Appreciating Local Knowledge

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Edited by

Elisabeth Kapferer, Andreas Koch
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PREFACE

This volume is the result of a two-day conference in November 2013 in Salzburg, Austria, dedicated to bringing together researchers and practitioners from different scientific disciplines in order to follow distinct trains of thought about local knowledge—the phenomenon, its theoretical and philosophical reflection, methodological comprehension, and practical application—in a transdisciplinary fashion.

In the light of the globalization, (post-)modernization, social fragmentation and economization of many of our living contexts, local knowledge has regained increased attention in social sciences like ethnography, poverty and inequality studies, social anthropology and social geography, to mention just a few. Commonly, local knowledge indicates a counterpart to both rational forms of an explicit knowledge of facts and knowledge of universal validity. Local knowledge attempts to appreciate a more comprehensive view of people's skills, capabilities, experience and sophistication. On the other hand, the reference to "local" implies a bounded applicability of knowledge in specific spatial-cultural environments. Thus there seems to be a similarity in nature to indigenous knowledge.

Beyond this scope of application, local knowledge can be either acknowledged as instrumental in order to achieve specific goals or as something which has intrinsic value in order to deal with social relations, solidarity, common values and norms accordingly. Social and spatial settings appear to be influential for everybody's quality of life, personal identity, and political commitment—and local knowledge is the essential foundation to turn these settings into a vivid arena.

The contributions in this volume discuss local knowledge as a specific kind of knowledge in its different settings and means of transfer. The chapters approach issues and questions of local knowledge from manifold academic backgrounds, including sociology, philosophy, social geography, economics, history, interpersonal communication studies, cultural studies, and theology, and hence address themselves to a broad academic audience from diverse disciplines.

Salzburg/London, September 2015
Elisabeth Kapferer, Andreas Koch, Clemens Sedmak

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CHAPTER I

DIFFERENT KINDS OF KNOWLEDGE—
EPISTEMOLOGICAL APPROACHES

INTRODUCTION

ELISABETH KAPFERER

As argued by various experts on local knowledge, the concept of certain bodies of knowledge with specific characteristics that are best described by prefixing them with "informal", "indigenous", "folk" or "traditional", or, in a more summarizing way, "local", originated essentially in anthropology and ethnology. Here, this knowledge is discussed with reference to the specific interest that development cooperation (focusing on people in less, and the least, developed countries and areas on the planet) has taken in both disciplines. Given that mere technological assistance and support has not proved completely successful in many of development aid's fields of action, the idea of integrating the knowledge and skills of simple subsistence oriented societies and their members, knowledge that is emerging "bottom up", has seemed a promising perspective for new approaches to and new strategies of development cooperation (cf. for example Schareika 2004, 9, and Korff 2002). Other academic disciplines, such as philosophy, history and political sciences, and here especially the history of political thought, have also found their interest in the specific epistemic qualities of so-called local knowledge (see Chambers 1983, Geertz 1983). The contributions to the opening chapter of this volume shed light on different epistemic aspects of local knowledge from various perspectives from the humanities.

In his opening contribution, *Clemens Sedmak* discusses the nexus between the specific epistemic form(s) of local knowledge and epistemic justice. Given that local knowledge not only relies on and interferes with spatial bonding but also with social norms and cultural codes, it is obvious that the question implied is not simply whether "to know" or "not to know", but more significantly it is a question of being "in place" or "out of place". Sedmak hence argues that "challenging local knowledge means challenging truth claims, epistemic and social authority, and cultural codes. That is why negotiating the status of local knowledge is epistemologically as well as politically sensitive," and is most relevant for investigating epistemic justice.

Iryna Matsevich, in her paper, broadens the meaning of local knowledge with an approach which at first glance appears paradoxical. Matsevich challenges the epistemic categories by introducing a form of "academic local

knowledge" and discusses the scientific status of humanitarian sciences in the Belarusian and Russian academic context. Suggesting that a mistake of translation opened the path for this locally distinct academic tradition, she shows how the novel concept could yet justifiably persist in the light of a predominant humanistic philosophy of the societies involved.

