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Disowning knowledge: To be or not to be 'the immigrant' in Sweden

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Abstract

How do young people make sense of, challenge or inhabit racialized categories in their everyday lives? Through the narratives of five young people in Sweden, this article explores how the social production of 'the immigrant' works to structure their perceptions and experiences. An in-depth ethnographic account makes visible both the workings of a 'racial grammar' of 'the immigrant' and the contradictions of how this grammar is played out in the 'dilemmas' faced by 'Swedish' and 'immigrant' young people. It is argued that the grammar, arising in complex external structural and historical processes, is internalized as an 'ingrained stigma' and 'partial truths' that are performed and reproduced at the level of experience and interaction.

Keywords: Racial grammar; "the immigrant"; youth; disowning knowledge; Sweden.

> Immigrants relearn who they are in the social contexts to which they have migrated (Orlando Patterson 1982).
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> The attitudes I have resolved to describe are real. I've encountered them innumerable times (Frantz Fanon 1999).
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> Again, I want to stress, "racism" is too coarse a category to do the analytic work that needs doing here (Glenn C. Loury 2002).

Cecilia's dilemma

Cecilia is 18 years old, born in Sweden to Swedish-born parents.[1] She has grown up and still lives in a relatively small industrial town, several miles from one of Sweden's major cities. Her father is an industrial

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worker and her mother a childcare provider. Neither of her parents has ever been unemployed. Cecilia reports that she is 'really happy' in her family, but that she 'just has to move' away from her hometown to a major city in Sweden and, hopefully, abroad at some later time. Cecilia is the first in her family to begin university studies. She is what has come to be called in Sweden a 'class traveller', meaning that she is upwardly mobile (Trondman 1994; Wennerström 2004). Based on her good achievements in elementary and junior high school, Cecilia was accepted in a social science programme at a prestigious municipal high school in a nearby city. The city is post-industrial (jobs in industry were lost), multicultural (more than 50 per cent of the city's children and youth were born or have parents who were born abroad) and segregated. There are areas where 90 per cent of residents are immigrants, where over one hundred languages are spoken, where 70 per cent of residents are on social allowances and where half the children do not receive passing grades from comprehensive school. The city's state welfare institutions have been characterized by unstable finances and cutbacks for slightly more than ten years. Cecilia plans to study law at the university and become a lawyer. She realizes that she 'doesn't come from the same world as lawyers and such', but she has 'always wanted to be a lawyer' and, she adds, 'fight for justice and for people who are being mistreated'. Politically, Cecilia sees herself as 'definitely left-leaning' ('but absolutely not a communist'). She believes that a 'multicultural society is something positive', but stresses that there 'really are great problems with the segregation in this city'. 'There should', she believes, 'really be more integration'. 'Segregation', 'integration' and 'immigrant' are words that predominate in the Swedish public debate – in everyday life, politics, media and research. I therefore ask Cecilia whether there are any immigrant students at her high school.

> Sure, we have immigrants at our school. I've heard there are more and more. I think it's good, really. But . . . how should I put this . . . I don't know if you can really call the people who go here "immigrants". This sounds stupid . . . but . . . they're really more like us . . . They act, well, I know it sounds wrong to say this, but like "normal" people. They're nice and do their homework. Lots of them are really smart and all. They can be better than lots of "Swedes", if you know what I mean. . .I mean "Swedes" can also mess around, of course. When I was in junior high school at home . . . well, we really had some trouble-making boys, "Swedish" boys. They always made stupid remarks, thought they were funny, came late, messed around . . . So it's the same with "immigrants". I mean that all of them aren't the same. But still it's easy to think, "uh huh, an 'immigrant'" and, well, that's just wrong, but then you

> think, right *p-r-o-b-l-e-m-s*. Still I think lots of people in this city think like "oh, it's an immigrant city", "lots of immigrants there" and "oh, it's an immigrant school", you can't go there. Problems like. So even if you don't have anything against immigrants, you don't go there. You just don't. Not even immigrants do if things are going well for them. They come to this school . . . It's horrible to say so, but that's how it is. For example, there's more trouble at Sund School than here and there are more immigrants there. But we also have "immigrants", but not as many, and we have the kind that manage in school, and then . . . then you don't think there goes an "immigrant" and that this is an "immigrant school". I'm not at all a racist, absolutely not, but I still think that's how you think, unfortunately. I admit it, 'cause that's reality. Immigrants there, but not here, but they're here too. Do you understand what I mean? It's really crazy, sick, that you think like that. I hate it. But I think everybody does it. Well, maybe not everybody, but a lot of people. It's stuck in my head, for sure. That's really how you think.

Cecilia is dealing with a dilemma. Are the immigrant students at her school 'immigrants', and if so, why? In a certain sense they are undoubtedly immigrants. They were born abroad or born in Sweden to foreign-born parents. But these significations, which are the most frequently occurring definitions of immigrants in Swedish society, do not cause any problems for Cecilia. The problem is that she knows that the classification 'immigrant' has another meaning that permeates everyday life in Sweden, namely that *to be an "immigrant" is to be a representation of social problems*. Thus, it is entirely possible to be an immigrant (to have emigrated and immigrated) without being an 'immigrant' (connoting social problems). The immigrant students Cecilia sees at her school behave, regardless of skin colour, clothing or religion, just as she does. For this reason she wants to avoid calling them 'immigrants'. She feels, moreover, that the generalization that 'to be an immigrant is to have social problems' is wrong. All immigrants do not have social problems. Nor do all 'Swedes' attend prestigious schools or approach school as she does. There are 'trouble-making' students who do not do their homework among both 'immigrants' and 'Swedes'. On the whole, Cecilia tries to avoid generalizing. She has nothing against attending school with foreign-born students or with students who have foreign-born parents. She is not a racist who judges others based on their physiognomy or culture. Nor does she engage in 'racializing' or express what is called 'everyday racism' (Essed 2002, p. 190)[2]. Nevertheless, she finds it difficult to dispose of the classification 'the immigrant as a social problem', which fastens like glue to everything she mentions. Cecilia wants to avoid the generalization that renders all immigrants '*immigrants with problems*', but she *also*

