ARTÍCULOS
DE INVESTIGACIÓN

Presumed guilty until proven credible: epistemic injustice toward Venezuelan immigrants in Colombia*

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Abstract: With few exceptions, philosophers working on immigration have not taken up the topic of epistemic injustice, primarily, I imagine, because immigration justice is often too narrowly conceived of as encompassing moral and political concerns rather than epistemic ones. But the more I think about the injustices immigrants endure on a daily basis, the more I take this to be a mistake; epistemic injustices must be seen as a central aspect of immigration injustice too. In what follows, I will demonstrate how this is the case. More specifically, after providing an overview of the nature of epistemic injustice, I will highlight some examples of it in the lives of displaced Venezuelan immigrants in Colombia. In doing so, I hope to show why discussions about immigration injustice must include identifying and confronting epistemic wrongs.

Keywords: epistemic injustice, immigration, Venezuelan, Colombia, epistemic oppression

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Presumido culpable hasta que gane credibilidad: injusticia epistémica en contra de migrantes venezolanos en Colombia

Resumen: Con pocas excepciones, los filósofos que trabajan en el ámbito de la inmigración no han abordado el tema de la injusticia epistémica, principalmente, imagino, porque la justicia en materia de inmigración se concibe a menudo de forma demasiado limitada como algo que abarca las preocupaciones morales y políticas, más que las epistémicas. Pero cuanto más pienso en que los inmigrantes sufren a diario, más me parece que esto es un error; las injusticias epistémicas deben considerarse también un aspecto central de la injusticia en materia de inmigración. En lo que sigue, demostraré cómo es éste el caso. Más concretamente, tras ofrecer una visión general sobre la naturaleza de la injusticia epistémica, destacaré algunos ejemplos de la misma en la vida de los inmigrantes venezolanos desplazados en Colombia. Al hacerlo, espero mostrar por qué los debates sobre la injusticia de la inmigración deben incluir la identificación y la confrontación de los errores epistémicos.

Palabras claves: injusticia epistémica, migración, venezolanos, Colombia, opresión epistémica

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Whenever I am out on the streets of Bogotá —be it running errands, hanging out with friends, going to work, or just taking a morning stroll— I pass some of the approximately 1.8 million displaced Venezuelan migrants residing in the country (*Migración Colombia*). Often, though far from always, they ask me for some sort of help —money, food, clothes, or diapers— and I usually try to give something if I can. This seems to surprise some people. "You don't know what they are going to do with that money", they say; "How do you know that they cannot find other ways of making money?" they inquire; "You know, often those are not even their kids, it is part of a scam", I have heard.

I must admit that these refrains did not phase me at first; it is common to hear these types of sentiments. But recently I have noticed something about these retorts that previously eluded my comprehension: how they manifest a fundamental distrust of immigrants. Whereas I basically trust the testimony of those seeking my assistance and assume that the migrants are credible epistemic authorities about their own needs and circumstances, those questioning me about why I try to help view them with suspicion. Whereas I basically trust that migrants are telling me the truth, the rejoinders of others suggest that they do not; they think the migrant is lying, trying to "pull one over on me" or enacting a scam. In other words, the responses from some people seem to presume that immigrants are epistemically guilty until they can prove the contrary, rather than the reverse. And thus, I now realize that the questions and comments I hear from some about helping migrants are not innocent misunderstandings or disagreements; they are expressions of epistemic injustice.

With the exception of my own work (Wolf, 2020), philosophers working on immigration have not taken up the topic of epistemic injustice, primarily, I imagine, because immigration justice is often too narrowly conceived of as encompassing moral and political concerns, rather than epistemic ones. But the more I think about cases like the ones just highlighted, along with other common injustices immigrants endure, the more I take this to be a mistake; epistemic injustices must be seen as a central aspect of immigration injustice too.

In what follows, I will demonstrate how this is the case. More specifically, after providing an overview about the nature of epistemic injustice, I will highlight some examples of it in the lives of displaced Venezuelan immigrants in Colombia. In doing so, I hope to show why discussions about immigration injustice must include identifying and confronting epistemic wrongs.

Epistemic Injustices

Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr., José Medina and Ian James Kidd define epistemic injustice as broadly encompassing "those forms of unfair treatment that relate to issues of knowledge, understanding, and participation in communicative practices" (Pohlhaus, Medina, and Kidd, 2017, p. 1). Some of these forms of unfair treatment include:

> exclusion and silencing; invisibility and inaudibility; having one's meanings or contributions systematically distorted, misheard, or misrepresented; having diminished status or standing in communicative practices; unfair differentials in authority and/or epistemic agency; being unfairly distrusted; receiving no or minimal uptake; being coopted or instrumentalized; being marginalized as a result of dysfunctional dynamics, etc (Pohlhaus *et al*, 2017, p. 1).

These forms of mistreatment are systemic and structural, and they result from one's social group memberships and social positions within and between societies. As such, it is not random or accidental who is given or denied epistemic authority, status, and the like; epistemic injustice is inherently connected to other forms of oppression. In fact, as I have argued in other venues (Wolf, 2020), we should conceive of epistemic oppression as synonymous with epistemic injustice. And, although we tend to associate these discussions of epistemic injustice with Miranda Fricker's work, in truth, as Vivian May notes, feminists, especially Black feminists in the United States, have long been talking about epistemic injustice and oppression, even if they did not use that specific language to refer to it (May, 2014, pp. 94-112).

