

‘More than just an object’:

a material analysis of the return and retention of Namibian skulls from Germany



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Prologue

In the summer of 2014 I visited Windhoek during a month-long study trip in Namibia and South Africa. The trip was intended as a cultural exchange between Dutch students and Afrikaners. On the first day in Windhoek our two Afrikaner tour guides, Namibian cattle farmers, took us to Heroes' Acre, a Wild West-themed steak restaurant and to the city center of Windhoek to see the *Gedächtniskirche* and the *Alte Feste*, relics of the German colonial past. When our tour guides realized the museum inside the *Alte Feste* was permanently closed, they reluctantly let us visit the new Independence Memorial Museum just outside it (*that's just the SWAPO story*). Earlier that morning members of the religious Afrikaner community *Netwerk* had proudly lectured us on the history of the Afrikaner community in Namibia. Now, in the museum, we were introduced to a different perspective. Here the history of Namibia was told as a century-long struggle for independence ending in SWAPO rule. The German-Herero war (1904-1908), a genocide on the Herero and Nama, was incorporated in the narrative as the first anti-colonial struggle. Before we entered the museum we sat in the grass outside, enjoyed the sun and bought carved *malakani* palm nuts from hawkers. Once this had been the site of the biggest concentration camp for Nama and Herero prisoners in German South-West Africa. The old *Reiterdenkmal*, commemorating the German victims of the colonial war, had been removed from the site and stood forlorn in the courtyard of the *Alte Feste*, a new set of statues commemorating the genocide and independence in its place. At this crossroads of past and present, politics and tourism, my eye fell on a notification placed prominently at the entrance of the museum: *'No human remains on display here'*.

1. Introduction

On 4 October 2011, an eagerly awaited plane from Berlin landed at Windhoek's Hosea Kutako airport. On board were twenty Nama and Herero skulls and a delegation of about seventy politicians, museum officials, church leaders, and Herero and Nama representatives. On its arrival, hundreds of excited Namibians stormed the airfield – some had waited the whole night to welcome the skulls and the delegation home. The crowd had to be contained before the plane's precious cargo could be unloaded. The twenty skulls had been in Germany for more than a hundred years: they belonged to victims of the German-Herero war (1904-1908) in German South-West Africa (present-day Namibia), a genocide that cost the lives of eighty per cent of the Herero and half the Nama population. Eighteen of the skulls had arrived in Berlin as preserved heads, and all twenty had been used for racist pseudo-scientific research in the first decades of the twentieth century. After that, the skulls had laid untouched in the storage facilities of the anatomical collection of the Charité Universitätsmedizin (university hospital) in Berlin until their provenance was established by the interdisciplinary team of the Charité Human Remains Project (2008-2013). The repatriation of the Namibian remains was the first result of the project, which was started after the Charité had received repatriation requests from the Namibian and Australian governments.

Despite the triumphant return of the skulls, not everything went smoothly. The Charité was criticized by delegation members for failing to answer questions about the identity and the purpose of the skulls in their collection, while the Namibian government and Nama and Herero representatives failed to agree on their final resting place. This had everything to do with the complicated nature of the skulls involved. They were, and are, more than just 'objects'. Since the twenty skulls ceased to be the speaking, thinking, and sensing heads of living Nama and Herero men, women, and children more than a hundred years ago, they have become many different things. The heads or skulls acquired new meaning in the practices of collecting (1904-1910), studying (1910-1924) and repatriating (2011), each practice adding more layers of meaning. Who handled and discussed them in these practices, how, why, and in what context, determined what they were – and what they are today. In the eyes of German colonial soldiers involved in the collecting process they were the remains of the colonial opponent, while early twentieth-century anatomists studied them as anthropological specimens. The enthusiastic crowd at Hosea Kutako airport welcomed the skulls home as evidence and symbols of the suffering of Nama and Herero under the German colonial

regime, while the Namibian government treated the skulls as relics of martyrs, heroes fallen in the struggle for independence. Meanwhile, the Charité returned them as problematic study objects. Underneath these ‘layers’ the skulls continued to be the remains of Nama and Herero *individuals* who fell victim to the German colonial regime. It is this entanglement of different meanings (past and present) that complicated the repatriation process. In order to unravel these layers of meaning and understand the friction between the Namibian government, Herero and Nama representatives, and the Charité, I will analyze how the twenty skulls acquired meaning in the practices of collecting, studying, and repatriating respectively.

A material perspective

It was not until after Namibia’s independence in 1990 that the repatriation of the skulls appeared on the political agenda. Historians first began to publish on the subject around the turn of the twenty-first century. In 2001, Joachim Zeller mentioned the practice of collecting Nama and Herero skulls in his article on the appalling conditions in concentration camps in the German-Herero war (where many of the skulls came from) and that same year Andrew Zimmerman wrote about the skulls in his study of anthropology in Imperial Germany.¹ A few years later Casper W. Erichsen explicitly connected the research on the heads and skulls in Germany to the racist attitude in the colony in his extensive study of the concentration camps.² More recently, two articles have been published about the specific skulls discussed in this thesis in a comprehensive book published as part of the Charité Human Remains Project: *Sammeln, erforschen, zurückgeben?* (2013). In one article, Thomas Schnalke examined the scientific discourse on race in an early twentieth-century study of the Herero heads.³ The other article comes close to my own approach: ethnologist Larissa Förster analyzed the ceremonies and debates surrounding the repatriation, demonstrating that the skulls were alternately considered ancestral remains, relics, symbols, and evidence in the process.⁴

¹ Joachim Zeller, “Wie Vieh wurden hunderte zu Tode getrieben und wie Vieh begraben”. Fotodokumente aus dem deutschen Konzentrationslager in Swakopmund/ Namibia 1904-1908’, *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 49:3 (2001) 226-243 and Andrew Zimmerman, *Anthropology and antihumanism in imperial Germany* (Chicago/ London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001).

² Casper W. Erichsen, “The angel of death has descended violently among them”. *Concentration camps and prisoners-of-war in Namibia, 1904-1908* (Leiden: African Studies Centre Research Report 79, 2005).

³ Thomas Schnalke, “Normale” Wissenschaft. Ein Berliner Beitrag zur “Anthropologie der Herero” von 1914’ in: Holger Stoecker, Thomas Schnalke and Andreas Winkelmann (ed.), *Sammeln, erforschen, zurückgeben? Menschliche Gebeine aus der Kolonialzeit in akademischen und musealen Sammlungen* (Berlin: Ch. Links Verlag, 2013) 170-181.

⁴ Larissa Förster, “You are giving us the skulls – where is the flesh?” Die Rückkehr der namibischen Human Remains’ in: Stoecker, Schnalke and Winkelmann (ed.), *Sammeln, erforschen, zurückgeben?* 419-446.

This thesis is the first systematic analysis of all three main practices (collecting, studying, repatriating) surrounding the skulls from a material perspective. Starting point for the examination of each practice is not the discourse surrounding the skulls, but their physicality. I examine how, by whom, why, and in what context the heads or skulls were physically handled (cleaned, packed, probed, dissected, photographed, drawn, put on display) in each of the practices. Apart from secondary and primary literature, I use material sources – traces or ‘contact points’ of these physical practices – as source material. A colonial picture postcard of German soldiers packing Namibian skulls gives new insights about the way the skulls were viewed in the collecting process when it is analyzed in the context of the colonial picture postcard trade and the tradition of ‘power photography’ in the colony. Similarly, drawings and photographs from contemporary publications reveal how and why the skulls were studied when they are examined against the background of the ‘turn towards race and nation’ and a growing popularity of German anthropology. Finally, an analysis of the transport boxes and glass display cases used in the repatriation ceremonies in the context of the Namibian politics of remembrance and reconciliation sheds light on the many meanings attached to the skulls in this process. With my approach I aim to demonstrate the value of a material perspective on something as intangible as ‘layers of meaning’ and on the very real complexities involved in the repatriation of human remains.

Returning human remains

In the Summer of 2015, *NRC Handelsblad* published a special ‘Africa in pictures’ issue of its *DeLUXE* magazine, with South African photographer Pieter Hugo as guest editor. One of the features in the magazine highlighted a European skull from Hugo’s personal collection. Hugo smuggled it in his camera bag on a flight from Amsterdam to Cape Town. ‘Maybe it is a bit macabre to have such an object in my studio’, he says in the feature, ‘but I like the idea of taking a skull back to Africa because the trade route for this kind of objects is usually the other way around’.⁵ He now uses the skull as a prop in his Cape Town studio.

By smuggling a European skull to Africa, Hugo made a powerful statement on a global issue that affects all countries with a colonial past: the traffic of human remains in the name of science. The case of the Namibian skulls is not unique. Countless skulls, skeletons and body parts from former colonies ended up in anthropological and anatomical collections in Europe, the United States, Australia, and South Africa. In the last two decades some of

⁵ Sean O’Toole, ‘Yorick, de schedel van een Europeaan’ in: Pieter Hugo and Peter Vandermeersch (ed.) *DeLUXE. NRC Magazine* 24 (June 2015) 51.

these remains have been repatriated. The turn of the twenty-first century saw a ‘sudden appearance of restitution cases’, inspiring Elazar Barkan to write *The guilt of nations*. The book explores how the historical injustice of colonialism is compensated with reparations and apologies in the postcolonial era. Native Americans, Native Hawaiians, Maori, and Aborigines were granted rights and resources, while their culture was ‘legitimized’ and incorporated in the ‘national fabric’ of the United States, New Zealand, and Australia respectively.⁶ From the late 1980s onwards, Native Americans and Aborigines also demanded the return of the bones of their ancestors from museums around the world. Barkan wrote that ‘some museums’ have responded favorably to these requests.⁷ When his book was published in 2000, only a small number of museums had restituted remains on their own initiative. Since then however, many museums felt forced to deal with the issue of ‘problematic’ remains in their collection. The successful restitution agreements of the late twentieth century have set a moral standard, forcing nations and institutions to reflect on their ‘guilt’ and act accordingly.⁸

In The Netherlands, the Tropenmuseum in Amsterdam felt forced to deal with the issue in 2000, when a long-term loan of human remains was returned from anatomical museum Vrolik. The loan included the museum’s anthropological collection consisting mostly of skeletal material from the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) and Dutch New Guinea (Papua).⁹ The museum started a research project to establish the provenance of the remains and to determine what to do with them. Even though there were no outstanding claims, or specifically contested items, the institute was aware of its responsibility when dealing with a collection of human remains.¹⁰ Because there were no restitution claims, the Tropenmuseum was unsure how to proceed. Following extensive interdisciplinary studies, the researchers eventually proposed to ‘destroy or dispose of (...) the physical anthropology collection’, because these items were ‘probably no longer of scientific value’.¹¹

Even when there are restitution claims, the repatriation of bones and body parts is never straightforward. When returning human remains there is a lot that can go wrong, not in the least because different parties involved have differing views on the remains. This is why it is important, if not essential, to understand the complexities involved. In the first repatriation case of an African body from Europe, just about anything that could go wrong, did. ‘El

⁶ Elazar Barkan, *The guilt of nations. Restitution and negotiating historical injustices* (New York/ London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000) 168.

⁷ Idem, 257.

⁸ Idem, 317 and 346.

⁹ David van Duuren (ed.), *Physical anthropology reconsidered. Human remains at the Tropenmuseum* (Bulletin 375, Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 2007) 41.

¹⁰ Idem, 5.

¹¹ Idem, 52.

Negro', a stuffed Tswana man, was returned from a provincial museum in Banyoles, Spain, to Gaborone, Botswana in 2000. The remains of El Negro were sent back in a small wooden crate, to the outrage of onlookers, who had expected a proper coffin. Even more problematic was the fact that the Spanish museum had only returned the bones of El Negro: his skin, hair, fingernails, clothing, and attributes were apparently left behind in Spain. Finally, there were doubts whether the Tswana man had really come from the region he would be buried in. In Botswana, all this led to rumors about drought caused by El Negro's angered spirit.¹²

In the beautifully written book *El Negro en ik* ('El Negro and me') Frank Westerman interweaves the story of El Negro, from the desecration of his grave in 1830 or 1831 to his repatriation in 2000, with an exploration of race, culture, and identity through the ages using the relation between Self and Other, 'the West' and El Negro, as a focal point.¹³ The story reveals that there are and have been many layers of meaning attached to El Negro. In Westerman's book El Negro is a 'European artefact', 'because he says something about us' and also a metaphor for 'the Other'.¹⁴ For the Haitian-born Spanish doctor who campaigned relentlessly for his repatriation, El Negro symbolized the colonial gaze and continuing racism. For the museum in Banyoles however, the stuffed African had become a symbol of local pride – and for citizens in Botswana, he was an individual whose spirit had to be appeased. The Spanish museum reluctantly returned some of the remains but kept the spear as a relic of their local symbol, while Botswana citizens expected 'complete' remains for a proper burial.

Many of the mistakes made in the El Negro case were avoided in the repatriation of Saartje Baartman to South Africa in 2002. Baartman, a Khoisan woman from the Eastern Cape, had been on display in the early nineteenth century in London and Paris as 'The Hottentot Venus'. After her death in 1815 her genitals and brains were studied and preserved by anatomist Georges Cuvier. Together with her skeleton the body parts were on display in the *Musée de l'Homme* in Paris until the 1970s. Unlike El Negro, her remains were repatriated following a claim from the South African government. The remains of Baartman too, have different layers of meaning. In Paris, they had been specimens and museal objects, but they were buried as the remains of an individual with living descendants. Already before her repatriation, they had also become the symbol of the colonial gaze and voyeurism of the black female body, inspiring academics, artists, and activists around the world.

¹² Jan-Bart Gewald, 'El Negro, El Niño, witchcraft and the absence of rain in Botswana', *African Affairs* 100 (2001) 555-580.

¹³ Frank Westerman, *El Negro en ik* (Amsterdam: Atlas, 2004).

¹⁴ Frank Westerman, interview with the author (2014).

Although Baartman was buried according to Khoisan custom, her remains arrived, again, in a wooden crate. It was not until 2012 that former ‘anthropological objects’ were repatriated as actual human remains. Klaas and Trooi Pienaar, a Khoisan couple, had been dug up by a notorious anthropological ‘collector’ from the grounds of the farm they had worked at in South Africa in the beginning of the twentieth century. Historian Ciraj Rassool initiated the repatriation of their remains to South Africa, after he had identified their skeletons in the natural history museum of Vienna. The Pienaar couple still had living descendants in South Africa and for the first time, a conscious effort was made to change the object’s status from a human remain to a corpse. The couple received a state funeral and was buried in proper coffins. Later, Rassool criticized the Charité for repatriating the twenty Namibian skulls as ‘objects’.¹⁵

Ethical considerations

In recent years there has been much debate about the reproduction of nineteenth-century scientific and anthropological photographs and illustrations. Reproducing photographic material made in an ethically incorrect context of unequal power relations in the colony would reproduce the voyeuristic gaze of the colonizer and perpetuate insult and injustice. Some authors have decided to minimize or even omit reproductions of contemporary image material in their studies of anthropological and medical practices.¹⁶ For my study this would be problematic. Studying practices from a material perspective inevitably led me to the few ‘material traces’ of these practices available, including a colonial postcard and photographs and drawings from contemporary publications. I acknowledge that reproducing the colonial postcard, of German colonial soldiers packing Namibian skulls, and drawings and photographs of the preserved Herero and Nama heads and skulls does reproduce a voyeuristic gaze. Ignoring these sources however and refusing to analyze them would be to overlook crucial evidence for the layers of meaning of the skulls. I have decided to include images of all source material used. What forced this decision, was the position of Nama and Herero representatives who argue that the human remains themselves should be made accessible and visible as evidence.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ciraj Rassool, ‘Handling restitutions of human remains. The case of a repatriation from Vienna to Kuruman (South Africa) in 2012’, interview on www.africavenir.org.

¹⁶ Amos Morris-Reich, for example, who writes about racial photography as scientific evidence, is very careful to make limited use of images and to contextualize each image reproduced in his work. In a similar vein, Geertje Mak decided to leave out nineteenth-century ‘voyeuristic’ image material from her work on hermaphroditism.

¹⁷ Larissa Förster, “‘These skulls are not enough’”. The repatriation of Namibian human remains from Berlin to Windhoek in 2011’, *Darkmatter* (online report on www.darkmatter101.org, 18 November 2013).

The most problematic of the images is a series of photographs of severed Nama heads, from Christian Fetzer's study *'Rassenanatomische Untersuchungen an 17 Hottentottenköpfen'* (1913/1914).¹⁸ They were probably included more for their voyeuristic than for their scientific value in the first place (see chapter five). I am not the first to consider the ethical problem of reproducing these images. All six photographs were reproduced in the fortnightly column 'Picturing the Past' in prominent Namibian newspaper *The Namibian*, on 9 April 1998. Below the photographs it read: 'Readers please note we are not publishing these photographs with a view to sensationalism, but simply in the interests of properly documenting our historical past.' The author decided to make the photographs public to demonstrate the plausibility of stories of whites taking home heads as trophies (!) and also as evidence of the atrocities committed in the German-Herero war ('one of the most extreme racial wars the world has ever seen'). 'Errors of the past', the author concluded, should be 'acknowledged and publicly rejected' to avoid re-occurrence.¹⁹ I agree that they should certainly not be 'hidden', but reproduced – if properly contextualized.

Today, the same images circulate on the Internet on countless little known websites and private blogs. Usually, the captions are vague and generic. Often, they are incorrect. Reproducing the images without proper context, as evidence of 'what the Germans did' can be problematic. In this thesis, I have attempted to thoroughly analyze and contextualize the images of Namibian heads and skulls. Arguably, the meticulous descriptions of the practices of collecting and studying are in some way 'voyeuristic' themselves: they contain many gruesome details. However, such thorough descriptions are necessary to fully understand how the heads and skulls were handled. The practices surrounding Namibian skulls are usually left to the imagination. Authors such as Casper W. Erichsen and Andrew Zimmerman write that Namibian skulls were collected 'to prove the racial inferiority of Africans', but exactly *how* this was done remains unclear. It is only when the practices are described in full detail that the different layers of meaning of these human remains are revealed. Detailed knowledge of past practices can perhaps even guard us from the re-occurrence of derailed research. It is not difficult to see the analogy between past skull collecting and today's practice of 'blood collecting' for worldwide DNA maps.

¹⁸ Christian Fetzer, 'Rassenanatomische Untersuchungen an 17 Hottentottenköpfen', *Zeitschrift für Morphologie und Anthropologie* 16 (1913/14) 95-156.

¹⁹ Patricia Hayes, Jeremy Silvester and Wolfram Hartmann, 'Picturing the past in Namibia: the visual archive and its energies' in: Carolyn Hamilton, *Refiguring the archive* (Dordrecht [etc]: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2002) 102.

In *El Negro en ik* Frank Westerman problematizes his own relationship, as a white man, towards El Negro. For this research, it would only be fair to consider my own relation - as a white, Dutch woman - to the Nama and Herero remains used for racist science. I admit the story did not at first horrify me - it *fascinated* me. Human remains always have. I still have an article about Julia Pastrana, a bearded 'ape woman' from Mexico whose remains were stuffed, that I carefully cut out of *Vrij Nederland* in 1997, when I was ten years old. I pestered my parents for taking me to museums 'with mummies' and I bought *El Negro en ik* as soon as it was published. Someday, I hope to write about the remains of Johan and Cornelis de Witt on display at the *Haagsch Historisch Museum*. I am aware of my 'voyeuristic gaze'. It was not until I started to describe the practices surrounding the Namibian skulls in full detail that my fascination gave way to disgust. A turning point was a passage in chapter five, about scientist Paul Bartels physically comparing Nama and Herero specimens with those of apes. It made me cringe. In my opinion, a degree of voyeurism is unavoidable - but analyzing the practices surrounding human remains is one way to pierce through this voyeuristic layer.

From Windhoek to Auschwitz?

German anthropologists were not alone in their interest in the flesh and bones of the colonized. Research similar to that done on the twenty Nama and Herero skulls was conducted throughout Europe in the late nineteenth, early twentieth century. German racist science however, has a special ring to it - in retrospect. Many authors hint at the analogy between the racist studies of Nama and Herero victims who had perished in concentration camps and racist experiments on Jewish victims in Auschwitz. In the popular non-fiction work *Himmler's crusade. The true story of the 1938 Nazi expedition into Tibet* Christopher Hale uses autobiographical information to mold the story of an anthropological expedition to Tibet into that of a gloomy Nazi-quest, at a time when 'anthropological science, forged in the factories of colonial violence, (...) became a rallying cry to German youth to purify the race'.²⁰ In Hale's view, the collecting of Herero and Nama skulls had set the precedent for a search for the 'master race' in Tibet and for the assembly of a skeleton collection of murdered Jews.²¹

In the last decade, some historians, including Benjamin Madley and Jürgen Zimmerer, have also stressed causal links between the German colonies and the Nazi state. This 'From

²⁰ Christopher Hale, *Himmler's crusade. The true story of the 1938 Nazi expedition into Tibet* (London: Bantam Books, 2003) 166.

²¹ Idem, 515.

Windhoek to Auschwitz' school of thought departs from notions first articulated by philosopher Hannah Arendt and (East-)German historian Horst Drechsler in the 1960s. While Arendt was the first to describe the Nazi state as the summit of imperialism, Drechsler was the first to point to the 'excessive', exceptional violence in German South-West Africa. Madley argues that the colonial experience in German South-West Africa contributed 'ideas, methods, and a lexicon' that were transmitted to the Nazi's 'through language, literature, media, institutional memory, and individual experience'.²² Zimmerer centers his arguments for a link between colonialism and the Nazi state around the concepts of 'race' and 'space'. In his view the Nazi war against Poland and the Soviet Union 'can be seen as the largest colonial war of conquest in history'.²³ Although he acknowledges that 'the crimes of the Nazis cannot be traced back 'mono-causally' to the tradition of European colonialism, he does argue that 'colonialism provided important precedents'. This leads to his somewhat uncomfortable and vague conclusion that the Namibian war was 'one of many roads to Auschwitz', because it was 'on the one hand the culmination of colonial genocide and on the other hand the first step towards the bureaucratized murder of the Third Reich'.²⁴

The 'From Windhoek to Auschwitz' school of thought has been criticized by authors who address the conspicuous 'gap' between 1904 and the Second World War in the writings of these historians. Gerwarth and Malinowski point out that the First World War has been strikingly absent in the debate on colonial traditions and radicalization of '*Gewaltpraktiken*'. It is indeed surprising that scholars such as Madley and Zimmerer jump from German South-West Africa to Nazi Germany without even mentioning one of the biggest catastrophes of the twentieth century. The authors rightly point out that the war of 1914-1918 was a '*Blutmühlen*' in which both in nature and scale new dimensions of destruction were reached. They also draw attention to the importance of experiences of defeat, revolution, and civil war as a possible explanation for the increased potential of violence ('*Gewaltpotenziale*') in Germany.²⁵ With this in mind, they argue that the 'German (Nazi) war of annihilation' constituted a break with European traditions of colonialism rather than a continuation.²⁶

The comparison between colonial genocide and Holocaust however, remains tempting. This is caused by 'a sense of *déjà-vu*' after 1945: the colonial discourse, the violence, even

²² Benjamin Madley, 'From Africa to Auschwitz: how German South West Africa incubated ideas and methods adopted and developed by the Nazis in Eastern Europe', *European History Quarterly* 35 (2005) 429-464.

²³ Jürgen Zimmerer, 'Annihilation in Africa: the "race war" in German Southwest Africa (1904-1908) and its significance for a global history of genocide', *GHI Bulletin* 37 (2005) 54.

²⁴ Idem, 56.

²⁵ Robert Gerwarth and Stephan Malinowski, 'Der Holocaust als "kolonialer Genozid"? Europäische Kolonialgewalt und nationalsozialistischer Vernichtungskrieg', *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 33:3 (2007) 453.

²⁶ Idem, 439.

the people involved simply remind one of the Nazi genocide.²⁷ In Namibia, representatives of the Herero community compare the Namibian genocide with the Holocaust to motivate their demand for monetary recompense: they reason that because the Jewish community received compensation, the Herero should be compensated as well. Popular book titles such as *The Kaiser's Holocaust. Germany's forgotten genocide* and the BBC documentary *Namibia: genocide and the Second Reich* (2005) have brought the continuity thesis home to a broad audience. This school of thought is so influential, that the official report accompanying the twenty Herero and Nama skulls that were repatriated in 2011 implicitly linked the skulls to Nazi science. In the summary of the report the research team concludes: 'As far as we can say by now, these 20 skulls were (...) not used by Nazi scientists.'²⁸

In this thesis I have tried to steer clear from 'tempting' comparisons with Nazi science. Many 'From Windhoek to Auschwitz' scholars who touch on the subject of science dwell on the writings of Eugen Fischer, the later Nazi scientist, who spent a year in the colony in 1908 to do research on the Rehoboth Basters, people of mixed Khoisan and Afrikaner descent. In his person racist studies of the colonized and racist experiments on the Jews are linked. I also briefly touch on Fischer's work, but I discuss it in the context of the 'turn towards race and nation' and the popularization of anthropological imagery. His work, it seems, transcended popular and scientific writing and would have been of influence on the practice of studying the Nama and Herero skulls. Doubtlessly, these practices can somehow be linked to later Nazi practices, even if only through personal links such as Fischer, but I did not find any direct links between the practices I examined and Nazism. Aware of the sense of *déjà-vu*, the anachronism that results when we measure past practices by standards or events of a later date, I have tried to examine the practices of collecting and studying in their specific time and place: German South-West Africa during the colonial war of 1904-1908 and the early twentieth-century scientific environment in Germany respectively.

²⁷ Tilman Dederig, 'The German-Herero war of 1904: revisionism of genocide or imaginary historiography?', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 19:1 (March 1993) 82.

²⁸ Charité Human Remains Project, Summary of the research results (30 September 2011).

2. Theoretical framework and methodological approach:

Analyzing practices surrounding the skulls from a material perspective

This chapter explains the methodological approach used in this thesis to analyze how the practices of collecting, studying, and repatriating added layers of meaning to the twenty Nama and Herero skulls repatriated in 2011. I speak of a process of acquiring layers of meaning, rather than transformation, because the remains had and have different meanings to different people at the same time. For each practice I analyze material traces, ‘contact points’, of the practices: a colonial postcard (collecting), contemporary drawings and photographs (studying), and transport boxes and display cases (repatriating). I will demonstrate that the material perspective is a new and fruitful approach to study the practices surrounding the skulls and therefore, a perspective that helps us understand how the skulls acquired different layers of meaning throughout the years. On a general level I want to demonstrate the value of a material perspective for the study of physical anthropology and the racialized body, particularly for the study of practices surrounding human remains acquired in a colonial context. In order to do so, I first need to determine my position in two fields of study: colonial history (physical anthropology) and body history (the racialized body). I will first discuss this theoretical framework, before explaining my methodological approach in more detail.

Physical anthropology in metropole and colony

The two fields I need to relate my research to, colonial history and the study of the racialized body, have been heavily influenced by the work of French philosopher Michel Foucault. Since the 1970s colonial history has been dominated by the postcolonial tradition, established in the wake of cultural critic Edward W. Saïd’s enormously influential *Orientalism* (1978), which in turn relied heavily on Foucault.²⁹ Following Foucault, who argued that discourse involves a power relationship because it imposes its linguistic order on the world, Saïd argued that Orientalism was a discursive construction rather than an objective body of scholarly knowledge. Foucault’s insistence on the ‘inextricable relationship between knowledge and power’ also had a major impact on postcolonial scholarship.³⁰ For Saïd, Orientalism was a

²⁹ Edward W. Saïd, *Orientalism* (New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1978/ London [etc.]: Penguin Books, 2003).

³⁰ Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, *Tensions of Empire. Colonial cultures in a bourgeois world* (Berkeley/ Los Angeles/ London: University of California Press, 1997) 11.

relationship of power, a form of cultural domination working in tandem with colonialism.³¹ As a result of this definition, a binary model of colonizer and colonized, powerful and powerless, dominated postcolonial studies until well into the 1990s.³²

Remarkably, Foucault himself never explicitly discussed colonialism.³³ When he touched on the subject of ‘ethnology’ (which he considered a ‘synonym for anthropology’) he stressed that the ‘colonizing situation’ was ‘not indispensable’ for ethnology – what is indispensable for ethnology is ‘the historical sovereignty (...) of European thought’.³⁴ Foucault’s preoccupation with Western thinking (rather than Western expansion) did not stop academics from applying his concepts of authority and exclusion, technologies of power, and apparatuses of surveillance to the colonial arena.³⁵ Indeed, according to Ann Laura Stoler ‘no single analytical framework has saturated the field of colonial studies so completely’ in the 1980s and 1990s, sparking research on topics such as disciplinary regimes producing subjugated bodies, discourses on hygiene or education shaping the social geography of colonies and specific strategies of rule, and, importantly, on the ties between the production of anthropological knowledge and colonial authority.³⁶

A recent turn in postcolonial studies has questioned the binary, Foucauldian model of powerful colonizer and powerless colonized that dominated the field until the 1990s. Homi K. Bhabha has argued that power in the colony did not exclusively reside in the realm of the colonizer.³⁷ He argues that the ‘persistent unsettling presence’ as well as the ‘sly civility’ (*apparent* compliance) of the colonized was enough to have a ‘destabilizing effect’ in the colony.³⁸ Earlier, in the 1980s, Ann Laura Stoler had explored the interrelationship between metropole and colony, arguing that colonial cultures were never ‘direct translations of European society planted in the colony’, but ‘unique cultural configurations’.³⁹ In the binary model of powerful colonizer and powerless colonized, the makers of metropolitan policy had become indistinguishable from its local practitioners, like colonial bureaucrats and officers.⁴⁰ Stoler corrects this simplistic view, arguing that the metropole did not dictate colonial

³¹ Robert J. C. Young, ‘Foucault on race and colonialism’, *New Formations* 25 (1995) 2.

³² *Idem*, 5.

³³ *Idem*, 6.

³⁴ *Idem*, 7 and 10.

³⁵ *Idem*, 5.

³⁶ Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the education of desire. Foucault’s ‘History of sexuality’ and the colonial order of things* (Durham/ London: Duke University Press, 1995) 1.

³⁷ Simon Gunn, *History and cultural theory* (Harlow (etc.): Pearson Longman, 2006) 163.

³⁸ *Idem*, 164.

³⁹ Ann Laura Stoler, ‘Rethinking colonial categories: European communities and the boundaries of rule’, *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31:1 (January 1989) 135-136.

⁴⁰ *Idem*.

cultures, rather, the hybrid culture in the colonies fed back into metropolitan policies. In Stoler's view, colonialism created both colonizer and colonized.⁴¹ In her work on the Netherlands Indies she demonstrates that sharp distinctions between rulers and ruled were drawn, but also that these distinctions were not clear-cut, but shifting. Colonial privilege and its boundaries were determined by control over sexuality and reproduction (legislation on marriage and 'European' status), but these boundaries shifted constantly, resulting in population groups such as white women, poor whites and Indo-Europeans being alternately included in or excluded from the boundaries of colonial privilege.⁴² In the cauldron of population groups and individuals with conflicting interests, different ethnic and class backgrounds that was colonial society, racism kept both colonized and colonizers in check.⁴³

A few years later, Stoler would further explore the interrelationship of metropole and colony in the volume *Tensions of empire* (1997), which she edited together with Frederick Cooper. In the preface of this volume, the editors advocate a move away from a binary self/other opposition in which the function of anthropologists in colonialism is essentialized as 'handmaidens of colonial domination'.⁴⁴ Cooper and Stoler point out that although anthropologists were often called upon to provide knowledge to fortify the position of colonial elites, the knowledge they provided did not always fit neatly into administrative categories, and their findings more often than not complicated the division between 'primitive' cultures and 'civilized' nations.⁴⁵

German South-West Africa too, was a hybrid colonial society. The first generation of German settlers had married local Rehoboth Baster girls in significant numbers and their progeny – colored but German – blurred the lines between colonizer and colonized. Meanwhile, the brutal conduct of settlers towards Africans in the colony sparked fear in the home country of Germans, cut off from 'civilization', 'going native'. This is important to realize, because it suggests that the practice of studying in the metropole did not fit seamlessly with the practice of collecting in the colony. Collectors in German South-West Africa may well have had different motivations to acquire human remains than scientists back in Berlin.

Editors H. Glenn Penny and Matti Bunzl similarly present a more complicated view on the relationship between colonialism and anthropology in their volume on German anthropology *Worldly provincialism* (2003). By emphasizing differentiation, exploring

⁴¹ Stoler, 'Rethinking colonial categories', 155.

⁴² Idem, 154.

⁴³ Idem, 138.

⁴⁴ H. Glenn Penny and Matti Bunzl (ed.), *Worldly Provincialism. German anthropology in the age of empire* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003) 24.

⁴⁵ Cooper and Stoler, *Tensions of Empire* 14.

specific roles German anthropologists played at different times and in particular colonial settings, the editors complicate the popular notion of German anthropology as a discipline consolidating colonial regimes and a prelude to Nazi eugenics.⁴⁶ In their view the relationship between German anthropology and German colonialism should be understood in terms of a ‘shifting intersection’ of ‘particular agendas’ – not in grand oppositions.⁴⁷

Stoler’s call to study the metropole and the colony together has been taken up by postcolonial scholars such as Antoinette Burton and Anne McClintock, who emphasize the colonial dimensions in the constitution of modern Europe, particularly in regard to gender and sexuality.⁴⁸ Glenn Penny and Bunzl offer a ‘critical corrective’ of this approach, arguing that although colonial articulations did ‘shape the metropole in important ways’, the German metropole also had its own intellectual momentum.⁴⁹ They follow Stoler’s move away from the binary opposition between colonizer and colonized and towards a more complex understanding of the colony but are not convinced that anthropology in the colonies in turn affected the metropole. Rather, they continue to explain physical anthropology as an autonomous discipline firmly anchored in German scientific thinking. They even argue that the early twentieth-century ‘turn towards race and nation’ within the discipline gained its most powerful impetus from ‘within the German context’ (pressures in academia and popular demands) rather than from Germany’s experience abroad.⁵⁰ It is quite remarkable that the editors argue that German anthropology was ‘a liberal endeavor’ before it was tainted by a preoccupation with race in the *inter-war years*, given the obvious racism involved in the collecting and measuring of Nama and Herero skulls in German South-West Africa, a full decade before the First World War.⁵¹ Nevertheless, their emphasis on differentiation, individual research agendas and external pressures on the discipline of anthropology is helpful for understanding the practices of collecting and studying the skulls.

The collecting of body parts in German South-West Africa is the topic of only one of the contributions to *Worldly Provincialism*. In ‘Adventures in the skin trade’ Andrew Zimmerman highlights the metropolitan quest for objectivity as the major culprit in this colonial collecting frenzy. According to the editors, this ‘new objectivity’ became a ‘building block in an anti-humanist trajectory that would lead to the catastrophic treatment of non-

⁴⁶ Glenn Penny and Bunzl (ed.), *Worldly Provincialism* 24-25.

⁴⁷ *Idem*, 27.

⁴⁸ *Idem*, 10.

⁴⁹ *Idem*.

⁵⁰ *Idem*, 18.

⁵¹ *Idem*, 7.

German people as objects rather than subjects'.⁵² Zimmerman's framework is strikingly Foucauldian. In his view, anthropology in the German colonies 'depended upon, and gave meaning to, the institutions of colonial violence, including prisons, battlefields, and concentration camps'.⁵³ The power relations in these colonial territories 'at once yielded the docile subjects for anthropologists' measurements as well as the ultimate sites for the collection of body parts'.⁵⁴ Zimmerman argues that colonial rule and anthropology worked together to create a heightened state of corporeality 'fundamental to each'. The colonized was reduced to a pure, objective (replaceable) body, a passive subject of a German scientific gaze.

In recent studies, historians studying physical anthropology in the colonies have moved away from this Foucauldian framework. Fenneke Sysling's dissertation *The archipelago of difference* (2013), about the ideas and practices of Dutch anthropologists working in the Netherlands Indies, demonstrates how the discipline of anthropology, its objects and anthropologists were shaped by the Indonesian context and how the discipline constructed a racial geography of the region. According to Sysling, the practice of data collecting was influenced by the people in the colony, who shaped anthropological data by 'granting and denying access to their bodies'.⁵⁵ Although Sysling does mention the inherent racism of the anthropological practices, she sketches quite a sympathetic portrait of the Dutch anthropologists, who, she argues, did not aim to study the difference between colonizers and colonized, but rather hoped to explain the diversity of people in the archipelago.⁵⁶ She describes how the anthropologists in practice encountered endless difficulties in classifying people. The 'ideal specimens' of peoples they hoped to find in isolated island populations in the archipelago, did not actually exist: even these 'isolated' people had mixed ethnic backgrounds.⁵⁷

By demonstrating how colonial circumstances influenced metropolitan theories on physical anthropology, Sysling adds a valuable dimension to the study of physical anthropology in the colony. Ricardo Roque's work goes one step further. He focuses on the interrelationship between colonial collecting and indigenous headhunting practices in his study of anthropology and the circulation of human skulls in the Portuguese empire. He proposes the concept of 'mutual parasitism' to understand the entanglement between

⁵² Glenn Penny and Bunzl (ed.), *Worldly Provincialism* 19.

⁵³ Andrew Zimmerman, 'Adventures in the skin trade: German anthropology and colonial corporeality' in: Glenn Penny and Bunzl (ed.), *Worldly Provincialism* 156-157.

