

FIRST- AND SECOND-ORDER JUSTICE: MAKING ROOM FOR AFFECTS IN SOCIAL CRITIQUE

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Abstract: Over the last decades, different approaches linked to decolonial tradition have shifted the pendulum of critique from claims of universality towards individual accounts and experiences. However, in what we can call “narrative turn”, the moral justifications for first-person perspectives are not always evident. In this paper, I explore the boundaries of epistemic relevance regarding the role that subjective accounts and experiences play in the critique of injustice. For that, I start by inverting the question of objectivity in the critique considering the particularity of different experiences. The issue, in this case, is the position from where philosophers speak in their attempts to describe experiences of suffering. With regards to first-person standpoint, the question that is at stake is whether philosophers are capable of describing others’ experiences. In these terms, how can we share experiences of injustice after all? Next, I argue that there ought to be, in the debate, a distinction between two dimensions of justice. According to usual distinctions of “first- and second-order” approaches, I insist that theoretical claims related to the narrative turn refer to demands of first-order justice: it is about moral recognition of individuals’ epistemic claims, opening to the possibility to confront defective notions of universality and blind spots in theories of justice. However, these claims do not have justification criteria themselves, requiring, thus, normative dependencies which are external to experiences – these are situated in second-order justice. I argue, then, that this model has the advantage of incorporating the insights of decolonial theories without neglecting the potential for the critique of injustice.

Keywords: affects; narratives; epistemic injustice; suffering; decoloniality

“But how could I help feeling sorry? What affects a person most if the ugly nature of suffering itself, not the quality of the sufferer.” (...)

“This life is full if hidden pathways. If you know, sir, you know; if you don’t know, you won’t understand me (...)”

“The most important and nicest thing in the world is this: that people aren’t always the same, they are not all of a piece (...).”
(Guimarães Rosa, *The Devil to Pay in the Backlands*)

When it comes to the different approaches associated to the liberal tradition, it is possible to see that they share an attempt to find criteria of justice that would not obstruct the plurality of world perspectives, but rather

make it possible to reconcile them. In view of the tensions amid particular preferences, liberal theorists chose to abstain from criticizing them, arguing that it would not be their role to determine the contents of individual preferences. A behavior explained by a self-preservation logic: if critique were oriented by moral imperatives related to notions such as authenticity or a good life, it would end up putting at risk a supposed objectivity and impartiality claimed by liberal justice criteria. Political theories turned their attention to the universality of demands of justice, shaping, one way or another, criteria that transcend the partiality and contingency of particular world perspectives. Adam Smith’s impartial spectator, David Hume’s judicious spectator or John Rawls’s veil of ignorance are theoretical solutions that try to prevent theories from any particularity which would, so to speak, hinder finding impartial criteria for justice. By drawing a line between public reason and private sphere, subjective experiences as self-description and singular narratives must be restricted to this last one, not being a matter of justice anymore.

More recently, however, feminist and decolonial theories have moved their attention to the role of particular narratives in the social critique. Calling into question the strict separation between public and private, we find a renewal role that singular accounts and narratives could have in the elaboration of a theory of justice. Due to their particularity, experiences would be heterogeneous pieces which cannot fit into a homogeneous puzzle of a “supposed universality”. The notion of reason – which is subjacent to this ideal of universalization – has been attacked as restrict or exclusionary: instead of a plurality of worldviews, it assumes rather a hegemonic standpoint which results in different forms of epistemic violence.

In light of these circumstances, the issue I would like to discuss in this paper is: what is exactly the epistemic relevance of subjective accounts and experiences in the critique of justice? Before addressing this question, however, I would like to invert the problem of objectivity in the critique given the particularity of experiences. The issue, in this case, would be: which is

the place from where the philosopher speaks in their intention to describe suffering experiences from other individuals? Here we move into an epistemic realm, that is, to what extent can we talk about experiences that are not our own? In other words, to what extent can we share subjective experiences – namely “second-person standpoint” – or, in a closer sense than I am discussing, can we move from a first-person to a third-person perspective – as in social critique? If we always speak in first person and if there is any cognitive or epistemic limit of experiences, from where would the capacity of criticizing desires and choices of experiences that are not our own come from? How can we share experiences of injustice after all?

Where do we speak from? Sharing experiences of injustice

Firstly, in order to address this issue, it could be useful to remember the distinction Peter Strawson (2008) proposed between resentment and moral indignation: whereas resentment is taken as a reaction to an offense or indifference directed to oneself, moral indignation is an unpersonal and uninterested attitude. Unlike resentment, indignation attitudes would be “reactions to the quality of others’ wills, not towards ourselves” (Strawson, 2008, p. 256). Strawson, then, distinguishes personal reactive attitudes from what he calls *vicarious attitudes*: those of putting yourself on someone else’s shoes, although the offense is not directed to yourself. In other words, you can be dominated by a feeling of indignation in face of an experience of injustice, regardless of the fact it is directed to you. In his words:

What we have here is, as it were, resentment on behalf of another, where one’s own interest and dignity are not involved; and it is this impersonal or vicarious character of the attitude, added to its others, which entitle it to the qualification ‘moral’ (Strawson, 2008, p.258).