In 1892, for example, Anna Julia Cooper spoke against the ways Black women's ideas were suppressed through epistemic violence and interpretive silencing (May, 2014, p. 97). May also notes that in an 1867 speech, Sojourner Truth condemned Black women being denied status as knowers (May, 2014, p. 98). More recently, Patricia Hill Collins' now infamous book, *Black feminist thought*, is premised on the realities of denying that Black women's ways of knowing exist and/or are valid. And she expressly condemns epistemic injustice without naming it as such throughout the book, as we see in the following passage:

> Because elite White men control Western structures of knowledge validation, their interests pervade the themes, paradigms, and epistemologies of traditional scholarship. As a result, U.S. Black women's experiences as well as those of women of African descent transnationally have been routinely distorted within or excluded from what counts as knowledge (Hill Collins, 1999, p 251).

And Pohlhaus, Jr. reminds us that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak "identifies what she calls 'epistemic violence' in claims to know the interests of subaltern persons that preclude the subaltern from formulating knowledge claims concerning their interests and speaking for themselves" (Pohlhaus, 2017).

Most specific to epistemic oppression, Kristie Dotson was the first scholar who explicitly used the term as such in her article, "A cautionary tale: on limiting epistemic oppression". There she defines "epistemic oppression" as "epistemic exclusions afforded positions and communities that produce deficiencies in social knowledge" (Dotson, 2012, p. 24). Dotson elaborates by explaining that "epistemic exclusions" are "infringements on the epistemic agency of knowers that reduce her or his ability to participate in a given

epistemic community" (Dotson, 2012, p.24). Given this, epistemic oppression infringes on the ability of knowers to generate, validate, or contribute to knowledge production and dissemination in various communities of knowers. As a result, the knower has fewer epistemic resources from which to draw, struggles to belong to communities of knowers, and is often not afforded the epistemic authority they have earned. Dotson explains that all forms of epistemic injustice constitute epistemic oppression because they all "involve some form of pervasive, harmful, epistemic exclusion" (Dotson, 2012, p. 36).

A few years later, Dotson continued her exploration into epistemic oppression in "Conceptualizing epistemic oppression". There she argues that theorists are reluctant to employ the term "epistemic oppression" and hypothesizes that the source of this reticence is rooted in an (incorrect) assumption that epistemic oppression is reducible to social and political oppression. Consequently, epistemologists, in part, wrongly think that there is nothing distinctly *epistemic* about "the catalyst for and maintenance of such oppression" (Dotson, 2014, 116) and, as a result, there is no ontological distinction between epistemic oppression and social and political oppression. Given this, they mistakenly believe that epistemologists need not concern themselves with oppression.

The problem, argues Dotson, is that this assumption is false; there is something appropriately denoted as epistemic oppression that is not reducible to historical, social, and political factors. And, she defines this epistemic oppression as, "the persistent and unwarranted infringement on the ability to utilize persuasively shared epistemic resources that hinder one's contributions to knowledge production" (Dotson, 2014, 116). This distinctly *epistemic* oppression originates from epistemological systems and their epistemological resilience, and thus, cannot be addressed through changes in the historical, social, or political structures (Dotson, 2014, p. 116). Epistemic oppression can only be altered by dealing with the epistemological systems themselves. Again, then, Dotson demonstrates the importance of thinking about epistemic oppression, *epistemically* (and not just social politically).

Despite wholeheartedly agreeing with Dotson that we need to think more about epistemic oppression *epistemically*, I also think we must acknowledge that specifically epistemic oppression exists (or at least can exist) *even if it is somehow connected to similar forms of political and social oppression.* In other words, even areas that appear to be reducible are actually not because there is specifically *epistemic* oppression and injustice even in social and political oppression. While there *are* irreducible forms of epistemic oppression, in other words, it can also be apt to employ the term "epistemic oppression" in cases where the oppression is reducible to social and political structures. The question is not (or is not solely) the, how do we identify irreducible epistemic oppression, but also how can we identify epistemic oppression that is connected to social and political oppression?

Understanding this long intellectual history is important because it helps us understand the depth and variety of epistemic injustices and oppression. These distinctions are elaborated by Miranda Fricker in her 2007 book, *Epistemic injustice:*

power and the ethics of knowing, where she delineates two specific types of epistemic injustice: testimonial and hermeneutical. According to Fricker:

> Testimonial injustice occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility of a speaker's word; hermeneutical injustice occurs when (...) a gap in collective interpretative resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences (Fricker, 2007, p. 1).

In other words, testimonial injustice is about individuals being denied credibility due to prejudice, whereas hermeneutical injustice refers to a lack of epistemic resources at the societal level that prevents us from making sense of our social world and experience.

As Fricker observes, epistemic injustices are connected to oppressive systems; racist, sexist, ableist, heteronormative, and other similar logics and systems affect how we communicate with each other such that a speaker often, "receives a credibility deficit owing to identity prejudice in the hearer". Put differently, a speaker (such as a poor immigrant) is denied epistemic authority because of systemic prejudices, rather than based on the strength of their arguments or the truth of what they are professing. And this causes a distinct harm to its victims. Fricker explains:

> the subject is wronged in her capacity as a knower. To be wronged in one's capacity as a knower is to be wronged in a capacity essential to human value. When one is undermined or otherwise wronged in a capacity essential to human value, one suffers an intrinsic injustice. The form that this intrinsic injustice takes specifically in cases of testimonial injustice is that the subject is wronged in her capacity as a giver of knowledge (Fricker, 2007, p. 44).