⁵⁴ Glenn Penny and Bunzl (ed.), *Worldly Provincialism* 18-19.

⁵⁵ Fenneke Sysling, *The archipelago of difference. Physical anthropology in the Netherlands East Indies, ca. 1890-1960* (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam: dissertation, 2013) 86.

⁵⁶ *Idem*, 8.

⁵⁷ *Idem*, 227.

colonialism, headhunting and anthropology in East Timor.⁵⁸ In his view, there was no dichotomy between ‘headhunting’ and ‘pacification’, but a ‘parasitic symbiosis’, in which colonizer and colonized both fulfilled the role of ‘host-parasite’.⁵⁹ The Portuguese authorities and Timorese headhunters profited from each other and used each other at the same time. Faced with their own weaknesses as colonial rulers, the Portuguese in Timor had to incorporate and facilitate local customs and beliefs, *estilos*, into their rule.⁶⁰ The Portuguese even took headhunters (*arraias*) along with their military campaigns, with mutual benefit.⁶¹ The headhunters were to keep their booty, while the ‘head count’ of such campaigns actually added to Portuguese vitality as an imperial nation.⁶² Indigenous headhunting therefore lived on as a part of what was colonial, while European colonialism held the ‘otherness’ of indigenous headhunting inside itself.⁶³

Roque’s concept of mutual parasitism is a refreshing approach, but I doubt whether the concept can be applied to many more colonial situations. Roque suggests that colonial history might learn from the study of peripheral colonial fragments (like Timor) where colonial power was ‘weak and parasitic’, often entangled with ‘indigenous violence’. German South-West Africa was certainly, like Timor, an imperial backwater in a ‘wild and peripheral part of the world’, but here, there seem to have been little or none ‘organic connections with indigenous practices and almost unrestricted concessions to entrenched local arrangements’.⁶⁴ Rather, the Germans sought to destroy the societies of the Herero and Nama. At any rate, it was a completely different colonial situation: the Portuguese and Timorese had already been in contact since 1500, while Germans only arrived in South-West Africa in the late nineteenth century. Also, it was not possible for Nama and Herero prisoners to resist the endeavors of physical anthropologists. Still, the binary model that links anthropology to colonialism as its ‘handmaiden’ does not suffice for understanding the practices surrounding the skulls from German South-West Africa. This simple connection might explain (partially) why the skulls were used as anthropological specimens to prove the inferiority as Africans and why they were later used as evidence of the suffering of Nama and Herero, but it does not allow for a more complicated approach in which the skulls have multiple layers of meaning.

⁵⁸ Ricardo Roque, *Headhunting and colonialism. Anthropology and the circulation of human skulls in the Portuguese empire 1870-1930* (Basingstoke [etc.]: Palgrave Macmillan 2010) 7.

⁵⁹ Idem, 17.

⁶⁰ Idem, 59.

⁶¹ Idem, 33.

⁶² Idem, 24.

⁶³ Idem, 37.

⁶⁴ Idem, 222.

Although Sysling and Roque provide helpful frameworks for understanding the complex interrelationship between metropole and colony, their work lacks an analysis of the material culture of physical anthropology. Both assume that ‘objects, in the form of skeletal material’, unlike objects such as photographs (that can be interpreted) only reveal their historical background to scholars when they are documented.⁶⁵ I disagree. Bodily and skeletal remains can be ‘read’ as well. The condition they are in, the way they are preserved, the collection they are part of, are all indications of the ideas and practices of anthropologists collecting, handling and studying the skulls. It is unfortunate that Sysling’s visit to ‘what is left’ of the colonial medical schools in present-day Indonesia apparently only led to a disillusioned report of the state of the collection: ‘dusty shelves with skulls and pots containing specimens in spirits that have become milky over time’.⁶⁶

Like Sysling, Ricardo Roque relied heavily on sources of the colonial rulers to give flesh to his theories about interrelationships between colonizer and colonized. In my opinion, Roque should have analyzed his image material further. His book contains some fascinating photographs, but Roque only uses these to illustrate his narrative. Like Sysling, he relies too much on written sources, ignoring traces of the material culture of physical anthropology in a colonial context. But how to study these ‘traces of material culture’? To answer this question I will now turn to new approaches from the relatively young academic field of body history.

The material turn and the racialized body

Like colonial history, the field of body history has been heavily influenced by the writings of Michel Foucault. When academics first began to take the topic of the body seriously in the 1980s and 1990s the body was considered to be shaped in discourse and socially disciplined.⁶⁷ Body historians expanded on Foucault’s notion of ‘bio power’: physical control over the biological body as a means to control the individual. This ‘political technology’ is concerned with the disciplining of individual bodies and the regulating of larger human populations.⁶⁸ Racism comes in when these forms of control are carried out in the name of the race, for the welfare of the species or the survival of the population.⁶⁹ For Foucault, racism took shape in the second half of the nineteenth century when ‘a whole politics of settlement, family, marriage, education, social hierarchization, and property, accompanied by a long series of

⁶⁵ Roque, *Headhunting and colonialism* 7.

⁶⁶ Sysling, *The archipelago of difference* 7-8.

⁶⁷ Iris Clever and Willemijn Ruberg, ‘Beyond cultural history? The material turn, praxiography, and body history’, *Humanities* 3:4 (2014) 546.

⁶⁸ Stoler, *Race and the education of desire* 3-4.

⁶⁹ Young, ‘Foucault on race and colonialism’, 11.

permanent interventions at the level of the body, conduct, and everyday life, received their color and their justification from the *mythical concern with protecting the purity of blood* and ensuring the triumph of the race'.⁷⁰ 'Blood' is the key ideological term here, tying class, sexuality and race together.⁷¹ Clearly, for Foucault bio power and the body were to be located in discourse.

In Foucault's framework the individual corporeal experience was absent. New approaches in body history, grouped together as 'the material turn', have reacted against this preoccupation with discourse and social disciplining. These approaches aim to retrieve individual bodily agency by moving away from discursive constructionism without resorting to essentialism (older biologist concepts of the body), turning towards the material practices surrounding the body.⁷² The 'material turn' approaches are characterized by a multidimensional view in which the body is neither 'biological fact' nor 'social construction'. This multidimensional approach both complicates and deepens our understanding of the racialized body in a colonial context.

Canadian historian Lisa Helps based her material approach of the body on the work of Gilles Deleuze, defining the body not as a fixed/ stable unit but as an 'assemblage', interacting with the environment, actors, and other bodies and constantly becoming through embodiment. She argues that a focus on the body as a site of historical investigation can shed new light on historical processes such as colonization.⁷³ Mary-Ellen Kelms for example, demonstrates how the 'reshaping and re-formation' of Aboriginal bodies (through nutrition and diet, education etc.) was central to the process of colonization in British Columbia.⁷⁴ In her own research Helps focuses on the bodies of prisoners jailed for vagrancy to learn about the process of city-making of Victoria. The prisoners were frequently punished with a bread-and-water diet and had to perform labor in chain gangs. She sees these practices not merely as disciplinary measures, but also as attempts to 'block' the becoming of bodies.⁷⁵

Praxiography is a promising new development within the material turn. Departing from the notion that bodies acquire meaning in practices, praxiography is a systematic approach to analyze the practices surrounding bodies. Iris Clever and Willemijn Ruberg argue that this approach has the ability to move beyond the essentialist notion of the body as a stable

⁷⁰ Young, 'Foucault on race and colonialism', 12.

⁷¹ Idem, 11.

⁷² Clever and Ruberg, 'Beyond cultural history?', 547.

⁷³ Lisa Helps, 'Body, power, desire: mapping Canadian body history', *Journal of Canadian Studies* 41 (2007) 126.

⁷⁴ Idem, 138.

⁷⁵ Idem, 144.

identity independent of social encounters (a biological fact) and the constructionist notion of the body as the discursive product of these encounters (a social construction), because praxiography departs from a notion of *multiplicity* of the body and focuses on the *practice of enactment* in social encounters.⁷⁶ Using the example of a Dutch anthropological expedition to New Guinea, they evaluate to what extent praxiography enables historians to direct their attention to multiple actors and whether the method pays due attention to the material aspect of racial research.⁷⁷ They analyze the practice through reading material of anthropologist G. A. J. van der Sande along and against the grain and by studying his personal documents. In their analysis, praxiography successfully exposes the agency of the natives: they ultimately had control over their bodies and could and – as Van der Sande’s letters testify – did refuse access to researchers. The analysis also demonstrates that the western notion of the Papuan race was complex and fragmented: Van der Sande ignored inconsistencies in his data and manipulated clusters of race to be able to use his findings for racial classification.⁷⁸

The material turn in body history offers useful approaches to study the skulls as multilayered ‘objects’. Even though the skulls are not living bodies, but bodily remains, they continue to embody/ become, because they form different ‘assemblages’ in different practices (of collecting, studying and repatriating). It is in the material culture that we can find traces of these practices. Postcards, photographs, museum displays, transport boxes etc. become dynamic ‘contact points’ or places of encounter in which we can study the practices surrounding the racialized body in a (post)colonial context. Although the praxiographic approach demands more attention to material practices, different kinds of actors and a more open eye for encounters, the source material used by Ruberg and Clever in their analysis of an anthropological expedition still only consists of written material from the perspective of western anthropologist. Even though such sources can be read against the grain (a method I intend to use myself), what lacks again – as in the research by Roque and Sysling – is the use of physical traces of actual material culture surrounding practices.

Amade M’Charek approaches the material culture of practices closer because she uses her own personal experience in a praxiographic analysis. Rephrasing the distinction between ‘biological fact’ and ‘social construction’ as one between fact and fiction M’Charek uses a praxiographic approach to show that race is simultaneously factual and fictional and that a

⁷⁶ Clever and Ruberg, ‘Beyond cultural history?’, 553-554.

⁷⁷ Idem, 557.

⁷⁸ Idem, 559-560.

fact depends on its relations to fictions.⁷⁹ She suggests that fictions help ‘clean up the mess’ of different facts in tension or conflict with each other. In the case of Van der Sande’s research, data inconsistencies were ignored by manipulating clusters of racial classification. M’Charek gives a striking example from her own experience: when her infant was admitted to hospital, the simian palmar crease of the newborn was connected to her pale skin color and contrasted with the darker skin color of her mother. The paleness was therefore seen as an abnormality that might – together with the palmar crease – indicate Down Syndrome. When the father of the child turned out to have a light skin color, all suspicions of Down Syndrome faded. By analyzing the practice of this personal experience M’Charek demonstrates that race is established in relations between different bodies, in this case that of the parents and the infant.

Marieke Hendriksen took the new scholarly interest in the material culture of practices to the next level in her fascinating research on eighteenth-century anatomical collections. Wanting a more hands-on experience of the topic she was researching, she actually went through the process of making a preparation in order to gain a better understanding of the complexities involved in this process through ‘sensual knowledge’.⁸⁰ In two workshops, Hendriksen, together with some fellow researchers and staff members of Museum Boerhaave, made preparations of sheep hearts and a liver. Although Hendriksen acknowledged that it would have been impossible (and unpleasant) to recreate actual eighteenth-century circumstances in which preparations were made, the ‘slightly chaotic process’ of injecting the organs with colored wax proved an invaluable experience for the researchers.⁸¹ Firstly, the experiment affirmed that the task of making anatomical preparations relies largely on tacit knowledge – it is not possible to simply follow written instructions when making a preparation. Secondly, the fact that disgust quickly gave over to fascination in the process helps understand why Leiden anatomists wanted to share the beauty they encountered in anatomical practices with refined preparations. Finally, the team was surprised by the resistance of the materials used and the difficulty of commodifying them.⁸²

Methodology: contact points of practices

Of course, not every practice lends itself well for actual re-enactment. Certainly, the practices of interest for my research – the collecting, studying and repatriating of human remains – do

⁷⁹ Amade M’Charek, ‘Beyond fact or fiction. On the materiality of race in practice’, *Cultural Anthropology* 28:3 (2013) 420.

⁸⁰ Marieke Maria Anna Hendriksen, *Aesthesis in anatomy. Materiality and elegance in eighteenth-century Leiden anatomical collections* (Leiden University: dissertation, 2012) 199.

⁸¹ Idem, 200-201.

⁸² Idem, 210-211.

not. To study these practices from a material perspective, moving beyond the written source material, I will analyze ‘contact points’: material traces of these practices. In doing this, I build on the notion of ‘contact point’ as understood by Jeffrey David Feldman in his work on plaster casts made by Italian anthropologists, integrating his notion in a praxiographic approach.⁸³ Feldman argues that when the ‘embodied experience’, the unpleasant experience of casting that can actually be read from some of the faces of the people cast, is left out, a key aspect of the relationship between Italian colonialism and material culture is lost.⁸⁴ Racial casts actually ‘epitomize’ the ‘mimetic contact point’ because they offer visual cues of the body. The casts open onto a much broader experience of ‘body’ and stand symbolically for the whole.⁸⁵ It is this ‘embodied experience’ that makes them valuable and allows for multilayered interpretation. A 1996 exhibition about the image of Bushmen for example, which featured plaster casts, was criticized by Khoisan who recognized other embodiments in the plaster casts than the curators had done. They used the museal images of their own relatives and ancestors ‘to reconstitute community, to fortify the value of their tourist performances and broadly speaking, to seek greater control of their own cultural capital’.⁸⁶

Similarly, material traces of the practices of collecting, studying, and repatriating the Namibian skulls can reveal the meaning they have and had in these practices. Material traces are contact points of the experiences of these practices and reveal how, by whom, and in what context they were physically handled and discussed. Not only the skulls, the contact points themselves acquire layers of meaning in different practices throughout the years. A photograph of a severed Nama head made by an anthropologist in the early twentieth-century acquires a new layer of meaning when it is reproduced in a Namibian newspaper a hundred years later. Material traces like these are crucial for unravelling layers of meaning because it is in these contact points that different meanings and histories cross paths.

The series of photographs of Nama heads is one of the contact points I will analyze to answer *how* the skulls were encountered at different times and places in different practices. The first of these contact points is a postcard of soldiers packing skulls ‘for shipment to Berlin museums and universities’ (ca. 1905), a key source for the process of acquiring, packing and shipping the skulls. I will use this postcard as a focal point in my analysis of the practice of collecting. Even though this postcard is published in almost every article dealing with the

⁸³ Jeffrey David Feldman, ‘Contact points: museums and the lost body problem’ in: E. Edwards, C. Gosden and R. Phillips, *Sensible objects. Colonialism, museums and material culture* (Oxford/ New York: Berg, 2006) 246.

⁸⁴ Idem, 248.

⁸⁵ Idem, 255-256.

⁸⁶ Idem, 258.

Herero and Nama genocide, it has not been properly analyzed as either an image or an object. The second contact point, relating to the practice of studying the remains in the early twentieth century, consists of several sets of scientific drawings and the photographs made of the heads in the early twentieth century. These images are contact points for the practice of studying preserved heads and skulls. Finally, I will turn to the transport boxes and glass cases in which the skulls were presented during the repatriation ceremonies in Berlin and Windhoek as a focal point for my analysis of the practice of repatriating.

I begin my analysis of each practice with a detailed description of the material trace(s). Next, I proceed to shed light on the background of each practice: the colonial postcard trade and ‘power photography’ in German South-West Africa (collecting), the ‘turn towards race and nation’ and the growing popularity of anthropological visual material in Germany (studying), and the politics of remembrance and the Herero/ Nama quest for recompense in Namibia (repatriating). Practices do not consist of materiality alone, but are determined by a variety of factors including (keeping in mind Glenn Penny & Bunzl and Stoler respectively) the personal motivations of researchers and scientific developments in the metropole as well as colonial circumstances. Finally, I analyze what the material trace (as a contact point) reveals about each practice. Rather than using the material traces as examples for a much larger whole (representation of race in twentieth-century drawings for example) I try to zoom in on each specific practice. This resembles the methodology of Elizabeth Edwards. In her study of photography and anthropology she presents short case studies in which specific images or short series of images are considered in detail. In her view this has the advantage of concentrating on *reading* the image supported by contextual material, rather than *using* photographs to exemplify general statements.⁸⁷

In addition to analyzing these material traces of practices to answer how the skulls were encountered, I will rely for a large part on secondary literature to describe the background of the practices. Like Roque, Sysling, and Clever & Ruberg, I will read the writings of scientists who used the skulls as study objects in the early twentieth century ‘against the grain’, analyzing the practice they subjected the skulls to, but I will do the same with the documentation of the Charité Human Remains Project. In addition, I interviewed the project leader of the Charité Human Remains Project, Dr. Andreas Winkelmann, about the repatriation process. He kindly explained to me how the skulls were physically handled in this process, which would have been nigh on impossible to find out otherwise. In the spirit of

⁸⁷ Elizabeth Edwards, *Anthropology and photography 1860-1920* (New Haven/ London: Yale University Press, 1992) 5.

M'Charek and Hendriksen, I will keep in mind my personal experiences in the Windhoek Independence Memorial Museum, where the skulls are stored, hidden from public view, and several Berlin museums, where references to the skulls are entirely absent.

Before I begin my analysis of the practices of collecting, studying and repatriating the skulls, I want to emphasize that the twenty skulls discussed in this thesis are the mortal remains of actual human beings, who suffered greatly at the hands of German colonial forces. They should have been buried according to Herero or Nama custom. In order to get a grip on the sentiments involved in the practice of repatriating the skulls and underline the transgressive nature of the practices of collecting and studying them, I will first discuss the context of colonial genocide in which the skulls were collected.

3. 'The Herero are no longer German subjects':

Racial relations and genocide in German South-West Africa 1884-1914

In 1918 the new British-led South African administration of South-West Africa published the so-called 'Blue Book': an extensive report of the atrocities committed by Germans in the colony between 1884 and 1914.⁸⁸ The first part of the report described the fate of 'natives' in German South-West Africa, from the first injustices done to the Herero, to the military campaign against the Herero and Nama and the maltreatment of 'prisoners-of-war'. The second part of the book treated the topic of 'natives and criminal law', focusing on the lack of legal protection and disproportionate punishments of Africans in the colony. In a sense, the Blue Book was First World War propaganda, intended to prove that Germans were not fit to run colonies. Despite this intent, the evidence produced in the book – photographs, German documentation and sworn statements of victims and witnesses – still makes it a valuable source of information for the fate of black Namibians under colonial rule. An estimated eighty per cent of the Herero and fifty per cent of the Nama had died under German colonial rule – many of them had perished in concentration camps.

Even though the British were far from blameless themselves, author Major O'Reilly placed the atrocities committed by the Germans in the context of their belief in racial superiority, condescendingly referring to Germans as 'simpleminded people who really believed in the superior *'Kultur'* of their race'.⁸⁹ The author suggested that the killing of natives was actually condoned by the authorities because 'from the point of view of the, at that time, comparatively few German settlers in the country there were far too many Hereros'.⁹⁰ This was the context in which general Lothar von Trotha issued his *Vernichtungsbefehl* in the first month of the war: by butchering 'this now disorganized, leaderless, and harmless tribe' he solved the perceived Herero-problem.⁹¹ In this chapter I discuss how the relation between the Germans and the Herero and Nama in the colony could eventually lead to genocide and a climate in which skulls and preserved heads of victims were shipped to the home country. I examine the relations between colonizer and colonized before the war in metropole and colony, and the dehumanization of Nama and Herero during the war.

⁸⁸ Jan-Bart Gewald and Jeremy Silvester, *Words cannot be found. German colonial rule in Namibia. An annotated reprint of the 1918 Blue Book* (Leiden: Brill, 2003) XV-XVII.

⁸⁹ *Idem*, 111.

⁹⁰ *Idem*, 93.

⁹¹ *Idem*, 109.

‘Protection treaties’

Present-day Namibia came under German rule in 1884, when Bismarck after much deliberation agreed to ‘protect’ German trading posts already established in the area. A year before, tobacco trader Adolf Lüderitz had requested protection for his planned trading post at Angra Pequena in present-day Lüderitz.⁹² Bismarck had been reluctant, but when the British, who were in control of Walvisbaai, ‘found’ documents that proved they had rights over the area, he felt forced to act.⁹³ The Germans managed to get a foothold in the area thanks to strife between the Nama and the Herero and internal rivalry.⁹⁴ The Herero, a pastoral people, lived in the middle of the country, the Nama, pastoralists and traders led by captain Hendrik Witbooi, had control over the area to the South of them. White settlement was slow: by 1891 the white population only stood at 139.⁹⁵ Facing some 200,000-300,000 black Namibians in an area one-and-a-half times the size of the German Reich, Germany’s high expectations of economic benefits from the colony were only very slowly or not fulfilled at all.⁹⁶

Under the first *Reichskommissar*, Dr. H. E. Göring (father of the later nazi *Reichsmarschall*) the tactic of the small number of Germans was to establish themselves in the area by signing ‘protection treaties’ (*Schutzverträge*) with various local leaders, the first with Nama leader Jozef Fredericks in October 1884.⁹⁷ Nama captain Hendrik Witbooi himself however, ignored their advances. He condemned the signing of treaties with the Germans. When chief Manasse of Nama clan Red Nation (*Rooi nasie*) signed a treaty with the Germans and accepted a German flag, Witbooi confiscated it and wrote to Göring: ‘I captured the flag which you had presented to Manasse. It is now in my keeping. I should like to know what to do with this flag; I ask because it is an alien thing to me’.⁹⁸ For prospecting expeditions arriving in the colony in the 1880s to prospect for valuable minerals, ‘the powerlessness of the German authorities’ came as a great shock. They had to ask Witbooi, not Göring, for permission to prospect for minerals on Nama land.⁹⁹

Like the Nama, the Herero were a well-organized people who possessed modern fire arms. They did not match the military strength of Witbooi however, and Germans used the

⁹² David Olusoga and Casper W. Erichsen, *The Kaiser’s Holocaust. Germany’s forgotten genocide and the colonial roots of Nazism* (London: Faber and Faber, 2010) 33.

⁹³ Idem, 37.

⁹⁴ Sebastian Conrad, *Deutsche Kolonialgeschichte* (München: C. H. Beck, 2008) 27.

⁹⁵ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser’s Holocaust* 62.

⁹⁶ Karlheinz Graudenz and Hanns-Michael Schindler, *Die deutschen Kolonien. Geschichte der deutschen Schutzgebiete in Wort, Bild und Karte* (Augsburg: Weltbild Verlag, 1988) 58.

⁹⁷ Idem, 56.

⁹⁸ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser’s Holocaust* 51.

⁹⁹ Idem, 52.

Nama threat to coax them into signing protection treaties. Herero soon found out that ‘protection treaties’ with Germans were worthless. Not only were Germans unable and unwilling to stand up to Witbooi, many prospectors were violent and abusive. The problems were magnified because of the gender imbalance in the colony: white men outnumbered white women by far. Many of the first generation of German settlers married Rehoboth Baster girls, Christians who descended from sexual liaisons between Afrikaners and Khoisan and were considered ‘European’ enough to marry. German women protested against such mixed-marriages, arguing that these liaisons would de-civilize German men (*Verkafferung*) and return marriage to a state of ‘primitive male brutality’. German men meanwhile used the syndrome of ‘going native’ as an excuse for their treatment and rape of African women.¹⁰⁰ Rape of black women by white men was so common that German settlers had names for it like *Schmutzwirtschaft* (dirty trade).¹⁰¹ These abuses were justified by the conviction shared by the majority of the German settlers (and soldiers) of ‘belonging to a superior race’.¹⁰²

When German prospectors ‘took liberties’ with Herero women in the early days of the colony, chiefs were outraged.¹⁰³ It was Göring himself however, who ‘transgressed the customs of the Herero most unforgivably’ by adding an extension to the old mission building in the Herero settlement of Otjimbingwe, which he purchased in 1885, over a Herero graveyard, disturbing the sacred bones of ancestors. The *Rheinische Mission* had been active in the area since the mid-1800s and had Christianized several hundred Herero.¹⁰⁴ The mission documented the ‘heathen’ burial customs of the Herero extensively. When a prominent Herero died, sacred cattle of the deceased were slaughtered, their horns placed on a giraffe acacia tree standing to the West of the grave as a symbol of the status of the deceased. The tree and surrounding ground would then be sacred.¹⁰⁵ Missionaries collected such ‘*Grabmals*’ to document the success of the mission: one can still be found in the *Völkerkundemuseum* of Wuppertal.¹⁰⁶ Göring’s blunt conduct was another matter though. Confronted by a furious paramount chief Tjamuaha in 1888 Göring left the protectorate ‘fearing for his life’.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁰ Lora Wildenthal, ‘Race, gender, and citizenship in the German colonial empire’ in: Cooper and Stoler (ed.), *Tensions of empire* 280.

¹⁰¹ Benjamin Madley, ‘Patterns of frontier genocide 1803-1910’, *Journal of Genocide Research* 6 (2004) 183.

¹⁰² *Idem*, 184.

¹⁰³ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser’s Holocaust* 53.

¹⁰⁴ Larissa Förster, Dag Henrichsen and Michael Bollig, *Namibia – Deutschland. Eine geteilte Geschichte. Widerstand – Gewalt – Erinnerung* (Köln: Rautenstrauch-Joest-Museum für Völkerkunde/ Wolfratshausen: Edition Minerva, 2004) 52.

¹⁰⁵ H. G. Luttig, *The religious system and social organization of the Herero. A study in Bantu culture* (Utrecht: Kemink en Zoon N.V., 1933) 39.

¹⁰⁶ Förster, Henrichsen and Bollig, *Namibia – Deutschland* 58.

¹⁰⁷ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser’s Holocaust* 53.

Göring's successor, Curt von François, tried to subjugate the Namibians with military might – he massacred Witbooi's clan at Hoornkrans in 1893– but failed to gain control in the colony. That year the *Reichstag* summoned up the situation: 'Witbooi is the real master of the country and François is no match for him'.¹⁰⁸ His successor Theodor Leutwein, who arrived in the colony in 1894, managed to gain control by a system of '*divide et impera*'.¹⁰⁹ His strategy was two-fold: he built up the German administration, including a new administrative center and permanent settlement at Windhoek, while at the same time 'establishing formal working relations with the leaders of the different African groups'.¹¹⁰ After forcing a treaty upon the Khauas and Franzmann Nama within weeks of his arrival, he confronted Witbooi and a thirteen day battle at Naukluft ensued. Eventually, Witbooi (still a formidable enemy) signed a treaty which obliged him to 'maintain peace and order in his territory'.¹¹¹

The Herero were likewise drawn in the colonial fold with Leutwein's protection treaties. Although the Herero were well-aware of his intention to transfer all their best land and cattle into 'white hands', they had little choice but to sign the treaties.¹¹² Herero society had become fragmented and impoverished during the first decades of colonial rule. In his account of the socio-political history of the Herero before the war, Jan-Bart Gewald paints a picture of a society very much in decline.¹¹³ Political unity in Herero society unraveled after Samuel Maharero illegitimately took the place of his father, Herero chief Maharero Tjamuaha, after his death in 1890. To consolidate his power Samuel Maharero was dependent on Theodor Leutwein, who in turn needed Maharero's support to give the German colonization the air of legitimacy crucial to his divide-and-rule policy.¹¹⁴ The rinderpest epidemic that reached Namibia in 1896 and killed cattle on a massive scale dealt another heavy blow to Herero society. Traditional systems of patronage were destroyed, and the economic devastation left the Herero 'hopelessly indebted'.¹¹⁵ Gewald argues that Herero society had lost its independence and '(...) became dependent on the good will of the colonial state for its very existence'.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁸ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust* 78.

¹⁰⁹ Conrad, *Deutsche Kolonialgeschichte* 29.

¹¹⁰ Jürgen Zimmerer and Joachim Zeller, *Genocide in German South-West Africa. The colonial war of 1904-1908 and its aftermath* (Monmouth: Merlin Press, 2008) 26

¹¹¹ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust* 83.

¹¹² *Idem*, 182.

¹¹³ Jan-Bart Gewald, 'Colonization, genocide and resurgence: the Herero of Namibia 1890-1933' in: J.B. Gewald and M. Bollig (ed.), *People, cattle and land. Transformations of a pastoral society in southwestern Africa* (Köln: Köppe, 2000).

¹¹⁴ *Idem*, 194.

¹¹⁵ *Idem*, 199.

¹¹⁶ Gewald, 'Colonization, genocide and resurgence', 200-201.

The 1896 'Völkerschau'

The Germans justified their conduct in the colony with a belief in the superior *Kultur* of their race, based on new notions about the nature of the German *Volk* and *Naturvölker* of the colonies. Anthropology, considered a natural science at the time, was *en vogue* and at the forefront of these ideas. German anthropology had a distinct character, represented by the *Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte* (BGAEU) which was established by prominent medical doctor, politician and anthropologist Rudolf Virchow in 1869. The German anthropologists associated with the BGAEU embarked on a *Kulturkampf* directed at 'catholic backwardness', transforming notions of culture to 'create a new science and new civic identity for a German polity marked by mass culture, imperialism and natural science'.¹¹⁷ In their view 'subjective historical narratives' had to be replaced by 'objective' observations of people 'uncomplicated by culture and historical development'. They rejected humanism and proposed to study *Naturvölker*, non-European 'natural peoples' without history and culture, rather than *Kulturvölker* (like the German *Volk*) to understand humanity.¹¹⁸

Völkerschauen provided an excellent opportunity for German anthropologists to study such *Naturvölker*. At *Völkerschauen*, representatives of exotic races from the colonies were put on display in Germany for an audience hungry for curiosities and anthropologists eager to add measurements and even bones to their collection.¹¹⁹ They were spectacular events at the crossroads of mass culture, imperialism, and natural science. One of the largest of these manifestations was the 1896 Berlin Colonial Exhibition, organized by the Colonial Section of the German Imperial Foreign Office in collaboration with a group of private financial bankers. More than one hundred people from German colonies in Africa and the Pacific came over to Berlin to live and perform next to a carp pond in Treptower Park during the summer.¹²⁰ The show replicated a visual encyclopedia by featuring an array of villages populated by German East Africans, Togolese, Herero, and Pacific Islanders.¹²¹ The apparent authenticity however, was fabricated. The supposedly 'traditional houses' of forty East Africans and 'ancestral huts' of the Pacific Islanders could only be built with the help of anthropologist Felix von Luschan of the *Museum für Völkerkunde* in Berlin.¹²²

¹¹⁷ Zimmerman, *Anthropology and antihumanism in imperial Germany* 39.

¹¹⁸ Idem, 38.

¹¹⁹ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust* 92.

¹²⁰ Zimmerman, *Anthropology and antihumanism in imperial Germany* 24.

¹²¹ Sierra A. Bruckner, 'Spectacles of (human) nature: commercial ethnography between leisure, learning, and Schaulust' in: Glenn Penny and Bunzl (ed.), *Worldly Provincialism* 130.

¹²² Zimmerman, *Anthropology and antihumanism in imperial Germany* 26.

Interestingly, the 1896 colonial exhibition was a kind of two-way *Völkerschau*: ‘the German state tried to recruit indigenous elites as performers, hoping to bolster colonial domination by impressing them with German museums, theaters, zoos, and military parades during their stay in Berlin’.¹²³ German South-West Africa was represented by the Herero. While rinderpest raged in the Herero communities, Samuel Maharero sent five notables, including his eldest son Friedrich Maharero, to the colonial exhibition as a ‘diplomatic party’. He had arranged for them to meet Kaiser Wilhelm after the exhibition to confirm the loyalty of the Herero to Germany and to support the current governor of German South-West Africa – Leutwein – against criticisms that he ruled too leniently.¹²⁴ It was an occasion to discuss and consolidate the ‘fragile power balance’ in the country.¹²⁵ Like other elites ‘on display’, the Christian Herero diplomats were far from the *Naturvölker* envisaged by anthropologists. The Herero ‘act’ for the exhibition was driving around on the exhibition grounds in an ox-cart used by both black and white farmers in their home country. Only once – to the dismay of a missionary present – the Herero changed into old-fashioned costumes and performed Herero rituals ‘to show the public what “heathens” back in Southwest Africa did’.¹²⁶

The 1896 Colonial Exhibition not only offered Germans in the metropole a glimpse of the people from the colonies, it also offered scientists an opportunity to make ‘objective observations’. The Africans however, turned out to be reluctant to pose in front of the camera in the costumes they wore as ‘traditional clothing’ at the exhibition. To the frustration of Von Luschan, most insisted on wearing their habitual formal European dress for photographs, blurring the distinction between ‘cultural’ and ‘natural’ peoples. Luschan referred to these Africans contemptuously as ‘*Hosennigger*’ (sic).¹²⁷ Luschan then set his hope on measuring the people, but again he found it difficult to persuade them to ‘strip off their European shells’.¹²⁸ I could not find out how the Herero party responded to Von Luschan’s attempts, but a photograph of a sophisticated Maharero in suit and tie taken during his stay, suggests they would have been reluctant to cooperate.¹²⁹ When some exhibited people fell ill, Von Luschan jumped on the chance and struck a deal with Wilhelm Waldeyer of the Pathological Institute and the organizers of the exhibition. Should any Africans or Pacific Islanders die in Berlin,

¹²³ Zimmerman, *Anthropology and antihumanism in imperial Germany* 24.

¹²⁴ Idem, 28-29.

¹²⁵ Bruckner, ‘Spectacles of (human) nature’, 135.

¹²⁶ Zimmerman, *Anthropology and antihumanism in imperial Germany* 28.

¹²⁷ Idem, 33.

¹²⁸ Idem, 34.

¹²⁹ Idem, 29.

Waldeyer would get the brains and soft parts of their bodies, while he would keep the skeletons.¹³⁰

Zürn's skulls

Despite Samuel Maharero's diplomatic attempts to consolidate and improve relations between the Herero and the Germans, at the cost of his son playing heathen in a human zoo, the abuse and maltreatment towards Herero only increased. Rape of women, physical abuse and legal inequality were the main grievances. Often, members of the colonial army were the perpetrators. From the late 1890s 'levels of racial abuse in South-West Africa began to increase', and 'a succession of junior *Schutztruppe* officers were implicated in murders, rapes and beatings of Africans'.¹³¹ Large-scale German cattle purchases were considered a threat for the Herero way of life, whose society was based on cattle ownership. European merchants tricked and swindled the Herero and took cattle as payment for debts, even forcing them to part with their sacred cattle.¹³² When Herero wanted to complain, they had nowhere to turn to: in court the evidence of one white outweighed that of up to seven Africans.¹³³

In January 1904, Herero finally attacked European settlers – initially only in Okahandja. Gewalt argues that 'ideas of a nation-wide insurrection existed solely in German colonial minds'.¹³⁴ The brutal response of the Germans however ensured that the uprising spiraled into a full-scale war: 'events in Okahandja were the spark that set all of Hereroland ablaze'.¹³⁵ According to Gewalt the war broke out as a result of 'settler paranoia coupled with the incompetence and panic of a German officer': *Distriktchef Leutnant* Ralph Zürn, who was responsible under Leutwein for obtaining land from the Herero through whatever means necessary.¹³⁶ Five weeks before the fighting broke out, at the end of 1903, Zürn had demanded a number of Herero leaders to sign a contract that condoned the transfer of large tracts of ancestral land to the German authorities and the establishment of a second Herero reservation. When the chiefs refused, Zürn simply decided to forge the contract by signing it with a series of 'X's' and on 8 December he announced that the boundaries of northern and central Hereroland had been formally agreed.¹³⁷

¹³⁰ Zimmerman, *Anthropology and antihumanism in imperial Germany* 35.

¹³¹ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust* 120.

¹³² Madley, 'Patterns of frontier genocide 1803-1910', 183.

¹³³ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust* 119.

¹³⁴ Gewalt, 'Colonization, genocide and resurgence', 201.

¹³⁵ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust* 126.

¹³⁶ Gewalt, 'Colonization, genocide and resurgence', 205.

¹³⁷ Jan-Bart Gewalt, *Herero Heroes. A socio-political history of the Herero of Namibia 1890-1923* (Oxford: James Currey/ Cape Town: David Philip/ Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999) 147.

Although this would clearly have been a huge insult to the Herero chiefs, many of them literate, Zürn's disrespect went even further. Göring had already experienced in 1888 that it was absolutely unforgivable to disturb sacred ancestral remains. While Göring had done so more or less by accident, possibly without realizing the dire consequences, Zürn deliberately ordered his men to exhume skulls from various Herero graves in Okahandja. On at least one occasion in 1903 his men dug up skulls, probably 'as an easy source of additional income'. There was a worldwide trade in human remains at the time and anthropological collectors would have been eager to buy such skulls.¹³⁸ In 1905, Ludwig Conradt, a German trader and confidential of Samuel Maharero, would name the 'desecration of the graves of Okahandja' as 'one of the main reasons why the Herero had risen up'.¹³⁹

In this 'aggressive atmosphere of crude disregard for Herero rights', rumors among settlers and soldiers started to circulate about an impending uprising.¹⁴⁰ With rumors going around, Zürn misinterpreted the arrival of a delegation of some two-hundred Herero in Okahandja. They had come to settle a succession dispute under the guidance of Samuel Maharero. These were the very men whose signatures Zürn had forged weeks earlier. In panic, he reported to Windhoek that Herero were approaching, revolt was imminent and he needed reinforcements.¹⁴¹ According to missionary Wandres, Zürn's cowardice was rooted in his 'bad conscience': '[H]e had dealt with the inhabitants of Okahandja, particularly Samuel, in a very brusque manner and was known to say things like: "When a native comes and complains, then I wallop (*haue*) him a couple of times behind the ears".'¹⁴² When the shooting started, Zürn effectively barricaded himself in the fort, from where he took the missionary house under heavy fire.¹⁴³ He took no half measures: Leutwein would later write that the Herero were unable to storm the fort '*auf die von 71 Gewehren unter Oberleutnant der Reserve Zürn verteidigten Mauern*'.¹⁴⁴

In June 1904 Zürn was relieved of his duty and sent back to Germany. With his trademark disregard, he did not forget to bring home one of the Herero skulls he had dug up from a grave in Okahandja.¹⁴⁵ Two years later he donated it to Felix von Luschan, who had been so eager to acquire human remains of the *Naturvölker* on display at the colonial exhibition eight years earlier. Luschan had written to him in April 1905 because he was

¹³⁸ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust* 127-128.

