

Namibia: Germany's African Holocaust

By [Andre Vltchek](#)

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SWAPO's fight for freedom.

How outrageous, how heartbreaking, how truly grotesque! Windhoek City – the capital of Namibia – is, at one extreme full of flowers and Mediterranean-style villas, and at the other, it is nothing more than a tremendous slum without water or electricity.

And in between, there is the town center– with its Germanic orderly feel, boasting 'colonial architecture', including Protestant churches and commemorative plaques mourning those brave German men, women and children, those martyrs, who died during the uprisings and wars conducted by local indigenous people.



Fidel Street. (Click to enlarge.)

German church with racist depiction of history and

The most divisive and absurd of those memorials is the so-called "Equestrian Monument", more commonly known as "The Horse" or under its German original names, Reiterdenkmal and Südwester Reiter (Rider of South-West). It is a statue inaugurated on 27 January 1912, which was the birthday of the German emperor Wilhelm II. The monument "honors the soldiers and civilians that died on the German side of the Herero and Namaqua 'War' of 1904-1907".

That 'war' was not really a war; it was nothing more than genocide, a holocaust.

And Namibia was a prelude to what German Nazis later tried to implement on European soil.

A European expert working for the UN, my friend, speaks, like almost everyone here, passionately, but without daring to reveal her name:

"The first concentration camps on earth were built in this part of Africa... They were built by the British Empire in South Africa and by Germans here, in Namibia. Shark Island on the coast was the first concentration camp in Namibia, used to murder the Nama people, but now it is just a tourist destination – you would never guess that there were people

exterminated there. Here in the center of Windhoek, there was another extermination camp; right on the spot where “The Horse” originally stood.”



The Horse and German tourists. (Click to enlarge.)

“The Horse” was recently removed from its original location, and placed in the courtyard of the old wing of The National Museum, together with some of the most outrageous commemorative plaques, glorifying German actions in this part of the world. Nothing was destroyed, instead just taken away from prime locations.

Where “The Horse” stood, there now stands a proud anti-colonialist statue, that of a man and a woman with broken shackles, which declares, “Their Blood Waters Our Freedom”.

Germany never officially apologized for its crimes against humanity in what it used to call German South-West Africa. It did not pay reparations.

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A visit to those German genocidal relics is ‘an absolute must’ for countless Central European tourists that descend every day on Namibia. I followed several of these groups, listening to their conversations. Among these people, there appears to be no remorse, and almost no soul-searching: just snapshots, posing in front of the monuments and racist insignias, pub-style/beer jokes at places where entire cultures and nations were exterminated!

Central European, German-speaking tourists in Windhoek, appear to be lobotomized, and totally emotionless. And so are many of the descendants of those German ‘genocidal pioneers’. Encountering them is like *déjà vu*; it brings back memories of the years when I was fighting against the German Nazi colony, ‘Colonia Dignidad’ in Chile; or when I was investigating the atrocities and links, of the German Nazi community in Paraguay to several South American fascist regimes that had been implanted and maintained by the West.

And now the German community in Namibia is protesting the removal of “The Horse”. It is indignant. And this community is still powerful, even omnipotent, here in Namibia.

Almost nobody calls the ‘events’ that took place here, by their rightful names, of holocaust or genocide. Everything in Namibia is ‘sensitive’.

But even according to the BBC: “In 1985, a UN report classified the events as an attempt to exterminate the Herero and Nama peoples of South-West Africa, and therefore the earliest attempted genocide in the 20th Century.”

On 21 October 2012, The Globe and Mail reported:

“In the bush and scrub of central Namibia, the descendants of the surviving Herero live in squalid shacks and tiny plots of land. Next door, the descendants of German settlers still own vast properties of 20,000 hectares or more. It’s a contrast that infuriates many Herero, fuelling a new radicalism here.



This is how most of
Namibians live. (Click to enlarge.)

Every year the Herero hold solemn ceremonies to remember the first genocide of history’s bloodiest century, when German troops drove them into the desert to die, annihilating 80 per cent of their population through starvation, thirst, and slave labor in concentration camps. The Nama, a smaller ethnic group, lost half of their population from the same persecution.

