

# **Patterns of frontier genocide 1803–1910: the Aboriginal Tasmanians, the Yuki of California, and the Herero of Namibia**

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The continuing destruction of indigenous people is a global human rights problem. Today, tens of millions of Aboriginal people reside in dozens of countries around the world (Hitchcock and Twedt, 1997, p 374). Whether called native or tribal peoples, First Nations or the Fourth World, many live under the threat of annihilation.

During the twentieth century, dozens of states implemented policies intended to physically destroy indigenous populations. In the age of the UN Genocide Convention, signatory nations waged campaigns of genocide against the Cham of Cambodia, indigenous peoples in East Timor and the Amazon basin, Iraqi Kurds, the Maya of Guatemala, and others. Today, perpetrators employ sophisticated weapons delivery systems, advanced communications equipment, and overwhelming firepower to kill indigenous people. No evidence suggests a waning in this trend.

Comparing cases of frontier genocide provides information valuable to detection, prevention and intervention as well as victimized peoples' land and reparations claims. Just as important, cognizance of common patterns between cases deepens understanding of man's worst crime: the attempt to obliterate an entire people.

The analysis of the frontier genocides waged against the Aboriginal Tasmanians, the Yuki of California, and the Herero of Namibia reveals a surprisingly congruent pattern despite the fact that the cases took place on different continents, under different regimes, and in different periods. The pattern divides into three phases. Colonists initiate the first by invasion. Economic and political frictions then develop between the two groups as they struggle for limited resources and political power. Unable to compete with the invaders' technology, arms, and wealth, the indigenous people find their economy fundamentally threatened and basic political rights denied under the settler regime.

Aboriginal people begin the second phase by attacking settlers and their property in an attempt to regain access to economic resources, reclaim lost land, protect political rights, or exact revenge. Settlers and their government then retaliate, but cannot quickly defeat the indigenous peoples' guerilla insurgency. Out of frustration and expediency, the invaders choose a "final solution" to the military conflict.

During and after the genocidal military campaign, the settlers' government initiates the final phase by incarcerating Aboriginal people in camps that bear comparison with the Soviet gulag. In these reservations, settler governments continue genocidal policy through a varying combination of malnutrition, insufficient protection from the elements, inadequate medical care, overwork, unsanitary conditions, and violence.

### **The lie, the myth, and racism**

Genocide in Tasmania, California, and Namibia began with a common lie: the assertion that the land was "empty," "unclaimed," or should be "made empty." The British in Australia employed a doctrine of *terra nullius*, or "land where nothing exists," while in the US settlers and their advocates spoke of *vacuum domicilium*, or "empty domicile," to justify invasion and expropriation (Stanard, 1992, pp 234–235). In Namibia, colonists enacted policies of *tabula rasa*, or "creating a map scraped smooth," to facilitate dispossession and ethnic cleansing (Drechsler, 1966, pp 168–169). The concept of *tabula rasa* asserted that indigenous people should be removed and that these people had minimal moral claim to the land. If white settlers saw no European-style agriculture or Western trappings of civilization, they often deemed an area "empty" to rationalize conquest and settlement. Under the British doctrine of *terra nullius*, Aboriginal Tasmanians had no right to territory because they were not using the land in a European fashion and had no legal title under British law. Likewise, under the *vacuum domicilium* doctrine, the California legislature excluded the Yuki from state citizenship and thus legal land ownership. The German government did grant land titles to Hereros, but utilized the "empty" land concept as part of the rationale behind Chancellor von Caprivi's 1893 claim that "the territory is ours, it is now German territory and must be maintained as German territory" (Bley, 1971a, p 611). Later, the Germans justified policies designed to transfer land from blacks to whites with the same concept. The idea of "empty" or unclaimed land provided the legal and intellectual framework for genocide by rationalizing dispossession and by suggesting that native people were less worthy of land ownership and thus essentially less human than white settlers.

Victors write history, and, in the final phases of frontier genocide, perpetrators create a myth to excuse their crimes. By claiming that so-called "primitive" peoples and cultures are fated to vanish when they come into contact with white settlers, a deadly supposition emerges: the extinction of indigenous people is inevitable and thus killing speeds destiny. While visiting Tasmania in 1836, the Reverend Thomas Atkins attributed the "almost extinct" condition of the

Aborigines to the “universal law in the Divine government” that “savage tribes disappear before the progress of the civilized races” (Atkins, 1869, 10). Across the Pacific, white settlers in California expressed similar sentiments. An 1850 article in the San Francisco *Alta California* described the destruction of California Indians, such as the Yuki, as “unavoidable,” suggesting they would evaporate “like a dissipating mist before the morning sun from the presence of the Saxon” (San Francisco *Alta California*, December 5, 1850). California Governor Peter Burnett transformed passive acquiescence into active acceleration by arguing, in 1851, that “A war of extermination will continue to be waged ... until the Indian race becomes extinct ... the inevitable destiny of the race is beyond the power or wisdom of men to avert” (Heizer and Almquist, 1971, p 26). Fifty years later, Theodore Leutwein, Governor of German South West Africa, articulated his version of the inevitability myth: “The native who did not care to work, and yet did not want to do without worldly goods, eventually was ruined; meanwhile, the industrious white man prospered. This was just a natural process” (Leutwein, 1907, p 372).

The lie of empty land and the myth of inevitability helped perpetrators disguise, accept, or rationalize genocide and transfer responsibility to impersonal forces, even when deaths resulted from Aboriginal Tasmanians being “hunted down like wild beasts,” Yuki men, “... women and children, [being] cruelly slaughtered by the whites” or the Herero being destroyed by General Lothar von Trotha’s plan to “annihilate these masses” (Atkins, 1869, p 11; Browne, 1959, pp 41–42; Poole, 1990, p 251).

In all three cases, profound racism informed genocide. In Tasmania, colonists who seized Aboriginal children and dashed their brains out or lined Aborigines up as targets for musket practice likely considered their victims less than human (Plomley, 1966, pp 194, 88). Whites spoke of Aborigines as “horribly disgusting,” lacking “any traces of civilization,” “constituting in a measure the link between man and the monkey tribe,” or “undoubtedly in the lowest possible scale of human nature, both in form and intellect” (Backhouse, 1843, p 79; Cunningham, 1827, p 46; Péron, 1809, pp 67–68; Prinsep, 1833, p 111). Likewise, many white settlers in California considered the Yuki subhuman. Why else would settler Dryden Lacock proudly brag that he routinely joined Yuki-massacring parties while his neighbor Hank Larrabee boasted of killing 60 Yuki children with his hatchet (Carranco and Beard, 1981, pp 59, 63)? An 1859 letter from the notorious Indian killer Walter Jarboe to the Governor of California sums up white racist sentiment towards the Yuki, describing them as “the most degraded, filthy, miserable thieving lot of any living thing that comes under the head and rank of human being” (Carranco and Beard, 1981, p 94). Whites in Namibia articulated similar views of the Herero. A missionary named Elger suggested “that the average German looks down upon the natives as being about on the same level as the higher primates (baboon being their favorite term for the natives) and treats them like animals. The settler holds that the native has a right to exist only in so far as he is useful to the white man” (Drechsler, 1966, p 349). Governor Leutwein spoke of “the higher *Kultur* of the Whites” and

missionary Heinrich Vedder wrote of “undoubted [German] superiority” (Leutwein, 1907, p 415; Vedder, 1938, p 229).

Ideological racism was not the primary motivation behind these frontier genocides. However, it provided the context in which settlers and their advocates attempted to annihilate indigenous people who rose up against them.

### **The Tasmanian case, 1803–1847**

European colonization of Australia began in earnest during 1788, when Britain established penal settlements to replace those lost with the United States’ independence. British settlers first arrived in Tasmania in 1803. They were soldiers, convicts, and free colonists sent to claim the island and establish a new agricultural penal colony. During the next 75 years, British policies led to the destruction of between 4,000 and 7,000 indigenous Tasmanians, the majority between 1803 and 1847 (Plomley, 1992, pp 10, 29; Reynolds, 1995, p 4). In 1878 the last full-blooded Aboriginal Tasmanian, a woman named Truganini, died leaving a handful of mixed-blood survivors.