¹³⁹ Idem, 128.

¹⁴⁰ Gewalt, *Herero Heroes* 148.

¹⁴¹ Idem, 150.

¹⁴² Idem, 149.

¹⁴³ Idem, 154.

¹⁴⁴ Theodor Leutwein, *Elf Jahre Gouverneur in Deutsch-Südwestafrika* (Berlin: E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1908) 473.

¹⁴⁵ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust* 128.

interested in the Herero skull 'he was rumored to have brought back'. He persuaded Zürn to donate the skull to his collection and proceeded to ask him if he knew any contacts in the colonies that could help him 'secure a larger collection of Herero skulls for scientific investigation'.¹⁴⁶ Zürn was happy to oblige. One of the first Herero skulls that found its way into German anthropological collections, was brought home by a lieutenant that had effectively set the destruction of the Herero and Nama in motion – a destruction that would in turn provide more skulls for German scientists to examine.

War fever

The attacks in Okahandja provoked a brutal crack-down by settlers and soldiers in the colony. Herero working for German companies and farmers were arrested and imprisoned as a matter of precaution, there were cases of lynching by settlers, and Herero communities who did not take part in the uprising were attacked nonetheless.¹⁴⁷ Exaggerated reports of the initial attacks provoked outright war fever in Germany.¹⁴⁸ The German press constructed an image of the Herero as a fearsome barbarian, a dangerous enemy that did not actually exist in reality.¹⁴⁹ Newspapers fabricated stories of white women being raped and children killed (in reality, Maharero urged his followers to spare women and children) and of murdered male settlers who had their noses and testicles cut off.¹⁵⁰ In a striking role reversal, trading cards of coffee and chocolate companies depicted blood-thirsty Herero men, stealing cattle and plundering German households (figures 1 and 2).

In the jingoistic atmosphere that developed, settlers did not have faith in Leutwein's attempt to solve matters through negotiation with Maharero and demanded military action.¹⁵¹ The dominant argument in the home country was that the Herero had to be punished. The German Colonial Society who represented the interests of the German settlers in the colonies, drummed up support for a large-scale military intervention, warning that the 'savage race' of the Herero would only respond to military force.¹⁵² Partly driven by public opinion, Kaiser Wilhelm sent in general Lothar von Trotha to take command of the German troops in

¹⁴⁶ Andrew Zimmerman, 'Adventures in the skin trade: German anthropology and colonial corporeality' in: Glenn Penny and Bunzl (ed.), *Worldly Provincialism* 174.

¹⁴⁷ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust* 129.

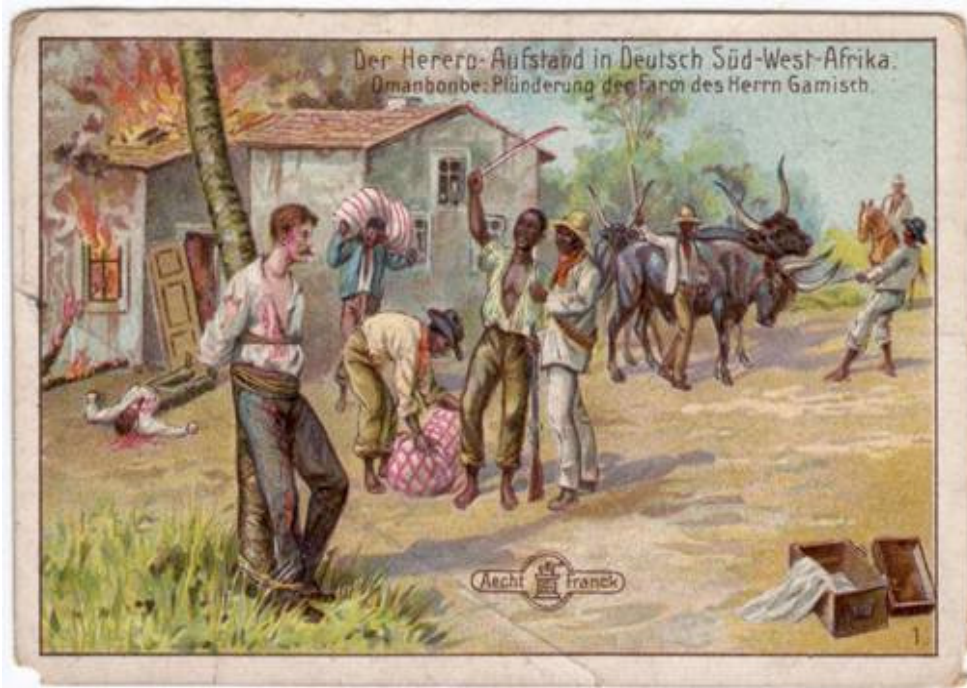
¹⁴⁸ Madley, 'Patterns of frontier genocide 1803-1910', 185.

¹⁴⁹ David Olusoga, *Namibia: genocide and the Second Reich* (BBC documentary, 15 August 2005).

¹⁵⁰ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust* 130.

¹⁵¹ Gewalt, 'Colonization, genocide and resurgence', 205.

¹⁵² Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust* 131.



Figures 1 and 2. Trading cards issued by the Aecht Franck coffee company, ca. 1905.

Namibia.¹⁵³ Von Trotha had forged a reputation for ‘ruthlessness’ as a commander in German East Africa and had been in charge of a unit attacking Chinese villages in the aftermath of the Boxer Rebellion in 1901.¹⁵⁴ He shared the public’s conviction that the Herero should be punished. In his view, all African tribes had ‘the same mentality insofar as they yield only to force’. In 1904 he wrote: ‘It was and remains my policy to apply this force by absolute terrorism and even cruelty. I shall destroy the rebellious tribes by shedding rivers of blood and money. Only then will it be possible to sow the seeds of something new that will endure.’¹⁵⁵

By the time Von Trotha had arrived in the colony in June, the vast majority of the Herero, some 50,000, had united under the leadership of Samuel Maharero. Together with tens of thousands of heads of cattle they had congregated around the Waterberg plateau while the Herero leaders were considering their options: negotiating with the Germans, fighting back, or fleeing to British-controlled Bechuana (Botswana) – but this would mean an almost impossible trek through the *Omaheke*, the Kalahari desert.¹⁵⁶ In August, Von Trotha overran the Herero with ease. He then pursued the fleeing survivors into the desert and began a systematic killing of men, women, and children. He blocked the escape routes back to Herero territory by cordoning off huge stretches of land and cutting off water holes.¹⁵⁷ Von Trotha then issued a proclamation which has become known as the *Vernichtungsbefehl*, declaring that every Herero in German territory would be shot.¹⁵⁸ The order read:

“I, the Great General of the German troops, send this letter to the Herero people. The Herero are no longer German subjects. *They have murdered and stolen; they have cut off the ears, noses and other body-parts of wounded soldiers;* now out of cowardice they no longer wish to fight. I say to the people: Anyone who delivers a captain will receive 1000 Marks. Whoever delivers Samuel [Maharero] will receive 5000 Marks. The Herero people must however leave the land. If the populace does not do this I will force them with the Groot Rohr [Cannon]. Within the German borders every Herero, with or without a gun, with or without cattle, will be shot. I will no longer accept women and children, I will drive them back to their people or I will let them be shot at.

¹⁵³ Olusoga, *Namibia: genocide and the Second Reich*.

¹⁵⁴ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser’s Holocaust* 138.

¹⁵⁵ *Idem*, 139.

¹⁵⁶ *Idem*, 141.

¹⁵⁷ *Idem*, 147.

¹⁵⁸ Gewalt, ‘Colonization, genocide and resurgence’, 206-207.

These are my words to the Herero people. [Signed: The great General of the mighty Kaiser]”¹⁵⁹

Benjamin Madley has argued that frustration on the part of the Germans played an important part in this course of action. The German troops suffered from disease and had to deal with an inhospitable terrain, lack of water and an opponent who, when fighting did occur, used guerrilla tactics.¹⁶⁰ Not only Herero were killed, other Africans – Damara, Ovambo, and San – also fell victim to the troops: ‘[h]undreds of miles from their senior commanders, operating on the fringe of an endless desert and under order to shoot Herero on sight, it may well have been a very small step for exhausted men to reinterpret their orders as a license to kill all Africans’.¹⁶¹ Afrikaner historian Gerhardus Pool wrote about a division that had to fight in ‘*n uitgestrekte, byna waterlose sandwereld*’, far from any military posts. ‘*Die skaars waterbronne en die groot afstande tussen hulle was vir menige Duitse troepe-afdeling ’n nagmerrie. Waterbesoedeling en die siektes wat dit tot gevolg gehad het, veral maagkoors, was ’n wesentlike gevaar.*’¹⁶² Added to this was fear. Rumors of Herero cruelty (as stressed by Von Trotha in the *Vernichtungsbefehl*) were fueled by findings of dead mutilated Germans on the battlefield. Pool describes how wounded German soldiers were beaten to death with ‘*knopkeries*’ and ‘*baie*’ or ‘*gruwelik vermink*’.¹⁶³

Late December 1904 the *Vernichtungsbefehl* was lifted again, after the stories of Herero women and children dying of thirst in the Kalahari desert had caused a national scandal back home.¹⁶⁴ By ending the policy of extermination, Kaiser Wilhelm responded to domestic pressure and extensive missionary lobbying. However, this only meant the start of the last and most destructive phase of the genocide, when the remaining Herero were rounded up and put into concentration camps in Windhoek and along the coast. The prisoners each received a number (they had to wear a metal badge with this number around their necks) and were then used as laborers for military and civilian enterprises.¹⁶⁵ Big companies even had their own concentration camps.¹⁶⁶ In horrendous conditions, the prisoners were ‘driven to

¹⁵⁹ Erichsen, “*The angel of death has descended violently among them*” 10, quoted from: Jan-Bart Gewald, ‘The great general of the Kaiser’, *Botswana notes and records* 26 (1994).

¹⁶⁰ Madley, ‘Patterns of frontier genocide 1803-1910’, 185.

¹⁶¹ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser’s Holocaust* 153.

¹⁶² Gerhardus Pool, *Die Herero-opstand 1904-1907* (Cape Town: Hollandsch Afrikaansche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1979) 161.

¹⁶³ Idem, 180 and 217.

¹⁶⁴ Olusoga, *Namibia: genocide and the Second Reich*.

¹⁶⁵ Gewald, ‘Colonization, Genocide and Resurgence’, 209.

¹⁶⁶ Olusoga, *Namibia: genocide and the Second Reich*.

death like cattle'.¹⁶⁷ The majority of the prisoners died of exhaustion.¹⁶⁸ Of the estimated 80,000 Herero who lived in German South-West Africa before the war, only 15,130 survivors were recorded in the 1911 census.¹⁶⁹

At Waterberg, Nama troops had fought on the side of the Germans. Soon afterwards however, Hendrik Witbooi decided that war with the Germans was inevitable and commenced hostilities towards the Germans in September 1904. Possibly, the experience of his troops at Waterberg, who brought home accounts of German cruelty, influenced this turnaround.¹⁷⁰ The Nama leaders, fluent in German and Afrikaans, were also aware of the eventual aim of the settlers to disarm and control the entire African population.¹⁷¹ Like the Herero before them, the Nama attacked isolated farms and villages.¹⁷² What followed was a guerrilla war that continued for years, even after Hendrik Witbooi was fatally wounded and died on 29 October 1905.¹⁷³ Some Herero units who had made their way South joined the Nama in their fight against the Germans. After Witbooi died, the 'biggest problem' for the Germans was Nama leader Cornelius Fredericks who fought them on a variety of fronts in collaboration with Germany's 'state enemy number one', Jacob Marengo. Fredericks and his men were eventually cornered and forced to surrender in March 1906. They were interned on Shark Island, where Fredericks died on 26 February 1907.¹⁷⁴

Shark Island, an island in Lüderitz Bay linked to the mainland by a small causeway, was the most notorious of all concentration camps. The actual camp was located on the most northern tip of the island, completely exposed to gale-force wind and surrounded by icy waters.¹⁷⁵ Lack of shelter, nourishment, and warm clothes together with forced labor, abuse, and rape caused the people who were imprisoned here to die in droves.¹⁷⁶ On 9 September 1906 some two-thousand Nama prisoners arrived at Shark Island, where a thousand Herero were already imprisoned.¹⁷⁷ Within weeks the Nama began to die: the first reports spoke of 15-20 deaths every week – a few months later it was reported that there were often days when as many as eighteen people died. The Herero died in similar numbers. Many died of scurvy.

¹⁶⁷ Gewalt, 'Colonization, genocide and resurgence', 210.

¹⁶⁸ Olusoga, *Namibia: genocide and the Second Reich*.

¹⁶⁹ Allan D. Cooper, 'Reparations for the Herero genocide: defining the limits of international litigation', *African Affairs* 106:422 (2006) 114.

¹⁷⁰ Zimmerer and Zeller, *Genocide in German South-West Africa* 147.

¹⁷¹ Idem, 149.

¹⁷² Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust* 176.

¹⁷³ Zimmerer and Zeller, *Genocide in German South-West Africa* 152.

¹⁷⁴ Idem, 153.

¹⁷⁵ Erichsen, "The angel of death has descended violently among them" 71-72.

¹⁷⁶ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust* 210-211.

¹⁷⁷ Idem, 214.

The prisoners suffered from the cold coastal climate and only received uncooked rice and flour as regular rations, with hardly any facilities to cook. Emaciated and sick, the Nama were still made to perform heavy labor in the harbor of Lüderitz, constructing a new quay.¹⁷⁸ We know of the mortality rates because a frustrated project leader of the quay construction saw his work force dwindle from 1600 to 30-40 Nama in a matter of months and complained to the authorities because he was afraid 'the work will not be completed'. In mid-February 1907 the construction project was abandoned because seventy per cent of the Nama on Shark Island were dead, and of those still alive, a third was so sick they were likely to die soon.¹⁷⁹ It was from here, that at least some of the twenty Herero and Nama skulls were sent as preserved heads in 1907. They belonged to prisoners who had died in horrific circumstances.

¹⁷⁸ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust* 214-215.

¹⁷⁹ *Idem*, 216.

4. 'Kijk die kopbeenen wat hulle begraven':

the practice of collecting skulls in German South-West Africa (1904-1910)

There is only one known image of the practice of collecting human remains for anthropological research in German South-West Africa: a postcard on which we see a group of German colonial soldiers packing skulls into a wooden crate. The caption on the back reads '*Verladung der für deutsche Museen u. Universitäten bestimmten Herero-Schädel*': 'transport of Herero-skulls destined for German museums and universities'. The fact that settlers in German South-West Africa made this photograph into a postcard, a popular mass-medium, seems to indicate that this practice was not considered abnormal by the producers, senders or receivers of the card. However, a superficial reading of the image depicted leads to hasty, generalized conclusions about the way human remains were collected in German South-West Africa. Not all human remains were sent to Germany in this way: eighteen of the twenty skulls discussed in this thesis arrived in Berlin as preserved heads with the soft tissue still intact. The card is therefore not entirely representative of the collecting practice in the colony.

Only when we move beyond the image and analyze the card as a contact point of the practice of collecting, do we understand the true connotations of the image and the layers of meaning the skulls acquired in this practice. In this chapter I analyze the card in the context of anthropological collecting, the colonial postcard trade, military policy, and 'power photography' in the colony. I compare different versions of the image and importantly, I will also turn one example of the postcard around, engaging the written text on the back. Analyzed from this material perspective, the postcard proves to be a valuable source of information about the way human remains were collected in German South-West Africa. It turns out that the skulls were more than just anthropological 'objects' in the practice of collecting.

'Eine Kiste mit Hereroschädeln'

Before critically analyzing the card as a material trace of the practice of collecting, I will briefly discuss the image and the conclusions other authors have drawn from an analysis of this source. On the first postcard I want to discuss we see a retouched black and white photograph printed in a grey monochromatic tint (figure 3). The card has yellowed with age and is worn around the edges. We see five German soldiers, dressed in the khaki uniform worn by regular German *Schutztruppe* in the colonies. In the foreground, a soldier is using

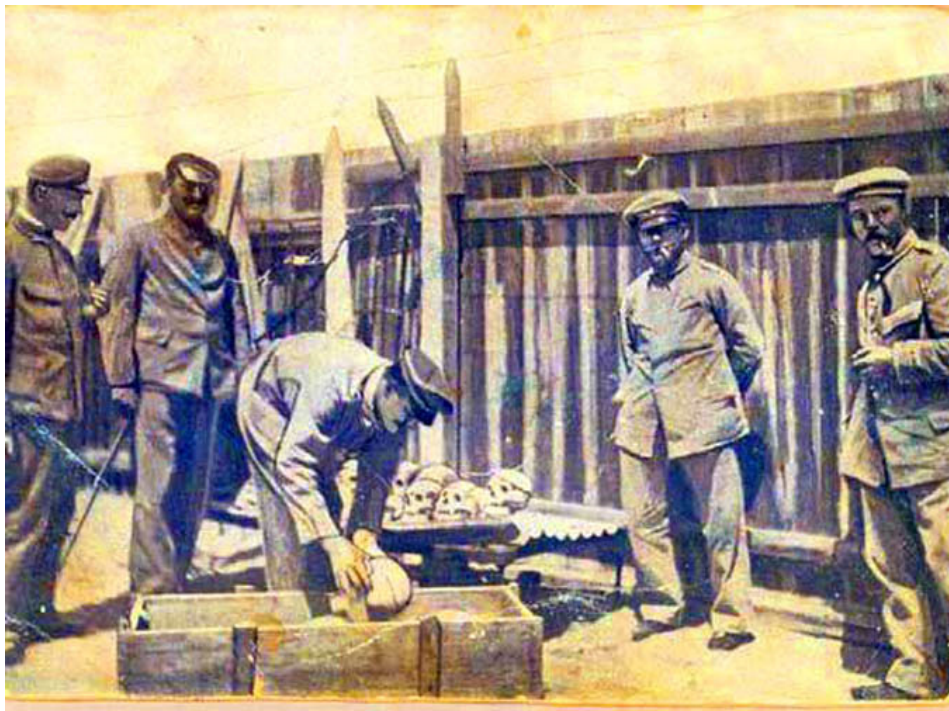


Figure 3. Postcard from German South-West Africa, ca. 1905. The caption on the back reads: 'Verladung der für deutsche Museen u. Universitäten bestimmten Herero-Schädel'.



Figure 4. Illustration from 'Meine Kriegs-Erlebnisse in Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika. Von Einem Offizier der Schutztruppe' (1907), an anonymous account of the German-Herero war.

Eine Kiste mit Hereroschädeln wurde kürzlich von den Truppen in Deutsch-Süd-W. Afrika verpackt und an das Pathologische Institut zu Berlin gesandt, wo sie zu wissenschaftlichen Messungen verwandt werden sollen. Die Schädel, die von Hererosfrauen mittels Glasscherben vom Fleisch befreit und versandfähig gemacht wurden, stammen von gehängten oder gefallenen Hereros.

both hands to lower a skull in a wooden crate. We can just make out the bulges of two other skulls already in the crate and behind him eight or more skulls are waiting to be packed on a low bench or table, possibly covered with cloth. The skulls are turned at a three-quarter angle and the tops of the craniums have been sawn off to remove the brains. The two soldiers on the left look on, one smoking and the other carrying what seems to be a stick. The soldiers on the right are also smoking and look towards the camera. The photograph was made in the open air: in the background we see a makeshift wooden fence under a clear sky and the floor seems to be stamped earth. According to historian Joachim Zeller, the photograph was probably made on the terrain of the customs shed in the harbor of Swakopmund around 1905-1906.¹⁸⁰ Indeed, when comparing the image with a photograph of laborers on the terrain (1905), the fence and flattened earth in the distant background of this image appear very similar.¹⁸¹ The photograph has been retouched to accentuate details (such as the moustaches of the soldiers) and increase contrast (the outlines of the skulls, the right arm of the soldier holding the skull).

The same photograph was used as the basis for an illustration in the book *Meine Kriegs-Erlebnisse in Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika. Von Einem Offizier der Schutztruppe* (1907), an anonymous account of the German-Herero war.¹⁸² The photograph (or perhaps the already retouched postcard) was traced, leaving it to the artistic imagination of the illustrator to fill in and accentuate details as he or she saw fit (figure 4). The image was cropped to leave the two soldiers on the right out, making the setting appear more intimate. In this version, details of the khaki uniforms such as the lining around the collar and the metal buttons are more marked, the facial expressions of the two on-looking soldiers are more clearly visible and the hands of the second and third soldier are in different positions because they have been drawn in. Importantly, the skulls were drawn in as well, the lines indicating that the tops of the craniums had been sawn off have disappeared, and the angle of the skulls on the bench has changed. Three of the skulls now face the viewer, which makes for a more haunting image. In this version the skulls are more present than on the postcard, because we now have a full view of four rather than three skulls, and because of the way the image was cropped.

The caption on the back of the postcard, as mentioned above, is brief and generic: '*Verladung der für deutsche Museen u. Universitäten bestimmten Herero-Schädel*', only revealing that the skulls belonged to 'Herero' and were destined for 'German museums and universities'. The description accompanying the illustration is much more elaborate:

¹⁸⁰ Joachim Zeller, "Wie Vieh wurden hunderte zu Tode getrieben und wie Vieh begraben", 241 and Zimmerer and Zeller, *Genocide in German South-West Africa* 77.

¹⁸¹ Zeller, "Wie Vieh wurden hunderte zu Tode getrieben und wie Vieh begraben" 236.

¹⁸² Zimmerman, 'Adventures in the skin trade', 175.

“Eine Kiste mit Hereroschädeln wurde kürzlich von den Truppen in Deutsch-Süd-West-Afrika verfasst und an das Pathologische Institut zu Berlin gesandt, wo sie zu wissenschaftlichen Messungen verwandt werden sollen. Die Schädel, die von Hererofrauen mittels Glasscherben vom Fleisch befreit und versandfähig gemacht wurden, stammen von gehängten oder gefallenen Hereros.”

The description specifies whom the skulls belonged to (executed or fallen Hereros), where they would be sent to (the Pathological Institute in Berlin) and why (to be measured for scientific purposes). It also adds a gruesome bit of information: Herero women, fellow prisoners, had scraped the skulls clean using glass shards.

There are few sources on the collecting of human remains in German South-West Africa, and as a consequence the postcard and illustration (circulating on the Internet as a ‘postcard’), are often adopted uncritically as an objective source for the practice of collecting. This can lead to generalized conclusions. Popular author Christopher Hale for example, writes that: ‘Whenever a Herero died, the women were ordered to strip the flesh from the corpse using shards of glass, then the skeletons and skulls were shipped to Berlin.’¹⁸³ Although Germans involved in the process also reported that they forced imprisoned Herero women in Swakopmund to remove the flesh of severed heads in this way, this was not the case with all the skulls and certainly not *whenever* a Herero died.¹⁸⁴ A superficial comparison of the two versions of the image can also lead to problematic conclusions. To emphasize the inhumanity of the practice of collecting ‘anthropological specimens’, historian Casper W. Erichsen argues that the ‘soldiers even took time to pose and smile for the camera and even to meticulously turn the skulls around’ for a second photograph.¹⁸⁵ However, as explained above, the second version is a drawing traced from the first, and the skulls were drawn in.

Behind the scene: German scientists and military doctors

For a more thorough analysis we have to move beyond the image on the postcard. The postcard and the illustration with accompanying text only reveal information about the last stage of the practice of collecting. We know that soldiers packed skulls of Herero destined for Germany in wooden crates, ready for shipment. The image also suggests that these skulls

¹⁸³ Hale, *Himmler’s crusade* 150.

¹⁸⁴ Zimmerman, ‘Adventures in the skin trade’, 175.

¹⁸⁵ Erichsen, “*The angel of death has descended violently among them*”, 143.

were not sent as isolated specimens, but in batches. We cannot be sure how frequent this happened. On the one hand, the fact that a postcard was made indicates it was not considered abnormal. On the other hand, it could also have been a rare occasion that made for a ‘quaint’ image, interesting to send home.¹⁸⁶ The fact that soldiers are looking on as the skulls are packed could suggest that this was something not seen every day. We also know, from the text below the illustration, that Herero women were made to remove the soft tissue from the skulls. So far, we know that soldiers and Herero women were involved in the process. But these were not the people involved in the selection of the skulls and in the on-site preparation and analysis of the human remains. It seems that the brains of the skulls depicted on the postcard were expertly removed. Here we come to the role German scientists and military doctors in the camps played in the practice of collecting.

The collection of human remains for anthropological research was a worldwide phenomenon at the time. Scientific institutions, anthropologists, (military) doctors, traders, and amateur enthusiasts made up an international network of human remains collectors. Anthropologists wanted to collect as many examples as possible in the belief that they could extract knowledge from the ‘objective’ study of these specimens.¹⁸⁷ In practice, they had to take what they could get. Anthropological material such as skulls, bones, and photographs were sent from the colonies by amateurs. As a result, anthropological collections developed in a haphazard way.¹⁸⁸ Often, the material was of dubious origin. Historians Martin Legassick and Ciraj Rassool have written a chilling account of the practices of anthropological collectors operating in Southern Africa around 1900, adventurers and rogue traders who sent macabre packages to museums containing items such as ‘three Bushwoman heads, one tin reptiles, one tin insects’.¹⁸⁹ At the time of the German-Herero war, between 1907-1909, anthropologist Rudolf Pöch had rogue-collectors roaming Southern Africa, where they exhumed and preserved a recently buried Khoisan couple that would later be identified as Klaas and Trooi Pienaar. The couple was dug up from the grounds of the farm they had worked at despite protests from their erstwhile employer.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ Erichsen, “*The angel of death has descended violently among them*” 143.

¹⁸⁷ Anja Laukötter, ‘Gefühle im Feld. Die “Sammelwut” der Anthropologen in Bezug auf Körperteile und das Konzept “Rasse” um die Jahrhundertwende’ in: Stoecker, Schnalke and Winkelmann (ed.), *Sammeln, erforschen, zurückgeben?* 27.

¹⁸⁸ Sysling, *The archipelago of difference* 29.

¹⁸⁹ Martin Legassick and Ciraj Rassool, *Skeletons in the cupboard. South African museums and the trade in human remains 1907-1917* (Cape Town: South African Museum, 2000) 36.

¹⁹⁰ Idem, 22-23.

The two main collectors of anthropological material in Berlin were Rudolf Virchow, founder of the Pathological Institute and of the *Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte* and Felix von Luschan, the curator of the African and Oceanic collections of the *Museum für Völkerkunde*.¹⁹¹ Like so many anthropologists at the time, they aimed to acquire as many specimens as possible: Von Luschan wrote in 1907 that ‘you can hardly have enough ethnographical collections’.¹⁹² Correspondence of both scientists reveals their position in the international network. In his 1875 guide for amateur-enthusiasts Virchow instructs how to send fresh severed heads to Berlin in zinc containers filled with alcohol.¹⁹³ Aware of the problematic legal status of many objects acquired through this international trade network, Von Luschan began asking his contacts in the colonies for bodies and body parts obtained ‘in a loyal way’ and ‘without giving offence’. In his view, blatant grave robbery should be avoided, but skulls from Chinese and Malaysian prisoners executed in Singapore and skulls taken from battles with German soldiers in the African colonies posed no problem. Von Luschan even corresponded with the government of German East-Africa about the bodies of Africans slain during the Maji Maji uprising.¹⁹⁴ Elsewhere the ‘theatre of war’ provided similar opportunities. In 1904 a doctor in the Dutch Indies wrote: ‘The rebellion here showed me the terrible effects of the new small-bore rifle: a horrible battlefield, but otherwise I made good use of it to add to my anthropological collection’.¹⁹⁵

Von Luschan had no scruples about acquiring the very skull brought back from Germany by lieutenant Zürn for the *Museum für Völkerkunde*. Luschan had contacted Zürn himself, and after persuading him to donate the skull, send him a further request: ‘The skull you gave us corresponds so little to the picture of the Herero skull type that we have thus far been able to make from our insufficient and inferior material, that it would be desirable to secure as soon as possible a larger collection of Herero skulls for scientific investigation’. In order to make ‘objective’ measurements, Luschan felt that he needed a large collection of specimens, so the typical traits of the Herero could be uncovered. He asked Zürn if he knew of ‘any possible way’ the museum could acquire a larger number of Herero skulls (Zimmerman pointed out that Luschan added his customary ‘in a loyal way’ only in the final draft of the letter). Zürn did: through a contact stationed near Swakopmund. In the

¹⁹¹ Zimmerman, ‘Adventures in the skin trade’, 167.

¹⁹² Laukötter, ‘Gefühle im Feld’, 28.

¹⁹³ Zimmerman, ‘Adventures in the skin trade’, 167.

¹⁹⁴ Idem, 171.

¹⁹⁵ Sysling, *The archipelago of difference* 68-69.

concentration camps skulls would be readily available and without the ‘danger of offending the ritual feelings of the natives’ Zürn had experienced first-hand.¹⁹⁶

The request was supposedly passed on to military doctors in concentration camps, where they embarked on a more systematic collecting. Many such doctors were involved: Wilhelm Waldeyer and his students also studied body parts from concentration camps, provided by ‘military doctors Dansauer, Jungels, Mayer and Zöllner’.¹⁹⁷ Military doctors had easy access to the bodies of Nama and Herero prisoners, as well as the knowledge necessary to preserve body parts and access to preservation fluids like formalin and alcohol. In the Shark Island camp, the ‘*Feldlazarett*’ was feared by the prisoners, and for good reason, as missionaries noted that not a single person recovered there.¹⁹⁸ The military doctor, Dr. Hugo Bofinger, examined the corpses of the Shark Island prisoners to determine the reason for the extremely high mortality rate in the camp. In a paper he published in 1910, he suggests that the death rate was caused by ‘a viral or bacterial’ spread of scurvy, ultimately caused by the ‘unhygienic nature’ of the prisoners.¹⁹⁹ Dr. Bofinger was one of the military doctors responsible for collecting, preserving, and delivering preserved heads to Berlin, including some of the human remains that were repatriated in 2011.

Heads in tins: how the twenty skulls were collected

Two Herero skulls repatriated in 2011 had arrived at the Pathological Institute as dried skulls. The other eighteen (seven Herero and eleven Nama) arrived in Berlin as preserved heads, with the tissue still intact. They were sent to anthropologist and anatomist Paul Bartels who worked at the Pathological Institute in Berlin.²⁰⁰ In one of his studies, Bartels mentioned that he possessed ‘a large number of heads from South-West Africa’ and that these individuals had been ‘*Kriegsgefangene*’ (prisoners-of-war).²⁰¹ Heinrich Zeidler, one of Bartels’ doctoral students reported that ‘the material’ of this ‘Bartels collection’ was collected by *Herren Stabsarzt* Dr. Bofinger and *Oberarzt* Dr. Wolff ‘*gelegentlich der Afrikawirren*’ (‘during the Africa-troubles’).²⁰² Christian Fetzer, another doctoral student of Bartels who did research on the preserved heads explained that the heads had come from ‘prisoners from the uprising’,

¹⁹⁶ Zimmerman, ‘Adventures in the skin trade’, 175.

¹⁹⁷ Idem, 175-176.

¹⁹⁸ Erichsen, “*The angel of death has descended violently among them*” 141.

¹⁹⁹ Idem, 140.

²⁰⁰ Charité Human Remains Project, Summary of the research results (30 September 2011).

²⁰¹ Paul Bartels, ‘Histologisch-anthropologische Untersuchungen der Plica semilunaris bei Herero und Hottentotten sowie bei einigen Anthropoiden’, *Archiv für mikroskopische Anatomie* 78 (1911) 530.

²⁰² Heinrich F. B. Zeidler, ‘Beiträge zur Anthropologie der Herero’, *Zeitschrift für Morphologie und Anthropologie* 17 (1914/15) 12.

‘who were interned on Shark Island and had died there of diseases, mostly scurvy’.²⁰³ The researchers of the Charité Human Remains Project accordingly conclude that these eighteen skulls had belonged to individuals who died in the concentration camp on Shark Island between 1905 and 1907.²⁰⁴ However, only Dr. Bofinger was active on Shark Island: Dr. Wolff was a military physician in Southern Namaland. Because they were active in different units and areas, it is unlikely that they cooperated as collectors.²⁰⁵ This casts doubt on Fetzter’s (and Bartels’?) assumption that all specimens had come from the concentration camp on Shark Island.

It is not possible to ascribe individual specimens to either Dr. Bofinger or Dr. Wolff, as both would have had access to human remains of Nama and Herero. In recent literature, attention has focused on Dr. Bofinger as a ‘Dr. Mengele’ of the colonial concentration camps, who subjected the dead and dying prisoners to cruel experiments. Some authors suggest that he personally cracked open skulls, removed and weighed the brains.²⁰⁶ In a similar vein, the researchers of the Charité Human Remains Project conclude that the deceased were dissected, ‘most likely at *Feldlazarett XII* (military hospital 12) on Shark Island’, their heads removed and conserved. *Feldlazarett XII* was the half-timbered building on Shark Island where Dr. Bofinger had established a bacteriological laboratory to investigate the cause of death of prisoners.²⁰⁷

Looking past these assumptions, what do we know about the way the skulls were preserved? According to Fetzter, most of the skulls (*‘mit wenigen Ausnahmen’*) were opened to remove the brain for study.²⁰⁸ Nothing is mentioned about weighing, and it is unknown what happened to the brains.²⁰⁹ After the military doctors removed the brains, they conserved the heads in a ten per cent formalin solution and put them in *‘Blechbüchsen’* (tins) for transport.²¹⁰ Fetzter’s study reveals that the heads arrived in two batches. Apparently, the heads in the first sending were put in the tins without protection and damaged: lips, noses, and ears were ‘flattened’. Dr. Bartels requested to preserve the other heads in a protective layer of wood fiber and with success: *‘die so fixierten Köpfe kamen in einem viel besseren Zustände an’*.²¹¹ For the anthropologist, the preserved heads were valuable anthropological specimens

²⁰³ Fetzter, ‘Rassenanatomische Untersuchungen an 17 Hottentottenköpfen’, 95.

²⁰⁴ Charité Human Remains Project, Summary of the research results.

²⁰⁵ Charité Human Remains Project, Provenance analysis. Specimen A801 (Herero) (30 September 2011) 5.

²⁰⁶ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser’s Holocaust* 225.

²⁰⁷ Charité Human Remains Project, Summary of the research results.

²⁰⁸ Fetzter, ‘Rassenanatomische Untersuchungen an 17 Hottentottenköpfen’, 95.

²⁰⁹ Charité Human Remains Project, Summary of the research results.

²¹⁰ Zeidler, ‘Beiträge zur Anthropologie der Herero’, 12.

²¹¹ Fetzter, ‘Rassenanatomische Untersuchungen an 17 Hottentottenköpfen’, 95.

that had to arrive in the best possible condition. All the heads were sent to Bartels in Berlin before the end of 1907.²¹²

Dr. Bofinger and Dr. Wolff did not send the heads directly to Paul Bartels. They were transferred to Bartels '*in liebenswürdiger Weise*' by 'middleman' *Herr Hauptmann Wagenführ*.²¹³ Felix Wagenführ was a lieutenant in the *1. Eisenbahnbau-Kompanie* (1st Railway Construction Company) in Namaland between 1905 and 1908. The Charité report suggests that he might have been involved in the construction of the railway line between Lüderitz and Keetmanshoop in 1907-1908 for which prisoners from Shark Island were used as forced laborers.²¹⁴ In any case, in his position he would have had contacts throughout the colony. Like Zürn's contact, Wagenführ was one of the many amateur enthusiasts involved in the collecting of anthropological specimens around the turn of the century. In 1910, he joined the *Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte*.²¹⁵ Originally, the Bartels collection consisted of a larger number of skulls (25-28) and an unknown number of soft-tissue specimens. Wagenführ probably delivered the heads together with other human remains of Herero and Nama origin.²¹⁶ No further details are known about their journey to Germany – most likely they were shipped aboard a steamboat of the Woermann line.

Little is known about the two skulls that arrived at the Pathological Institute as dried skulls. Banker, politician and arts patron Arthur von Gwinner donated them to anatomist Hans Virchow (son of Rudolf Virchow) at the Institute, between 1904 and 1910. Like Wagenführ, he was a layman interested in natural sciences. He sponsored the Museum of Natural History in Berlin and became a member of the *Paläontologischen Gesellschaft* upon its foundation in 1912.²¹⁷ The skulls had belonged to juvenile males, were delivered without lower jaws and teeth and were said (by Von Gwinner) to have come from '*der Zeit der Vernichtung des Her[ero]-Stammes*'.²¹⁸ It is unknown how they came in possession of Von Gwinner, who had never traveled to Africa himself.²¹⁹ The skulls had been macerated and the bone surface was sealed with shellac, a resinous substance composed of lac – though it is not certain at which point this was done.²²⁰ No traces were found to indicate that the skulls had been cleaned with

²¹² Charité Human Remains Project, Specimen A801 (Herero) 5.

