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Exilic epistemic displacement: external actors reproducing forms of epistemic injustice in global public discourse

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ABSTRACT

This article examines how exile voices are epistemically displaced in global public discourse during moments of authoritarian political rupture. Drawing on discourse studies, social epistemology, and exile scholarship, the manuscript introduces and defines *exilic epistemic displacement* as a patterned social and discursive process through which interpretive authority is relocated away from individuals with lived experience of authoritarian repression (i.e. exiles) and towards external actors positioned at a privileged and safe distance from its consequences (i.e. outsiders). Rather than proposing exilic epistemic displacement as an entirely new type of epistemic injustice, the article identifies and theorizes it as a recurring pattern through which multiple forms of epistemic injustice are organized in exile-outsider encounters. Through situated narrative encounters and discourse-analytic examples, the analysis illustrates how exiles' emotional responses – such as relief, hope, or cautious optimism – are frequently corrected, moralized, or dismissed by outsiders who lack experiential proximity to repression yet assert interpretive and moral authority. These dynamics reproduce testimonial, hermeneutical, and expressive forms of epistemic injustice by rendering exile knowledge suspect while privileging abstraction, ideological fluency, and moral distance. Conceptualizing exile as an epistemic condition rather than a legal or identity category, the article argues that struggles over political interpretation are also struggles over credibility, recognition, and authority. The manuscript concludes by reflecting on the implications of exilic epistemic displacement for public discourse, exile studies, and social epistemology in transnational political debate.

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Introduction

In 2024, at a professional academic event in Warsaw, Poland, where I currently reside, I was approached by a colleague after he learned that I am Cuban. He introduced himself as someone born and raised in Italy who now works as a university professor in the United Kingdom. Right after introducing himself, he expressed admiration for Fidel Castro and for Cuban communism, explaining that his perspective was shaped by his visit to Cuba and by his personal intellectual interests.

I responded that my understanding of the Cuban regime was shaped by growing up under it and that, therefore, my perspective differed substantially from his. “Oh no! You are wrong! You don’t understand!” He reacted emphatically to my statement. His justification was straightforward: he had visited Cuba and therefore believed he understood the system better than I, despite never having lived under its long-term political, social, or material constraints.

I begin this manuscript with this real-life narrative neither as an account of personal antagonism nor as evidence of individual bad faith, but as an entry point into a broader social dynamic of epistemic injustice that extends well beyond a single interaction. Such encounters are not exceptional, nor are they confined to a single national or political context; rather, they exemplify a recurring discursive pattern in which experiential authority is contested and overridden by external interpreters. Experiences like this one have occurred to me repeatedly since I left Cuba at the age of 17. In such encounters, individuals without lived experience of authoritarian repression assert interpretive and moral authority over those who have endured it. These interactions

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reveal a persistent asymmetry in how knowledge, experience, and legitimacy are socially distributed. For those who have lived under authoritarian regimes, such moments of invalidation of lived experience are rarely isolated or inconsequential; they accumulate over time and shape how exile communities are heard, corrected, or dismissed in public and professional spaces, while also contributing to a cumulative emotional burden and the reactivation of trauma. In this manuscript, I approach such encounters of experiential invalidation as socially meaningful moments that reflect larger patterns of power, authority, and recognition rather than as interpersonal misunderstandings or ideological disagreements.

For clarity, throughout this manuscript, exile is not treated as a self-ascribed political identity or legal category, but as an epistemic condition produced by separation from authoritarian governance and continued proximity to its consequences. Many individuals who leave or are forced out of authoritarian contexts may not identify or be legally categorized as ‘exiles’ in a political sense; nevertheless, they occupy the same epistemic position examined here when engaging in discourse about authoritarianism with external actors. What is analytically salient in this manuscript is not the personal, legal, or political label, but the exile/outsider dynamic through which experiential authority over authoritarian governance is negotiated, contested, or displaced between those with lived proximity to the regime under discussion and those who interpret it from relative distance and safety.

Relatedly, authoritarianism is used here in a specific analytic sense. I do not use the term to deny that authoritarian practices, coercive state power, racialized policing, surveillance, or political repression can occur within democratic societies. Rather, the focus of this manuscript is on authoritarian governance as a regime condition that structures everyday political life and produces exile through coercion, constrained political participation, punishment for dissent, surveillance, restricted civic agency, and, in many cases, restricted or highly consequential exit. This distinction matters because many external actors, particularly those positioned within Global North contexts, speak from forms of mobility, passport privilege, institutional protection, and geopolitical insulation that shape what they can risk, ignore, criticize, or leave behind. The relevant exile/outsider distinction is therefore not between people from ‘authoritarian’ and ‘democratic’ countries, but between those who have lived the specific consequences of the regime under discussion and those who interpret it from a position of relative distance, safety, or insulation from those consequences.

The purpose of this paper is to foreground a social and discursive phenomenon rather than to advance a political position or adjudicate political systems. While I recognize that the context from which this manuscript emerges is undeniably political, as most things are nowadays, the object of analysis is not political outcomes or ideological alignment, but the social organization of interpretive authority, moral judgement, and emotional legitimacy in public discourse. The focus here is on how authority over interpretation, moral judgement, and emotional legitimacy is negotiated between individuals with lived experience of authoritarian governance and those who engage these conversations from a distance. The paper examines how claims to knowledge are established, challenged, and upheld in moments of political change, particularly when exile communities express relief, joy, or hope. These expressions often provoke strong reactions from observers who approach authoritarian contexts through second-hand and highly sanitized knowledge, such as travel, media, or ideological frameworks, rather than lived experience. At the same time, these observers often remain comparatively passive in the face of authoritarian power itself, a contrast that reveals another important asymmetry in how moral and epistemic judgement is exercised. By treating these interactions of experiential invalidation as a social phenomenon, in this manuscript, I invite readers to consider how power operates through discourse, credibility, and recognition rather than through formal political institutions alone.

The central concern of this paper is therefore who is socially recognized as entitled to interpret, evaluate, and emotionally respond to political change in authoritarian and post-authoritarian debates. Rather than assessing whether particular political outcomes are desirable or undesirable, the analysis centres on recurrent interactional patterns and discursive dynamics that shape whose voices are affirmed and whose are contested. In public discussions surrounding political rupture, exile communities frequently encounter correction, dismissal, or moral condemnation when articulating their responses to change (Said 2000). These reactions often emerge from individuals who lack lived experience of repression and who maintain limited deep social proximity to those who endured it. Such dynamics reveal how emotional expression itself becomes a site of condemnation, where relief or hope is reframed as naïveté, moral blindness, or

political immaturity rather than as a meaningful response to lived experience. This manuscript treats these patterns as analytically significant, warranting sustained examination rather than dismissal as disagreement or misunderstanding.

