
The Visual Archive of Colonialism: Germany and Namibia

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Colonial memories and images occupy a paradoxical place in Germany. This is due in part to the peculiarities of German colonial history, but it also reflects another aspect of German exceptionalism—the legacy of Nazism and the Holocaust. In recent years German colonialism in Southwest Africa (Namibia) has been widely discussed, especially with respect to the attempted extermination of the Ovaherero people in 1904. For reasons explored in this article, these discussions of Germany’s involvement in Southwest Africa have created new and unexpected discursive connections that are reshaping colonial memories in both Germany and Namibia. One possible outcome could be a belated decolonization of the landscape of colonial memory in both countries.

Postwar Germany was long preoccupied with its National Socialist prehistory; the German colonial past has only started to come into focus more recently.¹ The years 2004–5 saw numerous commemorative events around the centenary of the 1904 German genocide of the Namibian Ovaherero people and the completion of the controversial Berlin Holocaust Memorial. On one level this is mere coincidence. At the same time, there is an increasing entanglement of these two central political topics. But little research has been done on the visual archive of German colonialism, in contrast to the extensive studies made of the public circulation of

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1. For a discussion of the ways in which the formerly divided country’s Nazi past was thematized anew after 1989, see Julia Hell and Johannes von Moltke, “Unification Effects: Imaginary Landscapes of the Berlin Republic,” in “The Cultural Logics of the Berlin Republic,” ed. Julia Hell and Johannes von Moltke, special issue, *Germanic Review* 80, no.1 (2005): 74–95.

Holocaust photographs and images.² The present essay is a first attempt to trace the role of colonial images in Germany in relationship to Namibia. More specifically this essay examines the relationship between discussions about the legacy of the Holocaust and discussions of the legacy of colonialism, including its iconic legacy—both in Germany, and more surprisingly, in Namibia.

Germany's Peculiar Relationship to European Colonialism

For centuries, Germans participated in overseas colonialism in fleeting and indirect ways. Brandenburg-Prussia briefly established a slave trading fort, Großfriedrichsburg, on the West African Gold Coast in 1683 but sold it to the Netherlands West Indies Company in 1721. Individual Germans sailed with Russian vessels of imperial exploration in the Pacific or enlisted with the Dutch East Indies Company. German missionaries worked in the colonies of other European powers: Cape Colony, Hong Kong, India. The first official German overseas colonial endeavor did not occur until 1879, when Germany signed a “friendship treaty” with Samoa that initiated a twenty-year period of informal influence in those islands by consuls from Britain, Germany, and the United States. The conventional date marking the onset of the formal German empire is April 24, 1884, when Germany declared Southwest Africa a protectorate. During the next sixteen years, this empire expanded to encompass parts of West and East Africa, Polynesia, Micronesia, and New Guinea, as well as the Jiaozhou colony centered on Qingdao (Tsingtao) and its hinterland in the Chinese Shandong peninsula. The Germans lost their overseas empire in World War I, and in 1920 the former German and Ottoman colonial territories were distributed to the war’s victors under the League of Nations’ mandate system.

This thirty-year endeavor had profound aftereffects on the peoples in Africa and Oceania for whom Germany was the first colonial ruler. However, in post–World War I Germany, only a small number of revanchists, mainly former colonial officials and military officers, actively cultivated the memory of the lost colo-

2. There is no colonial-studies equivalent to Habbo Knoch’s *Die Tat als Bild: Fotografien des Holocaust in der deutschen Erinnerungskultur* (*The Act as Image: Photographs of the Holocaust in Germany’s Culture of Memory*) (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001), which explores the circulation of Holocaust photographs in postwar Germany’s culture of memory—from the confrontational strategy of the Allies at the end of the war to the deliberate withholding of concentration camp images in recent practices. **On this topic, see also Cornelia Brink, *Ikonen der Vernichtung: Öffentlicher Gebrauch von Fotografien aus nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern nach 1945*** (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998).



Figure 1 Scene from *Ohm Krüger* (director, Hans Steinhoff; Tobis, 1941)

nies. New colonial monuments were erected and a number of northern German cities named streets after the lost colonies. Colonial films began to appear, such as *Ohm Krüger*, a 1941 release about the Boer struggle against the British in South Africa (see fig. 1).³ In the same year, the Nazis permitted the *Kolonialpolitisches Amt* (Office for Colonial Policy) to expand and to begin drawing up plans for a German reconquest of the lost territories. But in February 1943, after the defeat at Stalingrad, Hitler shut down that office, putting a final end to any dreams of a renewed overseas empire.

After 1945, positive memories of Germany's overseas colonies were kept alive mainly by small militarist groups in West Germany and by descendents of German settlers in the former colonies (especially Namibia). In East Germany,

3. See Sabine Hake, "Mapping the Native Body: On Africa and the Colonial Film in the Third Reich," in *The Imperialist Imagination: German Colonialism and Its Legacies*, ed. Sara Friedrichsmeyer, Sara Lennox, and Susanne Zantop (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 178–84.

colonial-imperialist agitation was suppressed and monuments were dismantled. In West Germany, “only those colonial signs were removed that stemmed from the Nazi period,”⁴ and a few new monuments glorifying German colonialism were actually installed. Public historical discussion focused on Nazism, Communism, and the Holocaust; for most people the colonial past receded into a dimly remembered past. The anticolonial conflicts that played such a powerful role in France during the 1950s and 1960s were experienced by most Germans only at a distant remove.

Yet during the entire modern era, Germany—or, at least, parts of what eventually became Germany—participated in Europe’s economic and ideological relation to the dominated periphery. Raw materials and precious metals from the global South flooded into the German-speaking lands. Produce stores were known as *Colonialwarengeschäfte*, or colonial wares shops, even until recently. Some northern Germans participated in the Atlantic slave trade.⁵ Racist images and tropes generated in colonial contact zones circulated in Germany and throughout Europe (see figures 2–3). Accounts of imperial voyages of exploration were translated quickly into German during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. German race scientists and later eugenicists and anthropologists participated in international scientific networks. These pan-European colonial ideologies took on specific accents in different linguistic and national contexts, of course. But the brevity of Germany’s direct participation in overseas colonialism did not mean that Germany was any less steeped in colonial mentalities than were Britain or France. Indeed, the manner in which Germany was inserted into European domination of Africa, Asia, and the Americas has actually impeded criticism of colonial ways of thinking and acting.⁶ The caesura between the end of the German colonial era and the onset of European anticolonialism is partly responsible for

4. Winfried Speitkamp, “Kolonialherrschaft und Denkmal: Afrikanische und deutsche Erinnerungskultur im Konflikt,” in *Architektur und Erinnerung*, ed. Wolfram Martini (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000), 185. According to Joachim Zeller, two colonial monuments that had been dismantled by the German Democratic Republic (GDR) have been reinstalled since 1990 (*Kolonialdenkmäler und Geschichtsbewußtsein* [Frankfurt am Main: IKO, 2000], 59).

5. See Brantwein, *Bibeln und Bananen: Der deutsche Kolonialismus in Afrika; Eine Spurensuche*, ed. Heiko Möhle (Hamburg: Verlag libertäre Assoziation, 1999), 11–18; and Catharina Lüden, *Sklavenfahrt: Mit Seeleuten aus Schleswig-Holstein, Hamburg, und Lübeck im 18. Jahrhundert* (Heide: Westholsteinische Verlagsanstalt Boyens, 1983).

6. How else can we explain that German neo-Nazis’ preferred epithet for dark-skinned foreigners is *Kanak*, a term originally designating an indigenous people from French New Caledonia? The term *Kanak* (or *Kanack*) was subsequently embraced by German hip-hop musicians and Turkish-German writers; see Feridun Zaimoglu, *Kanak Sprach: 24 Misstöne vom Rande der Gesellschaft* (Hamburg: Rotbuch Verlag, 1995). The best study on the circulation of images of Africans in early modern Germany is Peter Martin’s *Schwarze Teufel, edle Mohren* (Hamburg: Junius, 1993).



Figure 2 The Moors' Café in Naumburg, built in 1596.
Photo: George Steinmetz



Figure 3 The Naumburg Moor figure from 1714.
Photo: George Steinmetz



Figure 4 Marzipan figures, Café Schubert, Saarbrücken (2005). Photo: George Steinmetz



Figure 5 Café Schubert in Saarbrücken. Photo: George Steinmetz

the fact that colonial-racist images and tropes remain so widespread and commonsensical in Germany. Germany did not have a resident population from its former colonies that could serve as the local bearer of anticolonialism or postcolonial criticism. In contrast to Jean-Paul Sartre and Pierre Bourdieu in France or W. E. B. DuBois in the United States, postwar German intellectuals were not drawn into the criticism of colonialism.⁷

Public television shows and coffee-table books promoting an exoticized colonial nostalgia appeared continuously in West Germany after 1945. Studies of schoolbooks used in West Germany through the 1980s found that they devoted very little space to the non-European world and treated colonial history mainly from the standpoint of European explorers and conquerors. Informal socialization seemed to generate similar forms of historical consciousness: interviews conducted in West Germany between 1979 and 1981 found that most interviewees emphasized the “progress” brought to “the developing countries” by colonialism.⁸ West German universities devoted comparatively meager resources to the study of non-European history.⁹ Political elites had an interest in defining German colonial history as irrelevant, in part so that they could try

7. On Bourdieu’s less familiar critical analyses of French colonialism in Algeria, see Loïc Wacquant, “Following Bourdieu into the Field,” *Ethnography* 5 (2004): 387–414.

