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**The reproduction of ignorance in
normative political theory**
An intersectional methodological critique

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ABSTRACT

Social ignorance is widely recognised in scholarly literatures as a substantive epistemic practice, stemming from dominant socioepistemic standpoints that cultivate systematic insensitivities to historical structures of oppression. The thesis mobilises these scholarly insights to illuminate the reproduction of social ignorance in certain strands of normative political theory. Specifically, I argue that within these strands of normative political theory, their methodological practices, and the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning them, reproduce social ignorance. Although much normative political theorising proclaims a commitment to social justice, I show that these methodological practices make injustice difficult to perceive. I identify: i) a widespread methodological insensitivity to historical structures of oppression; ii) the deployment of theoretically reductive representations of sociopolitical reality; and iii) a lack of reflexivity, as indicative of the ontological and epistemological engines behind the reproduction of social ignorance. The thesis seeks to remedy the problem of social ignorance in normative political theory through a turn to intersectionality. I develop an understanding of intersectionality as a social justice-oriented paradigm for guiding reflections on knowledge cultivation, and for thinking through the possibilities of nurturing non-ignorant methodological practices. I distil a series of intersectional methodological injunctions that can transform normative theorising and orient it towards identifying and contesting social ignorance. Having identified the need for normative political theory to attend to the ethical and political implications of its methodological practices, I make the case for an intersectional, historically grounded, critical, and reflexive ethos to theorising. To animate these theoretical arguments, the thesis interrogates forms of social ignorance stemming from two distinct axes of sociopolitical power, racism and ableism. Drawing on a cross-section of critical literatures on race and disability respectively, I introduce different intersectional approaches to methodological practice that can enable the process of identifying and contesting social ignorance. I curate a preliminary range of conceptual tools and practices that illuminate intersectional paths to non-ignorant theorising, and show how these tools enable the identification of social ignorance in several major, influential works of normative political theory.

LAY SUMMARY

Social ignorance is widely recognised in scholarly literatures as a substantive epistemic practice. Instead of an incidental gap in knowledge, social ignorance is a strategic failure or refusal to know, in the interests of maintaining the status-quo. Social ignorance is sustained by relations of oppression that suppress the knowledge and understanding of the sociopolitical world developed by oppressed groups, and is specifically linked to ignorance of historical structures of oppression and their effects. This thesis draws on these insights to show how social ignorance is reproduced in certain strands of normative political theory. I argue that within these strands of normative political theory, social ignorance gets reproduced as a result of methodological decisions and practices regarding how normative problems are framed and addressed. Underpinning these decisions are assumptions about what the sociopolitical world is like and how its characteristics are known. Although much normative theorising claims it is committed to social justice, I show that normative political theory's methodological practices in fact make injustice difficult to perceive. I identify three problems: i) a widespread insensitivity to relations of oppression; ii) the use of theoretically reductive representations of sociopolitical reality; and iii) a lack of reflexivity with respect to the decisions that orient normative research. I argue that these problems appear in normative political theory's methodological practices. Moreover, I show that they are shaped by underlying assumptions about what the sociopolitical world is like and how it is known, and that these assumptions are the key engines behind the reproduction of social ignorance. The thesis aims to solve the problem of social ignorance in normative political theory by turning to intersectionality, a way of thinking that understands distinct relations of oppression as mutually informing one another in the ways they shape sociopolitical contexts. I develop an understanding of intersectionality as a social-justice-oriented theoretical framework that can guide reflections on knowledge cultivation and help to think through the possibilities of nurturing methodological practices that contest rather than reproduce social ignorance. I present a series of intersectional methodological recommendations that can transform normative theorising and orient it towards identifying and contesting social ignorance. Having identified the need for normative political theory to attend to the ethical and political consequences of its methodological practices, I make the case

for an intersectional, historically grounded, critical, and reflexive approach to theorising. I illustrate these theoretical arguments with reference to two distinct axes of sociopolitical power, racism and ableism. I draw on a cross-section of critical scholarship on race and disability respectively. Building on these literatures, I introduce different intersectional approaches to methodological practice that can enable the process of identifying and contesting social ignorance. I draw together an initial range of conceptual tools and practices that help us identify intersectional paths to non-ignorant theorising, and show how these tools enable the identification of social ignorance in several major, influential works of normative political theory.

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|------------|
| 1. Ignorance, intersectionality, and normative political theory: an introduction | 9 |
| 1.1 Introduction | 9 |
| 1.2 Intersectionality | 15 |
| 1.3 The reproduction of ignorance in normative political theory..... | 23 |
| 1.4 Structure and outline of the thesis..... | 39 |
| 2. Intersectionality: a critical methodological framework..... | 43 |
| 2.1 Introduction..... | 43 |
| 2.2 Intersectional ontology: structure, history, relationality | 44 |
| 2.3 Intersectional epistemology: assembling the “facts” | 57 |
| 2.4 Intersectionality, social justice, and reflexivity | 69 |
| 2.5 Conclusion | 77 |
| Part 1 | 81 |
| 3. Contesting racial ignorance: a methodological toolkit | 84 |
| 3.1 Introduction | 84 |
| 3.2 Decoloniality, racial ignorance, and the conceptual repertoire of modernity..... | 87 |
| 3.3 Post-imperial states, race, and culture | 96 |
| 3.4 Settler colonial states, race, and culture | 104 |
| 3.5 Conclusion | 109 |
| 4. Racial ignorance in normative political theory: immigration and cultural difference..... | 114 |
| 4.1 Introduction | 114 |
| 4.2 David Miller’s liberal nationalism | 118 |
| 4.3 Will Kymlicka’s liberal multiculturalism..... | 127 |
| 4.4 Joseph Carens’ liberal cosmopolitanism | 136 |
| 4.5 Conclusion | 144 |
| Part 2 | 148 |
| 5. Contesting ableist ignorance: a methodological toolkit..... | 151 |
| 5.1 Introduction..... | 151 |
| 5.2 Mapping ableism..... | 153 |
| 5.3 The normate subject..... | 162 |
| 5.4 Crip futurity and transformative care..... | 167 |
| 5.5 Conclusion | 175 |
| 6. Ableist ignorance in normative political theory: disability and the moral subject | 178 |
| 6.1 Introduction | 178 |
| 6.2 Peter Singer’s practical ethics | 179 |

| | |
|--|------------|
| 6.3 <i>John Rawls' justice as fairness</i> | 189 |
| 6.4 <i>Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach</i> | 196 |
| 6.5 <i>Conclusion</i> | 202 |
| 7. Intersectional aspirations | 204 |
| Bibliography | 210 |

1. Ignorance, intersectionality, and normative political theory: an introduction

1.1 Introduction

This dissertation critically examines two interrelated questions concerning the politics of knowledge production in normative political theory (NPT). Centring its analysis on commonly deployed methodological tools and practices in NPT and the ontological and epistemological assumptions that sustain them, it first seeks to give an account of the mechanics behind the systematic reproduction of social ignorance in NPT; that is, the socioepistemic failure to recognise, acknowledge and theoretically account for systems of sociopolitical power and their effects. Its second, normative contribution is to develop possible avenues of theoretical intervention that challenge the reproduction of social ignorance, drawing on a paradigm animated by intersectional thought. This project makes a distinctive contribution both to methodological debates in NPT and to scholarly literatures on intersectional approaches to knowledge cultivation, through probing the epistemological conditions under which uninterrogated assumptions get reproduced through research processes.

In framing the project, I refer to practices of knowledge *cultivation*, rather than *production*. As Robbie Shilliam (2015, 24) puts it, to produce knowledge is to ‘lengthen, prolong or extend’, whereas cultivation conjures a practice of tilling, ‘to turn matter around and fold back on itself so as to rebind and encourage growth’ (2015, 25). The distinction is an important one in recognising that the project’s concern lies not in accumulation, or the supplementation of NPT’s existing repertoire of knowledge practices, but uprooting them, disrupting historically entrenched epistemological monocultures, and oxygenating the theoretical soil. Knowledge cultivation in this sense recalls bell hooks’ characterisation of knowledge as ‘a field in which we all labor’ (1994, 14), revealing its situated, spatial, and – not least – its relational dimensions (Pohlhaus Jr 2002). As I will discuss further in Chapter Two, the dissertation elucidates relations between different knowledge traditions, showing how, in concert, they can disrupt dominant epistemologies and foster practices of epistemic resistance against the reproduction of ignorance in normative theorising.

Taking as its point of departure the recognition that epistemological systems constitute a key site within which entrenched relations of oppression are reproduced, this metatheoretical project is composed both of a methodological analysis of how certain strands in NPT are implicated in oppressive epistemological structures through practices of social ignorance, and a normative rejoinder that seeks to offer “us” a way out of these practices. The “us” that animates this dissertation is constructed on the assumption of a shared political and ethical commitment to what Mihai (2019) refers to as *responsible and responsive theorising*, recognising the distinctive epistemic authority of the theorist and the attendant requirement of greater reflexivity and critical self-interrogation.¹ In this regard, my imagined community is composed predominantly of political theorists interested in exploring methodological questions from an explicitly politicised perspective. It extends, however, to readers who are seeking to engage with traditions of scholarship beyond those to which they have been habituated, as well as those amongst us who wish to ‘border-dwell’ or ‘world-travel’ responsibly and responsively, with attunement to the structural epistemological conditions that shape and constrain our crossings (Anzaldúa [1987] 2012; Lugones 1987; Mignolo 2012).

“*Normative political theory*” constitutes the dominant tradition of political theorising in Anglo-American academia (Finlayson 2015; Forrester 2019; see also McCumber 1996; Vincent 2004). Broadly characterised by its commitment to clarity and rigour in conceptual analysis and its emphasis on developing generalisable normative principles and theories to guide moral action with respect to a range of sociopolitical phenomena (List and Valentini 2016; McDermott 2008; Owen 2016; Wolff 2013), this particular tradition has been profoundly, but not exclusively, shaped by the liberal egalitarianism of John Rawls (1971, 1993). It is the post-war, Anglo-American liberal tradition this dissertation primarily concerns itself with,² identifying and drawing out the

¹ Montefiore (2009), for example, writes in relation to the political responsibility of intellectuals that ‘truthfulness’ – with which theorists must be concerned in order for their interventions to be politically salutary – is ‘political in as much as the nature and degree of truthfulness within a community is a major determinant of the nature of the public or political space in which the community conducts or contests its affairs’ (2009, 228). Getting the “facts” right (see 1.3.1 below) and having one’s epistemological house in order are then of distinctive importance to the enterprise of theorising and to the social and political role of the theorist. On the related question of reflexivity, see, for example Rose, (1997), Pillow (2003) and Doucet (2008), and the discussions below in 1.3.1 and 2.4.

² While “liberal” is not a straightforward term, and can denote a variable and contested historical and political terrain (see, for example, Bell 2014), I focus on some central features of the tradition, including the commitment to and pursuit of freedom and equality of persons, and the faculty of reason. See 1.3.1 for an account of how these commitments are expressed in methodological practice.

political and theoretical implications of the methodological similarities between dominant, liberal approaches to NPT, and cognate subdisciplines such as practical ethics.³ While I do not analyse all strands of normative theorising implicated in the reproduction of social ignorance, I draw on a range of examples of influential approaches in NPT to demonstrate the prevalence of the issue and the shared methodological practices and theoretical assumptions behind it. To target my analysis, I focus on race and ignorance (Chapter Four) and disability and ignorance (Chapter Six). As I will show over the course of the dissertation, the methodological approaches that characterise these strands of NPT, as well as related branches of contemporary practical ethics and political philosophy working in a broadly liberal tradition, have tended to produce normative theories that are insufficiently attuned to historical and deeply socially entrenched structures of oppression and exclusion. Moreover, as I will go on to argue, this lack of attunement is a fundamental driver behind the reproduction of *social ignorance* in NPT.

Social ignorance constitutes one of the conceptual lynchpins around which this dissertation is organised. Located in disciplinary terms at the intersection of critical philosophies of race and social epistemology, social ignorance is neither a benign effect of epistemic neglect nor a historical accident. Rather, it is a 'substantive epistemic practice' (Alcoff 2007, 39) through which failures to know act as systematic responses to historical and structural patterns and processes of oppression (Dotson 2014; Fricker 2007; Mills 1999, 2007; Pohlhaus Jr 2012). Ignorance on this basis is a 'social achievement with strategic value' (Steyn 2012, 8), because of its role in maintaining the status quo of power and privilege. Moreover, it is a central mechanism through which oppression is disavowed and consequently upheld, not only by individual agents, but structurally, in terms of the kinds of epistemic and interpretative resources that are available to differently situated persons and groups. Ignorance is 'actively produced for purposes of domination and exploitation' (Sullivan and Tuana 2007a, 1), through persistent processes of miscognition, misperception and misremembrance that calcify dominant visions, narratives, and imaginaries of a given sociopolitical domain. In this respect, the relationship between social ignorance and patterns of oppression and privilege becomes clear through the tendency for

³ See specifically Chapter Six, which evaluates the methodological practices of both John Rawls' egalitarian justice as fairness and Peter Singer's utilitarian practical ethics with respect to disability.

ignorance to manifest itself through sociopolitically and economically privileged standpoints.⁴ Such standpoints are typically desensitised to or otherwise unaware of the material and ideological effects of oppression (Medina 2013).⁵ Social ignorance, then, sustains oppression by removing from the purview of dominant standpoints those salient aspects of the sociopolitical world that are potentially disclosive of oppression and its workings.⁶ I return to this point from a methodological perspective in greater detail in 1.3.1.

Literature on social ignorance tends to focus on two key areas. On the one hand, much of the ignorance scholarship focuses on the ways in which ignorance manifests itself in the psyches and the cognitive, affective and perceptual habits of individuals implicated in sociopolitical systems of oppression (Fricker 2016; Medina 2013; Mills 2007; Pohlhaus Jr 2012; see also Martín 2021). On the other, a further portion of scholarship deals with the structural conditions of ignorance by focusing on the epistemological dimensions of structures of oppression, such as Eurocentrism, white supremacy or coloniality (Alcoff 2007, 2017, 2019; Mignolo 2012; Mills 2007; B. de S. Santos 2016, 2018; Sullivan and Tuana 2007b).⁷ In this dissertation, however, I focus on the reproduction of social ignorance in a specific academic field, NPT, as a result of its methodology, which I discuss at length in 1.3.1. By “methodology”, I refer to the overarching rationale that shapes a research process, incorporating, but not reducible to, the ontological and epistemological assumptions that undergird the research.⁸ Doing so, I argue, allows me to make a novel contribution in terms of investigating ways of identifying and resisting social ignorance as a substantive epistemic practice in normative theorising, and importantly, one that reproduces relations of sociopolitical and epistemic oppression (Dotson 2014). I understand this as especially salient for

⁴ In this respect, social ignorance bears a fundamental theoretical relation to the epistemic disadvantage that accrues to the bourgeoisie in Marxist thought, and to men in classic articulations of feminist standpoint epistemologies; see, for example, Hartsock (1983).

⁵ Accordingly, social ignorance must be addressed in several stages: sensitising epistemically disadvantaged and socially privileged agents to their ignorance; attuning them to the limitations of their conventional modes of knowledge acquisition and validation to the extent that these exclude non-dominant or marginalised forms; and finally, attuning them to the epistemic agency and epistemologies of the oppressed. See, for example, Medina (2013); Ortega (2006).

⁶ I use the term “sociopolitical world” interchangeably with “sociopolitical reality”, acknowledging that the task of interpreting and representing that world or reality is always a political one, and never a straightforward issue of simply selecting the correct facts. See 1.3.1 for an expanded discussion.

⁷ Other contributions complicate this distinction and weave elements of the structural epistemological and historical with the cognitive and affective dimensions of ignorance; see, for example, Bailey (2021).

⁸ My understandings of ontology, epistemology and methodology build on those in Harding (1987).

NPT as a discipline self-consciously oriented towards social justice. The project therefore develops a potential path towards the cultivation of scholarship that is reflexively attuned to the historical and political weight of the practices it deploys, and the implication of these practices in the reproduction or contestation of relations of oppression.

To develop this alternative methodological proposition, the dissertation draws on *intersectionality*, both as a paradigm for orienting critical reflections on knowledge cultivation in normative theorising and for thinking through the possibilities of nurturing non-ignorant methodological practices. Intersectionality names a ‘way of thinking’ (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013, 795) that recognises the irreducibility and simultaneity of distinct relations of oppression, and pays heed to the ontological and epistemological complexity yielded by their mutual imbrication. This dissertation shows that intersectionality is well suited for contending with the problem of social ignorance precisely because it reveals, rather than obscures, the ontological and epistemological nexus through which various forms of oppression are reproduced, sociopolitically and epistemically. In other words, intersectionality draws attention to the ways in which situated knowledges shape perceptions of the world, whilst challenging dominant epistemologies and the privileges they confer on dominantly situated knowers, themes I address in greater detail in Chapter Two. In this work, I use the notion of dominant epistemologies to refer to those epistemological systems and epistemic strategies that systematically marginalise, exclude, or silence epistemic agents and epistemologies of historically oppressed cultures, groups, or otherwise salient categories of being.

Concretely, I use insights from intersectional thought and theorising to argue for the cultivation of a methodological ethos that foregrounds historical, contextual and structural attunement, sensitisation to the imbrication of knowledge with historically constituted forms of power, and practices of critical reflexivity. Intersectionality guides this ethos by methodologically attuning its practitioners to the complexity of sociopolitical reality. It shows that relations of power are interwoven but fundamentally irreducible to one another and foregrounds the profound effects of political and ethical relationality on processes of knowledge cultivation (Hoagland 2007; see also Collins 2000; Ortega 2006). By offering a framework that reveals the significance of

relationality, intersectionality demonstrates the representational inadequacies, political inefficacies, and ethical limitations of both “view from nowhere” analyses that purport to circumvent the situatedness of knowledge (Haraway 1988; Code 1991), and “single axis” analyses that reify a particular social category as foundational.⁹ In other words, it shows us that both “single axis” and “view from nowhere” analyses of the world are inadequate, particularly when the conceptual repertoires and standpoints developed in these analyses systematically distort historically salient sociopolitical phenomena. It offers instead the theoretical insight and an ethical orientation with the capacity to guide methodological practice towards critical engagement with the historical and sociopolitical conditions under which normative theorising takes place.

To animate this set of critical and normative interventions, the dissertation draws on a range of literatures and scholarly traditions that share in the project of cultivating practices of resistance to consolidated configurations of epistemological power, such as the dominant standpoint of liberalism in NPT. It works from an account of intersectionality that valorises contributions and developments forged across different political and historical contexts of oppression, and uses the notion of a ‘resistant knowledge project’ (Collins 2019) to coordinate and synthesise contributions from historically and sociologically grounded interventions in, for example, Black and women of colour feminisms, critical disability studies, postcolonial and decolonial thought and Indigenous studies. Bringing into dialogue insights from these literatures allows me to assemble a methodological “toolkit” that can help identify and contest social ignorance in NPT. I do so by drawing attention to the kinds of conceptual repertoires, standpoints, and ethical commitments that sustain academic fields and approaches that are attuned to the persistence of Eurocentric, racist, bourgeois, ableist and heteropatriarchal hegemonies in knowledge production.

In the remainder of this introductory chapter, I set out some key features of intersectionality as a transformative project in the academy before turning to the reasons it should travel to NPT, namely, the persistent methodological reproduction of social ignorance. I then address the field of NPT in greater detail and introduce the

⁹ For instructive discussions of identifying and contesting single-axis thinking from a critical intersectional perspective, see, for example, May (2014) or Hancock (2016), and my discussion in 2.3.

main theoretical sites underpinning its methodological practices. The chapter closes with the structure of the dissertation and an outline of each chapter's arguments.

1.2 Intersectionality

Intersectionality, I argue in this dissertation, can help uproot methodological practices that sustain the reproduction of social ignorance if its insights can 'travel' to, as well as gain purchase and uptake in, NPT. To think through the process of intersectionality traveling to NPT, I draw on the idea of *traveling theory*. Originally articulated by postcolonial theorist Edward Said (1983), traveling theory elucidates the process of transformation undergone by a theory as it is adapted and reinterpreted across time and space. Pertinent to the purposes at hand, traveling theory calls attention to the risk of the depoliticisation of radical scholarship as it reaches new political, institutional, disciplinary, or geopolitical environs. I discuss the specifics of what necessitates such a movement in the following section, but first, it is important to account for where intersectionality comes from and why the dynamics of travel matter in the academy with respect to epistemic justice and the politics of knowledge production.

According to Said's analysis, as they travel, theories can be 'appropriated' and thereby depoliticised through uncritical and dogmatic repetition (Said 1983, 247; see also Bilge 2013; Lutz 2014). A theory which begins as a 'radical' intervention becomes a 'commodity to be consumed; no longer seen as a product of activist scholarship or connected to emancipatory knowledge, it can circulate as a sign of prestige in an elitist, neoliberal landscape' (Mohanty 2013, 971). These questions matter for intersectionality because of the speed and the extent of its sojourns around the academy, both geopolitically and across disciplinary boundaries (K. Davis 2020; John 2015; Knapp 2005; Lewis 2013; Lutz 2014; Lykke 2020; Menon 2015; Salem 2018). Such movements are now an inherent feature of the globalised knowledge economy in which intersectionality circulates (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013; Nash 2019, chap. 2),¹⁰ meaning that while intersectionality's emergence as an academic

¹⁰ Intersectionality's propensity to travel is neither a happy accident, nor necessarily intrinsic to the power of the term itself, but a result of the configuration of the (geo)politics of academic knowledge production/cultivation and of disciplinary epistemologies (Nash 2016). However, Salem (2018, 2), for example, argues that intersectionality's travels are testament to its power as a concept. With Nash, I think it is important to recognise that intersectionality's intrinsic conceptual appeal is not the *only* factor at play.

'buzzword' (K. Davis 2008) indicates that it has attained scholarly gravitas, some have argued that its popularisation has served to undermine its political commitments, particularly to theorising and foregrounding Black women's experiences of oppression (Alexander-Floyd 2012; Bilge 2013; Jordan-Zachery 2013; Lewis 2009; May 2014; Salem 2018). These complex and contested debates are constitutive of the highly politicised academic context within which I suggest that intersectionality can and should 'travel' to NPT.

As Said later reflected, while there is no guarantee that a theory will remain an adequate tool for critical analysis across contexts, the possibility remains that it may yet refine its critical edge as it travels (Said 2002). It is with this reflection in mind that I aim to show in the dissertation that intersectionality's radical potential is neither already exhausted, nor necessarily extinguished, by extending its interventions to NPT. In order to show how intersectionality's critical edge can be sustained as it evolves, in this dissertation I follow Collins (2019) and argue for the conceptualisation of an intersectional *paradigm*. A paradigm offers an overarching framework for thinking through the ontological and epistemological commitments and methodological practices that guide research (Collins 2019, 2000, 252; Harding 1987).¹¹ The idea of intersectionality as a paradigm is particularly useful because, in the Kuhnian sense, a paradigm is an interpretative structure that shapes how knowledge is conceptualised, acquired, and comprehended (Kuhn 1996). As paradigms shift, the individuals, fields, disciplines, and epistemologies that shift with them must undergo processes of learning and unlearning, attaining familiarity and fluency with different ways of thinking. In line with Said's appraisal of traveling theory, there is space for dynamism and movement as these transformations occur. Crucially, thinking of intersectionality as a paradigm allows for the thinking together of different traditions and strands of critical and oppositional scholarship, which share some key theoretical and political commitments in relation to contesting dominant epistemologies.

Envisaging an intersectional paradigm allows me to depart from the narrative that intersectionality *travels* from a singular point of origin, and to draw attention instead to its multiplicitous points of emergence and development. This move facilitates

¹¹ Chapter Two provides an exposition of the *theoretical* contours of an intersectional paradigm along the dimensions of ontology, epistemology, and ethics.

engagement with a range of critical and oppositional scholarly traditions, each with their own distinctive historical, political, and intellectual trajectory of development, a task I embark on more concretely in Chapters Three and Five. For now, I turn to the historical, political, and intellectual contours of the intersectional paradigm I draw on in order to structure my interventions.¹² My aim in the mapping I undertake in this section is to give a snapshot of intersectionality's richness, depth, complexity, and open-endedness, in line with its politics of transformation. Importantly, however, these avenues all serve to unsettle the presumption of a foundational moment and linear trajectory of development and refinement in the academy, as well as recognising and revaluing work that can be retrospectively imagined as part of intersectionality's expanded theoretical universe.¹³ In relation to traveling theory, this reconstruction also opens up a conversation about the ways in which intersectionality has already travelled in the academy, and sets the scene for its thinking through its "arrival" in NPT.

The familiar story of intersectionality frequently retold in academic literature is that it was "coined" by Kimberlé Crenshaw in her landmark (1989) essay in race-critical legal scholarship, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics'. While Crenshaw introduced the terminology of intersectionality, animated by the metaphor of the crossroads of race and gender at which the Black female subject is located, the key political and theoretical ideas behind intersectionality have deeper roots, particularly in Black feminist thought (Brah and Phoenix 2004; Collins 2000; Collins and Bilge 2020; Hancock 2016; May 2012). Scholars such as Vivian May (2012) and Brittney Cooper (2017) have drawn attention to the work of Anna Julia Cooper, a Black feminist intellectual, educator, and activist, writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, while Hancock (2016) makes the case for interpreting the writings

¹² Scholars have increasingly partaken in the construction of intellectual histories of intersectionality (see, for example, Collins and Bilge 2016; Hancock 2016; May 2015; Nash 2019), which bring into view a lengthier historical arc of activist, artistic, and academic labour. I acknowledge the intellectual value of these reconstructive projects whilst remaining cautious regarding the notions of completeness or correctness they sometimes imply (on this point see Nash 2019, chap. 2).

¹³ I take these and related projects of an 'expanded' (Collins 2017) universe of intersectional theorising to be importantly different to those critiqued by Bilge (2013), who is suspicious of the inauguration of predominantly white academic feminisms as significant contributors to the intersectional canon. Such attributions by contemporary white European feminists undermine intersectionality's antiracist history and commitments and leave intact structural anti-Blackness in the politics of academic knowledge cultivation.

of nineteenth-century activist and free Black woman Maria Stewart as part of an intersectional ensemble. bell hooks' (1982) *ain't I a woman* reprises the words of the abolitionist Sojourner Truth, conjuring the intersection of Blackness and womanhood Truth foregrounded in her 1851 speech on abolition and women's rights, *Ain't I a Woman*. Afro-Caribbean Communist activist and intellectual Claudia Jones, organising and writing in the early to mid-twentieth century, was an early proponent of the triple oppression of race, class, and gender; Boyce Davies (2008) indicates her influence on Frances Beal (1969), who introduced the term 'double jeopardy' for the intersection of race and gender, and on Angela Davis' (1983) work on race, class, imperialism and gender.

This preliminary mapping suggests that intersectional thinking is not the invention of a single author, but the product of decades of collective intellectual labour, struggle, and dialogue. The collective participation of a range of intellectuals and activists, suggests that intersectionality is much broader than its presentation in the academy as a singular concept or a theory, or its use as a heuristic or metaphor. Simultaneously, they situate contemporary interventions within a broader political and historical constellation, allowing us to grasp, for example, what it is about Crenshaw's coining that had such resonance in (and beyond) academic circles (see Collins and Bilge 2016, 53; see also Carastathis 2016).¹⁴ In this sense, while Crenshaw's publication constitutes a pivotal moment as it marks intersectionality's formal entry into academic discourse (Collins and Bilge 2016, 53), it would be reductive to describe it as intersectionality's point of origin.¹⁵ With these initial mappings in mind, I now turn to two interrelated ways that intersectionality as a *paradigm* or *way of thinking* helps us make sense of some of the traveling debates it is entangled in. First, I consider the ways in which its complex genealogy foregrounds its coalitional horizons. Second, I

¹⁴ Davis (2008) suggests intersectionality's popularity amongst women's and gender studies scholars is attributable to its addressing 'the most central theoretical and normative concern within feminist scholarship: namely, the acknowledgement of differences among women' (2008, 70), thus situating intersectionality as uniquely able to 'save' women's studies from its tendency to centre white women (Nash 2019).

¹⁵ Nikol Alexander-Floyd (2012) thus distinguishes between intersectionality as an 'idea' – Crenshaw's terminology and metaphor of the intersection, and an 'ideograph' – a less clearly defined but recognisable term that represents the broader political impetus behind theorising different axes of social division as simultaneous to 'to examine and redress the oppressive forces that have constrained the lives of black women in particular and women of color more generally' (2012, 4). In envisaging intersectionality as a paradigm and interpretative framework, I take forward this ideographic sense.

examine different iterations of intersectional ways of thinking across geopolitical locations.¹⁶

First, thinking of intersectionality as a paradigm broadens the horizons within which intersectionality's genealogy proliferates. Black feminist theorising has resonated and often found coalition with Third World, transnational, Indigenous and other women of colour feminisms, both within and beyond the academy (Carastathis 2016; Falcón and Nash 2015; Hancock 2016; May 2015; Mohanty 2013; Nash 2019), delineating an initial dynamic of travel.¹⁷ Radical activist groups such as Combahee River Collective and their *Black Feminist Statement* (1979) and the *Black Woman's Manifesto* from the Third World Women's Alliance (1970) highlight the context of radical social activism of the 1970s in which Black, women of colour and Third World feminists theorised the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class, as well as imperialism and nationalism. *This Bridge Called My Back* (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983) presented writing by 'radical women of color' that traversed the terrain between art and theory, with contributions based on personal experience and narrative as providing powerful insights into academic and quotidian understandings of racism, hetero/sexism, settler colonialism and nationalism. The radical and transformative agendas of academic-activists and artist-theorists such as Audre Lorde ([1984] 2007, 2017) and Gloria Anzaldúa ([1987] 2012) are key examples of a broad trajectory of intersectional intellectual activity that laid the epistemological, ontological, and normative groundwork for later interventions. This makes apparent not only the academic dialogues that have forged intersectional thought, but the social movement practices and experiences that have, in concrete terms, laid the foundations of intersectional praxis.

Second, this means a broader perspective on intersectionality's geopolitical "origins". While intersectionality is historically associated with a contextually specific set of struggles in the USA, its paradigmatic quality and its political orientation have understandably led to its purchase in geopolitical contexts beyond the USA. Researchers from and working in different geopolitical locations, including India (Chakravarti 2018; Rege 1998), the UK (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983, 1996a), and

¹⁶ I address the theoretical dimensions of these debates at greater length in 2.2 and 2.3.

¹⁷ For a more comprehensive account of intersectionality's intellectual history see Hancock (2016).

Argentina/ Latin America (Lugones 1994, 2007), for example, have contributed analyses and elaborations of ways of thinking and theorising that, whilst emerging from different contexts and trajectories of thought, can be considered intersectional. The analytical purchase of intersectionality is, in this respect, partly due to its emphasis on solidarity, relationality and interconnectedness, both ontologically and ethically. This does not mean that as a framework, intersectionality simply transfers from one context to another without shifts and changes; rather, there is flexibility in terms of the precise permutations of salient historical, sociopolitical, and material relations, a point I discuss further in 2.2. Intersectionality therefore constitutes a useful paradigmatic framework in the context of this dissertation for thinking through the ways in which conceptual tools and practices from different resistant knowledge traditions can complement one another as part of a broader methodological toolkit to transform dominant epistemologies.

The configurations of power relations to which these scholars draw attention differ from the race-class-gender triad most commonly articulated in the US context, and as such, raise important questions regarding the locations and the configurations of power that intersectionality can illuminate. They point to the flexibility and transmutability of intersectionality, while keeping a sharp focus on how different constellations of power constrain and marginalise, and confer different patterns of privilege and oppression across historical and geopolitical contexts.¹⁸ Crucially, these movements suggest that there is an absence of straightforward directionality from, for instance, the USA to the UK. As a 'way of thinking', different geopolitical articulations of intersectionality converge because of the ways in which the *convergence* of different systems of power acts as the *catalyst* for theorising these systems as synchronous, yet distinct in their effects (Collins and Bilge 2016, 53). This is significant because it helps us to make sense of how intersectionality is often thought of as being a theory about how *multiple* marginalities cohere to forge a distinctive politics of visibility, social justice, and solidarity. Reading intersectionality as being intimately connected to the

¹⁸ I borrow the terminology of *constellations* from Walter Benjamin ([1928] 1998). 'Constellations arise out of the conjunction of certain factors that are *significant* for a situation, a process, a (textual) structure; they result *from the presence and the arrangement or grouping* of certain factors or elements' (Krauß 2011, 439; *emphasis added*); thus, in mapping relations of power as *constellations*, I do not assume that their pattern is a matter of fixity; rather the act of specifying a constellation is always a situated act of interpretation.

politics of multiplicitous social locations (Phoenix in Ali et al. 2010) is helpful in enabling us to make the connections between different articulations of intersectional thought. What these rich and multifaceted trajectories enable us to grasp is the importance of grappling with the complex and dynamic currents that comprise the contexts out of which intersectional thought has developed. These currents elicit us to recognise that intersectional thought is not the product of a singular, linear development that can be added in order to diversify or complexify NPT. Rather, it is a way of thinking emergent from resistance and opposition to complex, interwoven oppressions.

Third, thinking of intersectionality as a paradigm is useful in terms of understanding and evaluating its disciplinary crossings. As noted above, some scholars have expressed anger, frustration, and discomfort about the appropriation and depoliticisation of intersectionality as it has travelled to new disciplinary environs¹⁹. Specifically, many draw attention to its misinterpretation and misapplication by white feminist academics in Gender and Women's studies (Bilge 2013; Knapp 2005; Lewis 2009, 2013; Mügge et al. 2018; Salem 2018), and the concomitant reproduction of both the material and epistemic exclusion of Black women from feminist intellectual spaces, a process Lewis (2013) refers to as 'unsafe travel'. These critiques point to concerns about intersectionality's appropriation for academic cache without due attention to the full ramifications of its theoretical commitments or its ethical and political orientation. I address the normative dimensions of appropriation in depth in 2.4, at which point I also incorporate a reflexive discussion of my positionality in relation to adopting an intersectional standpoint. For now, I want to provide a brief account of how thinking of intersectionality as a paradigm can help to guide reflections on transdisciplinary travel.

One avenue for these reflections emerges through the distinction between paradigms, theories, methods, and methodologies. By conceptualising intersectionality as a paradigm of thought, rather than a singular method, methodology, or theory, it becomes possible to recognise the importance of ongoing dialogue regarding its scope, applications, and objectives. In other words, there may not be a single "right" way to do intersectional research, for example, but rather many different methods and

¹⁹ For an analysis of these affective orientations in relation to the (mis)appropriation of intersectionality, see Nash (2019).

methodologies that fit within an intersectional paradigm. The important aspect, however, is that there are certain essential ingredients that characterise intersectionality as a paradigm: reflexivity and accountability in conjunction with its core ontological and epistemological insights (Collins 2019, 49-50). In this sense, disagreements about intersectionality's appropriation can be conducted within a framework that recognises that there is no singular, correct way to do intersectional research, whilst critically engaging with the ways that some disciplines, theoretical approaches, or methodological traditions attempt to take up intersectional thought. As Cho et al. put it, intersectionality has 'travelled into spaces and discourses that are themselves constituted by power relations that are far from transparent' (2013, 789). By taking a critical and reflexive orientation, intersectional thinking can analyse and interrogate the power relations shaping the context into which it arrives. Accordingly, it becomes evident why intersectionality's travel to and uptake in NPT is propitious: NPT is a historically constituted field of enquiry, and the standpoint from which normative theorising is consequently articulated is constructed by and replicative of specific constellations of power, a point I discuss at length below in 1.3.1.

To sum up, intersectionality's travel and uptake across a range of contexts makes it a dynamic, living approach to theorising. In this sense, even when disciplinary crossings appear to conclude with a failure of intersectional thinking, it is possible to draw on Said's meta-analytical perspective of traveling theory to grasp the possibility of deepening critical purchase through the process of charting failures as well as successes. This approach to intersectionality as traveling theory chimes with Collins' (2019) conceptualisation of intersectionality as critical social theory 'in the making': that is, a critical and reflexive approach to theorising still in the process of establishing the contours and orientation of its praxis.

This introduction to the idea of an intersectional paradigm begins to indicate the temporal and spatial dimensions of intersectional theorising, enabling us to grasp its multiple points of emergence, elaboration and departure. An expanded perspective shows a history of intersectional theorising that attends to a wide array of power structures and the relations between them. This is a theme I take up in Chapter Two, examining intersectionality – following Collins (2019) – as a paradigm that draws on a multiplicity of different traditions of epistemic resistance to guide its praxis. On this

reading, intersectionality can help us to plot the co-ordinates of socioepistemic power that fix epistemologies of ignorance in place, and illuminate the necessary political conditions for overturning them. It is for these reasons that intersectionality's methodological insights should 'travel' to NPT. In 1.3.2, I will outline some of the ways in which intersectionality might act in transformative capacity to contest the reproduction of social ignorance in NPT. Meanwhile, the next section further situates the dissertation in relation to the problem of social ignorance, and explores the contours of the methodological practices that intersectionality will ultimately address.

1.3 The reproduction of ignorance in normative political theory

In this dissertation, I argue that one central vehicle through which dominant knowledge projects are reproduced in NPT is through the *methodological practices* that animate certain mainstream, liberal approach to normative theorising. I use the concept of a *methodological practice* here to denote a decision regarding how to theorise about or represent the sociopolitical world in the context of producing research, specifically for this project in the field of NPT. *Methodological practices*, then, are of critical importance in tracing the reproduction of social ignorance, because they sit at the intersection of the theorist's perception and understanding of the sociopolitical world and the reproduction of those perceptions in the process of theorising. In this section, I situate the concept of social ignorance in relation to the methodological focus of the dissertation. I then place NPT in methodological context, outlining my central argument in terms of the implication of NPT's theoretical standpoint and undergirding assumptions in the reproduction of ignorance. I consider three central sites of methodological practice in NPT that mobilise these assumptions, and which animate my engagements with NPT across the remainder of the dissertation: *methodological individualism*, *fact insensitivity*, and *foreclosed reflexivity* (1.3.1). Finally, I outline the dissertation's rationale of contesting ignorance with recourse to intersectionality (1.3.2).

As I outlined in 1.1, social ignorance is an epistemic strategy that facilitates the reproduction of dominant knowledge projects. In relation to methodological practices, social ignorance can flourish through the continued circulation of historically specific conceptual repertoires, which in turn reflect the interpretative frameworks and interests

of different systems of power (Alcoff 2017; Mills 1999, 2015; Simpican 2015). To help us grasp the ways in which social ignorance can be reproduced within specific institutions, domains, or fields, it is instructive to consider the concept of an *epistemology of ignorance*. Social epistemologists have used this term to describe a range of epistemological formations through which relations of oppression and exclusion are sustained by epistemic means. In this sense, ignorance and the epistemically negligent dispositions that sustain it reside ‘both in individuals *and in entire groups*’ – that is, ‘in social, cultural, and institutional attitudes and relations’ (Medina 2020, 251; *emphasis added*). Thus, whilst scholars such as Mills (1999, 2007) have examined the ways in which white people, as a historically privileged group, practice ignorance regarding racism and white supremacy, others such as Tuana (2006) and Crichton et. al (2017) have examined structural power relations pertaining to gender and expertise animating the women’s health movement, and to mental illness and epistemic credibility in psychiatric settings respectively. Similarly, epistemologies of ignorance have been used to characterise education settings, informing analyses of the ways in which curricula and pedagogical practices incorporate social ignorance and drawing attention to how decisions about what is taught function to obscure historic relations of power (Kuokkanen 2008; Schaeffli and Godlewska 2014). Uniting these analyses is the emphasis on understanding not only specific aspects of identity and positionality as conferring or sustaining ignorance, but the ways in which certain institutions, domains or fields of thought create and sustain the structural epistemological conditions in which ignorance gets reproduced.²⁰ While acknowledging the value of institutional analyses, in this thesis I focus on the methodological aspects of social ignorance, examining how NPT reproduces the conditions for ignorance to flourish within its disciplinary confines as a result of its conventional methodological practices.

Social epistemologists interested in the problem of ignorance have also theorised a range of epistemic dispositions that individual agents embody in order to variously reinforce, reproduce or resist ignorance (Bailey 2007; May 2014; Medina 2013;

²⁰ One effect of this shift in focus is that it recognises the ways in which individuals from distinct social locations are implicated in and participate in dominant knowledge practices to some degree, even if they participate in different ways, i.e., strategically, subversively, or in ways that consolidate rather than disrupt dominant practices.

Pohlhaus Jr 2012). Although my concern here is a disciplinary context, rather than the cognitive of affective states of individuals, I find it apposite to borrow Medina's (2013) concept of *insensitivity*, in order to index the ways in which ignorance is produced substantively through active – albeit often pre-reflective – dispositions or practices. *Insensitivity*, I maintain, can be *methodological*, in the sense that the theoretical assumptions undergirding normative theorising's methodological practices can render theorists *insensitive* to particular aspects of sociopolitical reality. Ignorance then gets reproduced through methodological insensitivity to those aspects of the sociopolitical world that are most aptly revealed through marginalised standpoints and the epistemic resources they generate. The deeper problem emerging, however, is when we are unaware of our insensitivity, thus producing a *meta-insensitivity*, or ignorance of our ignorance (Medina 2013, 75).²¹ *Meta-insensitivity* is a theme I take up in the dissertation to express the problem arising when NPT's methodological decisions fail to incorporate practices of reflexivity, removing them from the purview of accountability and critical scrutiny. I elaborate this argument below in 1.3.1.

Building on conceptualisations of epistemologies of ignorance as formations that can structure not only institutions, but fields of thought – inflecting what Mills refers to as 'doxastic architecture' (2007, 25), or the conventional structures of thought that get institutionally reproduced – I outline below in 1.3.1 (and develop further in Chapters Four and Six) an analysis of NPT's methodological practices that maps the reproduction of ignorance. I chart ignorance not as a direct result of faulty cognitive norms in individual agents, but as cultivated through collective participation in sanctioned and legitimised research practices that reproduce dominant knowledge projects. In this respect, I focus on ignorance as corresponding with *structural epistemological conditions* under which *particular standpoints and conceptual repertoires are methodologically reproduced and come to predominate*, rather than as collectivities of epistemic agents who make particular kinds of interventions resulting

²¹ *Insensitivity* is a more apt descriptor of the disposition through which ignorance is sustained than *blindness*, which is often deployed as a sensory metaphor to capture the failure to know. Blindness connotes a sensory absence, but, as Medina argues, insensitivity is 'not restricted to one sensory modality' and it 'can be easily extended to the non-perceptual' (2020, 250). This is significant because the epistemic deficiencies in question may 'go beyond our perceptual organs and concern our interpretative and conceptual capacities' (2020, 250). Moreover, the metaphorical substitution of blindness to denote a failure to know has ableist connotations (May and Ferri 2005), associating sensory impairment with discourses of lack or deficiency, and in the context of this dissertation, such associations are to be critically interrogated rather than replicated.

from their socioepistemic locations.²² As I will argue below, the key to this excavatory project – in reading what is absent, unstated, or assumed in NPT’s methodological practices – lies in making apparent and explicit the contours of the theoretical standpoint from which normative theorising is articulated. By identifying the constellations of power that authorise this standpoint and inform its animating assumptions, we equip ourselves with the initial tools necessary to disclose the theoretical mechanisms behind the reproduction of ignorance.

1.3.1 Normative political theory in methodological context

In 1.2, I stated that the *standpoint* from which normative theorising is articulated is constructed and sustained by the kinds of historically constituted power relations that intersectional social critique aims to identify, explain, and transform. In 1.3.1, my task is to elucidate the contours of this standpoint, drawing our focus to the undergirding ontological and epistemological assumptions from which it is constructed. As will become clear over the course of the dissertation, NPT’s *standpoint* and its undergirding theoretical assumptions are replicated across a range of ethicopolitical commitments expressed through normative theorising in the dominant liberal tradition. To show how and where social ignorance is reproduced in NPT, I will analyse the methodological practices of influential normative theorists with race (Chapter Four) and disability (Chapter Six) as the thematic foci. Before we turn our attention to NPT’s undergirding assumptions and the methodological practices they authorise, it is important to clarify how I understand *standpoint* and explain how I use it in the dissertation.

My use of standpoint in this project diverges from the understanding associated with standpoint epistemologies (see e.g., Collins 2000; Harding 1992; Narayan 2004). Rather than naming a positionality, or a structurally defined epistemic location, I use *standpoint* to refer to the ontological and epistemological “scaffolding” that undergirds and facilitates the articulation of knowledge claims from a particular theoretical perspective. Thinking about standpoint in this manner opens up possibilities for

²² Linda Martín Alcoff (2019) makes a similar point with respect to Eurocentrism as an epistemology of ignorance. While I draw on Alcoff’s work to inform my analysis of Eurocentric Enlightenment assumptions in NPT, it is important to note that this dissertation, in addressing methodological practices in NPT, has a more circumscribed focus.

envisaging the ways in which historically constituted relations of power (re)produce entrenched and consolidated bodies of theoretical assumptions that govern how knowledge cultivation is carried out in particular disciplinary locales. In the dominant strands of NPT that I probe as part of this dissertation, I identify a common theoretical standpoint that is liberal in its ethicopolitical outlook, as well as “modern” and “Western”, or “Eurocentric”, in terms of its temporal horizon and geopolitical orientation. Standpoint as I use it here, however, extends beyond these discursive markers. It expressly incorporates the ontological and epistemological assumptions that characterise and specify “liberal”, “modern” and “Western”/“Eurocentric” as historically constituted discursive constructs.

Drawing on insights from intersectionality as a critical social theory, my dissertation critiques the dominant standpoint in NPT and the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning it: respectively, the individual subject in abstraction from its embeddedness in social relations, and the centrality of reason in liberal epistemology, to which NPT adheres. These ‘Enlightenment accounts of knowing subjects as faceless, disembodied spectators who hover over the Cartesian landscape’ (Bailey 1998, 28) are profoundly enmeshed in historically constituted constellations of power.²³ NPT’s *standpoint* is, then, a theoretical *and* a political device: far from being an objective or impartial vantage point from which the sociopolitical world is observed and represented, its disembodied spectator is a white European, bourgeois, male, and able-bodied subject. As I will go on to indicate below, NPT’s methodological practices reflect these ontological and epistemological assumptions, making them a key vehicle through which social ignorance is reproduced. Social ignorance enables us to explain the process through which certain strategic misperceptions of sociopolitical reality become dominant interpretations, as a result of the extent to which they serve the interests of historically sociopolitically privileged groups. The remainder of this section turns its attention to those dimensions of methodological practice in NPT through which I chart the reproduction of social ignorance. Through an examination of

²³ Critical appraisals of this theoretical state of affairs have emerged from a vast array of scholarly traditions, including various strands of feminist philosophy (e.g., Butler 2020; Jaggar 1983, 1989; Lloyd 1995; Plumwood 2005), decolonial thought (e.g., Castro-Gómez 2021; Mignolo 2011), postcolonial thought (e.g., E. C. Eze 2008; Mbembe 2001; Spivak 1994), critical race theory (e.g., Mills 1999, 2005), and critical disability studies (e.g., Campbell 2009; Erevelles 2011; Simplican 2015), as well as their disciplinary intersections.

methodological individualism, *fact insensitivity*, and *foreclosed reflexivity*, I foreground the analytical lynchpins around which my critiques of specific bodies of work in NPT in the rest of the dissertation are organised.

Methodological individualism

As a methodological practice that reflects NPT's theoretical assumptions about what kinds of entities populate the sociopolitical world and what those entities are like, methodological individualism is a site of central importance for examining the reproduction of social ignorance. Underpinned by the two assumptions introduced above, methodological individualism *operationalises* NPT's atomistic, 'idealized social ontology' (Mills 2005, 168), as well as NPT's commitment to reason as the defining capacity of the archetypal liberal subject.²⁴ In normative and explanatory terms, the individual is what *matters*, morally speaking, but it also constitutes the basic 'building block' through which sociopolitical phenomena can be explained and social problems addressed (see List and Spiekermann 2013; Wolff 2013, 798; Jaggard 1983, 33).

As a result of adopting an individualist ontology grounded in the notion of a "core self" that is free to exercise reason, the liberal strands of NPT I focus on in this project tend to neglect the ways in which historically and materially grounded relations of oppression (and their intersections) such as racism, heteropatriarchy, colonialism, capitalism or ableism, shape the subject and the sociopolitical world. Crucially, it is the theoretical neglect of relationality through which methodological individualism effectuates the reproduction of ignorance. By limiting its theoretical focus to the status and role of the individual subject, NPT fails to yield due consideration to the role of historically constituted relations of power as central features of the sociopolitical landscape, whether as phenomena that organise norms and institutions, or constitute subjects. Methodological individualism is the practice that enables NPT to theorise oppressed or marginalised identities as 'fixed natural characteristics' (Rawls 1999, 84), rather than as shifting, contextual social locations shaped by historically

²⁴ The liberal vision of a self-possessed, rational and autonomous subject is evident in Rawls's original position, as the Kantian-inspired originator and deliberator of the kinds of institutional arrangements that ought to regulate a society populated by prudentially self-interested individuals (Rawls 1999, 224–25; Freeman 2007, 285; see also Dworkin 1981). It is also apparent in *homo economicus*, the rational, self-interested agent of utilitarian thought.

contingent power relations. This disavowal is a central mechanism through which social ignorance is reproduced, as it removes from critical purview the exigencies of subject formation under conditions of oppression, whilst instead substituting a universalising account of subjectivity as undergirding the normative framework through which inequalities and injustices must be addressed. We will see these processes play out in Chapters Four and Six, in terms of how NPT makes sense of “cultural difference” in abstraction from relations of racism (4.2) and “disability” as a naturalised phenomenon (6.2) respectively.

