

Epistemic injustice and the conditions of political contestation

U2202476

Independent Project

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Wordcount: 5500

Epistemic injustice, as developed by Miranda Fricker, refers to a form of wrongdoing in which individuals are harmed specifically in their capacity as knowers. Fricker argues that social power can distort credibility judgements, leading to two central forms of epistemic injustice: testimonial and hermeneutical injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs when “prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker’s word”, and hermeneutical injustice refers to cases where a “gap in collective interpretive resources” prevents someone from understanding and making sense of their social experiences. (Fricker, 2007. P1) The implications of epistemic injustice extend beyond the realm of interpersonal knowledge and into the political domain.

This essay argues that epistemic injustice should be understood not only as a moral defect in our epistemic practices but also as a structural, institutional phenomenon that undermines political freedom. In particular, I argue that epistemic justice is a necessary condition for citizens to contest interference and secure against domination. I develop this argument in four stages. First, I examine Fricker's account of testimonial injustice and argue, following Davis and Pohlhaus, that it must be extended to include cases of prejudicial credibility excess, where testimony is instrumentalised rather than dismissed. Second, I turn to hermeneutical injustice, showing how interpretive gaps systematically disadvantage marginalised groups in their ability to articulate their experiences. Third, I situate these forms of epistemic injustice within a republican account of political freedom, drawing on Pettit's conditions for contestation and Fricker's argument that epistemic justice is a constitutive condition of non-domination. Finally, I argue that Fricker's account does not go far enough. By drawing on Dotson's account of testimonial smothering and Liveriero's account of political co-authorship, I argue that epistemic injustice functions as a mechanism of political silencing that undermines not only the conditions required for contestation but democratic legitimacy itself.

Epistemic injustice refers to a form of discrimination where one is wronged “specifically in their capacity as a knower.” (Fricker, 2007. P1) This injustice can occur in two forms: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. Testimonial injustice is often understood as occurring when a prejudice or bias in the hearer causes them to “give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker’s word.” (ibid) The most common example in literature is where racial prejudices may affect the perception of police officers when dealing with black agents - with the victim facing a deflated level of credibility in their claims.

The 1993 murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence in London and subsequent investigation into the handling by police of Lawrence’s friend and key witness, Duwayne Brooks, provides us a key example of injustice caused by testimonial prejudice. On the 22 April 1993, two friends Stephen Lawrence and Duwayne Brooks had been waiting at a bus stop when they faced a brutal racially motivated attack. Whilst Lawrence was fatally stabbed, Brooks was unharmed and witnessed the crime in full. According to 5.10 of the Macpherson Report inquiring into police handling of the investigation, police are shown to have described Brooks as “very agitated”, “very aggressive” and “virtually uncontrollable.” Despite being the main witness of the attack, Brooks was treated as a potential suspect and agitator, with no one treating him “properly as a victim” or caring to listen to his description of the attack. This characterisation of Brooks as a ‘troublesome black man’ wrongs him specifically in his capacity as a knower of important information of the assailants, meaning he is unable to communicate this due to not receiving enough credibility from the police.

This credibility distortion caused by prejudice can operate on two levels. First there is excess, where a speaker receives more credibility than they otherwise would have, and a credibility deficit- less credibility than they would have. Fricker gives the example of a speaker’s accent to further illustrate the role of prejudice. An accent carries both a social and epistemic charge that affects the hearer’s perception of a speaker. (Fricker, 2007. P17) An accent can carry with it social assumptions about class or background. Take how the Aboriginal accent is often perceived as uneducated, and lacking sophistication, which can lead to epistemic consequences - speakers being afforded less credibility due to being judged as less intelligent or reliable. Or even the working-class regional accents in the UK, such as the Essex accent, with speakers being stereotyped as ‘common’ and unintelligent, leading to hearers assuming that the speaker is less competent, or requiring more evidence than the more ‘intelligent’ RP speaker. Fricker’s point here is that a speaker’s accent, in itself, is not evidence about the truth of what they say, nor about their reliability as a knower. The credibility assessment on the perpetrator’s part is driven by social prejudice, rather than epistemic evidence.

