

9 Conclusion, discussion and outlook: Memories of colonial genocide in journalism

In June 2021, the former Vice President of Namibia, Nangolo Mbumba, introduced the joint declaration between the German and Namibian governments in a live broadcast on NBC's National FM. When he reached the section on memorial initiatives funded by Germany, Mbumba said, "The Germans like the word memory. I think it is a poor translation. It basically means that which was recorded, photographed, taken – it must be there for everyone to see and must never be denied." (National FM, 04.06.21, 18:54) Here, Mbumba suggested that the negotiations between both nations were premised on "a poor translation" that equated evidence of the past with "memory."

Mbumba's quote highlights the theoretical and methodological problems outlined at the beginning of this dissertation. First, much of the previous journalism research on the Herero and Nama genocide has both emanated from and focused on Germany, foregrounding the willingness of former colonizers to face "their" colonial history (Adebayo, 2023, p. 9). Perspectives from Namibian journalism have generally been absent or viewed separately from German journalism. Second, the Herero and Nama genocide has no more living witnesses that can speak about what happened between 1904 and 1908. This shapes how "memory" can be conceptualized, especially when much of what was "recorded, photographed, taken" (NBC English FM, 04.06.21, 18:54) comes from former colonizers. Finally, Mbumba's quote shows that the visibility of the past cannot be equated with the remembrance of the past. The Herero and Nama genocide has been negotiated for years, yet there is seemingly still no consensus about how these events should be talked about. In this vein, Stoler (2016, p. 153) asked about the current resurgence of colonial history in public debates: "Is colonial history really a charged terrain, or is it somehow safer to reexamine now?"

This dissertation addressed these challenges through its theoretical framework and ensuing analysis. It began by posing the question: How do German and Namibian journalism construct the Herero and Nama genocide as an object of cultural memory from 2015 until 2021? This question was broken into three sub-questions: How does journalism delimit what can be said about the events of 1904–1908 in its coverage? How does this journalistic construction of knowledge shape who can speak for the interests of Herero

and Nama individuals and communities in the present? Finally, how do these representative structures in journalistic memory production (de-)legitimize power relations between Germany and Namibia today?

In the following, I briefly recapitulate the theoretical-methodological framework of this dissertation, which sheds light on the blind spots in previous research. Then, I discuss the results of the previous chapters and show how they expand my theoretical framework. Finally, I reflect on how my results illuminate the limitations in my research position and consider avenues for future research.

Theoretical contribution: Journalism and memory through a postcolonial lens

The Herero and Nama genocide poses a challenge to previous research on journalism and memory (cf. chapter 3.3): In contrast with many prior conceptualizations of mediated cultural memory, journalism has no pre-established public commemorative frameworks to draw from in its coverage of the Herero and Nama genocide. Moreover, the memorialization of the Herero and Nama genocide spans two countries and involves both tribal and national communities that are still negotiating the meaning of the genocide. Finally, there are no more living witnesses who can contest mediated constructions of cultural memory through their personal experiences, as is often the case in the literature on counter-memories.

To address these research gaps, this dissertation has combined perspectives from memory, journalism and postcolonial studies. In this way, the dissertation produced a theoretical and methodological lens that foregrounds the practices and strategies by which journalism (dis-)connects past and present while placing a specific focus on how these connections shape the boundaries of belonging and exclusion in post-colonial society.

The dissertation began by showing that journalism is a crucial lens for understanding how cultural memory is socially produced and negotiated in society. Journalism not only reflects but also actively structures, organizes and produces “true” knowledge about the past through discursive practices that produce a meaningful relationship between the past, present and future. This understanding shifts the gaze away from a static understanding of cultural memory to the negotiations and struggles over who can legitimately connect to past events. Then, this dissertation added the postcolonial concept of silence to the journalistic production of cultural memory. For this, it used Spivak (1988) to critique previous understandings of forgetting as absence in journalism and memory studies (cf. A. Assmann, 2017). Instead, silence is defined as the presence of mediated representative patterns rooted in colonial power structures that hinder subversive connections between past and present. The effect of these speakership structures can be described as “aphasia” (Stoler, 2016), whereby the past is not completely effaced but rather continues to be cyclically (re-)discovered by journalists in the present.

