1 Introduction: Remembering (and forgetting) colonial genocide

In May 2021, the German and Namibian governments announced that they had reached an agreement on the Herero[1] and Nama genocide. For over six years, both nations had been negotiating events that took place between 1904 and 1908 in German South West Africa, or present-day Namibia. In a statement released by the German Foreign Ministry, the former foreign minister Heiko Maas declared, "We will now officially describe these events as what they are from today's perspective: a genocide." (Auswärtiges Amt, 2021). He also mentioned that Germany would officially apologize in the Namibian National Assembly and pay 1.1 billion euros as voluntary compensation to Namibia for the genocide.

The agreement between the German and Namibian governments came in the wake of growing awareness of and reparative demands for colonial crimes committed during the early 20th century. At the heart of these debates lies a fundamental question: Who can or cannot determine what we know about the past? This question has been amplified through protest movements such as Rhodes Must Fall or Black Lives Matter and addressed in actions such as the renaming of streets or restitution of cultural artifacts (Bosch, 2017; Jethro & Merrill, 2023; Rigney, 2022; Shigwedha, 2023). At first glance, the German-Namibian declaration of 2021 appears in line with many of these previous actions and debates: Here is a formerly colonizing nation finally acknowledging wrongdoings that occurred during its colonial past. At least, that's how Heiko Maas portrayed it in his statement above.

Nevertheless, the 2021 declaration was largely renounced by the Herero and Nama communities. Some of the main points of criticism were that the German government exclusively negotiated with representatives selected by the Namibian government and did not include legally binding reparations (Chiefs' Assembly on Genocide [Okandjoze Declaration], 2023). The widespread criticism following the announcement of the agreement in Namibia has led to an impasse on Germany's "gesture of recognition" (Auswär-

1 The terms Herero and Ovaherero are both used in the research and in journalistic reporting. The prefix "Ova" denotes plurality in the Otjiherero language. In the following, I will be using the term "Herero" and using the suffix -s to denote plurality, if necessary.

tiges Amt, 2021): At the time of this writing, the 2021 agreement has not yet been officially signed and, therefore, has not yet been enacted. Instead, both nations are continuing to negotiate. In 2023, special rapporteurs from the United Nations criticized the lack of direct participation by the Herero and Nama in the negotiations as well as the lack of "effective reparative measures […] including an unqualified recognition of the genocide" (Mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion of truth, justice, reparation and guarantees of non-recurrence et al., 2023, p. 1). Coming to terms with the colonial past seems as far away as ever.

The 2021 joint declaration points to blind spots that extend well beyond the German-Namibian negotiations. To begin, much of the political, academic and cultural debate on the recognition of German colonialism has focused on actions that Germany is or is not willing to take. In the words of the literature and memory scholar Sakiru Adebayo:

> "Most research grants and sponsored academic projects in the postcolonial memory field are channeled into how Europe needs to deal with looted artifacts and how it needs to decolonize its museums. While these conversations are very important and should continue to be had, they still position the colonial powers as the center of analysis and, as a result, play into the intransient violence of erasing colonial subjects." (Adebayo, 2023, p. 9)

The erasure of colonial subjects is not merely a question of ongoing epistemic injustice; concentrating primarily on the former colonizer also leads to a fundamentally short-sighted research perspective. From this point of view, the 2021 joint declaration can be presented as groundbreaking and novel.

Maas' statement is not the first time the German government has officially recognized the events of 1904–1908 or even offered compensation for colonial crimes. Following a German development minister's unofficial apology in 2004, the German and Namibian governments initiated a "Namibian-German Special Initiative Program" that provided 20 million euros for "communities that had suffered during the German colonial period" (National Planning Commission, n.d., p. 1). In 2015, the former president of the German Bundestag, Norbert Lammert, wrote a guest article recognizing the events of 1904–1908 as genocide (*Zeit*, 09.07.15), a stance that was officially confirmed by the German government in a press conference the following day (Bürger, 2017, p. 10). From this perspective, the 2021 agreement is part of a much longer pattern of interactions between Germany and Namibia that cannot be grasped by research that concentrates primarily on Germany's (re-)discovery of the genocide.

