

Designing for epistemic justice: Epistemic apprenticeship as an institutional commitment

Philosophy and Social Criticism

2023, Vol. 0(0) 1–26

© The Author(s) 2023



Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/01914537231184493

journals.sagepub.com/home/psc**Millicent Churcher** 

Freie Universität Berlin, Germany

Abstract

This paper develops the concept of *epistemic apprenticeship* as a response to failures among privileged social actors to perceive the knowledge bases of unjustly marginalised groups as sources of valuable insight. Inspired by Elizabeth Spelman's reflections on apprenticeship and intersectional feminism, an epistemic apprenticeship represents an obverse form of apprenticeship; one in which socially privileged knowers become apprentices to those who do not enjoy equivalent power and privilege. This paper critiques and extends Spelman's account of apprenticeship by focussing on how the institutional sedimentation of dominant social imaginaries works against the volitional and virtuous practice of apprenticeship, and by exploring what a commitment to epistemic apprenticeship demands at the level of institutional practice. As part of this discussion, I scrutinise the conditions under which institutionalised apprenticeships may fall short of their meliorative potential, and may obstruct rather than aid efforts to achieve greater epistemic justice.

Keywords

affect, Elizabeth Spelman, epistemic apprenticeship, epistemic justice, institutions, social imaginaries

I mean none of it's easy, getting community engagement is not easy. I had to learn myself that you can't set a schedule, you can't tick off an agenda list, that there's that kind of flexibility and organic nature of the process that you have to respect and, of course, it's culture first you have to respect ... We would have a meeting where we got everyone we needed in the

Corresponding author:

Millicent Churcher, CRC 'Affective Societies,' Freie Universität Berlin, Habelschwerdter Allee 45, Berlin 14195, Germany.

Email: millicent.churcher@sydney.edu.au

community in Bourke and it was like, "Great. Here we are." I'm going, "Great, we're going to get so much done today," and then welcome to country. Phil, this gorgeous man, just says, "Okay. Does anyone want to talk about someone who's passed away, but still has an impact that they're still thinking about a lot?" Well, two hours later, there goes the meeting because everyone just starts talking about how important this person was to them and whatever, and I just think, "Okay. This is what we're doing today" (Sarah Hopkins, Just Reinvest NSW, qtd. in [Brown et al. 2016](#), 133–134).

In 2013 the regional Australian community of Bourke was reported as having one of the highest rates of assault, break-ins, and car theft in the state of New South Wales. Statistically, the small town was more dangerous per capita than any other country in the world ([Olding and Ralston 2013](#)).¹ Decades of tough law and order approaches had done little to curb the high levels of crime in the community. Bourke has a population of fewer than 3000 people, a third of whom identify as Indigenous Australian. The high rates of Indigenous crime in the town emerged within a wider socio-political context marked by enduring settler colonial violence and institutional discrimination. Frustrated with the situation in Bourke and ineffective policing practices, Alistair Ferguson – one of Bourke's Indigenous residents and founder of the Bourke Tribal Council² – initiated contact with the non-profit association *Just Reinvest NSW*³ in late 2012 to co-operatively develop a 'Justice Reinvestment' model for Bourke. Known as the Maranguka Justice Reinvestment project (hereafter 'Maranguka'), the ongoing initiative involves members of Bourke's Indigenous community working together with the local police force and *Just Reinvest NSW* to reduce Indigenous youth incarceration rates and to improve the well-being of Bourke's Indigenous population. In contrast to the top-down approaches taken by government agencies to addressing Indigenous disadvantage,⁴ Maranguka is premised on a formal commitment from *JustReinvest NSW* to support a program of action that endows Indigenous communities in Bourke with the authority to set organizational agendas, priorities, and procedures.

In this paper I situate and examine Maranguka in relation to the broader issue of 'epistemic injustice' ([Fricker 2007](#)) and the practical interventions that are prescribed by a commitment to epistemic justice. Epistemic injustice broadly refers to the wrong done to a person 'in their capacity as a knower' (2007, 5).⁵ Central to the epistemic injustice literature is a concern with how members of dominant social groups persistently fail to treat members of marginalised social communities, including First Nations communities, as 'trusted informants' (*ibid.*, 132), and as having valuable knowledge bases from which they might learn and benefit ([Medina 2012](#), 92. Also [Dotson 2012](#); [Santos et al. 2008](#); [Tsosie 2017](#)).⁶ This is true even (and, sometimes, especially) of dominant actors who are broad-minded and egalitarian-spirited. Within the existing scholarship, there is broad recognition that these disrespectful postures are structurally scaffolded and maintained.

In this article, I develop the concept of *epistemic apprenticeship* as a response to these dynamics. Epistemic apprenticeship is situated within a broader conceptual framework that comprises different principles of epistemic justice, including commitments to epistemic respect and recognition of difference, as well as commitments to reflective self-critique. Inspired by Elizabeth Spelman's reflections on apprenticeship and intersectional

feminism in *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought* (1988), an epistemic apprenticeship represents an obverse form of apprenticeship; one in which powerful social actors become apprentices to those who do not enjoy equivalent power and privilege. An apprenticeship of this kind takes the form of an embodied, inter-subjective practice that draws upon and assists to cultivate virtues that include epistemic curiosity, openness, and humility.⁷

Spelman, as we will see, treats apprenticeship primarily as a volitional, individual practice. She does not closely attend to the background conditions against which this practice takes place. In taking stock of the interrelationship between imagination, affect, institutions, and epistemic agency, I argue for the need to extend Spelman's account to the level of institutional practice, and defend an institutional commitment to epistemic apprenticeship as a critical resource for epistemic justice. In so doing, this paper marks a contribution to the existing scholarship on the role of institutions in perpetuating and disrupting patterns of epistemic injustice (e.g. Anderson 2012; Fricker 2013; Medina 2012, 2019; Samaržija & Cerovac 2021).⁸

This paper is in three parts. The first part of the paper (Section I and II) critiques and develops Spelman's account of apprenticeship by foregrounding the imbrication of imagination and affect with perceptions of epistemic value and significance. This discussion centres the concept of the 'social imaginary'⁹ (Gatens 1996) and focuses on how the institutional sedimentation of dominant social imaginaries works against the volitional and virtuous practice of apprenticeship, including among subjects who are conscientious and well-meaning.

The second part of the paper (Sections III and IV) considers the institutional forms that are prescribed by a commitment to epistemic apprenticeship as part of its conditions of possibility. Broadly speaking, this commitment involves positioning less powerful identities as powerful institutional placeholders, and positioning powerful identities as apprentices to ways of knowing and being that they may have previously had the privilege to discount or overlook. In this context, I reflect on the normative and practical significance of institutionalized apprenticeships as compared with institutional arrangements that are guided by a commitment to ensuring epistemic participation and collaboration on terms of formal equality (e.g. Anderson 2012; Samaržija & Cerovac 2021). I argue that the typical configurations supported by these principles may fail, on their own, to offer a sufficiently forceful challenge to deeply internalized and embedded imaginaries that invest overriding value in the knowledge bases and methodologies of dominant social groups.

Maranguka represents one example of an institutional arrangement that instantiates an inversion of epistemic power and authority between dominant and marginalised social actors. Drawing on a qualitative study of this initiative (Brown et al. 2016), I draw attention to some of the embodied experiences that can arise among privileged actors who are structurally positioned as apprentices, and the potential of these experiences to open up dominant imaginaries to critical scrutiny.¹⁰ In the final part of the paper (Section V), I reflect on the conditions under which institutional commitments to epistemic apprenticeship may fail to realise their meliorative potential, and may risk obstructing rather than supporting epistemic justice.

I. Epistemic apprenticeship

The term ‘apprenticeship’ is widely known from trade guild and union contexts. In those contexts, an individual becomes an apprentice to a master tradesperson for a limited span of time in order to acquire trade skills and knowledge, and to become independently competent. As the following discussion will make clear, I am not interested in the notion of apprenticeship in this sense. Nevertheless, what I draw from this folk conception is an understanding of the apprentice’s education as being less about disembodied, individualistic learning and the acquisition of abstract, factual knowledge from one’s mentor, and more about learning through a form of intersubjective engagement that engages both mind and body; cognition and affect.

The starting point of my analysis adopts a broad view of apprenticeship, which treats it as an embodied activity of learning, or apprehension, by one who lacks knowledge or skill.¹¹ Epistemic apprenticeship, as I conceive of it here, is bound up with considerations of group power relations and the ethical development of privileged subjects *qua* knowers. To develop my notion of epistemic apprenticeship, I draw on the model Spelman develops for White feminist engagements with Women of Color. Noting that racial oppression both produces and is maintained in part by the ignorance of oppressors vis à vis the perspectives of the oppressed,¹² Spelman suggests undoing this ignorance requires, among other things, ‘an apprenticeship; and making oneself an apprentice to someone is at odds with having political, social, and economic power over them’ (1988, 178). Spelman, as I read her, counsels what might be called an obverse apprenticeship, whereby powerful social actors apprentice themselves to socially oppressed actors. If White feminists are to avoid participating in the oppression of women from BIPOC communities, they must – among other things – apprentice themselves to the latter, and invert the relation of racial authority and subordination that exists between them.

