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Revisiting Knowledge and Power

Reconciling the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production with the role of power

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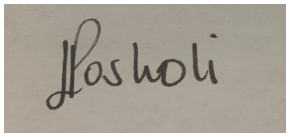
Thesis submitted for PhD in Education

February 2021

Declaration

I, Lerato Posholi, declare that this thesis is my own work and that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any university. It is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Signed:



Lerato Posholi

February 2021

Abstract

This thesis investigates the relationship between knowledge and power through a critical analysis of two seemingly oppositional schools of thought: social realism and decolonial theory. The impetus for revisiting the subject are two contemporary debates about 'bringing knowledge back in' and decolonisation in curriculum. The main objective of the investigation is to explore whether the decolonial or the social realist account of the relationship between knowledge and power reconciles the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production with the role of power. I argue that the accounts fail, to some extent, at this task because of how they each construe the idea that knowledge is socially produced. Social realism foregrounds the idea that knowledge is produced systematically and collaboratively by disciplinary specialists following rigorous methods. On the other hand, decolonial theory emphasises the idea of the social situatedness of knowledge producers in (unequal) relations of power. I argue that reconciling the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production with the role of power requires seeing the ideas of the sociality of knowledge production and the situatedness of knowledge producers highlighted in the two accounts as complementary and conjointly necessary aspects of the production of truthful knowledge. I demonstrate that a synthesis of these two aspects of the idea that knowledge is socially produced is possible through an appraisal of social realism and decolonial theory.

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Most importantly, I am deeply grateful to all my family and friends. Their love, support and cheer held me through the many phases of this project. They remained cheerful and supportive even when it made no sense what it is I am doing and why it took so long. To my grandmothers and grandfather who did not live to see the completion of this project, your pride and faith inspired me to see this project to completion.

To my dear friends: thank you for listening, for cheering and for reminding me to laugh. Nomonde, Palesa and Ziyanda, I could not have asked for better companions on this PhD journey.

I dedicate this thesis to my great-grandmother Mmachopho Posholi. You are always in my thoughts.

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1 Revisiting Knowledge and Power

> One way forward may be to recognize the fact that growing political challenges to the status quo do not necessarily herald a reactionary, anti-enlightened flight from truth, but rather a demand for more truth. (Kelly & McGoey, 2018, p. 7)

The topic of this investigation is the relationship between knowledge and power. The concepts of knowledge and power are not foreign in our everyday talk, and we do ordinarily talk about these concepts in some relation to each other. Phrases such as 'knowledge is power' are commonplace. In ordinary usage, phrases signalling the relation of knowledge and power can have negative or positive connotations. On a positive association, the connection between knowledge and power is generally understood to mean that knowledge confers some cognitive intellectual capacities for a better understanding of the world. In this positive sense, knowledge might afford people a certain status of privilege or recognition in society because of their assumed intellectual prowess. On a negative association, 'knowledge is power' expresses the idea that knowledge can be an instrument of some form of control or domination over others. In this sense, knowledge is a means of oppression and domination. The 'positive' association implies an intellectual relation between knowledge and power, while the latter 'negative' association has a political connotation. The latter highlights an instrumental relationship between knowledge and power: knowledge is a means to assert power and advance particular interests.

In relation to education, concerns with the relationship between knowledge and power tend to centre around the distribution of knowledge. The distributive link between knowledge and power is readily in view in our current society. Studies about widespread inequality in access to education, and hence to knowledge, across the world abound in educational studies. Such studies consider the ways in which power influences the distribution of and access to knowledge by constraining or denying access into institutions such as schools and universities. Those who are not (materially) powerful usually do not have the means to access knowledge by participating in schooling or university education.

This investigation explores, in particular, the epistemological relation between knowledge and power, and considers the broad question of how power is relevant to our considerations of knowledge qua knowledge. The topic of the relationship between knowledge and power is not new. It is a long-standing subject that has been widely studied. Various intellectual traditions — Marxism, Frankfurt critical theory, feminism, race theory — present different characterisations of the relationship, either implicitly or explicitly. My current project is a 'revisiting' of the topic. This begs the question as to the necessity of such a revisiting and the contribution it promises.

A revisiting of the question of the relationship between knowledge and power is called for and timely because of the continuing pertinence of the topic. The continuing pertinence and relevance of the topic of knowledge and power is indicated by the currency of debates about knowledge and power in curriculum and the extensive engagement they have spurred. The impetus for this investigation is two seemingly oppositional debates about knowledge and curriculum that are relevant and pertinent in South Africa which surface and engage with the topic of knowledge and power: the 'bringing knowledge back in' debate and the debate about decolonising the curriculum. The two debates about 'bringing knowledge back in' and decolonising the curriculum are underpinned by and correspond, respectively, with two schools of thought: social realism and decolonial theory. I use the term 'social realism' for convenience here and highlight its diverse use and reference in Chapter 4.

The first curriculum debate is about 'bringing knowledge back in' to the curriculum. There is growing scholarship in curriculum theory about knowledge in curricula that is associated with social realism. The social realist approach is primarily concerned with 'bringing knowledge back in' and recovering its central role in the curriculum (M. Young, 2008). Social realism argues that the primary role of education is to provide access to cognitively powerful knowledge that students do not have access to in their everyday lives (Wheelahan, 2010). This argument is positioned against curriculum approaches which treat knowledge in educational institutions as nothing but knowledge of powerful groups in society that aims to control and dominate less powerful groups. It is in an effort to ward against such arguments that marginalise knowledge qua knowledge that social realism engages with the question of the influence of power on knowledge. Social realists introduce a conceptual distinction between 'knowledge of the powerful' and 'powerful knowledge'[1] in order to argue that knowledge can be cognitively powerful and worthwhile beyond its connections with or origins in the powerful groups in society (M. Young & Muller, 2013). As a curriculum approach, social realism promotes the idea that it is the cognitively powerful kind of knowledge that should be the basis of curriculum.

The 'bringing knowledge back in' goal of social realism is advanced by a number of educationalists and sociologists of education from different parts of the world, including the United Kingdom, South Africa, Singapore and Australia. Social realism and its advancement for subject-based curriculum is influential in policy making and curriculum thinking in South Africa (Hoadley, 2015). It emerged in the 1990s through the involvement of some key social realism proponents in policy development at that time that promoted subject-based curricula. As Hoadley (2015) argues, Michael

[1] This distinction is not made by all those associated with social realism. It is made specifically by Michael Young and those aligned with the 'powerful knowledge' framework.

Young, who is regarded as one of the leading social realists, has greatly influenced curriculum policy-making in South Africa. Allais (2014, p. 82) explains that social realism was initially met with some resistance due to the ways in which subject-based curriculum had been used for ideological control by the apartheid regime. Nevertheless, the influence of social realism grew in South Africa, according to Zipin, Fataar and Brennan (2015), following the deficient outcomes-based education framework of 2005. The significant influence of social realism in South African curriculum thinking makes it a relevant and important approach to study.

The second debate that has recently re-emerged and gained world-wide uptake is about decolonising curriculum knowledge. Decolonisation movements have a long history and have been prominent in different parts of Africa from the period of independence in the 1960s and with the rise of critical sociology in the 1970/80s. My focus is specifically in the recent re-emergence of calls for decolonisation. Higher education institutions in South Africa (and across the world) have seen a wave of calls for decolonisation in universities. These calls for decolonisation were voiced prominently by student movements such as #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall in South Africa, what some have called the 'fallist' movements (Kasembeli, 2020), as well as campaigns such #RhodesMustFall and 'Why is my curriculum white' in the United Kingdom. Recent calls for decolonisation, particularly in South Africa, raise broader concerns and demands for educational institutions to be transformed. Some of the demands concern funding in higher education, workers' struggles in higher education, teaching and research practices, and the transformation of institutional culture. For current purposes, I focus specifically on what calls for decolonising curricula in South Africa present as the problem with knowledge and the curriculum.

The literature on calls for decolonising curricula brings the topic of knowledge and power to the fore explicitly. A fundamental claim of calls to decolonise curricula is that curriculum knowledge privileges Eurocentric understandings of society and thus perpetuates social inequalities and injustices in society. Crudely, calls for decolonisation suggest that curriculum knowledge in South African universities represents knowledge of the powerful groups in society and aims to serve their interests. According to Shay (2016, para. 11),

> one of the central concerns of the decolonising movement is how curriculum content is dominated by — to name some — white, male, Western, capitalist, heterosexual, European worldviews … curriculum content under-represents and excludes the perspectives, experiences, epistemologies of those who do not fit into these mainstream categories.

Echoing the call for decolonisation, Le Grange (2016, pp. 4–5) argues that

> Since inception, universities in SA adopted Western models of academic organisation which largely excluded and decimated the knowledges of colonised people. The colonial model of academic organisation of the university, based on Western disciplinary knowledge, was entrenched during apartheid and has not been redressed in post-apartheid in any serious way.

Having imported 'Western' models of academic organisation, curriculum knowledge in universities in South Africa is argued to be 'disconnected from African realities, including the lived experiences of the majority of black South Africans' and 'still largely reflects the colonial and apartheid worldviews' (Heleta, 2016, p. 4). Mbembe (2016, p. 32) summarises the core decolonising argument about what is wrong with curriculum knowledge when he writes:

> What is wrong with our institutions of higher learning is that they are 'Westernized'. What does it mean 'they are Westernized'? They are 'Westernized' in the sense that they are local instantiations of a dominant academic model based on a Eurocentric epistemic canon. A Eurocentric canon is a canon that attributes truth only to the Western way of knowledge production. It is a canon that disregards other epistemic traditions. It is a canon that tries to portray colonialism as a normal form of social relations between human beings rather than a system of exploitation and oppression.

The debate about decolonising curricula in South Africa grapples with the topic of knowledge and power in its concern with how curriculum knowledge is Eurocentric and perpetuates Eurocentrism. As I demonstrate in Chapter 5, the argument about the Eurocentricity of knowledge and its connections to colonialism is at the heart of decolonial critiques of Eurocentrism.

The two debates about 'bringing knowledge back in' and decolonisation share a concern with knowledge and social justice in curriculum, but have different starting points and views in relation to both. As I noted above, the two debates might even seem oppositional. Broadly, the seeming opposition between social realism and decolonisation surrounds the way in which each characterises the social justice concern in curriculum and the weight given to this concern. The social realist objective of 'bringing knowledge back in' is intended as an argument against the tendency to approach curriculum knowledge in ways that marginalises questions about the intrinsic properties of knowledge that warrant its being the basis of the curriculum (M. Young, 2008). Social realism argues for 'powerful knowledge' as a curriculum principle against the prevalence of approaches to curriculum that over-emphasise the ways in which curriculum knowledge is 'knowledge of the powerful'. Social realists are concerned with the injustice of curricula which fails to provide students with access to knowledge that facilitates the cognitive development of students and takes them beyond everyday forms of thinking. Hence, for social realism, the social justice issue in relation to curriculum has to do with ensuring access to powerful disciplinary knowledge (Moore, 2013; Wheelahan, 2010).

Conversely, decolonisation is centrally concerned with what understandings of society are formed through curriculum knowledge and the ways in which these may perpetuate and sustain social injustice. Decolonisation, at least at first glance, might appear to be too concerned with 'whose' knowledge is in the curriculum and for what ideological purposes at the expense of questions about the properties of knowledge that make it cognitively powerful and intrinsically worthwhile. Decolonisation of knowledge is a broader call concerned with the ways in which knowledge is, or can be, entangled with power. Calls for decolonising the curriculum do not reject the idea that knowledge should be in the curriculum. Decolonisation does not reject that there is knowledge that students should learn at school and other educational institutions. Rather, decolonisation raises crucial questions around the politics of knowledge, and calls for a critical reflection of the kind of knowledge that is 'passed on' to students in the curriculum as of inscrutable value.

The different starting points as well as the distinct understandings of the social justice problem of curriculum knowledge guide the concerns and aims of the social realist call to 'bring knowledge back in' and the calls for decolonising curricula. Moreover, these differences explain their divergent emphasis on what aspects of knowledge production are important, as I argue in Chapter 6.

It is important to note at the outset that although both debates about 'bringing knowledge back in' and decolonising curriculum are about knowledge and curriculum, they are not equally 'approaches' to curriculum. Social realism is rooted in the sociology of education, and develops the 'powerful knowledge' framework as an explicit curriculum approach. Conversely, though the debate about decolonisation of curriculum critiques curriculum and offers insights for thinking about knowledge and the curriculum, it is not a developed as a curriculum approach. In other words, decolonisation is not 'originally', or primarily, a theory of curriculum. Hence, in Part II, my discussion of social realism involves more discussion of its curriculum approach than is the case with decolonisation.

A further point to note is that the 'powerful knowledge' framework for curriculum thinking advanced by social realism is aimed more at school curricula, hence the social realist argument for subject-based curricula. In contrast, the debate on decolonisation of curriculum knowledge, in its recent re-emergence, is often discussed as though aimed primarily at university curricula. These points of difference are important to highlight for the sake of clarity. Although this investigation is prompted by debates about knowledge in the curriculum, the primary object of investigation is the relationship between knowledge and power. My analysis aims primarily at the conceptions of knowledge and power operational in the schools of thought within which these two debates about curriculum are embedded: social realism and decolonial theory. Decolonial theory traverses a number of fields but is perhaps most prominent in the field of critical sociology, and social realism is rooted in the sociology of education

The two curriculum debates about 'bringing knowledge back in' and decolonising the curriculum are a springboard into the topic of knowledge and power. The schools of thought underpinning these debates, social realism and decolonial theory, offer an interesting lens through which to re-consider the topic and capture some of the contemporary thinking on it. This chapter introduces the current study, defines the scope of the investigation and explains the significance of the study. I divide the chapter into four sections.

In section one, I introduce the topic of this investigation and define the research problem motivating the study. I explain that the study of the relationship between knowledge and power is characterised by two polemical and untenable positions. On the one hand, the traditionalist position argues that for knowledge to be knowledge, questions of power have to be set aside. On the other hand, the reductivist position argues that knowledge is inescapably entangled with power. I then explain that the key problem with these two polemical positions is that they present a false dichotomy of the options available: either knowledge is knowledge and has nothing to do with power, or power is deterministic in knowledge and relativism about knowledge holds. This false dichotomy is underpinned by a mistaken assumption that for knowledge to be knowledge, it cannot be social.

In section two, I clarify that the main goal of this investigation is to explore to what extent and in which ways the two accounts of knowledge and power presented in social realism and decolonial move us out of the false dichotomy. I define the core problem as a challenge regarding how to adequately recognise the involvement of power in knowledge production without undermining the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production. The main research question posed in this study is 'whether it is possible to develop an account of the relationship between knowledge and power that adequately recognises and addresses the involvement of power in knowledge production without undermining the truth-seeking goal of knowledge?' I suggest that a critical analysis and examination of social realism and decolonial theory promises a way forward in understanding the relationship between knowledge and power. Specifically, social realism and decolonisation surface conceptions of the idea of the social production of knowledge that present the possibility for recognising the inevitable involvement of power in knowledge without undermining the idea that knowledge is truth-seeking.

In section three, I explain the core argument of this thesis and underscore the significant contribution to knowledge it attempts. My core argument is developed from critically analysing social realism and decolonial theory and collating key insights about what the idea that knowledge is socially produced means from these two schools of thought. I argue that the idea of the sociality

of knowledge stressed in social realism and the idea of the situatedness of knowledge producers foregrounded in decolonial theory are complementary aspects of what the social production of knowledge means and that these ideas are conjointly necessary for an account of knowledge and power which attempts to reconcile the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production with the involvement of power in knowledge. I suggest that the novel contribution of this study is that it takes a different approach to the topic and attempts to show that the idea of the situatedness of knowledge producers does not threaten the truth-seeking goal of knowledge.

Finally, I end with an outline of how I develop my argument in the seven chapters of this thesis.

1.1 Problem statement

> Either knowledge ... is unrelated to the social position and intellectual interest of the knower, in which case general theory and universal knowledge are viable, or knowledge is affected by its relation to the knower, in which case relativistic and particularistic knowledge can be the only result. This is a true dilemma, because it presents a choice between two equally unpalatable alternatives. [However, the] alternative to positivist theory is not resigned relativism and the alternative to relativism is not positivist theory. Theoretical knowledge can never be anything other than the socially rooted efforts of historical agents. But this social character does not negate the possibility of developing either generalized categories or increasingly disciplined, impersonal and critical modes of evaluation. (Alexander, 1995, p. 91 quoted in (M. Young, 2008, p. 26))

I noted in the opening paragraphs above that the relation between knowledge and power is widely studied. In academic literature, the topic of knowledge and power is typically investigated through analyses of Marx's critiques of ideology or Foucault's views on 'power-knowledge'. My current investigation takes a different approach and looks at how the topic is discussed in two schools of thought: social realism and decolonisation. To set up the scope of the investigation and delineate the conceptual problem that is the object of focus in this project, I describe two dominant positions on the topic of knowledge and power presented by Miranda Fricker in her explicit theorisation of the relationship between knowledge and power in the paper 'Rational Authority and Social Power: towards a truly social epistemology' (Fricker, 1998).

In the 1998 paper, Fricker explains that the study of the relationship between knowledge and power is dominated by two polemical positions which she labels 'traditionalist' and 'reductivist' (Fricker, 1998). The traditionalist position is generally associated with arguments in mainstream analytic epistemology that disregard the involvement of power in knowledge. According to Fricker (1998, p. 160), the basic distinction between the two positions is that 'whereas on the traditionalist view social power is seen as wholly irrelevant to the rational, on the postmodernist view reason tends to be reduced to social power'. Broadly, the *traditionalist* position denies that questions of power are

relevant to knowledge when it is knowledge proper, while the *reductivist* position reduces knowledge to the workings of power.

The reductivist position is generally associated with postmodernism. According to Fricker, one of the central claims of postmodernism is that what passes for knowledge is really the perspectives that serve the interests of those whose social power shapes the practices of validation of knowledge: 'propositions approved as knowledge are likely to reflect the perspectives and even serve the interests of those whose social power shapes the practices of approval' (Fricker, 2000, p. 146).[2] Knowledge is, in the postmodernist view, nothing more than the effects of power. In other words, power is, for the reductivist, omnipresent and deterministic in the production of knowledge. The reductivist position risks falling into relativism because knowledge becomes whatever power makes appear as knowledge; it is whatever the powerful say knowledge is. Fricker (2000, p. 146) summarises the position of postmodernists on knowledge and power as follows:

> Those who embrace postmodernism believe that metaphysically speaking, knowledge is less than it seems. But politically speaking, they believe it to be more than it seems. In other words, they take it that knowledge is not a representation of true reality. It does not represent our understanding of reality as it truly is. Rather, knowledge is political. It reflects the interests of the powerful, and it is developed and used by social and political power to affirm itself.

In a nutshell, postmodernism overstates the political nature of knowledge: the politics of knowledge are all there is to knowledge. The criteria for knowledge are arbitrary and vary according to who has the power to promote their perspectives as knowledge.

Fricker argues that postmodernism surfaces a deep philosophical issue: a scepticism about 'the special authority that is supposed to attach to the force of reason' (Fricker, 2000, p. 156). The postmodernist scepticism about the authority of reason raises the question of which uses of reason are authoritarian and which uses are authoritative (Fricker, 2000). Put differently, the sceptic's challenge is how to distinguish between 'real' knowledge that is legitimately authoritative and what 'poses' as knowledge through connections with power. For Fricker, postmodernism is right to be concerned with authoritarian uses of reason but is problematic in its failing to distinguish authoritative uses of reason: 'postmodernism despairs of the possibility of distinguishing

[2] Fricker draws attention to the distinctively political character of postmodernists' rational scepticism. She explains that 'their scepticism is not a response to familiar problems in metaphysics or philosophy of mind about the place of reason in nature or the relation of mentality to the physical realm. It is a response first and foremost to a problem which cuts across epistemology, metaphysics and ethics: the problem of discursive authority' (Fricker, 2000, p. 156). The postmodernist concern is with the discourses that gain authority and the power mechanisms by which they gain authority in society. This concern surfaces strongly in my discussion of Foucault's views on knowledge and power in the next chapter.

authoritative from authoritarian uses of reason' (Fricker, 2000, p. 156). Thus, according to Fricker (1998, p. 161), 'reductivism about reason stands or falls with the question whether there can be a characterization of rational authority which is genuinely independent of social power'.

To undermine the reductivist claim that knowledge is nothing more than the perspectives and disguised interests of the powerful, we need to show that there can be a way to characterise knowledge as genuinely independent of power. Fricker argues that if knowledge and power were the same, we could not tell that particular instances of 'knowledge' are mere appearances of knowledge owing to power operations. Hence, in so far as the postmodernist is committed to the claim that some 'knowledge' is really the disguised interests of power, they have to accept that there is, or can be, knowledge that is genuine knowledge apart from power to grant themselves the point of contrast (Fricker, 2000, p. 157). Crudely, knowledge is not always 'power dressed as knowledge' because if it were, we would not be able to tell that some appearances of knowledge are appearances of knowledge and not genuine knowledge.

So much for the reductivist position, I turn now to explain the traditionalist position.

Traditionalist positions about knowledge insist that power is epistemologically irrelevant in as much as it does not affect the 'veritistic' assessments of knowledge. In other words, power is seen as irrelevant to assessments of whether some knowledge in question is true or not. Laudan (1984), for example, espouses the view that cognitive norms and values are the only ones that matter when it comes to knowledge. He argues that 'ethical values are always present in scientific decision making and, very occasionally, their influence is of great importance. But that importance fades into insignificance when compared with the ubiquitous role of cognitive values' (Laudan, 1984, p. xii). The general suggestion is that social and ethical factors are insignificant when it comes to the epistemic status of knowledge. This view is commonly espoused by logical positivists who hold that genuine knowledge consists of analytically true statements, that is, statements which are true by definition.

Lončarević (2013, p. 72) points out that traditional epistemology tends to reject any substantive role of politics in knowledge, and that the field insists that knowledge is knowledge only when it is dissociated from power. This traditionalist understanding figures the foundations of Western analytic philosophy and is represented powerfully in Plato's insistence that truth is achievable only once the philosopher withdraws from the political realm of society (Reeve, 2004). Similarly, in Descartes' *Meditations,* the abstraction of the subject of knowledge from their 'everyday' material context is treated as a prerequisite for knowledge acquisition. In science studies, the traditionalist position finds expression in accounts of value-free, or value neutral, science. According to the

traditionalist view, knowledge is a purely rational affair, void of any social or political influences. If we find that knowledge has been influenced by social factors, then the knowledge in question cannot be knowledge proper but the mere appearance of knowledge.

To be sure, traditionalist positions do not have to completely deny that knowledge has anything to do with power. Traditionalists about knowledge might concede that power is relevant in the context of discovering which questions to pursue, for example, but insist that power has nothing to do in the process of justification. Srinivasan (2019, p. 130) references the distinction analytic philosophers make between the 'context of discovery' and the 'context of justification' and suggests that the distinction 'serves as a pre-emptory defence of analytic philosophy's general lack of concern with the contingent contexts from which philosophy itself emerges'. Reiterating this point, Alcoff (1996, p. 11) points out that

> Political considerations … have not been considered germane to the justification of beliefs that claim referentiality or truth, … power and desire — the "other" of reason — are regarded as even less relevant. To admit the ineliminable influence of such elements would seem to spell the demise of any hope for knowledge. But this is only because traditionally dominant accounts of justification have presented … a linear, single-line, inferential model of knowledge in which politics, values, and desire could only be seen as obstacles at worst, irrelevant at best.

Along similar lines, Annis (1978, p. 215) contends that

> Man is a social animal and yet when it comes to the justification of beliefs philosophers tend to ignore this fact. … perhaps the most neglected part in justification theory is the *actual* social practices and norms of justification of a culture of community of people. Philosophers have looked for universal and a priori principles of justification.

For traditionalists, knowledge par excellence is only possible where social factors such as power are suspended. Karl Popper, for example, insisted that the social origins of knowledge claims are irrelevant to the justification of knowledge since the evidence for a knowledge claim has nothing to do with why, how and by whom the knowledge claim was conceived. The traditionalists' way of acknowledging power influences in knowledge is 'to regard them as aberrations, occasional and unfortunate departures from the scientific ideal' (Laudan, 1990, p. 149). In this view, attempts to take power's entanglement with knowledge seriously merely aim at 'political correctness' rather than truth because questions of power have no bearing on matters of justification required for securing truth.

The traditionalist and reductivist positions as presented here are very generalised and not nuanced. Fricker (1998, p. 160) admits that 'these characterizations of traditionalist and reductivist extremes

are somewhat artificial' but maintains that 'they are not quite caricatures'. Fricker's characterisation of the two positions usefully captures, for this investigation, the possible extreme positions that can be taken on the topic. Moreover, the characterisation Fricker present does not seem incongruous with other scholarship on the topic. Morris' (2016) distinction between the 'epistemic critique of ideology' and 'functional critique of ideology' roughly maps on to, respectively, the traditionalist and reductivist positions. According to Morris (2016, p. 5), the functional critique of ideology

> examines the social dimensions of beliefs and theories in a manner that largely brackets or bypasses their cognitive properties. … it assumes that beliefs can be studied and criticized without consideration of their epistemic properties, without considering their intentional relation to the world, their representational content, their truth-value, their logical consistency, and their justification.

In contrast, Morris (2016, p. 8) explains that the epistemic critique of ideology

> seeks to reveal the epistemic errors that arise from social, political, or psychological interferences in the cognitive process. It thus helps us to identify, understand, and avoid some common errors, and it thereby clears the way for the proper acquisition and justification of knowledge.

The basic contrast highlighted between the functional and epistemic critiques of ideology is that the former over-emphasises the role of social factors in determining knowledge to the relative neglect of the cognitive properties of knowledge while the latter over-states the cognitive properties of knowledge and sees knowledge as possible only once social factors and context are set aside. Crudely, the latter implies, similar to the traditionalist position, that social factors are a hindrance to knowledge, and thus something to be cleared away before knowledge can be achieved.

There is growing contestation against this idea that social factors such as power can be 'easily' removed to clear the way for proper knowledge, or set aside in questions of knowledge. Alcoff (2013, p. 218) writes that, 'to ask for power's removal from the sphere of knowledge is like asking for the removal of human bodies'.[3] Fricker's theorisation of the relationship between knowledge and power through is prompted by her perceived lack of attention to questions of power in epistemology. Fricker (1998, p. 160) contends that 'in epistemology it can too often seem as if a concern with truth and rationality were wholly disconnected from any concern with power and the social identities of the participants in epistemic practices'. Fricker also explains that

> ideas with a politicizing portent for how we think about our epistemic relations — ideas such as that epistemic trust might have an irrepressible connection with social power, or that social disadvantage can produce unjust

[3] Elsewhere, Alcoff (1996, p. 153) points out that 'knowledge has no autonomous existence apart from power', and argues that 'power always needs to be taken into account in assessing justificatory strategies' (Alcoff, 1998, p. 289).

> epistemic disadvantage — tend not to feature in the context of Anglo-American epistemology. (Fricker, 2007, p. 2)

This concern that analytic epistemology largely ignores questions of power in knowledge is echoed by other scholars. Alcoff (2013, p. 214) argues that inquiry into knowledge's entanglement with power is strikingly absent from Anglo-American analytic epistemology despite convincing arguments, for example, that 'social relations are imbued with power dynamics and that these affect which ideas and concepts become dominant and whose perspective formulates and frames dominant projects of inquiry'. Alcoff summarises this point succinctly:

> Analytically trained epistemologists have made significant contributions to our understanding of knowledge, justification, and belief, but they have generally been unwilling to explore the implications that follow from recent work in the sociology of knowledge, feminist epistemologies, continental theories of meaning and interpretation, and the whole press of forces which are demanding that we begin to take a close look at the politics of knowledge.[4] (Alcoff, 1996, p. 3)

Some scholars note the neglect of questions of power in epistemology by highlighting the persistent neglect of Foucault's work on power-knowledge in the field. Arguably, the persistent neglect of Foucault's work in analytic philosophy is an indication of the hostility of the field to questions of knowledge's entanglement with power (Alcoff, 1993, 2013; A. Allen, 2017; B. Allen, 2010; Lončarević, 2013). The neglect of Foucault's views is justified, Alcoff (2007, p. 89) argues, on the grounds that 'Foucault's analyses of knowledge are taken to be a species of critical sociology, not normative epistemology'. Foucault's fitness for, and contribution to, epistemology is controversial because of his historical approach to conceptualising knowledge, and his perceived lack of respect for the aim of truth. Srinivasan (2019, p. 130) notes that for philosophers such as Karl Popper, 'historicist inquiry was not only irrelevant to the pursuit of philosophical truth, but morally pernicious'. I discuss these points further in the next chapter on Foucault's views on knowledge and power.

The general neglect of questions of power in analytic epistemology can be attributed to the field's tendency to work with abstracted and individualistic conceptions of knowers as well as its aversion to postmodernism (Fricker, 2000, 2007). Fricker (2007, p. 2) postulates that ideas that highlight knowledge's connections with power are not featured in mainstream analytic epistemology because

[4] Alcoff (1996, p. 4) adds that 'many philosophers hold that sociology and related disciplines may tell us how beliefs *actually* attain justification, but that epistemology alone pursues the question how they *should* attain justification. But this border between the normative and the should sociological is perhaps the most important border that needs to be crossed'.

> they are presumed to be necessarily allied with the relativistic outlook of which postmodernism was the apotheosis, or perhaps simply because the theoretical framework of individualism and compulsory rational idealization that epistemology traditionally creates for itself makes it very hard to see how such questions might have a bearing on epistemology proper.

Mainstream analytic epistemology conceives of the subject of knowledge in individualistic terms. As illustrated in the Cartesian tradition expressed in Descartes *Meditations*, the subject pursues knowledge by herself by abstracting themselves from their material context and performing certain mental reflections. This abstracted conception of the subject of knowledge is generally supposed to secure neutrality and objectivity in the pursuit of knowledge. The abstracted conception of the subject of knowledge and strict adherence to value-neutrality in the pursuit of knowledge are distinctive features of traditional epistemology (Fricker & Hornsby, 2000). Fricker and Hornsby (2000, p. 8) argue that 'analytic philosophy creates an intellectual climate in which it is especially problematic to acknowledge locatedness'. The contention is that the requirement of abstraction from context for the subject of knowledge makes epistemology unreceptive to questions of the influence of power in knowledge. The implicit point is that it is impossible to see power as potentially relevant to knowledge if knowers are seen as abstracted from their social settings. The abstracted individualistic conception of the subject of knowledge, and its implications for how epistemology is conducted, has been challenged by different intellectual traditions.[5] In Chapter 6, I discuss how the field of social epistemology critiques the individualistic orientation of traditional epistemology. For now, the general point is that in so far as epistemology tends to work with abstract and individualistic conceptions of the subject of knowledge, it remains hostile to questions of the knowledge's possible entanglements with power.

A second possible explanation for why questions of power and its influence on knowledge may be ignored in epistemology is because such questions are commonly associated with postmodernism and its relativist tendencies. Relativism threatens, for the traditionalist, whenever knowledge is associated with power. Alcoff (2007, p. 88) notes that, 'for epistemology in the Cartesian tradition, to note the role of the situation of the knower is to submit to relativism'. Fricker (2000, p. 153) explains that 'many philosophers of an analytic persuasion meet postmodernism with bafflement, or doubt that it has any genuine philosophical motivations'. In contrast, Fricker maintains that the core virtue of postmodernism is that 'it placed reason and knowledge firmly in the context of social power' (Fricker, 2007, p. 2) even though it mistakenly undermines the distinction between what is made to appear as knowledge and what is genuine knowledge. Epistemology's hostility to questions

[5] In epistemology, feminist approaches have been pioneers in attempts to elucidate the ways in which power can influence epistemic practices and knowledge by criticising the abstracted conception of the subject of knowledge and the pursuit of knowledge (Fricker, 1998; Fricker & Hornsby, 2000).

of power in knowledge, for Fricker and Alcoff, is unwarranted because such questions do not necessarily entail relativism.

Fricker aims to address the persistent inattention to questions of power in epistemology by politicising epistemology (Fricker, 1998, p. 174). Her goal is to demonstrate the significance of taking questions of social power and its interaction with knowledge more seriously, and to urge more critical attention to the subject of power in epistemology. In this goal, Fricker is united with other scholars developing and promoting the project of 'political epistemology' (see Alcoff, 2011; Shomali, 2010). 'Politicising' epistemology does not mean making knowledge all about politics. In Fricker's use, it seems to imply devoting critical attention to the epistemological effects of the political circumstances in which knowledge is produced and shared. The general idea of a 'political epistemology' is to investigate how politics frames questions of knowledge rather than to reduce knowledge to politics. Shomali (2010, pp. 6–7) explains that

> The project of political epistemology seeks an epistemological criterion of truth that is attentive to the sociopolitical conditions that determine meaning. This research project presupposes recognition of the roles that interests, social contexts, moral commitments, political involvements, and the historicity of the knower play in the formation of knowledge.

Similarly, Alcoff (2011, p. 71) points out that

> a political epistemology could consider the conditions that structure epistemic roles, it could reveal how authority and presumptive credibility are sometimes arbitrarily distributed, and what conditions give rise to the illusion of a totally individualised epistemic agency. Political epistemology might also clarify how some contextual conditions are rendered relevant to the question of justification, while other contextual conditions are rendered completely irrelevant.

So far, I have been concerned to delineate two dominant positions on the topic of knowledge and power, and adopted Fricker's labelling and characterisation in this respect. I also tried, briefly, to highlight that there is general contestation against both the traditionalist and reductivist positions. It is noteworthy that the contestation against epistemology's tendency to ignore questions of power in knowledge is formulated in terms of epistemology's lack of engagement with insights from sociology of knowledge (see the quote above by Alcoff about epistemology's refusal to engage with sociology of knowledge) as well as attributed to its framing conceptions of the subjects of knowledge. The argument I make in this thesis turns on the general question of how to understand the idea that knowledge is socially produced. To conclude this section, I define the problem with the two positions that necessitates the current investigation.

The traditionalist and reductivist positions 'both make the same mistake of thinking it is an all or nothing situation, so that if social power is involved in rational proceedings in any but the most superficial of ways, then it is all up with rationality' (Fricker, 1998, p. 160). Essentially, 'either power considerations are irrelevant to what is known or, if power relations are involved, the validity of the knowledge claims are determined by the power effects' (Wong, 2003, p. 106). These prevalent positions construe knowledge and power as mutually exclusive. The underlying assumption for both the traditionalist and reductivist positions is that genuine knowledge can only be produced in abstraction from social contexts:

> It is assumed that objective truth itself depends on the existence of a pure observer or thinker, untrammeled by anything but insight into truth. The notion is that the social is necessarily a distortion, an alien intrusion in epistemology; if ideas are determined by social interactions, then they cannot be determined by truth. (Collins, 1998, p. 7)

For the two positions, if power is present in knowledge production, then knowledge fails to be genuine because power necessarily undermines the validity conditions of knowledge. Young (2008, p. 30) explains that both 'positivists and their postmodernist critics insist that for knowledge to be knowledge it must be outside history, although of course they then draw precisely opposite conclusions as to whether this is, in reality, possible'. Crudely, the traditionalist believes that universal and absolute knowledge is possible whereas the postmodernist believes that knowledge is always historical. Moore (2013, p. 337) helpfully formulates the 'false dilemma' presented by the traditionalist and reductivist positions in terms of 'a perceived conflict between the sociology of knowledge and epistemology':

> To put it succinctly, if knowledge is knowledge then it cannot be 'social' (if it was, it would not be certain because it is merely relative), but if knowledge can never be anything other than social it cannot actually be 'knowledge' (because it must be relative rather than certain). The traditional epistemological line (e.g. in logical positivism) was to detach knowledge from its social context by grounding it in unmediated sense-data organized by propositional logic. The traditional sociological line was to ground knowledge within the social and historical conditions of those constructing the knowledge as organized around their standpoints and interests (e.g. Marxist ideology analysis, social constructionism [SC], feminist standpoint theory, postmodernism). On this basis, the relationship between epistemology and sociology is a zero-sum game – one side or the other, but not aspects of both and somewhere in the middle.

Moore (2013, p. 338) suggests that the abstracted and decontextualised conception of knowledge in traditional epistemology and the traditional sociological approach that grounds knowledge in the social context of its production leave epistemological foundationalism and epistemological relativism as the only two choices. Roughly, if knowledge is dependent on the social context of its

production, then knowledge is relative. On the other hand, if knowledge is abstracted from the context of its production, then it is absolute and certain.

Moore's helpful formulation of the 'false dilemma' presented by the traditionalist and reductivist positions in terms of a problem between traditional epistemology approaches and traditional sociology of knowledge approaches demonstrates that the fundamental problem is how to conceptualise a sociological approach to knowledge that adequately recognises the ineradicable presence of power in knowledge without giving up on the idea of truthful knowledge. In crude terms, the challenge is how to reconcile two truisms: that power is perpetually present in knowledge production and that the idea of 'objective' truthful knowledge is undermined if power is conceived as determining the validity of knowledge. The basic problem is whether the presence of power necessarily implies that power becomes deterministic in knowledge and triumphs all the 'normal' justificatory and evidentiary processes of producing truthful knowledge.

My primary quest in this project is to map a way towards an account of knowledge and power that reconciles the truth-seeking goal of knowledge with the perpetual involvement of power in knowledge production. To this end, I critically analyse and examine the accounts of knowledge and power presented in social realism and decolonisation. I wish to note at the outset some difficulties with investigating knowledge and power, and formulating an appropriate framework for the investigation. The terms knowledge and power have diverse and contested meanings. When used together, they are often too provocative. I want to note some general difficulties with investigating the topic, and then note some specific difficulties with my particular framing of the study in this project.

Characterising the relation between knowledge and power is a complex task. Foucault notes that he was 'struck by the difficulty' he had in formulating the question of power in the social sciences. He notes that his historical genealogies of psychiatry, for example, were crucially about asking the question of power and knowledge, even though he is aware that he 'scarcely ever used the word (power)' in his analysis (Foucault, 1980, p. 115). Koopman (2008, p. 349) suggests that there is lack of sufficient recognition of the amount of intellectual labour that Foucault put in to construct the power-knowledge relation as a specified and coherent object of conceptualisation. I take these remarks as 'cautionary tales' in this endeavour to reconsider the relationship between knowledge and power.

Methodologically, and conceptually, the difficulty in formulating and characterising knowledge and power adequately can be explained by the fact that the topic requires grappling with topics which have a history of long philosophical and sociological inquiry. The study of knowledge and power

traverses highly contested issues about the nature of reality and our efforts to know it, as well as the nature of the multi-faceted, often mysterious, phenomenon of power. The topic is studied widely and in complex ways through critiques of ideology (Morris, 2016), feminist critiques of knowledge (Lloyd, 2002) and critiques of the connections between race and knowledge (Sullivan & Tuana, 2007). Formulating a clear framework for articulating the relationship between knowledge and power is challenging.

Furthermore, it is often difficult to talk about and formulate the issue of knowledge and power because there is a kind of 'intellectual stigma' attached to claims that knowledge and power are entangled. As Koopman (2008, p. 349) explains, 'the very idea of the entanglement of power and knowledge is, in a culture such as ours which is obsessed with a certain purifying tendency in modern philosophy, hardly evident'. Efforts to bring questions of power into the knowledge sphere tend to be seen as anomalous within mainstream discourse, and are shunned on grounds that they inspire relativism. Affirming power's entanglement with knowledge is commonly seen as the intellectual prelude to anti-truth perspectives. Still, Alcoff (1996, p. 119) suggests that 'the "cognitive dissonance" created within our own discourse by the question of the history of truth should not dissuade us from broaching the subject.'

Despite the 'intellectual stigma' that is often attached to studies affirming knowledge's entanglement with power, there is broad recognition of the important contribution that affirming the knowledge-power relation has made in critical traditions such as feminism and critical race theory. Most forms of social critique and critical theory invoke some conception of the relationship between knowledge and power to bring light to some of the challenges in popular discourse and society. Appeals to some relation between knowledge and power figure prominently, explicitly and implicitly, in critiques of the social order in public debates and in academic spaces. There might be a sense in which the allegiance, however broad and complicated, to such critical traditions might be threatened by a refusal to take seriously the idea of knowledge's entanglement with power. It would be somewhat inconsistent to hold allegiance to these traditions and deny that knowledge has nothing to do with power. It is no doubt possible that the allegiance to feminism, for example, is to the conclusions it draws and the practical implications of it but not to their methodological route via knowledge and power to feminist conclusions. Still, it seems that feminism's hold and appeal in the academy is not merely for its practical conclusions but more crucially its theoretical insights. Affirming power's involvement with knowledge, then, seems pre-requisite to our political-intellectual commitment to some of the prevailing forms of critical theory and social critique.

As my definition of the research problem indicates, this investigation more broadly aims at a conceptual understanding of the nexus between power and truth-seeking in knowledge.[6] Given this abstract object of study, the 'obvious' approach might be to investigate and engage with major philosophical and sociological theories of knowledge. However, prompted by the 'bringing knowledge back in' and the decolonising curriculum debates in the field of education, this project takes an unusual route and considers the topic from the perspective of social realism and decolonial theory. This begs the question: why this methodological approach?

Social realism and decolonial theory, while not theories of knowledge in the strict sense, assume social views of knowledge and conceptualise the relationship between knowledge and power in relation to the field of education. This gives some indication that the power and knowledge issue is a conceptual problem with great practical stakes. Investigating the subject of knowledge and power from the perspective of these schools of thought which have much currency within contemporary the curriculum debates about 'bringing knowledge back in' and decolonising curriculum may offer insights with more immediate curriculum relevance and application. If previous and current dominant studies are anything to go by, they indicate that the relationship between knowledge and power comes to view more clearly when considered from the perspective of, or in relation to, some concrete concern. Feminism investigates the topic in relation to gender, critical race theory in relation to race, ideology critiques via ideology and class, and so on. My methodological approach considers knowledge and power in relation to education.

Focusing on decolonial theory and social realism allows me to capture and draw attention to some of the current arguments on the topic since the two schools of thought have much currency in contemporary debates about curriculum. The two schools of thought are generally seen as oppositional and by studying them together, I challenge this tendency and show what is useful about combining insights from both.

Having now clarified the scope of this research and delineated the problem I tackle, the next section sketches the argument of this thesis and highlights the purported contribution of this study.

1.2 Thesis statement

> The dawning recognition that such elements as desire and power are always involved in the determination of validity conditions for knowledge does not entail the claim that they are all that is involved. At the same time,

[6] I would like to acknowledge and thank my proposal reader Prof Johan Muller for pointing this out in his comments on my earlier PhD proposal.

> there is a pressing need to produce epistemologies that will acknowledge the ubiquity of these elements in all processes of knowing. (Alcoff, 1996, p. 2)

I have suggested that the core problem surrounding our understanding of knowledge and power is the question of how we account for the role of power in the production of truthful knowledge. The question is: 'is it possible to develop an account of the relationship between knowledge and power that adequately recognises and addresses the involvement of power in knowledge production without undermining the truth-seeking goal of knowledge?' Both social realism and decolonial theory foreground the idea that knowledge is produced socially and affirm a relationship between knowledge and power. The idea that knowledge is socially produced makes space for power to be one of the factors that conditions and possibly influences the production of knowledge. However, social realism and decolonial theory present different understandings of what the idea that knowledge is socially produced entails, and hence diverge in their accounts of the relationship between knowledge and power.

I show that the social realist view of knowledge emphasises the sociality of knowledge — the idea that knowledge is socially produced using rigorous specialised methods and procedures developed by disciplinary communities of experts that ensure the reliability of the knowledge produced. Consequently, the social realist account of the relation between knowledge and power foregrounds the idea of the 'power of' knowledge produced in the disciplines. On the other hand, the decolonial view of knowledge emphasises the situatedness of knowledge producers — the idea that knowledge producers are situated in social relations and systems of (colonial) power. The decolonial account of knowledge and power argues that the dominant system of global knowledge production tends to mirror unequal power relations between different social groups, and the knowledge produced tends to foster understandings of society that reproduce the same unequal power relations.

The shortcoming of each account is that it emphasises one aspect of the idea that knowledge is socially produced to the relative neglect of the other. I argue that a satisfactory account of knowledge and power which reconciles the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production with the role of power in knowledge production must combine and emphasise both aspects of knowledge. I propose that a complementary understanding of social realism and decolonial theory allows us to see that the idea of the sociality of knowledge production and the idea of the situatedness of knowledge producers are conjointly necessary for producing truthful knowledge.

1.3 Significance

> It is the possibility that a sociological view of knowledge might actually influence the ways that teachers think about how and what they teach that makes the knowledge question so much more problematic in the sociology

> of education than in intellectual fields such as cultural and literary studies, which are far more insulated from any practice external to themselves. (M. Young, 2000, p. 529)

In 'Truth and Power', Foucault explains that the question of power and knowledge that he was centrally concerned with 'totally failed to interest those to whom he addressed it and was regarded as a problem which was politically unimportant and epistemologically vulgar' (Foucault, 1980, pp. 109-110). In contemporary times, interest in the subject of knowledge and power is evident through, for example, world-wide debates about decolonising knowledge. Furthermore, the 'political' importance of the subject is growing due, in part, to the increasing spread of 'fake news' and its potential harms, and the general phenomenon of 'post-truth'. These phenomena have growing political importance in contemporary society.

Epistemologically, I noted that a tendency to neglect the topic of power and knowledge pervades mainstream thinking. This neglect is inspired by the fear of relativism and the intellectual stigma attached to affirmations of knowledge's entanglement with power. This thesis tries to show that considerations of power are not only appropriate for thinking about knowledge, but are necessary in the production of truthful knowledge. In this way, I hope to extend and contribute to growing efforts to break the silence and neglect of questions of power in mainstream thinking about knowledge. Relativism looms in conceptions of knowledge that emphasise the idea of the situatedness of knowledge producers. I offer an interpretation of the idea of the situatedness of knowledge producers that circumvents relativism by demonstrating that taking into account the idea of the situatedness of knowledge does not necessarily reduce knowledge production to the standpoints of producers.

My argument for complementarity between the social realist view of knowledge and the decolonial view departs with the tendency in most social conceptions of knowledge to treat as separate and incompatible the idea that the collaborative social production of knowledge has the potential to secure objective knowledge, and the genuine recognition of the implications of the situatedness and locatedness of knowledge producers. My argument sees the two dimensions of the idea that knowledge is socially produced — the collaborative production of knowledge by communities of disciplinary experts and the critical importance of recognising the situatedness of knowledge producers — as complementary and conjointly necessary for the production of truthful knowledge. This complementary understanding has possible implications for curriculum thinking which I briefly sketch out at the end of this thesis.

In the next section, I outline how my argument unfolds in the different chapters.

1.4 Project Outline

The argument of this project unfolds in three main parts, divided into six chapters and the conclusion. Part I introduces the study and sets the scope of the investigation. It comprises of Chapters 1, 2 and 3. Part II discusses the two schools of thought, social realism and decolonial theory. It is comprised of Chapter 4 and 5. Part III synthesises the key insights from social realism and decolonial theory about knowledge and power, and presents my answer to the research question and contribution on the topic. It is comprised of Chapters 6 and the conclusion Chapter 7.

Part I introduces the thesis. Chapter 1 above explained that the current investigation revisits the widely studied question of knowledge and power to explore whether an account of knowledge and power that reconciles the involvement of power in knowledge production with the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production is possible. I introduced the topic of the project and claimed that dominant accounts of knowledge and power either advance traditionalist positions that neglect power's involvement in knowledge, or reductivist positions that reduce knowledge to power and risk falling into relativism. The conceptual problem centres around developing a social conception of knowledge that makes it possible to acknowledge that power can enter knowledge production but avoids the pitfalls of relativism. My novel methodological approach consists in a critical analysis and examination of two schools of thought, social realism and decolonisation, that have currency in contemporary debates about curriculum. I explore whether these schools of thought offer valuable insights that improve our understanding of the relationship between knowledge and power.

In the next chapter, Chapter 2, I highlight some of the key controversies on the topic through a discussion of Foucault's influential views on the topic. My goal in this chapter is to discuss Foucault's views to surface some of the prevailing understandings of the concepts of knowledge, of power, and of the relation between them. To this end, I highlight contrasting positions with regard to these notions which are brought to the fore in social realism and decolonial theory. In regards to the concept of knowledge, Foucault's historicist account of knowledge brings to the fore the juxtaposition between asocial and social conceptions of knowledge which is taken up, sometimes implicitly, in social realism and decolonial theory. His notion of power highlights the juxtaposition between repressive and productive accounts of power, and is broadly related to the 'power over' and 'power to' distinction in contemporary understandings of power. Finally, I discuss how Foucault's account of knowledge and power as co-constitutive is commonly interpreted as reductionist, and is charged with relativism. The discussion of Foucault highlights that prevalent accounts affirming knowledge's entanglement with power are susceptible to charges of relativism.

It is important to clarify that I discuss Foucault to illustrate an example of an affirmative account of knowledge and power that is widely accused of relativism. I am not adopting a Foucauldian framework for my current investigation.