While the personal encounter described at the beginning of this manuscript is but one example, similar dynamics recur in public discourse surrounding authoritarian and post-authoritarian contexts, particularly during moments of political rupture. Exiles and survivors who articulate relief, joy, or cautious optimism are frequently met with challenging, at times condemnatory responses that question the legitimacy of their emotions and the credibility of their experiences. These responses often come from individuals who have not lived under the specific authoritarian regime, political history, or consequences of repression being discussed and who therefore lack direct experiential knowledge of those particular consequences. Such responses frequently rest on abstract moral frameworks or second-hand forms of knowledge (i.e., hearsay, regime-supported propaganda, social media influencers, etc.) that override exiles' lived reality. This paper argues that contemporary reactions to political change in post-authoritarian regimes exemplify this broader social pattern. Individuals without lived experience of authoritarian governance assert and, at times, impose interpretive and moral authority over those who endured it, thereby delegitimizing exile communities' emotional responses, political hopes, and historical memory. This dynamic, I argue, constitutes a recurring pattern of epistemic injustice rather than a wholly new type of epistemic injustice. The manuscript's aim is therefore to apply and extend existing theoretical resources in order to identify and track how testimonial, hermeneutical, expressive, and broader oppressive epistemic dynamics converge in exile-outsider encounters. Exilic epistemic displacement names this patterned relocation of interpretive authority away from exiles and towards external actors who speak from positions of relative distance, safety, or abstraction.

Building on these observations, this manuscript introduces the concept of *exilic epistemic displacement* as a way to name and track this recurring pattern. I define exilic epistemic displacement as a patterned social and discursive process through which interpretive authority is relocated away from those with lived experience under authoritarian regimes and of authoritarian repression and towards external actors (i.e., outsiders) who speak from positions of distance and privilege. In this process, exile communities' emotional responses, political hopes, and historical memory and trauma are rendered suspect or illegitimate, reproducing forms of epistemic injustice in global public discourse. To do so, I organize the manuscript into several sections. Following the introduction, I situate my positionality and clarify how exile is conceptualized as a social and epistemic condition rooted in agency, memory, and lived experience. I then engage relevant scholarship on epistemic injustice and exile to establish the theoretical context for the analysis. The subsequent sections foreground exile perspectives and voices, drawing on narrative accounts and illustrative discourse examples as conceptual entry points for theorizing how exile testimonies are challenged, dismissed, or morally condemned in public discourse. Building from these materials, I analyse recurring patterns of contestation, including the social positioning of those who assert interpretive authority and the discursive strategies through which exile narratives are displaced. The manuscript concludes by reflecting on the broader implications of exilic epistemic displacement for exile studies, public discourse, and social epistemology.

Positionality and the epistemic condition of exile

My positionality as an individual speaking from an exilic epistemic location shaped by the lived experience of authoritarian governance is analytically relevant to this manuscript, not as a claim to moral authority, but as an epistemic location shaped by historically constituted relations of power, displacement, and voice. Positionality matters here because knowledge about authoritarianism, exile, and political rupture is not produced from a neutral vantage point, but from socially situated locations that shape what can be seen, said, and recognized as credible (Collins 2000; Haraway 1988). Exile is one such location. Exile is marked by proximity to repression without proximity to power. Such proximity does not make exile knowledge infallible, but it does confer situated insight into the everyday operations and consequences of authoritarian governance that are less available from positions of distance (Collins 2000; Haraway 1988). Exile is also marked by the persistent demand to translate lived experience into terms legible to or accepted by external audiences. This demand to translate lived experience is itself a discursive condition that, in turn, shapes how exile

knowledge is expressed, evaluated, and authorized within public discourse. Exiles understand solitude, estrangement, and the suffering produced by rigid proscriptions in ways not fully accessible to those who have not lived exile (Said 2000). In this sense, positionality is not about identity alone, but about how access to experience and constraints on expression shape what can be known and whose knowledge is recognized. Accordingly, throughout this manuscript, exile is treated not as a personal story or identity claim, but as an epistemic position that shapes how experience is interpreted, evaluated, and granted authority within and beyond broader regimes of power.

Scholarship on exile and displacement has documented how exile voices are frequently positioned within public discourse through narratives that emphasize vulnerability, gratitude, or symbolic value rather than epistemic agency (Grenier 2020; J. O. Pérez 2005; L. A. Pérez 2011). Exile voices have frequently been framed as objects of rescue, evidence of ideological success or failure, or moral referents in broader geopolitical debates. Such discursive positioning is reinforced through state narratives, humanitarian frameworks, and geopolitical storytelling that render exile testimony suspect, partial, or morally compromised. Empirical work on displaced, exiled, and vulnerable populations across multiple contexts illustrates how such positioning authorizes institutions and external actors to speak on behalf of exiles while constraining their own interpretive agency (Chouliaraki 2012; Gronbeck-Tedesco 2022). These practices produce enduring expectations of silence, loyalty, and moral indebtedness that extended well beyond childhood. Situating my positionality within this broader discursive history underscores that the patterns examined in this manuscript are not isolated, contemporary, or individual, but embedded in longer trajectories of authority over exile voice.

In this manuscript, exile is conceptualized as distinct from migration and from narratives of permanent victimhood (c.f., Chouliaraki 2024). Here, exile refers to a condition of displacement produced by political rupture and coercion, in which individuals are separated from meaningful participation in their political community and continue to bear the epistemic, emotional, and relational consequences of authoritarian governance. While migration describes movement across borders, exile denotes a condition produced by political rupture, coercion, and the loss of sovereignty over one's own political life (Malkki 1995; Said 2000). Therefore, in this manuscript, exile is not conceptualized as synonymous with passivity or suffering alone, a reduction that has been widely critiqued in sociological work on exile (Reinprecht 2023). Rather, it is a condition shaped by memory, agency, and ongoing interpretive labour, as exiles carry with them historical knowledge, intergenerational experience, and a persistent relationship to authoritarian governance. As Edward W. Said famously observed, exile involves 'the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home,' yet it also produces a distinctive critical consciousness rooted in displacement rather than detachment (Said 2000, 173). Exile voices thus constitute forms of situated knowledge grounded in lived consequence, not merely expressions of affect or trauma. Recognizing exile as an epistemic position rather than a humanitarian or political category clarifies why the displacement of exile voices constitutes an epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007) rather than a disagreement of opinion.

