Towards A Plausible Account of Epistemic Decolonisation

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Abstract: Why should we decolonise knowledge? One popular rationale is that colonialism has set up a single perspective as epistemically authoritative over many equally legitimate ones, and this is a form of epistemic injustice. Hence, we should take different epistemic perspectives as having equal epistemic authority. A problem with this rationale is that its relativist implications undermine the call for decolonisation, which is premised on the objectivity of the moral claim that 'epistemic colonisation is wrong'. In this paper, I aim to provide a rationale for epistemic decolonisation that avoids the shortfalls of this relativist rationale. I develop a distinctly epistemic rationale for epistemic decolonisation that positions the imperative to decolonise knowledge as an epistemic virtue.

A common rationale for why we should decolonise knowledge goes like this: colonialism has 'set up a single perspective as epistemically authoritative' over many equally legitimate ones; so decolonising knowledge requires taking different epistemic perspectives as having equal epistemic authority (Mitova forthcoming). Veli Mitova argues that there are two problems with this rationale for decolonising knowledge. 'First, it undermines the call to decolonise … knowledge, by entailing that there are no objective moral truths' (*ibid.*). Second, the rationale undermines the call for decolonisation of knowledge in academic institutions. This is because if different epistemic positions have equal epistemic authority, we cannot defend the claim that one syllabus is epistemically better than another (*ibid.*).

These problems mean that accounts that take this relativist rationale as their starting point do not work. In this paper, I aim to provide an epistemic rationale for epistemic decolonisation that avoids these problems. In particular, my rationale positions the imperative to decolonise knowledge as

an imperative of epistemic virtue.[1] Firstly, I establish that epistemic colonisation is a form of epistemic injustice that is antithetical to the fair-minded pursuit of knowledge. This move grounds the necessity for epistemic decolonisation as a requirement of epistemic virtue. Secondly, I argue for my account of epistemic decolonisation by investigating the role of the subject and object of inquiry. I substantiate my claim to the centrality of these themes by appeal to Heidi Grasswick's (2018) conception of epistemic trust.

I proceed as follows. In Section 1, I look at three accounts of epistemic decolonisation offered in the literature. I consider the uncontroversial features of two of these accounts, and show the problematic relativist implications that the third holds. In Section 2, I look at the 'civilising mission' justification for colonisation and isolate the epistemic elements that are of interest to my argument for *epistemic decolonisation*. In Section 3, I provide my distinctly epistemic rationale for epistemic decolonisation. In the sections that follow, I defend the premises of this rationale.

1. Accounts of Epistemic Decolonisation

Colonialism refers to ' … a practice that involves both the subjugation of one people to another and the political and economic control of a dependent territory' (Ypi 2013: 162). Implicit in this definition are some of the wrongs commonly associated with colonialism: 'oppression, exploitation, murder, racism, and dehumanization' (Valentini 2015: 312), to mention just a few.

During the colonial era, decolonisation referred to the political struggle against colonialism. However, the common understanding of decolonisation in the contemporary post-colonial era is as the undoing of colonial legacies. These legacies include—but are not limited to—social, economic, political, legal, and epistemic systems that are present in former colonial

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1 I appreciate that vices and virtues are, in the first instance, properties of individuals. However, they can also be systemic. That is, a vice characterising an institution's epistemic practices or an epistemic virtue that should be implemented at an institutional level. Thanks to Veli Mitova for making me see this.

states, as a direct offshoot of colonisation. A commonplace rationale for why these colonial legacies need to be decolonised is that colonialism is unethical. It is commonly accepted that moral wrongs, such as the ones listed in the previous paragraph, generate a strong need to decolonise or, at the very least, to offer some sort of redress and reparation. My focus here will not be on these moral wrongs and the sort of redress they might require. Since I am interested in epistemic decolonisation here, let me briefly focus on three scholars who give a general idea of what exactly the decolonisation of knowledge involves, how we should go about it, and why we should decolonise knowledge.

On the question of what we should decolonise, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (1986) canonical work, *Decolonising the Mind* offers some valuable insights. Ngũgĩ argues for the centrality of African languages in African universities as essential to decolonising knowledge. Ngũgĩ sees language not simply as a means of communication, but also as a carrier of culture (1986: 13). Put together, language becomes the way a person understands themselves and the world around them. Thus, language shapes and grounds knowledge. In addition to the economic and political control that colonialism aimed at, Ngũgĩ argues that the control of the mental universe of the colonised was central to colonialism. This was done by

> the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, [followed by] … the conscious elevation of the language of the coloniser. (Ngũgĩ 1986: 16)

This linguistic domination, for Ngũgĩ, 'was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised' (*ibid.*). Hence, his argument for decolonising the mind is centred around the revitalisation of African languages in educational institutions.[2]

On the question of how we should decolonise, Paulin Hountondji (1995; 2009) offers us some insights. Hountondji sees epistemic decolonisation as

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2 See also Kwasi Wiredu (2002) for an argument for the centrality of African languages in the context of African Philosophy.

