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On epistemic freedom and epistemic injustice

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ABSTRACT



This article examines the relationship between epistemic freedom, and epistemic injustice and epistemic oppression. I situate epistemic freedom within the larger project of epistemic decolonisation and argue that epistemic freedom is central to both its positive and negative programme. Through exploring the intersections of the notion of epistemic freedom and the scholarship on epistemic injustice and oppression, I argue that one can think of epistemic injustices and oppression as infringements on epistemic freedom. I identify shared themes between the theorisation of epistemic freedom and the literature on epistemic injustice and epistemic oppression, including silencing, active ignorance, and epistemic exploitation. I briefly explore each of these themes, identifying both intersections and divergences. Lastly, I draw on the literature on epistemic injustice and oppression to sharpen Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018, *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization*. London: Routledge) general conception of epistemic freedom and develop a tripartite structure for what substantial epistemic freedom entails. I argue that being epistemically free entails being able to choose one's epistemic endeavours, having the means to pursue them, as well as being able to meaningfully partake in the shared endeavours of the epistemic communities that one belongs to.

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1. Introduction

'Seek ye epistemic freedom first' is how Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni begins his book *Epistemic Freedom in Africa: Deprovincialization and Decolonization* (2018, 1). Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) book constitutes a nuanced

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study of the politics of knowing and knowledge production with emphasis on what he calls the African struggle for epistemic freedom. He locates the struggle for epistemic freedom in the continued entrapment of knowledge production in Africa within colonial, Euro- and North America-centric matrices of power (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018, 1). A core contribution of the book is Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018, 3) development of an account of epistemic freedom. This account is centred around epistemic freedom as the right to think, theorise and develop one's own methodologies to interpret the world, and write from where one is located unencumbered by Eurocentrism. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) argues that questions pertaining to epistemic freedom stands in direct relation to what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) calls cognitive justice. That is, proper recognition of the diverse ways of knowing by which humans from across the globe makes sense of their experiences.

In this article, I examine the relationship between epistemic freedom and a different set of theories pertaining to justice and injustice in our epistemic lives, namely those of epistemic injustice and epistemic oppression developed in analytic feminist epistemology. In doing so I elucidate and discuss a number of common concerns and intersections between the decolonial literature on epistemic freedom and the literature on epistemic injustice and oppression. I argue that despite substantial differences, these share common themes. This, I argue, provides the basis for combining the two in order to theorise and expose unjust practices, relations and structures that shape epistemic lives while at the same time elucidating strategies for their redress. I draw on the literature on epistemic injustice and oppression to sharpen Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) general conception of epistemic freedom, and I develop a tripartite structure for what substantial epistemic freedom entails. I argue that being epistemically free entails being able to choose one's epistemic endeavours, having the means to pursue them, as well as being able to meaningfully partake in the shared endeavours of the epistemic communities that one belongs to. Doing so includes gaining appropriate uptake when sharing one's knowledge.

In the next section, I introduce the notion of epistemic freedom, and in Section 3, I situate the literature on epistemic freedom in relation to the wider debates on epistemic decolonisation. In Section 4, I situate epistemic freedom in relation to the notion of cognitive justice as advanced by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014), before I turn to the topic of epistemic injustice in Section 5. Section 6 consists of an analysis of the direct relationship between epistemic freedom and epistemic injustice, and in

Section 7, I identify and discuss three shared concerns between the two sets of theory. These three themes, I argue, illustrate how the theorisation of epistemic freedom intersects with the literature on epistemic injustice and epistemic oppression. Lastly, in Section 8, I draw on the theorisation of epistemic injustice and oppression together with the republican social epistemology of James Bohman (2012) to develop a tripartite account of epistemic freedom that sharpens and improves upon Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) general account.

2. Epistemic freedom

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) is one of many decolonial scholars that challenge the hegemonic status of western epistemes, and particularly western paradigms and traditions of knowledge production. His conceptualisation of epistemic freedom originates in the recognition of the continued entrapment of the production of knowledge in Africa within relations of power dominated by Europe and North America. For Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018), similar to many other scholars interested in the relationship between knowledge and power, he views these as inextricably intertwined. He argues that control over the domain of knowledge production and dissemination is central to maintaining asymmetrical relations of power, and power structures across the world. Decolonial theorists from a range of different traditions and disciplines trace these asymmetrical relations of power to the colonial history of the last 500 years (See, e.g. de Sousa Santos 2018; Grosfoguel 2007; Mignolo 2000; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018), and both Paulin Hountondji (1997; 2002) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) trace the contemporary scientific and intellectual dependency of Africa to the epistemicides, linguicides and alienation wrought by colonisation and colonial education.

For Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018), colonial domination entails a denial of the full humanity of the colonised Other. He argues that in being denied their humanity, the colonised others are denied their status as knowers, producers of knowledge and any epistemic virtues. This 'epistemic line' between the colonised and the coloniser Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, 3) argues is sustained by what Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007) calls 'abyssal thinking'; a form of imperial reason that reduces some humans to sub-human categories without knowledge. In response to this denial of humanity, Africans have sought to affirm their humanity by pursuing epistemic freedom from the colonial powers of the global North (Tobi 2020).

