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UN/DOING EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE

Special Issue Guest Editor: Claudia Brunner

Contents

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Un/Doing Epistemic Violence while Trying to Change the World

Abstract *The aim of this introduction to the present JEP volume on epistemic violence is threefold: by linking a post- and decolonial perspective to the productively ambivalent German notion of* Gewalt*, I first argue why it is important to keep analysing and theorising epistemic violence across different scholarly disciplines and fields of (academic) knowledge production. Second, and based on the concept of the coloniality of power, knowledge, and being, I present a multi-disciplinary approach to the concept of epistemic violence that is rooted in multi-disciplinary efforts to work with it. Based on a multitude of approaches to the problem, readers from many disciplines can find ways to make use of it within their own terrain of knowledge. Third, I introduce the notion of* Hegemonie(selbst-)kritik *in order to link the heterogeneous efforts of dealing with epistemic violence, both as a phenomenon and as a concept, that are presented in this volume, with a deep reflection on our own scholarly practices across modernity's epistemic territory and its Euro-Anglo-American epistemic monoculture. The latter has inspired the title and focus of this article. Since even critical scholarship cannot transcend the double-bind that comes along with knowledge production in colonial modernity, we should remember that our efforts to undoing epistemic violence remain entangled with the colonial condition. This is why I suggest speaking of un/doing epistemic violence instead of claiming to be able to fully undo it.*

Keywords *Epistemic violence, knowledge, decolonisation, academia, colonial modernity*

1. Returning to interpretation

In the preface to his book *The End of the Cognitive Empire*, Boaventura de Sousa Santos states that 200 years after Marx's 11th thesis on Feuerbach, Western-centric critical thinking has failed with regard to its agenda of changing the world of capitalism, colonialism and patriarchy.[1] It is therefore imperative, he argues, that we return to interpretation, before trying to change the world (Santos 2018: vii). That said, we must not take for granted already existing terminologies and methods, concepts and theories, if we (re-)interpret the world. Returning to interpretation necessarily entails the reformulation of the intellectual tools and resources we dispose of. We need to contextualise them in time and space, to both unthink and to rethink them.[2]

This is especially relevant for intellectual and political debates regarding violence. For decades, critical scholars from various (inter- and multi-)disciplinary backgrounds have done that work, and they have come up with many interesting and rewarding concepts that I will refer to in the next but one section. Nonetheless, and in many disciplinary fields that deal with 'the international', violence is still frequently reduced to its most direct and physical manifestations (Brunner 2021). Even in development studies, where anti-, post- and decolonial theories resonate a lot more than in other disciplines dealing with 'the international', violence often and still becomes quasi-naturalised and thereby decontextualised from its "complex ideational and material infrastructure needed to sustain a world in which the fact that violence works is self-evident" (Frazer/Hutchings 2008: 105).

According to the Eurocentrist tradition (not only) of social theory, knowledge is thought of as completely opposed to violence, since the latter is usually defined along three axiomatic lines: first, as something that occurs somewhere else (i.e., not in the Global North – and if so, it is understood to be the exception rather than the rule); second, as something that is perpetrated by somebody else (i.e., not by a rational political subject – and if so, it is done for the right reasons); and, third, violence is genuinely something else (i.e., non-existent in the academic realm – and if so, it is understood to be an unfortunate ideological aberration) (Brunner 2021: 194). It is, therefore, hardly surprising that epistemic violence for a long time seemed to be an academic non-issue, and a theoretical oxymoron.

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In the course of the ongoing post- and decolonial turn, however, the global entanglements of Eurocentrist, Androcentrist and Occidentalist knowledge with violence have increasingly come into view. I argue that the concept of epistemic violence is best suited to guide our task of reinterpretation and change according to both Marx and Santos. Gayatri C. Spivak's feminist-postcolonial understanding of epistemic violence as "the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other" (Spivak 1988: 280f) is the preeminent theoretical touchstone for addressing this issue. Innumerable creative scholars, especially feminists, have worked with the concept, transposed it to a multitude of disciplines and debates, and thereby contributed to its further theorisation.[3] Decades later, feminist philosophers also speak of epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007) or epistemic oppression (Dotson 2014). Boaventura de Sousa Santos has coined the strong notion of epistemicide (Santos 2014), which decolonial theorists embed in the paradigm of colonial modernity (Quijano 2007). In addition to that, many authors have moved beyond criticising the important processes of Othering and focused on the epistemic power and privilege of the colonial and imperial Self (Maldonado-Torres 2007; Brunner 2017; Dietze 2008).

Having shown how deeply embedded epistemic violence is, both in real-world politics and in the foundations of scholarly disciplines, feminist, post- and decolonial, as well as indigenous theorists proceed towards decidedly counter-hegemonic ways of knowing and modes of organising knowledge with a view to transforming, decolonising and/or subverting dominant paradigms and practices. This agenda is as imperative as it is complex. From Development or Peace Studies to International Relations, from Educational Studies to Global Sociology, from Philosophy to Gender Studies and beyond, the understanding and implications of colonial modernity have inspired critical voices to search for alternative modes of knowing the world. With regard to the history and nature of these and other academic disciplines, it is at the same time quite obvious that we all operate on "modernity's epistemic territory" (Vázquez 2011: 29). Theoretical concepts and notions such as pluriversality, colonial difference, border thinking, epistemic disobedience (all of which can be found in Quijano's and Mignolo's abundant work),[4] transmodernity (Dussel 2013), rearguard theory (Santos 2014) and many more have shown that, and how, it is

possible to un- and rethink the world and thereby transform both para-
digms and policies. However, all of these perspectives are well aware that
substantial social and political change has never advanced from theories
alone. Change will continue to be fought and negotiated in the streets by
social movements of marginalised and oppressed people across the world.
They themselves have come up with alternative epistemologies, most of
which are yet to be properly acknowledged in academic debates – and not
simply exploited.

