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Gaslighting and Echoing, or Why Collective Epistemic Resistance is not a “Witch Hunt”

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Abstract

This essay reflects on some of the problems with characterizing collective epistemic resistance to oppression as “unthinking” or antithetical to reason by highlighting the epistemic labor involved in contending with and resisting epistemic oppression. To do so, I develop a structural notion of epistemic gaslighting in order to highlight structural features of contexts within which collective epistemic resistance to oppression occurs. I consider two different forms of epistemic echoing as modes of contending with and resisting epistemic oppression that are sometimes mischaracterized as “unthinking” or “group think.” The first sense highlights the epistemic labor entailed in withdrawing from conditions of structural epistemic gaslighting that is sometimes mischaracterized as a pernicious self-sequestering that is antithetical to reason. The second sense highlights the epistemic labor entailed in actively confronting epistemic structures that gaslight what is sometimes mischaracterized as an “irrational group think.” In both cases, I highlight how epistemic acts that may appear unreasonable “within the gaslight” are, on the contrary, engaged in serious and important epistemic labor.

“[W]hen a critique is heard as censorship a critique is not heard. In fact the allegation of censorship is often what is censoring; what stops a critique from staying in circulation.”

—Sara Ahmed (2015)

Individual and collective epistemic resistance to oppression is sometimes characterized as antithetical to reasonable discussion in a manner that works to displace such resistance and to discredit the epistemic credibility of those enacting it. I am interested in focusing attention on the political-epistemic context within which epistemic resistance to oppression occurs in order to highlight how charges of “unreasonability” operate in such settings. As I shall elaborate over the course of this essay, resistance in the form of epistemic disengagement may be a necessary and reasonable response to mitigate the ill effects of what I will call structural epistemic gaslighting. For this reason, calls to

re-engage on the premise that disengagement is *de facto* unreasonable may further exacerbate the effects of structural epistemic gaslighting.

By resistant epistemic disengagement, I mean disengaging and calling upon others to disengage from frameworks that maintain epistemic oppression, especially when those frameworks cast nondominantly situated knowers as less reliable and/or render unintelligible what is of interest to nondominantly situated knowers. For example, I take certain instances of “deplatforming” (or refusals to give airtime to particular viewpoints) to be resistant epistemic disengagements. As I have argued elsewhere, refusing to consider lines of thought that unfairly foreshorten epistemic agency for some is not only warranted but also in some instances epistemically generative (Pohlhaus, Jr. 2011). In this essay I am concerned with identifying the harm in soliciting re-engagement from those who resistantly disengage and elucidating what is obscured when refusal to (re)engage is characterized as contrary to reason, operating under a “mob mentality,” or “pursuing a witch hunt.”¹

While I recognize that refusing to engage with viewpoints that are harmful can itself result in harm, particularly insofar as it would be beneficial to dissuade people from holding them, those who are oppressed are often faced with double binds, making it nearly impossible to escape negative judgments. Marilyn Frye notes that one feature of oppression is that it produces situations in which the oppressed are castigated no matter what they do (Frye 1983a). It should come as no surprise, then, that the situations in which one finds oneself when resisting structures of oppression might themselves contain double binds. There are dangers to working resistantly within as well as resisting by refusing to work within oppressive frameworks. Oppressed people have contended with this dilemma for centuries. Insofar as this is the case, part of the purpose of this article is to explore the harm that is done when those working from within epistemically oppressive frameworks (whether resistantly or not) call upon those who are disengaging from those frameworks to re-engage within the confines of that from which they are trying to disengage. More specifically, I want to caution feminists in particular from aligning with those who would charge such forms of disengagement with “unreasonability,” “shutting down the conversation,” “unthinking,” or, when that disengagement is collective, a “mob mentality” or a “witch hunt.”

Importantly, not all disengagements are the same. Who is disengaging from whom, the context within which disengaging occurs, and how the disengaging is enacted all *matter* here. For example, am I disengaging from a source that is calling into question the way unjust systems privilege me or from one that is reasserting dominance over me through unjust systems? If I am disengaging from a particular speaker, in what capacity are they speaking? Are they speaking as one who holds political office? As my student in a classroom setting? As someone with whom I have history or as someone I have just met? As a researcher contributing within an arena (for example, in a journal or at a conference) that has been consistently historically sexist and racist? Or as a scholar contributing research within an arena that has specifically identified itself as feminist and antiracist? Given the different nuances that disengagements can take, I think it is unwise simply to assert that feminists ought always to engage with others. Given differences in social positioning among feminists, I think it is particularly unwise to understand all disengagements that happen between and among feminists as the same.