It is not clear, however, which criteria make it possible to entitle a vicarious (or indirect) attitude as being *moral*. Although Strawson contributes to distinguish between,

on the one hand, resentment as a direct reactive attitude and, on the other hand, indignation as a feeling of whom observes and perceives an experience of injustice, this should not lead us to assume that every feeling of indignation is morally legitimate *per se*. I can feel indignation for an attitude directed to someone close to me or with whom I have some emotional tie, without this feeling laying down the moral justification of the action. Additionally, in these cases, affects are majorly ambivalent: taking sides may be highly motivated by emotional ties, which, in turn, can act on the impartiality of a moral judgement. Such difficulty can be partly explained by the fact that Strawson’s argument has already the intention to bring the role of affects into the analytical debate – more specifically regarding the problem of moral determinism (as he recognizes, “it is pity that talk of the moral sentiments has fallen out of favour” (Strawson, 2008, p.268). Despite the oddness of this disuse, I would like to detain myself on the issue concerning the first-person perspective. What is exactly the difference between the experiences I feel in first person and the ones I feel in second person? More precisely: *is experience a condition for the critique of injustice?*

Let us see a story told by Joaquim Nabuco, a prominent Brazilian abolitionist. Born in the Massangana sugar mill, near Recife, in a wealthy white family of the rural aristocracy of the Brazilian state of Pernambuco, Nabuco tells his childhood memories living in a sugar mill. One of the most remarkable recollections of this period is the rupture from when slavery stops being something familiar, felt through an acritical emotional tie, and starts to be questioned:

I was sitting one afternoon on the landing outside the house, when I see rushing up to me an unknown young black man, about eighteen years old, who threw himself at my feet begging me, for the love of God, to have him bought by my godmother to serve me. He came from the neighborhoods, looking for a new master, because his, he told me, punished him, and he had fled, risking his life...This was the unexpected trait that made me discover the nature of the institution with which I coexisted familiarly so far, without suspecting the pain it concealed.

Nothing shows better than slavery itself the power of the first vibrations of the feeling. [...] Thus, I fought slavery with all my strength, repelled it with all my consciousness." (Nabuco, 2012, p. 190)

The epistemic issue of Nabuco's perception of injustice, which is clearly not the same as the experience of the slave who encounters him, is a standpoint shift from first to second person. What is the difference between both experiences? What allows Nabuco sharing this narrative as injustice?

A first answer to this question is what we can call *epistemic privilege of experience*, as it has been the tendency in most of the recent literature associated to the narrative turn. Nabuco, obviously, does not (and he cannot) feel the same experience of the slave. His critical and reactive position is crossed by the feeling originated by a moral felling (a vicarious one, as in Strawson's vocabulary): when facing the young black man in the condition of slave begging to be bought, Nabuco says he feels – and, in a way, shares – the pain that afflicted that man. *Feeling*, in this case, did not mean experiencing in first person (as in the concept of *lived experience*), but *realizing*, that is, being able to share, in second person, experiences which can intersubjectively be perceived as unfair.

Nevertheless, the epistemic issues we see in this narrative are not only inherent to lived experiences as a condition for the critique of injustice - what we can call *epistemic privilege of experience*, as it has been the tendency in the recent literature associated to the narrative turn. Indeed, the privileged position of Nabuco, from which he narrates his perception of the injustice intrinsic to the condition of slavery, not only reveals his narrative as an example of the problem from a second-person perspective, but makes his account relevant *as an account*. Even though the role of black intellectuals, such as Luiz Gama, or of important characters in the Maroon resistance, such as Tereza de Benguela, was relevant to the abolitionist movement, Nabuco's account is the one heard and which resists time. From the perspective of epistemic injustice, the issue of injustice does not only refer to the reflexive capacity of injustice. Beyond the

second-person standpoint (that is, the perception from someone who does not suffer the experience of injustice directly), what is unfair here is the fact that the first-person standpoint does not gain social or political relevance¹. It is not merely a circumstantial detail that we rarely hear first-person accounts from slaves. The fact that the account by Mahommah Gardo Baquaquá's, a former slave who ran away to the United States, had been the only autobiography of enslaved people in Brazil corroborates the discrepancy of how these stories circulate and of the epistemic relevance they historically assumed in the perception of injustice². The narrative of lived experience in first-person acquires different weights in the scope of injustice when it is socially set beforehand which of them matters. The absence of first-person accounts and, especially, its effacement are *problems of justice*. Whereas some are heard, others are silenced; some are remembered; others, forgotten.

When Frantz Fanon wrote *Black skin, white masks*, he alerts us to what is behind the claims of epistemic universality – closely related, in this case, to the colonial discourse. There, Fanon articulates an intrinsic connection between his experience as a psychiatrist and his practice in a context of cultural dissonance that takes place in Algeria under the French colonial domination.