> an autonomous, self-reliant process of knowledge production and capitalisation that enables us to answer our own questions and meet both the intellectual and the material needs of African societies. (Hountondji 2009: 128)

What is important for Hountondji (1995: 5) is a shift from the 'vertical discussion' with the global North to a 'horizontal discussion' among African scholars. That is, rather than gear their discussions towards questions posed by, and of interest to, the global West (a vertical discussion), African scholars are to focus on a horizontal exchange with their fellow scholars from the global South. Hountondji sees this sort of horizontal exchange as a step towards epistemic independence for Africans. This provides a model for the decolonisation of knowledge insofar as it focuses on what Africans ought to do to gain epistemic autonomy.

On the question of why we should decolonise, Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017) highlights two points. The first is 'that every human being is born into a valid and legitimate knowledge system' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2017: 51). The second is the illegitimacy of

> Eurocentric modernity through colonialism and imperialism [that] unleashed a particularly racial ethnocentric attitude that led European colonialist to question the very humanity of African people. (*ibid.*)

Simply put, the second point is that the hegemony of Eurocentrism is illegitimate. In the process of colonialism, the colonisers denied the legitimacy of African's knowledge systems while simultaneously imposing a foreign system on Africans. This amounted to 'epistemicides, linguicides, and cultural imperialism' (*ibid.*). These harms of colonialism are a justification for why we should decolonise knowledge.[3] Epistemic decolonisation thus involves an acknowledgement of the legitimacy and equal validity of different knowledge systems, accompanied by the freedom to theorise from these distinct perspectives.[4]

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3 See Lebakeng et al. (2006) for a similar argument on why we should Africanise universities in South Africa, stemming from a similar rationale of remedying epistemicide, etc.
4 Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018: 3, 4, 8) argues elsewhere for these as necessary features of epistemic freedom.

While these three accounts are hardly a fair representation of the growing debates on epistemic decolonisation (at least in the African context), what I have provided is a vague outline of the starting point of most of these debates and the salient features that cut across them. This is sufficient for the point I argue for in this paper. So, from Ngũgĩ's argument, we get that one thing crucial to the decolonisation of knowledge is the decolonisation of the mind. I take this claim to be uncontroversial. From Hountondji's argument, I take this qualified claim to be uncontroversial: the decolonisation of knowledge, at least, requires Africans to prioritise issues that are central to them. However, Ndlovu-Gatsheni's argument for the legitimacy and equal validity of different epistemic positions represents the sticking point for epistemic decolonisation. Let me make this clearer.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni's rationale is that colonialism destroyed many legitimate epistemic perspectives and set up a single perspective as epistemically authoritative over many equally legitimate ones; so decolonising knowledge requires (at a minimum) taking different epistemic perspectives as having equal epistemic authority (Mitova forthcoming). While this claim might seem intuitively plausible and is mostly accepted as a rationale for, and a picture of epistemic decolonisation, its implications are problematic for epistemic decolonisation itself. Mitova (forthcoming) argues in detail for two problems specifically. I give a brief overview of her arguments because I think they set a constraint on a successful rationale for epistemic decolonisation (of the kind that I take myself to be offering).

The first problem is that our claim that there are many equally legitimate epistemic perspectives (a relativist claim) entails that there are no objective moral truths. This is problematic insofar as we—*qua* proponents of decolonisation—take the claim 'we should decolonise knowledge' to be an objective truth. Mitova (forthcoming) argues in detail for these claims. I do not go into her arguments in further detail here. I take it that stating the problem like this is enough to prompt the intuition that we want a rationale for epistemic decolonisation that holds universal force.

The second problem, Mitova argues, is that the above relativist rationale undermines the call for decolonisation of knowledge in academic institutions. This is because by saying that different epistemic positions have equal epistemic authority, we rule out the possibility that one syllabus is *epistemically* better than another, something that an academic institution should, presumably, be in a position to assert. Although she does not spell this out, a corollary is that a syllabus that is discriminatory can claim to be epistemically equal to a syllabus that is inclusive. This is an unpalatable implication for a view of epistemic decolonisation.

I argue for a distinctly epistemic rationale for epistemic decolonisation as a possible remedy to these problems. My rationale honours the core intuitions driving the rationale above but avoids its relativism. It rests, rather, on considerations of epistemic fairness and justice.

As a start to spelling out this rationale, let us consider what we might call 'the civilising mission justification' for colonisation, in order to pin down the exact harms of colonialism that inform my proposed rationale.

2. The Civilising Mission Rationale for Colonisation

The 'civilising mission' is the putatively 'moral' ideology used as a justification for colonialism. It involved ideals of enlightenment, racism, evangelism, and liberation (Pekanan 2016). It is obvious to us now that the propagation of these ideals through an unjust process like colonialism represents a contradiction of some of these ideals (domination vs liberation). Nonetheless, the civilising mission defence for colonialism

> suggested that a temporary period of political dependence or tutelage was necessary for uncivilized societies to advance to the point where they were capable of sustaining liberal institutions and self-government. (Kohn and Reddy 2017)

This idea is backed by the assumption that the colonisers possessed knowledge and civility that the colonised lacked and needed to acquire. The misinterpretation and oversimplification of the practices of the colonised by the colonisers without openness to properly understanding them was central to

this conception of the colonised. This civilising mission and the misinterpretation that preceded it ' … embodied the simplification of diverse peoples and historical experiences into conceptual boxes like savage and barbaric' (Liebersohn 2016: 383). The 'discovery' of the 'barbaric' and 'savage' nature of indigenous people supposedly justified the need to civilise them.

