Epistemic Injustice, Misrecognition, and Liberation Movements as Resistance Struggles for (Self-)Recognition

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Introduction: Oppression, Epistemic Marginalization, and Misrecognition

Oppressed groups typically face severe communicative and epistemic obstacles, especially when it comes to communication and knowledge about their predicaments as oppressed subjects. The visibility and audibility of members of oppressed groups when they try to protest their predicaments is often precarious and defective. Oppressed subjects are often invisible and inaudible *qua* oppressed subjects, or they are hyper-visible and hyper-audible in distorting ways.[1] Moreover, members of oppressed groups often have a hard time making their non-mainstream experiences and perspectives properly visible and audible not only to others—to out-group members—but even *to themselves*—to in-group fellow members and even to their own selves. For example, think of how difficult it is for those who are economically exploited in similar ways to develop class consciousness, to recognize themselves as *exploited* and to link their predicament to that of others as suffering similar kinds of harms that amount to an *injustice*. But think also of how difficult it was (and still is in some social contexts) for queer subjects to recognize themselves as being improperly stigmatized by heterosexist norms and expectations, to trust their own inclinations or judgements and give proper epistemic recognition to their own experiences of desire. It takes a village that doesn't yet exist, a supportive community that needs to be created, for oppressed subjects to be able to achieve vis-

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1   See my discussion of the epistemic harms of invisibility and hypervisibility in Medina (In Preparation).

ibility and audibility under conditions of oppression. And this is exactly what grassroot movements of liberation do: struggles for liberation led by these social movements include struggles for recognition that can create the conditions under which certain subject positionalities can become visible and the experiences and perspectives of those subjects can receive proper recognition. And note that, as I will argue in detail throughout this essay, in these liberation struggles members of oppressed groups seek being properly recognized not only by others—by society at large and its institutions, or by members of dominant groups—*but also by themselves*, by each other and by their own emerging counter-communities of respect.

Authors like Axel Honneth (2023), Michele Moody-Adams (2022), and myself (2023) have recently called attention to the crucial role that movements of liberation play in securing social recognition for oppressed subjects and their struggles for justice, through the development of critical concepts such as "exploitation," "unpaid domestic labor," or "sexual harassment," and through liberatory slogans such as #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, and "We are here, we are queer, get used to it!" What I want to highlight in this essay, drawing from my recent work (Forthcoming), is that the liberatory struggles of social movements (such as the labor movement, the Women's movement, or the Queer Liberation movement) have to do not only with securing the recognition of society and its institutions, but also with making one's own *self-recognition* possible. The liberation that these movements seek require not only the mobilization of social support and recognition for their causes from out-group members, but also the mobilization of *people like them*, that is, the articulation of a public that didn't exist before and comes together through their *self-recognition* as members of a group who share similar experiences of oppression or marginalization and similar aspirations of freedom. The resistance work against deep-seated roadblocks for recognition that liberation movements engage in fits well what I have termed *epistemic resistance* (Medina 2013); and it consists in ways of making the predicaments of the oppressed visible, audible and known *not only to others, but also to themselves*. Resistance struggles for recognition involves fighting against the systematic ways in which the visibility, audibility, and knowability of the experiences of the oppressed have been blocked for all, including also (although differently and to a lesser degree) for the experiential subjects themselves: these subjects have a hard time being in touch with their own experiences of oppression and becoming able to give voice to them, not only because of the hostile communicative environments they see themselves in and the likelihood of receiving defective uptake or no uptake at all, but also and more fun-

damentally because they are alienated from their own experiences and subject to ideological distortions in ways that make it very difficult for them to recognize themselves as experiencing injustices. The recognition struggles undertaken by liberation movements aim at overcoming different kinds of misrecognition: being misrecognized by society and its institutions; being misrecognized by one's fellows in interpersonal interactions of all kinds; but also being misrecognized by oneself in one's own self-understanding and self-assessments.

Drawing from recent literature that brings together normative social theories of recognition and theories of epistemic injustice,[2] the rest of this paper will argue that there are deep *epistemic injustices* created by the social dynamics of misrecognition involved in systems of oppression: they include *testimonial injustices* that occur when oppressed subjects are not recognized as subjects who can be trusted when they report on their own experiences; and *hermeneutical injustices* that occur when oppressed subjects are prevented from (or undermined in their attempts of) making sense of their own experiences and predicaments in their own terms. As Miranda Fricker's own account of epistemic injustice emphasizes, when oppressed subjects are not being given the intelligibility and credibility that the interpretations and assessments of their own experiences deserve, they are unfairly treated as epistemic subjects and are, therefore, the recipients of *deficient forms of epistemic recognition* that amount to *epistemic injustices*. Other contributors[3] to the literature of epistemic injustice have emphasized that, even independently of credibility or intelligibility deficits, oppressed subjects can also suffer from *agential* epistemic injustices when their participation in meaning-making and knowledge-sharing practices is compromised because their status and agency in those practices is *not properly recognized*—here too these subjects become the recipients of deficient forms of epistemic recognition that amount to epistemic injustices.