Tobi (2020) traces such pursuits in African scholarship on a range of topics, including on epistemic decolonisation, by scholars such as Ngugi wa (1986), Hountondji (2009), Wiredu (2002) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017; 2018). In response to what he calls the ‘perennial problems’ of the epistemic line, and particularly the systematic silencing of marginalised knowers, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) calls for a re-humanising epistemological decolonisation that reaffirms the common humanity of all, which he argues, is ‘the most important aspect of decoloniality’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018, 80).

Like many other decolonial scholars, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) distinguishes between colonisation and coloniality, and between decolonisation and decoloniality. Similar to Latin-American theorists such as Quijano (2000) and Mignolo (2014), he views coloniality as a concept that describes the persistence of colonialism despite the end of direct colonial administrative control in many former colonies. In this sense, coloniality emphasises that we are not living in a ‘post-colonial’ world in the sense of ‘after colonialism’, but rather in a world shaped by the persistence of coloniality. Relatedly, he identifies the resurgence of calls for decolonisation in the survival of global coloniality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018) but separates political decolonisation in terms of the dismantling of direct colonial administrative control from decoloniality. Decoloniality for Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018), again inspired by Latin-American theorists, is an umbrella concept that picks out anti-slavery, anti-racist, anti-colonial, anti-capitalism, and anti-patriarchal initiatives and struggles that are emerging across different geopolitical sites. In line with this wider conceptualisation of decoloniality, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, 49–53) identifies 20 different intellectual traditions/movements/currents as part of global decoloniality, including, for example, black and decolonial feminisms, dependency theory, post- and decolonial theory and Africana philosophy. He argues that it is such traditions of thought that can dismantle the ‘metaphysical empire’, now that the ‘physical empire’ of direct territorial control and administration has been dismantled in many former colonies.

It is in response to systematic domination and exclusions that Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) identifies the struggles for epistemic freedom. He calls for a decoloniality, and an epistemic freedom that enables knowledge production and dissemination from the vantage points of the socio-epistemic and geohistorical locations of the colonised (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). In doing so, he argues the appropriations, epistemicides, linguicides and denials of the humanity of the other would be laid bare. He defines epistemic freedom as the right to think, theorise and interpret the world,

develop own methodologies, and write from where one is located and unencumbered by Eurocentrism. Similar to the 'ecologies of knowledge' argued for by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007), Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) argues that the pursuit of epistemic freedom ought to recognise various forms of knowing and knowledge rather than being reduced to just scientific forms of knowing and knowledge.

One finds similar lines of argumentation pertaining to epistemic freedom in the philosophy of Paulin J. Hountondji (1997; 2002), who argues that the continued power asymmetries in knowledge production and dissemination necessitates the creation of an autonomous space for philosophical and scientific reflection and debate within Africa. For Hountondji (2009), self-reliant processes of knowledge production that enable the colonised to answer their own questions and meet both their intellectual and material needs is a core dimension of epistemic decolonisation. Hountondji (2002, 103) argues that such autonomous spaces for reflection, debate and theorisation not only enhance the epistemic participation of Africans, but also are a condition for epistemic freedom. He argues that sustainable epistemic freedom is based upon the organisation of autonomous debates that are not just appendices to the debates in the global North, but rather pursuing answers to original sets of questions of relevance for the local context. This, he argues, would spur the creation of autonomous bodies of thoughts based on original sets of questions, rather than continuing the pursuit of questions based on the interests and preoccupations of others. Similar arguments can be found in the scholarship of Jennifer Lisa Vest (2005; 2009) who calls for debates and dialogues within and between African, Native American, Asian and Caribbean philosophies rather than what she calls the 'perverse questions' and 'perverse preoccupations' of the West. In this sense, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) and Hountondji (2002) argue for an epistemic freedom that would re-centre Africa and Africans as epistemic agents with their own valid, legitimate and useful knowledge and educational systems.

Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018, 60 and 61) analysis of epistemic freedom runs along three trajectories common to scholarship on coloniality and decoloniality: power, being and knowledge. The first unit of analysis, power, entails an analysis that targets the creation, architecture and universalisation of contemporary, asymmetrical power structures including both visible and invisible matrixes of power resulting in dehumanisation, exploitation, domination and control. Decolonial theorists who focus on power, such as Ramon Grosfoguel (2007; 2011), have argued that dominant global power structures are made up by multiple

intersecting 'colonialities' that run along vertical as well as horizontal lines and touch every aspect of human life. The complexity of which calls for nuanced analysis that considers a multitude of intersecting dimensions of power.

The second unit of analysis is that of being. Decolonial scholars such as Fanon (1966; 1967), Maldonado-Torres (2007) and Ngugi wa (1986) among many others have argued that the being of the colonised suffered forms of colonisation. Maldonado-Torres (2007) calls this the 'coloniality of being', which he argues consists of the systematic denial of the humanity of those who became the targets of enslavement and colonisation. The denial of the humanity of the Other, moved the Other into a sub-human category and into what Fanon called the 'zone of non-being' (Fanon 1967). The dehumanising dimension of colonialism is a core concern for the third unit of analysis as well. The process of dehumanisation of the colonised was accompanied by the appropriation of the knowledge of the colonised, and by outright epistemicides and linguicides (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018, 62). This aspect of colonisation is what Quijano (2007) has called the 'coloniality of knowledge', consisting of the systematic repression and marginalisation of the beliefs, ideas, concepts, symbols and images that make up the knowledge systems of colonised people (Quijano 2007). With this general overview of Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) scholarship on epistemic freedom in place, I now turn to situate the calls for epistemic freedom within the project of epistemic decolonisation.

