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SWAPO and the appropriation of history. Memory politics and resulting conflicts of remembrance in the post-colony

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Abstract

This paper illustrates the significance of memory culture in the post-colony. The analyses of the "Independence Memorial Museum" in Windhoek will show different aspects of Namibian memory culture and how the SWAPO dominated government uses history to define a national Namibian identity – an approach that leads to tensions between the government and several communities, like the Nama and the German-speaking Namibians. Their conflicts with the state will be discussed in the cases of the Witbooi Bible and the Bismarck Street, and shown how they are connected with questions about property, heritage, and identity in the post-colonial setting.

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SWAPO and the appropriation of history
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Introduction

The past and the present are interwoven in the Independence Memorial Museum of Namibia in Windhoek that is made clear with the very first exhibit. Sam Nujoma, the "father" of independent Namibia, dressed in a military outfit with a Namibian flag in the background, surrounded by nine bronze busts of "Early Resistance Leaders" (Picture 1). Below Nujoma one can find a specific plant: The Welwitschia mirabilis. The Welwitschia is decorating the Namibian coat of arms too, and therefore is being referred to as the national plant. Because it can resist extreme harsh droughts in the Namib Desert and becomes several hundreds of years old, botanists gave it the Latin suffix mirabilis: The miraculous. As the national plant it fits the narrative of Namibian resistance. This frame which emphasizes the resistance characteristic of the Namibians as continuum in history, was used to unify all Namibian people as one nation (Melber 2003: 308; Nujoma 2001: 29). Therefore, the people's will to resist colonial powers became naturalized as inherent to all Namibian people (SWAPO 1981: 160; Katjavivi 1982). This narrative is reinforced through the use of the Welwitschia, which can be understood as a naturalization of resistance as part of the Namibian soil.

Fig. 1. Sam Nujoma and the "Early Resistance Leaders" in the Independence Memorial Museum. Photo: Tilman Gorenflo, 16.8.2019

The Independence Memorial Museum was inaugurated in March 2014 on top of one of the most important hills in Windhoek. It tells a specific history: A history of resistance and victory against colonial oppression. It depicts the growth of a nation out of an arbitrary demarcation of land, which was made on the imperial drawing table. In its selective manner, it also tells a history of silencing and historical denials. Thirty years after the Namibian independence, I intend to show in this article how state memory politics follow a specific narrative of resistance in the Independence Museum. After a theoretical overview of memory culture and its connection to nationalism, I will conduct an analysis of selected exhibits of the museum. Therefore, I want to come back to the "Early Resistance Leaders", Sam Nujoma and the naturalization of resistance. I will show how the museum is supporting the particular narrative of Namibian resistance against colonial oppression, that was made up during the Liberation Struggle in the 1960s and how the colonial history is appropriated by the SWAPO[1].

Additionally, I want to focus on the role of historiography and memory politics in the agenda of post-colonial nation-building. How has history been appropriated during de-colonial liberation movements and nationalism? Although memory culture in Namibia has been analyzed by many scholars before, there are just a few publications that mention the museum because of its relatively short existence. I see the museum as an important source for researching nation-building in Namibia due to its primary focus on liberation in combination with its North Korean design. I will argue that memory culture is an important aspect in the post-colonial Namibia and that the museum is just one example of that. In further examples, the restitution of the Witbooi Bible and the Bismarck Street controversy, I aim to illustrate how state driven memory politics are strengthening tensions between different ethnic communities and the government. In the end, I draw the line to a broader context and discuss the impacts of memory politics on the relationship with Germany and coming to terms with the colonial past.

This point is particularly crucial in connection with my own position. Doing a six weeks field trip in Namibia as a German researcher, reflecting my own privileges and position was very important for me. Anthropology played a significant role in the colonial administration by providing legitimation through racist science (Asad 1973: 17).[2] Considering this, it was crucial for myself to avoid setting up further (neo-)colonial hierarchies during my research – a goal which is nearly impossible considering my heritage and my own privileges. It is important to recognize that my own position as a *white*[3] German man led me to a specific truth and shaped my research focus and methodologies (Abu-Lughod 2006: 156). As a consequence of this

1 "South-West Africa People's Organisation"

2 See also the Editorial of this Volume.

3 "White" is a socially constructed category and therefore written in italics.

position, that is deeply ingrained in my body I was eager to avoid focusing on the "victimized" people – which were exploited for too long. Accordingly, my research is mostly based on the approach of "studying up" (Nader 1969) which focuses on institutions of power. Another aspect is the role of history and historiography in the post-colony and my position in it. I consider myself as an anthropological observer of *how* history is used and less as a historian who is examining historical wrongs. Particularly when I consider the constructedness of history and its connection to institutional power, a combination which occurs incidentally.

