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To cite this article: Kristin Gregers Eriksen (2020): Discomforting presence in the classroom – the affective technologies of race, racism and whiteness, *Whiteness and Education*, DOI: [10.1080/23793406.2020.1812110](https://doi.org/10.1080/23793406.2020.1812110)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/23793406.2020.1812110>



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Published online: 10 Sep 2020.



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Discomforting presence in the classroom – the affective technologies of race, racism and whiteness

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ABSTRACT

This article sheds light on the elusive presence of race, racism, and Whiteness in Norwegian primary schools. Empirical examples from observations at six schools exemplify how race and racism appear as taboo concepts, but nonetheless play central roles in structuring conversations in the classroom. I argue that applying an affective theoretical lens provides access to perspectives on race, racism and Whiteness often concealed in education for social justice. This shifts the focus from who is racist, to what race, racism and Whiteness do as affective technologies in social encounters. A major implication is that the common focus on knowledge, attitudes and values in anti-racist education is insufficient for education that enhances social justice. I argue that the insights from affect theory might serve well both as analytical and pedagogical tools in approaching anti-racist education, but also face challenges when confronted with the greater imperative of decolonising education.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 29 March 2019
Revised 19 February 2020
Accepted 16 August 2020

KEYWORDS

Race; whiteness; affect; discomfort; decolonial; primary school

Introduction

One in four children with minority backgrounds frequently experience racism in primary schools in Norway according to the Norwegian Centre Against Racism (2017). At the same time, race and racism as concepts remain elusive in public debate (Bangstad 2015; McIntosh 2015), educational research (Osler and Lindquist 2016) and practice (Røthing 2015; Svendsen 2014a). The avoidance of race reflects a Norwegian national imaginary invested in Whiteness, obscured by an ideology of colourblindness and ‘equality as sameness’ (Gullestad 2002; Svendsen 2014b). Such discursive patterns also channel affect, and negative elements are externalised onto the perceived Other (Ahmed 2000). Affect underlines the role of emotions in the formation of social norms, and the possible ambivalence associated with disrupting hegemonic perceptions, described as *pedagogical discomfort* (Boler 1999; Zembylas and McGlynn 2012). Although Fanon (2002, 1952 [2008]) reminds us that affective understandings of racism are not new, the (re)conceptualisation of race and racism through affect has crucial implications for how we think about anti-racist education. In this article, I illuminate how this is epitomised through ambiguities in how teachers and students externalise race and racism as irrelevant concepts, while they nevertheless work as important facets structuring key affective economies (Ahmed

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2004) of citizenship and national identity in classroom discourses. I examine *the potential of an affective lens as an analytical tool in approaching citizenship education in Norway*, and discuss how this can be turned into insights for developing anti-racist pedagogical strategies.

The empirical basis for this article is a small-scale ethnographic study of citizenship identity in primary school social studies education at six schools, where race and racism emerged as central categories structuring conversations. The patterns of appearance included denial of racism while making clearly racist comments, implicit centring of Whiteness within images of Norwegianness, and racist attitudes as a marker of the external boundaries of accepted behaviour. Another layer also appeared through racialised students' navigation of stereotypes in order to position themselves as culturally readable subjects. The intense affective labour displayed through this identity work illustrates how emotions are not located in the subject, but work as sites of power and resistance in particular situations with particular individuals (Boler 1999, 6). In the micro-level interaction that I observed between students, such affective dimensions of Whiteness materialised as fear of losing personal and cultural identities, resentment, distress with ambiguity, and defensive anger. While race in linguistic terms mostly appeared implicit through the enactment of skin colour as a marker of Norwegianness, racism acted as something from which the students expressed a pressing need to distance themselves.

