

The Negotiated Apology: “Double Ventriloquism” in Addressing Historical Wrongs

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In this article, I analyze two recent diplomatic agreements between a colonizing state and a post-colonial state that address grave historical wrongdoings: the 2021 Germany–Namibia “Joint Declaration” regarding the colonial past and the 2015 Japan–South Korea “Joint Press Occasion” regarding Imperial Japan’s use of so-called comfort women. These agreements point to an emerging trend of states openly negotiating, coordinating, offering, and accepting apologies. In analyzing these agreements, I re-pose Gayatri Spivak’s classic question: Can the subaltern speak? Where Spivak demonstrates that the colonized subject is spoken for by both the colonizer and indigenous elites (and Western intellectuals), I demonstrate a similar process within these agreements. Specifically, a “double ventriloquism” occurs whereby both the (former) colonizing state and the post-colonial government collude to speak for the colonized in respect to offering a narrative of the wrongdoing, determining remedial measures, and agreeing that the issue is “closed.” Such collusion frames the state as the sole interlocutor in the transitional justice process and is an exercise in marginalizing subaltern voices in addressing the past. Nevertheless, where Spivak is pessimistic about the prospects of the subaltern speaking, I demonstrate that apologies inadvertently afford the colonized an opportunity to publicly disrupt official narratives and restate demands for justice.

Dans le présent article, j’analyse deux récents accords diplomatiques entre un État colonisateur et un État postcolonial qui traitent de fautes historiques graves: la « déclaration commune » de 2021 de l’Allemagne et la Namibie relativement au passé colonial et l’accord entre le Japon et la Corée du Sud de 2015 sur l’utilisation des « femmes de réconfort » par l’Empire du Japon. Ces accords soulignent l’émergence d’une tendance des États à négocier, se coordonner, proposer et accepter des excuses publiquement. En analysant ces accords, je pose à nouveau la question classique de Gayatri Spivak: « Les subalternes peuvent-elles parler ? ». Quand Mme Spivak montre que les colons et les élites indigènes (et les intellectuels occidentaux) parlent à la place du sujet colonisé, je démontre quant à moi un processus similaire à l’œuvre dans le cadre de ces accords. Plus précisément, une « double ventriloquie » intervient: l’(ancien) État colonisateur et le gouvernement postcolonial s’accordent pour parler au nom des victimes de la colonisation pour proposer un récit des méfaits, déterminer les mesures correctives et convenir de la clôture de l’affaire. Cette connivence présente l’État comme l’unique interlocuteur dans le processus de justice transitionnelle et constitue un exercice de marginalisation des voix subalternes lors de la confrontation au passé. Néanmoins, quand Mme Spivak se montre pessimiste quant aux perspectives de prise de parole des subalternes, je propose de montrer que les excuses donnent, par inadvertance, l’occasion aux colonisés de perturber les récits officiels et de reformuler leurs demandes de justice.

En este artículo, analizamos dos acuerdos diplomáticos recientes entre un Estado colonizador y un Estado poscolonial que abordan graves injusticias históricas: la «Declaración conjunta» de los gobiernos de Namibia y Alemania, de 2021, sobre el pasado colonial y la «Conferencia de prensa conjunta» entre Japón y Corea del Sur, de 2015, sobre el uso por parte del Japón Imperial de las llamadas «mujeres de consuelo». Estos acuerdos apuntan a una tendencia emergente de Estados que negocian, coordinan, ofrecen y aceptan disculpas abiertamente. Al analizar estos acuerdos, volvemos a plantear la clásica pregunta de Gayatri Spivak: ¿Puede hablar el subalterno? Donde Spivak demuestra que tanto el colonizador como las élites indígenas (y los intelectuales occidentales) hablan en nombre del sujeto colonizado, nosotros demostramos un proceso similar dentro de estos acuerdos. En concreto, se produce una «doble ventriloquia» mediante la cual tanto el (antiguo) Estado colonizador como el gobierno poscolonial se confabulan para hablar en nombre de los colonizados con el fin de ofrecer una narrativa de la fechoría, determinar las medidas correctivas y acordar que el asunto está «cerrado». Dicha confabulación enmarca al Estado como único interlocutor en el proceso de justicia transicional y es un ejercicio de marginación de las voces subalternas a la hora de abordar el pasado. Sin embargo, mientras que Spivak es pesimista sobre las perspectivas de que el subalterno se manifieste, nosotros demostramos que las disculpas ofrecen inadvertidamente a los colonizados la oportunidad de desmontar públicamente las narrativas oficiales y reafirmar las reivindicaciones de justicia.

Introduction

In a 2015 “Joint Press Occasion,” Japan apologized to South Korea for its military’s wartime use of so-called comfort women. South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se, standing alongside his Japanese counterpart, accepted that “the issue is resolved finally and irreversibly with this announcement” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2015). After years of negotiating, the German and Namibian governments in 2021 agreed a “Joint Declaration” on the colonial past, including recognizing the genocide of the Ovaherero and Nama communities between 1904 and

1908.¹ The declaration recognizes Germany’s “moral, historical and political obligation to tender an apology for this genocide” (Joint Declaration 2021, III.11), and it is widely understood that this will see the German President travel to Namibia to offer contrition (BBC 2021). The agreement declared that “the Namibian Government and people accept Germany’s apology,” and that “this shall close

¹As explored later, the Joint Declaration contains a degree of equivocation by recognizing that the events “from today’s perspective, would be called genocide” (Joint Declaration 2021, II.10). There is also some ambiguity in respect to naming the exact communities that were subject to genocide.

the painful chapter of the past” (Joint Declaration 2021, IV.14). This article offers an analysis of these two apology agreements. But rather than re-treading the well-worn path of analyzing the discourse and political objectives of the apologizer, I assess the power dynamics at play within the statist model of the (former) colonizing state and the post-colonial state openly negotiating, coordinating, and jointly offering/accepting contrition for historical wrongs.² In doing so, I ask Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s (1988) famous question: Can the subaltern speak?

For Spivak (1988), the subaltern cannot speak; she is spoken for by colonial authorities, domestic elites, and Western intellectuals. Focusing on state actors (rather than intellectuals), my central argument is that the joint apology agreements analyzed here resemble such a formation. That is, the colonizing state and the government of the post-colonial state, through the joint agreements, combine to speak on behalf of surviving former comfort women and the descendants of those killed in the genocide. In this process, a “double ventriloquism” occurs whereby elites of both states paternalistically narrate the historical wrongdoing, determine remedial measures, and jointly agree that the episode is closed.³ The format produces a scenario whereby the sole appropriate interlocutor for addressing historical wrongs is framed as the state, and voices of those marginalized by colonial violence—and, indeed, their own state—are sidelined. This problem is particularly acute given that, in both cases, the post-colonial state has a questionable record in representing the affected communities.

