

Facing Postcolonial Entanglement and the Challenge of Responsibility

Actor Constellations between Namibia and Germany¹

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As has been argued persuasively, Germany emerged in 1919 as the first “postcolonial nation in a still-colonial world”.² Under the Treaty of Versailles, she was stripped of her colonial possessions, which entailed what has been termed “phantom pain”³ – at least to a point in time when German national identity and indeed, existence had been put to enormously more momentous hazards. The years following World War II were occupied by various efforts to grapple with the grave and violent heritage of the Nazi

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 - 2 Marcia Klotz, *The Weimar Republic: A Post-Colonial State in a Still-Colonial World*, in: *Germany’s Colonial Pasts*, ed. Eric Ames et al. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 135-147, here: 141.
 - 3 Leo Kreutzer, *Deutsche Heimat und afrikanische Wahlheimat in Hans Grimms Roman “Volk ohne Raum”. Zur Dekolonisierung eines “Kolonialismus ohne Kolonien“*, in: *Erinnern verhandeln: Kolonialismus im kollektiven Gedächtnis Afrikas und Europas*, ed. Steffi Hobuss and Ulrich Lölke (Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2007), 179-193, here: 179.

war of expansion and the Holocaust. Overall, the colonial past was sidelined in this process in public memory. Such ‘colonial amnesia’ has been questioned in particular in connection with the genocide perpetrated by the *Schutztruppe* (German colonial army) in 1904-1908 in what was then German Southwest Africa, today independent Namibia.⁴ One may speak of partial re-activation of a repressed content of public memory, which at least in its mainstream is linked to a clear re-evaluation, in effect reversing former interpretations. At the same time, this process forms part of a larger, transnational process of remembrance linked to wider post-colonial concerns, focusing here particularly on memory politics going on in Namibia. In this way, we observe a further stage of entangled history between Namibia and Germany that has been initiated during the 19th century, even several decades before formal colonisation took place in 1884. Concurrently, this perspective leads, on several levels to the politics of such post-colonial, transnational remembrance.

Along with a brief rehearsal of the historical record, the following paper addresses a case of transnational and post-colonial politics of apology and reconciliation, which is of considerable current relevance and presents an experience still in the making. Negotiations and conflicts about the past and its meaning have acted on strategies of amnesia and marginalisation on both sides. The over-all process involves a surprising array of actors in a rather complex web that cannot be exhausted here. Still, as will emerge from the exposition, governments and non-state actors have mobilised divergent meanings and understandings of reconciliation. However, all these conceptions relate to one set of historical events, the Namibian War of 1903-1908.

I begin by sketching out the divergent trajectories of remembrance that relate to the genocide, both in Namibia and in Germany. In the former, complexity is added by regional differences while in the latter case the discussion is inserted into the broader issues of post-World War II memory politics. This is followed by a closer look at the mnemoscope in Namibia contrasting memory practices and concerns of German speakers with those of descendants from the victims of genocide. I then recount exemplary memory practices amongst Ovaherero and Nama in Central and Southern Na-

4 As is usual in the literature, the term ‘Namibia’ will pertain to the country even before it was finally officially adopted at the time of independence in 1990. Occasionally, GSWA or SWA will be used.

mibia. These practices testify to communal resilience and contrast starkly with the hegemonic, nationalist master narrative of the ruling party South West Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), which focuses on the experience of the Northern regions. What emerges is a tension-ridden web of concerns and claims, both to spaces and to recognition. With a view particularly to the ongoing negotiation process of historical memory between Namibia and Germany, a closer look at how Namibians of various strands construe 'Germany' then provides further background for an understanding of this process itself, which has evolved in highly conflictual ways since the Namibian independence in 1990. This account then contrasts in particular state and non-state actors, the latter, mainly Namibian victims, represented by traditional leaders, and German advocacy groups. Noting the turning point of the centennial of the genocide in 2004, the process is taken up to the dramatic events surrounding the return of human skulls in Berlin in September 2011. In this way, the difficulties involved in unravelling the complex post-colonial situation are highlighted. Further, light is shed on the ways in which clearly divergent interests and concerns link up with post-colonial memory issues.

THE FIRST GENOCIDE OF THE 20TH CENTURY AND ITS REMEMBRANCE

Most serious scholars concur that the campaigns of the *Schutztruppe* during the Namibian War amounted to the perpetration of genocide.⁵ This refers above all to the intent to annihilate not just combatants, but entire ethnic groups by various means. The same goes for the chain of command reaching to the General Staff and the government in Berlin as well as to the emperor. The genocide was perpetrated, in a first stage by sealing off the waterless Omaheke steppe in Eastern Namibia not allowing Ovaherero fugitives to return to areas where they could survive. A second phase, this time also targeting Nama, is marked by concentration camps where men, women, and children were interned and forced to labour under conditions that resulted in exorbitant death rates. This was complemented by deportations,

5 Marion Wallace, *A History of Namibia. From the Beginning to 1990* (London: Hurst, 2011), 177-182.

both inside Namibia and to the German colonies of Togo and Cameroon. A third stage refers to the Native Ordinances that stripped groups deemed insurgent of their land and worked towards transforming them into a docile labour resource by means of stiff pass laws, ceilings on settlement strength, and a prohibition to own large stock, which destroyed the symbolic fabric of Herero society.⁶ The resultant structure of settlement and land ownership is the hallmark of the landscape and settlement pattern in Central and Southern Namibia still today.

Nevertheless, the survivors did coalesce to reassert the communal nexuses that had been shaken to their foundations. South African rule of 1915 did not bring an end to the tribulations of indigenous Namibians, as many had hoped for. The reserves the new administration introduced were designed as little more than repositories for migrant labour. Still, they afforded opportunities for communal resilience.⁷ We shall turn to the form of commemorations that were linked to this resilience in the following section.

In Germany, the response to the war and the genocide it involved was also significant – not only since arguably this was the last victorious war a German army fought during the 20th century. One salient feature is the high public profile of the genocide and other atrocities committed by German troops. The Great General Staff published a lavish two-volume account of the war.⁸ A mushrooming array of books of fiction and memoirs extolled the exploits of the German troops and pointedly justified the annihilation of indigenous peoples who supposedly had not put to good use the

6 Jürgen Zimmerer, *Deutsche Herrschaft über Afrikaner. Staatlicher Machtanspruch und Wirklichkeit im kolonialen Namibia* (Münster: Lit, 2001), 68-94.

7 Reinhart Kössler, *In search of survival and dignity. Two traditional communities in southern Namibia under South African rule* (Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan, 2005), part 1; Wolfgang Werner, “No one will become rich”: *Economy and society in the Herero reserves in Namibia, 1915-1946* (Basel: Schlettwein 1998).

8 *Die Kämpfe der deutschen Truppen in Südwestafrika*. Auf Grund amtlichen Materials bearbeitet von der Kriegsgeschichtlichen Abteilung I des Großen Generalstabes. Erster Band: *Der Feldzug gegen die Hereros* (Berlin: Mittler, 1906); *Die Kämpfe der deutschen Truppen in Südwestafrika*. Auf Grund amtlichen Materials bearbeitet von der Kriegsgeschichtlichen Abteilung I des Großen Generalstabes. Zweiter Band: *Der Hottentottenkrieg* (Berlin: Mittler, 1907).

land given by God.⁹ Such literature was included in set readings in school.¹⁰ The fledgling production of post cards took to the theme and conveyed a range of images, which included scenes of emaciated prisoners and executions.¹¹ In addition, the political realignment known as the *Bülów Block* was forged in the ‘Hottentot Elections’ of 1907, which saw intense campaigning on the issues of the colonial war.¹² Broadly speaking, one may say that these developments coincided with the ascendancy of what Geoff Eley has termed ‘radical nationalism’ in Germany.¹³

In contradistinction to other genocides of the 20th century,¹⁴ even some of the more gruesome aspects were aggressively exposed to the public. In this way, acts that today would be categorised without question as crimes against humanity found their way into everyday German life. They were banalised and thus became more acceptable. Moreover, adversaries were

