




ARTICLE

Appreciative Silencing in Communicative Exchange

Abraham Tobi 

African Centre for Epistemology and Philosophy of Science, Department of Philosophy, University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg, South Africa
Email: tobitejiri@yahoo.com

(Received 6 October 2021; revised 31 May 2022; accepted 11 June 2022)

Abstract

Instances of epistemic injustice elicit resistance, anger, despair, frustration or cognate emotional responses from their victims. This sort of response to the epistemic injustices that accompanied historical systems of oppression such as colonialism, for example, is *normal*. However, if their victims have internalised these oppressive situations, we could get the counterintuitive response of appreciation. In this paper, I argue for the phenomenon of *appreciative silencing* to make sense of instances like this. This is a form of epistemic silencing that happens when the accepted hegemonic intuitions of the oppressed are formed/influenced by the ideologies of the oppressors over time. Here, we have a resilient, oppressive and hegemonic epistemic system. Put together, it creates a variant of epistemic injustice and silencing that is obscure since its victims are neither resistant nor aware of the injustice they face but are appreciative.

Keywords: Epistemic injustice; epistemic silencing; testimonial injustice; epistemic harm; hegemony

Introduction

Is it conceivable to talk of an appreciative victim of epistemic injustice, or would such talk be some kind of category mistake? The current literature on epistemic injustice would suggest that victims of epistemic injustice (or cognate epistemic bad practices¹) experience a similar range of emotions.

These emotions include anger, frustration, resolve or determination to resist, despair when it is overwhelming, fear when it is accompanied by severe physical harm, etc. This range of possible emotional responses is justified.

For instance, think of a victim of Miranda Fricker's (2007) concept of testimonial injustice. Suppose Agent A testifies about their experience of police brutality, and the credibility given to their testimony is affected by prejudicial stereotypes about them

¹This includes practices such as 'epistemic violence' (Dotson 2011), 'wilful hermeneutical ignorance' (Pohlhaus 2012), 'contributory injustice' (Dotson 2012), 'epistemic oppression' (Dotson 2014), 'epistemic exploitation' (Berenstein 2016), 'interpretative injustice' (Peet 2017), 'epistemic trust injustice' (Grasswick 2018), 'affective injustice' (Srinivasan 2018), etc.

as a black person. In that case, they are a victim of testimonial injustice. We can imagine Agent A experiencing any or multiple emotions in the range above. When an epistemic agent is a victim of testimonial injustice like this, Fricker notes a purely epistemic harm that might arise. The harm is that ‘knowledge that would be passed on to a hearer is not received’. The speaker is prevented ‘from successfully putting knowledge into the public domain’. Fricker sees this as an ‘unfreedom of our collective speech situation’ (43). For Fricker, the harm of testimonial injustice is that it prevents an epistemic agent from communicating effectively. That is, an agent’s utterance fails to get the desired uptake.

Without arguing for testimonial injustice as the primary kind of epistemic injustice,² we can see how this instance of testimonial injustice can lead to other forms of epistemic bad practices. For example, when Agent A is silenced, his failure to put knowledge into the public domain about his experience of police brutality creates a gap in the collective hermeneutical resources available to make sense of instances of police brutality. This sort of gap is responsible for the hermeneutical strands of epistemic injustice (hermeneutical injustice (Fricker 2007), wilful hermeneutical ignorance (Pohlhaus 2012), contributory injustice (Dotson 2012)). We can imagine Agent A feeling frustrated when the collective hermeneutical resources lack the materials to make sense of his experience. In all, epistemic bad practices elicit emotional responses from its victims that are contained or similar to those in the range above. These emotional responses to injustice are valid.

However, imagine a counterintuitive scenario where a victim of a historical system of oppression (like colonialism, patriarchy, racism, etc.) appreciates this system of oppression and accepts it as the norm simply because of the hegemonic³ status of this system. A scenario like this would mean it is conceivable to think of an appreciative victim of epistemic injustice.

I argue in this paper for a novel phenomenon I call *appreciative silencing*. By appreciative silencing, I mean those instances of epistemic silencing where (i) the perpetrator relies on ‘hegemonic intuitions’, (ii) the victim is neither resistant to the oppression they experience nor do they recognise it as such, and (iii) the victim shows or at least experiences appreciation towards the system that oppresses them. The first and second conditions are not jointly necessary for instances of appreciative silencing. Either is sufficient. However, the third condition of appreciation (or cognate affective response) is necessary.

I begin in section 1 by showing that in some cases where someone is a victim of epistemic injustice, the kind of emotional responses we have come to expect in such scenarios are not present. Instead, we see the victims being appreciative of the harm they face. After that, I drill down on the epistemic dimension of the problems that make this counterintuitive response to injustice possible in section 2. Then, I explain the particular features of appreciative silencing in section 3. I finish section 4 by arguing for the primary and secondary harms of appreciative silencing.

1. Epistemic injustice without ‘anger’

Is it possible for a victim of epistemic harm to appreciate the harm? Consider the following scenario.

²As an argument either way does not affect the argument I aim to make.

³I use the term hegemonic to refer to the dominantly accepted ideologies within a society. This way of seeing hegemony is in line with Antonio Gramsci’s initial conception of the term. See Bates (1975) for more on this.

