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Genocide, Apology and Reparation – the linkage between images of the past in Namibia and Germany

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The relationship between Namibia and Germany is a special one – not just by a resolution of the Bundestag saying so upon Namibia's independence in 1990, but on account of a number of linkages, both historic and current. In the following I would like to explore some of the ways how this connection finds expression in the frequently controversial ways of negotiating a past that on account of sometimes acrimonious exchanges, does not appear quite as bygone as up to 100 years might suggest that have elapsed since some of the key events people still refer to took place. Rather, it is my key thesis here that discourses and debates around the past in both countries mutually function as it were as sounding boards, throwing back and forth impulses and themes. In a way, this may be considered as a specific case of an 'entangled history' (cf. Randeria 2002, 2006), relating social actors and public discourses within both the former colony and the former colonial power in an intricate web of repeated, and ongoing interaction. In Namibia, the concerns voiced in this context remain pressing for many groups even today. From a German perspective, on the other hand, this is of particular relevance, because the country today is largely lacking a postcolonial presence that might impact on the public mind.

To substantiate this thesis, I shall first briefly recall the main relevant events and developments, while stressing their *discursive* importance both in Germany and in (much of) Namibia (1). This will be followed by a look at relevant memorial practices to be found more in Namibia than in Germany (2), giving the direct backdrop to current controversies and memory activities, centring around the issue of genocide committed by the German *Schutztruppe* in Namibia in 1904-08. For an understanding of the existing interrelationship, I shall further explore what to many seemed as a turning point, namely the apology for the genocide offered by a German Cabinet minister in 2004 and its consequences (3), and then look at ways the issue of colonialism has been dealt with recently in Germany, again in connection with discursive developments in and around Namibia (4). In closing I wish to give an account of the current situation regarding remembrance and reparation.

1. The point of reference: From public genocide to colonial amnesia

Within the fragmented mnemoscape of present-day Namibia one can discern certain key events, personages, dates and periods that form vital points of reference for various regions and communities (see Kössler 2007). Quite clearly the central date of reference in southern and central Namibia, is formed by the colonial wars of 1904-08. This is not by accident: The war occasioned sweeping changes in the power relations and in the socio-economic set-up of this region, more or less co-extensive with the 'Police Zone', the area of effective colonial occupation during German rule in the country. Even though the figures of casualties among African groups are still being contested in some quarters (see below), not only the carnage as such, but also the systematic repression that followed, and above all the wholesale expropriations of most African communities in the region caused sweeping changes. Indeed, in terms of the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, not only 'killing members of the group' but also 'deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part'[1] falls under the definition of genocide. In the Namibian case, this perspective dislodges much of the arguments about body counts and victim numbers fielded against the idea that the German military committed genocide during the last months of 1904, by sealing off the *sandveld* to prevent fugitive Ovaherero from returning from the waterless Omaheke steppe, and by its warfare against Nama groups during the following years, and in particular, by its policy of

[1] http://www.preventgenocide.org/law/convention/text.htm, Art. II, (a) and (c) (6.6.07); see, with specific reference to Namibia, also Krüger 1999: 67-68.

confining whole ethnic groups, after surrender, to concentration camps under conditions that proved fatal to a majority of inmates, while many were subjected to forced labour (Krüger 1999: 126-137; Zeller 2003; Erichsen 2005). Further, the Native Ordinances of 1907 decreed the wholesale expropriation of all Ovaherero and most Nama groups in the region. Expropriation of land was complemented with a ban on the possession of large stock, a rigorous pass system. In this way, the indigenes in the Police Zone were stripped of any means of independent existence outside *forced* wage labour. The ordinances also stipulated restrictions for more than three Africans meeting in the open, and introduced tight ceilings for the numbers living in African settlements. All this, in the case of Ovaherero not least the ban on large stock, impacted not only on the material but also on the symbolic level to foreclose efforts at resuming communal life, let alone reconstruct communal institutions. Over and above systematic mass murder, this particularly violent form of detribalisation therefore must be related to the concept of genocide contained in the Convention. By these means, the basis was laid for white settlement on African land now declared crown land and for the consummation of a colonial 'society of privilege' (Zimmerer 2001: 94, *passim*).

The consequences are still readily evident in central and southern Namibia today: a countryside almost devoid of visible settlements, ordered into neatly fenced in farms. The apparent emptiness is due not only to an arid climate, but to a radical reorganising of the spatial and socio-economic orders on the basis of genocide which, at the same time, laid the groundwork to a societal set-up that, some forty years later, was to evolve into apartheid.
From this perspective, the preoccupation with numbers in much of the recent debate, centring in particular on the consequences (or not) of General von Trotha's infamous 'extermination proclamation' (cf. Lau 1995b: 43-46; on which Hillebrecht 2007: 80-84) actually is beside the point. Regardless of the extent and exact proportion of the large-scale loss of lives during the war and as a direct consequence of a ruthless military strategy, genocide was also perpetrated in the sense that the great majority of ethnic groups living in the region that became the Police Zone were stripped of any means of carrying forth their communal lives and thus their possibilities of survival as independent polities or even distinct social nexuses were effectively foreclosed. Moreover, native policy in German South West Africa was marked by a 'basic continuity' (cf. Zimmerer 2001: 6), spanning the war period and pursuing strategic objectives defined prior to 1904. It is therefore extremely hard to deny, in the Namibian case, the intentionality which forms a central feature within the prevailing notion of genocide (cf. Kiernan & Gellately 2003).

However, it was not this more or less structural feature that caught the public eye in Germany, but quite explicitly the war itself and the extermination of those who had occupied the land before the arrival. As a recent study notes, the debate in the press was marked, early-on, by 'utmost openness and brutality' (Sobich 2006: 101). In a lavishly styled two-volume publication, the General Staff revelled in the exploits of the German troops, closing with the words that due to General von Trotha's measures, 'the waterless Omaheke was to consummate what had been initiated by German arms, the annihilation of the Herero people' (Kriegsgesch. Abt. 1906: 207). The publication recorded also von Trotha's proclamation bluntly warning the Nama to surrender or meet the same fate as the Ovaherero (see Kriegsgesch. Abt. 1907: 186). Again, the sense of this strategy, not in humanistic but in clearly utilitarian terms was openly debated, with Paul Rohrbach, the settlement commissioner in German South West Africa and a prominent liberal proponent of colonialism, noted with dismay the 'unhappy principle of "annihilation"' inherent in the conduct of the war (Rohrbach 1909: 177) and bemoaned this strategy, 'indulg(ing) in the luxury first to mete out the punishment of dying from thirst to so many thousands natives, because once their tribal independence and their old property rights disposed of, economic life was in need of them as labour power' (Rohrbach 1907: 261). Thus, besides underscoring the

mass killings that had taken place, Rohrbach also took the destruction of communal life as an established, and salubrious, fact. Elsewhere, he noted the chances for settlement in southern Namibia, once a clean slate had been made of the tribal property which the 'Hottentots' had 'forfeited by their present rebellion' (Rohrbach 1909: 206).

Of course, debate about what happened in the African colonies was also subject to more formal political controversy, in particular pitting the (potential) majority parties in the *Reichstag*, the Social Democrats and the Centre Party representing Catholic petty bourgeoisie and workers, against the colonial excesses, if not against colonialism as such. In particular August Bebel, the patriarch and parliamentary leader of Social Democracy, immediately when the war had begun, dubbed the struggle of the Ovaherero as a 'fight in despair', precisely on account of their loss of 'their former independence and freedom', and he likened this struggle to that of Arminius, styled at the time as a German national hero for his victory over the Romans in 9 AD. Referring to the execution of Ovaherero leaders he exclaimed: 'But this is the world turned upside down. In truth, the Herero defend the country which has been theirs for centuries, which they view as their heritage given to them by the Gods, and which they are obliged to defend by employing all means at their disposal.' (Bebel 1904: 581, 584). Roughly a year later, Bebel castigated von Trotha's conduct of the war likening it to that of a 'any butcher's henchman' and a 'barbarous kind of war making', unfit to lay claim to civilisation (Bebel 1905: 697). The parliamentary conflict came to a head when in late 1906, the Imperial government used a procedural issue to resolve the *Reichstag* claiming the majority had unpatriotically withheld the funds from the soldiers fighting for the fatherland in South West Africa. The tactics of snap elections, along with a reshuffle of German parliamentary politics was successful, reducing the number of Social Democratic deputies and forging a new broad alliance supporting the government of Count Bülow (cf. Crothers 1941). This success was predicated, besides using features of the electoral system, on an unprecedented mobilisation of right wing civil society organisations (cf. Wehler 1995: 1079-80; Nipperdey 1998: 601; Sobich 2004; 2006). Still, Social Democrats also retorted by electoral propaganda strongly critical of the war and its conduct (cf. Short 2004).