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- 9 Gustav Frenssen, *Peter Moors Fahrt nach Südwest. Ein Feldzugsbericht* (Windhoek: Benguela Publishers, 2002, 1st ed. 1906); Medardus Brehl, *Vernichtung der Herero. Diskurse der Gewalt in der deutschen Kolonialliteratur* (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2007).
 - 10 Gunther Pakendorf, The Literature of Expropriation: “Peter Moor’s Journey to South-West” and the Conquest of Namibia, in: *Namibia in Perspective*, ed. Gerhard Töttemeyer et al. (Windhoek: CCN, 1987), 172-183, here: 176.
 - 11 Felix Axster, “... will try to send you the best views from here”: Postcards from the Colonial War in Namibia (1904-1908), in: *German colonialism, visual culture, and modern memory*, ed. Volker M. Langbehn (New York: Routledge, 2010), 55-70.
 - 12 Frank-Oliver Sobich, ‘Schwarze Bestien, rote Gefahr’: *Rassismus und Antisozialismus im deutschen Kaiserreich* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 2006); John Philipp Short, Colonisation, War and the German Working-Class: Popular Mobilisation in the Reichstag Elections 1907 (Paper presented at the conference “1904-2004 – Decontaminating the Namibian Past. A Commemorative Conference”, University of Namibia, Windhoek, 17-21 August 2004).
 - 13 Geoff Eley, Reshaping the Right: Radical Nationalism and the German Navy League, 1898-1908, *The Historical Journal* 21, 2 (1978), 327-354.
 - 14 Robert Gellately and Ben Kiernan, *The Spectre of Genocide: Mass Murder in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

pointedly framed in racial terms.¹⁵ All this may be understood as one further strand within a tendency that enabled many Germans three or four decades later to victimise also their immediate neighbours.¹⁶

Moreover, even after the loss of the colonies, the colonial quest was kept alive and many former agents of colonialism as well as institutions serving it or economic enterprises involved in colonial ventures, turned to the new colonial sphere that was envisaged in Eastern Europe during World War II.¹⁷ In this way, the colonial discourse remained largely unbroken in Germany after the loss of the colonies. This experience could be integrated into the larger picture of unjust humiliation ostensibly inflicted by the victors through the peace terms and thus fed into colonial revisionism. That attitude was taken up and its aims were pursued, with varying intensity by the Nazi regime well into World War II.¹⁸

After World War II, colonial revisionism was no more an option, and a clear discursive break occurred. In West Germany, nurturing the tradition of the *Schutztruppe* was relegated to rather marginal groups while a majority found themselves preoccupied with seemingly more pressing issues. Moreover, for those who undertook seriously to grapple with Germany's dire past of the first half of the 20th century, the shadow of the Shoah tended to overwhelm all other concerns. At the same time, the early loss of the colonies could now be viewed with a certain 'relief' as not being implicated in the conflicts and dirty wars that accompanied the sustained independence movements of the day.¹⁹ It may be argued that such colonial amnesia is still prevalent, even if on the other hand there is a tendency in popular culture to

15 Pascal Grosse, What Does German Colonialism Have to Do with National Socialism? A Conceptual Framework, in: *Germany's Colonial Pasts*, ed. Eric Ames et al. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), 115-134.

16 Omer Bartov, Defining Enemies, Making Victims: Germans, Jews, and the Holocaust, *The American Historical Review* 103 (1998), 771-816; Reinhart Kössler, From Genocide to Holocaust? Structural parallels, *afrika spectrum* 40 (2005), 309-317.

17 Jürgen Zimmerer, *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz? Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Kolonialismus und Holocaust* (Berlin: Lit, 2011), chapter 10.

18 Karsten Linne, *Deutschland jenseits des Äquators? NS-Kolonialplanungen für Afrika* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2008).

19 Kreutzer, *Deutsche Heimat*, 179.

transpose dramatic and sentimental fiction or film to the erstwhile colonies or generally, to 'Africa' where then decidedly German stories are played out.²⁰

However, the centenary of the genocide in 2004 marks a certain shift in memorialisation also in Germany. Enhanced awareness of and debate about the events enforced the interrelated issues of remembrance, apology, reparation, and reconciliation. The interrelationship between these concepts is quite controversial. As will become clear, polar positions are represented by a clamour for silence or denialism along the lines of the otherwise well-known 'final stroke' rhetoric; and on the other hand, the linkage between active memorialisation and reparation based on an official apology by the German government. In this case, reparation denotes more than material compensation, namely an actual process of restoring victims' integrity and dignity through the full acknowledgment of past wrongs and their recognition as equals.²¹ These issues can be understood from the vantage point of 2004 and subsequent developments. In each case, actors include governments as well as various strands of civil society. Arguably again, such dynamism as can be discerned in the issue derives from non-state actors. Their array differs starkly on the Namibian and on the German side.

ACTORS, SITES AND EVENTS ON THE NAMIBIAN MNEMOSCAPE

As should emerge from the following, it makes sense to operate with an inclusive notion of a mnemoscape to encompass the entire array of contradictory memory landscapes, actualised and potential memory contents, and actor formations. Especially with reference to a highly variegated historical record and associated differential claims and concerns, it is important to

20 Wolfgang Struck, *The Persistence of Colonial Fantasies: Colonialism as Melodrama on German Television*, in: *German Colonialism and National Identity*, ed. Michael Perraudin and Jürgen Zimmerer (New York: Routledge, 2010), 224–231.

21 *To Repair the Irreparable. Reparation and Reconstruction in South Africa*, ed. Erik Doxtader and Charles Villa-Vicencio (Claremont: David Philip, 2006).

stress the spatial, temporal, as well as social dimensions of mnemoscape.²² One important dimension of the latter concerns the starkly diverse endowment of actors with resources and power. As a result, actors' chances to make themselves heard are distributed quite unevenly. This forms a crucial aspect of the memory process.

In Namibia, the commemoration of the war and the genocide began quite early. It encompassed two main, structurally opposed strands. On the one hand, the German colonial power started almost immediately after the event the ritual memory of the supposedly victorious Battle of the Waterberg, which according to this reading had sealed the German claim to Namibian soil with German blood. From this stems an annual ritual that was to become a mainstay of identity politics of German speakers in Namibia. It underwent several important changes, in particular reflecting efforts at alliance building after World War II, first with Afrikaners, later also with groups involved in the attempts at internal settlement, notably Ovaherero.²³ This event, which consistently featured the German imperial flag, was finally banned by the president in 2003, thirteen years after independence; there was little activity by German speakers during the centennial year of 2004.²⁴ Another important and related dimension of the memory politics of German speakers in Namibia concerns colonial buildings, which are represented as central features of national heritage.²⁵

Up to 2009, arguably the most important and certainly the most conspicuous site with respect to this, was the ensemble of the *Christuskirche* and the Rider Statue in central Windhoek. Both were built as markers of the German claim to the land after the defeat of primary African resistance. In

22 Reinhart Kössler, Facing a Fragmented Past. Memory, Culture and Politics in Namibia, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 33 (2007), 362-382.

23 Larissa Förster, *Postkoloniale Erinnerungslandschaften. Wie Deutsche und Herero in Namibia des Kriegs von 1904 gedenken* (Frankfurt a.M.: Campus, 2010), 185-231.

24 Larissa Förster, The German Cemetery at the Waterberg, in: *Genocide in German South-West Africa. The Colonial War of 1904-1908 and its Aftermath*, ed. Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller (Monmouth: Merlin, 2008), 252-258; Förster, *Postkoloniale Erinnerungslandschaften*, 318-329.

25 Andreas Vogt, *National Monuments in Namibia* (Windhoek: Gamsberg Macmillan, 2004).

the words of the German governor in 1912, the Rider Statue was intended as a symbolic statement “to proclaim to the world that we are and will remain masters here”²⁶ while the church forms part of an array of similar, and evenly named buildings in various German colonies that served the same purpose.²⁷

In terms of memory politics, the removal of the Rider Statue some 150 meters away from its original site clearing the ground for a monumental Independence Memorial Museum became a rallying point for German speakers shortly after the turn of the millennium. At the same time, the issue served as one of the rare instances when various communities with stakes in memory politics related to German colonialism communicated amongst each other at least in a minimal way. When plans to move the Rider became first known in public in 2001, the local German language newspaper in a random survey elicited responses such as ‘They want to take from Namibians all our history. They only value their own’.²⁸ Significantly, ‘our’ and ‘their’ here referred to rather vague entities, but obviously were constructed to exclude from ‘Namibians’ the incumbent government, which could boast a massive and uncontested majority. A more elaborate argument against the removal stressed the monument’s reference to the fallen *Schutztruppe* soldiers, which from this view motivated the sacralisation of the periodic memory rituals performed at the site, such as the laying of wreaths. The claim of a ‘sacrosanct’ nature of the statue was linked, in some hazy way with the physical dangers it would face when removed from its pedestal and relocated.²⁹ Counterarguments pointed to the aggressive form in which the mon-

26 Quote in: Joachim Zeller, *Kolonialdenkmäler und Geschichtsbewußtsein. Eine Untersuchung zur kolonialdeutschen Erinnerungskultur* (Frankfurt a.M.: IKO, 2000), 120.

27 Markus Braun, EKD im Schatten des Kolonialismus. Jubiläum von Hundert Jahre Christuskirche, in: *Windhoek transparent* (online) 99 extra, 2011, http://www.transparentonline.de/index.php?option=com_joomdoc&task=doc_details&gid=145&Itemid=77, accessed 14 June 2011.

28 *Allgemeine Zeitung* (Windhoek), 6 June 2001.