8. Bodo von Borries, “Rassendünkel, Schuldgefühle oder Weltgesellschaft? Zur Verarbeitung der Kolonialgeschichte im Geschichtsbewußtsein der Gegenwart,” *Journal für Geschichte* 5 (1984): 31.

9. There were at least as many serious books on German colonialism written in the GDR as in West Germany before 1989; for one example, see Ulrich van der Heyden, “Die historische Afrika-Forschung in der DDR: Versuch einer Bilanz der Afrika-Geschichtsschreibung” (“Historical Research on Africa in the GDR: An Attempt to Draw up the Balance Sheet of Historical Writing on Africa”), in *Die DDR und Afrika (The GDR and Africa)*, ed. Ulrich van der Heyden, Ilona Schleicher, and Hans-Georg Schleicher (Münster: Lit, 1993–94), 108–30. The most influential study of German colonialism in Namibia is by the late East German historian Horst Drechsler: “*Let Us Die*



Figure 6 Marzipan figure, Café Schubert (2005).
Photo: George Steinmetz

to “redefine Germany’s role as a ‘global player’” in countries that suffered from more recent incursions by other colonial powers.¹⁰

This is not to say that during the 1950s and 1960s West Germans were completely oblivious to the global upsurge in anticolonial activity. Colonial monuments were defaced and

toppled. (But such acts sometimes seemed to be directed at least as much against U.S. imperialism as against specifically German colonial legacies: a leaflet distributed at the toppling of a statue in Hamburg in 1967 argued that “the labor of ‘pacification’” in Germany’s lost colonies “was carried out with the same thoroughness as in the Indian wars in North America or like today in Vietnam.” See fig. 6.)¹¹ Third World solidarity movements sprung up, some of them focused on the former German colonies. A handful of critical novels and historical studies were published.¹²

Fighting”: The Struggle of the Herero and Nama against German Imperialism (1884–1915) (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1966).

10. Heiko Möhle, “Gedenken um zu vergessen: Vergangenheitspolitik am Beispiel des ‘Tansania-Parks,’” *iz3w. informationszentrum 3. welt* 275 (March 2004): 37.

11. Leaflet quoted by Zeller, *Kolonialdenkmäler*, 209.

12. One example of critical writing in West Germany is the work of Uwe Timm, whose 1978 novel *Morenga* concerns an anticolonialist leader in German Southwest Africa. But other “critical” treatments of German colonialism recycle colonial-racist stereotypes. A particularly egregious example is the 2004 novel *Herero* by the left-wing writer Gerhard Seyfried, which is indistinguishable from colonial novels. A recent Namibian travel narrative by a former West German RAF terrorist recycles figures from colonial adventure novels as well: Inge Vielt, *Morengas Erben: Eine Reise durch Namibia (Morenga’s Heirs: A Journey through Namibia)* (Hamburg: Edition Nautilus, 2004). For an analysis of the colonial literature on Namibia see Jörg Wassink, *Auf den Spuren des deutschen Völkermordes in Südwestafrika: Der Herero-/Nama-Aufstand in der deutschen Kolonialliteratur; Eine literarhistorische Analyse (In the Tracks of the German Genocide in Southwest Africa: The Herero and Nama Uprising in German Colonial Literature: A Literary-Historical Analysis)* (Munich: M, 2004). Even Uwe Timm fell back into a colonial style in his edited book of photographs from the German colonial era, reproducing images of scantily clad women from the “colonial harem” without captions or commentary. See his *Deutsche Kolonien* (Munich: AutorenEdition, 1981), 38–39.

Figure 7 Students in Hamburg trying to pull down the statue of colonial explorer Hermann von Wißmann, August 8, 1967. Photo: Courtesy *Hamburger Abendblatt*



Has postunification Germany changed? On the one hand, it has seen the rise of an extreme right-wing racist movement.¹³ On the other hand, researchers have found that historical consciousness is now dominated by “anticolonialism, even dependency theory,” especially among older, leftist, and better-educated interviewees.¹⁴ A less parochial historiography, one less focused on Europe and Germany, began to gain approval among leading historians during

the 1990s.¹⁵ Offensive colonial monuments and images were no longer simply eliminated but began to be presented historically or ironically.¹⁶ Today, colonial-racist language is becoming less acceptable in everyday life. The word *Schwarzer* (black) is replacing *Neger* (Negro). Companies that produce the chocolate-covered sweets traditionally called “Negro kisses” or “Moor heads” (*Negerküsse*

13. See George Steinmetz, “Social Class and the Reemergence of the Radical Right in Contemporary Germany,” in *Reworking Class: Cultures and Institutions of Economic Stratification and Agency*, ed. John R. Hall (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 335–68.

14. Bodo von Borries, “Das Bild vom Anderen: Kolonialgeschichte und jungliches Geschichtsbewußtsein in West- und Ost-Deutschland,” in *Rassendiskriminierung, Kolonialpolitik, und ethnisch-nationale Identität: Referate des 2. Internationalen Kolonialgeschichtlichen Symposiums, 1991 in Berlin*, ed. Wilfried Wagner (Münster: Lit, 1992), 470.

15. See Jürgen Osterhammel, *Geschichtswissenschaft jenseits des Nationalstaats: Studien zu Beziehungsgeschichte und Zivilisationsvergleich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2001); Jürgen Kocka, “Losses, Gains, and Opportunities: Social History Today,” *Journal of Social History* 37 (2003): 21–28; and Sebastian Conrad and Shalini Randeria, “Geteilte Geschichten—Europa in einer postkolonialen Welt,” in *Jenseits des Eurozentrismus: Postkoloniale Perspektiven in den Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften*, ed. Sebastian Conrad, Shalini Randeria, and Beate Sutterlüty (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2002), 9–49.

16. Informational plaques were added to the statue of the German colonial conquistador Carl Peters in Hannover, to a memorial in Nürnberg for soldiers who fell in the anti-Boxer campaign and the 1904–8 war in Southwest Africa, and to a monument to the German Southwest African colony in Göttingen. See Felix Schürmann, “Carl Peters,” at www.koloniale-spuren.de, accessed on July 14, 2005; Zeller, *Kolonialdenkmäler*, 309, 314. The central colonial monument in Bremen, dedicated

or *Mohrenköpfe*) have given them less offensive names like “chocolate kisses,” although images like those in figures 4–6 still appear regularly.¹⁷ The Sarotti company, which between 1918 and 2004 used the figure of an African servant to advertise its chocolates (see fig. 9; the Sarotti moor is currently recognized by “98 percent of all Germans”), has eliminated the figure’s large red lips and bulging eyes and lightened its skin color from black to a golden hue. A Web site for collectors of Sarotti memorabilia recommends as “obligatory reading” a critical and historical book on the Sarotti company’s “Moor” imagery.¹⁸



Figure 8 Postcolonial domesticity: Dressing a girl as a “native” for annual *Karneval* festival, 1960s. Courtesy Julia Hell, private collection

in 1932, was renamed “Anticolonial Monument” in 1990 and received a new plaque. In 1996 a second plaque dedicated “to the victims of German colonial rule in Namibia” was inaugurated at the monument in the presence of Namibian president Sam Nujoma. In 2004 a Hamburg artist known as Jokinen *reinstalled* the statue of Hermann Wißmann that had been overturned in 1968, arguing that the sculpture could now serve as “its own countermonument”—something the students in the 1960s obviously did not think possible. Joachim Zeller, “(Post-)Koloniale Monumente: Denkmalinitativen erinnern an die imperiale Übersee-Expansion Deutschlands,” www.deutschland-postkolonial.com/post.pdf, accessed July 14, 2005. A new student association named after Hermann von Wißmann (Studentenbund Hermann von Wißmann) was created in Berlin in 2003, suggesting that the struggle over this colonizer is still not over. The fraternity’s Web site glorifies German colonialism and is riddled with erroneous information about German colonial history; see www.studentenbund-berlin.de, accessed July 14, 2005.

17. On the history of these terms see Alia Mohammed, “PC und Sprachregelung in Deutschland: Negerkuss und Sarotti-Mohr” (“PC and Linguistic Regulation in Germany: The Negro Kiss and the Sarotti-Moor”), in *Political Correctness in der internationalen Politik*, ed. Susanne Nies, Arbeitspapiere des Osteuropa-Instituts der Freien Universität Berlin, Arbeitsbereich Politik und Gesellschaft, 2001, available at www.userpage.fu-berlin.de/~segbers/working_papers/AP36.pdf.

