

## ARTICLE

### **Toward a Foucaultian Epistemology of Resistance: Counter-Memory, Epistemic Friction, and *Guerrilla* Pluralism**

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**ABSTRACT:** In this paper I argue that Foucaultian genealogy offers a critical approach to practices of remembering and forgetting which is crucial for resisting oppression and dominant ideologies. For this argument I focus on the concepts of counter-history and counter-memory that Foucault developed in the 1970's. In the first section I analyze how the Foucaultian approach puts practices of remembering and forgetting in the context of power relations, focusing not only on *what* is remembered and forgotten, but *how*, by whom, and with what effects. I highlight the critical possibilities for resistance that this approach opens up, and I illustrate them with Ladelle McWhorter's genealogy of racism in Anglo-America. In the second section I put the Foucaultian approach in conversation with contemporary work in pragmatism and critical theory on the social epistemology of memory. In the third and final section, I explore some of the implications of the Foucaultian notion of resistance and what I term *guerrilla* pluralism for contemporary epistemological discussions of ignorance in standpoint theory and race theory.

**Keywords:** Counter-history, counter-memory, critical theory, epistemology, genealogy, insurrection, knowledge/ignorance, memory/oblivion, Michel Foucault, oppression, pluralism, pragmatism, race theory, racism, resistance, standpoint theory, William James.

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power. ... [There is] *a multiplicity of points of resistance*: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a *plurality of resistances*, each of them a special case.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality Vol. 1, An Introduction* (New York: Vintage, 1990) 95-6; my emphasis.

In order to understand the diversity and heterogeneity of forms of resistance, we need to understand the positionality and relationality of social agents in networks of power relations. Foucault insists that “resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” and that in order to understand how resistance works, we need to understand “the strictly relational character of power relations.”<sup>2</sup> Although this is often obscured by the widely assumed opposition between power and resistance, the Foucaultian analysis of power and resistance makes clear that these are internally related terms, and that resistance is not something that is exerted from outside power, but within it. One of Foucault’s great achievements is his critique of traditional conceptions of power as something repressive, top-down, and homogeneous or monolithic. By contrast, Foucault makes clear that there are irreducibly multiple and heterogeneous forms of power flowing in every direction within the social fabric, and offering multiple points of resistance.

Resistance is a complicated and heterogeneous phenomenon that defies unification and explication according to abstract and rigid principles of subversion. Our cognitive, affective, and political lives are caught up in various tensions among multidirectional relations of power/resistance. Our ways of thinking, feeling, and acting become empowered and disempowered in specific respects, as they are formed and remained inscribed within the different networks of power relations and the different forms of resistance that shape our lives in various (and not always fully coherent) ways. Struggles of resistance should be studied in their specificity, but without thereby renouncing investigation of their connections, intersections, and points of convergence and divergence. In this paper I want to address the question of what a critical epistemology that places bodies of knowledge and ignorance—especially *historical* knowledge and ignorance—in the context of power networks and struggles of resistance has to offer.

The central goal of this paper is to show the emancipatory potential of the epistemological framework underlying Foucault’s work. More specifically, I will try to show that the Foucaultian approach places practices of remembering and forgetting in the context of power relations in such a way that possibilities of resistance and subversion are brought to the fore. When our cultural practices of remembering and forgetting are interrogated as loci where multiple power relations and power struggles converge, the first thing to notice is the heterogeneity of differently situated perspectives and the multiplicity of trajectories that converge in the epistemic negotiations in which memories are formed or de-formed, maintained alive or killed. The discursive practices in which memory and oblivion are manufactured are not uniform and harmonious, but heterogeneous and full of conflicts and tensions. Foucault invites us to pay attention to the past and ongoing epistemic battles among competing power/knowledge frameworks that try to control a given field. Different

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

fields—or domains of discursive interaction—contain particular discursive regimes with their particular ways of producing knowledge. In the battle among power/knowledge frameworks, some come on top and become dominant while others are displaced and become *subjugated*. Foucault's methodology offers a way of exploiting that vibrant plurality of epistemic perspectives which always contains some bodies of experiences and memories that are erased or hidden in the mainstream frameworks that become hegemonic after prevailing in sustained epistemic battles. What Foucault calls *subjugated knowledges*<sup>3</sup> are forms of experiencing and remembering that are pushed to the margins and rendered unqualified and unworthy of epistemic respect by prevailing and hegemonic discourses.

Subjugated knowledges remain invisible to mainstream perspectives; they have a precarious subterranean existence that renders them unnoticed by most people and impossible to detect by those whose perspective has already internalized certain epistemic exclusions. And with the invisibility of subjugated knowledges, certain possibilities for resistance and subversion go unnoticed. The critical and emancipatory potential of Foucaultian genealogy resides in challenging established practices of remembering and forgetting by excavating subjugated bodies of experiences and memories, bringing to the fore the perspectives that culturally hegemonic practices have foreclosed. The critical task of the scholar and the activist is to resurrect subjugated knowledges—that is, to revive hidden or forgotten bodies of experiences and memories—and to help produce *insurrections of subjugated knowledges*.<sup>4</sup> In order to be critical and to have transformative effects, genealogical investigations should aim at these *insurrections*, which are critical interventions that disrupt and interrogate epistemic hegemonies and mainstream perspectives (e.g. official histories, standard interpretations, ossified exclusionary meanings, etc). Such insurrections involve the difficult labor of mobilizing scattered, marginalized publics and of tapping into the critical potential of their dejected experiences and memories. An epistemic insurrection requires a collaborative relation between genealogical scholars/activists and the subjects whose experiences and memories have been subjugated: those subjects by themselves may not be able to destabilize the epistemic status quo until they are given a voice at the epistemic table (i.e. in the production of knowledge), that is, until room is made for their marginalized perspective to exert resistance, until past epistemic battles are reopened and established frameworks become open to contestation. On the other hand, the scholars and activists aiming to produce insurrectionary interventions could not get their critical activity off the ground if they did not draw on past and ongoing contestations, and the lived experiences and memo-

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<sup>3</sup> See esp. Michel Foucault, *"Society Must Be Defended"* (New York: Picador, 2003), 7-9.

<sup>4</sup> See Foucault, *"Society Must be Defended,"* 9, where he introduces and explains the notion of "the insurrection of subjugated knowledges" that genealogical investigations should aim at. In section 1 I explain the relationship between critical genealogy and "the insurrection of subjugated knowledges."

ries of those whose marginalized lives have become the silent scars of forgotten struggles.

As I will try to show in detail in what follows, what makes the Foucaultian genealogical approach specifically *critical* is its capacity to facilitate insurrections of subjugated knowledges. In section 1, I will explain how exactly critical genealogies contribute “to desubjugate historical knowledges, to set them free,”<sup>5</sup> so that insurrectionary struggles against coercive epistemic closures are revived. Critical genealogies contribute to the production of *counter-histories*, which are centered around those experiences and memories that have not been heard and integrated in official histories. The counter-histories that critical genealogies can produce are possible because there are people who remember against the grain, people whose memories do not fit the historical narratives available. Counter-histories feed off such counter-memories and at the same time transform them, revitalizing practices of counter-memory and offering them new discursive resources to draw on. The critical goal of genealogy is to energize a vibrant and feisty epistemic pluralism so that insurrectionary struggles among competing power/knowledge frameworks are always underway and contestation always alive. In section 2, I elucidate the specific kind of epistemic pluralism underlying Foucaultian critical genealogies. I argue that this is not just *any* kind of epistemic pluralism but a particularly radical and dynamic one: what I term a *guerrilla* pluralism. I argue that a commitment to *guerrilla* pluralism is what guides the role of scholars/activists as facilitators of insurrections; and I contrast this particularly combative kind of pluralism with other epistemological pluralistic approaches to memory and knowledge of the past which have been prevalent in American philosophy. Finally, in section 3, I will lay out what Foucaultian genealogy and the *guerrilla* pluralism that supports it have to offer to contemporary epistemologies of ignorance in race theory and standpoint theory. Although the Foucaultian approach has often been viewed as antithetical to standpoint epistemology (since it destabilizes and calls into question standpoints as problematic cultural artifacts), I will show that there is an interesting and rich convergence between the Foucaultian genealogical critique of standpoints and the self-interrogation of standpoints recently developed in critical race theory and feminist theory.