3. Epistemic freedom and epistemic decolonisation

Veli Mitova (2020, 205) situates epistemic freedom at the heart of what she calls the 'negative programme of epistemic decolonisation'. She draws on Kwasi Wiredu's (1996) conception of conceptual decolonisation to outline the interlinked positive and negative programme of epistemic decolonisation. Wiredu (1996; 2002) thinks of conceptual decolonisation in terms of a negative and a positive programme. The negative programme for Wiredu (2002) involves the elimination of the modes of conceptualisation that spread across the world with colonisation, while the positive programme in contrast involves drawing upon and 'exploiting as much as is judicious the resources of our own indigenous conceptual schemes' (Wiredu 1996, 136).

Mitova (2020) conceives of epistemic decolonisation along similar lines. The negative epistemic programme would entail the elimination of

unreflective influences from the global North on knowledge supplies and knowledge production, while the positive programme would entail the proactive utilisation of the epistemic resources of the marginalised for the advancement of knowledge. These are, Mitova (2020) argues, two basic and uncontroversial features of epistemic decolonisation. However, importantly she notes that there are other commonly accepted features, such as that epistemic decolonisation entails a process of 're-centring', which was briefly touched upon in the previous section.

Achille Mbembe (2015) argues that re-centring entails rejecting the assumption that Africa is merely an extension of the West, and instead centring knowledge enterprises in local interests and epistemic frameworks. Mitova (2020) situates epistemic freedom as a core part of the process of re-centring. She argues that re-centring entails reclaiming the right to think and theorise from one's own geographic and socio-cultural location, choosing the aims of one's epistemic endeavours according to one's own interests, social identities and conceptual schemas. Relatedly, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, 34) argues that epistemological decolonisation consists of both 'provincializing Europe', and of 'deprovincializing Africa'. These are inextricably linked and entails 'moving the centre' as Ngugi wa (1993) calls it, in two senses. First in the sense of moving the 'centre' from the global North to a diverse set of locations around the world, and second in the sense of moving the centre away from the dominant male bourgeois social strata that constitute the centre in most nations. This, Ngugi wa (1993), argues would contribute to freeing the cultures of the world from the restrictions brought on by nationalism and class, race and gender-based inequalities.

The process of 'deprovincialising Africa' Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) describes as an intellectual process of centring Africa as legitimate epistemic site from which the world can be interpreted, while also recognising the global relevance of knowledge from Africa. Doing so, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, 4) argues, not only constitutes a core dimension in the struggle for epistemic freedom, but is an essential prerequisite for political, cultural, economic and other freedoms. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) argues that contemporary struggles for epistemic freedom illustrate the need for re-thinking decolonial trajectories away from putting the 'political kingdom' first. He suggests that while it is true that political, economic, cultural, and epistemological aspects of decolonisation are inextricably linked, he argues for the primacy of epistemic decolonisation due to its fundamental role in the critical consciousness building which he takes as essential for both political and economic freedom.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, 33), like other decolonial theorists, notes the importance of integrating different traditions of thought into the planetary struggle for epistemic freedom. That different traditions of thought inevitably develop and adopt different concepts and use different nomenclatures, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, 46) argues, should not be taken as a sign of incommensurability. Rather, he calls for dialogue and the identification of potential interconnections between different movements and traditions of thought. He argues that thinking about slavery, racism, colonialism, apartheid, imperialism and patriarchy from a diverse set of geopolitical and geohistorical sites enriches the conceptual and hermeneutical resources available for such critiques and expands decolonial archives. He further cautions that any one set of hermeneutical resources is never complete nor perfect and stresses the importance of avoiding the pitfalls of epistemic xenophobia, nativism, and ghettoisation of knowledge, which he argues impoverishes knowledge rather than enriches it (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018).

Similarly, Ramon Grosfoguel (2011) argues for a decoloniality that is critical of both Eurocentric and third-world essentialism. He calls for a broader canon resulting from critical dialogues between diverse critical epistemic, ethical and political projects that take seriously the epistemic perspectives of critical thinkers from around the world, and particularly those who are marginally situated. In the spirit of such critical dialogue, the relationship between decolonial theory and the corpus of critical analytic social epistemology has recently garnered increasing interest.¹ It is to this project the rest of this article contributes by examining the relationship between the theorisation of epistemic freedom and that pertaining to epistemic injustice. In doing so, I trace some of the common themes and concerns between the two sets of theories and develop an account of epistemic freedom that draws on the strengths of both decolonial theory and analytic feminist social epistemology. However, before turning to the literature on epistemic injustice and oppression it is necessary to situate Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) scholarship in relation to the notion of cognitive justice (de Sousa Santos 2014), as doing so will serve as a springboard for exploring the intersection of epistemic freedom and notions such as epistemic injustice and oppression.