18. At the same time, the revised Sarotti figure still has the huge turban, pointed shoes, and billowing pants, now awakening Orientalist rather than African stereotypes. **First quote from Rita Gudermann and Bernhard Wulff, *Der Sarotti-Mohr: Die bewegte Geschichte einer Werbefigur* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2004), 7; second quote from a Web site for collectors of Sarotti Moor images**



Figure 9 Sarotti Moor advertisement from 1934. Courtesy Wolfgang Kopetschny

This proactive approach to colonial iconography allows the images to continue circulating but seems to encourage a more distanced, reflexive approach to them.¹⁹

Namibia and Germany: A Very Special Case of Postcolonial Memory

The problems of public postcolonial memory are especially complex in the case of German relations with Namibia. The site of the first deliberate genocide of the twentieth century, Namibia has a special status in global, colonial, and German history. The war between Germans and Namibians that lasted from 1904 to 1908 came to an initial apotheosis after the Germans defeated the Ovaherero people on August 11, 1904, at the battle of Ohamakari (known as the battle of the Waterberg among Germans) and sealed them into the parched Omaheke (Kalahari) region to the east, where most died of thirst.²⁰ The next stage of the war involved the decimation of the Nama (Khoi) people, including those led by Hendrik Witbooi. The Witbooi rebelled against German rule on October 4, 1904. Those Witbooi who were not killed in battle were taken prisoner and died due to the harsh condi-

and figurines, www.sarottimohr.com/index.htm (Web site by Wolfgang Kopetschny, last updated Dec. 7, 2004, accessed July 14, 2005). According to this Web site, the Gudermann and Wulff book tracks the Sarotti Moor figure starting with “its origins in the *colonial desires* (*Kolonialsehnsucht*) of the late 19th century” (our emphasis).

19. Of course, some of these efforts have encountered resistance or failed altogether. A plan to rename streets near the Berlin Free University that had been named after battles and warships from the imperialist campaign against the Chinese Boxer Rebellion was scuttled by resistance from district representatives of the Christian Democratic Party. The plan was also abandoned because relevant laws allow for the renaming of streets only if they were given their offensive names during the Nazi or East German periods or under other restrictive conditions. An effort to install a plaque in Münster acknowledging the 1904 Ovaherero genocide also failed. In the eastern town of Stendal, a monument to Gustav Nachtigal, founder of the German colonies in Cameroon and Togo in 1884, was actually *reinstalled* in 1991 after having been removed in 1969 by the East German government; Zeller, *Kolonialdenkmäler*, 215–20, 315. A monument of a dying colonial soldier in Southwest Africa is still standing in Düsseldorf, although a Web site for teachers there recommends using this monument to discuss the 1904 genocide and to interrogate changing views of heroism; see Gerd W. Hochscherf, “Hereroaufstand 1904–08: Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwest? Schlussbetrachtung; Analyse eines Ehrenmals,” January 21, 2004, www.lehrer-online.de/dyn/9.asp?url=388739.htm. Despite protests, a new theme park devoted to Tanzania (“Tanzania Park”) in the Jenfeld district of Hamburg that opened in 2003 displays Nazi-era colonial reliefs.

20. On the divergent memories of this battle among Ovaherero and German Namibians, see Larissa Föster, “Zwischen Waterberg und Okakarara: Namibische Erinnerungslandschaften” (“Between Waterberg and Okakarara: Namibian Landscapes of Memory”), in *Namibia-Deutschland, eine Geteilte Geschichte: Widerstand, Gewalt, Erinnerung (Namibia-Germany: A Divided History)*, ed. Larissa Föster, Dag Henrichsen, and Michael Bollig (Cologne: Minerva, 2004), 164–79.

tions in the German prisoner-of-war camps in Southwest Africa, German Togo, and Cameroon.

Efforts to name and memorialize these events as genocide have met with resistance. In 2001, Ovaherero Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako and the Herero People's Reparations Corporation launched lawsuits against the German government and against firms that profited from the forced labor of prisoners taken in the 1904 war. Government officials fear a flood of new claims if third- or fourth-generation descendants of survivors are successful in claiming reparations. Some other Germans want to "prevent the inflationary use of the term genocide" and to "reserve the term for the extermination practices of the Nazis."²¹ In Namibia itself, which has been free of colonial and apartheid rule since 1990, there is resistance to removing or even contextualizing the numerous monuments from the German colonial period (1884–1915) that celebrate the perpetrators of various atrocities.

Nonetheless, in August 2004 the German government issued a formal apology for the events of 1904, and in May 2005 it offered a special aid package to the groups most affected by the extermination campaign (Ovaherero, Nama, and Damara peoples). In addition to this high-profile acknowledgment of colonial atrocities, public discussions have begun to connect German colonialism in Southwest Africa with Nazism, resituating Hannah Arendt's thesis of the colonial origins of totalitarianism (which emphasized South Africa) to this specific geo-historical setting. Regardless of this claim's plausibility or lack thereof, it forges an ideological connection that may permit established German practices of "coming to terms with the past" that emerged in the context of Nazism to be applied to colonialism in Namibia and in general. This could trigger in turn the sorts of anti-colonial and postcolonial thinking in Germany that have played a more powerful role elsewhere. Germany might even be moving into a unique territory of official admissions of colonial guilt and responsibility.²²

The international focus on the century-old extermination campaign is also

21. Zeller, *Kolonialdenkmäler*, 219, summarizing arguments made by Horst Gründer at a 1985 podium discussion of the plan to add an inscription to the colonial monument in Münster.

22. The recent response to criticism of the exhibition of African culture and people at the Augsburg zoo suggests that Germany may be catching up or even moving ahead of other countries. A social anthropological group at the Max Planck institute responded immediately and generated a forty-eight-page study of the exhibit, its colonial-era precursors, and responses by visitors to the zoo. That study also notes that zoos in other countries, including the Seattle and Cleveland zoos in the U.S., have permanent exhibitions of "primitive" human cultures. See Nina Glick Schiller, Data Dea, and Markus Höhne, "African Culture and the Zoo in the Twenty-First Century: Report on the 'African Village' in Augsburg," report to the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale Germany, July 4, 2005, www.eth.mpg.de/events.

having a series of effects inside Namibia. It is changing the way the Ovaherero are treated by the governing political party, SWAPO (the South West African People's Organisation), which led the struggle against South African apartheid rule. The 1904 genocide is absolutely constitutive for Ovaherero collective identity, but they make up less than 7 percent of the Namibian population. By contrast, the Ovambo, another Namibian ethnic group, constitute more than half the Namibian population and dominate SWAPO numerically, although SWAPO has long had Ovaherero and Nama members and leaders as well. Warriors led by Ovambo chief Nehale Ija Mpingana of Ondonga fought and died alongside Ovaherero fighting Germans in the colony's central region after the battle of Ohamakarari, but in general the Ovambo were not directly targeted by the Germans during the 1904–8 war. To some observers, SWAPO has seemed reluctant to focus too much attention on those events.²³ Most members of the German-speaking minority in Namibia have resisted making any changes to the many monuments from the German period. In their elaborate efforts to cultivate a specifically colonial and German view of the postcolony's history, German Namibians have reinforced a euphemistic language with respect to the events of 1904–8, and some deny the genocide altogether.²⁴ Because of the Germans' economic importance in Namibia and their connections to one of its most important trading partners and foreign aid donors, the postapartheid Namibian government has not directly attacked the German-era monuments. Indeed, the Namibian Monuments Council has held that *no* monuments should be altered or removed, thus continuing to accord special treatment to the German ethnic group (the council has, however, started to create new monuments and sites that construct the Namibian landscape from a more indigenous and anticolonial perspective).²⁵ The attention that recent events have

23. Sam Nujoma, *Where Others Wavered: The Autobiography of Sam Nujoma* (London: Panaf Books, 2001), 10–11. Nujoma, the country's first president and an Ovambo of royal lineage from the Uukwambi district, devotes several pages of his autobiography to the German-Ovaherero war.

24. See, for example, Claus Nordbruch, *Völkermord an den Herero in Deutsch-Südwestafrika? Widerlegung einer Lüge (Genocide against the Herero in German Southwest Africa? Refutation of a Lie)* (Tübingen: Grabert, 2004); Nordbruch, "Rede im Sinne der Versöhnung," *Allgemeine Zeitung* (Windhoek), August 29, 2004. The founder of this self-exculpating view of 1904 was German-Namibian historian Heinrich Vedder, author of *A History of South West Africa* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller, 1960) and other widely read histories of the colony; for an overview of German Namibian views of the genocide, see Klaus H. Rüdiger, *Die Namibia-Deutschen (The Namibian Germans)* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1993), and Zeller, *Kolonialdenkmäler*, 255–56.

25. Eberhard Hofmann, "Eine Geste nicht verstanden" ("A Misunderstood Gesture"), *Allgemeine Zeitung* (Windhoek), February 9, 2005. While under South African rule, the Southwest African Historical Monuments Commission (Historiese Monumente Kommissie van Suidwest-Afrika), founded in 1948, had "people of German descent in leading positions" but no black Namibians; see Zeller, *Kolonialdenkmäler*, 242.

drawn to the 1904 genocide may be unsettling this implicit compromise, however, making Ovaherero grievances more central to the national self-understanding and threatening the German Namibians' protected status with respect to their monuments as well as their ownership of the some of the country's best farmland.