Mario Wintersteiger, in his following work, prolongs the epistemic view of local knowledge through the spectacles of political thought and ecological interest. He examines the archaic knowledge of myths—or mythic knowledge—as a special manifestation of local knowledge. By discussing the epistemological status of mythology and culture-bound symbolic wisdom, Wintersteiger not only tackles potential insights into "irrational" violence and aggression but also touches on ecological questions. Hence his contribution thematically builds a bridge to the work of *Geoff Bil* who, coming from a historical background, takes the reader to New Zealand and to the knowledge of Mānuka (a small local tree) held by Māori people and gradually discovered and made use of also by—western educated—university researchers and biopharmaceutical companies. It is with this background that Bil discusses the relevance of local knowledge. In doing so he focuses "on the contingent, contested and ambivalent ways in which these very categories—local and global, indigenous and European, traditional and modern, non-science and science—have been defined, together with the contemporary contexts in which this binary tendency is both reified and reconsidered.".

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Schareika, Nikolaus (2004): Lokales Wissen: Ethnologische Perspektiven. In: Nikolaus Schareika, Thomas Bierschenk (Eds.): Lokales Wissen—sozialwissenschaftliche Perspektiven. Münster: LIT Verlag, 9–40.

Onions, soils, and watering plants:
Local knowledge and local epistemic justice

Clemens Sedmak

Onions

Sally Morgan discusses a clash of epistemic cultures in her autobiography "My Place". Her illiterate grandmother ("Nan") believed in the efficacy of onions as powerful tools to eradicate germs—she would put onions all over the house, including the bedrooms, with all the olfactory side effects. Sally challenged this knowledge claim as a 15 year old high school student. "I arrived home from school one day with the facts of a science lesson freshly imprinted in my brain, and proceeded to inform Nan that when it came to eradicating germs, onions were totally useless."[1] The reaction was harsh: "Nan was cross, she said high school had gone to my head." Sally proceeded to get rid of the onions in her room: "I walked into my room, flung back the curtains and collected up all the onion quarters that sat neatly along my bedroom window-sill. I hesitated at picking up two of them. They were slightly moldy and they looked at me as if to say, remove us and you'll get a deadly disease, just like your Grandmother says! I grasped them courageously with my bare hands and flung them dramatically in the kitchen bin. 'No more onions', I told Nan quietly, but firmly … I was trying to be rational about the whole thing. After all, I was studying science."[2] Needless to say, Sally's grandmother did not give up that easily and continued to smuggle onions into Sally's room.

What does this onion incident tell us about local knowledge? (1) Local knowledge in this case is "personal" (i.e. connected to an authority figure), "traditional" (i.e. with a habit-forming history) and "loosely justified" (i.e. justified with reference to authority and tradition/experience); (2) local knowledge in this case is challenged by "universal claims" based on the claims of "scientific evidence"; (3) Local knowledge in this case is linked to authorities that have more than just epistemic, but also social power;

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[1]   Sally Morgan: *My Place* (London: Virago Press, 2012 [reprint]), p. 85.
[2]   Ibid.

(4) It takes courage to go beyond and against local knowledge since local knowledge is administered and protected by agents with local power and challenging local knowledge claims will change the local power balances and dynamics.

"Local knowledge", so it seems, is not only a matter of social structures (grandmother with her power over the granddaughter), but also a matter of "cultural codes" that negotiate the boundaries between "in place" and "out of place". Scientific research produces different epistemic cultures with specific cultural codes. Challenging local knowledge means challenging truth claims, epistemic and social authority, and cultural codes. That is why negotiating the status of local knowledge is epistemologically as well as politically sensitive.

Soils:
The concept of local knowledge

Terms like "indigenous knowledge", "traditional knowledge", "folk knowledge" or "informal knowledge" have been used to characterize different nuances of "local knowledge". The first term seems to be limited to a sometimes negative reading of "indigenous people" as bearers of knowledge. The second emphasizes the source and way of transmission and may insinuate a certain lack of adaptive strength. The third is tacitly contrasted with "scientific" and "evidence-based" knowledge (as in the discourses on the limits of "folk psychology"), or that with higher levels of coherence, justifiability and authority (as in the discourse on "folk religiosity"). The fourth refers to the status of this knowledge as not explicit or systematic. Local knowledge is contrasted with other types of knowledge and, because of the discussion of validity and justified claims of knowledge types in general, is contested and politically sensitive.

