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Memorial politics: challenging the dominant party's narrative in Namibia *

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ABSTRACT

Greater international attention to human rights, particularly genocide, has offered activists opportunities to draw on transnational networks and norms. Many examples have been documented of the varying successes of domestic movement organisations employing international support. Much less attention has been paid to cases lacking significant organisations, but small groups and even individuals can draw attention to their demands if they effectively engage transnational interest. Genocide offers a particularly potent means of generating attention. Namibia is engaged in domestic debates over crimes committed by German forces over a century ago. In a country with no large opposition party and no significant social movement mobilisation, a number of relatively small groups of activists are indirectly challenging the power of the dominant party by correcting its one-sided narrative of the country's anti-colonial heroes. German efforts to respond to crimes committed in the past offer further opportunities for activists to draw attention to heroes and histories beyond those celebrated by the dominant party.

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INTRODUCTION

Greater attention to human rights since the end of the Cold War has unfortunately not stopped gross violations, but it has opened up new opportunities for activists to draw on transnational networks and norms, once violations have occurred (Keck & Sikkink 1998; Risse & Sikkink 1999). Many examples have been documented of the varying successes of domestic movement organisations reaching out for international support (Black 1999; Bob 2005; Hertel 2006; Klopp & Zuern 2007). Much less attention has been paid to cases lacking significant movement organisations, or dramatic successes such as the defeat of long-ruling governing parties. But small groups can draw attention to their demands and open up new opportunities for debate if they can effectively engage transnational interest. Genocide, even when it occurred in the distant past, offers a particularly potent means of generating attention.

In Namibia, the centenary of 'the 20th century's first genocide' offered activists new opportunities to challenge their government's narrative of the nation. In so doing, they were targeting a key component of the ruling party's popular appeal. Swapo, which has dominated all levels of government since independence in 1990, has employed its narrative of liberation and its central role in that narrative to encourage voter support and to diminish the contributions of other actors who fought earlier struggles against colonial rule. The challenge that activists present, though still small, is significant in a country in which no political party has been able to offer real electoral competition to the ruling party, and no social movement has threatened the great inequalities of political and economic power. As an indication of Swapo's dominance, these political contestations are playing out, not in parliament or the courts, but in the building of memorials and the holding of commemorations around the country. Though the actors driving these memorial commemorations are usually not politically or economically powerful, they have drawn attention to their demands through transnational interest in the crime of genocide.

The resulting memorial politics offers a window into both the dominance of the ruling party, and the ways in which some actors are finding indirect means to challenge its hegemony. This article focuses on the memorials and commemorations that have been employed by the governing party, Swapo, to support its power, and those drawing attention to genocide by commemorating Herero and Nama struggles against German colonial rule. Government commissioned sites include Heroes' Acre and the building of a new Independence Memorial Museum on

the site of a much-debated German colonial-era equestrian monument. Counter-narratives of the Namibian nation include memorials and commemorations in Okahandja in the centre of the country, Lüderitz in the south, and Swakopmund in the west. This is therefore not a comprehensive overview of Namibian memorials, but a discussion of key sites that are employed both to reinforce and challenge the country's stark inequalities by drawing on domestically and internationally resonant narratives of liberation and genocide.

MEMORIAL POLITICS

Memorials are sites of personal, cultural and political remembrance, offering stylised presentations of the past, highlighting and glorifying certain actors and actions while purposely forgetting others. They represent the power and perspective of those who build them, through both their physical and symbolic prominence, and the attention they receive from locals and tourists. They are strategic sites for the definition and mobilisation of communities, and therefore also for contentious claims over history. Memorials, and the ways in which they are honoured, adapted, contested, altered or even ignored (Simpson & Alwis 2008; Werbner 1998), provide clues to power relations among actors in a given society. Though they are just one component in the creation and recreation of national identity (Anderson 1983; Chaterjee 1993), they offer visual, concrete and seemingly permanent markers of the struggle to imagine the nation, its moments of greatest suffering and greatest triumphs. Because of the seeming permanence of many memorials, whether they are small gravestones or large monuments, they project their presentation of the past into the future. They tend to outlast the power of those who constructed them, leaving post-colonial or post-authoritarian states with the question of what to do with monuments honouring their former oppressors.

In Namibia, on 19 August 2009, the most prominent of the country's colonial monuments was moved. The infamous Reiterdenkmal, installed in 1912, stood on a grassy hill overlooking much of the capital city for almost a century. It bore witness to colonial rule in what was then German South-West Africa, to South African control under apartheid, and finally to independence for the state of Namibia. The Reiterdenkmal was a monument to the German colonial troops who fought indigenous resistance, and perpetrated genocide against the Herero and the Nama people, leading to the death of up to 80% of the Herero community (Gewald 2000: 22) and an estimated 50% of the Nama people

(Erichsen 2008). Standing next to the German colonial fort and on the site of a wartime concentration camp, it was erected by the colonial power as a symbol of the longevity of its rule. While the German forces in Namibia were defeated only a few years after the memorial was erected, the monument to colonial victory remained in place. Almost two decades after independence, it was moved as part of a state project to transform the memoryscape of the country's capital city.

Since independence, the Swapo-dominated government has created visible reminders of its liberation struggle victories and its power, from the renaming of streets to the building of sizable new memorials celebrating Swapo's victories. While the Swapo-led struggle for independence was dominated by Ovambo speakers from the northern sections of the country who were spared the brunt of earlier colonial violence, struggles against German rule were overwhelmingly fought by Herero and Nama speakers, living in the central and southern regions where the colonial forces and settlers were concentrated. While state-built monuments celebrate the Swapo-led struggle, a growing set of citizen-built memorials is attracting national and international attention and challenging the balance of power. Together, these memorials offer an insight into Namibian politics that is missed in an analysis of standard measures of political and economic power. Through the politics of memorialisation, dissent is encouraged, and some of the weaknesses of the ruling party become visible.

