"What? Could you explain it again?":
The Burden of Bridging the Conceptual Gaps between the Marginalised and the Dominant

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Abstract

How do some concepts become much more widely shared than others? Why do some ways of interpreting certain experiences become much more prevalent than the rest? How does social power play a role here? What does the process of negotiating what gets to be 'the dominant concept' look like? In this thesis, I analyse the interactive dimension of one of the kinds of epistemic injustice laid out by Miranda Fricker (2007), namely, hermeneutical injustice. Within hermeneutical injustice, I focus on the cases where hermeneutical injustice takes place at the level of communication. That is, I focus on the cases of injustice where an individual (or a group) faces difficulty in communicating their important experiences across social space because their experiences are not (yet) widely understood.

Through discussing some of the major critiques of Fricker (2007), I establish the importance of acknowledging the existence of different hermeneutical resources across communities. I focus on the conceptual gaps that get created between the dominant and the marginalised hermeneutical resources owing to the varying amounts of social power these communities hold. My main argument throughout this investigation is that the marginalised end up having to do the work of bridging the conceptual gaps between the dominant and the marginalised hermeneutical resources. I term this work of bridging as 'epistemic burden'. This requires the marginalised to translate and fit their experiences into the vocabulary of the dominant hermeneutical resource.

But why do the marginalised end up with this epistemic burden? Through important illustrations, I show that the marginalised have an asymmetrical need to bridge the conceptual gaps to make their

experiences known and communicate them to those who are dominantly situated. This need and dependence are often necessitated by the very nature of their marginalisation, which exists *in relation* to the privilege of the dominantly situated.

Further, I argue that this work of bridging the conceptual gaps, that is, the epistemic burden is unjust. I do this by focusing on three important harms of epistemic burden. I show that this burden of bridging the gaps between different hermeneutical resources (i) reduces the status of the marginalised to an 'epistemic other', (ii) distorts the very lived experiences of the marginalised, (iii) results in significant practical harms. Finally, I focus on the question, "Who should carry this epistemic burden?". I leave the query open by laying out two potential ways of tackling the epistemic burden, without adding yet another burden on the marginalised.

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Introduction

> We and you do not talk in the same language. When we talk to you, we use your language: the language of your experience and of your theories. We try to use it to communicate our world of experience. But since your language and your theories are inadequate in expressing our experiences, we only succeed in communicating our experience of exclusion. We cannot talk to you in our language because you do not understand it. So, the brute facts that we understand your language and that the place where most theorizing about women is taking place is your place, both combine to require that we either use your language and distort our experience not just in speaking about it, but in the living of it, or that we remain silent. (Lugones 1983: 575)

Here, when Lugones says that 'we' and 'you' do not talk in the same language, she is referring to how the feminists belonging to the Western world ('you') and the feminists from the Hispanic world ('we') have very different concerns in the context of feminism. Hispanic women find the Western theories of 'women' to be inadequate in capturing the intricate layers of the experiences and struggles of the women in the Hispanic world. When Hispanic women talk, they do not manage to convey their independent struggles since their "language" is not understood by those in the Western world.[1]

Now, when two people communicate, is it possible that the existing (dominant) social concepts are biased in favor of one? Does one of them have to do more work to make the other person understand their experiences? Does the social situatedness of the person make a difference in how much work they

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[1] Lugones does not necessarily mean the language divide between Spanish and English, but she is referring to differences in the concepts employed by these two groups. It is possible that this difference may arise partly because of linguistic differences.

have to do in explaining and translating their experience? Who should be doing this explaining and translating? Translating to what? Why? Is one communicator more dependent on the other? These are some of the main questions I want to address in my thesis.

In this thesis, I provide an analysis of the interactive dimension of one of the kinds of epistemic injustice laid out by Miranda Fricker (2007), namely, hermeneutical injustice. In Chapter 1, I analyse Fricker's position on the ontology of a supposedly monolithic 'collective' hermeneutical resource. This hermeneutical resource is composed of the shared pool of concepts we make use of. Then, I briefly discuss some of her major critiques, arguing for a more pluralistic and polyphonic account of hermeneutical resources. Through this discussion, I establish the importance of acknowledging the gap between different hermeneutical resources - especially between the dominant and the marginalised hermeneutical resources. It is not enough to focus just on 'what' is part of the dominant vocabulary. It is important to also focus on the processes through which the content of this dominant vocabulary is determined to be the way it is in the context of hermeneutical marginalisation. What gets to be the content of this dominant vocabulary and who decides? How does social power play a role here?

After establishing that there is a significant gap, in Chapter 2 of my thesis, I focus on the notion of *bridging the gap* between the dominant and the marginalised hermeneutical resources. I argue for the asymmetrical need of the marginalised to make their experiences known and communicate them to those who are dominantly situated. This need is often necessitated by the very nature of their marginalisation which exists *in relation* to the privilege enjoyed by the dominantly situated. To support

my argument, I bring examples of lived experiences of queer refugees where they have to translate their experiences into the vocabulary of dominant to communicate across social space. Additionally, I bring forth important examples of testimonies from trans people describing their experiences of being forced to use the vocabulary and the concepts developed by cis medical professionals - even though these concepts do not fully capture their experiences and needs. Using these examples, I argue for the phenomenon of 'epistemic burden' where I define epistemic burden as the work that the hermeneutically marginalised individuals (or communities) have to do to make their important experience(s) understood by those who are dominantly situated. This work involves translating or fitting their experiences into the concepts available within the dominant vocabulary by first learning the dominant vocabulary. It consists of bridging the gap between the marginalised hermeneutical resources and the dominant hermeneutical resource. Further, I establish important similarities between the notion of epistemic burden and Du Bois' notion of double consciousness to show this epistemic burden is more than just a practical difficulty.

In Chapter 3, I argue that the epistemic burden is unjust. I support my argument by presenting three important ways in which epistemic burden harms the marginalised: (i) it infringes the epistemic agency of the marginalised by reducing them to 'epistemic others', (ii) distorts their important lived experiences, and (iii) amounts to significant practical harms. I show how the *marginalised* have to constantly interpret their experiences through the dominant conceptions as well as the conceptions from the marginalised hermeneutical resources. But even after having done the work from interpreting their experiences using different hermeneutical resources, the marginalised are only able to express as much

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as the dominant vocabulary allows them to. They are not able to independently convey their experiences in the intended manner because they are guided (and often restricted) by the dominant ways of interpreting. In the next section, to situate the contribution of my thesis better, I spend some time showing how the notion of epistemic burden is distinct from the already available concepts of testimonial injustice, hermeneutical injustice, and epistemic exploitation. Finally, in the last section of my thesis, I focus on the questions: Who should bring forth the experiences of the marginalised if not the marginalised themselves? Who should carry this epistemic burden given the varying amounts of social power held by different communities? I give two potential ways of tackling epistemic burden without adding yet another burden on those already marginalised. These two ways are: (i) eliminating (or reducing) the gap between different hermeneutical resources, and (ii) alleviating the need of the marginalised to communicate with those who are dominantly situated.

Only once we acknowledge the hierarchy between different hermeneutical resources, can we acknowledge the existence of the phenomenon of epistemic burden. This will require serious effort from those who are dominantly situated in acknowledging the importance of marginalised hermeneutical resources. The translation and this bridging of conceptual gaps needs to start happening from those who hold more social power and privilege. We need to focus on understanding how the dominant hermeneutical resource does not actually give an adequate picture of the world – it only captures what the dominant sees and wants to see, while also limiting what the dominant are *able* to see. We need to make space for the experiences of the marginalised and learn more about different marginalised hermeneutical resources - without expecting them to comply with ways of interpreting and

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understanding prevalent in the dominant hermeneutical resources. This thesis is one small attempt at acknowledging the existence of epistemic burden and making space for the lived experiences of the marginalised.

Chapter 1
Different Hermeneutical Resources and The Gap Between Them

In this chapter, I give a detailed account of the notion of epistemic injustice as theorised by Miranda Fricker in her book *Epistemic Injustice: Power and The Ethics of Knowing* (2007). Then, I provide an in-depth analysis of 'hermeneutical injustice' using some paradigmatic illustrations. Through these illustrations, I bring forth an important criticism of Fricker's conception of hermeneutical resources in her definition of hermeneutical injustice. Following this criticism, I highlight the importance of acknowledging the multiplicity of hermeneutical resources and the danger of theorising about interpretive practices in a monolithic manner. After establishing the multiplicity of hermeneutical resources, I show that there is a significant gap between the multiple hermeneutical resources. I focus specifically on the gap between the dominant hermeneutical resource and the hermeneutical resources developed by those who are marginally situated in the social world. For clarity, I will spend some time defining the notions of 'dominant hermeneutical resource' and 'marginalisation'. Finally, after establishing the existence of a significant gap between different hermeneutical resources, I show how analysing the interaction dynamics involved in bridging this gap can shed light on the hidden layers of injustice within hermeneutical injustice.

