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Herero genocide in the twentieth century: politics and memory

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Herero genocide in the twentieth century: Politics and memory

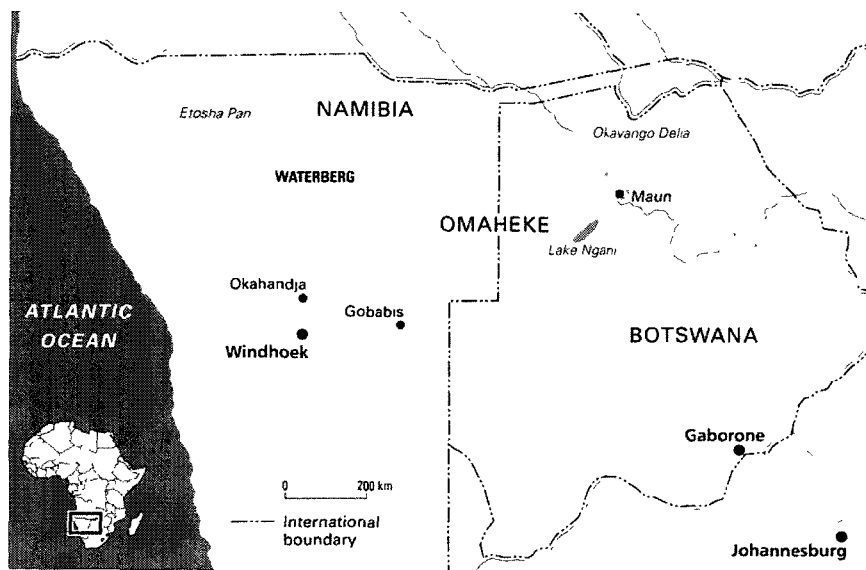
Jan-Bart Gewald

Between 1904 and 1908 imperial Germany pursued an active policy of genocide in German South West Africa, present-day Namibia. This chapter analyses the manner in which, during the course of the twentieth century, numerous people in varying contexts have sought to use the genocide perpetrated upon the Herero to further their own ends. It charts the manner in which an historical event has come to be deployed for varying and, at times, contradictory interests by German social democrats and English imperialists through to anti-Apartheid activists and post-colonial tribalists. It has been used to strengthen arguments that range from colonial policies through to claims that call for ethnic autonomy and compensation.

Introduction

On 11 January 1904, the Herero-German War broke out in a small dusty town in central German South West Africa (GSWA), present-day Namibia. By the time hostilities ended in 1908, genocide had been committed, the majority of the Herero people had been killed, and the survivors, mostly women and children, incarcerated in concentration camps as forced labourers.¹ Throughout the twentieth century, Herero survivors and descendants used the memory of this seminal act of failed resistance to substantiate and justify further acts of resistance against the colonial and post-colonial state in Namibia.

¹ J.B. Gewald, 'Forced Labour in the *Onjembo*, the Herero German War of 1904-1908', *Itinerario*, XIX, 1 (1995) and J.B. Gewald, *Herero Heroes: A Socio-Political History of the Herero of Namibia 1890-1923* (Oxford, 1999), 141-91.



Map 11.1 Namibia (formerly German South West Africa)

In this chapter, after a short description of the Herero genocide, a chronological overview is provided of the manner in which Herero and others have used the memories and historical recollections of the Herero-German War as a political instrument to support and further their own ends. The conscious deployment or negation of memories and references to the genocide has been used to strengthen arguments in support of a variety of issues ranging from colonial policies and claims through to ethnic autonomy and compensation. This is followed by a short discussion on the manner in which historical memories may be used to further political objectives. In conclusion it is noted that memories of resistance are powerful incentives for further resistance, and that a continued dialectical relationship between memory and resistance existed among the Herero of Namibia throughout the twentieth century.²

The Herero-German War (1904-1908)

Misunderstandings and the paranoia of self-fulfilling settler prophecies led to a war of extreme brutality and conscious genocide perpetrated by German troops against the Herero and to a lesser extent Nama peoples of colonial South West Africa.³ The increasing socio-economic pressure placed upon Herero society by the arrival of ever more German settlers demanding land and assuming racial privilege produced a tense situation. The war did not result from premeditated insurrection against German rule, rather, amid the tension that had developed over time, a single shooting incident served as a trigger. Starting in Okahandja, the war spread across central Namibia and developed in intensity and brutality as fresh contingents of German troops disembarked and attempted to impose their vision of order on the territory and its inhabitants. The Kaiser's personal choice and appointment of commanding officers in GSWA signalled the highest authorization and endorsement of what occurred in the name of imperial Germany. In a policy of genocide, German soldiers and settlers sought out, shot, beat, hung, starved and raped Herero men, women and children. By the end of

² For those interested in looking at a similar approach to history, i.e. the manner in which memories of violence influence and determine later action, see J. Alexander, J. McGregor & T. Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One Hundred Years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matabeleland* (Oxford, 2000) and L.H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago, 1995).

³ Those seeking a detailed day-to-day introduction to the Herero-German War are referred to G. Pool, *Die Herero-Opstand 1904-1907* (Cape Town, 1979). For an English introduction see J.M. Bridgman, *The Revolt of the Hereros* (Berkeley, 1981). Regarding the concept of self-fulfilling settler prophecies, see S. Marks, *Reluctant Rebellion: The 1906-8 Disturbances in Natal* (Oxford, 1970).

1904 the war had spread to southern Namibia. Here it also overwhelmed the Nama inhabitants of GSWA. When it finally ended, no fewer than 80% of the Herero and at least 50% of the Nama had lost their lives.⁴ Most of the Herero who remained, primarily women and children, survived in concentration camps as forced labourers employed on state, military and civilian projects.⁵ In short, the war and its aftermath were characterized by acts of excessive violence and cruelty on the part of German soldiers and settlers.

Indiscriminate shootings, hangings and beatings were the order of the day. The diaries, letters and photographs of contemporaries are littered with references to these events. Missionary Elger, working in the settlement of Karibib along the railway line to Windhoek, reported in his diary that all he heard was '*aufräumen aufhängen niederknallen bis auf den letzten Mann, Kein Pardon*' (clean-up hang-up shoot-down till the last man, no pardon). Elger also described the manner in which Herero prisoners were treated:

Things proceeded in a particularly brutal manner. Herero prisoners were terribly maltreated, whether they were guilty or not guilty. About 4 Herero were taken prisoner, because they were supposed to have killed a railway worker (Lehmann, Habis). The courtmartial ordered them to be freed and declared them to be not guilty. However one could not release them as they bore too many marks of shameful abuse [*Schändlicher Mißhandlung*] on their bodies. For example, people had beaten an eye out of one. After the court martial had declared them to be innocent, some of the Germans outside immediately resumed the abuse with the words, 'the court has declared you to be innocent, we however want to string you up'.⁶

After the initial battles, the civilian governor was relieved of his command and replaced by the Kaiser's own candidate, Lieutenant-General Lothar von Trotha.⁷ Under the command of Von Trotha, the German army sought to engineer a crushing defeat of the Herero in the vicinity of the Waterberg.⁸ In keeping with Von Moltke's principles of separate deployment and encirclement,

⁴ The history of the Nama-German War and its ongoing aftermath as well as the impact on Nama society are not dealt with in this chapter. Interested readers are advised to read H. Drechsler, '*Let us Die Fighting: The Struggle of the Herero and Nama against German Imperialism (1884-1915)*' (London, 1980), first published in German (Berlin, 1966).

