

Impartiality as an Epistemic Privilege

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Abstract

In this article, I will examine the phenomenon wherein white people feel that they can be impartial in discussions about racism. Specifically, I will argue that the experience of whiteness confers the belief that one can be impartial, that manifests itself in the appearance of an epistemic privilege. The phenomenological experience of whiteness is constituted in such a way as to ignore the racialized experience. Moreover, white people have privileged access to the majority's hermeneutic resources, as these reflect and build upon this whiteness. In this regard, I will analyse the white and racialized phenomenological experiences and examine their epistemic consequences to show how impartiality can be conceived as a white epistemic privilege.

Introduction

In her article “I’m Done Debating Racism with the Devil”, Maya Rupert recalls experiences she lived involving a discussion about race and racism with white people. She noticed the tendency for them to “engage in these discussions with people of color by summoning the devil himself and treating racism as a political disagreement around which two opposing viewpoints can reasonably form¹”. Because they are either unfamiliar, reluctant or do not follow the argumentation, the position of the devil’s advocate enables white people to challenge the discussion with counterarguments without needing them to give their personal opinion on the matter. This rhetoric strategy allows

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¹ Rupert, M. (2017), “I’m Done Debating Racism with the Devil”.

them to defend a position without having to actually hold it: “he reminded me that he wasn’t really disagreeing with me. The devil made him do it²”.

The devil’s advocate is often justified by the desire to bring a neutral or impartial insight to the discussion. However, this strategy shows that, as Maya Rupert states it, “there is something at the core of the argument that they are (perhaps ashamedly) compelled by³”. Otherwise, they would be open to explore individually and subjectively the arguments raised by the racialized person. This shows that it is likely that the white person feels concerned by the matter. Indeed, she cannot be impartial, because she is an agent who holds beliefs, biases, etc. which, paradoxically, allow her to feel neutral towards the matter. There is an inconsistency between the white person’s belief that she is impartial, her reaction to the matter (using the devil’s advocate), and her actual *situated* point of view. In light of this situation, we may wonder: why do white people feel impartial even though they are not? Why does it feel legitimate to them to maintain such a position? Is she truly impartial and objective? If not, what are the epistemic consequences of holding this position in a discussion on racism ?

I argue that the belief that she can be impartial is an epistemic privilege resulting from the experience of whiteness in a context of *white supremacy*. The concept of white supremacy refers to the historical domination of whites over non-whites when socio-political structures were explicitly racist. Many scholars, such as Charles Mills, argue that there is still a need to conceptualise and use the term because the enduring sociopolitical structures reifies the history of white domination: “insofar as the modern world has been foundationally shaped by European colonialism, there is a sense in which white supremacy could be seen as transnational, global⁴”. I will situate the argument at the intersection of three fields: first, phenomenology will help me to account for the white and non-white experiences. Then, I will refer to concepts from critical philosophies of race, such as *white privilege* and *white ignorance* to understand the impacts of whiteness on racialized experiences. Finally, I will borrow

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Mills, C. (2003), “White Supremacy as Sociopolitical System”, p. 37.

from Standpoint theories the concept of *epistemic privilege*. Precisely, in the *first section*, I will argue that: 1. A white person will benefit from the context of white supremacy, while a racialized person will experience racial oppression. 2. In this regard, the racialized person has an epistemic privilege when addressing the issue of racism because she experiences it. In the *second section*, I will argue that: 3. On the other hand, the white person has privileged access to the dominant hermeneutic resources, as they reflect and build upon whiteness. 4. White people therefore also have a type of epistemic privilege in a predominantly white society. 5. Precisely, we will see how this privilege manifests itself in the posture of impartiality. In the *third section*, I will finally examine how: 6. Impartiality generates *white ignorance* and 7. The epistemic harms this phenomenon causes.

1. Phenomenological Experiences and Epistemic Privilege

As a first step in the argument, I shall explain the phenomenon of white privilege. Current definitions of racism agree that it is not simply a socio-economic structure that disadvantages racialized people. According to Robin Di Angelo, it is rather an ideological system that systematizes the unequal distribution of privileges among different racial groups, therefore placing white people in a position of domination: “This unequal distribution benefits whites and disadvantages people of color overall and as a group⁵”. To exemplify this phenomenon, here are two manifestations of it that will also figure in my argument later on, presented in Peggy McIntosh’s census of fifty *white privileges*: “20. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race⁶” and “34. I can worry about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking⁷”. Furthermore, this phenomenon must be understood in terms of relationships, dynamics, and actions and not simply as a result of a global structure. This avoids, as mentioned by Di Angelo, the prejudice that racism only concerns disadvantaged, racialized people and therefore unprivileged people. To this extent, several theorists of whiteness have looked at how white people position themselves

⁵ Di Angelo, R. (2011), “White Fragility”, p. 56.

