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**Review:** Judith Fait, *Kupfer, Kolonialismus, Kapital. Das Bergwerk Tsumeb, Namibia*, Hamburg, Diplomica, 2019.

With the rapid rise of the electrical industry from the 1880s onwards, copper became a strategic and profitable material for industrialized nations. At the same time, the German Empire began to establish itself as a colonial power in the competition between the imperial powers. The colonization of what is now Namibia began in 1884 when the first territorial acquisitions on the coast were declared German protected areas (“German South West Africa”). The development and exploitation of mineral resources was paramount to the colonial movement from the start. Expeditions to the Otavi mountainous region were initiated to search for the copper deposits of the legends and rumours of pre-colonial times. With the discovery in 1893 of the ‘green hill’ near today’s Tsumeb, the exploitation of a geological-mineralogical singularity began. Not only did the Tsumeb ores have an extraordinarily high content of copper and lead, there were also deposits of a range of previously unknown minerals and the area became a Mecca for mineralogists and collectors from around the world. The exploitation of the deposits by the Otavi Mining and Railway Company (“Otavi Minen- und Eisenbahngesellschaft”, OMEG) began in 1900 and continued, under various owners, with some interruptions due to wars and economic factors until 2008. As a result of the decades of emissions, 500 square kilometres were contaminated

with arsenic and lead of sometimes “extreme concentrations” (p. 143).

The ‘biography’ of the Tsumeb mine, a “superlative mine” (p. 11) presented by Judith Fait, probably constitutes the first historical mining study designed in this way. Her analysis moves at the intersection between archaeology and colonial history, economic and corporate history as well as technological and environmental history. The richly illustrated 207 printed pages include around 100 pages of text and a three-page bibliography. The excellent illustrations contribute significantly to the book’s clarity. The author has evaluated mainly printed sources, as well as the archival records in the Tsumeb Archive, Namibia, which included previously “untouched” archival material (p. 7). Archival sources from the German Federal Archives or other archives were not consulted.

The main sections on the pre-colonial era (p. 19) and the role of missionaries as pioneers (p. 25) show the author’s critical attitude towards colonialism. She rejects the self-praise of the missionaries in the context of their alleged civilizing work (p. 30). The overall chronological structure emphasizes the fraudulent character of colonial rule. The development up to the emergence of the German mining settlement in Tsumeb, which has also been described elsewhere, underscores the dilemma of German colonial policy. It was only with Tsumeb that the tide turned for the first time and the colonial economy became profitable. Colonial mining companies such as the South West African Co. and OMEG (p. 47) became crucially important.

The “heyday of mining in Tsumeb” (pp. 71-92) began with the commissioning of smelting furnaces in 1907. The section of the book on this provides a telling example of its strengths and weaknesses. In a colourful kaleidoscope of quotes, some of which are relatively long, the most diverse aspects are dealt with under one heading: contemporary statements on the fuel problem in Tsumeb from 1907, chemical-technical explanations by Hollemann-Wiberg from 1976<sup>1</sup> (why not contemporary?), criticism of the Prussian State Geological Institute’s lack of vigilance towards the ore samples sent in, the enthusiasm for the ‘beauty’ of the crystals found in Tsumeb, the architectural style of the ‘architecturally curious director’s building’ in the mining settlement and much more. The chapter closes with a brief description of the events after the start of the war in 1914 and thus the end of the ‘golden years’ – actually of the copper and diamond years – of German colonial rule in South West Africa in 1915 (p. 92).

The effort required of the reader to follow the erratic chronological representation is rewarded with considerable insights. In the following chapters, the author tears the mask off colonialism, colonial revisionism, apartheid and unrestrained capitalist exploitation (pp. 93 ff.). In so doing, she pursues a source- and fact-based argumentation that traces the development of ore mining and profits and the resulting human losses (p. 116). This is also

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold F. Holleman and Egon Wiberg, *Lehrbuch der anorganischen Chemie*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1976.

indicated by the heading of the last section on the history after the Second World War (“The final looting - Die finale Plünderung”; pp. 117 ff.). All sections benefit from the fact that the author, as a qualified engineer, knows how to convey the different geological, but above all metallurgical and chemical-physical subtleties. This also includes the tragic accumulation of cancer cases in Tsumeb and the region in the second half of the 1990s (p. 131).

Her conclusion does not conceal the fact that colonial mining contributed to the development of the post-colonial era infrastructure, even if “the main goal [...] was clearly the plundering of natural resources” (p. 149). Finally, she points out the ‘collective amnesia’ of the German public and of the “German-born Südwestler”. Today not only is the colonial era there being forgotten, so also is National Socialism in South West Africa (p. 147). Despite the relatively small volume of text, the book is a valuable contribution to an analysis of mining history that considers political, technical and environmental-historical factors. The wonderful Tsumeb Mine crystals, extracted from the earliest days of mining operations, can now be found in academic and private mineral collections around the world. Their bloody colonial history of discovery is unfortunately mostly concealed from the admirer.

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