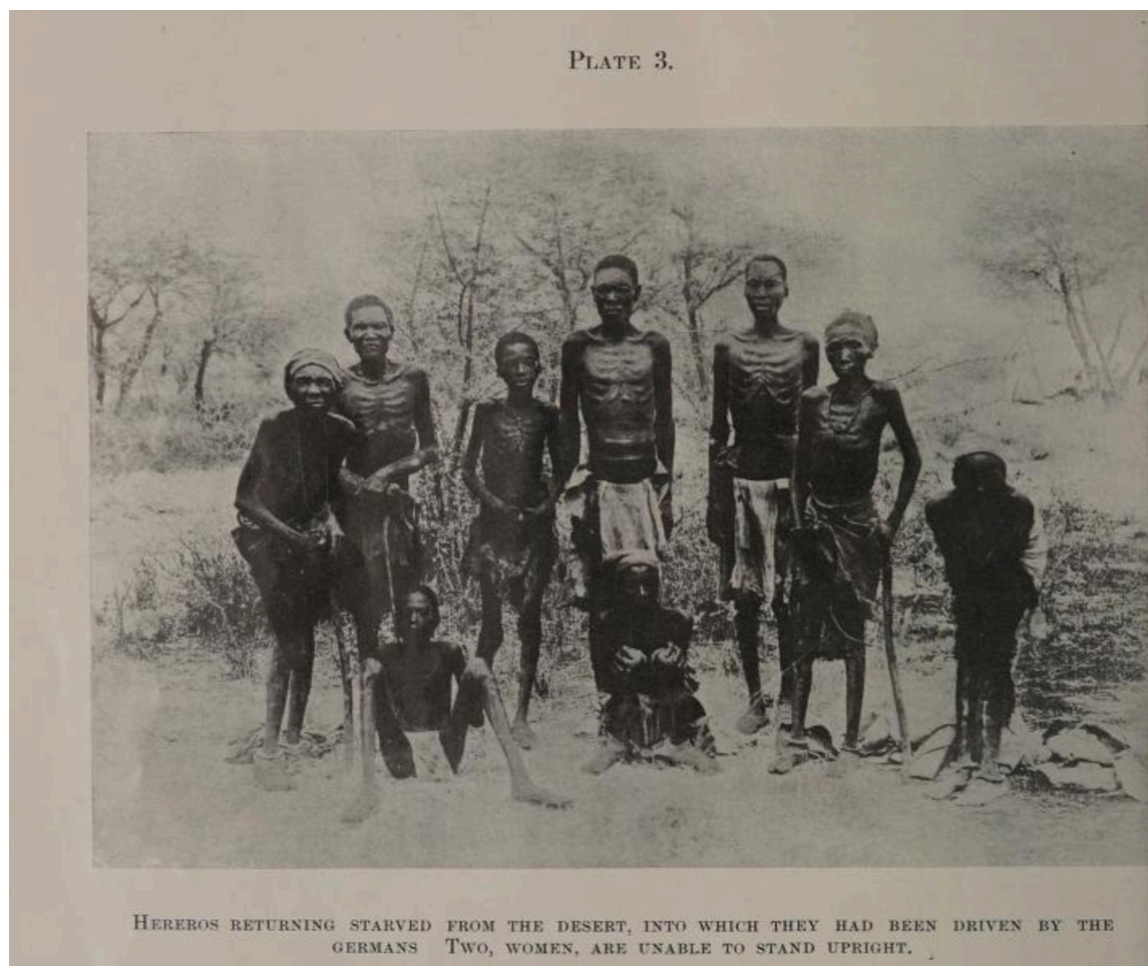


Primary Source Analysis - Herero and Nama Genocide:

Introduction:

The Herero and Nama Genocide is one of the least well known of all genocides or mass killings to take place in the Twentieth Century. It is so unknown that the incorrect, but not entirely unfounded belief that it was the 'practice run' for the Holocaust is one of the key points of discussion whenever it is brought up. This piece of research will deal with the below image, taken after the genocide had come to a close in 1908.