Local knowledge can be justified as "knowledge"; knowledge is an epistemic situation characterized by the appropriate justification of truth claims. Local knowledge can be understood to be a type of knowledge that is administered by epistemic agents within a particular (physical, cultural, social, political) context. Local knowledge presupposes familiarity with this context. Furthermore, the validity claims of local knowledge are generally limited to this particular context. The primary source of local knowledge is experience; as such it is "knowledge by acquaintance", knowledge based on practice and encounter. It is often tested over decades and even centuries of use. The "localness" of local knowledge refers both to the issues of (local) acquisi-

tion and (local) application. Local knowledge is a means of orientation, i.e. a response to orientation needs within a particular context. It presupposes a deep ("thick") understanding of the local context and, because of this, access conditions can sometimes be elusive and esoteric, i.e. restricted to groups with privileged access to local contexts. It is not surprising against this background that "origin" plays a major role in the understanding and assessment of local knowledge. Charles Lindblom and David Cohen characterize local knowledge on the basis of its "generating conditions" as a kind of "knowledge that does not owe its origin, testing, degree of verification, truth, status, or currency to distinctive … professional techniques, but rather to common sense, casual empiricism, or thoughtful speculation and analysis."[3] The wording of this characterization points to the sensitive issue of a juxtaposition between knowledge of type A (the result of standardized testing methods) and knowledge of type B (local knowledge as based on "casual empiricism"), which will be discussed in the subsequent section. On a positive note, we could say that local knowledge tries to do justice to a local context.

In this sense, one can understand local knowledge to be the result of epistemic adaptation to an environment. Since the "local" is a spatial category it is not surprising that local knowledge is often associated with specific and specialized knowledge of the physical environment, of wildlife or soil.[4] It is both an epistemological and a social question to ask if local knowledge is "too place-specific" to play a role outside its context of genesis. Korff argues: "When local knowledge is taken out of its specific spatial, social and religious frame, it is transformed and loses its local sense."[5] This touches upon the question of the validity of local knowledge. In order to enter this discussion it will be helpful to see the many forms of local knowledge as well as the different forms of epistemic justice.

Local knowledge may take the form of propositional knowledge ("know that") or procedural knowledge ("know how"). Because of its "embedded-

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[3]   Charles E. Lindblom/David K. Cohen: *Usable Knowledge. Social Science and social problem solving* (New Haven/CT: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 12.

[4]   Cf. Grant Gilchrist/Mark Mallory/Flemming Merkel: Can Local Ecological Knowledge Contribute to Wildlife Management? Case Studies of Migratory Birds. *Ecology and Society* 10/1 (2005), p. 20 (online); N. Barrera-Bassols/J. A. Zinck: Ethnopedology: a worldwide view on the soil knowledge of local people. *Geoderma* 111 (2003), pp. 171–195.

[5]   Rüdiger Korff: Local knowledge between thick description, ideology and science. *Contemporary Southeast Asian Dynamics Working Papers* 4 (Passau: University of Passau, 2011), p. 2.

ness" in life practices local knowledge is usually "personal", i.e. appropriated by epistemic agents and made their own. It is often "implicit" and not recorded systematically or officially, but rather handed down orally. It is "thick", in the sense that local knowledge presupposes and uses a "thick understanding" of the local context based on familiarity with the context mentioned above. It is "fluid" and open to the changes of the particular context of reference. It is "esoteric" in the sense that access to sources of local knowledge is not easily gained—this dynamic has been convincingly described by development expert Robert Chambers, who discusses "biases" of experts in rural development initiatives.[6] Chambers' attempt to correct the discourse on knowledge points to the contested struggles for epistemic recognition—whose knowledge counts, which knowledge counts? Discrediting local knowledge can also be read as an attempt by experts to retain their epistemically and socially privileged status. Local knowledge has not always been recognized; the symbolic capital value of this type of knowledge has often been downplayed. This dynamic has taken shape against the background of creating a divide between (objective, neutral, evidence-based, systematic) "Western scientific" and (subjective, interest-driven, anecdotal, non-systematic) "indigenous knowledge". This divide may be as misleading as the underestimation of local knowledge. The term "indigenous knowledge" may refer to an unhealthy "us" versus "them" juxtaposition.[7]

Local knowledge has long been neglected. Since the mid-1960s there has been a growing interest in it, and initially maybe even a kind of romanticization of local knowledge. Milestones on the road to acknowledging the importance of local knowledge have been the IDS Bulletin 10.2 in 1979, an edited volume by Brokensha, Warren and Werner in 1980, Robert Chambers's influential 1983 book on rural development, and the subsequent publications on rural development by P. Richards in 1985, and an edited volume

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[6] Robert Chambers: *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (London, 1983), Ch. 3: Chambers talks about the road bias, the seasonal bias, the day-time bias, the project bias, the report bias and the bias between urban experts and rural poor. These biases diminish the epistemic quality of the knowledge generating processes. Experts can access only realities accessible by cars during the dry season and during the day-time, they will be influenced in their perception by the project focus and their interest in drawing up a report, and they will not be able to enter easily information-providing relationships with rural people.

