



African Centre for Epistemology and Philosophy of Science (ACEPS)

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UJ on Empire

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Epistemic oppression and the division of epistemic labour

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Abstract

Our epistemic dependency on others and that we often rely on dividing up epistemic labour between different actors within and in between different epistemic communities has long been recognised in both social epistemology (Goldberg 2011) and philosophy of science (Kitcher 1990; Bird 2022). However, these divisions of epistemic labour have received relatively little explicit attention in the literature on epistemic injustice and oppression, except for in the scholarship on epistemic exploitation (Berenstein 2016; Toole 2019). This is surprising given that much of the literature on epistemic injustice and oppression is focused on the conditions under which differently situated epistemic agents are able to partake in meaningfully in shared epistemic endeavours with others. In this paper I argue that how different roles and epistemic labour are distributed is an important consideration for scholarship on epistemic injustice and oppression. In this paper I depart from my doctoral research and existing scholarship in social epistemology and philosophy of science to trace how processes that determine the division of epistemic labour within a specific epistemic community, as well as the outcome of these processes can be shaped by, and reproduce, epistemic oppression. I outline a number of cases that illustrate how epistemic oppression can reproduced and reinforced through the division of epistemic labour, as well as the result of such processes. The analysis spans processes in which epistemic labour is divided between epistemic agents, the results of such processes, and examples of how differently situated individuals can resist epistemically oppressive divisions of epistemic labour. Lastly, I conclude the paper by discussing some tentative suggestions for principles that could underlie a division of epistemic labour for ameliorative purposes to address epistemic oppression, as well as their shortcomings. In doing so this paper broadens the existing scholarship on epistemic oppression in and through the division of epistemic labour.

Bio

Karl Landström is a Research Fellow in applied philosophy at the Responsible and Sustainable Business Lab (RSB), Nottingham Business School. He joined Nottingham Business School and Nottingham Trent University in November 2022. Karl is also a Research Associate with the African Centre for Epistemology and Philosophy of Science at University of Johannesburg. Karl holds Master's degrees in Education and Applied Ethics from Linköping University, and is at the final stages of completing his Ph.D in Philosophy of Social Science at Coventry University. During his Ph.D Karl worked closely with the GCRF Migration for Development and Equality' Research Hub (MIDEQ). Karl's research is situated at the intersection of ethics and epistemology. The ethics of our epistemic lives and practices have become increasingly scrutinized not only in philosophy, but across the social sciences and the humanities. Karl's research contributes to these debates, particularly as they pertain to academic research practice and governance, by drawing upon a combination of feminist social epistemology, post- and decolonial theory, and hermeneutics.

