Epistemic violence: reflections between the invisible and the ignorable.

Moira Pérez.

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Abstract: Among the forms of violence that affect socially marginalized identities, epistemic violence is probably one of the least addressed, in favor of more direct or spectacular ones. However, it is a political, ethical and epistemic phenomenon that affects everything from day-to-day relationships to professional practice, from grassroots activism to international law. Epistemic violence threatens the integrity of individuals and communities and plays a key role in power systems such as sexism, colonialism, ableism, among others. This work offers a characterization of the phenomenon as a type of "slow violence", and an analysis of some of the ways in which it is presented. Subsequently, it analyzes the link between epistemic violence and identity, and considers the possibility of a violence-free epistemic system. The paper seeks to offer tools to understand this form of violence more deeply and comprehensively, and to address it in the different spaces in which it is expressed.

Epistemic violence: reflections between the invisible and the ignorable[1]

The slow pace of epistemic violence

Despite its magnitude and persistence, epistemic violence continues to be relatively marginal in the Humanities and Social Sciences, which -except for some perspectives focused on racial, colonial / postcolonial, or gender issues- have been reluctant to consider the epistemic realm as a specific site of violence. Perhaps as a consequence, this form of violence is virtually absent from the public agenda of international organizations, state agencies and social movements. However, these are forms of violence that can be central to the experience of marginalized individuals, not only because they affect them in their epistemic exchanges, but also because the imbalance they cause in the social system feeds other types of violence and exclusion. On the other hand, epistemic violence as a structural phenomenon is a key factor, though unrecognized, in systems of privilege such as racism, sexism and cissexism, and as such it is strengthened by its own imperceptibility. In this article I propose a philosophical perspective, one among many other possible ones, to face the difficulty of detecting and analyzing those less evident forms of violence; I will also seek to understand its specifically epistemic character, and to outline some ideas for its resolution.

The notion of epistemic violence refers to the different ways in which violence is exercised in relation to the production, circulation and recognition of knowledge: the denial of epistemic agency for certain subjects, the unacknowledged exploitation of their epistemic resources, their objectification, among many others. A brief catalogue of "the network of unequal relationships in the production of knowledge", proposed by philosopher Blas Radi, includes phenomena such as "de-qualifying and disapproving epistemic subjectivity; objectifying; canceling epistemic authority, as well as a division of intellectual labor; instrumentalization; academic extractivism; misreadings; and colonial appropriation"[2]. Insofar as it is a form of violence, it has ethical and

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[2] Blas Radi, "On Trans* Epistemology: Critiques, Contributions, and Challenges", in *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2019, p. 52.

political consequences; since it is a specifically epistemic mode of violence, it also entails epistemic damage for individuals and the communities to which they belong.

This brief introductory outline already reveals one of the first difficulties that we find to conceptualize epistemic violence -and to address it in practice-: some of its presentations would not seem to fit into the concepts of violence that are more widespread in our culture, such as "the fact of using force and intimidation to obtain something", "coercion",[3] or the use of physical force. Traditional definitions of violence usually involve an action or set of specific actions, an agent (individual or -on occasions- collective, as is the case with institutional violence) and a victim. Here, on the other hand, we are dealing with much more diffuse forms of violence, characterized by their capillarity, their imprecise temporality and their quasi-independence of specific agents executing them. So, if we do not want to inflate the category of violence to such an extent that "everything can be violence", but we do not want to leave out its less direct, visible and punctual forms either (such as the one we are referring to here), we need to develop a definition of violence that accounts for its diverse modalities, while at the same time serving to stipulate its specificity. In view of this need, in what follows violence will be understood not as an action or an event, but rather as "a form of social relationships characterized by the denial of the other"[4], that is, the historically and socially located denial of the subjectivity, legitimacy or existence of another individual or community. Violence, then, will be understood as a structure, "a fundamental force in the framework of the ordinary world and in the multiple processes of that world"[5].

Within these parameters, epistemic violence can be understood as a form of what Rob Nixon has called "slow violence", that is, "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all"[6]. Slow violence, including what Lauren Berlant[7] called "slow death," happens on a different scale and puts into question our usual notions of temporality, agency and gravity in relation to violence. Contrary to the prevailing conceptions that represent it as an event or act that is specific, explosive and spectacular, we are facing a form of violence that is "rather incremental and accretive", but with "calamitous repercussions [that play] out across a range of temporal scales"[8]. Epistemic violence as I will understand it in this work responds to these characteristics: a gradual, cumulative form of violence, difficult to attribute to a particular agent, and imperceptible to many -frequently including its own victims-.