29 Andreas Vogt, Status und Zukunft des Reiterdenkmals – eine Denkschrift, *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 20 June 2008.

ument asserts colonial, and German, domination of the country.³⁰ Subtexts and more subtle discourses should be noted as well. Thus, an Otjiherero speaker pointed out at one occasion that as his father had instructed himself and his brother, the Rider marked the spot where the concentration camp had been located during the Namibian War;³¹ prisoners had also been used for constructing the *Christuskirche*. The statue was eventually relocated in front of the *Alte Feste*, the colonial fortress, which has been rededicated as National Museum. Significantly, the painstaking process of carefully hoisting it from its pedestal, disassembling the latter, storing the entire ensemble for several months and re-assembling the complete monument was financed by private donations. This speaks clearly not only to the zeal of a large section of the German speakers in the country to preserve specifically markers of the German colonial past, but also to the material means at their disposal to do so. In this way, the economic power of a rather small but disproportionately privileged group enables them to project quite vigorously their particular vision of the past, which to a considerable extent revolves around the denial of the genocide.³² The latter dimension became quite clear once again at the rededication ceremony for the Rider. Speeches skirted the realities of the war, while traditionalist associations from both Namibia and Germany, in particular the Association for the Tradition of Former Protection and Overseas Troops – Friends of the Former German Protectorates³³ figured prominently. The trope of reconciliation, which, though rather ill defined, is ubiquitous in post-colonial Namibia, was on this occasion trans-

30 Phanuel Kaapama, Memory Politics, the Reiterdenkmal and the De-Colonisation of the Mind, *The Namibian* (Windhoek), 22 August 2008.

31 Luther Zaire, oral statement, Bahnhof Langendreer, Bochum, 17 March 2004; personal communication, 21 June 2004.

32 Reinhart Kößler, Im Schatten des Genozids. Erinnerung in einer extrem ungleichen Gesellschaft, in: *Genozid und Gedenken. Namibisch-deutsche Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. Henning Melber (Frankfurt a.M.: Brandes & Apse, 2005), 49-77; Reinhart Kößler, Entangled history and politics: Negotiating the past between Namibia and Germany, *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 26, 3 (2008), 313-339, here: 320-328.

33 *Traditionsverband ehemaliger Schutz- und Überseetruppen und der früheren deutschen Schutzgebiete*; see also <http://www.traditionsverband.de/>.

lated into a claim raised by German speakers for proper respect of their own culture, language and identity.³⁴

In many ways, the evolution of specific forms of African memory politics in Namibia took an inverse form in relation to this tradition of asserting colonial and settler dominance. This may be exemplified in particular by annual commemorations. These events took root from the mid 1920s onwards and may be considered as first public expressions of the processes of resilience of communal nexuses mentioned above. At the same time, they contribute importantly to the further reproduction of these nexuses. In various ways, these endeavours in Central and Southern Namibia took their clue and reference from events and personages connected to the Namibian War. Moreover, they involved the symbolic and temporary re-appropriation of salient places and spaces that had been lost to the respective communities as a consequence of that war.³⁵ However, this took the shape of subaltern practices that were marked by the colonial situation, which the actors had to confront on a daily basis. The systematic subjection implied by this situation was addressed and expressed in various ways at the very outset when these commemorations were first constituted. This becomes evident if we consider the two most important, Herero Day that even today refers to the momentous reburial of Samuel Maharero in Okahandja, the traditional capital of his group, the Red Band in 1923, and Heroes Day in Gibeon, the traditional centre of the //Khowesin or Witbooi.

The reburial of Samuel Maharero in 1923 marked the emergence of Ovaherero as once again a vociferous and rather solid ethnic grouping.³⁶

34 *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1 November 2010, 2 November 2010, 3 November 2010, 15 November 2010, 23 November 2010, 3 December 2010.

35 Gesine Krüger, *Kriegsbewältigung und Geschichtsbewußtsein: Realität, Deutung und Verarbeitung des deutschen Kolonialkriegs in Namibia* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 282-290; Reinhart Kössler, Communal Memory Events and the Heritage of the Victims. The Persistence of the Theme of Genocide in Namibia, in: *German Colonialism and National Identity*, 235-250, here: 243-244; Förster, *Postkoloniale Erinnerungslandschaften*, 256-259.

36 Jan-Bart Gewald, The Funeral of Samuel Maharero and the Reorganisation of the Herero, in: *Genocide in German Southwest Africa. The Colonial War of 1904-1908 and its Aftermath*, ed. Joachim Zeller and Jürgen Zimmerer (London: Merlin Press 2008), 207-216.

One particularly spectacular feature was and still is the “ceremonial occupation of Okahandja” by the formations of the typical *oturupa*, when “the uniformed troops symbolized and demonstrated the vision of a united people, reinforcing their claim to ancestral land”.³⁷ In this, the event stunned contemporaries, and the spatial claim as well as the determination to continue a memory practice in which communal resilience and coherence crystallised with such clarity was underscored by a vow to return each year to the graves in Okahandja.³⁸ By now, this vow has been kept for nearly 90 years. However, the annual commemoration was also marked by restrictions; thus, in 1923, Samuel Maharero’s heir apparent was allowed to remain in Namibia only on a temporary basis. During South African colonial rule, regular submissions to the colonial authorities were required. Consent was conditional on the banning of marching by the Herero *oturupa* – often misunderstood as a kind of mock army or quasi-military organisation. Once the Reverend Michael Scott had emerged as a champion of Herero grievances and of opposition to the proposed incorporation of Namibia into South Africa after World War II, it was decreed that no white person must address the festive crowd.³⁹ Today, these issues are largely forgotten. What remains is the festive appearance of ritually dressed men and women parading in long columns and visiting the chiefly graves, which are located in central Okahandja. Certainly not least because of its colour and the proximity of the event to the capital of Windhoek, some 80 km to the south, this has also become a tourist attraction. Apart from this more public form of commemoration, Herero Day takes place rather out of public sight at the *Herero Kommando*, which is located in the township a few kilometres away. Here, the recounting of history, as well as for some years claims for reparations from Germany, form the main contents of a long succession of speeches.

37 Gesine Krüger and Dag Henrichsen, ‘We have been captives long enough. We want to be free’: Land, uniforms and politics in the history of the Herero, in: *Namibia under South African rule: Mobility and containment 1915-1946*, ed. Patricia Hayes et al. (Oxford: James Currey, 1998), 149-174, here: 159.

38 Krüger and Henrichsen, We have been captives long enough, 158.

39 Kössler, Communal Memory, 242-247. On Michael Scott see Freda Troup, *In face of fear. Michael Scott’s challenge to South Africa* (London: Faber & Faber, 1950).

Again, Heroes Day in Gibeon, still also known by its former name of Witbooi Festival or *Witbooi Fees*, harks back to a humble commemoration at the graveyard to honour the group's prominent dead in 1930. Among these, *Kaptein* Hendrik Witbooi who in his advanced age was killed in action in 1905 during the Nama-German War, stands out as a clairvoyant and militant fighter against colonialism.⁴⁰ The communal commemoration of Hendrik Witbooi's death can be traced back to 1930, when a small commemoration was held under the tutelage of the resident missionary and the magistrate.⁴¹ Under the guidance of his evenly named great-grandson, the event has been transformed into a pageant that links a long succession of elements and lasts for three days. Items range from the centrally important church service to historical re-enactment to cultural demonstrations including dances of various ethnic groups in Namibia to pure enjoyment, such as the informal dance in the evening. In this way, spiritual concerns connected to honouring the dead are closely related to educative and political aims: to instruct the youth in history, above all concerning the contribution of Witbooi to anticolonial resistance and the liberation struggle, and by the same token to advance claims in the context of present-day, independent Namibia.⁴²

These two rather prominent examples may stand in here for an entire host of commemorations that are held today, mostly on an annual basis, across Central and Southern Namibia. The overwhelming majority of these periodic rituals refer to personages or events linked to the Namibian War.⁴³

40 See his celebrated *Diary* (Witbooi 1995).

41 Johannes Olpp, *Eindrücke einer Reise über die sieben Rh. Missionsstationen des Namalandes* (II), *Berichte der Rheinischen Missionsgesellschaft* 87 (1930), 136-145; here: 140-141. For further context see Kössler, *In search of survival*, pt. III.

42 Kössler, *In search of survival*, 249-253; Reinhart Kössler, "A luta continua": Strategic Orientation and the Politics of Remembrance. The Example of the Witbooi "Heroes Day" in Gibeon, in: *Genocide in German South-West Africa*, 217-230; Reinhart Kössler, Political Intervention and the Image of History: Communal Memory Events in Central and Southern Namibia, in: *The Long Aftermath of War: Reconciliation in Namibia*, ed. André Du Pisani et al. (Freiburg: Arnold Bergstraesser Institut, 2010), 371-402, here: 284-393.