Having surfaced the problem of relativism that haunts affirmative accounts of knowledge and power, I focus in Chapter 3 on explicating relativism and explaining why it is a problem. I describe the core thesis of relativism as the doctrine of 'equal validity' which states that all knowledge is equally valid. I explain how social constructionism is a common route to relativism but maintain that not all forms of constructionism are relativist. I suggest that the variants of social constructionism that fall prey to relativism are those that account for knowledge primarily in terms of the power interests of knowers, and thus undermine any 'objective' criteria for knowledge. I conclude that the core problem with relativism is that it rejects the possibility of independent and relatively objective criteria for adjudicating between different kinds of knowledge as more or less reliable in achieving truthful knowledge.

Overall, Part I highlights, through the discussion of Foucault, that prevalent affirmative accounts of the relationship between knowledge and power are susceptible to relativism, and tries to show that relativism looms in social accounts of knowledge that account for knowledge in terms of the standpoints of knowers. One aim of this project, then, is to develop an account of knowledge and power that circumvents the problem of relativism by consolidating key insights from social realism and decolonial theory about what it means for knowledge to be social.

Part II critically discusses social realism and decolonial theory. In each of the two chapters, I follow a similar structure and aim at two things. First, I explain the key tenets of each school of thought and excavate their account of the relationship between knowledge and power. Secondly, for each school of thought, I tease out the conceptions of knowledge operationalised and pay attention specifically to how the accounts interpret the idea that knowledge is socially produced. Since Chapter 3 shows that relativism looms in social conceptions of knowledge, my primary aim is to examine whether social realism or decolonial theory reduce knowledge to power and fall prey to relativism in their interpretation of the idea that knowledge is socially produced.

Chapter 4 focuses on the social realist account of the relationship between knowledge and power. Here I critically discuss how social realism conceptualises knowledge and power in effort to 'bring knowledge back in' to the curriculum and advocate for 'powerful knowledge' as a curriculum principle. I critically discuss the social realist notion of 'powerful knowledge' to excavate their particular account of the relationship between knowledge and power. I argue that the social realist account of knowledge and power is 'positive' in the sense that it foregrounds the 'power of'

knowledge. The account argues that knowledge is 'powerful knowledge' is produced using rigorous methods developed by communities of disciplinary experts, and enables those who access it to achieve understandings of the world that go beyond their everyday contexts. This is an account of a kind of knowledge that is powerful.

The social realist view of knowledge argues that knowledge is produced by specialised communities of experts using specialised methods and because of this, knowledge can achieve better approximations of truth. For social realism, the collaborative social production of knowledge using specialised methods is a condition of possibility for more truthful knowledge and for rationally adjudicating between different types of knowledge as more or less reliable. Thus, social realism avoids relativism. The problem is that although it admits the situatedness of knowers, it does not address its implications for specialised knowledge. In this way, I argue, social realism does not sufficiently account for knowledge's entanglement with social power.

Chapter 5 focuses on the decolonial account of knowledge and power. I focus mainly on the modernity/coloniality school of decolonial thought and its critique that dominant knowledge is Eurocentric and reproduces coloniality. The account invokes the social situatedness of knowledge producers to critique Eurocentrism. For decolonisation, the idea that knowledge is socially produced highlights the idea of the situatedness of knowledge producers (and thus knowledge). In specific, decolonisation argues that knowledge production is contaminated by the situatedness of knowledge producers in unequal relations of power. I identify the decolonial account of the relationship between knowledge and power as the claim that knowledge is intricately entangled in colonial systems and relations of power. I suggest that the decolonial emphasis on the deterministic effects of coloniality on knowledge can make it appear as though it reduces knowledge to colonial power and makes the criteria for knowledge colonial power interests. Moreover, I highlight that some proponents of decolonisation seem to promote the relativist thesis of the equal validity of knowledge. I argue, however, that relativism is not a necessary feature of decolonisation and that decolonisation makes a key contribution towards strengthening knowledge by exposing the possible contaminating effects of power on knowledge and offering proposals for addressing these contaminations. Crucially, decolonisation shows that improving knowledge production requires taking questions of 'who' produces knowledge seriously.

My main finding in Part II is that social realism and decolonial theory emphasise different aspects of what it means for knowledge to be socially constructed and consequently offer different accounts of knowledge's connection to power. Roughly, social realism emphasises the idea of the sociality of knowledge production and decolonisation emphasises the idea of the situatedness of

knowledge producers. Social realism and decolonial theory emphasise one aspect of the idea that knowledge is socially produced to the relative neglect of the other aspect and makes it seem as though these aspects are incompatible and even oppositional.

Part III consolidates and synthesises the insights from social realism and decolonial theory in order to map out potential directions for a way towards reconciling the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production with the involvement of power in knowledge production. I argue that social realism and decolonial theory emphasise different aspects of the idea that knowledge is social which must be seen as complementary in an account of knowledge and power that reconciles the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production with the involvement of power in knowledge production.

Chapter 6 starts by reiterating that what emerges strongly from the chapters in Part I and II is that accounting for the relationship between knowledge and power turns on how we conceptualise the idea that knowledge is produced socially and in certain social conditions. I divide the chapter into two main sections and proceed as follows.

In section one, I elaborate and extend my analysis of how social realism and decolonial theory interpret the broad idea that knowledge is socially produced. Social realism emphasises that the idea of the sociality of knowledge production — the specialised production of knowledge by communities of experts using rigorous methods — is the condition of possibility for achieving better approximations of truth, but it admits that knowledge can be influenced by power. Decolonial theory emphasises that the social situatedness of knowledge producers — that knowledge is produced by subjects who stand in social relations of power — is the condition of possibility for power to enter knowledge, but it does not necessarily deny that the social production of knowledge enables the achievement of greater truth. The shortcoming of social realism is that it does not sufficiently explore the implications of the social situatedness of knowers in the production of knowledge. The shortcoming of decolonial theory is that it risk being relativist in emphasising the deterministic role of power in knowledge.

In section two, I argue that the idea of the sociality of knowledge production and the idea of the situatedness of knowledge producers are complementary and conjointly necessary for an account of knowledge and power which attempts to reconcile the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production with the perpetual involvement of power in knowledge production. I maintain, crucially, that while social realism and decolonial theory emphasise two different aspects of the idea that knowledge is socially constructed, they do not completely reject the aspect that they each do not emphasise.

I argue that decolonial theory emphasises the social situatedness of knowledge producers is a 'door-way' to power in a way that helps us think about the constitution of knowers along race, class and gender which is important for being critical of knowledge production in ways that can strengthen the knowledge produced. What decolonisation shows us is that taking into account the situatedness of knowledge is essential to addressing the possible contaminations of power in knowledge. I suggest that this decolonial argument and insight is compatible with social realism because social realism only contests understandings of the idea of the situatedness of knowledge producers that treat knowledge as reducible to the standpoints of knowers. Ultimately, social realism *and* decolonisation demonstrate that improving knowledge production requires taking equally serious questions of 'who' produces knowledge as well as 'how' knowledge is produced.

Chapter 7 concludes the study. I note some methodological as well as substantive limitations of the study and underscore the contribution of the thesis. These limitations notwithstanding, the contribution my thesis makes is to show that the idea of the situatedness of knowledge producers is complementary to the idea of the sociality of knowledge. Affirming the involvement of power in knowledge production through the situatedness of knowers does not entail giving up on the truth-seeking goal of knowledge because taking the situatedness of knowers seriously in knowledge does not necessarily mean succumbing to relativism.

I end with some initial reflections on what the possible implications of my argument are for curriculum thinking.

Part I

2 Foucault's historical analysis of knowledge and power

Michel Foucault is a prominent figure on the topic of knowledge and power. His views on the subject are widely influential and controversial. He is commonly associated with postmodernism. The significance and utility of Foucault's work within contemporary thought in the social sciences and some medical fields is widely acknowledged. His thought spans across a diversity of fields including political philosophy, gender studies, epistemology, history, psychology and psychiatry. It would be remiss, maybe even considered fraudulent, to investigate knowledge and power without mentioning Foucault. Substantively, two features of Foucault's thought on the subject make him relevant and useful particularly for introducing this project. The first is the explicit pertinence of power and knowledge in Foucault's thought, and his affirmation of their relation. The relationship between knowledge and power formed a central concern of his work. Foucault (Foucault, 1980, p. 94) explains that 'it is the rules of power and the powers of true discourses, that can be said more or less to have formed the general terrain of my concern, even if, as I know full well, I have traversed it only partially and in a very zig-zag fashion'. In Foucault's view, knowledge cannot be disassociated from power. The second feature of Foucault's thought that makes him relevant is the charge of relativism that plagues Foucault's view that knowledge and power cannot be disassociated. This relativism critique is a paradigmatic concern for general efforts at interrogating the relationship between knowledge and power, and is the focus of this project.

Foucault's views on knowledge and power are formulated in complex ways across his works. The problematic of *'pouvoir-savoir'*, commonly translated as 'power-knowledge', is a fundamental theme of his historical genealogies (*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison; History of Sexuality; and Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*) as well as other seminal works such as *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*. The scholarship on Foucault's thought sometimes divide his thought into the archaeological and genealogical periods (see Lončarević, 2013). Broadly, the genealogies are understood as explorations into the historical conditions of possibility for bodies of knowledge on topics such as sexuality, prisons, madness and subjectivity. The historical genealogies describe and analyse the ways in which discourses on these subjects are historically conditioned and entangled with power interests. Foucault's archaeological method, Tiisala (2015, p. 654) points out, aims to 'uncover historically specific systems of unconscious rules' that shape the determinations of what falls within the candidacy for truth. Allen (2010, p. 145) suggests that Foucault's archaeology shows that knowledge is 'a historical economy of statements' which are generated by a set of rules.

My discussion of Foucault's views draws on textual evidence from his works and secondary sources on his scholarship. Given the vast breadth of Foucault's works on the subject of knowledge and power, it would be ambitious here to attempt to capture his views across all his works, and the wide-ranging debates they have spurred. My discussion will thus draw mainly from his lectures and interviews in the edited collection *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews & Other Writings* and his lectures in *Subjectivity and Truth*. Arguably, these interviews and lectures succinctly summarise Foucault's views on power/knowledge and explain what he sought to do in undertaking this topic.

This chapter 'sets the stage' for the current investigation by expounding Foucault's views on the relationship between knowledge and power. I use Foucault's views of knowledge and power to sketch out some dominant juxtaposed conceptions of power, knowledge and the relation between these concepts. My objective is to draw key insights from Foucault's views to highlight some of the key controversies surrounding the topic in order to frame the scope of this investigation. I show that one main controversy surrounding interrogations of knowledge's entanglement with power is that such interrogations are susceptible to charges of relativism and accompanying accusations of seeking to debunk knowledge. I divide this chapter into three main sections.

The first three sections present a critical discussion of Foucault's conception of the relationship between knowledge and power. Here I demonstrate how Foucault's conception of 'power as not merely repressive' and conception of 'knowledge as a thing of this world' permit his account of the relationship between knowledge and power as co-constitutive. Importantly, Foucault's historical view of knowledge surfaces the idea that knowledge is conditioned by the historical context of its production. I then explain Foucault's co-constitutive account of the relationship between knowledge and power.

In the fourth section, I critically discuss the charge of relativism against Foucault's account of the relationship between knowledge and power. The criticism is that Foucault reduces knowledge to its historical context and thus falls into the relativist tendency to undermine the idea of objective truth. I briefly explain some of the responses and defences of Foucault's views against these criticisms. My objective is not to settle the disputes but to highlight the problem of relativism for affirmative accounts of knowledge and power and how it arises.

The last section concludes by summarising the chapter and highlighting the main insights from the discussion that frame the scope and contribution of this study. Ultimately, I inherit the Foucauldian idea that knowledge's entanglement with power does not mean that the pursuit of truth is doomed to fail. But I learn from Foucault that this idea is difficult to hold if power is seen as inextricable from knowledge.

2.1 Knowledge as subject and object

Foucault's framing of his investigation into the relation of knowledge and power was, in his view, radically different from his contemporaries. He highlights two main ways in which the question of knowledge and power was framed, and makes clear that his approach is different. Firstly, Foucault notes that the question during the time of his studies was expressed mainly in terms of questions surrounding 'the political status of science and the ideological functions which it could serve' (Foucault, 1980, p. 109). This is an ideological framing of knowledge and power. Gordon (1980, p. 236) notes that Foucault's investigations into power and knowledge are commonly taken as a variant of radical ideological critiques that condemn all dominant and socially ratified forms of knowledge as masks and instruments of oppression. However, Srinivasan (2019, p. 140) suggests that Foucault's genealogical account of knowledge is not centrally concerned with the ways in which ideology informs knowledge. So what distinguishes Foucault's thought on knowledge and power from ideological critiques of knowledge? This question is complicated and can only be dealt with superficially here.[7]

Generally, ideological critiques of knowledge and power aim to show that knowledge is an instrument of power and aims at oppression and control. Ideological critiques of knowledge 'attempt to unmask various soft, deceptive, and frequently internalized forms of power' (Morris, 2016, p. 6). Morris (2016, p. 3) writes that 'Marx variously discusses ideology as cognitively distorted thought and as the intellectual weaponry of a particular class'. Srinivasan (2019, p. 140) notes that Frankfurt school ideology critiques, for example, seek to emancipate knowledge from bourgeois ideology by exposing its deficient epistemic standing. Ideological critiques of knowledge seem to presuppose that knowledge can be emancipated from power whereas for Foucault, as I show in the next sections, all forms of knowledge are inexorably linked to power. Allen (2017, p. 190) suggests that 'the refusal of the attempt to emancipate truth from power is what distinguishes Foucault's analysis of power/knowledge from classical forms of ideology critique'.[8] Foucault seems less concerned with the cognitive distortion of knowledge claims and its ideological roles. Alcoff (1993, p. 112) suggests that Foucault's account is unlike ideological critiques of knowledge and power which reduce knowledge to an instrument of power.

Foucault is not concerned with how knowledge can be cognitively distorted through its connections with ideology. In general, he is interested in the historical mechanisms and processes

[7] The relation between Foucault's account and ideological critiques of knowledge is contested. Morris (2016, p. 7), for example, seems to put Foucault's account under the same category as ideological critiques of knowledge.

[8] Ideological critiques of knowledge, such as those inspired by Marxism, tend to want to emancipate knowledge from the class and class interests while at the same time 'reserving for their own theory (Marxism) an epistemological privilege as existing beyond, and being unaffected by, ideology' (Hammer, 2020, p. 247).

that establish discourses of truth. Foucault explains that he is concerned with 'the politics of the scientific statement' (Foucault, 1980, p. 112), specifically in the human and social sciences. Foucault's investigations of power/knowledge focus on the politics of how scientific statements come to be demarcated and categorised as such. Foucault sought to understand 'what governs statements, and the way in which they govern each other so as to constitute a set of propositions which are scientifically acceptable, and hence capable of being verified or falsified by scientific procedures' (Foucault, 1980, p. 112). This seems different to the concern with exposing the ideological underpinnings and aims of knowledge.

The second way that the question is traditionally framed in political philosophy, according to Foucault, is in terms of understanding how knowledge governs the legitimate exercise of power. In contrast, Foucault does not ask how knowledge sets the limits or governs the legitimate exercise of power. His central question is: 'what rules of right power implements to produce discourses of truth?' (Foucault, 1980, p. 93). In other words, Foucault focuses on understanding how power is implicated in the production of knowledge discourses. Foucault's investigation into knowledge and power seeks to understand how knowledge production is conditioned by power, and how power is in turn conditioned by and operates through knowledge. A fundamental presupposition in Foucault's project is that 'the way in which the reasonable has been demarcated from the unreasonable, the true from the false, and the justified from the unjustified, is ultimately historically contingent' (Alcoff, 1993, p. 97). As Foucault puts it,

> each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1980, p. 131)

The goal of Foucault's analysis of power/knowledge regimes, then, is to provide a historical analysis of the 'politics of truth' (A. Allen, 2017, p. 191). Foucault is concerned with understanding the rules governing the intelligibility of the historically contingent bodies of scientific knowledge (Gordon, 1980, p. 244). He investigates the internal and external historical conditions of possibility of intellectual discourses. This does not mean that Foucault is attempting to understand and explain the ways in which certain bodies of knowledge in particular historical moments were justified by certain kinds of evidence (Gordon, 1980). Gordon (1980, p. 242) cautions against understanding Foucault's project as an attempt 'to interrogate the rationality of the "present"' in a way that entails a study of the relation between theory and evidence, as we might do in analytic epistemological

analysis. Foucault's work is more meta-philosophical: it seeks to investigate the historical conditions of possibility that frames what he calls the 'episteme'. The episteme is

> the epistemological space or field of a particular period that allowed for a specific kind of knowledge – its very possibility – to exist. It is a hidden mental infrastructure underlying all strands of knowledge … it aimed to discover what hidden order governed the way individuals came to know their world and themselves. (Drolet, 2015, p. 88)

The episteme consists of 'the list of "conditions," which qualifies something as a potential object of knowledge' (Maniglier, 2013, p. 106). Put simply, then, Foucault sought to understand the rules of formation and modification of statements which are accepted as scientific, and thus capable of truth during different historical periods. More specifically, Allen (2017, p. 190) suggests that Foucault's investigation of the relationship between knowledge and power constitutes a critical reflection on the 'power-laden conditions of possibility for forming true statements'. She explains that for Foucault, the dangers and historical effects of forms of rationality consist primarily in their entanglements with relations of social power (A. Allen, 2017, p. 187). Foucault's work was critical: it sought to uncover how certain bodies of knowledge become accepted as candidates of truth and intellectual discourse, and might escape critical scrutiny, through their association with the power interests in a particular historical moment.

Furthermore, Foucault's power/knowledge views arise in the context of his broader efforts to analyse the 'genealogy of the modern subject': the history of which humans became both objects and subjects of scientific inquiry (Foucault, 1984). Foucault's analysis of the relation between power and knowledge 'examines the societal arrangements that make possible certain kinds of research and the effects of such knowledge on individuals' (Wong, 2003, p. 119). The human social sciences are the primary object of inquiry for Foucault. However, Foucault does not work within the human sciences in search for the truth or falsity of specific claims made within disciplines. Foucault's genealogies sought to interrogate and reveal the historical conditions of possibility for the human sciences and the contemporary order of rationality (Gordon, 1980). He 'analyses the structures of the human sciences treated as discursive systems' (Foucault, 1984, p. 12). Foucault's central question, according to Gordon (1980, pp. 230–231), is: 'how are the human sciences historically possible, and what are the historical conditions of their existence?'

Having clarified the framing concerns of Foucault's investigation into knowledge and power, I turn now to present and discuss his characterisation of the relationship between knowledge and power. I begin by explaining Foucault's conceptions of knowledge and of power, and then present his co-constitutive account of knowledge and power. As concepts in themselves, knowledge and power

are widely studied and their definitions highly contested. Foucault's understanding of these concepts departs radically from traditional dominant theorisations of the concepts. The discussion I undertake below of his understandings of these concepts allows for a surfacing and brief survey of some of the common ways in which we define these terms.

Foucault conceptualised knowledge and truth by grasping how it operates through his historical genealogies. This historical approach to questions of knowledge indicate that Foucault was not intending to present a general 'abstract' theory of knowledge. In this way, Foucault's approach contrasts with how the question of knowledge is traditionally taken up specifically in mainstream analytic philosophy. According to Foucault, the central concern around knowledge and truth in traditional philosophy from Plato to Kant is the question of the possibility of a truth for a subject in general: 'how and on what conditions I can know the truth, or: how is knowledge as experience peculiar to a knowing subject possible? Or: how can someone who has this experience recognize that it is indeed a matter of true knowledge?' (Foucault, 2017, p. 10).

The traditional philosophical framing of the question of knowledge centres on defining the necessary and sufficient conditions for knowledge. The chief aim is to understand how we can identify knowledge. To this end, the classical conception of knowledge defines knowledge as a set of beliefs about the world that represent the world accurately and are formed through reasoned inquiry.[9] Rorty (1986, p. 44) points out that 'rational inquiry, the Cartesian says, is the process of insuring that representations correspond to reality — so a fixed reality means a fixed method'. In the classical conception, knowledge is a set of statements that say something true about the world. Rational inquiry is the method by which we achieve knowledge which accurately represents objective reality according to the classical view of knowledge. The general idea in the classical view of knowledge is that subjects acquire knowledge of mind-independent objects. There is a foundational distinction between subject-object that is drawn, where the subject is the condition of cognition. A corollary presupposition in this classical conception of knowledge is that 'there are objects in the world which offer themselves to be known, which are knowable in essence regardless of there being a subject which knows them' (Maniglier, 2013, p. 106).

Foucault's conception of knowledge and truth is radically different from the classical conception of knowledge, and challenges some of the core presuppositions of the classical idea of knowledge. Foucault does not raise the questions 'what is knowledge?' and 'how do we identify it?' Foucault's focus, as I explained above, is on the historical conditions of possibility for knowledge. In this way, Foucault's focus on knowledge contrasts with the classical focus on the content of knowledge. The

[9] In the next chapter, Searle (1993) defines this as the 'Western rationalistic tradition'.

heart of the question of truth for Foucault is not 'truth as content of knowledge or as formal structure of knowledge' but instead 'truth as bond, as obligation, and also as politics' (Foucault, 2017, p. 13). Foucault argues that:

> Truth is not defined by a certain content of knowledge that is thought to be universally valid, it is not even defined by a certain formal and universal criterion. Truth is essentially conceived as a system of obligations, independently of the fact that it may or may not be considered true from this or that point of view. Truth is above all a system of obligations. (Foucault, 2017, p. 12)

What is of importance about truth, according to Foucault, is not whether it is an objective and accurate representation of reality, which would make it universally valid. For Foucault, what is important about truth is its politics and the set of obligations that it confers. Crudely, Foucault is interested in how truth comes to be 'truth' and what it is capable of doing by virtue of its being 'truth'. Foucault is interested in 'the experience of ourselves in light of the existence of discourses about subjectivity which circulate, have the weight of truth, and are accepted as such' (Foucault, 2017, p. 11). His investigations into truth aim to understand

> what the effects on subjectivity are of the existence of a discourse that claims to tell the truth about subjectivity? ... In what ways is our experience of ourselves formed or transformed by the fact that somewhere in our society there are discourses considered to be true, which circulate and are imposed as true, based on ourselves as subjects? What mark, what wound or what opening, what constraint or what liberation is produced on the subject by acknowledgement of the fact that there is a truth to be told about him, a truth to be sought, or a truth told, a truth imposed? (Foucault, 2017, p. 11)

Foucault is essentially concerned with the efficacy of truth. According to Prozorov (2019, p. 21), Foucault aims to understand 'how statements of truth could have the power to modify reality itself by virtue of their status as truth'. Foucault's conception of truth highlights, critically, the power effects of knowledge when it acquires the status of truth.

> By truth I do not mean 'the ensemble of truths which are to be discovered and accepted', but rather 'the ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and *specific effects of power attached to the true*', it being understood also that it's not a matter of a battle 'on behalf' of the truth, but of a battle about the status of truth and the economic and political role it plays (emphasis mine). (Foucault, 1980, p.132)

To put it crudely, Foucault's view is that there is nothing more important about 'truth' in itself than its status as 'truth' and what this status can achieve politically, economically and socially. Allen (2010, p. 155) captures this sentiment when he writes:

> Knowledge is a status for statements. To "know" is to make pronouncements whose prestige predisposes people to take them seriously. Knowledge is what knowledge authorities take seriously. To "know" is to occupy a position (a prestige) in a historical episteme from which to speak in the name of knowledge.

Foucault's interest in knowledge and truth surrounds the status and efficacy of knowledge claims because he does not believe that knowledge acquires the status of truth through the 'being of things in reality' but instead through a system of historically contingent and determined rules that are power-saturated. For Foucault, there is an 'ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated' (Foucault, 1980, p. 132). Knowledge claims, to be crude, are not true because they represent reality where this reality is something beyond our representations of reality. This view rejects the correspondence theory of truth that undergirds mainstream understandings of knowledge and truth.

In terms of how we achieve knowledge and truth, Foucault challenges the notion of the subject of knowledge that Descartes, for example, paints in his *Meditations* where the subject of knowledge individually, in isolation and suspended from their exteriority, through rational reflection comes to knowledge. In contrast to this notion, Foucault argues that

> truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who has succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. (Foucault, 1980, p. 131)

There is an important sense in which, according to Foucault, we form ourselves as subjects in relation to existing knowledge and truth. Hence, Foucault challenges the notion of the 'givenness' of the subjects and objects of knowledge in the classical conception of knowledge. Foucault resists the idea that there is a subject prior to knowledge that cognises the world and possesses knowledge and truth. Foucault contends that 'the subject who knows, the objects to be known and the modalities of knowledge must be regarded as so many effects of these fundamental implications of power knowledge and their historical transformations' (Foucault, 1977, pp. 27–28). The point is that the subject does not exist 'outside' or 'prior' to the formations of knowledge. The Foucauldian understanding of subjectivity is that,

> subjectivity is not conceived of on the basis of a prior and universal theory of the subject. … Subjectivity is conceived as that which is constituted and transformed in its relationship to its own truth. No theory of the subject independent of the relationship to the truth. (Foucault, 2017, p. 12)

Part of Foucault's concern with knowledge and truth, is to account for the constitution of the subject as both subject and object of knowledge. Foucault is crucially concerned with 'the oddity of a possible scientific object that would at the same time be the object for whom there are objects in general' (Maniglier, 2013, p. 106). Foucault believed that to arrive at an understanding of the formation of the subject through knowledge discourses one has to dispense with the idea of the constituent subject that exists 'prior' to knowledge (Foucault, 1980, p. 117). Moreover, Foucault

maintained that genealogy is the proper method that would enable us to understand this oddity of subjects being both subjects and objects of knowledge. As he puts it, genealogy is

> a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history. (Foucault, 1980, p. 117)

Ultimately, Foucault rejects 'the Cartesian picture of an autonomous rational subject set over against a world of objects which it seeks to represent and, through representing, to master' (McCarthy, 1990, p. 438). Foucault denies the traditional 'identification of knowledge with abstract and universal truth that is available only to the abstract knower' (Shomali, 2010, p. 4). For Foucault, the duality of humans as both subject and object of knowledge is a grounding fact of the contingency of knowledge of the human sciences. Foucault's conception of knowledge is that it always has ties to and is in fact formed via its relationship with social, economic, and political practices.

The main claim to takeaway is that for Foucault, historically formed and contingent rules and procedures which are power-laden determine what we come to view as proper objects of knowledge and candidates for truth. Thus knowledge, according to Foucault, is historically produced and determined in power-laden contexts. Furthermore, truth claims, according to Foucault, attain the status of truth through historical processes and procedures, and have transformative effects on the subjects of knowledge. This idea of the historical formation and determination of knowledge is closely related to the idea of the social situatedness of knowledge producers (and hence of knowledge) which is brought to the fore in Chapter 5.

2.2 Knowledge as power's power: against a repressive account of power

> If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, one would not be brought to obey it. (Foucault, 1980, p. 119)

The concept of power is widely studied and contested across various disciplines including political philosophy, economics, sociology and so on. Common investigations of the concept offer various theories of power. Foucault, by contrast, does not develop an 'abstract' general theory of power. His conception of power derives from his analysis of how power operates in particular spheres of society. Speaking of his contemporaries, Foucault writes:

> The way power was exercised — concretely and in detail — with its specificity, its techniques and tactics, was something that no one attempted to ascertain; they contented themselves with denouncing it in polemical and global fashion as it existed among the 'others', in the adversary camp. (Foucault, 1980, pp. 115–116)

Discontented with the lack of studies focusing on the operations of power, Foucault conceptualises power by analysing how it operates. In this analysis, Foucault departs with dominant approaches to theorising power: juridical approaches and approaches that centre domination or repression. The juridical conception highlights an opposition between what is legitimate and illegitimate, and the repressive conception highlights an opposition between struggle and submission (Foucault, 1980, p. 92). The juridical approach to power is expressed most commonly in the notion of 'sovereign' power, or state power.

Both the juridical and domination approaches to power view power as a thing to be held. More specifically, power is held over someone, or something. These forms of power are exercised in forms of prohibition and repression by those who have power against those who do not. In juridical form, power works punitively to encourage and enforce obedience (Hewett, 2004, p. 9). In this form, the state and its institutions are the primary site of power. Power operates through the law (Lončarević, 2013). This form of power institutionalises, through law and other social practices, what is acceptable and not acceptable within society, and develops the mechanisms by which to prohibit transgressions from the law. Similarly, the repressors possess the repressive-domination form of power over those who are repressed, and power is exercised for the purposes of domination.

Foucault rejects the underlying presupposition in the two dominant approaches that power is possessed and can be localised in persons or institutions. Foucault explains that 'power is quite different from and more complicated, dense and pervasive than a set of laws or a state apparatus' (Foucault, 1980, p. 158). Power must be seen not as 'a quantity that can accrue to institutions as if stored in a vault, but as a more fluid operation that structures possibilities for action in a given domain' (Alcoff, 2013, p. 214). One impoverishes the conception of power, according to Foucault, if one poses it solely in terms of legislation and constitution, in terms solely of the state and the state apparatus. Power is not reducible to institutions such as the state, because it is not a 'thing' to be held. Foucault's understanding of power is encapsulated in the following passage:

> Power is not that which makes the difference between those who exclusively possess and retain it, and those who do not have it and submit to it. Power must by analyzed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localized here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising this power. They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application. (Foucault, 1980, p. 98)

The Foucauldian conception of power recognises power as extending beyond the limits of the state, beyond juridical forms of power. Specifically, Foucault maintains that 'the functioning of the prohibitive power of the state depends on, and in turn conditions, the multiple power relations existing in different forms in different spheres of life' (Foucault, 1980, p. 122). The basic idea is that 'power is "omnipresent" in discursive relations, as well as non-discursive relations; it is an event that is participated in, and it has different components and effects that go beyond its exercise through domination and subjugation' (Hewett, 2004, p. 8). The extension and application of power is multi-directional. Power emerges out of relationships within situations. It is not a thing that is held in a localised manner. It works through certain instruments of course, like institutions and persons. However, it is not an inherent property of such instruments.

More fundamentally, Foucault opposes the over-emphasis on power's prohibitive force in dominant understandings of power. The heart of Foucault's discontent is that dominant approaches crucially neglect the productive force of power and over-emphasise its prohibitive force. The repressive model of power represents power as a force to be overthrown or dismantled. Foucault does not deny the 'negative' side of power. However, Foucault argues that 'we cannot understand power fully and completely if we understand it as negative and as it only says "no"' (Lončarević, 2013, p. 72). For Foucault, the negative understanding of power is 'wholly inadequate to the analysis of the mechanisms and effects of power that it is so pervasively used to characterize today' (Foucault, 1980, p. 92). Foucault argues that understanding power as prohibitive could not account for its effectiveness because if power is simply prohibitive, then

> it is incapable of doing anything, except to render what it dominates incapable of doing anything either, except for what this power allows it to do. If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, one would not be brought to obey it. (Foucault, 1980, p. 119)

Foucault rejects the idea that the 'essence' of power is domination, or the understanding of power as an inherently forceful form of prohibition. Foucault's positive account of power's efficacy argues that

> What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which run through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (Foucault, 1980, p. 119)

More specifically, the efficacy of power rests on 'the installation of what Foucault calls a politics or a regime of truth-as opposed to a reign of falsity' (Gordon, 1980, p. 237). The effectiveness of

power is not to be explained in terms of its prohibitive force, but in terms of its connection with certain knowledge discourses in society. As Foucault (1980, pp. 93–94) argues,

> we are subjected to truth in the sense in which it is truth that makes the laws, that produces the true discourse which, at least partially, decides, transmits and itself extends upon the effects of power. In the end, we are judged, condemned, classified, determined in our undertakings, destined to a certain mode of living or dying, as a function of the true discourses which are the bearers of the specific effects of power.

Put differently,

> The essential function of the discourse and techniques of right has been to efface the domination intrinsic to power in order to present the latter at the level of appearance under two different aspects: on the one hand, as the legitimate rights of the sovereignty, and on the other, as the legal obligation to obey it. (Foucault, 1980, p. 95)

For Foucault, 'power cannot be exerted without the production of knowledge' (Wong, 2003, p. 112). Knowledge serves to ground the power of institutions such as the state. Power works not by domination or repression, but through the authorisation of certain claims of truth. The conception of power as productive through the utilisation of discourses of truth is captured and articulated in Foucault's concept of bio-power. Bio-power is a type of power that focuses on the regulation of subjects through norms. Bio-power operates through the characterisation of norms. Norms are a principle way in which persons were controlled by knowledge (Hewett, 2004, pp. 7–8). As subjects, we organise ourselves in 'normal' ways as a result of new productions of knowledge. The knowledge of social subjects, such as human beings, can transform or re-constitute such subjects (Alcoff, 2013, p. 217).

As I noted above, Foucault maintains that the subject is formed and transformed through certain relations with truth discourses. Discourses influence the behaviour of subjects by convincing them of certain truths. Knowledge has the effects of 'normalising' certain institutions, practices, policies and the power relations constituting these. Wong (2003) illustrates these normalising effects of knowledge through a consideration of the emergence of child development as an area of knowledge. The point of this consideration is to demonstrate how once child development emerged as a field of knowledge — that is, once we could make certain propositions about children and their development — parents willingly changed their behaviour and practices to correspond with these discourses. In turn, this established and legitimised particular relations of power between children and parents.

Ultimately, Foucault's conception of power reveals the subtle way in which power works through association and appeal to knowledge and truth in modern societies.[10] Foucault's account of power's reliance on and invocation of knowledge in its operations demonstrates that 'coercion by violence has been largely replaced by the gentler force of administration by scientifically trained experts, public displays of power by the imperceptible deployment of techniques based on a detailed knowledge of their targets' (McCarthy, 1990, p. 438). He shows that power is no longer exercised through obvious forms of authority such as the sovereign and brute force. It is exercised through subtle forms of constraint. Leiter (2020, p. 5) argues that power works through a form of epistemic (and consequent practical) authority that accrues to 'judgments of normality' regarding how we constitute ourselves as modern subjects. He points out that,

> what marks judgments of normality in the modern era is that their authority derives from the human sciences', that is, from claims about how one ought to be whose authority is, in the first instance, epistemic rather than moral or religious. (Leiter, 2020, p. 5)

The essential point is that power operates through appeal to the epistemic authority of the human sciences to create certain kinds of subjects. Fraser (1981, p. 272) summarises the juxtaposition between Foucault's account of power and prevalent accounts eloquently in the following passage:

> Foucault's account establishes that modern power is "productive" rather than negating. This suffices to rule out liberationist politics which presuppose that power is essentially repressive. Similarly, Foucault's account demonstrates that modern power is "capillary", that it operates at the lowest extremities of the social body in everyday social practices. This suffices to rule out state-centered and economist political praxes since these praxes presuppose that power is located essentially in the state or economy. Finally, Foucault's genealogy of modern power establishes that such power touches people's lives more fundamentally through their social practices than through their beliefs. This, in turn, suffices to rule out political orientations aimed primarily at the demystification of ideologically distorted belief systems.

Foucault's juxtaposition between a repressive and productive conception of power sketchily maps onto the influential distinction in contemporary literature on power between 'power over' and 'power to' distinction. 'Power over' is generally used synonymously with domination. On one prominent understanding, 'power over' refers to exercises of power in which 'A exercises power over B when A affects B in a manner contrary to B's interests' (Lukes, 2004, p. 27).[11] The exercise of 'power over' has negative connotations — it represses or prevents the pursuit of the interest of its object. 'Power to' generally refers to the capacity to do something. Sometimes 'power to' is used

[10] One line of criticism against Foucault's account of power raises concern over the value-neutrality of the account. The issue is that Foucault seems to describe the phenomena of power in neutral terms, bracketing the crucial normative question of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the operations of power (see Fraser, 1981, p. 282).
[11] Dahl (1957, pp. 202–203) formulates the notion of power as 'power over' similarly as: 'A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do'.

as equivalent to empowerment (Pansardi, 2012). 'Power to' highlights what power enables, or what it is able to do, and broadly aligns with Foucault's productive conception of power. In recent discussions, there is contestation about whether 'power over' and 'power to' are as distinct and separate as often assumed (see Morriss, 2012; Pansardi, 2012). The distinction between 'power to' and 'power over' comes up in Chapter 4 in the social realist explication of the notion of 'powerful knowledge'.

Foucault's conception of power as productive as well as his conception of knowledge as a historically formed thing of the world leads to his account of the relationship between knowledge and power as co-constitutive. The next section discusses this account.

2.3 Foucault's power-knowledge: the co-constitution of knowledge and power

I explained in the introduction that there are two main positions on the relationship between knowledge and power: traditionalist and reductivist. Foucault is commonly understood as belonging to the reductivist camp. Foucault's conception of knowledge and power contrasts strikingly with the views that 'knowledge is truly knowledge when it is answerable only to truth; power is not truly power when subject to the authority of knowledge' (B. Allen, 2010, p. 152). Foucault's opposition to the traditionalist view that neglects power's involvement in knowledge is summarised in the following quote:

> Perhaps, too, we should abandon a whole tradition that allows us to imagine that knowledge can exist only where the power relations are suspended and that knowledge can develop only outside its injunctions, its demands and its interests. Perhaps we should abandon the belief that power makes mad and that, by the same token, the renunciation of power is one of the conditions of knowledge. We should admit rather that power produces knowledge (and not simply by encouraging it because it serves power or by applying it because it is useful); that power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations. (Foucault, 1977, p. 27)

Foucault rejects the characterisation of the relationship between knowledge and power that describes the relationship as instrumental in the sense of knowledge serving power, or in the sense that power merely applies knowledge when it is useful. Foucault characterises the relationship between knowledge and power as co-constitutive, meaning that knowledge and power are inextricably connected.

Alcoff (2013, p. 214) suggests that 'in Foucault's work, knowledge and truth is not assumed to operate free from power relations, and he includes here not just the applications of knowledge but also its content'. For Foucault, 'truth isn't outside power' (Alcoff, 2013, p. 209). The relation

between knowledge and power, for Foucault, is a circular relation of partial mutual constitution. Foucault argues:

> In a society such as ours, but basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. (Foucault, 1980, p. 93)

The point is that knowledge has a constituting effect on power relations and systems which in turn set the boundaries of the production of knowledge. Foucault maintains that truth is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it (Foucault, 1980, p. 133). This means that relations of power in our society are

> indissociable from a discourse of truth, and they can neither be established nor function unless a true discourse is produced, accumulated, put into circulation, and set to work. Power cannot be exercised unless a certain economy of discourses of truth functions in, on the basis of, and thanks to, that power. (A. Allen, 2017, p. 190)

The central point is that knowledge and power cannot operate outside of each other. Power creates the conditions of possibility for knowledge, and knowledge in turn validates and reproduces the power that creates its possibilities. Knowledge is necessary for power to operate and power is necessary for knowledge production, but neither is sufficient for the other. Alcoff (2013, p. 217) explains that

> knowledge operates to produce relations of power between epistemic actors designated by their specific roles as expert or informant; such relations of power also make possible the elaboration, development, and testing of knowledges; and these knowledges in turn can constitute our experiences and identities in a material sense, causing experiences and identities to come into being rather than simply causing us to change the way our identities and experiences are named or categorized. Knowledge as power determines definitions of what is conceived as important, as possible, for and by whom. Through access to knowledge and participation in its production, use and dissemination, actors can affect the boundaries and indeed the conceptualization of the possible.

For Simons (2013, p. 304), to say that the relation between power and knowledge is constitutive is to highlight that 'power relations and scientific discourses mutually constitute one another by rendering the social world into a form that is both knowable and governable'.

To summarise, I started out by making clear that Foucault's analysis of power/knowledge sought to investigate the power conditions of knowledge, and the knowledge conditions of power. Foucault explores the power-laden conditions of knowledge production, and the operation of power through the invocation of knowledge. Ultimately, his analysis leads him to conclude that knowledge and power are co-constitutive. Foucault's investigation into knowledge and power examines and characterises the 'myriad ways in which power relations are both conditions and effects of the production of truth about human beings' (McCarthy, 1990, p. 443).

In the next section, I discuss one major criticism to Foucault's account of knowledge and power: the criticism that his account reduces knowledge to power and thus is relativist and undermines the idea of objective truth.

2.4 Foucault, relativism and truth

Foucault's account of knowledge and power as co-constitutive is influential and controversial. The most damning criticism of Foucault's account raises concern that his conception of knowledge as inextricably bound up with power reduces knowledge to power and hence disregards or undermines truth (Habermas, 1987). Foucault's co-constitutive account of power and knowledge 'is often read as threatening the principal norm that guides analytic philosophy itself as well as science: the norm of truth' (Alcoff, 2013, p. 209). Superficially, the concern that Foucault undermines the idea of truth seems to hold. As I explained above, Foucault's work did not aim to dispute the truth or falsity of disciplinary knowledge claims but rather was concerned to reveal 'the politics of truth'.

Rabinow (1984, p. 12) points out that Foucault 'never posed the question of the truth or falsity of the specific claims made in any particular discipline. … His aim was not to unveil the truths they had discovered or the falsities they had propounded'. Foucault's project, according to Alcoff (1993, p. 99), 'was to explore the development of the human sciences in a way that would not refer to the truth-value of their claims or epistemically evaluate the content of their theories'. It seems, at least at first glance, that Foucault side-lined questions of truth as an intrinsic property of knowledge. Goldman calls the tendency to 'bracket' questions of truth in the study of knowledge 'veriphobia'.[12]

[12] 'Veriphobes share the idea that the study of social "knowledge" should be confined to the interpersonal and cultural determination of belief: not true or false belief, just plain belief. When veriphobes talk of "knowledge," they do not refer, as I do, to true belief, but to something like institutionalized belief. They deliberately bracket questions of truth and falsity, holding that nothing legitimate can come of any attempt to draw distinctions in those terms' (Goldman, 1999, p. 7).

In the literature, the critique that Foucault debunks truth is expressed in criticisms of the reductivist nature of his account of power/knowledge.

One prominent line of argument against Foucault's account is that it reduces knowledge to power. In the ordinary sense, to reduce *x* to *y* is to suggests that *x fully depends upon y* or *x is constituted by y*. This typically implies that *x* is *nothing more than y* or *x is nothing over and above y*. To say that Foucault's account is reductivist is thus to imply that it views knowledge as no more than the determinations of power. This can mean that knowledge is identical with power and/or that knowledge is subordinated to power (knowledge is dictated by power). Habermas charges Foucault's account of reductivism. He writes that in Foucault's account:

> Not only are truth claims confined to the discourses within which they arise; they exhaust their entire significance in the functional contribution they make to the self-maintenance of a given totality of discourse. That is to say, the meaning of validity consists in the power effects they have. (Habermas, 1987, p. 279)

Habermas interprets Foucault's account of power/knowledge as replacing the validity conditions of knowledge with power effects and thus essentially dissolving the idea of knowledge as the pursuit of truth. Similarly, Putnam (1992, p. 162) reads Foucault's views on knowledge as suggesting that knowledge is 'mainly determined by unreason and selfish power' while Taylor (1984, p. 175) suggests that for Foucault, truth is subordinated to power. Fricker (2000, p. 154) echoes Taylor's point and suggests that Foucault's co-constitutive account of knowledge and power claims that reason is a fundamentally 'disciplinary' authority in the service of a 'regime of truth' and encapsulates the reductivist position that 'reason is just another form of social power'.

Reductivism about knowledge implies relativism: if knowledge is nothing but power then knowledge is whatever power determines or decides knowledge is. This means that knowledge is relative to power. This renders the very idea of truth claims problematic (Wong, 2003, p. 105). Knowledge and truth are, then, a function of whatever power presents as knowledge and truth in a particular historical period. Foucault denied such reductionism in his views on the relationship between knowledge and power. He says:

> I know that, as far as the general public is concerned, I am the guy who said that knowledge merged with power, that it was no more than a thin mask thrown over the structures of domination . . . [This] is so absurd as to be laughable. If I had said, or meant, that knowledge was power, I would have said so, and, having said so, I would have had nothing more to say. (Michel Foucault quoted in Alcoff, 2013, p. 207)

Those sympathetic to Foucault's account of power/knowledge defend Foucault by trying to show that the reductivist interpretation of Foucault's views is mistaken. Wong states that 'that knowledge and power are intrinsically related to one another in a co-constitutive manner does not mean that

knowledge is reducible to power' (Wong, 2003, p. 119). Falzon, O'Leary and Sawicki (2013, p. 3) write that the question of knowledge for Foucault is

> a concern to understand knowledge not as reducible to, but certainly as bound up with, social power practices, part of the historically emergent order that one's culture exhibits. Knowing that the order governing what we know and do is historically specific has critical implications, since that order is thereby stripped of any necessity or inevitability, and it becomes possible to think about whether or not it should be changed.

Foucault's power/knowledge, according to his defenders, is an attempt to show that knowledge — which may appear timeless, inevitable, unquestionable — has in fact very precise historical conditions of possibility: that it can be dated and therefore appears more contingent than was initially believed' (Maniglier, 2013, p. 104). Foucault's power/knowledge aims to highlight the historical contingency of knowledge and its power-saturatedness. To say that a truth is not necessary is not the same as to say that it is not existent (Prozorov, 2019, p. 27). More banally, it seems Foucault never denied the existence of truths. As mentioned above, Foucault says nothing of the truth value of the statements within the human sciences. He merely traces the emergence of discourses of truth as historically contingent. This idea that the objective of Foucault's power/knowledge account is to emphasise the contingency of the structures of the pursuit of truth makes him susceptible to the charge that he does not, then, contribute to epistemology as a field concerned with the truth content of knowledge claims.

The heart of the criticisms against Foucault is that he debunks the notion of truth: truth is, for him, whatever the power-laden structures and procedures for producing truth at a particular historical period determine to be truth. This is the relativist implication of the reductivist conception of knowledge and power.

2.5 Conclusion: inheriting Foucault

Foucault's co-constitutive account of knowledge and power is one prominent account in the literature. Foucault's co-constitutive account of the relationship between knowledge and power is the idea that knowledge is a condition of possibility for power, and power is a condition of possibility for knowledge. The characterisation of the co-constitution of knowledge and power is possible if we understand, in line with Foucault, that power is productive and that knowledge is a historically contingent thing of this world. Foucault's characterisation of knowledge and power as mutually constitutive does not imply that knowledge and power cannot be separated conceptually. Knowledge and power are conceptually distinct. However, according to Foucault, their operations are dissociable. In other words, power operates partly by appeal to knowledge, and the production of knowledge is conditioned by power. The exercise of either is always, to an extent, the exercise

of both. This is the basic contentious proposition of Foucault's conception of power/knowledge. Foucault's account of the co-constitution of knowledge and power is commonly criticised for its relativism and accused of seeking to debunk the idea of truth. This criticism surfaces the controversial problem of relativism that affirmations of the relation of knowledge and power are susceptible to. The charge of relativism is important because my investigation aims to affirm a relation between knowledge and power without but avoid relativism.

Foucault denies the idea that affirming the relationship between knowledge and power amounts to a denunciation of the idea of truth:

> The relationship between rationalization and excesses of political power is evident. … the problem is: What to do with such an evident fact? Shall we try reason? To my mind, nothing would be more sterile. (Foucault, 1984, p. 13)

For Foucault, affirming the co-constitution of knowledge and power does not mean denouncing reason and truth. As Hewett (2004, p. 24) succinctly puts it, 'to be in a relationship of power is not a mark of immediate rejection, but an invitation to a vigilant investigation'. The historical situatedness of knowledge and its entanglement with power is not necessarily tainting or obscuring truth (Wong, 2003, p. 119). Foucault's exposition of the historical relationship between knowledge and power is not an indictment on knowledge. Gordon (1980, pp. 236–237) argues that

> the purpose of the concept of power/knowledge is not … to act as an offensive weapon of ideological struggle by confronting various 'bourgeois' academic disciplines with the complicities inscribed in their origin. It is not a scalpel serving to extract from the body of good, true science those ideologies which act as comprador allies of repressive power. What is at issue is indeed a certain series of historical connections which become visible and intelligible in terms of power, but these relations are not for Foucault the symptom of a violent transgression of the bounds of legitimate knowledge.

The essential point is that, for Foucault, knowledge's relations with power do not necessarily imply a distortion of knowledge. Hence Foucault does not aim at 'removing' power from knowledge in order to secure and restore knowledge's 'pure' truth, as in the case of ideological critiques. 'It is not a matter of emancipating truth from every system of power (which would be a chimera, for truth is already power)' (Foucault, 1980, p. 133). Foucault's refusal to emancipate knowledge from power begs the question: 'does Foucault have anything worthwhile at all to contribute to epistemology, or is he attempting to discredit the discipline altogether?' (Hewett, 2004, pp. 29–30).

Foucault's historical genealogical approach to questions of knowledge inspire a view of his work as more a contribution towards sociology of knowledge than epistemology (Alcoff, 1993). For one thing, Foucault 'adopts a characterization of what knowledge is based on how we actually determine

it rather than based on idealized notions of what it should be' (Alcoff, 1993, p. 117).[13] The point is that Foucault's approach might offer insight into how the objects of study in question developed in history and how this influenced our understanding of the concept (Hewett, 2004, p. 22) but it does not answer the normative questions of whether or not the development of knowledge was done poorly or not.