From the vantage point of today this demonstrates that the war and the genocide that were taking place in Namibia were in the centre of the public eye in early 20th century Germany. In contradistinction to other 20th century genocides, including the holocaust, not only were no efforts made to hide what was happening, but these crimes and atrocities were even paraded almost as glorious exploits. Nor was this an ephemeral matter. From the beginning, a stream of literary treatments of various forms and calibres was coming forward, ranging from accounts of active soldiers or farmers wives to the works of renowned novelists, such as Gustav Frenssen, whose *Peter Moors Fahrt nach Südwest* was translated in several languages and in Germany became not only a popular reading for youth, but a set work at schools as well (cf. Pakendorf 1987: 176). Set as the story of a young German marine participating in the war, the book conveys in particular the Manichaean view of the black brute bordering the animal on the one side, and the cultured and literate German; at the same time, Frenssen propagates the right to take the land away from Africans (and indigenes in general), to put it to use for European settlement, thus aggressively formulating the rationale of settler genocide (cf. Brehl 2007: 185-190). The calibre of this book is underlined by the circumstance that lengthy quotations from it were used in the South African Blue Book as proof that Germany was unfit to be a colonising power (cf. Silvester & Gewald 2003: 111-114). If that was methodologically unsound, it is still remarkable that for generations, German school children were taught from a text that recounted and glorified atrocities which in the eyes of others, could back up a very serious indictment. In this way, this episode underlines the ways genocidal violence was communicated at that time in Germany on a mass scale, contributing towards race framing (cf. Grosse 2005) and towards banalising the application of brute force

against the racialised other and thus laying the ground for considering this as legitimate behaviour.

Thus, along images of strenuous pioneers, the image of Namibia in the German public mind therefore was shaped largely by the war and the aggressive ways it was communicated as a heroic feat – after all the last military victory in war German nationalists could boast of, also after defeat in World War I and the loss of the colonies which in these quarters was seen as a further humiliation of a deceived and betrayed nation. Arguably, therefore, colonial ideology was more widespread after Germany had become 'a postcolonial nation in a still-colonial world' (Klotz 2005: 141) than it had been during actual colonial occupation in Africa, East Asia and the Pacific (cf. Pogge von Strandmann 2002).

In a recent intervention, the resultant situation has been characterised as one of 'phantom pain' – suffering for lost 'new German soil' (*neudeutsche Erd'*) and motivating an attitude of colonialism without colonies (Kreutzer 2007: 179). This approach was significant for the policy of the Weimar Republic in particular in relation to Namibia where the *Reich* tried to safeguard the ethnic identity of the remaining German settlers (cf. Eberhardt 2007: 99-151), and in particular during the 1930s with a strong Nazi organisation taking root amongst this group, complete with phantasies of more or less imminent return to German rule (cf. ib.: 243-399). Subsequently, phantom pain gave way in (West) Germany to a kind of 'relief' not to be implicated any more into the conflicts around independence and decolonisation, and to a delusion not to have to deal with the reality of a postcolonial past, also in the present (cf. Kreutzer 2007: 179). This is borne out also by the circumstance that even the West German solidarity movement, when it took up the issues of apartheid and persistent colonialism during the 1970s and 1980s did not make much of the issue of Germany's colonial past or even the fact that one of the southern African liberation movements was fighting, in Namibia, within the context of a former German colony; issues such as West Germany's involvement in NATO and complicity with the Portuguese wars in Africa, and with the apartheid regime in South Africa seemed much more pressing and important at that time (cf. Kössler & Melber 2006: 105, 112-3, 116-7). In this way, colonial amnesia was pervasive in post- World War II Germany, even though events and conflicts in former German colonies, including the liberation struggle in Namibia, were certainly perceived in some quarters. They did kindle controversy and also support and solidarity action. Yet within this context, the specific, objectively post-colonial situation played only a marginal role. Criticism was directed rather against the policy of the West German government to continue its support for German language schools in Namibia as well as maintaining, up to 1977, a consulate in Windhoek, regardless of the illegal occupation by South Africa (cf. Hubrich & Melber 1977: 216-8; Bassmann 1987; Brenke 1989: 117, 119-25). Still, there were forays into the problems of memory politics, such as attempts to change war memorials relating to the genocidal war in Namibia (cf. Zeller 2000: 218), or colonial street names referring to personages such as Adolf Lüderitz (cf. Litzba 1982) or Carl Peters.[2] Even where allusions to a 'shared history' were present, the latter case was debated much more in terms of the immediate struggles in the present than in terms of the mediated presence of the struggles of the past (cf. Round Table 1982). Those who vehemently supported the apartheid regime's occupation of Namibia and its plans for unilateral independence, pointed much more to the danger of a supposed Soviet takeover than rehearsing the colonial past (see the documentation in Melber 1984: 149-78). Again, such attitudes did not preclude active relations between a German city like Bremen and German speaking associations in Namibia which applied for, and in most cases secured, financial support (cf. Müller 1982:146-8).

[2] cf. http://www.koloniale-spuren.de/

The situation was and remains quite different in Namibia. Here, the experience and memory of German colonialism cannot be marginalised, and for a sizable array of groups, the wars of 1904-08 still form a central reference for collective identity. Significantly, this applies for the posterity both of the colonised and the colonisers, albeit in clearly differential ways.

2. Practices of memorialisation

A whole range of memoralisation practices, in particular in the form of annual celebrations or festivals, take their cue from key events of that period, such as the battle of Ohamakari/Waterberg on 11 August 1904, or the day *Kaptein* Hendrik Witbooi was killed in action on 29 October 1905; the anniversary of the burial of Samuel Maharero, who had been Herero Paramount Chief at the time of the war and died in exile in present-day Botswana, on 25 August 1923 also refers to the war and its aftermath, certainly including the resilience of Ovaherero communities that found its clearest early expression on that occasion. While the most well known of these recurrent events go back several decennia, other communities have meanwhile taken up this impressive way of rehearsing the past, voicing current grievances and aspirations while at the same time, reproducing their own social nexus or in other words, enacting a 'ceremonial renewal of the people'.[3]

This becomes quite clear in the case of the commemoration of the national hero, Hendrik Witbooi, at the anniversary of his death after being wounded fighting the German colonial troops in 1905. The entire festival is spread over three days[4] and comprises an entire pageant of different components, including church service and in independent Namibia, also performances by army detachments. One vital feature is conveying views on history, by public readings but above all by enactment of horsemen's engagements, representing also German soldiers besides Witbooi fighters. The dimension of national goals and unity is articulated in the designation as 'Heroes Day' instead of *Witbooi fees* since 1980, and in features of reconciliation such as, in 1995, a German speaking Deputy Minister as the keynote speaker, or the performance of Nama songs by a predominantly white secondary school choir. In this way, the occasion is clearly marked yet also transcended, not least to voice concerns of the community's leadership such as problems connected with land reform and the restitution of communal land.

In the probably best known case, Herero Day in Okahandja, the 'visit to the ancestors', in the form of a colourful parade of *oturupa* ('Truppenspielers') along the graves of chiefs and other important personages in the erstwhile 'white' part of the town, serves as a means not only of commemoration, but also of asserting the rightful claim to these sites, against the backdrop of a prolonged struggle with the municipality around the preservation of and access to the graves during the 1920s (cf. further, Krüger 1999: 274-282). A historic site as literally contested terrain is even more in evidence in the Waterberg region, even though the precise spatial focus of commemorating the historic battle diverges, with the 'German' reading geared to the war cemetery at the foot of the majestic plateau, while Ovaherero refer rather to the fountain of Ohamakari, which is situated at present on a private farm owned by a German speaker (cf. Förster 2004: 168-70).

[3] Krüger 1999: 216. The following relates to ongoing research in the context of the project 'Reconciliation and Social Conflict in the Aftermath of large-scale Violence in Southern Africa: the cases of Angola and Namibia', which forms part of the VW Founation's Funding Initiative 'Knowledge for Tomorrow' and is conducted at the Arnold Bergstraesser Institut, Freiburg i.B. Previous work on some of the events mentioned includes, i.a., du Pisani 1976a, 1976b: 42-53; Gewald 2003; Kössler 2003, 2006a: 247-54: Krüger 1999: ch. 5.

[4] The festival was not observed in 2006.

In its original form, the German war cemetery underscored the eternal claim to the colony, with a central tablet stating, 'Where a German man, fallen in faithful fulfilment of his duty to his fatherland lies buried, and where the German eagle has thrown his claws into – that land is German and shall remain German' (qu. Förster 2003: 211). While this tablet had been removed after the South African occupation of the country in 1915, the implied meaning of the site did not change in substance. This emerges clearly from the commemorative practice that was resumed after World War II, to be sure no longer with swastika banners as in the 1930s, but still brandishing the black-white-and-red colours of imperial Germany, with paramilitary boy scout detachments playing a prominent part (cf. Förster 2003: 210; 2004: 170), much as they had done at functions during the 1930s (cf. Eberhardt 2007: 294f).

