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Epistemic (In)justice: Whose Voices Count? Listening to Migrants and Students

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Abstract

In this study, we present the results of a project, which involved students enrolled at four universities located in Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Czech Republic, and the United Kingdom. The main goal of the project was to raise students' awareness about the conditions that cause epistemic injustice for migrants and refugees. Epistemic injustice is a concept that sheds light on the ethical dimensions of our epistemic practices. It recognizes that individuals can be wronged specifically in their capacity as knowers, a capacity essential to human value (Fricker, 2007). The project material included a set of interviews with migrants and refugees as well as desk research about the status of their national migratory contexts. Students exchanged their testimonies via extended sessions that took place between October and November of 2022. An ethics of listening was cultivated to disrupt conventions of authorized discourse about migrants. Through understanding that labels such as illegal, undocumented and unauthorized are not neutral descriptors but carry implicit association and value judgments that frame and influence debate, students were invited to engage in a form of communication and consciousness to create spaces for unheard, marginalized voices of migration trends (Lipari, 2010.) Our international research with students and migrants was influenced by Arjun Appadurai (2006) who invites us to question established paradigms and critically reflect on contemporary global dynamics of migration contributing to Sousa Santos 'ecology of knowledges' across continents and cultures (2015).

Keywords: epistemic (in)justice, human rights, knowledge production, testimony

Resumen

En este estudio, presentamos los resultados de un proyecto que involucra a estudiantes de cuatro universidades ubicadas en Ecuador, la República Dominicana, la República Checa y el Reino Unido. El objetivo principal de este proyecto es concientizar a los estudiantes sobre las condiciones que conducen a la injusticia epistémica experimentada por personas migrantes y refugiadas. La injusticia epistémica es un concepto que destaca los aspectos éticos de nuestras prácticas

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basadas en el conocimiento, reconociendo que las personas pueden ser perjudicadas en su capacidad como seres que conocen; una capacidad esencial para la dignidad humana (Fricker, 2007). Los materiales utilizados en el proyecto incluyeron una serie de entrevistas con migrantes y refugiados, junto con investigaciones documentales sobre los contextos migratorios predominantes en sus respectivos países. Los estudiantes compartieron sus testimonios en extensas sesiones que se llevaron a cabo entre octubre y noviembre de 2022. A lo largo de este proceso, cultivamos una ética de la escucha, interrumpiendo los discursos autorizados convencionales sobre los migrantes. En efecto, el proyecto fomentó la comprensión de que términos como "ilegal", "indocumentado" y "no autorizado" no son descripciones neutrales, sino que llevan asociaciones implícitas y juicios de valor que moldean e influyen en el discurso. Así, se alentó a los estudiantes a participar en una forma distinta de comunicación y conciencia que buscaba crear espacios para las voces a menudo pasadas por alto y marginadas en las tendencias de migración (Lipari, 2010). Nuestra investigación internacional con estudiantes y migrantes fue influenciada por Arjun Appadurai (2006), quien nos invita a cuestionar los paradigmas establecidos y reflexionar críticamente sobre la dinámica global contemporánea de la migración que contribuye a la "ecología de conocimientos"de Sousa Santos (2015) en todos los continentes y culturas.

Palabras clave: derechos humanos, (in)justicia epistémica, producción de conocimiento, testimonio.

Resumo

Neste estudo, apresentamos os resultados de um projeto envolvendo estudantes de quatro universidades localizadas no Equador, na República Dominicana, na República Tcheca e no Reino Unido. O objetivo deste projeto foi conscientizar os estudantes sobre as condições que levam à injustiça epistêmica vivida por migrantes e refugiados. A injustiça epistêmica é um conceito que destaca os aspectos éticos de nossas práticas baseadas no conhecimento, reconhecendo que as pessoas podem ser injustiçadas em sua capacidade enquanto conhecedoras, uma capacidade essencial para a dignidade humana (Fricker, 2007). Os materiais do projeto incluíram uma série de entrevistas com migrantes e refugiados e uma pesquisa secundária (desk research) sobre os contextos migratórios de seus respectivos países. Os estudantes compartilharam seus depoimentos em sessões extensas que ocorreram entre outubro e novembro de 2022. Ao longo desse processo, cultivamos uma ética de escuta, interrompendo todo e qualquer discurso autorizado convencional sobre migrantes. Ao promover a compreensão de que termos como "ilegal", "não documentado" e "não autorizado" não são descritores neutros, mas carregam associações implícitas e julgamentos de valor que moldam e influenciam o discurso, os estudantes foram encorajados a participar de uma forma distinta de comunicação e consciência que tinha como objetivo criar espaços para as vozes muitas vezes negligenciadas e marginalizadas nas tendências migratórias (Lipari, 2010). Nossa pesquisa internacional, envolvendo tanto estudantes quanto migrantes, foi influenciada por Arjun Appadurai (2006), que nos instiga a desafiar paradigmas estabelecidos e refletir criticamente sobre as dinâmicas globais contemporâneas da migração, contribuindo com o conceito de "ecologia de saberes" entre continentes e culturas de Sousa Santos (2015).

Palavras-chave: direitos humanos, (in)justiça epistêmica, narrativa, produção de conhecimento.

In 1941, migrant philosopher, Hannah Arendt, exiled from her native Germany, made her way to the United States via Portugal. In "The Decline of the Nation-State and the Ends of the Rights of Man" she wrote that European migrants, refugees, and stateless people were "the most symptomatic group in contemporary politics" (Arendt, 1951, p. 277). Throughout the 1990s, civil wars and severe ethnic discrimination in Yugoslavia (1990-2001), Rwanda (1994), Iraq (1991) and Somalia (1993) forced hundreds of thousands of people to flee their homes seeking safety and protection; by 2017, more than 700,000 Rohingyas joined the approximately 300,000 who were already living in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh (UN News, 2018). Gloria Anzaldúa, a Chicana cultural theorist born in the United States, was exiled for her political views. In her 1987 poem, To Live in The Borderlands, she summarizes that exile, that is to live in the Borderlands, you must live sin fronteras, or without borders. You must be a crossroad in order to survive.

