namibia: 159 articles between 2021 and 2024. I placed well over half of them (91) in the category '**Namibia in the context of German colonialism**'.

Less than half (68) fall into the category '**Namibia in a non-colonial context**'. In this category, there are several articles about the production of green hydrogen or green steel and Namibia's potential in this respect, usually from the perspective of Europeans. There are also articles about science and research in Namibia. In a few articles, Namibia is presented as a country where gender equality is almost as advanced as in Germany.

Several articles frame Namibia as an exotic destination, with exciting animals, natural environments and indigenous peoples with whom Germans or other Europeans have had

encounters. There are numerous articles about hunting from different perspectives. There are also traditional crisis news stories, with Namibia suffering from drought or the COVID-19 pandemic or being in need of other forms of assistance.

Below is a more detailed description of the articles. I am using the classification I presented earlier, with the articles divided by theme into different subgroups.

In contrast to the other quality newspaper I am looking at in this project, the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, the SZ has several articles which, according to the newspaper's own words, have been taken directly from the DPA news agency. I will not single them out, as the matter is of little relevance to my project.

Direct and detailed accounts of the atrocities

When the SZ reports on Namibia **in the context of colonialism**, the most prominent theme of the articles is '**Germany's dealing with its colonial history**'.

The articles (30) typically give a direct and detailed account of the crimes committed in Namibia. Many of the articles discuss the need for more information, or call for more critical attitudes or broader action on the part of various German actors.

The articles usually focus on German people, institutions or interviewees. The focus is on what Germany or the Germans are doing about their colonial past – not on what people in Namibia might think about it.

The above-mentioned article *Lebenslügen einer Kolonialmacht* belongs to this thematic subgroup. It asks why it is so difficult for Germany to take real responsibility for its colonial crimes in Namibia, for example:

In der deutschen Diskussion über die Verantwortung, die aus Kolonialunrecht folgt, lässt sich seit einiger Zeit eine Art Persönlichkeitsspaltung erkennen. Wo es um die Rückgabe geraubarer Kulturgüter geht ("Restitution"), bewegt sich viel. Im positiven Sinne. -- Wo es aber um die Entschädigung von Menschen geht ("Reparationen"), mauern die Ex-Kolonialmächte, einschließlich Deutschland, weiter.

--

Es ist Rosinenpickerei, mit der Deutschland dem Ruf nach Aufarbeitung seiner kolonialen Vergangenheit begegnet.

Other articles in the same thematic group discuss, among other things, how the culture of remembrance in Germany has evolved. An example is this article from May 2021, published shortly after the German-Namibian reconciliation agreement:

Die relativ kurze, blutige Geschichte des deutschen Kolonialismus ist in der Bundesrepublik nicht unbedingt "verdrängt" worden, wie das manchmal zu hören ist. Aber sie ist angesichts

der deutschen Epochenverbrechen während der Nazi-Zeit in den Hintergrund geraten, ohne dass die Debatte selbst verstummt wäre.

([Der schwierige Umgang der Deutschen mit ihrer kolonialen Vergangenheit](#), May 29, 2021)

The article also states:

Andererseits aber hallte auch in Westdeutschland in manchen Kreisen noch lange der Mythos vom harten, aber gerechten Siedlertum in "Deutsch-Südwest" oder der bis 1918 angeblich unbesiegten Truppe des Generals Lettow-Vorbeck in "Deutsch-Ost" nach.

Some of the articles present studies that provide new insights into the colonial period. For instance, historian Matthias Häussler has published the diaries of Lothar von Trotha, who gave the annihilation order of the Ovaherero (["Die Siedler hatten Interesse an einer Eskalation"](#), January 3, 2024), while archaeologist Katja Lembke has been researching the first German concentration camp in Namibia ([Verheerende Lage](#), December 13, 2023).

There are a couple of articles on renaming streets and changing school curricula. One of them explains, for example, how the state government of Lower Saxony is planning changes to both the curriculum and teacher training to raise awareness of the atrocities of German colonialism:

"Überall finden sich Spuren und kolonial-rassistische Aussagen und Andeutungen, so auch in Schulbüchern und Lernmaterialien", sagte die Grünen-Politikerin. Auch die Ausbildung gelte es zu verbessern: "Lehrkräfte sind nicht ausreichend darin ausgebildet, sich kritisch mit diesen Inhalten auseinanderzusetzen", meinte Nzume. Das solle geändert werden.

(Green Party politician Lena Nzume in [Landesregierung plant neuen Umgang mit Kolonialgeschichte](#), May 12, 2023)

In this subgroup I also included several articles on German cultural products that deal with the colonial period. In 2023, for example, when the SZ reported on Sebastian Hirn's theatre performance in Munich, the article explains in detail what Germany did in Namibia at the beginning of the 20th century, quoting von Trotha's annihilation order ([Zu Besuch im Land der Täter](#), 6.9.2023). In 2021, the SZ reports on *Chief Hijangua*, a Namibian opera about German colonialism ([Standleitung nach Windhoek](#), November 30, 2021).

There are several articles on the *Der vermessene Mensch*, a German film on the colonial period in Namibia. According to the articles, the film has been criticized for clichés; however, in one of the articles producer Thomas Kufus gets to say he is disappointed by the criticism because, according to him, the filmmakers paid close attention to the subject matter (["Ich habe ein Interesse daran, Missstände aufzudecken"](#), May 25, 2023).

In 2023, the SZ published several articles about a TV documentary about the colonial era broadcast by ARD. Many people in Germany and Namibia were outraged and wrote open letters claiming that the documentary was incorrect. The SZ journalist criticizes the documentary for being lazy and says that there were indeed factual errors:

Der Film, der sich vor allem an Jüngere richtet, verunklärt seinen Gegenstand und enthält einen fatalen Subtext: Wenn die Öffentlich-Rechtlichen das Thema schon nicht ernst nehmen, dann brauchen es die Zuschauer erst recht nicht zu tun.

[\(Zu leicht genommen](#), November 28, 2023)

According to the same article, however, the most irritating aspect of the documentary for many was that German colonialism was called into question:

Die Unterzeichner der Briefe betonen, sie stellten die "an den einheimischen Bewohnern begangenen Verbrechen, Misshandlungen und Diskriminierungen" nicht infrage. Dennoch ist unübersehbar, dass ihnen vor allem die Kolonialismus-Kritik des Films nicht passt.

Some of the SZ articles also explain that remembering colonialism does not please everyone in Germany and Namibia. A few articles also refer to the long-standing German dispute about comparing colonial crimes to the Holocaust.

Museums going through their collections

Another major thematic subgroup (24) in the SZ is **'museums and return of objects to former colonies'**.

In these articles, the SZ reports on a number of German museums that have begun to further investigate their colonial collections or are even preparing to return objects to African countries, including to Namibia. For example, an article from 2022 reports that, according to the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz, the return of 23 objects is based on 'exemplary' cooperation with the Museums Association of Namibia ([23 Objekte aus Ethnologischem Museum gehen nach Namibia](#), May 19, 2022).

The articles give the impression that German museums have so far had little knowledge of their own colonial collections, nor do they necessarily know the function of individual objects.

Moreover, the stories give the impression that there has been a major change of attitude in the museum sector in Germany. In the light of new information, objects previously on display in museums have been withdrawn ([Wenige Sammlungsobjekte mit "unbedenklicher" Herkunft](#), October 23, 2023). In Freiburg, for example, there is direct talk of guilt: the press release for the new exhibition explains how Freiburg residents participated in the colonial administration and visited the so-called 'exhibitions of people' and how scientists at the University of Freiburg used the colonial infrastructure for their research ([Ausstellung beleuchtet Kolonialismus damals und heute](#), June 24, 2022).

In another article we learn that German museums hold the remains of 17,000 people from the colonial era. The article explains the racist background of such collections and the change in attitudes: a guidebook published by the German Museum Association in 2013 still defended the study of human remains, but the 2021 version condemns it. The Grassi

Museum in Leipzig, for example, no longer talks about remains (*Überresten*) but about ancestors (*Ahnen*):

“Für uns sind diese Überreste keine Objekte mehr, sondern Subjekte”, sagt Meijer-van Mensch. Menschliche Überreste sind daher immer getrennt von den Museumsobjekten und in einem geschlossenen Teil des Depots zu lagern: “Es ist ein Friedhof im Kontext des Museums.” (Museum director Léontine Meijer-van Mensch in [Albtraumhaftes Erbe](#), January 1, 2024)

‘This is long overdue’

There are also many articles (19) about **‘Germany’s reconciliation process with Namibia’**. In May and June 2021, the SZ, like all of the newspapers I studied, closely followed the developments after the so-called reconciliation agreement was made public.

