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# Don't Put Words in My Mouth: Self-appointed Speaking-for Is Testimonial Injustice Without Prejudice

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, I will characterize a phenomenon I call 'self-appointed speaking-for', and show how it constitutes a counter-example to Miranda Fricker's definition of testimonial injustice (TI), expanding our understanding of the category. Self-appointed speaking-for occurs when one speaks on behalf of or in place of another individual or group without their authorization. It is the sort of phenomenon that occasions complaints like, 'You put words in my mouth'; that happens when someone else answers a question directed at you; or when someone purports to represent the perspective of a group they are not affiliated with or entitled to represent. I argue that this is a central case of Fricker's testimonial injustice, on the grounds that it inflicts the same harms as other kinds of TI — particularly demeaning someone in their capacity as a giver of knowledge — in a way that is both epistemically and ethically culpable. TI is wrong not only for the harms it generates but also because its cause — prejudice — is ethically wrong and bad epistemic practice. As I show, self-appointed speaking-for is wrong for the same reasons as prejudice is, no matter what motivates it.

## KEYWORDS

Epistemic injustice;  
testimonial injustice;  
speaking for; silencing;  
prejudice

## I. Introduction: Self-appointed Speaking-for

Self-appointed speaking-for occurs when one speaks on behalf of or in place of another individual or group without their authorization. It is the sort of phenomenon that occasions complaints like, 'You put words in my mouth'; that happens when someone else answers a question directed at you; or when someone purports to represent the perspective of a group they are not affiliated with. I argue that this is a central case of Miranda Fricker's concept of testimonial injustice (TI), because it inflicts the same central harm as other kinds of TI – that of 'being wronged *qua* giver of knowledge' (Fricker 2007, 45) – for epistemically and ethically blameworthy reasons. Self-appointed speaking-for also expands the category of testimonial injustice by providing a counterexample to the claim that TI must be caused by prejudice. Though self-appointed speaking-for may often be caused by prejudice, this is not necessary for it to count as TI. The following example illustrates a paradigmatic (if rather banal) case of self-appointed speaking-for.

You are on a date at a restaurant you have never been to before and are still considering the menu when the server comes to take your order. Your date gives his order and the server turns to you, "And for the lady?"

Before you can say anything, your date answers for you: "She'll have . . ."

Perhaps this is the result of the speaker's prejudicial attitudes about women, or perhaps he authorizes himself to order for his date because he adheres to traditional gender roles because of such prejudices. If so, we can see here a standard case of TI. I argue, though, that this is a case of

testimonial injustice even if prejudice played no role whatsoever in the act. He may have spoken for her because of other epistemic vices besides prejudice: perhaps he is simply arrogant and habitually speaks for others assuming he knows what they want; or perhaps he is careless, habitually blurting out his answer to any question, whether directed to him or not. But this act of self-appointed speaking-for seems to be TI even if not caused by these kinds of epistemic vices. It may be that he is a regular at the restaurant and has ordered the only good thing on the menu, or the only item compatible with his date's dietary restrictions. Whatever mental states contributed to the decision to speak for his date, though, the act itself is disrespectful and exclusionary. By authorizing himself to speak for her, the man excludes the woman from participating in the exchange, communicating to her and the server that she is unfit to speak in this context.

A weightier example sheds more light on how self-appointed speaking-for is testimonial injustice. Apache philosopher Viola Faye Cordova vividly illustrates how systematic self-appointed speaking-for silences Native Americans. 'There is an industry of Indian Experts – academics who would interpret Indians to the rest of the world. They make a name for themselves. We gain little. Do you want to know what a Navajo thinks? Or a Lakota? We cannot speak for ourselves. We make the mistake of taking ourselves seriously. We need to be *interpreted*' (Cordova 2007, 41, emphasis original). This kind of silencing is widespread, systemic, the result of the domination relationships that obtain between mostly white academics and colonized indigenous peoples in the U.S. If it is not directly attributed to the prejudice of academics, it is certainly abetted by prejudicial patterns of credibility that offer excess to white researchers and deficits to Native people.

Cordova recounts the story of a white folklorist, intent on recording Native stories (Cordova does not say which tribe – if any particular one – the folklorist is investigating), disseminating them for white audiences, and – of course – furthering her own career.

The budding folklorist follows me for days. She wants me to understand what she is doing. "If you think it is so important that these old stories survive, then why don't you teach 'natives' how to do such transcriptions?" She apparently hadn't thought of it.

Each time she finds me she has a new approach. "Don't you think it is important for those voices to be heard?"

I respond: "If you write them down it isn't their voice that is speaking. It is yours." Shock. "If you speak for me, you rob me of my voice" (Cordova 2007, 42).

