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Collective Amnesia as an Epistemic Injustice

Flavie Chevalier

McGill University, Montreal, Canada
Email: flavie.chevalier@mail.mcgill.ca

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Abstract

By considering real-life cases of epistemic reparations (Lackey 2022), such as the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions in Canada, I identify and characterize a form of epistemic injustice that I call "collective amnesia." I distinguish this phenomenon from other recognized forms of epistemic injustice and argue that collective amnesia specifically leads to primary and secondary epistemic harms in the form of distorted representations of a community's past, preventing an even broader epistemic community from gaining adequate knowledge of its past and present identities. More precisely, I argue that collective amnesia arises as *an interplay of negative hermeneutical injustices*, whereby conceptual tools are lacking (Fricker, 2007), *and "positive" hermeneutical injustices*, whereby the positive presence of distorting and oppressive concepts defeats or prevents the application of more adequate concepts or narratives (Falbo, 2022). In addition, I address and respond to four objections. The first two objections allow me to identify two necessary conditions under which instances of *collective forgetting* are morally relevant and thus may count as instances of *collective amnesia as an epistemic injustice*: they must be partly agential, whether on the part of individuals or structures, and due to hermeneutical marginalization. The last two objections enable me to precisely define the scope of this epistemic injustice.

Keywords: Epistemic injustice; collective memory; collective amnesia; collective forgetting; epistemic reparations; history; hermeneutical injustices

1. Introduction[1]

Consider "epistemic reparations," such as Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs), which, among other things, are intended to uncover the truth that had been concealed or distorted about a group's past (Lackey, 2022). The mere existence of such epistemic *reparations* seems to presuppose that there has been an epistemic *injustice* in the form of "collective amnesia," understood broadly as referring to "forgotten" true

[1]I would like to thank Catherine Rioux (ULaval), Anna Brinkerhoff (Concordia University), Natalie Stoljar (McGill University), and an anonymous reviewer from *Episteme* for their invaluable insights on different versions of the present paper.

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narratives about a group's past.[2] These narratives are "forgotten" insofar as they are obscured by the mainstream narrative or collective memory that circulates in official history and pop culture. Therefore, in addition to raising concerns about respect owed to forgotten people (an issue I leave aside), collective amnesia might lead to epistemic harm. It is noteworthy that the concept of "epistemic injustice" has attracted increasing attention since it was first coined by Miranda Fricker in 2007. At that time, TRCs were burgeoning around the world. The first one had taken place in South Africa over a decade prior, and the Canadian one was about to start in 2008, for instance.

This essay addresses two questions. Despite the strong intuitions raised by the abovementioned and other examples, the relation between collective amnesia and epistemic injustices remains undertheorized.[3] Why? Moreover, if collective amnesia is indeed an epistemic injustice, what sort is it? "Epistemic injustice" is a broad category encompassing different types of epistemic wrongs, each calling for distinct normative solutions. Therefore, providing a precise account of the epistemic wrongs wrought by collective amnesia is crucial, for without it, the prospect of achieving epistemic justice seems dim.

In this essay, I outline answers to both questions. My argument will unfold in five steps.

First, I draw on Jennifer Lackey's work (2022) to develop the intuition that "epistemic reparations" presuppose an epistemic wrong in the form of collective amnesia. This paves the way for outlining the goal of this paper, which is to gain a better understanding of the precise epistemic wrong that existing epistemic reparations, such as TRCs, aim to address, and to argue that this constitutes a novel epistemic injustice.

Second, I provide definitions of the concepts of "collective memory" and "collective amnesia" that are central to my argument. Stated briefly, I consider collective amnesia as the "forgotten" true narratives about a group's past, that is, narratives obscured by the emphasis placed on collective memory, *i.e.*, the dominant mainstream narrative circulating in official history and pop culture. This definition aligns with the standard line of thought in sociology and, more precisely, in "Memory Studies" (but not necessarily with discussions in philosophy of the mind). I also provide an example of collective amnesia, that of *Project 1619*, by New York Times writer and Pulitzer Prize winner Nikole Hannah-Jones.

Third, I consider whether the epistemic wrong of collective amnesia can be accounted for by Miranda Fricker's account of epistemic injustices. I argue that they do not fit into

[2]It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a comprehensive account of the metaphysics of social groups. For the sake of this discussion, I take groups to be constituted around particular sociocultural positions.

[3]To my knowledge, this observation has three notable exceptions (Pantazatos, 2017; Trakas, 2020; Tanesini, 2018), but they all have problems. Stated briefly, Pantazatos speaks in terms of "heritage," which is only implicitly related to collective amnesia and memory; Trakas relies too much on a weak analogy between individual and collective memory (see section 1 of the present paper for more explanations on that point); and Tanesini's definition of collective amnesia departs from the standard socio-constructivist definition of collective amnesia broadly accepted in the field of "Memory Studies" (Tota and Hagen, 2015), which I use in this paper, and instead describes collective amnesia as "strong ignorance" and focuses on how individual remembering and its cognitive flaws influence the process of collective remembrance. Hence, I do not depart from or discuss these papers in the present essay. It is also worth noting that some authors have shown how "genocide denial" (Altanian 2021b, Altanian 2021a), a "lack of multicultural literacy" (Catala, 2019), and "settler-colonial ignorance" (Cook, 2018) can all count as epistemic injustices. While I concede that these concepts can intersect with that of collective amnesia, they nonetheless all exceed the latter's scope: genocide denial, lack of cultural literacy, and colonial ignorance are not confined to the representation of a group's past, which is at stake in the case of collective amnesia. For this reason, I leave those propositions aside for the present paper but encourage the reader to look into them.

I will address Charles W. Mills' concept of "racial erasure" at the end of the present essay.

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either the testimonial (3.1) or hermeneutical (3.2) categories of injustice, at least in Fricker's sense of the terms.

Fourth, and upon further examination of the distinctive wrong associated with collective amnesia, I argue that its primary epistemic wrong consists of *fostering distorted representations* of a group's past through collective memory. In turn, this leads to the secondary epistemic harm of *hindering* an even broader epistemic community's ability to ask and answer meaningful questions about the past, thereby preventing its members from gaining adequate knowledge about their past and current identities. I also respond to four potential objections to this thesis: that collective amnesia is not an *injustice* but rather the unavoidable consequence of collective memory's finitude (4.3.1) or of "epistemic bad luck" (Fricker, 2007) (4.3.2); that collective amnesia cannot wrong epistemic communities but only individuals (4.3.3); and that the scope of this epistemic injustice is too broad and overly inclusive (4.3.4). Responding to the first two of these objections allows me to distinguish collective forgetting from collective amnesia, and argue that only the latter may count as an epistemic injustice. To make this distinction, I identify the two necessary conditions under which instances of collective forgetting are *morally relevant* and therefore may count as instances of collective amnesia. These conditions are that they must be partly agential, whether on the part of individuals or structures, and due to hermeneutical marginalization. Addressing the last two objections enables me to precisely define the scope of this novel epistemic injustice.

