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THE BERLIN WALL VS. THE EUROPEAN BORDER, OR #JESUISCHARLIE VS #JESUISNIGERIA – ON THE WORKINGS OF EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE IN RACE MATTERS

Laura Appeltshauser
Independent Researcher

Abstract:

This article analyzes the workings of epistemic injustice regarding race, more specifically, the epistemic injustice inherent in the predominant conceptualization of the freedom of speech and the freedom of movement. For this purpose, the author juxtaposes the commemoration for the victims of the Berlin wall with the silencing of the migrants at the European border, and, secondly, the international JeSuisCharlie solidarity campaign with the absence of any commemoration of the victims of the Boko Haram massacre in Northern Nigeria. Drawing from the epistemic resistance in these two cases, and from works by Judith Butler (2010) and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007; 2012), this article looks into how white/European lives, agency and aspirations are framed as universal, as simply human, while Black/Brown/Muslim lives, agency and aspirations are either silenced or demonized. It questions to what extent scholarship on testimonial injustice can separate the epistemic injustice inflicted on a person as a bearer of knowledge from the epistemic injustice which denies agency and subjectivity in the first place and concludes that future research needs to engage with theories of subject formation and epistemic violence in order to grasp some of the differentiation along racial lines which renders Black/Brown/Muslim lives non-existent, disposable, and which denies them their most basic testimony of living meaningful lives.

Introduction

In November 2014, the German public commemorated the deaths of the victims of the former German-German border in a

big celebration of the 25th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin wall. As part of the three-day long festivities, a light installation representing the former wall was mounted as “a symbol of hope for a world without walls” (Berlin.de, 2014). At the same time, at the European border, thousands of people were waiting for their chance to jump the fences of the Spanish enclaves and to cross the Mediterranean. The death toll of those having tried in the past decades is now reaching well into the five-figure realm.

Two months later, in January 2015, an outcry of indignation shook the international public after the Paris Charlie Hebdo shootings. Read as an attack on the freedom of speech by the self-identified Islamist shooters with Al-Qaeda ties, an international campaign of solidarity was launched under the banner of JeSuisCharlie. In France, the rallies on the 10th and 11th of January united nearly 4 million protesters with numerous heads of states (including six African presidents) and public figures from all over the world. The white-on-black JeSuisCharlie slogan went viral on social media, but was also omnipresent on banners hanging from French town halls, taking over advertisement screens, and even making it onto the Oscar red carpet. In the same week, the killings and shootings committed by the Islamist Boko Haram in Nigeria went largely unnoticed, including the murder of nearly 2000 people in the town of Baga on the 7th of January.

There are plenty of such examples for different standards along racial lines in global politics, another example being the Charleston shootings¹ which – interestingly – do not fall under the US anti-terror agenda (see Baraka, 2015b).²

It surely comes as no surprise that race is a crucial element in defining who is worthy of media attention, and who is not. Nevertheless, I believe that examining these instances in direct comparison can yield some interesting insights, when it comes to the question of how epistemic injustice works in race matters – even if I can only represent the complexity and recent developments of my cases in a very fragmented way. The purpose of my analysis is to show that it is not only a question of media attention and coverage but more fundamentally, it is about whose life is conceptualized as meaningful.

Therefore, in this contribution, I will investigate how

people are apprehended and differentiated as bearers of knowledge, political agency and rights along racial lines. I will firstly resort to recent philosophical scholarship on epistemic injustice, focusing on how people are validated or silenced as witnesses. I will then turn to the epistemic resistance that was sparked by the Berlin Wall commemoration and the JeSuisCharlie campaign. By focusing on the freedom of movement (Berlin Wall) and the freedom of speech (JeSuisCharlie), I do not uncritically postulate the liberal and allegedly universal discourse of human rights as the normative goal for mitigating epistemic injustice. As I will develop below, I do not equate epistemic recognition as a bearer of human rights with epistemic justice. I rather intend to follow the strategy outlined by other critical interventions on human rights: According to Baxi (see 2009) and Hoover (see 2012), claiming human rights (such as the freedom of speech and freedom of movement) can be used strategically by grassroots groups and social movements when fighting for their liberation or self-determination. In these two cases, the agents of epistemic resistance do employ the framing and language of human rights, and emphasize their belonging to a shared humanity.

