Psychologies of not Knowing:
On the (Re)Production of Oppression via Processes of not Knowing or Ignorance

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Abstract

Social and liberation movements all over the world have acted on the premise that oppression is kept alive, among other ways, through psychological mechanisms. Feminist and critical race epistemologies such as "feminist standpoint theories" and "epistemological ignorance" suggest that there might be different forms of not knowing involved depending on the social location of the (not) knowing subject. In this paper we suggest that the concrete psychological mechanisms involved in not knowing or outright ignorance differ according to one's position in the social fabric of oppression and privilege. Drawing on various critical psychological and psychoanalytic reflections, as well as interpreting selected passages from a group discussion among elderly retirement home residents in Vienna, we illustrate how social position is translated into lack of knowledge about systems of oppression and privilege.

Oppression is kept alive, among other ways, through psychological mechanisms. This premise has been at the heart of many social and liberation movements all around the globe at least since the late 1960s and it has also been a basic tenet of many critical and liberation psychologies (e.g., Freire, 2005; Martín-Baró, 1994; Sandoval, 2000). One psychological dimension of oppression is knowledge or, rather, lack of knowledge about oppression, which new social movements of the 1960s, the women's movement in particular, identified as a major hurdle to social change. Social movements regarded knowledge about one's

oppression as a necessary prerequisite for political action: "The purpose of consciousness-raising was to get to the most radical truths about the situation of women in order to take radical action" (Sarachild, 1978, pp. 148-149). In the words of Paolo Freire: "For someone to achieve critical consciousness of his status as an oppressed man [sic] requires recognition of his reality as an oppressive reality" (Freire, 2005, p. 174). While these radical theories, like feminist standpoint theories that would later develop on the heels of the second wave women's movement, were concerned with the consciousness of the oppressed, other strands of thought, such as epistemologies of ignorance, tackle ignorance about systems of oppression among the privileged.

Taken together, these epistemologies suggest that there might be different forms of not knowing about systems of oppression and privilege depending on the social location of the (not) knowing subject within the matrix of oppression and privilege. Building on and expanding previous reflections on *scientists as not-knowing subjects* (Ruck et al., 2019) to make them applicable not only for the social field of science but for the field of everyday life, this paper suggests a terminological differentiation: we call lack of knowledge about social injustice that stems from a position of privilege *ignorance*; when addressing a void of knowledge about social injustice that arises from a position of oppression we propose to use the term *not-knowing*. In a previous paper some of us have asked how scientists' social positions and subjectivities afford opportunities or obstacles to knowledge. Starting from the observation that psychology has until now rarely been used to contribute to feminist science and technology studies, we asked how epistemological concepts developed by feminist and critical race theorists may be further developed by considering psychological processes. Focusing on *feminist standpoint theory* and *epistemologies of ignorance* we discussed the relations between social position, experience, and knowledge or lack thereof. In this previous paper, we speak of *epistemological ignorance* in order to highlight the meta-level of ignorance that is at stake when systems of oppression and privilege are ignored in the scientific production of knowledge, i.e., in a context of knowledge production that is characterized by ongoing reflection on the very process of producing knowledge and that has manifold mechanisms and criteria in place that aim at reducing bias. Drawing on social psychological and psychoanalytic reflections and studies we then illustrated how social position is translated into lack of knowledge about systems of oppression and privilege and we asked how this process may be disrupted by an "affective shift" (see Hemmings, 2012, p. 157).

In this paper we want to broaden our focus to psychological processes of ignorance and not-knowing about one's own privileges and oppression more generally. In an inversion of feminist standpoint theory we ask: how do social position, experience, and not-knowing or ignorance interact in everyday interactions? More specifically, how do subject's positions within the social matrix of oppression and privilege translate into ignorance or not-knowing within concrete everyday situations and what role does the concrete experience of oppression and privilege play in this process? We address these questions firstly by introducing feminist and critical race epistemologies that shed light on the complex interaction between social position and not-knowing or ignorance, such as epistemologies of ignorance and feminist standpoint theory. We then complement these considerations with an intersectional perspective on the entanglement of oppression and privilege. By analyzing segments of a group discussion, we finally illustrate the proposed forms of not knowing and ignorance and show their complex enactments in concrete situations.