Fifth, I turn to Arianna Falbo's twofold account of hermeneutical injustices – positive and negative – to answer both questions. More precisely, I make the case that collective amnesia arises as *an interplay of negative and positive hermeneutical injustices that targets the collective past*. "Negative" hermeneutical injustice occurs when hermeneutical resources are lacking. However, in the case of collective amnesia, one should note that this "lack" does not result from preserving an *existing* lacuna. Instead, this gap is created in the pool of hermeneutical resources due to the active *hiding* of the evidence available to some people because of hermeneutical marginalization. This is where the interplay with "positive" hermeneutical injustices is important. "Positive" hermeneutical injustice, first described by Falbo, occurs when an overabundance of conceptual resources *prevents or defeats* the application of more adequate and *already-existing* concepts (Falbo, 2022, 354). In addition, I argue that the connection between epistemic injustices and collective amnesia might have been overlooked because social epistemology has mostly followed Fricker in envisioning hermeneutical injustices from a "lacuna-centered perspective." The latter, however, is incomplete (Falbo, 2022, 344).

2. Epistemic reparations

In "Epistemic Reparations and the Right to Be Known" (2022), Jennifer Lackey develops an account of reparations that are distinctively "epistemic" in kind.[4] Lackey defines epistemic reparations as "intentionally reparative actions in the form of epistemic goods given to those epistemically wronged by parties who acknowledge these wrongs and whose reparative actions are intended to redress them" (Lackey, 2025, 394). She illustrates the concept by building on the framework provided by the United Nations' "right to know," *i.e.,* the *collective* right to know about the circumstances surrounding the perpetration of heinous crimes (2022, 59).

Lackey argues that this epistemic "right to know" seems to hint at another epistemic right that she articulates for the first time: the "right to *be known*." The right to be known belongs to the victims of gross violations and injustices. Such people suffer a distinctive

[4]For a map of precursors and neighboring concepts, see Lackey (2025).

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epistemic wrong when they are invisibilized, vilified, demonized, or when they are systematically represented in a *distorted* manner, among other things (Lackey, 2022, 56). Lackey claims that violations of a "right to be known" call for distinctive epistemic reparations, rather than only "traditional reparations that are epistemic in nature, such as memorialization and education" (2022, 56). These distinctive epistemic reparations, Lackey claims, involve epistemic labour, primarily in the form of listening and bearing witness to the victims' stories.

As an example, Lackey recalls Lewis "Jim" Fogle, who was convicted and imprisoned for thirty-four years for the 1976 murder and rape of a fifteen-year-old girl in Pennsylvania, Deann Katherine Long. In 2014, DNA testing done by the Pennsylvania Innocence Project proved his innocence. Fogle was released from prison and exonerated in 2015, but still expressed the wish, afterwards, that people "know the truth about his case" (Lackey, 2022, 55). Lackey highlights that Fogle's wish expresses *something* that is importantly and distinctively epistemic. Fogle's case also illustrates that, while being known may serve instrumental purposes, such as requesting liberation and exoneration or preventing the repetition of such violations, there is also a sense in which being listened to is an *end in itself* for victims (2022, 55).

In the context of the present paper, Lackey's argument about the "right to be known" is interesting in three additional respects. First, it highlights that the *distortion of the truth* can count as an epistemic wrong towards individuals. In other words, it stresses that being truthful about the past amounts to being *just*, both in the sense of conforming to epistemological standards of correctness and of being morally righteous. Fogle's story about how he was unduly convicted and thus represented as a murderer, which he never was, illustrates this aspect.

Second, it shows how such distortions of the truth can count as epistemic wrongs *towards communities*. Indeed, Lackey makes the case that epistemic wrongs can be intergenerational and thus collective. She says, "[j]ust as descendants may inherit wealth or property, they may also inherit an erased, vilified, or distorted history" (2022, 68). As an example, she points out that descendants of Black Americans inherited not only material consequences from slavery and Jim Crow laws but also epistemic consequences in the form of a history "replete with *erasure, vilification, and distortion*, one where Black Americans are either absent from the narrative, criminalized and presented as dangerous and violent, or misrepresented as sexually lascivious, angry, and so on" (2022, 68, emphasis added). This second point about distortions in history (rather than in an individual's personal history) allows me to highlight an important distinction. The relevant use of the word "distortion" in the context of this paper is that *of the truth*. It is to be distinguished from distortions *of a preferred narrative*, for instance, one that inspires positive affects or feelings (pride, for example), as it is the case with negationist or revisionist views.[5]

Third, Lackey's argument provides further justification, in the face of a popular objection, that we do have epistemic duties, including the duty to provide various *epistemic reparations*, in the form of actions, rather than doxastic changes only. Indeed,

[5]This distinction parallels another one, between two kinds of "memory activism," *i.e.,* efforts to change the collective memory in response to each aforementioned kind of distortion. The first type of memory activism is characterized by an effort to *simplify* the narrative and is driven by nostalgia "less for the past, but for past narratives of the past" (Faber, 2023, 32). By contrast, the second type of memory activism is characterized by an effort to *complicate* hegemonic narratives by giving voice to subaltern groups (Faber, 2023, 32). I believe this latter approach better captures the meaning of "truth" used in the context of collective memory, as the complexity of history arises from the multitude of voices involved in its creation. Lackey's example about African Americans illustrates the latter type of memory activism, aiming to correct the truth's distortions (rather than distortions of a "preferred narrative").

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Lackey challenges the "standard view" of epistemic duties, which typically relies on the "doxastic thesis," *i.e.,* the view that epistemic duties involve only doxastic changes, that is, changes in *beliefs* (2022, 75). For instance, the standard view of epistemic reparations would claim that we have an epistemic duty to revise the belief that Fogle was a criminal. In turn, an objection to the standard view claims that we do not have voluntary control over our beliefs, and since "*ought* implies *can*," we cannot have epistemic (doxastic) duties. Lackey persuasively responds to this objection in a way that highlights the standard view's limitations. She does so by challenging the underlying assumption that the epistemic realm and the realm of action are distinct. On the contrary, she shows that epistemic requirements, even the most ordinary, often demand doxastic changes along with *epistemic labor*, *i.e.*, when epistemic *actions* are to be taken (such as investigating, asking further questions, listening, etc.)

Here are two examples of such *active epistemic duties* relevant to my argument regarding collective amnesia. First, knowing the victims of injustices (in order to respect their "right to be known") requires, among other things, "seeking out their stories, bearing witness to them, inquiring, listening, committing what they say to memory, and so on. It also demands that we go beyond the evidence currently in our possession to acquire evidence that we *should have*" (2022, 78, author's emphasis). Secondly, respecting the "collective right to know" outlined by the UN framework Lackey builds upon, calls for the "duty to preserve memory," on the part of governments. This duty includes the duty to ensure an "independent and effective operation of the judiciary along with access to the archives regarding human rights violations," "the duty to preserve archives and other evidence concerning violations of human rights and humanitarian law" and the duty to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge about such violations, "including *protecting the collective memory* from extinction and *guarding against the development of revisionist and negationist views*" (2022, 60, emphasis added).

Noteworthily, the duty to preserve memory (or one could say, "collective" memory) is equivalent to the "duty to *guard against collective amnesia*." As such, this duty implies that the latter constitutes *a specific epistemic wrong*.

However, as I pointed out in the introduction, the relation between collective amnesia and epistemic injustice remains undertheorized. More precisely, even if we accept that there are collective epistemic duties, including but not limited to providing epistemic reparations, the question of whether *collective amnesia* is one of the many epistemic injustices in need of epistemic repair is a separate question. This latter question also begs another one: if collective amnesia is an epistemic injustice, of what kind is it? Because "epistemic injustices" is a broad category encompassing different types of epistemic wrongs, each calling for distinct normative solutions, answering those questions is crucial for achieving epistemic justice.