Ultimately, I inherit from Foucault the framing of the investigation into knowledge and power as an investigation into the 'politics of truth' with an aim not to undermine truth but to make sense of how both power and truth are features of knowledge. However, I do not hold his view about the inextricability of power from knowledge. Foucault's insistence that power is inextricable from knowledge makes his view difficult to square with the basic idea that power can contaminate knowledge, and thus that the contaminating effects of power must be neutralised. It also makes it difficult to develop a normative account of how knowledge development should be conducted to minimise or subvert the negative influences of power. As will become clear, my argument tries to show that power can enter knowledge production and contaminate it but critical awareness of this can inspire necessary strategies to minimise or avoid the contaminating effects of power on knowledge. While I do not think that detecting the operations of power and reversing them is easy, the claim that power is inextricable from knowledge seems prone to the relativism I wish to avoid.

I highlighted how Foucault's paradigm account of knowledge's entanglement with power is criticised for being relativist and attempting to debunk the idea of truth. In the next chapter, I explain what relativism amounts to and what the problem with relativism is.

[13] 'Epistemology distinguishes itself from the sociology of knowledge in that it is not merely concerned with describing the ways in which human beings have claimed to know, but with considering how this has been done poorly, and how it might be done better' (Alcoff, 2013, p. 207).

3 Relativism, knowledge and power

Relativism plagues most accounts that affirm a relationship between knowledge and power. In this chapter, I define relativism and spell out why it is problematic. I divide the chapter into three sections. In section one, I explain relativism as a topic discussed in philosophy. I define relativism as a philosophical doctrine advancing the equal validity of different kinds of knowledge, and elucidate relativism by juxtaposing it with objectivism and metaphysical realism. I show that relativism undermines objectivism by rejecting metaphysical realism and the idea of objective standards of rationality.

In section two, I discuss relativism's connection with social constructionism. I suggest that there is a mistaken tendency to treat relativism and social constructionism as interchangeable positions and try to show that social constructionism is a common and viable route to relativism but the two positions do not entail each other. Although most (all) relativists are social constructionist, not all social constructionists are relativists. I distinguish between relativist and non-relativist variants of social constructionism and suggest that social constructionism is prone to relativism when it reduces knowledge to the social context of its production and accounts for knowledge primarily in terms of the power interests of those who produce it.

In the last section, I emphasise that the heart of the problem with relativism is that it denies that there can be relatively objective criteria for judging some types of knowledge as more reliable at producing knowledge that approximates truth.

3.1 Defining relativism: the thesis of equal validity

Relativism has a long history of inquiry in philosophy as well as the social sciences. Philosophical discussions of relativism abound in ethics, logic, philosophy of language, metaphysics and epistemology. Relativism has a wide scope of application. I focus here on relativism as it pertains to knowledge. Ordinarily, relativism is understood as the idea that there is no objective truth, 'there is my truth and there is your truth'.[14] Relativism needs to be distinguished from the philosophically close position of scepticism. Scepticism maintains that no genuine knowledge is possible whereas relativism holds that knowledge is possible but always relative to some set of standards or framework (Baghramian, 2013, p. 116; Villa, 2010, p. 173). In this section, I explain relativism and juxtapose it to one form of objectivism that is grounded in metaphysical realism and

[14] In its ancient formulation, this idea appears in Plato's *Theaetetus* (152a 6-8) as 'Each thing appears (*phainesthai*) to me, so it is for me, and as it appears to you, so it is for you — you and I each being a man' (quoted in Baghramian & Carter, 2015, sec. 3).

foundationalism about rationality. Roughly, I explain that relativism denies that knowledge captures a mind-independent reality that is accessed through rational procedures that are foundational and self-evident.

Relativism comes in many forms and can be difficult to articulate coherently. In basic form, relativism involves a descriptive claim and a normative claim. The descriptive claim is that ways of understanding and forms of knowledge vary across different context and hence what counts as knowledge is always relative to some framework. Descriptive relativism asserts that 'the ways in which certain aspects of life and reality have actually been conceptualised and evaluated are relative to culture' (Wiredu, 2008, p. 13). The concepts and conceptual schemes that we use to make sense of the world — how we order the world — are relative to social or cultural context (Hollis & Lukes, 1982, p. 7). The standard formulation of relativism always involves a particular phenomenon X being relativised to a particular frame of reference, for example culture, context or conceptual framework.

From the descriptive claim of variance in ways of understanding the world, relativists make the normative claim that the validity of knowledge is always relative to a particular framework. Normative relativism (sometimes called conceptual or epistemic relativism) is the view that 'a concept is intelligible, or a proposition is true, or an argument is valid if it is accepted within a given culture on the basis of criteria operative therein' (Wiredu, 2008, p. 13). According to this view, 'the soundness, or even intelligibility, of any set of categories of thought is relative to its time, place, or context of origin' and this relativity implies that 'the possibility of critical evaluation from the standpoint of another time, place, or context, is not possible' (Wiredu, 2008, p. 12). The implication is that the criteria for knowledge and its justification is set within particular frameworks — there is no criteria for knowledge that is 'outside' a particular framework.

Relativism denies that there are 'external and independent' standards from which to evaluate knowledge. Kusch (2017, p. 4688) calls this the 'no metajustification' view and explains that

> All forms of epistemic relativism commit themselves to the view that it is impossible to show in a neutral, non-question-begging, way that one "epistemic system", that is, one interconnected set of epistemic standards, is epistemically superior to (all) others.

Epistemic relativism, as Kusch calls it, does not reject the possibility of evaluating knowledge claims. The point is that such evaluation is possible only within a particular framework that stipulates some particular epistemic criteria. Fundamentally, relativism denies that there can be 'a view from nowhere' on knowledge. According to this form of relativism, 'there can neither be a non-relative point of view from which to make claims, nor do human agents have recourse to a

position from which to adjudicate objectively between claims arising in incommensurable or incompatible frameworks' (Hammer, 2020, p. 248). All forms of knowledge, according to relativism, are valid in accordance with epistemic criteria of particular frameworks (Villa, 2010, p. 176). 'Epistemic relativists call into question the very possibility of unique, context independent and objective epistemic access to the world' (Baghramian, 2013, p. 120).

The denial of a 'meta-justification' view from which to judge knowledge embedded in different frameworks is connected to the abandonment of the 'the quest for commensuration: a set of rules which will tell us how rational agreement can be reached or what would settle the issue on every point where statements seem to conflict' (Hollis & Lukes, 1982, p. 4). When faced with two incompatible knowledge claims from different conceptual frameworks, 'the counsel of relativism is that we are to content ourselves with noting the disparity (between different forms of knowledge) and reminding ourselves that each way of thinking is valid within its own conceptual habitat' (Wiredu, 1995, p. 128).[15] For Wiredu (1995, p. 130), this relativist move 'commits the fallacy of supposing that from the tautological truth that every judgment has to be made from some conceptual framework it follows that one cannot make a judgment that is valid across conceptual frameworks'. Typically, relativism discourages evaluations of validity between knowledge embedded within different conceptual frameworks. As I explain in the final section, it is this denial of the possibility of rational adjudication between different types of knowledge that is at the heart of the discontent with relativism.

Relativism exploits the banal fact of variance in forms of knowledge and their always being embedded within particular frameworks to posit the equal validity of all types of knowledge. Relativism involves a postulation of equivalence: the relativist asserts that 'all beliefs are on a par with one another with respect to the causes of their credibility' (Barnes & Bloor, 1982, p. 23). Paul Boghossian calls the relativist postulation of equivalence the 'doctrine of equal validity'. The doctrine of equal validity states that 'there are many radically different, yet "equally valid" ways of knowing the world, with science being just one of them' (Boghossian, 2007, p. 2). The basic idea of 'equal validity' is that different types of knowledge have equal claim to epistemic authority. Relativism suggests that all forms of knowledge are valid only relative to their conceptual frameworks, and all conceptual frameworks have equal claim to epistemic authority. This idea that

[15] Wiredu (1995, p. 128) is sceptical about whether such 'judgmental abstension' is consistent since 'to believe that a proposition is true implies being committed to the falsity of its contradictory. Hence whether one says so explicitly or not, believing a proposition implies being committed to the notion that anybody who holds its contradictory is wrong'. The point is that believing that something is the case entails believing that propositions which are incompatible with the belief to be false (Wiredu, 1995, p. 129). If you take it to be the case that 'it is raining', for example, then this entails that you judge the proposition 'it is not raining' to be untrue.
Mitova (Forthcoming, pp. 9–10) discusses this point under the banner 'the problem of disagreement' against relativism.

different types of knowledge have equal claim to epistemic authority surfaces in the decolonial critique of Eurocentrism in Chapter 5.

In general, relativism contests the idea that all forms of knowledge must satisfy certain universal conditions and norms of validity. Turner (2020, p. 417) writes that 'the intellectual dynamic that produces social science relativism is a response to the universalism of the enlightenment, and its evolutionism'. Relativism insists that different knowledge equally satisfy the standards of validity within their particular conceptual frameworks. Relativists maintain that 'claims to knowledge are at best well justified within their relevant frameworks. Yet being well justified in this sense, knowledge claims cannot claim the status of objective truth' (Hammer, 2020, p. 248). This is the contentious heart of the relativist postulation of equal validity. Relativism is contested because it challenges the common idea that some types of knowledge are better at producing truth than others and thus deserve more epistemic authority.

To successfully undermine the thesis of equal validity, the opponent to relativism must show that there is a set of criteria for knowledge which 'carry their own credibility with them: they will be visible because they glow by their own light' (Barnes & Bloor, 1982, p. 29). Opponents of relativism, according to Barnes and Bloor, must show that there are criteria for judging knowledge that are self-evidently true and do not themselves require further justification.

So far, I have explained that relativism rejects the possibility of making judgments on knowledge outside a particular framework stipulating particular criteria for knowledge. I also explained that relativism maintains that there are many yet equally valid ways of knowing, and as such, different types of knowledge deserve equal epistemic authority. In the next paragraphs, I elucidate the concept of relativism more in juxtaposition to objectivism.

Relativism is generally opposed to objectivism.[16] Anti-objectivist relativism denies that there is such a thing as simply being 'true' and argues that we can coherently discuss truth only in relation to parameters set by different frameworks for thinking (Baghramian & Carter, 2015). The concepts of universality and mind-independence are crucial to objectivism. Objectivists hold that some truths are universal and hold for everyone regardless of whether they are inclined to believe them or not (Boghossian, 2007, p. 13).Objectivism is committed to the view that 'some facts hold mind-independently: they are the case whether or not we are there as subjects to cognise them as such' (Boghossian, 2007, p. 13). More broadly, relativism contrasts what Searle (1993, p. 57) calls 'the

[16] Some scholars argue that relativism is opposed to absolutism (see Villa, 2010, p. 173). Absolutism is the view that there are absolute truths: there are truths that hold universally in every context and for everyone independently of any conditions. These are not bound by any standards, contexts or frameworks.

Western Rationalistic Tradition'.[17] This tradition holds that there is an independently existing reality and that our attempts at saying something about reality achieve truth just in case they conform or correspond to that reality (Searle, 1993, p. 57). The tradition combines, to use philosophical terminology, the positions of objectivism, correspondence theory and metaphysical realism.

The objectivist idea that there are independently existing truths is underpinned by metaphysical realism: 'metaphysical realism represents the basic framework inside which to justify the objectivity of fact-judgements' (Villa, 2010, p. 169). The core claim of realism is the thesis of metaphysical independence. Realism maintains that there are a set of objects or states of affairs which exist independently of us (Braver, 2007, p. 14). The truth about metaphysically independent objects or states of affairs 'has no necessary relation with cognition or its human conditions' (Wiredu, 1995, p. 139). This is why in mainstream philosophy, realism and correspondence theory of truth tend to go together. According to the correspondence theory of truth, truth tracks mind-independent reality. In this view, truth is correspondence between 'something on the side of the mind or language and something on the side of the world' (Braver, 2007, p. 15).

To be sure, the relation between metaphysical realism and the epistemological position of the correspondence theory of truth is not one of logical entailment: the fact that there exists a world that is mind-independent does not necessarily entail that truth is correspondence with the way mind-independent reality is. Braver (2007, p. 16) explains that 'metaphysical realism does not force correspondence truth upon us'. However, there is a 'natural fit' between realism and correspondence theory of truth: 'if the world is out there with a determinate, independent structure, then it would be odd not to define truth as capturing that structure even if this turned out to be unattainable' (Braver, 2007, p. 16).[18] Thus 'even if not mutually entailing, metaphysical realism and correspondence truth naturally go together' (Braver, 2007, p. 17).

The combination of realism and correspondence theory of truth then leads to the epistemological position of objectivism: the idea that there are objectively true knowledge claims. Braver (2007, p. 17) conveys the point as follows:

[17] Some scholars make the same point about postmodernism. For example: Nanda (1998, p. 290) writes: 'Postmodernism in its various versions is skeptical of the representational view of knowledge in which facts are supposed to correspond to elements of a pregiven reality. Postmodernists see the knower, knowledge, and reality all as active constructs of one another, all bearing the marks of the socio-historical context. Thus, knowledge both participates in the construction of reality and is itself a construction'.

[18] There is similar intuitive plausibility to the reverse movement from correspondence theory of truth to realism: 'if truth is correspondence, then there must be something to correspond to' (Braver, 2007, p. 17).

> If reality has a determinate structure independently of us and truth consists in capturing that structure, then there will be one and only one way to do so accurately. … There exists, at least in principle, a total, final account of the contents of the universe and their relations to each other.

The point is that if the mind-independent world is 'ready-made' and has a pre-existing built-in structure, it makes sense that our attempts at truth are attempts to capture this determinate structure and can only happen one way (Braver, 2007, p. 19). Knowledge and truth depend upon fidelity and obedience to the world's pre-existing articulation and order (Braver, 2007, p. 18). Put differently, our attempts at truth amount to fitting and sorting constituent parts of mind-independent reality into a particular pre-determined structure, similar to putting together pieces of a puzzle. Knowledge is the discovery of an already ordered and pre-made world. 'Truth is the certification of the success of the search for reality' (Wiredu, 1995, p. 142). What we discover in our search for truth, according to the view that combines metaphysical realism and correspondence theory of truth, is reality as it is in itself.

In contrast to metaphysical realism, relativists maintain that the world does not present itself to us ready-made or with its inherent structure. Rather we supply different, and at times incompatible, ways of categorising and conceptualising it (Baghramian & Carter, 2015). Crucially, it is important to note that there are different epistemological conclusions that other theories draw from realism. For example: critical realism holds that there is mind-independent reality but does not draw the conclusion that knowledge constitutes some unmediated access to that reality in itself. Our knowledge of reality, according to critical realism, is always mediated by historical and contingent and can never be absolute, infallible or securely represent reality as it is in its 'mind-independent' state (Archer, 1998). Not all forms of realism draw the epistemological conclusion that knowledge represents the 'inherent structure of reality', and is thus infallible, absolute and unchanging.

In the 'Western Rationalist tradition', however, the realist invocation of the inherent structure of reality serves to 'explain the origins and stability of our beliefs' (Haslanger, 2012, p. 117). The objectivist, by appealing to the existence of mind-independent reality, fixes the standard for objectivity: the epistemic authority of different types of knowledge is in accordance with how close the knowledge in question is to mapping the inherent structure of reality. In this view, although knowledge claims may be embedded in different conceptual frameworks, there is the possibility of judging whether or not knowledge claims are objectively valid by checking them against 'the inherent structure of reality'. We may find that some forms of knowledge correspond better with the inherent structure and others do not. The question that remains is how to access the mind-independent reality to be able to measure different types of knowledge against it. The objectivist who subscribes to correspondence theory must hold this access to be possible: 'if truth is

correspondence with objective reality, then a commitment to obtaining truth presupposes that there is a way for the mind to reach and access reality in its mind-independent state, that is, as it is' (Braver, 2007, p. 21).

In the standard view of objectivism, 'an inquiry is *objective* in the relevant sense just in case the way the world is and the rationality of the inquirers are the only factors that determine its outcome' (Haslanger, 2012, p. 108). Objectivists invoke rationality and claim that it allows access to the inherent structure of reality and enables the achievement of objective knowledge. This appeal to rationality as the basis of objective knowledge is invoked by Boghossian (2007, pp. 130–131) when he writes that 'we are capable of arriving at beliefs about how things are that is objectively reasonable, binding on anyone capable of appreciating the relevant evidence regardless of their social or cultural perspective'. The idea of 'appreciating the relevant evidence' gestures at the rationality requirements for knowledge. Objectivism maintains that the question of validity of knowledge is 'settled directly by appeal to evidence and reason and is quite separate from the contingencies of actual belief' (Barnes & Bloor, 1982, p. 28). As Nanda (1998, p. 297) explains,

> The whole point of calling a belief rational is not that it is guaranteed to be true but only that it is arrived at through a process of inquiry that allows the inquirers to be so oriented to evidence that they can change their beliefs in ways that make it more likely that they are true.

Evidence plays a central role in the rational formation of true beliefs in this view. Truth, according to the objectivist, is a function of an independently existing reality which we access through rational inquiry instead of subjective attitudes (Searle, 1993, p. 66). But evidencing reasons are, of course, fallible: we can believe something false on good grounds (Boghossian, 2007, p. 15).[19] Nonetheless, in principle, evidence is something which increases the likelihood of the truth of knowledge claims.

Ordinarily, the notion of rationality is intimately tied to requirements of consistency, justification, warrant and evidence for beliefs (Baghramian & Carter, 2015). Rationality is a formal procedure for assessing knowledge claims; it makes no substantive claims (Searle, 1993, p. 67). It does not prescribe the content of what to believe. Rather, rationality provides a system of how to believe — it suggests that we must believe knowledge claims just in case certain logical relations obtain between reasons and relevant evidence. Rationality, according to Nanda (1998, p. 297), is characterised by 'suspicion toward received authority, a commitment to continually refining one's own understanding, a receptivity toward new evidence and alternative explanatory schemes, and a dedication to logical consistency'. These rational norms, the objectivist maintains, constitute

[19] For instance: the evidence available at a particular time in a particular context may make it reasonable to hold some claim to be true when it is actually false. In such cases, one is justified in believing something, but it is not true.

common criteria for evaluating and distinguishing between different kinds of knowledge. Rational norms provide stable criteria of evaluation because, as Searle (1993, p. 68) puts it, rational standards 'are not up for grabs. They are both objective and intersubjective valid criteria of intellectual achievement and excellence'. Crucially, rational methods of inquiry are taken to be universal and epistemically superior (Boghossian, 2007, pp. 4–5). Rationality is traditionally seen as a cognitive virtue as well as a hallmark of the scientific method. 'Reason is a natural human endowment which when directed properly can lead to the discovery of certain universal truths' (Higgs, 2001, p. 217).

Relativists usually oppose the distinction between 'rational' and 'irrational' beliefs. Barnes and Bloor (1982, pp. 27–28) explain:

> For the relativist there is no sense attached to the idea that some standards or beliefs are really rational as distinct from merely locally accepted as such. Because he thinks that there are no context-free or super-cultural norms of rationality he does not see rationally and irrationally held beliefs as making up two distinct and qualitatively different classes of thing. They do not fall into two different natural kinds which make different sorts of appeal to the human mind, or stand in different relationship to reality, or dependent for their credibility on different patterns of social organization. Hence the relativist conclusion that they are to be explained in the same way.

Barnes and Bloor (1982, p. 28) maintain that 'what counts as 'evidencing reason', that is evidence for a belief, is contingent and socially variable'. What counts as evidence for one group of knowers in one social context might not be evidence for another group. The challenge surrounds how we make judgments about the rationality of different knowledge claims in cases where what counts as relevant evidence for a particular phenomenon X is different according to different paradigms. Hence the relativist undermines the objectivist claims of rational norms as universal. The key question for the objectivist about rationality is: what justifies the rational norms as universally valid?

Some objectivists treat rational norms and processes of justification as self-evidently valid and reliable. Searle (1993, p. 80), for example, writes:

> There is something puzzling about demanding an argument in favor of, or a proof of, the validity of a whole mode of sensibility and framework of presuppositions in which what we count as a proof and as an argument take place. The situation is a bit like the common occurrence of the 1960s in which one was asked to justify rationality: "What is your argument for rationality?" The notion of an argument already presupposes standards of validity and hence rationality. Something only counts as an argument given that it is subject to the canons of rationality. Another way to put this same point is: You cannot justify or argue for rationality, because there is no content to rationality as such, in a way that there is a content to particular claims made within a framework of rationality. You might show that certain canons of rationality are self-defeating or inconsistent, but there is no way to "prove" rationality. (Searle, 1993, p. 80)

Essentially, rational norms cannot be established rationally. No rational defence can be given for these norms because this would entail following certain 'reasoned' procedure which assumes the norms in question. Thus we cannot prove the rationality of rational norms and procedures. We take these to be self-evidently the case and foundational in the sense that they do not require or derive justification from any other norms.

The general point of realism and appeals to rationality is to establish the idea that 'reality itself' and rationality have constraining effects on what we can permissibly claim as true knowledge. If this idea is true, 'the fact of the relativity of our descriptions of the world does not entail that no description of the world could be any closer to the way things are in and of themselves than any other' (Boghossian, 2007, p. 31). However, relativists insist that 'neither reality itself, nor men's relation to it, nor the constraints of rational thinking set limits upon the content or form of our knowledge schemes' (Hollis & Lukes, 1982, p. 7). Relativism maintains that neither reality nor rationality offer independent criteria for knowledge. Relativists maintain that 'the way we take things to be is quite independent of the way things are' (Laudan, 1990, p. viii). If this is true, then the problem of adjudicating between different kinds of knowledge remains.

To conclude this section, let me highlight two salient forms of philosophical criticism against relativism. The first criticism argues that relativism is self-refuting. Relativism claims that there are no objective facts. But if this is the case, then the relativist claim 'there are no objective facts' cannot be true except only for relativists. This is self-refuting. The second criticism undermines relativism through a form of *reductio ad absurdum*. This criticism shows that relativism is implausible because it leads to the unacceptable conclusion that intercultural dialogue is impossible and/or undesirable (Wiredu, 1993, 1995). Wiredu maintains that

> What the relativists need to show is that it is, in principle, impossible for people belonging to different cultures ever to resolve their cognitive differences rationally. This they cannot do, for as a matter of fact, such events have happened in the past. For example, some Africans have come, through an appreciation of the cognitive superiority of scientific methods over the more intuitive approach to the external world prevalent in their traditional societies, to abandon the belief in various supposed extra-human beings. (Wiredu, 1995, p. 136)

Moreover, Wiredu argues that the very possibility of recognising different conceptual frameworks presupposes some minimally shared tools of conducting inquiry (Wiredu, 1995, p. 129).[20] These criticisms highlight the conceptual inconsistencies of relativism. I set these aside here. I focus instead on the relativism problem of adjudicating between epistemically better and worse forms of

[20] Davidson (1973) argues along similar lines that relativism presupposes too radical a divergence between different conceptual frameworks to make the point of their incommensurability. He undermines such radical divergence by appeal to translatability between different conceptual frameworks.

knowledge in the last section of this chapter. In the next section, I discuss relativism's connection with social constructionism. I describe how social constructionism about knowledge paves the way to relativism but distinguish between relativist and non-relativist variants of social constructionism.

3.2 Relativism via social constructionism

> Once we allow the possibility of social construction in any given domain — values, norms, theories, objects, institutions, facts, etc. — then the possibility of relativising these constructs to the context and conditions of their construction arises. (Baghramian, 2013, p. 106)

Relativism is often commonly associated with social constructionism, and sometimes the positions are used interchangeably. Baghramian and Carter (2015) as well as Mitova (Forthcoming, p. 8), for instance, treat relativism as a form of social constructionism. Similarly, the following description of social constructionism by Nanda (1998, p. 287) captures the core claim of relativism: 'social constructivist theories hold as their first principle that the standards of evaluation of truth, rationality, success, and progressiveness are relative to a culture's assumptions'. The exact relationship between relativism and social constructionism is not easily discernible. Not all forms of social constructionism are relativist. Social realism, as I discuss in Chapter 4, is social constructionist but vehemently anti-relativist. In this section, I disentangle the different claims of social constructionism and relativism to delineate their relation more clearly. I argue that social constructionism does not logically entail relativism and distinguish between relativist and non-relativist variants of social constructionism.

Social constructionism has achieved great prominence in the contemporary academy (Boghossian, 2007, p. 16). Relativism's popularity in contemporary social sciences is usually exemplified in sociological accounts of knowledge. According to Schantz and Seidel (2013, p. 11), 'it was above all twentieth century work in the philosophy of science and the sociology of (scientific) knowledge that set the scene for a flourishing of relativist (and constructivist) claims'. The rise of relativism is also attributed to the influence of postmodernism. Boghossian (2007, p. 2) points out that postmodernist forms of relativism have achieved the status of orthodoxy in many of the human and social sciences except mainstream analytic philosophy. One possible explanation for analytic philosophy's steadfast immunity to relativism is its general tendency to treat knowledge as abstract and asocial. In contrast, the social sciences' tendency to focus on the socio-cultural determinants of human beliefs and actions makes them more hospitable to relativism. There is a shared focus on the social context-dependence of knowledge between relativism and social sciences. Sociological accounts of knowledge focus primarily on the social reality of knowledge (Berger & Luckmann, 1967, p. 15).

To begin with, the terms 'social constructionism' and 'constructivism' are sometimes used interchangeably. However, these terms have different uses in different disciplines and fields of study. For example: as a theory in developmental and cognitive psychology, constructivism is concerned with the internal individual cognitive processes of how we know, that is, how we integrate new knowledge with pre-existing knowledge and so on (R. Young & Collin, 2004). Broadly, constructivism 'proposes that each individual mentally constructs the world of experience through cognitive processes' (R. Young & Collin, 2004, p. 375). Hence as a theory of pedagogy informed by these insights from psychology, constructivism focuses on how learners acquire and cognitively organise knowledge (S. Allais, 2014, p. 195).

There are two variants of 'social constructionism' in discussions of epistemology that are relevant in this project. The first variant of social constructionism foregrounds the idea that it is because knowledge is socially produced by institutionalised social practices and social groups that it offers better approximations of truth. The second variant of social constructionism, what Allais (2014, p. 196) calls 'epistemological constructionism', foregrounds the idea that knowledge is socially constructed and hence 'knowledge is inevitably and inextricably bound to the interests and standpoints of the individuals and groups producing it'. Broadly, the former avoids relativism by suggesting that there are relatively 'objective' criteria for adjudicating between different knowledge because not all knowledge is produced in equally reliable ways. The latter is prone to relativism because the criteria for knowledge becomes the arbitrary social and power interests of knowledge producers.

What is social constructionism, and how is it different to relativism? Ordinarily, 'something is a social construction just in case it is an intended or unintended product of a social practice' (Haslanger, 2012, p. 86). Socially constructed facts obtain because of the existence and doing of humans; they depend on human attitudes and interactions (Baghramian, 2013, p. 106; Boghossian, 2007, p. 25; Haslanger, 2012, p. 214). Boghossian (2007, p. 18) explains that 'facts are socially constructed if and only if it is necessarily true that it could only have obtained through the contingent actions of a social group'. Constructionists share the fundamental idea that some things come into existence and are the way they are because of human practice, but they can diverge on the range of objects of construction (Baghramian, 2013). We can distinguish between global constructionist claims that every fact is a social construction, and local constructionist claims that only some facts are social constructions (Mallon, 2019). Various kinds of things have been claimed to be social constructs: race, gender, sexual orientation, psychological disorders etc.[21] There can be

[21] See Hacking (1999, p. 1) for a more extensive list.

social construction of representations (ideas, concepts) and *social construction of objects* (properties, events, categories) (Marques, 2017, p. 2). My current aim is to understand what it means to claim that knowledge is socially constructed, and to discern when and how the idea of the social construction of knowledge leads to relativism.

The notions of social dependence and contingency are essential elements of social constructionism. Social constructs 'depend on a social context for their existence' (Haslanger, 2012, p. 129). Social constructs can be socially dependant in two ways: either they originate (come into existence) from human practice, or they have the features they have because of human practices. As Haslanger (2012, p. 86) explains, things can be a product of social practice either because 'human beings play a causal role in bringing an object into the existence in accordance with a design plan or to fulfil a specific function', or just in case 'the conditions for being the kind of object in question make reference to social practices'. The social dependence of social constructs entails their contingency. If social constructs are products of social practice, then they are shaped by the social practice and context of their formation and need not be the way they are. Boghossian (2007, p. 17) explains this point:

> a typical social construction claim will involve not merely the claim that a particular fact was built by a social group, but that it was constructed in a way that reflects their contingent needs and interests, so that had they not had those needs and interests they might well not have constructed that fact.

The contingency of the needs and interests necessitating and shaping the social construction of knowledge means that knowledge could always be otherwise — the features that knowledge has in particular cases could be otherwise. 'Discourses of truths can only emerge out of and on the basis of their non-necessity or contingency, as something that did not have to be and could have been otherwise' (Prozorov, 2019, p. 21). The notion of contingency, and alterability, is fundamental to claims of the social construction of knowledge as social constructionism is often employed as a resource for criticising some state of affairs.

Hacking (1999, p. 7) points out that 'most people who use the social construction ideas enthusiastically want to criticize, change, or destroy some X that they dislike, (or view as problematic), in the established order of things'. Lynch (2019, p. 224) makes a similar point that social constructionist arguments are 'most provocative when they take aim at phenomena that most people insist are immutable facts of life and nature'. Boghossian (2007, p. 18) contends that, 'a social construction claim is interesting only insofar as it purports to expose construction where none had been suspected, where something constitutively social had come to masquerade as natural'. Social constructionist approaches typically challenge ordinary assumptions about what is

taken to be 'just the way things are' and thus taken for granted and not questioned.[22] The exposition of social construction in matters that appear necessary or inevitable produces fertile ground for the potential of liberation (Boghossian, 2007, p. 18).

The basic strategy of social constructionists who employ constructionism for critical aims involves demonstrating that phenomena which may appear natural in fact emerged at a particular historical juncture, for particular reasons. Additionally, such constructionists will demonstrate that X is quite bad as it is, and claim that things would be much better off if X were done away with, or at least radically transformed (Haslanger, 2012). Haslanger (2012, p. 115) calls this 'unmasking constructionism'. The 'unmasking constructionist' maintains that phenomena X is socially constructed and 'if we understand the function of X socially, we will see that it should have no appeal for or authority over us' (Haslanger, 2012, p. 115). Put crudely, the 'unmasking constructionist' exposes the problematic social functions of some constructed phenomena or concept in order to demonstrate that these must be done away with. For example, race constructionists, according to Mills (2014, p. 97), 'insist not merely on the reality of constructed race but the non-innocence of this construction'.

The general point of 'unmasking' forms of social constructionism, Haslanger (2012) explains, is to unmask the problematic functions of the particular constructions of knowledge in order to enable a proper reconstruction of knowledge in a morally superior form. The unmasking successes of social constructionist approaches are often acknowledged and applauded even by critics of social constructionism. For example: Nanda (1998, p. 288) explains that constructionist approaches 'have challenged the smugness of the colonizers who defined themselves as enlightened, rational, and free against the backdrop of the innately emotional, superstitious, and unfree "Other"'.[23] The point of unmasking of the ways in which knowledge is constructed is to call attention to the contingent ways in which knowledge is formed, and highlight the problems with the contingent constructions if there are any. Knowledge can be contingently rational. Generally, the social constructionist unveiling of the contingency of knowledge through exposing its social intentions and functions is meant to dislodge the tendency to think of established knowledge as universal, infallible and self-

[22] This partly explains why critical race theories and feminist theories, for example, tend to be grounded in social constructionism. Traditional efforts to justify racist and sexist practices often rely on viewing certain races or sexes as a particular way by nature, and this has contributed to the widespread wary of claims about things being 'natural' (Haslanger, 2012, p. 5).

[23] Similarly, Kowalenko (2015, p. 457) writes that 'critical theorists have shown that much harm has been done to society in general, and to colonial societies and developing countries in particular, in the name of presumptive scientific "Truth".

evidently rational. This does not entail that knowledge cannot be rational; it just means that the criteria of knowledge is contingent and not necessarily self-evident across the universe.

Social constructionism makes metaphysical and epistemological claims (Baghramian, 2013, p. 110). As a metaphysical position, social constructionism claims that our perception of reality is 'constructed through a variety of norm-governed socially sanctioned cognitive activities such as interpretation, description, manipulation of data, etc' (Baghramian & Carter, 2015). Contrary to metaphysical realism, the social constructionist holds that (some parts of)[24] reality is not 'out there' independent of the mind and human practice — there is no inherent structure of reality that we discover through inquiry. Rather, reality is constituted by our interpretations and classifications of it. Haslanger (2012) calls this view 'discursive construction'. 'Something is discursively constructed just in case it is the way it is, to some substantial extent, because of what is attributed to it' (Haslanger, 2012, p. 88). The key point in this form of construction is that 'classificatory schemes function more like a script than a map' (Haslanger, 2012, p. 88). This means that our classificatory schemes, at least for socially constructed phenomena, do more than just map pre-existing reality; our attributions have the power to both establish and reinforce reality which may eventually come to "fit" the classifications (Haslanger, 2012, p. 88). Discursive social construction surfaces the controversial notion that we 'make' reality through our attributions and interpretations of it. For constructionists, 'the world does not come quietly wrapped up in facts. Facts are the consequences of the ways in which we represent the world' (Hacking, 1999, p. 33).

The epistemological disputation between social constructionists and non-constructionists surrounds the origin and stability of our knowledge claims. The central issue is whether or not our representations of reality are 'determined by "how the world is," more specifically, by the domain they purport to describe?' (Haslanger, 2012, p. 117). Social constructionism rejects the objectivist view of knowledge that

> Some domain D has an inherent structure, that our understanding of D is in some sense inevitable because the inherent structure of D causally determines how to understand it, and that our understanding of D is stable because the stable structure of the world sustains it. (Haslanger, 2012, p. 117)

In contrast to this objectivist view, constructionism maintains that our 'classifications are not determined by how the world is, but are convenient ways in which to represent it' (Hacking, 1999,

[24] Social constructionists need not be metaphysical anti-realists about everything — they can maintain that some parts of reality are mind-independent and are there naturally. Similarly, realists can be constructionist about some things: 'it is consistent with realism to recognize that there are large areas of reality that are indeed social constructs' (Searle, 1993, p. 60). Realists can grant that some parts of reality are socially constructed. Realists can acknowledge, for instance, the social origins of concepts (Haslanger, 2012, p. 120).

p. 33). Broadly, social constructionism about knowledge suggests that knowledge is not a representation of mind-independent reality. Knowledge comprises of our interpretations and perspectives of the world. Knowledge, for social constructionists, is not determined by the way things are in reality (Prozorov, 2019, p. 24). The core epistemological claim of social constructionism is that

> the results of our inquiry into reality "are not predetermined," in particular that they are "not determined by how the world is" and that we remain stably committed to the results, not because the content of our theories supports them, but due to social and psychological forces at work. (Haslanger, 2012, p. 117)

So far, I have tried to foreground the general social constructionist idea that knowledge is not a representation of mind-independent reality but is a social construction that is dependant and contingent on a number of social factors. I turn now to discuss how some variants of social constructionism may be prone to relativism. I suggest that relativism looms in accounts of the social construction of knowledge that over-state the determining role of the power interests of knowers in knowledge.

Social constructionists deny that our representations of the world are determined by the way the world is in its inherent structure. If knowledge is not determined by mind-independent reality and adherence to universal norms of rationality, what forms the basis and criteria of knowledge? What alternative criteria for knowledge does the social constructionist offer? Broadly, the literature against social constructionism charges it with eschewing mind-independent reality and rationality in favour of social factors as determinants of the validity of knowledge. According to Nanda (1998, p. 297)

> Social constructivist programs break the connection between rationality and any sense of progress in improving the reliability and validity of knowledge. The place evacuated by all traditional surrogates for validity — Karl Popper's falsifiability, Robert Merton's institutional norms, and Thomas Kuhn's paradigmatic consensus — is left open to contingencies of power, social interests in maintaining power, and other pragmatic uses of knowledge.

It is not objective norms of rationality that determine knowledge but social and cultural factors. Allais (2014, p. 201) suggests that relativist social constructionist approaches 'deny realism and account for knowledge solely in terms of the standpoints of the groups constructing the knowledge'. Boghossian (2007, p. 6) echoes this point and writes that for social constructionists,

> the truth of a belief is not a matter of how things stand with an "independently existing reality;" and its rationality is not a matter of its approval by "transcendent procedures of rational assessment." Rather,

> whether a belief is knowledge necessarily depends at least in part on the contingent social and material setting in which that belief is produced (or maintained).

According to Boghossian (2007, p. 26), constructionists about facts maintain that 'necessarily, no fact can obtain independently of societies and their contingent needs and interests'. More specifically, Baghramian (2013, p. 115) contends that for constructionists knowledge is 'determined by the self-interest of the powerful (the wealthy, the white, the male) in retaining their power'. These quotes make the point that for relativist forms of social constructionism, 'it is not the truth content of ideas but their location — geopolitical and class, gender and racial — that legitimates beliefs (for indeed, truth claims cannot be separated from location)' (Nanda, 1998, p. 300).[25]

Moore (2013, p. 338) summarises how variants of social constructionism that account for knowledge into terms of the power interests of knowers slip into relativism in the following passage:

> Sociological accounts of knowledge drift inevitably towards relativism because they undermine any objective grounds whereby knowledge can be based in anything other than the standpoints of those producing the knowledge and entwined with their particular social interests.

Along similar lines, Bird (2011, p. 485) suggests that the relativism that prevails in social sciences stems from sociological accounts of knowledge that treat knowledge as 'that which achieves a certain social status — accepted as established by the relevant scientific elites'. In this way, knowledge is what is socially accepted as knowledge and not what is produced through relatively reliable methods.

The social constructionist accounting for knowledge solely in terms of the different power-laden and interested contexts in which it emerges is highly controversial and is the source of widespread accusations that social constructionism undermines the idea of objective truth. The controversy against social constructionism is essentially that it replaces epistemic criteria (norms of rationality) with the interests and needs of different standpoints of knowers. In such accounting, knowledge is defined according to the arbitrary power interests of different knowers. As such, there can be no independent criteria for knowledge and all forms of knowledge are equally valid because no one evaluative framework based on the arbitrary power of knowers can fairly claim the epistemological privilege. Social constructionist approaches which account for knowledge solely in terms of the power interests of knowers are predisposed to relativism because 'if a belief 's being knowledge is

[25] Nanda (1998) says that this denial of objectivity and emphasis on the social determinants of knowledge is the supposed epistemic charity (gift) of social constructionism and argues vehemently that especially Third World countries must refuse this epistemic charity.

always a function of the contingent social setting in which it is produced, then it looks as though it could very well turn out that what is knowledge for us is not knowledge for the Zunis, despite our having access to all the same information' (Boghossian, 2007, p. 7). Absent any independent criteria for knowledge, we cannot adjudicate between different kinds of knowledge and knowledge can be 'anything' one believes to be knowledge.

The social constructionist accounting of knowledge in terms of the interests of knowers provides no independent criteria for knowledge. The epistemic grounds for judging one form of knowledge as superior to another are undermined by social constructionism and this lends weight to the relativist thesis of equal validity. Nanda (1998, p. 295) argues that this form of social constructionism

> denies that there could be facts about the natural world that knowers in different times and places could recognize as more rational to hold on the grounds that they are based on better evidence, are better approximations of the truth, or have withstood serious attempts to refute them.

More fundamentally, Nanda (1998, p. 296) argues that 'constructivist programs grant not only that all of us are mapmakers of our physical world but also that all of us are equally competent and skilled mapmakers'. She adds that for social constructionism,

> all mapmakers in all cultures relate to the physical world using the same perceptual apparatus; all seek evidence to back their assertions; all reason logically; and all come up with maps equally useful in coping with the world they live in, depending on how different communities measure success in coping. There are no nonsocial and nonconventional grounds for preferring the way modern science maps the world in its theories. The only reason that anyone in a non-Western society could conceivably prefer the latter is due to the intellectual hegemony of the West backed by its military and economic might. (Nanda, 1998, p. 296)

Furthermore, some scholars argue that social constructionism rejects objective criteria for knowledge by collapsing the foundation for distinguishing and discriminating between 'rational' and 'irrational' forms of knowledge. Nanda (1998, p. 297) conveys this point when she writes:

> Constructivists spend a lot of time dispelling as myth the idea that there is any difference between traditional and scientific modes of legitimation: normal scientists operating within a paradigm are no different from knowers in traditional societies, in that both accept the existing fund of knowledge handed down by their intellectual ancestors and both act consensually, with one paradigm reigning at any given time.

The point is that social constructionists deny that the rational standards of knowledge, taken to instantiated most perfectly in scientific practice, are no better, in terms of their reliability and cognitive power, than other standards of knowledge. Nanda (1998, p. 297) contends that the goal of social constructionist projects is to claim that 'social institutions and practices of modern science

are no better oriented to evidence that would enhance the likelihood of its findings being any closer to the facts of the matter than are the knowledge-seeking practices of any other culture'. For social constructionists, Nanda (1998, p. 300) says, 'scientific "truths" are true only in the web of belief spun by the tribe of Western scientists'. Social constructionist approaches to knowledge (social analyses of knowledge) tend to be viewed as providing the grounds on which to deny the widely held idea that science represents a reliable and superior form of knowledge.

Anti-relativists such as Kowalenko (2015, p. 457) argue that:

> We cannot but espouse as a normative ideal the belief that at least some of our scientific beliefs, if formed in the light of the best available evidence, reason, and argument, are capable of truth. And we must acknowledge that the capacity to judge what constitutes the best available scientific evidence is neither evenly distributed nor possessed by democratic decision makers, nor even by democratically constituted decision-making bodies. It resides, rather, with experts, and the right kind of experts at that.

This passage contests the idea that the construction of knowledge through scientific methods is as good as the construction of knowledge through other means and methods. The general point is that not all knowledge is constructed in equally reliable, and relatively objective, ways. Hence, not all forms of producing knowledge are equally reliable at attaining the best truths possible.

This section sought to explain the connection between relativism and constructionism. The main takeaway is that social constructionism is a viable and common route to relativism but does not logically entail relativism. The variants of social constructionism that are prone to relativism are those that take the idea of the social construction of knowledge to mean that the criteria for knowledge is determined by the arbitrary power interests of different knowers and the social context of the production of knowledge. This relativist form of social constructionism carries connotations of 'anything goes' in terms of knowledge and undermines the widely intuitive idea that there are better ways of producing knowledge that can achieve truth with greater likelihood.

3.3 Relativism's threat to the pursuit of truth

> The displacement of the idea that facts and evidence matter by the idea that everything boils down to subjective interests and perspectives is … the most prominent and pernicious manifestation of anti-intellectualism in our time. (Laudan, 1990, p. x)

Relativism seems to have somewhat of a double life in the human and social sciences. The central thesis of equal validity seemingly holds promise for those seeking tolerance while at the same time causing much distress for those concerned with rational intercultural dialogue. Relativism is commonly touted because it evokes the ideals of tolerance, equal respect of diverse cultures as well

as challenging unjustified claims and deference to authority. The appeal of relativism has been particularly strong for its promise to promote open-mindedness and to encourage an understanding of different cultures from within and, importantly, to respect them. This prevents passing judgment on 'other' beliefs and denigrating them as dogmatic or biased. The implicit presupposition in this form of reasoning, Wiredu (1995, p. 132) argues, is that 'to evaluate an external conceptual framework is to try arbitrarily to impose one's ideas and criteria upon its residents'.

I noted earlier on that relativism forbids, or presents as impossible and undesirable, critical dialogue between cultures. Some scholars understand this abstention of judgment to be an inherent feature of relativism and constructionism. Lynch (2019, p. 227) suggests that 'in the sociology of science, constructivism was never established as a general theory of knowledge that would enable discrimination between true and false belief, or between justified knowledge and mere opinion. Instead, constructivism arose from a principled effort to avoid making judgments about validity in sociological and historical studies of science'. Similarly, according to Wiredu, 'the essence of relativism is the mistaken denial of rational dialogue and evaluation of propositions across different conceptual frameworks' (Wiredu, 1995, p. 147).

As far as it encourages open-mindedness, the relativist suggestion to withhold judgments seems attractive. As Nanda (1998, p. 297) puts it, 'there is no denying that as an initial methodological principle, it makes sense to set aside one's own evaluation of the truth or falsity of beliefs others hold, to understand why they find it reasonable to hold these beliefs'. Nonetheless, anti-relativists argue that forbidding judgments and dialogue across different cultural paradigms hinders progress in the pursuit of truth. For example, Nanda (1998, p. 286), writes that relativist approaches, which she takes to include 'ethnoscience, situated knowledge, anti-Northern Eurocentric, and postcolonial science', are a cluster of theories that

> forbid outsiders from evaluating the truth or falsity of any beliefs of other people in other cultures from the vantage point of what is scientifically known about the world and, conversely, allows the insiders to reject as ethnocentric and imperialistic any truth claim that does not use locally accepted metaphysical categories and rules of justification.

Boghossian (2007, p. 130) contends that social constructionism and relativism 'supply the philosophical resources with which to protect oppressed cultures from the charge of holding false or unjustified views'.[26] One problem with relativism is that it undermines the possibility of dialogue

[26] Some studies have attempted to illustrate some of the dangers that result from relativist approaches which discourage scientific thought as a more valid form of knowledge. For example: Kowalenko (2015) blames relativist thinking about Western science for the health crisis that ensued following late implementation of antiretroviral therapy for HIV/AIDS in the South Africa under the Thabo Mbeki administration, and suggests on these grounds that relativist critiques of Western science ought to be shunned (Kowalenko, 2015, p. 456).

and learning between different forms of knowledge. The problem is that the relativist claim of equal validity deprives different forms of knowledge of the opportunity to be subjected to critical scrutiny by other frameworks of evaluation, and hence the possibility to improve the likelihood of achieving truth. The thesis of equal validity, Nanda (1998, p. 288) argues, 'denies us the capacity for a reasoned modification of our beliefs in light of better evidence made available by the methods of science'. She adds that the relativist social constructionist 'injunction to prefer authenticity over truth, or at least consider authenticity as a determinant of truth, severely limits efforts to challenge the claims of local standards of truth and morality' (Nanda, 1998, p. 288). Appeals to social construction in intellectual and political disputes are often used as weapons to undermine any claims to truth. In its anti-epistemological form, relativism undermines the common reverence, in modern times, of the enterprise of science.

Relativism is objectionable because it threatens the idea of truth via its denial of objective criteria and rational norms of truth. Hollis and Lukes (1982, p. 4) remark that relativism is often anti-epistemological for it implies 'a principled rejection of the search for the rational foundations of knowledge'. The 'natural fit' between relativism and variants of social constructionism which account for knowledge in terms of the power interests of knowers indicates this further. Relativist forms of social constructionism which account for knowledge in terms of the power-interests of knowers leave us with no grounds for discriminating between better and worse forms of knowledge, and thus opens up the possibility of the equivocation of *genuine* knowledge established via reliable methods of knowledge production and the *appearance* of knowledge secured by the power of certain groups of knowers. The pairing of the equal validity of different forms of knowledge and the social constructionist claim that knowledge is determined by the power-laden and interest driven circumstances of its production is at the heart of the problem with relativism.

More crucially, the relativist denial of the possibility for independent criteria for adjudicating between different kinds of knowledge as more or less reliable for producing truth as well as its insistence of the equal validity of all kinds of knowledge poses a great challenge for curriculum thinking. Mitova (Forthcoming, p. 1) argues that relativism of this kind 'undermines the concept of teaching and the idea that one syllabus can be epistemically better than another'. Young (2008, p. 22) summarises the curriculum problem posed by relativist social constructionism as follows:

> By arguing that knowledge is inseparable from how it is constructed, they cannot avoid the conclusion that all knowledge, whether based on professional expertise, research, or the experience of particular groups, is of equal value. It follows that, when the standpoint and interests of those producing the knowledge have been identified, all that needs to be said has, in essence, been said. Debates between postmodernists and those they critique become little more than arguments about whose experience should underpin the curriculum. … If

> all standards and criteria are reducible to perspectives and standpoints, no grounds can be offered for teaching any one thing rather than any other (or, ultimately, for teaching anything at all!).

The concept of professional teaching implies, ordinarily, that there is a 'transferral' of knowledge that is reliably closer to truth from the teacher to the student. If all kinds of knowledge are equally valid, then it does not matter what knowledge is taught, and if it does not matter what is taught then the very concept of teaching is undermined. The problem of relativism, and overcoming it, is crucial for curriculum thinking. Hence my aim in this investigation to propose a view of knowledge and power that is not relativist is significant and relevant for curriculum thinking.