These traits imply that one of the first challenges facing those who seek to address epistemic violence, like other forms of slow violence, is to retrace the conceptions we inherit about this phenomenon, in order to grasp what it is exactly, what its forms are, and how it works. And, of course, to work on alternatives to face it. For this, it may be useful to begin by looking into the different expressions of epistemic violence and the different ways in which it functions.

Exploring the workings of epistemic violence

As with other modalities of violence, in its epistemic form violence has different shapes and

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[3]*Diccionario de la Lengua Española*, Madrid, Espasa-Calpe, 2005.

[4]Agustín Martínez Pacheco, "La violencia. Conceptualización y elementos para su estudio", in *Política y Cultura*, no. 46, 2016, p. 16.

[5]Bruce B. Lawrence & Aisha Karim, *On Violence. A Reader,* Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2007, p. 5.

[6]Rob Nixon, *Slow violence and the environmentalism of the poor*, Cambridge and London, Harvard University Press, 2011, p. 2.

[7]Lauren Berlant, "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)", in *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2007, pp. 754-780.

[8]Rob Nixon, op. cit., p. 2.

happens through the most diverse dynamics. In this section, I intend to offer a broad, though not exhaustive, characterization of different ways in which epistemic violence unfolds. In deploying this scheme, I am well aware of Gaile Pohlhaus Jr.'s warnings when describing a closely related phenomenon (to which we will return shortly): epistemic injustice. Pohlhaus[9] points out that offering a closed list of forms of epistemic injustice runs the risk of omitting other modalities that are not visible or relevant to the person who writes, but can be for others - particularly people who, because of a specific situation of oppression, are exposed to forms of epistemic violence that do not affect whoever is writing. This is why, instead of offering a closed taxonomy, I have chosen to focus on some of its outstanding features and forms of expression. This toolkit will surely allow us to analyze other phenomena that, due to my own positioning or the limitations of other studies done so far, have not been exposed yet.

At the root of any form of epistemic violence we find the compulsory assignment of subjects and cultural systems to one of two different and discrete spheres: "us" and "the others", each with its corresponding epistemic role. This phenomenon, called "othering", works by establishing an insurmountable distinction between "us" or "one" - the epistemic agents - and "them" or "others" - implicitly excluded and inferior, constructed in reference to that "one", while at the same time it makes it possible. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak develops the concept in relation to colonial domination and the ways in which "meaning/knowledge intersects power"[10], producing at once the colonized "other" and "the other text", the alternative historical narrative that consolidates an imperialist project[11]. Part of the violence in "othering" is that subjects are forcefully located in the place of epistemic (and, in this case, also political) objects of the "one", thus reconfiguring the world of those who are subjected to such violence (the colonizer is "worlding their own world", that is, "making the world" of colonized subjects[12]).

This bisection into two opposite and hierarchical areas sets the ground for all the forms of epistemic violence we will see in what follows. Returning to the definition given above of violence as "the historically and socially situated denial of the subjectivity, legitimacy or existence of another individual or community", we can organize the different expressions of epistemic violence around the different ways in which such denial takes place.

In the most extreme expression of this denial, the distinction "one" / "other" is deepened as a difference between the intelligible and the unintelligible, that is, what will not only fail to be included in epistemic exchanges as an authorized agent (as we will see in the cases below), but will not even be conceivable within that system. José Medina refers to this maximum degree of violence as epistemic death ("hermeneutical death" in the case that interests him, since he refers to the hermeneutical injustice), that is, the annihilation of the self "when subjects are not simply mistreated as intelligible communicators, but prevented from developing and exercising a voice, that is, prevented from participating in meaning-making and meaning-sharing practices"[13]. As Achille Mbembé has expressed, such distinction is drawn in terms of irreducible difference: in his analysis of Nineteenth-Century French racism, the author explains that "to point out that someone is a 'black man' equals to say that he is a biologically, intellectually and culturally predetermined being due to his irreducible difference. He would belong to a different species. And, as a distinct species, it should be described and catalogued. For the same reason,

[9]Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr., "Varieties of epistemic injustice", in Ian James Kidd, José Medina & Gaile Pohlhaus Jr., *Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice* (pp. 12-26), London, Routledge, 2017, p. 16.
[10]Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives", in *History and Theory*, vol. 24, no. 3, 1985, p. 255.
[11]*Ibid*., p. 257.
[12]*Ibid.,* p. 253.
[13]José Medina, "Varieties of hermeneutical injustice", in Ian James Kidd, José Medina & Gaile Pohlhaus Jr., *Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice* (pp. 41-52), 2017, p. 41.

he should be subject to a different moral classification"[14]. The unintelligible is thus sentenced to epistemic abjection - and, as a consequence, political, moral and social abjection as well.

