Clash of Cultures, Clash of Values
Wikipedia and Indigenous Communities

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CaTaC 2016, 17 June 2016
The 21st century encyclopedia

- Started 2001, open source, content licensed under CC-BY-SA
- 36 million articles, 291 languages
- Largest edition: English, 5.2 million articles, 10 billion page views
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- 21st century’s outline, bibliography, and definition of knowledge
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Wikipedia’s relevance for Namibia

- available in English, German, Afrikaans, Chinese, Portuguese
  - ... the native tongues of former and current colonial masters
  - 3 editors are actively writing about Namibia—2 Germans, 1 Australian
  - ⇒ ‘Namibian narrative’ again told from an alien perspective
- Namibian indigenous languages are in Incubator at best
  - Oshindonga: 54 articles
  - Otjiherero: 80 articles
  - Khoekhoegowab: 1 article
  - Silozi, Rukwangali, Ju’Hoansi, Oshikwanyama, Taa, !Kung ... :-(
  - languages for which no encyclopaedia exists
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#1: What did you actually do?

1. Hypothesised values to be the independent variable of editing activity
2. Hypothesised common values throughout Otjiherero–speaking community
3. Idea: Every language edition makes their own rules
4. Offered a ‘Wikipedia without rules’ to a group of OvaHerero
5. Observed self–organisation
6. Conceptualised and described the differences
7. Discussed desired features (Value Sensitive Design)
#2: But that’s all *black and white*!

- Only the most obvious differences collected for now
- Both Wikipedians and OvaHerero lack an accepted ethnological description
- Verification mechanism: one veteran Wikipedian, two Otjiherero native speakers
Trust: Why should I believe you?

- **OvaHerero**: trust the contributor
  - Groups defined by their members
  - Speech inseparable from speaker
  - Elders speak, others desist

- **Wikipedians**: trust the contribution
  - Individuality
  - Anonymity
  - Verifiability

- Solvable conflict: audiovisual content, username policy, group accounts, page protection
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Ownership: Anyone may edit

- OvaHerero: Strong oppose
  - Every bit of knowledge has a hierarchy of owners
  - Outside influence not welcome
- Wikipedians: Strong support
  - Knowledge is not created but merely documented
  - Diversification of duties

Not a conflict:
- Content that cannot be improved will not be improved
- Mere reporting (audio, video) acceptable to OvaHerero
- “Theorising” unwanted by both groups
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Collaboration: How shall we work?

- **OvaHerero**: Offline deliberation, present the end result
  - Be silent if you’re not designated to speak
  - Present nothing half-baked
  - Change nothing that resulted from consensus

- **Wikipedians**: Online drafts of varying quality
  - “Experts are scum”
  - Start somewhere to get the work done
  - Use consensus for changes

- **Probably solvable conflict:**
  - No problem: voluntary self-censorship
  - Doubtful: Different perceptions of quality
  - Doubtful: What about alternative narratives?
Courtesy: How shall we treat each other?

- **OvaHerero**: Extreme politeness is existential
  - Plethora of rules and customs
  - Harmony before all else
- **Wikipedians**: Nice–to–have
  - Extensive civility policies, selectively enforced
  - “Right to blow up” occasionally

**Solvable conflict**: Community rules are the blueprint
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Vicious Circle

Language in Incubator ➔ Common rule set ➔ No editing activity ➔ Language in Incubator
End of Presentation

- Thanks to the Wikimedia Foundation and the Namibia Knowledge Portal for sponsoring this project

Any questions?

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