

The homecoming of Ovaherero and Nama skulls: overriding politics and injustices

Vilho Amukwaya Shigwedha The University of Namibia

vshigwedha@unam.na

Abstract

In October 2011, twenty skulls of the Herero and Nama people were repatriated from Germany to Namibia. So far, fifty-five skulls and two human skeletons have been repatriated to Namibia and preparations for the return of more skulls from Germany were at an advanced stage at the time of writing this article. Nonetheless, the skulls and skeletons that were returned from Germany in the past have been disappointingly laden with complexities and politics, to such an extent that they have not yet been handed over to their respective communities for mourning and burials. In this context, this article seeks to investigate the practice of ‘anonymising’ the presence of human remains in society by exploring the art and politics of the Namibian state’s memory production and sanctioning in enforcing restrictions on the affected communities not to perform, as they wish, their cultural and ritual practices for the remains of their ancestors.

Key words: Skulls, Herero, Nama, genocide, Germany, Namibia

Introduction

Until 1919, today’s Namibia was officially the colony of German South West Africa (GSWA). This came as a result of the 1884/85 Berlin Conference, which formally recognised Germany’s right to operate in and colonise the territory that it renamed GSWA.¹ German colonial occupation of this territory, which was renamed Namibia in 1968, lasted from 1885 until 1919, when Imperial Germany was defeated in the First World War and subsequently lost her colonies in Africa. Other German colonies in Africa included parts of Tanzania, Rwanda, Burundi, Togo and Cameroon. In GSWA, Imperial German troops, the *Schutztruppe*, orchestrated the first genocide of the twentieth century against the Ovaherero² and Nama tribes who lived in central and southern Namibia, respectively. Above all, German occupation of Namibia witnessed the illegal trade of body parts, primarily of the victims of the 1904–8 genocide, to Germany by European scientists and anthropologists. To paraphrase Wesley Pepper, Felix von Luschan, who was a director of the Anthropological Department of the Ethnology Museum in Berlin, drew up guidelines for travellers to

Vilho Amukwaya Shigwedha

German colonies, instructing them how to pack skulls, skeletons and human brains, which they obtained illegally and for no cost, for shipment to Europe. Shortly after the genocidal war ended in GSWA, Luschan asked Lieutenant Ralph Zürn, 'commander of Okahandja and who had previously supplied him with human skulls, if he was aware of any way in which the Ethnology Museum in Berlin might collect a larger number of Herero skulls. Zürn assured Luschan that collecting skulls of the Herero prisoners of war from concentration camps will be more readily possible than in the country, where there is always a danger of offending the ritual feelings of the natives.' Another German scientist involved in the illegal trade of human skulls was the anatomist Wilhelm Waldeyer, who received Ovaherero body parts from the concentration camps in GSWA. They were shipped to Berlin by doctors Dansauer, Jungels, Mayer and Zöllner. Leonard Schultze, a zoologist, is recorded to have noted that the mass killing of the Herero and Nama people presented opportunities for 'physical anthropology' to flourish; thus he interpreted the mass killing of indigenous people by the Germans as an opportunity to take parts from fresh native corpses, a welcome addition to the study of the living body. The anthropologist Eugen Fischer came to GSWA on behalf of Freiburg University as soon as the death camps opened to collect African skulls for 'race science' studies by interested institutions in Germany. Fischer's 'race science' theories led to the idea of a 'supreme race' – white – vis-à-vis the black and inferior race. Fischer studied and made tests with the heads of 778 Herero and Nama dead prisoners of war. Severed heads were preserved – numbered and labelled as Hottentotte, the German colonial name for the Nama. By measuring skulls – facial features and eye colors – Fischer and his protégés sought to prove that the native races were inferior (as he put it) animals.³

In response to the representatives of the affected communities' demand for the repatriation of their ancestors' skulls from Germany, on 4 October 2011 the Namibian government received twenty Ovaherero and Nama skulls from Germany on behalf of the affected communities. This consignment was followed by the repatriation of a further thirty-five human skulls and two skeletons from Germany in 2014. So far the total number of skulls and skeletons repatriated from Germany to Namibia since 2011 stands at fifty-five. Kazenambo Kazenambo, the leader of the group of fifty-five Namibians (mostly from the Oshihherero- and Nama-speaking groups) who travelled to Germany to receive the first consignment of skulls, told *The Namibian* newspaper that 'eighteen of the skulls were identified as having been taken from a concentration camp at Shark Island and the other two were taken from other unspecified places in Namibia.'⁴ The skulls were returned in caskets draped in Namibian flags and received full military honours upon their arrival at the Hosea Kutako International Airport before they were escorted to the Parliament Gardens in Windhoek (about 50 km from Hosea Kutako International Airport) for public viewing. Two days after their arrival in Namibia, an official ceremony was held at the Namibian Heroes Acre to pay homage to the skulls. The ceremony was attended by President Hifikepunye Pohamba, founding President Sam Nujoma, National Assembly Speaker Theo-Ben Gurirab, cabinet ministers, traditional leaders, church leaders, members of diplomatic corps and other senior officials. About 2,000 people from the Ovaherero/Ovambanderu and Nama groups were also in attendance.⁵

In his speech, Pohamba told the audience that ‘the skulls will be interned in the Independence Memorial Museum (IMM) to preserve Namibia’s history for posterity and as a reminder to future generations of the cruelty of war.’⁶ Pohamba’s wish for the skulls to be interned in the IMM to preserve Namibia’s history of resistance to German colonial rule and the mass slaughter of Namibians by the colonialists invoked controversial responses from interested individuals and groups of the Ovaherero and Nama communities. In essence, Pohamba’s statement regarding his wishes to see the skulls displayed as museum objects and physical reminders of the genocide of the Herero and Nama people marked the beginning of controversies over what constitutes the proper way to treat the skulls with dignity and respect. Whereas Pohamba’s rhetoric represents an agency of state power and appears to have mandated the IMM to reconstitute the human skulls into ‘material remnants’ for the public gaze and memorialisation of the genocide, this political gesture is not destined to be fulfilled, because the odds are in favour of respecting the Ovaherero and Nama funerary rites, foregrounding ideas and practices considered salient to the well-being of the deceased’s remains and the social order of the bereaved communities.⁷ The current treatment given to the Ovaherero and Nama skulls, which remain unburied and hidden, foregrounds the absence of religious, spiritual and social humanising efforts that affected communities wish to practise for the skulls of their ancestors. Nevertheless, until now, much literature on the Ovaherero and Nama people genocide has dealt almost exclusively with issues regarding reparations, with the main focus on financial compensation, for the victims of the 1904–8 genocide. Moreover, existing works on the Ovaherero and Nama genocide have failed to draw academic attention to the packaging of bones as political symbols and tools of state abuse, containment and neglect following their return to Namibia from Germany. It is against these odds that this paper seeks to examine the practice of ‘anonymising’ the presence of human remains in society by exploring the art and politics of the Namibian state’s memory production and sanctioning in enforcing restrictions on the affected communities not to independently exercise their customary burial rites for the skulls that were returned from Germany. The article further argues that the anonymity surrounding the skulls, and their separation from their communities, are tantamount to the dehumanisation of the severed and fragmented human remains. To examine the dynamics of political subjectivisation and objectification of the skulls, it is fundamental to first present a brief political and historical context of the early colonialists’ intrusion into the territory that constitutes modern-day Namibia.