¹See for example the special issue of *Philosophical Papers* dedicated to the topic of epistemic decolonisation. Available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rppa20/49/2>

4. Epistemic freedom and cognitive justice

The literature on epistemic freedom does largely not engage with the scholarship on epistemic injustice or epistemic oppression beyond a few brief instances. However, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) does engage extensively with the notion of cognitive justice, which he argues that epistemic freedom speaks directly to. Cognitive justice, as defined by de Sousa Santos (2014), is premised on recognising the knowledge of those on the margins, and the diverse ways of knowing by which humans around the world make sense of their experiences. For de Sousa Santos (2014), cognitive justice is imperative for the struggle for social justice, and he argues that global social justice cannot be attained without global cognitive justice. Similar to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) and Grosfoguel (2011), de Sousa Santos (2014, 42) argues that it is imperative that the struggle towards global cognitive justice starts from dialogue and translation among different critical epistemologies and practices.

At times, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2021) has adopted the term epistemic injustice/cognitive injustice. However, he does not adopt the conception of epistemic injustice analytic philosophers will be familiar with from, for example, Miranda Fricker's (2007) work. Rather, Ndlovu-Gatsheni uses epistemic/cognitive injustice in a corollary fashion to de Sousa Santos (2014) conception of cognitive justice. Namely, as a term to pick out failures, and in some instances the outright refusal, to recognise the different ways through which people, and particularly marginalised individuals, across the world make sense of and provide meaning to their existence (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2021). Such failures he argues are a deliberate result of the epistemicides, linguicides and denials of humanity that lie at the core of the cognitive empire, each of which he argues constitute epistemic/cognitive injustice.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) develops a conception of cognitive justice that incorporates not only the recognition of diverse sets of knowers, and diverse ways of knowing but also includes considerations of what one is able to express and on whose terms such testimonies can be made. In its entirety, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, 3) argues that cognitive or epistemic justice entails the 'liberation of reason itself from coloniality'. Thus, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018; 2021) ties his conceptualisation of epistemic freedom to considerations of epistemic justice and injustice, albeit not to the conceptions of epistemic injustice and epistemic oppression coming out of anglophone analytic philosophy. However, as will be illustrated in the coming sections, which does not mean that there are no

common themes, or that the two sets of theories do not intersect in meaningful ways.

5. Epistemic freedom and epistemic injustice

Within analytic feminist epistemology, the concept of epistemic injustice is most commonly used as a term that covers unjust epistemic relations that disadvantages someone in their capacity as a knower following Miranda Fricker (2007). Fricker (2007) identifies two forms of epistemic injustice, testimonial injustice and hermeneutic injustice, which have become paradigmatic. Testimonial injustice occurs when a speaker's testimony is given less credibility than it ought to due to identity prejudice on the part of the hearer, and hermeneutical injustice occurs when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at a disadvantage when it comes to making sense of or communicating their social experience (Fricker 2007). However, at this point, more than 15 years from the publication of Fricker's book, scholars working on the topic of epistemic injustice have identified a wide range of different types and sources of epistemic injustice (see, e.g. Dotson 2012; Fairbairn 2020; Pohlhaus 2012). Similarly, epistemically unjust practices and structures across a wide range of domains and areas of social life have been identified, such as in health-care settings (Carel and Kidd 2014), politics (Catala 2015; Fricker 2013; Medina 2013), and within the academy (see, e.g. Grasswick 2017; Koskinen and Rolin 2019).

While the theorisation of epistemic injustice did not have decolonisation in mind initially, but rather issues pertaining to gender and race, Veli Mitova (2020) argues that the apparatus is particularly well suited to articulating the epistemic wrongs of colonialism. However, both Mitova (2020) and Andrea Pitts (2017) caution that employing the epistemic injustice apparatus to articulate the epistemic wrongs of colonialism is not without its pitfalls. Mitova (2020) warns against over-homogenising 'from-within' and 'from-without' meta-perspectives. 'From-within' meta-perspectives are those that critique the dominant epistemologies of the Global North from within those same epistemologies, while 'from-without' critiques are those that critique those same dominant epistemologies from the point of those outside of 'the cognitive empire' (de Sousa Santos 2018).

In this article, similar to Mitova (2020), I focus on intersections and common themes between concepts from different meta-perspectives, and she warns that in doing so one runs the risk of over homogenising

different meta-perspectives in a manner that undermines the decolonial project. However, Mitova (2020) argues that the feminist social epistemology centred around the concept of epistemic injustice offers enough of an intersection of 'from-within' and 'from-without' critiques for it to be a useful toolbox for thinking about decolonisation, without undermining the decolonial project. However, importantly Mitova (2020) also emphasises that while analytic feminist social epistemology offers an epistemically diverse, safe and powerful set of tools for thinking about decolonisation, the literature on epistemic injustice is far from perfect in terms of taking seriously the knowledge of marginalised knowers, and particularly those from the Global South.

Of particular interest for my purposes here is Mitova's (2020) argument that the three main stages of coloniality can be characterised by three key epistemic injustice concepts. She argues that the central concept of historical colonialism is that of 'epistemicide' found in the work of Ramon Grosfoguel (2013) and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014; 2018). The central concept for the subsequent coloniality is that of 'epistemic oppression' as developed by Kristie Dotson (2014), and for decolonisation those of epistemic disobedience (Mignolo 2009) and epistemic freedom (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). Thus, Mitova (2020) situates the notion of epistemic freedom as a key epistemic injustice concept and stresses its importance in the struggle for decolonisation and against the epistemic injustices of colonialism. However, while Mitova's (2020) framework is helpful in situating epistemic freedom as a key epistemic injustice concept, the intersection of epistemic freedom and epistemic injustice remains under-explored. In the next section, I examine the relationship between epistemic freedom as conceptualised by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) and the concepts of epistemic injustice and oppression.