It is important to note that in foregrounding methodological individualism, I do not mean to suggest that normative theorists reject the social facticity of entities such as nation-states or other collectives, or deny the possibility that non-individual entities might have normative significance. As we shall see in Chapter Four, for example, the normative positions of liberal nationalism (Miller 2000, 2016b) and liberal multiculturalism (Kymlicka 2003) emphasise the moral significance of nation-state formations whilst also retaining methodologically individualist assumptions about the nature and status of the liberal subject. Individualism remains as the ontological and epistemological anchor that holds in place liberalism’s normative framework, and its undergirding assumptions shape the ways in which theorists conceptualise and operationalise other central categories of analysis, such as cultural difference or the nation-state. It is NPT’s methodological practices with respect to the representation and conceptualisation of other central categories that compose the sociopolitical world that I now turn.

Fact insensitivity

The second site of methodological practice I address is *fact insensitivity*.²⁵ This practice pertains to the ways in which NPT’s theoretical standpoint selects certain aspects of the sociopolitical world over others as salient to its normative

²⁵ To clarify, by “facts”, I am referring to those aspects of the sociopolitical world about and *in relation to which* theorising is undertaken: we could understand one such “fact” in the liberal tradition as the existence of the rational sovereign subject, as discussed above with respect to methodological individualism. Alternatively, within critical paradigms, the “facts” include historical relations of power. Note that in the latter case, facticity does not entail immutability; rather, it is a means of directing our theoretical attention to the appropriate object of analysis. Perceptions of facticity, as well as what kinds of normative interventions are required in light of such perceptions, as I will elaborate in greater detail below, are functions of theoretical standpoint.

interventions.²⁶ In other words, we need a way to make sense of why some aspects of the sociopolitical world are conceptualised reductively, resulting in the reproduction of misrepresentations, whilst simultaneously, other aspects are systematically overlooked or neglected. Alongside a brief survey of existing critiques, I argue in this section that the underlying problem NPT needs to address is the way in which its standpoint naturalises and obfuscates various aspects of the sociopolitical world. In doing so, I map the relationship between methodological decisions regarding the representation of the sociopolitical world, the ontological and epistemological assumptions shaping these decisions, and the concomitant reproduction of social ignorance.

Existing methodological debates in NPT have considered whether theorising should proceed with attention to problems with the sociopolitical world as it is (e.g., Miller 2013; Sen 2010), if it should seek to articulate what the world *ought* to be like in the ideal case (e.g., Rawls 1999, 2005), or simply clarify the metaphysical status of the values that might guide such enterprises (e.g., Cohen 2008). The ensuing debate between ideal and non-ideal theory, and related critiques of NPT's idealisation of the sociopolitical world and abstraction from relations of power (Frye 1983; Geuss 2008; Honig 1993; Mills 1999; Mouffe 1993; Pateman 1988; Pateman and Mills 2007; Schwartzman 2006) speak to the unsettled question of what features of the sociopolitical world are taken as "facts" that constrain, irrelevancies that can be ignored, or pathologies that must be transcended. The question of which aspects of the sociopolitical world are naturalised as facts or overlooked as irrelevancies bears a direct relation to social ignorance, as the ontological and epistemological assumptions undergirding these distinctions are themselves manifestations of particular constellations of power. Rather than neutral parameters of a perceptual or observational exercise, assumptions about what kinds of entities and phenomena shape or populate the sociopolitical world and how these phenomena are or can be

²⁶ In existing methodological scholarship in NPT, the debate is often characterised as a standoff between 'ideal' and 'non-ideal' approaches (Erman and Möller 2013; Farrelly 2007; J. Knight 2014; Robeyns 2008; Stemplowska 2008; Valentini 2009, 2012), or, depending on the tradition of normative theorising being referenced, between 'moralist' and 'realist' approaches (Frazer 2010, 2018; Galston 2010; Jubb and Rossi 2015; Prinz and Rossi 2017; Rossi 2016, 2019; Sleat 2018; see also Geuss 2005, 2008; Williams 2005). While aspects of these debates organise my thinking here, I seek to map the characteristic features of the liberal NPT paradigm at a broader level of abstraction, in order to capture methodological commonalities that cut across not only the 'ideal'/'non-ideal' divide, but reach to methodological practices in practical ethics and moral philosophy also.

known, reflect the specific historical, geopolitical and ethicopolitical standpoint from which perceptions are leveraged.

Scholars addressing methodological concerns in NPT have picked out a range of techniques through which the assumptions of a liberal standpoint are mobilised. Notably, critics of dominant strands of NPT have focused on the practices of idealisation and abstraction (A. Knight 2018; Mills 2005; Schwartzman 2006; see also List and Valentini 2016; O'Neill 1987), objecting in both instances to the outcome of removing from theoretical purview the role of power in the sociopolitical world, and historically entrenched relations of oppression as central avenues through which power operates. Although distinct, the practices of abstraction and idealisation are often interwoven in practice. As Mills (2005) writes for example, the 'idealized cognitive sphere' of the liberal subject is a result of abstraction from the operative constellation of power under which assumptions about the nature of the white European bourgeois male subject are universalised.

However, the techniques of abstraction and idealisation alone do not capture the full complexity of *fact insensitivity*. Without an underlying account of what the salient "facts" are and how to access them, it is possible to dismiss critiques of abstraction and idealisation. Arguably, *all theorising* must abstract to some degree in order to be *theory*, rather than straightforward description. Similarly, O'Neill writes that 'abstraction is, taken strictly, unavoidable in all reasoning: no use of language can be fully determinate' (O'Neill 1987, 55). On the question of what counts as theory, Connell describes it as 'the moment in a larger social process of knowledge formation that transforms data or experience, always in some way moving *beyond the given*' (Connell 2014, 521; *emphasis added*). Of central importance is how this moving *beyond the given* takes place; in my understanding, judgements about what is given, or what can be taken for granted, fuel decisions about what to idealise or abstract from in NPT. On this basis, we need some account of how NPT is neglecting to *move beyond the given*, and instead reproducing the status quo of power. Again, Mills (2015) provides one of the most lucid analyses of this problem, articulating in terms of white supremacy and racism exactly what normative theorising operates in abstraction *from*, and the results of this practice. According to Mills, race and colonialism simply *are* the kinds of salient features of sociopolitical reality that normative theorists must attend to in order to

produce normative interventions that can challenge systemic racial oppression (see also Finlayson 2020). However, due to ‘the patterns of majoritarian group cognition influencing one as a member of a racially privileged white community inhabiting a white social and intellectual lifeworld’ (2015, 21), Mills regards the majority white discipline of NPT as systematically *desensitised* to race and colonialism.

Departing from Mills’ emphasis on *whiteness* as making some ‘epistemic and normative horizons [and] lines of theoretical development more “natural” and attractive than others’ (Mills 2015, 21), Stears (2008) poses the problem of NTP’s misrepresentations differently. He suggests that the culprit is the tendency, from a liberal theoretical standpoint, to remain overly *optimistic* about current sociopolitical conditions. As a result of a ‘set of unstated, untested, and infeasible assumptions about the actually existing world,’ liberal theory’s problem is not ‘its abstraction from reality but its faulty view of existing institutions and political practices’ (Stears in D. King 2008, 237). In this sense, the problem expands its emphasis from the ways in which predominantly white, Anglo-American normative theorists perceive and interpret the world, to the inefficacy of their shared theoretical standpoint for attending to salient aspects of sociopolitical reality. To help elucidate further the relationship between standpoint and the problem of fact insensitivity, I turn next to another distinct form of fact insensitivity, cherry-picking.

Mihai (2019) coins the practice of theoretical ‘cherry-picking’ to specify a further strand of methodological critique. Rather than abstracting or idealising, theorists who cherry-pick are *selective* about the “facts” they use to represent the world, deploying or omitting them strategically in ways that may help to reinforce pre-existing narratives. Although Mihai focuses on cherry-picking in the ‘realist’ political philosophy of David Miller, we will see over the course of the dissertation that cherry-picking can cut across different approaches to normative theorising. Importantly, it can appear in relation to historical circumstances, sociological analysis, or other forms of empirical evidence that are leveraged in support of the particular normative project in question. It is, moreover, different from abstraction and idealisation in the sense that it refers to a theoretical *choice* to prioritise some aspects of historical or sociological fact over others. This choice is reflected in Mihai’s critique of ‘realist cherry-picking’, whereby conceptualisations of central categories of normative analysis are presented in ways

that reinforce convenient narratives, rather than affording theorists the opportunity to scrutinise evidence and excavate inconvenient truths. However, cherry-picking as a methodological *choice* needn't indicate intentionality. Even where cherry-picking shades into distortion, obfuscation, mythologisation, sanitisation, or any misreporting otherwise of facts of historical or sociological record, such practices can remain pre-reflexive on the part of the theorist. The relation of cherry-picking to the other forms of methodological misrepresentation we have encountered, then, is that these practices all manifest themselves as a result of the underlying *standpoint* from which normative theorising is articulated.

NPT's theoretical standpoint, as discussed above, is constructed from its foundational ontological and epistemological assumptions: the liberal subject and the centrality of reason. In turn, these assumptions shape the methodological cultivation of *fact insensitivity*, and how it manifests itself in practices of theorising. Two important effects of *fact insensitivity* that can help us connect it to the methodological reproduction of social ignorance are naturalisation and obfuscation, which I now explore in relation to the ontological and epistemological assumptions of NPT's standpoint.

Ontologically, the absence of an analysis of contingent and historical relations power leads to methodological *fact insensitivity* through reliance on conceptualisations of central categories of analysis that do not reflect contingency, complexity, or interpretative indeterminacy. A recurring theme in the dissertation is how concepts get used in NPT in ways that naturalise certain aspects of the sociopolitical world, whilst neglecting or obfuscating others: for example, theorising cultural difference as an essentialised quality of individuals (4.2), or disability as a fixed identity in abstraction from historical, material and cultural context (6.2). I show how the decision to deploy a circumscribed, reductive, inaccurate or inadequate concept in normative theorising performs a series of obfuscations that leads to the reproduction of forms of social ignorance.

Epistemologically, the assumption of NPT's theoretical standpoint as embodying an Archimedean 'zero-point' (Castro-Gómez 2021; see also Haraway 1988) conceals the historical particularity of its theoretical scaffolding. In this process of concealment, further implicit assumptions about what counts as a legitimate source of knowledge or

mode of validation get reproduced uncritically. While the former pertains to the questions of who counts as an epistemic agent, and whether non-propositional forms of knowing are admissible in processes of theorising,²⁷ the latter relates to practices of analytic reasoning that animate how normative theorising is undertaken in dominant strands. Although different theorists considered in this dissertation recognise different kinds of evidence to be deployed in practices of normative reasoning, they share implicit assumptions regarding how such evidence is to be utilised in the pursuit of normative conclusions.²⁸ As a result, standpoint-typical assumptions about what knowledge is, where it comes from, and how it is validated become naturalised. Simultaneously, the constellations of power that produce and sustain these assumptions remain hidden from the scope of critical analysis.

In sum, I have argued here that NPT's theoretical standpoint authorises a range of techniques for representing the sociopolitical world, as a result of its ontological and epistemological assumptions. Because of these foundational assumptions about what kinds of phenomena compose the sociopolitical world, and "where", theoretically speaking, these phenomena are known *from*, normative theorising in its dominant, liberal articulations, persists in representing the sociopolitical world in analytically reductive ways. Whether the technique of idealisation, abstraction, optimistic misperception, or cherry-picking (or a combination thereof) is at play, the common result is the failure to attend to aspects of the sociopolitical world that ought to be understood as salient to NPT's interventions. In 2.3, I elaborate on the ways that an intersectional paradigm can guide our assumptions and methodological decisions, and sensitise us to the salient "facts". For the time being, however, I turn to the final methodological practice of this section, and examine the imbrication of *methodological individualism* and *fact insensitivity* with the problem of *foreclosed reflexivity*.

²⁷ Non-propositional knowledge is vast, and can include forms of 'implicit' knowledge (see Shotwell 2012, 2017), which incorporates the phenomenological and experiential: for example, embodied (Alcoff 2000; Al-Saji 2010a; Anzaldúa [1987] 2012; Ortega 2016; Young 1980) or affective (Bargetz 2015; Gorton 2007; Jaggar 1989) dimensions.

²⁸ For example, Rawls (1999) takes 'considered judgements' as the raw material of theorising, whilst Miller (2016b) draws on empirical evidence in the social sciences, and Singer (2011) similarly weights interests his utilitarian calculus. In each case, the input is taken to provide self-evidently correct representations of the sociopolitical world.

Foreclosed reflexivity

Strictly speaking, *foreclosed reflexivity* denotes the *absence* of a methodological practice, but it is this absence and its ramifications that I will explore here in the final section of NPT in methodological context. For the purposes of this dissertation, I use the concept of *reflexivity* to indicate the practice of critically “turning back” on one’s process of theorising (i.e., one’s methodology), in order to examine the dimensions and provenance of its theoretical standpoint, and the effects of that standpoint on how theorising is conducted. While ‘traditional theory brackets out the effects of power relations on its own practices’, ‘reflexivity is part of critical practice’ that interrogates how a theoretical standpoint’s ‘location within power relations shape those practices’ (Collins 2019, 64).²⁹ By first discussing *methodological individualism* and *fact insensitivity*, I have shown how NPT’s theoretical standpoint neglects analyses of historical relations of power, and their contingent but also deeply ingrained epistemological effects on how normative theorising is undertaken. Crucially, *because* of NPT’s ignorance of the theoretical import of these relations, and its ignorance with respect to how these relations inflect its representations of sociopolitical reality, it is left without the resources to identify the necessity of reflexivity in rectifying these lacunae. In short, learning how to practice reflexivity is, I submit, the cure for the methodological ignorance – and *meta-insensitivity* (see 1.3 above) – that accrues to NPT’s theoretical standpoint.

Reflexivity facilitates the critical appraisal of what one takes to be a “fact” and what kind of historical and sociological determinations such “facts” have. In the absence of reflexivity, practices of *methodological individualism and fact insensitivity*, and the constellations of power that shape and enable them, yield conceptualisations and representations of the sociopolitical world that get reproduced without critical attention to the extent to which they reinforce dominant frames and modes of understanding. In this respect, NPT naturalises, and universalises, its own standpoint: ontological and epistemological assumptions of Eurocentric, liberal modernity are naturalised and universalised, and the contingent relations of power that animate them remain

²⁹ My understanding of reflexivity is also informed here by feminist social science methodologies and the scholarship of, for example, Pillow (2003) and Rose (1997). Whilst these methodological reflections seek to situate the research subject within constellations of power, my focus here is the construction of the normative theorist’s theoretical standpoint. I undertake a more sustained engagement with my positionality in 2.4 below.

obfuscated. In contrast, a reflexive practice would entail ‘taking a position while recognizing the provisional nature of the positions we take’ (Collins 2019, 17). It is for these reasons that I have described the practice as *foreclosed* reflexivity, as the operative methodological practices and assumptions undergirding them systematically occlude the theoretical import of reflexivity. As such, NPT is broadly unable to grasp the ways in which its standpoint reflects particularistic conceptions of the sociopolitical world, which are manifestations of sociopolitical and epistemic *power*, rather than unmediated reflections of reality.

A methodologically sanctioned disinclination to draw on historically and sociologically informed material – academic or otherwise – and more specifically, on those resources cultivated from resistant knowledge traditions, helps to reproduce ignorance by sustaining the meta-insensitivity of NPT’s standpoint.³⁰ Without reflexivity, the naturalisation of NPT’s standpoint means that as a discipline, it continues to assume that that which lies beyond its own domain of concern is irrelevant to its practice, perhaps part of a natural academic “division of labour”.³¹ This dissertation argues, however, that encountering different conceptual resources and standpoints can both augment and disrupt our existing interpretative capacities, *sensitising* us to the limits of our own horizons. Engaging in a methodological practice of critically and reflexively evaluating the conceptual repertoires and standpoints we use enables reflection on the ontological and epistemological commitments we have brought to the table: in other words, a virtuous cycle that can short-circuit the tendency to remain methodologically desensitised to resources beyond conventional disciplinary purviews.

³⁰As scholar of decolonising research ethics Linda Tuhiwai Smith has argued, ‘Insularity protects a discipline from the ‘outside’, enabling communities of scholars to distance themselves from others and, in the more extreme forms, to absolve themselves of responsibility for what occurs in other branches of their discipline, in the academy and in the world’ (Tuhiwai Smith 2012, 71; see also Gordon 2011).

³¹ Important interventions have been made in NPT in order to attend to the nature of the relationship between normative work, ‘real politics’ and contributions from other branches of the social sciences: see especially Swift (2008), Swift and White (2008), and Wolff (2018). Whilst these interventions are timely and necessary, they leave unarticulated the rationale for treating certain kinds of empirical social scientific contributions as more urgent or pertinent to normative theorising, as opposed to, for instance, historic or contemporary subaltern-led social struggles such as anticolonial resistance, labour movements, or other oppositional sources foregrounding structural oppression and its effects on normative knowledge cultivation. For important exceptions to these trends, see, for example, Lu (2017), Deveaux (2018), and Nuti (2019); and for a critical examination of the ‘division of labour’ in political theory see Thaler (2012).

In this sense, curing the *meta-insensitivity* of NPT's theoretical standpoint is not simply a question of wider, cross-disciplinary reading – though of course, that is important. Rather, adopting a reflexive orientation towards one's own interpretative stance means developing the analytical tools to deconstruct the theoretical scaffolding of one's own standpoint to assess whether it is in fact participating in the production of false universals. Or, evaluating the contexts in which one's conceptual repertoires have developed and the uses for which they have been deployed in order to determine whether their application in contemporary theorising sustains distorted perceptions of the sociopolitical world. It is these practices that I demonstrate in greater detail over the course of the dissertation, through the compilation of a methodological “toolkit” that can better familiarise us with concepts and techniques that sensitise us to the complex imbrication of power and practices of theorising.

To recap, I've suggested that a principal issue with the ontological and epistemological assumptions animating normative theorising is that they remain implicit and unacknowledged and are thus removed from the purview of critical scrutiny. In this way, they function as part of an epistemology of ignorance, within which substantive beliefs regarding the legitimate structure of knowledge get reproduced whilst systematically failing to engage with the limitations of this structure. *Meta-insensitivity* to the conditions under which epistemological hegemony is reproduced means that the construction of NPT's theoretical standpoint typically goes uninterrogated. Before closing this chapter, the next section briefly outlines how intersectionality as a paradigm of critical thought can guide us in identifying meta-insensitivity and contesting the reproduction of social ignorance.

1.3.2 Contesting ignorance with intersectionality

So far, I have argued that NPT's theoretical standpoint sustains an epistemology of ignorance in the discipline, with its methodological practices acting as a key vehicle through which socially ignorant ontological and epistemological assumptions are reproduced. Over the course of the remaining chapters, I will show that thinking and theorising from an intersectional paradigm is crucial for the critical and transformative project of identifying and contesting social ignorance in NPT. This is so for four key reasons: first, intersectionality's relational attunement; second, its sensitivity to the

material and epistemological effects of historically grounded relations of power; third, its commitment to reflexive theorising that interrogates how relations of power shape its practices; and finally, the goal it shares with NPT for theorising and realising social justice.

First, underpinning intersectionality is a complex relational ontology. As I will discuss in greater detail in 2.2, intersectional theorising begins from the ontological assumption that relations of power manage and organise social contexts. Moreover, these relations shape one another, whilst also organising social categories relationally. Beginning from this theoretical assumption yields a practice of relational attunement that can guide NPT away from *methodological individualism*, and towards recognising how sociopolitical relations shape both subjects and contexts. The second advantage of an intersectional paradigm is that it offers ways of thinking about how normative theorists might become more *sensitised* to the material and epistemological effects of these relations, and the ways in which they organise the sociopolitical world. Intersectionality offers a distinctive theoretical window onto how relations of power shape knowledge, as historically contingent features of the sociopolitical world that organise perceptions and interpretations of that world leveraged from different socioepistemic locations. By learning to work from within an intersectional paradigm, NPT could cultivate ways of representing the sociopolitical world more adequately, as it is and how it might be, through methodologies that are attentive to the complex, intersectional situatedness of knowledge claims, and the ways in which historically defined constellations of power inform dominant conceptual repertoires.

Third, as a result of its *relational attunement* and *historical sensitivity*, an intersectional paradigm is well placed to direct a practice of *reflexivity*. As I outlined above, the methodological practices leveraged from NPT's theoretical standpoint foreclose reflexivity. This failure occurs at one level because NPT lacks the methodological resources to appropriately identify relations of oppression as salient features of the sociopolitical world, and to properly diagnose their effects. At a secondary level, NPT therefore also fails to identify how such relations shape its own standpoint and methodological practices. By adopting practices of *relational attunement* and *historical sensitivity*, however, NPT would be in a better position to cultivate a practice of *reflexivity*.

Finally, intersectionality and NPT share a commitment to social justice. However, as a result of the practices of *methodological individualism*, *fact insensitivity* and *foreclosed reflexivity*, NPT's methodological decisions and the theoretical assumptions underpinning them make *injustice* difficult to perceive. In other words, the "ends" of normative theorising are not adequately served by the conventional disciplinary means.³² Intersectionality can equip us with the methodological tools for transforming NPT's disciplinary conventions, as they appear in its dominant, liberal strands. As a paradigm comprised of core ontological and epistemological assumptions, which stand in a recursive relationship with its normative orientation towards social justice, intersectionality also provides a rationale for, and the tools to cultivate, a methodological ethos that can direct practices of theorising towards transformative and emancipatory ends. Chapter Two introduces us to these tools, but before that, the remaining section of this introductory chapter outlines how the overarching argument of the dissertation unfolds.

1.4 Structure and outline of the thesis

In order to explicate in full the contours of the paradigm that animates this dissertation, the next chapter dives into the theoretical underpinnings of intersectionality. Organised around the core analytical components of ontology, epistemology, and methodology that structure each part of the thesis, Chapter Two sets out a critical diagnostic framework that acts as a lens through which to analyse key texts in NPT and a benchmark against which I evaluate NPT's methodological practices. By engaging with postcolonial, decolonial and Black feminist debates about and approaches to intersectional theorising, I further underscore how *relational attunement* and *historical sensitivity*, in conjunction with *reflexivity*, can guard against the methodological reproduction of social ignorance.

The following four substantive chapters are divided into two pairs. The first (Chapters Three and Four) turns to the problem of *racial ignorance*, whilst the second (Chapters Five and Six) examines *ableist ignorance*. The first chapter of each pair begins by

³² One could argue, from a critical theoretical perspective, that it is an inherent feature of the liberal standpoint and its theoretical apparatus to preserve the status quo. For the purposes of this dissertation, I bracket this provocation and work from the assumption of a shared goal of social justice in order to direct my methodological interventions.

curating a range of conceptual tools drawn from resistant knowledge projects on race and disability respectively, and shows how these tools can sensitise normative theorists to the methodological reproduction of social ignorance. Chapters Three and Five foreground two interrelated points: first, how *race* and *disability* respectively are to be approached in line with an intersectional methodological framework; second, how social ignorance can be contested through these processes of theorising. Together, they compose the dissertation's "methodological toolkits" that, in conjunction with the guiding ethos outlined in Chapter Two, show one potential path towards non-ignorant theorising. In organising the chapters such that the reader encounters critical literatures at the beginning of each pair, my aim is to intervene in dominant norms of academic scholarship where canonical or mainstream approaches appear first, followed by critiques informed by alternative, marginalised standpoints. Pedagogically, this approach also aims to unsettle the expectations of the normative-theorist-as-reader. It takes the opportunity to begin with a reorientation towards potentially unfamiliar traditions and theoretical starting points, before showing in the second chapter of each pair how the conceptual tools these alternative traditions yield can help to disrupt the reproduction of social ignorance in NPT.

Drawing on the animating suppositions of the intersectional paradigm articulated in Chapter Two, and the conceptual repertoires delineated in Chapters Three and Five respectively, Chapters Four and Six undertake critiques of methodological practice in NPT along the dimensions of *methodological individualism*, *fact insensitivity*, and *foreclosed reflexivity*. These chapters are metatheoretical in character rather than substantive intersectional analyses of the topics under scrutiny. In this pairing, I show how the methodological practices used in order to reach normative conclusions sustain and reproduce epistemologies of ignorance in terms of race and disability respectively. With the insights of the conceptual tools elaborated in Chapters Three and Five, my critiques demonstrate the ways in which NPT's methodological practices yield inadequate explanatory and diagnostic accounts and normative responses to the substantive issues in question. This pair of chapters constitute an exercise in reading what is absent, unstated, or assumed, in order to work backwards to show the effects, at a metatheoretical and ethical level, of these lacunae.

More concretely, Chapter Three situates the idea of race within the political-epistemological project of modernity, and examines its contextually variant articulations across differing formations of statehood, including the post-imperial state and the settler colonial multicultural state. Drawing on decolonial thought, Indigenous studies, and anticolonial feminist phenomenology, the chapter seeks to reveal the logics of colonial racism and the ways in which they shape central analytical categories in NPT such as nation, culture, inclusion and belonging. Chapter Four then examines debates in the normative political theory of immigration and cultural difference. This decision affords me the opportunity to investigate the reproduction of social ignorance regarding race and colonialism. Coming at the problem of racial ignorance in NPT obliquely through the topical issues of immigration and cultural difference, I problematise the omission of an explicit grappling with race and colonialism in these debates. Accordingly, I address the ontological and epistemological assumptions undergirding three major theorists' engagements with the concept of cultural difference in the wake of imperialism and settler colonialism. Engaging several influential texts on immigration, culture and integration by David Miller, Will Kymlicka and Joseph Carens, I suggest that the assumptions and practices common to theorists with strikingly different ethical outlooks render their theorising similarly complicit with the reproduction of racial ignorance.

Chapter Five turns to the category of disability, and situates it in an intersectional constellation through engagement with a range of literatures that foreground disability as a historically and relationally constructed category. Specifically, I argue for the importance of understanding ableism as a distinctive power relation that is irreducible to class, race, or gender hierarchies, but profoundly entwined with them from an intersectional perspective. In addition to incorporating Chapter Three's insights from decolonial theorising, Chapter Five also draws on critical disability studies, feminist and queer theories of disability, and radical disability justice scholarship to foreground the emancipatory possibilities that emerge as a result of more complex and nuanced engagements with disability. The final substantive chapter investigates the reproduction of social ignorance about disability and ableism in political theorising. Focusing on the conceptual repertoires drawn on by Peter Singer, John Rawls and Martha Nussbaum, I argue that the ableist foundations underlying each theorist's work are borne out through their conceptions of moral subjectivity and disability, and

concomitantly, the absence of reflexivity regarding the effects of these selections. Moreover, the theorists share the contours of an ableist standpoint, from which disability is irrevocably located as an undesirable “other”. I suggest that social ignorance is actively produced in these theorists’ works by circumscribing the ethical and epistemic scope from which normative theorising should seek to inform itself about historical and intersectional forms of oppression and exclusion.

Finally, in my concluding chapter I provide a brief discussion of the methodological practices and ethos I understand as emerging from the analyses undertaken in Chapters Three to Six. I reflect on the overarching lessons the dissertation has sought to distil and reflect on the process and possibility of methodological transformation. With this overarching purpose in mind, I now turn to the development of the critical methodological framework that will animate the remainder of the dissertation.

2. Intersectionality: a critical methodological framework

2.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I made the case for interrogating NPT's methodological practices and their role in the reproduction of social ignorance. I introduced intersectionality as a *paradigm* that is well-placed to help us undertake this interrogation and begin to envision some methodological alternatives. In this chapter, I delineate the theoretical contours of this intersectional paradigm, with the objective of articulating a set of methodological injunctions that can upend epistemologies of ignorance and transform the constellations of power that underpin them. I organise the chapter around three key theoretical sites: *ontology*, *epistemology*, and *ethics*. The methodological discussions across these sites correspond to the three practices discussed in Chapter One: *methodological individualism*, *fact-insensitivity*, and *foreclosed reflexivity*. Together, these corresponding sites of methodological investigation structure the analyses that appear in Chapters Three to Six.

In elaborating the methodological foundation for the rest of the dissertation, this chapter performs two concrete functions. First, it outlines the theoretical contours of an intersectional paradigm, assembling resistant knowledge traditions to foreground the rich and multifaceted literatures composing a broader field of intersectional theorising: Collins' Black feminist thought (2000), Lugones' decolonial feminism (1994, 2007), Anthias and Yuval-Davis' sociological theory of social divisions (1993), postcolonial and transnational approaches (Mohanty 1984, 2003; Narayan 2004), and Dalit feminist standpoint (Rege 1998, 2000), to give an indicative summary. This practice of assembling resistant knowledge traditions represents a continuation of the discussion in 1.2, regarding intersectionality's multiplicitous trajectories of development and its 'travels' across different sites in the global academy. The ensuing 'paradigmatic' (Collins 2019, chap. 1) understanding of intersectionality's critical theoretical project helps ground Chapters Three and Five, where I curate methodological toolkits for challenging racial and ableist ignorance. Second, it maps out a critical diagnostic framework, setting out simultaneously a lens through which to analyse key texts in NPT, and a benchmark against which to evaluate their methodological assumptions and practices. In this way, the excursus below prepares us for Chapters Four and Six,

where I examine NPT's methodological practices in more detail and their implication in the reproduction of racial and ableist ignorance respectively.

In order to think through the contours of an intersectional paradigm, I examine in this chapter how intersectional theoretical elaborations across different disciplinary and geopolitical sites can yield indispensable theoretical tools for challenging dominant epistemologies. I build on existing work that draws attention to the potential synergies between intersectionality and post- and decolonial feminisms (Brah and Phoenix 2004; Carastathis 2016; Kerner 2017; Mollett 2017; Mollett and Faria 2018; Nash 2019; Pedwell 2010). The chapter integrates methodological insights from these developmentally distinct yet politically aligned approaches in order to delineate the contours of an intersectional paradigm that is sensitive to the complexities rendered by movements across geopolitical space as configured by relations of (neo)colonialism and imperialism.

The chapter unfolds as follows. The first section examines the ontological underpinnings of intersectionality, considering the conceptual tools at its disposal that render a distinctive account of the relationship between various relations of power. The second looks in greater detail at intersectionality's epistemological dimensions, drawing on insights from intersectionality as a resistant knowledge project and its relation to standpoint epistemology. The third section reflects on the ethicopolitical orientation associated with adopting an intersectional standpoint. I consider here debates on intersectionality's appropriation and detachment from its contexts of origin and link these to the imperative of methodological reflexivity. Concretely, I argue that, based on the "reality" carved out through an intersectional methodology, theorists must be critically reflexive with respect to the historical conditions that shape their socioepistemic and institutional locations, the relation between theorist (as subject) and topic (object) of enquiry, and their theoretical standpoint.

[2.2 Intersectional ontology: structure, history, relationality](#)

To help guide the theoretical engagements that unfold throughout the rest of the dissertation, I organise this section around the key methodological insights that form the ontological dimensions of my intersectional framework. Where appropriate, I

situate these insights in relation to relevant debates in intersectionality scholarship, showing where disputes and synergies emerge and how these can be productively engaged for the insights of this project. Ontology here refers to what a theorist carves out as sociopolitical “reality”. Given that, in my understanding, intersectionality refers to a project that challenges and transforms historically entrenched processes and patterns of oppression and marginalisation, we must be clear about what methodological tools are required for this undertaking. The section therefore considers what kinds of empirical engagements – be they historical, sociological, or geopolitical – substantiate an intersectional standpoint, and enables the cultivation of historical and relational attunement as opposed to *methodological individualism* and *fact-insensitivity*.

I begin by considering the methodological injunctions anchored by Patricia Hill Collins’ germinal notion of the ‘matrix of domination’ (2000), thereby outlining the kinds of engagement with the sociopolitical world that ground our understanding of matrices. Switching focus away from the macro-structural, the second part of the section examines intersectionality’s relationship to identity politics, and makes the case for understanding intersectionality as being fundamentally concerned with the ways in which constellations of power shape the terms on which identity projects are articulated. I suggest that intersectionality offers methodological strategies for avoiding the problematic reifications associated with identity politics without undermining the emancipatory ethos of identity-based political projects (Collins 2019; Gqola 2001; Yuval-Davis 2006).

2.2.1 Organising power: the matrix of domination

Emerging from Patricia Hill Collins’ work on Black feminist politics, knowledge cultivation, and subjectivity, *Black Feminist Thought* (2000), the idea of the matrix enables us to map the organisation of the axes that come together to produce specific forms of intersectional oppression (2000, 18).³³ Every social context, historical or geopolitical, retains its own distinctive matrix of domination, which represents a way

³³ Commenting on the distinction between intersectionality as delineated by Crenshaw (1989, 1991), Collins explains that while intersectionality helps us visualise how different axes of oppression come together to produce distinctive forms of injustice, the idea of a matrix of domination helps us to map the specific organisation of these axes (2000, 18).

of thinking about how power is organised, managed, sustained, and experienced across a particular social topography (Collins 2000, 276; see also Mollett and Faria 2018). Each is unique in terms of the salient axes, the intersections at which injustices and erasures are notably egregious, and the subjective effects and experiences produced at different intersections.³⁴

Introducing the configuration of the matrix of domination particular to the USA, Collins explains how the matrix comprises white supremacist, nationalist, capitalist hetero-patriarchal relations (2000, 23). This constellation specifies the ways in which race, citizenship status, class, sexuality, and gender respectively operate simultaneously to sustain structural processes and conditions that locate Black womanhood, in Collins' work, as a particularly revealing site of intersectional marginalisation, amongst other complex social inequalities. Brazil, for example, shares with the US a matrix shaped by the axes of class, race, and gender, as well as a history of conquest and colonialism through which both are tied to the Atlantic slave trade and its legacy. Regardless of these commonalities, however, each nation-state retains its own matrix, distinctive in the particular ways in which power is organised, managed, sustained and experienced in each context. Moreover, as I began to show in 1.2, intersectionality can 'travel' in ways that illuminate both the connections and divergences between different geopolitical contexts and the matrices that animate them. Intersectional thinking foregrounds the importance of attending to the relationships between contexts and between the structural conditions that differentially shape and organise them.

Three further examples are instructive here in order to help us establish a more comprehensive picture of the synergies and divergences between different matrices across national and regional contexts. The interventions below address the complex and contextual composition of different matrices of power in the UK, India, and, from the perspective of the Latin American decolonial school, the "modern" world. They remind us that intersectionality as a paradigm and as a form of critical social theory can hold space for resistant and oppositional theorising from a range of locations. As we saw in 1.2, travel is rarely unidirectional, and moreover, an examination of

³⁴ Insofar as matrices are historically contingent and situated mappings of power relations, I use the term *matrix* interchangeably with *constellation*; see fn. 18 above.

intersectionality's travels can refine its critical edge (Said 2002), illuminating horizons of power beyond those of its context of origin.

In the UK, the development of intersectional thought has been shaped by the legacy of British colonialism and empire.³⁵ Key interventions contesting white/imperial feminism in domains such as academia (Amos et al. 1984) and higher education (Ali 2007; Mirza 2009), and in relation to migration and diaspora (Brah 2005; Carby 2019) have emerged from the intersections of race, gender and postcoloniality. As Heidi Safia Mirza comments in her introduction to *Black British Feminism: A Reader* (1997, 4), UK feminists who experienced racialisation as 'non-white' formed a coalition around an idea of 'blackness' that sought to 'excavate the silences and pathological appearances of a collectivity of women assigned as the 'other' and produced in a gendered, sexualized, wholly racialized discourse' (1997, 21). While the broad-based coalitional work performed by 'blackness' as a political identity allowed for the development of a distinctive 'black British feminism', interlocutors also sought to carve out space to interrogate the ways in which other axes, such as ethnicity and nation, co-articulate with race to produce a multitude of complex, intersectional positionalities that cannot be reduced to a racial binary of Black/white (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983, 1996b; see also Berger and Guidroz 2009, 64–65).

In particular, Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis' (1983, 1996) work on class, gender, nation, and ethnicity interrogates the intersections of these divisions. Writing in and about the British context as minority-ethnic women, they elaborate a *relational* theory of social divisions that operate in tandem, shaping hierarchies simultaneously within and between different groups. In doing so, their analysis displaces the implicit racism of white feminism, whilst also critiquing the elisions performed by focusing on accounts of racism that foreground a Black/white divide (1983, 63). Anthias and Yuval-Davis instead theorise the axis of ethnic divisions as involving questions of identity, collectivity, community, and the social construction of ethnic group 'origin' in order to

³⁵ This is not to suggest that intersectionality in the North American context has not been shaped by both settler colonialism and migration; however, because the USA (and Canada) are settler colonial societies and because the legacy of chattel slavery looms so large in the national imaginary, the differential processes and effects of racialisation shape the context within which Black feminists began to articulate and theorise the intersections of race and gender. On the position of intersectionality with respect to decolonisation, see Dhamoon (2015). For coalitional accounts of Black and Indigenous feminisms, see, for example, T. L. King (2019) or T. L. King, Navarro, and Smith (2020).

illuminate the 'vast heterogeneous body of historical cases' of division brought about by 'migration, conquest and colonization' (1983, 66). In doing so, their account highlights the historically contingent and relational constitution of identity categories, undermining the methodologically individualist assumption that identities are fixed and naturally occurring. Their theorising thus reflects the differential historical trajectory of Britain, before, during and in the aftermath of its dominance as a metropolitan centre of Empire.³⁶ Moreover, it has shaped how intersectionality is understood contemporarily (see Berger and Guidroz 2009), without sharing in the same specific conditions that gave rise to intersectional theorising in the USA. As such, Anthias and Yuval-Davis's interventions signal the ways in which intersectional theorising must account for the specificities of different constellations of power across different temporal and spatial locations and scales of analysis (Yuval-Davis 2015).

Shifting our focus to feminist scholarship in India, critics of intersectionality such as Menon (2015) have argued that as a Northern framework, intersectionality adds little to existing debates within Indian feminism as to how sexuality, caste, and religious identity disrupt the category 'women' (2015, 40). Intersectionality masquerades as false universalism, assuming direct transferability in terms of analysing and interpreting the conditions under which social categories are produced and effectuate meanings in the sociopolitical world. It fails, epistemologically and politically, to shed new light on the distinctive colonial and postcolonial trajectory that has yielded the nexus of Indian feminism, democracy and citizenship, where there have always been negotiations of religious, caste and cultural identity alongside gender (Menon 2015, 38-9). This contextualisation differentiates India from the polities of Western Europe and the USA, where a unitary model of the citizen has always elided questions of gender and other dimensions of identity (2015, 39), and casts doubt on whether an intersectional paradigm can 'travel' to illuminate contexts besides those of its origin. However, Menon's objection to the import of intersectionality as a Northern framework overlooks the ways in which theoretical frameworks can adapt as they travel, expanding and refining their critical reach as well as illuminating new avenues for

³⁶ This is not to suggest that ethnicity has no role in the US matrix, or that it displaces race in the UK context – the authors detail the ways in which different forms of racism emerge with respect various types of ethnic division (1983, 67). Instead, what they draw attention to is the differentiated salience that axes of division take on depending on the particular dynamics that have historically come to shape the context in question.

solidarity. Interlocutors such as Mary John (2015), whose response to Menon I address below, have noted that intersectionality constitutes a useful framework for researching the intersections of caste and gender.

Sharmila Rege's (1998, 2000) articulation of Dalit feminist standpoint, which builds on earlier feminist analyses of the intersection of caste, class, and gender (e.g., Chakravarti 1995, 2018; see also Omvedt 1979), is one such intervention that highlights a less unitary, more expansive and solidaristic understanding of travel. Illuminating the political import of a Dalit feminist standpoint for disrupting upper-caste dominance in Indian feminism, Rege's account addresses itself to the ways in which categories of difference are mutually constituting, rather than ontologically separable.³⁷ Without having to argue that poor Dalit women are the same, or oppressed in the same way, as poor Black women in the USA or Europe, engaging Rege's analysis alongside US Black feminist approaches draws out the parallels between differently marginalised groups and the dynamics of intersecting power relations that shape processes of marginalisation (1998, 45). Dalit feminist standpoint is thus indicative of the flexibility of an intersectional framework for making sense of the complexity of different standpoints across national or cultural contexts. In accounting for this standpoint, an intersectional paradigm introduces a range of potential epistemological starting points that can guide normative theorising, united by their common emphasis on resistant knowing and countering dominant epistemologies.

In an important respect, Rege's work anticipates Menon's critique. Whilst Menon's claim that 'women' has never been a unitary category in Indian politics may be true, this does not mean that intersectional oppressions of caste, class and gender do not exist or merit critical scrutiny. Similarly, Mary John (2015) argues that the acknowledgement that 'women' has never been a unitary category in Indian politics does not undermine the capacity of intersectionality to aid in the analysis of how a given axis, such as gender, caste, or class, is conceptualised. As she puts it, '[a]ny

³⁷ Although it shares the nomenclature of feminist standpoint epistemology, my reading of Rege's Dalit feminist standpoint suggests that it departs from traditional standpoint epistemology in that it recognises the fluidity of intersectional positionality and the idea that loci of marginalisation pivot according to the relations in which they stand with respect to different axes of power. I return to this point in 2.3 below.

particular “axis” itself is the product of different levels of analysis involving structures, subjects produced by these structures and the discourses that advance them, which, depending on the moment and the context, may yield categories that are both fixed and fluid’ (John 2015, 75). The implication is that a different interpretation of intersectionality to the one adopted by Menon enables a distinctive perspective not only on the political salience of certain intersections, but on the epistemological and political strategies made available to locate and frame the problem of ‘where identities fail to appear or be recognised as we might have expected them to’ (2015, 73). John’s analysis posits intersectionality imparting a methodological strategy for identifying occlusions at the intersections, but equally importantly, as a framework for transforming how those occlusions are framed and understood. In this sense, an intersectional approach can remediate *fact insensitivity* by guiding us to theorise contextual specificity concretely, instead of assuming that identity categories are reproduced identically across different locations.

Finally, decolonial feminist María Lugones’ (2007) ‘heterodox reading’ of intersectionality (Carastathis 2016, chap. 6) broaches a similar challenge to Menon. Lugones suggests that the metaphor of intersecting axes of oppression essentialises categories of race and gender, suggesting their ontological separability (2007, see also 1994, 2010). However, she responds to this reading by specifying and situating global capitalism, white supremacist racism and Western heteropatriarchy in a broader configuration of power that captures what Yuval-Davis (2015, 97) refers to as the ‘translocality, transcalarity and transtemporality’ of intersectionality: namely, the idea that matrices of domination are not only historically and contextually specific, but are themselves multiplicitous – like the relations that compose them. Lugones’ account of the colonial/modern gender system (2007) addresses the constitutive role of Western heteropatriarchy within a broader *colonial matrix of power* (Mignolo 2011; Quijano 2000; see also Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 158 and discussion below in 3.2). In decolonial thought, the *colonial matrix of power* initially appears as a means of denoting the imbrication of relations of colonialism, capitalism and Eurocentric racism, but Lugones’ critique foregrounds how decolonial thinkers took gender categories for granted in this matrix, rather than interrogating them as colonial ‘impositions’ of Western heteropatriarchy that are *constitutive* of this matrix (2007, 202).

Decolonial thought works from ontological assumptions of complex relationality comparable to those of intersectionality, foregrounding the importance of addressing relations of oppression as mutually constituting, rather than operating in isolation from one another. Following Lugones' (1994) insights, decolonial feminist contributions also illuminate the complex, relational constitution of intersectional subjectivity. Lugones deploys two metaphors of separation and mixing that highlight this point: first, separating egg yolks from whites, and second, making an emulsion (mayonnaise) with egg and oil. The first metaphor pertains to splitting apart two substances, in an attempt to keep each one pure and separate from the other. In the second, however, the two substances are combined in an emulsion; even if they curdle and separate, they still inhere in one another, 'yolky oil and oily yolk' (1994, 459). For Lugones, the metaphor of curdling illuminates the structure of subjectivity as a site at which multiple systems of power act in simultaneous and mutually constituting ways. When multiple oppressions are conceptualised discretely, they produce a subject that is fragmented across these different sites of division. Conversely, if we take seriously the idea that oppressions are mutually constitutive, they cohere in the locating of the subject as a 'curdled' whole, rather than discrete units. Thus, the component parts of the subject can only be understood in relation to and in combination with the other facets of one's identity; it is impossible to distinguish the part of the self that is gendered or racialised in isolation from, and without reference to, how it is also shaped by class, sexuality, nationality, geopolitical location or dis/ability.

Lugones' insights help us to grasp the broader picture of intersectional ontology, showing how attending to interventions from different traditions and loci of theorising can enable us to simultaneously refine and expand the horizons of intersectional thought. Moreover, these insights regarding the structure of intersectional subjectivity constitute a crucial ontological grounding to take forward in the dissertation: neither a unified subject nor a fractured site of multiple identifications, the curdled subject is indelibly shaped by extant constellations of power, but simultaneously a part of the disruption and renegotiation of categorical boundaries. The account of intersectional subjectivity yielded through Lugones' curdling metaphor indicates a more promising theoretical starting point than NPT's liberal individual: this account of the subject is more complex, and avoids the trap of *fact insensitivity* by carefully attuning itself to the

effects of contingent and shifting, yet deeply entrenched intersectional relations of power.

These interventions hold a number of crucial lessons to distil in terms of the methodological insights we can gain from matrix-thinking. A first and crucial observation is that whatever axes of division are under scrutiny, we should not theorise them as static or unchanging across historical periods or geopolitical spaces. As I show later on in the dissertation with respect to race and disability, historical and contextual specificity are essential for grasping both the complexity and contingency of these categories. In other words, it would be a methodological mistake to theorise relations of power in abstraction from historical and geopolitical context. Rather, specific relations get their meanings in specific contexts, as part of broader constellations of power that organise the structural, processual and subjective dimensions of that society. In this sense, intersectionality *can* be a critical framework beyond the matrix of race-class-gender in the USA, and indeed beyond the many distinct and overlapping configurations of power of the global North. This is in part because intersectionality is poised as resistant *towards* dominant constellations of power in the North. Equally importantly, however, thanks to the emergence of intersectional thought and critique across a range of socioepistemic and geopolitical locations, intersectionality as a paradigm has the flexibility and transcalarity to enable us to identify and analyse different matrices of power across contexts, and the relationships between these contexts.

Second, conceptualising intersectional power relations as part of a matrix supports the insight that such relations cannot be theorised or analysed in abstraction from *one another*; rather, the different axes of division organised through the matrix are mutually constitutive.³⁸ Moving forward in the dissertation, in order to understand and explain how one social division, such as race or disability, operates in a given context, we need to understand its imbrications with other divisions. In other words, the effects of a singular axis cannot be explained in isolation, even if it can be analytically

³⁸ How to conceptualise the relationship between different axes of division has been a key site of debate in intersectionality scholarship; I do not enter into it in great detail here: first because in my understanding the mutual constitution of axes is a starting premise if we begin with a matrix of domination and second because the debate is so well trodden in the wider literature. See Hancock (2016) for an accessible and comprehensive overview.

distinguished from those intersecting it. Rather, we need to grasp how it shapes and is shaped, over time, by other axes. This insight foregrounds *relational attunement* as an essential methodological orientation within an intersectional paradigm.

Third, flowing from the historical, sociological, and geopolitical specificity of different power relations is the observation that each one possesses a distinct ontological basis (Yuval-Davis 2006). Each relation produces a different form of social division, relating to a specific ontological domain; for example, class divisions relate to the domain of the organisation of labour and the means of production, while ableist divisions relate to the domain of distinguishing who meets “normal” cognitive, physical, or psychological criteria, which are always historically specified. Both divisions reinforce one another in many ways, and under conditions of capitalist modernity, the question of who is “normal” is unanswerable without reference to what a productive worker is. Yet, the specific dynamics of organisation internal to each relation are distinct. Different relations cannot therefore be reduced to a singular dynamic of domination and marginalisation in abstraction from the specific domains to which they correspond. This suggests that when we assume the fundamental sameness of domination across contexts or ontological bases, we risk erasing the particularities of the social relations in question. Rather, an intersectional approach recognises the theoretical importance of attending to distinctive ontological bases as a means of contesting *fact insensitivity*, as well as the ways in which the relations become historically and sociologically entangled.

Thus far, we have encountered the structural, macro-level aspects of an intersectional ontology. I have suggested that intersectionality’s matrix thinking yields a range of methodological tools for theorising complex configurations of power and their effects in, and between, different contexts and locations. An intersectional ontology demands, in methodological terms, relational attunement and sensitivity to historical contingencies and contextual specificities – both of which will be central practices in delineating an alternative to NPT’s *methodological individualism* and *fact insensitivity*. The next task is to shift our focus to a further facet of intersectional analysis salient for this dissertation; namely, how an intersectional paradigm grapples with the question of identity and subjectivity.

2.2.2 Intersectionality, subject, and identity

The role and status of identity in intersectional theorising comprises one of the central axes of debate in what May (2014) refers to as the interpretative politics of intersectionality. On one side, scholars have argued that intersectional theorising is distinct from and irreducible to identity politics, and that critics who *reduce* intersectionality to identity politics have misread its political purpose and goals (Brah and Phoenix 2004; Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013; May 2014; Tomlinson 2013). On this account, identity politics names and forges political projects on the basis of a presumptively shared identity, which in fact reproduces the kinds of exclusions and erasures at different sites of intersectional marginalisation that intersectional activism sought to challenge. Yuval-Davis (2006) has critiqued how intersectionality has been taken up in and beyond the academy as being a theory of identity, which obscures the role of structural power relations in reinforcing essentialising identity categories. According to this critique, narratives of identity (e.g. *I experience the world as a member of X group, with other members of X group*) in relation to specific forms of oppression *conflate* identity politics with descriptions of positionality. The latter are complex, intersectional, and relational, and therefore subject to shifts and transformations over time and space (2006, 195). A further set of scholars have argued that intersectionality is frequently mis-conceptualised as an 'additive' model of identity rather than recognising that different axes of division are mutually constitutive both at the macro-level and at their confluence at the situated location of the individual, intersectional subject (Hancock 2007; May 2014; Yuval-Davis 2006).