Memory culture and nation-building

Several theorists, like Benedict Anderson and Eric Hobsbawm, stressed the importance of memory culture and historiography in the context of nationalism (Anderson 1998; Hobsbawm 2004). The majority of them put their focus on Europe and how nations emerged over a long period – mostly combined with the rise of language groups and a common feeling as a community (Anderson 1998). Post-colonial or de-colonial nationalism need to be discussed from another point of view. During colonialism imperial powers ignored and destroyed existing borders between societies. Groups and people were separated through arbitrary borders, while others were merged under one colonial administration (Hobsbawm 2004: 205). One thing, most societies under colonial rule had in common was the oppression by colonial administrations (Gellner 2006: 80). For them, the shared experience as oppressed people, became a source for their liberation movements because it could be mobilized against an outsider – the colonial power. This unity was tightened through the emerging nationalism, an aspect which is crucial when it comes to the Liberation Struggle and the road to the Namibian independence (Hobsbawm 2004: 194; Southall 2013: 2).

Ideologies of nationalism and nation-building are combined with a special understanding of history that is supporting their claim (Hobsbawm 2004: 7). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the interdependence of nationalism and memory culture and how the latter is used to legitimate the former (Anderson 1998: 176; A. Assmann 2009: 78). Aleida Assmann did an extended work on the concept of collective memory and how societies are using memory to define their identity and cohesion. In her understanding, memory can be channeled through political interventions with the concept of memory politics. In memory politics, cultural memory is directed and influenced through political guidance (A. Assmann 2006; A. Assmann 2009: 78). Those influences can be, on the one hand, constructed in physical traces like monuments, museums or street names. On the other hand, they can also be non-material interventions, like the creation of public holidays, celebrations or remembrance of ancestors (Anderson 1998: 17; A. Assmann 2009:

18). This can be seen in national holidays as they fulfill the function of connecting the constructed past with the present. Those days produce a common feeling as one nation – an imagined community (Anderson 1998: 176; A. Assmann 2006: 233). The central point is that the construction of memory is connected to the making of national identity and less about historical truths (A. Assmann 2009: 83). Another example are monuments, used to manifest and mystify a shared past of a nation and to imply a nationally shared and "modern" future (A. Assmann 2006: 41-42; Hobsbawm 2013: 7). To do so, states or political institutions often appropriate histories of individuals or specific communities to construct a shared past (A. Assmann 2006: 40). In the following I want to illustrate how the Independence Museum is fulfilling different aspects of memory politics and nation-building and how those approaches are simplifying and appropriating history.

Disruption of the colonial landscape in Windhoek

On top of one of Windhoek's most prominent hills, one can find colonial traces like the *Christuskirche*[4], the *Alte Feste*[5] and the *Tintenpalast*[6]. Those buildings symbolize three aspects of German colonial oppression: religious, military and administrative.[7] In addition, they indicate how Germany is still present and dominating the memory landscape of Windhoek (Becker 2018: 1; Zuern 2012: 506). But nowadays this dominance is disturbed. Right between the colonial landmarks one can find a new eye-catcher: The Independence Memorial Museum. The whole building was designed and built by the North Korean company "Manudae Overseas Project".[8] Through the socialist design and golden color, the museum disturbs the predominant unison of the German colonial architecture (Becker 2018: 2; Kirkwood 2013: 558; Zuern 2012: 506). In addition to the museum two monuments were built which replaced the former spots of the *Reiterdenkmal*[9]. One statue is Sam Nujoma,

4 Christ Church
5 Old Fort
6 Ink Palace
7 The *Christuskirche* is still hosting the "Evangelical-Lutheran Church in Namibia". Inside are commemorative plaques to remember German soldiers who died during the colonial wars. The area next to the *Alte Feste*, was where the concentration camps with the imprisoned Herero and Nama, as a consequence of the wars, stood (Zimmerer 2003: 57). The *Tintenpalast* is the place where the German colonial administration was based. Today it is used by the Namibian parliament.
8 The company used their own workers and offered no jobs for Namibians, which led to continued criticism during the planning and construction of the museum (Kirkwood 2013: 558-560).
9 Equestrian Monument. In remembrance of Germans who died in the colonial wars the *Reiterdenkmal* was inaugurated in 1912. In the last years it was moved twice and today stands inside the *Alte Feste*. Its removal cause criticism especially from the German community.