The results of this study demonstrate the common discrepancies between what students seem to know cognitively, and the practices and relations they perform. In the following, I introduce the theoretical lenses that combine insights from theories on affect with Critical Race Theory (CRT), and particularly Whiteness studies. I explain some of the particularities of the Norwegian racial grammar, and the details of data collection and construction, before discussing this material. Finally, I reflect upon opportunities and challenges with applying the idea of a pedagogy of discomfort as a strategy, especially in relation to the greater imperative of decolonising education.

Theoretical and contextual framework

The insight that racism is a systemic condition rather than an individual pathology and that it structures institutions and relationships, is central to CRT (Ladson-Billings and Tate 1995; Vaught and Castagno 2008). Whiteness works as the 'invisible and inevitable norm' (Solomona et al. 2005, 148). As Leonardo and Zembylas (2013) argue, the white majority can be emotionally invested in maintaining race structures even when allegedly educating against them. Bonilla-Silva (2014) described this colorblind ideology as a 'racism without racists', where racist discourse is recycled without speaking of race. Affect theory helps theorise these matters further. It encompasses a broad variety of approaches that they seek to extend and challenge analyses in considering additional levels of experience and change (Svendson 2012). It suggests that what is felt in the encounter with emotionally discomfiting phenomenon is not mere psychological processes, but embedded in social practices and discourses, not to be thought outside power, history and politics (Zembylas 2014). Applying the works of Fanon (2002, 1952 [2008]), the concept of affect used here is indebted to the entanglement of psychoanalysis and critical social and political theory.

Affective technologies and discomfoting pedagogies

A particular affective formation relevant for this study is Whiteness as technology of affect, described as ‘a kind of apparatus and technology of affect that produces inequalities, ossifies certain identifications, and prevents new affective connections with Others on the basis of solidarity, caring and justice’ (Leonardo and Zembylas 2013, 151). This concept draws on the Foucauldian notion of technology as productive assemblages of knowledge, practices, techniques, and discourses exerting disciplinary power on institutions and bodies. A crucial awareness when working analytically with Whiteness, is the risk of reifying social categories and recentring Whiteness (Ahmed 2007). A major aim with this work is thus to shed light to how Whiteness influences the lived realities of racialised students. Fanon (1952[2008]) explained how the logic of the colonial ideological and discursive structuring works on both the coloniser (white) and the colonised (black), establishing a binary and ontologically hierarchical structural relationship where the two opposites are mutually dependent. George Yancy (2008) explains how such colonial discursive constructions shapes colonised bodies through processes of inscription. Colonial discursive constructions becomes embodied through the lived experience of the colonial or White gaze. The White gaze traps black bodies in the white imagination, and allows for ignorance of racism through a form of learned, embodied seeing where the black is experienced as a non-human Other, an object. In this way, the body becomes a site of affectivity through racialising embodiment (Leonardo and Zembylas 2013). In a similar vein, Matias and DiAngelo (2013) approach the domain of affect and Whiteness through the concept of emo-cognitions, the interplay between cognitions and emotions. Importantly, while these emo-cognitions and their associated behaviours are generated from whites, they implicate people of colour who are forced to navigate them.

The analytical tool of a pedagogy of discomfort inspires a pedagogical strategy inviting students to ‘examine constructed self-images in relation to how one has learned to perceive others. Within this [...] a central focus is to recognize how emotions define how and what one chooses to see, and conversely, not to see’ (Boler 1999, 176). In traditional anti-racist education, the resistance towards being confronted with discomfort might serve as an obstacle (Boler and Zembylas 2003). However, critical education that aims at shifting racial dialogue is inherently epistemologically violent (Leonardo and Porter 2010). It demands altering the perspectives of Whiteness and revoking invisible privilege, and dissolves the idea of the classroom as ‘safe space’. Traditional race dialogue is never safe for students from marginalised backgrounds. Fanon (2002) suggests that the illusion of the safe space must be met by accepting violence, not as physical force, but rather as a liberating violence by which a new humanity is introduced. The lines between violence and non-violence here are not necessarily clear-cut, but entangled in the ontology of the human existential condition. As Todd (2015, 58) explains, violence is predicated upon the human condition. The ethicality of our relations across the radical ontological difference that divides us is dependent upon our acknowledgement of the harm I can do to you. My possible discomfort in this encounter is not bad, but simply necessary for my subjectification and an ethical relation. For the particularities of Whiteness, Matias and Allen (2013) describe how the self-understanding of whites is based on an investment in a kind of sadomasochistic white love out of the fear of ostracism. The investment of whites in a colourblind ideology and self-image produce

