A Review of: "Britain, Germany and Colonial Violence in South-West Africa, 1884–1919: The Herero and Nama Genocide" by Mads Bomholt Nielsen[1][2]

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Horst Drechsler made a revolutionary move when he explored the "Report on the Natives of South-West Africa and Their Treatment by Germany" a.k.a. Blue Book, written by the South African invaders of German South West Africa. The East German historian, whose book "Südwestafrika unter deutscher Kolonialherrschaft: der Kampf der Herero und Nama gegen den deutschen Imperialismus (1884–1915)" meant a paradigmatic change in the research of German colonial history, since the socialist scholar was the first who declared that the German rule in South West Africa was a form of colonial guilt.

More than half a decade later, the German Minister for Foreign Affairs, Heiko Maas called the colonial war crimes genocide and recognized it as a fact. The longtime work of historians, activists and other political actors was paid off: Germany no longer denies its dark past in Africa. However, a phenomenon can be observed in the German society, which was identified as 'colonial amnesia' by Reinhart Kössler: the Germans do not really know that their country was once a colonial power.

The European colonizers did not follow the same pattern in the era of 'Scramble for Africa'; nevertheless, they shared a similar point of view, as they saw in the native Africans the 'lower level of civilization'. Besides exploiting their goods, this attitude led to the establishment of oppressive systems: the French in today's Algeria, the Belgian in Congo, the German in today's Namibia, the British in today's Zimbabwe, and the descendants of the refugees from The Netherlands in Cape Colony were acting in a very same way when it came to deprive the Natives from their land, force them to slavery-like labour and to impose corporal punishment on them.

This phenomenon created an alliance between these colonial powers, and even led to some brutal actions. One of the strangest of these was the British helping Germans in crushing the Nama and Herero uprising. The history of this international collaboration was written by Danish researcher Mads Bomholt Nielsen. His monograph, entitled "Britain, Germany and Colonial Violence in South-West Africa, 1884–1919: The Herero and Nama Genocide", published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2022, is based on contemporary sources and the books of

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the most notable historians on the topic.

Bomholt Nielsen's conscientiously written book reminds the readers that the international politics is always a complex phenomenon; even states with opposite interests are able to cooperate, as it happened in German South West Africa. However, Wilhelm II openly approved Kruger's success against the British, who were the ruler of Cape Colony, and London did not help Samuel Maharero to regain the independency of the Herero. In fact, exactly the opposite happened, since the Cape authorities were afraid of a possible harmful effects of a successful anticolonial revolt in the neighbourhood.

Although, the Cape government made efforts to conquer South West Africa, London only supported the incorporation of Walvis Bay, which was the only port with good navigability. The rest of this territory was seen as less valuable, and the British frontier intended to connect Cape with Egypt anyway.

Bomholt Nielsen enlights the reader about the interesting fact that Leopold II and his soldiers became symbols of injustice of colonialism in the early years of the 20th century, but the German actions in German South West Africa were not able to receive the level of attention that the Belgian king could. The author emphasized the debate in the Reichstag and the anticolonial attitude of German social democrats in the debate on the Hottentot election (1907) and the bad reputation of the German military after Wilhelm II's Hun speech. Besides the development of the Imperial German Navy, these issues played a key role in the deterioration of British-German relations.

The author wrote an entire chapter about the Blue Book. The source-critical analysis gives valuable new knowledge about the birth and the impact of these documents. The South African invaders were seeking to justify the deprivation of Germany from its colonies; therefore, Gorges and O'Reilly tried to collect proofs and evidence of the brutal German rule. However, their aim was clearly political, as they wanted to merge South West Africa – just like their 'spiritual and political forefathers' in the 19th century Cape Colony.

The credibility of the Blue Book remained somewhat questionable. Andreas Eckl condemned the political agenda behind it, but Jan-Bart Gewald and Jeremy Silvester published a critical edition under the title "Words Cannot Be Found. German Colonial Rule in Namibia: An Annotated Reprint of the 1918 Blue Book". Bomholt Nielsen can be positioned on Gewald's and Silvester's (probably even Drechsler's) side, as he did not belittle the political motivations, but presented the importance of pictorial and oral historical evidences, which make the Blue Book a relevant document.

The interpretation of the Blue Book remains a core problem of the historical analysis of the Namibian history, and this is why a less concrete deficiency occurred: the South African authors predicted the extermination of the Ovambo tribe if the German rule were to continue. The utter hypocrisy of the South African authors is more than egregious if the UDF campaign in Ovamboland is taken into consideration, as the Ovambo Uprising was ended by the death

of King Mandume ya Ndemufayo who was killed and decapitated by South African soldiers. This can be linked to Heinrich Vedder's statement about the 'apartheid since German rule' in South West Africa. Bomholt Nielsen discoursed about Vedder's observation (sadly, the scientific work of this German scholar was not noticed in the monograph) and the crush of the Bondelswarts Rebellion, but the lack of a campaign in Ovamboland set back the complexity.

Bomholt Nielsen was seeking to collect the most relevant original sources. British, German, Namibian and South African files of colonial history are very well-elaborated. The only disturbing issue is the abbreviation of the German documents, since the Bundesarchiv (German Federal Archives) recommends the form 'BArch' not 'BAB', which was used by the author. The shortage of original German documents caused by the World Wars I and II are well-balanced by the use of newspapers and important German intellectuals and colonial officals, e.g. Theodor von Leutwein and Paul Rohrbach.

Based on this broad perspective and consistent work, the fact can be concluded that Bomholt Nielsen's book is a valuable contribution of the world history. His task of the elaboration of the German-British collaboration in colonial history yielded a genuine monograph.