

The common ground is epistemic violence: towards a social epistemology-based lens on the neoliberal-fascist nexus

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a framework based on Social Epistemology and developed for interdisciplinary applicability in Social Theory, Political Theory and Cultural Studies to tend to the task of developing a nuanced lens on intricacies of neoliberalism and fascism. The core argument this paper establishes is that neoliberal-fascist convergence arises precisely at instances of meaning-making that are instances of epistemic violence. To connect Social Epistemology to discourse on the neoliberal-fascist nexus, I employ Miranda Fricker's framework of *hermeneutical resources* to then develop the notion of *Hermeneutical Connectivity* to explore the neoliberal-fascist nexus in its overlappings regarding social interpretation. In a second step, I propose my understanding of the framework Epistemic Violence to further analyse these hermeneutical overlappings. My core argument here is that the notion of *epistemic violence* can be applied to both name and analyse the interconnectivity of neoliberalism and fascism. I explore essentialism with regard to gender and race as a case study to exemplify how these Social Epistemology-based frameworks may be applied to the case of the neoliberal-fascist nexus.

KEYWORDS

Epistemic violence; hermeneutical resources; philosophy of race; philosophy of gender; essentialism; neoliberal-fascist nexus; feminist epistemology; feminist anti-fascism

Introduction: neoliberalism and fascism as hermeneutical resources

Neoliberalism and Fascism have long been understood as separate ideologies (Gambetti, 2020; Maher, 2024; Jackson, 2021). In recent years however it has become clear that neoliberal and fascist politics and ideologies intersect in political phenomena such as Trumpism and the New Far-Right (Giroux, 2019; Tourish, 2024; Traverso, 2019). These political realities bring up an urgent need for frameworks that deepen the understanding of this neoliberal-fascist nexus while recognizing neoliberalism and fascism as 'distinct political bodies' (Maher, 2024).

In this paper I will employ my original understanding of two Social Epistemology (SE) – based notions to help account for the political meaning-making achieved through neoliberal-fascist convergence: Hermeneutical Connectivity will account for the neoliberal-

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fascist nexus as a shared endeavour of meaning-making. Epistemic Violence will be employed to argue that these neoliberal-fascist overlappings in meaning-making exist precisely because they are instances of epistemic violence.

My core endeavour here is therefore not to add findings to the contents of neoliberal-fascist overlappings, but rather to help explore the political meaning and functioning of these overlappings by employing my understanding of epistemic violence. Thus, this paper provides a perspective on existing findings on the neoliberal-fascist nexus that is based in Social Epistemology. SE-based frameworks originate from decolonial and feminist scholarly work and therefore bring the potential to strengthen decolonial-feminist accounts of the neoliberal-fascist nexus.

The main argument I put forth is that the hermeneutical overlappings between neoliberalism and fascism (a) are instances of epistemic violence and (b) that they are knots of neoliberal-fascist convergence precisely because they are instances of epistemic violence. My notion of epistemic violence builds on a connection of the work of Gayatri Spivak with Black Studies discourse on the notion of 'the human' (e.g. Wynter, 2003, 1994).

Epistemic violence in my understanding means a conceptual exclusion of marginalized people from the realm of 'the human' (see Kather, 2023). This conceptual exclusion lies at the core of all instances of epistemic violence and produces a normalization of political interests that are – partly or fully – related to the exclusion of certain groups of people. Hermeneutical resources that produce such epistemic violence are crucial for both neoliberalism and fascism because they build and uphold justifications and normalizations of various forms of violence that are part of both ideologies.

So, the scope of this paper is three-fold: (A) I am providing an argument why the connection of Social Epistemology and discourse on the neoliberal-fascist nexus is crucial for the understanding of the political meaning and functioning of the discourse, (B) I offer 'hermeneutical connectivity' as well as my understanding of 'epistemic violence' as frameworks that help connect SE discourse to the neoliberal-fascist nexus and (C) I offer a SE-based lens on neoliberal-fascist convergence that is based in the argument that these convergences exist because they are instances of epistemic violence. This paper therefore aims to both explore and to further inspire an interdisciplinary understanding of the neoliberal-fascist nexus, that draws from frameworks of SE as well as political sciences to identify political effects of neoliberal-fascist convergences. Thus, this paper aims to be a beginning: to provide a scholarly starting point for SE-based frameworks to be brought into the discourse on the neoliberal-fascist nexus.

Fascism here is understood as a political ideology that interweaves radical anti-feminism, racism, and ideologies of euthanasia (see e.g. Toscano, 2023, Sheffer 2018). The element of anti-feminism relates to the re-institution of conservative gender roles, the essentialization of gender and the employment of gender-based violence as a political instrument (Wood, 2018; Lloyd-Roberts, 2016; Brownmiller, 1993). Racism relates to beliefs in societal and political exclusion based on race and ethnicity and the normalization and usage of racist violence (Galván-Álvarez, 2010; Wynter, 2003, 1994). Ideologies of euthanasia refer to the fundamental structure of fascism to identify 'worthy life' and 'unworthy life' based on factors such as sexual orientation, neurotype, disability or race (see e.g. Sheffer 2018).

