

2 Discursive context: The Herero and Nama genocide

What is the Herero and Nama genocide, and how has it been commemorated over the past 120 years? The following chapters draw on historical, ethnological and Africanist research to describe the events of 1904–1908 and their contested aftermath. In this way, I include a variety of discursive levels of knowledge production, from academia to literature. Rather than separating each of these areas, I show how they have been intertwined in the construction of knowledge about the Herero and Nama genocide. The first chapter 2.1 provides a brief overview of the events that occurred between 1904 and 1908 in German South-West Africa. Chapter 2.2 then traces how these events have been produced as objects of commemoration and historicization in Germany and Namibia. At the end of this chapter, I also consider what communication studies can add to the previous research literature. This will be the foundation for the theoretical concepts discussed in chapter 3.

2.1 Historical overview: German South-West Africa, 1904–1908

To understand the events that took place between 1904 and 1908 in German South West Africa (GSWA), it is first necessary to sketch the outlines of German colonialism. GSWA became the first German colonial “protectorate” in 1884, following the purchase of land by the German tobacco merchant Adolf Lüderitz (Conrad, 2016, p. 29). Yet, colonial imaginations long predated Germany’s physical colonial empire, and visions of colonial discovery and adventure were an established part of Germany’s cultural landscape well before the physical colonial encounter (Conrad, 2016, p. 19). In the words of Ciarlo (2011, p. 12): “In the world of text, ‘the Colonies’ posed an imaginative space onto which new social orders, fantasies of racial superiority, or desires for gender emancipation could be projected.” This “imaginative space” often shaped expectations of colonialism in the metropole, which is important for understanding the development of events in GSWA.

GSWA stands out among German colonies because it was the only settler colony in the German empire. To this day, Namibia is the only former German colony with a German-speaking minority population (Conrad, 2016, p. 29). This added a source of conflict to the already-volatile conditions within the colony: Rather than merely obtaining fast wealth,

a settler population seeks to permanently change the balance of power by placing themselves as the apex of a new social hierarchy that, crucially, places indigenous populations at the bottom rung (Mamdani, 2020). Interestingly, although German settlers are often imagined as farmers, an image conjured up by colonial ideals, this description only applied to 10% of the German settler population in the early 20th century (Häussler, 2018, p. 46). Instead, most German settlers were civil servants, soldiers, workers and tradesmen. The settler community was inherently dependent on colonial structures to survive in the newly established colony, contradicting colonial ideals of self-determination and frequently leading to tensions between the settler community and the colonial metropole (Häussler, 2018, p. 47).

Häussler (2018) points out that this precarious societal position meant that interactions between settlers, the colonial state and indigenous populations were often shaped by fear. This environment of fear was stoked by German-language newspapers in the colony, which often focused on (real or imagined) threats that the indigenous community posed to the settler community and the lack of support the settlers received from the metropole (Häussler, 2018, p. 33). For example, just a few days before the outbreak of the colonial war in January 1904, the *Deutsch-Südwestafrikanische Zeitung* published an editorial entitled “On the current situation” (“*Zur augenblicklichen Lage*”), where the policies of the colonial governor, Theodor Leutwein, were criticized as too lenient towards the Herero and thus posing a threat to the German-speaking population (Häussler, 2018, p. 41).

Violence was omnipresent in daily settler life and foundational to the power position in which German settlers saw themselves. Any attempt of the German colonial state to curb this power was viewed as a direct encroachment of settler power (Häussler, 2018, p. 50). This omnipresence of violence is also visible in many of the testimonies of descendants of genocide survivors. Rather than a single event that began the war, many stories begin with individual skirmishes and deaths that took place in certain communities (Erichsen, 2008, p. 50; Krishnamurthy & Tjiramanga, 2021, p. 85). Some researchers have suggested that the war goes back to the “aggressive, erratic behavior” of a colonial officer named Zürn in Okahandja, a stronghold of the Herero (Häussler, 2018, p. 70, transl. CH; cf. Zimmerer, 2016b, p. 47). Samuel Maharero, the Paramount Chief of the Herero, apparently called the war *Ovita Ovita Zürn*, or Zürn’s war (Erichsen, 2008, p. 47).