Ignorance among the privileged

Epistemologies of ignorance hold that the absence of knowledge calls for an epistemology in its own right (Alcoff, 2007). They furthermore pose that ignorance is inextricably tied to systems of oppression. Charles Mills proposed that White supremacy uses an "inverted epistemology," (1997, p. 18) based on an epistemological contract which consists of *ignorance*. He conceptualized ignorance as a "pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional)," and a "group-based cognitive handicap" (2007, p. 15), which produces "the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made" (p. 18). What is vital to note from this perspective is that those in positions of power are conceptualized as being not only *less* interested in recognizing systems of dominance and oppression and their effects correctly, but as indeed having a "*positive* interest in 'seeing the world wrongly'" (Alcoff, 2007, p. 47).

Nancy Tuana adopted the concept of ignorance from a feminist point of view and differentiated several ways of not knowing: 1) knowing that we do not know, but not caring to know, 2) we do not even know that we do not know, 3) they do not want us to know, 4) willful ignorance, 5) ignorance produced by the construction of epistemically, disadvantaged identities, 6) loving ignorance (Tuana, 2006). This variety of different forms not only makes cogent that ignorance is a multifaceted phenomenon but also encourages us to consider psychological dimensions like cognition, affect, and the unconscious. Similarly, Mills (1997) emphasized that ignorance not only fulfills a social function for (re)producing systems of oppression but a psychological function as well.

Further exploring the psychological functionality of ignorance, we refer to Gabriele Rosenthal's studies on the silence of Nazi perpetrators and their families about the crimes they committed during the Nazi regime (e.g., Rosenthal, 1998; see also Ruck et al., 2019). Rosenthal and her colleagues' interviews with former Nazi perpetrators and their family members (spouses, children and grandchildren) garnered insights into the psychological defense mechanism against feelings of guilt. In particular, Rosenthal and her colleagues found narrative patterns that veiled and denied the crimes of the parent generation. Analyzing these narratives, Rosenthal (1998) reconstructed different strategies of deflecting responsibility and warding off guilt: 1) veiling 2) victim blaming and 3) pseudo-identification with the victims. The strategy of veiling is characterized by the utter absence of both Nazi victims as well as perpetrators in biographical narrations by grandparents. According to Rosenthal, this absence allows to cover up the actual historical dehumanization and extermination of Jews by repressing the factual historic existence of both perpetrators and victims from the narrators' consciousness. In narrations by children and grandchildren, this repression manifests itself as knowledge gaps that are often filled with fantasies about the (grand-) parents' role in national socialist Germany. Impressively, some children and grandchildren of Nazi perpetrators even imagined their parents or grandparents, respectively, as active in the resistance against Nazi Germany – even in cases where archival records clearly document the grandparents' war crimes. The second strategy, victim blaming, reverses the roles: perpetrators are constructed as victims and vice versa. Typical narratives would, for example, blame Jews murdered in concentration camps for not having resisted or even imagine a Jewish conspiracy at the root of national socialism. Finally, in some children of Nazi perpetrators, pseudo-identification with the victims, e.g., a philo-Semitism in children of Nazi perpetrators in combination with a complete denial of

the (grand-)parents' involvement, can be found as a third psychological mechanism of deflecting responsibility.

So far we can assume that epistemological ignorance is socially functional, since the partial view of the privileged "corresponds with their own interests and obscures the operations of the very power they benefit from" (Parker, 2015, p. 724). However, in order to fulfil its social function, ignorance is in need of psychological mechanisms like veiling or denial. Ignorance allows those who benefit from systems of oppression and privilege to ignore – or in psychological terms: to repress – their own privileged position by veiling or denying the advantages of being in this position or even by reversing the roles.

