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Epistemic Injustice and the Struggle for Recognition of Afro-Mexicans: A Model for Native Americans?

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INTRODUCTION

Though it is well documented that some of Hernán Cortés's companions during the conquest of the Mexica (Aztec) Empire were black men¹ and that hundreds of thousands of African slaves were brought to New Spain during the colonial period and that they contributed greatly to the development of the territory,² many Mexicans nowadays maintain that there are no black people in Mexico. But how can this be the case? One of the most common accounts that is offered to explain this assertion is that the African slaves brought to New Spain progressively mixed with white Spaniards and Amerindians, thus giving rise to a *mestizo* (mixed-race) population. In fact, this explanation has also been used to support the view that there is no racism in Mexico since all the different castes that existed during the colonial period gradually vanished after the Independence through a process of *mestizaje* (i.e., race-mixing) that eventually homogenized the post-colonial Mexican population.³

However, the thesis that pervasive *mestizaje* in Mexico has brought an end to racism by dismantling the racial distinctions made during the colonial period is a myth. In particular, various scholars have argued that the process of *mestizaje* has in fact strengthened and perpetuated certain forms of racism in Mexico to the extent that, by promoting the view that all Mexicans are *mestizos*, Mexicans whose

visible markers (i.e., skin color, hair texture) depart from a certain norm are racialized in ways that push them to the margins of Mexican society.⁴

To be more specific, as the traditional narrative about modern Mexican identity typically stresses that Mexicans are descendants from Spaniards and Amerindians in different degrees of admixture, Mexicans who exhibit visible phenotypical markers associated with Afro-descendant populations often fail to be recognized as Mexicans by their own countrymen despite providing testimony about their national identity. In particular, when Afro-Mexicans (who traditionally live in isolated and impoverished rural communities in coastal states such as Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Veracruz) venture outside their communities, Mexican civil authorities often mistake them with undocumented Caribbean or Central American immigrants. In fact, in some cases, police officers and civil servants disbelieve the testimony of Afro-Mexicans about their national identity, thus resulting in consequences that range from a denial of services in government offices to actual deportations.⁵ Given the occurrence of these situations, two pressing questions emerge: How can philosophy help us explain the systematic failure to recognize Afro-Mexicans as Mexicans? And can philosophy help to develop remedies to the treatment that Afro-Mexicans are subject to (i.e., being treated as strangers in their own country)? The pressing nature of these questions is further amplified by the fact that the treatment that Afro-Mexicans receive is not an isolated case, but rather part of a pattern of recognition failures that also afflicts other minorities in different geographic locations. In particular, Native Americans are often misrecognized as foreigners in the US by both civil authorities and average citizens.⁶

My two main goals in this paper are to provide some tentative answers to these two prior questions by using some tools developed both by feminist epistemologists and recognition theorists—namely, the concepts of meta-ignorance, epistemic injustice, and recognition—and to show how the application of these concepts to the situation of Afro-Mexicans illuminates how they are related to each other. After offering a brief account in Section 2 of how blackness was perceived in colonial times and in the post-Independence period in Mexico to provide some context, I contend in section 3 that one can effectively explain the situations that many Afro-Mexicans face (i.e., having their Mexican identity questioned by others) in virtue of the fact that other Mexicans who fail to recognize their national identity are subject to what José Medina refers as “meta-ignorance.” Using Medina’s analysis of the nature of meta-ignorance and of the circumstances in which it arises, I show that the failure of recognition which Afro-Mexicans are subject to can be accounted for in terms of the existence of a first-level ignorance about the history and the current presence of Afro-descendants in Mexico, which is compounded by a second-level ignorance about the social relevance of race in Mexico—a second-level ignorance that is manifested in the belief that racial differences are nonexistent, or, at least, irrelevant in contemporary Mexico. In addition, I also show that the application of the notions of meta-ignorance, recognition, and epistemic injustice to this case illuminates the relationship among them in

the following way: meta-ignorance creates relations of misrecognition, and these in turn promote instances of epistemic injustice (in particular, of testimonial injustice) that are directed against Afro-Mexicans. Subsequently, I show that the systematic misrecognition of Afro-Mexicans as Mexicans by many of their fellow countrymen has another deleterious effect, since it promotes instances of coerced silencing. Following Kristie Dotson, who maintains that “many forms of coerced silencing require some sort of capitulation or self-silencing on the part of the speaker,”⁷ and using Rae Langton’s insight that certain forms of speech can be considered as silencing acts since they disable the conditions to make certain assertions,⁸ I show that in the case of some Afro-Mexicans (particularly from the state of Veracruz), testimony about their own identity illustrates in certain cases the occurrence of coerced silencing given that they often refer to themselves in conversations with others as “morenos” (“swarthy”), thus foreclosing further conversation about their African ancestry.