2. *Gewalt begreifen*

Having said that, let me mention a few thoughts about *Gewalt* and
how to comprehend (*begreifen*) it. I want to make use of my first language
and cultural/academic socialisation in the geopolitical location of Austria
and Germany, which, from a mainstream UK/US point of view today is
considered as a rather irrelevant continental European periphery.[5] Over
here, we say *Gewalt*, when we mean violence, but sometimes, we also use
the term *Gewalt*, when we mean power – and not because we would not
know better. Violence might not exactly be the opposite of power, but it
is commonly considered as something that is distinct in nature and its
attendant connotations, even when theorised from a German tradition
of thought (Arendt 1970). While this distinction is semantically solidified
in dominant (post-)colonial languages such as English, French, Spanish,
Portuguese and Italian, the German notion of *Gewalt* simultaneously
denotes power and violence – and at the same time.

In the context of a journal that was founded in Austria and is
predominantly active in the German-speaking community, it is therefore
much more obvious to make use of the productively ambivalent German
notion of *Gewalt,* than it is to argue if and how violence on the one hand
and power on the other might be interrelated. In fact, they literally merge
in the German term. It encompasses both the foundation of political order
(*Ordnungsbegründung*) as well as its destruction (*Ordnungszerstörung*)
(Imbusch 2002: 27ff). While the former denotes institutionalised power
and its attendant legitimacy, the latter quite automatically suggests the
illegitimacy of sub-state violence. Neither by coincidence nor by semantic

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imprecision, *Gewalt* refers to the level of (political) order. Only seemingly blurry, the German notion of *Gewalt* in fact accurately circumscribes the historically violent heritage and foundations of the international political system, as based on the model of the modern nation state. The latter, as we know very well, not only holds the monopoly on physical violence, but is also a major agent of organising monopolies of knowledge within the modern/colonial academic system.

To point out this subtext of the concept of *Gewalt* allows us to recognise both the political and the epistemic premises of the international political system. This ambiguity of *Gewalt* does not necessarily constitute an obstacle or disadvantage to the analysis and theorisation of (epistemic) violence – quite the contrary. As Étienne Balibar shows in his work on the *œuvre* of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, their (German) understanding of *Gewalt* effectively unites two key constituent elements of politics that had been presumed to be antithetical to each other (Balibar 2009: 101). In an unperceived dialectic, he argues, the term refers both to the negation of law and its institutional realisation. According to the French philosopher, we would not conceive of politics as a compensation for violence, had we not previously eliminated all ambiguities of violence from our understanding of politics (Balibar 2015: 2). Consequently, while we tend to separate all phenomena designated as violence from the sphere of politics, we classify them in degrees of tolerability (ibid.). This is where the epistemic obviously and prominently takes the stage. As Walter Benjamin pointed out a century ago, knowledge is constitutive of the political foundations and the epistemic prerequisites of violence (Benjamin 1965). Feminist and post-/decolonial theories are well aware of this dialectic polymorphism, which we have to keep in mind when conceptualising epistemic violence.

In addition to highlighting the twofold meaning of *Gewalt*, let me suggest that the so-called international, i.e. English, conceptualisation of key terms of social theory can equally profit from the German notion of what a term is – especially when it comes to the supposedly self-explanatory term of violence. From a feminist post- and decolonial perspective that intends to subvert the dominant paradigms of colonial/capitalist/patriarchal modernity, it is obvious that this process must not be a solely cognitive one. The German equivalent of the English word term or notion is *Begriff*, deriving from the verb *begreifen*, which we can most accurately translate

as comprehending. Etymologically however, *begreifen* is a lot more physical and holistic than comprehending or understanding is. *Begreifen* refers to the act of touching, feeling and finally grasping something with one's own hands, while cognitively and affectively understanding it. To put it differently, *begreifen* is more holistic than understanding (*verstehen*), somehow deeper and more sustainable.[6] All of these components are included in the kind of conceptual work (*Begriffsarbeit*) that post- and decolonial as well as feminist theorists have been doing for decades. It is particularly authors familiar with practices and theories of racism and sexism, i.e. with the very physical and embodied dimensions of epistemic violence, who best succeed in theorising the problem. Moreover, the relevant epistemologies that allow us to deeply comprehend epistemic violence all originate from disciplines partly stemming from social movements: the anti-colonial struggle (post- and decolonial theories), the women's movement (feminist and gender theories), the worker's movement (class theories). That said, intellectuals of these traditions of thought are very conscious of the role and power of knowledge, of theories, of concepts and terms by means of which these movements themselves were suppressed and against which they struggled in the first place. They know very well how important it is to understand, adopt, subvert and transform cognitive and epistemic tools in order to make use of them for their own agendas.