Thus, the term 'fascism' is employed to describe an ideology with a trans-historic identity: I choose to employ the term 'fascism' not to equate today's Far Right with the fascism

of the Third Reich or the Italian ventennio, but rather to emphasize how there are trans-historic characteristics moving through various forms and histories of fascism. This understanding and employment of the term ‘fascism’ draws from and is supported by the work of Alberto Toscano (2023), who applies ‘fascism’, as he writes, ‘primarily to name a problem’, which is also the logic I follow in employing the term.

This paper sets out to understand fascism through the mechanisms of social interpretation fashioned by the ideology and the practices of social interpretation shaping the ideology: This is part of why I choose to write ‘fascism’ instead of ‘the New Far Right’ for example – because I believe this focus on mechanism of social interpretations made by and making fascism centres specifically the aspects of fascism that keep existing in different forms of fascism, even though they will always be modified in relation to the socio-political situation of the respective fascist ideology. Neoliberalism here is understood as a political ideology that promotes ‘the free market’ as well as statism as markers of progress and establishes a disbelief in concerns primarily rooted in social justice, while fashioning individualized accounts of success, freedom, and subjectivity (see e.g. Brown, 2018, 2019; Chamayou, 2021): As Grégoire Chamayou establishes in his historical re-tracings of neoliberalism, this ideology in large part originates from an internalization of governability that aligns with the capitalist system in place (Chamayou, 2021) and as Wendy Brown establishes, today’s neoliberalism largely strives off of a systemic discreditation of ‘social causes’ in the sense of practices or movements aimed at combatting systemic, historically fashioned inequalities (Brown, 2018, 2019).

This paper draws from different discourses in SE and moves as a philosophy-based lens fashioned for interdisciplinary applicability in Social Theory, Political Theory, Cultural Studies, and other related fields. Social Epistemology offers concepts that bring meaningful insights into how conceptual and interpretative resources re-enforce structures of power and how these conceptual structures intersect with material, physical or state-based forms of violence (Fricker, 2009; Galván-Álvarez, 2010; Schützle/Schellhammer et al., 2024; Brunner, 2020; Medina, 2013). I propose to draw from insights and concepts developed in SE to understand the conceptual and political interwovenness and mutual political beneficiality of neoliberalism and fascism.

I move through this endeavour by first connecting Fricker’s work to the discourse on the neoliberal-fascist nexus by proposing hermeneutical connectivity as a Fricker-based notion that is adapted to the context of the neoliberal-fascist nexus. I then relate this notion to my understanding of epistemic violence to engage in the main argument of this paper, mirrored by the paper title: that the hermeneutical common ground between neoliberalism and fascism is precisely epistemic violence. In the third and final section I employ both the notion of hermeneutical connectivity and the notion of epistemic violence to essentialism as a point of neoliberal-fascist convergence. This example will provide a first idea on how my SE-based lens and framework could be employed in the discourse on the neoliberal-fascist nexus. Thus, this paper builds a starting point for connecting SE-based findings and frameworks to discourse on the neoliberal-fascist nexus. I believe this interdisciplinarity to be crucial (a) to account for how neoliberalism and fascism connect to existing systemic inequalities, (b) to explore how they converge precisely in the endeavour to invisibilize and re-define violence, and (c) to substantiate decolonial-feminist perspectives on the neoliberal-fascist nexus – as have been instituted through SE discourse.

Hermeneutical connectivity: towards an interdisciplinary framework

This first section focuses on four interwoven aspects: (1) introducing Frickers' notion of hermeneutical resources, (2) introducing my reading of this notion, (3) developing and introducing my notion of hermeneutical connectivity, and (4) relating this notion of hermeneutical connectivity to the case of the neoliberal-fascist nexus.

The notion of hermeneutical connectivity establishes a framework and point of connection for interdisciplinary accounts of the neoliberal-fascist nexus: It is a vehicle to translate political science and philosophical discourse into one another to analyze neoliberal-fascist convergence.

Feminist philosopher Miranda Fricker defines epistemic injustice as forms of injustice harming someone in their capacity as a knower (Fricker, 2009, 1) and introduces hermeneutical injustice as a sub-category to epistemic injustice. Though I will not centre her notion of hermeneutical injustice here, I will introduce the notion as it is interwoven with her concept of hermeneutical resources as I will employ it moving forth. Her notion of hermeneutical resources arises in the context of characterizing hermeneutical injustice.