Underplayed in this justification for colonisation are the many forms of exploitation that came with the civilising mission. One such underplayed exploitation is the epistemic one imbedded in the motivation behind, and the mechanism of, the civilising mission.

The civilising mission was motivated by the colonisers' felt epistemic superiority, which gave rise to the need to civilise and teach people of barbaric and primitive inclinations. Indigenous cultures and knowledge frameworks were subjugated as unintelligent. This subjugation was manifested in numerous ways, one of which was in the power relationship between colonisers and colonised embodied in colonial education. This relationship, and the educational system was of the sort that fails to offer equal and reciprocal terms of interaction to all its members. The nature of this relationship is summarised aptly by Felix Maringe, when he describes colonial education as cultivating in the mind of the colonised, 'a sense of servitude towards a superior master through the creation of receptive and unquestioning learners' (2017: 4).

These unequal terms of interaction embody a process that is foundational to epistemic colonisation. This process involves, firstly, a disregard for existing epistemic frameworks in the colonies; secondly, the imposition of the coloniser's own epistemic framework; and thirdly, the formation of a new epistemic framework for the colonised as a result of the previous stages of this process. Let me explain these in more detail.

Firstly, the epistemic framework of the colonised is ignored due to the conception that they are unintelligent and in need of teaching. I employ here Rajeev Bhargava's (2013) conception of epistemic framework.

> An epistemic framework is a historically generated, collectively sustained system of meanings and significance, by reference to which a group understands and evaluates its individual and collective life. (Bhargava 2013: 414)

The existing epistemic frameworks in the colonies that are ignored are what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2017: 51) alludes to when he says, 'every human being is born into a valid and legitimate knowledge system'.

Secondly, through this breakdown of the epistemic framework of the colonised, a new epistemic framework is imposed on the colonised as objective, genuine and desirable knowledge. Maringe (2017: 4, author's italics) calls this process '*the injustice of alienation*'. It is a process where the 'language, culture, beliefs, norms and values [of the colonised] are cast aside as uncivilised, barbaric and inhuman, and replaced with new forms which they struggle to internalise and understand' (*ibid.*). In addition to the injustice of this alienation, the foreign nature of these new systems creates a hurdle for the colonised to readily understand them.[5] To the coloniser's mind, this difficulty in comprehension is further proof of the uncivil and unintelligent nature of the colonised.

Thirdly, these imposed perspectives form the new epistemic framework of the colonised. These epistemic impositions, along with the other harms of colonialism, are generally conceived of as a physically destructive process that leads to harms like genocide, linguicide, etc (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2017: 51). However, the absence of such destructive processes in some cases does not automatically imply that there was no form of epistemic imposition there. Such imposition occurs insofar as (a) there is an interference in an epistemic framework by a hegemonic epistemic framework, and (b) the colonised now theorise from this hegemonic epistemic framework. This sort of interference is captured aptly by Kwasi Wiredu (2002: 56) when he defines 'conceptual decolonization [as] … the elimination … of modes of conceptualization that came to us through colonization and remain in our thinking owing to inertia rather than to our own reflective choices'. Put differently, the imposed perspectives which form the new epistemic framework of the colonised become hegemonic in such a way that the

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5 See also Wiredu (2002), who makes this point in the context of philosophy. He argues that when philosophers are forced to philosophise in a foreign language, philosophical problems that make no sense in the philosopher's own language are imposed on them.

colonised, in theorising from this perspective, become 'accomplices of the imperialist project' (Maringe 2017: 4).

These three features characterise the core process of epistemic colonisation. Epistemic colonisation essentially involves practices that are harmful to the epistemic lives of the colonised as producers and receivers of knowledge. So, for example, when the medical practices of the colonised are reduced to witchcraft by the colonisers, the colonised are harmed as producers of knowledge. And when the colonised are seen by the colonisers as incapable of comprehension, the colonised are harmed as receivers of knowledge. This distinct epistemic harm of colonialism is the locus of my rationale for epistemic decolonisation, to which I now turn.

3. My Rationale for Epistemic Decolonisation

I define epistemic decolonisation as *an epistemically faithful and just knowledge-forming practice that is open to, and actively draws on, diverse perspectives.* By 'epistemically faithful knowledge-forming practice', I refer to practices that value epistemic ends over the advancement and sustenance of non-epistemic agendas. By 'epistemically just knowledge-forming practice', I mean epistemic practices that privilege the virtues of epistemic justice over the vices of epistemic injustice. Being epistemically faithful and epistemically just amounts to the fair-minded pursuit of knowledge. Fair-mindedness here refers to an epistemic disposition in which an agent takes the need to be epistemically faithful and just as central to their epistemic practices.

