



Epistemic Violence Toward Immigrant Women in Iceland: Silencing, Smothering, and Linguistic Deficit

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an examination of how stories shared as a result of the #metoo movement in Iceland exemplify aspects of how culture and institutions in Iceland are complicit in the silencing of immigrant women who experience violence, both in intimate partner and employment situations. Through a critical analysis of 10 of the narratives shared by immigrant women in Iceland, the authors explore how testimonial smothering and silencing are both producing and reproducing epistemic violence in the women's lives. We argue that the focus on linguistic purity of the Icelandic language maintains these exclusionary practices. Recognition of hegemonic practices is important in the continued development of a more equitable society and a first step in the inclusion of diverse voices in the continued development of the diversifying Icelandic knowledge society.

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INTRODUCTION

Until recently, Iceland has been ethnically a rather homogenous country. However, this homogeneity has rapidly changed, where in 1996 immigrants made up 2.8% of the island's population, today immigrants currently comprise 16.7% of the total population of 369,870 (Statistics Iceland 2019: 2). Public policy regarding immigrants was slow to emerge and early discourse related to immigrants focused on assimilation to Icelandic society and culture (Ministry of Welfare 2007), where the main focus has been on the acquisition of Icelandic as the key to life on the island. More recent political and policy developments have led to the passing of anti-discrimination legal frameworks, a focus on labor rights and better support for students in pre-, compulsory, and secondary schools (Parliamentary Resolution 1285:145; Law on equal treatment regardless of race or nationality nr. 85/2018).¹

At the height of the #metoo movement 2017–2019 (Chandra & Erlingsdóttir 2020), immigrant women formed a Facebook group #metoo konur af erlendum uppruna [e. #metoo women of foreign origin] with membership of over 500. There they shared stories of violence and abuse and offered each other support. In January 2018, the group selected stories for publication in a local online journal *Kjarninn* along with a statement for change (Júliússon 2018). The 34 stories that the women elected to share differed significantly from stories that had been shared by other mainly professional groups in the local media. Not only were these stories of sexual abuse at the hands of individuals, but in some cases indicated levels of institutional and systemic exclusion and oppression due to the women's status as immigrants. These stories also highlighted the limited reach immigrant women have in the formation of new knowledge within the society. In other words, as will be argued in this paper, immigrant women in Iceland often lack epistemic resources (Skaptadóttir & Loftsdóttir 2020) and experience what we understand as epistemic violence at different levels, for example at home, among friends or at work, but also in interactions with various societal institutions. They are, thus, excluded from the knowledge community and depicted as 'deficient' in terms of epistemic trust and credibility. These subject positions are then reproduced through the dominant discourse and become institutionalized.

The aim of this paper is to map out and analyze how the immigrant women's narratives express forms of epistemic violence and injustice they experienced in their interactions with institutions or at work. By concentrating on epistemic violence, we draw attention to how power and oppression are reproduced and sustained within institutions through processes of silencing and exclusion. We pose two main questions: How is epistemic violence produced and (re)produced within institutions as depicted in the #metoo narratives of immigrant women? In what ways do immigrant women resist epistemic violence by claiming a discursive space?

So far, in Iceland, no studies have been undertaken regarding how immigrant women experience violence in intimate partner relationships. The immigrant women in Iceland are a highly heterogenous group in terms of ethnic background, race, and place of origin. As our aim here is to draw attention to the commonalities of how immigrant women experience violence, our analytical lens is on their immigrant status. Thus, our focus is on how being an immigrant woman in Iceland contributes to their oppression and marginalization, and how violence, in the context of this paper, analyzed as epistemic violence, intersects with, and is sustained through the process

1 The Icelandic immigration laws are quite recent. The first comprehensive laws regarding immigrants and the process of immigration to Iceland were ratified in 2016 and came into force in 2017 (see Lög um útlendinga 2016/80).

of immigration. In that sense, we are influenced by the work of Erez, Adelman and Gregory (2009) who draw on intersectional theory in their research on immigrant women and violence in the US. They have argued that immigration status should not be viewed as ‘a variable or static category within race’ (p. 33) but instead ‘as a part of the multiple grounds of identity shaping the domestic violence experience’ (p. 33).