THE GRATEFUL GRADUATE: Peter studied and obtained multiple degrees from universities that adopt the Western curriculum. When asked what he attributes his success to in an interview, Peter talks about his childhood growing up in Nigeria. For Peter, the reason for his success is that as a child in Nigeria, he went to schools where he was taught ‘correctly’ (a Western curriculum) and taught to speak the ‘proper way’ (English), and was scolded when he spoke in his home language (Urhobo) which is considered to be ‘vernacular’, and ‘uncivilised’. Peter becomes a teacher in a Nigerian school and asks his students not to speak in their mother tongue because it is unintelligible and uncivilised. Instead, they should all speak in English because it symbolises civility and intelligibility. However, one of Peter’s students, Amina, refuses to abide by this and claims that her local language is perfectly intelligible and civilised.

This scenario is common in most colonised countries (and is, indeed, similar to my experience growing up in Nigeria). The literature on various epistemic bad practices gives us the resources to theorise the epistemic wrongs in this scenario and the harms done to Peter. Through colonisation – which has an epistemic dimension – Peter is mistreated as an epistemic agent; he is a victim of epistemic injustice.

By epistemic colonisation, I mean those ‘practices that are harmful to the epistemic lives of the colonised as producers and receivers of knowledge’ (Tobi 2020: 261). In Peter’s case, the most obvious of these is the imposition of the English language on him. We can imagine how the process of this imposition involves some instances of testimonial injustice since the imposition is premised on the unintelligibility of Peter’s language.⁴ Any testimony Peter would have given in his language would not get the credibility it deserves. Recall that testimonial injustice occurs when an agent is harmed in their capacity as a knower due to a credibility deficit. Prejudicial stereotypes cause this credibility deficit. The prejudicial stereotypes in cases of epistemic colonisation are those stereotypes about the colonised as uncivilised, savages, etc.

When we consider the role these stereotypes have in the level of credibility given to Peter, we see how instances like these are cases of testimonial injustice. An effect of this in Peter’s case is the marginalisation of his language in favour of the coloniser’s language. This sort of linguistic domination that imposes a different language on a people can lead to other variants of wilful and unwilful hermeneutical injustices (Fricker 2007, Poulhaus 2012). When Peter is forced to use a different language, concepts meaningful to him in his language are no longer available to him to articulate the injustices he experiences. To the extent that languages are a conduit for knowledge and intelligibility, we can see how Peter is a victim of testimonial injustice in the first instance and hermeneutical injustice in the second instance.

As was stated previously, Fricker (2007) notes a purely epistemic harm that might arise from instances of testimonial injustice. That harm is that ‘knowledge that would be passed on to a hearer is not received’. The speaker is prevented ‘from successfully putting knowledge into the public domain’. Fricker sees this as an ‘unfreedom of our collective speech situation’ (43). For Fricker, the harm of testimonial injustice is that it prevents an epistemic agent from communicating effectively. That is, an agent’s

⁴Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o (1986) in his seminal work *Decolonizing the Mind* focuses on language as the primary loci of epistemic decolonisation. This argument points to the central role that linguicide played in enabling the epistemic dimension of colonisation. Kwasi Wiredu (2002) makes a similar argument in the context of philosophy.

utterance fails to get the desired uptake. This is one factor that causes the gap in the knowledge economy⁵ responsible for other strands of epistemic injustice (hermeneutical injustice, contributory injustice, wilful hermeneutical ignorance). When an epistemic agent's testimony or utterance fails to get the desired uptake, or when an agent is unsuccessful in putting knowledge into the public domain due to insufficiencies in the collective hermeneutical resources, that epistemic agent is silenced.

This harm can be understood in the simple sense of silencing (Langton 1993; Maitra 2017), which involves simply preventing Peter from speaking. Or it can be understood in more subtle forms of silencing that involve a breakdown in communicative reciprocity or a failure to attain the desired uptake (Hornsby and Langton 1998; Fricker 2007; Dotson 2011). When an epistemic agent experiences this, the appropriate response to this harm and other harms and wrongs of epistemic injustice almost always involves anger. This is an appropriate response to injustice as anger is the emotion of injustice. This anger is a catalyst for creating resistant knowledge that pushes back against ignorance and oppressive systems (Bailey 2018).

However, there is a little twist to Peter's situation that means it does not fit squarely within what is available in the literature so far: Peter is appreciative of the system that silences him. He thanks the system for his 'success'. This system that Peter is thankful to for his success is one that oppresses him. But with time, rather than being seen as an oppressive system, this system becomes hegemonic in the minds of Peter and his fellow victims. This becomes the epistemic framework that Peter and his community operate on. Call this epistemic framework A. Within epistemic framework A, we see how Peter is the victim of different varieties of epistemic injustice that lead to the formation of the intuitions about intelligibility that guide his epistemic system. He is, firstly, a victim of testimonial injustice. Recall, testimonial injustice happens when identity prejudice affects the credibility that a person's testimony gets. In most colonial societies, this sort of injustice is primary and is the starting point for the linguistic and eventual hermeneutical marginalisation that these societies experience (Tobi 2020). And secondly, the hermeneutical injustice and marginalisation that are an effect of the prior testimonial injustice lead to the formation of epistemic framework A. Within epistemic framework A, it becomes possible for Peter, a victim of testimonial injustice, to be the perpetrator of the same injustice simultaneously. Let me explain how.