In other words, one is harmed by testimonial injustice not only in their capacity as a knower but also as a human being. This is because denying someone credibility in this way undermines the person's ability to participate in society as a producer of knowledge and, by extension, by extension, attacks a defining feature of humanity —one's capacity to reason. In a society where reason dictates one's value as a human, says Fricker, this means that one cannot be (or cannot be seen as) a full human being without a certain degree of epistemic authority. As Fricker explains, "the epistemic wrong bears social *meaning* to the effect that the subject is less than fully human. When someone suffers a testimonial injustice, they are degraded *qua* knower, and they are symbolically degraded *qua* human" (Fricker, 2007, p. 44).

A core way this dehumanization occurs is via silencing and epistemological objectification. Because victims of testimonial injustice are perceived to have a credibility deficit, they "tend simply not be asked to share their thoughts, their judgments, their opinions" (Fricker, 2007, p. 130), which silences them before they can even speak. Since they do not speak and lack credibility even when they do, the person's testimony is

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never solicited, which further silences their positions. And the cycle continues. This silencing then leads to epistemic objectification (or demoting someone from being an epistemic subject to an epistemic object). As such, the subject is:

> unable to be a participant in the sharing of knowledge (except insofar as he made be made use of as an object of knowledge through others using him as a source of information). He is thus demoted from subject to object, relegated to the passive role of active epistemic agent (...) He is ousted from the role of participant in the co-operative exercise of the capacity for knowledge and recast in the role of passive bystander (Fricker, 2007, p. 132).

At its core, then, testimonial injustice reduces the knower from an epistemic subject to an epistemic object by denying them proper epistemic credibility as a result of systemic prejudice.

In contrast to testimonial injustice, hermeneutical injustice results from gaps in collective understandings that prevent social groups and their members from grasping or articulating the meaning of their experiences. In cases of hermeneutical injustices, we simply do not have the concepts, the words, the collective consciousness, or the ability to articulate what is happening. And the reason this is the case, says Fricker, is "a structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutical resource" (Fricker, 2007, p. 155) that prevents understanding. Take Fricker's example of women trying to understand and name sexual harassment. As she notes: "it was no accident that their experience had been falling down the hermeneutical cracks. As they struggled in isolation to make proper sense of their experiences of harassment, the whole engine of collective social meaning was effectively geared to keeping these obscured experiences out of sight" (Fricker, 2007, p. 153). Women could not make sense of what was happening to them because sexism (among other things) made it difficult to generate the collective vocabulary, resources, and epistemic authority needed to explain what they were experiencing on the streets, in the workplace, or during the course of their everyday lives. And consequently, women were prevented from participating in the generation of social meaning and understanding of their social experiences; they were hermeneutically marginalized (Fricker, 2007, pp. 153-4).

When a group is hermeneutically marginalized, they can neither explain their experiences to others, nor describe them to themselves. Instead, their experiences are expounded by others (dominant groups) or simply not acknowledged as legitimate or real. But we must be careful here because unlike testimonial injustice, which is committed one-on-one between agents, there are no agents perpetrating hermeneutical injustice; this is done at a structural level (Fricker, 2007, p. 159).

Since Fricker's book was released, many scholars have elaborated, enhanced, and critiqued her account. Gaile Pohlhous, Jr., for example, has expanded and complicated Fricker's explanation by offering four lenses from which to think about epistemic injustices: social contracts and systems of oppression; care and trust and

interdependency; the epistemic structures themselves, and epistemic labor and knowledge production (Pohlhaus, 2017). Kristie Dotson expands on Fricker to not only elucidate the nature of epistemic oppression but also to specify two types of testimonial injustices –testimonial quieting and testimonial smothering– where testimonial quieting refers to an audience failing to identify a speaker as a knower, while in testimonial smothering, a "speaker perceives one's immediate audience as unwilling or unable to gain the appropriate uptake of proffered testimony", and so they truncate their own testimony, "to ensure that the testimony contains only content for which one's audience demonstrates testimonial competence" (Dotson, 2011, pp. 236-257). Or they simply do not speak at all (Dotson, 2011). And José Medina distinguishes different kinds of hermeneutical injustices to position us better to resist them (for example, via virtuous listening and the creation of epistemic friction) while also noting that there are some hermeneutical injustices so dire and serious –like hermeneutical death– that they require their own form of insurrection and resistance, for example, refusing to engage or understand the dominant oppressive speakers (Medina, 2017, pp. 45-49).

Because the literature on epistemic injustice is vast and still growing, I could continue for many more pages. Still, these specific debates are not our concern here. Instead, I have provided this brief synopsis of the concept to position us to note the role of epistemic injustice in immigration injustice more broadly. To that end, I will spend the remainder of this essay highlighting various examples of epistemic injustice in the treatment and lives of displaced Venezuelan migrants in Colombia.