Given that not all disengagements are the same, I am concerned in particular about characterizing resistant epistemic disengagements as “shutting down conversation” or “disengaging from thinking” for at least two reasons. First, it suggests that epistemic disengagements are simply refusals to engage in a nonpolitical, “purely epistemic”

endeavor (hence “irrational”). This obscures not only the way epistemic activities are politically structured, but also the amount of epistemic labor that may very well be operative in enacting resistant epistemic disengagements. Second, characterizing resistant epistemic disengagements as “shutting down conversation” or “disengaging from thinking” can itself be a form of shutting down conversations and disengaging from difficult thinking. In other words, refusing to engage, and calling upon others not to engage, in particular ways of thinking need not shut conversation down; instead, it can be a call toward a different conversation. It need not be a disengagement from thinking altogether, but a disengagement from one particular line of thinking and an invitation to engage epistemically in another. For this reason, what appears to be disengagement from one perspective might also be characterized as animating new or different forms of engagement from another perspective. Insofar as this is the case, resistant disengagements can call upon others to participate in more justly structured engagements.

It can be difficult for some knowers to recognize this call when epistemic systems press upon knowers in distinctly different ways. However, when nondominantly situated knowers are cast as “unreasonable,” “unthinking,” or “difficult,” this should give feminists pause (Frye 1983b). Given that all oppressed groups are themselves coalitions among oppressed groups (Crenshaw 1995), collective epistemic resistance is *hard*. Structural conditions that gaslight nondominantly situated knowers can actively disappear the epistemic labor entailed in resisting oppression and can enlist knowers in perpetuating those conditions by casting resistant disengagement as unreasonable.

In the first half of this article, I develop a structural notion of epistemic gaslighting in order to highlight conditions under which epistemic agents might reasonably enact resistant epistemic disengagement. In the second half, I develop two senses of the term *epistemic echoing*. The first sense highlights the epistemic labor entailed in withdrawing from conditions of structural epistemic gaslighting that is sometimes mischaracterized as a pernicious self-sequestering that is antithetical to reason. The second sense highlights the epistemic labor entailed in actively confronting epistemic structures that gaslight, sometimes mischaracterized as “irrational group think.” In both cases, I highlight how epistemic acts that may appear as unreasonable “within the gaslight” are, on the contrary, engaged in serious and important epistemic labor.

Epistemic Gaslighting

In order to highlight what is obscured when collective epistemic resistance is labeled “unthinking,” I begin by considering some features of the landscape within which epistemic resistance to oppression occurs. As Alison Bailey has noted, our endeavors to know the world take place within “unlevel knowing fields” (Bailey 2014). In other words, under conditions of oppression, epistemic institutions and practices structure knowers differently such that some will be enabled in their epistemic projects whereas others will be hindered. This is due not only to material inequities that hinder epistemic agency but also to collective epistemic practices, assumptions, and institutions that work against the epistemic interests of particular knowers. One way to understand this unequal distribution of epistemic support and disablement, particularly in relation to attempts to resist them, is through the concept of epistemic gaslighting.

Although it is not the only way to illuminate the context within which epistemic resistance to oppression occurs,² recent work on gaslighting touches on a number of features that help to highlight the epistemic labor involved in resistant epistemic disengagement and why the response of soliciting *re*-engagement is harmful. First, as Kate

Abramson notes, gaslighting frequently occurs in response to women's protestations against sexism and relies upon norms that disqualify marginalized knowers (Abramson 2014, 4). If resistant epistemic disengagement is, at least in part, a type of protestation against that which harms, forms of gaslighting are likely to occur in response to them. Second, as Abramson and Rachel McKinnon both note, gaslighting may be enacted unintentionally, so it is particularly helpful for understanding how well-intentioned calls for re-engagement might nonetheless be harmful (Abramson 2014; McKinnon 2017). Finally, McKinnon has specifically developed a notion of epistemic gaslighting with respect to cases where claims of allyship are used to gaslight (McKinnon 2017). This feature makes the concept of epistemic gaslighting particularly helpful for considering cases that involve those working against oppressive structures from different positions within them.