Semantic shifts from 'heroes cemetery' and 'victory celebration' to 'honouring the fallen soldiers' and 'commemorating the dead', were harbingers of attempts to open up, with the creation in the 1960s of nine fictitious graves and a tablet commemorating the 'faithful kaffir soldiers'. From 1978, Herero Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako was invited to attend (Förster 2003: 210-1). Again, this was revised in 1984, when a placard honouring 'Herero warriors' was affixed to the cemetery wall by a 'Comeradeship (*Kameradschaft*) of old soldiers and shortly later, the 'native graves' were removed (Schmidt-Lauber 1998: 276), the inclusion of Ovaherero also in the commemoration ceremony being mainly motivated by the current 'anti-SWAPO coalition' (Rüdiger 1993: 35). The commemoration itself did not change in its basic content, including boy scout detachments and imperial flags (cf. Förster 2003: 213; 2004: 170). Regardless of the claim to honour the *Schutztruppe* soldiers by the flag under which they fought (qu. by Rüdiger 1993: 34), in the semantic order of German politics these colours generally mark a basic refutation of republican Germany in favour of authoritarian, monarchist and revisionist and even (Neo-)Nazi sentiments.

This ties in with more general observations on the image of present-day (West-)Germany among *Südwesters* who, as far as they take a public stance may be termed, in their majority, as 'backward looking' (Rüdiger/Weiland 1992: 348) not only regarding widespread insistence on the salutary role of colonialism, but also the complaint about alleged Western decay in Germany itself. When in August 2003, President Sam Nujoma decreed the end of these activities, this was not merely a move against a group of unreformed and unrepentant adherents of colonial nostalgia. In linking these backward looking activities to the land issue and by invoking the struggle of 'our forefathers' when particularly the Herero-German and Nama-German wars had involved the northern communities in Namibia marginally if at all (cf. Schaller 2003), Nujoma allowed a glimpse on his own agenda which appeared, in the last analysis rather particularistic, ignoring the specific situation the genocide had created in central and southern Namibia (cf. Melber 2005d: 112-3). This attests to both to the intricacy of Namibian memory problems and to the fact that the 'past', even though seemingly 100 years distant, is in fact of very current relevance in the country. Inevitably this also implies the past is put to political use by political parties as well as by claimants of various persuasions and legitimacies.

3. The Namibian connection in denialism

It is here in particular where remembrance in connection with the Waterberg appears to function as something like a sounding board of sentiments going back and forth between specific groups in Germany and specific groups among German speaking Namibians. Förster (2004: 168-170) found strong sentiments about the exploits of German soldiers in 1904 among German tourists visiting the region and the battlefield. Here, they were particularly keen to savour the supposedly authentic atmosphere and if possible, to pick up the odd ammunition shell from the ground. This conveys the impression of a hardly reflected

enthusiasm for the military, but potentially, nostalgia for imperial glory. The latter, along with the mythical memory of the exertion of the settler pioneers, forms the core of what has been considered as the ideology of *Südwester* nationalism (cf. Rüdiger 1993: 14, 23, 35).

Another dimension of this attitude, which apart from the claim to a separate identity as *Südwester* still largely overlaps with an ideological stance that may broadly be considered as 'German nationalist' (*deutschnational*), bordering on Nazism, is the tendency to 'relativise, play down and embellish historical events' (Schmidt-Lauber 1998: 274). Such tendencies came to the fore when in 1987, 'ethnically conscious (*volksbewußte*) Germans' advertised in the daily *Allgemeine Zeitung* to honour Hitler's deputy Rudolf Hess as the 'last representative of a better Germany', or when two years later, a rather liberal minded weekly trivialised the production of swastika adorned buns and the celebration of Hitler's 100th birthday as mere foolishness and detrimental to the tourist industry (ib.: 280, 279). Such attitudes are by no means a thing of the past. On occasion of the death of Simon Wiesenthal, the bi-lingual (English & German) weekly *PLUS*, distributed free of charge in supermarkets and the like, carried an advertisement slandering Wiesenthal as an 'eyesore of humanity'.[5]

To be sure, this time there was an immediate outcry, not only by the German ambassador, writing in the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, but also from the editors of this medium of central importance to German speakers in Namibia, as well as from the majority of writers of letters to the editor. However, the editor of the weekly, a former editor of *Allgemeine Zeitung*, apologised in a rather ambidextrous fashion, much along accustomed ways, as though a practical joke had gone somewhat astray, and musing that to deny to Hitler or Saddam Hussein the 'right to live', was just as bad as to deny it to Wiesenthal (*PLUS*, 2.10.2005). Exactly this kind of attitude was then taken up on right-wing websites from Germany who openly reproached the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, obviously for having deviated from upright national sentiment and bemoaned Feddersen's 'moral weakness' for having acceded at all to an apology. The article went on to ironically challenge the ambassador to 'champion German interest the same way as he does Jewish interest' and to doubt such a perspective on the grounds of the recent 'increase of development aid for Namibia in terms of indemnity for the putting down of the Herero rising 1904.'[6]

In this way, the episode – apart from its unpalatable dressing and content – underscores two decisive points I want to make in this paper: (1) a constant interplay between broadly like-minded circles in Namibia and in Germany, and (2) a very ready reference to the genocide of 1904-08 as a persistent central topic, both of colonial history in Namibia *and* for memory of a colonial past, as far as such memory exists, in Germany. For German speaking Namibians, the 'battle at the Waterberg' is an object of 'multifarious engagement', typically directed to counteract the notion of 'German war-related guilt' (Schmidt-Lauber 1998: 273). Besides mustering a plethora of detailed information about troop movements, weaponry and geographical features of the region (cf. Schneider-Waterberg 2005: 159-161), the thrust of this interest comes to the fore in particular by the way any clue for a 'scientific' refutation of the designation of the *Schutztruppe's* conduct of the war as genocide is taken up. This pervasive and persistent concern was documented once more on occasion of the *Bundestag* debate in June 2007 when *Allgemeine Zeitung* (13.06.2007), in the caption of its preview,

[5] *PLUS*, 23.9.2005, documented on: http://de.altermedia.info/general/%20der-makel-der-woche-politische-korrektheid-am-ende-der-welt-300905_3768.html (1. July 2007) and http://at.nntp2http.com/gesellschaft/politik/2005/09/e0a5fdb56e5370bba87d138de115c613.html; significantly, both the advertisement and the ensuing 'apology' are not available on the journal's website http://www.namibiaplus.com/. Thanks to Joachim Zeller, Berlin for support.

[6] http://de.altermedia.info/general/knallt-das-monstrum-auf-die-titelseite-streit-um-einen-nachruf-in-afrika-290905_3766.html; also http://de.altermedia.info/general/der-makel-dieser-woche-politische-korrektheit-am-ende-der-welt-300905_3768; http://www.wno.org/newpages/his26b.html.

referred to genocide only in scare quotes. These concerns found particularly ample expression in the pages of the same newspaper, both in editorial material and in letters to the editor.

In purely academic terms, the polemically worded analysis of German historian Christoph Marx, stating that the conception of history prevalent in those utterings dates back to the year 1830 is as valid as is his assessment of the paper as basically provincial (Marx 2005: 143). One might add to the list of shortcomings the lamentably poor German in which the paper is written, should this not be claimed as an expression of specific *Südwester* language. By itself, such a diagnosis would rather warrant to ignore the sustained effort in denialism. Its interest stems from the linkages that emerge between denialist stands concerning the genocide of 1904-08 on the one hand and those concerning the holocaust on the other, or more broadly between attitudes that call for an end or 'final stroke' of recalling the past as they have been articulated in (West) Germany continuously practically since 1945 (cf. Frei 2005). Further, these epistemic communities exist in both Germany and Namibia and extend from some academic quarters right into extreme right wing circles.