According to Fricker, hermeneutical resources are those collectively shared resources one implicitly refers to when forming an understanding of a situation of any kind (Fricker, 2009, 6). Fricker suggests there might be characteristics to these resources for understanding, which are structurally prejudicial in relation to particular social groups, that are systematically disadvantaged (Fricker, 2009, 6). Hermeneutical resources are the collectively shared tools that shape practices of social interpretation and the exclusions and prejudices those practices of social interpretation might contain (Fricker, 2009, 6).

I suggest understanding both neoliberalism and fascism as hermeneutical resources in their own right: Through this reading neoliberalism and fascism become analyzable as tools of forming social understanding. This shifts the focus to the specific forms in which neoliberalism and fascism each fashion social interpretation. More precisely: how each of these political bodies works as its own mechanism of social interpretation and which prejudices and exclusions related to particular social groups are formed through the social interpretations of neoliberalism and of fascism, and how precisely this forming of exclusionary social interpretations functions.

So, my first proposal is just that: understanding both neoliberalism and fascism as distinct hermeneutical resources that each produce particular mechanisms of social interpretation, and with-it specific mechanisms of prejudice and exclusion that are woven into the social interpretation that is produced and reproduced. This proposition fully understands neoliberalism and fascism each as an ideology and political body in their own right.

My second proposal takes up the task of analyzing the relation neoliberal hermeneutical resources and fascist hermeneutical resources share in. To take up this task I suggest my notion of hermeneutical connectivity, deeply inspired by Fricker but fashioned precisely for the analyzation of the neoliberal-fascist nexus. Hermeneutical connectivity describes any dynamic, in which two distinct hermeneutical resources – such as neoliberalism and fascism – are accessible or fruitful for one another or directly overlap in terms of their ways of social interpretation or the exclusions and prejudices formed through these social interpretations. Hermeneutical connectivity therefore specifically centres

connectivity with regards to social interpretation: It asks and detects similarities, overlapping, and convergences in what is de-/normalized, how day-to-day and political situations are narrated, and what common narratives, and explanations – in short moments and mechanisms of social interpretation – they share. This lens thus (a) understands neoliberalism and fascism as resources shaping social interpretation and bringing their own practices and rules of social interpretation and (b) detects convergences in neoliberal and fascist social interpretation.

As Fricker highlights systemically powerful groups have historically and contemporarily shaped the hermeneutical resources in place and thus these resources for social interpretation benefit these structurally powerful groups, while they continue to harm and legitimize harm perpetuated against minoritized groups (Fricker, 2009, 147 f.). So, employing Fricker in relation to the neoliberal-fascist nexus helps to account for the systemic inequalities already in place and for how those very inequalities are deepened, legitimized, and reproduced through neoliberalism, fascism, and the neoliberal-fascist nexus.

Furthermore, drawing from Fricker's work on hermeneutical resources can help to understand the relationship of ideologies and human actors in a nuanced way: The hermeneutical resources in place are systemic, they are a shared equipment for social interpretation. However, these hermeneutical resources and the social interpretations they produce are kept alive and re-enforced through human actors (see Fricker e.g. 149 f.). As Fricker puts it: Everyone is systemically ill-equipped when hermeneutical resources contain structural bias and hermeneutical lacks, but this situation still leaves space for individuals as well as groups to resist and re-shape hermeneutical resources, rather than re-producing them (Fricker, 2009, 169).

Thus, asking for hermeneutical connectivity of neoliberalism and fascism first characterizes them both as hermeneutical resources, and second identifies the specific aspects of each hermeneutical resource that form a point of connectivity for the other. These points of hermeneutical connectivity can take different shapes, such as an exclusion, prejudice, a framework or specific social interpretation that is shared by both hermeneutical resources. Or it could take the shape of hermeneutical resource A forming a point of reference for hermeneutical resource B that helps authorize an aspect crucial within hermeneutical resource B. The framework of hermeneutical connectivity thus caters to the continuous development of any hermeneutical resource by analyzing the social interpretation produced as an ever-moving dynamic with specific points of reference – both within the hermeneutical resource itself and in its relation to other hermeneutical resources.

Through her notion of hermeneutical resources Fricker herself recognized social interpretation as a dynamic logic with political dimension:

Our interpretive efforts are naturally geared to interests [...]. Consequently, a group's unequal hermeneutical participation will tend to show up in a localized manner in hermeneutical hotspots—locations in social life where the powerful [...] have a positive interest in sustaining the extant misinterpretation (such as that repeated sexual propositions in the workplace are never anything more than a form of 'flirting' [...]). But then in such a hotspot as this, the unequal hermeneutical participation remains positively disguised by the existing meaning attributed to the behavior ('flirting'), and so it is all the more difficult to detect. Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, p. 152–153

Fricker's concept of hermeneutical resources is developed to understand systemic oppression on the level of social interpretation within a specific socio-cultural context.