To understand the historical memories that connect and divide Germany and Namibia and the place of these memories in the two countries' visual archives, we need to revisit the relevant colonial history and reconstitute its visual contributions to the contemporary period. German colonization began in 1883, when the first treaties were signed by indigenous Namibians granting use of their land to representatives of a Bremen trading company. By the mid-1890s, the Germans had created a small colonial army made up mainly of Europeans, and had crushed the first movement of primary anticolonial resistance (1893–94) led by Hendrik Witbooi. Land and cattle were transferred from the Ovaherero to the colonizers through various legal maneuvers as well as direct sales by native leaders. Indebtedness, loss of land and livestock, settler and state violence, and the construction of railways through the pastoralists' traditional territories created a sense of crisis among the Ovaherero. Panic and hatred among the colonizers led German troops to open fire on the Ovaherero at Okahandja on January 12, 1904, an event that marks the effective beginning of the war.²⁶ The Ovaherero response was immediate and well coordinated: Ovaherero killed over one hundred German men (and four women), many of them settlers, many unarmed or defenseless. The German military response gathered steam slowly, and in May, General Lothar von Trotha was appointed to replace the apparently vacillating colonial governor as the commander of the German forces. On August 11, German troops armed with machine guns and cannons defeated the bulk of the Ovaherero nation—as many as forty thousand men, women, and children—who had gathered at water holes at the base of the Waterberg mountains (about 140 miles north of Windhoek; see fig. 10). The Ovaherero fled into the Omaheke, to the east of the Waterberg. Von Trotha's aim, in his own words, was to “finish off the rebellious tribes with rivers of blood and rivers of money.”²⁷

On October 2, 1904, von Trotha issued his infamous statement to the Ovaherero: “All Herero, armed or unarmed . . . will be shot dead within the German borders. I will no longer accept women and children, but will force them back to their people or shoot at them.”²⁸ Graf von Schlieffen, head of the Great General Staff

26. See Jan-Bart Gewald, *Herero Heroes: A Socio-Political History of the Herero of Namibia, 1890–1923* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1988), for a reconstruction of the onset of the war.

27. German Federal Archives, Berlin, Colonial Office documents (Reichskolonialamt), Vol. 2089, 100v, November 5, 1904.

28. German Federal Archives, Berlin, Colonial Office documents, vol. 2089, 7r, October 2, 1904.

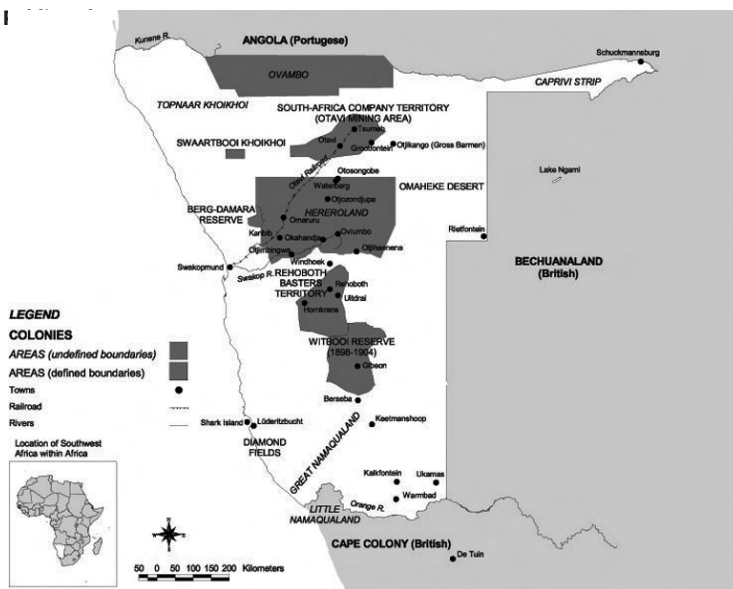


Figure 10 German Southwest Africa at the time of the colonial war of 1904–8. Map: Rob Haug

of the German Army to whom control of the Southwest African war had been transferred from the colonial government early in 1904, and von Trotha's superior, did not countermand this decision but instead wrote in a letter to German chancellor von Bülow that "it is hard to disagree" with von Trotha's assessment that "the entire [Ovaherero] nation should be annihilated or driven from the country," since they had "forfeited their lives."²⁹ Von Trotha first ordered his troops to pursue them into the desert, and when pursuit became impossible, he stationed patrols around water

holes to prevent their survival and along the edge of the desert to limit their escape. Only on December 9, after tens of thousands of Ovaherero had perished in the desert, did von Schlieffen lift the shoot-to-kill order.³⁰ But even then the surviving Ovaherero who were not able to escape to British Bechuanaland (Botswana) or stay hidden were condemned to undergo, in the words of the colony's acting governor, a "period of suffering" (*Leidenszeit*) in the concentration camps. This was intended to ease the labor shortage caused by the extermination of most of the colony's workforce and to guarantee that Namibians would "not revolt again for generations."³¹ All Ovaherero land and cattle were expropriated, and European settlers acquired most of it.³² Even today, more than 40 percent of the land in Namibia consists of commercial farms owned mainly by whites, many of them

29. German Federal Archives, Berlin, Colonial Office documents, vol. 2089, 4r, November 23, 1904.

30. German Federal Archives, Berlin, Colonial Office documents, vol. 2089, 48r, December 9, 1904.

31. German Federal Archives, Berlin, Colonial Office documents, vol. 2118, 154v, July 3, 1905.

32. "Kaiserliche Verordnung, betreffend die Einziehung von Vermögen Eingeborener im südwestafrikanischen Schutzgebiet. Vom 26. Dezember 1905" ("Emperor's Decree Concerning the Seizure of Native's Property in the Southwest African Protectorate"), *Deutsches Kolonialblatt* 17 (1906): 1–2.



Figure 11 “A Herero Woman,” from *Berichte der Rhenischen Missionsgesellschaft* (Rhenish Missionary Society, 1855), Wuppertal, Germany



Figure 12 “Damaras” (or “Ovaherero”) from Charles Andersson, *Lake Ngami* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1856). Sketched by Edm. Walker and drawn on stone by Brandard

descendents of German colonizers.³³ The post of Herero Captain, or chief, was banned. The Germans tried to uproot and fragment Ovaherero communities. A large proportion of the rebellious Witbooi and other Nama groups were killed in battle or died in prison camps through willful neglect, in a process that can also be considered genocidal.³⁴

Figure 11 was published in the reports of the Rhenish Missionary Society, which founded the first mission to the Ovaherero in 1844; it was based on a pic-

33. The German-speaking population in Namibia, estimated at 18,000–20,000 in number, consists primarily of descendents of the pre-1918 German colonizers, although more than 3,000 new Germans emigrated to Namibia between 1951 and 1962. Rüdiger, *Die Namibia-Deutschen*, 155n5. On the distribution of farms owned by ethnic Germans, see Guido G. Weigand, “German Settlement Patterns in Namibia,” *Geographical Review* 75 (1985): 156–69. The rest of the country is made up of crowded “communal lands,” as they are officially called—the sites of native reserves in the South African period. These constitute about 43 percent of Namibia and are inhabited by more than a million Africans. Sidney L. Haring and Sam Amoo, “Namibian Land: Law, Land Reform, and the Restructuring of Post-Apartheid Namibia” (paper presented at the conference, “Decontaminating the Namibian Past,” National University of Namibia, August 17–24, 2004), 3.

34. Although von Trotha’s proclamation to the “rebellious Nama” in 1905 did not announce an intention to kill, there is copious official correspondence in which the Witboois and other Nama prisoners are knowingly condemned to deadly conditions of imprisonment, in both Southwest Africa and Cameroon.



Figure 13 Theodor Leutwein (left), Samuel Maherero (right), and others. Courtesy National Archives of Namibia

ture from a narrative of travels in the region by Francis Galton, the future eugenicist.³⁵ Despite its romanticizing approach, the drawing accurately depicts traditional Ovaherero women's headgear and bracelets (compare figures 26 and 27 for contemporary versions of hat and bracelets). Figure 12 is from a book by adventurer Charles Andersson, one of the few nonmissionary Europeans to live in Southwest Africa in the mid-nineteenth century.³⁶

Figure 13 shows Theodor Leutwein, governor of German Southwest Africa between 1894 and mid-1904 (sitting on the left), at a meeting in 1895 with



Figure 14 Samuel Maherero posing like Kaiser Wilhelm. Courtesy National Archives of Namibia

35. Sir Francis Galton, *The Narrative of an Explorer in Tropical South Africa* (London: J. Murray, 1853), 189.

36. The caption to this image, “Damaras,” is somewhat confusing. Damara was what Khoisan-speaking inhabitants of the country called the Ovaherero (Otjiherero speakers). New European arrivals from the British Cape Colony often called the Ovaherero “Damaras” in the first half of the nineteenth century. Nowadays *Damara* refers to the Khoisan-speaking people who were called “Hill Damaras” (or “Berg Damaras”) in the nineteenth century. Many of these Damaras were workers or servants for Ovaherero in the early twentieth century and therefore suffered along with their masters in the Omaheke desert in 1904. This is the reason why the recent (May 2005) German reconciliation fund targets Damaras as well as Namas and Ovaherero.

omuhona (chief) Manasse of Omaruru (fourth from left, sitting) and Samuel Maherero (standing, right). Maherero, who had attained the title of Ovaherero Paramount Chief in 1891 with the support of German missionaries and colonial officials, is dressed in stylish European-made clothing. After leading the Ovaherero war effort against the Germans in 1904, he was able to escape to neighboring British Bechuanaland. Samuel Maherero's body was brought back to Okahandja for burial in 1923.

Figure 14 shows Samuel Maherero wearing a uniform consisting of diverse pieces of German uniforms. Similar sartorial bricolage was carried on by the “troop players” (*oturupa*) movement after the war (see below). Maherero is striking a pose here that his contemporaries would have associated with Kaiser Wilhelm II (the emperor with the lame arm).³⁷ African chiefs were given photographs of the emperor and his wife by the colonial government and were expected to display them prominently, and Kaiser Wilhelm's birthday was a major public celebration in all of the German colonies.