Summary of Part I

This study revisits the question of the relationship between knowledge and power in order to explore whether there is a way to characterise the relationship between knowledge and power in a way that reconciles the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production with the role of power in knowledge production. In Chapter 2, I introduced the topic by critically discussing Foucault's views on the topic. Foucault characterises the relationship between knowledge and power as co-constitutive. Knowledge and power form the conditions of possibility for each other. Foucault's historical analysis of power-knowledge focuses on the historical conditions and meanings that the belie and inform the creation of knowledge as well as its purposes. Foucault's account is charged with relativism.

In Chapter 3, I discussed what relativism means and why it is problematic. I argued that the most common route to relativism is through social constructionist understandings of knowledge. What unites all relativist approaches is the edifice of social construction. All (most) relativists are social constructionists but not all social constructionists are relativists. I tried to distinguish between relativist and non-relativist variants of social constructionism. Broadly, relativist forms of social construction conclude that the idea that knowledge is socially constructed implies that knowledge is inevitably bound up with the power interests of those constructing it. These two variants of social construction are crucial because the two accounts that I discuss in Part II are committed to the broad idea of social construction that knowledge is socially produced. To anticipate what is to come, I show that social realism is anti-relativist for it maintains that the social production of knowledge grounds the possibility of better approximations of truth. I suggest that the tendency of decolonisation to stress the power-saturatedness of knowledge production and its advancement of the equal validity of different forms of knowledge makes it *appear* as a relativist form of social constructionism but argue that this not be the case.

PART II

4 Social Realism

This chapter focuses on the social realist account of the relationship between knowledge and power. I identify and develop the social realist account from analysing the body of literature on social realism.[27] The particular variant of social realism which I focus on here commonly goes by the tags 'bringing knowledge back in' or 'powerful knowledge' framework. As a school of thought, social realism is characterised by variety and diversity in theoretical influence, focus and affiliation, making it difficult to define strictly a group of scholars who self-identify as 'social realists'. It is helpful to understand the group of social realists as a 'coalition of minds' (Maton & Moore, 2010). What unites this coalition is the distinctively epistemological route they take in their intervention in curriculum theory: social realists propose and defend a 'social realist view of knowledge' in order to present 'powerful knowledge' as a principle for making decisions about what knowledge should constitute the curriculum. In this project, I focus on social realism as developed mainly in the work of Karl Maton, Rob Moore, Johan Muller, Michael Young and Leesa Wheelahan, and espoused (and sometimes challenged) in various ways by scholars like Stephanie Allais, Ursula Hoadley, Elizabeth Rata, Suellen Shay and Lyn Yates. To be clear, it is not that all these scholars self-identify as 'social realists'. I include them here because they, in various ways and to different extents, extensively engage with social realism.

As a curriculum approach, social realism responds to a rising trend that marginalises knowledge in curriculum in order to emphasise targets, outcomes and widen participation at whatever cost (M. Young, 2003). It advances subject-based curricula, and became influential as a curriculum policy foundation following the deficient outcomes-based education frameworks in countries like South Africa. The arguments advanced by social realism in curriculum have gained much prominence in countries such as UK, Australia, Singapore, New Zealand, Portugal and South Africa[28] (Hoadley, 2015; M. Young & Muller, 2013; Zongyi, 2015). More generally, the social realist framework challenges three policy trends in education: 'the introduction of national qualifications frameworks; the shift to learning outcomes; the move from subject-specific to generic curriculum criteria' (M. Young, 2009, p. 1). It also contrasts with the increased tendencies to think about education in terms of skills and competences (Biesta, 2014). These tendencies are aligned with instrumentally-driven aims to make education more relevant and responsive to labour-market issues as well as to the construction of particular forms of societies. It is in efforts to instrumentalise education that

[27] There is a variant of social realism advanced by Margaret Archer which is closely related to Bhaskar's critical realism. My focus is on the variant of social realism that advocates the 'powerful knowledge' framework for curriculum and is associated with the work of Michael Young and associates.

[28] Zipin, Fataar and Brennan (2015) suggest, for instance, that the current CAPS framework for curriculum in South Africa has a social realist underpinning.

'curriculum knowledge has been selected and recontextualized through the principle of relevance, and in the process disconnected from the disciplinary system of meaning in which it is embedded' (Wheelahan, 2008, p. 207).

In this chapter I critically discuss social realism and present its account of knowledge and power. I divide the chapter into four sections. In section one, I present a general overview of social realism as a curriculum approach and describe how it situates itself within broader debates in curriculum studies. I highlight the development of social realism as a critical response to what is commonly referred to as the 'new sociology of education' (henceforth NSOE) and the wide influence of social constructionist, postmodernist and standpoint theories in the sociology of education. I explain the social realist distinction between 'everyday' knowledge and 'specialised' knowledge, and describe the social realist argument for 'powerful knowledge' as a curriculum principle. I show that the core argument of the 'powerful knowledge' framework is that curriculum should provide access to specialised bodies of knowledge to enable students to think beyond their local contexts and create new knowledge.

In section two, I focus on the social realist view of knowledge underpinning the argument for 'powerful knowledge' in the curriculum. The social realist view of knowledge underscores the idea there are reliable relatively objective criteria for knowledge. I highlight the sense of 'social' and 'realist' in social realism. I emphasise that the 'social' aims to capture the sociality of knowledge and the 'realism' indicates the idea that knowledge is about something other than itself. This discussion surfaces the crucial social realist claim that the sociality of knowledge is the condition of the possibility of its objectivity rather than the denial of such objectivity.

In section three, I discuss some key criticisms of social realism under two broad categories. The first category of criticisms addresses social realism as a curriculum approach. The criticisms here surround the notion of 'powerful knowledge' as a guiding principle for curriculum decisions and highlight some shortcomings in the applicability of the principle. The second category of criticisms are directed at the idea of disciplinary specialisation and challenge the social realist valorisation of disciplinary formations. The second category of criticisms highlights, specifically, the challenge to the social realist distinction between 'knowledge of the powerful' and 'powerful knowledge'. The main contention is whether these conceptually distinct ways of talking about knowledge and power are, in reality, easily distinguishable, and whether social realism sufficiently accounts for the influence of social power in disciplinary formations.

In the final section, I present the social realist account of the relationship between knowledge and power. The social realist account argues that knowledge has an epistemic form of power which it

confers upon those who access it. I argue that the main virtue of this account is that it offers a 'positive' account of the relationship between knowledge and power that is often neglected and overshadowed by 'critical' accounts of the relationship. However, I suggest that social realism does not explore and address the implications of social power relations in knowledge production in academic disciplines. In this respect, I argue, the social realist account adequately captures the truth-seeking character of knowledge production but does not sufficiently address the role of power.

4.1 'Bringing knowledge back in': (social) epistemology for curriculum

> Knowledge as we know it in the academy is coming to an end . . . (and this represents) a crisis arguably more serious than those of finance, organization and structure. (Griffin 1997 quoted in Beck, 2010, p. 81)

The fundamental goal of social realism is to 'bring knowledge back in' to the curriculum and counter the growing neglect of knowledge as a central object of study in curriculum practice and theorisation (Maton & Moore, 2010b; Yates & Millar, 2016). Broadly, the social realist approach in curriculum was borne out of a concern with what social realists viewed as the curriculum crisis: the growing neglect of the centrality of knowledge in curriculum (M. Young, 2013a, p. 103). According to social realists, dominant curriculum theory neglects important epistemological issues of the nature of knowledge and truth (M. Young & Muller, 2016). The social realist intervention in the curriculum debate takes a distinctively epistemic route to curriculum issues. Young (2008, p. xvi) writes that,

> If an emancipatory vision of education and, it follows, the sociology of education is not to be vacuous, it must include rather than try to wish away the centrality of epistemological constraints and the inescapable reality that acquiring and producing new knowledge is never easy.

As an alternative curriculum approach, social realism is distinguished by its grounding in a social realist view of knowledge. Since social realism contends that the curriculum crisis is a result of mistaken views about the nature of knowledge, it offers a view of knowledge that makes clear why knowledge is the proper central object of curriculum.

The social realist approach to curriculum seeks to depart from two dominant approaches in the curriculum: the traditional conservative approach where the curriculum caters exclusively to the elite, and the 'progressive' approaches which emerged in opposition to the conservative approach (M. Young & Muller, 2010). According to Young and Muller (2010, p. 14) these two dominant approaches are underpinned by what they call, respectively, 'under-socialised' approaches and 'over-socialised' approaches to knowledge. These two approaches broadly correspond to the two polemical positions I introduced in Chapter 1 as traditionalist and reductivist. Young and Muller

(2010, p. 14) explain that 'under-socialised' approaches invoke an asocial conception of 'knowledge as sets of verifiable propositions and the methods for testing them', taking for granted the social production of knowledge whereas 'over-socialised' approaches 'play down the propositional character of knowledge and reduces questions of epistemology to 'who knows?' and to the identification of knowers and their practices'.

The defining mission of social realism, 'bringing knowledge back in', implies that knowledge has been 'taken out' and begs the question as to why and how knowledge has been displaced from the curriculum. What happened to knowledge? How was knowledge displaced from the curriculum and why? Young (2003, 2011, p. 145) argues that the marginalisation of epistemological issues of knowledge in curriculum studies is a result of a number of trends in educational sociology since the 1970s which led to the critical questioning of the role of schools and largely negative views of education. Social realists trace the emergence of the crisis specifically to the prevalence of the NSOE and the wide influence of social constructivist, postmodernist and standpoint theories in the sociology of education and the social sciences more broadly (Moore & Muller, 1999; M. Young & Muller, 2007). Social realists sometimes refer to these theories collectively as 'over-socialised' views of knowledge or 'voice discourses' (Moore & Muller, 1999; M. Young & Muller, 2010, p. 14).

For social realists, the NSOE prioritised questions of the social construction of knowledge and power relations in analyses of education and curriculum (Moore, 2013). It was primarily concerned to address the problem of the discontinuity between the culture of the school and its curriculum, and the culture of those coming to school and accessing the curriculum (M. Young & Muller, 2007). This concern with the problem of discontinuity, social realists argue, shifted the focus in curriculum from questions about knowledge itself to questions about 'whose knowledge?' was in the curriculum. Hoadley (2015, p. 734) explains that the NSOE advocated 'a particular political approach rooted in social constructivism' which focused on whose knowledge was privileged and socially distributed in society through education. The NSOE stressed that curriculum knowledge, more than anything, reflects the dominant culture and is used to impose dominant culture on subordinate groups (Hammersley, 2011).

Maton and Moore (2010) argue that since at least that period of the NSOE, key approaches and perspectives in the sociology of education have focused more on unmasking and debunking knowledge, denying the possibility of objectivity and the autonomy of knowledge-producing fields. Social realism argues that the general project of social constructionist, postmodernist and standpoint theorist approaches is to 'demystify the epistemological pretensions to cognitive superiority [of curriculum knowledge] by revealing its social base and standpoint' (Moore & Muller,

1999, p. 190). Young and Muller (2016, p. 138) suggest that 'over-socialised' approaches to curriculum knowledge share 'the reluctance of curriculum theory to address the epistemological issues concerning questions of the truth, and reliability of different forms of knowledge and how such issues have both philosophical and sociological dimensions'.

The social realist point is that questions of knowledge in these approaches are reduced specifically to relations of domination by the powerful and subordination of the powerless (Wheelahan, 2008). The social analysis of curriculum knowledge is reduced to identifying the underpinning interests that knowledge serves and identifying producers of the knowledge (Moore & Young, 2001). The implication of such social analyses of knowledge in terms of the interests it serves is that there is no knowledge qua knowledge; there is only the power of some dominant groups to assert their perspectives and experiences as what counts as knowledge (M. Young, 2000). As Moore & Muller (1999, p. 190) put it, curriculum knowledge is identified as "'bourgeois", "male" or "white"'. The social realist claim is that curriculum knowledge is reduced to nothing more than a reflection of the interests of those with power in society in 'over-socialised' approaches to curriculum.

Social realism does not deny the importance of questions that seek to understand curriculum knowledge and its entanglements with social interests in education. Young (1999) explains that curriculum refers to the way in which knowledge is selected and organised into subjects and fields for educational purposes, and has to do with questions about linking knowledge to particular educational purposes. Thus, in so far as curriculum reflects our assumptions about the kind of culture we want young people to access, it will remain contested and political (M. Young, 1999, p. 464). Furthermore, Young (1999) adds that curriculum can be ideological because it reflects particular views of society and has always a particular intention behind it. The question about whose interests are being served in any particular curriculum arrangement is central because of the indispensable link between education and the interests of society (Shay, 2015). This idea is at the core of the sociological approaches to curriculum.

Sociological approaches to curriculum argue that 'the curriculum is socially constructed, and specifically that there is a link between the distribution of power, the interests of the powerful and the curriculum' (M. Young, 1999, p. 468). Understanding the societal contexts and the intended roles that education is supposed to play can shed light on the origins of the ideas about knowledge that underpin the curriculum and the goals and vision of society that it implies. Young (1999) acknowledges that the sociological approach to curriculum which inspires 'over-socialised' approaches has laudably exposed the ways in which powerful interests that underlie curriculum organisation and content can operate against the interests of those less powerful. Moreover, Young

and Muller (2007) commend the sociological approach to curriculum knowledge and argue that it is generally inspired by a commitment to 'truthfulness': an eagerness to go beyond appearances to reveal the complex workings of power behind knowledge.

However, social realists take issue with a reductionist interpretation of the connection between curriculum knowledge and power, which they attribute to social constructivist, postmodernist and standpoint theories. Young (2008, p. 22) explains that the main problem with 'over-socialized' views of knowledge is that the knowledge question in curriculum becomes, essentially, about 'whose experience should underpin the curriculum' and involves undermining the forms of knowledge associated with subjects and disciplines. The social realist concern is that 'over-socialised' approaches to curriculum knowledge reduce knowledge to social and power interests. This amounts to an unacceptable and untenable 'over-politicisation' of curriculum knowledge. This over-politicisation, according to social realism, eclipses the intrinsic properties of knowledge that qualify it as the central object and foundational basis of curriculum. The heart of the social realist contention with prevailing social constructionist, postmodernist and standpoint theorist influenced approaches to curriculum is that they treat knowledge as if it has no inner structures with properties, powers and tendencies of its own. The critical stance that social realists take against dominant curriculum approaches is informed by their epistemological view of the social character of knowledge as well as its inherent properties.

So far, I have explained that social realism emerged as a critical concern with what it perceived as the over-politicisation of curriculum knowledge that resulted from the influence of NSOE and the intellectual traditions of postmodernism, standpoint theory and social constructionism. The crucial social realist claim is that these traditions eschew questions of the epistemological significance of knowledge in curriculum and instead centre questions about the power interests of particular knowers. This means that the legitimacy and authority of curriculum knowledge is accounted for and justified in terms of whose interests it represents and serves in society. Against this, social realism contends that the efficacy of some knowledge over others is independent of the social interests they are entangled with, and can form an objective basis of curriculum knowledge.

As an alternative approach to curriculum, social realism focuses the knowledge issue in curriculum around questions about what knowledge does for those who access it. In this way, it grounds the legitimacy of curriculum knowledge in the intellectual and cognitive capacities that it confers to those who access it. This is what 'bringing knowledge back in' entails for social realism: it means centring knowledge itself, not knowers, in curriculum theory. The basic argument of the social

realist approach to curriculum is that the best possible knowledge should be accessible to all students. This overall aim is captured succinctly in the following passages:

> Social realism attempts to recover knowledge in the service of progress and social justice. The impulse underlying social realist work is … both the creation of epistemologically more powerful forms of knowledge and establishing the means to enable them to be accessible to everyone. (Maton & Moore, 2010, p. 10)

In contrast to 'over-socialised' curriculum approaches, the proposed social realist approach seeks to help us think about curriculum proposals in terms of 'balancing goals such as overcoming social exclusion and widening participation with the no less important cognitive interests that are involved in knowledge production, acquisition and transmission' (M. Young, 2008, p. 34).

Social realism as an approach to curriculum argues that curriculum should provide access to 'powerful knowledge'. The argument tries to show that since the principal role of education is to provide access to the best knowledge, and the best knowledge is specialised powerful knowledge, curriculum content should be based on and provide access to 'powerful knowledge'. The underlying presupposition is that there are non-arbitrary ways that allow us to select certain forms of knowledge as epistemically better than others. In the next paragraphs, I expound this social realist argument and elucidate the concept of 'powerful knowledge'.

Social realism is concerned with the fundamental question of what it is that pupils need to have the opportunity to learn whether they are at primary or secondary school, attending university, or following any programme of vocational or professional education. Social realism seeks to answer the question: 'what is the important knowledge that pupils should be able to acquire at school?' (M. Young, 2013, p. 101). The concern with the kind of knowledge that should constitute the curriculum is essentially a question about the principles that ground the legitimacy of what constitutes curricula content. Social realism argues that

> Whether in astrophysics or literature, there is a body of knowledge to be learned and renewed. Most would like [it] to be useful and many would like it to be easy. However it is not often the former and rarely the latter. What really matters about knowledge is that it is true or rather that we can learn or find the truth or truths as best we can, in any field. This is what education and more specifically, universities are for. (Judith Williamson, 2002, quoted in (Judith Williamson, 2002 quoted in M. Young, 2011, p. 555))

To be clear, the social realist approach to curriculum does not prescribe specific content for curricula. It provides a principled epistemic approach to answering questions about what knowledge is appropriate for the curriculum and why.

The fundamental question of what deserves to be available for learning at school and institutions of formal education requires that we simultaneously consider what the aims of educational institutions are. Hence addressing the question of the content of the curriculum involves first revisiting the purposes of education. Social realists argue that 'the principal role of education is to provide students with access to powerful knowledge' (Wheelahan, 2010, p. 1). What distinguishes schools is that their primary concern to provide all their students with access to knowledge (M. Young, 2014). Maton and Moore (2010, p. 2) make clear that, 'knowledge is the very basis of education as a social field of practice; it is the production, teaching and learning of knowledge that makes education a distinct field'. Scott (2018, p. 15) makes a similar point that 'knowledge is central to the construction and realization of the curriculum'.

The basic social realist idea regarding the purposes of educational institutions is that acquisition of knowledge is the key feature that distinguishes education at any level from all other activities (M. Young, 2003, p. 553). In specific, Young (2013, p. 102) argues that curriculum has to fulfil two interdependent purposes of education: the purpose of transmitting past knowledge as well as developing the student capacity to use that knowledge to generate new knowledge. Consequently, social realism argues that there is a specific kind of knowledge that can fulfil these two purposes. Young (2011) argues that educational institutions are distinctive institutions that emerged historically with the specific purpose of enabling people to acquire knowledge not available to them at home or in their everyday life. Formal educational institutions provide the unique opportunity for students to acquire knowledge that helps them move beyond their experience (Shay & Peseta, 2016; Young, 2012, 2013, p. 103). The distinctive role of schools is to transmit the best knowledge possible available at any given time that enables students to create and produce new knowledge.

A central claim within social realism is that the goal of educational institutions is not to reproduce people's experiences but to take people beyond their experiences (Scott, 2018). Young (2014, p. 8) writes that 'what uniquely schools can do for all pupils is to offer opportunities for pupils to move beyond the experience they bring to school and to acquire knowledge that is not tied to that experience'. According to social realism, 'curriculum knowledge must be discontinuous, not continuous with everyday experience' (M. Young, 2003, p. 555). Social realists argue that this is especially important for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Young (2011, p. 152) points out that

> For children from disadvantaged homes, active participation in school may be the only opportunity that they have to acquire powerful knowledge and be able to move, intellectually, beyond their local and the particular circumstances. It does them no service to construct a curriculum around their experience on the grounds that it needs to be validated, and as a result leave them there.

This point underscores the social realist concern with social justice. Moore (2013, p. 335) suggests that 'the most fundamental inequality in education is that of access to the most powerful knowledge'. The social realist prioritisation of access to the best knowledge for students from disadvantaged backgrounds can be seen, partly, as a response to increasing calls for a reduced role for school subjects in order to challenge inequalities and respond to the new global economy (Yates & Young, 2010). The social realist proposal is that access to the best available knowledge is crucial to addressing the challenge of inequality.

Overall, the social realist argument connects the question about what should form the basis of curriculum content with the fundamental question about the aims of education. To this end, social realism suggests that education has the important purpose of providing access to knowledge that enables students to understand the world in ways that transcend their particular everyday experiences. This argument is, at first glance, intuitive and plausible. Ordinarily, parents send their children to school expecting them to acquire the kind of knowledge that they would not have access to at home, and that enables them to understand more than their own contexts. Schools would be redundant if they provided access to knowledge that is easily available in everyday life. Knowledge must, in some ways and to some extent, be unlike students' everyday knowledge if it is to enable students to move beyond their experiences, and make them capable of imagining new ways of being and understanding the world. Students enrol in educational institutions precisely to access a specific kind of knowledge that they cannot access in their everyday lives.

Despite its apparent intuitive plausibility, the idea that the knowledge that students access at school must 'distance' or 'abstract' them from their everyday knowledge and experiences, is controversial and has spurred debates amongst curriculum scholars. (I briefly explain the contestation around this point in the criticisms section). Hence, social realism must defend the idea that there is a specific kind of knowledge that students must access through education, and justify why this knowledge is, and must be, distinct from information that can be accessed through everyday experiences. To this end, social realism invokes the distinction between 'specialised (abstract theoretical)' knowledge and 'everyday (non-specialised) knowledge'. This distinction, according to social realists, roughly maps onto the Durkheimian distinction between the 'sacred' and the 'profane' (M. Young & Muller, 2013). In general, social realism is inspired by and draws much from the works of Emile Durkheim and Basil Bernstein to develop their approach (M. Young & Muller, 2010). I do not trace exactly how social realism draws from these scholars here. I briefly discuss how social realists explain and use the distinction between everyday knowledge and specialised knowledge in the next paragraphs.

Wheelahan (2008, p. 205) explains that Durkheim and Bernstein 'provide the theoretical tools to analyze and differentiate between different kinds of knowledge through distinguishing between abstract and everyday knowledge and the role each plays in society and the social relations on which it rests'. The basic idea of the distinction is to emphasise that knowledge is differentiated from our experiences (M. Young & Muller, 2007, p. 184). Social realists use the distinction between specialised and everyday forms of knowledge to classify types of knowledge according to their epistemic justifiability and reliability, and the subsequent roles they should play in education. The general point is that these two types of knowledge have varying epistemic strengths and that determines whether or not they are suitable for the curriculum.

The essential distinction between specialised and everyday knowledge is that the latter is developed informally from everyday experiences whereas the former is developed formally through specialised forms of knowledge production. Specialised knowledge is knowledge that is generally found and produced in universities by specialists within a hierarchical framework that specifies the methods for knowledge creation, what counts as knowledge and who can contribute to it (Wheelahan, 2010). It is distinguished from non-specialised everyday knowledge because it is not produced informally as part of people's everyday lives (Rata, 2012). Specialised knowledge is produced within 'particular socio-epistemic formations' in specialised institutions like universities and research institutes by specialised disciplinary experts (M. Young & Muller, 2013, p. 238).

The distinction between specialised and non-specialised everyday knowledge turns on the difference in the methods of production between the two types of knowledge. The distinguishing feature is specialisation: everyday knowledge is not produced through sustained course of study following the formal methods and procedures found in institutions such as universities. Generally, knowledge production may occur in many sites outside of universities or research institutes. So what is the significance of this difference in the method of production between the two types of knowledge? Essentially, social realists argue that the method of knowledge production (i.e. specialisation) in academic disciplines found in universities undergirds the epistemic power of specialised knowledge. The *how* of what we know is paramount here. Specialised knowledge is (generally) more epistemically reliable, according to social realism, because of the systematic and rigorous ways in which it is produced. The fundamental social realist claim is that the method of specialisation can produce 'powerful knowledge': an epistemically superior kind of knowledge that should form the basis of curriculum. Let me elucidate this concept of 'powerful knowledge'.

To elucidate the notion of 'powerful knowledge', I focus primarily on Young and Muller's (2013) paper 'On the powers of powerful knowledge'. It is in this paper that the concept is explained and

discussed most elaborately, especially in connection with specialisation and the powers it affords knowledge. Young and Muller (2013, p. 233) propose three cumulative distinctions to explain the concept of 'powerful knowledge': the distinction between 'knowledge of the powerful' and 'powerful knowledge', specialised (disciplinary) knowledge and non-specialised knowledge (everyday), and specialised powerful knowledge and specialised less powerful knowledge (M. Young & Muller, 2013, p. 233). I discuss the two latter distinctions first as they illustrate the dependence of 'powerful knowledge' on specialisation in academic disciplines and highlight the different powers of specialised knowledge (M. Young & Muller, 2013). I already introduced the second distinction between specialised and everyday knowledge. In the following paragraphs, I elaborate the key properties of specialised knowledge that, according to social realists, make it powerful knowledge.

Firstly, specialised knowledge is *real*: 'it is about something other than itself about which it says something in a robustly reliable way' (M. Young & Muller, 2013, p. 238). This point encapsulates the 'realism' in social realism. Recall that the basic claim of realism is that there is a world that is independent of us, and that knowledge aims to say things about the world which are true of the world independently of our views on them. The 'realism' of social realism emphasises that knowledge claims aim to say something about the world that would be true beyond what our views of it. Maton and Moore (2010, p. 4) explain the constraining effects of mind-independent reality on knowledge formation:

> Ontological realism involves the recognition that knowledge is about something other than itself: there exists a reality beyond our symbolic realm. This 'otherness' of independently existing realities, both natural and social, provides an independent, external limit not on what we can believe (we can believe whatever we like, such as in fairies at the bottom of the garden) but rather on what we can know. We, as individuals, can believe in anything, but we collectively cannot in the same way know just anything.

More broadly, the 'realism' of social realism insists that knowledge is not arbitrary. There are boundaries to knowledge creation.

Secondly, specialised knowledge is *social* but *emergent*: 'it is produced by social conditions and contexts but cannot be reduced to them' (M. Young & Muller, 2013, p. 237). The 'social' in social realism indicates that knowledge is socially constructed 'in relation to our history and on the basis of what formed generations have discovered' (M. Young & Muller, 2007, p. 184). Young and Muller (2007, p. 184) make clear that 'truth and knowledge have a givenness that is historical and social'. Powerful knowledge is 'knowledge that draws on the work of communities of specialists that we describe as disciplines which are primarily forms of social organization for producing new

knowledge' (M. Young, 2014, p. 9). The central idea here is that specialised knowledge is socially produced — by a group of experts — but it is not merely a function and result of its social production. In other words, the knowledge produced by socially formed collective groups of experts transcends its social conditions, it does not simply encapsulate the experiences of its producers. Moore (2013, pp. 344–345) summarises this point succinctly in the following passage:

> Knowledge is doubly social in that it is socially and historically located…, but *also* socially grounded in relatively autonomous modes of symbolic production that have their own logics and capacities which are not simply continuous with individual experience.

Specialised knowledge is distinguished 'by its capacity to pass the most demanding scrutiny of well-informed people who have no prior investment in confirming it' (M. Young & Muller, 2007, p. 173). The conclusions that constitute disciplinary knowledge that experts reach are based on rigorous methods of testing rather than the experiences or preferences of the experts themselves as individuals. According to social realism, these disciplinary norms, even if context-sensitive, are not themselves reducible to their context (M. Young & Muller, 2013, p. 237). In a nutshell, the experience-independent disciplinary norms warrant the emergent character of specialised knowledge.

For social realists, 'knowledge is historically produced through collective procedures within which critique is a constitutive principle' (Moore, 2013, p. 348). Social realism, according to Moore (2013, pp. 348–349), insists on the 'procedural objectivity' of the systematised, fallible and revisable yet relatively reliable process of collective knowledge production. The 'social' of social realism foregrounds the idea that knowledge is produced by communities of experts following specific rigorous methods and procedures. The social production of knowledge, according to social realism, assumes its most rigorous form in academic disciplines. Hence, specialised knowledge is more powerful and reliable because of *how* it is produced.

Lastly, specialised knowledge is *systematically revisable*. Specialised knowledge is produced through continual revision and strengthening of conceptual and methodological coherence, making it progressively better and reliable as a type of knowledge. This kind of knowledge is acquired through sustained and structured courses of study following specified methods. Academic disciplines devise agreed upon criteria for evaluating knowledge claims for their truth. Specialised knowledge derives its authority from internal disciplinary procedures that allow, crucially, for criticism and critical scrutiny (Rata, 2012). In this sense, what passes as knowledge is a result of rigorous debates among

experts, and methodologically rigorous criteria for standards of knowledge.[29] The rigorous, even if fallible and revisable, collective procedures of producing knowledge underwrite the genuineness of knowledge. As Moore (2013, p. 345) explains:

> All knowledge is fallible because none is certain and open to revision through critique, but *how* this is done enables us *not* to assert that some knowledge is axiomatically better than others, but that some has been arrived at in *ways* in which we can be demonstratively more confident and, hence, more secure in what we choose to believe.

Moore's point is that the rigorous social production of knowledge does not produce unquestionable knowledge and absolute truth. Rather, it produces reliably better knowledge. The properties of specialised knowledge just explained are meant to specify what is distinctive and epistemically superior about specialised knowledge. The general point is that the methodological rigour, emergence, revisability, generalisability and social character of such knowledge makes it epistemically better knowledge. These properties of specialised knowledge foreground the main claim that 'better ways of knowing are always associated with specialisation, and hence powerful knowledge is specialised knowledge' (M. Young & Muller, 2013, p. 231). Crucially, the third distinction between 'specialised powerful knowledge' and 'specialised less powerful knowledge' highlights, however, that not all specialised knowledge is powerful knowledge (M. Young & Muller, 2013). All powerful knowledge is specialised knowledge but not all specialised knowledge is powerful knowledge. The example of scientology illustrates a form of specialised knowledge that is nonetheless not powerful knowledge (M. Young & Muller, 2013, p. 231).

The final key distinction in understanding 'powerful knowledge' is between 'knowledge of the powerful' and 'powerful knowledge'. Broadly, the notion of 'powerful knowledge' focuses on the epistemic merits of knowledge *qua* knowledge, and the notion of 'knowledge of the powerful' has to do with who makes the decisions about knowledge and who benefits and is excluded in such processes (Roberts, 2014; M. Young & Muller, 2013). Crudely, the legitimacy and authority of 'knowledge of the powerful' is grounded in its association with powerful groups in society and is therefore arbitrary. 'Powerful knowledge', on the other hand, is argued to be powerful in its own right because of the way in which it is produced. Its power and authority derives from the way in which it is developed through rigorous methods by disciplinary communities of experts (Rudolph Sriprakash & Gerrard, 2018; Yates & Millar, 2016).

[29] It is important to note here that specialised knowledge requires and is founded upon a degree of consensus among communities of experts concerning the relevant problems and appropriate methodological procedures that form part of a discipline. Such consensus is often difficult to reach in some disciplines. The human and social sciences are particularly notorious, and sometimes appreciated, for their wide-ranging disagreements within and between disciplines.

The distinction between 'knowledge of the powerful' and 'powerful knowledge' underlies the social realist alternative approach to curriculum. Recall that social realism as a curriculum approach seeks to undermine the tendency to overstate the control of curriculum content by the powerful groups in society and its role as a tool to construct, legitimate and reproduce unequal power relations that favour the powerful (Baker, 2015; Lilliedahl, 2015). Social realism challenges the claim that all knowledge inevitably reflects the interests of dominant groups and the subsequent idea that the legitimacy of knowledge is only a function of the social position of those who produce it (M. Young, 2000). Rather than treating the curriculum as merely reflecting the dominant culture that is imposed by powerful groups on the powerless, social realism argues that we should recognise curriculum knowledge for its truth-seeking properties and its basis in specialisation (Hammersley, 2011). Young (2013, p. 104) argues that a focus on 'knowledge of the powerful'

> neglects the extent to which some forms of knowledge give greater power than others to those with access to them, irrespective of their origins. … 'knowledge of the powerful', despite its strengths, almost inevitably shifts the analysis from what goes on in schools to the distribution of power in the wider society and offers little either to teachers or to political movements seeking a more equitable approach to the curriculum.

The point is that while the issue of how knowledge can be influenced by power interests is important, the centring of this issue in our thinking about the curriculum compromises and ignores the fundamental epistemic properties and cognitive power of knowledge that is a product of specialised methods of the disciplines and forms the basis of curriculum.

So far I have explained the properties of specialised knowledge in order to show its connection with the notion of 'powerful knowledge'. Now, I turn to explain the justification for why specialised powerful knowledge should form the basis of the curriculum by turning to the question of what it is that access to powerful knowledge promises. What is the 'power' of powerful knowledge that makes it necessary and relevant for students to access?

The concept of powerful knowledge is meant to help us resolve questions relating to 'how school knowledge is and should be different from non-school knowledge, and the basis on which this differentiation is made' (M. Young, 2011, p. 151). The key virtue of 'powerful knowledge' is that it is the kind of knowledge that gives people intellectual capacities that they would unlikely be able to develop from their everyday experiences (Maude, 2015). Young and Muller (2013, p. 229) make clear that their idea of powerful knowledge as differentiated and specialised knowledge is drawn from Durkheim and Bernstein:

> For Durkheim the knowledge that we need as a basis for understanding the world and therefore the possibility of changing it, is separate from and prior to the practical activities of people's everyday lives. (M. Young & Muller, 2013, p. 234)

The basic idea is that everyday knowledge (horizontal discourse) is 'context-dependent, procedural, and segmented', whereas specialised knowledge (vertical discourse) is 'abstract and generalisable' (Shay, 2008, p. 602). The language of vertical and horizontal discourses is from Bernstein (M. Young & Muller, 2007, p. 187). The main distinguishing feature between vertical and horizontal knowledge is how they are organised, and their subsequent capacity to form the basis for the generation of new knowledge. The underlying idea is that knowledge is created cumulatively, by building on already existing knowledge.[30] Vertical knowledge consists of internally coherent concepts and theories organised hierarchically in a systematic manner. This kind of knowledge exhibits a high capacity for cumulative knowledge-building (Muller, 2007). New knowledge is generated by extending and integrating existing concepts and theories to explain and understand new phenomena. The hierarchical and coherent structure of specialised knowledge gives it a generative capacity for new knowledge. This is at the core of the power of 'powerful knowledge' and why it should form the basis of curriculum knowledge.

In contrast, horizontal knowledge is fragmented and not coherently systematised (Shay, 2008). The shared ideas that comprise everyday knowledge are often 'vague and contradictory' (M. Young & Muller, 2007, p. 184). Horizontal knowledge lacks the capacity for cumulative knowledge-generation because the collective ideas that form it are not structured systematically and coherently to form a basic set of assumptions from which new concepts and theories can be developed. There is no discernible order relating the body of ideas and they are devoid of coherence. As Young & Muller (2007, p. 187) explain, 'the level of integration, and the possibility for knowledge progress in the sense of greater generality and hence wider explanatory reach, is limited in horizontal knowledge structures'.

I noted earlier that social realists emphasise the point that the chief purpose of education is to provide access to knowledge that take students beyond their experiences and enables them to generate new knowledge. As Young (2013, pp. 101–102) argues, 'the purpose of the curriculum is not only to transmit past knowledge; it is to enable the next generation to build on that knowledge and create new knowledge'. Specialised knowledge is 'made up of concepts developed by subject

[30] There is a finer distinction between Bernstein's concept of 'verticality' and 'grammaticality' that explains how knowledge progress works. Young and Muller (2007, p. 188) explain the distinction as follows: 'grammaticality determines the capacity of a theory to progress through worldly corroboration, verticality determines the capacity of a theory to progress integratively, through explanatory sophistication. Together, we may say that these two criteria determine the capacity a particular knowledge structure has to progress'.

specialists, and these concepts enable pupils to generalise beyond their experience' (Roberts, 2014, p. 189). The capacity to generalise beyond specific contexts is the first step towards a broader understanding of the world, and the possibilities for creating new knowledge. Specialised powerful knowledge provides a foundation for further development of knowledge in the relevant subject. This point is emphasised in arguments that disciplinary subject knowledge should form the basis of curriculum subjects (see Allais, 2014).

The power of 'powerful knowledge' lies specifically in what it enables those who have it to do; that is, the intellectual power it gives to those who access it (Harland & Wald, 2018; Maude, 2015). The social realist claim is that 'powerful knowledge' is epistemically powerful in that it develops the intellectual capacity to better understand and engage with the world (M. Young, 2008; Zipin et al., 2015). Moreover, Harland and Wald (2018) suggest that insight into the methodological procedures and systematic ways of producing and evaluating knowledge is what makes 'powerful knowledge' powerful because this allows those who have it to apply it in new contexts and to produce new knowledge. Access to powerful knowledge exposes students to the principles organising the coherence and logic of the subjects, and the principle of conceptual progression which allow for the creation of new knowledge. Students can understand and emulate the conceptual links that animate the subjects in generating new knowledge. 'Powerful knowledge enables those who have it to produce and evaluate knowledge, to do so beyond a specific context and, hopefully, be prepared to use this ability wisely' (Harland & Wald, 2018, p. 626).

To conclude, social realism as a curriculum approach defends the idea of 'powerful knowledge'. 'Powerful knowledge' is an epistemic principle for decisions about what kind of knowledge should form the basis of curriculum. The idea that specialised powerful knowledge should be the primary ordering principle in education entails that a systematised bodies of specialised disciplinary knowledge should regulate teaching and learning: teachers must be competent in these bodies of knowledge and be able to facilitate students' learning of these bodies of knowledge (Hugo & Wedekind, 2013). The argument is that the structure and content of specifically 'powerful' specialised bodies of knowledge make it possible for students to extend their understandings of the world beyond the particularities of their experience, and be able to generate new knowledge.

The concept of 'powerful knowledge' is both a sociological concept and a curriculum principle (M. Young & Muller, 2013). I have presented the social realist position of 'powerful knowledge' as the organising principle in curriculum. I explained earlier that the guiding concern for social realism is the intellectual basis of the curriculum and the nature of knowledge that is undermined by 'over-socialised' approaches to curriculum and their relativist tendencies (M. Young & Muller, 2007, p.

184). In the next section, I discuss the broader epistemological argument underpinning the social realist curriculum proposal.

4.2 A social realist view of knowledge

> It is the social nature of knowledge that in part provides the grounds for its objectivity and its claims to truth. (M. Young, 2008, p. 24)

According to social realists, a theory of knowledge is necessary 'to analyse and criticise existing curricula, and to explore the different forms that they can take' (Young, 2013, p. 107). Hence, a social realist theory of knowledge is put forward to ground the alternative social realist curriculum approach. In the previous section, I explained that the social realist approach in curriculum theory emerges out of a concern with the marginalisation of knowledge in dominant theories of curriculum and that the fundamental objective of social realism is to argue that 'powerful knowledge' should form the basis of curriculum by presenting a social realist view of knowledge. In this section, I discuss the social realist view of knowledge and develop the claim that this alternative view of knowledge marks its distinctiveness in its interpretation of the idea that knowledge is socially constructed and the conclusions it draws from this idea. Essentially, social realism, in contrast to other social accounts of knowledge, understands the sociality of knowledge as the basis of its objectivity rather than the basis of the denial of such objectivity.

Social realism about knowledge positions itself against what it collectively groups as 'over-socialised' theories of knowledge, which include postmodernism, social constructionism and standpoint theories. The grouping of these distinct theories as 'one' is challenged by some scholars. For example: in his review of Rob Moore's *Towards the sociology of truth*, Hammersley (2011) accuses the social realist position of conflating and caricaturing the theories of knowledge that it seeks to distinguish itself from. Hammersley (2011) points out, for example, that standpoint theories of knowledge are philosophically more complex and not as easy to dismiss as social realism makes it to be. Similarly, Edwards (2014) accuses social realism of representing and critiquing a caricatured view of standpoint theory and argues that standpoint theory is entirely compatible with the realist understanding of knowledge.

Social realists acknowledge some of the potential limits of their attempts to work across specialist literatures to bring epistemological concerns into curriculum issues. Young (2008, p. xvi) explains that the epistemological route that social realism takes in developing its curriculum approach is challenging because it involves

> the almost impossible task of holding together issues and questions that conventionally are discussed in quite distinct specialist literatures (for example, epistemology and the sociology of knowledge, and educational policy and practice) that traditionally have had few if any connections. Inevitably this means that I do not fully grasp the complexity and detail of either set of specialist literatures, and as a result am likely frustrate a variety of readers at different points. (Young, 2008, p. xvi)

Nonetheless, while acknowledging the potential limits of his expertise in trying to deal with complex primarily epistemological theories, Young maintains the important commitment to engage in knowledge questions in order to shine light on educational issues. Here I set aside issues of the accuracy of the social realists' labelling of the ideas that they challenge as postmodernist, standpoint theorist or social constructionist. I focus rather on explicating the ideas and counter-arguments against them as represented in the social realist literature.

The theories that social realism positions itself against — social constructionism, postmodernism and standpoint theory — are varieties of what is generally called 'social' or 'sociological' theories of knowledge. Social theories of knowledge are juxtaposed with asocial traditional theories of knowledge. Recall the dichotomy between traditionalist and reductivist positions introduced in Chapter 1. These two approaches, social and asocial theories, have set the terms for recent debates about knowledge in the social sciences and in philosophy (M. Young & Muller, 2010). In broad strokes, social theories stress that knowledge is socially produced while the latter treats knowledge as abstract (Moore, 2013). Social realism shares with social constructionist, postmodernist and standpoint theories the view that knowledge is social. However, Young and Muller (2013, p. 230) argue that the social realist view of knowledge is developed from 'a relatively new way of thinking sociologically about knowledge and stands in contrast to more traditional sociologies of knowledge which have tended to associate the sociality of knowledge with bias'. According to social realists, traditional sociological theories of knowledge 'adopt or at least favour or imply, a form of perspectivism which sees knowledge and truth claims as being relative to a culture, form of life or standpoint and, therefore, ultimately representing a particular perspective and social interest rather than independent, universal criteria' (Moore & Muller, 1999, p. 189). The implicit point is that most social theories of knowledge are relativist. As Young (2008, p. xvii) explicitly puts it, 'more often than not the sociology of knowledge has led to the intellectual cul-de-sac of relativism'. In contrast, social realists develop an alternative social theory of knowledge which 'while accepting that knowledge is always a social and historical product, *avoids the slide into relativism and perspectivism* with which this insight is associated in postmodernist writings' (Moore & Young, 2001, p. 446 emphasis added). Before I explain how social realism tries to avoid relativism, I want to explain the positions social realists reject as guilty of relativism.

Fundamentally, social realism rejects the characteristic reduction of knowledge to experience or standpoint or interests of dominant social theories of knowledge (Moore & Muller, 1999, p. 189). According to social realists, the sociological study of knowledge is exhausted by exploring processes of and influences on knowing. Dominant social accounts of knowledge focus on 'knowing' instead of knowledge itself. As such, the criteria for what counts as knowledge becomes centred on knowers and their particular standpoints. According to Wheelahan (2008, p. 207) constructionist approaches 'reduce knowledge to the perspectives of differently positioned actors in which the end result is relativism'. Young (2008, p. 22) argues that postmodernist views 'start from the assumption that all knowledge is embedded in the interests of particular groups of knowers'. Similarly, Young and Muller (2007, p. 177) argue that 'for social constructivists, how we think about the world, our experience, and any notion of 'how the world is', are not differentiated'. Allais (2014, p. 196) uses the term 'epistemological constructionism' to refer to 'the position that knowledge is inevitably and inextricably bound to the interests and standpoints of the individuals and groups producing it *because* it is socially constructed'. The common threat in the positions challenged by social realists is the reduction of the criteria for knowledge to the experiences or perspectives of different knowers.

Social realism opposes the reductionism pervading dominant social theories of knowledge: 'it recognizes that knowledge is socially produced under given historical conditions, but adopts, *contra* constructionism, an emergentist rather than a reductive view of this ('emergent materialism')' (Moore, 2013, p. 346). The problem with this reductionism is that knowledge criteria is left to the arbitrary perceptions or experiences of knowers. More crucially, social realism argues that this reductionism leads to relativism. Essentially, the reductionist view of knowledge leads to the unfortunate conclusion that 'there is no knowledge, only the power of some groups to assert that their experiences should count as knowledge' (M. Young, 2000, p. 524). The criteria for knowledge, is reduced to the perspectives of different groups of knowers. Young and Muller (2007, p. 174) argue that in 'voice discourses' the core assumption is that 'identification with the powerless or with a particular disadvantaged group brings one automatically closer to the truth.' These views are relativist, in social realist terms, in so far as they view 'knowledge and truth as being relative to a culture, form of life or standpoint and, therefore, ultimately representing a particular perspective and social interest rather than independent, universalistic criteria' (Moore & Muller, 1999, p. 190).

According to social realists, dominant social constructionist, postmodernist and standpoint theories of knowledge are paradigm cases for the rejection of the objectivity of truth and general scepticism about the notion of truth (M. Young & Muller, 2007). The goal of these theories, according to social realism, is 'to de-legitimise rational, epistemologically grounded knowledge

forms and truth claims by suggesting that they express no more than the 'standpoints' and 'interests' of 'dominant' social groups' (Moore & Muller, 1999, p. 189). For dominant sociological views of knowledge, social realists argue, truth is not a property of the content knowledge claims but rather a status conferred by different powerful groups.

Social realists maintain that despite their important contribution in terms of highlighting the idea that knowledge is socially constructed, social constructionist views have misunderstood the implications of this insight. Moore (2010, p. 133) suggests that 'relativism is the consequence of … a failure to properly understand the sociality of knowledge'. Young and Muller (2007, pp. 181–182) contend that,

> At best social constructivism reminds us that, however apparently given and fixed certain ideas or institutions appear to be, they are always the product of actual human activities in history. At worst, social constructivism has provided an intellectual legitimacy for criticizing and challenging any institution, any hierarchy, any form of authority and any knowledge as arbitrary.

While social realism shares the broad view that knowledge is socially constructed, it draws different implications from this insight. In contrast to relativist variants of social constructionism, social realism maintains that the sociality of knowledge grounds the possibility of truth instead of undermining it. The social realist view of knowledge can be understood as 'a quest for a theory which grants knowledge a status independent of knowers' and 'a view of knowledge as objective though always socially mediated' (Shay, 2008, p. 600). The central social realist view of knowledge is that,

> The social character of knowledge is not a reason for doubting its truth and objectivity, or for seeing curricula as no more than politics by other means. Its social character is (even more truthfully) the only reason that knowledge can lay claim to truth (and objectivity) and therefore the only reason for preferring some curriculum principles to others. (M. Young & Muller, 2007, p. 183)

Social realists want to show that a social theory of knowledge, when conceptualised responsibly, grounds the objectivity of knowledge instead of leading to relativism. The proposed social realist view of knowledge aims to show that 'the social character of knowledge is an indispensable basis for its objectivity, rather than the condition that makes this objectivity impossible' (Moore & Young, 2001; Young, 2008, p. 30). The social realist view of knowledge accepts that

> knowledge is socially produced by communities of knowledge producers which are characterized by struggles around power and competing interests. However, it wants to maintain that knowledge has emergent properties that are not reducible to those who produced it, with the consequence that such knowledge is capable of providing insights into aspects of the world, even if it bears the marks of its production. (Wheelahan, 2008, p. 207)

Social realism seeks to avoid the tendency towards reductionism, and the subsequent relativism and unacceptable undermining of the possibility of truth. The strategy involves an appeal to realism and the methodological rigour characteristic of the social production of knowledge by specialised communities of experts. Young and Muller (2007, p. 177) maintain that 'sociology of education must re-align itself with realism.' The realist orientation gives knowledge a distinct identity and status from knowing and knowers (Shay, 2008). Knowledge is in part a product of the constraints of mind-independent reality than a particular group of knowers.

The social production of knowledge, according to social realists, secures certain forms of knowledge as more reliable and authoritative than others (M. Young, 1999; M. Young & Muller, 2013). To demonstrate this, social realism identifies what social conditions might be necessary if objective knowledge is to be acquired (Young, 2008, p. 165). Let me note that though some of the quotes from social realists talk about 'objective' knowledge, it is clear that what they mean more precisely is 'better approximations of truth'. As Zipin, Fataar and Brennan (2015, pp. 14–15) point out, 'what SRs claim as guaranteed is not absolute or final truth, but superior progressive advancement on truth due to capacities special to conditions and procedures of intellectual knowledge fields'. I have already discussed this in the previous discussion of the criteria for powerful knowledge. The general claim is that disciplines have special powers to achieve truth, as much as possible, through their intellectual networks and rigorous methods of knowledge production:

> the objectivity of knowledge is in part located in the social networks, institutions and codes of practice built up by knowledge producers over time. It is these networks of social relations that, in crucial ways, guarantee truth claims, and give the knowledge that has produced its emergent powers. (Young, 2008, p. 31)

The kinds of knowledge which are epistemically better and more reliable at approximating truth are so by virtue of their capacity to pass demanding standards of critical scrutiny developed and upheld by a community of experts who are well-informed and committed to truth (M. Young & Muller, 2007).

