

THE CALL FOR MUSLIM SCHOOLS IN NORWAY.

Paul Thomas

University College of Southeast Norway

Accepted version of article in
Nordic Studies in Education. 2017, 37 (3-4), 166-182.

This article has been accepted for publication and undergone full peer review but has not been through the copyediting, typesetting, pagination and proofreading process, which may lead to differences between this version and the Version of Record. Please cite this article as

doi: [10.18.261/issn.1891-5949-2017-03-04-04](https://doi.org/10.18.261/issn.1891-5949-2017-03-04-04)

This article is protected by copyright. All rights reserved.

THE CALL FOR MUSLIM SCHOOLS IN NORWAY

The Political Debate

Paul Thomas, PhD (Education, King's College, London)
Associate Professor
University College of Southeast Norway
Faculty of Humanities, Sports and Educational Science
Department of Educational Science

Tel: +47 31 00 89 88
paul.thomas@usn.no
www.usn.no

Abstract

Using a critical discourse analysis method, this study explores media coverage of six online newspapers and their coverage of the Muslim school debate in Norway in 2014, when permission was initially granted, and then rescinded, for the establishment of a Muslim school in Oslo. The debate is considered in light of differentiation and de-differentiation theories in making sense of the way the authorities and advocates of Muslim schools contend for their viewpoints. It is argued that the government rhetoric, which justifies the rejection of Muslim schools on the pretext of 'integration', is untenable for two reasons: the existence of over 200 private schools, of which 72 are Christian, and a growing pattern of ethnic 'enclavization' in the capital in the absence of Muslim schools. This absence does not justify the creation of Muslim schools. However, it is argued that this may lead to a further segregation of schools along ethnic-religious lines.

Introduction

There were ninety-eight private Christian schools in Norway in 2014 (a 30% increase since 2009) (Tallaksen and Simenstad, 2014). The numbers are small compared to countries like the UK, but appear at odds with a long-standing tradition that valorizes equity and egalitarianism (*enhetsskolen*)¹ in schooling (Gullestad 2002; Rugkåssa, 2012, p. 39). In general, the tradition of a shared school for all has come under some strain with the growth of private schools. According to Statistics Norway (2014):

While the number of primary and lower secondary schools is decreasing, the number of private schools is increasing. There are about 100 more private schools than in 2002, while the number of public schools has fallen by 545. Today, 7.2 per cent of all the primary and lower secondary schools are private, with and without state subsidies.

The current Norwegian curriculum, despite referring to a poorly defined ‘Christian heritage’ (Breidlid, 2012), is secular in the main. In recent years, agitation for state-supported Muslim schools has grown in tandem with the increase in the Muslim demographic. The numbers have doubled from 72, 023 in 2006 to 141,027 (2015) in a country with just over 5 million people (Statistics Norway, 2015). The first Muslim school in Norway, Urtehagen, opened in 2001, but was short-lived due to, among other reasons, internecine squabbles that paralysed the school.ⁱⁱ The Municipality of Oslo had to step in and place the students in mainstream state schools, given the intransigence of the parties involved. The school was closed down in 2004.

The biggest political party in Norway, the Labour Party (*Arbeiderpartiet*; AP), is of the opinion that Muslim schools would undermine the concept of a school for all (*enhetsskolen*). With regard to education, the Party’s website has this declaration: ‘All children shall have the right to education, regardless of social background. A good school for all is the cornerstone in the Norwegian model. That is why we say no to further privatization which diverts funding from the public schools’ (Arbeiderpartiet.no). The small Christian Democratic Party (KrF) has thrown its support behind Muslim schools. The two major political parties on the right of the political spectrum, which are at the time of writing currently in a coalition government, are divided in their support for the establishment of Muslim schools. The Conservative Party (*Høyre*) is principally in favour, with the Progress Party (FrP), a populist, anti-immigrant party, opposed. The latter declares on its official website: ‘For FrP, the concern for good integration is too important to welcome such schools [i.e. Muslim schools]’ (frp.no).

In 2016, an application to establish Muslim schools by a group called ‘Mothers for Muslim Secondary Schools’ was rejected by the Ministry of Education and Research, on the grounds that some of the board members were affiliated to the first, ill-fated Muslim school.

Advocates for Muslim schools have been undeterred by rejections, of which the first was in 1995, when the then Minister of Education, Gudmund Hernes, stated that ‘parents’ right to decide which religion children should be taught in must yield to foreign-language-speaking [literal translation of *fremmedspråklige* - a term no longer in usage] children’s integration into Norwegian society’ (Grytnes, 2004, p. 146). Significantly, and germane to the discussion in this study, the Progress Party (FrP) is ideologically sympathetic to the notion of private

schools, and champions the creation of Christian schools, while eschewing the establishment of Muslim schools. The question this paper seeks to grapple with is the following: what are the most typical objections to Muslim schools as refracted through some Norwegian newspapers? Furthermore, how do some of these papers frame the stakeholders in the debate?

Conceptual framework

Modernity, while improving efficiency, eradicating diseases and raising living standards, has also left a ruptured and fragmented landscape in its wake. Examples include: the sectarian rifts within Christianity after the Reformation and the Westphalian (1648) legitimation of state sovereignty (MacCulloch, 2004); the carving up of states in Africa during the Berlin Conference; Adam Smith's division of labour; social Darwinism and the hierarchy of 'races'; and Marx's alienated labourer and the separation of adults and children into compartmentalized zones of work, school and nursery.

Modernity is characterized by the attempt to 'pin down': to establish the determinate; to find order by way of classification; to explain how things work by distinguishing between essences and finding relevant mechanisms of operation (Heelas, Martin and Morris 1998, p. 2).