THE POST-INDEPENDENCE STATE NARRATIVE

The prevailing public narrative in Namibia is that offered by the ruling party. Swapo has not only dominated every post-independence local, regional and national election, but has also maintained a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly since 1994. It therefore has the power to unilaterally change the constitution (Hopwood 2007: 174). As a result, the party and the state are often difficult to distinguish, and state memorial events become party events. Economic power is a bit more complex, but here the state and the dominant party also play a powerful role. Of all the countries for which the UNDP (2007: 296–9) collects inequality data, Namibia stands out as the most unequal.[1] Past inequality was produced by black exclusion under colonial rule and apartheid. Today, economic inequality remains stark, as a small black elite from the ranks of the liberation movement has joined the wealthiest (formerly all white) decile, and the government has failed to institute programmes to reduce broader economic inequality (Melber 2007). Those with the

greatest economic resources in Namibia thus include the majority of the white population, a group that largely lacks political power, and a politically connected black elite.

Although many remnants of German colonialism still dot the Namibian countryside, the dominant current presentation of Namibian history is a Swapo-based narrative, in which Swapo is equated with liberation and support for Swapo with patriotism. The most striking example of this trend is Heroes' Acre, a socialist-realist national monument park built by a North Korean firm, located 15 kilometres south of central Windhoek.[2] Its design makes the visitor feel very small in comparison to the 36-metre high obelisk, meant to represent a sword, and the 8-metre tall Unknown Soldier standing in front of it. The uniformed soldier stands with a gun in one hand, ready to throw a grenade with the other. The fact that this freedom fighter resembles Sam Nujoma, leader of Swapo (1960–2007) and the country's first president (1990–2005), further underlines the dominance of Swapo-memorialism at the site (Figure 1).

Behind the obelisk is a bronze relief portraying the 'Namibian journey [history] to independence, from the awakening of the independence ideal and mass mobilisation of the armed liberation struggle and finally the achievement of independence' (NHCN undated). It too is dominated by depictions of Swapo's post-1966 military struggle. Reinhart Kössler (2007: 377) remarks: 'There the war and genocide of the early twentieth century cede importance to a liberation struggle, represented almost exclusively in military terms, thus referring to the experience and suffering mainly of people in the Northern regions of the country.' Swapo's contributions edge out the earlier struggles of people in the central and southern regions, and the focus on the bravery of Swapo's military wing, The People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), silences any discussion of its human rights violations.

The park is meant for grand public celebrations. It includes a seating area for 5,000 people, and a platform large enough for military parades. At the inauguration of Heroes' Acre in 2002, President Sam Nujoma (2002) began his address by noting that the planning and construction of the memorial had incited significant public debate, but quickly added that the 'genuine majority' supported it: 'It is well and good that the genuine majority of our patriots raised their voices in concurrence with the construction of the national monument in the broadest sense of that concept.' He continued: 'In the final analysis, it must be seen as one of those tangible expressions of our policy of national reconciliation, Statehood and unity as a nation.' Towards the end of his speech he

FIGURE 1
Unknown soldier – Heroes' Acre

stated: 'Historically, throughout the world nations and peoples recognise those who fought in defence of their country's freedom and national interest and not the cowards and collaborators who sided with their people's enemies. And that is precisely what we are doing here today.' This presentation demonstrates the stark limits to the government's understanding of national reconciliation. While Nujoma did acknowledge freedom fighters before Swapo, he largely equated the struggle for freedom with Swapo.[3] His successor, President Hifikepunye Pohamba (2005), has continued in a similar vein. On his first Heroes'

Day, a national holiday marking the first military battle between PLAN and the South African forces in north-west Namibia, his speech at Heroes' Acre also focused on the actions of Swapo's fighters.

As part of the dominant narrative, government representatives repeatedly warn of the dangers of delving into past injustices. Nahas Angula (quoted in Saul & Leys 2003: 341–2), then Swapo Minister of Education and Culture, argued that if investigations are to be opened they must not simply look at Swapo's actions. 'If you want to return to the past, fine . . . But we must know about the consequences of that. You will never stop anywhere. You will have to go all the way from the crimes committed from the Berlin Conference up to 21 March 1990. That you have to do if you are to be honest and do justice.' Interestingly, many German-speaking Namibians have offered a similar argument that it would be unjust to simply focus on one set of crimes. According to this argument, presented to the author in a number of informal conversations, if one wishes to consider the actions of the German colonial authorities, then one must also interrogate the violent acts indigenous groups committed against one another both during and prior to colonial rule. Both arguments seek to limit discussion, suggesting that if one cannot investigate all abuses, one has no right to investigate any. This contention, along with a political culture that discourages non-state actors from engaging in political processes (Melber 2003), has long thwarted attempts to pursue truth, justice, and reconciliation.

ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES

The state-built Heroes' Acre is billed as a 'place where all Namibians irrespective of their political, racial, ethnic or religious backgrounds should go' (Pohamba 2005), but few have chosen to do so. The National Heritage Council reported in 2006 that only 7,533 visitors had been to Heroes' Acre in an entire year. Entrance fees of N$64,188 (less than US$10,000) were collected, but this came nowhere near meeting the running costs of N$500,000 per year (*The Namibian* 19.10.2006). As the expansive Heroes' Acre stands largely empty,[4] Namibians in different parts of the country have created their own memorials and celebrate their own heroes' days.

There is a heroes' day observed by Nama-speaking communities to commemorate the death of Kaptein Hendrik Witbooi, who died in 1905 leading the first armed resistance to the colonial forces. Similarly, among Herero speakers today, numerous heroes' days celebrate the leaders who led the fight against the German forces. The Ovaherero

White Flag celebrations are held in October to honour the royal family of Wilhelm Zeraua from Omaruru. The Green Flag Ovambanderu hold celebrations in Okahandja in April and near Gobabis in August. The largest of these celebrations, organised by the Red Flag Ovaherero, honours the memory of Samuel Maharero and the Tjamuaha-Maharero royal family in Okahandja. While the state focuses its remembrance activities on recent history, these celebrations draw attention to the actions of indigenous forces fighting against German colonial rule culminating in the wars of 1904–8 and genocide. Since independence, calls to remember the genocide have become a political platform for Herero elites critical of the Swapo government (Gewald 2003).