As I will argue in the next two sections, under conditions of oppression, there are forms of non-recognition and *misrecognition* that undermine the epistemic status and agency of members of oppressed groups, and thus create epistemic injustices that make it difficult for these subjects to be properly seen and heard by others and *even by themselves*. I will develop my own view of how we should conceptualize epistemic injustices as forms of misrecognition that call for the epistemic resistance struggles of liberation movements in two parts.

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2   See esp. the collection of essays edited by Paul Giladi and Nicola McMillan (2023).

3   See especially Lackey 2023 and Medina 2021.

In section 1, I will address worries about bringing together recognition theory and epistemic justice in a unified theory of social critique, developing an argument in defense of such unified theory. In section 2, I will argue that a unified theory of social critique needs to be grounded in grassroot movements of liberation. Focusing on the problem of alienation and self-ignorance, the argument of this section will be that properly diagnosing the epistemic injustices against oppressed groups can only be done from the engaged perspective of an activist, and that a critical consciousness about epistemic misrecognition (including *self*-misrecognition) can only be developed in and through the practices of consciousness-raising, collective learning and social transformation that liberation movements make possible. On my view, the kind of immanent critique of social pathologies of epistemic misrecognition that can be found in grassroot movements of liberation can avoid problems of paternalism and heteronomy.

1. Epistemic injustice and the Social Critique of Recognition Failures

In "Two Interpretations of Social Disrespect: A Comparison between Epistemic and Moral Recognition" (2023), Axel Honneth elucidates the strong convergence between his own theory of social recognition and Fricker's theory of epistemic injustice. Honneth emphasizes that what unites the two theories is the core idea that those who are subordinated or oppressed are not only materially disadvantaged, but also "mistreated with a certain condescension, disdain, and degradation that has to be conceived as unjust." (2023: 11) This form of mistreatment is explained in both theories as a form of *disrespect* (or lack of esteem) that results from the absence of social recognition or the presence of distorted recognition, that is, from being *misrecognized* as a moral and/or epistemic subject. While arguing for the priority of moral recognition over epistemic recognition, Honneth emphasizes that these two forms of recognition are intertwined in various ways: for example, being recognized as a moral subject requires (among other things) being recognized as being accountable for one's actions, which involves being recognized as capable of making sense of one's actions and of giving testimony about them. In a similar vein, Fricker also calls attention to the *hybrid* character of epistemic justice as involving the proper recognition of the moral and epistemic agency of subjects; and her entire account is framed as an ethics of knowing. Being properly recognized as a subject and participant in moral and epistemic practices is

crucial for just treatment; and when such recognition is not given, there is a failure of justice that warrants struggles for recognition aimed at being counted as an equal. As Honneth puts it, "in my analysis, it is the practical subject, in Fricker's the epistemic subject, whose experiences of disrespect are made central to normative analysis." (2023: 14)

Following Hegelian insights, Honneth emphasizes the intersubjective nature of moral subjectivity: the moral subject becomes possible in and through relations of reciprocal recognition whereby one's status and agency as a subject of moral value are affirmed. Similarly, the epistemic recognition of others is crucial for the constitution of epistemic subjectivity, which is something that Fricker and her followers[4] have emphasized when they elucidate how the misrecognition of one's epistemic capacities and agency undermines one's status as a subject of knowledge and understanding and contributes to the deterioration of one's epistemic character and subjectivity—think, for example, of how difficult it is to maintain self-trust when one is systematically distrusted by others. As Honneth puts it, "the moral subject [...], due to her intersubjective nature, can establish a functioning *self-relation* only if she and her various capacities are adequately recognised by her fellows." (2023: 13, my emphasis) And the same is shown to be true of the epistemic subject by Fricker's theory of epistemic injustice. Therefore, Honneth rightly concludes, moral recognition theory and the theory of epistemic injustice teach us how different "*kinds of disrespect violate the normative conditions of realising an unimpaired self-relation as either an epistemic or a moral subject*," (2023: 17) showing that misrecognizing people morally or epistemically amounts to "treating them as something less than a fully-fledged human being." (2023: 18)

How can the erosion of one's humanity resulting from these different forms of disrespect be protested and fought against? Drawing from Honneth's insights, let's look more closely at how recognition struggles can begin in the aftermath of moral and epistemic forms of misrecognition that, as Honneth puts it, impair one's "self-relation as either an epistemic or a moral subject." One can only recognize oneself as a moral and epistemic subject if one is also recognized as such by others; this "functioning self-relation" cannot be established otherwise. Moral and epistemic subjectivity requires relating to oneself in a particular way, namely, recognizing oneself as a moral and epistemic subject with certain capacities; but this self-recognition in turn requires being properly recognized by others, which is precisely what it not available to the misrecognized

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4   See Medina (2013) and Lackey (2023).

subject. One cannot begin the struggle for recognition without having at least a *minimal* sense of oneself as a moral and epistemic subject, and therefore a sense of what one is owed and not given in the recognitional dynamics one finds oneself in. In other words, the subject struggling for recognition needs to be capable of self-recognition, not only in a generic sense of seeing themselves as a moral and epistemic subject, but also in the more specific sense of recognizing oneself morally and epistemically *in excess of* the recognition received from society and its institutions. This seems to create an important paradox, namely, the *paradox of resistant subjectivity*: subjects who lack proper recognition from others seem to be ill equipped to protest the misrecognition they suffer because a critical consciousness of their misrecognition requires recognizing themselves fully and properly and they do not have the required social support for such self-recognition. How can morally and epistemically injured subject develop the capacity to recognize themselves otherwise and embark on recognition struggles?