In what sense does this constitute an injustice? The primary harm of testimonial injustices is an exclusion of the victim from being a trusted informant of knowledge. Fricker claims that this exclusion takes the form of an epistemic ‘objectification’ of the victim - the victim is “relegated from the role of active epistemic agent and... recast in the role of passive

bystander.” (ibid, P132) This shift from an active role to a passive object of knowledge renders the victim as a mere source of information, rather than as an informant. For Duwayne Brooks, he is relegated from a key witness and giver of important information to someone whose testimony could potentially be useful. Craig’s distinction between a “source of information” and “informant” illustrates the difference between the active role in epistemic practices and the passive role one is relegated to when facing testimonial injustice.

Whilst Fricker’s account focuses primarily on the negative identity prejudices, there is a convincing argument to be made that positive identity prejudice and credibility excesses can and do lead to testimonial injustices. Though Fricker does acknowledge cases that do wrong the agent in their capacity as a knower, she argues that such cases do “not undermine, insult, or otherwise withhold a proper respect for the speaker qua subject of knowledge.” (ibid, P20)

As Emmalon Davis, among others, argue, stereotypes “need not be disparaging, nor credibility assessments deflated to cause genuine epistemic harm to marginalised knowers.” (Davis, 2016. P486)

Positive stereotypes are traits that are evaluated favourably by the attributer - common examples being the characterisation of East Asians as good at maths, women as nurturing or Black people as being athletic. These positive stereotypes are examples of identity-prejudicial credibility excesses. In contrast to a credibility deficit, features of the victim’s social identity are judged to be “reliable indicators of what source of knowledge the target possesses.” (ibid, P487) According to Davis, prejudicial credibility excesses (hereafter PCEs) are driven by an “ethically flawed affective investment - namely an inability or unwillingness to recognise the individuality of members of the same social group.” (ibid) Targets of PCE are treated as interchangeable with any other persons who share the same social identity. Reyes and Halcon discuss this interchangeability in the context of the ‘typecasting’ of minorities in academia.

For Hispanics aspiring to break into the field of academia in the late 1970s/1980s, there was an underlying belief that they “can, or should only...occupy minority-related positions” (Reyes and Halcon, 1988. P304) When minority quotas were introduced and implemented in non-academic positions, such as diversity and equal opportunity programmes, existing minority academics were left with a legacy of tokenism. This meant that they faced an implicit pressure to prove themselves worthy of the academic position on the same level as white academics. This typecasting reduces agents to type, confining individuals to a socially prescribed epistemic role. Features of social identity are treated as reliable indicators of specific epistemic competence.

It is not intrinsically obvious that PCEs qualify for cases of genuine epistemic injustices - especially on Fricker’s account of the primary harms of epistemic injustice.

Victims are not objectified in Fricker's sense as inert, passive objects of knowledge. They are treated in fact the exact opposite - not as mere sources of information but experts in their particular field. This is far from the exclusion from epistemic participation that Fricker has in mind.

Davis and Pohlhaus both suggest that Fricker's objectification thesis misdiagnoses the intrinsic wrong done to victims. Fricker claims that the denying of one's capacity as an informant "relegates them to the same epistemic status as a felled tree whose age might glean from the number of rings." (Fricker, 2007. P133) This analogy to objects that give information but are not epistemic agents that can assert claims or justify themselves, however, seems bizarre. As Pohlhaus suggests, such objects have evidential force that makes disbelief irrational. If I counted the rings on a felled tree, "I cannot possibly deny that it has the number of rings I have just counted." (Pohlhaus, 2014. P103) As well as this, if someone refused to believe the result with reason, then their judgement would be questioned. In contrast, testimonial injustice allows hearers to dismiss testimony without appearing irrational, just on the basis that the speaker is perceived as a potentially unreliable epistemic subject.