Since 1990, according to a report by the Pew Research Center (2018), the number of international migrants around the world increased significantly. In 1990, there were approximately 153 million international migrants, which accounted for 2.9% of the world's population. By 2017, the number of international migrants had increased to 258 million, or 3.4% of the world's population. In 2018, the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration (GCSORM) intergovernmental agreement was formally adopted to address migration "in all its dimensions" and as a "roadmap to

prevent suffering and chaos" (UN News, 2018). The GCSORM rests on the principles of the United Nations Charter and the Declaration of Human Rights to establish a non-legally binding cooperative framework while upholding states' sovereignty over border control.

The contemporary age of migration shows no signs of decreasing with unprecedented challenges for the vulnerable and millions of people on the move facing uncertain and precarious futures. By mid-2022, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimated that global forced displacement had reached more than 117 million of which more than 53 million were internally displaced, 4.9 million were asylum seekers, 32.5 million were refugees, and 5.3 million needed international protection. There were at least 4.3 million stateless people in the world as of 2022, according to United Nations General Assembly.

Migrants and refugees are at a greater risk of statelessness, the consequence of which, conceived in human rights terms, result in discrimination such as rights to health care, work, and education and potential vulnerability to other violations like being trafficked. People escaping conflict may lose or not be able to bring citizenship documents with them. Their children are also at risk of statelessness if they cannot prove their nationality. The language of human rights is that of contested entitlement claims based on the dominant Western idea of humanity and the understanding of colonialism as a legacy of class, sexual, gender, spiritual, linguistic, geographical, and racial hierarchies of the modern world system.

The economic and health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be felt in countries and communities across Latin America and the Caribbean where refugees and migrants remain some of the most vulnerable populations– especially those without documentation. More than twenty years ago, Walter Mignolo (2000), following Chicano(a) thinkers such as Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) and José David Saldévar (1997), described "critical border thinking" as a redefinition of humanity, of citizenship, of democracy of human rights, and economic relations beyond the narrow definitions imposed by Western modernity. Critical border thinking aimed to disrupt mainstream national and international discourses and cultivate spaces for marginalized voices.

For example, Ecuador, with an estimated 500,000 Venezuelans, is hosting the third-largest refugee and migrant population worldwide. While the majority of these half-million people were undocumented, in June 2022, the government of Ecuador decided to provide them with legal protection, social stability, and training opportunities delivered by universities. One of the primary ways that universities can deconstruct and disrupt historical and contemporary power structures impacting marginalized populations, such as migrants and refugees, is through highlighting their relationship to geopolitics (Mignolo, 2003).

Wimmer (2007) offers the notion of "dilemma of culturality" from an information ethics perspective. "Dilemma of culturality" can be seen as an alternative to Eurocentrism. It speaks to the separatism of ethno-philosophy, no longer merely comparative or dialogical, but rather polylogical with questions concerning the fundamental structures of reality and the validity of norms being discussed in such a way that a solution is not propagated unless a polylogue, between as many and as different traditions as possible, has taken place. Wimmer's inter-epistemic dialogues, or "polylogues," provide a framework in which students can explore their collective, decolonial listening and thinking. Polylogues can function as a space for a rhetoric of "knowledging" or transcultural overlapping of concepts and theories. This notion aligns with the research of Miranda Fricker (2013) who argued that it is probable that well-founded theories of epistemic injustice have developed in more than one cultural tradition. In *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (2007), she defines epistemic injustice as the wrongs that are committed against someone in their capacity as a knower, which is essential to human value. Fricker identifies two forms of epistemic injustice: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs when a speaker is not given the credibility they deserve due to prejudice or stereotypes. Hermeneutic injustice occurs when a person's social experiences are not understood or are misunderstood due to a lack of shared interpretive resources. Fricker (2007) argues that epistemic injustice is a potent yet largely silent dimension.

A polylogue differs from Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic process as it shows that meaning is derived from interactions among an author, the work, and the reader or listener, all of which are affected by the social and political contexts in which they are placed. Wimmer (2007) emphasizes the role of the web of ontologies at play in any interaction. He states,

> the imagination of meta-intercultural ontologies is to realize a complete multilateral influence supporting epistemological polylogues (A ⇒⇐ B and A ⇒⇐ C and A ⇒⇐ D and B ⇒⇐ C and B ⇒⇐ D and C ⇒⇐ D) with cross-influences from all sides to all sides equally while practicing internationalization (p. 87).

This approach can foreground what we know, how knowledge is constructed, and what is considered legitimate. In treating epistemology as having both intellectual and ethical dimensions, identity and power systems that silence and delegitimize knowers and ways of knowing can be identified.

In this study, we recognize how the web of different types of relationships shape our reality of global migration across continents and cultures by highlighting the significance of teachers and students. Together, these concepts of relationships and reality underscore the capability approach, a normative approach to human welfare that has practical relevance for assessment and policy design (UN HDR). Social philosopher, Miranda Fricker (2007) defines epistemic contribution capability as (students) receiving information and making interpretations to contribute to knowledge, understanding and practical deliberation.

As we explain in the following pages, we developed an intercultural participatory-emancipatory (Cresswell, 2014) research project that involved undergraduate students and faculty from universities in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Western and Central Europe. In this paper, we sought to analyze how our community of learners might prepare to ethically engage across differences in research practices that can contribute to valuing diverse ways of knowing and forms of expression (Fricker, 2007).

Literature Review

The literature review includes stories of projects using a participatory-emancipatory action research method and elements of the immigration crisis.

Participatory-Emancipatory Action Projects

Participatory-emancipatory action research differs from classical methodologies by its commitment to transform the social reality that is being researched. In education, this approach is relatively common. For example, in 2019, a methodological approach to disrupting epistemic injustice was implemented in a university setting in South Africa. With a focus on epistemic capability of all project participants, Walker et al. (2020) designed an inclusive process of knowledge-making through a photo-voice project. It involved students as trainee researchers adopting a methodology that recognized them as legitimate producers of knowledge, utilizing university resources of different kinds that are "converted" into achievements shaped in enabling or constraining ways by social and personal "conversion factors" (Robeyns, 2017).