Nevertheless, the beginning of the colonial war with the Herero is typically pinpointed on January 12, 1904, when Herero attacked and murdered (overwhelmingly male German) settlers following a declaration of war by Samuel Maharero (cf. Häussler, 2018, p. 72; Zimmerer, 2016b, p. 47). The events of January 12 threw a match into the gasoline of fear in the settler community and ignited public debate in Germany through the reporting of German journalists and correspondents (Methfessel, 2019, p. 242). Social democratic and left-leaning newspapers, especially the Social Democratic-aligned *Vorwärts*, initially criticized the actions of German colonial settlers and soldiers, accusing them of brutality towards the indigenous communities (Methfessel, 2019, p. 269). These critiques were often based on the eyewitness testimonies of German-speaking missionaries. The perspectives of Herero individuals were almost never heard in German newspaper accounts, and most debate in the articles took place between different German representatives such as missionaries, colonial officials, settlers and

politicians. In the pro-colonial press, there was often a focus on the atrocities of the Herero, who were described in childlike or animalistic terms and shown as a menace to the German-speaking population (Methfessel, 2019, pp. 270–271). Yet, despite these characterizations, most newspapers continued to downplay the war by referring to the actions of German soldiers in terms of punishment or as “operations” or “expeditions” (Zeigerer, 2016, p. 44). Rather than a military conflict, the colonial war was shown as a meeting of the “races” and as a juxtaposition of un/civilized groups (Zeigerer, 2016, p. 83).

In this context, the governor of GSWA, Theodor Leutwein, was forbidden from seeking peace negotiations without the explicit approval of the Kaiser (Zimmerer, 2016b, p. 49). A few months later, Lothar von Trotha was given command of the German colonial troops with the goal of definitively ending the war (Häussler, 2018, p. 105). Von Trotha explicitly sought to achieve this goal through extreme violence, aligning himself with some of the positions already held in the settler community (Häussler, 2018, p. 124). Von Trotha’s assumption of command was also an attempt to bring the war closer to the standards of European warfare, specifically away from smaller skirmishes and towards a decisive battle (Häussler, 2018, p. 156). On August 11, 1904, both sides met at the Waterberg (Ohamakari), offering an opportunity for this decisive battle. Yet, the Battle of Waterberg did not quite bring the conclusive end to the war, even as it led to a second phase in the war. After the battle, large portions of the Herero fled into the Omaheke desert with German soldiers in pursuit (Häussler, 2018, p. 160). This stage of the war is characterized by “many small combat operations such as raids or ambushes,” and many Herero were indiscriminately killed by German colonial soldiers or died of dehydration and starvation in the desert (Häussler, 2018, p. 190, transl. CH).

On October 2, 1904, von Trotha issued an order entitled “Call to the Herero people,” which ordered the Herero community to leave the colony. In the proclamation, von Trotha threatens that if the Herero do not leave, “I will force them with the *Groot Rohr*. Inside German boundaries, any Herero with and without a rifle, with and without cattle, will be executed, I will no longer take women and children, [I will] drive them back to their people or fire on them.” (Häussler, 2018, p. 190, transl. CH) In this proclamation, von Trotha’s use of the word “*Groot Rohr*,” for which there is no direct translation, stands out. Dunker (2018, p. 34) writes that while “*Groot*” is Dutch/Afrikaans for “big,” there is no equivalent Dutch translation for “*Rohr*.” Instead, this word simply means “pipe” in German. This combination of words would not have been familiar to the audience and instead represented a linguistic invention by von Trotha. Dunker (2018, p. 34) suggests that this is reflective of German popular literature at the time, which often used appropriated and imagined language to speak to indigenous populations. This word shows how imaginations of colonialism collided with the expression of power in the colonial encounter.

Von Trotha’s proclamation was widely debated in German newspapers at the time (Zeigerer, 2016, p. 70). Interestingly, the actions at the Waterberg two months earlier had not drawn widespread attention – in fact, the main point of critique had been that the battle strategy failed and that part of the enemy had been able to flee (Methfessel, 2019, p. 277). Von Trotha’s proclamation is a testament to an escalation of violence that had reached genocidal levels in the colony, which made such an order thinkable and sayable.