I explain these concepts and their implications for epistemic decolonisation in more detail in the sections that follow. For ease of exposition, here is my succinct rationale for epistemic decolonisation derived from the foregoing:

P1 Epistemic colonisation involves several forms of epistemic injustice.
P2 Any practice that involves epistemic injustice is antithetical to the fair-minded pursuit of knowledge.
P3 Any practice that is antithetical to the fair-minded pursuit of knowledge should be reversed for epistemic reasons.

C So, epistemic colonisation should be reversed – i.e., we should decolonise knowledge—for epistemic reasons.

In what follows, I provide an elaborate defence of this rationale for epistemic decolonisation by defending each of the premises.

3.1 Defence of Premise 1

The first premise of my rationale says that epistemic colonisation involves several forms of epistemic injustice. I defend this claim in this section. As I have stated above, epistemic colonisation centrally involves colonial practices that are harmful to the epistemic lives of the colonised as producers and receivers of knowledge.

Consider the following interaction between Emeka (an indigenous Nigerian) and Peter (a colonial 'master') in a colonial context.

> **The Master Knows:** Emeka complains about an illness and asks if he can go to the village healer. Peter responds by offering Emeka some pills. Emeka retorts that those pills do not work on him. Peter insists that the pills work and Emeka is wrong. Emeka used to work in a colonial post as a steward. In his experience there, the white 'masters' had always given him pills whenever he fell ill. However, the pills never worked for him. Emeka knows why: his illness is not merely a physiological matter, but also has to do with his relationship with members of his community (living and dead).[6] He knows only the village healer will understand him and is hence in a position to cure him. Emeka does not raise this with Peter because when he raised a similar issue with his former 'master', it was laughed off as superstitious nonsense. Peter has worked in Congo as a colonial 'master' before he was transferred to Nigeria. During his time there, he heard people say things similar to what Emeka had said. Peter believes this to be barbaric talk as there is no way communal relations can affect physical health.

Using **The Master Knows** as my paradigm case for the rest of the paper, let me proceed to tease out some of the forms of epistemic injustice present in it.

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6 Godwin Sogolo (1998) provides an account of the Yoruba people's conception of health that is holistic, spiritual, and relational. This is the kind of conception that Emeka is working with in the example.

Epistemic injustice is the unfair treatment of others in their capacity as epistemic agents due to prejudicial stereotypes (Fricker 2007). Miranda Fricker argues that 'testimonial injustice' and 'hermeneutical injustice' are two main forms of epistemic injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs when a speaker suffers credibility deficit due to identity prejudice held against them (Fricker 2007: 28). In **The Master Knows**, Emeka suffers credibility deficit when he testifies about his illness and the treatment he knows is bound to work. Peter's prejudicial stereotypes about African's medical practices prevent him from taking Emeka as a credible testifier on this issue. This is the first kind of injustice involved in colonialism.

Hermeneutical injustice occurs when a gap in the collective linguistic/interpretative resources prevents members of a social group from making sense of significant aspects of their lives. It is especially a case of hermeneutical injustice when this gap is due to hermeneutical marginalisation (Fricker 2007: 155). Gaile Pohlhaus (2012) further increases the purview of hermeneutical injustice from cases where the victim of epistemic injustice lacks the resources to make sense of their experience to cases where these resources are available, but members of socially dominant groups disregard them. The dominantly situated knowers' disregard allows them 'to misunderstand, misinterpret, and/or ignore whole parts of the world' of the marginally situated knower (Pohlhaus 2012: 715). Pohlhaus argues that such 'willful hermeneutical ignorance' is a form of epistemic injustice. In **The Master Knows**, Peter fails to engage with, or try to make sense of, Emeka's experience about illness. Peter does so, in part, by deliberately disregarding an epistemic tool of Emeka's—a richer concept of health that includes one's social relations. This is the second kind of epistemic injustice involved in colonialism.

This breakdown in meaningful engagements, that Emeka has come to expect from the colonisers on issues surrounding illness, means he no longer bothers to explain himself to them or expect any useful suggestion from them. This also makes Emeka a victim of a third kind of injustice —'epistemic trust injustice'. This is a form of epistemic injustice which occurs when a community or agent (usually the dominantly situated) fails

to 'satisfy the conditions of responsibly-placed trust' put on them by others (usually the socially marginalised group) (Grasswick 2018: 83–84). These conditions of responsibly placed trust are 'competency' and 'sincerity/care'.

Remedying epistemic trust injustice, to my mind, is a crucial starting point for epistemic decolonisation. This is because the colonisers have, historically, not had the best interests of the colonised at heart. I return to this point in the final section of this paper. In the meantime, let me continue to elucidate the ways in which epistemic colonisation involves forms of epistemic injustice.