Drawing from these examples, and from some interventions made by decolonial/deconstructivist scholarship concerned with theories of subject formation, I will argue that any theories of testimonial injustice cannot separate the credibility denied to an agent of knowledge from the credibility denied to a person as a witness to her/his own lived life. In the conclusion, I will suggest how further research on epistemic injustice might broaden its scope to include these insights.

The European Border and the Boko Haram Massacres – a Matter of Testimonial Injustice?

According to some recent scholarship in philosophy and more specifically, epistemology, epistemic injustice can be defined as a wrongful exclusion or inequality inflicted onto a person regarding their epistemic capacities, their knowledge agency, so to speak (see Fricker, 2007; Anderson, 2012; McConkey, 2004; Medina, 2011). Some other authors subscribe to a definition of epistemic injustice as the elimination and

colonization of knowledge (Bhargava, 2013; Sousa Santos, 2014). In both strands, knowledge is not a given essence that can be “listened to” or “taken away”. The concept of “epistemic injustice” rather highlights the power struggles inherent in the production, recognition and elimination of knowledge.

In general, I consider more productive exchange between theorizing on hermeneutical injustice and the elimination of knowledge³ highly desirable. However, for the purpose of this contribution, injustice regarding the ability to grasp or interpret social reality seems less relevant to the two cases I am interested in. I will therefore start my inquiry by concentrating on what is generally called “testimonial injustice” (Fricker, 2007): the denial, neglect or degrading of somebody's testimony and credibility.

First Case: the Berlin Wall vs the European Border

The struggle and testimony of former Eastern German inhabitants are widely acknowledged. The 138 Berliners⁴ who were killed while trying to cross the wall or swim through the canal separating the former East and West are commemorated as dissident witnesses. Memorials have been erected, in forms of white crosses near the German parliament or information panels along the former border. These memorials and a corresponding website detail the individual histories of suffering and oppression, which prompted the victims to flee (see Chronik der Mauer, n.d.). Equally, this testimony of unfreedom in the former GDR is accepted as the official version of history. The speeches held at the festivities mention “the deep-seated frustration, which prompted more and more people to leave the GDR” (Wowereit, 2014), the “desire for freedom and justice” (ibid.) and their flight towards “freedom and democracy” (Schulz, 2014)⁵.

On the other hand, people trying to cross the border into Europe are mostly ignored when they testify of the hardship and persecution they (have) endure(d) and when they give reasons for their desire to move freely. Many individuals and groups, refugees and freedom fighters have spoken about how people not only flee from persecution and economic deprivation, but also look for liberty, education and self-

realization (see for example Berlin Refugee Strike, 2015; Mbolela, 2014; “Todos somos migrantes - Nous sommes tous des migrants,” 2015, “Voix des Migrants,” 2015; Traoré & Le Dantec, 2012). Fatou Dioume, a Senegalese writer living in France, states: „Migration is not only about poor, exploited people. It also includes people who leave to emancipate themselves, who leave in the name of liberty – and for a number of other reasons“ (Cited after AfricAvenir, 2015). Equally, many refugees and migrants have spoken out about their attempts – and failure – at obtaining a visa or asylum in the European Union by “legal” means. Usually, their attempts at the European embassies in African countries are met with racist abuse and corruption, and result in the applicants losing their money without obtaining a visa. The book *In our own words* compiles testimonies from different refugee women who “could have migrated, but wouldn’t have been given a visa” (International Women’s Space, 2015, p. 4). One of the refugees, Devika Ranja, explains:

It is almost impossible for us to get a tourist visa. It is like going to heaven. So for the people who want to come, there are only a few options. You pay for a visa that is not fake, as it is given by the local European embassy, but through “illegal” ways. (International Women’s Space, 2015, p. 48)

Even when migrants and refugees are approaching the fences around the Spanish enclaves, their statements that they want to apply for asylum and their testimony that they need international protection is rejected: either they are physically blocked from accessing the asylum office or they are directly pushed-back by the border guards, as the statements by the young Malian Abdoulaye Mara exemplify (see Ramajo, 2015). Lastly, numerous migrants have explained how the borders only increase human suffering and death, e.g. by showing their wounds caused by the border fences (see the wounds shown by Pascal and Mamadou in Desalambre, 2014a).

