

Epistemic Exploitation and Ideological Recognition

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In this chapter, I want to develop a thus far comparatively neglected critique of white privilege and entitlement, one which fuses resources from critical social epistemology and contemporary recognition theory. My focus is on making sense of whiteness as a power structure that also manifests itself through practices of epistemic exploitation. I contend that the activity of epistemic exploitation, which is geared towards credibility excess attribution, may be understood as an operational activity of what Axel Honneth has termed 'ideological recognition'. This social pathology is potentially the most concerning of recognition abuses because it mutates the affective dimension of approval and encouragement, a dimension which all intersubjectively vulnerable agents require for a healthy practical relation-to-self. I argue that whereas practices of manifestly unsubtle violent silencing and invisibilisation aim to deprive marginalised and oppressed groups of that affective dimension by obvious practices of degrading, delegitimising, and dehumanising, the practices of epistemic exploitation and ideological recognition both aim to marginalise and oppress precisely through discourses of approval and encouragement that are degrading, delegitimising, and dehumanising. In this way, credibility deficits do not have the monopoly of painful humiliation and trauma.

Introduction

Since starting to make my own contribution to the literature on critical social epistemology, I have focused on mapping out and proposing some ways in which (i) feminist approaches to epistemic injustice and epistemic oppression¹ and (ii) the German idealist-inspired concept of intersubjective recognition² might be said to fruitfully bear on another.

With regard to testimonial injustice, one of the principal types of epistemic injustice termed by Miranda Fricker (2007), I put forward a case for how recognition theory helpfully makes sense of credibility deficits.³ This was further borne out in my articulation of discursive abuse in relation to the Elaine Scarry/Richard Rorty-inspired idea of agential pain.⁴ With regard to hermeneutical injustice, another principal type of epistemic injustice termed by Fricker, both an alleged absence of epistemic resources in a local community required to make sense of that local community's oppression for its members full self-understanding, as well as instances of, what Kristie Dotson has called, 'contributory injustice' leave hermeneutically marginalised

¹ Kristie Dotson defines epistemic oppression as "a persistent and unwarranted infringement on the ability to utilise persuasively shared epistemic resources that hinders one's contributions to knowledge production" (Dotson 2014: 115). For Dotson, systemic practices of epistemic exclusion result in positions and communities that produce deficiencies in social knowledge.

² Fichte is the first theorist of recognition in the Western canon. Briefly put, Fichte contends that for the 'I' to "posit" (*Setzen*) itself as an individual, the 'I' must recognise itself as 'summoned' by another subjectivity. This summons (*Aufforderung*) of another individual limits the freedom of the 'I' out of a proto-Lévinasian deontic perception of the Other's inherent vulnerable freedom and respectability. Indeed, with regard to the Lévinasian point, an interesting question – though one which lies outside the scope of my chapter – is whether the idea of the recognitional summons that may be said to stand in some relation with *le rapport de face à face* is best construed as a 'pleading invitation' or as a 'demand'. Interestingly, Emmanuel Lévinas (TI: 84) gives reason to think such a contention is a false dichotomy.

The first paper to start a conversation between recognition theory and epistemic injustice is McConkey (2004).

³ See Giladi (2018).

⁴ See Giladi (2020).

groups subject to epistemic oppression.⁵ In this respect, I have argued that the primary harm of hermeneutical injustice consists in denying access to the self-interpretational dimensions of rational agency. This keeps marginalised and oppressed subjects under ideological grips.⁶ In other words, hermeneutical injustice maintains the *status quo* either by preventing a marginalised person/group from accessing relevant epistemic capital, or by ensuring that the non-whitecentric, progressive vocabulary of an ideologically-rendered ‘subaltern’ person/group does not figure in wider collective epistemic schemes. Similar to the idea that the primary harm of testimonial injustice is a type of violence that does irreparable damage to the targeted agent’s healthy development as a socialised inquirer, hermeneutical lacunae risk stunting the development of agents *qua* self-interpreting subjects of experience.

What is a common thread in my iteration of the interplay between epistemic injustice and recognition theory is alienation: (i) *being forced out of*, to use Wilfrid Sellars’s expression, the logical space of reasons through the attribution of credibility deficits; (ii) *being deprived of* ways to make sense of one’s own experiences in cases of either asymmetrical epistemic resource distribution or in cases of improper circulation and concomitantly poor, distorted uptake. In this chapter, I do not wish to simply find new ways of talking about alienation. For better or worse, I want to do something more ambitious and hard-hitting. I have realised that whatever critical social epistemological insights I may have had seem too *safe*. They seem too safe, because they are structural features of my own failure in those two papers to attend to arguably the most important contemporary critical theoretic task: the unmasking and sustained critique of privilege. My recognition theory-infused account of discursive abuse and agential pain, whatever critical worth it may have, is directly produced by the privileged epistemic standpoint which I, along with many others, occupy. This is problematic, not because it is a

⁵ “*Contributory injustice* is caused by an epistemic agent’s situated ignorance, in the form of wilful hermeneutical ignorance, in maintaining and utilising structurally prejudiced hermeneutical resources that result in epistemic harm to the epistemic agency of a knower. Both the structurally prejudiced or biased hermeneutical resources and the agent’s situated ignorance are catalysts for contributory injustice” (Dotson 2012: 31). Dotson rightly argues that marginalised people often have no difficulty articulating their experiences. Indeed, the systematic epistemic harm produced by a privileged inquirer’s wilfully ignorant use of the prejudicial features of interpretive capital in a way that violates the epistemic agency of a non-privileged person (or group), includes instances where there are interpretive resources readily available for marginalised groups to sufficiently make sense of their marginalisation. But, crucially, those particular interpretive resources have not been recognised as part of the overall shared hermeneutic resources of a given society. This is due to dominant groups’ negative attitudes towards the authors and producers of those particular interpretive resources. In other words, it is not the case that marginalised groups lack the hermeneutical resources to make sense of their own experiences – but rather that dominant groups, for a plurality of reasons, are not inclined to deem those resources as epistemically and politically significant. As Nora Berenstain puts it, “[i]t is a failure of circulation rather than a failure of creation, and it is due to the refusal of dominant groups to acknowledge epistemic resources that resist assimilation into dominant epistemic schemes” (Berenstain 2016: 585).

⁶ See Elling (forthcoming) for an excellent study of hermeneutical injustice and the theory of ideology.

standpoint and therefore inherently limited as such, but because it is a standpoint that, unless subjected to constant scrutiny and ideology-unmasking, fails to bring to light other faces of oppression, violence, and injustice, which, ironically, are themselves the working of that very privilege in question. More to the point, my recognition theory-infused account runs the real risk of being naïve and insensitive to the workings of identity power and prejudice. For, the very notion of a ‘recognition order’ may presuppose the vocabulary and practices of hierarchical power relations. As Patchen Markell puts it, “[t]his irony makes the pursuit of recognition at best an equivocal instrument of emancipation, replete with double binds”.⁷

To this extent, then, my aim in this chapter is to develop a critique of white privilege and entitlement, which fuses resources from critical social epistemology and contemporary recognition theory. My focus is on making sense of whiteness⁸ as a racialised and colonial power structure and phenomenological stance that also manifests itself through practices of epistemic exploitation.⁹ I contend that the activity of epistemic exploitation, which is logically bound up with specific practices of credibility excess attribution, may be reasonably understood as an operational activity of what Axel Honneth has termed ‘ideological recognition’. This social pathology is potentially the most concerning of recognition abuses because it mutates the affective dimension of approval and encouragement, a dimension which intersubjectively vulnerable agents require for a healthy practical relation-to-self.

To begin, I would like to briefly foreground the notion of epistemic vulnerability. This is important, because recognising epistemic vulnerability as anthropologically significant is required to set up my case about the interrelation between epistemic exploitation and ideological recognition.

I

Epistemic Vulnerability

As human beings, we are characteristically baptised into socialisation schemes that make us intersubjectively vulnerable in a specific way when playing game of giving and asking for reasons: we self-conceive as open to the judgements of others and subject to critical gazes.¹⁰ Our positive affective inclinations towards friends, family members, work colleagues,

⁷ Markell 2003: 5. Cf. Oliver (2001).

⁸ See Du Bois (1903/2007), Baldwin (1955), Morrison (1970, 1992, 1993), hooks (1992), Frankenberg (1993), Mills (1997), Roediger (1998), Owen (2007), and Alcoff (2015). In April 1997, UC Berkeley hosted the first academic conference in the U.S. on whiteness.

⁹ Cf. “whiteness as a structuring property of modern social systems” (Owen 2007: 204).