Colonial rule in GSWA

Around the time when the German Empire (1871–1918) was beginning to initiate projects for expansion and colonial conquest of overseas territories, Friedrich Ratzel’s theory regarding his notion of *Lebensraum* or living space for the prosperity of the German poor, the *Volk ohne Raum* or the people without space, was also gaining momentum and recognition in Imperial Germany. For Ratzel, *Lebensraum* meant the establishment of a pre-industrial agricultural society in German settler colonies.⁸ Whereas the official German takeover of GSWA was declared in 1884 and

Vilho Amukwaya Shigwedha

lasted until the end of the First World War, German missionaries, explorers and merchants were well established in the south and central parts of the country before the colonial conquest and ceremonial takeover of the territory. German invaders of land in GSWA perpetuated gross human rights violations against indigenous the communities who lived in central and southern Namibia, where land and cattle were confiscated from them. These actions by German intruders incited local communities to stage protests which later turned to violent confrontations. The Ovaherero and Nama communities' resort to violence started, initially, from peaceful negotiations with Germany's representatives in the country and ended with armed uprisings to which the Imperial German government in Berlin responded with an iron fist. This translates into Imperial Germany issuing the reprehensible extermination order against the Herero people. According to Rachel Anderson, a letter written by a German missionary to his colleagues captures the violent sentiment among Germans in Hereroland, supporting the annihilation of the Hereros:

The Germans are consumed with inevitable hatred and a terrible thirst for revenge, one might even say they are thirsting for the blood of the Hereros. All you hear these days is 'make a clean sweep, hang them, shoot them to the last man, give no quarter'. I shudder to think what may happen in the months ahead. The Germans will doubtless exact a grim vengeance.⁹

The Imperial German order to annihilate the population of Oshihherero-speaking ethnic group rejects the *Lebensraum* theory which 'dismisses the notion that the races who came into contact with European colonialists suffered some form of inexplicable extinction'.¹⁰

Nevertheless, Imperial Germany's start of a war of annihilation against the Hereros in retaliation for their resistance toward the German colonial administration's oppressive treatment¹¹ constituted a violation of the General Act of the Berlin Conference. Outlined in the General Act were provisions and guidelines for European behaviour in Africa. Obligations included 'preservation of the native tribes, the suppression of slavery and the slave trade, and the protection of religious freedom'.¹² Thus, by 1884, Germany had entered into a treaty obligating it to protect some of the rights of the indigenous populations in its colonies. Additionally, Germany became part of the 1899 Hague Conventions on 4 September 1900, which outlined several laws of war, including laws on the conduct of fighting and treatment of prisoners and non-combatants. Unfortunately, Imperial Germany breached the 'binding formal agreements' of the 1889 Hague Treaty, resulting in the 1904–8 genocide of the Ovaherero and Nama people and looting of body parts of the victims of the genocide.

As noted by the former East German historian Horst Drechsler, the beginning of the German colonial period was characterised by the signing of protection treaties between local chiefs and representatives of the Imperial German government. Local chiefs who co-operated with the Germans were promised the conditional protection of the German Reich, provided that they would abide by the terms and conditions of the agreement. 'Treaties of protection were concluded in 1884 and

1885 with the following tribes: the Bethanie people, the Topnaars under Piet Haibib, the Berseba tribe, the so-called Red nation, the Rehoboth tribe and the Herero.¹³ Drechsler adds that 'tribal chiefs who signed the treaty agreed to not enter into treaties with any other colonial powers or give over any of their land to other colonial powers, and tribal chiefs promised to protect the life and property of German settlers and to protect their right to trade. The Germans in return promised to . . . recognize each chief's jurisdiction over his tribe; also, the Germans promised to respect local and indigenous traditions and practices and promised to not engage in actions that would be illegal in Germany.'¹⁴ Although German representatives were able to sign protection treaties easily with some of the smaller groups, such as the Basters, the Nama and Herero communities were reluctant at the outset. However, after the possibility of renewed hostilities between the two groups increased, the Herero signed protection treaties to take advantage of the offer of German protection, especially because they knew that British influence and protection in the region were waning.¹⁵ By signing the protection treaties with Imperial German representatives, local chiefs accepted German rule over them and promised to offer military collaboration in support of Imperial German efforts to suppress local resistance to foreign intrusion and confiscation of ancestral land from the local people. The indigenous communities' (Ovaherero and Nama) loss of land, especially following 'the stream of German settlers that descended upon the territory [Hereroland] following the discovery of gold in the area in 1887',¹⁶ forced the Herero people to initiate a revolt against the Germans as early as 1903. Likewise, the Nama communities joined the uprising towards the end of 1904. Such revolts presented Berlin with an opportunity to deliberately kill tens of thousands of the Herero and Nama people, resulting in what is today widely accepted as the first genocide of the twentieth century. The Herero and Nama prisoners of war, mainly civilians who surrendered to the *Schutztruppe*, were sent to concentration camps or *Konzentrationslager*, where, apart from being forced to work as slave labour, they were also subjected to very harsh environmental conditions and poor sanitation. 'By 1908 when the camps were closed, diseases and malnutrition had killed up to 80% of all prisoners who had entered Shark Island – including Namaqua chief Cornelius Fredericks.'¹⁷

Through Imperial Germany's commanding office in GSWA, the extermination order empowered the *Schutztruppe*, the genocidal regime force, to turn Hereroland and Namaland into slaughter houses, that is, to reduce to nothing the Ovaherero and Nama population groups wherever they were to be found across territories that Germany claimed to belong to it. Imperial Germany's command to slaughter and annihilate local populations was mainly ignited by its lust to acquire unrestricted access to natural resources and other riches that the country possessed. In accordance with Imperial Germany's plan, the extermination order set the stage for the unprecedented mass killing of tens of thousands of Ovaherero and Nama people, resulting in what is now generally perceived as the first genocide of the twentieth century. Also, this political development, based on racial prejudice towards the Other, set a precedent for the illicit trade and export of hundreds of human remains of the victims of the 1904–8 genocide of the Ovaherero and Nama people. These included complete human bodies, skeletons, skulls, jaws, hair, etc. which were

Vilho Amukwaya Shigwedha

traded to Germany, and from there to other European countries and to the United States of America. In fact, 'in the 19th century, scientists in all European metropolises had embarked on large-scale acquisition of human remains from around the world and also from pre-historic European grave sites'.¹⁸ As noted earlier in this article, there can be no doubt that the interest of European collectors of human skulls from GSWA was motivated by the appetite to pursue crude scientific research (based on racial prejudice of the Other) intended to claim the inferiority of the black race to that of the superior white race.¹⁹ In this relation, when Sarah Baartman died in France in 1814, French scientist Georges Cuvier dissected her body and exhibited her genitalia and brain. Her skeleton and body casts were on display at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris for almost 200 years, until the demands to repatriate her remains, initiated in 1996 by the Griqua National Conference, an organisation for Khoikhoi descendants.²⁰ Another related issue that should be noted here regards the fact that the skulls from Namibia were taken not only for perverted scientific experimentation but also as war trophies. From a psychoanalytic point of view, this claim would imply a violation of universal customary rites, modalities and ethics regarding how most societies want the dead to be treated. Simon Harrison explored the social relations affirmed through bones, and the tension between objects and subjects.²¹ Consequently, as long as this anomaly causes a violation, in particular of the Ovaherero and Nama people's customary etiquettes, it will also result in permanent and repeated emotional trauma.