This paradox would be unsolvable if we expected isolated individuals to start struggles for recognition by themselves, in isolation and independently of each other. But, of course, this is not how recognition struggles begin, as a cursory look at the history of grassroot liberation movements can show us. In the next section, "Coming to Recognize Oneself (and Others) Properly," I will discuss how a critical consciousness about social pathologies of misrecognition can emerge in and through the shared activities developed by communities of resistance and grassroot movements of liberation, that is, how the members of such communities and social movements come to recognize recognition failures through protest actions, resistant practices, and activism. For now, as a preliminary response to the paradox of resistant subjectivity, it suffices to say that struggles for recognition are rendered possible by gaps and deviances that can be found in economies of recognition and are exploited by networks of eccentric subjects in resistant interactions. This brings together two important insights: an insight about the *communal* nature of recognition struggles, and an insight about the *polyphonic* nature of recognition dynamics.

In the first place, recognition struggles seeking moral and epistemic repair are not only intersubjective but *collective or communal*: dyads of persons struggling for recognition are inscribed in communities and networks of interaction in which subjects recognize each other differently and forge new relations of recognition among themselves, thus becoming capable of comparing and contrasting their nascent relations of reciprocal recognition with the consolidated forms of misrecognition they suffer. It is not the individual alone (or even a

dyad of individuals) who develops resistance to misrecognition; resistant attitudes and actions are developed by an emerging network or community of those who begin to cultivate expanded or alternative forms of recognition.

In the second place, it is important to note that struggles for recognition are rendered possible by gaps and deviances that can always be found in economies of recognition because recognition dynamics are heterogeneous and intrinsically *polyphonic*: there is always (at least the possibility of) diversity and plurality in intersubjective relations of recognition. No matter how uniform recognitional practices may become and how dominant and hegemonic the standard norms of recognition may appear, recognition dynamics are never completely monolithic; they always admit variation across subject position and relations; they can be differently textured and layered, and their underlying normative principles of recognition can be contextualized in various ways. Therefore, social practices of recognition tend to have some degree of diversity and plurality, some heterogeneity within them; and this makes it possible that even the most marginalized and misrecognized subject may nonetheless find a modicum of recognition here and there, and can gather these various forms of piecemeal recognition received from a limited few and in limited contexts to stitch together a sense of self, a way of recognizing oneself that departs from the perversive forms of misrecognition that they tend to be subject to. Eccentric subjects who deviate from dominant recognitional dynamics can start to develop a critical consciousness about the misrecognition they receive from mainstream society and its institutions, as they start to mobilize in a community of resistance that struggles for recognition.

I will return to these ideas and will elaborate them more fully in the next section when I discuss the role of collective or communal self-recognition in the recognition struggles of grassroot liberation movements. As I will argue in that next section, recognizing forms of misrecognition that amount to epistemic injustices requires protesting the social dynamics of recognition in ways that vindicate alternative forms of communal self-recognition and self-affirmation, which is what protest actions and protest movements teach us how to do. But before getting to the crucial role of grassroot social movements in diagnosing and resisting misrecognition, let me first elaborate a bit further the account of epistemic injustice as a social pathology of misrecognition that I have sketched in this section, following Honneth. I will do so by addressing two worries about bringing together recognition theory and considerations of justice that have been raised in the recent literature.

In *Diagnosing Social Pathologies* (2023) Frederick Neuhouser argues that normative assessments in terms of justice do not fare well when compared with theories of social pathology, which include theories of recognition such as Honneth's. More specifically, Neuhouser argues that theories of social pathology have two distinct advantages over theories of justice: an explanatory advantage and an evaluative advantage. According to Neuhouser, the first advantage that theories of social pathology exhibit over theories of justice is that the former are not only capable of identifying normative failures, but they are also capable of giving an account of the sociogenesis of those failures in terms of the dysfunctional social dynamics that create and perpetuate them. Whereas theories of justice in liberal political philosophy do not contain a social theory that explains the social production of normative failures and how to correct them, Neuhouser emphasizes that theories of social pathology explain how those failures originate in social dysfunctions that are hard to break and give guidance for resisting and overcoming those dysfunctions. The second advantage of theories of social pathology, according to Neuhouser, is that "they have at their disposal critical resources beyond those employed by most liberal political and social philosophy." (2023: 10) Whereas liberal theories of justice rely on formal and thin normative notions, theories that diagnose social pathologies, such as recognition theory, use *thick* normative notions for assessing "social life as spiritual," that is, "as informed by the aspiration of social members to unite in their social activity the ends of life with those of freedom." (2023: xiv) In other words, "a diagnosis of social pathology is always in part an ethical critique." (2023: 12) Theories of social pathology concern themselves with "failures in realizing the good, broadly construed, rather than in achieving the right." (2023: 11) They evaluate how the human flourishing or "spiritual" development of some members of society becomes stifled or truncated because of social dysfunctions, such as misrecognition. Neuhouser points out that considerations of justice are not irrelevant for these social theories, but he argues that these considerations do not go to the core of the ethical failures involved in social pathologies. So, for example, in Marx's critique of capitalism, Neuhouser points out, "the problem with alienated labor is not primarily that it is unjust, [...but rather,] that the conditions under which such labor is carried out make it impossible for laborers to realize spiritual goods—recognition, self-esteem," etc. (2023: 13)