¹⁰ Cf. Petherbridge 2016: 590.

professional peers, some authority figures, institutions of power, and (increasingly) social media reveal not necessarily in the first instance how lifeworld structures constituting society, personality, and culture (re)produce ‘needy’ agents, but rather the great extent to which our socialisation means that we are not, and cannot be, wholly self-sufficient.¹¹

At the epistemic level, I think it is reasonable to state that, as a socialised agent, one does not view oneself as normatively self-supporting. By this, I mean we do not self-interpret as having no need for or minimally positive affective disposition towards others when judging the world as thus-and-so. Indeed, developmentally speaking, socialisation means that our epistemic inclination towards others, at least in healthy circumstances, lacks the reactive attitudes of disdain, aloofness, indifference, or hostility. Being independent is not equivalent to being dismissive of others. For that matter, developing and eking out one’s independence involves continuously checking one’s individual commitments and judgements against the commitments and judgements of fellow agents.

Crucially, this type of epistemic practice is constitutive both of ordinary talk and normatively saturated political discourse. Common to both types of dialogical interaction and their concomitant social contexts is the acute awareness of feeling open, visible, and perennially assessable, so much so that one cannot help paying close attention to scrutiny by others.¹² Again, this focus on others is not, in the first instance, due to a pathological and obsessive desire for constant validation and positive reinforcement. One cannot help paying close attention to scrutiny by others, because their epistemic presence may be thought of as a shield against doxastic self-delusion and as a summons to develop greater sensitivity and care. Indeed, one might go so far as to say that one actively seeks out the judgements of others, because one, by default, *trusts* others as ameliorative presences.¹³

Specifically, the type of trust here is the confidence that the presence and responsiveness of others offer opportunities for self-awareness and self-improvement. For example, receiving a reviewer’s report on a paper submitted to a professional academic journal which recommends rejection or revision and resubmission can often alert an author to errors and infelicities on the author’s part. For that matter, one would be hard-pressed to find authors failing to acknowledge reviewers once their paper has been officially published. The reason for

¹¹ Cf. “vulnerability as a critical or ethical category, one based on our primary interdependence and intercorporeality as human beings” (Petherbridge 2016: 589).

¹² Cf. “I understand vulnerability neither as an *a priori* normative category nor as merely indicating a form of injury or primary susceptibility to violence, but rather as a general *openness toward the other*” (Petherbridge 2016: 591).

¹³ Cf. Williams 2002:197-98. I am grateful to David Owen here for altering me to Bernard Williams’s remarks about the virtues of truth.

this is not so much that the practice of recognising the symbolic work of reviewers is an instance of professional *bonnes manières*. The reason has more to do with the type of epistemic vulnerability I have sketched and the significant extent to which we are intersubjectively moulded and ‘horizontally’ oriented, to use Adriana Cavarero’s turn of phrase.¹⁴

However, cruel recognition orders deliberately prey on this type of vulnerability, namely a socialised aversion to, what Kant termed, ‘logical egoism’.¹⁵ Cruel recognition orders work to manipulate and pervert the communicative dynamics in the game of giving and asking for reasons by making those wrongly excluded from the logical space of reasons think and feel as though their rejection is entirely the result of their failings. Systemic testimonial non-recognition and credibility deficit attribution permeate one’s naturally vulnerable self-interpretation to the extent that individuals or social groups are made to blame themselves for not being deemed worthy enough to be accorded credibility. In addition, there is a significant danger that testimonial non-recognition and the lasting effects of discursive abuse on, what Honneth has called ‘self-confidence’, can be so systemic, as in gaslighting, that the victim can end up thinking *they* are at fault or that they *deserve* humiliating treatment.¹⁶

Importantly, the (re)production of manifestly hostile epistemic environments geared towards systemic credibility deficit attribution is not exhaustive of how cruel recognition orders exploit socialised epistemic vulnerability. What receives comparatively much *less* attention in the growing literature on critical social epistemology and recognition theory is how cruel recognition orders, given their drive to find new ways of preserving old oppressions, often take advantage of socialised epistemic vulnerability in the following way: through particular power relations governing the affective dialectics of receiving praise, so much so that the activity of praising people in specific socio-epistemic contexts may well represent the most effective way of maintaining patterns of domination and unequal power structures that benefit the *status quo*. To put this another way, a manifestly kind word or gentle nudge and touch might contain more venom than a Trumpian look of unbridled disgust and ferocious contempt.

The contention that praise can be a tool to sediment structures of oppression is one of Black feminism’s many powerful insights. In what immediately follows, I devote attention first to how Patricia Hill Collins reveals practices of pathological praise. I then turn to Emmalon

¹⁴ See Cavarero (2016).

¹⁵ Viz. APPV: 128-129 and LL: §57, 563; §740. See Deligiorgi (2002) for an engaging discussion of Kant on logical egoism.

¹⁶ See Honig (2021) for further on this.

Davis's analysis of credibility excess attribution, which provides a different but complementary way of revealing practices of pathological praise.

II

Collins and Davis on Pathological Praise

Central to Patricia Hill Collins's critical social theory is her account of the "negative controlling images"¹⁷ that constitute the "matrix of domination"¹⁸ and the "structural domain of power"¹⁹ responsible for (re)producing intersectional injustices that oppress Black women. For Collins, there are four principal negative controlling images of Black women:²⁰ (i) *the mammy* – the desexualised, contented, obedient domestic labourer in White households; (ii) *the matriarch* – the 'sassy' working mother who is rarely at home, emasculates her husband, and neglects her children; (iii) *the welfare mother/queen* – the avaricious, domineering, working-class woman who leeches on state-benefits; (iv) *the Jezebel/whore/'hoochie'* – the sex-obsessed young woman whose intense and wide carnal appetites are never sated and whose erotic practices and speech acts are a clear marker of deviancy.

The mammy is the controlling image that I wish to focus on, precisely because unlike the matriarch, the welfare queen, and the Jezebel, its oppressiveness is more insidious than the crass, unabashed abusiveness of the other principal controlling images: a contented, asexual, maternal Black servant who is not only unfailingly respectful to her White employers, but also committed to "teaching Black children their assigned place in White power structures"²¹ is someone who receives *praise* for all these traits. Indeed, while the 'good wife', namely a bourgeois, White, heterosexual, able-bodied ciswoman, might be said to struggle with denying her sexual impulses and therefore merit choleric indignation from the patriarchy should she focus on her self-eroticisation, the mammy's desexualised subjectivity and her adoration of her White family means that she is only focused on performing exploitable labour tasks that reproduce the White lifeworld²² and White systems. In this respect, the mammy is lauded

¹⁷ Collins 2000: 10. See also King (1973), hooks (1982), White (1985), Carby (1987), and Morton (1991).

¹⁸ Collins 2000: 18.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

²⁰ Cf. David S. Owen's notion of conditioning "cultural representations" (Owen 2007: 207).

Collins also construes the 'Black lady' as a controlling image, but I do not take her as thinking the Black lady controlling image operates with the *same* level of coercive force and oppressive power as the other four controlling images. I think an argument could be made that Collins takes the Black lady controlling image as logically dependent on the mammy and the matriarch frames. For this reason, I deem the four controlling images listed in the body of the chapter as 'principal' controlling images.

²¹ Collins 2000: 73.

²² Cf. Owen 2007: 213.

because she enthusiastically bathes in intersectional servitude. That praise further entrenches her in oppressive power structures. bell hooks makes this point especially effectively:

Her greatest virtue was of course her love for white folk whom she willingly and passively served. The mammy image was portrayed with affection by whites because it epitomised the ultimate sexist-racist vision of ideal black womanhood – complete submission to the will of whites. In a sense whites created in the mammy figure a black woman who embodied solely those characteristics they as colonisers wished to exploit. They saw her as the embodiment of woman as passive nurturer, a mother figure who gave all without expectation of return, who not only acknowledged her inferiority to whites but who loved them. The mammy as portrayed by whites poses no threat to the existing white patriarchal social order for she totally submits to the white racist regime.²³

Significantly, the extent to which the mammy is ontologically and politically docile and devoid of any type of erotic sensuality, so much so that there is no risk of becoming sexually deviant, suggests that the mammy is *almost* (but not quite) an ideal patriarchal woman: she is passive, non-agentive, enjoys being exploited as a (socio-economically disadvantaged Black) woman, *but* she is not sexually attractive.

In terms of the pathologies of praise in this controlling image, I think one may contend that the more the mammy serves White power structures, the more praise she receives.²⁴ And the positive affect of praise encourages her to serve White power structures with even more relish and blissful servitude as an Aunt Jemima. This, in turn, reproduces the cycle of oppression and maintains the sexist-racist *status quo* by also preventing the mammy from achieving intersectional consciousness of modern ideology, modern institutions, and modern moral grammars.²⁵ As long as she is yet to achieve intersectional consciousness, her liberation remains in stasis.

On the more social epistemological side of things concerning pathologies of praise, I now want to turn the discussion to credibility excesses – i.e. identity power-mediated hypervalorisations of a speaker's testimony/testimonial capacity. *Prima facie*, it would seem such a discussion may struggle to get off the ground, because Fricker rules out that a credibility excess involves the (primary) wrong of testimonial injustice. Indeed, Fricker provides a short argument that logically precludes a credibility excess from being counted as *any* kind of

²³ hooks 1982: 84.

