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OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



Exploring Herero Genocide Survivor Narratives

Nependa ri kuuka ondoro
(Herero - a brave one also breaks his knee)

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Overview

- Introduction
- Objectives
- Literature Review
- Historical Background
- Research Methodology
- Narratives
- Findings and discussion
- Conclusion



Objectives of the study

- Main : To solicit personal narratives to provide for empirical evidence about the cause, trajectory and effects of genocide on the Herero communities.
- Specific : to collect stories of the German-Herero war narrated by the survivor families
- to create a new collection of this period;
- To preserve and analyze; and,
- To set up a repository internationally at the Basler Afrika Bibliographien which is one of the leading organisations for Namibian and Southern African Archives



Literature review

- Don Forster (2000, March), “Entitlement as explanation for perpetrators actions”, *South African Journal of Psychology*, 30 (1), 10.
- David Olusoga & Casper W. Erichson (2011). *The Kaiser’s Holocaust Germany’s forgotten genocide*, (London, Faber & Faber,).
- Elisabeth Baer (2018). *The Genocidal Gaze*, (Windhoek: UNAM press).
- Jurgen Zimmer and Joachim Zeller, *Genocide in German South-West Africa The Colonial War of 1904-1908 and its Aftermath*, transl by E.J. Neather, (Monmouth: The Merlin Press, 2008).
- Rienhart Koessler, 2015, *Namibia and Germany Negotiating the past*, UNAM Press, Windhoek.
- Ronald Niezen, “Speaking for the dead: the memorial politics of genocide in Namibia and Germany” *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 2018 Vol. 24, No. 5, 547–567.
- Sarala Krishnamurthy, “Resisting colonisation and colonising resistance: The writer as a historical witness in ywo Namibian novels: The Scattering by Lauri Kubuitsile and Mama Namibia by Maria Serebrov, *Research in African Genocide*, Ed Maurice Vambe, 2018.



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The Herero Genocide is acknowledged as
the first Genocide of the 20th Century

*The Kaiser's Holocaust Germany's
forgotten genocide*

(Olusoga & Erichson, 2011)

Historical background



German – Herero War 1904 - 1908

- 12 January 1904 – Okahandja
- Germans defeated in Oviombo
- Maharero moves to Waterberg area
- 11 August 1904 Attack at Ohamakari (Waterberg)
- Flight into the Omaheke desert, poisoning of wells, shootings, mass hangings



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1st genocide of the 20th century

10 July 2015:

The German Ministry of Foreign Affairs describes the actions of the Germans during the war as genocide.



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German attack at Oham

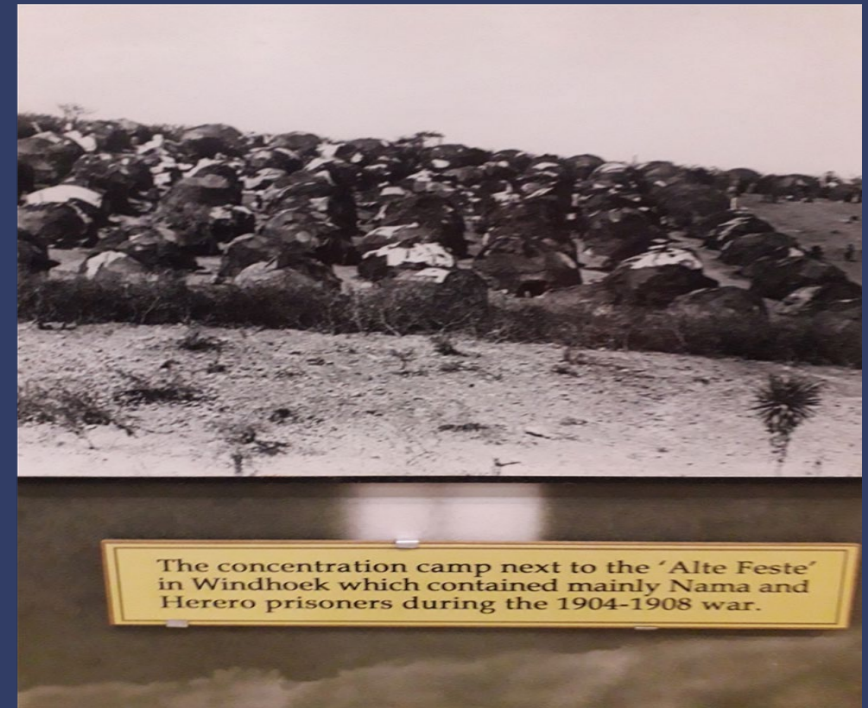


80,000 (80% of Hereros): less than 50 Germans died



Concentration camps -Windhoek (Alte Feste), Swakopmund and Luederitz

The Herero Genocide is
scientifically acknowledged as
first Genocide of the 20th
Century (Olusoga & Ericson,
2011)





Lüderitz – 3 camps



One of the few photographs showing the conditions in the Shark Island concentration camp (around 1906).