Moreover, the negotiations on the Herero and Nama genocide also point to a second blind spot. Much of the previous literature on traumatic memory is overwhelmingly focused on the Holocaust and has often followed the presumption that the perspectives of genocide victims can, at least in theory, be recovered and brought to public attention (A. Assmann, 2018b; Frosh & Pinchevski, 2009, p. 3; Kansteiner, 2004). This lens has also shaped the confrontation with colonial crimes, for instance through the establishment of truth and reconciliation commissions after independence (F. C. Ross, 2003). Yet, the Herero and Nama genocide complicates some of these underlying presumptions. There are no more living witnesses to the genocide, and much of the recorded knowledge of

what occurred between 1904 and 1908 was collected and documented by former colonizers. The question of memorialization now fundamentally becomes a question of mediatization: Who can speak for and about victims who are no longer alive? Nowhere does this tension become more clear than in a question asked during oral interviews with descendants of Herero genocide survivors: "Can you tell us about your own family, not something you have heard on the radio?" (Krishnamurthy & Tjiramanga, 2021, p. 24). This question shows that the genocide has moved from the realm of oral, or "communicative," memory to the broader realm of "cultural" memory, defined through the collective circulation of the past through symbolic references that are no longer bound to the lived experiences of individuals (A. Assmann & Assmann, 1994, p. 120).

The construction of cultural memory in the absence of living witnesses is becoming ever more relevant in memory literature as the number of Holocaust survivors declines (cf. A. Assmann, 2018b; Zandberg, 2010). At the same time, the Herero and Nama genocide adds a post-colonial[2] power dimension to the process of mediated memorialization: Not only are there no more living witnesses, but indigenous witnesses were actively effaced from the historical record (Brunner, 2020, p. 13; Castro Varela & Dhawan, 2020, p. 19; Spivak, 1988, p. 280). Given this imbalance, how can the past be constructed in ways that challenge existing power and knowledge constructions? Answering this question requires looking at the mediated spaces that determine where colonialism is remembered.

In recent years, there has been a surge of research literature exploring the relationship between memory and journalism (Hajek et al., 2016; Meyers et al., 2011; Pentzold & Lohmeier, 2022; Zelizer & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2014a). This research has shown that journalism is an essential institution for the preservation and proliferation of cultural memory, ritually reactivating past events for present audiences (Pentzold et al., 2022, p. 5). Moreover, prior studies have shown that recurrences to the past are an integral part of the practices by which journalism produces "reality" for its audience (Zelizer & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2014b, p. 1). Journalism therefore not only preserves but also continuously reshapes the past to fit present needs, desires and interests (Hömberg, 2012). Hence, journalism is a crucial medium for understanding how the Herero and Nama genocide is currently being (re-)constructed amid ongoing reparations negotiations in the present. However, much of the literature on memory and journalism has often focused on broadly commemorated events within defined national boundaries. To address this gap, it is necessary to expand previous research in communication and memory studies through a postcolonial theoretical lens. This can put a spotlight on moments that have not previously been at the center of public commemorations, such as the Herero and Nama genocide, while also considering how these memories move and are shaped between formerly colonized and colonizing nations. This research perspective also adds vital nuance to previous theoretical understandings of journalism and memory.

In previous research, journalistic coverage has often been equated with the presence of memory. By extension, a lack of journalistic coverage has often been equated with for-

2 In the following, a hyphen between post and colonial indicates that while the physical experience of colonial rule has ended, colonial patterns of exploitation and knowledge production continue to shape reality (cf. Wolff, 2021, p. 14). When referring to postcolonialism as a field of scholarship, no hyphen is used.

getting (Kitch, 2018, pp. 179–180). This dissertation aims to challenge this core principle by going beyond the question of *whether* journalism reports on colonial genocide to ask *who* can make effective demands through memory production in journalism. Multiple studies have shown increased German journalistic coverage of the genocide over the past few decades, partially because of the ongoing German-Namibian genocide negotiations (Rausch, 2023b; Robel, 2013; Wolff, 2021). In this sense, the concept of "colonial amnesia" to describe Germany's current relationship to its colonial past does not quite fit (Bürger & Rausch, 2022). Rather than viewing the memorialization of German colonialism as a question of the absence/presence of knowledge, it is necessary to go deeper to ask how (post-)colonial knowledge patterns continue to normalize colonial perspectives in memory production.