wants to avoid schools dominated by students who are not using their education as leverage towards positive future life opportunities. With her class traveller habitus in her calm school environment, she wants to pave her ascending social path, that is, what Bourdieu calls 'the specific effect of social trajectory' (1984, pp. 109–12). This also applies to the immigrant students at her school whom she does not wish to call 'immigrants'. In other words, when immigrants are motivated to study, they do not belong to the category 'immigrant'. At the same time, however, Cecilia stresses that 'immigrants' is an incorrect categorization of the social problems she is describing. *Thus, Cecilia's dilemma concerns what she should call people who do not correspond to a representation – a representation that too is incorrect*.

Yet Cecilia's dilemma has an additional dimension. She has a positive outlook on a multicultural society with respect to differences and diversity. Cecilia knows that the generalization 'the immigrant as a social problem' is wrong. But for her, *deconstruction* of the discourse is of no help. She does not want to use incorrect labels such as 'immigrant schools', yet 'real' problems do exist there. While the school as a multicultural meeting place does not constitute a problem at Cecilia's school, *social integration* with students who are not middle class or who are not class travellers does constitute a risk. The risk may be somewhat greater with 'immigrants' because, as she puts it, 'there are more immigrants with problems like that'. She is thinking chiefly about families with experiences of long-term unemployment, social allowances and housing segregation. And 'in families like that it's more likely that children will have problems, and then maybe they don't speak Swedish so well either'. 'If lots of kids like that are at the same school', she adds, 'then it's not easy'. This she 'understands'.

It is *not* my intention to moralize about Cecilia's way of understanding and dealing with her climbing of the social ladder. When social and economic differences increase and are perceived as a threat to one's own strategies of action, students such as Cecilia choose the path that best promotes realization of their own future goals. Cecilia wants, at one and the same time, to avoid negative and incorrect social representations of the 'immigrant as problem' *and* to ensure her own social mobility. Her dilemma, thus, is more profound than how her classmates should be labelled. At one and the same time, she is battling 1) *the political philosophy of social representations*: how individuals and groups should be represented, 2) *an epistemological search for truthfulness*: understanding and explaining the reality of people's living conditions, forms of self-understanding and life opportunities and 3) *socially productive agency*: how she should manage her own work opportunities in this specific social and historical context.

Questions and aims

The *focus* of my article concerns the social meaning production, in Sweden, of the *immigrant as a social problem*. I am guided by three questions: What can this imply? How can it occur? And how can it be explained? The word *can* is used in all three questions. My intention here is not to determine the studied phenomenon's scope, distribution and depth. However, the empirical material used here does show that the phenomenon can be a strong presence in the everyday life of young people in Sweden. My intention is also not to discuss all conceivable theoretical perspectives that could be constructed. My aim, instead, is to elucidate *one* form of *everyday thinking practices* – with respect to forms of understanding and actions – that has caused the classification of 'immigrant' to come to represent various aspects of 'social problems' in Swedish society, and in such a way that even young people who are profoundly critical of this meaning production help to reproduce it in practice. An additional aim is to test one way of explaining this thinking practice. To help me in this I have chosen the framework of analysis that Glenn C. Loury presents in his book *The Anatomy of Racial Inequality* (2002). For Loury too is struggling with the same dilemma as Cecilia.

I share Knowles' belief that social signification 'is *made*' and that 'race and ethnicity are not exceptions' (2003, p. 21). 'Race', she writes, 'is about *race making* just as ethnicity, too, is about its own production' (ibid.). Because 'immigrant', and not 'race' and 'ethnicity', is absolutely the predominating choice of terms in everyday thinking practices in Sweden, it is this classification that is used here and critically investigated. Consequently, my ambition is to try to understand, to paraphrase Knowles, 'the social mechanisms through which the categorization and meaning-making of *the immigrant* work, and the forms of social practice – as a grammar – to which they give rise' (2003, p. 29). Guided by Knowles, I see the category 'the immigrant as a social problem' in terms of a *grammar*. Unfortunately, Knowles suggests the notion of grammar without specifying its meaning and use. My starting point is Wittgenstein saying that 'grammar tells us what kind of object anything is' (quoted from Cavell, 2005, p. 244). Grammar in this sense is not, of course, linguistic analysis nor is it ordinary language philosophy. It is rather, as in Dewey's understanding, a shared '*condition* of experience' (Sleeper 2001, p. 118). Or, in other words, 'felt needs' and 'existential meanings' as 'forms of reasoning' 'generated from the practices of communication' within specific socio-historical conditions of existence and human relations'' (ibid). 'Grammar' has a very strong 'being-there-ness character'. If we say 'immigrant', we will discuss 'social problems'. It is an everyday thinking with practices already in place, but it is also not wholly predetermined. This is what

Cecilia's struggle with representation, knowledge and agency is all about. She is in search of knowledge to control the distorted grammar. But then again, there is the *dilemma* that the wrong grammar turns out to be unintentionally proved in practice. And this grammar does not simply exist, it has come into existence and for this there are reasons. Moreover, this grammar has tangible consequences for those affected. Thus, a critical analysis of the everyday thinking practices that construe people who have immigrated to Sweden as social problems may elucidate the *what* (content), *how* (forms of expression) and *why* (reasons for) of this grammar. In addition, this grammar is lived with, as Knowles wrote, 'a deep personal resonance' (2003, p. 30). By addressing the 'social mechanisms' of this grammar, in Mills' classical words, 'the personal troubles of milieu' can also be made into 'the public issues of social structure' (1959, p. 8). In other words, this grammar's lived and embodied forms must be related to the socio – economic and cultural contexts in which they emerge with specific meanings and tangible consequences.