My goal in the next section is to provide a characterization of collective amnesia's epistemic wrongs and cast it as a *specific* epistemic injustice, precisely the one that is aimed to be redressed by epistemic reparations such as TRCs (which embody the active processes of fulfilling our epistemic "duty to preserve memory"). Before doing so, I shall outline more precisely the elements of the concepts of "collective memory" and "collective amnesia" that are central to my argument.

3. What is collective amnesia?

"Collective memory" is an expression that was coined in the middle of the last century by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, influenced by philosopher Henri Bergson and sociologist Émile Durkeim (Lavabre, 1998). According to Halbwachs, collective memory is the "totality of traditions preserved and transmitted through the exercise of various

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social functions" (Nikulin, 2017, 529). The term has subsequently been widely taken up, and its definition has been reworked many times due to a growing interest in the notion. It has given rise to a singular field of research: "Memory Studies" (Tota & Hagen, 2015).

Collective memory and collective amnesia are also at the center of a heated debate in the philosophy of the mind, where they are treated as "group mental states." In this context, these concepts give rise to the following question: under what conditions is the analogy between individual and collective memory fitting (Michaelian & Sutton, 2017)? Proponents of the view that there are group mental states such as collective memory or amnesia explain these concepts either from a summativist perspective (ascribing propositional attitudes to groups by assigning them to most or all their members; Quinton, 1975, 17) or a non-summativist perspective (which ascribes collective properties to groups while not seeing them as the sum of the properties displayed by their members). Other philosophers are skeptics about the plausibility of such group mental states and argue that the analogy between individual and group memory is misleading and should be abandoned (Michaelian & Perrin, 2023).

For the present argument, I suspend judgment on this debate over the metaphysics of collective memory and amnesia in the philosophy of the mind. While these questions are relevant, they seem to alter the meaning of the expressions "collective memory" and "collective amnesia," as they are understood in everyday contexts as well as in the field of memory studies. The latter, in line with Halbwachs' seminal definition of the phenomenon, usually takes a *social constructivist perspective* regarding collective memory and amnesia, focusing on the *results* of collective efforts to establish and preserve collective memory, embodied in scaffolds such as history books, but also in movies, series, songs, toponymy, etc. Likewise, in everyday contexts, when we speak of "collective memory," what is brought to mind is often *the mainstream narrative over a group's past that circulates in official history as well as in pop culture*. Conversely, "collective amnesia" indicates *forgotten true narratives about a group's past, obscured from the public eye due to the existence of the dominant mainstream narrative*. Notice that these definitions do not require answering metaphysical questions about group mental states. Therefore, I use "collective memory" and "collective amnesia" as rough analogues of the corresponding individual mental states and leave aside the question of the precise metaphysical conditions that would justify this analogy. However, I will latter go on to argue that we should restrict the concept of collective amesia to morally relevant instances of collective forgetting.

It is worth observing that these definitions of collective memory and amnesia go hand in hand since the mainstream narrative, or collective memory, plays a role in the collective obscuring other events, which amounts to collective amnesia. It is also significant that, according to memory studies, any act of commemoration necessarily *entails an act of forgetting* (Forest & Johnson, 2019, 129). But, one could ask, why are some narratives collectively remembered and others forgotten? While an element of contingency is involved in many cases, I will argue that, at least sometimes, when two necessary conditions are met, the processes of collective remembering and forgetting lead to an *epistemic injustice*. I now turn to an example that illustrates this claim.

4. Is collective amnesia an epistemic injustice?

The 1619 Project was published in 2019 by African American activist, journalist for *The New York Times*, and Pulitzer Prize winner Nikole Hannah-Jones. It immediately sparked a *Historikerstreit* of sorts,[6] as it undertakes the reframing of American national history,

[6]The "historians' dispute" (ca. 1986-1989) is a debate about the significance of Nazi crimes for national and world history, which occurred in Germany, between Habermas and Nolte, among others.

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intending to do justice to African Americans' contribution. Specifically, it seeks to uncover the significance of the year 1619, when the *White Lion* landed on the shores of present-day Virginia, carrying the first Africans to be enslaved in British America, a year prior to the arrival of the *Mayflower* (Hannah-Jones, 2019, 18). According to Hannah-Jones, the year 1619, understood as a symbol of violence, should become the United States' founding date, given the importance of the practice of slavery for the emergence of that country (Deyle, 2005), rather than the 4th of July 1776, which is understood as a symbol of freedom. Hannah-Jones's work was then accused of sketching out an ideological version of national history, rather than a truthful one (Silverstein, 2019). Interestingly, this accusation is similar to the insight that gave her the impetus to begin writing. In the preface to her book, she tells of her youthful passion for history. She recalls first stumbling upon the year 1619, glaringly missing from most textbooks, realizing that it had been voluntarily concealed: "People had *made the choice* not to teach us the significance of this year. [. . .] What else hadn't we been taught? I was starting to figure out that the histories we learn in school or, more casually, through popular culture, monuments, and political speeches rarely teach us *the* facts but only *certain* facts" (Hannah-Jones, 2019, 19, emphasis added). Accordingly, *The 1619 Project* was meant to reassess the significance of certain historical facts, long excluded from history books, to produce a more complete and objective body of knowledge, hoping to reshape the United States' collective identity (2019, 24). *The 1619 Project* was subsequently banned from being taught in schools in several states, such as Florida (Asmelash, 2021).

This example establishes that collective amnesia leads to epistemic harm by fostering *distorted representations* of a community's past, precisely the epistemic harm that *Project 1619* aims to address and rectify. Collective amnesia also prevents members of the community whose history has been distorted, such as young Hannah-Jones, but also other Americans, from asking and answering meaningful questions about their collective past. This prevents its members from gaining adequate self-knowledge of their past and current identities. But is it an epistemic injustice? According to Fricker, epistemic injustices are injustices harming individuals *qua* knowers or members of an epistemic community. She distinguishes two kinds of epistemic injustices: testimonial and hermeneutical (Fricker, 2007, 1). In the following paragraphs, I assess whether collective amnesia might fall under one of these kinds of epistemic injustice.

4.1. Collective amnesia: a testimonial injustice?

A testimonial injustice is a wrong done to an individual by granting them less credibility than they deserve simply because their social identity is a target of prejudice (Fricker, 2007, 20). The paradigmatic case that Fricker employs is taken from Anthony Minghella's *The Talented Mister Ripley* and recalls the exchange between Herbert Greenleaf and his daughter-in-law, Marge. Marge voices evidence-based suspicions about the involvement of Tom Ripley, her fiancé Dickie Greenleaf's best friend, in the latter's disappearance. During this exchange, Herbert Greenleaf, who holds Ripley in good graces, silences Marge by saying, "Marge, there's [female] intuition, and then there are facts." By contrasting women's intuition with reason, Greenleaf implies that Marge is irrational and signals her failure to give due credibility to Marge's testimony.

Yet collective amnesia does not seem to be a "testimonial injustice." The epistemic status of claims about one's national history is different from the epistemic status of a testimony regarding one's own experience or beliefs. Contrast Hannah-Jones' claims about the history of the United States with Marge's testimony about her fiancé's disappearance. The former heavily depends on the credibility of other sources, whereas the latter relies mostly on Marge's epistemic competence. For this reason, it is unlikely

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that the "virtue of testimonial justice," which is supposed to neutralize the impact of prejudice in one's credibility judgements about others' epistemic competence (Fricker, 2007, 92), will suffice to correct the epistemic wrongs associated with collective amnesia (which I will describe in the next section).