Now, in what seems like a civil conversation between Emeka and Peter, there are a lot of unspoken thoughts that represent the process of epistemic colonisation I highlighted in Section 2. Firstly, Peter's belief that Emeka's testimony about illness is barbaric talk represents a prejudicial stereotype that guides the interpretation of all that Emeka says. Secondly, Peter's generalisation based on his experience in Congo represents a lack of openness to properly understanding Emeka's specific practices. All African practices are alike to Peter. Thirdly, these two points above lead to a misinterpretation and oversimplification of Emeka's practices by Peter. Fourthly, Emeka's refusal to engage with Peter based on his experience is a testament to the unequal terms of interaction between them. This power inequality effectively silences Emeka. Finally, Peter's concluding statement to Emeka (Emeka is wrong) captures a sentiment that is at the core of the civilising mission: the colonisers *know* and the colonised require teaching. It goes without saying that Peter feels an unwarranted epistemic superiority over Emeka.

The harms and injustices I have highlighted from the interaction between Peter and Emeka are by no means exhaustive of the epistemic harms present in **The Master Knows** or in epistemic colonisation. However, they are hopefully sufficient to show that (P1) is true.

3.2 *Defence of Premise 2*

The second premise of my rationale says that any practice that involves epistemic injustice is antithetical to the fair-minded pursuit of knowledge.

The harms of epistemic injustice and epistemic colonisation highlighted in the previous section are antithetical to the fair-minded pursuit of knowledge. Recall, the fair-minded pursuit of knowledge is an epistemic disposition in which an agent takes the need to be epistemically faithful and just as central to their epistemic practices. Being epistemically faithful entails valuing epistemic ends over the advancement and sustenance of non-epistemic agendas. Being epistemically just entails privileging the virtues of epistemic justice over the vices of epistemic injustice.

In the previous section, I discussed different forms of epistemic injustice and showed how its core concept (prejudicial stereotypes) is present in epistemic colonialism, thereby establishing that epistemic colonialism involves forms of epistemic injustice. What does it mean to say—as does (P2)—that any practice involving epistemic injustice is antithetical to the fair-minded pursuit of knowledge? To answer this question, I focus on two epistemic virtues that are correlative of the disposition of epistemic fair-mindedness. Thus, practices that embody or enable the opposing epistemic vices count as being antithetical to the fair-minded pursuit of knowledge.

Open-Mindedness

The disposition of open-mindedness requires receptivity to other ideas and to the possibility that an idea we hold might not be the case. Jason Baehr defines an open-minded person as someone

> characteristically … willing and (within limits) able … to transcend a default cognitive standpoint … in order to take up or take seriously the merits of … a distinct cognitive standpoint. (Baehr 2011: 202)

In Baehr's conception, while it is possible (as is commonly the case) that open-mindedness requires a person to set aside their accustomed pattern of thinking, it is not always the case that the open-minded person's beliefs are challenged. Baehr considers three forms of open-mindedness. In the first, the agent's core beliefs are challenged. In the second, the agent is required to assess or act as a neutral adjudicator between conflicting standpoints. In the third, the agent is required to be open-minded when there is

neither a challenge to their beliefs nor a need for rational assessment (Baehr 2011: 200–201). Let us consider what these conceptions of open-mindedness look like in a colonial setting to gain more clarity.

The first form of open-mindedness that requires the agent to be open to challenges to their accustomed way of thinking is, perhaps, the most difficult kind of open-mindedness to cultivate. In a colonial setting, it requires the colonisers to accept their fallibility as humans, and thus be able to entertain the idea that their firm beliefs might be wrong. This is not what in fact happened, as can be seen in the unequal terms of interaction between the coloniser and colonised. These unequal terms, inspired by the civilising mission, meant that the colonised and their epistemic system were not given the benefit of the doubt. The colonisers conceived of their epistemic system as superior to that of the colonised. This is in direct contrast to the first kind of open-mindedness.

The second form of open-mindedness requires the agent to assess or act as a neutral adjudicator between conflicting standpoints. Within the colonial setting, this would require the colonisers to suspend their prejudices and preconceptions about the colonised and be open to understanding what is presented to them. This includes things like languages, epistemic frameworks, social systems, *et cetera*. In **The Master Knows**, this would require that Peter listens to Emeka's specific testimony about his illness rather than equate whatever Emeka says to his experience in Congo.

The third form of open-mindedness requires an agent to be open-minded when there is neither a challenge to their beliefs nor a need for rational assessment. Within the colonial setting, this requires the colonisers to have the disposition of someone willing to learn and understand new things. Hence, an open-minded coloniser is one who, for example, is open to understanding the languages of the colonised as having the value of intelligibility. This sort of agent will not see the need to impose their language on the colonised as the sole intelligible means of communication.

Epistemic Humility

Alistair Wardrope (2015: 349) defines epistemic humility as 'an attitude of awareness of the limitations of one's own epistemic capacities, and an active disposition to seek sources outside one's self to help overcome these shortcomings'. This is an epistemic virtue that requires an agent to be prudent in their claims to knowledge. This prudence implies that the agent, first, admits their limitations, second, restricts their knowledge claims to what falls within these limitations, and third, is open to acquiring new epistemic resources in light of these limitations.

Within the colonial context, this requires the colonisers to view their knowledge claims as arising from a limited perspective. This will enable them to be open, not just to the possibility that they are wrong, but also to being taught. This is the disposition of the epistemically humble agent.