Having done this, I then argue in section 4 that, in response to the epistemic injustice they suffer, some Afro-Mexicans (in particular, women) have engaged in activities that José Medina describes as instances of “epistemic resistance.”⁹ In particular, I show that one of these instances of epistemic resistance by Afro-Mexicans involves a struggle for recognition that I label “self-referential empowerment,” which consists in a demand to be able to self-designate rather than letting others (in particular, Mexican civil authorities) name them. Using the taxonomy of different forms of recognition developed by Axel Honneth,¹⁰ I also show in this section that the struggle for recognition that Afro-Mexicans are engaged in has a dual dimension, which involves a demand for respect of civil rights and a demand for social esteem. Finally, in section 5, I provide a brief conclusion that aims to explore to which extent some of the strategies used by Afro-Mexicans in Mexico can be modeled or replicated in the US to address the situation faced by Native Americans, and I also sketch some lines of future inquiry.

2. BLACKNESS IN MEXICO DURING COLONIAL TIMES AND IN THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

As I mentioned in the introduction, historians have documented extensively the vicissitudes of African men and women who were brought in large numbers to New Spain throughout the colonial period (1521–1810). In particular, Herman Bennett has maintained that by 1640, Spaniards had imported 275,000 slaves from West and Central Africa into New Spain in order to replace Amerindian populations as sources of labor,¹¹ since some groups had been decimated as a result of diseases introduced by Europeans.¹² Now, in the framework of the Spanish colonial system (which was structured on the basis of caste divisions), African slaves were perceived, as Gates and Appiah have pointed out, under a negative light, and, in virtue of this, “they were invariably placed at the bottom of the hierarchical society that the Spaniards had established.”¹³ Given their position at the bottom of the hierarchical Novohispanic society, African slaves and their descendants pursued different strategies to resist or subvert the oppression they were

subject to. In particular, while some openly revolted and escaped from plantations to remote mountainous areas where they established free settlements (*palenques*),¹⁴ others sought to undermine the colonial caste system from within by assimilating to the upper castes, learning their language and mixing progressively with Spaniards, Amerindians, and mestizos in order to climb the social ladder. This climbing was made possible in part by the fact that, in contrast to the North American English colonies, the one-drop rule did not exist in New Spain. As a result of this, while caste divisions were established and enforced by colonial authorities, their borders were rather porous and could be challenged in individual cases within the court system. Thus, while blackness was perceived within the Novohispanic colonial framework as a feature that was demoting or devaluating for individuals, it was not deemed to be a characteristic that was fixed once and for all in populations, which were considered to be capable of racial transformation over time.¹⁵

Even after the triumph of the independence movement in 1821 and the official abolition of caste divisions, phenotypical and cultural markers of blackness remained features that pushed individuals to the margins of Mexican society, making them both invisible and foreign at once. In light of this, one can then maintain, using the notion of cultural imperialism articulated by Iris Marion Young, that Afro-Mexicans have been traditionally subject to cultural imperialism, since “victims of cultural imperialism are (. . .) rendered invisible as subjects, as persons with their own perspective and group-specific experience and interests. At the same time, they are marked out, frozen into a being marked as Other, deviant in relation to the dominant norm.”¹⁶ One of the manifestations of this cultural imperialism was that although several prominent Mexican politicians and intellectuals throughout the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century (in particular, Justo Sierra and Francisco Bulnes) vigorously debated how the project of building a strong and modern nation and creating a common Mexican identity should unfold, none of the proposals that were articulated acknowledged the significant presence of Afro-descendants in the territory and their economic and cultural contributions to the Mexican mosaic.¹⁷ As a result of this neglect, though the ideology of *mestizaje* (or race-mixing) was promoted by members of the Mexican intellectual and political elite such as José Vasconcelos (1925) and Manuel Gamio (1916) as a policy that that would allow Mexicans to finally turn the page on the lingering racial divisions and discriminations inherited from their colonial past, it actually operated, as Christina Sue has pointed out, as “a mechanism to whiten the country through the dilution and eventual elimination of the country’s black and indigenous populations.”¹⁸