Spelman’s appeal to epistemic apprenticeship resonates with a set of claims that are central to feminist standpoint theory (e.g. Haraway 1988. Also Harding 1993; Wylie 2003; Pohlhaus 2012) and which are embedded in the work of Patricia Hill Collins (1990, 1998), Charles Mills (1997, 2007), and other theorists of racial oppression and white supremacy.¹³ Among these claims is that an oppressed subject will typically have an epistemic advantage when it comes to knowledge of their own oppression and the oppression suffered by the group to which they belong – a knowledge which takes the form of a ‘knowing that’ and a ‘knowing how’. Second, underprivileged persons will typically have a robust understanding of the knowledge systems of those in positions of privilege, whereas the same is not true of privileged actors vis à vis the knowledge bases of the underprivileged.¹⁴ Familiarity with, and appreciation for, characteristic ways of knowing and being that have developed within particular social and cultural communities tends to be unequally shared and unevenly distributed across group lines (Lugones and Spelman 1983; Santos et al. 2008).

Spelman offers scarce detail about what an obverse apprenticeship between members of privileged and underprivileged groups demands pragmatically. She briefly notes that an apprenticeship of this kind may take on various forms depending on the context: in the space of the Academy, for example, Spelman encourages privileged White ‘apprentices’ to:

read books, take classes, open your eyes and ears or whatever instruments of awareness you might be blessed with, go to conferences planned and produced by the people about whom you wish to learn and manage not to be intrusive, and so on. [Also] be careful about what books you buy, what classes you take; think about the limits there presently are on what you are prepared to see or hear; examine your own motivations for wanting to understand others' lives (178–179).

Since, for Spelman, the epistemic is tightly imbricated with the social, political, and material, seeking out and engaging with unjustly marginalised epistemes in a self-critical and reflective manner may assist to challenge social, political, and material hierarchies that are supported – at least in part – by overinvestments in the knowledge bases of powerful groups, and by a corresponding lack of investment in the perspectives of the oppressed.

Apprenticeship takes the form of a volitional, disciplined, and reflective exercise of inquiry and listening that engages an individual's capacities for perception and feeling. This exercise may prove discomfiting: as an apprentice, Spelman notes, one 'must be prepared to receive new information all the time, to adapt [one's] actions accordingly, and to have [one's] feelings develop in response to what the person is doing, whether one like [s] what she is doing or not' (181). In this context, one is confronted with and compelled to negotiate new experiences that draw one out of one's comfort zone. This activity involves a readiness on the part of the apprentice to tarry with the challenges presented by the unfamiliar, which includes a commitment to perceiving the other in their full reality and to pushing back against any temptation to imaginatively turn the other 'into someone or something ... who poses no difficulties' for the apprentice's lived reality (181). An apprentice does not dictate the manner in which the interaction with the other unfolds, and does not attempt to render it amenable to their personal interests, values, desires, and capacities. In this sense, Spelman's notion of an apprentice evokes virtues of 'curiosity' and openness to learning' – especially an openness to learning 'what may be disadvantageous to one's closely guarded position of privilege' (184). To these virtues I would add humility as well as courage and forbearance, since learning that which threatens one's comfort and privilege will often require tarrying with experiences that are unsettling and discomfiting for one's self (Lugones and Spelman 1983; Lugones 2003; Ortega 2006).

Spelman's emphasis on the need for well-meaning White feminists to meaningfully engage with worlds of experience and meaning that are unfamiliar, challenging, and self-destabilizing echoes and resonates with the insights of various scholars, including scholars of epistemic injustice who call upon dominant actors to open themselves up to alternative epistemes beyond those that they have inherited, without attempting to subsume these epistemes within the realm of what they already know and are comfortable with (see, e.g. Kuokkanen 2003, 2008; Medina 2012; Spivak 1993; Freire 1998).

So conceived, the practice of epistemic apprenticeship does not merely facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge or information: by engaging and cultivating a cluster of epistemic and moral virtues, it assists to support the ethical development of privileged identities *qua* epistemic agents. An obverse apprenticeship represents an intersubjective mode of engagement that encourages dominant social actors to re-orient themselves in

relation to subjugated knowledge bases as well as their own. This process of re-orientation engages both cognition and affect; mind and body. In this sense, and as [Section IV](#) elaborates, an epistemic apprenticeship facilitates a form of knowing that is not merely intellectual but which is deeply embodied; ‘a knowing that transforms the self who knows’ ([Bartky 1997](#), 179. Also [Kuokkanen 2003](#); [Razack 1998](#)). This point is important to stress, since merely gaining knowledge need not entail ethical self-development among dominant knowers. The activity of epistemic apprenticeship engages one’s capacities for imagination, perception, and feeling in addition to one’s intellectual and reflective capacities in order to challenge and shift one’s overinvestments in dominant epistemes. The knowledge that is gained through an epistemic apprenticeship is not simply about acquiring additional beliefs or new information, which one then adds to their existing collection of beliefs. Rather, an epistemic apprenticeship is about facilitating interactions that re-orient dominant knowers towards their particular ways of knowing and being in relation to those of others. These epistemic interactions can be more or less challenging, and the re-orientations they invite can be more or less extensive depending on what and to whom one apprentices oneself – a point to which I return in [Section V](#).

As noted earlier, epistemic apprenticeships place the responsibility of improvement on privileged subjects. This process of growth stems beyond a capacity to tolerate difference. As Spelman writes, ‘to tolerate someone is simply to let her have her say; I needn’t listen to her, I needn’t respond to her, I needn’t engage with her in any way at all. All I have to do is not interfere with her’ (182). Merely adhering to an ethic of non-interference is at odds with the kind of active and reflective engagement required of an epistemic apprentice, and tends to preserve rather than disrupt unequal relations of power and privilege. In addition, the education of the apprentice is not transient or finite; rather, it is ongoing. Since ‘there is an infinite amount to learn from a real object or a real person’ (Spelman 180), an epistemic apprenticeship involves a continual effort among privileged subjects to reflect upon and revise their perspective through open and critical engagement with perspectives that are arbitrarily denied epistemic recognition (see also [Kuokkanen 2017](#), 322–23).

What further distinguishes Spelman’s account is her framing of apprenticeship as an activity that places the responsibility of epistemic inquiry, and the time, effort, and resources entailed by this responsibility, squarely on the shoulders of privileged apprentices. The role and responsibilities of underprivileged persons are noticeably absent from her analysis. This framing is consistent with her emphasis on apprenticeship as being bound up with an inversion of power between oppressors and the oppressed. Racially marginalised knowers are not invited or encouraged to go out of their way to educate White apprentices. The apprentice absorbs insights and lessons through an educative process that does not necessarily extract further resources (material, psychological, and emotional) from underprivileged actors who are already likely to be under-resourced and overburdened (see [Berenstein 2016](#)). In her work on the decolonisation of academia, Indigenous studies scholar and Sámi woman Ruana Kuokkanen highlights the importance of this non-extractive relation for epistemic justice:

one of the implications of the shift from the approach of knowing the other to the continuous process of “learning to learn” is that the academy is propelled to “do its homework,” rather

than expect indigenous people to offer ready-made answers or divert their attention away from their priorities and concerns to teaching the ‘mainstream’ (2008, 78).

Apprenticing oneself to, and learning from marginalised others in a curious, open-minded, humble and self-reflective manner comprise key virtues that are called upon by Spelman and her contemporaries. In what follows, I turn attention towards the wider structural conditions that form the backdrop to individual efforts of apprenticeship, and what these conditions imply for the possibility and promise of apprenticeship as a resource for epistemic justice.

II. Embedded and embodied imaginaries: Implications for Spelmanian apprenticeship

For Spelman, as we have seen, an apprenticeship involves a commitment from the apprentice to perceiving the other in their full reality and resisting any inclination to imaginatively filter out that which unsettles the apprentice’s sense of comfort. In the existentialist tradition of Jean-Paul Sartre, Spelman (180–182) distinguishes between the process of entertaining images of real persons (which allows individuals the freedom to imagine such persons in any way they desire) and the process of perceiving persons (in which individuals do not enjoy such freedom of imagination) in order to argue for an apprenticeship based on ‘real perception’ (181). Whereas Spelman distinguishes imagination from perception, and subordinates the former to the latter, my account of epistemic apprenticeship treats these two capacities as inextricable from one another: imagination is always at work in perception (see [Pillow 2009](#)). Whilst wider social structures can shape, enable, and sustain colonizing forms of imagination that narrow one’s range of perception, this fact does not necessitate a turn away from the imagination as an important resource for apprenticeship. In contrast to Spelman, I defend a model of epistemic apprenticeship that engages and develops a capacity for more expansive, educated, and disciplined imagination – one that works in tandem with one’s capacities for feeling, reason, and reflection to support responsible and responsive habits of perception.