Instead of amnesia, Ann Laura Stoler has suggested the concept "colonial aphasia" to describe the continuous disconnection between colonial pasts and the present, a process of memories "rendered irretrievable, made available, and again displaced" (Stoler, 2016, p. 12). This concept builds on a broader trend in memory studies away from broadly commemorated events towards the gray area between remembering and forgetting (A. Assmann, 2017; Hoskins, 2022; M. H. Ross, 2018). In this perspective, German and Namibian audiences are not completely unaware of the 1904–1908 genocide; however, the genocide has frequently been constructed in ways that make reparations unthinkable. For instance, in both Germany and Namibia, German colonizers are commemorated in monuments and street names that interpret the genocide as a successful war (Niezen, 2017; Zeller, 2016b, 2018). Merely removing the physical traces of these monuments does not remove their residue in cultural knowledge production. Memory scholar Astrid Erll has pointed out that these "implicit memories" can shape "stereotypes […] which are usually not explicitly known or addressed but […] shape perception and action in new situations." (Erll, 2022, p. 1)

Obviously, the search for "implicit" or "aphasic" memories poses concrete epistemological and methodological questions. How can the researcher look for potentially implicit (post-)colonial structures in journalistic texts? The concepts above offer a first clue: Rather than focusing on nonexistence, they ask how connections between the past and the present make alternative versions of memory (im-)possible. This centers on the actions, practices and performances that normalize certain perspectives in the retelling of the past. Communication studies offers a crucial lens into this process by showing how journalism produces, organizes and hierarchizes "true" knowledge in its coverage. Linking this research perspective with memory studies can provide useful insights into the connection between past knowledge and present power.

In addition, through the lens of postcolonial studies, this dissertation considers the memory construction of the Herero and Nama genocide as inherently entangled between former colonies and colonizers. Conrad and Randeria (2002) emphasize that (post-)colonial knowledge and power production is part of a relational process between former colonies and colonizers, even if this has historically not taken place on equal footing. Merely viewing one perspective does not provide the full picture in a postcolonial world. The Herero and Nama genocide is a memory that impacts both Germany and Namibia, as evidenced by the 2021 agreement. It is vital to view both perspectives together to understand how the genocide is strategically being constructed in journalism

today. An entangled research lens also offers insights into the blind spots and restrictions that each perspective entails. Continuing to follow a national framework, as much of the prior research has done, can continue to entrench these blind spots. With this research perspective, my goal is not to compare how journalism in Germany and Namibia reports but instead to show how knowledge and power are produced and challenged through journalism between both nations. This can also show how the national boundaries of memory construction continue to be shaped and questioned by journalism. Therefore, the following chapters aim to show which arguments, sources and speakers can become visible in both German and Namibian journalism – and which cannot.

An analysis of entangled blind spots and silences in memory production must also consider the epistemological limitations at the core of this dissertation. I am a German researcher analyzing the Herero and Nama genocide at a German university, part of a long line of German academics who have published on the genocide over the past 120 years. This position both enables and limits my research perspective, as I will reflect at various points throughout this dissertation.

Research questions and dissertation structure

Given the research perspectives and interests outlined above, this dissertation asks the following overarching question: *How do German and Namibian journalism construct the Herero and Nama genocide as an object of cultural memory from 2015 until the present?* This research question broadly traces the time frame when the genocide negotiations between Germany and Namibia were covered in journalism, from 2015 until 2021.

The following sub-questions specify this broad research question by analyzing aspects of journalism's construction of cultural memory on the genocide:

- 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?

The questions above aim to shed light on the mnemonic practices and strategies by which journalism produces knowledge about colonial genocide and, in so doing, reinforces or subverts existing power structures between Germany and Namibia. These questions will continue to be refined through theoretical and research literature in the following chapters.