43 See also Memory Biwa, *Stories of the Patchwork Quilt: an Oral History Project of the Nama-German War in Southern Namibia*, in: *The Long Aftermath of War*,

This underscores the fact that for people relating to this region of Namibia – the area under effective colonial control in German times – the events of the Namibian War, the genocide, and the concentration camps still form the central feature of their historic memory. For people relating to the Northern regions on the other hand, different events and in particular, the liberation struggle of the 1970s and 1980s, figure much more prominently.

The commemorations can thus be read as efforts by communities in Southern and Central Namibia to assert their historic role in anti-colonial resistance.⁴⁴ Within the overall mnemoscape of Namibia, such endeavour has a two-pronged thrust beside the obvious reproduction of the communal nexus in a festive get-together linked with recounting the common past. On the one hand, the commemorations effectively address the specific national narration that has become hegemonic in post-independent Namibia. This narration pegs the construction of the nation not only to the trajectory of the ruling party SWAPO⁴⁵ but also to an overwhelming emphasis on the military aspects of the liberation struggle of the 1970s and 1980s. Significantly, President Hifikepunye Pohamba, when appearing at the Bondelswarts Festival in Warmbad in the southeastern-most corner of the country in October 2008, responded to the rehearsal of the community's exploits during the Nama-German War by confessing not only his utter ignorance but also the incompetence of his speechwriters who had failed to prepare him adequately for the occasion.⁴⁶ The relevant information is obviously available, also

331-70; Förster, *Postkoloniale Erinnerungslandschaft*, 247-268; Jan-Bart Gewald, Herero Annual Parades: Commemorating to Create, in: *Afrikaner schreiben zurück. Texte und Bilder afrikanischer Ethnographen*, ed. Heike Behrend and Thomas Geider (Köln: Köppe, 1998), 131-152; Kössler, Political intervention and the image of history: Communal memory events in central and southern Namibia, in: *The Long Aftermath of War*, 371-402, here: 379-384, 293-399.

44 Kössler, Facing a fragmented past.

45 André du Pisani, The Discursive Limits of SWAPO's Dominant Discourses of Anti-colonial Nationalism in Postcolonial Namibia – a First Exploration, in: *The Long Aftermath of War*, 1-40.

46 Autor's field notes, 25 October 2008; Kössler, Political intervention, 371-372; for historical background, see Andreas Heinrich Bühler, *Der Namaaufstand gegen die deutsche Kolonialherrschaft in Namibia von 1904-1913* (Frankfurt a.M.: IKO, 2003).

in accounts very close to SWAPO,⁴⁷ even though the most extensive official account available arguably downplays the agency of Ovaherero or Nama.⁴⁸ The point is that the image of history amongst Namibia's liberation elite virtually excludes these contents. Yet in spite of mostly opposed, polar evaluations in particular by Otjiherero and Nama speakers on the one hand and by German speakers on the other, the events of the Namibian War still form a central and possibly the main historical reference for people referring to Central and Southern Namibia as their home region. The anecdote underscores graphically how this is marginalized in the official version of history, as well as the potential of staged oral accounts and performative events to provide a certain counterweight against the officially received narrative.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF 'GERMANY' AND ITS RESPONSIBILITY

Inevitably, these endeavours are intertwined with various references to 'Germany' and the 'Germans'. They occur in speeches, in claims and in appearances of specific personages at commemorations. This is partly due to one of the poles in the post-colonial relationship. In central and southern Namibia, the vestiges of German rule are obvious – less so in often carefully renovated colonial buildings seen not least as attractions for German tourists. More importantly, the re-ordering of space initiated and first undertaken under German rule in the wake of the genocide⁴⁹ – and indeed as one of its integral components – remains a ubiquitous feature of the landscape as well as of everyday life. Prevailing land property relations shape the region as a fairly rigidly ordered countryside, largely devoid of humans and geared to a market-oriented economic endeavour. This entails the right of admission to spots where the graves of ancestors of black Namibians are still remembered, and to areas many still consider as their ancestral land.

47 Peter H. Katjavivi, *A history of resistance in Namibia* (London: James Currey, 1988), 10.

48 SWAPO, *To be born a nation: The liberation struggle in Namibia* (London: Zed Press, 1981), 13-14.

49 See also Zimmerer, *Von Windhuk nach Auschwitz*.

Even where this is not complemented by the position of a dependent farm labourer, these features serve as constant reminders of historic loss and trauma, which is transmitted through the oral tradition. The connection appears even more obvious on account of the large number of German speaking commercial farmers and the high profile presence of German speakers at privileged positions in economic life in general. Further, some of this group have played a vociferous part in debates around the evaluation of German colonialism in the country, above all denying the colonial genocide.⁵⁰

On a more personal, even intimate plane, a discourse mainly among Otjiherero speakers refers to their own German ancestry. This is linked to the record of sexual violence during the Namibian War, rape and forced prostitution, but also various forms of concubinage. Reference is made to physical features of the speakers, such as light skin or straight noses. One main issue concerns the difficulty with which children of such fathers are located within the complex dual kinship system. A more immediate concern, however, points to the distinct negligence of most German men who even when parentage was known and in some way acknowledged, on their return to Germany just left their offspring and their mothers to their own devices, cutting all ties and denying belonging or affiliation and above all, responsibility. This discourse was strongly articulated at the centennial commemoration of the fateful Battle of Ohamakari on 14 August 2004, most conspicuously by the wearing of placards showing the names of the German ancestors (sometimes several) of their bearers. This was complemented by individual expressions of concern and distress.⁵¹

An indispensable component of this discourse addresses German responsibility. This responsibility is couched in a three-pronged identification, which is premised on the overarching idea of kinship that has been forged by the illegitimate relationships in question. Such kinship is construed not only in relation to the families of common forebears, but to 'Germans' and 'Germany' at large, which terms also tend to be construed within a framework of kinship. Further, this identification is extended to German speakers in Namibia, quite regardless of whether they actually claim a Namibian identity. Under the circumstances, this construct clearly

50 Kössler, *Entangled history and politics*, 320-328.

51 Personal observation; Förster, *Postkoloniale Erinnerungslandschaften*, 319-321.

translates into responsibility that has been neglected not only by German progenitors of grandparents and great-grandparents, but also by ‘Germany’ at large. Neglect of parental duty – unquestionable in the case of the overwhelming majority of German forefathers of living Ovaherero – in this way is transferred to Germany, and Ovaherero at large are seen as its victims.

From a Namibian perspective, ‘Germany’ forms an integral part of the mnemoscope in question. ‘Germans’ and ‘Germany’ therefore are seen as actors, to some extent even as a kind of amalgamated collective actor within this mnemoscope. Arguably, this looks different from a German vantage point, for two reasons. The first, most obvious and possibly also the most intractable one, concerns the clearly smaller amount of attention accorded in Germany to anything that happens in and about Namibia, including Namibian-German relations, as opposed to the much greater attention given to Germany, and in particular to Namibian-German relations, in Namibia. At least on the face of it, this is related to the stark differences that exist between the two countries in population size and economic power, but at least the latter consideration clearly refers back to the colonial connection. Except for a few fleeting moments and also regardless of the ideological consequences of the Namibian War, Namibia was mostly rather marginal to Germany, whereas Germany on the other hand has been of quite central importance to Namibia for some 150 years. As already mentioned, this applied to the violent imposition of a new social and spatial order; German speakers continued to occupy a central and influential position within the settler colonial structure. Regardless of some frictions, they arranged themselves with South African rule and even became a mainstay of the Apartheid regime.⁵² They remain an economically powerful and conspicuous grouping in independent Namibia. Moreover, Germany has recognised “a particular relationship” based on a special responsibility on account of colonial rule⁵³ and consequently, German presence in the development sector is also very conspicuous.

52 Martin Eberhardt, *Zwischen Nationalsozialismus und Apartheid. Die deutsche Bevölkerungsgruppe Südwestafrikas 1915-1965* (Berlin: Lit, 2007); Brigitta Schmidt-Lauber, “Die verkehrte Hautfarbe”. *Ethnizität deutscher Namibier als Alltagspraxis* (Berlin: Reimer, 1998).

53 Janntje Böhlke-Itzen, *Kolonialschuld und Entschädigung. Der deutsche Völkermord an den Herero 1904-1907* (Frankfurt a.M.: Brandes & Apsel, 2004), 7.