The cluster of capacities (imaginative, perceptual, affective, intellectual, reflective) that an epistemic apprenticeship draws upon and develops are invariably shaped by the cultural and institutional conditions in which apprentices are embedded. Central to my analysis of these conditions is the concept of the ‘social imaginary’. Broadly speaking, the social imaginary comprises the common stock of widely-shared images, narratives, myths, and symbols that are particular to a culture ([Gatens 1996](#). Also [Gatens 2004](#)).¹⁵ Among other things, these significations bestow differential value and significance on particular bodies and social practices, and structure a tacit, pre-reflexive sense of what, and whom, is worthy of respect, attention, and emulation. The broad-ranging and particularised attachments, values, and aspirations that social imaginaries condition among members of a culture come to bear on which ideas, methodologies, arguments, and proposals (and so on) are taken to be intelligible, credible, and worth taking seriously, and become sedimented in ways of knowing and being that are particular to different cultural groups (see [Churcher 2022b](#)).

Through appealing directly and forcefully to the imagination, the images, symbols, and other significations that comprise any given imaginary shape how individuals *affectively* register differently embodied knowers and diverse knowledge bases – as, for example, trustworthy, authoritative, or deficient (see [Gatens 2004](#), 283). Furthermore, they do so in ways that often bypass an individual's reflective awareness and scrutiny, such that one may consciously affirm a particular group of actors as epistemic authorities but affectively perceive them to be otherwise. This dissonance can often escape undetected (see [Anderson 2012](#). Also [Alcoff 2010](#); [Langton 2010](#)). The embodied and unconscious aspects of internalised social imaginaries have implications for the volitional practice of apprenticeship, as I will come to explain.

Within any given social context, different social imaginaries compete for legitimacy. The dominant social imaginary of a culture typically confers an excessive degree of authority on the perspectives and practices of those groups who are privileged within this imaginary. The patterns of value and meaning that are structured by dominant imaginaries become sedimented in and through normative habits of behaviour and institutional arrangements that centre, normalise, and privilege certain ways of knowing and being above others ([Celermajer et al. 2019](#). Also [Churcher 2022b](#)).

Pervasive images of Black 'primitiveness' and entrenched myths of White supremacy comprise examples of racist imaginaries that work to strip Indigenous voices of epistemic credibility in relation to White subjects. These imaginaries are reflected in and reinscribed through material arrangements that exclude Indigenous perspectives, and become sedimented in the habituated behaviours of individuals. As Kuokkanen notes, Indigenous knowledges are often discursively positioned as 'residual artifacts of archaic societies' as opposed to being a rich source of insight for contemporary global challenges and inquiries ([2017](#), 323). Such imaginings reveal themselves even at the highest levels of public office. In the Australian context, one of the most explicit articulations of an imaginary that pathologizes Indigenous voices and circumscribes the relevance of Indigenous epistemes can be witnessed in the remarks of former Australian Labor Minister Gary Johns:

What if the [Aboriginal] culture is no more than people behaving badly, a result of blighted environments, poor incentives, awful history, and an historic culture best relegated to museums and occasional ceremonies? (Johns qtd. in [Manne 2014](#), 106).

In Australia as elsewhere, the systematic exclusion and marginalisation of Indigenous knowledge bases extends to the histories, laws, and epistemologies that are represented in the legal and judicial system; what is taught in schools and how it is taught; who is consulted and listened to in processes of policy-making – and so on ([Davis 2006](#); [Bignall, Rigney, and Hattam 2015](#); [Behrendt 2003](#); [Moreton-Robinson 2009](#); [Tsosie 2019](#); [Nakata 2007](#); [Kuokkanen 2003, 2008](#)). Among other things, the cultural and institutional privileging of epistemes that are governed by monochronic norms, and which cast the knowing self as a disembodied self, serves to devalue the knowledge sharing practices that have been developed by First Nations communities, many of which treat knowledge creation and acquisition as necessarily holistic – as engaging mind, body, emotion, and

spirit – and as reliant on the slow work of building trusting and respectful relationships with one’s interlocutors (Sherwood, Watson, and Lighton 2013; Tuhiwai Smith 1999).¹⁶ As the example of Maranguka illustrates (Section IV), for Indigenous people this relationship-building exercise will often comprise acts of remembrance and processes of healing that acknowledge and address the active and enduring presence of the past (see also Tuhiwai Smith 1999, 146).

The bare fact of dominant groups having their knowledge bases validated by prevailing social imaginaries and normative practices – and the benefits they reap from this arrangement – tends to produce a pronounced degree of epistemic solipsism and incuriosity among such groups with respect to the insights, conventions, and innovations of marginalised social groups, and overconfidence in the merits of their own culturally specific conventions (Medina 2012; Dotson 2014; Mills 1997, 2007; Nakata 2007). Socially and institutionally supported failures among powerful actors to register the specificity and limitations of their perspective, and to perceive less privileged actors as sources of privileged insight, can produce a strong (yet often unacknowledged) sense of entitlement to dictate the conditions under which practices of inquiry and knowledge sharing take place.

Spelman herself notes that ‘the end of privilege means the end of institutional support for one’s concerns above those of others, the end of being able to discount, however unintentionally, the experiences and perspectives of others’ (172). Yet she does not elaborate on this point in relation to her account of apprenticeship – as her readers have pointed out (see Nedelsky 1991; Young 1990). Spelman, as we have seen, treats apprenticeship primarily as a practice that relies on individual volition, and does not extend her account of apprenticeship to the level of institutional practice. Privileged social actors are to seek out alternative standpoints to their own, and engage with these perspectives in a reflexive and non-intrusive manner. Missing from Spelman’s account is an acknowledgement that even highly conscientious and committed actors are unlikely to recognize of their own accord when they are being obtuse and arrogant as opposed to appropriately engaged – especially in contexts where inflated investments of esteem in dominant ways of knowing and being are underwritten by imaginaries that operate at a level below reflective awareness, and which are structurally embedded and perpetually reinforced. Affective postures and attachments that have their roots in sedimented imaginaries, and which work against the virtues that distinguish Spelman’s apprentice, can readily co-exist with egalitarian commitments – rendering their influence difficult to detect and control for.

III. Instituting epistemic apprenticeships

I have described an epistemic apprenticeship as an obverse form of apprenticeship in which powerful actors become apprentices to those who lack power and privilege. The fundamental power relation to be inverted through a commitment to obverse apprenticeship is the power and privilege that arbitrarily attaches to embodied difference (e.g. racial difference). Apprenticeship so conceived involves a continual process of embodied learning and growth, wherein the apprentice does not dictate what or who is seen, heard, or prioritized, and does not enjoy the power to set the terms of epistemic engagement. The

apprentice must co-ordinate their actions around the person to whom they are apprenticed, and expose themselves to experiences that are potentially discomforting and destabilising for their sense of self. This challenging activity of learning and growth draws, among other things, upon a capacity for courage, openness, and humility.

That Spelman does not account for the mediating force of the imagination and wider social imaginaries in how one perceives and affectively registers alternative ways of knowing and being troubles her appeal to apprenticeship as an individual practice. A focus on affect, imagination, and institutionally sedimented imaginaries suggests that the virtues and capacities which distinguish Spelman's apprentice are likely to be lacking among those who occupy positions of relative privilege, and that their overinvestment in their particular knowledge bases is likely to escape their attention.

This issue foregrounds the importance of having institutional arrangements in place that instantiate a commitment to epistemic apprenticeship. Broadly speaking, institutional commitments to epistemic apprenticeship would aim to expose and disrupt the epistemic solipsism and arrogance of privileged subjects through challenging imaginaries that sustain unspoken and uncritical attachments to dominant ways of knowing and being. In practice, a commitment to epistemic apprenticeship would involve positioning less powerful identities as powerful placeholders, and positioning powerful identities as apprentices to ways of knowing and being that they may have previously had the privilege to discount or overlook. This institutionally supported mode of epistemic apprenticeship would demand substantive changes to everyday institutional norms, procedures, and policies – including who has the authority to speak, to set agendas and targets, and to dictate how dialogue on certain matters will proceed – to ensure that normative institutional arrangements and practices center marginalized subjects and epistemologies. Importantly, this configuration is not modelled on a conception of apprentices as knowing nothing of worth (Section V): rather, institutionalised apprenticeships ultimately assist to pave the way for an 'ecology of knowledges' (Santos et al. 2008, xx) and for greater epistemic reciprocity through drawing an apprentice's awareness to their inflated investments in dominant epistemes and inviting a moderation of those investments.

