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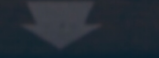
Northwestern

Program in Comparative
Literary Studies

IN SEARCH OF EPISTEMIC JUSTICE: A TENTATIVE CARTOGRAPHY

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS

AMERICA · AFRICA
ASIA · AUSTRALASIA



Register by January 20

INSEARCHOF.EPISTEMIC.JUSTICE@GMAIL.COM

This seminar aims to explore epistemic inequality and epistemic injustice in a variety of cultural, historical and geopolitical contexts, as well as within the academy. When discussing epistemic inequality or injustice we refer to the marginalization and de-legitimation of ways of knowing and methods of knowledge production and dissemination that stem from non-dominant cultural locations, identities and positionalities.

Issues related to epistemic justice have been explored by scholars from various academic disciplines, grounded in different locations in the global academy. In the Anglo-American tradition, philosopher Miranda Fricker (2007) defined epistemic injustice as a wrong done to someone as a subject of knowledge. She distinguished two kinds: testimonial injustice, which occurs when “prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word,” and hermeneutical injustice, which occurs when a “gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences” (2007, 1) or to communicating them to others.

While this is the theory most often cited when referring to issues related to epistemic justice, other scholars from different traditions have dealt with similar issues using different terms. Argentine theorist Walter D. Mignolo (1999, 2009) discussed the “geo-politics of knowledge,” pointing to the ties between epistemology and the politics of location, and targeting the phenomenon he called “epistemic racism.” Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014) coined the term “epistemicide” to refer to the marginalization and eventually extermination of non-western ways of knowing from the global arena, and called for “cognitive justice” in which global forms of knowing and reasoning are recognized and valued.

Others have exposed the workings of epistemic injustice within the academy, studying the ways our theories and methodologies are mostly informed by western intellectual traditions, while other forms of knowledge are marginalized and devalued. For example, Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu (1998, 2002) addressed the problems that lie in philosophizing through concepts and categories that are assumed to be universal but are actually of western origin, while in Literary Studies, scholar Revathi Krishnaswamy (2010) addressed the “epistemic dependency of the rest of the west” in the context of literary terms and theories and called for a consideration of “world literary knowledges” as providing valuable tools for the study of literature. In the social sciences, Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell

(2007) critiqued the “northern bias” in the global dynamics of knowledge production and advocated for the inclusion of “southern theory.”

As these examples demonstrate, most academic disciplines are still characterized by a lack of epistemic trust and a mismatch between social realities and hermeneutical tools. The categories, theories, and methods through which we model and validate knowledge production are still determined at the centers of global academic production, while peripheral epistemologies often do not circulate beyond their national borders and therefore do not participate in the shaping of our fields, oftentimes struggling to assert themselves even in the peripheries, stunted by the hegemony and pervasiveness of western thought. Our primary aspiration is to create an international and interdisciplinary forum where scholars from all backgrounds and career stages can reflect together on this phenomenon, its implications for knowledge formation in their disciplines, and how to create more epistemically just environments—inside the academy and beyond.

This seminar will hold six meetings during the academic year 2021-2022. We will alternate invited lectures and workshop sessions where scholars from the very young to the very senior can present and discuss works in progress. Scholars with an interest in epistemic justice who do not wish to present their own work at this stage are welcome to join the seminar as listeners and discussants.

We warmly encourage presentations from scholars conducting research on underrepresented topics and fields and hailing from underprivileged institutions. By creating this seminar, we are following Boaventura de Sousa Santos’ exhortation to create an ecology of knowledge based on an “intercultural dialogue and translation among different critical knowledges and practices: South-centric and North-centric, popular and scientific, religious and secular, female and male, urban and rural, and so forth” (2014, 42). We hope that the seminar’s online format will not only foster intercultural dialogues and translations along the expected lines of languages, nations, and regions, but also set the stage for unexpected and innovative encounters.

Possible themes for lectures and workshop presentations include, but are not limited to:

- Theorizations of epistemic injustice/inequality stemming from different geopolitical and disciplinary locations
- The dialogue between the Anglo-American theorization of epistemic injustice as elaborated by social epistemology and other traditions of thought
- Epistemic inequalities in different academic disciplines, including specific case studies

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- The ties between epistemic injustice and empires, capitalist expansion, racism, and discrimination based on class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability
 - The relationship between epistemic justice as a value emerging in contemporary social epistemology and post-colonial and decolonial theories and practices
 - Peripheral theories and methodologies and their circulation
 - The role of institutions in maintaining epistemic inequalities
 - Concrete practices of epistemic disobedience and resistance drawn from activism and pedagogy

If you are interested in participating in this seminar, please send an email to insearchof.epistemic.justice@gmail.com. Please include a short bio and indicate how you would like to participate – giving a lecture, presenting work in progress at a workshop session, or as a group member who will not present. Please apply by January 20. The first seminar session will be held toward the end of January 2022, participants will be notified via email.

The organizers:

Chen Bar-Itzhak (Department of Comparative Literature, Bar-Ilan University)

Micol Bez (Philosophy, Institut Jean Nicod / École Normale Supérieure / Department of Comparative Literature, Northwestern University)

Angelo Vannini (Laboratoire d'Études Romanes, Université Paris 8 Vincennes - Saint Denis)

Victoria Zurita (Division of Literatures, Cultures and Languages, Stanford University)

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