What secures the objectivity of knowledge and its better approximations of truth in the disciplines, social realists maintain, is the fact that intellectual fields build powerful and cumulative knowledge over time and are constituted by a 'coalition of minds extending across time and space' (Maton & Moore, 2010).[31] The broad point is that

[31] Kowalenko (2015, p. 457) echoes this point and points out that 'we must acknowledge that the capacity to judge what constitutes the best available scientific evidence is neither evenly distributed nor possessed by democratic decision

> we construct knowledge of the world but not just as we please (or at least not free of worldly consequences), not perfectly, and not simply by ourselves … knowledge is not constructed by individuals as each sees fit but rather produced by actors within social fields of practice characterised by intersubjectively shared assumptions, ways of working, beliefs and so forth. (Maton, 2014, p. 34)

Knowledge is not just what we say and want knowledge to be but is something that is created systematically following specified procedures and practices. Zipin et al. (2015, p. 12) explain that while social realists agree that 'socially generated knowledge can never yield unmitigated, transparent truth about social 'realities', their claim is serious about specialist communities as the social locus that guarantees progressively greater approximations of objective truth'. According to Moore and Young (2001) postmodernist approaches unfortunately neglect to recognise the cognitive norms and values of truth that form an essential part of knowledge production. The challenge is to ensure that the communities of disciplinary experts are not compromised in order that the success of this disciplinary process of the certification of knowledge may work as best as it can.

To summarise, the social realist theory of knowledge argues that knowledge is social in that it is socially produced but real because it is produced reliable ways by communities of experts following relatively autonomous procedures and processes. Specialised powerful knowledge is produced by self-regulating communities of scholars that regulate and ensure reliability, revisability, and emergence of knowledge (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 14). This makes knowledge progressively truth-seeking and objective.

So much for the social realist approach to curriculum and the view of knowledge undergirding it. In the next section, I discuss two categories of criticisms against social realism. The first category of criticisms challenges the social realist notion of 'powerful knowledge' as a curriculum principle. The second category of criticisms raise question against the social realist view of knowledge especially its claim that objective knowledge is instantiated by academic disciplinary knowledge.

4.3 Criticisms

> In its appeal for objectively 'better' knowledge, the powerful knowledge framework largely overlooks the ways in which the refinement of disciplinary knowledge is itself connected to social interests. (Rudolph et al., 2018, p. 26)

makers, nor even by democratically constituted decision-making bodies. It resides, rather, with experts, and the right kind of experts at that'.

Social realism as a school of thought has spurred much debate and criticism. In this section, I highlight some of the major criticisms to social realism. My primary interest is on the criticism that social realism does not sufficiently account for the power relations and interests that condition even specialised disciplinary fields of knowledge production. In the first sub-section, I briefly discuss two sets of criticisms internal to debates about curriculum. The first set of criticisms take issue with the social realist distinction between everyday and abstract knowledge, and the privileging of the latter in the curriculum. The criticisms challenge the distinction between specialised and everyday knowledge on grounds that the distinction is not so 'clear-cut' (especially in human and social sciences) as well as encourages a problematic and unproductive devaluation of everyday experience. The second set of criticisms offer reflections on the applicability of the concept of 'powerful knowledge' as a curriculum principle. These criticisms raise concerns about implementing the framework in policy development and curriculum practice. especially in interdisciplinary contexts. I do not discuss them with great depth. I highlight briefly to indicate some of the engagement that the 'powerful knowledge' framework has generated.

In the second sub-section, I discuss criticisms against social realism which specifically problematise the connection between power and the academic disciplines, and challenge the principal social realist distinction between 'knowledge of the powerful' and 'powerful knowledge'. These criticisms inform my argument that the 'powerful knowledge' framework emphasises the 'power of' knowledge produced in the disciplines and does not address the implications of the role of social/political power on knowledge production.

4.3.1 Against social realism as an approach to curriculum

Recall that the social realist argument for 'powerful knowledge' as a curriculum principle foregrounds the intuitive idea that educational institutions are distinctively about providing access to knowledge, and then it invokes the distinction between 'everyday' and 'specialised' knowledge to argue that only the latter is the appropriate basis for curriculum knowledge. One prominent critic of the PK framework for curriculum, John White[32], argues that 'PK is a poor vehicle for discussing — and justifying — the curriculum as a whole. The aims of education go wider than acquiring academic concepts and the knowledge that comes with them' (White, 2012, p. n.p.). White (2018, pp. 328–329) argues that the 'powerful knowledge' framework assumes rather than shows that access to theoretical knowledge is the primary aim of educational institutions. For White (2012) the 'powerful knowledge' argument implies that 'access to the concepts peculiar to academic subjects is the primary aim of education and education is reduced to providing access to

[32] For a summary of the core disagreement between Michael Young and John White, see Reiss (2018).

academic knowledge. He contends that this begs the question as to what it is about (academic) disciplinary knowledge that makes it crucial to access through education. He suggests that educational institutions have many other legitimate goals including helping students learn to become citizens of democracy and 'enabling students to live flourishing lives' (White, 2018, p. 329). White challenges the general idea that the primary aim of education is to provide access to disciplinary knowledge and sees this as one among many other aims that should be examined and argued for as appropriate aims of education. White (2018) contends that the assumption within the 'powerful knowledge' framework that access to powerful disciplinary knowledge is the primary aim of education because educational institutions are distinguished from other institutions by their focus of providing knowledge is a tautology:

> that schools do or should provide access to knowledge … stands in need of justification. To pursue why knowledge is desirable takes one into an ethical discussion of what it should be for, i.e. what schools should be aiming at. Whether the aims one uncovers overlap with those of other institutions is irrelevant.

The point is that the 'powerful knowledge' framework must justify why access to disciplinary knowledge is the primary aim of education. As discussed above, proponents of the 'powerful knowledge' framework argue that such knowledge enables thinking beyond local contexts and enables students to learn how to generate new knowledge. Still, White (2019) contests whether this capacity to enable broader thinking and generate new knowledge is 'powerful' and suggests that this needs further elaboration and clarification.

Another line of argument against the 'powerful knowledge' framework challenges the distinction between 'specialised' and 'everyday' knowledge on grounds that it strips away the complexities of both concepts and their relations. The argument challenges the perceived implicit notion in the 'powerful knowledge' framework that everyday experience is not useful for students' intellectual development. Alderson (2019, p. 5) writes:

> SR works with dichotomies and a kind of stripping away of complex or ambiguous features to find the unique essence in each isolated concept, phenomenon or discipline in the curriculum. PK theorists also tend to disregard complexity in the socio-politics of designing curricula and their effects.

The basic point is that everyday experience can be valuable for the curriculum. Alderson (2019) highlights research done in psychology which demonstrates that the capacity for abstract thought can be developed and seen in everyday contexts in children, challenging the idea in the 'powerful knowledge' framework that abstract thinking can be introduced only through academic subjects. There are possibilities for abstract specialised and everyday forms of knowledge to interact productively. Roberts (2014, p. 193) writes:

> The issue for me is not whether the school geography curriculum should develop students' knowledge beyond their existing experience. I know of no geography curriculum for any age group based entirely on students' everyday knowledge. The issue is about whether a geography curriculum document setting out what students are required to study, should exclude, as Young suggests, students' everyday knowledge.

This quote suggests that the curriculum question should be focused on how everyday experience can be useful in the curriculum. Some of the disciplinary concepts in the humanities and social sciences rely on everyday experiences and seek to understand the profound questions raised by everyday life. In broad terms, the criticisms contend that the 'powerful knowledge' framework, in advocating for the exclusion of everyday knowledge in the curriculum, fails to realise the ways in which experience and abstract concepts can interact productively to enhance understanding and enable the generation of new knowledge (Wrigley, 2018).

A related critique challenges the implicit privileging of disciplinary knowledge and suggests that it undermines the possibilities of education to be emancipatory, especially for marginalised students. According to Wrigley (2018, p. 8), 'a curriculum which excludes students' everyday knowledge might be anything but emancipatory'. The suggestion is that insistence on the exclusion of everyday knowledge from students' experiences can be seen as encouraging a kind of alienation between students and their everyday experiences and contexts that may not be conducive to their experiencing education as emancipatory. This kind of alienation is highlighted in some of the writings on decolonising the curriculum in contexts like South Africa. For example, one of the leading scholars on decolonisation Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013, p. 11) writes that

> What is disturbing is that African children and youth begin a journey of alienation from their African context the very moment they step into the school, church, and university door … they begin to be taught that all the knowledge they possessed before coming to school was nothing but folk knowledges, barbarism and superstitions that must be quickly be forgotten.

Student experiences of this sort of 'cultural' alienation via devaluation of the knowledge they have from their experiences are commonly highlighted in South African universities. Presumably all students experience a form of alienation when introduced to abstract and theoretical bodies of specialised knowledge. This critique points out that there is, in addition, a cultural form of alienation that certain marginalised groups of students may experience in a curriculum that excludes everyday knowledge.

Relatedly, some scholars contest the exclusion of everyday knowledge in the curriculum and connect such exclusion with Eurocentric tendencies (see Guthrie, 2015; Wrigley, 2018; Zipin, 2013). Guthrie (2015), for example, argues that the privileging of disciplinary knowledge denies the

value of everyday knowledge 'unless filtered through Eurocentric disciplinary induction'. The connection between disciplines and Eurocentrism is controversial and might invite confusion here. I explain the perceived connection between disciplines and Eurocentrism in the next sub-section. For now, the basic point of the criticism seems to be that the privileging of disciplinary knowledge over everyday knowledge encourages the idea that knowledge from everyday experiences is devoid of value unless it is 'purified' and validated through Eurocentric disciplinary knowledge processes.

In sum, these criticisms challenge the justification of 'powerful knowledge' as a curriculum principle and the privileging of specialised knowledge over everyday knowledge. The latter contends that there is a way in which the two forms of knowledge can interact or be used together in the curriculum to enhance the emancipatory goals of education.

Proponents of the 'powerful knowledge' framework have engaged the debate about the place of everyday knowledge in the curriculum. One possible response to the charge about the cultural alienation that can result from disciplinary knowledge is to acknowledge the possibility of such alienation but highlight the role that proper pedagogy can play in minimising the potential of this alienation to inhibit the desired effects of knowledge. Rata (2012) seems to pursue this line of argument when she suggests that everyday knowledge can serve as a pedagogical tool that enables teachers to relate sensitively to students by showing an understanding of the student's socio-cultural background which contributes to the student's motivation to learn and to the overall learning atmosphere in the classroom. This argument implies that it is the role of pedagogy to ensure that everyday experiences of students are integrated in ways that are productive for accessing curriculum knowledge and its benefits. It relegates everyday experience and knowledge to a pedagogical resource and still leaves everyday experience out of the curriculum. But it is precisely this exclusion that the criticism challenges. The criticism calls for a justification for selecting specialised knowledge over non-specialised knowledge in the curriculum, and excluding everyday knowledge.

Proponents of 'powerful knowledge' defend the exclusion of everyday knowledge by arguing that

> We differentiate knowledge because in important ways not all knowledge is the same. … We intuitively feel that some knowledges are 'better' — epistemically, morally or aesthetically — than others, and that they represent criteria about what is true, what is beautiful and how we should treat our fellow human beings and the non-human world that are more universal than others. (M. Young & Muller, 2013, pp. 230–231)

The privileging of specialised knowledge is grounded in the claim that this knowledge is produced in a rigorously and therefore more reliable. Crudely, the hierarchy between everyday and specialised knowledge is grounded on the epistemic superiority of specialised knowledge. I already discussed the idea of the epistemic superiority of specialised knowledge in the previous section.

Proponents of the 'powerful knowledge' framework can acknowledge that students can experience alienation but insist still that the privileging of specialised knowledge in the curriculum is justified by the epistemic superiority of specialised knowledge. As Young (2013, p. 107) argues:

> Although knowledge can be experienced as oppressive and alienating, this is not a property of knowledge itself. An appropriate pedagogy, which engages the commitment of the learner to a relationship to knowledge, can have the opposite consequences — it can free the learner to have new thoughts and even think the 'not yet thought'.

Generally, education knowledge can be experienced as alienating and difficult because it is challenging. Allais (2014, p. 158) explains that 'because of the internal structure of bodies of knowledge, the conditions for their acquisition are different from the conditions for the acquisition of the knowledge acquired in everyday life'. She adds that

> Necessarily, bodies of knowledge are often not directly practically useful, or easy to learn. Learners need to be introduced to them in a sustained way, gradually acquiring greater levels of conceptual depth and breadth. … If this knowledge were easy to learn in the course of everyday life, we would not require education institutions; we could simply allow individuals to acquire knowledge in the world. (S. Allais, 2014, p. 158)

Specialised knowledge is comprised of an internally consistent world of concepts from which gradually emerge the truth of modern theories (Alderson, 2019, p. 6). The process of acquiring specialised knowledge is different and often more difficult than acquiring knowledge in everyday contexts and experiences:

> While learning, of course, happens everywhere and all the time, education provides access to knowledge which is not typically learnt in the course of everyday life. Organized bodies of knowledge enable us to treat the world as an object of study, and not simply as an environment or place of experience; they are systematized because objects must be seen in the relations they maintain with other objects within bodies of thought, and not only by a direct connection with a individual referent, as often happens in the world of experience. (S. Allais, 2014, p. 157)

Crucially, Young and Muller (2013, p. 231) emphasise that their view is not that 'specialised knowledge has a higher cultural value than non-specialised knowledge. Specialisation is not a basis for denying respect or value to non-specialist common sense knowledge that people draw on in their daily lives'. Young and Muller caution here against conflating a claim about the intellectual superiority of knowledge with a claim about the cultural value of knowledge. Proponents of 'powerful knowledge' maintain that everyday knowledge is 'culturally' valuable and useful, but not as the centre and basis of curricula. They contest the idea of a curriculum centred on everyday experience and shared ideas, and learning primarily focused on emulating everyday experiences. But it is not clear that there are curriculum approaches advancing this idea. Notably, Muller and

Young (2019, pp. 15–16) admit that they do not address 'the thorny issue about how PK can best articulate with the lived world of meanings of all learners, making it accessible without boring or alienating them'. They commit to addressing this in the future.

The idea that there is knowledge that might be epistemically better and offer more reliable and sound explanations is intuitive. However, there is controversy about the status of such knowledge in the humanities and social sciences disciplines. There are concerns about how we are to understand the epistemic superiority of specialised knowledge in fields such as the arts and humanities where the epistemic virtues of generalisability and consensus driven rigour are not as evident as in the 'hard' sciences. Alderson (2019, p. 2) highlights, for instance, that 'PK theory emphasises a natural sciences model of knowledge. … In a hierarchy of 'better', more generalisable, reliable, accurate or predictable knowledge, the STEM subjects are highly esteemed as 'the nearest we can get to universal knowledge". Proponents of the 'powerful knowledge' framework tend to use the natural sciences as the best model of 'powerful knowledge' and this can give the impression that the 'heartland' of 'powerful knowledge' is science and mathematics (White, 2012). Young and Muller (2013) (see also Maton, 2014; Muller, 2007; Muller & Young, 2019) address this concern about the 'power' of specialised knowledge in the arts and humanities. I do not elaborate on this further here.

The second set of criticisms raise questions about the applicability of the 'powerful knowledge' framework in curriculum practice and its usefulness as a policy framework in education. The general concern is whether the conceptual notion of 'powerful knowledge' can guide practical decisions about curriculum. Zipin et al. (2015) argue that the 'powerful knowledge' framework is deficient for meeting the social justice requirements of contexts such as South Africa because of its alleged emphasis on the cognitive aspects of education over the ethical aspects. Roughly, the argument here charges that social realism has a 'thin' conception of social justice that emphasises only questions of access to knowledge, and not justice issues relating to recognition of different knowers and diverse perspectives in knowledge production.

Moreover, some empirical studies found that knowledge selection for teaching is more complex and does not imply a straightforward adaptation of the knowledge generated in the academic discipline corresponding to the particular subject at school (Wyse, Hayward, Livingston & Higgins, 2016; Yates & Millar, 2016). Yates and Millar (2016) use the case of school physics to challenge what they see as over-simple assumptions about the verticality of 'powerful knowledge'. The general point is that the 'powerful knowledge' principle does not mean that curriculum selection is

simply a matter of transposing academic disciplinary knowledge into school curriculum.[33] A related study sought to think about the notion of 'powerful knowledge' in relation to the growing popularity of cross- and inter-disciplinarity in curriculum (see Millar, 2016). The critical focus of such studies is to understand how to apply the concept of 'powerful knowledge' to inform inter-disciplinarity curricula where there is a complex combination of knowledge from different disciplines.

All these criticisms could be further elaborated and responses to them discussed in greater depth to establish whether the 'powerful knowledge' framework is a sound curriculum principle. This is beyond the scope of this current investigation. My primary interest is the social realist view of knowledge underpinning the 'powerful knowledge' framework. In the next sub-section, I discuss the critique that the social realist view of knowledge expressed through the notion of 'powerful knowledge' does not address the power and social interests that influence disciplinary knowledge production, and challenges the social realist distinction between 'powerful knowledge' and 'knowledge of the powerful'.

4.3.2 The 'sanctity' of disciplinary knowledge: power in disciplines

> The powerful knowledge framework says little of, and much less accounts for, colonial-modernity in the formation of specialised knowledge. (Rudolph et al., 2018, p. 27)

Despite the important distinction social realists draw between 'knowledge of the powerful' and 'powerful knowledge' to help us see that knowledge is not reducible to power interests, there remain arguments that 'powerful knowledge' does not escape possible entanglements with social power. In this sub-section, I explain the critique that specialised disciplinary knowledge can, and often is, entangled with social power as articulated specifically by Rudolph, Sriprakash and Gerrard (2018) and Zipin, Fataar and Brennan (2015).

The 'powerful knowledge' framework, according to Rudolph et al. (2018, p. 24), 'evokes a faith in the shine of disciplinary knowledge without adequately attending to its shadow'. The 'powerful knowledge' framework is said to hide the negative aspects of disciplinary knowledge: its connections with colonialism and associated epistemic injustices. The argument highlights that disciplinary knowledge has both a 'shine' and a 'shadow' side that is hidden in the 'powerful knowledge' framework but has been documented as a historical fact in accounts of the development of the disciplines. The disciplines are steeped in the hierarchical global economy of

[33] 'Social realism acknowledges differences between the logics of intellectual production and educational reproduction – the practices found in a physics research laboratory are not the same as those found in a physics classroom. However, it does not thereby sever relations between the two. There may be good reasons for why some subjects are typically organized in curricula and taught differently to others' (Maton & Moore, 2010, p. 7).

knowledge production that is shaped by unequal relations of power and social hierarchies. Rudolph et al. (2018, pp. 33–34) argue that

> the conceptual development of powerful knowledge unfortunately constructs a false binary that posits powerful knowledge as concerned with the 'what' of knowledge, and critical accounts of knowledge as too overly concerned with the 'who' of knowledge. This polarising position seems to enable powerful knowledge to bypass the political nature of knowledge and the interwoven practices and processes of knowledge production and use. The result is that disciplinary and specialised knowledge is reified as in and of itself somehow capable of transcending 'knowledge of the powerful' to become 'powerful knowledge' for all.

Rudolph et al. (2018, p. 24) contend that 'the disciplines (and thus, the concept of powerful knowledge) cannot be extricated from the power relations of colonial-modernity which hold the 'shine' of possibility whilst denying the 'shadow side' of colonial violence'.

Along similar lines, Zipin et al (2015, p. 12) demur against the 'sacred' esteem accorded to the 'truth' value of knowledge generated by those in specialist disciplinary communities. The following passage captures the authors' contention:

> On what basis can specialist knowledge achieve such rarefied power of truth? After all, do we not find that actually practising communities of specialist knowledge, situated in given times and places, typically consist far more of men, and/or those who are white, and/or born to families of relatively powerful socio-economic status? Are there no partialities of perspective in such imbalances of membership? how can specialist production of knowledge nonetheless bypass partial perspective to a degree that *guarantees truth*? (Zipin et al., 2015, p. 12)

The passage calls for the social realist 'powerful knowledge' framework to account for how specialist disciplinary knowledge can achieve its rarefied power of truth. More precisely, social realism must explain how the methodological rigour and systematic process of knowledge production characteristic of the disciplines, which secures the epistemic power of 'powerful knowledge', escapes the permeation of power and interests. Zipin et al. (2015) point out that the constitution of communities of experts in specialised disciplines often mirror unequal power relations in society such that there are imbalances in terms of represented perspectives within these communities. The thrust of the criticism is that the 'powerful knowledge' framework 'does not truly contend with the politics and power of social relations and knowledge production' (Rudolph et al., 2018, p. 35). This gestures at the idea that the socio-political constitution of disciplinary communities is not inconsequential to the knowledge produced.

It is important to note that these criticisms do not deny the cognitive potency of powerful specialised knowledge. Rudolph et al. (2018, p. 25) make clear: 'we are not suggesting the dismissal of disciplinary knowledge, and we in fact concur that disciplinary knowledge is often useful and

powerful, we are also interested in its accountability to the very real legacies of the colonial past in the present'. Moreover, Rudolph et al. (2018, p. 27) add that they

> are not arguing for 'less' knowledge, or for all knowledge-claims to be 'relative', but for the powerful knowledge framework to see its shadow side in order to reconstruct curricular knowledge that is powerful in dismantling — not reproducing — the epistemic formations of colonial-racial hierarchies, dispossessions, and violence.

Echoing the same point, Zipin et al. (2015, pp. 11–12) make clear that they do not want to

> sacrifice the value of knowledge that has been hard-wrought by specialist disciplinary communities, by dismissing it as merely or primarily '*power*-knowledge', that is, knowledge made powerful by the arbitrariness of historical struggles in which certain social-structural positions gain upper hands over others to shape curriculum. … We thus share something of Young's valuation about 'more reliable explanations' that provide greater 'intellectual power' to engage in political and moral domains of social life.

There is a shared commitment to the idea that disciplinary knowledge can be cognitively powerful between these critics and social realists. These criticisms are not guilty of 'reductivism' for they do not seem opposed in principle to the power of some (disciplinary) knowledge over others owing to the methodological rigour of their production. The general point of the criticisms is that 'powerful knowledge', even with its superior epistemic powers, can and often is entangled with social power. As Allais (2018, p. 230) puts it, 'knowledge of the powerful must be seen as conceptually distinct from powerful knowledge, but it is important to explore the ways in which powerful knowledge is entangled with the powerful and with power relations'. We can make the conceptual distinction between knowledge as something possessed, used by powerful groups in society and knowledge as something that is intellectually powerful in expanding and improving our understanding of the world in what seem to be powerful ways. At the same time, 'powerful knowledge', tends to suspiciously correspond or align with ideas held by power groups, or produced by communities of experts constituted by powerful groups in society. The contestation is whether the epistemic power of specialised disciplinary knowledge can be separated from other forms of power that knowledge is susceptible to.

What the criticisms above point out, in invoking the uncanny historical association between the disciplines and power, is that social realists do not adequately address how unequal power relations can influence the specialised production of knowledge. To be sure, social realists concede that social power can influence the production of knowledge. Young (2008, p. 31) explains that social realism 'in no way denies that the production and transmission of knowledge is always entangled with a complex set of contending social interests and power relations' and goes on to explain that one of the goals of social realism is 'to properly reveal the manner in which external power relations

might be affecting knowledge both in research and in the curriculum'. Moreover, their notion of 'knowledge of the powerful' indicates their acknowledgement that knowledge can be entangled with power. However, social realists maintain that knowledge is not *only* about power; it is not just the arbitrary ideas of the powerful. The challenge is that even though knowledge is not only about power, power does often have a seemingly unavoidable influence on knowledge, making it critical to address the implications of such influence on knowledge. This is the heart of the contestation against the social realist view of knowledge. I return to this point in concluding this chapter below.

In the next section, I collate the main ideas from the foregoing discussion in order to present a statement of the social realist account of the relationship between knowledge and power. I focus on explicating the sense of power that social realism associates with knowledge and examine whether social realism adequately reconciles the truth-seeking goal of knowledge and the role of power.

4.4 Conclusion: a social realist account of knowledge and power

The social realist account of the relationship between knowledge and power is encapsulated in the distinction between 'powerful knowledge' and 'knowledge of the powerful', and the social realist view of knowledge. Together, these key ideas from social realism capture a 'positive' social realist account of the relationship between knowledge and power.

In the previous section, I noted the contestation surrounding the involvement of power even in disciplinary 'powerful knowledge'. Simply, the contestation raises questions around the precise role of the 'political' sense of power in knowledge that may nonetheless be epistemically more reliable and intellectually powerful. The most recent social realist work attempting to respond to this criticism is the Muller and Young (2019) paper 'Knowledge, power and powerful knowledge re-visited'. In the paper, the authors specify that they aim to explore the question: 'if knowledge can be said to be 'powerful', in what ways can it be said to have, or exert, power? ... what different senses of power are at play in PK?' (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 2). The authors highlight that part of the impetus for addressing this question is the criticism that the concept of 'powerful knowledge' 'neglects the inter-relationship of all knowledge with power relations' (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 2). To address this criticism, the authors re-emphasise the distinction between 'knowledge of the powerful' and 'powerful knowledge' and introduce two different senses of power — 'power over' and 'power to' — associated with 'knowledge of the powerful' and 'powerful knowledge'. Roughly, the argument attempts to show that 'power to' (the 'capacity to' sense of power) rather than 'power

over' (the dominant political sense of power) is the power operative in the notion of powerful knowledge.

In the paper, Muller and Young (2019) start by clarifying and re-emphasising the distinction between 'knowledge of the powerful' and 'powerful knowledge'. Muller and Young point out that 'knowledge of the powerful' highlights the idea of 'knowledge as a handmaiden to power' and 'powerful knowledge' captures the sense in which knowledge is 'something which has its own power' (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 2). The idea of 'knowledge of the powerful' links knowledge to power through knowledge's origins and use. In this idea, knowledge is something that becomes infused with socio-political forms of power; it is produced for and by powerful groups for purposes of control and domination. In contrast, the power in 'powerful knowledge' is a property of knowledge; power is a quality of the 'powerful knowledge'. Thus 'knowledge of the powerful' and 'powerful knowledge' are not the same category of things: 'KOTP is a way of referring to its use or origins and the interests of those originators or users, whereas PK is a kind of knowledge' (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 2). Roughly, 'knowledge of the powerful' is a product and tool for powerful groups to assert control while 'powerful knowledge' is knowledge that has a kind of cognitive power. Muller and Young (2019, p. 3) summarise this point as follows:

> KOTP belongs to the domain of political structure and action and hence to political discourse: PK belongs to the socioepistemic domain, and gestures towards characteristics of knowledge that are objective features of the knowledge in question.

Muller and Young explain that the power operative in 'knowledge of the powerful' differs from power in 'powerful knowledge'. The basic difference is that

> in KOTP, power is not transferable from the power holder to those subjected to the power, unless the subjected actors manage to negotiate its transfer or wrest it back by force. It is a rival good. In PK, by contrast, the power is potentially available to all who acquire it; potentially, everyone can have this power, it is infinitely transferable. (Muller & Young, 2019, pp. 2–3)

The power in 'powerful knowledge' can be conferred upon those who acquire the knowledge in question, whereas the power in 'knowledge of the powerful' is the sort of power that is possessed by powerful groups and must be fought over if it is to be transferred between agents. This surfaces the distinction between two senses of power: '*potentia (power to)*' and '*potestas (power over)*'. The latter denotes the exercise of power over someone or something (usually through domination or violence) whereas the former highlights 'power as capacity to do something' (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 13). The 'power to' operative in 'powerful knowledge' is a socio-epistemic property: it is essentially the generative capacity to augment knowers' thinking and enable them to generate new

ideas (Muller & Young, 2019, pp. 14–16). The claim is that the power of 'powerful knowledge' rests on 'socio-epistemic senses in which it embodies positive or transformative power or potential power' (Muller & Young, 2019, pp. 12–13).

The distinction between 'knowledge of the powerful' and 'powerful knowledge', and the supplementary distinctions between the two senses of 'power as domination' and 'power as capacity' encapsulate the social realist account of the relationship between knowledge and power. The idea is that knowledge is linked with the sort of power which affords those who access it certain epistemic capacities to broaden their thinking and generate new ideas. This account gives a 'positive' epistemic characterisation of the relationship between knowledge and power. The social realist account contrasts dominant conceptions of knowledge and power that see specifically political forms of power as deterministic in knowledge. Recall that the problem, according social realists, is that dominant approaches to curriculum have taken the maxim that 'knowledge is power' to mean that knowledge is only about power (Wheelahan, 2008, p. 206). The concept of 'powerful knowledge' is meant to 'affirm that social interests do not exhaust what is educationally significant about knowledge' (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 2). The 'powerful knowledge' framework challenges the claimed omnipotence of power interests and relations over knowledge and demonstrates that power interests are not the organising principles of knowledge. In this way, social realism decisively opposes reductionist conceptions of knowledge and power.

However, social realism leaves unaddressed the core challenge of the problem of knowledge and power: how to conceptualise the entanglement of 'powerful knowledge' with social power. In the recent paper cited above, Muller and Young note explicitly that do not address this challenge:

> knowledge can be considered as powerful but still deformative. Insofar as we understand it, the demand to 'decolonise' the curriculum would seem to be a demand to rid the curriculum of its deformative properties, not its powerful ones–its generality, coherence and explanatory power, and above all, its capacity to extend horizons. Can they be so separated? This is not a question we will try to answer here. (Muller & Young, 2019, p. 8)

I said at the beginning that the clarification of the senses of power in 'powerful knowledge' and 'knowledge of the powerful' attempts to resolve the question of whether 'powerful knowledge' and 'knowledge of the powerful' can be conceptually distinct and it still be the case that social power influences and shapes 'powerful knowledge'. The social realist account does not get to the core of this issue.[34] The distinction between 'power as domination' and 'power as capacity' intended to

[34] I highlighted in Chapter 2 that there is ongoing contestation about whether there really is a distinction between the two senses of power. Pansardi (2012), for example, contends that there is no distinction. If Pansardi is right, this could

address the core issue recapitulates what arguments in previous social realist literature that 'powerful knowledge' is knowledge that better approximates truth because of its specialised production by disciplinary experts (White, 2019).

Social realism acknowledges that knowledge can be intricately entangled with social power. Muller and Young (2019, p. 13) 'recognise that no knowledge, including specialised knowledge, when used in the real world of contending interests, can remain innocent of power relations'. Muller and Young (2019, p. 3) further note that powerful groups in society have tended to impose restrictions of the distribution of 'powerful knowledge' precisely to delimit the epistemic capacities it confers only to certain sections of the population. Relatedly, Moore (2013, p. 350) suggests that 'the powerful are so *not* because they can arbitrarily impose *their* knowledge/culture as 'powerful knowledge/culture', but because they enjoy privileged access to the knowledge/culture that *is* powerful in its own right'. Still, social realism does not theorise the precise ways in which the specialised processes of knowledge production can be influenced by power, and how this impacts the knowledge productions. In its strong espousal of the cognitive superiority of 'powerful knowledge', social realism seems to over-state the extent to which the specialised processes of knowledge production and communities of disciplinary experts can overcome the social power relations and systems that often condition and influence them. Allais (2014, p. 211), argues that disciplines are not reducible to power relations as they 'have their own rules, codes, traditions, and core values that have been developed over time, and are thus able to some extent to resist ideological manipulation, and to provide tools to contest bias and ideology'. The extent to which the disciplines can resist contamination by power is controversial.

Social realism shows that disciplinary knowledge production is truth-seeking and conducted by specialist communities of experts following rigorous methods and procedures. However, though acknowledging the entanglement of even 'powerful knowledge' with social power, does not address the role of power in the production of knowledge and its implications for the production of truthful knowledge. Even though the intellectual networks and disciplinary processes of the production of knowledge offer better approximations of truth, they are not insusceptible to the influence of social power. The academic production of knowledge is embedded in, and conditioned by, social power relations. My general discontent with social realism is that it curtails the influence of power in the constitution of the disciplines and their processes, and subsequently on the knowledge produced. Social realists do not address, for example, social hierarchies along race, class and gender in communities of disciplinary experts and the implications this tends to have on knowledge

undermine the 'power to' and 'power over' distinction grounding Muller and Young's argument. I do not try to establish here whether the distinction is accurate or not.

production. This failure to adequately address the influence of power in specialised knowledge production, I suggest, is facilitated by social realism's under-emphasis on the situated 'knower' in knowledge. In this respect, I concur with Shay and Peseta's (2016, p. 364) point that 'the social realists in their zeal to defend (and rightly so) the 'about something' have perhaps occluded the 'by someone". This point is echoed and elaborated by Rudolph et al. (2018, p. 25 emphasis added):

> The binary position constructed by Young and colleagues between powerful knowledge on the one hand, and knowledge of the powerful on the other, limits analysis of curricula in ways that problematically bracket out the social relations in disciplinary communities that do impact the constitution, organisation, categorisation, and prioritisation of knowledge. … There has been insufficient attention to how disciplinary communities — in which this process of specialisation takes place — are constituted by *people*, norms, histories, and politics.

My proposal for reconciling the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production with the involvement of power in knowledge turns on the idea that power enters and shapes knowledge via the situatedness of knowledge producers. I elaborate on this idea for my argument in Chapter 6 but the next chapter surfaces the idea of the 'situatedness' of knowledge producers.

5 Decolonisation

> More than economy, it is perhaps through science that a beginning to the much-awaited revolution — the change of relations of production across the planet — will come about. (Hountondji, 2006, p. 56)

This chapter develops the decolonial account of the relationship between knowledge and power. I excavate this account by critically analysing decolonial theory. There are many variants of decolonial theory, or what we may consider as decolonial approaches.[35] However, all decolonial approaches share the view that coloniality is a fundamental problem in the modern world and decolonisation is a necessary task to overcome this problem (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b, p. 11). Here I critically discuss the 'modernity/coloniality school of thought' within decolonisation because it formulates the connection between knowledge and power most explicitly and strongly. Some of the prominent scholars within the modernity/coloniality school of thought include Enrique Dussel, Arturo Escobar, Ramon Grosfoguel, Maria Lugones, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Walter D. Mignolo, Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Anibal Quijano. I primarily reference these scholars in this chapter but I also draw from other decolonial theorists. Most notably, I draw from Boaventura de Sousa Santos who is a prominent proponent of 'Epistemologies of the South' and Gurminder Bhambra who is a proponent of postcolonial theory. The core argument of the modernity/coloniality school of thought is that coloniality is, crucially, the underside of modernity. The key task of decoloniality, then, becomes the critical exposition of the coloniality (of knowledge) and devising proposals to overcome it. Mignolo (2011, p. xxvii) explains that decoloniality is one legitimate option among existing options in the human and social sciences such as liberalism and Marxism, but it does not claim to be *the* option.

Mignolo (2011, p. 3) explains that 'decolonial thinking and doing emerged and unfolded, from the sixteenth century on, as response to the oppressive and imperial bent of modern Europe and ideals projected to and enacted in, the non-European world'. Maldonado-Torres (2011) suggests that a profound shift away from modernisation towards decoloniality as an unfinished project took place in the twentieth century and is still unfolding now. Recent calls for decolonisation are motivated by the critical realisation that coloniality did not end with colonialism. Walsh and Mignolo (2018, pp. 5–6) point out that:

> By the 1990s, decolonization's failure in most nations had become clear; with state in the hands of minority elites, the patterns of colonial power continued both internally and with relation to global structures. At that moment coloniality was unveiled; decoloniality was born in the unveiling of coloniality.

[35] Postcolonial theory, 'Epistemologies of the South' and Wiredu's conceptual decolonisation can all be classified as variants of decolonisation. But my focus here is specifically on the modernity/coloniality variant of decolonial theory.

The grounding realisation of contemporary decolonial approaches is that colonialism produced a complex situation in which 'coloniality' structures the world (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). This predicament is sometimes referred to as a 'postcolonial neocolonized world' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013a, p. 3). Decolonial scholars make a distinction between coloniality and colonialism. Maldonado-Torres (2007, p. 243) explains:

> Colonialism denotes a political and economic relation in which the sovereignty of a nation or a people rests on the power of another nation, which makes such nation an empire. Coloniality, instead, refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism.

Quijano (2007) identifies coloniality in four domains of society: control of economy, control of authority, control of gender and sexuality, and control of subjectivity and knowledge. The principal objective of decoloniality is to reveal and challenge the colonial patterns of power that continue to shape different spheres of life long after the formal end of colonialism. In this way, decolonial approaches contest the colonial world order established by European empires (Bhambra, 2014, p. 119). My specific focus in this project is on epistemic decolonisation.

Epistemic decolonisation focuses on uncovering and challenging the influence of colonial patterns of power on knowledge. Alcoff (2013, p. 58) contends that 'colonial ideologies remain strongly influential of new discourses and new theories even in the contemporary moment'. The underlying sentiment in epistemic decolonisation is that the repressive effects of colonialism

> fell, above all, over the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images and systems of images, symbols, modes of signification, over the resources, patterns, and instruments of formalized and objectivised expression, intellectual or visual. (Quijano, 2007, p. 169)

The general point is that colonialism shaped prevailing ways of understanding and interpreting the world. As a conceptual framework, decoloniality centres coloniality in articulating the history and current configuration of the world (Bhambra, 2007, p. 16; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b). What motivates and justifies this centring of colonialism and coloniality in decolonial analyses of knowledge?

Decolonial approaches to knowledge are motivated by the perception that colonialism and its effects are perpetually neglected or distorted in dominant discourses about the modern world. According to Bhambra (2007, pp. 21–22),

> Colonialism was intrinsic to the contemporary scene in which dominant forms of inquiry were formed and yet the colonial is rendered unseen. These forms of inquiry elaborated universal criteria and presumed themselves to be universally relevant and yet, were constructed on the basis of marginalizing and silencing other experiences and voices.

The decolonial argument is that dominant accounts of the constitution of the modern order tend not to adequately and sufficiently centre the role of colonialism. Bhambra (2007, p. 20) points out that 'colonialism does not enter into the general categories of modernity nor the broad historiography that is modernization theory, it is even given a marginal role in the sociological histories of particular western countries which had pronounced colonial pasts'. Echoing the same point, Jones (2015, p. 129) explains that 'the character and legacy of colonialism and, before that, three centuries of slave trade, as well as the ongoing role of international forces and interventions in the structuring and constitution of the post-colonial present, are generally overlooked or mischaracterized' in contemporary narratives about the modern world. The general point is that there is a tendency of excluding and silencing colonial encounters in dominant global discourses of the modern world (Bhambra, 2007, p. 9). I suggest, in Posholi (2020), that decolonial approaches are motivated by what they perceive as an epistemic crisis consisting in dominant discourses inadequately theorising the contemporary order owing, in part, to the perpetual neglect and marginalisation of colonialism's critical role in the constitution of the modern order.

A set of epistemic problems resulting from colonialism's entanglement with knowledge concern decolonial approaches: inheritance of colonial concepts and categories, unequal relations in global knowledge production and the crucial problem of Eurocentrism. Wiredu (2002, p. 54) explains that in the case of Africa,

> Colonialism has caused a wide-spread involuntary intermixing of Western and African intellectual categories in the thinking of contemporary Africans. Common sense alone dictates that we Africans of the immediate post-independence era should try to unravel the conceptual entanglements.

A related concern is the continuing asymmetries in the global knowledge production between the global North and South. Hountondji (2006, p. 46) describes this asymmetry in the following passage:

> Despite the important changes which have taken place since decolonization, postcolonial scientific research to this day has been tributary to, and structured like, colonial scientific research. In short postcolonial scientific research has been basically extraverted, i.e. turned outwards toward the outside world and organized to respond to a demand (theoretical, scientific, economic, etc.) that comes from the 'centre' of the world market.

The postcolonial era is characterised by a division of labour put in place by colonisation where the North has the monopoly of invention and the South is reduced to supplying the resources for that invention and to implementing the results as applicable. The 'developed' parts of the world dominate global knowledge production — the global South provides the raw data for scientific theory development in the global North. In this way, the global South consumes rather than produces knowledge about the world, including its own parts of the world. Elsewhere, I argue that this unequal contribution in global knowledge production constitutes the hermeneutical injustice against which epistemic decolonisation contests (Posholi, 2020).

The heart of the epistemic problem motivating decolonial arguments about knowledge are encapsulated in decolonial critiques of Eurocentrism. This chapter critically discusses the decolonial critique of Eurocentrism in order to extricate the decolonial account of the relationship between knowledge and power. I divide the chapter into four sections.

In section one, I explain the decolonial critique of Eurocentrism and highlight the argument that Eurocentrism posits and privileges Eurocentric knowledge as the only valid knowledge for the whole world. I also emphasise the decolonial argument that Eurocentrism is underpinned by a problematic epistemology that sees knowledge as abstract and de-contextualised, and conceals the located and embodied 'knower' in knowledge.

In section two, I explain that the decolonial proposal for subverting Eurocentrism requires a commitment to a conception of knowledge as located and embodied, and an advancement of the epistemic privilege of marginalised knowledges. I explain and illustrate that the strategy for decolonisation and contesting Eurocentrism foregrounds the located and embodied knower in knowledge. The decolonial argument about the problematic epistemology underpinning Eurocentrism as well as the proposal for overcoming Eurocentrism surfaces the decolonial account of the situatedness of knowledge producers which is central for the argument I develop in Chapter 6.

In section three, I critically examine some prominent criticisms of decoloniality and present possible responses to them. I discuss two categories of criticisms. The first category raises challenges around defining Eurocentrism and asks whether there is a coherent way of specifying Eurocentric knowledge. The second category of criticisms poses questions about the justifiability of the decolonial proposal to privilege marginalised perspectives in knowledge. My objective is to consider both the criticisms and counter arguments in order to develop a decolonial account of knowledge and power in the final section.

In the final section, I argue that decolonial theory characterises the relationship between knowledge and power as one in which knowledge is intricately entangled with colonial forms of power: Eurocentric knowledge hides and perpetuates the operations of coloniality. I examine this account and argue that it usefully demonstrates a particularly pervasive and pernicious relationship between knowledge and power that distorts our understandings of the world. However, I argue that the decolonial emphasis of the power-saturatedness of dominant knowledge, though rightful and helpful, tends to overshadow the idea of the truth-seekingness of knowledge and makes the decolonial account susceptible to relativism.

5.1 Decolonial critique of Eurocentrism

> Colonial history is the non-acknowledged center in the making of modern Europe. (Mignolo, 2009, p. 16)

I suggested above that decolonial approaches target Eurocentrism as a framework for thinking about the world. As an epistemological project, decolonisation undertakes a negative and a positive project. The negative project consists in the critical project of exposing the latent Eurocentrism characteristic of dominant paradigms of knowledge. The positive project takes on the reconstructive task of reformulating and reconstructing our knowledge systems and norms (De Sousa Santos, 2018, p. vii). Mignolo (2011, p. 10) explains that 'decolonial thinking consists in relentless analytic efforts to understand, in order to overcome, the logic of coloniality underneath the rhetoric of modernity'. Critical engagement with discourses about modernity is a key component of decolonial thought and its concern with Eurocentrism. Modernity can refer to a number of things. It can refer to a historical period, processes and institutions, intellectual outlooks and so on (Bennett, 2013). My focus is on the decolonial critique of what it takes as dominant Eurocentric narratives about modernity.[36] The aim of decolonial critiques is to undermine Eurocentric narratives of modernity by showing that such narratives hide the coloniality that is constitutive of modernity and thus offer distorted understandings of the contemporary order. What is Eurocentrism and what are the dominant Eurocentric narratives of modernity against which decoloniality contends?

[36] We can distinguish between two forms of critiques about modernity: internal 'Western' critiques, and external critiques emerging from Third World and Asia. 'Western' critiques of modernity include, for example, post-structuralism and post-modernity. External critiques can be categorised broadly into 'de-westernization' and decolonisation. Mignolo (2009, p. 3) writes that 'decolonial options have one aspect in common with de-westernizing arguments: the definitive rejection of 'being told' from the epistemic privileges of the zero point what 'we' are, what our ranking is in relation to the ideal of humanitas and what we have to do to be recognized as such' and maintains that they diverge, however, in their questioning of the hidden logic of modernity. Mignolo (2011) argues, however, that de-westernising approaches fail to question the hidden logic of modernity: coloniality.

Eurocentrism is a contested concept and can be defined in different ways. A general common understanding of Eurocentrism defines it as a paradigm which tends to posit 'Western' ways of thinking and cultures as the norm and standard by which all other parts of the world must abide and be judged. Stanziani (2018, p. 2) explains that Eurocentrism is characterised by a general tendency to 'interpret the planet and its history and diversity using the yardstick of a few Western categories and values'. Eurocentrism privileges and produces the dominance of European ways of thinking not only for itself, but for all others. Matin (2013, p. 354) captures the essence of Eurocentrism when he writes that 'Eurocentrism is a specific mode of comprehending modernity that begins and ends with Europe'.

The main target of decolonial analyses and deconstruction is the epistemological framework that underpins Eurocentric narratives about the world. Mignolo (2000, p. 98) explains that

> subaltern reason must aim to rethink and reconceptualise the stories that have been told *and the conceptualization* that has been put into place to divide the world between Christians and pagans, civilized and barbarians, modern and pre-modern, and developed and undeveloped regions and people' (emphasis added).

Decolonial approaches target the framing assumptions and conceptualisations of Eurocentrism. Several proponents of decolonial thought emphasise this point. De Sousa Santos (2018, p. viii) explains that the imperative of the decolonial critique of Eurocentrism is 'to go beyond the truly magnificent and brilliant body of theories generated by such thinking and to question their epistemological foundations'. Similarly, according to Bhambra (2007, p. 21), decolonial approaches aim to conduct 'a more thoroughgoing analysis of the very constitution of knowledge and a reappraisal of the underlying assumptions upon which discourses and practices come to be premised'. The target of decolonial theory 'is rarely the content of specific epistemological positions or theories but rather of their imperial assumptions and scope of application' (Alcoff, 2007, p. 91).

Eurocentrism does not designate a particular theory. Rather, it is a pattern of interpreting and producing knowledge about the world. Three interrelated presuppositions, arguably, form the conceptual core of Eurocentrism. The first historical presupposition 'posits the endogenous and autonomous emergence of modernity in Europe' (Matin, 2013, p. 354). The second normative presupposition is that 'the autonomous production of modernity renders it superior to the rest' (Matin, 2013, p. 354). This leads to the third presupposition that 'European modernity and its associated institutions and practices are destined to become universal' (Matin, 2013, p. 354). In general, Eurocentrism perpetuates views to the effect that Europe's successful modernity, which apparently developed endogenously, confers a certain kind of superiority to Europe and makes it

a universal model for the rest of the world to aspire to. I elaborate these presuppositions in the next paragraphs.

Proponents of decoloniality argue that Eurocentric paradigms narrate modernity as an exclusively European phenomenon. According to this narrative, the modern world — its institutions, thought and processes — originates as a result of European efforts without any intervention or contribution from the rest of the world. Eurocentric narratives of modernity claim that 'Europe is ahead because Europe is smarter and more reflective than the rest of the world and presumes the entitlement of Europe as the political vanguard of the human race' (Alcoff, 2007, p. 85). This dominant view of modernity, Araújo and Maeso (2016, p. xix) argue, 'naturalizes and re-enacts the "exceptionality" of Europe and Europeaness in constituting the global order'. The exceptionality of Europe is achieved by erasing and rendering invisible the experiences and conditions of non-Western parts of the world that influence the development of modern society (Maeso & Araújo, 2015). The role and contribution of the rest of the world in the formation and constitution of the modern world is hidden or marginalised, and distorted interpretations of history and the contemporary world are produced.

Eurocentrism as a global paradigm for the production and interpretation of knowledge is argued to be hegemonic. According to De Sousa Santos (2018, p. 40), 'a certain system of knowledge is hegemonic to the extent that it convincingly omits the unknowns it lives with or generates and credibly denies that there is any other kind of knowledge in any rival cognitive system'. 'Hegemonic knowledges always work through distortions and omissions at the local level in order to enable the reductionist move of containment' (Alcoff, 2013, p. 223). Omission and exclusion are important elements in securing the hegemonic status of Eurocentrism. As Matin (2013, p. 354) puts it, 'the theoretical omission of the plural and interactive nature of the social, is at the intellectual heart of Eurocentrism'. Alcoff (2017, p. 401) argues that 'the overarching frames of Eurocentrism are intrinsically imperialist and insusceptible to compatibilism or an adequate inclusivity'.

Decolonial approaches highlight specifically that colonialism, more precisely coloniality, is often left out of Eurocentric discourses about the modern world. According to Mignolo (2011, pp. 2–3) the Eurocentric discourse of '"modernity" is a complex narrative whose point of origination was Europe; a narrative that builds Western civilization by celebrating its achievements while hiding at the same time its darker side, "coloniality"'. Similarly, Maeso and Araújo (2015, p. 3) argue that the dominant Eurocentric paradigm often interprets the processes of colonialism and racial slavery as 'a dark chapter in the triumphant development of modernity, that is, an appendix to this history that is offset by the eventual progress in rights, equality and democracy'. Bhambra (2007, pp. 18–

19) contends that 'whatever Europe is, cannot be understood outside of its imperial relationships'. To be sure, the claim is not that none of the dominant paradigms of thought address colonialism. Proponents of decolonial theory concede that some frameworks, which they claim to be Eurocentric, acknowledge colonialism but contend that such frameworks do not sufficiently recognise and underscore its constitutive relation with modernity. For example: Mignolo (2002, p. 60) writes that 'modern world-system analysis brings colonialism into the picture, although as a derivative rather than a constitutive component of modernity, since it does not yet make visible coloniality, the other (darker?) side of modernity'.