Whereas the mass killing of the Ovaherero and Nama people appeared to be forgotten for many decades after it was presumed over, a century later, stifled traumatic memories began to re-emerge. This reality would translate into the decision by the descendants of the Ovaherero and Nama people to demand the restitution of their ancestors' human remains from Germany and to begin, possibly, a process towards healing and closure of the genocide chapter. The repatriation of fifty-five human remains from Germany in 2011 and 2014 occurred under Namibian government patronage and directives, which certified the National Museum of Namibia to be the custodian of the returning genocide skulls, which until now remain unburied. Considering the chronic shortage of skilled staff and funding support for the National Museum of Namibia, one can deduce that the skulls are being kept in a volatile and harmful environment. Very alarmingly, the Namibian public, including descendants of the victims of the genocide, is not allowed to visit the skulls. Foreign visitors and researchers who are interested in the subject are also treated in the same way. As Ester Muinjangu, a politician-cum-academic, has pointed out:

The National Museum of Namibia has chosen not to give us access to where the skulls are kept. Instead of allowing us to see and assess the condition and environment in which the skulls are kept since their return from Germany. The desires and demands of the representatives of the affected communities to connect with the skulls of their ancestors are completely ignored.²²

Hallam et al. would affirm that bodies and bones are, in numerous ways, central to the ongoing relationships between the living and the dead and a focus for

processes of mourning.²³ Katherine Verdery, writing about the repatriation of bodies in the post-Soviet context, proposes that bodies are particularly good political emblems because they are indisputably there, as our sense of sight, touch, and smell can confirm. Bodies have the advantage of concreteness that nonetheless transcends time, making the past immediately present.²⁴ Nevertheless, the issues surrounding a state entity, the National Museum of Namibia's enforced separation of the affected communities from the skulls of their ancestors, can be considered a violation of the indigenous communities' right to decide how they want to put the skulls to rest. Certainly, not everyone within the Ovaherero and Nama communities agrees that the skulls should be buried, nor does it mean that the issue regarding the Herero and Nama skulls is not characterised by political and cultural tensions among members of the affected communities. In fact, some Ovaherero and Nama groups feel that 'instead of burying such vital material remnants of the genocide where no one will see them, the skulls should be kept in a special chamber within the IMM for restoration and posterity'.²⁵ It is this complexity that this paper is concerned with.

The homecoming: politics and shame

In 2008, a German television documentary reported that forty-seven skulls collected from GSWA had been found at two German universities. At the 2008 Herero Red Flag Day²⁶ in Okahandja, numerous speakers mentioned the demand for the repatriation of the skulls. Ester Muinjangu, chairperson of the Ovaherero Genocide Committee, called upon Germany to return the skulls quickly so that they might be buried with dignity.²⁷ Similarly, Chief Kuaima Riruako of the Ovaherero and Chief David Fredericks of the Nama petitioned the Namibian government to send a formal request to the German government 'to return the skulls of our people in order for them to be given a proper burial in Namibia'.²⁸ Arguably, it was as a result of the request made by these chiefs that twenty skulls of the Herero and Nama people were repatriated from Germany to Namibia in October 2011. Nevertheless, these skulls have been laden with complexities and politics since their repatriation from Germany. In this light, the homecoming of the Ovaherero and Nama skulls is synonymous with the reappearance of unyielding traumatic memories of the 1904–8 genocide which the injustices of the past and the present help to exacerbate.

Whereas the restitution of the first consignment of skulls from Germany to Namibia in 2011, most of which had been collected during the genocide, was initially embraced by affected communities as marking the beginning of a process towards healing and closure, that expectation appears to have diminished in later years. This is due to unfulfilled tasks and obligations that the descendants of the victims of the genocide expected to materialise following the repatriation of their ancestors' remains. Notable among these is the politics of state intervention that pays no attention to the demands of affected communities to accord what most of them would consider a 'befitting resting place' for the skulls of their ancestors. What is particularly disturbing for some members of the affected communities and scholars interested in this subject concerns obstructive measures which prohibit the public interaction with the skulls since their return from Germany to Namibia in

Vilho Amukwaya Shigwedha

2011 and 2014. Certainly, the skulls are in the custody of the National Museum of Namibia, where they are locked up in a store room and where they remain packed in their original cabinets as they were prepared in Germany for repatriation to Namibia.

The National Museum of Namibia's starring role as the custodian of the genocide skulls has disempowered the affected communities to conduct proper burials in accordance with their communities' burial rites. This scenario indicates the Namibian government's intent to use the genocide skulls to pursue unspecified political interests and goals. This is when political actors or 'memory entrepreneurs', as Elizabeth Jelin would put it in a different context, attempt to use the skulls saga to 'seek social recognition and political legitimacy'²⁹ of the ruling class. This would also relate to the Namibian government's attempt to treat the genocide saga as not only about the Ovaherero and Nama people who were directly affected by it, but about all Namibians. As it was reported in a local newspaper, the Namibian government is of the view that 'We live in a representative democracy where elected people have to represent the greater majority . . . We are engaging Germany as representative of the Namibian people.'³⁰ This statement echoes the position of the German government, which on numerous occasions stated that it 'would not engage tribal groupings but only representatives of the Namibian government'.³¹ It should therefore not surprise anyone that the first consignment of Ovaherero and Nama skulls, as well as the second consignment, was handed over to a government representative from Namibia, not to the representatives of the affected communities. Ester Muinjangu, who witnessed the official handover of the Ovaherero and Nama skulls in Berlin, considers that the event was a mistake, an inappropriate political decision, and that it was insensitive to the affected communities' right to own the process of repatriating and burial of their ancestors' human remains:

Esther Moombolah, by then the acting director of the National Museum of Namibia, signed for the official handover of the skulls and received them on behalf of the National Museum of Namibia, which is a political entity of the Namibian government.³²

It appears that the National Museum of Namibia's appropriation and control of the skulls are intended to alter the socio-cultural significance and meaning that affected communities attach to the skulls of their ancestors. This sort of enforced control also indicates how the Namibian government places political interests above the affected communities' traditional norms and customary rites pertaining to how cultural communities should pay respect to deceased members of their communities. Moreover, this scenario also demonstrates the government's disrespect for the affected communities' views on matters concerning how the genocide issue, including the ongoing negotiations between Namibia and Germany, should be resolved. In fact, representatives of the Ovaherero- and Nama-speaking Namibians have simply been sitting in discussions with representatives of the Namibian and German governments, when invited, as passive observers or ceremonial figures. As a result, the genocide issue has become a space for political deliberations between the

Namibian and German governments only. Similarly, as much as the ongoing discussions are crucial in negotiating the future of the 1904–8 genocide, the exclusion of the affected communities and their anxiety at being left out when deliberations take place on issues that affect their ancestors has become another battle. In fact, the Namibian government is being accused by some representatives of the Ovaherero and Nama people on local genocide committees of being a puppet for the German government, as it concentrates only on trivial and insignificant issues which are not what the Ovaherero and Nama people are demanding Germany to adhere to.

The issue of the skulls that returned from Germany is one of the items that the Namibian government, in particular, is accused of taking for granted. To paraphrase Eric van Grasdorff, Nicolai Röschert and Firoze Manji, the leading goals of the campaign created by descendants of the genocide victims around the skulls were: first, the moral and political recognition of the genocide, and second, material compensation and negotiations between Germany and Namibia.³³ This became obvious not only in the talks held by representatives of the committee in Berlin and Windhoek and when some members of the Namibian delegation to Berlin proposed to finally reject the skulls and leave them in Berlin in order to scandalise the ‘non-handling’ of the reparation issue by the German foreign ministry.³⁴ This situation may stand out as one of the reasons why the focus of the Ovaherero and Nama representatives on genocide matters appears to have drifted away from the skulls saga since their homecoming. This is not to rule out claims that the National Heritage Council has on numerous occasions turned down requests by the Ovaherero-Ovambanderu Genocide Foundation (OGF) to visit the skulls and familiarise itself with the environment and condition of the skulls. According to Ester Muinjangu:

We have made several calls to the National Heritage Council demanding to see the condition of the skulls. Regrettably, they always refer us from one person to the other. It is a tactical game. So, we really do not know what is going on there.³⁵

Similarly, in 2017, Al Jazeera correspondents conducted interviews with a number of descendants of the victims of the genocide, with the aim to raise public awareness about the genocide of the Ovaherero and Nama people and their ongoing demands for reparations. Unfortunately, the Al Jazeera crew was completely denied access to the skulls, which they wanted to see for a comprehensive documentary regarding the current situation of the skulls and prospects for their future. Very disappointingly, the Al Jazeera interviews were broadcast without the skulls been shown on television. Whereas the Namibian government appears complacent about the unfortunate condition in which the skulls are currently held, it raises a general concern that keeping the skulls locked up in their original boxes as they were packaged in Germany will lead to a deterioration in the condition of the skulls, many of which were already fragile when they were handed over to the Namibian delegation in Berlin.