The critique of identity politics as an essentialising project is an important one in the sense that these interlocutors are arguing against conceptions of identity that are methodologically reductive, ahistorical, and static. Methodologically individualist approaches, in this respect, can essentialise identity, facilitating its dismissal as a morally irrelevant characteristic, or leveraging it as ammunition in the interests of exclusion, themes we will encounter in relation to race and cultural difference in Chapter Four. Importantly, however, proceeding from this set of methodological starting points leads us to a number of theoretical and political pitfalls down the line: notably, these assumptions can obscure the complex and intersectional nature of the relationships between oppression and privilege. That is, all individuals have an

intersectional positionality, most likely a combination of some structurally conferred advantages and others that are oppressive or lead to marginalisation. Identity politics can conceal the ways in which different individuals within identity groups are differentially, intersectionally located, and precipitate forms of exclusion of those marginalised *within* an identity group. Moreover, working from fixed identity positions lends the impression that certain identities are always oppressed – everywhere, in the same way – rather than theorising oppression as a result of complex relational and context-specific constellations of power. For instance, these starting points can foster a theorisation of patriarchy as universal and ‘woman’ as a position of oppression the world over. They can lead to the assumption that Blackness is the root of racism rather than white supremacy (Carbado 2013; see also Brah 2005, chap. 5). Similarly, as we will see across Chapters Five and Six, disability is a relationally constructed, historically contingent category structured by relations of ableism, rather than a fixed and monolithic identity.

Taking identities either as naturally occurring features of the sociopolitical world, or as fixed and ahistorical effects of monolithic power relations, is theoretically inadequate from an intersectional standpoint. Both interpretations fail to attend to the ways in which intersectional constellations of power, which are historically and geopolitically specific, shape our social categories and our perception of who belongs to which category and why. Mobilising this account of identity politics in practices of normative theorising can reproduce and reinforce the methodologically individualist assumption that *identities* are the cause behind inequalities, and that the solution is tackling prejudicial views, or allocating remedial rights, rather than focusing our attention on the structural nature of oppression. Methodologically, intersectionality demands precisely this form of attention to identity and to structure, as well as the nature of the relationship between them. In Chapters Four and Six, I will draw on intersectionality’s practice of *relational attunement* to critique the methodologically individualist reproduction of essentialised understandings of cultural difference and disability respectively.

Intersectionality’s broader social ontology holds resources that enable us to approach the relationship between structure and identity in a theoretically sophisticated and politically salutary way. Beginning with the matrix of domination gives us a way in to

theorising both structure and identity as well as illuminating the relationship between them. An intersectional ontology opens up the field to explore not only questions about how individuals identify themselves or what categories they fall across, but the specific constellations of power that shape and define those categories, and thus determine how patterns of hierarchy, privilege, marginality and oppression play out across a particular social context. The importance of understanding power relations as historically and sociologically grounded means that, from an intersectional perspective, claims grounded in the politics of experience and identity must nonetheless recognise that such identities are neither fixed nor absolute, nor always oppressed in the same way or to the same degree (Collins 2000). As South African postcolonial feminist Pumla Dineo Gqola puts it, although identities are constituted through specific constellations of power, the 'space' of identity is a nexus of power relations within which political agency is situated (2001, 12). Thus the challenge is to harness political agency to 'refashion the terms of representation' (Gqola 2001, 14), such that those more rigid and obdurate processes through which intersectionally oppressed subjects are identified, othered, and marginalised, can be contested, transgressed and transformed.

The crucial lesson to take forward here in relation to contesting social ignorance pertains to ensuring that our normative analyses are *attuned* to the complex, relational nature of intersectional social ontology. Instead of practicing *methodological individualism*, for example, normative theorists can become more fluent in attending to the relations that compose matrices of domination across various contexts. In combating *fact insensitivity*, we can direct our attention to the ways in which matrices of domination, across various contexts and scales, shape sociopolitical and epistemological landscapes. Contextual, relational structural attunement as a methodological injunction translates to asking after the ways in which historically contingent power relations shape the categories populating dominant social imaginaries. Concretely, in this dissertation, we will direct our enquiries to how race and disability are theoretically constructed and deployed from NPT's standpoint, and encounter resources that attune us to their historical specificity and intersectional complexity.

Through elaborating intersectionality's ontology, this section has imparted a first methodological lesson, but it has also laid the groundwork for the following section on intersectional epistemology. I show next how cultivating an intersectional standpoint enables us to do the necessary theoretical work of being sensitised to the appropriate "facts". Corresponding to the discussion of *fact insensitivity* in 1.3.1, my account of how an intersectional paradigm guides this sensitising mission focuses on the importance of building on the ontological foundation outlined above. I explain below that, because the relations constituting matrices of domination are interwoven and simultaneous in their effects, as well as historically contingent, we must continue to think intersectionally about the construction of a theoretical standpoint that can sensitise us to the salient "facts" across varying sociopolitical and historical contexts.

2.3 Intersectional epistemology: assembling the "facts"

In this section, I examine how intersectional thought conceptualises and responds to the complex relationship between power and knowledge. As the domain in which we consider questions of what counts as knowledge and how it is validated, epistemology is profoundly, if not always explicitly, concerned with how power in its various guises shapes the answers to these questions. In 1.3.1, I critiqued NPT's theoretical standpoint, arguing that it is methodologically desensitised to salient dimensions of the sociopolitical world, as well as to its inability to acknowledge these epistemic limitations. Because of its lack of attunement to structural relations of power, NPT also *naturalises* some aspects of sociopolitical reality when they require critical scrutiny to evaluate whether they are implicated in the reproduction of ignorance. In response, this section thinks through the ways in which an epistemology guided by an intersectional paradigm enables us to generate a more theoretically robust, critically attuned account of the sociopolitical world.

Building on the intersectional ontology developed in 2.2, I argue that the salient dimensions of sociopolitical reality for normative theorising must be identified with attention to the historical matrices of power that shape and organise dominant epistemologies. I begin by situating intersectionality in relation to standpoint epistemologies, foregrounding their joint relation to ignorance and how they can help us develop a theoretical standpoint sensitised to intersectional matrices of power. I

explore some of the divergences between intersectionality and standpoint epistemology, and then sketch the contours of an *intersectional standpoint*. I close the section with a consideration of the democratising function of intersectional epistemology. In exploring how different resistant knowledge traditions cohere to form intersectionality's epistemological community, the reconstruction I undertake here attempts to render a robust and vindicatory defence of intersectionality's capacious and transformative epistemological power.

2.3.1 Intersectionality *or* standpoint?

The relationship between intersectionality and standpoint epistemologies (Collins 2000; Harding 1991; Hartsock 1983) is an important one to unpack for this dissertation.³⁹ Standpoint epistemologies yield important resources for enabling us to attend to the multifaceted ways that power relations shape perception and understanding, and thus indicate fruitful avenues in terms of rooting out ignorance and contesting the dominant epistemologies and epistemic practices that reproduce it. In fact, Yuval-Davis (2011, 3) describes intersectionality as a 'development of feminist standpoint theory', but while both constitute resistant knowledge projects, intersectionality offers a different theoretical perspective on the relationship between different social categories and the epistemic locations to which they are related (Hancock 2016). I begin the discussion with the key theoretical features of standpoint epistemology (Crasnow 2014), and then organise the remainder around the methodological strategies normative theorising might turn to in order to sensitise its theoretical standpoint to structural relations of power. I focus first on "single-axis" and then "multiple-axis" standpoints. I aim to show that, whilst seeking out knowledge cultivated from the standpoint of the oppressed is an important methodological practice in challenging social ignorance, approaching such standpoints intersectionally offers a more politically salutary strategy.

Standpoint epistemologies work from three key insights: first, that all knowledge is situated, and that the social location of the epistemic agent matters for their perception

³⁹ I note here that Patricia Hill Collins' oeuvre spans interventions in Black feminist epistemology and intersectionality; while I do not have space to address the continuities between her many contributions, I hope to show over the course of the discussion in 2.3.1 that there are important synergies and also points of departure between standpoint epistemologies and intersectionality broadly construed.

of the world and the kinds of knowledge they acquire about it. Second, the members of marginalised or oppressed groups are epistemically privileged in that their location may potentially yield a recognition of dominant epistemological frames. Third, the construction of a group consciousness facilitates the articulation and negotiation of a group's collective interests. What do these theoretical features of standpoint epistemology divulge in terms of the methodological practices NPT might deploy in order to identify and contest social ignorance in its theorising? Instead of disavowing the particularity of situated knowledges and assuming an epistemic 'zero-point' from which it can leverage its theorising, NPT could utilise standpoint epistemology to inform its engagements with and representations of the sociopolitical world. Two points emerge here regarding the kinds of strategies that standpoint epistemology makes available.

A first approach to methodologically attuning normative theorising to the effects of entrenched relations of power emerges in the form of seeking out a socially marginalised, but epistemically privileged, standpoint. By taking seriously the epistemic privilege thesis, we can demystify the epistemic effects of power relations in the interests of becoming *sensitised* to normatively salient aspects of the sociopolitical world. This process sometimes takes the form of seeking out the 'voices of the marginalised' or oppressed. As a strategy, it involves identifying an oppressed group and becoming familiar with its epistemic resources, explanations, interpretative practices, and standpoints in order to remediate the abstract "zero-axis" perspective frequently adopted in normative theorising. This approach has merit in terms of contesting social ignorance: it addresses an important methodological practice of attunement by guiding us to attend to perspectives and resources that are typically disbarred from normative theorising as a result of the exclusionary effects of entrenched formations of power. However, it also carries with it some theoretical and ethical limitations. Ethically, the injunction to seek out the knowledge of oppressed groups can also carry with it the risk of epistemic exploitation (Berenstain 2016), placing the burden of educating structurally more privileged groups on those who already face the constraints of marginalisation. The practice of epistemic exploitation is importantly related to the assumption that members of a particular social group share certain inherent qualities or insights – a notion intersectional theorising aims to dispel.

The recognition of marginalised or oppressed social locations alone is inadequate if we want to generate a diagnosis of the historical conditions under which NPT's standpoint, its conceptual repertoires, and methodological practices come to predominate. In other words, single-axis analyses are not well equipped, theoretically speaking, to help methodologically attune us to *relationality*. In this respect, traditional standpoint theories predicated on a primary contradiction (e.g., Hartsock 1983), reify binaries of oppressor/oppressed and posing social categories as fixed and ahistorical entities. Moreover, whilst attending to epistemic contributions from marginalised locations may provide some resources that enable us to *supplement* or *extend* our account of which aspects of the sociopolitical world are normatively salient, it won't necessarily enable us to adequately reorient NPT's theoretical standpoint. Without a theoretical standpoint that can sensitise us to the relational nature of contingent historical constellations of power, we may continue to reproduce social ignorance through our methodological practices.

A second way NPT might draw on standpoint epistemology takes into account the intersections at which situated knowledge is cultivated. In other words, rather than a single-axis socioepistemic location emerging as the result of a primary contradiction, we take seriously the idea that the intersections are where the more epistemically privileged social locations are situated. Taking a "multiple-axis" approach confers some methodological advantages over a single-axis standpoint. It enables us to recognise internal heterogeneity amongst oppressed groups, and avoids the forms of categorical essentialisation that come with assuming a group standpoint. However, because a multiple-axis approach still relies on fixed intersections, the group consciousness condition raises concerns.

In the context of feminist standpoint epistemologies, the group consciousness condition implicitly positions gender as the primary axis of social division around which a feminist standpoint is articulated (Crasnow 2014; see also Hancock 2016). Accordingly, the category 'women' is positioned as that which attains a group consciousness through its shared struggles. This produces the political effect of assuming that other axes of division – class, disability, sexuality, race, ethnicity or nation, for instance – are of secondary epistemic importance. They become part of a process of negotiation to make their way into the realm of women's shared interests,

rather than being of irreducible significance in their own right. Feminist standpoint epistemologies therefore risk reflecting an additive model of marginalisation (Hancock 2016) that conceptualises oppressions as layered on top of one another rather than being mutually constitutive.

To recap, there are important limitations to what I've referred to as single-axis and multiple-axis standpoint epistemologies for transforming NPT's theoretical standpoint and methodological practices. We've seen that single-axis standpoints alone can impart valuable epistemic resources that direct our attention to salient facets of sociopolitical reality in specific contexts. In disavowing the underlying ontological complexity of an intersectional framework, however, single-axis standpoints can be easily misappropriated as part of an "add-and-stir" approach that expands the pool of epistemic resources on offer to normative theorists without troubling the underlying assumptions that shape NPT's theoretical standpoint. Multiple-axis contributions offer a partial solution to single-axis standpoints. Insofar as they reproduce an additive ontological framework though, they also risk reifying certain intersections as *a priori* sources of resistant knowledge. For this reason, methodologically speaking, they do not instigate the necessary analysis of intersecting power relations as historically contingent and contextually specific. These theoretical limitations are not intended to suggest that drawing on standpoint epistemologies can never be an ethical, politically salutary, choices in practices of theorising. The important point to recognise is that such standpoints are never a "given"; rather, through cultivating an intersectional standpoint, we do the consistent methodological work of attending to how contingent relations of power shape not only marginalised standpoints, but dominant ones too. To relate these issues back to the problem of *fact-insensitivity*, I have been arguing that, in order to recognise and evaluate which "facts" are salient to our normative interventions, we need a framework that sensitises us not only to the existence of different epistemic locations, but the matrices of power that relationally shape and sustain them. To map out how an intersectional paradigm affords us precisely this framework, I now turn to three characteristics of an intersectional standpoint that puts us on a more promising methodological track.

2.3.2 An intersectional standpoint

In arriving at an account of an intersectional standpoint, I aim to respond to three key shortcomings identified above: taking a singular axis as a primary contradiction; reifying particular socioepistemic locations as conferring epistemic privilege ahistorically; and taking socioepistemic locations as static and fixed, rather than relational. To respond to these limitations, my understanding of an intersectional standpoint rejects three assumptions: a priori conceptions of power; the possibility of “shared” standpoints; and the possibility of “fixing” a singular resistant or emancipatory standpoint. I explore these points below. In order to better situate and contextualise my interventions, I draw on the work of three feminist theoretical interventions that utilise some of the insights of standpoint epistemology, without compromising the integrity of an intersectional ontology: Sharmila Rege’s (1998) Dalit standpoint, Uma Narayan’s (2004) postcolonial feminist critique, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s (1984, 2003) transnational feminism.

In my understanding, an intersectional standpoint begins from the recognition of the complex organisation of power relations that shape and forge distinctive situated knowledges. To illustrate this point, consider Mohanty’s now-canonical intervention on feminist academic knowledge production in a global context, *Under Western Eyes* (1984). Mohanty argues that in projecting a monolithic account of Third World women as oppressed as a result of patriarchal relations, the Western feminist inaugurates herself as the apotheosis of liberation and the universal subject of feminist politics, both an ‘authorial subject’ and as the ‘implicit referent’ by which to judge other women’s lives (1984, 336). Interrogating the Western feminist assumption of the primacy and cross-cultural validity of ‘sexual difference’ (1984, 335), Mohanty’s critique indicates that intersectional frames are not confined to single national or regional contexts. Rather, there exist matrices of domination at the global level that position women differently through relations such as Western/Third World, or global North/South. Without relying on a reductive politics of identity as a means of generating authenticity, Mohanty’s contributions yield tools for interrogating and demystifying how global intersectional systems of power differentially authorise and amplify the locations and experiences of some subjects over others.

In *Under Western Eyes Revisited* (2003), Mohanty explains that her methodology begins ‘from the lives and interests of marginalized communities of women’ so that she is ‘able to access and make the workings of power visible—to read up the ladder of privilege’ (2003, 511). Yet importantly, this methodological strategy should not be conflated with a crude rendering of standpoint epistemology; the idea is ‘not that all marginalized locations yield crucial knowledge about power and inequity, but that within a tightly integrated capitalist system, the particular standpoint of poor indigenous and Third World/South women provides the most inclusive viewing of systemic power’ (2003, 511). In a similar deconstruction of the epistemic privilege thesis, Uma Narayan also argues against the reification of intersectionally marginalised locations, which can never serve ‘as a substitute for concrete social analysis’ (Narayan 2004, 223). Instead, Narayan recommends that we ‘all attempt to cultivate the methodological habit of trying to understand the complexities of the oppression involved in different historical and cultural settings’ (2004, 216), allowing us the theoretical space to ‘criticize dominant groups for their blindness to the facts of oppression’ (2004, 221).

The strategies Mohanty and Narayan deploy retain the key component of situated knowledge, but they present an importantly qualified methodological defence of epistemic privilege. Moreover, in line with intersectional theoretical insights, their accounts recognise that no social division can take primacy over others, while nonetheless acknowledging the particular historical configuration of power relations that produce hierarchy and inequality within and across different configurations of marginalisation and privilege. Mirroring the account of intersectional ontology in 2.2, this form of intersectional epistemology is relational, and does not take as a priori or given any specific axis or intersection, either as primary contradiction or “most” epistemically privileged. This is not to say that, empirically speaking, in specific contexts, there are no intersections that yield unique and distinctive epistemic locations for understanding the workings of power. On the contrary, this remains a central insight of an intersectional epistemology. My theoretical point is that, given its ontological commitments, an intersectional standpoint can make no a priori claims as to what relations will compose that intersection without careful and historically, contextually specified analyses of operative constellations of power. This assertion speaks to the idea, however, that intersectionality can be detached from its theoretical and geopolitical context of origin in order for its radical critique to travel (Nash 2019). In

recognition of the range of conflicting views on this position, I address this point at greater length in 2.4 below.

Second, an intersectional standpoint is not a “shared” standpoint, in the sense that members of different groups come to inhabit the same epistemic location.⁴⁰ In this respect, intersectional standpoint differs from articulations of standpoint epistemology that emphasise the importance of a shared situatedness for the cultivation of distinctive knowledge claims. Descriptions of standpoint theory, for example, argue that the feature of a standpoint as struggled for is a result of the effort of coming to consciousness under specific constellations of power, thus delineating, for instance women’s standpoint in patriarchal society or a subaltern or proletariat standpoint in imperial or capitalist society. As Narayan puts it, it would be a mistake to conclude ‘that those who are differently located socially can never attain *some* understanding of our experience or *some* sympathy with our cause’ (Narayan 2004, 220), as this possibility constitutes the very basis of political solidarity. What my understanding of an intersectional theoretical standpoint shares with standpoint epistemology, however, is the process of cultivation as solidary struggle. In Rege’s terms:

‘The dalit [sic] feminist standpoint which emerges from the practices and struggles of dalit woman [...] may originate in the works of dalit feminist intellectuals but it cannot flourish if isolated from the experiences and ideas of other groups [...]. A transformation from ‘their cause’ to ‘our cause’ is possible for subjectivities can be transformed. By this we do not argue that non-dalit feminists can ‘speak as’ or ‘for the’ dalit women but they can ‘reinvent themselves as dalit feminists.’ (Rege 1998, 45)

Rege’s analysis here points to the distinctively political dimension of cultivating a standpoint that is struggled for. This standpoint is achieved through the recognition that, in spite of different socioepistemic locations, the constellations of power that must be transformed are interrelated. In this sense, whilst matrices yield distinctive socioepistemic locations, the interwoven nature of distinct relations of power requires the cultivation of a standpoint that is sensitive to this ontological complexity. In this regard, an intersectional standpoint incorporates the solidary ethos required to contest intersectional matrices in their full complexity. Moreover, it offers us the resources to

⁴⁰ On this point more generally, see Bailey’s (1998) critical elaboration in response to Harding (1991).

reflexively locate our own relationally constituted locations, as well as the constructions of dominant socioepistemic *and theoretical* standpoints. Such a practice is vital in undoing NPT's *foreclosed reflexivity*, which severely constrains its capacity to interrogate the historical and relational construction of its underlying theoretical assumptions.

The final theoretical quality of an intersectional standpoint is that it cannot be historically "fixed". Following the argument in 2.2, that matrices are contingent structures with historically and contextually specific compositions, an intersectional standpoint is not a generalisable or fixable epistemic location, guaranteed in all cases to deliver resistant or emancipatory knowledge. The kinds of strategic and solidary coalitions required for the forging of an intersectional standpoint, similarly, are not fixed, immutable, or ahistorical categories, but themselves effects of specific matrices of power. Writing on the construction of a Dalit feminist standpoint, Rege writes that in recognising that the category 'Dalit women' is not homogenous, it becomes apparent that 'the subject of dalit feminist liberatory knowledge must also be the subject of every other liberatory project', which 'requires a sharp focus on the processes by which gender, race, class, caste, sexuality – all construct each other. Thus we agree that the dalit feminist standpoint itself is *open to liberatory interrogations and revisions*.' (Rege 1998, 45, *emphasis added*). In other words, because the processes through which social categories are constructed are contingent operations of power, the emancipatory standpoints they leverage are likewise contingent. An intersectional standpoint is cultivated in accordance with these historically contingent, relational arrangements.

One further theoretical feature of an intersectional standpoint important to consider here relates back to the discussion in 1.3.1, regarding NPT's theoretical standpoint. There, I discussed the critique of 'zero-point' epistemology, and pointed to the problems associated with assuming that knowledge can be generated and validated from an objective, impartial 'view from nowhere'. An intersectional standpoint that accounts, ontologically and epistemologically, for the role of power in the cultivating of different situated knowledges, the specification of different marginalised socioepistemic locations, and the development of different critical traditions, should not be conflated with zero-point epistemology. Zero-point epistemology imagines

'disembodied spectators who hover over the Cartesian landscape' (Bailey 1998, 28), an invocation compatible with what Connell (2014) refers to as *mosaic epistemology*, where 'separate knowledge systems or projects sit beside each other like tiles in a mosaic' (2014, 522). The zero-point's disembodied spectators, however, may still position themselves as the ones possessing an 'integrating view' (2014, 522) of the mosaic. An intersectional standpoint, on the other hand, is always *located*; it is always a view from *somewhere*. However, that *somewhere* is anchored in two ways: first, by the contingent relations of power that have historically shaped the emergence of salient socioepistemic locations, and second, by a future horizon oriented towards the transformation of those relations. To reiterate, then, an intersectional standpoint remains untethered to static identity categories, as, in line with its ontological commitments, such categories themselves are contingent effects of power. At the same time, it is nonetheless rooted in the recognition that specific socioepistemic locations at the intersections of relations of oppression are amongst those which hold the key to emancipatory and transformative knowledges.

How do these complex articulations of standpoints as resistant knowledge projects cohere with the broader epistemological aims of this dissertation? First of all, they demand attention to the multiple frames of reference within which the dissertation's objects of critical analysis are situated, whether these frames are made explicit or not. The postcolonial dimension of Narayan's and Mohanty's thought, for example, is concerned with relationality, and the implicit construction of hierarchical binaries through which discourses, and specifically in this instance, academic discourses, position certain types of subject as knowledgeable while reducing others to knowable objects. In Mohanty's words, 'even if we think we are not personally racist or sexist, we are clearly marked by the burdens and privileges of our histories and locations.' To therefore 'think through, theorize, and engage questions of difference and power' 'means that we understand race, class, gender, nation, sexuality, and colonialism not just in terms of static, embodied categories but in terms of histories and experiences that tie us together—that are fundamentally interwoven into our lives' (2003, 191). In terms of methodological practice, this requires critical, reflexive attention *not only* to *theorists'* geopolitical and social locations, but the ways in which matrices of power shape and inform the theoretical standpoint, whether dominant or resistant, and the implicit construction of epistemic subject and object emerging therein.

An intersectional standpoint, then, guides this thesis, methodologically, as a result of intersectionality's flexible attunement to historical constellations of power in both their material and epistemological dimensions. Its attentiveness to how power relations organise knowledge "on the ground", through careful consideration of the complexities of situated perspectives, means that an intersectional paradigm yields a distinct theoretical standpoint through which to engage the question of which "facts", aspects, or dimensions of sociopolitical reality are salient to the theoretical task at hand. An intersectional standpoint is a crucial methodological construct in contesting social ignorance, as it directly contests the commitment to the abstract, 'zero-point' epistemology of NPT. An intersectional epistemology instead directs our attention to complex, contingent and shifting matrices of power, which differentially shape and constrain different epistemic locations. Recognising these shifting and relational contextual specificities and the material realities of oppression they engender, however, intersectionality also yields an ethicopolitical orientation towards sustaining a struggled for and solidary – though not shared – standpoint.

2.3.3 Intersectionality as a democratising epistemology

Above, I noted that Collins' Black feminist epistemology was especially concerned with democratising processes of knowledge cultivation. In this closing section on *Epistemology*, I argue that this feature is also a core component of intersectionality's epistemology. To fully elaborate this feature, I turn to Collins' work in *Black Feminist Thought* (2000) and *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory* (2019) on resistant knowledges and dialogical processes of knowledge cultivation and validation. Noting that 'for Black women, new knowledge claims are rarely worked out in isolation from other individuals' but 'are usually developed with other members of a community' (2000, 260), Collins positions dialogical processes of knowledge validation in contradistinction to positivist epistemologies. While the latter emphasise the researcher as detached from the context in which they construct their knowledge claims (2000, 255), dialogical processes recognise the situatedness and embeddedness of epistemic subjects within the communities in which their knowledge claims are generated, interpreted and validated. Such an approach recognises that reliance on a singular perspective runs the risk of making unnoticed and therefore unacknowledgeable errors. This is especially the case in strands of normative

theorising where the particularity of the dominant perspective is systematically disavowed, reproducing the illusion of an abstract, disembodied knower. With a broader interpretative community within which to situate and test one's knowledge claims, however, shared experiences, meanings, and understandings enable the validation of those claims that meet the interpretative standards of the group whilst also providing the context within which dissent can be voiced and evaluated.

Recognising one's situatedness in a broader interpretative community is vital for undoing practices of epistemic ignorance. Given that epistemologies of ignorance function by rendering facets of the social world imperceptible or distorted to members of dominant groups, one way of overcoming these distortions is by epistemically 'sensitising' (Medina 2013; see 1.3.1) oneself to the different experiences, meanings and interpretative standards articulated by differently situated groups. Dialogical processes of knowledge cultivation and validation enable this by engaging the relational dimensions of knowing (Pohlhaus Jr 2002), and moreover, indicating that through these relational processes, resistant, emancipatory standpoints can be achieved (see also Rege 1998). While Collins' account of dialogical validation emerges out of the specific context of Black feminist thought, I understand the practice as being available for a wider interpretative community to engage. In other words, one needn't be a Black feminist in order to participate in dialogical processes of knowledge validation, or work towards the cultivation of an emancipatory, intersectional standpoint. I use the concept of a dialogically structured interpretative community here both as a key tool of reflexive methodology in situating oneself as an epistemic agent, and as a pivot point to bring us into the interpretative context of this chapter. Here, the contours of my imagined interpretative community are shaped by the dissertation's goal of illuminating potential dynamics of travel between intersectional theorising and NPT.

Importantly, dialogical processes of validation underscore the way in which I have sought to formulate the intersectional framework presented in this chapter. By examining different traditions and the potential synergies between them, I intend here to participate in dialogical processes of internal critique and elaboration of intersectionality. Engagement with different resistant knowledge projects and the multi-layered approaches to conceptualising an intersectional ontology part of a process that

continually probes and reimagines the boundaries of what is considered intersectional knowledge cultivation, and what is or is not part of the field of intersectionality. In this sense, while dialogical processes are particularly useful for staging this project of travel and transformation in relation to NPT, they also point us towards the ways in which intersectionality as a paradigm and a critical social theory might travel otherwise, and help us think through the ethical and epistemological quandaries that accompany such dynamics. In this sense, we can think of intersectionality as cultivating epistemic solidarity with critical projects emerging from different geopolitical locations. That is, it can complement, without displacing, epistemological systems that value marginalised forms of knowing, and which also contest positivist, rationalist paradigms that hold rigid and iniquitous conceptions of who constitutes a credible, plausible epistemic agent (Collins 2000). Moreover, intersectionality emphasises the kinds of dialogical processes between interlocutors and between traditions that challenge binary conceptions of dominant and marginalised, centre and periphery, and 'North' and 'South'.

Throughout the dissertation, knowledge validation through dialogue offers further guiding principles in terms of the methodological practices I adopt. In the context of this chapter, I have aimed to draw connections between different articulations of intersectionality as the concept has travelled, showing how in dialogue, they cohere to produce a flexible framework that grapples successfully with relational structural complexity and contextual nuance. Extending through the rest of the dissertation, I continue to cross-pollinate the distinctive resources of different theoretical traditions, foregrounding the points where mutual elaboration can generate the necessary conceptual tools and methodological practices for transformative theorising. In conjunction with the focus on embodied and spatialised epistemologies that reflexively interrogate the relationships constituting subjects and objects of knowledge, dialogical processes of validation serve as a foundational epistemological dimension of intersectional knowledge cultivation.

[2.4 Intersectionality, social justice, and reflexivity](#)

In this final section, I set out the ethicopolitical underpinnings of my work as oriented by intersectionality. An intersectional politics leverages the insights of 2.2 and 2.3 to

work towards the transformation of existing constellations of power and privilege. I attend here to intersectionality's transformative project and the ways in which this can become distorted through academic circulation. I then consider the politics of using intersectionality from my situated academic, geopolitical and social locations, drawing together the strands of these debates to forge a methodological ethos going forward.

2.4.1 Intersectionality and transformative politics

Intersectionality's ontological and epistemological insights stand in a recursive relationship with its political project. Through its articulation as a critical framework that both captures the mutually constituting and simultaneous operations of ontologically distinct power relations, and demands interrogation of the ways in which these relations shape our epistemological milieu, intersectionality's methodological characteristics are tied to an overarching project of critiquing and transforming dominant modes of knowing and perceiving the world. The overview of intersectional theorising in 1.2, and the construction of an intersectional methodological framework in this chapter, have sought to foreground the expansive and flexible nature of intersectionality's theoretical grasp. Here, however, in order to demonstrate more robustly how intersectionality's political project unfolds, I examine two different interpretations of intersectionality that arguably *fail* to grasp the contours of this project. Emerging from this discussion will be a clearer understanding of the methodological commitments necessary for theorists to engage in transformative political theorising.

In 2.2, I introduced Nivedita Menon as a critical interlocutor in intersectionality's academic sojourns. I return here to a further dimension of her critique in order to draw out a key feature of intersectional politics: namely, that rather than being a *solution* to a particular set of political and theoretical problems, intersectionality offers a different set of methodological and critical tools to fundamentally reframe and thereby contest the terms on which such problems are staked. Menon interprets intersectionality as an intervention in legal theory (2015, 38), one that demands the law recognise multiple simultaneous identity categories. As a post-structuralist, she argues that categories such as "women" are not naturally given, but a reflection of the ways in which specific constellations of power shape and inform our understandings of gender. Turning to the law can undermine this, by facilitating the proliferation of identity categories without

interrogating the powerful role law, amongst other regulatory systems, plays in producing and legitimating these categories (see also Brown 2005). In this way, ‘the regulating and defining force of the law is directed towards the creating and naturalising of specific, governable identities’ (Menon 2015, 41, see also 2009). Intersectionality is here cast as fundamentally preoccupied with identity politics and as such, a problematic strategy of reification that not only fails to challenge, but actually reinforces, oppressive regimes of discursive power.

Considering the account of intersectionality this chapter has sought to delineate, however, Menon’s reading takes an overly circumscribed view of its multifaceted nature. Not only does intersectionality denote a prior legacy of intellectual work beyond the specific juridical site of Crenshaw’s intervention (John 2015), it includes a more expansive interpretative frame in which claims about the efficacy of specific juridical interventions can appear alongside an interrogation of the historical constellations that make such interventions necessary to begin with (Lewis 2009).⁴¹ Intersectionality thus enables the identification of those intersections at which the fixity of categories produces occlusions, and as such, requires political contestation. What this analysis suggests is that in order to participate in the transformative project intersectionality promises, theorists must attend reflexively to the interpretative politics of intersectionality (May 2014). That is, when engaging with the question of how intersectionality is theorised, and what it is theoretically and politically *doing*, we need to scrutinise the ways in which our own disciplinary assumptions curtail or inhibit our capacity to interpret intersectional thought. Reading intersectionality exclusively as juridical intervention confined to the disciplinary conventions of legal scholarship renders imperceptible the transformative dimensions of intersectional theorising, and thereby diminishes its horizon of political contestation.

A second site of interpretative struggle over intersectionality’s political project has emerged in the context of European women’s studies and feminist scholarship (Bilge 2013; Lewis 2013; Mügge et al. 2018; Salem 2018). Against a broader political context in which race is disavowed and displaced (Knapp 2005; Lewis 2013; Mügge et al.

⁴¹ I take this to be one of the primary advantages of intersectional theorising described by Nira Yuval-Davis when she refers to it as translocal, transcalar, and transtemporal (2015, 95).

2018),⁴² some white European feminist researchers⁴³ have rejected race as a category of analysis in intersectional research (Lewis 2013).⁴⁴ Significantly, in a survey of scholarship in European political science, Mügge et al. (2018) found that white-identified researchers were less likely to accord race a central analytical role in intersectional research. For continental white European scholars, 'race is less central, and perhaps invisible, in the operationalisation of intersectionality', leading to 'disagreement about what intersectionality's political project is, which particular groups it is meant to represent and whose history and intellectual labour it should reflect' (2018, 31).

Black British feminist Gail Lewis (2013) refers to these conditions as signalling 'unsafe travel' for intersectionality, indicating that the reception of intersectionality by predominantly white European scholars has yet to challenge the perception that race is an exceptional US and UK phenomenon that does not apply in mainland Europe (Knapp 2005). German theorist Gudrun-Axeli Knapp (2005) notes that as the mantra of 'race-class-gender' spread, European feminists and women's studies scholars treated it as a sign of being politically and theoretically well-informed, whilst simultaneously ignoring the substantive political imperative behind using such an analytical frame. In other words, as many other commentators have pointed out (Bilge 2013; Nash 2019), claiming to be intersectional has, in some contexts, become a substitute for undertaking the political and intellectual work of illuminating those constellations of power which continue to produce occlusions and erasures. Lewis (2013) highlights white feminists' reluctance to engage with race and to attend adequately to the perspectives of racialised women, even at conferences dedicated to intersectionality. Bilge (2013) and Salem (2018) point out the ways white feminist researchers 'whiten' and depoliticise intersectionality by refusing to recognise race as

⁴² Bassel and Emejulu (2018) and Emejulu and Sobande (2019) are important correctives to this trend.

⁴³ See K. Davis (2020) for a rejoinder to these criticisms. Davis reminds readers that European women's studies is not a monolithic bloc and that the significant regional and ethnic variations across Europe demand a more nuanced account of the politics of intersectionality's European reception. For an alternative rejoinder that emphasises epistemic humility, see Lykke (2020).

⁴⁴ See Lutz (2014, 7): 'Many European researchers regard 'ethnicity' as a more appropriate category than 'race' because, after the Holocaust, 'race' is first and foremost connected with Nazi racial ideology and is considered historical baggage that cannot be used in a positive way.' While I do not have space to get into the details of this dispute, my sense based on the position I outline in this chapter is that those who hold racial privilege not only within national contexts but within racialised global hierarchies should reflect on the stakes involved in choosing the terminology of ethnicity over that of race, and consider the occlusions such a choice performs. On this point see e.g., Lentin (2008).

a constitutive dimension of the context in which they work. Depoliticisation in this sense refers to the disavowal of race as a constitutive axis of European political contexts, thus obstructing intersectionality's capacity to contest and undermine racializing processes. Moreover, intersectionality has been claimed as an innovation already under way in predominantly white European women's studies (Bilge 2013). These dynamics contribute to the silencing and marginalisation of racialised women in European contexts, as well as the erasure of Black feminist and women of colour contributors to intersectional thought (Lewis 2013).

The problem here is the failure to adequately operationalise an intersectional lens in order to grasp the full complexity of the power relations that shape various European contexts. The failure to reflect on the historical and ideological constitution of the context in which they are situated distorts white feminists' perception of the necessity of theorising race as part of intersectional analyses. Inadequate reflection on intersectional positionality⁴⁵ becomes a methodological 'blank spot' (Shollock 2012), which impedes intersectionality's transformative project: that which is not rendered perceptible cannot be contested. Intersectionality can render racism perceptible but only if those who engage in intersectional praxis understand how they are intersectionally racially situated. An adequate reckoning with those constellations requires that theorists critically reflect upon and engage with the specificities of their historically produced social location. Intersectionality offers a methodological framework for guiding such an exercise. This is of paramount importance. While Mügge et al.'s (2018) research demonstrates that the researcher's racial positionality shapes their interpretation and operationalisation of intersectionality (see also Labelle 2020), the extent to which one is able to reflexively and critically engage with one's historical situatedness also has ramifications for how intersectionality is framed and understood, and taken up as a methodological framework.

Given the interpretative struggles around defining intersectionality's political project, it bears reflecting further on the orientation required in this dissertation as part of the process of attempting to leverage a methodologically intersectional critique in the service of transforming NPT – especially in light of Cooper's (2015) critique that

⁴⁵ That is, inadequate reflection on racial positionality as related to but ultimately distinct from ethnic positionality.

operationalising intersectionality as methodology appears to be a key means by which white researchers allow themselves to shift emphasis away from race. The next section broaches this task through a reflection on the politics of ownership: who gets to use intersectionality and how.

2.4.2 Intersectional politics as situated and reflexive

Having considered above *why* the politics of how intersectionality is used and interpreted takes on a decisive and forceful role in intersectionality scholarship, I now turn to two ways that the idea of ownership is incompatible with the account of intersectional theorising I have been outlining in this chapter. One leading scholar of intersectional research, Ange-Marie Hancock, has argued persuasively for scholars of intersectionality to become ‘stewards’ (2016, 22), adopting a care-taking role to safeguard intersectionality’s reputation and legacy. Jennifer Nash (2019), on the other hand, presents a compelling alternative to stewardship in the practice of surrendering or ‘letting go’ of intersectionality as an intervention to reroute the energy currently expended on defending proprietary relations to intersectionality; however, as Nash addresses herself specifically to US Black feminism in its relation to the discipline of Women’s Studies, ‘letting go’ is not a practice I am in a position to enact, neither in terms of disciplinary location nor racial identity.

Similarly, Hancock’s suggestion remains ambiguous with respect to who is appropriately situated to do such work. Particularly for me as a white researcher in political theory at a UK institution, and as such an ‘outsider’ in multiple senses to the contexts in which intersectional thought has been predominantly developed and debated, stewardship may connote a paternalistic relation. Moreover, the colonialist undertones of this meaning urge caution with respect to how I conceptualise my relationship to intersectionality and how I use it.⁴⁶ Given the contours of my racial and disciplinary positionality, I desist from taking a firm stance in relation to the proprietary debates over ownership, stewardship, or surrender; however, I remain aware and mindful of their implications. I turn my attention now to the context in which I am writing,

⁴⁶ For example, a steward being an individual appointed to protect and preserve a territory and its resources or its artefacts; see Funari and Mourad (2016).

in order to reflect on this context and make more readily apparent the ethos with which this dissertation proceeds and the political motivations that undergird it.

This project started as a way for me to try and understand how my own thinking was evolving, and to address the disciplinary norms and epistemological structures that shaped the conditions under which I first started to engage with theory. Intersectionality enabled me to grasp the complexities of my social location, helping me to navigate positionality as a shifting and relational concept that considers the interplay between dynamics of privilege and oppression. Equally importantly, intersectionality offered me both a theoretical vocabulary and a guiding ethos, showing that the same constellations of power govern not only the vicissitudes of individual socioepistemic location, but the economies of knowledge production within which dominant epistemologies reproduce themselves.

Intersectionality is thus decisive for me and for this project in two interrelated ways. First is the motivation to try and get my theoretical house in order, to try and think through the issues of what it means to be doing research using intersectionality, on NPT, from a position of unfair advantages in terms of racial and class privilege, as well as in terms of funding, institutional support, and institutional location – all of which I understand as underscoring two important points: first, the responsibility to exploit these privileges for the interests of disrupting dominant assumptions and methodologies; and second, taking seriously the significance of theorising responsibly and reflexively in terms of making sense of those constellations of power that shape and locate me personally, as well as the disciplinary milieux in which this project aims to intervene. Whilst initially, my reflections on positionality yielded a sense of guilt for not having theorised more attentively and more reflexively, over the course of the project, my thinking on this point and the tools I use to address it have changed. Besides, as Audre Lorde wrote,

'guilt is just another name for impotence, for defensiveness destructive of communication; it becomes a device to protect ignorance and the continuation of things the way they are, the ultimate protection for changelessness.... Guilt is only another way of avoiding informed action, of buying time out of the pressing need to make clear choices, out of the approaching storm that can feed the earth as well as bend the trees' (2007, 130)

The recognition of guilt as impotence feeds into the second way that intersectionality motivates me in this project. Now that the problem – ignorance – is apparent, there is no choice but to take ‘informed action’, and to chart the means of making ‘clear choices’. These choices materialise in terms of unravelling the methodological reproduction of social ignorance in NPT, and clearing some theoretical ground in order to make space for NPT to be less epistemologically exclusionary and better oriented towards emancipatory ends.

In holding this theoretical space, my intention concretely is to cultivate a ‘traitorous identity’ (Harding 1991; see also Bailey 1998; Plumwood 2005) in two senses. In the first, drawing on the tradition of standpoint epistemology, a traitorous identity means learning ‘to think and act not out of the “spontaneous consciousness” of the social locations that history has bestowed on us but out of the traitorous ones we choose with the assistance of critical social theories generated by the emancipatory movements’ (Harding 1991, 295). In other words, this process entails cultivating a ‘privilege-cognizant’ (Bailey 1998) epistemic location that might ‘serve as [a site] for liberatory knowledge’ (1998, 29) through a process of apprenticeship (Mihai 2019) to experiences, narratives, and theories of oppression and emancipation.

My second traitorous identity is disciplinary: as ‘someone from within that group who has some knowledge of its workings’ (Plumwood 2005, 205), my training in NPT provides me with insights and tools, competencies and fluencies, that render the critical engagements more fluid in the act of translation than they might otherwise be. It also means that my primary theoretical training was deeply embedded in the epistemological milieu I now critique, in terms of its racial ignorance (Mills 1999, 2007), its reliance on Eurocentric epistemologies and methods of theorising (Alcoff 2017; Mills 2015) and the implicitly exclusionary norms of reason and capacity (Lloyd 1995; Simplican 2015). It imparts the specific task of learning the ‘philosophical strategies and methodologies that maximise our sensitivity’ (Plumwood 2005, 206) to other ways of knowing, thinking, and theorising – a process distilled and represented over the course of this dissertation. Importantly, as my traitorous positionality in relation to NPT fluctuates and shifts, so too does my positionality in relation to the epistemic communities existing around the various critical literatures I engage with,

making the cultivation of traitorous identity commensurate with the theoretical insights of intersectionality.

Both forms of traitorous identity encapsulate an ‘epistemic shift’ (Bailey 1998, 32) – not a shift in location, but a shift in what is perceived and how it is understood. In order to grasp how NPT’s methodological practices can be transformed, and rendered more attentive and responsive to the demands of challenging injustice and oppression, I have had to find ways of becoming sensitised to the dimensions of my own epistemological practices that preclude such attentiveness. This sensitisation is a necessarily ongoing process, and insofar as I am reconstructing myself and my theoretical practice *in the act*, so to speak, there is no chance of ever attaining a position from which I can pronounce it adequately accomplished (Rose 1997). With this caveat in mind, however, I remain in the process of cultivating an intersectional theoretical standpoint that holds the twin aims of attentiveness and responsiveness to entrenched forms of oppression and the contestation and transformation of the matrices sustaining them. Reflexivity remains an integral part of this process, as a practice of trying to understand how we got here and where, as a result, we might be going.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have offered an account of the theoretical contours of an intersectional paradigm. In doing so, I have illustrated intersectionality’s multiplicitous sites of emergence and trajectories of development first alluded to in Chapter One. The purpose of the chapter, architecturally speaking, has been to distil the methodological lessons that animate the remainder of the dissertation. On this basis, what are the lessons we will take forward?

First of all, intersectional thinking yields productive theorisations of a range of interwoven strata of structural complexity: accounts of the subject, of social categories, and of macrostructural formations of power. As I showed in 2.1, it is possible to map this complexity with theoretical nuance, without resorting to reductive understandings – either of individualism, or of the relations of power that comprise any given matrix of domination. Matrices of domination help us to visualise these complex and interrelated

structures and processes. Similarly, insights regarding the structure of intersectional subjectivity constitute a crucial ontological grounding to take forward in the dissertation: neither a unified subject nor a fractured site of multiple identifications, the ‘curdled’ subject is indelibly shaped by extant constellations of power, but simultaneously a part of the disruption and renegotiation of categorical boundaries.

The significance of the notion that there is no singular, static matrix that applies across historical and geopolitical contexts cannot be overstated, as this is one of the key insights that confirms intersectionality’s analytic scope and its political and normative import to ontological theorising. It affirms intersectionality’s capacity to interrogate not just single contexts characterised by intersectional complexity, but multiple contexts and the relationships between them, such as the historical trajectories and geopolitical manifestations that forge the links between the local and the global.

The methodological lesson to take forward here, then, is a rejection of methodological individualism. In its place, an intersectional paradigm elicits theorists to cultivate an attunement to *relationality*; to begin from concrete relations of power, and how these shape individual subjects. At a metatheoretical level, this means also reflecting on the constellations of power that inaugurate an abstract, dislocated subject as the basic ontological ground of theorising. However, this injunction is only feasible when practiced alongside the cultivation of a theoretical standpoint that sensitises us to these relations of power.

This brings us on to the second lesson. A theoretical standpoint informed by intersectionality guides the rest of the dissertation by keeping us attuned to the contingent and relational nature of matrices of power. In specifying this standpoint, an intersectional paradigm introduces a range of potential epistemological starting points that can guide normative theorising, united by their common emphasis on resistant knowing and countering dominant epistemologies. Crucially, responding to the methodological practices incurring *fact insensitivity* extends beyond “adding” a different standpoint. Rather, the task entails recognising the structures of epistemological power that shape what we perceive as “facts”, structures that are intersectional in composition. Because these structures are intersectional, adding reductive single-axis or multiple-axis standpoints cannot do the work of transforming

methodological practice, as they do not sufficiently unsettle and dislodge the underlying ontological and epistemological assumptions that animate NPT's theoretical standpoint. In other words, an intersectional standpoint must align with an intersectional ontology, and recognise that *sensitisation* to the "facts" is contextual and oriented by attention to the specific historical matrix of power governing the context in question. In this sense, *historical sensitisation* emerges as the second practice imparted by an intersectional methodological framework.

Theorising an *intersectional standpoint* through intersectionality's complex relational ontology also enables reflection on the construction of the dominant theoretical standpoint leveraged in NPT, which disavows its particularity whilst universalising Eurocentric, masculinist, bourgeois epistemology. Working from a binary, single-axis or additive, multiple-axis standpoint limits our analysis of this relational construction. From an intersectional paradigm, however, the contingent, yet deeply entrenched dominant standpoint is made more readily apparent in its full complexity. In this way, an intersectional standpoint is a critical tool for unpacking epistemologies of ignorance. As dominant epistemologies are organised and sustained by intersectional constellations of power, an intersectional theoretical standpoint acts as an interpretative lens through which we can elucidate how power relations are organised and supported through a recursive relationship with the dominant epistemology. It enables us to comprehend how those whose knowledge practices adhere to the dominant epistemology can remain ignorant.

The methodological strategy we can distil, then, is to cultivate an intersectional standpoint that is sensitised to the constellations of power that differentially shape and constrain perceptions of what counts as salient knowledge, and where, socioepistemically and geopolitically, such knowledge is cultivated from. As Mary John's analysis of intersectionality's travels suggests, intersectionality enables us to identify pertinent occlusions at marginalised intersections, but equally importantly, it guides us to the knowledge cultivated at those intersections that can transform how those occlusions are framed and understood. In this way, attending to resistant and situated knowledges cultivated from contextually specific marginalised locations can guide normative theorising, if NPT learns to sensitise or attune itself to where those intersections are, structurally speaking.

I want to close this chapter by reemphasising the final way that intersectionality guides this project methodologically: through a practice of reflexivity regarding the ‘epistemic shifts’ necessary for processes of learning, knowledge cultivation, and political transformation. These are processes which are also by their nature open-ended and incomplete. But I think that it is, if anything, *because* of their indeterminacy that they place such a profound burden of ethical and political responsibility on the shoulders of the theorist. Intersectionality is not ‘a lens with a liberatory guarantee’ (May 2015, 87), but, as I hope to have related here, I believe it offers an indispensable map of the ontological and epistemological terrain to be negotiated, and directions for how to undertake this journey ethically – even if the final destination remains unclear.

With this map in hand, the remainder of the dissertation examines the mechanisms through which social ignorance is reproduced in normative theorising, and charts a range of conceptual tools and practices that can help contest it. Whilst I do not offer intersectional *analyses* of the topics in question, I do address the ways in which foundational ontological and epistemological assumptions, as well as the methodological practices and ethical commitments with which they stand in a recursive relationship, can reorient NPT towards the cultivation of an ethos that is sensitised to how power inflects practices of theorising.