the "founding father" of the Independent Namibian Republic and the other remembers victims of the German genocides. The design of those two matches the golden bronze appearance of the Independence Museum. This could be seen as a metaphorical representation of a golden future for an independent Namibia. At the inauguration of the museum the former president Hifikepunye Pohamba supported this interpretation. For him, the colonial traces on the hill, especially the *Reiterdenkmal* "symbolize the victory of the Imperial German Forces over the Namibian people" (Pohamba 2014: 4). This symbolic supremacy should forever be broken as "we became the masters of this place, now and forever. Not the colonialists. Never again will our Motherland be colonized" (Pohamba 2014: 4). The use of the exceptional design points into the same direction. For the art historian Meghan Kirkwood the North Korean design is a way to cut the ties to the former colonial powers and to define an own post-colonial identity (Kirkwood 2013: 558). It could be an alternative approach to demonstrate the change of symbolic power by breaking with German domination. But the museum also embodies a new way of narrating the past as the following analyses will show.

The Independence Memorial Museum

The whole exhibition is divided into three floors.[10] Due to the round construction of the building, visitors are walking through the floors in a circle – from pre-colonial times until the independence. This cyclical construction gives no chance for shortcuts; on the contrary a visitor has to follow a specific course which can be seen as exemplary for the displayed understanding of history: as singular and linear.

The approach of the exhibition follows a clear line. Information about the broader historical context of the displayed exhibits is mostly missing. One can tell from a frequent use of the social realistic style, a characteristic of socialist painting, that the past is romanticized and deformed (Kirkwood 2013: 551-552). Meghan Kirkwood pointed out that this style is used in North Korea to show the horrors of the Japanese colonialism and the resistance nature of the Korean people against their oppressor (Kirkwood 2013: 552). This suggests that a propagandistic message and the construction of a past is more important than to display the historical contexts and information.

Additionally, the neglecting of historical data and explanations is part of an approach of simplification – a feature I aim to chisel out with my following analyses. Therefore, I will introduce four different exhibits of the Independence Museum in a chronological order from the "Pre-colonial Society", via "The Early Resistance Against Colonialism" and "The Dark Room" to the "Outlook into the Namibian Future" and locate them into the context of dif-

10 The museums administration is on the 4th floor which is closed for public. On the 5th floor is a restaurant with three balconies that offer a great view of Windhoek and the surrounding buildings.

ferent aspects of the Namibian memory culture. I chose these four exhibits because they primarily display the German colonial time and the Namibian future – most of the exhibition itself focuses on the Liberation Struggle and the achievements of the SWAPO.

Pre-colonial society

The second room of the exhibition is titled "Pre-Colonial Society, Peaceful Coexistence" and is filled with several wooden showcases. Different artifacts are displayed without clear inscriptions of the originating epoch or location. On the walls black and white photographs show the landing of the German colonial troops. Next to it, one can see a map of current Namibia which shows the different ethnic groups and how they were labeled by the German colonial administration. All in all, the title of the room "Pre-Colonial Society, Peaceful Coexistence" is the greatest eye-catcher because it is written in big capital letters.

It is a noteworthy fact that the Independence Museum begins with the display of the pre-colonial era without giving any further explanations about this time. By omitting the historical context, the topic of the room is the only thing one will remember after the visit: That the pre-colonial time was a peaceful coexistence between the different Namibian societies. Even the map indicates that the border of today's Namibia limited the pre-colonial societies, without acknowledging that these borders were colonial constructions. Furthermore, the room illustrates how the pre-colonial time or even the present, as I will show later, is imagined as peaceful coexistence of different societies in the boundaries of nowadays Namibia.

Early resistance against colonialism

The room "Early Resistance Against Colonialism" is dominated by black and white photos picturing the German wars against the Herero and Nama. The third wall is filled with an enlarged photo of Jakob Marenga. In the room's center are three bronze colored busts of Samuel Maharero, Hendrik Witbooi, and Iipumbu ya Tshilongo – symbolizing three Namibian societies: The Herero, the Nama and the Ovambo, by ignoring all other groups.

Again, it is conspicuous that further information of the exhibits and the context is missing – just a few notes about the specific photographs are given. This makes it hard to follow the intended argumentation of the room. Additionally, the displayed photos are mostly showing the German *Schutztruppe*[11] and their captives – since only Germans took photos. However, it is surprising that the room was not curated with more information about the "Early Resistance Against Colonialism" from a local point of view. This could have

11 Name of the German colonial troops

been an act of empowerment and strengthening of the own history, because it would consider own sources as equal with sources of the former colonizer.