Not-knowing among the oppressed

While epistemologies of ignorance tend to analyze lack of knowledge about oppression among the privileged, feminist standpoint theories foreground the processes that turn lack of knowledge among the oppressed into critical consciousness about oppression. In particular, feminist standpoint theories emphasize the interplay of cognition, subject and social position, relying on the Marxist notion that humans' being and knowledge are shaped by the ways in which they interact with each other and with nature in the process of production (Hartsock, 1983). Standpoint theories allow for the argument that while socially marginalized individuals are disadvantaged by their social position in many respects, they do hold a privilege in epistemological terms. Indeed, feminist standpoint theories suggest that social inequalities – and hence our society, which is so permeated by these inequalities – are more accurately and more readily recognized by those who are affected by them. Insofar as some standpoint theories link an oppressed social position with an epistemological privilege, Ian Parker (2015, p. 722) has described the standpoint as a reversal and transformation of what a "crass conspiratorial form of Marxism" has dubbed false consciousness, i.e., the product of the working classes' adoption of the ruling classes' ideological understanding of the world. While the notion of false consciousness refers to the working classes' inability to conceive of the oppressive nature of society and their own position in it, feminist standpoint theories, in a vein similar to epistemologies of ignorance, argue that the false consciousness of the ruling class is even more pronounced.

Although a standpoint is related to an individual's position within the overall social structure, and to the experiences and activities associated with it, it is not identical with this social position. Rather, the standpoint is a political project and thus a goal and not something that is already given. As Harding emphasizes, the struggle for a standpoint begins where oppressed groups learn "to turn an oppressive feature of the group's conditions into a source of critical insight about how the dominant society thinks and is structured" (Harding, 2004, p. 7). It is the mediated relation between social position and knowledge that allows for the possibility of not-knowing about the social conditions of one's experience before or unless a standpoint is achieved. If this is the case, what psychological processes mediate between oppression and *not-knowing* about oppression before or unless a standpoint is achieved?

Feminist standpoint theorists were not the first feminist theorists to emphasize the interplay between social position, experience, and cognition. Radical feminists of the late 1960s and 1970s, especially those who experimented with consciousness-raising, laid the groundwork for later feminist standpoint theories. In our view, it is precisely the aspects of radical feminism that standpoint theories did *not* further elaborate that allow for insights into the psychological dimension of now-knowing among the oppressed. Radical feminists had

observed that many women were not aware of their own oppression. We believe that even today, these activist insights are of enormous significance for understanding how and why members of oppressed groups partake or do not partake in activities that improve their collective situation or even participate in actions that directly work against them. In order to analyze why women were not aware of their own oppression, radical feminists compiled lists of so-called "resistances to consciousness " (e.g. Peslikis, 1970), which included, for example, glorifying, excusing or identifying with the oppressor or other privileged groups, over-identifying with one's own oppressed group or other oppressed groups, various forms of escapism, overestimating the capacity to act in traditionally female roles, individualism and many others (Sarachild, 1970). Radical feminists were thus convinced that there were psychological and mostly unconscious mechanisms in place that prevented members of oppressed groups from gaining insight into their own oppression.

This line of thinking was partly rooted in critical theory (see for example, how Firestone, 1970, drew on critical theorist Herbert Marcuse). Asking why individuals did not revolt against the very conditions they suffered from was a core question critical theorists of the Frankfurt school asked beginning in the 1920s and against the background of the absence of revolution and, later, the rise of National Socialism in Europe (cf. Brunner et al., 2013). Critical theory claimed that the authoritarian personalities produced within the nuclear family of late capitalism avoided revolting against their authoritative fathers and against those in power. Instead, these personalities pursued pseudo-rebellions against social scapegoats that were enabled, in particular, by the rise of nationalism. Feminist psychoanalysts applied these reflections to gender relations and analyzed the emergence of femininity under male domination. Christa Rohde-Dachser (2003), for example, used the notion of "complementary narcissism" in order to describe the position of many heterosexual women in patriarchal societies as identified with their fathers, with men more generally, and with the male gaze. This way, Rohde-Dachser argued, women submit to, but at the same time participate in the successes and power of men through identification.

An intersectional perspective on not-knowing or ignoring oppression and privilege

Rohde-Dachser's account presupposed that the men identified with are powerful or can at least be imagined to be so. It appears to us that in her notion of complementary narcissism, Rohde-Dachser (2003) pictured a middle or upper class White daughter identifying with a father or husband positioned along similar class and/or race lines. However, an intersectional perspective urges us to ask about the social position of the women identifying and of the men identified with and about the conditions for identifying with them.