In Norway, the homogeneity and alleged superiority of Norwegian ethnicity and culture was contrasted with the indigenous Sami people of the north who were 'otherized' (Minde, 2003). At the heart of modernity's differentiation was the apparent need to think in binary terms -- a need to sustain a constructed identity by constantly sanctioning differences. Hence, Lutheran Norwegians made their opprobrium for Jews and Jesuits known by inserting a clause into the 1814 Constitution forbidding the two groups from entering the Kingdom. Bäckström (2014) highlights a crucial point that helps in making sense of a rather aberrational Scandinavian approach to state-religion relations. He writes that although 'there was very little differentiation between these two entities' (i.e. state and church well into the 20th century), 'the system of national churches was kept intact because it gave governments an opportunity to contain religion and thus to avoid any "public disturbance" of the established order' (Bäckström, 2014, p. 63).

In contrast, de-differentiation is the process which seeks to heal rifts and elevate commonalities. Whereas differentiation preoccupied itself with constructing differences and erecting walls, the latter seeks to transcend these differences by downplaying them and highlighting the consensual. The loss of colonies and Empire, the dilution and contempt of authority (Vietnam and the 'flower power' generation), the postmodern 'death of the subject'

(Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard) (Hans, 1995) and the proliferation of the ‘New Age’ movement, where an assortment of religions are on offer, are examples of de-differentiation.

The search has been for the unifying or the unitary; for the same; for the transcendental, in the Kantian sense of the necessary and the universal. With regard to morality, Kantians have sought unconditional or categorical imperatives, serving as laws for everyone; and on the ground, human rights legislation has spread throughout the world (Heelas, Martin and Morris 1998).

The trend has been to recapture the universal through ecumenical movements such as the World Council of Churches. One can argue that the project of education and schools are themselves arenas of de-differentiation through which governments hope to inculcate certain ‘universal and desirable’ values deemed essential to the future stability of the country. The school is not an ideologically neutral ideological space. John Stuart Mill wrote that ‘Every education system makes use of indoctrination’ (Mill (1969, 1859). Hence, one witnesses the existence of a mandatory subject called religious education where the percentage allocated to Christianity oscillates depending on the politics of the day. On offer is a smorgasbord of religions and philosophies such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Humanism, Feminism, Ethics and Philosophy (Classical Greek, Western and Eastern).

Norway itself is at the forefront of global efforts commensurate with what has been written about de-differentiation. Through the Nobel Peace Prize, various efforts at global peace making (e.g. the Oslo Treaty between Israelis and Palestinians), and generous bilateral/multilateral financial backing of various developing countries and the United Nations, it seeks to bridge differences and secrete values amenable to a peaceful and more equitable world order.

Rather than compartmentalize differentiation and de-differentiation, it is more useful to conceptualize the two as interrelated without collapsing the differences. The machinations of differentiation and de-differentiation lend themselves well to understanding the current rift between advocates for Muslim schools and large sections of the Norwegian population, which feeds into the debate. The ethos of one school for all (*enhetskolen*) was held up as a panacea ameliorating the deleterious effects of balkanization. It was also assumed that granting more space for Islam in the mandatory subject of religious education would appease Muslims’ need for differentiation. Despite this, the chorus calling for Muslim schools from among Muslim ranks has only grown louder in recent years. The state’s policy of de-differentiation -- especially the Labour Party’s commitment to create a state school that caters for all communities -- appears to have failed. In the eyes of the Labour Party (AP) and the Progress

Party (FrP), agitation for Muslim schools is synonymous with differentiation, which harks back to the age of modernity characterized by division, rifts and instability. Muslims schools are not conducive to integration is the mantra these parties promulgate by way of answer.

In Norway, to be different is seen as a threat to what the Norwegian anthropologist, Marianne Gullestad (2002), referred to as ‘the ideal of sameness’ (*likhetsidealet*). The collocation gives expression to a discourse of assimilation and standardization which until recently appeared within reach, given Norway’s homogenous population. Differentiation can be tolerated insofar as it is a ‘Christian’ differentiation, which is evident in the existence of seventy-two such schools (Gustafsson, 2015), with new ones starting up each year. Christianity in Norway evinces little by way of dissonance with the mainstream culture. By this I mean a narrowing of the gap in regard to controversial stances, such as the status of women (e.g. ordination of female bishops) and a softening in attitudes towards the gay community. While the secular majority and dwindling Christian community have found a rapprochement of sorts in the confluence of a de-differentiated Norway, Muslims, unwilling to jump on the bandwagon of de-differentiation (gay rights, for instance), have opted for differentiation in calling for Muslim schools. As more and more schools in the capital, Oslo, for example, are witnessing ‘white flight’, the ideal of one school for all rings hollow. One recent headline stated, ‘Children of immigrants comprise a majority in one-third of Oslo schools’ (Falch-Olsen and Stokka 2015).

Methodology

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis (from hence CDA) interprets, contextualizes and argues that textual meaning is constructed (Richardson, 2007, s. 15). At the heart of CDA is an examination of language with a view towards understanding social problems. Language is approached as a discursive tool that manages the calculus of power. The researcher is concerned with the ideological effects of linguistic utterances as evidenced in the interpretation, reception and social effects engendered. Following Wittgenstein, it is argued that language is historically embedded, and hence must be explored in a process of *circulus fructosus* in which text, social conditions, ideology and power relations are analysed dialectically to arrive at a good gestalt (Titscher, Meyer and Vetter 2000).

Wodak and Meyer (2009, 35) describe discourse as ‘an institutionalized way of talking that regulates and reinforces action and thereby exerts power’. There are parallels with Foucault’s

(1972, p. 63) ‘archaeology of knowledge’, which sees knowledge as utterances that through regular dispersion have gelled diachronically into a formidable discourse. Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1991) maintains that it is language’s *originative* capacity in a Kantian sense that endows it with the ‘power to produce existence by producing the collectively recognized, and thus realized, representation of existence’, and calls it ‘the principal support of the dream of absolute power’. This knowledge-power nexus is not repressive alone, but also ‘traverses and produces things, induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse’ (Foucault 1972, 119). The appropriate domain, then, of CDA is textual language. It assumes that power relations are negotiated on the micro-level of linguistic elements concealed in newspapers for instance. The objective of CDA is to de-mystify the machinations behind this opacity. As Fairclough (1989, 5) contends:

When a researcher draws on CDA for the first time, what they will realise is that it is often in the smallest linguistic details where power relations and political ideology can be found. In texts we may be aware of what the speaker or author is doing, but not so much how they are doing this.

