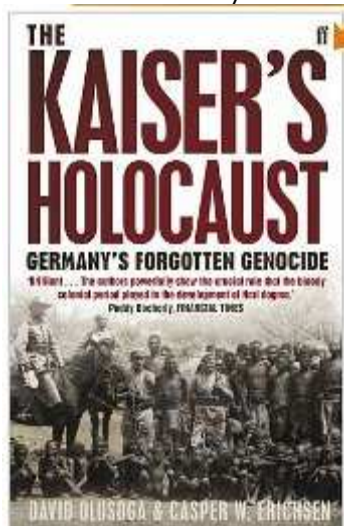


Ruth Barnett

Olusoga, David; Erichsen, Casper: The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's forgotten Genocide. London: Faber & Faber, 2011, Paperback

Not even in German, the language of the Kaiser's colonial rulers, is there any sizeable literature on the first two genocides of the 20th century, perpetrated against the Herero and Nama in the Kaiser's name. This period is grossly under-researched¹ hence the enhanced relevance of this book.

For a historical presentation this book reads like a gripping novel so that I was obliged periodically to remind myself that all this was indeed the horrific reality of our European past. David Olusoga is an Anglo-Nigerian historian and TV/radio producer who studied the accounts of native SW Africans of the Colonial period and compared them with the 'revised' history created and perpetuated by the Europeans. His co-



author, Casper Erichsen, studied the genocide of the Herero and Nama at the University of Namibia.

The tragic drama begins with the brutal subjugation of native tribes by British, French, Dutch and Belgian 'masters' in their African colonies, labouring under the delusion or deception that they were bringing culture and civilisation to the backward barbaric native peoples. The Kaiser's Second Reich, reluctantly at first, joined the 'colonial club', not so much to exploit African resources but for 'Lebensraum' to expand into. The German colonial military, supported by propaganda in Germany based on 'Wild West'' mythology of the 'American Frontier' and goaded by envy of the British Empire developed this domination into a 'white supremacy' theory that deprived the 'inferior races' of Africa of any right to life unless they were of use to the furtherance of the 'superior Aryan race'. Hence, as they argued, the extermination of the Herero and Nama was inevitable and necessary. They also had no scruples in using native prisoners, in concentration camps like Shark Island, for unimaginably cruel 'medical experiments' and shipping skulls and body parts to order for use in German universities, where some of them

¹ So far, two collective monographs in German language were published by the Berlin Ch. Links Verlag: Jürgen Zimmerer & Joachim Zeller (Ed.): Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika: Der Kolonialkrieg (1904-1908) in Namibia und seine Folgen. Berlin 2003; Felicitas Becker & Jigal Beez (Ed.): Der Maji-Maji-Krieg in Deutsch-Ostafrika 1905-1907. Berlin 2005

remain today. In particular, the medical museum of the Berlin Charite, has so far refused to return their store of preserved body parts to Namibia for decent burial.

Olusoga and Erichsen demonstrate how this was the prelude to Hitler seeking to 'colonise' Eastern Europe 'as of right' as a replacement for the Kaiser's colonies in Africa that were 'unfairly stolen' from Germany by the Treaty of Versailles. The Nazis developed the 'white supremacy' theory into the 'pure-blood of the Aryan master-race', Jews and Gypsies being treated as Herero and Nama had been used in the German colonies. The very clear message of this book is that failure to remember and take into account, in the Nuremberg Trials, the annihilation of the Herero and Nama, has led to widespread amnesia regarding the realities of the colonial period. Those alive today are not guilty of what our ancestors perpetrated but we are guilty of colluding with amnesia if not denial, if we shrug this off as no concern of ours, and this allows impunity for current and future brutality, racism, massacre and genocide. Therefore, I consider this a timely and extremely important book for the general public, whether or not the reader has much background historical knowledge.

Ruth Barnett, September 2011