

BOOK REVIEW

Olivier van Beemen. *Heineken in Africa. A Multinational Unleashed*. London: C. Hurst & Co., 2019. xvi + 307 pp. Photographs. Bibliography. Index. \$29.95. Cloth. ISBN: 9781849049023.

At many levels, the Heineken corporation is mythical. The Dutch brewery is easily one of the most iconic beer brands in the world. Until recently, it was the largest beer company worldwide (after the merger between InBrew and SABMiller in 2016, it moved down to second place). With more than 250 brands sold in more than 70 countries, Heineken's worldwide presence is almost as ubiquitous as Coca-Cola's.

Olivier van Beemen, in his recent book *Heineken in Africa. A Multinational Unleashed*, demystifies Heineken's activities in Africa, which experts consider the new promised land for the beer industry. As noted by Heineken's ex-CEO, until recently the region was "the international business world's best kept secret" (xi). Organizing his work in a foreword, fifteen chapters, a postscript, and an epilogue, and using a selection of case studies and cross-country comparative analyses, Van Beemer provides a multi-faceted investigation into how Heineken uncovered this "secret" and cold-bloodedly exploited it to the company's advantage.

Each country chapter is followed by a thematic one, in which the author attempts to add depth and context to the identified phenomena. Most of the analyzed case studies are focused on countries south of the Sahara—Heineken's primary zone. Van Beemen studied the Dutch beer hegemon's activities in Africa for over six years. His findings—supported by corporate documents and over four hundred interviews with managers, ex-employees, suppliers, customers, partners, politicians, and whistle-blowers—offer the reader a nuanced analysis of the (un)ethical dilemmas faced by the corporation in Africa.

The author argues that the disgraceful behavior of the Dutch brewery in Africa was, prior to the publication of his book, actively supported by Dutch politicians. One chapter dedicated to Heineken's inroads into Mozambique offers a good example. Despite international condemnation of the country's political elite over a gigantic corruption scandal, the Dutch king, the prime minister, and the parliament extended a "fanfare" reception to Filipe Nyusi,

the Mozambican president, during his state visit to the Netherlands in 2017. Reportedly, Heineken's local brewing license in Mozambique was at stake. Van Beemen's meticulous research into the topic revealed that soon after the visit, the Dutch Embassy in Mozambique started lobbying forcefully not only to push forward the license awarding process for Heineken but also to pass an entirely new bill, which would have granted the company tax breaks. Somewhat unsurprisingly, the lobbying activities proved successful. Heineken was awarded extensive tax holidays and—although its revenues were twice the size of the entire country's GDP—was shockingly granted “small brewery” status, which qualified it for subsidies and even further tax breaks.

According to the author, the Mozambique case study is not an exception but rather representative of Heineken's “game” across the continent. Other chapters make this argument even more strongly. Van Beemen provides ample evidence (though sometimes anecdotal) about the company's commercial “success” and double standards, from high-level corruption practices in DRC, to support for apartheid in South Africa, to promoting the supposedly “positive” health benefits of drinking beer in several countries, to “socially responsible campaigns” which involved painting Heineken's logos on schools in Nigeria.

Van Beemen's book is not merely about Heineken's endeavors in Africa. The author reveals difficult facts and asks even more difficult questions of a bigger caliber, such as, does foreign direct investment actually benefit the host country? What should be the limit of political lobbying activities in least developed countries? Is it ethical for foreign corporations with billions of dollars in revenues to squeeze out the very last dime in tax abatements from the poorest countries?

For readers with a deeper knowledge and understanding of the sub-continent's corporate world, the revelations of Heineken's fraudulent, unethical, and evasive business activities may seem somehow less shocking, but they provide yet another well-documented confirmation of the established phenomenon of foreign corporations abusing weak institutions and regulations in developing countries. Nevertheless, surely van Beemen's investigation offers enough hard evidence for the Dutch parliament to initiate a formal investigation into Heineken's activities in Africa.

Overall, this book offers a valuable contribution to the literature on the malpractices and abuses of multinational corporations operating within poor countries. This book is a must read for not only beer industry aficionados but also those who want to see firsthand how international corporate interests may undo development efforts in Africa.

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