While each report can be analysed for a range of issues that are salient to CDA, space restraints will permit the application of a limited perspective for each report. For instance, if a report is peppered with photographs, then an icono-semiotic approach is germane, whereas another feature of CDA may be more relevant in a different report.

Data

In April 2014, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training approved an application for the establishment of a Muslim school in Oslo forwarded by the organization ‘Mothers for Muslim Schools’. This came ten years after the first ever Muslim school was forced to close, and after several unsuccessful attempts at establishing new Muslim schools. The school was expected to start up last autumn, but in a surprising volte-face, the Ministry of Education and Research (*Kunnskapsdepartementet*) overturned the earlier decision of the Directorate in the autumn of 2014. The earlier favourable decision galvanized several nonplussed stakeholders of whom Oslo Council (*Oslo Kommune*) was most prominent.

Having perused through several online newspapers, and having reached a point of saturation, six newspapers were deemed representative of the general thrust of the coverage -- three that reported on the approval in the spring of 2014, and three that reported on the rejection during the autumn and winter of the same year. Some of the papers are among the largest in the country (e.g. *Verdens Gang* and *Dagbladet*) while others focus on the capital, Oslo (e.g.

Osloby). In narrowing down the research to six media reports, the latent and connotative meaning is privileged. The above is commensurate with what Lindlof (1995) calls the ‘the study of situated, emergent and reflexive human phenomena’. All translations from the Norwegian are mine. Where appropriate, and to enhance authenticity, I have reproduced the original Norwegian in italics.

The articles included editorials, regular columns by diverse contributors, op-eds, and letters to the editor. According to its Website:

Retriever is the Nordic Region’s leading supplier of media monitoring and tools for news research, media analysis and corporate information. We provide you with quick access to all the relevant information from newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, the Internet and social media (Retriever 2015).

Typing ‘*Muslimsk skole*’ into ‘Retriever’ and selecting ‘Norwegian newspapers and TV/Radio’ returns the following breakdown:

Source	References
NTB text	38
Aftenposten	30
Dagen	23
Vårt Land	23
Dagsavisen	17
VG	10
Dagbladet	9
Klassekampen	8
Stavanger Aftenblad	7
Fædrelandsvennen	6
Drammens Tidende	5
Morgenbladet	5

Of the 287 hits for 2014, NTB had 38 references of which only 7 revolved around the Muslim school debate. These newsfeeds all fell on the same day – 13 November 2014. These can in turn be separated into two camps: the disappointment of the Norwegian doctor and convert, Trond Ali Linstad, and politicians from the Progress Party and Conservative Party who express satisfaction with the decision. NTB is a news outlet, which, like Reuters, provides news scoops to other media outlets which subscribe to it, which means that several of the reports are reproductions of NTB's newsfeeds. Hence, although the latter must be taken into account when sifting the three selected papers for content, it is ultimately the overall coloration as distilled through the papers as a collective that is salient. The fact that several news outlets have reproduced these feeds with varying comments commensurate with their ideologies is itself significant.

Of the thirty reports in *Aftenposten*, thirteen revolved around the issue of Muslim schools. The reports focus on diverse stakeholders on either side of the debate. For instance, Loveleen Brenna, a leader for Seema -- an organization which works towards developing talent and diversity, argues that the creation of Muslim schools will ameliorate the need for some Muslim parents to send their children to Muslim countries from Norway (10 April 2014). On the other hand, there are those like the Progress Party politician, Mazyar Keshvari, who urges the Minister of Education to reconsider granting 'Mothers for Muslim schools' permission to start such schools for fear of exacerbating segregation. The newspaper with the third highest references, *Dagen*, had eight of thirty directly linked to the issue. Once again, the same stories appear to circulate with roughly the same stakeholders given prominence. The Labour Party politician, Trond Giske, features twice with warnings to Parliament about a possible 'flood of religious schools' (headline 25 April 2014).

Findings

Coverage of the Directorate's approval

Vårt Land, a national newspaper with a Christian coloration, has this headline, 'Sandberg thunders against government's plans for own Muslim school' (*Vårt Land* 2014). Significantly,

the determiner, 'own' (*egen*), connotes parochialism, something castigated in the Norwegian psyche conditioned to valorize collectivism (*dugnad*) and egalitarianism. The politician, Per Sandberg, whose party, the Progress Party (FrP) is at the time of writing currently in a coalition government with the Conservative Party, appeals adeptly to the Norwegian consensus that state schools are arenas where appropriate values are inculcated. The headline subliminally activates intertextual (Fairclough 1995) topoi of deviance that are designed to provoke the reader. The subtext is also significant: 'The last thing Oslo needs is more segregation,' says the the FrP politician. Rather unsurprisingly, not one word is mentioned about the fact that Sandberg's own party have styled themselves as champions of Christian private schools, of which there are roughly seventy-two in Norway, with new applications granted every year. While the Prime Minister, Erna Solberg, from the Conservative Party is cited as saying, 'We cannot discriminate and stop schools simply on the grounds of being Muslim schools,' Sandberg retorts that she ought to think of 'integration and not principles'. Furthermore, the hyperbole 'thundered' is employed as a rhetorical device intended to underscore the egregious nature of the issue. What is suppressed and silenced -- what Machin and Mayr (2012, 38) call 'lexical absence' -- is equally crucial: the question of why in the *absence* of Muslim schools there has been a slide towards ethnic segregation in schools in Oslo in the last few years. As Thomas (2015) points out:

Figures for 2014 from the Municipality of Oslo indicate that 40.2 per cent of pupils in the capital Oslo (primary and lower secondary schools) hail from minority/immigrant backgrounds. The distribution is highly skewed, with seven of these schools having a cohort of over 90% students from minority/immigrant backgrounds (i.e. mainly Africa and Asia).