Some writers claim that the Germans used mainly German troops in their overseas colonies, setting them apart from the British and the French. But even in Southwest Africa, where the majority of the colonial soldiers were German, the army relied on indigenous troops (see fig. 15). The unit that fought the Witbooi rebels in 1893–94 included soldiers from the Reheboth Baster people, who were descended from Cape Boers and Khoikhoi peoples and classified as “natives” under German colonial law (see also fig. 38). Witbooi and Rehebother soldiers fought alongside Germans in the 1904 war against the Ovaherero.



Figure 15 German officer drilling African troops of the First Company of the *Schutztruppe* at Windhoek, 1901. Courtesy National Archives of Namibia

37. Susanne Kuß, “Der Herero-Deutsche Krieg,” in Förster, Henrichsen, and Bollig, *Namibia-Deutschland*, 65; John C. G. Rohl, *Young Wilhelm: The Kaiser's Early Life, 1859–1888* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).



Figure 16 OvaHerero surrendering to Germans, 1904–5. Courtesy National Archives of Namibia

In figure 16 the colonial power structure has not disappeared, but its visual constellation has been altered, making this an image of fear and humiliation. The gaze of photographer and colonizer have merged. The OvaHerero are not just starving in this photograph; they are also surrendering. Compelling arguments have been made against reproducing comparable images from the Holocaust. The risks of over-familiarity and reproducing the gaze of the photographer-perpetrator seem partially offset in this case by the fact that these events and images are still relatively unfamiliar to the descendants of the perpetrators and others outside Namibia.³⁸

OvaHerero who were captured or who surrendered after the extermination order was lifted in December 1904 were executed or sent to concentration camps, where the majority perished. Shark Island, located off the coast at Lüderitzbucht, held both Nama and OvaHerero prisoners and was one of the most notorious concentration camps during the 1904–8 war, with a mortality rate above 90 percent

38. For a recent look at the ethics of pictures of atrocities, see Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003). On the potentially depoliticizing effects of such photographs, see John Berger's "Photographs of Agony," in *Selected Essays* (New York: Vintage, 2001), 279–81. For the specific postwar and post-Holocaust context see Julia Hell, "The Angel's Enigmatic Eyes; or, The Gothic Beauty of Catastrophic History in W. G. Sebald's *Air War and Literature*," in *Criticism* 46 (2004): 361–92.

until a change of command occurred in April 1907.³⁹ (See fig. 18.) Between mid-1904 and the end of 1907 Ovaherero and other prisoners were forced to build railroads and were put to work for other private and public employers. (See figs. 17, 19, and 20.)

The Postcolonial Visual Archive in Namibia

German rule in Namibia ended in 1915, when South African troops occupied the territory. In 1920 the League of Nations officially transferred control of the colony to Great Britain, which subcontracted the job to its South African colony. Unlike the other former German colonies, Southwest Africa retained a sizable German-speaking settler population and continued to attract new German immigrants during the interwar period and especially after 1945. Today there are as many as twenty thousand German speakers in Namibia, including the current (as of July 2005) Namibian ambassador to Germany, whose grandparents emigrated to the colony during the 1920s.⁴⁰

In the 1920s the Ovaherero began to reconstitute their shattered society and cattle herds and to reclaim ancestral lands.⁴¹ Survivors of the 1904 genocide converted in great numbers to Christianity in the German POW camps between 1904 and 1908 after resisting missionary blandishments for more than a half century. Similarly, the *Oturupa*, or “troop players” movement, initially involved an adoption of part of the enemy’s symbolic system. The practices of conversion and *Oturupa* were generated out of the post-1904 context of defeat and identification with the aggressor, although both eventually became sites of mutual aid and resistance to the South African regime. The *Oturupa* initially took on a degraded version of

39. On mortality rates among Namibian prisoners in the concentration camps in Southwest Africa after 1904, see the report for the High Command of the *Schutztruppe* of March 23, 1908, in German Federal Archives, Berlin, Colonial Office documents, vol. 2140, fols. 161–62; see also Casper W. Erichsen, “Zwangsarbeit im Konzentrationslager auf der Haifischinsel” (“Forced Labor in Concentration Camps on Shark Island”), in *Völkermord in Deutsch-Südwestafrika: Der Kolonialkrieg (1904–1908) in Namibia und seine Folgen (Genocide in German Southwest Africa: The Colonial War (1904–1908) in Namibia and Its Consequences)*, ed. Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller (Berlin: Links, 2003) and “‘The Angel of Death Has Descended Violently among Them’: A Study of Namibia’s Concentration Camps and Prisoners-of-War, 1904–08,” (master’s thesis, University of Namibia, 2004).

40. Hanno B. Rumpf was a member of SWAPO and went into exile in (West) Germany in 1984. See Rolf Lautenschläger’s “Ich träume auf Deutsch,” an interview with Hanno B. Rumpf published in *die tageszeitung* (Berlin), December 22, 2003.

41. As noted by Gesine Krüger, *Kriegsbewältigung und Kriegsbewußtsein: Realität, Deutung, und Verarbeitung des deutschen Kolonialkrieges in Namibia 1904 bis 1907* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1999), 211.

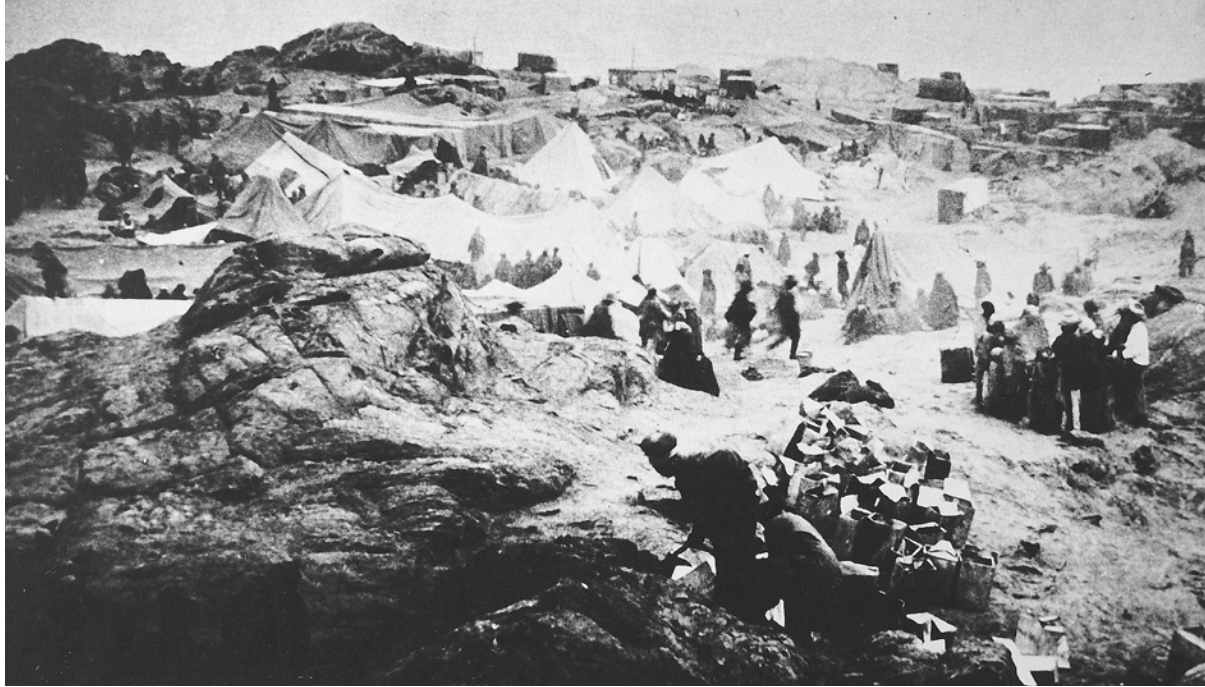
German culture, but they also reworked the visual archive of German colonialism.⁴² In the years after World War I, Ovaherero men began to wear odd bits of German military uniforms. (See figs. 21–22.) *Oturupa* members conducted German-style drills using sticks for rifles. The *Oturupa* was organized into regimental districts in which ranking individuals took the names of former German officers and passed notes to one another written in German. In the 1920s *Oturupa* members sometimes carried flags with the black, white, and red colors of the imperial German flag.⁴³



Figure 17 Ovaherero prisoners in chains, 1904. Courtesy National Archives of Namibia

42. The *timing* of the sudden wave of Ovaherero conversion immediately after the war underscores the context of social crisis in which these cultural transformations took place. The Ovaherero did not adopt the clothing or other signifiers of their Khoikhoi enemies before or after their “liberation” from the Khoikhoi leader Jonker Afrikaner in the nineteenth century. The fact that the Ovaherero adopted the signifiers of the Germans but not of the Khoikhoi, and that they did so en masse only after the defeat and genocide of 1904, is of crucial importance. Nor were there long-standing traditions of competitive dancing or parading among Ovaherero before 1914, according to Deborah Durham, “Images of Culture: Being Herero in a Liberal Democracy (Botswana),” vol. 2 (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1993), 229.

