CONTRADICTIONS AND CHALLENGES IN REPRESENTING THE COLONIAL PAST: HERERO MEMORY ACTIVISM IN NAMIBIA

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Abstract: This paper attempts to investigate recent urban space-making practices and imaginaries of two different civic actors: Swakopmund City Tour, operated by Namibian Germans depicting the history of Swakopmund linked to German heritage, and a group of Herero activists around Swakopmund Genocide Museum, challenging the monopoly in framing representations of urban heritage and history, and presenting alternative memory narratives. The aim is to explore how the official memory is dealt with in present day-remembrance policies and practices, and how it is challenged by alternative memory driven by Herero activists. Conceptually, the notion of a mnemoscape (Kössler, 2012) is used, including both intangible and tangible aspects of the remembrance of collective experience. Methodologically, the paper is largely based on the outcomes of a short fieldwork in the urban environment of Swakopmund in 2022.

Keywords: *memory politics, memory activism, mnemoscape, Herero genocide, German colonialism, Namibia*

Introduction

The politics of memory in postcolonial Namibia is highly contested since it serves as a catalyst for the process of (re)construction of group identities, narratives of national history and nation-building. Namibian society is epitomised by divided memories and divergent visions of the past, which produces conflicting views on present-day society and politics (Becker, 2011; du Pisani, 2021; Kössler, 2007; Lähteenmäki et al., 2022; McConnell, 2000;

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Melber, 2005a, 2005b, 2020, 2022; van Beek et al., 2017; Zuern, 2012; Zuern and Jasper, 2020). After independence in 1990, the Namibian government came up with a version of national history that reduced the complex history of the country's anti-colonial war to a narrative of a military struggle under the sole leadership of Swapo[1] (Höhn, 2010; Kössler, 2007). This hegemonic narrative has been championed as the most important historical event by all subsequent post-independence governments (Armbruster, 2008). The struggles against German colonial rule fought by the Ovaherero/Herero[2] have not become part of this version of national history.[3] This is the reason why the interpretation of the German-Herero War in former German Southwest Africa from 1904 to 1907 has been the subject of heated discussions in postcolonial Namibia (Müller, 2013; Kössler, 2015; Sarkin, 2009; Bach, 2019; Melber, 2005a, 2007, 2020, 2022). However, no consensus on this issue has been achieved in the political debate over the past thirty years. Quite the contrary, issues over how to address the history of colonialism continue. The recent attempt translated into the negotiations between representatives of the Namibian- and German state known as the "Genocide, Apology and Reparations (GAR) Talks" are also far from over (du Pisani, 2021).

The repetitive failures to reach the consensus with the negotiating parties (Germany and Namibian postcolonial governments), as well as an underrepresentation of the Herero in national politics have led to a substantial intensification of civil society activism around issues of colonial heritage and colonial memory, both in and outside of Namibia (Bach, 2019; Becker, 2011).

The aim of the present paper is to explore local contestations around public memory space, accountability, and guilt in Namibia. Using a memory activism bottom-up approach, the paper attempts to investigate recent urban space-making practices and imaginaries of two different non-state actors located in Swakopmund, the city largely neglected by an overly large focus on Windhoek: the City Tour operated by Namibian Germans depicting the "glorious" history of the city linked to German heritage, which silences the genocide, and a group of Herero activists around the Swakopmund Genocide

1 Swapo means South West Africa People's Organisation.

2 Since *the Herero* are also known as the Ovaherero (the plural *prefix ova* means "people"), these two terms will be used interchangeably in this text.

3 Though our research perspective is restricted to Ovaherero, it is important to note that the Nama-German War lasted considerably longer than the Herero-German War and strained German resources at least as much. In the same vein, one must mention the unity of action between Herero and Nama that has been demonstrated in the Reparation Talks ever since March 2014.

Museum and the Namibian Genocide Association (NGA), challenging the monopoly in framing representations of urban heritage and history and the government's amnesia, and presenting alternative memory narrative. We are interested in the ways activists understand and feel about the present situation, and how their positioning towards future possibilities translates into daily activist practice. We feel that a spatial dimension focussing on alternative urban imaginaries, and thus reflecting on the heterogeneity and complexity of the urban space, is rather underresearched in contemporary scholarly production.[4] Our goal is to identify the multiple terrains of activist practices and registers of action that shape political and moral economies of city building.[5] By identifying the activist narratives and practices, and examining the relations between the two streams, we ask: How is the official memory challenged by Herero political activists? How do the alternative forms of urban tourism serve as a space for new forms of resilience? To answer these questions, we use a notion of a mnemoscape (Kössler, 2012), epitomising the link between landscape and memory, since memories are often organised around places and objects. A group's memory is linked to places, ruins, landscapes, monuments and urban architecture, which play an important role in helping to preserve group memory (Misztal, 2003, p. 16). Halbwachs (1992) argues that memory imprints its effect on the physical surroundings and that each group cuts up space in order to compose a fixed framework within which to enclose and retrieve its memory. Thus, mnemonic communities tell us what should be remembered and what should be forgotten. Kössler informs us that mnemoscape includes both intangible aspects of the remembrance of collective experience, and a memory landscape, i.e., the concrete shaping and transformation of the urban landscape by memory politics, with the aim to encompass the complex set of contradictory memory landscapes.

Methodologically, the paper is largely based on the outcomes of two three-week phases of fieldwork in Namibia between May 2020 and August 2022. Most of the research data is derived from our participation in two different city sightseeing tours in Swakopmund in August 2022. The methodology used, distinctively (though not uniquely) anthropological, involves mixed methods. A major part of the fieldwork consists of participant observation carried out in Swakopmund, but also Katutura, Windhoek, Okahandja

4 One of the powerful examples of the scarce scholarly production on this topic is Becker (2018).

5 The fieldwork was carried out by two senior researchers, including the present author, and six students of cultural anthropology – four students participated in the first phase, two of them in the second one. One of the students took part in both phases.

and Walvis Bay. Many hours were spent (in)formally talking to Herero activists, including the local tour guides, and also Namibian Germans who work for the NGOs established by the Herero to reach the three appeals: genocide, apology, reparation. The second most important source of data is in-depth interviews along with semi-structured interviews (both group and individual) held with Herero political representatives, especially from the NUDO, various activists (e.g., performers in audio-visual arts), the Herero engaged in organising the Herero Days in Okahandja, and other non-state actors. Additionally, we also conducted interviews with ordinary members of the Herero communities, especially in Katutura, a township of Windhoek. The interviews were held in English, those that were recorded were then transcribed. A total of sixteen interviews were conducted, with thirteen individuals and three groups. All our communication partners quoted in the paper were anonymised and/or given pseudonyms, except for the major protagonist of the Swakopmund Historical Tour, himself a widely-know activist, and a female activist from Windhoek.