The violence immigrants face often begins in the country of origin and is then further magnified during the process of immigration – during the travels from the country of origin, often located in the global south, to countries in the global north, during the process and procedures in the receiving country, through the registration and the application procedures, and during the period of waiting to be processed and obtaining a decision. Laws on immigration themselves are an example of legal violence, which is then codified on the bodies of immigrants, applied in courts and institutions (Menjívar & Abrego 2012). Immigration along with other categories of oppression is part of the violence regimes, which defines how people experience and are constituted by violence (Hearn et al. 2020). These violence regimes draw attention to the systemic nature of violence and the multiple intersectional modalities of violence toward immigrant women. For example, some immigrant women may lack effective knowledge of their legal and cultural rights while others have been more successful in securing these rights (Wilson & Aðalbjarnardóttir 2019). However, since full participation in society is often framed around the institution of the dominant language, many immigrant women feel excluded from the Icelandic language community (Rawlings et al. 2020).

To offer a more detailed analysis and description, we focus on the commonalities experienced and narrated by immigrant women of epistemic violence. We draw attention to how the category of ‘immigrant status’ sustains and contributes to epistemic violence in order to analyze the modalities of violence these women experienced, how they showed resistance, and positioned themselves within the discursive frame of immigration and being a foreigner in Iceland. This analytical focus allows for a broader understanding of violence, as both material and discursive in the context of immigrant women in Iceland.

We begin by grounding our discussion in the concept of epistemic violence with a particular focus on how the experiences of marginalized groups, such as immigrant women, are discursively and institutionally silenced and excluded – through and by their immigrant status. This is followed by a brief description of our data and the methodological underpinning of our analysis. In the findings section we delve into the concepts of testimonial silencing and smothering. We conclude by discussing a few examples of the workings of institutionalized epistemic violence in relation to immigrant women’s testimonials of work-based and intimate partner violence published during the high of the #metoo movement in Iceland.

EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE

Epistemic violence, Spivak (1994) argues, is inflicted on marginalized groups through the dominant knowledge or epistemological systems and is (re)produced by the ruling classes. It is manifested in legal frameworks, employment policies and in the social consciousness of societies. Through such violence, certain knowledge and epistemological traditions are legitimated and reinforced the dominance and privileges of particular groups, i.e., white and Western. Moreover, the process of immigration itself can also be understood as epistemic violence (Erez, Adelman &

Gregory 2009). Hence, according to Spivak, the silencing of knowledge or experiences of the 'other' is one aspect of epistemic violence. Dotson (2011) refers to this as testimonial quieting and testimonial smothering. Testimonial quieting occurs when a person is not acknowledged or given credibility as a knower. This form of epistemic violence is institutionalized at the macro level, inflicted upon those subjects who belong to a marginalized group on the basis of particular identity or social categories, whether racial, sexual or gendered identities. Fricker (2007) uses the term *testimonial injustice* for the forms of epistemic violence, in which '... someone is wronged specifically in her capacity as a knower' (p. 20). As Fricker (2007) has argued, this kind of epistemic injustice is a 'credibility deficit' (p. 21) in which those with marginalized identities are not given the opportunity to articulate their experiences and participate in knowledge production. The 'credibility deficit' arises from power imbalances, and according to Fricker (2007) is 'directed at a person or a group that has marginalized position in terms of power' (p. 21). Epistemic injustice based on 'credibility deficit' is relational and dependant on the given context and interpersonal relationships.

Where testimonial quieting is experienced at the macro level in interactions with institutions of society, of which the dominant language is an example, testimonial smothering occurs at the micro or individual level when the 'marginalized other' experiences lack of understanding from the targeted audience or a society's institutions (Dotson 2011). This other is not perceived as a subject of knowing thereby their experiences, background, and culture are perceived as irrelevant to the knowledge system or to knowledge production. This results in the 'marginalized other' 'smothering' their own testimony or embodied experiences in order to 'fit' into the dominant epistemological system and thereby silencing themselves (Dotson 2011). Testimonial smothering and quieting (silencing) are manifestations of epistemic violence, which then becomes institutionalized or systemic within public institutions.