This manuscript is situated primarily within discourse studies, understood as an analytical tradition concerned with how authority, legitimacy, and credibility are interactionally produced and contested through language and social practice (Bourdieu 1991; Fairclough 1995). From this perspective, public discourse is not merely a site of expression, but a mechanism through which interpretive authority is distributed, challenged, and reasserted. Social epistemology provides this manuscript's conceptual vocabulary for understanding social dynamics as epistemic rather than merely rhetorical, foregrounding how credibility, knowledge claims, and interpretive rights are unevenly allocated (Fricker 2007; Medina 2013). Finally, exile scholarship contributes historically grounded frameworks for understanding displacement as a political and epistemic condition shaped by coercion, memory, and lived consequence rather than as a demographic event (Malkki 1995; Said 2000). Drawing these three fields together allows me to examine how exile voices are positioned historically, as well as how they are interactionally contested and displaced in contemporary public discourse. The concept of *exilic epistemic displacement* emerges from this engagement, naming a patterned discursive process through which interpretive authority is relocated away from those with lived experience of authoritarian repression and towards external actors who speak from positions of distance. In doing so, this manuscript clarifies how

struggles over exile voice are not merely political disagreements, but contests over epistemic authority and recognition.

Epistemic injustice and exile: theoretical context

This manuscript draws on the framework of epistemic injustice to analyse how exile voices are discounted, overridden, or reframed in contemporary public discourse. Following Miranda Fricker's (2007) foundational account, epistemic injustice refers to a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower. Fricker (2007) distinguishes between testimonial epistemic injustice, which occurs when prejudice or power asymmetries lead relatively privileged actors to dismiss or mistrust the testimony of others, and hermeneutical epistemic injustice, which arises when collective interpretive resources are insufficient to make sense of certain forms of experience. While both forms are relevant to exile discourse, this manuscript treats epistemic injustice not only as a moral harm but as a discursive process through which credibility and interpretive authority are interactionally organized. Accordingly, this manuscript is primarily concerned with testimonial epistemic injustice, as it manifests through the patterned devaluation of exile credibility in debates about authoritarian governance and political rupture. Framing these dynamics as testimonial epistemic injustice allows the analysis to move beyond interpersonal disagreement and towards the interactional and structural conditions that shape who is believed and whose interpretations are treated as authoritative.

In exile contexts, testimonial epistemic injustice often emerges through credibility deficits assigned to those whose proximity to repression is reframed as bias, emotional excess, or political compromise. Exiles are frequently positioned as too invested to be reliable knowers, while outsiders are positioned as more objective precisely because they are not personally affected by the consequences of authoritarian rule (Medina 2013). This asymmetry reflects a broader discursive logic in which distance from lived consequence is misrecognized as epistemic neutrality. As Medina (2013) argues, epistemic injustice is sustained through forms of epistemic arrogance and ignorance that allow socially privileged actors to overestimate the reliability of their own perspectives while dismissing resistant or experience-based knowledge. In this sense, exile testimony is not merely questioned; it is systematically subordinated within credibility economies that privilege distance over consequence. The result is a recurrent pattern in which those most directly affected by authoritarianism are treated as less epistemically authoritative than those who observe from afar.

Hermeneutical epistemic injustice further compounds these dynamics by limiting the interpretive resources available for understanding exile experience. Many of the emotional and ethical responses expressed by exiles – such as relief, joy, grief, or cautious hope during moments of political change – do not fit easily within dominant macro-political frameworks organized around ideology, sovereignty, or moral consistency. As a result, exile affect is frequently misrecognized, pathologized, or morally condemned rather than understood as a meaningful response to prolonged repression. In such cases, the injustice lies not in the absence of exile speech, but in the dominance of interpretive frameworks that render exile experience unintelligible on its own terms (Fricker 2007; Medina 2013). Hermeneutical injustice thus helps explain how exile voices can circulate widely in public discourse while remaining persistently misunderstood and even morally condemned by external actors who do not have firsthand (hi)stories of living under an authoritarian regime.

Recent work has extended the epistemic injustice framework by emphasizing that injustice can persist even when testimony is heard, and interpretive resources formally exist. Dryzek and Niemeyer (2024) introduce the concept of expressive epistemic injustice to describe situations in which the conditions of discourse systematically inhibit individuals or groups from expressing their values and beliefs in ways that reflect their lived realities. Importantly, expressive epistemic injustice can occur even in the absence of overt testimonial dismissal or hermeneutical gaps. This insight is especially relevant for discourse involving exiles, who may be invited to speak, acknowledged emotionally, or even amplified rhetorically, yet remain constrained by discursive conditions that prevent their experiences from functioning as legitimate grounds for interpretation or judgement. In such contexts, exile voices are present but epistemically constrained, a pattern that resonates strongly with the discursive mechanisms I analyse later.

This manuscript also places epistemic injustice in conversation with scholarship that distinguishes credentialed expertise from experience-based expertise. Mantilla-Blanco's (2025) analysis of *scholar-*

experts and *victim-experts* in post-conflict memory contexts demonstrates how authority is negotiated between those whose legitimacy rests on institutional credentials and those whose legitimacy rests on lived experience. Although Mantilla-Blanco's (2025) empirical focus differs, the analytic distinction is directly applicable to exile discourse, where outsiders frequently claim interpretive authority through theoretical fluency or political abstraction, while exiles claim authority through lived consequence. Mantilla-Blanco (2025) shows that experience-based expertise – in this case, exiles' histories and lived experiences – is often required to conform to dominant discursive registers (i.e., outsiders' discursive registers) in order to be recognized as legitimate, a dynamic that mirrors how exile testimony is routinely filtered, reframed, or subordinated in public debate. This requirement to translate experiential knowledge into externally sanctioned discursive forms constitutes a key mechanism of epistemic displacement.

This framing also requires distinguishing exilic epistemic displacement from the claim that exile produces an entirely separate type of epistemic injustice. Rather than naming a new standalone category of epistemic injustice, exilic epistemic displacement names a patterned configuration through which existing theoretical resources can help identify and track how several forms of epistemic injustice and epistemic oppression converge (Dotson 2011, 2014). This configuration includes testimonial injustice, insofar as exile testimony is assigned diminished credibility by outsiders, but it may also involve contributory injustice, insofar as outsiders rely on dominant or biased hermeneutical resources that prevent them from recognizing the intelligibility of exile knowledge on its own terms. Dotson's work on epistemic oppression is useful here because it shifts attention from isolated credibility deficits to the broader conditions that constrain participation in knowledge practices (Dotson 2012, 2014). Likewise, accounts of wilful hermeneutical ignorance and discursive injustice help explain how exile testimony may be formally present while still denied proper uptake (Kukla 2014; Pohlhaus 2012). Exilic epistemic displacement, therefore, refers to the relational and discursive arrangement through which these dynamics are organized in exile-outsider encounters, in which exiles speak from lived consequence while outsiders frequently retain authority over interpretation, framing, and moral evaluation.

