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Part IV

EPISTEMOLOGY,
COGNITION,
AND LANGUAGE

EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE AND EPISTEMOLOGIES OF IGNORANCE

José Medina

Miranda Fricker has defined epistemic injustice “as a kind of injustice in which someone is *wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower*” (2007: 20). Although the topic of epistemic injustice has recently received a lot of attention, it had been systematically ignored in idealized discussions in epistemology that assumed the equal status and participation of all subjects in the epistemic practices in which understanding, belief, and knowledge are formed, communicated, and used. Idealized theories of understanding, belief, and knowledge disregard the differential epistemic agency of different subject positions and social locations, and they also neglect the internal relations and dialectics between understanding and misunderstanding, believing and disbelieving, knowing and ignoring. Taking seriously the power dynamics within epistemic practices involves unmasking “epistemologies of ignorance” that protect the voices, meaning, and perspectives of some by silencing the voices, meanings, and perspectives of others. Marxist theory, critical race theory, feminist theory, and queer theory have all produced powerful diagnoses of these “epistemologies of ignorance” by analyzing the impact of different forms of oppression (linked to class, race, gender, and sexuality) on our epistemic practices, and the different forms of epistemic injustice that relations of oppression produce. Although *epistemologies of ignorance* have been discussed by that name only recently (Mills 1997; Sullivan and Tuana 2007), they have always been a key theme of race theory, and they have figured prominently in the philosophies of race of classic authors such as Sojourner Truth, Anna J. Cooper, W.E.B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, and Frantz Fanon, to name a few. Philosophers of race have developed robust discussions of social facts, experiences, and meanings that, as a result of racial oppression, become invisible, inaudible, or simply unintelligible in certain social locations and for certain perspectives that protect themselves from facing their involvement in racial oppression with a shield of *active* ignorance. The sections that follow elucidate the accounts of racial *active* ignorance and racial epistemic injustices developed in classic philosophies of race and in contemporary reflections on “epistemologies of ignorance.”

The first section of this chapter will examine the relationship between racial ignorance and different kinds of dysfunctions and epistemic injustices such as unequal access to and participation in knowledge practices, silencing, vitiated testimonial dynamics,

patterns of misinterpretation and distortion, and so forth. The second section will elucidate what counts as *epistemic resistance*, exploring how individuals and groups living under conditions of racial oppression can use their epistemic resources and abilities to undermine and change oppressive structures and the complacent cognitive-affective functioning that sustains those structures. This section will sketch, in broad strokes, the key elements of an *insurrectionist epistemology*. Finally, in the last section I will discuss how epistemic violence can be fought on the grounds, in our daily activities, through *micro-practices of resistance*.

The Will Not to Believe: Invisibility, Inaudibility, Insensitivity

When Sojourner Truth poignantly asked “And ain’t I a woman?,” she was unmasking and denouncing bodies of racial ignorance that sustained and protected mainstream conceptions of gender—heterosexist and invisibly whited conceptions of femininity that marginalized black women. When W.E.B. Du Bois wrote about piercing “the veil of ignorance” and eloquently described what it meant to lead one’s life “behind the veil,” he was identifying the cognitive dysfunctions that resulted from the social invisibilization of the experiences and perspectives of racially oppressed groups. When Ralph Ellison (1952) described the invisibility of the black man as produced by white people’s insistence to see only the black man’s “surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination,” he was dissecting a cognitive pathology, that of the *white gaze*: a racialized way of seeing that proceeds through the carefully cultivated refusal to see and acknowledge certain things and the suppression of other ways of seeing and experiencing the world. The racial ignorance these authors described is a very *active* and *contentful* form of ignorance: it is something more than a gap or an emptiness that can simply be filled when the opportunity arises; it is an ignorance that creates epistemic privileges and epistemic harms by protecting the epistemic agency of some and by blocking the epistemic agency of others.

Racial ignorance interferes with the meaning-making and knowledge-producing capacities and activities of individuals and groups in unfair ways, and therefore it produces epistemic injustices of two kinds. In the first place, when the unfair epistemic treatment of a subject concerns her *credibility* in testimonial dynamics, we have an instance of what Fricker has termed *testimonial injustice*: the subject is judged as less credible than other subjects in the same epistemic predicament would be; she doesn’t receive the trust that she deserves, her capacity for ascertaining truth is called into question, and her inclusion and participation in knowledge-producing practices are compromised (if allowed at all). So, for example, when police officers racially stereotype a black bystander in a crime scene as a suspect involved in the crime rather than as a witness, he is not treated as a reliable observer and his account of the events are not taken as *prima facie* believable or displaying positive epistemic qualities (accuracy, reliability, veridicality, etc.). In the second place, when the unfair epistemic treatment of a subject concerns her *intelligibility* in communicative dynamics, we have an instance of what Fricker has termed *hermeneutical injustice*: the subject is judged as unintelligible or less intelligible than other subjects; her words and meanings are not taken in their own terms, her capacity for meaning and understanding is undermined, and her agency in meaning-making and meaning-expressing practices is compromised (if not eliminated altogether). So, for example, when a subject’s racialized language or accent is perceived

as ignorant, less articulate or clear, less reliable or accurate, she is less likely to be asked questions that require cognitive sophistication, her interpretations and perspectives are less likely to be understood in their own terms, and she is more likely to be taken as unable to make full sense of certain areas of experience or to contribute to certain semantic domains.