The SZ published news stories, backgrounders, news analyses and comment pieces on the topic from different angles. Many of the articles describe in detail the crimes committed by Germany in Namibia. There are several articles in which the journalist and/or interviewee express themselves in a very straightforward way about the German colonial period in Namibia and the so-called reconciliation process.

For example, in an article in which historian Henning Melber assesses the agreement, there is talk of a ‘slap in the face of the descendants’ and an ‘open wound’ (*‘Das bleibt eine offene Wunde’*, August 4, 2021). A comment piece in May 2021 begins with a description of how the Germans either shot the Ovaherero or drove them into the desert to die, and how afterwards an officer wrote in his diary how the voices of the dying men finally faded into a ‘sublime silence of infinity’. Germany confesses its deeds at last, the article says:

Das ist überfällig. Viel zu lange hat das Land die eigene Kolonialgeschichte ignoriert. ([Eingeständnis eines Verbrechens](#), May 28, 2021)

Not long after the publication of the agreement, the SZ reports that the agreement is being heavily criticized not only by the Namibian opposition, but also by Ovaherero and Nama associations, for example in the article *‘Eine schockierende Offenbarung’* (May 31, 2021). There are articles explaining what the colonial era did to land ownership in Namibia and what the impacts are today (*Chor der Vernachlässigten*, May 28, 2021). In one of the articles, the historian Jürgen Zimmerer analyzes the reasons for the agreement’s running into difficulties (*Europas dunkle Seite*, June 7, 2021). The articles also report on the reception of the agreement in Germany: the partly far-right AfD party says it ‘continues Germany’s culture of apology’, while Archbishop Ludwig Schick welcomes the agreement.

In the articles of this thematic group, Namibian politicians and Namibian community leaders also have a voice. However, many of the experts interviewed or quoted are German.

‘Germany’s special responsibility for Namibia’

A much smaller proportion of the SZ articles fall into two subgroups that I call **'the colonial past in contemporary German-Namibian relations and in German foreign relations'** and **'in the footsteps of Germans in present-day Namibia'**. I have placed fewer than ten articles in each group.

The relevance of colonialism to contemporary German-Namibian relations is highlighted, for example, in articles on the German-Namibian energy partnership. These include articles about German politicians' trips to Namibia. An article published in 2023 about a trip by Wolfgang Tiefensee, Thuringia's State Minister for Economy, underlines Germany's 'special responsibility for Namibia':

"Unabhängig davon verbindet Deutschland aber eine besondere Partnerschaft mit und eine besondere Verantwortung für Namibia", betonte Tiefensee. "Im Blick auf die koloniale Vergangenheit können und wollen wir auf unserer Ebene einen Beitrag dazu leisten, dass alte Wunden heilen." Der Weg dazu führe über geplante gemeinsame Ausbildungsprojekte in der Bauwirtschaft oder die Unterstützung beim Hausbau-Programm der namibischen Regierung. ([Wasserstoff und Bauprojekte: Minister reist im Süden Afrikas](#), October 15, 2023)

Another article about the trip of the Federal Minister of Economy, Robert Habeck, explains Namibia's plans to produce green hydrogen, which is to be brought to Germany to replace natural gas. However, the story moves on to talk about colonialism.

Habeck spricht von einem "ethischen Imperativ". Mit dem Wissen des Unrechts und des Schadens, den der Kolonialismus in Afrika angerichtet habe, verbiete sich eine Denke, wie Deutschland am allermeisten profitiere, sagt Habeck mit Blick auf das Wasserstoffprojekt. ([Habeck auf Wasserstoff-Mission - Große Hoffnungen in Namibia](#), December 9, 2022)

An article about Habeck's 2022 visit starts with him visiting a museum to commemorate the genocide of the Ovaherero ([Habecks Auszeit in der Zukunft](#), December 7, 2022). In a third article, Habeck says Germany cannot accept any form of green energy imperialism ([Wunderwaffe gegen den Klimawandel?](#) December 5, 2022).

In an article from May 2024 we learn that the criticism Germany gets for its treatment of history suits Russia's interests very well. In the article, Russia gloats at Germany for having been involved in drafting a text at the UN to commemorate the Srebrenica genocide. According to the Russian ambassador, Germany has no moral authority even to mention the word genocide 'to describe anything other than its own brutal crimes' ([UN führen Gedenktag für Völkermord von Srebrenica ein](#), May 23, 2024).

Several articles in the group 'in the footsteps of Germans in present-day Namibia' are about a meeting between German and Namibian towns that are both called Lüderitz. Interestingly, three different stories on this topic take three different approaches to colonial history.

An article from 2023 only reports that German culture is still present in Lüderitz, Namibia ([Lüderitzer aus Namibia besuchen Partner in der Altmark](#), September 5, 2023). An article from

2022 mentions the colonial crimes that have led Lüderitz to consider changing its name ([Partnerschaft zwischen Altmark und Namibia vertieft](#), November 13, 2022). Another article from 2022 tells a slightly different story: when the government wanted to change the name of the town, the residents – both black and white – took to the streets ([Lüderitzer aus Altmark reisen ins namibische Lüderitz](#), November 2, 2022).

'Not the stereotypical Africa' but one 'full of dynamism'

When the Süddeutsche Zeitung reports on Namibia **in a non-colonial context**, by far the biggest number of articles (22) is in the thematic subgroup I call **'modern Africa'**.

Some of these articles describe science and research in Namibia. For example, giraffes have been transferred from Namibia to Angola as part of a conservation project in 2024. The story explains how the Namibia University of Science and Technology conducted a feasibility study to assess the risks of the project ([13 Giraffen von Namibia nach Angola umgesiedelt](#), May 23, 2024).

Another article explains how a German institution of higher education plans to work more closely with a Namibian university ([Hochschule Anhalt will mit Uni in Namibia zusammenarbeiten](#), December 5, 2022). Namibian research is also mentioned in an article on the parody Nobel prizes: Namibian scientists have been involved in finding out whether it is safer to transport rhinos upside down ([Kaugummi-Bakterien und Kino-Düfte: Ig-Nobelpreise verliehen](#), September 10, 2021).

Several of the articles in this group mention the production of green hydrogen or green steel in Africa. A few of the articles are broader ones about climate change where Namibia is mentioned as a country with excellent conditions for producing green hydrogen from solar and wind power (e.g. [Jetzt kommt es auf den Wasserstoff an](#), July 27, 2023). Some of the articles mention an energy partnership with Germany, as Germany has had to look for new partnerships in Africa since the Russian invasion of Ukraine (e.g. [Afrika erhebt seine Stimme im Klimawandel](#), September 6, 2023). Some articles discuss business opportunities for German companies in Namibia, such as the one about Saxony's State Minister for Economy Martin Dulig travelling to Southern Africa ([Dulig reist mit Delegation nach Mosambik und Namibia](#), June 2, 2023).

A comment piece on Minister Habeck's visit to Namibia underlines how the destination is not the stereotypical Africa of bad news, but a different kind of Africa, and how German companies just don't realize that countries like Namibia are developing fast and make good partners:

Es ist nicht das Afrika aus den Nachrichten, das Robert Habeck dieser Tage besucht hat. Der deutsche Wirtschaftsminister war nicht im Kontinent der Krisen, Katastrophen und Hungersnöte, sondern in einem voller Aufbruch und Dynamik. Die meisten deutschen Unternehmen aber schauen staunend zu. Was für ein Fehler.
([Auf nach Afrika](#), December 8, 2022)

A few articles present Namibia as a country where gender equality is almost as advanced as in Germany ([Gleichstellungsindex: Deutschland rückt auf 6. Platz vor](#), June 21, 2023) and where (unlike in many African countries) the LGBTQ community is able to organize a Pride event.

There is also a relatively high number of articles (12) in the **'exotic Africa'** subgroup. Most of these stories are about Namibian nature in one way or another.

For instance, a German writer has had a wonderful encounter with an antelope in Namibia ([Der unbekannte Star](#), March 21, 2024); India receives cheetahs as a gift from Namibia, where they are still abundant ([Indien siedelt wieder Geparden an](#), September 17, 2022). A science article from 2022 talks about elephants as an export product. According to the article, dwindling water resources in Namibia have pitted local people against animal populations. The Namibian government has started to trade elephants to regions such as Dubai, which has also been internationally condemned ([Graue Riesen als Exportschlager? - Elefantenschützer empört](#), March 13, 2022).