Debates within exile scholarship underscore the epistemic stakes of defining exile itself. For instance, some scholars have argued that contemporary Cuban migrants should no longer be considered exiles, framing the 'Cuban exile' as a Cold War construct rather than a meaningful analytic category in the present (Dembicz 2020). While such arguments highlighted important shifts in migratory patterns and geopolitical contexts at that point in time, they also raise a critical epistemic question: who is authorized to define exile, and on what grounds? From the perspective developed in this manuscript, exile is not reducible to migratory status, temporal distance from departure, or formal returnability; it is an epistemic condition shaped by coercion, political constraint, and the enduring consequences of authoritarian governance. Claims about the 'end' of exile thus function not only as empirical assessments, but as outsiders' discursive interventions that reallocate interpretive authority away from those who continue to experience exile as a lived and consequential condition.

These frameworks clarify the theoretical gap this manuscript addresses. Epistemic injustice theory explains how credibility and interpretive authority are unequally distributed, while exile scholarship documents the historical and political conditions that shape exile voice. What remains under-theorized is the recurring interactional dynamic through which individuals without lived experience of authoritarian repression assert interpretive and moral authority over exiles in public discourse, thereby displacing exile communities from their position as primary knowers of their own histories. The concept of *exilic epistemic displacement* introduced in this manuscript names this process. The sections that follow examine how outsiders claim and stabilize interpretive authority and how exile knowledge is interactionally redirected, diminished, or rendered illegible in public discourse, grounding exilic epistemic displacement in recurring patterns of contestation.

Patterns of discursive contestation and epistemic distance

Now that exiles have been situated as social actors whose knowledge is grounded in lived experience, memory, and agency, this section turns to the other actors involved in public debates and discursive encounters surrounding political change. The focus here is on outsiders, understood relationally as individuals who participate in conversations about a particular authoritarian or post-authoritarian context

without firsthand lived proximity to that context's specific histories, risks, constraints, and consequences of repression. These outsiders frequently assert interpretive and moral authority over exiles within public discourse, positioning their own judgements as more objective, informed, or ethically sound. In this section, my objective is not to approach such dynamics through questions of individual intent or ideological affiliation. Instead, my goal is to examine the interactional and epistemic positions that enable certain voices to carry disproportionate authority in debates involving exile communities. Scholarship on epistemic injustice and exile discourse helps explain how external commentators may speak over, correct, or reframe experiential testimony while claiming analytical distance or moral clarity from afar, producing credibility distortions in which outsiders, as speakers with privilege, are granted excess credibility and exiles suffer testimonial deficit and discursive sidelining (Fricker 2007; Grenier 2020; Medina 2013).

A defining feature of outsiders' discursive authority is structural privilege, understood broadly rather than through narrow or singular frameworks. Outsiders may assert interpretive authority over exiles from positions of relative safety, mobility, institutional protection, passport privilege, or distance from the particular regime under discussion. This positioning allows outsiders to express strong opinions without fear of surveillance, retaliation, or loss. Exiles, by contrast, often remain connected to the consequences of political speech through family ties, unresolved material confiscations, histories of imprisonment, forced disappearance, political killings, or sustained state violence, to name a few, as well as ongoing vulnerability tied to the regimes they fled or were forced out of. These experiences are not confined to the past but continue to shape exile subjectivities through fear, grief, responsibility, and trauma. Scholarship has documented how exile continues to entail political, familial, and symbolic risk long after migration, shaping how, when, and where exiles speak in public and transnational forums (Cogo and Rodríguez Santos 2022; Pedraza-Bailey 1985). These asymmetries matter epistemically because they shape who can afford certainty. Outsiders often speak with confidence precisely because the regimes they defend or minimize do not affect them or their loved ones, while exiles often speak grounded in lived consequence and through the ongoing reactivation of vulnerability and trauma.

The forms and funds of knowledge that outsiders bring into public debates further reinforce this epistemic imbalance. Outsiders' understanding of authoritarianism is often mediated through travel, academic texts, media representations, or ideological communities rather than sustained exposure to repression as a lived reality. Such knowledge is typically episodic, curated, and sanitized, offering moments of access without constraint or consequence. Travel allows observation without risk. Academic and journalistic sources often privilege structural or geopolitical analysis while marginalizing everyday experience. Work on mediated knowledge and distance demonstrates how such forms of access can obscure the textures of repression while producing interpretive confidence (L. A. Pérez 2011). This dynamic enables moral abstraction, where ideological coherence takes precedence over lived specificity. Exiles' accounts are treated as partial, emotional, or biased, while outsiders' interpretations are framed as objective, principled, or intellectually rigorous. The result is a discursive hierarchy that privileges distance over lived experience and theory over practice, positioning outsiders as superior interpreters of realities they have not lived.

To clarify how these dynamics recur across public discourse, I introduce below six ideal-typical profiles that represent analytical positions rather than individual actors. In introducing these profiles, my goal is not to describe psychological types or moral characters; rather, I seek to capture recurrent ways in which interpretive authority is claimed, stabilized, and defended in exile-outsider interactions. These profiles are constructed conceptually from the theoretical literature discussed above, my positional location, and recurring patterns observed across professional encounters, public commentary, mediated debate, and illustrative digital discourse; they are not derived from a formal corpus or systematic fieldwork. These profiles include:

- **The Ideological Observer.** The Ideological Observer approaches public debates about authoritarianism through strong and often rigid ideological commitments, such as anti-imperialism, anti-capitalism, or revolutionary romanticism. This actor prioritizes ideological coherence over lived consequence and tends to interpret exile testimony through pre-existing political frameworks rather than experiential knowledge. Exiles' accounts are frequently dismissed as politically compromised, emotionally driven, or insufficiently critical of global power structures. From this position, lived experience is reframed as bias, while ideological alignment is treated as evidence of analytical rigour.

Scholars of ideology and political discourse have noted how abstract commitments can override empirical complexity, particularly when moral identity becomes tethered to political positioning (Bourdieu 1991; Žižek 2008). Within this logic, the Ideological Observer asserts interpretive superiority by framing exile voices as lacking political sophistication, thereby displacing experiential authority in favour of theoretical purity.