Considering the concerns raised above, the transfer of the Ovaherero and Nama genocide skulls to the National Museum of Namibia, as had been the case during their exile in Germany (where most of the skulls were kept in museums, anatomical

collections and so on), constitutes an alienation of the affected families from their cultural and biological responsibilities for the dead.³⁶ This is especially so when this institution's role of appropriating the skulls appears to be indefinite, and inconsiderate of how the affected communities feel or what their wishes for the skulls of their ancestors are. Notably, when thinking of a museum as a sanctuary for human remains it creates tensions and contradictions with most African practices of memorialisation and commemoration of the dead. Certainly, the incompatibility between museum practice and ways of doing things makes its function, role and purpose alien to the diverse burial rites of the African people. Therefore, to display or confine human remains to a museum environment is, to paraphrase Samuel Bienkowski, tantamount to treating them as things and not as persons, and not as the dead wished to be treated.³⁷

So, storing or displaying human remains in a museum, where they are packaged in a particular context, voiceless and with restricted access and information that is carefully chosen to 'interpret the dead body for contingent purposes' creates tension and dissonance with the affected communities and the public viewership at large. This puts many of the affected communities in a compromised position because, as a political entity, the National Museum of Namibia decides what is good for the human remains, regardless of the voice of opposition or concern of the affected communities to whom the skulls belong. As the historian Anitar Libongani suitably put it:

Personally, if these people were alive they would be unhappy with the decision to keep them in a museum. They are supposedly kept there as evidence for the genocide of the Nama and Ovaherero people without thinking that they were once human beings and deserve a better treatment as such and in recognition of their individual sufferings and trauma. I am sure they did not dream that one day their remains will be dissected and displayed for public consumption. This has never happened in Namibia as far as I am concerned. I am sure if they had to wake up, they would firstly demand to go home and rest.³⁸

Certainly, most African traditions encourage interaction between the dead and the living. Even those who had been dead for long are treated as if they are still part of the community of people who are still living and who are guided by the spirits of the dead, provided the deceased are happy with the treatment they receive from those who are still living. Thus, consigning the skulls to the care of a museum is to confine them to solitary confinement and extreme anxiety. If they were buried in communities of their origin and belongingness, their families and relatives would always visit and interact with the spirits of the ancestors as they wish, feel their presence and receive their blessings.

Sifting genocide dynamics

In a literal sense, the return of the genocide skulls from Germany is compared to a small ingredient, 'a little piece from the big cake', of a full package that contains

complex and solid demands which the affected communities want Germany to act upon and take full responsibility for the genocide, which remains one of the most reprehensible and contagious traumatic events of the violence committed by colonialists against Namibians. To try to reduce the sensitivity and complexity of the afterlife of the genocide, there is an urge for full involvement and participation of the affected communities in all the negotiations regarding the genocide; 'everything done about us without us is against us'.³⁹ This statement is synonymous with the Herero and Nama representatives' demand for reparations and full compensation for the theft of their ancestral land, cattle, the illicit trade of body parts to Europe and the desecration of the genocide victims' dignity. However, the narrow approach to what form of reparations the affected communities demand leaves a number of questions unanswered. What sort of reparations should it be – cash, or what? Who should receive it? How will it be put to use? Can the restitution of all human remains known to be held in Germany also count as a form of reparations? Can a befitting burial for the human skulls and skeletons that were looted from GSWA help the affected communities to find satisfaction and closure? One may speculate that the issue of the skulls is a trifling substance of the genocide talks and negotiations. As of now, the dynamics of the genocide appear to have shifted towards negotiations, court cases and debates involving the two principal negotiators, the Namibian and German governments, whose bid to find a permanent settlement for the genocide is intended to patronise and influence the affected communities to agree to a political settlement that exempts Germany from paying reparations as demanded by the descendants of the two affected communities. It is due to these other vigorous and resilient issues of political and economic concerns that the focus on the genocide skulls which are back in Namibia has since been neglected. This scenario also appears to suggest that the restitution of the genocide skulls is secondary to the victims' bid for monetary benefits, such as their solid demand for financial compensation from Germany which many of them, at least from the OGF view, see as a realistic package that would help to lift the affected communities from poverty that the majority of the Ovaherero and Nama people, especially those who live in the remote south of the country, continue to endure. Sadly, Germany is noted as treating such demands with some degree of triviality and disrespectfulness.

Addressing mourners at the funeral of the late Nama Chief David Frederick (one of the pioneers of the fight for restorative justice in the form of genocide reparations to the Ovaherero and Nama people) at Bethanie in February 2018, the paramount Chief of the Ovaherero, Vekuii Rukoro, said the following:

We will not rest until we get what we want. The German government has declined what the Namibian government proposed in terms of reparation payments, saying it is too expensive and that they instead want to give what they feel is reasonable. They have proposed that they provide affordable housing, solar electricity, affirmative action farms and vocational training centers, amongst others, as a way to pay back. They found the list [of demands] to be too expensive and rejected it, and they said we instead give you this basket, take it to your people and tell them this is what we, the murderers of your people are prepared to give, take it or leave it.⁴⁰

What Germany has proposed as a package to reach a monetary settlement with the Ovaherero and Nama communities is far from what the victims want and are demanding. The victims demand nothing else but financial compensation amounting to tens of billions of Namibian dollars in cash from the Federal Republic of Germany. For instance, back in 2001, 'Chief Riruako and around 200 supporters filed a lawsuit in the United States for US\$4 billion in damages from the German government and three German companies.'⁴¹ Nonetheless, scepticism about Germany's commitment to paying reparations appears to have reached an alarming proportion, which also seems to have frustrated most leaders of the Ovaherero and Nama people. Certainly, the return of the skulls, coupled with the ongoing negotiations between the Namibian and German governments, which are accused of the neglect of full participation of the affected communities, is not anything solid and tangible to produce any outcome that representatives of the affected communities desire to see and agree to. As the Ovaherero 'Paramount' Chief, Vekuii Rukoro, put it: 'The two governments are hatching a dubious plan to establish a trust fund that will be used to fund projects in communities with the aim to neutralize genuine demands for reparations.'⁴²

The exclusion of the descendants of the affected communities from critical negotiations concerning attempts to find a reasonable settlement for the 1904–8 genocide has resulted in the Ovaherero and Nama people filing 'a lawsuit on January 5, 2017, suing Germany for excluding them from current negotiations between the German and Namibian governments concerning the genocide.'⁴³ This has also resulted in the affected communities' rhetoric suggesting that Germany should 'take back the genocide skulls' if it cannot honour the demand of the representatives of the Ovaherero and Nama people for reparations and 'restorative justice' for the grisly cases which Germany is accused of committing against the Ovaherero and Nama people. On the other hand, this scenario also echoes issues regarding the authenticity and legitimacy of the skulls' belongingness to the victims of the Nama and Ovaherero genocide, as human skulls were not only collected from GSWA but also from other countries and places across the globe.