To conceptualize this process for journalism, the dissertation drew on the concepts of cultural citizen- and subjectship (Klaus & Lünenborg, 2014; cf. Mamdani, 1996). These concepts describe how journalism hierarchizes positions of belonging and difference by determining which perspectives are normalized in the connection between past and

present. Especially in post-colonial contexts, the mediated boundaries of belonging and difference are often negotiated between a variety of positions vying for representative power within and between national boundaries. By bringing together journalism, memory and postcolonial studies, it is possible to critically question the role that journalism's production of cultural memory plays in maintaining or challenging these positions of belonging.

This theoretical lens also makes it possible to analyze silence in journalistic texts by focusing on the representative patterns underlying memory production. Following my research questions and theoretical background, my analysis focused particularly on mnemonic practices of speaking *about* and *for* the past and asked how these practices combine to de-/legitimize power structures within and between Germany and Namibia today. With the method of CDA, the analysis ascertained strategies of normalization in journalistic material while also reflecting on how these structures intersect with my position as a German researcher, as this discussion will outline in more detail.

My results have shown that the sources that are available for speaking about the past bleed into how journalism normalizes the positions of those who can speak for the interests of present communities. In the following sections, I now combine the results of my formal and in-depth analysis of German and Namibian journalism and discuss how they add nuance to my theoretical framework. For this, I focus on the three challenges outlined at the beginning of this chapter, which will help me to consider the broader implications of my results for journalism as an institution of cultural memory production.

(Re-)defining the nation through mnemonic controversy in journalism

How does journalism report on a transnational object of cultural memory? This question addresses a gap in previous research, which has often focused on the memory of the Herero and Nama genocide in national contexts. My results show that it is impossible to understand the full scope of power relations underlying journalism's construction of cultural memory by only focusing on one nation. This is especially important because journalistic reporting obscures the entangled power relations underlying the genocide through its construction of mnemonic controversy, thereby enabling journalism to uphold existing relations between Germany and Namibia in the present.

In my results, I find that both German and Namibian journalism formally evoke the Herero and Nama genocide in the context of present political, academic and cultural controversies. This reflects the fact that there are few local and no national commemorations of the genocide that journalism could build its coverage around (see above). Research has shown that controversies in journalism can produce national commemorative frameworks: By repeatedly reporting on mnemonic controversies, journalism brings contested past events into public consciousness around set dates (Johnson, 2016; Meyers et al., 2014). My findings challenge this assumption. Despite continuous journalistic reporting on the genocide over the past years, I find that coverage is often sporadic and rarely attracts sustained or repeated attention. This also points to a blind spot in previous research on the Herero and Nama genocide, which has often focused on central memorial dates such as Red Flag Day: My results suggest that these memorial dates are

not central for reporting on the genocide in journalism, at least not between 2015 and 2021.

In both German and Namibian journalism, the genocide is thus typically constructed as an object of “legitimate controversy” (Hallin, 1986, p. 117). Interestingly, the newspapers in my sample were not easily placed on one “side” of these controversies: Even though there were occasional articles in my German and Namibian newspapers that espoused different views, most newspapers contained relatively similar articles, arguments and even authors during my analysis period. No newspaper, for instance, explicitly argued that there should be no financial compensation for the genocide, except for some AZ letters to the editor. Apart from opinion pieces and letters to the editor in the AZ and a few articles in the FAZ and *Spiegel* early in my sample, there were also no articles that argued that the events of 1904–1908 did not constitute genocide. This points to a larger shift in the construction of the Herero and Nama genocide that has been shown for German newspapers by Rausch (2023a): The object of controversy is not the historical assessment of the genocide anymore but rather what should occur after the recognition of the genocide. My results show that this is also the case in Namibian journalism, which rarely explicitly focuses on the events of 1904–1908 and is instead often centered on the question of potential consequences.

