

## **The importance of a Remembrance and Memorialization Day AND meaning of its denial thereof**

### **Why Shark Island and Many other such Places??**

Shark Island, initially opened as a prisoner camp for Ovaherero Prisoners earmarked for working on the AUS-Luderitz rail-line, between 1904 to 1908, singularly and swiftly morphed into the deadliest population density anywhere in then South West Africa where numerous Ovaherero and Nama people were dumped to be incarcerated, raped and tortured.... a campaign of systemic and deliberate obliteration of a people sanctioned by a racist, brutal and genocidal Germanic state.

Although there were several concentration camps during the German colonial period in South West Africa, the space then formerly known as Ovahererland and Great-Namaqualand....then two sovereign states that in their own could conclude international treaties and trade independently, present day Namibia.... Shark Island become notorious as the most lethal, barbaric and most feared by the victims of the genocide committed by Germany against the native Nama and Ovaherero people.

As to what exactly happened in this space, right here in the heart of the former Great Namaqualand, is not part of my brief this afternoon, it firmly falls to our His Excellences, the esteemed Goab Haanse and Paramount Chief, Professor Dr. Mutjinda Katjiua both adequately resourced to dispose off with that matter, I though would want us to reflect deep and hard ABOUT why we must remember events that took place on sites like Shark Island AND why we must honor and memorialize our departed, our forebears AND specifically asks questions of what these days represents to our person, institutions, memory and literature.

On this score I will lean on the words of 19<sup>th</sup> century British Prime Minister William Gladstone who once proudly exclaimed "show me the manner in which a nation or community cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender sympathies of its people, their respect for the law of the land and their loyalty to high ideals". End of quote..

Esteemed Leaders of our movement, supporters and sympathizers AND ladies and gentlemen, there are many reasons to celebrate and mourn the life of loved ones who leaves us behind, but for many, these six aspects sums up why remembrance is important:

1. To acknowledge the reality of death.
2. To acknowledge the emotions associated with the death;
3. To acknowledge that the relationship with the person who died has shifted from physical presence to memory;
4. To acknowledge changes in personal self-identity.
5. To ponder and search for new meaning in life;
6. To receive the loving support of remaining family and friends....for the loss of life[s]....to find closure through expression of remorse, repentance, commitment to non-reoccurrence BUT importantly achieve genuine and commensurate justice if such death was intentionally caused by others..!

Sadness at the loss of a loved one may never entirely go away, but remembrance lives on. The desire to be remembered lives within our genetic makeup. It is the age-old reason man carved their initials in trees, place their hands in cement, and chalk their names on rocks. They want to leave their mark. They want to be remembered.

But for the living, the real marks they leave are the ones they've left on us. A hug. A smile. A timely word of advice. We want to remember those we've loved and lost, not only for them, but also as importantly for ourselves, to mend, to heal, to live, and never to forget.

\*so may we ask, What does the absence of a national day of remembrance mean for the people?

On the individual level, a state that opposes and or ignores the inalienable right of people to remembrance, prevents those people from knowing who they truly are, who they could become.

It steals the possibility to grief for their ancestors and find closure through healing and acceptance. Inversely hindering people from grieving for ancestors and their loss amounts to a day more, each day, each year, of a new attack to the dignity of the ancestors, those killed, abused, exploited in their name.

Because of the absence of remembrance and memorialization ...sponsored fully by our state which as a custodian of all people's interests .. some of our people do not even know who they are. And the erasure of our history begets erasure of identities, culture and languages AND ultimately a while people..so remembrance days are a necessity to the continued sustenance of any people..

At the same time, the fight cannot end at a national remembrance day. Still such a day is an imperative for the memorialization of our ancestors, of educating younger generations, of taking breathe... in order to continue the struggle.

Further the fight must involve seeking out concrete places where people can go to..to heal and remember...A place where others from else where could come and see what happened to fellow human beings at peacebin their own space...

A commemoration stone that does justice is a symbolic form of recognition. It must be part of a Foundation with many different stones that builds a solid house, where land and property is redistributed, where people can live together, share and know who they are and why they live together..

So in summary, absence of remembrance mean many things at different...

At Personal level..it means loss of identity, no (re)connection to own history, no occasion to grieve collectively, weakens community.