DATA AND ANALYSIS

In the context of this research, we understand narrative to be a way that individuals make sense of their everyday experiences. The narratives are framed within the discursive context in which they are produced. By doing so, we highlight the interaction between the narrative self and the discursive context (see Lakoff & Johnson 1980). So, after reading all the narratives published online at *Kjarninn*, 10 narratives were selected that exemplify the workings of epistemic violence and how it intertwined with and reproduced work-based violence and intimate partner violence. Our selection of narratives, informed by our theoretical perspective, was purposeful and not focused on generalizability or universality among immigrant women in Iceland. In this paper, the use of the term 'immigrant woman' is not intended to be reductionist, as we are aware of the heterogeneity of the group. To use a single identity category such as woman or immigrant is not intended to simplify complex subject positions and identities, rather we draw attention to the focus of our study, in the same way as queer has been used in some research as an umbrella concept for sexuality and gender diversity (Francis & Kjaran 2020). The focus is on how immigrant status sustains and contributes to the epistemic violence experienced by immigrant women within institutions of society. As a matter of fact, epistemic violence intersects with other gender-based violence these women experienced at work and in their intimate partner relationships. Furthermore, our aim is not to give 'voice' to these women as they had already done so themselves through the narratives, before our engagement with the data. Nor is it our aim to reflect or describe their 'real' experiences as our

engagement with the narratives is an interpretive act. Rather, we as white middle-class researchers, one of whom is a member of the immigrant women's Facebook group and identifies as an immigrant woman, are fully aware of how our interpretation of the data creates one version of meaning and understanding. By practicing self-reflexivity during the research process, we recognized how we as researchers and authors are the creators of particular versions of truth. Our analysis draws attention to how violence through and by immigration can be both epistemic and institutional and open a discussion related to immigrant women that has not been addressed before in the Icelandic context.

The 10 stories were published anonymously; thus, it is impossible to provide detailed information about the authors of the stories. In our analysis, we rely solely on information about the author (narrator) revealed in the story itself. For example, in some stories, the narrator provides information about their ethnic, racial background or social position in their description of violence or discrimination. In other stories, there is no such information. Our focus is on the commonalities of the experiences of the violence narrated in these short extracts on the basis of them being immigrants. After having read and reread these 10 narratives, we thematized them and coded according to the type of epistemic violence described/narrated. Afterwards, we used narrative analysis to obtain a deeper understanding of the workings of power and oppression depicted in the stories and which subject positions could be detected in the narratives (Squire et al. 2014). Narrative analysis offered us the opportunity to 'illuminate the complex interplay between every day lived experience and social structures' (Frost & Ouellette 2011: 151).

In the immigrant women's narrative context, we sought to understand how the narrator, or the narrative subject, utilizes different discourses or narratives while telling a story and how these stories illustrate everyday lived experience and oppressive social structures (Frost & Ouellette 2011). The analysis of narratives such as the ones presented in this article can illustrate how everyday lives are shaped and shape social policy. In this way, the narrative and the narrative subject within it are constituted by their subject positions, which then draw on discursive resources available at the time (Foucault 1978). The women's stories illustrate the complexity of the relationship between social policies and the impact they have on their lived experiences; reflecting their experiences within the dominant cultural constructs (Fraser 2004; Fraser & MacDougall 2017).

FINDINGS

In the analysis of the 10 narratives, we focused on the intertwined practices of epistemic violence experienced by immigrant women and how this intersects with their immigration status: smothering and quieting (silencing). We focus on three themes deduced from the narratives, which are illustrated at the macro and micro levels of epistemic violence. The first theme is misrecognition and institutionalized quieting as a knower. The second theme focuses on the hierarchy of knowledge through language and exclusion from the dominant linguistic community, and the final theme relates to testimonial deficit and self-censoring.

QUIETING THROUGH MISRECOGNITION

The philosopher Taylor (1994) argued that being recognized is a 'vital human need' (p. 26), and in the stories that follow, the immigrant women describe how they are denied recognition in their interactions with institutions and at their places of

work. In the stories, lack of recognition or misrecognition was a recurrent theme that entailed not being heard, valued or trusted. The women's stories describe how they were silenced and excluded from the dominant knowledge community, and not valued as subjects of knowledge and agency because of their immigrant status. Misrecognition, as an aspect of epistemic violence and injustice, is manifested in not being recognized as a person who has experienced abuse and violence, a human being or as a knowledgeable subject.