This testimony may gradually make its way into international media and the European public⁶, but it is still largely ignored or deflated by those in power. On the political

level, there seems to be no consideration whatsoever to broaden the tight criteria for asylum claims and little recognition that the EU is partly responsible for socio-economic deprivation and war in many countries. While there is some sympathy and credibility for migrants' stories and suffering when they die in the so-called "tragedies" in the Mediterranean, this is only superficial and short-lived. As Geddie (2014) points out, politicians usually mourn the dead while imprisoning the survivors, and then deny any claims by the witnesses that the border regime actually has deadly consequences, which results in an even higher militarization of the border and an even higher death toll. Similarly, regarding the fences, the Spanish Minister of the Interior, Fernandez Diaz, claims that the razor-wire fences only cause superficial injury, and have more of a "dissuasive" character (see Desalambre, 2013).

However, silencing and willful ignorance are not the only ways, in which testimonial injustice manifests itself. Another strategy frequently employed is demonization, along the lines of the "good migrant, bad migrant" dichotomy. This becomes evident in the recent EU rhetorics and resolutions to adopt a gradual military approach towards destroying "smugglers' boats" (see Council of the European Union, 2015). As an answer to the "migration crisis", NATO decided to launch an operation in the Aegean Sea in February 2016, prompted by the "conflict and instability on our southern borders, as well as the criminal networks that traffic in human suffering" (Stoltenberg, 2016). As the NATO Secretary General explained, "This is not about stopping or pushing back refugee boats. NATO will [...] help counter human trafficking and criminal networks" (ibid.). With the increasing numbers of arrivals of refugees and migrants in Europe, the strategy of demonization also targets young men of Muslim creed. Especially in Germany, headlines have been brimming with so-called truths about "young Muslim men"⁷. Since the large-scale sexual assaults in Cologne on New Year's Eve by presumably North African migrants and asylum seekers, this debate has intensified dramatically. North African people are now generally suspected to be sex offenders and deportation to their countries of origin is currently being facilitated by another revision of the German asylum laws. In a common statement,

the North African community refuses to be demonized as the “scapegoats”:

We find ourselves without any protection, as we are targeted and criminalized by the state and by a largely ignorant public, with the aim to deepen our stigmatization and facilitate our deportations to serve their political purpose. The real issue that is the daily and brutal violence against women in this society is generally overlooked and swiftly swept under a concrete carpet. [...] No mention is made of the violent abuse and rape that our sisters and mothers suffered on the way here and the continued abuse they are subjected to here in the Tents and “Heims.” (The North African Community, 2016)

Apart from being demonized as criminals, human traffickers, and sex offenders, migrants are also accused of harboring terrorists, as several comments by Spanish and French officials show. The Spanish minister of the Interior claims that the sub-Saharanans outside Melilla simply do not want to claim asylum but prefer jumping the fences (see Sanchez, 2015), and even worse, that they are harboring jihadists and terrorists amongst them (see Desalambre, 2014b). Following the Paris shootings on the 13th of November 2015, it was discovered that some of the perpetrators had entered Europe via Greece, disguising themselves as Syrian refugees. This immediately provoked some media outlets and right-wing politicians across Europe to call for a complete halt to migration (see *LeMonde*, 2015).

These instances certainly cannot cover the overall European discourse and deflating of refugees' and migrants' testimony and credibility. But I think it does allow a glimpse of how epistemic injustice works when it comes to the freedom of movement. Freedom of Movement is conceptualized in a certain way, which will attribute legitimacy and credibility to European/white testimony, but not to Black/Muslim/Brown people. As the example shows, both groups of people cite the same motives for their flight: economic hardship, political persecution, and self-realization. Yet, freedom of movement works along narrow racialized lines, fitting into the narrative of

capitalist self-realization (given that the former GDR was a socialist state), but denying freedom of movement to people who are not deemed economically useful in the first place. It appears that the normative goal of free movement is actually configured to fit into capitalist logics of productivity and commodification.⁸