From a slightly different perspective, Boni and Velasco (2019) explored the epistemic injustice and capabilities nexus via two empirical cases. The first one was an experience developed in Lagos, Nigeria which demonstrated how participatory action-research methodologies promoted epistemic capabilities amongst both students and local citizens. The project generated interpretive materials to speak about the political realities of slum housing and forced eviction.

In Colombia, Boni and Velasco (2019) included student participants in mixed-profile, interdisciplinary teams composed of communities and local government in the Tolima Region Peace Construction Program to develop an action plan built around dialogic spaces. Various collective reflections via video and documentation were made by teachers and students about the actions they had performed; epistemic capability was realized not only for students, but also teachers and various other community participants in both projects according to the authors. Students remarked that in this project they were the ones deciding what to photograph and which photographs to choose; they were given opportunities "to think of something new, think of something creative," to talk, to interact, to present, to improvise, and to think critically, attending to relations of power and preparing "people to take part appropriately, fairly and justly in knowledge exchange" (Kotzee, 2017, p. 329). The authors describe their identification of "epistemic contributor functioning," which they perceive as crucial for concrete change in epistemic justice at the individual and collective levels.

The Importance of Raising Awareness about the Global Migration Crisis

In every epoch, refugee lives are marked by loss of their homes and entire social texture. Arendt describes this texture as the fabric or structure of social life and intricate web of relationships, interactions and institutions that shape the collective existence into which they were born and established a distinct place in the world (Arendt, 1958). In her book *The Human Condition* Arendt argued that the modern world was increasingly characterized by "world alienation"—a disconnection from the public sphere and a focus on private concerns. Arendt's work challenges us to reevaluate our roles in society, emphasizing the need for active participation, dialogue, and collective responsibility.

However, United Nations human rights declarations in the twentieth century, which promulgated a larger number of inalienable human rights in the 1940s and 1950s in response to the devastating effects of totalitarianism, were later denounced as another form of cultural imperialism in the 1960s and 1970s, especially in the context of African and Asian authoritarianism. Over a decade ago, in their call for a more consistent application of human rights, Mignolo (2009) and Damrosch and Spivak (2011) noted that decolonial humanities were often found outside of universities in social, artistic, and intellectual movements rather than in the modern colonial design of university knowledge. To provide some examples of this phenomenon, we will highlight some of the reflections provided by the students who participated in our project to amplify their capability, which is the opportunity aspect of freedom and agency expansion, which is the process action of freedom.

One Ecuadorian student who participated in the project reviewed the text "Four Epistemic Injustices in University Curriculum" written by the Colombian scholar Laura Bernal-Rios (2022). This student noted how the generation of marginalizing terms, intrinsic to systemic injustice, unconsciously perpetuate unjust and violent acts toward groups in society by framing them in a certain etymology; the etymology comes from a discriminatory ontology of systems embedded with social structures, relations, and practices. These terms may be intrinsically problematic, or they may be distressing only insofar as they interact with other structures in the system to produce injustice, often unknowingly, in ways that African American author Ta-Nehisi Coates stated in *Between the World and Me* (2015). He scrutinizes the significance of lived experience of race and race relations at the corporeal level: "You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body" (p. 57).

Similarly, a second Ecuadorian student wrote that, rather than thinking of epistemic injustices in daily life, he remembered the work of the Colombian philosopher Alicia Natali Chamorro (2022) who describes how politicians use arguments to take advantage of the ignorance of certain groups to build a world that excludes other sections of society. Excluded groups, such as migrants and refugees, are not only victims of the perfidy of politicians, but they are also systematically exposed to social injustices.

Following this argument, one of the primary conditions at the macro level of national governments for migrants and refugees to obtain asylum, is the requirement to demonstrate sufficient need. By 2022, it was estimated that more than 26 million people refugees were seeking asylum in foreign countries (Govindarajan, 2022). To obtain this status, they must be able to demonstrate that they reasonably fear being persecuted in their homeland, which can make them vulnerable to testimonial, that is, unfairness related to trusting someone's word and hermeneutic forms of discrimination referring to the situation where someone's social experience is not understood due to prejudicial flaws in shared resources for social interpretation. This can lead to a significant area of someone's social experience being obscured from understanding (Govindarajan, 2022).

Forms of silencing or epistemic misjudgment of refugee applications occur in the use of insufficiently intersectional conceptions of social identity that receive unduly deflated levels of credibility. For example, being a refugee from an upper middle social class can render an applicant less needy or having a non-binary gender orientation could make an asylum seeker look more suspicious. In addition, algorithmic and automation bias and the opacity of automated artificial intelligence systems of migrant management exacerbate the vulnerability of asylum seekers to epistemic injustice, including exclusion and silencing.

In this dysfunctional, dialogic environment, asylum seekers are at risk of being unfairly penalized and immigration officials are impaired in their capacity to exercise epistemically responsible agency. Refugees are often forced to speak, narrate, and persuade in a foreign language unfamiliar to them and in which they lack proficiency. Yet, the ability to give their testimony as displaced people is a chance to re-establish a social bond. Viet Nguyen (2018) reminds us that if we are

aware of what we cannot hear and capable of listening, we will hear the people—refugees and asylum seekers--described as voiceless. Similarly, in *Refugee Tales*, authors Herd and Pincus (2016) identify that refugee stories are important for addressing their collective situations. Such situations may unsettle state legitimacy where credibility may be distributed unevenly in "credibility economies" (Fricker, 2007, p. 30)

In addition to testimonial injustice, refugees and migrants also face physical violence at the hands of border officials. According to Davies et al. (2023), border violence known as "epistemic borderwork" is regularly used by state authorities to stifle the capacity of refugees to draw attention to their mistreatment.

Theoretical Framework

The key concepts of this study are inspired by Wimmer's (2007) inter-epistemic dialogues, or polylogues, Lotman's complexity theory, and Fricker's (2007) epistemic injustice. Learning from each other through interaction helps change values and develop new ones and maintain accountability for collective choices. Perhaps this form of democratic reasoning should not be exclusively associated with or imposed by the Western world but may exist across different civilizations and times (Sen, 2009). Wimmer emphasizes the role of the web of ontologies that are at play in any interaction that can cross-influence all participants equally through epistemological polylogues that have both intellectual and ethical dimensions. Polylogues can be used to identify power systems that silence and delegitimate knowers and foreground what we know, how we know it, and how knowledge is constructed.