The order was later withdrawn by Kaiser Wilhelm II. due to widespread criticism in Germany; however, colonial troops continued to attack Herero settlements and murder Hereros (Kreienbaum, 2019, p. 89).

At the end of 1904, the Nama, originally aligned with the German colonial forces, also began fighting against the German colonial forces. Kaptein Hendrik Witbooi's decision to begin fighting was linked to sentiments in the German settler community, made explicit through newspaper articles, that demanded the complete subjugation and disarmament of all indigenous communities (Methfessel, 2019, pp. 242–243; Zeigerer, 2016, p. 63). Again, von Trotha issued a proclamation to the Nama, calling on them to surrender by referencing the plight of the Herero: "I ask you, where are the Herero people today, where are their chiefs?" (Zimmerer, 2016b, p. 54, transl. CH) However, von Trotha's aims of swiftly ending the war were dashed, and he returned to Germany in 1905. Guerilla warfare between various Nama communities and German colonial forces lasted until March 31, 1907 (Zimmerer, 2016b, p. 60).

Following the withdrawal of von Trotha's proclamations, German colonial soldiers began imprisoning Herero and Nama in a shift "from annihilation to concentration" (Kreienbaum, 2019, p. 89). This shift should not suggest that murder ended, but rather that the form that this murder took changed. The term "concentration camp" was first used in a telegram from the German Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow ordering von Trotha to establish concentration camps to hold the remnants of the Herero community (Zeller, 2016a, p. 65). The camps were later expanded to include the Nama. The German colonizers promised the communities mercy if they surrendered, which they did in mass numbers (Kreienbaum, 2019, pp. 89–90). In addition to interring large Herero and Nama populations to prevent them from continuing resistance, the camps provided forced labor and often functioned as an extended form of punishment (Kreienbaum, 2019, p. 103).

The combination of forced labor with interment blurred the boundaries between private business interests and military administration – fleeing Herero even surrendered directly to the privately operated Otavi railroad (Kreienbaum, 2019, p. 89). Camps were founded across the colony in larger towns, typically with railway access (Zeller, 2016a, p. 65). Due to a lack of adequate supplies and inhumane living conditions, these camps led to mass deaths among the Herero and Nama populations, especially on Shark Island in Lüderitz. For this reason, the end of the genocide is usually marked with the closing of the last camp on January 27, 1908, rather than the end of fighting in 1907 (Zimmerer, 2016b, p. 60).

The assessment of the events of 1904–1908 as genocide is largely undisputed in the current historical research. However, the arguments underpinning this assessment can differ slightly among different authors. Some authors focus specifically on the intent of genocide, which becomes especially visible in von Trotha's orders and the pursuit of Herero through the desert (Zimmerer, 2016b, p. 53). In this sense, von Trotha's proclamation is often termed an "extermination proclamation" or "orders to shoot" (Zimmerer, 2016b, pp. 52–53). Other scholars such as Häußler (2018) have argued that the emphasis on intent in the genocide definition draws attention away from the situational context and affective dynamics of the Herero and Nama genocide, which represented a string of events that escalated over time (cf. Kreienbaum, 2019).

For the purposes of this dissertation, it is important to note that genocide occurred and that it sustainably shifted the balance of power and knowledge production within the colony. The events of 1904–1908 effectively disempowered the Herero and Nama communities in the new hierarchy of the colony. They also produced new structures of dependent labor in the colony, restricting the movement of indigenous communities through a registration system and essentially binding them to the whims of employers (Zimmerer, 2016a, p. 34). The Herero and Nama genocide thus crystallized boundaries of citizenship and imaginations of belonging – both within GSWA and in Germany. To understand these effects in more depth, I will now consider how the Herero and Nama genocide has been memorialized in Germany and Namibia.