Conflict between indigenous people and settlers often revolves around two interlocking economic issues: access to natural resources and control of territory. Both groups need natural resources and land to achieve their definition of economic success, but these requirements need not lead to war or genocide. However, when economic competition becomes a zero-sum game in which settlers and their advocates threaten the foundations of an indigenous economy, Aboriginal people often fight to protect their traditional modes of production. This economic scenario informed the Aboriginal Tasmanian, Yuki, and Herero decisions to attack settlers and their property. All three groups responded to economic pressure from settlers with violence in an attempt to protect their traditional economies.

Economic conflict between settlers and Aboriginal Tasmanians began soon after the British arrived. During the initial years, imported food supplies rarely met settlers’ nutritional needs. Provisions from Britain and India were delivered infrequently. Grain and salted meat often arrived water-damaged, weevil infested or wholly inedible (Watson, 1921, pp 361, 392). Thus, during the winter of 1803–1804, the Derwent River settlement suffered scurvy, diarrhea and catarrh. It was a period officials later referred to as “amounting almost to a famine” (House of Commons, 1831, p 257). To survive, the British began hunting emu, swan, wallaby and kangaroo.

Kangaroo meat likely saved the lives of many early settlers (Robson, 1983, p 53). By 1808 kangaroo and other game became scarce in settled areas and British hunters ranged farther into the interior in search of food. Competition for the decreasing game supply then led to some of the first violent British/Aboriginal encounters (Nicholls, 1977; Ryan, 1996).

British pastoral settlement from 1820 to 1828 brought economic tensions between settlers and Aborigines to a boiling point; the white population swelled from 5,400 to 18,128 (Plomley, 1992, p 25). Between 1816 and 1828, the

number of sheep in Tasmania increased more than 12-fold from 54,600 to 791,120 (Ryan, 1996, p 83). The government granted vast tracts of territory to settlers and nearly 30% of the island became pasture or agricultural land. These expropriated areas represented prime Aboriginal hunting grounds and in 1828 the Aboriginal Tasmanians rose up against the British (Ryan, 1996, p 85). The loss of their food supply and land threatened both Aboriginal society and their physical survival. However, limited documentation of Aboriginal statements suggests that violations of perceived political rights also played a crucial role in decisions to attack.

In the frontier genocide pattern, two political issues dominate an indigenous people's decision to go to war: the mistreatment of women and the physical abuse of other members of indigenous society. When settlers enslave large numbers of indigenous women and/or routinely rape them, they threaten the foundations of Aboriginal society and communicate utter rejection of political equality. Physical abuse also generates political frustration and vengeful emotions. Like economic competition, the mistreatment of indigenous people creates a zero-sum competition between indigenous and settler societies.

Although the paucity of written records makes Aboriginal strategic thinking difficult to discern, it seems their primary political grievances included the mistreatment and enslavement of women and the abduction of children. Like the shortage of food, the scarcity of British women in early colonial Tasmania—one woman to every six men—exacerbated interracial violence and Aboriginal frustration (Plomley, 1973, p 2; Robson, 1965, pp 176, 185). In 1827 Peter Cunningham noted “the dearth of ‘female loveliness’ in the colony” (Cunningham, 1827, pp 291–293). Responding to the shortage, sealers and settlers raped and abducted indigenous women.

George Augustus Robinson described the sealers' treatment of Aboriginal Tasmanian women as “the African slave trade in miniature” (Plomley, 1966, p 82). Writing the Colonial Secretary of New South Wales in 1815, William Stewart described sealers' brutal enslavement of Aboriginal women:

they have also a custom of getting the Native women ... who they mostly obtain by force and keep them as Slaves or Negroes, hunting and foraging for them, who they transfer and dispose of from one to another as their own property; very few of whom ever see their Native home, being away for a number of years, and, if they do not comply with their desires or orders in hunting, etc., they by way of punishment half hang them, cut their heads with Clubs in Shocking Manner, or flog them most unmercifully with Cats made of Kangaroo Sinews ... (Watson, 1921, p 576)

Corroborating this account, Robinson's journals describe 18 abductions, 10 instances of torture, and seven murders of Aboriginal women by sealers (Plomley, 1966, pp 184, 240, 246, 290–291, 349, 403, 417, 451–452, 454, 461–462, 466, 576, 591, 642, 671, 676, 704, 801, 246, 249, 259, 271, 295, 301, 324, 184, 249, 256–257, 271–272, 274, 293, 295, 308, 342, 468).

Settlers also raped, kidnapped and murdered indigenous women, thus intensifying black–white conflict. Robinson asserts that Aboriginal women living with

settlers, shepherds and stockmen were frequently held by force as sexual and domestic servants and that British men were frequently guilty of raping and murdering Aboriginal women (Plomley, 1966, pp 72, 259, 316, 354, 373, 423, 448, 506, 713, 751, 753, 234, 344, 346). Writing in 1835, journalist Henry Melville railed against settlers abducting Aboriginal women:

The stock-keepers may be considered as the destroyers of nearly the whole of the aborigines ... they thought little or nothing of destroying men for the sake of carrying to their huts the females of the tribe; and, if it were possible in a work like this to record but a tittle of the murders committed on these poor harmless creatures, it would make the reader's blood run cold at the bare recital. (Melville, 1835, p 31)

Robinson provides evidence that at least some Aborigines staged attacks in reprisal. One man told Robinson: "I spear a white man, I spear a white woman" in vengeance for a murdered Aboriginal woman. Robinson also claims that after seeing his wife shot by sealers an Aboriginal man vowed to avenge her death by killing white men (Plomley, 1966, p 192).

The enslavement of Aboriginal children also provoked agitation for war. Settlers stole children for labor or to serve as pets. The practice was widespread enough that two successive Tasmanian Lieutenant Governors made speeches condemning the practice. According to historian Lyndall Ryan, "by 1817 there were at least fifty Aboriginal children in settlers' homes" (Ryan, 1996, p 78). When war broke out in 1826, the number of captive children was likely higher. One Aborigine told Robinson, "if black man came and took away his lubra [wife] and killed his piccaninnies [children], would not he [the white man] kill black man for it?" (Plomley, 1966, pp 546, 219).

Beginning in 1826, the Aboriginal Tasmanians fought a desperate guerilla war. They sought redress of economic and political grievances as well as revenge. Chief Tongerlongter summed up the vengeance motive succinctly for Robinson, who wrote that:

The reason for their outrages upon the white inhabitants (was) that they and their forefathers had been cruelly abused, that their country had been taken away from them, their wives and daughters had been violated and taken away, and that they had experienced a multitude of wrongs from a variety of sources. (Ryan, 1996, pp 121-122)

Recorded Aboriginal statements suggest they attacked to either drive the British off the island or to the negotiating table. Statements such as "Go away you white buggars, what business have you here!" suggest the former, while historian Henry Reynolds argues that Aboriginal Tasmanians fought to obtain an official sanctuary protected by British authorities (Reynolds, 1995, p 48). Explaining why the Aborigines "... began to annoy the settlers to a degree that required some active measures of the Government," Melville noted that "These poor creatures had been treated worse than were any of the American tribes by the Spanish," and that "... they could no longer brook the treatment they received from the invaders of their country" (Melville, 1835, p 30).

Three years into the conflict, attacks on whites had escalated while British

military strategy stumbled. In 1826 and 1827 over 100 Aboriginal attacks assaulted colonists and/or their property; 42 Europeans were killed and many wounded (Plomley, 1992, p 26; Ryan, 1996, pp 90, 92). Then, in 1828, Aborigines carried out twice as many attacks on colonists and their property as they had in 1827 (Plomley, 1992, pp 26, 30). Colonial forces clearly needed a new strategy.