On an epistemic level, this consensus is marked by a naïve historical realism, harking back to the day of Leopold von Ranke, claiming to relay the 'purely factual … "as it actually has taken place (*wie es denn wirklich gewesen ist*)"' as one of the self-proclaimed lay historians put it (Schneider-Waterberg 2004). This conviction to be in possession of unassailable truth based exclusively on the recounting of factual detail also is upheld against pointers which in early 21st century social science and historiography may sound almost trivial, namely that the writing of history or the rendering of social reality presupposes a reduction of complexity and thereby cannot expect a full representation of all facts and materials which obviously would overtax human capacity (cf. Gehlen 1986: 35-46; 62-73); further, that such processes are predicated upon the interest or 'value ideas' which lie at the basis of any intellectual undertaking since they provide its indispensable perspective. The insight that such perspective does not preclude objectivity or even the abstention from 'value judgement' has by now also passed its centenary.[7] Untainted by such sickly cast of thought, proponents of such a pure fact approach eagerly seized upon an albeit somewhat provocative wording of this simple, if sobering insight (Melber 2005c: 10) or even the mere statement that history writing is an interpretative (or hermeneutic) business (cf. Kössler 2005b: 52-53). They conflate a clear statement of perspective, which very well can imply taking sides, with narrow partiality of analysis which is clearly refuted at the same time (Zollmann 2007: 114-5 on Kössler 2005:77). The claim that is linked to this is just as naïve and preposterous, namely to be in possession of some objective truth by the mere 'collection and publication of materials' (Hofmann 2006a).

Much of this argument harks back to an intervention by the late Brigitte Lau, otherwise one of the proponents of anti-colonial historiography in Namibia during the 1970s-1990s. The concern of Lau, seemingly replicated by the publications of Eckl (*infra*) and more recently also by Zollmann, relates to Eurocentrism in the sense of the supposed misappropriation of Namibian history in the interests of German history. Apart from the open question how such misappropriation can happen, given the difficulty of finding 'owners' of history, such an approach, while predicated, in Lau's case at any rate, on a high anti-colonialist profile, misses important points of colonialism as a process and thereby, of (post-)colonial history. This is precisely the entanglement between very diverse social, cultural and political realities, in the

[7] cf. Weber 1904: 180-181. It would lead too far to explicate here my own position, suffice it to say that I do entertain doubts on the possibility of a neat division along Weber's lines, but consider it important to be guided by him towards clarity about what one is doing in particular situations. The subject matter treated here makes a neat separation particularly difficult, since debate is charged, not only with emotion, but also with strong and historically grounded normative convictions (or 'value ideas') that inform such emotions as they do scholarly endeavour.

classical cases separated by oceans and long distances, but at the same time linked together by acts of violent conquest and persistent, grossly asymmetrical and racialised relations of domination, again regularly backed up by brute force. Very early on, the potential repercussions of the colonial relationship have been discerned by critics of imperialism, such as the clairvoyant British liberal, John A. Hobson (1954: 146-147; ch. II.1).

Such mutual interaction, creating a shared history in the strict sense of the word, is in fact an inevitable result of the colonial encounter. To tear this connection apart – even in the mode of objecting to 'Eurocentrism' – is hardly a way to arrive at an adequate reconstruction of historical processes. Still, this does not preclude specific emphases and concerns – it is fully legitimate to search for repercussions of the colonial experience, and of experience with colonial violence in particular, on German (or British, French etc.) society or the public mind, just the same way as it will not be possible to understand what happened in Namibia (or in Togo, New Guinea etc.) without for instance a knowledge of the kind of state apparatus the colonisers had in mind and strove for as their ideal. Moreover, such interaction is not a thing of the past, and those whose interventions are taken up today in quarters one would not want to suspect they mean to associate with, still have an obligation to at least pause and reflect on the potential, if unintended consequences of their interventions – even if, in the case of Brigitte Lau at least, such appropriations run clearly counter to the intention of her life work.[8]

Two revealing linkages can by discerned. One relates to the enraged response on a colonial traditionalist internet forum which ostensibly is focused on former colonies but is in fact closely connected to the German extreme right[9], when the left liberal daily *Frankfurter Rundschau* carried an article pointing to the prevalent use by school students of right wing, traditionalist websites as sources of information on German colonialism (cf. Geyer 2006). Contributions to the forum[10] stressed, i.a., that the 'best facts' were to be had from 'contemporary' books – leaving open any use for historical analysis. Others voiced interest to know 'how and who [sic] was governor of Togo in 1908, which rank one's great-grandfather on the old photograph had or how the flag of the Jaluit Society looked like'. Related websites[11] convey indeed the view of focusing, besides achievements such as infrastructure and agriculture, on the 'last button on a litevka', but studiously 'leaving unmentioned the African victims' of German colonial rule (Geyer 2006). By displaying merry people, including an African and a Chinese boy, waving black-white-and-red flags and their top hats, the reality of colonialism is obscured and banalised.[12] As it were to preserve such cosy views on the past, a contribution in the mentioned internet forum warns of 'German self-hate' as the reason for dealing with of colonial atrocities and genocide.

A recurrent ruse in this debate consists in attributing the view that the *Schutztruppe* had committed genocide exclusively to Horst Drechsler (1966), who conveniently can then be shrugged off as a 'SED historian',[13] an attitude echoed by a Regensburg physics professor, lashing out in the *Allgemeine Zeitung* against 'the Stalinist construct of genocide' (Obermair 2006). Quite in keeping with this, in the above-quoted internet forum the *West* German

[8] Significantly, none of the adherents of her article on 'Uncertain Certainties' – which moreover is rendered on right-wing German websites in ways that may be called cannibalising and clearly expose the prevalence of ulterior motives (cf. Hillebrecht 2007: 73[4]) – has bothered to deal with the opening piece of the slim volume, her scathing refutation of the apologetic view, epitomised by the revered settler patriarch Heinrich Vedder, that German rule brought order to a supposedly chaotic country (Lau 1995a).

[9] On which see, Böhlke-Itzen & Zeller 2006; Schwarzenberg 2007.

[10] http://www.forumromanum.de/member/forum/forum.php?action=std_show&entryid=1096528025&USER=user_21216&threadid=2&onsearch=1

[11] http://www.deutsche-schutzgebiete.de; http://www.traditionsverband.de; http://www.jaduland.de/kolonien

[12] http://www.deutsche-schutzgebiete.de/deutsche-kolonien.htm (This website, catering to a wide range of interests in Wilhelminian nostalgia, would warrant a separate analysis).

[13] SED – Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands, ruling party in the German Democratic Republic.

historian Helmut Bley, author of a well-known and path breaking study on German South West Africa (Bley 1968/1971/1996) which was broadly contemporaneous to Drechsler (1966/1980), is presented as 'a proponent of the Drechslerian … point of view.' Such strategies of argument and apperceptions, conflating the entire problematic to the term of genocide and at the same time, attributing a 'genocide thesis' exclusively to Drechsler, whose careful study, based on a wealth of archival material from the German colonial office, is then discounted because of a few quotes from Marx and Lenin – or by guilt of contagion with the state he lived in – are not limited to outspoken rightists.

Thus, in a somewhat opaquely titled article ('Namibian history challenges its posterity'), much acclaimed in the community, the erstwhile editor of *Allgemeine Zeitung* assailed Christoph Marx specifically for his intervention against revisionist historiography, and – while suing for differentiation between rightists and hobby historians of various strands in Namibia – musters a whole range of authors in Germany who 'do not converge in [Marx's] kraal' (Hofmann 2006c), without noting that in German historiography and social science at any rate, the debate moves within a totally different framework. Unnoticed by those who have fixed their eyes and minds upon denying the 'genocide thesis', a wide consensus has emerged in the debate in Germany that the *Schutztruppe* had indeed committed genocide in 1904-08 in Namibia; controversy persists on a quite different issue, namely the relationship, if any, between the genocide in Namibia and the Holocaust.[14]

Hofmann and others, eager to find allies, simply included authors like Birthe Kundrus into *their* 'kraal' – probably upon the apperception that they are not of one mind with proponents of the 'genocide thesis' such as Jürgen Zimmerer (e.g. 2005a) or Henning Melber (e.g. 2005b). By this, they conveniently overlook a truly fundamental difference of concerns: In a direct intervention within the ongoing controversy, Kundrus certainly warns against a false 'teleology' which would link rashly the genocide in Namibia to the Holocaust and points to the long-term design to annihilate European Jewry in contradistinction to the Namibian case, where 'genocide was a consequence of ongoing armed conflict', her interest seems to be less with the 'annihilation of the Herero' as such (2005: 300, 304, 303). It is rather on that basis that she engages the supposed continuity thesis to insist that 'a specific constellation was necessary to realize the Shoah' (2005: 303). This is of course rather the opposite of denialism. It is characteristic for the discursive predisposition apparently prevalent in denialist quarters that every straw, however, ill-fitted is taken up. If Kundrus critiques Zimmerer or Melber *in connection* with the genocide, she must surely supply ammunition to one's own cause. Would the world were as simple as that!