The vast Namibian deserts are the subject of a 2023 science article, in which German archaeologists have been working with Namibian trackers who use their traditional knowledge to help interpret rock engravings in the Namibian mountains ([In der Jäger-und-Sammler-Schule](#), September 13, 2023). Another story describes symmetrical red rings appearing in the desert, a phenomenon on which scientists have not yet agreed:

Womöglich sind die mysteriösen Kreise in der Wüste die Fußabdrücke unbekannter Riesenlebewesen? Oder Landeplätze für Ufos? Oder vielleicht doch Tanzflächen für Feen? ([Der Mythos der Feenkreise](#), January 11, 2022).

The group also contains several articles on Germans hunting in Namibia and the import of hunting trophies into Germany. One of the articles mentions Namibia as a country where hunters want to follow Hemingway's footsteps in the 'bush'. In another one, Christian Schmitt, who runs a hunting lodge in Namibia, explains how regulated hunting does not endanger protected species and how the real problems are poaching and local people who do not like dense animal populations ([Unversöhnliche Debatte um Trophäenjagd](#), January 31, 2024).

The next biggest subgroups (up to 10 articles) are the thematic groups **'COVID-19'**, **'accidents and crimes'** and **'African country in trouble'**.

Articles on the COVID-19 pandemic mostly mention Namibia in the context of the ever-changing travel restrictions, often as one of several countries. Namibia is a popular travel destination for Germans, and in 2021 an article declares that South Africa and Namibia, 'beloved by Germans', are now open for travel under certain conditions ([Winterurlaub: Welche Fernziele sind machbar?](#) September 30, 2021). Some articles say that Namibia has been badly affected by COVID-19; Berlin has donated protection and medical equipment ([Namibia: Berlin schenkt Partnerstadt medizinische Ausrüstung](#), February 8, 2022).

Despite the name of the group, the SZ 'accidents and crimes' articles do not depict Namibia as a particularly dangerous country.

The accident stories are about a fatal plane crash involving a German family in Namibia in 2022. The articles are written in a fairly neutral tone: they do not give the impression that flying in Namibia is particularly dangerous, as the accident is largely blamed on an inexperienced South African pilot ([Überladene Cessna, unerfahrene Pilotin](#), May 24, 2023). The crime stories are about prohibited goods arriving at Frankfurt airport from Namibia, or about drunken Eastern European sailors arriving in Germany from Namibia ([Betrunkene Seeleute über den Wolken: Polizeieinsatz](#), January 24, 2022).

In the 'African country in trouble' articles, Namibia is portrayed as a stereotypical developing country, subject to intervention by foreign players or at the mercy of climate change.

This is the case, for example, in an 2024 article, where the worst drought in 100 years threatens millions of people and Namibia has declared a state of emergency ([Dürre in Afrika: Namibia erklärt Ausnahmezustand](#), May 27, 2024). Similarly, in 2023, the UN warns of a worsening education crisis in Southern Africa ([UN warnen vor Bildungskrise in Ost- und Südafrika](#), January 24, 2023).

This group also includes an interview with a German priest living in Southern Africa. According to him, Africa needs a new kind of development aid. Otherwise, there is a risk that migration to Europe will accelerate:

'Wenn wir es nicht schaffen, Menschen in Afrika zu halten, ihnen die Möglichkeiten zu einer Ausbildung und Wertschöpfung zu geben, dann werden die nächste und übernächste Generation in Europa neben dem Klimawandel noch eine andere Katastrophe zu bewältigen haben' – –

(Stefan Hippler in [Pfarrer Hippler: Afrika braucht andere Entwicklungshilfe](#), October 27, 2023)

In this group I have also placed two articles on the death of Martti Ahtisaari, former President of Finland and Nobel Peace Prize laureate. In these articles, Namibia is described as a country that had to struggle for independence, which Ahtisaari contributed to ([Friedensnobelpreisträger Ahtisaari tot](#), October 16, 2023).

I have placed a few individual articles in the subgroups '**land of skilled workers**', '**paradise for Europeans**' and '**dangerous country for Europeans**'.

In the SZ, there are a few articles on skilled workers from Namibia who have come to ease the labour shortage in Germany, and the experience is good ([Erzieherinnen aus dem Ausland gegen Fachkräftemangel](#), April 1, 2024).

In the Süddeutsche Zeitung, there are strikingly few 'paradise' and 'danger' articles, especially in comparison to the Bild. Among the articles about a 'paradise for Europeans' there is, for instance, an article on a German writer who has moved to Namibia and found a new kind of

human and artistic freedom (["Es gibt einfach Punkte im Leben, wo man sich verloren fühlt"](#), May 3, 2024). In the articles about a 'dangerous country for Europeans' we get to read, among other things, about a British man who ran across Africa and who, according to his own account, constantly found himself in dangerous situations and got bad food poisoning in Namibia (["Brite läuft durch Afrika - Zweifel an Rekord"](#), April 8, 2024).

On the challenges of classification

Not all of the SZ articles fit neatly into just one or the other category or subgroup. For example, articles about Namibia's economy often refer to Germany's colonial history in the country.

The articles about Habeck's 2022 visit to Namibia are a good example of the subjective nature of classification in my project. I have interpreted some of the Habeck stories as belonging to the colonialism context and placed them in the group 'the colonial past in contemporary German-Namibian relations and in German foreign relations'. However, when the main focus of the article is clearly on the 'potential' of present-day Namibia, I have placed it in the non-colonial context and in the group 'modern Africa'.

Bild: Most of the articles present Namibia in a non-colonial context

DIESE Drohung dürfte deutsche Diplomaten den Schweiß auf die Stirn treiben... -- Vekuii Reinhard Rukoro (66) zu BILD: "Wir werden eine riesige Demonstration veranstalten gegen Steinmeier, Massen von Herero und Nama!" -- Der politische Schaden für Deutschlands Diplomatie wäre immens.

This is what an online article in the Bild said on June 4, 2021, under the headline [Herero-Boss bläst zum Marsch auf Namibias "Tintenpalast"](#).

The snippet above is a good example of how the tabloid wrote about Namibia in 2021–2024. Sensationalism is a concept often associated with the Bild. A typical angle on many articles on German-Namibian relations is that things are going wrong in one way or another – sometimes because of Namibian demands, sometimes because of the actions of German politicians, often the Greens.

The Bild had a total of 58 articles on Namibia. In contrast to the two quality newspapers, the Süddeutsche Zeitung and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, the majority of articles in the Bild (31) are about **Namibia in a non-colonial context**.

Most of these articles report on **'accidents and crimes'**, or describe the dangers Europeans have encountered in Namibia. The group includes numerous articles in which the Bild follows the misfortunes of German reality TV personalities in Namibia. (The SZ and the FAZ did not report anything on reality TV.) In the Bild, Namibia is a land of wildlife and wilderness. Unlike the other two newspapers, Bild only has a handful of articles that fit into the **'modern Africa'** subgroup – these articles usually deal with green energy.

Many of the Bild articles often highlight anecdotes that perpetuate the image of Africa as exotic and foreign. For example, a couple from a reality TV show living in rural Namibia joke that they will do everything they can to prevent their child from being eaten ([Beim Kaiserschnitt wirkte die Narkose nicht richtig](#), June 8, 2021).

An article on a talented Namibian early childhood education professional who has moved to Germany, says she could teach at a school in her home country, but many parents still do not send their children to school ([Erste Stadt holt Erzieherinnen aus Namibia](#), March 22, 2024). In an article about a plane crash involving a German family, the Bild vividly describes how they clearly had no chance: 'There are hippos and crocodiles in the river, an eyewitness told the local newspaper' ([Anwohner hörten noch die Schreie aus dem Wrack... dann war Stille](#), September 1, 2022).

In many of the Bild's articles, Namibia is framed right at the beginning as a former colony, *ex-Kolonie*, sometimes even in the headline. It is possible, of course, that this is mainly to help the reader get a quick idea of which far-off country the story is about. (From my editorial experience, I know that a certain simplicity and a degree of familiarity in the headline increases the likelihood that readers will click on stories about distant countries.) However,

my theory of conscious framing is supported by the fact that in the Bild's articles, Namibia is also routinely referred to by its colonial name, *Deutsch-Südwestafrika*. In the two other newspapers, the SZ and the FAZ, this practice is absent.