Instead of simply deploying the term 'epistemic violence' without further discussion, any discipline and field must not only learn to acknowledge epistemic violence, but also understand its workings within its own domain. Referring to the twin dimension of *Gewalt*, I argue that we should do so for two reasons. First, epistemic violence is key to the legitimisation of various phenomena of violence in the political sphere, the analysis of which is an explicit issue in many fields related to the domain of 'the international'. Even if we limit our analysis to so-called second order violence[7] (i.e., visible, direct, physical), we can make use of the concept with a view to gaining a deeper understanding of observable phenomena of violence as procedural and relational. Second, the coloniality inherent in the disciplines that deal with 'the international' is central to the methods and methodologies that we make use of for analysing and theorising what is going on in the world. Moreover, it influences our everyday behaviour and practices as researchers, teachers, experts or simply colleagues. We

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should therefore pay significantly more attention to first order – epistemic – violence, since our ways of thinking and un/doing academia are complicit in it by default. Looking at our own cultures and practices of knowledge production through the lenses of epistemic violence will not only deepen our methodologies, theories and epistemologies, but also sensitise us to the shadow sides of 'doing academia' (see Brunner 2021: 207–209).

3. Towards a multi-level theory of epistemic violence

For decades, academics from a whole range of disciplines have come up not only with critiques of violence, but with concepts and theories that allow us to better understand the complexities of violence, both as a phenomenon and as a concept. Be it Johan Galtung's (1969) structural violence, Pierre Bourdieu's (1996) symbolic violence, Judith Butler's normative (2009) and ethical (2005) violence, Walter Benjamin's (1969) divine violence, Jacques Derrida's (1976) grammatical violence, Rob Nixon's (2011) slow violence, Michel Foucault's discursive (1973) violence, different concepts of visual (Regener 2010) and linguistic (Kuch/Herrmann 2010) violence or, last, but not least, Gayatri Spivak's (1988) epistemic violence: virtually all of them (including the many more scholars who have expanded and deepened the above-mentioned concepts) have a background in Marxist theory, and almost all of them understand and highlight entanglements between manifest and latent, visible and invisible, physical and other forms of violence.[8] All of them, explicitly or implicitly, reject the commonsense idea that violence is (only) an event, a fact, a given, a phenomenon in itself. Instead, they suggest (also) thinking of it as a process, a relation, a structure, and a mode. To all of the above-mentioned critical theorists, who more or less explicitly relate to Karl Marx, it is obvious that questions of knowledge and power are in one way or another related to violence, which in less complex and/or liberal and conservative approaches remains restricted to a rather physical, often quasi-natural problem. As I have argued elsewhere (Brunner 2020: 271–298; Brunner 2021: 204–207), we must therefore not isolate phenomena of (epistemic) violence, but understand their complexity through and across their manifestations on the (personal) micro-, the (societal) meso- and the (global) macro-level.

What conceptually unites phenomena of epistemic violence on the micro-level is experience of violence, be it as a victim or as a perpetrator. The experience of direct and physical violence in the colonial context lays the groundwork for Nelson Maldonado-Torres' (2007) framing of a "coloniality of Being". Linking this individual dimension of both the suffering and the perpetration of violence to the colonial condition, a key concept of post- and decolonial theory to which numerous authors have contributed, subverts the dominant micro-perspective that most perspectives privilege when it comes to explaining phenomena of violence in the international domain. According to Maldonado-Torres, violence and war are in fact not the exception in the modern political order; rather, they constitute an everyday experience for racialised and sexualised Others. What is going unnoticed in conventional perspectives of violence is the suffering of the victim and the agency of a very specific perpetrator of violence, i.e., the "Imperial Being" (Grosfoguel 2013: 77). The presumably disembodied, but politically, socially and epistemologically privileged perspective of the latter has become a universal epistemic norm, expurgated from any trace of violent agency during its *mission civilisatrice*. On such a micro-level of colonial and imperial experience, epistemic violence refers to the embodied dimensions of the epistemic racism/sexism that is constitutive of colonial modernity's abyss, with regard to both epistemology and real-world politics. From this perspective, it is impossible to reduce the micro-level analysis of violence to an issue of individual deviance from an otherwise supposedly non-violent international order.

On the meso-level, we have to address the multiple processes of normalisation of (epistemic) violence, and their embeddedness in structures and institutions of knowledge production, including within the academic sphere. Edgardo Lander (2000) speaks of the "coloniality of knowledge", when he identifies the mechanisms that normalise multiple forms of violence. Key to this concept is the argument that modern secularism never fully replaced the former religious (i.e., Christian) epistemology. Rather, the former successfully integrated key elements of the latter, while claiming to have overcome it. Rethinking international politics with regard to the coloniality of knowledge urges us, on the one hand, to call into question existing institutionalised knowledge about the nature of the international sphere, and its attendant epistemological

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premises and consequences (Gruffydd Jones 2006, Shilliam 2011). On the other hand, we have to dismantle conventional forms of rationalising and legitimising different forms and modes of violence and inequality – this be done through dominant classifications and hierarchisations, through the monopolisation and universalisation of, in fact, very particular and privileged knowledge claims, or the very concrete everyday practices of doing academia. From this vantage point, we can understand the terrain of knowledge as a transfer point for relations of power, domination, and violence of all sorts. Taking the entanglements of first and second order violence (Benjamin 1965; Balibar 2015) into account, we have to link the modes of legitimisation and the foundations of violence to each other – and to the international political order at large. Epistemic violence, then, is more than a question of how to organise systems and nurture cultures of knowledge. Rather, it is about how these systems and cultures have co-constituted colonial modernity. Considering epistemic violence on this meso-level means to acknowledge the colonial heritage of the domain of academic knowledge itself.