In her essay "Allies Behaving Badly," McKinnon makes a distinction between a psychological form and what she classifies as an epistemic form of gaslighting. The psychological form is represented in the 1944 film *Gaslight* and involves acts of purposeful deception in order to cause another to question their perception, memories, and judgment, leading ultimately to psychological breakdown. The epistemic form can have a similar effect, but there are important differences between epistemic and psychological gaslighting. As characterized by McKinnon, epistemic gaslighting is "often unintentional, where a listener doesn't believe, or expresses doubt about, a speaker's testimony. . . [and in so doing] raises doubts about the speaker's reliability at perceiving events accurately" (McKinnon 2017, 168). In the case of epistemic gaslighting, the agent who gaslights may act intentionally or unintentionally, so intention is not a deciding factor in whether epistemic gaslighting is present. In addition, the actions of expressing doubt with respect to another's testimony are epistemically and not psychologically oriented. In other words, epistemic gaslighting is oriented not toward psychological breakdown, but rather toward a sort of epistemic breakdown: to put out of circulation a particular way of understanding the world, one that centers the experience of the one who is gaslit. Specifically, in raising doubts about speakers' reliability, epistemic gaslighting is oriented at getting knowers to change their beliefs, to stop noticing or testifying to something, with the risk of being deemed incompetent should they refuse to do so.

While it is important to identify acts of gaslighting by particular individuals, in contrast to the accounts given by McKinnon and Abramson, I am interested in highlighting how epistemic institutions and practices themselves can place epistemic pressure on certain knowers that can put them harmfully at odds with their experiences. To be clear, the accounts given by both Abramson and McKinnon have structural aspects. But in order to understand how epistemic resistance might appear as "unreasonable" disengagement, it is helpful to emphasize more fully both the structural aspects that enable epistemic gaslighting by individuals, and how those structural aspects can function to gaslight on their own, independent of any particular perpetrator.

In the 1944 film *Gaslight*, the villain has quite a bit of control over the environment of the woman he gaslights, and it is owing to systematic manipulation of her environment that she starts to doubt her own perceptions. In other words, the perpetrator in psychological gaslighting is able to cause psychological breakdown by drawing upon a situation in which he can enlist features of their shared environment (that he has isolated her, that he has moved the furniture while she was asleep, that he has convinced the house staff that she is unwell, and so on) to pressure his victim into breaking. The ability to place epistemic pressure on other knowers to "break from" and doubt their own experiences must therefore also come, in part, from something in their shared epistemic environment.

Although the cases McKinnon examines feature unwarranted disbelief by a perpetrator, they are not only about disbelief, but about how disbelief by a perpetrator puts unwarranted pressure on victims to doubt their own experiences and to perceive the world differently. To gaslight is to cast doubt. Specifically, McKinnon calls attention to cases where people who have been harmed report their experience to someone they trust and that person denies the harm on account of the perpetrator being an “ally” to people who are subjected to this sort of harm. In these cases, the image of “the ally” is doing some of the work to coerce victims to regard the world in a way that is at odds with their experience. In other words, the idea of a person’s being an “ally” is used to put pressure on others to doubt their own experience of the so-called ally. What I want to point out here is that the image of the ally itself can potentially put pressure on people to distrust their own experience without anyone actually doing anything clearly identifiable as “taking another to be less credible.” This is, in part, why I want to expand the term *epistemic gaslighting* to include features of the epistemic environment that can function on their own.