1.1 Fricker's Notion of Epistemic Injustice

According to Fricker (2007), epistemic injustice occurs when someone is specifically wronged in their capacity as a knower. Fricker further classifies it into two kinds: (i) testimonial injustice and (ii) hermeneutical injustice.[2] Testimonial injustice "occurs when a discriminatory identity prejudice causes a hearer to give lesser credibility to the speaker's word because the speaker belongs to a socially marginalised group" (Fricker 2007: 4). Here, 'discriminatory identity prejudice' refers to the kind of discrimination where someone gets discriminated against because of their membership to a particular group such as gender, race, social class, caste, etc. For example, a case of testimonial injustice would involve a woman not being taken as seriously at an interview as compared to a man just because she is a woman and is considered to be irrational. Fricker gives the paradigmatic example of Tom Robinson from Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird,* where Robinson suffers testimonial injustice. Robinson's testimony in the court is not taken seriously because of the white jury's identity prejudice against him due to him being black. The jury does not believe him when he says that he did not assault the white woman in question. He is not believed to be telling the truth. As a result, he suffers from being seen as a liar (Lee 1960: 202). Eventually, due to epistemic injustice, he also suffers the secondary harm of being taken to be guilty of assault.

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[2] It is crucial to acknowledge that Fricker (2007) is not the first theorist to analyse epistemic injustice and epistemic oppression. For example, Frye (1983) was trying to capture the existence of conceptual gaps affecting marginalised communities*. Collins (1999) captures how Black Women have been excluded from processes of knowledge production. Similarly, Fürst (2023) points out how the account of rhetorical spaces in Code (1995) talks about hermeneutical marginalisation.

*I am thankful to Rafał Kłosek for bringing this to my attention.

The second kind of epistemic injustice that Fricker talks about is hermeneutical injustice. Fricker defines hermeneutical injustice as "the injustice of having some significant area of one's experience obscured from collective understanding owing to hermeneutical marginalisation" (Fricker 2007: 154). So, hermeneutical injustice occurs when an important part of someone's experience is rendered unintelligible either to themselves or others (or both) due to hermeneutical marginalisation. As per Fricker, "this is likely to happen in oppressive situations, where it is not a coincidence that the oppressed lack the resources to explain (and even to understand it themselves) aspects of their oppression" (Fricker 2007: 159). This kind of epistemic injustice will be the focus of my thesis. Before I turn to examples of hermeneutical injustice, I would like to clarify the terminology in Fricker's definition.

What is meant by 'hermeneutical resource'? Hermeneutical resources refer to the tools we use to make sense of our experiences and interpret them in a certain way. For instance, the concepts and categories we employ to communicate our experiences within our community and across social space would count as hermeneutical resources. The community members develop these concepts and resources through collaboration and participation in social activities, which help render their experiences intelligible to others across different communities. For example, interpretations and expressions employed by Hispanic women to understand their experiences of being women would count as their hermeneutical resources for these specific experiences. Similarly, the concepts through which women living in the Western world understand their experiences would constitute their hermeneutical resources.

Further, what does Fricker mean by 'hermeneutical marginalisation'? Fricker defines hermeneutical marginalisation as belonging to a marginalised group that does not generally get to contribute to the shared pool of concepts due to discriminatory structural identity prejudices against them. Hence, it leads to inadequate participation of the group in the social shared meaning-making practices and contribution to the collective understanding due to differential power structures at play against them (Fricker 2007: 158).

This hermeneutical marginalisation can lead to a condition where the collection of hermeneutical resources lacks an important part of someone's experience. As per Fricker, this conceptual lack results in "a more or less doomed attempt on the part of the subject to render an experience intelligible, either to herself or to an interlocutor, or both" (Fricker 2007: 159). Fricker mentions that hermeneutical injustice can result in (i) difficulty understanding one's experience, (ii) communicating one's experiences, or (iii) difficulty understanding one's experience *and* communicating one's experiences. For instance, Fricker brings up an important example from Susan Brownmiller's *In Our Time* (1990). Fricker highlights how the lack of a public concept of 'sexual harassment' until the 1970s resulted in hermeneutical injustice for the victims of sexual harassment. Before that time, it was difficult for women to understand and communicate their experiences of sexual harassment fully. I reformulate this case in the following paragraph.

In *In Our Time* (1990), Brownmiller talks about the case of Carmita Wood, where a woman named Carmita, along with many of her female colleagues, was subject to unwanted sexual advances from their

male bosses at their workplace in the 1970s. They lacked the concept and the term 'sexual harassment'. So, they would often doubt what happened, blame themselves for not being 'playful enough', and for not being okay with 'mere flirtations'. As a result, they were not able to fully understand and articulate their experiences related to these sexual advances to themselves as well as to others. Further, arising from the absence of a relevant concept, this lack of deep understanding and the inability to articulate made it difficult for them to frame their experiences in a way that was required to report them as crimes (Brownmiller 1990: 280).

As a result, it made it difficult for Carmita and her colleagues to fully understand what was happening to them and file any formal complaint about it. The women were not able to find readily available and acceptable formulations to adequately communicate their experiences to others or even to understand them themselves. It was very much in their interest to understand these experiences. This lack of intelligibility suffered by women due to the lack of the concept of 'sexual harassment' is what Fricker means by hermeneutical injustice. The main cause of hermeneutical injustice here is the hermeneutical marginalisation of women during the given time. Women belonged to a hermeneutically marginalised group in the 1970s since they did not hold the social power to have much control over the publicly shared pool of concepts. Owing to powerful patriarchal social structures, most of the social power was in the hands of men who controlled what became a part of the shared pool of concepts and what did not. So, women's experiences did not get to be part of the widely shared understanding.

Another example Fricker considers is from Edmund White's *A Boy's Own Story* (1982), where a gay boy does not have readily available concepts and words to fully understand his experience of being gay. He is conflicted between his genuine feelings of love and desire and the prevalent societal image of homosexuality that portrays being gay as a 'crime' or a 'filthy sickness' (White 1982: 169). Historically, gay people have been marginalised in that they did not have the chance to contribute their significant experiences to the pool of publicly shared social meanings. So, there was no vocabulary to draw upon to make sense of their experiences of homosexuality and queerness like it did for straight people. Hence, this leads to a lack of intelligibility where it becomes difficult for the gay boy to understand his own experiences even though it is very much in his interest to understand them. This lack of intelligibility, as per Fricker, is unfair since it results from systemic hermeneutical marginalisation owing to identity prejudices (Fricker 2007: 158). This lack of intelligibility is at the core of what constitutes hermeneutical injustice.

In both above examples considered by Fricker, the victims of hermeneutical injustice face difficulty understanding their relevant experiences and find it difficult to communicate with others. What about the cases where the person (or a community) has the relevant concepts and an adequate understanding but faces difficulty at the level of communication with others across social space? How does hermeneutical injustice show up in such cases? Such cases of hermeneutical injustice have yet to be adequately examined in the literature on epistemic injustice so far. To understand the intricate layers within hermeneutical injustice, analysing cases where hermeneutical injustice shows up at the communication level becomes crucial. In what follows, these kinds of cases will be my focus.

1.2 Hermeneutical Injustice at the Level of Communication

I would like to start with a relevant example from my experience working as a legal translator for Queer Base, a social services organization based in Vienna, Austria - which helps queer refugees from third-world countries who are in the process of seeking asylum in Austria.

While working on a case of queer refugee from India at this organisation, I noticed that there did not exist adequate concepts in English or German language to capture the adversity associated with inter-caste and inter-religion conflicts in rural areas of India. There also did not exist concepts for the kind of *social pressure* that comes from the community to get married for an Indian woman of a certain age. It was difficult to translate these experiences and especially the intersectionality of these experiences in an adequate way.[3] By 'an adequate way', I mean translating them in a way that these experiences would count as *legitimate enough* reasons for a scheduled-caste lesbian to flee India and seek asylum in Austria. It was difficult to talk about her reasons for fleeing India without being able to employ the concepts of 'caste' or 'societal pressure to get married' or 'the gravity of interreligious conflicts'. It was difficult to explain how all of these came together to form her experiences of queerness, which forced her to seek asylum in Austria. The queerness of this refugee existed in a very different manner than the conception

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[3] When I talk about 'translation', I do not just mean linguistic translation. I refer to translation across sets of two different conceptual repertoires. The difference in conceptions across communities can arise due to many factors, such as differences in culture, language, social and economic conditions, historical background, etc. Specifically, I am concerned with those cases when specific conceptions of certain experiences become the dominant conceptions, sidelining the other possible conceptions and ways of interpreting those experiences.

of 'queerness' held by the Austrian authorities. This kind of 'third-world queerness' made it impossible for the refugee to live in her country due to the intersectional factors that came along with this queerness. But there did not exist an adequately shared understanding of this kind of intersectional queerness in the Western context - that would allow space for these relevant intersectional factors and how they can create adverse circumstances forcing someone to leave the country they grew up in.[4]

In this example, it is not the case that the refugee lacks the relevant concept of queerness to make sense of her queerness. Rather, she faces difficulty communicating an important part of her experience to the concerned legal authorities who lack this concept. The refugee *needs* to convey the adversity of her situation and her important experiences of queerness to justify her appeal. However, the hermeneutical resources employed by the Austrian authorities do not contain the relevant conceptions to understand the refugee's experience in the way she intended. How can we understand this case in the context of hermeneutical injustice?