¹ In *Epistemic Injustice*, a pioneer work on this discussion, Miranda Fricker (2008) calls this problem *testimonial injustice* – when accounts are not heard in their epistemic potential. This concept differs from what Fricker calls *hermeneutic injustice*: unlike testimonial injustice, which refers to the prejudice in light of the content of the account and depending on the author of the narrative, *hermeneutic injustice* embraces relations of injustice rooted in social practices which restrain individuals to perceive them as unfair.

² Certainly, the importance given to first-person accounts only refers to the epistemic dimension of injustice, but it is not enough to overcome political dimensions of injustice. It suffices to recall that Frederick Douglass, who would become one of the main characters of the abolitionist movement in the United States, left his memories in three autobiographies – the first one, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* – which would become a best-selling success. The moral meaning of epistemic acknowledgment does not replace the meaning of the social and legal dimensions that constitute the normative horizon of the vocabulary of justice. It is also for this reason that I dissent from the reflections about justice which reduce it to the epistemic dimension of lived experience, which I interpret as one of the pre-conditions so that the vocabulary available for the *disputes* about justice can be put in a more symmetric and, consequently, fairer way.

Under the perspective of psychiatric practice, claims of universality become even more latent since they assume a totalizing model of the subject category and its symptoms. This kind of resistance unfolds questions like: who can speak on behalf of the universal? Which universalism? For whom? In sum, which voices have universal value, whereas others only have particular value?

These were issues that, one way or another, mobilized different sides of the decolonial thought. Fanon argues that behind what we call “universal” there are disputes between narratives that exclude perspectives which are prevented from being recognized in their epistemic claim. When bringing light into this issue, what is valid and consolidated as the center of the canonic speech contrasts with what Fanon calls “the lived experience of the black man”, which names one of the chapters of his book. Narrating in first person, he describes the experience of not recognizing himself in the supposed universality of knowledge in the French colonizer in Algeria: a kind of racial and colonial scope which provokes a vertiginous strangeness – a type of *epistemological de-identification*. Fanon’s choice for the first-person narrative brings an epistemic force into a struggle for the acknowledgement of a subjectivity forbidden to the universal category. Since it is directed to the theory, the critique is neither particular nor wants to affirm its perspective as “other universal”, but revindicates that his *lived experience* is not included in that colonizer discourse that, as such, wants to be worth as universal. He is saying: “I do not recognize myself in this theory”.

What we see here is the case of the “man” category, mostly connected to its *desires* – an issue that Fanon elaborates from his professional experience as a psychiatrist. “What does the man want? What does the black man want?” – he asks, transferring the emphasis of the universality of the “man” category to an identity which does not recognize itself in this universal category. The black man’s desire is questioned as a volitive sphere that does not fit in the category “man’s desires”, since the “universal” pattern of recognition of the Martinican black man – Fanon argues – is the French white man.

Then, the particular becomes refractory to its encapsulation in categories which is strange to it. It is the universal, not the particular, which is alienated from itself, being reduced to a self-referential and, therefore, excluding reason. Fanon’s conclusion is emphatic: “The black is not a man” (Fanon, 2008, p. 1).

The same is valid for language: while asking himself about the construction of the black man’s identity, Fanon brings the example of the use of “*petit-nègre*” as an incorporation of the colonial language: once being a simplified version of French language, the speaker of *petit-nègre* self-subdues himself due to the colonialist discourse, so that “answering in *petit-nègre* is immuring the black person with extremely toxic strange bodies” (Fanon, 2008, p. 48). This means, first and foremost, that colonial subjection is also psychic subjection. For Fanon, what is exposed is the fact that colonial and racialized ways of life are specific ways of suffering, which, as such, must be faced under reactive models of political action.

An analogous sense of language strangeness is narrated by Kwame Appiah in his work entitled *In my father’s house*. In what he calls “the invention of Africa”, Appiah mentions the subterfuges of semantic violence in the speech of Alexander Cummel, an American Episcopal priest who defended that due to the colonization, despite slavery, the “divine providence” had inherited the ownership of the Anglo-Saxon language, “superior in its euphony, its conceptual resources, and its capacity to express the ‘supernal truths’ of Christianity” (Appiah, 1992, p. 19). The epistemic violence that Appiah accounts is a result of an excluding sense of universal that can only deal with difference by eliminating it. In this scope between universal and particular, the issue remains being which speeches are taken as universal and, mostly, who can speak on behalf of universal.

Appiah concludes, in an ironic tone:

Now, over a century later, more than half of the population of black Africa lives in countries where English is an official language, and the same providence has decreed that almost all the rest of Africa should be governed in French or Arabic or Portuguese (Appiah, 1992, p. 19).

Whose reason? Between particular and universal

When confronting the supposed “reason’s standpoint”, decolonial critiques paved the way for a shift in the pedulum, moving it from universal to particular and confronting what was taken as defective notions of universal reason. However, whereas these critiques were originally directed to an epistemic widening and inclusion of discourses initially excluded of this universal, they started to play a role of self-validation, in which it was no longer clear to what extent their claims could go beyond their particular dimension. The result was that, from the centrality of the struggle for recognition of different narratives, these approaches changed their focus from what would be an epistemic critique to a kind of normative self-validation based on experience. First-person narratives which could have a potential for critique started to be self-referenced, that is, instead of affecting and contributing to theoretical claims reassessment, they remained mattering as particular accounts.