Inappropriate training and insufficient troops were primary causes of the British inability to achieve victory (Melville, 1835, p 26). According to Reynolds, by “early 1828, 450 soldiers were in the interior,” but “the British troops were unsuitable for fighting a guerilla war,” because they were “trained for European conflict and ... disciplined, formal maneuvers” (Reynolds, 1995, p 100). In contrast, Aborigines enjoyed tactical advantages: internal lines of communication, intimate knowledge of geography, and the ability to live off of the land. With limited troops the British could neither quickly rout the Aborigines nor protect thousands of widely dispersed settlers. After nearly three years of unsuccessful warfare, military and government leaders sought a new strategy with which to end to the conflict.

In the pattern of frontier genocide, guerilla warfare plays an important role in setting the stage for genocide. By plundering and destroying private property, killing civilians, and resisting set-piece battles, guerilla warfare violated pre-World War I Western rules of engagement and military conduct. To the settler society, such acts might be likened to criminal behavior or occasional, unsavory elements of war, but they were not considered ethical military methods. Indeed, the emphasis on the destruction of property and civilians reversed the principles that rooted pre-World War I conceptions of warfare in conflict between designated military forces in assigned fields. Thus, attacks on non-combatants and property may have informed modes of retaliation that did not distinguish between combatants and civilians, rather classifying all indigenous people as military targets.

Guerilla warfare also set the stage for genocide by confronting European-style armies with tactics for which they were ill-prepared and against which they could not swiftly concentrate superior firepower. Unable to quickly vanquish an indigenous insurgency, colonial forces turned to genocide in wars that seemed difficult to win within the constraints of conventional rules of engagement.

Both settlers and officials were deeply concerned by Aboriginal guerilla warfare and the British inability to defeat them. Cunningham describes Aborigine tactics, noting “they can always steal in upon the whites, by gliding from tree to tree [to] rush in and spear their victim” (Cunningham, 1827, pp 32–33). Another settler named Wallace complained, in 1825, that “if you meet them in the bush you are likely to be speared,” if not “on horseback” (Richards, 1950). Lieutenant Governor Arthur also voiced deep concern in 1829: “The species of warfare which we are carrying on with them is of the most distressing nature; they suddenly appear, commit some act of outrage and then as suddenly vanish: if pursued it seems impossible to surround and capture them” (Watson, 1922, p 446).

Evidence, such as the murder of 30 indigenous Tasmanians at Mount Victory by settlers, perhaps suggested to the government that settlers' genocidal tactics provided a solution to the military stalemate by making every white a potential soldier with a license to kill Aborigines (Plomley, 1992, pp 175, 183). By declaring martial law, the colonial regime commenced "military operations against the Natives" and removed formal restraints against killing Aborigines (Turnbull, 1948, p 249).

When in November 1828 Arthur declared martial law, he implicitly institutionalized ethnic cleansing, if not genocide. Arthur urged "the most energetic measures on the part of the settlers themselves," while at the same time cautioning that "the use of arms is in no case to be resorted to until other measures for driving them off have failed" (Shaw, 1980, pp 126–127). Martial law made killing Aborigines legal until they had all been "driven off." Melville observed that "The effect of the proclamation of martial law, was to destroy, within twelve months after its publication, more than two thirds of the these wild creatures ..." (Melville, 1835, p 79).

The declaration unleashed a wave of massacres. In January 1829, 10 Aborigines were shot dead at Moulting Lagoon; in March five were killed in the Eastern Marshes (Ryan, 1996, p 102). Robinson wrote on June 16, 1830 of speaking to a man who claimed that four British men killed 30 indigenous Tasmanians in one day (Plomley, 1992, p 175). In the same month, the *Colonial Times* editorialized:

Settlers ... consider the men as wild beasts whom it is praiseworthy to hunt down and destroy, and the women fit only to be used for the worst purposes. The shooting of blacks is spoken of as a matter of levity. (Turnbull, 1948, p 109)

Later, on August 12, Robinson wrote of hearing that a stock keeper single-handedly "shot nineteen of the western natives" (Plomley, 1992, pp 197–198). And, Melville reported, "This murderous warfare, in the course of a few years destroyed thousands of aborigines, whilst only a few score of the European population were sacrificed" (Melville, 1835, p 33).

In May 1829 search-and-destroy parties were organized to hunt down Aborigines. (Turnbull, 1948, p 98). The spears, wadis and showers of stones that had served the Aborigines well in hit-and-run assaults were insufficient to hold off attacks by death squads armed with muskets and pistols. Thus, in many encounters, the British killed many Aborigines with few or no casualties. Plomley estimates that in 1824 there were still 1,500 Aborigines (Plomley, 1992, p 29). By 1835 fewer than 300 survivors remained.

During and after military campaigns, settler governments initiate the final phase of frontier genocide by incarcerating indigenous people in ethnic gulags. By imprisoning them in remote reservations, settler governments finalize an indigenous people's dispossession, remove them from economic competition for resources, and complete their political emasculation. Ethnic gulags also provide a relatively hidden venue for continued genocide. These camps or reservations are often publicly promoted as a means of saving or protecting Aboriginal



people from settlers and Western Civilization. Yet, like Soviet gulags, the ethnic gulag incarcerates indigenous people under conditions likely or even intended to destroy significant numbers through malnutrition, insufficient provision of clothing, exposure to the elements, inadequate medical care, and unsanitary conditions.

In 1829 Robinson began negotiating with Aboriginal Tasmanians to lure them out of the interior and onto reserves (Reynolds, 1995, pp 121–157). The process, which included both voluntary migration and forced removal, was completed on February 3 1835, when Robinson reported to Arthur: “The entire Aboriginal population are now removed [to Flinders Island]” (Ryan, 1996, p 170). Robinson’s project was successful in expatriating the last 300 Aborigines from a home their ancestors had inhabited for perhaps 35,000 years, but he only facilitated their near total destruction (Ryan, 1996, pp xxi, 183).

Flinders Island has been described as “a concentration camp where genocide was committed” (Gill, quoted in Reynolds, 1995, p 159). Indeed, in 1999 Tasmanian Premier Jim Bacon publicly called the Wybalenna camp on Flinders “a site of genocide” (Bacon, 1999). By 1847 three-quarters of the Aboriginal Tasmanians Robinson removed from the interior had died on Flinders Island or its predecessors Gun Carriage Island and Green Island. Robinson blamed “the sad mortality which has happened among them since their removal” on “the will of providence” (Pomley, 1987, pp 314–315). But, as nineteenth-century author James Walker suggested, conditions on Flinders Island were “only too well calculated to induce those severe pulmonary diseases which were destined to prove fatal to them [the Aboriginal detainees]” (Turnbull, 1948, pp 155–156). The prisoners lived at the mercy of the state and the state refused to provide for their survival.

Respiratory illnesses, including influenza, tuberculosis, and pneumonia, were the most common causes of death, precipitated by harsh physical conditions. In 1835 the Flinders Island surgeon, Dr. James Allen, reported to Robinson: “the great mortality amongst the aborigines has been caused, in most instances, by the application of cold, either in exposed situations or by irregular use of improper clothing.” Allen went on to warn that “blankets and clothing ... have been too scantily supplied.” He also alerted Robinson to the fact that “the water at this settlement is not wholesome,” and that “it is highly necessary for the natives to be located in a sheltered situation ... the huts ... are decidedly very improper ... being neither warm nor dry” (Turnbull, 1948, pp 176–177). Allen sounded the alarm, but the administration never acted on his warnings.

Institutionalized malnutrition caused widespread disease and death. The prisoners’ daily rations—one pound of salt meat and one and a half pounds of flour—were nutritionally inadequate, often irregular, and unpalatable to the Aborigines (Ryan, 1996, pp 186, 196). To survive they hunted. However, if they became ill, due to their inadequate clothing, housing, or bad water they could not hunt. Without the nutrition provided by hunting they could not recover from illnesses. Compounding these problems, Flinders Island was often cold, fre-

quently rainy, and perpetually windy, with no hospital and few, if any, medications.