[7] Cf. R. Ellen/H. Harris: Introduction, in: R. Ellen/P. Parkes/A. Bicker (eds.): *Indigenous Environmental Knowledge and its Transformations* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000), p. 1–33.

by I. Scoones and J. Thompson nine years later.[8] The emphasis of these publications was on aspects of rural farming. Meanwhile, different areas are being discussed, including local knowledge as insider knowledge in the finance world or local knowledge for marketing purposes.[9] Local knowledge has been globalized. According to Rüdiger Korff this globalization has happened in at least two ways. It has been "de-territorialized" by anthropological research, thus enabling a comparative view, and it has been put on the agenda of global development players.[10] Furthermore, the relationship between local knowledge and other types of knowledge has been explored in less competitive terms. For example, in a study on forestry management in Mexico, D. J. Klooster has shown that both scientific and local forest knowledge are limited in their respective ways and can complement each other.[11] This seems to be a promising approach, moving us in a direction of epistemic justice which will be discussed in the next section.

Local knowledge is the result of locally anchored orientation responses; local knowledge comprises beliefs formed about the world around us. A key issue in debates on local knowledge is the question of the definition of "localness". Since local knowledge is often embedded in local community practices and local institutions, one could follow Mary Douglas's approach and claim that the local expresses the reach of institutions.[12] There are different levels of institutionalization relevant for the understanding of local knowledge. There are community practices as well as institutions such as families and offices, roles and functions. All communities possess

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[8] D. Brokensha/D. Warren/O. Werner (eds.): *Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Development* (New York: University of America Press, 1980); R. Chambers: *Rural Development: Putting the Last First* (Harlow: Longman, 1983); P. Richards: *Indigenous Agricultural Revolution: Ecology and Food Production in West Africa* (London: Hutcheson, 1985); I. Scoones/J. Thompson (eds.): *Beyond Farmer First: rural people's knowledge, agricultural research and extension practice* (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1994).

[9] Kazuo Ichijo/Florian Kohlbacher: Tapping tacit local knowledge in emerging market—the Toyota way. *Knowledge Management Research & Practice* 6 (2008), pp. 173–186.

[10] See Korff: Local knowledge between thick description, ideology and science (loc. cit).

[11] D. J. Klooster: Toward adaptive community forest management: integrating local forest knowledge with scientific forestry. *Economic Geography* 78 (2002), pp. 43–70.

[12] Mary Douglas: *How Institutions Think* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1986).

local knowledge; indeed it could be mentioned as a community-defining feature to have access to local knowledge—even though it is useful to distinguish between "common (local) knowledge" shared by all community members, "shared (local) knowledge" owned by a particular group within the community, and "specialized (local) knowledge", which is local expert knowledge such as the knowledge of medicine men. Local knowledge is an important element in securing social cohesion. As such, local knowledge does not only coordinate the relationship vis-à-vis the environment, but also vis-à-vis relationships. Shared knowledge is a basis for dialogue and understanding. Local knowledge is an important tool in "maximizing agreement" within the epistemic community sharing this knowledge. It has a social function and is not only, to introduce a distinction, a "knowledge about", but also a "knowledge towards". Local knowledge is not a set of propositions stored in a local archive, but a form of life including a particular style of perception and thought that is realized and shared within a particular community.

Local communities are usually not homogeneous entities. Accordingly, local knowledge is scattered and institutionally dispersed. "It is located at the individual and household level as well as collectively through community stewards and other key social actors (e.g., shamans, elders, local religious and political leaders, and healing artists). As such, one can distinguish between common (or everyday or public) knowledge (i.e., held by the whole community) and specialist knowledge (i.e., retained by a few local experts, e.g., healers with specific medical expertise and knowledge of local curative plants; knowledge of local plants known only by women; or knowledge of crops known only by men)."[13] Different types of local knowledge are generated by different local players, and gender differences come heavily into play. Hilary Warburton and Adrienne Martin quote an example from the Mbeere people of central Kenya: "Generally, the best information about the small annual herbs is obtained from older women; herdboys, being always hungry and also experimental, are experts on the range of wild edible fruits; honeycollectors show the most detailed knowledge of flowering sequences, and indeed know most differential characteristics of their local plants. Yet even within a group, one individual will stand out because of keen powers of observation, prodigious memory, curiosity and

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[13]   Julia Diekens: *Local Knowledge for Disaster Preparedness: A Literature Review* (Kathmandu/Nepal: International Center for Integral Mountain Development, 2007), p. 24.

intellect."[14] Local knowledge is unevenly distributed, a matter of power as well as of initiative.