In particular, while some photographers such as Romualdo García (1852–1930) and Agustín Casasola (1874–1938) documented during the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century the presence of people of visible African descent in Mexico, as Wendy Phillips has shown,¹⁹ systematic efforts were made to ignore (or, at least, downplay) the role of Afro-descendants in the construction of the Mexican nation to the point that an important theme in several Mexican movies and novels in the late 1940s,

1950s, and the early 1960s was the ignorance of one’s Black heritage.²⁰ Moreover, insofar as blackness was implicitly perceived as a stain or a badge of shame, any cultural expressions associated with it (such as certain types of culinary practices or musical compositions) were either systematically suppressed or attributed to the *mestizaje* process while deliberately ignoring or whitewashing their African roots. For instance, in the 1940s, certain regional musical expressions from Veracruz with African influence progressively became symbols of Mexican culture on the national stage while their origins were ignored, as Theodore Cohen has argued:

As “La Bamba” became a popular song in the radio, in politics and in feature films, it became a national symbol that sometimes lost any affiliation with blackness. In the mid to late 1940s the Mexico City-based radio station XEQ regularly broadcast Baquero Foster’s Suite Veracruzana No. 1 on the Sunday evening [program] “El Instituto Salvador Díaz Mirón’ Sección cultural del Casino de Veracruz.” The program celebrated the history and culture of Veracruz. . . . One commentator declared that “La Bamba” etymologically and musically originated in Andalusia, Spain. There was no reference to indigeneity or blackness.²¹

Now, considering the strength of this tremendous social pressure to negate or make invisible blackness in Mexico in the post-Independence period, I argue that, given this historical context, it is not very surprising that people of visible African descent in Mexico have been subject to forms of epistemic injustice such as disbelieving their testimony when they are asked about their nationality. In my view, this can be explained in terms of the fact that most Mexicans are subject to what José Medina has referred to as meta-ignorance.

3. RACIAL META-IGNORANCE, MISRECOGNITION, AND EPISTEMIC INJUSTICE IN MEXICO

One can explain the epistemic injustice that Afro-Mexicans are subject to when they give testimony about their national identity in terms of the presence of a meta-ignorance that is prevalent in Mexican society. In order to appreciate how this meta-ignorance affects mainstream Mexicans, let me first briefly rehearse how Medina characterizes meta-ignorance in racial relations with others. Following Medina, one can characterize meta-ignorance, which is a specific type of ignorance about one’s beliefs or cognitive gaps, by distinguishing it from another type of ignorance, which operates at the level of objects:

On the one hand, there are specific things we should know about the racialized subjects we interact with: for example, how they think about themselves, how society thinks of them, the history and current status of the social positionality of their group, and the history and current status of the social relationality that binds the perceived and perceiving subject together. One may fail to know all kinds of specific things in these areas; and these

failures constitute (some degree of) *first-order or object-level of racial ignorance*. But, on the other hand, specific mistaken beliefs or lack of beliefs about the racial others with whom we interact may be rooted in and supported by very general attitudes about them and about social relationality: for example, the inability to see racial others in their differences—*blindness to racial differences*; or the assumption that racial differences are irrelevant to one’s life—*blindness to the social relevance of race*. Here we would have a *second-order or meta-level ignorance*, which is what I have termed racial *meta-blindness*: blindness to one’s blindness, insensitivity to insensitivity.²²

In the case of Afro-Mexicans, I contend that the epistemic injustice that they endure vis-à-vis their testimony about their national identity is the product of a racial meta-ignorance that most other Mexicans are victims of. This type of meta-ignorance arises in virtue of the fact that, as the school curriculum has traditionally privileged the narrative according to which modern Mexicans are the descendants of Spaniards and Amerindians in various degrees of admixture, most Mexicans nowadays associate the presence of the descendants of African slaves in Mexico with the colonial period, and thus fail to consider them as part of the fabric of contemporary Mexican society.²³ This type of ignorance, which is a first-order or object-level ignorance insofar as it pertains to the current status of the descendants of African slaves, has been compounded by the fact that most Mexicans tend to believe, given the pervasive myth that the process of *mestizaje* has homogenized Mexican society and erased the racial divisions imposed by the colonial caste system, that racial differences have either vanished in contemporary Mexico, or that they have become irrelevant in everyday life. Thus, the development of a second-order or meta-level racial ignorance has led most Mexicans to ignore the social relevance of race in Mexico, and the effects of this ignorance are manifested in various facets of life. For instance, given that this meta-ignorance erases racial differences by perpetuating the belief that Mexicans are racially homogenous, it shapes common patterns of social identification by systematically making mainstream Mexicans associate phenotypical markers of blackness (e.g., skin color or hair texture) with foreignness.²⁴ And since Afro-Mexicans are often misidentified as foreigners, they tend to be subject to a deep credibility deficit, which can be a type of epistemic injustice,²⁵ because they are often taken to be undocumented Caribbean or Central American migrants that use Mexico as a platform to ultimately reach the US when they travel outside their communities.²⁶