However, in German and Namibian journalism, the “sphere of legitimate controversy” (Hallin, 1986, p. 117) surrounding this question is often plotted within national boundaries, and these boundaries typically reflect the location of the journalist. In my results, this means that when German or Namibian journalists are in Namibia, the genocide is shown as a point of conflict between traditional authorities and the Namibian government. Even when there are critiques by Namibian speakers against the German government, German speakers rarely directly respond to Namibian demands. This forms the discussion on financial reparations as part of a present inner-Namibian debate. In turn, when German or Namibian journalists or guest authors are in Germany, they construct the genocide as a point of conflict about how to produce more knowledge about the genocide between German individuals and German institutions or the German government.

These two controversies are almost never brought into dialogue with one another. This limits the “legitimate controversy” in both nations and shapes the “consensus” at the basis of reporting (Hallin, 1986, p. 117): There was often no question that Germany should pay some form of financial compensation. However, German speakers never had to directly respond to Herero and Nama speakers demanding legally binding and exclusive reparations. The main point of contention surrounding the 1904–1908 genocide remains conveniently lost in translation between two national boundaries, as Mbumba put it above. This enables newspapers to continue to make relatively similar arguments while still suggesting that the genocide is part of an ongoing controversy.

Furthermore, by continuing to construct mnemonic controversy in national contexts, journalism (re-)produces the nation as the legitimate context of meaning-making about the past. In my sample, this national framework was upheld despite the different personal positions of authors, especially in Namibia: While journalists with ties to the Herero, Mbanderu and Nama communities would occasionally diverge in the speakers and commemorative events they covered, they continued to construct the genocide as

part of a larger controversy between traditional communities and the national government.

Nevertheless, even though German and Namibian journalism continues to (re-)produce the nation in its practices of meaning-making, the power structures that are maintained or challenged through these practices are not tethered to national boundaries. Instead, the continued normalization of the nation as the context of memory production obscures the transnational power relations that largely remain unspoken in journalism. Considering these power structures shows the potential for change that lies underneath the construction of memory above.

In my results, there were a few examples of authors or speakers crossing national boundaries – almost always German-speaking individuals appearing in Namibian coverage or German articles translated and reprinted in Namibian newspapers. Moreover, Namibian articles often focused on German political debates that were not even covered in German newspapers, such as motions to debate the genocide. This points to the entangled power structures that structure journalistic reporting and that are both made invisible and normalized through the de-/legitimization of speakers in a German and Namibian national landscape.

In addition to a spatial divide, these normalization strategies also reflect a temporal divide in the legitimization of speakers. The transnational discursive authority of German-speaking individuals is upheld through the dis-/connection of past and present and the construction of expertise in journalism. When the past was the primary topic of reporting in journalism, it was often shown in “history” or “features” articles that explicitly separated the historical events of 1904–1908 from the present context of reporting. These articles, in turn, were often written by German-speaking academics, both in Germany and in Namibia. This editorial decision indicates a specific way of speaking about the past that is more akin to archival rather than functional memory (A. Assmann & Assmann, 1994, p. 129). Those who can speak about archival memory do not have to legitimize their connection to the past through personal experience but rather through their academic knowledge of the events of 1904–1908. In this way, journalism upholds a distinction between the past and the present as well as academic/non-academic knowledge production that transcends national boundaries. This allows academic knowledge production to remain largely unchallenged from Herero and Nama demands while upholding historical patterns of speakership.

These patterns of speakership reflect the structures of “silence” that Spivak (1988) outlined for colonial literature: those who can legitimately speak *about* the past as experts are often simultaneously legitimized as being able to speak *for* the interests of present communities. These speakership structures build on the epistemic injustice at the heart of the colonial archive: Many of the primary sources that journalism uses to describe the events of 1904–1908 come from German colonizers. German-speaking academics are thus in a unique position to analyze and interpret these sources.