Institutional initiatives that are guided by a commitment to epistemic apprenticeship are distinct from institutional arrangements that aim to foster epistemic recognition through engaging differently situated actors in co-operative and collaborative activities on terms of formal equality (Elizabeth Anderson (2012) offers racially integrated classrooms as an example of this last, and as a partial remedy to patterns of epistemic injustice.) The former approach represents a deeper normative intervention than the latter: institutionalised apprenticeships are not simply about giving marginalized epistemic actors a 'seat at the table', and endowing them with equal epistemic authority vis à vis their socially privileged counterparts; rather, they are geared towards positioning marginalized actors as epistemic *authorities*, and endowing them with the power to set the terms of engagement within institutional settings. As Spelman herself acknowledges in an earlier text with María Lugones, 'conversations and criticism take place in particular circumstances. Turf matters. So does the fact of who if anyone already has set up the terms of the conversations' (1983, 579). The importance of pursuing institutionalised apprenticeships can be appreciated in light of the limitations associated with integration on terms of formal

equality: Iris Marion Young (2002) and Tommie Shelby (2014) are among those who rightly note that such arrangements may not be conducive to achieving substantive equality if they fail to challenge the habits, attachments, and experienced realities of privileged social actors. Such challenges are unlikely to arise in contexts where established institutional norms and practices deeply embed the imaginaries and knowledge bases of powerful groups, and work to implicitly reinscribe the overriding authority that is invested in dominant ways of knowing and being. In the absence of deep normative change, commitments to integration within the confines of existing structures risk positioning marginalized and privileged subjects in ways that, to borrow Spelman's language, do not 'pose' any significant 'difficulties' for the latter and their present reality, and which do not encourage the kind of disciplined, self-reflexive learning that she and other scholars of epistemic justice have called for in their respective accounts.

Positioning diverse actors as epistemic equals within existing institutional structures does not necessarily require from privileged actors a forfeiture of their (unspoken, unacknowledged, and institutionally-supported) power to dictate how a given interaction unfolds, how things proceed, and who or what is prioritized. Even institutional arrangements that strictly adhere to norms of fairness – by, for example, granting marginalised and privileged actors equal time to speak; rotating who determines the set-up of meetings, and so forth – are unlikely to forcefully 'break frame' for privileged subjects who may be inclined to implicitly imagine themselves and their particular knowledge-building practices as authoritative, and who are rarely expected to actively engage with and learn from non-normative ways of knowing and being in a sustained manner.

The structurally warranted inversion of power that marks an epistemic apprenticeship cannot be reduced to a mere role-reversal, where powerful actors gain some experience of what it is like to be deprived of epistemic agency and authority. Rather, it is fundamentally about redistributing embedded patterns of value and meaning that sustain a lack of critical self-awareness and epistemic openness among privileged actors. This redistribution is most forcefully realized when practices of epistemic apprenticeship are woven into the fabric of commonplace institutional procedures and arrangements, as opposed to only occurring in and through isolated and supplementary programs of education. When practices of epistemic apprenticeship are integrated in this manner, they offer a deeper challenge to embedded imaginaries that encourage postures of obtuseness and arrogance among dominant actors.

It is through working to embed marginalized imaginaries and epistemologies in normative procedures, practices, and arrangements that an institutional commitment to epistemic apprenticeship instantiates a commitment to releasing marginalized identities as far as possible from the need to engage in educative efforts. A non-extractive form of apprenticeship is realised in part through having institutional arrangements in place that prevent a privileged 'apprentice' to grow and develop by means of their 'mentor,' who stays in place. If epistemic apprenticeships are to disrupt rather than reinscribe systems of unearned privilege and undeserved disadvantage, subjugated actors cannot merely serve as an aid to the moral development of the privileged self (see Spivak 1985, 134–135; 1999, 208, 284). The new institutional forms that are guided by the concept of epistemic

apprenticeship inscribe a commitment to benefiting, in the first instance, the needs of marginalised social actors to whom privileged actors apprentice themselves.

Positioning dominant actors as apprentices to voices, insights, and practices that they might otherwise (and unwittingly) fail to recognize as credible and authoritative confronts such actors with different images of epistemic authority and agency than those they may have internalized. This experience may be marked by a general sense of unease among privileged actors in response to feeling out of their depth, or, as the example given in [Section IV](#) illuminates, it may be marked by knee-jerk reactions of impatience that reveal one's lack of investment in what is being prioritised. By challenging and redistributing existing patterns of epistemic value, meaning, and authority, an institutional commitment to epistemic apprenticeship can assist to foreground the cluster of images and affective investments that usually form the inarticulate background of epistemic judgement, and can draw one's critical attention to such investments. Generating experiences of dissonance, and providing individuals with an alternative imaginary through which to re-imagine and re-position themselves in relation to others, is part of what enables institutionally-supported modes of apprenticeship to lay the ground for the development of critical self-awareness, humility, and other virtues that distinguish the committed apprentice.

IV. Epistemic apprenticeship in action: Maranguka Justice Reinvestment

Institutional commitments to epistemic apprenticeship will take on different forms according to the specific context and social actors under consideration, and may be moderate or thoroughgoing (a point to which I return in [Section V](#)). In this section I frame and discuss Bourke's Maranguka Justice Reinvestment project as an instantiation of a moderate commitment to epistemic apprenticeship.

As noted earlier, the extraordinarily high levels of crime and violence that were recorded in Bourke emerged against a wider historical and social landscape marked by enduring regimes of settler colonial violence, racism and institutional discrimination.¹⁷ At the national level, White authorities (e.g. the law, the police, the prison system and policy-makers) have long been complicit in the subjugation of Indigenous communities, and continue to enforce practices and measures that have largely served to curtail rather than promote social and economic opportunities for Indigenous youth, particularly those living in regional towns. The structural inequalities, exclusions, dislocation, and segregation suffered by present generations of Indigenous Australians as a result of Australia's ongoing settler colonial regime continue to significantly undermine the ability of Indigenous communities to retain a connection to country, culture, and community.¹⁸ As a consequence, Indigenous feelings of mistrust for, and estrangement from, non-Indigenous communities and institutions are commonplace.

The cultural, political, and distributive injustices suffered by Indigenous Australians are intertwined with the devaluation and discounting of Indigenous insights and knowledge bases. This pattern of treatment persists despite growing calls among wider sectors of the Australian community for stronger commitments to Indigenous

self-determination, and for enhanced representation of First Nations perspectives in social, cultural, and political life. Governing bodies in Australia routinely fail to solicit or heed Indigenous recommendations with respect to public policy-making, even those policies directly impacting Indigenous communities. This failure often takes the form of a wilful, rather than accidental or unintentional, oversight – one that is tied to explicit and strategic interests among settler colonial governments to reclaim or maintain control over Indigenous lands and other material resources (Turner qtd. in [Robertson 2007](#)). Yet even among White actors who are explicitly committed to Indigenous rights and sovereignty, the lack of robust, sustained opposition to structures of White governance and policy-making with respect to Indigenous lives, despite clear evidence of their ineffectiveness for improving Indigenous outcomes, can also be taken in part to reflect a marked degree of ignorance, disesteem, and incuriosity among non-Indigenous actors vis à vis Indigenous-led alternatives, and an insufficiently critical view of White methods and approaches.

Maranguka – meaning ‘caring for others’ in Ngemba language – was implemented in Bourke in 2016, with support from government, philanthropic, and corporate bodies. The local initiative was spearheaded by members of the Bourke Tribal Council, who were particularly concerned with the criminal justice issues facing the town’s Indigenous youth.

From its early stages of operation, Maranguka achieved extraordinary success in curbing rates of domestic violence and juvenile crime, and in improving school attendance and student retention rates.¹⁹ The initiative is founded upon a view of Indigenous culture as a ‘preventative mechanism’ with respect to crime in Aboriginal communities ([Solonec 2014](#)). In contrast to established narratives that represent Indigenous epistemologies and imaginaries as peripheral to addressing social justice issues within Indigenous communities, the Bourke pilot recognizes the practical effectiveness of policies and procedures that are responsive to Indigenous outlooks, values, and practices.

Maranguka instantiates an epistemic apprenticeship that supports a non-extractive and non-exploitative relation between its Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants: the initiative involves structured forms of engagement that directly benefit the needs of the Indigenous communities concerned, as expressed by them.²⁰ Unlike integrated settings that are underwritten by relations of interdependence and co-operation on terms of formal equality, Maranguka positions Indigenous actors as powerful institutional placeholders, and prioritises their culturally specific approaches and perspectives over those of their privileged White interlocutors, who are positioned as apprentices. Specifically, the initiative prioritizes Indigenous voices and concerns with respect to matters of public policy in Bourke: for instance, as part of the pilot, Indigenous representatives set policy priorities and negotiate these priorities with different levels of government, rather than the other way around ([Brown et al. 2016](#), 136). This arrangement sharply contrasts the way in which Indigenous Australians are typically treated by federal and state government agencies. As noted earlier, these agencies regularly fail to heed or meaningfully engage with Indigenous viewpoints and uniquely Indigenous approaches to addressing Indigenous disadvantage. The Maranguka pilot also introduced a series of youth engagement sessions in Bourke that led to the development of programs tailored to the specific concerns of Indigenous teens with respect to arrest warrants and driving offences. These programs currently allow those in Bourke with outstanding warrants to meet with a local

support team to discuss their needs and issues as an alternative to presenting themselves to the authorities. In presenting an image of Indigenous subjects as active and esteemed epistemic participants, and endowing them with epistemic authority over those who are habitually granted this authority, such institutional practices work to pierce settler colonial imaginings that position Indigenous subjects as objects rather than subjects of knowledge; as patients rather than agents.