Epistemic injustice toward Venezuelan migrants

Let me begin with some general observations about epistemic injustices related to seeking asylum and migration more broadly. As Lisa Eckenweiler notes, asylum-seekers and migrants face entry and other processes (like interviews) that are expeditive and inquisitorial' and infused with an air of suspicion and tension" (Eckenweiler, 2019, p. 23). Questions that may seem simple, such as: "Why are you coming to Colombia?" or "What will you do for work in Colombia?" reflect concern or skepticism that they *may* not work (and thus will depend on state resources) or engage in criminal activities. Moreover, the process is infused with the supposition that immigrants are trying to "game the system". The whole procedure of obtaining regularized status is predicated on the view that the migrant is lying, and the job of immigration officials is to weed out those who are from those who are not. This is reflected by the prevalent practice of accusing migrants and asylum seekers of concocting stories of persecution and fear to gain admission or regularized status in the receiving nation (Eckenweiler, 2019, p. 23). The process then is premised upon the notion that the migrant is untrustworthy until other epistemic authorities validate their claims. That is, before any particular immigrant's case is heard, there is an unfair distrust and unfair differentials in epistemic authority

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that stack the deck against the migrant and that diminish the chances that they will be believed, *even when they are telling the truth*.

More broadly, I think asylum and other regularization processes reflect epistemic injustice in the form of epistemic powerlessness (Wolf, 2020). I understand epistemic powerlessness to be a type of testimonial injustice that refers to the lack of epistemic influence and authority rooted in categorizing an entire social group, nation or their individual members as untrustworthy and, consequently, lacking in epistemic credibility. As such, their claims are overlooked, dismissed, and met with suspicion and they cannot adequately defend their claims —even before they make them. And so, they are rendered unable to entrust others with what they know, they are excluded from cooperative interactions, and they are robbed of their rights as a result.

We see this general phenomenon very clearly in the United States,[1] especially in policies, such as the Remain in Mexico Policy, enacted by former President Donald Trump predicated on the idea that, in essence, Latinx immigrants are deemed untrustworthy in the dominant U.S. epistemic imagination. Claims that they are fleeing violence, for example, are dismissed "lies to get into the country". This sentiment was echoed by Donald Trump, who said that Central American and Mexican migrants are not really fleeing danger but rather are simply taught to say that so they can get into the United States more easily (Roller, 2018). In both gaslighting immigrants' claims and categorizing them as dishonest and lawbreakers, the entire group is then stripped of epistemic credibility. The migrants, then, apart from being unable to plead their cases, also cannot contribute to the dialogue and knowledge about immigration issues, *even though they speak the truth*.

Worse, as Eckenweiler again notes, this general epistemic environment contributes to fear, re-traumatization, distortion of identity and experience, misunderstanding, and perhaps too, political exclusion, thwarted life prospects, and gendered injustice on a global scale (Eckenweiler, 2019, p. 23). As such, I agree with Eckenweiler that the asylum system and, I would add, most immigration processes are "epistemically disadvantaged or defective" (Eckenweiler, 2019, p. 23). And so, apart from the political harms of all of these issues, these are *epistemic* harms; they are not only being denied entry into a country, immigrants are being denied rightful epistemic authority on the conditions of their own existence, they are being denied recognition as trustworthy members of the epistemic community, and they are being placed in a position where

1 In general, I am going to restrict my analysis to epistemic injustices against Venezuelan migrants in Colombia for a variety of reasons: I think that exploring Colombian responses to Venezuelan immigration is both philosophically significant and opens various avenues of new philosophical reflection in relation to immigration justice; as I have argued elsewhere, I maintain that there is already a disproportionate emphasis on immigration in the United States and Europe in ways that detract from other significant contexts, like Colombia; I do not have the space to adequately conduct an analysis that considers more global manifestations of epistemic injustice in immigration; my goal here is to open a conversation on these issues around the world and in Colombia where I reside and work. Still, I am going to make an exception here to make a general point about how epistemic injustice is connected to immigration injustice more broadly.

they have no ability to defend her claims to know, have no discretion with respect to disclosure, cannot entrust another with what they know, and are excluded from cooperative interactions. Immigrants are being rendered epistemically powerless.

These are other epistemic injustices are prevalent in the lives and treatment of displaced Venezuelans in Colombia, especially for Venezuelan women who have children in Colombia. On June 12, 2019, Claudia Palacios published an editorial in *El Tiempo,* "Stop having babies!" ("Paren de parir"), that reflects an all-too-common position in Colombia. In the editorial, Palacios chastises Venezuelan women for having babies in Colombia, suggests they stop doing so and asks the Colombian government to control Venezuelan reproduction as part of its migration policy (Palacios, 2019). In the piece she laments: "I wonder why people with an absolutely uncertain future and who are merely existing, bring children into this world to suffer an even worse fate than their parents" (Palacios, 2019) (implying that Venezuelan migrants do not love or want the best for their children) and suggests that Venezuelan women are coming to Colombia for nefarious reasons by affirming that Colombia is not (and never will be like) Venezuela and quoting an anonymous Venezuelan migrant saying "we Venezuelans (...) have kids because we get money for every child we have" (Palacios, 2019). While I could condemn these statements on countless fronts, here I want to focus on how Palacios' arguments both reflect and promote epistemic injustice.