Nevertheless, where Spivak is pessimistic about the prospects of the colonized speaking, I suggest that apologies inadvertently afford the colonized an opportunity to publicly disrupt official narratives and restate demands for justice. In other words, the format of the diplomatic ritual may serve to marginalize the colonized and reinforce a statist approach to dealing with historical wrongs, but, even if unintentionally, it opens space for the colonized to articulate their contemporary and historical experiences. In offering this argument, I suggest that there are clearer examples of the subaltern speaking in the case of surviving comfort women. While the Germany–Namibia agreement has experienced strong contestation, this has tended to be primarily through civil society organizations who, although including people from the affected communities, may maintain their own internal hierarchies and processes of representing others.

The article proceeds as follows. The first section offers a survey of existing literature on political apologies and a wider discussion on the pertinence of Spivak’s classic text. The following three empirical sections tackle the repercussions of double ventriloquism, namely the two states colluding to (1) narrate historical wrongs, (2) determine remedial measures, and (3) declare the issue resolved. The final section captures how the affected communities have resisted the statist approach to transitional justice.

²I henceforth refrain from using the term “former” colonizer to describe Japan and Germany. The reader is no doubt aware that the Republic of Namibia and the Republic of Korea have long since become independent.

³In a recently published chapter, Dunkel and Trammel (2021) also propose the term “double ventriloquism” in their analysis of a character in an online video game. They demonstrate how seemingly contrasting ideological perspectives supposedly from Korea and the North America are infused into the character’s voice. To be clear: earlier drafts of this article using the term “double ventriloquism” were written long before the publication of Dunkel and Trammel’s excellent work.

The Politics of Regret

From once being a niche subject, the last two decades have seen the emergence of a sizeable body of work on the politics of regret (key works include Olick 2007; Gibney et al. 2008; Lind 2008; Nobles 2008; Daase et al. 2016; Dolan 2021). Although a team at the University of Tilburg have recently conducted a large *N* survey of political apologies (Schaafsma, Zoodsma, and Sagherian-Dickey 2021; Zoodsma and Schaafsma 2021), the general format within the literature has been to undertake detailed case study analyses of given apologies. In the colonial–settler context, this has included critical analysis of contrition by settler states to indigenous populations (e.g., Nobles 2008; Moses 2011; Short 2012; Lightfoot 2015; Friedrich 2022). Literature also abounds on case studies of interstate apologies offered by the former colonizing state. Such work includes analysis of colonial apologies offered by the states studied in this article, namely Japan (e.g., Park 2000; Yamazaki 2006; Bentley 2018; Dolan 2021) and Germany (e.g., Jamfa 2008; Melber 2011; Bentley 2016; Boehme 2020). A common theme that cuts across most of the literature on apologies is that the focus tends to be on the speech and remedial actions (or lack thereof) of the apologizing state, with little or no attention paid to either the interlocutor or victims.⁴ This article turns this trend on its head by examining the discourse and political implications of the designated interlocutor’s speech.

Among exiting work on political apologies, it has previously been observed that the format of the ritual affords the offending state a superior speaking position at the expense of victims (Cornassel and Holder 2008; Bentley 2018).⁵ In a previous article, I drew on Edward Said’s (1978, 1994) texts *Orientalism* and *Culture and Imperialism* to demonstrate the imperialistic implications of the colonizer having a raised platform to articulate historical narratives in the process of offering apologies (Bentley 2018). While clearly magnificent texts, one of the limitations of Said’s work is that it is considerably stronger on how the colonizer inscribes the colonized than how the colonized retort. For a broader theorization of the multitude of voices at play, I instead turn here to Spivak’s (1988) classic essay, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*

Can the Subaltern Speak? is a notoriously dense essay that offers detailed critiques of, among others, Foucault, Deleuze, and Derrida. To this extent, it is impossible to capture the full breadth and complexity of the essay here. Nevertheless, Spivak’s answer to her own question is straightforward: using the case study of *sati*—the practice of a woman’s self-immolation on the pyre of her dead husband—in colonial India, Spivak (1988/1994, 104) concludes that “the subaltern cannot speak.” Through the colonial process, the women are spoken for by colonial authorities and Western intellectuals who, even when engaged in “radical” work, ventriloquize the colonized. This entrenches the colonial project and positions the colonizer as a kind of fair-minded administrator vested in the well-being of women who suffer at the hands of “traditional” practices that require elimination. In Spivak’s (1988/1994, 93) words, there is a discourse of “white men saving brown women from brown men.” On their part, the intellectuals, even if unintentionally, become implicated in the colonial project by portraying a homogenized idea of the colonized and depicting the

⁴For a rare example of work that reflects the positions of the recipients of the apology, see Bentley (2021). It should also be said that there has been more research on the interstate negotiation between Germany and Namibia in respect to Germany apologizing (Kössler 2008; Boehme 2020; Melber 2020).

⁵See also Trouillot’s (2000) analysis of how apologies are “abortive rituals” in the sense that they preclude the creation of radically new power constellations.

subaltern as without agency and in need of savior.⁶ This reinforces the inaudibility of those who are already the most subordinated in society because of both colonialism and existing patriarchal institutions.

While a large part of Spivak's essay focuses on the European intellectual, a frequently overlooked aspect of it is how the subaltern is spoken for by domestic elites. On the one hand, "the ambiguity of the position of the indigenous colonial elite is disclosed in the nationalistic romanticization of the purity, strength and love of these self-sacrificing women" (Spivak 1988/1994, 96–97). The epitome of this is "a parody of the nostalgia for lost origins: 'The women actually wanted to die'" (Spivak 1988/1994, 93). On the other hand, Spivak (1988/1994, 97) captures how "all through the mid and late-eighteenth century, in the spirit of the codification of the law, the British in India collaborated and consulted with learned Brahmins to judge whether *suttee* was legal by their homogenized version of Hindu law." But clearly such collaboration was asymmetric, and "when the law was finally written, the history of the long period of collaboration was effaced, and the language celebrated the noble Hindu who was against the bad Hindu, the latter given to savage atrocities" (Spivak 1988/1994, 97). Nevertheless, even in such uneven power relations (as mirrored in contemporary international politics), the key here is that indigenous elites, like the Western intellectual, join the colonial administrator in representing the subaltern as depersonalized, homogeneous, a subject to be discussed and presided over, and people to be given a kind of mythological status in the service of political ends. In such groups speaking, "one never encounters the testimony of the women's voice-consciousness" (Spivak 1988/1994, 93).