### **1. Remembering Against the Grain and Resisting Oblivion: The Insurrection of Subjugated Knowledges**

In the 1975-76 lectures “*Society Must Be Defended*,” Foucault draws a contrast between “the genealogy of knowledges” and any kind of linear intellectual history such as the history of the sciences: whereas the latter is located at “the cognition-truth axis,” “the genealogy of knowledges is located on a different axis, namely the discourse-power axis or, if you like, the discursive practice—clash of power axis.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 178.

Genealogy traces the development of discursive formations that give rise to certain forms of knowledge and power relations. Through their meaning-generating activities, through a grammar of meanings that makes certain things intelligible, surveyable, and the proper objects of investigation and knowledge (and others unintelligible, unsurveyable, and epistemically opaque), discursive practices have both (and simultaneously) epistemic and power effects. And it is of course crucial that we regard power and knowledge not only as intimately related but as inseparable, which is why Foucault and Foucaultians have used the cumbersome expression “power/knowledge.” One may naively think that the opposite of power/knowledge would be powerlessness/ignorance, so that those excluded or marginalized in the discursive practices that produce certain epistemic and power effects would be simply subjects without any knowledge and any power, quasi-non-agents. But the pluralistic genealogical approach that Foucault sketches goes completely against those views that portray the oppressed as merely powerless and ignorant. In fact, this approach unmasks as an important misconception the view that the oppressed simply lack power and knowledge because of the forms of exclusions and marginalization they suffer. That distorted characterization plays in the hands of the dominant ideologies and grants too much to them: namely, it grants the very definition of what counts as legitimate power and legitimate knowledge. Instead, a more accurate characterization would be the one that describes oppressed groups as those whose powers and knowledges have been demeaned and obstructed. This is why, after drawing the contrast between genealogy and history of knowledge, Foucault goes on to say that the critical task that genealogy confronts us with is “an immense and multiple battle, but not one between knowledge and ignorance, but an immense and multiple battle between *knowledges in the plural*—knowledges that are in conflict because of their very morphology, because they are in the possession of enemies, and because they have intrinsic power-effects.”<sup>7</sup>

How do we fight against power on this view? Not by trying to escape it (as if liberation consisted in standing outside power altogether), but rather, by turning power(s) against itself(themselves), or by mobilizing some forms of power against others. Similarly, how do we fight against established and official forms of knowledge when they are oppressive? Not by trying to escape knowledge altogether, but rather, by turning knowledge(s) against itself(themselves), or by mobilizing some forms of knowledge against others. The critical battle against the monopolization of knowledge-producing practices involves what Foucault calls “an insurrection of subjugated knowledges.” When it comes to knowledge of the past and the power associated with it, this battle involves resisting the “omissions” and distortions of official histories, returning to lost voices and forgotten experiences, relating to the past from the perspective of the present in an alternative (out-of-the-mainstream) way.

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 179; my emphasis.

And this is precisely what the Foucaultian notions of “counter-history” and “counter-memory” offer.

Official histories are produced by monopolizing knowledge-producing practices with respect to a shared past. Official histories create and maintain the unity and continuity of a political body by imposing an interpretation on a shared past and, at the same time, by silencing alternative interpretations of historical experiences. Counter-histories try to undo these silences and to undermine the unity and continuity that official histories produce. Foucault illustrates this with what he calls “the discourse of race war” that emerged in early modernity as a discourse of resistance for the liberation of a race against the oppression of another, e.g. of the Saxons under the yoke of the Normans. Foucault argues that in Europe—and especially in England—“this discourse of race war functioned as a counter-history”<sup>8</sup> until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, at which point it was turned into a racist discourse (aimed not at the liberation of an oppressed race, but at the supremacy of an allegedly superior race that views all others as an existential threat). In lecture IV of “*Society Must Be Defended*” Foucault sets out to analyze the “counterhistorical function” of the race-war discourse in early modernity.<sup>9</sup> Part of what the race-war discourse did was to retrieve the untold history of a people which could be used as a weapon against the official history that legitimized their oppression. This counter-history tapped into the subversive power of a silenced historical experience and reactivated the past to create distinctive knowledge/power effects: new meanings and normative attitudes were mobilized, so that what was officially presented as past glorious victories that legitimized monarchs and feudal lords as the rightful owners of the land to whom taxes were owed, now appeared as unfair defeats at the hands of abusive conquerors who became oppressors and had to be overthrown.

In his analysis of race-war discourse, Foucault identifies two different roles that counter-history plays. In the first place, by establishing itself in opposition to an official history, a counter-history reflects and produces *disunity*. A counter-history blocks the unifying function of the official history by bringing to the fore the oppositions and divisions in the political body. This is what Foucault calls the *principle of heterogeneity*, which guides counter-history and has the following effect:

The history of some is not the history of others. It will be discovered, or at least asserted, that the history of the Saxons after their defeat at Battle of Hastings is not the same as the history of the Normans who were the victors in the same battle. It will be learned that one man’s victory is another man’s defeat. [...] *What looks like right, law, or obligation from the point of view of power looks like the abuse of power, violence, and exaction when it is seen from the viewpoint of the new discourse.*<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 66.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 66ff.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 69-70.

The disunity effects of a counter-history have the potential to destabilize a normative order by introducing a counter-perspective that resists and invalidates the normative expectations of the imposed dominant ideology. As Foucault puts it, “this counter-history breaks up the unity of the sovereign law that imposes obligations.”<sup>11</sup> Through counter-history, the legitimacy of the obligations imposed on a subjugated people “is undone, and the law comes to be seen as a Janus-faced reality: the triumph of some means the submission of others.”<sup>12</sup>

In the second place, by undoing established historical continuities, a counter-history reflects and produces discontinuous moments in a people’s past, gaps that are passed over in silence, interstices in the socio-historical fabric of a community that have received no attention. This is what we can call, by symmetry with the previous point, the *principle of discontinuity*. Foucault describes it in the following way:

This counter-history [...] also breaks the continuity of glory [...]. It reveals that the light—the famous dazzling effect of power—is not something that petrifies, solidifies, and immobilizes the entire social body, and thus keeps it in order; it is in fact a divisive light that illuminates one side of the social body but leaves the other side in shadow or casts it into darkness.<sup>13</sup>

A counter-history is the dark history of those peoples who have been kept in the shadows, a history that speaks “from within the shadows,” “the discourse of those who have no glory, or of those who have lost it and who now find themselves, perhaps for a time—but probably for a long time—in *darkness and silence*.”<sup>14</sup> A counter-history is not the history of victories, but the history of defeats. As Foucault remarks, it is linked to those “epic, religious, or mythical forms which [...] formulate the misfortune of ancestors, exiles, and servitude;” it “is much closer to the mythico-religious discourse of the Jews than to the politico-legendary history of the Romans.”<sup>15</sup> While an official history keeps entire groups of peoples and their lives and experiences “in darkness and silence,” a counter-history teaches us precisely how to listen to those silent and dark moments. But how do we learn to listen to silence? In an earlier essay, “What is an Author?,”<sup>16</sup> Foucault offers helpful remarks about how to fight against the “omissions” and active oblivion produced by discursive practices, that is, how to listen to lost voices that have been silenced or coopted in such a way that certain meanings were lost or never heard. Foucault is particularly interested in those forms of silencing produced by a discursive practice which, far from

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<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*; my emphasis.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>16</sup> Originally published in French in 1969, but translated and published in English in 1977.