2.2 Memorializing and negotiating the genocide in Germany and Namibia

Already during the colonial war and genocide, German colonizers began to establish a certain interpretation of the events of 1904–1908. Soldiers' graves, which dotted the colony, provided spaces to (re-)interpret the past and portray the death of soldiers as a sacrifice to the German nation. In 1905, Germans in GSWA began an annual commemoration known as "Waterberg Day" at the site of a large cemetery for German soldiers – a ceremony that still exists to the present (Förster, 2010, p. 210). In addition to these gravesites, multiple monuments were erected to commemorate German military casualties in the colonial war. These monuments functioned to portray German military prowess and express claims to power in the colony (Förster, 2010, p. 209).

This function is particularly clear when considering the discussions that surrounded the *Marinedenkmal*, a 1908 war memorial commemorating the First Marine Expedition Corps. The statue shows a German soldier standing on top of a cliff. Below him lies a dead German soldier. The monument was initially destined for the colonial capital of Windhoek. However, the monument was deemed unsuitable because it showed a dead soldier, which could be construed by the indigenous population as a sign of weakness (Zeller, 2016b, pp. 193–195). Hence, the *Marinedenkmal* was erected in the port city of Swakopmund, whereas Windhoek received the *Reiterdenkmal*. This memorial only shows a single soldier riding on a horse, his gun pointed in the air (Zeller, 2016b, pp. 193–195). The colonial war had to be shown as an unequivocal German victory to suppress any remembrance of (successful) colonial resistance. The commemoration of the Herero and Nama genocide was a claim to power that not only reflected the self-perception of the colonizer but was also clearly aimed towards a colonized audience. Shigwedha (2023, p. 283) shows how two communities reference the memorial in their naming of the city of Windhoek:

"Windhoek is known as *Otjirongo tjOkakambe* in Otjilerero praise songs, idioms, and stories; similarly, in the Oshiwambo language it is known as *Oshilongo shOkakambe*. Both versions allude to a city of a solid horse rider who never dismounted from the steel horse's back against all odds."

This example demonstrates the complex entanglement of the genocide's memorialization. It also shows how the construction of this colonial war became essential to the expla-

nation and later the subversion of colonial power, which would shape subsequent commemorations of the genocide.

In Germany, the colonial war was a major discursive event that inspired a variety of cultural products such as popular novels (Brehl, 2016, p. 86). One of these fictional novels, “*Peter Moor’s Fahrt nach Südwest*,” or “Peter Moor’s trip to Southwest,” became an international bestseller, was translated into multiple languages and even became part of the German school curriculum for a brief period in 1914 (Brehl, 2016, p. 92). The plot largely removed the colonial context of the war and instead showed Germans fighting an existential fight against racially different “Others,” which was used to construct a collective, racially homogenous imagination of “German” identity (Brehl, 2016, p. 90; Hermes, 2009, p. 262). In addition to these works of fiction, memoirs of colonial soldiers also enjoyed great popularity in Germany and played an important role as sources in the later historicization of the colonial war (Bürger, 2017, p. 56; Zimmerer, 2016b, p. 60). These memoirs continued to portray the genocide as a story of German heroism and relativized the genocide, echoing themes also found in colonial war memorials (Bürger, 2017, p. 57).

Apart from this initial memorialization by the colonizers, how did the Herero and Nama commemorate the events of 1904–1908? As Gewalt (2016, p. 171) has pointed out, the genocide was a deeply traumatic event that disrupted many of the social structures at the heart of the traditional communities. He notes that, in rebuilding these structures, many Herero communities established mutual welfare organizations known as *otruppe* or *oturupa* (Gewald, 2016, pp. 171–172). These organizations often drew on German colonial military traditions and structures. Gewalt (2016, p. 171) suggests that this could be because, after the genocide, surviving Herero children had often worked as servants in the German colonial army. In the aftermath of the war, “[t]he young Herero took on the names and titles of their former officers. They sent each other handwritten messages in German, issued military passports, pay books and instructions.” (Gewald, 2016, p. 172, transl. CH) Perhaps most visibly, the Herero also began wearing the military uniforms of German and British colonizers, particularly at commemorative events when the community presented itself as a collective. As Förster (2010, p. 250, transl. CH) writes:

“The appropriation of military practices should not only be understood as imitation but also as symbolic usurpation, as a parodic commentary and as a counterproposal. The *oturupa* is by no means a military or paramilitary organization but rather a civil society organization in which women and children are also active. To this day it forms one of the main networks within Herero society.”