Considering this, the situation that Afro-Mexicans endure casts light on the relationship between the notions of meta-ignorance, recognition, and epistemic injustice. The racial meta-ignorance that has traditionally been created and maintained in Mexico through the ideology of an homogenizing *mestizaje* underpins a particular relation of misrecognition, and this failure of recognition in turn supports the emergence of instances of epistemic injustice in which the testimony that Afro-Mexicans give about their national identity is systematically doubted or challenged by other Mexicans. The illumination of the relations

between these three notions is of crucial importance because it suggests that failures of recognition, which are often driven by forms of ignorance, promote instances of epistemic injustice. And, if this is indeed the case, this is potentially quite useful since the nature of the relationships between the three notions suggests that, in order to remedy the systematic instances of epistemic injustice created by misrecognition, we have to push back against the forms of ignorance that create and perpetuate failures of recognition.

Having clarified this, I want to examine some reactions that Afro-Mexicans display to the epistemic injustice they are subject to. In particular, I argue that one usual type of reaction that Afro-Mexicans have developed involves developing certain attitudes that correspond to what Dotson calls “coerced silencing,” which obtains when “a speaker capitulates to the pressure to not introduce unsafe, risky testimony.”²⁷ It is my contention that a form of coerced silencing can be appreciated in the case of certain Afro-Mexicans, when they are questioned about their identity. For instance, Henry Louis Gates Jr. has provided, in his recent book *Black in Latin America*, a clear example of this coerced silencing among some Afro-Mexicans when narrating a conversation that one of his hosts in Mexico, Sagrario Cruz-Carretero (who is an Afro-Mexican professor at the Universidad Veracruzana), had with her grandfather in her late teens. As Gates points out in his narration, when Cruz-Carretero traveled to Cuba, she came to discover that “my family was black—because [Cubans] looked like my grandfather, like my father. I started tasting the food and I said ‘Oh, my God—this is the food my grandmother prepares at home’.”²⁸ After describing to Gates Jr. the realization of her Black heritage and the feelings that this generated in her, Cruz-Carretero subsequently narrates to him the interactions with her grandfather: “I came back to Mexico and I asked my grandpa why he never told me we were Black. And he told me, holding my hand, “We are not Black; we’re *morenos*.”²⁹

I contend that the assertion of Cruz-Carretero’s grandfather is a clear case of coerced silencing. Indeed, if we agree with the claim, made by Rae Langton, that “it is possible to use speech to disable speakers and possible to prevent them from satisfying the felicity conditions for some illocutions they may want to perform,”³⁰ one may argue that, in claiming a *moreno* identity, Cruz-Carretero’s grandfather aimed to disable the line of inquiry undertaken by her regarding the family’s African ancestry. This form of coerced silencing is prevalent among many old Afro-Mexicans, who often prefer to pass as Indigenous rather than accepting a Black identity. Indeed, since indigeneity is acknowledged by virtually all as a familiar and recognizable feature of individuals within the Mexican social fabric (in spite of being a negative social marker) while blackness is perceived as a foreign and potentially disruptive element, the deployment of this strategy enables its users to push back partially against failures of recognition of their Mexican identity since being *moreno* does not preclude (as being Black very often does) being Mexican in the collective imagination. However, despite the tremendous social pressure that has traditionally existed to hide, downplay, or ignore blackness in Mexico, it is important to

emphasize that not all Afro-Mexicans have bowed to this pressure and that certain groups (particularly, associations of women from the Costa Chica region that overlaps Guerrero and Oaxaca in the Pacific coast) have in the last three decades developed various attitudes and actions that can be properly considered as constituting a type of epistemic resistance.

