

**Des-
Integrate.**

The “African Quarter” in Nippes

Street names reflect history – this is also the case in the “African Quarter” in Northern Nippes, known to Cologneans as “Little Africa” or “Heia Safari Quarter.” The neighbourhood is a place of colonial remembrance. The name is connected to the strong revisionist colonial movement in Cologne in the 1930s that was committed to retrieve the colonial territories which were lost after the end of the World War I. These ambitions did not end after the election of the National Socialist German Workers’ Party (NSDAP) – quite to the contrary. Through many pro colonial propaganda events, the movement defended themselves against accusations from the victorious Allied forces, which claimed that Germany had failed in its colonies. In 1934, 16 years after the loss of its colonies, the zeitgeist of colonial revisionism enabled a colonial exhibition in Cologne. Simultaneously many streets were named after colonists or former “protectorates.” Thus the memory of the alleged one-time grandeur of colonial power was reinforced. This notion reached out to a wide public sphere and supported the call for restitution of lost territory.

The area, which until 1932 was home to the oil and fat manufacturing plant of the company Krätzer & Wirtgen, was in 1933/34 planned to become a housing complex of 60 private homes. Construction took place from 1935 to 1938. The official naming of the new streets was celebrated on January 9th 1935. Three streets were given names of alleged colonial heroes: Gustav-Nachtigal-Straße, Car-Peters-Straße and Lüderitzstraße. Thus, three men were honoured who had more or less forcefully colonized land in Africa for the German Reich. Two streets were named after former colonies: Kamerunstraße and Togostraße. Furthermore, the Tangastraße served to remind people of the battle of Tanga in former German East Africa. From the German perspective a “glorious” battle was won against the superior British forces.

By the end of the 1980s, discussions arose in the Nippes local government and the Carl-Peters-Straße, was renamed Namibiastraße, Lüderitzstraße became Usambarastraße. The geographical mix-up – Lüderitz was an active colonists in Namibia, Carl Peters in German East Africa, present day Tanzania and home of the Usambara mountains – was an honest mistake that was only recognized some years later.

Namibiastraße

Since 1990 Nippes' "African Quarter" has a Namibiastraße. The former Carl-Peters-Straße received its new name at the time of Namibian independence. Namibia was the last former colony in Africa to gain state sovereignty; through a long and bloody struggle for independence, a century of foreign domination came to an end. From 1884 until 1914 Namibia was known as German South-West Africa and a colony of Wilhelmine German Empire. After World War I South West Africa fell under the mandate of South Africa, i.e. the regime of the White minority in Pretoria.

More than half of all German settlers, so called Kolonialdeutsche, lived in South-West Africa, the only settler colony of the German Reich. The Germans settled in the central highlands and drove the local population out of the best grazing grounds.

After a series of repeated violent conflicts, the Herero-Namaqua-Uprising broke out in January 1904. This colonial war lasted until the beginning of 1908 and shook the colony immensely. Initially the Herero, under command of Paramount-Chief Samuel Mahereo, stood up against the German colonial regime due to social tensions that arose as a result of colonization. These tensions worsened when an increasing number of white settlers arrived in the colony: They raped Herero women without suffering consequences due to a racist jurisdiction, suppressed the local population by suddenly reclaiming debts and loans, robbed their land, and built the first reservations to which they planned to deport the African population. Kaiser Wilhelm II sent Lieutenant-general, then supreme commander of the "Schutzgruppe" Lothar von Trotha into the colony in order to fight a merciless campaign against the Herero. Trothas extermination order led to the first genocide of the 20th century.

In October 1904 the Nama in the Southern territories of the colony stood up against their oppressors as well, at first under command of Hendrik Witbooi and after his death under command of Jacob Marengo as well as other leaders. This guerrilla war lasted for years. The Germans reacted with a policy of “verbrannte Erde” (engl. scorched earth) and eventually the resistance was defeated by the superior forces of the German colonial military. The surviving Nama were interned in concentration camps just like what happened to the Herero.