This is not discussed, but Sandberg subliminally couples Muslim schools to segregation as if the link is causal. This is illustrative of a 'pathological fallacy',

[...] where an arguer will base argumentation on arousing emotions, specifically the manipulation of emotion, in order to distort perception or impair the audience's critical faculties. Common pathotic fallacies include scare tactics -- often involving exaggeration and hyperbole -- and sentimental appeals (Richardson 2007, p. 168).

NRK Østlandssendingen, part of the national broadcasting company, ran the headline 'Said yes to Muslim Schools in Oslo' (i.e. the government say yes) (Jenssen and Nakken 2014). In applying CDA to the iconographic content, interesting insights can be gained. There are four pictures in the report. The first and most prominent is a small, pink building (figure 1).



Figure 1: Urtehaven school.

The caption reads: ‘WARNING: Urtehaven school was closed in 2004 after disturbances and criticism from the county governor. Oslo Council is critical to the creation of a new school.’ The reader looking at the picture cannot imagine how this building can accommodate the proposed 200 students mentioned in the report. Furthermore, the lower side of the building appears to feature a hemispherical semi-elliptical roof reminiscent of domes in Islamic architecture. Obviously, the intertextual link of ‘madrasas’ is intended here. The next two photographs are of well-groomed politicians from the ruling coalition parties, the Oslo City Commissioner of Knowledge and Education, Anniken Hauglie (Conservative), and Camilla Wilhelmsen (figure 2) the leader of Oslo Progress Party (FrP), both staunchly opposed to Muslim schools.

Figure 2: Camilla Wilhelmsen.



Figure 3: Parents at the opening of Urtehagen School.



The smiling, photogenic politicians appear to be brimming with confidence. This creates what Machin and Mayr (2012, 71) call a ‘visual address’ in which the viewer is acknowledged and a response demanded, as opposed to the last photograph in the report, where an audience of Muslim parents look away from the viewer (figure 3). ‘Where a person does not look out at the viewer there is a different kind of effect. There is no demand made on the viewer. No response is expected’ (Machin and Mayr 2012, p. 71).

Although the Muslim parents portrayed (an archived photo from the inauguration of the first Muslim school) do not look at the viewer and invite a response, nevertheless, the two closest individuals in the picture are bearded and wear the traditional shalwar kameez (specifically the *perahan tunban* indigenous to parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan). The choice to foreground these individuals, and not the third gentleman who appears to be wearing western attire (suit jacket), is significant. This aligns with what Kress and Leeuwen (1996, 124) refer to as an ‘offer image’ in which ‘the viewer is offered the image as information available for scrutiny and consideration’. By subtly coupling the issue of Muslim schools to iconography in which ‘trustworthy and familiar’ Norwegian politicians who are opposed to Muslim schools ‘demand’ a response, and a concomitant iconography of Islamic architecture and bearded elderly men with attire reminiscent of troubled regions such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, Muslim schools are delegitimized. (Kress and Leeuwen 1996).

Osloby, a newspaper that focuses on the capital, ran a similar headline to *NRK Østlandssendingen*: ‘Said yes to a Muslim school in Oslo’ (Mellingsæter, 2014). The journalist asks a tough question of the aforementioned leader for Oslo FrP:

Mellingsæter: Is it not discrimination to be in favour of a Christian private school and against a Muslim private school?

Camilla Wilhelmsen: It is a dilemma. We are for private schools. We have seen that Christian private schools integrate. That we will have a Christian private school in Groruddalen is good. The problem here is that people are leaving. Christianity is also a part of our cultural heritage and Muslim children need to be integrated.

Rather than concede that it is discrimination, Wilhelmsen conjures up the word ‘dilemma’, which has the effect of suggesting that the matter is complicated and requires some deliberation. In the next breath, however, she suggests that a Christian school in Groruddalen, a section of Oslo which has the densest Muslim demographic, is ‘good’ for integration. In addition, the classic strategy of ‘divide and conquer’ is at play in the manner she employs the pronoun ‘we’ three times, while spelling out who ‘they’ are (i.e. Muslim children). Hence, ‘Muslim children’ represent a ‘collective “other” that is in opposition to these shared ideas’ (Oktar, 2001). Pronouns that dichotomize are intended to despatialize the immigrant in discourse of ‘national self-glorification’ (Van Dijk, 2008). What is perhaps most telling is the barefaced admission that a Christian school in the middle of Groruddalen will have a mitigating effect on ‘white flight’. Wilhelmsen appears insensible to the signal this sends out to Muslims in Oslo, which is in effect: Norwegians will stay in minority-dominated areas only if Christian private schools are established. Not only that, but she declares that such schools will serve to ‘integrate’ Muslim children. This is tantamount to exploiting Christian schools as weapons in a ‘cultural war’ against Muslims. Again, the fact that state schools in Groruddalen and southern parts of Oslo, such as Klemetsrud and Mortensrud, are haemorrhaging white, ethnic Norwegians, *despite* the absence of Muslim schools, is not up for discussion.

Coverage of the Ministry of Education’s rejection

The national newspaper, *Verdens Gang*, with one of the largest online readership, featured the headline ‘Discriminating no to Muslim school’ (Ertesvåg and Aspaas 2014). Five times in the report, mention is made of the collapse of the first Muslim school, Urtehagen, in 2004, and the accompanying problems of finding schools for the roughly 113 students who had to be enrolled in mainstream state schools. The justification for the decline is as follows:

The Ministry of Education does not believe that the initiators/applicants are serious enough. Concretely, Mothers for a Muslim Secondary School have too close a connection with former managers of the Muslim school in Oslo.

This harking back to the collapse of the school in 2004 permeates virtually all the reports studied for this paper, but this particular report stands out. Here one observes what Richardson (2007, 157) refers to as ‘forensic rhetoric’.

Forensic rhetoric covers any form of argumentative discourse in which an arguer -- or rhetor -- condemns or defends someone’s past, its means are accusation and defence, and its special topics are the justice and injustice of actions allegedly committed by the defendant.