Conceptualising epistemic violence on the macro-level certainly does not content itself with mainstream theorisations of international politics and the attendant methodological nationalism that tries to bring order to the assumed chaos of an irreversibly globalised world. Rather, it addresses the geopolitical and epistemic space of global colonial modernity itself. It is in this space that the Eurocentric and Occidentalist (Coronil 1996) paradigm of classification, hierarchisation, separation, and exploitation has come into being over the course of five centuries of colonialism; today, it has become quasi-naturalised. According to decolonial theory, processes of mass violence, organised and rationalised by political, religious and intellectual European elites in the so-called long 16th century, have paved the way for the colonial-capitalist world system that constitutes our life-world in the present. From this perspective emerges a genuine imperative to acknowledge how racialised and sexualised exploitation and extinction were entangled in the early period of European colonial expansion, and how they have become constitutive of dominant orders of Eurocentrist and Occidentalist knowledge. According to Grosfoguel (2013), the *Reconquista* on the Iberian Peninsula, the conquest of indigenous populations in the Americas, the abduction, shipping and exploitation of Africans, and, as

Silvia Federici (2004) shows, the pursuit and killing of so-called witches on the European continent, are co-constitutive of the colonial/modern paradigm. What interconnects these four "genocides/epistemicides" (Grosfoguel 2013) is the religious-turned-scholarly epistemic racism/sexism that laid the groundwork for the legitimisation of multiple forms of violence in the service of colonialism and capitalism. This is what decolonial scholars call the violent "colonial underside" (Maldonado-Torres 2008) of the supposedly non-violent, progressive, and enlightened modernist paradigm that came into being over the past 200 years. Re-signifying the macro-level of analysis from this perspective allows us to focus on the global order(s) of violence, which is inherent in the supposedly non-violent international political system as such – including related systems of knowledge.

Based on a recoded understanding of micro, meso and macro, I suggest addressing epistemic violence along three trajectories. First, as a phenomenon, we have to investigate its entanglements with other forms of violence (how does epistemic violence work?). This is what many post- and decolonial scholars have been doing in the past decade, and whose work has been very inspiring at the outset of my own considerations about theorising epistemic violence. Second, as a theoretical concept, epistemic violence has yet to become intelligible in any scholarly discipline (how can we define epistemic violence?). Third, we must understand epistemic violence as the prevailing *modus operandi* in academia (how can we deal with the dialectics of un/doing epistemic violence while un/doing academia?). I argue that we can use a deeper understanding of epistemic violence in order to change the terms of academic and political conversation itself.

That said, the desire to undo epistemic violence on a micro- or even meso-level cannot be fully separated from the ongoing stream of epistemic violence that unfolds from and on the macro-level of the global colonial/modern/capitalist/patriarchal order. We must not consider this double bind an absolute impediment *to*, but an inevitable condition *of* epistemic violence. Starting from there, our efforts to undo epistemic violence are as important as is it obvious that we cannot, at the same time, fully escape it. This is no excuse for not trying, but a caveat against pretending to have achieved the 'wokest' state of mind possible. Stripping off one's own intellectual, cognitive and affective heritage is what we need to strive after. Undoing epistemic violence is a prerequisite for undoing other forms of violence that shape our

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capitalist, colonial/modern, patriarchal, racist, sexist, extractivist world – even if there is no guarantee that we succeed in doing so.

4. *Hegemonie(selbst)kritik* as a practice of dealing with the double bind

In the preface to his book *Epistemologies of the South*, the same theorist of social epistemology whom I cited at the beginning, Santos, states that "[o]ne of the tricks that Western modernity plays on intellectuals is to allow them only to produce revolutionary ideas in reactionary institutions" (Santos 2014: 3). As one of the leading intellectuals of decolonial theory of our time, he is obviously well aware of the inescapable paradox we face when un/doing epistemic violence. That said, our hands, or rather, our minds, are somehow tied to the material and ideational circumstances that surround and shape what we can (not) think, re- and unthink. Even if we consciously refer to the most critical concepts and theories of (epistemic) violence available, even if we constantly reflect on our own speaking, writing, thinking and acting, we cannot fully escape the problem of reiteration, because, in the end, we are all operating on (colonial) "modernity's epistemic territory" (Vázquez 2011: 29). According to indigenous, post- and decolonial theory, this territory has been defined by multiple processes of not only epistemic, but many other forms of violence, and colonial modernity is persistent (Quijano 2007). The same voices, however, remind us of the fact that we are located at various places across that territory, and that we dispose of different resources to do our work between privilege and marginalisation. While critical scholars must therefore not stop their (scholarly and non-scholarly) efforts of supporting societal change across and beyond the territory of colonial modernity, and to transform institutions and practices, it is indeed indispensable to de- and reconstruct the existing canon of theories, concepts and terms available for this endeavour. Spivak calls this an inevitable "double bind" (Spivak 2012): it is impossible to do the absolutely right thing, as we are always already co-constituted in colonial modernity.