Part 1

Race and social ignorance

With a methodological framework focused on *relational attunement*, *historical sensitisation*, and *reflexivity* in place to guide dissertation, I now turn to the first of two pairs of thematically oriented chapters. As I outlined in 1.4, this first pair familiarises us with the constellations of epistemological power through which social ignorance with respect to race is methodologically sustained and reproduced in NPT. In elucidating the relational, structural and historical conjunctures productive of race as a central but elided category in practices of theorising, Chapter Three guides us through a process of critical attunement to the methodological practices with which we can rectify this elision. Having detailed the theoretical horizons that facilitate a more nuanced and robust reckoning with the ways in which race permeates the assumptions undergirding NPT, Chapter Four analyses liberal nationalist, liberal multicultural, and liberal cosmopolitan approaches in NPT to show how they contribute to the reproduction of racial ignorance. By focusing on the practices of *methodological individualism*, *fact insensitivity*, and *foreclosed reflexivity*, I show how these practices maintain a standpoint of ignorance in certain dominant, liberal strands of normative theorising.

Over the course of Chapters Three and Four, I will argue that the failure to acknowledge the epistemological effects of European colonialism and racism on the construction of the liberal standpoint means that NPT's conceptual repertoire remains a central vehicle through which racial ignorance is reproduced. The alternative theoretical starting points I delineate in Chapter Three offer us some preliminary means of cultivating a methodological ethos that adheres to the injunctions distilled in Chapter Two: relational attunement; historical sensitivity; and reflexivity. My objective for Chapter Three is to curate a conceptual vocabulary that can sensitise theorists to ways of thinking that disclose the epistemological effects of European colonialism and racism on NPT's methodological practices. In doing so, we can reorient our practices towards less ignorant understandings of race, and in the process, transform the ontological and epistemological assumptions that sustain social ignorance. An

important corollary of Chapter Three's investigations, then, is that rather than a fixed or natural category, it is imperative that we understand "race" as a historically and relationally constituted category.

In spite of the vast and wide-ranging philosophical, historical, and sociological literatures on race and racism, and increasing scholarly interest in the epistemological effects of European colonialism across a number of academic disciplines, dominant, liberal strands of NPT have remained relatively insulated from such interventions. Methodological critiques guided by a sensitivity to racism and colonialism (Mills 1999, 2005, 2015, 2017) have thus far had relatively little impact on the mainstream of the discipline. Influential practitioners of normative theorising remain persuaded that the liberal framework, in conjunction with personal rejections of racism, are sufficient to keep NPT on track for producing acceptable and useful normative conclusions (Miller 2021). It is for these reasons that Chapter Four critically engages scholarship in NPT that is not explicitly *about* race or racism, instead choosing a set of normative debates on immigration and multiculturalism that *elide* race where it ought to be foregrounded. By focusing on how racial ignorance is reproduced, the chapter probes the practices of *methodological individualism*, *fact insensitivity*, and *foreclosed reflexivity*, and argues that the dominant strands of normative theorising under consideration remain anchored in assumptions that essentialise cultural difference and naturalise the historically contingent formation of the nation-state. Through these assumptions, liberal nationalist, multicultural, and cosmopolitan approaches systematically elide racism, and produce instead an analytically reductive account of cultural difference. As a result, their normative recommendations reproduce, rather than disrupt, forms of social ignorance that obscure the racialised foundations of normative theorising. Whilst I argue that all three approaches essentialise cultural difference and rely on a historically desensitised and circumscribed conceptualisation of the nation-state, the normative consequences vary across these positions. Whilst liberal nationalism in the context of post-imperial polities has distinctive exclusionary outcomes for racialised migrants, liberal multiculturalism and liberal cosmopolitanism in settler states have consequences for Indigenous nations in terms of sustained processes of colonisation and dispossession.

Over the course of Chapters Three and Four, I illustrate the methodological practices that reproduce social ignorance with respect to racism and colonialism. I aim to show that the reproduction of social ignorance *forecloses* the possibility of theorising that is reflexive with respect to its situatedness in constellations of epistemological power. In this way, the methodological practices deployed in NPT, and the standpoint underpinning them, reproduce, rather than contest, dominant epistemologies and the conceptual repertoires flowing from them. However, through introducing a conceptual vocabulary that can attune us to the epistemological effects of racism and colonialism on NPT's standpoint, these chapters begin a process of sensitisation to an alternative set of theoretical starting points. These starting points can reorient our theorising towards adopting a more reflexive, and a more historically sensitised and relationally attuned standpoint that recognises the effects of epistemological power on its own construction. These chapters thus provide an opportunity to learn how to cultivate an intersectional methodological ethos aligned with the injunctions distilled in Chapter Two.

3. Contesting racial ignorance: a methodological toolkit

3.1 Introduction

This thesis has so far argued that NPT is implicated in the reproduction of social ignorance through its methodological practices, and that a turn to intersectionality can help to remedy this. I have introduced the contours of an intersectional paradigm, and distilled a series of methodological injunctions that can help us to identify and contest social ignorance in NPT. Here, I turn specifically to the problem of *racial* ignorance. Scholars have shown that *racial ignorance* amounts to the failure to acknowledge “race” as a salient category of analysis in normative theorising (Mills 2015; see also Finlayson 2020; Jaggar 2020); this failure in turn facilitates the reproduction of racism epistemologically. By treating “race” as a morally irrelevant characteristic or identity, and assuming that racism stems from individual prejudice to be addressed with moral censure, the historical, structural and systemic aspects of race and racism are elided in normative theorising (Mills 2015). This elision fuels the reproduction of racial ignorance by obscuring the ways in which race structures many of the assumptions on which normative theorising proceeds. Instead, I aim to foreground some of the historical and contemporary manifestations of race as a useful and persistent social fiction (Mills 2013; see also S. Hall 2017), or as Stuart Hall succinctly put it, a ‘floating signifier’ (S. Hall 1997). However, rather than locating the problem in the faulty cognitive practices of white normative theorists, my concern is the ways in which racial ignorance is methodologically sanctioned through theoretical assumptions characteristic of NPT. This chapter therefore turns to a key question of the dissertation: how can the resources of critical literatures enable NPT to reorient its methodological practices to align with the intersectional injunctions stipulated in Chapter Two? In other words, what ontological and epistemological assumptions can be found in critical literatures that can *sensitise* NPT to the limits of its own horizons, and the ways in which these are implicated in the reproduction of racial ignorance? What are some of the different conceptual tools and practices that help us to identify and contest this reproduction?

The central argument of this chapter and the next is that a vital engine behind the reproduction of racial ignorance in NPT is the conceptual repertoire and standpoint of

liberal modernity and the concomitant failure to take theoretical heed of the constitutive relationship between modernity and European colonialism. As I will go on to demonstrate, racial ignorance is reproduced as a result of the ontological and epistemological assumptions embodied in central categories of normative theorising; that is, in NPT's conceptualisations of the subject, the nation, and culture, and the dominant standpoints from which normative theorising is typically articulated. Building on the components of NPT's methodological practice outlined in Chapter One, I show how *methodological individualism*, a liberal moral psychology and the centrality of reason, and the standpoint of liberal modernity – coupled with an absence of reflexivity – are the vehicles through which racial ignorance is reproduced. Doing so affords me the opportunity to pay close attention to NPT's ontological and epistemological foundations, and the ways in which these reflect Eurocentric, racist, and racialised understandings of the sociopolitical world and assumptions about how this world is best represented in theorising.

The argument proceeds in three sections. The chapter begins with the central conceptual apparatus underpinning normative theorising; that is, the relationship between the liberal Enlightenment subject and reason. It turns to decolonial theory to problematise this relationship. First, it indicates “where” racism is lurking. It then introduces a theoretical vocabulary that can sensitise us to the ways in which the ontological and epistemological apparatus used to justify European colonialism continues to animate the conceptual repertoire of modernity – and by extension, NPT. To this end, I draw on the concept of *coloniality* (Ramón Grosfoguel 2002; Mignolo 2007; Quijano 2000), which enables the expression of the continuity between the dominant formation of power relations that animated European colonialism and that persist in the contemporary period of formal decolonisation. The *colonial difference* (Ramón Grosfoguel 2002; Mignolo 2002) and the *epistemic line* (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2018) further specify the epistemological effects of *coloniality*. With the help of this trifecta, the first section addresses *methodological individualism* and its theoretical underpinnings, specifically in terms of the liberal Enlightenment account of the subject and Eurocentric reason. This inquiry paves the way to examine a further central analytical category of modernity: the nation-state.

The next part of the chapter continues to draw on these insights to foreground the relationship between Eurocentric reason and the nation-state. Specifically, this section probes into the ways in which the reliance on an inadequately rendered conceptualisation of the nation-state further obfuscates dynamics of racialised exclusion, a theme I will also return to in Chapter Four in my analysis of influential works in NPT. It brings into focus the tendency in NPT to represent liberal democracies of the Global North as nation-states, an observation that orients two counter-conceptualisations of contemporary liberal democracies as post-imperial and settler colonial states, respectively. In relation to the post-imperial state, my curation of concepts stresses the importance of cultivating sensitisation to the ways in which historical constellations of power inform not only so-called “national” imaginaries, but the conceptualisation of these imaginaries as “national” *per se*. This sensitisation is necessary, I argue, to grasp the ways in which racial ignorance gets reproduced through deployments of an unreconstructed concept of the nation-state. The concept of the *situated imagination* (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002; Yuval-Davis 2011) guides me here in the process of interrogating putatively national standpoints, deconstructing their intersectional complexity, and locating the ways in which racialised accounts of belonging often operate implicitly therein. Furthermore, I discuss two concepts, *racializing vision* and *colonial gaze*, from anticolonial feminist phenomenologist Alia Al-Saji (2010b, 2014), as a pair of conceptual tools that foreground the complex temporo-spatial and embodied nature of racialised perception.

The third section of this chapter engages with Indigenous scholarship to consider some of the theoretical possibilities for identifying how racial ignorance manifests itself through NPT’s relationship to the concept of the settler colonial state. Specifically, I discuss both the ethics of *settler innocence* (Tuck and Yang 2012) and the relational ethical orientation of *grounded normativity* (Coulthard 2014; Coulthard and Simpson 2016) as separately developed, but interconnected tools that can sensitise normative theorists to the limits of methodologically individualist cultural rights approaches through which settler hegemony is consolidated. Finally, in the chapter’s conclusion, I relate the insights of this chapter to the methodological injunctions distilled in Chapter Two, and give a brief account of how the critical projects I have surveyed in the chapter fit within an intersectional paradigm.

3.2 Decoloniality, racial ignorance, and the conceptual repertoire of modernity

What tools, then, what concepts, practices, and standpoints, might be marshalled in the service of contesting racial ignorance in NPT? The first field of scholarship I turn to in assembling the chapter's methodological toolkit is the decolonial school, whose conceptual architecture and theoretical vocabulary offer an instructive starting point for examining how "race" is embedded in the ontological and epistemological foundations of normative theorising. As I will go on to demonstrate, getting to grips with the ways in which colonial understandings of race continue to inflect NPT's central categories of analysis offers a crucial initial inoculation against racial ignorance. The section proceeds with attention to the first of the methodological objections identified in Chapter One – against *methodological individualism* – and works through the ways in which a decolonial conceptual vocabulary can *sensitise* its interlocutors to how racial ignorance is reproduced through this practice, and *contest* it by delineating alternative theoretical starting points.

First, however, what is distinctive about the decolonial school in terms of the tools and practices it can offer here? Decoloniality, in my understanding, offers an especially lucid account of the ways in which ontology and epistemology inform each other (Mignolo and Walsh 2018; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020; Savransky 2017). This is particularly useful in relation to the liberal Enlightenment tradition where the account of reason and the individual subject, as outlined in 1.3.1, constitute the core ontological and epistemological anchorings for understanding and intervening normatively in the sociopolitical world. Through its critique of Eurocentric reason, and its mapping of the ways in which European Renaissance and Enlightenment beliefs about the nature of the human subject, knowledge, and political society were implicated in colonialism, decolonial thought deconstructs the theoretical architecture of Eurocentric Enlightenment thought to show how racism permeates its foundations. On this basis, I introduce here some of the key conceptual contributions from decolonial thought in order to disclose how we can do this excavatory work with respect to race, and, in the process, begin to identify how racial ignorance is reproduced through NPT's ontological and epistemological assumptions and methodological practices.

3.1.1 Methodological individualism: race, reason, and subjectivity

The first concern identified in Chapter One was *methodological individualism*, which neglects the effects of social relations on the constitution of the subject and on sociohistorical context, whilst universalising a particular understanding of reason as the central characteristic of the subject. Decolonial thought, on the other hand, takes an analysis of power and oppression as its theoretical starting point, problematising in the process the hegemony of Eurocentric reason. This is encapsulated in what Walter D. Mignolo (2002) refers to as the ‘colonial difference’, a concept used to refer to the relation constructed between European colonisers and colonised non-European peoples. The *colonial difference* historically served to legitimise European colonialism by inaugurating a racialised hierarchy, at the top of which sat (Western) European culture.⁴⁷ For decolonial thinkers, the *colonial difference* is a central relation for understanding the ways in which historical constellations of power shape the contemporary world. This point emerges through the argument that through European colonialism, knowledge itself was colonised, meaning that Eurocentric epistemology has become dominant through colonial practices of *epistemicide* (B. de S. Santos 2016) or the violent repression and destruction of non-European epistemologies. On this basis, Grosfoguel (2002), for example, argues that the *colonial difference* ‘is always constitutive of processes of knowledge production. To speak from the subaltern side of the colonial difference forces us to look at the world from angles and points of view critical of hegemonic perspectives’ (2002, 209).

The division of the world into the dominant and ‘subaltern’ sides of the *colonial difference* speaks to the way in which an idea of race has animated Eurocentric perceptions of subjectivity and knowledge. The interweaving of epistemic colonisation and race is fruitfully captured in Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s concept of the epistemic line (2018). Invoking W. E. B. Du Bois’s ‘color line’, which denotes the division of the globe into hierarchised racial groups, the *epistemic line* draws attention to the ways in which Enlightenment ontological and epistemological assumptions regarding the “human” capacity for reason excluded colonised peoples, who, as members of inferior races, were believed to lack Eurocentric reason. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni writes, the

⁴⁷ See, for example, Mignolo (2000) and Alcoff (2008, 2017) for the progression from European superiority predicated on Christianity to a secular-scientific hierarchy that foregrounded biological race as the central marker of difference.

'denial of humanity automatically disqualified one from epistemic virtue' (2018, 3), whilst a Eurocentric Enlightenment understanding of epistemic virtue reflected naturalised assumptions about who counts as a fully "human" subject (2018, 243). The epistemic line enables us to recognise that a central problem arising from the theoretical underpinnings of *methodological individualism* is the ascription of "human" to a particular account of the knowing subject. In this sense, one way that *methodological individualism* reproduces specifically *racial* ignorance is through the belief that a particular capacity for reason characterises the human subject, without consideration for the way in which this belief reflects an implicit, racialised premise about what 'reason' is and who has, historically, possessed it.

Contra *methodological individualism*, decolonial thinking highlights the centrality of relationality by foregrounding the relational nature and structural complexity behind the concept of "race". By taking a historically grounded standpoint, cognisant of the ways in which now-dominant understandings of knowledge and knowledge production processes both guided and were shaped by the exigencies of colonial domination, decolonial thinking shows that race is not an identity that we know as a result of recognising difference, as measured against a Eurocentric yardstick. As Castro-Gómez puts it, 'notions of "race" and "culture" operate as a taxonomic construction that *generates opposing identities*. The colonized thus appears as the "other of reason," which justifies the use of disciplinary power by the colonizer' (Castro-Gómez 2002, 276; *emphasis added*). "Race" then emerges as both an effect and an object of a complex set of historical processes, both ideological and material, that have naturalised a specific hierarchy designed to serve Eurocentric exploits. Racism becomes the 'hegemonic discourse that questions the humanity of all those who do not belong to the locus of enunciation [...] of those who assign the standard of classification and assign to themselves the right to classify' (Mignolo 2009, 8).

Decolonial thought traces contemporary white supremacist racism as, if not *emanating* from, then at least *organised* and *amplified by* a particular constellation of beliefs and practices, predicated on the "racial" social classification of the world population under

Eurocentred world power' (Quijano 2007, 171).⁴⁸ In this way, it enables us to identify how beliefs about the superiority of European thought and culture, as well as ideologies of racial hierarchy, remain implicit in many of the categories used to make sense of and intervene normatively in the modern world. The *colonial difference* and the *epistemic line* help to illustrate this point with respect to the archetypical individual subject of liberal Enlightenment thought and the presumptive universality of Eurocentric reason.

Whilst decolonial thought *begins* from the *colonial difference* as a central organising axis of Eurocentric epistemic power, and provides in the process an account of the significance of "race" in relation to colonial domination, decolonial scholars are not inured to the multiplicity of relations that shape and structure dominant constellations of power. This is evident from the work of sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2000, 2007), for example, whose concept of the *colonial matrix of power* laid the groundwork for much contemporary decolonial thought (see also Mignolo 2011; Mignolo and Walsh 2018). The *colonial matrix of power* denotes a formation of interwoven relations, and recalls the notion of an intersectional matrix of domination encountered in 2.2. Quijano's conception of the *colonial matrix* draws attention to the way in which Eurocentric hierarchies of race, interwoven with colonial practices of dispossession and genocide, and capitalist relations of extraction and exploitation, gave shape to the material and ideological circumstances of the colonisation of the Americas. In this regard, decolonial thought works from ontological assumptions of complex relationality comparable to those of intersectionality, foregrounding the importance of addressing relations of oppression as mutually constituting, rather than operating in isolation from one another.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ I don't take a firm position here on whether racism *began* with the advent of European colonialism; the more important point to make is that it is as a result of the initiation of colonialism as a process that potentially pre-existing perceptions of race get remade and systematised through the classificatory framework of Eurocentric understanding. On Eurocentric racial classification, see, for example, Quijano (2000); Mignolo (2000); Amin ([1988] 2009, chap. 3), Chap. 3; Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020). For a useful discussion on whether race precedes the (post-) colonial, see Meer (2018).

⁴⁹ For a decolonial feminist articulation of this point, see most importantly, Lugones (2007, 2010); see also Walsh and Mignolo (2018, 158); Costa (2013); Mendoza (2015); and the discussion above in 2.2.1. For more recent interventions in thinking intersectionality and decolonial feminism together, see Carastathis (2016, chap. 6) and Dhamoon (2015); and for a critique of decolonial feminism's anti-Black misappropriation of intersectionality, see Terreffe (2020).

Moreover, decolonial thinking sheds light on the ahistorical and contextually disembodied liberal, Enlightenment subject. As I discussed above in 2.2, an intersectional account of subjectivity is attentive to the ways in which relations of power shape the subject. Decolonial theorisations of subjectivity, such as the decolonial feminism advanced by María Lugones (1994, 2007), also suggest that understandings of racialised and gendered identities, for example, are neither static, monolithic entities, nor components of a composite subject scattered across various categories. Rather, the conditions under which subjectivity is constituted are shaped historically and relationally. In this sense, instead of positing an ahistorical and contextually disembodied “core” self, typical of liberal accounts of subjectivity, decolonial feminist and intersectional accounts both foreground the ways in which the subject is constituted by these relations. In other words, Lugones and other decolonial thinkers beginning from, and critical of, the imposition of the *colonial difference*, show that the perception of difference *as such* is relationally constructed, and not essential. However, it is an epistemological function of the *colonial matrix of power* to remove from critical purview this quality of relationality. As we will see in the following chapter, the essentialisation and naturalisation of difference is a central outcome of *methodological individualism*; a practice that, as discussed in 1.3.1, neglects and disavows relationality, theoretically speaking.

Lastly, how can decolonial thinkers respond to the challenge that the *colonial matrix of power* describes oppressive relations of the past, rather than conditions that endure in the present? In the era of formal decolonisation, arguably there are still many forms of oppression, but colonialism is assumed to be a practice consigned to history. How can it continue to animate contemporary constellations of power? A final significant conceptual contribution from decolonial thought in this regard is *coloniality/modernity*. Conceptually continuous with the *colonial matrix of power*, *coloniality/modernity* also expresses a particular arrangement of and relationship between different power relations in which Eurocentrism and racism are present. However, what decolonial scholarship has charted through *coloniality/modernity* is the constitutive relationship between the “modern” period, putatively emerging as a result of Enlightenment processes of deepening philosophical and scientific understanding and innovation, and European colonialism. Rather than “modernity” emerging from the civilisationally advanced milieu of Western Europe, its patterns, processes and practices – including

the emergence of the Westphalian order of sovereign states, capitalist industrialisation, and European self-understanding as modern – were closely dependent on relations of domination cultivated through colonisation (Dussel 1993; Mignolo 2011; Quijano 2007). Insofar as *modernity* persists, *coloniality*, or the organisation of the sociopolitical world in the wake of European colonialism and imperialism around Eurocentric hierarchies of race, ethnicity, religion, nation, gender, and class, persists also.⁵⁰ In other words, *coloniality/modernity* enables us to chart how white supremacist racism, and its connection to colonialism, sit at the heart of modernity in terms of the logic through which it advances and legitimises its central categories.

This insight into the relationship between colonialism, modernity, and liberal Enlightenment ontology and epistemology begins to demonstrate how the formation of *coloniality/modernity* matters for the identification of racial ignorance in normative theorising. By drawing our attention to the ways in which complex constellations of power shape the concepts and standpoints typically utilised in NPT, the conceptual architecture of *coloniality/modernity* exemplifies a form of methodological reflexivity. Becoming familiar with the small slice of decoloniality's conceptual repertoire I have introduced here is part of a broader elicitation to reflexively scrutinise the historical epistemological conditions under which dominant categories of analysis and ways of knowing have consolidated their hold on normative theorising. Specifically, engaging a practice of reflexivity guided by a decolonial conceptual repertoire should sensitise us to two points: first, as I've discussed above, attention to the *colonial matrix of power* indicates the theoretical limitations of *methodological individualism*, and points us instead towards a relational ontology that recognises how structures and processes such as racism and colonialism epistemologically organise the sociopolitical world into contingent categories. Second, engaging a decolonial repertoire allows us to reorient our theoretical attention to naturalised aspects of the sociopolitical world that demand critical interrogation. By attending to the *colonial matrix of power* and its material and epistemological effects, methodological practices of *fact insensitivity* leveraged from

⁵⁰ This is not to suggest that such categories have remained static since the beginnings of European colonialism. Rather, whilst their specific articulations have changed, they remain amongst the central organising categories of the social world as characterised by *colonial modernity*.

NPT's theoretical standpoint become untenable, as they result in the naturalisation of historically contingent assumptions.

To sum up, this section has sought to provide an account of the racialised ontological and epistemological foundations of some of the central categories that animate normative theorising: the individual subject and Eurocentric reason. I have argued that contesting racial ignorance in NPT requires sensitisation to the racialised underpinnings of *methodological individualism* and the Eurocentric accounts of the subject and reason it advances. I have shown that the *colonial difference* draws our attention to the kinds of methodological practices that enable this sensitisation, and elicit a more robust, nuanced engagement with the historical unfolding of colonialism, its racialised epistemological dimensions, and its continuities in contemporary normative theorising. By adopting a different set of theoretical starting points, we can start to identify and contest the ways in which racial ignorance is reproduced through the methodological practices typical of NPT. Moreover, in demonstrating the ways in which the ontological and epistemological assumptions undergirding *methodological individualism* organise and contribute to the reproduction of racial ignorance in NPT, this section has laid the groundwork for the following section, which examines NPT's historical and sociological insensitivity with respect to the concept of the nation-state.

3.2.2 The nation-state: race, culture and citizenship

This section aims to trace the continuities between the assumptions undergirding *methodological individualism*, and the ways in which they guide normative theorising with respect to a further central category of analysis in its conceptual repertoire: the nation-state. The nation-state in normative theorising is a conceptual lynchpin that orients a range of debates (Sager 2016, 2021), and acts as a common touchstone amongst various liberal ethical outlooks, including forms of liberal nationalism, multiculturalism, and cosmopolitanism, as we will see in the following chapter. However, like the liberal Enlightenment subject, the nation-state is heir to a complex history that is often overlooked or minimised in NPT. Moreover, it rests on a set of ontological and epistemological assumptions that, left unchecked, allow racial ignorance to flourish. Here, I consider three characteristics of methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002, 2003; see also Chernilo 2011; Sager

2016): elision of the historic emergence of nation-states; misrecognising the normative assumption of national homogeneity as a fact; and naturalising the nation-state as a central category in normative theorising. I suggest these aspects of methodological nationalism shape *fact insensitivity* in NPT and reproduce racial ignorance.

To begin with, the methodological decision to theorise the nation-state in abstraction from historical processes and power relations is a source of and engine behind racial ignorance. Failing to account for the ways in which imperialism and colonialism shaped the emergence of Westphalian sovereignty and the contemporary global border regime, normative theorists tend to disregard racism as something inherent in the nation-state order (Goldberg 2002). Put differently, NPT's theoretical standpoint remains desensitised to the foundational role that racism has played, via colonialism and imperialism, in the creation of consolidated liberal-democratic states and their persisting imaginaries. This desensitisation plays out across three main sites: first, the rationale for the nation-state, which is justified on the basis of Eurocentric reason. Its origins, as Mignolo puts it, stem from 'the religious war that concluded with the Peace of Westphalia (1648)' and which 'created the conditions and the need to look for a *rational* society that would transcend and avoid previous horrors' (Mignolo 2000, 726, *emphasis added*). Second, the nation-state was conceptually predicated on the equality of its citizens as subjects to whom the rational organisation of political society could be justified (Waldron 1987). This marks a significant racialised boundary through which the belief in the cultural superiority of European peoples is consolidated. Finally, although Westphalian sovereignty was the doctrine of equal sovereignty amongst nation-states, its non-interference clause only extended amongst the European nations, and not to colonised peoples of the Americas, Asia, or Africa. Inattention to this historical fact also obscures the extent to which the development of European states, and later, empires, in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, was reliant on the extraction of wealth from their colonies (Bhambra 2021; Bhambra and Holmwood 2018).

Second, despite the fact of ever-present plurality, the construct of the nation and subsequently "the people" inhabiting a state's territory tends to be premised on ideas of historical continuity and homogeneity (Benhabib 2004; Brubaker 2002). Theorising the nation-state in abstraction from historical constellations of power thus means that

the heterogenous composition of “the people”, whether in terms of culture, religion, language, ethnicity, or race, appears exceptional, rather than the norm. The problem for NPT emerges in terms of its methodological decision to leverage an idealised account of the nation-state that fails to account for heterogeneity. Instead, an uncritical, unreconstructed account of “the nation”, which neglects the effects of conquest, colonisation, or imperial expansion on the nation-state’s historical composition and development, legitimates and reproduces itself as a standpoint from which normative claims can be advanced. In this regard, normative interventions that seek to address issues such as multiculturalism and immigration view the nation-state as the stable backdrop against which cultural difference appears anomalous. The reproduction of racial ignorance here hinges on two points: first is the problem of a reductive account of difference articulated from a dominant standpoint which disavows its own epistemic particularity. Second is the failure to recognise the way in which the theorisation of the nation-state in these terms both works from and reproduces this dominant theoretical standpoint, which is desensitised to the entrenched historical and structural dimensions of racism and how these inflect and inform contemporary nation-building projects and articulations of “national” cultural identity.

Third, assuming a standpoint of a consolidated, homogeneous nation-state as a central anchor of analysis in normative theorising obscures the range of potential other ordering categories of the social world. In this respect, methodological nationalism tends to discount alternative forms of sociability and relationality as deviant to the naturalised nation-state form (Sager 2016). As a result, the nation-state tends to be a given and unquestioned category of analysis in NPT, such that any historical and normative presumptions remain implicit. Methodological nationalism consequently desensitises normative theorists to the contingency of the nation-state as a historical reality, perceiving it instead as an immutable fact. Moreover, this lack of attention to historical contingency means that NPT’s theoretical standpoint is systematically inured to the racialised foundations of the nation-state as a concept, and the processes of colonialism and imperialism through which specific states developed. In other words, NPT’s desensitisation to the contingency of the nation-state manifests itself methodologically as historical neglect of the epistemological and material relations that led to the nation-state’s emergence. This desensitisation reproduces the epistemological relations of *colonial modernity*.

Given the ways in which NPT's methodological practices reproduce racial ignorance via the conceptual repertoire of colonial modernity, including the individual subject, reason, and the nation-state, 3.3 and 3.4 both aim to populate further a toolkit that can sensitise normative theorists to the limitations of NPT's ontological and epistemological horizons. First, 3.3 guides us through a selection of conceptual tools that elicit us to interrogate the construction of putatively "national" imaginaries in post-imperial state contexts, probing racialised dynamics of inclusion, exclusion and belonging. Then, 3.4 turns to the question of the settler colonial state. It asks what tools and practices are available to sensitise normative theorists to the limits of methodologically individualist cultural rights approaches through which settler hegemony is consolidated.

3.3 Post-imperial states, race, and culture

This section broaches the question of how NPT can identify and contest racial ignorance reproduced through insensitivity to the historical processes and dynamics that shape discourses of race, culture, and belonging in contemporary post-imperial states. I have already argued that, conceptually, it is important to recognise that "modern" liberal democratic states have been shaped by relations of imperialism and colonialism, rendering their populations heterogeneous and undermining their status as "nation"-states. However, missing from our toolkit are ways of critically interrogating the standpoints from which these faulty conceptualisations of the state are leveraged, and unpacking the ways in which these standpoints are complicit in reproducing racial ignorance through colonial-inflected taxonomies of racial and cultural difference. To help us persevere with this project, I draw on the work of two scholars working in quite different traditions, but whose conceptual contributions are linked through the ways in which they enable us, as theorists, to critically reflect on the construction of putatively national standpoints and remain alert and sensitised to how such standpoints can shape our theorising.

The conceptual tools I have found to be useful for this task draw attention to the internal complexity and heterogeneity of contemporary liberal democratic states, whilst also illuminating the construction of the dominant standpoints from which heterogeneity and cultural difference are problematised and addressed. In other

words, these concepts can help to sensitise normative theorists to the ways in which processes of imperialism and colonialism shape how these issues are framed from presumptively national, or methodologically nationalist, standpoints. To do the necessary work of sensitisation, I first introduce *situated imagination* (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002), which enables us to map the contours of the standpoints from which dominant understandings of nationhood are articulated. Second, I turn to *racializing vision* and the *colonial gaze*, drawn from the work of anticolonial feminist phenomenologist Alia Al-Saji (2010, 2014). This pair of concepts underscores the ontology of racialization, revealing its perceptual register and how it animates contemporary “national” contexts shaped by imperial and colonial pasts.⁵¹ Furthermore, these concepts draw attention to the ways in which intersectional constellations of power shape and inform racialised and gendered perceptions of cultural difference, shifting the emphasis from biological or phenotypical difference to symbolic markers such as those associated with specific religious or cultural practices. All three concepts lead us to the importance of the reflexive interrogation of the standpoint from which normative theorising is undertaken, and impart to us the theoretical tools necessary to denaturalise faulty assumptions about the history and composition of post-imperial states.

Starting with *situated imagination*, this concept appears as a means of attuning us to the sedimented imaginaries within which discourses of national identity and belonging are articulated (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002; Yuval-Davis 2011). Imagination in this sense is ‘simultaneously a category of epistemology and society’ (2002, 324), foregrounding the connection between knowledge on one hand, and social agency and experience on the other. On this basis, an imaginary constitutes a repository of cognitive, affective, and perceptual epistemic resources that those socialised into it can draw on, in order to organise and interpret their encounters with others. Specifically, these imaginaries guide assumptions and beliefs about who can and does ‘belong’ to the nation, whether on grounds of visual markers of culture, religion, or

⁵¹ The racialization of culture is well documented in existing scholarship; for example, Balibar (1991); Modood (1992); Gilroy (1993); Essed (1996); Grosfoguel (1999); Lewis (2007); Lentin and Tittley (2011); Meer (2013). In my understanding, by undertaking a phenomenological deconstruction of the relationship between dominant imaginaries, perceptual apparatuses, and the effects of individual acts of perception, Al-Saji’s scholarship illuminates in finer theoretical detail the process through which markers of visible cultural difference become racialised and politicised.

ethnicity, physiognomic features, or citizenship status (Yuval-Davis 1993; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1996).

Methodologically, *situated imagination* elicits us first of all to interrogate various standpoints, such as those leveraged to account for some vision of the “nation”, by critically situating them in a broader historical and intersectional context, and second, to conduct reflexive inquiry into the composition of dominant imaginaries. In doing so, it becomes more readily apparent how processes of racialised exclusion have shaped the construction of national standpoints, an observation that theorists must learn to make and consider when leveraging national standpoints in normative argumentation. Critical and reflexive scrutiny of standpoint is indispensable for contesting the reproduction of ignorance in our own practices of theorising, as it constitutes a necessary dimension of analysing the intersectional power relations within which dominant knowledge practices emerge. The capacity to identify the constellations within which certain dominant articulations of “national” identity and its attendant standpoint emerge is in itself part of a resistant knowledge project that contests relations of epistemic and political oppression.

Taking the theoretical assumptions undergirding *situated imagination* as a methodological starting point can help us to contest racial ignorance. By illuminating the contours of dominant imaginaries, we can more aptly identify the historical and contemporary junctures at which exclusions have been constructed on assumptions of racial inferiority or other hierarchies. Because *situated imagination* references explicitly the idea that standpoints from which theorising proceeds are historically and socially complex constructions, methodologically, it elicits us to critically reflect on the constructing of our own theoretical standpoints, rather than assuming that these are politically and epistemically neutral. From here, following Yuval-Davis’s emphasis on the complexity of intersectional power relations, we have the tools and the building blocks necessary to analyse and reflect on the ways in which racism as an axis of power shapes the socioepistemic contexts in which theorising is undertaken. This is an important initial step to understanding some of the methodological processes through which race can be excavated. Below, I turn to the effects and ramifications of national imaginaries in terms of how repositories of shared resources are mobilised in the reproduction of racialised ignorance.

To address more fully the problem of race in relation to situated imagination, I draw on two concepts, taken from Alia Al-Saji's (2010) anticolonial feminist work on the phenomenology of racialization: *racializing vision* and the *colonial gaze*. Whilst *racializing vision* refers to the process through which racialized interpretations of bodily difference are naturalised through socially embedded processes of perception, the *colonial gaze* names a standpoint from which certain forms of racialization proceed. Al-Saji's scholarship aids me here by revealing the perceptual mechanics behind the naturalised and sedimented forms of colonial racialization that persist in post-imperial imaginaries. I suggest that *racializing vision* and the *colonial gaze* are modes of perception that can be reproduced theoretically in NPT, without adequate reflexive scrutiny of the conceptualisations normative theorists choose to deploy.

Al-Saji builds on the anticolonial scholarship of Frantz Fanon and phenomenological works by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Linda Martín Alcoff to argue that racialization is performed 'largely through a visual register' (Al-Saji 2010, 884). *Racializing vision* is a mode of perception that habitually and unconsciously *naturalises* the inferiority of physiognomic qualities such as skin colour, or cultural-religious symbols such as the hijab. Put simply, this means that when we 'perceive' racial or cultural difference, the difference we understand ourselves to be perceiving is constructed through the act of perception itself, but made to appear as if it were there all along. This is because perception is not a purely cognitive process performed by discrete individuals, but a socially embedded practice that draws on shared repositories of meanings, such as those encountered above in relation to the *situated imagination*. Al-Saji therefore argues that 'Western'⁵² perceptions of the hijab as indicative of Islam's inherently oppressive gender relations are already shaped by an existing architecture of meanings, which serve to reproduce, through a visual register, the perception of Muslims as racially 'Other'. In this way, processes of racialization are reproduced, unconsciously, as a result of differently situated individuals' embeddedness within socio-visual fields. As Al-Saji puts it, the inability to 'see otherwise [...] should be understood to belong to social-cultural horizons, historically tied to modernity and colonial expansion in the West and motivated by imaginary and epistemic investments in representation' (2014, 139). In other words, *racializing vision* is one outcome of a

⁵² I follow Al-Saji's usage here: the 'West' designates a 'cultural and discursive construct in formation [...] that constitutes itself through representations of its (racialized and gendered) 'others'' (2010, 878).

historically specified perceptual apparatus that distinguishes between “modern”, “Western” cultures and “traditional”, “oppressive” ones on the basis of visual signifiers, such as the hijab: ‘the past here is congealed as schema and is, as such, overdetermined and fixed in its sense; this is the past as “historico-racial schema,” the past constructed as myth, stereotype, distorted and isolated remnant’ (2014, 141). Conceptually, then, *racializing vision* discloses the ontology of racialization, or the process and effects of ascribing “race” to a particular body on the basis of a historically congealed repertoire of visual meanings. While the first part of this chapter showed how *colonial modernity* assumes an onto-epistemological hierarchy of races, the elaboration here hinges on the extent to which that hierarchy becomes naturalised and sedimented through the perceptual schemata of post-imperial imaginaries. Crucially, *racializing vision* as a dominant mode of perception within the constellation of *colonial modernity* is, I suggest, reproduced through NPT’s theoretical standpoint when normative theorists engage reductive analytics of cultural difference in abstraction from historical relations of oppression. This is a problem we will encounter frequently in the normative approaches I engage in Chapter Four.

The *colonial gaze*, meanwhile, names a mode of perception that draws uncritically on interpretative resources of the Western imaginary, and which habitually perceives symbols such as the hijab as racially ‘Other’. Where *racializing vision* discloses an ontology of racialization, the *colonial gaze* directs us to the theoretical scaffolding – in terms of the historical, social, and political conditions – that materialise and shape it as a standpoint, as well as the parameters of the visual field in which it operates. For Al-Saji, the *colonial gaze* is not reducible to a single relation between coloniser and colonised. Through the analysis of the hijab as a site where ‘the projection of gender oppression onto the veil is the means by which racialization takes place’ (2010, 888), Al-Saji shows that, within the structural parameters of coloniality, race and gender ‘rely on and function through one another’ (2010, 888). The standpoint in question, then, is one that draws together race, gender, culture, and colonisation in shaping its visual field and the perceptual apparatus through which it inscribes and naturalises otherness to visible features of the body. In this way, *racializing vision* proceeds from the standpoint of the *colonial gaze*, which, as a reflection of the colonial matrix of power relations, organises perceptual habits and interpretative repertoires. Critically, these perceptual habits and interpretative repertoires extend to form the naturalised

conceptual canvas of NPT. In this sense, we can think of the *colonial gaze* as being deployed from NPT's theoretical standpoint. As I will elaborate in Chapter Four, processes of cultural essentialisation in normative theorising are made possible through the apparatus of the *colonial gaze*, which constructs cultural difference in absolute and essentialising terms.

What can we learn from the concepts of *racializing vision* and the *colonial gaze*? How might they inform our theorising, and how can they help to challenge racial ignorance in NPT? First of all, by disclosing the historical weight of perceptual schemata and the ways in which these shape dominant understandings of societal membership and otherness, both concepts elicit us to reorient our theoretical starting points. Rather than beginning from the assumption that our perceptual schemata are neutral and underpin objective reflection, Al-Saji's conceptual repertoire guides us to reflect on the kinds of interpretative resources that inform dominant standpoints, especially in pluralistic, racially diverse post-imperial contexts. In conjunction with *situated imagination*, these two concepts offer an account of how dominant imaginaries, such as those undergirding understandings of the "West" or the "nation", get constructed. They point to the ways in which these imaginaries structure modes of perception and processes of othering by registering certain aspects of the visual field, such as skin colour or cultural-religious symbols, as not belonging.

One important way of challenging the reproduction of racial ignorance emerges, then, through identifying and sensitising ourselves to historically sedimented modes of perception that shape dominant understandings of who "belongs" where, or to which society or culture. Crucial here in methodological terms is reflection on the construction of our theoretical standpoints and the kinds of assumptions they reproduce. The process of being socialised into the embodied practice of *racializing vision* indicates that there is a historical dimension through which racialization occurs, as a result of drawing on longstanding repositories of interpretative and perceptual resources. This reinforces the idea that "race" is constructed and reproduced socially, rather than simply being a manifestation of or cognitive response to a pre-existing difference. By illustrating how racialization occurs through the visual field, these concepts help us to clarify that cultural and racial difference are neither neutral facts about the world, nor

morally irrelevant characteristics that must be addressed by correcting for individual prejudice and bias.

The *colonial gaze* adds a further layer to the construction of racial difference by drawing our attention to the theoretical scaffolding that sustains colonial logics through the medium of standpoint. In this regard, it is essential for us to learn how to identify and critically analyse the extent and the ways in which our “gazes” and our standpoints reproduce colonial logics. One way to do this, as Al-Saji does, is to situate the emergence of the colonial gaze in terms of historical instances where visual indicators of presumptive cultural “otherness” have been leveraged for violent or exclusionary purposes, to foreground the ways in which difference is instrumentalised and made to signify “otherness” for the purposes of domination. Combatting racial ignorance here requires a process of excavation that reveals the processes through which racial difference is constructed and then naturalised.

Second, both concepts afford us an instructive view on the relationship between race and culture, and the processes through which culture can become racialised whilst still existing as a distinct axis of analysis. Al-Saji writes that *cultural* racism ‘is directed at bodies, which this racist vision materially inscribes and perceives as culturally different. This racism naturalizes cultural difference to visible features of the body’ (2010, 889). As a result, judgements of cultural difference are always entangled in a pre-existing field of power. Methodologically, *racializing vision* orients us towards recognising that judgements of cultural difference cannot be taken for granted, and need to be brought under critical scrutiny as part of the research process. Crucially, Al-Saji’s analysis here invites us to be mindful of the ways in which culture is used euphemistically in discussions of difference, and foregrounds a significant site where racial ignorance can get reproduced through asserting that the difference at stake can be reduced to culture. This is a theme I take up in the following chapter, in relation to the kinds of normative interventions NPT’s liberal standpoint deems suitable for responding to the perceived problem of cultural difference in contemporary liberal democracies of the Global North.

Finally, the *colonial gaze* and *racializing vision* are useful and appropriate tools to have in the methodological kit because they are predicated on intersectional ontologies that

take power relations to be historically entrenched, contextually specific, and intertwined with the dominant standpoints from which analyses of such contexts are articulated. By drawing attention to this theoretical nuance, these tools alert us to the ways in which dominant concepts of *colonial modernity* deployed in normative theorising – the nation-state, cultural difference – are sites through which racial ignorance is reproduced. Specifically, they help us to dispel the assumption that the post-imperial state is, or has until recently been, racially and culturally homogeneous, or that it can be theorised in abstraction from its contingent emergence in the aftermath of European empires. As an alternative, these concepts offer us a different constellation of theoretical starting points, and the opportunity to address ethical dilemmas in ways that are attentive to the weight of colonial and imperial histories in shaping dominant imaginaries.

I have argued in this section that we can cultivate sensitivity to the complex construction of “national” standpoints, the ways in which these standpoints leverage incomplete histories and inadequate conceptions of the nation-state, and how racial ignorance is reproduced in turn. Through engagement with *situated imagination*, *racializing vision*, and the *colonial gaze*, I have sought to highlight the ways in which imperial and colonial pasts continue to shape and inflect the imaginaries through which dynamics of racialised belonging and exclusion come to predominate in states with imperial pasts. Most important for the aims of this project, however, is the ways in which these imaginaries also inflect the theoretical standpoints from which normative theorising is undertaken. I have suggested that by becoming more familiar with conceptual repertoires from critical intersectional, feminist, and anticolonial thought, normative theorists can begin to engage in a wider practice of reflexivity regarding the adequacy of the concepts and standpoints conventionally deployed in NPT.

So far, the chapter has problematised *methodological individualism* and the absence of relational attunement, and *fact insensitivity* in the form of the historically incomplete leveraging of the nation-state in normative theorising. I’ve shown how, as methodological practices, both reproduce racial ignorance by naturalising dominant conceptualisations of subjectivity and nationhood. In response, I have suggested some potential additions to an alternative conceptual repertoire and methodological toolkit that can sensitise us to racial ignorance and provide theoretical starting points

better attuned to the complexities of race, racism and racialization. The final section addresses a further instantiation of methodological incompleteness and obfuscation in relation to the presumptively national context of the settler colonial state. It engages with Indigenous perspectives on the naturalisation of settler standpoint and its ramifications for normative theorising, and closes with the consideration of a conceptual alternative to the framework of liberal political morality for contesting settler hegemony.

3.4 Settler colonial states, race, and culture

Within the horizon of modern/colonial constellations of power, critical scholarship is also invaluable for understanding contemporary conditions (or configurations) of *ongoing* colonisation. In this final section of the chapter, I engage with Indigenous scholarship to consider some of the theoretical possibilities for identifying how racial ignorance manifests itself through NPT's relationship to the concept of the settler colonial state. Building on the discussion in 3.2 and operating on the assumption that the normative role of the state is to assign and protect the equal rights of its citizens, I discuss two conceptual alternatives that help guide our thinking in terms of reorienting us away from the Eurocentric liberalism animating normative theorising. Specifically, I discuss both the ethics of *settler innocence* (Tuck and Yang 2012) and the relational ethical orientation of *grounded normativity* (Coulthard 2014) as separately developed, but interconnected conceptual tools. In anticipation of the next chapter's examination of liberal multiculturalist and cosmopolitan standpoints in NPT, I argue here that these tools can sensitise normative theorists to the limits of methodologically individualist cultural rights approaches through which settler hegemony is consolidated. These tools not only make visible modern/colonial violence, but at the same time help us challenge and resist the ontological and epistemological assumptions through which the framework of cultural rights undergirded by liberal political morality is defended.

In their (2012) paper 'Decolonization is not a metaphor', Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang designate 'settler moves to innocence' as attempts to 'reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity' (2012, 3); that is, securing the means of continuing to colonise Indigenous land. *Settler innocence* is then enacted through various practices that evade, deny or otherwise fail to acknowledge that colonisation

is an ongoing process in settler contexts, and that decolonisation entails the ceding of land, power, and privilege (2012, 10). It stands as a particularly useful concept for diagnosing racial ignorance in normative theorising, naming a process of engaging with the sociopolitical world that systematically fails to grapple with interwoven relations of racial, capitalist, and colonial domination and their effects. Specifically, racial ignorance gets reproduced theoretically as part of an imaginary in which “good” settler liberals are non-culpable or non-responsible for ongoing colonisation. “Race” is embedded in here in the sense that the conceptual apparatus drawn on by normative theorising to advance and legitimise the settler colonial state and its nation building projects is a Eurocentric, colonial one that supports and sustains a settler standpoint at the expense of Indigenous onto-epistemologies and ways of organising political society.

In the first instance, *settler innocence* helps sensitise us to the ethical limitations of the standpoint of the settler colonial state as it is leveraged in normative theorising. It reveals the theoretical parameters of the standpoint from which settlement is legitimised, intimating that the justification of cultural rights frameworks sustain and further entrench settler colonisation and dispossession of Indigenous land. Put another way, the concept of *settler innocence* serves to underscore the extent to which the settler state remains invested in discourses of equality whilst perpetuating colonial violence. Through enacting *settler innocence*, normative theorising remains systematically inured to the problem of stolen land, instead taking for granted the legitimacy of the settler state. In this regard, while distinct from ignorance, innocence is also importantly related to substantive and strategic practices of failing to know, as it occludes oppressive colonial relations and the settler state’s complicity therein. This process occurs on the pretence that, through accommodating cultural difference, settler politics produces an adequate ethical response to the violence inflicted by settler colonialism. The pretence of *settler innocence* thus renders normative theorists complicit in practices of colonial dispossession, and circumvents the need to countenance Indigenous demands for decolonisation as the ‘repatriation of land simultaneous to the recognition of how land and relations to land have always already been differently understood and enacted’ (Tuck and Yang 2012, 7).

Second, as a further example of *settler innocence*, Tuck and Yang describe the problem of 'equivocation'. Discourses of colonial equivocation, where decolonisation is used as a 'metonym for social justice' (2012, 21), form part of a 'move' to innocence that undermines solidarity with Indigenous decolonial resistance. Discourses of equivocation mask not only the distinctiveness of the coloniser/colonised relation as counterposed to other relations of domination such as capitalism, heteropatriarchy, or ableism, but also collapse specific racial and colonial apparatuses into one another. Ethically and methodologically speaking, the specificity of relations matters in terms of articulating appropriate strategies of resistance and advancing a politics with the necessary capacity to transform those relations (Tuck and Yang 2012, 19). On this basis, it is ethically and politically unviable, in the interests of decolonisation, to treat Indigenous "cultural difference" on a par with other ethnic, racial, or religious minorities in the settler state who have been assimilated into the system of liberal rights, as the oppression of colonised Indigenous peoples is inextricably tied to the question of stolen land. As noted above, reducing Indigenous resistance and calls for decolonisation to the pursuit of cultural rights, or recognition (see also Coulthard 2014) is to deploy a theoretical standpoint that furnishes claims to *settler innocence* and perpetuates racial ignorance regarding the historical and ongoing realities of settlement and dispossession. This is not to suggest that broader anti-racist demands can, in fact, be adequately met through a liberal normative framework; rather, it foregrounds precisely the limitations of reducing distinctive relations of domination and oppression to a singular form, in abstraction from historical and material particularities.

Third, as a result of foregrounding the ways in which the standpoint of the settler state is implicated in the perpetuation of dispossession and domination, becoming sensitised to *settler innocence* can also elicit practices of methodological reflexivity. It invites us as theorists to reflect on whether our standpoints reproduce *settler innocence*, for example, by neglecting or disavowing the historical and structural relations that sustain settler hegemony. In this sense, what we might call "*methodological*" *settler innocence* affords us an opportunity to map and reflect on the constellations guiding the construction of our standpoints and the methodological decisions we take in representing the sociopolitical world. As I will go on to elaborate in Chapter Four, the framing of injustices suffered by Indigenous people in cultural terms, the leveraging of the settler state as immutable, and the systematic forgetting

of the colonial order that preceded and precipitated the settler state to begin with, are all forms of *methodological settler innocence* that normative theorising may ignorantly participate in as a result of its methodological decisions. The remainder of this section, meanwhile, turns to *grounded normativity* as a means of reorienting our theorising away from the problematic ontological and epistemological assumptions undergirding the liberal rights framework and avoiding *methodological settler innocence*. Instead of a universalising ethic of individualism that remains desensitised to historical contingency and contextuality, *grounded normativity* engages a ‘place-based’ (Simpson 2017), relational ethic that practices attunement to contextual specificity. It thus invites NPT to critically and reflexively interrogate the universal moral standards advanced by liberal theorising.