Second Case: Charlie Hebdo vs the Boko Haram Killings

As a second example, I will juxtapose the JeSuisCharlie campaign with the Boko Haram killings, and deal with the conceptualization of freedom of speech. Although the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo was heavily criticized as racist, sexist and disrespectful (see Gutiérrez, 2015), the violent attacks and killings of some of its editors (but also some other people who were not directly involved with the magazine) were largely perceived as an attack on the freedom of speech and liberal, democratic values (see Baraka, 2015a). Charlie Hebdo seems to endorse some specifically French style of satire which intentionally collides with social norms and taboos, and deliberately shuns respect for any social group, authority, or belief system. While this may be an obvious exercise of freedom of speech, Charlie Hebdo nevertheless writes from a position of power; it has been established in France for decades, and embodies the Western liberal values, which any Black/Muslim/Brown person is required to assimilate to (see Baraka, 2015a; Sayare, 2015). Its disrespect, racial, islamophobic, and anti-religious slur are uttered from a hegemonic position (see Cole, 2015; Khader, 2015). As the tremendous wave of solidarity well shows, Charlie Hebdo enjoys the backing of the French and international public. Muslim leader Mohammed Henniche adequately put it: “They’re making *Charlie Hebdo* into the symbol of France and of freedom of speech” (cited after Sayare, 2015).

At the same time, however, freedom of speech seemed not to be limitless after all: In 2008, a journalist was fired from Charlie Hebdo for an allegedly anti-Semitic article (see Sousa Santos, 2015), and several critics of the JeSuisCharlie solidarity campaign found themselves arrested for condoning terrorism (see The Guardian, 2015) – Amnesty International counts up to 69 arrests (see Amnesty International, 2015).

In contrast to this validation of speech attributed to the Charlie Hebdo victims, the Nigerian victims of another Islamist group, Boko Haram, have been met with “deafening” silence (Ajayi, 2015; see also Shearlaw, 2015 for the gap in media coverage). Boko Haram's declared targets include democratic participation, freedom of speech and voting. When they killed an estimated 2000 civilians in the northern Nigerian town of Baga, the group timed its murderous campaign with the onset of the Nigeria elections in February 2015 (see Tran, 2015). Not only in Baga and not only in January 2015, but in several towns and villages, people were killed, displaced, and abducted; resulting in an estimated 1.5 million refugees. Hardly anybody bothered to listen as to whether the victims of Boko Haram were not only dead bodies, killed by self-declared Islamists, or actually bearers of knowledge: witnesses to the atrocities committed by Boko Haram but also the Nigerian military (see Ford, 2014a), or witnesses to the implication, corruption and neglect of the Nigerian central state and international institutions, which have favored the strengthening of Boko Haram in the first place (see Campbell, 2014). As a consequence, the Nigerian elections were rescheduled from the 14th of February to the 28th of March (see Taylor, 2015), yet, hardly any medium or newspaper mentioned this blatant denial of the freedom of speech and democratic participation.

The only instance where Nigerian victims of Boko Haram were credited internationally was the #BringBackOurGirls twitter campaign in April 2014, after Boko Haram had kidnapped around 200 school girls. This campaign, started by Nigerian women, was eventually taken up by celebrities such as the Pope or Michelle Obama, or any other “moral compass in showbusiness” (Agence France-Presse, 2015)⁹, portraying them as young, vulnerable girls in the hands of monsters who would sell them off as sex-slaves. This feminization of the suffering tied in very well with the US neoimperial agenda of military intervention (see Dabale, 2015; Ford, 2014b), but failed to actively listen to the victims as witnesses beyond this narrow framing.

Along similar lines as the first case, European/white victims¹⁰ are attributed with the cognitive capacity to express themselves, they are seen as agents of speech and testimony,

whereas in similar circumstances, black victims do not receive any credibility as speaking or knowing agents. Again, freedom of speech is configured in a certain way that will deny credibility to any testimony that does not fit into the agenda of Western liberal discourse – whether it is critical of the War against Terror, or of state power (Nigeria, US interventionism). Again, I find that the freedom of speech departs from its normative universality. However, it sanctions a secular, state-centric agenda in which the origin of violence is clearly confined in the “terrorist” other. Voices suggesting otherwise, voices criticizing the violence emanating from the state or the liberal order, are either silenced (e.g. critics of the Nigerian or US state power) or demonized (e.g. critics of Charlie Hebdo).