María do Mar Castro Varela is another strong voice to remind us of both the challenges and the importance of this endeavour when it comes

to knowledge and, especially, (tertiary) education. To her, it is of utmost importance to investigate how to intervene in the production of knowledge and subjects in such a way as to change the desire for an imperial way of life that cannot be had without the prevailing capitalist relations of exploitation (Castro Varela 2021: 92). With reference to Spivak's argument about the inevitable "double bind" (Spivak 2012), Castro Varela leaves no doubt that as 'Western' academics, we must strengthen our efforts of undoing epistemic violence through processes of unlearning, affirmative sabotage and the striving for cognitive and epistemic justice, while at the same time acknowledging the ways in which we find ourselves double bound in colonial modernity's intellectual heritage (Castro Varela 2021).

Instead of returning to naïve nativism and ethno-romanticism, instead of deliberately misunderstanding pluriversality as another concept for diversity, in search of the most innocent and right ways of knowing and being, and beyond mere self-reflection, which risks remaining within the "ego-politics" (Mignolo 2009) of the Cartesian paradigm, we should better cultivate what Gabriele Dietze calls *Hegemonie(selbst)kritik* (Dietze 2008, Brunner 2017).[9] It is true that this unwieldy term also places the self at the centre. In contrast to the isolated Cartesian self-reflection, however, it flanks it with two terms: hegemony (i.e., the context of domination-securing appropriation) and critique (i.e., a concrete concern that incorporates this context into critical analysis; Brunner 2017: 200). Therefore, although *Hegemonie(selbst)kritik* is also a fundamentally self-reflexive theorem, it does not see itself as a tool of optimisation within the framework of the existing, but as a practice of constant questioning of its premises, precisely because it is aware of the effectiveness of the invisible framework conditions and the resulting privileges. The title of this issue, un/doing epistemic violence, is an attempt to highlight this perspective when it comes to rethinking the manifold entanglements of violence, on the one hand, and knowledge, on the other. The less visible element of the term, the slash, stands for the most important aspect of this endeavour: the entanglements and paradoxes of critical knowledge production in colonial modernity. One of these paradoxes is what decolonial theory discusses as epistemic monoculture (Santos 2014).

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5. *Lingua franca*, the 'international' and epistemic monoculture

When the first volume of this journal appeared in 1985, using the English language in the context of Development Studies across Austria (where JEP was founded and is still based), Germany and Switzerland was rather a pragmatic practice, enabling exchange among like-minded scholars of critical development scholars from different linguistic/cultural backgrounds. In 2023, publishing in English is a prerequisite that even established non-English journals, such as JEP, have to adapt to, if they want to be considered as academically relevant – even in their own (non-English) discursive communities. Very much aware of the modern/colonial euphemism of such an understanding of 'the international', the call for papers for this volume was also written in English and broadly distributed on platforms and 'international' mailing lists that would potentially reach a larger audience. Ironically enough, the first language of almost all authors (except for the multi-lingual writing collective) who finally contributed to this volume (myself included) is German. I see a couple of possible explanations for this outcome, which surprised us in the first place. First, academics in the Anglosphere are likely to submit their texts to better known or more prestigious and internationally more visible journals than JEP, especially when it comes to post- and decolonial debates about and across the international domain. Second, we received proposals by international scholars obviously written for other purposes, not related to the concept, possibly quite randomly submitted, which is why we rejected them. The third reason refers to another dimension of doing academia in colonial modernity: both myself, as an editor, and JEP as a journal, want to explicitly support so-called 'early-career-scholars', and less institutionalised ones. We want to support critical voices located in the German-speaking context to gain experience with publishing in the Anglosphere, while not having to pay for often immorally high publication fees. Moreover, we try to cultivate an environment of academic knowledge production that does not blindly reproduce the 'publish-or-perish' paradigm that might discourage less experienced authors from joining the field of critical scholarship in the first place.

Most of the present authors of this volume were socialised in and contribute to predominantly German-speaking academic networks, debates, and contexts, while at the same time being compelled to follow the so-called international academic debates in English. If we want to be considered as serious scholars by our own institutions and academic communities, and, more importantly, if we strive towards relating our work to the Anglosphere, there is no alternative to this hegemonic mode of 'doing academia', which is deeply rooted in colonial modernity. We cite the canonised authors publishing in English and refer to the alleged key debates of relevant social theory available in English. We are all expected to perform what is considered 'international' academic knowledge production, thereby referring to the Euro-American canon of (even critical) academic knowledge, and pretending this was a genuinely normal practice for all of us and a universal standard of knowledge production. I certainly subscribe to the idea that it is great to at least potentially participate in and contribute to an 'international' debate about knowledge production and (epistemic) violence. At the same time, I am painfully aware of the partially artificial nature of this endeavour – especially along the topic of 'un/doing epistemic violence'.