The point of leaning on Spivak's work is thus both the ever-relevant nature of the question and the strength of her analysis. Spivak is, of course, not alone in doing this, but she sharply demonstrates the unequal yet collaborative dynamics of the colonial process in silencing and objectifying the most marginalized in society. And while *sati* and colonial apologies are clearly not the same, I draw on Spivak's observations on *sati* to demonstrate comparable formations and speaking positions at play in the arena of post-independence recent apologies between the colonizing state and the post-colonial state.

Case Study Selection

In re-posing Spivak's question, I draw on two case studies: the aforementioned 2021 Germany–Namibia "Joint Declaration" and the 2015 Japan–South Korea "Joint Press Occasion." Even in the so-called age of apology, cases of international colonial apology remain relatively rare, but there are other cases of colonial apology that could have been selected here.⁷ I have selected the two case studies as recent apologies for colonial wrongdoing that serve as

exemplars of the phenomenon in question, namely the explicitly negotiated diplomatic apology agreement between a colonizing and a post-colonial state. It must be said that, while the format of the politician of the colonizing state speaking remains constant, other colonial apologies have not necessarily followed the exact format of having an explicit interlocutor or diplomatic agreement between state officials. In this respect, I have chosen the two most overt cases of open negotiation and agreement. Nevertheless, though normally through more unofficial channels, political apologies tend to emerge through a process of "co-construction" (Yamazaki 2004, 156). Reflecting on this, I return to the generalizability of the argument in the conclusion.

A further similarity that binds these cases together is the ambivalent relationship between the affected communities and the state. In one sense, the Herero and Nama communities and comfort women have been appropriated for nationalistic purposes by their respective states as symbols of the nation's colonial suffering. In another sense, these groups have experiences of being marginalized by the very state that purports to represent them. On its part, the comfort women system must be situated within "gendered structural violence in Korea before, during, and after the epoch of Japan's military comfort system" (Soh 2008, xiv–xv). Soh (2008, xvi) demonstrates how an existing "patriarchal system, with its long-standing masculinist sexual culture, contributed as much as did the colonial political economy to the ready commodification of these women's sexual labour." Moreover, after the fall of Imperial Japan, the South Korean military utilized comfort stations in the Korean War, and "hundreds of thousands of young South Korean women continued to endure sexual exploitation and violence as they laboured in camptowns serving the US military" (Soh 2008, xvi). At least until the 1990s (and beyond), surviving comfort women tended to be stigmatized within their own society. Since the 1990s, comfort women have become a rallying point in the harnessing of sometimes nationalistic sentiments.⁸

On their part, the Herero and Nama communities are indigenous communities that remain dispossessed as a consequence of the genocide and German colonialism (Mudau, Mukonza, and Nshangase 2018). Since Namibian independence, SWAPO, the governing party, has tended to craft national narratives that emphasize Ovambo speakers' experiences of the struggle against apartheid over the Herero community's struggle against German colonialism (Reitz and Mannitz 2021, 4–5). This has included SWAPO tending to eschew events relating to the genocide (Reitz and Mannitz 2021, 5). Moreover, the Herero and Nama communities have experienced fluctuating and sometimes lukewarm support from the government in their bids for legal redress, partly because of the government's interest in continuing aid for the whole Namibian state (Bentley 2016, 77–78). And, as demonstrated in this article, the government has been less than inclusive of the affected communities in formulating the Joint Declaration. In other words, in their respective governments representing and speaking for the descendants of the genocide and the former comfort women, it is necessary to recognize that there is more complexity here than the governments straightforwardly representing their own citizens. The governments are, instead, representing groups that have simultaneously

⁶As a white male academic writing from a British university on the subject of colonial power relations, I am also situated within, and may reinscribe, imperialistic power relations. There is also a sense that I may play a role in reproducing the inaudibility of subaltern voices. The goal of this article is not to speak *for* the colonized but to analyze particular apology agreements between state elites. In the final section of the article, I draw extensively on the voices of surviving former comfort women and descendants of the genocide. It must be acknowledged, however, that even in reproducing the speech of survivors and descendants, I play a central role in selecting particular representations, not selecting others, and reproducing this within the Eurocentric political economy of academic publishing.

⁷A comprehensive database of political apologies created by the Political Apologies Across Cultures research group is available at https://www.politicalapologies.com/?page_id=74. For a comparative analysis of colonial apologies, see Bentley (2016).

⁸See Kim (2019) for a detailed study of the interplay between nationalist and feminist narratives in South Korea in respect to comfort women since the 1990s. Kim points to the role of survivors' own voices in challenging patriarchal structures.

experienced marginalized status and found themselves as candidates for nationalist appropriation by politicians claiming to represent them. Having established this, I turn now to the implications of double ventriloquism.

Endorsing the Narrative

Apologos, the Greek root of "apology," means story (Tavuchis 1991, 15). And, significantly, a central component of apologizing, especially for a very grave offence, is offering a narrative of the events and articulating the wrongdoing. To this end, it has previously been observed that the format of political apologies affords the apologizer a privileged speaking position from which to craft a narrative. This enables the apologizer to underscore or play down aspects of the past, utilize legalistic caveats, and forge a script that may be politically expedient, exculpatory, or self-flattering (Bentley 2018, 404). But in the format of the joint agreement, the narrative is also explicitly coauthored and endorsed by the recipient state. In this respect, the double ventriloquism entails both the offending state and the state ostensibly representing the victims narrating what happened to the subaltern. To capture the implications of this, I turn first to the German apology.