The saying that "knowledge is power" has a particular meaning with regard to local knowledge. It is a sign of power to label knowledge as "local", but it is also a sign of power to be able to utilize local knowledge. Local knowledge is an important element in bringing about sustainable change.[15] If you want to see accepted and incarnated social transformation, the introduced changes need to make use of local epistemic resources. The introduction of new technologies into small remote communities can alter how individuals acquire knowledge about their surrounding environment. This is especially true when technologies that satisfy basic needs, such as freshwater use, create a distance (i.e. diminishing exposure) between individuals and their environment. However, such distancing can potentially be countered by the transfer of local knowledge between community members and from one generation to the next.[16] That is why the consideration of epistemic cultures of local knowledge is an indispensable step in the successful introduction of change. "Indigenous knowledge systems form the basis for decision-making, which is operationalized through indigenous organizations, and they provide the foundation for local innovations and experimentation."[17] Jason Corburn has identified local knowledge (understood as "first-hand experience") as a key issue in proper environmental planning; it can contribute to the planning process epistemologically, procedurally, in terms of effectiveness and regarding distributive justice.[18]

A benevolent-critical perspective on local knowledge will acknowledge its limitations. John Briggs opens a study on the use of indigenous knowledge in development work with a statement from a Tanzanian small-scale

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[14] Hilary Warburton/Adrienne Martin: Local people's knowledge in natural resources research. *Socio-economic Methodologies for Natural Resources Research* (Chatham, UK: Natural Resources Institute, 1999), p. 2.

[15] Julia Diekens: Local Knowledge for Disaster Preparedness (loc. cit.), p. 14f.

[16] Christopher Bone et al.: Assessing the Impacts of Local Knowledge and Technology on Climate Change Vulnerability in Remote Communities. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 8 (2011), pp. 733–761.

[17] D. M. Warren/B. Rajasekaran: Putting local knowledge to good use. *International Agricultural Development* 13/4 (1993), pp. 8–10, 8.

[18] Jason Corburn: Bringing Local Knowledge into Environmental Decision Making. Improving Urban Planning for Communities at Risk. *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 22 (2003), pp. 420–433.

farmer: "If indigenous knowledge is so good, why is my farm so poor?"[19] Indeed! Is this a question of not giving proper status to local knowledge or is this a question of the limited impact of local knowledge on innovation and the improvement of living conditions?

Summarizing, we could say that local knowledge, to be held by individuals or within and by communities, is

(i)   a set of beliefs about the surrounding world
(ii)   based on a culturally embedded justification
(iii) as a result of responses to orientation needs
(iv)   with a spatial dimension both in its genesis and in its application.

Watering plants:
Epistemic justice

The discourse on local knowledge is not "innocent". This can be exemplified by looking at local memories and local cultures of remembering. Czech intellectual Milan Kundera has used the image of "talking about the past" as "watering plants".[20] The suppression of memories is an expression of social injustice and leads to epistemic injustice. Local knowledge has to be "watered", i.e. nurtured by respect and brought to life in communicative practices. There are many examples of distorted historiographies. The discourse on local memories and on local knowledge is not innocent. There is a history of suppression as well as exploitation of power issues and conflicts. "Local knowledge" sometimes refers to "non-Western" types of knowledge or "knowledge of minorities". "Epistemic injustice" has been linked to colonialism and post-colonialism overwriting local knowledge with its claims.[21]

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[19]   J. Briggs: The use of indigenous knowledge in development: problems and challenges. *Progress in Development Studies* 5/2 (1999), pp. 99–114, 99.

[20]   "Remembering our past, carrying it with us always, may be the necessary requirement for maintaining, as they say, the wholeness of the self. To ensure that the self doesn't shrink, to see that it holds on to its volume, memories have to be watered like potted flowers, and the watering calls for regular contact with the witnesses of the past." (Milan Kundera: *Identity* [London: Faber & Faber, 1999, p. 43])

[21]   R. Bhagava: Overcoming the Epistemic Injustice of Colonialism. *Global Policy* 4/4 (2013), pp. 413–417; V. Gentile: 'Epistemic Injustice' and the 'Right Not to Be Poor'. Bringing Recognition into the Debate on Global Justice. *Global*