6. The intersection of epistemic injustice and epistemic freedom

As suggested in the previous section, the notions of epistemic freedom and epistemic injustice stand in relation to each other, and intersect in a number of ways. Both Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) and Mitova (2020) position epistemic freedom as a key dimension of the struggle against the coloniality of knowledge, and existing epistemic oppression, with Mitova (2020) identifying epistemic freedom as a core part of the negative programme of epistemic decolonisation. Epistemic freedom also stands in

direct relation to the project of re-centring epistemic endeavours onto the geohistorical and social locations of the non-dominantly situated. The acknowledgement of the legitimacy and validity of marginalised epistemic systems and resources, and the freedom of theorising from the associated geohistorical and social locations are not only core parts of the project of decolonisation, but also core features of epistemic freedom (Tobi 2020; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018). However, epistemic freedom underlies the positive programme of epistemic decolonisation of proactively utilising marginalised epistemic resources to advance knowledge (Mitova 2020). Without the freedom to think about and theorise the world using the epistemic resources that one sees fit, the positive programme would either be severely restricted or even impossible. As Tobi (2020) notes, addressing oppressive epistemic systems is a core part of the struggle for epistemic freedom and the resistance it makes possible, even if limited, has a role to play in changing and redressing oppressive epistemic practices and systems. One can also think of epistemic injustices as infringements on the epistemic freedom of those subjected to them. Emmalon Davis (2021) argues that both identity-based testimonial injustices, as well as content-based testimonial injustices introduce barriers to the participation in particular epistemic communities for the victims. Identity-based testimonial injustice is the kind theorised by Fricker (2007) that arises out of identity prejudice pertaining to the speaker's social identity. In contrast, content-based testimonial injustice arises out of content-based prejudice, particularly pertaining to content that is 'identity-coded' (Davis 2021, 219). Davis (2021) argues that an epistemic agent may be prejudicially assessed both owing to social identity, such as in cases of identity-based testimonial injustice, but also based on the kind of information that they are trying to convey. The content of an epistemic agent's testimony can itself become 'social identity-coded' in such a way that it provokes unwarranted epistemic assessments of both the credibility of the contributor and the testimony itself (Davis 2021, 218). These two distinct forms of testimonial injustice can occur independently of each other. Epistemic agents with non-dominant social identities can experience unjust epistemic harms based on identity-based prejudice regardless of the content of their testimony. Similarly, both dominantly and non-dominantly situated epistemic agents can experience content-based testimonial injustice in instances where their testimony includes content that is social-identity coded, and particularly so when the content pertains to the interests of non-dominantly situated individuals. It is also possible for an epistemic agent to be

vulnerable to each form simultaneously, such as in instances where marginalised knowers offer testimony that is 'social identity-coded' to the interests of marginalised groups. Thus, opening them up for both testimonial injustices based on identity prejudices, and the information they are trying to convey.

Davis (2021) provides an example of how epistemic injustices can affect epistemic freedom in practice in her argument that the combination of identity-based and content-based testimonial injustices has contributed to a lack of diversity in social identities and discourses among practitioners in academic philosophy. Similarly, Kristie Dotson (2014) argues that epistemic oppression, defined as persistent epistemic exclusions that hinder one's contribution to knowledge production, constitute infringements on the epistemic agency of knowers that reduces their ability to participate in a given epistemic community. Epistemic agency here pertains to a knower's ability to utilise persuasively shared epistemic resources within a given epistemic community in order to participate in knowledge production, and if required, the revision of those resources (Dotson 2012, 24).

As noted earlier, Mitova (2020, 203) argues that epistemic oppression, as conceived of by Dotson (2014), is the central concept for understanding the continued coloniality in which we find ourselves at the moment. Central to this argument is acknowledging that ongoing coloniality imposes a system of persistent epistemic exclusions that hinder the contribution to knowledge by marginalised knowers which infringes upon their epistemic agency. In this sense, one can think of epistemic injustices such as those identified by Davis (2021), and the epistemic oppression identified by Dotson (2014) as infringing on the epistemic freedom of the victims as their participation in knowledge producing and sharing endeavours is systematically hindered. Thus, one can think of the relationship between epistemic freedom and epistemic injustice in at least two closely related ways. One which centre on epistemic injustice and oppression as an infringement on epistemic freedom, and one which centres the ameliorative role of epistemic freedom in redressing and eliminating existing epistemic injustice and oppression. However, beyond their direct relationship, the literature on epistemic freedom intersects with the literature on epistemic injustice and oppression on a number of themes that are central to both sets of literature. In the next section, I examine a few of these intersections to illustrate that there is further common ground to be found between the two sets of literature.

