

Ignorance and (im)possibility

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This chapter is dedicated to an exploration of the connections between ignorance, possibility, and impossibility. While traditionally studies of ignorance have been firmly anchored in debates about knowledge (and the lack of knowledge), what I propose here is that this phenomenon is (also) essential for our engagement with the possible. The sociocultural theory of the possible claims that possibility emerges at the intersection between multiple perspectives that, in turn, build on differences of position within a shared social, material, cultural and psychological space. Conversely, the impossible concerns less that which cannot be actualised as much as it reflects singularity of perspective and the negation of difference. The argument I develop is that ignorance plays a key role in both the dynamic of possibility and impossibility. More concretely, ignorance can keep us away from recognising and embracing other perspectives while it can also make us humble and curious about those perspectives and positions in the world that are inaccessible to us. I will take the case of the perspective of others, especially migrants and refugees, to illustrate a small typology including: *default ignorance* or the state of not being aware, on a daily basis, of perspectives different than our own; *deliberate ignorance* or the conscious decision not to engage with the perspective of specific others; *masked ignorance* or the assumption of understanding a perspective one has no understanding of; and *wondrous ignorance* or a state of complete openness to new perspective without the assumption of final or certain knowledge. In the end, the embodied and distributed nature of each of these forms of ignorance will be discussed in light of how they contribute to the (im)possibility of an authentic engagement with others and otherness.

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The dictionary definition of ignorance ties it closely to knowledge, specifically its absence. To be ignorant means not to know or not to be aware of something¹. With this definition comes a generally negative list of associations for those who are ignorant and who, as a consequence, get depicted as uneducated, inexperienced, ill-mannered, unsophisticated, even stupid or brutish. This is how, in everyday language at least, calling someone ignorant is an insult or an accusation. It means positioning them as inferior – lacking knowledge – and ultimately bad – resisting the acquisition of knowledge. While the term itself is rarely used in psychology, there is a long tradition in this discipline of valuing knowledge over not knowing and especially focusing on errors and biases that corrupt knowledge and lead us to being wrong, misinformed, ignorant (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974; Gigerenzer & Selten, 2002). And yet, this has not always been the case. In fact, the Socratic roots of philosophy take us to a more positive relation between knowing and not knowing, between ignorance and wisdom. For Socrates himself, admitting one's lack of knowledge was the first step on the path to a deeper understanding of things (Leshner, 1987). An attitude of intellectual humility, one that includes the recognition of ignorance, was seen as much more productive for deeper intellectual pursuits. In the end, not knowing does not deny the willingness to know and the very awareness of ignorance can be the engine for new questions, wonderings, and possibilities.

This is what the present chapter aims to unpack: the relationship between ignorance and the possible. It is perhaps a curious connection, one that breaks away from the old-age relation to knowledge and moves us past simplistic, negative associations. More than this, it opens up a new horizon of understanding ignorance as state of mind or attitude that can welcome new possibilities. This is not an overly romanticised account, however. More ignorance doesn't automatically translate into more possibility. In fact, as we shall see, specific ways of being ignorant set up various kinds of impossibility in our relation to ourselves, to others, and to the world. And yet, there is something intrinsically valuable in not knowing, in not having made up one's mind, in being open to new and different knowledges – a condition of possibility for the possible itself. The crux of

¹ According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, see the following link: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ignorance>

the argument developed in this chapter goes something like this: The possible relies on the existence of multiple perspectives and their recognition. One can be ignorant in terms of the former or the latter (and, on some occasions, of both). Not knowing exactly what perspectives can be generated but recognising the value of generating them is a possibility-enabling kind of ignorance. Resisting new perspectives and not appreciating their importance is an impossibility-enabling ignorance. In this chapter, I will take the case of our relation to migration and the perspectives of migrants to illustrate one type of possibility-enabling ignorance – wondrous – and three types that are closer to impossibility-enabling ignorance – default, deliberate and masked. While the last three are certainly common and more differentiated, I will argue in the end that wondrous ignorance is fundamental not only for our sense of possibility, but also for our shared humanity.

The chapter starts with a general discussion of the notion of possibility and, more specifically, outlines a pragmatist, sociocultural account of both the possible rooted in the notions of difference, position, perspective, and dialogue. At the heart of this account we find the idea that possibility depends on the diversity of perspectives and these, in turn, depend on openness to difference (Glăveanu, 2020a). It will be argued that certain forms of ignorance capture precisely this openness to what is and to what is to come. At the same time, disregarding or radically opposing differences of perspective can also relate to ignorance, in these cases an ignorance that rejects rather than embraces otherness, possibility, and the future. The case of migration will be discussed with examples from social media studies of how the perspectives of migrants and refugees are represented (or not) in online spaces. This case will be used to document a typology of ignorance that includes default, deliberate, masked and wondrous forms, each one with its own set of characteristics and practical consequences. In the end, a distributed account of ignorance is outlined, one that moves it from stable forms and categories to the interactive and shifting spaces of dialogue between self and other, self and objects, self and society. It is here, at the encounter with the world, especially the world of others, that ignorance can help us unleash the possible, if we allow it to.