Going back to Fricker's definition of hermeneutical injustice, this case would count as a case of hermeneutical injustice since a significant part of one's (in this case, the refugee) experience is obscured from collective understanding owing to hermeneutical marginalisation. It is plausible to think that queer people, specifically queers from third-world countries, belong to a hermeneutically marginalised group

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[4] I am highly thankful to P, the refugee, for letting me use her case in this thesis. This case will henceforth be referred to as 'the refugee case' in this thesis.

as compared to non-queer people. Historically, queer people have not held enough social power to be able to contribute their important experiences to the social meaning-making practices. As a result, this structural hermeneutical marginalisation leads to difficulty at the level of communication with others, which is at the heart of difficulties faced by the victims of hermeneutical injustice. But here, the refugee *does* understand her experience. If the refugee *does* have an understanding of her experience, would it be correct to say that her experience is obscured from the 'collective understanding'? As per Medina's reading of Fricker, 'the collective' refers to the sum of all the available hermeneutical resources which create an 'exhaustive inventory' (Medina 2013: 103). See Figure 1 for an illustration of this reading of Fricker (2007) by Medina (2017), where C is 'the collective' hermeneutical resource, the sum of all the publicly available hermeneutical resources.[5] But in the refugee case, the refugee does have the hermeneutical resources to make sense of her experience. So, maybe it is 'the collective' that is missing the relevant conception of queerness and not the refugee herself?
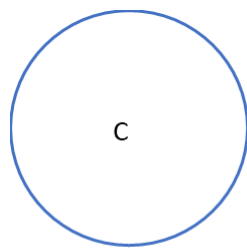
Figure 1: Fricker's Notion of "The Collective"   Figure 2: Multiplicity of Hermeneutical Resources (Medina, 2013)
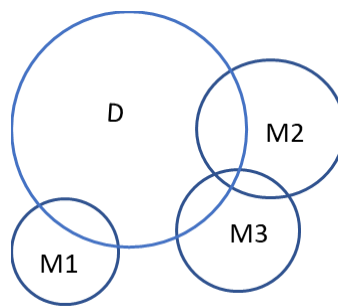
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[5] I would like to thank Goetze (2016) for the inspiration to use figures to visualise different aspects of this thesis. However, it is important to note that these figures are meant to illustrate my point to the reader for a better understanding. These figures should not be seen as a replacement for the conceptual nuances in my analysis.

1.3 Multiple Hermeneutical Resources Holding Different Social Power

Medina (2013) argues that it would be helpful to replace the notion of 'collective understanding' from Fricker's definition of hermeneutical injustice with the notion of 'dominant understanding' instead. Instead of thinking about the collection of publicly available concepts in terms of the sum of all the hermeneutical resources, Medina suggests it would be helpful to think of this shared collection in terms of the *dominant* hermeneutical resources instead (Medina 2013: 104). That is to say, it is possible that there exist hermeneutical resources outside of what is publicly available as the pool of shared concepts. Just because some concepts do not exist in the public sphere does not mean they do not exist at all. "Even when you do not (yet) have standard formulations available in the 'collective hermeneutical resource', it is possible that some form of nascent, fragmented, embryonic, or even fully complete formulations already exist in the non-dominant hermeneutical resources" (Medina 2013: 101).[6] See Figure 2 for Medina's conception of hermeneutical resources as the dominant (D) and marginalised hermeneutical resources (M1, M2, M3).[7] Relatedly, Mason (2011) also points out that it is possible that the marginalised do have their own resources for interpretation, but they may still end up being

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[6] See Dotson (2011) for a related argument where Dotson argues that the marginalised communities often have their own ways of interpreting and have the relevant hermeneutical resources. These marginalised hermeneutical resources, however, do not get the adequate uptake by those dominantly situated.

[7] The overlaps between different hermeneutical resources (for instance, denoted by the intersection between D and M1 in Figure 2) refer to the basic common concepts that we all use to communicate across communities. If there were no common concepts at all, it would be rather difficult to communicate.

hermeneutically marginalised because their interpretative resources are not part of the dominant pool of concepts (Mason 2011: 299f).[8]

So, someone can be a victim of hermeneutical injustice due to her hermeneutical marginalisation even when she has an understanding of her experience herself. What makes this a case of hermeneutical injustice? It is the fact that an important part of her experience is not understood widely enough across social space for her to be able to communicate her experience in the intended manner. So, in the refugee case I presented above, the hermeneutically marginalised refugee does have a concept and an adequate understanding of her experience. But it is the widely shared dominant hermeneutical resource that lacks the relevant concept. This is why she suffers hermeneutical injustice when she tries to communicate with the authorities.

I would like to clarify here that when I talk about the difficulty in communication of experiences across social space, I do not refer to just about any *niche* experience which might be hard to describe to a communication partner. For instance, it might be difficult to describe living amidst the serene Austrian mountains to someone living in a coastal area of South India. But is this kind of difficulty in making one's experience intelligible an instance of hermeneutical injustice? No. For the communication difficulties to count as cases of hermeneutical injustice, there must be a clear component of background

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[8] Mason (2011) goes on to further argue that it would be wrong to assume that the victims of sexual harassment did not have a complete understanding of their experiences of being sexually harassed - before the term 'sexual harassment' was coined. In this thesis, I do not take a stand on whether it would be correct to make such an assumption in the context of sexual harassment. I am thankful to Katalin Farkas for our discussions on this point, which helped me realise the complexity of this specific case.

hermeneutical marginalisation involved. The victim must belong to a marginalised group and her important experience needs to be missing from the dominant hermeneutical resource. What do I mean by 'marginalised' and 'dominant hermeneutical resource'?

I would like to clarify what I mean by 'marginalised' in the way I use it throughout my investigation. I draw the term 'marginalisation' from feminist scholar, Iris Marion Young's notion of marginalisation in her essay, *Five Faces of Oppression* (1990). She considers marginalisation as one of the five faces of oppression including violence, exploitation, powerlessness, and cultural imperialism. Marginalisation is defined as "a whole category of people being expelled from useful participation in social life" and therefore they are exposed to "severe material deprivation and even extermination" (Young 1990: 53). According to Young, this is "the most dangerous" form of oppression since it excludes people from experiencing the social world fully. In other words, Young argues that marginalisation is a systemic process that occurs when certain individuals or groups are excluded and pushed to the edges of social, political, and economic life (Young 1990: 53). It is important to understand that the kind of marginalisation I am concerned with in this thesis is not simply a result of an individual's actions or choices but is deeply rooted in structural and institutional inequalities. Here, marginalisation has an important structural and historical component of hermeneutical marginalisation to it. It is a systematic kind of oppression that has existed for years. This oppression has rendered certain social groups incapable of expressing their experiences across social space owing to the underdevelopment of adequate conceptual vocabulary. There is a clear component of social power involved here. This leads to the dominant groups' contribution to the dominant hermeneutical resource whereas it simultaneously

excludes marginalised hermeneutical resources. Further, what do I mean by 'the dominant hermeneutical resource'?

> The construction of knowledge has been a space for power struggles: knowledge has been controlled and manipulated by elites and has served to create a social imaginary of what knowledge is. The body of knowledge: male. The color of knowledge: white. The territories of knowledge: western Europe. The place of knowledge: the academy. Everything and everyone that is outside of these whimsied parameters has historically fought to be recognized as knowledge and as knowing subjects. (Berenstain et al. 2022: 310)

Drawing from the above quote, by 'the dominant hermeneutical resource', I mean the set of prevailing perspectives, concepts, or interpretive practices which hold the most amount of social power because of structural inequalities and injustices. Due to the amount of social power these interpretive practices hold, they shape how people's experiences are understood, interpreted, and valued within our society. This set of interpretive resources influences whether something is considered as a legitimate enough interpretation of a certain experience. It also guides who gets to be the producer of such interpretations and how they are produced. Here, in the context of marginalisation, the dominant hermeneutical resource and interpretive practices specifically refer to a Eurocentric conceptual framework, controlled majorly by cis-white, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-upper-class men in positions of power. This set of interpretive practices reflects the perspectives and interests of those in positions of power and privilege within the given context. It establishes the norms, criteria, and standards for what is considered as a legitimate interpretation of an experience. At the same time, it marginalises or excludes alternative ways of interpreting, meaning-making, experiencing, thinking, and other epistemic practices which do not fit into the prevailing set of concepts and interpretations. For example, as illustrated in the refugee example

before, the experiences of queerness often get understood through this prevailing Western perspective, and this perspective guides what notion of queerness gets to be widely shared in our society. As a result, the other experiences of being queer get excluded or marginalised.

As opposed to the dominant hermeneutical resource, the marginalised hermeneutical resources are those interpretive resources developed by communities often excluded from social participation. These communities do not hold significant social power due to systematic inequalities. Communities develop these interpretive resources for understanding, making sense of, and communicating their own experiences. These interpretive resources do not become part of the dominant hermeneutical resource given the hermeneutical marginalisation. It is important to understand that these hermeneutical resources developed by those who are marginalised are *not* inherently marginalised. These resources end up being marginalised *in relation* to the dominant hermeneutical resource. This marginalisation of resources happens because of the social power held by those who are dominantly situated, who can control what gets to be dominant and what is not.