Denoting ethical commitments that are anchored in place-based, solidary relationships, *grounded normativity* (Coulthard 2014; Coulthard and Simpson 2016) directly contests the conceptual apparatus of the implicitly racialised, Eurocentric liberal ethics undergirding the politics of the settler colonial state. What Coulthard describes here should be recognised as different from what Ackerly et. al (2021) refer to as grounded normative theory. Whilst the latter seeks to delineate a methodology grounded in empirical analysis of existing struggles for social justice, it does not explicitly aim do so on a terrain that problematises the fundamental ontological and epistemological categories of modernity that an Indigenous grounded normativity necessarily vitiates. Theorising *methodological settler innocence* enables recognition of both the ways in which complicity with these ethics is sustained and can be challenged, whilst *grounded normativity* takes on the task of showing the effects of adopting a different constellation of theoretical starting points. This constellation begins with *grounded normativity’s* relational ontology, then moves to place-based knowledge, a strategy that I suggest combats *fact insensitivity* by drawing our attention to particularistic and contextualised aspects of the sociopolitical world. Finally, I examine the consequences for racial ignorance of adopting these alternative starting points.

As part of a relational account of the sociopolitical world, *grounded normativity* rejects the *methodological individualism* characteristic of normative theorising in the liberal tradition. However, at stake here is not only the matrix of power relations that sustain

white and Eurocentric dominance, but a broader ethical ontology attuned to the question of what entities are of moral import. Coulthard describes *grounded normativity* as emerging through ‘modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time’ (2014, 13). In this way, *grounded normativity* is animated by an expansive and complex vision of the ways in which relations between various human and non-human entities sustain the conditions for their mutual flourishing. Taking *grounded normativity*’s relational ontology as a theoretical starting point shifts our focus from defining the characteristics and qualities of individuals, and towards examining the quality of the relation that obtains between humans, land, and other beings. Whilst practices of settlement and dispossession of Indigenous land materially disrupt these relations, the assumptions that undergird and legitimise settler colonialism – individualism and instrumental reason – also participate in processes of epistemological colonisation. In this way, *grounded normativity* reveals both the material and epistemological dimensions of this ongoing violence, and simultaneously challenges the atomistic individualism that undergirds it.

As a ‘place-based’ approach, *grounded normativity* is also instructive in terms of how it conceives of the knowledge relevant to informing its interventions. According to Coulthard, place is ‘a way of knowing, of experiencing and relating to the world and with others’ (2014, 61). Crucially, as place is always particular, knowing from the place that is *somewhere* is incompatible with the universalising, view-from-nowhere standpoint adopted in liberal normative theorising. As noted earlier in the chapter, the colonial imposition of this particularistic, Eurocentric framework as a superior and universally valid epistemological system depends on the repression and extermination of alternatives. It is important, then, that ‘these relational practices and forms of knowledge guide forms of resistance against other rationalizations of the world’ (2014, 61), and illuminate the epistemic import of particularity and situatedness in the construction of normative interventions.

Finally, through adopting a relational ontology, guided by sensitisation to ethical relations between place and people as well as historical relations of domination, *grounded normativity* opens up possibilities for challenging the conceptual repertoire

of colonial modernity this chapter has sought to problematise. At stake here is the way in which liberal normative theorising advances an individualist moral paradigm, which forms part of an implicitly racialised and exclusionary ontological and epistemological framework. Taking seriously the lessons of *grounded normativity* enables us to reorient our theoretical starting points in response to the complex histories of colonialism and racism that have shaped contemporary relations of global epistemological and material power. In rejecting individualism, and embracing relationality and particularity through a place-based ethic, *grounded normativity* illuminates the possibility of displacing the ontological and epistemological apparatus of colonial modernity and the conceptual repertoire that flows from it. In conjunction with the toolkit the rest of this chapter has assembled, it enlivens normative theorists to the idea that categories such as the individual subject, reason, and the “nation”-state are neither natural nor inevitable, but flawed and contestable.

3.5 Conclusion

What I hope to have demonstrated in this chapter is that if we wish to advance, rather than foreclose racial justice through our scholarly ventures, it is necessary to reckon with the ways in which racism informs NPT’s central categories and practices. My goal has been to approach this reckoning by examining the ways in which pursuing intersectional methodological injunctions can help contest racial ignorance. The chapter therefore presented a preliminary curation of conceptual tools and practices that can enable us to scrutinise the processes through which racial ignorance is reproduced and render more adequate representations of the sociopolitical world in our theorising. In this regard, the first aspect of this chapter’s contribution was a curation of existing scholarly efforts to approach race and racism, and their related onto-epistemological effects, in appropriately complex and theoretically nuanced ways. The second has been to chart how this scholarship can help to contest racial ignorance, by orienting us towards a different set of theoretical starting points that can enable our own work to become more adequately sensitised to the ways in which race and racism are implicated in NPT’s onto-epistemological foundations.

I have sought to show “where” racial ignorance is located, in conceptual and epistemic terms, *and* make an argument about how to challenge it with the concepts and

practices curated here. The main theoretical takeaway with respect to racial ignorance is that contesting it requires understanding the foundations on which it is predicated; in other words, to resist racial ignorance means becoming *sensitised* to race as an axis of power and oppression, its historical trajectories, and the ways in which it remains embedded in dominant traditions of theorising. Simultaneously, I've shown how attending to the conceptual vocabularies and theoretical tools of different critical traditions and approaches concerned with the effects of colonialism and racism on knowledge production and normativity can sensitise NPT to the problem of racial ignorance.

Acknowledging that there already exist many rich scholarly traditions that have named and critiqued constellations of white, Eurocentric power, I have drawn on a small sample of these to present a preliminary curation of tools that can sensitise normative theorists to racial ignorance. The chapter began by specifying the racialised ontological and epistemological assumptions undergirding some of the key categories of analysis animating NPT. It showed how taking *coloniality* as a theoretical starting point can help to name and demystify the ways in which Eurocentric colonial hierarchies of race shaped and continue to inform dominant epistemologies. I then discussed the *colonial difference* as a further concepts that sensitise us to the ways in which liberal Enlightenment subjectivity and the standpoint it authorises are racialised.

The chapter then considered three concepts that help to sensitise us to the racializing dynamics behind questions of belonging and cultural difference. *Situated imagination* provided a theoretical starting point for interrogating the power relations animating presumptively neutral standpoints, eliciting reflexivity regarding the ways in which the contexts from which we theorise shape our assumptions. *Racializing vision* and the *colonial gaze* pointed to the complex processes through which 'race' becomes a naturalised category of difference. I argued that these concepts familiarise us with the necessary theoretical vocabulary to bring race back into critical purview, through addressing the historical processes and sedimented perceptual apparatuses through which racial, and cultural, difference are rendered as fixed points in dominant white, Western and colonial theoretical imaginaries.

Finally, through an engagement with the ethics of *settler innocence*, I argued that deeper reflexivity regarding the racialising logics of settler standpoints can act as a further inoculation against normative theorising that reproduces racial ignorance through an uninterrogated liberal perspective. I examined *grounded normativity* as an alternative conceptual starting point for exercising normative judgement in contexts shaped by complex imbrications of race and settler colonialism. *Grounded normativity* troubles and shifts the reductive axis of cultural difference advanced in normative theorising, articulating instead a complex relational ontology. Instead of seeking redress through the individualistic apparatus of liberal cultural rights, *grounded normativity* reorients normative theorising to a recognition that this apparatus serves the racialised project of settler dominance and ongoing colonisation.

The specific lessons distilled over the course of this chapter align with the methodological injunctions I drew out in Chapter Two. First, we ensure attentiveness to historically grounded constellations of power, undergirded by a relational ontology, through working from a concept such as the *colonial matrix of power*. A term that also expresses a specific *intersectional* matrix, its theoretical starting point is an analysis of the manifestations and effects of 'Eurocentered' colonial power, and facilitates an elaboration of the various axes that come to constitute the *colonial matrix of power* and *coloniality/modernity*. Beginning from the insight that *modernity* is epistemologically intertwined with the process and effects of colonialism gives us pause to reflect on the adequacy of concepts such as the liberal Enlightenment subject and the nation-state, which reflect assumptions about reason, personhood, and national membership in relation to Eurocentric racial hierarchy and exclusion. Consequently, we are challenged to reconsider the aptness of *methodological individualism* and nationalism, for example, both in terms of their capacity to represent, with historical and sociological accuracy and complexity, sociopolitical reality, and their ethical adequacy in the service of delivering normative theorising committed to racial justice. Indeed, the *colonial matrix of power* can then be thought of as an intersectional matrix, within which racism, and concomitantly, relations of coloniser/colonised (and settler/Indigenous), take a central role alongside relations of capitalist and imperial domination, 'Western' heteropatriarchy (Lugones 2007, 2010) and ableism (Campbell 2009; Ghai 2012; see further Chapter Five).

Second, the approaches curated in this chapter can all be considered resistant knowledge projects, committed to identifying and contesting dominant epistemologies. I argued that conceptual tools such as the *colonial difference* sensitise us to the scaffolding supporting the standpoints from which theorising is articulated, enabling us to conceptualise the ways in which different sets of ontological and epistemological assumptions shape theoretical perspectives and their ethical ramifications. I will return to this point in the following chapter to pinpoint more precisely the ethical ramifications of standpoints adopted in NPT with respect to questions of cultural difference and immigration. While the *colonial difference* invited us to embrace relationality and complexity in relation to the construction of contestatory standpoints, the *colonial gaze* and *settler innocence*, on the other hand, name standpoints that perform the work of consolidating and reproducing dominant constellations of power. However, in drawing our attention to the assumptions undergirding these standpoints, the chapter has sought to model the methodological process through which we can sensitise ourselves to what is disavowed and elided. As I noted in 3.1, the approaches I have included here should be thought of as a preliminary curation, rather than the final word on literatures that can sensitise scholars to structural racism, Eurocentrism, and colonialism, and enable the contestation of racial ignorance. In presenting this selection in conjunction with the methodological injunctions from Chapter Two, I have provided a selection of conceptual tools that enable us to pursue these injunctions more effectively, and sketched out a framework through which other literatures might be encountered as sources of epistemic resistance.

The third injunction from Chapter Two was incorporating a methodological practice of reflexivity into theoretical research, which is reflected in two ways in this chapter. In the first instance, common to the approaches I curated here is the practice of what I referred to in Chapter One as critically “turning back” on one’s process of theorising (i.e., methodology), in order to examine the dimensions and provenance of its theoretical contours and the effects therein. What I have shown in this chapter, more specifically, is that more historically sensitised representations of sociopolitical reality, expressed through ontological and epistemological assumptions more attuned to constellations of power and their effects, are precisely what is required to enable methodological reflexivity to unfold. In the second instance, through an extended engagement with the onto-epistemological assumptions that undergird different

traditions of knowledge production, this chapter has sought to pose and address the kinds of theoretical questions we must ask ourselves in order to practice reflexivity: why these concepts? What projects do they serve? From what standpoint is my theorising articulated? What sustains this standpoint? What are the effects of my methodological choices?

Finally, the ethical orientations of the approaches to understanding race, racism and racialization surveyed in this chapter are guided by the recursive relationship in which resistant knowledge projects stand with dominant formations of power. This chapter has paid particular attention to the operation of colonialism, imperialism and racism within a broader *colonial matrix of power*, and foregrounded scholarship committed to an anti-racism informed by the organisation of this matrix. In this regard, sensitisation and commitment to a specific set of ontological and epistemological assumptions both motivate and are motivated by an ethical orientation towards the transformation of dominant constellations of power. *Grounded normativity* as a practice of place-based, relational ethical orientation encapsulates this injunction, inviting theorists to abandon the pursuit universal moral standards and instead recognise their ontologically chimerical and ethically pernicious nature.

As I have sought to foreground throughout the chapter, the stakes of this process of sensitisation are both political and epistemic. What should by now be clear is that the lessons of an intersectional paradigm and the multiplicitous resistant knowledge projects that sustain it should not be conceived of as aesthetic choices that add a gloss of epistemic diversity to normative theorising. To take seriously the injunctions of Chapter Two, and the tools and practices curated here in Chapter Three that begin to fulfil those injunctions, is to recognise the need for the radical transformation of NPT's foundational theoretical assumptions. This chapter has taken a step towards showing how that transformation might be achieved. In order to dispel any doubt regarding its import, the following chapter examines in greater detail the consequences, in terms of the reproduction of racial ignorance, of NPT's methodological practices.

4. Racial ignorance in normative political theory: immigration and cultural difference

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I route my methodological critique of NPT through an engagement with contemporary normative debates on immigration to, and cultural difference in, affluent liberal democratic states of the Global North, such as the UK, Canada, and the USA. I examine racial ignorance in these debates in the form of the elision of race as a historically salient category of analysis.⁵³ As I argued in Chapter Three, in order to recognise race as a salient analytical category, we need appropriate conceptual tools and practices to sensitise us to its effects in practices of theorising and in the sociopolitical world. In this chapter, I draw on the lessons learned in Chapter Three in a critical engagement of three prominent scholars in NPT, David Miller (Miller 1999, 2000, 2013, 2016b), Will Kymlicka (1992, 1997, 2003, 2007), and Joseph Carens (1987, 1996, 2000, 2013), who all intervene in normative debates regarding how the state should respond to immigrants and cultural “others”. I demonstrate how commonalities in their theoretical standpoints and methodological practices reproduce racial ignorance and the epistemological relations of the *colonial matrix of power*. Drawing on our repertoire of critical interventions developed in Chapters Two and Three, my critique here aspires to illustrate the process of identifying and contesting racial ignorance.

As I indicated in Chapter Three, the formation of *coloniality/modernity* is a key analytic through which we can trace the ways in which these complex relations of power continue to animate the present. Building on this insight, I argue in Chapter Four that each theorist’s methodological decisions pertaining to ontology and epistemology reinforce the erasure of race as a salient category of analysis, and reproduce

⁵³As this chapter does not deliver an intersectional analysis of these issues, but rather a methodological critique of how they are theorised, it does not examine every salient axis comprising the matrix of power that organises them. Whilst immigration and cultural difference are shaped by sociopolitical structures of oppression beyond racism, imperialism and colonialism, my goal here is to foreground how abstraction from only one central set of relations significantly inhibits the diagnostic capacity of NPT’s theorisations. For recent intersectional analyses of race and immigration, see, for example, Bouliia (2019) or the discussions in Mayblin and Turner (2021, chap. 7).

theoretically the epistemological relations that animate the *colonial matrix of power*. NPT's *methodological individualism*, *fact insensitivity*, and *foreclosed reflexivity* obscure the ways in which the *colonial gaze* continues to operate through its theoretical practices, sustaining a *situated imagination* within which discourses of cultural difference shape normative responses to migrants and national minorities such as Indigenous nations. Moreover, the elision of race shapes methodological decisions to present normative issues in terms of cultural difference, against a backdrop of a supposed national or cultural integrity. Through a sustained analysis of the relationship between NPT's theoretical standpoint and the methodological practices deployed, the chapter contributes to ongoing scholarly debates regarding the role of methodology in NPT, as well as to substantive normative debates on immigration and cultural difference.

The decision to foreground immigration and cultural difference as the orienting rubric for this chapter is a complex one that requires explanation. An obvious question is why we should investigate NPT's methodological practice with respect to immigration and cultural difference, rather than engaging with the few authors who do theorise about race explicitly?⁵⁴ In my view, debates oriented around immigration and cultural difference are apposite precisely because it is one area in NPT where the omission of race is most obvious, and where racial ignorance is clearly sustained. In other words, I begin from the premise that an adequate theorisation of race is integral to how we understand and respond normatively to the constellation of issues animated by immigration and cultural difference. Another way of framing this issue is to state that in order for race to be brought onto the agenda in the first place, it must be recognised already as significant or salient to the analysis. Political theorists who do write about

⁵⁴ There has been substantial engagement with the question of racial justice in the USA in NPT, with Tommie Shelby's *Dark Ghettos* (2016), and Elizabeth Anderson's *Imperative of Integration* (2010) as key contributions from an analytical methodological tradition. In intersectional terms, both works offer single-axis analyses of racial oppression, and would have made good candidates for critical engagement in pursuit of elucidating the importance of theorising oppressions intersectionally. Two issues arise, however: first, the theorists I have selected instead are in more urgent need of critical analysis, given their disavowal of race, and their hegemonic positionings within and impact on the state of the field. Second, focusing on US-based analyses would delimit too significantly the scope of the argument I intend to develop. One of the principal considerations in this thesis has been the importance of producing theory that elucidates the particular, making a discussion of racial injustice embedded in a specific context surely all the more relevant. While particularity is crucial, in this instance my aim is to develop an account of theorising about race that addresses a different aspect of colonial racism's history and scope.

race have already conceptualised it as a salient category, whereas my aim here is to foreground the methodological choices that lead to the failure to recognise it as such. Second, while not all issues concerning immigration and cultural difference are related to racism, an investigation of immigration to affluent Northern liberal democracies in relation to the perceived problem of cultural difference facilitates inquiry into the ways in which questions of cultural identity and national belonging displace, or serve as a proxy for, race. Third, in order to adequately understand these issues in NPT, an analysis that foregrounds race can offer the necessary contextualisation in relation to historical and structural processes of power and oppression, and consequently to do the necessary diagnostic work before advancing an adequate normative evaluation. In other words, examining race and its intersections with other salient axes of power in the context of these debates also allows me to connect the theoretical dots between the legacies of European colonialism and empire, and the racialised nation-state (Goldberg 2002). As a result, examining the methodological choices that lead to the elision of race foregrounds the ways in which a lack of *relational attunement* and *historical sensitisation* in relation to racism and colonialism structure debates where race ought to be, but is not, included as a salient category of analysis.

To develop its critique, the chapter examines the methodological decisions underpinning three distinctive normative positions with respect to the nation-state and cultural difference: David Miller's liberal nationalism, Will Kymlicka's liberal multiculturalism, and Joseph Carens' liberal cosmopolitanism. In NPT, these three positions fall on a continuum in what Amy Reed-Sandoval characterises as the 'classical open borders debate' (Reed-Sandoval 2016).⁵⁵ At one end of this continuum sits Miller's liberal nationalism (2016b), which marshals a defence of the state's right to exclude those immigrants it deems disadvantageous – or, in some instances, a threat – to national prosperity and cohesion. At the other end sits Carens' 'moderate' (2019, 23) cosmopolitanism, which endorses a vision of an open-borders world, grounded by the individual right to freedom of movement (1992). In the middle, I have

⁵⁵ Normative work located within the terms of this debate asks, for example, whether borders should be open (Carens 1987; Cole 2000) or restrictive; the extent to which national identity (Miller 2020), economic productivity (Pevnick 2011), or coercive state authority (Blake 2014) justifies the state's right to restrictive border controls; whether there is a human right to migrate (Oberman 2016; Fine 2019; Risse 2008; or conversely Miller 2016a); or which of these rights would win out in philosophical argumentation (Wellman and Cole 2011).

placed Kymlicka's multiculturalism (1992, 2001, 2003). His account, whilst not addressed exclusively to the ethics of immigration, defends minority cultural rights within the limits of nation-building projects. His position is, in this sense, a midpoint between Miller's emphasis on national identity and cohesion, and Carens' rejection of the import of national cultural identity. The implication of my analysis of these theorists' standpoints and methodological practices is that NPT must learn to be attentive to historically embedded, intersectional relations of power and the ways in which these shape our practices of theorising. As I will demonstrate below, the choice of standpoint in each theorist's work *forecloses* reflexivity. This is not, in my reading, because Miller, Kymlicka, or Carens would necessarily argue that such an engagement is inappropriate or unwarranted, but rather because the prior methodological decisions deployed in their theorising foreclose the recognition of reflexivity as a methodological choice. It cannot appear as one of a range of methodological options if the construction of the theoretical standpoint occludes the conditions under which reflexivity's function and import become intelligible. I show therefore that the liberal standpoint cultivates a *meta-insensitivity* to the import of reflexivity and to the theoretical orientations that would enable such a practice. This chapter seeks to address this *meta-insensitivity* in disclosing the theoretical ramifications of NPT's methodological practices.

A final clarificatory point before we begin: this chapter's task is not to settle the question of whether liberal nationalist, multiculturalist, or cosmopolitan approaches offer the correct normative response to questions of immigration and cultural difference. Instead, I argue that scholarship in NPT approaches it through a reductive analysis of cultural difference, rather than through an intersectional paradigm that recognises the historical salience and centrality of race.⁵⁶ As such, the methodological practices of this scholarship are politically and ethically obstructive, in that they divert our attention from salient dimensions of analysis and consequently hinder our capacity to address political and ethical concerns. The chapter's contention, then, is that the ontological and epistemological foundations of all three theorists' work, and the

⁵⁶ Fine (2016) addresses NPT's failure to acknowledge the racist history and legacy of immigration controls though specifically in relation to arguments that defend the state's right to exclude, and how theorising such a right precludes our ability to adequately diagnose racism. Fine's approach is limited by the framing of racism as discrimination (in relation to states' exclusionary practices) at the expense of fully drawing out the implications of understanding racism and colonialism as playing a structuring role in how the problem is framed and understood.

methodological decisions issuing from these, are not adequate to the task diagnosing the historical and sociopolitical conditions under which immigration is figured in Northern liberal democratic states as an urgent normative problem.

The chapter unfolds as follows. In sections 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4, I briefly reconstruct each theorist's position, and probe the theoretical standpoints and methodological practices deployed in Miller's, Kymlicka's and Carens' works respectively. I show how the practice of *methodological individualism* results in a shared lack of attunement to racism as a structural relation in appraising their chosen normative issues. I then consider how their standpoints shape their perceptions of the sociopolitical world, arguing that their standpoints practice *fact insensitivity* in relation to their conceptualisations of central categories such as the nation-state. I show how their prior theoretical commitments produce *foreclosed reflexivity*, leading to the cultivation of a methodological *meta-insensitivity* to the concepts and practices that would enable them to identify and contest racial ignorance. In the conclusion, I consider the ways in which the effects of their methodological practices converge, in spite of their divergent normative positions. This similarity across a range of normative orientations indicates a more widespread problem in NPT, with respect to the underlying theoretical commitments that animate methodological decisions and practices.

4.2 David Miller's liberal nationalism

Thematically, David Miller's work has focused on distributive justice in the context of the nation-state, and how the more circumscribed duties to others beyond the associative obligations we have to our co-nationals can be squared with the demands of liberal egalitarian justice (1999, 2007). These thematic issues re-emerge with notable salience in his most recent monograph, *Strangers in our midst* (2016b), which assembles the manifold strands of Miller's signature liberal nationalist position to defend the state's right to exclude. The nation-state is central in this account, as it constitutes the fundamental political entity through which distributive justice and collective freedom are secured for citizens (2016b, 27). Miller's robust vindication of the role of national identity grounds his vision of the nation-state as the fulcrum of democratic politics and judgement. In his view, the nation as a historic entity and a people with a distinctive identity is what binds together its various constituents and

makes possible the kind of civic solidarity and trust that underwrites democratic politics and social justice (1999, 2000, 2016b).

Over the course of this opening section, I examine *methodological individualism*, *fact insensitivity*, and *foreclosed reflexivity* in Miller's work. Respectively, the three stages of the argument focus on his essentialising account of cultural difference, the role of his liberal nationalist theoretical standpoint in leveraging an untenable, homogenising view of the nation, and the limitations of his reflections on method. I show through this analysis that, due to its choice of conceptualisations of cultural difference, nation, and legitimate evidence, Miller's account reproduces racial ignorance. It sustains a racially ignorant and exclusionary theoretical imaginary, within which immigration to affluent liberal democracies of the global North is framed in abstraction from the material and epistemological effects of the *colonial matrix of power*.

I first consider how *methodological individualism* shapes Miller's account of immigration and migrant subjects in his defence of the state's right to exclude. Specifically, I show how presenting cultural difference in abstraction from broader constellations of power results in its essentialisation and naturalisation. I demonstrate these tendencies with respect to his characterisation of migrants in affluent, liberal democratic "host" societies, and show how the failure to interrogate cultural difference as a relationally constructed artefact of the intersectional colonial matrix of power reproduces racial ignorance. In short, the assumption that cultural "difference" is an essential characteristic, rather than relationally constructed, is a vehicle for the reproduction of a dominant imaginary in which perceptions of racialized "otherness" legitimise exclusion from the "host" society.

Miller characterises migrants as disruptive to existing cultural practices and ways of life (2016b, 163). Migrants insufficiently versed in the liberal values of Miller's own state of Britain are presented as cultural ingenués, to whom the "host" state's culture is opaque and alien; that 'much of what [newly arrived migrants] see around them will appear mysterious without that background knowledge [of the "host" culture]', and that they 'risk giving offense, inadvertently or otherwise, if they don't grasp the national significance of some event or institution' (2016b, 144). Those who have 'inherited their culture from nonliberal societies' may face 'inner conflicts' at having to integrate

culturally (2016b, 8). Migrants' cultural difference is rendered here in essentialising terms: those from 'nonliberal' societies in particular are presented as facing distinctive challenges to integration because of their "difference". Other salient contextual aspects of the "host" society are elided, such as: intersecting issues of racism and poverty in the post-imperial polity (Bhattacharyya et al. 2021; Shilliam 2018b; Virdee 2015); the discursive environment as precipitated by political phenomena such as Brexit (Virdee and McGeever 2018); government policies such as the UK's 'hostile environment', (Goodfellow 2020; Jones et al. 2017) and the recent Windrush scandal (Gentleman 2019).

Miller also leverages cultural difference to map characteristics such as violence, greed, and irresponsibility as ineluctable qualities of migrants. Chapter Eight opens with a discussion of instances 'involving violent clashes between ethnic minority immigrant groups, indigenous whites, and the police' (2016b, 130), implying that violence is an unavoidable result of unbridgeable cultural difference:

'what *unites* [the episodes of violence] are the presence of immigrant communities concentrated in deprived areas of the city, with Islamic backgrounds and visibly different from the natives; strained relations between these communities and the police; and resentful working-class whites, susceptible to incitement by far-right parties' (2016b, 131; *emphasis added*).

The 'visible' difference of migrants is significant here. Miller participates in the reproduction of racializing perceptual schemata, through the apparatus of racializing vision discussed in 3.3. Recall that racializing vision habitually and unconsciously naturalises the inferiority of physiognomic qualities such as skin colour, or cultural-religious symbols. Although Miller also draws our attention to the resentment of 'white' citizens, he draws racialised and culturally essentialist distinctions between the two groups, and legitimises the white citizens' discontent through the decision to describe them as 'indigenous' and 'native', and thus entitled to object to the presence of migrants. In turn, his account reinscribes the assumption that migrants cannot belong to the "host" society because of their cultural difference and inability to integrate. Through these representations, Miller also mobilises the *colonial gaze*, reproducing and reinscribing the *colonial difference* between the resentful, but ultimately entitled

'native' or 'indigenous' members of the "nation" and those who pose a threat to its cultural integrity, cohesion, and prosperity. Miller's account thus reproduces a specific perception of migrants as threatening and disruptive to the existing national fabric, by virtue of their culture. This perception participates in the reproduction of racial ignorance by removing from critical purview those constellations of power that shape and inform understandings of cultural difference as absolute, rather than historically and relationally constructed.

Miller also leverages public perceptions of migrants as economically burdensome, diverting welfare services from citizens (2016b, 1, 170, 172), and characterises migrants as 'boat people' who arrive in herd-like groups and 'cluster together in particular localities' (2016b, 133). He writes:

'because immigrants are drawn to places where they can join a community of earlier immigrants from a similar cultural or national background, the size of the diaspora and the speed with which it integrates into the host country are important factors. As the size of the (unassimilated) diaspora grows, its pulling power increases, and the rate of immigration will tend to increase indefinitely if there are no effective controls.' (2016b, 3)

As well as foregrounding cultural disruption, then, Miller emphasises the strain that 'indefinitely' increasing migrant populations will place on the "host" state. He depicts migrants as irresponsible individuals, choosing to take advantage of the 'generous' (2016b, 172) offerings of affluent "host nations", though notes that these generous responses may not survive 'immigrants entering local communities in large numbers and competing for jobs and housing' (2016b, 173). In this respect, Miller's understanding of immigration is articulated in individualistic terms, condemning migrants for their choices rather than seeking to grapple with the broader historical and sociopolitical contexts within which immigration becomes necessary (Fine 2017; Mayblin and Turner 2021; Sager 2016).

Through a methodologically legitimated *colonial gaze*, which deploys *methodological individualism* to theorise migrants as subjects and immigration in abstraction from broader matrices of power, Miller reproduces representations of migrants as culturally inferior. Also implicitly operative in his theorising in this respect is the *colonial*

difference, through which Miller's theoretical standpoint differentiates between racialised cultural "others" who lack moral entitlement to enter the "host" nation, in spite of Miller's putatively liberal normative commitments. While inferiorisation may not be an intended consequence of his position, his theorising uncritically draws upon and reproduces a perceptual schemata that projects difference as an inherent quality of the bodies, habits, and customs of culturally "other" migrants. In turn, the liberal nationalist standpoint reproduces an understanding of cultural identity as static, and cultural difference as inevitably leading to conflict, hence the logic of (national, cultural, racial) separation.⁵⁷ Alternatively, taking the *colonial matrix of power* into account would allow us to recognise that drawing on "culture" as a category of difference has a longstanding history in Euro-colonial ideological manoeuvres that aim to classify and rank variations of human cultural forms (Ramon Grosfoguel, Oso, and Christou 2015; Mignolo 2011).

Closely related to Miller's racialised and culturally essentialist framing of migrants is the question of how he arrives at his presentation of the "problem" of immigration, or the problem he takes to be real. To investigate this question, I turn to *fact insensitivity*. In order to probe the contours of this practice, I ask: what does Miller take to be the real, or salient aspects of the sociopolitical world that require theoretical attention? How is his theoretical standpoint implicated in these selections? What aspects of the sociopolitical world does his standpoint elide, and why? To answer these questions, I examine three sites in Miller's work: his account of the nation-state; whose interests his normative interventions are leveraged in favour of; and how he substantiates his perceptions of the salient "facts". In brief, I argue that Miller naturalises an imaginary, sanitised version of the British "nation" in abstraction from historical constellations of power, and that he leverages an idealised, homogenous national cultural identity from the dominant perspective of Englishness. In turn, these distorted representations of sociopolitical reality allow him to frame immigration as a legitimate worry amongst concerned citizens, whose grievances he mobilises to validate his approach.

In the first instance, Miller takes a methodologically nationalist approach, presenting the nation-state as a natural, rather than contingent formation. This approach elides

⁵⁷ On this point see Balibar (1991).

historical processes of colonialism and imperialism, and their epistemological and material effects on the emergence and development of the nation-state form generally (Jaggard 2020; Mills 2015) and Britain specifically (Bhambra 2017, 2022; Shilliam 2018b, 2018a). The result is a theoretical leveraging of the nation-state that fails to reflect historical reality (Fine 2017; Mihai 2019). Instead, Miller leverages an account of the British “nation” as an entity that ‘embodies historical continuity’, ‘stretch[ing] backwards into the past’, its origins ‘lost in the mists of time’ (1999, 23). Members share ‘a sense that they and their ancestors are deeply rooted in a place’ (2016b, 18), while national identities ‘reflect the historic culture of the majority of native-born citizens’ (2016b, 145). Moreover, his vision of Britain specifically as a “nation”-state omits shameful, exclusionary and violent episodes from the historical record: the picture of Britain he advances exists entirely in abstraction from the intersections of imperial, capitalist and racial oppression. He maintains that the impact of empire for the British was ‘transient’ (1999, 169), stating that empire for the majority of British people only touched on their lives in terms of those who had left for ‘White Dominions’ (1999, 168). This is to say nothing of the effects on the lives of those who were colonised by the British Empire, or the subsequent effects on Britain in terms of its putative identity as a former metropole and its contemporary demographic make-up (C. Hall 2002; C. Hall and Rose 2007; McClintock 1995).

Second and relatedly, we can further probe Miller’s conceptualisation of Britain in relation to whose interests his standpoint takes as primary. Miller’s account of the nation-state foregrounds the importance of national identity as a prerequisite for democratic politics and social justice: nation-states have a ‘communitarian character *by virtue of the way that its members identify with each other*’ (2016b, 28, *emphasis added*). Moreover, although he maintains that states are composed of a ‘mixture of cultures’ (2016b, 28), Miller casts this mixture in the shadow of an overarching and historic national identity, unique to a ‘community’ and its ‘particular homeland’ (2016b, 28). This ideal of a homogenous, shared national identity and its anchoring in a ‘homeland’ moralises and biologizes the nation in racially exclusionary ways, and facilitates the theoretical reproduction of a *situated imagination* in which dominant articulations of national identity retain their status as norm and referent. Distinct but non-dominant national identities that compose Britain drop out of view in *Strangers in*

our midst. In earlier work, Miller discusses the unique identities of the British nations (1999, chap. 6), and rejects the idea of a multination state in favour of:

‘a specifically British identity [that] was first forged precisely to aid the integration of these communities—an integration that was favoured by elite groups on both sides for different reasons. There then followed more than two centuries in which the destinies of England, Scotland, Wales, and Ulster have been woven together politically, militarily’ (1999, 173).

As the continued debate over a possible second Scottish independence referendum and the fall-out of the Brexit referendum have shown, however, this united British identity is chimerical. Obtaining instead in Miller’s theorising is a projection of a historic and unique national identity rooted in dominant discourses of Englishness.⁵⁸ The *situated imagination* Miller reproduces is leveraged from the standpoint of the “nation” as he sees it, and although it accounts for some aspects of British history, it cherry-picks those aspects that suit the narrative of historical continuity, and fails to recognise that Britain has rarely, if ever, been a nation. Crucially, it is necessary to ask what sustains this *fact insensitivity*, methodologically speaking. Miller’s faulty conception of the nation flows from a failure to attend to historical constellations of power and their epistemological and material effects – how the nation is conceptualised in dominant epistemological frameworks, and what it is actually like, respectively. He simultaneously idealises the nation, as if it were not stratified and organised by historically entrenched relations of power. Theoretically and methodologically speaking, then, he cherry-picks those “facts” that support his particular conception of it for the purposes of his normative stance (Mihai 2019).

The final point I consider in relation to *fact insensitivity* is how Miller supports his framing of the “problem” of immigration, and the choice of drawing on ‘what the people think’ (Baderin et al. 2018) for the purposes of substantiating his arguments in support of the state’s right to exclude. Miller’s account takes as a given that existing members of the “host” society perceive migrants as an existential threat to the nation (2016b, 1-4). Of his approach here, Miller writes that ‘in order to use public opinion to develop a theory of justice, we must at least start with an embryonic theory that allows us to

⁵⁸ On the political salience of Englishness, see Henderson and Wyn Jones (2021). For a historical perspective on the dynamics between England and the Celtic nations, see Hechter (1999).

identify and categorise the relevant beliefs' (Miller in Baderin et al. 2018, 99). Public opinion is supposed to provide an appropriate starting account of the appropriate beliefs as objects of scrutiny. However, the effect of utilising "public opinion" this way is to reinforce an impression of a homogeneous national community of legitimate citizens, the "we" of a nation whose authentic anxieties warrant the intervention of the normative theorist to defend their interests.⁵⁹ A further issue is that Miller's approach uncritically reproduces the dominant *situated imagination* within which nationalistic anxieties about immigration are articulated, without considering whether such anxieties do in fact reflect material realities (Mihai 2019). Of particular concern is that through mobilising discourses of popular sentiment, Miller disavows the particularly of the standpoint his theorising leverages. Instead, the dominant narrative of a historic national culture under siege is presented as self-evidently correct. In the process, a vast tranche of historical nuance, including the expansion and aftermath of the British Empire and the material consequences for its racialised current and former subjects are removed from critical purview.

I've argued here that Miller's *fact insensitivity* is implicated in the systematic elision of a range of historical processes and dynamics that should be methodologically incorporated in framing and addressing immigration. In obscuring from its horizon the role of imperialism in shaping contemporary Britain, both materially and in terms of its putative national identity, Miller's theoretical standpoint reproduces racial ignorance. Moreover, it cultivates a form of *meta-insensitivity* to those aspects of the sociopolitical world that would disclose the significance of race and racism in structuring the set of normative concerns in which he aims to intervene.

The problem of *meta-insensitivity* brings us to the final part of this section: *foreclosed reflexivity*. How, if at all, does the practice of reflexivity figure in Miller's methodological decisions? I show here that although Miller does incorporate some limited reflections on his methodological choices (2013, 2016a, 2016b, 2021; see also Baderin et al. 2018), these reflections are insufficient in enabling adequate critical scrutiny of the theoretical scaffolding that sustains his standpoint. This lack of adequate reflexivity produces *meta-insensitivity* to the limits of his standpoint and its theoretical horizons.

⁵⁹ The complexity and heterogeneity of public opinion in relation to immigration in the UK context is attested to by Blinder et al. (2011) and Butt et al. (2022).

It is these horizons that ultimately require critical interrogation in order to intervene in and contest the reproduction of racial ignorance. Across a range of texts, Miller discusses his methodological choices with respect to traditions of 'contextualism' (2013) and 'realism' (2016b), 'a political approach [that] gives greater weight to the evidence' (2016b, 18). Through these engagements, he identifies a major shortcoming in normative theorising that fails to respond to the relevant evidence, or facts, that characterise the sociopolitical world (2013, 28). Insofar as I have been arguing that appropriate fact sensitivity is a prerequisite for adequate normative interventions, Miller agrees. He also maintains that normative theorists 'ought to be more self-reflective [...] about the status of the intuitions or 'considered judgements' that they deploy in order to justify their conceptual or normative claims' (Miller in Bader et al. 2018, 97), further pointing to Miller's appreciation of the importance of the theorist reflecting on the source of their commitments. Where Miller's practice diverges, however, is that for him, reflection means testing the validity of 'beliefs' and 'arguments' (2021, 94), rather than interrogating the contours of the standpoint from which they are articulated. In this sense, Miller's appraisals of empirical evidence, or of 'universal features of the human condition' and contingent 'facts about particular societies' (2013, 28) are only subjected to scrutiny from the standpoint of liberalism that assumes a self-referential standard of evaluation.

Similarly, there are two components involved in Miller's nascent critique of idealisation in normative theorising (see Mills 2005). Miller successfully identifies the first; that is, not capturing what the world is really like. The second process of correctly diagnosing the problem, however, is mystified in his theorising. This is because the fundamental ontological and epistemological assumptions that ground his theorising are shared in common with ideal theorists and, as such, persist in reflecting a distorted picture of sociopolitical reality. In terms of method, Miller simply selects different "inputs", with the goal of reflecting reality. In his approach, these inputs include empirical, social scientific evidence assumed to reflect sociopolitical reality, or records of public opinion that guard against the biases of 'university faculty', whose 'political convictions are overwhelmingly liberal when measured against the views of the population at large' (Miller in Baderin et al. 2018, 97-98). In attempting to build on foundations from which a realist account can proceed to feasible normative recommendations, however, Miller

theorises *from* the very assumptions that ought to be problematised (on this point, see further discussions in Baderin et al. 2018; Thomassen et al. 2018; Mihai 2019).

Flowing from the foreclosure of reflexivity is Miller's uncritical adoption of certain strands of public opinion, as mentioned above. Importantly, Miller draws on public opinion without consideration for the construction of the *situated imaginations* that nurture it. By failing to reflexively scrutinise the assumptions underpinning both his own political standpoint and those of the (monolithically constructed) public, his theorising reproduces a particular post-imperial imaginary, through which exclusionary processes of *racializing vision* and the *colonial gaze*, which pathologise and criminalise migrant cultural "others", are taken up and reproduced. Racist, exclusionary imaginaries such as those Miller implicitly draws on to substantiate his position are not without pernicious repercussions. Whilst he claims that his normative interventions do not become racist simply because they make use of arguments that could be 'used' by racists (2021), his argument draws on numerous examples of exclusionary, racialized, and pathologizing rhetoric that continue to circulate in the public sphere (Mihai 2019, 12).

In sum, Miller's methodological decisions foreclose the practice of reflexivity with respect to the contours of his theoretical standpoint and its complicity with forms of colonial racism. While he reflects on his own methods as they relate to the broader disciplinary framework of normative theorising, his methodology lacks adequate reflexivity with respect to the sociohistorical context within which his theoretical practices are situated. Due to the methodologically individualist, desensitised nature of his theoretical standpoint, his theorising is not configured to engage reflexively with its own situatedness within a particular tradition. The extent to which his theoretical assumptions and methodological practices are implicated in and shaped by the epistemological dominance of *colonial modernity* is disavowed.

4.3 Will Kymlicka's liberal multiculturalism

Kymlicka's extensive oeuvre on multiculturalism and minority rights asks how liberal democratic societies ought to respond to cultural minorities. Starting from the observation that in practice, liberal democratic states distinguish between cultural

rights for national minorities, who have historically existed alongside a national cultural majority within a single state, and cultural rights for ethnocultural minorities such as immigrants, his objective is to offer a justification based on liberal theoretical principles as to how this difference in treatment can be accounted for (1997, 2003). He argues that whilst ethnocultural minorities have chosen to leave their place of birth, they can be legitimately expected to integrate (1997, 75-6). National minorities such as Indigenous nations in settler states, however, are entitled to maintain their own cultural practices (2003, 11-12). Kymlicka's account draws on the concept of an overarching public political culture, referred to as a 'societal culture' (1992), characterised by longstanding political and social institutions and shared language. 'Membership in a societal culture' according to Kymlicka, 'is necessary for liberal freedom and equality' (1997, 75), as it makes up the social context within which individuals make choices. The objective of a theory of minority rights is then to facilitate the integration of ethnocultural minorities into the dominant societal culture whilst also protecting minority national cultural identities and practices through a scheme of cultural rights.

My argument in this section aims to indicate where and how Kymlicka's theoretical standpoint leads to the reproduction of racial ignorance, in ways that are comparable to Miller's liberal nationalism despite the divergence in their normative perspectives. I begin by examining Kymlicka's account of cultural difference, showing how the liberal rights framework systematically fails to grapple with racism and colonialism, whilst essentialising and instrumentalising cultural difference for the enrichment of the settler majority. I then examine *fact insensitivity*, attending again to the effects of methodological nationalism and the naturalising of the interests of the white settler majority. I show that, because of its systematic methodological misperceptions of the sociopolitical world, Kymlicka's theoretical standpoint displays an optimism regarding liberal norms and institutions that ultimately results in a form of *methodological settler innocence*. Finally, I argue that reflexivity is methodologically foreclosed in Kymlicka's theorising, as a result of the naturalisation of its theoretical standpoint. Because of its methodologically individualistic and fact-insensitive practices, like Miller's, it cultivates a form of *meta-insensitivity*.

Our focus shifts slightly in relation to *methodological individualism* in Kymlicka's theorising compared to Miller's. Contrary to Miller's objective of defending the state's

right to exclude, Kymlicka's multicultural approach is expressly concerned with inclusion of migrant 'ethnic minorities' and Indigenous 'national minorities' within a liberal, rights-based framework (2003). Kymlicka envisages a scheme of minority cultural rights as putting a brake on nation-building projects, envisaging multicultural demands as 'specifying the injustices that majority nation-building has imposed on them, and as identifying the conditions under which majority nation-building would cease to be unjust' (2002, 365). Irrespective of the divergence between Miller's and Kymlicka's normative commitments, however, *methodological individualism* remains a central feature in Kymlicka's theorising. I indicate below how this practice reproduces racial ignorance by examining two aspects of Kymlicka's conception of cultural difference: first, methodologically, in its theorisation in abstraction from *colonial/modern* relations of power, and second, substantively in the role it plays in "enriching" the majority culture of the state.

First, the conceptualisation of cultural difference as a facet of identity to be mediated by a liberal rights framework is an overarching effect of *methodological individualism* in Kymlicka's work. As we saw in 2.2, theoretical constructs of identity in abstraction from intersectional relations of power serve to reify and fix those constructs. Again, *methodological individualism* results in the naturalisation of cultural difference, when as a category, it requires critical interrogation within a broader constellation of power. Kymlicka writes predominantly about multiculturalism and cultural rights in the USA and Canada, as liberal democratic nation-states with historically white, European-descended cultures. This characterisation of such states and their cultural histories, however, neglects the effects of structural racism, and the persistence of settler colonialism, in constructing perceptions of these states as historically European and white. By abstracting from these structural relations and pursuing a *methodological individualism* that prioritises the assignment of cultural rights to "different" cultural identities, Kymlicka's theorising fails to address the import of the broader *colonial matrix of power* at play in terms of how cultural difference emerges as a racialised, power-laden construct.

Second, Kymlicka characterises members of ethnic minorities as bearers of different cultural 'identities' who offer an 'opportunity for enrichment' (2001, 211) for the dominant culture. 'Immigrants' are 'almost always a source of enrichment, both

culturally and economically, to national societies' (2001, 219), whilst 'liberals' want a 'societal culture that is rich and diverse', its 'richness [coming] from the way it has appropriated the fruits of other cultures' (2003, 102). Kymlicka's use of 'immigrants' and 'liberals' to define pre-existing and migrant members of the state is significant. It discloses a practice of essentialisation and homogenisation, i.e., the assumption that existing white-European members of the nation are always already "liberal", constituting immigrant "others" in the process as non-liberal. The non-ironic use of 'appropriation' is also indicative of the broader elision of the context of colonisation under which the settler culture developed. Migrants, moreover, are 'expected to become members of the national societies which already exist in their new country', such that 'promoting the good of cultural membership for immigrants is primarily a matter of enabling integration, by providing language training and fighting patterns of discrimination and prejudice' (2003, 114). Cultural rights, in this respect, are an individualistic, identity-based solution to the structural and historical problem of racism. Whilst Kymlicka demonstrates greater awareness than Miller of the challenges migrants face upon arrival in hostile "host" societies, through the reference to 'patterns of discrimination and prejudice', his solution remains targeted at the level of individuals. The primacy of individuals ontologically speaking reproduces the understanding of culture as an essential quality or characteristic, rather than cultural difference as a relationally constituted phenomenon.

In contrast to its treatment of migrants, Kymlicka's theory of minority rights holds that members of national minorities, such as Indigenous nations, are not expected to integrate into the dominant societal culture. Instead, they 'have a range of rights intended to reflect and protect their status as distinct cultural communities', such as 'rights regarding language and land use' (2003, 12). However, reducing the "problem" of national minorities to one of cultural identity and difference obscures a central, structural process and relation that animates the issues Kymlicka is grappling with, namely, settler colonialism. In framing Indigenous nations as beneficiaries of cultural rights, Kymlicka's account obscures the need to engage with the question of dispossession and repatriation of territory. For example, he writes that Indigenous nations were 'involuntarily incorporated [...] through conquest or colonization. Had a different balance of power existed, these groups might have retained or established their own sovereign governments.' (2003, 11-12). In this sense, whilst Kymlicka

recognises that colonisation occurred historically, his theoretical framework precludes him from addressing it and adopting it as part of the framing for his normative interventions. Colonisation is an event consigned to the past rather than recognised as an ongoing structure (Wolff 1999; see also Coulthard 2014), reproducing what I discussed in 3.4 as *methodological settler innocence*.

The decision to characterise culturally “other” ethnic and national minorities in abstraction from an analysis of the settler state’s *situated imagination* is replicative of the *colonial gaze*. The methodologically individualist standpoint Kymlicka theorises from is inured to the historically contingent construction of its assumptions, and fails to interrogate the ways in which its perceptions of difference reflect the *matrix of power* through which white, liberal culture attained dominance. In this way, it also reproduces a theoretical version of *racializing vision*, drawing on elements of the settler *situated imagination* to sustain an essentialising perception of cultural difference. It proceeds on the basis that essentialising judgements of cultural difference from the perspective of the dominant culture are legitimate means of deciding who may belong to, participate in, and get incorporated in the project of nation-building. The extent to which such judgements are predicated on a broader cognitive, affective and perceptual apparatus that assumes the neutrality of its subject and essentialises the cultural “other” is systematically obfuscated. The function of Kymlicka’s theoretical standpoint in sustaining these obfuscations is our next point of focus.

Next, we turn to *fact insensitivity* in Kymlicka’s work, and probe how his theoretical standpoint is implicated in this practice. I suggest here that Kymlicka’s theoretical standpoint performs three crucial functions in terms of obscuring and naturalising various aspects of the sociopolitical world that require critical interrogation in order to contest the reproduction of racial ignorance. First, it authorises a form of methodological nationalism. The resultant framing obscures the historical contingency of the settler state as a product of conquest, colonisation, and dispossession, and elides exogenous processes such as the importing of cheap migrant labour in sustaining its economic development. Second, as a result of these elisions, Kymlicka’s theoretical standpoint leverages a particular vision of the Canadian state as historically white, and implicitly takes for granted the interests of the white settler majority. Third, Kymlicka’s theoretical standpoint reflects this privileging of the interests of the white

settler majority in terms of the normative proposals it advances. It demonstrates a misplaced *optimism* (1.3.1) regarding current sociopolitical conditions, and misperceives the adequacy of liberal institutions and practices to intervene in these conditions. In the process, Kymlicka's standpoint reproduces the relations of epistemological and material power of the *colonial matrix*, sustaining *methodological settler innocence*.