From the outset, British authorities knew that conditions on Flinders Island were lethal. Inaction despite clear warnings and high mortality rates suggests that population decline was government policy, or was considered preferable to returning the survivors to their homes. In addition to Dr. Allen's warnings, Melville wrote in 1835 that "It is generally believed that this race of human beings will soon become extinct altogether, as the deaths are common and the increase nothing equal in proportion" (Turnbull, 1948, p 168). In 1836 the commandant of Launceston visited Flinders Island and warned that if conditions were not improved, "the race of Tasmania ... will ... be extinct in a quarter of a century" (Ryan, 1996, p 186). In 1838 Robinson himself reported that if the deaths "continue much longer no vestige of their race will be left behind" (Reynolds, 1995, pp 184–185). Still, the government did not address the issues contributing to mortalities. In fact, they operated Flinders Island with virtually no policy amendments for over a decade, until closing the reserve in 1847. The colonial government may not have planned to kill large numbers of Aborigines on Flinders Island, but they did little to stop mass death when they were clearly responsible for it.

When the Flinders Island camp closed in 1847, only 46 survivors remained (Reynolds, 1995, p 159). For those who wished to save the Aboriginal Tasmanians, Flinders Island had failed tragically. For those who wished to speed what they saw as inevitable extinction, the project was a success: inexpensive and distant from the public it nearly completed the eradication of Tasmania's original people.

Today, some 4,000–16,000 Aboriginal Tasmanians of mixed descent live on Tasmania and neighboring islands. Although the 1995 Aboriginal Lands Bill returned 12 small parcels of land to the community, most land claims remain unrecognized by the Australian government. Aboriginal Tasmanian activists now seek control of sites with historical, cultural or religious significance as well as reparations and self-government.

### **The Yuki case, 1851–1910**

On February 2, 1848 the United States took possession of California from Mexico. Ten months later, news of the gold found at Sutter's Mill triggered a tidal wave of immigration into the new state. Between 1849 and 1851 alone nearly 250,000 settlers arrived (Cook, 1970, p 28). These immigrants needed food and triggered an agricultural explosion that in turn created shock waves of land grabbing. In 1851 the first white explorers visited the Yuki homeland, in northern California, and in 1854 settlers arrived to farm and ranch the area's fertile valleys. Before whites arrived, the Yuki numbered between 5,000 and 20,000. By 1864, settlement policies and a war of genocide had reduced them to "85 male[s] and 215 female[s]" (Carranco and Beard, 1981, p 126). Genocidal

policies then continued into the twentieth century, further reducing the population.

Like the Aboriginal Tasmanians, the Yuki came into conflict with settlers over natural resources, land, the abduction of their children, and the enslavement and mistreatment of their women. Likewise, the Yuki rose up only to be hunted nearly to extinction and incarcerated in lethal ethnic gulags. Indeed, these genocides demonstrate remarkable similarities.

Soon after white settlers arrived in 1854, their pastoral activities began to threaten the Yuki hunter/gatherer economy. The Yuki depended on hunting deer and birds, fishing for steelhead and salmon, and gathering insects, nuts, seeds, tubers, and wild plants for survival (Carranco and Beard, 1981, pp 18–19). The lush meadows and river valleys where these Yuki staples thrived were also the best places for building houses, tilling the earth, and grazing livestock. Settlers' hogs, cattle, and horses set out to pasture in these areas consumed the core of the Yuki diet. Further, the settlers' domesticated animals drove wild game away from prime grazing areas thus depriving the Yuki of meat.

As in Tasmania, competition for natural resources generated conflict. Settlers occupied traditional Yuki hunting, fishing, and gathering grounds, denying them to the Yuki and forcing the Yuki to the point of starvation. According to settler John Burgess, who lived in the Yuki homeland:

I saw a man driving some squaws from a clover field ... they were picking clover or digging roots; he said he would be damned if he would allow them to dig roots or pick clover, as he wanted it for hay. (Carranco and Beard, 1981, p 68)

In the face of the sudden and intense competition for access to natural resources, many Yuki radically changed their lives in order to eat. They retreated into mountain areas where they faced the twin challenges of fewer food sources and violent encounters with hostile tribes.

Without access to productive land and fearful of the dangers associated with hunting and gathering on neighboring tribes' lands, Yuki began killing settlers' stock to survive (Miller, 1978, pp 249–254). The San Francisco *Bulletin* noted on January 21, 1860 that due to their "condition bordering on starvation ... [the Yuki] are committing serious depredations on the stock" (San Francisco *Bulletin*, January 21, 1860).

A dearth of written records obscures Yuki thinking, but their attacks on settlers' livestock were also likely intended to exact revenge for dispossession, loss of food, the enslavement of children and the abduction and mistreatment of women. As one settler noted, "the treatment received by the Indians from some of the white settlers has tended to exasperate them and cause them to destroy stock in a spirit of revenge" (Heizer and Almquist, 1971, p 39).

Forcibly indenturing Indians was legal in California from 1850 to 1863. On April 22, 1850, the state legislature passed "An Act for the Government and Protection of Indians" into law, providing for the indenture or apprenticeship of California Indians (Carranco and Beard, 1981, p 40; Castillo, 1978, p 109; Hurtado, 1988, pp 129–131). This legislation led to widespread kidnapping of

Yuki children. When Indian Agent Simon Storms visited a Round Valley Yuki encampment in 1856 he found that “a number of squaws and children had been taken away by white men, which was the principal reason they were so much afraid of whites” (Carranco and Beard, 1981, p 40). Indian Agent Vincent Geiger reported in 1857 that “the Indians ... have very few children, most of them doubtless having been stolen and sold” while in 1858 a settler noted what appeared to be kidnappings: “In coming into the valley, on the first occasion, I met a man with two Indian boys taking them off, and the third time I came on the trail, I met a man taking off a girl” (Carranco and Beard, 1981, p 61). There are no written records of stolen Yuki children ever returning to the tribe.

Few white women migrated to California with the Gold Rush. To obtain sex and labor, white settlers abducted and enslaved Indian women, including the Yuki. According to genocide scholars Frank Chalk and Kurt Jonassohn, stolen Yuki women became “temporary harvest hands, household servants, and camp wives” (Chalk and Jonassohn, 1990, p 197). Written evidence of Yuki reactions to these kidnappings are not extant, but Sherburne Cook suggests that abduction and abuse of Yuki women were causes of violent conflict between the Yuki and settlers (Cooke, 1976, p 278).

Between 1856 and 1859 the Yuki began attacking first livestock, and then both stock and a limited number of settlers. The conflict was always asymmetrical. California Indians were prohibited from owning guns and records suggest that the Yuki primarily relied on bows and arrows. Despite the disparity in firepower and the fact that the Yuki rarely killed whites, settlers responded with massacres of increasing scale (Heizer, 1974, p 11). Farmer John Lawson explained, in 1856, that when “I lost twenty hogs ... [I] went after the Indians ... shot three [and] five ... were tried at the reservation, found guilty and hanged” (Carranco and Beard, 1981, p 59). Settler Dryden Lawson stated in 1860 that:

... in 1856 the first expedition by the whites against the Indians was made ... these expeditions were formed by gathering together a few white men whenever the Indians committed depredations on their stock; there were so many expeditions that I cannot recollect the number ... we would kill on average fifty or sixty Indians on a trip ... frequently we would have to turn out two or three times a week. (Carranco and Beard, 1981, p 40)

Between 1857 and 1858 the Yuki killed four white men in attacks that appear to have motivated settlers to perpetrate increasingly large massacres. In May 1859, Round Valley settlers avenged the killing of a single prize stallion with the slaughter of 240 Yuki (Carranco and Beard, 1981, pp 64–65, 82). Responding to the increasing violence of the summer of 1859, the editor of the *Sacramento Union* wrote: “The aborigines are melting away as the snows of the mountains in June ... they are doomed to steady extirpation” (*Sacramento Union*, August 22, 1859).