Fig. 2. "Early Resistance against Colonialism". Photo: Tilman Gorenflo, 16.08.2019

Furthermore, it is not explained how the three men in the center are connected to each other and why they got an own sculpture. Like the nine "Early Resistance Leader" at the beginning of the exhibition the resistance is broken down to a few historical key figures that represent some Namibian societies, while others were left out totally. The equating of Iipumbu ya Tshilongo with Samuel Maherero and Hendrik Witbooi in a room which focuses only on the German colonial wars, implies that the Ovambo were oppressed by the Germans in the same way as the Herero and Nama. By omitting the local point of view and the history of resistance by the Ovambo against the Portuguese in the north of Namibia, it is suggested that the German colonial-trauma was a *national* experience and every society suffered the same under the German rule (Gewald 2003: 300; Kössler 2003: 146). This is a historical misrepresentation because the German so-called "police zone" had its primary impact on the center and the south of Namibia whereas the Ovambo kingdoms in the north were affected indirectly by the foreign rule (Gewald 2003: 300; Kössler 2003: 146). Those three busts are exemplary for the Namibian nation-building through the appropriation of history where the histories of specific communities are displayed as national experience. The German colonialism and particularly the colonial wars are imaged to be the shared past of the whole nation and therefore the fate of all Namibians.

The dark room

The construction of a shared past through appropriation of history is present in the third room too – a room that can only be entered through heavy red curtains. It is dark inside, just a few spots of light shine from a low ceiling. The walls are kept in dark colors and depict bodies that are lying on the ground or hanging from ropes. The illumination is constructed in a way that the figures throw long shadows onto the walls, which generates an oppressive feeling for the visitors. There is no title of the room, just one date "02.10.1904" is written on the wall in gold letters (compare picture 3). Beneath is a drawing of a man who wears a German military uniform.[12]

Fig. 3. Dark Room. Photo: Tilman Gorenflo, 16.8. 2019

The gloomy atmosphere of the room in combination with dead bodies and the date gives a clear hint to the genocide of the Herero people. On the 2nd October 1904 the German general Lothar von Trotha signed the so called *Schießbefehl*[13] in which he ordered the death of every Herero armed or unarmed, no matter if men, women or children (Speitkamp 2017: 86; Zimmerer 2003: 51).

This information is not provided to the visitors. It is a room to show the horrors of German colonialism where apparently no further explanation is needed. From an analytical point, the missing historical context suggests that the cruelties were done to all people in the former German colony. Though it is a history of specific Namibian societies, mostly of the Herero and Nama people – although the *Schießbefehl* of von Trotha, to whom the date of the 2nd

12 The man on the wall looks like Viktor Franke who was the last commander of the *Schutztruppe* in the former German colony.

13 Firing Order

October 1904 refers, only mentions the Herero people. This is particularly important considering that the Herero are still fighting for recognition of their histories and its consequences for their communities in nowadays Namibia (Häussler 2018: 8). Through the lack of information provided, I again see a nationalizing of a specific history which implies that the horrors where *national* horrors and shared by all societies in the German colony. This assumption is strengthened because the exhibits in the previous rooms never distinguished between the several Namibian societies.

Outlook into the Namibian future

Different aspects of the Liberation Struggle, military and diplomatically, are the core of the museum, as the second and third floor are exclusively about the SWAPO and their achievements. The end of the exhibition is an outlook into the imagined Namibian future and at the same time a reference back to the beginning of the exhibition – the pre-colonial time. Opened by some exhibits of the first independent elections and the first Namibian parliament, a giant drawing follows, titled: "Long Live Namibian Independence!" (see picture 4). In the right corner a bright orange sun, similar to the one in the national flag, spreads its sunbeams into the whole picture – three of them in the Namibian colors: red, green, blue.[14]

