

German imperialism assignment



The Scramble for Africa in the late 19th and early 20th centuries encouraged many different nations to become involved in colonialism. In this time period, competing European powers carved up the continent of Africa between themselves, due to a variety of political and economic motives. Generally, these powers benefited from these land acquisitions. However, Germany's neo-imperialist experience was unlike that of the other powers. Within the colony of Namibia, located in South West Africa, the real advantages that Germany received were far outweighed by the disadvantages the German empire faced.

Although Germany received elevated political status from occupying colonies, the economic and military efforts that were invested in maintaining and obtaining its colony of Namibia could not justify this elevated political position. Through the means of imperialism, Germany hoped that it would consolidate its position as an international power. This would be done by strengthening the German economy, spreading German influence, and gaining political status. Firstly, between 1875 and 1914, holding a large colonial empire was a symbol of national prestige.

At the time, acquiring colonies was a symbol of status, and the greatness of a colony was measured in colonial possession (Cowie 1986, p48). For Germany, as an emerging power, colonial acquisition was therefore seen to be of paramount importance. If Germany wanted to be compared to the other major powers such as Britain and France, she would have to control an impressive colonial empire. During this time period, the " Kaiser Wilhelm I and his government demanded that Germany be given equal status with

France and the United Kingdom, including in colonial possessions,” (Hutchinson Unabridged Encyclopaedia, 2005).

The Kaiser clearly outlines that Germany desired an elevated political status. But in order for Germany to be recognised as an influential state, it must first have an impressive portfolio of colonies. Hence, Germany desired to accomplish an increase in national prestige through the possession of colonies. Secondly, Germany was persuaded into colonialism by the possibility of an increase in her international power and influence. As Schuller states: “ Many of Germany’s ideas on imperialism were inspired by France and Britain ... It seemed logical to seem that colonies were a good idea, because these two powers had them.

A simple thought resulted; if Germany had colonies, it too would be as dominant as France and Britain ... Colonisation would prove Germany to be a force to be reckoned with. ” (Schuller, 2006) As Germany was trying to emulate France and Britain’s success, it seemed valid to think that the same process of colonial expansion could be applied to Germany’s case. Following the examples of Britain and France, all Germany had to do was acquire a large colonial empire, and she would have the same amount of power and influence that the other powers enjoyed.

The lure of being able to rival magnificent powers such as Britain and France proved to be too much for Germany to resist. The possibility of international greatness was one of the contributing factors that convinced Germany to become imperialist. Thirdly, Germany was enticed into imperialism by the possibility of economic gains in Africa. During the time period, many other

countries were exploiting Africa's natural resources for a healthy profit. A German political analyst of the time Friedrich Fabri states " Colonies will have a salutary effect on our economic situation, as well as our entire national progress" (Fabri 1987).

Although this statement may have been false, Fabri, along with many other authors thought that colonising areas of Africa would not only establish Germany as a political power, but also return great profits for Germany. This belief was all that was needed to convince the German government to colonise. This opinion can also be seen in the German public, as one source states that " German settlers were eager to come to south-east Africa, as they were seeking economic possibilities outside Europe," (A Rosenberg, 2008).

This shows that there was support from Germans to colonise Africa not just for political gain, but for economic interest as well. Germany was motivated into imperialism by economic opportunities, being recognised as a political power with an increase of international status, and being able to exercise the power and influence that would come with colonies. Germany's imperialist experience in Namibia came with several advantages. These advantages were of a political and economic nature.

Benefits experienced included an increase of trade with other powers, an increased amount of political influence, and the control over valuable resources in South West Africa. Firstly, Namibia contained many valuable resources, which Germany had control over. Resources in Namibia included diamonds, rubber plantations, copper, lead and gold (Unknown Author,

2004). This stockpile of valuable resources meant that Germany could make massive profits if the correct steps were taken. Out of all of these commodities, not only is diamond the most valuable, but it was the most abundant in South West Africa.

Access to these minerals greatly expanded Germany's portfolio of tradable commodities. Secondly, Germany received large profits from trading its colony's resources with other powers colonies. The direct trade between Germany and Britain colonies in 1910 was nearly 630 000 British pounds. Over two thirds of this income was from South West African territories (Henderson 1962, p59). Also, in 1912 German colonies exported 573 000 pounds worth of rubber to other countries (Henderson 1962, p59). In this time period, German colonies were very profitable.

However, it is possible that these figures may have been exaggerated by German officials due to their desire to be seen as a powerful and profitable nation. Nevertheless, Germany was making a healthy profit off its colonies. Thirdly, Germany's possession of colonies in Africa meant that Germany now had a considerable amount of political influence and power. During the Conference of Berlin in 1884-85, Germany exercised its newly found bargaining power. Prince Bismark was able to make a deal with Britain using his colonial possession in Africa. A British Earl G.

Granville quotes: " We (Britain) are uncommonly grateful to Prince Bismark.... Our being left with a free hand in Egypt we owe when all is said to Germany's good will. " (Granville 1963, p100) The Earl states that Britain is uncommonly grateful for Germany's help in securing Egypt. However,

Germany did not lend its support without a price. Prince Bismark expected in return that the British would accept German colonial ambitions in Africa and elsewhere (Cowie 1986, p82). In this conference, Germany has used its influential position in Africa to gain support from Britain.

An occupation of colonies meant that Germany now had the political power to affect events in Africa, and bargain with international power for its own advantage. Through occupying land in Africa Germany's economy developed for a period, it controlled many valuable resources, and now had increasing amount of political power. Although Germany received advantages from its colonisation of Namibia, these advantages were drowned out by the many economic disadvantages experienced in the colony. The imperialist nation struggled to organise its funds successfully, which lead to a poor profit from its colonies, and insufficient officials were present in the colony of Namibia. Firstly, when Germany first gained control of Namibia, not enough funds were invested to earn a profit off the colony. Economic advancements were constantly hampered by a lack of working capital. The main German corporate enterprise, which was comprised of some of the richest men in Germany, committed only 408 000 marks, or about 24 000 British pounds (Cocker, 1999, p295). This lack of funds meant that the colony could never reach its full potential, and little would be accomplished.