⁵ *Gewald, Herero Heroes*, 141-230.

⁶ Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia (ELCRN), V12 Karibib, JBG's translation.

⁷ See H. Bley, *South-West Africa under German Rule 1894-1914* (London, 1971), 158-63 for a discussion on the appointment of Von Trotha.

⁸ Pool, *Opstand*, 210-11.

Von Trotha sent out his armies to annihilate the Herero at the Waterberg. Or, as he put it in his own words:

My initial plan for the operation, which I always adhered to, was to encircle the masses of Hereros at Waterberg, and to annihilate these masses with a simultaneous blow, then to establish various stations to hunt down and disarm the splinter groups who escaped, later to lay hands on the captains by putting prize money on their heads and finally to sentence them to death.⁹

On 11 August the Battle of Hamakari took place at the Waterberg. The Herero were defeated and fled in a southeasterly direction into the dry desert sands of the Kalahari, known to the Herero as the *Omaheke*.¹⁰ Von Trotha issued orders which, by placing a cordon along the waterholes, cut off all escape routes to the west, south and northeast. This effectively forced the fleeing Herero to move ever further into the inhospitable *Omaheke*.¹¹ Surrounded by the desert and German patrols, the Herero chiefs and their followers congregated along the Eiseb River.

Around 1 October 1904, General Lothar von Trotha, who was actively taking part in the pursuit, and his retinue had reached the *Osombo-Windimbe* waterhole. During the afternoon of the following day, Sunday 2 October 1904, after the holding of a field service, General von Trotha addressed his officers.¹² In his address he declared that the war against the Herero would be continued in all earnestness and read out a proclamation, which stated amongst others that:

The Herero people must...leave the land. If the populace does not do this I will force them with the *Groot Rohr* [Cannon]. Within the German borders every Herero, with or without a gun, with or without cattle, will be shot. I will no longer accept women and children, I will drive them back to their people or I will let them be shot at. These are my words to the Herero people. The great General of the mighty German Kaiser.¹³

Of late a number of authors have sought to deny or at least downplay the existence and implications of Von Trotha's proclamation, which has become

⁹ Von Trotha's diaries cited in G. Pool, *Samuel Maharero* (Windhoek, 1992), 251.

¹⁰ Pool, *Opstand*, 219-40. *Omaheke* is the Otjherero name for the sandveld area east of the Waterberg.

¹¹ Pool, *Opstand*, 245 ff.

¹² C. Rust, *Krieg und Frieden in Hererolande: Aufzeichnungen aus dem Kriegsjahre 1904* (Berlin, 1905), 384.

¹³ Namibian National Archives Windhoek (NNAW), ZBU D.1.a Band 3-4, leaf 165. With thanks to Mr W. Hillebrecht for finding it at such short notice. JBG's translation.

known as the *Vernichtungsbefehl*.¹⁴ However, Von Trotha's own words, in his diary and elsewhere, indicate that he knew full well what his proclamation would entail. On the day the proclamation was issued, Von Trotha wrote in a letter:

I believe that the nation as such should be annihilated, or, if this was not possible by tactical measures, have to be expelled from the country by operative means and further detailed treatment. This will be possible if the water-holes from Grootfontein to Gobabis are occupied. The constant movement of our troops will enable us to find the small groups of the nation who have moved back westwards and destroy them gradually.

My intimate knowledge of many central African tribes (Bantu and others) has everywhere convinced me of the necessity that the Negro does not respect treaties but only brute force.¹⁵

From 1904 and through into 1905 Ludwig von Estorff, one of Von Trotha's officers, 'had the thankless task of chasing after the refugees in the Sandveld and preventing their return'.¹⁶ Estorff's own words describe clearly what he did and what his commanding officer's intentions were:

I followed their tracks and found numerous wells which presented a terrifying sight. Cattle which had died of thirst lay scattered around the wells. These cattle had reached the wells but there had not been enough time to water them. The Herero fled ahead of us into the Sandveld. Again and again this terrible scene kept repeating itself. With feverish energy the men had worked at opening up the wells, however the water became ever sparser, and wells evermore rare. They fled from one well to the next and lost virtually all their cattle and a large number of their people. The people shrunk into small groups who continually fell into our hands [*unsere Gewalt kamen*], some of the people escaped now and again through the Sandveld into English territory [present-day Botswana]. It was a policy which was equally gruesome as senseless, to hammer the people so much, we could have still saved many of them and their rich herds, if we had pardoned and taken them up again, they

¹⁴ B. Lau, 'Uncertain Certainties: The Herero-German War of 1904', in *Mibagus*, 2 (April 1989) 4-8; K. Poewe, *The Namibian Herero: A History of their Psychosocial Disintegration and Survival* (Lewiston, 1986); G. Spraul, 'Der "Völkermord" an den Herero: Untersuchungen zu einer neuen Kontinuitätsthese' in *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* (1988/12), 713-39; and G. Sudholt, *Die deutsche Eingeborenenpolitik in Südwestafrika. Von den Anfängen bis 1904* (Hildesheim, 1975).

¹⁵ Pool, *Samuel Maharero*, 272-74.

¹⁶ L. von Estorff, *Wanderungen und Kämpfe in Südwestafrika, Ostafrika und Südafrika: 1894-1910*, (Windhoek, 1979), 117. JBG's translation.

had been punished enough. I suggested this to General von Trotha but he wanted their total extermination.¹⁷

In early 1905 the German parliament rescinded Von Trotha's extermination order following which captured Herero were placed in concentration camps (*Konzentrationslager*) and put to work as forced labourers. By late 1905, an estimated 8,800 Herero were confined in camps and forced to work on various military and civilian projects across GSWA.¹⁸ Missionary sources provide first-hand eyewitness accounts of conditions in the camps. In Karibib missionary Elger wrote:

And then the scattered Herero returned from the Sandfeld. Everywhere they popped up -not in their original areas-, to submit themselves as prisoners. What did the wretched people look like?! Some of them had been starved to skeletons with hollow eyes, powerless and hopeless, afflicted by serious diseases, particularly with dysentery. In the settlements they were placed in big *kraals*, and there they lay, without blankets and some without clothing, in the tropical rain on the marshlike ground. Here death reaped a harvest! Those who had some semblance of energy naturally had to work. (...)