For this reason Pohlhaus argues that instead of the victim of epistemic injustice being treated as an inert object, the victim is relegated to the role of epistemic Other, assuming a "truncated or circumscribed subjectivity." (Pohlhaus, 2014. P105) By being relegated to the epistemic Other, a victim's epistemic subjectivity is recognised only when they are able to offer testimonies that are inaccessible by the dominant hearer. This derivatisation of a subject means that the subject can only contribute to epistemic practices only if it supports the dominant worldview- "anything the victim might try to express that exceeds the range of the perpetrator's subjectivity is actively prohibited and/or left unrecognised." (ibid. P106)

Taking this model, coupled with the prior discussion of compulsory representation and tokenisation, we can start to explain the distinct harm involved in credibility excesses. PCEs are unique in how the speaker is only allowed to contribute in a specific way and expected to speak as a representative of their group identity, not as an individual knower. The primary harm is that the speaker's epistemic identity becomes restricted - included in discussion but only as a minority voice. This so-called 'de dicto inclusion' (Davis, 2016.P490) means that the individual person is not genuinely recognised as an epistemic agent, as anyone fitting their social category could replace them.

What Davis' account reveals is that the wrong of PCEs is not merely attribution but epistemic confinement - the speaker is not excluded, but trapped, within epistemic participation. This is a more insidious harm than Fricker's objectification thesis captures, precisely because it operates under the guise of recognition.

In addition to this primary harm of epistemic 'othering', Davis argues that PCEs generate further secondary harms, which I will mention briefly.

Since marginalised individuals are often tokens in dominant institutions, they are treated as representatives of the entire group, “being called upon to act as spokespersons for their own non majority constituencies.” (Ibid, P491) This produces several harms: it essentialises experiences and reinforces the idea that marginalised groups have one shared experience. Moreover, it places the victim under a burden of education to educate dominant others. This creates extra epistemic labour even when the individual may not have expertise in the areas expected to be taught. This expectation, coupled with the little benefit victims receive when educating for the benefit of dominant others has been described as a form of “epistemic exploitation.” (ibid) Alongside the burden of education and exploitation of epistemic labour, victims of PCEs are “often placed in a double bind.” (ibid. P493) If they refuse to participate and become knowledgeable in the topics they are expected to contribute to, they may appear uncooperative. On the other hand, if they do, and “assume the role of representative”, this traps them in epistemic roles that has its associated negative implications.

In this way, PCEs extend the conceptual framework of epistemic injustice beyond credibility deficit, revealing how injustice may arise through distortion rather than deflation alone.

Fricker’s discussion on hermeneutical injustice centres around the emergence of the concept of sexual harassment in the early 1970s. Whereas testimonial injustice concerns how hearers distort credibility in epistemic exchanges, hermeneutical injustice highlights how a gap in shared collective resources can prevent someone from articulating and understanding their own experiences.

Carmita Wood was a victim of unwanted sexual advances by a colleague who “would jiggle his crotch... and deliberately brush up against her breast” while at work. As a result, Carmita would go out of her way to avoid a repeat encounter, using the stairs in the lab building instead of the elevator. (Fricker, 2007. P151) This pressure at work led to her resigning from work and applying for unemployment benefits. Upon being asked for the reason she had left the job, Wood was unable to articulate her experiences and reported that she had quit for ‘personal reasons’, being subsequently denied insurance.

This case serves as a paradigmatic instance of hermeneutical injustice.

Wood suffered from an “acute cognitive disadvantage from a gap in the collective hermeneutical resource.” (Fricker, 2007. P151) She was unable to properly interpret and articulate her experiences within the available social vocabulary- since the concept of sexual harassment had not yet been widely recognised, Wood lacked the linguistic and conceptual tools to describe what she had experienced. This interpretive lacuna placed Wood at a systematic disadvantage when attempting to communicate her reasons for leaving the job, ultimately leading to the denial of her unemployment benefits.