- **The Experiential Tourist.** The Experiential Tourist derives epistemic authority from limited yet symbolically powerful forms of proximity, such as travel, short-term fieldwork, cultural immersion, or mediated encounters with authoritarian societies. This profile often includes academics, journalists, activists, influencers, and cultural consumers who claim insight through presence rather than duration. Statements such as ‘I have been there,’ ‘I saw it myself,’ ‘I know such and such person,’ or ‘I have a friend/colleague who is from _____ (nationality of exile)’ function as credentials that elevate brief exposure over lifelong experience. Sociological work on tourism and knowledge production has long shown how proximity without consequence can produce confidence without accountability (Urry 1990). In public discourse, the Experiential Tourist often frames exile narratives as outdated, exaggerated, or disconnected from present realities, implying that their observations carry more epistemic weight than sustained survival under repression.
- **The Moral Universalist.** The Moral Universalist enters public debates armed with abstract ethical principles that are applied uniformly across contexts. This profile frequently invokes human rights, justice, or moral consistency while minimizing historical and social specificity. Exiles’ responses to political change are assessed against universal standards rather than situated realities, and deviations from these standards are interpreted as moral failure. Scholars of moral reasoning have observed that universalism can obscure power relations when applied without attention to lived context (Benhabib 2004). Within this framework, exile testimony is treated as morally partial or emotionally compromised, while the Moral Universalist positions themselves as ethically superior through distance and abstraction. For this external actor, authority is claimed not through lived experience, but through perceived moral neutrality.
- **The Performative Ally.** The Performative Ally centres ethical self-presentation within public discourse, often through symbolic gestures of solidarity, declarative statements, or visible alignment with popular causes. While appearing supportive of exiles, this profile prioritizes maintaining a coherent moral identity over engaging with the substance of exile testimony. Exile voices are welcomed when they affirm existing and acceptable narratives, but are sidelined when they complicate them. Scholars of performative politics have documented how allyship can reproduce hierarchies when visibility replaces listening (Ahmed 2012). In this configuration, exiles become instruments for moral display rather than authoritative speakers, and interpretive control remains firmly with the ally.
- **The Paternalistic Humanitarian.** The Paternalistic Humanitarian supports exiles primarily as victims rather than as agents. This profile derives moral satisfaction from offering compassion, advocacy, or protection, often positioning exiles as passive recipients of care. Exiles are welcomed when they appear grateful, silent, or apolitical, but are met with discomfort or resistance when they express political judgement, joy, or authority. Sociological analyses of humanitarianism have shown how paternalism can coexist with empathy while still reinforcing power asymmetries (Ticktin 2011). In public discourse, this profile implicitly asserts superiority by treating exile agency as inappropriate or unseemly, thereby delegitimizing exile voices once they move beyond suffering.
- **The Comfortably Critical.** The Comfortably Critical occupies a position of safety from which sharp judgements are delivered without material risk. This profile emphasizes nuance, scepticism, and critique, often demanding complexity from exiles while avoiding direct confrontation with authoritarian power itself. Exile responses are scrutinized for emotional excess or political simplicity, while the critic’s own distance is framed as intellectual virtue. Scholars of critique have noted how detachment can function as a form of authority when insulated from consequence (Boltanski 2011). In this configuration, exile testimony is treated as insufficiently analytical, and authority is reassigned to those least affected by the realities under discussion (i.e., outsiders).

For clarity, while similar typological approaches may appear across discourse, sociological, and exile studies, the profiles developed here are grounded in recurrent interactional patterns observed across public

discourse, including social media exchanges, professional interactions, and mediated debate. They are intended as analytic tools for the purpose of this manuscript and the concept of *exilic epistemic displacement*, not exhaustive classifications or empirically generalizable categories.

Taken together, these six discursive positions produce predictable effects within public debates. Exiles' accounts may not be silenced outright, but they are displaced as authoritative interpretations of lived reality. Further, exiles' emotional responses, such as relief, grief, or hope, are reframed as bias, immaturity, or political naivety rather than as legitimate responses to repression. Historical memory becomes framed as subjective or unreliable, while outsiders' interpretations are treated as neutral, principled, or intellectually superior by virtue of their privilege, distance, credentials, or moral posture. These outcomes refer specifically to the erosion of exile credibility, the delegitimization of exile affect, and the reassignment of interpretive authority to external actors. In many cases, outsiders may believe they are engaging ethically or critically; yet, the interaction of epistemic distance, structural privilege, and discursive authority produces the displacement of exile voices and generates epistemic harm, even in the absence of deliberate intent. These patterns indicate that contestation in exile discourse arises from recurring discursive practices through which outsiders assert interpretive authority over exiles, rather than from interpersonal misunderstanding or communicative failure.

Discursive and linguistic mechanisms of invalidation

Public debates involving exiles increasingly unfold within transnational and digital spaces, where authority is negotiated through visibility, framing, repetition, and networked amplification rather than through proximity to lived experience. In such environments, interpretive authority often accrues to those who speak confidently, abstractly, and repeatedly, regardless of their experiential relationship to the issues under discussion. Scholarship on exiles has noted how digital and transnational platforms facilitate the circulation of dominant narratives while marginalizing dissenting or experiential voices, particularly when those voices challenge established interpretive frameworks (Grenier 2025). These spaces reward macro-level commentary that appears analytically sophisticated, while rendering micro-level testimony situational, emotional, or insufficiently rigorous. By macro-level discourse, I refer to commentary that centres political figures, ideologies, regimes, institutions, and geopolitical abstractions, often organized around named political actors and systems, whereas micro-level discourse refers to accounts grounded in lived experience, including personal histories, family narratives, and everyday consequences of repression. The result is not the absence of exile voices, but their subordination within discursive hierarchies that privilege abstraction over lived experience. In this section, I examine how such hierarchies are reproduced through specific linguistic and interactional mechanisms that collectively function to invalidate exiles' authority.

One central mechanism through which exile authority is displaced is what I call *scale shifting*, whereby outsiders consistently situate debates at the macro level of ideology, political figures and systems, or geopolitical alignment, while exiles speak from the micro level of lived experience and personal (hi)stories. Outsiders often frame discussions around 'isms' concepts (e.g., colonialism, capitalism, imperialism) or state sovereignty, treating these abstractions as the proper objects of analysis. Exiles, by contrast, tend to introduce narratives grounded in family (hi)stories, personal loss, fear, and everyday survival under authoritarian rule. Within public discourse, macro-level commentary is routinely treated as serious, intellectual, and legitimate, while micro-level testimony is cast as anecdotal or overly emotional. Sociological and philosophical work has demonstrated that distance from lived consequences is frequently mistaken for analytical objectivity, granting authority to those insulated from harm (i.e., outsiders) while diminishing the credibility of those who have directly experienced it (i.e., exiles) (Bourdieu 1991; Medina 2013). In this way, scale shifting becomes a tool of epistemic hierarchy, where macro-level abstraction is elevated as insight and micro-level lived experience is relegated to the margins.