Financial analyst E Gorges comments on the German effort to develop Namibia: " Trying to achieve anything with such ridiculously small working capital, was as absurd as the idea of a man who would try to cut a tunnel through the alps with a pickaxe. " (E Gorges, 1918) Gorges tells of how difficult it was for Germany to make any economic gains within Namibia, and <https://assignbuster.com/german-imperialism-assignment/>

how little progress was actually being made in the colony. This lack of funding was one of the major faults which contributed to the colony of Namibia failing. This in turn led to a second major problem for Germany.

Because of the miniscule amount of capital invested initially, it took Germany far too long to start to make a profit off its colonies. Diamonds were not found in South West Africa until 1908, and rubber exports only started to thrive in 1912 (Henderson 1962, p59). This was very late in Germany's colonial history, considering that Germany had control of colonies since 1884 (Cocker 1999, p296). It took Germany more than 20 years to start making a healthy profit from its colonies. Also, Germany's colonies were confiscated by the League of Nations at the end of World War One in the Treaty of Versailles (Truman 2006).

To add to the problem, Germany could not support its diamond trade during World War One, as the country would no longer trade with other competing powers, and it could not financially support the mining of diamonds during the war. Hence, Germany only experienced profit from Namibia's diamonds from 1908 until the start of World War One, which is only a period of seven years. The small amount of profit made in this short time period could hardly justify Germany's efforts to possess overseas colonies. The third problem that Germany faced in Namibia was the lack of German officials, which led to a lack of German authority. In 1888, only three German officials were present in the country (M Cocker, p295, 1999). This severe shortage of staff meant that the German influence within Namibia was very small, and they were in no position to press authority over their Africa subjects. 4 years later, due to the lack of German authority, the threat of tribal violence forced German

officials to retreat to British protection in Walvis Bay, and the German colony collapsed amidst great humiliation (M Cocker, p295, 1999).

The lack of German staff, and therefore a lack of German authority inevitably led to indigenous uprisings in Namibia. This shortage of German staff also meant that the colonisers could not protect themselves from the tribal warriors, and were forced to retreat to British territory. Not only did this mean that Germany momentarily lost control of the colony, but Germany also experienced great embarrassment because of the incident.

Germany's colonial experience was riddled with economic disadvantages like a lack of staff, taking too long to exploit the colonies resources and insufficient capital, but this was not the end of Germany's problems in Namibia. As well as the numerous economic weaknesses in the colony of Namibia, Germany also suffered when maintaining and obtaining the colony. The German government was constantly defeating uprisings from the native tribes, who were outraged by the brutality and exploitation that was forced upon them. The tribe which was involved in the most conflicts was the Herero tribe.

In 1904, on the eve of the greatest Herero uprising, the chief of the tribe wrote: " If we rebel, we will be annihilated in battle since our people are practically unarmed and without ammunition, but the cruelty and injustice of the Germans have driven us to despair and our leaders and our people both feel that death has lost its terrors because of the conditions under which we now live. " (Maherero, 1904, Quoted by Rosenberg, 2008) The chief of the

Herero tribe expresses not only his, but the emotions of his whole tribe towards the German invaders.

As he is the leader of the tribe opposing Germany, it is possible that he may have exaggerated the situation in order to motivate his warriors. Due to his bias against the Germans facts may have been supported and others omitted to support the chief's argument. He states that even though his people do not have a fighting chance against the Germans, it is still necessary to rebel because of the agony that his people have gone through. Over the next few months, the uprising was successful as the Germans were caught by surprise, and were not ready for war (Rosenberg, 2008).

This early success in the Herero's campaign against the Germans was a fleeting moment of victory. The Germans were on the back foot ??? losing a war to a primitive African tribe, which brought great humiliation on the emerging power. This humiliation overshadowed the prestige that Germany had previously gained from occupying colonies in Africa. However, the Herero tribe's success was short-lived. The new German General in Namibia saw that the only path to victory was the complete annihilation of the Herero tribe, and issued his extermination order to spare no Herero (Rosenberg, 2008).

Even for the time, this was an extremely barbaric solution to the problem that German authorities faced. Not only was the genocide of the Herero people socially unacceptable, but it was also a violation of basic human rights. Out of the Herero population of 80 000, it is estimated that only 16 000 survived the genocide (Rosenberg, 2008). Germany thought that it was

necessary to eliminate this whole tribe in order to be unchallenged in Namibia. This shows how difficult it was for Germany to gain control and maintain its colony in South West Africa. Germany also struggled to defeat a second native tribe.

Over the two years after Germany defeated the Herero tribe, the Nama tribe fought a fierce guerrilla war which the Germans were unable to pacify (Rosenberg, 2008). This style of warfare was particularly effective against the German invaders, and Germany received many casualties during this war. This guerrilla war shows how determined the natives were to be free from foreign control, and the lengths that they would go to to hinder German progress. The process of obtaining control of Namibia was extremely difficult for Germany, as they were involved in many conflicts with the native peoples.

In conclusion, the benefits that Germany received throughout its imperialist experience could not justify the difficulties that it faced as a nation. Germany was motivated into imperialism by the possibility of increased political and economic power, but the military and economic disadvantages experienced far outweighed the small amounts of profit and political influence that was achieved throughout the campaign. Germany's showed severe aggression and cruelty in its occupation of Namibia, but still had nothing to show by the end of its occupation in Africa.