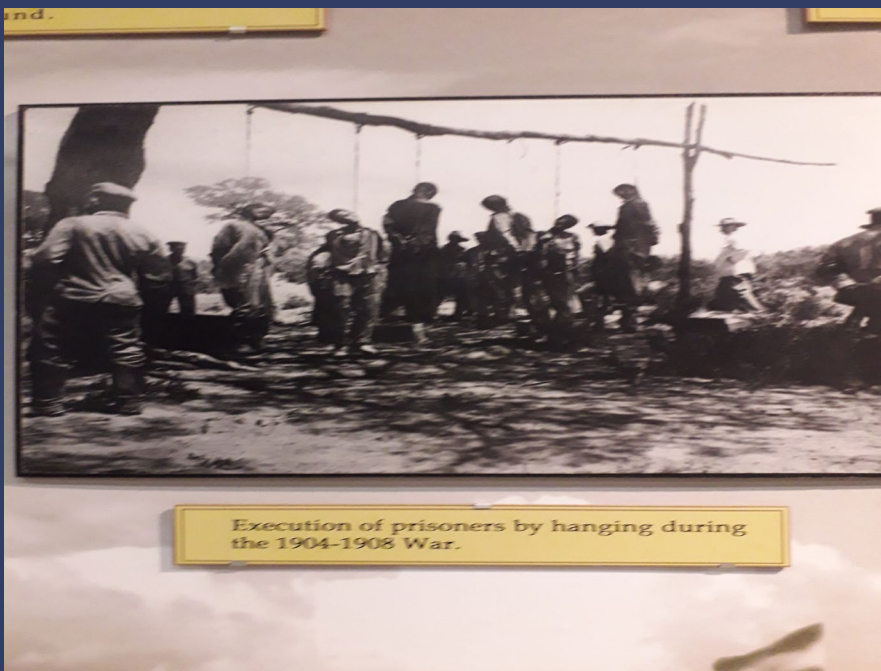


Relentless pursuit into the Omaheke desert

Poisoning of wells:
Ozombo va Vindimba
Cultural Heritage and
Information Centre



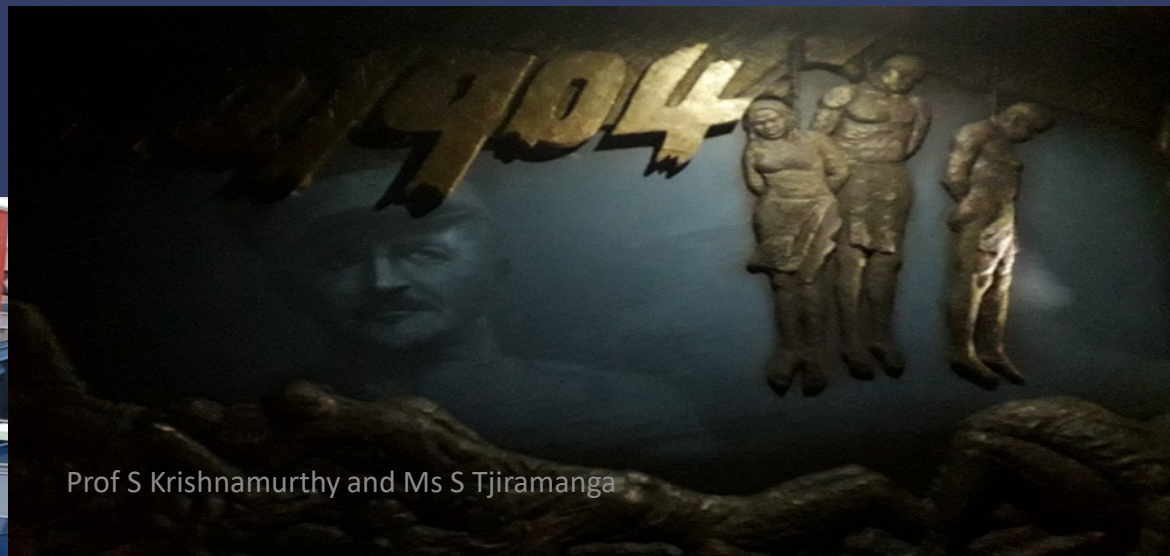
Mass executions and the Hanging Tree (Ngauzepo)