A closely related mechanism is what I call *ideological recentering through moral abstraction*, which occurs when outsiders respond to exile testimony by reasserting their own political frameworks rather than engaging the substance of lived accounts. When exiles introduce narratives of suffering, displacement, or trauma, the conversation immediately shifts into a micro-level space grounded in experience, memory, and consequence. In these moments, outsiders lose epistemic footing, as they lack the experiential and narrative resources that confer authority within such micro-level registers. To restore discursive balance, they redirect

the exchange towards macro-level ideological vocabularies that align with their own commitments. At this juncture, abstract moral frameworks are invoked (e.g., appeals to ‘isms’ or abstract notions of ‘historical context’) not as openings for dialogue, but as linguistic strategies that re-establish interpretive authority and symbolic control. Scholars of moral reasoning have shown that universalist frameworks, when detached from lived context, can function as forms of abstraction that obscure power relations rather than clarify them (Benhabib 2004; Fanon 1963). Sociological analyses of language and symbolic power further demonstrate how such abstraction confers legitimacy on those positioned to speak fluently within dominant discursive registers, while marginalizing experiential forms of knowledge (Bourdieu 1991; Mantilla-Blanco 2025). In these exchanges, ideological fluency is treated as evidence of moral seriousness, while exile knowledge is reframed as partial, biased, or insufficiently rigorous. The effect is a recentralization of outsider perspectives (i.e., macro-level discourses) that ranges from sidelining exile (or micro-level) narratives to, in some cases, explicitly denying their credibility.

These dynamics become particularly visible in moments of heightened political rupture, such as the escalation of public debate surrounding Nicolás Maduro’s rule in Venezuela following widely circulated announcements and contested reports of his removal from power and U.S. involvement in that process. Regardless of how these events are ultimately interpreted or adjudicated, the moment itself generated intense global discussion about authoritarianism, intervention, and sovereignty, prompting exiles from the region to speak publicly in order to centre the lived consequences of Maduro’s governance for those still in the country as well as for families forced into exile. In the exchanges illustrated in Figures 1, 2, and 3, a Cuban exile’s effort to redirect discussion towards the experiences of people affected by authoritarian rule in Venezuela (Figure 1) is met with repeated returns to macro-level commentary by outsiders (Figure 2). Even when prompted to address specific harms, family histories, or personal consequences (Figure 3), outsiders reintroduce ideological language that abstracts away from individual suffering, repeatedly recentring the exchange around macro-level moral and political frameworks. When such probing persists, as shown in Figure 3, interactional breakdown often follows; that is, outsiders either disengage entirely (as shown in Figure 3) or shift to personal critique that reframes the exile interlocutor as unreasonable,

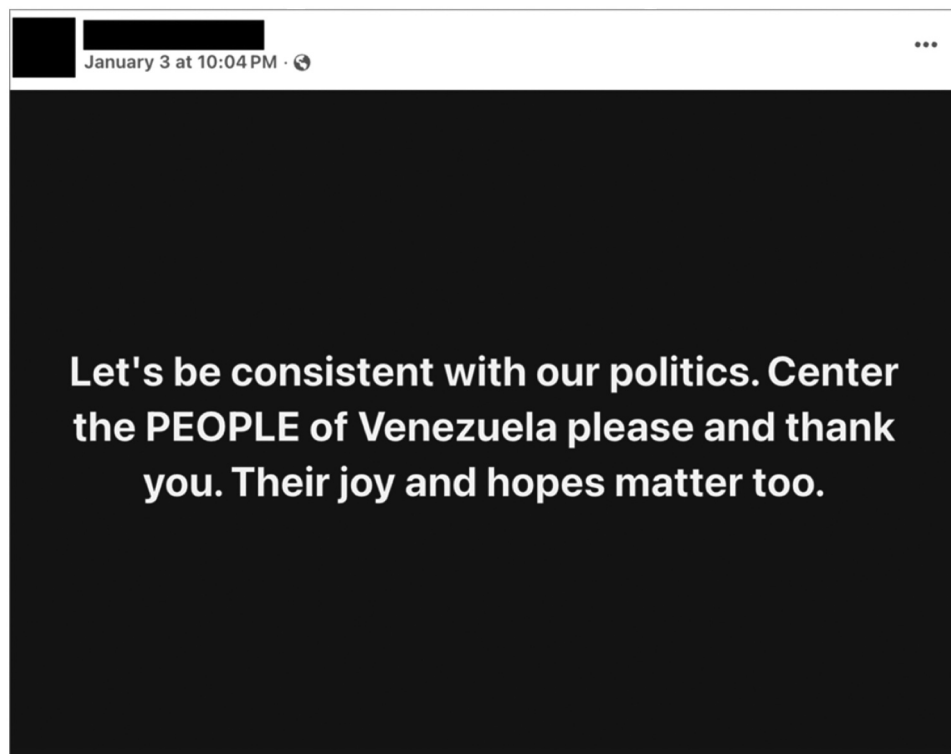


Figure 1. Cuban exile attempt to recenter lived experience and collective affect. Note: This screenshot was taken at a public social media post by a Cuban exile calling for the centring of Venezuelan people’s experiences, joy, and hopes during heightened political debate.



Figure 2. Macro-level reframing through sovereignty and ideological abstraction. Note: Responses that redirect discussion towards geopolitical sovereignty, U.S. intervention, and ideological consistency, sidelining micro-level testimony.

emotional, or intellectually deficient. From a discourse-analytic perspective, this pattern does not reflect a failure of communication but a struggle over interpretive authority. Critical discourse scholars have shown that conversational breakdowns frequently occur when dominant speakers (in this case, outsiders) lose control over framing, prompting strategies of withdrawal or delegitimation that function to reassert power within interaction (Fairclough 1995; van Dijk 2009).

Another recurring mechanism of invalidation operates through *devaluation by comparison*, whereby exile testimony is displaced through the invocation of other historical events, geopolitical contexts, or distant struggles. In these moments, exile narratives are not directly rejected but are decentred through analogies that shift moral and political attention elsewhere, as illustrated in Figure 2 by references to Puerto Rico and Palestine, which are beyond the conversation about Venezuelan exiles. Rather than engaging with the specificity of the Venezuelan exile experience, in this case, outsiders reframe the conversation by situating suffering within broader comparative frames that implicitly downplay its epistemic relevance. This move does not explicitly deny harm, but it relocates it within a hierarchy of comparison that renders exile testimony less urgent, less central, or less actionable. Linguistic anthropologists have shown how such comparative framing operates as a powerful ideological mechanism, producing erasure and re-scaling that reorganize whose experiences count as politically meaningful (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992; Irvine



Figure 3. Interactional breakdown following persistent micro-level probing. Note: Escalation from ideological reframing to disengagement or delegitimation when the exile interlocutor continues to press the outsider for recognition of lived consequences.

and Gal 2000). From an interactional perspective, these comparisons function to restore outsider authority by shifting the terms of engagement away from micro-level registers (i.e., lived experiences) and back towards abstract moral reasoning (i.e., macro-level registers). As a result, exile pain may be acknowledged rhetorically while being stripped of its capacity to ground claims, demands, or recognition within the discourse.

