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Who Gets To Know? Combating Colonial Epistemic Oppression

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Abstract

This Independent Study thesis is divided into five chapters. In the introduction, I explain the focus of the paper. In the second chapter, "Landscapes of Epistemic Injustice," I clarify the concept of epistemic injustice by breaking it down into hermeneutical injustice and testimonial injustice. I argue that we have obligations to each other as knowers and producers of knowledge, and the content of these obligations within a given situation depends upon the social position of both the speaker and the audience or audiences. In the third chapter, "Epistemic Oppression and Colonialism," I contend that Western colonial projects frequently enact third-order epistemic oppression upon colonized and marginalized groups by imposing a colonial set of background assumptions upon these groups and using these assumptions to subjugate their ways of knowing and expressions of knowledge. In the fourth chapter, "Situating Resistance to Epistemic Oppression," I argue that different colonized and marginalized groups may develop a multitude of different methods of resistance to colonial epistemic oppression, but that members of groups that benefit from this oppression such as myself ought not dictate to these groups how resistance ought to occur. However, I contend, beneficiaries of colonial epistemic oppression can work with each other to critically examine and combat dominant practices of epistemic injustice. Finally, in the conclusion, I outline some practices in which beneficiaries of colonialism can engage to combat colonial epistemic oppression.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

In principle, we can understand epistemology — the theory of knowledge — in individualistic terms. We can conceive of knowledge in a vacuum, where there is only one agent, and that agent comes to know things in solitude. However, if we adopt this lens as the default or primary mode of understanding knowledge, we thoroughly fail to appreciate the complex social dimensions of knowledge production and distribution that characterize every aspect of our epistemic practices. Our use of language reflects the interrelatedness and interdependence of knowers: we rely upon each other in order to learn and use such tools for acquiring, creating, and disseminating knowledge. Ethico-epistemic dimensions arise from the ineluctably social nature of our epistemic practices: for instance, "suppose that you were to find out that your doctor was not knowledgeable about best treatment practices regarding a common medical condition…you would appeal to this expectation *in order to criticize your doctor for not having been relevantly knowledgeable*" (Kidd et al. 2019, 214). In this case, the doctor in question is irresponsible in a manner that is simultaneously ethical and epistemic: the doctor's failure to live up to our normative epistemic expectations has the capacity to cause harm to their patients. Because our epistemic practices have ethical dimensions, we can inquire into issues such as the justness of certain epistemic practices and our responsibilities as knowers.

However, it would be a mistake to try to form a positive conception of epistemic justice without first considering the ways in which certain epistemic activity harms people in their capacity as knowers. Because justice is concerned with "rational idealizations of human beings and their activities," we may be tempted to conceive of injustice as the mere negation of these ideals (Fricker 2007, vii). However, such negation is misleading because it creates a superficial

binary that neglects the complexities of the world and does not allow us to explore the different degrees and manners of harm imposed by unjust epistemic activities. Conversely, focusing on the injustices imposed upon people through epistemic activity can provide us with a rich conception of practices to avoid and direct our attention more precisely to our current shortcomings: "the only way to reveal what is involved in epistemic justice (indeed, even to see that there is such a thing as epistemic justice) is by looking at the negative space that is epistemic injustice" (Fricker 2007, viii).

Further, we can partially combat such unjust epistemic practices by identifying, conceptualizing, and calling them out. We can more effectively address injustice when we are aware of it. However, as I later contend, unjust epistemic practices are multifarious and the forms they take are context-dependent. As such, rather than attempting to establish a single all-encompassing account of these practices, I narrow the focus of this paper to unjust epistemic practices in a particular set of contexts that share important socio-historical overlap: particularly on unjust epistemic practices with regards to Euro-colonial projects. In this paper, I argue that Western colonial projects create a system of epistemic injustices that silence, discredit, and disregard marginalized groups, culminating in colonial epistemic oppression. To combat this oppression, members of oppressive groups ought to engage in practices and live our lives in ways that counter and critically examine our epistemic shortcomings.

Chapter 2: Landscapes of Epistemic Injustice

Overview of Testimonial and Hermeneutical Injustice

In *Epistemic Injustice: Ethics and the Power of Knowing*, Miranda Fricker argues that one can be wronged "specifically in their capacity as a knower" (2007, 1). Rather than focusing on injustices that result from an unfair distribution of epistemic goods such as information or education, Fricker limits her analysis to those injustices that either cause or result from failures to recognize a person's ability to act as someone who holds knowledge. Thereby, Fricker contends, we can demonstrate that there is an ethical — and therefore political — dimension to our epistemic practices which we must critically examine. Specifically, Fricker argues that there are two kinds of epistemic injustice: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice.

Fricker asserts that one type of epistemic injustice is testimonial injustice. This, she contends, is caused when prejudice causes a hearer to unfairly grant a speaker less credibility because of the speaker's socially ascribed identity/identities. In any communicative interaction, a responsible hearer must decide what level of credibility to assign to a speaker. This attribution of credibility can vary on the basis of certain information about the speaker and the testimony that the speaker provides. For instance, in a conversation about exceptional bowling techniques, if a speaker has successfully competed in several national tournaments, then that speaker deserves more credibility on that basis. Conversely, if the speaker only bowls infrequently, and when they bowl they get low scores, then Fricker would assert that it is not unjust to attribute that speaker lower credibility in that discussion. This is because the lower credibility does not in this case result from prejudice about the speaker's perceived identity, but rather from relevant judgments based on the topic of conversation. As such, these instances do not constitute testimonial injustices.

Fricker outlines the "central case" of testimonial injustice as such: a systematic "*identity-prejudicial credibility deficit*" (2007, 28). Under this conception, the most egregious testimonial injustice occurs when a hearer attributes a lower degree of credibility to a speaker because of prejudice against a dimension of that speaker's identity. Notably, this excludes many instances. First, although Fricker acknowledges that epistemic injustice can occur non-systematically, she contends that such cases are not the central cases of testimonial injustice. For instance, although someone may hold a prejudice against professional bowlers and as a result allocate a professional bowler less credibility, Fricker would not consider that systematic because "the prejudice in question...does not render the subject vulnerable to any other kinds of injustice (legal, economic, political)," and therefore she considers the epistemic injustice in that situation "incidental" (2007, 27). Conversely, testimonial injustices based upon identities that "'track' the subject through different dimensions of social activity" such as race, gender, etc. are systematic because they are likely to render a person susceptible to a variety of other injustices. Finally, Fricker contends that a credibility deficit is necessary for testimonial injustice. She does acknowledge that it is possible, given sufficient credibility excess over a long enough timeframe, for a person to develop epistemic arrogance — a "cognitive superiority complex" that occurs "when those with social power enjoy "in a disproportionate manner the privilege of knowing (or rather, of being assumed to know)" (Medina 2013, 30; 32). However, Fricker argues that this is both anomalous and cumulative. Further, she posits that no individual instance of credibility excess constitutes an injustice, and thus hearers do not commit an injustice by consistently affording someone a credibility excess.

The other type of epistemic injustice that Fricker outlines is hermeneutical injustice. According to Fricker, this occurs when a "significant area of one's social experience [is]

obscured from collective understanding owing to hermeneutical marginalization" (2007, 158). This definition intentionally includes both incidental and systematic hermeneutical marginalization: whether or not an instance of hermeneutical injustice is repetitive and pervasive, that instance counts under this definition. Hermeneutical marginalization occurs when a person is forcibly subordinated and excluded from the practice of interpreting a particular experience. Fricker contends that hermeneutical marginalization could occur either incidentally or systematically. As an example of systematic hermeneutical injustice, Fricker cites Carmita Wood, a former university employee who experienced repeated nonconsensual sexual advances from a male superior, which ultimately caused her to suffer severe stress and develop chronic medical conditions, forcing Wood to leave her university position. At the time, Fricker asserts that Wood was unable to sufficiently communicate her situation in terms that were intelligible by the dominant epistemological order. Ultimately, this meant that because she did not identify a discriminatory reason for leaving her work, Wood was unable to collect unemployment benefits. Eventually, Wood met with a group of women who had each undergone similar unwanted workplace sexual misconduct. In discussing their shared experiences, they generated a new concept and new understandings to describe the phenomenon of pernicious sexual misconduct: "sexual harassment" (Fricker 2007, 150). According to Fricker, the pervasive hermeneutical marginalization that resulted in Wood's situation is harmful because (1) "it renders the collective hermeneutical resource structurally prejudiced, for it will tend to issue interpretations of that group's social experiences that are biased because insufficiently influenced by the subject group, and therefore unduly influenced by more hermeneutically powerful groups" and (2) it results in people of a certain group being unable to intelligibly communicate something that is particularly in their interest to

communicate (2007, 155). Fricker contends that, unlike testimonial injustice, hermeneutical injustice is purely structural and therefore "[n]o agent *perpetrates* hermeneutical injustice" (2007, 159). Therefore, Fricker suggests, no individual is blameworthy for instances in which their conduct reflects hermeneutical injustice.

Epistemic Injustice as Thoroughly Contextual

Fricker's accounts of both testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice are informative, but they fall short in crucial ways. First, Fricker's description of testimonial injustice fails to adopt a sufficiently wide framework, instead focusing on the individual level injustice between a single speaker and a single hearer. This denies the contextuality of epistemic injustice by ignoring cases in which identity prejudices lead hearers to attribute *more* credibility to a speaker from a dominant group. I argue that this is an important aspect of testimonial injustice because such cases reinforce the dominant social and political epistemic stratification. Second, Fricker's view of hermeneutical injustice is unhelpful in that it removes culpability for perpetuating hermeneutical gaps. By doing so, Fricker attempts to render innocent the behaviors and actions in which dominant groups engage to *preserve* their ignorance.

Testimonial injustice occurs when prejudice leads a person to attribute an unjustifiable level of credibility to a speaker based on factors other than that speaker's demonstrated qualifications (Fricker, "Testimonial Injustice," 2007). Occasionally, a hearer may make a simple mistake in allotting credibility to a speaker; I agree with Miranda Fricker that for the hearer, "[s]o long as her false belief is itself ethically and epistemically non-culpable (it does not, for example, result from an immoral hatefulness or from epistemic carelessness), there

will be nothing culpable in her misjudgement of his credibility" ("Testimonial Injustice" 2007, 21). As such, these epistemic mistakes are not relevant to the discussion of epistemic injustice. In terms of real epistemic injustice, it is easy to see how underestimating a speaker's capabilities due to one's prejudice is a form of injustice: disadvantaging the viewpoints or contributions of a speaker based upon an identity prejudice is both unfair to that speaker and a poor epistemic practice. However, I will argue that this injustice is equally relevant whether granting an excess or deficit of credibility, as credibility is properly understood akin to a limited resource. In doing so, I contest Fricker's view of epistemic injustice as solely imposed by a hearer onto a speaker.

Fricker acknowledges that 'credibility excess' can lead to epistemic injustice. She contends that this occurs when — on a long enough time frame — the speaker who is consistently given a sufficient amount of credibility excess develops epistemic arrogance. José Medina details such arrogance as a form of "cognitive superiority complex" in which one is so epistemically spoiled that one finds difficulty acknowledging and recognizing one's errors, biases, and gaps in knowledge (2013, 30). I find this highly plausible: for example, in American society, men are frequently granted significantly higher credibility than women, often to the point of significant excess. In this process, many men become overconfident in both their knowledge and their ways of obtaining it, failing to grant adequate credibility to the opinions of others. Similarly, European colonial empires — often emboldened by viewing theirs as the only 'civilized' culture, in addition to theirs as the only 'true' religion — developed an epistemic arrogance that led them to discredit the knowledge of others and attempting to establish Western European knowledge and religion as the only legitimate option.

Although this second example is on the societal level rather than the level of the individual speaker/hearer, it is important to understand and acknowledge the political nature of epistemic injustice: when prejudices, being inherently political attitudes, are responsible for a credibility deficit, the personal bias is conditioned by the political. Thus, where widespread prejudices exist, credibility deficits are bound to occur on a societal level, with certain groups receiving credibility disadvantages to other groups on the basis of identity prejudice. In this way — although Medina correctly notes the importance of treating oppressed and privileged perspectives alike as pluralistic — we can discuss epistemic injustices as imposed by one group onto another, while recognizing that individual epistemic situations vary within each group.

Further, although this epistemic arrogance that arises from repeated credibility excess is crucial to understanding the current political epistemic context, I argue that identity-prejudicial credibility excess constitutes an epistemic injustice as a rule. Fricker rejects the notion that credibility excess is intrinsically an epistemic injustice, as "it does not undermine, insult, or otherwise withhold a proper respect for the speaker qua subject of knowledge," and thus the speaker is not wronged in their capacity as a knower. This is based on the notion that credibility is not a good that is properly categorized under the distributive model of justice. However, I contest this assertion, and contend that credibility, applied to the real world, are finite resources subject to distributive justice.

In theory, it would be a simple task to allot each speaker the proper level of credibility on each topic based upon their experience, knowledge, beliefs, and desires. If a speaker has studied the topic in question for much of their life, is widely viewed as an expert in the field, has demonstrated trustworthiness through their actions, and does not have any conflicts of interest about the subject at hand, then a listener ought to attribute to that speaker a high level

of credibility. Conversely, a person with no expertise on the subject and who has both a history of lying and a direct conflict of interest is not owed a high degree of confidence. At extremes, it can seem simple to determine the proper level of credibility to attribute to a speaker.