Total restitution and total closure?

Chief Rukoro's concept of 'genuine demands for reparations' would suggest that both the German and Namibian governments should unconditionally respond to the affected communities' set of conditions and demands for what the victims consider a standard and acceptable package for the damage incurred. Certainly, reparations whether in a form of restitution, compensation, acknowledgment and guarantee of non-repetition or promise of never again cannot undo the injustices of the past. Contrary to this perception, when he received the first consignment of the genocide skulls from Germany in 2011, Nahas Angula, former Prime Minister of Namibia, remarked that the return of the Ovaherero and Nama people skulls marked a special event that will lead to closure of a difficult chapter in the history of Namibia. When examined closely, the notion of 'closure' becomes not only problematic but also a very complex reality to substantiate and calibrate. Politically,

the homecoming of the skulls would be simply seen and construed as a significant shift to repair colonial damage, foster the spirit of national healing, forgiveness and reconciliation. However, the Namibian government appears to be more skewed towards meeting the expectations of the German government than those of its own people. It does this not only by not voicing a concern for the exclusion of the affected communities from the ongoing negotiations, but also by failing to openly challenge flimsy proposals that Germany dictates as conditions for reaching a permanent settlement with descendants of the victims of the genocide. This unpalatable situation does not only steer away positive initiatives and direct involvements of the affected groups to find a permanent solution to the problem, but it also suspends healing and makes closure a remote and inaccessible reality. Of course, political engagement is a vital component of every effort to try to resolve the genocide ordeal. However, this should not interfere with the socio-cultural practices and demands of the affected communities, including respecting what these communities think is befitting for their ancestors' skulls and skeletons. As Ester Muinjangué noted:

If the skulls were to be handed over to us and give them a dignified burial, it will make a big difference to us, spiritually and emotionally, because in your mind, you will tell yourself that these noble human remains that had been abused and displaced for too long are now finding a dignified resting place. So, if they can just allow us to do what we want with the skulls of our ancestors it will help us to accept what happened and move on.⁴⁴

In connection with the above, it can be assumed that as long as human remains stay detached from the mother community, let alone with plans to display them in a museum, healing and closure will not take place. Notably, the obstruction of affected communities from practising burial rights for their ancestors is both unethical and a violation of the Human Tissue Act of 2004, which points out that human remains should be treated with appropriate respect and dignity.⁴⁵ As Anitar Libongani put it:

Displaying remains of someone's dead dog in a museum, without the owner's consent, could generate controversies and may even lead to prosecution. How about a human being?⁴⁶

In contrast, a recent development calling for public display of genocide skulls in the diaspora has been making headlines in local and international media. This makes reference to the Ovaherero and Nama skulls which were recently discovered at the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH) in Manhattan, New York.⁴⁷ Intriguingly, the Ovaherero-Ovambanderu Genocide Foundation is reported to have signed an agreement with the management of the AMNH not to return the skulls to Namibia, at least for now, but to keep them in the museum. The decision not to repatriate the skulls in New York to Namibia is apparently in response to ongoing uncertainty and anxiety that they could be treated in the same way as the skulls that were returned from Germany. On the other hand, it is also reasoned that the display

Vilho Amukwaya Shigwedha

of these skulls at the AMNH in New York will help to generate international support for the Ovaherero and Nama people's demands for reparations from Germany:

They decided that the skulls should stay in New York for now. Because their publicity is crucial for the ongoing court cases in N[ew] Y[ork] which has so far attracted the international attention. Because of the presence of the skulls there, researchers and media people from all over the world are starting to flock to New York and put the genocide of the Ovaherero and Nama people on the world map.⁴⁸

Similarly, Kenneth McCallion, the attorney for the Namibian leadership of the Ovaherero and Nama peoples, relates that 'the discovery of Namibian human remains at the American Museum of Natural History highlights the fact that the genocide of the Ovaherero and Nama peoples continues to have repercussions not only in Namibia, but also in places such as New York and the rest of the U.S. where many of the descendants of survivors of the genocide have settled and still maintain their vibrant cultural and ethnic identities, despite the effort by the German imperial forces to wipe them out.'⁴⁹ The Herero skulls in New York raise a daunting reality that human remains of the victims of the first genocide of the twentieth century are not only found in Germany but displaced across the globe. If true, this scenario also raises the possibility that human remains from communities that were not directly affected by the genocide could also be found in the diaspora. This indication would echo the Namibian government's position that the skulls that returned from Germany do not only belong to the Ovaherero and Nama ethnic groups but also include Damara, San and Owambo people.⁵⁰ This also infers that from the nationalistic point of view, the Namibian government would entertain opinions that place the skulls in the context of national assets as opposed to ethnic and tribal belongingness, which, however, invites opposition by those who feel that every ethnic group in Namibia has prerogative customary rites and practices which should be respected.

Affected communities should be given freedom to exercise their customary rites and decide what is befitting for the skulls as each has its own ways of remembering, rituals and designated burial sites.⁵¹

Given the problematic interpretation of what constitutes a befitting honor for the skulls and skeleton that returned from Germany, it raises no doubt that most of the Oshihero-speaking people to whom most of the skulls belong would prefer to bury the skulls of their ancestors at Okahandja in central Namibia (situated about 70 km north of Namibia's capital city, Windhoek), where the paramount Chief Samuel Maharero, who led the Herero people in the war against the Germans, lived before the war broke out. In fact, Okahandja is where the war between the Ovaherero and Germans started on 12 January 1904. This is also where the remains of Chief Samuel Maharero were reburied on 23 August 1923 following their repatriation from Botswana, where he died in March 1923. Since then, Ovaherero have gathered at Okahandja on 23 August of each year to commemorate the genocide and pay tribute to their fallen heroes and heroines.

Similarly, representatives of the Nama people would prefer to bury the skulls of their ancestors at a number of designated places in southern Namibia, such as Warmbad. This place is where the war between the Germans and Bondelswarts (Namas) began in October 1903. Other desirable places for the Namas to bury their ancestors' skulls include Gibeon, Bethanie and Shark Island. Shark Island, near the Namibian southern coastal town of Lüderitz Bay, is often cited as one of the most notorious sites of the 1904–8 genocide: This is where more than '80 per cent of Nama prisoners died of maltreatment, hunger and diseases in German concentration camps'.⁵² In the same vein, while some concerned individuals and groups, like Muinjangu, are of the view that a dignified burial for the genocide skulls would help to restore the dignity of the genocide victims and make closure possible, others equally contest the rationality of that perception, which raises four key concerns.

The first concern regards the fact that the devastation caused by the genocide is 'too profound and permanent' to guarantee rational closure to the genocide chapter. The second concern indicates the fact that the repatriation of the skulls comes too late, when the dignity of the victims is already tarnished and no longer retrievable, following a century of mortification and dreadful conditions in Europe. Third, the unyielding bitterness of the descendants of the victims is expressed, who feel that material compensation or restitution of human skulls cannot bring back lost lives. It is also estimated that thousands of human remains were 'collected or stolen' by colonisers, explorers, hunters, traders and others, but only a very few of them have been returned so far. In his benediction when the Namibian government officially welcomed the first consignment of the skulls at the Namibian Heroes Acre in Windhoek, Bishop Zephania Kameeta (also from the Oshihherero-speaking population group) of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia was hopeful that the repatriation of the skulls from Germany would set the stage for the return of other Namibian mortal remains from Germany, Angola and elsewhere in the world.⁵³ Thus, the return of a few human skulls and skeletons is considered meaningless, as it is estimated that there are hundreds or thousands of skulls that remain missing and it is likely that they will never return or resurface to make the process of mourning and burial complete and meaningful.