²¹³ Zeidler, 'Beiträge zur Anthropologie der Herero', 12.

²¹⁴ Charité Human Remains Project, Specimen A801 (Herero) 5.

²¹⁵ *Idem*.

²¹⁶ *Idem*, 3 and 6.

²¹⁷ Charité Human Remains Project, Provenance analysis. Specimen A298 (Herero) (30 September 2011) 5.

²¹⁸ Charité Human Remains Project, Specimen A298 (Herero) 3 and Provenance analysis. Specimen A299 (Herero) (30 September 2011) 7.

²¹⁹ Charité Human Remains Project, Specimen A298 (Herero) 5.

²²⁰ *Idem*, 7 and 11.

glass shards and the Charité researchers concluded that none of the twenty skulls were macerated by imprisoned Herero women.²²¹

Regardless of the circumstances in which the Namibian skulls had originally arrived in Berlin, to the anthropologists and anatomists at the Pathological Institute they were first and foremost anthropological specimens. The collectors and military doctors in the colony who went to great lengths to provide the meticulously preserved heads, would likewise have considered these heads valuable scientific material. However, we should not conclude that the postcard simply depicted soldiers packing ‘anthropological specimens’. This card was not made for anthropologists: it was made with German colonial soldiers in mind. I will argue that the postcard reveals that they would have viewed the skulls differently.

A quaint greeting from a German colony

Most steps of the cumbersome collecting process (German scientists requesting skulls, amateur collectors tracking and sending them, and medical doctors selecting and preserving them) are left out of the card and illustration. The practice is reduced to the photogenic image of colonial soldiers packing the already ‘*versandfähige*’ skulls in a box, ready for shipment to Germany. The more scientific side of the process was omitted: the description of the illustration merely reveals that the skulls were going to be measured, the postcard leaves it to the reader/ viewer to imagine why the skulls were sent to ‘Berlin universities and museums’. To understand why this particular image was made into a postcard – a quaint greeting from a German colony- we have to turn towards the broader context of the postcard trade in German South-West Africa in the early twentieth century.²²² To analyze this visual source it is necessary to find out why, for whom, and how the card was produced.²²³

The thirty years of German colonial rule coincided with the ‘golden years’ of the picture postcard in Europe. The production of picture postcards started in the 1890s, when photography and printing innovations made large scale production possible, and picture postcards soon became a craze throughout Europe, not only as a fast and cheap medium but also as a collectible. Like Britain and France, by 1900 Germany had become a ‘true global player in the production and distribution of postcards’.²²⁴ For settlers and soldiers in German

²²¹ Charité Human Remains Project, Summary of the research results.

²²² Erichsen, “*The angel of death has descended violently among them*” 143.

²²³ M. J. Wintle, *The image of Europe. Visualizing Europe in Cartography and Iconography throughout the Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 14.

²²⁴ Felix Axster, “... will try to send you the best views from here”. Postcards from the colonial war in Namibia (1904-1908) in: Volker M. Langbehn (ed.), *German colonialism, visual culture, and modern memory* (New York/ London: Taylor & Francis, 2010) 55.

South-West Africa, the new medium was an ideal way to keep in touch with their family back home. The postcard format, short messages accompanied by images that gave a quick impression of the colony, replaced the more formal letters with their long-winding descriptions. The fact that postcards were mass-produced and intended for a large audience makes them particularly valuable source material ‘through which to explore turn-of-the-century European popular perceptions of, or imaginaries about, African peoples and places’.²²⁵ Historians today acknowledge that the picture postcard – like the trading cards discussed in the previous chapter - had ‘political utility’ as part of the colonial project.²²⁶

The political utility of postcards from German South-West Africa is evident: the postal service in Namibia played a crucial role in strengthening and maintaining the link between the colony and the mother country.²²⁷ The first post office in the colony opened at Otjimbingwe 7 July 1888, followed by post-offices in Windhoek (1891) and Swakopmund (1895). These post offices used local cancellations on German stamps.²²⁸ In 1897, a mobile postal agency was installed when the 382 kilometers long railway line between Swakopmund and Windhoek was under construction. Train drivers were obliged to accept mail at any stop along the advancing railroad where there was no post office.²²⁹ Photography studios soon sprung up in the German colony as well, and with them postcard publishers. Even small towns like Usakos, Omaruru, Karibib, Keetmanshoop, and Swakopmund had competing postcard publishers, who bought negatives for the production of cards from whatever source available: traders, hunters, settlers, and soldiers.²³⁰

The function of the postal service as a link between colony and the mother country became even more important at a time of war. Already during the so-called Bondelswarts rebellion of 1903, prior to the German-Herero war, soldiers sent *Feldpostkarte* to their family back home.²³¹ During the German-Herero war there were four mobile military postal services sending and receiving mail. In the first year of the war these services handled around 1,5 million letters or parcels, including 960,000 letters or postcards sent from the colonial front to

²²⁵ Richard Vokes, ‘Reflections on a complex (and cosmopolitan) archive: postcards and photography in early colonial Uganda, c. 1904-1928’, *History and Anthropology* 21:4 (2010), 381.

²²⁶ Peter M. Burns, ‘Six postcards from Arabia. A visual discourse of colonial travels in the Orient’, *Tourist Studies* 4:3 (2004) 256.

²²⁷ Axster, “...will try to send you the best views from here”, 59.

²²⁸ Ton Dietz, ‘A postal history of the First World War in Africa and its aftermath – German colonies. III Deutsch-Südwestafrika (SWA)’, *ASC Working Paper* 118 (2015) 8.

²²⁹ Idem, 68.

²³⁰ Wolfram Hartmann, Jeremy Silvester and Patricia Hayes (ed.), *The colonising camera. Photographs in the making of Namibian history* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1999) 13.

²³¹ Dietz, ‘A postal history of the First World War in Africa and its aftermath’, 75.

the home country.²³² Soldiers sent cards directly from the front: a day after Okahandja was ‘liberated’ from the Herero ‘rebels’ (28 January 1904) a postcard was sent with a cancellation stamp of Okahandja – one Herr Secretair Böttner in Cassel received it two months later.²³³ Sometimes, the fighting even hampered postal delivery. When Nama attacked Warmbad on 27-28 November 1905, the canceller was apparently lost: until the arrival of a ‘new cancellation device’ on 18 February a provisional typeset canceller was used – a card sent as *Feldpost* to Freiburg in January showed improvised cancellations.²³⁴

As the demand for postcards increased during the German-Herero war, postcard production flourished. The postcard of soldiers packing skulls was probably produced in 1904 or 1905, early on in the war. The card is quite unique because the image relates directly to the military conflict. This was certainly not the case with all the post sent from the front: soldiers sent pictures of the vast Namibian landscape, German colonial architecture, local people (Herero, Nama, Bergdamara, Ovambo, and Bushmen) and of fellow-Germans in action. Research by Felix Axster gives an idea of the context in which a crude image like this would have been used by soldiers as a medium to inform friends and family back home of their well-being. Axster analyzes a set of postcards sent from German South-West Africa by colonial soldier Hermann Ohrt to his brother and sister-in-law in North Germany between 1904-1906. He argues that postcards contributed to the privatization of the colonial war, because they ensured that images of military action and colonial scenes found their way into the domestic German environment.²³⁵ Most of the cards sent by Ohrt depicted colonial locations or buildings, only two – a card of captured Nama (*‘gefangene Hottentotten’*) and a card of the execution of ‘rebels’ – depicted military brutality. The trivial nature of Ohrt’s messages remained the same: the postcard depicting the *‘Hinrichtung aufführerischer Mörder’* in Gibeon (dated 24 November 1905) is accompanied with the text ‘Happy holidays!’²³⁶ According to Axster, the apparent discrepancy can be explained because the images did not require commentary: they spoke for themselves. The cards offer a glimpse of the colonial soldier’s environment, in which the capture and murder of the colonized was ‘business as usual’.²³⁷ This is how postcards, sent as souvenirs from the front accompanied with short personal messages, brought the colonial war into the domestic sphere back in Germany.²³⁸

²³² Axster, “...will try to send you the best views from here”, 59.

²³³ Dietz, ‘A postal history of the First World War in Africa and its aftermath’, 76.

²³⁴ *Idem*, 80.

²³⁵ Axster, “...will try to send you the best views from here”, 56.

²³⁶ *Idem*, 65.

²³⁷ *Idem*, 66.

²³⁸ *Idem*, 67.



Figure 5. Front of a different version of the postcard depicted in figure 3, ca. 1905.



Figure 6. Picture postcard from German South-West Africa of 'Divisionspfarrer Schmidt'.

How does the postcard of soldiers packing skulls fit into Axster's analysis? Like the postcards of captured Nama and the execution, this card has a very succinct caption with little details as to where, how, why, and in which context the image was made. A specific event is turned into a generic caption: '*Gefangene Hottentotten*', '*Hinrichtung aufrührerischer Mörder in Gibeon*' and '*Verladung der für deutsche Museen und Universitäten bestimmten Herero-Schädel*'. The images spoke for themselves and did not require further explanation by the sender. The postcard of soldiers packing skulls was made in 1904 or 1905 with the new, sizeable, market of German soldiers in mind. This image too was sent back home in a matter-of-fact way accompanied with short personal messages. The postcards depicted a simplified version of colonial life. All three postcards read '*Deutsch Süd-West-Afrika*' in small letters on the back. Specific scenes and settings were reduced to more general practices, typical for German South-West Africa but exotic or interesting to friends and family back home.

It is crucial to realize that the production process determined this simplification. In the process of making the photographic image of soldiers packing skulls into a postcard, crucial information about the specific context was lost. If we could trace back the provenance to the original photograph, we would understand much better, how, why, and in what context the image was made – maybe we would even find out the specific destination and provenance of the skulls depicted. In his research on postcards from colonial Uganda (c. 1904-1928) Richard Vokes traces back postcard images to a photography collection made for visual lectures on the 'Empire' in Britain. By decontextualizing them and providing them with new, generic captions, the original photographs were 'trivialized' and 'exoticized' as postcards.²³⁹ Postcard producers and publishers of popular colonial literature chose images that represented the colonized as strange, wild and exotic. A striking example of such 'exoticization' is a photograph of pregnant Bushwomen and malnourished Bushmen children with swollen bellies, taken in the 1930s. It was published in books and newspapers with captions such as: 'Bushmen after a raw meat feast'.²⁴⁰ Information about the photographs also got lost when postcards were produced in different variations. Often, postcard images were colored in by hand, reversed, or printed in a different monochromatic tint for a new version.²⁴¹ The postcard of soldiers packing skulls also circulated in a different version, printed in a blue tint and cropped differently. In this version (figure 5), the image has less contrast and we see more of the soldiers, so that the skulls stand out slightly less.

²³⁹ Vokes, 'Reflections on a complex (and cosmopolitan) archive', 398.

²⁴⁰ Robert J. Gordon, *The Bushman myth. The making of a Namibian underclass* (Boulder/ San Francisco/ Oxford: Westview Press, 1992) 4.

²⁴¹ Hyung Gu Lynn, 'Moving pictures: postcards of colonial Korea', *IIAS Newsletter* 44 (2007) 8.

Kijk die kopbeenen!

Postcards sent from the front gave a simplified impression of colonial life, fashioning stereotypes of the primitive, docile, sometimes eroticized Namibian versus the civilized, masculine, victorious German. ‘Self’ and ‘Other’ were presented as inhabiting different spheres: we rarely see a German and a Namibian on one postcard, and if we do, the latter is a prisoner or servant of the former. Namibians (with the exception of infamous leaders like Nama captain Hendrik Witbooi) were either portrayed as anonymous groups (accompanied by captions such as ‘*Hereros*’ or ‘*Negerkinder*’) or types (‘*Hererofrau*’, ‘*Eingeborene Arbeiter*’). By contrast, Germans were either depicted in action, as individuals or as idealized figures (the German soldier on horseback).

The postcard of the soldiers packing skulls fits in this pattern. It resembles a postcard of divisional chaplain Schmidt (figure 6). Here we see a group of German soldiers in colonial uniforms posing stiffly in front of their well-equipped camp. Both cards depict a clearly staged photograph, arranged around one central person/ action. They offer a glimpse of colonial military life, in which Namibians are absent – except as skulls. In this aspect, the card resembles those made of executions, and of captured Nama. For German colonial soldiers, the postcard made for a quaint greeting featuring the mortal remains of their colonial opponent, a reassuring affirmation of the power relations in the colony. I want to argue that the postcard, seen in the context of cards made for *Feldpost* demonstrates that the skulls were not only considered anthropological specimens in the collecting process but also, for German soldiers first and foremost, human remains of the colonial enemy – trophies even.

One example of the card demonstrates how contemporary viewers might have interpreted the image (figure 7). Here we see the reverse side of the blue version of the postcard discussed above. The card is written in proto-Afrikaans (Afrikaans became an official language in 1925) by one Johnnie Robinson and addressed to his ‘aunty’, miss Kitty Robinson in Warrenton, in the Northern Cape of South Africa.²⁴² The full text reads: ‘*Aunty, dit is deutsche soldaaten waar my Papa gewees het in die [oorlog?] – kijk die kopbeenen wat hulle begraven*’. Apparently, the writer could or did not read the German caption explaining that the skulls were to be sent to German museums and universities. We should not conclude that the image was read in this way more often: most senders would have been Germans, not Afrikaners (although many Afrikaners did work in German South-West Africa during the German-Herero war, as suppliers for the colonial soldiers). Without over-analyzing the text,

²⁴² Unfortunately, it is unclear *when* (indeed, if) the card was sent, as it bears no stamp or cancellation.

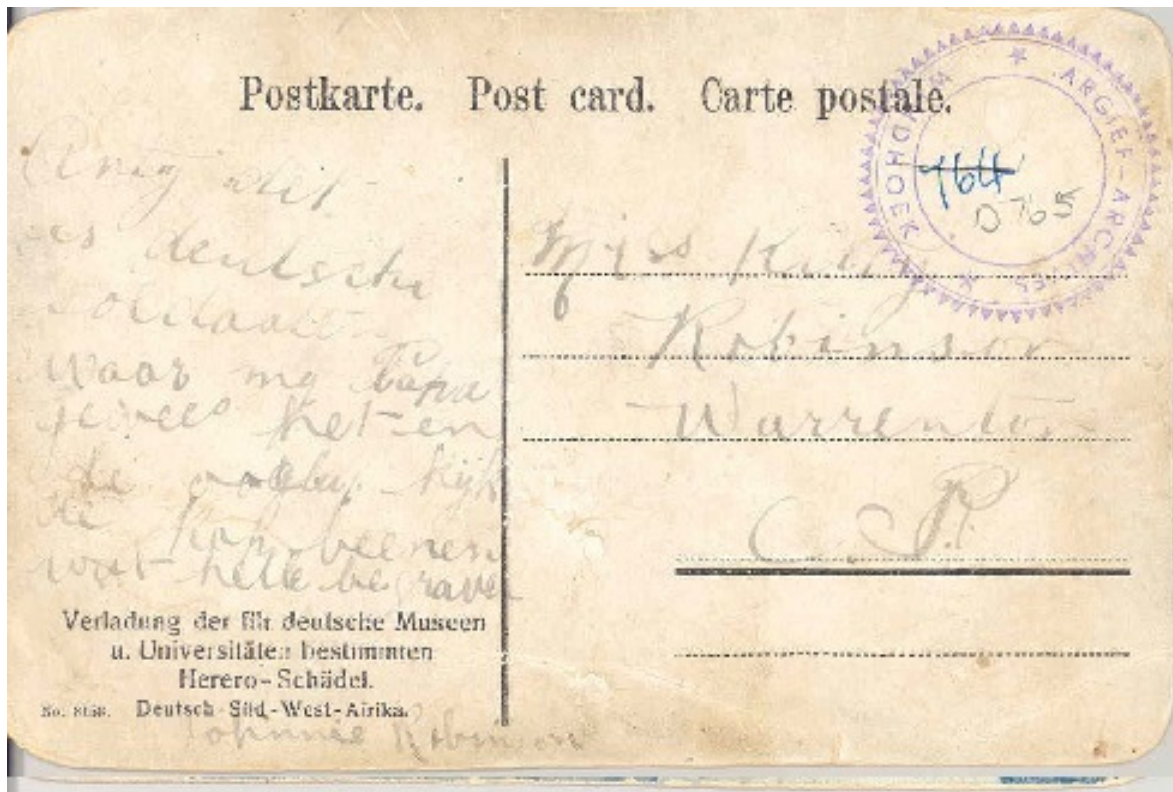


Figure 7. Back of the postcard pictured as figure 5, written on by Johnnie Robinson: 'Kijk die kopbeenen wat hulle begraven'. Possibly 'liberated' from the Windhoek Archive. For my analysis I enhanced the contrast to be able to read the card; this is the original version.

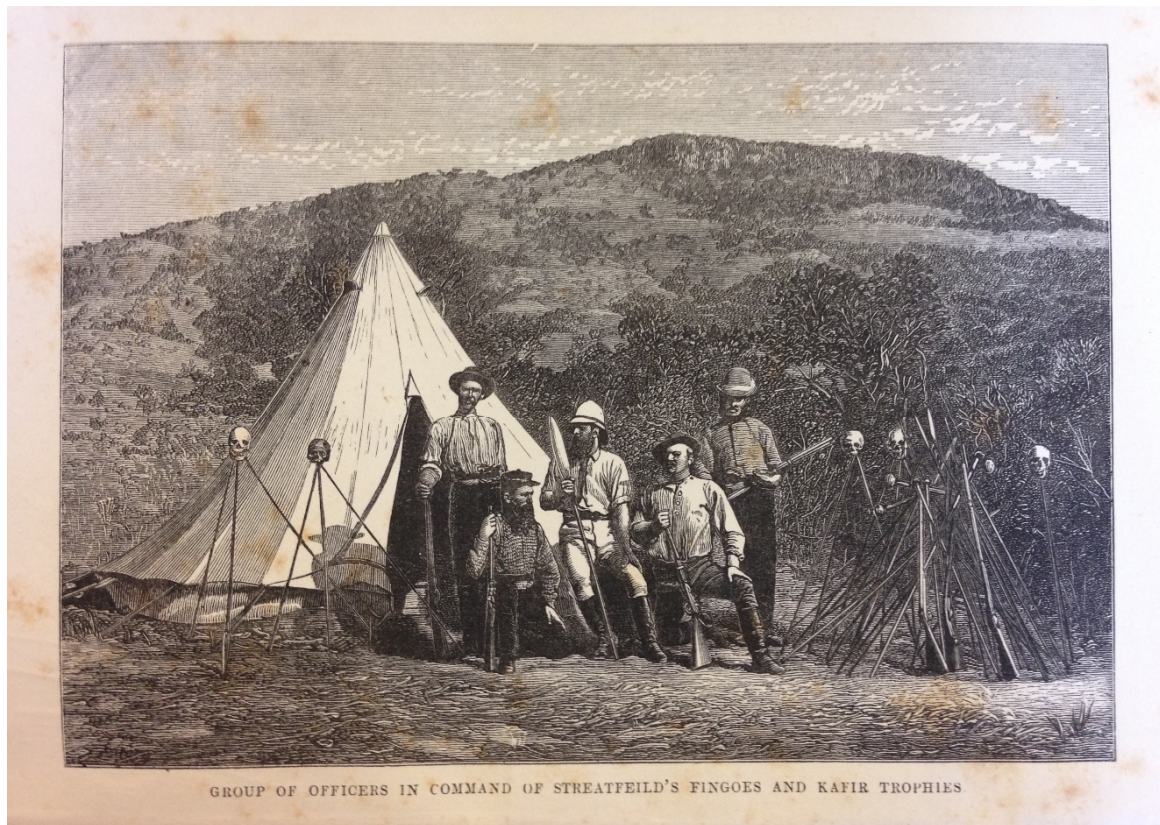


Figure 8. Illustration from Frank N. Streatfeild's 'Kafirland: A Tenth Months' Campaign' (1879).

we can conclude that the (young?) sender saw the skulls depicted first and foremost as human remains of opponents in a colonial war, not as anthropological specimens. The writer draws attention to the fact that German soldiers (*'deutsche soldaaten'*) are handling the remains and the triumphant 'look at the skulls they are burying' suggest no sympathy for victims, but portrays the German soldiers as victors of the colonial war – all in the guise of a trivial greeting to a family member.

How would the soldiers have viewed the skulls? In a recent article, Denver A. Webb has re-examined the collecting of heads in colonial conflicts in Southern Africa, arguing that scientific interest alone does not explain the practice. Rather, human trophy collecting was part and parcel of the establishment of colonial hegemony.²⁴³ Webb focuses on the collecting of Xhosa heads by the British in conflicts in present-day South Africa in the nineteenth century, but the similarities with the German-Herero war are striking. The view of the British military on their Xhosa opponent is crucial in explaining the practice. The Xhosa drew the British in troublesome 'protracted wars' and were despised by the British soldiers.²⁴⁴ The Xhosa were framed as inhuman savages, which on the one hand justified the extreme brutality of soldiers and settlers alike, and on the other hand made the soldiers frightened and reluctant to pursue them into the thick bush. Rumors of the extreme cruelty of the Xhosa were widespread. They were said to torture the wounded and disembowel the dead.²⁴⁵ As a result of these widespread fears, a 'military ideology' emerged that encouraged to 'out-savage the savage'.²⁴⁶ This savage conduct meant that no Xhosa were spared, skulls, ears, and testicles were collected by many who had no interest in phrenology as proof of their killings, and heads were taken as 'trophies' as a way to exert power over the Xhosa.²⁴⁷

A disturbing illustration in the book *Kafirland: A Tenth Months' Campaign* (1879) leaves nothing to the imagination (figure 8). We see five British officers with rifles and spears in front of a tent with skulls placed on thin sticks stuck in the ground on either side of them. The caption: 'Group of officers in command of Streatfeild's Fingoes and Kafir trophies'.²⁴⁸ The book is an extremely racist account written by a former colonial soldier and is quite comparable to the anonymous account *Meine Kriegs-Erlebnisse in Deutsch-Südwest-Afrika. Von Einem Offizier der Schutztruppe* (1907). As such, the illustration is comparable with

²⁴³ Denver A. Webb, 'War, racism, and the taking of heads: revisiting military conflict in the Cape Colony and Western Xhosaland in the nineteenth century', *The Journal of African History* 56:01 (March 2015) 39.

²⁴⁴ *Idem*, 40.

²⁴⁵ *Idem*, 43.

²⁴⁶ *Idem*, 47.

²⁴⁷ *Idem*, 55.

²⁴⁸ *Idem*, 50 and Frank N. Streatfeild, *Kafirland: a ten months' campaign* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1879).

figure 4. In this image, the skulls are turned, facing the viewer. This not only gives a more haunting impression, fitting in with the masculine, tough account of a *Schutztruppe* officer about his years in the savage colony, it is also decidedly less scientific. Without the lines indicating that the skulls were carefully opened to remove the brains, the skulls look less like anthropological specimens and more like remains of the perished colonial opponent. This analysis brings the image one step closer to the illustration in Streatfeild's book, which blatantly describes the skulls as trophies – leaving all scientific pretense behind.

Like the Xhosa, the Herero were demonized in popular texts, images, and rumors in Germany and German South-West Africa alike (see chapter 3). The military campaign against the Nama and Herero was also frustrating. Herero and Nama used guerrilla tactics, and the Germans had to deal with a lack of water, inhospitable terrain and diseases. Here too, the Herero was framed as a savage as an excuse for brutal warfare. Rumors of Herero mutilating the dead sparked retaliation: Lothar von Trotha says as much in his infamous *Vernichtungsbefehl*. Extreme cruelty became a policy of the German colonial soldiers. Women and children were raped, beaten and murdered. No-one was to be spared.

As we read in the last chapter, one of the contributing factors to the outbreak of the war was a morbid trade in Herero skulls, supplied by a number of German soldiers, who dug up Herero graves, stealing the skulls.²⁴⁹ But is there evidence that proves that German soldiers cut off heads and body parts of Nama and Herero as retaliation and revenge? In his account of the German-Herero war, Pool mentions several times that it was difficult to count the number of Herero victims because the Herero were in the habit of taking the fallen soldiers with them.²⁵⁰ Perhaps this points to their distrust of the Germans – the Herero would have known about their disrespect for mortal remains. The Nama certainly did not trust the Germans to treat their dead with respect. When Nama captain Hendrik Witbooi died, 'his men drove their cattle over the grave to conceal it' because they were worried that 'the body would be exhumed by German soldiers'.²⁵¹ The most convincing evidence of Germans collecting remains as trophies can be found in Namibian oral history. When Cornelius Fredericks, the Nama leader that had given the Germans so much trouble, died on Shark Island on 26 February 1907, his head is reported to have been preserved and sent to Germany. This oral history is supported by a German diary that names one of the men decapitated for experiments

²⁴⁹ Erichsen, "*The angel of death has descended violently among them*" 144.

²⁵⁰ Pool, *Die Herero-opstand 1904-1907* 121.

²⁵¹ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust* 187.

on Shark Island as Fredericks.²⁵² Indeed, one of the skulls repatriated in 2011 may have been Fredericks': the date of his death and the arrival of the preserved heads in Berlin seem to match. Out of the thousands that died on Shark Island, the odds are slim that it was pure chance that this infamous leader's head was cut off and preserved.

The skull that lieutenant Zürn brought home from German South-West Africa was maybe not a trophy from the battlefield, but it was a souvenir, a memento of his military career in the colony. Because Herero were considered savages – who were thought to do far worse things to fallen German soldiers – it was at least in the eyes of some colonial soldiers perfectly acceptable to dig up skulls as a macabre memento. Zürn was not the only one who did this. In 1910 Von Luschan received a complete skeleton brought back from the colony by one Major Maerker. That several military men later donated their 'trophies' to science was perhaps a way to ease their consciousness. Zimmerman suggests that men like Maerker and Zürn 'perhaps sought to exculpate their own barbarism' by donating 'body part they perhaps originally took as trophies'. In this way physical anthropology transformed 'acts of colonial brutality into contributions to science'.²⁵³ The fact that Zürn – who would have been aware of the value of a Herero skull – held on to the item until Von Luschan requested it, indicates that he did not bring it home to sell, but to keep as a personal memento.

Of the twenty skulls that were repatriated in 2011, eighteen were sent as preserved heads. The other two however were donated to the Pathological Institute 'unfortunately' without lower jaws, which made them much less suitable for scientific research. Virchow writes that they '*sind leider ohne Unterkiefer u(nd) Zähne, wodurch der Eindruck sehre beeinträchtigt wird*'.²⁵⁴ Only one of these skulls was used for a general paper on muscular attachments on the human skull. Virchow planned a study of both skulls, but it never materialized.²⁵⁵ The shady provenance of the skulls ('from the time of the destruction of the Herero tribe') together with their unsuitability as anthropological specimens suggests that the skulls were once taken from the colony as 'souvenirs'.

'Zeichen des Triumphes'

This interpretation is supported when the postcard is re-examined in the context of postcards depicting violence and photo documents of the Namibian concentration camps. Visual

²⁵² Hayes, Silvester and Hartmann, 'Picturing the past in Namibia: the visual archive and its energies' in: Carolyn Hamilton, *Refiguring the archive* (2002) 103.

²⁵³ Zimmerman, 'Adventures in the skin trade', 177.

²⁵⁴ Hans Virchow, 'Muskemarken am Schädel', *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 42 (1910).

²⁵⁵ Charité Human Remains Project, Specimen A 298 (Herero) 5.

reminders of suffering or dead colonial opponents in concentration camps such as Swakopmund and Shark Island likewise functioned as morbid souvenirs, emphasizing the power of the Germans over the subordinated Namibians. From the early days of the colony photography had been deployed to consolidate the imperial presence of territory.²⁵⁶ As the German-Herero war boosted postcard production, images of colonial control, beatings in particular, became hugely popular.²⁵⁷ In these tumultuous times, images of *Eingeborenen* being flogged (by fellow-‘natives’) circulated widely ‘with the aim of reassuring colonial audiences with images depicting the strict administration of law and order’.²⁵⁸ In fact, the demand for such images was so great that pictures of imprisoned Nama from earlier conflicts circulated again with new, generic captions.²⁵⁹ The analogy of taking skulls home as trophies and taking (or sending) home images of suffering Namibians becomes even clearer when we consider private photographs taken of imprisoned, dead, or dying Nama and Herero.

The album of Gustav Fett, who was stationed in the colony between 1905 and 1908, is a typical example of such ‘power photography’. It contains three pictures (probably taken inside a Windhoek prison) of prisoners being beaten for various crimes.²⁶⁰ Even more voyeuristic are photographs taken inside concentration camps. *Hauptmann der Schutztruppe* Friedrich Stahl took photographs of starving Herero children and a dead or dying young Herero in the Swakopmund camp in 1905 without any compassion for the victims. Historian Joachim Zeller suggests that Stahl may have presented these images back home as a ‘*Zeichen des Triumphes*’, possibly uttering that those ‘*frechen aufständischen Eingeborenen*’ now had their ‘*gerechte Strafe*’: such comments were not unusual in contemporary literature and press.²⁶¹ The colonial authorities in German South-West Africa were of the opinion that if the Herero felt the consequences of the uprising ‘*am eigenen Leibe*’, the risk for a new uprising would be small.²⁶²

One of the most important sources of information about conditions in the concentration camp on Shark Island is a set of photographs from the recently discovered photo album of Lieutenant von Düring, who visited the camp in 1905. These photographs were taken as private souvenirs and as a ‘self-choreographed narrative of colonial exploits’ aimed at impressing family and friends. The photos, showing a soldier (possibly Von Düring

²⁵⁶ Hartmann, Silvester and Hayes (ed.), *The colonising camera* 12.

²⁵⁷ Wolfram Hartmann, *Hues between black and white. Historical photography from colonial Namibia 1860s to 1915* (Windhoek: Out of Africa Publishers, 2004) 13.

²⁵⁸ Hartmann, Silvester and Hayes (ed.), *The colonising camera* 42.

²⁵⁹ Hartmann, *Hues between black and white* 62.

²⁶⁰ Idem, 67.

²⁶¹ Zeller, “‘Wie Vieh wurden hunderte zu Tode getrieben und wie Vieh begraben’”, 233-234.

²⁶² Idem, 242.

himself) standing – ‘colonial pose’, hand in his side – amidst seating subdued Herero prisoners in rags and a young naked woman, were power photos ‘presenting an arranged juxtaposition of the powerful and the powerless’ and revealed ‘a basic irreverence and abhorrence with which prisoners must have been regarded by the German soldiers’.²⁶³ Zeller considers the practice of collecting skulls of Nama and Herero as the pinnacle of the ‘*rassistisch motivierten Menschenverachtung*’ displayed in such private photo albums.²⁶⁴

Although the collecting of preserved heads and skulls in concentration camps was much more systematized than the taking of ‘trophies’ from the battlefield in direct retaliation, the general sentiment seems to have been that the victims in the concentration camps got what they deserved. Considering that German soldiers were notoriously disrespectful towards Herero and Nama remains and that officers were in the habit of making photographs of suffering or dead Herero and even brought home skulls as personal mementoes, the soldiers involved in the practice of collecting may well have considered the skulls trophies.

²⁶³ Erichsen, “*The angel of death has descended violently among them*” 89.

²⁶⁴ Zeller, ““Wie Vieh wurden hunderte zu Tode getrieben und wie Vieh begraben””, 240-241.

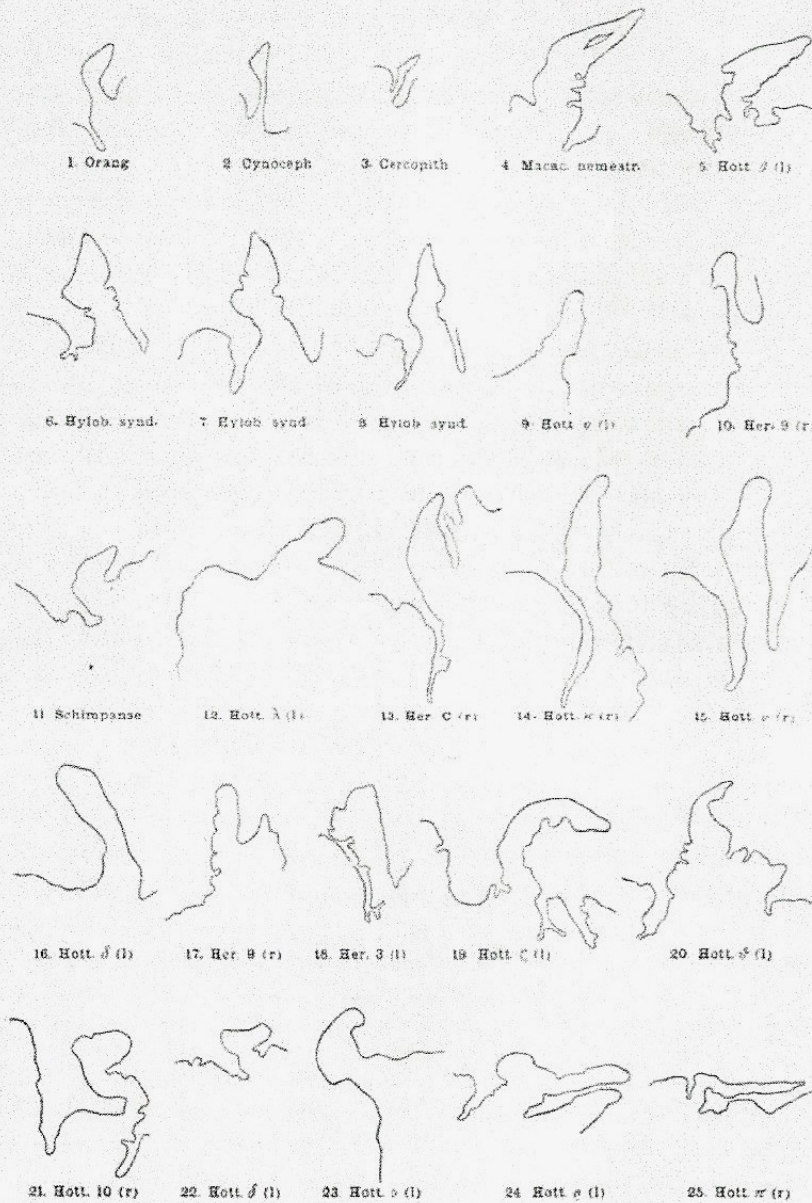
5. Facial muscles of ‘farbigen Rassen’:

the practice of studying preserved heads and skulls in Berlin (1910-1924)

All twenty skulls arrived at the Pathological Institute in Berlin between 1904 and 1910. The eighteen preserved Nama and Herero heads from German South-West Africa arrived before the end of 1907. There, anatomist Paul Bartels integrated them into a larger collection of about fifty preserved heads. Bartels and his colleague Hans Virchow had acquired this collection to study racial differences (*‘Rassenunterschieden’*) in facial muscles (*‘Gesichtsmuskulatur’*) and soft tissues.²⁶⁵ The eighteen heads were first studied by Bartels, who compared the ‘third eyelid’, the small piece of skin between the tear-duct and the eyeball, of twenty-five Herero and Nama heads with those of several species of ape. After that, doctoral students Christian Fetzter and Heinrich Zeidler studied the muscular structures and measurements of eleven Nama and five Herero heads respectively. The two Herero skulls were less fit for research: Hans Virchow only used one of them in a study of muscle attachments on the human skull. In 1924, he also examined the skull of one of the Nama heads that had been studied by both Bartels and Fetzter - as part of a study on the ‘anthropology of the nose’.

In this chapter I analyze the practice of studying the preserved heads and skulls by examining the visual material in these studies as contact points of the practice: one set of schematic drawings in the work of Bartels, drawings and photographs in the study of Fetzter, drawings in Zeidler’s work and photographs in the work of Virchow. Analyzed against the background of the ‘turn towards race and nation’, the drawings and photographs reveal how the scientists, all associated with the influential *Berliner Gesellschaft für Anthropologie, Ethnologie und Urgeschichte*, responded to developments in German physical anthropology at the time. While the first, non-Darwinist generation of scientists associated with the *BGAEU* had been taken up with a quest for objectivity and standards of measurements, drawing, and photography to identify different races, after 1900 Darwinist German scientists became preoccupied with *comparing* races, more specifically: with comparing the German (or European) race with ‘primitive’ races. This ‘turn towards race and nation’ – strongly influenced by public opinion – would determine the way scientists handled and studied the preserved heads and skulls of Herero and Nama.

²⁶⁵ Andreas Winkelmann, ‘Die anatomische Sammlung der Berliner Universität und ihre anthropologischen Bestände’, in: Stoecker, Schnalke and Winkelmann (ed.), *Sammeln, erforschen, zurückgeben?* 80.