Even before reaching the point of abjection or unintelligibility, subjects can be strongly diminished in their role in an epistemic exchange, that is, their epistemic agency can be reduced and their knowledge denigrated. The idea -and its application in practice- that certain people or types of people are not capable of producing adequate knowledge, or will not be able to evaluate or understand it, is one of the most evident forms of epistemic violence, even to the point of obscuring subtler, but equally effective, forms.

A practice that has long been denounced by critical epistemologies is that of objectification, which was already suggested above with Mbembé's reflection on the mandate to describe and catalogue. Here, the distinction "one" / "other" is given through the division of intellectual labour, where one part is considered "subject" of knowledge and another "mere object". While the "one" monopolizes the subject's place, the "other" will serve as the object of his/her inquiries; neither place exists without the other, and a displacement of the "other" to the position of "one" would mean a crisis for the epistemic system in question. Objectification has been the target of critique by many theoretical positions originated in socially marginalized places, such as postcolonial studies[15], feminist theory, or trans* studies[16]. These currents have denounced, for example, that objectification effaces the agency of those who are reduced to "mere objects" and consolidates an idea of intellectual superiority for the "subjects". According to Radi, "mere objectification" occurs in the conjunction of "objectification" (taking something as an object of study) and "epistemic disqualification" (considering that it is not capable of fulfilling another role or contributing to the exchange): "In practical terms, a relationship of epistemic dependence is established whereby the bodies, sexualities, and genders of trans* people are turned into matters whose credibility requires the opinion of various (cis) intellectual authorities"[17]. Donna Haraway, for her part, has denounced how objectification feeds systems of inequality and exploitation that exceed the epistemic realm. According to the author, behind that conception of the "object" as "a passive and inert thing" and of science as the process of describing said object, they hide "either appropriations of a fixed and determined world reduced to resource for instrumentalist projects of destructive Western societies, or "masks for interests, usually dominating interests"[18].

The reduction of the subjects' epistemic role can also be expressed through the denial of their epistemic authority, that is, the affirmation that a certain subject, due to an extra-epistemic trait, is not a reliable source of knowledge. Here I include testimonial injustice, one of the most discussed phenomena in recent years in the field of social epistemology. The category of "testimonial injustice" serves to point specifically at "the injustice that a speaker suffers in receiving deflated credibility from the hearer owing to identity prejudice on the hearer's part"[19]. An important feature of the notion of epistemic injustice as originally proposed by Miranda

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[14]Achille Mbembé, *Crítica de la Razón Negra,* Buenos Aires, Futuro Anterior Ediciones, 2016, p. 131.

[15]See for instance Edward Said, *Orientalismo,* Barcelona, Penguin Random House, 2002; and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses", in *Feminist review*, no. 30, 1988, pp. 61-88.

[16]See for instance Blas Radi, "Defundamentos y postfundaciones: Revoluciones conservadoras, tecnologías de apropiación y borramiento de cuerpos y subjetividades trans en la obra de Preciado", in *Sexualidades-Serie monográfica sobre sexualidades latinoamericanas y caribeñas,* vol. 12, 2015, pp. 1-27; and Leila Dumaresq, "Ensaio (travesti) sobre a escuta (cisgênero)", in *PeriódiCus,* vol. 5, no. 1, 2016, pp. 121-131.

[17]Blas Radi, "On Trans* Epistemology…", op. cit., p. 49.

[18]Donna Haraway, "Conocimientos situados: la cuestión científica en el feminismo y el privilegio de la perspectiva parcial", in *Ciencia, cyborgs y mujeres. La reinvención de la naturaleza,* Madrid, Cátedra, 1995, p. 340.

[19]Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 4.