So, in view of the still unclaimed human remains, it is difficult for the affected communities to ever forget and close the genocide chapter just because a few skulls have returned home. It is also difficult for them to find closure and contentment when the repatriated skulls are noted to be in very fragile conditions. More importantly, there is no explanation about what actually happened to the rest of the deceased bodies when the heads were severed from them. Kwame Opoku is convincing when he argues that the return of the skulls will not activate holistic healing among Namibians. The Germans will have to do more than this: they have to disclose fully the number of human skulls that they sent to Berlin and other German hospitals and universities; only they can do this . . . Taking into account the number of Ovaherero that the Germans massacred – some 60,000 – and the keen interest of German ethnologists, such as Luschan and the evil anthropologist Eugen Fischer, in obtaining human skulls, there must be thousands of such remains in German natural history and ethnological museums and university collection.⁵⁴

Fourth is the uncertainty and ambiguity that the affected communities attach to the human remains that returned home. As a matter of fact, these ancestors are considered to have been gone for too long and have returned supposedly as victims of the Herero and Nama genocide without any scientific evidence to support these claims. This does not, however, rule out the fact that the return of the skulls seems to have opened a gate for negotiations and debates between Germany and Namibia on issues concerning the affected communities and which may one day result in Germany agreeing to pay reparations to the communities affected by the genocide. While this, reparations of any kind, may also not lead to closure and healing, it would enable the affected communities to at least deal with their destitute livelihood that is an everyday experience for many of them. This would include, as demanded by the affected communities, compensation for the loss of land, cattle and subsequent poverty which currently defines the livelihood of many of them. Whereas the federal government of Germany is said to have officially acknowledged the genocide, it has yet to extend a formal apology to the victims. This, for now, means that 'the Germans have not accepted their full responsibility and do not appear willing to make the necessary compensations for the loss and pains suffered by the Ovaherero and Nama and to make a formal apology at the highest state level as they have done several times for the victims of Nazi atrocities.'⁵⁵

Intiguously, following the tabling of the genocide demands in the Namibian Parliament, German officials who have visited Namibia on several occasions had refused to meet with Ovaherero and Nama representatives. Except for the German Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development, Heidemarie Wiczorek-Zeul, who spoke to Ovaherero leaders during the commemoration of the 1904–8 genocide at Okakarara, near the Waterberg mountain (where the last major battle between Ovaherero and the *Schutztruppe* was fought) in 2004. In her speech to mark the 100th anniversary of the suppression of the Herero uprising, Wicz-Zeul acknowledged, in her personal capacity, that the violence inflicted by the German colonial powers against Ovaherero and Nama people was genocidal in nature. She also admitted that 'following the uprisings, the surviving Ovaherero, Nama and Damara were locked up in concentration camps and put to forced labour of such brutality that many did not survive'. More ambiguously, she concluded that 'the atrocities committed at that time would today be termed genocide.'⁵⁶ Nevertheless, a close examination of Germany's refusal to officially apologise and pay reparations as demanded by descendants of the victims of the genocide would explain Germany's anxiety to be, as George Steinmetz rightly put it, 'saddled with a legal responsibility for yet another case of genocide – especially one that some historians interpret as having laid part of the groundwork for the Nazi Holocaust.'⁵⁷

It is possible that the disrespect for the affected communities that the German federal government appears to demonstrate, at least for now, is rooted in the colonial and racial indifference towards the black race as inferior to the superior white race. Similarly, the disregard off the federal government of Germany for the affected people's demands for a state apology and compensation also makes the return of the skulls an isolated event that certainly cannot heal the victims in the absence of burning issues that affected communities consider critical, but which are not

receiving the attention of the perpetrator of the genocide. As Peter Katjavivi put it, 'instead of being a symbolic closure of a terrible chapter in the history of Namibia and Germany, the handover of the skulls appears to many as a symptomatic opening that reveals the worst aspects of this history and the unwillingness of some to assist the victims and their descendants to finally come to terms with the tragic past.'⁵⁸ Similarly, Kwame Opoku is of the view that 'this problem will [not] simply go away, no matter how long it takes to find the right solution, since the effects of the evil deeds of the past are still too visible in the inequalities that persist and reveal their historic origin in many aspects of Namibian society.'⁵⁹ Nevertheless, to overcome these challenges it becomes significantly important for both parties, Namibia and Germany, to show commitment to assist the affected communities to practise what they think is the best way to restore the dignity of their ancestors. However, it also appears that a collective approach among the affected communities to find a common ground regarding the social well-being of the descendants of the genocide has been in peril. This situation is apparently generated by 'historical trauma' regarding the rhetoric of trauma that continues to be transmitted through generations. According to Ester Muinjangué;

'Historical trauma' relates to the victims' everyday dealing with emotional issues . . . most of the time emotions of trauma do influence the rationality and logic of things in a negative way. This is one of the reasons why people could not really take a common and decisive decision on what is befitting for the skulls and the social welfare of the affected communities at large.⁶⁰

Maria Yellow Heart describes historical trauma as 'the cumulative emotional and psychological wounding, over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences.'⁶¹ An example of this intergenerational transmission of trauma are the disunity and disagreements among the Nama and Ovaherero people, making it difficult for them to approach the reception of the skulls as a collective. This is suggestive of a permanent damage in the collective psyche of the current generation of Ovaherero and Nama people. Muinjangué is of the view that

This situation is inevitable for any society trying to recover from experiences of mass violence and trauma. But, I think, when it comes to the issue of what should happen to the Ovaherero and Nama genocide skulls, each community can conclusively decide on common values and reach a consensus.⁶²

Nevertheless, the Ovaherero, who are the majority group, are also accused of dominating and influencing discussions regarding efforts to resolve the whole genocide issue. Moreover, there is also an element of division among the Oshihherero-speaking population groups themselves. In fact, there are two main factions within the Oshihherero-speaking community. One of these groups is the Riruako group represented by the Ovaherero and Ovambanderu Genocide Foundation (OGF) and of which Vekuii Rukoro, the Paramount Chief of the Ovaherero, is the head. The other

Vilho Amukwaya Shigwedha

faction is the Maharero group, which is represented by the Ovaherero – Ovambanderu Council for Dialogues on the 1904 Genocide (OCD-1904), led by Reverend Willem Konjore. The two groups, as Ellie Hamrick et al. put it, are culturally indistinguishable, but diverge on key political questions, creating a rivalry between the OGF and the OCD-1904.⁶³ According to some local media reports, the two groups ‘never saw eye to eye.’⁶⁴ Therefore, it should not surprise anybody, when in March 2017, Konjore’s group met [Hage] Geingob [the Namibian president] and claimed to be ‘the only representative of the descendants of the genocide victims.’⁶⁵

Conclusion

It is evident that political and economic factors were some of the driving incentives for Imperial Germany’s invasion and occupation of Namibia and the genocide that followed. It is also tangible to recognise that the genocide was not a mistake but a systematic process to eliminate the Ovaherero and Nama people. The *Schutztruppe*, Imperial Germany’s killing machine, were responsible for the numerous deaths, detention, banishment, rape and forced displacement of the Ovaherero and Nama people. In most cases the dead, especially those who were detained in concentration camps such as at Shark Island, Swakopmund, Orumbo rua Katjombondi (which stood at the site of the national museum of Namibia in Windhoek) and many other places in south and central Namibia were not buried because of their prisoners’ status. These grisly conditions created a worst-case scenario where dead bodies of the victims of starvation, diseases and German soldiers’ fire-power scattered across the landscape of mass violence in the central, southern and the western coastal parts (particularly Lüderitz Bay and Swakopmund) of GSWA. For a number of Germans, including some scientific scholars, this scenario created an enabling environment for them to select the best of these human remains for export to Europe, where a market was created for them. Many of these dead bodies were dismembered and packed into wooden boxes for export.