Cordova charges her with epistemic theft: of taking Native peoples' place to speak and filling it with her own voice. She does not accuse the folklorist of getting the stories wrong, or spreading lies about Native Americans, or even of perpetuating harmful stereotypes. The credibility of Native people is not directly impugned by the folklorist's work. By appointing herself speaker on behalf of Native people she excludes them from a chance to speak for themselves, to tell their own stories in their own way, and be credited for doing so – 'If we're lucky, we get to be "informants" and we're assigned a number, sometimes even initials' (Cordova 2007, 42) – or to keep silent altogether. This kind of scholarship is *about* a marginalized people as an *object* of study, or as an *other* that requires expert interpretation. What Cordova describes as theft is right on – self-appointed speaking-for is a communicative and epistemic theft. Just as one's motivations are not usually relevant to whether the taking of some property constitutes theft, it does not matter why the folklorist appoints herself recorder of Native stories. Perhaps anti-Native prejudice causes her to believe Native people are not fit to do this themselves. Or it could be, as Cordova charges, that the folklorist's own self-confidence and ambition drive her project. More charitably, perhaps she is motivated by the belief that the telling of Native stories is so important or so urgent that the messenger is irrelevant. Even on this most charitable interpretation, however, Cordova's charge still sticks: 'If you speak for me, you rob me of my voice.'

It is not enough for Cordova that Native folklore should be made accessible to a wider audience, nor is it enough that the stories in question be told well. Who gets to do the telling matters too. Full participation in an epistemic community requires more than that one's ideas be shared – one must

actually do the sharing. Fricker argues that central to human flourishing is the capacity to make one's own 'epistemic contributions' – the 'loosely unified social epistemic capability on the part of the individual to *contribute to the pool of shared epistemic materials*' (Fricker 2015, 76, emphasis original). When one is spoken for, whether in matters of small consequence (like ordering dinner) or large (sharing the stories of one's people), one is prevented from making their own epistemic contributions in their own way. If Fricker is right, as I think she is, about the centrality of epistemic contributions to human well-being, self-appointed speaking-for is a serious and central form of testimonial injustice.

Self-appointed speaking-for does not merely exemplify TI, however. It expands the horizons of the category because it does not require prejudice (or any other epistemically or ethically culpable proximate cause) to be testimonial injustice: rather, the act itself is always epistemic and ethical bad practice. In what follows, I first demonstrate that self-appointed speaking-for shares the conceptual structure (Section II) and harms (Section III) of testimonial injustice. In Section IV, I argue that self-appointed speaking-for is TI even when prejudice is absent. In Section V, I will address objections to more clearly delineate the scope of self-appointed speaking-for, as well as its gravity.

## II. The Same Wrong for the Same Reasons: Self-appointed Speaking-for Shares TI's Conceptual Structure

Testimonial injustice and self-appointed speaking-for share a conceptual structure, by which I mean that they produce the same harms (Section III) through actions that are blameworthy in the same way. Though the actions themselves are quite different (audiences making a subconscious estimate of credibility on the one hand, and speakers talking out of turn on the other), they begin and end in the same places. The parallels between self-appointed speaking-for and TI can be seen more clearly by examining their relationship to epistemic injustice (EI) generally. For Fricker, EI is 'a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower' (Fricker 2007, 1). An epistemic injustice is specifically testimonial when 'a hearer wrongs a speaker in his capacity as a *giver* of knowledge, as an informant' (Fricker 2007, 5, emphasis added). Fricker convincingly argues that one's capacity as a knower or as a member of a community of epistemic reciprocity is central to human flourishing. This claim 'depends on the idea that functioning not only as a receiver but also as a giver of epistemic materials is an aspect of human subjectivity that craves social expression through the capability to contribute beliefs and interpretations to the local epistemic economy' (Fricker 2015, 87). Fricker frames this in terms of Jo Wolff and Avner De Shalit's argument that 'from the point of view of human well-being, while it is good to receive, it is also good to *give*' (Fricker 2015, 75, emphasis original). Accordingly, the human capability to offer epistemic inputs can be seen as 'the quite general epistemic counterpart of the capability to offer someone a cup of tea' (Fricker 2015, 76). Just as 'the inability to offer conventional hospitality always tempts shame [and] the rejection of hospitality always risks insult' (Fricker 2015, 76), the inability to share one's own ideas, to speak for oneself and be listened to is a serious detriment to well-being. In other words, testimonial injustice is a slight against one of the very core aspects of one's humanity.