More generally, an intersectional perspective should interrogate the interrelations between oppression and privilege both on the social level and on the psychological level. For many or even most individuals, oppression overlaps with privilege, and both positions may be accompanied by ignorance or not-knowing of the mechanisms and consequences of oppression from which one either suffers or benefits. Cole and Zucker (2007) found that Black women in the United States were more likely to identify themselves as feminists than White women, indicating a higher awareness of gender inequalities among Black women. They assumed that experiences of racial oppression also sensitized Black women to sexism, while Cole (2007) theorized that White women may be complicit with the status quo

because, as daughters, mothers, or wives of white men, they are closer to the privilege of White men and thus benefit from the perpetuation of racial inequalities.

Scholars from feminist, critical whiteness, and postcolonial studies have coined the term "occidentalist dividend" to understand why White women, in particular, actively – while not necessarily consciously – resist insights both into their own oppression as women and into the benefits reaped from a racial and postcolonial order (e.g. Dietze, 2010). Gabriele Dietze originally used this concept to explain why many German women participated in a discourse that problematized gender inequality especially in Muslim communities and countries but denied gendered injustice when it came to the non-Muslim White majority. Referring to the social psychologist Birgit Rommelspacher, Dietze also claims that "the greater the gap between the claim [for social equality] and reality, the greater the desire to prove one's own progressiveness through a forced rhetoric of 'emancipation' and liberation" (p. 98). Therefore, the projection of gender oppression onto Muslim or other communities is psychologically functional for White non-Muslim women in at least two ways: it enables them to feel liberated, equal to men and emancipated, as opposed to the imaginary oppression of Muslim women, and to reject, at the same time, responsibility and guilt for a system of racial and post-colonial inequality that discriminates against both Muslim men and women.

While the term 'occidentalist dividend' tackles the intersection of privilege and oppression, feminist epistemologists have pointed to the 'epistemological advantage' of multiple marginalization. For example, Patricia Hill Collins has theorized the "outsider within" status of Black women in the USA (Collins, 1986, p. 14). Collins (1986) coined this term to refer to the specific epistemic situation of Black women, a situation that, after the abolition of slavery, was often characterized by Black women working in white households as – paid or unpaid – caretakers and domestic helpers. Collins points out that these women saw and got to know the White elites from a perspective that remained hidden from both their husbands and the Whites themselves.

Both psychologically and politically, intersectionality poses the challenge that "those who occupy multiple subordinate identities, particularly women of color, may find themselves caught between the sometimes conflicting agendas of two political constituencies to which they belong" (Cole, 2008, p. 444). Elizabeth Cole has suggested that intersectionality can help to move beyond identity politics by focusing on the concrete coalitions that individuals and groups form in their attempts to orient themselves and struggle against oppression. Depending on these coalitions or loyalties, some systems of oppression may be better recognizable than others by those affected by multiple axes of oppression.

The entanglement of oppression and privilege in everyday practice

To sum up our theoretical point of departure: So far, we assume that 1) those in power have a vested interest in keeping their view of the social world partial, as they socially and psychologically benefit from their own ignorance about the systems of oppression they are intrenched in, and that 2) psychological mechanisms, for example, veiling and denying privilege, are involved in keeping their ignorance alive. In contrast, 3) the social position of oppressed groups may enable a less partial perspective, but 4) such a more complete view of social reality – a standpoint – is not given, but needs to be developed, and there are psychological mechanisms at play that interfere with becoming conscious of one's own

oppression e.g., identification with those in power. Not least because there might be different psychological processes involved in lack of knowledge about one's own privilege on the one hand and about one's oppression on the other hand, 5) we employ a terminological distinction: We speak of *ignorance* to demarcate lack of knowledge about one's own privileges, and of *not-knowing* to address absence of awareness of one's own oppression. Finally, 6) the complex intersection of oppression and privilege in respect to not knowing and ignorance needs to be accounted for.