In one narrative, the narrator encapsulates several examples of misrecognition: 'My husband speaks better Icelandic than me and therefore he was always addressed, not me even though I was the victim'. Here, she indicates that despite being the person who contacted the authorities, her husband is the one with whom the authorities interacted. He is accorded value and trust and thereby addressed and recognized as a human being because he speaks the language 'better'. She is on the other hand not spoken to or given any recognition. Whether the husband is also an immigrant or not is not revealed fully in the narrative but as Erez, Adelman and Gregory (2009; Erez & Harper 2018) have pointed out that within the US context, authorities often value the testimony of men over immigrant women. In fact, being an immigrant, particularly if you come from a non-Western country, has in the global north been gradually associated with mistrust and increased surveillance and thus criminalized (Chacón 2021; De Giorgi 2010; Rumbaut, Dingeman & Robles 2019). Through this the immigrant other is not to be recognized as a person of trust and is therefore not be addressed. In the same narrative, the narrator further recounts how she had struggled with official institutions (child protection and the police) to be recognized as the victim of domestic abuse:

I went once to Child protection services and told them that my husband needs some psychological help because he is abusing me a lot. I need help, my children need help, I told them. They only said to me that I should see a doctor if he hurts me and abuses me.

According to her, the authorities repeatedly advised her to report the incidents of abuse and contact the police and medical services: 'They also told me that I should report this to the police and then told me that they could not do anything for me because I had not reported this'. By her account, she is not being heard or listen to and her testimony is not valued as being trustworthy.

Later in her narrative she recounts that she does not feel comfortable in contacting the police as they have treated her with disrespect: 'Once, police said to a child protection woman that we live like wild animals'. Fraser and Honneth (2003) have argued that being treated with disrespect is another aspect of misrecognition by which 'the withdrawal of social recognition, in the phenomena of humiliation and disrespect' takes place (p. 134). This is what the narrator experiences as when she is not recognized as a trustworthy and knowledgeable subject by child protection services and the police. Her testimony is not acknowledged, and she is positioned by these same institutions as a 'wild beast' and a 'stupid' woman, who is 'not doing anything right'. In so doing, these institutions frame their responses and arguments within a racist discourse (hooks 1992). Because she does not speak Icelandic fluently, the narrator is positioned by the institutions as inferior, even as not worth talking to or not as Butler (2020) would argue 'grievable'.

Rorty (1993) has argued that misrecognition is likely to occur when we do not see others as being like ourselves. They are somehow outside of the dominant cultural

matrix and are not recognized as being part of the dominant epistemic community. This is what the woman's story reveals – Icelandic, the dominant language and culture, becomes a marker or a signifier of being recognized, or not, as a knowledgeable and trustworthy subject (Butler 2020; Skaptadóttir & Innes 2017). The conflicting subject positions the narrator herself takes in her struggle to achieve recognition are noteworthy. On the one hand, she depicts herself as a victim, arguing that she is not recognized as a genuine victim since her husband speaks better Icelandic than she does and as a result she is considered to be untrustworthy as a knower. On the other hand, the story draws attention to her acts of resistance. She sees herself not only as a victim but a fighter and a survivor of both domestic abuse and violence, and of institutionalized epistemic violence. She repeatedly seeks help for herself and her children and is rebuffed. In her narration, she draws attention to racist discourse, which is sustained and reproduced within some Icelandic institutions, the discourse of the abject other as animalistic. This indicates that the narrator does not share the same ethnic or racial affiliation as the members of the dominant culture and is seen as 'wild' and acting like an 'animal' – which are common discursive tropes used to describe African or black people in colonial discourse (Fanon 1967; hooks 1992). Several other narrators indicated how immigrant women experience intersecting forms of oppression and aspects of violence related to their gender, race, and social position. For example, in one narrative, the narrator reveals that she left the country due to her feeling that she will never achieve respect as a 'woman of color'. These narrators draw attention to how immigrant women resist the forms of institutionalized epistemic violence by speaking up and breaking silence around these issues.