Imagine, for example, that I am a lesbian student and my professor has placed a “safe-zone” sticker on their office door. Such a sticker usually indicates that a person has undergone some training with regard to LGBT advocacy and identifies either as LGBT or as an “ally” to LGBT persons. Imagine further that I am at a meeting in this office with my professor and a few other students from our class. Over the course of the conversation some of the other students say things that I perceive as homophobic, but nobody else seems to notice, including my professor. If this professor hadn’t put the safe-zone sticker on the door, I might have just noticed and thought I was among people I cannot trust. However, because the professor has declared the office a so-called “safe zone,” I start to question my own perception. Moreover, this self-questioning may be compounded by a double bind: if I say nothing, I may feel complicit in having not called attention to a perceived harm, but if I call attention to the remarks, my interlocutors may insist on their good intentions as allies in spite of my perception of harm. Moreover, the “safe-zone” sticker may heighten the latter worry insofar as it indicates that my professor has an investment in being seen as well-meaning and so may be averse to (and defensive of) being identified as participating in a context that perpetuates harm.

Notice that I do not even have to offer testimony, and no one else has to doubt my credibility, for the figure of “being an ally” to cast self-doubt. Here the figure of being an “ally” who is attentive to injustice and by so doing excises themselves from the effects of their social positioning acts as what we might call a “controlling image of dominance.” Patricia Hill Collins uses the term *controlling image* to describe pervasive and pernicious stereotypes of Black women that palpably thwart them as they navigate the world, aware of how they may be perceived through these live stereotypes (Collins 2001). What I am suggesting is that “the good ally” may be an image of dominantly situated persons that has a similar effect, not to thwart *dominantly* situated people, but as with Collins’s “controlling image,” to thwart nondominantly situated persons who must navigate the world in light of how this self-image may direct the imagination of those who hold it.

Similar to the image of the “ally,” the image of the “well-intentioned white person” may act as a controlling image of dominance that serves to cast doubt upon the world as experienced by Black Americans and other people of color in the US. As Saba Fatima points out, “One of the common responses to hearing someone tell of an incidence of microaggressions is an attempt to offer . . . an alternate account of the *well-meaning*

motivations of the perpetrators. They may offer explanations such as ‘I don’t think he meant it like that,’ or ‘It is very possible that she was actually trying to help you’ (Fatima 2017, 152). Notice here that the image of the “well-intentioned white person” shifts focus from behavior to intentions in a manner that centers the world as experienced by dominantly situated people while casting doubt on the perceptions and experiences of nondominantly situated people. In sum, the dominating controlling images of the “ally” and “well-intentioned” white people give unwarranted weight to the world as experienced from positions of dominance and put unwarranted epistemic pressure on those who are nondominantly situated to prioritize other people’s experiences over their own.

Returning to the unsafe-safe-zone example, I withhold judgment on the actors in the scenario because I want to keep focused on how images that circulate in a culture can bear a kind of epistemic weight on nondominantly situated persons, directing them to perceive the world in ways that favor those dominantly situated even when doing so is in conflict with their own experience. We have enough now for a definition of epistemic gaslighting that includes both agential and structural forms. Epistemic gaslighting, we might say, occurs when a person, practice, image, or institution exerts unwarranted pressure on epistemic agents to doubt their own perceptions.

Of course, there are cases where people, practices, and institutions *warrantedly* put pressure on epistemic agents to doubt their own perceptions. For example, the empirical science on implicit bias should put epistemic pressure on all of us to doubt when our perceptions of the world align too neatly with pervasive stereotypes. So, to be clear, I don’t think it is the case that everything should always align seamlessly with our perceptions of the world. We do regularly rely on others to “check in” about our own experiences, and this checking in can helpfully adjust our perception.

But, of course, this is what makes epistemic gaslighting so pernicious and why instances of “allies” behaving badly are apt cases of epistemic gaslighting at the agential level—because, as McKinnon points out, when persons have identified themselves as allies, they have signaled to nondominantly situated persons that they can be trusted, and we need epistemic relations with trusted others in order to know well. Our attention to the world is in many ways coordinated and sometimes even helpfully redirected by the attention of others. This can be as simple as the kind of shared attention that happens when everyone around you notices something, and then you notice too, to the kind of shaping of attention that happens in the academic disciplines, where one learns to pay a particular kind of attention to the world.