It was a terrible misery with the people; they died in droves. Once 24 came together, some of them carried. In the next hour one died, in the evening the second, in the first week a total of ten - all to dysentery - the people had lost all their energy and all their will to live. (...)

Hardly cheering cases were those where people were handed in to be healed from the effects of extreme mistreatment (*schwerer Misshandlungen*): there were bad cases amongst these.¹⁹

The Herero camps were finally abolished in 1908, after which the Herero were confined within a tangled web of legislation that sought to control the lives, in their entirety, of all black people living in German South West Africa. Within the areas of German control, all Africans over the age of eight were

¹⁷ Ibid. 116-17. JBG's translation.

¹⁸ *Berichte Rheinische Missions Gesellschaft (BRMG)* 1906, 10.

¹⁹ ELCRN, V. 12, *Missions Chronieken*, Karibib 1906, written by missionary Elger. See also *BRMG* 1906, 11-12. That this mistreatment of Herero was not merely incidental but structural is indicated by a circular letter from military headquarters in Windhoek to the German officer commanding Karibib in late 1906. The letter noted '(...) due to the mishandling of Herero prisoners, who act as carriers, it is advisable to recruit Ovambo labour as carriers'. NNAW, STR 19 *1. und 4. Kompagnie Karibib*, Letter Windhuk 16/11/06.

ordered to wear metal passes. They were embossed with the imperial crown, magisterial district and labour number, and were used to facilitate German control of labour. In addition, all Herero were prohibited from owning land and cattle – the two basic necessities of a society based on pastoralism.

‘Blue Book’ (1914-1921)

At the outbreak of the First World War, South African forces under British command invaded German South West Africa and defeated the much-vaunted German army. Between 1915 and 1921, Namibia fell under the jurisdiction of a military administration. As the war progressed, it became clear that the victorious parties had no intention of allowing Germany to retain its colonies. To this end, from at least 1915 onwards, British colonial officials were instructed to gather material which would strengthen the British Empire’s claims to Germany’s colonies.²⁰ In Namibia this task was facilitated by the existence of a well-organized and detailed German government archive which the incoming military administration found waiting for it in Windhoek. In the most chilling detail, officials found in it accounts and reports on the manner in which the settlers of German South West Africa and its administration had dealt with the country’s original inhabitants. Apart from files dealing with the way in which the Herero had been incarcerated in concentration camps and distributed amongst settlers and companies, the archives also contained a series of documents dealing with the excesses of settlers who had flogged Herero. Glass-plate negatives detailed the torn and rotting backs of women flogged for alleged insubordination, and pages and pages of court transcripts covering the brutal lashings of labourers.²¹

Apart from detailed archives, the South Africans were greeted by a population more than willing to provide information about their experiences under German rule. During the course of their successful military campaign, South African forces were dependent on Herero scouts for information regarding watering points, routes and so forth. These scouts had in many cases fought against German forces between 1904 and 1908 and had vivid memories of the atrocities committed by German soldiers at that time. Often these scouts

²⁰ Public Records Office (PRO) CO 537/1-17 Telegram from Mr Long, to Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, 4 January 1918 quoted in ‘Memo for War Cabinet’, 15 October 1918.

²¹ The glass-plate negatives and files, and in fact most of the original source material used to compile the Blue Book have been sought out by J. Silvester and J.B. Gewald in the National Archives of Namibia. Silvester and Gewald are currently engaged in republishing an edited and annotated edition of the Blue Book.

were the sons of Herero chiefs who prior to and in the course of German colonialism had turned in vain to Britain for assistance. They were highly articulate men who left a deep impression on the South African officers they were assigned to. Being Herero royals, these men also had direct access to substantial numbers of people. When in 1917 the military administration formally called upon its magistrates to provide information that would substantiate the British Empire’s claims to the territory, men such as magistrate O’Reilly of Omaruru could depend on the support of the Herero community. A memorandum for the war cabinet noted:

The fullest reply received has been from the Union which sent a series of statements on oath by responsible and respected leaders of the various native races of South-West Africa.²²

The combination of testimony taken from the German archives found in Windhoek along with a series of painstakingly detailed statements taken under oath from large numbers of surviving Namibians resulted in the publication of one of the most shocking documents of colonial history. The *Report on the Natives of South-West Africa and their Treatment by Germany* (London 1918), generally referred to as the ‘Blue Book’, remains an indispensable source document on the nature of German colonial rule in Namibia. It is beyond doubt that the events and issues presented so clearly in it served to scuttle any attempts by Germany to retain control over its former colonies, and Namibia in particular.²³ In the Treaty of Versailles, Germany was deemed to be unfit to govern colonies and forced to renounce ‘in favour of the Principal Allied and Associated Powers, all her rights and titles over her overseas possessions’.²⁴ In addition, in terms of the Charter of the League of Nations, Namibia, which was seen to be ‘inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world’, was deemed to be a territory which could ‘be best administered under the laws of the Mandatory [the Union of

²² PRO CO 537/1-17 Memo for War Cabinet, 15 October 1918.

²³ A.J. Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking: Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles, 1918-1919* (New York, 1967) provides a detailed and authoritative account of the Versailles Treaty negotiations. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *The Treaties of Peace 1919-1923* (New York, 1924) contains a complete text of the 1919 treaty.

²⁴ Article 119 of the Treaty of Versailles.

South Africa] as integral portions of its territory'.²⁵ As such, Namibia was placed under the jurisdiction of South Africa.²⁶

The Blue Book was not unique. The British also commissioned research into the Armenian genocide perpetrated in 1915 by the forces of the Ottoman Empire, Germany's First World War allies. In the aftermath of the humiliation of Versailles and in direct response to the Blue Book, the Germans published a 'White Book' on the activities of Britain in its colonies. Nevertheless, the Blue Book had fulfilled the purposes for which it had originally been compiled, and the genocide perpetrated by imperial Germany on the Herero had been successfully used for political purposes. Germany was forced to relinquish forever its colonies.²⁷

White settler unity and the Blue Book (1920-1928)

Within settler society in Namibia under South African mandate, the existence of the Blue Book continued to bedevil settler politics. German settlers wanted to have the Blue Book banned and all copies of the publication destroyed. In 1925 the first all-white election for a legislative assembly took place. Representatives of the German settler party, the *Deutsche Bund in Südwestafrika*, opposed settler parties allied to the Union of South Africa. Anxious to maintain a working relationship within the legislative assembly, the administrator, A.J. Werth, acceded to German settler demands for the abolition of the Blue Book. Thus in 1926, Mr Stauch, a member of the all-white legislative assembly in Namibia, tabled a motion stating that the Blue Book:

...only has the meaning of a war-instrument and that the time has come to put this instrument out of operation and to impound and destroy all copies of this Bluebook, which may be found in the official records and in public libraries of this Territory.²⁸

²⁵ Article 22 of the Charter of the League of Nations.

²⁶ A. du Pisani, *SouthWest Africa/Namibia: The Politics of Continuity and Change* (Windhoek, 1985), 76.