Fig. 4. Long Live Namibian Independence. Photo: Tilman Gorenflo, 16.8.2019

14 The same colors are also the party colors of the SWAPO.

In the foreground ten different people face the same direction. A woman in a "traditional"[15] dress stands next to a *white* farmer. A soldier is placed next to a young girl in a school uniform who is in front of a nurse. One can see two men in suits and another man in a wheelchair who are all assembled next to a woman with a broom. Behind her is a man in a construction worker outfit with a hammer in his hand. In the background are the silhouettes of a cheering and flag waving crowd of people. It is noteworthy that the people who are depicted as women are displayed in care jobs, while the people displayed as men are mostly shown as white-collar workers. Here different characteristics of gender roles are reproduced and set for the Namibian future, an aspect that is also found in the works of Angola and Gemmeke (both this paper). The *white* farmer, perhaps a descendant of former colonialists, is supposed to be a natural part of this community as well as the woman in the "traditional" dress. The whole spectrum of the Namibian society is united under the silhouette of Sam Nujoma who is in the sky above them, like a divine person. He seems to pose as the founding father of (t)his imagined community. This form of depiction suggests that under his rule the Namibian people can look forward to a bright future. At this point of the exhibition the imagined past becomes the present in the Independence Museum. The SWAPO and especially Sam Nujoma led them back to the already displayed "pre-colonial time". A time where all different societies where living together in a "peaceful coexistence" though united as one nation. This is also expressed by the national motto "unity in diversity" (Becker 2011: 537). But the exhibition shows that national aspirations are paramount and more important than this diversity. One of the most important publications of the SWAPO during the Liberation Struggle "To Be Born A Nation" is supporting this interpretation (SWAPO 1981). The title of the book is a quotation which was used during the Mozambican liberation struggle "to die a tribe and to be born a nation" (SWAPO 1981: ii). It illustrates that the needs of different communities are subordinate to the nation's interests. Specific "tribes"[16] and their histories become nationalized as long as it serves the national interest, like the history of the Herero and Nama. The appropriation of history in the nation's interest by the SWAPO is also an important aspect of the already existing memory culture in Namibia, which I will discuss in the following.

The exhibits of the museum fulfill different aspects of nation-building to form an imagined Namibian identity. Through the appropriation of history, a common past is constructed – a past that reinforces the narrative of resistance and bravery, broken down to key figures. This approach is supported by the method of historical simplification. Omitting data and context is a tool

15 The term "traditional" is often used to label people as "backwards" or „unmodern". To avoid such interpretation and to indicate "tradition" as a construct, I write it in quotation marks.

16 I consider "tribe" as a colonial term to devalue local political structures in comparison with the European colonial powers. Therefore, it is set in quotes.

to tighten the own narrative and to provoke emotions without considering the chronological order of events. This understanding of history and further memory political interventions lead to conflicts and tensions between the Namibian state and several communities, which I will show in the following section.

Recent memory political battlefields

One example of memory politics and conflict about remembrance was the restitution of the Bible and whip of Hendrik Witbooi from Germany back to Namibia in February 2019. The restitution of those artifacts was criticized by parts of the Nama community, who claimed that the Bible and the whip belonged to them and not to the Namibian state. But for the German federal state Baden-Württemberg and their minister Bauer it was reasonable to give the artifacts back to the "*namibischen Volk*"[17] (Baden-Württemberg 2019: 2). This argumentation is also based on the established memory culture in Namibia as it is concluded that: "*Er [Witbooi] ist heute ein Nationalheld Namibias, dem durch zahlreiche Denkmäler gedacht wird*"[18] (Baden-Württemberg 2019: 2). Baden-Württemberg is following the narrative of the Namibian state instead of giving the artifacts of Hendrik Witbooi back to the Nama people as their Traditional Leader Conference had claimed (Kahiurika 2019). The case illustrates several layers of coming to terms with the past in the restitution debate. It raises the question about heritage, property and international relations.

The second case is the controversy that followed the memory political approach of the Namibian state and the Windhoek city council to change the name of the "Bismarck Street" in Windhoek. This initiative provoked the resistance by parts of the German-speaking community because they felt left out of the discourse in post-colonial Namibia. The German-speaking community are in a special position as the descendants of the former colonialists in this memory political "battlefield" for recognition and participation. In the following I discuss how their identity is connected with memory culture and what this means for their relationship to the government and other Namibian communities.