These discursive mechanisms operate without the need for overt denial or explicit hostility. In the discursive pattern theorized here, exile voices are not necessarily silenced outright. Instead, they are redirected through scale shifting, recentered through ideological abstraction, relativized through comparison, or rendered analytically subordinate through interactional breakdown. Across these moments, outsiders seek to assert and maintain authority not by disputing the existence of exile suffering, but by reshaping the terms under which that suffering can be recognized, evaluated, or acted upon. What emerges is a patterned reorganization of discursive space in which experiential knowledge is consistently displaced by abstraction, and moral or political fluency substitutes for proximity to lived consequence. Importantly, these shifts also function to restore discursive balance for external actors, who seek to regain epistemic footing when conversation returns to macro-level registers that privilege abstraction, ideology, and analytical distance over lived experience. Within the transnational and digital environments examined here, these practices operate cumulatively to relocate interpretive authority away from exiles and towards external actors who assert and retain control over framing, relevance, and legitimacy, despite their privileged distance. It is through these everyday processes of discursive rebalancing, rather than through explicit acts of silencing, that exilic epistemic displacement is produced and sustained.

Conditional recognition and the displacement of exile agency

The discursive dynamics identified throughout this manuscript are sustained by a broader regime of conditional recognition that structures how exile voices are received, evaluated, and constrained in public discourse. Exiles are frequently welcomed when they appear vulnerable, grateful, or primarily descriptive of

suffering, particularly when their testimony aligns with humanitarian narratives that position them as objects of care rather than as authoritative interpreters (Ticktin 2011; Welfens 2023). In such moments, outsiders may grant exile voices visibility and moral attention, but without ceding epistemic authority. Recognition takes the form of sympathy; that is, affective acknowledgement without the transfer of interpretive power or decision-making authority. As Fricker (2007) emphasizes, epistemic injustice does not require silencing; it can persist whenever credibility is systematically withheld or unevenly distributed. Within exile discourse, suffering may be acknowledged by outsiders, yet authority over meaning remains with outsiders who occupy structurally privileged positions and therefore retain control over framing, evaluation, and relevance.

A critical shift occurs when exiles move from being treated as objects of sympathy to subjects of interpretation; that is, when exiles express emotions, judgements, or interpretations that exceed the narrow affective range deemed acceptable by outsiders, which includes political agency. Exile agency becomes visible when exiles articulate political judgements, contest dominant frames, or interpret moments of political rupture based on lived consequence rather than abstract principle. At this point, exile voices no longer function as illustrative evidence within an outsider's narrative; they begin to assert epistemic standing grounded in lived experience, a form of knowledge that outsiders do not possess and to which they lack direct epistemic access. This shift destabilizes discursive hierarchies maintained by outsiders, who equate their own distance from repression with objectivity while treating proximity to harm as bias. Medina's (2013) account of epistemic arrogance helps explain why this moment provokes resistance. When socially privileged actors (i.e., outsiders) mistake insulation from harm for analytical rigour, experience-based authority appears threatening rather than informative. Exile agency thus becomes a site of epistemic contestation not because it lacks coherence, but because it disrupts established credibility economies and challenges the discursive comfort and authority of those positioned as interpreters rather than subjects of consequence.

This resistance is especially pronounced when exiles express joy, relief, or hope. While exile suffering can be accommodated within humanitarian frameworks that preserve outsiders' moral positioning – for example, when exiles recount deprivation, loss, or trauma in ways that confirm narratives of rescue, benevolence, or warning – exile joy disrupts those frameworks by asserting that exiles possess the standing to name political change as meaningful. Expressions of relief refuse the role of perpetual victimhood and signal interpretive autonomy rooted in lived history (Reinprecht 2023; Said 2000). In response, outsiders often recenter discourse around macro-level moral and political abstractions, thereby displacing exile affect as epistemically suspect (Benhabib 2004; Bourdieu 1991). Dryzek and Niemeyer's (2024) concept of expressive epistemic injustice is particularly useful here, as it captures how injustice can persist even when speech is formally permitted. Exiles may be invited to speak and even acknowledged emotionally, yet the discursive conditions of debate – macro-level framing, ideological primacy, and abstract moral evaluation – prevent their experiences from functioning as legitimate grounds for interpretation or judgement.

Expectations of gratitude play a central role in sustaining this conditional recognition from exiles towards host societies, international actors, and external audiences positioned as benefactors or moral arbiters. Exiles are frequently positioned as morally indebted, and gratitude becomes an implicit requirement for legitimacy (Menezes 2025). As D'Cruz (2014) argues, gratitude in displacement contexts operates as a political obligation that constrains critique and regulates acceptable speech. Recent philosophical work has shown that such expectations produce epistemic harm (Menezes 2025), undermining exiles' credibility by framing them as beneficiaries rather than as knowers whose judgements carry authority. Within public discourse, this logic may allow for the acknowledgement of exile suffering while restricting exile agency. Gratitude thus functions as a moral technology that enables recognition without transferring epistemic power, while simultaneously reinforcing exiles' liminal social positioning as neither full insiders nor legitimate authorities anywhere. This condition of epistemic limbo resonates with the characterization of exile as a state of enduring suspension and non-belonging, marked by estrangement and the continual negotiation of one's place, family, culture, voice, and authority (Eglāja-Kristone 2015; Said 2000).

Scholarship on vulnerability and deservingness further clarifies why exile agency becomes so fraught. Welfens (2023) concept of promising victimhood captures how displaced populations are required to demonstrate vulnerability in the present while signalling future compliance, adaptability, or assimilability.

Exiles are expected to be sufficiently harmed to merit attention, yet sufficiently malleable to avoid posing epistemic or political disruption. Within this logic, sustained joy, political confidence, or interpretive authority violates expectations of victimhood by reasserting full personhood and agency. Although Welfens (2023) framework was developed in the context of refugee resettlement, it is directly applicable to exile discourse. Exiles are recognized when they perform vulnerability in legible ways but encounter resistance when they assert interpretive authority that exceeds the role of grateful victim. As Welfens (2023) shows, vulnerability functions not as a neutral descriptor, but as a regulatory category that disciplines agency and delimits recognition. In this sense, the denial of exile joy and authority is, therefore, not incidental but integral to maintaining exiles in a diminished epistemic position.