On September 6, 1859 California Governor John Weller intervened to sanction genocide by granting a state commission to Walter Jarboe, a notorious

Indian killer whose “Eel River Rangers” had already murdered 62 Yuki men, women and children that year (Carranco and Beard, 1981, pp 90–91, 89). Despite these killings, Weller considered the Yuki a threat requiring even more extreme measures. A San Francisco *Bulletin* editorial even suggested, “Extermination is the quickest and cheapest remedy, and effectually prevents all other difficulties when an outbreak [of Indian violence] occurs” (San Francisco *Bulletin*, September 1, 1856). When US Army generals refused to order their troops to join the war against the Yuki, Weller hired Jarboe and his “Rangers.”

Five months later, in January 1860, Weller disbanded the “Eel River Rangers” and Jarboe presented his final report to the new Governor of California, John Downey: “from ... [September 20] to the 24th of January[1860], I have fought them twenty-three times, killed 283 warriors, the number of wounded was not known, took 292 prisoners, sent them to the Reservation” (Carranco and Beard, 1981, pp 95–96).

Jarboe then presented the state with a \$11,143 bill for his expeditions (San Francisco *Bulletin*, February 24, 1860). Given his previous record for killing scores of women and children, Jarboe’s official account cannot be trusted. He lists only men killed. Yet, if his previous activities are any indicator, he and his death squad did not discriminate between men, women, and children. All were likely targeted.

Governor Weller understood that Jarboe would kill women and children as well as the California press did. By February 1860, despite its earlier editorial, the San Francisco *Bulletin* was shocked and criticized Jarboe’s actions as a “Deliberate, cowardly, brutal massacre of defenseless men, women, and children ...” (San Francisco *Bulletin*, February 24, 1860). In March of the same year, San Francisco *Herald* editor John Nugent attacked the government’s genocide with biting wit:

I propose to the legislature to create the office of Indian Butcher with the princely salary conferred upon the man who has killed the most Indians in a given time provided it is satisfactorily shown that the Indians were unarmed at the time and the greater of them were squaws and papooses [women and children]. (San Francisco *Herald*, March 5, 1860)

Governor Weller had officially sanctioned genocide. He understood that by commissioning Jarboe he would unleash a force with a proven record of killing women and children and that it would annihilate most, if not all, Yukis. The government of California sanctioned and paid for Weller’s genocide policy and Jarboe’s execution of it. On April 12, 1860 the California state legislature appropriated \$9,347.39 for “payment of the indebtedness incurred by the expedition against the Indians in the county of Mendocino organized under the command of Captain W.S. Jarboe in the year 1859” (Carranco and Beard, 1981, p 97). Jarboe’s 292 prisoners then joined other Yuki at the Round Valley Reservation.

The Round Valley Reservation was established in 1854 as a collection point for the Yuki as well as a number of other northern California tribes. In 1857 Special Indian Agent Browne reported that “some 3,000 Indians” were living on

the reservation (Carranco and Beard, 1981, p 58). No records exist to show exactly how many Yuki died there. However, it is clear that even as Indians were continually brought to the reservation in the hundreds, the population steadily declined as a result of malnutrition, the abduction of women and children, rape and consequent venereal disease, and constant settler attacks. Although ostensibly created to protect the Yuki, in practice Round Valley bore striking resemblances to the Tasmanian ethnic gulag on Flinders Island.

Inadequate rations led to malnutrition, disease, and subsequent death. In 1858 a reporter from the San Francisco *Alta California* visited the reservation and gushed:

There is ... an abundance of food ... to supply the immediate wants of a vast multitude of Indians, and in a short time, their labor might produce an adequate supply of grain and vegetables for the entire aboriginal population of this State. (Steamer Edition, San Francisco *Alta California*, May 27, p 1858)

But those Yuki working on the reservation farm were provided only a starvation diet. Rations consisted of six ears of corn per worker per day or flour with which to bake bread; those who did not work were not given food (Carranco and Beard, 1981, p 68; Heizer, 1974, p 106). To supplement these insufficient rations, the Yuki turned to foraging and hunting on the reservation (Heizer, 1974, p 106). Here too they confronted a penal system designed to destroy them: ranchers were allowed to graze their livestock on the reservation, thus destroying the seeds, plants, tubers, and acorns the Yuki were foraging for. Without sufficient nutrition immune systems weakened and many Yuki succumbed to disease.

The abduction and rape of Yuki women increased the reservation mortality rate. Despite US Army soldiers stationed on the reservation to protect the Yuki, Round Valley was no safe haven. Lieutenant Edward Dillon, based on the reservation, reported "It is a common occurrence to have squaws taken by force from the place" (Carranco and Beard, 1981, p 61). Frequent rapes brought death by spreading venereal diseases through the Yuki reservation community. According to an 1859 petition sent by Tehama County settlers to the US Secretary of the Interior, the agent in charge of the reservation was "compelling the squaws, even in the presence of their Indian husbands to submit to (he and his cronies') lecherous and beastly desires," thus introducing "among them diseases of the most loathsome character" (Heizer, 1974, p 139). When Simon Storms entered Round Valley in June 1856 he noted that not a single Indian was "affected with the venereal," but by August 1858 he reported "about one-fifth are now diseased" (Carranco and Beard, 1981, p 61).

The reservation even became a shooting gallery for white settlers. Without the authority to arrest white men beyond the reservation, US Army soldiers had little ability to pursue and punish whites that attacked the Yuki. Settlers would commit a crime on the reservation and slip over the line of safety. Moreover, because the California legislature excluded Indians from serving as witnesses "for or against any white" in the California court system, it was virtually impossible to charge those suspected of victimizing Yuki on the reservation

(Heizer, 1974, p 5). With little fear of consequences, whites killed those incarcerated on the reservation with impunity. As Captain Johnson, charged with protecting the reservation, explained of the Yuki, “they had always been told by the white man ‘come on the reservation; we do not want to kill you,’ but they had been invariably deceived and killed, and now they did not know whom to believe” (Tassin, 1887, p 29). In 1859 Captain Johnson warned, “I believe it to be the settled determination of many of the [white] inhabitants to exterminate the Indians,” but given the laws he could “see no way of preventing it ...” (Carranco and Beard, 1981, p 90).

Long after the war was over, reservation policies continued to destroy the Yuki. According to Sherburne Cook, starvation and sickness combined with settler encroachment and attacks to destroy 80% of the Yuki on the reservation between 1873 and 1910 (Cook, 1976, p 238). Thus, the reservation system continued the genocide into the twentieth century. As on Flinders Island, there was a clearly discernible record of steadily declining population at Round Valley. The US and California governments may not have set out to destroy the Yuki at Round Valley, but they—like the colonial government of Tasmania—did little or nothing to correct this process despite years of evidence indicating that extermination was under way and that official policies contributed to it.

Today approximately 100 Yuki live in Mendocino County on the Round Valley Indian Reservation together with members of five other California Indian nations. Fewer than a dozen native Yuki speakers remain.

### **The Herero case, 1905–1906**

Germans hoisted their flag over the Namibian coast in August 1884. Over the next 19 years settlers slowly trickled into German South West Africa. By 1903 4,674 Germans lived in the colony, trading with Africans and ranching cattle (Palmer, 2000, p 149). In 1904 the 60–85,000-strong Herero nation rose up against German rule and were defeated (Irlé, 1973, p 52; Leutwein, 1907, p 11; Schwabe, 1907, p 37). The German Army then waged genocide against the defeated, killing 40–70,000 Herero men, women, and children. Only 15–20,000 out of 60–85,000 Hereros survived the war and genocide.