²⁴ As Kathryn Starnes helpfully raised in conversation with me, the mammy may also receive praise for her neglect of her own children – i.e. she is lauded for the very activity other Black women are criticised for doing under the matriarch controlling image. The result is the creation a hierarchy of 'good' neglect of one's children and 'bad' neglect with the determining factor being subservience to the White family.

²⁵ I think it is well worth investigating how the type of Black consciousness constitutive of African-American Black Power political movements, critical legal studies, and critical race theory sits in *logical* relation with Kwasi Wiredu's concept of 'epistemic awakening' – viz. Wiredu (1992).

normative deficiency. According to her, to be wronged in one's capacity as knower with respect to testimonial exchange and uptake presupposes that one has been deprived of epistemic dignity by the hearer. To be "*wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower*";²⁶ means that that the knower must be undermined, insulted, or withheld "proper respect"²⁷ *qua* subject of knowledge. Thus, so Fricker's argument goes here, a speaker is subject to testimonial injustice and experiences its primary harm "if and only if she receives a credibility deficit owing to identity prejudice in the hearer".²⁸

In this way, under Fricker's argument, were one to propose that the failure to properly recognise and accord somebody the epistemic acknowledgement they merit is an act of abuse, in the sense of forcibly depriving the individual of a progressive social environment in which the epistemic recognition accorded to them plays a significant role in enabling and fostering their self-confidence as a knowing agent, such a contention could only be true of credibility *deficits*. It could not be true of credibility *excesses*. Credibility excesses, on this picture, are merely "(unusually) disadvantageous in various ways",²⁹ as opposed to anything harmful to the speaker. Indeed, for Fricker, a credibility excess disadvantages a speaker by habituating epistemic hubris and obnoxiousness such that "a range of epistemic virtues are put out of his reach, rendering him closed-minded, dogmatic, blithely impervious to criticism, and so on".³⁰ However, becoming arrogant and insufferable does not wrong an agent in their capacity as a knower.

Responding to Fricker, Emmalon Davis has argued that practices of credibility excess attribution *targeting people of colour* count as a wrongful, as opposed to merely disadvantaging, act. As Davis writes, "Fricker's discussion of credibility excess overlooks entirely the ways in which marginalised speakers (as opposed to privileged speakers) are subjected to prejudicially inflated assessments of their credibility".³¹ It is this occlusion by Fricker, whose imagined hyper-valourised speaker is "a member of a ruling elite, and that his education and entire upbringing are subtly geared to installing this message firmly in his psychology",³² which creates a serious problem for her position: Fricker's occlusion prevents her from *seeing* that credibility excess attribution as *harmful* (as opposed to merely (unusually) disadvantaging): racialised speakers subjected to credibility excess attribution by positive

²⁶ Fricker 2007: 20.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Davis 2016: 486.

³² Fricker 2007: 20.

typecasting and spokesperson accreditation are undermined, insulted, or withheld proper respect *qua* subjects of knowledge. The wrong of credibility excess attribution, therefore, is the wrong of testimonial injustice.

According to Davis, “[a]n identity-prejudicial credibility excess ... occurs when a speaker is assessed to be credible with respect to some bit of knowledge on the basis of prejudicial stereotypes associated with the speaker’s social identity”.³³ In other words, credibility excess attribution involves a hearer viewing the speaker as epistemically hyper-reliable (rather than hypo-reliable) because the speaker is a member of a social group which is typecast positively (rather than negatively). To put this another way, while credibility deficits often stem from the hearer’s failure to “see his interlocutors in epistemic colour”,³⁴ credibility excesses might be said to overload the colour field in a way that harms minorities in a unique way.

Building on Uma Narayan’s and Audré Lorde’s respective insights that positive stereotyping construes minorities as “virtual encyclopaedias of information”³⁵ about gendered, racial, and/or sexual oppression,³⁶ Davis contends that the harm of credibility excess is the whole process of having to “perform a specific act of labour”.³⁷ To use her own examples to illustrate the point about targeted expectations of certain speakers subject to credibility excess attribution:

MATH HELP: A group of American high-school students struggle to complete a difficult algebra question during their lunch period. After several failed attempts to solve the problem among themselves, the students decide to seek outside help. The students have heard that Asian-Americans are particularly good at math, so they ask an Asian-American student seated nearby for help with the problem.³⁸

[I]magine that you are an African American, female college student. You are the only person of colour in the seminar room and your class is discussing an article entitled ‘Black Males, Social Imagery, and the Disruption of Pathological Identities: Implications for Research and Teaching’. It is not long before discussion lulls and the professor turns directly to you and says, “So, _____, what would your experience with this be?” Upon hearing your name, you bristle. Experience with what? Does the professor think you are a black male? Or that you suffer from a pathological identity? Perhaps you didn’t even get a chance to read the article in its entirety since you were up all night studying for the biology exam you will take in your next class. At any rate, none of that

³³ Davis 2016: 487.

³⁴ Fricker 2007: 71.

³⁵ Narayan 1997: 132.

³⁶ “Black and Third World people are expected to educate white people as to our humanity. Women are expected to educate men. Lesbians and gay men are expected to educate the heterosexual world. The oppressors maintain their position and evade responsibility for their own actions. There is a constant drain of energy ...” (Lorde 1993: 115). Cf. Lorde 1993: 113.

³⁷ Davis 2016: 490.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 487.

matters. You must now think quickly of something to say, as the rest of the class eagerly awaits your testimony.³⁹

Focusing on the second example specifically, the type of racial gaze on the Black female student is hostile.⁴⁰ Though, its hostility is not commensurable or logically reducible to the racial gaze of the Benetton's shop clerk blowing bubble gum at Patricia Williams.⁴¹ While the latter type of hostility demonstrates Trumpian contempt for a Black woman *qua* Black woman, the former type of hostility involves exerting pressure (intentional or not) on a Black woman, where the pressure is a crippling norm of burdensome expectation: the Black female student has to fulfil her moral-epistemic 'duty' to educate the White people in the room. This creates a type of double-bind, for (a) if the Black female student bears the burden, she is symbolically and materially harmed in doing so; but (b) if she refuses to bear the burden, she fails to live up to White expectations, and subsequently merits reactive attitudes of hurt, resentment, and aggression.

Regarding (a), the harm of bearing the burden and performing the epistemic labour tasks amounts to, what Davis calls, 'epistemic exploitation'.⁴² This involves the

increased risk of becoming overburdened by requests to 'educate' others. When extra epistemic responsibilities are routinely allocated to members of underrepresented communities, these individuals find themselves confronted with higher volumes of epistemic labour than their dominant peers. Often, this labour is not compensated (or is inadequately compensated); sometimes the labour is not even recognised as labour.⁴³

Much of what Davis writes here synchronises, at least in a *formal* sense, to a fair degree with two of my own experiences.

- (i) I recall a White friend of mine saying the following to a Black friend of mine in London in 2017 while we were having lunch together and the conversation turned to ameliorative discourse: "Because you are a person of colour, you are in a far

³⁹ Ibid., pp. 491-92.

⁴⁰ It is reasonable to think the racial gaze at the Asian-American student is hostile, too.

⁴¹ See Williams (1991).

⁴² Manissa McCleave Maharawal's lived experience paints a powerful picture of the phenomenological of epistemic exploitation and the range of reactive attitudes in response to credibility excess attribution:

"Let me tell you what it feels like to stand in front of a white man and explain privilege to him. It hurts. It makes you tired. Sometimes it makes you want to cry. Sometimes it is exhilarating. Every single time it is hard. Every single time I get angry that I have to do this, that this is my job, that this shouldn't be my job. Every single time I am proud of myself that I've been able to say these things because I used to not be able to and because some days I just don't want to." (<http://www.leftturn.org/so-real-it-hurts-notes-occupy-wall-street>)

⁴³ Davis 2016: 492. Cf. Berenstain 2016: 573.

better position than me to talk about racial oppression. So, it's really down to you here".