Rebecca Tsosie has argued that indigenous people have been mistreated in the name of "knowledge" and "discovery". Even seemingly neutral science has been used to disadvantage indigenous people who are predominantly seen as "objects" of epistemic agency rather than epistemic agents.[22] There is a politics of recognition at stake when discussing local knowledge. Local knowledge has been characterized as "knowledge", and knowledge as an epistemic situation characterized by appropriate justification of truth claims. The very idea of "justification" and "bringing forth reasons" can be identified as a potential source of epistemic injustice. Ian Werkheiser has pointed out that the question of "good reasons" can be used as a mechanism of exclusion, as

> asking for reasons privileges people who are able to come up with reasons over people who actually have a lot of knowledge. Some people will be able to provide reasons and thus maintain knowledge when others in the same situation would lose knowledge; this is not because of epistemic differences but differences in rhetorical ability. It is perhaps no great revelation to say that people who are able to sound convincing are more likely to have what they say taken up by an audience, and that people who are good at rationalizing things are more likely to be able to convince themselves of things as well. What is perhaps less often considered is that when we ask for someone's reasons, people who are better able to produce convincing-sounding reasons *whether or not they are the actual causes of their belief* will be able to maintain their knowledge, while people who are less able to do this will lose their knowledge.[23]

It is also a power issue to ask for reasons from people who are not trusted—hence, different levels of justification apply to different epistemic agents. "This means that people who are from marginalized groups in our society and who are therefore not trusted to know things will be epistemically oppressed by the increased demand to provide reasons, and their knowledge will in fact have less uptake in the community."[24] Werkheiser calls

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Policy 4/4 (2013), pp. 425–427—for the link between epistemic injustice and recognition see also J. McConkey: Knowledge and Acknowledgement: 'Epistemic Injustice' as a Problem of Recognition. *Politics* 24/3 (2004), pp. 198–205.

22 Rebecca Tsosie: Indigenous Peoples and Epistemic Justice: Science, Ethics, and Human Rights. *Washington Law Review* 87 (2012), pp. 1133–1201.

23 Ian Werkheiser: Asking for Reasons as a Weapon: Epistemic Justification and the Loss of Knowledge. *Journal of Cognition and Neuroethics* 2/1 (2014), pp. 173–190, 185.

24 Ibid.

for special attention to the marginalized, to a conscious effort to listen to under-heard voices.[25] The issues of what counts as a justification and who is being asked to justify knowledge claims are also social and political issues. Justice, we could say, does not only have a social, but also an epistemic, dimension; epistemic justice, we could also say, is not only about episte-mology, but also about social justice. That is why epistemic justice needs to be linked not only to individuals, but also to institutions.[26]

Which person is given which kind of attention is not only a matter of individual good will, but also a matter of institutional arrangements and cultural practices. Listening to people can be an expression of, but also a road to, social justice. Taking local knowledge claims seriously can lead to a sense of local problems. Jason Corburn observes that there is a type of local epistemic claim that "represents a type of local knowledge that identifies or poses a problem. This claim is reflected in statements like, 'I've seen sick people' and highlights contextual knowledge that allows professionals to focus on things they may have missed."[27] Because of the above-mentioned biases—also expressed in the term *déformation professionnelle*—profes-sionals need the corrective force of community-based sensitivity towards a problem. Accepting local agents as epistemic agents implies acknowledging their sense of problems and priorities; their epistemic claims about concerns have to be taken seriously in order to avoid epistemic injustice that goes hand in hand with social injustice.

The very idea of epistemic injustice has been significantly shaped by Miranda Fricker, who discussed recognition of credibility as a key issue in the debate. Certain people's claims are assigned privileged status, and other people's claims are not taken seriously.[28] Some people are ignored and

[25] Ibid., p. 187.

[26] Elizabeth Anderson: Epistemic justice as a virtue of social institutions. *Social Epistemology* 26/2 (2012), pp. 163–173. Andreas Follesdal and Simon Hix have introduced the term "epistemic democracy" as an arrangement of proper deliberation processes (A. Follesdal/S. Hix: Why there is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik. *Journal of Common Market Studies* 44/3 [2006], pp. 533–563).

[27] Corburn (loc. cit.), p. 421.