Various Federal Governments of Germany refused to acknowledge these acts as genocide. Herero and Nama are still waiting for an official apology and reparations which the Federal Republic of Germany continues to deny them.

Usambarastraße

Upon hearing or reading the name “Usambarastraße” one might inevitably think about the Usambaraveilchen (engl. African violet), a famous potted plant that in earlier days was found on almost every German windowsill. The connection between this plant and the street name is not completely absurd. Usambara, a mountainous region in North-Eastern Tanzania, gave name not only to the plant but to street in Nippes as well.

Upon motion of the Green party the local government in Nippes decided to rename the Lüderitzstraße Usambarastraße on September 13th 1990. In National Socialist Germany Franz Adolf Eduard Lüderitz, who originally gave the street its name in 1935, was celebrated as “father of the first German colony.” By naming a street after him, German authorities aimed to commemorate Lüderitz and at the same time stress the importance of owning colonies.

Driven by prospect of finding diamonds, Bremen merchant Lüderitz underhandedly took possession of wide territories in later German South-West Africa, today’s Namibia. In his contracts Lüderitz used Prussian instead of British miles as basis for measurement so that he could later claim a territory substantially larger than the territory negotiated. This fraudulent means of “acquisitions” earned him the nickname “Lügenfritz” (engl. Lying Fritz). Gustav Nachtigal, Commissioner of the German Reich, later ensured and legitimized the rights which Lüderitz had unlawfully obtained

Why Lüderitzstraße was re-named as Usambarastraße cannot be explained. A historical connection between Lüderitz and the Usambara mountains does not exist in any way. The Green party, who encouraged the process of re-naming, wanted to change the street name to Marengostraße.

They thought it more appropriate to honour an important figure of the struggle of freedom against colonial powers than one of Germany's "colonial heroes." Jakob Marengo was one of the leaders of the African resistance against Germany's colonial power in German South-West Africa. He was shot in 1907. The proposition of the Green party was not accepted in the local Nippes District Council. Due to other street names in Nippes' "African Quarter" the representatives decided upon a name that only geographically refers to the African continent. The historical context of the original naming was not taken into account.

Togostraße

Togo was the smallest German colony in Africa and for a long time was considered an “exemplary colony.” It did not experience colonial wars, which were costly for the German Reich, and it was an economically profitable colony, of course due the exploitation of the local population.

After the flag had been hoisted and the “treaty of protection” had been signed by Gustav Nachtigal on July 5th 1884, Togo experienced an economic boom, especially in the area of today’s capital Lomé. German companies mainly exported spirits to the coastal regions of Togo. Due to heavy tariffs on the import of alcoholic beverages in the neighbouring French and British colonies, an active black market developed around Lomé and its surroundings. Even local authorities were paid in booze and modern weaponry for their loyalty to German trading houses, thus further strengthening the local German dominion.

At the beginning, the colonial territory only contained the coastal regions of Togo, but the German colonists aimed to expand their regime into the interior of the colony. To accomplish this task, the Germans undertook expeditions to conquer more land, under the guise of “scientific expeditions,” and to intimidate the population by the show of military force. Further “treaties of protection” were signed and new German stations founded. Over the years these expeditions developed into downright raids. The German forces systematically suppressed the local population by raiding, murdering, burning villages to the ground, taking women and children hostage, and instigating battles against the local population for little to no reason. In a short time German colonist had taken a great territory in inner Togo by force of arms, blackmailing, fraud and fear.

For easier access into the hinterland, the Germans built various new railway lines, so that cotton, coffee, cocoa, rubber, peanuts, coconuts and sisal could be easily transported from the new local plantations. In the coastal territories German merchants had built brandy distilleries and petroleum industries in order to organize trade to broader markets.

The Togolese people made futile attempts to objects against the German colonial politics. Points of critique were way too high taxes, confiscation of land, penalization without any evidence, abuse and rape of underage girls by German colonist, jurisdictions in favour of the Germans, forced labour and cruel and unusual punishment which ranged from putting human beings in chains to flogging them with a hippo whip.