New research suggests that the German racial genocide in Namibia from 1904 to 1908 was a significant influence on the Nazis in the Second World War. Many of the key elements of Nazi ideology – from racial science and eugenics, to the theory of Lebensraum (creating “living space” through colonization) – were promoted by German military veterans and scientists who had begun their careers in South-West Africa, now Namibia, during the genocide...”

The Namibian government is still negotiating the return (from Germany) of all skulls of the local people, which were used in German laboratories and by German scientists to prove the superiority of the white race. German colonialists decapitated Herero and Nama people, and at least 300 heads were transported to German laboratories for ‘scientific research’. Many were ‘discovered’ in the Medical History Museum of the Charite hospital in Berlin, and at Freiburg University.



For those Germans who died for 'Reich' (Click to enlarge.)

Leading German doctor, who was working on 'the pure race doctrine' in Namibia (the doctrine later used by the Nazis), was doctor Fisher. He 'educated' many German physicians, including Doctor Mengele.

It is all to a very little surprise, considering that the first German governor of the colony was the father of Hitler's deputy Herman Goering.

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Germany's holocaust in 'South-West Africa' is, among other things, a proof that the common Western theory about how German Nazism came to existence before the WWII was totally wrong. According to that theory, after the WWI, defeated and humiliated Germany got radicalized and 'reacted' monstrously to its condition.

But in reality, before and during the Second World War, Germany simply decided to behave in Europe exactly as it was behaving in its colonies, for many decades.

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There are Robert Mugabe and Fidel Castro Streets in the center of Windhoek. And there is that tremendous National Museum, commemorating the national-liberation struggle and the role of the heroic Cuban and North Korean troops in their fight against Western-supported apartheid.



Their blood waters our freedom. (Click to enlarge)

Bizarrely, German pre-Nazi/WWII monuments and insignias literally rub their shoulders alongside those great liberation struggle tributes.

Divisions are shocking: ideological, racial, social.

In Namibia, there is segregation on an enormous scale, everywhere.

While neighboring South Africa is moving rapidly away from racial segregation, introducing countless social policies, including free medical care, education and social housing, Namibia remains one of the most segregated countries on earth, with great private services for the rich, and almost nothing for the poor majority.

“Apartheid was even worse here than in South Africa”, I am told by my friend from the United Nations. “And until now... You go to Katutura, and you see who is living there, they are all local people there, all black. Katutura literally means ‘We have no place to stay’. 50% of the people in this city defecate in the open. Sanitation is totally disastrous. Then you go to Swakop city, on the shore, and it is like seeing Germany recreated in Africa. You also see, there, shops with Nazi keepsakes. Some Nazis, who escaped Europe, came to Windhoek, to Swakop and other towns. In Swakop, men march periodically, in replicas of Nazi uniforms.”

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Katutura is where the black people were moved to, during apartheid.

My friend, a ‘colored’ Namibian, who fought for the independence of his own country and of Angola, drove me to that outrageous slum which seems to host a substantial amount of the capital’s population, with mostly no access to basic sanitation or electricity.



South African armored apartheid era train in Namibia. (Click to enlarge.)

He has also chosen to remain anonymous, as he has explained, in order to protect his lovely family. To speak up here, unlike in South Africa, which may, these days, be one of the freest and most outspoken places on earth, can be extremely dangerous. But he clarifies further:

“In Namibia, it is very rare for people who used to suffer, to speak about it publicly. In South Africa, everyone speaks. In Angola, everyone speaks... But not here.”

Then he continues:

“What we can see in Namibia is that many German people are still in control of big business. They are ruling the country. They have hunting farms and other huge estates and enterprises. Germans bring money to Namibia, but it stays with them, and it consolidates their power – it does not reach the majority. You cannot even imagine, how much local people working on their farms, are suffering. It is still like slavery. But it is all hushed up here.”



Commemorating the people's battles for independence. (Click to enlarge)

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"Sprechen Sie Deutsch?" A black Namibian man intercepts me, as I am walking down the Fidel Castro Street.

"I do, but I would rather not, here", I explain.

"But why not?" He grins at me. "You know... It is not only them... Germans... I grew up; I was educated, in East Germany during our fight for independence. And my friend that you see over there - he was flown to Czechoslovakia and he went to school there. Communist countries did so much for us, for the Africans: Cuba, North Korea, Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and East Germany. We are so grateful!"