Both kinds of racial epistemic injustices—testimonial and hermeneutical—are created and perpetuated by epistemic dysfunctions that are constitutive of racial ignorance. These dysfunctions produce the phenomenon of *epistemic hiding*, that is, of making subjects and their experiences and perspectives invisible and inaudible, or visible and audible only precariously and in a distorted way—“through a glass darkly,” as it were. In racial testimonial injustices, the epistemic dysfunctions involve an *active* tendency to *mishear* certain voices and perspectives and to *disbelieve* their contributions. In racial hermeneutical injustices, the dysfunctions involved foster not simply the inability to interpret or make sense (the formation of interpretative gaps or semantic lacunas), but also and more importantly, the *active* tendency to *misinterpret* the experiences of racial others. When pockets of this *active* racial ignorance are formed, what is rendered invisible and inaudible (or precariously visible and audible) are not only things that are entirely outside the reach of the racially ignorant person’s life, but also things that reside in the most intimate corners of her cognitive and affective life. In critical race theory we find these two different notions of what has been rendered experientially alien: the *simply alien* and the *alienated familiar*.

As Charles Mills explains in “Alternative Epistemologies,” the *simply alien* comprises “experiences that are outside the hegemonic framework in the sense of involving an external geography” (1998: 28). It is an exhibition of “the simply alien,” for example, when “a muckraking Frederick Engels brings details of British slum conditions to the shocked attention of a middle-class audience” (1998: 28). But even more interesting for the analysis of *active* racial ignorance is the *alienated familiar*, which comprises “experiences that are outside because they redraw the map of what was thought to be already explored territory” (1998: 28). Confronting interpretations that make you radically rethink your most familiar experiences is not easy. It can be quite shocking to hear that something you thought you knew well what it was—well-meant acts of charity toward worse-off others, for example—can be experienced by the other subjectivities involved quite differently—as a subtle form of racism, or as passive-aggressive acts that keep people in subordinate positions and demand their gratitude and conformity. Indeed, confronting the alienated familiar is more disruptive than being exposed to the simply alien; and more resistances are mobilized to block that confrontation or to stage it so that the alienated familiar appears as pathological or unintelligible experience that can simply be dismissed. It is here, in the resistance to confront the alienated familiar, that we find what I have termed “the will *not* to believe” (Medina 2015), the cognitive-affective investment in not knowing, in protecting one’s beliefs and meanings through a resistant insensitivity to meanings and perspectives that can create *friction* in one’s epistemic life.

Although traditionally depicted as a form of *blindness*, the active racial ignorance I am describing is no regular kind of blindness, but a very generalized form of *insensitivity* or *numbness*. The metaphor of *blindness* misleadingly disguises important features of active racial ignorance and the distinctive kind of insensitivity it involves. In the first place, the terms “insensitivity” and “numbness” are more appropriate than “blindness”

because, although clearly related to our embodied sentience, they are not restricted to one sensory modality and can be easily extended to the non-perceptual—and indeed the epistemic deficiencies in question go beyond our perceptual organs and concern our interpretative and conceptual capacities. In the second place, the terms “numbness” and “insensitivity” can avoid the ableism of the metaphor of blindness. Indeed, the equation of blindness with ignorance is offensive and contributes to the “otherness” of people with disabilities. Finally, in the third place, the metaphor of blindness is conceptually inept because it hides a key feature of active racial ignorance: namely, its *self-effacing* nature, its self-hiding and self-denying mode of operation. Whereas the blind person is acutely aware that there are things that escape her and she leads her life adjusting to this perceptual deficit, the actively insensitive person is quite oblivious of there being anything at all she is missing and she arrogantly assumes that she is attuned to everything there is to know about the social world. This is what I have called the *meta-level* of racial insensitivity. Active racial ignorance involves *meta-ignorance*: the insensitive person is ignorant of her own ignorance, unable to recognize that there is anything she is missing concerning racial experiences and meanings. This is a key element of the contrast between *active* racial ignorance and other (less recalcitrant, less harmful, and easier to eradicate) forms of ignorance.