When Peter discredits his students' languages and teaches them to operate from epistemic framework A, he engages in a process similar to the one unjust to him. Peter, a victim of epistemic injustice, becomes a perpetrator of epistemic injustice. This is possible because Peter has accepted epistemic framework A as his operative epistemic framework. Neither anything within epistemic framework A nor anyone who fully believes in the claims of epistemic framework A offers resistance to this injustice and perpetuation of ignorance in the way that we have come to know and expect from the literature when there is an instance of epistemic injustice. However, the intuition remains that Peter is the victim of epistemic injustice, and his actions, in turn, are instances of epistemic injustice to his students.

When Amina refuses to abide by the claims of epistemic framework A and claims that her local language also has the element of intelligibility, she stands in resistance to epistemic framework A. This is the kind of resistance we are used to from the

⁵Fricker (2007) understands the primary cause of hermeneutical injustice to be structural prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resources. When I use the term 'knowledge economy' in this paper, I am referring to this shared hermeneutical and general epistemic resources within a society.

literature and generally expect in cases of epistemic injustice. In this scenario, we see this sort of resistance from Amina but not from Peter. It remains the case that there is something wrong with Peter showing appreciation for the injustices he experiences.⁶ Because if we take a step back, we see that Peter and his community did not come up with this epistemic framework A independently. Rather, it is something that they have come to accept over time due to the impact of colonialism. It has become hegemonic in their collective understating. Peter is effectively a victim of a unique kind of epistemic injustice.

It is a form of epistemic injustice where the victims become accomplices to the injustices they suffer. This form of epistemic injustice is crucial in helping us make sense of instances of epistemic injustice where there is no resistance or friction against the injustice. Instead, we even get victims who appreciate the system that oppresses them. This sort of epistemic injustice is enabled by a harmful phenomenon that I call *appreciative silencing*.

By appreciative silencing, I mean those instances of epistemic silencing where (1) the perpetrator relies on 'hegemonic intuitions' (I explain this term shortly), (2) the victim is neither resistant to the oppression they experience, nor do they recognise it as such, and (3) the victim shows or at least experiences appreciation towards the system that oppresses them. By hegemonic intuitions here, I mean those in-built standards of validation with which we judge epistemic systems. That is, the unquestioned, generally accepted, and biased epistemic practices that guide our epistemic lives. These hegemonic intuitions I argue for are similar to what Tommie Shelby (2014) considers to be foundational to racism. Shelby (2014: 66) argues that '*Racism is a set of misleading beliefs and implicit attitudes about "races" or race relations whose wide currency serves a hegemonic social function*' (author's italics). The hegemonic status of these sorts of ideologies means they are easily internalised. In the case of Peter, the internalised hegemonic intuition is the 'superiority' of the English language and the Western academic curriculum over those indigenous to Peter. So, when we consider a particular epistemic system superior to another, we do this based on some prejudgments. These prejudgments are our hegemonic intuitions.

They count as hegemonic intuitions when they are the intuitions of the dominantly situated, accepted widely and to a greater extent than other competing intuitions in a given epistemic community. So, apart from the harms done to Peter, which are apparent and have been argued for by most theories on epistemic injustices, there is the harm done to the knowledge economy through the gap created by appreciative silencing. To the extent that language is a conveyor of meaning and intelligible epistemic resources, the appreciative silencing of Peter's language (as an instance of appreciative silencing) creates a gap in the knowledge economy. It leaves us worse off as epistemic agents when we fail to know what we should have known because of the pervasive nature of our epistemic practices.

⁶The conception of 'adaptive preferences' (Khader 2011) in the feminist literature captures this intuition in the background of my paper that victims of injustice can sometimes collude with an oppressive system. Serene Khader (2011: 42) understands adaptive preferences as nonconductive preferences that oppressed people have due to internalised deprivation. While the focus of the adaptive preferences literature is on human flourishing more generally, my focus here is on the influence of these internalised oppressive situations on our epistemic lives. (Thanks to an anonymous reviewer from this journal for pointing me to this insightful literature on adaptive preferences.)

2. Showing appreciation for harms

What are the exact conditions for something to count as appreciative silencing, and how do these come about? For ease of explanation, I first show how it is possible to have an appreciative response to injustice in a social context. I then show how this is analogous to what happens in the epistemic context.

FARMERS AND MINERS: This is a case of social injustice in a colonial context that spans three generations. The first generation is my grandparents, the second is my parents, and the third is mine. My grandparents are a community of farmers. During their time, they witness the advent of the colonisers. These colonisers come into their community, take up a large chunk of land on the village's periphery, and start mining gold from that piece of land. My grandparents are indifferent to this situation because there is no intrusion on their farmlands, and they are not harmed. They live side by side with the colonisers, one a community of farmers and the other a community of miners. Everything is harmonious.

After a while, the colonisers form a community living alongside my grandparents and my parents at this point. My parents now view the colonisers as legitimate members of the larger community. Some years down the line, the mining activities of the colonisers begin to have some effects on the environment. The victims here are my parent's community. The productivity of their farmlands dwindles. This harms my parents. However, they are not angry. They see it as the natural course of things. To my parents, the colonisers are engaged in the ways of their community (mining), while they (my parents) are involved in their ways (farming). With the dwindling productivity of our farmlands, my generation is left with no choice but to abandon farming altogether. Left jobless, we are offered jobs to work in the mines of the colonisers. We are appreciative to the colonisers for this opportunity. They are now seen as our saviours, and we gladly work for them. However, it remains the case that they are responsible for us losing our source of livelihood. We do not see this. All we see are people offering us a way out. This is a case of harm done to people that elicits a response of appreciation rather than anger.