psychological defence mechanisms when the meeting with the racialised. Others suggest that their practice is incongruent with their racial idealism. In this manner, engaging discomfort and Whiteness might be theorised as a resource in education, without ever accepting violence as a means or goal.

Norwegian exceptionalism and the Norwegian racial grammar

While much research on race and ethnic belonging has taken place in the context of the US and the UK, Scandinavia and Norway have a different racial grammar (Sandset 2014), partly in light of the phenomenon of ‘Europeanization’ of race and racism, whereby race is subsumed under the modalities of cultural or religious differences (Goldberg 2006). As Essed (1991) argues, racial concepts are especially hard to recognise in places with strong taboos against discussion of race. This is commensurate with the dominant Norwegian narrative that there is no such thing as ‘race’: ‘Nonetheless there are Norwegians and there are Others, and the demarcation between the two returns again and again to perceptions of phenotype, culture, geography, and religion’ (Myrdahl 2010, 6). Categories such as race, religion, language, culture, and values still amount to substantial barriers for acceptance, belonging, and participation in Norwegian society (Friberg and Midtbøen 2017). Historically, the ideological construction of Scandinavia as the historical homeland of the so-called Nordic (white) race, helped stimulate a significant amount of race-biological research on minority populations in the early 1900s. Race and Whiteness became ambiguous albeit important features of ideas of nationhood, and this had significant political implications in terms of assimilationist and racist policies towards the country’s minority groups, the Roma, Romani, Jews, Forrest Finns, Kvens and the indigenous Sami (Kyllingstad 2014). This racial grammar, although seldom named, is still evident in the social landscape today, notably by the term ‘ethnic Norwegian’ as a synonym for white, excluding racialised and indigenous individuals.

As people in Norway generally associate racism with classical, biological racism, and in particular Nazism and the Holocaust (Gullestad 2004), the concept is reserved for discussing anomalous or extreme historical events, or deviant individuals. Race is consistently among the most discomfoting topics to both educators and students (Boler 1999, 176), and it stands out in the Norwegian context by the strong and persistent subjugation of its presence. The impossible presence of race and racism is channelled through a form of nation-branding in which the manifestation of colonial knowledge within the Norwegian self-image is actively externalised, described as *Norwegian exceptionalism* (Browning 2007; Loftsdottir and Jensen 2012). While most Norwegians see themselves as victims of Danish ‘colonialism’, as Norway was in a formal union with Denmark in the period 1380–1814 (Gullestad 2004), the history of Danish-Norwegian maritime involvement in the transatlantic slave trade is assiduously disregarded (McIntosh 2015). The annexation of the Sami ancestral homeland of *Sápmi* by the Norwegian state from around 1500 and onwards is hardly ever recognised as colonisation, and silence is also mostly the case for brutal, discriminatory state policies towards the national minorities Kvens, Jews, Roma, Romani/tater and Forest Finns during the 18th and 19th centuries. Norwegian exceptionalism also manifests itself in education through the absence of the colonial history of Norway and a vocabulary related to concepts such as colonialism in curriculum and practice (Eriksen 2018; Jore 2018). The

avoidance of colonialism is only one facet of the greater issue of the colonality of education. Colonality refers not simply to historical colonialism, but also to how the structures of knowing and being that was established with colonialism still prevails in the educational systems of the modern/colonial society today (Mignolo and Walsh 2018). Within this logic, Racism and Whiteness are manifestations of the colonality of education.