being accidental, are in fact foundational and constitutive. Those are *constitutive silences*, for the discursive practice proceeds in the way it does and acquires its distinctive normative structure by virtue of the exclusions that it produces, by virtue of those silenced voices and occluded meanings that let the official voices and meanings dominate the discursive space. Omissions and silences are foundational, a constitutive part of “the origin” or “the initiation” of a discursive practice. For that reason, the fight against those exclusions requires “a return to the origin”:

If we return, it is because of a basic and constructive omission that is not the result of accident or incomprehension. [...] This nonaccidental omission must be regulated by precise operations that can be situated, analysed, and reduced in a return to the act of initiation.<sup>17</sup>

Foucault distinguishes this critical “return to the origin” from mere “rediscoveries” and mere “reactivations”: a rediscovery promotes “the perception of forgotten or obscured figures;”<sup>18</sup> and a reactivation involves “the insertion of discourse into totally new domains of generalization, practices, and transformation.”<sup>19</sup> By contrast, an attempt to transform a discursive practice deeply from the inside by resisting its silences and omissions requires a “return to the origin.” This critical return involves revisiting the texts that have come to be considered foundational, “the primary points of reference” of the practice, and developing a new way of reading them, so as to train our eyes and ears to new meanings and voices: we pay “particular attention to those things registered in the interstices of the text, its gaps and absences. We return to those empty spaces that have been masked by omission or concealed in a false and misleading plenitude.”<sup>20</sup> Foucault emphasizes that the modifications introduced by this critical return to the origin are not merely “a historical supplement that would come to fix itself upon the primary discursivity and re-double it in the form of an ornament which, after all, is not essential. Rather, it is *an effective and necessary means of transforming discursive practice.*”<sup>21</sup> If rediscoveries and reactivations of the past are crucial for extending discursive practices, a “return to the origin” that unveils omissions and silences is what is required for a deep transformation of our meaning-making capacities within those practices. The ability to identify omissions, to listen to silences, to play with discursive gaps and textual interstices is a crucial part of our critical agency for resisting power/knowledge frameworks. Lacking that ability is a strong indication of one’s inability to resist epistemic

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<sup>17</sup> Michel Foucault, “What is an Author?,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 135.

<sup>18</sup> Foucault gives as an example Chomsky’s “rediscovery” of Cartesian grammar by reviving the tradition of grammatical investigation from Cordemoy to Humboldt.

<sup>19</sup> Foucault, “What is an Author?,” 134.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*; my emphasis.

and socio-political subjugation, of the limitations on one's agency and positionality within discursive practices. And the ability to inhabit discursive practices critically that we develop by becoming sensitive to exclusions—by listening to silences—enables us not to be trapped into discursive practices, that is, it gives us also the ability to develop *counter-discourses*. Indeed, being able to negotiate historical narratives and to resist imposed interpretations of one's past means being able to develop *counter-histories*. Becoming sensitive to discursive exclusions and training ourselves to listen to silences is what makes possible *the insurrection of subjugated knowledge*: it enables us to tap into the critical potential of demeaned and obstructed forms of power/knowledge by paying attention to the lives, experiences and discursive practices of those peoples who have lived their life "in darkness and silence."

Foucault opened the 1976 lectures in "*Society Must be Defended*" with a discussion of "the insurrection of subjugated knowledges."<sup>22</sup> In this discussion he highlights two different aspects of subjugated knowledges that are crucial to understand their critical potential, that is, the kind of insurrection that they can be mobilized to produce. In the first place, Foucault emphasizes that subjugated knowledges are "historical contents that have been buried or masked in functional coherences or formal systematizations" and that are dug up by new forms of scholarship.<sup>23</sup> By resurrecting these buried and masked blocks of historical knowledge, the critique of institutions, discourses, and hegemonic histories becomes possible. For example, Foucault remarks that what made it possible to develop "an effective critique of the asylum or the prison" was the retrieval—through "the tools of scholarship"—of "blocks of historical knowledges" present but masked or buried in "functional and systematic ensembles."<sup>24</sup> These blocks of historical knowledge make critique possible because they "allow us to see the dividing lines in the confrontation and struggles that functional arrangements or systematic organizations are designed to mask."<sup>25</sup> The historical dimension of subjugated knowledges is crucial because it enables us to see, diachronically, different substrata or deposits of ongoing epistemic subjugations by calling attention to the social struggles and conflicts that have been part of the production of institutions and discourses, but have become buried in their interstices.

In the second place, Foucault also highlights another key aspect of subjugated knowledges: they are "knowledges from below," "unqualified or even disqualified knowledges."<sup>26</sup> The lack of sanction or pedigree, their marginalization and stigmatization, is a crucial part of the epistemological subordination or exclusion that makes them subjugated knowledges: they are "knowledges that have been disquali-

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<sup>22</sup> See esp. Foucault, "*Society Must be Defended*," 7-10.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

fied as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naïve knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity.”<sup>27</sup> But Foucault is quick to point out that these disqualified or unqualified knowledges should not be identified with “common knowledge or common sense,” which is excluded from the realm of science and erudition, but has great currency in mainstream epistemic markets. By contrast, a subjugated knowledge is the one that suffers a more pervasive social exclusion and stigmatization: “a knowledge that is local, regional, or differential, incapable of unanimity and which derives its power solely from the fact that it is different from all the knowledges that surround it.”<sup>28</sup> These are knowledges that are not articulated or voiced in the *proper* way, knowledges without accepted credentials; in short, knowledges without social currency because of the history of epistemological exclusions and marginalizations that have kept them out of official markets for epistemic transactions. This second feature of subjugated knowledges is also what makes social critique possible by calling into question official and hegemonic knowledges and interrogating the exclusions that they rest on. Thus, referring to his own genealogical critiques of institutions like the asylum or the hospital and of discourses such as psychiatry or medicine, Foucault remarks that “it is the reappearance of what people know at a local level, of these disqualified knowledges, that made the critique possible.”<sup>29</sup>

A perfect illustration of these two features of subjugated knowledges and their critical potential can be found in Ladelle McWhorter’s use of the local and forgotten blocks of historical knowledge which she uncovers in her genealogy of racism in the US. In her research of the eugenics movement McWhorter found that between 1927 and 1972 “poor people in Virginia were rounded up by the thousands and taken to Lynchburg and Staunton to be sterilized”<sup>30</sup> (—about 8,500 were forcibly sterilized, McWhorter tells us):

In Virginia, and elsewhere, the memories are still there—scattered, in pieces, dispersed into this or that individual’s or family’s shame and pain—but still there. The knowledge of what was done to two generations of Virginia’s poor, her disabled, her nonconformists, her misfits, is a local knowledge shared by ordinary people [...]. It is knowledge that for decades was *not recognized as any kind of knowledge at all* and that barely recognizes itself as such even now.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ladelle McWhorter, *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America: A Genealogy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press 2009), 296.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 296-97.