43. *Oturupa* members insisted that this flag was their own and not the Germans’, but this could reflect the South African rulers’ wariness of any sign of German influence. Uniforms modeled on the South African defense forces were not introduced for several decades after the 1920s. See Wolfgang Werner, “‘Playing Soldiers’: The Truppenspieler Movement among the Herero of Namibia, 1915 to ca. 1945,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 16 (1990): 476–502; Deborah Durham, “Images of Culture,” vol. 2, 229–30; and Jan-Bart Gewald, “Die Beerdigung Samuel Maherero und die Reorganisation der Herero” (“The Burial of Samuel Maherero and the Reorganization of the Herero”), in Zimmerer and Zeller, *Völkermord*, 105–20.



Today the *Oturupa* is “a Herero network that supports members socially and economically” and whose members appear in German dress from the colonial period “to honor chiefs of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”⁴⁴

When Samuel Maherero died in 1923, his body was returned to Okahandja for burial. Since that time, every August on “Red Flag Day,” the Ovaherero, led by the *Oturupa*, have made an annual pilgrimage to the graves of the Tjamuaha-Maherero royal family in Okahandja. In the pictures from 2004 (see figs. 23–31), the men and women affiliated with Okahandja and the Maherero-Tjamuaha line indicate this affiliation with red bands and insignia. Those wearing white (see fig. 26) are associated with the royal family of Zeraua, based in Omaruru, and hold a similar celebration every October. The large number of women in white at the end of the procession is thus suggestive of a desire for unity among the sometimes fissile Ovaherero nation.⁴⁵ On the one hand, these celebrations represent a reap-

Figure 18

Concentration Camp,
Shark Island, ca. 1906–7.
Courtesy National
Archives of Namibia

44. Michael O’Sullivan, review on the H-German Web site (June 2004) of the exhibition *Namibia-Deutschland: Eine geteilte Geschichte; Widerstand-Gewalt-Erinnerung* at the Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum für Völkerkunde, at www.h-net.org/mmreviews/showrev.cgi?path=728.

45. In another show of unity, in August 2004 Herero Paramount Chief Kuaima Riruako attended the separate Ovambanderu Green Flag ceremony rather than participating in the Red Flag events in Okahandja. The Mbanderu (Ovambanderu) consider themselves to be a semiautonomous branch of the Herero nation and hold their own celebrations: one, in April, in Okahandja and another, in August, on a farm near Gobabis. See Kae Matundu-Tjiparuro, “Has God Now Fated Unity?” *New Era* (Windhoek), August 24, 2004; Zeller, *Kolonialdenkmäler*, 261–62n673; and Theo Sundermeier, Heinrich Tjituka, and Brigitte Lau, *The Mbanderu: Their History until 1914 as Told to Theo Sundermeier in 1966*, trans. Annemarie Heywood (Windhoek: MSORP, 1985).



Figure 19 The use of prison slave labor after the German-Ovaherero war. Courtesy National Archives of Namibia



Figure 20 The use of prison slave labor after the German-Ovaherero war. Courtesy National Archives of Namibia

appropriation of ancestral Ovaherero space and an ongoing consolidation of a shattered nation; on the other hand, they continue to reveal the legacies of German colonialism and genocide. For example, one aspect of the annual Red Flag Day events is the gathering around the traditional ancestors' fire and the recitation of praise songs and *ombimbi*, which, in precolonial times, were sung when warriors and hunters returned home; today the songs often refer to the 1904 war.⁴⁶ In the background of figure 28 is a cameraman from the Namibian Broadcasting Corporation, indicating one of the ways in which independent Namibia is reclaiming the visual representation of itself.

Another visible indicator of change is the construction (since the mid-nineteenth century) of Ovaherero graves in European Christian style (figure 30). A traditional Ovaherero grave, like the one in figure 29, indicated the status of the deceased with the number of cattle skulls displayed on it (some contemporary Ovaherero graves combine a European-style headstone with a cattle skull). Ovaherero traditionally believe that ancestors have more power than the living, and that one should never engage in struggles over a grave, much less desecrate one. Indeed, this may be an additional reason for the failure to remove or alter the offensive

46. Jekura Kavari, Dag Henrichssen, and Larissa Förster, "Die *oturupa*," in Förster, Henrichssen, and Bollig, *Namibia-Deutschland*, 162.

German colonial monuments in Namibia (like the ones in figures 33, 35, 37, and 39, below), some of which are allegedly understood as German graves.⁴⁷

Each year on the annual memorial days, the Ovaherero visit the Okahandja and Waterberg cemeteries and honor the graves not only of their own people, but also of their erstwhile enemies, the fallen soldiers of the *Schutztruppe*, or German colonial army. Figure 31 shows Ovaherero behind the old Rhenish mission church at Okahandja visiting the grave of Richard Max von Rosenberg, a lieutenant in the Imperial Colonial Army who was wounded in action on April 9, 1904, and died on April 25. According to the inscription, he “fought the good fight.”

Germany and the Memory of Nazism and Southwest Africa

German-Namibian relations have slowly intensified since the 1980s.⁴⁸ SWAPO’s victory in the first free Namibian elections in 1989 was greeted by a Bundestag resolution welcoming Namibia’s independence and recognizing Germany’s “special relationship” to the country, which made it a focal point for bilateral German development aid.⁴⁹ In a speech in 2004, the German ambassador to Namibia stressed that “the German government lives up to its historical responsibility by establishing a special relationship with independent Namibia,” adding that “since 1990 Namibia has been receiving more than five hundred million euros for its own development” — more aid per capita than Germany gave to any other country.⁵⁰ The “special importance” of the relationship between Namibia and Germany “is also reflected in high-ranking reciprocal visits.” Movement toward a more direct acknowledgment of past atrocities began in the late 1990s when a governing coalition of Social Democrats and Greens came to power in Germany. In August 2004 the German Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, Heidemarie Wiecek-Zeul, addressed Ovaherero leaders during the commemoration of the battle of Ohamakari and acknowledged “the violence inflicted by the German colonial powers on your ancestors, particularly the Herero and

47. Zeller, *Kolonialdenkmäler*, 244–46.

48. East Germany provided assistance to the Namibian liberation movement in the 1970s and gave shelter to 430 Namibian children from refugee camps between 1979 and 1988. See Constance Kenna, “Homecoming: The GDR Kids of Namibia,” in *Homecoming: The GDR Kids of Namibia* (Windhoek: New Namibia Books, 1999), 9–62.

49. Reinhard Kößler, “Berlin weiß nichts von Völkermord” (“Berlin Knows Nothing About Genocide”), *Afrika Süd: Zeitschrift zum südlichen Afrika* 4 (2004): 12.

50. Wolfgang Massing, in a speech posted on the Web site of the German Embassy in Namibia, “Speech of Dr. Wolfgang Massing, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, to commemorate 1904 at Okahandja, 11.01.2004,” at www.windhuk.diplo.de/de/seite__rede__Okahandja__2004__01__11.html.



Figure 21 *Oturupa* member, after World War I, wearing German spiked helmet and uniform and posing like Samuel Maherero. Courtesy National Archives of Namibia



Figure 22 *Oturupa* drilling exercise, after World War I. Courtesy National Archives of Namibia

the Nama” and “the atrocities committed.” She recognized that “following the uprisings, the surviving Herero, Nama, and Damara were interned in camps and put to forced labor of such brutality that many did not survive.” And in a carefully worded conclusion, Wiczorek-Zeul admitted that “the atrocities committed at that time would *today* be termed genocide.”⁵¹ In May 2005 the German government created a special reconciliation fund of €20 million (separate from its annual aid budget for Namibia of €12 million) to pursue specific development projects among the Ovaherero, Damara, and Nama peoples—the groups most grievously affected by the German policies of 1904–8. In Namibia, the SWAPO government began recently trying to return some of the previously expropriated commercial farmland to indigenous Namibians. The Germans responded by seeking ways to prevent a situation like in Zimbabwe, where in recent years government-backed mobs have violently attacked white farmers and forced them off of their land.⁵²

51. Heidemarie Wiczorek-Zeul used a nearly identical formula in May 2005 when she stated: “Today one would designate these atrocities as genocide.” See Stefan Fischer, “20 Mio. Euro für Versöhnung: SPD-Ministerin will Initiative gründen und die Entwicklungshilfe verdoppeln” (“Twenty Million Euros for Reconciliation: SPD Minister Wants to Begin Initiative and Double Development Aid”), *Allgemeine Zeitung* (Windhoek), May 26, 2005.

52. The German colonial government had transferred large tracts of arable and mineral-rich land from Ovaherero and other indigenous communities before the 1904 war; see George Steinmetz, *Pre-coloniality: Ethnographic Discourse and “Native Policy” in the German Overseas Empire (South-west Africa, Samoa, and Qingdao/China)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), chap. 3.