However, in practice, hearers cannot learn about the entirety of a speaker's qualifications, expertise, and ignorance before attributing to them a certain level of credibility. The vast majority of speakers will not fit neatly into either mold set forth above, and even speakers presented as experts with stellar credentials may nevertheless be engaged in deception or be subject to significant oversights that impair their judgment. As such, hearers must to some extent rely on heuristics to determine an appropriate level of credibility to give to a speaker. The use of such heuristics in belief formation has complex implications: our heuristics are sometimes helpful and sometimes harmful. Even the heuristics that seem fundamental to our social order can reinforce epistemic injustices. For example, when a person confesses to committing a murder, we may be inclined to use that confession as a heuristic to determine that the person is guilty of that murder, and therefore deserving of certain consequences. This can be a reliable heuristic in many cases. However, a confession may be an unreliable basis for the attribution of guilt in a number of situations that deviate from the normative juridical ideal: for instance, if the confession was acquired through intense coercive interrogation; if the confessor is highly suggestible; or if the confessor had good reason to believe that they would still be found guilty and punished more harshly if they did not confess, even if the confessor was innocent. In the last situation, epistemic marginalization can worsen the reliability of the confession heuristic for some people, and in turn result in greater epistemic marginalization. An epistemically marginalized person is less likely to be believed when they claim to be not guilty of a crime, and if they are very likely to be found guilty once accused regardless of

whether or not they are innocent, then they have good reason to avoid harsher punishment by confessing to a crime regardless of whether or not they committed that crime. On a societal scale this process may reinforce identity prejudices against members of that epistemically marginalized group, as being convicted of a crime is a common heuristic for criminality, and criminality is frequently used as a heuristic for untrustworthiness.

Moreover, we often view certain credentials — such as holding an advanced degree from an accredited institution, being widely respected in an academic field of study, and publishing many influential academic papers and books — as heuristics to grant someone a high level of credibility. Such credential heuristics can allow us a division of epistemic labor, which can significantly help in knowledge production and distribution. When a society develops clear hallmarks that delineate expertise in a particular field of knowledge, knowledge creation can be organized in a way that permits specialization and the institutionalization of knowledge. Under some circumstances, using such credentials as heuristics for credibility may help combat epistemic injustices: when members of epistemically marginalized groups are granted these credentials, this may force some people to reconsider their identity prejudices that reinforce testimonial injustice. However, credential heuristics are frequently insufficient to overcome identity-prejudicial heuristics. For example, professors and academics who belong to epistemically marginalized groups — particularly women of color — are often taken less seriously than their epistemically privileged counterparts, despite having stellar credentials (Smith 1999). Further, the institutionalization of knowledge creation through credential heuristics can serve to reinforce identity prejudices that enable epistemic injustice. For example, scientific racism takes advantage of credential heuristics to reify racial differences and form hierarchies of cognitive capacity along racial lines. Samuel George Morton, “the

most highly regarded American scientist of the first half of the 19th century and one of the founders of the field of Physical Anthropology," exemplified this process in his work dedicated to form a hierarchy of races based upon cranial capacity (Weisberg 2014, 166). Morton's work in racial craniometry is fraught with racial bias, which led him to draw unjustifiable conclusions ranking Caucasians at the top of the racial hierarchy in terms of cranial capacity, which he used as a heuristic for racial intelligence. Thus, by leveraging credentials and scientific procedures to claim that nonwhite people are less intelligent than white people, Morton — and the other thinkers who contributed and continue to contribute to scientific racism — furthered epistemic injustices against nonwhite people. As low intelligence is often used as a reason to disbelieve testimony, using scientific framing and credentials to claim that nonwhite people have low intelligence is likely to intensify the racial identity prejudices that result in lower credibility afforded to nonwhite people.

Further, no epistemically virtuous person can grant the same level of credibility to everyone; to do so would itself be epistemically vicious. It is neither practical nor desirable to adopt a strict egalitarian stance concerning the credibility that one affords to all testifiers. People often provide testimony that (1) contradicts the testimony of others, (2) contradicts the prior testimony of the speaker, or (3) contradicts itself. This is because testimony is often not merely a statement of personal belief that holds no normative thrust. In many cases, testimony is a claim to knowledge, a claim that exists as a part of the struggle over that which is true and that which is false. If testimony merely consisted of the detached report of non-normative beliefs, then all credibility assessments could be nothing more than an estimation of the extent to which a person can accurately report their own thoughts. This is certainly one form of credibility judgment, which may occur when we think a speaker may be lying, but the range

of our analyses to determine credibility is far more textured than that. We sometimes inquire into our own knowledge, the knowledge of the speaker, and the knowledge of others to understand the extent to which a given speaker is credible on a given topic, without ever seeking to determine how precisely the speaker's testimony mirrors their beliefs. In assessing credibility, we do not only determine whether a speaker is lying or whether they have the capacity to communicate their beliefs intelligibly. We also attempt to determine whether a speaker has good standing to provide such testimony: for instance, whether they have reliable first-hand experience, substantial knowledge in the subject field, etc. Claims to knowledge about the world, thus, may be contradictory. It is possible to hold two contradictory beliefs, but merely accepting all testimony as maximally credible regardless of the speaker is fatal for knowledge creation.

Further, we must assign different levels of credibility to different speakers for given testimony. If we wish to create and communicate knowledge, then we also can neither abstain from believing nor disbelieve all testimony: to do so would be to harm everyone else in their capacities as agents who can produce, share, and inquire into knowledge. In this sense, to treat all testimony as equally credible is to enact testimonial justices upon many knowers: this would mean that one treats a first-hand account of an event with the same credibility that one grants to testimony about the event from a person who has not been informed beyond the headline of a newspaper. Although first-hand accounts are not always outright authoritative, we have good reason to grant a speaker more credibility based on lived experience.

For example, consider the game telephone, in which players line up and the first player whispers a phrase into the ear of the player next to them, who attempts to accurately whisper the same phrase into the ear of the next player, and so on. Once the phrase reaches the end of

the line, the final player attempts to accurately speak aloud the phrase that they heard whispered into their ear, to compare how close it is to the original phrase. If we want to gain knowledge of what the original phrase was, we have good reason to give more credibility to the statements of the first player (and perhaps the second player) over the players further down the line, who did not hear the original phrase. Unless we have outstanding reasons to believe that the first speaker is either unwilling or incapable of accurately reporting the original phrase, to grant all players equal credibility in reporting the original phrase would be detrimental to gaining knowledge of the original phrase and unjust to the first player in their capacity as a knower. This does not mean that we, therefore, must grant the first player maximal credibility in all circumstances as they move through the world; rather, we owe them a heightened level of credibility because of their particular position within the context of the game. Similarly, lived experience is a good reason to grant heightened (albeit not unlimited) credibility to testimony in general. As such, not only must we grant different levels of credibility to different testimony, but we must also do so based upon the positionality of the speaker.

This alone does not necessitate the distributive model of justice for credibility: it is conceivable, as Fricker claims, that despite the fact that different people are owed different levels of credibility on a certain topic, credibility is not a finite resource in the sense that the distributive model of justice demands. However, combined with the everyday necessity of using heuristics to judge credibility, the need to attribute different levels of credibility to different speakers in effect turns credibility into a limited resource. Using heuristics such as the speaker's degree and type of education can be a useful method of determining credibility, and this results in those with more education being accorded greater levels of credibility than those with less. Similarly, with stereotypes, attributing to a cishet straight white man speaker

a greater level of credibility than he is owed based upon any of his identities that are not directly relevant to his speech necessitates a lower level of credibility granted to a speaker who does not share his identities. Thus, even when the only relevant speaker is granted an excess of credibility based upon irrelevant identities, it is an injustice on the societal level, as their speech is being unduly privileged over others.

In "Hermeneutical Injustice and Polyphonic Contextualism: Social Silences and Shared Hermeneutical Responsibilities," José Medina challenges Miranda Fricker's conception of hermeneutical injustice, emphasizing its fundamentally contextual and agential aspects. First, Medina contends that Fricker's account of the injustice inherent to certain hermeneutical gaps is not sufficiently relational: although Fricker acknowledges that certain marginalized groups suffer injustices regarding interpretations of their experiences, she does not specify in her analysis "for whom experience is being rendered intelligible, in what kind of communicative interaction and according to which dynamic" (Medina 2012, 207). Medina argues that a thoroughly contextualist approach to understanding hermeneutical injustice is necessary, as (1) failures of intelligibility could occur in many different situations, (2) the experiences of marginalized groups can be made intelligible before this intelligibility is acknowledged widespread or by other groups, and (3) the heterogeneity intrinsic to complex societies problematizes the idea of a single collective hermeneutical resource in favor of a range of resources, particularly in contexts where oppression leads to social divisions. Moreover, Medina clarifies — contrary to Fricker — that the participants in hermeneutical injustice are blameworthy and have shared responsibilities to combat such injustice.

I agree with Medina's contention that a proper conception of hermeneutical injustice must be thoroughly contextual. As Medina argues, there is a significant difference between (1)

conveying the understanding to those who have not undergone this experience, (2) communicating this understanding to similarly-situated others who share this experience, and (3) gaining understanding of an experience to oneself, although all three can be products of hermeneutical injustices (2012). For instance, large-scale active ignorance by dominant groups can produce a hermeneutical injustice that inhibits the oppressed from communicating their experiences to their oppressors. Secondly, policies and practices that inhibit collectivization and communication among oppressed groups can significantly impede the spread of an interpretation of a certain experience among a marginalized group. Finally, in extreme cases, by imposing and propagating certain prejudicial epistemic valuations, an oppressor group can make it difficult for a member of a marginalized group to interpret their own experience. However, this does not mean that *no* oppressed person under any of these conditions can adequately interpret their experiences and communicate them to others: "even during slavery there were multiple ways in which black voices found ways to express their suffering and to speak out against racial oppression. And it would be to indulge in a dangerous fiction to postulate a dark time in which *everybody* was blind to the wrongs of slavery and *nobody* knew how to communicate about them," (Medina 2012, 209). Despite intense and prolonged oppression, rampant ignorance, and the imposition of prejudicial epistemic valuations that fundamentally disregard the personhood of an oppressed group, we can still find examples of hermeneutical resistance, which occurs when a dissident combats the mainstream interpretive framework. Thus, Fricker's assumption that everybody in a society will be affected by hermeneutical gaps is untenable, as those engaged in hermeneutical resistance are not constrained by the hermeneutical gap(s) that they resist. Finally, as Medina asserts, the heterogeneity of fractured publics further warrants a highly contextual analysis of

hermeneutical injustice (2012). Even under centralized oppressive systems, some degree of heterogeneity inherent to complex societies permits a certain level of hermeneutical resistance, as exemplified by the hermeneutical resistance of enslaved peoples. Further, where societies have rigid social divisions and fragments, marginalized groups are likely to develop their own understandings and interpretations of their experiences, even though dominant groups may still find these interpretations unintelligible.

Moreover, I assent to Medina's contention that members of dominant groups are blameworthy for the perpetuation of hermeneutical injustice. The question of culpability is crucial to understanding how to combat an epistemic injustice. Before figuring out how to address such an injustice, it is necessary to determine (1) whether anyone is responsible for the injustice, (2) if so, *who* is culpable and in what sense. These determinations can be especially difficult given the intricacies of social dynamics: as José Medina contends, "[e]ven the same subject may have an easier or harder time being unaffected by epistemic distortions and escaping different forms of social insensitivity as she moves across activities and contexts" (2013, 120). Further, although a person may be the victim of a systematic epistemic injustice, this does not preclude that person from also perpetuating systematic injustices against other groups. Because societies have complex social dynamics, it is unlikely that a person will only ever be epistemically marginalized or privileged in their social interactions. However, this is not to say that all people are on equal epistemic ground: for some people, experiencing epistemic injustice is an anomaly, whereas for others it is the default under many or most circumstances. When I refer to epistemically marginalized/privileged, I am discussing people *insofar* as they are epistemically privileged or marginalized, but the distinction between people who are generally epistemically privileged as they move through the world and those who are

generally marginalized is important for considering ways to resist epistemic injustice and oppression. Because the question of epistemic culpability has complex implications based on the positionalities of the speaker and hearer(s), it is important to carefully contextualize and analyze the responsibility of subjects in perpetuating epistemic injustices.

One response to the question of culpability is that *everyone* is responsible, and therefore *no one* is culpable. This view holds that systematic epistemic injustices are merely features of society, and therefore nobody can be held as culpable for perpetuating them. Miranda Fricker takes this stance concerning hermeneutical injustices. Fricker argues that agents cannot be considered blameworthy for hermeneutical injustices, which are purely structural in nature, and therefore "[n]o agent *perpetrates* hermeneutical injustice" (2007, 159). I will later address the ways in which this "structural injustice" view is misguided, but I will first argue that it reflects at least two truths.