Methods and materials

This study was undertaken as part of a larger research project investigating knowledge production in citizenship education in Norwegian primary schools, with the purpose of exploring manifestations of and possible pedagogical strategies of resistance towards the colonality of educational discourses. The particular material for this study emerged from small-scale ethnographic fieldwork in Norwegian primary schools. In the first phase, I conducted classroom observations, as well as semi-structured interviews with some of the students. In the second phase, teaching interventions actualised some of the topics related to citizenship, belonging, and national identity. The teaching interventions involved me entering the classroom as ‘teacher-researcher’ for one or two lessons. Some of the topics were rarely discussed in the classroom, and several teachers expressed a wish for more knowledge. The methodological framework for the teaching interventions was inspired by the idea of a ‘pedagogical research process’ that ‘aims to provide authentic learning experiences’ (Starkey et al. 2014, 428).

The empirical material consists of observations of social studies classes in nine Norwegian primary school classrooms at six different schools in mainly urban parts of South-Eastern Norway, during the first half of 2018. The classes were level 5–7, with students aged 10–13 (See overview in Table 1). Classroom dialogues and interviews were recorded and transcribed, and translated into English for use in this article. The students were given fictitious names, and in order to increase anonymity, a student might appear twice under different pseudonyms.

The teaching intervention comprised a one-hour lesson addressing the key question ‘What does it mean to be Norwegian?’ It was created and conducted in the period around the Norwegian national day on 17th May, as around this time discussions on national identity, cultural diversity, and ethnic borders flourish in popular media. The lesson started with positioning the students as researchers, allowing them to reflect upon the key question with the help of thinking sheets. This was followed by a classroom discussion related to a famous speech by the Norwegian king Harald V. His main message was that there are many ways of being Norwegian, deliberately aiming to include minority positions related to race, religion, sexual orientation, and gender. In the following

Table 1. Overview of empirical material.

	Classroom observations	Student focus group interview	Teaching interventions
School A	X	5 students	-
School B	X	4 students	1 class
School C	X	-	1 class
School D	X	6 students	3 classes
School E	X	3 students	1 class
School F	X	-	1 class

section, the students worked on classifying and deconstructing concepts, applying the teaching strategy ‘Odd one out’, where they are to classify concepts and argue for why one does not fit in the given classification. The pedagogical goal is to gain understanding of abstract concepts. Importantly, this strategy presents itself as teaching without clear or factual answers, where conversation in the group is core (Lund 2016).

Considering radical ethics

While the blurring of the roles between researcher and teacher may be an advantage in gaining access to students’ perspectives (Starkey et al. 2014), it also poses challenges in the tensions between ethical and epistemological concerns. This became especially clear in the discussions that took an explicitly racist or aggressive turn. This emerged both in how students immediately located co-students of colour as non-Norwegians, as well as instances of offensive joking with cultural symbols such as Sami traditional dress. This situation is paradoxical, as although learning about racism is important, it might increase Othering of minorities. Ethical guidelines actualise the responsibility of not undermining individual human dignity through research (NESH 2016, 13). However, working with the acknowledgement that human dignity is already unequally distributed in the classroom and society, the classroom is not a safe space from the outset. As Cannella and Lincoln (2011) note, within a critical methodological approach, epistemology, ethics, and practice are deeply interconnected, and demand a radical ethics that is already always concerned about power and oppression even as it avoids constructing power as new truth’ (81).