However, while polylogues offer the opportunity to deconstruct and to unsettle historical and contemporary power structures, R'boul (2022) identifies English as a necessity to participate in global knowledge networks, including international conferences and journals. Identifying the use of English-only narratives and practices that serve the colonial epistemic structure in the dissemination of Global South epistemologies within their local context, Rosa and Flores (2021) consider how applied linguistics tends to focus on modestly supporting affirmation and inclusion of marginalized populations rather than on fundamental institutional changes to eradicate the forces that produce marginalization. They suggest that social justice is "an existential horizon that necessitates a fundamental re-imagination of communication's role in narrating and creating decolonial worlds that sustain collective well-being" (Rosa & Flores, 2021, p. 1167). Building systemic social change involves decentering the individual researcher's interests and instead foregrounding processes of collective solidarity, thereby demonstrating how justice is relational and aspirational (Martinez et al., 2021). Learning from and with the epistemic Global South suggests an ecology of knowledges based on intercultural and inter-political translation (Sousa Santos, 2015).

Similarly, an Ecuadorian student who participated in the extended Spanish readings for our project noted the research of political scientist Moira Perez (2019), which includes concepts such as the violence of othering, testimonial injustice, and hermeneutic injustice. This latter form of injustice occurs when a gap in collective, interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage with regard to making sense of their social experiences, and determining whether epistemic violence or injustice brought upon them is intentional. There are different situations through which our seemingly imperceptible actions can be interpreted by another individual as contributing to their marginalization; many times, we may categorize the subjects without even knowing them, recreating previous prejudices and even cultural issues. For example, in "Refuge and Refuse: Migrant Knowledge and Environmental Education in Germany," Jacobs (2019) notes that discussions about the large influx of refugees to Germany and other European countries in 2015 focused on what migrants did not know, such their lack of understanding of the host country's bureaucracy and deficit of language skills and cultural sensitivity, Jacobs noted that, although migrants' perspectives and testimonies can draw attention to flaws in the (German immigration) system and be crucial to improving it, it is difficult for migrant voices to be heard and for their knowledge to be seriously considered.

Thinking of the complexity and intertwined systems of injustices that underlie any research endeavor about refugees and migrants, it is worth amplifying the words of Merit Rickberg, who made a dedication to the Russian-Jewish founder of the Tartu School, Juri Lotman, in the Eurozine review of the Tartu journal *Akadeemia*. She writes:

> Complexity-thinking as a separate approach to research and practice in education has arisen as a response to the growing need to understand how learning systems, such as individual students, schools and whole societies, can become more flexible in light of accelerated change (Rickberg, 2022, p. 2).

Lotman's focus on dialogue for cultural evolution comes from the relationship and exchange with different spaces and temporalities. The idea of the border is pivotal with cultural identities defining their own boundaries, but precisely on the lines of separation is where maximum exchange occurs. In his posthumous work, Lotman acknowledges the predictability of historical situations, but introduces the category of "explosion" as a moment of unexpected acceleration of historical-cultural dynamism in ways that may transgress learning as a controlled linear process with predictable outcomes (Mosquera, 2009).

Returning to the concept of epistemic injustice and considerations of intentionality, social philosopher Miranda Fricker (2017) writes in "Evolving Concepts of Epistemic Justice" that it is necessary to examine the interpersonal level of one's lived experience to understand how beliefs and social interpretations are received, even by well-meaning others.

Working between theories of value and knowledge, Fricker (2007) argues that knowledge is not for its own sake alone, but for the purpose of morally awakening a knowing subject and influencing collective social and political change. She problematizes identity power related to race, gender, and socioeconomic class, which she believes is a form of social practice inevitably producing an unjust epistemic disadvantage that is "most fundamentally, a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower" (p. 1).

Who is afforded credibility and authority as knowers is a pervasive feature of universities (Allen, 2017). Homogenization and normalization of the content of knowledge, its centralization around core axioms, and the hierarchization of different forms of knowledge production can be seen as a form of testimonial injustice. In fact, Fricker (2012) questioned if research groups in universities, among other organizations ever function as genuine group testifiers as opposed to mere sources of information. She reiterates Craig's (1990) concern that the distinctiveness of testimony is somebody being a good informant and not merely functioning as a source of information. By attending to relations of power, we can prepare people to take part appropriately, fairly, and justly in knowledge exchange, rather than as objects from which true belief can be extracted.

To be fully engaged, students need opportunities to develop what Fricker describes as their epistemic contribution capability of receiving information and making interpretations to contribute to knowledge, understanding, and practical deliberations. This requires epistemic reciprocity by expanding students' capabilities of knowing and being a knower. Through participating in our project, they were able to enhance these capabilities and recognize how, migrants and refugees can be disenfranchised as knowers. Our project also prompted students to critically reflect on how knowers with power may enact injustices, even without their knowing. Sen (2003) notes that, although capabilities are used for different purposes, they cannot be independent of social/interpersonal actions; whatever the "given social conditions, public discussion and reasoning can lead to a better understanding of the role, reach, and the significance of particular capabilities" (p. 79).

Methodology

In this study, we used a participatory-emancipatory approach (Creswell, 2014) to encourage students to develop awareness about systems of injustices and then deeply examine the processes of power that create these inequities through critical reflection. Similarly, a participatory emancipatory approach incorporates capability action, setting goals, maintaining processes and monitoring outcome aims to identify and avoid modern extractivist methodologies. In other words, the way to share implementing research with those who might be interested or with those who might also benefit.

As researchers, we must be committed to producing new knowledge that recovers lived experiences and help create spaces for the voices of the silenced to be expressed and heard. Likewise, we expect that this project challenges racism, colonialism, and oppression by re-positioning those who have been objects of research into "questioners, critics, theorists, knowers, and communicators" of this process (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018, p. 1).

Participants

The participants in this study were faculty members and students from the fields of Education, International Relations, Latin American Studies, Law, Linguistics, and Tourism. They were affiliated with four universities located in Latin America, the Caribbean, Western Europe, and Central Europe. Students from the Czech Republic (5 students), the Dominican Republic (5 students), the United Kingdom (10 students), and Ecuador (10 students) participated in weekly

online sessions. These 75-minute sessions, conducted on the Zoom platform, were held at 11:00 a.m. Ecuadorian local time over a five-week period in November and December of 2022. Our research project brought together participants from diverse geographical, political, economic, and social backgrounds, and was built upon faculty relationships established in previous projects and shared interests in epistemic injustice and global migration.