These results also add an important dimension to Spivak’s (1988) conceptualization of silence: Disconnecting the past from the present enables journalism to normalize the perspectives of German academic and cultural representatives in describing and interpreting the events of 1904–1908. However, this normalization of German speakership across boundaries does not become visible through the continued (re-)production of a

national “sphere of legitimate controversy” (Hallin, 1986, p. 117). Instead, German academics continue to be shown primarily in conversation with other German-speaking individuals and groups in journalism. This shows how journalism upholds spatial boundaries through temporal boundaries in its production of cultural memory.

Previous research has shown that journalism relies on other official sources of knowledge production to legitimize its interpretation of past events (Zandberg, 2010, p. 18). My results indicate that the current processes by which journalists select and amplify these sources entrench colonial power-knowledge structures, especially given the skewed archive and unequal distribution of academic institutions between Germany and Namibia. To change this, it is necessary to challenge the normalization between being able to speak *about* the past and being able to speak *for* the present interests of Herero and Nama communities. This requires rethinking the current editorial boundaries that often continue to sequester archival and functional memory, or the connections between past/present, in ways that reinforce spatial separation. Rather than sequestering “history,” or academic knowledge production, away from current political debates and the perspectives of affected communities in Namibia, it is necessary to show how both perspectives are part of a complex field of interested parties that claim to speak for the Herero and Nama. Showing representative interest in terms of the transnational power structures between Germany and Namibia can probe the national boundaries described above and challenge the homogenization of Herero and Nama communities and desires.

Rethinking these editorial boundaries also requires confronting the locational boundaries that currently shape journalism’s institutional production of knowledge. My results show that the location of journalism matters for including perspectives that are often not part of reporting. However, the current structures of journalistic knowledge production emphasize difference between “us” and “them” in ways that disable speakers from coming into dialogue across national boundaries. This became especially visible through the position of “foreign” correspondents in German journalism, who temporarily visit an area and describe what things are like “over there” for their “home” audience (cf. Mücke, 2009, p. 183). This structure of journalistic knowledge production furthers spatial differences and cannot capture the complexity of events that take place in transnational contexts.

For journalism, this means that rather than merely traveling to a “foreign” country or reprinting an article (cf. Wahutu, 2024), more collaborations between journalists are needed to grasp the full context of colonial power relations in the present. It is not that journalism *ought to* write more about transnational power relations; these power relations are already tangibly shaping the negotiation of power on the Herero and Nama genocide, both in terms of academic speakership and material realities. However, the current practices of producing knowledge about the past in journalism cannot grasp these entangled power dynamics and, therefore, cannot effectively challenge the representative structures underlying memory production. Instead, German and Namibian journalism continue to artificially separate two contexts that are fundamentally intertwined, leading to irritations as two conversations are held in parallel about the same topic.

However, as the theoretical framework and results above have outlined, it would be short-sighted to insist on journalism simply offering *more* Herero and Nama perspec-

tives. Instead, it is necessary to question and challenge the representative structures through which these perspectives can become visible and speak against other interested positions in journalism. Thus, the following section now discusses how former colonial subjects are positioned as il/legitimate speakers in journalism. This responds to the second theoretical gap outlined at the beginning of this chapter: Much of the previous research has focused on the theoretical possibility of living witnesses' perspectives being mediated and thereby countering hegemonic representations of the past. Yet, what happens when these witnesses are no longer alive?

Beyond living witnesses: The suffering of "Others" in journalism

In journalistic coverage, references to the 1904–1908 genocide are used to define Herero and Nama identity and to legitimize Herero and Nama speakership. These references to the past stand in irritation with the editorial placement of Herero and Nama perspectives in political or features sections that focus on current political debates (see above). This irritation points to a current power struggle over how the Herero and Nama can effectively speak and be heard in journalism today. Previous research has noted the importance of emphasizing past experiences to legitimize victimhood status and, by extension, achieve visibility in the media (A. Assmann, 2018b, p. 79; Chakravarti, 2008; Schaller, 2010). My dissertation challenges some of these research assumptions by showing that the current construction of colonial victimhood in journalism limits the ability of Herero and Nama speakers to make demands.