The standout aspect of the Joint Declaration is in Germany naming the specific crime of "genocide." The statement is in English and reads: "The German government acknowledges that the abominable atrocities committed during periods of the colonial war culminated in events that, from today's perspective, would be called genocide" (Joint Declaration 2021, II.10). While this has been seen as a significant turning point in Germany dealing with the past (BBC 2021; DW 2021a), the then Development Minister used very similar phraseology in a 2004 apology (also offered in English) at the centenary of the genocide, saying that "the atrocities at that time would today be termed genocide" (Wieczorek-Zeul 2004). There is legal significance to this repeated use of the conditional because it enables the genocide to be positioned as not applicable to the 1948 UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Also echoing the 2004 apology, we see other exculpatory aspects from Germany's perspective, for instance, the extensive use of the passive voice in capturing events.⁹ Such passive structures include:

Internees were enslaved and forced to work under inhumane conditions, resulting in the death of thousands of people from hunger disease and forced labour. Some of the Nama fighters and their families were banished to Togo and Cameroon. (Joint Declaration 2021, I.4)

By the time these camps were finally closed in 1908, thousands of people had died from hunger, disease and exhaustion from forced labour. (Joint Declaration 2021, I.5)

In the aftermath of the war, large swathes of territory, constituting ancestral land historically inhabited by and belonging to indigenous communities, were seized and occupied by the German State. These actions led to the expulsion and displacement of indigenous communities from their ancestral lands. (Joint Declaration 2021, I.6)

Human remains of members of indigenous communities were removed unlawfully and shipped to Germany. (Joint Declaration 2021, I.7)

Overall, tens of thousands of men, women and children were subject to the orders and associated German policies. They were shot, hanged, burned, starved, experimented on, enslaved, worked to death, abused, raped and dispossessed. (Joint Declaration 2021, I.8)

It must be said that, certainly compared to other colonial apologies, which tend to be characterized by euphemism and sanitization (Bentley 2016), the inclusion of such detailed narratives of wrongdoing is remarkable and is very likely owing to the input of the Namibian government's negotiating team. Notwithstanding this, the extensive use of the passive voice and the hypothetical that the violence "would today be termed genocide" doubtlessly reflect the legal concerns of the German negotiating team. Indeed, German Foreign Minister Heiko Mass clarified that "legal claims to compensation cannot be derived from this" (quoted in Moulson 2021). In the text being a product of negotiations, the victims' own government has thereby cemented, endorsed, and given the affected community minimal space to challenge such exculpatory turns of phrase.

In the negotiated text, we also see a continual tightrope walk in respect to identifying the primary victims of the colonial violence, including, at some junctures, the absence of naming the primary victims. In the quotes above, for instance, we see reference to the victims as "indigenous communities." At other junctures, the text explicitly speaks of "a substantial number of Ovaherero and Nama communities [who] were exterminated through the actions of the German State. A large number of the Damara and San communities were also exterminated" (Joint Declaration 2021, I.9). In another instance, the text speaks of the "implemented policies to exterminate clearly defined communities. These measures also affected other communities of what today is Namibia" (Joint Declaration 2021, I.1). The purpose of highlighting the shifting nomenclature involved is not to suggest a type of sinister political agenda but to highlight the difficulties facing individuals or communities in narrating their own experiences. It points, for instance, to the diminished capacity of the Damara and San communities to have prominence in the narrative of colonialism and genocide (I return to this in the conclusion). It also reflects the concern of the Namibian government to, at least to some degree, nationalize the genocide in the sense of it being framed as a shared narrative across Namibia, as well as being a particular experience of the Herero and Nama communities.

In respect to the Japan–South Korea joint agreement, the narrative of the event contains considerably less detail than that of the Germany–Namibia agreement. The text, offered in the ceremony in Japanese and Korean but also officially disseminated in English by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, reads:

The issue of comfort women, with an involvement of the Japanese military authorities at that time, was a grave affront to the honor and dignity of large numbers of women, and the Government of Japan is painfully aware of responsibilities from this perspective. As Prime Minister of Japan, Prime Minister Abe expresses anew his most sincere apologies and remorse to all the women who underwent immeasurable and painful experiences and suffered incurable

⁹On the use of the passive voice and other exculpatory devices in the 2004 apology, see Jamfa (2008).

physical and psychological wounds as comfort women. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2015)¹⁰

There is much to say about this. First, the phrase “the involvement of the Japanese military authority” leaves considerable ambiguity about the role of the Japanese authorities, especially given that there is no verb that clarifies the army or state’s exact role (such as “organize” or “order”) (Bentley 2018, 405). The text also trades in the oft-seen maneuver of apologizing for outcomes rather than the wrongdoing. In other words, the remorse is not for a clearly defined act of implementing, organizing, or overseeing the comfort system but for the outcome of affronting the “honor and dignity” of the women. Again, it should not be a surprise that the transgressor state should wish to employ such a sanitized and euphemistic account of the past. The point is that the South Korean state, in agreeing the text, is affirming such a narrative. In the agreement being authorized by the South Korean state, there is thereby no room or incentive for introspection into the role of Korean protagonists or domestic patriarchal structures in facilitating the comfort system.

It is imperative to also analyze some of the sexist aspects of the narrative. First, there is the problematic assertion that the women suffered “incurable” harms. Rather than the women representing their own experiences (which may or may not be curable or need curing), such a representation imposes a type of permanence on the women that chimes with the patriarchal-normative expectation that the effects of rape are permanent. Moreover, the apology’s focus on restoring the “honor and dignity” of the women recycles a sexist disposition that reveres female virginity and portrays the principal harm of rape as not so much the violent act but the societal dishonor associated with it. It particularly resonates with the patriarchal idea that rape brings dishonor to brothers, fathers, and the wider nation. Indeed, the very format of a male foreign minister apologizing to a male foreign minister reflects the impression that the women’s “honor” is something to be negotiated by men as a central matter for the state.¹¹ In respect to Japan, there is an irony in the state that practiced the comfort system reproducing patriarchal discourse at the very moment of offering contrition. This is compounded by the state that purports to speak for the women colluding in such representations.

This section has pointed to various problematic passages within both texts. In one sense, such passages are particularly likely to appear in statist joint agreements exactly because there is minimal or no input from the victims. But even if the texts did not contain such passages, perhaps there is a wider problem in respect to the agreements: in both states colluding to narrate the wrongdoings, experiences, and injuries afflicted on the victims, the story is inescapably authored and verified by the states. In this sense, the high-profile and public retelling is not authored

by the subaltern but, even if we assume the diplomats’ benign intentions, is a story *about* the subaltern that is managed and utilized by the state. It is thereby necessary to heed Spivak’s warning that victims are silenced, homogenized, and depersonalized when spoken about.

Determining Remedial Measures

Both the Germany–Namibia agreement and the Japan–South Korea announcement have strong parallels in terms of the provisions for material redress. I demonstrate in this section three facets of the agreements that marginalize the affected communities: first, instead of employing the term “reparations,” the material redress is explicitly framed as at the behest of the states. Second, the material redress is to be state managed. Third, it is allocated by the states in paternalistic ways. In these ways, the agreements confer agency to the states but not to the victims. I explore these three points in turn.