Not being recognized as a subject of value was not only mentioned in the stories through interactions and communications with Icelandic institutions but also through occurrences at women's places of work. In one narrative, the woman indicates her awareness of being seen as a racial other: '[H]e [her husband] believes he has earned the respect of his colleagues but his wife because she is a woman and a woman of color never earned that respect and, in the end, she could not even ask for it'. In this excerpt, the narrative is presented in the third person, in which the object of the narrative is the experience of a friend or a colleague, recounted by the narrator. The embodied experience of the protagonist of the story is interpreted and contextualized by a narrator who draws attention to how epistemic violence and misrecognition intertwines with racism, whiteness, and sexism. The protagonist is dehumanized by her experiences of racism, sexism, and misrecognition by not being respected because she is 'a woman and a woman of color'. In the retelling, the narrator emphasized the subject position of being a woman by repeating word twice within the narrative. In so doing, they indicate awareness that by being a woman of color she is more likely to be silenced, which draws attention to the power relations within Western societies where women of color have throughout history been silenced and not recognized as subjects of knowledge and respect (Collins 1989, 2000; hooks 1992; Phoenix & Pattynama 2006).

Honneth (1995) has argued that there are three modes of recognition, of which one is respect from our fellow citizens, regarding us as being valued and rights-bearing subjects. The protagonist in the aforementioned narrative seems to have internalized the subject position of the racialized other who does not deserve respect and is rendered invisible at her work. She is 'just' a 'woman of color' without a name or a body that matters (hooks 1992). However, in the telling of the story, and posting it online, the narrator draws attention to how women of color experience exclusion at work because of their immigrant status or their racial or ethnic background. Yet,

through posting their narratives online, women of color in Iceland are indirectly given a platform and visibility. They become narrative subjects that matter, need to be listened to, can be heard, and by doing so a discursive space for immigrant women of color is claimed (Loftsdóttir 2020).

EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE AS TESTIMONIAL DEFICIT

Several narratives exemplify how epistemic violence was enacted by not believing testimonies of violence and abuse, which we define as *testimonial deficit*. Our use of the economic metaphor of *deficit* as something lacking, in our case being valued as a subject of testimonial truth, resonates with the Bourdieusian concept of *cultural capital*, and how its value or 'currency' intersects with class, race, and gender. Those subjects who have more cultural capital, in the Icelandic context, by being white and male, have greater testimonial surplus and are more likely to be valued as subjects of truth (Loftsdóttir & Jensen 2016). In this section, we explore how experiences of testimonial deficit result in smothering or censoring what is known or experienced. In one of the narratives, the narrator offers an example of both, testimonial deficit and smothering: 'I cannot anymore count the amount of time I wasted going to those [custody] meetings only to talk to a *Sýslumaður* [Icelandic for sheriff] who clearly took his side and stopped me from finishing my sentences'. In this extract, the woman's testimony is not valued by *Sýslumaður*, as she is neither heard nor listened to. Even though she brings a friend (who presumably holds greater cultural and social capital) to the meetings with the *Sýslumaður*, it does not decrease her testimonial deficit, and she is still treated as an object of knowledge rather than a reliable and trustworthy subject of knowledge: 'I even took a friend with me and it didn't help. The *Sýslumaður* we talked to didn't have any interest on hearing my side of the story and already had concluded that everything that my ex said was true'. In the end, she feels that attending to these sessions is a waste of her time: 'So yes, after all my experiences, I don't want to say it, but I will, I was discriminated and no matter how hard I tried to tell them my side of the story since I requested for another *Sýslumaður*, their ears were closed'. The narrator indicates that she is aware that what she does or says the outcome for her or her family will not change given the authorities lack interest in her story. Through her acknowledgement of the futility of the meetings, she smothers herself as a subject of knowledge. In the end, she moves out of the country and feels relieved not having to attend the meetings: 'I don't live in Iceland anymore, not for the time being. I have never felt so good in my life since all of the years I had to attend all of those waste of time of meetings'. What is noteworthy is that the narrator does not position herself as a 'victim', although she acknowledges being discriminated against in her interactions and communications with *Sýslumaður*, but rather takes the subject position of the 'fighter'. For example, she requests to be heard by another employee at the office of the *Sýslumaður* but he also does not listen to her side of the story. The narrative reveals that there are two stories: her story and the story of her ex-husband. The binary logic of 'the story' is invoked here and her side of the story was not granted any testimonial credit with the *Sýslumaður*. Binary logic in terms of stories and side taking is also evident in another narrative that illustrates testimonial deficit in a workplace: 'I mentioned as one example how Icelanders often speak to me in English, assuming I don't speak Icelandic just because of the way I look'. The narrator draws attention to the intersections of being a woman and an immigrant who does not look typically Icelandic, meaning being nonwhite (Halldórsdóttir & Kjaran 2019; Loftsdóttir 2011). She points out that had she been male this would perhaps not happen, although she does not indicate if the