In a similar fashion to Miller's liberal nationalism, methodological nationalism emerges in Kymlicka's multiculturalist approach as a result of the failure to scrutinise the conditions under which "nation"-state formations emerge. Specifically, Kymlicka naturalises the Canadian state, and evades questioning the legitimacy of its sovereignty by way of advancing his cultural rights scheme for Indigenous nations. Leaving these elisions aside for the moment, what is the problem Kymlicka himself perceives to be real? As he puts it, the central question animating his theory of minority rights is how a theory of liberalism can accommodate the fact that liberal democracies such as Canada and the USA treat their migrant ethnic and national minorities differently. He writes,

'The *reality*, it seems to me, is that this differential treatment reflects different aspirations, and a different sense of legitimate expectations. Immigrants and national minorities have different beliefs about what is desirable and about what they are rightfully entitled to [...]. The historical development of ethnocultural relations in liberal democracies does not just reflect prejudice or power politics, but also a process of mutual accommodation in which each group's sense of rightful expectations has played a role in redefining the interpretation of liberal democratic norms and institutions.' (1997, 74; *emphasis added*)

Reprising a methodologically individualist stance in reducing complex historical dynamics to questions of the aspirations and expectations of members of different groups, Kymlicka's standpoint here systematically elides the historical and material processes through which the settler state 'incorporated' (1997, 76) various minorities into its frame. The intersecting relations of capitalism, racism, and colonialism that compose the *colonial matrix of power* are absent from Kymlicka's analysis. At both a material and epistemological level, his theorising remains desensitised to the ways in which these relations of power shape his conceptualisations of the categories he deploys and the sociopolitical world in which he intends to intervene.

In turn, the account of sociopolitical reality that Kymlicka's theoretical standpoint conjures is rooted in the perspective and interests of the white settler majority. Kymlicka's conceptualisation of a societal culture as a neutral backdrop to a society is a central point at issue here. The problem with his conceptualisation is that, in assuming the neutrality and the overlapping, shared nature of a societal culture (2003, 76), Kymlicka presents it in abstract, ahistorical terms that obscure the processes and dynamics that give contemporary liberal democratic societies their distinct characters. Far from being neutral, the political, economic, legal and linguistic institutions that shape contemporary multicultural states are contingent on specific historical trajectories in which racially exclusionary projects of nation-building played a constitutive role.⁶⁰ Rather than attending to the complex domain of historical power relations at play, Kymlicka's theoretical decisions inaugurate a vision of liberal democratic states that exist in abstraction from the intersections of racial, (settler) colonial and capitalist oppression.

Whilst acknowledging, for example, that historically, immigration restrictions against certain nationalities and ethnic groups have been motivated by the perception that they are unassimilable (2003, 14), Kymlicka's subsequent presentation of societal cultures rests on a disavowal of the lasting material and ideological effects of such policies in the present. This assumption demonstrates historical ignorance of the constitutive role of racism in shaping Canada and the USA, as well as ignorance of the patterns of racialisation upon which narratives of cultural membership are predicated. On this account, membership of the societal cultures of North Atlantic settler colonial states are historically predicated on whiteness, resulting from historical policies of favouring those settlers/immigrants racially demarcated as white (Dhamoon 2009). Critically, the distinction in treatment between national minorities and migrants that Kymlicka is at pains to explain is driven precisely these exclusionary and often violent historical trajectories and structural relations that his standpoint fails to recognise. In leveraging a taken-for-granted history of settler nation-building, Kymlicka

⁶⁰ To give two examples: first, the Chinese Head Tax, implemented by the Canadian government in the late nineteenth century to limit Chinese immigration following the end of a period of high demand for cheap Chinese labour in Canada; see Cho (2002) and Mawani (2004); and second, the residential school system, set up by the Canadian government to remove Indigenous children from their families and forcibly assimilate them to white, settler culture.

naturalises and reproduces the dominant *situated imagination* of the settler state, exculpating it from its role in sustaining relations of racism and colonial violence. Kymlicka's theoretical standpoint is *desensitised* to the ways in which historically entrenched relations of power and ongoing processes of colonialism are constitutive of the "problem" he identifies. That is, he has located the problem in terms of the liberal state's differentiated practical responses to national and ethnocultural minorities. However, his methodological decisions ensure that a crucial historical factor removed from critical purview is the advantages that accrue to the settler state by assimilating migrants in order to bolster sovereign nation-building and further entrench Indigenous dispossession.⁶¹

Finally, Kymlicka's *fact insensitivity* regarding the historical and contemporary effects of racism and settler colonialism lead to a misplaced optimism about the efficacy of liberal norms and institutions for addressing the normative problems he has identified. For example, in relation to fears that liberal multiculturalism will not 'improve the situation of gypsies or illegal immigrants or African-Americans' Kymlicka maintains that 'To fight this sense of defeatism, [...] it is important to emphasize the real and important successes' (1997, 79). From Kymlicka's standpoint, the 'real' success in this instance is the way in which liberal theorising and liberal political practice can respond to ethnic and national minorities differently, whilst still presumptively adhering to the principle of liberal equality. He therefore remains optimistic that the extension of a liberal cultural rights framework to other minority groups is a fitting normative intervention. This optimism regarding the efficacy of liberal institutions, I suggest, is further evidence of *methodological settler innocence*. As a result of the methodological decisions sanctioned by Kymlicka's theoretical standpoint, including the failure to cultivate *attunement* to relations of racism and colonialism, and the failure to hone a practice of *historical sensitisation*, liberal multiculturalism participates in the reproduction of racial ignorance by systematically eliding the constellations of material and epistemological power through which racism is sustained.

⁶¹ Several authors have intervened on this point, drawing attention to the ways in which migrant subjects can become complicit with the apparatus of the settler state; see, for example, Amadahy and Lawrence (2009) and Lawrence and Dua (2005). See Sharma and Wright (2008) for a critical rejoinder on the problem of nativism and Indigenous sovereignty, and Dhamoon (2015) for an intersectional perspective. For approaches that have sought to think these complicities in a politically solidary frame, see, for example, King (2019) and King et al. (2020).

To round off this discussion, I turn to the problem of *foreclosed reflexivity*, and consider what would be required to transform the theoretical underpinnings of Kymlicka's standpoint. In order to probe the foreclosure of reflexivity in Kymlicka's theorising, I examine his reflections on his method and approach, asking how *methodological individualism* and *fact insensitivity* as discussed above entrench and naturalise his theoretical standpoint. I show how Kymlicka's interpretation of the "facts" reflect the construction of his standpoint, and argue that this leaves him without the necessary tools to interrogate its embeddedness in relations of *colonial/modern* power. As a result, his standpoint remains complicit in the reproduction of racial ignorance.

Above, we saw that, as a result of his theoretical standpoint, Kymlicka takes certain aspects of the sociopolitical world for granted, whilst obscuring and naturalising others. As a result of *fact insensitivity*, his standpoint naturalises contingent features such as the nation-state and Canadian sovereignty and the material and epistemological structures undergirding them, and in turn, removes them from critical purview. As a result of *methodological individualism*, a scheme of minority cultural rights is elaborated whilst foregoing an analysis of how structural power relations shape the context to which cultural rights are designed to respond. Kymlicka's standpoint and its attendant theoretical assumptions regarding the primacy of the individual and the neglect of historical relations of power authorise the methodological decision to approach cultural difference in abstraction from other relations. In other words, it is Kymlicka's standpoint that shapes his perception of the salient "facts".

Kymlicka furthermore explains that his approach is driven by the observation that neither 'prejudice' or 'power politics' (1997, 74) fully account for the difference in treatment between national minorities and immigrants. As he puts it, this difference in treatment is 'a long-standing feature of liberal democracies, but one which is more or less totally neglected in liberal political theory. The motivation for my book is [...] to see if we can find an adequate justification within liberal theory for this differential treatment' (1997, 73-4). By identifying their differing 'desires', 'expectations' and 'aspirations', Kymlicka argues, we can reconcile the differential treatment of both groups in relation to one another, as well as to cultural majorities, through a liberal theory of minority rights. It is these observations of the "facts" that drive Kymlicka's framing of, and approach to, the problem that liberal multiculturalism is meant to solve;

namely, how to account for the differing treatment in practice of ethnocultural and national minorities. What can we make of his observation that the difference in treatment has been ‘totally neglected’ by liberal theorising? What does it tell us about the construction of his standpoint?

The *colonial gaze* operates through Kymlicka’s standpoint, in the sense that it performs the implicitly racialised “othering” of cultural minorities and essentialising cultural difference, whilst reinforcing the naturalised interests of the dominant, white-Anglo settler nation and culture. The standpoint performs *methodological settler innocence* by offering the solution of a liberal rights framework to the historical problem of settler colonialism, whilst obscuring the ways in which this framework perpetuates, rather than solves, the problem. As Audra Simpson puts it, when Indigenous nations are ‘viewed not as a people with a governmental system, a philosophical order, but as a remnant, a “culture”, a minority within an ethnocultural mosaic of differences’ (A. Simpson, 2014, 10), the settler state is more effectively able to undermine Indigenous sovereignty and retain control of Indigenous territory. Reducing the “problem” of Indigenous national minorities to the “fact” of cultural difference, to which minority cultural rights are posited as an appropriate liberal solution, obscures the real issues at stake – those which are real from the standpoint of Indigenous nations and their members: ongoing settler colonisation and dispossession of Indigenous land. The absence of reflexivity with respect to the assumptions that characterise his theoretical standpoint, and the ways in which this standpoint authorises a particular representation of sociopolitical reality, *naturalises* the standpoint as producing self-evidently correct perceptions and understandings. Simultaneously, the historical contingency of the assumptions grounding *methodological individualism* and *fact insensitivity* is obscured. In naturalising this standpoint, Kymlicka’s theorising also operates to obscure its complicity with ongoing colonial violence, against Indigenous peoples and nations, as well as against migrants expected to shoulder the burden of integration.

4.4 Joseph Carens’ liberal cosmopolitanism

Carens’ cosmopolitan position is most clearly presented in his contribution to the immigration debate, *The Ethics of Immigration* (2013), in which he shifts alternately

between two sets of presuppositions that guide his theorising. First, he works from the assumption that affluent, liberal democratic states of the global North are committed to liberal and democratic values, entailing a scheme of individual human rights that includes freedom of movement. Second, he begins his argument by assuming that states do have a right to control who crosses their borders. From these two sets of presuppositions, Carens goes on to argue that liberal democratic states should, by their own standards, open their borders to immigrants and accommodate a wide range of cultural identities. Further distinguishing Carens' cosmopolitan vision from the more nationally circumscribed accounts of Kymlicka and Miller, his social membership theory (2013) argues that belonging and membership should ultimately be measured according to residence and length of stay, rather than any substantive account of cultural membership (2013, chap. 8). In foregrounding the rights of individual migrants, Carens seeks to challenge the moral legitimacy of coercive border controls, allowing the argument for open borders to be guided by the moral-ontological significance of individuals' right to immigrate. Carens' comparatively weaker attachment to the significance of particular national cultures in liberal democratic states permits him to develop a thinner understanding of culture as the backdrop of norms and institutions into which immigrants arrive (2013, chap. 4). In contrast to Miller's pursuit of the preservation of historic national cultural forms and Kymlicka's minority-tempered nation-building, Carens maintains that if a 'democratic state seeks to promote a national culture and identity, it must limit itself to versions of culture and identity that are open to all of those within the state' (2013, 284).

In this final section of the chapter, I show how Carens reprises the methodological practices addressed in Miller's and Kymlicka's works. I briefly revisit *methodological individualism* and cultural essentialism, showing that Carens' standpoint disavows the salience of historical relations of racism and colonialism in his opposition to the state's right to exclude, and continues to reproduce relations of *colonial modernity*. I then attend to the problem of *fact insensitivity*, and examine how Carens idealises certain aspects of the immigration debate, whilst simultaneously sustaining *settler methodological ignorance* in failing to consider the ramifications of his open-borders position in relation to settler colonialism. Finally, I address Carens' methodological reflections, and show that whilst his approach entails greater scope for reflexivity than

either Miller's or Kymlicka's, it remains insufficient to transform the assumptions underpinning his theoretical standpoint.

Carens' *Ethics of Immigration* contests the legitimacy of the state's right to exclude and endorses an open borders cosmopolitanism, grounded in the commitment to the moral equality of individuals and the right to freedom of movement (2013, chap. 11). Liberal cosmopolitanism in this sense is predicated on a universal framework of individual rights, and Carens develops his argument through the assertion that 'the freedom to move across state borders as a human right is a logical extension of the well-established democratic practice of treating freedom of movement within state borders as a human right' (2013, 237). His standpoint is guided here by what Carens refers to as 'democratic' principles, such as 'people should not be subject to discrimination on the basis of characteristics like race, religion, or gender' (2013, 2). Although Carens' approach departs from Miller's, for example, in terms of his rejection of national culture as morally relevant to the immigration debate, it shares with Miller and Kymlicka its liberal theoretical basis and thus reprises *methodological individualism*. As a consequence, Carens' cosmopolitan response to the immigration debate also shares the lack of attunement to historical relations of power encountered in 4.2 and 4.3. For example, in treating 'race' as a presumptively irrelevant 'characteristic' (2013, 2), Carens' account systematically elides race as a salient category of analysis. The failure to perceive it as such, however, limits the cosmopolitan standpoint in its capacity to interpret the global historical context in which immigration takes place, as well as "host" societies enmeshed in histories of colonial racism. In this sense, Carens' cosmopolitan standpoint is also implicated in the reproduction of racial ignorance.

The neglect of racism as a pertinent relation has a knock-on effect on Carens' conceptualisation of culture. In addressing the question of how liberal democratic states should respond to cultural minorities, he advances a conception of 'democratic culture' (2013, chap. 4; see also 2013, 116) as the backdrop of norms and institutions into which immigrants arrive (2013, chap. 4), including laws (2013, 65-7) and informal norms of conduct (2013, 71-6). Rejecting Kymlicka's conception of 'societal culture' on the basis that it implicitly privileges the majority culture over cultural minorities (2000, chap. 3), Carens' conception of democratic culture is intended to accommodate

different cultural backgrounds with greater 'evenhandedness' (2000, 8-12) from the state. In assuming the neutrality of liberal democratic norms and institutions, however, Carens' standpoint has no analytical purchase on their historical construction. At the same time, it fails to grasp the ways they have been leveraged for racially exclusionary ends. That is, Carens' standpoint elides a historical contextualisation of the ways in which liberal democratic states, and especially settler colonial states of north Atlantic, normatively centre Euro/white/Christian cultural norms. In this sense his reliance on the notion of democratic culture as a neutral backdrop systematically obfuscates histories of racial exclusion and reproduces the dominant relations of *colonial modernity* within which individual rights framework as presided over by the modern state is legitimated.

Next, I consider *fact insensitivity* in Carens' work. Probing the contours of the sociopolitical world disclosed by his theoretical standpoint, I suggest that it performs three main functions that contribute to the reproduction of racial ignorance. First, the standpoint of liberal cosmopolitanism treats states and borders as moral irrelevancies to be transcended. As an implicit form of methodological nationalism, the perception of the nation-state form as an irrelevance reproduces and naturalises epistemological relations of *colonial modernity* and removes from critical purview political communities that do not fit the model of Westphalian sovereignty. Second, an idealised social ontology renders Carens' theorising desensitised to the effects of racism and colonialism on the contemporary contexts of immigration, which in turn leads to the framing of the problem as one of cultural difference and integration. Finally, I show how a theoretical optimism regarding the potential of liberal norms and institutions to substantiate an ethics of immigration leads to *methodological settler innocence*.

First, in relation to methodological nationalism, Carens' liberal cosmopolitan standpoint departs from Miller and Kymlicka in that it is not explicitly deployed with reference to or in the interests of any particular state. Its claim to a universal ethical scope is reflected in its articulation of what is required of liberal democratic states with respect to immigration (2013, 6), given liberal democratic values, and the eventual argument for open borders and the right to free movement. Carens' theoretical standpoint, however, naturalises the existing order of sovereign states, seeking to divorce conceptualisations of sovereignty from coercive immigration restrictions

(2013, 271). Although his position advocates for open borders, borders themselves are placed beyond the purview of critical scrutiny; they are taken as morally arbitrary facts, which need to be transcended by a liberal cosmopolitan political morality. In this respect, the liberal cosmopolitan standpoint is desensitised to how historical constellations of colonial and imperial power have shaped the global sovereign order, as well as to the epistemological effects of *colonial modernity*, which are instrumental in making sense of how the nation-state has become a central analytical category of political theorising. Absent from this representation of the sociopolitical world is a consideration of the historical conditions under which many state borders were drawn and enforced. Importantly, affluent North American liberal democratic states such as the USA and Canada, which Carens envisages as having duties to ‘open’ their borders to facilitate freedom of movement, are addressed in abstraction from ongoing processes of settlement and dispossession of Indigenous peoples. As a result, the extent to which many state borders are artefacts of colonialism, as well as mechanisms through which colonising processes continue to be enacted, are aspects of the sociopolitical world to which Carens’ theoretical standpoint remains desensitised.⁶²

Second, an important distinction between Carens’ defence of cosmopolitan immigration ethics and the works of Kymlicka and Miller (besides their differing normative commitments), is that Carens’ account offers a more heavily idealised account of immigration ethics. Carens begins from the question of what liberal democratic principles commit their proponents to, irrespective of what Miller would count, for instance, as political constraints that necessarily modify what a liberal political morality can aspire to achieve. This distinction is central because it cuts to the heart of the “fact” question. Whereas Miller and Kymlicka, in different ways, begin from observations about the ways in which “reality” in their understanding disrupts or modifies the application of liberal principles to particular cases, Carens begins from the presumptively salient moral principles: his reasoning begins from ‘norms and standards that most people in contemporary democratic societies accept’ (2013, 3). That he takes principles as his starting point does not mean that his argument has no account of the “facts”; rather, they are simply different starting assumptions about what

⁶² See f.n. 61 above.

constitutes a constraint and the extent to which such constraints should be regarded as fatal to the project of liberal cosmopolitanism. However, Carens' idealisation has repercussions in terms of *fact insensitivity*. For instance, although he acknowledges the interwoven aspects of global poverty, inequality and immigration (2013, 227-28), there is no theoretical mapping of the link between the historical relationship between colonial and capitalist processes of extraction and exploitation, concomitant patterns in movement and immigration, and the economic development of liberal democracies. These dynamics are left unlinked to the ways in which colonial processes of extraction and exploitation fuelled the expansion of liberal democratic material and cultural power in the metropolises and settler colonies of the North (Bhambra 2021; Go 2011; Rodney [1972] 2018; see also T. D. Santos 1970).

Moreover, as we saw above, Carens' reductive and analytically limited focus on culture results in abstraction from the historical and material relations that shape the context of immigrant arrival and integration (Ottonelli 2014; Sager 2016). In this respect, Carens' account also *naturalises* liberal democratic culture as the neutral backdrop against which immigrants' arrival, integration and settlement take place. A further consequence here, shared with Miller's and Kymlicka's approaches, is the assumption that essentialised conceptions of "host" and immigrant cultures, in isolation from other relations of power, can do the theoretical work of illuminating the normative contours of integration and cultural belonging. An appropriate historical contextualisation of the conditions of emergence of liberal democratic culture indicates that this vision of neutrality rests on a practice of *fact insensitivity* that fails to grasp the historical connections between liberalism, colonialism, and capitalism (Bell 2020; Bhambra 2021; Go 2011; McCarthy 2009).

Carens' theoretical optimism regarding the potential of liberal norms and institutions to substantiate an ethics of immigration leads to *methodological settler innocence*. I have been arguing that the liberal cosmopolitan standpoint is desensitised to the relations of *colonial modernity* and its own complicity in reproducing these relations. One way this insensitivity manifests itself is through the liberal cosmopolitan pursuit for open borders. From this standpoint, the liberal cosmopolitan can ignore histories of colonisation and dispossession, and the challenge of stolen land, instead naturalising the global order of sovereign states through which Indigenous

dispossession is facilitated. This naturalisation reinforces the sovereignty of settler states, but simultaneously evades critical scrutiny, instead performing *methodological settler innocence* in advancing a liberal political morality with respect to immigration. Simultaneously, the morality of the cosmopolitan standpoint is taken for granted, without registering competing conceptions of cosmopolitanism that do entail a greater sensitisation to relations of oppression,⁶³ or ways in which liberal cosmopolitanism has been continuous with historical forms of racism and racialisation. It is the methodological foreclosure of reflexivity with respect to the construction of the liberal cosmopolitan standpoint I now turn.

Finally, Carens' standpoint also forecloses reflexivity, although in an importantly different way to Miller or Kymlicka. Carens' work incorporates explicit discussions of methodological practice, notable in both his earlier writings on liberalism, culture, and justice (2000, 2004), and in *Ethics of Immigration* (2013). The former delineates an approach Carens refers to as contextual political theory, which, as I indicate below, holds potential resources for cultivating reflexivity and contesting racial ignorance. The latter, however, discards contextual political theory in favour of the 'shifting presuppositions' approach (outlined at the start of 4.4), which remains more reflexively circumscribed.

Contextual political theory (Carens 2004) recognises that the historical and cultural particulars of different contexts can undercut the possibility of reaching fully generalisable normative conclusions. Carens leverages this insight to make the argument for actively pursuing examples, cases, and contexts that are unfamiliar to the theorist, challenging their intuitions about ethical issues and encouraging them to fine-tune their moral arguments in light of this process. As he puts it, we can 'learn a lot by trying to think about how our theories do or do not work in other contexts', which may 'lead us to reconsider how well they really work in contexts with which we are most familiar' (2004, 127). Carens notes that this approach values specificity and difference as positive contributions to building more robust normative theories, as part of an open-ended process. Moreover, it implicitly recognises that different epistemological traditions exist across varying historical and social contexts, and that

⁶³ See, for example, Nwankwo (2005), Friedel (2008), Mendieta (2009), Rao (2010), Eze (2017), M'Baye (2017), and the essays in Bhambra and Narayan (2016).

these may, in turn, draw on different normative and interpretative resources to the ones with which the theorist is familiar (2004, 127; see also 2000, Chap. 8).

Contextual political theory utilises a form of reflexivity to cultivate epistemic humility, so that instead of ‘simply acknowledging our limitations we might try to move beyond them’ (2004, 127). It recognises the contextual situatedness and possibility of the limitations of its own epistemic horizon, acknowledging that different contextual examinations offer different interpretative resources that enable more nuanced normative argumentation. This methodological practice can aid in resisting ignorance through the cultivation of a theoretical disposition that is open to encountering challenges to its own presuppositions. In this way, it hints at the possibility of moving towards what we encountered in 3.5 as *grounded normativity*, recognising that normative frameworks are deeply contextual. The important limitation with contextual political theory, however, is that, unlike *grounded normativity*, it retains the ontological assumptions of the liberal standpoint, removing structural relations that condition and mediate different normative standpoints from critical purview. What Carens takes as a process of becoming ‘conscious of moral considerations that are relevant to our general theories but have been left out’ (2004, 127) reflects what I discussed in 2.3 as an “add-and-stir” approach to attaining epistemic diversity. Such an approach may begin to recognise the import of seeking epistemic resources beyond one’s own theoretical horizon, but will otherwise leave the scaffolding of the liberal standpoint intact.

To fully appreciate the scope of methodological reflexivity in Carens’ work, it is worth considering also the ‘shifting presuppositions’ approach employed in *Ethics of Immigration*. The argument in *Ethics*, as noted in 4.2, is constructed on the basis of a series of presuppositions, one of which is the ‘democratic principles presupposition’.⁶⁴ According to this presupposition, Carens takes the ‘broad moral commitments that underlie and justify contemporary political institutions and policies in states in Europe and North America’ (2013, 306) to be both widely shared and an adequate normative

⁶⁴ Over the course of the text, some of these presuppositions ‘shift’ depending on the specific normative question Carens addresses at each juncture; for example, at times he privileges the assumption of more just sociopolitical conditions, whilst at others, theorising proceeds with greater attention to existing sociopolitical and institutional feasibility constraints.

backdrop for his theorising. Note that the important point here is not so much whether or not such commitments are widely shared,⁶⁵ but the absence of interrogation as to whether these commitments underlie and justify contemporarily political institutions and policies in the way Carens supposes them to. As I have argued in the foregoing sections, it is the methodological processes of abstraction from historical constellations of power and the idealisation of contemporary liberal democracies in the present that yield a vision of liberal democratic states as actual bearers of liberal democratic values. In relation to reflexivity, then, the problem is the failure to grasp the ways in which methodological decisions such as historical abstraction shape the normative contours of the theoretical conclusions produced.

As a result of Carens' circumscribed reflexivity, the ontological and epistemological frame within which questions of immigration ethics are posed is ultimately obscured. In other words, it is the historically contingent construction of the liberal cosmopolitan standpoint that becomes naturalised, and which remains theoretically unnoticed and unremarked upon. This, in turn, facilitates the reproduction of racial ignorance as a result of the liberal cosmopolitan standpoint's lack of conceptual and methodological resources to make sense of the *colonial matrix of power* that sustains it.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have encountered some of the key methodological mechanisms through which racial ignorance is reproduced in normative theorising. I have argued that the methodological practices authorised by NPT's dominant, liberal standpoint reproduce racial ignorance by systematically failing to acknowledge race and racism as salient to ongoing normative debates about immigration and cultural difference. Approaching the problem from this angle brought to the fore the racialised nature of crafting national identities, whether mono- or multicultural, both in practical terms and ideologically through the construction and reproduction of situated national imaginaries. It also opened up the theoretical space for critiquing liberal cosmopolitan frameworks constructed without an adequate theorisation of the constitutive role of racial hierarchies in historical imaginings of the cosmopolitan political community.

⁶⁵ There is evidence to suggest they are not; see discussions in Cole (2014a, 2014b) Bauböck (2015) and Abizadeh (2015) for in relation to Carens' methods in this regard.

My critique in this chapter has been guided by the insight that fundamental theoretical assumptions about how the sociopolitical world is organised, known, and theorised about are expressed through methodological decisions to conduct that theorising in specific ways. I identified *methodological individualism*, *fact insensitivity*, and *foreclosed reflexivity* to be implicated in the reproduction of racial ignorance in the following ways. First, Miller, Kymlicka and Carens each selected an analytically reductive lens of cultural difference to animate their normative interventions regarding immigration (Miller and Carens) and minority rights (Kymlicka). Their shared commitment to the practice of *methodological individualism*, underpinned by an individualist social ontology, reproduces racial ignorance by obscuring from critical purview the constellation of *colonial/modern* power. In the absence of attunement to the import of racism in understanding contemporary debates about immigration and cultural difference in settler colonial/post-imperial states of the global North, all three accounts ensure its theoretical occlusion. This has important consequences for *fact insensitivity*.

Because of their lack of attunement to racism, each theorist's standpoint is limited in terms of its diagnostic capacity to adequately frame the normative problem it seeks to address. Whilst Miller's standpoint leads him to idealise and moralise a chimerical vision of the homogenous nation, Kymlicka's fails to note the constitutive role of Indigenous dispossession in motivating the discrepancies in the settler state's treatment of national and ethnocultural minorities. Carens' more heavily idealised cosmopolitan theorising similarly lacks sensitisation to the epistemological effects of colonialism on the development of liberal cosmopolitan thinking, leading to the uncritical reproduction of its undergirding theoretical tenets. I also sought to highlight how all three theorists display their epistemological and ethical commitments through their choice of theoretical standpoint, indicating the ways in which they choose to privilege certain loci of theorising over others. Whether rooted in a narrow vision of national identity in contemporary liberal democratic states, or an expansive vision of the liberal cosmopolis, all three accounts fail to interrogate the historical processes and deeply entrenched intersectional relations of hierarchy and violence constitutive of the envisioned nation or culture they leverage. Procedurally, these choices reflect each theorist's ontological construction of their standpoint, in terms of their failure to incorporate a historically and sociologically informed vision of the sociopolitical world

about which they theorise. This brings to the fore the complex and intricate relationship between ontology and epistemology, and the choices in methodological practice they consequently undergird.

The extent to which the three authors engage in reflexive practice regarding their theorising has also a significant methodological touchpoint in my analysis. While Miller, Kymlicka and Carens display different degrees of reflexive awareness regarding their methods of theory construction, all three fall short of examining their theories' embeddedness in a specific methodological tradition within which the normative problems of immigration and cultural difference are conceptualised and addressed. Troublingly, the possibility of disrupting the reproduction of racial ignorance is foreclosed to the extent that each theorist also *naturalises* his theoretical standpoint, removing from critical purview the contingent historical processes and entrenched structural relations that shape their theoretical assumptions. In this way, *methodological individualism*, *fact insensitivity*, and *foreclosed reflexivity* inform and reinforce one another, together cultivating a form of methodological *meta-insensitivity* to the kinds of tools and practices that might reorient normative theorising.

I close the chapter by returning to the question of the kind of ethical orientation authorised by these three accounts. It is important to restate here that this orientation is distinct from the normative conclusions endorsed by each theorist. It is an orientation disclosed through methodological practice rather than by a substantive normative position, and as such, it is possible for it to be at odds with the avowed normative commitments of the theory. Across the work of Miller, Kymlicka, and Carens, I have identified a shared methodological reproduction of racial ignorance, as a result of a lack of *relational attunement*, *historical sensitisation*, and *reflexivity*. Against a broader political backdrop in many liberal democratic states of increasing racialised hostility and violence, this ignorance should be of utmost concern to theorists wishing to challenge violence and oppression in the name of justice. This is so because the absence of the appropriate theoretical resources to diagnose complex and historically entrenched patterns of oppression precludes our capacity to adequately respond to them, rendering ignorance ever more challenging to identify. Thus, the historically entrenched intersectional constellations of power within which an understanding of race must be situated is occluded. The subsequent depoliticising substitution of culture

in the work of Miller, Kymlicka, and Carens fails to adequately diagnose the social conditions under which immigration and cultural difference are perceived as normative challenges for the liberal state, reproducing socially sanctioned ignorance about the historical salience and effects of race, colonialism and empire, and ultimately perpetuating the conditions of theorising under which an intersectional, solidary and transformative political orientation towards racial justice is foreclosed.

Part 2

Disability and social ignorance

Thus far, we have encountered the central mechanisms through which NPT is implicated in the reproduction of social ignorance and seen how reorienting our practices to align with Chapter Two's methodological injunctions can help contest this reproduction. Through delineating a range of conceptual tools that can sensitise us to the epistemological effects of racism and colonialism, Chapter Three showed the theoretical foundations of NPT to be co-extensive with some of the racialised, Eurocentric ontological and epistemological assumptions characteristic of Enlightenment thought. Chapter Four analysed these assumptions in action, working through the ways in which they are operationalised in the works of several influential theorists in NPT. Continuing our critique of the methodological reproduction of social ignorance in NPT, the second pair of thematic chapters turns its attention to disability. I begin in Chapter Five by charting a conceptual constellation that draws on critical literatures sensitised to the intersectional complexity of disability, and use the emergent theoretical vocabulary and methodological practices it discloses to critique the reproduction of social ignorance in NPT in Chapter Six. Focusing again on the practices of *methodological individualism*, *fact insensitivity*, and *foreclosed reflexivity*, my aim is to foreground the ways in which these practices maintain a standpoint of ignorance in certain dominant liberal strands of normative theorising. Chapter Six engages three influential liberal approaches to normative theorising – utilitarianism (Singer 2011), egalitarianism (Rawls 1999), and the capabilities approach (Nussbaum 2007) – and shows how the foundational theoretical assumptions common to all three reproduce social ignorance with respect to disability.

In Chapters Three and Four, I argued that the elision of colonialism and racism in NPT left conceptualisations of its central analytical categories as key vehicles through which racial ignorance is reproduced. I continue this line of argument in Chapters Five and Six, showing how NPT's standpoint remains anchored in assumptions about the nature of subjectivity that reproduce ontologically and epistemologically limited understandings of disability, and normative recommendations that perpetuate

oppressive and exclusionary sociopolitical conditions for disabled people. The alternative theoretical starting points I delineate in Chapter Five afford us the opportunity to cultivate methodological practices that adhere to the injunctions distilled in Chapter Two: relational attunement; historical sensitivity; and reflexivity. Through concepts that guide us towards adopting these practices, I chart a course that sensitises us to those aspects of the sociopolitical world that can reorient ignorant understandings of disability, and transform the ontological and epistemological assumptions that sustain social ignorance.

Disability has become a topic of substantive interest in normative theorising over the last two decades, with a number of edited volumes appearing (Arneil and Hirschmann 2016; Brownlee and Cureton 2009; Hirschmann and Linker 2015), as well as approaches that seek to extend liberal egalitarian frameworks to include and accommodate different forms of disablement (Cureton 2008; Richardson 2007; Silvers 2009; Silvers and Francis 2005, 2009; Stark 2007, 2013; Wong 2007) and account for the labour performed in caring for disabled people (Kittay 1999; Silvers 1995; see also Bhandary and Baehr 2021).⁶⁶ However, there has been relatively little engagement with the ways in which assumptions about disability shape the methodological practices of normative theorising itself.⁶⁷ In this sense, we can think about the *inclusion* of disability within the remit of normative theorising as indicative of an “add-and-stir” approach (2.3), which expands the pool of epistemic resources available to normative theorists without troubling the underlying assumptions characterising NPT’s theoretical standpoint. By directing our attention to influential, field-shaping articulations of normative theorising, however, I will demonstrate that it is only by attending to the undergirding theoretical assumptions that the reproduction of social ignorance can be adequately identified and contested.

What I aim to show across these two chapters is that the reproduction of social ignorance in relation to disability forecloses the possibility of theorising that is responsive to dynamics of exclusion. In reproducing this ignorance, NPT remains

⁶⁶ Some theorists have extended different frameworks for thinking about disability justice, including contemporary civic republicanism (O’Shea 2018b, 2018a) and the capabilities approach (Baylies 2002; Burchardt 2004).

⁶⁷ For exceptions to this trend, see, for example, Kittay (2009, 2010), Simplican (2015) and Knight (2018).

desensitised to the contingencies of its central conceptualisations and the construction of its own standpoint. In other words, the methodological practices deployed in NPT, and the standpoint underpinning them, obstruct, rather than facilitate, theorising that can guide us towards the realisation of disability justice. By introducing a conceptual vocabulary that can attune us to the intersectional complexity of disability, however, I initiate a process of sensitisation to alternative theoretical starting points. These starting points can aid us in producing normative theorising that is reflexive, relationally attuned, and historically sensitised. Such theorising holds greater potential to contest oppressive and exclusionary sociopolitical conditions, and to imagine and realise instead inclusive, accessible, and emancipatory alternatives.

5. Contesting ableist ignorance: a methodological toolkit

5.1 Introduction

Chapter Five turns our attention to concepts and practices that can contest and disrupt *ableist* ignorance. Centring *ableism* as a structural relation pertaining to bodily ab/normality around which contemporary normative theorising is implicitly organised,⁶⁸ this chapter asks: what alternative theoretical orientations populate critical literatures on disability that can sensitise NPT to the limits of its horizons? What kinds of conceptual tools and practices are available that can enable us to acknowledge the ways in which *ableism* and ableist ignorance are reproduced in practices of normative theorising? I discuss the concept of *ableism* in detail below in 5.2; for now, I want to briefly explain the concept of ableist ignorance and how it operates in this chapter. In Chapter Three, I characterised *racial ignorance* as the failure to acknowledge “race” as a salient category of analysis, eliding it and in doing so, obscuring it from critical purview. Ableist ignorance follows a similar logic, and I maintain the emphasis here on attending to what is obscured from critical scrutiny. Specifically, what I unpack through the lens of ableist ignorance is the process through which dominant strands of NPT reproduce ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of disability and subjectivity. I argue that these assumptions reflect understandings of disability that are predicated on an understanding of the “person” as having particular cognitive and productive capacities, and that by failing to recognise the historical contingency of these assumptions, normative theorists reproduce the epistemological conditions under which disability is essentialised as a form of lack or deficiency.

This chapter charts a conceptual constellation that draws on critical literatures sensitised to the intersectional complexity of disability, foregrounding its constitution as a category of analysis in relational, structural, and historical terms: feminist disability studies (Garland-Thomson [1997] 2017), critical disability theory (Kafer 2013) and ableism studies (Campbell 2009), transnational feminist approaches (Erevelles 2011), and disability justice approaches (Kim and Schalk 2021; Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018).

⁶⁸ Implicit to the extent that, even though two out of the three theorists I engage with in Chapter Six address disability directly, their analyses lack a theorisation of ableism as a central structuring relation in the ontology and epistemology of disability.

The chapter's conceptual constellation is composed of: *ableism* (Campbell 2009), the structural relation and set of processes governing understandings of bodily normality and deviance; the *normate* (Garland-Thomson [1997] 2017), the subject position representing the unrealised and regulative ideal of the abled individual; *crip futurity* (Kafer 2013), which maps an alternative horizon that rejects disability as inherently undesirable; *care webs* (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018), concrete practices of building networks of care to sustain and nourish complex interdependence; and the *curative imaginary* (Kafer 2013), the repository of beliefs that figure disability as requiring, above all else, curative interventions.

The concepts of *ableism*, the *normate*, *crip futurity*, *care webs*, and the *curative imaginary* enable the theoretical cultivation of a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of disability. Simultaneously, they assemble for us a second methodological toolkit that can begin to sensitise theorists to the ways in which historically contingent but entrenched relations of power shape the contours of NPT's standpoint, and sustain the exclusion of disabled subjects from the horizons of liberal normative theorising. My argument in this chapter builds on the outlay of Chapter Three, where I suggested that a key engine behind the reproduction of racial ignorance is NPT's liberal standpoint and its conceptual repertoire, which are artefacts of *colonial modernity*. The reproduction of ignorance in relation to disability is also intimately related to NPT's liberal standpoint, but in this chapter, we shift our focus from the contingent construction of national and cultural membership to that of normality, as figured through the position of the *normate* subject. As I will go on to show, social ignorance regarding disability is reproduced through assumptions embodied in a central category of normative theorising; in this case, its conceptualisation of the individual subject as possessed of reason and autonomy.

The chapter unfolds as follows. In the first section, I foreground *ableism* (Campbell 2009, 2012, 2019) as the relation and set of processes through which categories of ability and disability are contingently organised. Then, returning to the apparatus of *colonial modernity* encountered in 3.2, I offer a reading of *ableism* as one of *colonial modernity's* constitutive axes. I suggest that unpacking *ableism* affords an opportunity to sensitise ourselves to the imbrication between different relations of power constituting the *colonial matrix*, and how these cohere in the liberal conception of the

subject. This conceptualisation, I contend, sits at the root of a range exclusionary processes that position specific forms of difference beyond the realm of the “human”.

The following section develops 5.2’s argument regarding the liberal conception of personhood through an engagement with feminist disability theorist Rosemarie Garland-Thomson’s ([1997] 2017) concept of the *normate*. As the subject position constructed through relations of privilege, the *normate*, I argue, animates dominant articulations of normative theorising as the implicit referent of *methodological individualism*. Building on Garland-Thomson’s initial theorisation, I draw on a range of critical literatures that entreat us to forge an intersectionally attuned account of the *normate*. I show that recognising the construction of the *normate* subject also requires methodological sensitisation to the material relations and contexts that differentially constrain or foreclose the possibility of some populations gaining proximity to the *normate* position.

The final section draws on the three remaining conceptual tools, *crip futurity*, *care webs*, and the *curative imaginary*, to foreground the emancipatory possibilities emanating from the alternative theoretical starting points these concepts impart. The *curative imaginary* invites us to evaluate the limitations of normative theorising that assumes disabled people must seek to approximate abled norms, and reminds us, methodologically speaking, to reflect on our choice of interpretative resources for making sense of disability. Together, *crip futurity* and *care webs* present an opportunity to attend to *relationally attuned* and *historically sensitised* practices of caring-giving and care-taking. They present an alternative to NPT’s *methodological individualism* and *fact insensitivity* by imparting politicised, prefigurative practices of relating; I argue that these theoretical starting points can open up normative theorising to more emancipatory future horizons.

5.2 Mapping ableism

In curating a toolkit for challenging the reproduction of ableist ignorance, our first port of call entails familiarising ourselves with the concept of *ableism* itself. Generated by the theoretical insight that the category of disability itself may tell us less about what disability is than a study of abledness, *ableism* (Campbell 2009, 2018, 2019; see also

Goodley 2014) in its most abstract sense refers to a set of processes and relations that divide and distinguish bodyminds (Price 2015) on the basis of a particular set of sociopolitical, economic and cultural norms. ‘Bodymind’ is a term intended to capture the insight that ‘mental and physical processes not only affect each other but also give rise to each other’ (Price 2015, 269). As well as contesting the dualistic idea that bodies and minds are separate entities, the individual bodymind is ‘a sociopolitically constituted and material entity that emerges through both structural (power- and violence-laden) contexts and also individual (specific) experience’ (2015, 271). Integrating *ableism* and the notion of the bodymind enables us to recognise the complex ways that historically contingent assumptions about normality and functionality pertain to physical and mental domains. The *ontological basis* of ableism is constituted by ‘discourses of ‘normality’ from which all disabled people are excluded’ (Yuval-Davis 2006, 201; see also 2.2), meaning that *ableism* produces social divisions on the basis of the achievement of “normal” functioning, whether this functioning is physical, cognitive, educational, or psychosocial. I approach *ableism* here as a means of bringing to light another dimension of the theoretical scaffolding that constructs the liberal standpoint in normative theorising. Through elucidating *ableism* as part of the structural underpinning that shapes NPT’s ontological and epistemological assumptions, we can trace more precisely the methodological mechanisms through which ableist ignorance is reproduced.

In introducing the concept of *ableism*, I first locate it as a central structural mechanism through which we can begin to grasp what disability is. By theorising disability as a product of a specific set of processes, we can then critically interrogate the assumption that disability is a natural, individual, or historically fixed phenomenon. Next, I seek to situate *ableism* as a structural relation and process within the *colonial matrix of power* (3.2). Doing so affords us the possibility of grasping the broader structural, intersectional context within which *knowledge* of disability gets moulded according to Eurocentric ontological and epistemological assumptions. I show that understandings of disability exist outwith the colonial matrix, but due to the hegemonizing features of *colonial modernity*, convergence on specifically EuroAmerican-centric understandings tend to predominate, especially in disciplines such as NPT.

Ableism posits that categories of abledness and disablement, of ability and disability, are not comparative, but co-constitutive (Campbell 2009, 6). In this sense, disability is not a category that can be known from outwith a particular sociopolitical, historical and epistemological context, as it is defined in relation to a norm of ability that reflects the specificities of the context in question (Goodley 2014; see also Anand 2014; Chataika 2012; Ghai 2017). Similarly, abledness is a ‘hegemonic referential category to differentiate the ‘normal’ from the ‘dispensable’ [...] predicated on some pre-existing notion about the normative nature of species typical functioning’ (Campbell 2019, 147). *Ableism* then constitutes an axis around which categories of abledness and disablement, ability and disability, are organised. Like other axes considered in this dissertation as part of an intersectional matrix, however, *ableism* operates in conjunction *with* other axes. Thus categories of ability and disability are also enmeshed with categories of gender, race, sexuality, class, and nationality, with permutations that shift over different contexts and locations. The concept of ableism as a structuring relation within a broader matrix of power allows us, for example, to ‘map discourses of nationhood, citizenship and ethical norms within specific periods and places buttressed by configurations of the normative (endowed, extolled) and non-normative (those potentially disposable remnant ‘failed’ bodies)’ (Campbell 2019, 139).

Given that *ableism* denotes a structural relation and a set of processes that distinguish between normative and non-normative bodyminds, what can it impart in terms of understanding the category of “disability”? I consider three central points that will guide my critique of NPT in Chapter Six by foregrounding the limitations of *methodological individualism*: rejecting individualising accounts of disability; attending to relationality; and becoming sensitised to the structural epistemological context in which knowledge of “disability” gets constructed. In the first instance, thinking disability through the lens of *ableism* elicits a rejection of disability as an essential property of individual bodyminds. As disability rights activists and disability scholars have long argued, conceptualising disability as an individual lack or deficiency precipitated by a medical abnormality serves to depoliticise disability, maintaining it in the private sphere as a stigmatised position of abjection. Disability on this account is best addressed through interventions that seek to treat, cure, and or/rehabilitate disabled individuals, and overcome through exhibiting characteristics of resolve and determination.

Reconceptualising disability through the lens of *ableism*, however, enables us to contest this individualistic and depoliticised understanding. *Ableism* as a set of processes foregrounds the ways in which the sociopolitical world is *organised* to cast bodyminds that deviate from the norm of abledness as disabled. In this sense, *ableism* is constitutive of the conditions through which certain sociopolitical and material contexts produce differential outcomes for disabled and abled bodyminds.

This takes us to the second dimension of “disability” through the lens of *ableism: relationality*. In a first sense, disability under conditions of *ableism* is not an essential property of individual bodyminds, but defined in relation to an idealised norm of abledness. As Campbell (2019) points out, this norm is historically and culturally contingent: constructions and perceptions of disability shift according to the distinctive ways that *ableist* relations and processes organise particular sociopolitical and material contexts. Crucially, disability in this sense is not a static or monolithic category, but a construction that depends on how *ableism* is articulated in a specific context. It follows that *ableism* must be read in conjunction with intersectionality, as *ableism* does not appear in abstraction from other relations of power. Rather, it is shaped in and through other axes composing a matrix of power. Again, disability is not a monolithic category, but intersectional in the sense that *ableism* works in conjunction with other relations – for example, racism, heteropatriarchy, or capitalism – to produce a range of intersectional positionalities. Such complexity is obscured by *methodological individualism*, which ascribes identities to individuals as essential qualities, rather than contingent constructions shaped by dominant constellations of power.

Third, *ableism* also takes on an epistemological dimension. It imparts something about how disability is or comes to be known. Campbell suggests that *ableism* is ‘deeply seeded at the level of epistemological systems of life, personhood, power and liveability’; it denotes ‘a trajectory of perfection, a deep way of thinking about bodies, wholeness, permeability and how certain clusters of people are en-abled’ (Campbell 2019, 146). In other words, becoming sensitised to *ableism* as a structural relation and a set of processes facilitates a tracing of the epistemological structures through which certain ways of embodied being are inaugurated as the norm, whilst others are relegated to abnormality or defectiveness. Crucially, then, *ableism* denotes an

epistemological process through which a specific social division pertaining to how the normal and abnormal capacity and functionality of the body/mind is distinguished and divided into a hierarchical binary of *abled* and *disabled*. To explore this division in greater theoretical depth, I now turn to the broader material and epistemological context in which *ableism* functions, situating *ableism* in its dominant articulation as part of *colonial modernity*.

In Chapter Three, I introduced the decolonial school as a starting point for thinking through the conceptual architecture and theoretical vocabulary that might unsettle some of NPT's central assumptions. I foregrounded the *colonial matrix of power*, an intersectional matrix within which the social division of race gets operationalised, as an important conceptual tool in engaging with the structure and logics of *colonial modernity*. Central to this apparatus is the observation that, in a globalised – or rather, neocolonised, capitalist – world, dominant articulations of power systematically privilege an idealised Euro-American, elite/bourgeois, white subject. Here, I want to expand on this notion of *colonial modernity* as the crucible of relations in which the project seeks to unpack, understand, and demystify how ableism structures NPT's foundational theoretical assumptions. It's important to note here that, as Campbell (2017) suggests, different articulations of *ableism* will operate in different contexts, according to localised norms of normality and abnormality. However, exploring *ableism* in the context of *colonial modernity* is instructive because of its epistemological dominance, and the convergence of what Campbell (2011) has referred to as geodisability knowledge; that is, the process through which Northern conceptual and interpretative frameworks come to dominate knowledge cultivation about disability.

There is a small but illuminating body of scholarship on theorising ableism as a constitutive part of *colonial modernity* (Campos 2015; Danel 2020; González 2021; Grech 2015; Ndlovu 2021; Pino Morán and Tiseyra 2019).⁶⁹ Pino Morán and Tiseyra (2019) note 'an absence in decolonial thought, in terms of theorising and recognising ableism as a constitutive part of modernity'. For them, ableism is 'a foundational axis of classification and hierarchy of populations' (2019, 504). Similarly, Campos (2015, 199)

⁶⁹ With the exception of Grech (2015) and Ndlovu (2021), the works cited here are published in Spanish. Subsequent translations are my own.

proposes ‘the category of *normality* be added to the colonial matrix of race, gender, and social class, which [...] grants to those who establish themselves as ‘normal’, the power to decide the place that those with abnormalities, deformities, and disabilities should occupy in society’ (2015, 199). Through an engagement with this emergent literature, I consider two sites where reading *ableism* as an axis of the *colonial matrix of power*, and as such, constitutive of *colonial modernity*, can further illuminate NPT’s ontological and epistemological assumptions and their implication in the reproduction of ableist ignorance: first, the “human” as an abled subject, and second, the integration of *ableism* with relations and processes of capitalism and racism.

First, attending to *ableism* as a constitutive element of *colonial modernity* yields further insights on the construction of the idealised human subject. Building on Chapter Three’s discussion of the *colonial difference* (3.2), which I charted through the deployment of Eurocentric racial hierarchies in distinguishing between human and less-than-human subjects, *ableism* facilitates an interrogation of how norms of cognitive capacity (see, for example, Samuels 2014; Stubblefield 2010), productivity and eventually health and hygiene (see, for example, Stubblefield 2007), were also constitutive elements of Eurocentric hierarchies of humanness. As González puts it, the ‘human’ is a ‘marker of power, defining an exclusionary normative category that controls the boundaries of legitimate recognition and defines the field of abject and dehumanized bodies’ (González 2021, 129). Integrating *ableism* with the *colonial matrix of power* affords us the opportunity to probe assumptions around the centrality of reason, and the import of the human intellect, in posing questions of personhood and moral value. Such questions are a central pillar of scrutiny in Chapter Six, which examines how ableist norms regarding the possession of higher mental faculties determine personhood and the terms of participation in political community.