Aside from centring and privileging Indigenous voices and recommendations, the Maranguka initiative enables Indigenous participants to embed their particular ways of knowing and being in institutional practices and procedures. This particular regime of change can be witnessed in a business meeting between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants, where the (normatively White) practice of bureaucratic box-ticking was sidelined in favour of Indigenous investments in empathic dialogue, relationship building and remembrance. The reflections of *JustReinvest NSW* director Sarah Hopkins, an Anglo-Australian woman, help to illuminate the embodied dynamics of apprenticeship in this context:

I mean none of it's easy, getting community engagement is not easy. I had to learn myself that you can't set a schedule, you can't tick off an agenda list, that there's that kind of flexibility and organic nature of the process that you have to respect and, of course, it's culture first you have to respect ... We would have a meeting where we got everyone we needed in the community in Bourke and it was like, "Great. Here we are." I'm going, "Great, we're going to get so much done today," and then welcome to country. Phil, this gorgeous man, just says, "Okay. Does anyone want to talk about someone who's passed away, but still has an impact that they're still thinking about a lot?" Well, two hours later, there goes the meeting because everyone just starts talking about how important this person was to them and whatever, and I just think, "Okay. This is what we're doing today." (Hopkins qtd. in [Brown et al. 2016](#), 133–134).

Here we witness the embodied experience that Hopkins undergoes through being placed in the position of an apprentice. Hopkins' expectations of how the meeting should proceed, and what outcomes should arise from it, are frustrated. Acts of remembrance take precedence over setting goals and allocating action items. A heightened degree of critical self-awareness and self-restraint can be witnessed in Hopkins' recognition of the specificity of her perspective; that her approach to epistemic co-operation represents one possible approach among others ('I had to learn myself that you can't set a schedule, you can't tick off an agenda list ... there's that kind of flexibility and organic nature of the process that you have to respect'). Having the Indigenous participants in the room set the terms of engagement leads Hopkins to become aware of her implicit sense of entitlement to determine how the meeting will unfold and how dialogue with them will proceed. At the same time, her experience of being required to proceed at the pace and according to the priorities set by First Nations participants conveys a mild sense of impatience and frustration instead of curiosity and gratitude ('Well, two hours later, *there goes the meeting...*'). I have suggested that these affective reactions can draw attention to the tension between one's consciously-held beliefs (e.g. that Indigenous knowledges and

conventions merit respect and prioritising) and one's underlying perceptions (e.g. of White, bureaucratic approaches to problem-solving as authoritative). As noted earlier, the dissonance and discomfort that dominant social actors may experience in being required to accommodate and engage with alternative knowledge bases renders accessible those imaginaries that tacitly shape their judgements. This experience opens up opportunities for collective reflection on the taken-for-granted authority invested in dominant ways of knowing and being, and can lay the ground for the cultivation of greater epistemic openness and humility.

In sketching this possibility, I do not mean to overstate the transformative potential of institutionalised apprenticeships. Hopkins' testimony, for instance, reveals a residual paternalism and arrogance alongside a burgeoning degree of critical self-awareness and self-restraint. What I take her testimony to reflect are the kinds of contradictions and ambivalences that typically mark processes of ethical self-growth. The lived tension between Hopkins' perception of Indigenous methodologies as inefficient, and a more critical perception of her own bureaucratic approach offers an impetus for her underlying assumptions and dispositions to be worked through, so that the latter come to be more aligned with her explicit belief (and the belief of *Just Reinvest NSW*) in the importance of prioritising and learning from Indigenous perspectives and methodologies.

Whilst the embodied changes wrought through institutional commitments to epistemic apprenticeship may be hard to predict and difficult to detect or quantify, the individual initiatives that have emerged since the introduction of Maranguka suggest that such commitments have real potential to foster more responsible and responsive epistemic postures and practices among privileged subjects. For example, prior to the pilot relations between Bourke's Indigenous residents and the local police had been deeply fractured, and were marked by a lack of mutual respect, constructive dialogue, and co-operation. Not long after Maranguka was implemented, Bourke's non-Indigenous police chief, Greg Moore, decided to go beyond simply responding to domestic violence incidents and serving court attendance notices. Moore began to regularly visit perpetrators and victims at their homes with offers of help and support, and made routine inquiries into their specific needs (McGregor and Thompson 2016). Moore's departure from a 'business as usual' approach, and his adoption of a respectful, concerned, and curious posture, is significant from the standpoint of epistemic apprenticeship: it reflects, at least in part, a nascent form of epistemic humility and courage, and an attentiveness and openness to Indigenous voices and needs that remains widely absent from current practices of non-Indigenous policing and governance more broadly.

V. Epistemic justice through apprenticeship: A fragile achievement

I have argued that institutionalised apprenticeships comprise enabling conditions for the responsible and virtuous practice of apprenticeship at the individual level. Arrangements that position privileged social actors as epistemic apprentices can lay the ground for more reciprocal forms of epistemic recognition through disrupting dominant imaginaries that are deeply embedded and embodied. Maranguka provides a valuable glimpse into what

happens when well-meaning, privileged White actors are structurally positioned as apprentices to Indigenous actors and epistemes, and the embodied experiences that can arise out of this positioning. I have suggested that such experiences can alert powerful actors to the influence of a particular imaginary on their habits of perception, and can prompt scrutiny of the taken-for-granted authority such actors tend to invest in knowledge bases that are privileged within this imaginary. Nevertheless, given the robust capacity of privilege to reassert itself, it is worth pausing to reflect on the obstacles to instituting epistemic apprenticeships, as well as the circumstances under which institutionalised apprenticeships may fall short of realising their meliorative potential and can even risk obstructing epistemic justice.

First, it is not necessarily the case that the embodied experiences provoked by institutional apprenticeships will pave the way for greater humility, openness, and vigilance among those positioned as apprentices. There is always the possibility that those who occupy positions of relative privilege will retreat into old habits and attachments. (It is not known, for instance, whether Hopkins comes to genuinely value the approach taken by her Indigenous interlocutors, or whether she comes to moderate her investment in the methodologies to which she is accustomed.) This issue highlights the importance of having favourable structural conditions in place for the dissonance generated by institutionalised apprenticeships to be constructively carried through. Such conditions are likely to include the establishment of a robust 'institutional ethos' (Fricker 2013) in relation to new institutional forms and the principles underpinning them, as was the case for *Just Reinvest NSW*. For dominant actors who are particularly recalcitrant and who may be highly averse to being positioned as an apprentice, institutions can play a key role in enforcing certain arrangements and standards of conduct through robust regimes of accountability and systems of incentives and disincentives.

Second, problems arise when institutionalised apprenticeships remain limited to centering and embedding ways of knowing and being that do not challenge particularly pervasive imaginaries, especially those that underwrite deep-seated and enduring patterns of marginalisation and disadvantage (epistemic and otherwise). Maranguka, for instance, disrupts an imaginary that casts Indigenous actors as patients rather than agents and which confers diminished value on Indigenous approaches to problem-solving and knowledge-building. However, it does not instantiate an apprenticeship that de-centres dominant neoliberal logics and legal frameworks. In the main, Maranguka has been lauded for its role in reducing taxpayer funding for detention facilities through reducing Indigenous imprisonment rates. Despite the pilot being instigated by Indigenous leaders seeking better solutions to youth delinquency and crime in their town, reports of its success tend to omit reference to other important indicators of Indigenous well-being, such as the retention of Indigenous languages, and the capacity of Aboriginal people to observe obligations to ancestors and land.²¹ One could argue that Maranguka only gained the level of government, philanthropic, and corporate backing that it did insofar as it does not forcibly challenge neoliberal commitments and does not threaten the material interests of the settler colonial state.²² In addition, the program only recognizes the non-Indigenous legal system, and does not refer to Indigenous Law (except indirectly, through reference to cultural norms such as respect). As noted earlier, the Maranguka initiative is explicitly

founded upon a view of Indigenous culture as a ‘preventative mechanism’ with respect to crime in Aboriginal communities. Taken on its own, this implies a reductive view of what can be gained from engaging with Indigenous epistemes.²³ On this basis, it may be wondered whether Maranguka ultimately becomes another route for settler colonial imaginaries, epistemologies, and dominance to be reinscribed rather than contested and transformed, and renders Indigenous communities ripe for continued exploitation.