male in question would have been a white Icelander or not: 'Not allowing me to finish my thoughts, immediately dismissing everything I said, was definitely affected by me being a woman. I doubt he would have spoken to a male colleague that way.'

Her story also exemplifies the use of boundary making through language inclusivity and how this intersects with how people look. Those who do not look 'Icelandic' enough are not considered legitimate speakers of the Icelandic language, thus bearers of Icelandic heritage, and are hence addressed in English (Loftsdóttir 2011). Through this boundary construction, the immigrants who do not 'look' typically Icelandic (i.e. white and Nordic) are excluded from the Icelandic epistemic community and experience greater oppression than those immigrants who 'pass' as being Icelandic, e.g. white European. As indicated in the narrative, even before she speaks, she is presumed to be foreign, not part of the language community, and constituted as 'deficient' in terms of language knowledge. In the narrative, the narrator cites the dominant discourse that Icelandic is a difficult language to learn and mostly spoken by those who are born in Iceland and 'appear' Icelandic enough (Rawlings et al. 2020). Such exclusion as detailed in this narrative and illustrates how Icelandic perceptions of language proficiency intersect with looking the part of being ethnically Icelandic. As the narrator reveals, being seen as non-Icelandic positions her as a 'deficit' subject who is assumed not to speak the language correctly and is therefore not fully admitted to the Icelandic community. When she tries to convey her experience to her coworkers, she fails to receive support from them and is in fact silenced and discredited, first and foremost, as she indicates, because she is an immigrant and a woman who does not look Icelandic. Concurrently, she is aware of how her experiences as an immigrant woman of color is constituted within that same story, by referring to experiences of other immigrant women, who are positioned outside of her narrative. In doing this, she opens her story, and it becomes polyphonic, drawing attention to other immigrant women in similar positions to her own. Reflecting on her experience, she concludes that the reactions of her colleagues were 'a result of prejudice'. By doing so, she positions herself within the narrative as being agentic and fully aware of the underlying forces constituting her subjectivity within Icelandic society, and how her status as an immigrant contributes to and sustains violence and oppression.

HIERARCHY OF KNOWLEDGE THROUGH LANGUAGE

A key theme within the narratives analyzed for this article was how the dominant language, Icelandic, constituted individuals and excluded those who could not master it from the epistemic community. The Icelandic language also works to sustain inequalities and produce a hierarchy of bodies. The narrator of one story describes how she actively attempts to learn Icelandic, but she finds it difficult: 'At my job I feel like nobody wants me to learn good Icelandic. I try but it is really difficult language'. She receives no help or support from her coworkers. In fact, to her it seems that they want her to remain 'ignorant' and outside the Icelandic epistemic community. Through her telling of the story, she is aware of the power imbalances at work and that she is kept in a subordinate position through language and knowledge, as she says that 'it keeps me at the bottom'. The 'it' symbolizes the constellations of power embedded in the Icelandic language, which regulates, categorizes, and hierarchizes bodies, making some bodies matter while others are excluded and put at the 'bottom' (Loftsdóttir 2015; Tran 2015). It also draws attention to how language intersects with looks, ethnicity, race, and social position. By reflecting about these issues in the narrative, the narrator positions herself as a knowledgeable subject, taking care of

the self by being aware of what hinders her and what needs to be done to overcome her current situation.