The Bild also has many articles where the topic is linked to German colonialism. In May 2021, the Bild (as well as the SZ and the FAZ) followed in several articles the so-called reconciliation agreement and its aftermath in Namibia. The articles give a direct account of the crimes committed by Germany in the past. There is no attempt to erase or explain away the past.

In many of the articles, there is detailed analysis of Namibia's domestic politics and of the reasons for the failure of the agreement. Sometimes things are over-simplified, at least to my understanding: for example, the Ovaherero politician Vekuii Rukoro is described as having opposed the agreement mainly because he personally felt he was sidelined in the negotiations ([Kämpfer gegen Herero-Abkommen mit Deutschland stirbt an Corona](#), June 18, 2021).

Many of the Bild's articles on the topic give a voice to Namibian politicians and Namibian community leaders, although many of the experts interviewed or quoted are German.

Namibians in general often get to have a voice in the Bild's articles. Many articles feature interviews with Namibian politicians. On the other hand, they are most often presented as critics of Germany – the framing of these articles is usually of the type 'Harsh criticism from Africa: The German government screwed up again'. Namibians may also be portrayed as untrustworthy – for example, perhaps the best-known opponent of the German-Namibian agreement, Vekuii Rukoro, is presented as a luxury-loving businessman and populist who makes unrealistic promises ([Was macht Namibia jetzt mit den 1,1 Mrd. aus Deutschland?](#), May 28, 2021).

In the Süddeutsche Zeitung and Frankfurter Allgemeine, the Namibian interviewees are more diverse: they represent different social positions and many different perspectives. In the SZ and FAZ articles, a Namibian interviewee may reflect on the issue at hand from different perspectives, whereas in the Bild articles each interviewee usually has only one message.

Below is a more detailed description of the articles. I am using the classification I presented earlier, with the articles divided into different subgroups.

Encounters with wild animals, challenges for reality TV celebrities

When the Bild talks about Namibia in a non-colonial context, the two biggest thematic subgroups are '**accidents and crimes**' (8) and '**dangerous country for Europeans**' (7). This is in stark contrast to the Süddeutsche Zeitung and Frankfurter Allgemeine, both of which have by far the biggest number of articles in the 'modern Africa' subgroup. The FAZ has only a few individual articles in the groups of danger, accident or crime. The SZ also has only 10 such

articles out of a total of 159. (In comparison, the SZ has almost three times as many Namibia articles as the Bild).

Even though accidents and crimes are over-represented in the Bild's coverage, the topics of these articles are largely the same as in the SZ articles on the same subjects. There are several stories about a small plane crash that took the lives of a German family in Namibia, and, like in the SZ, the events are reported in a fairly neutral tone; the articles do not give the impression that flying in Namibia is particularly dangerous. The accident is blamed on an inexperienced South African pilot and a tour operator, whose country of origin is not disclosed ([Ihr Kleinflugzeug war zu schwer und zu langsam](#), May 23, 2023).

The group also includes short news stories about drunken sailors from third countries arriving at Frankfurt from Namibia, and about illegal animal parts seized by the customs at Frankfurt. Thus, these articles do not paint a picture of Namibia as an unsafe country with a high crime rate.

In the '**dangerous country for Europeans**' subgroup I have placed articles on frightening encounters with wild animals and articles on the misfortunes of German reality TV celebrities in Namibia. For instance, there is a video story about a hippo attacking a tourist boat despite the tourists keeping quiet and keeping their distance ([Nilpferd verbeißt sich in Motorboot](#), May 11, 2024). A black mamba has bitten a German documentary filmmaker who has been living in a corrugated iron hut 'like the locals'. The bite happened when the man decided to take a selfie with the snake. Fortunately, a local woman was there to revive him ([Deutscher Tierfilmer von Todes-Mamba gebissen](#), April 5, 2023).

According to the articles, a couple from a German reality TV show is having a lot of difficulties in their country of residence. In one story, their farm in Namibia has been set on fire. The Bild reports the comments Anna Heiser's comments:

Der unbekannte Brandstifter konnte noch nicht geschnappt wurden. Noch schlimmer: Auf die Polizei in Namibia sei laut Anna wenig Verlass. -- Ihr Plan ist es nun, das Schießen zu lernen, auch wenn sie niemals ernsthaft zu einer Waffe greifen möchte.
([Farm von "Bauer sucht Frau"-Paar angezündet](#), May 26, 2023)

On another occasion, the couple crashed their car into an antelope, and Heiser says she narrowly escaped death. According to the article, such collisions are common in Namibia, though rare with such large animals ([Schwerer Unfall bei "Bauer sucht Frau"-Star Anna](#), May 8, 2023).

Fewer articles about 'modern Africa' than in SZ and FAZ

There are only two to three articles in all of the Bild's other non-colonialism thematic subgroups. The articles about '**modern Africa**' are about renewable energy projects in Southern Africa and Germany. According to an article, environmentalists in Namibia oppose the planned wind and solar parks ([Habeck gesteht Doppelmoral seiner Energiepolitik](#),

December 8, 2022). In this subgroup, I have also placed an article about a Namibian politician called Adolf Hitler Uunona. No doubt the Bild is reporting on him mainly because the name guarantees a certain kind of interest. Be that as it may, the article explains how the politician is committed to campaigning against domestic violence and wants to educate people about 'toxic masculinity' ([Adolf Hitler kämpft gegen "toxische Männlichkeit"](#), December 3, 2022).

In the '**land of skilled workers**' group, there are a couple of articles about Namibian early childhood education professionals who are presented as success stories and who are more than qualified for their job in Germany because they have a higher education than the job requires. One of them is 26-year-old Theresa Ndala, recruited from the University of Windhoek, who loves German children, snow and Currywurst. Her manager Eva Jethon says:

"Das ist eine Erfolgsgeschichte. Es ist auch kulturell und menschlich ein großer Gewinn für unsere Einrichtungen und die Kinder."

([Erste Stadt holt Erzieherinnen aus Namibia](#), March 22, 2024)

Unlike the FAZ, the Bild does not raise the question of the brain drain, i.e. what Namibia stands to lose by educating people who then go for the German labour market.

The group '**African country in trouble**' includes, for instance, an article about a severe drought affecting Southern Africa ([Schlimmste Dürre seit 100 Jahren](#), April 23, 2024) and a couple of articles about China's actions in Africa. One of these articles, behind a paywall unlike most other Namibia stories in the Bild, explains how 'China wants to subjugate Africa' and has built a training centre for young politicians from the ruling parties of Southern Africa, including the SWAPO of Namibia, to mould them to Beijing's wishes ([So will China Afrika unterwerfen](#), December 9, 2023).

Another article reports that a Chinese company has effectively pushed a German cement company out of Namibia. The case involves allegations of high-level corruption: President Hage Geingobi is said to be in close contact with the Chinese. German tax money, which was supposed to benefit Namibia, is also said to flow indirectly to China ([Zementwerk-Zoff beim Namibia-Hitler](#), December 31, 2021).

The articles in the '**exotic Africa**' subgroup are mostly about wildlife. The Prime Minister of India has donated himself cheetahs from Namibia, where they are still abundant ([Indischer Premier schenkt sich acht Geparden](#), September 18, 2022). In another article, conservationists have pushed a beached whale back into the sea ([Männer schieben Buckelwal zurück ins Meer](#), July 25, 2021).

In one of the articles in the '**paradise for Europeans**' group, a German reality TV celebrity has proposed in a national park in Namibia: between lions and zebras, he knelt down in front of his boyfriend ([TV-Moderator Maurice Gadjia \(40\) macht Heiratsantrag](#), October 16, 2023). In another story, another German celebrity is on a 'love safari' with her new boyfriend. She has lost her heart to Namibia – where the lovers are surrounded by untouched nature and wildlife in a luxury Austrian-owned lodge ([HÜ-HOTT Girl Summer](#), April 14, 2023).

'The African is horrified'

Among the articles that I have classified in the category of **Namibia in the context of German colonialism**, one thematic subgroup is completely missing in the Bild. The tabloid does not report anything on **'museums and return of objects to former colonies'**, whereas in the SZ and the FAZ there are more than 30 articles in this group.

In the Bild, most of the articles in this category are about **'Germany's reconciliation process with Namibia'**, **'the colonial past in contemporary German-Namibian relations and in German foreign relations'**, and **'Germany's dealing with its colonial history'**. There are almost 10 articles in each group.