As Karen Bennet (2015) has convincingly argued with reference to Santos' (2014) concept of epistemicide, the processes of adapting a range of different cultures of knowledge and language to the hegemonic Euro-American practices of publication is not only a question of translation. Not only do nuances of style and elegance get lost along the way, but we also narrow our own practices of reading and citing beyond what is considered to be a universal canon, even of critical knowledge production within post- and decolonial studies, for instance. Keeping in mind Rolando Vázquez's notion of "modernity's epistemic territory" (Vázquez 2011), the problem is certainly not only one of language and translation, which is both communication and "erasure" (Vázquez 2011). At the same time, by accommodating to the *de facto* dominance of the English language in the social sciences, by becoming socialised into according canons of reference, by having got used to standardised style manuals and forms of expression, we subject our manifold ways of knowing and thinking, speaking and writing to what is considered to be universally valuable academic performance. Bennet (2007) reminds us of the fact that this specific way of scholarly

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knowledge production is not a coincidence, but a very concrete result of the modern/colonial implementation of the so-called European scientific revolution from the 17th century onwards, which at least since the end of World War II translates into a presumed English/Euro-American *lingua franca*. Along with this comes a very specific norm of textual organisation, and, even more importantly, all the underlying normativity of what is (considered) valuable scholarly knowledge in the first place. In the end, this permanent call for conformity (disguised as individual excellence) leads to more and more linguistic, stylistic and even epistemic conformity, including self-censorship, among scholars who want to be read and heard across the Euro-American academic terrain. The resulting "epistemological monoculture" (Bennett 2015) is therefore also part and parcel of the topic of this volume on 'un/doing epistemic violence' – even against the authors' and editors' best intentions.

6. Individual authorship and invisible collaboration

Anybody who is at least superficially familiar with a feminist-post-decolonial or other substantial critique of the academic publications system must be aware of the practical and theoretical tensions between the ideals of collaborative work and the realities of individual performance (see also Torres Heredia 2021). As a guest editor, however, enabling the latter is a conscious gesture of support, especially for young academics, and many of the authors of this volume are in the process of obtaining their PhDs. At the same time, none of the texts, including this introduction, could have been completed without, now invisible, time-consuming comments and critiques of dear colleagues, the unpaid work of anonymous reviewers, the efforts of proof-readers, translators and language editing support. In addition to these co-workers on the individual level of support, the editorial team, JEP's production management and I had various joint discussions about texts and topics, authors and reviewers, timelines and many other issues related to the production of academic knowledge. While a handful of quotable names remain at the table of contents of this volume, most of its direct and indirect collaborators entirely vanish from the manuscript, or slide into a tiny footnote, at best. Not least therefore, I especially want

to thank JEP production manager Clemens Pfeffer, with whom to cooperate was a pleasure throughout the process of almost three years. Thanks also goes to the 26 member editorial team for coordinating reviews, corrections and re-submissions, and to all dear colleagues who provided expertise and support to the authors during the reviewing process. Due to the conventions of double-blind reviewing (that one can certainly discuss from a perspective of un/doing epistemic violence), I cannot mention these 14 names here. Yet, I equally thank them for their time-consuming 'invisible' collaboration and support.

With regard to adding transparency to the 'making of' such a volume, let me finally mention that we received 28 suggestions for articles after publishing our call for papers. In close and consensual cooperation with the editorial team, Clemens Pfeffer and I invited 17 authors[10] to submit their full papers, which 9 of them finally did. It is certainly no coincidence that the only writing collective involved has no full academic background, and stems from a cooperation between an NGO and a feminist scholar. Unfortunately, and only after an internal reviewing process involving the entire editorial team and myself as a guest editor, we had to reject one of the proposed (single-authored) texts due to lack of quality before sending the papers out to potential reviewers. Eight papers were then reviewed by two reviewers each, as well as by two more members of the editorial team, JEP's production manager and myself. That is a lot of invisible collaboration on the way to individualised authorship. This by-product of 'un/doing epistemic violence' sheds light on a problem that critical academic knowledge production must certainly find more suitable ways to deal with in the future.

7. Multi-disciplinary and heterogeneous approaches to un/doing epistemic violence

In the call for papers for this JEP issue (February 2022), we called for contributions about knowing the world otherwise from all kinds of academic disciplines, and from all kinds of social movements, with a special focus on rethinking, unknowing and possibly undoing the, in many ways violent, condition(s) of global colonial modernity. We invited authors to

focus on epistemic violence and its entanglements with other forms of violence when exploring ways of knowing the world otherwise: what is the potential of these alternative epistemologies and ontologies, and in what ways are they limited when it comes to un/doing epistemic violence? How can we challenge and change our colonial and imperial modes of knowing the world? In what ways do we have to keep asking, with Audré Lorde, whether the master's tools are adequate to dismantle the master's house, when it comes to undoing epistemic violence, especially within the field of knowledge production and education?

With these kind of questions in mind, we hoped that authors would debate the phenomenon of epistemic violence and ways of overcoming it, either by way of a comparative approach, or within a specific disciplinary frame; by tackling the academia realm, the university or a given discipline as a specific site of un/doing epistemic violence; discussing alternative epistemologies and ontologies with regard to reducing or avoiding epistemic violence in a given context, taking into account possible limitations and obstacles; introducing specific counter-hegemonic didactics and pedagogies by which we can address the problem of un/doing epistemic violence; analysing entanglements of epistemic violence with other forms of violence, with a focus on identifying intersections of potential intervention; fathoming conceptual as well as political entanglements between violence and non-violence and the resulting problems from the perspective of un/doing epistemic violence; delineating 'modernity's epistemic territory' by way of exemplifying difficulties and successes in reducing epistemic violence; challenging the concept of intersectionality when it comes to analysing epistemic violence; correlating questions of race, sexuality, class and other co-constitutive categories with regard to un/doing epistemic violence; and/ or focusing on social movements and their capacities for addressing and/or challenging epistemic violence.

