Coloniality, Global Power Asymmetry and Epistemic Liberation

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Colonialism, as a political structure and form of domination, has long ended in Africa and other southern countries. However, the power asymmetry in the world political economy persists as colonialism's historical legacy. The structural domination of colonialism in the postcolonial world also persists at various levels. Such is the case with the coloniality of epistemology that dominates in southern counties. It is described as the 'colonial matrix of power'—the totality of coloniality. To overcome epistemic injustice in the international aid sector, it is not enough to identify the symbolic inclusion of some issues, institutions and intellectuals/experts from the global south in the policy formulation process, but to understand the colonial matrix of power and to achieve epistemic liberation.

Recently, the domain of international development cooperation has entered in the debate regarding epistemic injustice. Furthering debate in this area, Susanne Koch in "The Local Consultant Will Not Be Credible" (2020) argues that even though the field of international development cooperation purports to be concerned with 'doing good' and working for global justice, in practice it might not be doing the good it ambitiously claims. Setting aside the political economy issue, such cooperation at the epistemic level creates and sustains epistemic injustice. Koch supports her argument with the help of interview material that she generated in Tanzania and South Africa as the local policy experts in these countries are subjected to epistemic injustice and discriminatory epistemic practices. She makes her point regarding epistemic injustice from the theoretical positions of critical development theory, post-colonial scholarship, and Southern theory.

Miranda Fricker articulated the rubric term 'epistemic injustice' for normalised experiences when 'someone is ingenuously downgraded and/or disadvantaged in respect of their status as an epistemic subject' (Fricker 2017, 53). Epistemic injustice is conceptualised at the individual level as testimonial injustice, and at the structural level as hermeneutical injustice. Testimonial injustice takes place when 'someone is wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower' (20) in which a speaker suffers a credibility deficit. It takes place when an epistemic agent receives an unfair deficit credibility due to identity prejudice on the hearer's part.

At the structural level, hermeneutical injustice occurs when certain social groups are prevented from fully participating in social processes and are epistemically subjected to discrimination. Furthering this debate, J.Y. Lee (2021, 564) conceptualised 'anticipatory epistemic injustice'. This pernicious kind of injustice refers to the various wrongs that epistemic agents may suffer because of anticipated challenges in the process of taking up opportunities to share testimony. The effects of anticipatory epistemic injustice are primarily evident in cases where epistemic agents enact testimony-suppressing behaviour. Such behaviour might encompass the practice of withholding, diminishing, retracting, repudiating, and revising one's own testimony in response to the consequent challenges anticipated. This addition is useful to analyse the testimonial suppressive behaviour on part of the epistemic agent.

Development Aid and Injustice

In the development aid context, Anna Malaise argues that the process of injustice happens, 'when development professionals visit poorer countries for a few days and believe they "understand" the situation of the other, and therefore base their decisions on this experience' (Malaise 2015, 118). Koch, taking a cue from Malaise, argues that this situation of injustice leads to a visible harm done in a situation of credibility excess and continuous discriminatory epistemic imaginary. Kristie Dotson argues the individual's epistemic injustice is rooted in 'socio-epistemic structures' (2012), a marginalised group's 'epistemic oppression' (2014) and, at the extreme, 'hermeneutical death' (Medina 2017).

Testimonial and hermeneutical injustices mutually reinforce one another. In the aid-related advisory processes, Koch claims that epistemic authority is tied to identity-based prejudice. The suffering of systematic credibility deficit of experts from aid-receiving countries are interrelated to credibility excess of 'international' experts. Such systemic 'epistemic discrimination' prevents experts from the global south to understand and make a legitimate claim in the epistemic universe therefore; they are prevented from having autonomy over their shared destiny. It would have enabled visibility of their social world from their own 'epistemic standpoint' otherwise—this unique standpoint is not accessible to global exporters. The social imaginary as 'a repository of collectively shared images and scripts' (480) play crucial role in preventing local experts to produce knowledge from 'standpoint epistemology'. The creation of this imaginary has historical dimension as colonialism in the global south created and sustained certain types of negative-images. These images are epistemically reproduced in the global political economic process.

Koch empirically examined testimonial injustice in South Africa and Tanzania by interviewing local experts. It was clear that the interviewees were subjected to credibility-deficits as the sharing of local knowledge had little or no weight in designing development planning. The development strategy designed by local experts in Tanzania was rejected by donor advisors simply because the local experts designed it. The experts from aid-receiving countries are subjected to systemic discriminatory credibility judgment based on their identity. The credibility deficit of local experts is inherently linked with the credibility excess of experts from donor country. Thus, the process of epistemic injustice here is interactive, comparative and contrastive (Medina 2011, 18). The social identity of local experts dominates over their competence and expertise as they are reduced to epistemic informants with (out) certain capability to speak. This injustice occurs in the context in which the domain of international cooperation claims appears to have been democratised.