For this, chapter 2 first discusses the Herero and Nama genocide as a historical event. It delves into the current historical literature to contextualize my research object. Then, it explores how the events of 1904–1908 have been commemorated within Germany and Namibia over the past 120 years. This research, and the gaps that result from previous disciplinary approaches to the genocide, forms the background for my ensuing theoretical chapters.

Chapter 3 then introduces key terms from memory studies, specifically the idea of "cultural memory" by A. Assmann and Assmann (1994). This concept is useful for my research interest because it points to the mediated structures in which memory becomes a motivator for collective action or, alternatively, inaction. Using cultural memory as a springboard, I show how memory studies has often implicitly conceptualized the role of journalism in its key terms and concepts. Then, drawing on approaches from cultural and communication studies, I show how journalism shapes cultural memory through the circulation of knowledge between producers and audiences.

Chapter four builds on this theoretical groundwork to connect ideas of silence by Spivak (1988) with conceptualizations of 4 memory and forgetting. Spivak's work is particularly useful for uncovering the post-colonial power structures that silence indigenous voices in journalism. Rather than viewing silence as the inability to speak, Spivak instead conceptualizes silence as an inability to be heard – thereby placing a spotlight on the mediated structures that shape expectations and enable certain individuals to become legitimate representatives for indigenous interests (Spivak, 1996b, p. 292). To understand how this works in journalism, the chapter connects to the idea of "cultural citizenship" to show how journalism's production of the past is used to produce and hierarchize distinctions of belonging. This concept is helpful because it is used in both European and African communication studies (Klaus & Lünenborg, 2014; Nyamnjoh, 2015). This enables me to draw out the colonial basis of journalistic memory production. With this background, I then propose a framework of mnemonic practices and analytical questions that will guide my methodological implementation.

The following chapter 5 outlines how I will answer my research questions using the method of critical discourse analysis (CDA). I begin by reflecting on CDA's use within communication studies and outlining its possibilities in uncovering (post-)colonial power structures in journalistic reporting. I also introduce my research material, which consists of four German newspapers, four Namibian newspapers, one German news magazine as well as one Namibian radio broadcaster and background conversations with Namibian journalists. Newspapers have been selected as the primary source for this dissertation due to previous research literature that has suggested that this medium has been important in shaping the discussion on the Herero and Nama genocide (Förster, 2010; Kößler & Melber, 2015, p. 14; Robel, 2013; Wolff, 2021). In my methodology chapter, I discuss this selection process and my material in more detail while also outlining the challenges of material collection and analysis.

The following chapters 6, 7 and 8 then provide an insight into my results and are guided by the research questions outlined above. Chapter 6 begins by outlining the formal structure of the memory discourse in German and Namibian journalism, focusing specifically on the timeline, rubrics, authors and topics of coverage. These results are then the basis for my ensuing in-depth analysis, which deconstructs the patterns of representation through which journalism produces the Herero and Nama genocide as an object of memory. Chapter 7 considers how mnemonic practices of remediation and connections to other memories in journalism shape the Herero and Nama genocide as a past event. Then, chapter 8 analyzes how these strategies shape the position from which various speakers can make demands for the past. The final chapter 9 connects these results back to my theoretical framework and discusses how my findings add to the understand-

ing of journalism as an institution of (post-)colonial knowledge production. Lastly, the chapter also discusses the limitations of this dissertation and makes suggestions for future research.

It is important to note that this dissertation builds on work that was begun during my master's thesis (Haritos, 2019). The results of my master's thesis were published in the Journal of Global Communication (Haritos, 2021a) and the Journal of Namibian Studies (Haritos, 2021b). Aspects of this dissertation have also been published in *Forum Wissenschaft* (Haritos, 2023). These results will be considered and cited at various points in this dissertation. Given the time and material constraints of a master's thesis, I was only able to scratch the surface of a very complex topic, especially with my Namibian material. This dissertation builds on the research interest of my master's thesis while adding significant theoretical and material depth. This depth was also enabled by a six-week research trip to Namibia as well as a two-week research trip to the Basler Afrika Bibliographien in Basel. In this way, the following dissertation adds to the previous research literature on the Herero and Nama genocide and highlights the necessity of research beyond national boundaries to uncover the power structures underlying (post-)colonial memory production.