Despite Japan and Germany facing sustained calls from victims, descendants, and civil society for reparations for their respective wrongdoings, both agreements eschew the language of reparations. Where reparations infer a moral or legal requirement, both agreements instead emphasize how the provisions for material redress are of the offending state’s own volition. The Germany–Namibia agreement reads that “the two Governments jointly decided to embark upon measures to heal the wounds of the past” (Joint Declaration 2021, IV.15). This includes 1,100 million Euros over 30 years “as a grant to implement the envisaged projects” (Joint Declaration 2021, IV.18). Likewise, the Japan–South Korea text states that “it has been decided that the Government of the ROK establish a foundation for the purpose of providing support for the former comfort women, that its funds be contributed by the Government of Japan as a one-time contribution through its budget” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2015). The terms “grant,” “foundation,” and “contribution” have notable philanthropic overtones, suggesting that the money is generously allowed or permitted by the state. Note also how both texts use the verb (in the past tense) “decided,” with a clear emphasis that the governments monopolized the decision-making process. This makes explicitly clear, as we already knew, that the redress was without meaningful consultation with the affected communities. But the significance is beyond this: in framing it as a decision between the two governments, there is a sense that they are forged out of a mixture of the colonizing state’s goodwill and the post-colonial state’s adept diplomacy *on behalf* of the affected communities. The agreements thereby negate any notion that the redress was a response to the agency of the victims. As such, the framework of the agreements produces a statist ontology on material redress. In relation to the research question, the format generates a scenario in which material redress is not a matter for the subaltern to consider but a matter for the respective governments.

A further significance is that the material redress is not given directly to the surviving comfort women or descendants of the genocide. The money is instead explicitly designated to be managed by the state. The Germany–Namibia agreement makes provisions for the establishment of two institutions—a “reconstruction and development support programme” (RDSP) (Joint Declaration 2021, IV.16) that is (ostensibly) orientated toward the descendants and a “joint trust or fund” to “improve reconciliation” (Joint Declaration 2021, IV.17). In relation to the RDSP, the text states that “representatives of these communities will participate in

¹⁰The analysis for the apology is undertaken in English, using the official text as published by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It is, of course, plausible that some of the cultural subtleties around apologizing, including in respect to such concepts as “honor and dignity,” are lost in the translation here. Nevertheless, the apology was, without question, designed to have the international audience and media in mind. As such, the Japanese and South Korean governments would certainly have been sensitive to, and highly advised upon, the English wording of the text. Moreover, as I discuss elsewhere (Bentley 2020), I am persuaded by Derrida’s (2001, 29–32) position that the diplomatic discourse of contrition has been globalized to such an extent that apologies draw on similar templates no matter the cultural background of the state offering contrition. I am also wary about offering potentially Orientalistic explanations about particular societies’ cultural practices of apology, especially in respect to such easily Orientalized notions as “honor and dignity.”

¹¹On the gendered aspects of apology, including a detailed analysis of this apology, see Dolan (2021).

this process in a decisive capacity" (Joint Declaration 2021, IV.16). The text, nevertheless, is clear that the RDSP "will be set up by both Governments to assist the development of descendants of the particularly affected communities, in line with their identified needs" (Joint Declaration 2021, IV.16). The agreement, in this way, is clear that the active parties are the governments while the subjects that require "development" are from the affected communities. Representatives of the community may participate, but ultimately this is a state-led and initiated scheme.

A similar process can be observed in the "joint trust" established by the German and Namibian governments. In the agreement's words, "both Governments further decide to jointly develop and put into place a separate legal structure, i.e., a joint trust or fund in order to select and fund projects which aim to improve reconciliation" (Joint Declaration 2021, IV.17). The agreement outlines the structure of the trust, saying that "both programmes will operate on the basis of the principles of equal partnership, joint decision taking, good governance and transparency as well as affected community participation" (Joint Declaration 2021, IV.19). The hierarchy of decision-making is thereby again clear: the participation of the "affected community" is permitted by the states, but the program is essentially statist and the "joint decision-making" is between the two governments.

Where the Germany–Namibia agreement at least acknowledges the need for participation of members of the affected communities, there is no such lip service in the Japan–South Korea agreement. Instead, the payment of a reported 1 billion yen (US\$9 million) (Reuters 2019) was to be managed through a foundation established by the South Korean state that would promote "projects for recovering the honor and dignity and healing [of] the psychological wounds of all former comfort women [to] be carried out under the cooperation between the Government of Japan and the Government of the ROK" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2015). In this way, the remaining survivors do not get the money directly to spend as they please. Rather, the colonizing government and the post-colonial government paternalistically decide how to "heal" the women. And where one finds paternalism, it is not surprising that this should be accompanied by the sexist representations already discussed in this article.

There are also discernibly paternalistic aspects to the Germany–Namibia agreement. This, again, is not surprising, especially given that the states manage the money for the specified purpose of achieving "development," a word steeped in colonial overtones (see, e.g., Duffield and Hewitt 2013). The agreement specifies that

The projects will include the following sectors: Land Reform, in particular Land Acquisition, within the framework of the Namibian Constitution, and Land Development, Agriculture, Rural Livelihoods and Natural Resources, Rural Infrastructure, Energy and Water Supply, Technical and Vocational Education and Training. (Joint Declaration 2021, IV.16)

It is observable here that the very programs specified echo the colonial discourse of bringing education, development, and infrastructure to the colonized. On Germany's part, like the Japan–South Korea case, there is an irony in the colonizing state employing a colonial discourse even in its contrition. There is a further irony in the post-colonial state colluding in such infantilizing discourse in respect to its own citizens.

So, in relation to material redress, can the subaltern speak? Ultimately, the statist format of the two apology agreements ensures that the money is never given directly to the survivors or affected communities. The Germany–Namibia agreement makes provisions for the participation of representatives, but, in both cases, it is the states that oversee the amount, form, and implementation of the redress. The affected communities have their agency curtailed here, and the projects are to be implemented for, and on behalf of, the communities. Such a format involves the perpetrator state and post-colonial state speaking for the affected communities in respect to restitution.