²⁷ This must have been galling given that there was a secret convention in 1898 which contemplated the partition between Great Britain and Germany of certain of Portugal's African colonies in the event of it not being found possible to maintain the integrity of the African possessions of Portugal. PRO CO 323/957/5 'Draft Memo: The Case for Mandate', Under-Secretary of State for the Colonial Office, 30 June 1926.

²⁸ NNAW, ADM 225, Memorandum on the Blue Book, Annex A. In addition, the administration was 'requested to make representations to the Union Government and to the British Government to have this Bluebook expunged from the official records of those Governments'. Furthermore Stauch's motion requested that the administration 'take into consideration the advisability of making representations to the Union

The motion was passed and legislation came to into force, to be applied in all territories administered by the Union of South Africa that circumscribed the distribution of the Blue Book. Copies were no longer made available to the public, and were removed from libraries and destroyed. In the rest of the British Empire, copies of the Blue Book were moved to the Foreign Office. Even in wartime Britain as late as 1941, in response to a request from the Ministry of Information, it was noted that: 'No copy may be issued without authority of the librarian'.²⁹

Stauch and his fellow members of the *Deutsche Bund* consciously denied the recorded role of German settlers and soldiers in the Herero genocide and put pressure on the South African administration to accede to their demands. As Stauch noted, the passing of the motion 'would...remove one of the most serious obstacles to mutual trust and co-operation in this country [Namibia]'. In his view, 'the honour of Germany had been attacked in the most public manner and it was right that the attack should be repudiated in an equally public fashion. (...) The defence of the honour of one's country was a solemn duty imposed upon all sons of that country.' The validity of Stauch's claims were not questioned by the assembly, even less was any Herero view of the recorded events given an airing. The subjective arguments of Stauch and his compatriots sought to obscure a historical past in the interests of their own continued privileged position as settlers. The promise of peaceful cooperation with the German settler community was uppermost in the minds and concerns of South Africa's administrators. Stauch claimed that 'the Germans were ready and anxious to co-operate in the building up of South West but they could not do so fully until the stigma imposed by the publication of the Bluebook ...had been removed from their name'. This claim was considered to be more important than historical veracity and the views of Namibia's African inhabitants. In other words, the Herero who died in the genocide were dismissed and forgotten in the interests of white settler cooperation.

Michael Scott and Herero representations to the UN (1945-1952)

To the members of the white settler community it may have looked as if their attempts to rewrite their own vision of the past had succeeded. For a number of years after 1926 nothing was heard of the Herero genocide. Within the territory,

Government and the British Government to impound and destroy all copies of the Bluebook, which may be found in the public libraries in the respective Countries and with the official booksellers mentioned on the title-sheet of the Bluebook'.

²⁹ PRO F= 371/26574 Minute, 20 June 1941.

Herero had withdrawn to the newly established native reserves and refrained from directly articulating demands that related to the genocide.³⁰ This is not to say that the genocide was no longer of any importance to Herero society, far from it. Instead, Herero society literally turned in upon itself and sought as much as possible to refrain from any form of interaction with the colonial state. References to the genocide perpetrated upon the Herero surfaced from time to time in unexpected places, yet it was no longer an essential part of the colonial discourse.³¹

In the aftermath of the Second World War, the South African government undertook steps to incorporate Namibia as the fifth province in the Union of South Africa. To this end, in 1946, a series of staged meetings was held with the African population of the territory. As the newly formed United Nations had taken over from the League of Nations, Namibia, as a mandated territory, fell under the jurisdiction of South Africa under the auspices of the United Nations. With carefully structured meetings, it was hoped that the colonially appointed and recognized leaders of Namibia's African populations would sanction South Africa's plan to incorporate Namibia. However, this was not to be. The events of 1904-1908 once again became part and parcel of settler and administrative concerns with the arrival of Rev. Michael Scott in Windhoek in 1947.³² In conjunction with Herero leaders, Scott used the atrocities perpetrated in the Herero genocide as a weapon at the United Nations against the incorporation of

³⁰ J.B. Gewalt, *'We Thought We Would Be Free': Socio-Cultural Aspects of Herero History in Namibia 1915-1940* (Cologne, 2001).

³¹ Thus while searching for waterholes in the newly established Herero reserves in the eastern reaches of South West Africa, British administrators stumbled across the site of the German massacre of Herero at Ombakaha. Gewalt, *Herero Heroes*, 182.

³² Scott is one of the more remarkable figures of Southern African history. Having experienced Gandhi in India, Scott became actively involved in the anti-colonial struggle, first in India and later in Southern Africa. Initially Scott campaigned amongst the Indian community in Natal, and later became active in drawing attention to and improving the shameful living conditions in Bethel, one of Johannesburg's 'native locations'. In exile he founded the Africa Bureau in London and continued campaigning for Namibia's independence, even going so far as to drop his initial non-violent approach. In 1958, whilst attending the All African People's Conference in Accra, Scott delivered a speech to the delegates on behalf of the Herero people living in Namibia who had been prevented from sending their own representatives. In his speech, Scott called for the creation of an African freedom army saying, 'Africa needs such a freedom army desperately urgently if it is to be saved from inhumanity'. Scott continues to be fondly remembered by many in Namibia. His activities brought the injustices of colonial rule in Namibia to the attention of the wider world. For an overview of this remarkable man's life see F. Troup, *In Face of Fear: Michael Scott's Challenge to South Africa* (London, 1950).

Namibia into South Africa. In the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, the full extent of which was still only just beginning to be understood, genocide committed by an earlier generation of Germans made powerful political ammunition.

Throughout most of 1948, Michael Scott lived in a tent along the Gammans River just beyond the Windhoek old location. Here he met and entertained township residents, many of whom had experienced the horrors of German rule at first hand.³³ Scott's attention was drawn to the Herero genocide. Here, in a nutshell, Scott realized the sum of the inequities of colonial rule: a people driven off their land, slaughtered, banished to live in barren homelands, and still with no rights. An article entitled 'Michael Scott and the Hereros' published in *The New Statesman and Nation* in 1949 presented Scott's summary of Namibian history:

Then came the German colonists, hungry for land; and finally von Trotha, a general whom Hitler would have delighted to honour. (...) In 1904 he issued the 'Extermination Order'. All Hereros whether man, woman or child were to be killed. An orgy of looting, torture, and massacre followed. To read the records is exactly like reading the accounts of the obliteration of Poland, except that the Germans had not gas chambers then, but killed babies with their own hands, or burned sick old women in their huts. The tribe broke and fled... The majority, all but fifteen thousand out of ninety thousand, were hacked to pieces by the Germans or died of thirst.³⁴

The mention of Von Trotha's 'Extermination Order' clearly indicates that Scott must have gained access to a copy of the Blue Book. Scott's history also made explicit the link between the horrors perpetrated by the Nazis and the activities of the forces of Imperial Germany in Namibia, a link that continues to garner extensive academic interest.³⁵ In addition, Scott indicated how the South Africans had betrayed the Herero:

³³ Troup, *Face of Fear*, 173-80.