It comes as no surprise then that the former Headmaster of Urtehaven school, the Norwegian GP and convert to Islam, Trond Ali Linstad, is foregrounded. To the right of the picture, three African women wearing long-flowing, black *abayas* sit. By repetitively reminding the reader of the collapse of the first school in 2004, and the subsequent chaos in its wake, the reader is invited to conclude that any future endeavour is also bound to fail. The etymology of the word ‘forensic’ is traced to the accused brought before the Roman forum to plead his case. Dr Linstad is thus forensically ‘guilty’ and is presented as such before the readers. The hope is that any mention of ‘Muslim school’ and ‘Trond Ali Linstad’ will have been so delegitimized in an ignominious past that any future applicants would be deterred (pathological fallacy).

The next media outlet with the headline ‘Muslim schools get a no from the Ministry of Education’ (Aftenposten, 2014) is *Aftenposten*, the largest newspaper in Norway. The paper notes that ‘A new curriculum for Islam, religions and philosophies of life (IRL) was supposed to replace the curriculum in religion, philosophies of life and ethics (RLE). In addition, the school wanted to have its own curriculum in Arabic.’ The paper does not draw readers’ attention to the controversial history of the mandatory subject of religious education over the years. The mandatory subject has been a bone of contention for several years in Norway. As Thomas (2015, 202) notes,

In 2004, after a group of parents supported by the Norwegian Humanist Association and the Norwegian Islamic Council brought litigation against the state to the United Nations (UN), the teaching of RE in Norway was found to be in violation of the Human Rights Codes of article 18, paragraph 4, of the Covenant by the UN Human Rights Committee (Leirvåg v. Norway). Two years later, another ruling against the current status of RE in Norway in 2006 by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in Strasbourg led to amendments that redressed some of the concerns raised.

In contrast to the earlier ‘forensic rhetoric’, where the collapse of Urtehaven school was recapitulated, there is lexical suppression with respect to the embarrassing defeat of the government in both the UN and ECtHR (the latter is binding).

Of interest also is the issue of mental transitivity in the newspaper report. A Hallidayean transitivity enables the researcher to ‘construe the world of experience into a manageable set of process types’ (Halliday, 1985, s. 106). According to Machin and Mayr (2012, p. 107), ‘Mental processes are processes of *sensing* and can be divided into three classes: “cognition” (verbs of thinking, knowing or understanding), “affection” (verbs of liking, disliking or fearing) and “perception” (verbs of seeing, hearing or perceiving)’.

The Oslo City Commissioner of Knowledge and Education, Anniken Hauglie (Conservative), said that she was against the establishment because she feared a repeat of what happened in 2004...

The report later adds that the Ministry of Education shares this doubt. The Commissioner is made the subject of a mental process, and readers are invited to empathize with her ‘fear’. She is privileged as a ‘focaliser’ or ‘reflector’ of action. Furthermore, it conveys a sense that the participants are busy ‘although they participate in no material transactions’ (Machin and Mayr, 2012, 107). In this manner, the media play a ‘frame game’ understood as a ‘process by which information is organized by focusing on certain aspects of reality as normal and desirable, but away from others as irrelevant or inferior’ (Fleras 2011, 13, 14).

Finally, *Bergens Tidende*, based in Bergen, the second most populous city in Norway, carries the headline, ‘Muslim school gets no from the Ministry of Education’ (Bergens Tidende, 2014). Towards the end, this report highlights an incident which is found in several of the other papers too. When the green light to set up a Muslim school was given in the autumn of 2014, the Commissioner, Anniken Hauglie (Conservative), made it clear that she would appeal the decision on behalf of Oslo Council. The paper reports that the Minister of Education and Research, Torbjørn Røe Isaksen, also from the Conservative party, sent her a text message in which he dissuaded her from appealing. He wrote, among other things, that her appeal would ‘only prolong a bad case for them’. The media reported that the Minister, who was in favour of Muslim schools, and *mutatis mutandis* would have deliberated on the issue, declared himself ‘incompetent’ or ‘unfit’ (*inhabil*) to do so.

In line with Aristotle’s rhetorical modes of persuasion, an ethotic argument is one which, sensing that the arguments on both sides are valid, shifts strategy towards maligning the

character of the speaker who is on the opposing side. The speaker who appears ‘wise, virtuous and full of goodwill’ (Fortenbaugh 1996, 151) carries the argument. Significantly, the Minister of Education and Research, Torbjørn Røe Isaksen, the most senior minister in the matter, whose intervention could have effectuated a different outcome, declares himself suspiciously ‘unfit’. One is left to speculate about the intricacies of this ‘SMS-gate’, but, once the cat is out of the bag, ethotical rhetoric kicks in and the case is further disadvantaged for the Muslim school case.

In general, virtually all reports analysed on the subject operated with ‘functional honorifics’, which are ‘terms that suggest a degree of seniority or a role that requires a degree of respect (e.g. President, Lord or Judge)’ (Richardson 2007, 82). Almost without exception, the titles and roles of government officials were made explicit (e.g. Commissioner, Leader of Oslo FrP). This contrasts with the abstraction ‘Mothers for Muslim Schools’. Overall, powerful members of government, who were individualized with honorifics, were marshalled in opposition to the Muslim schools, while only one person, the delegitimized Trond Ali Linstad, was made the face of the proposition. The purpose of such individualization versus collectivization is to draw the former close to the readers and repel the latter.

Discussion

The analysis of media reports above throws up some challenges. Firstly, it is clear that differentiation appears to be the driving agent for both the Norwegian authorities and stakeholders behind the push for Muslims schools. In believing that Christian schools will stem the tide of ‘white flight’ and somehow integrate Muslims into a diffuse Christian heritage, politicians resort to ‘the construction of national or “tribal” identities’ (Heelas, Martin and Morris 1998, 2). It is puzzling that while private schools of all stripes have increased by 100 since 2002, the battle still rages for the the acceptance of Muslim schools. Not once did the research turn up any suggestion that Islam harbours denominational differences in a manner that is not unlike Christian denominations. Rather, a unified and ‘otherized’ picture of Muslims emerges. As Bulliet (1996, 175) notes, ‘No religiously denominated societies in the world are so consistently approached through reference to a presumed normative uniformity as those described as Muslim.’ This differentiation imposed on Muslims, and which ignores rivalries and theological tension (e.g. Ahmadiyya, Sufi, etc.) serves to paint a picture of Muslims as a homogenous force intent on dismantling cherished Norwegian values. If such a consensus exists, it begs the question, ‘Why then did the first Muslim school collapse?’ It must be kept in mind that *Muslim* parents accused a *Muslim*

leadership of mismanagement. In the UK context, although 60 privately funded Muslim schools entered the state-funded sector way back in 1998 (Parker-Jenkins, 2002), with numbers only growing since (156 state-funded Muslim schools as of 2015 (Hill 2015, 181)), the ‘Trojan Horse’ (2014) affairⁱⁱⁱ in Birmingham shows that Muslim schools are still considered suspect (Pecenka and Anthias 2015).