Both examples show an inherent testimonial injustice at work in the conceptualization of the freedom of movement and freedom of speech along racial lines. White/European subjects enjoy credibility for their testimony, their aspirations and agency is configured as universal, democratic, or simply human. On the contrary, testimonies of suffering, hardship, aspirations and political agency are largely neglected when it comes to Black/Brown/Muslim people. This testimonial injustice mostly adopts two strategies, either silencing or demonization. As a result, I argue that these freedoms are conceptualized from a position of power: They allow testimony which confirms Western liberal and democratic values, such as capitalism (people escaping from socialist East Germany into the capitalist West) and the secular agenda (journalists attacking a minority religion from a secular position of power). However, testimony is denied when it contradicts or does not fit Western liberalism, when it unmask the multi-faceted violence inherent in state-centrism (evident in the Boko Haram case) and in the Western colonial past and present (with exploitation being a major driving force for migration). This insight confirms my initial precautions about using human rights and freedoms as a normative framework for assessing epistemic injustice. The evidence of this analysis rather suggests that the dominant conceptualization of the freedom of speech and the freedom of movement serve as a tool by promising emancipation but inscribing hidden exclusions and double standards on the legal normative level.

Up until now, I have limited my inquiry into epistemic injustice in race matters to testimonial injustice. However, looking at it more closely, it becomes evident that racism not only denies knowledge capacities, but basically degrades knowledgeable agents to mere bodies, already killed (Boko Haram) or yet to be disposed of (European border). Therefore, I will look into some of the strategies of epistemic resistance, which both cases have sparked, hoping to gain some insight into the wider workings of epistemic injustice along racial lines.

Instances of Epistemic Resistance: The White Crosses Outside Melilla and #JeSuisNigeria

In November 2014, the German public was confronted with the conjunction between the fall of the Berlin wall and the European border through a radical art action, planned and conducted by the Center for Political Beauty. This group of (mainly white German) political action artists removed some of the white memorial crosses from their place near the German parliament, and transported them to the European borders in Bulgaria and Morocco, outside of the Spanish enclave Melilla. As the activists claimed, “[i]n an act of solidarity, the victims fled to their brothers and sisters across the European Union’s external borders, more precisely, to the future victims of the wall” (Zentrum für Politische Schönheit, 2014). The pictures of Malians holding white crosses with the names of victims of the Berlin Wall resonated widely in German and international media (see for example Oltermann, 2014 in *The Guardian*). What the direct comparison emerging from these pictures emphasizes is the sameness of the situation of refugees and freedom fighters, today and 25 years ago, at the inner German and outer European border. Through the photos, the comparison between the former and “future victims of the wall”, the Center for



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Political Beauty underlines the sameness of aspirations of the refugees, and the cruelty of the borders that prevent their movement. It must have come as quite a thorn in the side of the German public, who was celebrating historical past events, and was suddenly made aware of the failure to address the same situation occurring in the present.¹¹

The art action was not carried out by people who are directly affected by the epistemic injustice regarding the freedom of movement. Weirdly, it also failed to name any of the Malian refugees, or give them any space for testimony; they only appear as a background to the white crosses carrying German names. To that extent, the Center for Political Beauty has again perpetuated testimonial injustice by neglecting the refugees involved as bearers of knowledge. Yet, I argue that the art action has one remarkable achievement of epistemic resistance: it carries a strong message about the sameness of aspirations, of people – regardless of race – overcoming walls in search for a better life, escaping hardship and persecution. In that art action, Black/Brown/Muslim aspirations suddenly become visible, too.

Just as the action by the Center for Political Beauty, the hashtag #JeSuisNigeria is another attempt at emphasizing sameness in a world marked by racial differentiation. Along with other twitter responses such as #BagaTogether, #weareallbaga, #pray4baga and #stopbokoharam, the hashtag



One of the designs of the #JeSuisNigeria twitter campaign, imitating JeSuisCharlie with a similar font and colors, and frequently retweeted. (Source: <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/B7LrPKNCEAAavhQ.jpg>, accessed 7th of July 2015).

#JeSuisNigeria (and #JeSuisBaga) draws the direct comparison with the international JeSuisCharlie solidarity campaign, thereby exposing the absolute lack of international (and

African) responses to the Boko Haram atrocities. Tweets compare the 2000 people killed in Baga with the 17 people shot in Paris, and repeatedly ask “Where are the JeSuisNigeria banners?” (twitter, 2015).

This direct comparison is also reflected by the many versions of a white-on-black JE SUIS NIGERIA image, imitating the style of the JeSuisCharlie campaign design. Perusing through the tweets, I find general consensus that Nigerian/Black lives seem to matter less than French/White lives, a sentiment that is reflected by the frequent appearance of the #Blacklivesmatter hashtag in the same tweets, and taken up by multiple blog posts and alternative media outlets (see for example Allison, 2015; Laboy, 2015). The twitter campaign resulted in a series of rallies and demonstrations under the banner of #JeSuisNigeria and some international media attention. Recognition by government officials, however, remained scarce. Again, the epistemic resistance posited by #JeSuisNigeria makes an important contribution: Through the imitation of the JeSuisCharlie campaign for the Nigerian victims of islamists killings in Baga under the header of #JeSuisNigeria, it exposes the completely differential recognition of the suffering of subjects, according to their race.