That our attention to the world is shaped in interaction with other knowers through the use of socially shared epistemic resources and with respect to epistemic institutions suggests a myriad of ways in which epistemic gaslighting, or exerting unwarranted pressure on particular knowers to doubt their perception, might occur. Just as nonepistemic institutions and practices can be structured in ways that unfairly advantage some over others, so can epistemic institutions and practices. Charles Mills famously called this to philosophical attention in *The Racial Contract*, noting that structural injustice is facilitated by what he called an “epistemology of ignorance” or institutions and practices that systematically encourage the ignoring of injustice (Mills 1997). Said differently, the epistemic pressures placed upon nondominantly situated persons within epistemologies of ignorance to ignore instances of injustice that they face constitute a form of epistemic gaslighting. Mills and most of the epistemology of ignorance literature highlights the effects of structural injustice on producing ignorance and vicious knowers. In contrast, the term *epistemic gaslighting* highlights those whose experienced world is

ignored and how very epistemically difficult it can be to traverse a world within which your experiencing of that world is systematically ignored by the knowers around you.

Recent work in feminist epistemology suggests a plethora of ways in which nondominantly situated persons are pressured to ignore their own experiences of the world. For example, Saba Fatima identifies the habitual practice of white people regarding reports of microaggressions as a list of isolated acts and explaining away individual acts one by one (Fatima 2017). This method belies the function of microaggressions whose full force is precisely in their cumulative effects, which ought to be understood in relation to one another. Jeanine Weekes Schroer argues that the scientizing of discrimination in empirical studies on stereotype threat, with its focus on performance independent of testimony, can be understood not only as a symptom of, but also contributing to, a culture in which the testimony of those who experience discrimination is not regarded as credible on its own (Schroer 2015). Christine Wieseler analyzes the manner in which definitions of quality of life often favor what able-bodied persons imagine their lives would be like were they to have a disability over what actual people with disabilities say about the quality of their lives (Wieseler 2012). In these cases, practices, approaches, and definitions shift attention away from the experiences of nondominantly situated persons and center (or continually recenter) the world as experienced from positions of dominance.

This is the aspect of gaslighting that is crucial to hold in one's attention when nondominantly situated knowers disengage from and ask others to disengage from particular epistemic frameworks: that nondominantly situated persons are continually called upon to center the experience of those who are dominantly situated even when (and perhaps especially when) their own experiences come into conflict with it. It makes sense that dominant frameworks would highlight the experiences of dominantly situated people, for those are the people who are in a position to alter them. But the ubiquity of epistemic frameworks that highlight the experiences of dominantly situated knowers gives the illusion that these frameworks simply highlight reality itself and not reality as it is experienced from particular positions within the world. To disengage from such frameworks and to call upon others to likewise disengage from them need not be a disengagement from reality, but rather a decentering of dominantly situated knowers and attending to the experiences of nondominantly situated knowers. For this reason, such disengagement does at least two things. First, it engages in some strenuous epistemic labor. Because knowers are interdependent with one another (Grasswick 2004; Pohlhaus, Jr. 2011), it is not easy to disengage from epistemic frameworks that are held firmly in place, in part, through the epistemic activity of those with whom one may be interdependent. Second, it contests the epistemic weight collectively given to the experienced world of dominantly situated persons in a manner that can be unsettling to those who have no other experienced world pressing upon them. In this sense it can be experienced as "flying in the face of reality" to those who need not face the reality of those subordinated to them. However, it does so with the aim of recalibrating the inordinate amount of collective weight given to one set of experiences and denied to another set of experiences. Insofar as such disengagements are epistemically laborious, it is inaccurate to characterize them as unthinking. Insofar as they may be necessary in order to aptly attend to one's experienced world, it is wrong to call them irrational.

In discussing the sort of unwarranted epistemic pressure placed on women of color to ignore and disregard their own experiences, Fatima notes, "*Being unintelligible to one [s] own self is not epistemologically sustainable [for] the long term, and we as [women of color] need to be able to retain our knowledges in the face of gaslighting*" (Fatima 2017,

149, italics in original). Under conditions of epistemic gaslighting, a person is pushed in opposite directions. On the one hand, there are situational pressures insofar as the world presses upon the person in particular ways with respect to how they are situated within the world and they need to make sense of those pressures. On the other hand, interdependent epistemic pressures (in the form of other knowers, collective epistemic practices, and socially recognized epistemic institutions) push the person to doubt or disregard the sense of those situational pressures that fit with their experience. It is within the context of these dueling pressures, present under conditions of epistemic gaslighting, that I want to think about the concept of epistemic echoing.