In calling for Muslim schools, clearly, some in the Muslim community feel the need to preserve and nurture a distinct Muslim identity which mainstream state-funded schools are unable to safeguard. The reasons forwarded for Muslim schools overlap with those made in the UK prior to 1997, when Islamia Primary School became the first to receive public funding (Hill, 2015, p. 181). Lax discipline, lack of respect for teachers, and poor or mediocre academic standards are cited as examples. The author, who was himself a teacher in an upper secondary school with over 75 per cent of the over 600 student cohort adhering to Islam, has often heard the same reasons given. Thus, one witnesses what the present author calls a ‘double de-differentiation’. The authorities and those who call for a Muslim school both paradoxically cite ‘better integration’ as the reason for their claims, all the while drifting further apart. Hill (2015) looks to Kymlicka (1995) in defence of Muslim schools citing the need to shield the group from the impact of external decisions, but there is the risk of reifying groups as stable, immutable entities. That said, there is some optimism to be gleaned from an Ofsted Report which states, ‘In all of the 51 independent faith schools visited (including Muslim schools), “the pupils gained a strong sense of personal worth and of belonging to their faith community”, which were seen as “fundamental to the development of pupils identity, their sense of self-worth and esteem’ (Hill 2015, p. 185).

On the flip side, few if any believe that the creation of Muslim schools is a panacea remedying the current rupture in the educational landscape. Speaking about the UK context, Coles (2008), an educator and convert to Islam, states:

The problem for Muslim youth is that Islam is not a homogenous one size fits all religion. It is sectarian and doctrinal divisions are potentially deep and complicated. Fundamentalist, anti-western statements can seem attractive to British Muslim youth. Especially those who feel disaffected and disempowered. Britain’s Muslims, like Europe’s, are a community of communities (Coles, 2008, p. 23).

It was precisely such divisions which sealed the fate of the first Muslim school in Norway in 2004. There are legitimate concerns that such schools could become hotbeds of radicalism and religious parochialism, as the ‘Trojan horse’ scandal in Birmingham, UK, demonstrated.

The then Minister for Education, Michael Gove, had to step in to investigate claims of radical Islamic elements squeezing out school heads and teachers deemed ‘moderate’ (Arthur, 2015). Thomas (2016) considers the enormous challenges involved in combating antisemitism in a school where the majority come from Muslim backgrounds. Behdad and Nomani (2006) mention, *inter alia*, the marginalization of Muslim women in education in exploring the significance and limitations of Islamist normative and legalist discourse on key areas of public policy. To the list above one can no doubt add a plethora of other concerns which must be rigorously debated before Muslim schools are a reality in Norway. A school foregrounded with ‘Muslim’ would clearly serve to send the unfortunate signal that membership is exclusively for those who adhere to the tenets of Islam -- a stance that is incongruous with deeply ingrained Norwegian values of equity and inclusion.

Despite the above, the ‘ideal of sameness’ in Norway (Gullestad 2002) has suffered irreparable cracks in recent decades. The fact that there are over 200 private schools is a testament to a reluctant acquiescence to individuals’ and groups’ needs for differentiation -- the right to be different. This growing trend of privatization is frowned upon by Norway’s largest political party, the Labour Party (AP), who still hold on tenaciously to the ‘ideal of sameness’. It rings hollow for politicians to conceive of differentiation only in terms of Christian schools that foster the same values of state schools. What, then, is the rationale and justification for Christian schools if all they ever do is provide more of the same that state schools already do? In the UK, the previously maligned Catholic community felt that establishing separate Catholic schools, of which there are 2,100 (Shah, 2012, s. 60), helped them move out of their ‘initial isolation and become more confident and self-assured’ (Konstant, 1991). Østberg (2005), who did a longitudinal study of Norwegian-Pakistani Muslims, employs the term ‘integrated plural identity’ to approximate their everyday lives.

My study of Norwegian-Pakistani children shows not only a diversity when it comes to social belonging, but also a diversity of cultural meaning. We have met children who are agents in their home environment, at the Koran school, and in the state school, at McDonalds and on the football ground, on pilgrimage to Mecca and on holiday to Pakistan (Østberg, 2003, p. 102).

In essence, it appears that both parties discussed in this paper, the Norwegian authorities and those calling for Muslim schools, are responding to the current zeitgeist of de-differentiation which is in effect driving globalization with all its positive and negative corollaries. Whereas the Norwegian authorities seek to

countervail the forces of modernity by perceiving schools as catalysts of de-differentiation, many Muslims look to the superordinate global community called the *Ummah* for a sense of shared belonging. This is not unlike Catholics who look to the global Catholic Church and the Pope -- catholic after all means ‘universal’ or ‘all-embracing’.

The perception among Muslims of being targeted and discriminated and complaints of Islamophobia, hostility from media and masses in the West, and an alleged lack of respect for their faith, prophet, rituals and way of life are often quoted among the forces driving them to in-group cohesion (Shah, 2012, p. 52).