4. 'SOMOS AFRO-MEXICANAS': SELF-REFERENTIAL EMPOWERMENT AND OTHER FORMS OF EPISTEMIC RESISTANCE DEVELOPED BY AFRO-MEXICAN WOMEN

As I mentioned at the end of the previous section, in response to the traditional social pressure to either conceal or ignore their African heritage, a number of Afro-Mexicans from the Costa Chica region (particularly, women) have engaged in actions to push back against the epistemic injustice that they suffer. Echoing Medina, I maintain that these actions are forms of epistemic resistance since they involve "the use of our epistemic resources and abilities to undermine and change oppressive normative structures and the complacent cognitive-affective functioning that sustains this structure."³¹

One of the axes pursued by Afro-Mexican activists has consisted in pressuring institutions of higher education such as the National School of Anthropology and History to modify the school and university curriculum to make visible the African heritage of Mexico. This is of great importance given that, as Carlos López Beltrán and Vivette García Deister have emphasized, most of the anthropological and medical research undertaken in Mexico during the twentieth century was focused almost exclusively on Amerindian and mestizo groups, leaving aside Afro-Mexican groups whose invisibility was then further reinforced and perpetuated.³² Considering this, one of the main victories of the epistemic resistance led by Afro-Mexican groups has been the establishment in May 2017 of a UNESCO Chair at the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) that is devoted to the study of Afro-descendants in Mexico and Central America.³³

In addition to the creation of spaces for the study of the African diasporic experience in Mexico, another axis of epistemic resistance has been the struggle of Afro-Mexicans to be recognized in the national census and to be able to choose how they want to be named. In my view, this has been the most difficult struggle because it aims to roll back deliberate and systematic efforts by the Mexican state to eliminate racial distinctions in the twentieth century. Indeed, after the 1921 national census, the Mexican government stopped collecting data about the racial status of the different regional subpopulations that inhabit Mexico under the assumption that using racial categories in the census promoted and perpetuated racism.³⁴ However, although this deliberate ignorance vis-à-vis any racial origin or status of people was well intended, it had some perverse consequences since it made Afro-Mexicans demographically and legally invisible.

As a result of this, Afro-Mexican communities (which are still nowadays among the most socially marginalized and

impoverished in Mexico, often lacking electricity, running water, sanitation, or basic health-care services) have been traditionally disadvantaged with respect to Amerindian communities. Indeed, Amerindian communities have been usually recognized by the Mexican state on the basis of linguistic affiliation and, in virtue of this, data have been collected in the national census concerning the lacks and lags that they suffer. Because of this, the Mexican government was able to devise and implement development policies which, though exhibiting a very mixed track record, have been at least aimed to alleviate the marginalized and impoverished situation of Amerindian groups. However, since Afro-Mexicans became demographically and legally invisible as a group (even though individuals were singled out as potential undocumented foreigners) in virtue of the cultural imperialism they were subject to, no targeted efforts were made to improve their material conditions.

In virtue of this, some Afro-Mexican women have developed a form of epistemic resistance that I call *referential self-empowerment*. This form of epistemic resistance has consisted in organizing their communities to pressure the Mexican government to include, once again, racial designations in the national census to be able to identify them and, rather than letting the government impose certain categories to designate them, to retain the right of how they want to be named and recognized. And as one of their spokeswomen, Yolanda Camacho, explained in a 2016 interview, after organizing a debate in their communities on this issue, they agreed that they want to be named and politically recognized as "Afro-Mexicanas" rather than as "costeñas," "morenasm," "negras," "mascogogas," or "jarochas" because "we are descendants of Africa, but we live in Mexico, we were born in Mexico, we are in Mexico."³⁵

In virtue of this, the process that Afro-Mexican women have followed to resist the epistemic injustice consists in articulating a positive double identity (as descendants of Africa and as Mexicans) and demanding that they are recognized as possessing this double identity. As a result of the pressure exerted by various Afro-Mexican NGOs, the Mexican government allowed a question about racial self-adscription to be included in its 2015 national census so that people of African descent in Mexico could be identified as Afro-Mexicans if they so chose. In undertaking these actions, I contend that Afro-Mexican women activists have implicitly adopted a general recommendation put forth by Young for victims of cultural imperialism, which is that "having formed a positive self-identity through organization and public cultural expression, those oppressed by cultural imperialism can then confront the dominant culture with demands for recognition of their specificity."³⁶