The present paper is divided in four sections. The first one, drawing primarily on secondary literature, provides a discussion of the concept of memory in general; the second describes the contradictory memory landscapes in Namibia from the perspective of transnational activism. The third section, involving the major discussion, analysis, and interpretation, examines the Swakopmund memory landscape from tourism perspectives. The last section discusses the presented empirical evidence and summarises the main points of the study. We argue that the Herero activists as active future-makers (Appadurai, 2013) are agents for political transformation and social change and the ones who guide aspirations for urban futures in African societies.

Theorising Social Remembering

The memory turn of the 1980s and 1990s heralded the re-emergence of interest in the concept of memory in social sciences. The "obsession with memory" (Huyssen, 1995), or the "passion for memory" (Nora, 1984-1992) can be explained, among others, by the growing use of the past as a screen into which different groups can project their contradictions, controversies and conflicts (Huyssen, 1995). This bears political and theoretical implications: memory challenges or subverts dominant accounts of history, and also disguises and reinvent, serving to cover up as well as to reveal (Hodgkin and Radstone, 2014, p. 7). A memory crisis, epitomised by the fragmentation or collapse of the comprehensive collective, authoritative

memory, has given voices to those who have been silent and ignored and who came up with counter-narratives as a corrective to hegemonic memory discourses and practices. To contest the past means to pose questions about the present. Thus, the association of memory with the capacity of minority groups to generate alternative narratives of their own pasts has paved the way to diverse appeals of restitution and reparation, evoking both financial and/or political justice, as well as the healing of trauma.

In order to understand the complex relationships between memory and commemoration, memory and identity, memory and trauma, or memory and justice, scholars carrying out memory studies make use of various theoretical approaches to remembering (and forgetting), be that Halbwachs' theory of social memory,[6] or the presentist tradition also known as the "theory of the politics of memory."[7] To analyse the content and location of alternative memories that exist beneath the dominant discourse, we decided to adopt the popular memory approach for many reasons. First, it provides a more complex view of the relation between the official memory and popular memory. Second, it is less deterministic, as it investigates a much richer spectrum of representations of the past than the presentist approach showing how the past is moulded to suit present dominant interests. Third, and most important, it enables us to focus on the dialectical interaction between hegemonic, official memory and particular forms of remembering construed from the "bottom up," such as "popular memory" (Foucault, 1977; Pearson, 1999), "public memory" (Bodnar, 1992), "counter-memory" (Foucault, 1977; Zerubavel, 1997), "unofficial memory" or "alternative memory" (Misztal, 2003, p. 62). The relation between dominant memory and oppositional, often marginal forms is viewed as dynamic, conflictual, fluid and unstable. For instance, public memory that emerges from the interplay of official, vernacular, and commercial interpretations of past experiences, can be simultaneously multivocal and hegemonic, as Bodnar (1992, p. 14) has argued. In the same vein, vernacular memory carried forward from first-hand experience in small-scale communities, though often having a distinct claim on the past, can be "co-opted" into the official memory-narrative, and thus stop threatening social unity.

Apart from the popular memory approach, we were also inspired by another recent "bottom up" perspective – the dynamics of memory approach

6 Halbwachs' key contribution to the study of social memory is the connection between a social group and collective memory. His assumption that every group develops a memory of its own past that highlights its unique identity is still an indisputable starting point for research.

7 For more information on the theories of remembering, see Misztal (2003).

arguing that memory is a process rather than a fixed object: it is continually changing (Hodgkin and Radstone, 2014, p. 42). As such, it cannot be solely manipulated or constrained by the official narrative. Instead, the "bottom up" perspective assumes a more complex relation between the past and present in shaping collective memory by stressing the role of agency as well as the flexibility and ambiguities of memory (Misztal, 2003, pp. 69–73). It emphasises the fragmented nature of memory and its complexities.

Contradictory Mnemoscapes and (Trans)National Activism in Namibia

Memory is at the heart of the nationalist struggle, and as such a site of confrontation between the state and various sectors of society. Public memory – memory in the public sphere – is inseparable from discourses of national identity (Hodgkin and Radstone, 2014, p. 170).

Memory both underpins and undermines the national narrative. It is also one of the major mobilising forces in the modern nation state, as Pierre Nora noticed in his seminal work *Lieux de Memoire*. Lieux, or sites, are at stake, even if they are abstract and conceptual.

Struggles over memory extend to questions of what is to be remembered by whom, and how the past is to be memorialised (Fairweather, 2003, p. 281). As Heike Becker claims, their function is not to preserve the memory of the past; rather, they facilitate the preservation of selective *interpretations* of the past (Becker, 2011, p. 521) and, as such, have a profound effect on the way we experience the present (McConnell, 2000, p. 30).

Memory is often employed as a reservoir of officially sanctioned heroes and myths (Misztal, 2003). This is the case of Swapo, the leading political force in postcolonial Namibia. While its exclusive narrative of the armed liberation struggle has recently been refined to recognise a wider range of heroes, some of the communities, particularly Ovaherero and Nama, minority ethnic groups in today's Namibia with limited political power,[8] still feel inadequately represented by the Namibian state. Two issues have become the central unifying tool of their identity in post-independence Namibia, irrespective of the inner fissures and power struggles among the

8 The Herero form about 7% of the Namibian population (van Beek et al., 2017, p. 42).

Herero[9] – the 1904–1908 genocide,[10] and the Swapo-led dominant narrative of national history. These two historical narratives – that of the colonial wars and genocide on the one hand, and that of the armed liberation struggle on the other – are set in a competitive framework and are unequally represented in today's Namibia (Kössler, 2007, p. 363).

Hence, descendants of the Herero and the Nama genocide challenge two main actors, one external – Germany, the other internal – the Namibian government. They began to formulate charges of genocide and war crimes against the German state and seek "restorative justice," which should include symbolic and material reparation, that is recognition, apology, and compensation for genocide (Bach, 2019, pp. 59-60; Zuern and Jasper, 2020, p. 23; Melber, 2020). Their claims embodied in the tripartite principles of *acknowledgement, apology*, and *reparations* appeared in the resolution passed by the Namibian Parliament in 2006 (du Pisani, 2021, p. 133). These three pillars – genocide, apology, and reparations – convey the central message on the Ovaherero Genocide Foundation (OGF) web page established in 2021, accompanied by two hashtags #NothingAboutUsWithoutUs and #GermanyMustPayReparations (The Ovaherero Genocide Foundation, n.d.). Similarly, the Association of the Ovaherero Genocide launched in New York in January 2008 puts emphasis on "Coming to Terms with the Past" (Namibweb, n.d.).