Injustice arises when structural inequalities in the production and circulation of social meanings leave certain groups without the conceptual resources required to make sense of their own experiences. But is this not also the case for the harasser? In the example, harasser and harassee are both epistemologically disadvantaged by the hermeneutical lacuna as neither

has proper understanding of how they are treating each other. The absence of an appropriate interpretive concept may actually serve the interests of the perpetrator, insofar as it leaves his behaviour less likely to be identified and challenged as wrongdoing. The hermeneutical lacuna operates in a way that systematically disadvantages the marginalised subject while leaving dominant agents comparatively unaffected or even advantaged. (Fricker, 2006. P3)

This asymmetry arises because marginalised groups are excluded from positions of epistemic influence. As a result their experiences are less likely to shape the collective interpretive frameworks through which social life is understood. When interpretive resources are structured in this way, certain forms of social experience remain obscured from collective understanding, leaving those who suffer them at a systematic disadvantage when attempting to articulate and challenge the harms they face.

The harm of epistemic injustice, as seen, is not restricted to the level of interpersonal exchange but also operates at a structural level, shaping who is able to participate in the collective production of meaning, and crucially, who retains the capacity to contest the power relations that govern them. Fricker's insight is that social injustice produces epistemic injustice- it is through their dominated social position that marginalised groups are excluded. I extend this argument further and argue that these epistemic injustices in turn undermine political freedom, by disabling the capacity to contest power relations that produced them in the first place.

There are positive and negative conceptions of political freedom.

The negative conception holds that freedom is non-interference - meaning that to be free is simply to be unimpeded by others in one's actions. On this view, one is free to the extent that no external obstacle is imposed upon one's choices, regardless of whether the absence of such interference is secured or merely contingent.

Yet, this conception faces a significant issue: it cannot distinguish between a citizen whose freedom is constitutionally secured and the slave whose master never happens to exercise his power. It is possible to have interference without domination, and domination without interference. As Pettit argues, it is possible that my master "is allowed to interfere with me but only on condition that the interference promises to further my interests". (Pettit, 1999. P24) In such a case, the interfering party cannot be seen as a master who dominates over me, but an agent constrained to act in one's interests. What matters then, for domination, is not that interference occurs but whether another retains the capacity to interfere on an arbitrary basis.

Unlike purely negative conceptions of freedom which "requires the absence of interference by others, and not necessarily the presence of self-mastery" (Pettit, 1999. P51), Pettit's republican conception requires security against domination, that is "the capacity to interfere

on an arbitrary basis” in one’s choices. (Ibid. P52) This is such that one’s freedom is held as of right rather than contingently at another’s discretion.

The security against non-domination requires that the citizen retain the genuine capacity to contest any interference they are subject to, and Pettit identifies three conditions that must be in place for contestation to be effective.

(1) There must be a potential basis for contestation.

This concerns the form of the public decision making and it must be “debate-based” rather than “bargain based”. (Ibid. P187) In bargaining, outcomes depend on strength of one’s starting position rather than force of argument, rendering contestation available only to those with sufficient power. Having it debate based allows anyone to contest interferences reasonably.

(2) There must be a channel or voice available by which decisions may be contested.

Citizens must be credibly represented so that their case can be properly heard. Potential testers have to be able to have a voice, and this requires legislature to be inclusive voices must “come from the sector represented, not just resonate in sympathy with that sector” (Ibid. p 191), ensuring that no group faces a forum composed entirely of those who cannot understand their experience

(3) There must be a suitable forum in existence for hearing contestations.

This concerns the setting in which contestation occurs. It must be free from pressures that might distort proceedings, such as the influence of parties with vested interests. It must allow citizens to receive a proper hearing. (Ibid. P195)

These 3 conditions establish the structural prerequisites required for someone to contest a potential impingement of their freedom. Whilst Pettit’s conditions are each individually necessary for effective contestation, I argue that they are not jointly sufficient, for even when all three are formally satisfied, a citizen may remain dominated if the epistemic conditions of the exchange itself are unjust. Their testimony may be dismissed on prejudicial grounds, or their experience rendered unintelligible to the adjudicating body, such that they cannot get a fair hearing to contest threats to their freedom, regardless of formal procedures in place.

Thus, a further condition is required so that citizens retain their ability to contest.

(4) Epistemic justice must prevail

Unlike condition (2), the channel/voice, which concerns “the credibility of the relation of representation between citizen and representative”, (Fricker, 2013. P11) epistemic justice concerns how the speaker’s testimony is intelligibly and credibly understood.