7. Shared concerns and themes

Beyond the direct relationship between epistemic freedom and epistemic injustices, the two sets of theory share a range of concerns and core themes. One such core theme is the issue of silencing. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) argues that silencing is a perennial problem for the victims of colonisation, and his call for epistemic freedom is explicitly a response to silencing and domination of colonial subjects. Likewise, silencing is a central theme in the literature on epistemic injustice (Dotson 2011; 2012; Fricker 2007). Depelchin (2005) demonstrates the historical and ongoing silencing of colonial subjects, and how the political decolonisation of the twentieth century failed to deliver epistemic decolonisation. For those who endured, and still endure, enslavement, colonialism, capitalist exploitation, cultural imperialism, discrimination based on race and gender as well as political domination and repression, silencing constitutes a fact of life (Depelchin 2005, xii). Drawing on Amy Allen's (2016) work, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) argues that in order to appreciate the importance of the struggle for epistemic freedom one has to consider the discursive terrain of the politics of knowledge and knowing, and particularly how different epistemic agents are situated in relation to each other, institutional practices and systems of exclusions. Each of which has been the target of extensive debate in the literature on epistemic injustice.

Many theorists of epistemic injustice engage with the topic of silencing, and the literature offers plenty of examples of how practices of silencing can take on different forms. For example, Kristie Dotson (2011; 2012; 2014) has demonstrated how processes of silencing can be epistemically unjust, and how they can be part of larger systems of epistemic oppression. Both Miranda Fricker (2007) and Pohlhaus (2012) illustrate how silencing can be caused by failures of one's words to gain appropriate uptake. Both testimonial injustice and what Pohlhaus (2012) calls wilful hermeneutical ignorance are examples of forms of epistemic injustice in which a speaker is unfairly silenced due to their testimony failing to gain appropriate uptake. Wilful hermeneutical ignorance occurs when there are different hermeneutical resources that a hearer could utilise besides structurally prejudiced hermeneutical resources, and the hearer wilfully refuses to acknowledge and utilise those resources (Pohlhaus 2012). Instances of wilful hermeneutical ignorance are cases in which dominantly situated knowers pre-emptively dismiss and refuse the epistemic resources developed by the marginally situated.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018), drawing on de Sousa Santos (2014), argues that Eurocentric knowledge production breeds arrogance and refusal to recognise the language of resistance of others. This arrogance can be understood as a form of wilful hermeneutical ignorance, as it manifests as dominantly situated knowers refusing to acknowledge the epistemic tools developed from the experienced world of those marginally situated. Such ignorance allows the dominantly situated to misunderstand, misinterpret, or simply ignore the knowledge of whole parts of the world. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018), calls this a form of ‘epistemic deafness’, and argues that the beneficiaries of the status quo develop this form of insensitivity to the knowledge of the marginalised in the face of decolonial struggles.

The arrogance, or deafness, that de Sousa Santos (2014) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) identifies in Eurocentric scholarship produces what José Medina (2013) calls meta-blindness. The meta-blind individual, or meta-blind ignoramus using Medina’s (2013, 76) term, is an epistemic agent who arrogantly assumes that there is nothing else to perceive or learn beyond what they already perceive or know. The persistent arrogance of the ignoramus consists of an inability to recognise and acknowledge one’s own limitations and inabilities. Medina (2013) argues that meta-blind individuals are unable to understand what they miss out on due to their arrogance and ignorance, such as aspects of the social world that they do not see and should care about.

However, overcoming silencing, marginalisation and ignorance is not without its pitfalls, as Nora Berenstain’s (2016) conceptualisation and analysis of epistemic exploitation illustrates. Epistemic exploitation occurs when dominantly situated knowers compel marginalised individuals to educate them about the nature of the latter’s oppression (Berenstain 2016, 569). Berenstain argues (2016) that practices of epistemic exploitation are marked by unrecognised, uncompensated coerced epistemic labour that is emotionally taxing. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) identifies practices of epistemic exploitation in how the beneficiaries of colonialism continuously ask those involved in decolonial struggles about what decolonisation means. This, along the lines of Berenstain’s (2016) account of epistemic exploitation, he argues creates a burden on the colonial Other to educate the dominantly situated in the face of doubts and scepticism focused on erasing existing epistemic resources that undermine dominant narratives about the relationship of their experiences to larger structures of oppression.

In specific, Berenstain (2016) argues that the coercive and exploitative nature of epistemic exploitation is exemplified by the unpaid nature of the epistemic labour, and the associated opportunity cost that places the marginalised individual in a double bind. Berenstain argues that epistemic exploitation is made possible by, and intertwined with the social and political structures in which epistemic practices take place, and thus interacts with other types of epistemic harms, including epistemic injustices and epistemic oppression resulting from these structures. Berenstain (2016) illustrates how epistemic exploitation can intersect with testimonial and hermeneutical injustices to compound epistemic harms and epistemic marginalisation. She argues that epistemic exploitation constitutes a form of epistemic oppression that reproduces and upholds active ignorance that is integral to maintaining dominant epistemic frameworks.

Across the last two sections, I have examined the direct relationship and the common themes between the theorisation of epistemic freedom and the literature on epistemic injustice and oppression. However, not only do these sets of theories share common themes and concerns, but they can also be used to inform and strengthen each other. In the next section, I will draw on parts of the literature on epistemic injustice and oppression to specify and sharpen Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) general account of epistemic freedom, in light of some of the insights of analytic feminist epistemology.