McWhorter points out that in the last twenty years “a small contingent of researchers has disinterred a lot of the buried evidence to corroborate” the ignored, but not forgotten historical knowledge of that official campaign against the disabled and the vulnerable.<sup>32</sup> In this hidden but remembered historical knowledge from below we can appreciate the two aspects of subjugated knowledges which, according to Foucault, contribute to make critique possible: the buried but documentable historical knowledges and the locally scattered memories that were never allowed to amount to more than unqualified and dismissible experiences. As McWhorter puts it:

By foregrounding historical material that hegemonic histories and official policies have de-emphasized or dismissed, they [the genealogical researchers] have created an erudite account of scientific racism and eugenics, and in so doing they have critiqued received views and called into question some aspects of the epistemologies that support them.<sup>33</sup>

As Foucault puts it, “it is the coupling together of the buried scholarly knowledge and knowledges that were disqualified by the hierarchy of erudition and sciences” that gives strength to genealogical critique.<sup>34</sup> What both of these forms of subjugated knowledges brings to the fore is the “historical knowledge of struggles,” “the memory of combats, the very memory that had until then been confined to the margins.”<sup>35</sup> And this is exactly what the critical and transformative work of genealogical investigations consists in, according to Foucault: with the “coupling together of scholarly erudition and local memories,” genealogical investigations provide “a meticulous rediscovery of struggles and the raw memory of fights”; “this coupling [...] allows us to constitute a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of that knowledge in contemporary tactics.”<sup>36</sup> Genealogical investigations can unearth multiple paths from buried or forgotten past struggles to the present; and thus they can promote a critical awareness that things are as they are because of a history of past struggles that are hidden from view, which can have a great impact on how we confront our struggles in the present. As McWhorter’s genealogical investigations illustrate so well, “one consequence of that awareness is the recognition that today’s status quo was far from inevitable and need not persist into tomorrow.”<sup>37</sup> Genealogies are *insurrections* against hegemonic power/knowledge effects of discursive practices. Thus, for example, McWhorter’s genealogical account of racism in the US is “an intellectual assault on the power-effects of institutionalized, entrenched, and

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<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Foucault, “*Society Must be Defended*,” 8.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> McWhorter, *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America*, 296.

taken-for-granted academic, clinical, moralistic, and religious discourses about racism."<sup>38</sup> And it is important to note that the possibilities of critique that are opened up by unearthing marginalized past struggles benefit not only those whose experiences and lives have been kept in the dark, but the entire social body, which can now become critically conscious of the heterogeneity of histories and experiences that are part of the social fabric. This is why McWhorter's genealogy of racism makes racial oppression relevant in novel and unexpected ways to a wide variety of groups and publics that can now relate to old struggles in new ways.<sup>39</sup>

As Foucault puts it, genealogies can be described as the "attempt to de-subjugate historical knowledges, to set them free, or in other words to enable them to oppose and struggle against the coercion of a unitary, formal, and scientific theoretical discourse."<sup>40</sup> But, as he emphasizes, genealogies do not simply "reject knowledge, or invoke or celebrate some immediate experience that has yet to be captured by knowledge. This is not what they are about. They are about the *insurrection of knowledges*."<sup>41</sup> Genealogical investigations proceed by "way of playing local, discontinuous, disqualified, or nonlegitimized knowledges off against the unitary theoretical instance" that filters them out or absorbs them by putting them in their *proper* place within a hierarchy. Genealogies are *insurrections* of subjugated knowledges. And the plurals here are crucial, for the plurality of insurrections and of subjugated knowledges has to be kept always alive in order to resist new hegemonic unifications and hierarchizations of knowledges. The danger that the critical work of genealogies can be reabsorbed by hegemonic power/knowledges is brilliantly described by Foucault:

Once we have excavated our genealogical fragments, once we begin to exploit them and to put in circulation these elements of knowledge that we have been trying to dig out of the sand, isn't there a danger that they will be recoded, recolonized by these unitary discourses which, having first disqualified them and having then ignored them when they reappeared, may now be ready to reannex them and include them in their own discourses and their own power-knowledge? *And if we try to protect the fragments we have dug up, don't we run the risk of building, with our own hands, a unitary discourse?*<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> As McWhorter describes it, what her genealogy tries to accomplish is "to resurrect old questions and formulate a few new ones, to mess up tidy categories and definitions, to make the questions of what racism is, where it comes from, and what it allies itself with too complex and too persistent and too frightening to put down." (Ibid.)

<sup>40</sup> Foucault, "*Society Must be Defended*," 10.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 9; my emphasis.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 11; my emphasis.

Insurrections of (de-)subjugated knowledges and their critical resistance can be co-opted for the production of new forms of subjugation and exclusion (new hegemonomies) or for the reinforcement of old ones. The only way to resist this danger is by guaranteeing the constant *epistemic friction* of knowledges from below, which—as I have argued elsewhere<sup>43</sup>—means guaranteeing that eccentric voices and perspectives are heard and can interact with mainstream ones, that the experiences and concerns of those who live in darkness and silence do not remain lost and unattended, but are allowed to exert *friction*. Genealogies have to be always plural, for genealogical investigations can unearth an indefinite number of paths from forgotten past struggles to the struggles of our present. And the insurrections of subjugated knowledges they produce also need to remain plural if they are to retain their critical power, that is, the capacity to empower people to resist oppressive power/knowledge effects. In the next section I will put this Foucaultian pluralism in conversation with other epistemological pluralistic approaches to memory and knowledge of the past.

## 2. Epistemic Friction, *Guerrilla Pluralism*, and Counter-Memory

What we need in order to maintain possibilities of resistance always open is *epistemic friction*. As Wittgenstein puts it: “We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground!”<sup>44</sup> I want to define epistemic friction as follows: epistemic friction consists in the mutual contestation of differently normatively structured knowledges which interrogates epistemic exclusions, disqualifications, and hegemonomies. Epistemic friction is acknowledged and celebrated in pluralistic views of our epistemic negotiations and our cognitive lives, but not every kind of epistemic pluralism makes room for epistemic friction in the same way. In this section I want to explore the implications of a thoroughgoing epistemic pluralism for genealogical investigations. For this purpose, I will compare and contrast Foucault’s pluralism with two different kinds of epistemic pluralism that can be found in American philosophy, arguing that Foucaultian pluralism offers a distinctive notion of epistemic friction that has tremendous critical force.

Different experiential and agential standpoints can make different contributions to genealogical investigations and even offer alternative genealogical histories. Given the right socio-political conditions, the critical reconstruction and re-evaluation of our beliefs can (and should) be reopened and resumed whenever new standpoints appear on the scene, but also whenever we discover that certain voices or perspectives were never considered or were not given equal weight. Thus it is not surprising that populations feel particularly compelled to reopen the conversation about their past when the socio-political conditions change in such a way that voices

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<sup>43</sup> José Medina, *Speaking from Elsewhere: A New Contextualist Perspective on Meaning, Identity, and Discursive Agency* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2006).

<sup>44</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), §107.

and perspectives that had previously been ignored or not fully taken into consideration can now participate differently in the reconstruction of their past because they enjoy a different kind of agency. For example, this has been happening periodically in different ways and on different fronts in the public debates about past dictatorial regimes that have taken place in countries such as Argentina, Chile, or Spain.<sup>45</sup> In these countries different publics have demanded a sustained effort to critically revisit the reconstruction of a shared past in the light of evidence, testimony, and articulations or interpretations of facts that challenge established beliefs or are simply not integrated in the collective memory and “official history” in circulation. There is a plurality of lived pasts and of knowledges about the past that *resist* unification and create *friction*. But what are we to make of this *resistance and friction*? Pluralistic views of truth and knowledge make productive use of those forms of epistemic friction and resistance, whereas monistic views regard epistemic diversity always as a problem. I will restrict myself here to pluralistic views, but I want to emphasize that different kinds of epistemic pluralism involve different normative attitudes with respect to epistemic diversity and the kinds of epistemic friction and resistance that heterogeneous perspectives can exert.

I want to distinguish three very different attitudes with respect to epistemic differences and the plurality of heterogeneous perspectives that we can find in pluralistic accounts of truth and knowledge. In the first place, in classic pragmatists such as C.S. Peirce and G.H. Mead (at least under some interpretations),<sup>46</sup> we can find an approach to discursive practices that places emphasis on the plurality of experiential perspectives, but nonetheless preserves a commitment to unification, so that all available standpoints must ultimately be subsumable under a *single perspective*—for example, if we were to reach a hypothetical end of inquiry, or if we were to push our communicative processes far enough until all perspectives were heard and integrated. This is what I call a *converging pluralism*. For converging pluralisms, the diversity and heterogeneity of conflicting perspectives are merely contingent and in-principle transitory features of our epistemic practices that we should aspire to eliminate or at least minimize. By contrast, in more thoroughgoing

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<sup>45</sup> In Spain multifaceted debates about how to remember and talk about the civil war and Franco’s dictatorship have raised wide-ranging questions about objectivity and justice, covering many diverse issues from reparations and restitutions, to modifying the historical narratives available so as to include other voices and perspectives, and to changing all kinds of elements in public life that echo past events and past subjects in particular ways through street names, the display of symbols, public art, etc. All of these issues are addressed by the new legislation (the so-called “Ley de Memoria Histórica”) proposed by the socialist government in Spain, which passed in July of 2006.