The genocide of the Herero advanced along lines similar to the Tasmanian and Yuki cases, with variations. The Herero attacked white settlers as a result of economic and political pressures that threatened their way of life. Land was, as in the other cases, a central point of economic conflict. However, in the Herero case competition for cattle took the place of competition for natural resources, and trade introduced an element of economic conflict absent from the Tasmanian and Yuki cases. Herero political grievances also differed from those of Aboriginal Tasmanians and the Yuki. Herero children were neither abducted in large numbers nor enslaved. Herero political frustration centered on German treatment of Herero women, general physical abuse, and legal inequality under colonial law. Like Aboriginal Tasmanian and Yuki attacks, the Herero revolt was met

first by warfare, second by a genocidal military campaign and finally by deadly ethnic gulags.

The economic basis of the Herero uprising was conflict over land. The Herero plain contains some of Namibia's best pasture. The settlers wanted it, since according to Commissioner for Settlement Paul Rohrbach, "Whoever will live in South West Africa must live essentially by stock farming" (Rohrbach, 1907, pp 282, 223). Governor Leutwein articulated a racial dispossession strategy: "the whole future of the colony lies in the gradual transfer of the land from the hands of the work-shy natives into white hands" (Poole, 1990, p 117). The *Deutsch Südwestafrikanische Zeitung* of January 22, 1901 agreed:

the land, of course must be transferred from the hands of the natives to those of the whites, [this] is the object of colonization in the territory. The land shall be settled by whites. So the natives must give way and either become servants of the whites or withdraw ... (Wellington, 1967, p 194)

These views were not new. Military commander Curt von François, for example, had portentously suggested in 1889, "That the natives had a right to the land and could do with it what they like ... cannot be contested by talk, but only with the barrel of a gun" (François, 1899, p 49).

These opinions were not lost on the Hereros, many of whom spoke German or were in contact with German missionaries, employers or traders. The missionary Reverend Kuhlman suggested that "They firmly believed that they would be robbed of their land." A despairing Okahandja Herero complained before the war: "We can't be bothered making gardens any more, as we will in any case be driven out by the Germans" (Poole, 1990, p 193).

By 1903, Europeans had purchased more than 25% of Herero lands (Bridgman, 1981, p 52; Wellington, 1967, p 197). Historian Jon Bridgman suggests that "At the rate of alienation that prevailed in 1903 it would have taken only a few more years for the Hereros to be completely dispossessed" (Bridgman, 1981, p 52). Plans for the Otavi railroad amplified the threat. The track would cut diagonally through Hereroland, making strips of land on either side crown property (Bley, 1971b, p 139). Neville Alexander considers the Otavi railway the critical land issue compelling the Herero to choose war (Wood, 1988, p 195).

Competition for cattle constituted the second major economic source of interracial friction. Leutwein had a clear economic goal for German South West Africa: developing a "cattle-raising country able to compete on the world market" (Leutwein, 1907, p 410). The Herero saw large-scale German cattle purchases as a threat to their way of life, in the same way that Aboriginal Tasmanians and the Yuki saw the loss of access to game, fish, and plants as a profound threat to theirs. Herero culture and economy revolved around cattle. The Herero language contains over a thousand words for cattle, the animals figure prominently in Herero religion, and soured cow's milk is the staple of the traditional diet (Vedder, 1938, p 46). Cattle also conferred wealth, prestige and political power on Herero men. In his 1906 book, *Die Herero*, the Reverend Irle observed that the Herero's "whole object in life was the increase and preser-



vation of his herds” (Irlé, 1973, p 121). As the Hereros sold cattle for European goods, they helped undermine their own society. By 1902 the Herero nation owned just 45,910 head of cattle, having sold and lost through military confiscation some 44,490 cattle to settlers (Drechsler, 1980, p 119).

Trade was the third major economic cause of conflict and war. The Herero were angered by what they considered European trading abuses. According to Chief Daniel Kariko, “Our people were being robbed and deceived right and left by German traders ...” (Administrator’s Office, 1918, p 47). European merchants charged high interest rates, frequently swindled the Herero, and sometimes extracted payment by force or trickery, even dressing as police to collect debts (Poole, 1990, p 182). To make sales, merchants sometimes dropped unrequested goods in a village and charged them to the chief’s account (Administrator’s Office, 1918, p 47). Eventually, many Hereros could no longer pay off debts with cattle, and had to sell their land.

The German administration tried to correct trading abuses with the 1903 Credit Ordinance, giving German creditors a year to collect debts from Hereros, “after which no indebtedness would be recognized.” As a result, in historian John Wellington’s words, “The traders fell on the Hereros like a pack of wolves” (Wellington, 1967, p 198). As their cattle and lands were taken, Herero frustrations rose. The use of soldiers to collect debts prompted one Herero to observe that the Europeans “wished to take everything all at once” (Poole, 1990, pp 184–185). Moreover, many Hereros did not fully understand the German financial system and as Leutwein suggested, a court official “who wants to take away his cattle is to the Native a cattle-thieving enemy” (Wellington, 1967, p 199). As headman Moses M’Buanjo observed, “They took our cattle ... and we had no protection” (Administrator’s Office, 1918, p 47).

Three primary political issues motivated indigenous attacks on settlers: mistreatment of women, physical abuse, and legal inequality. Given the size and resources of the Herero population, the Germans treated the Herero more carefully than the British had treated Aboriginal Tasmanians or white Californians the Yuki. Nevertheless, the Herero experienced significant abuse. Associated concerns appear to have shaped their political discontent.

By 1903, 3,970 European men and only 712 European women lived in Namibia. As in the Tasmanian and Yuki cases, this gender imbalance led to rapes of indigenous women by white men. This practice was so common that German settlers had names for it: *Verkafferung*, or going native, and *Schmutzwirtschaft*, or dirty trade (Rohrbach, 1907, p 243).

One incident of attempted rape and murder, just prior to the outbreak of war, particularly incensed the Herero. The son of Chief Zacharias, and his wife, Louisa Kamana, gave a ride to a German settler named Dietrich. That night, as the chief’s son slept, Dietrich made sexual advances towards Louisa. She refused. Dietrich then shot and killed her. The Herero were outraged and their frustrations multiplied when a German court acquitted Dietrich. Even when the case was appealed and the killer sentenced to three years in prison, the Herero observed that the life of even a chief’s daughter-in-law was worth little to the

Germans (Administrator's Office, 1918, pp 54–55; Wellington, 1967, pp 199–200). According to Leutwein, after this event, “Everywhere people asked themselves if the whites then had the right to shoot native women” (Leutwein, 1907, p 223).

The German colonial system in Namibia tacitly accepted European abuse of African women (Administrator's Office, 1918, p 5). According to historian Horst Drechsler, not a single case of a white man raping an African woman came before a German court prior to the 1904–1905 war (Drechsler, 1980, p 133). When a Swiss newspaper, *Berner Tagwacht*, published a story about three Germans gang-raping a Herero woman and beating her husband, officials in Windhoek told the Colonial Department in Berlin that such incidents were so common as to be deemed unworthy of reporting (Drechsler, 1980, pp 133–134).

Like sexual abuse, physical violence against the Herero was a major reason they went to war. In a letter to Nama leader Hendrik Witbooi, Herero paramount chief Samuel Maharero wrote, “All our patience with the Germans is of little avail, for each day they shoot someone dead for no reason at all” (Katjavivi, 1988, p 9). Leutwein explained the attitude that engendered abuse and the anger it aroused in Herero leaders:

the Europeans flooding into Hereroland were inclined, with their inborn feeling of belonging to a superior race, to appear as members of a conquering army ... The majority of the settlers had no knowledge of the protection treaties signed by the Herero. They did not know that ... the Germans were pledged to respect “the particular customs and practices” of the Herero. But, at the very least the ruling Herero knew as much. (Bley, 1971b, pp 139–140)

Europeans frequently beat their Herero employees under the authority of the *Väterliche Züchtungsrecht*, or paternal right of correction (Soggot, 1986, p 7). Even Chief Assa Riarua reportedly “was flogged until the blood ran” (Drechsler, 1980, p 136).