In Berlin in November of 2004, at a panel discussion of the genocide, a member of the von Trotha family apologized publicly for the deeds of his distant relative.⁵³ Around the same time, representatives of the von Trotha family met with two descendants of Samuel Maherero and issued a written statement indicating that “we, members of the ‘von Trotha’ family, are ashamed of the terrible events that took place a hundred years ago,” and that “we share . . . what has been expressed by our Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development . . . concerning the historic guilt of Germans during their colonial rule in Namibia.”⁵⁴

Namibia is thus a distinctive case in many ways for Germany, as Germany is for Namibia. For many the theme of colonial genocide appears to connect Namibia to Nazism.⁵⁵ An influential older history of German Southwest Africa by historian Helmut Bley concludes with a section entitled “Growing Totalitarianism,” which discusses Hannah Arendt’s argument about the continuity between imperialism and totalitarianism (despite the fact that Arendt focused on the South African Boers rather than the colonial Germans).⁵⁶ After all, Southwest Africa’s first German governor, Heinrich Goering, was the father of the Nazi *Reichsmarschall*

53. This was during a discussion following a paper by George Steinmetz called “The Herero Genocide, One Hundred Years After” at the House of World Cultures in Berlin on November 13, 2004.

54. The first quote is from Oliver Hoischen’s “Versöhnung am Kaffeetisch: Hundert Jahre nach der Schlacht: Familie von Trotha trifft Familie Maharero,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, November 21, 2004; the second quote comes from the unpublished text by Wolf-Thilo von Trotha, president of the von Trotha Family Association, “Introductory Speech for the Meeting with Chief Maherero on November 15, 2004.” Thanks to Karin von Trotha for sending us this statement. The descendants of Samuel Maherero who met with the von Trothas rejected reparations payments and requested instead a fund for projects that could reconstruct the “fabric of the Herero communities and other groups affected by the colonial war” (Alfons Maherero, quoted in Hoischen, “Versöhnung am Kaffeetisch”). Herero Paramount Chief Riruako is a controversial figure and the ruling party, SWAPO, has opposed reparations. The German government’s ethnically targeted aid package could be seen as corrosive of Namibian national unity. But as Reinhard Kößler points out, “by no means were all [Namibian groups] targeted by the colonial genocide. . . . the denial of differentiated experiences will also lead inevitably to resentment and conflicts.” And for the Germans to “restrict themselves to developmental cooperation with the Namibian government would be to misrecognize the difference between historic guilt and contemporary cooperative relations and at the same time squander the chance to set in motion a broad social process of reconciliation” (“Politik mit Erinnerung—post-colonial,” *Afrika Süd: Zeitschrift zum südlichen Afrika* 5 [2004]: 2–3).

55. Thomas Pynchon depicted von Trotha and Southwest Africa as precursors of Nazism. Pynchon’s novel *V* (1963) includes an entire chapter dealing obliquely with the massacre of the Herero (“Mondaugen’s Story,” chap. 9); the Ovaherero appear in his *Gravity’s Rainbow* as the “Schwarzkommando,” reinforcing the linkage between Nazism and “the scrupulous butcher named von Trotha” (*Gravity’s Rainbow* [New York: Viking, 1973], 367–69, 420).

56. Helmut Bley, *South-West Africa under German Rule* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1996); Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: World Publishing Company, 1950).



Figure 23 Annual Red Flag Day (“Herero Day”), commemoration of Ovaherero anticolonial and anti-apartheid leaders, Okahandja, August 2004.
Photo: George Steinmetz



Figure 25 Annual Red Flag Day (“Herero Day”), commemoration of Ovaherero anticolonial and anti-apartheid leaders, Okahandja, August 2004.
Photo: George Steinmetz



Figure 24 Annual Red Flag Day (“Herero Day”), commemoration of Ovaherero anticolonial and anti-apartheid leaders, Okahandja, August 2004.
Photo: George Steinmetz



Figure 26 Annual Red Flag Day (“Herero Day”), commemoration of Ovaherero anticolonial and anti-apartheid leaders, Okahandja, August 2004.
Photo: George Steinmetz



Figure 27 Ovaherero honoring the grave of Samuel Maherero (died 1923), Okahandja, August 2004. Photo: George Steinmetz



Figure 28 Ovaherero honoring the grave of Senior Chief David Kukajorua Ndisiro (died 1999), Okahandja, August 2004. Photo: George Steinmetz

Hermann Goering. The majority of German Namibians were enthusiastic Nazis during the 1930s and 1940s, and even in modern independent Namibia there remain neo-Nazis and right-wing extremists.⁵⁷ The neo-Arendtian argument deriving Nazism from colonialism has been followed up by more recent research on the Nazi *Generalgouvernement* in occupied Poland and the Final Solution.⁵⁸

57. Rüdiger, *Die Namibia-Deutschen*; Brigitta Schmidt-Lauber, *Die abhängigen Herren: Deutsche Identität in Namibia (The Dependent Masters: German Identity in Namibia)* (Münster: Lit, 1993), 74.

58. On comparisons and continuities, see Reinhard Kößler and Henning Melber, “Vergangenes in der Gegenwart: Kontinuitäten des deutschen Kolonialismus” (“The Past in the Present: Continuities of German Colonialism”), *iz3w. informationszentrum 3. welt* 275 (March 2004): 22–26; Jürgen Zimmerer, “Krieg, KZ, und Völkermord in Südwestafrika. Der erste deutsche Genozid” (“War, Concentration Camp, and Genocide in Southwest Africa: The First German Genocide”), in Zimmerer and Zeller, *Völkermord*, 45–63; Jürgen Zimmerer, “Die Geburt des ‘Ostlandes’ aus dem Geiste des Kolonialismus: Ein postkolonialer Blick auf die NS-Eroberungs- und Vernichtungspolitik” (“The Birth of Ostland from the Spirit of Colonialism: A Postcolonial View of Nazi Policies of Conquest and Annihilation”), *Sozial.Geschichte* 1 (2004): 10–43; and Markus Roth, “‘Pioneers of the East’: The District Chiefs (*Kreishauptleute*) in the Government-General in a Comparative Perspective” (paper presented to the Conference of Europeanists, Chicago, Ill., March 2004).

Memories of German Colonialism and the Namibian Visual Archive

Tied together by these events of a century ago, the two countries have dealt with them in different ways. The colonial monuments in the capital that celebrate the country's erstwhile German colonizers are one of the more remarkable sights for a newcomer to Namibia. Southwest Africa was unique both because before World War I it already had more colonial monuments than any of the other German colonies and because none of these monuments were removed by the South African or



Figure 29 Traditional Ovaherero grave. Courtesy Archiv- und Museumsstiftung Wuppertal (Archival and Museum Foundation Wuppertal), Germany



Figure 30 European-style Ovaherero grave, Okahandja. Photo: George Steinmetz



Figure 31 Ovaherero visiting German graves behind old Rhenish Mission church, Okahandja, August 2004. Photo: George Steinmetz

postcolonial governments; in the other former German colonies the comparable monuments were removed by the new colonizers after World War I. Yet these monuments are unambiguously intended to demonstrate German political-military superiority and dominance. Churches too were “signs of spiritual and cultural dominance” where missionaries’ condemnation of indigenous beliefs was backed by the power of the colonial state.⁵⁹ The Christ Church in Windhoek combines the political-military and the spiritual-cultural modes of domination. It is located on a hill above the main street in downtown Windhoek, adjacent to an even more powerful symbol of colonial political-military authority, the German fortress called *Alte Feste*, built in 1889 by Curt von François, the colony’s second Imperial Commissary from March 1891 to March 1894.⁶⁰ In front of the fortress stands the most aggressive colonial symbol in all of Namibia, the bronze equestrian

59. Speitkamp, “Kolonialherrschaft,” 167.

60. The Imperial Commissary, or *Kaiserlicher Kommissar*, was the colony’s head governing post and was renamed *Landeshauptmann* in 1893 and *Gouverneur* in 1898.



Figure 32 Christuskirche (Christ Church), Windhoek. Photo: George Steinmetz

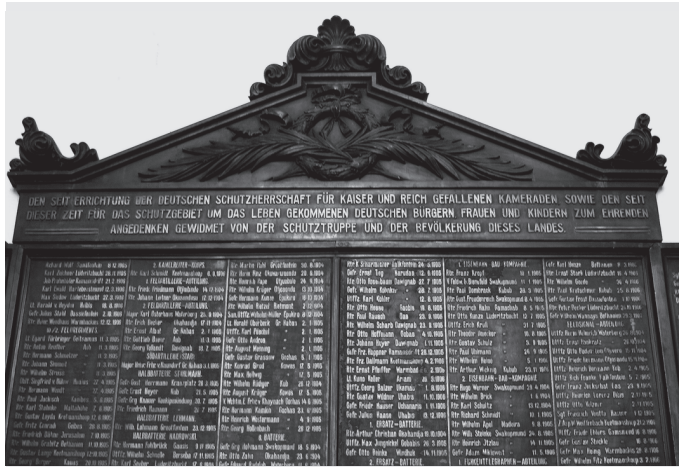


Figure 33 Plaque inside the Christuskirche. Photo: George Steinmetz



Figure 34 Plaque inside the Christuskirche with names of civilians killed in the “Uprising of Hereros and Hottentots, 1904–1907.” Photo: George Steinmetz

monument with horse and rider wearing the uniform of the *Schutztruppe* (see figs. 35–36). (The German committee in charge of creating the monument after the 1904–1908 war rejected proposals for statues showing wounded or fallen soldiers, since their aim was to demonstrate triumph and readiness.)⁶¹ The statue is located on the site of the first concentration camp created during the German-Ovaherero war of 1904. This entire complex overlooks downtown Windhoek from a central position.