This contrasts starkly to the low significance of Namibia as a foreign relations or trading partner, seen from the perspective of the public sphere in Germany as well as German politics at large. Here, relevant government activity is largely inconspicuous and civil society activity, while present, is limited to special interest circles. Quite a few initiatives exist to provide links with Namibia, such as school partnerships, and a quite active German-Namibian Society along the classic lines of a friendship society promoting general information, economic links, development projects, and in this context also tourism.⁵⁴ However, these bodies have and intend to have only limited impact at best on memory politics related to the colonial past. This is left to small pressure groups that work towards a pro-active approach to the colonial past in Germany. Their limited potential is also due to a negligible post-colonial presence, clearly in contradistinction to Germany's neighbour countries like Netherlands, Belgium or France.⁵⁵ Still, these small, but active groups can be understood as a rather new phenomenon, in the wake of the decline of the more conventional solidarity movement. They pursue an agenda of awareness rising about colonial issues, largely on a local level. As a result, a network of post-colonial initiatives has developed that actively takes up memory issues.⁵⁶

BETWEEN AMNESIA AND REPARATIONS: NEGOTIATING THE PAST

Up to Namibian independence on 21 March 1990, the country's colonial past under German rule played a rather marginal role, even for (West) German solidarity groups that supported the liberation struggle.⁵⁷ On the other

54 <http://www.dngev.de>.

55 *Kolonialismus und Erinnerungskultur. Die Kolonialvergangenheit im kollektiven Gedächtnis der deutschen und niederländischen Einwanderungsgesellschaft*, ed. Helma Lutz and Kathrin Gawarecki (Münster: Waxmann, 2005).

56 As a representative website, <http://www.freiburg-postkolonial.de>; <http://www.freiburg-postkolonial.de/Seiten/Links.htm> also gives an overview of similar activities in other German cities.

57 Reinhart Kössler and Henning Melber, The West German solidarity movement with liberation struggles in Southern Africa: A (self-)critical retrospective, in:

hand, black Namibians did not have a chance of raising their voices effectively before independence had been achieved.⁵⁸ For such reasons, the independence date can be seen not only as a turning point in the political set-up and fortunes of the country, but also as a point of departure for a novel politics of memory. Given this perspective, it should also be noted that in spite of latter-day triumphalist rhetoric, this was a classical case of pacted transition.⁵⁹ The terms had been set to a large extent by prior agreements within the UN system. The process in terms of Security Council Resolution 435 (1978) was set into motion in 1988 by the Tripartite Agreement between the US, South Africa and Angola about the ending of the war situation in that country, which had become closely linked to the Namibian liberation struggle. The constitution was a product of very speedy deliberation by the Assembly that had been elected in late 1989. Here, SWAPO had been denied a two-third majority and depended on reaching an agreement with the opposition.⁶⁰ These circumstances as well as the need to avoid social and economic disruption coalesced into an overall policy orientation of “reconciliation”, stalling any potential controversies and further struggles. This silencing of public controversy had profound consequences for the dealing with the past.⁶¹ In general, potential controversy was relegated to the realm of academic or more or less private pursuit.

Germany's Africa policy revisited: Interests, images and incrementalism, 2nd ed., ed. Ulf Engel and Robert Kappel (Münster: Lit, 2006), 101-123.

- 58 Peter Katjavivi, From Colonialism to Bilaterality. Challenges of the Namibian-German Relationship, in: *The Division of the Earth. Tableaux on the Legal Synopses of the Berlin Africa Conference*, ed. Dierk Schmidt (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 2010), 91-93.
- 59 Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule. Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), 37-39.
- 60 Lionel Cliffe, *The Transition to Independence in Namibia* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner, 1994), chap. 9; *The Namibian Peace Process: Implications and lessons for the future*, ed. Heribert Weiland and Matthew Braham (Freiburg: Arnold Bergstraesser-Institut, 1994).
- 61 Justine Hunter, Dealing with the Past in Namibia: Getting the Balance Right Between Justice and Sustainable Peace?, in: *The Long Aftermath of War*, 403-433;

Nevertheless, independence also meant the possibility for issues to come into the open that had long been nurtured in the relative privacy of oral tradition and personal transmission through the generations. Now was the first chance to move beyond such subaltern practices and link such memory contents to public initiatives. Most important amongst such initiatives were the forays by leading Ovaherero who aimed at reaching some understanding with the German government on the premise of its accession to the guilt incurred by the former Imperial government.

Such forays met a rather stern rebuff on occasion of the state visits of the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl in 1995 and the German President Roman Herzog in 1998, when Herero delegations were either not admitted or met only on an informal level. While Kohl praised specifically the services of the German speakers towards Namibia's development, President Herzog voiced concern about the future of the German language in the country.⁶² These experiences exacerbated the sensitivities of "ex-colonial Namibians about representatives of the former colonial power and their successors in the country".⁶³ Against this backdrop, the Herero People's Reparation Corporation (HPRC) was formed. This body pursues a court case in the USA under the Alien Tort Claims Act (ATCA). The German state and German companies are held liable for reparations on account of the war crimes committed in Namibia under the German colonial regime and for the exploitative conditions that prevailed and from which the companies had profited.⁶⁴ This action resonates with cases brought under the same legislation also against the German state and German companies by former forced labourers during World War II, where an out of court settle-

Reinhart Kößler, *Zweierlei Amnesie und die komplexe postkoloniale Lage Namibias*, *Die Friedenswarte* 86 (2011), 73-99.

62 Henning Melber, "We never spoke about reparations". German-Namibian relations between amnesia, aggression and reconciliation, in: *Genocide in German South-West Africa*, 259-273, here: 265-266.

63 Ibid., 265.

64 Jeremy Sarkin, *Colonial Genocide and Reparations Claims in the 21st Century: The Socio-Legal Context of Claims under International Law by the Herero against Germany for Genocide in Namibia, 1904-1908* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2008); Böhlke-Itzen, *Kolonialschuld*, 31-32.

ment was reached in 1999.⁶⁵ In a whole series of events, the centennial commemoration of the Battle of Ohamakari (Waterberg) on 14 August 2004 stood out.⁶⁶ This brought together between 5,000 and 10,000 OvaHerero from all over Southern Africa and beyond. This was an important step in the reproduction and re-constitution of Herero ethnicity. At the same time, quests for alliances amongst different ethnic groups in Namibia as well as of the difficulties in actually forging such alliances were evident. These problems existed above all between the two committees that had formed during the preceding year in order to organise the long commemorative calendar of the centennial that culminated on August 14. The cleavage between the two committees reflected the unresolved juxtaposition of two forms of traditional leadership amongst OvaHerero as well as diverging party political orientations. Moreover, a certain amount of Herero exclusionism found expression in a tendency to claim victim status solely for this group.⁶⁷ On the other hand, the Ohamakari event was marked by efforts to underline historical bonds. Thus, the appearance of Ndonga King Kauluma from Northern Namibia, was linked to the successful attack on fort Namutoni by Ndonga warriors during the Herero-German War in 1904. Again, Nama groups from Southern Namibia were clearly underrepresented on the programme, and the only scheduled speech did not materialise.

The central feature, however, was the speech of the German Minister of Economic Cooperation, Heidemarie Wiecezorek-Zeul. She surprised many and went against the grain of established government policy when she acknowledged that the crimes of the *Schutztruppe* and its leadership

“would today be called genocide [...]. We Germans accept our historical and moral responsibility and guilt incurred by Germans at that time. And so, in the words of the Lord’s Prayer that we share, I ask you to forgive us our trespasses and our guilt.

65 <http://www.stiftung-evz.de>, accessed 25 March 2009.

66 Förster, *Postkoloniale Erinnerungslandschaften*, 278-308.

67 Henning Melber, Namibia’s Past in the Present: Colonial Genocide and Liberation Struggle in Commemorative Narratives, *South African Historical Journal* 53 (2005), 98-119, here: 116-117.

Without a conscious process of remembering, without sorrow, without apology, there can be no reconciliation – remembrance is the key to reconciliation.”⁶⁸

This wording clearly referred to the prevailing idea in Germany that remembrance forms the basic legitimate approach towards dealing with a cruel past and mass crimes involved in it, and that this will engender reconciliation. It did not quite work this way on this occasion. After the Otjiherero version of the Minister’s speech had been read out, there was a loud interjection: “Where’s the apology?” Only when the Minister had come back and had stressed that she thought she had given one, the audience seemed to be satisfied. This speaks to the importance of ritual wording in adequate dealing with the past in this context. At the same time, the inherent problems and contradictions of this carefully worded speech in terms of a viable reconciliation process were to be revealed through subsequent developments. These developments revolved around the interlinked issues of reparation, which the speech had skirted, and of acknowledgment of the victims (in their descendants) as partners in dialogue.

Wieczorek-Zeul’s speech clearly digressed from the line taken at that time by the German cabinet. Only a few weeks before, the *Bundestag* had passed a motion that carefully avoided the word ‘genocide’ and on that account, caused considerable irritation and stir in Namibia.⁶⁹ The Minister’s speech therefore attested her personal courage, but it proved also an important limitation to her apology. Even though given by a Cabinet member, it still did not emanate from a Cabinet decision, but precisely the opposite, from the Minister’s personal resolve. Much less was the apology rendered by a representative of the German people as the sovereign body in question, such as the President or the *Bundestag*.