To shed light on the applicability of the proposed terminological differentiation on everyday processes of now-knowing and ignorance about systems of oppression and privilege, we now draw on an empirical example. We explore the complex interaction between oppression and privilege in processes of not-knowing and ignorance using transcript excerpts from a group discussion collected as part of a project that aimed at analyzing the formation of ressentiment[1]. In this group discussion, two of our students interviewed both male and female elderly residents of a retirement home in Austria on their daily experiences in the retirement home as well as on larger questions of social solidarity and divisions in society. As becomes evident rather late in the group discussion, a nurse, who presumably immigrated to Austria in her younger years, is present during the conversation and partakes in the interaction at one point. As we will see, the chosen material affords multiple opportunities to analyze the interrelations of not-knowing and ignorance with social position as all participants occupy positions both of power *and* of subjugation at different moments in the discussion.

Methodologically, our interpretation relies on the *documentary method of interpretation* (see Bohnsack, 2014). Because of our interest in processes of ignorance or not-knowing, we chose a method that focuses on the latent layers – the tacit social knowledge that finds expression in the everyday practices of speech – rather than on manifest contents. This perspective allows to ask just how "socio-structural constructions co-constitute individual psychological processes" (Hametner et al., 2020, p. 3). Especially when analyzing group discussions, the documentary methods allows to tackle so-called *conjunctive experiences* (Mannheim, 1980), i.e., experiences that are shared by individuals, for example because they are positioned similarly in society in terms of gender, race, class, age, or other social structures or social milieus, and/or because they have made similar experiences for other reasons – live in the same neighborhood or in a retirement home for elderly residents, as in the case of our group discussion.

The documentary method is of methodological interest for our purposes because it differentiates between two layers of meaning, which are methodologically associated with two forms of knowledge, which are, in turn, reconstructed by two steps of interpretation: "communicative and conjunctive knowledge" (Bohnsack, 2014, p. 220). On the one hand, an explicit or communicative form of knowledge can be analyzed by summarizing *what* is said by an interviewee or by participants in a group discussion. This first interpretative step is called *formulating interpretation*. Moreover, and on the other hand, the documentary method aims to tackle "a type of knowledge which is not available to us in a lexical, or conceptual form, but as an implicit shared knowledge that is intrinsically embedded in our

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[1] This project is part of the collaborative research cluster „Ressentiment and Change Potential in Europe (RECHANGE)" at Sigmund Freud University of Vienna (https://psychologie.sfu.ac.at/de/forschung/forschungsprojekte/forschungscluster-rechange/).

immediate, everyday practice" (Przyborski & Slunecko, 2009, p. 144). This interpretative step, which is called *reflecting interpretation*, aims at the reconstruction of the implicit, tacit, or practical forms of knowledge that guide everyday practices. A methodological tenet of the documentary method that is pivotal for our interest in processes of ignorance and not-knowing concerns the relation between the two forms of knowledge, as it is assumed that a subject's self-theories do not necessarily correspond to their everyday practices, i.e., to the tacit knowledge that guides their everyday actions. Indeed, the documentary method allows to theorize that in some cases, what people say and think about their everyday experiences and practices serves to conceal the implicit orientational sense of these very experiences and actions from them.

In our analysis of the group discussion between retirement home residents, we follow both our interest in subjects' knowledge or ignorance/not-knowing about their own social position and the methodological principles of the documentary method. Accordingly, we sought out transcript passages in which explicative, communicative knowledge about the participants' social position is uttered. However, instead of focusing only on *what* the participants say about their social position we are rather interested in *what they do* with this communicatively uttered knowledge. The passages we have selected for interpretation are interactively dense and vivid, which we interpret as signs of conjunctive experiences. Sometimes, the accompanying affect is also made explicit by the interlocutors. In some of these passages, we find rather abrupt changes of topics, which do not seem to make sense thematically. However, in line with the documentary method's focus on latent layers of meaning, we propose to interpret these passages as indicators that something else is going on, that knowledge about the participants' social position that becomes subject of explicit knowledge at some point is actively made implicit, i.e., (re)-moved to the level of unknowing or ignorance, at a later point.

Upon being asked by the interviewers to talk about their daily experiences in the retirement home, the residents start the discussion by describing their daily routines, their meals, their community, and their habits of sharing things and of giving gifts to each other, as well as their varying degrees of freedom in determining their daily activities and their company at the communal meals. As it turns out, some residents with more severe physical impairments are not allowed to choose their company at the dinner tables but are assigned to tables by the nurses. They then talk about deaths of spouses and about their own homes before moving to the retirement home.