Before discussing ways in which epistemic injustice disable contestation, it is worth considering how one might object that the argument developed here depends on accepting the republican conception of liberty, and that a committed advocate of negative liberty need simply reject non-domination as the relevant standard.

However, one may respond to such an objection by arguing that non-domination is not a uniquely republican value but a generic liberal ideal to which the advocate of negative liberty is implicitly committed to.

Fricker draws an analogy with the value of knowledge over mere true belief. What makes knowledge more valuable than mere true belief is that the knower possesses a justifying reason for their belief, making it more resilient and less likely to lose it in the face of misleading evidence. For “if one values true belief, then one will attribute more value to secured true belief, that is knowledge.” (Fricker, 2013. P7) Similarly, if one values defacto non-interference, then one would place greater value on secured non-interference- that is- non domination, freedom as of right.

So how does epistemic injustice disable contestation? Fricker points to the Macpherson report, discussed above, as a paradigmatic case. Brooks was not only a victim of violent interference but stood in a relation of domination to the attackers, his capacity to contest the crime structurally foreclosed by testimonial injustice (Fricker, 2013, P12).

Notably, Brooks faced domination on two fronts simultaneously. Firstly he was dominated by the attackers insofar as testimonial injustice foreclosed his ability to contest their interference. Secondly, he was dominated by the police as the institutional body whose prejudicial treatment of his testimony constituted an arbitrary exercise of power over him as a citizen (Fricker, 2013, P.13). His domination was produced not by the attackers' power alone but by the epistemic conditions that denied his access to institutional contestation.

Though this example does show how epistemic injustice disables contestation, it does so through the visible failure to satisfy Pettit’s conditions - specifically conditions (2) and (3). Brooks’ voice was not credibly heard, and there was not a forum free from the distorting pressure of racial prejudice.

The examples that Fricker gives are on their own not enough to establish the need for a separate condition, and the stronger claim made above, that even if Pettit’s conditions for contestation are all formally satisfied, a citizen can remain dominated.

I will present two cases that show how Pettit's conditions for contestation are jointly insufficient for contestation.

Firstly, a subtler undermining of Pettit's condition is revealed by the operation of PCEs in manipulating speaker's testimony. Even when the structural requirements for contestation appear satisfied, the epistemic quality of participation can be distorted from within. A marginalised speaker who is tokenised and celebrated for their exceptional knowledge is formally included and represented in the epistemic debate, satisfying condition 2 on its face. However, their testimony is instrumentalised rather than genuinely heard. They are confined to a prescribed representative role and expected to speak as a token of their group rather than an individual epistemic agent. Given this, condition (2) is formally satisfied yet substantially hollowed out, with the credibility of the speaker being determined not by force of their argument, but by their identity. This also undermines not only the voice of the speaker, but also condition (1) - the debate-based form of contestation is satisfied in name only, its substance undermined in ways that mirror the bargaining it was designed to avoid. Thus, PCEs have broader implications than just tokenisation. PCEs show that formal compliance with both conditions can mask epistemic distortions that significantly reduce the ability to contest interferences.

Whilst the operation of PCEs reveals how the conditions may appear to be satisfied whilst being substantively undermined, Dotson's account of testimonial smothering reveals a still deeper problem, where conditions are truly fully and genuinely satisfied, yet domination persists due to an internal silencing of the victim produced by structural epistemic conditions, meaning that someone can be dominated even before contestation is even attempted.

Dotson identifies a form of epistemic violence that is distinct from Fricker's account, where epistemic silencing is not imposed by a prejudicial hearer but instead internalised by the speaker. It is the "truncating of one's own testimony" in anticipation of an audience's "testimonial incompetence that follows from pernicious ignorance." (Dotson, 2011. P.244) Unlike Fricker's framework, which requires a prejudiced hearer to distort a speaker's credibility, testimonial smothering operates without any discrete act of prejudice, where silencing is structural and produced by the speaker's social position rather than by an individual hearer's prejudice.

Dotson gives three circumstances that characterise testimonial smothering.