Open-mindedness and epistemic humility do not exhaust the list of epistemic virtues that are constitutive of the fair-minded pursuit of knowledge. My decision to stick with these two is due to their dialectical similarity to some of the virtues proposed as remedies to various forms of epistemic injustice in the literature. For example, Fricker argues for a form of reflexive critical awareness to remedy testimonial injustice. When

> the hearer suspects prejudice in her credibility judgement … she should shift intellectual gear out of spontaneous, unreflective mode and into active critical reflection in order to identify how far the suspected prejudice has influenced her judgement. (Fricker 2007: 91)

To the extent that the virtues of epistemic justice are similar to the fair-minded pursuit of knowledge, it makes sense to think that the vices of epistemic injustice are antithetical to the fair-minded pursuit of knowledge. Take, for instance, Fricker's requirement of reflexive critical awareness and the virtue of open-mindedness. If a close-minded coloniser is guided by prejudice when they listen to the testimony of the colonised, this disposition (of close-mindedness) will make it impossible for the coloniser to 'shift their intellectual gear' in order to notice the influence of their prejudice on their judgement of the colonised.

Thinking of the relationship between epistemic vices that are antithetical to the fair-minded pursuit of knowledge and epistemic injustice like this is also plausible in other cases. Consider Pohlhaus's (2012) notion of wilful hermeneutical ignorance and the virtue of epistemic humility. Wilful hermeneutical ignorance occurs when dominantly situated knowers disregard the epistemic tools of marginally situated knowers. A virtue that can speak specifically to this vice is epistemic humility, which involves 'an active disposition to seek sources outside one's self' (Wardrope 2015: 349). To the extent that there is this intricate relationship between epistemic vices that are antithetical to the fair-minded pursuit of knowledge and epistemic injustice, epistemic injustice is antithetical to the fair-minded pursuit of knowledge.

3.3 Defence of Premise 3

Premise 3 says that any practice that is antithetical to the fair-minded pursuit of knowledge should be reversed for epistemic reasons. I take it that this premise is the least controversial of the lot.

I employ Fricker's (2013) recommendation on how we can derive the requirements of epistemic justice (virtues) as a remedy to the injustices and vices highlighted in the previous two premises. Fricker (2013: 1318) suggests, as good philosophical practice, 'that taking failure as one's starting point is a good strategy' to attain a positive value. Hence, I consider epistemic decolonisation to be the positive value of epistemic colonisation. But, why should this be the case?

Let me answer with the aid of an analogy. Suppose I am fouled during a game of football and the referee awards me a free kick. The fundamental reason why the referee is awarding me the free kick is because my opponent has done something against the rules of the sport (football). While the foul committed against me (kicking my legs) might be accepted in other sports (kick-boxing for example), it is not acceptable in football. Hence, the referee's decision to award me a free kick is in keeping with the requirements of football specifically.

Similarly, if epistemic colonisation, in virtue of involving epistemic injustice, is antithetical to the fair-minded pursuit of knowledge, the imperative to reverse it is distinctly epistemic. By relying on this distinctly epistemic imperative, I avoid the relativist implications that I highlighted in Section 1. For example, when deciding between syllabi, the epistemic merit of each syllabus will be the criterion. This epistemic merit will be determined by how much a particular syllabus is faithful to the fair-minded pursuit of knowledge. Thus, faithfulness to epistemic ends becomes the measure for epistemic credibility.

4. The Focus of Epistemic Decolonisation

If these thoughts are on the right track, the conclusion of my rationale follows: epistemic colonisation should be reversed—i.e., we should decolonise knowledge—for epistemic reasons. In this section, I develop the notion of epistemic decolonisation that emerges from this rationale. But a recap is in order first. I started off by looking at some accounts for epistemic decolonisation. I highlighted three general intuitions about epistemic decolonisation. I considered two of these intuitions to be uncontroversial. However, the third intuition has relativist implications that are problematic for epistemic decolonisation. Thus, I set out to defend a novel rationale. In defending this rationale, I have stressed the harms of epistemic colonisation and shown how they are antithetical to the fair-minded pursuit of knowledge.

It is noteworthy that these harms affect two things—the epistemic agent (the colonised) and the knowledge economy. I refer to the first as harm to the inquirer and the second as harm to inquiry.

In what follows, I provide a detailed defence for my conception of epistemic decolonisation. Recall, I define epistemic decolonisation as *an epistemically faithful and just knowledge-forming practice that is open to, and actively draws on, diverse perspectives.* Since the inquirer and inquiry are the primary victims of epistemic colonisation, I make their role central to the definition of epistemic decolonisation. I talk about the inquirer and inquiry under the themes: 'who asks the questions' and 'what questions are asked' respectively.

4.1 Who Asks the Questions

The question of who inquires is crucial for understanding what goes into the creation and reception of knowledge, at least for members of socially marginalised groups. This is because the social position of the inquirer influences their epistemic practices.[7] I focus on two aspects of the inquirer—competence and sincerity—to highlight the importance of epistemic trust in the epistemic practices of members of socially marginalised groups and, by extension, for a plausible account of epistemic decolonisation.