It is important to point out here that the demands for recognition that Afro-Mexicans make have a dual nature: as Camacho emphasizes in the interview, they want to be recognized specifically as *descendants of Africa* and as *Mexicans*. This is important because the recognition that they demand has a double dimension. On one side, Afro-Mexicans want to be recognized as Mexican citizens who are entitled, just as any other Mexicans, to the same civil and social rights that their fellow countrymen enjoy. In virtue of this, one aspect of the Afro-Mexicans' demand for

recognition involves a specific pattern of intersubjective recognition that depends on being accepted in a community of equal citizens where all are entitled to the same civil and social rights. This form of recognition, which Honneth labels “legal recognition,” is important since it is tied to the acknowledgment of the obligation to respect certain rights. In particular, as Honneth remarks, “in being legally recognized, one is now respected with regard not only to the abstract capacity to orient oneself vis-à-vis moral norms, but also to the concrete human feature that one deserves the social standard of living necessary for this.”³⁷

On the other side, Afro-Mexicans want to be recognized as descendants of Africa who are different in their specificity from other groups of Mexicans. In virtue of this, the other aspect of the Afro-Mexicans’ demand for recognition involves a different pattern of intersubjective recognition that depends on becoming socially esteemed for possessing certain characteristics that differentiate one’s particular group from others while contributing, nonetheless, to the collective realization of societal goals. This form of recognition, which Honneth terms “social esteem,” is also important since it is tied to the development of a positive self-valuation that drives individuals to acknowledge and take pride in the contributions that their specific characteristics allow them to make to society. Indeed, as Honneth observes, “people can feel themselves to be ‘valuable’ only when they know themselves to be recognized for accomplishments that they precisely do not share in an undifferentiated manner with others.”³⁸

For Afro-Mexican activists, achieving these two forms of recognition is a very important step, given that when Afro-Mexicans have gained not only legal recognition but also social esteem from other Mexicans, they will not only become visible as an important group that that has been (and is) a crucial part of the Mexican nation, but they will also be able, as individuals, to develop symmetrical relations of solidarity with other Mexicans. Thus, for Yolanda Camacho and other activists, the struggles for legal recognition and social esteem (which are two parallel forms of epistemic resistance) are of the utmost importance since they view them as gateways to the achievement of a true social equality. Because of this, they clearly accept the insight of Young, who has maintained that “groups cannot be socially equal unless their specific experience, culture and social contributions are publicly affirmed and recognized.”³⁹ Indeed, according to these activists, once there are actual data on the total number of Afro-Mexicans, the locations where they live, their levels of health and educational attainment, Afro-Mexican communities will be in a better position to demand from the Mexican government targeted intervention policies to improve their material conditions.

5. CONCLUSION

Let me recap. I have argued that, in response to the epistemic injustice that they have been traditionally subject to when they are questioned by other Mexicans (in particular, by police officers and other civil authorities) about the intersection of their national and racial identities (which is an epistemic injustice that is rooted in a relation of misrecognition), Afro-Mexicans deploy at least two different responses. While some resort to some form of

coerced silencing, others have developed certain types of epistemic resistance in order to create beneficial epistemic friction that would force the vast majority of other Mexicans to acknowledge their existence and recognize them as both descendants of Africa and as Mexicans. As I mentioned in the introduction, I am interested in exploring briefly whether some of these strategies can be replicated in the US to address the situation of Native Americans, which is very similar to that of Afro-Mexicans. Indeed, various scholars have pointed out that “what differentiates Native Americans [from other minorities] is that they uniquely experience absolute invisibility in many domains in American life,”⁴⁰ and this invisibility causes them to be misrecognized as foreigners (in particular, as Mexicans). Now, though Native Americans have been recognized in the US census for a longer period than Afro-Mexicans have in the Mexican census, they are subject to policies by the US federal government that have made them invisible to the extent that they usually have to prove a certain degree (or blood quantum) of Nativeness to be recognized as Native Americans.⁴¹ This is particularly problematic, as Native Americans themselves stress, because these policies not only divide them against each other, but they also promote in the long run a dilution of Nativeness, thus paving the way to a situation in which, once they are erased, the federal government will no longer have to respect treaties and will be able to take over Native American lands and resources.⁴² In virtue of this, perhaps a way in which Native Americans could exert epistemic resistance against the treatment they are subject to would consist in collectively organizing (as Afro-Mexicans have done) to pressure the US federal government to change the ways in which they are recognized at the national and state level. In future work, I intend to explore whether other potential strategies (such as collective organizing to put pressure on film and other media industries to change the traditional representations of Afro-Mexicans in Mexico and of Native Americans in the US) could be effective to change the relations of misrecognition that give rise to epistemic injustices on both sides of the US-Mexico border.