When our ignorance is nothing more than the absence of true belief and/or the presence of false belief, learning should be easy: we just unmask false beliefs and inculcate true ones. However, in the case of active ignorance, learning is resisted and blocked in a number of different ways: because of a lack of interest in knowing or understanding better, because of a vested interest in not knowing or understanding, because of distortions and preconceptions that get in the way of seeing things in a different way, and so forth. Adapted from my essay “Ignorance and Racial Insensitivity,” (2016) here is a schematic contrast between the key features of *passive versus active ignorance*:

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| Passive ignorance: | (1) absence of true belief |
| | (2) presence of false belief |
| Active ignorance: | (3) cognitive resistances (e.g., prejudices, conceptual lacunas) |
| | (4) affective resistances (e.g., apathy, interest in not knowing—
“the will not to believe”) |
| | (5) bodily resistances (e.g., feeling anxious, agitated, red in the face) |
| | (6) defense mechanisms and strategies (e.g., deflecting challenges, shifting burden of proof) |

As I understand it, active racial ignorance involves being cognitively and affectively numbed to the lives of racial others: being inattentive to and unconcerned by their experiences, problems, and aspirations; and being unable to connect with them and to understand their speech and action. How can this racial insensitivity be displaced? Resisting racial insensitivity is a particularly challenging task for two reasons. On the one hand, there is what I have termed *the problem of meta-ignorance*: racial insensitivity protects itself from being recognized and resisted; there are individual and collective mechanisms of epistemic hiding that are so insidious that individuals and groups (even entire cultures) often are in a recalcitrant state of self-denial that disarms any critical intervention and neutralizes any attempt to wake them up from their racist slumbers.

On the other hand, resisting racial insensitivity also encounters *the problem of the individual and the collective*: racial insensitivity resides simultaneously both in individuals and in entire groups (in social, cultural, and institutional attitudes and relations). Since racial insensitivity operates both at the interpersonal level and at the level of socio-cultural and institutional practices, any attempt to diagnose and treat the problem *only* at one level will be partial and deficient: individuals cannot by themselves overcome the well-entrenched forms of racial insensitivity they have inherited; but, on the other hand, institutions and social structures cannot overcome patterns of racial ignorance through purified procedures and protocols without remaking the attitudes, habits, and communicative dynamics of the individuals who inhabit those institutional and structural spaces. In the next two sections I will highlight some resources and arguments available in the epistemology of race to address these problems, developing an argument for the need to cultivate sustainable insurrectionary acts and practices of resistance both in interpersonal relations and in structural and institutional settings.

Epistemic Resistance and Insurrection of Subjugated Knowledges

How can we resist racial insensitivity? The available forms of resistance against it and the feasible processes of sensitizing the racially ignorant subject will vary widely depending on the identity, environment, and trajectory of the subject in question. How does the subject partake in patterns of racial knowledge and ignorance? How does racism and dysfunctional racial relations affect her cognitive and affective life and shape her sensibility? It all depends on the set of social locations, positions, and relations that one sees oneself enmeshed in as one navigates the social world and finds oneself enjoying and suffering (sometimes simultaneously!) racial privileges and racial harms.

Disregarding racial harms and privileges and desensitizing oneself to racialized aspects of social life are well-entrenched defense mechanisms of racial insensitivity, but they are not always available to all the agents who co-inhabit the social world from different locations and perspectives. Racial ignorance is a luxury that oppressed subjects typically cannot have. As many race theorists have emphasized, racially oppressed subjects have no option but to master the dominant perspectives of privileged groups that shape the social world. In this way oppressed subjects accomplish the epistemic feat of maintaining active in their minds (at least) two cognitive perspectives simultaneously, the dominant perspective of the privileged and the non-dominant perspective(s). Following Du Bois, this has been described as having a *double consciousness*. The epistemic perspectives of oppressed subjects often exhibit a characteristic kind of split or hybridity, whereas the cognitive functioning of privileged elites tends to be more monolithic and one-sided, often operating in complete disregard of other perspectives. In his discussion of double consciousness Du Bois states that the American Negro is “born with a veil and gifted with second sight in this American world” (1903/1994: 2). The Negro is painfully aware of his veiled existence and he looks at himself as veiled, as white Americans do. This split consciousness can produce anxiety, paralysis, and epistemic dysfunctions. As Robert Gooding-Williams (2011) has argued, it is a misunderstanding (and a misinterpretation of Du Bois) to think of double consciousness as being, in and of itself, an enlightened condition; it is the Du Boisian notion of “second-sight” that has that role. Not just by virtue of having a double consciousness, but by virtue of inhabiting it critically, the Negro can pierce the veil of ignorance of the white world and develop an

alternative way of seeing, a “second-sight”, a *resistant perception* alongside the dominant perception he has internalized.