Various non-state actors among the Herero[11] such as OGF, Ovaherero Traditional Authority, etc., express their dissatisfaction with the ways the colonial wars and genocide are represented in official memory by a wide variety of "alternative" forms – be that political proposals, public discussions, performative activities and images, media, and specific forms

9 The Herero are far from being a unified force, or a socio-political monolith. They are divided over many issues, related to fights between the different royal houses, but also related to internal competition over the succession of the so-called Paramount Chief (an institution established by the German colonial administration). The succession struggle dates to 1978. However, Herero factionalism is beyond the scope of the present text. For further information, see van Beek et al. (2017).

10 The dates for the Herero-Nama genocide in today's Namibia are subject to some debate among historians, but the most commonly accepted timeframe is from 1904 to 1908. The conflict and genocidal actions continued until 1908. While active military operations ceased in 1907, the period of persecution, internment in concentration camps, forced labour, and systemic efforts to annihilate the Herero and Nama populations persisted into 1908. Therefore, while some sources may cite 1904 to 1907 as the period of active conflict, the broader context of the genocide justifies the 1904 to 1908 timeframe as more accurate.

11 As our research focused specifically on Herero memory activism, the Nama will no longer be discussed in the present text.

of tourism. Alternative narratives of national history are publicly presented at key occasions and in different areas of Namibia. Herero commemorative practices and rituals are held in Okahandja in the centre of the country,[12] Lüderitz in the south, and Swakopmund in the west (Zuern, 2012, p. 494). They allow the Herero to resist the political and social marginalisation they have been experiencing in postcolonial Namibia as a legacy of the colonial period.

The activities of civil society actors oriented at campaigning for the recognition of the genocide at the local, regional, and national level include organising public lectures at schools and other educational institutions, actively discussing issues in national media, posting online information about the genocide,[13] and other forms of decolonial activism such as public discussions, film screenings, etc.

Activism constantly takes on new forms, attracts new actors, and creates new links. Due to a greater international attention to human rights, particularly to genocidal violence, and colonial histories since the 1990s (see Müller, 2013), activism has acquired a transnational character and offered small groups, even individual activists many opportunities to draw on transnational networks and norms, and effectively employ international interest and support. "In a country with no large opposition party and no significant social movement mobilisation, a number of relatively small groups of activists are indirectly challenging the power of the dominant party by correcting its one-sided narrative of the country's anti-colonial heroes" (Zuern, 2012, p. 493).

Since the mid-2000s, a considerable number of NGOs labelled as postcolonial "decolonising" associations have been established in Germany. These grassroots organisations are instrumental in connecting issues of colonial memory to contemporary problems of racism and inequality (Bach, 2019, p. 65). For instance, the civil society organisation "Augsburg Postkolonial-Decolonize Yourself" interrogates the so-called colonial amnesia and what Nicola Lauré Al-Samarai calls "disremembering" (*Entinnerung* in German) (Bach, 2019, p. 68). As Elise Pape reminds us, their members, from African, German and other origins, engage in decolonising activities aimed at both the public space and the German collective mind, such as "anticolonial" guided tours, educational activities in schools, and/or advocating for the

12 For the Herero Day (known also as the Okahandja Red Flag Day), see van Beek et al. (2017).

13 For instance, the Instagram profile by Hildegard Titus, currently a journalism student in London (*A Curt Farewell, n.d.),* an interview conducted in Windhoek in September 2022.

change of street names commemorated to key figures from the German colonial era (Pape, 2017, pp. 6–7).

Campaigning for attention for the genocide at the transnational level is the realm of the OGF focusing on challenging the accepted heroes by postcolonial political dispensation and drawing attention to heroes previously only recognised within Herero communities. The OGF organises seminars, workshops, conferences, and demonstrations both in Namibia, and in Botswana and Tanzania where the Herero diaspora lives, as well as in Germany. It also establishes a cooperation with NGOs and organisations that address human rights and social justice issues both in Africa and in Germany. Transnational activism may also result in taking legal action. Since their demands against Germany for reparations, recognition, and apology were not backed up by the Namibian state, the descendants of the Herero victims filed a legal case at a US court in 2001. The action was not successful, but it did at least achieve the aim of generating publicity (Müller, 2013, p. 55). Moreover, the issue was later dealt with in the BBC (2020) documentary titled "The Namibia Genocide: Parts of African history that have been swept under the carpet," which gained considerable transnational publicity.

Overall, non-state actors among the Herero are engaged in an intense memory work whereby they contribute to the strengthening and maintaining of Herero memory by registering the oral history of grandparents, discovering forgotten places linked to the genocide, or searching for authentic archival documents (interviews with Herero activists in Walvis Bay, May 2020). Descendants of victims of the German genocide cooperate with students researching Herero history, and organise commemorative festivities linked to the genocide, such as the Reparation Walk in Swakopmund.

A multiplicity of actors on the Namibian side, with differential claims and concerns, proves how selective the commemoration in Namibia is. The selectivity of the (non-)commemoration of the colonial genocide is behind the trauma among Herero-Nama communities (Melber, 2005b, p. 139). In many Namibian cities, monuments to the twentieth century's first genocide still stand, and have become a key battleground for activists demanding reparations from Germany for its colonial-era crimes (Zuern, 2017).

Postcolonial Namibia has two major memorials that reflect the dominant narrative of national liberation: first, the Heroes Acre, Namibia's official war memorial inaugurated in 2002 on the public holiday marked as Heroes Day, demonstrating the cult of the liberation leaders, and second, an Independence Memorial Museum, narrowly focusing on Swapo's role

in liberating the country while presenting the Herero and Nama as passive victims (see Zuern and Jasper, 2020). Both state-sanctioned memorials do not provide room for multivocal and fragmented memories (Becker, 2011, p. 529). The monological, univocal story they represent, excludes various counter-narratives from the construction of a national identity, and thus negates the possibility of postcolonial social reconstruction that is inclusive of all members of society (McConnell, 2000, p. 30).

Memory is inextricably linked to landscape: memories are often organised around places and objects, which play an important role in helping to preserve group memory. Maurice Halbwachs has observed that space is a reality that endures (1992). Similarly, memory and urban landscape are contested processes. Walter Benjamin (1986, cited in Misztal, 2003) viewed the city as a repository of people's memories, and the urban landscape as the battleground for the past, where the past remains open and contestable. The city can be read as the topography of a collective memory in which buildings, monuments, and memorials are mnemonic symbols that can reveal hidden and forgotten pasts.

Our research focus was put on urban landscape, in particular on memorials as key sites for the production of social memory. According to Zuern (2012, p. 495), memorials are sites of personal, cultural, and political remembrance offering stylised presentations of the past, highlighting and glorifying certain actors and actions while purposely forgetting others. They represent the power and perspective of those who built them, through their physical and symbolic prominence, and the attention they receive from locals and tourists. They are strategic sites for the definition and mobilisation of communities, and therefore also for contentious claims over history.