(1) Unsafe and risky testimony

This is a testimony that "an audience can easily fail to find fully intelligible, running the risk of leading to the formation of false beliefs that can cause social, political and/or material

harm.” (Ibid) She points to Crenshaw who gives the example of how race can “add another dimension to sources of suppression of the problem of domestic violence within non white communities.” (Crenshaw, 1991. P1256) Within the African American community, domestic violence victims often stay silent, since it risks reinforcing racist stereotypes about black men. The risk is not created by any individual but by the broader social and epistemic environment.

(2) Testimonial incompetence

This is a “failure of an audience to demonstrate to the speaker that they (the audience) will find proffered testimony accurately intelligible.” (Ibid. P245) This failure need not necessarily be conscious or deliberate. Harvin, recounting on her encounter in a public library with a white woman, describes how upon mentioning she was researching raising black sons in society, the woman asked: “How is that any different from raising white sons?” The tone in which it was said indicated to Harvin that she was “making something out of nothing” (Dotson, 2011, P247). Rather than attempting to explain, Harvin extricated herself from the conversation. The woman's question was most likely an unconscious racial micro-invalidating yet demonstrated to Harvin that her testimony would not be properly received, triggering her self-silencing before any formal exchange had taken place.

(3) Pernicious ignorance

The testimonial ignorance (2) follows from a situated ignorance that is produced by the audience’s social position that is reliable and persistent. It is not a random gap in knowledge but a structural feature of how social positioning shapes what people can and cannot understand. It is precisely this structural, persistent ignorance that makes the silencing coerced - the speaker is coerced into it by the epistemic conditions that govern them.

These 3 circumstances combine to produce a structural coerced silencing that operates through the speaker’s rational anticipation of epistemic conditions rather through any discrete act of prejudice.

Testimonial smothering reveals the full force of the claim that Pettit’s conditions are not jointly sufficient for a contestation. Even when all three conditions are formally satisfied, a citizen subject to structural epistemic marginalisation may never attempt to contest at all. In Pettit's terms, such a citizen acts by the leave of those conditions rather than as a free epistemic agent. They are dominated not through any active interference but through the structural capacity of epistemic conditions to foreclose their agency - a form of domination that formal procedural guarantees, however well designed, cannot reach.

This gives us all the more reason to reject a negative conception of freedom and simply rework the republican conception by adding a fourth condition of epistemic justice. Under the negative conception of freedom, a citizen who silences themselves would be perfectly free, as they would be free of any active interference that prevents them from

contesting. The possibility of testimonial smothering requires not just the absence of active interference but also the absence of structural vulnerability to arbitrary power.

If testimonial smothering reveals how structural epistemic conditions can foreclose an individual citizen's ability to contest, Liveriero extends this to the level of democratic legitimacy itself, arguing that structural epistemic injustice does not merely disable individual acts of contestation, but also undermines the conditions under which marginalised groups can be genuine co-authors of the political arrangements that govern them.

Liveriero's ideal of co-authorship states that a democratic decision is "legitimate to the extent that all individuals subjected to them can be described as authors of such decisions." (Liveriero, 2020. P798) This is not exhausted by the democratic practice of voting but instead regards the respect citizens owe each other as political agents and informs both formal procedures and informal participatory practices that characterise democratic life. (ibid)

This co-authorship requires not only that citizens can participate formally in political processes, but that they are genuinely recognised and treated as "a putative epistemic authority." (ibid, P799) This is the status every citizen should be granted by default in democratic deliberation. Being treated as a "putative epistemic authority" means that we should "engage in evaluative abstinence" (ibid, P800), meaning someone should be treated as a credible contributor to public decision making without first assessing their agential, epistemic or moral capabilities. This status is not unconditional - it applies to all citizens above a minimum threshold for democratic participation and actual epistemic competence is irrelevant, and no further assessment of credibility should be made based on social identity. (ibid)

Yet this ideal of co-authorship is betrayed in non-ideal circumstances, such as the actual condition of real-world democracies, where power is unequally distributed and public space has been shaped by historically dominant groups. In non-ideal circumstances, structural epistemic injustice does not merely obstruct citizens from participating as co-authors but undermines the very conditions under which marginalised groups can conceive of themselves as legitimate political actors at all.