According to some sources, more than 3,000 skulls from GSWA were disseminated to institutions in Germany such as the Medical History Museum at the Charité and Freiburg University for racial and anatomical research.⁶⁶ In addition, human skulls from GSWA also decorated private homes as trophies. In 2011 and 2014 fifty-five human skulls were repatriated from Germany to Namibia, and the prospect for the return of more skulls from Germany and elsewhere around the world is very high. Initially considered a fundamental and necessary element of the process leading to acceptance, closure and forgiveness of what happened, the return of the skulls from Germany to Namibia turned out to reflect the complexities of bringing the difficult memories of the genocide of the Ovaherero and Nama people to closure. Notably, the skulls and a few skeletons that returned from Germany have been kept in an isolated environment with restricted public access to them. Whereas it is reasoned that the return of the skulls from Germany is not one of the key demands and conditions that the affected communities want Germany to adhere to, it is generally believed that they can corroborate the gruesomeness of the genocide and justify the Ovaherero and Nama people’s demands for unconditional

apology and reparations in kind from the federal government of Germany for the multiple losses and suffering of the victims of the genocide. This regards the fact that the colonialists not only took control of the country's natural resources but also subjected different indigenous communities in Namibia to unresolved social and economic distresses, including the unresolved issue of land ownership, racial divide and exploitation of resources which remain an everyday experience in postcolonial Namibia. Very significantly, the unyielding demands for reparations for the genocide of the Ovaherero and Nama people cannot be fully understood without making reference to the historical development and cultural sensibilities of the two affected communities, which the governments are accused of belittling. This implies that when the repatriation of more genocide skulls materialises in the future, both governments, and more especially the Namibian government, should strive to listen to the demands of the affected communities whose ancestors went missing during armed uprisings against the Germans. Certainly, it is crucial to give the skulls that returned from Germany all the recognition, respect and dignity that they deserve in accordance with customary practices and traditions of the respective communities to which these individual skulls belong. Therefore, the homecoming of the genocide skulls should not be taken lightly, they are the only tangible pieces of evidence for the affected communities to lay a strong case against the German government and force it to unconditionally agree to pay reparations, the hard way, for the deliberate and despicable mass killing, displacement and disappearance of untold numbers of victims of colonialism and their permanent damage to all indigenous communities in Namibia.

Notes

- 1 J. Sarkin and C. Fowler, 'Reparations for Historical Human Rights Violations: The International and Historical Dimensions of the Alien Torts Claims Act of Genocide Case of Herero of Namibia', <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12142-007-0053-z>.
- 2 Ovaherero, Hereros and Oshihherero are sometimes used interchangeably in this article. They all make reference to the one group of people, although the last, Oshihherero, makes reference to the language spoken by the Ovaherero/Herero people.
- 3 W. Pepper, 'The Herero and Namaqua Genocide, African History and Biographies', <http://consciousness.co.za/the-herero-and-namaqua-genocide/>.
- 4 C. Sasman, 'Skulls Received by Government', *The Namibian*, 6 October 2011, p. 1.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 C. Krmpotich et al., 'The Substance of Bones: The Emotive Materiality and Effective Presence of Human Remains', *Journal Of Material Culture*, 15:4 (2010), 371–84, p. 379.
- 8 M. Woxland, 'Lebensraum in Context: A Challenge to the Southwest Africa to Auschwitz Continuity', Master's thesis, Department of History, Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Brandeis University, May 2013.

- 9 Drechsler, (citing letter from missionary Elger to the Rhenish Missionary Society (10 February 1904). Cited in R. Anderson, 'Redressing Colonial Genocide under International Law: The Hereros' Cause of Action Against Germany', 93 *California Law Review*, 93:4 (2005), 1160–1.
- 10 D. Olusoga and C. Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust: Germany's Forgotten Genocide And the Colonial Roots of Nazism* (London, Faber and Faber, 2010), p. 110.
- 11 Cited in Anderson, 'Redressing Colonial Genocide'.
- 12 Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust*, p. 341.
- 13 According to Drechsler, the content of the agreements reached in 1884 and 1885 may be summed up as follows: The Chief, as one party to the treaty, undertook not to enter into any treaties with other nations and not to cede his territory or portions thereof to any other nation or members thereof without the approval of the German government. He also pledged to protect the life and property of German nationals and to allow them to carry on trade without let or hindrance on his territory, the German authorities retaining jurisdiction over all Europeans. See H. Drechsler, *Let Us Die Fighting: The Struggle of the Herero and Nama against German Imperialism (1884–1915)* trans. Bernd Zöllner (Berlin, Akademie-Verlag, 1966), p. 27.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 Sarkin and Fowler, 'Reparations for Historical Human Rights Violations'.
- 17 Pepper, 'The Herero and Namaqua Genocide'.
- 18 L. Förster, D. Henrichsen and H. Stoecker, 'Tracing the Descendants of Kuiseb's 1884 Grave Robbery', *The Namibian*, 6 May 2016, p. 13.
- 19 J. Gorbler, 'The Saga of the Skulls Restitution Enacted – Recognition Failed', unpublished paper, cited in V. A. Shigwedha, 'The Return of Herero and Nama Bones from Germany: The Victims' Struggle for Recognition and Recurring Genocide Memories in Namibia', in J.-M. Dreyfus and E. Anstett (eds), *Human Remains in Society: Curation and Exhibition in the Aftermath of Genocide and Mass-Violence*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2017), p. 197.
- 20 C. Rapoo, "'Just Give Us the Bones!'" Theatres of African Diasporic Returns', *Critical Arts*, www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02560046.2011.569057.
- 21 Krmpotich et al., 'The Substance of Bones', p. 375.
- 22 Author's interview with Ester Muinjangu, University of Namibia, 31 January 2018. Muinjangu is affiliated to the National Unity Democratic Organization (NUDO), an opposition party in Namibia. At the time of writing this article she was campaigning for the presidency of NUDO.
- 23 E. Hallam et al., *Beyond the Body: Death and Social Identity*, London: Routledge, 1999, cited in Krmpotich et al., 'The Substance of Bones', p. 375.
- 24 K. Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Post-Socialist Change* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1999), cited in Krmpotich et al., 'The Substance of Bones', pp. 375–7.
- 25 V. A. Shigwedha, 'The Return of Herero and Nama Bones from Germany: The Victims' Struggle for Recognition and Recurring Genocide Memories in Namibia'