⁶ Zack, N. (2018) *Philosophy of Race, an Introduction*, p. 165.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

within racism. They attempt to show the discrepancy between racialized people's experience of historical oppression, and the privileges held by white people and their attitudes towards racism. Indeed, white people benefit from the "hierarchical racial system"⁸ which means that they can function without questioning their whiteness and without experiencing a sense of otherness and differentiation. This constitutes the concept of white privilege and is, according to Michelle Fine, characterized by the protection of whiteness by the North American society. This systemic protection provides white people the necessary conditions to feel free from racial issues and thus to avoid experiencing "race-based stress"⁹: "This insulated environment of racial privilege builds white expectations for racial comfort while at the same time lowering the ability to tolerate racial stress"¹⁰.

Now that I have situated the concept of whiteness in the contemporary context of racial issues, I will further investigate the phenomenological conditions underlying the experience of whiteness. As Sara Ahmed argues in "Phenomenology of Whiteness", whiteness is a category of experience. This definition avoids the pitfall of essentializing the phenomenon of whiteness. Indeed, through her phenomenological analysis, Ahmed demonstrates that it is often falsely naturalized, made invisible and universalized, and therefore constantly institutionally reified.

Sara Ahmed draws on Frantz Fanon's work to whiteness has become institutionalized in such a way that it appears as a form of "public comfort"¹¹, i.e. the world is built from and around whiteness. The world comfortably surrenders and is offered to white people, as it corresponds in every measure to their horizons of deployment; white bodies, in this space, can thus feel "at home". Whiteness is what makes it possible for the white body to feel in the right place, to be a "body-at-home": "if the world is made white, then the body-at-home is one that can inhabit whiteness"¹². She grounds her argument in Fanon's analysis of colonialism, saying that it made the white world

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁹ Fine, M., *op. cit.*, p. 55.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Ahmed, S. (2007), "Phenomenology of Whiteness", p. 158.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 153.

'ready' for white bodies and experiences and explaining how it othered non-white existences. Colonialism has made whiteness the implicit norm of common experience which has taken root into Western institutions: "spaces are orientated 'around' whiteness, insofar as whiteness is not seen¹³".

Consequently, white people are not exposed to other phenomenological experiences because they maintain the belief that there is only one "normal" way of being in the world. Sara Ahmed refers to Adrienne Rich's concept of *white solipsism* to capture, beyond consciously held racist beliefs, the assumption that the experience of whiteness it is the only one constituting the world. As a "tunnel vision", this assumption directs white people's perspective such that they don't see non-white experiences as "precious or significant¹⁴" as theirs. To clarify, white solipsism is not simply plain ignorance about racial issues. It's the ignorance of how whiteness interacts with and impacts non-white people. Rich gives the example of guilt, as it makes white people feel bad about the other's situation, but not in a way that they can understand and empathize with the person, but rather to center the feeling on them: it is "a preoccupation with our own feelings which prevents us from ever connecting with the experience of others¹⁵". Thus, even if a white person is aware of how racial issues affect non-whites, the focus of their reflection remains the experience of the white person and not of the racialized person.

I will now link the white phenomenological experience and the hermeneutical resources that are constituted from it to show how they create epistemic ignorance towards non-white experiences. A hermeneutical resource is a collective interpretive resource allowing to account for and to give meaning to reality. Miranda Fricker theorized how these resources can generate hermeneutic injustices by undermining someone's ability to explain her social experience in an intelligible manner. Accordingly, a person might not be understood because she lacks hermeneutical resources, which means that she does not possess the concepts to make her testimony intelligible to her interlocutors. Since hermeneutical resources are collectively

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁴ Rich, A. (1979), "Disloyal to Civilization: Feminism and Gynophobia", p. 24.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

shared, they are based on concepts and realities made understandable to the majority. Fricker adds that access to hermeneutical resources is unequally distributed because of power dynamics: “relations of unequal power can skew shared hermeneutical resources so that the powerful tend to have appropriate understandings of their experiences¹⁶”.