The organization of Herero society through *oturupa* shows the structures of hybridity and interaction that were strategically eliminated from German representations of victory following the colonial war.

The *oturupa* became prominently visible in commemorative practices on August 23, 1923, when the body of the former Paramount Chief, Samuel Maharero, was transferred from Bechuanaland (present-day Botswana) to Okahandja in present-day Namibia. Maharero had fled to Bechuanaland during the colonial war and had never been allowed to return, even after South Africa took over the colony (Gewald, 2016, p. 173). The burial became a crystallization point for the Herero community. To this day, commemorations

around Namibia are held to commemorate the reburial of Samuel Maharero in what has come to be known as “Herero Day” or “Red Flag Day” after the colors of the Maharero/Tjamuaha Royal House (Zuern, 2012, p. 500). Similar commemorative patterns can also be found in the Nama community, which celebrated a church service in 1930 at the grave of Kaptein Isaak Witbooi that also commemorated his father, Kaptein Hendrik Witbooi, whose burial site is not known (Kößler, 2010, p. 238). Yet, many of these commemorations, at least at the outset, did not focus exclusively on the genocide, instead commemorating “historical victories and [...] successful leaders” more broadly (Silvester & Gewald, 2010, p. xiii).

One of the first (and only) documented sources of indigenous testimonies on the events of 1904–1908 came in the form of a Blue Book published in 1918 by British colonial forces (Silvester & Gewald, 2010). The Blue Book documented crimes committed by German colonists against the indigenous populations of GSWA, with one section on “the treatment of prisoners during the 1904–1908 war” (Silvester & Gewald, 2010, p. xxv). The goal of the publication was to argue that Germany had been incapable of overseeing its colonies and that GSWA should permanently remain under South African rule following Germany’s defeat in World War I (Silvester & Gewald, 2010, p. xv). These production contexts have shaped the assessment of the Blue Book as an unreliable and biased source. Nielsen (2017, p. 321), for instance, shows how British involvement in the 1904–1908 colonial war through the murder of Nama leader Jakob Marengo was minimized in the Blue Book. In addition, the book draws on a variety of colonial stereotypes and derogatory language, often showing the native population as childlike and thus requiring the protection of a colonial power (Silvester & Gewald, 2010, p. 52). Nevertheless, this book is one of the only primary sources where indigenous witnesses of the genocide are documented.

After the acquisition of the colony by South Africa, the Blue Book was declared a “war instrument” in 1926 and subsequently destroyed (Silvester & Gewald, 2010, p. xxxi). The reason for this destruction was aimed at fostering ties between white communities of Afrikaans, German, and English descent (Silvester & Gewald, 2010, p. xxx). Despite its destruction, the Blue Book’s role in discrediting German colonialism had an impact on the memorialization of the colonial war and genocide, especially in Germany: Rather than showing colonialism as a successful military incursion, German colonialism was increasingly portrayed as a harmonious and nostalgic experience with largely positive interactions between colonizers and indigenous populations, and accusations of violence were dismissed as propaganda and lies, especially from the 1930s onwards (Bürger, 2017, p. 53). At the same time, German colonial monuments remained standing throughout Namibia and in parts of (West) Germany. This shows that changing conceptualizations of the 1904–1908 colonial war often did not eliminate previous structures and instead often drew on pre-established patterns. This is particularly useful for understanding the renewed confrontation with the colonial past in the 1960s.

