



Gems of Germans in Namibia¹

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"What do we really need, water or diamond?" This question occurs very frequently in education of the Economics. And when a professor asks it, a student will answer with confidence, "Water, of course!" If this student has got some good knowledge in Biology, the professor and probably even the entire group will get the explanation that 60-70% of human body is water, and there is no survive without water, so "the only correct answer can be water". Some student with rebellious mindset will preach about the bad condition of our planet, namely, how exploited the Earth is, when it comes to resources. Probably there will also be a more realistic student who will pose to his audience the question, "It's obvious that we need water so badly, but what would you give to your beloved one, a nice ring with well-shaped diamonds, or a bottle of water?" After this short and improvised debate, our professor would introduce the concept of Giffen goods, and his students would have to approve the fact that people like to make decisions beyond their real interests. Therefore, the *homo economicus* remains a vulnerable character in further economic analysis.

In the monography *Blood and Diamonds: Germany's Imperial Ambitions in Africa*, written by Steven Press, both of the above questions are discussed, since today's Namibia, a country that was a German colony between 1883 and 1915 under the name of German South West Africa, is rich in diamonds and extremely poor in water. This combination meant bad luck for the indigenous Khoisan, the migrating Bantu and Cape Coloured, and also for the white settlers.

The title reminds readers of the movie *Blood Diamond*, which presented the adventurous story of how the African diamonds appeared on the market. The exact same can be easily applied to many chapters of this monography: the readers can get genuine information on the struggles of the German colonial masters, on how exploration and exploitation of diamonds changed the lives of people of colour, and why the diamonds that belonged to Germany were sold in Antwerp, Belgium. As the parallel between "*Windhoek and Auschwitz*" was postulated by Jürgen Zimmerer, the correlation between colonial history and antisemitism has been proven by another piece of evidence, as Press displayed the protagonists of the story of German colonial diamonds from their exploitation to their sale. The assimilation of German Jews failed at this point too, not only in the debates in German mainland.

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The monography is articulated to eleven chapters and a conclusion. Each chapter has a strong focus on a certain analysed point; however, the political history plays a key role, given that it makes the story more understandable. The footnotes can be found at the end of the book, and the numbering of pages begins from one with each chapter. Press' aim was to write a socio-economic analysis about the German colonial history in Namibia, concentrating on the issue of diamond. Therefore, besides the rich and diverse literature, he elaborated on many original files from the *Bundesarchiv* (German Federal Archives), documents of the German stock-market, and the contemporary media, especially influential newspapers. This last one seems to be especially important, since the German public opinion was very divided in the topic of colonisation from the beginning, i.e. the Bismarck-era.

Talking about symbolic figures, every paper and book about the German colonial rule in Namibia name Adolf Lüderitz, Lothar von Trotha and Bernhard Dernburg. As the founder of the first German settlement, Lüderitz must be noted. Leading the grime actions of the colonial war between 1904 and 1907, General Trotha ordered to annihilate the Herero, which was recognised as genocide in the near past. Bernhard Dernburg and his colonial policy, however, was not considered a particularly bad period: the first scientific works, the high financial investment, the extensive Germanization of South West Africa that created a 'Germanness' of today's Namibia, were rather considered as a good achievement. But the dark side of Dernburg's legacy and the half-baked reforms of that period also has got a long-lasting effect.

As a son of a banker and a liberal politician, he enjoyed the company of financially influential people. Thanks to his experience in New York City, he could gain up-to-date knowledge about the modern economy. Albeit the ruling coalition of the Reichstag was formed of conservative and liberal parties; the agrarian lobby could never accept the growing importance of the financial and industrial magnates. Thus, Dernburg was always a suspicious person in their eyes. The left-wing social democrats kept up the class struggle against the noble and bourgeois elements of every society; hence, their negative attitudes do not require any further explanation. As prominent members of the widely attacked Catholicism, the Centre Party could rarely find a common voice with the government, which was engaged with Protestant aristocracy and liberal anti-Catholicism. Nevertheless, it should be noted, that the German conservatives found common interests with the Centre Party occasionally, since both were opponents of class struggle and critics of industrialism. At the end, Dernburg's most vicious enemies must be named: the anti-Semites. The representatives of these could never believe that the converted-to-Lutheran Dernburg became a German, and they never took kindly to a Jewish man having a key role in finance of the German Empire. The topic of diamonds became a battlefield, where the first colonial secretary of Germany was intensely attacked by different parliamentary factions.



Meanwhile, Dernburg's policies were being heavily criticised, even though the core of the problem was not him, or at least, not from historical perspective. As Press emphasises, the establishment of Forbidden Zone, a.k.a. *Sperrgebiet* meant a considerable mistake. The surplus of this diamond mining area belonged to private entrepreneurs, and the exploited gems were not sold in the German mainland. This whole mechanism led to many negative consequences, and it highlights the fact that regardless of Dernburg's liberalism and American experiences, he could not understand the real meaning of liberal capitalism, where the average people are encouraged to participate in lucrative tasks such as the Gold Rush in America.

The existence of the Forbidden Zone was responsible for introducing and maintaining harmful social structures. As the Nama and Herero people were not numerous enough to cover the labour needs for mining, contract labour was introduced in order to solve the problem of colonial labour shortage. In fact, Ovambo workers migrated southward and settled down around the major cities. The Black workers had very restricted rights compared to White settlers, and Press points out correctly that former soldiers of Trotha's expedition army inspected them while they were working there. Nonetheless, the administrative structure established by the late 1900s also had many deficits: the German officials did not intend to move into the direction of more democracy, neither in the case of Whites, nor in the Blacks especially. As Heinrich Vedder pointed out in the South African Senate, the Germans were always living in apartheid in South West Africa, and Press also enlightens his readers that major change after 1915 occurred only in the interethnic relations between Germans and South African white people. But there was also a considerable change in economy, and it happened in the diamond business.

The Regie, established in 1909, was a company responsible for diamond production. This firm was backed by major German banks, and had the aim to show an alternative to the De Beers, which was established by Cecil Rhodes, and recently led by Ernest Oppenheimer. Oppenheimer, who came from a German Jewish family, spoke good German and belonged to the most influential South African magnates, approached to take over the Forbidden Zone and the Regie. After World War I, his dreams came true, and the De Beers became a monopoly company in the diamond business in South Africa and its C class mandate. This change led to an increase of colonial anti-Semitism, as the German settlers felt that they had lost position.

Because of the parallel between "*Windhoek and Auschwitz*", the stance of the Nazis to diamond and the whole issue of colonialism should be analysed. Dernburg remained one of the prime evils in their propaganda materials, as the Jews in general were depicted as traitors and the responsible group for the loss of World War I. Nonetheless, Dernburg's contribution created solid base of separation and segregation policies in German South West Africa, which was surely impressive for the National Socialist regime.

The elaboration of diamond rush in the history of German colonialism took a long time to happen, and this monography could show that such a tiny piece of history can be also a very complex phenomenon. The broad perspective of analysis, the abundance of information, the investigative mindset makes Press' book really remarkable. The author suggests a further elaboration of the history of diamond mining in South West Africa in the first period of South African rule. As the author of this review, I probably do not reveal a closely guarded secret by affirming that diamonds played a key role in the settlement policy of the new overlords: the South African authorities spent a fortune from the profit of diamond mining to settle Afrikaner families in South West Africa.