Closing the Past

It is well known that political apologies utilize the discourse of closure, turning pages and drawing lines under events (Schaafsma, Zoodsma, and Sagherian-Dickey 2021). As Adorno (1998, 89) warned, we should be skeptical of those who wish to "close the books on the past" because it is a disposition "practiced by those party supporters who committed the injustice." In this respect, the discourse of closure is a hegemonic and exculpatory maneuver, and it is of little surprise that the transgressor should employ such terms. The peculiarity here is that such closure is proclaimed not only by the state that committed the injustice but also by the post-colonial state. This, as unraveled in this section, has implications for both claims to reparations and speaking positions.

To start with reparation claims: the Germany–Namibia agreement states that "both Governments share the understanding that these amounts mentioned above settle all financial aspects of the issues relating to the past addressed in this Joint Declaration" (Joint Declaration 2021, IV.20). Likewise, the Japan–South Korea agreement confirms that "funds [are to] be contributed by the Government of Japan as a one-time contribution through its budget" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2015). In both cases, then, the agreements establish that the material redress has clear monetary and temporal boundaries. Moreover, without meaningful consultation with the affected communities, these boundaries are negotiated, decided, and explicitly delimited by the two states. A consequence of this is that it impedes and explicitly rules out the affected communities' own demands for reparations. It moreover creates a situation whereby the post-colonial state has already "won" redress for the community, thereby making any further claims by the community seem invalid or even onerous. It also prohibits opportunities for the state to lend support to (rather than appropriate and lead) ongoing and future victim-led demands for reparations.

But, as always, reparations are only one aspect of a transitional justice movement. To this end, the Germany–Namibia Joint Declaration reads that "the Namibian Government and people accept Germany's apology and believe that it paves the way to a lasting mutual understanding and the consolidation of a special relationship between the two nations" (Joint Declaration, IV.14). It further states that "this shall close the painful chapter of the past and mark a new dawn in the relationship between our two countries and peoples" (Joint Declaration, IV.14). Similarly, the Japan–South Korea agreement reads that

The Government of the ROK values the GOJ's announcement and efforts made by the Government of Japan in the lead-up to the issuance of the announcement and confirms, together with the GOJ, that the issue is resolved finally and irreversibly with

this announcement. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan 2015)

A pertinent question to ask the Namibian and South Korean governments is: who are you to accept these apologies? In more academic terms, one might question whether the Namibian and South Korean governments have the appropriate standing to accept the apologies. Questions of standing and accepting apologies on behalf of oneself or a group are always fraught (see Smith 2008), but, in one respect, the issue may be marginally more straightforward in the Japan–South Korea case study where there are still survivors alive. It thereby seems particularly problematic that the Korean government declared the matter closed when (as explored later) there remain survivors who say otherwise. Here, saying that the matter is closed is a clear case of ventriloquism on the part of the post-colonial government. Within the framework of the diplomatic agreement, the deal denies survivors the chance to retort, offer a different version of events, or determine for themselves if the matter is closed.

The absence of immediate victims of the genocide renders the issue of standing more complicated in the Germany–Namibia case. The opening passage of the Germany–Namibia agreement seeks to affirm standing by noting that the agreement is between the two governments “as democratically elected by the people of Germany and Namibia respectively” (Joint Declaration 2021, Introduction). But even if one accepts (problematically) that a government, as a democratic and representative body of an intergenerational polity, is the appropriate entity to offer and receive contrition (see Thompson 2009), it remains erroneous to say that “the people” accept the apology. For one, as demonstrated in the next section, there is strong resistance to the apology in many quarters. As such, saying that “the people” accept the apology is not just ventriloquizing the population but is patently false. It also feeds into Spivak’s observation that groups are homogenized when spoken for. Moreover, among the citizens of Namibia, clearly different communities have been affected by the legacies of colonialism in different ways, including an estimated 6 percent of the population who are of European origin (CIA.gov 2021). If the “people” can accept the apology, this raises the conundrum of whether the white colonial–settler population can accept the apology for colonialism. In short, in the Namibian government proclaiming that the people accept the apology, the government is ventriloquizing the affected communities and submerging their distinct experiences and legacies in comparison to the wider Namibian population, including the settler population.

There is a further silencing dimension to the Namibian government accepting the apology and the South Korean government agreeing that the issue is closed. This problem can be illustrated through Ahmed’s (2012) notion of “overing.” Using examples within an academic environment, Ahmed demonstrates how the speech act of declaring something “over” or “in the past” serves to discredit those who continue to point to the endurance of injustices, such as racism, sexism, and colonialism. That is, in saying something is “over,” it is the justice campaigners who are painted as antiquated, belligerent, and disruptive (Ahmed 2012, 179–80).¹² It is, of course, to be expected that the transgressor state would declare an issue resolved or in the past. But in the post-colonial state openly validating this position, the idea that the comfort women system and Herero and Nama genocide are squarely a matter for the past is now

reinforced by both parties to the statist agreement. That both states, including the one purportedly representing the victims, collude in reinforcing the “pastness” of the wrongdoing is to strengthen such a narrative within a framework that allows no voice for the affected communities.

Resisting the Agreements: “Anything about Us without Us Is against Us”

As demonstrated, the format of the interstate apology agreement enables a discourse about—but not with—the subaltern. To this end, there is unquestionably a silencing dimension to the agreements, with the format lending itself to both the colonizing state and the post-colonial government ventriloquizing the victims. But apologies, as with all speech acts, do not always do what the speaker intends. In her work on political apology for sexual violence, Dolan (2021) draws on Judith Butler’s (1997) concept of “excitable speech” to illustrate how, once uttered, the meaning and interpretation of an apology is no longer under the speaker’s control. The speaker may meticulously script the apology to their liking, but they no longer regulate or own the words once enounced. Instead, the narrative may be ridiculed, critiqued, rejected, or interpreted in ways that the speaker cannot anticipate. As such, the speech act of the state declaring an issue “resolved” or an apology “accepted” does not make it so. And although the joint agreements entail a format that privileges statist voices and lends no platform to victims, this does not mean that victims cannot disrupt such narratives or speak back. Indeed, both agreements have been met with considerable public contestation, largely owing to the activism of the affected community.

To start with the Japan–Korea case: the day after the agreement, Korean Vice Foreign Minister Lim Sung-nam visited a shelter where former comfort women live. On his arrival, Lee Yong-soo, a survivor, challenged him in front of a large media contingent, saying:

Lee: Who are you? What do you do? Are you the person who settled this? You’re here to report that you have settled it now? What are you doing? Why are you trying to kill us twice? For what? Are you going to live this life for me?

Lim: Please take a seat first.

Lee: Shouldn’t you have met with the victims first before doing that? Isn’t it only right that you should tell us what you’re agreeing to? Did you exclude us because we’re not educated, because I’m too old? Because you think I don’t know anything?