Therefore, my reading of Fricker in the context of the neoliberal-fascist nexus diverges slightly, while keeping the structure of her framework and the aspects it highlights intact: Here Fricker highlights that hermeneutical resources are shaped by interests that a structurally powerful group shares. These interests, Fricker shows, are (a) reflected in and (b) socially and politically established through social interpretation that caters to these interests.

I believe these exact points stand when analyzing ideologies as hermeneutical resources with the slight twist that the interests influencing the social interpretation are not primarily related to a powerful social role but more so to an ideology: neoliberalism has the primary interest to keep itself alive as an ideology and produce realities that correlate as much as possible with neoliberal visions (e.g. Massumi, 2025). This is to say: An ideology is a body of meaning-making that reflects particular political interests and works to fulfil them. However, this work in the favour of particular political interests done by the ideology is also a work, a functioning that has its own dynamics. In this sense ideologies are bodies keeping themselves alive as well as being kept alive by human and institutional actors: it is a complex dance that facilitates this meaning-making towards the fulfilment of particular political interests. Just like the primarily interest of fascism as a hermeneutical resource is the interest of keeping fascism alive and producing realities in alignment with fascist ideology. Frickers mention of hermeneutical hotspots is fruitful for my endeavour of analyzing the relationship of two distinct hermeneutical resources to one another: identifying shared hermeneutical hotspots is exactly what the framework of hermeneutical connectivity does.

I will now apply the framework of hermeneutical connectivity and Frickers vocabulary to the analysis of Henry Maher, who works on the convergence between neoliberalism and fascism from a standpoint rooted in Social and Political Sciences:

I theorize three points of convergence. The first was a belief that socialism had to be opposed by all possible means, including violence and the repression of popular democracy. The second was a racialized understanding of the underpinnings of the market economy, leading to an acceptance of the necessity of racial exclusion. Thirdly, both fascist and neoliberal thinkers believed that patriarchy was a necessary feature for the reproduction of capitalism, and hence that traditional gender roles had to be preserved against pressures for social change.

Henry Maher, *Neoliberal fascism?*, p. 392

These three points of convergence analyzed by Maher can be understood as points of hermeneutical connectivity: neoliberal hermeneutical resources and fascist hermeneutical resources share (a) an understanding of socialism as a threat to be opposed, (b) an interpretation of exclusions related to race as necessary, and (c) an interpretation of traditional gender roles as necessary. With this argument Maher in part touches on convergences of racial capitalism with fascism too (see e.g. Toscano, 2023 for a nuanced account on this intricacy). This paraphrasing of Maher's findings through the terminology of Fricker forms a first basis to relate studies such as Maher's to findings in the SE discourse. I believe forming this interplay of political theory and SE can help understand (a) the specific functionality of points of hermeneutical connectivity like those identified by Maher and (b) the relationship of frameworks and narratives with material and physical consequences and forms of violence within the neoliberal-fascist nexus.

The hermeneutical connectivity consists of epistemic violence: epistemic violence as neoliberal-fascist convergence

This section establishes the core claim of this paper, the argument and the lens provided here: That neoliberal-fascist knots of connectivity are cases of epistemic violence and that this is precisely the reason they come to be instances of hermeneutical connectivity. This lens forms an interdisciplinary account of the neoliberal-fascist nexus and offers findings from the discourse on epistemic violence to understand (a) why the neoliberal-fascist nexus is built from precisely the contents it is and (b) what the political effect and historic and societal context to these contents of neoliberal-fascist convergence is.

First, I establish my own understanding of the notion of epistemic violence that builds on previous work (e.g. Kather, 2023). Second, I employ this understanding of epistemic violence to argue that neoliberal-fascist connectivity arises precisely where there is epistemic violence in a hermeneutical resource.

The understanding of epistemic violence put forth here is a deliberately wide understanding: There is work on epistemic violence that employs the framework to critique the philosophical canon or to offer insights on specific instances of disbelief – such as a victim of sexual assault not being believed (Freitas, 2019; Brison, 2003; Brownmiller, 1993). However, there too is a more wide-ranging usage of the notion – such as originally conceptualized by Gayatri Spivak: In this wide-ranging understanding the notion epistemic violence accounts for how ‘knowledge itself’ – that is what even counts as a body of knowledge – is interwoven with instances of colonial and patriarchal violence (Spivak, 2020).

I do not regard these various usages of the notion as in opposition to one another. Rather, I believe it wise to work with different understandings of the notion of epistemic violence for different purposes. My understanding of the notion is devoted to Spivak’s original use and connects her work with that of the decolonial scholars Sylvia Wynter and Enrique Galván-Álvarez.