Patricia Hill Collins (1990/2000) has called attention to the resistant perceptions and interpretations of women of color in her black feminist epistemology. Thanks to a bifurcated consciousness, she argues, black women can generate self-representations that enable them to resist the demeaning racist and sexist images of black femininity in the white world. Hill Collins finds the critical payoff and subversive potential of double consciousness in allowing the subject to take critical distance from the dominant perspective. Double consciousness brings with it the *opportunity* to develop the ability to shift back and forth between two ways of seeing and, hence, the ability to make comparisons and contrasts between perspectives. But notice that this is only a *possibility*; there is no guarantee that every double consciousness will have this flexibility and dynamic inner structure and will lead to the development of a “second-sight” and it remains possible for subjects with double consciousness to live in cognitive dissonance.

Concurring with Hill Collins and other race theorists, the *epistemology of resistance* I have developed (Medina 2012) identifies the ability to shift back and forth between epistemic perspectives and to establish instructive comparisons and contrasts between them as the special source of critical power and lucidity available to oppressed subjects. The mere coexistence of epistemic perspectives is not sufficient for lucidity and epistemic virtues to emerge; there must be beneficial *epistemic friction* between the alternative standpoints available. On my view, epistemically virtuous double consciousness is the consciousness that has *epistemic counterpoints inside it* that produce beneficial *epistemic friction*. As Andrea Pitts (2016) has pointed out, an excellent account of (both beneficial and detrimental) *internal epistemic friction* can be found in Gloria Anzaldúa’s description of the process of confronting one’s “shadow self,” which includes one’s epistemic gaps and complicity with patterns of ignorance and insensitivity (Anzaldúa 2009: 551). As Pitts (2016) shows, the kind of confrontation with one’s own forms of racial ignorance that Anzaldúa describes operates at two levels: at the first-order level of ignoring specific things about racial subjectivities and racial groups (including one’s own), and at the meta-level of ignoring (being confused about, or simply being inattentive to) what one knows and does not know about racial positionality and relationality and one’s capacities for racial learning. As Pitts puts it:

the kind of confrontation with one’s own forms of ignorance and ways of self-knowing that Anzaldúa describes is an important point of convergence with what Medina calls epistemic resistance. Epistemic resistance, in Medina’s work, echoes Anzaldúa’s distinction between “inner works” and “public acts,” and her distinction between the “inner/spiritual/personal” and the “social/collective/material” Medina argues that epistemic resistance appears in two forms: internal and external, with two potential valences: positive and negative [i.e. beneficial or detrimental].

(Pitts 2016: 362)

Beneficial internal epistemic friction exerts resistance against racial insensitivity by forcing oneself to be self-critical, to confront one’s limitations and to become attentive to internalized patterns of ignorance. But there is also *detrimental* internal epistemic friction that is complicit with racial insensitivity and protects racial ignorance by blocking

learning and resisting alternative ways of knowing. This connects with what Mariana Ortega (2006) has termed “being lovingly, knowingly ignorant.” Ortega describes this form of ignorance taking place among white feminists who appropriate the work of women of color for their own aims, but nonetheless they resist the interrogation of their own racialized positions (Ortega 2006: 61–62).

But how does the epistemic friction of conflicting racial perspectives operate externally as they confront each other? And how can social practices and communicative dynamics be arranged so that the interaction of perspectives result in beneficial epistemic friction that fosters the resistance against racial insensitivity? In other words, how can we cultivate practices of epistemic resistance so as to stage an “insurrection of subjugated knowledges,” to borrow Foucault’s phrase? (see McWhorter 2009 and Medina 2011, 2012). In the remainder of this essay, I want to highlight some resources and suggestions from the recent literature in the epistemology of race.

In *The Racial Contract*, Charles Mills (1997) put *white ignorance* in the agenda of critical race theory. Arguing that privileged white subjects have become unable to understand the world that they themselves have created, Mills called attention to the cognitive dysfunctions and pathologies inscribed in the white world and its epistemic economy, which revolves not only around the epistemic exclusions and stigmatizations of peoples of color, but also around a carefully orchestrated self-hiding of the white gaze. As Mills suggests, white ignorance is a form of self-ignorance: the inability to recognize one’s own racial identity and the presuppositions and consequences of one’s racial positionality. Not having developed expressive practices and interpretative devices to understand their experiences of racialization, white subjects have been lost in a racialized world. A lot has been written on the invisibility of whiteness and the hypervisibility of blackness in the racialized world of American culture (see Hill Collins 1990/2000 and 2005). But of course whiteness has been invisible only for the white gaze but not for racially oppressed subjects, who—as Mills emphasizes—have formed a powerful counter-public, with their alternative experiences and interpretations, and their counter-memory.