For Fricker, testimonial injustice occurs 'just if prejudice on the hearer's part causes him to give the speaker less credibility than he would otherwise have given' (Fricker 2007, 4). For testimonial *justice*, Fricker says 'the hearer's obligation is obvious: she must match the level of credibility she attributes to her hearer to the evidence that he is offering the truth' (Fricker 2007, 19). Variances between the right level of credibility given by the hearer and the sort of evidence offered the speaker are often at odds; credibility deficit alone is insufficient for TI. Fricker notes that credibility deficits may come about as the result of 'innocent errors' and 'stupid mistakes' (Fricker 2007, 21–22). The former are generally the result of bad luck or fallible human information-processing abilities, while the latter involves an 'ethically innocent but epistemically culpable error' (Fricker 2007, 22). Both epistemic and ethical culpability are required for TI: 'the poison of testimonial injustice must derive

from some ethical poison in the judgement of the hearer . . . . *prejudice*' (Fricker 2007, 22, emphasis original). Testimonial injustice may occur in a one-off fashion (perhaps because the hearer holds an idiosyncratic prejudice) or systematically due to tracker prejudices that color many aspects of a person's life. These are typically (or perhaps exclusively) identity prejudices (Fricker 2007, 27–28). Specifically, she focuses on 'negative identity-prejudicial stereotypes' as the causes for central cases of TI due to their 'resistance to counter-evidence owing to an ethically bad affective investment' (Fricker 2007, 35). Testimonial injustice, then, constitutes an epistemic and ethical harm done for reasons both epistemically and ethically culpable.

Though Fricker's initial pictures of TI consist of actual exchanges of testimony in which hearers wrong (actual) speakers by according them less credibility than they deserve, she also notes that prejudice can result in 'pre-emptive testimonial injustice,' preventing the testimonial exchange altogether, silencing (potential) speakers by undermining their credibility in advance (Fricker 2007, 130). Kristie Dotson articulates a type of silencing she calls testimonial smothering, in which 'the speaker perceives one's immediate audience as unwilling or unable to gain the appropriate uptake of proffered testimony' and does not speak at all (Dotson 2011, 244). Victims bite their tongues when they realize that it may be 'unsafe and risky' to speak in front of an audience that cannot or will not understand (Dotson 2011, 244–45). For example, she follows Kimberlé Crenshaw in discussing silence about domestic violence within African American communities: 'given the possibility that [such] testimony . . . can be understood to corroborate stereotypes concerning the imagined "violent" black male' it is often 'smothered,' because speaking about it is expected to do more harm than good (Dotson 2011, 244–45). We can see testimonial smothering when one is silent because they can expect to be misunderstood – and that such misunderstandings may be dangerous. This kind of silencing is the result of 'pernicious ignorance,' which Dotson defines as a harmful 'reliable ignorance or counterfactual incompetence' on the part of a (potential) audience (Dotson 2011, 242). Like Fricker's account of negative identity prejudice, pernicious ignorance is both an ethical and epistemic failing; like TI, testimonial smothering harms its victims as givers of knowledge. Instead of speaking and waiting for their testimony to receive a credibility deficit, victims of testimonial smothering decline to risk speaking at all. Like TI, this kind of silencing results in both epistemic and practical harms.

Fricker and Dotson both draw attention to the way these epistemic injustices disrupt relationships of epistemic reciprocity between speakers and hearers. Fricker considers the ability to make epistemic contributions 'and thereby to enjoy the mutual regard and trust that go with that kind of *epistemic reciprocity*' (Fricker 2015, 87, emphasis added) a central aspect of human flourishing. Dotson follows Jennifer Hornsby in highlighting the importance of the relationship between speakers and hearers for successful speech acts. Speakers depend on '*an audience willing and capable of hearing*' them (Dotson 2011, 238, emphasis original) as much as hearers depend on intelligible speakers. Ideally, communication would occur in 'epistemic relational equality' (Fricker 2015, 87) with speakers and audiences doing their parts to understand one another. Testimonial injustice and testimonial smothering, however, sever the bonds between speaker and audience because audiences fail to do their part.

Self-appointed speaking-for also severs this bond: the speaker-for effectively silences a third party who may or may not be present, co-opting their opportunity to participate (or not) in the communicative exchange. As in testimonial smothering, the victim's speech act never occurs at all, or is quite literally talked over. Even if what is said is exactly what victims would have said, they are denied the chance to participate *for themselves*. Self-appointed speaking-for is a form of pre-emptive testimonial injustice that silences and blocks victims from exercising their capacity to make epistemic contributions and their ability to control which and how contributions are made in their names.

If Fricker is right about the central importance of making epistemic contributions – of offering an epistemic cup of tea, so to speak – then it is clear that self-appointed speaking-for wrongs someone in this capacity. When Cordova says: 'If you speak for me, you rob me of my voice' (Cordova 2007, 42); she is talking about being wronged in her capacity as a giver of knowledge. This, of course, is not

enough to make something a testimonial injustice. Fricker requires prejudice for all instances of TI because we are both epistemically and ethically culpable for prejudicial attitudes. Self-appointed speaking-for, however, does not need prejudice because the act itself is epistemically and ethically wrong.