<sup>46</sup> Alternative—and more interesting—interpretations of Peirce and Mead can be found in Vincent Colapietro, *Peirce’s Approach to the Self: A Semiotic Perspective on Human Subjectivity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1989) and David M. Aboulafia, *The Cosmopolitan Self: George Herbert Mead and Continental Philosophy* (University of Illinois Press, 2006).

pluralistic views such as that of William James, diversity and heterogeneity are unavoidable features of our epistemic lives that can be only hidden with violence and exclusions, but that can never be fully erased. But in Jamesian pluralism, though more radical, the possibilities for epistemic friction and resistance are qualified and constrained for the sake, not of consensus and unification, but of *coordination and cooperation*. This is what I call a *melioristic pluralism*.

As I have argued elsewhere,<sup>47</sup> according to James and in contrast with consensus theories of truth and knowledge,<sup>48</sup> radical fallibilism and pluralism, the openness to contestations and re-interpretations of our beliefs, never goes away, but rather constitutes the very normative core of our epistemic lives. This openness calls attention to the kind of accountability and responsiveness to others required by our epistemic agency. However, although on this pluralistic view epistemic differences and conflicts are not erased, they are put at the service of mutual improvements. On this melioristic view, epistemic contestations and negotiations are directed toward improving the objectivity of the different standpoints available, toward correcting their biases and mistakes, and toward maintaining their truth *alive*—that is, dynamic, adaptable, and integrated in the lives of those who hold those experiential perspectives. Although here there is no aspiration to combine and unify all perspectives into a single one, there is the normative expectation that the interactions among diverging perspectives will result in an increase of objectivity and in the improvement of the articulations and justifications of beliefs and epistemic appraisals. On this view, epistemic friction among perspectives is always an opportunity for learning from each other and correcting each other.

By contrast, the radical epistemic pluralism that we find in Foucault is not melioristic in this sense. On this more radical pluralism, epistemic frictions are no more tools for learning than they are tools for unlearning (for undoing power/knowledges—e.g. for undoing ways of remembering and forgetting, when it comes to knowledge of the past). On this view, epistemic frictions are not merely instrumental or transitional—that is, tools for, or steps toward, harmony or conflict

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<sup>47</sup> See José Medina, "James on Truth and Solidarity: The Epistemology of Diversity and the Politics of Specificity," in John Stuhr (ed.), *100 Years of Pragmatism: William James's Revolutionary Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 124-143; and José Medina, "Hacia una Epistemología de la Resistencia: Memoria, Objetividad, y Justicia," *La Balsa de la Medusa* 4 (2011), 47-74.

<sup>48</sup> According to Jamesian pluralism, however deep or shallow our epistemic differences turn out to be, they cannot be erased, overcome, or subsumed under some (more abstract) unity of a higher order. It is for this reason that James's pluralistic approach cannot support a *consensus theory of truth*, whether relativistic or universalistic. For when the harmonization of epistemic differences takes the form of a mandatory consensus, differences become something purely transitory that must be eliminated for epistemic success. On the Jamesian view, truth is not identified with agreement at all: neither with the current agreement of particular communities *à la* Rorty, nor with the ideal agreement of a universal community *à la* Habermas.

resolution. Epistemic frictions are sought for their own sake, for the forms of *resistance* that they constitute. This is why I will call this more radical epistemic pluralism that can be found in Foucault a *guerrilla* pluralism. It is not a pluralism that tries to resolve conflicts and overcome struggles, but instead tries to provoke them and to re-energize them. It is a pluralism that aims not at the melioration of the cognitive and ethical lives of all, but rather, at the (epistemic and socio-political) *resistance* of some against the oppression of others. This is a pluralism that focuses on the gaps, discontinuities, tensions and clashes among perspectives and discursive practices. With respect to knowledges of the past, Foucaultian genealogical investigations do not simply revive alternative memories that can act as correctives of each other and cooperate without losing their specificity, as a Jamesian melioristic pluralism would have it. Rather, Foucaultian genealogical investigations resurrect *counter-memories*, not just for the sake of joint cooperation, but for the sake of reactivating struggles and energizing forms of resistance. On this view, alternative memories are not simply the raw materials to be coordinated in a heterogeneous (but nonetheless shared) collective memory; rather, they remain counter-memories that make available multiplicitous pasts for differently constituted and positioned publics and their discursive practices.

Despite differences in depth and radicality, Foucault's and James's pluralistic approaches have overlapping commonalities and they are both part of a genealogical approach to truth, or—more accurately—to ways of establishing, articulating, and transmitting truths within the different economies<sup>49</sup> of discursive practices. The pluralistic and genealogical approach to truth defended by both James and Foucault offers a piecemeal approach that is not in the business of identifying what makes all our truths true.<sup>50</sup> By contrast, the piecemeal approach of pluralistic genealogy is in the business of examining, case by case, the diverse ways in which particular truths are settled, challenged, negotiated, evaluated and re-evaluated in particular contexts. Both James and Foucault call attention to our proclivity to forget how truths have been established, to block the memories of the multiple experiences and struggles that went into the making of those inherited truths. For both James and Foucault, truths are made, not given; they are made in and through our practices, experiences, and valuations. But we are prone to forget about their genesis. This is what I have

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<sup>49</sup> And it is worth mentioning that both Foucault and James make explicit use of economic metaphors to elucidate the normative structures and dynamics of discursive practices or “discursive regimes.” In his discussions of the pragmatic value of truth as “what is expedient” in our thought and action, James talks about “the cash-value of truth” and of cashing out the value of truths by elucidating their roles in our practices and experiences: see William James, *Pragmatism: A New Name for Some Old Ways of Thinking* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 110.

<sup>50</sup> Substantive theories of truth are defined by their attempt to identify such a general truth-maker. Consensus theories of truth, for example, find it in agreement (whether local or universal). See José Medina and David Wood, *Truth: Engagements Across Philosophical Traditions* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005).

called *genesis amnesia*.<sup>51</sup> Insofar as they try to undo this amnesia, Jamesian and Foucaultian genealogies are as much about forgetting as they are about remembering; that is, they pointedly target oblivion from different angles and perspectives and for different purposes. However, in this *undoing of oblivion*, James tends to focus on the positive experiences that went into the making of established truths, whereas Foucaultian genealogies bring to the fore the forgotten struggles, silenced voices, and violent exclusions. I will briefly sketch how the genealogical approach appears within Jamesian pragmatism to then turn to the radicalization of the genealogical approach by Foucault, hoping to bring into a sharper focus the contrast between a melioristic and a *guerrilla* pluralism.

The genesis amnesia with respect to the truths circulated in our discursive practices is problematic because it forces us to accept inherited truths independently of the life-experiences from which they were drawn. James warns us against the danger of relying uncritically on fixed truths, for this means relying on the experiences and valuations of others or of our past selves, which may have lost their force and appropriateness in our current experiential contexts. Fixity is a property that human truths cannot have. Those recalcitrant truths that take the appearance of being permanent and fixed simply hide ossified valuations and rigidified beliefs. Our body of truths always has to be critically revisited in the light of new experiences. On James's view, truths cannot simply be taken for granted, because they become *inert* or *dead* truths, i.e. truths that have been removed from the stream of life and are presented in complete independence from particular experiential contexts and particular experiential subjects.<sup>52</sup> Truths have to be related to the subjects in whose life they make a difference, to their experiences and valuations. According to James, when truths are detached from the life-experiences that gave them birth, they lose their vital force and they become rigid, ossified, *dead*. Truths cannot be simply *found*; they have to be created or recreated to be *alive*. *Living* truths are truths of our own making. Of course, the living truths we make today will be the dead truths of tomorrow. Our truths lose their action-guiding value and productivity when they are detached from concrete life-experiences, becoming ossified by habitual use. But this does not mean that we cannot rely on those beliefs that have been previously accepted as true. Our epistemic activities need to rely on a stock of truths that have been previously established in our transactions with the world (our own as well as

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<sup>51</sup> José Medina, "Wittgenstein and Nonsense: Kantianism, Psychologism, and the *Habitus*," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 11 (2003), 293-318.