Further, it soon became clear that this courage was not matched by a political strategy to reach a form of reconciliation that would be acceptable

68 http://www.inwent.org/E+Z/content/archive-eng/10-2004/stud_art3.html, accessed 29 June 2011, quoted from Förster, *Postkoloniale Erinnerungslandschaften*, 283, who uses a rendering of the oral delivery.

69 Reinhart Kößler, Berlin weiß nichts vom Völkermord, *afrika süd* 4 (2004), 12; Luther Razemua Zaire, Enttäuschend – Beschämend – Historisch falsch. Offener Brief, *afrika süd* 4 (2004), 13.

to all parties concerned, most of all to those in the victim position.⁷⁰ The months following the Ohamakari event were marked by spurious activities that did not coalesce into such a meaningful dialogue driven by victims' concerns. In particular, the Minister unilaterally announced in May 2005 a reconciliation initiative that would bring 20 million Euro to the regions of Namibia predominantly inhabited by victim communities. Not surprisingly, this announcement was met by objections from Herero spokespersons since there had been no prior consultations and the whole initiative therefore was seen as unilateral. Even in late 2005, on occasion of a visit of President Hifikepunye Pohamba in Berlin, the Namibian delegation refused to sign the necessary agreement.⁷¹ The diplomatic *éclat* could be patched up, but at the time, it underscored a serious difference in approach of how to deal with the challenge to come to terms with a colonial genocide and to reach reconciliation between the heirs of the victims and the perpetrators.

Subsequent developments highlighted these differences. At the same time, the issue was drawn into a labyrinthine web of countervailing interests, including party political concerns on both sides. An interesting realignment concerned the linkage that developed between the German Left Party and the Namibian NUDO party headed by Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako. Some Left Party deputies started to champion the concerns of the HPRC as well as other issues related to the genocide from 2005 onwards. On the side of the German Left, stalwarts from GDR times were hesitant about such a line up, as long as SWAPO, with whose formerly exiled leadership they shared close bonds, had not pronounced clearly its approval.⁷²

70 Since neither survivors nor perpetrators of what happened in 1903-1908 are still alive today, it is appropriate to clearly distinguish between personal experiences and guilt, and between longer term consequences and historic responsibility, such as that of German citizens. These considerations lead to the wordings of "victim position" and "perpetrator position"; but see on victims and perpetrators Don Foster et al., *The theatre of violence. Narratives of protagonists in the South African conflict* (Oxford: James Currey, 2005).

71 Joachim Zeller, Festgefahren. Ratlosigkeit angesichts der vorläufig gescheiterten Versöhnungsinitiative zwischen Namibia und Deutschland, *afrika süd* 6 (2005), 32.

72 Personal observation at the seminar "Deutsche Kolonialverbrechen. Wie kann Wiedergutmachung für die Herero und Nama aussehen?", Rosa Luxemburg

Still, a motion was tabled in the *Bundestag*, and Left MP Hüseyin Aydin, who had also been the main sponsor of that motion appeared as one of the speakers at Herero Day, 2006. He underscored the yet unfulfilled responsibility of the “Federal Republic of Germany as the legal successor of the Imperial Reich [...] towards the surviving victims of the genocide and their posterity”.⁷³ This line of thinking, which focused on the continuity of the German state, differs distinctly from the discourse centring around obligations based on kinship and blood ties as articulated by Ovaherero (*supra*). Still, both coalesced in a common perspective, featuring an intimate connection between apology, reparation and reconciliation.

At the same time, SWAPO departed from its previous stance of not supporting any demand for reparations on the grounds that this might entail the risk of fostering tribalism, favouring one or other ethnic groups over others. In October 2006, the National Assembly carried a motion tabled by Riruako with only one member abstaining.⁷⁴ When introducing his motion, the Paramount Chief had reiterated the wish for “the German Government to convene a consultative conference to set up an agenda for dialogue”.⁷⁵ In the event, the passing of the motion by the National Assembly, which was clearly aimed at furthering such a process, has so far not contributed towards a continued momentum as had emanated from Wieczorek-Zeul’s apology. Rather, the halting process of transnational and post-colonial memory politics that had been given a new turn in 2004 has shifted once again. Namibian victim communities have by no means backed down on their demand for reparations. However, at least temporarily, symbolic politics have moved to the foreground. This is interlinked with important realignments in Namibia.

Foundation, Berlin, 13-14 October 2006; see www.freiburg-postkolonial.de/Seiten/Rez-Linke-Seminar-Namibia2006.htm, accessed 4 June 2011.

73 Hüseyin Aydin, MdB, Rede am Herero-Tag in Okahandja (Namibia), 27 August 2006, as disseminated via email to author; see also *New Era* (Windhoek), 31 August 2006; *The Namibian*, 1 September 2006.

74 *The Namibian*, 27 October 2006.

75 *The Namibian*, 20 September 2006.

INTRICACIES OF SYMBOLIC POLITICS AND RECONCILIATION

This new turn, which rounds off this account, involves a fairly extensive range of changes. First, the number and to some extent the structure of civil society actors on the Namibian side has changed significantly. In 2004, the victim position was articulated and occupied largely by Ovaherero, even though split into two competing committees. During the following years, an array of further ethnic groups voiced their demands for recognition of past suffering and of the contribution of their forebears to the anti-colonial struggle, as well as for adequate redress. Thus, early in 2005, the newly formed Damara Cultural and Heritage Forum pointed out that regardless of the marginal role accorded to Damara within accounts of the Namibian War, 17,000 of their people had disappeared during the war. In motivating the intervention, Chief Gaseb stressed a widely inclusive notion of victim groups who all “have a history”, thus closely linking victim status and “history”.⁷⁶ The insistence on the latter by a spokesperson for a group that has been notoriously marginalized both in social terms and in historical accounts once again demonstrates the importance carried by inscription into the national record in this way.

The issue of remembrance and claims connected with such quests also furthered closer cooperation among Nama traditional leaders. In late 2006, nine of them appealed for a “meaningful dialogue” with the German government, while insisting that the Namibian government should attend properly to the identification and further treatment of the human remains that had been found near the southern Namibian port of Lüderitz, and which were attributed to former prisoners at the concentration camp on Shark Island.⁷⁷ At this historic site, the commemoration in early 2007 of the centenary of the death of Chief Cornelius Frederick of Bethanië who had perished in the concentration camp marked a galvanizing point.⁷⁸ By late 2007, a joint declaration by Ovaherero and Nama traditional leaders was released. The text indicted the German government and the *Bundestag* as well as the Namibian government for denying direct negotiations between the repre-

76 *The Namibian*, 26 January 2005.

77 *The Namibian*, 19 October 2006.

78 *New Era*, 19 February 2007.

sentatives of the victimised groups and the German government. The declaration listed a series of measures to improve the lives of these groups based on “seeking redress for the wrongs of the past in order for the wounds to heal and for resultant genuine reconciliation and peaceful co-existence amongst the Nama/Ovaherero and the German people in our country and for a lasting friendly bilateral relations [sic] between the two countries”.⁷⁹ The connotations contained in this appeal are characteristic for the complex situation it addressed: The principle addressees are the two governments, but at the same time, the German state is seen as closely connected to the ethnic group of German speaking Namibians, and the aim is defined by the hope to reach friendly relations between the two countries, Germany and Namibia. This phrase, only seemingly ill construed, contains in a nutshell central difficulties that are involved in coming to terms with the post-colonial relationship that exists between Namibia and Germany.

These difficulties may be conceptualised precisely in problems involved in the identification, and indeed, in the construction of the relevant collective actors and protagonists. This concerns obviously the central issue of who should be held responsible on the one hand and who shall be entitled to claims for recognition and eventually, reparation on the other. This question does not merely concern what may appear as a mere confusion between ‘Germany’, ‘Germans’ and ‘German speakers’. It also concerns the definition and constitution of ‘Namibia’, as well as that of the victim groups.

These problems of definition and identity formation are bound up with the process of colonisation and subsequent transformations, right up to Namibia’s independence as a sovereign state. The act of colonisation did not only entail the definition of boundaries, as occurred with the formation of *any* form of modern statehood, but it also set into motion a process whereby the sovereign rights of indigenous groups or their leaders were progressively reneged. In Namibia, this process came to an abrupt and decisive conclusion through the genocide of 1904-1908. For most African groups within

79 Joint Position Paper from the Nama and the Ovaherero People on the Issue of Genocide and Reparation, 14 December 2007, signed by Ovaherero Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako and Chief David Frederick (Bethanië); http://ovahererog-enocideassociationusa.org/images/Document%20pdfs/New%20pdfs%202_20_08/Ovaherero_NamaPosition%20Paper.pdf, accessed 10 July 2011.

the Police Zone, this event decisively terminated any chance for autonomy or for the exercise of sovereign rights, which at least according to some readings had still been implied by the protection treaties concluded with the fledgling German colonial power in the 1880s.⁸⁰ While the difficulties encountered in asserting claims that emanate from this mass crime today can be related to the eurocentric bias of international law,⁸¹ the heritage of colonisation and spatial reorganisation also entails that today the sovereign power claiming to legitimately speak for *all* Namibians is the national government. This makes it quite difficult to arrange meaningful relations, let alone negotiations, between representatives specifically of victim groups and the German government. As can be observed, the Namibian government is constantly mindful that such a process might be seen to subvert its own hard won sovereignty. The chagrin of representatives of victim groups who refuse to “accept that we have initially raised the issue and now it should be *about us* and yet *without us*”⁸² refers precisely to such structural underpinnings.