In order to elucidate the grammar's 'what' and 'how', I continue by providing the reader with four additional dilemmas. My approach can be likened to crocheting on the basis of a pattern I believe I see. Together, the five presented dilemmas should be read as attempts to elucidate *different* cases of *the same* grammar, which construes 'immigrants' as 'social problems'. My ambition has been to give these young people the opportunity to, in Bourdieu's words, '*explain themselves* in the fullest sense of the word' (Bourdieu *et al*. 1999, p. 615). They have been given the space to 'construct their own point of view both about themselves and about the world and to bring into the open the point within this world from which they see themselves and the world' (ibid.). In the best of all worlds, 'the respondents take over the interviews themselves' to find 'a sort of relief' and 'a joy in expression' (ibid.). And the researcher's capacity to take those respondents and understand their problems 'just as they are in their distinctive necessity is', Bourdieu writes, 'a sort of *intellectual love*' (ibid, p. 614). I am prepared to live with the hazardous consequences of what I now wish to claim: that I, in my encounters with Cecilia's, Sten's, Christina's, Omar's and Melia's dilemmas, have experienced precisely relief, joy and love.[3] At the same time, I wish to elucidate 'public issues of social structure'.

An additional *four* dilemmas, *one* grammar

Sten's dilemma

Sten is 18 years of age and attending 'Motor Mech'[4] in a medium-size Swedish town. Like Cecilia, he is, according to state welfare statistics

and prevailing everyday thinking practices, Swedish. Sten's parents, too, have working-class jobs. In contrast to the class traveller Cecilia, Sten does not view education as an investment in social mobility. He is, instead, a living answer to Willis' classical question concerning why working-class boys take working-class jobs and why they go along with it (1977, p. 1). In our 'post-industrial' age, the better question is why they go along with the risks of long-term unemployment and exclusion.

The experience of students in 'Motor Mech' is that other students, particularly those who have chosen university-track programmes, label them, to use Sten's and his friends' own words, 'uneducated', 'lazy', 'rowdy', 'sexist', and 'hostile toward foreigners'. In their leisure time, Sten and his friends do not want to be associated with 'being in Motor Mech', because of the negative meanings attached to that label. Sten feels that it is meaningless to talk about who's Swedish and who's an immigrant, and careful to say that everyone should be treated as an individual and that they're not all alike, He thinks it is 'hard the way people think he's against immigrants' just because he is in 'Motor Mech'. However, Sten also believes that 'immigrants' tend to be associated with 'unemployment', housing segregation, language problems and 'violence'. and does have acquaintances who are 'against immigrants', On several occasions, Sten has been close to ending up in fights with, as he puts it, 'cocky immigrant guys' outside places of entertainment. He also reports that 'rowdy and cocky immigrant guys' perceive him as someone who is against immigrants – as a *Svenne* (a derogatory term for working-class Swedish men). If a fight begins he 'doesn't back out. Then somebody's gotta hold on to my jacket'.

Just as Cecilia does, Sten is struggling with issues of how others should be represented, what people's situations actually are and how he should understand and handle himself in various situations.,However, he is also struggling with how others represent him. Sten wants to study in the 'Motor Mech' programme, but he does not want the social meaning that 'Motor Mech guy signals' Sten, too, must deal with a grammar whose content and effectual power are interrelated to and parallel with that of the 'immigrant'. He tries, in his thinking and actions, to avoid verifying both grammars: that he and 'immigrants' constitute social problems who see each other as adversaries. But if 'real blattar' (*blattar*: Swedish slang for 'immigrant guys'), challenge him as a 'real *Svenne*' (racist 'Swedish' guy), then he will not back down. The problem lies in these perilous grammars' 'unavoidable' presence and effectual power in the lives of both groups. The risk is that 'the racist' and 'the immigrant' will be verified, despite the fact that these labels are wrong, even in the self-images of both parties.

Sten's dilemma is the risk of living up to something he is not: a racist. In this way, he confirms that which he does not wish to be.

Christina's dilemma

Christina is 21 years old and studying at Komvux (a municipal adult education programme). As a child she was adopted by two Swedish-born parents. She has grown up in a white, middle-class family in a medium-size town near the town where she now studies. Christina often experiences that because of her dark skin, she, 'has to clarify her position and identity as Swedish and middle class'.

> So, most people think I'm an immigrant . . . foreign . . . not that I'm adopted or Swedish. And it feels like I always have to prove that I'm *not* having problems in school. When they get to know me it's no problem, but at first, in the beginning, it often happens that teachers think I have problems.

In her encounters with teachers, she both hopes and dreads the question: 'And where do you come from?' The question certainly construes her as 'the other' – 'the immigrant' – *but* her answer gives her the chance to escape the grammar being studied here. 'Because then', Christina says, 'I can say it myself before I'm labelled'. For when people have understood that she is an adopted child, who has grown up in a Swedish middle-class family, she can be ascribed other social significations: motivated, good with the language (Swedish) and a high-performing Swedish girl.