The epistemic relevance of the widen potential of the narratives rests precisely when it is able to transcend the particular character of first-person accounts. In other words, the problem of lack of epistemic acknowledgment occurs when, even though accounts were heard, they were not taken in their potential of epistemic contribution to overcome the status of a mere private story. In *Plantation memories*, Grada Kilomba complains about being criticized for her excess of emotivism and about being discredited. The categorization of her analysis as full of sentimentalism, little objective or little scientific (“you overinterpret”) meant to discredit her speech or to silence her – the “endless control over the voice of the *black subject* and the desire to govern and rule how we approach and interpret reality” (Kilomba, 2010, p. 34).

As a scholar, for instance, I am commonly told that my work on everyday racism is very interesting, but not really scientific, a remark that illustrates the colonial order in which Black scholars reside: “You have a very *subjective* perspective;” “very *personal*;” “very *emotional*”, “very *specific*;” “Are these *objective* facts?” Such comments function

like a mask, that silences our voices as soon as we speak. They allow the white subject to place our discourses back at the margins, as deviating knowledge, while their discourses remain at the centre, as the norm. When they speak it is scientific, when we speak it is unscientific;

universal / subjective;”
objective / subjective;”
rational / emotional;”
impartial / partial;”
they have facts, we have opinions”
they have knowledge, we have experiences

These are not simple semantic categorizations; they possess a dimension of power that maintains hierarchical positions and upholds *white* supremacy. We are not dealing here with a “peaceful coexistence of words”, as Jacques Derrida (1981: 41) emphasizes, but rather a violent hierarchy that defines who can speak.” (Kilomba, 2010, p. 51–52)³.

Kilomba’s claim is that her speech must not be acknowledged as merely a particular one, but rather be understood in its potential of objectivity which precisely *transcend the subjectively meaning of their singular experiences*. When she reclaims the acknowledgment of people and identity groups whose speeches are systematically made invisible, this is not restricted to the sphere of particular experiences, but it ultimately encompasses a matter of justice: the epistemic reasons for exclusion or invisibilization of these discourses are unfair. This type of revindications refer, therefore, not only to a claim of particularity (characteristic of plural ways of life), but to a *universalism* that embraces justice demands. They bring, in sum, the moral potential of the struggle for the *equality of epistemic recognition*.

Grada Kilomba’s revindication is for having their speeches acknowledged as more than their own experiences, *i. e.* , whose claims of validity transcend mere

³ Also in this sense of the relation between narrative and power, Chimamanda writes: “It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. There is a word, an Igbo word, that I think about whenever I think about the power structures of the world, and it is “nkali.” It’s a noun that loosely translates to “to be greater than another.” Like our economic and political worlds, stories too are defined by the principle of nkali. How they are told, who tells them, when they’re told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power” (The danger of a single story, p. 37)

particularity. The scope of epistemic validation – what makes some speeches worth as particular, others as universal; some as central, other as peripheral – is in itself a problem of justice. Nevertheless, the theoretical outreach of these narratives must precisely be able to overcome its relevance as restrictive to their particular character: if they do not bring the epistemic claim of transcending particularity, first-person accounts will continue to be just accounts.

The normative potential of accounts centered on identity is not immune to these same ambiguities. On the example mentioned by Appiah, he argues that what makes Alexander Crummel feel entitled to make an assertion about the semantic superiority of the English language is his condition of Afro-American. He does not speak – so he believes – from the perspective of a white colonizer, but as a black man – an identity scope that, for Appiah, can also bring distortions in his claims of speech legitimacy. This same option for an analysis focused on subjective experience – but which intends to be, at the same time, shared in terms of identity – leads Fanon to reduce, at times, the complexity of a culture to an almost archetypic construction of the post-colonial man. When Fanon claims for an identity position in his speech, is he speaking on behalf of all black subjects? Black men born in Martinique can speak on behalf of black female students in Paris⁴? What is shared and what is not between dark-skinned black people from the suburbs of Paris of Senegalese ascendance who have just immigrated, and light-skinned black people of diasporic origin in Rio de Janeiro? In sum: who can speak on behalf of the “blackness”?

The question proposed by Fanon in the beginning of his book – what does the black man want? – is, then, delimited by a kind of constitution of desire that neither fits the speech “what does the man want?” (which ends up meaning what does the white man want), nor necessarily delimits a valid constitution for all black men. Although Fanon’s speech is in first person, speaking from the *lived experience* of the black man, it brings the po-

tential of rupture and tensioning; it cannot be dissociated from *his* experience – which can assume shared traits with other lived experiences –, but cannot easily transcend the pendulum between particular experience and universal category. In other words, any speech with claims of shared identities can reveal itself paradoxical.