3 October 1904 – Trotha's extermination order

Excerpt: The Herero nation must now leave the country. If it refuses, I shall compel it to do so with the 'long tube' (cannon). Any Herero found inside the German frontier, with or without a gun or cattle, will be executed. I shall spare neither women nor children. I shall give the order to drive them away and fire on them. Such are my words to the Herero people



Transport to concentration camps in Swakopmund and Lüderitz



Concentration camps

Windhoek – Alte Feste, 3 gallows erected

Swakopmund – for Herero and Nama people

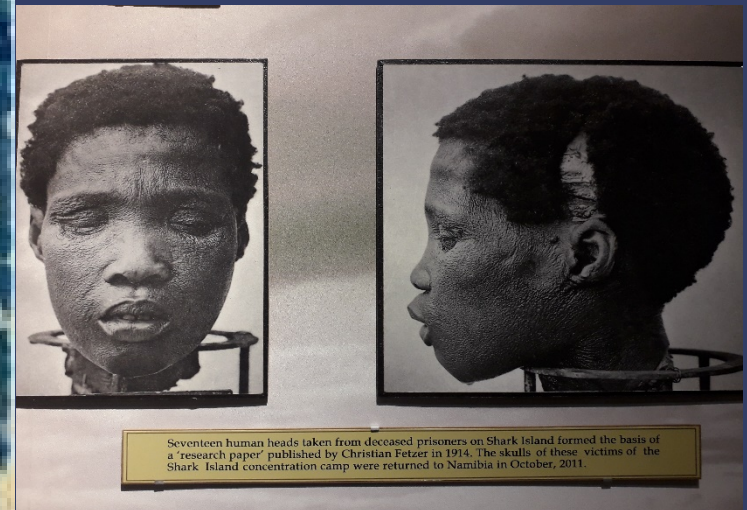
Lüderitz – 3 camps

A few facts:

- Hard labour - people were used to build railways
- Skulls of 17 Herero people sent to Germany for examination and academic publication – returned in 2017



Packing of skulls to be sent to Germany for scientific examinations (post card)



Narratives

- Story or account of events told to the narrator;
- Descriptions, records, or portrayals;
- Personal narratives elicited through interview questions about the experiences and events of Herero genocide survivors as told by their descendants;
- African tradition, stories are passed on from generation to generation orally;
- Numerous stories still hidden deep in the individual and collective memory of the Herero society; and
- Collecting these narratives and making them available to the public will shed light on their experiences of the Herero Genocide.

Methodology

Sample selection

Purposive sampling with snowballing (28 out of an estimated population of 500 elders; total Herero population 250 000)

Phase 1 – Approach people to name potential interviewees

Phase 2 – Contact persons in villages to approach named person to explain the nature of the project

Phase 3 – Obtain consent of the person and organize the interview

Selection criteria

- The interviewee must have been related to the survivor;
- The interviewee had to have lived with the survivor or spent a substantial time with the survivor; and
- The interviewee had to be willing to talk about the life of the survivor.

Findings and discussion

- Recording video interviews to capture the essence of what is being told in Otjiherero language itself;
- Investigating trans-generational narratives and trans-generational trauma, identity, stories of survival, atrocity stories, etc;
- The stories could be categorized focusing on five sub themes. These are:
 - The Herero Genocide itself (the Ohamakari war);
 - Stories of survival;
 - Stories of the concentration camp;
 - Identity; and
 - Reparation and land issues.

The Herero Genocide (Ohamakari Attack)

- History is painful for the Herero families even today and forms a part of the collective consciousness of the Herero people;
- The elders responded to questions about the Genocide in different ways;
- Some grieved for the loss of their people, but others stricken silent;
- Men spoke about the genocide in general terms mostly concentrating on the political and economic ramifications of the war;
- Women described the cruelty of the Germans and the loss in personal terms.

Stories of survival

- The Herero elders spoke of the need to survive and prevent the decimation of the clan;
- They talked of how they survived in the desert, where they learnt to set traps for birds and then ate them raw because they were too scared to cook them in case the Germans caught them;
- One story which we heard from an old man at the Omaihi village in the Okakarara was significant;
- He stated that the men advised nursing mothers to abandon their babies so that they could get nourishment from their women. He said it was important for the males to survive so that they could fight the Germans. Omaihi in Herero means milk.