Christina's picture of immigrants also contains a 'them' who are not 'us'. On the one hand, she feels a great sense of affinity with one of her friends at school, a girl from Pakistan. On the other hand, her friend is, as Christina says, 'culturally' like 'traditional people'. Her friend, a faithful Muslim, has quit her studies at Komvux to take care of relatives, family and children on a full–time basis. This is 'so typical of those women', she says, 'the home and all that come first'. As Hägerström has shown in a study among Komvux students in Sweden, there are, among both 'Swedes' and 'immigrants', conceptions concerning the existence of 'real, real immigrants' (2004, pp. 140). These 'real, real immigrants' have 'real' problems and live in highly segregated and, what everyone calls, 'immigrant-dense' housing areas. Such 'immigrants' seldom or never study at Komvux. Thus, this grammar differentiates 'immigrants' from 'real, real immigrants'. Hägerström uses the classification *the other others* (ibid.). Due to her appearance, Christina always runs the risk of being defined as one of 'the other others'. She must, for this reason, constantly show that she is 'Swedish', that is not having social problems. Thus, in her

everyday life, Christina is also struggling with social representations, an epistemological search for truthfulness and her own socially productive agency. *Her dilemma is that her physical appearance constructs her as the social problem she is not, but could well be, even according to her own experience and understanding*.

Omar's dilemma

Omar is 20 years old, from Somalia and lives with his parents and siblings in one of Sweden's most well known and badly reputed 'immigrant-dense' urban areas. His suburb is in the same city as Cecilia's high school. Omar is very critical of housing segregation, but stresses that it has *one* advantage. Because 'only immigrants live where we live. . .you're not a problem when you walk around there'. 'In that way', he says, 'the area is super'. The city's 'biggest problem' is, however, that there 'isn't any contact between Swedes and immigrants'. On the one hand, 'Swedes don't dare to come to our neighbourhood' because 'they're afraid to'. 'They might get robbed', he adds. On the other hand, Omar is critical of 'Muslim private schools where kids don't learn how to live in Swedish society'. 'The schools should be more mixed'., he claims. Only in this way, he believes, is there a chance to change the stubborn patterns of segregation.

Omar socializes exclusively with, as he puts it, 'all kinds of immigrants', with two exceptions. One exception he calls '*Svenne* Erik'. Erik 'manages in school' and 'gets good grades, but', Omar points out, 'he acts more like us' because 'he's almost always with immigrants'. The other exception is Johan, who is 'adopted and East Indian'. Johan often hears 'fucking immigrant and stuff', because 'he looks like' and 'hangs around with us'. Omar feels that such treatment happens everyday. 'That's how it is being an immigrant'.

One evening when Omar and a friend were about to buy candy at a petrol station in an area outside their neighbourhood, they met a large group of what Omar himself calls 'Swedish' boys. These boys had been 'partying', were 'drunk' and 'very rowdy'. 'The Swedes' were behaving, as Omar expressed it, like 'the worst gang of hooligans'. Afraid of being provoked or simply attacked, they were about to 'make a detour', when a police car with two officers passed by. The police chose to stop, which made Omar and his friend feel more secure. As it turned out, however, the police stopped, to, as Omar says, 'check *us* out, *not* the drunken Swedes'. The police showered them with questions: '"What are you doing here? Where do you come from? What have you done there? What are you going to do now? Where are you going?' Omar reports that 'if you look like a real immigrant' you will often be stopped by the police. 'If they treat you well you don't need to make

trouble', he says, and continues, 'But with some of them you want to make trouble'. 'You know', he says, 'they assume you've done something. They say: 'Show us the drugs!' 'Whose car is this?' 'What have you stolen?"' Consequently, Omar and his friends feel that they live in a very divided community. 'They live there, we live here, that's how it is', he says, and continues, 'We immigrants, we always stick together'.

Omar has completed a social sciences programme aimed at uniformed services careers. This training is preparatory and gives qualifications for work within the police force, fire department, military and customs. Omar thinks that the school and the training 'were good', but as he says, 'if I told my friends or other immigrants I know, that I was going to become a police officer, they'd think I was a traitor. It's true. There's a lot of "we" against "them". If something bad happens to one of us, we stick together, we immigrants, we do'. Omar considers that, overall, 'we immigrant guys are often, 'livelier', 'talk louder', 'push each other around' and 'get into minor fights'. He says that, because of this, 'we're visible and noticeable' and 'some people are afraid'. 'But', he continues, laughing, 'after a few drinks, Swedes are louder than I am'. When I ask Omar who 'we immigrant guys' are, he replies, 'we, people like me, my friends', 'many from our neighbourhood, like us' or 'people like us from other areas'. 'Swedish guys', he stresses, 'don't stick together, they don't. Not like we do. That's how it is. Swedish guys, they leave one at a time. We don't. That's maybe why we're noticeable, 'cause we stick together. Here, everyone is with everyone'.

Omar sees himself as an 'immigrant'. In the present situation, he cannot see any other alternative. Omar finds it difficult to break through the negative representation of 'immigrant as problem'. He largely handles his socio-cultural fate by confirming it. 'Immigrant' is one thing, 'Swede' another. The spatial division and encounters between different worlds amplify the unequivocal nature of the grammar, which is verified through the experiences and forms of understanding generated by dealing with everyday reality. As if the grammar, counter to the actors' own hopes, were a player piano. 'In our neighbourhood', he says, 'you choose between playing soccer or becoming a criminal'. That is a drastic picture of reality, indeed. Omar is not a criminal, nor does he play soccer. He has not completely given up on the idea of joining the police force. 'It might work', he says, 'in an area like I live in, but in another city'. Omar *wants to break through the stubborn patterns of segregation, but the grammar ensures that it is in his 'immigrant identity' that he gets the recognition that denies him the formal opportunities that, in spite of everything, are available, for example investing in an education and becoming a police officer*.