Palacio's arguments reflect an increasingly prominent view in Colombia (which is why I take it to be an instructive example), conveying a general distrust of Venezuelan migrants, and, especially, Venezuelan women. Her prejudices about Venezuela and its people since Chavez took power (as reflected in her warning to Venezuelans that Colombia is *not* and will never become like the socialist nation) immediately reveal that she distrusts the motives of displaced Venezuelan migrants who have children and lead her to distort their experiences and life circumstances. One place we see this is in her implication that Venezuelan women are actually able to choose whether they have a baby in Colombia. While this is certainly true in some cases, it is a highly questionable assumption in many others given that there are significant barriers to access birth control or abortion services (*Barreras al acceso*, 2019). In a recent report, La Mesa por la Vida y la Salud de las Mujeres identified three types of barriers to abortion for migrants: (1) they do not know that they have a right to legal abortion in Colombia; (2) they do not have the resources to find and obtain abortion services and (3) problems in the health care system itself (Maldonando, Londoño, and Ospina, 2019). In ignoring these realities, Palacios words perpetrate epistemic injustices in precisely the ways that Pohlhaus, Medina and Kidd identify: she distorts and misrepresents the meaning of Venezuelan migrants' actions around procreation, which leads to unfairly reducing their credibility and epistemic authority. In doing so, she harms Venezuelan women's capacities as knowers and treats them as less than fully human by demoting them from epistemic subjects to epistemic objects as

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a result of systemic prejudice. These constitute epistemic exclusions referenced by Dotson that not only "produce deficiencies in social knowledge" (Dotson, 2012, p. 24) but also infringe "on the epistemic agency of knowers that reduce her or his ability to participate in a given epistemic community" (Dotson, 2012, p. 24). In other words, not only do Palacios' words distort the lived experience of pregnant Venezuelans in ways that epistemically harm them in ways that render them uncredible, but they also lead to epistemic marginalization of these migrants that make them unable to generate, validate, or contribute to knowledge production and dissemination about their lives. And, as Dotson notes, all of these manifestations of epistemic injustice "involve some form of pervasive, harmful, epistemic exclusion" (Dotson, 2012, p. 36). And, while these undoubtedly involve historical, social, and political factors, they are also fundamentally *epistemic* harms that originate from epistemological systems —in this case, systems that inform Colombian perceptions of, particularly poor, Venezuelans— and their epistemological resilience.

Arguments like Palacios' also lead to another epistemic injustice —testimonial smothering; these kinds of positions lead many migrants to preemptively silence or truncate their testimony because they think it will not be believed and/or they fear repercussions, such as the denial of care or abuse by providers. This was the case with Migdelis Pineda who was sick after a cesarean delivery but felt she could not say anything because the nurse told her, "I don't care if you die", (Tellez) as she entered the room. That statement caused her so much anxiety that even though she felt sick and like she was going to faint, she said nothing for fear of the consequences (Téllez, s.f.). Beyond this, when Pineda shared her experience with another migrant, she was completely supported in her decision to suffer in silence because, as the other migrant told her, "she had no other choice since, after all, the nurse is the one with the power" (Téllez, s.f.) In this way, systemic prejudice against Venezuelan migrants having children in Colombia led Pineda to smother her testimony in ways that reflect "unfair differentials in authority and/or epistemic agency" (Pohlhaus *et al*, 2017, p. 1) that give the nurse credibility rather than Pineda herself.[2]

2 It could be the case that someone may argue that there is an ambiguity here that I am not sufficiently recognizing, namely that it is a legitimate question as to whether one should grant the birthing person or the health care provider more credibility. And, as such, it is not clear where disagreements end and epistemic injustice begins. While I recognize the point, I strongly disagree with it. First, in the case of Pineda, there was no disagreement about medical care – the area that there would be a legitimate debate about whether it is a problem to give the health care provider more epistemic authority. To the contrary, the nurse told Pineda that she does not care if she died and, as a result, Pineda felt that she could not trust the nurse to care for her and smothered her testimony. But beyond that, given that testimonial smothering is already a type of testimonial injustice and the reason that the testimony was smothered was because of power dynamics that already placed Pineda in a situation of diminished epistemic credibility (and power), I do not think that the objection is particularly convincing or operative in this case. Finally, the point is that the interactions between pregnant migrants and health care officials are already occurring in a context where one is seen as credible and the other not; at the very least the ground has already been cultivated for epistemic injustice and I think we should, at minimum, be sensitive to this in our understanding of the situation.

A third epistemic injustice perpetuated by Palacios is how she distorts and misrepresents Venezuelan women's decisions around procreation. While Palacios attributes Venezuelan migrant's "choice" to give birth in Colombia to a mistaken perception that women will receive money for procreating or a desire to benefit from Colombia's social net or institutions, she is completely silent on the actual circumstances that lead many Venezuelan women to give birth in Colombia. The reality is that many Venezuelans do *not* want to leave their country or have children abroad but fear they have no other option given that Venezuela's health care system collapsed long ago, there are severe shortages of medicines and birth control, and the maternal mortality rate is skyrocketing. In other words, many Venezuelans come to Colombia out of necessity. In fact, contrary to Palacios's narrative, some migrants, like Raulimar Ortega, receive such terrible treatment in Colombia (often because of systemic prejudice), that they eventually returned to Venezuela (Téllez, s.f.). But because of the constant barrage of condemnation and blatant distrust from people like Palacios, they are not believed, and their testimony is quieted, leading to epistemic injustice on top of the other social and political injustices that they have had to endure.

These xenophobic and sexist sentiments that Venezuelan migrants should stop having babies in Colombia also constitute to hermeneutical injustices. Recall, hermeneutical injustices result from gaps in collective understandings that prevent social groups and their members from grasping or articulating the meaning of their experiences. And when a group is hermeneutically marginalized, they can neither explain their experiences to others, nor describe them to themselves. Instead, their experiences are expounded by others (dominant groups) or simply not acknowledged as legitimate or real (Fricker, 2007, p. 159). In this case, the misinformation promulgated by Palacios not only substitutes her (false) understanding of Venezuelan motives for giving birth in Colombia for the migrant's understandings, but it also makes it seem that the migrants are crazy or imagining barriers that are not there. This means that the migrants lack the epistemic tools they require to make sense of their own situation and are hermeneutically marginalized as a result.