The material was produced in interaction with, and highly influenced by, the plan sketched above. My positioning as a white majoritarian teacher-researcher was likely to influence the conversations too, as it was likely to reassure white majoritarian students more than students of colour. It might be argued that the conversations would not have taken the form they did without these conditions. For example, the use of pictures of people associated with different ethnic and racial identities could have forced the students into applying quite specific racial schemata in their conversations. As many of the situations actualised discomfoting emotions, this calls for a clarification of ethical concerns. Firstly, one reason for the lesson was that experiences from field observations indicated that the topics were seldom thematised in lessons, as the theoretical framework above argues that it should be. Secondly, although there can be no ethical justification for deliberately producing violence in education, creating non-violent relations depends upon acknowledging the inherent violence of human relations (Todd 2015). In hindsight, a pertinent critique of the lesson design is that it did not allow enough time to unpack the affective aspects of the situations for the students, rather than the choice to actualise discomfoting topics as such.

Discussion of results: the impossible presence of race

Norwegianness is, much as national identity elsewhere, commonly seen as defined by citizenship, ancestry, and culture (Hylland Eriksen 2010). These aspects were reflected in the students’ initial reflections on what it means to be Norwegian, as depicted in [Figure 1](#). The answers are organised under the categories ‘Genealogical’, ‘Monocultural’, ‘Liberal Multiculturalist’ and ‘Affective’. The results were dominated by concepts related to what

Share of answers on "being Norwegian" at the beginning of the lesson

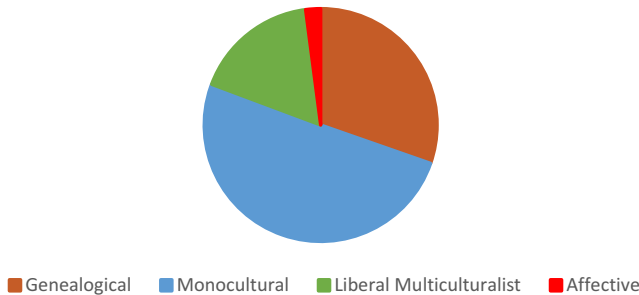


Figure 1. Answers on Norwegianness before the lesson.

I choose to call ‘monoculturalism’, indicating concepts such as ‘Following Norwegian traditions’ and engaging in activities commonly associated with essential Norwegian culture such as skiing or hiking. A large proportion of the answers were linked to with a genealogical outlook, in which nationality of parents, place of birth, and physical appearance dominated. A few answers also mentioned formal citizenship and rights, related to a liberal multiculturalist outlook, and affective dimensions such as ‘feeling Norwegian’.

The most striking presence in the initial conversations between students was the persistent but somewhat impossible presence of race. Many of the students instantly applied classification schemes related to skin colour or physical appearance, but somewhat implicitly. For example, when the students were asked to write their ideas down on the thinking sheet, they seemed reluctant:

Researcher Do you have any suggestions?

Brian Skin colour. Or, you know, in Norway you are not exactly brown, you know . . .

Anna Light skin colour.

David You can tell from the looks. The skin colour is light.

[I ask the students to write their thoughts on the thinking sheets, but they are reluctant. They seem to understand the inappropriateness of talking about skin colour, and their discomfort with making it ‘official’ by putting it on paper is pressing.]

Researcher If you were to describe being Norwegian to someone in another country, what would you say?

Cecilia Erm . . . that you in a way can tell by the looks. Light skin.

Researcher Why don’t you write it down?

Cecilia [Bites her nails]. No . . . maybe not. It is not exactly appropriate.

Cecilia is evidently discomforted by her encounter with race through the concept of skin colour. Writing down her ideas might for her represent the act of accepting their