Furthermore, the potential of experiences in the constitution of individuals not only means a static standpoint, but also a critical position on this place from where one speaks. It is precisely this critical awareness as a learning horizon that makes possible living other experiences. More than that, experiences unclose a multitude of possibilities: as subjects, we are not only located in the threshold of lived experiences; we are at the outset of what we can still live: experiences that can still be lived, other desires that can still be desired.

Therefore, moving the critique’s pendulum from universality to singular experiences does not easily solve the problems initially faced by the narrative turn. The tension between universal and particular as the horizon of constitution of the subject from a logic focused on affects as a property persists in a paradoxical manner: particular takes the place of universal, relying in the subject’s experience what could be found before in the horizon of the social vocabulary that precedes it.

However, Fanon’s reflection brings an important contribution by questioning the colonization of the speech supposedly based on a universal rationality, whose claim of universality validates itself only excluding. Even though the epistemic contribution of the lived experience does not automatically concede the moral criteria that transcend its phenomenological immanence, it can pressure flawed notions of injustice. In these cases, first person’s narratives are relevant, because they reveal that the supposed impersonality of universal reason is, in fact, equally concrete and particular, with the difference that it imposes itself more coercively than the other.

Neither every translation of different narratives means speaking on behalf of the other as a denial of difference nor every representation must take the form

⁴ This is a concern which is present in Fanon’s documentary.

of replacement. Representations can mean, as Spivak proposed in relation to its meaning in the German vocabulary, not only the replacement of another (*Vertretung*), but an exhibition, presentation (*Darstellung*) – the other who speaks for herself, mitigating ways of epistemic violence⁵. The dialog between the Shaman Yanomami Davi Kopenawa and the French anthropologist Bruce Albert, whose intense conversations resulted in the monumental work *The Falling Sky*, is an example of these translation efforts in which the theoretical disposition goes from *speaking on the behalf of to listening to the other*. Without denying the risk of a reductionist confrontation of perspectives, inherent to language itself, Albert spent four decades interacting with Davi Kopenawa, in a position of a mediator who creates a bond of mutual trust. Only after this commitment, it became possible to respond to new conceptual tools and to world perspective(s) (or “worlds of perspectives”, to use an expression by Viveiros de Castro) based on radically different ontologies. An encounter that somehow echoes the potential mode of translation assumed by the shamanic entity itself⁶. “I like to explain these things to whites, so that they may know”⁷. The verbs Kopenawa uses in this statement have their own force: *explaining* and *knowing* bring an unsettling and conscious

pretension of truth, which, for that matter, arrogates an epistemic superiority. Kopenawa has the consciousness of whom he is talking to, the sentence is less arrogant and more ironic. The tone is disconcerting, provocative. And Kopenawa knows that.

Accounts such as Kilomba’s, Fanon’s, Appiah’s and Kopenawa’s revindicate, in different ways, a process of struggle for epistemic recognition, not only as representativity –by making themselves seen and heard – but by revealing how the way the “universal” construction of epistemic categories is constituted excludes other invisibilized accounts in this process. Its pressure is fundamentally “metacritic”, since these claims are not disputing the content of the critique *per se*, but the acknowledgement that their critical potential should be equally heard. When these claims pressure the canon, they do not do it only from a condition of particularity – a lived experience in particular –, but from a process of rectification of epistemic injustice. By saying “I do not recognize myself in your universal”, particular experiences are neither reduced to their particularity nor they impose themselves as a new universal; instead, they press theories towards correction and widening. As Spivak says:

It is not about a description of “how things really were” or about privileging the narrative of history as imperialism as the best version of the story. It is, on the contrary, to offer an account of how an explanation and a narrative of reality were established as normative (Spivak, 1988, p. 48).

Epistemic recognition and moral justification: Distinguishing first- and second-order injustice

If, on the one hand, the inclusion of these perspectives enables to create a theoretical vocabulary which is already disposed in the demands for justice in an immanent way, their justification criteria depend, on the other hand, on a constant tension between particular experiences and social norms. None of them brings justification criteria *a priori*, but express a majorly negative function of criticism and correction, putting in question the supposed normative neutrality of the “narrative of reality”. Insofar as these narratives are directed to descrip-

⁵ “They must observe how the pretense of the world in representation – its scene of writing, its *Darstellung* – dissimulates the choice and the need of ‘heroes’, paternal proxies and agents of power – *Vertretung*. In my opinion, the practice must be attentive to the double sense of the term representation, instead of trying to reinsert the individual subject through totalizer concepts of power and desire” (Spivak, 1988, p. 43).

⁶ “In anthropology, the image of the shaman is known as a diplomat or a cosmic translator; the one who travels around different worlds and deals with subjects who are different, but equally human. To go back and tell what he saw, the shaman cannot confuse the perspectives, otherwise he runs the risk of being captured by others’ point of view, definitively turning into somebody else. In the theory of shamanic translation, a same referent, object or word can mean another thing entirely, depending on the perspective. There is not an Adamic, absolute language, responsible for equaling the differences between world and languages” (Arthur Imbassahy, *The art of holding the sky through the difference*, Suplemento Pernambuco, p. 12. n. 162, August 2019).