Critical perspectives from the 1960s onwards

Critical perspectives on the Herero and Nama genocide arose in the confluence of three interrelated events throughout the 1960s: the growing independence movement in Namibia, competing legitimacy claims between East and West Germany, and a global

student protest movement. In 1966, the East German historian Horst Drechsler called the events of 1904–1908 a “genocide” (Bürger, 2017, p. 94). Drechsler’s book on German colonialism in South West Africa describes the genocide in terms of a Marxist-Leninist struggle between Herero and Nama communities and imperialist oppressors (Bürger, 2017, p. 113). His work played an important role for East Germany, which aimed to both differentiate itself from West Germany and position itself on the side of the Namibian liberation struggle (Bürger, 2017, p. 94). Yet, Bürger (2017, pp. 106–107) also shows how Drechsler’s work often remained mired in colonial discursive structures, amplified through his reliance on colonial source material as well as popular literature. This was also true of East German popular literature on the genocide (Hermes, 2009, p. 265). Nevertheless, these works offered a reappraisal of what had, to that point, been a largely nostalgic perspective on colonialism. Moreover, Drechsler’s work also shaped relations with Namibia: The resistance leader and first president of Namibia, Sam Nujoma, even wrote a foreword to Drechsler’s book that was included in the second edition of the book in the 1980s (Bürger, 2017, p. 129).

In the same year that Drechsler published his monograph, controversy erupted in West Germany over a two-part documentary called “*Heia Safari*” that aired on the public broadcaster *Westdeutscher Rundfunk* (WDR) (Bürger, 2017, p. 158). The title of the documentary references a book written by Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, a former general of the German imperial army who came to widespread fame fighting the British in East Africa during the First World War (Bürger, 2017, p. 159). In this way, the documentary already sets itself up in dialogue with previous nostalgic or revisionist perspectives on colonialism. The documentary casts a critical gaze at German colonialism and calls the events of 1904–1908 the “first genocide of our century” (quoted in Bürger, 2017, p. 165; transl. CH).

Bürger (2017, p. 163) shows that the documentary built on East German research findings but did not credit these, enabling the filmmakers to suggest that this was the first critical engagement with colonialism. At the same time, as also became clear in the East German historicization above, the documentary also repeats many colonial discursive structures through its reenactments and by relying on colonial source material (Bürger, 2017, p. 165). This points to a larger conundrum in knowledge production on German colonialism that will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4 (cf. Struck, 2003, 2012). Nevertheless, the WDR documentary led to widespread controversy, and multiple complaints by groups of former colonial soldiers and administrators prompted the broadcaster to air a discussion between the filmmaker and various critics in 1967 (Bürger, 2017, p. 158).

This controversy is indicative of German knowledge construction on the genocide. Critical appraisals of colonial history increased throughout the 1960s, for instance through the dissertation of West German historian Helmut Bley, which was published in 1965 (Bürger, 2017, p. 191). This academic interest came together with student protests calling for a reappraisal of Germany’s past, complete with the removal of a statue portraying the former German colonial governor Hermann von Wissmann in 1968 (Bürger, 2017, p. 179). Popular literature such as the 1978 book “*Morenga*,” which describes a Nama leader during the colonial war, shifted the reader’s perspective away from the victorious German soldier towards the doubtful German bystander (Göttsche, 2018, pp. 386–387). The colonial war was even included in school curriculum: “In the textbook ‘Historical

World Studies' from 1980, the 'Herero Wars' are discussed in more detail. A colonial apologetic excerpt [...] is juxtaposed with a passage from Helmut Bley's monograph, which is introduced with the heading 'War of Extermination.'" (Bürger, 2017, p. 206, transl. CH) This juxtaposition shows how the genocide was constructed as an object of contestation and debate, often combined with fears that an acknowledgment of the colonial war and genocide could lead to the discreditation of West Germany through the argumentation used by East Germany (Bürger, 2017, p. 189).

As Bürger (2017) shows, the historicization of the Herero and Nama genocide must be understood as a process of larger transnational power struggles and knowledge exchanges between East and West Germany in the context of (changing) relationships with South Africa and Namibia. The examples above have demonstrated how increasingly critical perspectives towards the Herero and Nama genocide arose in both East and West Germany, even as these critiques relied on and reproduced colonial imaginations and power structures. What connects both East and West German historicizations of the genocide is often a personalization of the genocide on the figure of Lothar von Trotha, the primary enactor of the genocide (Bürger, 2017, p. 144). Moreover, both nations often constructed the genocide from an understanding that their current German state was not a successor to the former German colonial empire. Both East and West Germany attempted, in various degrees, to present themselves as potential partners to newly independent nations without the baggage of a long colonial history (Bürger, 2017, pp. 94, 175).