Coming back to hermeneutical injustice at the communication level, understanding this multiplicity of hermeneutical resources and the distinction between different hermeneutical resources – the dominant and the marginalised is important. Acknowledging the multiplicity of hermeneutical resources helps us understand why certain communities can have adequate concepts but still face hermeneutical injustice due to the amount of social power they hold. Here, the marginalised communities face difficulty at the level of communicating their experiences across social space. This happens because the dominant

hermeneutical resource is structured in a way that excludes the important parts of the experiences of the marginalised. In the queer refugee case, the concept of queerness that the dominant hermeneutical resource contains very conveniently and structurally excludes intersectional elements to it. This widely shared conception of queerness only caters to those who are dominantly situated. This happens because the queer people in this case are hermeneutically marginalised and have not been able to contribute to the social meaning-making practices. So, it is important to acknowledge that just because some concept is not publicly available or is not widely shared does not mean that it does not exist at all. For instance, Medina (2013) points out how in cases of marital rape and domestic abuse, even though the phenomenon did not have standard formulations of 'marital rape' and 'domestic abuse' yet, it would be dangerous to think that the victims did not have any way of expressing their experiences no matter how fragmentary they were (Medina 2013: 99). It is possible that there exist "hidden communicative processes" and "embryonic formulations of meaning" in various marginalised contexts (Medina 2013: 99). Relatedly, Medina adds that it is not the case that before the public terms 'homophobia' or 'heterosexism' did not exist that the people affected by them did not have a way of understanding or communicating what they were experiencing (Medina 2013: 99).

This claim of the independent existence of interpretive resources outside of the dominant understanding can be further supported by suggestions from Charles Mills' *The Racial Contract* (2007). Mills suggests that black people *did* have multiple ways of interpreting and expressing their suffering and racial oppression (Mills 2007: 33). As per Mills, it would be a mistake to assume that they did not have a way of making sense of their experience *just because* the widely shared conceptions of 'racism' or

'racial oppression' had not been formulated yet. That is, concerned marginalised groups did have an understanding of their experiences and had a way of communicating them within their communities. Only when they tried to communicate across communities, specifically with those who are dominantly situated, did they face difficulties.

1.4 The Gap Between Different Hermeneutical Resources

As I illustrated above, it is important to recognise that there is a huge danger in theorising about all the hermeneutical resources as a 'collective resource' in the way Fricker does in formulating hermeneutical injustice. The idea of a monolithic 'collective understanding' or 'collective resource' ignores the existence of certain *kinds* of hermeneutical resources, usually the kinds of hermeneutical resources developed by the marginalised. Further, the idea of 'collective understanding' also obscures our understanding of the gap that exists between different hermeneutical resources. It is only when we replace the 'collective understanding' with the 'dominant understanding' that we start to see how structural power imbalances and injustices consistently maintain this gap. By 'the gap between different hermeneutical resources', I mean the difference between what gets to be part of the widely shared, publicly available set of hermeneutical resources and what gets sidelined as marginalised. The gap consists of the concepts which exist within the marginalised hermeneutical resources but do not (yet) adequately exist within the dominant hermeneutical resource. By taking only the widely shared concepts as our 'collective understanding', we take away the possibility and the capacity of certain marginalised

groups to make sense of their own experiences - *without* necessarily needing their concepts to be known by the dominant social groups. We end up ignoring the gap between the concepts developed by the marginalised and the ones that get to be widely shared.

This gap is created due to differences in social power held by the communities to whom the concepts belong. One might argue that there always exist gaps between how any two individuals or two communities might understand an experience depending on their context. As a reply, I would like to clarify that I do not mean just about any gap that might exist between the ways in which two people experience the world. For instance, your experience of being a woman might be very different from my experience of being a woman due to different factors. Instead, I am specifically concerned about the gap between conceptions and ways of interpreting when the differences between them get tied with structures of social power and systematic injustices. As a result, the amount of social power held by those who have these experiences dictates which of these two experiences gets to be widely shared (or to become part of the dominant hermeneutical resource). That is, when the differences in experiences and their conceptions get tied with the existing structures of social power, such differences are what I refer to as 'the gap'.

As a result of systemic power relations, conceptions held by one individual (or a group) get to be widely shared, while reducing the other conception to the status of the marginalised. For instance, in the refugee example, there exists a gap between the conception of 'queerness' held by the refugee and the dominant understanding of this conception held by the Austrian authorities. It is not the case that the

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refugee cannot fully make sense of her experience of queerness *if* the authorities do not have the relevant

conception of queerness. The difficulty in communication happens because the dominant

hermeneutical resource does not have the relevant intersectional conceptions of interreligious conflicts,

caste, and societal pressure. The dominant conception of queerness lacks these intersectional

conceptions, which is what I mean by 'the gap' in this case. But it is crucial for the refugee that these

authorities adequately understand the subtleties and related difficulties of her experience to make her

appeal for asylum strong enough. It is strongly in her interest to bridge this conceptual gap between her

and the authorities. But who should bridge this gap? It is important to clarify that she does not need to

communicate to make sense of her experience. She can fully make sense of her experience without

communicating with the dominant groups. Instead, it is her very social and material conditions of

marginalisation which force her to depend on those who are dominantly situated.[9] Her marginalisation

forces her to bridge the gap between her and the Austrian authorities.

But is it even possible to bridge this conceptual gap? How can the bridging of this gap take place? Does

the refugee have a choice on whether or not to bridge this gap if she needs her asylum appeal to succeed?

I will focus on these questions in the next chapter.

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[9] By 'social and material conditions' of the refugee, I mean her belonging to a scheduled caste working-class background in a third-world country without proper laws ensuring queer rights. These conditions force her to seek help from the Austrian authorities, which are dominantly situated. Hence, forcing her to communicate with these authorities - in their vocabulary.
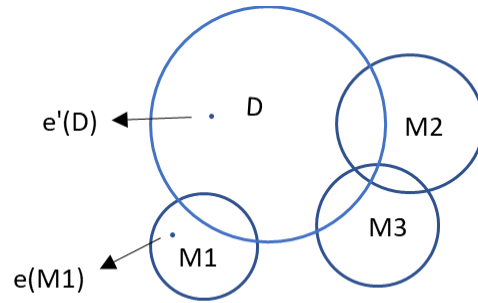
Figure 3: The Conceptual Gap Between Different Hermeneutical Resources

Before moving to the next chapter, in Figure 3, I visualise the gap between the conceptions of the dominant and the marginalised using e'(D) and e(M1), respectively. Here, e(M1) is an experience of the marginalised, which is very much in her interest to communicate with those who are dominantly situated. I use e'(D) to denote a surrounding[10] conception available within the dominant hermeneutical resource (D). For instance, in the refugee case, e'(D) would refer to the Western conception of queerness. e(M1) would refer to the conception of queerness held by the refugee. To communicate with those dominantly situated, the marginalised end up having to translate their experience e(M1) in terms of e'(D). In doing so, many of the subtleties of the experience of the marginalised end up being lost in translation.

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[10] By saying that e'(D) is the surrounding conception of e(M1), I mean that e'(D) captures some of the elements captured by the conception e(M1) in the given context. Here, the conception of queerness held by authorities [e'(D)] somewhat captures certain elements of the conception of queerness held by the refugee [e(M1)]. In some contexts, for instance, it is possible that 'race' might be considered as a surrounding conception for 'caste' since the concept of race can help explain some features of oppression present within the concept of caste. It is outside of the scope of this thesis to provide a detailed analysis of what criterion a conception needs to fulfil for it to be seen as a surrounding conception of the other. For the purposes of this thesis, it is enough to take the 'surrounding conception' to be a conception capturing some elements of the conception in question.

So far, I have shown that different communities in our society develop and use multiple hermeneutical resources. Depending on the amount of social power these communities hold, their hermeneutical resources either become part of the dominant resource or get sidelined as marginalised. This leads to conceptual gaps between different hermeneutical resources, which then need to be bridged by the marginalised. Before I move on to the next chapter, I would like to clarify how my investigation differs from Fricker's. I differ from Fricker (2007) in that I do not take the hermeneutical resources as one 'shared pool of concepts' as per Medina's (2013) reading of Fricker (2007). Instead, I take hermeneutical resources to be multiple in number. I replace the notion of 'collective resource' with the notion of 'dominant hermeneutical resource' instead. However, my investigation is similar to Fricker's in that I also focus on *an obscured understanding* of the important experiences of an individual owing to hermeneutical marginalisation. This obscured understanding, however, in my investigation, comes from the fact that there is a gap between the different hermeneutical resources holding different amounts of social power. This obscured understanding does not come from the fact there exists no relevant concept at all, as it does for Fricker.

Additionally, with my investigation, I take a step forward from Fricker and her critics' works by analysing the communicative difficulties within the cases of hermeneutical injustice. I examine the interactions which happen when a victim of hermeneutical injustice attempts to make her important experiences known. Paying attention to these interaction dynamics helps bring out the power hierarchies between different hermeneutical resources. The story of hermeneutical injustice does not just end with the difficulty the victims face in understanding their experiences. Even when someone

does have an understanding, and they try to overcome hermeneutical marginalisation, they still face significant difficulty at the level of communication. This difficulty in communication adds another distinct layer of injustice. I will devote the next chapter to talking about this layer of injustice which shows up when one tries to bridge the gap between different hermeneutical resources.