Red Flag Day is the largest of the Herero commemorations. It occurs on the weekend closest to 26 August to mark the anniversary of Samuel Maharero's burial in Okahandja in 1923. This is also where the first shots in the German–Herero war were fired in January 1904. While the Herero initially had the advantage, the Germans received troop reinforcements from overseas. At the 11 August Battle of Ohamakari, Herero forces were defeated and dispersed. The German units then drove them into the Omaheke desert to the east where the majority of people and their cattle died. The German General Lothar von Trotha then issued the infamous genocide order: 'I, the great General of the German troops, send this letter to the Herero … The Herero people must leave the land … Within the German borders every Herero, with or without a gun, with or without cattle, will be shot. I will no longer accept women and children; I will drive them back to their people or I will let them be shot at' (quoted in Olusoga & Erichsen 2010: 149–50).

Moses Maharero told his family's story: 'At Waterberg, I was told, my great-grandfather, which is Samuel Maharero, and the whole group of the Otjihazembua clan fought very well … [although] they thought the war had finished … then an order was given, maybe from Windhoek, from the German side, for these people to come more into this place, into Waterberg and they fought … So, the whole sad story happened basically in Ohamakari' (quoted in Erichsen 2008: 52). At commemorative events such as Red Flag Day, this story and others are retold. The narratives present Herero leaders as courageous and strong in contrast to the brutal German troops. Though the history is one of great suffering, it is a story of small victories and ultimate survival, and a call for the unity of the Herero people. Goliath Kaune (2008 int.), a speaker at the 2008 Red Flag commemoration, argued that despite von Trotha's incredible use of violence, he was a failure. 'Von Trotha failed in his objective to decimate the Herero people.'

Samuel Maharero's struggle and those of many others, serve as a focal point for the reassertion of Herero identity and pride (Förster 2010). After the Battle of Ohamakari, Maharero and a group of his followers fled to the Bechuanaland Protectorate, today Botswana. Herero survivors, some men and many women and children, who remained within Namibia, were held in prison camps and forced to work as labourers for the German military and settlers. The camps were closed in 1908, but not until the South African invasion in 1915 were Herero speakers once again able to move about the country more freely and re-establish their own communities. Eight years later, Samuel Maharero's funeral provided a basis for the reassertion of Herero society and the re-establishment of Herero identity and traditions (Gewald 2000: 22–9).[5] In response to the devastating number of Herero deaths under German colonial rule, survivors worked through public festivals such as the Red Flag commemoration and privately to pass on their family and community histories. This strong sense of Herero identity has served as an example to other communities, who seek to bring their history to greater local and international attention. In Casper Erichsen's (2008: 48) oral history research among the Damara, Nama, San, Baster and Herero communities he found that 'unlike any other groups that took part in this research, the Herero/Mbanderu respondents were able to track the direct impact of the war on their own families, providing both the names of people who had died and the places where they died'.

2004 marked the centenary of the beginning of the Herero–German war. It thus became the focus of activities to draw greater attention to the colonial genocide, and demand reparations from the German state. As preparations began for a series of commemorations, the chairman of the national preparatory committee, Arnold Ranongouje Tjihuiko (*New Era* 25.7.2003), explained their importance: 'The activities will be more specifically focused on the genocide. Marches and demonstrations will be organized in August to sensitise the community on the event that took place … which culminated in the extermination of the Hereros.' These initiatives to commemorate the events of 1904 were all citizen, rather than state-led (Melber 2005: 106). Government leaders, in the words of one leading newspaper, 'snubbed' most of these events. The president offered no explanation for his failure to attend the opening observance in January (*The Namibian* 9.1.2004). Although Namibia issued a new postage stamp on Independence Day in 2004, it made no mention of any individuals or groups. It was, instead, presented as a celebration of national progress from colonialism to independence (*New Era* 5.12.2003).

The year's events culminated in the commemoration of the Battle of Ohamakari. Despite some tensions over the course of the year between competing preparatory committees,[6] both groups came together at this event. Members of the Red, Green and White Flags were present, as were Herero speakers from Botswana and South Africa. Chief Kuaima Riruako also included King Kauluma of Ndonga in northern Namibia, the chairperson of the Council of Traditional Leaders (Kössler 2007: 379). This helped to extend the event beyond the Herero community to assume a more inclusive nationalism. Despite the broad unity among Herero speakers and their inclusion of other traditional leaders to commemorate the centenary of their struggle, on Heroes' Day no government representatives attended the ceremony in Okahandja. They were instead in the north for the unveiling of a monument to the beginning of the armed struggle led by Swapo (Melber 2005: 107); this was a 38-year anniversary.

Despite their government's feigned indifference to these events, Herero activists used the centennial to draw attention to their demand for reparations from Germany. In 2001, Paramount Chief Riruako and others filed a claim in the United States courts (using the US Alien Torts Claims Act) against the German state and German corporations, seeking US$2 billion.[7] The Ovambo-dominated government did not initially support this claim, as it was concerned with its relationship with Germany, its largest donor, and the ways in which such vast resources paid to one relatively small group, Herero speakers, could alter domestic power relations. In the following years, particularly during the commemorative events of 2004 both in Namibia and Germany, reparations demands gathered increasing national and international attention. While the German government continued to deny these claims, in 2005 Minister Wieczorek-Zaul offered a 'reconciliation' package of development aid to Namibia totalling 20 million euros over ten years. As part of this initiative, the German government offered loans, infrastructural development, and enhanced education and skills transfers (*New Era* 24.8.2009). After much debate, this broad package was accepted by the Namibian state, but the National Assembly also voted to support continuing reparations claims (Kössler 2007: 381).

Speakers at the Annual Red Flag commemorations in the following years renewed their calls for reparations that had failed in American courts. In 2008, then Deputy Local and Regional Government Minister Kazenambo Kazenambo (author's notes, 24.8.2008), a Herero member of Swapo, surprised the audience and the assembled media by defining the demand for reparations as a 'tsunami' that could not be stopped.

'We call on the German government to read the mood – it is not the Herero community alone, they have been joined by the Nama people and how that tsunami could be stopped, I don't know.' He argued that 'reconciliation cannot happen on an empty stomach', but also made it clear that his comments were made in his personal capacity, not on behalf of government. Chief Riruako (*ibid.*), president of the opposition National Unity Democratic Organisation (NUDO), called for unity among the Herero people and all Namibians. He also stressed that the German special aid package for Namibia would not weaken the demand for reparations. The president of the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA, also in opposition), Katuutire Kaura, also participated in the commemorations, offering a narrative of Samuel Maharero's fight against the German forces and repatriation back to Namibia. Together, opposition politicians and Herero members of the ruling party challenged the status quo, demanding economic compensation and greater political attention to their claims.