³⁴ NNAW, SWAA 1981, A 427/48, Rev. M. Scott, Typed copy of article that appeared in *The New Statesman and Nation*, 5 March 1949.

³⁵ Hannah Arendt became the first academic to alert the world to the linkages that exist between Germany's colonial past and the later development of the national socialist state. H. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (London, 1967). The work of East and West German historians, Horst Drechsler and Helmut Bley further developed this theme, and recently a new generation of historians has once again taken it up. A selection of some of the papers presented at the annual meeting of the African Studies Association in Houston, Texas in November 2001 clearly brings this trend to the fore. J.B. Gewalt, 'Anticipating the Kaiser: German Soldiers and the Herero-German War'; J. Gaydish, "'Die Lösung der Eingeborenenfrage': The Role of the Swakopmund

In the 1914 war, lured by British promises that native lands would be returned, the desert remnant trekked back. But in 1918 they met not the British as the Mandatory Power, but the South Africans, who never for a moment considered giving them back their tribal lands. Some pastures were left to the German settlers who remained. More went to the Afrikaner settlers, ...³⁶

Throughout 1948 and 1949 and in the face of constant harassment, Scott sought to bring conditions as they existed in Namibia to world attention. Eventually in November 1949 the United Nations granted Scott an official hearing. In the months following this hearing, the colonial authorities in Namibia started a campaign to dismiss his statements.³⁷ Vilified in the press, Scott continued to be supported by Herero, many of whom recalled the events of 1904-1908 to justify and support their faith in Scott. One such Herero, who signed his letter as 'A Native who had been deprived of his land from 1904-1950', noted:

I want to emphasise that the information given by the Rev. Michael Scott at UNO is what actually happened in S.W.A. and was obtained from the best reliable sources.³⁸

Finally in 1950, Scott, already the victim of constant harassment, was declared a prohibited immigrant and prevented from ever returning to Namibia.

The Herero genocide and nationalist struggle (1958-1990)

In Namibia, the events of 1904-1908 informed the establishment of the South West African National Union (SWANU) and the South West African People's Organization (SWAPO). Particularly within SWANU, which came to be dominated by Herero ideologues, the loss of the land incurred in the Herero genocide proved to be a major mobilizing factor.³⁹ Within Namibia, the political

Concentration Camp in the Development of German "Native Policy" in Southwest Africa'; C. Erischsen, 'Shark Island: Forgotten Concentration Camps and History in Colonial Namibia 1904-1908'.

³⁶ NNAW, SWAA 1981, A 427/48, Rev. M. Scott, Typed copy of article that appeared in *The New Statesman and Nation*, 5 March 1949.

³⁷ See for example, NNAW, SWAA 1981, A 427/48, M. Scott, Draft letters of Bowker written to the *Windhoek Advertiser* and published 1 March 1950.

³⁸ *Windhoek Advertiser*, 18 March 1950.

³⁹ Z. Ngavirue, *Political Parties and Interest Groups in South West Africa (Namibia): A Study of a Plural Society* (Basel, 1997), 214 ff, and T. Emmett, *Popular Resistance and the Roots of Nationalism in Namibia, 1915-1966* (Basel, 1999), 283 ff.

mobilization, which had begun in earnest in the years after the Second World War, was brutally terminated by the December shootings of 1959. These shootings, by the South African authorities, took place in response to African protests against the Apartheid Group Areas Act.⁴⁰ In the aftermath of the shootings, there was a substantial South African government clamp-down on nationalist political organization in Namibia. This saw the flight into exile of many of Namibia's most highly skilled and articulate Herero.⁴¹ It was in the context of these events that some of the Herero leaders who had remained within the territory sought to play down the ideas of conflict and tension engendered through the remembrance and commemoration of the Herero genocide. Instead they sought to pursue a policy of appeasement in which they urged leaders of the German community to do the same. The conditions of heightened repression and tension that existed in Namibia at the time made some of the Herero leaders within the territory seek cooperation as opposed to opposition to the settler community. As Herero chief Hosea Kutako stated in response to German commemorations of the Battle of Hamakari:

We do not want to cling to the past or to have old war grudges. Our aim is to forget the past and to look forward rather than backward and to have good relations with all sections of the population but good relations cannot exist if some people try to remind us of the bad past.⁴²

Younger Herero such as Clemens Kapuuo, Hosea Kutako's eventual successor, were far less conciliatory. When German settlers wanted to commemorate the Herero-German War, Kapuuo reminded them of the terror wrought in the genocide and its links to the Holocaust.

To our minds there is little difference between the extermination order of General von Trotha and the extermination of Jews by Adolf Hitler. The members of the *Alte Kameraden* are today a free people whereas the Hereros are not and are under a foreign Government which was elected partly by members of the *Alte Kameraden*. It is natural that the Hereros would be opposed to the celebration of a battle which placed them under foreign domination up to this day.⁴³

⁴⁰ K. Dierks, *Chronology of Namibian History: From Pre-Historical Times to Independent Namibia* (Windhoek, 1999), 124.

⁴¹ Amongst others, Moses Katjiongua, Mburumba Kerina, Fanuel Kozonguizi and Zedekia Ngavirue.

⁴² "Forget the Past": Improve Race Relations Kapuuo Urges Kameraden', in *Windhoek Advertiser*, 7 August 1964.

⁴³ 'Hereros Oppose Waterberg Celebrations: Alter Kamerad Denies "Extermination"', in *Windhoek Advertiser*, 29 July 1964.

As might well have been expected, Carl Schrader, a spokesman for the Alte Kameraden, denied that the Herero had been 'exterminated'.

In exile, the genocide perpetrated upon the Herero and the Nama came to be one of the pillars of anti-colonial propaganda used by those who wanted to rid Namibia of its South African occupiers. Initially, this propaganda was based primarily on the works of Bley and Drechsler. Given the gravity of the Herero genocide, it seems remarkable that the only published account of it in English until the 1970s was the Blue Book. The reworked academic theses of the German historians Horst Drechsler and Helmut Bley first appeared in German in 1966 and 1968 in East and West Germany respectively. Bley's work came out in English in 1971, whilst Drechsler's was only published in English in 1980.⁴⁴ These two excellent studies were primarily concerned with a debate relating to the nature of German imperialism and the development of totalitarian societies. Both books sought and found the roots of National Socialism in Germany's colonial past in Namibia. For both historians, the genocide committed upon the inhabitants of Namibia between 1904 and 1908 foreshadowed later events in Western Europe between 1939 and 1945. As Bley noted in the conclusion to his work:

In SWA conditions crossed over into totalitarianism. This confirms, perhaps even reinforces, Hannah Arendt's contention that in African colonialism one may find the seeds of modern totalitarian rule.⁴⁵

The publication of *To be Born a Nation* by the SWAPO publicity bureau in London owed much to these two works.⁴⁶ The title referred to SWAPO's nationalist slogan 'To die a tribe, to be born a nation', which reflected the earlier words of the Nama anti-colonial warrior Hendrik Witbooi who, while fighting against the Germans, had called others to arms with the words:

Let us die fighting rather than die as a result of maltreatment, imprisonment or some other calamity.⁴⁷

For the first time in a single volume, the atrocities committed by the Germans were linked directly to the atrocities being committed by South

⁴⁴ See notes 4 and 7 above.