Chapter 2

Bridging the Gap Between Different Hermeneutical Resources

> When we are in your world, many times you remake us in your own image, although sometimes you clearly and explicitly acknowledge that we are not wholly there in our being with you. When we are in your world, we ourselves feel the discomfort of having our own being Hispanas disfigured or not understood. And yet, we have had to be in your world and learn its ways. We have to participate in it, make a living in it, live in it, be mistreated in it, be ignored in it, and rarely, be appreciated in it. In learning to do these things or in learning to suffer them or in learning to enjoy what is to be enjoyed or in learning to understand your conception of us, we have had to learn your culture and thus your language and self-conceptions. But there is nothing that necessitates that you understand our world: understand, that is, not as an observer understands things, but as a participant, as someone who has a stake in them understands them. (Lugones 1983: 576)

In this chapter, I will focus on the process of bridging the conceptual gaps between different hermeneutical resources. This process of bridging the gaps takes place within the cases of hermeneutical injustice, where hermeneutical injustice happens at the level of communication. I will focus on how communication takes place across different hermeneutical resources holding different amounts of social power. My main argument is that the marginalised end up with the work to bridge the conceptual gaps between the dominant and the marginalised hermeneutical resources. I term this work as 'epistemic burden'. Then, I will show what is 'epistemic' and what is 'burdensome' about this epistemic burden. Using examples from the experiences of refugees and trans people, I highlight the *need* of the marginalised to bridge this gap between the dominant and the marginalised hermeneutical resources.

2.1 Communication Across Different Hermeneutical Resources: Case Studies[11]

2.1.1 "Flee, But Remember to Wear Pink"[12]: Refugee Case Studies

Going back to the refugee case from Chapter 1, I would like to focus on how this bridging of gaps takes place between the hermeneutical resources held by the marginalised (the refugee) and those who are dominantly situated (Austrian authorities in this case). It is in the refugee's interest that the conceptual gap between her and the authorities gets bridged. That is, it is very much in the interest of the refugee to communicate her experiences to the authorities in the way intended by her. So, the refugee has to specifically communicate her important experiences to the Austrian authorities using the vocabulary available in the dominant hermeneutical resource. What does this communication look like? How does this bridging of the conceptual gaps happen?

During the refugee's interview to determine whether she qualifies for asylum and whether her appeal was justified, most of the interview questions asked by the concerned officials were related to the majorly Western phenomenon of 'coming out'. They asked whether the refugee had come out to their friends and family, and what their potential reactions were. This was important for the authorities to

[12] I borrow this phrase from Garnter (2015) as it perfectly captures the performative aspect of queerness expected from the refugees by the Western authorities during the asylum process.

understand, to assess the danger the refugee faced during her time in her home country. However, these questions were not relevant to the refugee's experiences. 'Coming out as a queer person' as a phenomenon does not exist in the rural part of Haryana, India, where even being in a heterosexual relationship without being married is frowned upon. The queerness of this refugee existed in a very different manner due to the other intersectional factors which made it impossible for her to live in her country. Although the main reason for fleeing was her queerness, at the same time, it was essential to understand that focusing on *just* the queerness aspect (from the Western perspective) of this refugee's identity did not help make her appeal strong enough.

What I am pointing out here is not the difficulty of coming out in this part of India, even though that also does exist. I am talking about the vocabulary and concepts which exist in this specific context and community. Focusing the interview questions on 'coming out', 'why not seek help from relatives', and 'why not move to another city within India' did not help the refugee communicate the atrocities of her experiences and the reasons for fleeing India. As a result, the refugee had to tell her story differently. She had to fit her experiences into the vocabulary of these authorities operating within the dominant hermeneutical resource. The refugee had to bridge the conceptual gap between her understanding of queerness and the authorities' understanding by fitting her experience into the vocabulary of the dominant hermeneutical resource.

Nayeri perfectly captures the experience of this 'bridging the conceptual gap' in the context of refugees in her work, *Who Gets Believed?* (2023). She focuses on interactions between different refugees and the concerned authorities in the asylum-seeking process. She writes, "In order for an asylum seeker to be believed, they must choose the right story out of many, the relevant part of a complicated life. It's like being asked to cut a circular disk from a cylinder. You have many stacked circles, but if you cut at the wrong angle, you have an oval. You've failed to present the desired thing" (Nayeri 2023: 65). Queer asylum seekers are often required to "perform their identities in a way that shows they are 'in place' among the receiving state's good gay and lesbian citizenry" (Gartner 2015: 137). Both Nayeri and Gartner point out how the refugees from third-world countries have to explain their marginalised experiences of discrimination and oppression from their native cultures. They have to do this by explaining in the vocabulary that can legitimise their appeal for asylum. Even if the dominant vocabulary does not capture the critical parts of their experiences, they still have to communicate using it. Consequently, "the words of those who must adjudicate their case, the words of the new dominant culture they are requesting access to, become the words through which the refugees need to express themselves" (Boncompagni 2021: 161). I would like to present another example in the following section where the marginalised end up having to fit important experiences from their lives – into the vocabulary available in the dominant hermeneutical resource.

2.1.2 "Be Trans, But Cis Terms and Conditions Apply": Trans Experiences

Fricker and Jenkins (2016) give examples of trans people who had to present themselves in particular

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ways to seek transition-related medical help and surgeries. For instance, trans women had to conform to specific standards of normative 'femininity' (Fricker, Jenkins 2016: 9). They had to *perform* a certain degree of hatred towards their bodies and the gender norms associated with them. This was required to *prove* that they were trans in the way the medical authorities, usually composed of cis people, would envision the experience of a trans person. If trans people did not meet these set criteria, then they were seen as not being trans enough or not trans at all. As a result, they were often denied access to the necessary medical treatment.

Additionally, the medical terms which came about to articulate trans experiences were ill-suited or inadequate. They did not capture the experiences of trans people the way they experienced the world (Serano 2007: Ch. 7; Green 2004: 46). Further, Aultman (2016) argues that when trans people complain about being discriminated against, their complaints are interpreted from the model which "takes cis people with non-normative gender expression as the paradigm, rather than engaging with trans people on their own terms" (Aultman 2016, p.11). That is, when these complaints are assessed, the concerned authorities do not independently engage with trans people's statements about the way they are experiencing discrimination. Instead, these authorities interpret them through a lens of what *they* imagine being trans to be like and the struggles that come along with such an experience. Here, the trans community belongs to a systematically marginalised group who has not had the chance for their experiences and interpretive sources to become part of the dominant hermeneutical resource. This marginalisation necessitates the need of trans people to communicate with those who are dominantly

situated to seek equal rights. So, when this communication takes place across social space, trans people end up having to bridge the conceptual gap between their experiences and what the concerned authorities take their experiences to be. Hence, they have to do the work of explaining their experiences using the concepts available in the dominant hermeneutical resource.

2.2 Epistemic Burden: The Work of Bridging the Conceptual Gaps

As I illustrated in the above two cases, the gap between the dominant and the marginalised conceptual resources makes it difficult for the hermeneutically marginalised to communicate their experiences – in the way intended by them. To communicate their experiences across social space, owing to the hermeneutical marginalisation, they are burdened with bridging this gap between the two sets of hermeneutical resources. This work done by the marginalised to bridge the conceptual gap between marginalised hermeneutical resources and dominant hermeneutical resource is what I term 'epistemic burden'. More specifically, I define epistemic burden as follows:

The epistemic burden is the work that the hermeneutically marginalised individuals (or communities) have to do to make their important experience(s) understood by those who are dominantly situated. This work involves translating or fitting their experiences into the concepts available within the dominant vocabulary by first learning the dominant vocabulary. It consists of bridging the gap between the marginalised hermeneutical resources and the dominant hermeneutical resource.

This work of bridging involves knowing the concepts available in the dominant resource, and constantly interpreting and articulating one's experience through the vocabulary of both the dominant and the marginalised. This work is similar to the phenomenon captured by Du Bois' (1905) notion of Double Consciousness. In his phenomenal work on race theory, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1905), Du Bois argues that the black person has a double understanding of himself where the black person is aware of how he sees himself. At the same time, he is also very aware of how a white person sees him because of the structural prejudices present due to racism. The black person is aware of his existence and experiences from both the perspectives – his own perspective and the perspective of a white person. This kind of double awareness is necessitated by racial oppression, where the black person learns to see himself through the oppressive eyes of the oppressor. Du Bois describes the experience of this constant double interpretation as follows, "it is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder" (Du Bois, 1903: 38).