More precisely, then, the target of decolonial critique is the Eurocentric 'celebratory rhetoric of modernity'. The core argument of decoloniality is that hidden behind the 'celebratory rhetoric of modernity' is coloniality: an insidious system of power spread through different domains of life that perpetuates and justifies domination, racism and inferiority of the colonised (Mignolo, 2011, p. 6). For Mignolo (2011, pp. 2–3):

> Coloniality names the underlying logic of the foundation and unfolding of Western civilization from the Renaissance to today of which historical colonialisms have been a constitutive, although downplayed, dimension. The concept, as used by the collective modernity/coloniality, is not intended to be a totalitarian concept, but rather one that specifies a particular project: that of the idea of modernity and its constitutive and darker side.

To reiterate a point already made above, the key task of decolonial thought is to challenge Eurocentric conceptions of modernity by demonstrating the ways in which colonialism and coloniality are constitutive parts of European modernity (Franzki, 2012). Decoloniality argues that modernity is a product of global relations between the West and the rest of the world. 'Modernity is not an exclusively European phenomenon but constituted in a dialectical relation with a non-European alterity' (Mignolo, 2007, p. 457). In the words of Maldonado-Torres (2007, p. 244) 'modernity as a discourse and as a practice would not be possible without coloniality, and coloniality continues to be an inevitable outcome of modern discourses'. Decolonial approaches contest the framing presuppositions that produce the conceptualisations of the development of modernity as an essentially and exclusively European phenomenon.

Proponents of decoloniality usually to highlight the particular racial hierarchy created by colonialism, and still present in our modern world, and its general absence in current Eurocentric theorisations about the modern world. Grosfoguel (2007) argues that the Eurocentric paradigm ignores and conceals the fact that race and racism is the organising principle that structures and configures all of the multiple hierarchies of the world system. Along similar lines, Mbembe (2017, p. 2) writes that

> Since the beginning of the eighteenth century, Blackness and race have constituted the (unacknowledged and often denied) foundation, what we might call the nuclear power plant, from which the modern project of knowledge — and of governance — has been deployed.

In political philosophy, Charles Mills' (1997, 2017) work on race tries to demonstrate how the neglect of race in dominant 'Western' political philosophy, such as those in the Rawlsian tradition, results in inadequate understandings of the phenomenon of global social justice. In his influential book *The Racial Contract*, Mills suggests that 'as a central concept the notion of a Racial Contract might be more revealing of the real character of the world we are living in, and the corresponding historical deficiencies of its normative theories and practices, than the raceless notions currently dominant in political theory' (Mills, 1997, p. 7). The crude point in the passage is that dominant political theory (liberalism) fails to treat as central the racial hierarchies instituted partly by colonialism in its understandings of global justice, and hence offers deficient understandings of the world. In other words, the neglect of colonial racial ordering as a central notion for theorising the global order results in distorted knowledge about important issues such as social justice. This foregrounds an epistemic motivation at the heart of calls for decolonising knowledge.

Decolonial approaches argue that Eurocentrism hides certain core aspects of the constitution of the modern world even as it poses as a universal model. Some scholars argue that the Eurocentric paradigm tends to render the modern order as 'natural', treating the existing order as more or less as given (Flikschuh, 2014). This implies that it 'has little room for popular cravings to understand "the underlying order in the world"' (Nyamnjoh, 2012, p. 130). The general point is that the categories of thought employed by Eurocentric frameworks — the 'fundamental concepts by means of which whole ranges of issues are formulated and discussed' (Wiredu, 1998, p. 20) — simply fail to reveal certain fundamental (colonial) aspects of the modern world. Mills' critique of the field of 'Western' political philosophy demonstrates how the dominant concepts and methods of the field conceptually occlude the very possibility of foregrounding colonialism's role in establishing the contemporary international order and the particular racial hierarchy dominant in modern society. For example: Mills (2015, pp. 8–9) explains that

> the central political unit of the modern period is the nation state, which, in the Anglo-American field over the past forty years, has primarily been conceptualized, following Rawls, as the contractarian nation-state. … But such a concept cannot capture the crucial difference between those polities which were the rulers and those which were the ruled, nor the distinct histories of colonizers and colonized, settlers and indigenous, free and enslaved, in the colonial world.

This offers one example in which a dominant concept that is used for understanding the world occludes some important aspects of the realities of the modern world. Mills (2005, 2018) presents a similar critique of 'ideal theory' as a dominant method in 'Western' political philosophy.

So far, I have been describing the target of decoloniality, Eurocentrism, and highlighting the core argument regarding its problem: it hides coloniality and the social hierarchies it established to configure the modern order. The decolonial contention is that Eurocentrism perpetuates distorted understandings of the contemporary order. Earlier on I noted the decolonial claim that Eurocentrism is underpinned by an epistemological conception of knowledge production as abstracted, dislocated and disembodied such that the particular characteristics of the knower are eclipsed or insignificant. I turn now to elaborate on this point.

Eurocentrism, according to Grosfoguel (2007, p. 212), implies that 'there is only one sole epistemic tradition from which to achieve truth and universality'. Eurocentrism in knowledge is characterised by claims about the superior validity and legitimacy of Eurocentric concepts and categories of thought as well as the positing of modes of thought which originate from and respond to European conditions as universally valid across all social and geographical conditions. The problem with Eurocentrism, proponents of decoloniality maintain, is not the origination of knowledge from Europe. The problem surrounds the posited scope of validity and legitimacy of knowledge produced in and for Europe extending beyond Europe as a universal model to the exclusion and undermining of other forms of knowledge outside of Europe. As Mignolo (2007, p. 493) explains, 'there is nothing wrong in the fact that a given group of people put forward its own cosmovision. The problem arises when a limited number of people feel they are appointed by God to bring (their) good to the rest of the humanity'. Quijano (2007, p. 177) echoes this point and argues that the problem with Eurocentrism is 'the pretension that the specific cosmic vision of a particular ethnie should be taken as universal rationality, because this is actually pretend to impose a provincialism as universalism'.

The charge is that Eurocentric thought poses as the only valid means of theorising for the whole world and so undermines the validity and legitimacy of other forms of knowledge. As I noted above, this kind of exclusion is argued to be a core element of Eurocentric hegemony. Mignolo (2009, p. 6) explains:

> The history of knowledge-making in modern Western history from the Renaissance on will have, then, theology and philosophy-science as the two cosmological frames, competing with each other at one level, but collaborating with each other when the matter is to disqualify forms of knowledge beyond these two frames. Both frames are institutionally and linguistically anchored in Western Europe.

Epistemic decolonisation challenges the positing of Eurocentric frameworks of knowledge as the only valid frameworks for the entire planet: 'it is crucial for the ethics, politics, and epistemology of the future to recognize that the totality of Western epistemology, from either the right or the left, is no longer valid for the entire planet' (Mignolo, 2002, p. 86). Ultimately, decolonial arguments contest narratives that paint Europe as 'the point of arrival of human history and the model for the entire planet' (Mignolo, 2011, pp. xiii–xiv). Arguably, decolonial efforts to de-centre 'Europe' are achieving some success. Mbembe (2017, p. 1) argues that 'Europe is no longer the center of gravity of the world'. How does Eurocentrism manage to posit itself as the universal and only valid form of theorising the world?

Decolonialists argue that the positing of Eurocentric thought as the only valid form of knowledge is grounded in epistemological presuppositions of knowledge as abstract, dislocated and disembodied. Alcoff (2017) suggests that the illegitimate hegemony of Eurocentric thinking is underpinned by the separation of thought from its socio-historical genealogy and context. Writing on the imbalances in global knowledge, Hountondji (2006, pp. 41–42) explains how descriptions of global knowledge

> leave unaddressed the conditions under which that knowledge is produced, the conditions of its management and control, and its relationship with the culture or cultures specific to the places of its production. Such descriptions do not question the position of Southern countries in relation to existing information…. These descriptions insist on the planetary extension of scientific paradigms and of their related practices, or in the uniformity of methods and founding theories. But nobody appears to wonder where such paradigms come from, geographically or socially.

Decolonial critiques contend that Eurocentric thought fails to acknowledge its location, the undeniable fact of its local history (Alcoff, 2007). Eurocentric thought, Quijano (2007, p. 177) explains, imposes its 'provincialism as universalism' through an epistemology that treats knowledge as abstract, dislocated and disembodied, and as simply the word of god or the neutral practice of reason. To understand the decolonial argument against Eurocentrism, we must understand how the alleged failure to acknowledge the locatedness of knowledge aids claims of the universal validity of Eurocentric thought.

Proponents of decoloniality argue that the epistemology underwriting Eurocentrism naturalises the idea that 'knowledge-making has no geo-political location and that its location is in an ethereal place that can be described as 'the hubris of the zero point" (Mignolo, 2009, p. 8). Quijano (2007) contends that traditional Eurocentric epistemology starts with dualism; a strong distinction and separation between mind and body; between subject and object; between reason and nature. The

subject is abstracted from the object of its knowledge. Alcoff (1996, p. 204) captures this point concisely when she writes:

> Modernist epistemologies have attempted to eliminate subjectivity as an overt feature of their accounts of knowledge, they have allowed a very particular subjectivity to structure their epistemologies in a more covert manner, with predictably self-validating results.

Broadly, the point is that Eurocentric epistemology hides its locality and embodiment in order to grant itself a detached and abstract view from which to judge its knowledge as superior and others as inferior. It is from this 'false' position of detachment and abstraction that Eurocentrism claims its superiority and universal validity. Hence, for Mignolo (2011, p. xv) one of the defining tasks of decolonial options is:

> the analytic of the construction, transformation, and sustenance of racism and patriarchy that created the conditions to build and control a structure of knowledge, either grounded on the word of God or the word of Reason and Truth. Such knowledge-construction made it possible to eliminate or marginalize what did not fit into those principles that aspired to build a totality in which everybody would be included, but not everybody would also have the right to include.

Decolonial approaches 'seek to interrupt the idea of dislocated, disembodied, and disengaged abstraction, and to disobey the universal signifier that is the rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality, and the West's global model' (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 3). Decolonial analyses aim to reveal 'how the hubris of the zero point … created the figure of the detached observer, a neutral seeker of truth and objectivity who at the same time controls the disciplinary rules and puts himself or herself in a privileged position to evaluate and dictate' (Mignolo, 2009, p. 4). This point about the 'the figure of the detached observer, a neutral seeker of truth and objectivity' is worth highlighting here as it foregrounds the decolonial claim that Eurocentric epistemology conceals the social situatedness of the subject of knowledge. Decoloniality argues that Eurocentric epistemology in fact privileges, under the disguise of abstract and neutral subjects of knowledge, a particular kind of knower privileged in the colonial racial hierarchy. Crudely, the knower that is privileged in Eurocentric epistemology is 'Western'.

In a nutshell, decolonial work exposes the covert locatedness (and perspectivism) of Eurocentric knowledge. The core argument is that the 'geo- and body-politics of knowledge has been hidden from the self-serving interests of Western epistemology and that a task of de-colonial thinking in the unveiling of epistemic silences of Western epistemology and affirming the epistemic rights of the racially devalued' (Mignolo, 2009, p. 4). Once the hidden underlying assumptions of Eurocentric knowledge production are revealed, we can 'dispel the myth of universality grounded

on theo- and ego-politics of knowledge' (Mignolo, 2011, p. xvi). More specifically, proponents of decolonisation argue that once Eurocentric epistemology's false claim to 'the view from nowhere' is exposed, the particular connection between Eurocentric forms of knowledge and coloniality becomes clearer. In specific, it becomes clear that:

> The intersubjective universe produced by the entire Eurocentered capitalist colonial power was elaborated and formalized by the Europeans and established in the world as an exclusively European product and as a universal paradigm of knowledge and of the relation between humanity and the rest of the world. (Quijano, 2007, pp. 171–172)

Stojnić (2017, p. 107) extends this argument and explains:

> Colonialism connected the concepts of knowledge and science with the authority of power and race by establishing the hegemony of western Eurocentric model of knowledge as the only valid one. This hegemony has survived the historic colonialism and maintained till present day.

The crude point is that the hegemony and legitimacy of Eurocentrism is founded on and sustains colonial forms of power but this fact, decolonial scholars maintain, is masked in Eurocentric discourses that pretend that knowledge is abstract, objective and universal. Proponents of decolonisation contend that Eurocentric forms of knowledge are legitimised and privileged by suppressing and rendering other forms of knowledge as less credible through the exercise of colonial forms of power.[37]

As indicated earlier, calls for decolonising curricula in South Africa foreground the Eurocentrism of curriculum knowledge. Heleta (2016, p. 2) points out that the curriculum in South African universities 'remains largely Eurocentric and continues to reinforce white and Western dominance and privilege while at the same time being full of stereotypes, prejudices and patronising views about Africa and its people'. This Eurocentric curriculum, it is argued, has its origins in the colonial and apartheid periods in South Africa. As Mbembe (2016, p. 32) puts it, 'the syllabi designed to meet the needs of colonialism and Apartheid continue well into the post-Apartheid era'. Colonial education aimed at the promotion and imposition of Eurocentric worldviews while subjugating the perspectives and worldviews of marginalised groups (Heleta, 2016).

Echoing similar sentiments, but speaking of calls to decolonise universities across the world more broadly, Rudolph, Sriprakash, and Gerrard (2018, p. 26) suggest that the fact that university curricula are predominantly 'white' is 'not an outcome of independent criteria for 'better' knowledge but a consequence of colonialism and racial domination in the epistemic communities

[37] Hence some scholars have called for conviviality in knowledge production that seeks the integration of sidestepped popular epistemologies informed by popular universes and ideas of reality (see Nyamnjoh, 2017, p. 267).

of the academy'. The implicit claim here is that the colonial racial hierarchies that privilege certain groups of knowers persists in knowledge production. The calls for decolonising knowledge and the curriculum emphasise the Eurocentric character of curricula in South Africa, and the consequent incapacity of such curricula to serve the post-colonial needs of the country. The core argument is that curricula privileges and promotes Eurocentric thinking about the world.

The main take away from the foregoing discussion is the decolonial claim that Eurocentrism has dominated, and continues to dominate, global knowledge production to the detriment of knowledge. In other words, Eurocentrism as a pervasive phenomenon in global knowledge production results in distorted knowledge about the modern order. Decoloniality argues that Eurocentrism is underpinned by a particular epistemology that hides the situatedness of knowledge producers and thus allows Eurocentric thought to pose as universally valid and dominate global knowledge. Moreover, the epistemology underpinning Eurocentrism is argued to conceal the privileging of knowers and knowledge along colonial racial hierarchies.

In the next section, I discuss the decolonial proposal to de-centre 'Europe' as the locus of enunciation of thought and knowledge production in order to overcome Eurocentrism.

5.2 Towards decoloniality: shifting the locus of enunciation

> Decoloniality is distinguished from an imperial version of history through its push for shifting of geography of reason from the West as the epistemic locale from which the 'world is described, conceptualised and ranked' to the ex-colonised epistemic sites as legitimate points of departure in describing the construction of the modern world order. (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b, p. 13)

I have explained in the previous section that Eurocentrism, according to decoloniality, hides coloniality, and as a framework for knowledge, claims universality by concealing its privileging of particular subjects of knowledge and modes of knowing. To counter Eurocentrism, proponents of decoloniality insist that all knowledge is located and embodied. Moreover, proponents of decoloniality expose the privileging of 'Western' knowers and forms of knowing inherent in dominant global knowledge and propose that marginalised knowers must be prioritised and privileged to contest Eurocentrism. Decoloniality argues that 'an epistemological shift is necessary in order to recover the idea that there are alternatives and indeed recognize, as the bearers of potential alternatives, the struggles against oppression that continue to be fought in the world (De Sousa Santos, 2018, p. viii). Mignolo (2003, p. 85) explicitly suggests 'the future demands thinking beyond Eurocentrism'. Similarly, De Sousa Santos (2016, p. 9) argues that,

> Given the peculiar pervasiveness and intensity of the institutionalized, harmful lies running our contemporary world, the adequate recognition of injustice and the possible overcoming of oppression can only be achieved by means of an epistemological break.

Recall the point explained above that Eurocentrism leads to distorted interpretations of the constitution of the modern order. The decolonial proposal is to look 'outside' and beyond the Eurocentric paradigm for resources to re-interpret the world and change it. This 'outside' does not designate a pure positionality outside to the modern/colonial world order. Escobar (2004, p. 218) explains that the 'outside' referred to is 'an outside that is precisely constituted as difference by hegemonic discourse'. Mignolo (2002, pp. 61–60) encapsulates this position of exteriority in the notion of 'colonial difference' — a position marked as 'outside' and silenced by Eurocentric discourses. Colonial difference is a position formally 'inside' the Eurocentric modern/colonial order while at the same time excluded or marginalised by it.

The epistemological break that decoloniality calls for seems to consist in countering Eurocentric conceptions of knowledge as dislocated and disembodied to reveal particularly the inherent hierarchy in global knowledge that privileges Eurocentric forms of knowledge and knowers and excludes or marginalises all others. The process of breaking with the epistemology of Eurocentrism is captured in the decolonial concept of 'delinking' (Mignolo, 2007). Delinking from the Eurocentric paradigm consists in taking seriously the geo-politics and body-politics of knowledge, and bringing to the fore perspectives and forms of knowledge excluded and marginalised by and within Eurocentrism. Delinking, according to Mignolo (2007, p. 453), 'brings to the foreground other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding and, consequently, other economy, other politics, other ethics'. Mignolo doubts that delinking can happen within Eurocentric paradigms which are grounded in ideas of knowledge as grounded in the word of God or the reason of abstracted neutral knowers. He explains:

> De-linking cannot be performed, obviously, within the frame of the theo and the ego-logical politics of knowledge and understanding. For, how can you de-link within the epistemic frame from where you want to de-link. The process of delinking needs a different epistemic grounding that I describe here as the geo- and body- politics of knowledge and understanding. De-linking is the reverse of 'assimilation': to assimilate means that you do not belong yet to what you are assimilating. It does not make sense to conceive assimilation within the frame one wants to assimilate. In other words, de-linking could hardly be thought out from a Marxist perspective, because Marxism offers a different content but not a different logic. (Mignolo, 2007, pp. 461–462)

The reason that 'delinking' cannot happen with Eurocentric paradigms of knowledge is because such paradigms hide the locatedness and embodiedness of knowledge by presenting the subject of knowledge as abstracted from their context and neutral in their pursuit of knowledge. Mignolo

(2009, p. 4) argues that 'in order to call into question the modern/colonial foundation of the control of knowledge, *it is necessary to focus on the knower rather than on the known*. It means to go to the very assumptions that sustain locus enunciations' (emphasis added). Mignolo (2009, p. 1) argues:

> Once upon a time scholars assumed that the knowing subject in the disciplines is transparent, disincorporated from the known and untouched by the geo-political configuration of the world in which people are racially ranked and regions are racially configured. From a detached and neutral point of observation (that Colombian philosopher Santiago Castro-Gómez describes as the *hubris of the zero point*), the knowing subject maps the world and its problems, classifies people and projects into what is good for them. Today that assumption is no longer tenable, although there are still many believers.

Delinking must eschew the focus on the mind-object distinction and focus on the located and embodied knower. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015, p. 492) explains that 'the core of decoloniality is the agenda of shifting the geography and biography of knowledge, bringing identity into epistemology by centralising the questions: who generates knowledge and from where?' Shifting the geography of knowledge means asking the questions 'who and when, why and where is knowledge generated?' so as to shift the focus from the enunciated to the enunciation, and prioritising, specifically, the subaltern locus of enunciation (Mignolo, 2009, p. 2). The main focus of decolonial approaches is the 'locus of enunciation, that is, the geo-political and body-political location of the subject that speaks' (Grosfoguel, 2007; Mignolo, 2009).

The critical focus of current decolonising efforts on upending and challenging Eurocentric epistemological foundations is supposed to mark their radical extension of earlier decolonising efforts that focused more on severing political dependency of previously colonised states, and gaining status on the global world as independent stakeholders. The contention is that these earlier efforts did not sufficiently challenge and dismantle the colonial power systems that still persist today. Decoloniality 'endeavors to delink from the theoretical tenets and conceptual instruments of Western thought' (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 7). Mignolo (2007, p. 459) explains what it takes to truly decolonise knowledge, and thus change the terms of the conversation, in the following passage:

> If delinking means to change the terms of the conversation, and above all, of the hegemonic ideas about what knowledge and understanding are… it is necessary to fracture the hegemony of knowledge and understanding that have been ruled, since the fifteenth century and through the modern/colonial world by what I conceive here as the theo-logical and the ego-logical politics of knowledge and understanding.

Broadly, decolonisation aims at changing the terms of conversation by starting from what they perceive is different epistemological assumptions. In contrast to what is positioned as Eurocentric paradigms of thought which start from assumptions of knowledge as based on abstract reason,

proponents of decolonisation maintain that knowledge is, in a crucial way, a function of the knower's social location and social identity. Decoloniality foregrounds the idea that 'the knower is always implicated, geo- and body-politically, in the known, although modern epistemology (e.g. the hubris of the zero point) managed to conceal both and created the figure of the detached observer' (Mignolo, 2009, p. 4). Decolonial approaches focus on 'contesting the hegemony of zero point epistemology' (Mignolo, 2009, p. 4) and challenges the myth of abstracted subjects in knowledge production (Grosfoguel, 2007). Against the hegemony of Eurocentric paradigms that claim universal and objective knowledge, decolonial approaches maintain that 'nobody escapes the class, sexual, gender, spiritual, linguistic, geographical, and racial hierarchies of the modern/colonial capitalist/patriarchal world system' (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 213).

Decoloniality posits that marginalised groups of knowers can provide different conceptual tools that can 'correct' dominant distorted knowledge and provide fertile ground for envisioning an alternative global order (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 3). In specific, the decolonial proposal is to look at 'how those who live the colonial difference think theory, theorize practice, and build, create, and enact concrete processes, struggles, and practices of resurgent and insurgent action and thought, including in the spheres of knowledge' (Mignolo & Walsh, 2018, p. 9). Mignolo & Walsh (2018, p. 28) write that we must

> give attention to the ways those who live the colonial difference think theory through from political praxis, theorize their own practice, and take (very) seriously the epistemic force of local histories and struggles. Such attention takes us beyond postures that simply associate social movements and subalternized groups with social and cultural resistance, and resistance as an end goal.

Shifting the geography and biography of knowledge from 'Europe' and prioritising the perspectives of subalternalised groups is at the core of decolonial strategies for subverting Eurocentrism (Grosfoguel, 2010). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015, p. 492) points out that decoloniality's point of departure is the 'existential realities of suffering, oppression, repression, domination, and exclusion'. Similarly, 'epistemologies of the South' theorise from 'the experiences of large, marginalized minorities and majorities that struggle against unjustly imposed marginality and inferiority, with the purpose of strengthening their resistance' (De Sousa Santos, 2016, p. 2).

It is important to note that the decolonial proposal to privilege and prioritise specific marginalised perspectives in knowledge does not assume, nor does it need to claim, that this strategy is exclusively its own and 'new'. Critical traditions, such as Marxism and feminism, have consistently sought to theorise the world from the perspectives of groups marginalised along class, race and gender, and share a commitment to the idea of the epistemic privilege of such groups. Generally,

the commitment to marginalised perspectives and their epistemic superiority/privilege is characteristic of 'standpoint epistemologies'.[38] Underlying this commitment is 'the intuitive idea that a life led at the sharp end of any given set of power relations provides for critical understanding (of the social world, in the first instance) where a life cushioned by the possession of power does not' (Fricker, 2000, p. 147). The basic idea is that 'there are whole parts of social reality that marginalized knowers are well positioned to investigate and analyze, and that dominantly situated knowers may ignore entirely' (Toole, 2019, p. 606). The decolonial commitment to prioritising marginalised perspectives is motivated by 'considerations of how narratives about historical phenomena and our conceptual paradigms for interpreting the world in social theory changes when view from perspectives especially located and formed in colonial encounters' (Bhambra et al., 2014). As Chakrabarty (2000, p. 17) notes, 'Europe appears different when seen from within the experiences of colonization or inferiorization in specific parts of the world'.

Decoloniality centres the situatedness of knowers in its conception of knowledge and is united, in this respect, with approaches within epistemology that emphasise the situatedness of knowledge and knowers (such as some variants of standpoint epistemology). Mignolo (2009, p. 2) acknowledges this fact explicitly when he writes that 'by setting the scenario in terms of geo- and body-politics I am starting and departing from already familiar notions of 'situated knowledges'. It seems then, that decoloniality shares some views in common with what it might deem as Eurocentric paradigms. Alcoff (2007) notes one slight divergence and suggests that theories about situated knowing tend to highlight more the idea that all epistemic sites have limitations whereas decolonial approaches seek to emphasise the useful epistemic resources that accompany specific marginalised sites.

The project of decoloniality involves 'the re-embodiment and relocation of thought in order to unmask the limited situation of modern knowledges and their link to coloniality' (Cheah, 2006, p. 9). Proponents of decolonialisation insist that the validation and prioritisation of marginalised perspectives in knowledge does not seek to further alienate marginalised groups from the global arena, nor is it to encourage a withdrawal from it. Mbembe (2017, p. 157) explains that decolonisation 'does not lead to secession from the world but rather to the affirmation of its plurality and the necessity of making it thrive. To affirm that the world is plural, and to militate for it to thrive, is to announce that Europe is not the world but only a part of it'. The aim is to affirm the plurality of perspectives on the world in order to demonstrate and position Eurocentric

[38] For some philosophical discussion and defense of the idea of the epistemic privilege of the marginalised, see Fricker (1999), Mills (1988) and On (1993).

knowledge as only one set of perspectives and not constitutive of the only valid perspective on the world. Maldonado-Torres (2011, p. 10) explains that

> we do not produce rigorous knowledge by adhering to the questions, concepts, and standards on the basis of the views or needs of only one region of the world, and even less of a region that has been characterized by either colonizing or ignoring other regions but instead open reason beyond Eurocentric and provincial horizons.

Decoloniality aims towards a form of universalism. This form of universalism is captured as pluriversality and it is distinguished from Eurocentric notions of universality by its groundedness in the plurality of knowledges and ontologies in the world. According to Mignolo (2007, p. 463),

> the geo- and body-politics of knowledge provide both the analytics for a critique and the vision toward a world in which many worlds can co-exist. … As a vision, the geo- and body- politics of knowledge lead the way toward a 'pluri-versal world as a uni-versal project'.

The shifting of the geography and biography of reason works to decentre 'Europe' in global knowledge production 'not in order to deepen the distance between Africa and the world, but rather to make possible the emergence, relatively lucidly, of the new demands of a possible universalism' (Mbembe, 2017, p. 8). The point is that the decolonial form of universalism, 'pluriversality', is grounded in plural perspectives and thus subvert the hegemonic and exclusionary tendencies Eurocentric thought. The plurality of perspectives must be embraced to create more rigorous knowledge. Writing about Foucault's views on local knowledges, Alcoff (2013, p. 223) contends that 'local knowledges are to be preferred epistemically because they require less distortion and omission, and they are to be preferred politically because they can allow for a diversity of experience and perspective'. Along similar lines, De Sousa Santos (2016, p. 2) argues that 'Epistemologies of the South' 'prepare ground for both valorising non-Eurocentric conceptions of emancipation or liberation and for proposing counterhegemonic understandings and uses of Eurocentric concepts, such as human rights, the rule of law, democracy, and socialism'. Hence, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013b, p. 15) argues, 'decoloniality needs to be appreciated as liberatory thought that gestures towards the possibility of another world and knowledge'. The idea seems to be that marginalised knowledges are less distorted and less exclusionary. This point is highly contestable, and I return to it, though indirectly, in the criticisms against the decolonial epistemic privileging of marginalised groups.

So far, I have presented a broad discussion of decolonial theory, explaining its critique of Eurocentrism and the proposal for how to decolonise knowledge. Two key ideas are important to take away here. First, the core argument of the decolonial critique of Eurocentrism is that

Eurocentric forms of knowledge hide coloniality as a constitutive part of modernity. The epistemic problem of Eurocentrism is that it leads to distorted understandings of the modern order because it neglects the crucial role of coloniality in setting up and maintaining the dominance of 'European' ways of being and knowing. The second point worth noting is the decolonial claim that the concealment of knowledge's relation with coloniality is grounded in conceptions of knowledge that treat the knowing subject as abstracted, dislocated and disembodied. Decoloniality insists on a conception of knowledge that takes seriously the locatedness and embodiedness of subjects of knowledge in order to expose Eurocentrism as well as propose strategies to overcome it.

In the next section, I briefly discuss some of the main criticisms against decolonisation. I restrict my discussion to key criticisms under two broad categories. The first category highlights problems with the analytic project of decolonial theory — how it conceptualises Eurocentrism. The second category of criticisms undermine the reconstructive project of decoloniality — its proposals for overcoming Eurocentrism. I do not aim to resolve these criticisms. In the final section, I consolidate some insights from both the criticisms and possible responses to them to present what the decolonial account of knowledge and power.

5.3 Criticisms

There are some 'procedural' challenges with decoloniality. Cheah (2006) argues that decolonial scholars oversimplify 'Western' thought, and use rhetorical strategies which polemicise the positions of 'Western' thought. For example: the decolonial critique claims that Eurocentric thought is distinguished by its grounding in dislocated and abstracted conceptions of knowledge. It is largely true that this was, and might still be, a widely accepted view of knowledge in dominant thought. However, this is not true of all 'Western' epistemology. The criticism is that decolonial theory often understates the extent to which this epistemological tradition has been challenged within and outside the so-called Eurocentric tradition.[39] Furthermore, there is a tendency of decolonial scholars to overemphasise their 'differences' with either mainstream or critical traditions of social theory,[40] and discount the fact that some of the ideas and arguments of decoloniality are not new, nor exclusively found in decolonial theory.

[39] Resolving this charge of oversimplification and polemicisation would require close textual analysis of the works decolonisation challenges and decolonial texts themselves to point out the specific positions that are oversimplified, misrepresented and polemicised. I do not have the space for such a task here.

[40] For example: Mignolo (2007) emphasises the differences between decoloniality and post-structural as well as postmodern thought.

I set these sorts of concerns aside here and focus on criticisms that challenge the substantive claims of decolonisation regarding what Eurocentric thought is and why the positionality of marginalised groups deserves epistemic privilege.

5.3.1 The problem of defining (Euro)centrism

One strong criticism posed against decolonial theory raises scepticism about whether there is a coherent and consistent way to define Eurocentrism and specify exactly what it refers to. The concern is that definitions of what counts as Eurocentric thought often essentialise and ignore the heterogeneity encompassed within it. What is perceived as Eurocentric thought covers a wide range of topics and uses different methodologies (Allais, 2016, pp. 543–544). Stanziani (2018, p. 14) contends that 'by imagining Eurocentrism as consistent and clearly defined, the various currents of global history and post-colonial studies are in danger of remaining trapped within that same Eurocentric thinking'. The point is that decolonial theory is in danger of generalising and essentialising what are in fact plural perspectives and traditions of thought under 'Eurocentric knowledge'. This is a pattern of thought that proponents of decolonisation fault Eurocentrism for. The general point is that decolonial theory cannot define Eurocentric thought as unified and homogenous, as if it has been universally accepted and never challenged internally and externally.

The criticism regarding the definition of Eurocentrism is sometimes formulated in terms of a problem with defining concepts like 'Europe/European' and the 'West/Western'. The use of terms such as 'European', 'West/Western', global North/global South is common in decolonial discourses. The contestation is that it is not clear that we can define these concepts in ways that clearly delineate their reference. I noted above that so-called Eurocentric thought is heterogeneous — it encompasses diverse topics and methodologies, and there is much internal and external contestation around its epistemological foundations. Hence defining Eurocentric thought in terms of its epistemological presuppositions, as decolonial theory does, is not promising. Similarly, defining 'European' or 'Western' geographically is complicated because 'the West' has referred to different things at different points in time.[41] More crucially, there is the question of the historical accuracy of defining certain thought as 'Western'. The influence of other regions of the world and traditions of thought within so-called 'Western' thinking is often neglected and excluded, and hence undue credit is sometimes given to the West for ideas that are not properly its own (Allais, 2016). Defining Eurocentric thought in terms of its geographical origins, then, is not promising either.

[41] Sometimes it refers to the Western world – Europe, Australasia and the Americas-and sometimes it refers more narrowly to Western Europe and North America, leaving the status of Russia and Eastern Europe ambiguous.

Relatedly, there are some practical concerns against using dichotomous distinctions such as 'Western/non-Western' and 'colonised/coloniser'. The concern is that decolonial theory, by adhering to these distinctions, might perpetuate divisions that do not help resolve the important issues it seeks to address. Vickers (2019, p. 4), for example, argues that the distinction between the 'West' and the rest often translates into a distinction between coloniser (perpetrator) and colonised (victim) in some decolonial arguments, and presents 'Western' thought as intrinsically colonial, and therefore morally and politically reprehensible. Hence, he questions the meaningfulness and usefulness of such dichotomous distinctions.

These criticisms are valid and difficult to resolve. But there are some possible responses to them. Regarding the origins of thought, it is possible, in some cases at least, to trace the historical and geographical origins of ideas. Given the fact of the interconnections between various parts of the world, however, this task would be challenging. Generally, we do not need a strict definition of these terms as far as there is a reasonable degree of agreement on what they mean in our ordinary use of them. We ordinarily can agree that 'there are modes of conceptualization that are very deeply entrenched in Western thought which 'most Western thinkers would find these categories at least intelligible'. But this 'is not to suggest that every Western thinker believes in this thought' (Wiredu, 1998, p. 19). We can maintain ordinary use of the terms even if there are these potential conceptual problems with what the terms mean in strict terms. This does not foreclose the possibility that we might be mistaken in our application of the terms and might misidentify what knowledge falls under 'Europe/European'. This is largely an empirical question. But generally, we tend to have a shared sense of what is being demarcated in the use of the such terms as 'Europe' and the 'West'.

The terms 'Western'/'European' are generally used not to denote the geographical region that is Europe but rather as an imaginary figure that marks particular forms of thought and culture (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 4). My understanding of Eurocentrism is that it is a pattern of thinking about the world that is characterised by ideas of 'Western' exceptionality, superiority and universality. This pattern of thinking does not have to be attributed to a specific group of people or regions of the world. If we take 'Eurocentric' as designating a particular pattern of thinking, then it remains an open question where such patterns of thinking are prevalent, which groups developed them and what their link with colonialism is. It is consistent with this that we discover that such patterns of thought are common in what is considered as 'Western' geographical regions or among 'Western' thinkers even if not all 'Western' regions or thinkers share them. It is also consistent with finding out that the origins of what we have come to categorise as 'Western' thought are in fact a mix of 'Western' and 'non-Western' intellectual traditions. The point is that if we see the target of decolonisation as a particular pattern of thought rather than thought of 'Western' origin, we can

readily accommodate different contingent possibilities about where such thought originates and is prevalent, and do not have to essentialise 'Western' thought (Posholi, 2020).

The criticism against treating Eurocentric thought as unified and homogenous is a powerful one. Decolonial theory has to adequately acknowledge the heterogeneity within what it perceives as the Eurocentric paradigm of thought and put some limitations around the scope and precise target of its critique. Still, proponents of decolonisation have pointed out that even though so-called Eurocentric thought is heterogeneous, it consistently and persistently ignores the experience of colonialism and how it shapes knowledge. Alcoff (2007, p. 91) writes:

> If Western epistemology is truly complex, as it would certainly seem if one sets Putnam or Quine or Brandom against Frege or Russell or Popper, then how does one explain the lack of complexity in the way in which most Western philosophers attend to the thought that originates from feminists or any of those outside the West? Western epistemology's internal complexity is somehow able to coexist with a uniform resistance to engaging with the implications of the fact that its own historical genealogy precisely maps onto the period of European colonialism.

The complex diversity and heterogeneity of 'Western' epistemology, Alcoff suggests, is unified in its resistance, particularly, to engaging sufficiently with colonialism's profound and resilient effects on knowledge. Alcoff makes this point of mainstream epistemology specifically, but the point could be extended to include other fields and has been argued to be the case in other fields as well. Allen (2016) makes a similar point about the consistent neglect of colonialism in some of the prominent works within Frankfurt critical theory. The point is that dominant knowledge largely and consistently ignores the subject of colonialism.[42]

There is a profound sense of the primacy of the epistemic in undoing coloniality (Cheah, 2006, p. 10) and some might question whether the attention on coloniality and knowledge that decolonisation calls for is warranted. Should we not be focusing instead on the more tangible political and economic effects of colonialism? It is more common to agree that 'colonialism is related to power, to juridical forms of management and to evaluative conceptions of difference, and to conceptions of the human, but not necessarily to the European Enlightenment's theory of knowledge, which was, after all, openly anti-authoritarian' (Alcoff, 2007, p. 81). Cheah (2006, p. 10) raises this point in posing the question 'is the link between modernity and coloniality primarily epistemic in character?' The crude point is whether colonialism has had such a profound effect of knowledge, or fundamentally shaped knowledge. Kindling such scepticism are assumptions about the self-critical and self-correcting character of so-called Eurocentric knowledge. The assumption

[42] This might be changing with the prominence of decolonial/postcolonial scholarship and other critical traditions.

is that even if there might be some flawed relation between dominant knowledge and colonialism, Eurocentric thought is both capable and disposed to acknowledge and fix this. The broad question might be whether decolonial theory overstates the influence of colonialism on knowledge, and whether knowledge can be colonial.

Despite its strong insistence that coloniality should be a central unit of analysis in social theory, decolonial theory does not claim that coloniality is the totality of the experience and structure of the modern world. As Quijano (2007, p. 170) explains, 'to recognise coloniality as a fundamental aspect of the current global order is not to preclude any other aspects that possibly yield different ways of theorizing the world'. Coloniality is not the only, nor the ultimate, framework for theorising the modern world. There are convincing arguments and bodies of literature in different fields, some mentioned above, illustrating, through meta-reviews, how coloniality shapes knowledge. However, the nature and extent of the influence of colonialism on knowledge is contested and controversial.

5.3.2 Contesting the epistemic privilege of the colonial difference

A second set of criticisms challenge the decolonising proposal to privilege and prioritise marginalised perspectives and understandings of the world in order to subvert Eurocentrism. The concern is whether such a move essentialises or romanticises marginalised subjects as occupying a pure privileged space from which to derive 'better' knowledge. Cheah (2006, p. 11) contends that,

> the focus on re-embodying knowledges and knowledges in other languages can very easily lead to an idealization of bodily experiences and the concrete and the linguistic other. First, do concrete corporeal experiences offer a genuinely other perspective if the concrete bodily needs of individuals are crafted by the techniques of biopower as they are incorporated into the international division of labor? Second, indigenous languages are not inherently egalitarian or liberating just because they are non-European. Non-European languages can have hierarchical, conservative or reactionary forms of address.

The quote above questions whether there is something inherently 'better' about knowledge that is embodied by particular groups of people, or that comes from particular regions, or that is formulated in non-European languages? Furthermore, are marginalised knowers and their perspectives essentially pure, untouched and untransformed by the colonial power systems which decolonial scholars perceive as pervasive in society? The general point is that decolonisation assumption that marginalised perspectives are superior and should be epistemically privileged might overly romanticise these perspectives. Marginalised perspectives are not formed from a pure 'outside' of the modern system; these perspectives too are formed and entangled in complex relations of power. The privileging of particular marginalised epistemic locations, for example, might elide class differences and institutional privilege in the loci of enunciation (Laurie, 2012).

Relatedly, there are some criticisms that decolonial arguments oversimplify the way power operates, and incorrectly assume that power, when in the hands of the marginalised, is less oppressive and distortive. Cheah (2006, p. 10) decolonial arguments present colonial power 'as having a clear logic that we can chart, decipher, and ultimately correct'. These arguments assume that there is a clear logic of coloniality that can be counteracted by a logic of decoloniality. Furthermore, power is presented by decolonial thinkers as,

> repressive and emanating from a totalizing source according to a logical design or plan. The modern world is grounded in a logic that is dangerous or mistaken and that needs to be corrected by the intervention of other logics that emanate from the various subjects that have been excluded and subjugated by coloniality. (Cheah, 2006, p. 10)

However, the mechanics of colonial power are not as clearly charted as decolonial thinkers make it seem. Cheah (2006, p. 11) argues that 'power in fact does not operate according to a logic and from a totalising source that represses and subjugates those it has excluded in contemporary globalization but precisely by including, integrating and assimilating every being into the circuit of the international division of labor'.[43] 'The oppressive effects of ideological beliefs and desires depend largely upon their innocuous appearance' (Morris, 2016, p. 7).

Decolonial arguments for shifting the geography and biography of knowledge seem to assume that the knowledge resulting from the positionality of the marginalised will be unmediated by power interests. The decolonial proposal to subvert Eurocentrism seems committed to emancipating knowledge from specifically colonial forms of power. Decoloniality debunks dominant forms of knowledge which they see as Eurocentric in favour of 'decolonial' marginalised forms of knowledge. Implicit in this idea of emancipating knowledge from colonial power is the idea that decolonial knowledge does not suffer the corrupting effects of power. The implicit assumption seems to be that once knowledge is disentangled from colonial power, it will be fit for the advancement of global justice.

Another concern is whether decolonisation is consistent with plural conversations in which all participants contribute equally and different perspectives are treated equally. The epistemic privileging of marginalised perspectives might be understood as suggesting that decolonisation calls for a differentiated distribution of power in plural conversations. Put differently, the worry is that

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[43] As Srinivasan (2019, p. 146) explains, 'it is the peculiar genius of systems of domination—patriarchy, capitalism, racism—that they are able to reconstitute themselves materially under new representational orders'. What makes colonial power insidious and able to persist without being detected is precisely its ability to operate productively not by repressing but by assimilation and integration.
Nyamnjoh (2019, pp. 27–28) alludes to this point when he writes that 'at the heart of the failure of many an ambition for rupture or delinking is the obvious or hidden reality of interconnections and interdependences that bind the oppressed and the oppressor'.

the epistemic privileging of marginalised perspectives might imply that their perspectives become dominant and unchallenged. This echoes Nanda's critique, cited in Chapter 3, that the epistemic charity of postmodernism leaves marginalised knowledges unchallenged. Wiredu (2004, p. 4) also warns against thinking that all marginalised perspectives are inherently better and have nothing to gain from conversations and criticisms with so-called Western thought.

There is some evidence of an aspiration towards egalitarianism in knowledge by decolonial scholars. In the beginning of this chapter, I emphasised that decolonial scholars see decoloniality as one option amongst many. 'If you say that modernity is an option and development is an option, then decoloniality is also an option, and as "options," all are at the same level' (Mignolo, 2011, p. xxix). There is some direct assertion by decolonial scholars, then, that decolonial options do not seek to pose as the only option for thinking about the world. Furthermore, as cited in the sections above, proponents of decolonisation express that their ultimate goal is 'pluriversality', which entails the equal weighting of plural perspectives in knowledge.

Against warnings of potential romanticisation, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013b, p. 15) argues that some decolonial positions might degenerate into romanticism and fundamentalism, but not all forms of decolonisation romanticise and essentialise. More strongly, Grosfoguel (2007, p. 213) makes clear that 'the fact that one is socially located in the oppressed side of power relations, does not automatically mean that he/she is epistemically thinking from a subaltern epistemic location'. The general idea is that the subaltern epistemic location can be occupied, in theory, by anyone. It is not necessarily marked, that is, by one's being on the marginalised side of power relations. The decolonial notion of 'border thinking' captures this point. Border thinking specifies 'the locality of subaltern knowledge as a *border* location rather than simply the beyond of Western knowledge or the site of pure difference' (Alcoff, 2007, p. 93). Alcoff (2007, p. 93) explains that

> The concept of the border is meant to signify that the locality of subaltern knowing, far from simply being "the other side" of Western knowing, has a border-like quality, near the West, but not of it entirely ... it is positioned at the fissure or fault-lines of Western hegemony.

Most importantly, 'border thinking' is to be understood as 'an epistemic resource for both imagining multiplicity as well as invigorating critique' (Alcoff, 2007, p. 97). Lazarus (1993, p. 93) writes that 'arguably, the specific role of anti-imperialist intellectualism today: to construct a standpoint … from which it is possible to assume the burden of speaking for humanity'. Decolonial theory sees the epistemic standpoint of the colonial difference as the most promising standpoint from which to attempt to develop knowledge that tends more towards universalism grounded in plural perspectives — pluriversality. The precise details of how and why are contentious and require

further elaboration. To strengthen the case for the epistemic privileging of the situatedness of marginalised groups and explain why it is a resource for improving knowledge, decolonial theory has to specify more clearly the scope of the epistemic privilege, the aspect of the social location of marginalised knowers that generates their epistemic privilege, how they access the epistemic privilege and the type of epistemic superiority that their social location affords them (Anderson, 2020).

Let me end with a remark that underscores the significance of decolonial theory, notwithstanding the foregoing criticisms. The decolonial project can be understood as addressing a dimension of knowledge that is largely ignored by prevalent forms of knowledge: it tries to understand the ways in which the colonial relations of power shape and determine our knowledge production practices. The political significance of this is obvious if we acknowledge that colonialism contributed to the unjust and wrongful exclusion and destruction of some forms of knowledge. The epistemological significance is similar to the epistemological significance that is typically attributed to fields such as feminist epistemology. Part of what is valuable about bringing feminism to bear on questions of knowledge is that this has the potential to broaden the scope of concepts and problems that the field engages with, and to contribute to the conceptual richness of the field. Decolonial theory should be understood in a similar light, *mutatis mutandis*. Decolonial analyses of epistemology, Alcoff (2007, p. 97) suggests, 'move us away from the transcendental, imperial, universal formulation of the project of epistemology … and also expand the domain of issues with which epistemologists should concern themselves, such as the locus of enunciation'. Decolonial argument about knowledge can broaden the scope of epistemology and enrich the field.

Overall, decoloniality stresses the connection between colonialism (coloniality) and knowledge. The general argument of decolonial approaches is that 'colonial power' pervades dominant knowledge and privileges Eurocentric ways of knowing. The main contention is that coloniality establishes and perpetuates Eurocentrism as the only valid paradigm of knowledge and as the ultimate model of knowledge for the entire world. Decolonial approaches argue that this is accomplished through understandings of knowledge as dislocated and disembodied. The subversion of Eurocentrism thus involves, for proponents of decolonisation, showing that knowledge is located and embodied to reveal specifically that Eurocentric forms of knowledge and 'European' knowers are privileged in global knowledge production, and ultimately to recognise and affirm the forms of knowledge excluded by Eurocentrism as legitimate and equally valid.

In the next concluding section, I present a statement of what I identify as the decolonial account of the relationship between knowledge and power from the foregoing discussions and examine

whether this account adequately reconciles the truth-seeking goal of knowledge with the role of power in knowledge production.

5.4 Conclusion: a decolonial account of knowledge and power

As I noted in the opening section of this chapter, the decolonial account of knowledge and power is encapsulated in the decolonial critique of Eurocentrism, and more succinctly in the decolonial notion of 'coloniality of knowledge'. Coloniality as a system of power, decolonial theorists argue, sets up the framework for what counts as knowledge as well as who is legitimised as a 'knower' in alignment with Eurocentric social and racial hierarchies. Quijano (2007, p. 170) argues that it is through colonial exercises of power that 'European or Western culture imposed its paradigmatic image and its principal cognitive elements as the norm of orientation on all cultural development, particularly the intellectual and the artistic'.

Alcoff (2007, p. 79) similarly argues that colonial power controls and manages 'the spheres of justification and the delimitation of the "regime" of the truth, or what passes for truth'. Colonial systems of power, proponents of decoloniality contend, determine what is knowledge, who can be a subject of knowledge, and how we produce it. More precisely and importantly, decolonial theory argues that coloniality sets up a global condition in which knowledge is valid if and only if it meets certain Eurocentric standards. Coloniality of power names that set of framing and organizing assumptions that establish and justify this hierarchy in which Eurocentric forms of knowledge are the ultimate model of knowledge and alternative forms of knowledge are valid only as far as they come closest to Eurocentric standards (Alcoff, 2007, p. 86).

The 'coloniality of knowledge' expresses the fundamental decolonial point that coloniality sets up a global epistemic condition in which 'only European culture is rational, the rest are not rational' (Quijano, 2007, p. 174). According to Quijano (2007, p. 172), colonial power had a decisive influence in the constitution and elaboration of the Eurocentric paradigm of thought. Alcoff (2007, p. 83) explains that "'coloniality of power" refers to the system that organized the distribution of epistemic, moral, and aesthetic resources in a way that both reflects and reproduces empire'. She adds that 'the concept of coloniality of power allows us to think through how the colonized were subjected not simply to a rapacious exploitation of all their resources but also to a hegemony of Eurocentric knowledge systems' (Alcoff, 2007, p. 83). This results in the 'coloniality of knowledge'. The decolonial account of the relationship of knowledge and power theorises the relationship squarely in the context of coloniality. The account argues that Eurocentric knowledge, which is the dominant knowledge, is inextricably entangled with colonial power. Eurocentric knowledge,

proponents of decoloniality argue, is hegemonic and imbued with the colonial will to dominate and exclude so that it may pose as the only valid form of knowledge.