In the southern part of the country, Nama activists, who have joined Herero leaders in their demand for reparations, have worked to develop another memorial site. Shark Island, just outside the centre of Lüderitz, was established as a prisoner of war camp by German forces in 1905. Figures from the German High Command show a death rate in camps across the country of just under 50%.[8] Shark Island, however, had an estimated death rate of 80% or more (Erichsen undated). The prisoners on the island were captured during both the Herero and Nama wars against the Germans. The Herero prisoners were brought from Windhoek and Okahandja to work as labourers on the railway line and were joined in early 1906 by members of Cornelius Fredericks, Hendrik Witbooi and Samuel Isaak's Nama guerilla fighting units. While Witbooi died in battle in 1905, Fredericks and Isaak were captured with their people. Isaak was one of the few survivors of the notorious camp. Fredericks died in the camp on 16 February 1907 (Erichsen 2005: Chapter 2; Silvester & Erichsen undated).

Willem Boois (quoted in Erichsen 2008: 26) told the history as told to him by his elders: 'Cornelius was taken there to Shark Island. It was not only the !Aman who were taken there. There were also Damaras, Hereros and maybe other people. These people were taken there for the purpose of revenge. Of course there were also preachers and other whites among these soldiers who bemoaned the situation. The people were destroyed there.' Almost one hundred years later, as a product of the efforts of members of the Nama community (Pastor Isaac Fredericks int.), a monument was erected to Captain Cornelius

Fredericks and the !ama community on Shark Island in 2002. This memorial stands on the edge of a stone patio. In the centre of the patio is a memorial to Adolf Lüderitz, the Bremen merchant after whom the town was named. Small white plaques arranged in a semi-circle around the patio commemorate the German troops who died in the area during the 1904–8 war, fighting guerilla units including those led by Captain Fredericks.[9] All these memorials sit on the grounds of the former concentration camp. While the Fredericks memorial is therefore just one of many, it is the first memorial the visitor passes and offers a clear counterpoint to those recognising Lüderitz and the Schutztruppen (Figure 2).

In 2007, a centennial commemoration was held in honour of Fredericks and the Nama heroes who died on Shark Island. The tee-shirts for the event read, 'May their souls rest in peace' and described the event as a 'National Genocide Commemoration'. Like the Herero celebrations, the commemoration of the victims of Shark Island has led to greater interest in the history of the !Ama community among the youth (Erichsen 2008: 28). The so-called 'skulls debate' has also drawn significant international attention to Shark Island. In the early twentieth century, the skulls of numerous Herero and Nama prisoners were taken to Germany in a fallacious attempt to demonstrate the superiority of white Europeans. In 2008, a German television documentary reported that forty-seven skulls had been found at two German universities. Reports suggested that one of the skulls might be that of Cornelius Fredericks.[10] At the 2008 Red Flag Day in Okahandja, numerous speakers mentioned the demand for the repatriation of the skulls, joining Herero and Nama claims. Esther Muinjangue, chairperson of the Ovaherero Genocide Committee, called upon Germany to return the skulls quickly so that they might be buried with dignity. Chief Maharero (*The Namibian* 25.8.2008) added to the call, emphasising: 'No lasting reconciliation is possible without meaningful dialogue, and we will continue to sensitise both governments of this unfinished business.' Herero Chief Riruako and Nama Chief David Fredericks petitioned the Namibian government to send a formal request to the German government to return the skulls (*The Namibian* 12.1.2009).

CONTESTED SITES

Since the end of colonial rule in Namibia, two important shifts have occurred in the memory landscape. First, the state has built new memorial sites that are employed to underline Swapo's role as liberator of the

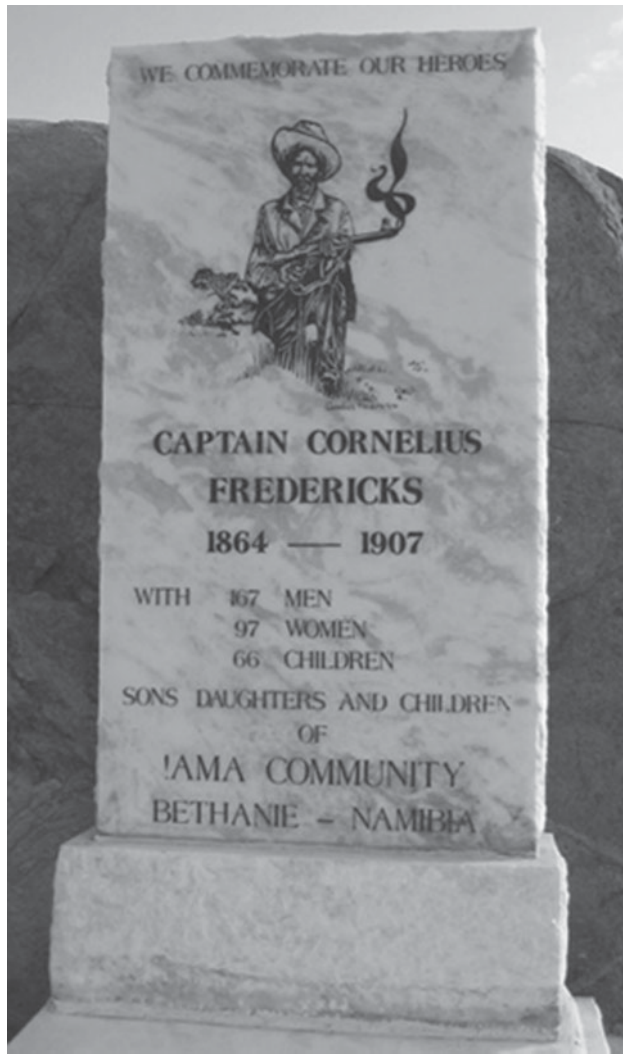

FIGURE 2
Fredericks memorial – Shark Island

nation, and therefore its position as the dominant party. These include Heroes Acre and the new Independence Memorial Museum, as well as numerous other sites around the country. These new monuments and museums have been built by the state while colonial era memorials are allowed to remain (Steinmetz & Hell 2006: 158). As German speakers remain the wealthiest ethnic group in Namibia and have maintained clear ties to Germany, Namibia's largest aid donor (Kaapama 2008), the

government has engaged them with caution. It has resisted any significant economic redistribution and did not tax commercial farms, the majority of which are still white-owned, until sixteen years after independence (Melber 2007: 116). While most German speakers remain outside formal politics and keep largely to themselves, a vocal segment of the German-speaking community accords great importance to its monuments and will go to significant lengths to protect them.