My choice of a colonial context example here is deliberate. The first reason for this is that the harm in this context is incremental and is disguised as good deeds. This disguise is what triggers the appreciative response at the end. The second reason for this choice of example is that it absolves me of the need to argue that there is a wrong involved since the wrongs of colonialism are well documented at this stage (Ngũgĩ 1986; Wiredu 2002; Ypi 2013; Tobi 2020). However, what I argue for can be extended to other systems of oppression that, at least, have a historical and continual edge to them (patriarchy, heteronormativity or racism, for instance).

Three features of **FARMERS AND MINERS** are noteworthy. First, the wrong in the scenario and the harm done take time. This makes the wrongs and harms both systemic and not apparent at first glance. The obscure nature of the wrongs and harms makes appreciation possible in the end. This incremental process is evident in my example. Still, I do not mean to claim that this is the case in all instances of colonialism or for appreciative silencing since the effects are immediate for most.

Second, the wrong becomes the norm. With my parents' generation accepting the colonisers as legitimate community members, a new system is formed where it is

difficult to know what it was like before that. This creates a collective knowledge passed on and engraved in the collective social understanding. The collective social understanding gains a hegemonic status that makes it difficult to see the harm in the colonisers' actions. Third, eventually, when the wrongs harm me, I do not see it as such, and I appreciate the solution.

As members of different communities, different resources are available to the miners and the farmers. This means that for me to move into the community of the miners and be able to work in the mines, I have to learn the language and ways of the miners and adapt to *mining*. If I ever become successful as a miner, I will be thankful to the miners for the opportunity they have offered me. I begin to see mining as superior to farming (owing to the success mining promises) and gradually lose touch with farming. The miners are responsible for the conditions that make me reliant on mining, which is clearly wronging the farmers. When mining gains its dominant status as the paradigm for success for me and future generations, its dominance will be problematic. The problem with mining is how it took root and how it maintains its privileged status. Recall that this involved the wrongful occupation of land. This led to processes that destroyed the lands of the original inhabitants of the community and are still serving to keep their descendants underprivileged.

If this analogy works in showing the wrongs and harms involved in a process like this, we should feel the same way for its epistemic equivalent.⁷ My marginalised epistemic system is analogous to farming, while the epistemic system of the colonisers is analogous to mining, and the mental universe of my people and me is analogous to the land occupied by the colonisers. From now on, I will refer to the epistemic framework of my people and the epistemic framework of the colonisers as epistemic frameworks A and B, respectively.

Now, let me focus on the epistemic equivalent of two features of this example that are central to my conception of appreciative silencing. The first is the problematic element of an epistemic system that gains its dominance through a process similar to the one in *FARMERS AND MINERS*. The second is the possibility of a harmful situation eliciting its victim's appreciation rather than anger.

2.1. Foundational epistemic problems

To elucidate the problematic element of an epistemic system that gains its dominance through the kind of process I have shown above, my starting point is Dotson's (2018) idea of a 'problem with epistemology' that normalises oppressive conditions. Dotson (2018: 130) defines a problem with epistemology as 'problematic epistemological orientations one can have toward world-features'.

Epistemological orientations, here, refers to expressed modes of defense for some claim and/or argument that are generated according to orienting variables. *Orienting variables* are understood as markers that determine not just higher and lower epistemic status, but appropriate domain for epistemic considerations. (Dotson 2018: 131, author's emphasis)

For Dotson (2018: 130), a problem with epistemology makes it possible to develop 'difficult-to-defeat arguments' in support of a system that normalises oppressive

⁷This example of the *FARMERS AND MINERS* is similar to the material exploitation that accompanied colonisation in most cases. Although I have tried to avoid talking about the epistemic dimension of the example above, it is not always distinguishable since these processes of exploitation (material, human, epistemic, etc.) are intertwined.

conditions. In my example, the evident ‘success’ and the future success that the coloniser’s epistemic system promises make it difficult to argue that my failing epistemic system is comparable to the coloniser’s epistemic system. This measure of ‘success’ is equivalent to the ‘orienting variables’ on Dotson’s account. I take the idea from Dotson that it is difficult to successfully argue against oppressive epistemic systems at times due to the resilience they have built. This difficulty makes the appreciative response to oppression possible in some instances.

What I add to Dotson’s argument emphasises the initially oppressive and historically persistent structures that create these oppressive epistemic systems. I tag this hybrid version ‘foundational epistemic problems’ in the rest of this paper. A foundational epistemic problem is an oppressive epistemic situation that arises from social conditions of oppression that influence our epistemic systems in an obscure, persistent, and, thus, difficult to defeat way. Let me explain what it means.

In my example, the foundational epistemic problem with the coloniser’s epistemic framework is tied to the system’s formation. Recall that its formation involved the wrongful occupation of the mental universe of my people. This led to processes that destroyed our epistemic framework. The focus here is on the distinct epistemic problem, even though ethical issues might arise from my example. This can be likened to epistemic domination in society, such as the process of epistemic colonisation.⁸ The resistance against this domination is what much of the literature on testimonial injustice, for instance, is about. However, there are instances where this domination faces no resistance. Instead, it is faced with a frantic effort by the dominated to try to fit into the system of dominance. Instances like this can be seen clearly in the processes of epistemic colonisation.⁹ If we understand epistemic colonisation as a process that involves the following three stages, it becomes clearer how epistemic systems with foundational epistemic problems are formed. These stages are (a) disregard of existing epistemic frameworks in the colonies, (b) the imposition of the coloniser’s epistemic frameworks, and (c) the formation of a new epistemic framework by/for the colonised.¹⁰

When a process involving these three stages to varying degrees is the foundation of our epistemic system, we have a foundational epistemic problem. Epistemic systems with this sort of foundational issues become breeding grounds for appreciative silencing since they are, for the most part, impervious to meaningful resistance. This is because, with time, epistemic systems develop resilience to external influences that try to disrupt them. So, if we have an epistemic system built on oppressive ideologies, which have evolved over time, the hermeneutical and general epistemic resources available to this system make it easy for it to resist an external force.