In general, the potential for institutional commitments to apprenticeship to obstruct rather than support greater epistemic justice necessitates – among other things – distinguishing between moderate and more thoroughgoing apprenticeships at the institutional level, and committing to institutionalised apprenticeships that are plural in form. As noted earlier in the paper, practices of apprenticeship exist on a spectrum and come in degrees. For the reasons outlined above, Maranguka instantiates a moderate and partial commitment to epistemic apprenticeship, not a radical and thoroughgoing one. Nor does the initiative exhaust the possible institutional forms prescribed by a commitment to apprenticeship. More demanding apprenticeships in the context of Indigenous and settler colonial relations would involve apprenticing non-Indigenous actors to Indigenous law and Indigenous commitments to caring for country, in addition to other aspects of Indigenous epistemes that deeply unsettle settler colonial imaginaries, aspirations, and established institutions.²⁴ Encounters that strike at the heart of an apprentice’s identity, comfort, and privilege, and which rigorously test their capacities humility, forbearance, and courage, more deeply honour the aims of an epistemic apprenticeship.

As an embedded practice, the particular shape and form that an epistemic apprenticeship takes on in any given context will vary according to the actors as well as the institutions under consideration: some institutional spaces, like the academy, will make certain forms of engagement more possible than other spaces.²⁵ The obstacles to implementing apprenticeships will also vary contextually: different institutions and institutional actors have varying degrees of investment in maintaining *status quo* arrangements. Moreover, institutions tend to be complex structures, serving different functions and comprising material infrastructures, policies, procedures, hierarchies of power between institutional role-bearers, guiding values, and various other features that can make the implementation of apprenticeships less, or more, difficult.²⁶ Whilst it may be possible to identify structural conditions that are generally favourable and unfavourable to instituting apprenticeships, there is no way of knowing upfront and with certainty what will constitute an obstacle or support to this last in specific contexts. Nor is there a set blueprint to follow for instantiating an apprenticeship: the shape of its implementation cannot be known in advance; rather, this shape will gradually emerge in and through practice. Further exploration of structural arrangements that fulfil a commitment to epistemic apprenticeship in different institutional contexts, and the obstacles to instituting such arrangements within these contexts, represents a further and much needed path of inquiry. Lastly, to insist on institutionalised apprenticeships as a resource for epistemic justice is not to deny the importance of having separate spaces in which members of marginalised social communities come together in the absence of dominant social actors to create knowledge and meaning, collaborate on issues of shared concern, and foster a collective sense of empowerment (see [Medina 2012](#), 7–8).

I have argued that institutionalised apprenticeships may constitute a limited resource for epistemic justice if they do not offer a substantive challenge to collective imaginings and attachments that underwrite highly entrenched forms of epistemic injustice as well as other kinds of injustice. Yet so too will their value be compromised if such arrangements encourage or produce postures of uncritical deference among those structurally positioned as apprentices. (Indeed, there is a distinction between the epistemic humility and open-mindedness that an apprenticeship ideally seeks to encourage and an excess of these last, which can manifest in habits of self-effacement). Given the layered complexity of social positionings and relations of privilege, the shared imaginaries and epistemologies of any given community – including unjustly marginalised communities – may embed their own set of distortions, inaccuracies, and prejudices. This possibility foregrounds the need for ongoing and wide-ranging apprenticeships to imaginaries and epistemologies that cut across various social axes and vectors of oppression (race as well as sexuality, class, gender, and so on). It also spotlights the importance of ensuring that any given arrangement which instantiates a commitment to epistemic apprenticeship remains open to contestation and revision. The cluster of institutional configurations and positionings that can support epistemic justice across multiple lines of group difference will be a matter of careful and ongoing experimentation, as well as constant vigilance.

Institutionalised apprenticeships can become a liability for epistemic justice if they are modelled on a ‘master-apprentice’ relation that positions the former as all-knowing and the latter as knowing nothing. Conversely, there is an inherent risk that privileged subjects, *qua* apprentices, will eventually come to see themselves as ‘masters’ of what they learn from engaging with subjugated knowledge bases, and capable of standing in (and speaking for) those to whom they once apprenticed themselves. This posture reflects and reinscribes the epistemic arrogance that an epistemic apprenticeship ideally aims to disrupt, and manifests the influence of a conservative imaginary that positions knowers as generic and interchangeable and which casts knowledge as disembodied and universally accessible. To mitigate or prevent a sense of potential ‘mastery’ among apprentices, it is critical (among other things) to encourage meaningful engagement with the critical insight from feminist standpoint theorists that knowledge is deeply embodied and not always universally accessible (Section I): a person of racial privilege, for instance, will never experience and know the world in the same manner as one who lacks that privilege, even when they act as a disciplined apprentice. A commitment to this claim entails a commitment to ensuring that marginalised actors and their embodied perspectives are fairly represented at all levels of social and institutional life (Alcoff 2010; Gatens 1996).

Positioning privileged actors as apprentices involves continually placing such actors on rough ground; exposing them to experiences and encounters that draw upon their capacities for courage and forbearance and which encourage postures of vigilance and humility over comfort, arrogance, and complacency. Through forcefully intervening in deeply embedded and embodied imaginaries that undermine relations of reciprocal recognition between differently situated knowers, institutional commitments to epistemic apprenticeship are able to pave the way for epistemic relations, interactions, and practices that more fully honour values of epistemic respect, equality, and reciprocity.

VI. Conclusion

Kuokkanen notes that “the ‘problem of knowing’ is so complex and multilayered that we cannot limit ourselves and our practices to single solutions” (2003, 279). Nor can we assume that the problem of epistemic injustice and the question of what is required to address it will ever be entirely ‘solved’: epistemic justice constitutes a horizon of achievement and working towards it will be a matter of ongoing struggle, negotiation, and vigilance. Positioning privileged actors as apprentices to unjustly marginalised knowers and epistemes represents one critical pathway among others for intervening in patterns of epistemic injustice.

Especially in contexts marked by racist, colonialist, and other damaging imaginaries that are deeply embodied and widely embedded, I have argued that instituting an inversion of epistemic power between socially privileged and underprivileged actors is key to exposing implicit perceptions of marginalised epistemes as having subordinate value to dominant knowledge bases, and is important for encouraging the cultivation of capacities and virtues that mark out Spelman’s committed apprentice. At the same time, positioning subjugated knowers as epistemic authorities and endowing them with the power to set the terms of engagement within institutional settings comes with potential risks and limitations. To instantiate an inversion of epistemic power that is non-extractive and non-exploitative requires, among other things, that institutionalised apprenticeships primarily serve the needs and interests of underprivileged communities as expressed by them. Moreover, if epistemic apprenticeships at the level of individual and institutional praxis are to serve rather than obstruct the goals of epistemic justice, they need to involve or enable an ongoing process of learning and transformation among actors who are differently situated across multiple axes of power and privilege. When subject to careful and considerate design, and embedded within a cluster of favourable structural conditions, the institutional forms that are prescribed by a commitment to epistemic apprenticeship can prepare the ground for greater epistemic justice across lines of group difference.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This work was supported by Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung.

ORCID iD

Millicent Churcher  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6046-5895>

Notes

The research for this paper was made possible by generous funding from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. My sincerest gratitude extends to Simone Bignall, Joanne Faulkner, Moira Gatens, Louise Richardson-Self, Sandra Calkins, Cornelia Ertl, and Matthias Kettner for their insightful and constructive feedback on the ideas presented here. My account of institutional commitments to epistemic apprenticeship also benefited significantly from discussions at various

events, including Jan Slaby's 2020 philosophy colloquia series at Freie Universität Berlin; the 2016 'Institutional Transformations' workshop hosted by the University of Sydney and funded by the Australian Academy of the Humanities; and the Institute for Social and Institutional Change research colloquia series at Witten/Herdecke University. My thanks also extends to the anonymous reviewer of this piece for their valuable input.