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NOTES

1. Matthew Restall, “Black Conquistadors: Armed Africans in Early Spanish America,” *The Americas*, 57, no. 2 (October 2000): 171–205.
2. See, for example, Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán, *La población negra de México: estudio etnohistórico* (Fondo de Cultura Económica: México, DF, 1946).
3. For a careful analysis of how *mestizaje* has operated to create and perpetuate a series of racist beliefs and practices in Mexico, see Mónica Moreno Figueroa, “Distributed Intensities: Whiteness, *mestizaje*, and the Logics of Mexican Racism,” *Ethnicities* 10, no. 3 (2010): 387–401.

4. Christina A. Sue, *Land of the Cosmic Race: Race Mixture, Racism, and Blackness in Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).
5. For further details, see the reportage "Somos Negros" made by the Mexican TV channel Televisa, which was aired in 2013 in the news segment *Primero Noticias* and is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DrvjN1z1WhY>.
6. This is clearly illustrated by the treatment received by Kanewakeron Thomas Gray and Skanahwati Lloyd Gray, two Mohawk brothers who were detained by police officers on April 30, 2018, while participating in a campus tour at CSU-Fort Collins for prospective students and their families after the mother of another prospective student called 911 to have them questioned since they looked out of place and foreign (in the phone call, she told the dispatcher: "I think they are Hispanic, one for sure"). For further details, see <https://safety.colostate.edu/reported-incidents-of-bias/>. In addition, it is important to notice that the misrecognition of Native Americans as foreigners is underscored by the structure of Harvard's Implicit Association test for bias against American Indians, which is available at <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/education.html>. (I thank Agnes Curry for bringing this to my attention).
7. Kristie Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," *Hypatia*, 26, no. 2 (2011): 244.
8. Rae Langton, "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 22, no. 4 (1993): 293–330.
9. José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and the Social Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).
10. Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).
11. Herman L. Bennett, *Colonial Blackness. A History of Afro-Mexico*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009), 4.
12. The traditional narrative stresses that the dramatic decline of Amerindian populations in New Spain (and in the rest of the hemisphere) was due to epidemics such as that of *cocoliztli* in 1545–1548. However, some historians, such as Andrés Reséndez, have recently provided a far more nuanced picture according to which the decline was also due to the fact that Amerindians groups were subject to slave-like treatment under the *encomienda* system. See Andrés Reséndez, *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2016).
13. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Kwame Anthony Appiah, "Africans in Colonial Mexico," in *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African American Experience*, 2nd ed., Vol. II (2005), 167.
14. The most famous example of a free Black settlement in New Spain is the one founded by the runaway slave Gaspar Yanga. For further discussion, see Sagrario Cruz-Carretero, "Yanga and the Origins of Black Mexico" *Review of Black Political Economy* 33, no. 1 (2005): 73–77.
15. A recurrent theme in *casta* paintings (pintura de castas) made during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is that, though improper mixes lead to offspring that tumble down the social ladder, the proper mixes lead instead to a progressive improvement of one's descendants who may become, after several generations, white. In light of this, *casta* paintings had not only a descriptive role of portraying different mixes, but also a prescriptive dimension. For further discussion of this, see Magali Carrera, *Imagining Identity in the New Spain: Race, Lineage and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2003).
16. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 123.
17. See, in particular, Sierra, "México Social y Político," and Bulnes, *El porvenir de las naciones latinoamericanas ante las recientes conquistas de Europa y Norteamérica. Estructura y evolución de un continente*.
18. Sue, *Land of the Cosmic Race: Race Mixture, Racism, and Blackness in Mexico*, 65.
19. Wendy E. Philips, "Representations of the Black Body in Mexican Visual Art: Evidence of an African Historical Presence or a Cultural Myth?" *Journal of Black Studies*, 39, no. 5 (2009): 774–79. It is important to stress here that, though photography has had historically an important role in documenting the existence of Afro-Mexicans as Phillips shows, it also has been used in ways that either perpetuate their "otherness" by representing them as "primitives" or that emphasize their integration to mainstream Mexican society by "taming" distinctively African features such as hairstyles. For a thorough discussion of this, see Mariana Ortega, "Photographic Representation of Racialized Bodies: Afro-Mexicans, the Visible and the Invisible" *Critical Philosophy of Race* 1, no. 2 (2013): 163–89.
20. For further discussion of this theme (and, in particular, for a detailed analysis of two case studies, the movie *Angelitos Negros* from 1948 and the novel *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* from 1962), see Marco Polo Hernandez Cuevas, *African Mexicans and the Discourse on Modern Nation* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2004), chapters 8 and 9.
21. Theodore W. Cohen, "Among Races, Nations and Diasporas: Genealogies of 'La Bamba' in Mexico and the United States," *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 35 (2017): 63–64.
22. José Medina, "Color-Blindness, Meta-Ignorance, and the Racial Imagination," *Critical Philosophy of Race* 1, no. 1 (2013): 35.
23. Rodrigo Zárate, "Somos Mexicanos, no somos Negros: Educar para visibilizar el racismo 'anti-negro,'" *Revista Latinoamericana de Educación Inclusiva* 11, no. 1 (2017): 72. In particular, "De modo sistemático y consistente a través del tiempo, la pedagogía nacionalista del Estado ha construido como inexistente la afrodescendencia en el territorio nacional, y se ha limitado a señalar la presencia de esclavos en los procesos de conquista y colonización emprendidos por los españoles en América," 58.
24. A clear example of this association consists in the fact that, as Sagrario Cruz-Carretero has pointed out, dark-skinned Afro-Mexicans in Veracruz are often referred to as "cubanos" (i.e., "Cubans"). See her presentation at the national colloquium "¿Cómo queremos llamarnos?" ("How do we want to call ourselves?") on April 17, 2017, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5-wfYVXKN88>.
25. Miranda Fricker has argued that credibility deficits that some people suffer in virtue of their social identities constitute instances of epistemic injustice, which are injustices "in which someone is wronged in her capacity as a knower." Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice. Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 20.
26. This misrecognition is further reinforced by the fact that, in recent years, a growing number of Cubans have traveled to Mexico in order to reach the US more easily and request asylum. See the ABC news article by Esteban Roman published on October 12, 2012 and available at https://abcnews.go.com/ABC_Univision/News/cuban-immigrants-entering-us-mexico-spikes-400-percent/story?id=17516832.
27. Dotson, "Tracking Epistemic Violence, Tracking Practices of Silencing," 245.
28. Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Black in Latin America* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 64.
29. *Ibid.*, 65.
30. Langton, "Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts," 319–20.
31. Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and the Social Imagination*, 3.
32. Carlos López Beltrán, Carlos and Vivette García Deister, "Aproximaciones científicas al mestizo mexicano," *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos* 20, no. 2 (2013): 391–410.
33. For further details on this, see the official announcement made by the INAH as well as portions of the inaugural lecture by Alberto Barrow, which is available at <http://www.inah.gob.mx/es/boletines/6138-instauran-la-catedra-unesco-afrodescendientes-en-mexico-y-centroamerica>.
34. For further discussion of this, and for a detailed historical analysis of various shifts in the methodologies employed in the realization of national censuses in Mexico, see Emiko Saldivar and Casey Walsh, "Racial and Ethnic Identities in Mexican Statistics," *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research* 20, no. 3 (2014): 455–75.