Their inability to obtain satisfactory redress in German courts redoubled Herero frustrations and emphasized Germans disinterest in granting the Herero political equality. As Leutwein noted, “Racial hatred has become rooted in the very framework of justice” (Bley, 1971b, p 140). Even a former District Judge in Swakopmund wrote that “a single drop of white blood was just as precious to me as the life of one of our black fellow-citizens” (Hanemann, 1905, p 46).

Lack of documentation limits our understanding of the immediate reasons why the Aboriginal Tasmanians and Yuki went to war. But Chief Samuel Maharero summarized his reasons in a letter to Leutwein dated March 6, 1904:

This was not begun this year by me, rather it has been started by the Whites. You know yourself how many Hereros have been killed by White people, particularly by traders, with guns, and in prisons and whenever I took these matters to Windhoek the blood of my people was compensated for by small numbers of small stock ... The traders increased the hardship by pressing my people to accept articles on credit; thereafter they robbed us and they went so far as to secure payment by taking away by force two or three head of cattle for a debt of £1 sterling. (Goldblatt, 1971, p 133)

Although a retrospective justification, this letter helps explain Maharero's decision to fight.

On January 12, 1904 Maharero commanded his people: "*Ich kämpfe, tötet!—I fight, kill!*" (Poole, 1990, p 1). Within days the Herero had killed 123 Europeans, mostly adult male civilians (Leutwein, 1907, p 466). Like Aboriginal Tasmanians and the Yuki, the Herero did not distinguish between combatants and civilians in the same way Europeans did. Thus, although Herero warriors obeyed Maharero's command to "refrain from laying their hands on" European women and children, the hundreds of initial attacks on farms, businesses, and civilian German men generated a strong emotional response from Germans (Bridgman, 1981, p 69; Leutwein, 1907, p 467). The Herero attacks provoked war fever.

In Germany, many perceived the Hereros' attacks on civilians as an unprovoked assault on the German nation. The conflict subsequently took on the emotional overtones of a full-scale national war, rather than a conflict of colonial suppression. Socialist leader August Bebel, for example, proclaimed to the *Reichstag*, "This is the worst crisis we Germans have faced since 1870" (Bley, 1971b, p 161). On January 18th, Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow proclaimed to the *Reichstag* his confidence in Germany's ability to "defend the honor of the flag" (Bridgman, 1981, p 75). And, in the early days of the conflict, even the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, the arch-enemy of colonial spending, supported sending troops to German South West Africa (Bley, 1971b, p 157).

Like the British army in Tasmania and irregular troops in California, the German military was unable to rapidly vanquish the Herero. As in the other cases, the inability to quickly defeat indigenous guerilla tactics played a crucial role in the rising military frustration that motivated the decision to wage genocide. Five factors thwarted a swift German military victory: their preparation for a European-style conflict, the Namibian environment, disease, insufficient troop strength, and Herero guerilla tactics. Each of these factors contributed to the decision to annihilate the Herero.

Like many early twentieth-century European armies, the Germans integrated machine guns and rapid-fire artillery into their tactics. In the absence of adequate rail or road networks, these weapons' tactical advantages were offset by logistical problems, long and vulnerable supply lines, and through dependence upon those supply lines, limited mobility. In effect, reliance on shell-hungry weapons exposed troops to constant ambush and kept German forces from turning tactical successes into strategic victories.

The Namibian environment also hindered a swift German victory. Namibia has the driest climate in sub-Saharan Africa and the resulting lack of water for horses and men slowed German forces. Thorn bushes also retarded movement, provided cover for Herero warriors, and wreaked havoc on German morale. Captain Maximilian Bayer wrote: "This damned thorn bush imprisons us. From all sides it chokes us, robbing us of light and air. One feels as if one were bundled in a sack, unable to move freely or make a fresh, vigorous decision. One can only lie in fury and anger and wait" (Bayer, 1909, pp 50–51). This feeling of inability to act likely paralleled the sense of impotence produced by Herero

methods of engagement, in which ambush frequently took the place of field encounter.

Deaths from disease, and typhus in particular, must have intensified the frustration and sense of powerlessness among German soldiers. Leutwein noted that typhus “demand[ed] more victims than the Hereros” (Leutwein, 1907, p 507). Indeed, between April 1904 and June 1905, diseases and sickness killed 321 German soldiers and officers fighting in Namibia (Generalstab, 1906, pp 237–247). As the war dragged on with mounting casualties, anger and frustration intensified in all ranks.

The loss of troops to disease exacerbated the fact that the Germans did not have enough soldiers for their mission. By March, three months after 60,000–85,000 Hereros revolted, the colony had received just 1,567 reinforcements. And even when the German offensive began in August the Germans did not have more than 4,000 men (Dederling, 1999, pp 207, 209). Only after the campaign of genocide was under way did reinforcements achieve the German troop strength necessary to both protect widely dispersed settlers and crush the uprising.

Herero guerilla warfare was the final factor that stopped the German army from achieving a speedy victory. After the battle of Ongandjira, in which Herero forces first fought against artillery, they learned to engage the Germans on level ground with dense brush. This diminished the killing power of shell-fire while allowing Hereros to move largely undetected (Poole, 1990, p 235). The Herero were masters of ambush. In one incident, warriors ambushed Major Glasenapp’s troops, killing 26 Germans. In another ambush Herero warriors wounded 17 and killed 32 (Generalstab, 1906, pp 66–71). These high casualties dealt a blow to the pride and morale of the Germans, who considered themselves one of the world’s best armies. They were unable to defeat an enemy they perceived as subhuman and savage.

Because the conflict did not fit German tactical frameworks, the troops fighting the Hereros may have felt that traditional military codes of conduct did not apply. One German soldier wrote to Kaiser Wilhelm, suggesting that German soldiers poison water wells to destroy the Herero and win the war. He justified “resorting to some new stratagem,” arguing that “After all, we are not fighting against an enemy respecting the rules of fairness, but savages” (Drechsler, 1980, p 147). Even if he never read this letter, from other evidence it seems that the Kaiser agreed with its basic sentiment.

In June 1904 General Lothar von Trotha took command of German troops in Namibia under orders from Kaiser Wilhelm to “crush the rebellion by all means necessary” (Dederling, 1999, p 208). Von Trotha discarded traditional military codes of conduct. According to Manuel Timbu, who served as von Trotha’s groom, “I was for nearly two years with the German troops and always with General von Trotha. I know of no instance in which prisoners were spared” (Administrator’s Office, 1918, p 64). Jan Kubas, who also served with German troops, simply noted “The Germans took no prisoners” (Administrator’s Office, 1918, p 65). Von Trotha justified killing prisoners on the grounds that his men could not care for them and that they carried infectious diseases (Poole, 1990,

p 270). These explanations of the departure from European codes of warfare embody the brutal logic that ultimately motivated genocide against the Herero.

The rationalizations for killing prisoners were also used to justify massacres of civilians. Timbu noted, “the soldiers shot all natives we came across,” while Kubas related how the Germans “killed thousands and thousands of women and children along the roadsides.” A German officer told Bastaard commander Hendrik Campbell that it was necessary to burn Herero women alive in their huts since: “they might be infected with some disease” (Administrator’s Office, 1918, pp 63, 65).

On August 11, 1904, von Trotha encircled the retreating Herero nation at the battle of the Waterberg. With 96 officers, 1,488 troops, machine guns, and cannons, von Trotha attacked from six directions, apparently on the model of Moltke’s encirclement of the French at Sedan (Bayer, 1909, p 139; Poole, 1990, pp 251–252). The encirclement failed to contain the 60,000 or so Hereros, including 5,000–6,000 warriors. Toward the end of this closely fought battle, a majority of Hereros broke through the lightly held eastern portion of the 100-kilometer-long encirclement perimeter (Bayer, 1909, p 139). The retreating, defeated Herero nation then continued southeastward, towards the Omaheke Desert and British Bechuanaland, now Botswana.