Mnemoscape and Swakopmund

Memorials, and the ways in which they are honoured, adapted, contested, altered, or even ignored (Werbner, 1998), provide clues to power relations among different actors in each society.

It was decided to focus our research on Swakopmund, a municipality on the Atlantic coast in the west of Namibia, 360 km west of Windhoek. Founded by German settlers in the late nineteenth century, Swakopmund is a popular holiday destination for Namibians and international visitors alike. This town of nice beaches and luxury hotels is also a place of a brutal colonial history, racialised difference, and local and global forces of inequality (Boulton,

2021). It was the main harbour for German South West Africa, and one of the two sites for the deadly coastal concentration camps established by German colonial forces (*Schutztruppe*). The estimates given by the missionary and colonial sources claim that between eighty and one hundred thousand Herero in what is today Namibia were killed before the war and approximately sixteen thousand survivors after the war (Dedering, 1993, p. 82). In total, up to 80 percent of the Herero were killed.

There is a strong German influence in Swakopmund. This town, together with another town founded by Germans – the harbour Lüderitz – were among the first to be connected by a railway. The first railway between Windhoek and Swakopmund was built between 1897 and 1902 (Lähteenmäki et al., 2022, p. 80). Swakopmund has the most German cultural imprint of Namibia (Lähteenmäki et al., 2022, p. 98) and retained German cultural influences (Quora, n.d.), as is evident in every aspect, from architecture to cuisine. Swakopmund urban memory landscape is arguably the most conspicuous aspect of the mnemoscape and the memory landscape. As for the latter, the specific shaping of the urban landscape is visible in German colonial architecture, especially the statue commemorating the sacrifices of German soldiers and marines who perished in the colonial battles known as the *Marinedenkmal* (Marine Memorial). While in Windhoek, the German colonial era memorial – the *Reiterdenkmal* (Equestrian Monument) – was eventually removed from its original spot in the city centre in 2009 and transferred into the backyard of the *Alte Feste* (German colonial era fort) in 2013, the German memory landscape in Swakopmund referring to colonial history is still largely untouched, even if there is a substantial activism and public debate over these memorials.

Although the German colonial period was short-lived (1884–1915), half of the German settlers stayed in South West Africa, followed by various waves of immigrants that lasted up to independence, many of whom have kept their identity, language, and culture up to the present day (Lähteenmäki et al., 2022, p. 80).

Swakopmund is a town known for its colonial nostalgia and to a certain extent for the colonial amnesia exemplified by cohorts of German gatekeepers protecting white supremacy (Melber, 2022; Zuern, 2017).[14] Colonial revisionism and white supremacy can be traced in the way some of the Namibian Germans mark themselves – "Southwesterners" (*Südwester*

14 On colonial amnesia, revisionism, and denialism, see Melber (2022); Kössler and Melber (2018).

in German). As Henning Melber (2020) points out, parts of this community are also ideologically aligned to the new right-wing populism by the AfD (*Alternative für Deutschland*). As Reinhart Kössler noticed, a routinised argument denying the colonial genocide is still prominent, if not prevalent, amongst this group. Other activities, including pronouncements on the Holocaust (which is illegal in Germany), have been met with remarkable tolerance by the Namibian government (Kössler, 2007, p. 378). In a similar vein, our research revealed that promoting Nazi symbols such as the swastika is quite commonplace in some of the Swakop antique shops. Yet, although German speakers, the wealthiest ethnic group in Namibia, have maintained ties with Germany, Namibia's largest aid donor, the German-speaking community in the country is hardly unanimous in its arguments concerning colonial history (Zuern, 2012, p. 506).

One of the inspirational sources for our research was an event of 2016 when a group of activists poured blood-red paint on the *Marinedenkmal* in Swakopmund. The event was covered by scholarly texts, media articles, and passionately discussed by some of our informants. The monument, erected in 1908, commemorates Germany's brutal suppression of the Herero and Nama uprising against German colonial rule. The German colony South West Africa was protected by a special force, the German *Schutztruppe*, consisting of about 2,000 soldiers and officers, who were predominantly German volunteers. Most of the troops were mounted on horseback, and were armed with infantry weapons, rifles, machine guns, and field artillery (Lähteenmäki et al., 2022, p. 80). The statue depicts classic heroes: muscular young men with guns, ready to fight. At the top stands an armed soldier, next to him lies a fallen man. His wrecked body powerfully demonstrates the sacrifices that these heroes made, and the whole memorial celebrates German military strength and victory in war. The Herero and Nama, the victims of their actions, are not acknowledged in this statue (Zuern and Jasper, 2020, p. 7). The activists' aim of the 2016 protest was to highlight the crimes committed by the former German heroes. They also saw the monument as a symbol of white supremacy and racial oppression (interview with Peringanda, August 2022). Therefore, they suggested that the memorial might be shipped back to Germany or be placed inside the local museum (Zuern, 2017). The activists challenged not just former colonial-era German heroes but also the centrality of Swapo heroes to national liberation (Zuern and Jasper, 2020, p. 21). They equally questioned that the rifle held by the German soldier points directly to the site from where the Herero and Nama were driven to the desert and where they died.

Memory Landscapes in Tourism Perspectives

Tourism as a medium of the politics of remembrance is increasingly used in countries with a troubled past (Müller, 2013). In the southern African countries, post-apartheid South Africa is well-known for its township tourism, or slum tourism (Frenzel et al., 2012; Booyens, 2010; Auala et al., 2019). These alternative forms of tourism have the potential to reshape urban landscapes of tourism sites, products, and interests. By overcoming a simplistic dichotomy between the powerful and the marginalised, they can also serve as a space for new forms of resilience. In Namibia, such forms are relatively new and less widespread (see, for instance, Steinbrink et al., 2016).