First, the structural injustice view holds epistemic injustice as the default mode of society, rather than as an anomaly. For members of dominant groups, it is often easy to do the opposite. Among people who are privileged under a certain context, injustice is usually assumed to be an occasional occurrence that deviates from a background of justice. Contrary to this assumption, the structural view of epistemic injustice asserts that *injustice* is the norm, and "the normalization of a presumed justice and the concomitant abnormalization of injustice have important ideological effects: they contribute to the invisibility of everyday injustices, to the formation of active bodies of ignorance that perpetuate the injustices and make us insensitive to the suffering they cause" (Medina 2013, 129). Because the structural view holds that epistemic injustices are principles along which societies are ordered, it promotes the correct notion that epistemic injustice is the norm. The idea that epistemic injustice is abnormal

reflects the ways in which dominant groups have control over cultural narratives. Those groups that have consistently dominant social positions are rarely the victims of identity-based injustices (such as systematic epistemic injustices), and so justice is commonly viewed as the default. However, the targets of such injustices have marginalized identities that are consistently affected by these injustices, although these identities become more or less relevant depending on the context. Moreover, the dominant groups perpetuate such injustices, and thus these groups are blind to certain epistemic injustices *despite their role in maintaining* these injustices.

Second, the structural injustice view properly acknowledges that epistemic injustices can be perpetuated without any subject engaging in explicit bigotry. In many cases, those who engage with and perpetuate systematic epistemic injustices have no intention to do so; they merely access the cultural touchstones and social norms with which they are familiar. Without any overt sign of identity-based hostility, they replicate and perpetuate epistemic injustices that target marginalized groups. An important example of this phenomenon is racial stigmatization: "racial stigmatization only requires *practical engagement* with racial stigmas, that is, acting in a way that expresses, evokes, or enacts demeaning stereotypes and scripts, even if such stereotypes and scripts remain unconscious and even if they are explicitly (and often sincerely) rejected by the agent" (Medina 2013, 141). For instance, if a white person praises a black person as "articulate," the white person is engaging in racial stigmatization even if neither person believes the stereotype that black people are inarticulate.

However, the structural injustice view erroneously serves to exculpate dominant groups, erasing their role in perpetrating epistemic injustices. In fact, an injustice can even occur out of ignorance. As Medina (2013) argues, to be a socially responsible and epistemically

competent agent, we must have a certain minimal level of knowledge about ourselves, the people around us, and the world. This means that ignorance cannot always (or even often) excuse someone from culpability for an epistemic injustice. Medina contends that ignorance does not equate to innocence: although such ignorance can often be the product of one's social environment, he claims that "one cannot inhabit [epistemic ignorance] comfortably and without making any effort to combat it (even when opportunities to do so present themselves), and legitimately use this inherited ignorance to excuse one's actions" (2013, 140). If someone does not pay attention to one's ignorance about themself, people and groups in their close proximity, and the world around them, then that person is actively maintaining that ignorance and they become complicit in that ignorance. Dominant groups frequently become active in maintaining their ignorance, both because they materially benefit from the results of their ignorance and because ignorance allows them to avoid the guilt and recognition of culpability that result from recognizing how the injustices that they perpetuate affect others. To combat epistemic injustice, it is not sufficient to throw up one's hands and deem everyone — or no one — complicit. Although these injustices are a feature of society in which everyone may participate, this does not mean that everyone is affected by epistemic injustices to the same degree or in the same way.

Epistemic Responsibility

In this paper, I do not focus on epistemic injustice as a failure to engender the most knowledge possible across subjects. This may be a tempting lens to adopt, as it reflects the common narrative of knowledge as a beacon, a light that casts out over the world and destroys the shadows of ignorance. Such a view holds that the point of communication is to convey information, and thus epistemic injustices are so-called because they inhibit the successful

transfer of knowledge. I will call this the maximizing view of epistemic justice. At first glance, this framework seems to line up with a critique of epistemic injustice under colonialism: when identity-based prejudices cause a hearer to grant less credibility to a speaker than is appropriate, the hearer imposes a clear epistemic injustice upon the speaker. Thus, if a member of the hegemony disregards the scientific testimony of a member of a subaltern due to cultural prejudice, the member of the hegemony imposes an epistemic injustice on that member of the subaltern (and upon all members of that subaltern). According to this framework, the injustice occurs precisely *because* the hearer is not behaving in the way that will produce the most knowledge for all parties involved.

The existence of misleading testimony problematizes this framework. When a true statement is likely to produce false beliefs in the audience, it can be unclear whether proffering the statement is justified under this view. Supporters of the aforementioned view may contend that knowers *can*, occasionally, obtain misleading knowledge, but that the best way to overcome the resultant error is to simply obtain more knowledge. I find this view fundamentally misguided insofar as it ignores the situated nature of knowledge itself and the social hierarchies thereby entailed. Let us adopt as an example Kristie Dotson's concept of testimonial smothering.

When speakers who are members of marginalized groups proffer "unsafe" testimony — that testimony which the audience has a high probability of finding less than fully intelligible based on the audience's social situation — and the audience has failed to demonstrate that they will find the testimony fully intelligible, the audience is likely to form false beliefs based on the speaker's testimony (Dotson 2011). Further, these false beliefs are likely to cause harm to the marginalized group of which the speaker is a member: for instance,

if a Black speaker in the United States proffers testimony to a white audience about disproportionate arrests and prosecution of Black people, and the audience does not find the testimony fully intelligible, then the testimony may reinforce negative stereotypes that frame Black people as criminals. In turn, because people considered to be criminals are often viewed as untrustworthy, this misleading testimony can have the effect of perpetuating epistemic injustices imposed upon them as a result of racial identity prejudice. As such, under these types of circumstances a member of such a group may be disinclined to proffer this unsafe testimony. When someone does not provide potentially unsafe testimony because the audience has not adequately demonstrated that they will find testimony intelligible and recognize what they do not understand, this is called "testimonial smothering" (Dotson 2011).

The framework at hand — that which emphasizes the maximization of knowledge — would hold that, in withholding information from certain parties, either those marginalized groups who do not proffer unsafe testimony would be imposing an epistemic injustice *on the audience*, or there is no epistemic injustice involved in testimonial smothering. Both readings are incorrect: testimonial smothering is an epistemic injustice imposed by the audience on the speaker. Whether an epistemically marginalized speaker is compelled to proffer testimony that is likely to further their own marginalization, or that speaker refrains from proffering that testimony because it is likely to be misunderstood, the conditions for testimonial smothering force a marginalized speaker into an epistemically disadvantageous position. It is possible that, although the epistemically privileged audience has not demonstrated that they can find the testimony intelligible, they will, nonetheless. However, this circumstance does not exculpate such an audience, as the positionality of the marginalized speaker with relation to the privileged audience means that the speaker cannot reasonably expect the audience to find this testimony

intelligible unless the audience demonstrates that they likely will. Even such demonstrations are imperfect, as it is also possible that an audience that demonstrates that they will likely find testimony intelligible will nevertheless fail. However, in lieu of omnipotence, such demonstrations are the best that we can do to ensure successful communication. Testimonial smothering is a form of silencing that occurs because of social positionality. Because marginalized groups are inhibited from providing testimony by the threat posed by creating or perpetuating negative stereotypes, Dotson properly views testimonial smothering as a coercive phenomenon in which an audience enacts epistemic violence upon those whose testimony it silences.

Moreover, epistemically marginalized peoples do not owe their knowledge to their oppressors, particularly not insofar as that group demonstrates a consistent and pernicious ignorance. As Mills contends, this ignorance is frequently deliberate and falls along the lines of social hierarchies, and such malicious ignorance results in a self-deceiving demeanor that Dotson considers a form of epistemic violence (Mills 2007; Dotson 2011). In fact, complete honesty on the part of the epistemically marginalized — that which would be required in order to truly maximize conveyed knowledge — would be counterproductive to obtaining epistemic justice. Without keeping certain knowledge inaccessible to their oppressors, such as enslaved people hiding information about revolts from their owners, oppressed peoples would be significantly limited in their ability to take action against the unjust systems and privileged individuals that enforce the social hierarchy. The maximizing view creates a conflict between epistemic justice and social justice: although an epistemically marginalized group may gain epistemic and material benefits from withholding certain testimony, the maximizing view requires them to proffer that testimony nonetheless for the purpose of increasing overall

knowledge. Instead, I contend that epistemic justice is a dimension of social justice. On this view, it is not always necessary to maximize the knowledge of all subjects, and strategic selection of which knowledge ought not be shared under certain conditions is potentially vital to obtaining epistemic justice.

Ultimately, it is necessary to develop a thoroughly contextual account of testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which epistemic injustices inhibit marginalized groups as knowers. Countering Fricker's contentions, when a hearer attributes to a member of a dominant group more credibility on the basis of an identity prejudice, it is important to understand this as an epistemic injustice in the same way that identity-prejudicial credibility deficits disregard marginalized groups as knowers. Further, we cannot let dominant groups off the hook for perpetuating hermeneutical injustices by strategically failing to combat their ignorances.

Chapter 3: Epistemic Oppression and Colonialism

Now that I have provided a general account of the landscape of epistemic injustice, I turn to epistemic injustice within a specific context: Euro-colonial projects. I argue that the forceful imposition of culturally-specific assumptions is a form of epistemic injustice that is distinctly colonial. Further, I contend that such injustices can, in aggregate, form a system of epistemic oppression. Finally, I analyze two examples of colonial epistemic oppression, while acknowledging that the specific features of this oppression largely depend upon varying contextual factors.

Distinctly Colonial Epistemic Injustice

The social assumptions, stereotypes, and identity prejudices that enable epistemic injustices within a certain context are influenced by a culture's *episteme*. An *episteme* is a set of prevailing assumptions that exist within a particular cultural context and distinguishes that which can be considered knowledge from that which cannot. Thus, an *episteme* constrains and conditions the production and dissemination of knowledge. As an *episteme* is constituted by the elements necessary for knowledge, and different cultures can have different such elements at a given time, different cultures can thus have different *epistemai*: "[i]n any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one *episteme* that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in a theory or silently invested in a practice" (Foucault 2002, 183).

Between two cultures with differing *epistemai*, discourse can prove exceedingly difficult. Because each culture has a different set of conditions for knowledge, and thus the adherents of the two *epistemai* have no means to communicate using a shared criterion of truth that supersedes discourse, any discursive endeavor that aims for persuasion must resort to

means of communication other than appeals to rational argumentation. This is because the very conception of rationality between the two cultures is different: to each culture at a given time, rationality is constrained by the confines of its *episteme*. To act in any way or believe anything that does not align with one's *episteme* is, therefore, definitionally irrational — it could not possibly align with the other areas of one's knowledge.

One of the major projects of modern European colonialism is the domination of the hegemonic *episteme* over that of the colonized. This domination reflects the epistemic arrogance at the center of the European colonial scheme: directly confronted with significantly different worldviews, the colonizers assume that their knowledge regime is superior and thus attempt to force the colonized to participate in their *episteme*. The European colonial *episteme* not only enables the establishment of social hierarchies along such particular dimensions as race, ethnicity, and gender, but also sets out the conditions for the establishment of these social categories in the first place. Further, as the colonizers enforce the hegemonic *episteme* through widespread physical violence, the colonized are often forced to contend with this *episteme* due to the existential threat the colonizers pose.

For instance, in an attempt to preserve the spirituality of indigenous Americans, Dale Turner argues that it is necessary to — at least partially — vie for political recognition within the colonial system: "[t]he source of our indigeneity lies in our relationships to our homelands; yet, in order to defend the political integrity of these relationships we must engage the legal and political discourses of the state. In other words, indigenous peoples can only empower themselves politically by using the legal and political discourses of the state" (Turner 2007, 199). Although Turner ultimately argues that the preservation of the indigenous American way of life must include both engaging with the political processes of the colonial state and

maintaining indigenous American spirituality and ways of knowing, it is revealing that Turner views political and legal recourse within the political structure of the United States as regrettable but necessary aspects of the preservation of indigenous American ways of life. In this way, although it is evident that Turner is highly critical of the discourses and practices that arise out of the *episteme* of colonial settlers in America, it is also clear that the dominance of the hegemonic *episteme* forces the colonized to contend and engage with those systems which uphold these colonial assumptions.

The existence of *epistemai* problematizes the ways in which we can combat colonial epistemic injustices. In lieu of such systems of background assumptions, perhaps we could solve the issue of epistemic oppression by ensuring our ethical principles are sufficiently egalitarian and that we enact these principles in a consistent manner. However, Leonard Harris demonstrates that this practice is simply implausible given the colonial *episteme*. Detailing a figurative account of "Dr. Dick," a medical doctor with strong ethical convictions and practices that reflect these convictions, Harris shows that a mere egalitarian mindset is insufficient to combat the unjust assumptions at the core of the *episteme* in the antebellum United States. Asked to castrate George Washington Carver, the scrupulous Dr. Dick adopts precautions above and beyond what is required for such a procedure. Taking deontological, utilitarian, contractarian, and religious viewpoints into account, Dr. Dick reasons that castrating Carver was the ethically correct action, although he would never do the same if Carver was white due to the racialized assumptions that the Antebellum *episteme* imposes (Harris 2020). This is central to colorblind racism: the American *episteme* enforces racialized constitutions of different racial groups but currently discourages explicit discussions of race. As such, the effects of racism persist, thinly veiled behind plausible deniability. Harris contends that logical

people "may also exhibit the moral traits of care, compassion and empathy, but it is how such traits are expressed and to whom they are directed that constitutes whether ethnocentric persons as prejudiced," based upon the *episteme* to which they adhere (2020, 239). This is important because it demonstrates the constraining aspect of the colonial *episteme*: regardless of how closely a person may adhere to ethical principles, they may still be led to perform atrocities, given the right set of background assumptions.