While I do not believe that collective amnesia is reducible to testimonial injustice, I concede that some instances of testimonial injustice contribute to the broader phenomenon of collective amnesia. This line of argument is defended by Rebecca Tsosie (Tsosie, 2012, 2017). In particular, she cites the example of Indigenous peoples who, in seeking to prove the existence of a sacred site, can only obtain this recognition from the federal government by referring to documents written by experts judged "objective" by the authorities, such as historians or anthropologists (Tsosie, 2017, 361). Likewise, Hannah-Jones would be the victim of testimonial injustice if people doubted her credibility because of an identity prejudice and regardless of the evidence she brought regarding national history.

4.2. Collective amnesia: a hermeneutical injustice (in Fricker's sense)?

Secondly, according to Fricker, a hermeneutical injustice occurs when a significant area of one's social experience remains "obscure owing to a *lacuna* in the collective hermeneutical resources" – that is, in the interpretative tools or shared meanings – due to hermeneutical marginalization (Fricker, 2007, 159, emphasis added). Hermeneutical marginalization occurs when non-dominant groups are excluded from participating in mainstream conceptual production and meaning-making processes. In other words, the injustice stems from a gap in the pool of hermeneutical resources (including concepts, tropes, narratives, stories, scripts, etc.). This makes this injustice *structural* in nature[7] instead of agential. Moreover, in theory, the gap, once filled, annuls the injustice. Consider, for instance, how women from the early 1970s, before the concept of "sexual harassment" was articulated, could only describe their experience by saying that they had been subject to unwanted "advances" from colleagues (2007, 151). Fricker further contends that the lack of intelligibility is most likely to affect marginalized individuals (such as women in the example), unlike privileged individuals, who, Fricker claims, enjoy "appropriate understandings" of their social experience (2007, 151).

For two reasons, I believe that collective amnesia is not a hermeneutical injustice *in Fricker's sense of the term*. However, I will later go on to argue that it involves hermeneutical injustices *in a different sense*.

First, hermeneutical resources are not "lacking" in the case of collective amnesia: they *exist* but are instead *kept hidden through collective memories*. For instance, the meaning of the year 1619 is known by some Americans, but not by all of them, and its significance as a violent event is *obscured or hidden* by the emphasis put on the 4th of July, a symbol of *liberty*. For this reason, I doubt that the "virtue of hermeneutical justice," as outlined by Fricker as a corrective for hermeneutical injustice, will suffice to remedy collective amnesia's wrongs. Fricker says, "[t]he form the virtue of hermeneutical justice must take, then, is an alertness or sensitivity to the possibility that the difficulty one's interlocutor is having as she tries to render something communicatively intelligible is due not to its being nonsense or her being a fool, but rather to some sort of gap in collective hermeneutical resources" (2007, 169). Contrast the victims of sexual harassment in the 1970s and Hannah-Jones' *1619 project*. In the case of collective amnesia, the problem is not one of mere intelligibility but rather one of *adequate uptake*, in the spirit of the "right to know" and the "right to be known" described by Lackey (Lackey, 2022, 54). Second, in

[7]"No agent perpetrates hermeneutical injustice – it is a purely structural notion." (Fricker, 2007, 159).

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collective amnesia, in contrast to hermeneutical injustice, it is possible that marginalized people have an epistemic advantage over privileged people. Marginalized people may possess adequate knowledge about their group's past, which is nevertheless *concealed* from the broader epistemic community (including most of the aforementioned privileged people). For example, Indigenous people knew that children had been missing long before their graves were publicly uncovered in recent years across Canada.

Nevertheless, as in the case of testimonial injustice, I acknowledge that instances of hermeneutical injustice, in Fricker's sense of the term, can contribute to the broader phenomenon of collective amnesia. An argument from Tsosie once again inspires this nuance. Tsosie insists on the hermeneutical marginalization of Indigenous peoples, which could be aggravated, among other things, by the fact that they "lack" the *same* hermeneutical resources as the dominant group to define categories of experience (Tsosie, 2017, 361), although they do not lack concepts of their own to describe them.

If collective amnesia is neither a testimonial injustice nor a hermeneutical injustice in Fricker's sense of these terms, then is it an epistemic injustice at all? The existence of TRCs and the example of *The 1619 Project* suggest a positive answer, but the epistemic wrongs of collective amnesia must be examined in more detail to establish that it constitutes an epistemic injustice.

5. The epistemic wrongs of collective amnesia

I suggested that collective amnesia's primary epistemic harm consists of *fostering distorted representations* of a community's past through collective memory. For instance, distorted representations occur when Canada silences narratives about residential schools, and history books omit the White Lion's passengers' story. This wrong is "primary" insofar as it represents, chronologically, the first "moment of dysfunction in the overall epistemic practice or system" (Fricker, 2007, 43). In other words, it is the first obstacle to the circulation of truth. Further, drawing from Lackey, this primary wrong is suffered by descendants of victims of injustices and can be *intergenerational* and thus *collective*. Lackey argued that the descendants of Black Americans not only inherited the material consequences of slavery and Jim Crow laws but also the epistemic consequences in the form of a "history replete with erasure, vilification, and *distortion*, one where Black Americans are either absent from the narrative, criminalized and presented as dangerous and violent, or misrepresented as sexually lascivious, angry, and so on." (2022, 68, emphasis added). Likewise, descendants of people whose history has been concealed from collective history suffer from this primary epistemic wrong of collective amnesia.

In turn, this primary epistemic wrong leads to secondary wrongs, including moral wrongs (such as reinforcing and strengthening damaging ideologies, like racism or sexism) and other secondary epistemic wrongs. According to Fricker, secondary epistemic wrongs are "follow-on disadvantages" (2007, 46) of the primary epistemic harm. In the case of collective amnesia, I contend that there is a secondary epistemic wrong of collective amnesia consisting of the *hindering* of a broader epistemic community's ability to gain adequate knowledge about its past and current identities. More precisely, it prevents them not only from *answering* meaningful questions about the collective past, but also from *asking* those questions in the first place. This affects most citizens in all the countries where epistemic reparations such as TRCs are (or should be) deemed necessary, and American citizens at large, including young Hannah-Jones, but also the broader public, in the example of *The 1619 Project*. For instance, the emphasis place on the 4th of July as a symbol of liberty might prevent individuals to inquire about the violence that was involved in the founding of the United States. In my view, this secondary wrong is suffered not only by the descendants of the injustice in question but also by the broader epistemic

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community. In the next section, I will further articulate this claim by examining four possible objections. The first two will specify how aspects of the past that have been collectively forgotten are morally relevant and thus count as instances of collective amnesia as an epistemic injustice. The last two will two will address the assertion that epistemic communities, rather than individual knowers, suffer the epistemic wrongs of collective amnesia.

5.1. Collective amnesia is not an injustice but the unavoidable byproduct of limitations on collective memory

First, one could claim that collective amnesia is not an injustice because it is the unavoidable *byproduct* of the finitude of collective memory. As I pointed out earlier, memory studies widely accept that any act of commemoration necessarily *entails an act of forgetting* (Forest & Johnson, 2019, 129). On this view, collectively forgetting something is the unavoidable consequence of memory's finitude (even at the collective level), since it would be impossible to remember the past in every detail. Indeed, if it were the case that our collective memory could retain every detail from the past, this would give rise, at the collective level, to the problem experienced by Funes the Memorious, in the eponymous short story by Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borgès. In the story, Funès' archival memory is so precise that remembering a single day in his past requires twenty-four hours of his time. This illustrates that forgetting is necessary because if not for this faculty, the weight of one's memory would prove impossibly burdensome from a practical point of view. By analogy, one could argue that collective memory is also limited, albeit not cognitively, but rather practically and materially. For instance, history books cannot include every detail, and there is only a finite number of streets and places that can be named after historical figures.