In Swakopmund visitors can participate in many tourism-related activities. Most of them are nature-oriented (Viator, n.d.). When it comes to sightseeing tours, there are basically two competing products on offer to all kinds of tourists that can exert both similarities and difference. Both focus visitors' attention to the urban landscape of Swakopmund and its objects and elements of culture. They are both planned, designed, and organised by non-state actors. They can be viewed as two strands of counter-memories, or alternative memories that challenge the dominant heroic narrative championed by Swapo. Both provide the possibility of accounting for "subordinated voices" from the past, yet from different angles. By challenging the hegemony of the political elite's construction of the past, they both turn memory into a "contested territory in which groups engaging in a political conflict promote competitive views of the past in order to gain control over the political centre or to legitimize a separatist orientation" (Zerubavel, 1997, p. 11). Thus, they can be simultaneously multivocal and hegemonic. Besides the commonalities, there is a host of differences, be that in the message they try to communicate, the target audience, the orientation to time and space, etc. The Swakopmund City Tour tends to reproduce the mental mindset of the former colonial empire in the built urban environment, while the Historical Tour aims at contesting state-directed *devoir de memoire* (duty of memory) (de Jorio, 2006, p. 98; Nora, 1984-1992), with special emphasis to memorial sites, campaigning for recognition of Herero suffering under German rule. Furthermore, while the former is oriented to the (colonial) past and is geographically delimited to the city centre, the latter rather mediates future imaginaries, attempting to forge a future that is emerging from re-interpreted history. Moreover, it covers a much wider semi-urban territory including suburbs such as Mondesa and Matutura where black people live, thus showing visitors less favourable aspects of the city, namely the unequal spatial dynamics of Swakopmund. An illustrative example is a

suburb called DRC – Democratic Resettlement Community, an informal settlement in Swakopmund founded in 2001 as a temporary resettlement community for the people waiting for subsidised housing in town.

In August 2022, during my second fieldwork in Namibia, I took part in the Swakopmund City Tour operated by Julia Travel and Tours Agency, offering a "unique insight into the beautiful town that is Swakopmund. This tour educates our visitors about the rich heritage. This tours also informs the guests [of] all the history and culture that lives in Swakopmund as well as how Swakopmund came to be" (Viator, n.d.). Swakop Info Activity Hub – Your "Go to" People – is a NTB registered Activity Booking Office offering complementary bookings to visitors and your "go to people." Three offices are located in Swakopmund town centre. All team members are local Swakopmunders who have a "wide general knowledge" (https://www.swakopinfo.com). We did not reveal our identity as cultural anthropologists interested in studying alternative forms of Herero political activism until the very end of the tour. Hence, for the most time of this walking tour we behaved like common tourists. The tour guide, a middle-aged woman of Namibian-German origin, met us outside the office in the city centre and showed us the *most important sites in Swakopmund*. The tour took about two hours.

By taking a "short journey through time by walking the streets of Swakopmund," we were observing the city's colonial landmarks including the Swakopmund Lighthouse built between 1902–1910, and the Mole, an old sea wall. Our gaze was directed towards the Swakopmund Railway Station, now a hotel complex since 1994, declared a national monument in 1972. Our guide made efforts in emphasising the characteristics of the place as Namibia's premier holiday destination, which boasts some of the best-preserved examples of German colonial architecture. The list of attractions corresponded to the highlights on the official web page of Swakopmund, including the Haus Hohenzollern building constructed in 1906, initially serving as a hotel; the Deutsche Evangelical Church, the second oldest building in Swakopmund, consecrated in 1912 and proclaimed a National Monument in 1978; the German school, completed in 1913; the Altes Amtsgericht; the Kaiserliches Bezirksgericht; and the so-called Freudhaus. As it was a walking tour, we did not manage to reach the other most popular attractions according to the web:

> spectacular sand dunes near Long Beach south of the Swakop River. Outside of the city, the Rossmund Desert Golf Course is

> one of only 5 all-grass desert golf courses in the world. Nearby lies a camel farm and the Martin Luther steam locomotive, dating from 1896 and abandoned in the desert due to breakdown (Namibweb, n.d.).

Most time of the tour was spent discussing with our guide the controversial *Marinedenkmal*, situated at the State House, and the Swakopmund Museum. It was here where we revealed our identity and started questioning the guide's one-sided narrative.

When standing at the *Marinedenkmal*, the tour guide explained its history:

> When the uprising started, the Germans were not prepared, they somehow didn't see it coming, although they'd been there for years…they quickly needed to bring soldiers and war equipment into the country and at that point, there was a marine ship in Cape Town [which was] immediately ordered to Swakopmund to help. These marine soldiers were young and inexperienced. They didn't know the diversity and they didn't know the circumstances of why they arrived here and many of these young German soldiers passed away here.

To our question why the monument was visibly sprinkled with red paint, she briefly mentioned the event of 2016 and continued to situate the memorial in the present:

> If you marry in Swakopmund you go out and take pictures. And to show that you got married in Swakopmund you stand there in the grass by the *Marinedenkmal*, people sit on the stones and take pictures. And yeah, that is a symbol of Swakopmund. You take your pictures there. And it shows me that on the one hand, to some it is a painful thing and on the other, it is just a symbol of Swakopmund that you got married here. And I think it is nice! If you don't know that part [of the history, i.e., genocide], it is just a statue and symbol of Swakopmund. For some, it's just a statue and let me say, when I see these weddings and kids jumping around there, I think that it's also great! To them, it is a symbol of Swakop. And you should see these... black faces of the bride and the white dresses… I can see that they are feeling good in it. They just do not feel connected to the symbol. There's no explanation there… those people taking pictures don't know what it is.

We asked her why the explanation is missing, or for what reasons the memorial's plaque shows only German names of the dead soldiers. By relativising the absence of the explanation and the description, she shifted our attention to the Swakopmund Memorial Park which also "lacks proper description: if you don't have the monument with the description on it, it can be very painful. Even the description is very painful."[15] What she perhaps forgot to mention is that Swakopmund Memorial Park is arguably the first broad, inclusive project in Namibia, initiated by German speakers, authorised and supported by the Swapo-dominated municipality, and endorsed by the Herero community which has since held traditional ceremonies at this site, funded in part by the German Embassy, and designed and built by Namibian artists. Only later, during the second tour, we found out that the Swakopmund Memorial Park inscription acknowledges that the victims died "in concentration camps" at "the realm of their German colonial masters," and those who died trying to expand and protect the German colony (participant observation on the spot, interview with L. Peringanda, see also Zuern, 2012, p. 510).

When discussing the Swakopmund Museum, and the fact that the Herero genocide is not mentioned there, the guide explained it in the following way: "there's a reason why it is not presented there and that's because it is a private collection and because whenever you talk about that subject you will be confronted. For the German guests it is also important because it goes through the media in Germany and Germans often get irritated like "it's more than 100 years ago, get over it." Museums are highly important institutions of memory thanks to their authoritative and legitimising status and to their role as symbols of community that constitute them as a distinctive cultural complex (Macdonald 1996). They play a key role in the social objectification of the past. However, unlike recent global trends in museums, redefining their strategies of representation of the past and finding spaces for marginalised memories, the Swakopmund Museum rather represents the official management of collective memory revolving essentially around the two poles of censorship and celebration, of socially organised forgetting and socially organised remembering.

After we ended the sightseeing tour, now without the tour guide, we headed for the recommended Hansa Hotel, which is well-known for its "Colonial

15 The guide pointed to the former text on the memorial (*In memory of the thousands of heroic OvaHerero/OvaMbaderu who perished under mysterious circumstances at the realm of their German colonial masters in concentration camps in Swakopmund/Otjozondjii during 1904-1908*) which was vehemently criticised and has been replaced – it no longer displays the "mysterious circumstances."