35. In order to appreciate the crucial importance of the issue of self-identification for Afro-Mexican women, see the interview made by journalist Lulú Barrera in the internet TV channel *Rompeviento TV* of two Afro-Mexican activists, Yolanda Camacho and Patricia Ramírez, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1JiQsKX5wo>.
36. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 155.
37. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, 117.
38. *Ibid.*, 125.
39. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 174.
40. Peter Leavitt, Rebecca Covarrubias, Yvonne Perez, and Stephanie Fryberg, "'Frozen in Time': The Impact of Native American Media Representations on Identity and Self-Understanding," *Journal of Social Issues* 71, no. 1 (2015): 41.
41. It is important to stress here that there are some tribes that recognize documented genealogical connection to those whose names were on the 1934 rolls, even if that puts them below blood quantum levels that would kick them out of other tribes. For further discussion of the multi-layered legal complexities pertaining to this issue, see the blog post by Paul Spruhan published on February 27, 2018, which is available at <https://blog.harvardlawreview.org/warren-trump-and-the-question-of-native-american-identity/>. (I thank Agnes Curry for bringing this issue to my attention).
42. For further discussion of this, see the documentary by Michèle Stephenson and Brian Young, "A Conversation with Native Americans on Race," which is available at <https://www.nytimes.com/video/opinion/10000005352074/a-conversation-with-native-americans-on-race.html>.

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