Following the retreat of the main body of Hereros, the Germans destroyed many of those too slow to follow. Stragglers were bayoneted, shot and burned alive *en masse*. According to one Bergdamara man who fought alongside the Germans, “We hesitated to kill Herero women and children, but the Germans spared no one. They killed thousands and thousands. We saw this slaughter day after day” (Bridgman, 1981, p 126).

Von Trotha pursued the Herero into the Omaheke Desert not to force surrender, but to destroy them. It was not a matter of military necessity to hound the leaderless and defenseless Hereros to the point of extinction. Employing a 250-kilometer-long *cordon sanitaire* of troops to keep them from returning to Hereroland, von Trotha deliberately annihilated the Herero (Generalstab, 1907, p 212). Indeed, the German General Staff suggested that:

If ... the Herero were to break through [at the Waterberg], such an outcome of the battle could only be even more desirable in the eyes of the German Command because the enemy would then seal his own fate, being doomed to die of thirst in the *Sandveld*. (Generalstab, 1906, p 132)

On October 2, 1904, von Trotha formalized a policy of genocide by forbidding the Hereros’ return from the arid Omaheke into Hereroland.

In the *Schrecklichkeit*, or Extermination, order to his officers, von Trotha proclaimed at Osombo–Windimbe, on October 2, 1904, that:

All Hereros must leave the country. If they do not do so, I will force them with cannons to do so. Within the German borders, every Herero, with or without weapons ... will be shot. I shall no longer shelter women and children. They must either return to their people or I will shoot them. This is my message to the Herero nation. (Rust, 1905, p 385)

It is possible, though unlikely, that von Trotha honestly thought the Herero would make their way through the desert to British Bechuanaland. However, it seems he knew a great number of Herero would die in the *Sandveld*. He observed on September 30th, 1904 that “There is a lack of water for man and beast, horses die ... the climate is barbarous ...” (Poole, 1990, p 271). Moreover, as commander of all German forces in Namibia, he knew how deadly the Omaheke was from patrol reports. For example, during five days of pursuing the Herero, Captain Klein lost 25 horses and 21 mules to thirst and exhaustion in the Omaheke (Generalstab, 1906, pp 203–206).

An undetermined number of Hereros died in the desert. One thousand or so reached British Bechuanaland, but the vast majority died of thirst and hunger en route. According to the official German military report,

The shutting off of the *Sandveld*, which was carried on for months with iron firmness, completed the work of destruction ... The death rattle of the dying and the shrieks of the maddened people—these echoed through the solemn silence of eternity. The court had now concluded its work of punishment. (Generalstab, 1906, p 214)

Unfortunately, this “court” had not concluded its “punishment.”

Responding to domestic German pressure, Kaiser Wilhelm agreed to lift the Extermination Order in late December of 1904. Yet, this did not end the genocide. As the Herero responded to the change in policy that allowed their remnants to surrender, they were collected and taken to work camps and ethnic gulags where thousands more died.

Camp conditions led to high mortality rates. German officials knew this, but chose not to improve the situation. On Shark Island, an official report to the Colonial Office stated that in eight months 1,032 out of 1,795 prisoners died (Drechsler, 1980, p 212). According to Fritz Isaac, some 3,500 Hereros and Namas were sent to Shark Island, but only 193 returned when the prison closed in August, 1906 (Administrator’s Office, 1918, p 99). Conditions and treatment in forced-labor railroad gangs also imposed a high toll. Herero headman Traugott Tjienda testified that of the 528 Hereros in his work party, 148 perished while working on the line (Administrator’s Office, 1918, pp 101–102). According to official German figures, of the 15,000 Herero survivors and 2,200 Namas in post-war camps, some 7,700, or 45%, perished (Bley, 1971b, p 151).

A continuing desire to destroy the Hereros played a part in the Germans’ maintenance of such lethal camp conditions. Between 1903 and 1905 some 865 Africans also died at a work camp in the port city of Swakopmund (Goldblatt, 1971, p 146). Heinrich Vedder, who was there at the time, noted: “During the worst period an average of thirty died daily ... it was the way that the system worked.” He suggested that “General von Trotha gave expression to this system in an article he published in the *Swakopmunder Zeitung*: ‘the destruction of all rebellious tribes is the aim of our efforts’” (Goldblatt, 1971, p 146; Vedder, 1953, p 139).

A century after the genocide began, the Herero people have regained their former population size. Although a precise number is difficult to obtain, it

appears that as many as 100,000 Hereros currently reside in Namibia and neighboring Angola and Botswana. Herero community leaders are currently working to obtain reparations from the German government for the genocide they suffered.

## **Conclusion**

Settlement policy tends to create the impression, and sometimes the reality, of a zero-sum game between indigenous people and settlers. Understanding the grievances which compel indigenous groups to go to war against colonists and their advocates reveals both common background patterns leading to the initiation of wars of annihilation and the foundations for settlers', administrators' and soldiers' motivation and self-justification for destroying indigenous people.

Economic conflicts between indigenous people and settlers are the result of a complex interplay of factors that vary from case to case. However, issues of land and access to resources appear again and again in the pattern leading to colonial wars of annihilation. Territory is inherently finite in area and resources; thus there is competition for access to and control of these fundamental sources of survival and wealth.

Political power is also a limited commodity which settlers and indigenous groups rarely share equally, unless circumstances dictate cooperation. Colonists' racist attitudes, disinterest in power sharing, and abuse of indigenous peoples' basic human rights are critical to the pattern of frontier genocide. Settler maltreatment of indigenous people both sows the seeds of violent resistance, by threatening the very fabric of indigenous society, and often at the same time sets precedents, in the minds of settlers and their advocates, for genocide as an operational solution to a difficult war.

By waging guerilla warfare, killing civilians, and destroying private property, indigenous peoples frustrate and shock settlers and their advocates, reinforcing existing racist hostility. Against guerilla tactics traditional military tactics rarely bring swift victory, especially when hindered by insufficient manpower and difficult environmental conditions. In the pattern of frontier genocide, colonists' desire for a swift end to indigenous attacks may inform their decision to employ genocidal tactics.

The frustration and stress of strategic and tactical difficulties, coupled with the perceived barbarity of indigenous guerilla warfare, contribute to the settler forces' abandonment of conventional warfare's methods and ethics, just as the legalities of civilian rights were ignored in the earlier stages. The vacuum created by this abandonment is then filled by a code of war that colonial armed forces perceive as mirroring indigenous tactics' failure to distinguish between combatants and civilians. Abandoning Western modes of warfare involves a significant danger of genocide.

In the final phase of the frontier genocide pattern, settler governments employ the ethnic gulag to complete the destruction of an indigenous people. These remote prisons are not created with the express intention of murdering their

inmates. But they are imposed and operated without providing for the survival of the prisoners. Thus, even as the government receives a steady stream of data indicating that its own incarceration policies are leading to mass fatalities, it chooses to allow the deaths and thus accept responsibility for them.

The pattern of frontier genocide suggests several truths about the destruction of indigenous people. First, there is no safe level of legal discrimination or institutionalized abuse of human beings under any regime. Tacit acceptance of the physical mistreatment of Aboriginal people coupled with inequality before the law sets dangerous precedents for later genocide. Moreover, this mistreatment and inequality have the strong potential for provoking full-scale war between victims and perpetrators. Second, when indigenous people employ guerilla tactics there is a high likelihood that settler armed forces will not adhere to traditional modes of warfare and, in the absence of legal or political constraints, may embark upon a military campaign of genocide. Finally, when a campaign of genocide has already been waged, so-called reservations for indigenous survivors are often no more than ethnic gulags in which genocide continues. These findings clearly call for additional study but are immediately valuable as red flags indicating the danger or existence of genocide. Given the continuing threat to indigenous people around the world, recognition of these factors may aid their survival.

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BENJAMIN MADLEY

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