Thus, in contrast, minorities and oppressed social groups experiencing a reality that cannot be formulated with the normative and dominant hermeneutical resources will suffer from these shortcomings. Indeed, the understanding of their experience, as Fricker explains, will be reduced to an individual, punctual phenomenon that will remain unspeakable and obscure. It is through speaking and discussions amongst marginalized people that the common experience is brought to light and that new hermeneutical resources can be developed to shed light on the situation: “the process of sharing these half-formed understandings awakened hitherto dormant resources for social meanings¹⁷”. While some people can benefit from dominant hermeneutic resources because they can make their experiences intelligible using those resources, marginalized people work to expand and modify dominant hermeneutic resources to make their experiences visible and intelligible. In order to do so, they advocate for the epistemic legitimacy of their experiences that are not yet represented in recognized dominant hermeneutic resources. Feminist epistemologies have thus, among other things, conceptualized the notion of *epistemic privilege*.

I will now elaborate on the concept of epistemic privilege. Normally, this term is mainly used in feminist epistemologies. It refers to the idea that, in a largely consensual way, “the constitution of experience by gender is asserted to be epistemologically significant¹⁸”. It means that a marginalized person has the possibility to formulate her experience in epistemic terms in a way that is far more revealing than others’ experiences. Why? Because this person is *situated* in her social context in such a way that she lives the experience of marginalization, thus giving her access to information

¹⁶ Fricker, M. (2007), *Epistemic injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, p. 148.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Bar on, B. (1993), “Marginality and Epistemic Privilege”, p. 83.

that makes explicit what she knows about this experience. Authors have broadened this definition to multiple types of oppression and marginalization. In this context, I will use it to refer to racialized people's experiences of race and their epistemic resources.

The use of epistemic privilege is not consensual amongst feminist epistemologies because, as Bat-Ami Bar On puts it, it becomes difficult to determine which of the marginalized groups have the most privileged epistemic access: "the source of the problem is the existence of multiple socially marginalized groups; is any one of these groups more epistemically privileged than the others [...]?"¹⁹ Despite this problem, I think it is still correct to say that an oppressed or marginalized person holds an epistemic position that gives her more complete resources about her situation with respect to her racial oppression than someone who does not experience it. Thus, I can restrict the understanding of epistemic privilege to a narrow context between a white person and a racialized person (which may also include other power dynamics such as sexism, classism, ability, etc.), to assert that the racialized person holds an epistemic privilege over her experience of racism. Also, Bar On asserts that although the concept of epistemic privilege is important in the process of marginalized groups coming to speak for themselves, it should stop to be used. Indeed, claiming epistemic authority through epistemic privilege somehow repeats traditional patterns that use authority as a form of domination: "although the empowerment [...] is an important goal [...], by claiming an authority based in epistemic privilege the group reinscribes the values and practices used to socially marginalize it by excluding its voice"²⁰. In this regard, I agree that the concept of epistemic privilege would need to be revisited. However, it does not seem sufficient to eliminate the use of this concept, because, precisely in a context of white supremacy in which there is dynamics of domination, it seems necessary to have a conceptual tool that allows us to diagnose the phenomenon. In this regard, I will argue that the concept of epistemic privilege can also apply to the experience of whiteness.

I will now analyse how an epistemic privilege is related to whiteness. To understand why a racialized person, in the context of

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

white supremacy, has an epistemic privilege regarding her experience of oppression, I must first formulate this experience in phenomenological terms, as I did previously with the experience of whiteness. If the white body's experience does not realize how it takes place in spaces, then the racialized body has a totally different experience. As Fanon describes it, the encounters with white people can be truly negative and difficult:

And then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity²¹.

Therefore, according to Fanon, a racialized body does not feel comfortable “at-home”, i.e. in its environment, because it is constituted by racist structures: “Below the corporeal schema I had sketched a historico-racial schema²²”. The experience of the racialized body is structured by a tense relationship between one's own experience and the projection of racist structures onto oneself. Whiteness is the condition making possible to take an orientation in space and to reach objects with ease: “White bodies are habitual insofar as they ‘trail behind actions’: they do not get ‘stressed’ in their encounters with objects or others, as their whiteness “goes unnoticed²³”. In this regard, the white body is capable of fulfilling its aspirations, its capacities, etc., more than a racialized body. Thus, the possibility for white people to orientate themselves towards an ‘I can’ is a privilege reserved to white people because all the possibilities of mobility are open to them, which is not the case for racialized people. The non-white person is therefore intercepted in her mobility, i.e. the body's ways and limits to engage in the world²⁴, and thus, she does not have the possibility to concretely unfold all of her intentions in

²¹ Fanon, F. (1986), *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 110.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 111.