It is in the confluence of these opposing trajectories that the debate discussed in this study can be usefully explored. Following Bäckström (2014), Scandinavian states have never really experienced a true rupture in their relations with churches and all religion by extension. In the case of Muslim schools, it is manifest that the Norwegian state perceives religion to be a ‘public disturbance’ (Bäckström, 2014, p. 63), and secular state schools the panacea. It is precisely in this skewed approach to religion that the authorities in Norway, as I have shown in the findings, fall foul of international conventions (Thomas 2015). The Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the European Union, for example, states in Article 14, ‘The Right to Education’ (EUR-Lex: Access to European Union law, 2012):

3. The freedom to found educational establishments with due respect for democratic principles and the right of parents to ensure the education and teaching of their children in conformity with their religious, philosophical and pedagogical convictions shall be respected, in accordance with the national laws governing the exercise of such freedom and right.

Conclusion

This study considered the debate about Muslim schools as refracted through media statements attributed to politicians. How the debate is framed, and on what aspect the ‘gaze’ is focused, are all salient. It considered the fault lines between the two major political parties in the centre-right coalition on the issue at hand, which epitomizes the inconsistencies that must be properly addressed in the future. The findings, although from a limited sample of newspapers covering the debate in its heyday of 2014, suggest that politicians opposed to the creation of Muslim schools do so with the understanding that such schools would undermine ‘integration’, a concept which is not engaged with robustly.

It does not automatically follow from the above that the lack of cogency should translate into the creation of Muslim schools. Tentative problems, along with concomitant successful templates of Muslim schools in the UK, among other places, have been alluded to in order to underscore the complexities involved. The government and advocates of Muslim schools engage in de-differentiation, but in ways that collide: the former seeks more conformity and national cohesion through state schools, while the latter looks to the *Ummah* to shore up against the crescendo of Islamophobia. For the authorities to persist in the fallacy that state schools are buffers against what in the UK Cattle report called the ‘parallel lives’ phenomenon -- that an Asian person could go home and not see a single white person until the following day (Ameen & Hassan, 2013, s. 12) -- is to prevaricate. Few can deny the inexorable slide towards ‘parallel lives’ in places like the capital city, Oslo. As one of my colleagues stated, ‘I live in a black and white world. The school campus is black, while the staff room is white.’ It must be reiterated that this ‘enclavization’ occurred in the absence of Muslim faith schools, as also Ameen and Hassan (2013) point out in the UK context.

The main concern this paper seeks to raise is the current untenable policy that perceives some private schools as more equal than others, to borrow from Orwell. It is argued, especially in a time when inimical forces with a global reach seek to stoke the flames of discontent and bigotry, that the notion of a genuine ‘school for all’ -- where neither religious, ethnic, class or similar affiliations -- do not obtain. The Scandinavian model has been a trailblazer in the past in this respect, and must redouble its efforts to ameliorate the current challenges thrown up *inter alia* by globalization and immigration.

References

- Aftenposten. "Muslimsk skole får nei fra Kunnskapsdepartementet (Muslim school gets a no from the Ministry of Education)." *Aftenposten*. 13 November 2014. <http://www.aftenposten.no/nyheter/Muslimsk-skole-far-nei-fra-Kunnskapsdepartementet-7785605.html> (accessed November 28, 2015).
- Ameen, R, and N Hassan. "Are faith schools educationally defensible?" *Research in Teacher Education*, 2013, 3 ed.:11-17. Arbeiderpartiet.no. Arbeiderpartiets kunnskapspolitikk. <http://arbeiderpartiet.no/Hovedsaker/Kunnskap>
- Arthur, J. (2015). Extremism and Neo-Liberal Education Policy: A Contextual Critique of the Trojan Horse Affair in Birmingham Schools. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 63(3), 311-328.
- Behdad, S., & Nomani, F. (Eds.). (2006). *Islam and the everyday world: public policy dilemmas* (Vol. 1). Routledge.
- Bergens Tidende. "Muslimsk skole får nei fra Kunnskapsdepartementet (Muslim school gets no from the Ministry of Education)." *Bergens Tidende*. 13 November 2014. <http://www.bt.no/nyheter/innenriks/Muslimsk-skole-far-nei-fra-Kunnskapsdepartementet-3240397.html> (accessed November 28, 2015).
- Bloom, I, J P Martin, and W L Proudfoot. "The Individual in Islamic Society." In *Religious diversity and human rights*, by R.W Bulliet. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Bourdieu, P. *Language & Symbolic Power*. Translated by G Raymond and M Adamson. Sunderland: Polity Press, 1991.
- Halldis Breidlid, 'Et ekskluderende "vi?" Verdier, kulturer og kulturarv i læreplanens generelle del og I formålparagrafen: nasjonalt fellesskap, multikulturalitet og kulturell kompleksitet' (An excluding 'we?' Values, cultures and cultural heritage in the curriculum's general section and in the mission statement: national community and cultural complexity), *Acta Didactica Norge* 6:1 (2012), pp. 1–18.
- Bäckström, A. "Religion in the Nordic countries: Between Private and Public." *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 2014, 29 ed.: 61-74.
- Ertesvåg, F, and E H Aspaas. "Diskriminerende nei til muslimskole (Discriminating no to Muslim school)." *VG*. 13 November 2014. <http://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/skole-og-utdanning/diskriminerende-nei-til-muslimskole/a/23335365/> (accessed November 28, 2015).
- EUR-Lex: Access to European Union law. *Charter of the Fundamental Rights of the European Union* . 26 10 2012. <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12012P%2FTXT> (accessed November 29, 2015).
- Fairclough, N. *Critical Discourse Analysis*. New York: Longman, 1995.
- . *Language and Power*. 2nd edition. London: Longman, 1989.
- Falch-Olsen, I, and J O Stokka. *tv2.no*. 16 2 2015. <http://www.tv2.no/a/6471075> (accessed 11 29, 2015).