Along with other epistemologists of race, Mills (1998) argues that oppressed groups have a distinctive set of experiences and they are well positioned to bring about an “inversion of perspectives.” Mills’s proposals for correcting racial ignorance are two-fold: a “cognitive therapy” that treats the dysfunctions and pathologies of white ignorance; and an epistemic “inversion” that makes learning possible and promotes healthy epistemic dynamics. Both correctives require privileging the epistemic perspective of oppressed subjects. Although oppressed subjects can indeed fall victim to socially generated illusions, they often have more resources to undo these illusions, they have a richer (or more heterogeneous) experiential life that they can use to dismantle the accepted description of reality that rules the day. Members of subordinate groups typically have experiences that from the point of view of the dominant ideology or hegemonic perspective are considered *alien* and are swept under the rug of the *alienated familiar* in the world of the privileged. Alien experiences of this sort call a radical questioning of assumptions and taken-for-granted interpretations. People (including the experiencing subject) may not be ready to accept these alien experiences as genuine experiences and they may not answer the call for a radical rearticulation or *inversion* of perspectives; instead, their reaction may be to dismiss the experience and block any alternative descriptions of social realities that may result from it. This is to be expected since it is

difficult to accept descriptions that challenge our world as we understand it; and the more invested people are in their understanding of social realities, the more reluctant they will be to accept alternative ones. But all the more reason to be attentive to alien experiences and receptive to their critical and transformative potential.

Mills has been criticized for a naïve cognitivism that forgets that the process of undoing racial insensitivity involves much more than “cognitive therapy” (see Bailey 2007). The fight against racial oppression indeed involves things that go beyond the merely cognitive: it involves the restructuring of habits and affective structures; and it also involves political action and deep cultural transformations. The liberation of the meanings, experiences and perspectives of the oppressed call for something more complicated than a mere “inversion of perspectives” that replaces the dominant memory with a counter-memory, the dominant imagination with a counter-imagination, and so forth. The more complicated business of redrawing conceptual boundaries and rearticulating epistemic norms through critical engagements and subversive communicative moves is what my notions of *epistemic resistance* and *epistemic insurrection* try to capture. Resisting epistemic oppression requires exerting epistemic friction on the grounds, that is, through practices that exert pressure and create trouble so as to halt and disrupt oppressive dynamics. In this sense I have argued for the importance of epistemic disobedience and insurrection for combatting epistemic oppression, especially when such oppression takes an extreme form and makes cooperation extremely difficult and painful if not impossible.

To conceptualize extreme epistemic oppression I propose the notion of *epistemic death*. Just like Orlando Patterson (1982) has identified the phenomenon of *social death* as occurring when people are deprived of rights and liberties and not given full status of subjects under the law, we also need to identify the phenomenon of *epistemic death*, which occurs when a subject’s epistemic capacities are not recognized and she is given no standing or a diminished standing in existing epistemic activities and communities. As I understand it, the concept of epistemic death has been foreshadowed in many accounts of the epistemic injuries produced by racism such as those developed by Maria Stewart, James Baldwin, and Gloria Anzaldúa. Stewart developed an understanding of epistemic oppression as a form of “deadening” and “numbing” of mental capacities that can kill oneself as a subject of knowledge, for “there are no chains so galling as the chains of ignorance—no fetters so binding as those that bind the soul, and exclude it from the vast field of useful and scientific knowledge” (1932/1987: 45). Baldwin described the predicament of the black man in the United States as an “endless struggle to achieve . . . human identity, human authority” after internalizing

fear as deep as the marrow of the bone; doubt that he was worthy of life, since everyone around him denied it; . . . rage, hatred, and murder, hatred for white men so deep that it often turned against him and his own, and made all love, all trust, all joy [all life] impossible.

(Baldwin 1998: 98)

And Anzaldúa forcefully described Anglo White privilege as killing her voice and her capacity to be heard and understood in her own terms, as using “linguistic terrorism” to annihilate her self: “*El Anglo con cara de inocente nos arranco la lengua*. Wild tongues cannot be tamed, they can only be cut out” (1987: 76). “Repeated attacks on our native tongue diminish our sense of self” (1987: 80).

The *epistemic death* that can result from racial oppression includes phenomena such as *testimonial death*, occurring when subjects are not given even minimal amounts of credibility and are prevented from participating in testimonial dynamics; and *hermeneutical death*, occurring when subjects are not treated as intelligible communicators and are prevented from participating in meaning-making and meaning-sharing practices. Under conditions of epistemic death, subjects owe nothing to those practices and communities that contribute to their annihilation; epistemic obligations (such as answering questions, telling the truth, sharing information, etc.) are suspended because one should not be expected to cooperate with practices that undermine one's own status and agency or that of one's fellows. Moreover, besides relaxing and suspending obligations, epistemic death also creates a right (if not a duty) to fight epistemically by any means necessary (including the right to lie, to hide, to sabotage, to silence others, etc.), demonstrating loyalty and solidarity only with alternatives epistemic communities (communities of resistance). But notice that while suspending cooperation with oppressive epistemic practices and institutions, epistemic insurrection aims at facilitating cooperation under fair conditions when non-oppressive epistemic dynamics and norms are established.