Lim: No, no.

Lee: What do you mean no? The Japanese media is reporting that [Japanese Prime Minister] Abe apologised and paid reparations. They’re reporting that in foreign media as well. What have you done? Which country’s foreign ministry are you part of?

Lim: Of course, I’m from the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Lee: What does the Korean Ministry of foreign affairs do? Is it a Japanese entity? Are you supposed to be their collaborator? Shouldn’t you have told us first? We suffered because we had no country; our country was too weak to protect us. We suffered as part of

¹²I consider Ahmed’s notion of “overing” in more detail in Bentley (2021).

the nation's suffering. Why are you killing us twice? For what? Are you going to live this life for me? You should have told us first. How could you do this when we are alive as witnesses and evidence of history? (No Cut News 2015)

There is much to unpack here. First, the politician's privileged speaking position and enhanced access to the media is a resource that can be harnessed to publicly confront him and elevate Lee's voice. The very fact that the politician has a media contingent following him, presumably to win public favor in a set-piece visit to docile and grateful "grandmothers,"¹³ illustrates how the women may have their voice transmitted at exactly the moment that they are being spoken about. Moreover, we see in Lee's rebuke that the format of the agreement, far from shutting down the women's voices, actively fosters it. That is, the accusations of collaboration, ventriloquism ("are you going to live this life for me?"), and paternalism ("did you exclude us because we're not educated, because I'm too old?") are damaging slights for the government that, paradoxically, turn the government's silencing techniques against them through the agency of the survivor.

Similarly, garnering international media attention, less than a month after the apology, two survivors, Lee Ok-sun and Kang Il-chul, visited Tokyo to attend public events and speak out against the agreement. In Kang's words, "it was agreed without consulting us. How could they have agreed on this and pushed us to one side? I'm furious" (quoted in McCurry 2016). Lee described how, "it is as if the Japanese government is waiting for us to stop speaking out and die" (quoted in McCurry 2016). Undermining the agreement's position that the matter is resolved, Lee said, "there are still scars on my arms and legs from when I was cut with swords," asking, "can you tell me. . . not to protest to the Japanese government?" (quoted in AFP News 2016). Again, the apology provokes such reactions and inadvertently elevates the domestic and international traction of the survivors' statements. This represents survivors publicly utilizing their own voice in dissent to both the colonizing state and their own state's position on the agreement.

A further arena where the agreement has been challenged is through legal action. Despite ultimately being unsuccessful, a group, including surviving comfort women, recently took their case to court in pursuit of damages against the Japanese government. The initial ruling in January 2021 declared that the comfort system constituted "intentional, systematic and wide-ranging criminal acts against humanity" (The Japan Times 2021). As such, despite the court later ruling that sovereign immunity meant that a South Korean court could not impose duties on the Japanese government, the case illustrates a high-profile challenge to the notion that the issue has been irreversibly resolved. It also illustrates that survivors have the agency to challenge the narratives and tenets of the existing agreement.

Despite this, the agreement had already effectively collapsed by late 2017 following a report by a task force established to investigate the agreement. In response to the report's publication, South Korean Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha apologized to the women and acknowledged that "the agreement failed to reflect a sufficiently victim oriented approach" (quoted in Ruttenberg 2017). There are two key points to be made here: first, survivors can use their voice to disrupt and ultimately overturn statist agreements

to which they have not been adequately consulted. Second, the state declaring a matter resolved does not make it so.

In respect to the Germany–Namibia case, the agreement also created considerable pushback and condemnation. And, contrary to expectations, the agreement has yet to be ratified by the Namibian parliament. Laidlaw Peringanda, Chairperson of the Namibian Genocide Association, said that "if the German government wants to reconcile, they need to give us our dignity back," adding, "but that can't happen as long as they are excluding us." He also offered a critique of the remedial measures, saying, "we are also worried that the social projects proposed by the German government won't actually benefit us." In his words, "if they are not including us in the negotiations, how will they suddenly involve us when it comes to these projects?" (quoted in Ossenbrink 2021). Likewise, the Council of Chiefs rejected the apology, releasing a statement calling the redress an "insulting amount," "unacceptable," and an "affront to our existence" (quoted in DW 2021b).

Vekuii Rukoro, Chief of the Ovaherero Traditional Authority, said, "when German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier comes to Namibia to render the apology, we will embarrass him" (Oltermann 2021). This, again, is an example of how the symbolic and supposedly dignified weight of apologies can be harnessed against the apologizer. Following Rukoro's death in June 2021 due to Covid-19, a series of figures vowed to continue his fight against the agreement. Goab Johannes of the Nama Traditional Leaders Association said:

To the Ovaherero and Nama nations wherever you find yourself, and to all people of the world who have stood side by side with us during our determined fight for justice for an international crime against humanity committed against us, namely genocide, I want to remind you that now is the time that we must stand firm in our resolve to fight until the end of days. There is no turning back (quoted in Tjitemisa 2021).

In also paying tribute to Rukoro, leader of the Landless People's Movement (LPM) Bernadus Swartbooi, said:

We shall never waver in our fight for reparation and restitution against the German Federal Government. We shall continue to intensify the fight with the knowledge that our people in Namibia and in the diaspora shall never accept Germany and Namibia's bilateral agreements for development aid (quoted in Tjitemisa 2021).

The agreement also received considerable resistance in parliament from opposition parties. Just as Lee Yong-soo evoked the historically provocative notion of collaboration, Edson Isaacks of LPM used an equally emotive phrase, saying: "they have excluded communities, groups of Namibians . . . that is apartheid that government has practised" (quoted in Al Jazeera 2021). Utaara Mootu, also of LPM, said the agreement did not allow "for equal participation based on human rights policies. You have not given us the chance to narrate the economic trauma," saying, "you have betrayed us" (quoted in Al Jazeera 2021). Josef Kauandenge, leader of the National Unity Democratic Organisation, lamented the lack of participation, saying that the "agreement can be signed between Germany and the Namibian government, but the vast majority of Nama and Ovaherero people will reject it with the contempt it deserves" (quoted in Al Jazeera 2021).

Social media and the internet have also provided a platform to express dissent at the agreement. Petitioning the

¹³The surviving former comfort women are widely known in Korea as "grandmothers."