Finally, Palacios' article reflects the idea that Venezuelan immigrants are not seen as sources of knowledge (or even of information) but rather threats trying to gain access to the Colombian system. It is notable that the only place in Palacios' article where a statement from a Venezuelan migrant appears is anonymous and used to place them in a bad light (Palacios, 2019). Migrant voices are thus either mere tools to support someone else's point against them (epistemic objectification) or they are seen as superfluous to our understanding of the situation. Instead, a Colombian journalist is seen as the credible source here, not the immigrants who she is discussing.

Palacio's editorial and epistemic injustices it reflects and promotes are part of a larger wave of widespread anti-Venezuelan xenophobia in Colombia that bolsters, underlies, facilitates, and reinforces epistemic injustice against displaced Venezuelan migrants. A December Gallup poll found that most Colombians view Venezuelan migrants as "a

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problem" and 69% view them "unfavorably" (Guzmán and Ponce, 2020). In August 2021, the social media platform, *Barómetro de xenofobia* measured a 731% increase in hate speech discourse, including language portraying displaced Venezuelans as dirty invaders, violent criminals, prostitutes, and spreaders of disease (Barómetro de xenofobia, 2021). So it should come as no surprise, then, to find out that displaced Venezuelans are constantly called derogatory names like *veneco/a*, regularly see graffiti saying "Fuera venezolanos" (Grattan, 2020) and images like one picturing a man with a relieved expression on his face with the caption: "When you thought you ran over a dog but realized it was just a Venezuelan" (Memes Ran-Damn, 2019) and read Twitter posts saying things like: "Will pay a million Colombian pesos for a Venezuelan killed by rats" (Proyecto Migración Venezuela, 2019).

Sadly, these views are also expressed via violence. In December 2021, *El Nacional* also reported a steep increase in violence against Venezuelan migrants throughout the country, especially in Norte de Santander, Cundinamarca, Valle de Cauca, Atlántico and Antioquia (El Nacional, 2021). The Consultancy for Human Rights and Displacement (CODHES) reports that at least 1933 Venezuelan migrants were murdered and at least another 836 are considered to have gone missing from 2015-2020 (Almost 2,000 Venezuelan refugees murdered in Colombia in five years, 2021), meaning that while the overall homicide rate in Colombia has been declining, the murder rate for the Venezuelan population is growing and is now 2.8 times higher (Almost 2,000 Venezuelan refugees murdered in Colombia in five years, 2021). These realities make it hard to deny Venezuelan migrant, Alexander González's perception, that: "Colombians treat Venezuelans badly (...) They practically spit in our faces" (Otis, 2020).

Beyond these general xenophobic attitudes, there are specific ones stating or implying that Venezuelan migrants are untrustworthy, disrespectful, and criminals, despite the fact that Venezuelans are much more often the victims rather than the perpetrators of crime in Colombia (Knight and Tribín-Uribe, 2020). Bogotá's mayor, Claudia López, recently reflected these attitudes saying: "I do not want to stigmatize immigrants but there are those involved with crime who are making life impossible —so while those who want to make a decent life are welcome, those who come to commit crimes should be deported without a second thought" (Pertuz, 2020). This sentiment is also echoed by Colombian citizens, like Nelson Maldonado, who said: "It would be fine if they were people who contributed to the economy (...) But they only come here to commit crimes" (Otis, 2020).

These attitudes then lead to epistemic injustices against displaced Venezuelans where they are unfairly distrusted, have their contributions to Colombian society (for example, via enormous amounts of labor in difficult informal economy jobs like recycling, domestic care work, and food delivery) systemically distorted as criminal activity, and have their testimony quieted or they truncate it. Put differently, while it is clear that there are multiple injustices being perpetrated against Venezuelan migrants via xenophobia, violence, etc. these other injustices and manifestations of oppression then lead to

and support specifically epistemic injustices. Specifically, as I will now demonstrate in more detail, these other forms of immigration injustices lead to testimonial injustices. And, in turn, these testimonial injustices reinforce, justify, and maintain other types of injustices against migrants, for example in the economic arena.

First, because of xenophobic and sexist ideas about Venezuelan migrants, they cannot find work because, in part, people do not believe that they are qualified –that they have the necessary knowledge and skill set– to perform the jobs or that they do not want the kind of jobs available. As Venezuelan immigrant, Paula, reports: "There's too much xenophobia here (...) The Colombians think we're all thieves and prostitutes (...) But it's not like I had a choice. If I could open a business, I would. But the only job a *veneca* can get here is for less than [the] minimum wage in a shop or restaurant" (Collins, 2019). In other words, because of systemic prejudice, Venezuelan migrants face an immediate credibility deficit, when they report their experiences, which then forces them into low wage jobs they do not want or are overqualified for, such as, in Paula's case, sex work. In fact, The International Refugee Committee found "sex work was noted as a common coping strategy, with one focus group mentioning that even professionals, like doctors, have turned to sex work" (Collins, 2019). While there are many consequences of this, one is testimonial quieting of what jobs migrants want and are qualified to do.