- (ii) As a person of hybrid Jewish heritage – my paternal grandmother is an Ashkenazi Holocaust survivor; my paternal grandfather is Sephardic – I have found myself epistemically exploited by non-Jewish friends in conversation: despite their genuinely well-intentioned desires⁴⁴ to learn about antisemitism from Jewish folk (or at least 'Jewish-enough' folk like me, to use an expression I heard recently), some of my non-Jewish friends fail to sufficiently grasp the unacknowledged labour and invariably recycled trauma of those who have experienced the symbolic and material harms of antisemitism either directly themselves or indirectly through their family history.⁴⁵

Should the kind of propositional content extracted from the targeted speaker suit the interests and *Weltanschauung* of the epistemic exploiter, but the targeted speaker's racial identity represent an inconvenience for the epistemic exploiter, the discourses produced by the targeted speaker may well be appropriated by the epistemic exploiter due to whiteness as the 'coloniality of power'⁴⁶ that views the targeted speaker's speech as ripe for the taking and subsequent legitimation.⁴⁷ However, should the kind of propositional content extracted from the targeted speaker challenge the interests and *Weltanschauung* of the epistemic exploiter, and

⁴⁴ In cases of extremely pathological epistemic exploitation, where this is no reasonable ground for thinking the hearer is genuinely well-intentioned, Berenstain has proposed that "[t]he privileged demonstrate entitlement to the labour and means of production of knowledge but fail to actually recognise the goods produced as contributions to knowledge" (Berenstain 2016: 586). I think such a practice by the privileged may be reasonably thought of as invisibilisation. However, interestingly, what Berenstain has proposed poses a diagnostic challenge to the recognition theorist: it would *not* be correct to claim that no trace (or at least minimally operative trace) of what Honneth has termed 'antecedent recognition' (viz. Honneth 2008: 52) is involved in the evaluative perception of the epistemically exploited target here. The epistemically exploited target is still *automatically* viewed as an emotional and intentional subject whose sheer presence makes non-neutral claims on the hearer (viz. Honneth 2008: 34); the epistemically exploited target is *not* perceived as a "merely observable [object] lacking all psychic impulse or emotion" (Honneth 2008: 58). Mis/non-recognising the goods produced as not contributions to knowledge *presupposes* according antecedent recognition to the epistemically exploited target. In other words, such a practice by the privileged has no first-order pathology of invisibilisation *qua* antecedent recognition but has a second-order pathology of invisibilisation *qua* mis/non-recognition.

⁴⁵ Indeed, as Davis notes, and Aidan McGlynn (2020) further develops, epistemic exploitation is dehumanising in various ways that directly bear on Martha Nussbaum's cluster concept of objectification (1995):

- An epistemically exploited person is ontologically construed as type of tool.
- An epistemically exploited person is fungible, insofar as having the status of a 'spokesperson' and/or a 'typecast' means that the agent is, in principle, replaceable and interchangeable at no cost to the epistemic exploiter.
- An epistemically exploited person is violable, because their memories and experiences can be broken into for the sake of extracting the needed information demanded by the epistemic exploiter.
- An epistemically exploited person has their subjectivity denied, to the extent that their pain and/or righteous indignation at being nudged to recycle trauma when educating others is ignored.

⁴⁶ Viz. Quijano (1999/2007, 2000a, 2000b).

⁴⁷ See Davis (2018) for further on epistemic appropriation.

the targeted speaker's social identity bothers the epistemic exploiter, the discourses produced by the targeted speaker risk being dismissed as legitimate features of the logical space of reasons, thereby entrenching contributory injustice.⁴⁸ Such invisibilisation is particularly vicious; it is a degradation of important communities and their specific epistemic constellations. To quote Leon Moosavi here, “[o]ne may even say that we are witnessing a kind of intellectual genocide”.⁴⁹

Regarding (b), if Davis's Black female student actively resists-to-the-point-of-squarely-refusing the demand placed on her through the credibility excess attribution, then two interrelated harms may be said to occur. The first of which is the additional psychological distress and effort of having to confront a furtive but nonetheless warped racist response to her legitimate resistance-cum-refusal. The furtive and warped racist response is centred on White hurt and cries of White liberal pain: the Black female student would be deemed as having disappointed White people, her own racial community, *and* is consequently blameworthy for stymying the noble aspiration for racial unity – she let the eager-to-learn, epistemically and socio-politically virtuous White audience down.⁵⁰ They thirsted to learn from her expertise as a Black woman, but have now been substantially intellectually deprived and left none the wiser about ameliorative discourse. She is also charged with letting the African-American community down and furthering entrenched racial division by not showing epistemic kindness to humble White people: her lack of epistemic kindness only serves to reinforce narratives of ‘anti-honky’ dispositions in the African-American community, which serves to fan the flames of racial tension. The second harm that may be said to occur stems from a more traditional, non-furtive racist response to her legitimate resistance-cum-refusal: her act of defiance is met with reactive attitudes of acute resentment and concerted aggression, because she has explicitly challenged sexist-racist supremacist power relations.⁵¹ She has unmasked ideology. This leaves

⁴⁸ The following passage by Linda Smith cited in Mignolo 2009: 172 is worth highlighting here: “One of the supposed characteristics of primitive peoples was that we could not use our minds or intellects. We could not invent things, we could not create institutions or history, we could not imagine, we could not produce anything of value, we did not know how to use land and other resources from the natural world, we did not practice the ‘arts’ of civilization. By lacking such values we disqualified ourselves, not just from civilization but from humanity itself. In other words, we were not ‘fully human’; some of us were not even considered partially human. *Ideas about what counted as human in association with the power to define people as human or not human were already encoded in imperial and colonial discourses prior to the period of imperialism covered here*” (Smith 1999: 25 – Mignolo's emphasis).

⁴⁹ Moosavi 2020: 338. I am grateful to Sana Rahim for pointing me in the direction of this paper.

⁵⁰ Cf. Berenstain 2016: 570 for a point about the request from dominant social groups being ideologically branded as epistemically virtuous.

⁵¹ Cf. Owen 2007: 207.

her vulnerable to retributive symbolic and material violence, because she is an epistemic Jezebel.

There is compelling reason to suppose that epistemic violence⁵² is operative in practices of credibility excess attribution,⁵³ insofar as the activity of epistemic exploitation is itself a violent practice. For, the exploitative act involves the hearer's wilful or non-wilful ignorance⁵⁴ of and lack of empathic salience to the speaker's specific subjectivity and the symbolic and material cost of their epistemic work here.⁵⁵ Indeed, the ignorance and lack of empathic salience on display stem from a coloniality of power and its dehumanising practices geared towards violating the speaker and denying their subjectivity in part by "bracketing 'secondary qualities' (affects, emotions, desires, anger, humiliation, etc.)".⁵⁶ My point here, thus, stands in a supporting relation to Derald Sue et al.'s proposal that racial microinvalidation is "characterised by communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of colour".⁵⁷

Indeed, the culturally hegemonic hearer's expectation that the speaker is there to educate them serves as a means of coercive quasi-silencing the speaker through power relations governing the type of speech act the speaker makes under the spoken (and unspoken) normative requirements: while the ideologically-rendered subaltern is more than capable of speaking, their speech in cases of epistemic exploitation is shaped by and directed to serve the

⁵² Dotson, partly inspired by Gayatri Spivak's landmark 1988 article on subalternity, defines epistemic violence as "a refusal, intentional or unintentional, of an audience to communicatively reciprocate a linguistic exchange owing to pernicious ignorance" (Dotson 2011: 238).

⁵³ I am again grateful to Starnes for the following important and sophisticated remark here: there is also a hierarchy of knowing in operation across all the examples discussed thus far in my chapter. My own two examples and the example of Davis's Black female student are different from Davis's example of the Asian-American student – that is not to say there is a hierarchy of harm here, just that there is a subtle difference between some of the examples. My own two examples and Davis's Black female student example focus on how the knower is lauded as knowing things because of the knowers' personal experiences. There is an implicit assumption across the three cases that these epistemic agents did not have to expend effort to know what they know; they know what they know simply because of the agents' respective social identity positionality. There is legitimate ground for thinking that epistemic communities typically and routinely value knowledge perceived as having been gained this way far less in a way. Such de-prioritisation hearkens to how dominant epistemologies treat 'folk' knowledge. By offering 'praise' or 'recognition' of this 'specialist' knowledge that is in service to White people, other (indeed often more valued) forms of knowledge are made less available, much in the same way that the mammy is praised for looking after White children. The racist assumption that Asian folk are 'naturally' better at STEM subjects might also rely on this idea to some extent at least. For, the White students could solve the tricky algebra puzzle and do well in their STEM homework if effort on their part was expended (thereby devaluing any STEM knowledge Asian students acquire but also relying on an unspoken eugenicist framework). The other examples I have made use of abnegate any responsibility on the part of White people, who, given their social identity positionality, cannot possibly possess *this* kind of knowledge.

⁵⁴ See Mills (1997, 2007), Sullivan (2005), and Sullivan & Tuana (2007).

⁵⁵ Cf. Alcoff 1998: 8.

⁵⁶ Mignolo 2009: 177.