presence, and thus engaging in the emotional labour of recognising this part of her worldviews. Her self-image and learnt will not to be racist prevents her from 'seeing' colour. It might also be that because race and racism are such negative terms with the students, it is difficult for Cecilia and her co-students to speak the words. Perhaps by talking about it, the students might fear that they reproduce it. As Bonilla-Silva points out (2014), probing the forbidden concepts within the context of the colourblind discourse, leads to incoherent talk in order to be able to talk about race in a context where it is not supposed to matter, expressed by phenomenon such as self-corrections and long pauses. This is manifested through the response of Cecilia. The significant question here is not whether Cecilia or her co-students *are* racist. Their discussions rather illustrate that they are bearers of a cultural classification scheme that is established at a quite early age, but also emotionally repressed. As Boler and Zembylas (2003) point out, no one escapes internalising dominant cultural values, even though they might take different forms in different individuals. What happens with Cecilia here is an encounter with the self through the exposure of an impossible knowledge that evokes fear. She realises that she needs the language of race to explain the boundaries of being Norwegian. This contradicts the internalisation of attitudes towards racism as morally wrong, and is inconsistent with the Norwegian self-image as inherently anti-racist. As Fanon (1952[2008]) writes, the black person is only black in relation to the white person (90), and thus the acknowledging the presence of race presents Cecilia with her own Whiteness. This is also related to many whites' fear of being found out as racial beings (Leonardo and Porter 2010).

A related approach to the discomfort of talking about racism is a strategy of ridicule. I noticed how some of the students were continuously joking about being racist. Everyday microaggressions related to race, religion or culture in Norwegian classrooms are often conceived as not *really* racist, rather as just joking around or bad behaviour (The Norwegian Centre Against Racism 2017). Thus, it becomes impossible to see racism in everyday conversations. Joking becomes a strategy of underlining that one understands the severity of *real* racism, such as in the following example, where the students are discussing the task 'Odd one out' during the teaching intervention. They are looking at pictures of different clothing, discussing ways of grouping them:

Matthias Just write the shoes, the girl, the hijab-lady . . . Why did I say hijab-lady? I meant the Arab. It is not racist to say that? You know, the Arab [laughing].

[Mary mumbling about racism in a low tone, obviously frustrated by Matthias' lack of seriousness]

Cedric The shoes, because they are not like cultural dress-ish . . .

Mary The girl. The little girl, she eats ice-cream.

Brian You know, Matthias, Mary called you racist. [Laughing]

Matthias I am sorry. I am just like sooo racist, you know. Like watch out [Sarcastic tone].

Cedric It is actually very racist to say what you said, as it is a bad word [Arab], at least in Polish!

Matthias Yeah, we are gonna get disciplined by the principal now, as, like, racists [Sarcastic tone].

In the dialogue, racism is reconstructed through Whiteness by downplaying the possibility that racism exists in the classroom. It is thus safe for Matthias to joke around with being racist, as it is conceptually impossible for him to categorise himself as such. By his comments, Matthias tries by his sarcastic tone to show that he understands the severity of racism, and ridicule the possibility of his classroom comments having anything to do with the phenomenon. Through the use of diffuse concepts such as the mixture of 'Arab' and 'Hijab' when talking about a woman wearing a Sari in an Indian context, the Other is constructed as a mythical and diffuse Other without subjectivity. Additionally, the confusion might relate to lack of knowledge of non-Western identities and cultures, as such mirroring the dominance of Western epistemologies. The conversation about the 'Arab' enters what Fanon would term the 'zone of nonbeing' (Fanon 1952 [2008], xii). This zone of non-being is powerfully emphasised by Cedric describing 'Arab' as a 'bad word'. Racism becomes impossible to locate as there is no human victim for it. Importantly, the dialogue also clearly illustrates the students' lack of concepts for talking about Othering and racism. There is opposition to Matthias' joking, such as Mary mumbling that his comments appear racist. However, she seems somewhat disillusioned, or short of tools to challenge Matthias further. Cedric's reaction also illustrates how he contests Matthias' comments, but his modes of opposition are related to forbidden words. Ambiguity is avoided, and being racist here appears as an absolute in the alleged simple binary of good and bad, not approachable for a deeper discussion.