Epistemic arrogance — both at the individual and the societal level — is one major source of the epistemic injustices imposed by colonialism. In individual terms, epistemic arrogance occurs when a person has such an unwarrantedly high estimation of their own capacity as a knower that they develop a "cognitive superiority complex" (Medina 2013, 30). José Medina contends that epistemic arrogance occurs when those with social power enjoy "in a disproportionate manner the privilege of knowing (or rather, of being assumed to know)" (2013, 32). This is because one becomes epistemically arrogant when one is consistently granted a level of credibility so high that it damages their ability to accurately evaluate their own knowledgeability. Those who develop cognitive superiority complexes think that it is unnecessary to identify and acknowledge the limitations and errors in their knowledge. Rather, they frequently reify their characteristics of reliability, reasoning that their beliefs *must* be true because *they are a rational individual*. Thus, instead of reflecting to confirm that their beliefs are reliable given a certain context, the epistemically arrogant assume that their knowledgeability is an aspect of their very character, and thereby they avoid critical self-reflection.

In individuals, epistemic arrogance is typically fueled by privilege. Because this arrogance often arises when a person is granted a severe abundance of cognitive esteem, the

behavior of audiences is integral to understanding epistemic arrogance. These audiences are not abstracted hearers devoid of social context, nor should they be interpreted as such. Instead, they enter discourse as socially situated subjects who have biases. As Medina contends, "Race theorists and feminist theorists have identified the blind spots of those in privileged positions and some important epistemic advantages of those who have been marginalized in, and often excluded from, epistemic practices" (2013, 29). The fact that the blind spots associated with those who hold privileged identities often reflect societal stereotypes and prejudices is no coincidence: because everyone is in the position of listening to testimony, giving testimony, or (most commonly) both give and listen to testimony in various contexts throughout their lives, the stereotypes that pervade society will also have the aggregate effect of privileging the credibility of socially dominant groups over marginalized groups. Members of dominant groups are thus granted disproportionate credibility based on their social position, and members of marginalized groups are attributed reduced levels of credibility due to their social position. As a result, members of dominant groups are more likely to develop epistemic arrogance because they are systematically privileged as knowers.

Moreover, this systematic privileging of the knowledge of dominant groups can be self-reinforcing, as the behavior of the audience is often relevant to the level of credibility a speaker is granted. Audiences are frequently not mere passive hearers who intake testimony through the filter of credibility. Instead, through a combination of verbal and nonverbal signals, hearers communicate how much credibility they grant to those who provide testimony. When a hearer thereby indicates that they are granting a speaker either a high or low level of credibility, this indication is accompanied by implicit testimony about the trustworthiness of the original testimony. Such indicators thus become testimony, and this is also subject to the wide influence

of social hierarchies. In this way, other hearers may be influenced by the amount of credibility attributed to a speaker. Further, in some circumstances when a hearer indicates that they attribute low credibility to a member of a marginalized group because of their social status, the speaker's ability to produce testimony is impaired. One example of this is stereotype threat — a circumstance in which "negative stereotypes can undermine the intellectual performance of even very talented members of stigmatized groups" (McGlone, Aronson, & Kobrynowicz 2006; 393). Under certain circumstances, the effects of stereotype threat can be diminished when the audience indicates that the speaker is not at risk of perpetuating a negative stereotype about their marginalized group (McGlone, Aronson, & Kobrynowicz 2006). Thus, it is evident that, although epistemic arrogance can impair the cognitive practices of individuals, a proper understanding of this phenomenon cannot occur without an analysis of how individual hearers interact with societal stereotypes, assumptions, prejudices, and given certain discursive dynamics under certain contexts.

At the societal level, epistemic arrogance is found in *epistemai* that both make a claim to being superordinate and universal. Every *episteme* makes both ontological claims and claims about the proper interpretation of *what-is*, but this does not mean that epistemic arrogance is inherent to *every episteme*. The simple fact that each *episteme* contains a set of background assumptions that it takes as true is not sufficient to constitute an *episteme* plagued by epistemic arrogance. Rather, epistemic arrogance is only inherent to an *episteme* with an internal logic that imposes these assumptions as the *proper* way to live and understand the world. A particularly relevant *episteme* through which epistemic arrogance pervades is that of the colonialist techno-industrial West, which demands to be recognized as the sole knowledge regime. This is a key aspect of the initial colonization among European countries in the modern

era: imposing the assumptions and corresponding practices that maximize capital for "civilized" or white Christian groups, Europe has long engaged in colonial efforts that seek to expand both its economic and epistemic influence. The imposition of the Western colonialist *episteme* extends today to the propagation of the Western conception of "development." Fundamentally a project of both Western capital growth and extending the logic of global capitalism by maintaining current hierarchical economic relations between the Global North and the Global South, "development" reflects the epistemic arrogance of the Western colonial *episteme* particularly well because it ostensibly aims to shape the Global South in the image of techno-industrialized countries.

Theorizing Colonial Epistemic Oppression

Analyzing and addressing epistemic injustice is crucial in the struggle to achieve epistemic justice. However, just as it would be insufficient and irresponsible to discuss epistemic injustices without noting the ways in which they interact with and reinforce identity prejudices, we must also work to understand how epistemic injustices coalesce to create and maintain systems of epistemic oppression. This is particularly important for a decolonial epistemological project: understanding epistemic oppression is vital for determining ways to combat colonial epistemic projects and achieve epistemic justice.

Epistemic resources are the tools that we use to produce knowledge. These include the concepts, reasoning methods, and observational means that assist in knowledge production. Which epistemic resources are available is determined by a particular epistemological system, as revealed by an underlying *episteme*. The assumptions that compose an *episteme* limit to some degree which questions can be meaningfully asked, what answers are legitimate, and which methods of reasoning may enable these answers. An epistemological system is a

"holistic concept that refers to all the conditions for the possibility of knowledge production and possession" (Dotson 2014, 121). An epistemological system is built upon a particular *episteme* and formally determines the rules governing the use of epistemic resources. Whereas an *episteme* may only weakly constrain the range of epistemic resources available, an epistemological system constitutes a robust set of rules that determine which epistemic resources are available and how they can be used. Thus, an *episteme* does not necessitate a specific epistemological system, as multiple epistemological systems may conform to a given set of underlying background assumptions. As such, within an *episteme*, a number of different epistemological systems are possible. However, the underlying *episteme* does constrain the range of possible epistemological systems, as no epistemological system within a stable society can contradict the prevailing background assumptions that structure interpretation.

Epistemological systems are fundamentally resilient. As Dotson (2014) argues, stable epistemic resources are necessary for the production and dissemination of knowledge: without fixed and consistent concepts, methods of reasoning, or means of observation, we would face severe barriers to forming, retaining, and spreading knowledge. Thus, in the interest of maintaining and producing knowledge, an epistemological system must be able to "absorb extraordinarily large disturbances without redefining its structure" (Dotson 2014, 121). Disturbances arise when we receive information, such as testimony, that indicates our present epistemological systems are in some way dysfunctional, insufficient, or inadequate. Further, epistemological systems can absorb disturbances by using their preexisting epistemic resources. For example, in response to a person who introduces a significant disturbance that calls into question the adequacy of an epistemological system, adherents of that system may reject testimony as nonsensical, ridiculous, dangerous, deceptive, naïve, crazy, etc. It may not

initially seem like this is an absorption, because in any of these cases the adherents of the epistemological system deny the disturbance without accepting the disturbance and changing the epistemological system in a way that affirms the disturbance. However, concealed in the form of all of these rejections *is*, in fact, an incorporation. By applying the concepts of nonsense, ridiculousness, naïveté, etc. to the disturbance, these rejections utilize pre-existing epistemic resources to incorporate significant disturbances without substantially changing the epistemological system itself.

Because epistemological systems are resilient, if we wish to change these systems, we should seek to understand methods of achieving social change that focus on initiating change in deep-rooted structures of understanding. Jean Bartunek and Michael Moch provide such a framework in the form of first-, second- and third-order change. To understand this framework, it is first necessary to understand organizational schemata, understood analogically as shared "templates that, when pressed against experience, give it form and meaning" (Bartunek and Moch 1987, 484). These templates "guide organization members as they interpret their environment, select value priorities, and allocate resources" (Bartunek and Moch 1987, 486). As Dotson notes, organizational schemata are a form of epistemic resource that allows collective goals to be established.

First-order change constitutes a tacit reinforcement of current organizational schemata (Bartunek and Moch 1987). This requires adjustments to current practices within a set of shared understandings. In the terms of our epistemological analysis, first-order change targets inefficiencies within shared epistemic resources (Dotson 2014). For example, suppose person A is subjected to the central case of testimonial injustice: they are granted decreased credibility because of inaccurate and negative identity prejudices against them. In this circumstance, the

minimum change necessary to address this epistemic injustice can, in principle, be achieved without changing shared epistemic resources. Instead, it is only necessary to increase the efficiency of these resources by changing their application: by appealing to the shared epistemic resource of credibility, one at minimum only must advocate its revaluation within the pre-existing epistemological system.

Second-order change requires us to deliberately change current organizational schemata themselves in a particular direction (Bartunek and Moch 1987). In this case, it is not sufficient to modify pre-existing schemata. Rather, "one interpretive schema or set of schemata is 'phased out' as another is 'phased in'" to achieve a shared organizational goal (Bartunek and Moch 1987, 486). In epistemological terms, second-order change minimally requires us to change which shared epistemic resources that we use because of the insufficiency of present resources (Dotson 2014, 127). For example, shared epistemic resources may not be sufficient to find intelligible certain experiences, as in the case of hermeneutical injustice. As such, to achieve second-order epistemic change it is necessary to incorporate new and different epistemic resources into the epistemological system, with the end goal to make it possible to find these experiences intelligible. Because second-order change entails new epistemic resources, it changes which epistemic resources are available, and therefore changes the epistemological system.

Third-order change "concerns recognizing and, possibly, enabling the ability to alter operative, instituted social imaginaries, in which organizational schemata are situated" (Dotson 2014, 119). Social imaginaries reflect the boundaries of understanding that are typically constrained within a given epistemological system. Rather than simply changing schemata to achieve a desired end, this change results in recognizing the existence of the shared

epistemological system and possibilities beyond this system. Thus, it is necessary to become aware of the schemata under which one operates and to imagine different sets of schemata. For example, individuals perpetuating epistemic oppression must acknowledge the existence of the epistemological system and consider ways in which it could fundamentally change. Third-order change is required when the boundaries of an epistemological system itself prevents understanding between knowers, as in the case where someone provides testimony "that may seem impossible given the state of the operative epistemological system, that is, current shared epistemic resources and instituted social imaginaries, for example" (Dotson 2014, 131). Rather than merely absorbing such testimony, if we want to combat epistemic oppression, it is important to attempt to expand one's social imaginary to realize the limitations of one's epistemological system, and to understand this testimony through a different system.

In "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression," Kristie Dotson contends that there is a "form of epistemic oppression that is not solely reducible to social and political factors but rather follows from a feature of epistemological systems themselves, that is epistemological resilience" (2014, 116). In doing so, she differentiates those epistemic oppressions that *are* ultimately reducible to social and political oppression from those that are *not*. Dotson defines epistemic oppression as "persistent epistemic exclusion that hinders one's contribution to knowledge production" (2014, 115). Under this analysis, epistemic exclusion occurs when a knower's epistemic agency — the ability to persuasively use "shared epistemic resources within a given community of knowers in order to participate in knowledge production and, if required, the revision of those same resources" — is infringed upon (Dotson 2014, 115). This infringement on epistemic agency should not be understood as totalizing. Although epistemic exclusion limits one's agency, it cannot compromise agency entirely. A totalizing infringement

on epistemic agency would require oppressors to remove any possibility for resistance, any ability to push back against the dominant epistemological order. However, colonized and enslaved peoples have often endured severe and systematic epistemic exclusion while retaining and developing new methods for producing and disseminating knowledge. Thus, although an oppressed group may have compromised epistemic agency with respect to their oppressors, they maintain epistemic agency both individually and, frequently, as a group. Dotson argues that reducible epistemic oppressions can (usually) be addressed by using epistemic resources within an epistemological system. To redress irreducible epistemic oppressions, conversely, Dotson contends that it is necessary to recognize the limits of the epistemological system and utilize epistemic resources beyond one's epistemological system. This is because irreducible epistemic oppressions occur as a result of the features of an epistemological system.

To clarify the differentiation between reducible and irreducible epistemic oppression, Dotson outlines three types of epistemic oppression by extending Plato's Allegory of the Cave: those that arise from first-, second-, and third-order epistemic exclusions. Dotson delineates these types of epistemic exclusion according to the degree to which shared epistemic resources must change in order to address the exclusion. According to Dotson, first-order epistemic exclusions result "from the incompetent functioning of some aspect of shared epistemic resources with respect to some goal or value." (2014, 123). In the Allegory of the Cave, such an exclusion could result from the development of identity prejudice among the prisoners. For instance, if the prisoners on the left side of the cave were frequently granted a significantly reduced level of credibility by the rest of the prisoners because of inaccurate negative prejudices. This would be a form of testimonial injustice, which Dotson contends is a first-order epistemic exclusion because the minimum change necessary to address the exclusion can

be achieved "within instituted social imaginaries or prevailing schemata" (2014, 125). Correcting such injustice merely requires a reexamination and reconfiguration of how the preexisting value of credibility is afforded to different groups rather than the development of a new value or the removal of an existing value. Essentially, Dotson argues that first-order epistemic exclusions minimally require reform to the epistemological order, not revolution. Thus, first-order epistemic exclusion gives rise to reducible epistemic oppressions. However, she notes, this does not mean that remediating first-order epistemic exclusions is simple: they are tied to social and political hierarchies, and it is in the self-interest of those at the top of the hierarchy to maintain their privilege. At minimum, addressing first-order epistemic exclusions requires shifts in epistemic power; as such, "first-order epistemic oppression is reducible to social, political and historical formations" (Dotson 2014, 126).