Coffee" offered as the House Specialty. Established by the Colonial Coffee Company, the posts on Facebook skilfully bracket unpleasant allusions to colonial rule. Instead, there appear entirely apolitical contributions by Colonial Coffee Roasters on the ways of brewing coffee, advertising products such as "Colonial Blend: Authentic Colonial Coffee" and (almost exclusively) white visitors are served by a black waiter dressed in an outfit reminiscent of the colonial era (Colonial Coffee Company, n.d.). Thus, Colonial Coffee is consumed by affluent social classes, both local and international, together with colonial fantasies and desires.

Before we took part in the Historical Tour organised by the Namibian Genocide Association (NGA) and the Swakopmund Genocide Museum, we had already met and interviewed the major actor – Laidlaw Peringanda, the founder of the Swakopmund Genocide Museum and the Chairman of the NGA. Hence we disclosed to him our identity and research interest.[16] The first meeting took place in the museum located in Matutura, one of the "black" suburbs of Swakopmund. Later we met with a group of local Herero activists, and some Namibian Germans who, as volunteers, contribute to challenging the dominant narrative in Namibia by presenting alternative memory narratives, and at the same time campaigning for recognition of the Herero suffering under German rule at the local and (trans-)national level. The Historical Tour we attended was implemented by car, with an (activist) driver and Peringanda as our tour guide. It took about three hours.

Historical City Tour with Laidlaw Peringanda, 22 August 2022

We started at the controversial *Marinedenkmal*, erected in 1908 after closing the concentration camps. As a symbol of German colonial power, it commemorates the German marines who died during the Herero uprising in 1904. The commentary by Peringanda is in a stark contrast to the City Tour guide: *Each year the Swakopmund community commemorates war criminals who killed our ancestors. It's a sort of insult*. He invoked the event of 2015 – the commemoration of the "murdered Germans" in which Germans and Namibian Germans participated, while he and other activists protested.

16 Though our decision to (un)reveal our identities may seem rather inconsistent and even biased, when it comes to the two products we participated in, we found the possibility to conceal our research interest to Peringanda unfeasible. We had been in contact with him before visiting Namibia, thus he had been familiar with our research aims and positions. On the other hand, we did not want to affect the City Tour guide's narrative by revealing our identities from the start, for fear of a distorted knowledge production on her part.

In 2016, when the statue was sprayed by red paint, Peringanda was arrested and subsequently released after *submitting evidence*. Peringanda is not afraid of being arrested again: *it is the Swapo party that is afraid of international media*. According to him the *Marinedenkmal* is a contested issue: *the memorial is a "national monument" by Germans*, *and Herero and Nama are "rebels."* Peringanda and activists are perceived by the Swapo as a threat, hence the attempts to impose a culture of silence (McConnell, 2000). *The monument is confessing the genocide because the rifle the German soldier on horseback holds points directly to the Herero and Nama mass graves.* Some of the local Namibian Germans, e.g., Mr. Tietz, visited Peringanda and apologised for their predecessors. In 2023, Peringanda and two national artists were planning a public happening with the presence of international media to install crosses with the names of all the villages affected by the genocide around the monument, as well as translating all inscriptions on the monument into local languages.

Our next stop is at the *Reiterdenkmal* at Altstadt restaurant in Henrik Witbooi Street. In 2019, a replica of the statue was placed in the courtyard of this private restaurant in Swakopmund. Before, it was more provocatively placed on the roof top of the restaurant. The *Reiterdenkmal*, one of Namibia's oldest public monuments, was unveiled in 1912 in honour of the birthday of German Kaiser Wilhelm II. It was erected by the colonial power in remembrance of the soldiers and civilians killed in the 1904–1907 Herero and Nama uprisings (Lähteenmäki et al., 2022, p. 87). As a symbol of colonial power, it stood on a hill overlooking the capital, Windhoek, for almost a century. Its removal and relocation led to emotional discussions in the media and public space in terms of Namibia's "correct" history and politics of memory (Lähteenmäki et al., 2022).

For many, the *Reiterdenkmal* was a symbol of the longevity of the German colonial rule. While the German forces in Namibia were defeated in the First World War, only a few years after the memorial was erected, the monument to colonial victory remained in its place. Several leading Herero politicians, both in government and in opposition parties, argued that the horse should not be removed as it served as a daily reminder of German colonial-era war crimes. They also claimed that the monument stood for the demand that the German government must publicly acknowledge the genocide and pay reparations (Zuern 2017). In the end, the *Reiterdenkmal* was relocated, and in 2014 removed from the national heritage list (Lähteenmäki et al. 2022: 69).

After 2019, Peringanda submitted 16 objections and pleas to remove the replica of the *Reiterdenkmal* statue from the restaurant premises, claiming that the erection of the statue is a threat and a dangerous reminder of the genocide, which may lead to its recurrence. He negotiated the issue with the German owner, but failed: the owner justified it as part of "his" history. One could argue that this place of memory is merely an individual act. But as Halbwachs (1992) has rightly pointed out, memory is always a socially framed fact, related to a group of persons. Indeed, the event gained another measure when the issue was supported by a number of Namibian activists whose engagement in the protest was covered by the local media (Namibian Genocide Association, 2019).

The main attraction we were heading for was the Swakopmund Cemetery – under "normal" circumstance a space to collectively mourn. The Swakopmund cemetery is, however, an abrupt visual reminder of colonialism and apartheid, yielding a sharp contrast between the "African" cemetery and the part where Germans and other Swakopmund residents rest.[17] The former includes graves from the 1904-1907 wars as well as graves of the victims from concentration camps in Swakopmund – these are situated on a vast piece of land at Kramersdorf. It is basically an unmarked, open desert area, containing dilapidated, unmarked, neglected, and unwatered graves of Herero and Nama genocide victims, which looks like the antithesis of a well-preserved, well maintained, green cemetery where Christian whites including German and South African soldiers were buried in the past. Moreover, there is a monument dedicated to the fallen German soldiers during the Herero uprising. The contradiction is also underlined by the fact that the cemetery services (cleaning, maintenance, irrigation, etc.) are financed with municipal money so that one would expect a fair division of public financial means. Our horrid experience was crowned by what Peringanda revealed to us on top of the visual experience: we were told that in the "African" cemetery people were sometimes reusing graves, riding motorbikes and horses over the graves, and walking their dogs there.

The Swakopmund municipality also sold plots to build houses on a part of what had been cemetery grounds (Zuern 2012: 508, interview with L. Peringanda, August 2022). The activists made efforts to stop the construction of the houses. Although the owners of the houses were notified by the activists that their houses were built on the genocide victims' bones, they did not accept it (interview with Robert, a local Namibian German activist).