The possible, the impossible and the ignorant

Before understanding the role of ignorance in relation to (im)possibility, we need to delve deeper into the possible, a notion with deep historical roots that spans centuries of reflection in philosophy and the humanities (Ronen, 1994; Nolan, 2013; Khemlani, Byrne & Johnson-Laird, 2018) and has more recently become important for the social sciences and psychology (Mills, 2000; Poli, 2017; Glăveanu, 2018; Seligman, Railton, Baumeister & Sripada, 2016), including neuroscience (Abraham, 2018). In lay terms, the possible refers to something that is within the limits of one's ability to accomplish, something that can be conceived or done, or something that may or may not happen². In other words, it resides in the person's understanding of him or herself or of the situation – imagining what can exist or not, what can be done, what is, in the end, imaginable. This stands in contrast, in many ways, to etymological meanings where the Latin *possibilis* meant “that can be done” and related to the root *posse* “be able”³. As such, there is a closer connection established here between possibility and action as a way of turning the possible into the actual and, in and through this process of actualisation, opening up new horizons of possibility. The possible involves not only thinking but acting in and on the world in order to test and expands the limits of what is doable, thinkable, and of different ways of being.

This close connection between possibility and action is built upon in sociocultural theory and especially a sociocultural approach that follows pragmatist principles (Glăveanu, 2020a). From this standpoint, our awareness and exploration of possibilities is always anchored by our positioning in the world. This positioning takes many forms. We can think about physical positioning defined as where the person exists in space, or social positioning, defined in terms of the roles he or she is playing. There are also more symbolic forms of positioning that can be found in discourse and in the way people are categorised and referred to (for more details see positioning theory; Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart & Sabat, 2009). Importantly, human beings are always positioned *at*

² According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/possible>

³ According to the Online Etymology Dictionary: <https://www.etymonline.com/word/possible>

once in physical, social and symbolic terms in the sense that we cannot escape the embodied, sociocultural framing of our actions and interactions (even if, sometimes, one type of positioning comes to the fore and places the others in the background). Another important observation is that, from the different positions we occupy we develop specific relations to the world. These, following pragmatist scholarship, can be theorised as perspectives or action orientations that guide our thinking, emotional reactions, and behaviour (Gillespie, 2006; Martin, 2006). For example, from the physical position of being at the back of the class one develops a given visual perspective that is different than that of people seating in front. The social position (role) of a student will lead to different perspectives or orientations, within a classroom, than that of a teacher (and no two teacher and student carry exactly the same perspective). Given that each one of these perspectives ‘constructs’ the world for us in a specific way (in terms of what would, could and should do; Glăveanu, 2016), our sphere of possibilities is both enabled and constrained by the positions we occupy and the perspectives we adopt. Being ‘trapped’ within singular positions and perspectives is certainly highly constraining for how we see and approach any situation. Fortunately, the human condition is such that we always have alternative positions to inhabit and alternative perspectives to develop. This is not only because of the fact, noted before, that our positioning in the world is intrinsically multi-layered (and, as such, our perspectives on self and world are always plural), but because we can also move between positions and switch perspectives (for more details, see Position Exchange Theory; Gillespie & Martin, 2014). Continuing our example, those at the back of the class can move in front – and sometimes they are explicitly asked to do so by the teacher – or the other way around. Also, students can temporarily occupy the role of the teacher when making presentations and are supposed to instruct their colleagues; equally, teachers can find themselves in the position of a student at work – perhaps in front of their superiors – or in other context – for example, when attending a cooking class.

Is it enough though to have a diversity of positions and perspectives available in order to become aware of and, especially, to explore multiple possibilities? Unfortunately, no. Differences

of position and perspective are a necessary but not sufficient condition for engaging with the possible. This is because (and we shall explore this point at length in the chapter) differences, whether they refer to one's physical or social characteristics or one's point of view, can easily fail to be noticeable, especially if we want to conserve the illusion that most people think like us or believe in the things we believe in (see the false consensus effect; Marks & Miller, 1987). Second, even if we are aware of difference we might choose to either ignore it or downplay it. In the end, it is more comfortable to assume consensus than to go into the details of why we differ from others (e.g., Krueger, 1998). Finally, even when differences in perspective are properly acknowledged, it doesn't mean that the person will necessarily use them to gain new insights or learn from them. Coming back to the example of classrooms, the teacher can ask a question that generates multiple answers from students (reflecting, among others, their perspectives). The teacher has a specific answer in mind that he or she would like to highlight so, while recognising that some students think differently, the teacher might just decide to elaborate on one answer and close down the possibilities of understanding the problem differently provided by other points of view (a dynamic that is often found in school whenever teachers act to reduce uncertainty; Beghetto, 2017).

The key to unlocking the possible rests in establishing a dialogue between perspectives in which: a) we understand our own position and perspective as one among many; and b) we act on the difference presented to us by this multiplicity in ways that integrate and/or diversify perspectives. In other words, differences are not only recognized but used to generate new meanings about self, others, and world. In this context, the opposite of the possible has less to do with the absence of opportunities to act (which is a lay understanding of the term) and more to do with the absence of dialogue. Seen through the prism of dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981), dialogues are always emergent essentially because they keep perspectives in tension and avoid the easy resolution of difference. The possible dwells in dialogical tension more than it does in fleeing novel thoughts and actions. The monological dominance of a single perspective, at the expense of all others, closes down possibilities by not being able to escape singular relations to and understandings of the world

(Nesari, 2015). Of course, this doesn't mean that a plurality of perspectives is always needed; in fact, contemplating too many points of view at once can be disorienting or disengaging. It can dissuade people from acting as, often, the moment of action is monological in its enactment of a specific perspective or orientation. But, at the same time, we depend on the multiplicity of perspectives for some of phenomena considered eminently human like agency, imagination and, indeed, possibility. In short, to become aware of and explore the possible we need to 1) be aware of differences of position and perspective; 2) value such differences and the perspectival dialogues they ensue; and 3) act on difference in ways that either integrate or diversity the range of perspectives we have at our disposal (something that characterises a relationship to the world marked by 'openness to difference'; for details, see Glăveanu & Beghetto, 2017).