In journalistic reporting, descriptions of Herero and Nama suffering are often connected to a position of temporal and spatial Other in the present (cf. Spivak, 1988, pp. 280–281). This is amplified by the fact that commemorations of the genocide are almost always shown as local and ethnic ceremonies that can be observed but do not have to be participated in by journalism's imagined audience. Recurrences to the past in journalism thereby continuously define Herero and Nama communities through a tribal identity that exists uneasily in a national framework. In addition, speaking from a position of victimhood in journalism also requires Herero and Nama speakers to perform a connection to the past that is simultaneously shown as an irritation to journalism's description of the "modern" present. Both strategies combine to produce Herero and Nama speakership through expectations of homogeneity. This is especially clear in German journalism, where Herero and Nama speakers are introduced primarily through markers of their ethnic identity rather than their political position in Namibia. In Namibia, this expectation becomes visible through the continuous focus on tribal and national unity, with accusations of disunity functioning to delegitimize speakers.

These results show how cultural citizen- and subjectship (cf. chapter 4.3.1) are defined in German and Namibian journalism through the Herero and Nama genocide. Despite their speakership being legitimized through a seemingly unbroken connection to the past, Herero and Nama speakers are primarily quoted in journalism when they are expressing dissatisfaction at current political steps and the intergovernmental negotiations. For the Herero and Nama to legitimately make demands for the events of 1904–1908 in German and Namibian journalism, they must first signal their acceptance

of the national framework (and frequently also of the national government), underpinned through the journalistic characterization of some Herero and Nama speakers as radical, conflictual or even dangerous actors. Yet, this also means that Herero and Nama speakers must simultaneously renounce any direct connections of the genocide to the national present. This enables the genocide to continue to be shown as an aberration rather than as a constituent part of the current German and Namibian national collective.

Previous research has found that journalists emphasize speakers' personal experience with the past to underline the legitimacy of their interpretations (cf. Zelizer, 1998, p. 159). However, my results show how important it is for journalism to imagine that this experience is shared by its audience. In my sample, it was precisely the emphasis on past experiences that legitimized victimhood status while also making Herero and Nama demands the subject of current journalistic or "expert" interpretation. In this vein, it is important to note that in the AZ, the German-speaking community was often shown in continuity with the past, particularly in "history" sections. However, this was not used to delegitimize or describe the German-speaking community but rather was presumed as the perspective of the imagined audience, as indicated by the lack of contextual information provided in articles on the historical genocide.

These results also shed light on the difficulty of emphasizing the specific experiences of communities while still making these experiences relevant for a broader audience in journalism. In this way, the findings above challenge ideas such as "multidirectional memory" (Rothberg, 2009) that have previously been suggested for integrating and linking different experiences to one another. Both German and Namibian newspapers connect the Herero and Nama genocide to other German or European colonial atrocities or the Namibian anti-colonial struggle. These journalistic practices of mnemonic connection have often produced the Herero and Nama genocide as an example of broader colonial atrocities, echoing the speaking structures described above: Herero and Nama speakers must connect to these events to legitimize the events of 1904–1908, even as it blurs the distinctiveness of the genocide in ways that support present representative structures. This relieves journalists of the necessity of having to talk to Herero and Nama representatives – after all, the events are now merely one example of a wide array of colonial atrocities or anti-colonial struggles. This structuring of the discourse shapes transnational connections to the Holocaust in German and Namibian journalism, which are often not used to produce new structures of speakership but rather entrench the position of German-speaking academics in the discourse. Therefore, when memories such as the Holocaust "travel" (Erll, 2011) between both nations, they are typically used to address German audiences, to describe German perpetrators or to deflect blame from present German audiences. The normalized center of mnemonic connection in journalism directly reflects the imagined audience that receives journalistic coverage. Constructing the Herero and Nama communities from a position of difference continues to portray the Herero and Nama genocide as an event that must connect to but does not tangibly impact most of the imagined national community and journalistic audience.