⁷ Turner & Kopenawa, 1991, p. 63. Davi Kopenawa’s interview to Terence Turner, a representative of the American Anthropological Association’s special committee, formed in 1991 to investigate the situation of the Yanomami tribe in Brazil. Quoted in *The Falling Sky*, p. 63.

tive claims, the epistemic issue consists of ethnographic or cultural translation works; in other words, of the limits and efforts in approaching a culture which is different than the one of the researcher⁸. Without losing sight of this set of critiques around this issue of ethnocentrism, the problem which particularly interests me is, however, the impact they have in the scope of normative theories. Offering criteria for issues of injustice is certainly not in the same plain of narrating anthropological perspectives and, in the case of normative theories, such criteria refer, as I have insisted, to the potential that particular accounts based on experiences offer to these theories.

In light of what we have seen so far, I would like to suggest that the normative force of singular accounts is mostly connected to two different issues. The first one refers to *epistemic injustices*. Theories which are hermetically enclosed in their own speech, only hearing their own voice, fail to take their assumptions of universal rationality as incorrigible. For the sake of the concept of reason they claim to assume, some discourses validate themselves as universal, whereas others are treated as peripheral for supposedly not taking the reason's standpoint. These theories sometimes in a subtle, other times in a more explicitly violent manner, assume the other person cannot speak for him/herself. In these cases, we are facing relations of injustice which are not derived from disputes for rational criteria around justice, but of *whom is recognized as speaking on behalf of reason, whose reasons deserve to be heard*. In this change of perspective from *what* is announced to *whom* announces, the critique stops being delimited by the force

of arguments – and in its potential of universalization – and starts having higher or lower relevance depending on who speaks. The epistemic problem does not refer, in sum, to the privileged access to a set of experiences, but to the fact that such demands have not been historically addressed in a more equitably fair manner.

I call this problem first-order justice⁹. In these cases, we are not dealing with normative dispute of moral justification, but, in a previous step, assuring that the people affected can be acknowledged in their epistemic claims on a speech free of coercion¹⁰. Besides bringing problems of epistemic injustice into attention, accounts have the potential to expose the flaws of normative theories by bringing to light the universality claims. This other normative dimension of the accounts, which one can call *legitimacy claims*, consists of the pressures against the supposed universal knowledge, showing how defective it is, in other words, that the vocabulary we use to delimit notions as universality and rationality is flawed. Experiences and narratives then have critical relevance not only because they tell other stories, but also because these stories offer us new concepts and images, opening the subject to the expansion of their vocabulary, being able to see what had no “reason” to be seen before.

The fact that some narratives have been called “great” result from bets and claims of universalization. However, along the history, other narratives also offered the potential to be “great”. Such degree of relevance depended not only on its potential of universalization –

⁸ For some time, works in the scope of anthropology raised the question about the tendencies of epistemological construction as a false universalism which ended up fetishizing what did not belong to the center of the construction of knowledge. He? pointed to a change of perspective that, instead of showing itself as a supposedly neutral description, meant an “invention” (e.g., Mudimbe, *The invention of Africa*, Edward Said, *Orientalism. The Orient as an Invention of the Occident*). Nothing more dystopic than imagining Kant, in Königsberg, thoroughly describing the different world cultures. Behind this supposed – and even arrogant – cosmopolitanism of philosophy, hides itself a position which gets to be surprising in its presumption: a provincialism with colonialist pretensions.

⁹ I have in mind here the distinction between first and second-order volition made familiar by Harry Frankfurt (1971). More recently, this distinction was proposed by Alessandro Pinzani regarding different experiences of suffering, more closely to the difference that Miranda Fricker proposed between testimonial and hermeneutical injustice (see Pinzani, *First and second-order suffering*, manuscript). In this paper, I draw my attention to these distinctions, but aiming at clarifying what I see as some confusions between epistemic and moral dimensions of recognition.

¹⁰ Although they start from different premises, aspects of first-order justice are found, from procedural theories to decolonial theories. Because, one way or another, what is at stake is the possibility of including in the speech who was out of it. However, what these different approaches share does not prevent that the own premises of rationality and universality taken as procedural theories end up limiting the inclusion of other narratives, contradicting what they intend to defend.

if they can explain better structural phenomena, ideologies, etc. (which from the theoretical point of view can be justifiable) –, but on criteria other than its semantic power, as in the previously mentioned cases of first-order injustice. These criteria which are beyond a theory, let us say, morally neutral, define who is in and who is out, which narrative counts as universal and which counts as peripheral. And it is not by chance that this universal vs. particular scope coincides with theories that were historically located in the center and in the periphery of the geopolitical spectrum. Besides, we cannot just “jump” past narratives since they structurally constitute our current horizon of world perspectives. Even though it is possible to retroactively criticize the reasons that made them be accredited as canonic, its performative effect constitutes the vocabulary from which we think and act in the present.