Verschiedene Formen der Plica semilunaris. 1—3 aus: Giacomini (a); (Vergrößerung unbekannt); 4 aus H. Virchow; die übrigen nach meinen Präparaten. Letztere sind alle bei gleicher Vergrößerung gezeichnet, und zwar so, dass stets die Caruncula links liegt, der besseren Vergleichbarkeit halber; es sind deshalb zum Teil Spiegelbilder gezeichnet worden. Form I: Reihe 1 und 2. Form II: Reihe 3. Form III: Reihe 4. Form IV: Fig. 21—24. Form V: Fig. 25. Man beachte die Übergänge, sowie das Vorkommen verschiedener Formen beim gleichen Objekt!

Figure 9. Illustration of the 'third eyelid' of Herero, Nama and several species of anthropoid in: Paul Bartels, 'Histologisch-anthropologische Untersuchungen der Plica semilunaris bei Herero und Hottentotten sowie bei einigen Anthropoiden', Archiv für mikroskopische Anatomie 78 (1911).

Study of the ‘third eyelid’

The first illustration I want to discuss is a set of schematic drawings of the *plica semilunaris* of Herero, Nama and several species of anthropoid ape in the study by Paul Bartels (figure 9).²⁶⁶ What looks like a series of squiggly lines to the lay viewer is in fact a set of schematic renderings of the half-moon shaped piece of skin between the tear-duct and the eyeball, evolutionary remnants of the ‘third eyelid’ as seen in birds, reptiles, and amphibians.²⁶⁷ The illustration contains twenty-five small drawings ordered in rows. Together, they represent five ‘forms’ of the *plica semilunaris*. The top two rows represent the first form, a ‘*steife spitze Zottenform*’, as found in the specimens of an orangutan, a baboon (*2. cynoceph*), two types of macaco (*3. cercopith* and *4. Macac nemestr.*), three siamangs (*Hylobates syndactilus*), two Nama (‘Hottentots’), and one Herero. The third row represents the second form (‘*stumpfe, glatte Zottenform*’), as found in a chimpanzee, three Nama, and one Herero and the row below that the third form (‘*mehr weniger stark gebuchtete Zottenform*’), as found in three Nama and two Herero. Figures 21-24 (all Nama) and 25 (Nama) represent form four (‘*Hammerform*’) and five (‘*Peitschenform*’) respectively. The description below explains that some represent the left, others the right eye. Because they were all drawn in the same scale (exactly what scale is unclear), with the tear duct on the left, some were drawn in mirror-image.²⁶⁸

So, what does this illustration tell us about the practice of studying the heads? Firstly, considering that these drawings represent very fine tissue in a sensitive organ, the heads and specimen studied must have been in an incredibly good condition. Bartels remarks that most of the ‘material’ (preserved Nama and Herero heads) was very well preserved because it had been conserved – at his request – in a ten per cent formalin solution.²⁶⁹ Assuming that the heads had all arrived before the end of 1907, they would have been stored at the Pathological Institute for a couple of years until Bartels got the chance to study them.

Bartels must have started his research by selecting specimens for this study. Because the specimens in the study are marked with Greek and Latin letters that would later be painted on the surface of the skulls, it was possible to identify some of the twenty skulls returned to Namibia in 2011 as having been used for this specific research.²⁷⁰ He limited himself to ‘*südwestafrikanischen Material*’ for practical reasons (it would have been too time-consuming to include material from other regions as well, as the Nama and Herero ‘material’

²⁶⁶ Bartels, ‘Histologisch-anthropologische Untersuchungen der Plica semilunaris bei Herero und Hottentotten sowie bei einigen Anthropoiden’, 537.

²⁶⁷ Idem, 529.

²⁶⁸ Idem, 537.

²⁶⁹ Idem, 531.

²⁷⁰ Idem.

was already *'umfangreich'* and *'schwer zu übersehen'*). After selecting the human heads, he then requested anthropoid material from elsewhere.²⁷¹ *Herr Geheimrat* Fürbringer and *Herr* Dr. Loth in Heidelberg donated *bulbi* (eyeballs) from the chimpanzee, orangutan and several siamangs. A piece of gorilla eyeball turned out to be too damaged to be of any use.²⁷² In the illustration we see that the first three figures are noticeably smaller than the others: these were reproduced from a study by Giacomini from which the scale was unknown (*'Vergrößerung unbekannt'*). Figure 4 is also a reproduction, from a study by fellow anatomist Hans Virchow. The others were presumably drawn by Bartels himself.

Secondly, the drawings also reveal how closely Bartels must have scrutinized the 'material' to be able to make this study. Bartels did not simply draw the outline of the 'third eyelid' from sight – the drawing was preceded by a complicated anatomical process. After selecting twenty-five suitable heads, eight Herero and seventeen Nama, Bartels first examined the tear-duct and third eyelid 'in situ', before cutting these out with some of the *coniunctiva bulbi* still attached, *'unter möglichst tiefem Eindringen in die Augenhöhle'*. This was a process of trial and error.²⁷³ Only when he tried to cut out the first specimen (from Herero A, not drawn) with a very sharp razor he realized that it would be necessary to go through the 'cumbersome' process of making proper *'Schnittserien'* (very thin sections) suitable to be studied under the microscope. All other *'Objekte'* were embedded in paraffin in a series of sections together with the *'Anthropoiden-Material'*. Because the specimen were rather 'voluminous', including muscles and cartilage, he had to make relatively thick sections of 30-50 micro millimeter. It must have been a messy affair: it was *'natürlich bei einem so gekrümmten und oft bei der Fixierung geschrumpften oder verlagerten Objekt wie die Plica meist nur annähernd möglich, Horizontal-schnitte zu erhalten'*.²⁷⁴ The sections were then pigmented, which was necessary for the study of glands. Were possible he used a red colorant, *Alaunkarmin*, so that the original pigment would still be recognizable.

He followed the procedure for the *plica* of both eyes in each specimen – which indicates that the selection of samples for the drawings was arbitrary. The illustration depicts thirteen Nama and four Herero, while Bartels actually studied two sections of twenty-five preserved heads. Leaving 'Herero A' out, this would still amount to forty-eight samples.

²⁷¹ Bartels, 'Histologisch-anthropologische Untersuchungen der Plica semilunaris bei Herero und Hottentotten sowie bei einigen Anthropoiden', 531.

²⁷² Idem.

²⁷³ In a radical praxiographic approach historian Marieke Hendriksen made a preparation of a sheep heart herself, to experience the troublesome process of making an anatomical preparation. Her research sheds fascinating light on the arbitrariness and chance involved in making a preparation in the first place (see chapter 2).

²⁷⁴ Bartels, 'Histologisch-anthropologische Untersuchungen der Plica semilunaris bei Herero und Hottentotten sowie bei einigen Anthropoiden', 532.

Clearly, Bartels could shift and select specimens for the illustration until he could make a convincing argument about the different forms of the ‘third eyelid’ – and about the similarities between Africans and apes. The drawings come with more limitations, especially because they are not scaled. Bartels had first tried to measure the surface of the plica, but this proved impossible. He justified his decision to forego measurements thoroughly. For one of his measuring attempts he had to lift up a *plica* (he does not specify which one) and flatten it out – a procedure that according to Bartels could not be united with the goal of a ‘*histologischen Untersuchung*’. Moreover, the plica had shrunk irregularly in the formalin solution used to preserve the heads.²⁷⁵ It would of course have been extremely difficult to measure every millimeter and fraction of such an irregularly shaped object anyhow. Therefore, Bartels limited himself to giving ‘an overall impression’. Even then, he admits that the folds of plica could only be found with difficulty in the specimens (especially when the eyeballs were sunk deep inside the eye sockets) and that his findings could not be compared with findings in living human beings.²⁷⁶

Despite his acknowledgement of all these serious shortcomings of his study, Bartels ‘found’ sufficient evidence to prove the similarities between the studied primate specimens and Africans. The illustration clearly aims to emphasize similarities: drawings of the ‘third eyelid’ of primates and Africans are mixed and only on closer inspection - by reading the small letters below each drawing – does it become clear which is which. This presentation is especially striking because Bartels admits that only the chimpanzee was impossible to tell apart from the human specimens.²⁷⁷ He also points to the ‘*Übergänge sowie das Vorkommen verschiedener Formen beim gleichen Objekt*’, casting further doubt on his categorization. Still, he happily establishes two different forms of plica that occurs in both primates and Nama and Herero. This is because he sets out to underwrite a pre-existing theory of Italian anatomist Carlo Giacomini, who had ‘discovered’ that the *plica semilunaris* of coloreds (‘*Farbigen*’) is characterized by a piece of cartilage (‘*Knorpelstückchen*’) rarely seen in ‘*unserer Rasse*’.²⁷⁸ The plica was of special interest, because it is an atavism, a left-over of the ‘third eyelid’ of our ancient ancestors. Evidence that both ‘coloreds’ and primates had similar plica would prove the former’s lower ranking on the evolutionary ladder. Conveniently, Bartels does not discuss the third eyelid of whites.

²⁷⁵ Bartels, ‘Histologisch-anthropologische Untersuchungen der Plica semilunaris bei Herero und Hottentotten sowie bei einigen Anthropoiden’, 533.

²⁷⁶ Idem, 534.

²⁷⁷ Idem, 545.

²⁷⁸ Idem, 537.

The drawings depict a random mix of Nama and Herero. Clearly, Bartels did not set out to establish the characteristics of either race, they are merely '*Farbigen*' that happen to form a manageable part of his collection. Whether the specimens were fully Herero and Nama does not matter: '*auf die Reinblütigkeit kommt es für unsere Frage vorläufig nicht an*'.²⁷⁹ His only interest was the difference of these 'coloreds' and whites ('*unserer Rasse*'). In the practice of the study of Bartels, the Herero and Nama heads were partially dissected. Bartels removed sections of the 'third eyelid' from the preserved heads, embedded them in formalin, included them in a section series together with primate material and studied them to determine the similarities between Africans and apes. Fragments of the bodies of Herero and Nama prisoners became *physically* part of a series including anthropoids. The set of schematic drawings demonstrates that Herero or Nama identity, sex, age, and further particularities about the specimens were of no concern. The Nama and Herero heads had become representatives of '*Farbigen*', of whom Bartels pre-assumed their closeness to apes.

Turn towards race and nation

Bartels study is indicative of a 'turn toward race and nation' in German anthropology in the early twentieth century. In these years there was 'a rather abrupt shift', 'from a liberal preoccupation with the plenitude of the world's peoples (which had led to the popularity of the '*Völkerschauen*') to a more narrow concern with the nation's specific Others'.²⁸⁰ Bartels' study fits this 'narrow concern', by assuming a fundamental difference between Self and Other, '*Farbigen*' (in the shape of prisoners-of-war from the German colonies) and '*unserer Rasse*'. Bartels does not follow the non-Darwinist approach to study the traits of specific (unrelated, unique) races, but compares races from a Darwinist perspective. The first years of the twentieth century saw an upsurge in Darwinist racial theories. German scientists, including future Nazi-scientist Eugen Fischer, 'theorized and postulated on eugenics and social Darwinism in terms of a perceived Caucasian physical and mental superiority to other races'.²⁸¹ German anthropologists and ethnologists abandoned the liberal humanism of *BGAEU*-founder Rudolf Virchow (who had advocated the study of '*Naturvölker*' for an understanding of humanity) and embraced 'an increasingly *völkisch* vision, dominated by the various struggles for *Lebensraum*, both outside and within Europe' instead.²⁸² This shift

²⁷⁹ Bartels, 'Histologisch-anthropologische Untersuchungen der Plica semilunaris bei Herero und Hottentotten sowie bei einigen Anthropoiden', 530.

²⁸⁰ Matti Bunzl and H. Glenn Penny, 'Introduction: rethinking German anthropology, colonialism, and race' in: Glenn Penny and Bunzl (ed.), *Worldly Provincialism* 17.

²⁸¹ Erichsen, "*The angel of death has descended violently among them*" 141.

²⁸² Bunzl and Glenn Penny, 'Introduction: rethinking German anthropology, colonialism, and race', 17.

coincided with a transition of the conceptions what constituted good science. By studying the collection policies of the *Museum für Völkerkunde* in Berlin, Glenn Penny has traced a shift that turned an earlier emphasis on ‘empirical induction and global human psychology’ into ‘a more limited and mechanical concern for the location and comparison of distinct cultural groups and their respective histories’.²⁸³

Virchow’s generation had been preoccupied with an objective representation of ‘races’ and ‘types’, based on as many examples of the ‘material’ in question as possible. In the last chapter I described how Felix von Luschan – another representative of this generation – wanted to acquire more skulls to be able to establish the characteristics of the Herero. German anthropologists hoped that by taking standardized measurements of skulls from a given population, they could mathematically calculate the typical skull form of that group. These types could in turn be compared with each other to determine patterns of migration and other racial relations around the world.²⁸⁴ This approach required a lot of skulls (or other objects) before an average characteristic could be established. This explains the ‘*Sammelwut*’ of nineteenth-century anthropologists, a collecting frenzy that resulted in cluttered cases in ethnographic museums and depots with thousands of human remains.²⁸⁵

How to draw and measure the skull, an irregularly shaped object, had been the subject of much debate among this generation of German anthropologists. In 1883, after more than a decade of discussion, German anthropologists associated with the nationwide branch of *BGAEU* finally agreed to follow Rudolf Virchow’s adaptation of Hermann von Ihering’s craniometrics schema, which established from which angle the all-important horizontal line between the bottom of the eye socket and the top of the earhole should be measured, in what has become known as the Frankfurt Agreement.²⁸⁶ Likewise, the anthropologists sought consensus about forms of representation. Generally, the anthropologists (including photographer and prominent *BGAEU* member Gustav Fritsch), preferred drawing to photography. Photographs had several disadvantages: they depicted variations in color as shadows so that dark colors appeared as depressions, and did not discriminate between relevant and irrelevant detail.²⁸⁷ There was concern that lay viewers would not know how to

²⁸³ Bunzl and Glenn Penny, ‘Introduction: rethinking German anthropology, colonialism, and race’, 17.

²⁸⁴ Zimmerman, *Anthropology and antihumanism in imperial Germany* 87.

²⁸⁵ H. Glenn Penny, ‘Bastian’s museum: on the limits of empiricism and the transformation of German ethnology’ in: Glenn Penny and Bunzl (ed.), *Worldly Provincialism* 109.

²⁸⁶ Zimmerman, *Anthropology and antihumanism in imperial Germany* 91.

²⁸⁷ Idem, 98.

‘read’ photographs.²⁸⁸ In drawing however, the expert controlled its representation, making it *more* like reality.²⁸⁹ To overcome the problem of subjectivity, ‘drawing machines’ with complicated mirror-systems were invented to allow scientists to draw skulls without ‘perspectival distortion’.²⁹⁰ Although the later studies discussed in this chapter were likewise ‘empirical and quantitative to point of being ridiculous’, they were less concerned with following specific methodological schemes and measuring, and more concerned with proving differences between the Self and the Other.²⁹¹

Popular demand was a critical factor in this transition. Around the turn of the century, Germany was ‘refashioned by the forces of modernity’, including the onset of mass culture and commercial consumption, and the democratization of visual culture.²⁹² The effects of this refashioning were most clearly visible in museums, where the cluttered displays that were only penetrable by an erudite elite were replaced by more explanatory, lay-friendly displays. I want to argue that the saturation of racial theories and images of the Other (on postcards, trading cards, and as illustrations in popular literature about the colonies) affected the discipline of physical anthropology as well - and vice versa.

An important example of the interrelationship between anthropology and popular culture is the appearance of Gustav Fritsch’s anthropological portraits of Namibians (taken in the 1860s) in colonial travelogues from the first decade of the twentieth century. His images were not only re-appropriated but also re-contextualized for ‘huge lay audiences’ that had no interest in ‘the liberal empiricism’ that motivated Fritsch but wanted to read ‘quasi-Darwinian/ eugenic narratives of a hierarchy of races locked in mortal combat’. In this new context, Fritsch’s anthropological portraits only served to perpetuate stereotypes.²⁹³ This re-use of anthropological imagery demonstrates that a clear divide between a ‘scientific and objective function of photography within the field of medical anthropology’ on the one hand, and a ‘vulgarizing function that bases anthropological photography on colonial stereotypes’ on the other, is ‘dubious’.²⁹⁴

²⁸⁸ Udo Krautwurst, ‘The joy of looking: early German anthropology, photography and audience formation’ in: Anette Hoffmann (ed.), *What we see. Reconsidering an anthropometrical collection from Southern Africa: images, voices, and versioning* (Basel: Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2009) 169.

²⁸⁹ Zimmerman, *Anthropology and antihumanism in imperial Germany* 99.

²⁹⁰ Idem, 104.

²⁹¹ Erichsen, “*The angel of death has descended violently among them*” 141.

²⁹² Bunzl and Glenn Penny, ‘Introduction: rethinking German anthropology, colonialism, and race’, 18.

²⁹³ Krautwurst, ‘The joy of looking’, 177.

²⁹⁴ Christian Joschke, ‘Beyond objectivity: anthropometric photography and visual culture’ in: Nicolas Bancel, Thomas David and Dominic Thomas (ed.), *The Invention of Race. Scientific and popular representations* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2014) 281.

By the time Bartels published his study on the *plica semilunaris* of Herero, Nama and apes, the glory days of the *BGAEU* were over. Its fall was brought on by a number of goals the society had set for itself, in particular its rejection of ‘mass appeal’. German anthropology was from its inception ‘torn between two desires’. The first desire was to share its understandings ‘that Others (*Naturvölker*) are *neither simple nor homogeneous*’ through communications that could be understood by large audiences without pandering to the ‘mass appeal of ethnographic exotica and erotica’.²⁹⁵ Convinced that visual culture was the right tool for this, Virchow even instigated an own photographic collection of the *BGAEU*.²⁹⁶ In practice, only very few photographs were used in the *BGAEU’s Journal of Ethnology*, a journal that had in any case, a very small readership.²⁹⁷ On the other hand, as we saw, there was the ‘more consuming’ desire to satisfy standards of ‘conceptual rigor and evidence’. As a result, scholars wrote specialized material for a small, erudite audience. In an attempt to circumvent ‘biased’ natural language, in a logic similar to the reasoning behind the drawing machine, they even invented a minimalist, narrative writing style which was so complex that it was ‘impenetrable to the lay reader’.²⁹⁸

The ‘anthropological populist void’ which resulted from the *BGAEU’s* rejection of mass appeal was filled by ‘several anti-modern, broadly Romantic’ discourses which provided the ‘*Mittelstände*’ (the middle classes) with visual and written ‘ethnographica reworked on its own moral and political terms’: the colonial literature mentioned earlier.²⁹⁹ This re-appropriation was ‘the work of Germany’s cultural bourgeoisie (*‘Bildungsbürgertum’*) who controlled much of press and publishing industry. It was through these networks that new racial theories and ideas about the German nation and its colonies were popularized.’³⁰⁰

In 1913, it was Eugen Fischer who legitimated in science what was already ‘widely construed to be common knowledge’: the existence of the moral, cultural and physical hierarchy of races.³⁰¹ His study *Die Rehobother Bastards und das Bastardierungsproblem beim Menschen* (1913) set out to demonstrate the dangers of miscegenation using the Namibian Rehoboth Bastards, descendants of sexual liaisons between Afrikaners and Khoisan, as an example, by thoroughly analyzing which traits they had inherited of both parent

²⁹⁵ Krautwurst, ‘The joy of looking’, 157.

²⁹⁶ Joschke, ‘Beyond objectivity’, 285.

²⁹⁷ Krautwurst, ‘The joy of looking’, 170.

²⁹⁸ *Idem*, 157.

²⁹⁹ *Idem*, 150.

³⁰⁰ *Idem*, 176.

³⁰¹ *Idem*, 178.

peoples.³⁰² Fischer succeeded in adding the ‘missing aura of legitimacy’ to a pre-existent popular sentiment that had already reached a large part of the population through even more questionable ‘pseudo-science’ and popular writing.³⁰³ The study was published while doctoral students Fetzner and Zeidler were working on their dissertations. This interplay between popular ideas and science should be kept in mind when examining the visual material of their studies on preserved Nama and Herero heads respectively.

‘17 Hottentottenköpfen’

Fetzner’s study *‘Rassenanatomische Untersuchungen an 17 Hottentottenköpfen’* was published in the *Zeitschrift für Morphologie und Anthropologie* in 1913/1914. The illustrations in this study leave much less to the imagination than the schematic drawings in Bartels’ work. The study contains ten figures of partially dissected Nama heads in the running text, and three sets of photographs of three preserved heads, seen in profile and *en face*, in a separate section. By using drawings, Fetzner was able to draw attention to his main object of study: only the frontal facial muscles around the nose and mouth and some muscles around the ear were worked out in detail (figure 10). Fetzner left the ears, lips, points of the nose, and eyelids intact and drew them more or less realistically, if rather schematic. Some of the drawings (including figures 10.1 and 10.6) are parted in two halves by a vertical line, with ‘*Von hier aus zerstört*’ behind the line in small letters. It had been Fetzner’s intention to only publish the half of the drawing with the facial muscles, but the entire drawings were reproduced by mistake.³⁰⁴ These drawings show least detail around the ears.

By contrast, the photographs show very little detail that seems relevant for the study (figure 11). We see three complete, well-preserved heads from the front and the side indicated as XII, XIII and XIV. On the photographs numbered XIII (11.2) and XIV (11.3) we can see clear scars, indicating that the skull had been opened to remove the brains.³⁰⁵ Hans Virchow allowed Fetzner to have the photographs taken in the workspace (*‘Atelier’*) of the Pathological Institute. The photographs were made by one *‘Fräulein Eggebrecht’* – quite notable considering that the world of German anthropology was very male-orientated at the time. There were however, several female anthropologists active in the late 1890s.³⁰⁶

³⁰² Eugen Fischer, *Die Rehobother Bastards und das Bastardierungsproblem beim Menschen* (Graz: Akademische Druck und Verlagsanstalt, 1961. Unveränderter Abdruck der 1913 im Verlag Gustav Fischer in Jena erschienenen Ausgabe) 3.

³⁰³ Krautwurst, ‘The joy of looking’, 179.

³⁰⁴ Fetzner, ‘Rassenanatomische Untersuchungen an 17 Hottentottenköpfen’, 156.

³⁰⁵ Hayes, Silvester and Hartmann, ‘Picturing the past in Namibia’, 102.

³⁰⁶ Zimmerman, *Anthropology and antihumanism in imperial Germany* 129.

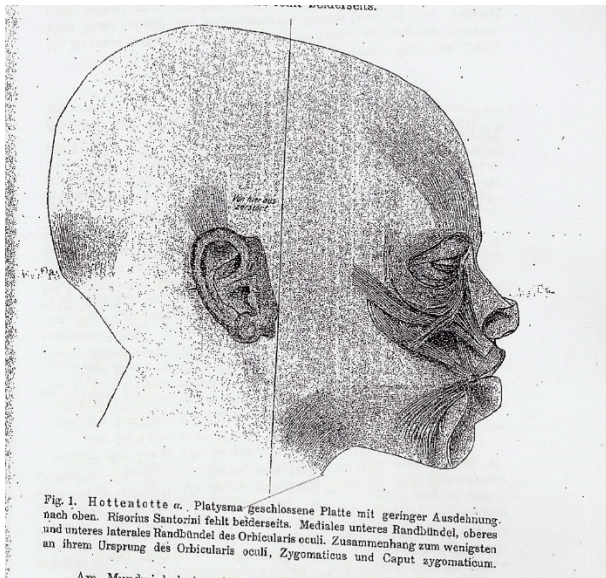


Figure 10.1

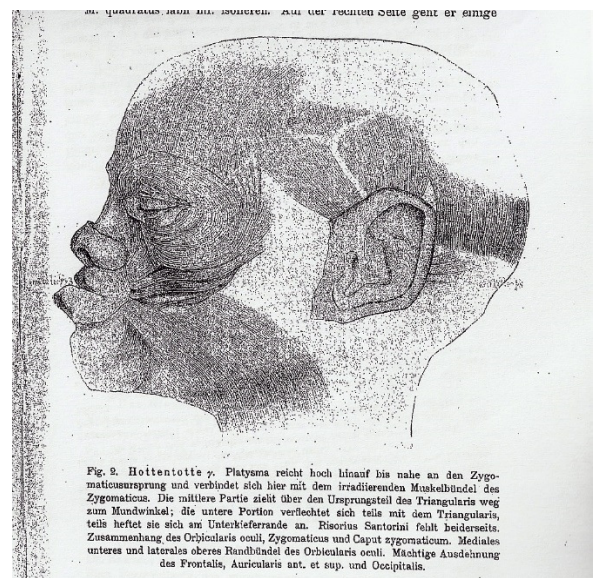


Figure 10.2

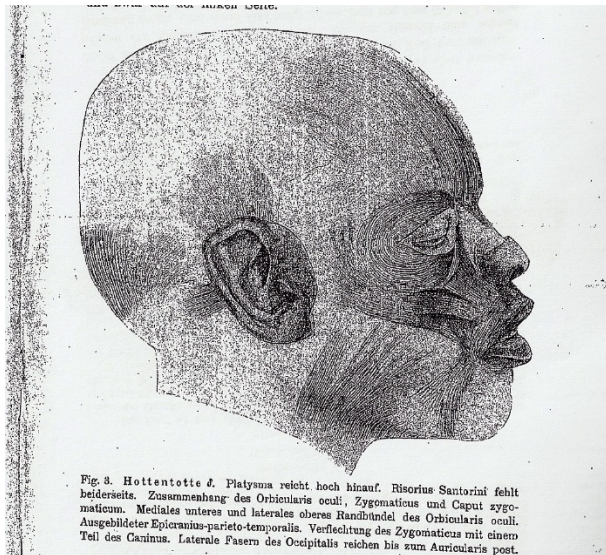


Figure 10.3

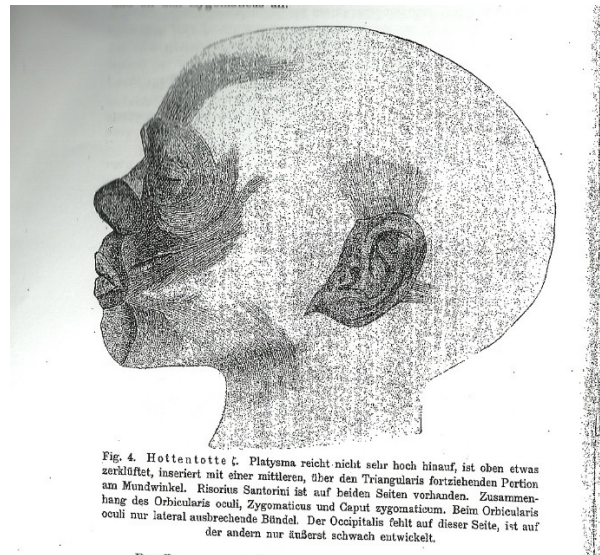


Figure 10.4

Figures 10. Illustrations of dissected Nama heads in: Christian Fetzer, 'Rassenanatomische Untersuchungen an 17 Hottentottenköpfen', *Zeitschrift für Morphologie und Anthropologie* (1913/14).

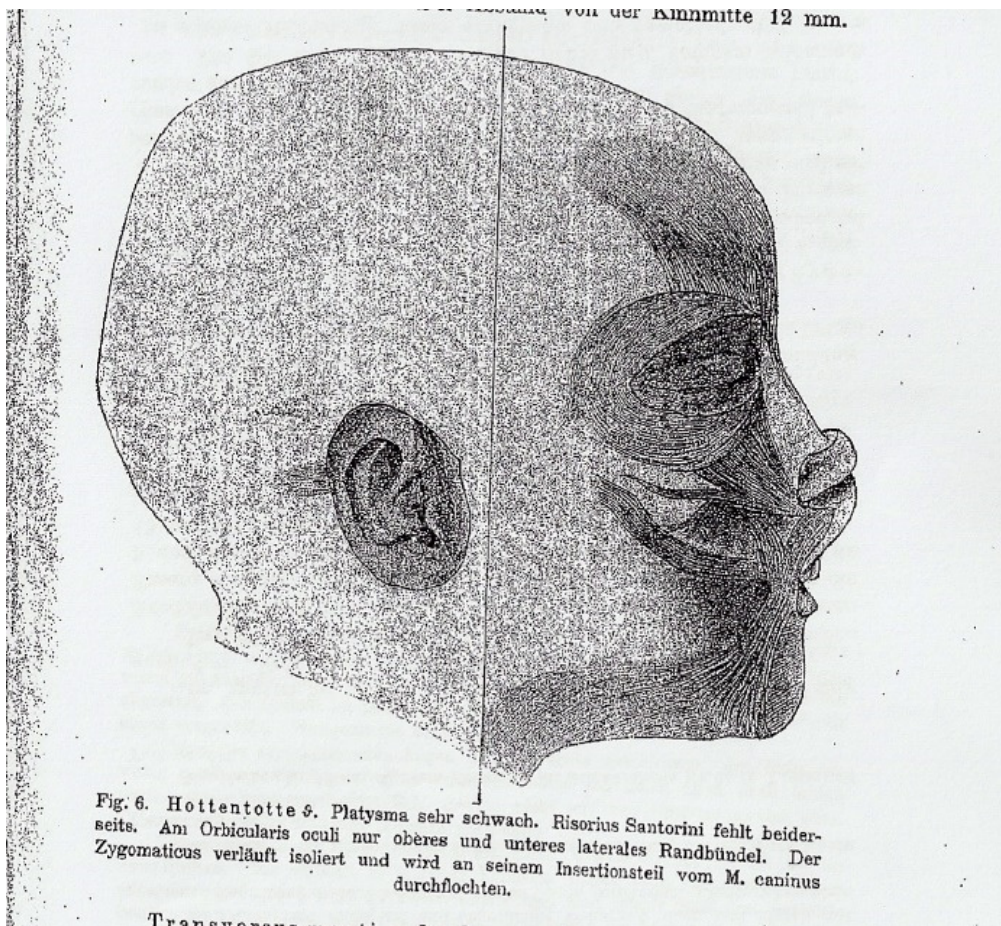


Figure 10.6

Figures 10.6 and 10.8. Illustrations of dissected Nama heads in:
 Christian Fetzer,
 'Rassenanatomische Untersuchungen an 17 Hottentottenköpfen', Zeitschrift für Morphologie und Anthropologie (1913/14).

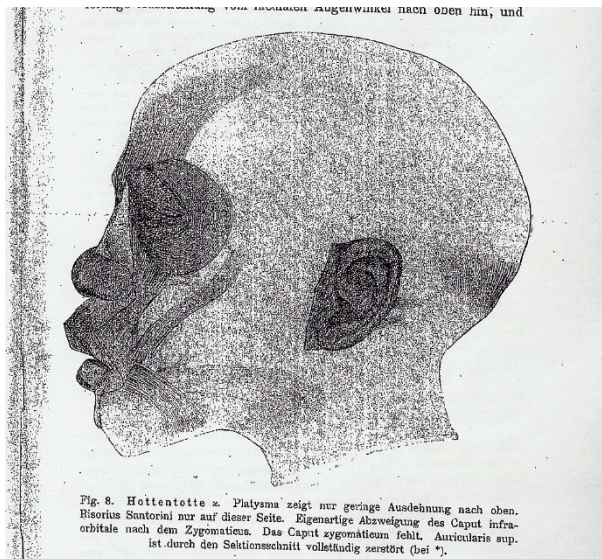


Figure 10.8

The photographs were obviously made before Fetzter dissected the heads and made the drawings. Before turning to the function of the drawings and photographs in the study in more detail, I will describe Fetzter's study goals and the procedure he subjected the heads to. According to Olusoga and Erichsen 'aspiring racial scientist' Christian Fetzter, used the preserved heads from Shark Island 'in a series of experiments' designed to demonstrate the 'anatomical similarities between the Nama and the anthropoid ape'.³⁰⁷ Fetzter's theories were influenced by the work of Eugen Fischer.³⁰⁸ Indeed, Fetzter does not skirt around his intentions: he wants to step in the latest trend ('*allerneusten Zeit*') of comparing the muscular structure of different races ('*verschiedener Rassen*') with each other and with those of anthropoid apes, as in the work of F. Birkner, A. Forster, E. Fischer and H. v. Eggeling.³⁰⁹ Of course he also builds on the previous work of his professor Paul Bartels, who advised Fetzter to make a contribution to the developing comparative racial science by studying seventeen Nama heads from his collection. Unavoidably, Fetzter's conclusion was that the type of facial muscles found in the '*Hottentotten*' was fundamentally different from that of whites ('*Weißten*').³¹⁰ Like his professor, he did not think it necessary to actually include 'whites' in his study. He considered the fundamental difference between whites and Nama a given fact. Convinced of the lower status of Nama, he concluded that it was probable ('*nur mit einiger Wahrscheinlichkeit*') that the facial muscular structure of Nama '*entspricht im allgemeinen einer niedrigeren Entwicklungsstufe des Menschengeschlechtes*'.³¹¹

To reach this conclusion Fetzter meticulously studied the muscular structure of each of the seventeen heads. Like his professor he describes his practice in some detail. He does not mention the criteria for selecting, and it seems that Bartels, who provided him with the heads, also selected them. During the whole process Bartels assisted Fetzter with '*Rat und Tat*', checking his preparations, descriptions and drawings.³¹² First, the heads were each photographed twice, from the front and from the side in 'half the real size'.³¹³ After the photographs were made, Fetzter measured and described the heads by following the method of Prof. von Luschan, using the '*Martin'schen Anthropometer*' for measurements (he made over thirty, including the '*Tiefe der Nase*' and '*Breite zwischen inneren Augenwinkeln*') and used Von Luschan's '*Farbentafel*' to establish the skin color.³¹⁴ Fetzter encountered a similar

³⁰⁷ Olusoga and Erichsen, *The Kaiser's Holocaust* 225.

³⁰⁸ Idem, 358.

³⁰⁹ Fetzter, 'Rassenanatomische Untersuchungen an 17 Hottentottenköpfen', 95.

³¹⁰ Idem, 149.

³¹¹ Idem, 149-150.

³¹² Idem, 95.

³¹³ Zimmerman, *Anthropology and antihumanism in imperial Germany* 129.

³¹⁴ Fetzter, 'Rassenanatomische Untersuchungen an 17 Hottentottenköpfen', 96-97.

measuring problem as his professor Bartels had experienced: the thickness of the soft tissue proved impossible to measure because the tissue had shrunk or expanded in the conservation fluid. It was also flattened during the transport from German South-West Africa to Berlin. Differences in age, sex, and nourishment would also influence the thickness of the tissue: *'Konserviertes Material wie das unsere, das von abgetriebenen, durch Krankheit und Siechtum geschwächten Individuen genommen ist'*, was not suitable for these kinds of measurements.³¹⁵ It is of course no surprise that Fetzter described the heads of emaciated prisoners from Shark Island, who had received small rations of uncooked rice and suffered from illness, *'in einem sehr abgemagerten Zustand'* and without a *'Spur von Fett'*.³¹⁶ Fetzter established that most had died of scurvy.³¹⁷ After the measurements, Fetzter made casts of the entire heads. Of the ones with very prominent scars, he only made casts of the faces.³¹⁸

Next, Fetzter made preparations of the heads. The heads were first welled in water, to 'soften the tissue' and 'against the strong formalin smell'. Fetzter gives little information about the preparation process, but he does mention that he experienced difficulties. He examined every smallest *'irradiierende Muskelbündel'*, which was not easy, especially when they were discolored in the preservation fluid. In case of doubt he had to make very thin sections – like Bartels had done in his study of the *plica* - and use the microscope to establish whether they were part of the muscular structure or not.³¹⁹ Fetzter gives a more detailed description about the second series of plaster casts he made of every face - *after the preparation*.³²⁰ He did this on the advice of Paul Bartels. Fetzter is excited about the resulting *'schönes plastischen Bild'* on which he could draw the smallest details of muscular structure. Again, this was a process of trial and error. After a failed first attempt, he discovered that he could draw on the casts after coating them with shellac. He was very satisfied with the result however. Together with the cast made before the preparation, the photographs, and the skulls (the heads were macerated after Fetzter had made the second set of casts), the casts would have *'bleibendem Wert'* for future studies.³²¹ They would not be used for further research. In fact, Fetzter's own study was not accepted as a PhD dissertation.³²² The fact that it was published anyhow, could be indicative of the great interest in comparative racial studies at the time.

³¹⁵ Fetzter, 'Rassenanatomische Untersuchungen an 17 Hottentottenköpfen', 96.

³¹⁶ Idem, 98.

³¹⁷ Idem, 95.

³¹⁸ Idem, 96.

³¹⁹ Idem, 97.

³²⁰ The researchers of the Charité Human Remains Project were not able to locate the two sets of casts, or the original drawings and photographs made by Fetzter.

³²¹ Fetzter, 'Rassenanatomische Untersuchungen an 17 Hottentottenköpfen', 97.

³²² Charité Human Remains Project, Provenance analysis. Specimen A787 (Nama) (30 September 2011) 5.