What does ignorance have to do with this dynamic? My proposal is that it plays a key double role when it comes to our awareness and explorations of the possible. On the one hand, ignorance of other perspectives and the lack of a desire to know or engage with them amounts to a reduction of possibility. The ignorance that separates us from others, closing down opportunities for communication and mutual understanding, presents us with the impossibility of de-centring oneself from one's own position. This kind of 'position fixity' reduces the range of perspectives one can envision or draw upon in relating to self, others and world. Either accidental or voluntary, this type of ignorance restricts one's mental universe and, with it, one's universe of action. By reducing differences, it reduces the chances for creative, new insights to emerge (something demonstrated also empirically by studies that compare the creative performance of homogenous and heterogeneous groups; Triandis, Hall & Ewen, 1965) and stifles the imagination (according to Vygotsky's first law of the imagination, this phenomenon depends on the wealth of life experience accumulated by the person in interaction with others and with culture; Vygotsky, 2004). This kind of ignorance can be generalised, when the person is unaware of or resistant to the perspective of almost everyone else, or, in most cases, reduced to a specific number of individuals or groups. Typically, we are at risk of displaying such attitudes towards people or communities that are

marginalized or oppressed. Historically, these have been represented by minorities or by discrimination based on gender, race, socioeconomic status, etc. While it might be argued that a 'narrow' or targeted ignorance is better than a generalised state, we should remember that engaging with radically different perspectives can unlock more possibilities than interacting with different yet 'close' positions and perspectives. This is, after all, the challenge presented to us by otherness, a notion often used to designate radical difference and the ways in which this difference is either ignored or 'domesticated' by labelling it as wrong, inferior, exotic, etc. (see, for instance, the case of orientalism; Said, 1978). In either form, this type of ignorance enhances the sphere of impossibility rather than that of possibility, primarily the impossibility of imagining another world or the world as imagined by an other.

Yet there is a side to ignorance that doesn't only contribute to the expansion of possibility but is its actual pre-condition. In perspectival dialogues, whether taking place between people or within one's inner dialogicality (Aveling, Gillespie & Cornish, 2015), one of the big challenges is that certain perspectives carry more weight than others. This is, in many ways, unavoidable, given the fact that both position and perspectives exist in fields of power (Foucault, 2019) and are attached to various types of capital (Bourdieu, 1987). As such, dialogues of perspectives are often unequal and set for predetermined conclusions. In order to diminish this effect, we need to consider each perspective with a degree of openness and humility that (only) wonder and ignorance can provide. Recognising one's lack of knowledge or understanding, especially when it comes to the logic behind someone else's perspective, position, or life experience, is an essential part of ensuring such openness. Bracketing one's assumptions and preconceived ideas is needed, and equally effortful. In these cases, ignorance is not the attitude of someone who lazily wants to avoid being bothered by the burden of thinking about the world from the standpoint of another. On the contrary, it means adopting the at times painfully difficult position of recognising one's limits and biases in the process of reaching out to others, not separating from them. It is the mark of what I called elsewhere *alocentrism* (Glăveanu, 2019), an approach in which the strangeness of the other is not assimilated

by the perceiving self through identification but remains a source of dialogical tension and learning. It is no accident that wonder is mentioned in this context. As a principal pathway to the possible (Parsons, 1969; Glăveanu, 2020b), wondering implies the questioning of taken-for-granted perspectives, a defamiliarization of the familiar, a kind of ‘dwelling in the unknown’ (Heidegger, 2002). And what unknown is there that is greater than that of the other, with his or her experience, beliefs, and lifeworld? Is there anything more complex we can wonder about than the people who are around us, anything we should more readily declare ourselves ignorant of? What about those we truly know less about and are separated from by tangible (e.g., distance) or intangible (e.g., prejudice) barriers? What kind of ignorance will we claim then and what consequences will this choice carry for our sense of possibility and for our shared humanity?

Migration, (im)possibility and ignorance

In order to illustrate the different claims and typologies above, I want to focus on the case of migration and, in particular, the situation of refugees. This context offers a rich exemplification of possibilities and impossibilities embedded in the field of positions, perspectives, and power relations. The position and perspective of the refugee are especially interesting to consider given that people are positioned by others as refugees (or refused the claim to this kind of positioning) and their perspective is most of the time constructed by others (especially those in host societies) rather than agentially chosen by those who experience forced migration. In addition, we need to place these issues in the context of mobility and of understanding how the movements of people, goods and ideas continue to transform today’s societies. The paradigm of ‘new mobilities’ offers a unique vantage point from which to consider this dynamic given the emphasis placed on processes and flows rather than reified and static categories (Sheller & Urry, 2006; Urry, 2016). What is even more interesting for our discussion here is the articulation between mobility and human possibility (Glăveanu, 2020c). There is an intrinsic connection between movement and the (im)possible given