According to Dotson, second-order epistemic exclusions result from limitations within shared epistemic resources. In the Allegory of the Cave, Dotson contends that this type of exclusion could occur when elements of the experiences of the people on the left (for instance, the particular ways in which shadows appear to people on the left differently from those in the center or on the right) are obscured from other prisoners due to historical testimonial injustices. Thus, Dotson argues that hermeneutical injustice — in which gaps in shared epistemic resources render unintelligible the experiences of a marginalized group — is a second-order epistemic exclusion that results from the insufficiency of shared epistemic resources. As Dotson notes, this type of epistemic exclusion does not mean that those subjected to hermeneutical injustices are incapable of producing and disseminating knowledge among themselves. However, "the exclusion follows from being unable to communicate their experience to others within their larger epistemic community who do not share epistemic

resources sufficient for tracking those experiences, especially where such experience is immediately relevant for knowledge production" (Dotson 2014, 127). Dotson uses María Lugones to illustrate an example: Lugones discusses how White/Angla women frequently ignore, erase, reject, and discredit women of color. To this end, White/Anglo women have formed epistemic resource structures that do not require women of color. To address such epistemic exclusion, which gives rise to second-order epistemic oppression, a conceptual revolution is necessary: one must be "willing to change one's instituted social imaginaries and/or prevailing schemata" in addition to being willing to address the social and political sources of first-order epistemic oppression (Dotson 2014, 128). Ultimately, Dotson argues that second-order epistemic oppressions are reducible to social and political oppression because "the major resistance to change [thereof] is reducible to the social and historical development of epistemic power" (2014, 129).

In Dotson's view, conversely, third-order epistemic exclusions occur when dominant shared epistemic resources are *inadequate*. Beyond being insufficient, to address inadequate epistemic resources, "the parameters of one's epistemological system must be recognized and, quite possibly, radically altered" (Dotson 2014, 131). In the context of the Allegory, Dotson proposes the experiences of a prisoner on the far left. In this thought experiment, every prisoner must be fed by mobile persons, but prisoners are restrained from turning away from the shadows on the wall. People regularly come in to feed the prisoners and talk to each other (not the prisoners), but each person only stands to the right of the prisoner that they are feeding. Thus, the person on the far left is the only prisoner who has never heard a voice to her immediate left. We assume, "given collective epistemic resources, she knows that her experience is unique and that it indicates a larger cave than is immediately apparent" (Dotson

2014, 130). However, when the prisoner to the far left tries to communicate this insight, her testimony is received without achieving the relevant changes to the shared epistemic resources. As opposed to Fricker's hermeneutical injustices, which are second-order exclusions that affect everyone — albeit not equally — in this case the prisoner on the far left is fully aware of and able to articulate her experience and insight, but the prisoners' "overall epistemic life ways are thwarting robust uptake of the testimony of the fettered person on the farthest left" (Dotson 2014, 133). This is because of the resilience of epistemological orders. Beyond aligning one's behaviors with one's values or identifying a necessary expansion to an existing epistemological framework, addressing third-order epistemic exclusions requires a radical change that would require a restructuring of the epistemological order. This is the type of epistemic exclusion that Western colonial projects have imposed upon colonized groups. By imposing a culturally specific *episteme* upon their subjects as a framework of universal truth, colonial powers have established a highly resilient and inadequate epistemological system. Under this Western *episteme*, testimony that demonstrates the need for changes to the epistemological order is frequently "rejected as nonsensical," one who proffers such testimony is often designated as a "deceiver with dangerous ideas," and the idea of legitimate epistemological orders beyond the Western *episteme* can sometimes "invoke ridicule and laughter" (Dotson 2014, 130). In these ways, people who benefit from the colonial system can discount alternatives and maintain the Western epistemological order as the only legitimate means of acquiring knowledge. Dotson argues that third-order epistemic exclusions cannot be reduced to social and political power, and thus it is insufficient to address these exclusions solely working *within* an epistemological order. Rather, she claims, it is necessary that fettered individuals "gain the ability to be aware of their larger epistemological systems, that is, what orients one's instituted social imaginaries,

so as to possibly change them or shift out of them entirely" (Dotson 2014, 131). Achieving awareness of the limitations of an inadequate epistemological order must be accomplished alongside efforts to combat first- and second-order epistemic oppressions. However, "[e]pistemic power, though present in third-order epistemic oppression, is just the beginning of the difficulties that follow from attempting to address third-order epistemic oppression" (Dotson 2014, 133). The resilience of an epistemological order can be nearly impossible to overcome: this resilience may "thwart one's ability to make significant headway in becoming aware of the limitations of one's epistemological system by only revealing what the system is prone to reveal, thereby reinforcing the idea that one's system is adequate to the task, when one is actually stuck in a vicious loop" (Dotson 2014, 132). As such, although epistemic power relations do inhibit third-order epistemic exclusions to some extent, the primary opposition to addressing third-order epistemic exclusions is the resiliency of an epistemological order itself. Thus, it is necessary to work outside of an epistemological order, to garner awareness of the third-order epistemic oppression in the first place.

Although first-order epistemic exclusions are less difficult to address than second and third-order epistemic exclusions, this does not mean that doing so will be easy. This is partially true because, as Medina (2012) contends, testimonial injustice frequently (if not usually) occurs alongside hermeneutical injustice. In fact, testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice can reinforce and reproduce each other. If group X is consistently accorded less credibility due to societal identity prejudices, then testimony from members of group X regarding their experiences that differ from the mainstream is unlikely to be taken seriously, believed, or considered noteworthy by dominant groups. Hermeneutical gaps emerge when such testimony is not granted sufficient credibility to warrant the introduction of new epistemic

resources into the mainstream of the epistemological system. Even if a member of an epistemically marginalized group can explain and conceptualize widespread practices that contribute to that group's epistemic marginalization, dominant groups may rely upon the credibility deficit to discredit their experiences.

For example, in American culture, many men have developed a form of epistemic arrogance that is expressed through over-explanation, frequently based on little information, directed at people of other genders. This phenomenon is exemplified by an article from 2008 by author Rebecca Solnit, entitled "Men Explain Things to Me: Facts Didn't Get In Their Way." In the article, Solnit recounts a conversation she had with a man at a party (2008). After finding out that Solnit is an author, the man condescendingly asked what her books were about. Solnit responded that she had recently written a book about Eadweard Muybridge. Jumping at the opportunity, the man asked if Solnit had heard of the "'*very important*'" recent book on Muybridge (Solnit 2008). Entertaining the idea that another book on Muybridge had recently been published without her knowledge, Solnit listened to the man's lengthy and confident explanation of her own book. This continued until Solnit's friend — another woman — repeatedly interrupted the man, telling him that he was describing the same book that Solnit had written (Solnit 2008). Evidently, the man had not read the book, but had only read about it in the *New York Times Book Review* months prior. In the article, Solnit proceeds to list a few more examples of what would eventually be known as "mansplaining," and Solnit contends that "[e]very woman knows what I'm talking about. It's the presumption that makes it hard, at times, for any woman in any field; that keeps women from speaking up and from being heard when they dare; that crushes young women into silence by indicating, the way harassment on the street does, that this is not their world" (2008).

There has been significant backlash to the concept of mansplaining. In one notable instance, Australian Labor Senator Katy Gallagher accused Government Minister Mitch Fifield of mansplaining after he interrupted Gallagher by saying "Let me just stop you so you don't waste a line of questioning" (Waugh 2016). In response, Fifield accused Gallagher of being sexist for using the term 'mansplaining,' proposed the term 'womansplaining' as an alternative, implied that Gallagher was rude for using the term, and contended that Gallagher was "seeking to make gender an issue" (Waugh 2016).

This case is interesting in several ways. First, although far from a widespread study, Solnit's account provides an example of Medina's claim that members of socially marginalized groups tend to develop tendencies of epistemic humility, whereas members of socially dominant groups tend to develop epistemic arrogance. Although she had a considerable degree of expertise on the topic of Eadweard Muybridge and the state of research about him, Solnit displayed epistemic humility by initially considering that the man had read a recent book about Muybridge of which she was unaware. Conversely, the man displayed epistemic arrogance by assuming that Solnit could not be the author of *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West*. We do not have mind-reading powers, and therefore we cannot determine with certainty the content of the man's intentions and assumptions. However, by interpreting his actions and demeanors, in combination with an understanding of the social positionality of gender roles, the history of gender dynamics, and testimony from other women who share similar experiences with men, we can reveal that this man was perpetuating epistemic injustice and behaving arrogantly regardless of his personal intentions.

Further, the backlash to the concept of mansplaining provides an example of how testimonial injustices and hermeneutical injustices can perpetuate each other. As a

conceptualization of common experiences that women face, the term ‘mansplaining’ denotes the lessened degree of credibility that men often accord to people of other genders, and to introduce a new concept to render intelligible experiences shared by many people of marginalized genders. As such, the term’s purpose is twofold: it simultaneously attempts to combat testimonial and hermeneutical injustices. The concept was likely somewhat successful in these endeavors, given how the term has persevered and spread. However, backlash to the concept of mansplaining nonetheless reveals how testimonial and hermeneutical injustices mutually reinforce each other. By accusing Gallagher of being sexist for using the term ‘mansplaining,’ Fifield revealed that he granted low credibility to the women providing testimony that points to men’s epistemic arrogance. Further, by claiming that Gallagher was simply “seeking to make gender an issue” and proposing “womansplaining” as an alternative, Fifield rejected Gallagher’s testimony on her experiences as unintelligible (Waugh 2016). This is not solely due to a lack of epistemic resources to render the experience intelligible, but also due to a presence of epistemic resources that hinder intelligibility, such as the notions that women who develop concepts to fight against their epistemic marginalization are “rude” or “hysterical,” and therefore unable to adequately interpret their own experiences (Langton 2010). These notions simultaneously work to lessen the credibility that the audience grants to a speaker and to render their experiences unintelligible to the mainstream. If a person cannot be trusted to give testimony, then their account of their unique social position is also suspect.

Examples of Colonial Epistemic Oppression

Now that I have established the distinct forms of epistemic injustice inherent to colonialism and given an account of how epistemic injustices coalesce to form epistemic

oppression, I turn to real examples of colonial epistemic oppression. Specifically, I provide two accounts of ways in which Euro-colonial projects have imposed epistemic oppression upon colonized groups. These are far from exhaustive, as the centuries of Euro-colonial projects are replete with different manifestations of colonial epistemic oppression, but they serve as crucial examples of how dominant epistemological systems can be used to subjugate groups of knowers.

Colonialism is multifarious and manifests itself differently in various contexts. However, the European colonization of North America can serve as an informative example of colonial epistemic oppression. It is crucial to acknowledge the violent subjugation and genocides imposed upon indigenous peoples as part of this process. This is also a long and still-developing history that is fraught with efforts to discredit indigenous folks, to render their experiences unintelligible to the European colonial epistemological system, and to forcibly impose this colonial epistemological system upon indigenous peoples. Throughout the history of the European colonization of the Americas, indigenous folks have resisted such efforts, proffering testimony that counters colonial assumptions and stereotypes about credibility, publicly announcing their experiences with the horrors of colonialism, and fighting against colonial attempts to erase indigenous *epistemai*. In doing so, resistant indigenous voices have created disturbances that call into question the idea that the European colonial epistemological system is universal and unassailable. However, in response to these disturbances, the dominant epistemological system has shown significant resilience, able to absorb them and minimize their impacts.

The history of the European colonization of North America is replete with colonial attempts to diminish the credibility of indigenous folks. As Luther Standing Bear, a Lakota

author during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, noted: "[i]rreparable damage has been done by white writers who discredit the Indian" (Standing Bear 1978, 227). This has come in many forms. For example, European Americans have long used the concept of "savagery" in a way that lessens the credibility of indigenous Americans. By deeming someone a "savage," colonial Europeans attempt to provide a reason against believing that person's claims. By conceptually aligning indigenous folks and "savages," while opposing "savagery" to the intellectual developments of "civilized people," European Americans implicitly claim that Native Americans do not have the mental capacity to produce worthwhile or consistently accurate testimony. This is furthered through stereotypes that indigenous folks are violent, prone to vice, and produce caricatured representations of Native Americans in various media. "This society believes it must tame the wilderness. It also believes in the superiority of civilized over primitive peoples...My experience is that people who are viewed as 'primitive' are generally people of color, and people who are viewed as 'civilized' are those of European descent" (LaDuke 1993). Thus, colonists were able to epistemically marginalize indigenous Americans by framing their cultures and knowledge as 'uncivilized' and 'primitive.' As a result, "[e]ven the boys and girls throughout the country…have the thought that the Indian is a curious creature, something to be amused at, and as not having contributed worthwhile things to the culture of this country" (Standing Bear 1978, 228). Because an effect of these practices is to diminish the credibility of indigenous folks in North America, first-order change is minimally required to eliminate the conditions for this form of epistemic injustice.