⁴⁵ Bley, *South-West Africa under German Rule*, 282. Bley was referring to the work of Arendt, *Totalitarianism*, 185-222.

⁴⁶ Dept of Information and Publicity, SWAPO of Namibia, *To Be Born a Nation: The Liberation Struggle for Namibia* (London, 1981).

⁴⁷ H. Witbooi cited in P. Katjavivi, *A History of Resistance in Namibia* (London, 1988), 9.

African security forces operating in Namibia and Angola at the time. Photographs of emaciated Herero with lashed backs were juxtaposed with images of migrant workers and affluent whites. The genocide perpetrated upon the Herero and Nama was conveniently linked to the exploitation of predominantly Ovambo migrant labourers. This oppression and exploitation were seen as two examples on a linked continuum of illegal colonial rule.⁴⁸ In this manner, the Herero genocide became the shared history of oppression of all Africans living in Namibia, and not just the Herero. The beaten backs of Herero in 1908 came to be linked to the beaten and burnt faces of Koevoet prisoners in northern Namibia in the 1980s.⁴⁹

In the early 1980s, shortly after he had completed his PhD in history at Oxford University, Peter Katjavivi – the current Vice-Chancellor of the University of Namibia – became the highly articulate SWAPO spokesman in London. Well-versed in the history of Namibia, Katjavivi did not hesitate to liken the attacks of South African forces to those perpetrated by Von Trotha 75 years earlier. The anti-colonial struggles of the Herero and the Nama came to be applied to all of Namibia, as if the nationalist struggle had begun with the wars undertaken by imperial Germany against the Nama and the Herero. The published version of Katjavivi's thesis *A History of Resistance in Namibia* clearly fell within this paradigm. It argued that Namibia's colonial governments were a single continuum where South African soldiers and police in the 1980s were continuing the work started by the German colonial *Schutztruppe* in the 1890s.⁵⁰ To a lesser extent, the work of Kaire Mbuende, who like Katjavivi was a Herero historian in exile, also emphasized the perceived continuum.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Thus for example, Peter Katjavivi, SWAPO's publicity officer in London, wrote: 'Although the hopes of a change with the end of German rule were soon dashed, the Namibian people were not deterred from pursuing their cause further'. P. Katjavivi, 'The Development of Anti-colonial Forces in Namibia', in *Namibia 1884-1984: Readings on Namibia's History and Society* (London, 1988), 561.

⁴⁹ Koevoet was a paramilitary anti-insurgency police unit established by the South African administration in Namibia in response to a legal loophole in UN Security Council Resolution 435 which allowed the presence of police in the envisaged changeover to Namibian independence. Guilty of outright murder, torture and extensive and consistent human rights abuses, Koevoet built up a ferocious reputation for itself in northern Namibia and southern Angola. See T. Cleaver & M. Wallace, *Namibia Women in War* (London, 1990).

⁵⁰ P. Katjavivi, 'The Rise of Nationalism in Namibia and its International Dimensions' PhD thesis, Oxford University (1984). The thesis formed the basis for *History of Resistance*.

⁵¹ K. Mbuende, *Namibia, The Broken Shield: Anatomy of Imperialism and Revolution* (Lund, 1986).

South Africa and the Herero genocide (1970-1990)

Whilst SWAPO used the history of the genocide to further its nationalist struggle from exile, the South African authorities sought the collaboration of the Herero and other communities inside Namibia through a selective commemoration of historical events. As SWAPO had effectively appropriated the sole rights, as it were, to use the genocide, those Herero who cooperated with the South African government could not use it for political purposes even though they were well aware of their history. In addition, they could not afford to alienate a major influential constituency, namely that of the economically and politically powerful German-speaking settler community.

Members of the South African Defence Force (SADF) operating in Namibia must have been aware of cross-currents in the minds of people in Namibia at the time. The mass conscription of Herero into the South West African Territorial Force (SWATF), the SADF proxy force in Namibia, united German settlers and Herero in the same uniform for the first time since 1908. Indeed, the beret badge of a section of the SWATF was that of a kudu, the symbol of the Herero royal house of Tjamuaha. The SWATF officers' school was situated in Okahandja at the ancestral site of the residences of the Tjamuaha chiefs. Herero and German settler conscripts were expected to run up a hill at Osona and bring down leaves from the tree at the top of this hill. The fact that the hill was one on which Herero chief Samuel Maharero anticipated the arrival of German soldiers in 1892, or that the tree in question was a *Witgat boom* that is considered by Herero to bear ritual meaning, cannot have been missed by observers.⁵²

From 1978 onwards the massed annual commemorative marches of Herero para-militaries to the graves of Herero chiefs in Okahandja became an event that was almost totally dominated by the SADF and SWATF. The commemorations of Herero chiefs, and through them the Herero dead of the genocide, became a demonstration of South African-sponsored opposition to SWAPO. In what is one of the profound ironies of Southern African history, SWATF forces, consisting in large measure of Herero conscripts, marched in staged spectacles in support of South Africa and against the liberation of their country. Indeed, the fraternity of blood brotherhood, which had allegedly been created between Herero and German settlers in the 1904-1908 genocide, now came to be realized in the massed marches of Herero and German settler conscripts. In support of this new-found fraternity, and in conscious negation of the past, Herero symbols were used to forge an opposition to nationalist forces. It was in this period that

⁵² In the first weeks immediately after Namibian independence the tree in question was sawn down, an act that would have been considered sacrilege on the part of any Herero.

Namibian papers carried extensive coverage of Herero soldiers at the graves of German soldiers at the annual commemorations in Okahandja.

In the second half of the 1980s, there was a flurry in which officially sanctioned monuments, graveyards and game reserves were established. Under the auspices of the SADF, ethnologists were asked to find and document the graves and monuments of Namibia's African people. In so doing, ethnologists travelled throughout the territory documenting graves and, in part, history. As a result of these activities, state-funded monuments came to be erected to the memory of Herero chiefs who had cooperated with the South African colonial administration.