²³ Ahmed, S. (2007), “Phenomenology of Whiteness”, p. 156.

²⁴ Cf. Young, I. M. (1980), “Throwing like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality”, p. 146.

the world. The consequence of being racialized in a world oriented for and by whiteness is the loss of a racialized person's agency: "which means [...] [being] diminished as an effect of the bodily extensions of others²⁵".

Returning to our definition of epistemic privilege, we can conclude that a racialized person in the context of white supremacy has epistemic privilege over her experience as she experiences racial oppression. On the other hand, as mentioned above, a white person is in a context that allows her to ignore racial oppression. Therefore, white people do not have a privileged access to this type of experience. While their experience of whiteness does not give them an epistemic privilege about racial oppression, it gives them another type of epistemic privilege that I would like to develop in the next section. Precisely, I will argue that they have a privileged access to the majority of hermeneutic resources because they reflect and are built upon whiteness.

2. Epistemic Privilege and Impartiality

The goal in this section is to show how the concept of epistemic privilege can be broadened to the experience of dominant experiences. I will refer to the concept of epistemic privilege as the possibility for a white person to be able to use and to refer to the dominant hermeneutic resources. Indeed, as they reflect and correspond to the white experience, they can perfectly make intelligible the situation of whiteness since it is constitutive of the dominant hermeneutic resources. As we have seen, the commonly lived, normalized and dominant experience corresponds to the terms of whiteness. Thus, hermeneutical resources are made to respond to the white socio-historical perspective. When a white person argues with a racialized person, both share certain hermeneutical resources, and each possesses their own, based on their social conditions. However, the white person will be supported by the majority's hermeneutical resources, which will give her the belief that her perspective is the norm and therefore she will think that she is impartial.

²⁵ Ahmed, S. (2007), "Phenomenology of Whiteness", p. 161.

My argument is that corroboration between white experience and the dominant hermeneutic resources is an epistemic privilege. It confers the possibility to feel impartial with respect to an issue involving racism. This epistemic privilege (white in this case) thus concretely manifests in a dialogue as the posture of impartiality which either constitutes or is part of this privilege. The current social conditions allow white people to feel unconcerned about racial issues because they do not feel racialized. Therefore, they can feel detached and as if they are outside the problem of racism, thus relegating this issue to racialized people. Impartiality is an expression of white privilege because a white person can afford to position herself on an issue, concerning racism for instance, without being perceived as biased for defending an ideology. She can argue for a certain argument without being reduced to her race, but rather considered as an epistemic agent in her own right, beyond race. White people hence have the privilege of being able to take position in a supposedly impartial way, which means that they do not have to bear the burden to justify how their posture is not initially biased by their “racialized” point of view.

Therefore, when it comes to engaging in a testimonial exchange with a person who attempts to express an experience outside the white phenomenological experience and hermeneutical resources, the white person cannot properly understand it because she ignores how her whiteness makes her overlook the othered experience. My argument follows logically from what has been stated previously: I have argued that the belief that it is possible to be impartial is given by the phenomenological experience of whiteness. Accordingly, since this experience is underpinned by the preconception that whiteness is the only way to reveal the world, experiences that do not correspond to it will be othered and marginalized. In this way, as whiteness becomes the norm and is institutionalized, it allows white people to feel legitimized in their dialogical and epistemic postures. Therefore, when it comes to engaging in a testimonial exchange with a person who attempts to express an experience outside the white phenomenological experience, the white person cannot properly understand it because she ignores how her whiteness makes her overlook it. Thus, a person who has a phenomenological experience corresponding to this framework can refer to it and will exclude her

interlocutor from it. If feeling “at-home” is a privilege for white people, then the posture of impartiality that is attached to it is one as well.

Hence, impartiality is part of the cognitive processes that lead back to white solipsism and therefore contribute to the maintenance of the dominant hermeneutical resources. Indeed, to feel impartial in a discussion is to believe that one’s position or idea better reflects reality than the interlocutor’s. However, as we have seen, this reality is epistemically forged by socio-historical and structural phenomena that partially account for reality and that lead to forms of ignorance.

