**Out of Africa**

BY Z A R R A R K H U H R O 2021-11-08

THE ongoing T20 World Cup has been a riveting affair, even for the oppressed minority of Pakistanis, such as myself, who don`t particularly care for cricket. Emotions run high as they do whenever Pakistan takes the field, but luckily (thus far) there has been none of the usual trauma and heartbreal( that we associate with the team, which does seem to have finally hit its stride.  
  
There have also been displays of magnanimity and sportsmanship spirit from the teams, and by extension from the fans as well, though memes and friendly banter were also on display. There have been some unfortunate, though predictable, exceptions, such as the treatment meted out to Mohammad Shami after India`s defeat by Pakistan, which saw social media abuse heaped on Shami and, later on, Virat Kohli who took a stand in defence of his teammate.  
  
There was also curiosity on display especially when it came to Pakistan`s match against Namibia, when people wondered why, in a nation where the overwhelming majority is black, the cricket team is almost entirely white. Essentially, this is the legacy of South African rule over Namibia. In 1915, South Africa captured the former German colony of Namibia, renaming it South-West Africa and effectively governing it as a province of South Africa while also extending its apartheid policies to its latest acquisition.  
  
This meant the oppression and political and economic disenfranchisement of the majority black population, who were deprived of the facilities and opportunities the white ruling class could avail.  
  
Given that the incubators of cricket in both South-West Africa and South Africa were the elite private schools and academies that could only be attended by the white upper class, one`s choice of sport was divided along racial lines, with cricket and rugby being a white domain and soccer being the black majority`s choice. Naturally, given the politics of resistance that inevitably follows occupation, the choice of sport also became a marker of racial identity.  
  
This occupation in turn sparked a long guerilla war led by the South West Africa People`s organisation (SWAPO), which aimed to free Namibia from the South African yoke. While Namibia finally gained independence in 1990, several decades later than most African nations, economic disparity in that country is still distinct and follows racial lines: even though whites make up less than six per cent of Namibia`s 2.6 million people, they still hold the levers of the economy and industry firmly in their hands.  
  
While post-independence governments in Namibia have attempted to rectify this imbalance, they have had little success. In 2017, the Namibian president while introducing a billon the Namibia Economic Empowerment Framework, said: `The majority of Namibians remain structurally excluded from meaningful participation in the economy and as we established earlier, inclusivity ensures harmony and exclusivity brings discord.  
  
However, money equals power and so the most far-reaching initiatives, such as a plan to force white businesses to sell a 25pc stake to blacks, floundered in the face of opposition from the white-dominated business community and their allies.  
  
But, however unequal contemporary Namibia is, and however painful the South African occupation and subsequent freedom struggle was, it all pales in comparison to the atrocities committed in Namibia by German colonists. That story starts in 1884 with the Berlin Conference where Namibia was declared a protectorate of Germany. Germany, a latecomer to the imperial game, effectively ended up with the parts of Africa no one else wanted, and this included Namibia. Poor in resources, Namibia did however offer Germany a potential settler colony as thatEuropean state has always been anxious to break the shackles of geography and find new lands for its growing population to settle in.  
  
I ncon ven ient ly, Namibia was already home to different indigenous ethnic groups such as the Herero and the Nama, both of whominevitably found themselves in conflict with white settlers intent on stealing their lands.  
  
Resistance ensued, and after a few setbacks, the Germans sent in Gen Von Trotha who implemented an extermination strategy against the dominant Herero.  
  
Unable to face the modern arms and artillery of the Germans, the Herero were penned into a desert where countless thousands died of dehydration and starvation. Many more later died in concentration camps like Shark Island, where the skulls of the dead were cleaned and sent to Germany for racial research that eventually formed the basis for Nazi race theory, just as these proto-death camps eventually led to Auschwitz and Dachau.  
  
In a period of four years, more than 80pc of the Herero population and 50pc of the Nama population were thus eradicated. So when we ask questions about the present, we find that the answers lie in the past, and for the most part, the past is always present.  The writer is a joumalist.  
  
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