Let's consider whether the worries that Neuhouser raises against theories of justice also apply to the theory of epistemic injustice. Does the theory of epistemic injustice also lack the crucial explanatory and evaluative advantages that

Neuhouser sees in theories of social pathology? Quite the contrary. I argue that what makes the theory of epistemic injustice distinctive and especially powerful is precisely the kinds of explanatory and evaluative advantages that Neuhouser highlights, which strengthens the case for its strong convergence with recognition theory and speaks in favor of using these two theories in tandem.

In the first place, what is so powerful about Miranda Fricker's (2007) theory of epistemic injustice is precisely that it does offer an explanation of how epistemic injustice results from social dysfunctions in credibility and intelligibility assessments. On her account, patterns of epistemic disrespect are grounded in an unfairly biased social imagination that mediates our interactions and epistemic appraisals of each other. Unlike the liberal theories of justice that Neuhouser focuses on, Fricker's theory of epistemic injustice does contain a social theory that explains the underlying mechanisms of the social dysfunction in question. Fricker's theory explains how epistemic misrecognition is grounded in a social imaginary that promotes prejudicial stereotyping. Honneth recognizes this and praises the explanatory power of Fricker's account. In fact, Honneth sees here a convergence between Fricker's theory of epistemic misrecognition and his own theory of moral misrecognition in that they both offer accounts of "the social mechanisms by which such forms of disrespect arise and become mental habits." (2023: 18) However, Honneth argues that Fricker's account of the sociogenesis of recognition failures in terms of prejudicial stereotyping is incomplete and needs to be supplemented. According to Honneth, without supplementation, Fricker's account would be insufficient because it focuses exclusively on cognitive and individualistic factors, and the cognitive explanation that Fricker offers needs to be supplemented with an account of the motivations and social interests driving the recognition dysfunctions in question, an account that also enables us to see more clearly the structural and institutional dimensions of these dysfunctions. Honneth argues that the efficacious and recalcitrant nature of the prejudicial stereotyping underlying misrecognition "stems from dominant groups' deep-seated need to find evidence supporting the putative rationale for their privileged social position." (2023: 20) Therefore, moral and epistemic disrespect "should be interpreted as resulting from a combination of 'ideas' and 'interests', to invoke Weber." (2023: 21) Honneth emphasizes that an account of misrecognition of this sort that combines cognitive and non-cognitive factors can explain how "such disrespect can assume an institutional, or indeed structural, character even within a (self-proclaimed) highly enlightened culture and a critical public sphere," for motivated prejudicial attitudes "seep into the modes of behaviour of administrative offi-

cials, public authorities, and companies, forming habits, altering the rules of social engagement and ultimately even finding themselves reflected in the architecture of buildings and interior design." (2023: 21) So, as supplemented by Honneth, there is no reason to think that a theory of epistemic injustice cannot share the explanatory power of theories of social pathology. In fact, the expanded account of the underlying mechanisms of misrecognition that Honneth proposes goes along well with recent expansions and supplementations of the paradigm of epistemic injustice that emphasize the structural and institutional dimensions of epistemic misrecognition.[5]

In the second place, Fricker's theory of epistemic injustice is clearly not constrained by a thin and formal notion of what is right that can be detached from thicker normative conceptions about full subjecthood and having one's humanity fully recognized and supported. So Neuhouser's worry about the thinness of considerations of justice in liberal political philosophy does not apply here, and Fricker's theory of epistemic injustice also enjoys the evaluative advantages that Neuhouser ascribes to theories of social pathology. Like these theories, Fricker's too offers an *ethical* critique. It is not accidental that the subtitle of Fricker's monograph is "power and the *ethics* of knowing"; and the core of Fricker's account of epistemic injustice can be understood as an ethical critique of social pathologies of epistemic misrecognition that are predicated on the ethical value of epistemic flourishing, that is, of having epistemic dignity and respect, having access to epistemic goods and agency in epistemic practices, and being supported in one's full development as a subject of knowledge and understanding. In his elucidation of the convergence between Fricker's theory and his recognition theory, Honneth emphasizes that both theories are concerned with the ethical failures involved in different kinds of disrespect that arise from patterns of misrecognition. However, Honneth argues that the virtue-theoretic approach to epistemic recognition and its failures that Fricker favors has its pitfalls. In particular, Honneth argues that Fricker's account of epistemic injustice as a virtue runs the risk of leading to "an overextension of individual responsibilities." (2023: 25) Given that epistemic disrespect should be thought of as resulting not only from attitudinal deficits but from "the institutional sedimentation of *interested ignorance*" (Honneth 2023: 24), responsibility for epistemic injustice should not be conceptualized primarily as a matter of the individual's duty to develop virtuous recognition of others, but rather, as a collective and institutional responsibility for changing practices

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5   See esp. Medina (2021) and Lackey (2023). See also Samaržija and Cerovac (2021).

of recognition and their underlying norms. Here too there is a strong convergence between Honneth's proposal for amending Fricker's approach and recent expansions and supplementations of Fricker's approach that focus on the collective, structural, and institutional aspects of epistemic injustice (e.g. Medina 2021 and Lackey 2023).