⁵⁷ Sue et al. 2007: 274.

whitecentric, asymmetrical power relational schema.⁵⁸ The hearer is not genuinely interested in the speech of the speaker *qua* the speaker's epistemic integrity and their *voice*, otherwise the hearer would not operate as an epistemic exploiter and seek to praise the speaker in *this* context. The hearer's attention is on the speech of the speaker *qua* what propositional content and epistemic capital might be mined from the speaker to beneficially serve the hearer *qua* culturally hegemonic agent. Fanon expresses the point arrestingly:

To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilisation ... The problem that we confront in this chapter is this: The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionally whiter – that is, he will *come closer to being a real human being* – in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language.⁵⁹

Situations such as this, therefore, are not merely symptomatic, but *constitutive* of an epistemic economy which is structured by norms of intersectional disciplinarity.⁶⁰ Given this, the logical space of reasons is now subjected to disclosing critique, insofar as illocutionary speech acts directly attached to credibility excess attributions clearly do not point to democratic forms of association. As Jürgen Habermas might put it, the hearer's knowledge-constitutive interest is not communicative;⁶¹ it is instrumental. The following passage by Patricia Williams highlights the connection between entitlement and a logical space of reasons whose constitution is whitecentric and increasingly disciplinary rather than communicative:

As well-intentioned as [the White folk mainly comprising a group on a walking tour of Harlem keen on dropping in and out of Holy Week services to see how the local Black church communities mark Easter] were, I was left with the impression that *no one existed for them who could not be governed by their intentions*. (Emphasis added)⁶²

In cases of racialised credibility excesses, such is the pathological nature of the discursive exchange and norms of assertion that the ideologically-rendered subaltern who

⁵⁸ Cf. “a task of decolonial thinking is the unveiling of epistemic silences of Western epistemology and affirming the epistemic rights of the racially devalued” (Mignolo 2009: 162). Cf. Owen 2007: 208.

It is also worth reflecting on this important passage by Paulin J. Hountondji, which is cited in Mignolo 2009: 167: “it seems urgent to me that the scientists in Africa, and perhaps more generally in the Third World, question themselves on the meaning of their practices as scientists, its real function in the economy of the entirety of scholarship, its place in the process of production of knowledge on a worldwide basis” (Hountondji 1982/1992: 238).

⁵⁹ BSWM: 17-18.

⁶⁰ Because the epistemic economy is structured in this way, it maintains the ideological myth of, to use Santiago Castro-Gómez's expression, the ‘zero point’. Critical social theories, then, with regard to their positive, transformative work, is in the business of promoting practices and cultures of ‘epistemic disobedience’, which “means to delink from the illusion of the zero point epistemology” (Mignolo 2009: 160).

⁶¹ See Habermas (1971).

⁶² Williams 1991: 72.

epistemically serve the cultural hegemon risk either losing their ability to express their own, local, radical doxastic commitments, or being able to have their own, local, radical voice heard.⁶³ In the former case at least, the Black female student risks starting to model her speech on sexist-racist epistemically exploitative frames. In this way, the credibility excess attribution's loaded praise is directed at how well the Black female student would perform the set epistemic tasks: if she performs to a high standard, she is deemed epistemically 'virtuous'. She would then receive acclaim, because her compliant speech makes her an epistemic mammy; if she performs to a low standard, or even refuses to perform her task, she is deemed epistemically 'vicious'. She would then receive admonishment, because her rebellious speech makes her an epistemic Jezebel.

Being able to speak and know the conditions of one's epistemic oppression is made significantly more difficult and invalidating if one is subject to coercive power relations and a coloniality of power that either silence, manipulate, or forcibly consign one to the margins. In this respect, then, there is an acute vulnerability here: the vulnerability in question is not the ordinary vulnerability associated with illocutionary speech acts that *eo ipso* disclose oneself to one's conversational partner by revealing the speaker's subjective world to a hearer.⁶⁴ The vulnerability in question is one associated with a *speaker's psychic precarity* – specifically, their fear of being in conversation and having to speak, let alone in situations where one feels an obligation to speak in response to receiving credibility excess attribution.⁶⁵ As Davis writes,

targets [of credibility excess attribution] are placed under tremendous pressure to deliver on behalf of their entire constituency. Indeed, targets may experience anxiety, embarrassment, or even anger

⁶³ This point here is inspired by Cora Diamond's rich analysis of the respective ways in which Alasdair MacIntyre, Stanley Cavell, and Iris Murdoch make sense of what it is to lose one's concepts. Such loss, to my mind, represents a type of alienation *qua* capability deprivation and epistemic impoverishment: the absence of "the capacity for a reflective use of ... concepts", which leaves a language-user "unable to make intelligible to himself ... the responsibilities and commitments internal to the moral life in which ... they participate" (Diamond 1988: 261). I take what Diamond writes here about incapacitation to signify the distressing situation in which an inquirer suffers from hermeneutical paralysis produced by discursive atrophy: being unable to articulate salient features of one's experience for one's own full understanding is caused by operating with a conceptual repertoire that is increasingly marked by decay. The decay results from an increasingly desensitised intellective capacity for rendering things intelligible to the inquirer *qua* the internal structure of their epistemic-moral life. Taking into account the concern about loss and its negative affect, I think there is much to be said here about developing a connection between Diamond/MacIntyre/Cavell/Murdoch and Honneth's reworking of 'reification' (*Verdinglichung*) in György Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness*: for Lukács (who fused Hegel, Marx, Weber, and Simmel together), reification is a constitutive and totalising feature of capitalism's practices of commodity fetishism and its mode of production's objectifying, dehumanising, and alienating nature. Honneth, however, rejects the Marxian macrosocio-economic focus on these deadening effects of capitalism on subjectivity and productive labour. He conceptualises reification as a forgetting of a primal, pre-discursive, purely affective, *non-moral* relation of care (in Heidegger's technical sense of *Sorge*) and engagement with the Other as a human being. See Honneth (1995b, 2008).

⁶⁴ See Giladi & Petherbridge (2020).

⁶⁵ Cf. "the obligation to respond to every hailing" (Althusser 2014: 191).

at having their social identity made into a public spectacle. Alternatively, the target may fear public shaming or ridicule if she does not possess (and transfer) the knowledge prejudicially attributed.⁶⁶

The key philosophical issue I now wish to address is what would be gained, if anything, by bringing in Frankfurt School recognition theoretic resources into the Black feminist conversation about epistemic exploitation and controlling images.⁶⁷ Specifically, the question concerns whether, and to what extent, recognition theoretic resources may help explain the harm of credibility excess attribution and epistemic exploitation.

III

Ideological Recognition and Explanatory Power

For Honneth, intersubjective recognition – acknowledging and being acknowledged by others – is the principal (postmetaphysical)⁶⁸ concept for making sense of societal normative deficiencies, as well as for mapping out social emancipatory visions.⁶⁹ Intersubjective recognition is also given pride of place by Honneth because of its psychosocial developmental

⁶⁶ Davis 2016: 492.

⁶⁷ I have written ‘Frankfurt School recognition theoretic resources’ to demarcate a clear difference between Honneth’s critical theory of society and Charles Taylor’s ‘politics of recognition’ (1994). There is compelling reason to think Honneth’s position concerning types of recognition struggles, the epistemology of disrespect, and the moral grammar of social pathologies is not only irreducible to but also *better* than Taylor’s. This is not least because Taylor’s multiculturalism is logically wedded to a crude, reifying identity politics that reproduces kind essentialism, and operates under a unidirectional, patronising framework of recognition that is a structural feature of hegemonic thinking.

⁶⁸ Postmetaphysical thinking is typified by Habermas’s fallibilist methodology of rational reconstruction and move to the pragmatics of communication, rather than resource to a representationalist mirror of nature: “[The former] concedes primacy to world-disclosing language – as the medium for the possibility of reaching understanding, for social cooperation, and for self-controlled learning processes – over world-generating subjectivity” (Habermas 1992: 153). According to Habermas, then, metaphysical thinkers such as Descartes, Kant, Fichte, and Hegel – the principal ‘philosophers of the subject’ – are said to peer “right through language as though it were a glassy medium without properties” (Habermas 1992: 161). Habermas’s own position manifestly prefers the postmetaphysical contractarian model of uncoerced intersubjectively constituted will-formation and validity claims in a communicative community of free and equal individuals – which is, in effect, the rationally reconstructed normative content of Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* (viz. Habermas 1987: 316). Honneth joins Habermas in postmetaphysically questing after undamaged intersubjectivity, where such an intersubjectivity contains the seeds for emancipatory immanent transcendence. In this sense, Honneth is wedded to the anti-Adornian turn in Frankfurt School critical theory, insofar as neither he nor Habermas put their respective energies into what they deem the metaphysical project of finding and protecting undamaged subjectivity. However, while Habermas’s postmetaphysical project focuses on detailing the communicative rational structure of speech acts, Honneth’s postmetaphysical critical theory of society focuses on detailing the moral grammars revealed by interweaving social structures and practices of recognition. For Habermas, the focal point of the Intersubjectivist Turn is a Kantian pragmatist rational reconstruction of communicative practices, which aims to principally answer the weak transcendental question ‘How is mutual understanding possible in general?’. For Honneth, however, the focal point of the Intersubjectivist Turn is a Hegel-inspired normative reconstruction of both individual and social recognition practices: processes of intersubjective recognition explain the development of both individuals and societies; and processes of intersubjective recognition mark a society’s normative standing. See Gledhill (2020) for a critique of construing the Habermas-Honneth difference this way.