Situating *ableism* as a constitutive component of *colonial modernity* enables us to scrutinise this complex configuration of power relations through which ‘certain bodies are denied their ways of knowing and understanding, as they are not based on the privileged, modern colonial subject’ (Pino Morán and Tiseyra 2019, 508). Campos (2015, 197-98) for example reads the colonial construction of the ‘human’ and ‘non-human’ differentiating civilised, European subjects from their colonised ‘others’ as relating to processes through which those considered disabled within a capitalist mode

of production are rendered less-than-human. Specifically, however, she notes that disabled people are simultaneously disqualified from economies of knowledge production as well as material production: ‘a great deal of knowledge is produced about [disabled people] [...] but there is little work with [disabled people] and even less by them, because it is assumed that they are subjects both lacking knowledge and incapable of producing knowledge’ (2015, 198). In other words, this situating affords us the opportunity to grasp how specific, historical perceptions of normality, functionality, and productivity have been operationalised to exclude those considered disabled from the category of the human, and to trace the exclusionary effects of such perceptions in both political and epistemological terms.

Second, becoming familiar with the contours of *ableism* in the context of *colonial modernity* sensitises us to the mutually constituting relationships between *ableism* and other axes, such as racism and capitalism. These relationships become particularly evident through the variety of binary constructions that get naturalised and reproduced through the theoretical standpoint of *ableist* Eurocentric modernity; for example, healthy/unhealthy; normal/abnormal; productive/unproductive; and abled/disabled. Unravelling these dichotomies in the context of the *colonial matrix of power* reinforces the ways and the extent to which *ableism* intersects with capitalism and racism in the context of European colonialism. For example, as disability theorist Ellen Samuels writes, institutionalised discourses of racial identification in nineteenth-century America were intimately related to ‘efforts to measure and classify forms of physical and mental difference we would now understand through the rubric of disability’; at the time, physicians and anthropologists ‘did not in fact distinguish between characteristics ascribed to race and those ascribed to physical or mental ability as we do today’ (Samuels 2014, 178). However, Samuels goes on to specify that the indistinguishability between pathologies of race and disability was not a result of analogising them, but ‘merging the two into a flexible category of mental immaturity and incapacity’ (2014, 178). In this sense, situating *ableism* within the *colonial matrix of power* affords a distinctive perspective on the simultaneous processes of biologizing race and disablement as defects of certain kinds of human – particularly those whose bodyminds are racialised as inferior and *intellectually* unsuited to civilization, and those whose bodyminds are inferiorized as *physically* abnormal and therefore disqualified from productive labour. Contemporarily, meanwhile, Connell (2011)

maintains that a 'key way of defining the disabled' is through identifying 'impaired productivity in the labour market, or exclusion from the labour market' (2011, 1375). The intersection of capitalism with *ableism* manifests itself as a 'boundary between two categories of bodies: those whose labour generates profit, and those whose labour does not' (2011, 1375).

What methodological lessons can we learn from a study of *ableism*? As a concept, what different understandings of dis/ablement does it yield, and how might it reorient normative theorising and its problematic methodological practices? First of all, becoming familiar with the conceptual vocabulary of *ableism* is instructive in sensitising us to the methodological centrality of relationality in understanding the construction and operationalisation of disability as a category of analysis. Rather than locating disability as a discrete or fixed phenomenon, thinking through the relation of *ableism* allows us to grasp that specific historical processes shape what gets perceived as disability in any given context. Simultaneously, situating *ableism* as part of an intersectional matrix – specifically the *colonial matrix of power* – enables us to chart the processes of mutual constitution between *ableism* and other relations and processes, such as capitalism, colonialism, and racism. Second, through attention to the relational and co-constitutive construction of norms of abledness and disablement, we begin to recognise more clearly the historical contingency of certain conceptualisations dominant in normative theorising, particularly the concept of the person as predicated on possession of reason and the capacity for certain forms of productivity. As we will see in more detail in the following chapter, in the strands of normative theorising I critique for reproducing social ignorance, there is an engrained assumption that personhood is yoked to the capacity for reason. The vestiges of this assumption persist even in cases where normative theorists explicitly pursue accounts of justice supposedly sensitised to disability and the needs and desires of disabled people.

Finally, then, how can the concept of *ableism* begin to guide us in contesting ableist ignorance in NPT? In this section, I have outlined the methodological significance of *attunement* to *ableism* as a relation and a shifting set of processes that construct perceptions of abledness and disabledness. In this respect, attunement to *ableism* is an important corrective to *methodological individualism*. It guides us away from

reifying or monolithic conceptualisations of disability as individual lack or deficiency. Crucially, naming *ableism* and becoming familiar with its role in organising dominant conceptualisations of central categories in normative theorising is a crucial first step in identifying and contesting ableist ignorance. Grasping the construction of categories of abledness and disablement according to historically contingent criteria, and norms of capacity and functioning, provide an important theoretical window for reflection on disability as a construction rather than a natural given.

To sum up, this section has offered an account of the function of *ableism* as a constitutive axis of the *colonial matrix of power*. As both a relation and a process of categorisation, *ableism* distinguishes between normative humans and non-normative, less-than-human ‘others’ by imparting an account of a ‘healthy body’ or a ‘normal mind’ (Campbell 2019, 147). I’ve argued that *ableism* is implicated in the ontological and epistemological foundations of NPT as a result of its postulating the conditions under which *persons* are recognised as such. This postulation will be central to our investigations in Chapter Six, where I show that NPT’s assumption about the centrality of reason to the concept of the person perpetuates ableist ignorance. I’ve suggested that a conceptual focus on ableism allows us to begin from a different set of theoretical starting points: rather than naturalising disability, figuring it as a naturally occurring, ahistorical or individualised phenomenon, we can start to identify the ways in which *ableism* is articulated across different contexts to produce categorisations of normal/abnormal, healthy/ unhealthy, productive/unproductive, etc. We can instead begin to chart the ways in which these binaries are constructed and reproduced, and crucially, begin to reorient ourselves towards theoretical positions that reject hierarchical and binary constructions in favour of more nuanced spectrums of human variation and difference. *Ableism* as a relation that co-articulates with other axes composing the *colonial matrix of power* also sets the scene for the following section, which looks in more detail at the idealised subject inaugurated by the *colonial matrix of power* – ‘the identity and supposed perfection of the white-abled-citizen-human’ as the ‘measure’ of humanity (González 2021, 135-36). In 5.3, I draw on Rosemarie Garland-Thompson’s influential concept of the ‘normate’ (2017) as a way into contesting the dominance of the idealised, presumptively abled subject. However, I propose a critical reading in conjunction with a range of critical and transnational

feminist disability accounts to more fully elaborate the theoretical contours through which the *normate* subject appears.

5.3 The *normate* subject

The second stop on this chapter's itinerary is the concept of the 'normate'. Coined by feminist disability studies scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, the 'normate' refers to the 'constructed identity of those who, by way of the bodily configurations [...] they assume, can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them' (2017, 8). Although Garland-Thomson's theorisation of the *normate* emphasises what she refers to as an 'economy of *visual* difference' (2017, 8) that focuses on the 'spectacle' of physical disability, the *normate* is nonetheless a useful concept for this project, as it enables us to grapple with the contours of the privileged location specified by *ableism*, in conjunction with other axes of power. The *normate* allows us to map the convergence between different axes of power as they produce a 'constructed identity', which is simultaneously figured as a 'position of authority': whilst the former addresses the intersectional idea that identities are multifaceted and fluid, the latter speaks to structural positionalities as differentially but also contingently conferring authority, and importantly, epistemological power. In this sense, it is from the position of the *normate* that dominant epistemologies are mapped and articulated, and through which dominant ontological assumptions are constructed and expressed.

In this section, I first explore the *normate* in relation to the construction of liberal subjectivity, showing the *normate* functions to highlight liberal subjectivity as an unrealised ideal. I then consider how the *normate* appears as part of *colonial modernity*, foregrounding its contingency and enmeshment with other axes of the *colonial matrix of power*. Critically expanding Garland-Thomson's reading, I examine how probing historically and culturally variable constructions of the *normate* help us to shed light on its contingency. Finally, I discuss the importance of recognising that although an unrealised ideal, the *normate* remains an important regulative ideal, particularly as a result of the differential proximity differently located subjects can achieve in relation to the *normate*. I suggest in sum that these features render the *normate* a useful conceptual tool for instigating *reflexivity* in terms of the contingent

relations of power through which dominant understanding of subjectivity are articulated.

Garland-Thomson's theorisation of the *normate* situates disablement as the relationally constructed antithesis of the sovereign subject of modernity. As 'one of society's ultimate "not me" figures' (2017, 41), disability acts as a category of otherness that mutually informs the autonomous, self-governing liberal individual. In other words, through erecting a strict binary between abled and disabled, disabled people '[become] an icon of all human vulnerability' (2017, 41), figured as exceptional sites of lack and deficiency, whilst the *normate* sustains the assumption that "normal" or "non-disabled" individuals fulfil the criteria of liberal subjectivity. It is according to assumptions about and from the standpoint of the *normate* that representations of the sociopolitical world as composed of discrete, self-governing individuals emerge. Importantly, however, because the *normate* is both a regulative and an *unrealised* ideal, it also constitutes a useful methodological tool for turning a critical lens on the assumptions about liberal subjectivity it supposedly materialises. The *normate* is an unrealised ideal because, as Garland-Thomson puts it, disability is 'perhaps the most universal of human experiences', and something all will experience 'if we live long enough' (2005, 1568). The assumptions undergirding the conception of the *normate* subject – autonomy, self-determination, sovereignty – turn out to be empirically unsustainable if we recognise that all individuals experience the periods of dependency and vulnerability that are typically taken to be characteristic only of disabled subjects and children. In this respect, deconstructing the *normate* points us towards a critical engagement with the theoretical underpinnings of *methodological individualism*; namely, the assumption of an individualist social ontology in which relations of interdependency are neglected. This central feature of *methodological individualism* as it functions in NPT will be addressed at greater length in Chapter Six.

With these initial qualities of the *normate* in mind, I now turn to two ways that Garland-Thomson's account can be brought into conversation with intersectional thinking. First, although Garland-Thomson's account foregrounds abled/disabled as the principle distinction through which the *normate* subject is established, implicit in this conception is an opportunity to interrogate how an intersectional matrix of power can produce a *normate* subject that sits at the privileged intersection of a range of relations. In other

words, while we can think of the *normate* as a product of ableist social relations, *ableism* does not exist in isolation from other relations of power. In this sense, an expanded, intersectional understanding of the *normate* might lead us to reflect on how dominant conceptions of subjectivity in the liberal tradition reflect not only norms of abledness, but assumptions that reflect the privileges of bourgeois European hetero-masculinity as well. More broadly, then, the *normate* as a historically contingent, intersectionally privileged subject position can be methodologically useful in two ways. First, it elicits us to reflect on how relations of power are implicated in shaping assumptions about the construction of the liberal subject. Second, however, it also motivates consideration of how this constellation of power shapes NPT's theoretical standpoint itself.

Second, although Garland-Thomson poses the *normate* as an unrealised ideal in order to foreground the universality of human vulnerability, it is important to recognise that proximity to this regulative ideal is nonetheless intersectionally differentiated and stratified. In addition to the construction of the *normate* across different contexts, access or proximity to the *normate* within the relations composing *colonial modernity* is differentiated according to positionality across various axes and locations. The structural processes of *colonial modernity* systematically and differentially limit certain subjects' likelihood of proximity to the *normate*. As a result, this proximity to the *normate* may be more easily achieved by certain disabled populations, such as wealthy, white citizens in states of the global North with access to healthcare and assistive technologies (see, for example, McRuer 2010; Puar 2017; Snyder and Mitchell 2010). Conversely, for populations with higher likelihood of exposure to military conflict, state violence, environmental degradation, or dangerous labour environments, disability may be 'more fundamental, more inevitable' as 'the work that one does and the places one lives have a huge impact on whether one becomes disabled sooner or later' (Kafer 2013, 26).

The *normate* as a concept can be presented in a more nuanced manner if we incorporate a practice of *sensitisation* to the contextual factors that differentially expose various groups and populations to disability, illness, injury, and other forms of impairment. Critical disability scholar Nirmala Erevelles (2011), for example, argues for a materialist analysis of the conditions under which already-marginalised,

dispossessed, and economically deprived populations suffer the greatest risk of disability. From an adequately sensitised perspective, industrial disasters such as the Rana Plaza collapse or the Bhopal gas tragedy,⁷⁰ the Flint water crisis,⁷¹ as well as environmental degradation, wars and economic crises,⁷² are all material factors that predispose already vulnerable populations to disability. Similarly, Jasbir Puar (2017) has theorised the biopolitical stakes of maintaining colonised populations such as Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank in permanent states of debilitation or disablement through the deployment of military strategies designed to maim rather than kill. This intervention serves as a reminder that the *normate* is a more profoundly inaccessible ideal for victims of state violence, compared to those disabled people whose states recognise them as productive-citizens-in-waiting. Both Erevelles' and Puar's accounts suggest that the *normate*, rather than disclosing itself through a permanent, static category of disablement as its antithesis, must be specified through a contextual and grounded analysis of the constellation of power through which it is inaugurated. Tracing the contours of the *normate*, then, becomes a critical methodological practice of appropriate historical and structural sensitisation, in order to combat *fact insensitivity*.

The *normate* can be a useful methodological tool for sensitising us to the constellations of power through which certain conceptualisations and forms of subjectivity become dominant. Concretely, what are the methodological lessons that this concept can impart? First of all, the *normate*, as an unrealised regulative ideal, tracks the assumptions undergirding liberal subjectivity. It offers us a blueprint for conceptualising the contours of the liberal subject in terms of its presumptive white, masculine, bourgeois and able-bodied positionality, whilst simultaneously revealing the limitations of liberal assumptions regarding autonomy and self-determination. In this respect, the *normate* is a useful concept for critically engaging *methodological individualism*, directing our attention to its unrealised premises. Like *ableism*, the *normate* disrupts *methodological individualism* by eliciting us to scrutinise the ways in

⁷⁰ The Rana Plaza building in Dhaka, Bangladesh, which housed several garment factories, collapsed in April 2013. At least 1,132 people died and more than 2,500 were injured; see Kabir et al. (2018). An industrial chemical leak at a Union Carbide pesticide plant in Bhopal, India in 1984 caused thousands of deaths and lasting effects in terms of impairment from exposure. See Sarangi (2002).

⁷¹ Drinking water in the city of Flint, Michigan was found to be contaminated with lead in 2014. Approximately 100,00 residents were exposed, and many suffered long-term lead poisoning.

⁷² See, for example, Campbell (2011) and Grech and Soldatic (2014).

which relationality governs our understandings of abledness and disablement, ability and disability. The *normate* as the product of contextually specific constellations of power also invites us to reflect on the “facts”: in addition to the specific relations through which the *normate* is constructed, addressing systematically the contextual specifics that yield particular understandings of the *normate* better equips us to grasp the shifting terrain of what disability is. In conjunction with *ableism*, mapping the *normate* draws us into a practice of structural and historical attunement, and sensitises us to the historical and structural processes that shape how dominant understandings of ability and disability have been constructed, sustained, and reproduced.

Finally, familiarising ourselves with the matrix of domination that produces the *normate*, and through which the liberal subject is inaugurated, enables us to reflect on how these constructions shape and confer the epistemological power of the liberal standpoint. Again, the *normate* acts as a blueprint for critically interrogating the constellation of power that privileges reason as the apotheosis of human cognitive capacity. Because the *normate* is ‘the constructed identity of those who [...] can step into a position of authority and wield the power it grants them’ (2017, 8), familiarising ourselves with the scaffolding undergirding this construction sensitises us to those relations that confer epistemic power, as well as sociopolitical privilege. Tracing the *normate* as the product of a set of contingent relations foregrounds the import of *reflexivity*, eliciting us to examine the ontological and epistemological assumptions undergirding the liberal theoretical standpoint. Importantly, the *normate* holds theoretical possibilities for thinking about the relationship between power and standpoint: as we will see in Chapter Six, the standpoints leveraged by Singer, Rawls, and Nussbaum embody the *normate* – the position from which they ‘wield the power’ granted to ‘normate’ subjects, with significant epistemic and ethical ramifications in terms of how they construe disability.

How does the *normate* help us to identify and contest the methodological reproduction of ignorance in NPT? As I will show in greater detail in the following chapter, the *normate* enables us to contest ableist ignorance by eliciting an analysis and recognition of the contingent nature of dominant conceptualisations in normative theorising. The *normate* discloses disability as relational, contextual, and historically contingent, whilst also throwing critical light on the presumptive subject of liberalism

as a model of abledness – as a result of its independence and its capacity for reason. Becoming sensitised to this relation and the way it shapes the direction and orientation of normative theorising offers an important channel for contesting the dominance of the liberal subject as an unrealised regulative ideal. In turn, we can contest ableist ignorance by showing how this regulative ideal systematically elides adequately contextual, relational understandings of disability from the standpoint of NPT.

The chapter so far has introduced a conceptual vocabulary that maps the historical processes and configurations of power through which the deeply entrenched yet contingent account of the abled subject emerges. I have introduced *ableism* as the structural relation and set of processes that organises categories of abledness and disablement, and the *normate*, to situate the abled subject in conjunction with other markers of power, privilege, and authority. I've suggested that the theoretical insights yielded so far enable us to engage a practice of reflexivity regarding the constellations of power through which the dominant, liberal theoretical standpoint of NPT gets constructed. The final section extends these theoretical insights through an engagement with the concept of *crip futurity*, as a means of further unsettling the assumptions undergirding NPT's standpoint and contesting their reproduction of ableist ignorance.

5.4 Crip futurity and transformative care

In this section, I turn to the intersections of feminist, queer and disability theorising (Kafer 2013), disability justice scholarship (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2017), and queer care ethics (Malatino 2020), to advance an account of how NPT might reorient itself towards a more relationally attuned, historically and structurally sensitised, and reflexive approach to theorising disability. I organise this section primarily around the concept of *crip futurity* (Kafer 2013).⁷³ Building on the insight that criped conceptualisations of temporality entail 'generating forms of sociability that can sustain individuals and collectivities into the future' (Kim and Schalk 2021, 340; see also Kafer 2021; Samuels 2017; Samuels and Freeman 2021; Wendell 1996), *crip futurity* denotes a process of 'working through what it means to project *disability* into the future'

⁷³ "Crip" is both a reclaiming of "crippled" and a signifier that, like "queer", rejects the binary categorisation of abled and disabled bodies. See McRuer (2006).

(Kafer 2013, 20, *emphasis added*). In doing so, it refuses the conceptualisation of disability as a 'terrible unending tragedy', and the idea that a 'better future' is signalled by the absence of disability (Kafer 2013, 2). I draw on the prefigurative and imaginative proclivities of *crip futurity* to begin to distil the contours of a theoretical standpoint that refuses the reproduction of ableist ignorance. To do so, I work through three sites: first, I show how *crip futurity* projects an alternative social ontology to the one presupposed by *methodological individualism*. Examining disability justice activist Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha's (2018) theorisation of *care webs* as a radical reinvention of the relational ontology of feminist care ethics, I show how a *crip futuritive* standpoint begins from the assumption of interdependence, rather than individualism. Second, I build on Kafer's (2013) account of the *curative imaginary*, the dominant repository of beliefs and assumptions that construct disability as temporally inclined towards cure, to argue that the foundational nature of moral personhood in the liberal tradition constrains *crip futurity* by seeking to assimilate disability to the *normate*.

Finally, I suggest that *crip futurity* performs a vital politicising function. In refusing static and monolithic understandings of disability as tragic and requiring curative measures, it galvanises us to imagine and materialise an alternative theoretical and normative horizon, or what Kafer (2013, 3) refers to as 'elsewhen'. This galvanising process sensitises us to salient aspects of the sociopolitical world that foreclose *crip futurity*, whilst also demanding a transformative methodological orientation that refuses to remain beholden to the constraints of the status quo. In this respect, *crip futurity* is less concerned about ensuring that disabled people meet minimum standards of functioning as prescribed by norms of abledness than about transforming the social and material conditions within which such norms are articulated. *Crip futurity* thus opens up an alternative horizon of possibility for imagining what disabled lives might look like. Such lives may incorporate different forms of relationality that are occluded, from a liberal standpoint, or viewed only as instrumentally valuable rather than constitutive of the fabric of existence.

One strand of scholarship that has consistently and thoroughly interrogated the assumption of the rational, autonomous individual of liberalism is feminist care ethics (Held 2006; Kittay 2011; Robinson 1999, 2011; Ruddick 1990; Tronto 1995; Tronto

and Fisher 1990). Theorising care ethics as grounded by an alternative social ontology and moral epistemology, feminist philosophers have prioritised relationality and interdependence over autonomy and disembodiment, and social embeddedness and emotions over abstract reason. Scholars such as Eva Feder Kittay and Fiona Robinson have drawn on the intersections of feminist care ethics, disability, and issues of complex dependency, to argue for forms of sociopolitical organisation that attend to the varying and distinctive care needs of disabled people. These forms also recognise that all individuals require care, and are all situated in complex relationships of interdependency, whilst also acknowledging that those undertaking care work require forms of sociality that can sustain them in performing this work. In this respect, Kittay (1999), for example, foregrounds the import of interdependence as underpinning a relational social ontology, showing the assumption of the sovereign individual to be both normatively undesirable and empirically unsustainable.

Whilst feminist care ethics has therefore been instrumental in dislodging some of the central individualist assumptions underpinning the liberal theoretical standpoint, it is important to consider the ways in which the feminist care framework tends to operate on assumptions of heterosexual and cisnormative forms of relations as paradigmatic in theorising care. As Malatino (2020, 7) puts it, ‘the forms of family and kinship that are invoked in much of the feminist literature on care labor and care ethics are steeped in forms of domesticity and intimacy that are both White and Eurocentered’, reproducing the gender relations of *colonial modernity*. In this sense, while the relational social ontology underpinning theorisations of care ethics offers a useful alternative to individualism, we need further theoretical resources in order to articulate a *crip futurity* that imagines care, interdependence, and vulnerability as politicised concerns that extend beyond the private sphere of familial relations.⁷⁴

In *Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice* (2018), Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha introduces the concept of *care webs*. Building from the principles of solidarity and respect that underpin anarchist practices of mutual aid, *care webs* redirect our attention from care as a private or domestic matter, and instead

⁷⁴ Such a rethinking would also politicise choices regarding home care, personal assistance, and sheltered accommodation that are typically cast as private matters for families to decide upon themselves.

foreground the inherently political nature of care as a decisive practice in sustaining liveable lives. In Piepzna-Samarasinha's descriptions (2018, 42-62), *care webs* are collectives of disabled – and usually, but not always – queer people of colour who *care for* one another in a wide range of ways, including help with housework, running errands or offering lifts, transporting equipment, providing emotional care, and sharing practical advice and support for navigating ableist society. *Care webs* are 'controlled by the needs and desires of the disabled people running them', thereby resisting models where 'disabled people can only passively receive care, not give it or determine what kind of care we want' (2018, 41).

I want to suggest two main ways that attending to the form and praxis of *care webs* can reorient our theorising in line with *crip futurity*, projecting disability into the future: politicisation and prefiguration. First, in addition to foregrounding a relational ontology, *care webs* politicise ethical relations of care. As Piepzna-Samarasinha writes, *care webs* are 'not just a practical survival strategy' to access basic care requirements, but sites of 'community and political organizing, where many people learn about disability politics [...] in action' (2018, 45). *Care webs* in this respect not only undermine individualist ontologies, but entail practices that invite us to 'address what constrains care, what marks certain bodies and subjectivities as (un)deserving of it, and call attention to the epistemologies, systems, and technologies that contribute to such unjust apportioning' (Malatino 2020, 70). In other words, *care webs* are sites that can *sensitise* us to salient aspects of sociopolitical reality that require critically reframing, interrogating, or transforming in order to realise goals of disability justice, by drawing our attention to the ways in which current sociopolitical configurations differentially extend or withdraw care, and how historically contingent relations of power are implicated in these configurations. In this sense, the concrete practice of forming *care webs* also foregrounds the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality in terms of how the complexities of positionality differentially mediate individuals' needs for and access to care. Against *methodological individualism*, *care webs* help to sensitise us to the ways that intersectional matrices of power shape the subject and their material context.

Second, insofar as *crip futurity* is invested in transforming the sociopolitical and material conditions within which *ableist* norms of independence and autonomy are

reproduced, *care webs* are prefigurative of *crip futurity*. In this sense, practicing care is 'not only a profoundly political gesture but also a mode of production toward alternate social and political worlds altogether' (Kim and Schalk 2021, 338). Informed by disability and queer-of-colour critique and activism, *care webs* both diagnose current injustices and actively intervene in them. Theoretically speaking, *care webs* impart a methodological approach of *relational attunement* and *historical sensitisation*, inviting us to locate in disability-justice-oriented practices of care the potential for articulating and realising normative goals that depart radically from the idealised, abled subject presupposed by a liberal theoretical standpoint.

Contemplating *crip futurity* also yields useful resources for probing dominant conceptualisations of moral, political, and economic subjectivity that animate normative theorising. From a liberal theoretical standpoint, individuals are typically theorised as *moral persons* or *moral subjects* with particular cognitive, and sometimes productive, capacities, enabling participation in modern democratic and capitalist society – a matter I will explore in greater detail in Chapter Six. In line with the discussion of *ableism* and the *normate* above, disablement in this sense is implicitly relationally configured in liberal theorising as the subject position which fails to adhere to the contextual, situated norms of the dominant subject. The crucial point to consider here is the extent to which *crip futurity* is precluded by the assumption that a more just sociopolitical configuration entails eradicating forms of disability that do not conform to liberal standards of moral subjectivity, and by assimilating, as far as possible, the remaining disabled people to personhood in the mode of the *normate*. From this perspective, a more just future is 'framed in curative terms, a time frame that casts disabled people (as) out of time, or as obstacles to the arc of progress' (Kafer 2013, 28), and situating currently existing disabled people as moving, temporally, towards a state of being less disabled. Whilst this move can signal the 'elimination of impairment', it can 'also mean normalizing treatments that work to assimilate the disabled mind/body as much as possible' (2013, 28). Kafer introduces the *curative imaginary* as the set of animating beliefs and assumptions that yield 'an understanding of disability that not only expects and assumes intervention but also cannot imagine or comprehend anything other than intervention' (2013, 27). As current assumptions 'about disability and disabled minds/bodies animate many of our collective evocations of the future' (2013, 27), we can engage the *curative imaginary* as a central apparatus

that is sometimes uncritically drawn upon and reproduced in normative theorising. Methodologically, it can direct our attention to the ways in which dominant assumptions about subjectivity legitimise forms of normative theorising that argue for the elimination of disability without regard for the implications for disabled people. Rejecting the *curative imaginary*, *crip futurity* instead imagines ‘futures that hold space and possibility for those who communicate in ways we do not yet recognize as communication, let alone understand’, and ‘futures that make room for diverse, unpredictable, and fundamentally unknowable experiences of pleasure’ (2013, 67-8).

Finally, the potential of *crip futurity* as delineating alternative theoretical starting points emerges in relation to its transformative capacities. Building solidarity and community through *care webs* and imagining futures that exceed the *curative imaginary* are exercises in prefigurative politics that show, concretely, that other worlds are possible. In this respect, Kafer’s articulation of *crip futurity* and the ‘elsewhen’ (2013, 3) play two roles. First, in demonstrating that other configurations of the sociopolitical world are possible and desirable, *crip futurity* motivates a reflexive process through which we as theorists can reorient ourselves, critically engaging with the contingency of our central assumptions and their effects on our methodological practices. Specifically, *methodological individualism* and *fact insensitivity* preclude sensitisation to the possibilities of imagining a future in which disability exists, but does not precipitate personal tragedy. The assumption that disability is a fixed and static category, rather than a historically contingent and relationally constituted phenomenon that relies on the perpetuation of an idealised, abled norm, forecloses the possibility of imagining and working to realise a different future. This is simply because disability is taken as a natural fact – a feasibility constraint, an unfortunate pathology, but not a political category that can be transformed or transcended. Second, *crip futurity* plays a galvanising function, demanding that, on recognition of these contingencies and their epistemological and material effects, we identify and pursue alternative strategies for realising disability justice. The possibility of *crip futurity*, in this sense, is dependent on the capacity to recognise structural and processual manifestations of *ableism*, and its conjunctions with other relations of oppression, in order to grasp how particular historically contingent configurations of subjectivity and sociopolitical arrangements systematically render non-*normate* lives expendable, excludable, or otherwise beyond the remit of normative concern.

In dwelling with the concept of *crip futurity*, I have sought to foreground the ways in which dominant assumptions about disability and subjectivity foreclose methodological alternatives. To close this section, I highlight the key methodological lessons that theorists can take away from this exploration. First, in addition to the critique of *methodological individualism* based on a non-essentialising, contextual and relational understanding of disability, *crip futurity* foregrounds a relational ontology grounded in interdependence. It rejects the individual person as the fundamental unit of analysis, and moreover, the assumption that the subject can be adequately theorised in abstraction from sociopolitical and interpersonal context. Instead, temporally extensive relations of interdependence inform a *crip "futuritive"* social ontology, eliciting us to attune ourselves and attend methodologically to sociopolitically embedded relations that sustain crip sociality. However, in enjoining this social ontology with a radical critique of entrenched contemporary configurations of power, *crip futurity* refuses conceptualisations of relational interdependence as predicated on the liberal distinction between public and private. Rather than consigning interdependence and the practices of care that sustain it to domestic familial spheres, *crip futurity* proposes relations that traverse the public/private distinction. Such relations are expressed through *care webs*. The temporally extensive relations of interdependence that sustain *crip futurity* prefiguratively and imaginatively are politicised; more than private practices of care, they constitute a critical form of solidarity.

Second, *crip futurity* elicits us to further develop a practice of *sensitisation*, rejecting disability as a static and monolithic category and the liberal conception of personhood as a bundle of cognitive faculties. Instead, *crip futurity* attends to the current sociopolitical conditions under which disabled lives become more or less liveable by imaginatively projecting a possible alternative future; an 'elsewhen'. This practice of sensitisation directs our attention to the "facts" as those aspects of the sociopolitical world that engender and sustain *ableist* relations and processes, and reproduce the *normate* as the position from which sociopolitical and epistemological power is articulated. In turn, *crip futurity* offers a set of theoretical starting points that constitute a radical alternative to the presuppositions of the liberal standpoint. Rather than beginning from the assumption that individuals are autonomous subjects of reason, and that disability represents an undesirable threat to this ideal, *crip futurity* imagines

an 'elsewhen' governed by assumptions of interdependence, the human need for care, and the political import of accessibility. Rejecting assimilation of disabled people into existing constellations through a *curative imaginary*, *crip futurity* invites stewards of the liberal standpoint to re-evaluate those taken-for-granted features of the sociopolitical world that effectuate the reproduction of *ableism*.

Finally, *crip futurity* also offers a crucial methodological remedy to *foreclosed reflexivity*. By imaginatively invoking an 'elsewhen', it reminds us that current sociopolitical conditions governed by *ableism* are not feasibility constraints that should curb our emancipatory aims, but contingent and mutable features that can and should be transformed. In offering alternative theoretical starting points that foreground the possibility of a world otherwise – prefiguratively, and in anticipation of the world to come – *crip futurity* elicits, rather than forecloses, reflexivity through the invitation to imagine an alternative future. Specifically, the temporally extensive relations that animate *crip futurity* and the *care webs* formed by these relations provide the basis of a relational ontology that reorients our theorising according to assumptions of mutual interdependence and solidarity. Critically, it is the process of charting these theoretical alternatives that must sensitise us to possibilities beyond the purview of NPT's liberal standpoint. In making apparent these alternatives, the poverty of liberal social ontology for imagining *crip futures* is thrown into sharp relief.

I have been arguing that ableist ignorance is reproduced in NPT as a result of the failure or refusal to reckon with the ways that dominant conceptualisations of central categories of analysis rest on exclusionary assumptions about who and what constitutes a "normal", abled subject. To close this section, how do *crip futurity*, *care webs*, and the *curative imaginary* figure in our efforts to contest ableist ignorance? First of all, this conceptual repertoire helps to highlight the ethicopolitical inadequacies of NPT's dominant conceptualisations, indicating how historically contingent and ethically limited understandings of personhood and disability systematically undermine the possibility of theorising more just and emancipatory alternatives. Second, by disclosing the foundational role that ableist assumptions about personhood and disability play in perpetuating ableist relations, these concepts offer NPT the means to cultivate alternative theoretical starting points and methodological practices that ensure sensitisation to salient aspects of the sociopolitical world – ableist structures

and processes such as the *curative imaginary*, and concrete relational practices such as those sustaining *care webs*. From these alternative starting points, NPT can begin to root out and contest ableist ignorance by attuning itself to *crip futurity's* horizons of anti-ableist possibility.

5.5 Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that if we wish to advance a vision of disability justice in our normative scholarship, we must attune ourselves to the ways in which *ableism* informs NPT's central categories and methodological practices. To facilitate this process, I have examined the ways in which pursuing intersectional methodological injunctions of *relational attunement*, *historical sensitisation*, and *reflexivity*, can enable us to contest ableist ignorance. I have presented the dissertation's second, preliminary curation of conceptual tools and practices that enable us to interrogate the processes through which ableist ignorance is reproduced in theorising. These conceptual tools, I have shown, provide us with more nuanced representations of the sociopolitical world, thus rendering our theorising more attuned to its intersectional complexities when we deploy this vocabulary. In this regard, the first aspect of this chapter's contribution was a curation of existing scholarly efforts to approach disability and *ableism*, and their related ontological and epistemological assumptions, in appropriately complex and theoretically nuanced ways. The second has been to chart how this scholarship can help to contest ableist ignorance, by orienting us towards a different set of theoretical starting points that can enable our work to become more adequately sensitised to the ways in which ableism is implicated in NPT's ontological and epistemological foundations.

Through the conceptual repertoire introduced in this chapter, I have sought to demystify *ableism*, and indicate how it implicates itself as an entrenched feature of NPT's theoretical standpoint. In doing so, my aim has been to demonstrate "where" ableist ignorance appears, and show a potential methodological path to challenging it. As I argued in Chapter Three with respect to racial ignorance, contesting ableist ignorance requires that we excavate the foundations on which it is predicated. To this end, I have shown that contesting ableist ignorance means becoming *attuned* to the structural, processual and relational manifestations of *ableism*, and *sensitised* to its

effects in terms of the ways in which it shapes and informs dominant conceptualisations of personhood and disability. Moreover, in curating a conceptual repertoire that draws on different critical traditions and approaches concerned with resisting dominant constellations of power and their epistemological effects, I have mapped out alternative starting points to those adopted by NPT's theoretical standpoint.

The chapter began by specifying *ableism* as the structural relation implicated in the production and regulation of categories of abledness and disablement. Attunement to *ableism* disrupts methodologically individualist practices of assuming disability as an individualised pathology, placing it instead in a relational context and eliciting us to consider the processes through which perceptions of disability as loss, lack, deviancy, or deficiency get embedded. In situating *ableism* in relation to *colonial modernity*, I showed how scrutinising the production of normal/abnormal and abled/disabled binaries can facilitate a critical perspective sensitised to the historical conditions under which axes of *ableism*, racism, and capitalism intersect. In addition to elucidating the racialised, Eurocentric underpinnings of dominant epistemologies in NPT, we have seen that hierarchies of ability, predicated on assumptions of normality, are also implicated in the matrix of relations composing *colonial modernity*. The chapter then considered the *normate* as a concept that sensitises us to the dynamics through which a particular conception of the subject comes to wield authority; or put in terms of the theoretical aims of this project, elucidates the contours of the dominant standpoint in normative theorising with an express focus on the ways in which this standpoint is shaped by *ableism* and the abstraction from material realities of disablement.

Finally, engaging with the alternative horizons sustained by *crip futurity*, I argued that the imaginative engagement of 'elsewhen' can aid in sensitising NPT to the contingent construction of its own standpoint and the assumptions that underpin it. Troubling NPT's three practices of *methodological individualism*, *fact insensitivity*, and *foreclosed reflexivity*, *crip futurity* enlists us in a process of interrogating three points: first, practices of relating that, through the concrete formation of *care webs*, animate a relational social ontology; second, practices of politicisation and prefiguration that invite us, as theorists, to re-evaluate and reframe our perception of the "facts" of the status quo; and third, as a result, practices of reflexively identifying the constellation

of power through which the liberal theoretical standpoint is implicated in manifestations of *ableism* and the assumption of disability as inherently undesirable.

From this perspective, the lessons distilled in this chapter correspond with the intersectional methodological injunctions elaborated in Chapter Two. Namely, the concepts encountered in this chapter orient normative political theorists toward *relational attunement*, *historical sensitisation* and *reflexivity* in ways that displace the liberal account of the subject. In the first instance, theoretical fluency with *ableism*, the *normate*, and *crip futurity* enlist us in a project of *relational attunement*, meaning that methodologically incorporating *ableism* ensures attentiveness to the ways in which historically contingent assumptions about bodily normality and functionality operate to obscure relational ways of being and theorising. Second, this chapter has continued to draw on resistant knowledge projects to stress the ways in which the reproduction of ignorance in relation to disability needs to be viewed within the wider context of *colonial modernity*. A historically sensitised contextualisation displaces the myth of the neutral conceptualisation of the individual subject as possessing reason and autonomy by foregrounding its ableist presuppositions. Third, the above discussion foregrounded the importance of incorporating *reflexivity* as a central practice of normative theorising. Fluency with this alternative repertoire can instigate reflexive processes, enabling NPT to grapple with the construction of its own standpoint as a product and reflection of dominant constellations of power.

Finally, the ethical orientations encountered in this chapter are guided by emancipatory temporal horizons that offer disability justice as a radical transformation of existing constellations of power. What I hope to have imparted in this chapter is that sensitisation to these dominant power constellations, and their effects in constructing NPT's theoretical standpoint, is vital in cultivating a methodological practice that has the capacity to articulate adequate normative interventions. Simply "adding" a disability perspective to NPT's conceptual repertoire is therefore insufficient for transforming dominant methodological practices; rather, it is crucial that we adopt the injunctions of Chapter Two, and the tools and practices curated in Chapter Five, in pursuit of an alternative methodological ethos.

6. Ableist ignorance in normative political theory: disability and the moral subject

6.1 Introduction

Chapter Six turns to the theorisation of disability in NPT and the reproduction of ableist ignorance. I draw on three influential normative approaches to examine the ways in which ableist ignorance permeates the theoretical foundations and methodological practices animating their accounts: Peter Singer's utilitarian practical ethics (1993, 2011), John Rawls' egalitarian justice as fairness (1999), and Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach (2007). Building on the argument of Chapter Five, which underscored the importance of understanding disability as a historically contingent and relationally constructed category shaped by *ableism*, this chapter continues to mobilise a methodological critique that foregrounds the limitations of the practices and concepts typically deployed from NPT's liberal theoretical standpoint.

As I outlined in Chapter Five, *ableism* refers to the structural relation and attendant process through which perceptions of disability as a monolithic, ahistorical category denoting individual deficiency or lack are sustained and reproduced. Building on this insight, I argue in Chapter Six that *ableism* animates NPT's theoretical standpoint as it appears in the work of Singer, Rawls, and Nussbaum, resulting in the methodological reproduction of ableist ignorance. I suggest that the central assumption on which this reproduction hinges is the shared commitment to a liberal account of the moral subject as characterised by its capacity for reason. I demonstrate through the arguments of this chapter that normative theorists who wish to avoid the reproduction of ableist ignorance must look beyond the resources of NPT's dominant liberal theoretical standpoint, and instead cultivate alternative methodological practices and theoretical starting points. I mobilise the conceptual repertoire introduced in Chapter Five to animate my critical engagements.

In selecting utilitarian practical ethics, Rawlsian justice as fairness, and the capabilities approach, I have sought to offer a range of normative positions on disability. Whilst Singer's practical ethics approach is well known for its controversial perspectives

regarding selective infanticide and its contention that severely intellectually disabled humans are not “persons”, Nussbaum aims to generate an account of justice that is explicitly inclusive of disabled people as bearers of human dignity. Rawls sits at the midpoint to the extent that his theory of justice omits disabled people altogether. As I aimed to illustrate in Chapter Four through the diverse normative positions taken by Miller, Kymlicka and Carens, my goal in Chapter Six is to foreground the methodological commonalities between Singer, Rawls, and Nussbaum. As before, I relate these commonalities to their shared, liberal theoretical standpoint.

The remainder of the chapter proceeds as follows. In sections 6.2, 6.3, and 6.4, I provide short reconstructions of the respective positions of Singer, Rawls, and Nussbaum, focusing on their interventions with respect to disability. For each theorist, I then examine their theoretical standpoints and methodological practices. In relation to *methodological individualism*, I foreground the elision of *ableism* and each theorist’s treatment of relations of dependency. I then examine the ways their standpoint and theoretical perspective shapes their framing and perception of the normative problem they seek to address. I show how the problem of *fact insensitivity* reproduces across all three approaches the naturalisation of a historically contingent conceptualisation of the moral subject. Finally, I indicate how these prior methodological practices engender *foreclosed reflexivity*. To conclude, I foreground the convergences between their practices, despite their divergent normative positions. As I addressed in Chapter Four in relation to racial ignorance, I suggest again here that the similarity across normative orientations is indicative of a widespread problem in NPT with respect to its underlying theoretical foundations.

6.2 Peter Singer’s practical ethics

In investigating the reproduction of ableist ignorance in normative theorising, I start with Peter Singer’s practical ethics approach (1993, 2011), which operates according to the maxims of utilitarianism. Though utilitarianism typically takes as its goal the maximisation of individual happiness or utility, Singer follows a variant called preference utilitarianism, which takes preference satisfaction as a proxy for utility. His project is therefore closely tied to the concept of individual interests, as well as how these are served in broader sociopolitical contexts (Singer 1993, 206). For Singer, “[to]

live ethically is to think about things beyond one's own interests' (1993, 205). In conjunction with utilitarianism, it asks moral reasoners to examine closely the interests of all those affected (2005, 206), whether their interests are being held in appropriate regard, to account for the empirical facts, and to use the facts to reach a justification for our course of action that we can readily universalise. In this respect, it embraces an ethic of impartiality, which he extends to its logical conclusion: our moral conduct should not discriminate between proximate and distant others (Singer 1972, 2011). The practical ethics approach is intended to address to real-world problems, eschewing rule-based ethical systems that fail to offer guidance in complex situations where rules conflict with one another (2011, 1-2).

Singer's normative interventions regarding whether parents should have the right to kill their severely disabled infants (Kuhse and Singer 1985; Kuhse and Singer 1989; Singer 2011; see also Johnson 2003, 2006; Kittay 2010), and his contention that 'nonhuman animals and infants and severely intellectually disabled humans are in the same category [of cognitive capacity and non-personhood]' (2011, 52), are two reasons why I include the practical ethics approach here: Singer is one of the most publicly recognised contemporary philosophers in the world, and his influence extends beyond the academy.⁷⁵ On this basis, I find it important to examine the kinds of assumptions that motivate his theorising. The section begins by examining how *methodological individualism* is leveraged in Singer's work. I suggest that the individualist social ontology underlying his account leads to a methodological practice both desensitised to *ableism* and replicative of understandings of disability as a form of individual lack or deficiency. In turn, the normative diagnoses and interventions his account supposes are limited, ignoring the constellations of power through which disability is both produced and comprehended, and neglecting the resources offered by an adequately theorised relational ontology. Having established a lack of relational attunement, I then examine more closely further aspects of the sociopolitical world that are naturalised or obscured by Singer's ableist standpoint. I make two interrelated points here: first, Singer's account of the subject is not only theoretically unsustainable, but problematically naturalised, and desensitised to the constellations of power through which historically contingent conceptions of the *normate* subject get

⁷⁵ See, for example, Gross (2021).

articulated and become dominant. Second, in assuming the possibility of the impartial judgement of interests according to the utilitarian calculus, I show that Singer's approach engages in *fact insensitivity*, employing the standpoint of the *normate* subject whilst making it the implicit referent of his judgements. Finally, I show how Singer's theoretical assumptions and the methodological practices they underpin foreclose the possibility of reflexivity, and sustain *meta-insensitivity* to the conceptual resources and practices that would counter the reproduction of ableist ignorance.

In understanding how *methodological individualism* operates in Singer's work, it's important to first grasp his account of interests. Instead of grounding his schema in the ethical principal of equality of persons, which runs into difficulty when empirical observation yields the realisation that individual humans are not equally endowed with a sense of morality (2011, 19-21), Singer argues for the equal consideration of interests. The advantage is that the 'principle of equal consideration of interests acts like a pair of scales, weighing interests impartially' (2011, 20), and prohibits us from assuming 'the interests of others depend on their abilities or other characteristics, apart from the characteristic of having interests' (2011, 21). This framework facilitates Singer in arguing that because it is not in the interests of a child to be born or grow up with a disability, parents ought to have the choice of whether to end the life of a disabled newborn infant (2011, 160-67).⁷⁶ He writes that although offering this choice 'suggests to disabled people living today that their lives are less worth living than the lives of people who are not disabled', this inference is the 'only way' to make sense of why, as a society, we take other measures to prevent children being born with disabilities in the future (2011, 165). He goes on:

'If we really believed that there is no reason to think the life of a disabled person is likely to be any worse than that of a normal person, we would not have regarded the use of thalidomide by pregnant women as a tragedy. No compensation would have been sought [...] The children would merely have been 'different'. We could even have left the drug on the market, so that women who found it a useful sleeping pill during pregnancy could continue to take it.' (2011, 165)

⁷⁶ Specifically, Singer argues for this conclusion on the basis that the parents should have the option to *replace* the disabled newborn with (the possibility of) an abled one (2011, 165). But by Singer's logic, according to which neither foetuses or newborn infants count as persons with interests, the replaceability point is secondary to whether the parents decide it is in their interests to end the life of a disabled newborn infant.

This argument takes us to the crux of the issue with Singer's approach: that asserting disabled peoples' lives are less worth living is the 'only way' to make sense of why we intervene to prevent further disability. From here, we can begin to unpack the assumptions underpinning Singer's theorising, and see how *methodological individualism* is interwoven with his limited conceptualisation of disability.

Thinking back to the discussion of *ableism* in 5.2, Singer's understanding of disability reflects ableist assumptions about what disability is, and the conditions under which it becomes framed as a normative problem. He claims that 'we all know that disabilities are not simply "differences"' (2005, 131), and that '[b]y definition, [disabled people] are lacking at least some ability that normal people have' (2011, 45). Lacking attunement to *ableism* as a structural relation and set of processes that shape and organise dominant understandings of disability as abnormality or deficiency, Singer reproduces these dominant understandings from an ableist standpoint. By focusing on the limitations of disabled individuals, rather than the contextual material and sociopolitical factors that shape both the lives of disabled people and dominant perceptions of disability, Singer's *methodological individualism* systematically obscures the contextual variability of disability and its contingent nature as a category of difference. The utilitarian practical ethics schema, through which normative problems are addressed in reductive terms of individual actions and interests, preclude a more theoretically nuanced account of the sociopolitical conditions under which disability emerges *as such*.

This is not to suggest that Singer is not aware of the broader social context as an obstacle to disabled people living fulfilling and worthwhile lives; as he notes, he 'recognizes the reality of the difficulties' disabled people face (2011, 165). However, such an admission appears only against the backdrop of a *curative imaginary*, which, as discussed in 5.3, assumes that curing disability is the only desirable horizon. Singer's framework can only imagine a world in which disability is worse than abledness, making curative intervention, where possible, the only rational course of action. Moreover, his acknowledgement of the 'difficulties' disabled people face does not account for the ways in which ableist social relations diminish disabled peoples' quality of life. Rather, in seeking to balance a utilitarian calculus through which individual interests are weighed against one another, Singer's theoretical standpoint

is methodologically inured to attaining fluency with structural relations of *ableism*. Because this reductive approach to ethics assumes that moral questions can be effectively settled by examining and weighing the interests of the various parties involved, it holds no methodological resources for interrogating the ways in which sociopolitical phenomena and entities beyond the individual are implicated in such questions.

In addition to neglecting ableist structural relations and their epistemological and material affects, Singer's *methodological individualism* results in an elision of relations of dependence that a relational social ontology would capture more effectively. Whilst he is aware of the preference a parent might have for caring for a disabled child, as opposed to ending its life, such a preference can only be accounted for as part of an individualist framework that takes as a central assumption the norm of (eventual) autonomy and rationality. In 5.4, I discussed *care webs* as a concept and a practice oriented towards prefiguratively transforming ableist sociopolitical conditions. By grounding its ethical schema in the notion of individual interests, Singer's utilitarian approach lacks the theoretical resources to be able to make sense of the prefigurative and anticipatory practice of *care webs* as a preferable alternative to a world without disability now. In other words, the reductive practice of *methodological individualism* as articulated through Singer's framework of weighing interests short-circuits the argument for transformative politics. His utilitarian calculus is thus constrained by what his theoretical assumptions cast as immutable facts of the sociopolitical world, without cultivating the methodological tools to adequately scrutinise these facts. Which "facts" appear as natural or inevitable constraints or problems to be normatively transcended, and how Singer's account theorises these facts, are the focus of the next part of this section.

Having established that Singer's standpoint lacks *relational attunement*, and as a result, produces a theoretically reductive and ethically limited understanding of disability, I now consider the broader ramifications of his standpoint in relation to *fact insensitivity*. The guiding question here pertains to the way in which Singer's choice of standpoint identifies and frames the problems he aims to intervene in. Another way of putting this in relation to *fact insensitivity* is what does he take to be real or salient, in terms of aspects of the sociopolitical world, that animate his normative concerns? What

does his standpoint obscure or fail to disclose? Closely related to *methodological individualism*, the *fact insensitivity* of Singer's utilitarian practical ethics emerges across three interrelated sites. First, I relate Singer's framing of the "problem" of disability to his account of suffering as the central ethical dilemma utilitarianism aims to solve. Then, I show how Singer's moral calculus engages a process of abstraction its methodological practice that systematically inures it to salient facts. Last, I briefly show how Singer's standpoint naturalises his own particular locus of judgement as a universal standard of evaluation.