At the same time, the quest to bring together relevant stakeholders in Namibia along the lines of civil society actors also runs into problems, which can be related to memories of past conflicts between ethnic groups, but more often, to current rivalries. Arguably, the most important issue here divides Ovaherero over the issue of legitimacy of traditional leadership, pitting Paramount Chief Riruako, who claims popular election for lifetime, against the heads of the Five Royal Houses who rely on genealogical legitimacy. This cleavage is reinforced by opposing party political alignments. Similarly, Damara are divided over claims made by traditional leaders for legitimacy and jurisdiction, and again this is reinforced by opposing party loyalties.

80 Malte Jaguttis, Paths to a Hearing of the Herero Case under International Law. Beyond the Patterns of Colonial Self-Description?, in: *The Division of the Earth*, 76-84; Jörn Axel Kämmerer, The Persecution of the Herero from the Perspective of Public International Law, in: *The Division of the Earth*, 85-90.

81 M.N. Kaapanda-Girnus, A Third World perspective on the History of International Law. The Herero Genocide as the Perfect Crime?, in: *The Division of the Earth*, 94-98.

82 Joint Position Paper.

Such divisions have made it difficult to constitute a joint body for action. Still, during the 2000s an Association of Nama Traditional Authorities was formed, and this has worked as a core to assemble a broad coalition to work for reparations and reconciliation with reference to the genocide, which encompasses Ovaherero, Damara, San, and Basters. Yet, such an alignment turned out not to be all-inclusive, leaving out larger or smaller sections of most ethnic groups.

Thus, there is a multiplicity of actors on the Namibian side, while it is only at first sight that the respondent to claims is easily identified to be the German state. As already mentioned, within the Namibian debate, this encompasses German speakers who live in Namibia as citizens, as well as descendants of *Schutztruppe* soldiers, in particular with reference to the concerns of their black descendants in Namibia. Such aspects make it quite clear how symbolic issues and concerns for recognition are in fact inextricably intertwined with the demand for reparations that has occupied centre stage for some time but again cannot be construed exclusively as a demand for material benefits.

It is against this backdrop that the dynamics around the restitution of human remains taken to Germany during its colonial rule in Namibia evolved. The fate of severed heads, in particular those taken from fallen leaders during the war, had been a concern since a long time,⁸³ but it had not been a public affair of particular note. This began to change with the discovery of human bones near Lüderitz in October 2006 and their obvious connection with the concentration camps, which had existed in this southern port town during the Namibian War.⁸⁴ The issue gained further momentum through the centennial commemoration for Cornelius Frederick in February 2007 as mentioned above. Here, one main grievance articulated concerned Cornelius Frederick's head. According to oral tradition, this head had been severed from the dead body and sent to Germany. This account has been contested by historians as not being factual;⁸⁵ however, the more important social fact is the belief that in such a case spurs actors on. Here, it gave rise to the de-

83 E.g., informal talk with *Kaptein* Petrus Koper of the Red Nation, Berseba, 3 June 1995.

84 *New Era*, 16 October 2006.

85 *New Era*, 19 February 2007; Casper Erichsen, email to author, 20 February 2007.

mand for the return of human remains from Germany. The Shark Island event proved an important stage in the process that at the end of 2007 brought together Nama and Ovaherero traditional leaders in a joint effort to make claims towards the governments and parliaments of both states, demanding recognition above all by being included within any process of negotiation and reconciliation.⁸⁶ Remarkably, this statement now treats the genocide perpetrated against both Ovaherero and Nama on an equal footing. It thus overcomes former tendencies towards victim competition and Ovaherero exclusionism. For nearly four years, subsequent efforts centred increasingly around the quest for returning human skulls taken from Namibia to Germany during colonial times and housed in various research institutions in Germany.

The story of the restitution and of the efforts bringing it into the range of possibility and even likelihood by the end of 2011 shall not be recounted here in full. Suffice it to say that beginning with some TV features in mid-2008, there developed a certain heightened sensitivity for the issue in parts of the German public.⁸⁷ In October 2008, the Namibian government formally requested repatriation, under the understanding that the skulls would be given a heroes' burial at Heroes Acre outside Windhoek.⁸⁸ However, the coalition of Ovaherero and Nama traditional leaders objected to this and insisted the skulls should be placed into the proposed Independence Museum as a constant reminder of the great and often undervalued contribution Namibians in the South and Centre of the country had made to anticolonial resistance.⁸⁹

The negotiations about restitution of the skulls evolved haltingly over more than two years, precisely since the formal process also had to reflect the complex constellation of historical facts, of remembrance and of current agendas. Nama and Ovaherero traditional leaders took more than a year to

⁸⁶ Joint Position Paper.

⁸⁷ For documentation on this process, see <http://www.freiburg-postkolonial.de/Seiten/anthropologische-schaedelsammlungen.htm>, accessed 10 July 2011; <http://www.africavenir.org/de/projektkooperationen/restitution-namibian-skulls/datum/2008/02/26.html>, accessed 10 July 2011.

⁸⁸ *The Namibian*, 21 October 2008.

⁸⁹ *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2 October 2009; personal communication with Ida Hofmann, Windhoek, 25 October 2008, 5 May 2011.

hammer out their positions vis-à-vis the Namibian government. They finally petitioned formally to act on the matter through diplomatic channels late in 2009.⁹⁰ At the same time, consensus was reached that the skulls, once returned, should be housed in a museum. In the words of Paramount Chief Riruako, “our history cannot be buried, they were beheaded in public, and thus we have to retain them in public”. At the same time, 28 May 2010 was announced as the date when representatives of the communities concerned would proceed to Berlin to receive the skulls and perform apposite rituals before bringing them to Namibia. The date was meant to commemorate the day in 1908 when the concentration camps were closed. A further demand concerned proper documentation about the fate of the skulls, including the research that had been undertaken on them.⁹¹

In the event, negotiations between the various parties concerned dragged on for more than another year. This involved also negotiations on the level of the two embassies in Windhoek and Berlin with their various counterparts. Only late in March 2011, the Namibian government felt they were in a position to set the procedure into motion for actual repatriation of the skulls. One reason had been the time taken up by scientific work at the University hospital *Charité* in Berlin and at the University Archives in Freiburg, where skulls had been located which had to be identified first as actually coming from Namibia. At this occasion, it was stressed by Utjiua Muinjangu speaking for the 1904 Herero Genocide committee that “in our African culture, we believe in ancestral spirits. When those skulls come home, I am sure the spirits of our ancestors will rest in peace.” On the other hand, the ultimate aim of reparations from Germany remained on the agenda.⁹²

Ensuing developments once again underscored the fallacies implied by the actor constellation in the repatriation and reparation issue.⁹³ The envisaged date of 28 May 2011 eventually did not materialise on account of conflicts that surfaced around the composition of the delegation that was to

90 *The Namibian*, 1 and 2 October 2009; *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2 October 2009.

91 *New Era*, 2 October 2009.

92 *New Era*, 25 February 2011.

93 For the following see detailed documentation on <http://www.freiburg-postkolonial.de/Seiten/anthropologische-schaedelsammlungen.htm>; besides, I rely on participant observation in Namibia during May 2011 and in Berlin in late September 2011, as well as press documentation and email correspondence.

travel from Namibia to Berlin. Ostensibly, these conflicts revolved around the composition of the 54 proposed delegates. There was a contest between a coalition of two committees, bringing together Ovaherero and Nama on the one hand and another committee formed by Ovaherero and closely related Ovambanderu. The dispute also had party political dimensions, given the diverse allegiances of the two Ovaherero groups concerned, and it articulated the pervasive leadership bifurcation amongst Ovaherero pitting Paramount Chief Riruako against the Royal Houses. In this way, the issue of how the delegation would be composed mobilised deep and central conflicts that were exacerbated by further competition to be included as a kind of recognition of an individual's as well as their community's importance and standing. Difficulties could not be resolved in time, and the entire event was called off. Subsequently, it was rescheduled twice, and a delegation of altogether more than 70 people finally arrived in Berlin, late in September 2011.