<sup>52</sup> As James puts it in a brilliant passage: "Truth independent; truth that we *find* merely; truth no longer malleable to human need; truth incorrigible, in a word; such truth exists indeed superabundantly [...]; but then it means only the dead heart of the living tree, and its being there means only that truth also has its paleontology and its 'prescription,' and may grow stiff with years of veteran service and petrified in men's regard by sheer antiquity." (William James, *Pragmatism*, 37)

those of others). But the older truths on which we rely cannot be simply taken for granted; they have to be subject to a critical epistemic examination that traces them back to their experiential sources. This is why James claims that, besides a method, pragmatism is “a *genetic* theory of what is meant by truth.”<sup>53</sup> We have to uncover how truths have been made. We need to recover “the trail of the human serpent” that is left “over everything”<sup>54</sup> and is often erased or forgotten. It is in this sense that the Jamesian approach to truth is essentially *genealogical*.<sup>55</sup> On James’s view, the epistemic analysis of our beliefs requires the genealogy of those ideas and thoughts that have been *made true* in our practices. But of course genealogies are driven by present concerns and interests and, therefore, they are both backward-looking and forward-looking simultaneously. Jamesian genealogies trace the vital trajectories of our truths within our practices, presenting them at the cross-roads between the life-experiences and actions of the past and those of the present and future. The critical task, for James, is to trace the practical trajectories along which the life of those truths have run their course, trying to determine if there is still some life left in them and what paths their present and future life can take.

But notice that the exclusive focus of Jamesian genealogies is on continuities and convergences in alethic trajectories within our practices. A Jamesian genealogy tries to uncover what our truths have done so far and what they can still do for us. A Foucaultian genealogy goes much further and its attention to epistemic differences is more radical. A Foucaultian genealogy tries to uncover what our truths have never done for (some of) us and never will; and it tries to connect the truths generated within a given practice with the un-truths that are also generated alongside them, digging up all sorts of epistemic frictions and struggles that reveal the competing and alternative truths that may lie in the interstices of a discursive practice or in counter-discourses. Thus, as argued above, in Foucault we find a more radical and uncompromising epistemic pluralism, a *guerrilla* pluralism. Grounded in this pluralism, Foucaultian genealogical investigations have their primary focus on discontinuities and divergences in alethic trajectories that can interrogate the continuities and convergences that we take for granted, and thus produce “an insurrection of subjugated knowledges.” Foucaultian genealogy is not only a way of refreshing or reviving our past in the light of our present; it is the more radical attempt to make our present and our past alien to us, to look at historical trajectories with fresh eyes, with different eyes, so that they appear as strange artifacts. And this process of *self-estrangement* in which Foucaultian genealogies consist involves the un-

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> James tells us that we should keep in mind that even the most ancient truths “also once were plastic. They also were called true for human reasons. They also mediated between still earlier truths and what in those days were novel observations.” (Ibid., 36-7); Truth has “its paleontology.” (Ibid., 37)

earthing of the radical differences that lie within our practices and within ourselves, but have been silenced, marginalized, stigmatized, excluded, or forgotten. A genealogy animated not simply by a melioristic pluralism, but by a *guerrilla* pluralism, requires more than merely revisiting the past to see how and why things were settled in the way they were. It requires interrogating and contesting any settlement, making the past come undone at the seams, so that it loses its unity, continuity, and naturalness, so that it does not appear any more as a single past that has already been made, but rather, as a heterogeneous array of converging and diverging struggles that are still ongoing and only have the appearance of having been settled. When social divisions and social struggles become the focus of attention, genealogies lead to the splintering of the present and the past into irreducibly heterogeneous presents and pasts that resist unification and contain multiple cross-roads full of friction.

Insurrectionary genealogies exploit the openness of our (indefinitely multiple) pasts. As G.H. Mead suggested in the *Philosophy of the Present* (1949), the past is as open as the future,<sup>56</sup> and they are both equally dependent on the present. As Mead puts it, “the novelty of every future demands a novel past.”<sup>57</sup> The past is renewed in and through our interpretative practices; it is rendered present in our lives through interpretations that are always the result of *re-descriptions* and *negotiations* from the vantage point of the present informed by our current vision of the future.<sup>58</sup> For this reason, our past is *incessantly novel*: we make it and remake it, incessantly, in every present.<sup>59</sup> But here an important worry arises: *the worry of instrumentalization*. We can do harm to past subjects by instrumentalizing their struggles, by co-opting their voices and experiences and using them for our own purposes. If forgetting or ignoring past subjects and their struggles can be unjust, we also commit injustices through the epistemic spoliation of past lives. We have obligations with respect to subjects of the past, who had their own interests and values. For example, those who have lived under slavery, the victims of Auschwitz, those tortured and killed by dictatorial regimes, the thousands who die every year in the USA without medi-

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<sup>56</sup> I have argued, however, that there are serious problems with this claim if taken literally and that some qualifications are required. See José Medina, “Hacia una Epistemología de la Resistencia: Memoria, Objetividad, y Justicia.”

<sup>57</sup> George Herbert Mead, *Philosophy of the Present* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1949), 33.

<sup>58</sup> Max Pensky has argued that “the key terms” for the reconstruction of the past “are ‘re-description’ and ‘negotiation’: the past is negotiated, and re-negotiated, across a spectrum of differing players, all of whom may have differing (even internally inconsistent) motives for the construction of a preferred version of a shared past.” (Max Pensky, “Pragmatism and Solidarity with the Past”, in Chad Kautzer and Eduardo Mendieta (eds.), *Pragmatism, Nation, and Race: Community in the Age of Empire* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), 77)

<sup>59</sup> As Pensky remarks, “both Mead’s and Benjamin’s thoughts on the nature of historical experience and the relation between present and past converge in a vision of a *shared* past that is *incessantly novel* insofar as the past is the ongoing production or performance of interpretive practices.” (Ibid., 81)

cal attention or basic necessities, and many others should be remembered not simply because we find it useful or in our interest, but because their lives and deaths deserve critical attention and to be put in relation to our own. Following Mead as well as critical theorists as different as Jürgen Habermas and Walter Benjamin, James Bohman (2009) and Max Pensky (2009) have argued against the instrumentalization of the past and for the need to give moral recognition to past subjects and moral weight to their experiences and perspectives. As Bohman puts it, “we do not just deliberate *about* the past but rather *with* the past.”<sup>60</sup> From a Foucaultian perspective the instrumentalization worry is appeased not by giving moral recognition to subjects of the past as partners in deliberation, but rather, by acknowledging their agency and power/knowledges, whether or not these can be recruited to our deliberation processes in the way we would like.

On the thoroughly pluralistic view of epistemic agency that we find in the Foucaultian framework, there is an irreducible plurality of centers of experience and agency that function as centers of *resistance and contestability*. Differently situated discursive subjectivities (or publics) have differential capacities to contest and resist the truths/untruths and the knowledges/ignorances that surround their discursive lives. And insofar as our predecessors are treated as discursive *subjects*—and not as mere objects to be manipulated at will—we need to take into account their perspectives. Insurrectionary genealogies must take into account the experiences and valuations of past subjects, in which we can find challenges, subversions, and resistances of all sorts. It is there where genealogical investigations draw their critical force. It is in the friction between forgotten and silenced lives and the lives of the present where the insurrections start to happen. Animated by a *guerrilla* pluralism, Foucaultian genealogies, far from contributing to instrumentalizations and subjugations of the past, are in fact tools for resisting them; their critical power resides precisely in resisting unifications and totalizing perspectives.