The core of my understanding of epistemic violence is this: epistemic violence is the violence that excludes marginalized groups from the notion of ‘the human’. To deepen the understanding of this notion, let me recall Wynter:

[...] we [the blacks] are the bearers of “human otherness” to the West’s conception of “Man.” If we are the bearers of “human otherness,” it means that the world of the human remains subordinated to the world of “Man.” Sylvia Wynter, ProudFlesh interview, 15

Wynter argues that the very understanding of what it is to ‘be human’ centres around distinctly Western ways of life. This centring of the Western in the idea of ‘the human’ has been historically instituted in ways and keeps existing in more subtle ways today than it did historically: So, the shapes of these exclusions from the human are changing in relation to historical periods and circumstances, but the systemic exclusion from ‘the human’ remains the same.

Now, let me account for why I understand this to be the core of epistemic violence by drawing from Galván-Álvarez:

Epistemic violence, that is, violence exerted against or through knowledge, is probably one of the key elements in any process of domination. It is not only through the construction of exploitative economic links or the control of the politico-military apparatuses that

domination is accomplished, but also [...] through the construction of epistemic frameworks that legitimize and enshrine those practices of domination. Enrique Galván-Álvarez, *Epistemic Violence and Retaliation*, p. 12

Here Galván-Álvarez contextualizes and further develops how I understand and employ the term ‘epistemic violence’ in this paper: political domination is established through different forms of violence and various ways of domination. One of these forms of domination moves on the level of the epistemic by domination frameworks, narrative, terminologies, and other epistemic resources. As Galván-Álvarez points out, these practices of epistemic domination are of particular merit because they legitimize and embed all other forms of domination and violence.

This argument employed by Galván-Álvarez can be further developed by connecting it to the work of Wynter: While Wynter does not herself make use of the term ‘epistemic violence’ she establishes that conceptual constructions of what counts and does not count as ‘thinking’ determine who is understood as ‘human’ and this – implicit or explicit – construction as human or non-human determines the levels of systemic harm committed against a specific group of people (Wynter, 1994, 2003).

I understand epistemic violence as this structural bias built into the notion of ‘the human’. This understanding aligns with the argument of Galván-Álvarez: conceptually rendering certain groups of people less-human or non-human legitimizes and naturalizes their exclusion.

I propose to explore existing findings on the contents of the neoliberal-fascist nexus through this understanding of epistemic violence. Let me recall Maher’s findings to begin enfolded this proposition: Neoliberalism and fascism share – according to Maher – (a) an understanding of socialism as a threat to be opposed, (b) an interpretation of exclusions related to race as necessary, and (c) an interpretation of traditional gender roles as necessary.

- So, all three claims are instances of hermeneutical connectivity between neoliberalism and fascism. And I now propose that they are instances of neoliberal-fascist hermeneutical connectivity because they are instances of epistemic violence: Understanding socialism as threat has epistemic implications: socialism is – like any ideology or political movement – a distinct body of knowledge. Conceptualizing socialist bodies of knowledge as well as knowledge drawing from socialism as a threat is thus (in part) a struggle against a system of knowledge. This is epistemic violence in the sense of a focused political violence directed at a body of knowledge.
- The normalization of exclusions based on race can be directly linked to Wynter: Race is emphasized as a decisive factor over a person’s ‘humanness’ and the normalization of race-based exclusions (a) hermeneutically connects to historical race-based exclusions from ‘the human’ and (b) re-institutes these exact exclusions from ‘the human’.
- Painting traditional gender roles as necessary fits Galván-Álvarez’ definition of epistemic violence exactly: Traditional gender roles bring with them forms of violence and vulnerabilities to violence such as financial dependency or domestic abuse (Federici, 2021; Conner, 2013; Basu and Famoye, 2004). These forms of violence are normalized and de-politicized by the conceptualization of traditional gender roles as necessary.

So, what can be seen even in these brief conceptualization is that all of Maher's findings on these three points of convergence between neoliberalism and fascism are instances of epistemic violence. I propose to understand this not as an accidental circumstance or a mere side-effect but rather as (a) the primary reason these three aspects become knots of neoliberal-fascist connectivity and as (b) the core political effect – the reason these ideological aspects are even politically beneficial for neoliberalism and fascism.

Epistemic violence invisibilizes various forms of political violence by – implicitly and explicitly – normalizing exclusions based on race and gender. Recalling the role epistemic violence plays for the systemic character of sexual violence helps to grasp the connection epistemic bears to other forms of political violence: Sexual violence exists as a systemic issue, a form of violence women are systemically at risk for precisely because of their gender (Lloyd-Roberts, 2016; Brownmiller, 1993). This gender-based risk to suffer sexual violence enhances disproportionately in relation to factors such as race or neurotype (West, 2014; Cazalis et al. 2022). So, groups most excluded from the historical meaning of 'the human' – most excluded from participating in the formation of hermeneutical resources – are those most effected by sexual violence. So, sexual violence is a form of political violence because it targets groups already socially marginalized to deepen their marginalization – it is a violence that increases political exclusion, even without distinct perpetrators consciously having this intention (Lloyd-Roberts, 2016; Brownmiller, 1993).