the fact that movement itself involves repositioning and, as a consequence, the possibility of developing new perspectives on self and world. Acts of mobility, including migration, tend to be useful when it comes to opening new horizons of understanding and possibility for those who achieve them. There are numerous empirical examples, for instance, of how mobility helps students and teachers, businesses and employees, and communities at large (Jensen, Kesselring & Sheller, 2018). This is because mobility not only helps individuals and groups encounter diversity, it also increases the ‘inner’ diversity of perspectives acquired through repositioning. Importantly, though, there is no linear relation between mobility and possibility. Engaging in more mobility, e.g., travelling more, doesn’t automatically increase the creative agency of the person. As the case of forced migration and refugees comes to show, there are types of mobility that raise a range of impossibilities – the impossibility to stay, to continue one’s job, to obtain a new job, to integrate in the new society, to return to the old one, and so on. Possibility-enhancing mobilities are those where changes of position are, at least to some extent, chosen, and the perspectives resulting from them are placed in dialogical relations. In other words, instead of the monological dominance of singular perspectives (e.g., the imposition of views and practices from specific groups in the host society), we should strive to allow for dialogical tensions between perspectives (e.g., those of migrants and locals) in which each position is treated as valuable and engaged with on ethical terms. This, sadly, is far from the experience of migration of many people around the world.

My own research interest has focused on social representations of migrants and refugees in online spaces and particularly on the ways in which the perspective of migrants is being constructed on social media. Together with collaborators, I have examined this topic in relation to both Internet memes and forum comments on platforms such as Reddit and Twitter (e.g., Glăveanu, de Saint Laurent & Literat, 2018; de Saint Laurent, Glăveanu & Chaudet, 2020). In these different studies, we documented the particular ways in which migrants and refugees especially are being positioned by others, not through their own choice or volition. These types of positioning are often paradoxical, bringing together aspects that oppose each other. For example, online memes and

comments tended to alternate between four main dichotomies: aggressors versus victims, worthless versus valuable, unethical versus ethical, and unable versus able to integrate. In each of these instances, refugees are depicted either as agentic (able to take swift aggressive or unethical action) or powerless (victims who bring nothing of value to society). They seemingly can, for instance, orchestrate terror attacks or take the jobs of locals while, at the same time, being unable to fend for themselves, unwilling to work, and migrating for state benefits. This kind of positioning is not only inconsistent but disempowering for migrants (and disadvantageous for those who persecute them and cannot seem to escape their preconceived ideas). Following what for many are highly dangerous acts of mobility – sometimes through forced displacement – the prospect of starting a new life elsewhere is fraught with impossibilities. Key among them is the basic impossibility of having one's own perspective heard, understood, or respected. While there are some dedicated online forums that actively seek and include migrant voices, the communities we studied primarily referred to migrants and refugees 'in their absence', as objects and not subjects of representation.

And this is where we encounter a first dimension of ignorance in online spaces – the lack of knowledge and lack of interest to acquire knowledge about the actual life experience of refugees. The absence of the refugee perspective in online forums, at least the ones we studied, is symptomatic of a wider issue which is the reduced horizon of possibility for many migrants and refugees. Mobility, in this case, does not lead to the agentic choice of new positions and roles but to being placed in positions and roles that afford no more forward movement, that are essentially static. This is what many refugees and asylum seekers especially experience 'being stuck', an emotional state that combines the hope for a better future with the frustration of not being able to reach that future. An analysis of the emotions associated with the nexus between mobility and possibility (for details, see Glăveanu & Womersley, 2021) reveals a complex picture of opposing states of mind and divergent drives. Longing for home stands side by side with a desire to build a new life, melancholy for the past is associated with the expectation for a different future, newly found feelings of safety co-exist with the anxiety of being 'trapped' in a place and position one has

not chosen (or, at least, not freely). Migrants and refugees are often ignorant about the future in the sense that they cannot foresee what will happen next and, in some cases, have given up on trying to anticipate. Immobility – at different scales, personal, social, economic, etc. – breeds impossibility and despair and these, in turn, lead to an ignorance that serves almost as a defence mechanism: not wanting to know what will come as a way of protecting oneself from deciding what to do about it.

Of course, such complexities rarely feature within online discussions about migrants and refugees where there often is little room for empathy and where processes of perspective-taking take various forms. Perspective-taking is an intrinsically interesting notion for scholars of mobility, possibility, and ignorance alike. For mobility and migration researchers, it brings to the fore the psychological dynamics between migrants and the host population and the assumptions made by each when it comes to the expectations, thoughts, feelings and motives of the other. For possibility scholars, the ability to engage with the (real or imagined) perspectives of other people opens up new horizons for understanding self and world sometimes in new and surprising ways. For those interested in ignorance, the way in which perspectives are constructed, recognised, or rejected gives a unique insight into what we are ignorant of, or prefer to be ignorant of, when it comes to others.