1. According to the New South Wales Bureau of Crime and Statistics Research, Bourke topped the state of New South Wales in 6 of 8 major crime categories, and was reportedly more dangerous per capita than any other country on earth when its per capita crime rate was compared with United Nations data.
2. The Bourke Tribal Council is a community decision-making body that represents Bourke's twenty-two Indigenous language groups.
3. *Just Reinvest NSW* is an incorporated association that was launched by a small group of people working with incarcerated Indigenous youth, with the aim of transforming government policy in relation to young Indigenous offenders. Broadly speaking, 'Justice Reinvestment' approaches consist in a suite of criminal justice reforms that aim to lessen the money spent on prisons and to invest more resources into community-driven crime prevention programs.
4. Government policy-making in relation to Indigenous communities is required to follow formal consultation procedures, however governing bodies can (and often do) ignore the recommendations that are made. Furthermore, consultation can take place with random representatives rather than with rightful First Nation authorities.
5. Epistemic injustice has agential and structural aspects, and can take on different forms (see e.g. Fricker 2007; Dotson 2012, 2014; Pohlhaus 2012; Medina 2012; Santos et al. 2008). 'Testimonial injustice', for example, occurs when a speaker's testimony is not given due credibility owing to social prejudice on the part of the hearer (Fricker 2007, 6) 'Cognitive injustice' is marked by a wilful failure to recognise and meaningfully engage with the knowledge bases of marginalised social communities, especially systems of knowledge and meaning that forcefully challenge the ways of life particular to dominant social groups (Santos et al. 2008, ix). Importantly, as Medina argues, the epistemic 'close-mindedness', 'laziness', and 'arrogance' characteristic of dominant social actors who are wilfully ignorant of unjustly marginalised epistemes is often 'an unconscious defense mechanism', and not typically the result of a conscious decision (Medina 2012, 35–36). Privileged social subjects tend to be blind to their own blindness, and unaware of their epistemic vices. My account of epistemic injustice in the context of settler colonial oppression assumes these insights as a starting point to argue for the importance of epistemic apprenticeship as an institutional commitment.
6. I use the term 'knowledge bases' interchangeably with 'epistemologies' and 'epistemes' in this paper to denote knowledge claims as well as methodologies for knowledge creation and sharing.
7. It may strike readers as problematic to draw predominantly from Spelman and her focus on intersectional feminism when the dynamics of settler colonialism and a lack of apprenticeship to Indigenous knowledge bases are a key focal point of this paper. Moreover, First Nations scholars have already articulated normative frameworks to guide non-Indigenous engagements with Indigenous epistemes (e.g. Kuokkanen 2003, 2008; Tuhiwai Smith 1999). This paper takes stock of some of this work, and outlines key points of resonance between these

frameworks and Spelman's own. My choice to draw primarily from Spelman's reflections is driven in part by a desire to centre myself in my own cultural knowledge traditions – and to challenge and critique the insights embedded therein – rather than cast aside these traditions and adopt Indigenous standpoints (a move that is problematic from a colonial-appropriative point of view).

8. With the exception of [Medina \(2012, 2019\)](#), existing accounts of epistemic injustice in relation to institutional praxis have not paid close attention to the intertwinement of imagination and affect with institutional arrangements and epistemic agency. Moreover, this literature has been mainly concerned with how institutions assist to perpetuate epistemic injustice, and comparatively less concerned with how institutions can be refigured to enable greater epistemic justice. This paper examines how the reality of embodied and deeply embedded imaginaries bears on the kinds of institutional arrangements that can support greater epistemic justice, and their guiding principles.
9. The concept of the social imaginary finds one of its earliest expressions in the work of Cornelius Castoriadis (1975). However, for the purposes of this paper I draw primarily on Moira Gatens' account of the social imaginary in *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power, and Corporeality* (1996). Gatens' account is particularly valuable for the close attention it pays to the connection between social imaginaries, affect, power, and embodied difference (e.g. racial and sexual difference).
10. It is not my intention to idealise Maranguka, nor to position Justice Reinvestment initiatives as a panacea for the cluster of injustices suffered by First Nations Australians. As later parts of this paper explain, I do not take Maranguka to instantiate an apprenticeship that is capable of radically disrupting patterns of White ignorance, violence, and domination vis à vis Indigenous Australian communities.
11. This way of framing apprenticeship is consistent with its etymological roots: 'apprenticeship' derives from the Latin *apprehendere*, which means 'to take hold of, or grasp, mentally or physically,' and from the Modern French *apprenti* – a term used to describe a novice who learns from a mentor.
12. For a detailed account of the relationship between racial oppression, white supremacy, and ignorance, see Charles [Mills \(1997, 2007\)](#).
13. Feminist standpoint theory is far more layered and nuanced than what I am able to present of it. For an extensive and critical overview of the standpoint theory literature, see [Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis \(2002\)](#). Also [Toole \(2019\)](#). My account of apprenticeship accepts the claim that members of underprivileged groups will typically have greater epistemic insight into systems of social domination and subordination, and are likely to evince greater familiarity with the knowledge bases of privileged groups and respectful recognition of the latter's knowledge building practices. It does so without accepting the further (and stronger) claim that privileged social actors should uncritically defer to the perspectives of marginalised social actors in all instances. I return to this point later in the paper ([Section V](#)).
14. Privileged actors' typical lack of familiarity and substantive engagement with marginalised epistemologies is not only due to their conditioned over-investment in dominant ways of knowing and being, but also to the various benefits they maintain as a result of (wittingly or unwittingly) ignoring or discounting the knowledge bases of those to whom they stand in a relation of domination ([Section II](#)). Underprivileged and oppressed actors, on the other hand, often must learn and accommodate the perspectives and methodologies of dominant groups in

order to have a greater chance of being heard and taken seriously, among other things (Mills 1997; 2007; Medina 2012).

15. Gatens' account of the social imaginary treats the imaginary primarily as a social phenomenon rather than an individual psychic capacity. On Gatens' view, the social imaginary comprises the permanent backdrop of socially shared significations against which individuals form an understanding of themselves in relation to their wider social context. See James (2002) for further discussion of the ways in which Gatens' concept of the imaginary distinguishes itself from competing accounts.
16. Linda Tuhiwai Smith – an Indigenous studies scholar and woman of Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou iwi descent – explains that Indigenous-led research projects typically place greater emphasis on the process over the outcome:

Processes are expected to be respectful, to enable people, to heal and to educate ... The quality of the interaction is more important than ticking boxes or answering closed questions (1999, 136).

Maranguka offers an insight into what Indigenous knowledge sharing practices look like on the ground, and the reactions they can engender among non-Indigenous subjects.

17. See Alistair Ferguson's reflections on the historical and structural underpinnings of Bourke's high rates of crime and violence, and on the transformative effects of Maranguka, in <https://insidestory.org.au/we-are-on-the-road-to-recovery/>. Ferguson is the founder and executive director of the Maranguka Community Hub. For Indigenous perspectives on Australian Justice Reinvestment initiatives, see <https://www.changetherecord.org.au/justicereinvestmentseminar>.
18. As a consequence of the historical removal and forced relocation of Australia's original inhabitants by settler colonial regimes, there are over 20 different Tribal Groups residing in Bourke, which include Ngemba, Murrawarri, Budgiti and Barkinji Peoples.
19. See <http://www.justreinvest.org.au/impact-of-maranguka-justice-reinvestment/> for a detailed summary of these statistics.
20. It may be argued, however, that the initiative risks contributing to exploitative and extractive relations in a broader sense. I return to address this objection in [Section V](#).
21. It is important to note, however, that the raw data documenting Maranguka's impact upon social, cultural, and economic outcomes in Bourke is given to Bourke's local Indigenous communities, whose ongoing feedback continues to shape the development of appropriate goals and targets (see <http://www.justreinvest.org.au/justice-reinvestment-in-bourke/>).
22. For further discussion of settler colonial state power and (mis)recognition, see Coulthard (2014). See also Santos et al. (2008), who argue that capitalist and imperial orders are at the core of the epistemic injustice (as well as other types of injustice) suffered by Indigenous communities.
23. On this point, see Martin Nakata (2007, 185), who notes an increasing tendency to treat Indigenous knowledge

as a commodity, something of value, something that can be value-added, something that can be exchanged, traded, appropriated, preserved, something that can be excavated and mined.

In line with Nakata, this paper acknowledges an ongoing and problematic trend of treating Indigenous knowledge bases as a mere means to satisfy non-Indigenous interests, narrowly conceived. Harnessing Indigenous knowledges to address global ecological collapse and its economic ramifications for colonial powers presents one example of this last. Widely absent is an appreciation of the intrinsic worth of Indigenous epistemes, and the capacity for Indigenous ways of knowing and being to enrich the lives of non-Indigenous actors beyond the satisfaction of the latter's material self-interest.

24. In the context of settler colonial oppression, this paper recognises that wide-ranging and thoroughgoing apprenticeships at the individual and institutional level are pivotal for encouraging greater critical attention to, and undermining community support for settler state control over Indigenous communities (see Churcher 2019). Locating opportunities and avenues for pressuring the state to relinquish this authority, including the privilege to listen without hearing, represents the next level of the problem to be addressed.
25. In Churcher 2022a, I elaborate on what an apprenticeship to unjustly marginalised epistemes may look like in the space of the university, and the kinds of structural reforms it calls upon. See Kuokkanen (2007, 2008) for valuable proposals to decolonize the academy, many of which align with a commitment to epistemic apprenticeship.
26. To offer one example: in university contexts, a guiding value of academic freedom may constitute a source of resistance to epistemic apprenticeships. I am grateful to Louise Richardson-Self for raising this point with me.