Stories of the concentration camps

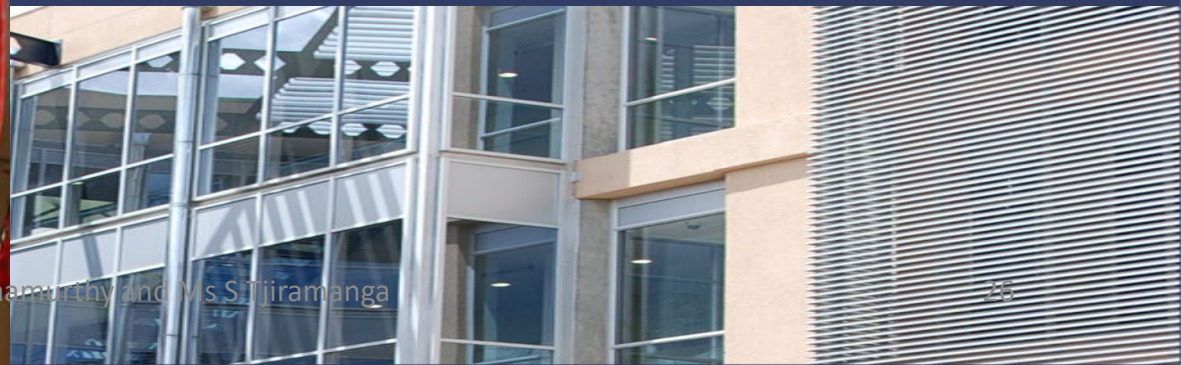
- More than 60,000 Hereros died in the desert;
- The rest were collected and forced to march across the harsh desert plains to Luderitz, a sea town where the Hereros were put to work in the concentration camps;
- Break stones and carry them;
- Carry heavy ammunition in boxes from place to place;
- The concentration camps on Shark island were dreadfully cold.
- Difficult for the Hereros to survive because they were fed bread and rice

Continued

- Stories describing how the bread was thrown to the Hereros were narrated and many of them were deeply affected by the indignity with which they were treated.
- They did not have the means to cook the rice and therefore ate them raw. Many died because of malnutrition and diarrhea.
- The third, most shocking stories that came from the time in the concentration camps, were the stories of how the men were killed and the women were made to boil the skulls and scrape them clean for research purposes.
- The skulls were sent to Germany. It was only in 2017 that the skulls were returned to the Namibian government in a ceremony at Zoo Park where important and influential people were invited.



- This event widely publicized by the media during November 2017.
- It must be noted that a delegation went to Berlin to receive the skulls, which were handed to them in a church without any acknowledgement from the German government.



Identity

- Proud of their traditional culture and the legacy of their ancestral beliefs;
- A great sense of dignity;
- All the elders spoke about the preservation of their culture and the need for continuing their traditional practices;
- The stories were told were about miscegenation and the offspring of mixed race relationships;
- Herero women raped during and after the war, fell pregnant;
- Even though the German fathers abandoned the children that were born in these circumstances, the Herero Community gladly welcomed these offspring into their households.
- Many children were sent away from their families in order to protect them during the genocide. Some survived because they fled to Botswana, South Africa and the Wamboland.

Reparation and land issues

- Both men and women bemoaned the loss of fertile land in central Namibia which belonged to the Herero people and which is mostly owned by Germans even today;
- The Ovitoro reserve dry and stony. Just next to it, there are grasslands which are owned by non-resident Germans;
- The Hereros feel very deeply the loss of their lands because land holdings and cattle farming is a part of their culture. The more cattle a Herero has, the higher is their status;
- All elders spoke about the need to get their lands back. Some of the women mentioned that it was the responsibility of Germans to build schools to educate the Herero children to make up for their cruelty during the genocide;
- Significantly, the men demanded that the land should be returned to them so that they can claim their heritage.

Message

- We asked the elders what message should we carry with us as we concluded the interviews and all of them requested for a dialogue with the Germans.
- They wanted to be heard by someone who mattered because they felt neglected not only by the Germans, but also by the larger Namibian populace.

- “The Herero people have to express their gratitude to their women because they faced brutality, suppression, rape and still had the strength to carry on. They had to find work with the Germans after the Genocide in order to support us and it is their resilience that has kept us alive.” Kazorondate (80 years)