In the view of many, what followed was a communication disaster on the side of the German government. It became clear that official pronouncements painstakingly avoided the term 'genocide'. A press statement by the foreign office took official occlusion to the point of speaking merely of "skulls of deceased members of the population groups of Herero and Nama brought to Germany during colonial times".⁹⁴ In addition, the government was less than forthcoming in acknowledging the delegation or in engaging them into exchanges. They did not receive the cabinet minister who was at the head of the Namibian delegation and they were not represented at important side events. This concerned in particular the memorial service conducted by the venerable Namibian Bishop Zephania Kameeta at the *Matthäuskirche* (Berlin-Tiergarten), where the seats reserved for German VIPs remained empty, save for the presence of Wieczorek-Zeul. At a panel discussion, organised by civil society groups at the central *Haus der Kulturen der Welt*, representatives of the government or of the coalition parties were also absent. Added disappointment and resentment were

94 Pressemitteilung: Übergabe und Rückführung von Schädeln verstorbener Angehöriger der Volksgruppen Herero und Nama aus Namibia, 27 September 2011, http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/sid_599AF8AB5706903D8C42417691EF7B18/DE/Infoservice/Presse/Meldungen/2011/110928-%C3%9Cbergabe-Sch%C3%A4del-Herero-Nama.html, accessed 13 October 2011.

caused by the announcement that contrary to expectations, the restitution document would not be signed at the core ceremony, by the Namibian minister of culture and by a German minister, but rather by a representative of the *Charité*, on the German side. This was motivated by considerations of German cultural federalism.⁹⁵ The unease and chagrin that had been building up within the Namibian delegation coalesced with similar feelings among parts of German civil society who had worked for publicity and side events, in particular for the panel discussion. In particular, groups of Afro-Germans organised a protest at the actual hand over ceremony at the *Charité*. When Minister of State in the Foreign Office, Cornelia Pieper, once again evaded the term genocide in her speech and merely asked for “reconciliation” without stating clearly the reasons why she considered that necessary, she was met with noisy demonstrations of displeasure and boos. The Minister then left the occasion without taking proper leave of the Namibian dignitaries. Regardless of the circumstances, this was seen as deeply disrespectful on the Namibian side, and in line with the German government’s previous behaviour, while they welcomed the protests.⁹⁶

This dissonance must also be related to the great symbolic importance of the delegation’s actions at various occasions.⁹⁷ Take only the whole group entering the *Charité* for their first encounter with the skulls, announcing their coming with solemn prayer, hymns and battle cries, or similar features at the church service and at the handover ceremony. Similar observations apply to seeing off and welcoming ceremonies in Windhoek. At the airport there, a crowd of a few thousand who broke the ranks met the delegation and the skulls. There were extensive ceremonies on subsequent days in Parliament Gardens and Heroes Acre, which also underscored the emphatic meaning attached to the “repatriation”⁹⁸ in Namibia. At the same time, the incongruence with the approach of the German government ap-

95 Cornelia Pieper MdB, Staatsministerin im Auswärtigen Amt to Yvonne Ploetz MdB, Schriftliche Fragen für den Monat Oktober 2011, Fragen Nr. 10-14-16, 12 October 2011.

96 Interviews, Windhoek, March 2012.

97 The following remains strictly impressionistic, pending more in-depth study underway.

98 Alexactus T. Kaure, On Repatriation, Reparation, Restitution and Reconciliation, *The Namibian*, 7 October 2011.

peared obvious. In part, this may also explain the enormous and certainly unforeseen media echo on the occasion of the handover and Pieper's walk-out. By insisting on formal niceties and legal considerations, above all to avoid by any means to utter words that might possibly be used in a legal case for reparations, German officials completely missed what moved their Namibian counterparts – quite regardless of the inference that such painstaking care actually attested implicitly to an awareness that there was really a cause also for material reparations. Pieper's speech was a clear expression of this dilemma when she asked for reconciliation on account of circumstances she had not bothered or dared to spell out. Amnesia was replaced, in this way, by what appears as a half-official ban on a word or even on a factual statement.

However, also on the Namibian side not everything was monolithic and harmonious. The skull issue and attendant events brought dormant, festering issues into the open. Obviously, this applies to the greatly divergent regional experiences such as regional differences in historical trajectories that entail regionally tinted hegemonic narratives.⁹⁹ This is further exacerbated by complaints about neglect by the SWAPO government for concerns of the communities affected by the genocide, ranging from advancing claims for reparations from Germany right to a more vigorous and equitably land reform.¹⁰⁰ It may have been such considerations, besides obvious chagrin about high-handed German official behaviour that prompted Prime Minister Nahas Angula a week later to come out with a strong demand that Germany respond to an official submission about reparations the Namibian government had made some while ago.¹⁰¹

99 Kössler, Facing a fragmented past.

100 Alfredo Tjiurimo Hengari, The Republic Must Show Solidarity With The History Of Genocide, *The Namibian*, 7 October 2011.

101 *New Era*, 13 October 2011.

OUTSTANDING DIALOGUE, PERSISTENT POST-COLONIAL SITUATION

This episode, then, focused once again the issues that shape post-colonial conflict and negotiation between Namibia and Germany. Even though the skull issue itself is by no means concluded as the repatriation of further skulls has been envisaged for 2012, the event can be seen as setting a provisional and temporary end to a trajectory of transnational memory politics set into motion at the Ohamakari commemoration in 2004. This trajectory revolves around the modalities and consequences of the recognition of genocide perpetrated under the authority of the German state, and the apology offered by the Minister. As has become clear in pronouncements, also from the delegation in Berlin, their quest for a dialogue with ‘Germany’ remains on the agenda. For them, such dialogue and the recognition it implies are prerequisite to the reconciliation they offer and strive for. Given the stance taken once again by the German government, a process with its potential consequences of making claims for reparations effective seems unlikely for the near future. Yet even moves in the realm of symbolic politics, while more feasible, seem to run into the difficulties that follow from the refusal to openly address and name facts that had been acknowledged already by Wieczorek-Zeul, albeit not in the capacity of a representative of the German nation. With a pointer, one might say that with the partial exception of Wieczorek-Zeul’s departure, the official German attitude implies a quest for silent reconciliation and thereby, at best limited recognition of the other. As long as the Namibian counterparts are not prepared to play along, this strategy may work on the advantage of a privileged power position, but will hardly be able to silence protest on the Namibian side or indeed from active parts of German civil society.¹⁰² One may therefore argue that the communication disaster around the return of the skulls was due in part to diplomatic misunderstandings and possibly incomplete negotiating during the run-up to the event. However, such contingent aspects do not exhaust the matter. The events underscore the complexity of the post-colonial situation and the quest for reconciliation.

102 For an account of a similar reconciliation strategy on the part of the Namibian government with respect to the liberation war of 1966-1989, see Kössler, *Zweierlei Amnesie*.

This complexity involves constellations of state and non-state actors in both Namibia and Germany and their at times difficult means and forms of communication. One main difficulty refers to the position of both governments who are styled as the main actors on the diplomatic level, but have demonstrated only limited potential in filling these roles. In Namibia, victim groups and affected communities continue to clamour for direct negotiation and dialogue with 'Germany', focusing clearly on the German government. Conversely, the German government has relied on arguments relating to cultural federalism and the niceties of the administration of cultural goods to fend off an official role for itself at the handover ceremony that before had seemed obvious to most observers. The government therefore is mediating between their Namibian counterparts in government and various instances, such as scholarly institutions, in Germany in contradictory ways. Again, civil society actors in Germany have been to some extent in longer contact with affected communities and their leaders or linked up readily with members of the delegation in Berlin in September 2011. It remains to be seen whether these contacts will bring a new quality to transnational civil society relationships between the two countries. So far, these did exist e.g. in the form of some school partnerships and close contacts between church bodies, but these have rarely addressed memory issues on a public scale.

In this way, not only does the image of the past remain a contested terrain both in Namibia and in Germany, but so remain the conclusions that are drawn even from widespread consensus about certain issues, such as the perpetration of genocide in 1904-1908. Namibia stands out, even among German ex-colonies, for the urgency with which this colonial past is addressed, and even though interest within Germany has arguably increased in recent years, there remains a huge hiatus between the levels of public interest in both countries. Again, this reciprocates, at least to some extent, the asymmetrical colonial and post-colonial situation and thus for those concerned remains an issue to reflect as well as to act upon. The post-colonial situation is here to stay for a foreseeable future and its acknowledgement remains a political challenge. Moreover, the experience of September 2011 may be read as an emphatic assertion precisely of the post-colonial quality of the relationship that has been the subject of this paper – a relationship marked not only by highly unequal means of those involved to make themselves heard, but also by highly unequal needs actually to listen. This can

be considered as a hegemonic relationship in the sense of quite differential possibilities of agenda setting. It remains to be seen to what measure recent events have aroused further awareness in Germany about the country's post-colonial dimensions and how existent and new actors both in Namibia and in Germany will be able to work together in possibly also changing this hegemonic relationship.