How can journalism make the experiences of the past relevant for a wider audience while still maintaining the claim of specific communities to speak about their past experiences? This question connects to the section above, which discussed how journalism

can challenge the temporal and spatial disconnections in its institutional production of knowledge. Another preliminary answer to this question is visible in the discussion on German tourism in Namibian newspapers, which shows that Herero and Nama communities are not the only groups with ties to the events of 1904–1908. However, these connections to the past are often kept invisible, shown as present economic considerations in journalism. Rather than (de-)legitimizing Herero and Nama speakership through a seemingly unique, homogenous and unbroken connection to the past, which often produces temporal disconnections between past and present, Herero and Nama communities are part of a present reality that also impacts and is impacted by readers across national boundaries. However, this positioning of speakership also requires rethinking how journalism positions itself as a discursive authority in the production of knowledge about the past, as the final section now discusses.

Silenced and silencing memories in journalism

The final challenge that this dissertation addressed was the fact that the Herero and Nama genocide has been a subject of negotiation for decades, even as it is still often described as a “forgotten” memory. To understand this irritation, it is necessary to consider how journalism’s use of time in its reporting overlaps with how it performatively legitimizes itself as a discursive authority in society. In my results, the genocide is continuously shown as important in coverage for its novelty, and every new action is shown in terms of its promise (or threat) for the future rather than its impact in the present. The past is thus shown as an impetus for action that will simultaneously address and resolve the past, often making its connection to the present unnecessary or superfluous. Instead, the past is primarily discussed in the context of a speculative future.

This adds crucial nuance to Tenenboim-Weinblatt’s (2014) idea of prospective memory and begs the question: Can prospective memorialization be a sustainable basis for cultural memory in journalism? Or does the resolution of the future task that prospective memorialization strives towards mean the end of reporting? These questions are especially important given the current research literature that has focused on mnemonic resurgences of colonialism in the context of street renamings or statue removals (Rigney, 2022). My results suggest that prospective memorialization in journalism continues to portray the past as something that must be overcome rather than as something that is part of a society’s expression of belonging. Journalism shows the Herero and Nama genocide as something that is unsettled due to its lack of memorialization; at the same time, it is precisely this unsettled status that journalism emphasizes to report on the Herero and Nama genocide. This leads to a state of memory production in journalism where the Herero and Nama genocide is (re-)produced as an event that strives towards a single future resolution rather than ritual reactivation.

This use of time is also vital for understanding how journalism does or does not mediate its coverage in the retelling of the genocide. Trouillot (2002, p. 102) has noted that a form of silencing is to show a past event in terms of its singularity, thereby making it an aberration. In contrast with Trouillot (2002), I find that both German and Namibian journalism do not describe the Herero and Nama genocide as a singular event, as shown

above. However, the singularity that Trouillot (2002) describes can instead be found in how journalism refers to the current memory debate on the Herero and Nama genocide. Therefore, both German and Namibian journalism continue to show current actions by the German and Namibian governments in terms of their singularity. These results show how “aphasia,” described by Stoler (2016) and Bijl (2016), functions in journalistic reporting to produce current memories as novel and surprising for the audience. In this way, German and Namibian journalism legitimizes memorial ceremonies attended by the German and Namibian governments as turning points rather than as a continuation of prior policies.

This strategy also legitimizes journalism’s discursive authority in cultural memory production. Studies have shown that journalism reactivates and reprints previous coverage to perform its position as a discursive authority in society (Kitch, 2005; Zelizer, 1993). However, in the case of the Herero and Nama genocide, I find that these results do not hold up. Rather than explicitly relying on past reporting to establish discursive authority, as Zelizer (1993) has previously outlined, journalism continues to show itself as producing a “first draft” (Zelizer, 2021, p. 1215). This reflects a central claim at the heart of journalistic knowledge production, whereby journalism as an institution presents itself as a provider of new and exclusive information. This performance always reflects which information journalists imagine that the audience knows and can thus leave unspoken, and which information is new. Whereas German audiences are often imagined as unknowledgeable by journalists, Namibian audiences are instead imagined to already know information about the 1904–1908 genocide. Hence, journalists can present themselves as providing “new” historical or political information while also comforting audiences: their prior knowledge is either largely upheld or shown as nonexistent. This legitimizes the representative patterns above by portraying journalism as a provider of previously unknown information, even as it obscures the various drafts and (colonial) remediations that have continued to shape reporting over time.