⁸Ngũgĩ (1986: 16) argues that through linguistic domination in the colonisation context, the colonised’s mental universe is dominated. To the extent that language is a tool for meaning-making, we can see how this sort of domination is also epistemic because the common epistemic resources available are those of the dominantly situated.

⁹While I use colonialism as my example here, the formation of hegemonic intuitions that can lead to appreciative silencing is also applicable to other instances of oppression. What ties them together is the historically, dominantly, and oppressively situated foundations of these intuitions. We can think of ideas around patriarchy and heteronormativity, for instance, that hold these features. These systems (colonialism, patriarchy, heteronormativity) for the most part have faced a fair deal of resistance. However, these oppressive systems have created some intuitions in the society that remain hegemonic. This is evident in the struggle of former colonies to try and fit into ‘the norms’ of society. Or when male standards are set as the norm that women are expected to attain.

¹⁰See also Tobi (2020).

Think of it in terms of world universities ranking, for instance. The older universities are generally ranked better than the newer ones. This is because, over time, the older universities have developed to such an extent that it is not easy for the newer ones to be considered superior to them. This does not necessarily mean that the older universities are better academic spaces than the newer ones.

Put differently; epistemic systems build their resilience not only due to their superiority but also because of how old they are. This is not necessarily a bad thing. However, if that epistemic system was built on, and influenced by, oppressive social ideologies, we are stuck with a very resilient and oppressive epistemic system (Medina 2011: 28). When we have a highly resilient but oppressive epistemic system, it becomes difficult for members of socially marginalised groups within that oppressive epistemic system to make sense of their oppression (Dotson 2014: 121). This epistemic system becomes the shared norms and understanding within a given society by which the society understands itself and is guided.

As I hope to have shown, these epistemic systems have a foundational epistemic problem in oppressive situations. When an epistemic framework with a foundational problem is resilient towards external forces that aim to change it, it ensures its sustenance and the sustenance of that oppressive power structure. When an epistemic system with a foundational issue is resilient and becomes hegemonic, the oppression embedded in the epistemic system gets internalised by the oppressed. This internalised oppression that leads to accepting and normalising oppressive situations is responsible for appreciative silencing. You can say the oppressed have been brainwashed as a way of speaking. This brainwashing ensures that the oppressed view the oppressor as the paradigm of progress and civility. So, rather than create or stick to their ways, they are caught in a frantic drive to try to be like the ‘master’.

In this drive to be like the ‘master’, members of oppressed groups form or adapt to a new epistemic system. In most cases (as in the FARMERS AND MINERS analogy), this epistemic system is the epistemic system of the oppressor. One of the problems with this is that, more often than not, these epistemic systems are of the nature that sustains the undue superiority of those it belongs to by creating the wrong kind of resilience against any idea that threatens it.

2.2. *Silencing that elicits appreciation*

I hope, at this stage, that I have shown how an epistemic system with foundational epistemic problems can be accepted by those whom it oppresses. This is a crucial element of appreciative silencing. If this problematic epistemic system offers the oppressed any semblance of success, we can imagine the oppressed grateful to the oppressive system. Recall THE GRATEFUL GRADUATE. We see there that Peter appreciates a system that is oppressive to him. This dimension of that example is what I aimed to make clear in sections 2 and 2.1. The core element is an epistemic system with foundational epistemic problems that have become hegemonic to the oppressed. This is what makes appreciation possible. This case with Peter represents more straightforward cases of appreciative silencing where the hegemonic status of the oppressive epistemic system is sufficient to make the victims of oppression appreciative.

A more complex case of appreciative silencing requires that the resilience of the oppressive epistemic system comes into play. For example, when a black person complains that the police disproportionately target black people, and the response they get is statistics that show that white people are also being targeted by police – or

legal explanations for why the treatment that black people receive is justified, the resilience of an epistemic framework is at play. If black people accept these legal explanations as valid over their experience, they are victims of appreciative silencing. This is problematic. Firstly, the epistemic framework is the one that considers these statistics and legal injunctions to have superior epistemic power to the claims of injustice by the black person. Secondly, what this resilience does is that it sustains a system that one group considers to be oppressive to them. Considering that the bulk of the legal systems in most countries existed before the abolition of some oppressive systems and that these oppressive systems (apartheid, Jim Crow law, colonialism) were legal,¹¹ it makes sense to take the leap that these laws are not in the interest of the oppressed in the first instance. This point was made as far back as the 1960s by Stokely Carmichael when he argued against integration. For Carmichael (1966), integration meant that black people were included in a white society. Apart from the problematic fact that this society was not made for black people, integration also maintained the presupposition that everything white was good.