After the opening discussion has come to a close, one interviewer asks the discussants who they are in contact with on an everyday basis, which they elaborate on by first mentioning "the nurses" (transcript p 8, line 234) and then cleaning staff. It is in this context that the discussants first mention their dire economic situation:

Am	(2) we are really well taken care of well
Is	ok
Am	(2) just one thing we must
Bm	I
	L the laundry is being washed
Am	mhm well
Cw	( )
Am	well it is uncomfortable that one has only twenty percent of one's salary of all one earns that is pension and ah I with twenty percent I have for example only 12 Euros at my

disposal ( ) now I have to buy a new hearing aid and it is about well (2) roughly thousand Schilling ah Euros well how long mustn't I buy anything else but a hearing aid (transcript p. 10, lines 273-285)[2]

On the level of content, we can observe that the participants evaluate the level of care in their institution as positive. On the level of discourse organization, the detailed transcription system allows to record that the participants tacitly agree on this statement as Bm finishes or elaborates Am's statement that they are "well taken care of" by noting that their laundry is washed. The participants thus develop the first part of the theme together, which, methodologically, can be evidenced by overlaps between the individual speakers' utterances. The passive formulation serves to de-thematize *who* is taking care of them and washing their laundry: The same nurses who take care of them, who act as their main contacts, who assign some of the residents to tables for meals and who, thus, determine and dominate their everyday interactions. Immediately following mentions of the quality of care, however, they elaborate that they (the residents) are only allowed to keep 20 percent of their pension, while the rest pays for the retirement home; i.e., they soon describe their problematic economic situation by framing it as "uncomfortable". While on the content level, the thematic change from contact to nurses and cleaning staff to their lack of money seems somewhat arbitrary, it makes more sense when taking into account their everyday experiences: Both as elderly citizens who depend on nurses and as being economically restricted, the residents find themselves in a subjugated social position.

Over the course of about three transcript pages, the discussants then elaborate in a rather detailed and highly interactive manner how much money they can keep and how much money they (can) spend on, for example, clothes, the hairdresser's, pedicure, or public transport. Somewhat later in the passage, Am comments on the affective dimension of these

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[2] All interviews were transcribed using the *Talk in Qualitative Social Research* (TiQ) transcription system. The passages quoted here were translated by the authors. All references to partcipants' personal data have been anonymized and/or synonymized. TiQ is rather meticulous in recording the way utterances are delivered and the modes in which participants in a group discussion refer to one another, and is thus often used for interpretation methods that focus on tacit forms of everyday knowledge (see Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, pp. 167). This is a guide to the used symbols:

[name]	pseudonymised content
(.)	short pause
( )	incomprehensible words
(2)	two second pause (the number indicates the duration of the pause in seconds)
⌊	direct turn-taking (interrupting the other speaker(s))
@(.)@	shortly laughing
@funny@	a word said while laughing
Funny	loud
<u>Funny</u>	emphasised
Fu-	broken off
Funny;	slightly sinking intonation
Funny?	strongly rising intonation
°funny°	low voice
Fu::nny	stretched word (the more colons, the more stretched the pronunciation)

financial restrictions by saying "that hurts me pretty much" (transcript p. 11, line 331). Thematically, this passage consists of the participants' elaborations on their dire financial situation and their comparisons of their current economic status with the way things used to be before they moved to the senior residence. In this section, the discussants' subordinate economic position becomes quite visible and by referring to it directly the participants also share communicative knowledge about it.