We can identify epistemic insurrectionary practices of all sorts that interrupt and disrupt the established epistemic economy of a society and its practices and institutions. There are insurrectionary practices that target oppressive epistemic presumptions and dynamics in public and private life, in education, in the media, in film and art, in public policy, in linguistic habits, in communicative dynamics, in the protocols and procedures of our institutions, and so forth. There are insurrectionary practices that are not only cognitive, but also affective; and there are insurrectionary practices that are not confined to the individual, but they involve entire publics and social movements and concern structures and institutions. Indeed dismantling epistemic norms and dynamics is not simply a cognitive and individualistic enterprise. Epistemic insurrectionary practices must include aesthetic, ethical, pedagogical, political, religious, and other forms of activities that create beneficial epistemic friction and contain subversive interventions that have the potential to open people's hearts and souls to marginalized racial perspectives and to expand their racial sensibilities. We can think of African American literary figures such as Maya Angelou, Audre Lorde, or Toni Morrison as involved in such epistemic insurrectionary practices against racial insensitivity. This kind of epistemic insurrection can also be seen in the innovative works of African American filmmakers who have revolutionize film-viewing and film-interpretation by turning the interpretative resources and scripts of genres such as *film noir* against themselves, using this subversion for uprooting racist assumptions and unmasking racial ignorance. For example, Dan Flory (2008) has argued that black *noir*—that is, the new film *noir* produced by black filmmakers in recent decades—has the potential to disrupt and disable racial insensitivity: “By urging viewers to think and reflect on their presumptions about race, many of these films [mobilize] alternative systems of social cognition that challenge dominant systems of moral knowledge”; and they “demonstrate how racist oppression deforms African-American life even as the majority of white Americans perceive it as nothing out of the ordinary” (2008: 4). And of course this critical and subversive potential can be generalized to other cinematic genres such as comedy (think, for example, of *Dear White People*). In fact, since Aristotle, comedy has been considered a particularly apt form of social commentary that can accommodate radical critique. In that sense, we can understand provocative stand-up comics of color such as Dave Chapelle and Margaret

Cho (or even more mainstream ones such as George Lopez, Richard Pryor, or Chris Rock) as radical social critics and epistemic insurrectionists against whiteness.

Just as Leonard Harris (2002) challenges moral theories to meet the challenge of rendering insurrectionist acts not only permissible, but also dutiful, under conditions of oppression, I have developed a similar argument with respect to epistemic oppression: when there are well-entrenched patterns of epistemic violence, epistemic insurrectionary acts should be considered *individually* permissible for victims of such violence and their allies, and *collectively* required by society and by the publics and organizations that can do something to disrupt oppressive dynamics and discontinue patterns of epistemic violence. In the next and final section, following Kristie Dotson's account of "epistemic violence," I will elucidate the kinds of epistemic insurrectionary acts that are required for resisting such violence, sketching and defending the move toward an insurrectionist epistemology that emerges from the recent literature on epistemic injustice.

No Justice, No Peace: Epistemic Violence and Epistemic Resistance

The demonstrators protesting against the killing of Michael Brown in the summer of 2014 were often accused by the authorities and the media of disturbing the peace. But what *peace*? One of their slogans was "No Justice, No Peace," which, far from being a threat, was a way of denouncing that there was no peace to be disturbed to begin with, that such peace was the dangerous and harmful illusion of a privileged class sheltered from the structural violence under which the black majority of Ferguson, Missouri, lives: systematic police brutality, extreme poverty, high unemployment rates, lack of representation in public institutions (from law enforcement to municipal, state, and federal offices), and so forth. Disregarding or denying these realities, indulging in the fiction of a social *peace* that most members of society do not enjoy, *that itself* is a form of epistemic violence: the affirmation of this illusory peace involves a *harmful* performative contradiction, for it performatively reenacts and reinscribes the very violence that it purports to deny, pretending that those whose experiences are being silenced have an equal voice, equal representation, equal access to institutions, and so forth. *Epistemic violence* of this sort, which silences and unfairly constrains the voices of some, is intimately connected with other forms of violence that helps to facilitate, such as psychological and emotional violence, symbolic and cultural violence, institutional (social, political, legal) violence, and even physical and material violence (from being beaten or killed to being denied access to health care and social services).

We need to distinguish the different kinds of violence (physical-material, institutional, structural, epistemic, etc.) that are part of racism, but we also need to elucidate their interrelations and examine how the many faces of racial violence work together in insidious ways. If racial *peace* remains a fiction today because of the many kinds of racial violence that are still pervasive, even if invisible to some segments of the population, the work toward racial justice will require fighting against *all* those patterns of violence, and prior to that another thing is required: making those different forms of violence visible, and calling attention to the fact that their very invisibility is a form of violence, *epistemic violence*. In what follows, following Kristie Dotson, I will elucidate some forms of epistemic violence and some forms of epistemic resistance. Far from being exhaustive, this elucidation is only a small step towards the kind of insurrectionist epistemology needed to fight against epistemic violence.