If we don't treat issues of responsibility for recognition and its failures in the abstract, in terms of virtuous dispositions that all individuals must have, but rather in concrete socio-historical contexts, in terms of specific institutions and economies of recognition historically developed, then, as Honneth puts it, this "historical institutionalism [...] requires accentuating an element of social practices much more strongly than Fricker does." (2023: 29) It is through social practices that we became capable of diagnosing and resisting epistemic injustices. As we shall see in the next section, it is *only* through grassroot social practices that we can develop a critical consciousness of forms of misrecognition such as those involved in epistemic injustice, and it is *only* through grassroot social practices that we can mobilize to resist epistemic misrecognition and fight for more just recognitional dynamics. This is exactly how Honneth concludes his elucidation of the convergence between recognition theory and the theory of epistemic injustice:

> [If] one wants to explain how historically given recognitional orders can be superseded in the first place, one has to draw on the transformational power of a type of social conflict that I, following Hegel, have called a 'struggle for recognition'. This denotes a form of social protest and revolt whose primary motivational source is not an interest in material improvement, but social respect and recognition. (2023: 29)

2. Coming to Recognize Oneself (and Others) Properly
Coming to recognize recognition failures through protest actions, resistant practices, and activism

How can patterns of epistemic misrecognition be recognized? Neuhouser points out that social pathologies are often invisible and it takes a social movement to make them visible. As he puts it, "social suffering must be articulated and made comprehensible to those who do not suffer from it." (2023: 4) And Neuhouser goes on to observe that in the social movements of the twentieth century, such as the Civil Rights movement, the Women's movement, or the

Gay Liberation movement, "the sufferers" themselves saw as their "principal task [...] to articulate the meaning of their suffering to others." (2023: 4) This is an important point, but it captures only one part of the struggles for recognition led by social movements of liberation, for the central challenge of these movements is not only to make a social pathology of misrecognition visible and audible *to others*, but also *to themselves*. That is, the victims of epistemic misrecognition and disrespect also have to struggle to come to recognize the misrecognition that they suffer. In her primary example of epistemic injustice, Fricker emphasizes how hard it was for women to communicate their experiences of mistreatment at the workplace before they developed the language of sexual harassment; but she also emphasizes that it was extremely hard for women to properly understand these experiences *themselves*, and it took many "speak-outs" before they could properly recognize them. On the other hand, in her discussion of Edmund White's *A Boy's Own Story* (2007: 163ff), Fricker underscores that some cases of hermeneutical injustice can be "so damaging that it cramps the very development of self" (2007: 164). According to Fricker's analysis, White's autobiographical narrative illustrates how a gay subject in a homophobic environment is not only epistemically disrespected by others but also by himself, since he becomes incapable of trusting himself and his experiences of desire and, therefore, incapable of giving himself proper epistemic recognition. Fricker emphasizes here that the emergence of a self-capable of resisting this misrecognition (what I call a *resistant* subjectivity) requires a "psychological rebellion," for the subject would have to become able to "rebel against internalized yet falsifying hermeneutical constructions of one's social identity" (165) But how can this *inner rebellion* be achieved? Let's look more closely at the difficulties that internalized misrecognition poses for victims of misrecognition to embark upon struggles for proper recognition, thus returning to the paradox of resistant subjectivity formulated in the previous section.

That proper self-recognition under conditions of oppression is challenging and takes a struggle to achieve should not be surprising since, as I have argued elsewhere (2013), systems of oppression produce bodies of active ignorance that include not only ignorance about others but also ignorance about oneself. This self-ignorance takes a particular shape that is important for our purposes to understand, since it blocks the path to develop critical consciousness about misrecognition, that is, it undermines the struggle to come to recognize one's own misrecognition. The cultivation of bodies of interested active ignorance incentivized by a system of oppression to protect itself includes the

promulgation of self-ignorance among the oppressed. But how is one blocked to know things about oneself? This is accomplished in two ways: by arranging social life in ways that alienate oppressed subjects from their own experiences and create forms of self-estrangement; and through ideological distortions that offer ready-made interpretations of the subject's experiences as something other than experiences of oppression, blocking the development of a critical consciousness about the misrecognition of oneself and one's experiences. One may think that if the subject does have these experiences available within themselves (e.g. women do experiences unwanted sexual attention as something other than "harmless flirting", gay individuals experience same-sex desire as something other than a "perversion", etc.), how is it that they become unable to develop an alternative understanding of their own experiences and unable to recognize themselves as being harmed by the dominant misrecognition? On my own view, the answer is that the subject's own *epistemic agency* is blocked or undermined so that they cannot develop their own alternative understanding and the alternative expressive and interpretive resources that they need to formulate that understanding. In my view, this fits perfectly well with what has been called *agential epistemic injustice* in the recent literature, but with the twist that the subject is recruited to block or undermine their own resistant epistemic agency, so I will call it *self-perpetrated agential epistemic injustice*.