Epistemic Injustice in Race Matters: Bringing The Subject In

While the first part of my contribution focused on the injustice done to subjects as bearers of knowledge (testimonial injustice), these examples of resistance unearth some more aspects of epistemic injustice which I consider relevant. In the following, I will draw from some arguments provided by decolonial and deconstructivist scholars such as Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2007, 2012, 2014), Judith Butler (2010) and Gayatri Spivak (1994) in order to elaborate on the linkages between epistemic injustice, the denial of agency and aspirations (as pointed out by the Centre for Political Beauty), and denial of recognition of lives as grievable (as lamented by #JesuisNigeria).

The differential treatment of the loss of lives in two different Islamist massacres, Paris and Baga, immediately reminded me of Judith Butler's *Frames of War* (2010).

Following her central question “When is Life Grievable?,” she examines the cases of torture and extra-judicial killings the US conducted in the so-called War against Terror. However, as she concedes, these frames also apply to the

[...] politics of immigration, according to which certain lives are perceived as lives while others, though apparently living, fail to assume perceptual form as such. Forms of racism instituted and active at the level of perception tend to produce iconic versions of populations who are eminently grievable, and others whose loss is no loss, and who remain ungrievable. (Butler, 2010, p. 24)

According to Butler, grievability and precarity are central prerequisites for conceptualizing of a life as such; however, they are differentiated according to racial lines. As #JeSuisNigeria and the deaths at the European border show, the loss of Black lives simply does not touch the so-called international community, there is no sense of urgency or loss which would prompt imminent action or declarations of solidarity. As Butler puts it, they “do not appear as lives at all” (Butler, 2010, p. 50). Consequently, epistemic injustice in race matters is confronted with the question whose lives, whose subjectivity, whose agency is silenced as to not appear as living at all. This means that epistemic injustice has to engage in some productive exchange with theories of subject formation:

If certain lives are deemed worth living, protecting, and grieving and others not, then this way of differentiating lives cannot be understood as a problem of identity or even the subject. It is rather a question of how power forms the fields in which subjects become possible at all, or rather, how they become impossible. [...] The matter [...] requires a kind of analysis capable of calling into question the framework that silences the question of who counts as a "who" - in other words, the forcible

action of the norm on circumscribing a grievable life. (Butler, 2010, p. 163)

Boaventura de Sousa Santos' work on "abyssal thinking" (2007) deals with similar concerns. According to him, abyssal thinking produces a radical line of demarcation, dividing social reality and knowledge into "this side of the line" (the global North) and the "other side of the line" (the Global South) (Sousa Santos, 2007, p. 45). While any knowledge north of this line is taken as universal, as truth, as simply human (see Barreto, 2014, p. 402), the other side of the line is produced as non-existent:

The division is such that "the other side of the line" vanishes as reality, becomes nonexistent, and is indeed produced nonexistent. Nonexistent means not existing in any relevant or comprehensible way of being. Whatever is produced as nonexistent is radically excluded because it lies beyond the realm of what the accepted conception of inclusion considers to be its other. (Sousa Santos, 2007, p. 45, see also 2012, p. 52)

Sousa Santos concludes that any struggle for global social justice must therefore also have an epistemic component, a struggle for cognitive justice (see Sousa Santos, 2007, p. 53).

The common point here consists in the core question of who is produced as a who, as a knowing agent, as a being whose life is deemed worthy, meaningful, "lived". What the examples of epistemic resistance, and Butler's and Sousa Santos' arguments make me wonder, is how far testimony extends: Does it extend to the most basic testimony of being and living? Race, or the global North-South division – which I do not read as a geographical distinction, but rather as a demarcation of privilege, and therefore deeply anchored in race and class – function as a central marker, allowing or denying the testimony of being and living. This was essentially Gayatri Spivak's insight when she asked "Can the subaltern speak?" (1994). She concludes that the subaltern cannot speak at all,