If collective amnesia were indeed unavoidable because of collective memory's practical finitude, then it could not count as an epistemic *injustice*. It would be more akin to *an unavoidable natural limitation*, thus making us truly helpless before it.

In order to address this objection, I propose distinguishing between two types of collective forgetting, as illustrated by the following examples. First, consider that the way jam used to be made in the province of Quebec in the 18th century has been collectively forgotten, since it is rarely (if ever) represented in material manifestations of the "immaterial good" that is collective memory, such as history books, statues, place names and songs. This type of collective forgetting, which is evidently a by-product of the material limitations of collective memory, should be distinguished from a second type, illustrated by the forgetting of what happened to Indigenous young people who were forcibly removed from their communities and sent to residential schools in Canada, for instance.

Importantly, the "jam" case of collective forgetting seems to be imputable to non-agential factors, collective memory's finitude, whereas the "residential schools" case is agential and can be imputed to individuals and social practices that marginalize Indigenous people. Thus, I distinguish between instances of "collective amnesia" – distortions in the collective memory that have an *agential component* – from mere instances of "collective forgetting," which can be non-agential and due to collective memory's material finitude or practical limitations. My contention in this paper is to show that the former, and not the latter, is an epistemic injustice. This intuition is also expressed elegantly in Haïtian historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot's work, *Silencing the Past. Power and the Production of History*: "The presences and absences embodied in sources (artifacts and bodies that turn an event into fact) or archives (facts collected,

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thematized, and processed as documents and monuments) are neither or natural.[8] They are *created*. As such, they are *not mere presences and absences but mentions or silences* of various kinds and degrees. By silence, I mean an *active and transitive process*: one "silences" a fact or an individual as a silencer silences a gun. One *engages in the practice of silencing*. Mentions and *silences are thus active*, dialectical counterparts of which history is the synthesis" (Trouillot, 1995, 48, emphasis added).

This refined definition of collective amnesia, displaying an agential feature as a necessary condition, is consistent with the definition I provided earlier of collective memory and amnesia as *socio-constructed* phenomenons. As such, they involve a kind of *multi-level agency shared between structures and individuals,* such as that engaged in "structural injustice" as defined by Iris Marion Young: "Structural injustice occurs as a consequence of many individuals and institutions acting to pursue their particular goals and interests, for the most part within the limits of accepted rules and norms" (Young, 2011, 52). Therefore, the epistemic wrongs caused by collective amnesia most likely do not flow from an inevitable situation (the unavoidable consequence of collective memory's finitude, for instance) but instead result from an *injustice*, albeit a structural one, which contributes to the overall distribution of power in society. This claim is also consistent with the findings of epistemologies of ignorance and agnotology, *i.e.*, the study of how ignorance is cultivated both individually and collectively to form patterns that contribute to the perpetuation of social injustices (Schiebinger & Proctor, 2008; Sullivan & Tuana, 2007). In addition, this feature of collective amnesia allows me to highlight a resemblance between my account of collective amnesia and Fricker's account of hermeneutical injustices: collective amnesia's epistemic wrongs are structural in nature, like Fricker's view of hermeneutical injustices.

5.2. Collective amnesia is not an injustice, but a case of "epistemic bad luck"

The second objection claims that collective amnesia is not an injustice, not because it is an inevitable result of the finitude of collective memory, but rather because it is more akin to – borrowing Fricker's word – "epistemic bad luck" (Fricker, 2007, 33). In other words, while some elements of the past seem to have drifted away from collective memory due to its finitude (like in the "jam" case), others may have been deliberately excluded through an agential process, either on the individual or structural level. However, unless this exclusion were due to identity prejudice or hermeneutical marginalization, on Fricker's account, this would be bad luck, not epistemic injustice.

Fricker's theoretical motivation in developing the notion of "epistemic bad luck" is modelled on the notion of "moral bad luck' (Nagel, 2012).[9] It identifies instances where knowers experience epistemic *harms* but fail to be *wronged* in their capacity as knowers. Such cases of epistemic bad luck happen when the harm suffered by knowers is due to *historical contingency* rather than to a biased auditor (in testimonial contexts) or structure (in hermeneutical contexts). For instance, Fricker contrasts the hermeneutical injustices she describes (the women suffering sexual harassment in the 1970s) with the following case of "hermeneutical bad luck": a patient suffering from a misunderstood and under-diagnosed illness at a given historical period (2007, 152). According to Fricker, this patient experiences the primary and secondary consequences associated with hermeneutical injustice, as he struggles to interpret his experience and suffers the

[8]And I might add, in every discourse from popular culture that follows from the interpretation of those sources and archives.

[9]An extensive discussion of the notion of moral and epistemic blame is beyond this project's scope, but these are two very rich themes (Boult, 2021).

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related practical consequences, without suffering any epistemic *injustice* (2007, 152), because the situation does not involve marginalization for which individual knowers or structures deserve blame (Fricker, 2007, 33). According to her interpretation, the patient is rather the victim of epistemic misfortune,[10] *i.e.*, of the state of knowledge *at the time*.[11]

Therefore, one could argue that collective amnesia is a case of epistemic bad luck, which is dependent on historical contingency: it just so happens that some things are forgotten and others are not. In other words, one could concede that, in addition to non-agential limitations on collective memory that arbitrarily allow some elements to drift away, there are also *agential processes* that also lead to forgetting some things over others while not being unjust *per se*. For instance, some ancestral remedies for mild rashes may have been replaced deliberatly due to a historical conjecture that enabled the development of more efficient treatments – and subsequently forgotten. I agree that the collective forgetting of the ancient remedy does not constitute an epistemic injustice, but only *if no identity prejudice or marginalization of non-dominant groups were involved*.[12]

This new example allows me to outline a second necessary condition for collective amnesia: it must be due to hermeneutical marginalization. This necessary condition is met in the "residential schools" case I outlined earlier, but not in the "remedy" example. Therefore, I suggest that the "remedy" example, too, belongs to the category of "collective forgetting" and not of "collective amnesia," for I only intend to depict the latter as an epistemic injustice.

Given the central role that I attribute to hermeneutical marginalization in collective amnesia, it is fair to say that my account bears a significant resemblance to previously identified forms of hermeneutical injustice. Example of these include Pohlhaus's "wilful hermeneutical ignorance" (Pohlhaus, 2012), Dotson's "contributory injustices" (Dotson, 2012) and Catala's "hermeneutical domination" (Catala, 2015). Similar to my own interpretation of collective amnesia, and contrary to Fricker's view, these concepts identify gaps between different epistemic communities (*e.g.*, dominantly situated individuals versus marginalized individuals) rather than within one community. They also emphasize that marginalized individuals frequently develop hermeneutical resources that could bridge the gaps in the pool of resources accessible to those in dominant positions, were it not for hermeneutical marginalization. While I agree that collective amnesia overlaps with these concepts to some extent, they nonetheless all exceed collective amnesia's scope: wilful hermeneutical ignorance, contributory injustices and hermeneutical domination are not confined to the distorted

[10]This example even convinced Medina, a critical reader of Fricker: "Fricker provides a persuasive example in which subjects who suffer from a yet unknown medical condition find themselves unable to render intelligible what is going on with them, given the lack of relevant medical knowledge. Here, we indeed have a hermeneutical disadvantage that is not part of the injustice. As Fricker puts it, the "non-comprehensionof their condition … is a poignant case of circumstantial epistemic bad luck" (Medina, 2013, 152).

