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For Namibia, Germany's promise of "never again" rings hollow



Sources: South Wind [Photo: Laidlaw Peringanda in a mass grave of concentration camp victims (BBC News)]

Germany's defense of Israel in the genocide case before the International Court of Justice shows the limits of its historical consciousness. Their hypocrisy does not go unnoticed in Namibia.

When Namibian President Hage Geingob rightly [condemned](#) Germany two weeks ago for backing Israel's genocide and defending it at the [International Court of Justice](#) (ICJ), many people understood why such a small country in southwestern Africa felt compelled to do so. People like me who grew up there were never safe from the legacies of German colonialism in Namibia and what is known as its "forgotten genocide."

It's no secret that German colonialism still [divides](#) Namibia. Not only do I see it in [German monuments](#) and schools all over the country, or when I listen to my older sisters tell how they were forced to learn German throughout his secondary education; in my own everyday life I'm also facing the German impact in Namibia.

Germany and the Western imperial core have always used their [reckoning with the Holocaust](#) as a reference point for historical atonement and the surrender of the Holocaust accounts. But the lack of widespread commemoration, of "remembering," of apologies or even reparations for Namibian people leaves Of course, this settling of scores was not extended, nor will it be extended, to the victims of [their first genocide](#).

Germany's Failed Accountability

Historians often point out how "brief" the German Empire was with the argument that having "lost" its colonies in 1918, German colonialism was not as relevant as other European conquests.

The Herero-Namaqua people of Namibia remember things differently. Following the "[Fight for Africa](#)" of 1884, Germany gained colonies in East Africa, South-West Africa, and Northwest Africa. In Namibia, German colonial troops stole indigenous land and livestock, and subjected indigenous populations – the Herero-Namaqua – including children, to exploitative labour and brutal forms of punishment.

In 1904, when the indigenous populations resisted, the Germans suppressed their uprisings and immediately issued an extermination order. In 1905 the "Konzentrationslager" (concentration camps) were created to cause "death by exhaustion", among other causes from starvation, sexual violence, medical experiments and disease.

The Namibian genocide [wiped out](#) approximately 80 per cent of the Herero population and 50 per cent of the Namaqua population; Some 100,000 Herero-Namaqua people were killed by colonial troops. It was the first genocide of the 21st century.

At the same time, in East Africa, [Tanzania's Maji Maji rebellion](#) against the oppression of German rule was taking place. The German Colonialists they crushed it by subjugating Tanzania's inter-ethnic population through a forced famine for three years. They even died 300,000 people in a sample of the degree of dehumanization that is taking place. It would later be fired and used during the Nazi Holocaust.

These systematic massacres were characteristics of German colonial rule in Africa. But today they are almost absent from Germany's memory.

The Politics of Memory and Reconciliation

It wasn't until [2004](#), a century later, that the German government formally acknowledged its colonial brutalities in Namibia and apologized. But he rejected the possibility of reparations for the survivors and descendants of the victims of the genocide. Then, in [2015](#), Germany negotiated with the Namibian government to "heal the wounds" of its colonial violence and officially recognize it as genocide. They also agreed to pay Namibia [€1.1 billion](#) in development aid over 30 years as a gesture of reconciliation, though not as legally binding reparation. This false pretense of reconciliation is a form of structural violence and can therefore be seen as a permanent legacy of German genocide and colonialism against the Herero-Namaqua people.

In modern-day Namibia, German settlers still own 70% of the country's land even though they make up only [2% of the Namibian population](#). Likewise, German "reconciliation" has continued to silence those most affected by its colonial legacy. Many members of the Ovaherero and Namaqua communities report that they have been [excluded](#) from the talks by both the Namibian and German governments, and are sceptical about the possibility of receiving any kind of reparations.

Since the genocide, there have been only symbolic commemorations. Remains of victims have been repatriated to Namibia in 2011, 2014 and [2018](#), only after being used and displayed in German academic and medical institutions.

Memory has multiple layers and nuances, but it forces us to recognize the truth. In Namibia, the legacy of the Herero-Namaqua genocide continues to require assessment. But the influence of this legacy extends far beyond Namibia and is reflected in the international community. Today it is clear that Israel is mobilizing the imperial core to do what it does best: maintain the *status quo*.

Germany's backing of Israel's indiscriminate war, ethnic cleansing and genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza over the past 109 days has revealed the limited scope of [German guilt](#) and ["never again."](#) We must continue to denounce Germany's hypocrisy in supporting Israel by pretending to have moved away from the racist and fascist state that it has always been. Why has Germany been able to pay such generous reparations to Israel and Holocaust survivors since 1952, but still deny the same courtesy to Namibians? Why did the German government realize the importance of including the Jewish people in reconciliation talks but refuse to sit down with the descendants of its victims in Namibia? More importantly, how can real change take place if colonial powers are only willing to do the bare minimum through a symbolic commitment to their colonial past?

A Changing World Order

Namibia's courageous condemnation of Germany for [making Israel's genocide possible](#) demonstrates that it is a country particularly positioned to act as a catalyst for a changing world order. After World War I, the German colonies were entrusted to the apartheid government of South Africa. Namibia was subjected to its own system of apartheid until it finally gained independence in 1990. Like South Africa with [the ICJ case](#), Namibia has tried to force accountability for genocide. In 2001, before the German government recognized the Herero-Namaqua genocide, representatives of the Herero people filed a [\\$2 billion](#) lawsuit in the U.S. against the German government and Deutsche Bank (the bank that financed the German government's colonial activities and other companies in Namibia). The application was dismissed. Which doesn't mean we forget.

Germany's guilt lies because, as a colonial power, it has no right to determine when and how to be forgiven, let alone how he should be forgiven. Namibia – and any of the other countries that have colonized – especially when they demand the reparations they have they deserve it.

Germany's efforts to completely ignore and silence its colonial history outside of the Holocaust, as well as to ignore and silence [current racism and repression](#), come full circle. What is disturbing is that the German genocide of the Herero-Namaqua and colonial history in Africa have not been prosecuted. Just as South Africa is doing by forcing Israel to acknowledge its current genocidal behavior, we need to have Germany's entire past persecuted.

[South Africa's landmark case before the ICJ](#) serves several purposes: not only does it rightly demand that Israel's brutal war be recognized as genocide, but it encourages other countries to reject the colonial paradigm that has determined their recent past.

By actively fighting for a true decolonization, for racial justice, for reparations, and for the unconditional freedom, new and ancient global solidarities between nations of the Global South such as South Africa, Namibia and Palestine.

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