There is a higher-level epistemic injustice that prevents individuals from being able to protest the epistemic injustice they suffer, and this higher-level epistemic injustice involves a *self-perpetrated agential epistemic injustice* in which the subject is recruited to undermine their own epistemic agency in attempting to understand and give testimony of aspects of themselves. Following Fricker's distinction, we can identify here two distinct types: there is *self-perpetrated agential hermeneutical injustice* when a subject blocks their own attempts to understand aspects of themselves or areas of their experiences because those attempts are rendered difficult and risky and any departure from dominant hermeneutical sensibilities is stigmatized; and there is *self-perpetrated agential testimonial injustice* in attempts to talk about aspects of themselves or areas of their experiences *even to themselves* (e.g. in diaries or acts of self-acknowledgements) or to people like them. These are different ways of unfairly blocking the oppressed subject's epistemic agency to even attempt to develop and share interpretations and assessments of their lives in their own terms, and this includes the self-blocking of one's own epistemic agency in such expressive and testimonial attempts. And note that this is different from

testimonial or hermeneutical *smothering*[6] because it is not just about being inhibited by hostile environments and the prospect of defective uptake, but rather, by one's own inability for proper self-recognition.

Since, on my account, the problem consists in being *disempowered* to develop resistant epistemic agency and thus unable to begin the struggle toward proper recognition, the fight against self-perpetrated agential epistemic injustice will require *becoming empowered*. But where can this empowerment come from? It can only come from oppressed subjects encountering each other, starting to recognize each other, and starting to support each other in their shared struggles. This is why struggles for recognition need to begin with *practices of self-empowerment*, practices in and through which oppressed subjects empower each other so that they can, together, get out of the traps of misrecognition. Only in this way can the oppressed subject get out of the predicament of self-blocking that prevents resisting misrecognition. As briefly explained in the previous section, my solution to the paradox of resistant subjectivity resides in a polyphonic and communal view of recognition dynamics and of the resistance against the normative failures in such dynamics. Grassroot movements of liberation tap into this polyphony when eccentric voices encounter each other and they start a social mobilization to speak together against their misrecognition. As I have discussed in detail in *The Epistemology of Protest* (2023), the activities of consciousness-raising that we find in liberation movements such as the Women's movement or the Queer Liberation movement are ways of resisting the self-misrecognition that prevents victims of injustice from seeing themselves as having been wronged in the first place, supporting individuals to overcome the self-blocking that prevents them from seeking recognition. Becoming capable of a kind of self-recognition required for resistance (recognizing the misrecognition of one's own worth) needs to be supported by the recognition of others. The self-recognition of victims of injustice and the mutual recognition of fellow victims go hand in hand and depend on one another; these interdependent forms of recognition are used in liberation movements for creating and sustaining communities of resistance. The visibility actions or pride actions of the Queer Liberation movement, such as kiss-ins, offer a paradigmatic example of this, as I have discussed elsewhere (2023 and Forthcoming).

Individual members of an oppressed group can muster the courage and develop the agency to resist misrecognition *not by themselves and in isolation*, but

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6   See Dotson (2011).

when they come out, encounter each other, and participate in shared resistance struggles where they start developing alternative forms of recognition that make it possible for them to establish self-recognition as they are being recognized by each other. Shared activities of resistance, such as the speak-outs or visibility actions that we find in liberation movements, offer not only the opportunity, but also the motivation, encouragement, and empowerment that oppressed subjects need to overcome the self-perpetrating agential epistemic injustices that prevent them from resisting misrecognition and seeking alternative forms of recognition. These shared activities of resistance are practices of *self-empowerment* that are directed primarily at the oppressed subject themselves, not at outgroup members: they aim at empowering those who share the predicament of being mistreated and being disempowered to protest their mistreatment. Self-recognition is a crucial part of the struggle of social movements that need to focus, first of all, on social mobilization, that is, on supporting and facilitating the emergence of a critical consciousness, on community-building, and on the creation of a public that didn't exist before. Unlike Neuhouser (2023), who focuses exclusively on the role that social movements play in making misrecognition visible "to others", Honneth (2023) acknowledges that the recognition struggles of these movements start with *an inner rebellion* and, before they reach out to wider publics, they focus on building a counter-community, cultivating alternative forms of recognition, and developing alternative languages and interpretative resources.