Carmichael's resistance here and the resistance shown by Amina in *THE GRATEFUL GRADUATE* example represent the kind of response appropriate to oppressive situations and help track these oppressive situations. However, even when resistance like this is shown, it is still possible for appreciative silencing to occur when the resilience of the oppressive epistemic system comes into play. Let me explain how.

As I have argued previously, a feature of the dominant oppressive epistemic system is that they offer, or at least promise, 'success'. In *FARMERS AND MINERS*, the success is in the eventual economic fruitfulness of mining. In *THE GRATEFUL GRADUATE* example, Peter boasts of his success which he attributes to the oppressive epistemic system in which he finds himself. These 'successes', in a way, are grounds for considering these systems to be superior to their counterparts. They make these epistemic systems impervious to change – if they are proven to work, keep them. It is imaginable to think that after Amina tried to resist Peter's claims about the superiority of the English language, Peter gave 'good reasons' why she was wrong. If Amina is to achieve any success epistemically (or even socially) within that system, she must accept Peter's reasons. If she goes on to be 'successful', like Peter, she will appreciate the system for the success it offers. This is possible because even though Amina resists initially, the epistemic system that Peter has endorsed is resilient enough and is hegemonic.

This is another dimension to appreciative silencing, where there is a form of resistance. Still, the resistance gains no traction because the victim has the same hegemonic intuitions as their oppressor. In this case, the hegemonic intuition dictates what counts as success. The hegemonic intuitions of epistemic systems with foundational epistemic problems lead to appreciative silencing. The hegemonic intuition in *FARMERS AND MINERS*, for instance, is the longevity and success of mining over farming. This success fails to consider the harm caused by mining on its way to the top.

3. Appreciative silencing

Recall that I define appreciative silencing as a form of epistemic silencing where (1) the perpetrator relies on ill-formed hegemonic intuitions, (2) the victim does not exhibit a fit of resistant anger or is unaware that they are a victim of an oppressive situation, and

¹¹And in some cases, they are still legal. Anti-gay laws in a country such as Nigeria (Adebanjo 2015), for instance.

(3) the victim feels and possibly shows appreciation instead. I explain these elements of appreciative silencing in more detail in the rest of this section.

By hegemonic intuitions, I mean those in-built standards of validation with which we judge what is properly epistemic within an epistemic system. When we consider a particular epistemic system to be superior to another, we do this based on some pre-judgment. This pre-judgment is the intuition that guides us. It is not always the case that our intuitions are hegemonic. They can be affected by gender, race, sexuality, beliefs about religion, etc. In these cases, individuals can have intuitions shaped by the particular social group they find themselves in. For instance, I can have the intuition that, as a black person, I need to be consciously aware of my black body and navigate the world accordingly. This intuition is not hegemonic if the dominantly situated do not share it. An intuition becomes hegemonic when it is the intuition of the dominantly situated and holds a prominent place in the collective subconscious. For instance, members of a sub-Saharan African community that advocate a system of consensual democracy over a majoritarian one. While this represents one aspect of their lives, the hegemonic intuition guiding them is the Ubuntu moral theory that promotes harmony over discord as the measure for right action (Metz 2007: 334).

This is one instance where a hegemonic intuition is not harmful. Consider another hegemonic intuition that is commonly held with the aid of this popular riddle. A boy and his father are in an accident and rushed to the hospital. When they get there, the Doctor says, 'I cannot treat him; he is my son'. Who is the Doctor? The confusion this might bring, or the fact that it is a riddle in the first place, points to a harmful hegemonic intuition we might hold. It is the intuition that Doctors are males. This is an example of an ill-formed hegemonic intuition. Intuitions of this kind are relied upon to silence another, which leads to an instance of appreciative silencing. This extends beyond clear cases to all cases where a hegemonic intuition is affected by prejudicial stereotypes and cases where prejudicial stereotypes guide our validation of other epistemic systems.

So, if I consider my epistemic system superior to another based on my prejudicial stereotypes about them, or if my epistemic system promotes prejudicial stereotypes about others, any hegemonic intuition I hold from it is ill-formed. Further, if I am a member of a socially dominant group, my (conscious or unconscious) imposition of this ill-formed hegemonic intuition on members of other social groups constitutes an epistemic injustice. One way to think of the epistemic injustice that happens here (especially when the imposition is unconscious) is in Dotson's (2012) sense of 'contributory injustice'. In what follows, I elucidate appreciative silencing by discussing the points of similarity and difference to contributory injustice.

Dotson (2012: 31) defines contributory injustice as a form of wilful hermeneutical ignorance that maintains and utilises structurally prejudiced hermeneutical resources to harm the epistemic agency of marginalised knowers due to 'situated ignorance'. Here, 'Situated ignorance' refers to a kind of ignorance that is an offshoot of one's social situatedness insofar as this social situatedness fosters close-mindedness to other epistemic and social realities. What Dotson shows here is that the situated ignorance of one group makes it possible for them to ignore whole parts of the world that they do not find relevant. This leads to the formation of prejudiced hermeneutical resources, which, in my terms, are the bedrock for ill-formed hegemonic intuitions. Seeing that members of dominant groups that rely on these intuitions are, at the very least, culpable for their decisions to ignore whole parts of the world that they find irrelevant, it stands to reason that they can also be held culpable for the unconscious decisions they make as

a result of their 'situated ignorance'. The point from Dotson's (2012: 31) contributory injustice that is vital in thinking about the possible harm of unconscious actions and the culpability of its perpetrators is that there is no single set of hermeneutical resources that everyone depends on. Instead, there are pockets of hermeneutical resources relevant to and available within each social group. Acting out of one of these while neglecting the others constitutes contributory injustice.