In the narratives, language stood out as a significant issue in power relations and an aspect of epistemic violence. One narrator illustrates how deeply power is embedded within the ideology of the dominant language and how it constitutes and hierarchizes subjects:

I am illiterate in my native language. It is difficult for me to learn to read and write English or Icelandic. I don't understand my rights, and nobody has explained them to me. My husband's family has taken over my banking records and seen to that my children were taken from me. I don't even understand how or why. The people I work with have excluded and bullied me. I can trust only one person who is my friend, is also an immigrant but even she is powerless sometimes. People with power of language, information and being Icelandic have not helped me. I believe some of them have even broken laws by sharing private information about me.

In this narrative, the narrator describes how she is not considered part of the Icelandic epistemic community. She is marginalized and excluded at work and by her in-laws. She draws attention to the fact that she is illiterate in her native language, which makes it difficult for her to relate to and learn other languages, which can be linked with her ethnic, racial or religious origins as well as her gender. She experiences her identity as multiple sites of epistemic violence, which connect with learning Icelandic as learning material for Icelandic as a second language is primarily based on the use of written texts. The narrator indicates that she is aware of the power dynamics embedded in the language and what it means to have knowledge of Icelandic, she recognizes this as a position of power. In her story, she draws a boundary between herself and her immigrant friend, who are 'powerless' because of language 'deficit' and those 'people with power of language', the Icelanders, who use their knowledge to discriminate against them, the immigrant other. Being constrained by the culture of silence, through exclusion from the Icelandic epistemic community, the narrator develops critical awareness of her situation and how she is mistreated through the power of language. As Freire (1973) notes, developing a critical awareness is the first step toward liberation, and by posting her story online she breaks the silence and tells her story.

Other narratives also revolve around the power dynamics inherent in the hegemonic status of the Icelandic language and how it is used to exclude and marginalize individuals: 'She is ashamed that she has to translate for me and does not want other girls to hear it'. Here, the woman shows how her inability to speak the dominant language affects not only herself but her daughter, through bringing shame and embarrassment for having to translate. The narrative draws attention to the dilemmas second- and third-generation immigrants experience within their own culture, being in between the Icelandic and their native cultural space. In another narrative, the woman follows the official processes, but when encountering institutions, she is silenced through her lack of language skill in Icelandic: 'She reported it to the police, but they did not do anything and did not even offer her the service of an interpreter. They did not talk to her daughter'. Both narratives center around issues of translation, or lack thereof, from Icelandic to the respective heritage language. This is further complicated by the women's positions within society, as it clearly shows

how language is a key factor in receiving appropriate and needed services and being valued as a victim of a crime. In the latter narrative, the narrator is a friend or a witness who describes how the police committed epistemic violence through testimonial quieting of an immigrant woman through access to and understanding of the dominant language. The police's failure to value the women's testimony of violence and abuse, similar to the other narratives in this section, points to the hegemonic power contained within access to the Icelandic language. The language, along with immigrant status and ethnic or racial appearance, play key roles through their intersections in the subordination of these immigrant women. These intersecting parts of their identities, grounded in their lack of access to the dominant language, impacted their interactions with Icelanders at work or with institutions such as the police. While Icelandic is a world minority language, the way it is mobilized in these women's narratives indicates, whether intentionally or not, it is used as an epistemic boundary that engages in testimonial silencing, of which the women are aware and through the sharing of their stories they are claiming discursive space.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Ten narratives of immigrant women were analyzed using the lens of epistemic violence and dominant discourse of language in order to give examples of how their immigrant status and immigration itself constructs regimes of violence. These violence regimes then sustain and contribute to the immigrant women's oppression and marginalization within Icelandic society. Through their narratives, the women shared instances of exclusion, which indicate that access to the Icelandic economic, social, and cultural communities can often be quite limited. The women indicate that sociocultural boundaries are actively maintained through testimonial quieting and smothering. The various stories illustrate practices of economic-, social-, gender-, ethnic-, and race-based discriminations within Icelandic institutions. The women's experiences reveal what can be termed as epistemic violence, enacted through hegemonic use of the Icelandic language, testimonial smothering, and silencing. In this section, we discussed these aspects from the perspective of (mis)recognition.