Although Fetzter based his study on seventeen preserved heads, he published the results of only fifteen. Of these fifteen, only ten were accompanied by an illustration and three of those were also depicted in photographs. It was very expensive to reproduce photographs at the time (the *BGAEU*-journal could barely afford it) so it would have been logical for Fetzter to make a selection.³²³ That he made a selection of drawings for the publication is more striking. What were his criteria for selecting the illustrations? In the descriptions and analysis of the muscles Fetzter makes no direct references to the drawings, and the descriptions below the drawings seem mostly there to emphasize traits that Fetzter argues are typical for a ‘Hottentott’: a limited differentiation (*‘mangelhafte Differenzierung’*) of the muscles in the middle part of the face, a frequent occurrence of strongly developed muscles in the lower muscular ring around the eye (*orbicularis oculi*) and a frequent absence of the *musculus risorius santorini*, a facial muscle behind the corners of the mouth. Below illustrations 1 (10.1), 2 (10.2), 3 (10.3), 5, 6 (10.6), 9, and 10 we read: *‘risorius santorini fehlt beiderseits’*.³²⁴ Only 4 (10.4) and 7 depict heads in which Fetzter did find this muscle on both sides of the face, while he found the muscle on one side of the head illustrated in 10.8.³²⁵

Why were the other seven not illustrated? Two were not included because Bartels had already made preparations of them: Fetzter could therefore not give a description of the *‘unpräparierten Kopfes’*, so his analysis would be incomplete. In both cases, Fetzter limits himself to reproducing Bartels’ findings – and incidentally both had no *risorius santorini*. Perhaps he only included these ‘incomplete’ cases to reinforce his hypothesis. Of the other five, two had strongly developed *risorius santorini*.³²⁶ Had Fetzter decided to include illustrations of these two ‘specimens’, omitting two without this particular muscle, his conclusion would clearly have seemed much less convincing. To bolster his analysis, he even included illustrations of heads without *risorius santorini* muscles that were not very well preserved (10.2 and 10.6). One had a flattened ear and bloated mouth as a result of the preservation process, as Fetzter acknowledges: *‘Beim Einlegen des Kopfes in Formol wurde er wahrscheinlich stark gedrückt’* (see figure 10.2).³²⁷ Of another specimen (figure 10.6) it is even more remarkable that Fetzter used it as an example of ‘Hottentot’ muscular structure, as he described the head as being strongly deformed:

³²³ See the section ‘Virchow’s skulls’, page 90.

³²⁴ Fetzter, ‘Rassenanatomische Untersuchungen an 17 Hottentottenköpfen’, 99, 105, 109, 117, 119, 129, 134.

³²⁵ Idem, 114, 122, 125.

³²⁶ Idem, 127 and 131.

³²⁷ Idem, 105.

“Die Richtung der Augenspalten kann man in diesem Falle nicht genau angeben, da beim Einlegen des Kopfes in Formol die Augenpartie stark deformiert wurde. (...) Auch der geöffnete Mund ist stark verzogen, ganz besonders die Oberlippe ist stark nach links zusammengedrückt.”³²⁸

Portraying ‘types’

The scientific merit of drawings of sometimes strongly deformed heads was debatable. Fetzer seems to have included them to bolster his conclusions – and as illustrations of his characterization of the Nama ‘type’. Fetzer began his analysis of every specimen with a description of the size of the head (including measurements of length and width), the form of the face, the eyes and eyebrows, the nose, mouth, teeth, ears, and hair. For example, he characterized the head seen in figure 10.1 as having ‘thick lips’ and a nose that was ‘*sehr breit und flach*’ (very wide and flat).³²⁹ Finally, Fetzer pinpointed the skin color with a number of Von Luschan’s *Farbentafel*, a chromatic scale that was to be established with equipment consisting of 36 opaque glass tiles which were compared to the subject's skin. All heads were neatly categorized at 29, just in the category 29-36 (‘very dark or black type’). Four of the specimens were classified as 29 ‘*mit starkem Einschlag ins schwärzliche 35*’. Fetzer put the two children at 30. In his descriptions of racial characteristics Fetzer is highly subjective, using words such as ‘well’, ‘weakly’ or ‘strongly developed’ and strange observations such as ‘a double chin, never observed in a Hottentot’.³³⁰

Descriptions of the nose, and even less so the hair, would not be relevant for a study of facial muscles but were included nevertheless. They served to illustrate racial characteristics of the Nama and their differences with the Germans or whites. This becomes even more evident when we consider the photographs included in the study. There are three sets of photographs: XII (11.1) corresponds with figure 10.3, XIII (11.2) corresponds with figure 10.4 and XIV (11.3) with figure 10.8. Fetzer does not explain why he chose to include these photographs. No reference is made to the photographs anywhere in the text. The necks, ragged were the heads had been severed, were placed in metal rings on a standard to keep them in place. They were photographed with a label designating their race and collection number, but this was only included in photograph XIII: ‘*Hottentotte. ḡ.*’. In the other four photographs, we can just make out the top of the plates. Possibly, he included them to invite

³²⁸ Fetzer, ‘Rassenanatomische Untersuchungen an 17 Hottentottenköpfen’, 118.

³²⁹ Idem, 98, 107, 113.

³³⁰ Erichsen, “*The angel of death has descended violently among them*” 142.

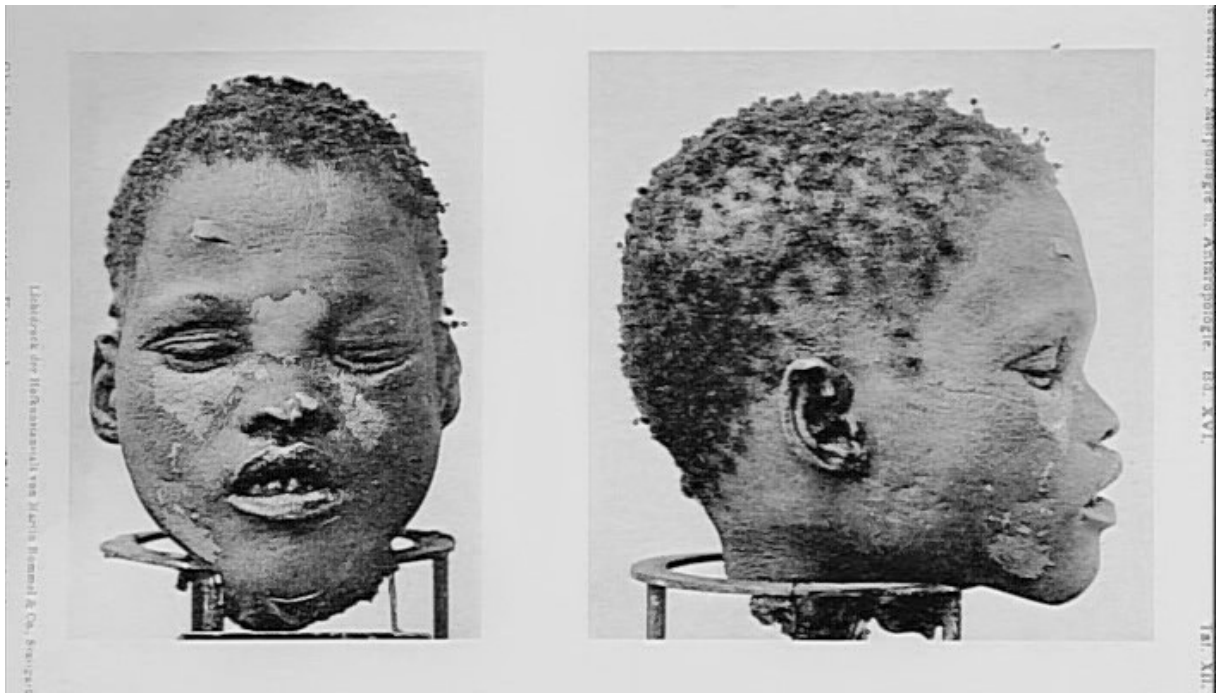


Figure 11.1. 'Tafel XII'.

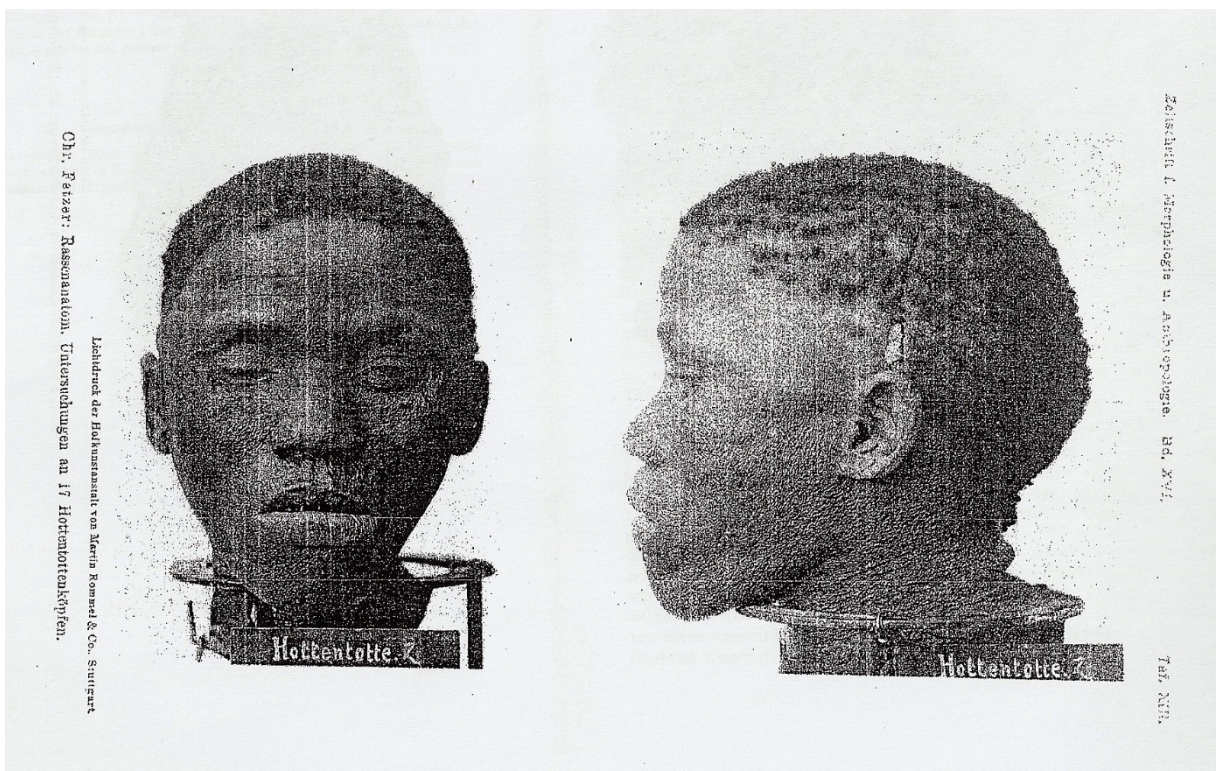


Figure 11.2. 'Tafel XIII'.

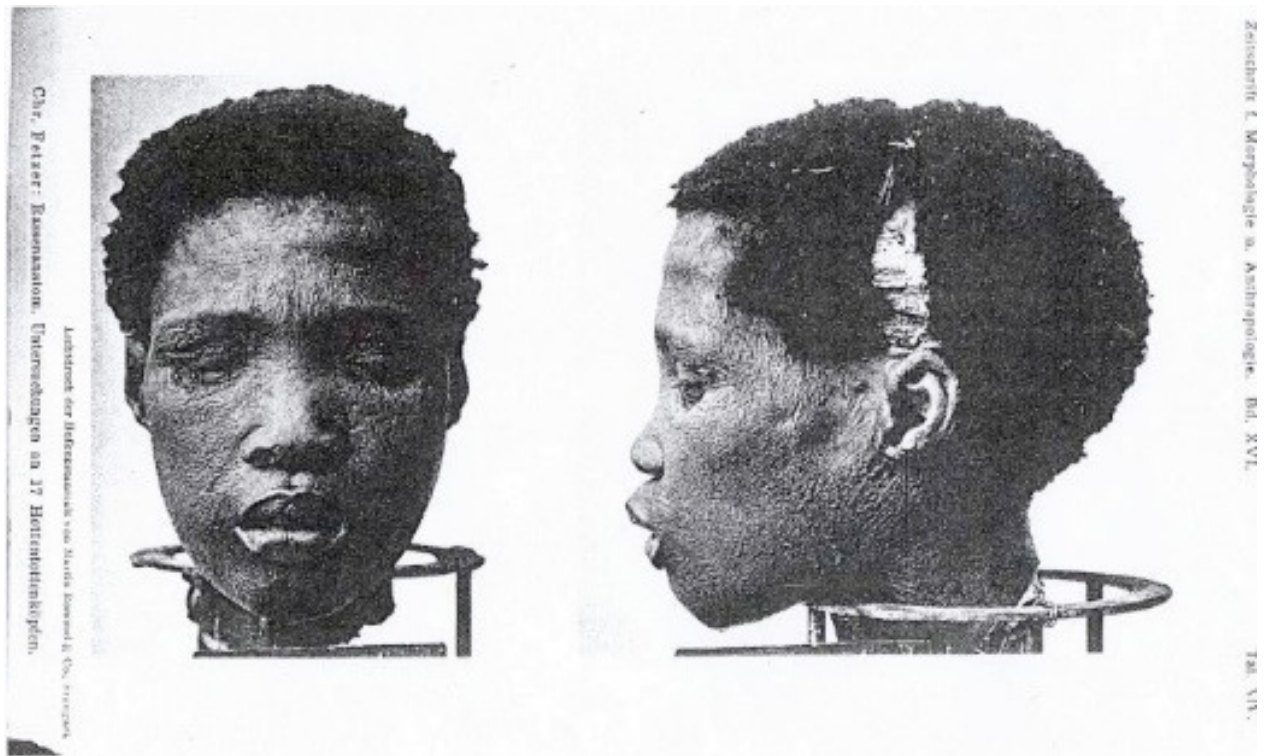


Figure 11.3. 'Tafel XIV'.

Figures 11. Photographs from Christian Fetzer, 'Rassenanatomische Untersuchungen an 17 Hottentottenköpfen', *Zeitschrift für Morphologie und Anthropologie* (1913/14).

other scientists to follow up on his research – elsewhere he expressed the hope that his complete set of drawings, casts and photos would be used for future studies. Why he selected *these* three remains unclear. They appear to be some of the more well preserved specimens.

Comparing the photographs with the drawings, it is notable that the photographs included portraits from the front as well as the side, while the drawings are all seen from the side. Anthropologists at the time agreed that frontal photographs demonstrated the shape of the nose more clearly than photographs from the side. Considering Fetzer's insistence on the shape of the nose as being '*sehr Breit*', this could well have played a part in this decision. Something else the photographs showed but the drawings did not was the hair of the Nama, which Fetzer also describes in some detail. In his description of his methodology, Fetzer degradingly refers to the Nama's hair ('*dicht verfilzten Haar der Hottentotten*') as a '*Hindernis*' for accurate drawings of the outline of the head.³³¹ In his descriptions of each specimen, his repetition of words is striking. All three heads photographed are characterized as having a nose that is '*(sehr) Breit*' and '*(sehr) Flach*'.³³² The hair in these three cases is described as '*(spiralig) zu kleinen Knötchen aufgerollt*'.³³³ By using the same terms again and again, Fetzer emphasizes that these traits are 'typical' for the Nama.

The photographs of the Nama heads bare an eerie resemblance to anthropological portraits of living Southern Africans. In the tradition of anthropological portraits, Fetzer includes photographs from the front and in profile and includes descriptions that point out where to look (albeit implicitly). In this, the photographs resemble the work of the most influential figure in German anthropological photography: Gustav Fritsch, the *BGAEU*-member mentioned earlier. In 1872 he had published the hugely influential *Die Eingeborenen Süd Afrika's*, a two-volume work with a volume containing a 'detailed physical, anthropological, and ethnographic analysis of the indigenous people of southern Africa', with a series of lithographic plates appended comparing the skulls, skeletal features and skin colors of different 'races'.³³⁴ The second volume contained portraits of Africans he had encountered on his journey some ten years earlier, when he was just twenty-five. They were presented in a hierarchical order, from 'A-Bantu' to the lowest rank, the 'Khoikhoin': a sequence of Khoi and San people that ranked from the Hottentots via the Korana down to the 'Bushmen'.³³⁵

³³¹ Fetzer, 'Rassenanatomische Untersuchungen an 17 Hottentottenköpfen', 96-97.

³³² Idem, 107, 133, 123.

³³³ Idem, 107, 113, 124.

³³⁴ Andrew Bank and Keith Dietrich, *An eloquent picture gallery. The South African portrait photographs of Gustav Theodor Fritsch, 1863-1865* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2008) 140.

³³⁵ Idem, 141.

Even though Fritsch had originally been driven by ethnographic curiosity, his work now emphasized racial characteristics rather than customs. This was in part due to his integration into the emerging anthropological community in Berlin as a member of the *BGAEU*. Besides his portrait of Xhosa chief Xhoxho he writes:

“(T)his table gives a good example of how important it is to have two views of the same individual. No one would have believed that the weakly developed nose in the profile view could convert into such a hideous, almost ape-like nose in the front view (...). Another characteristic of the Xhosa that diverges from the facial configuration of the European is the mouth. The lips are flattened and protruding.”

The descriptions of his portraits of the Khoikhoen likewise drew attention to their ‘peppercorn hair’, shoulders, skull configuration, wrinkled skin, facial features and the degree of ‘prognathy’ (protruding of nose and mouth). He even aestheticized the dead, describing the ‘impressions’ and ‘characteristics’ of skulls. Fritsch described bones as either ‘graceful’ or ‘ungraceful’, or as bearing a certain character, usually that of a lack of civilization.³³⁶ The European head and body served as the implicit model pointing out the ‘deficiencies’ of the African physique.³³⁷ This is striking, considering that the anthropological community at the time was not preoccupied with comparisons yet. Fritsch’s implicit comparisons would become explicit in the work of Fetzer’s generation.

Fritsch wanted his photographs to be of maximum scientific value. Like other anthropological photographers at the time he recommended techniques for this. To be able to compare measurements of different individuals on photographs, of the living and of skeletons, precise standardization was required.³³⁸ The subject should remove as much clothing as possible, lighting had to be simple and clear and the subject should stand before a light-colored background. Photographers should make images to a standard scale and the subject had to stand erect, with one arm down, the other hand on his or her torso.³³⁹ Fritsch himself proposed the following standards:

³³⁶ Andrew Bank, ‘Anthropology and portrait photography: Gustav Fritsch’s “natives of South Africa”, 1863-1872’ in: *Kronos. Journal of Cape History/ Tydskrif vir Kaaplandse Geskiedenis* 27 (november 2001) 72.

³³⁷ Bank and Keith Dietrich, *An eloquent picture gallery* 142.

³³⁸ Zimmerman, *Anthropology and antihumanism in imperial Germany* 95.

³³⁹ *Idem*, 96-97.

1. “To reduce the distortion of foreshortening, choose only level or horizontal projections;
2. Due to the dissimilarity between frontal and side views, always make a full face and a profile shot of the same individual;
3. Because of distortions resulting from short focal lengths, use middle and preferably long focal lengths;
4. In anticipation of future comparisons, compose subjects using a constant focal length, and keep the same distance between camera and subject;
5. In order to bring out anatomical features to their fullest, expose head and chest as brightly as possible; and;
6. To facilitate measurements or tracing, use lighting that is simple and clear, and a light-colored background.”³⁴⁰

This would become standard practice. The photographs of the three Nama heads made by *Fräulein* Eggebrecht closely follow the recommendations. A full face and profile shot were made, using a constant focal length, in front of a light-colored background. Although any scale is notably absent in his publication, Fetzter did do measurements. He would have been able to reconstruct the scale using the casts and measurements he had made.

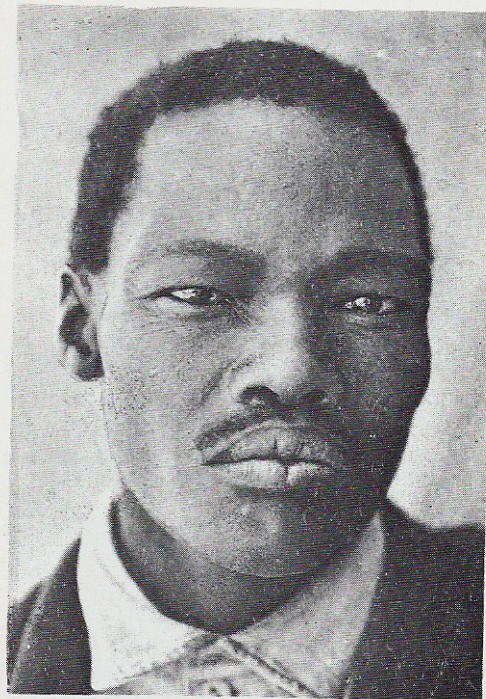
When Fetzter’s study was published however, a shift had taken place, coinciding with the ‘turn towards race and nation’ and popular anthropology discussed above. It was no longer relevant to have as many samples as possible to establish average measurements for ‘races’. Anthropometrical photography such as that of Fritsch was replaced by the photography of ‘types’. In popular literature, photographs originally taken for anthropometric research and intended for a small community of scientists, were now presented as types. Fritsch’s photographs reached a big audience when they were published, decontextualized, in the colonial war memoirs of Kurt Schwabe.³⁴¹ In *Die Eingeborenen Süd Afrika’s*, the photographs had been described in racist terms, but they were accompanied by names and geographic locations. Now, in Schwabe’s text, some of these individuals were made into types by new captions such as ‘Female Bushman of the Orange Free State’ and ‘Baster’.³⁴²

Scientific publications from the early twentieth century meanwhile used photographs of ‘types’ to facilitate comparisons. Eugen Fischer included seventy-two portrait photographs

³⁴⁰ Krautwurst, ‘The joy of looking’, 172-173.

³⁴¹ *Idem*, 173.

³⁴² *Idem*, 177-178.



Hottentotten.

Figure 12. 'Hottentotten'. Illustration in Eugen Fischer, 'Die Rehobother Bastards und das Bastardierungsproblem beim Menschen' (1913).

of Rehoboth Bastards with their names and position in extensive family trees (these diagrams were also included in the book). Preceding these portrait photographs is one page with four portraits (from different angles, of one male and one female) simply captioned '*Hottentotten*' (figure 12).³⁴³ Considering the Baster's mixed descent of Khoisan and Afrikaner, it is quite remarkable that no photographs of Afrikaners were included: Fischer was preoccupied with tracing Khoisan characteristics in the Bastards, to emphasize the 'danger of miscegenation'. Fischer's presentation of photographs of these living Nama – without caption, age, sex, or name, as an appendix of his study – is strikingly similar to the way Fetzer included the photographs of the three Nama heads: as an appendix, without caption or references made to them in the text. Fetzer seems to have assumed that his audience knew how to read these photographs – as Nama 'types' with racial characteristics different from those of whites.

'Beiträge zur Anthropologie der Herero'

In 1914 Heinrich F. B. Zeidler published his dissertation on facial muscles of '*farbigen Rassen*', based on five preserved Herero heads. Four of these were positively identified by the Charité Human Remains Project as specimens A 796 (Herero A), A 801 (Herero B), A 813 (Herero D) and A 834 (Herero E). Similarly to Fetzer, Zeidler wanted to establish to what extent the facial muscles of 'colored races', particularly the Herero, were different from the '*weißen Rasse*' and whether '*aus diesen eventuellen Unterschieden eine Klassifizierung in der zoologischen Reihe möglich ist*'.³⁴⁴ The study includes five drawings, one for each head, and no photographs (figure 13). The drawings in general appear a bit more crude than the drawings made by Fetzer. Like Fetzer's they are all in profile, showing schematic renderings of the muscles around the eye, the ear, and in the cheek. The nose, mouth, and in some cases, the ear are intact. Unlike Fetzer, Zeidler also drew (parts of) the hair of some of the heads (figures 13.1, 13.2, and 13.3). Herero 'D' (13.4) is more schematic: apparently Zeidler removed the entire scalp before he made the drawing. Zeidler also included another smaller, more schematic illustration of a '*négresse*' reproduced from a study by Herr Dr. Loth for comparison.

So how did Zeidler proceed? The five Herero heads were - again - made available by Paul Bartels in 1909. Von Eggeling made available the already dissected '*Material*' of four adult Herero, one Herero and one Nama child. Zeidler began with a description of the heads,

³⁴³ Fischer, *Die Rehobother Bastards und das Bastardierungsproblem beim Menschen* Taf. 1.

³⁴⁴ Zeidler, 'Beiträge zur Anthropologie der Herero', 12.

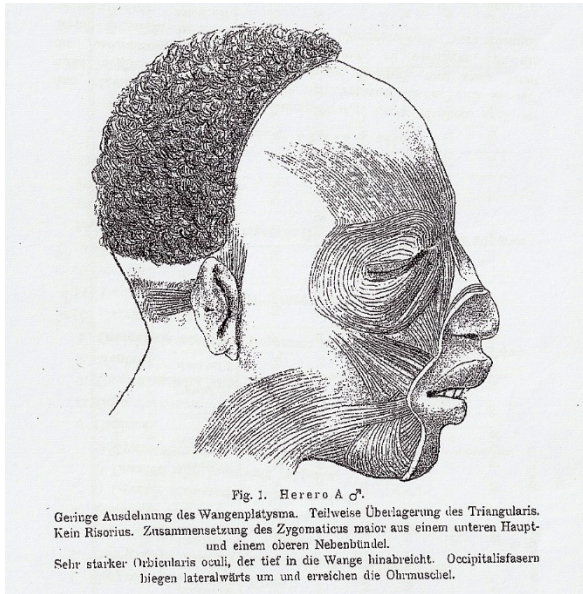


Figure 13.1

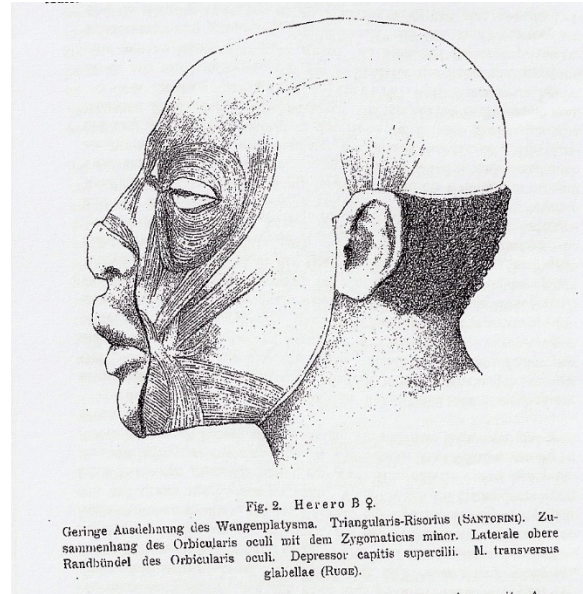


Figure 13.2

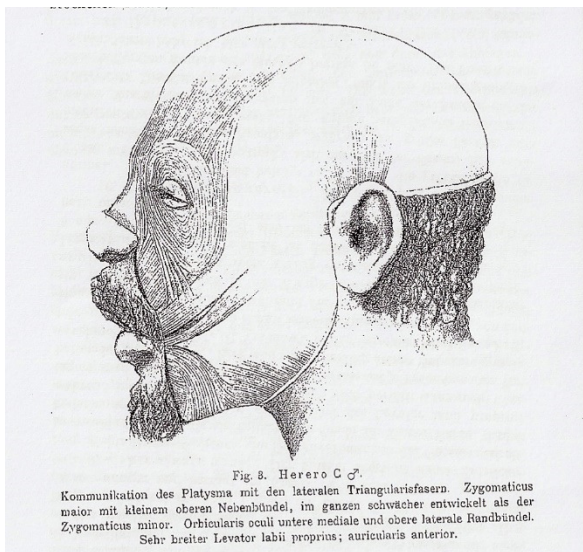


Figure 13.3

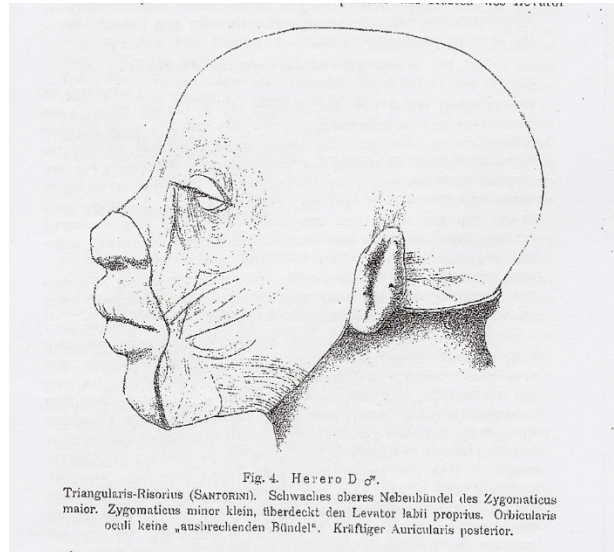


Figure 13.4

Figures 13.1-13.5. Illustrations of dissected Herero heads in: Heinrich Ziedler, 'Beiträge zur Anthropologie der Herero', Zeitschrift für Morphologie und Anthropologie 17 (1914/15).

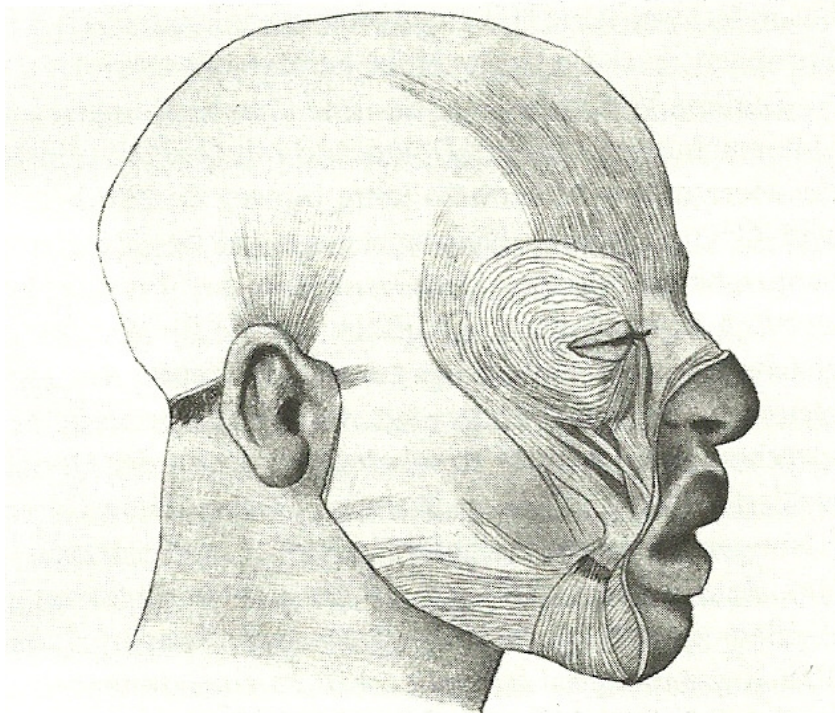


Fig. 5. Herero E ♂.

Spuren eines Nackenplatysma. Triangularis-Risorius (SAXTORINI). Obere Schicht des Triangularis nach unten geschlagen. Zygomaticus maior: unteres und oberes Nebenbündel. Ursprung dem Orbicularis oculi dicht angelagert. Orbicularis oculi sehr kräftig. Laterale obere und mediale untere Randbündel. Auricularis anterior.

Figure 13.5. Illustration of a dissected Herero head in Zeidler's study. During the 2011 repatriation ceremonies in Berlin and Windhoek, the skull of this individual was on display as representative of the nine Herero skulls returned (see chapter 6).

necessary for understanding ‘*manches typische der Hererorasse*’. Casts were then made ‘*um sich die Physiognomie und die Schädelformation jederzeit plastisch vor Augen führen zu können*’. They were described and measured according to the standards of Von Luschan, for which the Martin’schen instrument was used. Once again, measurements were not always possible because of the conservation process. They were hindered by the horizontal ‘*Sägeschnitt*’ made in the skulls for the removal of the brains. The long, complicated process took one-and-a-half years to complete. ‘*Oft war die anatomische Individualität so fein und kompliziert*’, writes Zeidler, ‘*dass ich lange Zeit mit der Lupe arbeiten oder zur Diagnose von Muskel- oder Bindegewebsfasern erst das Mikroskop zu Hilfe nehmen musste*.’³⁴⁵ Zeidler also explains in his introduction on what basis he ‘compares’ the Herero with the ‘white race’. Lacking material or statistics of the facial muscles of the ‘white race’, he chose to rely on his knowledge of what he had seen in ‘*Berliner Präpariersälen*’, and in study books, as ‘these were based on observations of the white race’. Like Fetzer, he made casts of his preparations, drawing the contours of muscular attachments on it in red after painting the cast with ‘*Leinöl*’.³⁴⁶ After Zeidler’s study, the heads were macerated and the skulls included in the anthropological collection of the Pathological Institute.³⁴⁷

Zeidler’s descriptions of the heads before preparation consisted of a systematic summary of superficial traits of the heads, indicative of his view on the heads as pure specimens (‘*reines “Material”*’). Like Fetzer, he described many aspects that had nothing to do with facial muscles but everything to do with ‘typical traits’ of Herero, such as the skin color (‘*braunschwarz*’), the shape of the head, face, skull, nose, and mouth.³⁴⁸ He also establishes the degree of ‘*Prognathie*’ and dwells on the teeth manipulation common for Herero men: in some ‘specimens’ the middle incisors of the upper jaw were sharpened in an inverted V- shape, while the lower incisors were pulled out.³⁴⁹ Remarkable is his very detailed description of the hair of some of the specimens, completely irrelevant for his study of facial muscles. The hair of ‘Herero A’ (13.1) is described as ‘*das typische Krause Negerhaar*’, and his description of the hair of another specimen is remarkably detailed:

“Das Haupthaar ist kürzer als bei den vorigen Köpfen; zeigt auf der Stirn lateralwärts größere freie Stellen. Backenbart ist vorhanden, wenn auch spärlich, immerhin so,

³⁴⁵ Zeidler, ‘Beiträge zur Anthropologie der Herero’, 186.

³⁴⁶ Idem, 187.

³⁴⁷ Schnalke, “‘Normale’ Wissenschaft”, 172.

³⁴⁸ Idem, 174.

³⁴⁹ Zeidler, ‘Beiträge zur Anthropologie der Herero’, 188.

dass er eine deutliche Verbindung mit dem Kinnbart bildet. Letzterer ist stark entwickelt, zeigt kurzes lockiges Haar. Der Schnurrbart geht jederseits in den Kinnbart über, zeigt im großen und ganzen jedoch kürzeres und weniger lockiges Haar.”³⁵⁰

Zeidler studied several muscles. He was not interested in the *risorius santorini* which could be observed ‘regularly’ in the Herero: Von Eggeling had only one specimen without it, from his own material ‘only Herero A and C’ lacked the muscle.³⁵¹ He was however, interested in the *musculus orbicularis oculi*, the round muscle around the eye, which he found to be very strongly developed in Herero ‘und übertrifft das beim Europäer Gewöhnliche bei weitem’ and the *musculus frontalis* in the forehead, which he found similarly more developed than that of the European.³⁵² Looking at the drawings, Zeidler seems to have drawn little detail around the muscle surrounding the eye, to make it appear more prominent. Although Zeidler conceded that he had not found anything in the Herero that he had never seen in whites, he still argued that facial muscles of a ‘*Farbigen*’ could be told apart from that of a white without difficulties. He argued that he could discern two ‘*typische Merkmale*’ of the ‘*Negermuskulatur*’: overall thickness of the muscles and ‘massiveness’ (‘*Massigkeit*’). Interestingly, he refers directly to his drawings to make this point: ‘*Ein Blick auf die Zeichnungen belehrt im Augenblick, dass die Übersichtlichkeit fehlt, die wir bei der Abbildung eines Europäers zu sehen gewohnt sind.*’ According to Zeidler this lack of ‘clarity’ (‘*Übersichtlichkeit*’) resulted from a ‘deficient differentiation of the facial muscles’ which led to ‘massiveness’ in the middle of the face.³⁵³ Looking at the rather crude drawings, it is easy to imagine that Zeidler, had he wanted to make another point, would have been able to make the drawings appear more refined and less ‘unclear’.

Zeidler concluded that the ‘thickness’ and ‘little differentiation’ of the muscles as well as other peculiar findings such as an absence of ‘*Wangenausstrahlung*’ of the platysma pointed to ‘*gewichtige regressive Zustände*’ and enough evidence – together with findings of other researchers – that the Herero ‘*als Vertreter einer sogenannten niederen Rasse den Europäern gegenüberstellen*’.³⁵⁴ Thomas Schnalke of the Charité Human Remains Project, explains that Zeidler’s study (like Fetzner’s) was embedded in a well-organized research

³⁵⁰ Zeidler, ‘Beiträge zur Anthropologie der Herero’, 188 and 191.

³⁵¹ Idem, 242-243.

³⁵² Schnalke, “‘Normale’ Wissenschaft”, 175.

³⁵³ Idem, 177.

³⁵⁴ Idem.

infrastructure that encouraged PhD students to do anthropological research. The high standing of the Pathological Institute in Berlin would have ensured that his dubious conclusions were taken seriously. The prominent head of the Institute, Wilhelm Waldeyer, personally gave Zeidler access to material for his study. Hans Virchow advised Zeidler and Paul Bartels – like he did with Fetzner – initiated the research and ‘*dirigierte*’ it to its final product.³⁵⁵ This however, does not mean that the findings of Zeidler were supported by all these men. It seems to have been Bartels in particular who was the driving force behind Zeidler’s research.