In this sense, appreciative silencing involves a form of contributory injustice broadly construed.

However, the second feature of appreciative silencing distinguishes it from contributory injustice. In Dotson's (2012: 32) analysis of contributory injustice, the victim tries to resist the injustice. In contrast, the victims of appreciative silencing neither show nor feel resistance. Even in cases where they offer resistance, the resilience of the oppressive epistemic system is sufficient to convince the oppressed that their resistance is unwarranted. This is a crucial point where appreciative silencing differs from contributory injustice and other forms of epistemic bad practices.

Recall that anger is an appropriate response to injustice. In cases of epistemic injustice, it is a form of resistant anger that acts as a catalyst to form resistant knowledge. This resistant anger has been a way of identifying instances of epistemic injustice. However, this feature is not present in appreciative silencing. This is because of the processes that are responsible for this injustice. Recall in *FARMERS AND MINERS*, the harms and wrongs of the injustices here are disguised as good deeds in the colonial context and other similar practices. In cases where they are not disguised as good deeds, they are presented as 'rational' alternatives that ultimately silence the victims of this injustice.

Take, for instance, the case of Peter and Amina from *THE GRATEFUL GRADUATE*. Since Amina shares similar hegemonic intuitions as Peter, Peter can effectively silence Amina by appealing to their shared intuition on what counts as success. To clarify, it is not that Amina is unaware of what is happening to her when she complains (if she has the same hegemonic intuitions as Peter). She knows something is wrong. However, by subscribing to the same hegemonic intuition about what counts as success as Peter, she is a victim of an ill-formed hegemonic intuition. What makes this a case of appreciative silencing is that Amina *accepts* this hegemonic intuition to be the case. If she does not accept this hegemonic intuition but pushes back against it actively or doubts its implications secretly, it will be a case of 'epistemic gaslighting'.¹²

The final (and perhaps the most harmful) feature of appreciative silencing is that the victims appreciate the systems that harm them. This appreciation comes through when the victim of the epistemic harm thanks the system directly or indirectly, thereby ending all epistemic engagements. In *THE GRATEFUL GRADUATE*, if Amina thanks Peter or the epistemic system, that will probably end the conversation. The danger here is that Amina does not see herself as a victim but as someone who has been helped. Whatever knowledge would have been gotten from her pushback will be lost. This loss is not caused simply by some sort of systematic erasure but also by the victim's blindness to their situation. It is of the nature of the blindness created here that the victims become *credible agents of injustice*. That is, by accepting and being appreciative of this injustice, the victims become agents of this injustice by subscribing to the ill-formed hegemonic intuition. Their membership in the social group that suffers this injustice gives them higher credibility when discussing issues affecting their social group. However, because

¹²I do not talk about epistemic gaslighting here, as it is not within the scope of this paper. See McKinnon (2017) and Stark (2019) for an account of epistemic gaslighting.

of the ill-formed hegemonic intuition that they hold, their contributions about their social group would be deleterious to their social group itself. This creates a problematic situation where the creation and spread of ignorance have the exact characteristics and seem more credible than the creation and spread of knowledge. So, Amina, like Peter, is more likely to be believed when she says the epistemic system of the colonised holds degrees of intelligibility that her epistemic system lacks.

Instances of this happening can be seen in marginalised people's efforts to sound, look and act in a certain way that is considered 'smart', 'civilised', 'normal' or 'acceptable'. These ways are usually the ways of the socially dominant groups and these recommendations, in themselves, hold no epistemic value.

4. Where is the harm in appreciative silencing?

I submit that the primary harm of appreciative silencing is to the collective knowledge economy and the secondary harm is to the victim. The reliance on ill-formed hegemonic intuitions ensures that the dominant epistemic position flexes its resilience so that it pushes back against any system-threatening position. This ensures that what is accepted in, or remains of, the collective 'social imaginary'¹³ (Medina 2011: 28) are intuitions and ideas that sustain the undue advantage of dominantly situated knowers. This sustenance leads to the neglect of hermeneutical resources from the marginally situated knowers. This is because while dominantly situated knowledge is more resilient, marginally situated knowledge does not.

Take, for instance, the dominant situatedness of Western medicine vs the marginal situatedness of medical practices from the global South. Western medicine has a higher resilience for many reasons, some good, some not so good. The good reasons could include its effectiveness, trust in it developed over time, the rigour of its methods, etc. To the extent that these factors are responsible for its sustenance, the resilience it has built is a good thing. However, if factors like social standing and stereotypes about the global South are also responsible for Western medicine's higher resilience over medical practices from the global South, it is a bad thing. This is because the resilience here is no longer based solely on its epistemic merits and benefits but also on biased and epistemically irrelevant factors. When factors like these are responsible for the resilience of Western medical practices, it is a bad thing. Suppose a person from the global South accepts and is thankful for Western medicine over the indigenous medical practices due to these pernicious reasons. In that case, they are a victim of appreciative silencing.

The harm it causes to the knowledge economy also has a relational dimension. When we privilege Western medical practices, we do so at the expense of medical practices from the global South. Hence, our reliance on a perniciously formed epistemic system and the dominance this system has leads to the unwarranted erosion and potential loss of knowledge that we could have otherwise had. To the extent that bad epistemic practices and intuitions are bad for epistemology, the primary harm of appreciative silencing is to the knowledge economy.