⁶⁹ Honneth 1995a: 95. Cf. Honneth 2007a: 4.

importance, insofar as “practical identity-formation presupposes intersubjective recognition”.⁷⁰ What this means is not simply that subjectivity is constituted intersubjectively, but that subjectivity is vulnerable to the modalities and affective dynamics of recognition. The aetiology of social conflict, under Honneth’s account, may be traced to feelings of having been disrespected through recognition deprivations.⁷¹ The negative affect of disrespect stems from not being accorded the recognition one expects to legitimately command. As Honneth writes:

Feelings of having been disrespected ... form the core of moral experiences that are part of the structure of social interaction because human subjects encounter one another with expectations for recognition, expectations on which their psychological integrity turns. Feelings of having been unjustly treated can lead to collective actions to the extent to which they come to be experienced by an entire circle of subjects as typical for their social situation ... [T]he models of conflict that start from the collective feelings of having been unjustly treated are those that trace the emergence and course of social struggles back to moral experiences of social groups who face having ... recognition withheld from them ... [In this case] we are dealing with the analysis of a struggle over the intersubjective conditions for personal integrity unjustly treated are those that trace the emergence and course of social struggles back to moral experiences of social groups who face having ... recognition withheld from them ... [In this case] we are dealing with the analysis of a struggle over the intersubjective conditions for personal integrity.⁷²

Disrespect, for Honneth, is the result of either *mis-recognition* or *non-recognition*: in cases of mis-recognition, the recognition order of a society acknowledges the subjectivity of a minority, but wrongly does not accord their subjectivity the *same* level of positive value as that of the majority. In cases of non-recognition, the recognition order of a society fails to acknowledge the subjectivity of a minority, wrongly according that minority *no* positive normative status.

Both mis-recognition and non-recognition are severely detrimental to human development at a symbolic and material level, since misrecognition and nonrecognition harm our inherent intersubjective vulnerability: “[t]hrough intersubjective recognition, [one] is engaged in the process of self-realisation with respect to [one’s] practical relation-to-self”,⁷³ to the extent that the self-realisation of any individual can only be achieved in a progressive social environment, an environment devoid of systemic practices of insult and degradation. As Robert Sinnerbrink puts it, “[t]he effects of social misrecognition involve not only distorted forms of communication but the real corporeal experience of suffering; this remains a fundamental experience essential to any account of misrecognition as a moral injury to the integrity, and hence freedom and dignity, of the autonomous subject”.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Honneth 1995a: 92.

⁷¹ See Honneth (2007a).

⁷² Honneth 1995a: 163.

⁷³ Zurn 2015: 25.

⁷⁴ Sinnerbrink 2011: 204.

However, for all Honneth's insistence on the inherently social and dialogic characteristics of recognition and the horizontal optics of intersubjective recognition, thinkers such as Amy Allen, Julie Connolly, Estelle Ferrarese, Markell, Lois McNay, Kelly Oliver, Beate Rössler, and Iris Marion Young have argued that his critical social theory, ironically, involves a vertical model of recognition and risks reproducing moral grammars that serve to engrain oppression.⁷⁵ As Oliver writes,

[Honneth] assumes that recognition is something that others confer on the subject in order to give that subject a sense of self-respect An effective aspect of the pathology of oppression is that those who are dominant have the power to create, confer, or withhold recognition, which operates as cultural currency Within the pathology of recognition, subjectivity is conferred by those in power and on those they deem powerless and disempowered. The desire to be seen, to be recognised, is the paradoxical desire created by oppression.⁷⁶

Oliver's critique of Honneth's recognition theory takes its lead from Fanon's postcolonial conception of the double-bind in which the colonised find themselves with respect to seeking recognition from the coloniser who revels in subjecting them.⁷⁷ The architecture of *Anerkennung* in such a context is anything but horizontal and *intersubjective*, because the power relation governing the colonial relationship involves the doling out of a specific resource – 'recognition' – from a set of colonial recognisers (ideologically positioned as cognitive subjects) controlling its supply to a set of colonial recognisees (ideologically positioned as cognitive objects) desperate for its acquisition and fairer distribution. To put this another way, if the process of recognition is the bestowal of a specific psychologic-moral good serving as developmental capital from a centralised domain of power at the behest and pleasure of one group for the purpose of enfranchising and legitimating another group seeking validation and access to such developmental capital, then recognition deals in domination, rather than evincing emancipation.

By way of complementing Oliver's Fanonian worry about the pathology of recognition, I think it is worth bringing Gaile Pohlhaus Jr.'s Beauvoirian worry about the pathology of recognition into the conversation:

As Beauvoir carefully delineates throughout the entirety of *The Second Sex*, one way of alleviating the vulnerability that can arise due to our need for recognition from others is to define one class

⁷⁵ See Oliver (2001), Markell (2003), Rössler (2007), Young (2007), McNay (2008), Ferrarese (2009), Allen (2010), and Connolly (2010).

⁷⁶ Oliver 2001: 48; 26; 24.

⁷⁷ Viz. BSWM: 98.

One may claim that Oliver's critique aims to collapse the distinction between Honneth's account of recognition and Taylor's multiculturalist politics of recognition.

of persons as ‘other’ or semi-subjects whose sole purpose is to recognise the class of persons deemed fully as subjects. Applying this idea to the epistemic context, we might say that the sole purpose of the epistemic other is to provide epistemic support for navigating the experienced world of those deemed subjects. In this relation, those persons treated as ‘other’ serve to recognise and maintain epistemic practices that make sense of the world as experienced from dominant subjectivities, but do not receive the same epistemic support with regard to their distinct lived experiences in the world. In the subject/other relation, recognition is monodirectional as opposed to intersubjective. This type of relation is not one in which objects are capable of participating; it is also a kind of relation that Beauvoir judges to be fundamentally unethical, since it denies a person’s full status as a free subject capable of experiencing and giving significance to the world uniquely.⁷⁸

However, Honneth himself is not simply alert to the possibility that recognition deals in domination, but sensitive to it:

Far from making a lasting contribution to the conditions of autonomy of the members of our society, social recognition appears merely to serve the creation of attitudes that conform to the dominant system. The reservations entertained with regard to this new critical approach thus amount to the thesis that practices of recognition don’t empower persons, but subject them.⁷⁹

To this end, Honneth has developed the concept of ‘ideological recognition’ as a way of responding to his critics: the concept functions to demarcate between genuine recognition – which is horizontal, constituted by relations of care, and necessary for a health practical relation-to-self – and recognition that enshrines not simply Marx & Engels’s idea of ‘false consciousness’, but a docile consciousness that is psychosocially subjected and deluded.⁸⁰ Ideological recognition involves providing an oppressed person with affective approval and encouragement for fitting the controlling image and satisfying the normative expectations of that person under a framework that decidedly functions to oppress them: “[b]y promising social recognition for the subjective demonstration of certain abilities, needs, or desires, they engender a willingness to adopt a web of practices and modes of behaviour that suit the reproduction of social domination”.⁸¹ To use three of Honneth’s examples here:

⁷⁸ Pohlhaus 2014: 106. Cf. McGlynn 2020: 11.

⁷⁹ Honneth 2007b: 323.

⁸⁰ Much like the first-generation of the Frankfurt School and their associates (specifically, Antonio Gramsci, Lukács, and Walter Benjamin) aimed to radically expand the categories of classical and orthodox Marxism into what is now commonly referred to as ‘Western Marxism’, Louis Althusser’s work on ideology involves a re-working of ideology on Gramscian and Lacanian psychoanalytic grounds.

Zurn regards ideology (and ideological recognition) as a ‘second-order disorder’: “[a] second-order disorder occurs where there is some social phenomenon that exhibits a constitutive disconnect between first-order contents and second-order reflexive comprehension of those contents, where those disconnects are pervasive and socially caused. The pathology of ideological recognition exhibits this disconnect. There is a first-order content of the evaluation promised by the form of recognition, but there is a significant, pervasive, and socially caused disconnect between this evaluative promise and, at a second-order of reflexivity, the material conditions needed to fulfil that promise” (Zurn 2015: 98-99). Cf. Zurn 2015: 100.