As an answer to the political intervention concerning the "Bismarck Street", a German-speaking lawyer published an article in the largest Namibian newspaper where he argued that it is wrong to change the street name into "Simeon Lineekele Shixungileni Street". Thereby he defended Otto von Bismarck as a "hero" for Germans by illustrating his achievements like the unification of Germany and the introduction of the social security system (Vaatz 2019a: 3). His main point is that the name change is a discrimination

17 Namibian people

18 He [Witbooi] is nowadays a national hero of Namibia, who is remembered by numerous monuments.

and additionally destroys the heritage of the German-speaking community in Namibia. Therefore, he raises the question: "[W]hy must the admired leader of one of the ethnics groups presently calling Namibia their home country be removed and *substituted* by a hero of one of the other ethnic groups" (Vaatz 2019a: 3; emphasis in original). The lawyer as well emphasizes that Bismarck was innocent about what happened in the former German colonies because he retired in 1890. Here he is, probably willingly, ignoring that Bismarck himself cleared the way for German colonialism which formally began in 1884. In a second article, in defense of his former article, he uses flawless colonial revisionist arguments to underpin his cause. "There have also been a number of benefits the colonial power have brought to Namibia, such as the education system, the road system [...] and generally speaking the administrative system" (Vaatz 2019b: 15).[19] Which fits in his previous argumentation where he highlights the importance of the German community in "making Namibia what it is today" (Vaatz 2019a: 3). Both articles were discussed for several days in the newspaper and showed how the descendants of the former colonialist see themselves and how they use different relativistic arguments and money to keep the sovereignty of interpretation about their colonial heritage. They want to have participation rights and an equal treatment among the different ethnic groups in Namibia without acknowledging the colonial guilt and the inequality that is inherent in their position. This became clear on a meeting of the German community titled: *"Namibisch-Deutsches Selbstverständnis. Werden die Meinungen deutschsprachiger Namibier in der Öffentlichkeit genügend wahrgenommen?"*[20]. The meeting was arranged by the *Namibisch-Deutsche Stiftung*[21] and apparently the topic aroused great interest because around 150 people came to the discussion. The idea was to negotiate how the "German tribe" could increase its perception in Namibia since they felt a decline of their influence and presence in inner Namibian matters. Therefore, the *white* German-speaking Namibians negotiated how they can form a new organization or a voice and how this could be used to reclaim their position in Namibia.[22] In the following discussion it became clear that the colonial era is still the core of their self-conception and the reason for their felt declining perception. As many agreed, such a voice should be used to defend themselves against verbal attacks from other communities, which were based on post-colonial questions about property and land. Particularly the Herero people and their verbal assaults against German-speaking

19 I don't want to reproduce such colonial revisionist arguments uncommented: Every attribute that was mentioned above as a benefit of colonialism was primary used to exploit the people in the former colonies.

20 Namibian-German self-conception. Are the opinions of German-speaking Namibians sufficiently noticed in public?

21 Namibian-German Foundation

22 There are about 20.000 German-speaking people in Namibia, which is around 1% of the population (Melber 2015: 16).

farmers were mentioned during the discussion. Apart from inner Namibian conflicts, their new organization could be a tool to reject generalizations and accusations that were coming from Germany – especially on topics about their colonial heritage.[23] A confident appearance as one united group should counter this felt paternalism from Germany-based academics and take back the agency to their community in Namibia. The initiative of the lawyer was appreciated by many during the discussion because he defended the "German tradition" against seemingly arbitrary governmental decisions. Many of them stressed that this should as well be an important attribute of their new organization. As a result their representatives could get in contact with the Namibian government and protect the rights of the German community, like the case of the "Bismarck Street". An attitude that was shaped in the last years, especially since the debate about the *Reiterdenkmal* and the changing memory cultural landscape in Namibia (Melber 2015: 164). According to the impression at the event, numerous no longer want to face their colonial guilt and want to be proud again of their heritage and identity.

The return of the Witbooi Bible and the Bismarck Street are recent examples for different Namibian communities who deal with the impact of governmental memory political interventions in two different ways. Both illustrate several layers of coming to terms with the past in Namibia. The case of the Witbooi Bible shows that there are tensions between the Namibian state and several communities like the Nama when it comes to restitutions and memorization. Because it arises crucial questions about property in the postcolony. Who is the owner of colonial artifacts – the state, the community, or the descendants of specific people? Particularly in the international setting, this question is mostly ignored because it exclusively focuses on the negotiation between nation-states. Although, as the removal of the *Reiterdenkmal* showed there is also a connection between the German memory culture and issues of the Herero and Nama, even if for different reasons. For the German-speaking community the preservation of German memory culture is an act of preserving their own identity and past. For the Herero and Nama on the other hand this memory culture preserves memories of colonialism itself and therefore of the crimes committed by the Germans. This is particularly important in a time where the memory landscape is changing and focuses exclusively on the SWAPO and their efforts during the Liberation Struggle.