Journalism’s performance of its discursive authority in society is linked to how cultural memory or forgetting is constructed in coverage. Perhaps unsurprisingly, research has shown that journalism typically remediates its coverage in uncontested and publicly commemorative moments (Carlson, 2016). However, the results above suggest that it is especially useful and necessary for journalism to connect to previous coverage in moments that are contested or do not have established commemorative frameworks. This requires a legitimization of journalism as an institution of memory production that explicitly draws on and critiques past journalistic coverage. In this way, journalism can break through the cycles of “aphasia” that have been described in the literature (Stoler, 2016) and that these results illustrate.

Journalism is not doomed to continuously recycle the colonial archive. Instead, as the sections above demonstrate, the practices by which journalism dis-/connects past and present have the potential to shape the boundaries of cultural memory in subversive ways. By showing how the past has impacted the present, including in its own coverage, journalism can challenge the temporal and spatial boundaries outlined above. Journalistic (and academic) knowledge production is undoubtedly limited through an archive that primarily contains the perspectives of former colonizers; however, by continuing to

portray the Herero and Nama genocide as “silenced,” journalism effectively silences the events of 1904–1908.

The results above have shown how journalism’s coverage of the Herero and Nama genocide both builds on and challenges previous theoretical claims. These results also reveal that postcolonial theoretical approaches are crucial for understanding journalism as an institution of knowledge production writ large, even beyond the topic of the Herero and Nama genocide. Journalism’s claim to producing “true” knowledge hinges on its relationship to power and the imagination of its audience, which determines which perspectives must be made explicit and which can be left unspoken in coverage. Both journalism’s relationship to power and the imagination of its audience cannot be understood without considering the entangled colonial power structures that continue to shape which knowledge is available and amplified in journalism, both in formerly colonizing and colonized countries. My results show how these colonial power structures intersect with journalistic practices and coverage in both Germany and Namibia today. Therefore, postcolonial approaches are crucial to avoid merely taking journalism “at its word” and instead questioning the national boundaries that have often been taken for granted as epistemic boundaries. For this reason, the results above not only raise questions about journalism but also about journalism research. To address these questions, the following section now discusses the need not only for more but also for different forms of research in the future.

Reflection of limitations and areas for future research

The power structures that uphold academic speakership in journalistic articles about the Herero and Nama genocide also normalize my position as a researcher writing about this topic. Just like the transnational German-speaking experts that I critique above, I am also a German-speaking academic writing about the Herero and Nama genocide. The act of writing this dissertation again produces and reinforces the directionality of interpretive power between Germany and Namibia. Hence, this dissertation builds on and exacerbates the blind spots I find in my results: The bulk of my Namibian material collection took place during a six-week research trip, and my material contains multiple gaps through these conditions, such as the AZ only being included up to 2020. These gaps were exacerbated by a lack of research literature on the Namibian media system.

My results show how vitally important it is to consider the entangled power structures underlying coverage in both nations. However, these power structures are also a roadblock for research across national boundaries. In my analysis of Namibian material, I included a newspaper officially classified as a “tabloid” and a government-owned newspaper. However, I found that these classifications were much more fluid than they appeared in the research, and they obscured more than they illuminated about journalistic practice in Namibia. This finding was reinforced in my conversations with Namibian journalists: There were far fewer distinguishing factors between the newspapers than I initially presumed given the prior research, and the distinguishing factors I found were often not easily mapped onto preexisting terms.