References

- Alcoff, L. 2010. "Epistemic Identities." *Episteme* 7, no. 2: 128-137.
- Anderson, E. 2012. "Epistemic Justice as A Virtue of Social Institutions." *Social Epistemology* 26, no. 2: 163-173.
- Bartky, S. 1997. "Sympathy and Solidarity: On a Tightrope with Scheler." in *Feminists Rethink the Self*, edited by D. T. Meyers, 177-196. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Berenstein, N. 2016. "Epistemic Exploitation." *Ergo, an Open Access Journal of Philosophy* 3, no. 22: 569-590.
- Behrendt, L. 2003. *Achieving Social Justice: Indigenous Rights and Australia's Future*. Annandale, NSW: Federation Press.
- Bignall, S, Rigney, D., and Hattam, R. 2015. "Colonial Letters Patent and Excolonialism: Forgetting, Counter-Memory and Mnemonic Potentiality." *Borderlands E-Journal* 14, no. 2: 1-23.
- Brown, D., Cunneen, C., Schwartz, M., Stubbs, J., and Young, C. 2016. *Justice Reinvestment: Winding Back Imprisonment*. United Kingdom, UK: Palgrave.
- Celermajer, D., Churcher, M., Gatens, M., and Hush, A. 2019. "Institutional Transformations: Imagination, Affect, and Embodiment." *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 24, no. 4: 3-21.
- Churcher, M. 2019. *Reimagining Sympathy, Recognizing Difference: Insights from Adam Smith*. Rowman and Littlefield International.
- Churcher, M. 2022a. "Power, Privilege, and Obverse Apprenticeship." *Journal of Social Philosophy* [forthcoming special issue publication on 'Gendered Excellence'] <https://doi.org/10.1111/josp.12457>

- Churher, M. 2022b. "Embodied Institutions and Epistemic Exclusions: Affect in the Academy." *Topoi* 41: 895-904. [Special issue publication on 'The Role of Emotions in Epistemic Practices and Communities'].
- Coulthard, G. S. 2014. *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Davis, M. 2006. *A Culture of Disrespect: Indigenous Peoples and Australian Public Institutions*, Vol. 8, 137-154. University of Technology Sydney Law Review.
- Dotson, K. 2012. "A Cautionary Tale: On Limiting Epistemic Oppression." *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 33, no. 1: 24-47.
- Dotson, K. 2014. "Conceptualizing Epistemic Oppression." *Social Epistemology* 28, no. 2: 115-138.
- Freire, P. 1998. *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Fricke, M. 2013. "Epistemic Justice as A Condition of Political Freedom?" *Synthese* 190, no. 7: 1317-1332.
- Fricke, M. 2007. *Epistemic injustice: Power and the ethics of knowing*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Haraway, D. 1988. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3: 575-599.
- Harding, S. 1993. "Rethinking Standpoint Epistemology: What is Strong Objectivity?" in *Feminist Epistemologies*, 49-82. New York and London: Routledge.
- Hill Collins, P. 1990. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Boston: Unwin Hyman.
- Hill Collins, P. 1998. *Fighting Words: Black women and the Search for Justice*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1998.
- Gatens, M. 1996. *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality*. London: Routledge.
- Gatens, M. 2004. "Can Human Rights Accommodate Women's Rights? Towards an Embodied Account of Social Norms, Social Meaning, and Cultural Change." *Contemporary Political Theory* 3, no. 3: 275-299.
- James, S. 2002. "Freedom and the Imaginary." in *Visible Women: Essays on Feminist Legal Theory and Political Philosophy*, edited by S. James, and S. Palmer, 175-195. Oregon, OR: Hart Publishing.
- Kuokkanen, R. 2017. "Indigenous Epistemes." in *A Companion to Critical and Cultural Theory*, edited by Imre Szeman, Sarah Blacker, and Justin Sully, 313-326. John Wiley and Sons.
- Kuokkanen, R. 2008. "What is Hospitality in the Academy? Epistemic Ignorance and the (Im) Possible Gift." *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 30, no. 1: 60-82.
- Kuokkanen, R. 2007. *Reshaping the University: Responsibility, Indigenous Epistemes and the Logic of the Gift*. Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Kuokkanen, R. 2003. "Towards a New Relation of Hospitality in the Academy." *The American Indian Quarterly* 27, no. 1-2: 267-295.
- Lugones, M. 2003. *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

- Lugones, M., and Spelman, E. 1983. "Have We Got A Theory for You! Feminist Theory, Cultural Imperialism and the Demand for 'the Woman's Voice.'" *Women's Studies International Forum* 6, no. 6: 573-581.
- Langton, R. 2010. "Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing." *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 25, no. 2: 459-464.
- Manne, R. 2014. "A Rightful Place: Correspondence." *Quarterly Essay* 56: 104-109.
- McGregor, G., and Thompson, L. 2016. "Backing Bourke." *Four Corners*. ABC News.
- Medina, J. 2012. *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Medina, J. 2019. "Racial Violence, Emotional Friction, and Epistemic Activism." *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 24, no. 4: 22-37.
- Mills, C. W. 1997. *The Racial Contract*. Cornell University Press.
- Mills, C. W. 2007. "White Ignorance." in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, edited by Shannon Sullivan, and Nancy Tuana, 11-38. Albany, NY: State University of New York.
- Moreton-Robinson, A. 2009. "Imagining the good Indigenous Citizen: Race war and the Pathology of Patriarchal White Sovereignty." *Cultural Studies Review* 15, no. 2: 61-79.
- Nakata, M. 2007. *Disciplining the Savages, Savaging the Disciplines*. Canberra, ACT: Aboriginal Studies Press.
- Nedelsky, J. 1991. "The Challenges of Multiplicity [review of *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*, by Elizabeth V. Spelman]." *Michigan Law Review* 89, no. 6: 1591-1609.
- Olding, R., and Ralston, N. 2013. "Bourke Tops List: More Dangerous Than any Country in the World." *Sydney Morning Herald*. February 2, 2013. Retrieved from <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/bourke-tops-list-more-dangerous-than-any-country-in-the-world-20130201-2dq3y.html>
- Ortega, M. 2006. "Being Lovingly, Knowingly Ignorant: White Feminism and Women of Color." *Hypatia* 21, no. 3: 56-74.
- Pillow, K. 2009. "Imagination," in Richard Eldridge (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy and Literature*. Online edition.
- Pohlhaus, G. 2012. "Relational Knowing and Epistemic Injustice: Toward a Theory of Willful Hermeneutical Ignorance." *Hypatia* 27, no. 4: 715-735.
- Razack, S. H. 1998. *Looking White People in the Eye: Gender, Race, and Culture in Courtrooms and Classrooms*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Robertson, D. 2007. "Govt Orchestrating a Land Grab: Aboriginal Leaders." in Lateline. Sydney, Australia: ABC TV.
- Santos, B. Sousa, Nunes, J. A., and Meneses, M. P. 2008. "Opening Up the Canon of Knowledge and Recognition of Difference." in *Another Knowledge is Possible: Beyond Northern Epistemologies*, edited by B. de Sousa Santos, London, NY: Verso.
- Shelby, T. 2014. "Integration, Inequality, and Imperatives of Justice: A Review Essay." *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 42, no. 3: 253-285.
- Sherwood, J., Watson, N., and Lighton, S. 2013. "Peer support: Mentoring responsive and trusting relationships." in *Seeding Success in Indigenous Australian Higher Education*, edited by R.G. Craven, and J. Mooney, 187-208. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

- Smith, Linda T. 1999. *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London, NY: Zed Books.
- Solonec, T. 2014. "Justice Reinvestment: What Difference Could it Make in WA?" *Sir Ronald Wilson Lecture*. Retrieved from. <https://www.lawsocietywa.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/2014-SRWL-Paper-Final.pdf>
- Spelman, E. 1988. *Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought*. London, UK: The Women's Press.
- Spivak, G. C. 1993. *Outside in the Teaching Machine*. New York: Routledge.
- Spivak, G. C. 1985. "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism." *Critical Inquiry* 12: 243-261.
- Samaržija, H., and Cerovac, I. 2021. "The Institutional Preconditions of Epistemic Justice." *Social Epistemology* 35, no. 6: 621-635.
- Stoetzler, M., and Davis, N.Y. 2002. "Standpoint Theory, Situated Knowledge and the Situated Imagination." *Feminist Theory* 3, no. 3: 315-333.
- Toole, B. 2019. "From Standpoint Epistemology to Epistemic Oppression." *Hypatia* 34, no. 4: 598-618.
- Tsosie, R. 2017. "Indigenous Peoples, Anthropology, and the Legacy of Epistemic Injustice." in *The Routledge Handbook of Epistemic Injustice*, edited by I. Kidd, J. Medina, and G. Pohlhaus. Routledge.
- Wylie, A. 2003. "Why Standpoint Matters." in *Science and Other Cultures: Issues in Philosophies of Science and Technology*, edited by R. Figueroa, and S.G. Harding, 26-48. Routledge.
- Young, I. M. 1990. "Review of Inessential Woman: Problems of Exclusion in Feminist Thought, by Elizabeth V. Spelman." *Ethics* 100, no. 4: 898-900.
- Young, I. M. 2002. *Inclusion and Democracy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.