Second, the charge that Venezuelans are criminals immediately undermines their credibility since criminality implies that one cannot be trusted. In this way, not only are migrants unfairly distrusted, but they are also dehumanized in the ways Fricker describes; associating immigrants with criminality marginalizes them (because we cannot have criminals in our midst) and prevents them from participating in society in ways that exhibit or develop their reason. They are degraded *qua* knower and *qua* human (Fricker, 2007, p. 44).

Third, xenophobia leads to testimonial smothering; migrants do not report their experiences or seek help from authorities for fear that they will either not be believed or that they will become the victims of further abuse. This is especially true in the case of undocumented, female, migrants who fear deportation and sexual violence. Let us return to the experiences of Venezuelan sex workers, for example. While sex workers are not subject to criminal law for their economic activities (because this work is legal in Colombia), they are subject to the supervision of administrative authorities, including police officers who are legally entitled to ask them to show a certificate confirming that they have completed a specified training. This rule gives authorities access to information about which sex workers are immigrants and their regulatory status. So, from the very first moment Venezuelan women enter the profession, they risk facing administrative migratory sanctions, like deportation by Colombian migration authorities (*Migración Colombia*) if they cross the police. Add this to the fact that the women rely on the same police officers for protection, for example, against violence from clients, and we see why they are unlikely to report

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police abuse. The system then pressures them to smother their testimony about their mistreatment out of self-protection.

Migrants also are likely so smother their testimony because some of the xenophobia and violence against them is supported and perpetrated by those who control the levers of power. We already saw this is true in the case of Bogotá's mayor, but she is not the only elected official to make such statements (or worse). For example, Maicao's mayor, Mohammed Dasuki, combined homophobia, sexism, and anti-Venezuelan sentiment in accusations that displaced Venezuelans are undercutting locals in the job market and bringing prostitution — "not just of women but also of homosexuals"— to his city (Stott and Long, 2020). And Luis Eduardo Castro, the mayor of Yopal, started deporting Venezuelan migrants whom he accuses of "breaking the law and has threatened to fine drivers who give lifts to refugees" (Stott and Long, 2020). If those who run the city make it clear that they do not trust Venezuelan migrants, then those migrants clearly will feel unsafe sharing their stories or reporting other crimes and mistreatment they face with authorities.

We see similar issues in the border region where migrants are silenced because those in power perpetrate the abuses. The border region is largely controlled by organized crime circuits and gangs who recruit Venezuelan men and women, sometimes forcibly, into armed groups and the women are particularly at risk, of being kidnapped, "required to cook, clean, harvest coca and sexually service male combatants" (Zulver, 2019). But almost nothing ever happens to the perpetrators. To the contrary, the groups "take advantage of the fact that [women] are almost invisible (...) They know that they won't be held accountable and behave accordingly" (Zulver, 2019). So, most migrants do not even bother reporting and instead choose to smother their testimony. And when they do not do so (in other words, when they do report), they face epistemic injustice in the process, as happened to one migrant who did report her paramilitary rapist to local authorities in a remote border region, but wasn't believed until the all-male committee reviewed her hospital examination results (Zulver, 2019). So, her testimony was quieted —her audience would not listen or give her credibility— until other, male, epistemic authorities affirmed its veracity.

Migrants also smother their testimony out of fear because police themselves sometimes carry out these xenophobic and violent acts. In the first week of the month of May 2019 alone there were "three reported cases of transwomen shot *by police* in Valledupar" (Granados, 2019). There are also numerous examples of police officers sexually assaulting, raping, and torturing displaced Venezuelan women, including the September 2017 rape of "Iris" by police office Darwin Flórez Miranda (Detienen a explicía que habría violado a venezolana en Sabanalarga (Atlántico), 2017), who, as he raped her, threatened Iris with deportation if she reported the crime (Detienen a expolicía que habría violado a venezolana en Sabanalarga (Atlántico, 2017). Colombian journalist, Claudia Ayola, perfectly captured the problem, noting: "This was not a common rape, its occurrence is deeply related to her status as an immigrant. The aggressor was a

member of the police force of the receiving nation, an employee of the State, a police officer, an actor of the armed state executing abuse with the threat of deportation" (Ayola, 2019). Among other things, these acts send a chilling message to migrants not to speak out. In turn, these acts effectively silence them, wronging them physically, emotionally, and politically, and epistemically.

Finally, we have indirect evidence that migrants smother their testimony due to fear from a recent World Bank policy working paper. According to the study, since granting Temporary Protective Status to Venezuelan migrants, they, especially Venezuelan women, are reporting more crimes, especially crimes related to sexual and domestic violence (Ibañez, Rozo, and Bahar, 2021). This suggests that the vulnerabilities connected to migration status works with xenophobia to smother testimony.

Epistemic injustice related to migration is not only apparent in the daily lives of Venezuelan migrants in Colombia, though, but also in the world's response (or lack thereof) to pleas for assistance by Colombia to help displaced Venezuelans in the country. More specifically, I want to suggest that the lack of international assistance to help Colombia meet the needs of these migrants itself reflects systemic global prejudice against the Colombian nation and Venezuelans.[3] And this prejudice has led to minimal uptake of Colombia's requests for aid and assigning Colombia unfair differentials in authority and epistemic agency that have led the world to instrumentalize and coopt the Colombian state and its people to confront and manage Venezuelan migration largely on its own and with private entities, like non-profits groups.