An article published immediately after the announcement of the German-Namibian reconciliation agreement asks what Namibia plans to do with the money promised by Germany. Vekuii Rukoro, a major opponent of the agreement, is said to have promised each Ovaherero one million Namibian dollars, or about 55,000 euros, in compensation from Germany. The article also reports on the disagreements between the Ovaherero and explains the background to the reconciliation process. Dr Clemens von Doderer of the Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung, presented as a Namibia expert, suggests that Namibian youths do not hold a grudge against Germany:

"Die Entschädigungszahlungen sind eher ein Thema der Altvorderen unter den Hereros, die Jugend blickt nach vorn. Die historischen Wunden bedürfen der Heilung, aber das Zusammenleben im Alltag gestaltet sich viel harmonischer und persönlicher, als man angesichts der Geschichte denken könnte. Die Menschen in Namibia sind sehr pragmatisch."
[\(Was macht Namibia jetzt mit den 1,1 Mrd. aus Deutschland?, May 28, 2021\)](#)

A couple of days later, it is reported that the Ovaherero do not accept the agreement and that some demand up to 477 billion euros from Germany. The ruling SWAPO politician Kazenambo Kazenambo calls the Namibian government a German puppet: *"Der gesamte Prozess zeigt, dass Deutschland alles kontrolliert!"* The article also claims that President Geingob is counting on funds from Germany because he has to cover the expenses of his bloated state machinery ([Herero-Vertreter fordern 477 Milliarden Euro von Deutschland](#), June 1, 2021).

Some time later, the Ovaherero leader Rukoro threatens a protest march. According to the Bild, *DIESE Drohung dürfte deutschen Diplomaten den Schweiß auf die Stirn treiben...* ([Herero-Boss bläst zum Marsch auf Namibias "Tintenpalast"](#), June 4, 2021). In the summer of 2021, the agreement faces headwinds due to COVID-19, as key Namibian officials die of the disease. Bild follows up with several articles and suggests that Rukoro rejected the agreement with Germany in part because he felt he was ignored ([Kämpfer gegen Herero-Abkommen mit Deutschland stirbt an Corona](#), June 18, 2021).

In the group **'the colonial past in contemporary German-Namibian relations and in German foreign relations'**, there are several articles where German Green Party politicians are being accused of neocolonialism. One of the topics is the so-called 'elephant scandal', meaning the dispute between the German government's Environment Minister Steffi Lemke and the countries of southern Africa over the protection of elephants and the ban on the import of hunting trophies.

In the Bild stories, the 'stubborn ignorance of the Greens' has plunged Germany into a diplomatic crisis with Botswana and Namibia.

In der Ex-Kolonie spricht man auch Deutsch, verfolgt die Bundespolitik. Der Afrikaner ist entsetzt, will Lemke stoppen!

[\(So stürzten die Grünen uns in den Elefanten-Eklat, May 19, 2024\).](#)

'The African' refers to Namibian Minister of Environment, Pohamba Shifeta. He also accuses Lemke in another Bild article of neocolonial interference. Maxi Louis, the head of the Namibian conservation organisation NACSO, even talks about racism ([Grünen-Ministerin knickt nach Afrika-Ärger ein, March 26, 2024](#)). In another article, Louis says:

"Die Grünen fallen mit ihrem Vorhaben in den Kolonialismus des 19. Jahrhunderts zurück. Diese Leute haben die Dreistigkeit, einem afrikanischen Land zu sagen, was es zu tun hat."

[\(Namibia wirft Grünen-Ministerin Rassismus vor, March 24, 2024\)](#)

In the subgroup, there is an article on a trip to Namibia by a Green minister, this time Robert Habeck. The article with the headline 'Germany wants green energy from the ex-colony' explains the basics of how the Germans want to invest in Namibia and produce green hydrogen, which, according to the article, would mean a significant influx of German speakers to Lüderitz, whose colonial past is described as striking.

However, according to the Bild, the Green minister has made a mistake by speaking in a sceptical manner about the development of Namibia's gas and oil resources. When a German minister gives advice on what resources the former colony can exploit, it is generally perceived by Africans as arrogant or even neocolonial, the article says ([Deutschland will 'grüne Energie' aus ex-Kolonie, December 5, 2022](#)).

The group also includes an interview with the Namibian opposition leader Panduleni Itula. Itula wants more German investment and hopes that skilled workers and pensioners from Germany come to Namibia. According to Itula, Namibia used to be a German island in Africa and now needs to capitalize on its history because it has a special advantage: 'We speak German!' ([Dieser Zahnarzt will Namibias Regierung stürzen, June 29, 2023](#)).

In the same spirit, there is another article in which the Namibian government wants to attract Germans and has developed a new special visa. The article explains how Germans can work remotely in Namibia and feel at home on the edge of the desert with German beer, German pop music and pork, Oktoberfest and even Black Forest cake. Nangula Uuandja, a representative of the president, says to the Bild:

Das ist eure zweite Heimat hier, ein Stück Deutschland in Afrika. Wir haben deutsche Architektur, deutsche Straßennamen, mit der A1 sogar eine deutsche Autobahn! Deutsch ist eine unserer Sprachen.

The article also reports that up to 15,000 'German Namibians' live in Namibia as a result of colonial rule. According to the article, they are very active in the economy and send their children to German-language schools. Namibia is 'relaxed' about its German heritage despite its brutal colonial history ([Deutsche sollen in Ex-Kolonie überwintern](#), December 10, 2022).

'Nonsense from a woke society!'

In the subgroup '**Germany's dealing with its colonial history**' there are several articles about a TV documentary on German colonial history by ARD. The article *Peinlich-Doku sorgt für Entsetzen – Afrika-Aufstand gegen die ARD* lists actual and supposed errors in the documentary. According to the article, various people have criticized the documentary, including the 'Forum of German-speaking Namibians', the descendants of German missionaries and the Protestant media service EPD, but also Naita Hishoono, a Namibian expert interviewed for the documentary ([Afrika-Aufstand gegen die ARD](#), November 11, 2023).

(As a side note: the Süddeutsche Zeitung commented on this Bild article by stating that the opponents of the TV documentary even mobilized a story in the Bild, where the whole thing was spun into 'Africa rises up against ARD'.)

Other articles report, among other things, that ARD has been forced to '[admit its lies](#)' and that the entire TV documentary [has been removed](#) from the ARD platform – 'after reporting by Bild'.

And it is not only ARD, but also ZDF, another public broadcaster, that has made mistakes in its journalism about the German colonial era, according to the Bild: 'The latest African embarrassment for the broadcasting company'. A ZDF video about German colonialism falsely claimed that Germany was testing poison gas against the Ovaherero ([ZDF löscht Giftgas-Lüge](#), December 16, 2023).

One article reports on a hotel in Regensburg called 'Hottentotten', where refugees may be accommodated in the future. A controversy has now erupted over whether the name is a racist or not. According to Herbert Saal, the owner, it is not.

"Blödsinn einer woken Gesellschaft!" -- "Ich hatte in Namibia 10 Jahre lang eine Firma namens Hottentotten Tour. Mit Stempel und Erlaubnis der Behörden." Sein Hotel sei sogar ein Erinnerungsort für die Völker in der ehemaligen Kolonie Deutsch-Südwestafrika. ([Ins 'Hotel Hottentotten' sollen Flüchtlinge einziehen](#), April 29, 2024)

The Bild also has a couple of articles in the **'in the footsteps of Germans in present-day Namibia'** subgroup. In an article about fans of football club HSV, we learn that one of the most exotic is the HSV Namibia fan club. It was founded by Harm Woortmann, a fifth-generation German-Namibian, who is a farmer and hunter in the Omatako Mountains ([Mit dem Diaz-Freistoß fing alles an...](#), December 15, 2022). Another story is about 'the expatriate German of the year', a radio presenter whose mother emigrated from Germany to Namibia in the 1960s. The daughter has been selected as *Auslandsdeutsche des Jahres*, even though she was born and lives in Namibia, and this is in no way questioned in the article ([Sie wurde "Auslandsdeutsche" des Jahres in Namibia](#), January 5, 2022).

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung: Just over half of the articles portray Namibia in a colonial context

Es dauert eine Weile, bis man vor den T-Shirts mit dem Aufdruck "Deutsch-Südwestafrika" steht. Man muss unter dem alten Kaiser-Wilhelm-Straßenschild durch, an dem Plan der Eisenbahn vorbei, die fuhr, als die Deutschen das heutige Namibia beherrschten. Und dann steht da Ernst Holtz. Ihm ist das alles unangenehm. Die T-Shirts mit den kolonialen Aufdrucken, die Schutztruppenhüte daneben und die Reichskriegsflagge hinten im Lager. "Ich habe darüber schon oft mit meinem Vater gestritten, aber er will sie unbedingt im Sortiment behalten", sagt Holtz. "Sie sind beliebt bei den deutschen Touristen."