I want to highlight two key points about the decolonial account of the relationship between knowledge and power related to its *apparent* reductivism and relativism.

The decolonial critique suggests that Eurocentric knowledge is established and maintained by coloniality. This seems to imply that the epistemic authority of what is perceived as Eurocentric forms of knowledge is grounded in colonial power. Crudely, colonial forms of power legitimise and validate Eurocentric knowledge not 'objective' epistemic standards. Eurocentric knowledge, some proponents of decolonisation suggest, is legitimised and validated by forms of 'violence, deceit, hypocrisy and lies' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013b, p. 11). According to some proponents of decoloniality (see Alcoff and Quijano cited in the preceding paragraphs), the operations of colonial power set up epistemic criteria and norms of justification that render only Eurocentric knowledge as valid. In its strongest form, this claim implies that colonial domination is the organising principle of knowledge. The decolonial notion of the colonial of knowledge and power seems to suggest that colonial power subsumes knowledge. Decolonial analyses of knowledge that overemphasise the role of colonial power in knowledge focus exclusively on exposing the operations of colonial power that dominant knowledge performs and informs. This can make it appear as though decolonial theory reduces knowledge to power. In Chapter 3, I suggested that relativism looms whenever knowledge is reduced to power for then the standards for what counts as knowledge are left to the arbitrary question of who has power.

Some variants of decolonisation seem to define the criteria for knowledge in relation to the struggle against oppressive systems and the advancement of global justice. This is articulated in the project of epistemologies of the South. De Sousa Santos (2018, p. 2) writes:

> The epistemologies of the South concern the knowledges that emerge from social and political struggles and cannot be separated from such struggles. They are not, therefore, epistemologies in the conventional sense of the word. Their aim is not to study knowledge or justified belief as such, let alone the social and historical context in which they both emerge (social epistemology is a controversial concept as well). Their aim, rather, is to identify and valorize that which often does not even appear as knowledge in the light of the dominant epistemologies, that which emerges instead as part of the struggles of resistance against oppression and against the knowledge that legitimates such oppression.

The suggestion from the passage above that decolonisation involves 'identifying and valorising' knowledges born of struggle seems to imply that knowledge is to be judged in terms of its opposition to political and epistemological systems of oppression. It seems that what validates such

forms of knowledge as knowledge, and qualifies them specifically for being knowledge in service of global justice, is their emergence and foundation in struggles against oppressive systems as well as the epistemologies that legitimate such systems.

The second related point I want to highlight is the relativist leanings of some variants of decolonisation. In general, relativism is an issue that is explicitly addressed only scantly in decolonial scholarship. De Sousa Santos (2018, p. 37) writes that 'epistemologies of the South take for granted that the validation of knowledge criteria is not external to the knowledges they validate'. Broadly, the relativist leanings of some decolonial approaches are apparent in the critique of Eurocentrism as the only valid form of knowledge and consequently, in the strong rejection of the idea that the Eurocentric paradigm of knowledge is the only valid one. The decolonial call to recognise and acknowledge all knowledge excluded by Eurocentrism as equally valid and legitimate echoes the relativist idea that there are many equally valid forms of knowledge. Decolonial arguments insist on the parity between so-called Eurocentric and non-Eurocentric paradigms of knowledge. Some proponents of decolonisation suggest that such parity is necessary for the sake of global justice. Masaka (2017, p. 60) argues that:

> The respect for the diversity of the epistemological paradigms in the world is a precondition for an authentic realisation of 'global justice'. It appears that the global North still habours the thinking that it cannot be treated on equal terms with the global South.

At least superficially, decoloniality can seem overly concerned with the operations of colonial power that it claims dominant Eurocentric knowledge conceals and obscures, and can appear to neglect that knowledge is also about truth. In emphasising the deterministic effects of coloniality in knowledge, decoloniality can appear to reduce knowledge to the operations of power. In this way, the account over-emphasises the power side of knowledge to the relative neglect of the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production. However, I want to counterbalance this appearance of reductivism in decolonial theory by highlighting that the decolonial concern with the entanglement between colonial power and dominant knowledge is motivated by a broader epistemic aim: to strengthen and broaden knowledge. This epistemic aim is foregrounded strongly in Wiredu's variant of decolonisation and other similar decolonising efforts.

There is a particular variant of decolonisation, 'conceptual decolonisation', in African philosophy formulated by Kwasi Wiredu that is not as popular in dominant scholarship on decolonial theory.[44]

[44] Wiredu's conceptual decolonisation is sometimes criticised for treating decolonisation as purely a matter of conceptual subversion of Western thought and being completely silent on the subject of unequal colonial power relations, and implications for decolonisation. This is seen as strikingly 'apolitical'. See Carman (2016) for some discussion on this criticism.

This form of decolonisation responds to one of the key questions in postcolonial reflections in African philosophy regarding 'what to do with modern issues and resources of philosophical thinking not directly originating from Africa, and also what to do with our inheritance of traditional philosophy' (Wiredu, 2008, p. 4). Conceptual decolonisation, according to Wiredu, focuses on the effects of the 'premature universalisation of certain Western modes of thought that came along with European colonialism and evangelism' (Wiredu, 2008, p. 14). More broadly, conceptual decolonisation involves:

> divesting thought of all modes of conceptualisation emanating from the colonial past that cannot stand the test of due reflection. This divesture does not mean automatically repudiating every mode of thought having a colonial provenance. That would be absurd beyond description. What it calls for is the reviewing of any such thought materials in the light of indigenous categories, as a first step, and as a second, evaluating them on independent grounds. (Wiredu, 2008, p. 15)

For Wiredu, the basic imperative of conceptual decolonisation is 'to work out a synthesis of the insights from our traditional African philosophies with any we can get from modern sources of knowledge and reflection' (Wiredu, 2002, p. 54).[45] The overarching goal of conceptual is to critically scrutinise dominant knowledge with the aim to refine it and broaden the conceptual tools we have for making sense of the world. As Carman (2016, pp. 235–236) explains, Wiredu's decolonisation project

> involves synthesising and appropriating what is valuable from both African and Western thought, and rejecting what is not. Wiredu hopes that his project will result in coherent conceptual schemes, generate intercultural dialogue, and even provide insight into old philosophical problems by introducing new ways of viewing key issues.

What is crucial to note is that the scrutinising of the ways in which knowledge is implicated in colonialism in Wiredu's decolonisation is that the motivating goal is to make knowledge better in the sense of being more accurate and capable of explaining the complexity of the social world. I elaborate on this point further in the next chapter. For now, the point is that the decolonial over-emphasis on the role of power in knowledge can seem to reduce knowledge to power and discount the idea that knowledge is also about the pursuit of truth. However, I suggest that this need not be the case, and some variants of decolonisation and decolonising efforts are explicitly concerned with addressing colonial power in knowledge in order to strengthen the pursuit of truth.

[45] Wiredu seems confident that interrogating our colonially inherited thought in light of African thought has the potential to create new forms of thinking that we require to understand the modern world. His own ground-breaking work in topics such as philosophy of language, political philosophy and metaphysics follows this strategy and critically synthesises Western and African forms of thought.

Summary of Part II

My discussion of social realism and decolonisation in the preceding two chapters sought to critically discuss how these schools of thought characterise the relationship between knowledge and power, and to examine whether and how they reconcile the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production and the role of power.

Social realism foregrounds the truth-seekingness of knowledge production by insisting that knowledge is socially produced by communities of experts following rigorous methods. In this way, it circumvents relativism because it makes clear that the criteria for objective knowledge has to do with the reliable standards of knowledge production used in the relatively autonomous and objective disciplines. It acknowledges that the specialised production of knowledge can be influenced by social power but does not address how this can happen and what the implications on knowledge's pursuit of truth can be. I suggested then that the social realist account of knowledge and power does not adequately address the role of social power in knowledge production and suggested that this is a result of the account's under-emphasis of 'who' produces knowledge in its view of knowledge. Social realism, because of its vehement opposition to the reductionist tendencies of accounts of knowledge which emphasise the situatedness of knowers ('over-socialised' accounts and 'voice discourses'), understates the relevance of the knower in knowledge production.

The decolonial account argues that knowledge is intricately entangled with coloniality. It is important to point out that it is sometimes ambiguous if decolonial theory makes its argument about 'all' knowledge or specifically Eurocentric knowledge. The latter seems more apt but, as discussed in the criticisms, it is not easy to pick out what it refers to. The decolonial critique of Eurocentrism suggests that colonial power determines what counts as knowledge, and in turn, knowledge reproduces coloniality. The core argument is that colonial forms of power set up Eurocentric knowledge as the only valid knowledge by processes of exclusion and marginalisation. In so far as decolonial arguments strongly emphasise the determining effects of colonial forms of power on knowledge, they can appear to reduce knowledge to power. Furthermore, the decolonial insistence that all forms of knowledge are equally valid that accompanies the decolonial critique of Eurocentrism reiterates the relativist thesis of equal validity.

Nonetheless, I suggested that there are decolonising efforts which do not reduce knowledge to colonial power and endorse relativism. These decolonising efforts, I suggested, aim to strengthen and improve knowledge by revealing and challenging the distortions on knowledge resulting from the influence of colonial power. My suggestion was to highlight that though it may seem that

decolonisation overstates the role of power in knowledge production, there is an important epistemic aim driving some decolonising efforts that recognises that knowledge is also about the pursuit of truth.

Both accounts highlight social dimensions of knowledge, although the social dimensions they highlight and their objectives for doing this are different. The social realist account foregrounds the specialised and institutionalised social production of knowledge, and this is foregrounded to demonstrate that there are relatively objective criteria for knowledge and for judging some knowledge as cognitively better than others. The social production of knowledge by communities of specialised experts furnishes the independent standards for determining and validating genuine knowledge. On the other hand, decolonisation invokes the social location and social identity of knowers in order to unmask Eurocentrism's universalist pretensions and claim the equal validity of different kinds of knowledge.

PART III

6 Reconciling truth-seeking and power in knowledge

> The sociology of knowledge is (or should be) modest in recognising that while it is a useful hypothesis to consider how knowledge claims reflect attempts to preserve particular social interests, the counter hypothesis that they frequently go beyond such interests is also important; even ruling groups need reality tests if they are to remain in power. (M. Young, 2000, pp. 532–533)

So far, I have discussed social realism and decolonial theory to investigate whether their accounts of the relationship between knowledge and power reconciles the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production with the role of power in knowledge. In Part II, I explained the ways in which social realism and decolonial theory define and operationalise the idea that knowledge is socially produced, and payed attention to their characterisations of the relationship between knowledge and power. My analyses of the two accounts discussed demonstrated that each account falls short, to some extent, at this task. What emerged most clearly from the discussion of the two accounts, and was surfaced in the introductory chapters, is that any affirmative account of the relationship between knowledge and power cannot get off the ground without a conception of knowledge as social. The foremost condition for seeing a relationship between knowledge and power is understanding knowledge as socially produced. The discussion indicated that social realism and decolonial theory operationalise diverging interpretations of the idea that knowledge is socially produced that may seem oppositional and not readily compatible.

In this chapter, I consolidate and synthesise the insights from the social realist account and decolonial account in order to map out a potential direction for reconciling the unavoidable involvement of power in knowledge with the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production. I suggest that the failure of each account to reconcile the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production with the involvement of power in knowledge is the result of how they interpret the idea that knowledge is produced socially and in social contexts. Specifically, I show that social realism and decolonial theory emphasise one aspect of the idea of the social production of knowledge to the relative neglect of the other aspect. The social realist interpretation emphasises the 'sociality of knowledge' and the decolonial interpretation stresses 'the situatedness of knowledge producers'. I argue that a reconciliation of the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production with power's involvement in knowledge depends on a conception of the idea that knowledge is socially produced that merges the sociality aspect and the situatedness aspect of the social production of knowledge. I divide this chapter in two broad sections to make my argument.

In section one, which I divide into two sub-sections, I elaborate and extend my analysis of the social realist and decolonial interpretations of the idea that knowledge is socially produced. I

demonstrate that both accounts share in common the view that knowledge is socially produced but emphasise different aspects of this insight that lead to different conclusions about knowledge and power.

In the first sub-section, I show that the social realist interpretation of the idea that knowledge is socially produced foregrounds *the sociality of knowledge*: knowledge is produced systematically and collaboratively by disciplinary specialists using specialised methods. Social realism emphasises that the sociality of knowledge is the condition of possibility for achieving better approximations of truth. However, the main shortcoming of social realism even though it does not discount the idea that knowledge production can be contaminated by social power, it does not address this potential contamination. As I suggested at the end of Chapter 4, the social realist failure to address the potential influence of power in knowledge results from its insufficient recognition of the implications of the social situatedness of knowers.

In the second sub-section, I show that the decolonial interpretation of the idea that knowledge is socially produced foregrounds *the situatedness of knowledge producers*: knowledge is produced by subjects who are socially situated. Decolonial theory emphasises that the social situatedness of knowledge producers is a condition of possibility for power to influence knowledge production. One shortcoming of this decolonial emphasis on the situatedness of knowers is that it risks making knowledge only about power. I discuss Fricker's concept of epistemic injustice to illustrate some of the ways in which power enters knowledge and may lead to distortions in knowledge that are not only unjust but undermine the truth-seeking goal of knowledge. Crucially, I show in the discussion that the decolonial focus on knowers' *situatedness* does not necessarily imply reducing knowledge to the power interests of knowers. Decolonisation shows that taking knowers' situatedness into account is essential to revealing and addressing the possible contaminations of power on knowledge.

In section two, I attempt to merge the insights of social realism and decolonisation. I reiterate their points of contention but show that they are compatible. Even though social realism does not explore and address the implications of the situatedness of knowledge producers on knowledge, it does not discount the potential influence of power on knowledge production. At the same time, decolonisation does not oppose the idea of the sociality of knowledge. Decoloniality does not deny that the systematic and collaborative production of knowledge enables the production of truthful knowledge. Rather, it contends that the constitution of knowledge producers must be interrogated for its possible connections with power so that the influence of power is minimised to secure the production of more truthful knowledge. I suggest that the sociality of knowledge and social

situatedness of knowledge producers are both key elements in knowledge production and are conditions of possibility for truthful knowledge.

6.1 The social production of knowledge: 'gateway' for power? condition for truth?

> To assert that all knowledge is socially produced and historically located, as is agreed by virtually all traditions of the sociology of knowledge, does not provide adequate demarcation criteria for identifying what is 'social' or what is knowledge. (M. Young, 2008, p. 30)

In this section, I distinguish between social realist and decolonial interpretations of the idea that knowledge is socially produced. To avoid confusion between the two interpretations and to capture what each interpretation encapsulates, I use 'sociality of knowledge' for the social realist interpretation and 'the situatedness of knowledge producers' for the decolonial interpretation. 'Sociality' highlights a concern with how knowledge is produced according to socially developed and applied procedures (Maton & Moore, 2010, p. 6). 'Situatedness' broadly highlights a concern with knowledge's reflection of the situation of the knower (Anderson, 2020). I explain that the social realist account argues that the sociality of knowledge is a condition of possibility for knowledge's achievement of greater approximations of truth and provides rational grounds for judging some kinds of knowledge as more reliable due to how they are produced. The decolonial account's emphasis on the idea of the situatedness of knowledge producers forefronts the idea that knowledge is a 'gateway' for power, but, I argue, does not reduce knowledge to the power interests of situated knowers. The challenge is that each of the two accounts over-emphasise one aspect of the social production of knowledge to the relative neglect of the other.

6.1.1 The sociality of knowledge as condition for better knowledge

> As a product of human society, it is the social constructedness of knowledge that enables it to get closer towards objectivity, or to develop better — in the sense of more accurate, more insightful, capable of explaining more — accounts of the social and natural world. (S. Allais, 2014, p. 211)

I mentioned in Chapter 4 that social realism puts forwards an alternative theory of knowledge that draws upon a different interpretation of the idea of social construction to dominant interpretations. Social realism foregrounds the sociality of knowledge: the idea that the social production of knowledge by communities of experts using disciplinary methods grounds the possibility of relatively objective knowledge and offers criteria for judging between different forms of knowledge. Social realism interprets the social construction of knowledge in terms of its social and collaborative production. The collaborative specialised social production of knowledge, according to social realists, secures the best knowledge possible. In this way, social realism takes seriously the inescapably social character of knowledge but, contrary to dominant social constructionist views

of knowledge which take this to undermine the possibility of genuine knowledge and fall into relativism, it takes the sociality of knowledge as a condition for better and relatively objective knowledge:

> SR configures an alternative way of being sociological about knowledge because it rejects the reductionism of constructionist perspectives in favour of an emergentist approach that understands knowledge in terms of the characteristics of knowledge-producing fields and the procedures they institutionalize. Because knowledge is socially produced it is always fallible, but what is of most importance is the way in which knowledge is produced – some ways are more reliable than others and the principle of reliablism provides criteria whereby knowledge claims can be objectively evaluated. Objectivity is a procedural and normative issue. (Moore, 2013, p. 349)

The 'alternative' interpretation of the idea that knowledge is socially produced in terms of its sociality enables social realism to avoid the relativism that plagues other social accounts of knowledge. The social realist points out that knowledge is produced 'within relatively autonomous fields of practice according to socially developed and applied procedures that may have both arbitrary *and* non-arbitrary bases' (Maton & Moore, 2010, p. 6). The relative autonomy of the fields of practice implies that 'knowledge is *emergent from but irreducible to* the practices and contexts of its production and recontextualization, teaching and learning' (Maton & Moore, 2010, p. 5). Social realism emphasises 'the properties of knowledge-producing fields of social practice and … the structured principles and procedures developed in those fields that provide the basis for rational objectivity in knowledge (Maton & Moore, 2010, p. 5). The social realist understanding of the sociality of knowledge foregrounds the idea that knowledge is produced systematically and collaboratively: knowledge production involves the co-ordinated labour of many individuals (disciplinary experts).

The general point is that the specialised social production of knowledge sets up boundaries for the social differentiation of knowledge (M. Young & Muller, 2010, p. 15). What social realism finds problematic about the relativist thesis of the equal validity of different knowledge is that it assumes that all knowledge is produced in equally (non)reliable ways and that there is no possibility of rationally judging particular forms of knowledge as more valid on the basis of their methods of production. Young (2000, p. 525) points out that 'what such positions never seem to account for is the practical efficacy of some types of knowledge (scientific knowledge and, in a more limited sense, knowledge in the social sciences), which makes them materially much different from knowledge based on experience'. Social realism insists on the critical realist notion of 'judgemental rationality': the idea that 'there are intersubjective bases for determining the relative merits of competing knowledge' (Maton & Moore, 2010, p. 4). The differentiation of knowledge is based on criteria that is developed intersubjectively in fields of practice.

It is important to emphasise that social realism does not claim that the specialised social production of knowledge characteristic of academic disciplines guarantees unchanging, absolute and eternal Truth with a capital 'T'. The point is that the specialised way of producing knowledge is more rigorous and reliable, and provides rational criteria for distinguishing knowledge that is epistemically better than other. In other words, it provides 'rational grounds for comparing the relative merits of knowledge claims in terms of their explanatory power' (Maton & Moore, 2010, p. 3). Zipin et al. (2015, p. 12) summarise this point succinctly when they write:

> specialist knowledge is not transcendental but socially generated. Yet, while SRs agree that socially generated knowledge can never yield unmitigated, transparent truth about social 'realities', their claim is serious about specialist communities as the social locus that guarantees progressively greater approximations of objective truth.

According to social realism, the social production of knowledge assumes its most rigorous form in academic disciplines. Disciplinary fields are a dynamic arena of the formulation of contested and disputed judgements. The collective structured principles and procedures of disciplinary formations — for example, the rigorous methods of critical scrutiny through systematic peer reviews — provide the basis for relatively objective knowledge.

An important idea underpinning the social realist foregrounding of the specialised social production of knowledge is that 'the ways in which groups are organized and structured in society affect and constrain how individuals behave and what they believe' (S. Allais, 2014, p. 214). We construct knowledge of the world but not just as we please, not perfectly, and not simply by ourselves. Knowledge is not constructed by individuals as each sees fit but rather produced by actors within social fields of practice characterised by intersubjectively shared assumptions, ways of working with knowledge, beliefs about knowledge and so forth. The social production of knowledge provides a form of social regulation in terms of what knowledge is and how it is produced. It places certain social constraints on the production of knowledge, and hence limits what can be rationally accepted as knowledge. Allais (2014, p. 215) argues that

> The social nature of humans, and the fact that society is more than the sum of individuals, is key to understanding … the nature and essence of knowledge and education. Human societies — people in interaction with each other — have developed bodies of knowledge that further our understanding of both the natural and social world. These bodies of knowledge are not acquired through everyday experience, and they are very seldom acquired by individuals alone. This is why societies bring young people together in institutions which can provide structured and social learning experiences: to acquire the heritage of humanity.

Allais (2014, p. 211) explains that 'it is because many people are involved in the development of knowledge, arguing, testing, developing contrary positions, and so on, that bodies of knowledge are developed which transcend individual points of view'. Specialised knowledge is created with

others within a system that constrains what any one individual or group of individuals can claim as knowledge. In this way, the production of disciplinary knowledge is a socially organised and socially constrained activity. Allais (2014, p. 211) adds that

> the distinctiveness of disciplinary communities is the unique value they place on the development of knowledge: it is their primary reason for existence. As a result, disciplinary communities, while open to manipulation of various kinds, particularly when they are, as they are in most instances, vulnerable to funding requirements, nonetheless have their own rules, codes, traditions, and core values that have been developed over time, and are thus able to some extent to resist ideological manipulation, and to provide tools to contest bias and ideology.

Allais here stresses the social realist argument that knowledge is not reducible to the individual standpoints and perspectives of the disciplinary experts involved in knowledge production even though disciplinary formations are perpetually open to power influences. She points out that the relatively autonomous processes and systems of disciplines are able to resist, to some extent, the influences of power on knowledge. This, again, reiterates the social realist acknowledgement of the potential influences of power in the academic disciplines.

Social realism rightly emphasises that the collaborative social production of knowledge by disciplinary specialists using rigorous specialised methods and procedures grounds the possibility for producing more truthful knowledge, and provides a standard against which to judge some knowledge as better than others on account of the reliable ways in which it is produced. Furthermore, social realism acknowledges that social power relations can, and do influence, the constitution of the communities of experts and their methods of operation. However, they insist that the production of knowledge is not reducible to the social power relations and interests of the individuals constituting the communities of experts. 'If validity is determined by power, then we have no reason to take the result of such a process as "knowledge"' (Alcoff, 2013, p. 215). At best, knowledge claims grounded solely on power have the *appearance or social status* of truth. Young (2008, p. 31) underscores the central role of the cognitive interests that motivate the production of knowledge to counteract the notion that knowledge could only be about the power interests:

> it is only when the cognitive interests involved in the production of knowledge and the pedagogic interests involved in its transmission are given the importance they warrant that a social theory of knowledge can avoid an all too often facile reductionism.

This echoes the point Allais, cited above, makes that the development of the best possible knowledge is the primary reason for the existence of disciplinary communities.

6.1.2 The social situatedness of knowers as 'gateway' for power as well as better knowledge

> Knowledge practice has always a political character due to the fact that it is a practice taken up by social subjects who stand in relations of power. (Fricker, 1998, p. 159)

Decolonial theory is centrally concerned with the situatedness of knowledge producers and formulates it in terms of the locatedness and embodiedness of knowers participating in the production of knowledge. The decolonial view of knowledge as situated enables it to bring to the fore some of the inescapably ways in which power influences enter knowledge and distorts it. I suggested above that such a focus on the situatedness of knowledge producers runs the risk of making knowledge only about the standpoints and power interests of knowers and being relativists. My goal is to appraise the decolonial focus on the situatedness of knowledge producers but avoid reducing knowledge to the standpoints of its producers. I argue that the decolonial concern with the idea of the situatedness of knowers is for the sake of revealing and devising ways to redress the possible contaminations of power on knowledge and not for the sake of making knowledge only about the power interests of knowers.

To elucidate the idea of the situatedness of knowledge producers and to show how it serves as a 'gateway' for power to enter knowledge without reducing knowledge to the situation of knowers, I draw on Fricker's distinction between the *Situated Social Conception* and the *Abstracted Social Conception* (Fricker, 2008) and her notion of epistemic injustice (Fricker, 2007). I do not wish to claim that Fricker is a proponent of decolonisation. I use Fricker's notion of epistemic injustice to explicate the idea of the knower's situatedness and to strengthen the argument I make that some decolonising efforts helpfully contribute to the improvement of knowledge production by revealing and challenging the workings of pervasive colonial forms of power that undermine the pursuit of truth. Fricker's situated social conception of knowledge and her notion of epistemic injustice helps to illuminate the decolonial argument that power is inexorably connected with knowledge because of the social situatedness of the subjects who participate in knowledge production without undermining the possibility of better knowledge, and without reducing knowledge to 'the situated knower'.

Typically, approaches that stress the situatedness of knowledge production argue that epistemology, broadly construed as inquiry into knowledge, must focus on the subject of knowledge rather than the object of knowledge. This means that epistemology must focus on who produces knowledge more than what knowledge is about. In decolonial scholarship, this focus is often formulated in terms of a focus on the 'locus of enunciation' (Grosfoguel, 2010; Mignolo, 2009). As an epistemological framework, decoloniality centres the geo-politics and body-politics of knowledge which comprise the locus of enunciation of knowledge: "Sure, all knowledges are

situated and every knowledge is constructed. But that is just the beginning. The question is: who, when, why is constructing knowledges" (Mignolo, 2009, p. 2). As explained in Chapter 5, the shift to the 'knower' as the unit of analysis in knowledge is necessary, according to Mignolo (2009, p. 4), 'to call into question the modern/colonial foundation of the control of knowledge'.

Mignolo (2009, p. 16), explains that 'historically, geo-politics of knowledge emerged in the 'Third World' contesting the imperial distribution of scientific labor' and 'body-politics of knowledge has had its more pronounced manifestations in the United States, as a consequence of the Civil Rights movement'. Broadly, the geo-politicisation of knowledge seeks to contest that idea that 'Europe' is the centre of all thought. Hountondji (2006), cited earlier, highlights the skewed division of labour in global knowledge production wherein the 'global South' provides the raw materials of data to be 'processed' into knowledge in the 'global North'. The 'body politics of knowledge' draws attention to the connections between the colonial social classifications of people and knowledge. Proponents of decolonial theory emphasise especially the colonial racial hierarchy and its connections to knowledge:

> rather than assuming that thinking comes before being, one assumes instead that it is a racially marked body in a geo-historical marked space that feels the urge or get the call to speak, to articulate, in whatever semiotic system, the urge that makes of living organisms 'human' beings. (Mignolo, 2009, p. 2)

Decolonisation takes seriously the colonial racial hierarchy that privileged the humanity of 'Europeans' over 'non-Europeans', and how this influences questions of which social groups are legitimised as knowers who can participate and contribute to knowledge production.

In broad terms, the claim that knowledge is situated encapsulates the idea that what is known and the way it is known reflects the perspective or situation of the knower (Anderson, 2020). The core claim is that knowledge is, in some way and to some extent, related to or conditioned by the knower's social location. Conceptions of knowledge as situated tend to focus particularly on how the social location of the knower affects what and how she knows. Social location refers to ascribed social identities along the categories of gender, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, kinship status, etc. and social roles and relationships in terms of occupation, marriage status, etc. (Anderson, 2020). Mignolo (2009, p. 4) argues that 'the knower is always implicated, geo- and body-politically, in the known'. The idea of the situatedness of knowledge producers is surfaced in two ways in decolonisation. On the one hand, it is highlighted as generating the distorted knowledge produced within Eurocentric paradigms. Recall that the decolonial critique of Eurocentrism aims to reveal the situatedness of dominant Eurocentric knowledge and implicitly alludes to this situatedness as partly responsible for the distorted understandings of modernity that leave out the aspect of coloniality. On the other hand, decoloniality advances the situatedness of knowers

marginalised in the Eurocentric paradigm as a resource that can be harnessed to challenge existing knowledge and generate new knowledge.

The task at hand is to explicate what it means to say that 'the knower is always implicated in known', and moreover, to explicate this in a way that does not reduce knowledge to the social location of knowers. I want to avoid the sense of the situatedness of knowledge encapsulated in the so-called 'over-socialised' conceptions of knowledge wherein 'the propositional character of knowledge — its potential to get closer to the truth, and its structured nature — is downplayed or denied, and the social constructedness of knowledge and its relationships to power are over-emphasized' (S. Allais, 2014, p. 210). This is a challenging task because the exact relationship between knower and knowledge is not explicitly discussed in the decolonisation literature covered in this project. The vehement foregrounding of the situatedness of knowers in decolonial scholarship seems to underemphasise discussions of knowledge as a system of propositions organised in particular logical and coherent relations. This is partly why, as I suggested in Chapter 5, decolonial approaches can seem to reduce knowledge to the operations of colonial power. However, I suggest that there are some variants of decolonisation (or ways to understand decolonisation) that do not necessarily reduce knowledge to power because they do not undermine the idea that there are more reliable methods of producing more accurate and truthful understandings of the social world. Next, I discuss some insights from Fricker to build my argument that the decolonial focus on the situatedness of knowledge producers is for the sake of improving and strengthening knowledge.

In the introduction of this project, I explained that traditionalist conceptions that deny power's involvement with knowledge typically conceive of knowledge as an activity that is carried out by individuals in abstraction especially from their social surroundings and social realities. The field of social epistemology contests this individualist conception of the production of knowledge and highlights the social production of knowledge. The fundamental claim of social epistemology is that knowledge is produced through social interaction with other subjects and/or within social systems that specify some rules and procedures for producing knowledge (Goldman & O'Connor, 2019). Social epistemology insists on the social production of knowledge: knowledge is acquired from others and collectively with others. Goldman (1999) explains that the 'social' of social epistemology denotes its principal focus on the social paths to knowledge and examines the spread of knowledge across groups. The social conception of knowledge contrasts the individualist conception of traditional epistemology and conceives of epistemic subjects not as 'lone individuals whose interactions with other individuals are epistemically incidental' but as 'fundamentally, naturally, placed in relations of epistemic interdependence' (Fricker, 2008, p. 28). Social

epistemology is interested in how knowledge is acquired and produced interdependently among social groups.

Social epistemology draws attention to the social interdependence of knowers in their pursuit of knowledge; it foregrounds the production of knowledge in and through social interactions. In this respect, it aligns with the notion of the sociality of knowledge which is stressed in social realism. However, Fricker (2008) draws a crucial distinction between a *situated social conception* and an *abstracted social conception* of knowledge and argues that mainstream social epistemology tends to work with the latter conception. Fricker (2008, p. 28) explains that in mainstream Abstracted Social Conceptions, the relations between epistemic subjects that condition epistemic practice remain restricted to 'relations between finite knowers and inquirers conceived as bearers of reasons, producers of evidence, seekers of information, conveyors of knowledge and so on'. The social realist foregrounding of the sociality of knowledge emphasises these epistemic relations between and among communities of disciplinary experts. As Allais (2014, p. 211) explains, it is in large part because the experts that produce knowledge argue with each other, scrutinise different viewpoints in light of reasons and evidence, and follow procedures such as peer review that the knowledge they produce achieves better approximations of truth. Put simply, there are particular epistemic relations that hold between communities of disciplinary experts that secure the production of better knowledge.

Fricker argues that the abstracted conception of the subject of knowledge is too narrow and advances a situated social conception of knowledge producers. The situated social conception enables us to acknowledge and identify the ways in which epistemic activities among and between social subjects are conditioned, crucially, by the social power relations that enclave them. Fricker (2007, p. 3) explains that a situated social account of a human practice such as knowledge production

> is an account such that the participants are conceived not in abstraction from relations of social power (as they are in traditional epistemology, including most social epistemology) but as operating as social types who stand in relations of power to one another. This situated social conception makes questions of power and its sometimes rational, sometimes counter-rational rhythms arise naturally as we try to account for the epistemic practice itself.

Fricker (2008, p. 29) sums up the distinction between the two conceptions of epistemic subjects in the following way: 'if the Abstracted Social Conception marks the moment of rebellion against excessive individualism in epistemology, the Situated Social Conception marks the moment of rebellion against excessive rational idealization'. The abstracted social conception of knowledge 'idealises' knowers and understates the implications on knowledge of their situatedness in societies

marred by complex social and political relations. In contrast, the situated social conception of knowledge advanced by Fricker 'conceives epistemic subjects and their interactions as situated in a context of social identity and power' (Fricker, 2008, p. 28). The socially situated knower is conceived as standing in particular complex relations to the known and to other knowers (Anderson, 2020).

At the end of Chapter 4, I suggested that my discontent with social realism is that it understates the 'politicalness' of knowledge production but warned at the end of Chapter 5 that decolonisation can seem 'too political' even though this does not apply to all decolonial approaches. Fricker and Hornsby (2000, p. 7) argue that the situated social conception of knowledge is resourceful for exposing especially the political aspects of knowledge. For Fricker (2000, p. 161), 'what makes the question of reason's authority important to the politically conscious epistemologist is its implications for the ethics of epistemic practice'. In the preface to her influential book *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*, Fricker indicates that her explorations into epistemology are centrally concerned with the entanglement between knowledge and power. She writes:

> My interest is in epistemic practices as they are, of necessity, played out by subjects that are socially situated. This socially situated conception puts questions of social identity and power centre stage, and it is the prerequisite for the revelation of a certain ethical dimension to epistemic life — the dimension of justice and injustice. (Fricker, 2007, p. vii)

The situated social conception of epistemic subjects centres the power relations between knowers and by doing so, usefully reveals the political aspects of knowledge. The object of focus in Fricker's analysis of knowledge's entanglement with power is the subject's position in terms of power and how this affects their claims to knowledge as perceived by other subjects. Fricker's theorises 'reason's entanglements with social power' through her notion of epistemic injustice (A. Allen, 2017, p. 187). The basic idea of epistemic injustice is that social power relations shape epistemic interactions between subjects of knowledge in ways that can undermine subjects in their capacity as knowers as well as undermine the pursuit of truth. The situatedness of knowledge producers in relations of power presents the perpetual risk that power will enter and contaminate knowledge in ways that can undermine its claims to truth.

Fricker (2007, p. 5) makes clear that epistemic injustice wrongs subjects specifically in their capacity as knowers — a capacity that is essential to being human. Mignolo (2009, p. 2) echoes this point about the connection between the capacity for knowledge and humanity, and explains that the contribution to knowledge 'makes of living organisms 'human' beings'. Fricker identifies two types of epistemic injustice: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. The two types of epistemic

injustice expose a politics of knowledge by revealing how our basic epistemic practices of conveying knowledge to others by telling them as well as developing interpretations and making sense of our own social experiences can be obstructed by operations of social power (Fricker, 2007). Broadly, testimonial injustice occurs when there is a dysfunction in attributions of epistemic credibility in knowledge exchange and hermeneutical injustice occurs when there is a gap in the collective conceptual resources, owing to the exclusion of some groups of knowers from knowledge, that leads to a failure in making sense of some particular social experiences (Fricker, 2007).

It is important to note that Fricker's paradigm cases of testimonial and hermeneutical injustice, as indicated in the examples she uses to explicate the concept of epistemic injustice, do not focus directly on institutionalised forms of knowledge production. She does not focus specifically on epistemic practice in the disciplines. Fricker's illustrations of the concept of epistemic injustice often draw from literary or other texts. For example: she builds her paradigm case of testimonial injustice through analysing an exchange that happens in a courtroom scene in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and uses the social experience of sexual harassment recounted in a memoir to explicate hermeneutical injustice. Broadly, the courtroom scene depicts a situation where a black man's testimony is discredited and doubted owing to racial identity prejudice (Fricker, 2007, pp. 23–26).[46] The sexual harassment example illustrates a situation in which women fail to convincingly articulate the social experience of sexual harassment because of the lack of appropriate terminology and conceptualisation of the experience in society's collective pool of meanings (Fricker, 2007, pp. 149–151). The arguments Fricker makes about epistemic injustice can be extrapolated to institutionalised knowledge and, I want to show, are brought to the fore in decolonisation. The general argument that Fricker makes is that social power can, and often does, enter knowledge and contaminate it. She illustrates some of the ways in which this happens via attributions of epistemic credibility and authority. Broadly, Fricker argues that attributions of epistemic credibility and epistemic authority mirror unequal social power relations and ultimately shape who participates in knowledge production, the nature of their participation and the knowledge produced. The social location of different knowers can influence the epistemic credibility and epistemic authority attributed to them and in turn influence their participation and contribution in institutionalised knowledge production.

Testimonial injustice occurs in the practice of attributing epistemic credibility. It has to do with how and why some subjects of knowledge receive less or more credibility. Testimonial injustice occurs when one's epistemic credibility is deflated on account of one's social identity and the

[46] Fricker also uses a similar example but using the real case of the murder of Stephen Lawrence in 1993 in the UK where the police initially failed to take the testimony of the friend of the victim who was present during the event.

prejudices that are attributed to that social identity (Fricker, 2007, p. 28). The paradigm case of testimonial injustice occurs when there is a credibility dysfunction where a subject of knowledge receives less credibility than warranted owing to social identity prejudice. According to Fricker (2007, p. 118), 'the risk of the dysfunction of testimonial injustice arises from the fundamental human proneness to prejudice, especially identity prejudice'. For a credibility dysfunction to count as injustice, it must arise from unfair operations of social power that skew our perceptions of certain groups of knowers unfavourably because of the prejudices we hold about their social identity.

Ordinarily, credibility is something that is conferred or withheld by one's community — society has the power to confer or deny credibility. As such, there is always a possibility that there will be discrepancies in who is given credibility and who is not. More specifically, attributions of epistemic credibility will tend to favour powerful social groups over less powerful ones. Daukas (2006, p. 114) explains:

> In a culture plagued by racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression, most community members have internalized, to varying degrees, pernicious stereotypes regarding the cognitive and moral traits of socially constructed 'kinds' of people. Typically, those stereotypes form an interlocking system in which dominant groups are defined to represent the human 'standard' or ideal, and others are defined in relation to, and, to varying degrees, as inferior to, that standard. For example, traditional gender stereotypes represent men as rational, and women as emotional, where 'emotional' is interpreted as implying '*ir*rational'; an ongoing legacy of the attempt to justify slavery in the US, is that African-Americans are traditionally represented as *less* intelligent than European Americans; and the poor are considered to be '*un*sophisticated' in relation to those who are upper-middle-class and wealthy. As a result of internalizing that interlocking system of stereotypes, we are trained, to varying degrees, to perceive individuals as members of groups, and in virtue of that membership, as *prima facie* more or less appropriate recipients of the epistemic principle of charity.

Fricker (1998, p. 170) similarly argues that

> There is likely to be some social pressure in the direction of the norm of credibility's favouring the powerful in its control over who is picked out as credible, and thus in who is picked out as a good informant. There is likely (at least in societies recognizably like ours) to be some social pressure on the norm of credibility to imitate the structures of social power.

The idea is that credibility assessments will tend to favour the powerful in society and disadvantage the powerless (McConkey, 2004, p. 198). Anderson (2020) contends that dominant groups tend to accord epistemic authority to themselves and withhold it from subordinates by constructing stigmatising stereotypes of subordinates as incompetent or dishonest. Thus, the closer to power one finds themselves, the more credibility they are likely to receive. Conversely, the further one finds themselves from power, the less credibility they are likely to receive. Social difference, then, (often) makes for epistemic difference (Fricker & Hornsby, 2000). Who we believe depends on

attributions of epistemic authority, which rely on views or attitudes about people's competence, expertise, epistemic credibility, and trustworthiness (Anderson, 2020).

The notion of testimonial injustice highlights that 'knowledge is connected at the core with structures of social power, through its necessary dependence on the norm of credibility' (Fricker, 1998, p. 176). The basic claim is that 'highly credible knowers tend to be drawn from groups that are already dominant in society, while those from less privileged groups lack the rhetorical space to have their perspectives appreciated and their knowledge claims acknowledged' (McConkey, 2004, p. 200). The proneness to the influence of power via social stereotypes and prejudice of our credibility attributions poses challenges for knowledge production. Since inquiry is collaborative and reliant on the testimony of others, what we believe is influenced by who we believe. And if assignments of epistemic authority often discriminate in ways that reflect and perpetuate social hierarchies such that less powerful social groups tend to be allotted less epistemic authority than more powerful social groups, the social location of knowers becomes crucial for knowledge production. Discriminatory attributions of epistemic credibility influence who is taken seriously as an epistemic subject, and thus who can participate and contribute meaningfully in knowledge production. So much for testimonial injustice. I turn now to explain hermeneutical injustice.

Fricker (2006, p. 102, 2007, p. 158) defines hermeneutical injustice as 'the injustice of having some significant area of one's social experience obscured from collective understanding owing to hermeneutical marginalization'. Hermeneutical injustice undermines the subject in their capacity as an interpreter of their own social experience and limits the capacity for subjects to be intelligible to others (Fricker, 2006, p. 108). What makes this inability to make sense of one's social experience and intelligibly articulate it to others a form of epistemic injustice is the fact that it results from a hermeneutical gap in the collective interpretive resources available that is itself caused by hermeneutical marginalisation. 'Hermeneutical marginalization occurs when some epistemic subjects are excluded or marginalized in epistemic activities that build our shared conceptual resources for interpreting and understanding the world' (Fricker, 2007, p. 153). Essentially, hermeneutical injustice manifests in a gap, or some sort of failure, in the pool of epistemic resources we share which is a result of hermeneutical marginalisation.

The main cause of hermeneutical injustice is a lack of parity in who participates and contributes to knowledge production. Why is this an epistemic problem? Fricker's notion of epistemic injustice is centrally concerned with the ethical harm to subjects as knowers. This is an important dimension. But hermeneutical injustice underscores the specifically epistemic problem of hermeneutical marginalisation. In other words, the notion of hermeneutical injustice surfaces the effect of epistemic injustice on the knowledge produced, that is, on knowledge as a product. The notion of

hermeneutical injustice highlights the possible inadequacy of available knowledge available in explaining certain aspects of the social world owing to the exclusion of certain groups of knowers. In this respect, it shows why the situatedness of knowledge producers in relations of power is critically important for knowledge that can achieve greater approximations of truth.

The pre-condition for hermeneutical injustice is unequal participation in collective knowledge production. Unequal participation in collective knowledge production results in a hermeneutical lacuna: 'a situation in which the social experiences of the powerless are not properly integrated into collective understandings of the social world' (Fricker, 1999, p. 208). There is a gap in available resources for understanding certain aspects of the world, particularly those relevant for marginalised groups that do not participate in knowledge production. Fricker argues that in general, the epistemic exclusion characteristic of hermeneutical injustice works out such that the collective epistemic resources available function well for the epistemically powerful groups in society and very poorly for the epistemically powerless groups:

> One way of taking the epistemological suggestion that social power has an unfair impact on collective forms of social understanding is to think of our shared understandings as reflecting the perspectives of different social groups, and to entertain the idea that relations of unequal power can skew shared hermeneutical resources so that the powerful tend to have appropriate understandings of their experiences ready to draw on as they make sense of their social experiences, whereas the powerless are more likely to find themselves having some social experiences through a glass darkly, with at best ill-fitting meanings to draw on in the effort to render them intelligible. (Fricker, 2007, p. 148)

When social power impacts the collective hermeneutical resources, the powerful tend to have an unfair advantage in structuring social meanings and understandings of the social world (Fricker, 1999, 2007, pp. 147–148; Hiebert, 2015). This means that, due to unequal power relations, the interpretive resources available for understanding social reality tend to be well-suited for articulating the experiences of those in positions of relative power and privilege. This hermeneutic bias stems from the fact that our epistemic inquiries tend to be geared toward our own interests. As Fricker (2006, p. 98) explains:

> Our interpretive efforts are naturally geared to interests, as we try hardest to understand those things it serves us to understand. Consequently, a group's unequal hermeneutical participation will tend to show up in a localised manner in hermeneutical hotspots — locations in social life where the powerful have no interest in achieving a proper interpretation, perhaps indeed where they have a positive interest in sustaining the extant misinterpretation.

Notice here that Fricker is not saying that knowers' interests determine the knowledge they produce. Her point is that interests tend to shape the kinds of questions we ask and the issues we

invest in inquiring. One common illustration is the ways in which funding tends to shape the research focus and agendas of institutions.

In the last statement of the passage above, Fricker suggests that the powerful may even seek to sustain certain distorted knowledge, or lack of knowledge, in certain areas of reality. For instance, it may be in the interests of those privileged by the Eurocentric paradigm to neglect the constitutive role of colonialism in establishing their privileged positionality in the modern order, and to ignore or destroy alternative hermeneutical resources which challenge the paradigm. It is a truism that colonialism often relied on destroying the knowledge of those under colonialism and perpetuated distorted views of, for example, racial inferiority, in order to enforce its rule. Hull (2017, p. 583) calls such a case in which a group's hermeneutical resources are deliberately destroyed or distorted 'hermeneutical sabotage'.

In Fricker's paradigm case of hermeneutical injustice, knowers are undermined in their capacity as interpreters of their social realities. However, proponents of decolonisation strongly emphasise that marginalised groups are not necessarily undermined in their capacity to interpret and understand social reality, at least not for and among themselves. Rather, the key problem is that collective frameworks of interpretation silence or neglect contributions from marginalised subjects. Recall the point made in the decolonial critique of Eurocentrism that the hegemony of Eurocentric knowledge is achieved and sustained by excluding other forms of knowledge. Hence the problem, according to decolonisation, is not that marginalised groups do not have conceptual resources to produce knowledge. It is rather that marginalised groups tend to have difficulties rendering their knowledge intelligible to others because their conceptual resources do not gain the authority they need to be part of the collective pool of resources.

The exclusion of marginalised groups from contributing to the collective pool of conceptual tools for meaning-making and knowledge building means that they cannot present their knowledge and experiences of reality to constitute part of the collective shared pool of epistemic resources. Dotson calls this phenomenon 'contributory injustice': 'those who experience contributory injustice find that they can readily articulate their experiences. However, those articulations generally fail to gain appropriate uptake according to the biased hermeneutical resources utilized by the perceiver' (Dotson, 2012, p. 32). The notion of contributory injustice highlights that the problem is that contributions to knowledge from certain 'powerless' groups in society tend not to receive the necessary uptake and treated as contributions to knowledge because of the lower epistemic authority and credibility attributed to these groups.

The phenomenon of contributory injustice might be illustrated with reference to some issues that have been raised by some proponents of decolonisation with regards to language and global

knowledge production. Proponents of decolonisation argue that the dominance of 'Western' languages and the marginalisation of others contributes to the dominance of what knowledge make up the canon of the academic disciplines. Mignolo makes an example with languages and points out how the languages of dominant groups have monopoly in global knowledge production:

> You can of course do sociology in Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, Mandarin, Bengali, Akan, etc. But doing it in those languages will put you at a disadvantage in relation to mainstream disciplinary debates. It will be a sort of 'local sociology'. Granted, doing sociology in French, German or English will also be 'local sociology'. The difference is that you have a better chance of being read by scholars in any of the above mentioned languages, but the inverse will not hold. You will have to get your work translated into French, German or English. (Mignolo, 2009, pp. 7–8)

The privileging of particular languages as 'proper' languages for knowledge production can block access for particular groups of knowers contributing to knowledge production and to the body of knowledge that comprise the disciplines. These issues surrounding the question of language and participation in global knowledge production are further interrogated in Wa Thiong'o (1992). More substantively, some of Wiredu's work uses the Akan language to challenge dominant conceptions of truth 'Western' philosophy (see Wiredu, 2004b). This presents an example in which changing the language in which one thinks and produces knowledge can challenge the epistemic accuracy of some of the dominant knowledge.

The notion of hermeneutical injustice foregrounds not only that 'the powerful have an unfair advantage in structuring collective social understandings' (Fricker, 2007, p. 147) but that this unfair advantage can lead to certain 'blind spots' in dominant knowledge that limits, or constrains, more comprehensive understandings of the world. Put differently, hermeneutical injustice underscores a systematic failure in dominant knowledge to render some parts of the world intelligible and to illuminate our understandings of these parts that results partly from who participates and contributes to knowledge production. Dominant knowledge may impose certain conceptual constraints in collective understanding of some aspects of reality because of hermeneutical exclusion. This shows that taking account of the epistemic exclusion of some knowers owing to their social location may be essential for achieving more comprehensive knowledge that addresses some of the gaps in current knowledge. Though Fricker's concern is with exposing specifically the ethical dimension to hermeneutical injustice, she admits that there is an acute cognitive disadvantage that results from a gap in the collective hermeneutical resource to those who suffer hermeneutical injustice (Fricker, 2007, p. 151). This cognitive disadvantage is not only significant for those who suffer hermeneutical injustice, but also constitutes a real concern for it means that there may be gaps in the repertoire of knowledge that leave us unable to make sense of certain parts of social reality. These gaps undermine the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production.