Now, I would like to apply this notion of double consciousness in the context of bridging the gap between the two sets of hermeneutical resources – the dominant and the marginalised. Here, the marginalised person is required to communicate their experiences from their marginalised perspective

using the 'required' concepts from the dominant vocabulary. This is needed so that the experiences of the marginalised are understood and recognised as 'legitimate' within the dominant hermeneutical framework. Here, in this communication process and bridging the gap, the marginalised person is required to be aware of their own experience *as well as* the relevant vocabulary of the dominant hermeneutical resource. They have to translate their experiences into the vocabulary of the dominant in order to communicate. This translation across the two sets of hermeneutical resources does not capture the subtleties of the experiences of the marginalised. Still, they are required to do this translation to communicate with those who are dominantly situated. This is similar to double consciousness in that one is aware of their own lived reality from their perspective *and* is simultaneously interpreting it through the lens of the dominant hermeneutical resource. The dominant conceptual resources are widely available so the marginalised automatically end up viewing their experience through that lens. But this lens of dominant vocabulary allows the marginalised to further only those concerns for which the vocabulary exists within the dominant hermeneutical resource.

For example, in the case of trans person, the trans person has to bear the burden of explaining their experiences of being trans in terms of cis terms. Even though these cis terms do not fully capture their experience, they still need to use them to communicate across social space – outside of their communities. So, they are very aware of the conceptual resources available to the cis people and the ones available to them in their community. To communicate with those who are dominantly situated, they are forced to think about their experiences from both conceptual lenses - their own lens of marginalised

resources as well as the dominant hermeneutical resource. In Figure 4, I visualise this epistemic burden by showing the bridging of the conceptual gaps between e(M1) and e'(D) - where e(M1) refers to the conceptions in the marginalised hermeneutical resource (M1) and e'(D) refers to the surrounding conception available in the dominant hermeneutical resource. For instance, in case of trans experiences, e(M1) will refer to the trans conceptions through which trans people interpret their unique lived experiences. e'(D) will refer to the cis vocabulary available in the dominant hermeneutical resource. So, to communicate their experiences across social space, trans people end up having to bridge this conceptual gap between e(M1) and e'(D). I visualise this bridging using 'b' in Figure 4.
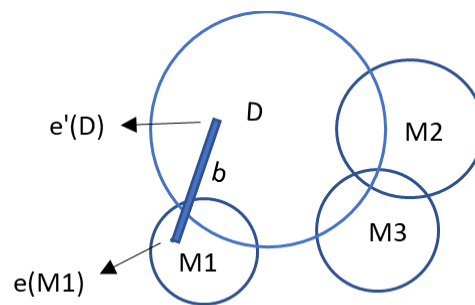
Figure 4: The Bridging 'b' of the Conceptual Gap

2.3 What is 'Burdensome' about Epistemic Burden?

Now, what is a 'burden' about this work of bridging the conceptual gaps? I call this work a burden since this work by the marginalised requires them to operate in another set of conceptual resources. It requires them to constantly interpret their world through the lens of two sets of conceptual resources. The work of translation is necessitated by the need to communicate with the dominantly situated groups owing

to marginalisation (See Section 3.1.1 for more details). The dominantly situated groups do not need to do this work of translation and double interpretation. This additional work automatically falls on the shoulders of the marginalised due to the very fact that they are marginalised. This difficulty is not just a practical difficulty, and it is not ethically neutral since it reduces the marginalised person to an 'epistemic other' rather than an independent epistemic agent (I will expand more on this in section 3.1.1).

This work is a burden since, on top of (i) being marginalised in the first place, (ii) then experiencing the secondary consequences of the marginalisation, (iii) the marginalised have to do the work of translating their marginalised experience as well – to communicate their very experiences of being marginalised. If they want these experiences to be understood across social space, this communication is required to be done often in a way that is compliant with the dominant hermeneutical resource. For instance, being trans, first of all, ends up putting the person into the category of the marginalised. Then, as a result, they may face social exclusion and a lack of basic rights as the consequences of being trans. Now, on top of these consequences, having to explain these very experiences of marginalisation in the words of those who are dominantly situated adds an additional layer of work for the marginalised. This additional layer of work is what constitutes the burden. This epistemic 'burden' is analogous to the concept of 'burden of proof'. In the case of the burden of proof, it becomes an obligation of the person who brings up a claim in the dispute or something not considered to be of interest to others - to provide evidence for their claims. Relatedly, if one deviates from anything that is available in the dominant hermeneutical

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resource (or wants to communicate something missing from it), then, they are the ones who end up having to explain this deviation.

2.4 What is 'Epistemic' about Epistemic Burden?

I call the work of bridging the conceptual gaps an 'epistemic' burden because the very nature of the work is epistemic. That is to say, this work involves thinking and interpreting one's experiences through the vocabulary of the dominant hermeneutical resource. The work of bridging the conceptual gaps requires one to have knowledge of both sets of hermeneutical resources. It requires the marginalised to understand the relevant concepts from the dominant hermeneutical resource and fit their experiences into those concepts. The marginalised are forced to think through the dominant hermeneutical lens even though it does not help fully interpret their important experiences. This kind of necessary interpreting and translating requires the marginalised individual to be cognitively engaged in both sets of hermeneutical resources – the dominant as well as the marginalised. This is what makes this work epistemic.

I would like to clarify that the fact that someone marginalised has to communicate their experience to those who are dominantly situated is *not* what I mean by 'epistemic burden'. Instead, when such communication *requires* the marginalised to translate their experiences into the dominant concepts for

their experiences to be understood (or considered legitimate) is what I call the epistemic burden. Communication itself is not a burden in this case. It is the bridging of the gap between two sets of hermeneutical resources to communicate an important part of one's experience is what I label as the epistemic burden. Now, how does the epistemic burden affect the marginalised who end up bearing it? Is the notion of epistemic burden ethically neutral? In the next chapter, I will argue that the epistemic burden is unjust. Then, I focus on the question, 'How else can we think about bridging these conceptual and communicative gaps?'.

Chapter 3
Epistemic Burden of Bridging the Gaps: Who Should Carry it?

> Expecting those whose experienced world reveals systematic gaps, to devote their epistemic labor (when directed) entirely to rectifying those gaps might be similar to expecting those who utilise wheelchairs to move through the world to be architects engaged in making buildings more universally accessible......such expectations can be seen not only as an infringement on epistemic autonomy, but also can be deployed in ways that disregard the epistemic labor involved in remedying systemic gaps.

> (Pohlhaus 2020: 246)

First of all, in the first section of this chapter, I argue that the epistemic burden on the marginalised is unjust. I support my argument by showing that the epistemic burden (i) reduces the marginalised individual to an epistemic other, (ii) distorts the lived experiences of the marginalised, and (iii) can lead to significant practical harms. In the second section, to better situate the contribution of my thesis, I show how the notion of epistemic burden is distinct from the already available concepts of epistemic injustice and epistemic exploitation. I highlight how the notion of 'epistemic burden' helps bring together different overlapping features of these important phenomena from the Social Epistemology literature. Finally, I focus on how we can better think about bridging the gaps between different hermeneutical resources without adding yet another burden on those already marginalised.

3.1 What Makes Epistemic Burden Unjust?

3.1.1 The Marginalised Get Reduced to an 'Epistemic Other'

First of all, the marginalised are forced to communicate with the dominantly situated because of the very fact that they are marginalised. To communicate, they need to translate and explain their experiences using the vocabulary of the dominant. In doing so, they are only able to bring forth what the vocabulary of the dominant hermeneutical resource allows them to bring forth. That is, knowledge and the experiences of the marginalised are only considered legitimate if they are translated into the dominant concepts. As a result, the marginalised are reduced to the status of 'epistemic other'. What do I mean by 'epistemic other'?

I borrow from Pohlhaus (2014), where she argues that in cases of epistemic injustice[13], the epistemic capacities of the victim "are reduced to attending only to that which stems from the perpetrator's subjectivity, so that anything the victim might try to express that exceeds the range of the perpetrator's subjectivity is actively prohibited and left unrecognised by the perpetrator, even while he recognises the victim as capable of having experiences, interests, and desires" (Pohlhaus 2014: 105). This notion of one's reduction of epistemic capacities is what I mean by being reduced to the status of 'an epistemic other'. This notion is applicable to our analysis of epistemic burden and can help us understand why epistemic burden is unjust. How? When the victim of hermeneutical injustice is faced with communicative unintelligibility, instead of being able to make her unique contribution to the conversation, she is left with the epistemic burden. She is burdened with the work of translating her

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[13] Pohlhaus (2014) uses this notion of 'reduction of one's epistemic capacities' specifically in the context of testimonial injustice. However, since it focuses on the interactive dimension of epistemic injustice, I find it applicable to our discussion. Hence, I apply it to the cases where hermeneutical injustice happens at the level of communication.

experience into the vocabulary of the dominant hermeneutical resource. She is left in a position where she can only say the things that the dominant vocabulary allows her to articulate. Hence, it can be argued that because of this epistemic burden, the victims of hermeneutical injustice at the level of communication end up as 'an epistemic other'. They are not seen as independent epistemic subjects capable of making a genuine contribution. They can only contribute something once it is 'filtered' through the lens of what the dominant vocabulary allows. This alienates various ways of interpreting and understanding experiences developed by the marginalised. It pushes the marginalised into the role where they are dependent on those who are dominantly situated and their hermeneutical resource. Being reduced to an 'epistemic other' seriously affects the epistemic agency of the subject involved. It affects "one's ability to pursue epistemic projects that stem specifically from one's distinct lived experiences" (Pohlhaus 2014: 106). For an independent subject to pursue epistemic projects, it is important to be able to talk about one's experiences the way one experiences themselves - rather than being led by what is talked about their experiences by others.