MISRECOGNITION AS A MEANS OF QUIETING/SILENCING

In the stories it is revealed how the women were silenced by the authorities and discredited as knowledgeable subjects. Without the appropriate signifiers of Icelandic culture, namely the ability to speak the language, the women experience testimonial quieting as the language of the dominant group is valued as the primary means of communication and conveying knowledge. In recent parliamentary statutes, issue of language has been seen a significant concern (1694/145 2016). Their real or perceived inability to communicate in the dominant language causes their knowledge to be erased because it is unintelligible to the dominant or the official epistemologies. The women's misrecognition is an aspect of epistemic violence manifested through the failure of organizational representatives or institutions, which are meant to help women who are in violent situations, but do not, because the women are not recognized as knowledgeable subjects who have experienced abuse and violence.

The women are often cognizant of their situations. They are aware of how their immigrant status intersects with issues of race, ethnic origin, and gender and how these social categories impact on their treatment and recognition within the Icelandic institutional context. They pinpoint workplace experiences of discrimination and

relate them to both their being women as well as their status as women of color (Collins & Bilge 2016; Crenshaw 1989; Phoenix & Pattynama 2006). All of the stories at some level center around being 'the outsider or other' in situations where education, socioeconomic status, cultural experience, and knowledge were not recognized in the women's sphere of work or in domestic situations.

THE DEFICIT AND SMOTHERING AS PART OF EPISTEMIC VIOLENCE

Several of the narratives indicated both testimonial deficit and smothering where the women were not perceived as subjects of knowing and their experiences, backgrounds, and cultures are perceived as irrelevant to the knowledge system or to knowledge production. This had implications as the women attempted to access various forms of cultural capital in order to be heard, and in spite of this they found themselves in a subject position where their testimony was smothered. Within the stories one aspect that stood out was how the Icelandic language and their lack of knowledge of the language was a tool for indicating deficit and smothering. The women experienced repeated instances of delegitimization (or silencing) based on both language skill and in terms of looking 'Icelandic'. As Icelandic and 'Icelandicness' are the highly prized aspects of belonging and recognition within Icelandic society, the women experienced discourses of deficiency. When they sought support and validation, they failed to find it within their work or home communities, and as result were required to smother themselves. Yet, in their stories, the women used common discourses in the constructions of their narratives and their positions within dominant hierarchies while claiming representation for the immigrant community.

LANGUAGE AS A HIERARCHY OF KNOWLEDGE

The knowledge of the Icelandic language and its implications for belonging within the society, which is still considered socially and economically important (Meckl et al. 2020), was a significant factor in the women's narratives. Not only were the women not believed when speaking the language, but they encountered barriers to accessing the language and this, as one of the women notes, was used as a means to keep them outside of the dominant culture. They were aware of how the language is a relevant tool for their entry into work and sociocultural aspects of Icelandic life, yet it remained out of reach. The women in their narratives indicated an awareness of how language allows Icelandic speakers to discriminate against them. This exclusion from the dominant language has serious implications for these women as their inability to access the language means that their access to important self-preservation services such as the police or other authority figures is significantly compromised by the hegemonic value placed on Icelandic as a medium of communication.

In conclusion, the narratives of immigrant women indicate the various and subtle ways of how epistemic violence is experienced. It is connected to prejudices, such as seeing the women as 'animals' and repeated silencing of the women's knowledge and experiences. This results in the women themselves being aware of their subject positions as well as at various points how they are constituted by the dominant discourses and engage in testimonial quieting and smothering. Through epistemic violence, the subjects in this paper, the immigrant women, are consistently undermined as knowers and perceived as less than fully human ('they live like animals' as mentioned by one narrator). They are excluded from the dominant knowledge community through lack of access to the dominant language or knowledge of

individual legal rights. They are, through their narratives of their experiences with various Icelandic institutions, depicted as 'deficit' in terms of epistemic trust and credibility. Ultimately, what becomes clear in the women's experiences are aspects, which are systematic and institutionalized within the Icelandic social, cultural, and legal context. Such exclusion leaves the women feeling marginalized, where their identities are unvalued; they are not seen as knowers who can speak about their experiences; and ultimately, they are excluded from participation in the knowledge production of Icelandic society.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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