Further, colonial projects in North America work to maintain ignorance of many of the experiences of indigenous folks. Although many indigenous folks have provided testimony about the harms of colonialism, including the loss of lands and traditional practices, the

colonial epistemological system has consistently failed to render this testimony intelligible to its adherents. By propagating concepts such as rugged frontier explorers, consensual sales of indigenous land, and Lockean notions of land ownership, the dominant epistemological system obscures the experiences and histories of indigenous groups from understanding by dominant colonial groups. As Standing Bear contends, "[e]very problem that exists today in regard to the native population is due to the white man's cast of mind, which is unable, at least reluctant, to seek understanding and achieve adjustment in a new and a significant environment into which it has so recently come" (1978, 248-249). This failure to seek understanding has resulted in hermeneutical injustices, resulting from a combination of concepts and myths that perpetuate the view of historical and current events through the lens of the colonial settlers while obscuring the perspectives and experiences of colonized groups. As such, combating this form of colonial epistemic injustice minimally requires second-order change.

Finally, North American colonization has frequently incorporated attempts to eliminate indigenous epistemological systems. Before colonization, indigenous groups had a range of epistemological systems with underlying assumptions that differed in important ways from the colonial European *episteme*. For instance, many indigenous *epistemai* emphasize cycles: "[w]e have noticed that much in nature is cyclical: the movements of moons, the tides, the seasons, our bodies. Time itself, in most indigenous worldviews, is cyclical" (LaDuke 1993). Conversely, the colonial *episteme* rests upon the linearity of time as a fundamental assumption (LaDuke 1993). With its tendency for epistemic arrogance, the colonial European epistemological system has long attempted to destroy indigenous epistemological systems. In the United States, this attempted destruction has in part been manifested by official boarding schools that were established to teach indigenous children the Euro-industrial epistemological

system and eradicate indigenous epistemic resources. For example, Standing Bear attended a boarding school as a child, at which he was "forbidden to speak our mother tongue, which is the rule in all boarding-schools. This rule is uncalled for, and today is not only robbing the Indian, but America of a rich heritage. The language of a people is part of their history" (Standing Bear 1978, 234). The language that a person speaks constitutes an epistemic resource, particularly insofar as it conducts the transfer and development of knowledge among fellow language speakers. By prohibiting indigenous students from speaking their own languages, these boarding schools inhibited the spread of indigenous epistemological systems. Although Standing Bear himself did not forget his people's language, this was not true for everyone who entered colonial boarding schools. In fact, Standing Bear "soon began to see the sad sight, so common today, of returned students who could not speak their native tongue, or, worse yet, some who pretended they could no longer converse in the mother tongue. They had become ashamed and this led them into deception and trickery" (Standing Bear 1978, 235). This can result in difficulties spreading the indigenous epistemological systems, in part because of the difference in the concepts that are accessible between languages. "Many of the grievances of the old Indian, and his disagreements with the young, find root in the far-removed boarding-school which sometimes takes the little ones at a very tender age. More than one tragedy has resulted when a young boy or girl has returned home again almost an utter stranger" (Standing Bear 1978, 252). Being a fundamental clash between two opposing epistemological systems, this is an example of the central case of colonial epistemic oppression. Because this clash cannot be resolved simply by adjusting one epistemological system, but rather requires a social imagination that expands beyond one's epistemological system, this epistemic injustice must be minimally addressed through third-order change.

In “The Colonial Construction of the Indian Past,” Gyanendra Pandey illustrates an example of the British “methodological reordering of Indian history [that] was in progress as the colonial regime set out to systematize its knowledge and consolidate its power” (2006, 57). In doing so, Pandey provides an account of a colonial structure with epistemic arrogance, imposing concepts from a hegemonic *episteme* and developing hermeneutical injustices. He argues that the concept of communalism within the Indian subcontinent is a fundamentally colonial form of knowledge, but even Indian folks struggling for sovereignty from the British eventually adopted this concept. In common Indian usage, communalism is a state of suspicion and hostility between religious communities, especially between Hindus and Muslims. Pandey notes that European scholars do not apply this concept to pre-capitalist Europe—where communalism may be more readily apparent—and that ‘communalism’ has a history of usage similar to ‘tribalism’ and ‘factionalism,’ framing colonized peoples as inherently violent or in need of a ‘benevolent’ colonial power to bring an end to the discord (2006).

Pandey proceeds to argue that, although the conception of communalism embraced by advocates for independence from the British Raj is significantly different from the conception developed by the British Raj itself, the two perspectives share crucial common ground. The archetypal perspective that was commonly held by proponents of Indian independence from British colonial rule frames communalism as a recent phenomenon that resulted from economic and political inequality and conflict and was caused by self-interested elites. Pandey dubs this the “liberal-rationalist” view. Conversely, the “racist-essentialist” perspective, frequently adopted by British colonizers to justify colonial rule, typically frames communalism as an ancient dynamic that resulted from innate characteristics of the essential characteristics of the peoples of India and affects all but the most enlightened, liberal, educated men and

women in India. Despite these differences, Pandey contends that the two views have fundamental similarities: both are concerned with the cause of communalism, identify an Other to communalism to which the people of India should strive, and "derive from the same liberal ideology in which 'rationalism' and 'secularism' are adjacent elements of thought" (Pandey 2006, 13). As such, both conceptions of communalism are manifestations of the British colonial *episteme*. This reveals both the legacy of British epistemic colonialism and the hermeneutical injustices therein. Although Indian advocates for independence did not simply accept the racist-essentialist conception of colonialism, the liberal-rationalist view is still rooted in the hegemonic *episteme* that the British imposed on India through colonial rule. As I have previously argued, such impositions indicate that colonial Britain acted in an epistemically arrogant manner towards colonized India. Further, the differences between the nationalist and colonialist conceptions of communalism reveal a hermeneutical lacuna — an experience or set of experiences that is rendered unintelligible by the failure of an interpretive framework. Not all hermeneutical lacunae result in epistemic injustice: at times, British colonizers are not entirely unable to use the liberal-rationalist view of communalism, and Pandey reveals that some colonizers have before. However, the colonialist conception of communalism served as an interpretive framework that justified colonial rule, rendering the experiences of Indian colonial subjects broadly unintelligible through a series of distortions.

Pandey turns from the concept of communalism to an example of its construction, and therefore part of the construction of the modern history of India: the 'grave' Banaras riots of 1809. Thereby, Pandey provides an account of how the hermeneutical lacuna regarding communalism developed. He argues that the British systematically distorted India's past to form a history conducive to colonial rule. By emphasizing and exaggerating religious tensions

in pre-colonial India, the British imposed the concept of communalism as a means to justify the British colonization of India. This is exemplified in the scholarly and colonial-governmental response to these riots: a series of disinformation in which British scholars continually distorted the events surrounding the Banaras riots until they bore little, if any, resemblance to the *actual* riots. At this point the Banaras *Gazetteer*, almost a century after the riots, published an account that inflated the number of injuries and deaths by at least an order of magnitude, shifted the location of the riots to one that was more pertinent to the narrative, and fundamentally changed the cause of the riots to religious strife in an attempt to make a positive statement about British rule (Pandey 2006). In fact, Pandey asserts, the purpose of the scholarly perversions of the past was to give the violence of 1809 a cause and a name; fundamentally, to promote the racist-essentialist idea that the peoples of India were inherently violent and tribalistic, and needed a colonial power to watch over them, lest the innate religious tension continue to escalate as it ostensibly had in Banaras. He contends that this implicit assertion is clear in the colonial accounts: after the riots ended, as police returned to replace the native Indian soldiers (Sepoys) in Banaras, tensions grew between the police and military classes. Some Sepoys refused to follow direct magisterial orders against carrying weapons in the city and would mock police upon their return. With a festival season approaching, civil authorities were concerned about potential conflict between the two branches of the state and urged both sides to maintain strict discipline. This event, Pandey argues, had been entirely bastardized by the time the Banaras *Gazetteer* wrote about it (2006). The *Gazetteer* claimed that the feud was, “no doubt,” the result of religious tension (Pandey 2006). Pandey contends that this demonstrates the colonial desire to frame indigenous Indians as violent along sectarian religious lines, and to therefore feel justified in the resulting colonial rule: by the later

nineteenth century, it is "also the argument that the 'natives' are hopelessly divided, given to primitive passions and incapable of managing their own affairs, that legitimizes British power" (Pandey 2006, 45).

During the British Raj, colonial institutions successfully imposed elements of the Anglo-colonial *episteme* onto their Indian subjects. By creating knowledge-making institutions and imposing them upon these subjects, the British were able to control the concepts and interpretive frameworks used to understand the experiences of Indians. This control was manifested through the colonial construction of Indian history in academic institutions, governmental programs, and media distortions of Indian events that attempted to justify British rule. Impositions of colonial *epistemai* such as these can be found throughout the history of European colonial projects, although the details of these impositions vary between different colonial contexts.

Chapter 4: Situating Resistance to Epistemic Oppression

Western "Allies" and Colonial Epistemic Impositions

Before prescribing methods for addressing epistemic injustice, it is necessary to consider one's social positionality and relation to the issues one is addressing. This is because "we must never forget that empirical discussions are always infused with power, which influences who is able to participate and who is excluded, who speaks and who listens, whose remarks are heard and whose dismissed, which topics are addressed and which are not, what is questioned and what is taken for granted, even whether a discussion takes place at all" (Jaggar 2000, 5). When we do not seriously consider how our social positionality influences our perspectives and constrains our understanding in attempting to address injustices, we risk doing more harm than good. Among epistemically privileged groups in the Western colonial context, this often manifests itself through imposing Western cultural ideals onto Nonwestern groups (Jaggar 2000). In so doing, the actions and interventions of well-meaning thinkers who are epistemically privileged "may have the consequence of positioning the subjects of their discourse as less than equal. In these circumstances, discussion of some issues by [Western] feminists may not only mute the voices of other women but even suggest that they are incapable of speaking for themselves." (Jaggar 2000, 5).

The importance of considering one's social positionality with regard to knowledge creation, problem determination, and solution finding is exemplified by Angela Davis's trip to Egypt, documented in her essay "Women in Egypt" (1990). Originally, the sponsors of Davis's trip expected her to report on "issues relating to the sexual dimension of women's pursuit of equality," including the practice of clitoridectomy. Clitoridectomy, also known as female

circumcision and female genital mutilation (FGM), is a practice that is often discussed by Western feminists as a significant source of women's oppression in certain Nonwestern countries, including Egypt (Davis 1990). For example, in Davis's experience as a lecturer at many different American universities, many American college students know practically nothing about the situation of women in Northern Africa beyond clitoridectomy practices. "Moreover, [these students] do not often recognize that they need to explore the larger picture of women's oppression in those countries before presuming to make authoritative observations about what should be done to eradicate this misogynist practice" (Davis 1990, 119). By attempting to determine and provide a solution for the fundamental oppression of women in Egypt without engaging with these women personally, reading their writings, or even first attempting to learn about the fuller context of their situation, these students simultaneously silence Egyptian women and reveal an underlying epistemic arrogance. In essence, by presuming that their severely uninformed perspective will suffice to allow them a legitimate claim to decide the problems that Egyptian women face and how to fix them, these college students demonstrate that they have diminished or not felt the need to consider the knowledge and perspectives of Egyptian women themselves. In this sense, the college students fail to recognize the Egyptian women as knowers. Because Davis was highly familiar with this tendency within the Western colonial *episteme*, she made conscious efforts to avoid such epistemic arrogance during her travels.

While in Egypt, Davis spoke with a group of women in the National Center for Sociological and Criminological Studies. After Davis told the women that she had been instructed to focus on the practices of clitoridectomies, the women responded with penetrating insight. One member of the discussion, Dr. Shehida Elbaz, proffered a particularly forceful

retort: she implored Davis to inform Western women "'that we [Egyptian women] have a stand in relation to them concerning our issues and our problems. We reject their patronizing attitude. It is connected with built-in mechanisms of colonialism and with their sense of superiority…. They decide what problems we have, how we should face them, without even possessing the tools to know our problems'" (Davis 1990, 121-122). This shows the harm of the epistemic arrogance and violence inherent in presuming to speak for and solve the problems of epistemically marginalized groups without first gathering extensive first-hand experience and cultural understanding.