Melia's dilemma

Nineteen-year-old Melia is a stateless Palestinian who grewup in Kuwait. Her family came to Sweden because of the Gulf War. A few years ago her father became a high school language teacher. Her mother is studying at Komvux. Before Melia's father got his teaching job, the family periodically lived on unemployment insurance and social allowances. Melia is in the 'Science' programme at Cecilia's school. Her goal is to become a dentist. For this reason, she spends almost all her leisure time doing homework. Melia and her parents see education as the key to their future. 'Things are going well at school', she says, 'but sometimes it's too much'. There is a great deal of homework, and Melia feels she has a way to go before she has mastered the Swedish language at the same level as her "Swedish" classmates. She has made a conscious decision not to attend an 'immigrant school'. By studying with 'Swedish' students, she develops her mastery of Swedish and becomes more familiar with Swedish society. 'If you don't go to school with Swedes, you don't know anything', she says. Her father, the high school teacher, made her particularly aware of the importance of choosing the 'right' school, partly in order to ensure success in school and partly because a family with a daughter in a prestigious school is living disproof of the grammar's classification of 'immigrants as problems'.

Despite her success in school, Melia still 'feels a bit foreign', both in school and in the surrounding community, 'especially in the city'. The main reason for this, as she puts it, is that 'there are many differences in this city'. 'Swedes in one direction, immigrants in another', she says, and adds, 'they don't interact, they don't talk, they don't help each other, they even hate each other'.

> If I'm in town and go into a store, then I'm a ''svartskalle'' (literally *black head*, a derogatory slang term in Swedish encompassing all non-Swedes or immigrants/minorities of colour). I can't help it. I'm just a "svartskalle". They stare at you till you leave. They think you've stolen clothes or something. If I take something and look at it, then "what have you done with that thing?" That's what they might ask. It's been like this the whole time, since I came to this city. I am an *immigrant*. I don't want to do the things they think I'm going to do, stupid stuff, not at all. I'm always thinking about "immigrants" and "Swedes" and such. Here you live without any dignity. Having food and not freezing to death aren't enough. You want to live like a human being. You want to live with a sense of dignity.

When Melia has realized her educational goals, she wants to leave Sweden. Her dream is to move to an independent Palestinian state. If

that is impossible, she wants to move to another Arab country. She stresses, however, that she does not want to live in 'one of those strict, religious countries'. 'I am a Muslim' and 'I do what Muslims should do. But I wouldn't make it in a strict country', she states. Melia wants to live in a country 'where you are free to choose what religion you practise'. Her parents, on the other hand, see no possibilities other than staying in Sweden. They may be 'immigrants', but they have come to stay. They are trying, therefore, to live their lives here and now. But Melia is living for the future. She 'is always thinking it will be better in the future than it is now'. She wants 'a good profession', a 'good salary', a 'good husband' and 'two children' in a 'good country' where there are 'good employers'. But while waiting for the future, she will continue living what she calls her 'regular, boring life'. Melia cannot "be happy in Sweden" because 'she feels like a stranger there'. She wants nothing other than to be a 'regular person' who 'doesn't go around thinking I'm a stranger'. 'I no longer know', she says, 'what a regular person is like' and 'how it feels to be one'. 'That's why', she continues, 'I have to improve my life, 'cause then the future can perhaps be better.' 'Yeah, in the future' she can be 'normal': 'not have to think I'm an immigrant'.

In his introduction to *Out of Place*, Edward Said writes, 'the main reason for this memoir is of course the need to bridge the sheer distance in time and place between my life today and my life then' (1999, p. xiv). Melia is still living at the start of the distance in time and place she will travel. She has far to go before reaching the state described in the sentence with which Said ends his memoirs: 'With so many dissonances in my life I have learned actually to prefer being not quite right and out of place' (ibid, p. 295). In one and the same school, Melia is both successful *and* a stranger. In one and the same society, she is both a future dentist and a shoplifter. In one and the same family, she is a beloved daughter who longs to return to origins that are no longer part of her parents' hopes and ambitions. *Melia's dilemma is that she cannot be the person she has become*. In an existential sense, she is even a stranger in her own family. On any account, she wants to leave all this behind her. The future is yet to come.

The nature of the grammar

Below, I have made a rough sketch of a *theoretically informed methodology*[5] (Willis & Trondman, 2000) that can be used to abstract and empirically study the nature of the grammar, *what* it implies and *how* it works in practice. The answer to the question of the *why* of the grammar, that is, how we can explain its content and form, must wait.

The nature of the grammar, its *actual realness,* is formulated through the following ten interrelated dimensions:

Immediate presence: that the grammar is characterized, as grammars are, by an ‘already thereness’. Choice of the word ‘immigrant’ immediately stages meaning production around social problems and the presence of social problems stages meaning production around ‘immigrants’.

Embodied form: that the grammar, as an everyday thinking practice, works in the thoughts, feelings, forms of understanding and practices of young people, as a lived common sense and an emotional structure in an embodied form.

Spatial and situational presence: that the grammar can be staged in the social spaces and situations in which young people live their lives.

Social positions: that the grammar is established in all (five) young people, regardless of their social origins, gender, ethnicity and life paths.

Feature-reduced and generalized logic: that in its lived forms, the grammar reduces ‘immigrants’ to *one* dimension, ‘social problem’, *and* generalizes this feature to *all* immigrants. But some ‘immigrants’ are considered more ‘real’ than others.

Unstable status: that the grammar, in spite of everything, carries the seeds of anomaly. It can unequivocally generate critical questions concerning how immigrants are represented, what the situation is really like and what it should be like. When this is the case, the grammar is lived and dealt with as a personal dilemma.