Windhoek's Christ Church, consecrated in 1910, was built to commemorate the Germans who died in the Ovaherero and Nama wars (see fig. 32). An entire wall of the church is filled with a plaque listing the names of every German and European killed in the Namibian colonial wars. The dedication along the top of the plaque reads "In respectful memory of the comrades who have fallen since the creation of the German Protectorate and of the German citizens, women, and children who have given their lives for the Protectorate since this date, dedicated by the *Schutztruppe* and the population of this country." (See figs. 33–34.) In front of the Alte Feste stands the bronze equestrian statue (*Reiterdenkmal*), installed in 1912.

In a park on Windhoek's main business street, formerly called Kaiserstraße and since renamed Independence Avenue, stands the so-called warriors' monument (*Kriegerdenkmal*), an iron obelisk erected in 1907 to commemorate the colonial troops killed fighting rebellious Witbooi in 1893–94. The symbolic German eagle on top of the monument is sitting on a ball, resembling a more elaborate monument in Braunschweig, Germany, which shows a lion grasping a globe inscribed with the names of the German colonies. On the front of the obelisk is a wreath with crossed swords and text that reads "To the memory of the heroes who fell in the war against the Witbooi tribe in the years 1893 and 1894." The text on the left side of the obelisk (figure 38) is remarkable in that it lists the names of five fallen soldiers from the Rehoboth Baster community who helped the Germans fight the Witbooi: indigenous soldiers are rarely listed on such monuments. As usual, this monument does not mention the indigenous victims of the massacre.

The statue of Major Curt von François, installed in 1965, looms over one end of Independence Avenue in front of Windhoek's town hall. (See fig. 39.) As a member of the German Colonial Army, von François participated in building the Alte Feste, and led the massacre of scores of Witbooi women and children in the early morning of April 12, 1893.

61. Joachim Zeller, "Der Reiterdenkmal in Windhoek/Namibia: Ein deutsches Kolonialdenkmal im Wandel der Zeiten," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 43 (1995): 778.



Figure 35 Alte Feste (Old Fortress) and equestrian statue, Windhoek. Photo: George Steinmetz



Figure 36 "Rivers of Blood": View from inside Alte Feste overlooking equestrian statue and Windhoek skyline (2004). Photo: George Steinmetz

Although this cluster of objects might seem to confirm the thesis of a failed decolonization of the urban landscape, more recent cultural interventions partially discount this theory. Like all colonizing powers, the Germans staked out their claim to rule in Namibia by creating a dense symbolic landscape, erecting a large number of monuments and replacing indigenous names with the names of their own leaders.⁶² The post-independence Namibian government also changed many street and place names; Leutweinstraße (Leutwein Street) in front of the Alte Feste became Robert Mugabe Avenue and the street leading up to the *Christuskirche* is now named for Fidel Castro (see figure 32).⁶³ The government stopped illuminating the equestrian statue at night, and a group of German and Namibian artists painted a mural nearby of the destruction of the statue of the horse and rider and their replacement on the pedestal by a white rabbit, which seems to represent a peaceful (and anxious) alternative to imperial militarism.⁶⁴ The display inside the old fortress, which now houses part of the Namibian National Museum, deals with the country's anticolonial and antiapartheid movements and the creation of post-colonial democracy. Statues of anticolonial leaders have been commissioned and installed in the Namibian Parliament Gardens, and historical sites that are not cel-

62. Of course this practice varied by colony; in segregated German Qingdao, streets in the Chinese section were named after places in Shandong Province. For an excellent study of efforts to stamp a German presence on the colonized landscape in Togo, see Trutz von Trotha, *Koloniale Herrschaft: Zur soziologischen Theorie der Staatsentstehung am Beispiel des "Schutzgebietes Togo"* (*Colonial Rule: On the Sociological Theory of State Formation, Using the Example of the Togo Protectorate*) (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1994). Even though the German colonial period was rather short, the dense network of monuments in Namibia reflects the fact that this was also the period in which the recently unified nation-state engaged in what Rudy Koshar calls the "formation of a national optics" via the saturation of the metropolitan landscape with national monuments; see *Germany's Transient Pasts: Preservation and National Memory in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 23. A similar dynamic is at work in post-1989 Germany, with a focus on Berlin; see Andreas Huyssen, "The Voids of Berlin," in *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 49–71. Colonialism decenters this national landscape of monuments in various interesting ways. First, German monuments are strewn all over the world, from Qingdao to Equatorial Guinea, a fact that is overlooked in some of the research on German monuments. Second, within Germany, Bremen and Hamburg (rather than Berlin) are the central memorial sites for colonialism (see n. 16).

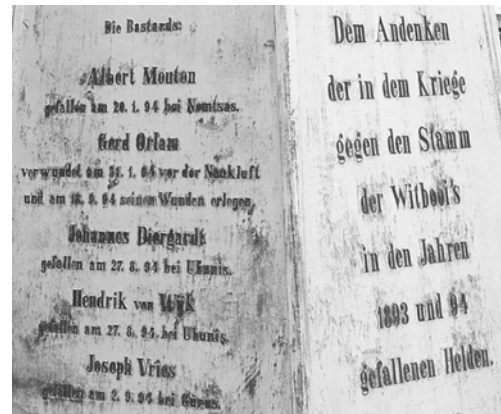
63. It is worth noting here that Namibia is widely considered to be one of the most democratic countries in Africa.

64. The rabbit is associated in German with anxiety, as in the expression *Angsthase* (literally "frightened rabbit," meaning "scaredy-cat"). For an image of the mural see the Web site "Mural Global" by the German artist group *Farbfieber* at www.mural-global.org/dir2A_doc58B.html (accessed July 14, 2005).



Figure 37 Warriors' monument, Independence Avenue, downtown Windhoek. Photo: George Steinmetz

Figure 38 Warriors monument, close-up. Photo: George Steinmetz



bratory of the colonizers have been turned into national monuments.⁶⁵ South of Windhoek is a massive socialist-realist monument, the Heroes' Acre, created by North Korean sculptors and inaugurated in 2002. Stalinist in style, its content diverges greatly from other monuments in Namibia: whites are depicted here as enemies, not as conquerors or civilizers. Heroes' Acre is dedicated to Hendrik Witbooi, whose countenance figures on the Namibian dollar. Several recent films also deal more honestly with Namibia's colonial past.⁶⁶



Figure 39 Statue of Curt von François, Germany's first hired colonial assassin in Southwest Africa. Photo: George Steinmetz

Figure 40 shows one display in the museum inside the Alte Feste containing images of heroes and martyrs of the armed struggle against South

African apartheid rule: a camouflage uniform made in the USSR and used by SWAPO and PLAN (its military wing—People's Liberation Army of Namibia), and Soviet-made rifles used by the first SWAPO combatants. There are also busts of Samuel Maherero and Hendrik Witbooi.

65. The Namibian National Monuments Council, under the chairmanship of Peter Katjavivi, has proclaimed three new historic sites as national monuments, as discussed on the excellent Web site on Namibian history compiled by the late Dr. Klaus Dierks, former member of the Namibian Parliament and SWAPO party member: www.klausdierks.com/Chronology/134.htm (accessed July 14, 2005).

66. Recent films made by non-Namibians include *White Ghosts*, a 2004 documentary by German filmmaker Martin Baer about an Ovaherero man in Berlin returning to Namibia to seek his putative white relatives and *The Colonial Misunderstanding (Le Malentendu Colonial)*, a documentary by Jean Marie Teno (a Cameroonian filmmaker based in France) about German missionaries in colonial and postcolonial Namibia.



Figure 40 Display box inside the Alte Feste (2004).
 Photo: George Steinmetz



Figure 41 Taking control of the camera.
 Photo: George Steinmetz

Figure 41 shows a poster announcing the film *Nujoma: Where Others Wavered* about the life of Sam Nujoma, the first president of a newly independent Namibia and the leader of SWAPO resistance against the South African regime.⁶⁷ The film is being directed by African-American filmmaker Charles Burnett and stars Danny Glover and Carl Lumbly. It is financed by the Namibian government and is scheduled for completion in December 2005. The filmmakers called on locals to participate as extras and transformed the streets of Swakopmund and other towns into stage sets.

Globalization of Public Memory

Although direct memory of German colonialism was weak in Germany from the 1920s through the 1980s, there was extensive indirect participation in colonial consciousness through the circulation of degrading images of African, Asian, Amerindian, and Oceanic people. But a weakly articulated discourse about colonial atrocities and imperialism's horrific legacy, based on the thesis codified by Hannah Arendt, was always present. Today we see the Arendtian thesis becoming a leading model for Germany's construction of its colonial past. Paralleling this is intensified public criticism of the ways Africans have long been depicted in Germany. The discussion of Namibia is partly responsible for this changing optic, due to the putative links between German colonialism there and the Holocaust.

The situation within Namibia is not separate from these reconfigurations of collective colonial memory and its visual archive in Germany. Some Ovaherero are comparing their community's history to the Holocaust. Although this German axis is just one factor shaping public memory in Namibia, it is an important one because of the local prominence of monuments from the German era and the Ovaherero reparations claims. Theorists have long insisted that postcolonialism is a global condition, not one that is located solely in the "Third World." The case of Namibia and Germany shows that the *decolonization* of public memory does not proceed separately but is also a relationship between (former) metropolises and postcolonies.

67. This is also the title of the founding president's memoir: *Where Others Wavered: The Autobiography of Sam Nujoma*.