The secondary harm of appreciative silencing, which is done to the epistemic agent here, is the topic of most debates on agential epistemic injustices when a person is harmed in their capacity as a knower. Just as in other instances of silencing identified

¹³Medina uses social imaginary to refer to a collectively shared repository that guides how thoughts are shared and listened to within a particular culture.

in the literature, appreciative silencing involves, broadly construed, a breakdown in communicative reciprocity. This is because when an agent suffers appreciative silencing, they fail to participate adequately in the knowledge economy. Instead, they are made to operate from and appreciate systems that are oppressive to them. These ill-treatments that victims of appreciative silencing suffer as epistemic agents are what I consider the secondary harm of appreciative silencing.

I consider this harm to the epistemic agent to be secondary because it is caused, in most instances, by the harm to the knowledge economy. The gap already created in the knowledge economy is what enables victims of appreciative silencing to keep being silenced. Since appreciative silencing relies on already accepted hegemonic intuitions, these intuitions that represent the gap in the knowledge economy are responsible for the harms that victims of appreciative silencing experience in their capacity as knowers. Just to clarify, when I consider the harm to the knowledge economy to be the primary harm and the harm to the epistemic agent to be the secondary harm, I do not in any way mean to suggest that the harm done to the knowledge economy is superior to, or more important than the harm done to the agent, and vice versa. My reason for classifying them in this way is what I have just mentioned.¹⁴

References

- Adebajo T.A. (2015). 'Culture, Morality and the Law: Nigeria's Anti-Gay Law in Perspective'. *International Journal of Discrimination and the Law* 15(4), 256–70.
- Bailey A. (2018). 'On Anger, Silence, and Epistemic Injustice'. *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement* 84, 93–115.
- Bates T. (1975). 'Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony'. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 36(2), 351–66.
- Berenstein N. (2016). 'Epistemic Exploitation'. *Ergo* 3(22), 569–90.
- Carmichael S. (1966). 'Integration Is Completely Irrelevant to Us.' *The Movement*, June, 2(4). The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee of California.
- Dotson K. (2011). 'Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing.' *Hypatia* 26(2), 237–57.
- Dotson K. (2012). 'A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression.' *Frontiers* 33(1), 24–50.
- Dotson K. (2014). 'Conceptualising Epistemic Oppression.' *Social Epistemology* 28(2), 115–38.
- Dotson K. (2018). 'Accumulating Epistemic Power: A Problem with Epistemology.' *Philosophical Topics* 46(1), 129–54.
- Fricker M. (2007). *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Grasswick H. (2018). 'Understanding Epistemic Trust Injustices and Their Harms.' *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement*.
- Hornsby J. and Langton R. (1998). 'Free Speech and Illocution.' *Legal Theory* 4, 21–37.
- Khader S. (2011). *Adaptive Preferences and Women's Empowerment*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Langton R. (1993). 'Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts.' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 22(4), 294–330.
- Maitra I. (2017). 'Speech and Silencing.' In A. Garry, S.J. Khader and A. Stone (eds), *The Routledge Companion to Feminist Philosophy*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- McKinnon R. (2017). 'Allies Behaving Badly: Gaslighting as Epistemic Injustice.' In I.J. Kidd, J. Medina and G. Pohlhaus, Jr (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*. London: Routledge.

¹⁴I would like to thank Veli Mitova for reading various earlier versions of this paper and for the fruitful discussions we had on these ideas. Thanks also to Gaile Pohlhaus and Jessie Munton for comments on an early draft of this paper. I am also grateful for the comments of the anonymous referees who reviewed this paper for *Episteme* and for the comments I got from participants of the Epistemic Injustice, Reasons and Agency Workshop, University of Johannesburg.

- Medina J.** (2011). 'The Relevance of Credibility Excess in a Proportional View of Epistemic Injustice: Differential Epistemic Authority and the Social Imaginary.' *Social Epistemology* 25(1), 15–35.
- Metz T.** (2007). 'Toward an African Moral Theory.' *Journal of Political Philosophy* 15(3), 321–41.
- Ngūgī T.** (1986). *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: James Currey.
- Peet A.** (2017). 'Epistemic Injustice in Utterance Interpretation.' *Synthese* 194, 3421–43.
- Pohlhaus G.** (2012). 'Relational Knowing and Epistemic Injustice: Toward a Theory of *Willful Hermeneutical Ignorance*.' *Hypatia* 27(4), 715–35.
- Pohlhaus G.** (2014). 'Discerning the Primary Epistemic Harm in Cases of testimonial Injustice.' *Social Epistemology* 28(2), 99–114.
- Srinivasan A.** (2018). 'The Aptness of Anger.' *Journal of Political Philosophy* 26(2), 123–44.
- Stark C.** (2019). 'Gaslighting, Misogyny, and Psychological Oppression.' *The Monist* 102, 221–35.
- Tobi A.** (2020). 'Towards a Plausible Account of Epistemic Decolonisation.' *Philosophical Papers* 49(2), 253–78.
- Wiredu K.** (2002). 'Conceptual Decolonisation as an Imperative in Contemporary African Philosophy: Some Personal Reflections.' *Rue Descartes* 36, 53–64.
- Ypi L.** (2013). 'What's Wrong with Colonialism.' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 41(2), 158–91.