8. Sharpening Ndlovu-Gatsheni's conception of epistemic freedom

Analytic social epistemology offers tools and insights that can be used to sharpen Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) general conception of epistemic freedom and to offer a more specific account of what being epistemically free entails. In defining epistemic freedom as the right to think, theorise and interpret the world, develop one's methodologies, and write from where one is located and unencumbered by Eurocentrism, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018) sets out a general account of what it means to be epistemically free. However, there are challenges to one's epistemic freedom that are not adequately captured as such using Ndlovu-Gatsheni's account. One set of such challenges is those that arise out of our interactions with other epistemic agents, and particularly cases in which one is able to theorise and interpret the world oneself but is unable to communicate this to other members of one's epistemic communities as one's epistemic agency is curtailed due to the prejudices or wilful ignorance of other epistemic agents.

Several core issues in the literature on epistemic injustice and oppression identify such problems, including central concepts such as testimonial injustice (Fricker 2007), wilful hermeneutical ignorance (Pohlhaus 2012) and contributory injustice (Dotson 2012). The existing literature pertaining to each of these concepts illustrates that one could be able to theorise and interpret one's own experiences, and yet have one's epistemic agency curtailed and one's epistemic freedom infringed upon as a result of the prejudices and wilful ignorance of other epistemic agents. In cases of testimonial injustice and wilful hermeneutical ignorance, the subject is rendered unable to equally and freely participate in the shared epistemic endeavours of their epistemic communities, as their testimony is denied appropriate uptake. This signals that there is reason to sharpen Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) account of epistemic freedom, so that it also includes the freedom from having one's epistemic agency unfairly curtailed as a result of the prejudices and wilful ignorance of others.

As a starting point for developing such an account of epistemic freedom, I propose moving beyond thinking of epistemic freedom as dichotomous, but rather as a scale on which one can be more or less epistemically free. As discussed throughout this article, different constraining factors, including epistemic injustices and epistemic oppression, shape to what extent one is able to freely exercise one's epistemic agency and to what extent one is able to pursue the epistemic ends of one's choosing. When theorising and analysing epistemic freedom, one thus ought to consider the wide range of factors that shape the ability of individual epistemic agents to exercise their epistemic agency. In this section, I outline what a more expansive, and social account of what being epistemically free entails, based on Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) conception of freedom, by drawing on insights from analytic social epistemology, starting with the republican epistemology of the late James Bohman (2012).

Inspired by the neo-republican philosophy of Philip Pettit (1997; 2001; 2012; 2014), Bohman (2012), proposes a conception of freedom based on the notion of non-domination for thinking about freedom in our epistemic lives. This view focuses on the choices available to individual epistemic agents and their power to determine the trajectory of their epistemic endeavours. Bohman (2012) centres on factors that might shape one's power to do so, for example how duties and obligations are distributed, and who has power to control the distribution of these. Bohman's (2012) account of what it means to be epistemically free centres on the range of choices available to differently situated epistemic agents within an epistemic community. Bohman (2012) argues that freedom at the very least

requires that the individual has the power and status to initiate, participate in and resist any form of decision-making that imposes duties on them, or limits the number of choices available to them. This view implies that freedom requires that institutions and agents respond to the demands of those they impose duties and obligations upon, and Bohman (2012) argues that it is possible to counterfactually judge whether an agent is free or not, based on whether they have the capability to resist the duties and obligations that are assigned to them.

Bohman's (2012) account intersects with Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) at several points. Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) account of epistemic freedom, as discussed in Section 2 of this article, is centred around the epistemic agent having the right to pursue the epistemic endeavours of their choosing from their particular geo- and sociohistorical location in the world. On this view, epistemic freedom entails being able to choose what, when, where, how and why one carries out one's epistemic endeavours, without being encumbered by existing asymmetrical power structures.

Bohman's (2012) view supplements this view well, as it elucidates the importance of not only being able to choose one's epistemic endeavours freely, but also the importance of having the ability to pursue them. Doing so requires having the ability to pursue one's epistemic endeavours within the landscape of constraints one finds oneself in, while at the same time being able to resist and decline to participate in epistemic endeavours that are contrary to one's interests. This highlights the importance of epistemic freedom of being able to dictate what one spends one's time and epistemic labour on, which is a significant part of Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) and Berenstain's (2016) critiques of epistemic exploitation. Explicating on Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) account of epistemic freedom in this manner is helpful as it illustrates how even when one is able to freely choose one's epistemic endeavours, one's epistemic freedom can still be limited if one's ability to actually pursue those endeavours is curtailed. Thus, the sharpened account of epistemic freedom ought to include not only the ability to choose one's epistemic endeavours, but also having the freedom and ability to pursue them.

As noted at the start of this section, the literature on epistemic injustice and oppression offers important considerations of epistemic freedom. More specifically, that epistemic freedom is not only a matter of being able to choose and pursue one's epistemic endeavours, but also being able to meaningfully partake in epistemic collaborations, in sharing knowledge, as well as contributing to the shared epistemic resources within the epistemic communities one belong to (Pohlhaus and Gaile

2017). For example, the theorisation of epistemic injustices such as testimonial injustice (Fricker 2007) and wilful hermeneutical ignorance (Pohlhaus 2012), as well as the theorisation of epistemic oppression (Dotson 2012; 2014) each target the ability of differently situated individuals to meaningfully partake in shared epistemic endeavours within the epistemic communities one is part of.