It should be noted that this preoccupation with the denial of genocide in the Namibian case merges with denialism in relation to the holocaust, which can be aired in the pages of the letters to the editor of the *Allgemeine Zeitung* (e.g. Friedrich 2006), or is linked to the complaint that under the heading of *Auschwitzlüge*, publication of such views is outlawed in Germany, as in a contribution to the above-cited internet forum. Again, this does not preclude a studied distance of other contributors to these Namibian-German exchanges who refuse to be confused with 'extreme rightist historians such as Dr. Claus Nordbruch' (Hofmann 2006c) – who however is given ample space in the *Allgemeine Zeitung* (e.g. Nordbruch 2004), and jocularly commented upon for his contributions to the Windhoek carnival by the very same author (Hofmann 2006b). Occasionally, Nordbruch's publications have proved surprisingly effective: This was the case in particular when the German Foreign Office, under the aegis of Green Minister Joseph Fischer, effectively pressurised parliamentary committees to water down a resolution of the Bundestag on Namibia in 2004. Above all, they blocked intentions

[14] cf. Kundrus 2005; Kössler 2005a; Zollmann 2007, in his criticism of recent interventions, significantly leaves out this later contribution by Kundrus, relying solely on Kundrus 2004.

by deputies to mention the word 'genocide' in the final text of the motion, supposedly pointing to Nordbruch's insights as evidence that this rested on 'factually very contested conclusions of individual historians'.[15] This puts the German Foreign Office under Green leadership into a direct connection with revisionist activities that clearly aim at denying both the genocide in Namibia and explicitly the Holocaust as well.[16]

If the 'factual' is marshalled against unwelcome insights, preoccupation with detail also knows its limits. Thus, a favourite argument to counter the 'genocide thesis' refers to the revocation of von Trotha's genocidal proclamation by the Emperor in mid-December 1904 which supposedly is 'suppressed by the genocide camp' (Hofmann 2006d). This argument is in fact evidence that Drechsler has been bashed so lustfully for being a 'communist' that apparently he has not actually been read. In Drechsler (1980: 162-165), there is an extensive account of the consultations in Berlin that resulted in the revocation. This account shows that the decision was based not on humanitarian principle but on purely pragmatic considerations, while the Chief of the Great General Staff, General von Schlieffen – best known for his strategic plan that informed Germany's attack on Belgium and France in 1914 – explicitly noted that 'General von Trotha's intentions are commendable', even though 'he is powerless to carry them out' (ib.: 163). This underscores the *intention* that, rather than the rampant body count, is constitutive for genocide. One may wonder who is treating evidence selectively.[17]

The whole approach just outlined resonates however with endeavours of more explicitly academic pretensions as well. These are linked in particular to recent interventions of Cologne based Africanist Andreas Eckl. Eckl initiated this line of activity at a prominent spot when delivering a paper at the opening keynote panel of the central scholarly conference in Namibia on occasion of the centenary of the events of 2004, strangely titled, 'Decontaminating the Namibian Past', implying a strong tendency to at good last dispose of the burdensome past, once and for all (on which see Marx 2005: 156-157). Eckl's main thrust was directed against those 'professional historians' who advanced the 'genocide thesis' to serve their own career interests[18] – an assertion that attests to a singularly myopic idea about the workings of the still largely conservative German historical guild or of German academia more generally. Instead of clinging to the notions of 'external' academics, Eckl called for taking into account 'African' viewpoints and more down to earth sources. It emerged that the 'African' voices he had in mind were mainly the 'settler historians' (Eckl) active in Namibia, pursuing their denialist project by amassing detailed information without actually tackling the long-established evidence (see esp. Schneider-Waterberg 2005).

In particular, he singled out historians Jan-Bart Gewald and Jürgen Zimmerer for allegedly having manipulated sources to suit the 'genocide thesis', without actually telling what kind of information had been withheld by the elisions, which after all are common practice of each and everyone writing scholarly texts. Eckl's own contribution so far consists mainly in the edition of two diaries by German participants in the South West African campaign of 1904-05, one field medical doctor and a lieutenant, later to advance to the chief of the Nazi colonial office (Eckl 2005). In his introduction to this volume, Eckl abstained from usual practice and did not give an editorial report, nor did he contextualise his sources or explain what they had to say on the genocide issue, but he rather reiterated his attacks on Gewald and Zimmerer (cf.

[15] cf. Kössler 2004; Melchers 2004.
[16] cf. http://www.nordbruch.org/englisch.html
[17] Note that among earlier denialist literature on which current interventions, and especially Lau's are largely based (cf. Hillebrecht 2007: 84-88) simply claim 'Berlin' had refused 'consent' to the 'doubtlessly unedifying Trotha proclamation' (Sudholt 1975: 190, based on an item in a Windhoek newspaper!), or that it was 'never realized' (Poewe 1985: 66). Both relying on an undocumented talk of Sudholt with eyewitness Dr Carl Frey (Sudholt 1975: 189) to play down the meaning of the proclamation as a device of 'psychological warfare'. On this complex, see also Dedering 1993: 83-86.
[18] Eckl 2004; similar sentiments can be found in the internet forum quoted above and in

more extensively, Kössler 2005c). One important feature of Eckl's volume, also resonating the above-mentioned interest in sheer facticity[19] and genuine materials, is his seeming belief, not substantiated in his introduction, that the field diaries could tell us about the strategy the commanding officers followed in Namibia and which was decided upon in Berlin (cf. Hillebrecht 2007: 84-87).

In his recent review article, Jakob Zollmann commends Eckl for having broadened a 'thinly exploited source base' (Zollmann 2007: 121) – a recurrent claim that can only rest on a very selective reading of existing work, ignoring for instance Drechsler's extensive use of the files of the German colonial office and insinuating instead that he merely used the South African *Blue Book* (cf. Hillebrecht 2007: 86). While the files of the colonial administration or von Trotha's correspondence with his superiors can indeed tell us a lot about administrative design and also of military strategy and therefore, about their underlying intentions, this cannot seriously be expected from diaries soldiers kept in the field. Zollmann (2007: 123) and others seem to suppose that 'a far broader and inclusive usage of the available sources makes sense', regardless of any reflection about what these sources actually can be expected to tell us. This uncritical approach is carried as far as to insulting serious scholars. In reflecting on the source value of soldiers' diaries, Gesine Krüger notes the difference between the 'extent of the destruction which the army and thus also the soldiers had to account for' and 'the "subjective" side of the war' concerning 'the question whether individual soldiers were aware of what they were doing or what they considered their task to be' (Krüger 1999: 71).

Zollmann (2007: 123) takes the liberty to read this as an indication of 'substantial pressure to justify her approach', disregarding at the same time Krüger's painstaking effort to critique Brigitte Lau's stand in the genocide question while, as Hillebrecht notes, recognizing 'Lau's plea for a change of paradigm from colonial history to African history'.[20] This idea may reflect Brigitte Lau's impression of 'group terror' imposed by 'West Germans on the Namibian discourse'.[21] However, Zollmann here betrays precisely a complete misunderstanding of the meaning of historical sources: After all, these do not constitute or convey objective facts in the sense that the more of them one puts on a heap the better, but are reflections of specific situations that need to be assessed. Verification of sources forms the basic tool kit of any serious historian. A further corollary of the necessary differentiation between the high command, the army and the individual soldier is the insight that 'genocide does not need human killing machines to be effective: willing or even reluctant compliance is enough' and therefore, 'nobody has ever pictured "German soldiers" as collective "plotters" of genocide'. The plotters are to be sought among the 'military and civil command'.[22] Soldiers' diaries, recording everyday events and feelings as well as frustration and some deprivation, cannot tell us any more about this than can the anguished testimonies by Ovaherero fleeing through the *sandveld* that have been transmitted orally over decennia (cf. Alnaes 1989) – or indeed the rabid diatribes in actual soldiers' letters quoted in the German press at the time and stating for instance, 'the Herero … must all perish [*müssen alle dran glauben*]' (Sobich 2006: 108).
In an intervention published in Swakopmund, Freiburg based Africanist Till Philippe Koltermann actually commends Eckl's neglect for contextualisation of his edited sources because thus, 'the grown-up reader, conversant with the matter at hand, would be entrusted with interpreting in an unprejudiced way, responsible only to himself' (Koltermann 2006: 33); one wonders what use there is for hermeneutical methodology. On the other hand,

[19] The German quip of *Faktenhuberei* applies.
[20] Hillebrecht (2007: 75) Hillebrecht has assembled the citations: Krüger (1999: 12-15, 67, 71-72, 129-130).
[21] Hillebrecht 2007: 74[6], quoting a private letter.
[22] Hillebrecht 2007: 76, 89; this insight dovetails with lines of research on the Holocaust pursued for some time, cf. the paradigmatic study by Browning 1992 and more generally, on the banality of large scale violence, see Foster et al. 2005; such lines of thought also subvert any 'collective guilt' argument, see below .