Through the constant threat and execution of violence, 350 German colonists were able to stabilize their control over one million Africans.

Immediately after the beginning of World War I, Togo fell into Allied hands. The 350 colonists and their small police brigade had no means to counter the highly equipped French and British colonial armies. Togo was the first German colony to surrender on August 25th 1914. At the end of the war in 1920 Togo was put under jurisdiction of the League of Nations and split between French and British administration.

Tangastraße

The seaport city of Tanga is situated at the coast of the Indian Ocean in the United Republic of Tanzania. Between 1885 and 1918 it was one of the biggest and most populated cities of the “German East Africa” colony.

After the outbreak of World War I, fighting began in the colonies as well, even though this represented an infringement of the “General Act of the Berlin Conference” of 1885, in which the European, American, Russian and Ottoman colonists had agreed upon the neutrality of the African colonies in case of an European war.

On November 2nd 1914 British troops attacked the German colonial army which lay near the port of Tanga. The commander of the German so-called “Schutztruppe” (engl. “Protection Force”) was General Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck.

Though von Lettow-Vorbeck and his army of 1.100 soldiers faced British-Indian superior forces consisting of 8.000 combatants, the German troops were able to win the battle after three days of fighting. The battle, henceforth known as “Battle of Tanga,” presented the British with a severe military defeat, while the Germans celebrated an early victory.

Lettow-Vorbeck thus became an alleged military German hero and the “Battle of Tanga” manifested the myth of German invincibility. The countless African victims of World War I in the colonies were not taken into consideration while forming this myth. The local population was forced into a war they had nothing to do with. By the end 500.000 individuals in German East Africa had directly or indirectly fallen victim to Lettow-Vorbeck’s conduct of war and vast parts of the colony were laid to waste.

The idea of establishing the “Tangastraße” in 1935 was to memorialize and glorify Germany’s colonial history, and in line with the revisionist activism of the time, stress the importance of recovering the “lost” colonies.

Gustav-Nachtigal-Straße

Gustav Nachtigal (1834-1885) is typically referred to as an “Africa Researcher” in most encyclopaedias, even though he played a key role in establishing the German colonial regimes in Togo, Cameroon and German South-West Africa, present-day Namibia. He used tactics of military force and, in Togo, took hostages in order to blackmail the local population into cooperation.

He came to Africa in 1862 while travelling for health purposes. After spending some years in Algeria and Tunisia, he spent a significant amount of time travelling to Libya, Nigeria, the Republic of Chad, Sudan and Egypt. In 1879 he published the first volume of his three part travel and research report “Sahara and Sudan” and was appointed president of the “Berlin Geography Society.

A less known fact about Nachtigal is his diplomatic service in 1882 as consul general of the German Reich in Tunis. At the orders of Otto von Bismarck he accepted the task of Reich commissioner for West Africa. In a secret mission he went to the African West coast on the battleship “Möwe” (engl. seagull) in order to secure land acquisitions already made by Hanseatic Africa merchants against other European colonial competitors. In Togo and Cameroon Nachtigal established “treaties of protection” with the German Reich, thus declaring the local territories German colonies. As mentioned above, blackmailing was one of Nachtigals method for establishing these contracts. In July 1884, for example, he tried to blackmail local king G.A. Lawson III / Mlapa III into a treaty of protection by keeping two West African hostages, Gomez and Wilson, as prisoners on the battleship “Möwe.” In Cameroon the establishment of the so-called “Schutzherrschaft” (engl. protectorate) was deeply connected to military force and violence as well. As commissioner of the German Reich Nachtigal ensured and legitimized the rights which Adolf Lüderitz unlawfully obtained over territories in the later German South-West Africa.

Cologne played a significant role in Nachtigal’s life. He had many relatives in the city, where he served as an army doctor from 1858 until 1861.

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Mit solidarischen Grüßen

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