because the multiple layers of oppression (gender, race, class, etc.) will always result in the subaltern subject being spoken for and not being listened to (see Spivak, 1994, pp. 91–92). Race or subalternity constitutes a grid, according to which some bearers of knowledge are not only silenced or demonized, but are not even conceptualized as agents, as subjects, or living at all. Scholars like Spivak, Sousa Santos or Butler do not specifically use the terminology of testimonial or epistemic injustice, but their works address a crucial point regarding epistemic injustice in race matters: If epistemic injustice pertains to the knowing agent, to what extent can the “knowing” be separated from the “agent”? I argue that the examples of epistemic resistance as well as the decolonial and deconstructive scholarship alert us to a central point: by rendering Black/Muslim/Brown lives non-relevant, non-existent, non-knowledgeable, they exclude them from the privilege white/European people have access to: giving testimony of simply being and living, in a putative universally intelligible way, with legitimate motives for exercising the freedom of movement or the freedom of speech.

This insight calls for a coupling of epistemic injustice with a theory of subject formation, with a conceptualization of the subject's agency – a demand for epistemic justice reflected in the #JeSuisNigeria or #BlackLivesMatter campaign: Importantly, the epistemic resistance emphasizes that Black Lives *Matter*. This demands not just recognition of a Black or a Nigerian life as an existing life, but the conceptualization as a life that matters, a meaningful life. The white crosses at the Melilla border make that same demand exactly: a conceptualization of the lives of Black migrants as lives that can give testimony of their suffering, hardship, and aspirations – as a subject with knowledge capacities and political agency. Scholarship on epistemic injustice should therefore restrain from theorizing based on the assumption of a given subject entity, a pre-existing knowledge bearer. Instead, epistemic injustice is already decisive in the process of subject formation, of rendering a subject capable of knowledge, agency and testimony.

Yet, taking the issue further, the analysis also questions what a reference point for epistemic resistance might be. Sousa

Santos' work stipulates that our reality is fundamentally characterized by dividing lines, and these divisions and exclusions have also become evident with regard to the freedom of movement and the freedom of speech. The two human rights purport universality, but are configured as to exclude and render illegitimate any voices differing from its Western, liberal bias. Critical voices have shown how resorting to human rights may fool us into assuming that political divisions can be transcended and violence be abolished through ethics (Meister, 2011; see Williams, 2010). Closely connected is the notion of humanity or humanness, which is often invoked by activists seeking to redress epistemic injustice in the cases I have examined. The question remains whether any call for the recognition of human rights or humanness does not amount to an assimilation of Black/Brown/Muslim subjects into the category of the “human” and the “bearer of human rights” as defined by those in power. To conclude, further research may investigate strategies of epistemic resistance tackling this dilemma.

Conclusion

In the past years, scholarship on epistemic injustice has increasingly broadened its categories. Fricker (2010) herself admits the “diversity of epistemic injustice, and in particular of those phenomena my own discussion tends to gather together under the head of testimonial injustice” (p. 175). A variety of authors have started including more structural/institutional aspects (see Anderson, 2012), or focused on the relations between the social imaginary/stigmatization and epistemic injustice (see Bunch, 2014; McConkey, 2004; Medina, 2011, 2013). Several contributions have linked epistemic injustice with questions of recognition (see Gentile, 2013; McConkey, 2004), as the socially marginalized/stigmatized are precluded from any credibility, empathy, legitimacy, denying them a position of a potential knower. This is why Medina (2013, p. 307,310) calls for a pluralization of social imaginaries, which challenge the cognitive-affective foreclosures by the epistemically privileged, and open up possibilities for epistemic friction and different lived experiences.

So far, epistemic injustice has already engaged with

racial oppression, especially in terms of testimonial injustice. Fricker's (2007) analysis of the epistemic injustice in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, as well as the constructive critique her work has received are highly illuminating when it comes to epistemic injustice in race matters. However, my analysis shows that epistemic injustice is not only relevant in situations of testimony, where credibility is denied to an individual because of racial prejudice. Rather, any theorizing of epistemic injustice on race matters also needs to contemplate how some are being precluded as witnesses to their own agency on all accounts, not only in the individual instance, but on the structural level of subject formation. The examples of freedom of movement and freedom of speech have shown that Black/Brown/Muslim lives fail to be acknowledged as meaningful lives in the first place, they are being denied the fundamental testimony of a subject position, agency and meaningful aspirations. Therefore, I suggest that further research on epistemic justice in race matters can greatly benefit from drawing inspiration from decolonial and deconstructivist scholarship such as Spivak, Sousa Santos and Butler. Scholarship on epistemic injustice should not ignore the epistemic violence (Spivak, 1994) that is inflicted on large parts of the globe along racial lines, nor can it separate the “knowing” from the “agent”. To my mind, it would be productive for the research on epistemic injustice to move more towards what Pohlhaus (2012) terms “willful hermeneutical ignorance”, which designates