Building on Gayatri Spivak's (1998) use of the expression "epistemic violence" as a way of marking the silencing of marginalized groups, Kristie Dotson (2011) has

developed an account of epistemic violence by analyzing different ways in which the “on-the-ground practices of silencing” operate. As Dotson puts it, “epistemic violence in testimony is a refusal, intentional or unintentional, of an audience to communicatively reciprocate a linguistic exchange owing to pernicious ignorance” (2011: 238). Dotson identifies two different kinds of silencing that epistemic violence can produce in testimonial exchanges: *testimonial quieting* and *testimonial smothering*. As Dotson explains, “testimonial quieting occurs when an audience fails to identify a speaker as a knower” (2011: 242) because of negative stereotyping, or the operation of what Hill Collins has termed “controlling images,” which heavily influence how black women are socially perceived. Specific to my discussion here, controlling images may stigmatize black women as a group and preclude their being fairly appraised as credible, mature, and capable epistemic agents (see Hill Collins’s analysis of “controlling images” that heavily influence how black women are socially perceived as “mammies,” “jezebels,” or “welfare queens” in Hill Collins 2000: 72–81, and also Hill Collins 2005).

The second kind of silencing produced by epistemic violence that Dotson identifies is *testimonial smothering*, which is a form of self-silencing that occurs when the speaker perceives her audience as unwilling or unable to provide appropriate uptake. As Dotson puts it, “testimonial smothering . . . is the truncating of one’s own testimony in order to insure that the testimony contains only content for which one’s audience demonstrates testimonial competence” (2011: 244). Dotson identifies three circumstances that routinely provokes this kind of self-silencing: (1) when the content of the testimony is unsafe and risky; (2) when the audience demonstrates incompetence with respect to the content of the testimony to the speaker; and (3) when there are patterns of pernicious ignorance that make it unlikely (if not impossible) to be understood and appropriately taken up in that testimonial climate (even if the signals of distrust or inability to understand or believe are implicit or hidden). As Dotson points out, the first case can be illustrated by Kimberlé Crenshaw’s discussions of what has been historically unsafe, risky testimony in “non-white” communities, as for example women-of-colors’ silence around occurrences of domestic violence (Crenshaw 1991). The other two cases can be illustrated by paying attention to the silencing effects of *racial micro-aggressions* (Sue, Capodilupo, and Holder 2008: 329).

Racial micro-aggressions typically function as subtle forms of intimidation and epistemic violence which, if they are not explicitly called out, resisted, and neutralized, can have silencing effects. Sarcastic tones, disapproving glances, skeptical stares, looking confused, puzzled, or unable to follow, and constantly interrupting or questioning one’s meaning are some of the communicative intimidations that can silence people or implicitly encourage them to limit their speech or take a discursive detour. This is well illustrated by one of the examples that Dotson examines. In “Conversations I Can’t Have” (1996), Cassandra Byers Harvin describes an encounter in a public library with a white woman who asked her what she was working on, and when Harvin answered that she was researching raising black sons in the United States, the white woman promptly replied, “How is that any different from raising white sons?” Harvin explains that the question as well as the tone gave her the distinct impression that her interlocutor thought that she was “making something out of nothing” (1996: 16). This clearly had a silencing effect on Harvin, who tells us that she politely pretended that she was running out of time and exited the conversation. As Dotson explains, this racial micro-aggression demonstrated testimonial incompetence on the audience’s

part, but it also performed a *micro-invalidation*, which is “characterized by communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color” (Dotson 2011: 247). In other cases, micro-aggressions can contain micro-insults, micro-intimidations, micro-harassment, and other forms of micro-behaviors that exert epistemic violence. Micro-aggressions are ways of performatively enacting racial insensitivity, often in subtle and insidious ways so that they go almost unrecognized by the people involved (more often by the perpetrators and by the bystanders than by their victims), but not without having consequences and producing epistemic harms that even if they seem negligible can amount to the systematic undermining of the epistemic capacities of subjects and groups. Empirical studies in the social sciences are only now gathering a wealth of evidence of the multiple and far-reaching harms that micro-aggressions can cause to individual subjects and even entire groups.