The coloniser's claim to epistemic superiority is premised on a (false) claim to neutrality and objectivity of his epistemic perspective (Mitova forthcoming). This means that to the coloniser's mind, the knowledge they produce is free of all external influences—hence, disregarding the perspectival influence on knowledge formation of which standpoint theorists have made us aware (Harding 1998). This perspectival influence on knowledge formation is the idea that knowledge stems from, and is consequently influenced by, the social position of the inquirer. I gave a rundown of the harms that result from this disregard in Section 3.1. One of the central harms to the colonised is best articulated in Grasswick's (2018) notion of 'epistemic trust injustice'.

Again, epistemic trust injustice occurs when a community or agent fails to 'satisfy the conditions of responsibly-placed trust' put on them by others (Grasswick 2018: 83–84). These conditions of responsibly placed trust are competency and sincerity/care. The competency condition requires that an agent knows what they are talking about (Grasswick 2018: 77–78). The sincerity/care condition requires that an agent is not merely epistemically upright (in the sense of telling the truth) but also genuinely cares for the subject of epistemic concern (Grasswick 2018: 80–81). I focus on the competency and sincerity conditions in this sub-section. I separate the care condition from

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7 This point is made by Standpoint Theorists. The central argument for standpoint theory is that there is no such thing as a disinterested knower. Knowers are influenced by their social position. What I take from them is this perspectival influence on knowledge formation (see Harding 1998).

the sincerity condition as I believe it is more insightful when investigated sep-arately. I use it in the next sub-section for the argument I make.

In the meantime, recall **The Master Knows**. In Emeka's experience, he has good reasons not to trust Peter (and his folk). This distrust that Emeka has is justified because firstly, in the past, members of Peter's social group have failed to provide significant knowledge to Emeka by offer-ing him pills that were not effective (failure of competency condition). Sec-ondly, Emeka has, historically, had an aspect of significant epistemic importance to him (knowledge about his illness) ignored by members of Peter's social group (failure of competency condition). Thirdly, Emeka has been on the receiving end of various ethical and social injustices from members of Peter's social group (failure of sincerity condition). These reasons for epistemic distrust seem insurmountable by any claim of episte-mic virtuousness that Peter would accord himself on issues that are of impor-tance to Emeka. Correspondingly, Emeka will be justified in being doubtful of any claim to such epistemic virtue by Peter.

This atmosphere of epistemic distrust created by Peter's (and his folk's) actions towards Emeka is representative of the atmosphere of distrust sur-rounding knowledge that comes from the global West to former colonies. This distrust is justified by the precedent set by epistemic colonisation. In the experience of the colonised, their best interests have not always been at the heart of the coloniser. Hence, addressing this distrust should be one of the aims of any plausible account of epistemic decolonisation. Let me unpack this in connection to what has already been discussed.

The distrust of the colonised is born out of historical experiences of epis-temic bad faith from the colonisers. By epistemic bad faith, I mean the unfair/unjust epistemic dispositions with which the colonisers address issues that are of importance to the colonised. By cultivating this disposition, the colonisers have placed themselves in antithesis to the fair-minded pursuit of knowledge. This grounds the distrust that the colonised have for the colonisers.

It is important to address this distrust when conceptualising any plausible account of epistemic decolonisation. This is because holding on to this

distrust harms the colonised as creators and receivers of knowledge. As creators of knowledge, the colonised are apprehensive of participating in any knowledge creation process that comes from the global West since, again, when they tried, they were not offered equal and reciprocal terms of interaction (Emeka's case). As receivers of knowledge, the colonised are harmed in their ability to trust, even when they should.

I take it to be intuitive at this stage that it makes sense for the colonised to distrust knowledge from the global West when this knowledge is in direct conflict with the colonised's best interests. However, the colonised also distrust knowledge from the global West when this knowledge could be beneficial to the colonised. This is not an epistemic vice on the part of the colonised. To the extent that the ability of the colonised to trust is an epistemic virtue, their inability to trust (even when they should) is not an epistemic vice but a result of an epistemic injustice. This is especially the case if the circumstances surrounding the colonised's distrust are historical instances of epistemic bad faith by the colonisers whom they distrust.[8]

The distrust caused by epistemic bad faith on the part of the colonisers means they are not wholly suited to provide all the epistemic goods relevant to the colonised. Hence, it is important that if an atmosphere of epistemic trust is to be created, the epistemic agent should be one that is trustworthy. This, to my mind, is one of the key foci of epistemic decolonisation. Epistemic trust increases the willingness of members of socially marginalised groups to participate in epistemic activities. Recall **The Master Knows** again. If Emeka trusts that Peter will engage credibly with him, Emeka's willingness to share the details of his illness with Peter will increase.

In addition to the need for restoring trust, my call for epistemic decolonisation is also motivated by the epistemic wealth that decolonisation promises. An atmosphere of trust avails us of the opportunity for more expansive epistemic exploration that will focus on formally underexplored perspectives, such as the potential epistemic wealth of holistic forms of healing present in the practices of Emeka's healer.

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8 See Grasswick (2018) and Daukas (2006) for more on this.

4.2 What Questions are Asked

The question of 'what is investigated?' touches on two themes that I consider to be important to epistemic decolonisation—relevance and diversity.