Fricker, which distinguishes it from the category of epistemic violence I am using here, is that she understands the former as an unintended phenomenon: Fricker was precisely interested in naming something that is frequent but difficult to identify, which entails damage but not intentional or conscious manipulation[20]. In this sense, we could say that testimonial injustice is a specific type of epistemic violence characterized, among other things, by its being unintended. As a result of these processes, there are entire areas of knowledge that are denigrated and marginalized, and that result in losses for the epistemic system. This includes what Foucault calls "subjugated knowledges", particularly in its meaning of the knowledge "coming from below": "a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naïve knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity"[21]. In other words, knowledge and experience - and the subjects that embody them - are organized in a multi-leveled hierarchy where the most privileged side affirms itself as a "radically exclusive universality"[22], and the least privileged -with a range of more or less valued knowledges in the middle- is completely excluded from the epistemic system. Here we find one of the key points when thinking about epistemic violence: besides the political and ethical problem implied in the marginalization or instrumentalization of certain subjects for the interests of others, we need to confront the specifically epistemic damage it entails. I will return to this in the last section; suffice it to say for now that the exclusion of certain subjects and knowledge results in an impoverishment of the epistemic system, which loses contents and capacity for self-criticism.

Now, epistemic violence does not always imply the rejection of the knowledge produced by marginalized subjects or groups. In some cases, this knowledge is known and used, but not recognized as the product of those who forged it and as part of a broader and more complex system of thought. Here we face what Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, intellectual of the Mississauga Nishnaabeg nation, called "cognitive extractivism": "Let's take whatever teachings you might have that would help us right out of your context, right away from your knowledge holders, right out of your language, and integrate them into this assimilatory mindset"[23]. Some years later, Ramón Grosfoguel would take up this notion to speak of "epistemic extractivism", that is, the unacknowledged exploitation of marginalized communities' epistemic resources. Both coincide in highlighting the connection between epistemic extractivism, physical extractivism and economic extractivism: each of these forms is based on "an attitude of reification and destruction towards the world of human and non-human life, [an attitude] produced in our subjectivity and in power relations by a 'capitalist/patriarchal, occidental-centric/Christian-centric, modern/colonial' civilization"[24]. Extractive practices transform "the knowledges, the forms of human existence, the forms of non-human life and what exists in our ecological environment in 'objects' to be instrumentalized, with the purpose of extracting them and exploiting them for their own benefit regardless of the destructive consequences that such activity may have on other human and non-human beings"[25]. Such processes of epistemic

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[20]Miranda Fricker, "Evolving Concepts of Epistemic Injustice", in Ian James Kidd, José Medina & Gaile Pohlhaus Jr., *Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice* (53-60), London, Routledge, 2017.

[21]Michel Foucault, *Defender la sociedad,* Buenos Aires, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2008, p. 21.

[22]Edgardo Lander, "Ciencias sociales: saberes coloniales y eurocéntricos", in Edgardo Lander (ed.), *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas Latinoamericanas* (pp. 11-41), Buenos Aires, CLACSO, p. 17.

[23]Naomi Klein, "Dancing the World into Being: A Conversation with Idle-No-More's Leanne Simpson", *YES Magazine*, 5/3/2013, accesible at www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/dancing-the-world-into-being-a-conversation-with-idle-no-more-leanne-simpson

[24]Ramón Grosfoguel, "Del «extractivismo económico» al «extractivismo epistémico» y al «extractivismo ontológico»: una forma destructiva de conocer, ser y estar en el mundo", *Tabula Rasa*, no. 24, 2016, p. 126.

[25]*Ibid*.

extractivism, then, entail an idea of the value of that knowledge, but not of the value, rights or dignity of those who produced them.

As I hope to have made clear so far, epistemic violence is a structural phenomenon, fueled by the individual actions of people (be them well- or ill-intentioned), but independent from them. Consequently, the effects of epistemic violence go far beyond the silencing of individual voices, or direct censorship from hegemonic subjects towards marginalized ones. They also include social phenomena that cannot be easily assigned to specific agents, or that call into question dualist "oppressed/oppressive" approaches. Consider, for example, what Fricker calls "hermeneutical injustice": the lack of adequate categories to make sense of the experiences of non-hegemonic communities, due to their hermeneutical marginalization, that is, to their exclusion from the processes and spaces where social senses about various phenomena are produced. Hermeneutical injustice is the specific form of injustice in which "a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences"[26], and particularly their experiences of oppression. This can occur through the absence of appropriate hermeneutical categories, a direct rejection of the notions developed by the communities, a lack of willingness to understand or incorporate them, and/or the illusion that they can adequately interpret their own reality based on the categories offered by the groups that marginalize them, what in another work we have called "hermeneutic mirage" (that is, "the illusion that there is in fact a category that gives meaning" to a certain phenomenon, "when in reality there is little more than an interpretive lacuna"[27]). Hermeneutical injustice impinges upon the sociocultural contexts where our daily lives take place, and shows how hospitable (or not) hermeneutical conditions are for different subjects and groups.

