

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book has been a long journey in the making, with many unexpected turns along the way. The idea of studying the culture of colonialism came to me in 1995, while living in Zimbabwe. On a short trip to the coastal town of Swakopmund, in Namibia, I was struck by the enormous jetty that leads out to sea—and to nothingness. It is a stark testament to the failed attempt by German colonizers to remake the very landscape. And yet, the intensity with which the German tourists there scoured the town for traces of Germanness was equally striking; it pointed to something else at work, something powerful. I resolved to figure out what it was. This book is not the answer to that question, but it is the answer to a different question stumbled across along the way. Several years later, in the old state library on Unter den Linden in Berlin, I chanced across an eighty-five-year-old booklet with an odd-sounding title, *Warenzeichen Humor*: it was a picture booklet of advertisements, some funny, some horrific. The six-digit number under each picture piqued my curiosity, and I went in search of a main registry. The rest was history—in all of its messiness. This book has taken many twists and turns, and I would like to give heartfelt thanks to all who have helped along the way.

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possibilities of approaching history in new ways, and this inspired me to take risks; while they do not always pan out, I am always glad to have made the attempt, and I thank her for the courage.

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