Partial self-deciphering: that the anomaly produces decipherings of the sort ‘all of them aren’t the same’, ‘even I/we/others can be like that’ or ‘I’m not what they think I am’. To be sure, decipherings such as these contribute to the grammar’s instability. But they must be viewed as partial, as they are not considered in relation to social mechanisms that tend to generate and reproduce the grammar.

Partial truthfulness: that the grammar, which underscores the partial nature of deciphering, is experienced as being empirically based. Isn’t there, ‘after all’, some truth to the grammar? To be sure, an ethnographer who spends a day at Cecilia’s school *and* a day at the ‘immigrant school’ she does not want to attend will discover marked differences with respect to the school culture, the youth culture and the

counter-culture. But these empirical facts must be related to a great extent to causal powers other than 'cultures'. They are not determined by whether a person is an 'immigrant' or 'Swedish' These things are instead determined by social origins, gender and life paths – by investments in various forms of cultural capital, by habitus, by a structure of dispositions that in their turn structure how a person understands and deals with life (Bourdieu 1984; Trondman & Bunar, 2001).

'Truth' in practice: that the grammar, in its partial self-deciphering and truthful form, has real consequences and works, therefore, as if it were verified. For despite their decipherings, these young people, in their individual agency, manage their own life situations *as if* the grammar were true. Consequently, the grammar creates real effects.

Reproductive logic: that individuals, in their own socially productive agency, recreate, paradoxically enough, that which they oppose for politico-philosophical and epistemological reasons. In other words: What is experienced as productive for the individual along his/her life path unintentionally recreates in society this non-desirable grammar.

While individuals' dilemmas are lived, using Mills' terms, as 'the personal troubles of milieu', the grammar's 'realness' and 'unintendedness' become 'the public issues of social structure'. To summarize and simplify, I wish to claim that the upshot of the grammar's *actual realness* (for the individual in his/her life context) at a societal structural level is what would seem to be *paradoxical unintendedness*. Thus, the grammar's *actual realness* is created and recreated on a daily basis through the *unintendedness* uncovered in the analysis above. In other words: *the epistemological search for truthfulness contained in the dilemmas of personal anxiety is not sufficient to change, at the grammar's collective level, the actual realness of meaning production because that which is socially productive for the individual in terms of his/her own actions unintentionally recreates the grammar in society.*

Disowning knowledge

We have finally reached the title of this article and the beginning of our answer to the third question. How can we explain the inability of individual agency – in spite of politico-philosophical hopes and epistemological questioning – to break the grammar's effectual presence and power: its *actual realness* and *unintendedness*? Why do we see this marked tendency towards, to borrow an expression from Stanley Cavell's (2003) analysis of Shakespeare's dramas, *disowning knowledge*? According to Cavell, the power of Shakespeare's dramas

lies in his ability to create characters who live the fates of their words – fates they cannot escape – *or* characters who suffer because they are unable to formulate the words that could make them understand what they are doing and why. Using Carscardi's words, Cavell's analysis is guided by the following three questions: '*How* do the characters in a play mean what they say? How can they *not* mean what they say? What are we to make of the meaningfulness of their words?' (2003, p. 193). Moreover, the characters '*must* mean what they say, and mean it thoroughly' (ibid.) Consequently, the phenomenon of 'disowning knowledge' may be understood as a method one can use to understand doubt, in this case, dilemmas, as a way of unintentionally avoiding the 'truth' one finds hard to accept. Explaining oneself in the form of a dilemma and thereby finding, using Bourdieu's words, "a sort of relief" (Bourdieu *et al*. 1999, p. 615) 'provides', to paraphrase Carscardi's determination of the nature of doubt, 'a way of 'disowning' knowledge that would bear too heavily upon us, that would leave us too exposed, or without defence' (2003, p. 197).

Let me now apply Cavell's method to the grammar studied here. In doing so, I ask myself why Cecilia and the other young people both mean and do not mean what they say. Or: How shall we understand that their doubts about the grammar's *actual realness* work as 'disowning knowledge', the unintentional consequence being that the grammar they oppose lives on and is reproduced in practice at the societal structural level?

The grammar's *how* and *why*

In *The Anatomy of Racial Inequality,* Loury formulates 'a novel conceptual framework' that can 'clarify how the phenomenon called "race" operates so as to perpetuate the inter-group status disparities' (2002, p. 3). His aim is to 'specify the criteria' and 'plausible causal mechanisms' 'that ought to be consulted in such reflections' (ibid, p. 7). Loury's analysis concerns African Americans in the US. I read his work *as if* it concerned the meaning production of 'the immigrant as a social problem' in Sweden. Where Loury writes "race", I thus write 'immigrant'. My aim is to elucidate the social mechanisms that can explain the grammar's *actual realness*. Part of this aim is also to explain why this 'realness' may be understood with respect to *disowning knowledge*. The latter must wait until the conclusion of this article.