Epistemic oppression may result in knowledge that is unable to capture and explain the diversity of human experience and the complex constitution of the social world. Dotson (2014, p. 115) defines as epistemic oppression the 'persistent epistemic exclusion that hinders one's contribution to knowledge production'. Dotson (2014, p. 116) argues that the epistemic resources — concepts and categories of thought — of dominant epistemological systems that perpetuate epistemic oppression may be wholly inadequate in revealing and addressing the persisting epistemic exclusions that are causing epistemic oppression. This point is implicit in the decolonial critique of Eurocentrism.

Recall that the core problem, decoloniality argues, is that the hegemonic Eurocentric paradigm consistently neglects the constitutive role of coloniality in establishing the modern order. This exclusion in dominant analyses of the modern order, according to decolonisation, means that the Eurocentric paradigm cannot, for example, make sense of how the colonial racial hierarchy might be part of the reason for the epistemic exclusion of certain groups of knowers in global knowledge production. Crudely put, as an epistemological system, the Eurocentric paradigm might conceptually occlude the very possibility of rendering epistemic oppression visible, making it difficult to convince others of the epistemic exclusion of the dominant paradigm of knowledge as well as the ways in which its concepts are inadequate for capturing certain aspects of reality. Compounding this difficulty might be the fact that dominant conceptual tools that may be inadequate for marginalised subjects usually work just fine for dominant groups making it difficult to convince them of the inadequacy of the conceptual tools in question (Dotson, 2014, p. 128). This is a complex, and perhaps controversial, argument that I cannot substantiate further here. The crude point is that the conceptual tools and knowledge generated from a Eurocentric paradigm that hides a constitutive aspect like coloniality are likely to be inadequate for explaining and making sense of realities stemming from coloniality.

Fricker's notion of hermeneutical marginalisation highlights the idea that social relations of power may block access for some groups to participate in knowledge production. Hence the collaborative inquiry of disciplinary formations that social realism underscores may be shaped and tainted by unequal access and contribution to knowledge. A lack of parity of participation and contribution in knowledge production by differently situated knowers poses an epistemic problem for it presents the risk that the knowledge produced might be less comprehensive, partial and inadequate for explaining certain significant aspects of the world. So, what to do? Epistemic subjects are inexorably positioned in relations of power, and consequently, power plays an inescapable influential part in knowledge. Alcoff (2013, p. 218) writes that, 'to ask for power's removal from the sphere of knowledge is like asking for the removal of human bodies'. The problem posed by

the situatedness of knowers in relations of power is the perpetual risk of distorted assignments of epistemic authority. At the same time, the situatedness of some knowers on the social margins of society might provide them with perspectives that are not visible from the 'centred positions' in society but can build and strengthen knowledge to be more comprehensive, more impartial and more truthful. I propose, in Posholi (2020), that working from 'outside' and 'inside' the dominant Eurocentric paradigm constitutes true epistemic decolonisation towards the end of better knowledge.

In sum, the two types of epistemic injustice (testimonial and hermeneutical) demonstrate that unequal power relations condition knowledge production. The unequal social power relations among different groups of people can, and often do, result in unequal treatment of different subjects as knowers in ways that lead to discrimination in who participates and contributes in knowledge production as well as the knowledge that is produced. Put differently, the situatedness of knowers in social relations of power creates space for epistemic authority to be allocated unequally between different knowers owing to social categorisation and the prejudices and biases that accompany such categorisations. Power can influence 'how authority and authoritativeness are distributed, how certain sites and processes and methodologies are valorized while others are repudiated, and how the production of theory mirrors the production of social inequity' (Alcoff, 2011, p. 67). This is relevant for the social knowledge production because it has implications for who is allowed to participate and contribute meaningfully in the epistemic communities of disciplinary experts who produce knowledge. Questions of who participates and contributes in knowledge are not inconsequential to what knowledge is produced, and more crucially, can have consequences on the epistemic power of the knowledge produced.

I have been making the case for a conception of the situatedness of knowledge producers that does not reduce knowledge to the power interests of knowers by showing that being critical about the situatedness of knowers can illuminate the problems of epistemic injustice and its implications for the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production. In so far as the situatedness of knowledge producers is foregrounded for the purpose of guarding against knowledge contamination by power and ensuring that knowledge is as impartial and truthful as possible, emphasis on the situatedness of knowledge producers does not reduce knowledge to the power interests of particular knowers. It becomes possible to see the decolonial epistemic privileging of marginalised standpoints in knowledge not as prioritising marginalised perspectives on account of their relative 'powerlessness' but because their exclusion from knowledge production can mean that the knowledge produced is weak or misses some parts of reality that could enhance the epistemic power and quality of knowledge produced. Put differently, the perspectives of marginalised groups should be privileged

in knowledge not for the sake of inverting the power relations such that marginalised groups hold power over dominant groups but for the sake of allowing their perspectives to challenge and address 'blind spots' in knowledge production that are not visible because of the current configuration of the knowledge academy. Decolonisation stresses that situatedness is the condition of possibility for power to enter knowledge at the same time as taking into account and address these potential contaminating effects of situatedness is a condition for the possibility of strengthening knowledge.

I have tried to show in this section how social realism and decolonisation present different interpretations of the idea that knowledge is socially produced. The former stresses the sociality of knowledge production and the latter forefronts the situatedness of knowledge producers. In the next section, I argue that these two aspects of the social production of knowledge can and must be merged to provide an account of knowledge and power that keeps the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production while also accounting for the perpetual involvement of power in knowledge production.

6.2 Social realism and decolonial theory: a synthesis

> Thinking sociologically about knowledge includes thinking about the different actors involved in knowledge creation, and their standpoints, experiences, interests, and relationships, *as well as* the labour process of knowledge development. It also involves thinking about the intrinsic properties of knowledge, and how bodies of knowledge interact with each other, how ideas shape each other, how knowledge areas are structured, which tools, assumptions, key ideas, and key subject matters are the focus of different areas, where the boundaries lie, and how and when they shift. (S. Allais, 2014, pp. 210-211, emphasis added)

In this section, I try to show that the idea of the sociality of knowledge and the idea of the situatedness of knowledge producers emphasised in the social realist and decolonial accounts, respectively, are complementary and conjointly necessary for reconciling the truth-seeking goal knowledge production with the involvement of power. I argue for the complementarity of the social realist idea of sociality of knowledge and the decolonial view of the situatedness of knowledge producers by showing that ultimately both social realism and decolonial theory are concerned with the conditions that would secure the production of knowledge that best approximates truth. Social realists importantly show that the collaborative specialised production of knowledge in the academic disciplines results in the best knowledge possible. Similarly, decolonial theory shows that while the specialised production of knowledge generally results in the best possible knowledge, this truth-seeking goal of knowledge production can be undermined by the involvement of power. Guarding against, and subverting, the influence of power in knowledge production requires taking seriously the idea of the situatedness of knowledge producers.

Let me start by explaining what seems to be some of the contentious points between social realism and decolonial theory. The points of contention were already surfaced, to some extent, in some of the criticisms I discussed against social realism. Here I reiterate them in order to disarm the contentions that make it seem that social realism and decolonisation are incompatible and then show their compatibility. At the end of Chapter 4, I suggested that a serious 'blind spot' of the social realist 'powerful knowledge' framework is its under-emphasis on the 'knower' in knowledge. I want to suggest that, more accurately, the 'blind spot' of social realism is its under-emphasis and lack of theorisation of the fact of 'the situatedness in relations of power' of those who produce knowledge. Put simply, social realism does not address the effects on knowledge production of the fact that 'knowledge practice has always a political character due to the fact that it is a practice taken up by social subjects who stand in relations of power' (Fricker, 1998, p. 159). Social realism seems to take it for granted that the specialised methods and procedures of producing knowledge will yield the best possible knowledge regardless of 'who' is taking part and contributing to the production of knowledge. There is a politics of knowledge production that social realism under-emphasises. Critical awareness of the politics of knowledge production and mapping out its potential effects seems of critical importance to securing the truth-seeking goal of knowledge.

So, what does social realism say about the knower in knowledge? Some of the social realist views about the knower surface most strongly in their critique of 'voice discourses' (see Moore & Muller, 1999) and in the arguments made to foreground the epistemic relations that hold between and among disciplinary experts that secure the pursuit of knowledge. At least superficially, social realism seems to work with conventional 'non-critical' notions of the authority and reliability of experts and the methods of knowledge inquiry in specialised fields. As I pointed out above, social realism foregrounds the epistemic relations that characterise the communities of disciplinary experts producing knowledge to strengthen the case they make for the sociality of knowledge. Social realism takes the 'socio-political' constitution of the academic fields of the production of knowledge for granted. Questions of, for example, social identities of knowers and how they might influence knowledge produced are not treated as potentially relevant not just for the sake of the 'politics of knowledge' but crucially for the epistemic power of knowledge that social realists emphasise. It is this sort of neglect of the socio-political constitution of participants of knowledge production that Zipin et al. (2015, p. 12) contest in posing the following questions:

> On what basis can specialist knowledge achieve such rarefied power of truth? After all, do we not find that actually practising communities of specialist knowledge, situated in given times and places, typically consist far more of men, and/or those who are white, and/or born to families of relatively powerful socio-economic status? Are there no partialities of perspective in such imbalances of membership?

Zipin et al. (2015) raise a general concern that the social constitution of disciplinary communities is not inconsequential to the ways in which disciplinary knowledge might suffer certain scientific inaccuracies and distortions. My discussion of the notion of epistemic injustice above tries to show how this might happen. To reiterate some points, the notion of hermeneutical injustice suggests that the social and political constitution of the production of knowledge is not inconsequential to the concepts that are available in the repertoire of knowledge. Recall that the condition for hermeneutical injustice is unequal participation in knowledge production and hence unequal contribution to the repertoire of conceptual tools available for making sense of the world. Fricker suggests that women's unequal participation in activities that produce collective social meanings is not inconsequential to the fact that the experience of sexual harassment, at some point, was not formulated in a meaningful way with terminologies that could gather appropriate uptake and response (Fricker, 2007). Mills makes a similar point, *mutatis mutandis*, with race. Writing on the inadequacies of Rawls' political philosophy, Mills (2018, p. 50) suggests that the underrepresentation of people of colour in the field of political philosophy explains why critiques of Rawls' deficiencies on race are not common. If these examples hold, they illustrate not that social identity is all there is to knowledge but rather that the parity of participation and contribution in knowledge production by diverse social groups increases the likelihood of concepts and experiences being brought to the fore that carry the potential of enhancing knowledge by making it more impartial, more comprehensive in explaining the diverse aspects of reality and more truthful.

It should be emphasised that it is not that the specialised methods and procedures of the academic disciplines are not rigorous and reliable in producing better knowledge, nor that the communities of experts do not adhere to these methods and procedures appropriately to avoid, as much as possible, inaccuracies and shortcomings in the knowledge produced. That the specialised production of knowledge as carried out in the disciplines is reliable and secure in producing the 'best' knowledge is accepted even by critics of social realism. For example, Zipin et al. (2015, pp. 11–12) make clear that they do not seek to

> sacrifice the value of knowledge that has been hard-wrought by specialist disciplinary communities, by dismissing it as merely or primarily 'power-knowledge', that is, knowledge made powerful by the arbitrariness of historical struggles in which certain social-structural positions gain upper hands over others to shape curriculum. It is important to consider how knowledge can be empowering in its own right, apart from the arbitrariness by which 'winners' in power struggles can promote their ways of knowing relative to others.

Along similar lines, Rudolph et al. (2018, pp. 34–35) explain that their disputation with social realism's emphasis on the role of the disciplines in producing knowledge

> is not a call to reject the disciplines nor an argument that suggests that disciplinary knowledge is not powerful. Instead it is an appeal to ward against the invention of a disciplinary past that overlooks the colonial and racializing practices that have contributed to their power.

Both critics of social realism admit and agree that the disciplinary processes and methods of knowledge production are most reliable in producing knowledge that can explain social phenomena and achieve greater approximations of truth. Still, the critics point out that the disciplinary production of knowledge is susceptible to certain systematic 'blind spots' that will tend to undermine the truthfulness of knowledge that can be attributed to the tendency of disciplinary formations to be comprised largely of powerful social groups. Some of these systematic 'blind spots', proponents of decolonisation argue, can be illuminated and addressed by taking the situatedness of knowledge producers in power relations and systems as playing a central role in shaping knowledge. 'Disciplinary communities are steeped in a hierarchical global economy of knowledge production' (Rudolph et al., 2018, p. 23).

Rudolph et al. (2018, p. 34) insist that the key problem with the 'powerful knowledge' framework 'is that it fails to account for the relationships that occur through the production and use of knowledge, and the power and politics that infuse such relationships'. Thus Rudolph et al. (2018, p. 22) write:

> we call on scholars and practitioners working with the powerful knowledge framework to address more fully the hegemonic relations within the process of specialisation and its historical connections with colonial-modernity.

The discontent is not with the specialised production of knowledge in the disciplines but the ways in which the disciplines have tended to ignore and/or understate their being conditioned by, and perpetuation of, unequal power relations. Fields of study such as gender studies and critical race studies produce knowledge like the 'traditional' disciplines but work within a framework of knowledge as situated and that seek to redress the ways in which the situatedness of knowledge producers has been inadequately foregrounded in disciplinary knowledge production. Rudolph et al. (2018, p. 30) explain that

> The establishment of new academic disciplines through the second half of the twentieth century (such as Women's Studies, Indigenous Studies, Critical Race and Whiteness Studies, Queer Studies and Postcolonial Studies) represents the inadequacy of older disciplines to account for and develop knowledge that adequately speaks to the diversity of human experience. These disciplines sought to *open up further possibilities for knowledge* at the same time as directly *contesting the ways in which disciplines can hold power relations in place in damaging ways* (emphasis added).

To reiterate a point I made above, the critiques contesting the role of power in knowledge advanced by theoretical approaches such as decolonial theory are for the end of strengthening knowledge. Critics of social realism seem to call for what Cross (2015, p. 49) refers to as 'political, ethical and *methodological vigilance* that requires researchers to check how their claims, descriptions and explanations may be determined by their social position in the social field, and the consequences for their positionality'. Questions about the positionality of those who make up disciplinary communities bring to the fore questions of social power and its implications for knowledge production. As I have tried to argue above, knowledge is connected with social power because knowers are socially situated in relations of power that partly shape assignments of epistemic authority and hence influence who contributes to knowledge and what knowledge is available collectively.

Proponents of decolonisation agree with social realism that the social production of knowledge through specialised methods grounds the possibility of better knowledge. At the same time, proponents of decolonisation emphasise the contaminating effects of power on knowledge that is possible because the social production of knowledge is facilitated by knowers who are social situated in power relations. Thus even if the social production of knowledge is not reducible to the individual knowers participating in it, it is affected by the social power relations that constitutes communities of experts and society more broadly. The question of who constructs knowledge and the implications of this on the produced knowledge is, for at least some variants of decolonisation, crucial but it does not seek to undermine or replace the specialised social construction of knowledge. Decolonising knowledge may involve challenging and replacing some of the methodological approaches internal to different disciplines but it does not have to entail a complete replacing of the systematic social production of knowledge. Decolonial theory does not seem to call for the replacement of the systematic and collaborative production of knowledge. It raises questions about who participates and contributes in the production of knowledge and what the implications are.

I have been trying to argue that the situatedness of knowledge producers in relations and systems of power is insufficiently explored in the social realist view of knowledge and have reiterated key points about how the idea of the situatedness of knowledge producers is needed for thinking about guarding against the influence of power in knowledge and strengthening knowledge production. Crucially, I have maintained that taking the political situatedness of knowers seriously does not necessitate replacing the largely reliable specialised production of knowledge that characterises disciplinary knowledge production. For the remainder of the section, I make my case for the compatibility between the idea of the sociality of knowledge and the idea of the situatedness of

knowledge producers. Social realism is not inherently opposed to accounting for the situatedness of knowledge producers in ways that positively transform knowledge. Similarly, decolonisation accedes that the specialised social production of knowledge secures its relative objectivity and bestness. Neither account forecloses the possibility of recognising the aspect of the idea that knowledge is socially produced emphasised by the other account.

The compatibility of social realism with decolonising efforts is, though difficult to see at first glance, is evident when we take seriously that social realists do not inherently oppose the idea of the situatedness of knowledge producers. As I have repeatedly pointed out, social realists acknowledge that knowers and the production of knowledge can be, and often is and has been, infested with power because knowledge production is embedded in and affected by broader unequal power relations in society. Social realism recognises that the constitution of the communities of disciplinary experts can mirror wider social hierarchies and relations of power. This is evident in Young's (2000, p. 530) explanation that 'the sociology of knowledge reminds us that history and experience inevitably enter into all forms of knowledge, whether or not it is produced by specialists within particular disciplinary traditions'. Moreover, Young (2008, p. 30) points out that

> The codes and procedures associated with the production of knowledge are reflected in research traditions and curricula, but also inherit and are shaped by a legacy of wider social divisions and inequalities that are becoming more acute, especially on a global scale. They exhibit an inertia and resistance to change, which are only partly cognitive in origin. However, they can in no meaningful sense be reducible to the interests of any particular social class, gender, nationality or ethnic group.

Young here highlights that the production of knowledge is shaped by broader societal power systems that produce certain inequalities. Social realism contests the reduction of knowledge to the interests of knowers, not the idea of the situatedness of knowledge producers. Indeed, at least sometimes, social realists acknowledge that the knower's situatedness can be a resource for enhancing knowledge production. For example: speaking of 'Southern theory', Moore (2013, p. 336) explains that 'the problem with such 'situated', culturalist accounts is not with the *situated*, because all situations reveal new knowledge, insights and concerns and enrich intellectual pluralism'. It is when such approaches 'invoke experience as the foundation of all knowledge and therefore the basis for claiming that all knowledge or truth claims are equivalent, whether they derive from common sense, folk tradition, laboratory-based scientific research or systematic, disciplinary knowledge' (M. Young, 2000, p. 527) that social realism opposes the idea of the situatedness of knowers. Social realism opposes reductionist interpretations of what the situatedness of knowers means. The problem is with the claims that knowledge is only about the

social situation of its producers. This idea is encapsulated in what Allais, cited earlier, calls 'epistemological constructionism'.

Still, because social realism does not address the situatedness of knowers in relations and systems of power and the implications of this for knowledge production, it seems to overstate the 'power of' specialised knowledge and understate the threat on the truth-seeking goal of knowledge of the involvement of power in knowledge production. The decolonial view of how power enters knowledge complements the social realist concern with accounting for the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production. Decolonial theory maps out some of the ways in which power affects the development of knowledge by influencing who participates and contributes to knowledge production as well as the nature of their contribution. Social realists do not intrinsically oppose this. Indeed, the point made by Allais (2018, p. 229) that 'if we want to build greater support for a knowledge based curriculum, we need to focus more on disentangling power relations in the development of knowledge' is a call for work to be done to map out some of the ways in which power contaminates knowledge so that strategies for addressing the contaminations can be implemented to secure the production of truthful knowledge. Social realism does not oppose bringing the situatedness of knowledge producers into how we think about knowledge. It opposes treating knowledge as if the situatedness of knowers is all there is to knowledge because this frequently leads to relativism. In general, then, while social realism does not emphasise and address the implications of the idea that knowers are situated in detail, it does not deny it.

In conclusion, the notion of the sociality of knowledge production emphasised in social realism secures the possibility of claiming that some knowledge is relatively objective and achieves greater approximations of truth. Similarly, the idea of the situatedness of knowledge producers is brought to the fore in decolonial theory with the intention to create awareness of the ways in which power can contaminate knowledge and to suggest ways to reverse and neutralise possible contaminations of power on knowledge to secure the possibility for the social production of knowledge to achieve better knowledge. The collaborative specialised production of knowledge plays an indispensable role in securing the production of the 'best' possible knowledge. At the same time, the socio-political constitution of disciplinary knowledge producers is not inconsequential to the 'bestness' of knowledge produced. So contesting and addressing the ways in which the constitution of disciplinary communities may contaminate knowledge is partly necessary for achieving better knowledge.

7 Conclusion

> Sociological approaches to knowledge can easily be used irresponsibly. … this irresponsibility is not intrinsic to the theories, but is a reflection of how theorists sometimes see their role. (M. Young, 2000, p. 535)

This chapter provides an overview of the main argument and conclusions of this thesis. I present a summary of the main claims made in the different chapters towards the development of the argument of the thesis. I then consider some potential limitations with the argument I advance and conclude with some remarks to underscore the contribution of this thesis to knowledge.

7.1 Summary of analysis

This thesis revisits the subject of knowledge and power. The thesis posed the question 'whether there is an account of the relationship between knowledge and power that adequately recognises the involvement of power in knowledge production without undermining the truth-seeking goal of knowledge?' To answer this question, I critically analysed and examined two schools of thought, social realism and decolonial theory, which have currency in some contemporary debates about knowledge and power in curriculum. I argued that both the social realist and decolonial account of knowledge and power fail, to some extent, to reconcile the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production with the involvement of power in the production of knowledge. Moreover, I suggested that this failure is a result of how the two accounts interpret the idea that knowledge is socially produced and proposed that successfully reconciling the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production with the role of power in knowledge production depends on understanding the idea of the sociality of knowledge production emphasised in social realism and the idea of the situatedness of knowledge producers stressed in decolonial theory as complementary aspects of the social production of knowledge.

The argument of this thesis was developed in three main parts. Part I introduced the topic and specified the scope and significance of the study. Together, the three chapters in Part I delineated the research problem motivating my study: how to affirm the relationship between knowledge and power without undermining the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production. In Chapter 1, I discussed that there are two polemical positions in extant literature: traditionalist and reductivist. The former ignores questions of power in knowledge while the latter reduces knowledge to power thus threatening the truth-seeking goal of knowledge via relativism. I demonstrated that the traditionalist position is untenable because power conditions knowledge production. This left the reductivist position. Interestingly, this surfaced an unusual commonality between epistemology (through Fricker and Alcoff) and sociology of knowledge (Moore and Young) by showing that both approaches vehemently oppose the traditionalist-reductivist false dilemma that implies that

any claim of knowledge as social inherently falls prey to relativism. In broad terms, Chapter 2 and 3 showed the potential problem(s) with affirming the involvement of power in knowledge.

In Chapter 2, I showed how Foucault's co-constitutive account of the relationship between knowledge and power is susceptible to relativism because it presents power as inextricable from knowledge. Foucault, and his defenders, insists that his co-constitutive account does not endorse relativism. However, absent a convincing explanation of his idea of the inextricability of power from knowledge, his account remains susceptible to accusations of being relativist. The main claim from this chapter is that affirmative accounts of knowledge and power are susceptible to relativism. The challenge for my thesis was to affirm the relation of knowledge and power without falling prey to relativism.

In Chapter 3, I spelled out what relativism is and argued that the common route to relativism is via social constructionism. I showed that social constructionism, especially in the social sciences, is typically accompanied by relativism because the idea that knowledge is socially constructed tends to be read reductively to imply that the criteria for knowledge are the power interests of different knowers. This chapter helped narrow the criterion for relativism: relativism looms for accounts that reduce knowledge to the power interests of knowers. My proposed conception of the idea that knowledge is socially produced avoids the threat of relativism by offering a non-reductive understanding of the idea of the situatedness of knowledge producers.

Overall, Part I set out that the conceptual problem in relation to the subject of knowledge and power is how to meaningfully affirm the involvement of power in knowledge production without threatening the idea that knowledge production is truth-seeking and generally achieves relatively objective knowledge. It is important to highlight, as I gestured in Chapter 1, that the framing of the conceptual problem of knowledge and power in terms of a problem of making sense of the idea that knowledge is social is consistent with the social realist framing of the problem. In my problem statement, I used some quotes from Moore and Young to emphasise the 'false dilemma' of the traditionalist and reductivist positions, and to emphasise that the problem is a problem of how to 'responsibly' conceptualise the idea that knowledge is social. It can seem, therefore, as though I am simply making the social realist case. Though I adopt the same framing (because it is useful), my argument differs from social realism because it attempts to take the idea of the situatedness of knowers as seriously as the idea of the sociality of knowledge production. Hence my central argument demonstrates the complementarity of social realism and decolonial theory. My primary interest is not to 'disagree' with either, but to maximise on their insights in a way that is useful for the attempt to adequately recognise the involvement of power in knowledge production without undermining the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production.

Part II examined social realism and decolonial theory in order to extricate their accounts of knowledge and power and subject these accounts to critical examination. Extant literature investigates the subject of knowledge and power through studies of Foucault's views or Marxist critiques of ideology. My own investigation of knowledge and power is prompted by the contemporary resurgence of the topic in debates about curriculum in the education field. My investigation of the subject of knowledge and power through a critical analysis of social realism and decolonial theory as relevant perspectives in education offers some insights with more immediate relevance and applicability for curriculum thinking which I sketch at the end of this thesis.

My analysis of social realism focused on explicating the social realist 'powerful knowledge' framework as a curriculum principle as well as a sociological principle. In other words, I discussed and analysed the social realist curriculum proposal that 'powerful knowledge' should form the basis of curriculum and critically reviewed the general social realist (sociological) view of knowledge. The latter characterises knowledge as the product of the collaborative efforts of disciplinary communities of experts following rigorous methods and procedures. Social realism emphasises the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production in the disciplines and avoids relativism by insisting that the specialised production of knowledge secures its relative objectivity and provides independent standards for the criteria for knowledge. The social realist account of knowledge and power emphasises the 'power of' knowledge that is produced in the disciplines. This 'power of' specialised knowledge grounds the social realist 'powerful knowledge' framework for curriculum.

The most damning criticism of social realism, however, showed that the account overstates the cognitive power of knowledge and insufficiently addresses knowledge's entanglement with social forms of power. In its efforts to challenge curriculum approaches that marginalise questions of knowledge and its intrinsic properties in favour of questions of the origins of knowledge as well as 'whose' interests they represent, social realism understates the role of the knower and the potential implications of the political situatedness of knowers on knowledge production.

In contrast to the social realist account, the decolonial account *appears* to overemphasise the deterministic influence of colonial power in knowledge and thus neglects the intrinsic properties of knowledge and its truth-seeking goal. It is this difference in focus that explains the apparent opposition between social realism and decolonisation. The decolonial centring of 'the knower' as the object of analysis on knowledge is evident in the decolonial critique of Eurocentric knowledge. The truth-seeking dimension of knowledge is overshadowed by the decolonial focus on the situatedness of knowledge and the power interests shaping it.

Moreover, some decolonial proponents seem to explicitly and implicitly advance the relativist thesis that all knowledge is equally valid. At times, as I pointed out, some proponents of decolonisation seemed to define knowledge in terms of struggles against oppressive systems. However, as I tried to show, there are some variants of decolonial theory (Wiredu's conceptual decolonisation), or specific decolonising efforts by scholars such as Mills, which seem committed to decolonisation for the sake of enhancing the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production. These variants of decolonisation emphasise the locatedness and situatedness of knowers for the end of diagnosing possible shortcomings of knowledge and addressing them so that knowledge can be better.

My core argument is that the social realist and decolonial accounts of power each fail to reconcile the truth-seeking goal of knowledge with the involvement of power in knowledge production owing to their partial interpretations of the broad idea that knowledge is socially produced. The critical analysis and examination of social realism and decolonial theory in Part II presents two seemingly divergent interpretations of the broad idea that knowledge is social. My proposal, then, is that a resolution to the problem of reconciling power and truth in knowledge production requires a complementary understanding of social realism and decolonial theory. The social realist and decolonial interpretations of the idea that knowledge is socially produced are complementary and jointly necessary for the production of knowledge that is more comprehensive, impartial and more truthful. The collaborative production of knowledge following using specialised disciplinary methods is indispensable to achieving the best possible knowledge. But it is not inconsequential to the kind of knowledge produced — how comprehensive it is, how critical of the status quo, its explanatory reach and power and so on — 'who' collaborates to produce knowledge. A complementary understanding of social realism and decolonial theory is possible if we see taking seriously the idea of the situatedness of knowledge producers not as an attempt to reduce knowledge to the power interests of knowers, but rather as a call for critical vigilance against the ways in which power can contaminate knowledge.

7.2 Limitations of the thesis

> The power-knowledge relation does not grow on trees. (Koopman, 2008, p. 349)

In the introduction chapter of this project, by way of anticipation, I highlighted the difficulty of characterising the elusive relation between the two widely contested concepts of knowledge and power. In this section, I briefly discuss some of the main shortcomings of the thesis in terms of the methodological approach adopted and the argument made in the thesis.

The subject of knowledge and power is loaded with questions and conceptual problems that have a long history of inquiry in diverse fields in the social sciences and humanities. The terms knowledge and power are widely contested within and between different fields. As such, investigating the subject of knowledge and power involves dabbling in intricate conceptual issues of the nature of knowledge and our claims to truth, the goals of education and curriculum, the political-epistemic problem of the aftermath of colonialism, and many other related sub-topics and conceptual issues. The introductory part of the thesis, Part I, especially, generalises some of the positions about what knowledge is and does not capture the nuances of some of the ideas presented. The traditionalist and reductivist positions, for example, are generalised and polemicised. Similarly, I did not discuss the positions of postmodernism, standpoint theory, social constructionism with sufficient nuance. Moreover, it is possible that only extreme forms of relativism commit to the idea of the equal validity of all knowledge claims and that moderate versions of relativism do not threaten the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production. It is unavoidable in a study that deals with the complex bodies of literature that some positions will be generalised and not sufficiently nuance.

I limited my project to investigating the subject of knowledge and power by understanding how it is conceptualised and interrogated in social realism and decolonial theory in order to focus my study more. These schools of thought are not homogenous and do not have a single unified group of scholars making the exact same arguments. There remains the possibility that I have failed to consider key thinkers whose rendition of the ideas of social realism and decolonisation would challenge the argument I present. This possibility notwithstanding, I selected some of the most prominent thinkers under each school of thought and focused on their views as representative of the broader arguments of the schools of thought. In each case, I selected particular key thinkers because their work foregrounds and encapsulates the issue of power and knowledge relevant for this study most explicitly and strongly.

The topic of this investigation is knowledge *and* power. One potential substantive weakness of my argument has to do with my framing of the investigation. The way I have framed my investigation and my argument pays unequal attention to the two concepts of knowledge and power. Most of my discussion and analysis focused more on the knowledge side and not on the power side. I hope that the conceptions of power that were surfaced in the discussion of the senses of power in 'powerful knowledge' in section 4.4 as well as the concept of the 'coloniality of power' sufficiently characterised how power is conceived within social realism and decolonisation.

Relatedly, the argument I advance proceeds as though the operations of power in knowledge are 'easy' to detect and correct. Strengthening my case for why paying attention to the situatedness of knowledge producers can lead to the production of better knowledge assumes that critical awareness of the situatedness reveals the operations of power so that they may be challenged and reversed. My discussion of Fricker's notion of epistemic injustice highlights that this is a reasonable assumption and indicates that such awareness does have the potential to show us, for example, that we should work to eradicate hermeneutical exclusion in order to minimise some of the inadequacies of knowledge arising from such exclusion. Still, strengthening this argument would require more theorising of the ways in which power works. As Cheah (2006) points out in his criticism of decoloniality, power works in mysterious and insidious ways, and we cannot assume that it is easy to detect.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this investigation makes a contribution to knowledge in two ways. First, it investigates the topic of knowledge and power from the perspective of education. Studies of this topic are dominated by Foucauldian and Marxist perspectives. This thesis presents a critical analysis of what social realism and decolonial theory conceptualise the relation between knowledge and power, providing a possible alternative perspective on the subject.

Secondly, the two schools of thought, social realism and decolonisation, are commonly perceived as oppositional. My engagement with the two schools of thought here sought to explore what insights they both offer for understanding knowledge and power instead of presenting them as competing against each other. This allowed me to show the complementarity between them in terms of how they understand the idea that knowledge is socially produced.

The thesis investigated the important subject of the relationship between knowledge and power from an alternative perspective of social realism and decolonial theory. By demonstrating the complementarity of the social realist and decolonial understanding of the idea that knowledge is social, this thesis shows that affirming the relationship between knowledge and power does not have to imply accepting relativism and its anti-epistemological stance because we can reconcile the unavoidable involvement of power in knowledge production with the truth-seeking goal of knowledge production.

Epilogue: preliminary thoughts on curriculum implications

> Any socially just curriculum reform agenda, in addition to 'recentering knowledge', must also 'bring the knower back in'. (Shay & Peseta, 2016, p. 365)

The impetus for this study is two debates in curriculum about 'bringing powerful knowledge back in' and about decolonising curriculum. I have not engaged directly with the field of curriculum theory in this project except through the discussion of some of the points that scholars in social realism and decolonisation make about curriculum. I would like to end this study with some very initial thoughts on what the potential implications of my claim about the complementarity of social realism and decolonial theory might be for curriculum thinking. Allais (2014, p. 197) explains that 'in education the relationship between knowledge and power is seen to be doubly problematic, because first knowledge is produced or constructed by the powerful in their own interests, and then a curriculum is constructed from this constructed knowledge—a 'double' construction'. The 'double construction' problem means that the social construction of knowledge in specialised disciplines has to be justified and 'cleansed' of the power interests of powerful groups before it is used to construct subjects for the curriculum.[47] Broadly, I want to suggest that the reconciliation I have argued for in this thesis provides a good *in principle* rationale for why curriculum must be based on specialised knowledge as well as involve critical inquiry of the role of the social situatedness of the disciplines.

The question of power's entanglement with knowledge in curriculum is prompted by the search for criteria of adjudication between different types of knowledge that should form the basis of curriculum. The central question in the curriculum knowledge debate is about what knowledge should be included and/or excluded from a curriculum. The context for this search is, among other factors, growing contestation from some educationalists that traditional curriculum knowledge sustains and perpetuates unequal power relations and social inequalities: 'education provides certain people with access to social resources such as networks, the right accent, and knowledge of high culture, all of which mark the bearers as members of the elite, and thereby perpetuate an unequal social order' (S. Allais, 2014, p. 194). 'Education also involves a 'passing on', of knowledge, or more broadly, a culture' (M. Young & Muller, 2010, p. 15). As I indicated in Chapter 5, this point is emphasised in calls to decolonise curricula in South African universities. The decolonial contention is that the knowledge (and culture) that is 'passed on' in curricula promotes the culture of dominant groups while devaluing the culture of marginalised groups who form a large portion of the

[47] Relatedly, Moore (2013, p. 338) gestures at the need for a satisfactory social theory of knowledge that would help solve the problem of the double construction of curriculum knowledge when he writes that 'the problem of knowledge in general becomes a particular problem within the sociology of education by virtue of the absence of a sociological theory of how knowledge can be both social and knowledge – a theory of the sociality of knowledge'.

constituency of the student population. However, decolonisation does not have to conclude from this that educational knowledge is only, or can only be, about perpetuating inequalities.

The growing influence of arguments that education reproduces social inequalities and unequal power relations, according to Allais, has led to the increasing appeal of curriculum approaches underpinned by 'epistemological constructionism':

> The epistemological constructionist position in education is generally associated with the position that school knowledge is the knowledge of the ruling class. The epistemological constructionist position sometimes holds that because subjects represent knowledge of other groups — ruling classes and elites, colonial rulers, Western or male elites — it is not of interest to learners, or, it is alienating to them. It does not necessarily reject the idea that bodies of knowledge are structured. (S. Allais, 2014, p. 200)

Epistemological constructionism in education, Allais explains, does not necessarily undermine the coherent and systematic organisation of knowledge in school subjects and hence are not intrinsically against school subjects qua knowledge. School subjects are bodies of knowledge 'created by drawing on disciplinary concepts, and organizing, sequencing, and selecting from them in ways that enable learners to acquire their key concepts' (S. Allais, 2014, p. 211). Epistemological constructionism has a problem with school subjects in so far as they are seen to represent the power interests of dominant groups and reproduce social inequalities.

Allais (2014, p. 199) explains the apparent appeal of epistemological constructionism in education is because 'it *appears* to offer a solution to the elite control of education. It *appears* to provide a basis for the dismantling of the traditional curriculum, and for taking power away from elitist educational institutions'. However, Allais argues that the epistemological constructionist idea that subject knowledge is nothing more than the knowledge of the powerful aimed at serving their interests conflates knowledge and ideology: She explains:

> Clearly the dominant ideology in society plays a role in the selection of curriculum knowledge, as well as in the development of knowledge. … However, accepting that education institutions, like any other institution in society, play a role in the perpetuation of ideology, and accepting that ideology can and does influence the curriculum, is not the same as accepting that the traditional curriculum is nothing more than the knowledge of the ruling class, or the knowledge of the powerful; that there is no difference between knowledge and ideology. (S. Allais, 2014, p. 195)

The conflation of educational knowledge with ideology in education makes it anomalous to support the central importance of knowledge in curriculum, and such arguments tend to be deemed as conservative and not progressive.[48]

[48] Moore (2013, p. 335) explains that to argue for the centrality of knowledge is 'to run the risk of being accused of academic elitism, cultural imperialism and of ignoring the relationship between knowledge and power'.

The core curriculum problem with the relativism of curriculum approaches grounded in 'epistemological constructionism', Maton and Moore (2010, p. 335) contend, is that 'it becomes increasingly difficult to decide what *to* teach as opposed to what *not* to teach'. The main problem with relativist views of knowledge is that they cannot provide an epistemic basis for distinguishing what is and is not appropriate knowledge to be taught in the curriculum. Young (2000, p. 534) argues that 'the rejection of any grounds for knowledge can lead to the view that the only question in knowledge is who has the power to impose their view of the world'.

Superficially, decolonisation, in its concern with the situatedness of knowledge producers, can seem more aligned with the epistemological constructionist position. However, the conception of the situatedness of knowledge producers that I tried to present in section 6.1.2 above indicates decoloniality's divergence with the conclusions of epistemological constructionism. The idea that we should teach the best available knowledge is not rejected in calls for decolonising. Moreover, calls for decolonising the curriculum do not seem to reject the social realist idea that specialised bodies of knowledge should be the starting point or basis of curricula. I showed in Chapter 4 that critics of social realism are not inherently opposed to disciplinary knowledge. Rather, they are opposed to the ways in which disciplines can have systematic gaps in the knowledge they produce and contend that this is not unrelated to the socio-political constitution of 'who;' makes up the disciplinary communities. Calls for decolonisation contest what kind of knowledge should be in curricula as well as what that knowledge should be able to do for students particularly given the complex histories of postcolonial societies such as South Africa. Decolonisation of curriculum knowledge calls for a 'politically-sensitive' methodological vigilance regarding the selection of educational knowledge that is attentive particularly to the ways in which colonial operations of power influence this selection.

Questions regarding criteria for selecting knowledge for curricula cannot be answered without clarifying the broader aims of education. As curriculum approaches, both decolonisation and social realism share a concern for social justice but diverge slightly in their understandings of the social justice issue in terms of curriculum knowledge.[49] Generally, social realism challenges the tendency to approach educational questions through a social justice lens that marginalises knowledge. Social realists are concerned with the injustice of curricula which fails to provide students with access to specialised powerful knowledge and fails to induct them into the processes and procedures that enable them to engage in debates about society and contribute to the generation of knowledge (Shay & Peseta, 2016, p. 362). For social realism, as I mentioned, 'the most fundamental inequality in education is that of access to the best knowledge' (Moore, 2013, p. 335). The 'best' possible

[49] I am grateful to Prof Lyn Yates for pointing this out to me in my PhD proposal.

knowledge, for social realism, is specialised disciplinary knowledge because it has the properties which enable students to think beyond local contexts and inducts them into how to generate new knowledge. The properties of specialised powerful knowledge include its generalisability, explanatory power and providing new ways of thinking about the world. The social justice concern as it pertains to curriculum knowledge for social realism surrounds access to knowledge that endows students with certain cognitive and intellectual capacities.

The social realist 'powerful knowledge' framework makes clear that the criteria for curriculum knowledge should be based on knowledge that is produced using reliable methods and has been subject to critical scrutiny. Moreover, curriculum knowledge should comprise of knowledge that facilitates students' conceptual understanding beyond particular experiences and inducts them into the rules and principles of producing new knowledge. Overall, the criteria for curriculum knowledge should focus on whether knowledge provides epistemic access and improves the intellectual capacities of students to think and engage intellectually with the world.

Decolonisation shares the social realist concern that access to knowledge is a key social justice concern. However, decolonisation places more emphasis on the entanglement of curriculum knowledge with social power. Hence, decolonisation stresses that 'more just curricula would make visible the politics of knowledge production and the power relations that underpin such politics' (Rudolph et al., 2018, p. 34). Decolonial approaches to curriculum are concerned with the injustice of curricula that does not develop, especially, students' abilities to critically engage, question and replace dominant knowledge but instead indoctrinates them into it. Balarin (2008, p. 517) makes this general point in the following passage:

> While it seems fundamental to put an end to the 'anything goes' approach to knowledge, which then makes any kind of educational or curricular proposal as good as any other, we need to promote approaches to knowledge development and transmission — through educational institutions — that incorporate some form of awareness about the limitations inherent in knowledge definition.

The point in this passage is that curricula knowledge needs to expose students to knowledge that develops their critical awareness of the limitations inherent in knowledge. Wrigley (2018, p. 21) similarly argues that, 'all students need knowledge which is powerful enough to challenge the distorted understandings of reality carried by 'common sense', but also — and this is indeed a challenge — some of the hegemonic orthodoxies accepted by academia'. Decolonisaton calls for knowledge that develops critical awareness of the limitations inherent in dominant Eurocentric knowledge precisely because of the entanglements between knowledge and colonial power. Decolonising efforts bring a particular vigilance in curriculum knowledge selection that is grounded in the concern with the entanglements of colonialism and knowledge. Such efforts foreground the

idea that 'both the production and use of knowledge (disciplinary and non-disciplinary) have been implicated by these colonial and racial violences' (Rudolph et al., 2018, p. 24). Hence Luckett (2016, p. 424) argues:

> Curriculum transformation has to begin in the field of knowledge production. A transformed curriculum would draw on research that critically deconstructs the historical development of the disciplines — especially in the colonies, the inherited canons and the contents of the colonial archive.

For proponents of decolonisation, curriculum knowledge must start from and be grounded in knowledge that challenges Eurocentrism. The criteria for curriculum knowledge, according to decolonisation, is knowledge that challenges and disrupts the dominant Eurocentric discourses and undermines its hegemony. A decolonising curriculum promotes access to knowledge that disrupts and undermines Eurocentric hegemony. Decolonising proposals argue that knowledge production more broadly, and consequently curriculum knowledge selection, needs to expand and critically re-read the disciplinary canon in new ways (Luckett, 2016, p. 424). The decolonial argument that curricula must subvert Eurocentrism is captured succinctly in the following passage:

> Decolonising humanities curriculum for a post-colonial university should provide students with conceptual tools and methodologies that allow them to challenge, de-centre and deconstruct colonial canons and re-read old texts in new ways. This entails understanding colonialism not only as a political and social event, but also as an epistemic event with continuing epistemological and ontological effects. Such an approach offers the possibility of holding in tension the contradictory ideological and knowledge producing functions of post-colonial university. (Luckett, 2016, pp. 425–426)

The following statement by Shay and Peseta (2016, p. 364) captures the views of social realism and decolonisation on the social justice issue in curriculum: 'to the extent to which curriculum maldistributes powerful knowledge and misrecognizes knowers, it perpetuates inequalities and social injustice'. There are two issues identified as central to social injustice in the curriculum: maldistribution of 'powerful knowledge' and misrecognition of who legitimately contributes to knowledge and the implications of this on knowledge. Social realism foregrounds the maldistribution of powerful knowledge and decolonisation foregrounds the misrecognition of some legitimate of sources of knowledge as a result of power operations and the ways in which this can lead to distortions in knowledge.

Allais (2018, p. 228) explains that 'powerful knowledge remains wound up with the powerful in ways that hinder our ability to build support for knowledge-based curricula'.[50] Allais' point seems to be that the social realist argument for 'powerful knowledge' as a curriculum principle is, to some extent, undermined and challenged by the ways in which knowledge is entwined with the powerful

[50] It is important to note that Allais is not a critic of the general argument that subjects must form the basis of curricula.

in society. Thus while the intellectual capacities bestowed by access to 'powerful knowledge' are important and useful, it remains a challenge if they are only accessed by the powerful and/or only perpetuate the ideas and interests of the powerful. The challenge, then, is how to avoid this. Allais (2018, p. 229) suggests that 'to build greater support for a knowledge-based curriculum, we need to focus more on disentangling power relations in the development of knowledge'. I propose that decolonising efforts aim at this sort of disentanglement of power from knowledge.

Social realism says that curriculum knowledge should bestow certain intellectual capacities but is not oblivious to the fact of power's involvement in knowledge (as Allais makes clear) and decolonisation adds that these intellectual capacities must be shaped and aimed at challenging, specifically, the intricacies and implications of power on knowledge. This is why decolonisation complements social realism about curriculum knowledge. In my understanding, decolonisation does not contest that curricula should provide access to 'powerful knowledge', it extends, materially, what powerful knowledge should be and what it should do for students. While social realism argues for curriculum knowledge to provide students with access to knowledge that enhances their capacities for engaging in society's conversations and generating new knowledge, decolonisation calls specifically for knowledge that develops students' capacities to critique, challenge and rebuild what is seen as 'colonial canons' in the disciplines.

> We therefore contend … that bringing history back into knowledge projects is required for working towards curriculum and educational justice. In attending to the history that has produced the disciplines that are central to the concept of 'powerful knowledge', the colonial relations of power become visible and the 'shadow' side of knowledge cannot be forgotten or overlooked. This, we argue, is knowledge that can be powerful in its interrogation of racial and colonial violence, rather than in its epistemic reproduction of it. (Rudolph et al., 2018, p. 25)

Decolonisation does not, in principle, challenge the idea of knowledge being the basis of the curriculum; it challenges the dominance of Eurocentric knowledge specifically because it is charged with perpetuating certain distortions in knowledge. Hence calls for decolonising curricula aim at disentangling knowledge from specifically colonial forms of power in order to preserve and enhance the truthfulness of knowledge as well as its ability to contest social injustice. Complementarily, social realism seeks to disentangle knowledge's truth-seeking from 'knowledge of the powerful'. Both decolonisation and social realism agree that knowledge should be the basis of curriculum, and both agree that disentangling knowledge from the contaminating effects of power strengthens its epistemic power. The broad idea in combining the insights of social realism and decolonisation in thinking about curriculum knowledge selection is to acknowledge the epistemic power of disciplinary knowledge, and hence the legitimacy of subjects based of disciplinary knowledge in providing access to epistemically powerful knowledge, whilst remaining

ever vigilant of the ways in which the development of knowledge may be tainted and contaminated by operations of power, and devising mechanisms of counteracting such contaminations.

The fundamental implication on curriculum design and questions of knowledge of a complementary combination of social realism and decolonisation is that we do not dispense with the social realist idea that subjects should form the starting point of curriculum knowledge choices but mandate that the selection of which knowledge is prioritised in educational subjects be contested in light of decolonial arguments:

> as much as the development of knowledge, is influenced by, and embedded in, power relations. But the disciplines and the subjects themselves are not reducible to power relations. Taking explicit account of these power relations is necessary in order to meaningfully contest the curriculum. But instead of arguing that schools should dispense with subjects to focus on learners' immediate interests and every day contexts, or the projected utility of bits of knowledge in the workplace, a left-wing approach to the curriculum should support subjects but contest which subjects are selected, and which knowledge is selected within subjects. (S. Allais, 2014, p. 211)

Allais accepts that the development of subjects for curricula is not free from the influence of power. Young (2000, p. 530) maintains that 'curriculum subjects, like any other source of meaning, are not given but shaped by society and a product of the practice of subject specialists themselves'. Thus while there can, and should be, contestation about which knowledge constitutes subjects, subjects are securely based on specialised knowledge. 'Contesting the way in which knowledge is selected within the curriculum is not necessarily inconsistent with holding the view that bodies of knowledge are important' (S. Allais, 2014, p. 200). Decolonisation contests the selection of knowledge in the curriculum but, as I have tried to show, does not undermine the idea that subjects are the starting points of curriculum knowledge. Heleta (2016, p. 2) contends that 'the universities in South Africa have done very little since 1994 to open up to different bodies and traditions of knowledge and knowledge-making in new and exploratory ways'.

The following statement by Young (2000, p. 530) encapsulates the compatibility and complementarity of the social realist notion of 'powerful knowledge' as a curriculum principle and the decolonisation call to contest dominant curriculum knowledge and interrogate especially the ways in which it is entangled with power:

> In relation to education, it follows that we have to accept the implications of the sociology of knowledge that social class, gender and race inequalities, as well as a variety of professional interests, are embedded in the organization of the school curriculum as well as in the academic disciplines and other structures within which new knowledge is produced.

Synthesising the insights of social realism and decolonisation might provide a way to combine the social realist insight that subjects which are developed and organised from disciplinary knowledge should form the basis of curriculum, and the decolonising insight that what constitutes subject knowledge (or the canon) must be contested to include knowledge that provides more comprehensive and critical understandings of society which take into account the complex entanglement of knowledge with power.

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