[11]This is a surprising feature of Fricker's account. For instance, according to Fricker, in a testimonial context, epistemic bad luck operates when listeners who wrongly attribute a credibility deficit to a speaker because of an identity prejudice are, so to speak, victims of the prejudices *of their time*. In other words, hearers fall prey to epistemic bad luck when expecting that they become aware of the fact that negative identity prejudices structure their apprehension of the world, would represent too high a moral demand (2007, 33). Accordingly, Fricker claims that Greenleaf is guilty of testimonial injustice towards Marge, but we cannot hold this against him (at best, we can be disappointed that he did not do better, but we cannot blame him; Fricker, 2007, 100).

[12]This case is to be contrasted with Abraham T. Tobi's example titled "The Master Knows" (Tobi, 2020, 262), where both identity prejudice and marginalization of a non-dominant group are involved regarding the treatment of an illness. The example is meant to illustrate several epistemic injustices.

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representation of a group's past, which is at stake in the case of collective amnesia. Therefore, I believe that collective amnesia should be recognised as an epistemic injustice in its own right, as it is associated with epistemic wrongs that require specific normative solutions. However, note that this proximity strengthens the intuition that collective amnesia might be a subtype of hermeneutical injustice.

Overall, responding to the first two objections allows me to distinguish between collective forgetting and collective amnesia, the latter being narrower than the former. Instances of collective amnesia must always meet two necessary conditions to be considered morally relevant cases of collective forgetting. First, they must be partly agential, whether on the part of individuals or structures, and second, they must be due to hermeneutical marginalization. Both conditions are met in the "residential schools" example. Conversely, when one or both of these conditions is not met, like in the "remedy" and "jam" examples, the cases belong to the broader category of collective forgetting, *i.e.*, "non-morally relevant instances of collective forgetting".

Additionally, consider how these conditions differentiate my account of collective amnesia from the United Nations' "right to know," mentionned earlier, which is the collective right to know about circumstances surrounding heinous crimes (Lackey, 2022, 59). More precisely, these conditions render collective amnesia a more comprehensive category than the "right to know." For example, it enables the argument that the erasure of women's intellectual work in the history of philosophy (see Deslauriers, 2022, for example) is an instance of collective amnesia, because it is at least partly agential and due to hermeneutical marginalization, and thus, morally relevant.

5.3. Can collective amnesia wrong communities instead of individual knowers?

Third, my claim that collective amnesia wrongs communities does not fit within Fricker's picture, which is focused on the wrongs experienced by individuals. Indeed, Fricker claims that "[t]he primary harm is a form of the essential harm that is definitive of epistemic injustice in the broad. *In all such injustices, the subject is wronged in her capacity as a knower*" (2007, 44, emphasis added). I articulated the primary epistemic harm of collective amnesia as a disruption in the circulation of truthful information. This is not directly harmful to *individual knowers* but rather damages a collective epistemic good: truth. Thus, collective amnesia primarily wrongs *epistemic communities* instead of individual knowers. Perhaps this feature of my account undermines the claim that collective amnesia is an *epistemic injustice* since it does not display the distinctive feature Fricker claims that all epistemic injustices share.

However, I reject this worry for two reasons. First, there is an individualistic bias at the heart of Fricker's account of epistemic injustice. Some critics have argued that her definition has trouble recognizing epistemic injustices when the prejudices that cause them are not identified on the cognitive or individual level but linger at the structural level (this line of reasoning has been defended by Elizabeth Anderson, 2012, among others.) Second, as critics of Fricker have already suggested, even individual-focused accounts of epistemic wrongs come with community-wide epistemic consequences. For instance, José Medina insists that all epistemic injustices produce distortions and erasures that shape and alter the entire knowledge economy (Medina, 2013). This argument is grounded in recognizing the relational nature of knowledge and our epistemic interdependence. In turn, these claims follow from the premise of the *situated nature of knowledge*, according to which the possibility for each individual to constitute and to transmit knowledge is crucially determined by their social position and is subject to power relationships (Code, 2014; Pitts, 2019). Indeed, if each individual possesses *both*

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a privileged and an incomplete perspective on the various potential objects of knowledge, as the thesis of the situated nature of knowledge holds, then the pooling of these perspectives, in principle, guarantees a better view of each object. Conversely, if certain perspectives are excluded, general knowledge will likely be impoverished, as is the case when dealing with collective amnesia. It follows from these considerations that it does not matter if a given epistemic harm is not primarily directed to individuals for it to count as an epistemic injustice, contrary to what is claimed by Fricker.

To further support my claim that collective amnesia leads to community-level epistemic wrongs, consider the following counterfactual example: *if* collective amnesia *were not* systematically associated with community-wide and hence public epistemic damage, then epistemic reparations such as TRCs *would not need to be public*. However, TRCs and other mechanisms of epistemic reparation are public. This feature of existing processes of epistemic reparations implicitly points to the publicness of the epistemic wrong they aim to repair. One could further object that such reparations are made public for *reasons other* than epistemic ones, such as to communicate moral or legal obligations. While it is true that TRCs *do not solely serve epistemic purposes*, they nevertheless always contain at least an element of *public truth-telling or truth-finding*, which is a *precondition* for reparations of other sorts. As Margaret Urban Walker puts it: "[i]t is obvious that establishing the facts of a violation is required in order to address or redress it" (Walker, 2010, 528). However, I contend that public truth-telling, in the context of collective amnesia, does not merely serve instrumental aims but is also *an end in itself*, in the spirit of Lackey's account of epistemic reparations such as the *right to be known* (Lackey, 2022, 55).

5.4. A broad and misplaced scope?

A fourth objection is that the scope of the harm I associate with collective amnesia is too broad and/or misplaced. The objection would be that my account unduly includes, as victims of the secondary epistemic wrongs of collective amnesia, the people who intentionally contribute to obscuring events from history books or to excluding the possibility that some people might have statues and toponymy in their names, etc.

I concede that these people should not be considered *victims* of collective amnesia's epistemic wrongs. However, I do not think that this observation undermines my argument. When I speak about the broad epistemic community impacted by the secondary epistemic wrongs caused by collective amnesia, I aim to highlight that it is detrimental to a broad population whose concern for truth *is such that it cannot be said to be affected by non-epistemic motives*.[13] A good example of the latter would be young Hannah-Jones, who claimed a passion for history. In my view, the exclusion of the year 1619 from most history books, an instance of collective amnesia, was a secondary epistemic wrong to her (in addition to the primary epistemic wrong she also suffers as a descendant of the injustice distorted in history), *as a member of the broad epistemic community*, because it precluded her from gaining adequate knowledge of her past,

[13]Such a concern for truth is shared by those whose knowledge-forming pratices are *epistemically faithful and just*, as described in Abraham T. Tobi's account of epistemic decolonisation: "By 'epistemically faithful knowledge-forming practice', I refer to practices that value epistemic ends over the advancement and sustenance of nonepistemic agendas. By 'epistemically just knowledge-forming practice', I mean epistemic practices that privilege the virtues of epistemic justice over the vices of epistemic injustice. Being epistemically faithful and epistemically just amounts to the fair-minded pursuit of knowledge. Fair-mindedness here refers to an epistemic disposition in which an agent takes the need to be epistemically faithful and just as central to their epistemic practices" (Tobi, 2020, 261).