When compared with the international community's response to Syrian refugees (and now toward Ukrainians fleeing the Russian invasion of their homeland), it is apparent that the world's response to help Venezuelans in Colombia has been tepid at best. Neighboring countries, like Peru, Chile and Ecuador, have imposed strict entrance requirements that most Venezuelans cannot meet (Maloney, 2019; Collins, 2019; Baddour, 2018), effectively closing their borders and forcing them to go to Colombia. The United States has made it difficult for Venezuelans to go there, denying half of the 30, 000 asylum petitions in 2018 and only recently granting Venezuelans temporary protected status for a mere eighteen months (O'Toole, 2019). And, while the European Union consistently declares that member nations should accept displaced Venezuelans, because of the distance and the resources needed to get to Europe from Latin America, they only report receiving about 18, 400 applications (Banchon, 2018; Guarascio, 2019). Colombia is, increasingly, the

3 I understand that it will appear odd, or even impossible, to some that a nation could be the agent or the target of epistemic injustice. It is beyond the scope of this essay to explain in detail why this intuition is wrong. In general, however, it relates to the fact that epistemic injustice can also be understood as epistemic oppression. And, once we understand that, we can begin to talk about global oppression and epistemic oppression between nations such that the agent and the target become not individuals but rather nations themselves (or communities, societies, etc.). For more information, see A.B, Wolf. (2020). *Just immigration in the americans: a feminist account.* Rowman & Littlefield

only game in town.

In addition to failing to take in more Venezuelans, the world's wealthy nations are offering woefully inadequate financial assistance to help Colombia meet the displaced migrants' needs. In fact, "only a fraction of the international assistance dedicated to other major crises has been devoted to helping Venezuelans" (Arnson, 2019). Even though The World Bank estimates that Colombia "had to spend roughly $900 million (...) to meet only the basic needs of Venezuelan migrants [that year] (...) a 2019 campaign by the World Bank to help raise funds to assist Colombia in settling Venezuelan migrants raised only $32 million" (Kurmanaev and González, 2019). And, according to the Brookings Institution, while donors have contributed an average of USD $1,500 in assistance per Syrian refugee, the amount earmarked for each Venezuelan refugee is a meager USD $125, leading them to call it "the largest and most underfunded refugee crisis in modern history" (Bahar and Dooley, 2019).

Many have offered explanations for this poor showing the world's resources are depleted, that this is considered a political crisis of Venezuela's own making, the international community may be waiting on the sidelines to contribute to Venezuela's reconstruction after Maduro falls, "compassion fatigue" in Europe and the United States —but, as The Wilson Center's Latin American Director, Cynthia Arnson, notes, "compassion fatigue hasn't stopped the international community from providing more than $17 billion in assistance for Syrian refugees in less than a decade, approximately $3,000 per person (...) [while] in the case of Venezuela (...) the number [is estimated] to be a scant $100 to $200 per individual" (Arnson, 2019). The world is choosing to not step up and they are abandoning both Colombia and the Venezuelan migrants in the process.

The reason that these points are important is because they demonstrate how the response (or lack of it) to the Venezuelan issue, intended or not, creates, reflects, and perpetuates epistemic injustice not only against migrants, but also against the nations receiving them. Specifically, it reflects a wide distrust that Colombia either really needs the resources or that it will use them well. The lack of international assistance also epistemically marginalizes Colombia in ways that render the South American nation epistemically powerless.

Epistemic marginalization occurs when an entire nation is excluded from useful participation in the production and dissemination of knowledge. And, when a nation is excluded from the community of knowers, they are no longer able to contribute to that community's knowledge. In other words, their epistemic marginalization leads to their epistemic powerlessness. Epistemic powerlessness refers to those groups or nations who lack epistemic credibility; they lack the ability to influence others, even if they are speaking the truth (Wolf, 2020, pp. 43-48).

We see both Colombia's epistemic marginalization and powerlessness in the international community's response in at least two ways. First, the international community appears to be taking action about Venezuelans without consulting or

considering Colombia's situation. In this way, they are excluding them from the conversation, which makes it impossible for Colombia to participate in intellectual dialogue on the crisis or contribute their knowledge to others. Second, the international community's failure to contribute even a minimally reasonable portion of the aid Colombia, the World Bank, and the UNHRC requested, reflects the fact that Colombia lacks epistemic credibility on the global stage; Colombia lacks the ability to influence other nations, even when it speaks the truth. In at least these ways, Colombia is epistemically marginalized and powerless, rendering the nation itself a victim of epistemic injustice.

A concluding note

I began this analysis by noting how I came to realize both the prevalence of epistemic injustice in Venezuelan migrants' lives and the significance of understanding it if we want to achieve immigration justice both for them and more broadly. This discussion demonstrates that epistemic injustice is a real and significant problem for displaced Venezuelan migrants in Colombia; it is all too common for this group to be victims of hermeneutical injustice, testimonial quieting and smothering, to be rendered epistemically powerless, to be unfairly distrusted, to have the meaning of their actions or their contributions to Colombian society distorted, and to have their pleas —including their pleas for help on the streets to people like me— receive minimal uptake. And much of this is boosted, caused, or reinforced by other forms of oppression. If we want to improve Venezuelan (and other) migrants' lives and resist immigration injustice, then, we must identify and confront epistemic injustice as well. I hope these observations have demonstrated why this is the case so that we can help all migrants get a fair shot in the new life that they seek.

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