The University of Azuay (UDA) in Ecuador hosted both the first and last sessions, while University College London (UCL) in the United Kingdom led the second. The third session was managed by Pontificia Universidad Católica Madre y Maestra (PUCMM) in the Dominican Republic, and the fourth was a collaborative effort between the Universities of Brno and Masaryk (MUNI) in the Czech Republic.

Each session began with a brief welcome from the hosting faculty. This was followed by a ten-minute, student-led presentation, which was primarily based on data from interviews, surveys, and other research methods. The presentation then transitioned to a 45-minute breakout session that incorporated students from all four participating countries. During this time, the faculty members seized a valuable chance to further discuss both the procedure and the content presented.

At the end of each session, students from the host university provided a summary of the discussions held. These breakout sessions were recorded. Additionally, students from UDA in Ecuador maintained a record of every breakout session they took part in, using a shared Google document. At the end of the course, all participants were required to complete a semi-structured survey that enabled a mix of qualitative and quantitative data to be collected.

English was used as the main language of communication during the five sessions. This was a second language for most students, including four out of the ten students studying at UCL. Some students in London also spoke additional languages such as Brazilian Portuguese and Hindi. We followed Appadurai's (2006) argument that research is a generalized capacity "to make disciplined inquiries" and "expand the horizons of knowledge" for participants contributing to what Santos calls an 'ecology of knowledges' (p. 49).

Preparatory discussions among faculty resulted in a participatory approach that included numerous methods to involve migrant and refugee interviewees and students for collaborative work on the research project. Participatory-emancipatory approaches can be especially useful when the project goal is to achieve epistemic and behavioral change or increase the utility of a particular knowledge.

We believed that students requesting time to listen to the narratives of migrants and refugees would promote critical and collective dialogue and intercultural exchange through the Zoom meeting sessions. In an attempt to re-position those (refugee-migrants) who may have been objects of research, students would gain access to the refugee-migrant testimonial experience and the opportunity to identify and name their own hidden capabilities and ethical responsibilities as well as misunderstandings for a "more inclusive and democratic approach that is epistemically just in its processes and impact" (Boni & Velasco, 2019, p. 9). Real opportunities for students to freely share the stories they witnessed might build hermeneutic justice, that is reflective discovery, as well as interpretive justice that emphasizes ongoing dialogue and contextual exploration. In addition, students participated in the selection of contemporary articles as well as content analysis of the breakout sessions. The testimonials that were collected are central to the analysis and discussion sections of this article. The group of refugees and migrants who agreed to participate consisted of staff from local restaurants that faculty and students had previously encountered, as well as young migrants–some of whom were undocumented–who were transiting through Ecuador in route to another destination. These young migrants had been met by students in various social settings.

Results

The completion of this project showed three main findings: the first finding is about the structure and process; the second is about the potential of polyloguing and use of the English language; and the final one relates to the state of students' epistemic capabilities.

In the following section, we discuss our findings about the changes in students' epistemic capabilities through intercultural participation by examining their students' voices. For the sake of brevity, we have included a detailed description of how the organizational structure and process content was conducted in Appendix A.

Students' Voices

Fricker (2007) prompts us to ask this important question related to our research: *Can the voices of diverse knowers, such as migrants and refugees, contribute to a broader and deeper social understanding of the human intercultural experience?*

In this section we discuss findings relative to literature from Latin American and European epistemological realities. Our intention is to share these findings as a transformative strategy to unveil and unsettle the discourse of historically rooted inequalities through highlighting their relationship to geopolitical issues.

Geographical borders are pivotal for cultural identities but are also, literally, and metaphorically, where there can be maximum cultural exchange. Forced global migration may be our moment of Lotman's "explosion," an unexpected accounting of historical-cultural dynamism that defies learning as linear and predictable and pushes us to a more complex type of thinking. How can research and practice become more flexible in light of this accelerated change?

In a recent university action research project in Ecuador, we took advantage of the complexity of online teaching to perform new research (Carr et al., 2021). As teachers began to exercise reflexivity in the action research project, certain dialogic characteristics emerged. They demonstrated epistemological and pedagogical transformation as they tried out new roles and modes of interaction with each other and students. This drew our attention to the extent to which teachers and students, as digital citizens, might step outside of backgrounds, roles, jobs, politics, and beliefs forged by the power differentials of the online economy.

In a mixed methods, sequential, explanatory study (Carr et al., 2023), we investigated the expectations of a convenience sample of undergraduate students and their teachers from courses in International Studies regarding the possibilities of distance learning and remote classes during the COVID-19 pandemic. We found significant differences between teachers and students' preferences for academic learning through social media interaction. While digital technology has simplified the communication process and expanded potential, interactive, communication opportunities, participation is structurally different from interaction. Interaction remains an important condition of participation, but it cannot be equated to participation.

Interaction has no political meaning because, contrary to participation, it does not entail power dynamics. Zoom sessions require active student participation where critically attending to power relations means improvising to take part fairly and justly in knowledge exchange. This concept relates to the epistemological dimension reclaimed by Habermas (2006) in the notion of the public sphere as a large body of people who have a common interest in the consequences of social transactions.

This notion raises the question of a shared language and how we might prepare to ethically engage across concomitant, epistemological differences. Wimmer's inter-epistemic polylogues that act as a rhetoric of transcultural overlapping of concepts and theories related to global migration sets the challenge for the role of language, specifically English.

The following student voices illustrate the emancipatory aspects of the intercultural experience. Through discussion of the validity of the norms of many different traditions, we initiate collective decolonial listening, which can disrupt the coloniality of injustice that marginalized populations suffer.