That self-appointed speaking-for is bad epistemic practice should be relatively easy to see. First of all, when we speak for others we run the risk of misrepresenting their views. Consider the examples of self-appointed speaking-for above, the folklorist and the restaurant. Generally, Native people know their own stories better – more intimately and with greater appreciation for context – than even well-trained and well-informed outside researchers do. At a restaurant, no one is in a better position to know what you want to order than you are. Despite the possibility of exceptions to this general rule, self-appointed speaking-for is bad epistemic practice. Appointing oneself to speak for others is an epistemic risk and rarely a necessary one. In the next section, we will see that self-appointed speaking-for is more than a ‘stupid mistake,’ (in Fricker’s sense of ethically innocent but epistemically bad) because it predictably generates serious harms. Thus, self-appointed speaking-for shares testimonial injustice’s conceptual structure: victims are wronged in their capacity as knowers for reasons both epistemically and ethically wrongful. While in TI this reason is a culpable attitude, in self-appointed speaking-for it is a culpable *action*.

### III. One and the Same: The Harms of TI and Self-appointed Speaking-for

In addition to mirroring testimonial injustice’s conceptual structure, self-appointed speaking-for shares TI’s harms. Fricker delineates between the primary harm of TI – being wronged as a giver of knowledge – and the secondary harms, which may be both practical and epistemic.

In the case of the primary harm of testimonial injustice, we have seen that self-appointed speaking-for is a type of silencing, as it prevents someone from making (or withholding) their own epistemic contributions in their own way. If making epistemic contributions can be likened to offering tea to a guest, self-appointed speaking for is like coming into someone else’s home and, unbidden, brewing a pot of tea for their guests. Victims of self-appointed speaking-for are wronged in their capacity as givers of knowledge, as full participants in the epistemic community. This, Fricker rightly contends, is a deep-cutting insult: ‘the epistemic wrong bears a social *meaning* to the effect that the subject is less than fully human. When someone suffers a testimonial injustice, they are degraded *qua* knower, and they are symbolically degraded *qua* human’ (Fricker 2007, 44, emphasis original). Identity-prejudicial credibility deficits speak against victims’ competence or sincerity (Fricker 2007, 45), sending messages like: ‘this sort of person doesn’t know about this topic,’ or ‘they don’t tell the truth.’ Self-appointed speaking-for sends a similarly degrading message: ‘people like this can’t speak for themselves, but we know what they mean.’

Fricker follows Edward Craig’s distinction between informants and mere sources of information: ‘informants are epistemic *agents* who convey information, whereas sources of information are states of affairs from which the inquirer may be in a position to glean information’ (Fricker 2007, 132, emphasis added) and argues that in cases of TI victims are treated as the latter. Whether through prejudicial doubts about someone’s honesty or their competence, TI results in victims’ ‘exclusion from the community of epistemic trust’ (Fricker 2007, 45). Self-appointed speaking-for does not need judgments about victims’ credibility to exclude them from relations of epistemic trust: when we speak for another, we show we do not trust them to speak for themselves while preventing them from earning that trust through their speech. Victims become – at best – a source of information that speakers-for make use of.

Even when victims of testimonial injustice are believed, Fricker contends, it is not as a trusted subject or a competent epistemic agent, but as a faulty though sometimes correct source of information. For her, this is a kind of wrongful objectification, as ‘in testimonial injustice, one person undermines another’s status as a rational agent’ (Fricker 2007, 136). Gaile Pohlhaus, Jr., however, describes the harm of TI as ‘*being relegated to the role of epistemic other, being treated as though the range of one’s subject capacities is merely derivative of another’s*’ (Pohlhaus 2014, 107, emphasis original). She prefers

the language of othering to that of objectification, as '[I]t is precisely because . . . speakers are seen as epistemically unreliable *subjects* with the capacity to deceive and/or be deceived that allows perpetrators to perceive their testimony as not credible' (Pohlhaus 2014, 104, emphasis original). Pohlhaus's terminology applies just as well to self-appointed speaking-for. She emphasizes the way victims of TI are used for perpetrators' 'own epistemic ends' (Pohlhaus 2014, 104), which neatly captures an important aspect of the wrong of self-appointed speaking-for. Consider Cordova's account of the folklorist: whether she correctly articulates Native stories or not, she is the one who will benefit from having spoken. I am agnostic regarding the difference in the language of othering versus that of objectification, as both terms capture the way self-appointed speaking-for demeans and excludes.

Another example from Cordova shows how self-appointed speaking-for objectifies (or others) victims. She recounts a confrontation she had with 'a New Age prophetess, discoursing on how "charming" Indian "stories" are, [who] tells [her] how much she "loves" reading them to her children. She "loves" Indian *myths*' (Cordova 2007, 40, emphasis original). Cordova publicly challenged the prophetess's standing to tell Indian stories as myths: 'My "stories" are not "myths." *Myth* is a term used to connote something that is untrue, unreal, unfounded, and having no utilitarian value beyond entertainment either intellectual or spiritual. We give the term *myth* to those ideas we do not happen to believe' (Cordova 2007, 40, emphasis original). The confrontation got ugly; speaking-for leads to injustices of other kinds.