This is the beginning of an article in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ) about the traces of German colonialism in present-day Namibia. The article was published in the FAZ online on February 4, 2024 with the headline [Schutztruppenhüte – Ja oder Nein?](#)

The article is an example of the FAZ's quality coverage from Namibia. I would argue that one of the things that distinguish the FAZ from the SZ and the Bild is its reports *made in Namibia* with interesting angles and nuanced details. In these articles, the FAZ follows in the footsteps of the Germans and meets Ovaherero who talk about transgenerational trauma and criticize German attempts to atone for its colonial crimes. On the other hand, there are also Namibians who say that not all criticism is based on realism.

What distinguishes the FAZ from the SZ in my database is that the FAZ has many articles that are clearly critical of decolonization arguments related to history and culture. For example, the new concept for a culture of remembrance put forward by the Green Culture Minister Claudia Roth is branded in the FAZ article as post-colonial activism that obscures the understanding of colonial history:

Ein Erinnerungsort, der den Kolonialismus durchgängig europäisierte, würde gerade das Spezifische der kurzen deutschen Kolonialherrschaft verwischen – etwa die Tatsache, dass sie in Ostafrika den arabischen Sklavenhandel beendete oder in Kamerun von der Kollaboration einheimischer Stammesgemeinschaften profitierte, die das Deutsche Reich dem Britischen Empire vorzogen. Der 'Lernort' würde zur Schule des Verlernens.
([Ein Lernort wird zur Schule des Verlernens](#), April 9, 2024)

Between May 2021 and May 2024, the FAZ had a total of 105 articles on Namibia. As in the Süddeutsche Zeitung, more than half (53) of the articles deal with **Namibia in the context of colonialism**. But only just over half: almost as many articles (52) are about contemporary **Namibia in a non-colonial context**.

The FAZ articles without a colonial context depict Namibia as a country of advanced gender equality and with investment and green energy potential, among other things. Furthermore, Namibia is – as in the other two newspapers – a land of exotic animals and rugged natural beauty, a country that can offer adventure for Europeans, but can also be a dangerous place.

Below is a more detailed description of the articles. I am using the classification I presented earlier, with the articles divided into thematic subgroups.

Detailed descriptions of crimes – and a warning against excessive apologies

In terms of numbers, the largest thematic subgroups in the FAZ are **'Germany's dealing with its colonial history'** and **'Germany's reconciliation process with Namibia'**, each with 19 articles.

The FAZ followed the so-called reconciliation process from May 2021 in several articles, as did the other two newspapers. The FAZ articles are in-depth and accurately detail German colonial crimes in Namibia. This group includes articles interviewing many Ovaherero, who reflect on the issues from different angles. In this way, the articles provide a multi-dimensional picture of the Ovaherero as a heterogeneous nation.

Katunohange jedoch will nicht den Eindruck erwecken, man stehe den deutschstämmigen Landsleuten feindselig gegenüber. Er selbst kennt Deutschland, lernte dort Deutsch. Sein eigener Urgrossvater war ein deutscher Soldat, sein Vater hat eine helle Hautfarbe, die Mutter eine dunkle. "Wie kann man die eigenen Vorfahren hassen?" Trotzdem findet auch er, dass der Völkermord an den Ovaherero und Nama genauso anerkannt werden müsse wie der Holocaust an der Juden. Das sei bisher nicht der Fall.

([Marvin Katunohange in Warum Herero und Nama unzufrieden sind](#), June 8, 2021)

"Diese Gespräche wären nie zu einem Ergebnis gekommen. Die Herero und Nama ziehen nicht an einem Strang, das haben sie noch nicht getan."

(Ueriuka Festus Tjikuua on the criticism that the Namibian government did not include all Ovaherero and Nama representatives in the reconciliation process, in [Alte deutsche Schuld in Namibia](#), October 11, 2021)

There is also a comment piece in which current affairs editor Reinhard Müller warns against over-apologising: Germany should not bow down to Namibia any more than it has to.

Wenn die Schuld der Vorväter, so groß sie auch war, heute allzu glühend beschworen wird, so hat das etwas von moralischer Selbstüberhöhung; man wäscht sich von fernen Sünden rein und fühlt sich besser. Dabei darf, auch wenn die Dinge schonungslos beim Namen genannt werden müssen, der historische Kontext nicht ausgeblendet werden. Die Nachfahren von Tätern und Opfern sind nicht ebenso Täter und Opfer. -- Die Bundesregierung tut gut daran, umfangreich Hilfe zu leisten, am besten an jene, die es wirklich nötig haben, aber zugleich keinen Rechtsanspruch auf (weitere) Zahlungen anzuerkennen.

([Völkermord – aber kein Zahlungs-Anspruch](#), May 29, 2021)

Later, the FAZ follows the fate of the so-called reconciliation agreement, including its challenges in Namibia and the criticism of UN rapporteurs. The process is also mentioned in stories on the death of Namibian President Hage Geingob and the visit of German Federal

President Frank-Walter Steinmeier to another former German colony, Tanzania, where he apologized for colonial crimes.

In the group **'Germany's dealing with its colonial history'**, there are several articles on the much criticized ARD TV documentary. According to the FAZ articles, critics of the documentary say it reinforces clichés and misinterpretations about the 'land question', among other things, instead of promoting understanding and reconciliation in Namibia and between Germans and Namibians. In one of the articles, the honorary president of the German Namibian Society, Klaus A. Hess says that the case should be a lesson for broadcasters for future productions about Namibia and the reassessment of the colonial era.

The FAZ also has several articles on videos by another public broadcaster, ZDF, which contained incorrect claims about Germany's colonial past.

Other articles in the same thematic group deal with issues such as the culture of remembrance in Germany. One article describes the renaming of streets in Berlin. This group also includes the above-mentioned article about the 'exceptionally unanimous' criticism by directors of German memorial sites of Culture Minister Claudia Roth's plan for a new 'framework for a culture of remembrance'. According to the FAZ article, 'a glance at the paper shows that they are right'. There is also a comment piece by journalist Johannes Leithäuser, who hopes that Germany and Namibia will find a common vision of history. The article makes an interesting argument:

Anders als in anderen europäischen Ländern ist für die Deutschen der Umgang mit der kolonialen Vergangenheit keine Identitätsfrage. Die einstige Beschaffung afrikanischer und asiatischer Gebiete wird hierzulande eher dem persönlichen Geltungsdrang eines schrillen Kaisers zugeschrieben als einem damals herrschenden allgemeinen kulturellen oder materiellen Imperialismus. -- Gerade die weitgehende Abwesenheit einer kolonialen Geschichte hat Deutschland in vielen Ländern der Dritten Welt zu einem eigenen Ansehen verholfen.

[\(Aufrichtiges Interesse an Namibia\)](#), June 1, 2021)

The article [Die Leichen im Familienalbum](#) (June 15, 2021) begins with a private experience as the journalist browses through the photo album of his wife's relatives. The article begins with the question: 'Decolonization as a private matter: how should we react to images of the Ovaherero genocide and the Wehrmacht's war of annihilation against the Soviet Union?' The journalist argues that although the photographs do not show violence, 'taking them is violence'.

'Scientists from the Global South criticize provenance research and restitution as a colonial project'

Compared with the other quality newspaper the Süddeutsche Zeitung, the FAZ has fewer articles on **'museums and return of objects to former colonies'**, less than 10. The articles

report on initiatives taken by different museums. The most recent ones show how museum professionals and researchers in the Global South criticize museum provenance research and restitution projects from different perspectives. Berlin, for example, was a colonial capital 120 years ago, and the same spatial pattern is now emerging, according to the article:

Wissenschaftler aus dem globalen Süden kritisieren die museale Provenienzforschung und die Restitutionsprojekte als kolonialer Projekt: Die Zuweisung von Arbeitsaufträgen kopiert die Kartierung der vom Imperialismus stillgestellten Welt.

([Verteile und herrsche](#), April 18, 2023)

According to the article, lists of objects are sent from Berlin to African countries, where Africans are expected to investigate the origin of the objects and the circumstances under which they were acquired. In this way, according to the article, researchers in the former colonies become the executors of Berlin's work orders. Although they are called 'collaboration partners' and are paid, this practice is far from the epistemic opening they seek.