A second shift, which has received considerably less attention, has been the building of new citizen-initiated memorials to provide a more inclusive narrative of local histories. These include the monument to the !Ama who died on Shark Island, as well as alternative actions surrounding the Reiterdenkmal and a new memorial park constructed in Swakopmund. Herero, Nama and German-speaking activists have reimagined and recreated Namibia's memoryscape. In some cases they have effectively put their ideas into place and done so largely on their own terms. In this way, their narratives work to challenge the dominant Swapo narrative and activists are given new opportunities to make political claims. But the state has also worked to rein in counter-narratives. As will be demonstrated in the final section, the Namibian state has worked to subsume these narratives into its own, allowing it to take ownership of heroes it had long ignored.

Until the recent construction of the new Independence Memorial Museum, German colonial monuments dominated a prominent hill overlooking Windhoek. The Alte Feste, the fort used by the Germans, housed the National Museum. A plaque on the outside wall next to the entrance to the museum reads: 'The Alte Feste was built in 1890 ... as a stronghold to preserve peace and order between the rivalling Namas and Hereros.' While Nama and Herero units did fight, more than a bit of revisionist history is necessary to view the German colonial troops as selflessly acting to bring peace to a warring countryside. To the left of the Alte Feste stood, until August 2009, the Reiterdenkmal, a 'soldier's and war memorial' (Vogt 2008; Zeller 2008), celebrating the might of the German empire. Finally, only slightly down the hill stands the Christuskirche, built to commemorate the defeat of the Herero and Nama. Inside the church, the names of the German soldiers who died are listed on bronze plaques. All three, the Alte Feste, Reiterdenkmal and Christuskirche, offer clear reminders of German colonial rule and the defeat of Namibian resistance.

The German-speaking community in Namibia today is hardly unanimous in its arguments concerning colonial history. Given its origins, the Reiterdenkmal has served as a focus of debate. On one hand, a

number of German speakers organised the Reiterdenkmal initiative to add a plaque to the monument to honour 'all victims of military conflict since the colonisation of the country, as a gesture towards the newly achieved liberty that embraced all citizens of the country' (Melber 2005: 110). A small number of German speakers strongly opposed the addition of the plaque, while others challenged the wording; the requested change was eventually denied by the National Monuments Council. On the other hand, there is still active denial among a significant number of German speakers that genocide occurred. Prominent members of the community such as Heiner Schneider-Waterberg, an amateur historian who owns a large farm in the Waterberg, still draw large all-white audiences in arguing that the death of the overwhelming majority of Herero at the Waterberg was not genocide.[11]

As the government-planned move of the Reiterdenkmal drew closer, it was met with expected outrage expressed by some members of the German-speaking community. The German-language *Allgemeine Zeitung* (*AZ*)[12] ran a series of articles and pictures offering day-to-day updates, letters, and an appeal by the Namibian Deutscher Kulturrat (DKR, German Cultural Association), which eventually raised the funds to pay for the removal and storage of the memorial. But, already a year earlier, others had taken action. Fifty-one crosses were anonymously erected in the area around the memorial to draw attention to indigenous deaths. Others also raised their voices against the removal of the memorial. Herero member of Swapo, Kazenambo Kazenambo (*New Era* 23.6.2008), objected. He argued that the monument had symbolic value for those who fought against German colonialism: 'the horse is a reference point, a reference of colonial engagement and we wanted to take the horse and control it'. Katuutire Kaura (*The Namibian* 11.7.2008), the leader of the DTA whose ancestors were imprisoned by the Germans during the 1904–8 war, also called for the monument to remain at its post. Finally, NUDO president and Herero Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako (*AZ* 25.6.2008) argued that the horse should not be moved, so that all Germans would be pressed to remember what their ancestors had done in Namibia. All three men were central participants in the Red Flag Day celebrations, and support the call for reparations.

The newly created Swakopmund Memorial Cemetery Park similarly offered an opportunity for activists to demand political action, but also to create a more inclusive memorial space. The Swakopmund cemetery has long been an abrupt visual reminder of colonialism and apartheid. Christian whites including German and South African soldiers were buried in a well-maintained, green cemetery. The Jewish

dead were buried outside the original cemetery grounds in clear graves with headstones. Beyond the Jewish cemetery lay open desert, marked not by walls or other boundaries or, in most cases, headstones, but by small mounds visible to the careful observer. This is the African cemetery. Because the area was not marked, people were reusing graves, riding motorbikes and horses over the graves, and walking their dogs there. The municipality also sold plots to build homes on part of what had been cemetery grounds. Commenting on cemeteries in post-colonial India, Buettner (2006: 7) has argued that they act as a 'barometer' as to how the ex-colonised and ex-colonisers engage in the post-colonial era. In Swakopmund, this has been changing.

In response to the neglect and abuse of the African cemetery, which includes graves from the wars of 1904 to 1908 as well as victims from the camps in Swakopmund, two local residents initiated a project that would result in the Swakopmund Memorial Park. The first step was to build a wall around the entire cemetery to protect the graves and to create a single unified cemetery. The Municipality of Swakopmund supported the plan and issued a press release to encourage members of the public to offer proposals for the new park. The organisers stipulated that, unlike Heroes' Acre, the process of designing the park should be as open as possible, and that Namibian artists and craftspeople would do the work. In 2005 *The Namibian* (1.7.2005) ran an article under the title: 'Swakopmund's Memorial Park to be a symbol of reconciliation'. Erika Rusch (*ibid.*),[13] a resident of Swakopmund and the initiator of the project, argued: 'This is the only place in Namibia where two cemeteries can be joined into one park … It is important for reconciliation, as it would unite us as a whole.' (Figure 3)

In 2007, the Herero community unveiled a monument on the African side of the now unified cemetery to honour those who died in the German camps. The wording on the memorial, the size of a large gravestone, draws attention to 'concentration camps', but avoids a direct accusation against German forces by stating that those who died did so under 'mysterious circumstances'. Herero participants made two arguments to explain their choice of words. First, the history of the time has been obscured and the label 'mysterious circumstances' aptly captures this. Second, the builders sought reconciliation: 'the people tell different stories, you must bring all together for the way forward' (Kavaa 2008 int.).