We can present seven texts whose authors discuss potential ways of un/ doing epistemic violence from a range of different disciplinary perspectives. While the present texts fulfil a couple of our expectations, others still remain to be addressed in future debates on the challenges of un/ doing epistemic violence. With this JEP issue, we want to contribute to an already ongoing multi-, inter- and possibly even trans- or anti-disciplinary debate on un/doing epistemic violence as a prerequisite for reducing other

forms of violence that keep existing orders of modern/colonial/capitalist/ patriarchal power in place. To conclude this introduction, let me finally introduce the articles and authors we have gathered in this volume:

The first text, *Undoing Epistemic Violence in Academic Knowledge Production through Survivor's Participation*, does not only describe this effort, but also performs it. Having fled ISIS in Iraq and Syria as students, academics or journalists, Yazidi women encounter manifest obstacles and exclusions in Germany, where they want to continue their education and/or develop their professional experience as competent knowers. Challenging individual authorship – the key currency of academic knowledge production – the Farida Global Writing Collective discusses epistemic violence from their specific societal location, which is constituted by multiple forms of violence. From there, the authors provide some concrete answers with regard to participating in formal higher education and on the academic terrain in Europe.

Performing Cracks in Public Memory: Undoing Epistemic Violence through Artistic Interventions is another contribution that focuses on epistemic and/as political resistance by those most afflicted by epistemic and other forms of violence. Christina Pauls asks whether artistic interventions into public memory can challenge or even transform German colonial history in the present. With the example of a huge monument of Otto von Bismarck in Hamburg, she discusses an example of postcolonial urban activism, "Bismarck-Dekolonial", that took place in 2021. Along with the activists, the author calls for a substantial epistemic shift in how we understand the dimension of time, both past and present. Enabling fissures, cracks, and overthrows in hegemonic public memory, she argues, must go hand in hand with reconceptualising modern-colonial notions of both space and time.

Mechthild Exo's contribution to this volume is leaving Europe, both physically and conceptually, while exploring *Democratic Peace Concepts Beyond the Abyss along three Examples from Afghanistan, Nagaland and Kurdistan.* Based on research stays and collaboration with scholars and activists in these three regions, she formulates a critique of liberal peace-building and argues for decidedly more engaged and political scholarship

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in so-called North-South relations – but not in the conventional paternalist or liberal mode of interventionism. By listening to how people and peoples in war-torn regions of the world conceive of sustaining peace, societal change, dignity and freedom, scholars, politicians and activists in the West must thoroughly transform their attitudes and conceptual frameworks, if they really want to help those who suffer wars and exploitation, she argues.

In a similar vein, but in the opposite direction, Melanie Hussak has travelled abroad to explore alternative ways of thinking and living (in) peace, in the midst of persistent structures of (post-)colonial violence in US settler colonialism. In her text *Exploring Self-in-Relation: UnDoing Epistemic and Ontological Violence in the Context of Indigenous Peace*, she describes the challenges of trying to undo epistemic violence as a Western white (former) PhD student while necessarily having to operate on modernity's epistemic territory. In fact, both herself and her interlocutors – Dakota and Lakota indigenous communities in South Dakota (Pine-Ridge-Reservation) and Minnesota – necessarily remain located on this epistemic territory, despite critique and reflection, collaboration and solidarity. We must keep this very manifest precondition of doing academia in mind while trying to undo epistemic violence in our scholarly practices.

Lena Merkle follows a different route to the paradoxical endeavour of un/doing violence, and remains within the EuroAmerican canon of epistemology. In her text *Epistemological Anarchism against Epistemic Violence?* she tries to link Paul Feyerabend's critique of science with the decolonial quest for undoing epistemic violence. Even though he never made this effort himself, some of his thoughts about the myths of academia, about democratic relativism and an attitude of epistemological anarchism can indeed be examined with reference to decolonial challenges to scholarly knowledge production and the academic field. Therefore, the author argues, we could consider Feyerabend as an accomplice of decolonising and decanonising science from within modern Eurocentrist academia.

In a similar vein, Simone Müller explores ways of *Undoing Epistemic Violence in Educational Philosophy* by *Changing the Story with Donna Haraway's* (concept of) *SF*. This seemingly mysterious acronym stands for different (feminist) practices of storytelling. SF is critical of power, but

at the same time caring and relational, the author argues, and can therefore potentially subvert the violent heritage of modern humanism. Critical towards modern-colonial anthropocentrism, Müller considers the racist-sexist-specieist concept of the human, which grounds the field of education and knowledge production, as a failed promise of modernity. Therefore, if we want to undo epistemic violence in academia and education, we not only need other concepts and theories, but many more and other ways of telling the world and ourselves to each other.