Epistemic violence brings about and stabilizes this status quo in two senses: (1) Epistemic violence in its most fundamental and systemic sense forms the exclusions from 'the human' that bring about heightened vulnerabilities to sexual violence in the first place. (2) Epistemic violence is a form of secondary violence that many survivors of sexual violence face and that takes the form of not being believed in their accounts of the violence faced (Lloyd-Roberts, 2016; Brownmiller, 1993). Thus, epistemic violence brings about and stabilizes sexual violence as a systemic violence that deepens existing power relations. And this effect of epistemic violence – as the ground and an active stabilizer and supporter of political violence – is precisely the reason instances of epistemic violence are crucial for both neoliberalism and fascism and thus become knots of hermeneutical connectivity.

Let me draw on essentialism of gender and race as an epistemically violent knot of hermeneutical connectivity between neoliberalism and fascism to further establish this lens.

Essentialism as hermeneutical connectivity: a case of neoliberal-fascist epistemic violence

In this section I explore essentialization of gender and race as one case of hermeneutical connectivity between neoliberal hermeneutical resources and fascist hermeneutical resources. I will further draw from Mahers findings and from SE discourses to (a) apply the notion of hermeneutical connectivity and (b) contextualize Maher's findings as forms of epistemic violence to further deepen the understanding of the contexts, and consequences to the hotspots of hermeneutical connectivity, that Maher identifies. My central claim here is that the essentialism of gender and the essentialism of race should be understood as forms of epistemic violence and that this understanding is fruitful for analyzing and understanding the neoliberal-fascist nexus.

I will begin by considering Maher's findings on the essentialism of gender through an SE – inspired lens:

Mises' biological conception of gender led him to the conclusion that women by their very nature were incapable of being full participants in the market society [...] (Mises 1962 [1922], 101). [...]

[...]

Here Mises again invokes an essentialised and biological understanding of gender, and a social order in which women are denied advancement not by unjust laws or social norms, but by their own nature.

Henry Maher, *Neoliberal fascism?*, p. 403

The resonance with a fascist view of gender and reproduction [...] should by now be abundantly clear. Henry Maher, *Neoliberal fascism?*, p. 404

Here Maher quotes and analyzes the words of Ludwig von Mises, a leading neoliberal figure, to showcase neoliberal gender conceptions in their conceptual alignment with fascist gender conceptions. Mises here relies on essentialism to explain exclusions women face within the market society. I propose to understand this endeavour of essentialism as a form of epistemic violence: epistemic violence meaning an interpretive endeavour that systematically invisibilizes, normalizes, legitimizes, and re-enforces an event of discriminatory exclusion (Galván-Álvarez, 2010, 12). This epistemic violence is precisely what makes essentialism into a hotspot of hermeneutical connectivity: The exclusion of women is made understandable through essentialism as a hermeneutical endeavour, that effectively invisibilizes that exclusions of women from the market society arise due to structural discrimination by attributing these exclusions to 'the nature of women'. This essentialism invisibilizes the forms of gender-based discrimination and violence leading to said exclusions and re-enforces this situation of exclusion by defining it as natural and therefore necessary as well as desirable.

Fricker and with her many scholars in the field of SE have analyzed how the attribution of intellectual and economic incapability to women is itself a form of violence because it actively harms women in their capacity as knowers (Medina, 2013; Schützle/Schellhammer et al., 2024; Sontag, 2023), and is highly related to other forms of gender-based discrimination and violence (Sontag, 2023; Freitas, 2019; Brison, 2003): constructing gender through attributing rationality to men and irrationality and emotionality to women is a core construct of patriarchal societal orders for it creates the basis to perceive of women as less worthy of participation, and respect (Sontag, 2023; Harding, 1982; Fricker, 2009). This hermeneutical basis of interpreting gender-based exclusions as signs of a biological nature of gender is both patriarchal and a key ingredient of anti-feminist ideology or ideologies prone to anti-feminism: adapting a essentialism-based notion of gender inequalities is to open up to open up to a framework that believes in the necessity of opposing feminism or contemporary forms of feminism – because within this logic there is no rightful place for feminism because gender-based inequalities are re-interpreted as signs of 'the nature of gender' so through this logic there is no discrimination or violence to be rightfully fought by feminist movements. This is to say: the invisibilization and naturalization of gender-based inequality and

violence is both itself a form of violence and gives way to more radical ideologies and movements, such as anti-feminism.

So, what forms the hermeneutical connectivity of neoliberalism and fascism here is precisely the epistemic violence of invisibilizing, normalizing, and reproducing gender-based discrimination and violence.