Another effect of this hospitality, or lack thereof, is the disposition that different groups have at the moment of initiating an epistemic exchange. For example, Kristie Dotson has called attention to cases in which a trajectory of epistemic marginalization leads to strategies of silencing or selectivity on the part of the agents themselves. The result, which the author calls "epistemic drowning," is "the truncating of one's own testimony in order to insure [sic] that the testimony contains only content for which one's audience demonstrates testimonial competence"[28]. This modality brings us back to the uselessness of dichotomous analyses regarding epistemic violence: it is not always perpetrated by specific agents (as was seen, for example, in the previous case), it is not always an action that can be pinned down to a specific moment, and it is not necessarily a form of violence directly exercised by an epistemically privileged person towards a marginalized one - although, of course, the practice of "epistemic smothering" arises from a history of experiences of marginalization.

Epistemic violence, marginalization and identity

This brief outline allows us to capture some of the multiple forms that epistemic violence can take: as a repression of a certain perspective or as the unacknowledgement of others; by the subjects themselves or from third parties; affecting individuals, concepts, approaches or entire worldviews. All these forms contribute to the international division of intellectual work, that is, the allotment of certain communities to the role of epistemic agents and others to the role of objects, while still others are completely left out of the zone of intelligibility. This division of labor can be structured along the lines of gender, nationality, language, among many others. In this section, I am interested in considering the link between epistemic violence and identity, and

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[26]Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice…,* op. cit., p. 1.

[27]Moira Pérez & Blas Radi, "El concepto de 'violencia de género' como espejismo hermenéutico", in *Igualdad, autonomía personal y derechos sociales,* no. 8, 2018, p. 84.

[28]Kristie Dotson, "Tracking epistemic violence, tracking practices of silencing", in *Hypatia*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2011, p. 244.

in particular how it affects those subjects whose identities are the target of deep-seated negative stereotypes, which "track them through different domains of the social world"[29].

Although there seems to be nothing in epistemic violence itself that makes it an identity phenomenon, it is often considered in terms of power identity relations, since certain groups tend to be marginalized epistemically on the basis of their identity (gender, racial, national, or other). Additionally, examinations of epistemic violence have historically been closely linked to anti-colonialist, decolonial and postcolonial theories, in which identity plays a central role. One of the first theorizations of that concept, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "Can the Subaltern Speak?", focuses on "the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other" and "the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subject-ivity [sic]"[30]. Analytical epistemology, on the other hand, has analyzed how prejudice enters our epistemic system, among other things, through the stereotypes that we need heuristically to determine in each situation if someone *appears as* reliable or not[31]. This is how a speaker's identity becomes a determining factor in their epistemic life: faced with the immediate need to assess our interlocutor's reliability, our credibility judgments "must reflect some kind of social generalization about epistemic trustworthiness - the competence and sincerity- of people of the speaker's social type"[32]. The point, as social epistemologies have warned us since their inception, is that these stereotypes, prejudices and generalizations are based on extra-epistemic factors, thus putting the quality of exchange at risk from an epistemic point of view.

It is evident that the damage produced by epistemic violence does not fall exclusively within the order of knowledge, but reaches all areas of social relations. For example, it is a phenomenon that plays an important role in the experiences of political marginalization, since it is triggered before the terms for inclusion (or exclusion) from the public sphere are established. In other words, epistemic violence cuts out the field of political participation prior to its hierarchization. In the words of Martín Savransky,

> Unlike the political violence provoked by exclusion in the definition of the *demos* [...], epistemic violence has a much more pervasive power, since it [...] occurs prior to the debate on recognition and representation (*Darstellung*). It is almost a play on words, since we could say that the characteristic of epistemic violence is that it does not 'exclude', for which it is necessary to 'in-clude' first, but rather 'pre-cludes': it mutes, silences, renders invisible, before the debate about inclusion even takes place.[33]