Last, but not least, Ursula Posratschnig also extends the question of epistemic violence beyond the human species in her text *Epistemic Violence and the Carnistic Matrix: Intersecting Oppressive Hierarchies among Human and Animal Others.* Linking post- and decolonial debates global about racism, sexism and classism to a critique of anthropocentrism, she argues that the strict modern-colonial differentiation between humans, on the one hand, and non-human animals, on the other, is a precondition of claims regarding who is Self and what is Other. The very practical results of this ethical framing are evident in the "animal-industrial complex" of our capitalist world system: cruel factory farming, often including disastrous working conditions for humans, environmental damage, and diseases that finally may threaten all life on the planet.

As a guest editor, I want to thank the Journal of Development Studies for actively taking up the topic of epistemic violence. I hope we can, together with the authors of this issue, make a small contribution to the multi-layered endeavour of 'un/doing epistemic violence while trying to change the world'.

Klagenfurt/Celovec, June 2023

1   Santos refers to Karl Marx's 11th of his philosophical notes, later becoming famous as *Theses on Feuerbach*: "The philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it." Dating from 1828, it was published (in German) only decades later.

2   A very upsetting aspect of contextualisation is that scholars and former colleagues of Boaventura de Sousa Santos have recently accused him of having repeatedly

misused his powerful position as a famous professor, including theft of intellectual property and sexual harassment (Viaene/Laranjeiro/Tom 2023). Of course, this is all the more outrageous, since Santos is one of the leading voices of critique against multiple forms of violence, oppression and inequality in the academic domain itself.

3   For an extensive discussion of a whole range of approaches to epistemic violence, see Brunner (2020: 77–146; 2021: 197–204).

4   For an overview see also Grosfoguel 2008, or Quintero and Garbe 2012.

5   Certainly German used to be and to some extent still is a colonial language itself, e.g. towards sub-national minorities within Austria, such as Slovene, Croatian or Hungarian.

6   For another framing of *begreifen* (instead of *ergreifen*/seizing) see Castro Varela's inspiring text in a former JEP issue (Castro Varela 2021).

7   The distinction of first and second order violence goes back to Walter Benjamin (1965 [1921]), whose work lays the ground for Judith Butler's concept of normative violence (see Butler 2009), and for Étienne Balibar's (2009) reflections on Gewalt. Its core is to both distinguish from and relate to each other's concrete phenomena of (predominantly direct and physical) violence to systems of knowledge, and especially law, that undergird the hegemonic political order in which these phenomena occur.

8   I cannot cite all of their works on all of these concepts and theories of violence in this text. In my comprehensive monograph about epistemic violence (Brunner 2020), I discuss most of these authors and concepts at length. For more publications on broad concepts of violence, and especially on epistemic violence from a post-decolonial and feminist perspective at the crossroads of Peace Studies and Political Theory see www.epistemicviolence.info.

9   One can best translate the German neologism as the move of self-criticism with a focus on hegemony (Brunner 2017). While centring the Cartesian Self, as other modes of critique do, the concept very consciously frames this invisibilised and privileged Self in a Gramscian understanding of hegemony and an anti-Occidental geopolitical perspective as outlined by Fernando Coronil (1996).

10   One of them co-authored by two, one by three persons, one single article written by a collective of several authors who explicitly discuss this decision as part of their genuine approach of un/doing epistemic violence.

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Abstract *Das Ziel dieser Einleitung zur vorliegenden JEP-Ausgabe zu epistemischer Gewalt ist ein dreifaches: Indem ich eine post- und dekoloniale Perspektive mit dem produktiv-ambivalenten deutschen Begriff der Gewalt verbinde, argumentiere ich erstens, warum es wichtig ist, epistemische Gewalt quer durch verschiedene wissenschaftliche Disziplinen und Bereiche der (akademischen) Wissensproduktion zu analysieren und zu theoretisieren. Zweitens stelle ich auf der Grundlage des Konzepts der Kolonialität von Macht, Wissen und Sein einen multidisziplinären Ansatz für das Konzept der epistemischen Gewalt vor, der in multidisziplinären Bemühungen zur Nutzung des Konzepts begründet liegt. Die Vielzahl an Herangehensweisen an die Problematik ermöglicht es Leser*innen unterschiedlichster Disziplinen, den Begriff in ihrem eigenen Wissensbereich zu nutzen. Drittens führe ich den Begriff der Hegemonie(selbst)kritik ein, um die im Heft vorgestellten diversen Zugänge zu epistemischer Gewalt – sowohl als Phänomen als auch als Konzept – mit einer*

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tiefgreifenden Reflexion über unsere eigenen wissenschaftlichen Praktiken auf dem epistemischen Terrain der Moderne und ihrer euro-anglo-amerikanischen epistemischen Monokultur zu verbinden. Der letztgenannte Aspekt hat den Titel und den Schwerpunkt dieses Einleitungsbeitrags inspiriert. Da selbst kritische Wissenschaft das Doublebind-Muster nicht überwinden kann, das mit der Wissensproduktion in der kolonialen Moderne einhergeht, sollten wir uns immer wieder bewusst machen, dass unsere Bemühungen zur Überwindung epistemischer Gewalt in eine koloniale Situation eingeschrieben bleiben. Deshalb schlage ich auch vor, von einem „UnDoing" epistemischer Gewalt zu sprechen, anstatt zu behaupten, sie könne vollständig überwunden werden.

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