Koch's article highlights the development cooperation through an epistemic justice lens and aligns it with critical development theory, post-colonial scholarship and Southern theory. In my critique (Vaditya 2020), I made the following observations. In the case of critical development theory, which 'offer a radical critique of the dominant paradigm and to use all its imaginative powers to develop a new paradigm offering renewed emancipatory horizons' (5)? The scholar has made a strong point for ending epistemic subordination of global south to the global north particularly in the field of development aid. However, the article misses an important point about structure of world economic system.

This system has been dominated by core/western/northern and perpetuates through economic dependency both in the form of aid and financial lending, which is termed as neo-colonialism, developmentalism, neo-liberalism etc. Ending this dependency might also ease the epistemic domination of the west/north. Hence, both economic and epistemic domination mutually reinforce one another. As Arturo Escobar (1995) has observed, development as the important mechanism through the Third World has been imagined and imagined itself.

Theoretically, partnership discourse stresses the importance of considering local knowledge while formulating policies in development aid, but without addressing the power asymmetries in international political economy. It is the historical baggage of the expansion of colonialism which subordinated the indigenous way of knowing reality which is termed as 'epistemic ide,' the indigenous legal and political forms—everything—is destroyed and subordinated to colonial occupation (Santos 2016, 18). Apart from the domination of western/northern epistemology on non-western societies, within these societies there is interplay between western and local dominant epistemology as in the context of Indian caste epistemology. It is in that sense the 'acquisition of knowledge is more an act of power rather than as an act of truth seeking' (bodhi sir and bipin JoJo 2019).

Such epistemic hierarchy is the historical legacy of colonial domination of the north over the south. During the colonial expansion science, as a dominant knowledge system that challenged theological interpretations, subscribed to universality and the generalisability of empirical knowledge. It hegemonized the context-driven local indigenous knowledge systems. This hold that was institutionalised during the 'colonial period continues in the form of the imaginary epistemic superiority of global north perpetuated by the donor bureaucracies in the South' (Vaditya 2020, 5).

In replying to the article, I made the point that Koch claimed to have taken theoretical propositions in critical theories. I added that all these theories overtly took the political position of seeking human emancipation as defined by (Horkheimer 1982, 244) 'which becomes catalyst in liberating human beings from the structures of domination'. The political nature of international development cooperation is to perpetuate dependency of aid recipient country and sustain western/north epistemic domination. Another critical point that I made was that the article highlights one context of epistemic injustice, but falls short of pointing out counter-movements at large that challenge the epistemic dominance of the west in Africa—particularly in Tanzania and South Africa. Thus, Koch's article captures the contextual dimension of epistemic injustice, but not the historical one (Vaditya 2020).

Perpetuating Colonial Power Asymmetries and Movements

One of the critiques that I made was that social imagery has created epistemic superiority of the north as its suzerainty over the south. Such superiority within the south, internalised by the national/local dominant groups, the integration of western and caste epistemology in an Indian context maintains and sustains its epistemic domination. Such domination has to be resisted actively by positioning alternative indigenous epistemologies otherwise, if the

dominated accept theories passively as 'received theories' it becomes difficult to liberate subjugated knowledges.

I raised the issue that 'the article was not overt in maintaining the position that the field of development aid was to maintain a humane face to the world economic dependency' (Vaditya 2020). In this regard, Koch (2021) argued that, it has to be read in larger context in which the author has produced other related works:

> Re-reading my article, I realise that my focus on making explicit the testimonial and hermeneutic injustices experts experience in the context of aid has left little space for a more comprehensive contextualisation of these experiences. While such contextualisation as well as a more thorough engagement with de- and postcolonial literature is indeed missing in this piece, they were substantial themes of my previous and subsequent works (15).

In the development aid sector that Koch refers to, there are unchanged power asymmetries in aid-related advisory process. Koch and Weingarten (2016) carried out interviews with key actors involved in this processes in the policy fields of health, environment and education that were complemented with a survey and comprehensive document analysis. While contextualising their empirical findings, they showed unequal relations and colliding interests at all levels of advice in the realm of aid (Koch and Weingarten 2016, 43–136 as mentioned in Koch 2021). These interests are to be found on all sides. However, the donor side is in a privileged position to safeguard and further their interests given the one-sided dependency of aid-receiving countries. Koch argued that 'this core asymmetry remains unchanged despite the partnership rhetoric and it inherently puts 'partners' into unequal positions' (Koch 2021, 16).