In the first example, participating in the testimonial experience helped an Ecuadorian student identify her ethical responsibilities, hidden capabilities, and prejudices. When she heard that a mother was ashamed that she and her daughter, who had made the long journey from Venezuela to Ecuador, had slept in the town square and asked for food in the street, the student described how she sympathized with the mother because of the political and economic difficulties they had left behind and felt that refugees should be given due process. The student continued that, if a case such as that of the Ukraine in which millions of refugees were forced to leave due to the war were to occur in Latin America, it could be more difficult as many of the countries in this region have several problems, such as poor education systems and high levels of social inequalities, that could present complications and delays in refugee and migrant immigration processing. While implicitly questioning how just societies are governed, how social membership is defined, and who benefits from being included, the student gains awareness of the web of different types of relationships that shape her reality.

For example, she commented that Venezuelan migrants and refugees are able to benefit from an International Organization for Migration initiative with legal protection, social stability, and training opportunities for which Ecuadorian citizens are not eligible, and therefore, less competitive in job placements.

In the following example, we hear the voice of a student from China who was studying in London who disrupts accepted discourse as she reflexively examines how gender identity-based epistemic traditional processes of power create intentional injustice:

> We do not hear the word 'epistemic injustice' a lot in my own country, China, partly because China is not an immigrant country. The topic most related to 'injustice' in our country is the gender issue. And the epistemic injustice towards females is the most-discussed and most common [type of injustice] to see in real life. For instance, the general social perception is that women should be housebound, more conservative, and not too ambitious compared to their male counterparts. On average, women are paid less than their male colleagues, and they have to pay more to improve themselves to compete with men over the same resources. The concept of 'epistemic injustice' in terms of race and nationalities appears in my mind after I came to London. I heard that one of my friends, a Chinese boy, was asked by a passer-by 'Do you know where is COVID?' And he replied nothing. I think the worst thing about epistemic injustice is that people who are treated with injustice usually have little voice in the public stage. They are mostly underrepresented in the public's view, and that's why we say 'silence does no better than the bully.'

Interestingly, according to Bing AI when we utilized this digital tool on August 18, 2023, "silence does no better than the bully" may be a contemporary adaptation of an early Chinese proverb. From this perspective, silence may be intentionally adopted, carefully crafted, and publicly performed to communicate, remonstrate, criticize, reveal, and target certain ideas. This concept of silence gives potential insight into Fricker's acknowledgement of the development of well-founded theories of epistemic injustice in more than one cultural tradition.

However, it appears that the student is using "those with little voice on the public stage" as a pejorative term, intrinsic to systemic injustice, and thereby unconsciously perpetuating acts of marginalization and violence toward particular social groups by framing them in a certain etymology; this etymology comes from a discriminatory ontology of social systems that embeds accounts of social structures, relations, and practices. She seems to be in a process of reflexivity questioning a fundamental structure and its knowability and coming to the realization that the ability to give testimony is the chance for the voiceless to re-establish a social bond.

A second Ecuadorian student alludes below to what he describes as the modern colonial world system that rules all social relationships to exemplify what Fricker (2007) describes as the "credibility economy," which defines stereotypes as reliable or unreliable, widely held associations of an attribute(s) and a social group(s). Fricker argues, as the student appears to be describing in the following quotation, that stereotypes are an essential, but prejudicial, heuristic in the making of credibility judgments during testimonial exchanges when individuals are undermined in their capacity as givers of knowledge:

> In theory, this production and distribution of knowledge should be equitable for all who seek education or engage in teaching. However, there are variables that affect the experience of learners, teachers, educational staff, researchers, theorists and other members of the academic community. Hermeneutic injustice (group exclusion and silencing) is the problem of passive racism in universities and workspaces when certain stories do not belong to or match those of the dominant group, the minority group is encouraged to code-switch to fit in.

Code-switching, a term well-known in applied linguistics originally proposed by Gumperz (1977), is the practice of shifting from one linguistic code (a language or dialect) to another, depending on the social context or conversational setting. It is a phenomenon particularly used by members of minority ethnic groups to shape and maintain a sense of identity and belonging within a larger community

In participating in our project, a Czech student of Roma ethnicity recovered her knowledge of subjectivities. Described by Sigl (2019) as how changing conditions are actually translated into a transformation of research processes as well as the role of researchers as active agents in this transformation, the student investigated how we can study subjectification as a locus of change in research to create spaces for silenced voices. She challenged coloniality and repositioned herself vis-à-vis those who have been made into objects, demonstrating that it is possible to escape the situated and personal class, sexual, gender, spiritual, linguistic, geographical, and racial hierarchies of the credibility economy. She

engaged in building systemic change by foregrounding processes of collective solidarity to demonstrate how justice is relational and aspirational (Martinez, 2021). Underscoring this concept, the student recounts:

> When I was in elementary school, other kids told me I was Roma, even though I wasn't. The background is that in my hometown we have a big problem with Romani people… We are trying to help them as much as we can—there are several organizations in our town that are dedicated to helping Romani people. They try to integrate them into society, but the problem is that they don't want to... So when someone told me I was Roma, I was ashamed. Now I am glad I have darker skin, it looks nice, and I am proud of it. But when I was a little girl, it marked me.

The following testimony of a student from London exemplifies the role that the critical and decolonial quest for intercultural epistemologies and discourses play in academic activities. Moreover, it also illuminates potential cooperation within society to build an ecology of knowledge that can bring about bottom-up, glocal (local and global) collaborations by emphasizing structure, process, language, identity and technology (Walsh, 2012). The student reflects:

> …the atmosphere of the group discussions allowed me to open my heart to communicate with everyone and to speak my mind. As for the most touching part, it would be the commonality, rather than the difference, in the views of students from different countries. I found that despite the very different social realities we were exposed to, when it came to issues of principles and the morality of immigration, there was a consistent tendency to oppose all forms of discrimination and to encourage ordinary people to speak out for the disadvantaged groups.

Another participant in the project, a student from the Dominican Republic, described how knowers with power may enact injustices that pervade cultures around the world:

> In many ways, because I got to hear many different points of view, and got me thinking more about epistemic injustice. Knowing different points of view, from countries similar to ours and others totally opposite, from the first world, from different cultures, helped me understand that discrimination problems exist in all parts of the world, and are even more frequent in those countries where we think that education is a priority.