It is precisely due to this false symmetry that theories of justice must be sensitive to accounts that historically could find little space in the constitution of the canonic models of comprehension of justice, constantly opening themselves to the *corrigibility* and the revision of their principles. Whereas the theoretical work is situated in a constant tension between different claims of legitimacy of particular world(s) perspectives, particular narratives and experiences continue to confront claims of universality which start to be constantly rectified¹¹.

¹¹ One of the issues that naturally arises here is if it is worth maintaining or abandoning theoretical claims characterized as “universal” or “great” narratives. Concepts, such as “pluriversalism” or “Amerindian perspectivism” have been proposed as means of resistance to theoretical approaches with claims of universal comprehensiveness (see Viveiros de Castro, 2016). In my point of view, we can widen our vocabulary about matters of justice without having to abandon the belief that issues such as slavery can be criticized as *universally fair*. For this reason, I understand that, in order to open ourselves to the critique, we must not forego the potential of reasons which continue to offer the own possibility of critique to injustices which transcend the particular character of experiences. However, these are the same claims that must assume the coverage which is constant to its correction by including other narratives in a more sensitive way. One of the biggest mistakes of the ones who are refractory when criticized is the arrogance of not allowing themselves to review their beliefs, always regarding them as truths instead of more modest attempts of hits that may occasionally fail. A little more of humbleness would enable to see that those who continue to speak on behalf of the uni-

The latent critiques then serve as thermometers and as forms of pressure between particular and universal. Depending on the assumptions – and, in a last analysis, on the senses of reason assumed – such critiques indicate that claims of universality are flawed as they cannot incorporate other narratives. This is what Judith Shklar, an author situated in the liberal tradition, affirms when it comes to what is called “normal justice”:

[...] normal justice is a set of rules and basic principles that rule the distribution of benefits and responsibilities inside a community, and this demands the establishment of effective and impartial institutions to assure the application of the rules and basic principles. This general and rule-based approach is necessary for justice to be institutionalized as organizational laws and practices. But as a result, “normal justice” frequently has blind spots, gaps and non-intentional consequences. (Shklar, 1998, p. 17)¹²

It is due to these blind spots of the justice system that Shklar proposes that political philosophy should seriously consider the perspective of victims of injustice. She defends that the victims’ “sentiment of injustice”, as a perspective of the directly affected, can contribute to correct theories and institutions, allowing philosophers to equally rethink their theoretical positions. In order to show the flaws and interferences in the perception of injustice, Shklar describes how relations that were historically described as mere *misfortunes* started to be regarded and described as unfair. As she describes it, much of this widening of the perception of injustice was due to the contributions brought by the narratives and accounts of suffering from victims of injustice.

In short: first-order injustice refers to unequal practices of epistemic recognition. This regards how narratives and experiences can play a role of widening the

versal do so because other perspectives were historically excluded from this universal. These are dwarfs in the shoulders of giants, but for reasons that are contrary to what the expression originally wanted to indicate.

¹² “Body of rules and basic principles governing the distribution of benefits and burdens within a community, and it demands the establishment of effective and impartial institutions to guarantee the enforcement of these basic rules and principles” (p. 17). This rule-bound, generalized approach is necessary for justice to be institutionalized as laws and organizational practices. But as a result, normal justice frequently has blind spots, gaps and unintended consequences.

epistemic outreach of normative theories, but it is still not clear how lived experiences can provide the criteria of injustice. Indeed, even though we recognize the normative potential of the speeches in what concerns first-order injustice – i. e., that all speeches *can* be normatively justified – it does not mean they *must* be justified.

It is in relation to these disputes about moral justification criteria of the speeches that we find what I call for *second-order injustice*. The way how we refer to our own experiences, mostly in its affective dimension, are ambiguous: there is not an immediate translation between what we feel and what are reasons to justify these experiences since, in the midst of a wide range of ambivalences where our affects are located, especially when we refer to experiences of suffering, not always we have reasons to find justification criteria in them. Since the theoretical contributions of psychoanalysis, not only the control and reflection of the subject about what they feel and desire were put under suspicion, but also the contingency and vulnerability which constitute the process of subjectivation started to be analyzed as a way of suffering that goes beyond the scope of normative theories of society. Such sense of suffering intends to indicate that, regardless of the socially conquered arrangements, there will always be fissures inherent to the constitution of subjectivity¹³. Unlike this kind of suffering – which we can understand as more radically contingent and idiosyncratic –, the tasks of normative theories must be directed to what we call *social suffering*, in other words, the social and institutional practices that could offer a therapeutic meaning in light of the *social* causes of suffering.

¹³ In the scope of psychoanalytical theories, the role of the clinic refers to this kind of singularly contingent suffering. Bringing light to this complementarity of a work division between psychoanalysis and social theory means, as I defended somewhere else, make way to what psychoanalysis has of best to offer: even though we imagined politics in its therapeutic potential, there will always be some kind of suffering which is inherent to subjectivation and that, as such, escapes a normative theory of society. It is due to the fact that an intersubjective relation does not depend on a previously determined content that a social theory cannot satisfy all the criteria of a subjectivity which is completely immune to suffering and symptom. For discussion, see Campello, 2017.