Epistemic Echoing

Echoing within an epistemic context has both positive and negative valences. One of the negative valences is evident in the expression “echo chambering” currently used by the media to refer to the phenomenon of surrounding oneself with only like sources of information, so that beliefs become amplified through repetition and circulation, as, for example, when people recirculate stories on Facebook, and one’s newsfeed is filled with the same story repeated in the same or a similar way over and over again. It is thought that this sort of echo-chambering has led to political polarization where those residing in different echo chambers make no sense to one another (see, for example, Nguyen 2018; Sunstein 2018). However, the term *echo chamber*, like *mob mentality*, is misplaced when used to describe epistemic collectivities that actively resist, by displacing or disengaging from particular viewpoints.

Worries about echo chambers implicitly recognize the importance of epistemic relations in knowing the world well. However, they fail to account for two things that are critically important in light of what I have said about epistemic gaslighting. First, knowers need a certain degree of echoing in order to sustain beliefs. It is not the case that others are needed just to keep my beliefs in check but also to affirm or steady them. Externalizing beliefs in the form of claims that are then echoed back positively can give solidity to those beliefs and help one to think further with them. To be sure, those who worry about echo chambers are aware of these possibilities, but some versions at least recognize these things only in a negative sense: they worry that people might make more solid and think further about beliefs that ought to instead be made less solid and abandoned. What this emphasis assumes, however, is that beliefs and claims worth keeping will somehow stand on their own if they are true and justified. But of course, part of what lends firmness to a belief *is* that it echoes in some way with others. The need for good echoing is precisely what makes epistemic gaslighting possible. So, while I am concerned about bad echoing, we need to acknowledge that good echoing is an important feature of epistemic life as well.

The second thing important to account for in light of my discussion of epistemic gaslighting is that relations of dominance and oppression situate knowers inequitably and that this matters, epistemically speaking. As José Medina puts it succinctly, “In a situation of oppression, epistemic relations are screwed up” (Medina 2013, 27). Within a stratified society, one in which some groups are empowered in relation to others who are disempowered, not all claims echo equally throughout the social imagination and in public discourse. Nondominantly situated knowers are often under epistemic pressure to recognize, acknowledge, and take seriously dominantly situated knowers’ experiences and the sorts of beliefs that arise from those experiences. However, the reverse is not true.

There are structural reasons for this sort of asymmetry in echoing. First, those who are dominantly situated have a much greater capacity to dictate with whom they interact. This is one aspect of what it means to be dominantly situated: to have this sort of power at one's disposal in relation to others who do not. Moreover, even if those who are nondominantly situated were to manage to limit their epistemic interactions only to similarly situated knowers, they would still need to know how those with power in relation to them experience the world, since another part of what it means to have power in relation to others is to be able to press upon another without that other being able to press back with equal (or sometimes any) force.

Factoring in relations of dominance reveals something interesting about the worry that echo chambers may have led to our current political impasses. Insofar as echo chambering seems in greater danger of wrongly amplifying beliefs that arise from being dominantly situated, expressing this danger as one that is (or ought to be) equally pressing for all universalizes a worry that should sit squarely on the shoulders of dominantly situated persons. In other words, to act as though this danger is a danger equal to all is to continue to echo the dominantly experienced world as though it is the only experience of the world that exists.

Treating all instances of deliberately seeking others who might echo one's beliefs as equally dangerous can itself be understood either as an instance of epistemic gaslighting or as significantly operating in conjunction with it. Insofar as treating all instances of such behavior as the same fails to consider that dominant epistemic institutions and other knowers *already* echo dominantly situated knowers significantly, it ignores the possibility that some may receive very little positive echoing of their own experiences. Moreover, to cast as pernicious all cases of deliberately seeking sources of echoing is to cast doubt upon those for whom such measures may be necessary on account of structural epistemic gaslighting.

Finding and maintaining sources of good echoing can be critical when one is subject to systematic and structural forms of epistemic gaslighting. This sort of *good echoing* can help one to maintain warranted self-trust and stability of beliefs in the face of unwarranted epistemic pressures to doubt them. We might call this sort of echoing *survival echoing* in order to reflect the importance stressed in the quote from Fatima, that being intelligible to oneself is a necessary component of epistemic life. Survival echoing counters epistemic gaslighting by providing support for beliefs to those under conditions of systematic and structural epistemic gaslighting.