3. Impartiality and White ignorance

This section will elaborate on the relationship between impartiality and the concept of white ignorance and their epistemic consequences in a dialogue. The dominant hermeneutical resources have historically been constructed from racialized social conditions that, according to Charles Mills, create a “racialized causality” between knowledge and non-knowledge. The “natural” point of view of whiteness, as discussed above, is the stepping-stone of the majority’s perception. Systems of knowledge must be constructed in a way that they respond to majority’s experience. Indeed, hermeneutical resources make reality intelligible, and therefore account for the white experience. Thus, according to Mills, race is at the origin of what we collectively know or do not know. The system of knowledge has been constructed in such a way that it obliterates what is outside of the white norm since it does not correspond to its horizon of signification. Knowledge outside of it will not make sense for the white majority, as it will not recall white experience. Charles Mills presents a very enlightening explanation: “*P* would be easily discoverable in a society were it not for widespread white racism, and that with additional research in the appropriate areas, *P* could be shown to have further implications²⁶”. This passage explains that something might have been known if the research was not held back by forms of racism. Because society retains the white experience as the norm, anything outside this horizon of significance is obliterated. Hence, hermeneutical resources are partial and are based on what

²⁶ Mills, C. (2007), “White Ignorance”, p. 24.

Mills calls white ignorance. White ignorance is a cognitive phenomenon shared by white people that is historicized by the removal of epistemological perspectives to account for their biases. Racialized causality is, according to Mills, what causes this ignorance, which is then perpetuated either by truly racist motivations or by a socio-structural transfer. White ignorance echoes hermeneutical oppression in the sense that the epistemic resources that make it possible to account for reality are partial because of a racist historicization that privileges white experience. Hermeneutical resources are therefore shaped by white ignorance.

The system of knowledge makes reality intelligible. Practically, this conceptual grid is elaborated by how society is epistemically structured by relations of power: “concepts will not be neutral but oriented toward a certain understanding, embedded in sub-theories and larger theories about how things work²⁷”. What Mills calls *white normativity*, the epistemic principle according to which Euro-American societies have established themselves as a socio-historical epicenter, has made it possible to forge a referential framework that constructs perceptions of reality. Thus, the framework and the perceptions of reality correspond to each other and are mutually valid from a dominant perspective: “with Europe's gradual rise to global domination, [...] a conviction of exceptionalism and superiority that seems vindicated by the facts, and thenceforth, circularly, shaping the perception of the facts²⁸”.

Back to the example of the white privilege presented by Peggy McIntosh: “34. I can worry about racism without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking²⁹”. This says that one can speak about racial issues without being accused of being motivated by an ideology or by personal motives. This example shows precisely how impartiality is a white epistemic privilege. Indeed, one must be a white person to be able to speak about racial issues without being accused of bias or lack of nuance. This is significant because it means that, to be perceived as legitimate to talk about these issues, one should not experience them personally to be impartial and neutral towards them. The white people's voices seem to have superior epistemic value in speaking

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Mills, C. (2007), “White Ignorance”, p. 25.

²⁹ Zack, N. (2018), *Philosophy of Race, an Introduction*, p. 166.

about racial issues, which entails that the voices of people experiencing the negative consequences of white domination continue to be reduced to the epistemic posture of being biased, subjective and non-neutral. One could argue, in response, that white people simply do not initially claim to be in an epistemic posture of impartiality. They might believe to have only one opinion among others, beyond race and white domination. But my argument is that even if the white person is not voluntarily racist, the hermeneutical resources she deploys will be based on white ignorance. Therefore, as long as the person does not recognize that her epistemic posture is tainted by oppressive structures, she will somehow thereby renew white domination. Also, even the racialized person who tries to explain her experience of being racialized must first learn and assimilate the colonizer's epistemic and linguistic resources to make her testimony intelligible: "to speak means to be in a position [...] to support the weight of a civilization³⁰". This mechanism reinforces the oppressive structures because, as Fanon explains it, the colonized (racialized) person participates in her own oppression³¹ by using the tools that were used to assert and re-affirm her inferiority. Some will argue that this process can actually be useful to oppressed groups because they can speak up and challenge these resources more efficiently because they are accessible and intelligible to dominant groups more effectively: this "*might* promise a certain kind of liberation from the alienation³²". However, according to Fanon, the racialized person will constantly be limited by her racialized embodiment in front of the white person: "embodiment frames the linguistic performance and limits its significance³³". This limit can be understood in terms of epistemic injustices.

Kristie Dotson, in her article "Tracking epistemic violence, tracking practices of silencing", offers an account of epistemic oppression within dialogical relations via the concept of "pernicious ignorance": "epistemic violence, then, is enacted in a failed linguistic exchange where a speaker fails to communicatively reciprocate owing

³⁰ Fanon, F. (1986), *Black Skin, White Masks*, p. 17.