She is angry. Frustrated. Exposed. "But you don't understand," she moans. She rises and leans forward on her dais. She who is decorated with the turquoise jewelry made by Indian artisans, who wears the garb crafted by a *real* Indian from India, who lights the incense made for Buddhist temples, who consults the charts of Babylonian astrologers, she rises to appeal to her rapt audience: "They don't understand." "They" – how odd that a people who so take pride in their own uniqueness so willingly deprive others of the same. I am no longer "I" offering her a challenge, but a representative of the "they" who persist in showing up at her Earth Rituals convocations to challenge the misuse of their own belief systems.

Dissolved into defending the "they," I leave (Cordova 2007, 41, emphasis original).

Cordova's picture of the prophetess is of cultural appropriator par excellence, an offence analogous to self-appointed speaking-for insofar as the artifacts of marginalized cultural others are usurped and repurposed by and for someone in a position of dominance. Self-appointed speaking-for is the testimonial aspect of this wider phenomenon. Victims become others (or objects) that can be used instead of full epistemic agents trusted to make their own contributions.

The example above also highlights how self-appointed speaking-for shares the secondary harms of TI. Fricker notes the wide variety of practical harms that come from prejudicial credibility deficits, from being found guilty in court to being disadvantaged in one's career (Fricker 2007, esp. 46–47). It is easy to see that self-appointed speaking-for may result in similar practical harms, in particular because – like the new age priestess – speakers-for are likely to distort the words of their victims. Putting the wrong words in someone else's mouth (or words they would rather leave unsaid) often results in harm, and self-appointed speaking-for always runs this risk. When the priestess categorizes Native stories as 'myths,' even if she gets all the words technically correct, she codes the story as false for her listeners, feeding into dominant identity-prejudicial stereotypes of Indigenous peoples as epistemically backward, belonging to the past. Of course, it is even worse when the stories are told incorrectly. Another practical harm is that limited institutionalized opportunities to speak – through writing books or op-eds, giving interviews, etc. – may be taken up by speakers-for.

Self-appointed speaking-for also leads to similar epistemic secondary harms as do other kinds of testimonial injustice (Fricker 2007, esp. 47–50), including future credibility deficits, as the message that the one cannot speak for oneself may resonate with witnesses and victims. Speaking for oneself is crucial to developing intellectual self-trust, which Karen Jones describes as 'created and sustained in interaction with others, [and] . . . porous to social power' (Jones 2012, 245). Jones notes that 'those who suffer from identity-based oppression, such as women, the poor, those with experience of mental illness, and indigenous peoples' find their self-trust eroded by pervasive but localized credibility deficits (Jones

2012, 245); frequent or systematic victims of self-appointed speaking-for face this effect as well. Vine Deloria, Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) notes the damage to Native self-trust caused by years of being spoken for by non-Native academics: 'Thus many ideas that pass for Indian thinking are in reality theories originally advanced by anthropologists and echoed by Indian people' (Deloria 1988, 82). Fricker describes TI as a potential cause for lost knowledge and underdeveloped intellectual virtues, and the feedback loop between the two (Fricker 2007, 49); being spoken for can initiate this vicious cycle as well.

We have seen that self-appointed speaking-for causes the same primary harms (exclusion from the community of epistemic trust through denigration as a rational agent), and secondary harms (of practical and epistemic varieties) as Fricker's central cases of testimonial injustice. In the previous section, we saw that self-appointed speaking-for and TI share a conceptual structure: being wronged as a giver of knowledge for epistemically and ethically culpable reasons. It is now clear that self-appointed speaking-for is a central case of testimonial injustice. In the next section, I turn to how self-appointed speaking-for expands this category by demonstrating that prejudice is not necessary for TI.

#### IV. Expanding the Category: TI without Prejudice

Self-appointed speaking-for is not just a specific application of TI. Rather, it expands the category because it is unjust irrespective of perpetrators' prejudice. Fricker, however, is 'committed to a definition of testimonial injustice as necessarily involving prejudice' (Fricker 2007, 41). Prejudice is crucial for Fricker because credibility deficits may arise for any number of reasons, not all of which are ethically or epistemically blameworthy (Fricker 2007, esp. 21–22). What distinguishes TI from simply being ethically wrong or epistemically incompetent is that it is necessarily both. I agree with Fricker on this but disagree that prejudice is the only way this mix of ethical and epistemic fault can come about. Prejudice may often cause self-appointed speaking-for, but it need not because the act itself is both ethically and epistemically blameworthy.