In the end, as discussed in previous work (Glăveanu & de Saint Laurent, 2018), processes of perspective-taking reflect different kinds of commitment on the part of those who attempt to understand the views and lifeworld of others. To simplify things, one can have a commitment to difference, in which the positions of self and other are kept separate and an insurmountable gap is placed between their experiences. In these cases, perspectives are constructed ‘from the outside’, oftentimes based on stereotypes and even prejudice. Other times, the commitment to sameness prevails and intersubjective bridges are built between the two positions, ‘from within’. Here we can understand the position and perspective of another person because we recognise ourselves within it. The first case is captured by what we called essentialism and situationalism in which perspectives are attributed based on assumptions about ‘how these people are’ (essentialism) and ‘how people in this situation are’ (situationalism), respectively. The second case is represented by repositioning (‘If

this happened to me') and identification ('If I were him or her'), in many ways more emblematic processes for what we usually understand by perspective-taking. Which doesn't mean that identification, for instance, will lead to more positive attitudes towards the other and a greater impulse to help then, let's say, situationalism. One can imagine a situation in which the person doesn't know him or herself well and, when imagining what they would do in a concrete situation (e.g., a situation of war), he or she ends up defending implausible courses of action (e.g., 'If it was me, I wouldn't run away but stay and fight'). Other times, thinking about how context – social, economic, political, religious – shapes others and how harsh living conditions can lead them to desperate actions (including migration) could inspire the need to help (oftentimes from a paternalistic position). Ignorance vis a vis the actual perspective of the other – in our case a migrant or refugee – is being bridged, then, by imagining his or her perspective from an 'outside' or 'inside' position. The former denies us the possibility of using our own life experience to understand another person, for as different as he or she might be from us. The latter risks misunderstanding the other by being ignorant about oneself. And then there is another way, one in which ignorance makes us wonder about the other and, by extension, the self. This move doesn't separate or dissolve the self into the other but placed them into an emergent, even if sometimes tense, dialogue. How do these 'versions' of ignorance become manifest, why and with what consequences? This is discussed and exemplified as follows.

Default Ignorance

Default ignorance designates those cases in which the person is not aware of perspectives different than his or her own. This is, in many ways, an adaptive state of mind since oftentimes we can be overwhelmed by thinking about different and especially competing perspectives or courses of action. It is cognitively economical (Rescher, 1989) to zoom in on single ways of thinking or doing things rather than ponder extensively over alternatives. This eases our thinking processes and facilitates action. Indeed, the moment of action is often one of convergence and of choosing one

view over all others. Being ignorant of or discounting alternatives can be useful in this regard. This was, after all, one of the key accusations against Socrates and his methods for educating Athenian youth (Gill, 1973). By helping them fight against (default) ignorance and question their own perspectives and ways of understanding the world, Socrates cultivated more complex, wise thought. But he also made some of his students undecided in a society that praised practical action and democratic participation. While this societal organisation certainly pushed back against ignorance by educating its citizens (a case in point being Socrates' own activity), it also appreciated determination and, as such, saw accepting ignorance as important as long as it didn't interfere with decision making. There is, perhaps, an optimum to be found between a state of generalised, default ignorance and being able to ignore specific points of view but the case remains that default ignorance has a part to play in society. Its shortcomings are exposed though whenever we end up ignoring useful perspectives because we are either not motivated or have no time to engage with them (requirements for passing from automatic to controlled forms of thinking; Devine, 1989).

In the context of migration, default ignorance is oftentimes harmful. It captures a state in which the host population or migrants themselves are unaware of the views, needs or desires of others. Unlike the case of deliberate ignorance, to be discussed next, default ignorance is a marker here of the fact that locals or migrants don't have enough opportunities to meet each other, exchange perspectives or be in the position of the other. This is common in those countries in which the migration policy, especially for refugees coming into the country, is to isolate people in communities that are heavily guarded until their applications are eventually processed. Such separation is counterproductive for the mental health and well-being of those who seek asylum (e.g., Tribe, 2002) and it also fosters an unwilling ignorance of the other and the situation of the other, particularly within the host society. In the social media studies referred to before, default ignorance is exemplified by the fact that, even in discussions about the perspectives of migrants and refugees, there are rare instances of actually referring to interactions and genuine exchanges. It is accepted that migrants and refugees are to be talked about but not to be talked to (and, even more,

listened to). There is a vacuum of representation in online spaces and in society when it comes to refugee voices (Alhayek, 2014; Cabot, 2016), one that fosters disengagement, prejudice (on both sides) and feeling of powerlessness (especially on the side of migrants). Such states of default ignorance are also what some politicians build upon to foster hatred and discrimination by demonizing migrants and their arrival. Analogies are frequently made in these cases to the idea of an ‘invading army’ or of a ‘disease’ that is spreading from one part of the world to another (e.g., El Refaie, 2001). Such demeaning discourses build on the willing or unwilling ignorance of those who never stop to consider the life of migrants and refugees or to take their perspective. In terms of the two processes of taking perspectives, from the ‘outside’ or ‘inside’, default ignorance doesn’t take a preferred path as it designates the absence of perspective-taking altogether. In this sense, this kind of ignorance is the antithesis of possibility given that it doesn’t allow for multiple perspectives and, therefore, for dialogue. It is also a sign of personal, especially psychological, immobility. The person who embraces default ignorance doesn’t get to experience multiple positions and, in doing so, to expand his or her perspectives on and experiences of the world. Default ignorance might sometimes help us take practical, decisive action, but it does little for establishing mutual understanding between self and other, particularly when the other is seen as radically different. Processes of othering thrive on the background of default ignorance (Canales, 2000).