While mostly unknown in comparison to other contemporary genocides, the brutal treatment of the Herero and Nama peoples in South-West Africa by the German colonial governments, and subsequent abandonment by the British authorities in their acquisition of the area after the Great War, paint an upsettingly accurate picture of how many other peoples and areas would be treated after other mass killings and genocides.



The Background:

What is now modern day Namibia was in 1904 the German colonial territory of *Südwestafrika*. This had come under German control in 1884, and remained so until the end of the Great War, except during the years immediately following 1914, when it was occupied by British and South African forces (Britannica, 2020). As it formed part of the German colonial empire in Africa, it is important to understand German motivations in both the initial

colonisation of the region, and the later motivations in perpetrating the genocide. Throughout German controlled Africa, plantation economies and extraction of regional wealth to the mainland were the norm, and this was no different in South West Africa. The *World Without Genocide* article on the Herero and Nama genocide states that control was necessary “to expand access to agricultural production for Germany’s rapidly-growing population” (World Without Genocide, 2021). This was not uncommon throughout German controlled Africa, and was mostly for the benefit of establishing economic dominance over the native populations.

It is also important to note that as the German Colonial Empire was one of the last major European creations, it had to settle for areas that had been left by other powers. Their control over South West Africa was a strategic decision more than an economic one. With the neighbouring British colony of South Africa, which for the sake of continuity will be referred to as such throughout this document, being much wealthier in terms of gold production, fertile land and development, South West Africa was beneficial only to the Germans. This is not to say that there was a lack of economic incentive: the discovery of diamonds by German colonists after the genocide provided an impetus for economic growth and development in the colonial territory (Janse, 1995, Pg. 243).

It was in the intervening years, from the start of German colonial control over South West Africa until the fall of the territory to the British Empire, that the genocide of the Herero and Nama people took place. The methods used in this genocide are very prescient for the later, more famous genocides carried out by the German state. The use of Concentration Camps, specifically Shark Island, were one of the first and most brutal uses of the concept in the world. The only nations to have used Concentration Camps before were the Spanish authorities in Cuba and the British in South Africa, just a few years before.

Genocide:

The image that this document is analysing comes from a book produced to encourage the delegates of the Treaty of Versailles to allow for the area formerly known as *Deutsches-Südwestafrika* to become a part of South Africa, under the League of Nations system of awarding protectorates. The book, *Report of the Natives of South-West Africa and their Treatment by Germany* (His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1918), is a spitting image of British colonial hypocrisy. It lambasted the German governance of the region, citing the mistreatment and crimes of the state, all for the purpose of extending British colonial control over what remained of German Africa. Showing that the German colonial authorities couldn’t maintain control, in an ethical or practical sense, in just one of their colonies provided a good reason to remove the others that they controlled throughout Africa, which Britain wanted for herself. The lack of real interest in finding justice for the peoples whose lives had been obliterated by the German colonial authorities is clear - the book was scrubbed from the pages of history as soon as the decision at Versailles had been reached (Silvester and others, 2003, Pg. xiii).

The image that has been used is clearly meant to evoke an emotional response from its reader. The two women who are unable to stand, both in the foreground, are very powerful

emotional figures. Given the preferred outcome of this report, it is probably safe to assume that these people were chosen specifically for their physical state, and were placed where they are in the image. As no photographer is credited with taking and publishing this image, it is also probably safe to assume that it was either a Colonial Office Official, or a serviceman charged with finding evidence of German negligence and abuse. The state of clear malnourishment and starvation is obvious when viewing the image, and given its presence at the Versailles Conference and the levels of starvation currently being experienced throughout Europe, it is not hard to see why the delegates attendees were compelled to award the British and South Africans custodianship over Namibia and its peoples.