Koltermann inadvertedly attests to the blinkered vision of the 'autodidactic historians' he seems to champion (ib:.25) by relating works on the long-term trajectory and resilience of Herero society such as Krüger 1998 or Gewald 1999 exclusively to the war of 1904-05 and the genocide issue. Again this preoccupation with mustering proof against the acknowledgement of genocide is evident from Koltermann's insistence that the diaries edited by Eckl do not extol von Trotha's strategy (although he even quotes approving references to 'annihilation' or 'Herero mass killing', ib.: 37, 38), while he disregards, at the same time the numerous letters by von Trotha, or the ensuing debate i.a. in the Reichstag (cf. Sobich 2006: 104) and solely fixes himself on the so-called Extermination Order. When Koltermann bemoans the lack of additional sources, therefore, this amounts to a clear immunisation strategy.

Regardless of its severe shortcomings as a scholarly work, Eckl's publication was seized upon with eagerness from various quarters. Apparently, it was used by one of the grand old men of German colonial historiography, Horst Gründer, to disparage Jürgen Zimmerer's work when the latter had claimed that a prime time TV series on the German colonies, along with an accompanying book (cf. Graichen & Gründer 2005), had 'reintegrate(d) colonialism as a positively valued epoch of national history' (Zimmerer 2005). In his rejoinder, Gründer alluded to supposedly dubious use of sources by Zimmerer, without giving details but clearly referring to Eckl. Moreover, Gründer also joined the apologetic crowd by claiming that von Trotha's proclamation had been revoked 'when it became known in Berlin', without mentioning the internal debate and the actual endorsement of von Trotha's intentions by von Schlieffen (cf. Gründer 2005). Almost simultaneously, Gründer substantiated Zimmerer's charge when on occasion of a public debate in Berlin about the Maji Maji war, he was pressed on the issue of genocide, and went on record with the declaration, that it was time to shed 'whininess, larmoyency and the penitential robe,' since everywhere in history, modernisation also exacted social cost (Kristen 2005; Wegmann 2005). This corroborated strongly the impression that a major drive for re-evaluating colonialism was underway, also clearly alluding to the language of the 'final stroke' to end a critical engagement with state crimes of the past. Gründer also chimed in, in this way, with initiatives in France to re-evaluate colonialism by pointing to its supposedly civilising effects.

Eckl's efforts were also gladly taken up by revisionist quarters in Namibia, apparently ready to seize on any straw that will help them to justify their denial of the genocide (cf. Schneider-Waterberg 2005: 11-12). It is hard to imagine that Eckl did not concur with this effect, given the following clear statement: 'Whoever speaks of a German genocide perpetrated by v. Trotha and the German *Schutztruppe*, commits a collective damnation which necessarily must provoke objection above all by the Namibia-Germans' (2005: 40). This is a clear reference to the discourse on 'collective guilt', fictitiously (cf. Frei 2005) assigned to Germans at large in the wake of the Holocaust, and employed ever since by revisionist circles to divert from the real problem, which concerns not 'guilt' but historic responsibility, in particular taking into account that until this day, the German state pointedly claims to be the legal successor of both the Wilhelminian and the Third Reich.[23] In any case, if Eckl and others may object to being pictured as 'reactionaries waving the German Imperial flag' (Zollmann 2007: 124), they certainly have done little to prevent those who explicitly do so – or even refer to black-white-and-red in its other, still more despicable form – to enlist their support.

What amounts to an apologetic, denialist thrust is carried forward especially by Zollmann (2007: 112-120) by the further ruse of conflating very diverse arguments, such as the statement that genocide took place in Namibia in 1904-08, its connection, however mediated

[23] Obviously, this also refers to a further dimension in the predicament of *Südwesters* defining themselves vis-à-vis (present-day) Germany.

(cf. Kössler 2005a), and the idea of a 'causal chain' on a supposedly straight path from 'Windhoek to Auschwitz' (as assailed by Kundrus 2004 & also 2005), which is in fact a bogus argument, since nobody has claimed such a straight causal connection. In the hands of denialists, such conflation serves in the end to negate the genocide and the Holocaust along with it. However, by constantly railing against this purely fictitious 'equation' of the genocide in Namibia with the Holocaust (also Kundrus 2004), one seems to gain an argumentative edge, which allows for further sloppy reading, e.g. when Zollmann blames me for 'stressing structural parallels between German colonialism and National Socialism' (Zollmann 2007: 111), where in fact I had suggested further research into discursive breaks occasioned by the broad publicity of the genocide in Germany in 1904-7, as a part of the rise of German radical nationalism (cf. Kössler 2005; see Eley 1978, 1986, 1990). A similar line of thought, more predicated on the haphazard manner in which the Nazis arrived at their final solution has been suggested in an early and one of the finest critiques of Lau's article (cf. Dedering 1993: 83). Not to see the difference between such arguments attests to a myopic fixation that no longer can be addressed in scholarly argument but rather as a social fact.

Apparently in an effort to back up his claim that the entire concern about genocide was a sort of foreign, 'eurocentric' imposition, Eckl asserted further that this term was of 'no use whatsoever for Namibian historiography' (2005: 16). He links up in this way with the Africanist concern that apparently was at the source of Brigitte Lau's intervention in 1989 (Lau 1995b: 39f, on which Hillebrecht 2007: 75-79). At the time of the above mentioned conference, Eckl could have seen in the streets of Windhoek people wearing T-Shirts or cars adorned with posters, all referring to the genocide. One might even say that such reference was incorporated into the collective identity at least of large groups of Herero community at that time. The mass turn-out at the memorial events in 2004, above all to the central one at Ohamakari on 14 August 2004, as well as subsequent developments attests to this concern. The same can be said of the rousing speech the leading Herero intellectual Zedekia Ngavirue delivered at that occasion to a crowd persevering in the moonlight after a long and exciting day. It would be hard to deny 'Dr Zed's' claim to being a Namibian historian, and he has addressed both the interrelationship between fierce African resistance against colonialism and the 'reign of terror' particularly of von Trotha (Ngavirue 1997: 121; see 115-124).

Another instance is Peter Katjavivi's brief account of the '1904-7 war of resistance' (Katjavivi 1988: 8-11). One proponent of Eckl's position inadvertedly cites the intervention of the prominent Swapo politician Theo-Ben Gurirab and of Herero Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako (Zollmann 2007: 117). While the latter two may not consider themselves as historians (although they may from their own side lay claim to 'history' in a rather essentialist understanding), they certainly represent very relevant perspectives and sentiments in Namibian society. These flashlights merely demonstrate the truism that in Namibia as anywhere else – and amongst Namibians maybe more than amongst some other nations – history is a contested terrain. At the same time, the modalities in which history is articulated are also outflows and expressions of both of the divisions persisting in Namibian society, and of the very severe differences when it comes to the means at the disposal of different groups to make their voices heard.

Clearly, German speakers, as a particularly affluent and well-organised, tightly-knit group are at an advantage here (cf. Kössler 2005b: 65-68). It is their concerns in the first place that Eckl is advocating, when he calls on 'academic historiography' to 'create a precondition for reconciliation and mutual respect' rather than to deepen 'the rifts between the current posterity of the colonists and the colonised of yore'. Apparently such respect, in Eckl's view, has to refer first and foremost the quest for 'the location of one's own self … which is constitutive for the historiography of German speaking Namibians' and thus help further the

'overcoming (*Bewältigung*) of the consequences of colonialism today and the creation of "normal" relationships between the various population groups in contemporary Namibia' (41). Far from a quest for objectivity, this aim, in Eckl's view apparently is served best by letting bygones be bygones if the facts appear too offensive to one of the groups involved. As any observer in Namibia or a reader of the Namibian press can see, however, the opposite is actually the case: As has been mentioned above, the violent colonial past is present in people's minds, and reconciliation cannot be reached by decreed silence, least of all when such decrees emanate from the position of the perpetrators.[24]

4. Commemoration and half an apology.

The quest of Ovaherero, but increasingly of other groups, to claim adequate recognition for the mass crimes visited upon their ancestors and still present in their minds, forms a constant point of reference for revisionists, but at the same time, and more importantly, has set into motion yet another, quite different dynamic of interaction between memory practice and related politics both in Namibia and Germany. It is with respect to this in particular that one needs to take into consideration the obvious asymmetry in public interest these matters command in both countries. There can be little doubt that Germany remains persistently more important to Namibia than Namibia is to Germany. This is attested regularly by the coverage in both countries of major events concerning their relationships: What makes headlines, sometimes for several days, in Namibia sometimes is hardly mentioned in the German press. An important reason for this, besides the purely numerical proportions, is the fact that there is next to no postcolonial presence in Germany today. Rather, awareness of Germany as a postcolonial society, in the limited ways in which such awareness exists, hinges on the activities of mostly locally active, nationally networked civil society initiatives[25] and in the case of southern Africa, on those of the surviving organisations of the broad anti-apartheid movement.[26]

Nevertheless, the centenary year of 2004 saw considerable activity (cf. Zeller 2005), which also made a limited impact on formal politics, the most important outflow of which was the appearance of the Minister of Economic Cooperation and Development at the commemoration at Ohamakari on August 14 and her emotional speech offering an apology in terms of the 'Lords Prayer'.[27] Even though this intervention, unexpected on account of official German government policy to date,[28] made a big impression on the spot in Namibia and arguably marked a turning point in the official German policy at least in terms of verbally conceding the fact of genocide, ensuing developments reveal a much more ambivalent picture.