Another article on the return of an artefact from Germany to Namibia describes a process 'without ideological excitement'. According to the article, the same criticism is repeatedly voiced in discussions with African museum professionals:

Dessen Intellektuelle distanzieren sich vom Dogmatismus der Berliner Kulturwissenschaftlerin Bénédicte Savoy, die in Deutschland als Sprachrohr im Restitutionsstreit auftritt, während sie in den meisten afrikanischen Ländern unbekannt ist. Savoy's Mantra "Alles in europäischen Museen ist Raubkunst, gebt alles zurück nach Afrika!" wird auf den Kontinent mit Befremden aufgenommen. Man sieht darin Auswüchse eines moralisch verbrämten Eurozentrismus und eines als unangenehm empfundenen Paternalismus.

([Afrikanische Renaissance](#), June 29, 2022)

Guest author Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin, Professor Emeritus of Ethnology in Göttingen, writes along the same lines. She accuses 'postcolonial activists' of wanting to interpret everything as plunder: 'the principle of presumption of guilt serves as a model for sifting through the complex colonial past of white perpetrators and victims'. Namibia is mentioned in this context:

Es steht ausser Frage, dass es grauenhafte koloniale Verbrechen gab, wie den Genozid in Namibia, aber diese waren Ausnahmen, kein systematisches Ziel.

([Die Schnelljustiz der postkolonialen Aktivisten](#), January 13, 2022)

There are also some articles in the thematic group '**in the footsteps of Germans in present-day Namibia**'. [In the articles](#) mentioned above, we meet Namibians of German background who are nostalgic about German colonial history, as well as Namibians who talk about colonialism and the inequalities in living standards in Namibia. Remnants of German colonialism are also depicted, such as Namibia's Oktoberfest.

In Namibia führen ein deutschstämmiger Vater und sein Sohn ein legendäres Geschäft. Lange verdienten sie auch mit der Kolonialzeit ihr Geld. Der Sohn will das ändern. Aber das ist doch unsere Geschichte, sagt der Vater.

([Schutztruppenhüte – Ja oder Nein?](#), February 4, 2024)

The son who runs the shop selling Schutztruppen hats to German tourists says that he recognizes his privileged position. The father says that no genocide ever took place in Namibia.

In the group **'the colonial past in contemporary German-Namibian relations and in German foreign relations'** there are a couple of articles, including one on the right-wing Polish government demanding reparations for World War II (['Deutschland will den Aufbau eines IV. Reiches'](#), December 2, 2021). According to the article, Polish politicians are wondering how Germany can pay compensation to the Namibians but not to Poland.

Namibia: An investment destination and a producer of green hydrogen

When the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung reports on Namibia in a non-colonial context, by far the most articles (16) are in the **'modern Africa'** group.

One of these articles deals with the popularity of Afropop worldwide. The article ([Über den wahnsinnigen Erfolg des Afropop](#)), published on March 13, 2024 begins with the Namibian rapper Lioness, who comes to the interview straight from work – it turns out that she is also a doctor. According to the article, Lioness fears that the diversity of Afropop is suffering because many artists try to imitate the popular Burna Boy, but at least it is a good thing that British and American artists are no longer being imitated.

A few articles ([So steht es in Deutschland und Namibia um die Gleichstellung](#), December 27, 2023) report on the World Economic Forum's gender equality ranking, in which Namibia is the only African country in the top ten for the third time. According to the article, Namibia is ahead of Germany in terms of gender equality in the areas of economy, education and health. The reason given is that women played an important role in Namibia's struggle for independence, which led to the creation of a more gender-equal state in 1990. The status of women in society is discussed from another perspective in an article on a new method of protection against HIV ([Selbstbestimmter Schutz von Aids](#), December 1, 2023).

Several articles mention Namibia as an investment destination or producer of green hydrogen ([Scholz verspricht, grünen Wasserstoff "in grossen Mengen zu kaufen"](#), November 20, 2023). A couple of articles follow the trip of Minister Habeck to Africa (e.g. [Habeck auf Werbetour in Afrika](#), December 7, 2022), where Habeck talks about Africa's great potential and the partnership with Germany. In one article, Namibia also appears as Germany's (apparently trusted) partner in the international political arena: in the article, Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock calls for a reform of the UN Security Council and says that Germany is leading negotiations with Namibia on a UN Future Summit ([Baerbock fordert grundlegende Reform der UN](#), September 17, 2023).

I have placed two articles on nature into the modern Africa subgroup. One deals with [cheetah research](#), the other with the private meat and hunting industry that has emerged in Southern Africa to protect wildlife populations ([Eine afrikanische Industrie für Jagd und Artenschutz](#), April 16, 2023). The story gives the impression of a regulated, modern activity. According to Namibia's Ministry of Environment, wildlife conservation is based on three pillars: national parks, community conservation areas and private game farms that generate tourism and jobs.

Dass afrikanisches Wild ähnlich wie Vieh gezüchtet, versteigert und verkauft werden kann, mag für Europäer befremdlich klingen -- Es gilt die Regel: Nur wenn die Einheimischen von ihren natürlichen Ressourcen leben können, besteht Interesse an ihrem Schutz.

'The sun hangs over the horizon as a glowing red ball'

The **'exotic Africa'** group has a relatively high number of articles (13) in the FAZ. Most of these articles deal with Namibian nature, indigenous peoples and European experiences of nature.

For example, there is an article on endangered pangolins and how the indigenous San people can help save the animals. The article is set in the Kavango-Zambezi Transfrontier Park, which is said to be 'away from civilization':

Oma Sao und sein Team können dabei helfen, denn sie gehören zum indigenen Volk der San. Und wer kann die Spuren der Schuppentiere in der dornigen Savanne besser lesen als diese Jäger und Sammler?

([Die Spur des Pangolins](#), November 21, 2023)

The article explains the beliefs that the community holds about these animals. The researchers interviewed are white and/or American.

Another article on the San explains that they have lived in Southern Africa for thousands of years as hunters and gatherers and now live on the margins of society, and their precious knowledge of nature is disappearing. The article visits a San family in the Kalahari. The story is told in old African clichés:

Während die Sonne am späten Nachmittag als glutroter Ball über dem Horizont hängt und ein milder Wind durch das karge Gras streicht --

Einst besiedelte dieses Volk der Jäger und Sammler mit dem zierlichen Körperbau und der honigfarbenen Haut das gesamte südliche Afrika --

([In der Wüste geschickt](#), November 6, 2022)

The article mentions how the San lands were first invaded by Bantu peoples and then by white colonialists who hunted and killed the San and drove them to the Kalahari. On the other hand, it also says that the family usually dresses in jeans and t-shirts, but today they have

put on traditional clothes because of the visitors. The author argues that presenting their culture to tourists is a double-edged sword: in a way, culture becomes an economic commodity.

Namibia's indigenous peoples are also portrayed in an article on a photography project ([Dem Himmel so nah](#), April 14, 2023), where young Himba men are photographed. The Himba are presented as a seminomadic indigenous people, whose traditional way of life and body paintings tourists want to see. According to the article, the Namibian government wants to maintain the image because it brings in tourists, but young men now prefer to dress in clothes such as football shirts. However, the article shows them during the traditional palm sap collection, which the article says is important to the Himba.

There's also an article about [mountain climbing](#) and a funny safari story about going to Namibia to look for 'the ugly five' instead of 'the big five' ([Wo die hässlichen Fünf zu Hause sind](#), February 17, 2023). Two articles describe ultramarathons in Namibia, one of them through the experience of [a German police officer](#).

The next largest subgroup (10) is **'African country in trouble'**. This includes an interesting report on the so-called GDR children in Namibia who were sent back from East Germany after the fall of the Berlin Wall. 'Since then, they have been tormented by a single thought.' The headline is 'If I could have stayed in Germany, my life would have been better'. The middle-aged interviewees talk about their problems, such as alcoholism (["Hätte ich in Deutschland bleiben können, wäre mein Leben besser"](#), March 5, 2024).

There are also two sports articles in this group. Collin Benjamin has returned from Germany after 11 years to be the coach of the Namibian national football team. Benjamin talks about poorly maintained stadiums and social inequality. The article says football would create jobs, but in Namibia the first thing the government does is cut the sports budget (["Das Potential ist da in Namibia"](#), August 26, 2022). An article about the Tokyo Paralympics (["Um die Tochter zu ernähren"](#), August 28, 2021) features Lahja Ishitile, who went blind as a child and whose road to the Paralympics was long and difficult due to lack of support. 'We are on our own, we have to work a lot', says Ishitile. (Note: Lahja is an old Finnish first name and in this case probably a 'legacy' of the Finnish missionaries who worked in Namibia since the 1870s.)