I want to conclude with the suggestion that, although seemingly small and negligible, a crucial part of an insurrectionist epistemology is *micro-resistance*. Precisely because micro-aggressions occupy such a central part in unfair communicative practices, the eradication of epistemic injustices will require micro-practices that disarm and subvert micro-aggressive moves at the same level at which they occur. Micro-aggressions call for *micro-resistance*, for micro-practices of resistance in which the insidious aggressive moves with disabling effects are neutralized, halted, or at least weakened. Micro-practices of resistance are heavily situated and contextualized moves that often require a lot of inventiveness and cunning as well as other epistemic virtues such as courage. Their effectiveness will never be guaranteed since the resisting act may need many things to succeed (cooperation of others, vulnerability of the targeted aggressor, etc.). But no matter how fragile, precarious, and minimally efficacious, micro-practices of resistance are worth pursuing in a sustained and concerted way because, just as any single act of micro-aggression may not do a lot of harm but collectively micro-aggressions help to maintain a culture of intimidation and epistemic violence, micro-activities of resistance taken collectively can help to undermine, weaken, and ultimately destroy such culture and to create one of support and mutual protection instead, even if no single act of micro-resistance will achieve that by itself.

Examples of micro-resistance can be: answering a question with another question that sends the disabling skeptical exercise back to the questioner; responding to a puzzling look with another puzzling look; to a claim such as “I am not sure I understand you” with a claim that casts similar doubts on the interlocutor; to a stare, gesture, or insinuation that calls into question one’s competence with a stare, gesture, or insinuation that calls into question the aggressor’s authority or ability to call into question other people’s competence, and so forth. And note that acts of micro-resistance do not need to be issued necessarily by the person suffering the epistemic violence of the micro-aggression, but it can be produced effectively (sometimes even more effectively) by others involved in the interaction even though they were not targeted, and in some cases even by bystanders and eavesdroppers. In some cases, micro-invalidations can be countered with a who-are-you-to-invalidate response, or with a way of deflecting or shifting the unfair argumentative burden being posed; but in other cases micro-invalidations may call for resistant micro-validations, or alternative ways of validating and supporting subjects who, in the given context, are not likely to be given full or equal epistemic standing and agency. Micro-practices of resistance can also work preventively, for example by proactively

offering gestures of validation to members of a group that has been stigmatized or is likely to encounter micro-invalidations in a particular context.

If nothing else, acts of micro-resistance can help alleviate or share the energy expended “rebounding” from micro-aggressions. But if effectively deployed and sustained sufficiently over time and across contexts, ideally with institutional backing and a support structure, they can also neutralize or at least counter the denigrating messages that micro-aggressions convey; they can minimize (if not eliminate) the negative consequences micro-aggressions can have; and they can prevent the harms epistemic violence produces or at least protect as much as possible the vulnerabilities of those exposed to it. Note that, although micro-practices of resistance will be performed by particular individuals in particular contexts, they also concern institutional settings, structural conditions, and collective attitudes and collective—or *chained*—actions; and in some cases they can even involve explicit institutional policies and legal frameworks. By supporting micro-practices of resistance, communities, publics, institutions, and their policies and structures can help the prevention of racial micro-aggressions and offer mechanisms of protection for when they happen; they can help to improve climates and facilitate the formation of a counter-culture of support. What Jennifer Saul (2014) has said about sexually harassing and counter-harassing micro-behaviors can also be said about racial micro-aggressions and micro-acts of resistance: we shouldn’t underestimate “the power of small things—microbehaviours or microinequities—to create an unwelcoming environment” (p. 20); but we should not underestimate “the power of small things” to help bring about big changes either. As Saul argues, just as there are microbehaviors that make up harassing environments, there are also microbehaviors that counter them and can prevent the formation of such environments. People are often unaware of the power of microbehaviors. Communities, organizations, and institutions should promote discussions of microbehaviors in their daily activities so that people become more aware of how they can disable harassing attitudes and micro-aggressions, and help to meliorate climates and environments.

Of course epistemic violence goes beyond micro-aggressions and dysfunctional interpersonal dynamics, and an insurrectionist epistemology will need to include many other things besides micro-practices of resistance for fighting epistemic injustices. We need to be attentive to the many faces of racial violence and the complex and multilayered harms that racism produces. We need to pay attention to the complex relations between the interpersonal level and the structural and institutional level at which epistemic injustices operate, and to the agential involvement and complicity with racial epistemic harms of individuals, groups, and institutions, so that we can fully appreciate the diverse ways in which we can encourage solidarity against epistemic violence, instigate insurrectionary attitudes and actions, and mobilize and sustain social movements of resistance striving toward epistemic justice. Micro-practices of resistance are simply some among the many subversive practices we need to cultivate to empower oppressed voices and to facilitate “insurrection of subjugated knowledges” in order to produce a more equitable distribution of epistemic resources and more fair access to and participation in meaning-making and knowledge-producing practices. The multifaceted and heterogeneous fight against the epistemic injustices produced by racial insensitivity will not have an end, but it has no shortage of beginnings, of strategies of resistance and subversive moves which oppressed subjects and their allies have produced. Indeed the fight is well underway: No Justice, No Peace.

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