Someone might argue that having to do the work of translation across communities is not unjust since this translation is required whenever we want to communicate across communities. That is, even if I want to communicate with someone who speaks Spanish, I need to translate a lot of my experiences into what the Spanish language allows. This is not unjust. So, what is unjust about the specific kind of translation happening within epistemic burden? As a reply to this objection, I want to higlight that the marginalised *need to communicate* with those who are dominantly situated - to bring forth their own experiences and for them to become a part of collective understanding. Arising out of this need to

communicate, they are forced to do this translation into the dominant vocabulary. When other kinds of communication and translation happen across communities, they do not happen out of necessity; one community is not dependent on the other. That is, I am not systemically dependent on someone speaking Spanish in the way the marginalised are dependent on the dominantly situated. In the case of epistemic burden, the marginalised are dependent on the dominantly situated and hence, end up having to do the translation into the dominant hermeneutical resource. It is not a choice; it is a need. For instance, in the case of trans people, it is not the case that they can choose whether to communicate with the cis medical officials at the hospital or not. They need to communicate to get the required medications. This one-sided dependence of the marginalised on the dominantly situated forces the trans people to translate their experiences into the dominant vocabulary. In doing this, trans people fail to be seen as someone with an independent voice capable of contributing something unique and genuine. Instead, trans people's "voices get effectively overridden by those of cis people with medical training" (Serano 2007: Ch. 7). They are not seen capable of contributing to our understanding of the world, which might alter the way the dominant experience and interpret the world.

In her work, *What is the point of equality?* (1999), Anderson argues that the basis of any ethical theory should be the relations that the people in a society hold amongst each other. As per Anderson, in order to ensure a free and fair society, we need to make sure that the people in society stand in equal relations with each other. What does it mean to stand as an equal in relation to another being? Quoting directly from Anderson (1999), "To stand as an equal before others in discussion means that one is entitled to participate, that others recognise an obligation to listen respectfully and respond on one's arguments,

that *no one need bow and scrape before others or represent themselves as inferior to others as a condition of having their claim heard*" (Anderson 1999: 33, emphasis added). For Anderson, it is crucial that people stand in equal relations with each other to ensure a fair society - where people have the chance to express themselves independently. The people are not inherently dependent on others in order for their claims to be heard. In such a society, people are not reduced to the status of an 'epistemic other' where they can only say the things that the dominant vocabulary allows them to express. By reducing the marginalised to 'an epistemic other', epistemic burden takes away this very basis of a fair society: people standing in equal relations to each other. Hence, epistemic burden can be seen as unjust as it forces the marginalised to stand in an *unequal* relation to the dominant where it is the dominant's conceptions which hold more power and value. The experiences and the conceptions of the marginalised are not recognised unless they are translated into the conceptions of the dominant.

3.1.2 Distortion of Lived Experiences by Being Lost in Translation

The second reason for arguing why this epistemic burden is unjust, is that during the process of translation across different sets of hermeneutical resources, some of the critical parts of the experiences of the marginalised get lost in translation. The marginalised are not able to fully communicate in the way intended by them because the dominant vocabulary restricts them. They can only bring forth their important experiences using somewhat surrounding concepts available in the dominant hermeneutical resource. These surrounding concepts often do not capture the important subleties of their experiences. Hence, important parts of their experiences do not get adequately translated. Further, this loss of critical

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parts of their experience often leads to distortion of their very lived reality. That is, while viewing their experiences from two conceptual frameworks and constantly engaging in double consciousness, their experiences get distorted. How does this happen? The marginalised end up doubting and questioning the parts of their experiences which are not yet part of the dominant vocabulary. For instance, constantly viewing yourself and your concerns from the framework of Western feminism while living in a Hispanic world makes you question your own experiences, concerns, and feminist values. Lugones (1983) mentions that as a Hispanic feminist, it is very important for her to remain embedded in the community she grew up in as a part of her Hispanic values. But the Western narrative of feminism often stresses leaving behind the familial patriarchal structures one grew up with. As a result, Hispanic feminists start to question whether it is even possible to combine their Hispanic values with those of feminism. They are often led to believe that they need to choose one out of the two: being Hispanic *or* being a feminist. They end up questioning their commitment to feminism if they are not able to follow the widely shared conception of feminism. This constant doubting and questioning alters their daily experiences – for instance, the way they communicate within their own community, the way they interact with other women, and the way they view themselves. Lugones adds, "the pressures to believe the western accounts are enormous even when the woman in question does not see herself in the account. She is thus led to doubt her own judgment and to doubt all interpretations of her experience. This leads her to experience her life differently" (Lugones 1983: 577).

Relatedly, in the cases of queer refugees, the asylum process shapes the way the refugee experiences and expresses their queerness. Out of expectations of the concerned official to follow a certain Western standard of queerness, the refugees starts to embody these Western conceptions. Gartner (2015) adds that "the interview and court rooms thereby become normative construction sites of a limited set of queer identities which adjudicators deem worthy of protection" Gartner 2015: 128). For instance, in the context of US asylum process, Sarah Hinger, a senior attorney, adds that "an applicant must anticipate and perform certain stereotypes in her own application as the surest means of gaining asylum. In this way, stereotypical descriptions become the legal truth of *what it is to be homosexual* and form the standard to be applied beyond the individual case" (Gartner 2015: 146).

3.1.3 Practical Harms

Further, the work of bridging conceptual gaps between the dominant and the marginalised hermeneutical resource also results in significant practical harms. These include doing the practical work of translation across different communities. This practical work requires time and energy on the part of the marginalised which goes into explaining one's experiences into the dominant vocabulary. Instead of being able to simply express themselves and moving on to follow other pursuits in their life, they are forced to take on this work of translation. The epistemic burden can also inhibit the ability of the marginalised to further their needs in the intended manner. For instance, if a trans person fails to present a *legitimate enough* interpretation of their experience of being trans through the lens of the dominant cis hermeneutical resource, they may be denied medication or the necessary treatment. So, even if the

marginalised do carry the burden but fail to carry it the *correct* way, they face the danger of severe

consequences. Relatedly, Gartner (2015) brings up an example of a gay refugee from Cyprus whose

appeal for asylum was denied. This happened because this refugee had taken part in the country's

military services. As per the Western conception of 'gayness' held by the concerned authorities, not

avoiding military service was seen to contradict 'the gay conduct'. Hence, one may face significant

practical harms in the process of bridging (or failing to bridge) the conceptual gaps.[14]

3.2 Epistemic Burden, Epistemic Injustice, and Epistemic Exploitation

To situate the contribution of my thesis better, I want to examine the available surrounding concepts in

the literature on epistemic injustice - testimonial injustice, hermeneutical injustice, and epistemic

exploitation. I will show how these concepts do not account for the phenomenon of epistemic burden

within their current formulations.

3.2.1 Testimonial Injustice

First of all, even though Fricker's notion of testimonial injustice is focused more on identity prejudice

at the level of communication, it does not capture the important notion of gaps between different

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[14] I do not claim to provide an exhaustive analysis of the harms faced by the marginalised. It is possible to imagine other ways in which epistemic burden harms the marginalised and also how the above three kinds of harms might overlap to form intersectional but distinct kinds of harm.

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hermeneutical resources. Testimonial injustice occurs when a prejudice causes a hearer to give lesser credibility to a speaker's word because the speaker belongs to a socially marginalised group (Fricker 2007: 4). For example, a black man not being taken as seriously in court as a white man just because he is black. The notion of testimonial injustice differs from epistemic burden in that it does not necessarily deal with translating across different sets of hermeneutical resources. In its current formulation, the victim of testimonial injustice does not face the challenge of bridging the gap between two hermeneutical resources. Consequently, testimonial injustice does not capture how important details of one's experiences get lost in this bridging process, which is a crucial feature of epistemic burden.

3.2.2 Hermeneutical Injustice

Secondly, the notion of hermeneutical injustice does manage to capture how a conceptual lack in the collective understanding leads to difficulty at the level of communication. However, it fails to capture the important feature of epistemic burden, the gap between different hermeneutical resource as per Medina's (2013) reading of Fricker (2007). Additionally, even if we acknowledge the multiplicity of hermeneutical resources as suggested by Mason (2011) and Medina (2013), this revised formulation of hermeneutical injustice still does not adequately capture the importance of bridging the gap between different hermeneutical resources. Also, it does not capture why the marginalised need to communicate and translate their experiences *using* the vocabulary of the dominant hermeneutical resource. The notion of epistemic burden manages to highlight how some marginalised groups often do not have a

real choice in whether to take up this epistemic burden or not. So, theorising about epistemic burden helps understand this hidden layer of injustice present within the communicative aspects of hermeneutical injustice.