- in J. M. Dreyfus and E. Anstett (eds), *Human Remains in Society: Curation and Exhibition in the Aftermath of Genocide and Mass-Violence* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2017), p. 208.
- 26 The Red Flag Day or *Otjiserandu* is an annual gathering by the Ovaherero people. It is held on 26 August each year to commemorate Chief Samwel Maharero, the leader of the 1904–8 war against the Germans. Chief Maharero's remains were repatriated from Botswana for reburial at his ancestral residence in Okahandja, 70 km north of Windhoek, the capital city of Namibia.
 - 27 E. Zuern, 'Memorial Politics: Challenging the Dominant Party's Narrative in Namibia', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 50: 3 (2012), 413–598, p. 504.
 - 28 B. Weidlich, '105 Years Ago: Herero Uprising against Colonialism', *The Namibian*, 12 January 2009, p. 1.
 - 29 E. Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*, trans. M. Godoy-Anativisa and J. Rein (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press), cited in E. Hamrick and H. Duschinski, 'Enduring Injustice: Memory Politics and Namibia Genocide Reparations Movement', *Memory Studies*, <https://doi.org/10.1750698017693668>, p. 3.
 - 30 Staff Reporter, 'Government to Remain in Charge of Genocide Talks', *New Era*, 13 April 2017, p. 2.
 - 31 *Ibid.*
 - 32 Author's interview with Ester Muinjangué.
 - 33 E. van Grasdorff et al., 'Germany's Genocide in Namibia: Unbearable Silence, or How Not to Deal with Your Colonial Past', www.pambazuka.org/human-security/germany%E2%80%99s-genocide-namibia.
 - 34 *Ibid.*
 - 35 Author's interview with Ester Muinjangué.
 - 36 According to Ester Muinjangué, the National Museum of Namibia claims responsibility for the skulls because a government representative, not a representative of the affected communities, signed for the repatriation of the skulls and their safety once they are back home.
 - 37 S. J. M. M. Alberti, P. Bienkowski, M. J. Chapman and R. Drew, 'Should We Display the Dead?', www2.le.ac.uk/departments/museumstudies/museumsociety/documents/volumes/alberti2.pdf.
 - 38 A. Libongani, 'Should Museums Display Human Remains?', Public History assignment no. 2, University of Namibia, 27 May, 2014.
 - 39 See 'Media Conference Statement' by I. Hoffmann, Chairperson, Nama Genocide Technical Committee, <http://genocide-namibia.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/PRESS-RELEASE-NOV-2016.pdf>.
 - 40 M. Hamutenya, 'We Will not Rest until We Get What We Want', *New Era*, 6 February 2018, p. 1.
 - 41 C. Honey, 'Herero Reparations Demand Still On', 9 December 2005, www.namibian.com.na/index.php?id=11545&page=archive-read.
 - 42 V. Rukoro, 'Ovaherero/Nama Remains Must Be Kept in USA', *The Villager*, 5–21 September 2017, p. 7.
 - 43 'Germany in a U-turn on Namibian Genocide Lawsuit', *The Herald*, 15 January 2018, www.herald.co.zw/germany-in-u-turn-on-namibian-genocide-lawsuit/.

Vilho Amukwaya Shigwedha

- The initiators of the legal challenge are the OvaOvaherero chief Vekuii Rukoro as representative of the Ovaherero Traditional Authority (OTA), and chief of the Nama Traditional Authorities Association, David Frederick, and the Association of the Ovaherero genocide in the USA.
- 44 Author's interview with Ester Muinjangué.
- 45 National Museum of Wales, Collection Management Policies – Policy on Human Remains Review, 2006, www.museumwales.ac.uk/1181/.
- 46 Libongani, 'Should Museums Display Human Remains?'
- 47 'Prof Felix von Luschan, a German anthropologist and ethnologist at the Museum for Ethnology in Berlin from 1885–1910, originally collected the Namibian body parts. He was a member of the German Society for Racial Hygiene. Over the span of many years, Von Luschan built up two large collections containing thousands of specimens: one for the Berlin Museum and one in his own private possession. Both collections contained skulls and skeletons of Namibian people that had been shipped from Namibia to Berlin during the German colonial period in Namibia. According to Holger Stoecker, a historian at Humboldt University in Berlin and who is familiar with these collections, after von Luschan's death in 1924, his widow sold his private collection to the AMNH in New York. It is believed that Felix Warburg, a German-born New York banker, donated the money for the transfer of the collection from Berlin to New York.' *New Era*, 14 September 2017, p. 1.
- 48 Author's interview with Ester Muinjangué.
- 49 Staff Reporter, 'Namibian Human Remains Discovered at American Museum.'
- 50 'Ovambo, Damara and San Skulls Found in Germany', *The Namibian Sun*, 10 March 2017, p. 1.
- 51 Author's interview with Ester Muinjangué.
- 52 See C. W. Erichsen, *What the Elders Used to Say: Namibian Perspectives on the Last Decade of German Colonial Rule*, Namibia Institute for Democracy (NID) and the Namibian-German Foundation (NaDS) (Windhoek, John Meinert Printing, , 2008), pp. 20–32.
- 53 Sasman, 'Skulls Received by Government.'
- 54 K. Opoku, 'Return of Stolen Skulls by Germany to Namibia: Closure of a Horrible Chapter?', www.pambazuka.org/governance/return-stolen-skulls-germany-namibia-closure-horrible-chapter.
- 55 *Ibid.*
- 56 In A letter authored by P. E. Muundjua (Ovaherero Genocide Committee) and addressed to the German NGO-Alliance, 18 March 2012, Windhoek, Namibia, <https://afriperspectives.com/2012/03/21/letter-by-ovaherero-genocide-committee/>.
- 57 In this relation, as Steinmetz put it in Thomas Pynchon's novel, *Southwest Africa*, the 1904–8 genocide is described as setting the stage for Nazism, and in *Gravity's Rainbow* the Ovaherero resurface in Nazi Germany as the 'Schwarzkommando' who worship a rocket programme and are dressed in pieces 'of old Wehrmacht and SS uniforms'. This is of course entirely fictional, but it does gesture toward the widespread sense of continuity between 'Southwest Africa' and Nazism, and toward Ovaherero survivors' adoption of many cultural attributes of their

- oppressors after 1904. See G. Steinmetz, 'The First Genocide of the 20th Century and Its Postcolonial Afterlives: Germany and the Namibian Ovaherero', *The Journal of the International Institute*, 12:2 (2005), <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/j/jii/4750978.0012.201?view=text;rgn=main>.
- 58 In Opoku, 'Return of Stolen Skulls by Germany'.
- 59 *Ibid.*
- 60 Author's interview with Ester Muinjanguue.
- 61 M. Y. H. Brave Heart, 'The Historical Trauma Response among Natives and its Relationship with Substance Abuse: A Lakota Illustration', *Journal Of Psychoactive Drugs*, 35:1 (2003), 7–13, p. 7.
- 62 Author's interview with Ester Muinjanguue.
- 63 The Riruako and Maharero groups are divided on three levels: Herero Royal House allegiance, national political party affiliation and genocide committee allegiance. The Riruako group supported Kuaima Riruako's claim to the paramount chieftaincy of the Herero before his death in 2014 and now supports his successor, Vekuii Rukoro, while Maharero group members support South West African People's Organisation-(SWAPO) affiliated sub-chiefs of various royal houses. These divisions within the Ovaherero community are not simply a matter of internal politics but, rather, are closely tied to, and exacerbated by, state law and policy. State bureaucracy offers formal recognition to some Royal House leaders and chiefs, who are dubbed 'traditional authorities' in the language of state law, on the basis of their affiliation, or lack of affiliation, with SWAPO. Since Riruako was a leader of the political opposition party National Unity Democratic Organization (NUDO), the SWAPO-controlled government never recognised him as Paramount Chief of the Herero. See Hamrick et al., 'Enduring Injustice', p. 9.
- 64 N. Kahiurika, 'Geigob Seeks Unity of Genocide Groups', *The Namibian*, 16 May, 2017, p. 3.
- 65 *Ibid.*
- 66 See "Skulls of My People": the Namibian Genocide and the Struggle for Reparations, 7 March 2017, www.702.co.za/articles/247369/skulls-of-my-people-the-namibian-genocide-and-the-struggle-for-reparations.