Namibian President, four descendants set up a change.org petition with the headline “NO Bilateral Genocide Negotiations! WE DEMAND Global Ovaherero & Nama Representation!” The petition also repeated the oft-seen and effective slogan, “Anything about us without us is against us.” Currently signed by 14,319 people, it makes three demands:

1. Full reparations shall be paid to the descendants of the victim communities of the genocide instead of a government which does not represent us.
2. We demand that Germany accepts its responsibility toward the genocide also according to international law.
3. We want to get rid of this so-called Reconciliation Agreement—not REPARATION AGREEMENT, which we see as a Public Relations coup by Germany and an act of betrayal by the Namibian Government (Kaunatjike 2021).

In this way, like the Japan–South Korea agreement, the Germany–Namibia agreement provoked considerable resistance by affected communities, including specific objections to the ventriloquizing logic of the agreement. Moreover, despite the agreements’ declarations that the issues are resolved, both agreements currently find themselves in limbo. The effective dissolution of the Japan–South Korea agreement and the stalled progress on the ratification of the Germany–Namibia agreement are, without question, in large part due to the public objections of the affected communities.

Conclusion

An already existing criticism of political apologies, especially in respect to colonial wrongdoing, is that they reinforce existing power formations, not least in terms of who does and does not get to speak. This article has added to this by capturing not just the asymmetric relationship between the colonizing state and the post-colonial state but by illustrating the manner by which both states may collude in marginalizing victims. In this respect, and in drawing on the work of Spivak, I have pointed to a “double ventriloquism” whereby the colonizing state and the victims’ own government, in the context of negotiated apologies, coordinate in speaking for victims. In doing so, the states combine to paternalistically narrate the wrongdoing, determine remedial measures, and declare the issue resolved.

This analysis has been based on the most illustrative examples of collusion, in the sense that the Germany–Namibia and Japan–South Korea agreements make no secret of the fact that they were negotiated between states. Other apologies are not so explicit about their collaborative dynamics. But even if not as overt, other state apologies routinely involve co-writing, coordination, and choreography. Focusing on the 2001 spy plane diplomatic incident, Debrix (2002) traces an evolving intersubjective dance between China and the United States to ensure that an appropriate amount of contrition could be secured to satisfy both American and Chinese audiences. In my previous work on the United Kingdom’s 2010 apology for the Bloody Sunday massacre, there were certain relatives who resented both what they perceived to be the co-writing of the apology by members of Sinn Féin and the sense that Sinn Féin were scripting family members’ immediate responses to the aftermath of the Bloody Sunday Report (Bentley 2021). In the context of Italy’s 2008 apology to Libya, we see the literal embrace of two strong-man leaders in Silvio Berlusconi and Muammar Gaddafi. I suggest, in other words, that the central argument here has applicability to political apologies that may

not necessarily emerge through the format of an explicitly negotiated diplomatic agreement.

But one should be wary not just of a double ventriloquism between states or governing political parties but also between a state and (relatively or even marginally) privileged groups. Take, for example, the 2011 Dutch apology for the 1947 massacre in Rawagede, Indonesia. Immler (2018, 167) captures how, at the ceremony, “the widows sat at the side, as the subjects of discussion, while the main protagonists were men, the local elite, who did the talking—and in Bahasa, not in Sudanese, the local dialect of the old people in the village.” The case also entails a foundation representing the widows that, in cooperation with local police and officials, seemingly pressured the women into “sharing” their compensation with the village and other victims.¹⁴ In other cases, the designated interlocutor may be a high-profile victim or, at least, a comparatively well-known figure: After Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau completed his 2017 apology to Labrador Residential School survivors, the host of the event announced: “I would now like to welcome Toby Obed to the stage to accept the apology on behalf of the former students” (CBC 2017). Even as somebody who attended a residential school, can Obed accept the apology on behalf of other students? Is this prearranged and orchestrated ceremony also an example of double ventriloquism? I suggest that more research is required on the dynamics of individuals (as well as states) speaking for other victims, including victims who may now be dead.

Likewise, research is needed on the role of civil society groups in accepting, rejecting, or campaigning for apology on behalf of victims. Many of these groups will certainly have progressive intentions and consist of victims, but what are the hierarchies at play and how do these hierarchies relate to the question of who can and cannot speak? In the case of the Herero and Nama genocide, this article has pointed to consternation about the apology from the Herero Genocide Committee, the Council of Chiefs, the Landless People’s Movement, and the Namibian Genocide Association, but whose voices are privileged and whose might be dimmed within and between such groups? Moreover, do Herero civil society groups have a privileged speaking position in comparison to the San and Damara communities, who, if anything, and of course it is not a league table, find themselves even more marginalized than the Herero community?¹⁵

And when it comes to civil society groups, there is potential for severe problems in respect to the representation of victims. Lee Yong-soo, for instance, recently accused the head of The Korean Council for the Women Drafted for Military Sexual Slavery by Japan of “sell[ing] out” and using the women for her own political ambitions (quoted in Korea JoongAng Daily 2020). The Korean Council has also been involved in controversies, including allegedly pressuring women not to accept money from the 2015 agreement and not spending donations on victims (Ock 2020). There is also an accusation that the organization had prior knowledge of the 2015 agreement but did not inform

¹⁴ See Immler (2018) for a detailed exploration of the case. As Immler demonstrates, this is more complex than a straightforward case of theft of the compensation. Rather, it may speak, to some extent, to a local disposition where victimhood and human rights are considered more communal and less individualized than routinely considered in the West. Even in contemplating this, Immler (2018, 169) captures how the widows were excluded from the sharing and decision-making process regarding compensation awarded to them.

¹⁵ Historically, including during pre-genocide German rule, the Herero community exercised power over the Damara and San communities, including economically (Wallace 2003, 357).

the women (Ock 2020). Of course, not every organization representing victims will face such severe allegations, but, in the politics of regret, more research is required on the potentially easy slippage between representation and misrepresentation.

Finally, I hope more research can draw on and develop the notion of "double ventriloquism" deployed here, including outside the domain of political contrition. One could envisage, for instance, occasions in which nongovernmental organizations and post-colonial states may collude in speaking on behalf of subaltern communities in the context of development aid. Alternatively, it is possible to imagine a situation in which a trade union and corporation collude in ventriloquizing a particular sector of the workforce. There are plausible scenarios in which pharmaceutical companies and advocacy groups may combine in speaking for patients with particular vulnerabilities. In other words, the format of institutional bodies colluding to narrate other people's stories and paternalistically agree what is best for the marginalized in society at the expense of voices from the affected community is a phenomenon that can be further explored, applied to different case studies, and still more richly theorized.

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