The critique that I made regarded the missing historical dimension of epistemic injustice while the article captured the contextual dimension. Koch (2021) brought out colonialism as an historical dimension of epistemic injustice. The social imagery that persists now has been constructed during colonial times. At the same time, Koch also refers to critical African and Latin American theorists and philosophers that address the 'coloniality of power' (Quijano 2000) in global knowledge relations (Grosfoguel 2011; Mignolo 2002; Thiong'o 1986). Koch refers to Grosfoguel (2011) who argued that colonialism consolidated the hegemony by constructing 'a hierarchy of superior and inferior knowledge and, thus, of superior and inferior people around the world' (Koch 2021, 16) and there is the prevalence of 'Eurocentric' epistemic governance' (Girvan 2007; Grosfoguel 2011).

Koch (2020) refrained from delineating the peculiar historical trajectories of aid-relations in South Africa and Tanzania as they were provided in Koch and Weingarten (2016). The third critique that I made was that the study did not mention any 'counter counter movements at large that challenge[s] the epistemic dominance of the west in Africa particularly in Tanzania and South Africa'' (Vaditya 2020, 6). Koch acknowledged that the 'prevailing knowledge order is indeed increasingly being challenged' (18) and refers to the decolonization movement which centres on overcoming the hegemony of Northern Science (Ahmed 2019; Mwonzora 2019). While highlighting other thinkers' critical theorisation against epistemic domination in an African context, Koch (2021, 19) argued to what extent the counter

movements challenging Northern epistemic dominance outlined above will induce not only a re-imagining of aid, but also help make a new imaginary operative in practice that remains to be seen. In the field of aid-cooperation, Koch makes a pessimistic prognosis 'as aid relations are inherently shaped by vested interests and a social imaginary of inequality that obstruct a radical transformation' (19).

A Shift in Outlook

Palash Kamruzzaman (2021) posits that the credibility deficit 'local' experts suffer is inherently linked with the credibility excess of 'international' experts. He argues that 'it is also important that such reflections receive wider attention particularly at a time when a growing genre namely aid ethnographies are gaining traction in international development scholarship' (77). The issue of credibility in aid sector is representative of a universal problem that is commonly practiced in the sector. He says that the prevalence of racial disparity in the form of white privilege within the international development domain can be historically traced back. With the help of Uma Kothari's (2006, 16) experience, Kamruzzaman (2021, 77) argues that as Kothari was working as a consultant in Bangladesh for a bilateral agency, she felt devalued when: '… her white colleague was allocated meetings at Ministries and head offices of international development agencies, while she was allocated meetings with smaller NGOs and lesser government officials' (77). The point seems to be that 'based on who would be taken more seriously and would wield more authority rather than on who had more appropriate experience and knowledge' (77).

The local/national aid development professionals/workers are described by Kamruzzaman (2017) as National Development Experts (NDEs). They are heterogeneous intellectual elites and/or policy elites integrated with local political elites. They have command over English and are differentiated by their westernised life style. It is implicit in this argument that the local elite/ dominant social class, or castes in countries like India, have access/congruence with western epistemology that subordinates the local group's epistemology. In that sense the marginalised class/social groups are doubly discriminated against by both western epistemology and the local dominant group's epistemology. Local experts both feel epistemic discrimination and, simultaneously, discriminate in several ways. It is undeniable that the processes and practices in development and development aid relationships are essentially power relationships.

Kamruzzaman makes important suggestions to make visible NDE's ideas and research in development ideas. One point is that the decolonizing, localizing, decentring or de-constructing development rhetoric emanates from scholars and institutions located in the west with token inclusion of researchers and institutions from the global south (81). The generic development model that is followed by the donor countries often relies on western ideology promoting the neoliberal model of development that makes the scope for context of different countries to include in the implementing process.

To end this epistemic injustice or inequality, Kamruzzaman (2021, 81) suggests that the donors should 'play a key role in altering their outlook towards development and funding policies' as existing inequalities considerably restrict the possibility of development

professionals from the global south to publish in high quality journals and presses. Hence, publishing their work in high quality journals or publications and creating a supportive eco-system by donor and recipient countries seems desirable.