Although many of the Egyptian women to whom Angela Davis spoke were hesitant or antagonistic towards Western feminist attempts to address the practice of clitoridectomies, this is not because they favored such procedures. In fact, Davis notes that in Egypt, "[t]he key question, it seems—at least among progressive women and men—is not whether circumcision is an acceptable contemporary practice, but rather how to initiate a viable strategy for relegating it to historical obsolescence" (1990, 130). Instead, these women expressed concerns to Davis that Western feminists frequently attempt to determine *for* nondominant and Nonwestern groups what problems they face and how they ought to address these problems. In these circumstances, by attempting to speak *for* epistemically marginalized groups, Western feminists impose epistemic violence upon these groups. Because of the heightened credibility and understanding frequently granted to people within the dominant colonial *episteme*, Western feminist perspectives begin to function as a substitute for the perspectives of Nonwestern groups. This is a form of testimonial smothering in which groups are silenced because an uninformed outsider develops a monopoly on knowledge in the related area. This violence receives backlash from members of the group being silenced, as the women in Egypt

expressed their frustration and harmful experiences with Western feminists' cultural assumptions. However, this backlash is often itself the subject of epistemic injustice: "[o]utsider feminists whose interventions are rejected often remained unconvinced by these arguments. Some may…argue that first-person experience is not authoritative, noting that victims frequently rationalize their abuse, as well as their 'choices' to remain in abusive situations" (Jaggar 2000, 4). Indeed, testimony about first-person experience is not authoritative, in the sense that such accounts may be limited by one's biases, social positionality, a number of contextual factors such as hallucinations, etc. However, this response from Western feminists commits the fallacy of begging the question. Having concluded that a certain issue constitutes a problem worthy of Western intervention, they are discounting challenges to the argument by, in essence, contending that the conclusion is true. In doing so, they attempt to frame Nonwestern feminists who do not agree with the argument as irrational beings who need Western intervention to fix their problems, *whether they like it or not*. Notably, this framing is done without regard for standard Western methods of psychological evaluation, instead relying upon the Western feminists' interpretive framework as the absolute truth and discounting Nonwestern perspectives that do not conform to this truth. This is a form of testimonial injustice, in which first-person testimony about the lived experience of women in a Nonwestern culture is outright discounted and discredited in favor of testimony that affirms the Western *episteme*, imposing cultural assumptions without working to comprehend the broader cultural context or listening to dissenting voices.

By attempting to speak *for* an epistemically marginalized group, or by deciding the problems that an epistemically marginalized group faces, without lived experience or making serious effort to listen to and understand the perspectives of that group, dominant groups

frequently commit acts of epistemic violence and injustice. Such epistemic violence and injustice are especially pernicious when a member of a dominant group has access to relevant testimony, but either ignores or dismisses this testimony in favor of promoting their own ideas and prescriptions, which are not properly informed. This furthers the epistemic marginalization of these groups, and particularly within the context of colonialism, reinforces the hegemonic *episteme* through the perpetuation of colonial perspectives on problems and problem-solving. Under this context, voices that do not align with colonial assumptions that uphold Manichaean dichotomies, international capitalism, etc. are silenced or discredited. This is one way in which dominant epistemic groups perpetuate hermeneutical injustices: by speaking over and rejecting the testimony and perspectives of epistemically marginalized groups, members of epistemically privileged groups further obscure the experiences of marginalized folks from collective understanding among the dominant group. For example, when Western feminists outright reject the perspectives of dissenting Nonwestern women, framing them as victims who are not sufficiently rational or psychologically sound to understand the *real* problems with their Nonwestern societies, these feminists enact epistemic violence and injustice upon the epistemically marginalized groups of Nonwestern women, helping to cement the hermeneutical gaps that limit the extent to which epistemically privileged folks find their testimony and experiences intelligible.

Complications: The Importance of Situating Epistemology in a Messy World

However, members of dominant groups may also speak for marginalized groups, and/or attempt to decide the problems they face, *as a result of* hermeneutical gaps. This can occur when a person does not have access to intelligible testimony from members of an epistemically marginalized group regarding an issue due to language differences, because of their exclusion

from dominant structures of knowledge creation, or for any other reason that obscures the experiences of epistemically marginalized groups from broad intelligibility by dominant groups. This situation is somewhat more complex. Without access to intelligible testimony from members of the group that is subject to the relevant issue or experience, members of dominant groups are in an epistemically difficult position. On one hand, by withholding judgment entirely, they risk perpetuating the obscurement of that experience among the epistemically privileged. Without attempting to evaluate or interpret certain events and experiences in lieu of personal testimony, members of epistemically privileged groups may thereby permit these experiences to remain unintelligible among dominant groups. This is exemplified by a certain tendency among Western feminists to accept a "romanticized picture of Nonwestern cultures as spiritual and harmonious while representing Western culture as exclusively materialist and genocidal" (Jaggar 2000, 20). This is a form of cultural essentialism that has the effect of obscuring the issues that folks within Nonwestern cultures face, especially those who are epistemically marginalized within their own culture. On the other hand, if members of a dominant group attempt to interpret and evaluate events on behalf of an epistemically marginalized group, they risk preemptively smothering the testimony of those who hold the experience and imposing harmful cultural assumptions upon those groups. For instance, many of the experiences of indigenous folks of North America have been largely obscured from understanding within the dominant culture of American settlers long before the formation of the United States. There have always been dissenting voices, but they have often been either silenced or rendered unintelligible to the dominant colonial *episteme*. By imposing cultural assumptions of savagery upon indigenous folks, the colonizers created a problem for themselves to solve with genocide. This occurred by systematically killing many indigenous

folks, but also by attempting to exclusively impose the colonial *episteme* upon indigenous children: “we went to school to copy, to imitate; not to exchange languages and ideas, and not to develop the best traits that had come out of uncountable experiences of hundreds and thousands of years living upon this continent” (Standing Bear 1978, 236).

There is no single solution to this difficulty that can be applied in every situation. Ideally, when faced with such a situation, members of dominant groups would seek to make intelligible the testimony of the epistemically marginalized people who have the experience in question. Although this testimony may not *at present* be accessible or intelligible within the dominant group, efforts to listen to, understand, and promote the perspectives of the group that have a given experience can help to evade the aforementioned dilemma. However, this solution is not always feasible: whether due to time constraints, limited resources, or other logistical issues, dominant groups cannot always withhold judgment about an issue before consulting with epistemically marginalized groups. In such situations, epistemic humility is vital to mitigating the harmful effects of speaking and acting on behalf of an epistemically marginalized group. This does not outright preclude dominant groups from performing bold or severe actions on behalf of epistemically marginalized groups. In some instances, these are necessary to rectify an issue. However, epistemic humility requires critical self-reflection, listening to and seriously considering testimony from the group on whose behalf one is acting, and attempting to gain access to testimony and perspectives from members of that group about the scope and nature of the issue, which should then inform and shape how one acts on their behalf.

Whether or not epistemically privileged groups have access to intelligible testimony about issues that affect epistemically marginalized folks, there is a significant risk that these

privileged people will perpetuate epistemic injustices in attempting to address these issues. As such, epistemically marginalized groups have good reason to exclude dominant groups from their attempts to develop epistemic resources and address epistemic injustices. In fact, even well-meaning members of dominant groups may hinder the development of these resources. Again, discourse is infused with power, and power dynamics can inhibit the free exchange of ideas (Jaggar 2000). Even members of dominant groups who are allied with the interests of an epistemically marginalized group may have a smothering effect on discourse. This may take several different forms: they may behave defensively, they may discount an experience because they fail to find it intelligible, etc. However, "[b]y uniting around certain shared assumptions, moral and political communities provide intellectual space in which members are freed from pressure continually to defend their premises and explain their technical vocabulary" (Jaggar 2000, 8). Temporarily excluding members of dominant groups from certain discursive efforts can be a useful tool in developing epistemic resources that make intelligible the experiences of an epistemically marginalized group.

Even within closed groups of epistemically marginalized folks, epistemic injustices and violence can smother, discredit, and/or render unintelligible the testimony of certain voices. These may or may not replicate the oppressions of the dominant *episteme*, and they often interact with dominant epistemic impositions in complex ways. For example, *Dalit* members of the Indian diaspora are often silenced and discredited on the basis of caste (Chakravarti 2019). Although caste has a long history of existing as a system alongside colonialism, and colonialism both affected and was affected by the caste system, caste has existed long before British colonial rule: "[u]ndoubtedly, caste changed under the British – but this is trivially true of every period of Indian history. Caste adapts to changing state technologies and political

economy, but remains a total social fact, organising every realm of Indian life: legal, economic and political, religious, aesthetic and cultural" (Chakravarti 2019). Even within the *Dalit* caste, however, the voices of women are more marginalized than those of men (Mitra 2019). Further, some members of the Indian diaspora in the United States — especially *Hindutva* members of upper castes — have campaigned to decrease references to the caste system in school curricula in the United States, with the justification that the curricula overemphasized caste, and thereby "left students open to harassment by their peers" ("Caste Won't Be Erased" 2016). This is a complex situation, with epistemic concerns arising from all angles, both originating from within and without the dominant colonial *episteme*.

As Jaggar notes, there are a number of hazards that arise when communities remain consistently closed: "repression and denial of autonomy, dogmatism, intellectual dishonesty and self-deception, elitism, and partialism" (2000, 10). Further, closed groups may prohibit people with certain identities from membership. Exclusion is necessary for a closed group, and in many cases can be vital to effectively creating epistemic resources: for instance, if a hermeneutical gap obscures the experience of Group A but not Group B, then (at least temporarily) restricting group membership to those who belong to Group A can be a legitimate step towards developing and honing epistemic resources. However, exclusions can also serve as epistemic injustices. By either prohibiting certain people from membership or suppressing the testimony of certain folks within the closed group based on identity prejudice rather than shared experience, members of these closed groups can reinforce and perpetuate epistemic injustices and violence, removing their ability to contribute to epistemic resources surrounding their experience. For example, while performing an ethnography of Truth and Soul — a Black barbershop — Quincy T. Mills met a Black man named Eric (Harris-Lacewell 2004). Eric was

a regular at the barbershop, and the barbers and many customers assumed that Eric was gay. In conversation, the denizens of Truth and Soul frequently engaged in enthusiastic discourse on a broad scope of topics, including Black women, the position of Black people in American society, the likelihood that Venus Williams would win against Martina Hingis, and more (Harris-Lacewell 2004). Further, the barbershop is designated as a place where Black men can freely discuss their opinions and experiences: during one argument about the nature of Black people, Hajj — the head barber and shopowner — was yelling at a barber named Sherman and a regular named Fred. Despite being Hajj's employee, Sherman reproached him, saying, "'Man would you stop yellin! See a conversation is when everyone has an equal say'" (Harris-Lacewell 2004, 180). However, this dynamic did not extend to Eric because of his presumed sexual identity. In fact, the barbers and most regulars "often ignore Eric and act annoyed by his mannerisms and voice. They tolerate his presence but do not engage with him when he brings up issues. Their body language usually reflects a lack of interest in having a true dialogue with him" (Harris-Lacewell 2004, 187). Although Eric was not outright excluded from going to Truth and Soul, his participation in discourse and knowledge creation was severely limited because of his perceived sexual identity.

Such hazards are diminished when a closed group seriously engages with perspectives that do not conform to its own dominant views. Through discourse and outside scrutiny, some of the limitations of a closed group may become apparent: "[i]n order to increase the degree to which their agreements are justified, communities ultimately must open their basic commitments to critical scrutiny from the outside" (Jaggar 2000, 10-11). This does not necessitate that the closed group open their discourse to scrutiny on a fixed timeframe, or even that the group open their discourse to epistemically privileged groups. They could do so, or

they could instead open their commitments to scrutiny from other epistemically marginalized closed groups. It is not my place to prescribe this method of action; likely, different groups will make highly contextualized decisions based on factors of their own selection.

I have several epistemically privileged identities. I am white. I am a settler on indigenous land. I am cisgender. I was raised in the hegemonic colonial *episteme*. I am straight-passing. The list goes on. Because closed groups of epistemically marginalized folks are vital to forming epistemic resources and adopting strategies to combat epistemic oppression, and because I hold these epistemically privileged identities, I ought not make prescriptive claims that direct epistemically marginalized folks to behave in a particular way, or to combat epistemic oppression through particular means. To do so would be to unnecessarily risk imposing the colonial *episteme* upon epistemically marginalized groups, and from a perspective that may be ignorant to the epistemic needs and desires of each particular group. Instead, I can begin to address ways in which people — insofar as they are members of epistemically privileged groups — can work to dismantle the conditions that allow for epistemic oppression.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Particularly for people who generally have epistemic privilege as they move through the world, combating colonial epistemic oppression and its preconditions is not easy. In fact, if it feels easy, something has probably gone wrong. This feeling may indicate a lack of epistemic friction, which is extremely important for developing understanding and knowledge that challenges epistemic injustices, especially second- and third-order epistemic injustices. Without such friction, it is easy for the epistemically privileged to fall back into relying upon the most available and least contentious epistemic resources within our colonial epistemological system. In many instances, combating colonial epistemic oppression may seem like attempting to comprehend the unintelligible. In a sense, this is exactly what the struggle will require: we must reach beyond the confines of intelligibility that exist within the colonial European epistemological system.

I cannot offer any all-encompassing solution to eradicate colonial epistemic oppression. In part, this is due to my positionality as a person who is generally epistemically privileged as I move through the world. This is also because any claim to a comprehensive account of epistemic injustice and the resistance thereof would potentially repress different thinkers' ways of conceptualizing and combating epistemic injustice. Even when bringing attention to epistemic injustices and ways to combat them, presuming that one's perspective is final "has the potential of fixating attention in ways that might render inconceivable other epistemic injustices as yet unarticulated and best understood by attending to altogether different aspects of epistemic life" (Kidd et al. 2019, 15). To presume to have ultimate say on the manners in which we ought to combat colonial epistemic oppression would not only be

misguided, but also indicate an epistemic arrogance and close-mindedness to alternative perspectives, especially those of differently-situated folks who are epistemically marginalized.

