

# **PERCEPTION OF GENOCIDE AND APARTHEID AS CRIMES OF SETTLER-COLONIALISM**

**Are these crimes, in any way, structurally/conceptually  
connected?**

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Era	Genocide in Namibia (1904–1908)	Apartheid in Namibia (1915–1990)
Colonial Power	Germany	South Africa
Affected Groups	Herero and Nama peoples	Namibians, particularly Black communities
Historical Context	Namibia, then known as German South West Africa, was a German colony from 1884 to 1915. In the early 20th century, Germany carried out one of the first genocides of the 20th century against the Herero and Nama people	After Germany's defeat in World War I, South Africa took over Namibia (then still called South West Africa) under a League of Nations mandate. South Africa later refused to relinquish control after the UN revoked the mandate in 1966.
Events	<p>In 1904, the Herero people rebelled against German colonial rule due to land seizures, forced labour, and brutal treatment.</p> <p>German General Lothar von Trotha issued an extermination order, saying: “Every Herero found within the German borders, with or without a gun, with or without cattle, will be shot.”</p> <p>Survivors were placed in concentration camps, such as Shark Island, where many died from abuse, disease, and medical experiments.</p>	<p>South Africa imposed its system of apartheid on Namibia. Laws institutionalized racial segregation, pass laws, and forced removals. The majority Black population had no political rights and faced severe restrictions on movement, education, and employment.</p> <p>Armed struggle and international pressure increased through the 1970s and 1980s. The United Nations declared South Africa's rule illegal and recognised SWAPO as the legitimate representative of the Namibian people.</p>
Losses/Death Toll Estimates	<p>Herero: 80% of the population (approx. 60,000 of 80,000)</p> <p>Nama: 50% (approx. 10,000 of 20,000)</p>	Unknown - war factors, it is estimated to be higher than death toll of the genocide
Recognition	In 2021, Germany formally acknowledged the events as genocide and offered a €1.1 billion development aid package but stopped short of direct reparations.	Namibia finally achieved independence in 1990, after years of armed resistance, UN mediation, and the withdrawal of South African forces.

# STRUCTURAL AND CONCEPTUAL CONNECTIONS

Element	Genocide	Apartheid	Settler-Colonial Connection
Goal	Eliminate Indigenous resistance and claim land/mineral	Maintain settler dominance and labour control	Both serve to secure settler claims to territory
Means	Mass killing, concentration camps, desert exile	Pass laws, forced removals, political disenfranchisement	Tools of racial domination
Logic	Physical elimination of the "native problem"	Social and political suppression of the "native threat"	Settler security through elimination or control
Legacy	Trauma, land loss, demographic shifts	Structural inequality, racial stratification	Persistent settler-colonial order in land and power

# SUMMARY ON POLICY APPROACH

Issue	Approach	Critique
Genocide	Acknowledged; limited reparations from Germany; some commemorations	Exclusion of victim communities; compensation seen as inadequate
Apartheid	National reconciliation; no TRC or prosecutions	No accountability or reparations; continued economic inequality
Transitional Justice	Emphasis on peace and stability	Avoidance of justice in favor of political expediency
Memory Politics	Focus on SWAPO's liberation narrative	Marginalization of other ethnic histories and traumas

## a) Namibia's Approach to Genocide

***Recognition and Commemoration:*** Namibia officially recognizes the 1904–08 genocide, especially through state-sanctioned memorials and annual commemorations. Monuments (e.g., the Genocide Memorial in Windhoek) and public events highlight the genocide's central place in national history.

***Demands for Reparations:*** Descendants of the Herero and Nama have consistently demanded reparations from Germany. Namibia's government (led by SWAPO) engaged in negotiations with Germany, but often excluded Herero and Nama traditional authorities, which has caused political friction.

***Germany's Response:*** In 2021, Germany acknowledged the genocide and offered €1.1 billion over 30 years for development aid — but not direct reparations. Germany emphasized this was not legal compensation, but a “gesture of reconciliation.” Many Herero and Nama leaders rejected the deal, calling it insufficient and negotiated without their full involvement.

***Namibia's Dilemma:*** The Namibian government has been reluctant to confront Germany more forcefully, due to: Dependency on German development aid; Desire to preserve diplomatic ties. Internal ethnic politics — Herero and Nama are minority groups outside the dominant SWAPO base.

## b) Namibia's Approach to Apartheid

***Truth and Reconciliation:*** No Formal Commission: Unlike South Africa, Namibia did not establish a formal Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) after independence in 1990. The SWAPO-led government emphasized “national reconciliation”, aiming to avoid revenge or instability. This meant no prosecutions for apartheid-era crimes — neither for South African perpetrators nor for SWAPO abuses (e.g., detentions and torture in exile camps).

***Legacy of Structural Inequality:*** Apartheid's economic and spatial inequalities persist: Land distribution remains highly skewed — most commercial farmland is still white-owned. Urban-rural disparities and racial wealth gaps reflect apartheid's legacy. Attempts at land reform have been slow and controversial, often constrained by the “willing buyer, willing seller” approach.

***Reparations and Redistribution:*** There has been no systematic reparations policy for apartheid victims. Calls for reparations, including from those detained or tortured by SWAPO, have largely been ignored or silenced.

# Final remarks

- Settler colonialism is inherently eliminatory. It is a structure, not an event.
- Apartheid is a form of *necropolitics* —the power to dictate who may live and who must die.
- Apartheid is a “*bantustanised*” form of indirect rule that follows from earlier genocidal logics.

Namibia uniquely showcases the **continuum between genocide and apartheid**:

- Same objectives: clearing land, controlling labour, maintaining white settler supremacy.
- Same victims: Indigenous African populations targeted for removal, marginalisation, and control.
- Same structure: racial hierarchies institutionalised over decades.

Yes, the genocide and apartheid in Namibia are **structurally and conceptually connected** as crimes of **settler colonialism**:

- Genocide represents the **violent birth** of settler rule.
- Apartheid is its **mature bureaucratic form**.

Both depend on the **devaluation of Indigenous life**, and both aim to **secure settler claims to land and power**. Far from being isolated atrocities, they are moments in a **continuous settler-colonial project**.