Beyond A Shift in Outlook: Epistemic Liberation

It can be argued that 'dominant knowledge as a tool of power' can reproduce existing social domination be it local or global. The issues that should concern researchers committed to bringing out subjugated knowledge regard how to challenge the influence of dominant and hegemonic knowledge (Vaditya 2018, 274). Thus, those groups that are at the margins would remain marginalized if the social domination were not to be challenged through appropriate research methods informed by apt epistemic standpoints. The social construction of various forms of domination and their naturalization through both qualitative and quantitative methods have to be looked at critically. While doing so, it is imperative to place forms of social domination central to the research praxis and to challenge dominant scientific methods claims over objectivity and neutrality. Emancipatory research practice demands, as a moral imperative, to do research *from inside* rather research *on* the dominated communities. Rather than producing neutral knowledge without any social utility, research has to improve the emancipatory potentiality of the research subjects. It should become an emancipatory tool to be accessible to people in their struggle and improve the social condition of the dominated.

Research should enable the oppressed to understand how underlying social structures have historically served the dominant group's interests. It should expose social inequalities, injustice and exploitation. At the same time, it should give voice to those exploited and marginalized groups by explaining generalized/naturalized oppression in order to precipitate social change. An emancipatory research practice makes social justice both part of the research process and a research outcome. It has to be highlighted the pretention of knowledge as an innocent activity by highlighting the political nature of knowledge creation process. It should foster oppositional discourses to challenge relations of domination and subordination. It is to be acknowledged that, knowledge construction takes place under historical, cultural and social hegemonic domination of a particular location, gender, race and caste.

In the context of Latin American Subaltern Studies group, Ramón Grosfoguel (2007) argued that this group in the United States attempted to produce radical alternative knowledge; however, they reproduced the epistemic schema of Area Studies in the USA. The major issue with this group was that they produce knowledge about the subalterns rather than studies with, and from, subaltern perspectives. Production of knowledge with the subject and ending the binary of subject and object becomes imperative to end epistemic injustice that has come as historical baggage of capitalist and racist colonial historical past.

In Grosfoguel's argument, that 'decolonization of knowledge would require to take seriously the epistemic perspective/cosmologies/insights of critical thinkers from the Global South thinking from and with subalternized racial/ethnic/sexual spaces and bodies' (2007, 212). To chive epistemic justice and, ultimately, epistemic liberation, the individuals and institutions that are engaged in knowledge production process have to be self-reflective as 'nobody escapes the class, sexual, gender, spiritual, linguistic, geographical, and racial hierarchies of

the 'modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world-system' (213). Such historically located privilege as well as domination has to be acknowledged through self-reflexivity in research practices. Those who live in the margins with epistemic inferiority and absence of their voice are disturbing phenomena. The positivism in social research creates a puzzle about the exploitative nature of research practice itself.

Overcoming epistemic injustice also requires understanding of what Quijano (2000) theorised as 'the colonial matrix of power' and overcoming it at various coloniality of power structures (as mentioned in Mignolo 2007).[1] The colonial conquest in Africa has been historically enabled by relationship between Western forms of knowledge and power. In the context of indigenous people of Africa's quest to attain epistemic liberation Masaka (2021, 258) shows that, 'the relation of knowledge and power could be helpful in devising a plausible strategy for the indigenous people of Africa's quest to attain epistemic liberation'. Alternatively Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018, 3) has called this quest as 'epistemic freedom'.[2] They must be cautious about using alien paradigms; rather, it would be in the interest of their liberation to theorise their own social realities by developing their own indigenous methods and methodologies. For that purpose, the indigenous people of Africa must have to take control over the production of knowledge in order to attain epistemic liberation. Thus, the process of decolonising from both external and internal colonialism can liberate subjugated knowledge of oppressed groups throughout the world.

Conclusion

The oppression that happens through various social processes also includes epistemic oppression in research practices. To bring epistemic emancipation, the researchers have to make an overt political commitment for emancipatory researcher practice as integral to their collaborative non-dualistic knowledge production process. What is important is to create a compatibility between the social position and the epistemic position of an epistemic subject. Thus, a person from marginalised social position, like an indigenous scholar from Africa, can overcome the use of epistemic positions of colonial masters and in reproducing dominant paradigms.

For epistemic liberation, there must not be any contradiction between social position and epistemic position. The site of international aid is part of global designs articulated to the simultaneous production and reproduction of an international division of labour of core and periphery that overlaps with the global racial and ethnic hierarchy. The achievement of epistemic justice is possible only when the 'global coloniality' ends. What is key is to demolish the house of the master using their own indigenous tools rather than strengthening the house of the master by using his tools.

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[1] The colonial matrix of power has been described in four interrelated domains: control of economy (land appropriation, exploitation of labour, control of natural resources); control of authority (institution, army); control of gender and sexuality (family, education) and control of subjectivity and knowledge (epistemology, education and formation of subjectivity; for details see Quijano, 2000).
[2] 'Epistemic freedom' is fundamentally about the right to think, theorize, interpret the world, develop one's own methodologies and write from where one is located and unencumbered by Eurocentrism.

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