

# The Namibian

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## The Namibian Skulls in Germany Must Return to Swakopmund

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**THREE** editions back **Cross Currents** wrote of the return of the skulls of Namibians that were taken from Swakopmund to Germany during the German-Ovaherero wars.

Subsequently I received calls and text messages with a mixture of thoughts. One felt that I must be stupid to provoke the wrath of government when I must know better. Another found the message insightful and encouraged me to mount the campaign I promised, while another advised that I leave sleeping dogs alone and history to the archives: After all we receive so much economic assistance from the Germans.

I maintain the position that these skulls must be returned to Swakopmund and be buried there, with a fitting ceremony. The ideal model would have been for these skulls to be individually buried in the graves or close to the graves of their bodies. But my assumption is that we are likely not to identify these graves effectively due to time lapse and limited research on the part of those who are interested or are stake holders. But I hold the view that they must return to Swakopmund.

The previous year we went to Swakopmund to unveil the monuments that were erected by the City Council. This experience was an eye-opener in more ways than one. The ceremony was crafted to deliberately leave out representatives of those whose kin were victims of the wars in question and were buried there. Kings Eerike Zeraeua and Kuaima Riruako attended the ceremony and they were side-lined in such a way that there was hardly recognition of their presence. Their supporters vainly attempted to have them at least accommodated on the formal program. After the formal program we gathered next to the Ovaherero monument and listened to their speeches before we proceeded to pay homage to all the monuments in the park.

What was even striking was the level of antagonism on the part of some of the officials who were at the head table and disrespect displayed by some of those who witnessed the second ceremony. And my impression was that those from the German community who attended, some of whom I knew personally, were filled with sarcasm during the event. This experience impelled Adam Katjitae to exclaim: 'we listened to your event, please listen to our leaders or leave the place'. As a subject of the victims, I left there with a heavy heart and ever since committed myself to seeing that something is done to rekindle that painful heritage, to also serve as education for us all, lest we forget that some paid with their blood.

We must return the skulls to Swakopmund and use this opportunity to convert Orumbo Rua Katjombondi into a National Heroes Acres, not just a monument and attraction for tourists that it seems conceived to be. I have come to believe that Swakopmund is one of the places in our country that seems to display elements of residual racism as it is believed to be a strictly German resort. This was evident when we, in March of this year, went to Swakopmund to commemorate and again pay homage to our fallen heroes. The distaste for the ceremonies and the march through town on the part of those who drove in opposite directions of the marchers, was disheartening and this cannot be left unattended.

The skulls must return to Swakopmund, from where they were shipped to Germany. They must be buried in a mass-grave that must stand out as shrine, to symbolize the true German/Namibian relationship. The Skulls must return.