Similarly to this consideration of the essentialism of gender, I will now consider Maher's findings on the essentialism of race as a hotspot of hermeneutical connectivity between neoliberalism and fascism:

In a similarly critical account of neoliberal 'racial blindness', Roberts and Mahtani (2010) suggest that neoliberalism ignores the category of race as a means of overlooking the historical and contemporary racial injustices created by capitalism. Henry Maher, *Neoliberal fascism?*, p. 400

And:

In contrast to Mises and Röpke, later neoliberal accounts would [...] instead [construct] western civilisation as a cultural grouping in line with broader trends in the European New Right. [...] In *The Genius of the West*, Rougier argued that western civilisation 'is a notion which is [...] essentially cultural' (1969, p. 9; my translation), and that what marked out western civilisation as superior to its rivals was a mentality based on reason, progress and freedom.

[...]

A racialized understanding of the world [...] is therefore the second point of convergence for neoliberal and fascist political rationalities. Henry Maher, *Neoliberal fascism?*, p. 401–402

Maher here analyzes different neoliberal conceptions of race. The first account he analyzes is a 'racially blind' neoliberalism, which is a neoliberal ideology that self-describes as 'racially blind' and refuses to understand race as a meaningful social role or political category. The second account Maher analyzes builds on an essentialist account of culture, that attributes 'reason, progress and freedom' to western culture specifically – thus forming a similar hermeneutical landscape as just witnessed with relation to gender: reason is conceptualized as a valuable attribute and attributing it to specific social groups, while systematically keeping it from others is a form of de-valuation of social groups through structural prejudice and exclusion (Fricker, 2009; Medina, 2013; Schützle/Schellhammer et al., 2024). This hermeneutical method has been recognized as a form of epistemic violence in decolonial and feminist SE and has been shown to bear long historical dimension – both in relation to gender as well as in relation to race (Césaire, 2000; Mbembe, 2017; Fanon, 2021 and Ruíz, 2020; Harding, 1982; Brison, 2003; Fricker, 2009). The alleged racial blindness invisibilizes racist forms of discrimination as such and can easily tie in with this cultural-essentialist account: inequalities related to race are interpreted as stemming from necessary cultural difference or are negated to be related to race. Both accounts share their dimension of epistemic violence because both accounts legitimize racial inequalities and invisibilize their relationship with racist discrimination and violence.

So, once more the convergence between neoliberalism and fascism arises where there is epistemic violence: the hotspot of hermeneutical connectivity is that of naturalizing, legitimizing, and producing racist inequality, discrimination, and violence.

Reading Maher's findings through Fricker's notion of hermeneutical resources and my notion of hermeneutical connectivity allows us to understand these points of convergence as means of social interpretation that cater to neoliberal, fascist, and neoliberal-fascist interests. This view allows to (a) make sense of neoliberalism and fascism as engaging in partially shared endeavours of meaning-making, (b) to trace how these hermeneutical convergences are manufactured, and (c) to form a deeper understanding of how these convergences in hermeneutical resources form more material, physical, and political manifestations and consequences. The last section of this paper will focus primarily on aspect (d) by deepening the notion of epistemic violence in relation to the neoliberal-fascist nexus.

Re-conceptualizing violence: essentialism and modes of violence

This final section develops a reading of the term epistemic violence that is (a) heavily influenced by Fricker's notion of hermeneutical resources, (b) inspired by Wynter's work on exclusive notions of being-human, and (c) fitted to the question of the neoliberal-fascist nexus. While Fricker herself relies on the term epistemic injustice rather than epistemic violence, I relate her framework of hermeneutical resources to the term epistemic violence to (a) relate Fricker's work more explicitly to decolonial discourses on epistemic violence, and to (b) relate matters of hermeneutical resources and hermeneutical connectivity to different forms of violence such as epistemic, physical, and political violence.

This is precisely what I have argued regarding Maher's findings on the essentialism of gender and race in both neoliberalism and fascism: gender-based and racist practices are invisibilized in their quality as discrimination and violence through the legitimization and air of necessity established through the concept of essentialism. Galván-Álvarez' definition of epistemic violence strengthens my claim to regard essentialism as Maher analyzes it as epistemic violence because these essentialism legitimate and embed gender-based and racist exclusion and violence.

My identification of essentialism drawing from SE is threefold: (1) I identify essentialism as a hotspot of hermeneutical connectivity between neoliberalism and fascism: essentialism is one of the overlapping frameworks between the two ideologies. (2) I identify essentialism as a form of epistemic violence according to Galván-Álvarez. (3) I claim that (1) and (2) are no accidental occurrences but rather inseparably linked: I argue that essentialism functions as a hotspot of neoliberal-fascist hermeneutical connectivity precisely because essentialism unfolds as epistemic violence. Both (1) and (2) have been primarily argued in the sections above while claim (3) will form the focus in the final endeavours of this paper.