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present, individual, and collective identity. From there, I think it is fair to extend this observation to children in general and, further, to a broad population of adults.

Moreover, one could argue that it is *precisely through representations of the past* in the official history of popular culture that children and adults alike endorse *false stereotypes as beliefs*. Indeed, what philosopher Patricia Hill Collins calls "controlling images," stereotypical images and symbols used by elite groups as tools of domination, are often grounded in a distorted or flawed representation of a group's past. For instance, as Hill Collins puts it, "The dominant ideology of the slave *era* fostered the creation of several interrelated, socially constructed controlling images of Black womanhood, each reflecting the dominant group's interest in maintaining Black women's subordination" (Hill Collins, 2000, 72, emphasis added). She then goes on to describe how Black women came to be systematically associated with stereotypical images such as the "mammy – the faithful, obedient domestic servant" or the matriarch. Just as the mammy represents the "good" Black mother, the matriarch symbolizes the "bad" Black mother" (2000, 72,75) for instance. Hill Collins observes that these images are reproduced by news media, schools, and government agencies, as well as through popular culture (2000, 85) and in the construction of history (to which Hill Collins points explicitly, 2000, 87). The perpetuation of such wrongful stereotypes is precisely the "intergenerational epistemic wrong" pointed out by Lackey, when descendants of victims of gross violations and injustice inherit the epistemic consequences of such injustices in the form of a history "replete with erasure, vilification, and distortion" (Lackey, 2022, 68). Therefore, the fact that collective amnesia fosters and strengthens such stereotypes, with consequences reaching across generations, indicates that there is a *secondary moral harm of collective amnesia as an epistemic injustice*. Thus, the primary epistemic harm of collective amnesia, from which it flows, seems to call all the more for pressing attention.

I have argued that collective amnesia leads to *community-level epistemic harm* resulting from structural processes, including hermeneutical marginalization, and as such, should be included in the broad family of epistemic *injustices*. However, we have seen that Fricker's picture of epistemic injustices cannot account precisely for collective amnesia. Perhaps most importantly, the solution Fricker provides for both wrongs (developing testimonial and hermeneutical virtues) will not suffice to secure epistemic reparations in the form of active epistemic labor that is called for by collective amnesia.

In the next section, I build on Arianna Falbo's insights (2022) to explain more fully how we should characterize collective amnesia as an epistemic injustice and why its status as an epistemic injustice has been overlooked.

6. Collective amnesia as an interplay of negative and positive hermeneutical injustices

In "Hermeneutical Injustice: Distortion and Conceptual Aptness" (2022), Falbo illuminates Fricker's account of hermeneutical injustices and uncovers its incompleteness. According to Falbo, Fricker's account of hermeneutical injustice is lacuna-centered and, as such, displays two interrelated flaws.

First, Falbo argues that by contending that hermeneutical injustices happen when there is a *conceptual lack*, Fricker fails to account for how the overabundance of distorting and oppressive conceptual tools thwarts the economy of knowledge in various other ways. They can crowd out, defeat, or preempt the application of more accurate concepts and thereby give rise to other forms of hermeneutical injustice (Falbo, 2022, 354). Importantly, this conceptual imbalance is due to "unequal authority and power concerning not just the initial creation and dissemination of conceptual resources, but also their revision, reinforcement, and overall influence and applicability in high-stakes

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social contexts – oppressive concepts remain operative within one's social milieu" (2022, 354-355). The epistemic harm Falbo associates with positive hermeneutical injustice is the hindering or "blocking," as she puts it, of the application of an accurate concept due to the existence and/or abundance of oppressive contradictory concepts (2022, 355). Drawing on Collins' work, Falbo describes "controlling images" as an example of such oppressive concepts (2022, 347). These are images meant to strengthen oppressive imaginaries (racist, sexist, colonial, etc.) and reinforce "exonerating narratives" (a term Falbo borrows from Kate Manne; 2022, 350) aimed at preserving the social order and its power dynamics.

Second, and in light of the example of controlling images, Falbo emphasizes that Fricker's account of hermeneutical injustices seems only to take into account the *interpretive function* of conceptual resources, namely that they facilitate intelligibility of experiences, and thus fails to acknowledge *their productive function*: the fact that they "organize and coordinate individuals within a social milieu" (Falbo, 2022, 344). Indeed, controlling images often serves to justify or normalize certain social arrangements (Falbo, 2022, 353). For instance, the image of the "golden boy," *i.e.*, the privileged typical man (cis, white, heterosexual, upper-class, etc.), contrasts with that of the rapist, associated with the idea of a monster, in a way that can prevent privileged men from being convicted for rape, even in the face of credible accusations (that is, the concept of a "golden boy" contributes to writing an "exonerating narrative"). Notably, the social function of such images is to *prevent* or *block* the application of more adequate concepts.

Therefore, Falbo's critique of Fricker's account enables her to provide a more complete account of hermeneutical injustices. On the one hand, she identifies "negative" hermeneutical injustices, which arise in the face of conceptual lacunas such as those described by Fricker, and, on the other hand, there are "positive" hermeneutical injustices, which occur when an overabundance of conceptual resources prevents or defeats the application of more adequate and already-existing concepts. However, these kinds of hermeneutical injustices *are not mutually exclusive* (Falbo, 2022, 357).

Accordingly, I suggest that collective amnesia is a *specific* kind of hermeneutical injustice that takes the past as its object, and that arises as *an interplay between the negative and the positive types*. Recall that collective amnesia's epistemic wrongs consist primarily of fostering distorted representations of a group's past and, secondarily, of hindering a broad epistemic community's ability to ask and answer meaningful questions about its past, and thus to gain adequate knowledge of its past and, thus, its current identity. This occurs by cultivating and disseminating a dominant, mainstream narrative – collective memory – which acts as a "controlling narrative" (to borrow Collins's words), *producing* pervasive cultural assumptions and social conventions. Compare the contrast described between the concepts of the "golden boy" and "the [monstruous] racist" with that of the year 1619 as a symbol of violence and the 4th of July as a symbol of liberty. The dominance of the latter in the mainstream narrative or collective memory blocks or prevents an understanding of American national history as more violent and less free than it seems to be. Therefore, in cases of collective amnesia, there is a hermeneutical gap in the collective memory (hence the negative aspect). However, and importantly, it is not due to the *absence* of hermeneutical resources but to their *hiding* behind a controlling narrative about the past - collective memory (hence the positive aspect) Noteworthily, the "hiding" component characteristic of collective amnesia hints at the two conditions I outlined earlier to discriminate between morally relevant and non-morally relevant instances of collective forgetting: they must be partly agential, whether on the part of individuals or structures, and they must be due to hermeneutical marginalization.