Wieczorek-Zeul's intervention seems to have meant a point of no return in the sense that after years and decades of successive (West) German governments of various party political complexions carefully skirting the issue and in particular the word of genocide in relation to the colonial war in Namibia, she courageously broke that spell. However, as it later emerged, there was little plan or strategy behind that courageous act, nor an awareness of what would be the consequences of admitting responsibility for such a mass crime against humanity. Still,

[24] Of course, people today are neither victims or perpetrators in any strict sense, which is one reason why 'collective guilt' is not a valid proposition. However, people do relate to the positions of victims and perpetrators, also in the sense that they carry trauma on the one hand and responsibility on the other.
[25] At present, such initiatives are active for instance in Berlin, Cologne, Freiburg, Göttingen, Hamburg and Hannover.
[26] Such as Informationsstelle Südliches Afrika (ISSA) e.V., Bonn and Koordination Südliches Afrika (KOSA), Bielefeld.
[27] cf. http://www.inwent.org/E+Z/content/archive-eng/10-2004/stud_art3.html
[28] For detailed background, see Kössler 2006b.

it soon emerged that the minister did not see a need for compensation or reparation to follow from such an apology. Since this claim had been at the centre of the campaign of at least one important group of Ovaherero headed by Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako who claims to represent the vast majority, and since the law suit filed by this group against the German state and a number of companies in the U.S. contributed greatly to such publicity as the issue could muster, the issue of reparations had been closely connected to that of apology for quite some time(cf. Böhlke-Itzen 2004).

It was therefore an indication of at least a quite unilateral approach when the minister attended the opening session of a conference in Bremen in November 2004 where a large Herero delegation was present, and on the opening day announced her own plan for a reconciliation initiative, complete with the incumbent mayor of Bremen (a German federal state) as the intended chairman, in the local newspaper (*Weser-Kurier*, 19.11.2004). One Omuherero present commented in a rather general way that it would be for those asking for forgiveness or offering an apology in the first place to listen and not prescribing follow-up procedure.[29] Such views are backed up by analysis of traditional Herero forms of reconciliation, based on reaching an agreement about the compensation required by the transgression.[30] The way of proceeding which the German government subsequently was consistent with the unilateral approach of Wieczorek-Zeul evident in November 2004.

For some months, a special representative without a clear mandate was active in Windhoek. In May 2005 the Minister, on occasion of being honoured, together with Namibian Bishop Zephania Kameeta, with a prize for her reconciliation work, elaborated on her reconciliation initiative and announced that € 20 Mio. would be disbursed over a period of ten years to support the communities in Namibia that had suffered from "what today is rightly termed genocide."[31] Besides the obvious discrepancy between the € 2 billion demanded in the court cases against the German government and private firms and this sum, a main objection by a number of spokespersons was once again that the announcement had been made without due consultation with the various stakeholders (see e.g. *Namibian*, 27.5. 2005). In late 2005, the initiative reached an impasse, ground between countervailing interests of the Namibian government and regional communities, and inept handling on the German side (cf. Zeller 2005b).

During the course of 2006, a modicum of consultation process – evaluated in very diverse ways by various stakeholders – was set into motion in Namibia with the participation of Deputy Prime Minister Libertine Amathila. After an agreement had been signed, a tender was published for a consulting firm actually administering the programme, once again stirring concern whether this could really satisfy the needs and concerns of the affected communities. Parallel to this long drawn-out process, a new departure has been reached which clearly stands in connection to the realignment of German party politics, particularly on the Left, after the federal elections in September 2005.

The incipient Left Party which eventually was founded formally in June, 2007 already formed a parliamentary faction after the elections. In conjunction with a number of individual and civil society actors, the Left deputy Hüseyin Aydin began an preparations for a parliamentary initiative concerning a formal apology for the genocide, along with an adequate process of compensation. Aydin also travelled to Namibia and spoke at Herero Day in Okahandja, besides meeting a number of politicians and traditional leaders. In his statement, Aydin noted

[29] Uazuvara Katjivena, personal observation, at the occasion.
[30] cf. Hinz & Patemann 2006; see also: Johan Galtung, After Violence: 3R, Reconstruction, Reconciliation, Resolution Coping with Visible and Invisible Effects of War and Violence http://classweb.gmu.edu/hwjeong/Conf702/Galtung,%20After%20violence.pdf (17 July 2007)
[31] Speech by Minister Wieczorek-Zeul, http://www.bmz.de/de/presse/reden/ministerin/rede20050524.html

that 'the Federal Republic of Germany, as the legal successor of the Imperial Reich, has not lived up to her responsibility towards the surviving victions of the genocide and their posterity.' In his view, former initiatives, such as Bundestag resolutions of 1990 and 2004 had skirted the issue of genocide and therefore were inadequate. Wieczorek-Zeul's 'brave speech' at Ohamakari had not been followed up by adequate political action. Thus, Aydin saw the lawsuit filed by the Herero People's Reparations Corporation as beneficial also to alert the German public.[32]

Aydin's announced parliamentary initiative, undertaken within the framework of the Left parliamentary party, took more than another eight months to reach the floor of the Bundestag. This is also indicative of the difficult processes that were involved in reaching a consensus even within that group. One of the topics of in-depth discussion seem to have concerned old-standing loyalties to Swapo who, while in exile, had received sustained support in East Germany. The apparent divergence of the initiative with the stance taken by the Swapo government at the time seems to have troubled some old stalwarts.[33] Meanwhile, however, the political situation in Namibia began to change, arguably also under the impression of Aydin's visit which was broadly reported on by the Namibian media.

Even though the Left Party in Germany is far from wielding an effective direct influence on official policy, this had been the first time that an elected German office holder had come out squarely not only in acknowledgement of the genocide, but of reparations or compensation of some kind as the necessary consequence of such an acknowledgement as well. Further, it was foreseeable now that that the Bundestag would at least debate a motion addressing this issue, even though at the time of writing, chances remain slim that it will eventually be adopted. This may have fostered some movement within the ruling party. A further thrust came probably from the renewal of demands by the Ovaherero/Ovambanderu Council for Dialogue on 1904 Genocide (OCD-1904), a group that in contradistinction to Riruako's Genocide Trust tends more to side with Swapo. Still, immediately before the tabling of a motion in the National Assembly to support the demand for apology and reparations, the whole campaign, especially from Riruako's side seemed somewhat in limbo, having lost its original momentum it had gained largely from the string of events in 2004 (see Matundu-Tjiparuro 2006).

To the surprise of many, during the debate of Riruako's motion in the National Assembly Swapo Secretary General Ngarikutuke Tjiriange came out in support and argued i.a.: 'This is a right of the Namibian people and Government recognises it as such and on the other side it is a wrong the German people and (their) Government are expected to accept and admit.' Further, Tjiriange stated, 'we should demand from the German government - in this case (it) is very simple: reparation for the 1904-1906 Herero Genocide.' (Weidlich 2006b). As the government financed Windhoek paper noted, 'Although Tjiriange claimed [to speak]on a personal level, it was the first time that a senior member of the ruling party had expressed himself so strongly on the issue' and stressed that all Namibians were concerned, not just one ethnic group (Kangueehi 2006). Eventually, the motion was carried unanimously by the National Assembly with its overwhelming Swapo majority (Weidlich 2006c).

Again, this sea-change at least on the level of public pronouncements gave additional momentum to the endeavours of Aydin and others in the Left Party, as became apparent in a public seminar held in Berlin in preparation of the motion in mid-October.[34] It is precisely in

[32] Hüseyin Aydin, MdB, Rede am Herero-Tag in Okahandja (Namibia), 27. August 2006, as diseminated via email; see also Weidlich 2006a; Ngavirue 2006.
[33] Personal observation, Seminar 'Deutsche Kolonialverbrechen - Wie kann Wiedergutmachung für die Herero und Nama aussehen?', Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Berlin 13./14 October 2006, on which see: http://www.freiburg-postkolonial.de/Seiten/Rez-Linke-Seminar-Namibia2006.htm.
[34] See footnote 25.

these variegated endeavours that problems of a different calibre have come to the fore, connected with conceptualising the genocide as well as Namibian history and avenues for reconciliation. First, what happened in Namibia in 1904-08 was not just one confrontation resulting in genocide committed by the colonial power, but rather a series of interlinked wars with changing actors, at any rate on the side of the colonised. This involved the Bondelswarts rising in late 1903 that according to some readings provided strategic opportunities for Ovaherero in January 1904 by tying down most of the colonial army on the southern fringe of the country. Again, large many Nama groups, while fulfilling their treaty obligation to render military service until after the Ohamakari battle, started their own campaigns in early October 1904 (Kriegsgesch. Abt. 1907: 186).