Loury's axiomatic point of departure is that the grammar 'is all about embodied social signification' (2002, p. 58) that works as 'a social truth' (ibid.) with 'all-too-real consequences' (ibid, p. 21). It should, thus, be understood as 'a socially constructed mode of human categorization' (ibid, p. 5) a 'social artifact' originating in 'a peculiar

history, culture, and political economy' (ibid.). The core of Loury's analysis is the notion that (what I call) the grammar is 'embedded in the social consciousness' in the form of an *ingrained stigma* that makes it difficult for 'the immigrant' to realize his/her 'full human potential' (ibid.). When explaining this stigma, Loury writes (in the spirit of Gunnar Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*) about "'vicious circles' of cumulative causation" (ibid, p. 6) [6]. By this he is referring to how a number of external, (e.g. historical, structural, socio-economic and representation-based,) causal powers influence and interact with the agents' own inner forms of self-understanding and agency (see Ali, this Issue). The circle is closed when immigrant individuals and groups, owing to the cumulative power of all these interrelated factors, come to understand and live their lives as 'immigrants' in the sense dictated by the grammar. And *voilá*!: the 'realimmigrant' is 'true' and 'verifies' him-/herself, while 'Swedes' and ('not real') 'immigrants', even those who feel the grammar is wrong, act *as if* it were real because it 'actually' can be 'true sometimes'. Thus, in the 'worst of all worlds', both those who are affected and those who think the grammar is offensive and wrong contribute to the 'self-sustaining' and 'self-perpetuating' processes (ibid, p. 7) that cause the grammar to work. It is in this way that the grammar, as a system of meaning and a 'fact' – its *actual realness* – is able to live on. It becomes an environment for new generations to grow up and be formed in. The grammar is kept alive and 'the immigrant' can be reproduced across the generations.

Yet how does this *ingrained stigma* arise and what can explain it? What 'deeper structural causes', Loury asks himself, contain these 'subtle processes' (ibid, pp. 6–7)? When people try to understand and deal with the life contexts in which they are embedded, there inevitably arises a need to categorize various phenomena in life. These phenomena are classified using language; they are given names and significations and become different and differentiable. With already existing names and significations, we seek the markers that can guide our understanding and actions in everyday life. Consequently, categorizing and judging constitute the basis of all *socio-cognitive* action.

When people are categorized in terms of 'race' (even if races do not exist), Loury uses the term 'race categorization' (ibid, p. 18). Thus, in accordance with the grammar, we may also speak of an immigrant categorization. According to Loury, a classification such as this is not normative per se, nor is it inherently 'good' or inherently 'bad' with respect to its content (ibid, pp. 18–19). Both the racist, who argues for the grammar's 'biological base' or 'cultural truth', *and* the public official, who is working to counteract the grammar, may speak about immigrants. 'Immigrant' may also be a category used by researchers to try and understand the structural, political and existential conditions

associated with the opportunities and difficulties resulting from the fact that a person has immigrated because he/she has emigrated (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2000; Trondman, 2001). The 'immigrant' of the grammar, however, is, using Loury's words, a 'biased social cognition' (ibid, p. 24) through which 'physical traits' 'are taken to signify something of import within an historical context' (ibid, p. 21). In this way, 'the immigrant' has become 'a mode of perpetual categorization people use to navigate their way through a murky, uncertain world' (ibid, p. 17). When the grammar's stigmatization structures our understanding of and relations between people, we have a society of immigrantized agents ('raced agents') (ibid, p. 66). Such an understanding generalizes all 'immigrants' as 'problems' based on indices (often physical appearance, but also people's names and neighbourhoods) that have no causal power. In the grammar's given form, immigrant individuals are dispossessed of 'a common humanity with the observer' (ibid, p. 67). And so the stigmatization, in the form of the grammar, lives a life of its own. 'Immigrant', a classification with many possible meanings, becomes in 'the public's imagination' (ibid.) '*the* immigrant' and is reduced and generalized to mean 'social problems'. Following in this track is one of the most tragic aspects of the *ingrained stigma* – its self-confirming feature: that the person affected experiences no other alternative than to unintentionally live up to the meanings ascribed to him/her by the grammar. Loury calls this *self-confirming racial stereotypes* (ibid, p. 23).

But, as already mentioned, everything cannot be reduced to a question of cognitively distorted meaning production. People who have immigrated may live under *socio-economic* and *communicative life conditions* that increase the risk that, in certain large or small minorities, the grammar will become real. Personal troubles may be the result of societal problems. Notwithstanding, the erroneous grammar may make it more likely that some people will find themselves in poorer conditions. Thus, such a grammar may help to create real problems, especially if these problems interact with vulnerable life conditions and dark perceptions of the future. In this way, the grammar's 'general inaccuracies' and 'partial truths' are woven together to form the dilemmas that our five young people must deal with. In a society dominated by this grammar, we citizens become, 'cognitive prisoners' 'inside a symbolic world of our own unwitting construction' (ibid, p. 46). The result is 'cultural isolation' and 'people apart' (ibid, p. 77).

Grammar, social reproduction and social integration

Loury's analysis, too, struggles, in an exemplary way, with the political philosophy of social representations, with the epistemological search

for truthfulness and with the scholar's productive agency: deconstructing the grammar's 'social truth' by laying bare the reasons for its consequences. In the spirit of the late philosopher Bernard Williams, Loury's analysis aims at *truthfulness*: 'you do the best you can to acquire true beliefs' (accuracy) and 'what you say reveals what you believe' (sincerity) (2002, p. 11). I wish to claim, however, that Loury's truthful analysis can be made more complete with an additional answer to the *why* question – an answer that may *also* explain the grammar's tendency towards *disowning knowledge*. In other words, what makes the young people simultaneously mean and not mean what they are saying – what forces them, in their individual agency, to treat the grammar as if it were true even though it is false?.