In addition to the negative term *echo chambering* with which I have just now contrasted positive *survival echoing*, another way in which the term *echo* is used colloquially has a more positive valence and extends beyond what I've said about survival echoing. Sometimes a speaker will use the term *echo* when the speaker wants to offer support of what another has forwarded because the point seems to have been lost and so removed from consideration. In such instances, one says something like "I want to echo the point raised earlier by so-and-so." Insofar as this sort of echoing can be done when another fears the point raised has been lost or isn't being taken as seriously as it should be, it can be a kind of echoing that functions not just to steady a belief for the one who holds it, but to actively resist the forces that would suppress it and prevent it from circulating. This sort of echoing attempts to bolster a claim so that it may press upon others beyond those for whom the claim is already situationally pressing. In so doing, this sort of echoing can be an attempt to transform an interaction among knowers where gaslighting may be structuring the interaction. I will call this sort of echoing *resistance echoing*.

Resistance echoing is akin to Medina's use of the term *echoing* in the context of his analysis of transformative political action. In thinking about how it is that some actions are able to politically transform a society and others are not, Medina argues that social change happens when individual acts form "chains of actions," and these chains or networks are able to provide a context within which individual acts that were previously unthinkable or impossible become thinkable and possible. As he puts it, "It is in social networks and movements that individual acts of resistance are *echoed* in performative chains" (Medina 2013, 224).

Medina's sense of chained action shows that with resistant echoing, knowers can work to reverberate meanings in spaces structured by epistemic gaslighting so as to affect those spaces themselves. When knowers are able to sustain their attention to parts of the experienced world that are under threat of being disregarded through epistemic gaslighting, this collective sustained attention may help to bring that part of the experienced world to others' attention in a way that might not have been possible for an individual alone to do. Moreover, when a group of knowers is able to make sense to one another concerning those parts of the world that structural gaslighting directs them to ignore, then beliefs and claims that arise from those ignored parts of the world can reverberate more widely. When they reverberate loud enough, they can begin to dismantle the features of our practices, institutions, and selves that support epistemic gaslighting.

Certainly repetition, in the colloquial sense, can be a way to sustain a claim under conditions of gaslighting, but Medina notes that the echoing of resistance in performative chains is more than repetition. Instead, it is when an act "resonate[s] in many different ways and in many different corners of the social fabric" (243)—so that it is given "a complex and heterogeneous range of uptakes and responses" (245) and is "reacted to, engaged with, remembered, mimicked, and resonated in subsequent words and actions" (247). This sort of resistance, Medina notes, "typically involves disrupting or interrupting well-entrenched forms of social ignorance" (248). It involves redirecting epistemic attention and disrupting naturalized habits of (in)attention. To those well-served by dominant habits of (in)attention, such resistance can be disorienting and may even appear nonsensical. This disorientation may be why some are quick to characterize resistance echoing as "an unthinking mob." Nonetheless, those who enact resistance echoing are engaged in some serious epistemic labor, which is in part why the epithet "unthinking" is so insulting.

In Conclusion: Gaslighting and Echoing

My concern has been to highlight the epistemic labor of certain forms of resistance that is obscured by the charge of unreasonability, but it is important to note some of the dangers and difficulties of working to engage collective epistemic resistance in light of what I have said about structural epistemic gaslighting and the need for epistemic echoing. Because epistemic agents are situated along multiple axes of dominance and oppression, we bring with us habits of attention supported by being situated dominantly in some respects even while we experience and work through pressure points on account of being nondominantly situated in other respects. In other words, because most people are multiply situated in relation to others, the world presses upon us in complex ways. On the one hand, insofar as I am nondominantly situated, part of my experienced world may be obscured on account of epistemic institutions and practices that were not designed to attend to those parts of the world. Even worse, epistemic institutions and practices may specifically draw attention *away* from those parts of the world

that press upon me owing to those aspects of my situation or situatedness that position me nondominantly. On the other hand, insofar as I am dominantly situated, I may nonetheless inadvertently turn to and rely upon aspects of those same institutions and practices when attempting to call attention to the parts of my world they would normally obscure—by this I mean that sometimes we are able to leverage institutions and practices against themselves in order to expand or alter their use beyond their usual range. However, this may be practiced at the cost of reinforcing the ways in which those resources unjustly harm others who are differently nondominantly situated.