Before the unveiling of the new memorial stone, members of the community and Herero-speakers from outside Swakopmund held the All Ovaherero/Ovambanderu Reparation Walk. Erika Rusch (2008 int.)

FIGURE 3
Ovaherero/Ovambanderu Memorial – Swakopmund Memorial Park

described the walk as a process of 'repairing' relations among the different communities in Namibia. The banner leading the procession read: 're-dedicating ourselves to our resolve that never again shall we be colonised and enslaved'. The walk was thereby framed by the 'never again' refrain of anti-genocide campaigns, but also included colonialism and slavery in the human rights violations that must be remembered. Other signs included 'apology + reparation = reconciliation' and 'never again shall we be enslaved'.

In the cases of the Reiterdenkmal and the Swakopmund Memorial Park, descendants of German settlers and some whose families suffered

under colonial rule agreed that the existing memorials should be preserved. To both the German speakers who sought to stop the Reiterdenkmal's move and the Herero speakers who voiced their opposition, the Reiterdenkmal stands as a clear symbol of power. Maintaining the memorial is a way to preserve memories of colonial era crimes. For most, it is no longer a symbol of colonial might, but rather offers a site for demands for reparations as well as questions concerning who has the right to white-owned land. Swakopmund's Memorial Park offers arguably the first broadly inclusive memorial site in Namibia. The project was initiated by German speakers, authorised and supported by the Swapo-dominated municipality, endorsed by the Herero-speaking community which has since held traditional ceremonies at the site, funded in part by the German embassy, and designed and built by Namibian artisans. The cemetery itself now includes graves both of those who died within the 'realm of their colonial masters', and of those who died trying to expand and protect the German colony.

THE POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MEMORIALS

Looking at Zimbabwe, Werbner (1998: 100) argued: 'The conflict between popular and state memorialization reaches to the very right of a citizen to have a recognized memory in public, to have the politically caused trauma and loss openly acknowledged.' Memorials offer the potential not only to begin processes of healing but also to affect broader power relations. This may seem a tall order in a country such as Namibia, where Swapo once again won roughly three quarters of the vote in the presidential and national assembly elections in late 2009 (ECN 2009). But voters in Namibia tend to vote for Swapo as the country's 'liberator from settler colonialism', rather than its ability to deliver services or address poverty and inequality (Melber 2009). This underlines the centrality of Swapo's narrative of liberation to its continued dominance of national politics.

In the last decade, non-state actors have created and expanded public memorials and alternative commemorations that stand in contrast to Swapo's narrative of history. Despite the Namibian government's reluctance to participate in ceremonies that offer alternative narratives, it did so for three significant commemorations: the centenary of the battle of Ohamakari, the inauguration of Swakopmund Memorial Park, and the return of skulls taken during German colonial rule. All three challenge Swapo's argument that it singularly led the anti-colonial struggle, and draw attention to German colonial-era crimes that

highlight the actions of Herero and Nama heroes, rather than the Ovambo-speakers who comprise Swapo's key constituency. While reparations from Germany are highly unlikely, even targeted aid programmes have the potential to divert resources away from the central state towards Herero and Nama communities. These factors lead the Namibian government to resist supporting events when it cannot control the messages they offer.

Despite this resistance, Namibian government representatives have attended a variety of events in response to a combination of internal and external pressures. In an age of expanding interest in human rights in general and genocide in particular, the historic genocides in Namibia have attracted significant transnational attention. Domestic memorial activists, including Chief Kuaima Riruako, Erika Rusch, Pastor Isaac Fredericks and many others, have worked to create events attended by a wide range of local notables, foreign dignitaries, and even foreign tourists. These local activists have drawn on concern for human rights and outrage at genocide by reaching out to German political leaders, from the Namibian ambassador to members of parliament (Bundestag) and ministers, in their quest for reconciliation and reparations. Namibian memorial activists seek international support, in the form of financial or other contributions, attendance and publicity, to raise the profile of their events. The German government, in its quest for reconciliation, has played a significant role in helping activists by funding some projects including the building of the Okakarara Community Cultural and Tourism Centre where the Ohamakari commemoration was held, and part of the Swakopmund Memorial Park. It then also sent government representatives to events held at these sites. While many of Namibia's memorial activists work to draw attention to past crimes, often to support their call for reparations, the German government has sought to present itself as addressing the past, without acknowledging genocide or offering reparations. Regardless of each party's motivations, once the German embassy agrees to send official representation to a memorial event, the Namibian government is pressured to do so as well. When Namibian government representatives then attend commemorations and speak at these events, they give support to the counter-narratives of liberation that the activists organising the events present.

While the Namibian government did not accept invitations to earlier commemorative events during the centenary of the Herero uprising and genocide, it did send a prominent representative to the 100-year commemoration of the battle of Ohamakari. Minister Pohamba, the

chosen successor to President Nujoma who assumed the presidency the following year, attended. His participation was necessitated by the German Minister for Economic Co-operation, Heidemare Wieczorek-Zeul, who travelled from Germany to speak at the event and inaugurate the German-financed cultural centre. At the commemoration, Wieczorek-Zeul surprised the audience by offering what turned out to be an unauthorised apology for the German genocide of the Nama and Herero people (*New Era* 23.8.2004). No less significantly, Pohamba then spoke of the importance of recognising this early history. Similarly, the inauguration of the Swakopmund Memorial Park in April 2010, funded in part by the Germany embassy, was attended by representatives of both the German and the Namibian governments.

After a German television programme drew renewed attention to the skulls taken from Shark Island and elsewhere in Namibia, the Swapo financed daily, *New Era* (31.8.2009), reported that 'Lüderitz's history has become a national priority, and all who know or have heard stories about what happened on Shark Island are requested to contact the committee [to share their stories]'. The Ministry of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture planned to oversee a project that includes restoring the gravesites in nearby Lüderitzbucht where Cornelius Fredericks is presumed to be buried. Government officials also suggested the island might become a World Heritage Site (*ibid.*), exceeding the expectations of Nama activists such as Pastor Isaac Fredericks (2008 int.).