3.2.3 Epistemic Exploitation

Thirdly, there is a related notion of epistemic exploitation by Nora Berenstain (2016). Epistemic exploitation captures the expectation that the privileged groups usually have from the marginalised groups. She argues that the marginalised are expected to educate the privileged about their experiences oppression and marginalisation. This kind of work is taken for granted from the marginalised. Quoting directly from Berenstain (2016), "Epistemic exploitation maintains structures of oppression by centering the needs and desires of dominant groups, and exploiting the emotional and cognitive labor of members of marginalized groups who are required to do the unpaid and often unacknowledged work of providing information, resources, and evidence of oppression to privileged persons who demand it— and who benefit from those very oppressive systems about which they demand to be educated" (Berenstain 2016: 570).

This notion of epistemic exploitation is close to epistemic burden in that the marginalised are expected to do the work to bridge the gap between the marginalised and dominant groups. But the current formulation of epistemic exploitation by Berenstain (2016) does not necessarily involve the *dependency*

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of the marginalised on those who are dominantly situated - for their experiences to be considered legitimate. That is to say, epistemic exploitation does not capture the instances where it is the *need* of the marginalised to communicate with those dominantly situated. This need arises out of the very marginalisation the marginalised suffer from, as I explained in Section 3.1.1. So, the notion of epistemic burden helps capture the additional work done by the marginalised even when it is not just about educating the privileged. But also, it captures the unjust work required from the marginalised when the marginalised themselves need their experiences to be recognised by those who are dominantly situated.

So, summarising this section, I have shown that the notion of epistemic burden captures something that the surrounding concepts of testimonial injustice, hermeneutical injustice, and epistemic exploitation do not fully capture. The notion of epistemic burden combines a focus on the 'communicative elements' from testimonial injustice, a focus on 'hermeneutical marginalisation' from hermeneutical injustice, and 'the additional work on the shoulders of the marginalised' from epistemic exploitation. Overall, epistemic burden captures a distinct phenomenon faced by the marginalised when they attempt to communicate their important experiences across social space. Is it possible to do anything to reduce this epistemic burden on the marginalised? How can we think about this work of bridging conceptual gaps which is more just? I will focus on these questions in the next section.

3.3 What Next? Who Should Carry this Burden?

Who else will bring forth the experiences of the marginalised if they do not do it themselves? The epistemic burden has two important components: (i) the gap between the marginalised and dominant hermeneutical resources, and (ii) the need of the marginalised to communicate with those who are dominantly situated. By attending to these two components, I offer the following two potential ways of tackling epistemic burden: (i) by eliminating (or reducing) the gap between different hermeneutical resources, and (ii) alleviating the need of the marginalised to communicate with those who are dominantly situated.

(i) Eliminating (or reducing) the gap between different hermeneutical resources

Going back to Fricker's formulation of hermeneutical resources as 'the collective', one way of tackling epistemic burden is by making 'the collective hermeneutical resource' bigger. This can happen by acknowledging the existence of different interpretive resources existing outside of 'the collective'. To do that, first of all, it needs to be acknowledged that there *is* bridging of different hermeneutical resources happening. Further, we need to pay attention to the fact that this bridging is happening in a particular direction - from the marginalised to the dominant. This one-directional, asymmetric need and expectation of bridging this gap necessitated by hermeneutical marginalisation adds another layer of injustice to the marginalised. Once this layer of injustice is acknowledged, we can start to alter the direction of this bridging. Bringing forth of experiences of the marginalised (i.e., bridging of gaps between different hermeneutical resources) is only made necessary when there exists a dominant hermeneutical resource which already does not capture the experiences of the marginalised. Without the

social hierarchy among different hermeneutical resources, the dependence on (translation to) the dominant hermeneutical resource would not be necessary. Focusing more on structural causes behind the asymmetric interdependence of communities with different hermeneutical resources will help reduce the epistemic burden.

(ii) Alleviating the need of the marginalised to communicate with dominantly situated

It is crucial to ask the question, "why do the marginalised need to 'bring forth' their experiences in the first place?" 'Bring forth' where exactly? This 'bringing forth' is necessitated by the amount of social power that the dominant hermeneutical resource holds. Certain ways of making sense of the world become marginalised only *in relation* to the existent dominant ways. The need of the marginalised to communicate with the dominantly situated is necessitated by their very marginalization. The injustice of epistemic burden remains inherently tied to other power structures that maintain the gap between different hermeneutical resources in the first place. Hence, it is difficult to provide a clear solution to how we can help reduce the epistemic burden on the marginalised. The burden to bridge the conceptual gap comes into picture only if there is a gap to begin with. One can only tackle the need of the marginalised to communicate with the dominantly situated and, consequently, to translate if the underlying unjust power structures are tackled first.

The responsibility to bridge the conceptual gaps should be on those who hold more social power and privilege - those who can *afford* to spare the amount of time and energy that goes into bridging these

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gaps. This responsibility can be recognised only if we focus on the asymmetric interdependence of hermeneutical resources created by systemic oppression. For instance, in the context of the refugee case, Gartner (2015) suggests that instead of asking questions from the limited Western perspective, "queer refugees should be questioned on their feelings about being (perceived as) 'different' in their respective societies, the stigma that arises out of such, the potential isolation that follows, and the related harm they have experienced[15]" (Gartner 2015: 153).

Stepping away from the dominant perspective and focusing on the very lived experiences of the marginalised can slowly help bridge the conceptual gaps. It can reduce the amount of burden that the marginalised have to carry. Additionally, it is not the case that there is no way *at all* for those dominantly situated to understand the experiences of the marginalised without the marginalised carrying further epistemic burden. In the refugee case from Chapter 1, for instance, there exist enough resources already talking about how queerness intersects with caste and religion. Similarly, there are a number of autobiographies written by trans people talking about their lived experiences of being trans. Those who are dominantly situated need to start utilising the already available resources. Utilising the already available resources to understand the experiences of the marginalised can help alleviate the epistemic burden. But why would the dominantly situated want to engage in such an understanding? Why would they want to bridge the gaps which structurally work in their favor? Do they have a need to do so?

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[15] This is based on S. Chelvan's 'Difference, Stigma, Shame & Harm Model' (2013).

Unfortunately, it is true that there is no *need* for the dominantly situated to understand the marginalised. Do they have an obligation though? No. But they are definitely obligated to think in ways which does not assume that they can keep controlling what conceptions get to be widely shared. The dominantly situated need to start thinking in ways that does not assume the dominant as 'the collective'. Lugones (1983) writes to those who are dominantly situated, "I do not think that you have any obligation to understand us. You *do* have an obligation to abandon your imperialism, your universal claims, your reduction of us your reduction of us to yourselves simply because they seriously harm us" (Lugones 1983: 580, emphasis added). There needs to be recognition from those who are dominantly situated that there exist people and experiences outside of what their dominant lens allows them to see. The dominantly situated *need* to step outside of their convenient yet *incomplete* hermeneutical resource and need to start acknowledging the world outside in its entirety.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I argued for the phenomenon of epistemic burden, the additional work that the marginalised have to do in order to communicate their experiences with those who are dominantly situated. This burden exists in the context of hermeneutical injustice at the level of communication. Specifically, I situate the phenomenon of epistemic burden when there is a gap between different hermeneutical resources - the dominant and the marginalised. Then it is the marginalised who end up bridging this gap. They bridge this gap by translating and fitting in their experiences into what the vocabulary of the dominant hermeneutical resource allows. Further, I showed that this epistemic burden is unjust for multiple reasons: (i) the marginalised are reduced to an epistemic other, (ii) the translation distorts the very lived experiences of the marginalised, and (iii) it adds practical work of translation and makes it difficult to further one's important needs. Further, I situate my contribution within the existing Social Epistemology literature. I show how the notion of epistemic burden is distinct from the surrounding concepts of epistemic injustice and epistemic exploitation. The epistemic burden helps bring out a hidden layer of injustice within hermeneutical injustice even when the victims of hermeneutical injustice have an understanding of their important experience.

Further, I presented possible ways of tackling this layer of injustice. To understand how we can bring forth essential experiences of the marginalised without infringing their epistemic agency, first, we need to acknowledge the existence of epistemic burden. Instead of expecting the marginalised to bridge the conceptual gaps between the dominant and the marginalised, we need to dismantle the underlying

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power structures making it necessary to 'bring forth' the experiences of the marginalised in the first place. However, admittedly, this is not an easy task since the dominantly situated do not get any 'incentives' from dismantling the power structures which serve them. It is possible that the marginalised will have to carry this epistemic burden for longer than they need to - for the dominant to fully recognise the importance of marginalised hermeneutical resources in having a complete picture of the world.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge one important shortcoming of this thesis. This thesis does not account for the distinct *kinds* of work that might take place in the process of bridging the conceptual gaps between the marginalised and the dominant. That is, it is plausible to think that this work of bridging might vary depending on the *kind of* and the *degree* of marginalisation faced by the marginalised groups in question. However, in this thesis, taking 'the marginalised' and 'the dominant' in binary terms helps acknowledge that there exists *some kind* of epistemic burden on those marginalised. This is the first step in acknowledging that epistemic burden exists. It will be interesting and helpful to further investigate the possible varieties of epistemic burden depending on the kind of marginalisation faced by the concerned community.

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