Epistemic violence can increase in the case of people located under multiple axes of oppression, such as racialized women or trans* and neurodivergent people. Consider, for example, the case of migrant women: as detailed by activist Ursula Santa Cruz, the experience of these people includes the construction of "a homogeneous group of 'migrant women'", including their "victimization and infantilization", along with "symbolic racism and exoticization"; furthermore, "their experiences are denied –their capacities, their knowledge, their aspirations and their

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[29]Ian James Kidd & Havi Carel, "Epistemic injustice and illness", in *Journal of applied philosophy*, vol. 34, no. 2, 2017: 177.

[30]Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "¿Puede hablar el subalterno?", in *Revista colombiana de antropología*, vol. 39, 2003, p. 317.

[31] See for example Linda Martin Alcoff, "On Judging Epistemic Credibility: Is Social Identity Relevant?," *Philosophic Exchange*, vol. 29, no. 1, article 1, 1999; and Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice…,* op. cit.

[32]Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice…,* op. cit., p. 32.

[33]Martín Savransky, "Ciudadanía, violencia epistémica y subjetividad", *Revista CIDOB d'afers internacionals*, no. 95, 2011, p. 117.

needs-" and "their voices are appropriated by experts, including feminists and academics"[34]. Both the place of the "one" and that of the "other" are built on racial, ethnic, religious, geopolitical, and gender factors, among others, that involve complex and multifaceted experiences of privilege and/or marginalization.

This is a fundamental part of the daily experience of marginalized subjects, to the point that it is present even within the framework of well-intentioned initiatives. Consider for instance Nannette Funk's analysis of the German welcoming policy in 2015-2016 (*Willkommenspolitik*):

> The state and civil society often acted *for* refugees, instead of empowering them, where possible - to be agents on their own behalf. [...] Mechanisms for refugee self-representation in the public sphere, for example, a right to speak in community discussions on refugee matters affecting them, were rare.[35]

Here we see an example of the denial of epistemic agency, when the discussion on a policy excludes the perspectives of those who will be directly affected by it. At this point, understanding the specific functioning of epistemic violence is central to address its different presentations, which otherwise may remain hidden behind a seemingly inclusive policy.

In this regard, it should be noted that progressive social movements and the academy also have their share of responsibility in the phenomenon. Some of the first theorizations about epistemic violence explicitly referred to activism as a site of marginalization, as is the case of Chakravorty Spivak, who points at the feminism of "the *comprador* countries" as an accomplice to those "one/other" distinctions, due among other things to their "belief in the plausibility of global alliance politics", that is, of an "international feminism"[36]. The case mentioned above in relation to the *Willkommenspolitik* is another example of how epistemic violence can leak into civil society initiatives that are considered inclusive. As for the academy, although epistemic violence occurs in all areas of social life, it obviously finds a particularly fertile ground in institutionalized spaces of knowledge production. This is where socially assigned epistemic roles are sanctioned and crystallized, as they are embedded in justifications that would seem to have no extra-epistemic bias. In addition, it is often there that the other is "invented"[37] and knowledge is produced that will then justify the distinction one/other, which exceeds the epistemic realm and even "dignifies" a process of political domination. As Edward Said detailed in *Orientalism* regarding the links between Orientalist studies and European expansion, "the important point was to dignify the simple conquest with an idea, to transform the appetite for more geographical space into a theory about the particular relationship that existed between geography, on the one side, and the civilized or uncivilized peoples, on the other"[38]. This is why it is urgent to think about how these forms of violence and institutionalized academic disciplines feed each other: "epistemic injustice now emerges not simply as ruptures or rips in the fabric of epistemological justices, but as a permanent condition of the injustices of the disciplines themselves"[39]. Analyzing the functioning and mechanisms of this "permanent condition" from a philosophical,

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[34]Katherine Braun & Simona Pagano, "Violence against migrant women: evidencing the matrix of colonial power. An interview with Ursula Santa Cruz", in *Movements: Journal für kritische Migrations-und Grenzregimeforschung,* vol. 4, no. 1, 2018, pp. 186-187.

[35]Nannette Funk, "A spectre in Germany: refugees, a 'welcome culture' and an 'integration politics'", in *Journal of Global Ethics*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2016, p. 293.