They were the target of von Trotha's second proclamation of April 1905 Members of all these groups underwent 'annihilation by neglect' in the concentration camps (Zimmerer 2003: 63). Quite a few were deported to other German colonies, Togo, Cameroon or New Guinea. After the official close of the war, they all were subject to the Native Ordinances. As has been mentioned above, resilience and redefinition of communal life referred, in various forms, to these catastrophic experiences. While the process of reconstitution of communal nexuses entailed, in the case of Ovaherero, the consolidation of translocal identifications as 'Herero', this was much less the case among Nama.[35] Again, Damara, with active prodding by the South African authorities, actually constituted themselves as a 'people' only after 1945.[36]

San, affected by virtual man-hunts during the late 1910s (cf. Gordon 1992: 77-85), have hardly any organisational expression of a common identity. This brief rehearsal is simply to remind us that apart from the very diverse historical trajectories, groups and communities dispose of voice to articulate concerns to very unequal degrees. Thus, while also divided among themselves over party allegiance as well as the issue of legitimacy of the paramountcy, Ovaherero still were in a better position than other groups to move into joint action. Their initiatives during the 1990s to approach German authorities, rebuffed consecutively on occasion of the visits of the German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, and the German President, Roman Herzog, as well as the turn to legal action as a consequence of these experiences, therefore may be seen also in this light. Still, particularly during the centennial commemorations in 2004, there was a clear tendency to victim competition up to the claim for monopolism over victim status by Ovaherero, denying that other groups as well have suffered genocide (Melber 2005a).

At the same time, the series of commemorations and possibly also the high profile claimed by some Ovaherero, together with the ongoing debate on reconciliation and reparations has been followed by initiatives of other groups to organise. In early 2005, the Damara Cultural and Heritage Forum was formed to rectify the marginal position of Damara as well as others and the pre-eminence of Ovaherero during the commemoration in the preceding year, pointing to the disappearance of more than 17000 people between 1904 and 1907. Thus Chief /Gaseb stated: 'We want the dialogue to be a national event. It must not be limited to the Herero people only. People in the North and South must also reveal their part in the war. They have a history.' (Maletsky 2005). The president of the group, Rosa Namises, explained: 'The genocide made us to lose our humanity, it alienated us from our culture, where today our younger generation are completely new people with a modern mindset and culture.'(Gaomas 2005).

[35] A similar observation is made, for the 'wars of resistance', by Ngavirue 1997: 121-4

[36] cf i.a. materials on National Archives of Namibia: Box LOM 3/2/12: N1/15/5 District Administration. Conferences Part I: 1-1-45 to 17-1949.

The call for reparations was again raised at the Damara Day in November 2006.[37] In October 2006, representatives of nine Nama Traditional Authorities met in Windhoek and issued a statement calling for recognition of the genocide committed against their people during the Nama-German war, for a 'meanigful dialogue' with the German government and for decisive action by the Namibian government to identify human bones that had been found near Lüderitz in late 2005 and that are likely to belong to victims of the concentration camp on Shark Island in the harbour of the southern town (Philander 2006; *The Namibian*, 27. 10. 2007). This was followed up by a large memorial ceremony to mark the centenary of the death of Chief Cornelius Frederick as one of the thousands of victims on Shark Island.[38] Such initiatives may be related also to a more outspoken stance on the fate of the Nama during the colonial wars (cf. Jacobs 2006), and efforts to move toward more unity among Nama and southern leaders (Philander 2007c).

Arguably, these new developments in Namibia were helped along both by the public change of mind of the ruling party in Namibia, as expressed by passing the parliamentary motion tabled by Riruako. Again, it may be surmised that the visit and clear language of a German MP, even though from an oppositional group largely isolated in Parliament, did make an impression at least among such Swapo leaders who were feeling uneasy with the former stance. In turn, the change of the official line of the Namibian government then helped to back up the proponents of the motion for apology and reparation within the Left Party *Bundestag* faction. Thus, the motion, notes that 'neither in legal nor in moral terms, genocide gets time-barred' and calls for 'the opening of a dialogue on material redress'. It welcomes the resolution of the Namibian National Assembly and suggests that the *Bundestag* should take up this appeal. To live up to 'historical responsibility', it calls on the German government to notify their Namibian counterparts of the readiness of the German side to enter into 'open dialogue … involving the concerned ethnic groups', and to enlist German companies who profited from forced labour and expropriations in Namibia to contribute towards indemnification.

Further, the creation of a memorial foundation to foster awareness is suggested to foster awareness of German colonialism in Namibia as well as youth exchange.[39] The motion was finally tabled and given a first reading on 13 June, 2007, which meant that for the first time, the issue of genocide – studiously avoided in former debates and resolutions – was discussed by the German Parliament in plenary session.[40] Predictably, attendance was low, and coverage by the national press was next to non-existent.[41] Still, in clear difference from a debate almost three years earlier, the parliamentarians of the Grand Coalition did name the genocide a genocide, and the speaker for the social democrats even mentioned the resolution of the Namibian National Assembly. In this way, there was a change of atmosphere, even though there no change of policy can be expected from the further parliamentary process.

Much more remarkable things happened on the Namibian side, besides the predictably broad press coverage. Herero Paramount Kuaima Riruako who had come to Berlin for the occasion, held a press conference jointly with the Namibian ambassador Peter Katjavivi. Katjavivi stated that 'Namibia welcomed that the matter is being discussed at the heart of German democracy'. However, he 'observed that because of the importance of the subject matter, it might have been more beneficial if the motion was brought before the Bundestag on an all-

[37] Personal observation, Okombahe 10 November 2006.

[38] cf. Gaomas 2007; Philander 2007a,b; the claim that Cornelius Frederick was beheaded and his head brought to Germany, reported in these newspaper articles, does not stand up to historical scrutiny (email communication, Casper Erichsen, 20 February 2007), although this did happen quite frequently in other cases.

[39] Deutscher Bundestag, 16. Wahlperiode. Drucksache 16/4649, 09.03.2007.

[40] I refer to the preliminary, electronically disseminated minutes.

[41] As observed by Wolfgang Lieb in introducing Hintze (2007).

party basis'. Katjavivi further 'that because of Namibia's colonial history, the genocide is a matter that affects everybody and touches all the Namibian people.' He further stated 'that it was the duty of the Namibian government to help facilitate a process that contributes to reconciliation and harmony firstly among the Namibians themselves, and secondly with its partners such as the Federal Republic of Germany' (Kangueehi 2007).

In the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, the current editor welcomed the debate, expressing his thinly veiled expectation that the motion would be thrown out and linked this perspective to the hope that once Germany would have taken a 'clear stance on the whole complex of issue' this would once and for all set the course for the future and put a final end to the debate (Fischer 2007). In this way, the final stroke motive was once again brought to the fore and at the same time, this writer at least displayed blatantly little concern for Namibians to be left by themselves to debate their history. Since there are other forces at work as well, both in Namibia and Germany, and given the recent dynamics in Namibia, it seems unlikely that this wish will be fulfilled.

Even should the parliamentary process reach fruition at some stage, possibly in actually bringing together a joint motion by the factions as suggested by Katjavivi as well as hinted by speakers in the *Bundestag*, the quest for a formal dialogue will remain a difficult one, not least because it has to solve a lot of tricky questions to do with the role of non-state actors within the framework of inter-governmental negotiations. After all, this will only mean to create the preconditions for the actual exchange of views.

The kind of barriers to be overcome emerged at a function at the Goethe Centre in Windhoek in November 2006, when the speaker, a Omuherero expert on Herero culture, before beginning her talk registered her dismay about what she called the latest insult from Germany: After many years of campaigning, citizens in Munich had succeeded finally in securing a decision by the city council to rename the local von Trotha Street into Herero Street (see Hintze 2006). The speaker's chagrin hinged on the disrespect she saw in the fact that in Otjiherero the new street name should properly be *Ova*herero Street, referring to the plural form denoting people. The predominantly German speaking audience was surprised or irritated. My later discussions, mainly with Nama speaking friends, added to my surprise. They all agreed that this form of renaming had been wrong, and to resolve possible linguistic problems with the correct prefix in Otjiherero, thought that such a question should properly be referred to the elders.

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