³¹ cf. Drabinski, J. (2019), "Frantz Fanon".

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*

to pernicious ignorance³⁴”. Within this framework, I will now argue that impartiality as a white epistemic privilege produces a form of epistemic violence within linguistic exchanges because it maintains a pernicious ignorance of racialized people’s testimonies.

How could impartiality produce epistemic violence? First, I need to explain what a failed linguistic exchange is. A linguistic exchange needs conditions of reciprocity, as Hornsby specifies, so that the two dialogical agents can understand each other and thus achieve a “successful linguistic exchange³⁵”. Thus, a linguistic exchange fails when a speaker cannot be understood because her interlocutor is not qualified to receive and understand her testimony to some degree, refusing to communicate with her. Violence occurs precisely in this type of refusal, i.e. when it is due to pernicious ignorance, whether it is intentional or unintentional. However, accounting for epistemic violence against an epistemic agent due to pernicious ignorance is difficult because it is closely related to context: “all ignorance has the potential to be harmful, but ignorance becomes harmful only in certain circumstances and to the extent that it causes harm³⁶”. How could pernicious ignorance be linked to the epistemic privilege of impartiality? Impartiality as a white epistemic privilege rekindles the majority’s norms and can impede a dialogue by maintaining a form of pernicious ignorance about the testimony of people in minority or in oppressed situations. The ignorance generating epistemic oppression imposes forms of silence and it hinders a dialogue by failing to recognize the epistemic value of a speaker as a knowing subject. As Dotson explains, as a result, certain social groups, such as black women, will have lower epistemic status because of their audience’s ignorance: “[...] ignorance produced by the construction of epistemically disadvantaged identities³⁷”. According to Tuana, certain social identities are often perceived as indicating a lack of credibility. Consequently, pernicious ignorance contributes to maintaining unequal epistemic positions in a dialogue. Moreover, people with a social identity allowing them to be recognized for their true epistemic

³⁴ Dotson, K. (2011), “Tracking epistemic violence, tracking practices of silencing”, p. 243.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

value (or even to benefit from a surplus of epistemic value) will benefit from their audience's reciprocity because they can be perceived as credible knowers. However, a social group considered to lack credibility will become the victim of epistemic oppression, since dialogical reciprocity depends on the recognition of their epistemic status. Impartiality thus is a privilege, because to be able to situate oneself in this posture is only possible if one feels recognized epistemically. Therefore, one must belong to a privileged group or to a social identity supported by the majority's epistemic resources. Impartiality also renews epistemic violence because it obliterates the interlocutor's testimony by diminishing its epistemic value. Pretending to be more impartial than her interlocutor is to renew the preconception that one's epistemic situation is better placed to evaluate a situation.

One might object that white people do not renew epistemic violence when they obliterate the testimony of a marginalized social group because they do not voluntarily renew pernicious ignorance. In this way, white people would only be part of the social structure, which would itself be responsible for the epistemic processes that silence the words of marginalized groups. To this extent, one could argue that the structural nature of white domination means that white people should not always be accused of committing acts of epistemic oppression. However, according to Dotson's conceptual framework, the restoration of acts of ignorance to their contexts can be divided into voluntary and involuntary acts. One can contextualize the different cases of epistemic oppression and avoid generalizing in a fixed framework. This conception avoids reproducing the same epistemic errors, for example, trying to detach oneself from the concreteness of dialogical and epistemic schemes. Moreover, the aim is precisely to explain how epistemic structures influence individual attitudes to highlight the importance of taking responsibility by acknowledging one's privileges.

Conclusion

In this paper, I aimed to expose the phenomenological and epistemological ramifications of the posture of impartiality as a privilege held by those who can benefit from the majority's epistemic

resources socio-historically constituted around and by whiteness. A lived experience is based on a situated, and therefore partial, point of view, which is itself constituted by a socio-historical context prioritizing whiteness. This leads to the occultation of other lived experiences, which is transposed epistemologically through the feeling of being impartial. Indeed, the majority's experience conceals the partiality of its point of view by this posture of impartiality. Hence, impartiality generates and maintains epistemic oppressions that cause harm on two levels. On a hermeneutical level, impartiality renews structures of oppression precisely because it maintains ignorance, or, in other words, because it maintains the knowledge system as it is, in all its partiality. On a testimonial level, the person who sees herself devalued in her testimony because her interlocutor overvalues her own posture cannot be truly understood and thus is silenced.

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