When Zeidler’s dissertation was published, Hans Virchow responded very critically. He was particularly critical of the drawings. Apparently, they were drawn from the plaster casts and these were, in his opinion, distorted. According to Virchow, a cast would have been unable to reproduce the details of a fine ‘*Präparat*’ like this, especially because the plaster would have set in between the fibers of the head and taken some along, damaging the surface of preparation and cast. Moreover, Virchow found the drawings ‘*zeichnerisch-technisch mangelhaft ausgeführt*’.³⁵⁶ He cast doubt on the typical characteristics of ‘negro facial muscles’ established by Zeidler. While he agreed to some extent with Zeidler’s finding of ‘massiveness’, he pointed out that it would have been highly unlikely that the ‘*Neger*’ would have less differentiation in facial muscles than whites ‘*weil der Schimpanse eine gleich hohe Differenzierung wie der Weiße hat*’.³⁵⁷

Bearing this criticism in mind, it becomes understandable why Fetzner’s study was not accepted as a dissertation. However, I have been unable to discover the grounds on which his was rejected and the study of Zeidler accepted: they seem to have similar shortcomings. It is important to note that Virchow was critical of Zeidler’s method - not of his general idea. He does not question the latter’s research question or use of imprecise notions like ‘*Mangelhafte Differenzierung*’, ‘*Unübersichtlich*’ and ‘*Regressivität*’. His commentary about the chimpanzee also reveals that Virchow stands in the same tradition: would ‘a chimpanzee’ have had much lesser differentiation in facial muscles than whites, he would not have doubted Zeidler’s conclusion about the lesser differentiation of ‘negro facial muscles’.

Virchow’s skulls

Hans Virchow himself was interested in the attachments of muscles and soft tissue on the skulls. On 19 January 1924 he gave a lecture on ‘the anthropology of the nose’ at a meeting of

³⁵⁵ Schnalke, “‘Normale’ Wissenschaft”, 171-172.

³⁵⁶ Idem, 179.

³⁵⁷ Idem.

the *BGAEU*, with slide projections (*‘Lichtbildern’*). His lecture was later published in the Gesellschaft’s *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*.³⁵⁸ The projections were reproduced as small illustrations: the magazine had ‘such a restricted circulation that it could barely afford to include any photographs or imagery’.³⁵⁹ One of the images shows the nose of a macerated Nama skull that had been examined by Bartels and Fetzer more than a decade earlier. The cropped image shows the nasal opening and the bottom of the eye socket. The caption below reads: *‘Nasenteil vom Hottentotten-Schädel (π) der P. Bartels’schen Sammlung’* (figure 14). Next to it is a similarly cropped image of a chimpanzee skull: *‘Nasenteil vom Schädel eines jugendlichen male Schimpanse’*.³⁶⁰ These images were actually not intended to be compared directly, although they both demonstrated a ‘primitive’ form present in ‘negro’ skulls: the chimpanzee skull showed two ‘graceful’ (!) *‘Knöpfchen’* found in some samples of *‘Negerkinder’*, the Nama skull an angle in the lower edge of the nasal opening, which made a ‘primitive impression’ (*‘einen primitive Eindruck’*).³⁶¹

Virchow builds on two lectures he had earlier given at the *BGAEU* about the ‘skeleton of the nose’, in 1912 and 1915 respectively. In 1915 he had ‘discovered’ the characteristic (*‘eigentümliche’*) form of the nose of *‘Negerkinder’*. Their nasal bones were flat and the nasal opening square with rounded corners: ‘such flat noses were never seen in European children’.³⁶² He concluded that a comparison with Europeans would increase the understanding of the nasal structure because the flat shape ‘made a very primitive impression’. Even so he was puzzled when he found a ‘European newborn sample’ which showed a nasal bone that was already *‘recht steil gestellt’*. This confused him (*‘diese Erfahrung bringt mich etwas in Verwirrung’*) because he had always thought such racial characteristics would only become evident in adults: a ‘Jewish lady’ had once shown him two pictures of her brother, one at a young age, the other as an adult. The first had *‘a niedliche indifferente Kindernase’* but the second *‘eine ausgeprägte Jüdische Form’*. Furthermore, looking at ‘adult negro’ examples of the ‘same people’ as the skulls of the children, he saw both flat and raised noses. To explain these apparent discrepancies, Virchow argued that anthropologists should not look at the skull alone but also at the soft tissue: *‘Wir müssten diese Menschen in Haut und Haaren kennen lernen’*.³⁶³

³⁵⁸ Hans Virchow, ‘Zur Anthropologie der Nase’, *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 56 (1924) 94-111.

³⁵⁹ Krautwurst, ‘The joy of looking’, 174.

³⁶⁰ Hans Virchow, ‘Zur Anthropologie der Nase’, 101.

³⁶¹ Idem, 99-100.

³⁶² Idem, 94-95.

³⁶³ Idem, 95.

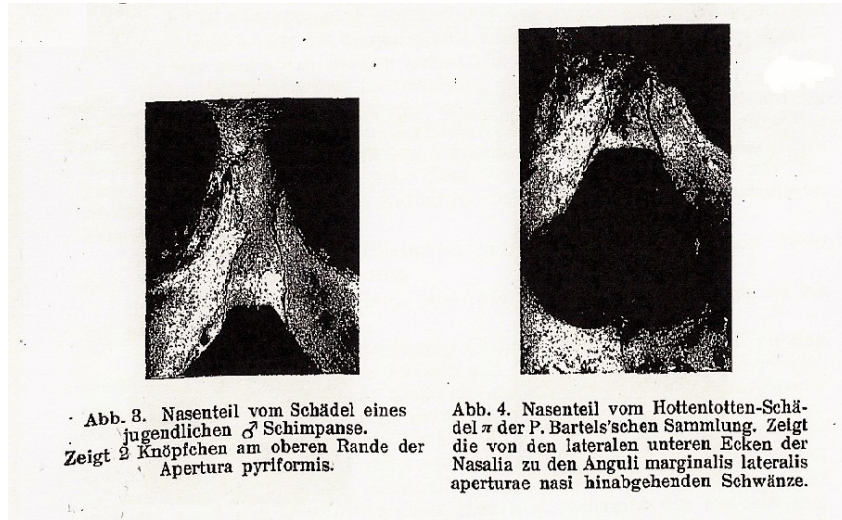


Abb. 3. Nasenteil vom Schädel eines jugendlichen ♂ Schimpanse. Zeigt 2 Knöpfchen am oberen Rande der Apertura pyriformis.

Abb. 4. Nasenteil vom Hottentotten-Schädel n der P. Bartels'schen Sammlung. Zeigt die von den lateralen unteren Ecken der Nasalia zu den Anguli marginalis lateralis aperturae nasi hinabgehenden Schwänze.

Figure 14. On the left the nasal bones of a chimpanzee, on the right those of a Nama individual. Photographs in: Hans Virchow, 'Zur Anthropologie der Nase', Zeitschrift für Ethnologie 56 (1924).

zweite Abbiegung, diesmal nach vorn, und es folgt ein Stück, welches dem Schuppenteil des Schläfenbeins

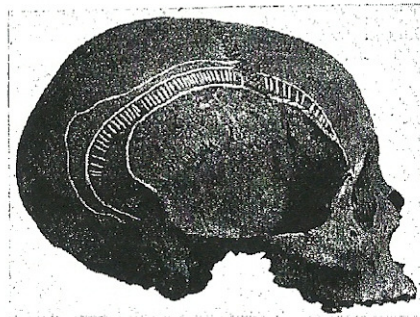


Abb. 1.

Hyrtl („Die doppelten Schläfelinien der Menschenschriften der mathem.-naturwiss. Klasse der Wien 1871) macht auffallenderweise keinen Unterschied zwischen der Linie und dem oberhalb derselben vorkommenden

Die gewöhnlich schwächeren supra-mastoiden Linien (Waldeyer hat „2 supra-mastoiden Linien“ Preuss. 1909.“)

Die Linien zwischen den Schläfenbeinen mehrerer

Figure 15. Herero skull without mandible, donated to Hans Virchow by Arthur von Gwinner between 1904 and 1910. Photograph in: Hans Virchow, 'Muskelmarken am Schädel', Zeitschrift für Ethnologie 42 (1910).

The rest of his presentation, for an audience of fellow researchers, was intended to demonstrate the merits of his approach and method. In his view, measuring was required. Although some anthropologists at the time (1924) had lost their faith in measurements (suffered from *'Messmüdigkeit'*), he was convinced that there *'nicht genau genug gemessen werden kann'*.³⁶⁴ In the lecture he discussed another Nama skull from the Bartels collection, not established as one of twenty sent back in 2011. In this case a plaster cast was used as well. Bartels measured the distance between the 'lacrimal lakes' in both eyes using the cast, something that would be impossible to establish looking at the skull alone.³⁶⁵ In a similar vein, he used the facial mask and skull of *'Togoneger Jim Gabo'* to demonstrate *'die größte Differenz von Flügelbreite und Aperturbreite'*: the width of the nose did not correspond directly with the width of the nasal opening.³⁶⁶ It must have been this type of future endeavors Fetzer was thinking of when he painstakingly made his plaster casts. As his final words, Virchow stressed the importance of observing, measuring and collecting on travels and *'längeren Aufenthalt im Auslande'*. He urged 'helpers' to conserve and package heads properly, because in many cases the noses were *'durch Anlagerung an das Versandgefäß verdrückt'*.³⁶⁷ This last sentence is telling: it is the soft tissue of people encountered on far-away journeys that Virchow was interested in. The Nama skull in this piece is used as an example of negro nasal structure, alongside a *'Togoneger'* and other Africans whose provenance is not further specified. Here, the other is explicit: *'Negerkinder'* are contrasted with *'Europäernkinder'*. The 'primitivity' of the former, Virchow simply assumed.

This lecture is interesting when we compare it with an earlier study (1910), for which Virchow used one of the two Herero skulls donated by Arthur von Gwinner as macerated skulls. In this article, also published in the *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, a photograph of the right side of the skull without mandible is published simply as *'Präparat des Berliner anatomischen Institut'* and included to demonstrate two lines of muscular attachments (figure 15). Only in the appendix we read the provenance of the skull: *'Abb. 1. Hereroschädel. Geschenk des Herrn Arthur von Gwinner an den Verfasser'*.³⁶⁸ The Herero skull was not very usable for his research because it had no mandible, but also because Virchow had no information about the individual - let alone a cast. Possibly he would have felt obliged to use the skull in one of his studies to thank the donor of the two Herero skulls. The photograph of

³⁶⁴ Hans Virchow, 'Zur Anthropologie der Nase', 95.

³⁶⁵ Idem, 107-108.

³⁶⁶ Idem, 109.

³⁶⁷ Idem, 111.

³⁶⁸ Hans Virchow, 'Muskelmarken am Schädel', *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 42 (1910) 653.

the skull follows anthropological conventions. It is depicted in profile, with a high contrast between skull and background. Craniologists working with photography preferred this type of photograph because 'it provided a means by which to compare and qualify structural differences in the conformation of racial crania'.³⁶⁹

Virchow's intention with the piece however was not to compare races, but to demonstrate the importance of '*sorgfältige und häufige Präparation der Muskelansätze und Festlegung derselben*' on the skulls because this could point to details on the skull such as dents and bulges that would otherwise be dismissed as coincidences.³⁷⁰ Race was not his primary interest, although he did consider racial differences. When he encountered a difference between two '*Neger*' and a Chinese and two Europeans in neck muscle attachments he acknowledged that further research would be necessary to establish whether this is '*eine individuelle Zufälligkeit*' or a '*Rassenunterschied*'.³⁷¹ In this paper it seems that Virchow randomly selected a mix of European, African, Chinese, and Indian skulls without emphasizing their provenance. He did not include references to the 'race' of the skulls in the captions. In either case, Virchow's 1910 and 1924 papers show a subtle, but crucial, shift towards an emphasis on racial comparison in the work of one prominent anthropologist. As German anthropology turned towards 'race and nation' and popular imagery of racial 'types' became prevalent, scientists began using the preserved heads and skulls of Nama and Herero as racial representatives of Africans to prove the inferiority of the 'Other'.

³⁶⁹ Frank Spencer, 'Some notes on the attempt to apply photography to anthropometry during the second half of the nineteenth century' in: Edwards, *Anthropology and photography* 103.

³⁷⁰ Virchow, 'Muskelmarken am Schädel', 653.

³⁷¹ Idem, 646.

6. 'Their blood waters our freedom':

the practice of repatriating skulls from Germany to Namibia (2011)

After 1924, the twenty Namibian skulls laid untouched in the storage facilities of the Pathological Institute (now Centre for Anatomy) on the campus of the Charité university hospital for more than eighty years, until the beginning of the twenty-first century. Hans Virchow had been the last physical anthropologist to study one of them. The discipline of physical anthropology was discredited after the Second World War, and the skulls became redundant specimens in the collection of the Charité. It was not until the independence of Namibia in 1990 that the skulls were politicized. The Namibian government requested the repatriation of the remains in 2008 and the university hospital, which received a repatriation request from the Australian government that same year, responded by starting the interdisciplinary Charité Human Remains Project (2008-2013) to establish the provenance of human remains 'with a difficult history' in its anatomical collection. The research team consisted of anatomist Dr. Andreas Winkelmann, anthropologist Dr. Katrin Koel-Abt, director of the Charité's *Medizinhistorischen Museum* (the former Pathological Museum) Prof. Thomas Schnalke, ethnologist Nils Seethaler and historian Dr. Holger Stoecker.

On Friday 30 September 2011 the twenty skulls were handed-over to the National Heritage Council of the Republic of Namibia. This was the first outcome of the Charité Human Remains Project. The Namibian skulls were the first to be repatriated because they were easiest to identify: all twenty had contemporary inscriptions on the surface of the skull and sufficient documentation to establish their Namibian provenance.³⁷² For the handover, the Namibian government flew over a sizeable delegation of almost seventy representatives to Berlin, including representatives of Herero and Nama interest groups, government officials and museum professionals. Despite 'big political pressure' during this first handover of the Charité, the German government was only nominally involved: the ceremonies were organized by the Charité in close collaboration with the Namibian embassy.³⁷³

In this chapter I analyze how the skulls were handled, presented and transported during this repatriation process. The official repatriation took over a week, and included a press conference at the Charité, a Q&A session with the delegation, a panel discussion at the *Haus der Kulturen der Welt*, a memorial service at St. Matthew's Church, the official

³⁷² Dr. Andreas Winkelmann, interview with the author (Berlin, 12 June 2015).

³⁷³ *Idem*.

handover on 30 September, and – after the arrival at Windhoek’s Hosea Kutako Airport on 4 October – elaborate welcome ceremonies in Namibia. Both in Berlin and in Namibia’s capital Windhoek, two skulls were put on display in glass cases as representatives of the Herero and Nama skulls returned. The other eighteen skulls were presented in individual boxes bearing labels specifying their Herero or Nama identity and their catalogue number from the anatomical collection. I analyze why the skulls were presented like this against the background of the politics of remembrance in Namibia and the quest for recompense of the Herero community, in order to unveil the many different layers of meaning the skulls had in the practice of repatriating – and continue to have to this day.

A visible return

The press conference, Q&A and handover ceremony all took place in a lecture room on the Charité campus in the *Mitte* district of Berlin, just a few hundred meters away from the Pathological Institute where the skulls were once studied by Bartels, Fetzner, Zeidler, and Virchow.³⁷⁴ During these public occasions, two skulls – one Herero and one Nama – were prominently on display in glass cases alongside eighteen individual boxes containing the other skulls. This was the first repatriation process during which human remains were actually visible for the public. Not only is it quite unique that the remains were put on display during the repatriation process, what is even more surprising is that they were presented as representatives of the ethnic categories ‘Herero’ and ‘Nama’. Even the boxes containing the other eighteen skulls were labeled accordingly. In a sense, the racial categories of interest to early twentieth-century racist researchers were reproduced. Before turning to the material traces of the repatriation process – the boxes and cases – I discuss the physical presentation of the skulls and the reasons behind this ‘visible return’.

At the press conference on 26 September, the Charité had set up tables on the stage and in front of the stage of the lecture room and covered them with white linen (figure 16). Project leader and anatomist Dr. Andreas Winkelmann and anthropologist Dr. Katrin Koel-Abt of the Charité Human Remains Project laid out eighteen boxes in a row on the large table on stage, the eight containing Herero skulls on the left and the ten with Nama skulls on the right, leaving a small space between the boxes on the right and those on the left. They placed the ninth Herero skull and the eleventh Nama skull in glass cases on top of the table in front

³⁷⁴ The building where this took place has in the meantime been demolished. A new high-rise Charité building is currently being constructed on the site.



Figure 16. Press conference at the Charité, 26 September 2011. Photo: © Larissa Förster. Previously published in: Larissa Förster, “These skulls are not enough”. The repatriation of Namibian human remains from Berlin to Windhoek in 2011’, Darkmatter (online report, 18 November 2013).



Figure 17. Q&A with the Namibian delegation conducted by Andreas Winkelmann. Photo: © Larissa Förster, “These skulls are not enough”.



Figure 18. Handover ceremony on 30 September 2011. Photo: © Larissa Förster, “These skulls are not enough”.



Figure 19. Memorial service at St. Matthew’s Church, Berlin on 29 September 2011.

of the stage, facing the audience.³⁷⁵ For the Q&A with the delegation, the first occasion for the Namibians to see the skulls, the Charité team altered the display slightly. They set up a large table in front of the stage, with the Herero and Nama skulls in glass cases in the middle and the boxes on either side of them (figure 17). During the official handover ceremony the display was similar to that of the press conference (figure 18), with two notable differences: the Charité presented the reports alongside the skulls and the embassy covered the boxes containing the skulls with two Namibian flags. On all occasions, the Charité placed bouquets of white flowers on either side of the skulls.

The day before the handover, on 29 September, the Namibian embassy organized a church service in St. Matthew's Church, close to Potsdamer Platz. Here the same Herero and Nama skull were on display in front of the altar (figure 19). Unlike the events in the lecture hall of the Charité, this memorial event was organized by the Namibian embassy. In close collaboration with the embassy, Andreas Winkelmann and his team placed the skulls here in the same glass cases, on a smaller table covered with white linen. Behind this table, on a black pedestal, the team laid out the eighteen boxes containing the other skulls. Representatives of the Namibian embassy placed large bouquets of white and purple flowers around the skulls and draped a Namibian flag over the boxes.³⁷⁶

The decision to put a Herero and Nama skull on display in the lecture hall of the university hospital and in the church was not made by the Charité alone. Winkelmann and his team negotiated the presentation of the skulls with the Namibian embassy, who in turn related to Herero and Nama representatives. Following negotiations with various interest groups the embassy requested a 'visible return' of the skulls. Nama, Herero, and the Namibian government agreed that the skulls had to be seen, not covered in closed boxes.³⁷⁷

Winkelmann: 'We suggested what would be possible: the choice was between showing all or two. We could not display all twenty skulls, mainly for practical reasons. As it was a public occasion we could not just put them on the table, they had to be under glass. And it would not have been easy to find identical glass cases for all twenty skulls in the *Medizinhistorischen Museum*'.

When the Charité brought up the possibility of 'representative' skulls it became clear that the Namibian embassy wanted a representative of each group involved. Winkelmann: 'To the Namibians it was very important to which group of Namibians these skulls belonged. It

³⁷⁵ Winkelmann, interview.

³⁷⁶ Winkelmann, interview and email correspondence with the author.

³⁷⁷ Winkelmann, interview.

was important to know that they were either Herero or Nama.’ Winkelmann explained that the decision was political. Nama and Herero are known as the main victims of the German-Herero War and it was this connotation that the skulls on display (also) had to evoke. All twenty skulls had belonged to victims of the genocide. Winkelmann: ‘The skulls were witnesses, *Zeuge*, to and evidence for what the Germans did between 1904 and 1908. We would not usually display skulls like this because they have a difficult past and come from a context that was not ethically correct, but it was the wishes of the Namibians that not just the human remains, but the negative colonial context should be visible in a way.’³⁷⁸

It was left to the team of the Charité Human Remains Project to select the skulls that were to be displayed: ‘Herero A 834’ and ‘Nama A 787’. Both had been part of Paul Bartels’ collection of preserved heads and used by Bartels for his research on the ‘third eyelid’. The Nama head was subsequently studied, dissected, drawn, and macerated by Christian Fetzer, the Herero head by Heinrich Zeidler. Probably Bartels himself wrote in ink on the outside of the Herero skull: ‘*Bartels No. 28, Blst. No. 38 Herero E*’ and on the inside ‘*Herero?*’, ‘*E*’ and again ‘*E*’ (figure 20). The other skull read ‘*Hottentott*’ in ink on the outside, and several inscriptions in pencil: ‘*I.*’, ‘*20*’ and ‘*alpha*’. More recently, curators had attached plastic notes with the catalogue numbers (834 and 787) to the skulls.³⁷⁹

Andreas Winkelmann, Thomas Schnalke and Katrin Koel-Abt of the Charité Human Remains Project chose these two skulls because they were intact, complete, and had legible inscriptions on them. The descriptions ensured that they could be identified by onlookers as Herero and Nama.³⁸⁰ Another factor for choosing the Herero skull was that it displayed the traditional Herero tooth manipulation: the lower incisors were pulled out and the two upper incisors filed in an inverted V-shape. This ‘impressed’ the Namibian delegation, because it was immediate evidence that this skull had belonged to a Herero individual. The fact that racial classifications were written on the skull, especially the derogatory word ‘*Hottentott*’, evoked even to a lay audience that the skulls had been used for racist science. Winkelmann: ‘In a way we had a bad feeling about displaying these skulls as modern-day scientists. We displayed the racist scientific approach of our predecessors.’³⁸¹

³⁷⁸ Winkelmann, interview.

³⁷⁹ Charité Human Remains Project, Provenance analysis. Specimen A 834 (Herero) (30 September 2011) and Provenance analysis. Specimen A 787 (Nama) (30 September 2011).

³⁸⁰ Winkelmann, interview.

³⁸¹ Idem.

Diplomatic cargo: boxes and cases

The Charité provided the cases and boxes for the ceremonies. The two glass cases were borrowed from the *Medizinhistorisches Museum*: ‘It was a matter of finding two identical cases that would fit a skull’. Andreas Winkelmann and Katrin Koel-Abt handled the skulls and positioned them carefully in the cases: ‘It was a big deal to arrange them for the display. They had to be symmetrical and you wanted to have it just right. If you return human remains you don’t want it to look like you’ve just thrown them there.’ Wearing white gloves they positioned the skulls carefully in the middle of the light-colored metal bottom of the case and then screwed the glass cases on top. Winkelmann explained that the lay-out of the skulls and boxes was dictated by the space of the room. In this given room the arrangement of the boxes on the stage and a separate table for the skulls simply ‘looked best’ in the eyes of the Charité team. The Namibian flags were draped over the boxes by representatives of the embassy, while the flowers were arranged by the press department of the Charité – after checking with the Namibian embassy if this was according to their wishes.³⁸²

At the Q&A the boxes were moved in front of the stage to give the delegation an opportunity to see the skulls inside the boxes. In front of the stage they were closer to the audience and there was more space to walk around the table. Winkelmann removed the covers of the boxes and placed them on the table: ‘They wanted to see them’. The delegation had a view of the top of the skulls: they were not taken out during the occasion. Because the delegation was given the opportunity to see the skulls from up close, the Charité chose boxes that would be safe and stable for the journey to Namibia, but also presentable and easy to open at the ceremonies.³⁸³

The team had ordered lavender-grey cardboard boxes, held together by eight staples (*Nieten*) on either side, ‘with the exact measurements’ (the boxes measured 22x19x22 cm. without the cover, which measured 23x20x10 cm.). They were made especially for the occasion by a company that produces storage articles for archives (figure 21). Winkelmann explained that skulls are normally stored with six or eight in one large box in the storage rooms of the Charité’s anatomical collection. For the repatriation however, they had to be transferred to individual boxes ‘so they could be labeled’. The boxes were labeled with a sticker on one of the sides without staples. Winkelmann: ‘We had to be very careful to do it symmetrically’. The labels read the catalogue number of the skull inside and the ethnic group

³⁸² Winkelmann, interview.

³⁸³ Idem.



Figure 20. Herero A 834 on display at the press conference.



Figure 20. Boxes like these were used for the transport and display of the skulls in 2011. Below the cover, the wrapping paper used to stuff the boxes. Photo: © Leonor Jonker.

(‘Herero’ or ‘Nama’) the individual had belonged to: ‘It was important to have ‘Herero’ and ‘Nama’ on them to be able to separate them’.³⁸⁴

Winkelmann and his team filled the boxes with paper to keep the skulls from moving during the journey. They scrunched up sheets of thin grey wrapping paper and stuffed them inside the box. The skulls themselves were wrapped in two or three sheets of acid-free paper. When the delegation had a look at the skulls during the Q&A, some of the paper was briefly removed and put inside the cover of the box to enable the delegation members to view the skulls from above. Winkelmann and his team carried the skulls in their individual boxes the short distance from the storage room, elsewhere on the Charité campus, to the lecture room. After the handover, the press department of the Charité had arranged that a ‘transportation company’ transported the skulls from the university hospital to the airport. For the transport to Namibia more wrapping paper was stuffed in the boxes so they would not shift. The individual boxes were then put into bigger cardboard boxes. Winkelmann: ‘You can’t see them in the photographs because they were covered in flags when they came out of the airplane. They went as “diplomatic cargo”, a special category in which you can transport anything - otherwise it would have been very difficult to check-in human remains.’³⁸⁵

The Namibian skulls were displayed in museum cases, transported in archive boxes by a transportation company and flown to Namibia as ‘diplomatic cargo’. In short, although the skulls were handled respectfully throughout the process, they were not physically handled as the remains of human beings with living descendants. Even in the church they were still in archival boxes and, importantly, on display. This was of course, on the express wishes of the Namibian embassy and the Nama and Herero representatives. Nevertheless, historian Ciraj Rassool criticized the Charité for repatriating the skulls not as *corpses* (as happened during the 2012 repatriation of Klaas and Trooi Pienaar initiated by Rassool) but as ‘human remains’ – in this sense they were still ‘objects’.³⁸⁶

Specimens returned

The Namibians wanted the skulls to be visible, because they were evidence of colonial atrocities. The Charité acknowledged this: Winkelmann ‘felt bad’ about ‘displaying the racist scientific approach of our predecessors’. On the request of Nama and Herero representatives the skulls were handed over together with the official documentation of the Charité Human

³⁸⁴ Winkelmann, interview

³⁸⁵ Idem.

³⁸⁶ Rassool, ‘Handling restitutions of human remains’.

Remains Project, consisting of twenty provenance analyses, one for each skull, and a summary of the findings of the team.³⁸⁷ The skulls were more than evidence however. For the Charité team, the skulls were specimens from its anatomical collection with a problematic history that had to be accurately, correctly, but also quickly returned under big political pressure. For Nama and Herero members of the Namibian delegation they were the remains of ancestors. These views collided during the Q&A conducted by Andreas Winkelmann and moderated by Namibian delegation members Hoze Riruako and Petrus Simon Kooper. Winkelmann was not able to answer all the questions about ‘the war and colonial violence’.³⁸⁸ To the frustration of the Namibian delegation, questions about the identity of the individuals and about what happened to the rest of the body could not be answered.³⁸⁹

Two years later, delegation-member Herero chief Kuaima Riruako remarked: ‘Both Herero and Nama people lost their lives and some of their heads were even cut off for so-called research and experimentation, but until today they have not told us what they were looking for and what they found by taking those skulls to Germany. What was the point we still don’t know’.³⁹⁰ In Riruako’s view, the answers provided by the Charité had not been forthcoming. The citation also illustrates that Riruako, speaking for many other Herero (‘us’), held modern-day German scientists responsible for the wrongdoings of their predecessors. German scientists then and now were conflated into one category: ‘they’. The Charité Human Remains Project sensed this during the Q&A, their first meeting with the delegation. Winkelmann: ‘There was quite an aggressive atmosphere. I felt I was the one held responsible for the past.’ At one point Winkelmann explained that the team had not found traces of violence on the skulls, because there had been no violence against the heads of these individuals: ‘That was understood as ‘there was no violence’ and there was a negative reaction from the crowd. But that was not what I wanted to say.’³⁹¹ This was not an emotionally detached return of evidence of colonial atrocities: emotions ran high.

The answers that the Namibians sought differed from those sought by the Charité Human Remains Project. The research team had to respond to the request of the Namibian government and wanted to establish with certainty which skulls were Namibian and acquired illegitimately – in a context of colonial war – so these could be returned. This is illustrated by the repatriation document, which explains that ‘extensive research’ indicates that nine of the

³⁸⁷ Claudia Peter, ‘Berliner Universitätsmedizin ehrt die Opfer. Charité gibt zwanzig menschliche Schädel zurück’ (Pressemitteilung Charité Universitätsmedizin Berlin, 30 September 2009).

³⁸⁸ Larissa Förster, “‘These skulls are not enough’”.

³⁸⁹ Winkelmann, interview.

³⁹⁰ Namene Helmich, ‘Genocide victims get statue’, *Namibian Sun* (16 September 2013).

³⁹¹ Winkelmann, interview.

skulls can ‘in all probability be attributed to the Herero, and eleven to the Nama people’ who according to ‘current historical research’ died during the colonial war between 1904-1908. It adds: ‘In all probability 18 of the 20 skulls came from Shark Island, where the German military leadership had built a concentration camp at the time.’³⁹² It was also made explicit on a poster (‘Skulls with a colonial past’) presenting the first findings of the research that still hangs in the Charité office: ‘For twenty skulls from the anatomical collection, the relationship of their origin with the German colonial war against the Herero and Nama of 1904-1908 could be clearly established. *These skulls therefore stem from an illegitimate collection context.* They were officially handed over to a Namibian delegation on 30 September 2011’.³⁹³ The identity of the individuals, or what happened to the rest of the body was of less concern. The team decided against DNA analysis, because this is an invasive research method: a piece of the bone would be lost.³⁹⁴ It would of course also be costly and time-consuming. The individual’s identity could not be established through historical research alone.

How did the team establish the provenance of the skulls? According to Winkelmann, the team already had a good idea of which skulls were likely to be Namibian, because there were ‘lists’. The team did not consider these lists sufficient proof of their provenance. Winkelmann: ‘You could not give them back based on this one list, the documentation was incomplete’.³⁹⁵ They embarked on an interdisciplinary research project for which the inscriptions and documentation found in the collection were the starting point. First, a historical investigation examined the documents and contemporary publications (those studies discussed in chapter five) ‘related to the specimen’. Then, there was the ‘anthropological approach: ‘the direct investigation of osteological remains’ including ‘the assessment of sex, age, pathology and/ or traces of trauma’. This also included the identification of ‘typical historical Herero tooth manipulation’. These data were then compared with historical publications to identify the skulls. A paleo-pathological investigation looked for traces of disease and injury, so a (possible) cause of death could be included. Five of the individuals whose heads were sent to Berlin, had scurvy. By establishing this the Charité Human Remains Team confirmed historical reports of dire living conditions on Shark Island.³⁹⁶

³⁹² Charité Human Remains Project, ‘Official handover without prejudice’ (repatriation document, as signed by Prof. Karl Einhüpl and Esther Moombolah- / Gôagosés, 30 September 2011).

³⁹³ Charité Human Remains Project, ‘Skulls with a colonial past. First results of the Charité Human Remains Project’ (Frankfurt/Main: Anatomische Gesellschaft, 2012).

³⁹⁴ Gretchen Vogel, ‘Germany returns colonial-era skulls to Namibia’, *ScienceInsider* (29 September 2011).

³⁹⁵ Winkelmann, interview.

³⁹⁶ Charité Human Remains Project, ‘Skulls with a colonial past’.

In this research, the skulls were examined as specimens. The title page of each provenance analysis underlines this: below the words ‘provenance analysis’, it reads ‘specimen [catalogue number]’, and below that the ethnic category of the skull – Nama or Herero – in brackets. The team shifted the emphasis for the labels of the boxes visible during the repatriation ceremonies. Here, the word specimen was left out: the stickers read the catalogue number and the ethnic category – not in brackets this time. In each provenance analysis the skulls were referred to as ‘specimens’ when the anthropological data or condition of the skull was discussed, while the team referred to ‘the individual’ in the section about the historical context and in the conclusion. It is important to note that each skull was meticulously photographed for the anthropological research. These photographs, along with the findings of the Charité Human Remains Project, still form part of the Charité archives.

It is also important to note, that the Charité Human Remains Project did – throughout the repatriation process – emphasize the suffering of the individuals who the skulls belonged to. The Charité tried to accommodate the Namibian embassy and delegation and to take its responsibility. At the press conference Thomas Schnalke asked for forgiveness on behalf of his predecessors and Charité director Karl Einhüpl apologized during the handover ceremony.³⁹⁷ The press release read that the skulls evoked the memory of the suffering (*‘erinnerte an die Leiden’*) of the Herero and Nama inflicted on them by German colonial troops during the extermination war (*‘Ausrottungskrieges’*). It even stressed the ‘link’ with Nazi science: *‘Hier habe sich erstmals eine Form des rassistischen Kolonialismus gezeigt, die später auch im Nationalsozialismus zum Tragen kam’*.³⁹⁸

Ancestral remains collected

The skulls that were returned with provenance analyses, were collected with Herero rituals and Nama prayers. Shortly before leaving for Germany, Herero chief Kuiama Riruako explained: ‘We are finally bringing our ancestors back home. We will perform traditional rites as we arrive on German soil Monday morning and when we receive the skulls’.³⁹⁹ Delegation member Ueriuka Festus Tjikuua of the ‘Ovaherero/Ovambanderu Council for the Dialogue on the 1904 Genocide’ similarly told reporters: ‘We have come first and foremost to receive the mortal human remains of our forefathers and mothers and to return them to the land of their ancestors’. According to Tjikuua, the mission intended to ‘extend a hand of friendship’ to

³⁹⁷ Vogel, ‘Germany returns colonial-era skulls to Namibia’.

³⁹⁸ Peter, ‘Berliner Universitätsmedizin ehrt die Opfer’.

³⁹⁹ David Knight, “‘There was injustice’”. Skulls of colonial victims returned to Namibia’, *Spiegel Online* (27 September 2011).

Germans.⁴⁰⁰ Ida Hoffmann, Nama member of the committee preparing the trip likewise said: ‘For us it means the return of our relatives, grandmothers and great-grandfathers’.

Interestingly, she cast light on what this ‘hand of friendship’ would ultimately entail by expressing the hope ‘*that the skulls of the Germans shot by Nama chief Cornelius Fredericks could be found*’.⁴⁰¹ Ignoring the context of unequal power relations and racist scientific research, she viewed both the remains of fallen colonial soldiers and of the victims of the genocide as the remains of human beings, remains that should be returned home with dignity.

The Church service in St. Matthew’s Church on 29 September ‘carved out a space for mourning outside the institutional framework of the Charité’. Speeches were given by the Namibian Minister of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture Kazenambo Kazenambo, the chiefs leading the delegation, Bishop Zephania Kameeta of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Republic of Namibia and representatives of the Evangelical Church in Germany.⁴⁰² In front of the speakers, the two representative skulls faced the audience. Some of the members of the Namibian delegation ‘stepped forward during the service to bow in front of the skulls, singing songs, reading prayers, and crying as they begged farewell’. They approached the skulls as they would deceased loved ones during a funeral service, even though they were on display - as anonymous Nama and Herero skulls. They were begged farewell, not as personal ancestors, but as ancestors of *all* Namibians. The words of the Ambassador of the Republic of Namibia in Germany Neville Gertze at the church ceremony emphasized this: ‘Today our hearts ache, but as we weep and condemn the evil, we are grateful to restore the honor and dignity of our ancestors.’⁴⁰³

On the day of the handover, 30 September 2011, members of the *oturupa* paraded in front of the Charité. The *oturupa* is a social organization of Herero that was formed after the First World War, by young men who had served in the German colonial army as boys (*‘bambusen’*). The organization was based on the structure of the army, and is today still recognizable by the quasi-colonial uniforms worn by its members. The activities of the *oturupa* are particularly prominent at social events – weddings, funerals and celebrations of historical anniversaries.⁴⁰⁴ They ‘maintain the memory of anti-colonial resistance by organizing yearly commemorative events’, including the anniversary of the funeral of Samuel

⁴⁰⁰ Richard Hamilton, ‘Germany returns Namibian skulls taken in colonial era’, *BBC.com* (30 September 2011).

⁴⁰¹ Knight, “‘There was injustice’”.

⁴⁰² Förster, “‘These skulls are not enough’”.

⁴⁰³ Kirsten Grieshaber, ‘German museum returning Namibian skulls’, *Associated Press* (30 September 2011).

⁴⁰⁴ Larissa Förster, ‘Parody and subversion. German colonial culture and the Herero Oturupa in today’s Namibia’ downloaded from: www.academia.edu (München: Forum Goethe-Institut, 2005). Previously published in: Eva Leitolf (ed.), *Rostock-Ritz* (Cologne: Schaden, 2005) 2.

Maharero, the chief at the time of the German-Herero war.⁴⁰⁵ According to Larissa Förster ‘with its uniforms full of historical references the *oturupa* spelt out the complex memory-political terrain that the return of the skulls was embedded in.’ They paraded in front of the Charité carrying a green-white-black flag and the flag of *oturupa* department Windhoek Komando No. 4, wearing red (a symbolic color for the Herero), as they would when commemorating a deceased chief. During the official handover ceremony, two flag-bearing *oturupa*-members positioned themselves on either side of the long table with boxes of skulls to guard the remains.