Memory culture and politics in Namibia

In the following I will show the characteristics of the Namibian memory culture by considering the current state of research and discuss the previous

23 Especially Bartholomäus Grill was criticized from different people in the room. In March 2019, the German journalist published a book where he examined among others the racist continuity of German-speaking Namibians (Grill 2019).

examples. Most of the scholars agree that the Heroes' Acre, an areal in the suburbs of Windhoek to honor the heroes, is a good example for attributes of the Namibian memory culture, especially militarization (Becker 2011: 524; Kirkwood 2013, 557; Melber 2003: 307; Zuern 2012: 497). Becker stressed that the militarization is accompanied by a celebration of hyper-masculinity. Her focus on gender aspects of memory culture has shown that women are almost invisible in the Namibian memory culture (Becker 2011: 530). I would add by referring to Gemmeke that this invisibility also applies to trans, inter, non-binary and queer people (this volume). Another attribute of the Heroes Acre is that through the focus on masculinity, military[24] and heroism there is no space for mourning – a theme which became, according to Becker and Melber (Becker 2011: 535; Melber 2005: 102), essential for the Namibian memory culture. Both aspects are found as well in the exhibition in the Independence Museum.

During the liberation struggle the history of the German colonialism was used to unify all Black[25] people in Namibia against the colonial oppressor (Gewald 2003: 295). "In this manner, the Herero genocide became the shared history of oppression of all Africans living in Namibia, and not just the Herero" (Gewald 2003: 295). For Southall this is a typical method of liberation movements (Southall 2013: 6). In the propaganda of the SWAPO in the 1960s, attacks by the South African Defense Forces against the PLAN[26] were equated with attacks by Lothar von Trotha and his troops against the Herero (Bargueño 2012: 409). This approach is furthermore supported by the Independence Museum. The "Early Resistance Leaders" are constructed as the forebears of the SWAPO and Sam Nujoma. This singular and linear narration of history sees resistance against German colonialism as a prelude to the "real" liberation which was finally accomplished by the SWAPO. A reason why the memorization of the Liberation Struggle is deeply connected with the German colonialism and vice versa. Those events do not count as single historic events but as mutually dependent, while emphasizing the achievements of the SWAPO. With this attitude colonial experiences under the Germans are nationalized by the SWAPO which goes along with accumulation of power. Because the memorization focuses on their own achievements during the Liberation Struggle that outshines the period of the German colonialism (Zuern 2012: 496). The whole construction of the Independence Museum supports this mindset and therefore completes the idea of forming a Namibian identity.

After independence, appropriation of history was used to make up a Namibian identity. A characteristic that is also established in the exhibition

24 Melber has shown that the diplomatic operations where more important for the achievement of independence than the military ones (Melber 2003: 312).

25 I understand "Black" as a political category, therefore I write it with a capital letter.

26 "People's Liberation Army of Namibia". The military wing of the SWAPO.

of the Independence Museum and surfaces in debates about restitution and reparation payments. Especially on an international level of negotiations the communities are not valued as negotiation partners from both sides – Germany and Namibia. As a consequence, the SWAPO accumulates power while they negotiate with the German state by leaving out the Herero and Nama (Gewald 2003: 298). The restitution of the Witbooi Bible showed that questions about property and heritage are connected with this established history and narrative. The German state Baden-Württemberg followed this approach and gave the artifacts back to the Namibian state because they considered Hendrik Witbooi as *national* hero without even acknowledging his particular importance for the Nama community. Accordingly, conflicts about memorization become significant because they lay the foundation for negotiations about reparation payments and distribution of land (Zuern 2012: 513). In this, communities like the Herero or the Nama stress the unique experience of their people during the German colonial time and how this caused a marginalization which is still visible today (Häussler 2018, 8). But the Namibian Government downplays their experience by emphasizing that it is a national history and that they don't want to "favor" any specific group in the country (Kössler 2007: 381). An acknowledgment of their fate and the silencing of other histories[27] would furthermore be seen as a criticism of SWAPO, their achievements and the Namibian independence itself. Silencing history is a way to maintain steadiness – a stability that is considered to be more important than to tear up old wounds (Saul and Lyes 2003: 97).