The following testimonial from a Czech student questions human rights in all its complexity as entangled with modernity and coloniality, and how historical forces like global migration generate dramatic social upheaval. This notion exemplifies Wimmer's (2007) description of meta-cultural ontologies as a multilateral influence supporting epistemological polylogues. The student comments:

> The breakout discussions helped me realize the magnitude of the problem. Unless one knows the world, one remains only in one's own little shell with one's own problems and does not care about other people and their problems. Especially here in the Czech Republic, we are used to solving our own problems and not helping others. Unfortunately, this is a consequence of communism, when people did not have much and were afraid of losing what little they had. They protected their property, their close people and did not care about others. Exchanging our narratives about refugees and migrants with students in other countries helped me to realize that there are countries that deal with much worse problems than we do in the Czech Republic. And that they encounter these problems on a daily basis.

The final three testimonials demonstrate the development of intercultural awareness. Maldonado-Torres (2017) notes that a fundamental problem of the continuing and unfinished project of decolonization is to identify the lack of full humanity of the colonized. In treating epistemology as having both intellectual and ethical dimensions, identity and power systems that silence and delegitimize knowers and ways of knowing can be identified. The following Dominican Student studying at PUCMM testimonials highlight these concepts:

> By being able to talk with students from other parts of the world, I was able to understand how many times the situations that we live daily are transferred to other contexts and have similar shareholders. We do not see them in the same way, that is, we think that what happens in our country is the worst, or that in other places they handle these issues better, but the reality is not like that.

Another student from India studying at UCL noted:

> The discussion with students from the Dominican Republic regarding the situation in Haiti was particularly eye-opening. This is because it is a situation which has very profound effects on Haitian and Dominican people, yet there is very little information about it in Europe. This is an interesting example of a global epistemic injustice in which knowledge about a certain part of the world is minimized and reduced, meaning that their voices are not heard.

Finally, an Ecuadorian Student at UDA said:

> The breakout session that had the greatest impact on me was the Dominican Republic meeting. This country is very close to Ecuador, indeed it can be said that it has a similar culture, as Latinos we understand that proximity to Central American countries, however, during the talk I could understand that we are not really united and in turn we are not informed of the situations that happen to them, despite being very close. For a long time, I knew about the problem of Haiti, affected by the earthquake and the poverty in that country, but I did not even know what it caused in the other part of the island. In fact, it was shocking when the student from the Dominican Republic asked us what we knew about her country, and beyond its capital and the important tourist center it represents, we had no more knowledge about its culture or way of life or government.

From the following findings about the organizational process, we highlight how the students interacted.

Structure and Process

As explained above, from experiences in two separate and different types of research projects, we learned about the significance of creating space for reflection and epistemological change in relationships between faculty and students through digital academic learning (see Carr et al., 2023).

Participation in weekly Zoom sessions enabled the opportunity for interviews between students and migrants. The students' engagement also allowed them to critically consider power relations while being cognizant of participating fairly and justly in knowledge exchange. During the Zoom sessions, students spent a significant amount of time in mixed breakout rooms where each week they prepared discussion questions and organized their approach to the sessions. After the first session led by Ecuadorian students, it became clear to them that they, in fact, could enhance the quality of the breakout discussions by utilizing epistemic listening skills, such as extending and/or clarifying a question or response and not inadvertently silencing others with words or gestures. Recording the sessions and utilizing Google's shared documenting tools proved invaluable for summarizing each class.

Polyloguing and the Use of the English Language

Although they are very experienced with social media interaction, it was evident that the students' participation skills in Zoom sessions with foreign peers who were also speaking English as a second language required more support and strategizing than initially believed. Social etiquette and skills, especially greetings, initiating discussions, and staying on topic, required their focus to the extent that conflicts and differences of opinion with their peers were largely avoided.

Each week, students presented a PowerPoint presentation and sometimes also edited videos. The presentations were extremely different from each other, which may be attributed to cultural, individual, and collective preferences, including those regarding relationality and directness. For example, Ecuadorian students prioritized interpersonal relationship aspects of their global cohort experience, while the students located in London and the Czech Republic were more focused on the details of laws, rights, politics, and agencies for supporting migrants and refugees. The presentation by the students based in the Dominican Republic demonstrated a mix of their foreign peers' themes by including aspects of the significance of relationships within the project, but also survey data.

State of Student Emancipation

An important question we sought to address in the participatory- emancipatory design of the study remains: *Did polylogues really raise the raise the emancipatory research levels of students?*

Through their intercultural voices, we can hear a fundamental reexamination of the role of communication in narrating and creating decolonial worlds. During our five-week research project, we focused on activities at the interpersonal level of the lived experience refugees and migrants, and how their beliefs and social interpretations are developed, which required epistemic reciprocity on the part of participants. Students' epistemic capabilities of receiving information and making interpretations to contribute to knowledge, understanding, and practical deliberations were significantly expanded as evidenced through their culminating reflections.

Implications and Conclusion

Did pluralizing our research methodologies enable students and faculty to better capture the experience of marginalized populations?

Focusing on and expanding our collective capacity to hold space for difficult conversations about global migration, without feeling immobilized or demanding immediate quick fixes, higher education students from the Global South and Global North utilized virtual engagement to navigate multiple perspectives of volatility, unpredictability and complexity in our interrelated world. Through beginning to recognize that how we articulate the social reality we know can scaffold how we reconfigure and invent revised judgement about the limits of possibilities about our thinking and action, students are becoming what Mignolo (2011) describes as "epistemically disobedient." This term means to be ready to ask questions about who is constructing knowledge in a pluriversal world that is critically responding to dominant and subordinate ideologies.

Feedback from students and subsequent conversations suggest that these processes of capability action, which include setting goals, exerting influence, and monitoring outcomes, were effectively executed. Savransky (2017) proposes that the epistemological problem of "who, when, why is constructing knowledge" can be complemented by the ethno-ecological question of "who/what, when and how inhabits what world," which he calls an "ontopolitics of knowledge" affirming the ontological plurality that makes this world both one and many.