First of all, as we've seen, because Singer's standpoint lacks *relational attunement to ableism*, it uncritically reproduces ableist assumptions through its conceptualisation of disability. I also want to review Singer's standpoint in terms of its role in the perception of 'suffering' (see especially Singer 2011, 52-3), which his utilitarian framework is intended to minimise. He claims that 'other things being equal, being able to walk, to move one's arms, to hear, to see, to recognize other people and communicate with them, are advantages.' (2005, 130), and that '[i]n seeking to raise research funds to overcome and prevent disability, people with disabilities themselves show that the preference for a life without disability is no mere prejudice' (2011, 46).⁷⁷ In this way, his standpoint reproduces a narrative about disability as entailing inevitable and unique suffering, as opposed to part of a broad spectrum of experiences that accrue to the many forms of sentient life.

While Singer is not incorrect to claim that disabled people experience suffering, there is an important theoretical rejoinder to make. Singer's standpoint is desensitised to some of the root causes of suffering: the material sociopolitical conditions through which ableist processes and relations manifest themselves.⁷⁸ Although he acknowledges that 'social conditions make the lives of the disabled much more difficult than they need be' (2011, 47), he fails to appreciate the ontological complexity of the

⁷⁷ Singer (2008) also entitled his obituary of disability rights lawyer and activist Harriet McBryde Johnson 'Happy Nevertheless', reproducing the ableist trope that disabled people can be happy *in spite of* their disability.

⁷⁸ It's important to note that many disability scholars and activists argue that individual experiences of poor health, distress, and other forms of suffering are compatible with, and often traceable to, ableism, requiring a structural analysis of the conditions under which disablement and suffering are experienced as intertwined. See, for example, Kafer (2013), Wendell (1996), Price (2015), Patsavas (2014) and Morris (1991).

social conditions to which he refers. As I explained in 5.2, *ableism* as a constitutive element of *colonial modernity* is part of an intersectional constellation of power that shapes and organises material reality, as well as the dominant epistemological categories through which the sociopolitical world is interpreted. Singer's utilitarian framework is systematically desensitised to the effects of such relations as contingent, rather than immutable features of sociopolitical reality. This desensitisation leads his standpoint to posit disability as a unique tragedy that can be remedied by genetic engineering, abortion and selective infanticide (2011, 166), and curative interventions (2011, 46). Obscured from critical purview is the extent to which disablement is produced and exacerbated by structural inequalities and forms of inaccessibility wrought by *colonial modernity* (Grech 2012; Grech and Soldatic 2015; see also 5.2 and 5.3 for discussion).

A consequence of this desensitisation is the failure of Singer's standpoint to respond adequately to narratives and voices that contest this perception of disability as inevitably and ahistorically yoked to suffering. For example, in his obituary of disability rights lawyer and activist Harriet McBryde Johnson, he writes that her life was 'evidently a good one, and not just for herself, because her legal work and political activism on behalf of the disabled was valuable to others as well' (2008, n.p.). Presented with appropriate evidence that Johnson's life was 'a good one', a revised utilitarian calculus kicks in to re-evaluate the interests served by that life. However, in spite of his acknowledgement that one particular disabled life was 'a good one', such an evaluation is only made possible through a moral calculus that converts empirical evidence into the medium of interests. As Johnson herself wrote,

'Are we "worse off"? I don't think so. Not in any meaningful sense. There are too many variables. For those of us with congenital conditions, disability shapes all we are. Those disabled later in life adapt. We take constraints that no one would choose and build rich and satisfying lives within them. We enjoy pleasures other people enjoy, and pleasures peculiarly our own. We have something the world needs.' (2003, n.p.)

Although the calculus can incorporate aspects of this narrative as evidence of a good life, as opposed to one of suffering, the problem of *fact insensitivity* remains to the extent that Singer's own evaluative and interpretative framework dictates what counts

as an appropriate fact and how it is to be weighed. This brings us to the second problem pertaining to *fact insensitivity* in his account, and the assumption that adequately universal, impartial evaluations of suffering can be made from Singer's standpoint.

Singer conceptualises suffering as something experienced by individual beings, but that our capacity to do so varies in relation to our cognitive development (2011, 52). Specifically, he maintains that 'normal adult human beings have mental capacities that will, in certain circumstances, lead them to suffer more than animals would in the same circumstances' (2011, 51). Simultaneously, however, he suggests that:

'There are many areas in which the superior mental powers of normal adult humans make a difference: anticipation, more detailed memory, greater knowledge of what is happening [...] It is the mental anguish that makes the human's position so much harder to bear. Yet these differences do not all point to greater suffering on the part of the normal human being. Sometimes animals may suffer more because of their more limited understanding.'
(2011, 52)⁷⁹

Here, Singer's standpoint assumes a position of neutrality in its capacity to judge the experiences of suffering of different beings, in the absence of reflection on the extent to which its perception of suffering is shaped by ableist assumptions. The framing of moral dilemmas such as whether parents of severely disabled infants should be permitted to select infanticide, or whether disability ought to be genetically engineered out of existence, all hinge on Singer's presumptive epistemic credibility in making evaluations about the relative levels of suffering a given course of action might entail. Though he claims that 'we have to make decisions based on probabilities, not on certainties' (2005, 130), the rationale of the utilitarian standpoint is that such decisions can be made, and that they will be universalizable (1993, 206; 2011, 5-7). Crucially, because of its naturalised ableist assumptions, Singer's standpoint is desensitised to ways of being that contest or undermine his perception that disability is inevitably a source of suffering that is against the interests of the individual. In this respect, *fact insensitivity* is borne out of an absence of epistemic humility (Kittay 2010), but also a

⁷⁹ Specifically, the implication of his account here is that cognitively disabled human beings may suffer more greatly, as 'nonhuman animals and infants and severely intellectually disabled humans are in the same category' (2011, 52) in terms of their capacity for understanding.

failure to interrogate whether the parameters of the utilitarian framework adequately account for the complexity of sociopolitical reality.

The final component of our investigation into Singer's *fact insensitivity* is his standpoint's desensitisation to the historically contingent construction of the account of the moral subject he advances. As noted above, Singer's perception of suffering is intimately related to the classifications he makes with respect to different levels of cognitive functioning, whilst cognitive functioning also affects how a being's interests are to be evaluated. Specifically, his classificatory framework posits that what distinguishes 'persons' from 'non-persons' are 'higher' cognitive functions such as 'rationality' and 'self-consciousness' (2011, 18, 85, 159-67; see also 2009). The emphasis on rationality and self-consciousness is 'endemic to modern political thought [...] as the disabled ("irrational" and/or mentally disabled/ill people) are constituted in direct opposition to the rational person' (Arneil 2009, 218), reproducing theoretically the ableist relation between abled and disabled. Absent from Singer's theoretical horizons here is regard for the ways in which relations of ableism, and also of racism, colonialism and heteropatriarchy have been instrumental in the inauguration of this particular, *normate* conception of the subject, and in sustaining it as a dominant ontological and epistemological category. *Insensitivity* to these relations and their effects on the liberal standpoint's conception of the subject ensures that personhood, or, as we saw in Chapter Three, the "human", is uncritically reproduced as a category from which those who fail to meet the requisite criteria are excluded.⁸⁰ In this way, Singer's standpoint reproduces the *normate* subject (5.3) as the regulative ideal that animates his ethical framework. Simultaneously, however, it reproduces the epistemological relations of the *colonial matrix of power*. This reproduction is evident in the dominant account of the subject Singer's account advances and in its foregrounding of rationality, both as a defining characteristic of the subject and as the anchor of Singer's moral-epistemological methodology. To close the section on practical ethics, I briefly explore rationality in relation to *foreclosed reflexivity*.

Singer is committed to the idea that 'reasoning can overcome an initial intuitive response' (2005, 250) in resolving moral dilemmas, and that the goal of practical ethics

⁸⁰ I address the limitations of 'expanding' the category of the moral subject in greater detail in 6.3 and 6.4.

is 'separating those moral judgments that we owe to our evolutionary and cultural history, from those that have a rational basis' (2005, 351). In order to inform rational moral judgements, 'we must go beyond a personal or sectional point of view and take into account the interests of all those affected' (2011, 20), undertaking 'careful estimates of what the consequences of our actions are likely to be', for which we must be 'guided by experience' (2005, 130). As a result of his commitment to a universalized conception of reason as rationality, Singer's approach *unreflexively* naturalises his own locus of normative judgement as a universal and impartial standard of moral evaluation. In applying these maxims, Singer presents his arguments as unassailable unless new evidence comes to light that undermines any stage of the reasoning. In this way, the practical ethics framework and its theoretical standpoint reproduce *meta-insensitivity*, remaining systematically inured to the limitations of its horizons. As such, it lacks the means to recognise the import of reflexivity as a methodological practice.

To conclude, in this critique of Singer's utilitarian practical ethics, I have sought to make three points. First, the reduction of ethical dilemmas to the weighing of individual interests operationalises a practice of *methodological individualism*, precluding Singer's theoretical standpoint from engaging with *ableism* and its material and epistemological effects. Disability is naturalised as a form of individual deficiency and depoliticised, removing it from the scope of critical purview, whilst transformative practices of care are elided as politically apposite responses to disablement. Second, Singer's standpoint engages in *fact insensitivity*, naturalising contingent assumptions about moral subjectivity and posing a reductive metric of suffering desensitised to the complexities of sociopolitical reality. Finally, I argued that Singer's theoretical standpoint is characterised by *meta-insensitivity* to the import of methodological practices that would help to combat the reproduction of ableist ignorance. Without attaining greater fluency with the kinds of conceptual resources that attune and sensitise us to complex relationality and historical contingency, the value of methodological reflexivity will remain undetected by a standpoint that naturalises itself as objective and universally valid.

6.3 John Rawls' justice as fairness

John Rawls' influential and field-defining *A Theory of Justice* ([1971] 1999) aims to delineate and defend an account of the ideally just society, building on the Western social contract tradition to incorporate a demonstration of the decision procedure that would yield principles to regulate such a society. Rawls argues that in order to arrive at the correct principles of justice to organise the ideally just society's basic structure, we should imagine an 'initial choice situation' referred to as the 'original position'. In this situation, a group of representative citizens deliberate which principles to choose, using their two 'moral powers': a sense of justice,⁸¹ and the capacity for practical reasoning (1999, xii). The citizens know nothing about their 'characteristics' or 'natural abilities or talents'; they deliberate from behind a 'veil of ignorance'. Because they know nothing of the type of person they represent and are therefore impartial, the representatives in the original position will, according to Rawls, choose principles of justice to which all would agree (1999, 17-19). The first of these is a principle of equal basic liberties. The second, the Difference Principle, governs the distribution of 'primary goods', and states that economic and social inequalities should be arranged to the 'greatest expected benefit of the least advantaged' (1999, 72). These principles apply to 'normal and fully cooperating members of society' (1999, xiii), productive citizens who participate in 'society [as] a cooperative venture for mutual advantage' (1999, 4).

A Theory of Justice is widely acknowledged as having little to say about disability; Rawls himself states that he sets aside the question of disabled people who are not active participants and as such, outside the scope of principles of justice (1999, 83-84). Some scholars have, in recent years, endeavoured to rehabilitate Rawls' theory to include disabled people in the remit of the principles of justice by reinterpreting the conditions of cooperation mutual advantage (Cureton 2008; Hartley 2009; Palaniappan and Rodrigues 2018; Sisson and DeNicolo 2015; Stark 2007, 2010; Wong 2007, 2010). However, in this section, my aim is to dig deeper into the theoretical assumptions underlying Rawls' account, and show how they preclude transformative justice by reproducing ableism. The remainder of the section unfolds

⁸¹ A disposition to act morally, as defined by the principles of justice; see Rawls (1999, 4229-30; 497).

as follows. First, I link the practice of *methodological individualism* to the reproduction of the *normate* subject in Rawls' original position, showing how the assumptions governing the *normate* also elide vulnerability and interdependence. Then, I examine Rawls' idealised social ontology, and argue that his standpoint's *fact insensitivity* leaves his theory unable to diagnose or identify the effects of oppressive relations as centrally implicated in the perpetuation of ableism, both materially and epistemologically. Lastly, in relation to *foreclosed reflexivity*, I demonstrate that, as was the case with Singer, Rawls' theoretical standpoint lacks the methodological resources to critically interrogate its own epistemological horizons. Although the method of reflective equilibrium is intended to ensure a fit between Rawlsian principles and the ethical dilemmas they seek to respond to, the theoretical underpinnings of Rawls' standpoint preclude him from recognising its limitations and its complicity in the reproduction of ableist ignorance.

As noted above, one objective of Rawls' principles of justice is that they should be chosen impartially, with the deliberators in the original position lacking knowledge of their particular characteristics or social location. By this logic, Rawls maintains that any inequalities that accrue on the basis of gender, race, or culture, for example, must be 'justified by the difference principle' (1999, 85), such that any inequalities benefit the disadvantaged group and are 'acceptable from their standpoint' (1999, 85). Rawls refers to gender, race, and culture as 'fixed natural characteristics' (1999, 85), properties of individuals that do not change, and the knowledge of which is part of the 'common sense' and 'public understanding' (1999, that make up the epistemic conditions of the original position (1999, 480). In this respect, Rawls' methodologically individualist standpoint reproduces understandings of these 'characteristics' as essential qualities, rather than relationally constituted phenomena. However, this lack of relational attunement works in another way to exclude disabled people from the remit of Rawls' theorising altogether. Rawls' account of the two moral powers and his assumption that all individuals within the remit of the principles of justice will be productive members of society are both manifestations of *ableism*. These assumptions naturalise understandings of disability as lack or deficiency, whilst removing from critical purview the structural relations that articulate historically

contingent norms of productivity (Silvers 2009) and cognitive capacity (Simplican 2016).⁸²

Moreover, Rawls' grasp of sex, race, and culture as implicated in the production of inequalities, even if only at the level of identity, indicates to him that the original position should aim to address ensuing inequalities. However, his standpoint works from the implicit assumption that certain forms of disability cannot be accounted for by the principles of justice, by definition: those 'persons distant from us whose fate arouses pity and anxiety' (1999, 84) whose needs are beyond the 'normal range' (1999, 83). There are two consequences flowing from this assumption. First, it expunges knowledge of disability from the original position (A. Knight 2018), precluding the possibility that the deliberators would choose principles that reflect a diversity of cognitive capacities or ways of contributing to society. In this sense, the relationship between Rawls' theoretical standpoint and the construction of the original position form a feedback loop: the lack of attunement to *ableism* facilitates a fixed and naturalised understanding of disability as an individual deficiency that precludes inclusion in the body politic. In turn, this perception of disability removes the impetus to address any ensuing inequalities, and systematically forecloses the possibility of a Rawlsian original position responsive to disability without overhauling its underlying theoretical assumptions. Second and relatedly, this occlusion of *ableism* facilitates the theoretical reproduction of the *normate*, the regulative ideal of the abled, intersectionally privileged, subject. The methodologically individualist theorisation of the Rawlsian subject in abstraction from sociopolitical relations privileges the qualities of the *normate*, such as rationality and productivity, whilst naturalising deviations from the *normate* as individual characteristics. In this way, Rawls' theorising reproduces ableist ignorance, disavowing disability as a salient and politicised category, constructed both historically and relationally.

A second repercussion of *methodological individualism* pertains to the relationship between disability and relations of interdependence. Rawls' theorising, although it

⁸² It's important to note here that in making this argument, I do not mean to suggest that all forms of disability preclude productivity or cognitive capacity. Rather, Rawls' theory implicitly excludes those disabled people whose productivity or cognitive capacity it evaluates as lacking, according to the standards it sets.

draws on ideas of familial attachment and bonding to undergird its account of moral psychology (1999, 405-09; 429-34), relies on an individualist social ontology populated by autonomous rational agents. Several scholars have sought to emphasise the theoretical import of practices of care for a theory of justice inclusive of disabled people (Kittay 1999; Silvers 1995; see also Bhandary 2010; Bhandary and Baehr 2021; Hartley 2009). Such accounts seek to bring to the fore the ethical import of relations between disabled people who are unable to care for themselves, and those who care for them. They also emphasise vulnerability and dependency as inevitable aspects of the human condition. As I indicated in 5.4, however, such accounts can risk naturalising the heteropatriarchal family as the principal site where care is given and received, reinforcing the public/private distinction and heteronormative gender relations in the process. I suggested as an alternative theoretical starting point the concept of *care webs* as underpinning a relational ontology that explicitly embraces kinship relations beyond the heteronormative family model. Rawls' *methodological individualism* reproduces ableist ignorance here in the sense that it forecloses the possibility of alternative theoretical horizons that might engender a more transformative politics. Naturalising the institution of the patriarchal family, as Okin (2005) critiqued, and relegating relations of care and interdependence exclusively in the private realm (Kittay 1999) both serve implicitly to maintain disability as a private, individual matter. Rawls' individualist social ontology lacks the methodological resources to make sense of the relations that compose Piepzna-Samarasinha's *care webs* because such formations reject Rawlsian ontological assumptions undergirding society as a 'cooperative venture for mutual advantage', namely, self-interest and a sense of justice. In this regard, the theoretical assumptions that underpin the Rawlsian conception of society and the Rawlsian subject are incompatible with transformative politics. Whilst the sense of justice itself is expressed from a standpoint that abstracts from and neglects relations of sociopolitical power, relations of sociability are contained to the private sphere of the family.

Turning our attention next to the ways Rawls' theoretical standpoint engages in *fact insensitivity*, I consider two main points: what his standpoint perceives as a "fact", given its idealised social ontology and its moral methodology, and its *insensitivity* to the historical contingency of his conception of moral subjectivity. In the first instance, then, Rawls' *fact insensitivity* is inextricably linked to his *methodological individualism*.

Due to a lack of relational attunement ontologically, his standpoint also fails to register the ways in which the sociopolitical world is shaped by relations such as *ableism*. This insensitivity manifests itself, for example, as the failure to recognise the ways in which the Rawlsian basic structure, closely emulating existing capitalist welfare states, reproduces norms of productive capacity as the benchmark for sociopolitical inclusion (Erevelles 2011, chap. 5). Instead, the “facts” appear as those aspects of the sociopolitical world that Rawls’ standpoint incorporates as the common sense and public knowledge available to deliberators in the original position:

‘the only particular facts known to the parties are those that can be inferred from the circumstances of justice. While they know the first principles of social theory, the course of history is closed to them; they have no information about how often society has taken this or that form, or which kinds of societies presently exist.’ (1999, 175)

In other words, from Rawls’ theoretical standpoint, the only salient facts are those which describe the (hypothetical) circumstances of justice – territorial boundedness, moderate scarcity of resources, a range of individual projects and plans, a plurality of ethical doctrines and beliefs, and a mix of moral virtues and vices (1999, 110) – and the moral-psychological assumptions of social choice theory, namely prudential self-interest and instrumental rationality (1999, 123-24). The perception of these “facts” as salient has a number of repercussions for how Rawls’ theory subsequently unfolds. For instance, the assumptions of rationality, self-interest, and moderate resource scarcity motivate a theory that conceptualises justice as pertaining to the fair distribution of goods and resources (Young 2011). That these assumptions constitute the available common knowledge in the original position also means that the deliberators share Rawls’ conceptualisation of justice as distributive. In the absence of historical knowledge and what human societies are or have been like, the deliberators lack access to the kinds of resources that might motivate different articulations of justice. Yet it is a methodological decision flowing from Rawls’ theoretical standpoint to dismiss this knowledge.

How should we account for this insensitivity, methodologically speaking? Whilst critics such as Mills (2005, 2015) blame theorist positionality and attendant epistemic distortions of sociopolitical reality, Knight (2018) suggests that the failure to sensitise

oneself the perspectives and experiences of disabled people is the problem (see also Simplican 2016). Stears (2008) argues that it is not a failure of familiarity with the real, but the adoption an 'overly-rosy view of the situation' (Stears in King 2008, 238) and the belief in the possibility of achieving liberal egalitarian goals within the sociopolitical system that presently exists. Irrespective of the cause of *fact insensitivity* and its manifestation in practices of theorising, however, there are two significant effects to consider. First, *fact insensitivity* severely limits the capacity of Rawls' theoretical standpoint to diagnose and respond to existing injustices, such as the effects of *ableism* (A. Knight 2018; Simplican 2015, 2016). In this sense, while proponents of the Rawlsian approach argue that understanding existing injustices is not necessary to theorise ideal justice (Erman and Möller 2013; Stemplowska 2008; Valentini 2009; see also Floyd 2009), its lack of diagnostic capacity and its presentation of a theory of justice in abstraction from relations of oppression and concrete manifestations of injustice mean that there is no "problem" that is "real".⁸³ Given that theorising does not happen in a social vacuum however, the second effect of *fact insensitivity* is that, as a legitimised methodological practice, it reproduces conceptualisations of central categories in normative theorising that sustain ableism and ableist ignorance. Specifically, its reproduction of the *normate* subject is at issue here.

Considering Rawls' assumptions about the circumstances of justice, the precepts of social choice theory, and the account of subjectivity underlying the two moral powers, together, these assumptions work to naturalise a historically contingent conception of the *normate* subject. As we saw in relation to Singer's practical ethics approach, Rawls' theoretical standpoint lacks the methodological tools to interrogate the relations of power that inaugurate and sustain the dominant, liberal conception of subjectivity as predicated on norms of reason. Moreover, as a result of his characterisation of society as a 'cooperative venture for mutual advantage' (1999, 4), which excludes those who have been historically figured as economically unproductive, the account of the *normate* subject that gets reproduced here sits at the intersection of ableist and capitalist relations. As Erevelles (2011, 152) puts it, Rawls 'relies on the humanist logic

⁸³ The failure to disclose a "real problem" is not necessarily a "problem" in itself; rather, it depends on what the goal of normative theorising is taken to be (Donahue and Ochoa Espejo 2016; Owen 2016); see also the discussion in 1.3.2 of the shared commitment to social justice in normative and intersectional theorising.

that emphasizes individual potential and its associated traits of autonomy, competence, and rationality as the necessary preconditions for being recognized as a citizen'. This subject is 'a critical component that supports the laissez-faire economic policies of capitalist societies, and is based on the tenets of liberal individualism' (Erevelles 2011, 152). It is Rawls' methodological failure to historicise the parameters of his theoretical standpoint that I now consider in relation to *foreclosed reflexivity*.

To address the problem of *foreclosed reflexivity*, I examine the failure to historicise his theoretical standpoint in conjunction with his account of how moral claims are tested and validated. Although Rawls writes extensively on method in terms of moral reasoning, I show here that his reflections do not extend to the form of critical reflexivity necessary to sensitise and attune his standpoint to its complicity in the reproduction of ableist ignorance.

In Rawls' account of his method for testing moral principles, he refers to 'reflective equilibrium' as a state where a moral reasoner has achieved a good fit between their particular moral judgements, and general principles of justice (1999, 43). To achieve reflective equilibrium, the reasoner examines different conceptions of justice to test the outcomes of their principles in relation to particular moral issues. As Rawls puts it, '[f]rom the standpoint of moral theory, the best account of a person's sense of justice is not the one which fits his judgments prior to his examining any conception of justice, but rather the one which matches his judgments in reflective equilibrium' (1999, 43). In short, reflective equilibrium is a method of ensuring that the conception of justice chosen to animate general principles of justice is compatible with the moral reasoner's individual judgements about particular moral matters.

Unlike Singer's utilitarian framework, the goal of reflective equilibrium is consistency, rather than concrete ethical guidance. As we saw in 6.2, the problem with the utilitarian approach was that it lacked the reflexive resources to identify the limitations of its reductive calculus. With reflective equilibrium, however, the issue is that its model moral reasoner is an artefact of the practices of *methodological individualism* and *fact insensitivity*. In the process of seeking a match between private judgements and general principles, the reasoner lacks the resources to interrogate the construction of their own standpoint or the theoretical underpinnings of the principles in question. In

this sense, if the reasoner begins from the individualist, fact insensitive standpoint of Rawls, they will also lack the tools to recognise its theoretical shortcomings. Reflective equilibrium as a method of moral reflection, then, also sustains the *meta-insensitivity* of the Rawlsian standpoint, thus curtailing its capacity to acknowledge anything problematic about its construction.

To close this section, Rawls' account of justice as fairness also reproduces ableist ignorance as a result of its *methodological individualism*, *fact insensitivity*, and *foreclosed reflexivity*. In abstracting from salient constellations of power, Rawls' *Theory of Justice* reaffirms the dominance of the *normate* subject. In neglecting relations of interdependence, it forecloses more emancipatory theoretical alternatives such as those underscored by *care webs*. In spite of the divergences between justice as fairness and utilitarian practical ethics, they nonetheless reprise a comparable conceptual repertoire and leverage similar iterations of a liberal theoretical standpoint.

6.4 Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach

The final theorist I consider in this chapter is Martha Nussbaum, whose capabilities approach to disability justice (2002, 2007) rejects the social contract premise of Rawlsian theorising on the explicit grounds that it excludes disabled individuals. Nussbaum proposes the capabilities approach as alternative form of 'political liberalism' (2007, 6), which starts with an 'intuitive grasp of [the] particular content' required for a 'life worthy of human dignity' (2007, 82), thus avoiding the Rawlsian strategy of deliberation in the original position, from which disabled people are excluded. As domains of human activity, such as bodily health and integrity, political participation, and education, the list of capabilities Nussbaum specifies (2007, 76–77) is intended to provide a 'fully universal' (2007, 87) account of human flourishing and dignity. Seeking to remedy the shortcomings in social contract theorising in terms of its individualist assumptions about dependency, productivity, and participation, the capabilities approach instead begins from the 'equal worth of persons' and their capacity to lead dignified lives (2007, 221). In Nussbaum's view, the capabilities approach holds important advantages over the social contract tradition, as it treats all with dignity and does not presuppose rational agency as the basis of personhood' (Arneil 2009, 230).

Initially, it may appear that Nussbaum's capabilities theory offers an approach to disability that is more attuned to the limitations of the assumptions animating Rawls' and Singer's accounts. Notably, her emphasis on relations of dependency, the commitment to including disabled people within the scope of justice, and the capabilities as normatively guiding material transformations to ensure their realisation suggest an approach that is more sensitised to concrete manifestations of ableism in the form of the inequalities and disadvantages faced by disabled people. However, as I will show in the remainder of this section, Nussbaum shares with Rawls and Singer the practices of *methodological individualism*, *fact insensitivity*, and *foreclosed reflexivity*. Although these practices are leveraged to different degrees and with distinct normative outcomes in Nussbaum's work, crucially, these practices share the theoretical underpinnings common to the liberal standpoint deployed by all three theorists. As a result, Nussbaum's capabilities approach also participates in the methodological reproduction of ableist ignorance. The rest of the section unfolds as follows. In relation to *methodological individualism*, I argue that although Nussbaum accounts for relations of dependency and foregrounds their import for human dignity, her liberal theoretical standpoint nonetheless requires that normative evaluations be undertaken on the basis of individual attainment of the capabilities. Her approach therefore lacks attunement to the sociopolitical relations that shape the contexts in which the capabilities are exercised. Next, I suggest in relation to *fact insensitivity* that while Nussbaum's standpoint picks out salient sociopolitical problems in terms of barriers to attaining the capabilities, it remains desensitised to the effects of ableist relations in its construction. Finally, I argue that Nussbaum's approach also results in *foreclosed reflexivity*.

A central point of divergence between Nussbaum's theory of capabilities and other liberal, contractarian approaches to justice is that she explicitly accounts for relations of dependency. As she puts it,

'Because of its variegated and temporally complex conception of the person, the capabilities approach does not include any analogue of the contractarian conception of the person as "equal" in power and ability. People vary greatly in their needs for resources and care, and the same person may have widely varying needs depending on her time of life.' (2007, 88)

In this respect, the ontological underpinnings of Nussbaum's work are attuned to the import of social relations, and indicate a partial departure from the practice of *methodological individualism*. 'Sociality', on her account, is part of what makes human life dignified (2007, 160), and incorporates fluctuating relations of dependency. In recognising relationality and the temporally changing needs for care over a range of human lives, Nussbaum's account positions itself as an inclusive and universal theory for achieving justice and human dignity. As a result of the focus on human sociability as one dimension through which individuals realise the capabilities, Nussbaum's account appears to be better placed than Rawls' or Singer's in terms of gathering the theoretical resources to respond to disability. Thinking back to Chapter Five's elaboration of *care webs*, for example, can be instructive here in imagining how collective care-giving, care-taking, and mutual aid might help individuals to flourish along the various dimensions of capabilities. This potentially transformative avenue reminds us that an important way of contesting ableist ignorance in practices of theorising is through the adoption of a social ontology that reflects disabled people's lives and needs without portraying them as exceptional.

Although attunement to sociality is one advantage of the capabilities approach, it otherwise reprises forms of individualism that reproduce ableist ignorance. The problem becomes evident in examining further the ontological underpinnings of the capabilities. As we've seen, according to Nussbaum, the capabilities are exercised by individuals. They are 'held to be important for each and every citizen, in each and every nation, and each person is to be treated as an end' (2007, 78), and in this regard, Nussbaum remains firmly committed to the explanatory and moral primacy of the individual in her work. Because the capabilities are specified as an objective and universal list designed to enable evaluation of individual lives against its internal normative standards (2007, 181), the approach reifies disablement as those forms of human existence which preclude functioning. As I will develop further in the next part of this section, Nussbaum's approach evaluates any barrier to attaining the capabilities as ethically undesirable, placing individual failures to function on the same diagnostic plane as sociopolitical and material constraints. Nussbaum further intimates that the capabilities approach will secure for disabled people a level of flourishing in line with their capacities (2007, 187). In spite of the capabilities approach being about ensuring opportunities to function and transforming social and material contexts to facilitate this,

in the last instance, the approach reinforces the idea that failure to function is a problem located in the individual. Elided, then, are the ways in which *ableism* as a structural relation and set of processes shapes perceptions, understandings, and categorisations of disability, obscuring from critical purview its status as historically and sociopolitically contingent.

Ableist ignorance is reproduced through the capabilities approach as a result of the specification of a universal and objective account of human functioning. It naturalises dominant understandings of disability as individual lack or deficiency. Although Nussbaum's defence of the capabilities preaches attention to the ethical import of interpersonal social relations, it lacks adequate attunement to relations of oppression. *Ableism*, as I will show in greater detail in relation to *fact insensitivity*, conditions the specification of the capabilities, but because Nussbaum's theoretical standpoint remains unattuned to its epistemological effects, the capabilities approach is limited in its normative response to ableism's material effects on the lives of disabled people. In other words, the capabilities can at best be an ameliorative and reformist approach to disability, rather than a transformative one.

Turning to *fact insensitivity*, I route my discussion through two main sites: first, I consider the forms of abstraction authorised by Nussbaum's theoretical standpoint, before turning to her specification of a 'species norm' (2007, 179) to direct evaluations of functioning. In the first instance, while Nussbaum's capabilities approach to justice is designed to be abstract in terms of having general theoretical applicability (2007, 1), its generalizability is not achieved by abstracting away from the specific instantiations of injustice in the present. In this respect, Nussbaum is motivated by the perception of one 'of the most pressing problems of justice in today's world' (2007, 14), namely, the ways in which disabled people are excluded from the scope of justice. However, we need to consider the precise nature of this problem in more detail to get a fuller grasp of how *fact insensitivity* operates in Nussbaum's work. Above, I noted that, diagnostically, the capabilities approach evaluates any barrier to attaining the capabilities as ethically undesirable. While this means that the capabilities approach demands institutional changes that can improve individual functioning across the different domains of the capabilities, it also has the effect of moralising individual failure to attain the capabilities. This is not to say that Nussbaum blames the individual;

rather, the issue is that the normative and evaluative framework underpinning the capabilities identifies failure to function as an ethical failure. In this respect, it is *fact insensitive* as a result of its limited resources to discriminate between different causes inhibiting the realisation of the capabilities. This limitation is a direct result of the approach's 'basic theoretical structure' (2007, 81), which Nussbaum describes as outcome-based, rather than procedural: 'it starts from the outcome: with an intuitive grasp of a particular content, as having a necessary connection to a life worthy of human dignity' (2007, 82). In other words, it is a problem that stems from the specification of an ideal of human functionality.⁸⁴

To help illustrate this point, consider Nussbaum's assertion that 'when someone does not attain [the capabilities], this is an *unhappy* state of affairs' (2007, 193; *emphasis added*). For Nussbaum, this unhappiness is a moral sentiment that expresses something bad or undesirable. Conversely, she writes in relation to 'curing' disabled people to bring them 'up to the capabilities threshold' (2007, 193), that

'[curing] is what we would do, because it is good, indeed important, for a human being to be able to function in these ways. If such a treatment should become available, society would be obliged to pay for it [...] And, further, if we could engineer the genetic aspects of it in the womb, so that [they] would not be born with impairments so severe, that, again, is what a decent society would do.' (2007, 193)

In this sense, Nussbaum's theoretical standpoint reproduces the *curative imaginary*, encountered in 5.4. Because of its *moralised* specification of a norm of functioning that explicitly excludes certain categories of human, the capabilities account is committed to the moral imperative of improving functionality or bringing about states of affairs where no individuals lack 'truly human' functioning (2007, 71). As a result, it is theoretically desensitised to arguments, narratives, and experiences that offer alternative appraisals of what makes a life truly human. Moreover, this insensitivity forecloses *crip futurity* and the possibility of imagining future horizons in which disability is figured neither as undesirable, nor a failure to conform to a particular,

⁸⁴ Nussbaum would reject the terminology of "ideal" on the basis that the capabilities are intended to specify a *basic minimum* of functioning needed for a dignified human life (2007, 179). I use "ideal" here to foreground that Nussbaum's basic minimum is an ideal that cannot be attained by some individuals.

moralised conception of subjectivity. This conception of subjectivity is the final point I consider in relation to *fact insensitivity*.

As I noted above, one of Nussbaum's aims with respect to the capabilities approach is defending a more central role for interpersonal social relations, given her view of their foundational importance for dignified human lives. However, as we've begun to see, Nussbaum's ethical framework incorporates some prior assumptions about whose lives count as fully human. Specifically, she mobilises a historically contingent, moralised conception of the person (2007, 94), which relies on both sociality and the import of 'practical reasoning'. Both, in her view, are required for 'truly human functioning' (2007, 71, 77). As part of the normative and evaluative framework Nussbaum elaborates within the capabilities approach, this historically contingent account informs her articulation of a 'species norm' in relation to the capabilities. From this standpoint, '[s]ome types of mental deprivation are so acute that it seems sensible to say that the life there is simply not a human life at all, but a different form of life' (2007, 187). In this regard, although Nussbaum untethers her account of the subject from the condition of autonomy notable in Rawls and other dominant strands of liberal theorising (Arneil 2009), in retaining practical reason as morally essential, the capabilities approach reproduces an exclusionary account of personhood (Kittay 2005). As a result, Nussbaum's theoretical standpoint also reproduces ableist ignorance through its *fact insensitivity* to the ways in which ableist assumptions inform her commitment to a species norm defined by the capacity for reason.

Finally, to what extent is *foreclosed reflexivity* a problem for the capabilities approach? In short, because Nussbaum's account is articulated from the same theoretical standpoint as those encountered in 6.2 and 6.3, it also lacks the methodological tools to critically interrogate its own construction. Moreover, like Rawls' and Singer's accounts, Nussbaum's capabilities theory of justice is articulated from a liberal theoretical standpoint characterised by *ableism*. Although it is more sensitised to some of the contextual factors that enable and sustain disabled subjects and therefore facilitates a greater degree of inclusion, it sustains a fixed and categorical separation between 'truly' human life, and lives which fail to conform to the species norm she proposes. The universalizing specification of a species norm as predicated on practical reasoning shares, with Singer and Rawls, a failure of theoretical standpoint

in sensitising itself to the constellation of relations that shape its foundational assumptions.

6.5 Conclusion

The central argument of this chapter has been that the same naturalised ontological and epistemological assumptions shape the three methodological practices common to Singer's, Rawls', and Nussbaum's theoretical standpoints. Theorising from the standpoint of abledness, and from a liberalism that differentiates humanity according to its capacity for reason, all three theorists reproduce persistent lacunae as a result of their failure to acknowledge and value ways of being in the world that do not conform to their assumptions of what qualifies a 'truly' human life. I have shown that *methodological individualism*, *fact insensitivity*, and *foreclosed reflexivity* serve to elide relations of ableism and their epistemological and material effects, thus facilitating the unimpeded reproduction of ableist ignorance. In the first instance, *methodological individualism* across all three theorists precludes the kind of *relational attunement* to ableist relations necessary to undertake an adequate diagnosis of the forms of oppression, marginalisation, and exclusion that disabled people experience. This lack of attunement feeds directly into *fact insensitivity* and the failure to recognise the effects of ableism on shaping the sociopolitical world. Finally, the resulting *foreclosed reflexivity* engenders *meta-insensitivity*, rendering the ableist, liberal theoretical standpoint systematically inured to its epistemological complicity in the reproduction of social ignorance.

In spite of their divergent normative commitments, all three theorists' theoretical standpoints enacted methodological decisions that reproduce the *normate* subject, due to the leveraging of the liberal moral subject as defined by its capacity for reason. Although Singer, Rawls, and Nussbaum emphasised different aspects of moral personhood in relation to the specific goals and commitments of their theories – respectively, the capacity to suffer, the capacity to cooperate, and the capacity for dignity – the shared emphasis on reason is decisive across all three for judging the boundary of what Nussbaum referred to as 'truly human' life. This universalizing and exclusionary account of reason echoes the discussion in 3.2, where decolonial theorists critiqued its Eurocentrism and its instrumentalisation to subjugate racialised

and colonised non-Europeans. This is not to suggest that any of the theorists in Chapter Six would endorse Eurocentric reason's racist history. However, as a result of their *foreclosed reflexivity*, it remains an unthematized aspect of their work.

Importantly, each theorist's methodological practices also led to the theoretical foreclosure of the emancipatory alternatives I identified in 5.4. Although Nussbaum's concession to dependency left a small window of opportunity for *care webs* to establish themselves within a capabilities framework, the strident pursuit of the *curative imaginary* shut down possibilities of *crip futurity*. Common to all three theorists, in this regard, was a form of *fact insensitivity* that facilitates the reproduction of the status quo. The failure to diagnose ontologically complex constellations of power as amongst the root causes behind oppression, exclusion, and suffering ultimately precludes the possibility of remedying them. This brings us to the end of the final substantive chapter of the dissertation. I stay with the theme of transformation in the concluding chapter to follow.

7. Intersectional aspirations

The reproduction of social ignorance is deeply embedded in the methodological practices and theoretical underpinnings of the dominant, liberal standpoint in NPT – a pressing problem for a discipline self-consciously concerned with producing theorising that advances social justice. In the context of a broader sociopolitical climate in which solidary resistance is an urgent necessity against the mounting threats of oligarchic capitalism, environmental crisis, hostile border regimes, austerity measures, far right nationalism, and a litany of other ills, it is vital that we produce theorising that grasps the complex operations of historically entrenched matrices power lucidly and with nuance. Recognising its embeddedness in this wider context, this dissertation has sought to disclose the theoretical contours of NPT's reproduction of social ignorance. It has aimed to show that the stakes of continuing to work with theoretical assumptions and methodological practices that reproduce social ignorance entail epistemological complicity with the structures of oppression normative theorising ought to contest. Through its interventions, the dissertation contributes to expanding urgent conversations about methodology in practices of normative theorising in two key ways.

First, I have advanced a methodological critique of NPT in terms of its role in the reproduction of social ignorance. I began by addressing the reproduction of social ignorance in NPT as a result of its theoretical standpoint. As the ontological and epistemological “scaffolding” that undergirds and facilitates the articulation of normative claims from a particular theoretical perspective, *standpoint* has served as conceptual lynchpin in this dissertation for making sense of how the practices of *methodological individualism*, *fact insensitivity*, and *foreclosed reflexivity* are authorised and leveraged. As key sites where social ignorance is reproduced in NPT, these practices organised the dissertation, both in terms of guiding our critical attention in normative literatures, and in specifying methodological alternatives. Throughout the dissertation, I have discussed extensively the importance of critically appraising and reorienting NPT's standpoint, its methodological practices and the conceptual repertoires selected for engagement. I have also pointed towards ways in which these repertoires and practices can be reconfigured and reimagined. This takes me to the second contribution of the dissertation.

Having identified the reproduction of social ignorance in NPT as a pressing ethicopolitical and methodological problem, I proposed a turn to intersectionality. Intersectionality as a paradigm, I have sought to show, is deeply attuned to the imbrication of knowledge and power, and places the impetus to transform oppressive relations of power front and centre in its interventions. It can orient critical reflections on knowledge cultivation in normative theorising, and enable us to think through the possibilities of nurturing non-ignorant methodological practices. I argued across Chapters One and Two that intersectionality's methodological insights must travel to NPT. In the interests of uprooting historically entrenched epistemological monocultures, and oxygenating NPT's conceptual and methodological soil, the seeds of *relational attunement*, *historical sensitisation*, and *reflexivity* must be planted and helped to grow. Drawing on a range of resistant knowledge projects and critical literatures envisioned as a part of an intersectional paradigm, I have shown how NPT can begin to familiarise itself with theoretical standpoints and conceptual tools that can nurture this transformation. In the remainder of this concluding chapter, I reflect on the three methodological lessons this dissertation has begun to cultivate, and consider how these lessons might aid in transforming normative theorising going forward.

The first lesson was *relational attunement*. Building on intersectionality's complex ontological insights in terms of the relations of power that compose matrices of domination, *relational attunement* elicits us to interrogate the ways in which oppressive relations shape, manage, and organise the sociopolitical world. In contrast to *methodological individualism*, which produces reductive analyses of social categorisations that essentialise difference, intersectional *relational attunement* draws our attention to the ways in which structural relations shape social categories such as race and disability, as well as dominant perceptions and understandings of these categories. In Chapter Three, I argued that attunement to racism and colonialism as relational processes composing the broader *colonial matrix of power* is essential in disclosing the ways in which these relations shape debates about immigration and cultural difference, as well as the material and sociopolitical conditions under which such phenomena unfold. We saw, for example, that within the formation of *colonial modernity*, perceptions of cultural difference draw on dominant perceptual schemata that operate on the basis of implicit racialisation. These schemata can be leveraged by and reproduced uncritically through NPT's theoretical standpoint without

appropriate *relational attunement* to the structural relations of oppression that shape dominant, white imaginaries. I showed in Chapter Four that, as a result of a lack of *relational attunement* to racism as a historically contingent relation, dominant theoretical approaches in NPT reproduced racial ignorance, engaging instead reductive analytics of cultural difference. In Chapter Six, this lack of *relational attunement* with respect to ableism led to reductive, ahistorical conceptions of disability. *Methodological individualism* in relation to disability and ableist ignorance served to foreclose alternative theoretical and ethicopolitical horizons by neglecting sociopolitical relations of oppression, as well as the transformative potential of politicised, social interpersonal relations. In Chapter Five, I showed that *relational attunement* as directed through the concepts of *crip futurity* and *care webs*, on the other hand, indicated theoretical starting points that rejected monolithic and ahistorical categorisations of disability as inevitably tragic, lacking, and undesirable. Instead, they foregrounded ways of resisting ableist sociopolitical relations and processes through prefigurative practices of care, conjuring the possibility of future transformation rather than resignation to the status quo.

The issue of the status quo delivers us to the second lesson, which was *historical sensitisation*. Taking as its point of departure the historical contingency and contextual specificity of the relations that compose intersectional matrices of power, this lesson imparted the significance of probing the epistemological provenance and effects of our conceptual repertoires. Importantly, *historical sensitisation* builds on *relational attunement* in the sense that, in order to identify the salient “facts”, phenomena, or aspects of the sociopolitical world in diagnosing normative problems, we also need an account the relations of power that shape and organise these elements. For this reason, in relation to *fact insensitivity*, I asked of the normative theorists engaged in this dissertation, what do they take to be the problem? What aspects of the sociopolitical world become naturalised, and what is obscured, as a result of their theoretical standpoint? The motivation behind critiquing *fact insensitivity* was not to accuse normative theorists of deliberately misrepresenting reality. Rather, the broader lesson here pertains to relationship between the standpoint from which theorising is articulated from, what the standpoint permits the theorist to grasp, in terms of the ontological and epistemological assumptions undergirding it, and the practice of reflexivity with respect to the construction of that standpoint. In this sense, the

intersectional methodological injunctions I distilled in Chapter Two point us back, again, to the complex relationship between ontology, epistemology, methodology, and ethics. Crucially, in this sense, transforming NPT's methodology must go beyond "adding" the perspectives of a wider range of socioepistemic locations to inform its theorising. I have sought to show instead that challenging *fact insensitivity* entails recognising the effects of constellations of power both on the sociopolitical contexts we hope to intervene in, *and* on the construction of the theoretical standpoint we choose to deploy.

Accordingly, the third lesson was incorporating a practice of reflexivity into NPT's methodology. Throughout the dissertation's engagements with NPT, I have sought to show that normative theorists who practice *methodological individualism* and *fact insensitivity* are left without the necessary methodological tools to critically interrogate the historically contingent relations that construct their own theoretical standpoint. Moreover, the ethicopolitical and epistemological significance of this practice also remains obscured. This *meta-insensitivity* to the import of reflexivity is a serious obstacle to identifying and contesting the reproduction of social ignorance, for if our theoretical standpoints appear natural and self-evidently correct, why press the question of whether they are implicated in complex relations of power? The problem of *meta-insensitivity* delivers us back to the central purposes of this dissertation, which was to identify the methodological mechanisms behind the reproduction of social ignorance in NPT and develop possible avenues of intervention that identify and contest it. Over the course of the argument presented above, I have undertaken an exercise in disclosing what is absent, unstated, or implicitly assumed, in order to show the effects of these lacunae. Through this process, my aim has been to chip away at NPT's *meta-insensitivity*: to illuminate the effects of its methodological practices, to expose the ethicopolitical and epistemological stakes, and to offer some alternative theoretical starting points that can orient normative theorising towards a more *relationally attuned, historically sensitised, and reflexive* horizon.

With these lessons in mind, the last part of this concluding chapter aims to tease out some of their implications and what they might hold for NPT going forward. First, I reflect briefly on the challenges I encountered through my own process of

methodological learning and unlearning in the dissertation, before closing with some considerations on the possibilities for transformation.

In Chapter Two, I wrote that I intended to cultivate a ‘traitorous identity’ in my critical engagements in the dissertation, both as a means of reflexively encountering the contours of my intersecting privileges and disadvantages, and working with, against, and from my disciplinary location, having trained as a normative political theorist. Over the course of researching and writing, the process of cultivating a traitorous identity has delivered some expected and some less-expected experiences. The two I want to thematise here are feelings of alienation and discomfort, and the potential horizons of hope and possibility. In the first instance, cultivating a traitorous identity has nurtured a growing sense of alienation from the currents and practices of mainstream normative theorising, in which I assumed at the beginning of graduate study I would eventually become professionally embedded. As part of the methodological learning and unlearning this dissertation has precipitated, this alienation is plausibly part of a process of self-reflexivity, through which I look back on what I thought I was doing (i.e., social justice oriented theorising), and realise that I wasn’t doing what I thought I was doing at all. In this respect, alienation breeds a kind of discomfort that arises with the knowledge that “unlearning” entails recognising that what I practiced previously warranted being unlearned. Part of cultivating a traitorous identity in the context of this dissertation has therefore involved learning to sit with discomfort, and to learn how to leverage it in the interests of (un)learning, a notion that will be familiar to practitioners of intersectional and feminist pedagogy.⁸⁵ The experience of discomfort that often crops up on encounters with the unfamiliar led me, on this basis, to structure my chapters so that an imagined normative theorist would, upon reading, be met with critical literatures on race and disability before the critiques of NPT unfold, to engender this sense of defamiliarisation and discomfort. As well as helping me to learn to approach normative theorising critically and attentively, this discomfort has also guided me in reflecting on my engagements with the intersectional theoretical standpoint I have aimed to mobilise. In Chapter Two, for example, I argued that an intersectional standpoint can make no a priori claims as to which relations will compose it, but I remain conflicted as to whether, in light of intersectionality’s frequent

⁸⁵ See, for example, Arao and Clemens (2013), Barrett (2010), Kishimoto and Mwangi (2009), Ludlow (2004), and Murray and Kalayji (2018).

misappropriation and the intellectual dispossession of Black feminists in the academy, this position is ethically tenable.

To close the dissertation, the second experience I want to thematise here is the unfolding horizons of hope and possibility I have encountered in cultivating a traitorous identity. As discussed in Chapter Two, one way of cultivating a traitorous identity entails familiarising oneself with critical scholarship underpinned by political movements for emancipation, and through these engagements, developing an epistemic location attuned to its intersectional positionality. In engaging with traditions of scholarship beyond those which I was already familiar, I have had the opportunity to border-dwell and world-travel, and to learn the practices of *relational attunement*, *historical sensitisation*, and *reflexivity* myself. I have learned, and am still learning, to attend to the structural epistemological conditions that shape and constrain my crossings. These experiences sustain the hope that radical transformation of NPT's methodological practices is possible, on two preliminary conditions. The first is that intersectionality's methodological insights must travel to, and gain uptake in, NPT. The second is that more normative theorists must prepare to cultivate traitorous identities. We must all continue to apprentice ourselves to forms of theorising that enable the critical interrogation and overturning of dominant theoretical standpoints.

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