As discussions regarding the return of the skulls began, initial plans were that the remains would be buried on Shark Island (*The Namibian* 13.8.2009). But, as Herero and Nama chiefs organised to raise their demands not only for repatriation but also reparations, the question of what to do with the skulls and how to return them to Namibia became increasingly politically charged. Debates included who should go to Germany to receive the skulls, what type of ceremonies should take place, who would attend these ceremonies both in Germany and Namibia, and finally how they would be received in Namibia and where they would be interred. Both the German and the Namibian governments worked to rein in the political demands attached to the return of the skulls. When the twenty skulls, eighteen of which were taken from Shark Island, were finally returned to Namibia on 5 October 2011, they came with a delegation led by now Minister of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture, Kazenambo Kazenambo, and Herero and Nama chiefs who had all travelled to Germany. They were received at the airport by the prime minister, viewed at Parliament Gardens,

memorialised at Heroes' Acre and are to be interred at the Independence Memorial Museum when construction is completed. In this way, what was initially envisioned by Nama activists as a return of Herero and Nama heroes to Shark Island became a return of Namibian heroes to the key sites of state power.[14]

At the ceremony marking their arrival, Prime Minister Nahas Angula accepted the skulls from Germany as the 'symbolic closure of a tragic chapter'. But the Ovaherero, Ovambanderu and Nama activists who returned the skulls clearly did not see this as a moment for closure. A member of the Nama technical committee argued: 'The crime is continuing today; it did not stop with 1908 … The ever-intensifying consequences remain with an impoverished nation on all levels and are leading to social and cultural disintegration. Thus the causes of the demand for reparations remain with us today' (*The Namibian* 5.10.2011). Similarly, the chief of the Royal House of Maharero, Alfons Kaihepavazandu Maharero, argued that the skulls provided strong evidence supporting the demand for restorative justice (*The Namibian* 6.10.2011). This is the heart of the debate, between Swapo leaders who wish to include the skulls as one small and early piece of Namibia's history of struggle against external oppression, and many Herero and Nama activists who believe the Herero and Nama people engaged not only in an anti-colonial struggle that led to genocide but actually began the liberation struggle. By understanding their actions as the beginning of national resistance, Herero and Nama activists see their communities, rather than Swapo, as leading the way, and argue that they thereby acquire a special status and deserve special compensation.

The return of the skulls highlighted the tensions over memorialisations and the political platform that they offer when government leaders attend. Both in Berlin and in Katatura (Windhoek's former black township), large discussions and ceremonies were organised by non-state actors. In Katatura, a church service was held in late September. Despite invitations to the president, prime minister, and various ministries, no Namibian government representatives attended (*The Namibian* 22.9.2011). In Berlin, an extensive panel discussion and church service similarly was not attended by any German government representative, despite invitations. These events provided key opportunities for activists not only to reiterate the history of genocide but also to make demands for reparations. Government representatives did not want to appear to sanction events whose overall message they could not control. The German government was clear that it sought to delink the return of the skulls from any discussion of a formal apology for genocide

or further demands for reparations.[15] The Namibian government sought to avoid supporting the claims of any Namibian group for special treatment, and clearly did not want any group to establish special relations with, let alone receive funds from, the German government.

The return of the first set of skulls raised tensions between the German and Namibian governments. This was demonstrated by German Ambassador Egon Kochanke's complaint that the Namibian delegation had a 'hidden agenda' (calls for reparations), and the ambassador's reported 'fallout' with President Pohamba (*The Namibian* 3.3.2012). Namibian Minister Kazenambo Kazenambo expressed his deep frustration after being questioned by a local journalist if the trip to return the skulls justified the expense of such a large delegation.[16] In early 2012, the director general for African Affairs in the German Foreign Office, Walter Lindner, travelled to Namibia in what he described as a 'goodwill gesture' to address some 'misunderstandings' between the two countries (*The Namibian* 6.2.2012). His meetings importantly included not just government ministers but also leaders of 'affected communities', and he promised to speed the pace of the so-called 'Special Initiative' projects funded by the German government targeting those communities most affected by German colonialism and genocide.[17]

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While the German government has continued to deny claims for reparation, it has had an unexpected impact upon Namibian politics by addressing some past crimes, such as at the centenary of the battle at Ohamakari and the return of the stolen skulls. It has provided a stage for the voice of communities long silenced by the Namibian government. This is crucial, because the alternative narratives of the Namibian nation that such communities offer still face stark competition. The Namibian government has continued to pursue its own plans to redefine the country's memoryscape. While many outspoken Namibians questioned the Reiterdenkmal move, the government stood firm because it was moving the statue to make room for its new Independence Museum. Critics raised the concern that the museum would continue to glorify the actions of Swapo and ignore the actions of others who resisted foreign oppression. One critic suggested that the government is seeking to 'wipe out our rightful place in the liberation history by erecting this museum on the very soil where our ancestors perished in concentration camps' (*The Namibian* 11.7.2008). While the government had promised to include all interested parties in the planning for the museum,

construction began without public consultation.[18] The Reiterdenkmal has, however, been returned to a spot about a hundred metres away from where it previously stood, thanks to the private 'Reiterdenkmal-initiative' which financed its relocation. The new site also overlooks the city. This is a small but significant victory for all, whether German, Herero, Nama or Ovambo speakers, who sought to preserve the memorial to remember the history it represents.

Clearly change in Namibia's memoryscape beyond the narratives offered by those with political and economic power will be a slow and halting process. But memorial activists have achieved some successes in creating a more diverse public presentation of the country's history. While this may be a small step, its potential significance is considerable. Namibia's new memorials and the state's recognition of these memorials open the door, if only a bit, for alternatives to the ruling party's once hegemonic narrative. They challenge attempts to silence those who lack political and economic power and offer the potential, however small, for some redistribution of power. The development of once marginalised voices is significant in and of itself, but is particularly so in a state where the dominant party's control is so overwhelming and draws upon its image as the singular force that liberated the Namibian nation.