Deliberate Ignorance

As mentioned above, default ignorance is largely unintentional. We grow into the habit of ignoring specific people and perspectives so much so that we don’t do it deliberately; or we are so overwhelmed by events that we have no time to think about things more deeply. But there is also ignorance as a conscious decision not to take or engage with the perspective of others (what Gigerenzer and Garcia-Retamero, 2017, call willful ignorance; see also Tuana, 2006). This deliberate ignorance extends to those we view negatively or generally disconsider. It is a phenomenon that oftentimes reflects power relations within society as we are likely to be

deliberately ignorant of the perspective of people who are marginalized or oppressed. This kind of ignorance makes others 'invisible' to the self and, as such, it has pronounced consequences for the way we relate to others and understand the world around us. Deliberate ignorance can also be used as a way of protecting oneself from harmful views or types of knowledge. If the views of the other are negative, then it helps to find excuses for not really engaging with them. In these cases, a dose of deliberate ignorance can maintain one's self-esteem (Blaine & Crocker, 1993) and even reflect one's agency in dealing with difficult situations. Of course, the risk is that of entering a spiralling interplay of ignorance in which both parts avoid recognising each other's perspectives and contest their validity. In such situations, communication and mutual understanding are severely curtailed.

Connecting deliberate ignorance back to the issue of possibility, it is clear that in most cases possibilities are being restricted by this refusal to know or to understand. Perspectives that would otherwise enrich one's own universe and worldview are rejected and, at the same time, the refusal of dialogue is enforced. Of course, things are not always so clear-cut. As alluded to above, the act of deliberately choosing to ignore specific people, situations or events can be a sign of empowerment and a self-protective measure. It can be a choice made, in fact, after prologued deliberation and, as such, be the opposite of default ignorance. In fact, a clear difference between the two has to do less with intentionality (or lack of) and more with the fact that deliberate ignorance does recognize the fact that specific perspectives are to be rejected and, as such, implicitly recognizes their existence. In terms of possibility, this means that perspectives are not overlooked as much as blocked and this leaves its marks on the external and internal dialogues that concern those perspectives. It also means that, in time, it is easier to move from deliberate ignorance to recognition than it is from default ignorance to recognition. At the same time, deliberate forms of ignorance can be reinforced by negative encounters and can solidify over time.

In the context of mobility, deliberate ignorance closes us off from experiencing different positions in the world and from communicating with those who do. It keeps us separate from others and protects us from their 'influence'. In practice, it is often associated with the rejection of

migrants and refugees based on the assumption of insurmountable differences, of radical otherness that cannot and should not be bridged. This is why most of the times deliberate ignorance is reflected by perspective-taking from an ‘outside’ position and, in particular, by the use of essentialism and situationism. In the studies we conducted on social media, the use of these strategies generally led to disengagement: the others (in this case refugees coming from Syria and other war-torn countries) were depicted as violent, indoctrinated, unethical, incapable of changing. Entering this ‘moral bubble’ (see Arfini & Bertolotti, 2019) closes down possibilities of understanding a refugee’s point of view beyond negative stereotypes and, in some cases, strong prejudices (Ahmed, Chen & Chib, 2021). Deliberate forms of ignorance have, in this case, a substantial impact on the self, not only self – other relations. Choosing not to know about the life of other people reduces one’s knowledge about the self as we emerge as human selves precisely through acts of self-reflection and perspective-taking (see Mead, 1934). Of course, it could be argued that people can choose to be deliberately ignorant vis a vis a specific group and not others and so that they never fully stop practicing adopting various positions and perspectives through their development. And yet, systematically rejecting a person or group will necessarily leave its mark on one’s the level of participation in social relations and on the intersubjective bonds that we normally tie together locals and migrants. In this sense, being open to difference and to the perspective of marginalised groups in society can be an antidote against deliberate ignorance. Unfortunately, not all such openness is authentic and there are ways of rejecting the other and his or her knowledge in more insidious ways, as we shall discuss next.

Masked Ignorance

Both default and deliberate ignorance share a lack of recognition of the perspective of the other. In contrast, masked ignorance promotes this recognition but at the surface level, without any proper reflection or engagement. Paradoxically, it is the assumption of knowledge what sustains this particular form of ignorance as the person him or herself is unaware of the limits of his or her

understanding. This disconnect between belief and reality makes masked ignorance harder to expose and counter. Indeed, we are sometimes pulled out of default ignorance by encounters with others and their perspectives that we cannot simply ignore. One can also be challenged by other people when displaying deliberate forms of ignorance. But masked ignorance is more difficult to detect and it offers the person displaying it the comfort of presupposing that he or she is knowledgeable and open minded. There are also degrees of masked ignorance that we can consider and they range from everyday practices of assuming knowledge in order to go on interacting with others, a belief that we can easily correct if we are made aware of it, to the strong and radical assumption that we know what others do not, even those concerned by the knowledge we have.