The interviewers then ask the participants about solidarity and divisions within society more generally. Upon this, they discuss political divisions within the previous and current Austrian government and in the process, political dissent within the group also become evident. At one point one discussant explicitly mentions their privilege as Austrians:

Bm	( ) we are pretty well off despite of everything, aren't we;
Am	mh (3) but there is one thing I want to disagree with
Bm	I
	L There are nations where people are taken everything they have from them and only a big few have all the money; the others are starving well this
Am	there is something I want to add here ah it is the achievement of the old government[3] that we are doing so well
Cw	exactly
Am	nobody wants to believe this well they only have to see how things are abroad well how they are doing well it is of course that we have so many unemployed people is again was a <u>mistake</u> that foreigners are allowed to work here ( ) that was a mistake; foreigners come <u>here</u>; work here; and ah and take our jobs away; (transcript p. 16, lines 468-498)

In this passage, the group first points out that "we" are rather well off in Austria and conveys awareness of their own privileged position as Austrian citizens. In a rather interactive manner, they elaborate and agree not only that Austrians are "better off" than people in other countries but also reasons why this is the case (the "old government"). Am starts to say that no one wants to believe this (how well off Austrians really are) and suggests that those who do not want to acknowledge should take a look at other countries (presumably to see that people there are worse off) and, in mid-sentence, shifts from conditions in other countries to Austria and asserts that allowing so-called "foreigners" to work in Austria was a mistake. Quickly the discussants switch from a position of communicative knowledge about their privilege as Austrians to a position of ignorance even to reversing the positions – less privileged "foreigners" are now imagined as powerful threats who take "their" jobs away (it is worth mentioning at this point that elderly participants were all retired).

How do we make sense of these two rather different passages? In order to understand how social position, experience, and knowledge or epistemological ignorance intersect here, and how the two different sequences of the discussion are related, we draw on the notion of ressentiment. As Max Scheler conceived of it, ressentiment derives from conflict (e.g., experience of inferiority) that cannot be solved. Because the negative affect that accompanies a hurtful experience cannot be acted out in certain social arrangements, it is

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[3] The "old government" probably refers to a coalition government between the Social Democratic Party and the People's Party. The group discussion was conducted in early 2017, when a coalition government between the right-wing conservative People's Party and the right-wing extremist Freedom Party had just been formed.

shifted to another object (Scheler 1915/2007, p. 27). Though we do not suggest following Scheler's social theoretical reflections and conclusions all the way (see Rodax et al., 2021), we believe that his account allows to examine how affect, power, and knowledge (of power) interact, as Scheler noted that it is usually those who find themselves in a subjugated position that are deprived of the possibility to act out affect stemming from insults or other hurtful interactions.

From the perspective of ressentiment, we interpret the two passages the following way: At first the discussants talk about their difficult economic situation (conflict or insult) explicitly – they demonstrate awareness of their social situation. Later on, when they are invited to talk about broader societal aspects by the interviewers, they first mention their privilege as Austrians. However, since they nevertheless experience an economically vulnerable situation they cannot change (conflict cannot be acted out), they shift their attention to migrants, who are concurrently constructed as the source of their problem (shifting the affect to another object). This helps the discussants to not only discursively cover up their economically precarious and upsetting situation (they explicitly refer to their lack of money as something that "hurts") and deflect from their economically subordinate position, but also to shift the locus of blame from rather vague systemic sources to a tangible object (migrants).

Over the following passages, the discussants continue complaining about migrants and about the fact that the immigration of "foreigners" has decreased the qualification level of workers in many professions. However, as soon as they bring up the example of untrained nurses, who despite their supposed lack of qualifications succeed in getting jobs in Austria, a nurse, who had been silently present all along, joins the discussion:

> Cw   I
>   L I do not want to know how many of our nurses are
>   (untrained helps)
> Bm   (2) well they get (   )
> Cw   I
>   L more than enough
> Xw   I am a foreigner myself but I have been here for thirty years, and have worked; learned; completed school here; completed training here and my children were born here they are like real Austrians; because they study here, they were born here, they are not like them, they we did not go to Turkey every year; I am a Turkish woman a [minority group] woman from Turkey ( ) and well but more or less I feel like an Austrian I don't know;
> Bm   well after thirty years you must @be@ an Austrian (transcript pp. 17-18, lines 537-543)

By pointing out that she is a foreigner herself but has attended school and trained in her profession in Austria and "more or less feels like an Austrian", the nurse challenges the image of the untrained migrant who does not belong to Austria. We can also see here that it is the migrant woman who disrupts the "epistemological contract" among the interlocutors, i.e., the consensus among the elderly residents to blame so-called "foreigners" for the dire financial situation of many Austrians, probably also their own. Nevertheless, she closes her utterance by saying "I don't know", which indicates not only insecurity but also her subordinated epistemological position in this situation.