Genealogical investigations are informed by multiple processes of interpellation with traffic going in all directions. In particular, there are two very different forms of interpellation at play: genealogists interpellate past subjects, but they are also interpellated by subjects of the past. And this *double interpellation* is something very different from merely treating past subjects as partners in deliberation. It involves more complex (and varied) communicative and normative interrelations. It involves a *mutual process of estrangement*: we make past lives alien as they also make our own lives strangely unfamiliar. So, in insurrectionary genealogies, far from making ourselves free to remember or forget in whatever way seems most convenient to us, we make ourselves vulnerable to the past by opening our memories to the challenges and contestations of various subjects—the subjects in our present and in

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<sup>60</sup> James Bohman, “Deliberating about the Past: Decentering Deliberative Democracy,” in Chad Kautzer and Eduardo Mendieta (eds.), *Pragmatism, Nation, and Race: Community in the Age of Empire*, 123; my emphasis.

our future as well as those in the past—with whom we compare and contrast our discursive perspectives. In genealogical investigations of this sort, the engagement with past subjectivities is mutually transformative: we open ourselves up to interrogation by voices and perspectives hidden in our past, while at the same time we also cast them in a new light that they did not enjoy before the genealogical encounter. Through these critical transformations new connections are brought to light, new possibilities of resistance are activated, and new forms of solidarity become possible. Without losing sight of the specificity of local struggles, without subsuming them under grand movements of liberation, genealogical investigations help us see the interconnections among historically situated forms of subjugation. Through insurrectionary genealogies we can become part of multiple communities of resistance—past, present, and future ones—which, without being unified, intersect and overlap in complex ways, creating friction of all sorts. Drawing on the epistemic friction among multiple sources of agency and multiple power/knowledges, insurrectionary genealogies activate counter-memories that make available multiplicitous pasts for differently constituted and positioned subjectivities, making it possible to form plural and heterogeneous forms of solidarity with the past, and opening up new possibilities for social contestation.

### **3. Insurrectionary Genealogies and Epistemologies of Ignorance**

In this brief concluding section I want to connect the critical and transformative possibilities underscored by a Foucaultian *guerrilla* pluralism with ongoing discussions in epistemologies of ignorance. It is surprising that Foucault is not widely cited and discussed in the epistemologies of ignorance developed in Feminist Standpoint Theory and Critical Race Theory. Perhaps this is a residual effect of the old-fashioned opposition between any theory that privileges standpoints and social constructivist views that interrogate those standpoints as cultural artifacts. But recent accounts in feminist standpoint theory and critical race theory are highly performative and constructivist, with the focus shifting from fixed notions of gender and race to dynamic and situated social processes of genderization and racialization that are deeply interrogated. Surprisingly, though, Foucault is still used only sporadically by this new generation of standpoint and race theorists. Lorraine Code is a notable exception here. In “The Power of Ignorance” she acknowledges and makes explicit use of the Foucaultian approach:

I follow Michel Foucault in recognizing the impediments to knowing what is not ‘within the true’ (1972, 224), thus within the knowable, within the conceptual framework held in place by an intransigent hegemonic discourse, an instituted social imaginary.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Lorraine Code, “The Power of Ignorance,” in Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (eds.), *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 226.

This Foucaultian perspective that Code echoes contains two crucial insights for the epistemology of ignorance. The first crucial insight is the idea that a discursive framework produces *spaces of knowability and unknowability* simultaneously, so that there will be things that lie within the true (“*dans le vrai*”)<sup>62</sup> as well as things outside it for agents who operate within that framework. In other words, the epistemic agency that subjects have within a discursive practice is such that their knowledge and ignorance are co-constituted: their epistemic lucidity and their epistemic blindness go hand in hand, mutually supporting each other. As another epistemologist of ignorance, Shannon Sullivan, puts it, “rather than oppose knowledge, ignorance often is formed by it, and vice versa.”<sup>63</sup> For this reason, Sullivan suggests that we talk about “ignorance/knowledge,” instead of talking about ignorance and knowledge separately, so that we undo certain epistemic illusions—in particular, “the purported self-mastery and self-transparency of knowledge, as if nothing properly escaped its grasp.”<sup>64</sup>

The second crucial idea that derives from the Foucaultian approach is that there is *no such thing as epistemic innocence*, for we always operate from a space of knowability and unknowability simultaneously, from a knowledge/ignorance framework. And this problematizes the notion of culpable ignorance. On the one hand, as Code remarks, there is no such thing as “an innocent position from which ‘we’ could level charges of culpability.”<sup>65</sup> Therefore, as Code insists, in dealing with the epistemic aspects of particular forms of oppression, we should be very careful not to indulge in the naïve charge of epistemic culpability “they should have known better,” for very often subjects *could* not have known otherwise and, therefore, the charge of culpability is vacuous. On the other hand, however, interstices within discursive practices as well as alternative practices are often available; and they present opportunities for epistemic resistance, for challenging knowledge/ignorance structures. Genealogical investigations can be used to point out how these subjugated knowledges could have been used, how people could have known otherwise by drawing on them, how they could have become able to undo epistemic exclusions and stigmatizations. Hence the insurrectionary power of subjugated knowledges, which genealogical investigations try to mobilize. As Sullivan puts it, echoing Foucault:

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<sup>62</sup> As Foucault puts it: “Mendel spoke the truth, but he was not within the true (*dans le vrai*) of contemporary biological discourse.” (Michel Foucault, “The Discourse on Language,” in Rupert Swyer (trans.), *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972), 224)

<sup>63</sup> Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (eds.), *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, 154.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Lorraine Code, “The Power of Ignorance,” 226.

The creation of ignorance/knowledge through relations of force often is unbalanced and unequal, as is the case in colonized lands. But as a dynamic, relational process, it involves the active participation of all 'sides' and includes the possibility of resistance to and transformation of the forms of ignorance/knowledge produced.<sup>66</sup>

A Foucaultian *guerrilla* pluralism enables us to see how different possibilities of resistance appear for differently constituted and situated subjects as they develop different forms of agency with respect to power/knowledge, or rather, power/knowledge-ignorance. Let me briefly sketch, by way of a conclusion, how this insurrectionary genealogical pluralism can be put to use against ideologies of racial oppression and the forms of *white ignorance* that they produce. In my application of the Foucaultian approach to *white ignorance*, we can appreciate the two points highlighted by Code's Foucaultian standpoint theory in the context of the epistemology of race: the co-constitutive relations between racial knowledge and racial ignorance, and the unavailability of innocent racialized standpoints. What a Foucaultian racial epistemology of power/knowledge-ignorance underscores is the constant epistemic struggles that take place in racialized social fields, calling attention to possibilities of resistance and contestation. In what follows I will compare and contrast Foucault's *guerrilla* pluralism applied to racial knowledge/ignorance with one of the most influential accounts in race theory: namely, Charles Mills's racial epistemology of ignorance.

In his now classic *The Racial Contract* Charles Mills (1997)<sup>67</sup> put *white ignorance* in the agenda of critical race theory. Following a long tradition in African-American philosophy, Mills argued there that privileged white subjects have become unable to understand the world that they themselves have created; and he called attention to the cognitive dysfunctions and pathologies inscribed in the white world, not merely as side-effects, but as constitutive features of the white epistemic economy, which revolves around epistemic exclusions and a carefully cultivated racial blindness. As Mills suggests, white ignorance is a form of self-ignorance, but this racial self-ignorance also produces blindness with respect to racial others and their experiences. As Code aptly puts it, the white epistemic gaze produces "an ongoing ignorance of its own positionality vis-à-vis people variously Othered."<sup>68</sup> In his recent work Mills has developed a critical epistemology of ignorance which—I want to suggest—overlaps with Foucaultian insurrectionary genealogies in interesting ways. In "White Ignorance" (2007) Mills emphasizes the role that official histories and hegemonic forms of collective memory play in sustaining white ignorance, and also the crucial role that counter-memory needs to play to resist and subvert the epistemic oppression

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<sup>66</sup> Shannon Sullivan, "White Ignorance and Colonial Oppression," in Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (eds.), *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, 155.