17 At the margins of the proper cemetery, bordering to the graves of the Africans, is a small (and rather neglected) Jewish cemetery, which complements the official cemetery.

Another informant came to see these people to get their point of view. She asked herself a question: why would one want to build one's house here? She was confronted with *wilful ignorance*. She even witnessed how some people were throwing their garbage onto the mass graves.

As Elke Zuern (2012) has noted, there is still active denial of genocide among a significant number of German speakers in Namibia. Some German denialists claim that concentration camps never existed in Swakopmund, even if there are many proofs related to the restoration of 1904-1908 Swakopmund war prisoners' unmarked graves in Kramersdorf. Heidi Armbruster wrote about the commonalities among white communities across the African continent, featuring an "ethics of dissociation and distance from the indigenous population" (Armbruster, 2008, p. 612). The categories of white (or German) exceptionalism have transferred into the post-independence milieu in Namibia, which is why public discourses of liberation and national reconciliation were largely met with attitudes of indifference, denial, or ignorance (Armbruster, 2008, p. 614).

Colonial amnesia was vividly captured in a story told by one of our informants – an activist: when she was attending high school in Windhoek, their teacher, a Namibian German took the class on a camping trip to Shark Island, one of the places where a concentration camp was established by the German colonial authority. The camping site built next to the Lighthouse was run by the government and is still in operation. In response to activists' demands, the government promised to turn the place, including the Lighthouse, into a museum, but instead *they made it into a hotel. Now it's like, come stay in this nice luxury lighthouse. You can go to Auschwitz, but it's very much like a genocide tour, not a holiday tour* (interview with Hildegard, September 2022, Windhoek). The teacher did not explain the history of the island, nor the broader context of the Herero uprising. This disrespectful event was a decisive moment in Hildegard becoming an activist.

The dismal condition of the genocide graves required action. On 10 December 2020, on the International Human Rights Day, activists from the Affirmative Repositioning (AR), the Namibian Genocide Association (NGA), and some members of the public were summoned at the Swakopmund Genocide Cemetery to assist in restoring unmarked prisoner-of-war graves in Kramersdorf. They took part in a joint cleaning and remoulding the sands of the graves. As Peringanda claimed, "we invite every Swakopmund resident and anyone who feels they want to participate to join the restoration." Since then, the graves are being remoulded and restored every year. Peringanda and the activists also

succeeded in stopping the construction of a wall and a road between the two grave zones thanks to the above mentioned BBC documentary (2020).

Furthermore, Peringanda was planning to purchase a special device to scan the soil where the human remains of the genocide victims were buried. Hence, he initiated a Project of the Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) Equipment to scan, map and trace the unmarked graves. As he pointed out, *this is the first project in the history of Namibia to restore thousands of missing slaves' graves who perished at the Swakopmund Concentration Camp.* He is planning to lay white tombstones on the victims' graves. He also highlighted a co-operation with artists who will paint murals depicting the Herero history on a wall fencing the plot, as well as a collaboration with the German embassy which promised to contribute several millions of Namibian dollars for the maintenance of the graves.

As has been argued, the places connected to the Herero genocide are not properly recognised at both the national and the local level in Swakopmund (Becker, 2011). The graves of the Herero who died in the concentration camp in Swakopmund have been abandoned and neglected for many years, which is why the municipal authorities decided to create the Memorial Park Cemetery that would symbolically connect the formerly segregated cemeteries of whites and that of Herero in a visible sign of reconciliation. In 2007, a memorial stone – a cross with a strip – was erected in the Swakopmund cemetery between the two zones, that is the German cemetery, and the Herero genocide graves, as a symbol of unification and reconciliation. The new Memorial Park, designed and constructed by Herero, Nama, and German-speaking activists has contributed to reimagining and recreating Namibia's mnemoscape, while challenging the dominant Swapo narrative. As we can see, new public monuments, posing a direct response and challenge to hegemonic discourses and contested ideologies, are important tools in reshaping public memory and rewriting the past (Marschall, 2010, p. 9).

On our way back we stopped at Mondesa, one of the black dilapidated suburbs in Swakopmund, lacking infrastructure such as electricity and water, with only one example of foreign aid – an elementary school co-financed by Angelina Jolie. As a result of poverty and marginalisation, Peringanda mentioned frequent local fires resulting in a considerable death toll.

The tour ended at the Swakopmund Genocide Museum in Matutura Location. Peringanda summed up the most important facts about the tour's attractions and practices, and pointed out the role the Swakopmund

Genocide Museum plays in memory activism by giving lectures about the suffering of the Ovaherero and Nama prisoners of war at the Swakopmund concentration camps. Underlining the transnational character of this kind of memory activism, and the international support he is gaining for his activities, he showed us pictures of volunteers from Germany, and university students from the US. He added that *anthropologists, researchers, tourists, students, historians, professors and journalists can book at our office historical tours to the genocide unmarked graves in Kramersdorf,* or they can ask for a tailor-made tour according to their personal wishes.

The tour showed us the ways activists around the Swakopmund Genocide Museum and the Namibian Genocide Association call for a proper recognition of the colonial past linked to the Herero and Nama genocide. According to them, the genocide should be properly commemorated in public space, not only visually but narratively as well. As a deterrent example of colonial amnesia (cf. Melber, 2022), Peringanda pointed to the misrepresentation of the genocide in the Swakopmund Museum, which is *decontextualised and misrepresented from the Herero point of view as the visual display lacks any legends explaining what happened*. The activists also require the removal of colonial memorials and statues glorifying the German war victory that still occupy public space in Namibia, such as the *Marinedenkmal*, the statue of German soldiers in Swakopmund next to the State House, and the replica of the *Reiterdenkmal*.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper has examined the relationship and interconnections between two contradictory tourism-directed narratives and practices of urban heritage and counter-memories by non-state actors. The goal was to offer new perspectives on the past, insights into the present, and lessons for the future.

The outcomes underline the flexible and ambiguous nature of memory, as presented by the dynamics of memory approach. This perspective conceptualising memory as actively restructured in a process of negotiations through time, "incorporates conflict, contest and controversy as the hallmarks of memory" (Misztal, 2003, p. 73). The bottom-up approach to memory does not reduce remembering to an instrument of elite manipulation, used to control the lower classes and minority groups (Radstone, 2000, p. 18). Instead, by focusing on alternative memories, it points to the "active production and mediation of temporal meanings of the past" (Schudson, 1997, p. 4).

