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## Germany's Africa: A Literary and Historical Disconnect

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### Abstract

*Lukanga Mukara* (1912), a young East African's letters written during his visit to the German interior and sent to his king anxiously awaiting news of his impressions of Germany. The letters are a social critique of pre-World War I Germany seen through the eyes of the young Lukanga Mukara. Never once does he refer to German colonial excesses on the continent where his king to whom he sends his letters lives. Hans Paasche, a young naval officer, author of *Lukanga Mukara*, son of the Vice Chancellor of the German Reichstag, arrived in Darussalam in 1904. In 1905 he led the Rufiji expedition, the German force that suppressed the *Maji Maji Rebellion* in German East Africa. The wholesale slaughter of Africans led to Hans Paasche's later conversion to pacifism and his eventual murder in 1920 at the hands of the Brigade Erhardt, ultra-nationalist forerunners of the Nazi Regime. Paasche's German East African experiences, his familiarity with Swahili, the knowledge he must have had of the effects of German colonialism, make his portrayal of the simple, naïve African character and his pastoral community untouched by Western civilization rather surprising. This paper examines African images dominating *Lukanga Mukara* and places these in the context of historical events and of literature written during and about this period of African history. It asks: What are the effects of images that form and inform the national consciousness.

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### 1. Introduction

On 21 May 1920 a man not yet forty was shot by members of the Brigade Erhardt – early forerunners of the Nazi regime. The man was unarmed. He had been swimming with his four small children when the soldiers surrounded the family estate. His children watched as the soldiers shot their father in cold blood. In one of his works the German poet and playwright Hugo von Hofmannsthal quoted the second eldest child as having asked the soldiers why they had killed his father who was after all a good man. The man who was murdered on that Spring day in 1920 in many ways embodied the national consciousness of Germany – its colonial practices and attitudes; its

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imperialism; its search for peace. He shared in Germany's colonial guilt and carried the blood of thousands of Africans on his conscience. His work and his life embody the disconnect between historical and literary perceptions of reality. His best known book – *Lukanga Mukara* – still being reprinted today – tells us of his and German society's understanding of Africa. This understanding stands in stark contrast to Germany's colonial history as well as to other literature which appeared during and about the same period in history.

## 2. The Author of *Lukanga Mukara*

Hans Paasche was the son of an economics professor who from 1912-1918 was Vice Chancellor of the German Reichstag. As such he belonged to Germany's educated middle class. His father, Hermann Paasche, was an economist and statistician who developed a national statistical index, the Paasche-Index, which to this day provides a calculation of the Price Index. He analyzed the German sugar industry and was closely associated with the "Rheinische Metallwaren- und Maschinenfabrik Aktiengesellschaft" which later became Rheinmetall, till today one of the world's largest weapons manufacturing companies; and was also a member of the Directorate of Erhardt Works, another major German armaments Company. Together both companies probably supplied most of the weapons used during the colonial wars in East Africa and on the battlefields of World War I.

His son, Hans Paasche, author of *Lukanga Mukara*, was a young ambitious naval officer. Like many German officers he was drawn to the German colonies where life in the barracks was generally not very exciting. But there was the promise of: unlimited lion- and elephant-hunting; continual access to oranges and dates and other tropical fruit; many women and on top of that the possibility of earning much money<sup>†</sup>. In the summer of 1904 he arrived in Darussalam where he took command of the military cruiser the *S.M.S Bussard*. The first months of his command were paradisiacal with extended hunting safaris. His interest in the people of the region was apparent when he learned Kiswahili. He impressed "the natives" with stunts during which he demonstrated his marksmanship. He became known as the "Mbana with the foolproof rifle" (Wanderer 1921:30).

In August 1905 news came that farmers in the south of the country who had been ordered by the colonial government to plant cotton fields had destroyed the latter and had threatened a native official. It soon became clear that this was not merely a case of a minor native revolt that could be put down by the local German Empire African Colonial Force (*Kaiserliche Schutztruppe*), but was a well-organized national struggle against foreign domination. And so Hans Paasche was given the opportunity he like the other German officers longed for: to prove himself in battle. He was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Rufiji region in today's southern Tanzania. It was he who led the Rufiji expedition, the German force that came to suppress the so-called *Maji Maji Rebellion* of 1905 in German East Africa.

During this time his father came to visit him and was proud of his son's military prowess. Hermann Paasche bragged that thanks to his good marksmanship his son had killed more than thirty Africans; he stood on the rock on which the African who had dared to kill a German sailor was shot down by his son; he stood proudly under the tree from which prisoners were summarily hanged in a display of uncompromising German justice (Wegmann 2009:12). Hermann Paasche's description of his son's military prowess is matched by his account of his hunting skills: "The battles which cost so many Africans their lives also sent many crocodiles to kingdom come," he tells in his account of his visit as when the two of them wandered along the Rufiji river in the evenings Hans shot crocodiles who had failed to leave their place on the sandbanks in time. Later Hans Paasche returned to Germany with more than forty different kinds of antelope antlers. These were proudly exhibited in 1907 in Berlin in the colonial museum of the German army and navy<sup>‡</sup>. No doubt Hermann Paasche had the added satisfaction of discovering that he had every reason to be proud of the weaponry the company in which he was involved, the "Rheinische Metallwaren- und Maschinenfabrik Aktiengesellschaft," was manufacturing. What is deeply disturbing though is that it is not only Hermann Paasche who uses the same tone to speak of both Hans Paasche's hunting and military prowess. Other accounts, for example those of Otto Wanderer who compares him to Ulrich von Hutten and Bernard Shaw, uses a similar tone to describe the almost playful manner in which he used his rifle to bring down man and beast (Wanderer 1921:30).

<sup>†</sup> Georg Maercker, *Unsere Schutztruppe in Ost-Afrika*, Berlin 1893, p. 19f.

<sup>‡</sup> Hermann Paasche, *Deutsch-Ostafrika. Wirtschaftliche Studien*. Berlin 1906 (p. 143-151)

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