At Political/ state level, it means no national recognition of history of pain, no institutionalization, less opportunity to educate others about history, not considered topic of national importance, national remembrance would unite people and further cohesion and solidarity and make it easier to drive political agenda for land reform/fight against political marginalization

**How much of our history, specifically the many sites of battles during the genocidal campaign is remembered, both personally and institutionally as is at the level of the state?**

Amongst others, who remembers these days:

1. January 12<sup>th</sup> when hostilities first broke-out in Okahandja 1904? We the Ovaherero and Nama people do, our state doesn't!
2. April 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, 1904 respectively when the gallantry and bravery of our forebears and torchbearers was on full display at the battles of Okandjira and Oviuombo specifically. Amongst other things an audacious assault on an aggressor which led to a hasty retreat of German forces from Okandjira and the consequent withdrawal of the military Commander, General Leitwein who would later on be replaced with the murderous Lothar von Trotha? Who remembers, we Ovaherero and Nama people do, our state, turns a blind eye;
3. 11<sup>th</sup> August 1904 when, after months and months of reinforcements and an intense public campaign of vitrioling the Ovaherero people as a blood-thirsty African beast that spilled the blood of the mighty Germans and thus must be exterminated...shipping in men armed with an ultra-racist zeal to kill the black folk and create what fellow-racist German geographer Fredrick Ratzel called *Laubenraum* through fully extinguishing and displacement of natives of the land...the Ovaherero people on that day specifically ... encircled our people at Ohamakari with the intent of fully decimating and or expelling them from the land of their birth? We the Ovaherero and Nama people remember these events and every year for the last more than hundred years converge on that side....our though state, 33 years down the line continues to be consulting, to be thinking of what must be done about?..through its functionaries, continues to reject our invitations..
4. October 2<sup>nd</sup> 1904, the first of the German Extermination Orders during the genocidal campaign of 1904 to 1908, essentially what began the march to Shark Island, is issued at Ozombu-Zovindimba by General von Trotha...Ovaherero people, all of them, children, women, the disabled, military or civilian, armed or unarmed, all of them must be shot at..killed in cold-blood...those who escapes have NO recourse to the rules of modern warfare herself had signed up..they all must perish and or driven off their land of birth for all times..this is why the delegations of Botswana and South Africa are sadly an important part of this pilgrimage....In terms of human lives only, at least 80 percent of my people would be annihilated...and Tell you who remembers, we do, I do...but the State of Namibia doesn't, over the last 33 years it neither issued a statement of remembrance and or memorialization Or simply just words of comforting and remembrance ...so much for a state that habitually issues hundreds of birthdays congratulatory messages to its leaders yearly !
5. April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1905, the day Von Trotha decided the Nama people of the mighty Great Namaqualand, with legendary figures like the Isaacks, the Fredericks, the....., leading the front as commanded by the iconic Jacob Marenga and the towering Hendrik Witbooi...too must be exterminated ...In that very the Nama smart forces of a war they didn't start would batter the German war machinery and hold it out for a near full for years. The legendary Hendrik Witbooi would be injured and eventually succumb during that campaign but his tenacious spirit would spur the Nama people to fight and fight further on under the almost illusive figure of Hendrik Witbooi, ...About 50 percent of what was once a glorious people populating these hills and open space of southern Namibia were decimated....But who remembers that , we the Ovaherero and Nama

people do! Our state chooses not to remember, it chooses not to know, it chooses to do nothing and say nothing!

6. But before that genocidal campaign, amongst the many days we also remember at our community level, on April 12<sup>th</sup> 1893, Curt von Fraincous marched on Hornkrans and explicitly made it clear that the Witboois must be extinguished...who remembers ? we the people of those people who fall at all those hostor&c sites..on those glorious days...do.. as a matter of fact, we recently did when the Nama Gaogu converged on Mariental to , without any representation of central government, pay homage and remembrance to that day of horror and barbarity...
  
7. The state of Namibia has both dementia and amnesia about these days and events... .. but we choose to remember, to convene around them. And for that reason alone, after many years of going to Swakopmund for a reparations walks and remembrance, our Leadership jointly agreed that this year we must come to Shark Island ..and importantly leave a mark behind....hence the tombstone we unveiled...!