Others have argued that prejudice is not a necessary condition for testimonially unjust credibility deficits. James Bohman (2012) claims that relations of structural domination can account for epistemic injustices as well as their associated prejudices. Bohman makes a strong case for the importance of structural domination in most cases of testimonial injustice, and while his aim is not precisely to show that TI can occur without prejudice, perhaps domination might cause testimonial injustice through other epistemic vices (arrogance or close-mindedness on the part of dominant knowers, for instance). It might be best to think of prejudice as the proximate cause of many or most types and occurrences of testimonial injustice, with structural domination often further up the causal chain. Elizabeth Anderson identifies three examples of 'transactionally innocent cognitive bias' (2012, 170) that nonetheless often cause or perpetuate structural epistemic injustice: 'differential access to the markers of credibility; ethnocentrism [that is, in-group bias]; and the "shared reality bias"' (2012, 169). As Anderson points out, practices with legitimate epistemic uses – for instance, keeping participants in shared inquiry 'on the same page' (Anderson 2012, 170) – have downsides that contribute to injustice. Like Bohman, Anderson highlights the social complexity of testimonial injustice. Education might be an appropriate marker of credibility, for instance, but when some groups are systematically deprived 'access to a decent education, the use of such markers in assessing credibility will tend to exclude those groups from further participation in inquiry' (Anderson 2012, 169). Rather than proving that TI can come about absent epistemic or ethical fault, however, I think Anderson demonstrates how systematic injustice can distort practices and attitudes that would otherwise be ethically innocent and epistemically sensible. I am sympathetic to her argument that locally innocent communicative transactions might nevertheless constitute or contribute to 'global properties of the epistemic system that may be seriously awry from both an epistemic and moral point of view,' (Anderson 2012, 171), but I suspect this leaves the characterization of testimonial injustice as requiring epistemically and ethically problematic causes intact; these causes should simply be understood as structural rather than individual.

Self-appointed speaking-for expands our notion of testimonial injustice in a different direction. Instead of identifying non-prejudicial causes of credibility deficits, self-appointed speaking-for is *intrinsically* epistemically and ethically problematic. When we speak on behalf of another individual who has not given authorization, or on behalf of a group one is not a member of or received authorization from, we overstep our epistemic bounds. Speaking-for puts one's own words into the mouth of another and claims to represent their perspective. This may be done for reasons of prejudice and often occurs in relationships of domination, but we should consider it a clear case of TI even without prejudice or domination. Other epistemic vices, such as arrogance and carelessness, often cause self-appointed speaking-for. For someone with an overinflated view of their own epistemic competence, no prejudice at all may be necessary for her to authorize herself to speak on behalf of another – even in ways that cut across relationships of dominance. Relatively innocent causes of speaking-for – such as a propensity to blurt out any thought that comes to mind, or such great exuberance to speak on the topic at hand that one fails to notice that a question was directed at another – are nevertheless bad epistemic practice. Whatever the cause of self-appointed speaking for, however well-meaning (or however unintended), the victims are still epistemically pushed aside, still prevented from making their own contribution in their own way.

Self-appointed speaking-for may also come about without any epistemic vice on the part of the speaker. Consider an academic panel, in which only those authorized to speak on an issue relevant to a marginalized group are those sitting at the table, none of whom are members of said group. Panelists, then, may be forced into a dilemma: leave the group's perspective entirely unmentioned, or appoint themselves speakers on the group's behalf.<sup>1</sup> In some cases, all things considered, self-appointed speaking-for will be the least bad option and it will be chosen without prejudice, arrogance, or other epistemic vices. Nonetheless, it seems it will still be pernicious: the spoken-for are still disrespected in their capacity as knowers and the message that they cannot speak for themselves is still sent. These harms are not necessarily canceled out by real benefits of having one's perspective mentioned. Importantly, self-appointed spokespersons commit testimonial injustice even when they accurately represent the perspective, beliefs, preferences, etc. of the other because they prevent those other individuals or groups from participating in the shared pooling of knowledge as epistemic peers. The audience receives the message that outside experts are enough to represent the marginalized group, that insiders' voices are unnecessary or impossible to find.

Fricker focuses on the ubiquity and 'normality of injustice' both for the purposes of correcting injustice and better understanding ideal justice (Fricker 2007, 7; see also 2015, 73–74). As she puts it, 'various degrees of testimonial injustice happen *all the time*. As Judith Shklar points out, the history of philosophy leads us to think falsely of justice as the norm and injustice as the aberration' (Fricker 2007, 39, emphasis added). Like other sorts of testimonial injustice, self-appointed speaking-for happens all the time and in varying degrees. Sometimes we may be confronted with circumstances in which no course of action is perfectly epistemically just and self-appointed speaking-for is the best option. We may also be confronted with situations in which the practical consequences of *not* speaking for others are grave enough that we are obligated to speak on their behalf. For example, a Western diplomat applying for a grant on behalf of a marginalized community in a developing country (and thereby speaking for those people) may be the difference between getting desperately needed funds and being denied them.<sup>2</sup> Even when it is necessary to appoint oneself to speak for others, they are still wronged as givers of knowledge, excluded from the epistemic community, and subject to further downstream harms from having been blocked from the opportunity to speak for themselves. I do not wish to overstate the case and suggest that we must never appoint ourselves to speak for others; rather, I wish to highlight the costs of self-appointed speaking-for as among the many ethical and epistemic considerations relevant to hard real-world decisions.