I would like to suggest that sufferings can be social not only in the stricter sense of how they can be confronted in the scope of a theory of institutions, but also in two senses, more immanent to social normativity: on the one hand, in relation to the norms that constitute the subjects' imperatives of accomplishment; and, on the other hand, in the limits given by the social grammar, preventing that the ways of life available to the subject can be widened. Differently than sufferings resulting from contingencies of subjectivation, this socially shared horizon can be a target of the social critique. In this sense, bringing narratives to the scope of critique does not mean to criticize them in an isolate manner, as individual choices, but to insert them in a shared semantic horizon.

However, when the critique takes affects as individual properties, it loses sight of the normative patterns that precede the horizon in which the phenomenology of subjective experiences is inscribed. Thus, it stops offering a critical potential to the vocabulary that precedes the way how subjective experiences are articulated. More than that: if experiences and accounts are intangible individual properties, they stop being a problem of justice. From this unilateral perspective of the accounts, singular experiences of suffering can no longer be faced in what could be their social causes. If I said: "what I feel is my exclusive property", these sentiments would no longer have any relevance from the social critique point of view. The result would be a set of "epistemic scubas": monads which could no longer communicate, blocking the conflict inherent to democratic pluralism itself about the degree of normative relevance of affects to matters of justice.

In the public perspective of accommodating the plurality of worldviews, particular accounts will always find divergences and will eventually conflict with other narratives, which might or *might not* be legitimate from the point of view of its moral value. In the perspective of procedural theories or theories which are closer to moral constructivism, it is up to the speech among the most affected people, and not to the moral philosopher, to

find the validity of their demands. Behind assumptions of rationality and universality, one can find worldviews which, due to the criteria established beforehand as rationally valid, end up excluding the epistemic relevance of other narratives. The theory impoverishes itself, being reduced to a ventriloquist that only repeats itself. In order to escape from this self-referential entanglement, the theory needs to be continuously open to the revision of what it takes as comprehensive criteria. If we reduce the critique to the epistemic potential of the accounts, we become intertwined with difficulties of legitimation, since such singular perspectives integrate a plural framework of world perspectives.

The semantic content of experiences refers, in sum, to the experiences themselves; accounts remain only as accounts if the epistemic potential to transcend its narrative horizon is not acknowledged. Whereas it speaks from their own particular experience, it does not concern to the subject the epistemic authority to distinguish between the horizon of justifications of their preferences so as to put them as a moral rule extended to society. In these cases, the revindication for justice does not derive only from a privileged set of exclusively particular experiences, but it is shared by other subjects. The list of our experiences, the more particular as they might be, are inscribed in a vocabulary which transcends our singularity. Abdicating from this would make us fall into a kind of *epistemic scuba*: particular accounts and experiences nobody can have access to. Normative theories, therefore, cannot claim the right to concede the epistemic authority of critique to subject accounts, by arguing they have authority over their own world perspectives. Just as claims of universality are permanently rectified, we make little progress if we assume that normative theories only refer to the particular.

We do not always have the necessary vocabulary to justify our choices at our disposal. When we do not have the space of reasons, to use the term by Willfried Sellars, to justify to ourselves, we do not have the semantic distance to criticize the singular horizon of what we feel at our disposal. We can call this notion the impartiality

effort of *theory perspective*. It consists of the continuous translation into normative criteria of a plural and often conflicting framework of singular narratives. Normative theories and the own epistemic sense attributed to philosophy – in what is left as an attempt of critique – cannot be reduced to biographies. If accounts were enough, we would not need more than literature.

However, neither philosophy nor literature are restricted to biographic accounts. The epistemic force of new vocabulary constitutes itself as heteronomous as it intends to account another self. If we follow autobiographic accounts closely and more attentively, we will see that they can rarely be enclosed in strict identities; they are as darkrooms of identity, inverting images.

When theories reduce themselves to experiences, they take over the assumption of self-referentiality of the accounts which, enclosed in themselves, end up obstructing the perception of other forms of injustice. Inversely, it is the decentering of the particular perspective that enables to widen its capacity of listening and continuously incorporating other accounts. There is, then, a change of perspective from where the philosopher speaks: instead of using their own theory as a guide, it takes the position of listener, that is, someone who not only speaks, but also listens to narratives and perceptions of injustice. It means to assume that the perspective of the researcher is embedded in a certain context. Acknowledging this stand of the theory puts us in a position of listening: being sensible to narratives that were not given reasons to be heard before; listening as a speech what used to be heard as a noise. This pendulum of reciprocal cooperation shows itself in a simpler scheme as this one, as follows:

Theory \longleftrightarrow Narratives

However, beyond this pendulum between narrative and theory, what makes us search for criteria of critique beyond the narratives is that perspectives related to the narrative turn are reduced to a semantic horizon of vocabularies that are *apparently* our properties. It is about, here, asking which affects are *possible*, what *can*

we feel? This is why, more than keep insisting in the tension between first-person standpoint and theory, we must ask ourselves how affects are lived and narrated, not only singularly, but specially in the horizon of a socially shared grammar.

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