Masked ignorance often has an important part to play in the dynamic of possibility due to its contribution to perspectival dialogues. Because we can never fully inhabit the perspective of the other, it is easier and faster to infer their worldview and take for granted our own constructions of their perspective. This is, after all, how we enrich our inner dialogicality and don't end up constantly questioning our knowledge. In this sense, masked ignorance can keep the dialogue going. The danger, however, is that by assuming knowledge we are not open anymore to being wrong or being contradicted. Social psychological research shows, in this regard, that the less people know the more they are confident in their views and opinions (Dunning, 2014) and this can have very negative consequences for both individuals and society. Instead of an expanded field of possibility, we are left with pre-determined, narrow possibilities that are constrained by our own experience and the degree to which we are willing to question it. Such a dynamic can lead to monological relations between perspectives, in which the impression of knowing dominates, or make way for a more authentic openness to otherness that is the marker of wondrous ignorance (to be discussed next).

Masked ignorance is often encountered in online discussions about migrants and refugees where it serves the purpose of legitimising one's own beliefs and denying the knowledge of others. It is common, for instance, for online participants to talk about the intentions, thoughts and abilities of refugees with the certainty of someone who understands these perspectives 'from within'.

Claiming privileged knowledge is coupled with lack of direct encounters with refugees and, most of all, with making no room for the participation of the latter in discussions that concern them. In these cases, acts of perspective-taking developed from an outside position (through essentialism and situationalism) are presented as if they are grown out of a commitment to similarity (e.g., identification and repositioning) (Glăveanu & de Saint Laurent, 2018). The interesting thing is that those who display masked ignorance don't necessarily have ill intent towards migrants and refugees. Indeed, sometimes claims are made in support of migrants and refugees that assume knowledge about the best ways to help or protect them. Unfortunately, many of these reflect paternalistic tendencies in which migrants are depicted as powerless and unable to help themselves (De Marneffe, 2006). These assumptions are certainly harmful, as they place others in a position they don't recognise or accept as their own. And, because of the rare – if not absent – exchanges with actual migrants and refugees, it is difficult to challenge masked ignorance and correct its shortcomings. There were a few online exchanges, however, that managed to make users reflective about their assumptions especially by inviting repositioning (e.g., through relating the current situation of refugees with the user's family history). In a limited number of cases, from those studied, such dialogues led from masked to wondrous ignorance and to a radical openness towards the perspectives of others. Perhaps the rarity of such changes of perspective and movements between types of ignorance can be attributed to the nature of social media platforms and the fact that they don't afford authentic dialogues between users (Elving & May Postma, 2017). The question then becomes how can we foster wondrous ignorance, online and offline? Before answering this, let's consider what this last type of ignorance is.

Wondrous ignorance

The discussion of default, deliberate and masked ignorance so far paints them as rather negative. We see, in each case, a restriction of possibilities and a limiting approach to others and otherness, especially in the case of migration. For each, however, some beneficial aspects were noted, even if

these generally led to shortcomings later on. For instance, default and deliberate ignorance have some adaptive value especially when it comes to the being decisive in the moment of action or protecting one's self-esteem. Masked ignorance is sometimes motivated by prosocial intentions and can lead to helping behaviours, at least in the short term. But, by and large, they all work to obscure specific perspectives and isolate us from the people holding them, from their experience and position in the world.

And yet, ignorance doesn't have to be associated with closing down perspectives and the rejection of others; on the contrary, it is actually a precondition for the most authentic forms of openness towards all other perspectives and towards radical otherness. This is what I call here wondrous ignorance, the state in which the person relinquishes assumptions of final or certain knowledge (see also the chapter by Ross, this volume). In this case, not knowing doesn't end in rejecting new knowledge or in quickly getting to know (as it is the case for deliberate and masked ignorance) but in a fundamental openness to what is present and what is to come. This makes ignorance akin to wondering (Glăveanu, 2020b), a process that acknowledges not knowing as a potentially generative, productive state of mind. Referring back to Socrates, he is widely credited for claiming that his only valid knowledge is that he knows nothing (Olive & McCune, 2017), something that didn't take him to the path of agnosticism or nihilism but that of wonder and philosophy. In wonder, we are able to bracket what we think we know and question that which is most familiar. This is why curiosity and wonder, although closely related phenomena, show some marked differences (Evans & Marr, 2006; Stone 2006), namely the fact that curiosity helps us turn the unfamiliar familiar while wondering makes the familiar unfamiliar. Curiosity fights ignorance and considers it an obstacle to gaining new knowledge. Wonder thrives on ignorance, the kind that accepts that multiple perspectives exist and that one never has a full grasp of them, especially the perspectives of other people.

If our sense of the possible is related to recognising multiple perspectives and placing them in dialogue with each other (Glăveanu, 2020a) then it requires a degree of humility, of admitting one's

ignorance and using it as a platform on which to build deeper forms of understanding. This is a very different attitude than using ignorance as an excuse (in default ignorance), as a tool (in deliberate ignorance), or as a cover-up for one's lack of knowledge (in masked ignorance). In contrast, wondrous ignorance enables a new type of relationship between self and world in which the self is both receptive and active in discovering new perspectives. This is because wonder itself places us at the intersection between passivity and activity, between being immersed into and being detached from our surroundings (Kareem, 2014; Glăveanu, 2020b) Ignorance helps strike this balance by keeping the person between not knowing and wanting to know, between a recognition of one's own limits and an attempt to overcome them.