[...] instances where marginally situated knowers actively resist? epistemic domination through interaction with other resistant knowers, while dominantly situated knowers nonetheless continue to misunderstand and misinterpret the world. (ibid., p. 716)

This is to say, that scholarship on epistemic injustice can benefit from not only considering epistemic vices and virtues, but including the willful ignorance, the structural epistemic violence wielded over Black/Brown/Muslim people as knowing agents and particularly as subjects. As this contribution has shown, white/European lives are conceptualized as simply

human, as bearers of knowledge and agency, as bearers of the freedom of movement and the freedom of speech. As human rights and concomitant notions of humanness appear to be ambivalent, it is questionable whether they should serve as a rallying-point for epistemic resistance. However, this should not prevent us from clearly denouncing the epistemic injustice and therewith the partial application of these putatively universal norms at work in the cases examined above: Although there is ample testimony of their aspirations and agency, these qualities are willfully denied to Black/Brown/Muslim lives, thereby not only silencing or demonizing them but precluding them from testimony all together. Analyzing epistemic injustice in race matters has shown that research on epistemic injustice should broaden its focus beyond narrow definitions of testimonial injustice. Instead, it needs to pay attention to the complex power struggles of subject formation and negation, and be mindful of the pitfalls of a human rights discourse.

Notes

¹ In June 2015, a white US-American killed 9 Black Americans in a Church meeting (BBC, 2015). The attacker, most likely a white supremacist, is now on trial for hate crime, amongst others.

² Since my first draft of this article in July 2015, the discursive material regarding my two cases has multiplied, caused by the unprecedented arrivals of migrants and refugees throughout the summer and autumn of 2015 and by the Paris shootings in November 2015. Although I will only be able to partially include recent events into my work, they essentially confirm my analysis.

³ Termed “epistemicide” by Sousa Santos (2007).

⁴ The composition of this figure can be found at the Chronicles of the Wall website (Chronik der Mauer, n.d.), for example, this number also includes the death of 8 border guards.

⁵ All the quotes in this sentence are translated by the author.

⁶ In the past years, a variety of critical reports, books and

stories have been published, however, they are still far from dominating the discourse on migration. For example, the report by the Ethical Journalism Network (2015) still finds that migrants are generally stigmatized, reduced to certain roles and deprived of their individual stories.

⁷ For examples, see an article published by the Philologist Association of the state of Sachsen-Anhalt (2015, for the original comment see MDR, 2015) which has by now been removed from the online publication, and newspaper articles such as Kelle (2015).

⁸ This point is highly up-to-date, as continuous debates about filtering and controlling migration (e.g. in Britain, France) remind us. It deserves further analysis, which would, however, go beyond the scope of this paper. For an interesting elaboration of the close ties between migration at the European borders and capitalist exploitation, see Traoré and Le Dantec (2012).

⁹ Translated by the author from “toutes les bonnes consciences du showbusiness” (original source).

¹⁰ Although I certainly do not want to render those People of Color invisible who were amongst the victims of the Paris shootings, I refer to the fact that the majority was white, and the discourse around French identity and liberal values inserted the victims of the Paris shootings into a hegemonic position.

¹¹ In October 2015, when Germany commemorated the 25th anniversary of the reunification (3rd of October 1990), the discrepancy between the festivities' slogan “Overcoming Borders” and the continuous arrival of refugees and migrants in Europe could not be overlooked any more, not even by high-level politicians. However, any reference to the common experience of East Germans and migrants entering Europe remained on a very superficial level. In his speech, the German president Gauck merely mentioned that similarly to 1990, a new feeling of unity needed to be created in Germany (see Gauck, 2015). The Hessen state secretary complemented himself for having invited refugees to the festivities (see Bußer, 2015). These utterings do in no way amount to any epistemic recognition of the arriving migrants and refugees as agents of knowledge or bearers of rights.

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