Another discussant apparently *does* know and replies: "Well after 30 years you must @be@ an Austrian", laughingly pronouncing and thus emphasizing "be" Austrian. He thus (re-)

claims an epistemologically superior position of the residents of the retirement home, enacting a categorical decision about who is considered to be Austrian and who is not. By contrasting what is made implicit in the two sequences we discussed – the fact of being economically deprived and at the mercy of nurses in the retirement home on the one hand, identifying as "we" Austrians on the other hand – one can see that there is a latent dynamic: We suggest that by claiming epistemological supremacy based on the construction of national identity (being Austrian and thus claiming the right to decide who else is), the participant neutralizes the discussants' own difficult and sometimes painful situation of economic and age-related precarity.

Conclusion

Processes of not knowing or ignorance relate to experience and social position in complex and deeply situated ways on both the macro and meso levels of social organization. The discussants in the group discussion we have explored, i.e., the male and female White Austrian elderly residents on the one hand and the female migrant middle-aged nurse on the other hand, are all positioned along macro structural dimensions such as gender, nationality, resident status, physical (dis)ability, and age. However, they are also situated within more meso level power dynamics of the concrete organization, i.e., the retirement home.

We now want to sketch ways in which to tie these elements together. Especially when attending to what the discussants *do* rather than say in discourse, our case study allows us to register the multiple ways in which the development of racist ressentiment conceals the social matrix of oppression and privilege the elderly interlocutors are entrenched in *from* them. Ressentiment sustains the epistemological contract of ignorance for their privileges as Austrians on the one hand and prevents consciousness about the economic unfairness of the system and the hurtful experiences of being dependent on the other hand: It enacts and solidifies the residents' privilege as "real" Austrians in contrast to the migrant nurse, who displays insecurity about her status in Austria and about her belonging. However, the discussants' ressentiment also deflects from the fact that in the context of the nursing home, where nurses have the power to determine and to structure the residents' everyday life, the elders' privilege is 'merely' discursive and can only be enacted as a kind of interpretational sovereignty that allows them – or seems to allow them – to decide who counts as a "real" Austrian and who does not. It is vital to emphasize, however, that these racist ressentiments follow, narrations of concrete experiences of impoverishment and loss of status that are described as 'hurtful' ("that hurts"). It is the temporal order of discourse here that indicates to us a shift of conflict or affect that is typical for the process of ressentiment formation and that is accompanied by shifts in acknowledging one's position in the matrix of oppression and privilege.

As outlined above (see also Ruck et al., 2019), there are several other psychological mechanisms for epistemological ignorance or not knowing. In the case of oppression, we pictured – relying on the Frankfurt school and Rohde-Dachser's analysis – identification with those in power as a powerful psychological mechanism. For ignorance about privilege, we described epistemological ignorance as a kind of defense mechanism against feelings of guilt. In the group discussion we have drawn on here it is interesting to note that the discussants express sympathy and compassion for the nurse's experiences as a refugee. This would have opened up the possibility of discussing the inequalities of postcolonial capitalism, of racial genocide, or of war zones in the Global South. The participants take another route, though. They do not recede from their assertions made in previous passages

that treating migrant and refugee families differently than Austrian citizens was justified and just – on the contrary, they cover up these discrepancies by proclaiming the migrant nurse as "one of us". In fact, they do shortly mention their privilege and the fact that people in other countries are far worse off than Austrians before the nurse's intervention in their discussion, but shortly afterwards they shift to rants about "foreigners" taking away jobs from Austrians and disguise their privileged position as Austrians.

However, while ignorance of one's own privilege can be both socially and psychologically functional for the privileged, powerful, or even perpetrators because it serves to avoid feelings of guilt, not knowing may also fulfill psychological functions for members of subjugated, discriminated, or oppressed groups. This form of not-knowing about one's own subjugated position is also evident in our own material when the discussants shift from hurtful knowledge of their own dire economic situation to scapegoating refugees and migrants instead. By developing ressentiments, their own marginalized position as elderly people living in economic precarity is veiled and, thus, disclosed by them and, at the same time, from them.

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