⁸¹ Honneth 2007b: 342.

the pride that ‘Uncle Tom’ feels as a reaction to the repeated praise of his submissive virtues makes him into a compliant servant in a slave-owning society. The emotional appeals to the ‘good’ mother and housewife made by churches, parliaments, or the mass media over the centuries caused women to remain trapped within a self-image that most effectively accommodated the gender-specific division of labour. The public esteem enjoyed by heroic soldiers continuously engendered a sufficiently large class of men who willingly went to war in pursuit of glory and adventure. As trivial as these examples may be, they do make strikingly clear that social recognition can always also operate as a conformist ideology, for the continuous repetition of identical forms of recognition can create a feeling of self-worth that provides the motivational resources for forms of voluntary subordination without employing methods of repression.⁸²

The unethical feature of *ideological* recognition, as opposed to recognition *simpliciter*, *contra* Louis Althusser,⁸³ is not simply the Beauvoirian idea that monodirectional recognition fails to accord the individual a unique sense-making and experiential framework.⁸⁴ The unethical feature of ideological recognition also consists in how affective approval and encouragement *in contexts of ideological recognition* reproduces hierarchical relations, such as privilege, and harms targets of such recognition. To quote Christopher Zurn, “[p]ositive public recognition may always be beneficial to a person’s practical relation-to-self, but it may be positively deleterious to that person’s interest in the good life, if and when that positive recognition serves to reinforce social structures that oppress the person”.⁸⁵

Curiously, even though the following by David Owen is a Foucauldian *critique* of Honneth’s *own* criterion for demarcating between genuine recognition and ideological recognition,⁸⁶ there is much conceptual kinship to be found between Owen’s point and my Honnethian approach to the architecture of ideological recognition *qua* making sense of credibility excesses:

... ideological forms of recognition are not fundamentally distinguished by the presence or absence of institutional prerequisites but rather by the *form* of the relation of recognition itself and,

⁸² Ibid., pp. 325-26.

⁸³ Althusser’s brand of Marxism construes ideology as the State Apparatus that complements the more explicitly violent and hegemonic activities of Repressive State Apparatuses. For him, all forms of recognition are practices of ideology (viz. Althusser 2014: 191, 199), because “*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*, through the functioning of the category of the subject” (Althusser 2014: 190). In other words, Althusser argues that every act of recognition coming from an existing social institution (re)produces subjects – not in the sense of agents, but in the sense of a set of subjected [*assujetti*] members conforming to and co-opted by dominant orders and their institutions. See Althusser 1971: 171, 173-74.

⁸⁴ Pohlhaus Jr. and Oliver – though Oliver cannot be blamed here, because *Witnessing* was published six years before Honneth’s essay on recognition and ideology – do not attend to Honneth’s concept of ideological recognition in their respective critical positions.

⁸⁵ Zurn 2015: 96.

⁸⁶ For Honneth, a key feature of ideological recognition is that the evaluative content of the ideologically recognition speech act and moral grammar “must be ‘credible’ in the eyes of the addressees themselves. If the latter have no good reason to identify with the value-statements addressed to them, then these statements will fail to fulfil their performative function” (Honneth 2007b: 338).

hence, of the *form* of the practical relation to self constituted by being recognised in this way. Here precisely power works through acts of recognition.⁸⁷

Ideological recognition bears on epistemic exploitation in the following way: it has illuminating critical theoretic explanatory power as a lens through which to help make sense of epistemic exploitation, because it diagnoses epistemic exploitation as a key practice of whiteness *qua* a normatively deficient moral grammar producing an oppressive *form* of social relations, practices, and institutions. To put this another way, the concept of ideological recognition may be helpful for critical theoretical allyship purposes, because it contributes to providing a complete critical topography of racist-sexist societies, and directs needed attention to the full-range of tools designed to maintain the master's house, as Lorde would put it. Recapitulating a point I made earlier in this chapter, the master's house is built and buttressed by not just outwardly explicit violence. It is also built and buttressed by practices and 'gifts' of pathological praise. As Althusser puts it, "[i]deology never says 'I am ideological'".⁸⁸ The coloniality of power, then, sustains itself by alternating between the brutalising boot of manifestly coercive conduct and the gentle glove of mammifying approval and encouragement.

To return now to the case of Davis's Black female student and provide an ideological recognition explanatory frame for making sense of her situation and her experiences. I previously argued that the credibility excess attribution's loaded praise is directed at how well Davis's Black female student would perform the set epistemic tasks delineated to her by White hearers. If the student performs to a high standard, she is deemed epistemically 'virtuous'. She would then receive acclaim, because her compliant speech makes her an epistemic mammy. If the student performs to a low standard, or even refuses to perform her task, she is deemed epistemically 'vicious'. She would then receive admonishment, because her rebellious speech makes her an epistemic Jezebel.

Using the concept and framework of ideological recognition, one may contend that the power relation shaping and (re)producing the *form* of recognition involves the doling out of a specific affective resource – 'ideological recognitive praise' – from a set of racist recognisers to a set of racialised recognisees vulnerable to the affective dynamics of ideological recognition. Ideological recognitive praise is a racial microinvalidation, because it "encourage[s] ... by means of repeated and ritual invitations [adopting] precisely that self-conception that conforms to the established system of behavioural expectations"⁸⁹ of people of

⁸⁷ Owen 2010: 106.

⁸⁸ Althusser 2014: 191.

⁸⁹ Honneth 2007b: 324.

colour, especially women of colour. Indeed, the spokesperson may well count as the fifth principal controlling image involved in (re)producing the matrix of domination. What is to be done to end the matrix of domination and dismantle structures of privilege, though? It is to this question I now wish to turn in the final section of my chapter.

IV

Desobediencia Epistémica y Desprendimiento: Prolegomenon for Any Future Death of White Privilege

Many contemporary political societies fail to promote practices of symmetrical recognition in communication. Many contemporary institutions and environments are pathological, since they often fail to encourage the quest for self-realisation and thereby leave people who are epistemically marginalised in a constant state of agential pain. Many existing political societies, institutions, and environments are constitutively cruel. To ensure that the “humiliation of human beings by other human beings may cease”,⁹⁰ many existing political communities, institutions, and environments require radical change, rather than incremental, piece-meal tweaks, *contra* Rorty’s liberal ironism.⁹¹ As Lorde writes, “[f]or the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change”.⁹²

If one accepts that the function of radical social critique is to identify and break unequal power relations directly responsible for suffering, marginalisation, and oppression, then the epistemology of radical critical theory of society is likely to involve the kind of creatively subversive practices and *Weltanschauungen* associated with Walter Dignolo’s concept of epistemic disobedience (*desobediencia epistémica*) and Anibal Quijano’s notion of de-linking (*desprendimiento*). Epistemic disobedience and de-linking are the logical motors of decoloniality. They are *creatively* subversive for at least two reasons.

First, epistemic disobedience and de-linking design the relation between the architecture of epistemic power and the organisation of the logical space of reasons as no longer involving any kind of colonial feedback loop. A colonial feedback loop sees modern epistemic practices and the moral grammar of modern political societies mutually sustain one another and maintain suffering, marginalisation, and oppression. To use epistemic exploitation as an example to illustrate this point, consider the following by Davis:

⁹⁰ Rorty 1989: xv.

⁹¹ Cf. Mignolo 2009: 173.

⁹² Lorde 1993: 112.

one's epistemic capabilities are exclusively confined to what the dominant perceives to be essentially *nonderivable*. Call this the harm of *compulsory representation* ... a speaker's epistemic subjectivity is recognised only insofar as the speaker might provide some informational service, where the information in question is perceived by dominant hearers to be inaccessible from their own epistemic position. In nearly all cases of [identity-prejudicial credibility excess], the hearer or inquirer presumes some social entitlement to the information.⁹³

Systemic practices of epistemic exploitation and asymmetrical recognition relations prop each other up as exercises in ideological legitimation. For that matter, members of a political society are in positions to epistemically exploit other members of that political society because that political society's recognition relations are asymmetrical (monodirectional or ideological). Equally, a political society's asymmetrical (monodirectional or ideological) recognition relations are distorted because some of its members engage in practices of epistemic exploitation. To put this more simply, epistemic exploitation is possible *only* if white privilege exists. And white privilege maintains its existence through successful practices and cultures of epistemic exploitation.

Second, the effort to radically re-design the architecture of power and the organisation of the space of reasons to ensure a virtuous feedback loop is a cathartic and convulsive act that goes beyond those progressive discourses that strive to eke out novelty in existing white, Eurocentric conceptual and material spaces. As Quijano and Mignolo respectively write,

It is necessary to extricate oneself from all the linkages between rationality/modernity and coloniality, first of all, and definitely from all power which is not constituted by free decisions made by free people. It is the instrumentalisation of the reasons for power, of colonial power in the first place, which produced distorted paradigms of knowledge and spoiled the liberating promises of modernity. The alternative, then, is clear: the destruction of the coloniality of world power.⁹⁴

[e]pistemic disobedience takes us to a different place ... to spatial sites of struggles and building rather than to a new temporality within the same space (from Greece, to Rome, to Paris, to London, to Washington DC).⁹⁵

Focusing on epistemic disobedience and discourses of de-linking and radical de-centralisation, one can find much space for conceptual and political alliance between Quijano and Mignolo and Davis's Black feminist articulation of what is needed to end practices of epistemic exploitation:

⁹³ Davis 2016: 490.