In Sections II-III I made the case that self-appointed speaking-for is a type of testimonial injustice because it shares the conceptual structure and harms of TI: victims are wronged as

givers of knowledge for reasons both ethically and epistemically culpable. Unlike other kinds of TI, though, I have shown that the act of self-appointed speaking-for is inherently a testimonial injustice. No prejudicial attitudes are necessary because appointing oneself to speak for others cannot be done without excluding them from making their own epistemic contributions in their own way. In the following section, I will discuss some possible objections to this analysis.

## V. Objections

I wish to respond to three objections to my claim that self-appointed speaking-for is a central case of testimonial injustice without prejudice. First, I take up the objection that perhaps prejudice always underlies self-appointed speaking-for after all and, second, that self-appointed speaking-for is not TI or any sort of injustice but a lesser kind of wrongdoing like rudeness. Finally, I address the claim that perhaps self-appointed speaking-for is sometimes necessary and therefore not (or not always) an injustice.

Fricker's analysis of testimonial injustice relies on the claim that prejudice is both widespread and subtle: most (or all) of us are prejudiced in some way or another; our prejudices often cut against our conscious beliefs in ways we never recognize. 'No wonder the prejudicial elements in the social imagination can impinge on our credibility judgments without our say-so' (Fricker 2007, 38–39). If Fricker is right about the ubiquity of prejudice – and I think she is – then perhaps prejudice is the underlying cause of all self-appointed speaking-for, even when we are unaware of it. While I have no doubt that prejudice fuels many, perhaps most, instances of self-appointed speaking-for, it seems unnecessarily reductive to posit that prejudice is the only cause of speaking for others in light of the variety of plausible causes: arrogance, carelessness, exuberance, presumed necessity, etc. More importantly, even if it could somehow be shown that all actual cases of self-appointed speaking-for were caused by prejudice, prejudice would still not be *necessary* for self-appointed speaking-for to be testimonial injustice because it exhibits the very features that make prejudice bad in the first place: it is degrading (so ethically bad), and likely to lead to errors (so epistemically bad). Whatever the speaker's motivations, however bad or good, self-appointed speaking-for makes an epistemic contribution in someone's name over which they have no control and by which the speaker usurps the victim's place in the epistemic community (even if only temporarily). Consider Cordova's folklorist: it is not at all clear that prejudice (even a positive prejudice about people of her own group) is why she appoints herself to record and disseminate Native stories, and – crucially – it does not matter what her motivations are. She may be motivated by *respect* for the people she is speaking for and the stories they tell, but the act itself nevertheless excludes them from making their own contributions – or keeping their own silence.

The second objection I wish to confront is that self-appointed speaking-for is not injustice at all but some sort of lesser form of wrongdoing. Fricker is clear that TI occurs in varying intensities (Fricker 2007, 39); minor instances of one-off testimonial injustice are daily occurrences that frequently go unnoticed, even by victims. Self-appointed speaking-for is much the same way, often a minor blip in an otherwise respectful conversation. Victims are spoken for but quickly regain the opportunity to make contributions for themselves. Just as many instances of TI are much more pernicious than this however, so too are many instances of self-appointed speaking-for. Speaking for others often happens systematically and in concert with other kinds of oppression and exclusion (epistemic and otherwise). These are the cases we are most concerned about and they are unjust even in the absence of prejudice. It is not always possible to tell from the outside when speaking for another will do them no real harm and when its impact will be quite serious.

The final objection I wish to deal with is that sometimes we authorize ourselves to speak for others in an effort to make the world better or more just. Above, I noted the dilemma that Western diplomats and aid workers may be faced with: speak for marginalized others to benefit them materially, or let them speak for themselves even when they will likely be ignored by

Western audiences (perhaps because they will be confronted by prejudicial credibility-deficits). Conditions of deprivation may force on us a choice between doing epistemic injustice and allowing harm to come to others. I do not think there is an easily applicable rule for situations like this (and if there is, it is beyond my scope here), but I do think that the harms of self-appointed speaking-for must be accounted on one side of the ledger if the right choice is to be made.

A similar issue is present when fighting injustice. Self-appointed speaking-for most frequently and importantly tracks with lines of dominance and oppression with the relatively powerful and privileged speaking for the less powerful and privileged relatively more often, reinforcing unjust hierarchies. Men, for example, more frequently interrupt and talk over women than the other way around. Perhaps the only way to upend this hierarchy is to fight fire with fire, so to speak, with women interrupting men. Unless one is firmly committed to an ethical theory in which the ends justify the means, however, I think we can explain this as at best a necessary evil. When the relatively powerless speak for the relatively powerful, the net result might be good, but we can still recognize the act as an injustice in the same way that a desperately poor person stealing from the very wealthy might lead to a good result (the poorer person's continued survival) through less than desirable means. There may be occasions in which justice is served by the relatively powerless appointing themselves to speak for the powerful, but if so, the means are less than ideal.