These reflections show how research perpetuates blind spots by only designating some newspapers as “quality.” In my work, I found that the designation of “quality” often served as an indicator of Western research attention instead of specific journalistic practices. For example, there is more research on the *Namibian* than any other newspaper in the Namibian media landscape. In contrast with the *Namibian Sun* and *New Era*, the *Namibian* is also comprehensively archived in the Basler Afrika Bibliographien and even has copies archived in the Berlin State Library. In my master’s thesis, this was the reason why I only decided to look at the *Namibian*. However, as I found in my results above, it is impossible to understand the full breadth of the discussion on the genocide without including other newspapers, which often provided unique insights into various communities. Much more research and theoretical work is needed on journalism’s relationship to power to meet the specific conditions of the Namibian media landscape beyond frequently used terms such as “quality” or “independent.”

Research across national boundaries forces researchers to grapple with different contexts of meaning-making. At the same time, a dissertation is expected to be the work of a single scholar. In my dissertation, for instance, I only used background conversations with Namibian journalists to contextualize my results. Future research must draw more on more collaborations between universities, scholars and journalists between different countries to capture the complexities of entangled power structures. Changing the flow of information between Germany and Namibia can help to expose blind spots in the theorization of cultural memory and journalism’s reporting on the Herero and Nama genocide that remain unspoken through the production and circulation of academic knowledge about Namibia between European researchers and institutions.

In my analysis, I focused primarily on national, English-language Namibian media, reflecting my linguistic limits. The focus on primarily English-language national media contributes to the homogenization of the Namibian nation that I critique in my results above. Local media outlets could contest the power structures I find in this dissertation. Research into the Otjiherero-language inserts in *New Era* would offer vital nuance to the results above, as would NBC’s Otjiherero- and Khoekhoegowab-language radio stations. The question of how the Herero and Nama genocide is discussed on social media also remains a significant blind spot, both in Germany and in Namibia. Facebook groups focused on Otjiherero communities or language often post old photographs around key commemorative dates, which suggests that these groups would add critical perspectives to the results above. This could also challenge the homogenization of “the” Herero and Nama that has become visible in both previous research and journalistic reporting. However, to counter these patterns of homogenization, much more research is needed from Namibia and especially from Otjiherero- and Khoekhoegowab-speaking communities.

Furthermore, the perspectives of German and Namibian recipients and producers of newspaper reporting were not systematically analyzed in this dissertation, which focused exclusively on textual content. Especially in an analysis of silence, the perspectives of recipients and producers warrant more research, particularly for how recipients interpret mediated representations of colonialism and integrate them into their memories of the past. This could also help to rethink the theoretical boundaries between communicative and cultural memory that have been at the heart of this dissertation (cf. Pentzold et al., 2023).

It is also important not to take the “nation” as an uncontested entity in Germany, but rather to show how the boundaries of the national community are continuously (re-)produced and challenged. Bürger (2017) has explored the entangled East and West German historiography on the Herero and Nama genocide. It would be useful to expand this to consider how East and West German journalism wrote about the Herero and Nama genocide and which entanglements existed between both nations, especially given the different relations of each country to Namibia during the anti-colonial struggle. Another useful avenue of research could be the newspapers of German-speaking veterans, who published eyewitness articles of the 1904–1908 war. Analyzing these newspapers could show how societal groups deal with changing boundaries of the un-/sayable after colonialism and during a period of *“damnatio memoriae”* following the First World War and the end of the German colonial empire (Bürger, 2017, p. 67).

Finally, much more research on journalism’s production of memories about colonialism is needed. For instance, how does journalism’s construction of “cultural citizenship” change when the witnesses of colonial atrocities are still alive or when reparations have already been paid? Or how does the mediated construction of colonial memories change when former colonies have actively integrated local memories into national commemorative frameworks, as in the case of the Maji Maji War in Tanzania (Kirey, 2023)? Answering these questions will require researchers to probe the boundaries of (post-)colonial silences in both journalistic coverage and academic research. Otherwise, memories of colonialism will continue to be little more than “a poor translation” between former colonies and colonizers (National FM, 04.06.21, 18:54).