Whose voices were still missing during this research project? In our next series of intercultural Zoom sessions, we are curious what the inclusion of students and migrant families in their mutually shared contexts across continents and cultures will teach us. As trainee researchers and legitimate producers of knowledge, can the students introduce us to possibilities that we could have never before imagined? By collaborating with and listening to the stories of "the investigated, who might normally be considered objects of the research," will they strive for methods that are ethical, open, respectful, and alert to power dynamics in which participants' voices, values, and insights are central (Korala-Azad & Fuentes, 2009, p. 1)? Might we all come "to a critical form of thinking about our world" (Freire, 1972, p. 104)?

As we begin a new phase of our intercultural, participatory-emancipatory project, "Epistemologies of Inclusion," with eight participating countries across continents and cultures in 2023, we remind ourselves of the Arendtian quote at the beginning of this paper that migrants, refugees and stateless people are the most symptomatic group in contemporary politics. While Arendt's comments were related to the European social and political context of her time, we welcome a suggestion from Ferguson (2020) about Arendt's concept of "thinking" as a hermeneutical virtue that is self-critical in guarding against an overly rigid approach to hermeneutic justice that can itself generate situations of injustice.

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Appendix A - Zoom Structure

First zoom session, led by Ecuador students (UDA)

Students from Cuenca, Ecuador inaugurated the series of online discussions. Their 15-minute PowerPoint presentation highlighted clips from video-recorded interviews with migrants discussing the everyday injustices they faced. The students took a relational approach, concentrating on the experiences of migrant mothers. The presentation included the testimonies of two mothers, who expressed the violence suffered by not being heard.

> "My daughter suffered bullying at school from teachers and classmates. She had to change schools four times. At the beginning, everything was normal but when she mentioned she was Cuban, the treatment changed."
> (Mother A from a long-term migrant Cuban family to Ecuador)

> "I had many doubts. I was wondering if I would be listened to and if I would get help with some of my needs".
> (Mother B from a migrant Venezuelan family that had recently arrived in Ecuador)

After watching the video, students developed the following questions to discuss with their peers who were located in the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom, and Dominican Republic:

- Would it be difficult to speak up if friends discriminated against someone you knew?
- If you had to leave your country immediately, what would you pack?
- Can we identify some of the adaptation issues that might be experienced by migrants even if the language of their new country was the same as the country they had left?
- Identify some of the adaptation issues that might be experienced even if the language of your new country was the same as the country you had left.

Second zoom session, led by students enrolled at UCL

In the second session, students enrolled at UCL, who were originally from the United Kingdom, China, Brazil, and India, delivered a 15-minute presentation discussing the U.K.'s involvement in the refugee crises. They highlighted the contemporary conditions faced by immigrants arriving in the U.K. and recounted the story of the Windrush, the vessel that transported the first group of African Caribbean immigrants who helped to rebuild the U.K. post-World War II. The students voiced criticisms regarding the U.K. government's political stance and the legal obstacles refugees confront in British society.

Questions to provoke discussion in the breakout were the following ones:

- To what extent do legacies of colonialism underpin epistemic injustices regarding immigrants?
- In what ways do migrants influence the culture of their new country?
- Would the world be a better place without borders?

Third Zoom session, held by Czech Republic students (MUNI)

Czech students developed a presentation to share how new laws in their country and in Europe were helping the influx of Ukrainian refugees. They focused on national aid processes for refugees in their city, Brno. Students showed some of the available resources provided for Ukrainian refugees, such as the "Ukrainians fleeing war" website, National

Assistance Centre and the "Smart Migration" app, free accommodation, translators, and free public transport. They also highlighted the epistemic injustices of Ukraine's history with Russia and the impacts on the Romani people.

Their questions for breakout discussion were very practical:

- What is the most difficult part of being a refugee host?
- Has the war impacted students' mental health?
- What is the future going to look like for host countries and refugee/asylum seekers/migrants?

Fourth Zoom session, held by Dominican Republic students (PUCMM)

In the fourth session, Dominican Republic students provided a general context of the situation of Haitian migrants in their country. It is estimated there are 500,000 Haitians, representing 5% of the total population, residing without residence permits.

Participants were asked if they had been treated unfairly, both testimonially as individuals and hermeneutically as a group, due to their Haitian nationality since arrival in the Dominican Republic. Sixty-six percent of the respondents said no. Students asked the 34% of the respondents who said they had been treated unfairly about the situations where they had felt mistreated. Some of the testimonies reported by the interviewees were the following ones:

- "When I don't speak well the words, they look at me strangely."
- "When talking and noticing that I am Haitian they look at me differently and make me feel uncomfortable."
- "I was mugged by five Dominicans on the way to church and nobody helped me."
- "Fewer options. It's just that I'm legal and when they say to pick up Haitians they take us all, they pick us up like animals thrown in a van in the back and those cops or Immigration don't have any respect."

Considering this evidence, Dominican students prepared the following questions for breakout discussion:

- Is hostility towards Haitian immigrants xenophobic?
- What is the evidence that Haitians are causing illegal drug issues?

Final zoom session

For the final Zoom session, both students and faculty from UDA (Ecuador) crafted a presentation that analyzed the celebrations of the Qatar World Soccer event, framing their observations using Byskov's (2020) criteria for epistemic injustice:

i) **Epistemic Condition**: This pertains to the denial of knowledge where knowers, despite possessing relevant knowledge, are excluded from decisions related to that knowledge. For instance, the obscured process of deciding the World Cup location.

ii) **Prejudice Condition**: This situation arises when there's a judgment about an individual's or group's epistemic capacity —where knowers face discrimination stemming from the speaker's prejudices. A case in point is the repression of the LGBTQ community.

iii) **Social Justice Condition**: This relates to unjustifiable discrimination. Here, knowers are exposed to unjustifiable discrimination while concurrently facing other societal injustices. An example is the repression of women.

iv) **Stakeholder Condition**: This is observed when knowers' rights as stakeholders are dismissed, meaning they are impacted by decisions that they have no influence over. For instance, the inhumane treatment of migrant workers.

v) **Unfair Outcome Condition**: This is where knowers experience both epistemic and socioeconomic (or ecological) disadvantages resulting from the discrimination they face. An illustration is the construction of environmentally unfriendly stadiums.

Questions for the 45-minutes group discussion were the following ones:

- How are Qatar rules about sexual orientation related to global norms?
- Is culture an excuse for epistemological problems occurring in Qatar?
- What are the benefits and disadvantages of global sports competitions?