[28] Miranda Fricker: Epistemic Oppression and Epistemic Privilege. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 25 [Suppl.] (1999), pp. 191–210; M. Fricker: Silence and Institutional Prejudice, in: Sharon Crasnow/Anita Superson (eds.): *Out From the Shadows: Analytical Feminist Contributions to Traditional Philosophy* (Oxford: OUP, 2012).

made silent. Kristie Dotson distinguishes two kinds of silencing: a kind of "testimonial quieting" which occurs when a speaker is not recognized as an epistemic agent, and a situation where a speaker feels compelled to adjust her message to the receptive expectations of a powerful listener.[29] Axel Honneth reflects on the experience of "seeing through or past" a person as a social pathology.[30] There are different ways of ignoring a person, i.e. acting as if she is not present, acting as if she is an object, or acting as if she is not a full person. This is a matter of recognition which is usually linked to institutional arrangements. Recognition is distorted if there is a gap between the evaluative acknowledgement of the person and the institutional conditions necessary for the validation of this acknowledgement. This can happen on a local level—paradoxically, local knowledge which is contested in its epistemically just consideration can itself be a result and expression of excluding practices. Some people are driven into silence. Honneth accepts Arendt's idea that "the distortions of the social world are expressed in those developments that threaten to destroy the communicative requirements for a public discussion of political affairs."[31] Exclusion from public debate and

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[29] K. Dotson: Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing' *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 26/2 (2011), pp. 236–257. In another paper, Dotson describes another incidence of epistemic injustice when an interlocutor is willfully ignorant of the hermeneutical resources used by the speaker resulting in a diminishment of the speaker's ability to contribute to the discourse— K. Dotson: A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression. *Frontiers* 33/1 (2012), pp. 24–47. This very point about willful hermeneutical ignorance has also been made by Gaile Pohlhaus (G. Pohlhaus Jr: Relational Knowing and Epistemic Injustice: Toward a Theory of Willful Hermeneutical Ignorance. *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 27/4 [2012], pp. 715–735).

[30] A. Honneth: Invisibility: On the Epistemology of 'Recognition'. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*. Supplementary Vol. 75/1 (2001), pp. 111–126; recognition plays a major role in the discourse in epistemic justice—see Jane McConkey: Knowledge and Acknowledgement: "Epistemic Injustice" as a Problem of Recognition. *Politics* 24/3 (2004), pp. 198–205. A powerful monograph exploring types of ignorance and silences and the need for resistance has been published by José Medina (The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imagination [Oxford: OUP, 2013]).

[31] A. Honneth: *Disrespect: The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007). Honneth suggests, not too far from Arendt's approach, "reflexive cooperation" as the basis of functioning democratic societies— A. Honneth: Democracy as Reflexive Cooperation. *Political Theory* 26/6 (1998), pp. 763–783.

discourse is epistemically unjust and also potentially destructive (a sense of
falling out of networks of social recognition can result in dangerous forms
of social and political protest since there is the risk that recognition will be
sought from extremist groups[32]). If individual groups are "silenced", the
whole social system is at risk. Overcoming epistemic injustice is a matter of
structural changes, but especially appropriate epistemic virtues.[33]

Looking at it more systematically, epistemic justice can be considered to
be a property of an epistemic situation, i.e. the situation of "knowers" and
"knowledge claim holders". This situation is always also a social situation
involving more than one player because of the social dimension of language
and cognitive categories. An epistemic situation is any situation in which
epistemic goods are generated, administered or transformed. The epistemic
situation, we could also say, is the epistemologically relevant aspect of any
situation involving knowers. The concept of epistemic justice could be ana-
lyzed as a three-dimensional concept involving: (a) the relationship vis-à-vis
an epistemic agent; (b) the relationship vis-à-vis a particular context; (c) the
relationship vis-à-vis a particular knowledge claim. Hence, we can distin-
guish a personal, a contextual, and a positional dimension of epistemic jus-
tice. This would give us three key questions to understand epistemic justice:
does the situation ensure justice to the knower, justice to the context, and jus-
tice to the knowledge claims made? The personal dimension is about respect
and acceptance of epistemic agency, the contextual dimension refers to the
acknowledgment of the framework of this agency, and the positional dimen-
sion concerns the proper evaluation of the knowledge claim(s) at stake.

Hence, epistemic justice can be defined with regard to epistemic situa-
tions in the following way.

An epistemic situation is just if:

(i)   the epistemic stake holders are recognized and their epistemic agency
       acknowledged,
(ii)   the framework of this epistemic agency, i.e. the situatedness of the epis-
       temic stakeholders including the environment, institutional arrange-
       ments, material conditions and politics contexts is properly considered,

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[32]   A. Honneth: The Social Dynamics of Disrespect: Situating Critical Theory
       Today. Transl. J. Farrell, in: P. Des (ed.): *Habermas: A Critical Reader* (Oxford:
       Blackwell, 1999), pp. 320–337, 335.
[33]   Miranda Fricker: Epistemic Injustice and a Role for Virtue in Politics of Know-
       ing. *Metaphilosophy* 34/1–2 (2003), pp. 154–173.