At the same time, the Waterberg and its immediate environs, the site of the defeat of Herero forces in 1904, was declared a game reserve. In other words, the Waterberg, the symbol and site of the Herero genocide, was consciously robbed of its potent symbolic function by relegating it to the status of a tourist resort.⁵³ In the Namibian newspapers of the period, in particular those owned by the South African-funded Republican press, there is no mention of the genocide. In addition, the genocide is almost totally missing from historical work being conducted in Namibia at the time. The Herero oral historian Alexander Kaputu, who was employed by the South African-sponsored Namibian Broadcasting Corporation, also steered clear of the subject. Afrikaner historian Gerhardus Pool discussed the war but not the genocide, and settler historian Sudholt denied that the genocide had taken place. This was a clear case of what Anderson charmingly referred to as 'remembering to forget'.⁵⁴

The successful sublimation of the Herero genocide in the interests of a unified front against the forces of nationalism drew the attention of SWAPO military planners. SWAPO propaganda continually railed against those Herero leaders who cooperated with the South Africans and referred to the history of anti-colonial resistance of Herero chiefs such as Samuel Maharero. It is possible that military operations were undertaken by SWAPO in eastern Hereroland because SWAPO planners wanted Herero to 'remember to remember'. Throughout the Bush War in Namibia, SWAPO military activities in eastern Hereroland were doomed to failure, and SWAPO planners were well aware of this. By the end of 1978, South African forces had effective and total military

⁵³ Interestingly in post-independence Namibia, the tourist nature as opposed to the commemorative function of this site continues to be emphasized. This is done primarily with the argument that 'all Namibians suffered', and that as the sites are allegedly linked solely to a single ethnicity, commemoration would support tribalism. Implicit in this position is a denial of the genocide.

⁵⁴ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised and extended edition (London, 1991), chapter 11.

control of Namibia. In the event of attempted infiltrations by SWAPO's People's Liberation Army of Namibia (PLAN), South African 'hunter-killer' units, such as Koevoet, ensured that incursions were short-lived. Although SWAPO planners knew that their forces would be defeated, captured and killed, the symbolic action of an infiltration into eastern Hereroland would not have been lost on the Herero population. The PLAN fighters who were infiltrated by SWAPO into Hereroland were a carefully selected multi-ethnic group of young Namibians, representative of the nation that was to be. Given that the military validity for their incursion was non-existent, one could argue that this group of young people was sacrificed in the hope that their actions would trigger memories of the Herero genocide, memories that would come to substantiate support for SWAPO, as opposed to collaboration with the South Africans.⁵⁵

Namibian independence, Herero genocide and Herero unity (1990-2000)

Whereas in the years leading up to independence in 1990 the Herero genocide had been successfully appropriated by the nationalist forces allied to SWAPO, immediately after Namibian independence the Herero genocide became the preserve of Herero elites opposed to the new government. In the run-up to independence, Herero activists began seeking a formal apology from the German government for the events of 1904-1908. In the late 1980s, SWANU activists living in Germany had already approached the anti-Apartheid movement in the Netherlands for assistance in bringing a case against the West German government.⁵⁶

After independence, the SWAPO government of Namibia tried to ensure that Herero claims for reparation would remain muted or couched within the demands of the nation-state which they controlled. The last time that

⁵⁵ 'Omaheke Region to Mark Heroes' Day', *The Namibian*, 25 August 1993.

⁵⁶ Author's personal observation regarding meetings held in Amsterdam in 1988 and 1989.



The inauguration of Heroes' Acre on Namibian Heroes' Day, 26 August 2002
Photo by Jan-Bart Gewalt

government ministers referred directly to the issue was during the visit of Chancellor Helmut Kohl and Bundes-President Herzog to Namibia in 1995. At the time, Foreign Affairs Minister Theo-Ben Gurirab noted in an interview that the injustices committed against the Namibian people by the former German colonial power would always remain a 'festering sore' and the two countries needed to discuss war reparations 'at some stage'. Yet he also said that the issue was at that time not a priority for the government, though he did add that 'we must have the courage and frankness to discuss this when the time is right'.⁵⁷ In 2002, the government, reaping the rewards of a booming tourist industry, was well aware of the benefits that accrue to the state on account of continued close economic and military cooperation with Germany.⁵⁸

During their 1995 visit, Chancellor Kohl and President Herzog refused to meet Herero representatives and found themselves unable to offer an apology to the people of Namibia for what had happened in the past. Instead, Herzog referred to the war as 'a dark chapter in our bilateral relations' and made the extravagant claim that the massacres formed 'a burden on the conscience of every German'.⁵⁹ Up to 2002, the government of Schroeder and Rau has also made no official statement with regard to Herero claims. This is in contrast to when the former governing parties were still in opposition and they agreed that what had occurred in Namibia constituted genocide.⁶⁰

The current government of Namibia is dominated by people who know that their support base is largely to be found in the Ovambo north.⁶¹ This area, though deeply affected by war during the dying days of South African occupation, was left untouched by German imperialism. Although Herero and Nama lost all their lands, the inhabitants of the Ovambo kingdoms were never driven off their lands by either the German or South African colonial presence. As such, the present government does not feel itself called upon to fight for something that is not part and parcel of its shared historical experience. In addition, the government is at pains to ensure that its heroes, and not those of another sector of society, receive recognition. This was well illustrated by the spectacle of the statue of the Herero chief Hosea Kutako that was placed in front

⁵⁷ L. Fild, 'War Reparations on Govt Agenda' in *The Namibian*, 21 September 1995.

⁵⁸ No less than 46% of the country's development budget is paid by Germany. 'German Visit is a "Total Success"', in *The Namibian*, 24 June 1996. German military advisors and technicians are stationed in Namibia where they teach and assist Namibian Defence Force personnel. B. Weidlich, 'Helmut Bistri: Offizier und Gentleman', in *Allgemeine Zeitung*, 1 December 1995.

⁵⁹ D.G. McNeil Jr., 'Its Past on its Sleeve, Tribe Seeks Bonn's Apology', in *New York Times*, Late Edition – Final Edition, COL 01, P. 3, 31 May 1998.

⁶⁰ 'Major German Parties Agree on "Genocide"', in *The Namibian*, 5 November 1990.

⁶¹ On the post-colonial state, see the chapter by Henning Melber in this volume.

of the Namibian parliament in early 1999 and immediately covered with black plastic sacking. Kutako, a major nationalist leader, also happened to be Herero, and though the government did not state so outright, Kutako's ethnic background ensured that his statue remained clad for no less than two years. The statue was eventually unveiled on 10 December 2001, Namibia's Human Rights Day. However, Kutako's statue was not unveiled alone. Instead it was unveiled together with two others hastily commissioned after the original statue of Hosea Kutako had been erected in early 1999. The two other statues were those of Reverend Theophelus Hamutumbangela and Captain Hendrik Samuel Witbooi, two nationalist leaders who had done much to ensure the establishment and maintenance of the ruling SWAPO party.⁶² The disrespect shown to Kutako, a man who came through the genocide and sought to re-establish Herero society and later fought for Namibian independence, merely serves to ensure that Herero speakers who entered post-colonial society in a thoroughly divided condition now find a shared identity in the genocide experienced by their ancestors and not by the ancestors of the current government.