The theorisation of different forms of epistemic injustice illustrates how social factors, such as prejudices, shape the perception of one's credibility and thus one's standing as a knower within an epistemic community. Relatedly, both the theorisation of testimonial injustice and wilful hermeneutical ignorance illustrate how one's epistemic agency is not only a matter of being able to pursue certain avenues of inquiry or having access to certain hermeneutical resources, but also about how one is treated as a knower and one's testimony and knowledge, gaining appropriate recognition and uptake. Similarly, the theorisation of epistemic oppression illustrates how undue epistemic marginalisation hampers the ability of some social groups to partake meaningfully in the epistemic communities they belong to, curtailing the epistemic agency of the members of those groups and thus limiting their epistemic freedom.

In this sense, the literature on epistemic injustice and oppression illustrates how social matters, and particularly social injustices and oppression, influence the epistemic agency of those subjected to them, and in many cases infringe upon their ability to partake in the endeavours of the epistemic communities to which they belong and ultimately on their epistemic freedom. The theorisation of epistemic injustices such as testimonial injustice and wilful hermeneutical ignorance emphasises the importance of appropriate uptake of one's testimony for one's ability to meaningfully partake in an epistemic community, and thus also for one's epistemic freedom.

However, this is not to say that epistemic injustices and epistemic oppression completely curtail the epistemic agency of those subject to them. Rather, as shown by for example Jose Medina's (2013) work on epistemic resistance and Abraham Tobi's (2020) discussion of pursuits of epistemic freedom in the face of coloniality, having one's epistemic freedom infringed upon does not mean that there is no space for resistance, thus further emphasising the importance of a non-dichotomous conception of epistemic freedom to better account for agency in the face of oppression.

These insights from analytic social epistemology highlight the need to sharpen Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) account of epistemic freedom and illustrate the points on which it needs to be improved. What is needed is an account of epistemic freedom that includes Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) initial

emphasis on being able to choose the aims, theories, and methods of one's epistemic endeavours in accordance with one's priorities unencumbered by the undue influence of oppressive and unequal relations of power. But as the discussion throughout this section illustrates, the conceptualisation of epistemic freedom also needs to account one's freedom and ability to pursue the epistemic ends of one's choosing, and for one's ability to meaningfully and freely partake in the shared epistemic endeavours of one's epistemic communities. What emerges then is a tripartite structure of what it means to be epistemically free. Being epistemically free entails being able to choose the aims and methods of one's epistemic endeavours as well as having the ability and freedom to pursue them, as well as the ability to freely and meaningfully partake in the epistemic communities that one belongs to and gaining appropriate uptake when sharing one's knowledge.

This tripartite structure, particularly when combined with a non-dichotomous view of epistemic freedom makes possible nuanced analysis of what substantial epistemic freedom would entail in the complex, non-ideal world in which we lead our epistemic lives. It would be able to account for many different factors that can infringe upon one's epistemic freedom to differing degrees, while at the same time preserving the original emphasis and strengths of Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) conception upon which it is built. Thus, the tripartite conception of epistemic freedom constitutes a development and sharpening of Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) general account of epistemic freedom. It broadens the range of infringements one epistemic freedom that it can account for, while at the same time preserving the central thrust of Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) conception. As the literatures on epistemic decolonisation and epistemic injustice illustrate, structural, material, social and political factors all can limit one's ability to pursue the epistemic endeavours of one's choosing and one's ability to meaningfully contribute to the epistemic communities one is a member of. Thus, the manner in which we conceive of epistemic freedom ought to reflect that complexity, which this article and the conception of epistemic freedom it develops contributes to.

9. Conclusion

In this article, I examine the intersection of epistemic freedom and the extant theorisation of epistemic injustice and epistemic oppression in analytic social epistemology. I argue that the notion of epistemic freedom serves a role in both the negative and positive programme of epistemic decolonisation, situating epistemic freedom as a key concept in the

project of redressing and overcoming the epistemic oppression wrought by coloniality. Further, I argue that we ought to think of epistemic injustice and epistemic oppression as infringements on epistemic freedom, and thus contrary to both epistemic justice and epistemic decolonisation.

Despite differences in scope and focus between the two sets of theories, there is common ground to be found. Exploring such intersections is particularly fruitful in instances where the two sets of theories intersect on a shared theme or issue. I have discussed such shared themes throughout Sections 6 and 7 and argue that they can serve as the starting point for an analysis that combines the two sets of theory to theorise and expose unjust practices, relations and structures that shape epistemic lives, while at the same time elucidating strategies for their redress. I attempt to do so myself in this article, as I draw on the literature on epistemic injustice and oppression to sharpen Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) general account of epistemic freedom in order to more clearly spell out what being epistemically free entails. I develop an account of epistemic freedom based on a tripartite structure that centres being able to choose one's epistemic endeavours oneself, having the means to pursue them, as well as being able to meaningfully partake in the shared endeavours of the epistemic communities that one belongs to. This tripartite account of epistemic freedom is a development on Ndlovu-Gatsheni's account, as it better accounts for the many different factors that can infringe upon one's epistemic agency theorised by scholars of epistemic injustice and oppression.

The arguments pursued in this article serve as a starting point for exploring the intersection of the decolonial theorisation of epistemic freedom and theories of epistemic injustice and oppression, and further inquiry in this direction would be welcome as doing so carries the potential of contributing to the aims and purposes of both theorists of epistemic freedom and epistemic injustice and oppression.

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