Relevance

To elaborate on the theme of relevance, recall the epistemic trust condition of care I hinted at earlier. If, for example, Emeka and Peter are asked to come up with a cure for an illness, their hypotheses will differ. Emeka's hypothesis will consider communal relations while Peter's will take a more physiological approach. Each, most probably, will do a thorough job in trying to link the cure to his perceived cause of the illness. Conversely, if Emeka is asked to investigate the physiological side to illness and Peter is asked to investigate the relational side to illness, they would most probably come up with results that are not as thorough as their first results.

Now, this speaks to their competence in both areas, but I think it also speaks to something greater—relevance. This is because even if Emeka is given the appropriate data about the physiological side to illness, and shows as much diligence in his research as possible, the fact that that sort of thing is not relevant to him means that he will not approach the research as conscientiously as Peter would, and vice versa. If I am to trust either of them on an issue, I will trust Emeka more on the relational aspect of illness, and I will trust Peter more on the physiological aspect of illness. This goes to show the role of relevance in determining epistemic trustworthiness and interest. An agent is likely to exhibit greater care in issues that are relevant to them, and by extension, they are more trustworthy agents on the intricacies of such issues.

Similarly, epistemic practices in colonial and 'post-colonial' settings are shaped by the level of relevance they have to the agent in question. Themes of greater relevance to members of colonised groups are probably non-issues to members of the other social group. (Debates on decolonisation are a case in point.) Hence, building from the premise of standpoint theorists, a plausible account of epistemic decolonisation should aim at

creating avenues where relevant themes to varying social groups become the starting point of their epistemic explorations.[9]

Diversity

With the goal of building a more inclusive epistemic framework, I argue for epistemic diversity as a key component of epistemic decolonisation. By epistemic diversity in this context, I mean the recognition of diverse epistemic resources, that takes the social situatedness of the agent into account. This sort of diversity aims at creating avenues for the revitalisation of 'fractured epistemologies',[10] thereby contributing to the global knowledge economy. In addition to the epistemic wealth that this promises, the revitalisation of fractured epistemologies holds the potential to create an avenue for members of socially marginalised groups to regain their rights *to be*. That is, it creates an avenue for the colonised to affirm their humanity that was called into question by colonialism, as evident in the coloniser's denial of African epistemic frameworks (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2017: 51).

In response to this denial of African's humanity, Africans have sought to affirm their humanity by seeking epistemic freedom from the global West. This can be seen in the range of literature on broader topics like transformation (Mamdani 1996, 2019), to identity related topics like Africanisation (Makgoba 1997; Ramose 1998), and more subject specific topics like epistemic decolonisation (Ngũgĩ 1986; Hountondji 1995; 2009; Wiredu 2002; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2017, 2018). While these might speak to different themes, they are all geared towards addressing oppressive epistemic systems as a way to gain epistemic freedom. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018: 4) argues that one of the key components of this epistemic freedom in Africa will be to centre Africa as a legitimate 'epistemic site from which to interpret the world, while at the same time globalizing knowledge from Africa'.

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9 This is similar to the intuition we get from Hountondji (1995; 2009) and Wiredu (2002).
10 I employ Wilfred Lajul's (2018) understanding of 'fractured epistemology' as a knowledge system that has been disintegrated through its contact with other (Western) dominant epistemic systems.

This approach to the diversity element of epistemic decolonisation avoids the temptation of thinking of fractured epistemologies as competing with mainstream Western epistemologies. The problem with approaching the diversity element this way (as competition between fractured and mainstream epistemologies) is that it easily lapses into setting Western ideas as the standard to beat. Rather than take this route, the diversity element of a plausible account of epistemic decolonisation should focus on creating a multiplicity of epistemic centres that strive for epistemic wealth through a dialogical method[11] of knowledge formation rather than an adversarial one.

There are at least three benefits to taking this route. First, it minimises the possibility of dominant epistemic frameworks damaging (again) the marginal ones by the sheer fact that they have held a dominant position for so long and are thus better developed. Second, it avoids another epistemic colonisation by whatever position comes out on top. Third, and perhaps most importantly, it instates the epistemic high ground of members of social groups with fractured epistemologies. This is because membership in these groups creates a sort of 'double consciousness' (Du Bois 1903) in the mind of its members. Hence, they are privy to their fractured epistemologies and to that of the socially dominant groups. If they take the approach of sticking to just the one system and fighting against the other, it would not take long for them to form a close-minded epistemic system.

In this paper, I have argued for an account of epistemic decolonisation that is grounded on a distinctly epistemic rationale. This is premised on the epistemic benefits of a fair-minded pursuit of knowledge. My account circumvents the relativist rationale for epistemic decolonisation by avoiding the need to rank epistemic perspectives in the first place. What is important, in my account, is setting epistemic fair-mindedness as the goal of epistemic practice. This redirects the focus of epistemic decolonisation to the development of fractured epistemologies, while remaining in conversation with other epistemologies to create epistemic wealth that is empowering to

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11 Jonathan Chimakonam's (2017) 'Conversationalism' is one attempt at this.

the socially marginalised and contributes to the global knowledge economy.

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