I propose to draw from the work of decolonial theorist and writer Denise Ferreira da Silva on essentialism in terms of race in order to further deepen the understanding of essentialism as epistemic violence as it relates to other forms of violence:

Both the scientific and ethical figurings of determinacy would enter into nineteenth-century scientific accounts of human difference, which produced the notions of racial and cultural difference. Both notions are manufactured in knowledge procedures that produce physical and social configurations as effects and causes of (explanations for) mental (moral and intellectual) differences. Further, these procedures deploy the European/white mind as the universal gauge. Denise Ferreira da Silva, (life) \div 0 (blackness) = ∞ - ∞ or ∞ / ∞ , 10

Da Silva drives home two points crucial to the epistemic violence enfolded through essentialism and essentialism related to race: (1) Essentialism and essentialism conceptualize differences as effects and causes and therefore as necessary occurrences – not only invisibilizing the societal structures that might have caused said differences but rendering them an unalterable reality. (2) This essentialist notion of difference forms a standpoint that is conceptualized as the universal, the neutral standpoint from which differences are understood as differences: this universal gauge is woven through with specifically European/white notions and interests that are invisibilizes in this situatedness. These two aspects further strengthen my proposition to regard essentialism as epistemic violence.

These considerations of da Silva help to note the Eurocentrism built into the convergence of neoliberalism and fascism as discussed here: It is a racialized and Westernized form of conceiving and knowing that forms the foundation for the power relations and frameworks the neoliberal-fascist nexus builds on and relies on. The universalization of Eurocentric and Western narratives and conceptions is – as da Silva so clearly shows – the very basis for essentializing, biologizing, and thus naturalizing racial differences.

I argue that it is precisely these two qualities of essentialism established by da Silva that are the reason essentialism functions as a point of hermeneutical connectivity between neoliberalism and fascism: These two aspects are what give essentialism the quality of epistemic violence. My overarching argument here is this: The epistemic violence enfolded through essentialism is what makes essentialism into a neoliberal-fascist hermeneutical connectivity. The quality of legitimizing, invisibilizing, and embedding exclusion based on gender and race (epistemic violence) is the exact reason that essentialism functions as a conceptual overlap between neoliberalism and fascism, because the effects of epistemic violence are what makes essentialism desirable and politically fruitful for both neoliberalism and fascism: it is the epistemic violence of essentialism that grounds the exclusionary status quo regarding race and gender and that forms a conceptual basis for justifications of anti-feminism and oppositional movements to anti-racist and decolonial struggles.

Conclusion: the common ground is epistemic violence

This paper moved with two goals in mind: (a) to argue for connecting SE-based frameworks to the discourse on the neoliberal-fascist nexus and (b) to argue that neoliberal-fascist hermeneutical connectivity arises precisely at instances of epistemic violence.

The core findings of aim (a) can be summarized as follows:

- Considering political ideologies such as neoliberalism and fascism as hermeneutical resources allows us to focus on political bodies as resources of social interpretation that cater to political interests. This lens opens up ways to relate studies of ideologies to SE studies and to focus on how political ideologies bring their ideologies into existence – conceptually and materially.
- The framework of hermeneutical connectivity makes Frickers notion of hermeneutical resources applicable to the neoliberal-fascist nexus and forms a lens that focuses on how the frameworks and narratives of neoliberalism and fascism relate to one another with regards to how they shape social interpretation.
- The frameworks of epistemic violence and hermeneutical connectivity can be related to one another to analyze the case of the neoliberal-fascist nexus: epistemic violence

explains why and how frameworks such as essentialism function as points of neoliberal-fascist hermeneutical connectivity.

I believe both SE and studies on the neoliberal-fascist nexus benefit from further developing the overlaps and points of mutual fruitfulness between these discourses. Specifically, the SE findings on the relationship of epistemic violence and other forms of violence should be applied to the case of the neoliberal-fascist nexus and to events such as the January 6 riot.

The core findings regarding aim (b) can be summarized as follows:

- Epistemic violence re-produces explicit and implicit exclusions from the notion of ‘the human’ and invisibilizes violence by means of conceptualizing certain groups of people as less-human. This is crucial to both neoliberalism and fascism: because it is precisely epistemic violence that builds the conceptual grounds – the societal normalization – of those forms of violence that will cater to the political interests of both ideologies.

Epistemic violence is inextricably interwoven with other forms of violence that arise out of and keep hegemonic power relations intact – such as sexual violence. Epistemic violence (a) normalizes gender-based and race-based violence and (b) hinders the expression of victimized groups and persons to speak of their experience and be believed. It is this effect that makes epistemic violence politically crucial to neoliberalism and fascism. Thus, making them converge in this exact hermeneutical locations that are epistemically violent to (a) benefit from the epistemic violence already present and (b) to further establish this exact epistemic violence through neoliberal-fascist convergence. Neoliberal-fascist convergence is therefore and endeavour in furthering existing epistemic violence towards the goal of normalizing systemic violence that caters to the political interest of both ideologies.

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