The hypocrisy of this document and its use to justify continued colonial rule of the region, against the clear wishes of its people who had already risen up against their colonial overlords is one of the most interesting aspects of this piece of evidence. When the Herero people, under Samuel Maherero, rose up against German colonial authorities and settlers in the area in January 1904, they were met with crushing opposition. In the years previously, a great number of Herero cattle had died, upwards of “80% of Herero herds in 1897” (Patin, 2022). This forced large numbers of former Herero herders into working in German-run farms, increasing the dependence of the Herero peoples on the German colonists. For clear reasons, this reliance was unpopular with the previously completely independent Herero tribes and when the breaking point was reached in 1904, it was with great popular support that the Herero people moved to support the uprising.

For that reason, and the desire of the German Colonial Administration, now acting under the direct military leadership of the now Governor Lothar von Trotha, to expand its control over the Herero hinterland, were so brutal and heavy handed in its crackdown on the uprising. By the time that the genocide had ended, at least 75,000 Herero and Nama peoples had been killed by the German authorities. The methods of killing were to become familiar throughout the rest of Africa in the Twentieth Century, and consisted of “forced starvation, forced dehydration, sexual violence, life-threatening medical experiments, and incarceration in concentration camps” (World Without Genocide, 2021). These brutal methods of killing ensured that the German goals set before the genocide were met, and ensured that even until current times, ownership of land in Namibia would be dominated by White-descendants of German settlers. Much as it was in South Africa following the fall of Apartheid, justice was only first served in the 1990’s. While land redistribution remains a contentious issue throughout Africa and especially in the Southern reaches of the continent, Namibia is still grappling with the consequences of the genocide of the Herero and Nama peoples.

Conclusion:

The image that this piece of research has been based around is a window into understanding the brutal and effective genocide of the Herero and Nama peoples. The killing of at least 75,000 people and the enduring consequences of it still define the modern history of Namibia, and can be seen today in how land ownership and control over the natural resources of the country are distributed. However, it also shows the blatant colonial hypocrisy on display in the period immediately following the Great War. British desires to gain control over German colonial territories in Africa and further afield were so great that

they created a portfolio of German mistreatment of South West Africa, and presented it to the collected governments in Versailles, as peace was finally being made. This conscious decision to weaponise the people of Namibia into shoehorning the region into the British colonial project of South Africa is deeply indicative of how the British were willing to punish other states for their involvement in colonial atrocities, but not address their own. The use of such an emotive image within the document provides a window through which the British colonial institutions stood to manipulate and coerce other nations into supporting the expansion of the Empire.

It was not until the fall of Apartheid in South Africa, and Namibian independence in 1990 that serious discussions began to take place on the subject of reparations and justice for those who had been killed between 1904 and 1907. Since then, the German government has paid huge amounts of money, totalling at least \$1.3 billion (World Without Genocide, 2021), and have officially acknowledged the genocide. While this is a step in the right direction, and sets a good precedent for other states, it has been criticised for not going far enough. Members of the Herero and Nama people have taken their government to court for “accepting reparations on their behalf” (Ahmed, 2023), and levied solid criticism at the German government for not discussing with them, directly, the topic of reparations.

There can be no doubt as to the importance of the genocide of the Herero and Nama peoples, beyond the huge loss of life and brutal methods used in carrying it out. As the first opening salvo in European atrocities in Africa, and the first genocide of the entire Twentieth Century, it provides a lens through which we can better understand actions taken by other governments, both at the time and in the remaining Ninety years of the Century. Many parallels have been drawn between the Herero and Nama genocide and the Holocaust three decades later. These are understandable, and the lines can be clearly seen when viewing the matter from a birds eye view. It's only when we further examine both that it becomes clear that there is no direct connection, beyond the desire to eradicate a people to further the cause of another. Being able to distinguish between the two is an important part of both Holocaust and genocide studies, and is something that this document has attempted to provide.

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