⁹⁴ Quijano 1999/2007: 177.

⁹⁵ Mignolo 2011: 45.

Among the responsibilities of the powerful is the requirement to acknowledge – and eschew – the ease with which their epistemic privilege enables them to occupy the centre of an epistemic exchange. The dominant must come to know when and how to use (and relinquish) their epistemic power... [M]arginalised individuals [need to] self-identify in opposition to the demands of the powerful, so that such individuals (we) may determine for themselves (ourselves) their (our) position within an epistemic community. Our goal should be to uproot the existing epistemic landscape.⁹⁶

The practice of uprooting the existing epistemic landscape is, in many respects, identifiable with the practice of epistemic disobedience. In the case of the Black female student, who faces the painful double-bind of *epistemic mammification* and *epistemic Jezebelisation*, it is not symbolically and materially enough that she refuses to operate in white spaces and empoweringly self-define.⁹⁷ The transformative burden cannot rest squarely on her shoulders. Since anti-racism and decoloniality are “collaborative enterprise[s]”,⁹⁸ White people must explicitly stand in solidarity with her,⁹⁹ “interrogate their own participation in whiteness”,¹⁰⁰ and relish self-decentring¹⁰¹ by becoming ‘race traitors’ à la Mab Segrest,¹⁰² not least because the privileges associated with whiteness are “unearned”.¹⁰³

A salient question here is to what extent, if any, can Honneth’s critical theory of society positively contribute to the destruction of the coloniality of power through the radical, progressive transformation of the epistemic economy and the logical space of reasons. *Prima*

⁹⁶ Davis 2016: 495.

⁹⁷ Viz. ““thinking and doing not what is expected of us” constitutes an important dimension of Black women’s empowerment” (Collins 2000: 285).

⁹⁸ Collins 2000: 38.

⁹⁹ Cf. Alcoff (1998).

¹⁰⁰ Moon & Flores 2000: 106.

¹⁰¹ A crucial feature of self-decentring here is a concerted effort not to wallow in white guilt, white shame, white self-loathing, because those kinds of affective attitudes precisely serve to maintain White folks’ position in the centre of the discourse about race, insofar as the conversation now revolves around attention directed to addressing their feelings of guilt, shame, and self-loathing as opposed to the serious, positive work that needs to be done to achieve racial equity. Cf. “an adequate critical theory of whiteness does not place the interests and needs of white people at the centre of its reflections. Rather, ... the *telos* of an adequate critical theory of whiteness (and this is one of the necessary conditions of its adequacy) must be the disruption of the structures and mechanisms that function to maintain racial oppression; its purpose must be in the service of liberation. A critical theory of whiteness that is grounded in the broader project of racial justice does not place whites on a pedestal for admiration and veneration; rather it turns a critical eye towards the consciousness and practices of those in the racially dominant position in a white supremacist society” (Owen 2007: 217).

¹⁰² See Segrest (1994). Cf. Katz (1978) and Ignatiev & Garvey (1996).

Noel Ignatiev and John Garvey founded the journal *Race Traitor: A Journal of the New Abolitionism*, whose motto was ‘Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity’. Nevertheless, as Lisa Flores and Dreama Moon note, “*Race Traitor*, at least at the explicit level, promotes Blacks. However, latent power positions are not actually disrupted ... *Race Traitor* all too often reinscribes that which it professes to abolish. Attempting to disrupt white privilege, *Race Traitor* positions a narrow and exclusive group of white men as the spokespersons for race” (Flores & Moon 2002: 198). Cf. Alcoff 1998: 17-19, Owen 2007: 203-4, Flores & Moon 2000: 108-9, 111, and Talbot 1997: 116, which is cited in Flores & Moon 2000: 98.

Given the multiple issues with Ignatiev and Garvey’s notion of race traitor, not least its reifying simplification and reproduction of whiteness and single-axes approaches, the notion of ‘race traitor’ I have in mind is specifically in Segrest’s sense of the term.

¹⁰³ Collins 2000: 37. Cf. McIntosh (2005).

facie, it seems naïve and dangerously parochial to consider that Honneth’s critical theory of society might positively contribute in this context, even taking into account his nuanced development of ideological recognition. For, his neo-Hegelian and Deweyan position on institutional design is ultimately a reproduction of the colonial matrix: Honneth’s *Freedom’s Right* explicitly endorses the core validity claim of Western modernity as *structurally* good, insofar as Western modernity has produced institutions amelioratively geared towards the realisation of social freedom. In other words, the problem with the proposal is its rootedness in whiteness, understood as “the enactment of power and privilege through ... white institutions”.¹⁰⁴

I think this worry is legitimate. However, at the same time, I think an important part of Honneth’s position in *Freedom’s Right* is genuinely useful for the de-linking project and the prolegomenon for the future death of white privilege. The aspect in question is Honneth’s Talcott Parsons-inspired account of a relational institution, which is not *logically* reducible to whiteness:

[Relational institutional] systems of action must be termed “relational” because the activities of individual members within them complement each other; they can be regarded as “ethical” because they invoke a form of obligation that does not have the contrariness of a mere “ought,” without, however, lacking moral considerateness. The behavioural expectations that subjects have of each other within such ‘relational’ institutions are institutionalised in the shape of social roles that normally ensure the smooth interlocking of their respective activities. When subjects fulfil their respective roles, they complement each other’s incomplete actions in such a way that they can only act in a collective or unified fashion. The reciprocally expectable behaviour bundled in these social roles therefore has the character of a subtle duty, because the subjects involved regard it as a condition for the successful realisation of their common practices.¹⁰⁵

Relational institutions, for Honneth, are inclusive spaces and bodies required for social freedom: an agent realises their own individual purposes in and through social institutions in which they engage in *mutual* recognitive practices. The roles and expectations of relational institutions gain their power and validity from the kind of inclusive recognitive relations they promote and embody. As such, for a social institution to be a *relational* one, it must be *wholly* constituted by practices of communicative action and intersubjective recognition.

For example, consider the case of a queer Latinx trans woman, Luz, whose participation in relational institutional environments enables her to identify that their self-realisation is best achieved through becoming an academic: in order to achieve a healthy practical relation-to-self through this career choice, Luz’s activities must take place in (a) institutional environments

¹⁰⁴ Flores & Moon 2002: 189. Cf. Olson (1995).

¹⁰⁵ Honneth 2014: 125.

whose norms of gender, race, and sexuality are free from (explicitly as well as subtly) coercive ideology; in (b) institutional environments with a wide range of educational opportunities with no structural barriers to access and participation; in (c) institutional environments with high levels of epistemic capital, such as significant expertise; and in (d) institutional environments which offer direct access to labour markets. The environment fostering and constituting relational institutions is distinctive, since

... the experience of such a free interplay with our intersubjective environment represents the pattern of all individual freedom: The schema of free activity, prior to any tendencies to retreat into individuality, consists in the fact that others do not oppose our intentions, but enable and promote them.¹⁰⁶

The relational institutional backdrop involves a model of recognition that is closer to Oliver's idea of witnessing than to centralised, unidirectional, and colonial systems of power,¹⁰⁷ not least because relational institutions are operationalised by their deep sensitivity to the "intersubjective presuppositions of human identity development that impact upon speech, communication, and the social scaffolding of the knower".¹⁰⁸ Relational institutions are *answerable to and legitimated by people like Luz*, so much so that, to use W. B. Yeats's expression, these institutions are summoned to spread themselves at the feet of people like Luz. Of course, though, as Honneth argues in the below passage, the West is far from comprising relational institutions:

There can be no doubt that the current economic system in the developed countries of the West in no way represents a "relational" institution and is thus not a sphere of social freedom. It lacks all the necessary characteristics of such a sphere: It is not anchored in role obligations to which all could agree, and which interweave with each other in a way that allows subjects to view each other's freedom as the condition of their own freedom; it therefore lacks an antecedent relation of mutual recognition from which the corresponding role obligations could draw any validity or persuasive power.¹⁰⁹

The project of dismantling white privilege and producing relational institutions will take years to complete, not least because the far-right is embedded in so many contemporary institutional arrangements. However, the transformative process may well accelerate if recognition theorists, intersectional social epistemologists, and decolonial theorists pool their critical

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁰⁷ Viz. "Having a sense of oneself as a subject and an agent requires that the structure of witnessing as the possibility of address and response has been set up in dialogic relations with others" (Oliver 2001: 87). Indeed, I think the logical and moral proximity of the kind of recognition underpinning and driving relational institutions close the gap between recognition and witnessing articulated by Oliver.

¹⁰⁸ Giladi & Petherbridge 2020: 219.

¹⁰⁹ Honneth 2014: 176.

vocabularies, frameworks, concerns about vulnerability and dignity, and progressive visions together. That would be a sight to see.

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