It is in this context that, on 22 August 1999, Dr Kuaima Riaruako, the self-appointed paramount chief and king of all of the Herero, proclaimed that the 'Herero nation' as a whole had decided to approach the International Court of Justice in The Hague, where a charge of genocide was to be laid against the German state and war reparations would be demanded for genocide committed in Namibia against the Herero between 1904 and 1907. At the time, Riaruako's statement caused a few ruffled feathers in Namibia. German diplomats in Windhoek emailed colleagues in Bonn and Berlin to look into the issue, and then two days later a clinically worded statement by a spokesperson of the International Court in The Hague put everyone, with the exception of Riaruako, at ease.

Only states may be parties in contentious cases before the ICJ and hence submit cases to it against other States.⁶³

However, nobody had actually approached the International Court of Justice, and clearly no case was being seriously constructed against the German government to plead for war reparations in Namibia. Why then did Riaruako go out of his way to claim that this was so? A possible explanation is that, since Herero identity increasingly appears to be determined by a shared history of genocide, Riaruako can claim to speak on behalf of his people as long as he is

⁶² *The Namibian*, 11 December 2001.

⁶³ Published accounts in *The Namibian*, 25 August 1999 and 8 September 1999.

able to control the calls for reparation.⁶⁴ If the Namibian government fails to take the initiative and call for reparation on behalf of the Herero and Nama, Riaruako can continue to control these financial demands, secure in the knowledge that he enjoys the support of the majority of Herero speakers.

In the absence of a formal apology, the call for war reparations from Germany has become more vociferous. Government inaction and the continued extensive presence of German tourists, settlers, businesses and farms merely serve to legitimate and emphasize the demands on the part of the Herero and strengthen the bonds of a shared genocidal experience. Recently, this has been emphasized with the launch of two court cases in the District Court of Columbia in the United States. With the assistance of Afro-American organizations, the Herero People's Reparations Corporation was established, with the objective of suing three German companies, Deutsche Bank AG, Terex Corporation (Orenstein und Koppel) and Woermann Linie (Deutsch Afrika Linien), as well as the Federal Republic of Germany in the person of its foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, for reparations. The introductory paragraph of the charge reads as follows:

...the Federal Republic of Germany ('Defendant' or 'Germany'), in a brutal alliance with German multi-national corporations, relentlessly pursued the enslavement and the genocidal destruction of the Herero Tribe in Southwest Africa, now Namibia. Foreshadowing with chilling precision the irredeemable horror of the European Holocaust only decades later, the Defendant formed a German commercial enterprise which cold-bloodedly employed explicitly-sanctioned extermination, the destruction of tribal culture and social organization, concentration camps, forced labor, medical experimentation and the exploitation of women and children in order to advance their common financial interests.⁶⁵

Possibly the historical linkage between the Herero genocide and the later Holocaust was emphasized because of the notable success that Holocaust claimants have had in the American courts.

⁶⁴ Regarding earlier work dealing with Herero identity, see in particular the work of H. Hendrickson, 'Historical Idioms of Identity Representation among the Ovaherero in Southern Africa', unpublished PhD thesis, University of New York (1992); 'The Long Dress and the Construction of Herero Identities in Southern Africa', *African Studies*, 53, 2 (1994) 25-54, and *Clothing and Difference. Embodied Identities in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa* (London, 1996). For an interesting discussion on the power of historical genocides in attributing identity, see R. Lemarchand, paper presented at the ASA Chicago 1998 and Malkki, *Purity and Exile*.

⁶⁵ Case papers in the possession of the author.

While in the past it was the *Otruppe* or *Truppspieler*⁶⁶ that maintained Herero identity in the face of colonial repression, now it is participation in discussion about genocide that performs that role. Association with the dreadful events of 1904-1908, even if only through language or fourth-generation descendancy, allows for the participation of all in the world of war reparations. This has also come to be combined with a notion of remembering-to-forget the often enormous differences that existed and still exist between the Herero.⁶⁷ Historically, Herero speakers were divided amongst themselves. Not all sections of Herero society were equally affected by the genocide, let alone in the South African Apartheid years. Yet discourse on the genocide allows people to paper over these distinctions. It is thus the first truly shared experience of all Herero speakers in the present.⁶⁸

Genocide, memory and resistance

In Namibia, memories of the genocide perpetrated between 1904 and 1908 have been instrumentalized and were used to further the aims and objectives of differing socio-political actors during the course of the twentieth century. Herero have sought to use the memory of their seminal act of resistance, which was in effect a disastrous failure, to advance and substantiate further acts of resistance since 1904, and memories of the genocide have been redeployed over the years in differing circumstances and with varying goals. Yet underlying all of these deployments has been the intention of Herero political actors to further their position and resist colonial and current post-colonial domination.

The immensity of the catastrophe that befell the peoples of central Namibia between 1904 and 1908 was such that it could not, and still cannot, be banished from public memory and debate. However, in Namibia prior to the Second World War, though the enormity of the genocide was known, it was not necessarily appreciated and expressed by all. For the Herero, it was an event in history that knows no comparable precedent. Yet though both Herero survivors and German perpetrators were aware of what had happened in Namibia between

⁶⁶ Herero paramilitary organizations formed after 1915. See W. Werner, "'Playing Soldiers': The Truppspieler Movement among the Herero of Namibia, 1915 to ca. 1945', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 16, 3 (September 1990), 485-502.

⁶⁷ For an interesting discussion on the issue of remembrance, memory and forgetting, see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 187-206.

⁶⁸ To a large extent this was also displayed by the presence of Chief Munjuku in Okahandja in August 1999. Munjuku who had previously been closely allied with the SWAPO government has of late left the fold, and through the articulation of claims to a shared genocide has found refuge with Herero associated with Riaruako.

1904 and 1908, German settlers were able to dismiss the Herero genocide as nothing more than a colonial war. However, the full horror of the Herero genocide became apparent to observers when, in the aftermath of the Second World War, the Nazi Holocaust became known to the wider world. The real and imagined linkages of the Herero genocide to the Nazi Holocaust could not be hidden and came to be deployed in further discussions relating to the Herero genocide. Hence, the Nazi holocaust changed forever the import and meaning of the Herero genocide.

Engaged as the Herero are at present in a legal tussle for war reparations, Herero political actors are well aware of the Nazi Holocaust and are making full use of the implications of this fact. In this manner the Herero indicate how memories, even of failed acts of past resistance, can be used as acts of resistance in the present. Though resistance to colonial rule in Namibia was by and large unarmed, it was not passive. Instead, it was a struggle for control of memory that informed and guided Herero political actors in their dealings with the colonial and post-colonial state. From 1945 onwards it came to be seen in the wider context of the Nazi Holocaust, and the issue of morality began to be emphasized. In Namibia the party that speaks on behalf of those killed in the Herero genocide can now claim the moral high-ground.

Thus, the case of the Herero genocide in Namibia emphasizes once more that though physical resistance may be of a passing nature, memories may continue to inform and justify political action long after the events that spawned them have receded into the past.