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Describing collective amnesia as such an interplay of hermeneutical injustices of both the "negative" and the "positive" kind has a significant advantage on the normative level. As Falbo puts it, recognizing hermeneutical resources' productive function in the social order has important implications for hermeneutical injustice. In order to reach *hermeneutical justice*, we not only must come up with new concepts or narratives to fill some interpretive lacuna, but we must also reflect on the concepts and narratives we already have, *including our collective memory,* with the aim of dismantling oppressive ideologies and social practices (Falbo, 2022, 357). Therefore, casting collective amnesia as an interplay of negative and positive hermeneutical injustices provides insight into tackling its epistemic wrongs and confirms the intuition, considered in the introduction, that epistemic reparations in the form of *epistemic labor*, such as TRCs, target this kind of twofold hermeneutical wrong. For instance, the Canadian TRC, which took place from 2008 to 2015, released its final report in 2015, stating that Canada had committed "cultural genocide" against indigenous communities, that is a destruction of structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group, on Indigenous communities. This acknowledgement has moral and legal implications, which I leave aside, as well as epistemic ones. By introducing this concept, the Canadian TRC did not fill an interpretive lacuna but rather reflected on the distortion at play in official Canadian history that has so far depicted its colonization. Therefore, the new narrative aimed at *correcting this distortion, which is produced by the interplay of a negative and a positive hermeneutical injustice*. This picture of the epistemic reparations called for by collective amnesia is consistent with Lackey's depiction of *active* epistemic duties. In the same way that an individual's "right to be known" calls for "seeking out their stories, bearing witness to them, inquiring, listening, committing what they say to memory" (Lackey, 2022, 78), collective amnesia and its characteristic twofold hermeneutical distortion of the past demand that "we go beyond the evidence currently in our possession to acquire evidence that we *should have*" (2022, 78, author's emphasis). It is worth echoing Falbo in insisting on the radical and far-reaching epistemic demands that come with the pursuit of hermeneutical justice: it plausibly calls for large-scale social movements aimed at dismantling oppressive ideologies and social practices (Falbo, 2022, 357), through the rewriting of dominant narratives among which we may include our collective memory.

On a metatheoretical level, Falbo's paper also highlights the extent to which Fricker's lacuna-centered account of hermeneutical injustices has been influential on the literature, showing how its perspective has influenced concepts developed afterwards, such as Gail Pohlhaus's "willful hermeneutical ignorance" (Pohlhaus, 2012) or Kristie Dotson's "contributory injustices" (Dotson, 2012). Both approaches describe inter-communal *gaps* (or lacunas), *i.e.,* gaps that arise *between* different epistemic communities instead of inside one epistemic community, thus recognizing intra-group hermeneutical resources and allowing marginalized individuals to have appropriate interpretations of their experience (Falbo, 2022, 345). As collective amnesia is partly constituted by positive hermeneutical injustices which have been underappreciated in the literature due to an emphasis on a lacuna-centred approach to hermeneutical injustice, it is unsurprising that collective amnesia has not yet been at the centre of discussions in circles interested in epistemic injustice.

7. Final thoughts

Before concluding, I would like to address one further consideration.

It is noteworthy that describing collective amnesia as a twofold hermeneutical injustice that targets the collective past is coherent with Charles W. Mills thesis on *racial erasure* which he defines as "the retrospective whitening-out, the whitewashing, of the

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racial past to construct an alternative narrative that severs the present from any legacy of racial domination" (Mills, 2015, 220) or as a "reconstructed and racially sanitized past." According to Mills, racial erasure plays a causal role in perpetuating "white ignorance" as a "particular orientation to the world, an aprioristic inclination to get certain kind of things wrong" (Mills, 2015, 218), and calls for "a radical rethinking of inherited narratives and frameworks" along with corrective racial justice (Mills, 2015, 220).

Despite the striking resemblance between what I called "collective amnesia" and Mills' "racial erasure," I chose to speak in terms of the former for two reasons. First, "collective amnesia" is intended to include more instances of collective forgetting than those fitting the category of "racial erasure." While with "racial erasure," Mills focuses *specifically* on how white ignorance about present and past racial exploitation plays a causal role in shaping the world as it is today, I suggest that "collective amnesia" includes other instances of collective forgetting due to other forms of oppression. Recall that one might argue that the erasure of women's intellectual work in the history of philosophy (see Deslauriers, 2022, for example) is an instance of collective amnesia, a morally relevant instance of collective forgetting, while not being one of *racial* erasure. In other words, my account of collective amnesia partly overlaps with the growing literature on "epistemic decolonization" (see Tobi, 2020; Mitova, 2025).

Second, in his 2015 paper, where Mills discusses and furthers his thoughts on "white ignorance," he addresses Fricker's contribution to social epistemology, provides her definitions of testimonial and hermeneutical justice, and suggests that both epistemic injustices contribute to the perpetuation of white ignorance (Mills, 2015, 222). While this is most certainly true, and I acknowledged these contributions above by pointing to Tsosie's work, I believe that it is significant to articulate collective amnesia as an epistemic injustice in its own right. In particular, collective amnesia requires specific epistemic normative solutions that do not correspond to the individual testimonial and hermeneutical virtues that Fricker advocates (Fricker, 2007). Instead, collective amnesia, as a structural injustice, calls for structural normative solutions in the form of epistemic labor, including, but not limited to, traditional epistemic reparations such as memorialization, education, and giving effect to the collective *right to know*. Nevertheless, my conclusions are congruent with those of Mills, who calls for, as a normative solution to racial erasure, a "radical rethinking of inherited narratives and frameworks" (Mills, 2015, 220), which amounts to *positive and negative hermeneutical labor* in addition to corresponding necessary measures of racial and social justice.

8. Conclusion

In this paper, I have addressed two questions: Why has the relation between collective amnesia and epistemic injustices remained undertheorized until now? If collective amnesia is indeed an epistemic injustice, what sort is it?

After having developed the intuition that some existing epistemic reparations, such as TRC's, aimed at repairing a yet-to-be-described epistemic wrong of collective amnesia, building on Lackey's insights (2022), I provided a plausible definition of collective amnesia, *i.e.*, the forgotten true narratives about a group's past, obscured from the public eye due to the existence of the dominant mainstream narrative, or collective memory. In addition, I outlined a distinction between collective forgetting and collective amnesia by identifying two necessary conditions under which instances of collective forgetting are morally relevant, and thus, may count as instances of collective amnesia as an epistemic injustice: they must be partly agential, whether on the part of individuals or structures, and due to a hermeneutical marginalization.

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Then, an attentive examination of the epistemic wrongs of collective amnesia revealed that they primarily consist of the distortion of true narratives about a group's past through a dominant narrative, *i.e.*, collective memory, and secondarily lead to the hindrance of an even broader epistemic community's ability to ask and answer meaningful questions about the past. I argued that this prevents its members from gaining adequate knowledge about their past and present identities. I demonstrated that these epistemic wrongs of collective amnesia cannot be attributed to Fricker's categories of testimonial and hermeneutical injustices, partly because they cannot be overcome only by cultivating the corresponding individual epistemic virtues. Therefore, if collective amnesia is an epistemic injustice, it cannot be classified as either testimonial or hermeneutical in Fricker's sense. Rather, it takes a unique form to which new normative efforts must adapt. Crucially, and in the spirit of Lackey's (2022) "right to be known," these efforts must involve epistemic labour aimed at ensuring the adequate uptake of true narratives about the past that have been distorted through collective memory — an uptake that enables social and political change.

Finally,I suggested that collective amnesia should integrate the broad family of epistemic injustices as a hermeneutical injustice of a specific kind. This type of injustice takes the past as its subject and arises from the interplay of the two types of hermeneutical injustice identified by Falbo: "negative" and "positive." This hybrid hermeneutical injustice occurs by cultivating and disseminating a dominant, mainstream narrative – collective memory – which preempts or defeats the application of more adequate narratives about the past, leading to the aforementioned specific epistemic wrongs.

Overall, this refined understanding of collective amnesia as an epistemic injustice should facilitate a reworking of our collective memory, ultimately contributing to making it more *just*, both morally and epistemologically.

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Flavie Chevalier is currently pursuing a PhD degree in philosophy at McGill University, Montréal (Tiohtià:ke).

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