In Namibia, the construction of the genocide was also shaped by the independence struggle and the nascent national movement as well as interactions with East and West Germany. Krautwald (2022, p. 2) notes that "in 1960, Herero UN petitioners began to compare the war of 1904–1908 to the destruction of European Jewry to discredit South Africa's imposition of apartheid in Namibia." In this way, the Herero and Nama genocide was increasingly shown as a struggle of liberation against German colonizers (Krautwald, 2022, p. 15). For instance, Nama commemorations of Witbooi's death were renamed "Heroes Day" in 1980 in a symbolic nod to the larger liberation movement (Kößler, 2016, p. 186). A commemorative ceremony for the Battle of Waterberg within the Herero community, Ohamakari Day, also began in the late 1960s and connected the ongoing liberation struggle to show that the Herero community had been fighting against colonialism for over 60 years (Förster, 2010, p. 252).

Ohamakari Day also provides an interesting perspective to consider the change in memorialization in Namibia after achieving independence in 1990. In the early 1990s, the commemoration of Ohamakari Day was primarily an educational opportunity to teach students about the national liberation struggle (Förster, 2010, pp. 253–255). With time, however, the speeches at Ohamakari Day developed into a platform to emphasize specifically Herero concerns, particularly against the newly independent Namibian government, with speakers emphasizing the ethnic exclusivity of the struggles and casualties during the colonial war of 1904–1908 (Förster, 2010, pp. 259–262).

In addition to these commemorations within the Herero community, Namibia's official independence in 1990 saw a broader national effort to remove monuments that glorified colonialism, for instance by renaming streets. The duality of this effort can perhaps be seen in the two statues that were mentioned at the beginning of this chapter:

Whereas the *Reiterdenkmal* was removed in 2009 (Shigwedha, 2023, p. 282), the *Marinedenkmal* is still standing at the time of this writing. Moreover, the *Reiterdenkmal* was removed to make way for the Independence Memorial Museum, which concentrates on the liberation struggle from the perspective of the ruling party, the South-West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO) (Zuern, 2012, p. 507). The removal of the statue was contested by both Herero and German-speaking groups, albeit from opposite sides of the aisle, who saw their history being expunged by SWAPO (Zuern, 2012, p. 507). This points to a broader trend in the construction of public memory in Namibia: Many national holidays and monuments, such as the Heroes' Acre outside Windhoek and the National Independence Memorial Museum in Namibia, remain focused on the SWAPO liberation struggle, with the genocide often being integrated into this narrative or, alternatively, not mentioned at all (Becker, 2011; Zuern, 2012).

Throughout the 20th century, the German-speaking community in Namibia continued to hold commemorations at the Waterberg. In 1978, the Paramount Chief of the Herero, Kuaima Riruako, was invited to the Waterberg as a speaker. As Förster (2010, p. 211) notes, the reason for this invitation was political and aimed at producing an alliance against the Ovambo-dominated SWAPO during the liberation struggle. More concretely, enabling Herero individuals to speak at this event gave the commemoration a sheen of reconciliation that could enable the memorial traditions at Waterberg to remain largely intact (Förster, 2010, p. 211).

The continued importance of Waterberg as a central mnemonic location was visible in the visit of Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul during the centenary of the Battle of Waterberg in August 2004. During this ceremony, which was attended by members of the Namibian government and traditional communities (Zuern, 2012, p. 512), Wieczorek-Zeul offered the first apology by a German member of government. Importantly, this apology was not an official statement of the German government but rather portrayed as the personal expression of Wieczorek-Zeul (Robel, 2013, p. 335). Following this apology, Germany and Namibia established a Namibian-German Special Initiative Program (NGSIP) in 2006 that would provide 20 million euros in aid to Namibia. The centenary of the Herero and Nama genocide also led to renewed academic and cultural interest in the topic. One typical example of this is a novel published in 2004 by Andrea Paluch and Robert Habeck, who is the current German Federal Minister for Economic Affairs and Climate Action. This novel describes colonial history through the history of a German family, with one of the family's daughters surprisingly being born Black after the end of German colonialism (Göttsche, 2018, p. 394).