NOTES

1. Due to differences in data collection, inequality scores are notoriously difficult to compare across countries and regions. UNDP 2007 cites an inequality ('in income or expenditure') score of 74.3 for Namibia. The next highest score is found in Lesotho with 63.2. Though Namibia's data were collected in 1993, there is no indication of declining inequality, and some trends suggest that it has actually increased (Melber 2007).

2. This socialist-realist memorial architecture is also found in Zimbabwe at that country's Heroes' Acre in Harare (Werbner 1998). This has led analysts to suggest a parallel between not only state monuments in these two countries but also the exclusion of other narratives. While the tendency to memorialise Swapo's struggle as well as that of Zanu-PF, and the refusal to address atrocities committed by both liberation movements, are worrying, this does not suggest that Namibia will follow the broader political trajectory of Zimbabwe. In both Mali and Senegal, the governments commissioned the creation of new monuments in socialist-realist style built by North Koreans (De Jorio 2006; *Wall Street Journal* 28.1.2010).

3. Commenting on Sam Nujoma's autobiography, *Where Others Wavered*, Saul & Leys (2003: 351) argue: 'This book is a true measure of the moral obtuseness that has become part and parcel of the Swapo project – an ironic index of the extent to which, over long years of struggle, the cruelty and callousness of the apartheid masters also entered into the souls of those who spent much of their lives fighting apartheid. The book can fairly be said to have raised the practice of "forgetting history" in Namibia to a new level.'

4. The site was empty when a reporter visited on Cassinga Day, a national holiday to remember those killed in the largest massacre of refugees in exile during the struggle (*The Namibian* 6.5.2005). It was also empty when the author visited on 10.1.2008. There were no brochures explaining the site, so the guards at the gate shared their only photocopy, which they had been using as scrap paper.

5. As the chiefs lead the procession on Red Flag Day, they stop to call upon their ancestors and honour not only their graves, but also those of their fallen foes, members of the German

Schutztruppen. In August 2008, for example, Chief Riarko stopped at the grave of Cuno von Bötticher, a lieutenant in the Schutztruppen who died in Okahandja in August 1904. He began by stating, 'We've been through a lot together', and called upon the deceased to talk to his people back in Germany to help bring about reconciliation.

6. The National Preparatory Committee for the Commemoration 2004, often called the Bishop's Committee, included Bishop Zephania Kameeta and Bishop Reinhard Keding among its leaders. The Genocide Commemoration Committee was authorised by the Herero Senate and led by Paramount Chief Kaima Riruako.

7. The reparations claim failed in a lower court and in 2004 the US Supreme Court declined to consider the case.

8. Among an estimated 17,000 prisoners across the country, the German High Command reported 7,682 deaths, just under half the total (Erichsen undated). This report probably underestimated the number of deaths.

9. Pastor Isaac Fredericks (int.), who played a leading role in erecting the tombstone on Shark Island, noted that he did not meet any concerted resistance to his efforts. But he expected his new project to rename the town of Lüderitz, as well as the street that leads to Shark Island, to generate considerable debate. He would like both to be named after Cornelius Fredericks.

10. It is unclear whether or not this is true. Researchers at UNAM found some indication that this might be the case but could not confirm it. Once the claim that one of the skulls might be that of Cornelius Fredericks was printed in the local newspaper, it was commonly asserted as a fact (Silvester int.).

11. Schneider-Waterberg gave a talk at the Swakopmund Museum on 8 January 2008, entitled 'Gedanken zum Herero Krieg und der sogenannten Schlacht am Waterberg' ('Thoughts on the Herero War and the so-called slaughter on the Waterberg'). He notes that to argue that this was a genocide suggests that the Germans were all-powerful while the Herero were helpless victims, both of which he argues are untrue (2008 int.). While this latter part of the argument is important, it suggests a needed revision in some accounts of the genocide, rather than any refutation of the fact that the Germans did engage in genocide. Two days later Dr Werner Wienecke presented his more critical talk 'Christliche Mission – Wegbereiter des Kolonialismus?' ('Christian missionaries – pathfinders for colonialism?'). Audience members suggested that Namibia would be worse off had it not been for German colonialism.

12. The fact that the articles are only published in German clearly restricts the paper's readership. One might guess that at least some contributors might have modified their arguments had they been published in English and thereby potentially read by a far wider Namibian audience. At the centenary in 2008 of the Marine memorial, also a memorial to German fighters, Eckhart Müller, head of the DKR, a German cultural organisation in Namibia, spoke in both English and German. His comments in English noted the importance of the memorial but were designed not to offend any of the participants who included Swapo local government office-bearers. His comments in German, in contrast, questioned the government's plan in moving the Reiterdenkmal, lamented the fact that some historic German buildings had been razed by the post-independence government, and called for all memorials across the country to remain in their place. His concluding comments in English, once again, returned to more inclusive statements.

13. Erika Rusch (2008 int.) was not formerly politically active. She came to play a significant role in this park, driven by her concern that a cemetery should not be so neglected or graves so disrespected, and argued that it was necessary to present a more inclusive history than the one that she had initially been taught.

14. Others hoped the skulls might be buried in Swakopmund's Memorial Cemetery Park (Kandetu 2011).

15. In 2011, the German party Die Linke used the skulls debate as a basis to raise twenty-three questions in the German Bundestag. Drawing on Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul's apology in Namibia in 2004, the party representative asked if the German government thereby accepted responsibility for the genocide. He then used this as a platform to press for reparations (*AZ* 13.6.2011).

16. In early 2012, Kazenambo lashed out at another journalist for suggesting he acted as more of a Herero than a government minister regarding the skulls issue. Kazenambo responded by accusing the journalist of being part of an 'Ovambo conspiracy', illustrating the domestic tensions surrounding the entire debate (*The Namibian* 3.2.2012).

17. As preparations were made for the return of more skulls, some German-speaking Namibians found an opportunity to celebrate colonialism at the centenary of the Reiterdenkmal, and other

Namibians raised demands not only for reparations but also land redistribution away from the descendants of German settlers.

18. The new Independence Museum is being built after another post-colonial museum project has stalled. In 2004, a Military Museum was built in Okahandja, also reportedly by a North Korean firm. It includes a larger-than-life mural of Swapo leader and the country's first president, Sam Nujoma (*The Namibian* 20.3.2008). By late 2011, the museum still had not been opened to the public.

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