Thus, rather than attempting to present a decisive account, I will merely provide some general ideas about how epistemically privileged people within the dominant epistemological system can begin to combat colonial epistemic oppression. This does not mean that only the epistemically privileged can resist epistemic oppression. Indeed, *epistemically marginalized folks ought to be centered in this struggle*. This is why I do not attempt to prescribe their behavior in combating epistemic oppression: as a person who is often in an epistemically privileged position, to give the marginalized unsolicited instructions about how to combat their own oppression would be fraught, as it would give the incorrect and harmful impression that I know the epistemic situation of every marginalized group better than them.

Redistributing Credibility

As I have previously argued, credibility ought to be understood in distributive terms. Because colonial epistemic oppression is composed of epistemic injustices — including widespread testimonial injustices — we should combat this oppression in part by redistributing credibility to people who have been epistemically marginalized under colonialism. As identity-prejudicial credibility excess and deficit are both forms of testimonial injustice, redistributing credibility also means lowering the credibility that we grant to epistemically privileged folks in proffering testimony about the situations of epistemically marginalized groups. This does not mean that we should accept all testimony as authoritative simply because it comes from a member of an epistemically marginalized group. Rather, because colonial epistemic oppression smothers and discredits the testimony of epistemically marginalized groups in almost all situations as they move through the world, redistributing credibility means

epistemically privileged people should challenge their default assumptions about who qualifies as a knower under a wide variety of situations. The result of this will be that, compared to the present circumstances of epistemic oppression, groups that are currently marginalized will receive more credibility and currently-privileged groups will receive less credibility.

At the societal level, redistributing credibility means increasing the representation of epistemically marginalized groups in knowledge-making institutions. This includes higher education, research, journalism, government, and numerous other organizations that contribute to the production and dissemination of knowledge within a society. However, such increased representation is a necessary but not sufficient condition for redistributing credibility: it may serve as a symptom of greater testimonial justice but ought not to be confused with testimonial justice itself. It is still possible that the epistemically marginalized people in knowledge-making institutions will still be granted less credibility despite their position. However, if epistemically marginalized people are taken seriously in these positions, this may put them in a better position for epistemic resistance.

Cultivating Epistemic Virtue

Developing epistemic humility and open-mindedness are important steps for the epistemically privileged to take in addressing epistemic oppression. Beyond merely avoiding epistemic arrogance, cultivating epistemic humility and open-mindedness means acquiring "attentiveness to one's cognitive limitations and deficits," as well as "attentiveness to the perspectives of others, to cognitive and interpretative differences" (Medina 2012, 43, 51). These virtues can help us avoid perpetuating epistemic injustice as we attempt to combat it: by remaining critically reflective about our perspectives and actions, and open to considering the testimony and interpretations of others, especially those who are disadvantaged under the Euro-

colonial epistemological system. Further, these virtues will encourage us to seek out marginalized perspectives in resisting epistemic oppression. Such perspectives are crucial because of their positionality and should constrain the ways in which the privileged combat epistemic oppression. However, this comes with a caveat: we ought to expect the marginalized to hold a multiplicity of different perspectives about how to help resist epistemic oppression. Epistemically marginalized people have a wide range of viewpoints, both at the group and individual levels. In many instances, this variety of perspectives can help us to address the epistemic needs of marginalized groups and individuals more precisely. Epistemic oppression varies in its manifestations under different contexts. Thus, to ensure that one's anti-oppression actions are effective and useful, it will be useful to obtain knowledge about the specific context and needs from the folks who have substantial lived experience in that context. In this sense, differing perspectives between contexts can help the epistemically privileged to tailor resistance more precisely to the needs of people experiencing epistemic oppression.

However, we should also expect that epistemically oppressed people within a given context will have a significant variety of perspectives about epistemic resistance. Such variance arises from several factors, including positionality, lived experience, ideology, and many more. Some of these perspectives will likely contradict each other, and multiple perspectives on epistemic resistance may have widespread support within a group. In these circumstances, it can be exceedingly difficult to determine the best course of action as an epistemically privileged person.

Sometimes, the best thing that epistemically privileged folks can do is to step aside and listen. For example, when a marginalized community is developing epistemic resources to combat oppression, we can expect that there will be differing viewpoints within the community

about which resources to develop and in what way. Unless specifically asked by a member of the marginalized community to provide input, epistemically privileged people should generally try to avoid repressing marginalized perspectives by merely listening and attempting to understand these perspectives instead of offering their own.

Further, the perspectives within an epistemically marginalized group may also contradict each other with regards to how — or whether — different privileged folks ought to help combat epistemic oppression within a particular context. This poses significant difficulties for privileged people who desire to be epistemically responsible: choosing between marginalized perspectives can introduce opportunities for the privileged to impose their assumptions and epistemic resources onto the marginalized community. There is no formula to determine the best course of action in all such situations. In these conditions, the privileged should first strive to make sure that they understand the nuances of the perspectives within a given community. This means utilizing epistemic humility and open-mindedness to attempt to ensure that one interprets each perspective in the same way as members of the marginalized community. Without doing so, we risk utilizing oppressive interpretive frameworks in coming to understand the perspectives, which can hinder or counteract efforts to combat injustice. For example, when a marginalized perspective about resisting oppression is incorporated by a dominant group, the dominant group often interprets the perspective in a way that perverts the original meaning, instead using it to preserve underlying social hierarchies. Ibram X. Kendi (2021) notes this phenomenon with respect to Martin Luther King, Jr. Deeming this the "second assassination" of King, Kendi discusses the mainstream American tendency to misappropriate King's ideas by carefully selecting quotes that are used to reinforce dominant understandings of race relations. Thus, if we want to successfully understand the marginalized

folks' perspectives about how we can help combat their epistemic oppression, then we ought to work hard to make sure that we truly understand what they are asking of us. This may require us to be open to adjusting our current epistemic resources, adopting new epistemic resources, and even expanding consideration beyond the dominant epistemological system. Sometimes, once we understand these perspectives through the proper interpretive lens, we may realize that perspectives that seem contradictory at first are not, in fact, mutually exclusive. However, this understanding does not eliminate all conflict: we should expect that often, different marginalized perspectives about how and whether privileged folks ought to help combat epistemic oppression within a particular context will be contradictory.

Once we have reached an understanding of contradictory prescriptions from within a marginalized community, we have to seriously consider which perspective we ought to follow. Again, there is no transcendental criterion that will tell us the right answer in all situations. Often, there may not be a *right* answer, and we must decide between several equally tenable courses of action. In situations where members of an epistemically marginalized group present competing courses of action, we should make a number of careful considerations. What are the likely epistemic, political, and social impacts of each course of action? Does this course of action further epistemic injustices against marginalized groups, and if so, how? Do I favor a given course of action mostly because it reinforces or aligns with the assumptions of the dominant group, or because it benefits me as an epistemically privileged person? This list is not exhaustive; instead, it should be used as a starting point for critically analyzing contradictory prescriptions for combating epistemic oppression. Rather than attempting to abstract complex social situations by adopting one-size-fits-all principles that determine the proper means of epistemic resistance in all situations, epistemically privileged folks ought to

seriously consider the nuances of each context by seeking to understand and critically reflect upon the perspectives of the people facing epistemic oppression on a situation-by-situation basis. By taking the perspectives of epistemically marginalized folks seriously and taking steps to understand these perspectives, privileged people can further cultivate the virtues of epistemic humility and open-mindedness.

Moving Beyond the Colonial Epistemological system

Because colonial epistemic oppression consists of third-order epistemic exclusions, effective resistance requires expanding social imaginaries beyond the traditional limits of the colonial epistemological system (Dotson 2014). As with all forms of epistemic resistance, we should expect this to take radically different forms in different contexts. This is because our goal is not transcendental: we are not aiming to achieve a viewpoint that is outside of any epistemological system, as even if this were possible, it would not help us to better understand the different contexts of colonial epistemic oppression. Instead, we should try to go beyond our dominant colonial hegemonic system by expanding our social imaginaries to embrace other epistemological systems. This will likely require significant effort, and there is no single way to go beyond the colonial epistemological system: there are many different epistemological systems, and each epistemological system may be approached from many different angles. Thus, instead of giving a comprehensive account, I will discuss two processes that epistemically marginalized scholars have developed for broadening one's social imaginary beyond the dominant epistemological system. When adopting these processes, we should continually ensure that we are maintaining epistemic humility and open-mindedness.

One practice that may be useful in moving beyond the colonial epistemological system is playful "world"-traveling, as conceived by María Lugones (2003). Lugones intentionally

uses the term "world" suggestively, refusing the "fixity of a definition" (Lugones 2003, 87). To avoid imposing an oppressive interpretive framework onto this concept, I will also refrain from tying the term "world" down with a concrete definition. However, it is true as a feature of lived experience that we inhabit different "worlds" at different times, and at the same time. In our social lives, we move between contexts in which we are constructed differently: "[a] 'world' in my sense may be an actual society, given its dominant culture's description and construction of life…but a 'world' can also be such a society given a nondominant, a resistant construction, or it can be such a society…given an idiosyncratic construction" (Lugones 2003, 87). Lugones encourages us to travel between these "worlds" in a way that is not arrogant or combative. Lugones refers to such travel as "agonistic," and notes that "[a]gonistic travelers cannot attempt to travel in this [playful] sense. Their traveling is always a trying that is tied to conquest, domination, reduction of what they meet to their own sense of order, and erasure of the other 'world'" (Lugones 2003, 95). Such attempts to erase other "worlds" constitute a third-order epistemic exclusion by denying the very construction of life that arises through lived experience. Instead, Lugones insists, we should adopt a loving and playful attitude in traveling between worlds, one that is neither "self-important" nor "fixed in particular constructions of ourselves" (2003, 96). Playful "world"-traveling involves "openness to being a fool, which is a combination of not worrying about competence, not being self-important, not taking norms as sacred, and finding ambiguity and double edges as a source of wisdom and delight" (Lugones 2003, 96). She argues that playfully traveling to other people's "worlds," is an important step in coming to understand others despite differences in positionality that frequently render each other's experiences unintelligible: "[b]y traveling to other people's 'worlds,' we discover that there are 'worlds' in which those who are the victims of arrogant

perception are really subjects, lively beings, resisters, constructors of visions even though in the mainstream construction they are animated only by the arrogant perceiver" (Lugones 2003, 97).

Another way to expand our social imaginaries beyond the colonial epistemological system is through embracing poetic knowledge. Aimé Césaire conceives of poetic knowledge as a fulfilling type of knowledge that reflects our connection with the world and others; it is a type of knowledge that trades exactitude for "richness and sincerity," that gives credence to myth, metaphor, and humor as legitimate tools for acquiring knowledge (1990, liii). According to Césaire, poetic knowledge is crucial to combating the dominant colonial epistemic order because its counterpart — scientific knowledge — is not only an incomplete method of comprehending the world, but because the colonial overreliance on scientific knowledge depersonalizes and deindividualizes us. Poetic knowledge allows us to reject this dehumanization, returning to purity in the form of "the cosmic thrust...rupestral design in the stuff of sound" (1990, xlii, xlix). Césaire contends that the current overreliance on scientific knowledge is the result of a colonial attempt to endlessly accumulate scientific knowledge while rejecting poetic knowledge, thereby relying too heavily on such hyper-rationalistic endeavors as categorizing and differentiating without focusing on essence (xlii). Thus, Césaire proposes poetic knowledge as a way to deconstruct some of the epistemic barriers that have been erected through the domination of scientific knowledge, for he asserts that — through humor and imagination — transgressions against the colonial order can break the hegemonic boundaries of knowledge that push their adherents towards a narrow conception of "coherence and efficacy," the signs of scientific truth (1990, lv). Avoiding exclusive use of this impoverished and singularly faceted type of knowledge by embracing poetic knowledge,

according to Césaire, promotes recognition of the richness of both the topics we discuss and of ourselves.

Poetic knowledge allows us to expand our social imaginaries beyond the colonial epistemological system by acknowledging forms of knowledge and ways of knowing that are outside of the boundaries of Euro-colonial knowledge. Respect for poetic knowledge can allow us to develop understandings that are inconceivable within the colonial epistemological system, which privileges scientific knowledge as the only 'true' source of knowledge, subordinating all forms of knowledge deemed 'unscientific,' 'irrational,' etc. By embracing poetic knowledge, we can come to understand perspectives that are incommensurable with the rigid structures of colonial scientific knowledge. This may help us to combat colonial epistemic oppression: by appreciating the value of oblique and textured descriptions for alternative forms of knowing, we can begin to expand our understandings beyond the dominant epistemological system.

Moving Forward

Ultimately, epistemic oppression is far from the only dimension of colonialism that needs to be addressed. Between exploitative economic structures that subordinate Nonwestern countries and groups, hierarchical racial orders, governmental and business practices that threaten to eradicate indigenous sovereignty, and many more, colonial projects continue to perpetuate oppressive systems worldwide. These dimensions of colonialism form a reinforcing cycle with epistemic injustice. Epistemic marginalization makes it easier for colonial projects to exploit certain groups. In turn, exploitation reinforces epistemic marginalization by removing material means of resistance and by rendering the beneficiaries of exploitation reluctant to view colonized folks in their full capacities as knowers. This reaffirms the

importance of centering the perspectives of colonized peoples in the struggle against colonialism: doing so simultaneously undermines colonial epistemic oppression and furthers efforts towards material decolonization. As members of epistemically marginalized groups continue to conceptualize and speak out against epistemic injustice and oppression, members of dominant groups should listen to their ideas and, when appropriate, help further their ends.

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