My addition is as follows: *The grammar constitutes to a great extent* – not least for those who accept the political goals and hopes of a multicultural society – *an avoidance of the social integration the young people actually want to believe in and work for*. For example, integration in the form of children and young people from different social milieus attending the same school. The fear of uncertain future life chances in an increasingly segregated and unequal society causes those individuals provided with resources and practical abilities to act to secure in the first place the prerequisites for their own social reproduction. It is for precisely this reason that Cecilia, Melia and Christina choose middle-class environments, that Sten does not want to be associated with 'Motor Mech' and that Omar wants integration but gets segregation. It is for this reason they all must, while they are doing what they are doing in their agency, *disown* the knowledge that tells them something different. The grammar is not desirable. The grammar is not true. Nevertheless, the risk is that it is becoming truer.In an era characterized by uncertain post-industrial transformation, social integration is actually more frightening than a multicultural society. *But* it is such a society with the grammar of 'the immigrant as a social problem' that has been made to represent people's fear of the lived outcomes of increasing inequality.. Thus, we should understand the grammar as a socio-cultural meaning production that causes the middle class and the upwardly mobile, at least those in major cities, to do things they do not wish to do, because they believe they must: to individually secure the reproduction of their own future opportunities. It is for this reason that the young people in focus here live with their dilemmas. The fear of social integration causes them to do things they do not believe in as *citizens*, but are forced to do as productive *individuals*. This is precisely what these young people cannot acknowledge and what they must disown.

My *conclusion* obviously requires more support through research. But I find support for it in a survey study, *Young Adults.* I recently conducted with a randomly selected group of more than 1000 18-year-

olds in thirty municipalities in Sweden (Trondman 2003a, 2003b). Nine in ten young people agreed completely or partly with the claim that 'it is important for students from different social environments and countries to attend the same school, because this prevents conflicts in society'. Over 90 per cent agreed completely or partly with the claim that 'what's most important is who a person is as an individual and not whether he or she is an immigrant'. Over 80 per cent agreed completely or partly 'that refugees who have come to Sweden have enriched Swedish society with their culture and language'. Among young people in Sweden there is unequivocal support for social integration in the schools, for multiculturalism in society and for judging individuals without staging the grammar under study. *But* at the same time, seven out of ten young people surveyed agreed completely or partly with the claim that 'well-educated parents don't want immigrant kids going to their own children's schools'. My thesis with regard to the *why* of the grammar is, thus, that those who are most positive towards social integration and a multicultural society are also those who are most likely to work in practice towards the contrary in order to secure their own social reproduction. The 'those' to whom I refer are primarily children from the well-educated middle class. The dilemma, or doubt, of the middle class makes apparent what Cavell calls *disowning knowledge*. It is in precisely the fear of social integration and in the securing of one's own social reproduction that we can understand the inability of individual social agency,, to break through the *actual realness* of the grammar and the stigma. In this way, finally, we have also understood that the unintentional is not a paradox and that the dilemma lives on because the grammar remains. I find this to be sad, but true. Omar's words still ring in my head: 'If people think you are a problem, you might wanna be that problem. It makes you feel fine, you know to scare those bastards that don't like you. I am fed up, but I'm not a problem. I might be a policeman'.

Notes

1. The concept 'immigrant' has been used by Swedish authorities since the end of the 1960s. It replaced the term 'foreigner'. The government's definitions and use of the concept 'immigrant' vary. Different authorities and reports may use different definitions. A relatively common definition of 'immigrant' is that it refers to persons who live in Sweden but were born abroad or who have at least one parent who was born abroad. The latter may be called a 'second generation immigrant'. The government considers that the concept 'immigrant' should only be used to denote persons who were born abroad. 'Swedish' thus refers to persons born in Sweden to Swedish-born parents. For a broader discussion, see the Swedish Ministry of Culture's report "Begreppet invandrare – användning i myndigheters verksamhet," Ds 2000:43.
2. It should be possible to argue that the examples (dilemmas) presented in this article can be read as manifestations of Essed's definition of 'everyday racism', which is 'a process in which (a) socialized racist notions are integrated into meanings that make practices

immediately definable and manageable, (b) practices with racist implications become in themselves familiar and repetitive, and (c) underlying racial and ethnic relations are actualized and reinforced through these routine or familiar practices in everyday situations' (2002, p. 190). Additionally: 'The concept of everyday racism distinguishes the reproduction of racism through routine and familiar practices from incidental and uncommon expressions of racism' (ibid, p.190). My primary objection to using Essed's concept to determine the categorization 'the immigrant as a social problem' is that Cecilia (like the other five cases that follow) is not the bearer of a 'socialized racist notion'. On the contrary, she and the others reject such a 'notion'. However, and here we see a clear connection to everyday racism, all six young people discussed here tend to reproduce the categorization 'the immigrant as a social problem'. Yet the reason for this is not that they are everyday racists. Why this may be the case is clarified during the course of the analysis.

3. I have conducted the interviews with Cecilia, Omar and Melia myself. The case of Christina is taken from Hägerström (2004), the case of Rusmir from Lindberg (2001) and the case of Sten from Lindberg (2004). The six cases were strategically chosen to constitute *different* cases of *the same* grammar, dealt with through relations between the political philosophy, search for epistemological truthfulness and individual productive agency of social representations.

4. 'Motor Mech' refers to the Motor Mechanics Program, one of the 17 different national programmes in the Swedish gymnasium system (here called "high school").

5. The concern of this methodology is, among other things, that empirical data and theoretical understanding be generated through *the dialectic of the double surprise* (ibid, pp. 11–14). At the same time as the methodology helps us pose questions to the empirical data, these data pose counterquestions to the methodology. The theoretically informed methodology surprises the data's everyday taken-for-grantedness. The data surprise the theory's academic supremacy. Thus, theory, method and data can never be separated; they can only interact in the service of 'analytical points' (ibid, p. 14). See Willis & Trondman (2001, pp. 5–14) as well as Trondman (2004, pp. 18–24).

6. Without referencing Loury, Bunar's (2001) and Dahlstedt's (2004) dissertations constitute two excellent examples of just how applicable Loury's analysis model is. Another good example is the work of Johansen (2004), which concerns the situation in Denmark, where the grammar refers to 'the bilingual child as a social problem."

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