- Fleras, A. *The Media Gaze Representations of diversities in Canada*. Vancouver: Canada, 2011.
- Fortenbaugh, W.W. "Aristotle's Accounts of Persuasion through Character." In *Theory, text, context. Issues in Greek rhetoric and oratory*, edited by C.L Johnstone, 147-168. New York: SUNY Press, 1996.
- Foucault, M. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*. New York: Vintage Press, 1972.
- Frp.no. Glad for muslimskole nei. <https://www.frp.no/aktuelt/0001/01/glad-for-muslimskole-nei>
- Grytnes, R. "Muslimsk privatskole -en trussel eller et uttrykk for flerkulturalisme? (Muslim private school - a threat or an expression of multiculturalism?)." *Norsk pedagogisk tidsskrift*, 2004, 88 ed.: 145-156.
- Gullestad, M. "Invisible fences: Egalitarianism, nationalism and racism." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 2002: 45-63.
- Gustafsson, K. "Kristen eller offentlig grunnskole? (Christian or state secondary school?)." *Dagen*. 10 9 2015. <http://www.dagen.no/Inspirasjon/utdanning/Kristen-eller-offentlig-grunnskole-242705> (accessed 11 29, 2015).
- Halliday, M.A.K. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. London: Edward, 1985.
- Hans, B. (1995). *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History*.
- Heelas, P, D Martin, and P Morris. *Religion, modernity, and postmodernity*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1998.
- Hill, P.M. "A Normative Approach to the Legitimacy of Muslim Schools in Multicultural Britain." *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 2015, 63 ed.: 179-196.
- Jensen, G.K, and M Nakken. "Sier ja til muslimsk skole (Say yes to Muslim school)." *NRK Østlandssendingen*. 7 April 2014. <http://www.NRK.no/ostlandssendingen/sier-ja-til-muslimsk-skole-i-oslo-1.11654098> (accessed November 28, 2015).
- Konstant, D. "Letters." *Times Educational Supplement* 16 (1991).
- Kress, G R, and T V Leeuwen. *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. Psychology Press, 1996.
- Kymlicka, W. *Multicultural citizenship: A liberal theory of minority rights*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995.
- Lindlof, T.R. *Qualitative Communication Research Methods*. London.: Sage, 1995.
- MacCulloch, D. (2004). *Reformation: Europe's house divided 1490-1700*. Penguin UK.
- Machin, D, and A Mayr. *How to do critical discourse analysis: A multimodal introduction*. London: Sage , 2012.

- Mellingsæter, H. "Sier ja til muslimsk skole i Oslo (Say yes to Muslim school in Norway)." *Osloby*. 7 April 2014. <http://www.osloby.no/nyheter/Sier-ja-til-muslimsk-skole-i-Oslo-7523846.html> (accessed November 28, 2015).
- Mill, J.S. *On Liberty*. London: Longman: Robert and Green, (1969, 1859).
- Minde, H. (2003). Assimilation of the Sami—Implementation and Consequences1. *Acta Borealia*, 20(2), 121-146.
- Oktar, L. "The ideological organization of representational processes in the presentation of us and them." *Discourse & Society*, 2001, 12 ed.: 313-346.
- Parker-Jenkins, M. "Equal access to state funding: the case of Muslim schools in Britain." *Race, Ethnicity and Education* 5, 2002: 273-289.
- Pecenka, J, and F Anthias. "Minority faith schools as claims for cultural recognition? Two examples from England." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*, 2015: 433-450.
- Retriever (2015). About us. <http://www.retriever-info.com/en/om-oss/>.
- Richardson, E. J. *Analysing Newspapers*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Shah, S. "Muslim schools in secular societies: persistence or resistance!" *British Journal of Religious Education*, 2012, 34 ed.: 51-65.
- Rugkåssa, M. (2012). Likhetens dilemma: Om sivilisering og integrasjon i den velferdsambisiøse norske stat. Oslo, Norway: Gyldendal
- Statistics Norway. "Puils in primary and lower secondary school, 1 October 2014." *Statistics Norway*. 12 12 2014. <http://www.ssb.no/en/utdanning/statistikker/utgrs> (accessed November 28, 2015).
- . "Religious communities and life stance communities." 2015. <https://www.ssb.no/statistikkbanken/selectvarval/saveelections.asp> (accessed 11 29, 2015).
- Tallaksen, S and Simenstad, L.M. Kristne skoler i vekst. <http://www.klassekampen.no/article/20140416/ARTICLE/140419956>
- Thomas, P. "Managing Religion in a Global World: The United Nation's ruling against Norwegian Religious Education." *Politics, Religion & Ideology*, 2015, 16 ed.: 201-217.
- Thomas, P. (2016). Exploring Anti-Semitism in the Classroom: A Case Study Among Norwegian Adolescents from Minority Backgrounds. *Journal of Jewish Education*, 82(3), 182-207.
- Titscher, S, M Meyer, and E Vetter. *Methods of Text and Discourse Analysis*. London: Sage, 2000.
- Van Dijk, T.A. *Discourse & Power*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

Vårt Land (Our Land). "Sandberg tordner mot regjeringens planer om egen muslims skole." *Vårt Land*. 13 April 2014. <http://www.vl.no/2.615/sandberg-tordner-mot-regjeringens-planer-om-egen-muslims-skole-1.888> (accessed November 28, 2015).

Wodak, R, and M Meyer, M. (2009). *Methods of Critical Discourse*. London: Sage, 2009.

Østberg, S. *Muslim i Norge: Religion og hverdagsliv blant unge norsk-pakistanere (Muslim in Norway: Religion and everyday life among Norwegian-Pakistani youth)*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2003.

Notes

ⁱ *Enhetsskolen* (literally 'oneness school') seeks to give expression to the Norwegian educational ideal of perceiving schools as levellers of socio-economic differences -- as incubators of an egalitarian ethos where students of all backgrounds rub shoulders.

ⁱⁱ Among other reasons, Urtehaugen School in Grønland, Oslo, saw the light of day because of the efforts of the General Practitioner, Trond Ali Linstad, an ethnic Norwegian who converted to Shia Islam and served as the school's first Headmaster. During the height of the turmoil, 6 out of 9 teachers went on sick leave and 100 students boycotted the school in a show of defiance by the parents who said the leaders were 'dictators'.

ⁱⁱⁱ The 'Trojan Horse' affair began with an anonymous letter purported to blow the whistle on a plot to radicalize schools in Birmingham. Among others, the government withdrew funding for some of the schools in question and some of the staff resigned.