In 2014, the German and Namibian governments began negotiating on a potential apology and reparations payments. In 2015, the German government officially acknowledged that the events of 1904–1908 constituted genocide. These government-led actions were preceded and followed by various lawsuits against German corporations and the German government. In 1998, the *Herero People's Reparations Corporation* (HPRC) under Herero Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako filed a lawsuit against the German government at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague for reparations (Robel, 2013, p. 311). In 2001, the HPRC filed another lawsuit against German corporations, including the Deutsche Bank AG, for profiting from the Herero and Nama genocide (Robel, 2013, p. 312). Finally, in 2017, the Ovaherero Traditional Authority (OTA) and Nama Traditional

Leaders' Association (NTLA) filed a class action lawsuit against the German government for inclusion in the negotiations as well as reparations (cf. chapter 6.1.1).

These events have been an integral part of commemorative events within the affected communities. For instance, Förster (2010, p. 266) shows that, from 2004 onwards, commemorative speeches at Ohamakari Day within the Herero community have increasingly focused on claims for reparation. Additionally, claims for reparation have also led to new commemorative activities, such as an annual march commemorating the genocide and calling for reparations in the city of Swakopmund, which has been occurring in various iterations since 2007 (Zuern, 2012, p. 509). Moreover, Zuern (2012, p. 504) has shown that debates on the restitution of human remains have often brought renewed attention to Shark Island, which had previously been a state-run camping ground for tourists and was declared a national heritage site in 2019 (cf. chapter 6.1.1). In Germany, renewed debates over restitution in museums, street renamings and statue removals have also led to a variety of exhibitions and debates on the topic of colonialism in recent years (cf. Zimmerer, 2019).

To summarize, the chapter above has sketched the complex background that shapes current memory debates on the Herero and Nama genocide. It has shown how the interpretation and construction of the 1904–1908 colonial war and genocide is shaped by changing power constellations within and between Germany and Namibia, ranging from colonial claims of landownership to questions of political legitimacy in newly independent and unified nations such as Namibia and Germany. Additionally, the examples above have demonstrated that the commemoration of 1904–1908 is by no means confined to national boundaries but has instead been shaped by interactions between Germany and Namibia. To this day, the negotiations between both nations continue to shape the expression of memory. It is important to note that, despite the mnemonic entanglement that is often emphasized in the research, most of the literature above comes from German-speaking authors. This is a blind spot that will continue to be reflected throughout the following chapters, particularly in chapter 5.1.

A question that arises from the chapter above is: How has journalism shaped the memorialization of the Herero and Nama genocide? The examples above have indicated that the media played an important role in defining how the genocide was perceived as an event, both during 1904–1908 and in ensuing mnemonic debates. For instance, Förster (2010, p. 187) shows that the German-language *Allgemeine Zeitung* covered the annual commemorations at the Waterberg for decades and that commemorative speeches from Ohamakari Day were aired on the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation's Otjiherero radio station Omurari FM (Förster, 2010, p. 259). However, in much of the previous research, German and Namibian journalism has often been used as a source rather than as an explicit subject of research. In other words, scholars draw on journalism to describe the positions of various communities or key figures without analyzing the production, reception or performance of journalistic products themselves. This makes sense given the disciplinary background in history or ethnology of most researchers analyzing this topic.

In recent years, however, German journalism has become an explicit topic of German-language research about the genocide, which I will consider in more depth in chapter 4.4. However, this perspective is still largely missing for Namibian journalism. A dis-

ciplinary perspective from journalism studies can shed light on some of the implicit assumptions that have accompanied journalism's use in the previous research. To achieve this, it is first necessary to theoretically conceptualize the relationship between journalism and memory. What practices and strategies are at the heart of how journalism constructs the past? How does this shape which knowledge is (not) available about the genocide? To answer these questions, I now delve into the theory of cultural memory.