[36]Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "¿Puede hablar el subalterno?", op. cit., p. 329.

[37]Santiago Castro-Gómez, "Ciencias sociales, violencia epistémica y el problema de la invención del otro", in Edgardo Lander (ed.), *La colonialidad del saber: eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas latinoamericanas* (pp. 145-163), Buenos Aires, UNESCO/FACES, 2000.

[38]Edward Said, *Orientalismo,* op. cit., p. 291.

[39]Andrew Keet, "Epistemic 'othering' and the decolonisation of knowledge", *Africa Insight*, vol. 44, no. 1, 2014, p. 33.

and specifically epistemic, perspective, is key to address them in institutional practice and design.

A precarious balance

The characteristics of epistemic violence, as a case of "slow violence", make it almost invisible for those who do not systematically reflect on their own epistemic practices, which in turn results in a remarkable lack of attention in the public agenda. In presenting his concept of "slow violence", Nixon notes that, although it entails "emergencies whose repercussions have given rise to some of the most critical challenges of our time"[40], there remains a great challenge linked to its visibility. This leads the author to ask how to "turn the long emergencies of slow violence into stories dramatic enough to rouse public sentiment and warrant political intervention"[41]. The strength of epistemic violence lies in its very imperceptibility: it subsists without being detected, either because it is presented in a context affected by other more evident forms of violence, or because it is framed within a "well-meaning" proposal, as we saw above. That is why, as stated before, in order to dismantle the mechanisms of epistemic violence, it is fundamental to learn how to see them. However, the topos of "visibility" is somewhat insufficient to address this issue since, like other forms of violence, it is based on a series of privilege mechanisms that favour ignorance or "not seeing": in many cases, epistemic violence is something "ignorable". Ignoring that epistemic violence exists, and ignoring that one exerts it, can result in considerable benefits for an epistemically privileged subject. Thus, it is indeed a problem of "being able to see", but not of one that is solved with mere "visibility", unless we also address the social license to ignore that sustains such ignorance.

Now, what would a violence-free epistemic system look like? Thinking of an ideal -and unattainable- model, we can imagine it as an epistemic system in which all people and their knowledge are evaluated exclusively on the basis of epistemic factors, without the influence of extra-epistemic variables (such as identity prejudices). Ironically, in order to come closer to that scenario, we need to consider extra-epistemic factors, and perhaps even give them centrality in our analysis. This is because, as social epistemology has extensively demonstrated, the neglect of social-historical factors that affect knowledge processes actually works to reproduce the mechanisms of exclusion that have historically placed certain subjects and collectives in an inferior position. Given that social location (ours and that of our interlocutors) affects epistemic judgments, it is fundamental to put "the researcher's cultural beliefs and practices" on "the display board"[42].

On the other hand, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that, as we are talking about an epistemic phenomenon, the strategies we design to combat it must also be of an epistemic nature, and must be specifically designed for this form of violence. Indeed, strategies designed for other forms of oppression (social, economic, etc.) may not be effective in the field of epistemic violence. For that reason, along with initiatives designed to confront other forms of violence (such as those that can be found frequently in government or civil society programs for "inclusion" and "non-discrimination"), we need to reformulate our "epistemic resources and the epistemological system within which those resources prevail", considering that they "may be wholly inadequate to the task of addressing the persisting epistemic exclusions that are causing epistemic oppression"[43]. This includes both initiatives to combat exclusion, and others to encourage inclusion through active policies. Helen Logino's work has helped us understand that

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[40]Rob Nixon, op. cit., p. 3.
[41]*Ibid.*
[42]Sandra Harding, "Introduction: Is There a Feminist Method?", in Sandra Harding (ed.), *Feminism and Methodology,* Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1987, p. 9.
[43]Kristie Dotson, "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression", in *Social Epistemology: A Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Policy*, DOI: 10.1080/02691728.2013.782585, 2014, p. 2.

a community must "take active measures to ensure that alternative points of view are developed enough to be a source of criticism and new perspectives. Not only must potentially dissenting voices not be discounted, they must be cultivated"[44]. In this sense, critical epistemologies, when posed from a truly intersectional standpoint, can offer valuable resources to think about how to put our biases on the table, to understand in what sense they make us participate in epistemic violence, and to imagine how we can begin to dismantle them.

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[44]Helen Longino, *The fate of knowledge*, Princeton, Princeton University Press*,* 2002, p. 132.

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