(iii) the knowledge claims reach reflective equilibrium in the sense of a balance between different aspects, different perspectives, and between general and particular claims.

Watering plants and soils—and eating onions: Local epistemic justice

The concern to bring local knowledge and epistemic justice together can be discussed with regard to an understanding of "local epistemic justice". Local epistemic justice is a situation where local knowledge, local conditions, and local epistemic agents are all taken seriously. Local knowledge has been characterized as a set of beliefs about the surrounding world based on a culturally embedded justification as a result of responses to orientation needs with a spatial dimension both in its genesis and in its application. Epistemic justice has been analyzed as a property of epistemic situations, i.e. a property of situations in which epistemic goods such as truth claims are generated, administered or transformed. It has been suggested that an epistemic situation is epistemically just if the stakeholders are respected, the context considered and the knowledge claims properly balanced.

Local epistemic justice, then, means to "see" the epistemic agents involved, to see the local people as "knowers" and "knowledge claim holders", and to respect this status by taking the claims made and the resources used seriously. This does not mean to wholeheartedly accept whatever is claimed but it definitely means to subscribe to "principles of charity" in the hermeneutics of approaching a particular situation. An illustrative example would be the situation of child patients who are not always taken seriously in their claims about their health situation.[34] Proper consideration of the epistemic agents involved requires "epistemic vigilance", a sense of attention and openness that can also be linked to the concept of "prudence".[35] Local epistemic justice means, secondly, to make an effort to understand the local context in both its particularity and its historicity.

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[34] Cf. H. Carel/G. Györffy: Seen but not heard: children and epistemic injustice. *The Lancet* 384/9950 (2014), pp. 1256–1257.

[35] See the characterization of "prudence" (as the opposite of a numbness of the senses) in Aquinas: *Summa Theologica II–II*, pp. 47–55; concerning the term "epistemic vigilance" see Dan Sperber et al.: Epistemic Vigilance. *Mind & Language* 25/4 (2010), pp. 359–393.

Hence, local epistemic justice is connected to a culture of remembering the local stories and histories, to an experience of communicative memory. Milan Kundera, as we have seen, has used the image of "watering plants" when talking about the past. The effort to bring about local epistemic justice is a lot like watering plants in this sense. It is not only a question of the "what" and the content of remembering, but also a question of the "how" and the mode of remembering. There are power questions linked to an ethics of remembering.[36] There may even be grounds to consider "epistemic dis-obedience" in the culture of remembering—the refusal to accept forgetting, such as by the Argentinian mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. Thirdly, local epistemic justice is about the proper consideration of knowledge claims. Do they do justice to the various aspects, the different perspectives and to the dynamics of general principles and particular dynamics?

Undoubtedly, there are different levels of "respect". Respecting local knowledge is one element in the attempt to bring about local epistemic justice. Respecting local knowledge can mean a number of things: (a) acknowledg-ing the availability and establishment of local knowledge; (b) considering local knowledge in finding orientation within the local context; (c) appre-ciating local knowledge in accepting it as a major source of a hermeneu-tics of the local; and (d) accepting a normative status of local knowledge as a binding authority. Local epistemic justice cannot mean accepting as binding whatever is there—extreme positions of "we know best" or "they know best"[37] can hardly be justified—but (a), (b) and (c) seem to be plau-sible candidates for the construction of local epistemic justice. Furthermore, it is not enough to simply "accept" local structures. Saskia Widenhorn has used a comparison of two approaches to show that the consideration of indigenous knowledge can lead to the reproduction of epistemic in-justices by reinforcing hierarchies of knowledge. Thus, the formal recogni-tion of cultural diversity does not necessarily entail a promotion of epis-temic diversity and social justice.[38] "Local epistemic justice" in this sense

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[36] José Medina: Toward a Foucaultian Epistemology of Resistance: Counter-Memory, Epistemic Friction, and *Guerrilla* Pluralism. *Foucault Studies* 12 (2011), pp. 9–35.

[37] Cf. F. Cleaver: Paradoxes of participation: questioning participatory approaches to development. *Journal of International Development* 11 (1999), pp. 597–612, 605.

[38] Saskia Widenhorn: Towards Epistemic Justice with Indigenous Peoples' Know-ledge? Exploring the potentials of the convention on biological diversity and the philosophy of Buen Vivir. *Development* 56/3 (2014), pp. 378–386.