To illustrate what I mean, I am going to highlight two dangers that arise within the context of resistance to gaslighting through practices of survival and resistance echoing. First is the danger of bringing the habit of echoing dominantly situated experiences into one's efforts within the context of "survival echoing." So, for example, when women work together, there is always the danger that only the experiences and concerns of otherwise dominantly situated women will be echoed or that they will be echoed in ways that make other women's experiences unintelligible. What is important to me here is not *just* that different women's voices may not be heard, but *also* that some women's voices may literally be rendered *unintelligible* in the echoing of otherwise dominantly situated women's experiences and voices.

Survival echoing takes place among epistemic agents who are already situated in some relation to one another. In other words, the communities within which we echo to survive are always coalitional. I mean this in the sense that Kimberlé Crenshaw does when she says, "the organized identity groups in which we find ourselves are in fact coalitions, or at least potential coalitions waiting to be formed" (Crenshaw 1995, 377). So, for example, Crenshaw considers that race could be conceived as a coalition between women of color and men of color, or between gay and lesbian people of color and straight people of color (377). What I appreciate about this rethinking of identity categories is that it highlights relations among members of groups and posits solidarity as something struggled for, not assumed.³ This means that even while we struggle together to make sense of our experiences, we must continue to recognize that multiple axes of dominance and oppression will create different pressure points for those working together in resistance to epistemic gaslighting. A good set of questions to keep in mind when engaging in survival echoing then begins with: to whom and with whom am I making sense? For whom are our interactions providing room for making sense and for whom are they not? Where are the silences in these ways of making sense and what might those silences tell us?

The second danger is that when we try to engage resistance echoing, we may succeed owing to epistemic institutions and practices that gaslight others who are differently but still nondominantly situated. This sort of danger is manifest in respectability politics. It is also manifest when, for example, the vicious character of dominant perspectives is communicated through the use of ableist metaphors such as being "blind," "delusional," or "idiotic" as sometimes happens within the literature on epistemologies of ignorance (Tremain 2017a; 2017b). So, when engaging in resistance echoing, we might keep in mind a set of questions that begins: How is the sense of these experiences able to travel and circulate? How and why are my claims being afforded reception? Importantly, these questions need to be revisited again and again, since claims that once echoed resistantly can be coopted in ways that disintegrate their resistant sense. For example, concerns about diversity that were initially raised for reasons of countering structural injustice get recast in terms of how diversity will benefit those who lack it.

Resistance to structural epistemic gaslighting, and to all forms of epistemic oppression, requires a good deal of work. We can and do err when we engage in this work. But our errors are more likely found in the ways in which dominant epistemic structures enlist our efforts into oppressing others who are differently nondominantly situated. They are less likely owing to what is misperceived as unreasonability when we withdraw from dominant institutions and echo nondominantly experienced worlds.

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Notes

- 1 For an example of the sort of thing about which I am concerned, see Bermudez et al. 2019.
- 2 Importantly, Kristie Dotson notes that oppression is a multistable phenomenon, by which she means that one can make sense of it in more than one way, that different ways of making sense of it will be equally certain, and finally that any one way may necessarily foreclose other equally certain ways of making sense of it (Dotson 2014). For this reason, I would stress that my own account here highlights particular issues with which I aim to contend in this essay, while undoubtedly obscuring issues that may also be important. For example, standpoint epistemology stresses the manner in which the tension between dominant ideology and marginalized experiences can lead to stronger objectivity through critical standpoints (Harding 1991). My aim in this essay, however, is to highlight the epistemic labor that is obscured when resistant responses to epistemic oppression are deemed “irrational.” I am “assembling reminders” for this particular purpose with the understanding that it will not be useful for all purposes.
- 3 In this sense it is similar to what Chandra Mohanty calls “reflexive solidarity” (Mohanty 2003).

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