<sup>67</sup> Charles Mills, *The Radical Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>68</sup> Lorraine Code, "The Power of Ignorance," 219.

that condemns the lives of marginalized people to silence or oblivion. As Mills puts it, a crucial element in white ignorance is “the management of memory,” which involves socially orchestrated, exclusionary processes of both remembering and forgetting: “if we need to understand collective memory, we also need to understand collective amnesia.”<sup>69</sup> Mills emphasizes that there is “an intimate relationship between white identity, white memory, and white amnesia, especially about nonwhite victims.”<sup>70</sup> But fortunately we have “both official and counter-memory, with conflicting judgments about what is important in the past and what is unimportant, what happened and does matter, what happened and does not matter, and what did not happen at all.”<sup>71</sup> Mills argues that the postbellum national white reconciliation was made possible and was subsequently maintained thanks to “the repudiation of an alternative black memory.”<sup>72</sup> There have been all kinds of mechanisms in white epistemic practices that have contributed to maintain this repudiation in place: blocking black subjectivities from giving testimony, keeping black testimony—when given—out of circulation,<sup>73</sup> exercising an epistemic assumption against its credibility, etc. In multiple venues of epistemic interaction in the white world, from the streets of white suburbs to the lecture halls of the academy, black voices have been traditionally minimized and heavily constrained in their ability to speak about their own experiences,<sup>74</sup> when they have been allowed to speak at all (think, for example, of how witnesses of lynching were terrorized into silence until not too long ago). “Black counter-testimony against white mythology has always existed but would originally have been handicapped by the lack of material and cultural capital investment available for its production.”<sup>75</sup>

The black counter-memories that Mills describes as getting systematically disqualified and whited out certainly count as subjugated knowledges in a Foucaultian sense. And Foucaultian genealogical investigations that tap into those subjugated knowledges could produce the kind of subversion and insurrection that Mills calls for:

White ignorance has been able to flourish all of these years because a white epistemology of ignorance has safeguarded it against the dangers of an illuminating

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<sup>69</sup> Charles Mills, “White Ignorance,” in Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (eds.), *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, 28-9.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>73</sup> As Mills puts it, “the ‘testimony’ of the black perspective and its distinctive conceptual and theoretical insights will tend to be whited out. Whites will cite other whites in a closed circuit of epistemic authority that reproduces white delusions.” (*Ibid.*, 34)

<sup>74</sup> As Mills points out, “slave narratives often had to have white authenticators, for example, white abolitionists.” (*Ibid.*, 32)

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

blackness or redness, protecting those who for 'racial' reasons have needed not to know. Only by starting to break these rules and meta-rules can we begin the long process that will lead to the eventual overcoming of this white darkness and the achievement of an enlightenment that is genuinely multiracial.<sup>76</sup>

But how can "a white epistemology of ignorance" be destabilized and resisted? There is no untainted standpoint of absolute epistemic innocence from which white ignorance and its companion epistemological principles of cognitive interaction can be subverted. But there are always multiple points of resistance, multiple possible struggles to initiate or continue from interested and biased standpoints with their own forms of racial lucidity and racial blindness grounded in their own power/knowledge-ignorance structures. What the *guerrilla* pluralism of the Foucaultian genealogical method can help produce is not complete epistemic liberation (as Mills and other epistemologists of race often seem to want), but rather, only pointed critical incursions and interventions in epistemic economies, that is, *epistemic insurrections* that have to be constantly renewed and remain always ongoing in order to keep producing epistemic friction. Insurrectionary genealogies, understood in the way I have sketched in this essay as grounded in a *guerrilla* pluralism, are invaluable critical tools for denouncing the epistemic exclusions and stigmatizations that sustain white privilege and white ignorance. In this sense, Foucaultian genealogy qualifies as the kind of critical theory that Linda Alcoff argues is needed in contemporary epistemology of ignorance. In "Epistemologies of Ignorance," (2007) following Max Horkheimer, Alcoff characterizes white ignorance as a "loss of critical rationality" characterized by "the atrophied ability to resist or critique."<sup>77</sup> If "the project of critical theory" is, as Alcoff puts it, "to bring to consciousness the link between the social production of knowledge and the social production of society,"<sup>78</sup> Foucault can certainly be recruited to participate in that project and to extend it to cover the social production of ignorance and its power/knowledge effects.

But Foucault has something more radical to offer than Horkheimer or Mills: an *epistemological insurrection*. A critical epistemology of ignorance informed by a Foucaultian *guerrilla* pluralism can achieve a kind of epistemological insurrection that goes *beyond a mere inversion* of white epistemology, that is, *beyond an epistemology of the victims*. Mills has argued that since white ignorance has produced an inverted epistemology that protects it (i.e. a white epistemology), the critical task is to re-invert the inverted epistemology of the privileged into an epistemology of the oppressed. But is this enough? Alison Bailey (2007) has argued that re-inversion strategies do not work because they reinscribe the logic of purity, failing to accept

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>77</sup> Linda Alcoff, "Epistemologies of Ignorance," in Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (eds.), *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, 53.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 54.

duplicities, multiplicities, and, in short, the complexities of our epistemic lives. As she puts it:

Re-inversion strategies are the only solutions purity has to offer. However, I do not think re-inverting inverted epistemologies will have radical long-standing effects. *Under purity, inverted epistemologies can only be re-inverted and not shattered.*<sup>79</sup>

Drawing on María Lugones (2003),<sup>80</sup> Bailey urges us to abandon the logic of purity and to shift to a curdled logic that can accommodate radical differences and the multiplicitous nature of our subjectivities. This curdled logic brings ignorance and epistemic oppression under a different light, and it opens up new possibilities of resistance and critique: “a curdled reading of ignorance will offer us a more relational understanding of ignorance by revealing the ways in which people of color have strategically engaged with white folks’ ignorance in ways that are advantageous.”<sup>81</sup> As Bailey puts it, curdled resisting subjects are those who “take hold of the double meaning of their actions”<sup>82</sup> and navigate “a world where both dominant and resistant logics are present.”<sup>83</sup> Curdling is a way of keeping alive the duplicities and multiplicities of our practices and of ourselves, finding opportunities for resistance within them. This curdling is very congenial with the *guerrilla* pluralism I have described as animating insurrectionary genealogies. The forms of epistemological resistance that insurrectionary genealogies can offer go well beyond a mere re-inversion of epistemic relations. But this should be taken as an extension of—or even simply as a friendly amendment to—the critical project of the epistemology of ignorance that Mills has formulated for us. Bailey herself seems to recognize this when she writes: “If we examine Mills’s ‘epistemology of victims’ through a curdled lens we see that it also includes an *epistemology of resistance*.”<sup>84</sup> And, as I have argued, Foucault offers the theoretical resources for an epistemology of resistance that goes beyond a mere re-inversion of relations of epistemic subordination and is capable of producing more complex epistemic subversions—perhaps even the *shattering* of epistemic economies—through insurrections of subjugated knowledges. This insurrectionary epistemology of resistance and the *guer-*

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<sup>79</sup> Alison Bailey, “Strategic Ignorance,” in Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (eds.), *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, 87.

<sup>80</sup> María Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

<sup>81</sup> Bailey, “Strategic Ignorance,” 84.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 87; my emphasis.

*rilla* pluralism in which it is grounded are the central contributions that Foucaultian genealogy can make to contemporary epistemologies of ignorance.<sup>85</sup>

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