Honneth rightly points out that "such struggles generally begin in small-scale domains: in private households, places of work, on public transport or in administrative offices, places where isolated individuals contend with representatives of power holders over the meaning and normative horizon of established recognitional norms." (2023: 29) Indeed, grassroot social movements of liberation start with micro-resistance in everyday life, with micro-struggles for recognition in ordinary interactions; and, building on those micro-practices of resistance, they develop larger-scale campaigns of mobilization for proper recognition. In this sense, it is not difficult to see the importance and subversive potential of the everyday micro-struggles for self-recognition that started the Queer Liberation movement: everyday interactions among queer subjects who made themselves visible to each other, practices in which queer individuals expressed pride to each other and reclaimed their own alternative spaces outside the mainstream, spaces—ranging from private or semiprivate (communal gay houses) to non-mainstream public spaces (such as gay bars)—in which queer visibility and queer pride became possible. These small-scale, rou-

tine practices of resistance paved the way for the visibility actions and pride actions that the Queer Liberation movement used in national campaigns like Queer Nights Out, carried out by Queer Nation in the 1990's. When activists of Queer Nation started their queer visibility campaign and staged kiss-ins in street corners and straight bars, it was definitely not the first time that queer subjects kissed in public and expressed pride in their sexual behavior. It was because they had been able to do that first in private and semiprivate spaces as well as in non-mainstream public spaces (gay baths and gay bars, for example), because they had empowered each other and developed expressive and interpretive agency to make sense of themselves in a different way, that they were able, eventually, to defy the mainstream and present their behavior to the world as worthy of recognition and pride.

The defiance that characterizes the struggle for recognition of the Queer Liberation movement was slowly developed by defiantly resisting misrecognition together in everyday spaces and interactions, by supporting each other in the refusal to hide and to accept shame and invisibility, by developing micropractices of queer pride and self-empowerment. Self-recognition and self-empowerment are crucial in the initial stage of a grassroot liberation movement because they are necessary to get the recognition struggles started; but they also remain central in later stages of liberation movements and in their public interventions to create new recognitional dynamics. We can see this clearly in the public visibility and pride actions of Queer Nation in the 1990's. Let's look at their kiss-ins more closely to see how queer activists aimed at self-recognition and self-empowerment in these public acts of protest.

Through defiant anti-stigmatization protests, in the 1990's Queer Nation fought for the dignity and proper recognition (ethical, political, and epistemic) of queer subjects through the expression of pride in sexual difference, alternative community-building, and practices of queer self-empowerment. Queer Nation encouraged queer subjects to feel unapologetic and proud of their sexual lifestyles and of their alternative communities and countercultures. The inaugural protest act of Queer Nation was a kiss-in that was staged as a visibility action at Flutie's, a New York straight bar, on April 13, 1990. That night dozens of same-sex couples entered Flutie's and started making out, deeply disrupting the heteronormative expectations that had structured that space up to that point, to the discomfort of the owner and many (if not most) of the establishment's regular clients. Visibility protest actions of this sort sponsored by Queer Nation came to be known as "Queer Nights Out" and became popular in some metropolitan areas in the 1990's. Probably the most disruptive and

best publicized kiss-in of this kind was organized by Queer Nation/L.A. in 1991 to interrupt the 64th Academy Awards by obstructing entry to the event with a multitude of same-sex couples kissing on the red carpet. Mainstream sensibilities felt insulted and disrespected: "Why are these queers rubbing their sexual preferences against people's noses in public? Why are they flaunting their indecent attitudes and behavior in everyone's face?" Queer Nation's kiss-ins were visibility actions that tried to de-stigmatize queer identities and deeply transform their social (in)visibility, turning the invisible and shameful into something visible and honorable, the object of pride. As I have argued elsewhere (Forthcoming), these kiss-ins contained both in-group and out-group communication with a deeply subversive potential; they aimed to achieve two things in the struggle for recognition: one is negative, reactive and deconstructive, while the other one is positive, proactive, and constructive. On the negative, reactive and deconstructive side, queer kiss-ins offered a public critique of and resistance against social stigmatization: in kiss-ins, protesters denounced and resisted the denigration and exclusion of their sexual identities. On the positive, proactive, and constructive side, Queer Nation's kiss-ins queered the public sphere and defiantly disrupted the heteronormative expectations of dominant sensibilities in order to assert queer dignity and demand proper recognition, creating new possibilities for social interaction and prefiguring more inclusive possible futures.

As I have argued elsewhere (Forthcoming), the central goal of Queer Nation's uncivil activism was not so much to persuade current mainstream publics, but to make room for the meaningful expression of the alternative sensibility of queer subjects and their allies. A central critical aim was *empowering an alternative sensibility*: the sensibility of queer counter-publics. What the uncivil activism of Queer Nation seems to have been most interested in was the transformative effects that aggressively confronting the mainstream public could have, not for members of that public, but rather, *for themselves*, for queer subjects bonding together and empowering themselves, while garnering the solidarity and support of at least some (no matter how small) cross-section of the American public. This puts *self-empowerment* at the center of the communicative dynamics of their protest acts: their primary audience was the *internal* audience of queer subjects and their allies; the primary goal was to develop an alternative sensibility for the queer community that could support self-recognition, a proud and defiant sensibility that could overcome the feelings of shame and other disabling negative emotions rooted in experiences of stigmatization and social rejection.

in those contexts and start stitching their critical experiences of injustice together into a new sensibility; but it is also transcendent because it points to something *beyond* that context, something that is prefigured by the alternative sensibility and counter-culture cultivated by the grassroot practices of the liberation movement, an alternative form of recognition. The subject position of the resistant subjectivities that liberation movements make possible can be described as an *insider-outsider* perspective: the critical perspective of those who, while being insiders in a given social context, have nonetheless been excluded from that context and forced to recognize themselves outside that context, that is, at the margins or in interstitial spaces that they have turned into a new context for their own self-recognition and self-affirmation.