Swakopmund appears as a site of contestation between various voices seeking to construct versions of the past, while its connection with dominant institutions (municipality) and official discourses (underscoring the genocide) ensures its pervasiveness and domination in the public sphere. It is equally a site of the dialectical interaction between 'public' memory, viewed as a political force of people marginalised by dominant discourse, and the state's 'hegemonic' discourses. The two sightseeing tours in Swakopmund in which we participated show how the history of Namibians and Germans in Swakopmund (and not only there) is intertwined, complicated, power-laden, hence difficult to disentangle since much of the urban landscape embodies the ingrained transgenerational traumas. The contradictory counter-memory narratives and practices the two tours attempted to transmit, reveal how the colonial mnemoscape is constructed and contested by different societal actors. They also reflect how deeply embedded the conflicting realities are in today's post-colonial Namibian society that still awaits its decolonisation.

Focussed on prominent memorials and urban heritage to commemorate the power and reach of Germany as the country's former European coloniser, the Swakopmund City Tour monopolises the city mnemoscape and thus serves to obscure the historical experience of colonial violence – the genocide, which is also part of the dominant memory narrative. Although the Namibian German guide attributed the *Marinedenkmal* to common German and African history, she had failed to recognise the ideological problems pertaining to the statue and was only capable of transmitting the white version of (colonial) history insensitive to colonial legacies. Such misguided practice and thinking prevents both confronting the colonial past and redressing the postcolonial present. Hence, the colonial imprint revealing painful histories gives way to the controversial present.

How can this enduring approach to past controversies be explained? As has been acknowledged in a number of scholarly works, major sections of the German-speaking community in Namibia (Namibian Germans and Afrikaners) generally tend to downplay and even deny the atrocities committed by their predecessors and are reluctant to admit responsibility for the colonial past (Kössler, 2007). Arguably, Namibia does not easily allow both Namibian Germans and white middle class visitors coming to Swakopmund for holidays in order to distance themselves from their own privilege (Armbruster, 2008, p. 612). The Swakopmund municipality plays an ambivalent role in reconciling contesting memories around German guilt and responsibility. On the one hand, the Swakopmund town councillor and Ovaherero elder Uahimisa

Kaapehi has condemned the German government's resistance to any form of reparations, while on the other, an ordinary visitor to Swakopmund wonders how (neo-)Nazi manifestations (in the antique shops) and the *Reiterdenkmal* replica can be tolerated by the municipality. It is predominantly the more recent Herero campaigning for recognition of their suffering under German rule that has had some, still quite modest, repercussions among Namibian Germans (see for example Grofe, 2005 cited in Armbruster, 2008).

Contrary to the City Tour narratives and practices glorifying a success story of colonial mnemoscape, the focus of the Historical Tour was put predominantly on memorial landscapes of violence, suffering, and trauma, and the accompanying commemorative activities. Their counter-memory narrative is in a sharp contrast to the official memory. At the same time, by omitting the Nama ingredient from the narrative, it acknowledges a thesis by which conflicts about the past among a variety of groups further limit our freedom to reconstruct the past according to our own interests since permanent and changing visions of the past are part of one another (Schudson, 1997, p. 4)

Sites and symbols of collective memories, such as museums, monuments, and landscapes become increasingly contested in such a way that memory needs to be viewed as the product of multiple competing discourses (Misztal, 2003; Förster, 2010). In other words, memory landscapes are never uniform or fixed, but rather emergent and contested since they are constantly re/produced by different people engaged in memory work in various ways (Schramm, 2011). Painful histories and a controversial present draw together actors and groups that are affected in different ways.

From a superficial viewpoint, the two city tours under observation, representing two forms of counter-memories (to the dominant memory narrative), could not be more different since they were based on opposite memory contents. The municipality official memorials and commemorations are in a stark contrast with the Herero memory discourses and practices, thus acknowledging the apparent power asymmetry within the politically charged sphere of commemoration. However, upon closer introspection, this dichotomised view and the seemingly clear juxtaposition of these two counter-memory narratives gives way to a more nuanced view which points to many overlaps between them. The explanation lies in the processual character of the relation between landscape and memory. Landscape is never purely representational but part of people's daily practices, as Eric Hirsch (1995) reminded us.[18] Various actors interpret and manipulate landscapes in

18 For the differentiation between the landscape as memory and of memory, see Kűchler (1993), Ingold (1993).

different ways, to satisfy their own cultural and socio-political interests, and ideological intentions. So, the question remains: how can persisting forms of coloniality be overcome?

One of the two illustrative examples of the trans/formation of memory landscape presented in this text is the joint activity of cleaning, restoring, and remoulding the sands of the 1904-1908 Swakopmund Prisoners of War Unmarked Graves in Kramersdorf. The other refers to the Swakopmund Memorial Park. Its inauguration in April 2010 was attended to both by the German and the Namibian government. Both memorial activities challenge the dominant narrative about the Swapo-led anti-colonial struggle, draw attention to German colonial-era war crimes, and highlight the actions of Herero and Nama heroes (Zuern, 2012, pp. 511-512). Both are instrumental in establishing a dialogue, rather than a contestation between different actors. It is probably too early to estimate if the *reworking* of experiences of genocide, understood as an active and constant process (Schramm, 2011, p. 14), can lead to the creation of an inclusive societal atmosphere in Swakopmund. These two examples of commemorative symbolism show that the past that is jointly remembered and commonly shared is a crucial element of collective memory (Schwartz, 2000, p. 9). It is fair to claim that these actions of memorial activists, although lacking political and economic power, have achieved considerable success in creating a more diverse public presentation of the country's history. Their once marginalised voices are being heard and even recognised by the Namibian state.

Irrespective of the divergent, contending, and sometimes mutually exclusive views of the past, there is a widely held assumption that memory tourism has the potential to contest state-directed narratives and become a space for building new forms of resilience. As Zuern claimed (2017), controversies over public memory may open opportunities for more productive discussions of the past, and for the acknowledgement and a broader understanding of the suffering of others. They may, however, also suggest their limitations: apparently "a fundamental enlargement" of the existing memory culture (Bach, 2019) is not happening in today's Namibia. Debates over how best to address the history of colonialism and genocide are far from being a *fait accompli* and thus offers further space for investigating various traces, influences, and layers in which a sense of the past is produced, through public representations as well as through private memory vis-à-vis the Swapo-led dominant discourse of national history.

We end by expressing a rather bold belief that various non-state actors, including memory activists, can play an important role in undermining the dominant narrative of national liberation, and (re-)building a more inclusive public memory. Moreover, the kind of memory activism we studied in Swakopmund can contribute to decolonising urban space, which can guide aspirations for urban futures in African societies. The future of Swakopmund is being prepared through memory activism. Memory conceptualised by the dynamics of the memory approach, is never solely manipulated or durable. Instead, as marginalised groups have more access to resources and to the public space in order to cultivate and express their memories, we seem to be witnessing a process of the denationalisation of memory as well as trends towards the fragmentation and democratisation of memory in today's Namibia.

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