"Yes", I say. "But it is over, isn't it? Czechoslovakia, East Germany... They joined the imperialists, the rulers. They exchanged ideals for iPads."

"Yes", he said. "But one day... who knows... things could be different, again."

Yes, definitely, I think. But most likely not in Europe...

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At the new and lavish National Museum in Windhoek, I salute the Namibian and foreign fighters against apartheid - those who struggled and died for freedom, and the independence of Africa.



Cuba and N Korea fighting for freedom of Namibia. (Click to enlarge.)

Then, I descended to the “Goethe Institute”, the German cultural center, a colonial building surrounded by barbed wire.

There, a local starlet is loudly rehearsing for something called ‘a night under the stars’, or something of that sentimental, over-sugary pop nature. These are basically evenings designed to bring together the pampered international crowd and those ‘feel-good-about-life’ local elites.

I ask the starlet, whether this institute is trying to address the most painful issues of the past and present, all connected to Germany, of course.

She is black but she speaks and behaves like a German. She gives me a huge and pre-fabricated smile:

“At Goethe we don’t want that... We are trying to get away from all this (meaning colonial and segregation issues). We are just trying to get Germans and Namibians together, you know...”

I later peek at those Namibians who are being brought together with the Germans. No Katutura here, naturally...

And for some reason, what came to my mind is a conversation I had, on the phone, many years ago, with one of the editors of the German magazine, Der Stern, after I offered him my findings and photos from Nazi Colonia Dignidad in Chile. He said: “Oh, Colonia Dignidad! Hahaha! Never again, ja?”

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One evening I eat at Angolan/Portuguese restaurant in Windhoek, O Portuga; an institution

known for its great food and mixed crowd. What an evening, what a place!

After dinner, I dive into German 'Andy's Bar', a nearby place that was described to me as "An institution, which not even a black or a colored person from the embassies or the UN would dare to enter".

The Beer is flat, but the conversation of the local crowd is extremely 'sharp'. Patrons are freely giving black Namibians names of local farm animals. Their spite is open and sincere. I listen, I understand. Eventually I leave.

I catch a taxi, driven by a corpulent black man. The radio is blasting and I hear the socialist, anti-imperialist lyrics of 'Ndilimani', a brilliant local political band.

It is now well past midnight, and despite the warnings from all those 'well-meaning Germans' that I met in Windhoek, I feel much safer in this taxi than in Andy's Bar and in so many other similar institutions.

"Is this country really governed by Marxist SWAPO?" I wonder aloud.

"No way", the driver points back, towards the bar. "'They' never left. 'They' are still controlling the country. The revolution is not over."

I tell him that I am beginning to understand what drove Robert Mugabe mad and angry, in Zimbabwe. The driver nods. I push my seat back, and make it recline.

"It is all f***ed up", I say.

The driver thinks for a while, but then replies, using almost the same words as the man who spoke to me on Fidel Castro Street: "Yes, brother, yes! But one day... who knows... things could be different, again."

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Andre Vltchek is a novelist, filmmaker and investigative journalist. He covered wars and conflicts in dozens of countries. The result is his latest book: "Fighting Against Western Imperialism". 'Pluto' published his discussion with Noam Chomsky: On Western Terrorism. His critically acclaimed political novel Point of No Return is re-edited and available. Oceania is his book on Western imperialism in the South Pacific. His provocative book about post-Suharto Indonesia and the market-fundamentalist model is called "Indonesia - The Archipelago of Fear". His feature documentary, "Rwanda Gambit" is about Rwandan history and the plunder of DR Congo. After living for many years in Latin America and Oceania, Vltchek presently resides and works in East Asia and Africa. He can be reached through his website or his Twitter.

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About the author:

Andre Vltchek is a philosopher, novelist, filmmaker and investigative journalist. He covered wars and conflicts in dozens of countries. His latest books are: "Exposing Lies Of The Empire" and "Fighting Against Western Imperialism". Discussion with Noam Chomsky: On Western Terrorism. Point of No Return is his critically acclaimed political novel. Oceania - a book on Western imperialism in the South Pacific. His provocative book about Indonesia: "Indonesia - The Archipelago of Fear". Andre is making films for teleSUR and Press TV. After living for many years in Latin America and Oceania, Vltchek presently resides and works in East Asia and the Middle East. He can be reached through his website or his Twitter.

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