Here, as Kössler illustrates, another important aspect becomes apparent: "Public memory in Namibia is deeply bound up with inequality, political actions of the state and political strategies, including those of party politics" (Kössler 2007: 382). Institutional power decides what is worth to be remembered and what is silenced (J. Assmann 2011: 54; Trouillot 1995: xxiii). This leads to a denial of specific histories and to a strengthening of those who have seized power (Trouillot 1995: 26). The museum as a memory political intervention itself is always forming and reproducing power. Through its selective manner it decides what is going to be preserved and moreover how this memory is sorted and contextualized. Different items are put together to create a common feeling, while others are left out for not fitting into the predominate narrative. This observation was also made by Schildkrout in her research about the Namibian museums in the early time after independence (Schildkrout 1995). She pointed out that most of the museums focused on a narrative that supported nation-building to overcome old conflicts (Schildkrout 1995: 65-66). The lack of information and historical context in the Independence Museum follows this nation-building approach, because it suggests that Namibia as one nation has one common singular history where nobody is favored – besides the SWAPO.

27 Like the fate of prisoners of the SWAPO.

Looking on the bigger scale of memory culture and reparation payments, the power is not in the hands of SWAPO. The Namibian state is still dependent on the goodwill of the former colonizer, the German state.[28] Namibia is receiving voluntary "development" funds from Germany and therefore they lose their bargaining power since they can't confront Germany harshly. But this is just one side of the coin. I talked to many Namibians who stressed that paying reparations can only be one step of a greater path of recognizing the German colonial heritage and ongoing guilt. Next to reparation payments and restitution of colonial artifacts, for many Namibians it is important that the German state apologizes for the colonial atrocities – in Namibia but also in other (African) countries.[29] Consequently, it is important for an inner German debate to challenge the pre-existing assumptions about an unproblematic *Kaiserzeit*[30], the self-concept of a neutral position[31] in Africa and the mystification as well as the romanticization of the colonial era (Krüger 2003: 122; 130; 132). This could also affect the German-speaking community in Namibia and their way to position themselves.

Conclusion and outlook

In their memory politics the SWAPO appropriates history to maintain power which leads to tensions and conflicts about memorization and heritage in the post-colony. This article showed how the new Independence Museum in the Namibian capital Windhoek fits well in the pre-existing Namibian memory culture. With its prominent location it breaks the symbolical dominance of German colonial memory culture in downtown Windhoek. The exhibition itself illustrates how history is used in different ways in the post-colonial setting. Through the appropriation of history, specific events like the Genocides of the Herero and Nama become nationalized. The museum fulfills what the former president Pohamba announced at its inauguration; that it should built up a Namibian identity. Additionally, the exhibition of the museum follows the established naturalized narrative of bravery, heroism, and resistance and lays the foundation for the self-staging of the SWAPO. Consequently, the Liberation Struggle against South Africa is emphasized while early colonial resistance against Germany is downplayed as the prelude to it, as the analyses showed. People and societies who do not fit into this SWAPO narrative are left out and their remembrance is silenced. In this article, I demonstrated

28 The initiate of the Herero and Nama to sue Germany before a court in New York brought no success apart from attention.

29 For example the brutal Maji Maji war in nowadays Tanzania which where around 300.000 people died.

30 Imperial period

31 The German Africa policy is based on the assumption that Germany is, apart from other European states, a neutral power in Africa because they lost their colonies so "early".

that the understanding of history in Namibia is used to imagine a post-colonial future where peaceful societies coexist next to each other under the fate of Sam Nujoma and the SWAPO. The cases of the Witbooi Bible and the Bismarck Street illustrated how memory politics is causing tensions and conflicts in this setting. They showed the inherent power of memory culture, its connection to questions about equal rights, participation and financial compensation. The nationalization of the genocides is used by the SWAPO to negotiate with the German state about reparations payments while excluding responsible people of the Herero and Nama. The created memory culture and the historic narrative that is told within it legitimizes the SWAPO to do so. An acknowledgement that some communities where more affected by the colonial oppression than others and still suffer from their marginalization, would weaken the narrative by SWAPO and their political position. It makes clear that "unity in diversity" – which should emphasize the specifics of each community – is still subordinated to national, thus SWAPO's, interest. The expansion of the educational institutions in Namibia, especially the humanities, could oppose the nationalizing approach of history. In this way scientific data would be available for all the communities and strengthen their position. But also the former colonizer, the German state, follows this narrative as the restitution of the whip and Bible of Hendrik Witbooi showed. The case of the German-speaking community in Namibia illustrated how descendants of the former colonizer lose influence and struggle with their own identity and facing their colonial heritage. Many of their struggles are connected to Germany and the predominant colonial amnesia. Therefore, it is important for Germany to set up a self-critical memory culture. Sculptures and Street names that honor former colonial officials or traders should be replaced and memorial sites about the genocides and colonial guilt should be erected. This could be a first step of the recognition of Germany's own responsibility as a former colonial power.

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