One article talks about the criminalization of homosexuality in many African countries. The Namibian parliament is reported to have passed a law that will mean that gender-neutral marriages contracted abroad will not be recognized in Namibia ([200 Männer wegen mutmaßlicher Homosexualität verhaftet](#), August 30, 2023). In an article on international politics, it is reported that Russia, the aggressor in Ukraine, has invited and hosted ministerial guests from Namibia and other countries to a conference in Moscow, which is a political victory for Russia ([Gäste und Panzer als Trophäen](#), August 17, 2023).

The group also features an article about a German company that is building social housing in Namibia as a development project. One of the managers, who used to work for a large

bank in Frankfurt, says that Africa is a continent with huge problems and an incredible number of potential refugees ([Sozialer Wohnungsbau als Exportartikel](#), August 12, 2021).

There are also a few articles in the groups **'paradise for Europeans'**, **'COVID-19'**, **'land of skilled workers'**, **'dangerous country for Europeans'** and **'accidents and crimes'**.

The 'paradise for Europeans' group includes articles on expensive and luxurious hotels ('Namibia under the stars' for 450 euros per person per night) and the possibilities of becoming a digital nomad in Namibia where the standard of living is high, the infrastructure is good and the weather is fine. One European interviewee says:

Namibia sei die optimale Mischung. Dort könne man, anders als etwa im europäisch anmutenden Kapstadt, "Afrika richtig erleben". Zugleich müsse man auf nichts verzichten, zum Beispiel eine zuverlässige Stromversorgung oder Internetverbindung.

(Sabrina Heer in [Co-Working in Swakopmund](#), March 3, 2023)

The COVID-19 articles cover topics such as testing at Frankfurt airport and [the serious COVID situation in Namibia](#). Several top Namibian politicians have died from COVID-19, and there is a shortage of protective equipment and vaccines. According to the article, Germany is helping and donating vaccines.

"In articles on the 'land of skilled workers', Namibian early childhood education professionals enjoy their stay in Germany after completing a four-year university degree in their home country. The articles compare Namibian and German kindergartens and the role of early childhood education professionals. They also pose the question:

Aber nehmen Städte in Hessen damit nicht anderen Ländern, deren Wirtschaft und den dortigen Kindern, kompetente, engagierte Kräfte weg? Die Partneragenturen verneinen das mit Hinweis auf die hohe Arbeitslosigkeit dort. Das erscheint schlüssig. Aus deutscher Sicht jedenfalls gewinnen alle Beteiligten.

([Bereicherung aus Namibia](#), March 15, 2024)

Some of the articles in the 'dangerous country for Europeans' group could also be in the 'exotic Africa' group, but in these stories Europeans face a particular danger: what to do if the engine will not start on a safari in Namibia and a pride of lions is nearby ([Der Jagdinstinkt](#), July 22, 2023)? Another article ("[Unser Körper ist ein Wunderwerk](#)", December 25, 2021) says that ultra-running in Namibia is above all dangerous: you can't run in the dark because a lion might eat you – you never know which animal's eyes will be flashing in the bush.

On the challenges of classification

As with the Süddeutsche Zeitung and the Bild, not all articles in the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung fit neatly into just one category or thematic subgroup. An example of this is the article on the ['mobilizing potential' of colonialism](#) in Africa: the young generations want to

break away from the past and are angry that it has not been addressed. I finally placed this article in the subgroup 'the colonial past in contemporary German-Namibian relations and in German foreign relations'.

I have placed articles on hunting in different subgroups according to angle and treatment of the story. One FAZ article on hunting in Namibia, mentioned above, is in the 'modern Africa' group, because it gives the impression that the hunting business in Namibia is conducted in a well thought-out, regulated and modern way ([Eine afrikanische Industrie für Jagd und Artenschutz](#), April 16, 2023). Another hunting story is in the group 'the colonial past in contemporary German-Namibian relations and in German foreign relations'. This is because it discusses whether Germany has the moral right to demand that Namibia stop the export of hunting trophies ([Schöne Tiere, hässliche Vorwürfe](#), March 27, 2024).

The 'modern Africa' group has an article on Namibia's dreams and doubts about green energy and how German investment is helping Namibia towards its goal. The article could also have been interpreted as relating to colonialism, as it begins with a description of how the town of Lüderitz has art nouveau houses from the imperial era and churches that look like they are from a German village. The green hydrogen boom is compared to the diamond rush of the colonial era. A Swakopmund-based consultant asks whether Europeans in developing countries are mainly promoting their own goals. However, as the article is mainly about Namibia's green energy prospects, it is in the 'modern Africa' subgroup ([Namibia zweifelt und träumt von Grüner Energie](#), March 25, 2022).

7 Conclusion

Colonialism and decolonization are extremely relevant topics for both journalism and research, even if not everyone, especially in the so-called Global North, agrees.

In many countries of the so-called Global South, politicians, academics and citizens are increasingly demanding the dismantling of the political, economic and military remnants of colonial power structures.

Even in the so-called Global North, the legacy of colonialism is visible to those who are willing to look. In addition to colonial street names and stolen objects in the collections of European museums, there has been much discussion about structural racism in European societies.

Over the past year, colonialism and decolonization have been debated and contested concepts in the context of Israel's war on Gaza. When I started this project, I considered looking at the German media from the perspective of how this angle is (or is not) presented in German news coverage.

In the end, I decided to stick to my original plan to focus on German colonial history, for a number of reasons. I had already collected material on Namibia, and comparing the two subjects felt asymmetrical. Moreover, studying two large topics would have inflated the scope of the project to such an extent that it would not have been feasible within my time frame.

In Namibia, the impact of colonialism is felt in many ways. The country was first under colonial occupation by Germany and then occupied by South Africa, which extended its brutal apartheid regime to Namibia.

Today, Namibia is classified as an upper middle-income country that has large natural resources deposits. But despite the average increase in wealth, Namibia is the second most unequal country in the world. Land ownership is still concentrated among a few. At the same time, 43% of the Namibian population are multidimensionally poor.

For many descendants of the survivors of the Ovaherero and Nama genocide, colonialism means unrealized development, because the land and the livelihoods of their people were expropriated.

Many of them are deeply offended by the German way of trying to atone for past crimes.

In this project, I examined three major German newspapers and their coverage of Namibia in the 2020s.

In the database of 322 articles I collected, most of the articles presented Namibia in one way or another in the context of German colonialism. In the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the vast majority of the articles on Namibia were in this context.

Based on my classification, it can be argued that in the online editions of the two major German quality newspapers, the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, as well as the *Bild*, the image of present-day Namibia is still partly filtered through the German colonial period.

The *Bild* was the only one of the three newspapers where the majority of articles on Namibia were not in a colonial context. However, the *Bild* often literally frames Namibia as a former colony in its articles.

My conclusions of course come with certain caveats. The figures I present in this project should not be taken as the exact truth about how many individual articles about Namibia there were in the three newspapers. I have described above how I searched for articles and what gaps there may have been in the system. Moreover, my classifications are subjective. Someone else might have come to different conclusions.

Finally, I would like to point out that many of the articles in the major German newspapers can be said to portray Namibia in a *neocolonial* context.

In these articles, Namibia is often presented as a source of raw materials, energy or labour for Germany or Europe. Alternatively, Namibia is depicted as a destination, either for European tourism or foreign investment.

In both Germany and Finland, the history of colonialism has long been little known or of little interest to the general public.

As a state, Finland does not have a history of occupying countries in the so-called Global South. However, Finland's history cannot be separated from the rest of Europe.

The Finnish missionaries in Namibia were not part of the German colonial administration, nor were they involved in the Ovaherero and Nama genocide. Still, it is relevant to ask to what extent Finns were involved in German colonialism.

Some Finnish missionaries worked as advisors and interpreters for the German colonial administration in Namibia. The Finns also brought their religion and customs to the region, which supplanted many aspects of the local culture. Finnish first names are still used in Namibia.

Today, talk of colonialism or decolonization is often met with rejection or irritation both in Finland and in Germany. As the issue is increasingly discussed, it is also politicized – or re-politicized.

This is unfortunate. The lack of understanding of the history of colonialism and its consequences contributes to simplifications and prejudices.

These can also be exploited by political parties for their own purposes.

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