In the context of migration, wondrous ignorance serves a completely different purpose than default, deliberate or masked forms do. If the latter manage to create distance between those who migrate and those who receive them, wonder-driven ignorance has the opposite effect. By recognising the other as an expert when it comes to his or her own perspectives and beliefs, this state places the 'ignorant' into the position of the learner. Moreover, it upsets established power relations whenever the one who experiences ignorance is also the person who is in a position to welcome or reject the other. In those cases, there is a genuine interest for who this other – migrant or refugee – is, without following stereotypes or other easy or preconceived ideas. In online spaces this kind of ignorance is rarely displayed, potentially because those who participate on social media typically do so because they have a point they want to get across and, as such, don't allow themselves the time to wonder. As noted also above, it is during exchanges with other participants that someone can be put in the position of wondrous ignorance, for example by making them aware of how they would feel if they were treated as refugees wherever they went (e.g., on holiday). This scaffolding of identification processes, although not always successful, creates a much needed space for reflection, including a reflection on the limits of one's own ideas.

Returning to the question raised before, the way we can cultivate more wondrous forms of ignorance, either online or offline, is by shaking the participants' belief in the infallibility of their

own perspective. Whether it concerns migrants and refugees or any other aspect of the world, wondrous ignorance depends on our ability to question taken-for-granted knowledge and replace it with a genuine quest for understanding – it helps us see knowing as a continuous process, not as an outcome. Instead of final, singular understandings, we need to make more room for multiplicity, difference, and wonder in our thinking, in our relations with others, and in our societies. We need, in other words, more rather than less (wondrous) ignorance.

Distributed ignorance

In this chapter my main aim was to go beyond common assumptions about ignorance and the (lack of) knowledge and connect this phenomenon to a wider horizon, that of the possible. At first glance, this relationship doesn't seem obvious or, at the very least, it comes across as negative. Ignorance reduces our sphere of possibility, constrains our thinking, and limits our actions. Being ignorant is thus a marker of impossibility rather than possibility. And yet, this would be a misguided supposition. As our understanding of ignorance expands, we can notice valuable intersections between ignorance studies (Gross & McGoey, 2018; Magnani & Arfini, 2020) and possibility studies (Glăveanu, 2022). We discover, for instance, that we need a more nuanced understanding of ignorance in its relation to how we develop new perspectives on the world and take (or not) the perspective of other people. Default, deliberate, masked and wondrous ignorance, described above, are not meant to represent final and static categories. On the contrary, I consider them as dynamic, relational categories that easily merge into one another in daily action and interaction.

The case of migration was useful to consider and illustrates such issues because it clearly embeds ignorance within self–other relations, something that resonates also with my particular, sociocultural approach to the possible (Glăveanu, 2020a). By connecting possibility to the multiplicity and dialogue of perspectives, we can discover new roles for ignorance in the way we notice, explore, or refuse to engage with the possible. In many instances, ignorant cognition is either

not aware of or refuses perspectives, including the perspectives of others. In others, there is an assumption of knowing that masks a lack of understanding. And still, ignorance can also be a precondition for deeper forms of understanding. In fact, it can be argued that wondrous ignorance is essential for being genuinely open to the experience of others and to perspectives different than our own. Without such open-ended, generative ignorance we would remain trapped by our assumptions and by the lack of self-doubt that often characterises human relations, especially those with people considered radically different.

A new vocabulary of ignorance emerges through this chapter, one that includes possibility-related terms such as positions and repositioning, perspectives and perspective-taking, dialogue and reflexivity, mobility and immobility. In each case, we depart from an internalist view of ignorance, as something that ‘happens’ within the head, and distribute it into the world, into how we relate to others, how we change our position and perspective, how we move around and encounter difference and, most of all, how we react to it. Extended mind accounts of cognition (see Clark & Chalmers, 1999) started to be inspirational for ignorance scholars (e.g., Arfini, 2019) but there is more to explore when it comes to externalist accounts of ignorance. The small typology proposed here hopes to make a small contribution in this regard. Within it, the criterion that helps us evaluate ignorance is external to the ignorant mind itself. In the tradition of pragmatism and sociocultural thought, ignorance becomes a relation between one’s perspectives and the perspectives of others where perspectives themselves are not mere ideas but action orientations (Gillespie, 2006; Martin, 2006), forged within the embodied, social and cultural worlds we all inhabit. In fact, it is precisely because we live in perspectival worlds, dominated by a variety of positions and the relations between them, that we can become aware of new possibilities, overcome specific forms of ignorance, and use other forms to open ourselves up to otherness and to the unexpected. Mobility has a unique contribution to make to our understanding of this dynamic. The present chapter talked about the migration of people and how their perspectives are constructed by others in the host societies. In essence, this example talked about the possibilities and impossibilities associated with

taking the position of others, of moving from one position to the next and, with it, relating to the world in a different manner. There is much more to explore when it comes to the relation between movement – physical, social, symbolic – and ignorance and I am confident that a distributed, externalist account of the latter can both benefit from and inform future discussions in this area.

This chapter hopes to have contributed to our understanding of ignorance and (im)possibility and show, among others, that there are no linear and easy connections between the two. Ignorance can be an obstacle or an enabler of possibility. It can present us with various impossibilities – including the that of fully grasping the perspective of others – but it can also help us overcome the impossible and, for instance, change our mind about things and people we considered already known. What we need is a greater appreciation of the complexities of ignorance and of not knowing in general (Glăveanu, in press) and we also a need to accumulate more practical examples of their dynamic, above and beyond the case of migration. This is, in the end, how ignorance studies are certain to reveal their own (expanded) possibilities for thinking, acting, and being in the world.

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