In Namibia, it is the task of the *oturupa* to ceremonially lead the procession to the graves at funerals. Then, at the graveside, a dialogue with the forefathers is led by chiefs and respected members of Herero society, who are themselves usually also members of the *oturupa*. Finally all the participants and guests reassemble at the premises of the *oturupa*, where they listen to speeches, songs, and tales from the history of the Herero and their chiefs.⁴⁰⁶ In Berlin, ‘Herero spiritual experts’, members of the *oturupa*, performed various ‘seminal’ rituals on the steps of the Charité building after the marching. These spiritual experts had also performed rituals before the delegation left and on arrival in Germany. In these rituals ‘ancestors – not in the least those whose skulls the delegation had come to fetch – were asked for their support of the delegation’s mission’ – a mission that was intended to extend a hand of friendship. The rituals secured ‘good relations between the dead and living’ and a safe return to Namibia.⁴⁰⁷ Before entering the building, Nama members of the delegation recited a poem thanking God for the return of the skulls.⁴⁰⁸

‘Reparations now!’

Why was it so important to have these ancestral skulls visible as evidence? In order to understand the political implications of displaying skulls of Herero and Nama victims of the German-Herero war at the ceremonies we have to turn to the context of the quest for apology and recompense of Nama and Herero. During the handover ceremony, Prof. Karl Einhäupl apologized for the crimes of his predecessors, but when the Minister of State Cornelia Pieper spoke at the occasion she circumvented an official apology. Pieper’s speech was interrupted by ‘activist members’ of the delegation, who shouted ‘reparations’, ‘apology’, and

⁴⁰⁵ Förster, ‘Parody and subversion’, 3.

⁴⁰⁶ Idem, 2.

⁴⁰⁷ Förster, “‘These skulls are not enough’”.

⁴⁰⁸ Idem.

‘genocide’.⁴⁰⁹ Tellingly they held up papers alternately reading ‘*Entschuldigung sofort*’ (apology now) and ‘Reparation now’. An official apology would be meaningless without reparations, which is why the German government tries to steer clear from this path.

Winkelmann: ‘The government tried to keep their involvement at a minimum, but they were involved. They had to be because it was an event of international significance for Germany.’⁴¹⁰

When the plane with the skulls touched down at Windhoek’s Hosea Kutako airport, hundreds of Namibians who had come from all over Namibia and had waited for hours or even the whole night, stormed onto the airfield to welcome home both the skulls and the large delegation of dignitaries. According to Larissa Förster, the excitement could be explained because many Namibians viewed the remains as ‘irrefutable proof of colonial repression, exploitation, and violence’ and therefore, Namibians – especially the descendants of victims of the genocide – hoped that the return of the skulls ‘would eventually open up a space for German-Namibian negotiations about symbolical and material compensation for colonial injustices and atrocities’.⁴¹¹ This hope was expressed at the airfield by members of a Herero interest group carrying a banner with the text ‘Welcome Home – Reparations now!!!!’ and images of – from left to right – several skulls seen from the front and in profile on a black background, the Namibian flag, and the Herero skull (A 834) that was displayed during the ceremonies (figure 22).⁴¹² Like the other Namibian citizens present, they were held back by Namibian soldiers so the skulls could be unloaded from the plane.⁴¹³

The Herero have been on a quest for recompense for more than fifteen years. Like many people worldwide they still suffer the consequences of the colonial era every day: land owned by their ancestors before the German-Herero war is still in the hands of white, mostly German farmers, and they feel marginalized in modern-day Namibia.⁴¹⁴ According to Elazar Barkan, the postcolonial era saw a global trend to amend past injustices of colonialism through restitutions, apologies, and monetary reparations, in order to incorporate ‘indigenous people’ in a new, postcolonial, national identity. However, Barkan argued that it is always the

⁴⁰⁹ Hamilton, ‘Germany returns Namibian skulls taken in colonial era’.

⁴¹⁰ Winkelmann, interview.

⁴¹¹ Förster, “‘These skulls are not enough’”.

⁴¹² This same photograph was used for a badge worn by the Namibian delegation. It was originally published in *Der Spiegel Online* with the credit ‘dapd’ on 27 September 2011, the day after the press conference.

⁴¹³ Susannah Palk, “‘Stolen’ African skulls return to Namibia’, *CNN* (5 October 2011).

⁴¹⁴ Olusoga, *Namibia: genocide and the Second Reich*.



Figure 22.. Banner at Hosea Kutako Airport, 4 October 2011.



Figure 23. Badge worn by members of the Namibian delegation in Berlin, 2011. Photo: © Leonor Jonker.

‘state’ that determines the ‘price’ of this amendment.⁴¹⁵ In the case of the Herero, neither the Namibian nor German state have so far been willing to settle any compensation.

In September 2001 the Herero People’s Reparations Corporation side-stepped the Namibian government by filing a legal claim against the German government for crimes against humanity, slavery, forced labor, violations of international law, and genocide committed in German South-West Africa during the German-Herero war of 1904-1908.⁴¹⁶ The Corporation demanded \$2 billion in reparations, arguing that the Herero had suffered as much during the Namibian genocide as the Jewish community in the Holocaust and should therefore receive similar compensation. This card is played by a variety of non-Jewish groups in the postcolonial era. An analogy with the Jewish suffering serves as a moral legitimization and challenges politicians to find a solution.⁴¹⁷ Because Germany has compensated the survivors of the Holocaust with a substantial sum, Herero representatives claimed that they should be compensated in the same manner. They argued that they were the victims of atrocities as destructive to their community as the Holocaust was for the Jewish community.⁴¹⁸ This argument is still used by Herero and Nama, so the admittance of the Charité of the racial studies on the remains foreshadowing Nazi racist science, is significant.

In 2004 the German Minister of Economic Cooperation and Development Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul apologized for the crimes committed against the Herero at an event in Namibia commemorating the start of the German-Herero war, a hundred years earlier. It was only a partial apology though. Prior to her apology, Jan-Bart Gewald suggested that the absence of a formal apology explained the Herero’s increasingly ‘vociferous’ call for war reparations.⁴¹⁹ The eventual apology however, was far from unreserved - an internal document of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spoke of a ‘*vergleichsweise weniger belasteten kolonialen Vergangenheit*’ (quite a stretch of imagination, given that the majority of Herero and Nama were systematically worked to death).⁴²⁰ Wieczorek-Zeul admitted that the atrocities would ‘today be considered a genocide’, but proceeded to deflect the blame and redirect responsibility for the genocide from the German authorities to general Lothar von

⁴¹⁵ Barkan, *The guilt of nations* 168.

⁴¹⁶ Jan-Bart Gewald, ‘Imperial Germany and the Herero of Southern Africa: genocide and the quest for recompense’ in: Adam Jones (ed.), *Genocide, war crimes and the west. History and complicity* (London: Zed Books, 2004) 59.

⁴¹⁷ Barkan, *The guilt of nations* 143.

⁴¹⁸ Cooper, ‘Reparations for the Herero genocide: defining the limits of international litigation’ 118.

⁴¹⁹ Gewald, ‘Imperial Germany and the Herero of Southern Africa’, 72.

⁴²⁰ Conrad, *Deutsche Kolonialgeschichte* 122.

Trotha, who had issued the *Vernichtungsbefehl* declaring that every Herero on German territory would be shot. ‘Today *he* would be punished, and rightly so’, she concluded.⁴²¹

The admission and apology of 2004 only fueled demands for reparation. If Germany acknowledges the genocide, why do the Germans pay reparations for one genocide and not for another? Kuaima Riruako, paramount chief of the Herero, accused the German authorities of continuing racism.⁴²² At the same commemoration event the German ambassador to Namibia ruled out financial compensation for the descendants of victims but did offer increased aid to Namibia, particularly to aid land reform.⁴²³ He explained that ‘the payment of compensation to one or two (...) ethnic groups would “upset the policy of national reconciliation pursued by Namibia”’.⁴²⁴ All legal cases were finally dismissed in 2007.⁴²⁵

In 2006, political scientist Allan D. Cooper had effectively predicted this outcome by arguing that the success of reparation claims depends on three factors: that the perpetrators are alive and identifiable, that victims or their immediate descendants are still alive and that political pressure for reparations is strong and the victims enjoy cohesive support.⁴²⁶ None of these factors applied to the Herero case. It was particularly the lack of cohesive support which haunted (and continues to haunt) the quest for restitution. The claims submitted were exclusive to Herero people and any reparations would flow directly into Herero community – to the dismay of other ethnic communities, particularly the Nama, and the national government.⁴²⁷ Despite earlier rallying cries for the Herero and Nama cause, SWAPO (South West Africa People’s Organization, the dominant political party and former national liberation movement dominated by Ovambo, the largest ethnic group in the country) has, according to Jan-Bart Gewald, ‘gone out of its way to ensure that Herero claims for reparation remain muted’. The government wants to maintain its ‘special relationship’ with Germany: the republic receives most of its development budget from Germany and relies on German military expertise, as well as the income generated by German tourists.⁴²⁸ The government does not endorse compensation for suffering in colonial times for any specific group, and is quite happy with the tacit agreement with the German government that its exceptionally

⁴²¹ Olusoga, *Namibia: genocide and the Second Reich*.

⁴²² Jürgen Zimmerer and Dominik J. Schaller, ‘Settlers, imperialism, genocide. Introduction: apologies and the need to right historical wrongs’, *Journal of Genocide Research* 10 (2008) 476-477.

⁴²³ Cooper, ‘Reparations for the Herero genocide’, 117.

⁴²⁴ Anne Laure Bandle, Alessandro Chechi and Marc-André Renold, ‘Case 20 skulls – Namibia and Charité Universitätsmedizin Berlin, Germany’, *Platform ArThemis* (Art-Law Centre – University of Geneva, March 2013) 5.

⁴²⁵ Cooper, ‘Reparations for the Herero genocide’, 115.

⁴²⁶ *Idem*, 123.

⁴²⁷ *Idem*, 119.

⁴²⁸ Gewald, ‘Imperial Germany and the Herero of Southern Africa’, 71.

strong financial support in development aid reflects its intention to compensate indirectly for the colonial past.⁴²⁹

Three NGO's have taken up the cause for claims since: the Ovaherero/ Ovambanderu Council for the Dialogue on the 1904 Genocide, the Ovaherero Genocide Committee and the Nama Technical Committee.⁴³⁰ Representatives of all three organizations were part of the delegation. In 2011, the aid intended for land reform that was promised in 2004 had still failed to make an impact. The *BBC* reported that 'Germany has consistently refused to pay reparations to its former colony, arguing that it has given much development aid to Namibia. But Namibians at the ceremony said that the aid had not reached them'.⁴³¹ For representatives of the committees the handover was an occasion to draw attention to their cause. This explains the bitter disappointment when Pieper carefully avoided to mention the 'atrocious circumstances' under which the Herero and Nama whose skulls were returned had died and, instead of giving the much hoped-for apology, asked for reconciliation.⁴³²

Adding insult to injury, the German government had also refused to sign the official declaration that was prepared to seal the restitution. This prompted the Namibian Minister for National Affairs to similarly refuse to offer his signature.⁴³³ At the handover ceremony the document was signed by Karl Einhüpl and Esther Moombolah- /Gôagosos of the National Heritage Council of the Republic of Namibia.⁴³⁴ Rassool, who criticized the way the remains were returned, concluded: 'The return was enacted on a scientific level, not as an act of state. As Berlin still owes Namibia a bilateral act of state, the German government has still refrained from uttering a formal apology'.⁴³⁵ A legal analysis of the case concluded that it is questionable that the outcome was satisfactory to Nama and Herero representatives 'considering Germany's reluctance to apologize and formally and expressly take legal responsibility for the genocide. (...) By offering an apology from its highest level (by the CEO of the university hospital, Karl Einhüpl) 'the Charité stepped in to act in place of what should have been the German government's responsibility'.⁴³⁶

⁴²⁹ Henning Melber, 'Namibia's past in the present: colonial genocide and liberation struggle in commemorative narratives', *South African Historical Journal* 54 (2005) 105-106.

⁴³⁰ Förster, "These skulls are not enough".

⁴³¹ Hamilton, 'Germany returns Namibian skulls taken in colonial era'.

⁴³² Bandle, Chechi and Renold, 'Case 20 skulls', 4.

⁴³³ Idem.

⁴³⁴ Charité Human Remains Project, 'Official handover without prejudice'.

⁴³⁵ Rassool, 'Handling restitutions of human remains'.

⁴³⁶ Bandle, Chechi and Renold, 'Case 20 skulls', 5.

Under the flag

The reluctance of the German authorities to get involved stood in stark contrast with the close involvement of the Namibian government, which paid for the expenses to fly over the delegation of nearly seventy representatives to collect the skulls and made the return a national event. Representatives of the Namibian embassy draped the Namibian flag over the eighteen boxes containing skulls during the handover ceremony and the church ceremony, literally covering the skulls with the most powerful national symbol of the Namibian state: the flag adopted upon Namibian independence from South Africa in 1990. It is based on the SWAPO flag and on the colors of another party, the Democratic Turnhalle Alliance. The three horizontal bands in blue, red, and green symbolize the sky and water, the people, and land of Namibia. The flag was also draped over the larger boxes containing the individual archive boxes with the skulls when they were unloaded from the plane. Although *oturupa* paraded in front of the airplane, performing warrior and mourning songs, the boxes were unloaded by members of the Namibian Defense Force.⁴³⁷ This signaled a new context, in which the government dominated the ceremonies.

For the Namibian SWAPO government, the return of the skulls provided an opportunity for nation-building. Events were held ‘in tone of national solidarity and recognition’.⁴³⁸ The skulls were welcomed home as the remains of heroes, fallen in the struggle for independence. They symbolized a chapter in the ‘master narrative of national liberation’ that is the ‘foundation myth of post-colonial Namibia’.⁴³⁹ This foundation myth emphasized the role of exile-based armed liberation politics, and the central role for the SWAPO in these politics, overshadowing the part played by the civilian population during the liberation war. At independence in 1990 the SWAPO government adopted a ‘Policy of National Reconciliation’, centered on an approach of forgiving and forgetting. The master narrative of national liberation driven by SWAPO heroes, a ‘sanctified memory’, became a crucial component of ‘an aggressive nationalism, which in the early years of post-colonial Namibia de-emphasized (cultural and regional) difference in favor of an authoritarian nation-building policy’.⁴⁴⁰

The Herero and Nama ethnicity of the twenty skulls was affirmed throughout the repatriation process, partially on the request of these two groups: the Nama or Herero

⁴³⁷ Förster, ““These skulls are not enough””.

⁴³⁸ *Idem*.

⁴³⁹ Heike Becker, ‘Commemorating heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana. Memory, culture and nationalism in Namibia, 1990-2010’, *The Journal of the International African Institute* 81:4 (November 2011) 520.

⁴⁴⁰ *Idem*, 522.



Figure 24. The skulls 'lying in state' in the Parliament Gardens, Windhoek. Photo: © Larissa Förster, "These skulls are not enough".



Figure 25. The ceremony at Heroes' Acre. Photo: © Larissa Förster, "These skulls are not enough".

provenance of the skulls could be read on the boxes and the reports, the boxes were grouped according to the ethnic identity of the skulls they contained, and the skulls on display represented both ethnic groups. The Namibian government however, welcomed them as the remains of Namibian – rather than Nama or Herero – martyrs. Not only was the Namibian flag draped over the boxes with skulls, delegation members also wore a badge stressing this ‘patriotic’ martyrdom (figure 23). The central image on the badge is a photo of Herero skull A 834 (the same photograph that was used for the banner at the airport). On either side of the badge past and present Nama and Herero leaders are depicted side by side, including Hendrik Witbooi, whose countenance also features on the Namibian dollar. Below this is an image of Herero or Nama prisoners in chains with German guards, emphasizing the context of colonial violence, and in the middle the Namibian flag. The top of the badge reads ‘Return of Herero & Nama Skulls’, ‘25-Sep 2011’ (the day the delegation left for Germany) ‘04-Oct 2011’ (the day of their return)’. The bottom reads the SWAPO slogan ‘Their blood waters our freedom’, with the dates of the German-Herero war on either side. The Nama and Herero blood spilled then, was the first blood spilled in the struggle for independence leading to today’s freedom.

After arriving in Windhoek, the skulls were brought to the Parliament Gardens, a stone’s throw from the *Gedächtniskirche* in the center of Windhoek. Here they were exhibited while symbolically ‘lying in state’ for twenty-four hours – a practice usually reserved for the corpses of very prominent Namibian citizens that are accorded a state funeral.⁴⁴¹ Namibian museum officials placed the same two ‘representative’ skulls in a glass case from the national museum, standing on a red carpet below a green sun roof (figure 24). Here, the Nama skull was placed on the left, and the Herero skull on the right. They were placed together in one case, alongside their provenance analyses. On either side stood a table covered with white linen – on the left table the ten boxes containing Nama skulls were laid out, on the right the eight boxes with Herero skulls. Again, the remains (and the documentation) were on display as evidence, in museum cases. At the same time the event was choreographed as a ‘heroes funeral’, a state affair usually reserved for ‘freedom fighters’: the skulls were guarded by members of the National Defense Force (rather than *oturupa!*) and all Namibians were invited to come to pay homage.⁴⁴²

Larissa Förster has argued that the procession of Namibian citizens paying homage can be read as a ‘republican ceremony’. She considered the public ‘lying in state’ an invitation of the Namibian government to its citizens, to acknowledge the communal past of a

⁴⁴¹ Förster, ““These skulls are not enough””.

⁴⁴² Larissa Förster, ““You are giving us the skulls – where is the flesh?””, 424.

Namibian nation (*'sich zu der gemeinsamen Vergangenheit einer namibischen Nation zu bekennen'*). Three weeks after the arrival of the skulls, Minister Kazenambo Kazenambo stressed this aim of inclusivity in an interview with Förster, when he said that the skulls were ancestors of all Namibians, *even* 'German Namibians'. However, Förster noted that the German community was conspicuously absent from the ceremonies.⁴⁴³ In addition to the 'lying in state' of the skulls in the Parliament Gardens being a republican ceremony, I would like to argue that it was an opportunity for Namibian citizens to see evidence of the atrocities committed, take photographs (many of the Namibians paying homage took pictures on their mobile phone), and afterwards write about and discuss the returned skulls.

After lying in state for twenty-four hours, the skulls were brought to the Heroes' Acre memorial just outside Windhoek. Here they were displayed in exactly the same set-up as in the Parliament Gardens, only with the addition of colorful flower bouquets (figure 25). The location was and is wrought with political connotations. According to Heike Becker, the 'Namibian master narrative of national liberation' has found its most potent symbol in the national Heroes' Acre.⁴⁴⁴ Inaugurated in 2002, the site, constructed by a North Korean company, was intended to establish the 'heroes' of the liberation struggle as national symbols. The central statue is a rather aggressive-looking male PLAN-combatant who is about to launch a hand grenade. A bronze mural features an idyllic representation of pre-colonial existence and the anti-colonial struggles.⁴⁴⁵ As one author concluded: 'The visual and iconic signification of Namibia's Heroes' Acre (...) establishes it as a space to enact and create consensus'. It does not facilitate a mourning of the dead as a process of (national) identification, but instead, 'imposes a narrative of triumphalist victory'.⁴⁴⁶

Who is honored here is therefore significant. Many Namibians consider the Acre 'for SWAPO heroes only'. UNAM students commented that the 'anonymous PLAN soldier' 'clearly is the [former] president, Sam Nujoma', the SWAPO leader who was president of the country from its independence until 2005.⁴⁴⁷ At any rate the features of the statue 'certainly correspond with how Namibians imagine ethnic Owambo features'. This alienates many Namibians from the southern and central regions, who 'harbor perceptions that they have been marginalized by the hegemonic politics of SWAPO, which they equate with an ethnic Owambo domination'.⁴⁴⁸ Historical Herero and Nama leaders however, including Hendrik

⁴⁴³ Förster, "You are giving us the skulls – where is the flesh?", 424.

⁴⁴⁴ Becker, 'Commemorating heroes in Windhoek and Eenhana', 523.

⁴⁴⁵ *Idem*, 525.

⁴⁴⁶ *Idem*, 528.

⁴⁴⁷ *Idem*, 529.

⁴⁴⁸ *Idem*, 530.

Witbooi and Samuel Maharero, have symbolic graves at the site alongside former SWAPO leaders.⁴⁴⁹ At this memorial for independence fighters, the Nama and Herero individuals that the twenty skulls belonged to were solemnly declared heroes and ‘martyrs of the liberation struggle’, during an official act of state that lasted three hours, with ‘almost the entire political elite present’.⁴⁵⁰ President Hifikepunye Pohamba emphasized the hero status of the individuals behind the skulls (‘these are the heroes and heroines who made history for our nation’) and by comparing them to Hendrik Witbooi, Samuel Maharero, and anticolonial Ovambo leaders Nehale IyaMpingana and Madume yaNdemufayo (all official national heroes) incorporated them into ‘the pantheon of Namibian heroes and martyrs’.⁴⁵¹ Three Herero and Nama chiefs present spoke very differently. They expressed their sadness and shock (*‘Trauer und Erschütterung’*) about the genocide and the colonial crimes, criticized the attitude of the German government, and stressed the need for an official apology and reparation from Germany. They asked the Namibian government to support their cause.⁴⁵²

‘No human remains on display here’

Although the ceremonies in the Parliament Gardens and at Heroes’ Acre were choreographed after the example of state funerals of prominent Namibians, the twenty Herero and Nama skulls were not actually buried at Heroes’ Acre. Instead, they were moved to the storage facilities of the national museum, which at the time was still located at the *Alte Feste* – the new Independence Memorial Museum was under construction. Subsequent Herero rituals and activities as well as a Nama thanksgiving were conducted without the skulls present. The Namibian cabinet had actually decided in 2008 that the skulls were to be buried at Heroes’ Acre, but Nama and Herero representatives refuted this ‘cooptation’ of the skulls. The three committees agreed that the skulls should be kept accessible, rather than buried and invisible, because they were ‘proof of the genocide’, but they failed to reach an agreement with the government on the final destination of the skulls.⁴⁵³ This did not hamper the repatriation process: the twenty Namibian skulls were returned ‘unconditionally’.⁴⁵⁴ According to Andreas Winkelmann it was ‘very, very clear’ that the Charité was not to suggest what should be done

⁴⁴⁹ George Steinmetz and Julia Hell, ‘The visual archive of colonialism: Germany and Namibia’, *Public Culture* 18:1 (2006) 181.

⁴⁵⁰ Förster, “‘These skulls are not enough’”.

⁴⁵¹ Förster, “‘You are giving us the skulls – where is the flesh?’”, 426-427.

⁴⁵² Förster, “‘These skulls are not enough’”.

⁴⁵³ Idem.

⁴⁵⁴ Bandle, Chechi and Renold, ‘Case 20 skulls’, 5.

with the skulls in Namibia: ‘I think at the time it was unclear what would happen to them, but it was also clear that we should not comment on that really’.⁴⁵⁵

Some of the Herero and Nama representatives argued that the skulls should not just be ‘accessible’, but on *display* at the Independence Memorial Museum.⁴⁵⁶ This museum was constructed in the same spirit of nation-building as Heroes’ Acre. In the permanent exhibition, the genocide is presented as a small, first chapter in the chronological (master) narrative of the struggle for independence. The chronological display deals with ‘colonial repression’, the ‘liberation war’, and the ‘road to independence’. The museum was unveiled in March 2014 together with a set of two statues, one depicting the genocide of 1904-1908, the other celebrating the independence of Namibia.⁴⁵⁷ By placing the new statue side by side with the independence statue, in front of the Independence Memorial Museum, the genocide is incorporated into the Namibian history of the struggle for independence. The Namibian government is still careful to make the genocide a matter of national, rather than Herero or Nama, concern. According to some Herero, the skulls could have an educational purpose in the museum, to ‘make younger generations aware of history of ancestors’ and ‘show evidence of the genocide for international audience’, but also as a ‘testimony of the Herero and Nama role in the struggle for independence’.⁴⁵⁸

When I visited the Independence Memorial Museum in the Summer of 2014 the issue was still unresolved. At the entrance and in the elevator of the museum were notifications reading: ‘no human remains on display here’ and ‘note: there are no skulls or human remains exhibited here’. The twenty skulls are still stored there, not in an anthropological collection but together with unidentified remains from all over the country, unearthed during construction work or mining, or found at archeological excavation sites.⁴⁵⁹ When the Charité returned another thirty-five skulls and three skeletons in 2013, these were also added to the storage facilities. That time, the repatriation ceremony had been more low-key. The event was less media genic because not all remains had come from victims of the German-Herero war. Also, the press had criticized the huge expenditure of the travel costs for the large delegation during the first repatriation ceremony, especially because – as minister of Kazenambo Kazenambo put it shortly after arriving – the German government ‘abandoned us during our stay’.⁴⁶⁰ In sum, the skulls had been transferred from the storage facilities of the Charité’s

⁴⁵⁵ Winkelmann, interview.

⁴⁵⁶ Förster, ““These skulls are not enough””.

⁴⁵⁷ Fifi Rhodes, ‘President unveils Independence Memorial, Nujoma Statue’, *New Era* (24 March 2014).

⁴⁵⁸ Förster, ““These skulls are not enough””.

⁴⁵⁹ *Idem*.

⁴⁶⁰ Ed., ‘Skulls repatriation mission costly’, *Namibian Sun* (11 November 2011).

anatomical collection to a depot for unidentified remains at the Independence Memorial Museum. Today, they are still stored as objects.

7. Conclusion

This thesis uncovered the layers of meaning twenty Namibian skulls acquired in the practices of collecting, studying, and repatriating. Analyzing a colonial postcard as a contact point for the practice of collecting revealed that this card was made for German colonial soldiers – soldiers who were notoriously disrespectful towards the remains of their colonial opponent and would have considered the skulls trophies. Similarly, an analysis of the illustrations and drawings as a contact point for the practice of studying revealed that these images served to emphasize ‘typical’ racial characteristics. For scientists, responding to developments in German anthropology and popular culture, the heads and skulls were representatives of ‘Africans’, to be compared with ‘whites’. Using material traces as contact points, I also unraveled the many meanings in the practice of repatriating. The glass cases indicate that the skulls served as evidence of the colonial genocide of 1904-1908, the archive boxes that they were (still) specimens. The fact that the boxes with skulls were also the center of attention in a church service and various rituals indicate that they were considered ancestral remains, while the Namibian flag draped over the boxes revealed their new status as remains of martyrs.

In the repatriation process the twenty skulls were welcomed home as ancestral remains and evidence by Herero and Nama representatives, declared the remains of martyrs by the Namibian government, and returned to Namibia as problematic specimens by the Charité. To fully understand the friction between the parties involved, it is necessary to realize that the skulls at this point were also *former trophies* and *former representatives of racial types*. These older layers of meaning acquired in the past practices of collecting and studying affected the way they were handled and discussed in the practice of repatriating. It was because the skulls had once been collected as trophies, as the remains of victims of the German-Herero war, and because they had been used as anthropological specimens in racist research, that they were now compelling evidence and symbols in the eyes of Herero and Nama representatives and problematic specimens for the Charité. The representatives and the Charité team had different questions about these past practices though, and this is why their views collided during the Q&A organized as part of the repatriation ceremony. Once the skulls arrived in Namibia, Nama and Herero representatives and the Namibian government could not agree on the final resting place of the skulls, because the latter was not so much interested in the past practices surrounding the skulls as in their present-day potency as national symbols.

The 'trophy' layer

My analysis of the practice of collecting revealed a hidden 'trophy' layer. Although none of the parties involved in the repatriation process have explicitly referred to the skulls as (former) trophies, the analysis of the practice of collecting revealed that the heads and skulls were not collected as 'neutral' anthropological specimens. This interpretation is backed up by the fact that two out of the twenty skulls repatriated in 2011 had in the early twentieth-century arrived in the anatomical collection without mandibles. This made them very unsuitable for research, indicating they might have originally been taken to Germany for a different purpose. The fact that their provenance is decidedly shady ('from the time of the destruction of the Herero tribe') confirms this reading. Even the preserved heads that arrived at the Pathological Institute as specimens on the specific request of Paul Bartels, could be considered trophies: according to Namibian oral history, the head of notorious Nama leader Cornelius Fredericks was one of the heads preserved in formalin and sent to Berlin in 1907.

Importantly, in the practice of collecting, this 'trophy' layer continued to shine through. The heads and skulls became examples of African 'types', but they were also – still – trophies: remains of Africans from the German colonies (think of Virchow's *Togoneger*). This is evident in the descriptions of Bartels, Fetzner and Zeidler of the provenance of their 'material'. Bartels mentioned that he possessed 'a large number of heads from South-West Africa' and that these individuals had been 'prisoners-of-war'. Fetzner was more elaborate: he explained that the heads came from prisoners from the uprising in German South-West Africa, 'who were interned on Shark Island and had died there of diseases, mostly scurvy'. Perhaps the emphasis on the fact that they were 'prisoners from the uprising' and had died from disease served to assure readers that they had met a non-violent, but deserved death – even though some of the heads were from women and children. It is striking that Zeidler's remark that the Herero heads examined in his study were collected 'during the Africa troubles' required no further explanation. Presumably his audience would in 1914 still have had a clear mental picture of the savage, dangerous Herero that threatened German colonial households and had to be punished, eliminated even.

As trophies, the Herero and Nama skulls once symbolized the supposed superiority of the German colonizer over the colonized Namibian and the power of the German colonial forces over Herero and Nama prisoners who had dared to 'trouble' the colonial government. In the hands of German anthropologists, they were subsequently used as evidence for the inferiority of the colonized. It is precisely because they were handled and discussed as trophies in these past practices, that the skulls have become strong symbols and compelling

evidence of the atrocities committed both in the colony and in Germany. They belong to victims from a genocide, some of whom perished on the notorious concentration camp Shark Island, and were continued to be misused even in death. Because the skulls lost their names and individuality when they became anonymous ‘specimens’ in the collecting process, they have become symbols of all the suffering and injustice of Namibians under German colonial rule. It was because of these connotations that Minister Cornelia Pieper was so careful to avoid any reference to the suffering of the individuals the skulls had belonged to when she spoke at the 2011 repatriation ceremony – and why the Namibian delegation was so frustrated when she circumvented an apology and asked for reconciliation instead.

Practices in metropole and colony

In this thesis I examined practices surrounding the skulls in the metropole and the colony. The collecting practice in the colony was not directed, or even started, by collectors in the metropole. Lieutenant Zürn took to raiding Herero graves on his own account, sparking the collecting frenzy back home. Moreover, while the practice of studying in the metropole was reserved for ‘professionals’, anatomists and anthropologists (although public opinion did influence them), ordinary colonial soldiers were involved in the collecting process in the colony. As a consequence, these practices had to be studied in their own specific time and place (the scientific environment in Germany of the 1910s and 1920s and German South-West Africa during the war of 1904-1908), while acknowledging that the collecting practice influenced the practice of studying (to an extent, they remained trophies) and vice versa (eighteen of the skulls were sent as preserved heads on the specific request of Bartels). Indeed, I am confident that practices in the colony, metropole, *and in postcolonial society* should be studied together. This thesis demonstrates that the layers of meaning that the skulls acquired in the practices of collecting and studying in metropole and colony, continued to inform the modern-day practice of repatriating in Germany and Namibia.

My analysis of the practices surrounding the skulls has also confirmed that a praxiographic approach helps us to understand the body as neither biological fact nor social construction but as something that becomes and exists in practices. Even though this thesis dealt with preserved heads and skulls, not living bodies, it demonstrated that skulls acquire meaning in practices. How they were handled, why, by whom, and in what context determined what they were. Indeed, it even determined the racial identity of the skulls. When they were handled by white German soldiers in German South-West Africa they were the remains of Nama and Herero, of the dead colonial ‘Other’. In Germany, integrated in a large

collection of skulls and body parts from around the world and studied by white German scientists, they became the remains of the ‘Other’ in a broader sense: although catalogued as Nama and Herero they represented ‘Africans’ or ‘*Farbigen*’. Many years later, they became the remains of ‘Namibians’ in the ceremonies organized under the auspices of the Ovambo-dominated Namibian government. Interestingly, Nama and Herero representatives pressed for the skulls to be explicitly returned as ‘Nama’ and ‘Herero’. Although this seems to perpetuate racial classification of the German collectors and scientists, the categories now served to allow Herero and Nama to easily identify them as kin (they were no longer the ‘Other’ but the ‘Self’) and other onlookers to identify them as remains of victims of a colonial genocide, known to have been directed at the Nama and Herero.

Further research

In chapter two I wrote that it is in ‘contact points’ such as the material traces analyzed in this thesis that different meanings and histories cross paths. Hayes, Hartmann, and Silvester explained these dynamics in their article ‘Picturing the past in Namibia’. When the photographs of severed Nama heads from the study of Fetzer were published in newspaper *The Namibian*, they were seen by a new, postcolonial Namibian audience, which was taken up – above all else – with the task of identifying these nameless victims. Drawing on oral and family history, the readers of *The Namibian* were able to add a new dimension to these colonial images, uncovering meanings and histories. The photographs ‘came to life’ when a great-granddaughter of Nama-leader Cornelius Fredericks realized she might be able to identify her great-grandfather in one of the photographs. For this new audience, the photographs functioned not just as evidence of the atrocities committed by the Germans, but as a contact point for lost bodies, relatives, and stories about the genocide.

The photographs from Fetzer’s study have not only resurfaced in *The Namibian*, they have also appeared on numerous blogs and websites. South African artist William Kentridge based some of the drawings in his multimedia installation about the German-Herero war ‘Black box/ Chambre noire’ (2012) on the photographs, and a political theatre group from Berlin has projected the images of severed Nama heads in a play. They have also been recontextualized in the documentation of the Charité Human Remains Project, and now, in this thesis. Similarly, the postcard of soldiers packing skulls can be found on various websites, with an infinite number of captions, some sticking to the historical facts, others dwelling on generalized, even fanciful accusations. My research could be expanded by tracing these material traces as contact points connecting past and present, analyzing the different meanings

adhered to the skulls in these new contexts by contemporary bloggers, artists, theatre makers, scholars, and their audience.

In addition, the practice of repatriating could be analyzed more thoroughly by examining a material trace not considered in this thesis: modern-day photographs of the skulls. Images of the skulls on display during the 2011 repatriation have traveled far and wide. Press photographs were made into banners and badges (the picture of Herero A 834 reappeared on a banner during protests in Berlin on the occasion of the second repatriation in 2013), and picked up by countless websites. Both in Berlin and Windhoek, Namibians – members of the delegation and Namibian citizens – photographed the skulls on their mobile phones. These photographs could be examined as another set of contact points for a better understanding of the layers of meaning the skulls acquired in the practice of repatriating.

Finally, this research could be expanded by examining other practices surrounding the twenty Namibian skulls. I originally intended to examine the *practice of storing* the skulls in Berlin (1924-2008/2011) as well. However, so little information is available about this practice, that such an analysis would require extensive research in Berlin, including interviews with (former) curators of the collection. The storage boxes, containing multiple skulls, could be examined as a material trace. Finding out how they were stored may reveal more layers of meaning. Were the twenty Namibian skulls stored together, or together with skulls of other provenance? Who looked after the collection? And did they really only ‘gather dust’ for eighty years, or were they periodically checked or moved around the collection?

Another practice that could be analyzed is the *practice of examining* the skulls to establish their provenance (2008-2011). Although I touched on this in the chapter on the practice of repatriating, the research to establish the provenance of the skulls could be examined as a separate practice. The photographs made by the team could be analyzed as a material trace to establish how the skulls were physically handled in this process. What was the background of each of the team members who handled the skulls? Did the team work differently when they examined Australian remains, or the Namibian remains repatriated in 2013? By analyzing the Charité’s practice in full detail (using the photographs, reports, and interviews with the team members) perhaps yet more meanings could be uncovered, helping us understand the complicated nature of the skulls and the immense complexities involved in the repatriation of human remains acquired in a colonial context.

Epilogue

In June 2015 I visited the *Deutsches Historisches Museum* (DHM) in Berlin on a hot summer's day. Only one glass cabinet in the entire museum, the monumental *Zeughaus* on Unter den Linden, is dedicated to the history of the German colonies. Partially hidden behind a display of Second Reich uniforms and tucked under a staircase, it is easy to miss the entire section if you follow the visitor's route past the collections. It is symptomatic for the way museums in the capital deal with the German colonial past. In the ethnological and pathological museums, once directed by German anthropology's leading figures Felix von Luschan and Rudolf Virchow respectively, no references are made to the German colonies, let alone to the connection between scientific racism and imperialism. In the latter, Peruvian skulls are still on display. All this is likely to change in the coming years. The ethnological museum will have to re-evaluate its collections when it will move from Dahlem, on the outskirts of Berlin, to the new Humboldt Forum in the city-center in 2018. Two years after that, in 2020, photographer Marc Erwin Babej will present his new exhibition about the horrors and dreams of colonialism in German South-West Africa at the DHM. For now, however, the horrors of colonialism are hidden from public view. The few items on display include a colonial uniform from German South-West Africa and '*Waren aus den Kolonien*' in 'exotically decorated tins'. When I stopped to take notes, a museum guard walked up to me to inform me enthusiastically about today's legacy of 'colonial products' in German supermarkets, drawing my attention to a tin with '*Elefantenkaffee*'. Behind us, a class of school children walked past the display without as much as a glance.

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