Martha Nussbaum<sup>3</sup> presents a case where the relatively powerful should speak for the relatively powerless to promote a more just outcome. She argues that equal respect for people with severe cognitive disabilities commits us to make provisions for them to exercise their rights to vote and participate on juries even if this requires speaking-for. (Nussbaum 2009, 347). As she puts it:

I am thinking about cases in which the person may not be able to speak or express thoughts in a way that is comprehensible to the world at large, or which could easily be adapted to the typical structure of the jury or the polling place, but the person is agreed to have views and to be able to communicate them to a small group of trusted individuals (Nussbaum 2009, 344–45).

She contrasts this case with the provisions she recommends for persons who can speak for themselves but are prevented, and those who can speak for themselves but need assistance and intends this example to show that when persons *cannot* make the epistemic contributions expected of citizens for themselves, they must be allowed to be spoken for. In this, I think she is right on: this kind of speaking-for is demanded by justice.

I think, however, that this is not a case of *self-appointed* speaking-for at all. She emphasizes that *trusted guardians* should be allowed to represent people with severe cognitive disabilities on juries and in voting booths. Trusted guardians, of course, are much more likely to accurately represent the views and interests of individuals with severe cognitive disabilities than, for instance, a court-appointed proxy juror. An existing relationship of trust and connection is necessary for Nussbaum's recommendation. Even this, she admits, is epistemically and ethically imperfect (Nussbaum 2009, 347), but she is right that it is an improvement over the status quo. It is much less clear that being spoken for by a self- (or court-) appointed outsider would improve on the current state of affairs.

The wrongs of self-appointed speaking-for draw our attention to the importance of having the proper standing to represent another individual or group. Linda Alcoff analyzes speaking-for in broad terms – whether self-appointed or not – noting that even direct 'authorization does not render null and void all attendant problems with speaking for others' (Alcoff 1991–1992, 10). She rightly argues that speaking-for and speaking about others are tightly connected (Alcoff 1991–1992, 9) and sees speaking-for 'as a very specific subset of' representation (Alcoff 1991–1992, 11). I agree with Alcoff's conclusion that 'It is not *always* the case that when others unlike me speak for me I have ended up worse off, or that when we speak for others they end up worse off' (Alcoff 1991–1992, 29, emphasis original); this is true even when speaking-for is self-appointed. Part of what makes self-

appointed speaking-for an interesting and central case of testimonial injustice, however, is that even at its best (all things considered), it still occasions the wrongs of TI. Appointing oneself to speak for another may give their perspective a platform it would otherwise never have received, or secure material benefits they would otherwise have lost, or promote justice for people in their situation, but it cannot avoid also denigrating them as givers of their own knowledge and running the serious risk of misrepresenting them. Self-appointed speaking-for unavoidably mirrors the form and harms of testimonial injustice.

## VI. Conclusion

I have argued that self-appointed speaking-for is a central case of testimonial injustice because it shares TI's conceptual form of wronging victims in their capacity as givers of knowledge for reasons both ethically and epistemically culpable. More than a mere application of TI, however, self-appointed speaking-for helps us better understand the nature of epistemic injustice by expanding TI to include a type of action that does not require prejudicial attitudes. As a kind of epistemic theft, self-appointed speaking-for is inherently wrong (all things equal), even if some circumstances render it the least of possible evils. I wish to conclude by noting that – like other kinds of TI – self-appointed speaking-for is not a minor wrong that should be on the fringes of our concern in a world with many other kinds of injustice. Self-appointed speaking-for is instead a central form of epistemic marginalization. For Native Americans, being systematically spoken for continues to perpetuate other kinds of injustice. Instead of speaking further for Native people on this topic, I will close with the words of Tommy Orange (Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes of Oklahoma) from the prologue to his novel *There, There*:

We've been defined by everyone else and continue to be slandered despite easy-to-look-up-on-the-internet facts about the realities of our histories and our current state as a people. We have the sad, defeated Indian silhouette, and the heads rolling down temple stairs, we have it in our heads, Kevin Costner saving us, John Wayne's six-shooter slaying us, an Italian guy named Iron Eyes Cody playing our parts in movies. We have the litter-mourning, tear-ridden Indian in the commercial (also Iron Eyes Cody) ... . Our heads were on the penny first, of course, the Indian cent, and then on the buffalo nickel, both before we could even vote as a people – which, like the truth of what happened in history all over the world, and like all that spilled blood from slaughter, are now out of circulation (Orange 2018, 7).

## Notes

1. Of course, there are institutional and individual ways around these dilemmas, given sufficient forethought: including members of the group in the conversation, or quoting on-the-record statements from group members. Once these options are closed off, the dilemma presents itself.
2. Thanks to Christalyn Steers-McCrum for this example.
3. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for this example.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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