Paternalistic forms of recognition further reinforce these limits of epistemic authority and political subjectivity. Exiles are often granted legitimacy when they remain deferential, silent, or affectively contained, but are disciplined when they express political judgement or challenge dominant narratives. Ticktin (2011) demonstrates how humanitarian reason combines care with control, extending compassion while preserving asymmetries of authority. In exile discourse, this paternalism manifests through language that frames agentic exile speech as excessive, divisive, or irrational (Ahmed 2012; Medina 2013). Mantilla-Blanco's (2025) distinction between credentialed expertise and experience-based expertise further clarifies how exile knowledge is filtered through dominant discursive registers in order to be deemed legitimate. These registers – academic abstraction, ideological fluency, and macro-level political framing – are registers that outsiders inhabit as a matter of structural privilege. By design and default, exiles are not and will not be considered dominant, as dominance is tied to positions outsiders experience as natural sites of authority, even when unacknowledged. When exiles refuse to fit their experiences into those accepted by outsiders and their dominant registers, interactional breakdown often follows in the form of withdrawal, moral correction, or delegitimation.

Conditional acceptance, thus, explains why the discursive mechanisms I identify throughout the manuscript recur so predictably. Scale shifting, ideological recentering through moral abstraction, devaluation by comparison, and interactional breakdown are not isolated rhetorical habits; they are discursive strategies through which interpretive authority is re-stabilized when exile agency threatens outsider dominance. As illustrated in the figures discussed earlier, exile attempts to recenter their lived consequences are repeatedly met with abstraction, moral correction, or disengagement once epistemic authority is contested. The issue, then, is not simply that exile voices are displaced in discourse, but that exile agency itself becomes the trigger for displacement. Exiles are tolerated as objects of sympathy but challenged as subjects of interpretation. In the next section, I formalize this insight by specifying what exilic epistemic displacement is, how it emerges under these conditions of recognition, and how it differs from disagreements within exile communities.

Exilic epistemic displacement: theoretical synthesis

Building from the preceding sections, this manuscript theorizes *exilic epistemic displacement* as a patterned social and discursive process observable in authoritarian and post-authoritarian discourses. Exilic epistemic displacement refers to the systematic relocation of interpretive authority from those who have endured authoritarian repression (i.e., exiles) to external observers (i.e., outsiders) who lack lived experience of that repression, particularly during moments of political rupture. In such moments, exiles' emotional responses, political judgements, and historical memory are rendered suspect, excessive, or morally compromised, while outsiders' interpretations are treated as more objective, principled, or analytically sound. Crucially, this process does not depend on the silencing of exile voices. Exiles may speak, be heard, and even be amplified. What is displaced is not speech itself, but authority over meaning. Exilic epistemic displacement thus names a form of epistemic injustice in which credibility, relevance, and interpretive power are systematically reassigned away from those with experiential knowledge and towards those positioned at a privileged distance from harm, consequences, and firsthand trauma. By identifying this process, I seek to elucidate how epistemic injustice operates not only through denial or exclusion but through the reorganization of discursive authority within contemporary public discourse.

The concept of exilic epistemic displacement emerges from the cumulative analysis developed across the manuscript. The positionality section established exile as an epistemic condition shaped by coercion, memory, and proximity to repression rather than as a biographical identity or humanitarian

status. The engagement with epistemic injustice theory demonstrated how testimonial, hermeneutical, and expressive forms of injustice structure whose knowledge is recognized as authoritative. The analysis of outsider profiles illustrated how interpretive authority is claimed through structural privilege, ideological fluency, and distance from consequence. The examination of discursive mechanisms showed how scale shifting, ideological recentering through moral abstraction, devaluation by comparison, and interactional breakdown function to subordinate experiential knowledge without explicit denial. Finally, the analysis of conditional recognition demonstrated how exile voices are welcomed only when they conform to scripts of vulnerability, gratitude, victimhood, or political quietude, and are resisted once agency or interpretive autonomy is asserted. Considered relationally, these elements show that exilic epistemic displacement functions as a patterned outcome of ordinary discursive practices rather than as an exceptional event, an interpersonal failure, or an isolated act of misrecognition.

It is important to clarify the scope of this theorization because exile is not a homogeneous epistemic position. Exiles are differently situated by race, gender, class, language, legal status, nationality, institutional location, and access to media or academic platforms, and these differences shape whose exile testimony is heard, circulated, ignored, or silenced. The concept of exilic epistemic displacement is therefore not intended to account for all epistemic harms experienced by exiles, nor to deny that some exiles face forms of exclusion more severe than displacement. Rather, it names a specific relational pattern in which exile voices that do enter public discourse are deprived of interpretive authority by external actors who claim authority from positions of distance, privilege, and insulation from consequence.

Additionally, the concept of exilic epistemic displacement that I introduce in this manuscript does not concern itself with debates within exile communities, nor with disagreements between exiles and regime supporters from the same national context. Such intra-community disputes involve distinct dynamics of identity, loyalty, and power that warrant independent analysis and theorization. Rather, in this manuscript, I sought to examine the relational dynamics between exiles and outsiders. The concept of exilic epistemic displacement does not describe ordinary political disagreement or conflicting opinions, but asymmetries in epistemic recognition: who, between exiles and outsiders, is entitled to interpret political change, name its meaning, and evaluate its emotional significance. By specifying these boundaries, the concept avoids overextension while clarifying its analytic contribution. Exilic epistemic displacement names a specific configuration of power, knowledge, and recognition that arises when exiles' experiential authority is overridden by outsiders' abstraction, and when exile agency itself becomes the trigger for epistemic marginalization.

Conclusion: implications for exile studies and ethical listening

This manuscript has argued that contemporary public reactions to authoritarian political change often reproduce epistemic injustice by displacing the voices of exiles—i.e., those who have lived under authoritarian regimes – from their position as primary knowers of their own histories. By theorizing the concept of *exilic epistemic displacement*, the paper contributes to discourse studies, social epistemology, and exile scholarship by naming a patterned social and discursive process through which interpretive authority is relocated away from those with lived experience of authoritarian repression and towards external actors positioned at a privileged and safe distance from its consequences. Importantly, these dynamics do not arise from ignorance alone, but from discursive regimes of recognition that reward abstraction, ideological fluency, and moral distance while constraining experiential authority. In this sense, exilic epistemic displacement also illuminates what Medina (2013) describes as forms of active ignorance, in which subjects, here understood as outsiders in exile-outsider encounters, remain unaware of the limits and situatedness of their own epistemic perspectives.

The analytic lens developed here is especially relevant in a global context marked by recurrent authoritarian crises, contested political rupture, and intensified transnational debate, where exile communities are frequently called upon to speak yet routinely denied epistemic authority when doing so. For scholars, journalists, activists, and policymakers, this theorization underscores that ethical listening requires more than allowing speech or expressing sympathy; it requires attending to how interpretive authority is distributed and being willing to relinquish epistemic control when others bear the consequences of political

power. Re-centring exile voices, as argued here, is not an act of generosity, sympathy, or moral accommodation, but a matter of epistemic justice—one that becomes increasingly urgent in a world where political rupture is no longer exceptional, but recurrent.

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