Marginalised groups are powerless both practically and epistemically. Drawing on Young, Liveriero identifies three features that members of powerless groups are perceived as lacking. Firstly, they are perceived as lacking authority. This is as they are discounted as putative epistemic and practical authority by default. Secondly, their status, due to their standing as trustworthy and sources of legitimate knowledge is deflated. Lastly, is their sense of self. Since our sense of ourselves as political agents is dependent on the epistemic recognition we receive from others, the structural denial of that recognition does not merely obstruct political

participation but damages the identity-building process through which citizens come to understand themselves as legitimate members of the political community. (Ibid, P802)

The consequence of this is that members of a powerless group tend to internalise the misrecognition of their epistemic worth, such that structural epistemic injustice shapes who is able to conceive of themselves as a co-author of political life in the first place. A citizen whose reflexive agency has been structurally undermined has been dominated. This is not through discrete interference but through structural conditions that have shaped what is politically possible for them.

It follows that establishing fair procedures of voting and contestation is not enough. Formal political equality is insufficient without the epistemic conditions that make genuine co-authorship possible.

The forms of epistemic injustice examined in the earlier sections compound this powerlessness in specific ways. Firstly, hermeneutical injustice restricts co-authorship by leaving marginalised groups without the required conceptual resources to articulate their experiences in terms that the dominant interpretive framework recognises. Without the vocabulary required to make their experiences intelligible, they cannot contribute to political deliberation as co-authors- their perspective is structurally absent from the collective production of meaning. Furthermore, PCEs restrict co-authorship by violating the opacity requirement. Rather than engaging in the evaluative abstinence that Liveriero's framework demands, hearers replace the presumption of equal epistemic standing with a conditional, identity-dependent authority - crediting speakers not as individual epistemic agents but as representatives of their group. This dynamic is perhaps most evident in the experiences of 2nd generation immigrants, who often lack the conceptual resources to articulate a hybrid identity that sits outside the dominant interpretive framework of 'immigrant', or 'citizen.' This leaves them not only hermeneutically dismissed but also confined to a representative role that forecloses genuine co-authorship.

The operation of PCEs in violating putative epistemic authority is often subtle, manifesting through microaggressions, which are small, oftentimes unconscious signals that communicate to the speaker that their epistemic standing is conditional rather than presumed. Consider Davis' example of the East Asian student being told 'you must be good at maths', or a person of colour being asked where they're 'really' from. In each case, the speaker's epistemic authority is not denied straight on but distorted, acknowledged within a prescribed identity-based domain. These signals do not merely harm the victim epistemically in the moment but can accumulate structurally to produce the conditions that make testimonial smothering rational. The speaker registers that their epistemic authority is conditional and prescribed onto them, pre-emptively restricting and silencing themselves accordingly. PCEs and testimonial smothering are thus not parallel phenomena but causally connected in a way that can be best illustrated through the experiences of second-generation immigrants.

This essay has argued that epistemic injustice functions as a method of political silencing that operates at multiple levels. At the level of contestation, Fricker's proposed fourth condition reveals that the epistemic quality of the exchange itself is a constitutive condition of non-domination. At a deeper level, Dotson's account of testimonial smothering reveals a distinction Fricker's fourth condition cannot capture - between conditions being formally satisfied and contestation being genuinely possible. One step further, Liveriero shows that the structural epistemic injustice undermines the reflexive agency through which citizens come to understand themselves as legitimate political actors. This is not only an obstacle to contestation, but also the possibility of conceiving of oneself as a co-author of one's political life.

What this reveals is that Pettit's conditions for contestation are individually necessary but not jointly sufficient, as well as that Fricker's account does not go far enough. Genuine political freedom requires not merely the structural prerequisites for contestation, but the epistemic conditions that allow those structures to function as genuine guarantees of freedom rather than empty procedural promises. Formal political equality is insufficient without epistemic equality. To be deprived of that recognition is not merely a moral or epistemic harm, but a form of domination.

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On the Brooks case- see pdf.