Insider-outsiders are what Patricia Hill Collins (2000) aptly describes as "outsiders within," that is, subjects who participate in a practice while being treated as strangers who don't belong, which gives them distinctive epistemic advantages and a critical edge: they are able to notice things that others don't and to develop a critical perspective from their experiences of not belonging or not being fully accepted. It is by virtue of being insiders who do not fully fit in that these subjects are capable of identifying normative deficits, such as recognition failures, which go unnoticed by mainstream or dominantly situated subjects. Through the engaged perspective of activists who are insider-outsiders, liberation movements are able to develop *transformative immanent critiques* of social pathologies of recognition. This kind of immanent critique[7] is neither internal reformism nor external interventionism: it is a critique that does not remain (entirely) within the insider's perspective and is capable of transcending that perspective; but, at the same time, it is a critique that does not come (entirely) from the outside and does not indulge in paternalistic interventions that violate the autonomy of a community or a social practice. The kind of immanent critique of social pathologies of misrecognition developed by grassroot movements of liberation can avoid problems of paternalism and heteronomy: this critique does not come from an external normative standpoint that self-proclaims to know better and dictates how a recognition dynamics (or "recognition order," to use Honneth's terminology) should be meliorated; rather, it is the subjects themselves experiencing the problems of those dynamics that develop the critical sensibility to diagnose social pathologies of recognition and work toward repairing the harms and toward the cultivation of proper and just recognition.

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7   For a compelling account of immanent critique of this kind, see Jaeggi (2018).

The grassroot approach to the diagnosis of social pathologies of recognition can thus solve the problem of epistemic and normative authority that arises for critical social theories. The therapeutic and diagnostic language of these critical social theories invites a question about epistemic and normative authority: who is the doctor who can diagnose a social pathology and prescribe a cure? Who has the authority and expertise to identify social illness and the path to social health? Who can be the subject and agent of the kind of social change that can bring about social healing? The answer of the grassroot approach is: the people themselves; in particular, those who suffer social exclusions and can develop critical insights and critical consciousness by being in touch with and transformed by their experiences of marginalization and oppression; they are the ones who have understanding and knowledge of social exclusions and insights into what needs to change for the social fabric to heal, become more inclusive, and allow for new paths of social communication and social growth. The diagnosis of social pathologies of recognition and the fight against them are not driven by an external standpoint or a *deus ex machina*. According to the grassroot approach I have defended in this essay, struggles for recognition have to be grounded in the critical experiences of those who suffer from recognition failures and injustices (such as patterns of epistemic misrecognition and the resulting epistemic injustices); only those insider-outsiders who develop a critical consciousness about misrecognition can guide the struggle of resistance against recognition failures and the fight for building or re-building a community that can create new dynamics and normative orders of recognition.

3. Recapitulation

In the first part of the essay, I have argued that epistemic injustices can and should be conceptualized as social pathologies of misrecognition, elaborating further Honneth's suggestions in this direction and addressing some concerns about bringing together recognition theory and the theory of epistemic injustice. I have further argued that resisting epistemic injustices involve recognition struggles, and that these struggles are hard to get started under conditions of oppression because oppressed subjects themselves are encouraged to misrecognize themselves and tend to be blocked from developing a critical consciousness about their own misrecognition (what I called *the paradox of resistant subjectivity*). In the second part of the essay, I argued that shared activi-

ties of resistance are required for overcoming the self-misrecognition of op-pressed subjects (a form of *self-perpetrating agential epistemic injustice*), and get-ting recognition struggles started. These shared activities of resistance are *communal counter-practices of epistemic self-empowerment*, that is, practices in which those who have been epistemically disempowered to the point that they cannot even recognize aspects of themselves or areas of their experience start empow-ering each other to think differently and speak differently, in their own terms. I analyzed visibility actions (such as kiss-ins) of the Queer Liberation movement as a paradigmatic example of a practice of self-empowerment necessary for recognition struggles to get off the ground. Focusing on the problem of alien-ation and self-ignorance, I argued that properly diagnosing the epistemic in-justices against oppressed groups can only be done from the engaged perspec-tive of an activist (the *insider-outsider*), and that a critical consciousness about epistemic misrecognition (including *self*-misrecognition) can only be devel-oped in and through the practices of consciousness-raising, collective learning and social transformation that liberation movements make possible. Grassroot liberation movements are capable of developing an *immanent critique* of recog-nition dynamics that aims at the self-transformation of those dynamics from the inside, avoiding the strictures and problems of both internal reformism and external interventionism.

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