The ambiguities of the indigenous Sami as a national other

The particularities of the national affective economy present itself in a different way when the students discuss being Sami. Although the Sami are constructed as a racialised Other, the racialisation takes on a different shape than the traditional binary of white and black. Sami researcher Astri Dankertsen (2019) argue that for the Sami, who might pass and be perceived as white by themselves and others, Whiteness is an ambiguous but still very real presence. Although theories of distinct Scandinavian races are abandoned, they still exist in everyday categorisations of Sami individuals as non-white Others, and influence identity processes among the Sami today. According to the efforts for recognition by Sami communities in Norway, Sami culture and history is quite visible in the formal curriculum for mainstream Norwegian schools, presented as part of the shared Norwegian cultural heritage (UDIR 2017). Although practical and lived realities are more ambiguous (Eriksen 2018), the students explain how they have 'learned a lot' about Sami culture and history. When discussing being Sami, the students seem less discomforted by the appearance of a racial vocabulary, although the categorisations pose difficulties:

Alicia I think that girl is Sami, because I have seen that outfit before ... [Looking at pictures of different people with Sami identities]

Taylor No, she looks more Aryan than anything else.

Olaf It is a bunad,¹ no?

Taylor She has really pale skin, and they have that in the North.

Olaf Yes, and you know that other guy, he is from one of those spicy countries.

Researcher Do all Sami people have similar skin?

Olaf No, no ... or, you know ... But you can tell from their looks, you know.

Taylor Look at Ellinor, she is pale, she is Sami!

[Laughter]

Alicia That wasn't nice to say, it is not nice to call someone Sami!

Ellinor I am not really Sami, but I think someone in my distant family is.

From the dialogue, it is clear that the students apply a quite extensive racial vocabulary. However, the Sami challenges the students in not fitting the traditional binary racial scheme. Racialisation of the Sami thus creates ambiguity, which might be a major source of discomfort (Boler and Zembylas 2003). The Sami appears as not quite Norwegian, but not a foreigner, often white in the physical sense, but not conceptually white. When I ask the students if there are any Sami students in their school, their immediate and unanimous answer is 'no'. They explain that the Sami 'live up in the North', consistent with traditional historical narratives. The students overlook the fact that due to urbanisation most Sami individuals probably live outside of *Sápmi* today. Prior to the dialogue in which the students discuss what it means to be Sami, the Sami is first introduced as a quite mythical character. The students talk about a concert held at their school by Sami artists performing the traditional musical expression *joik*, something they obviously experienced as 'exotic'. As Marna says: 'They were like uh ... uh ... Let's go far up in the Sami mountain and do joik! They are so extremely superstitious those Samis'. However, the proximity changes with Ellinor's account of her possible Saminess. It produces obscurity, and the response of her co-students is to safeguard her identity as white. Ellinor expresses the need to distance herself from her possible Sami heritage. Being 'a little bit Sami' becomes affectively impossible:

Ellinor I just have someone in my family ...

Marna Ellinor said that she was Sami, a little bit Sami ...

Ellinor [Laughing]. No, I am not. It is not really I who is Sami. But, I think, it is my mom's cousin who is Sami.

Taylor Should we do a DNA test of you? [Laughing]

However, the students also emphasise their support for an inclusive, multicultural Norwegian society, in which the image of the good citizen is related to respecting each other and protecting minorities. They would surely pass the often-alleged litmus test of anti-racist attitudes. Interestingly, the students in this study expressed a clear wish for racism to be treated more explicitly in their schooling, despite their young ages of 10–13. However, theorising affect here provides access to a deeper layer. Affect sheds light on the difficult knowledge and ambiguities of race as intersections of subjectivity, social structures, and emotions. A person might express herself within the logic of non-racist tolerance and feel committed to such values, while at the same time experiencing a set of affective bodily reactions related to certain Others (Zembylas 2014, 399). This is clear

from Alicia's position. In spite of her inclusive attitudes, Alicia exposes her emotional resistance towards the idea that Ellinor might be Sami. The students in this way correct themselves through the dialogue; although it is possibly degrading to call someone Sami if they are not *really*, it is not wrong to *be* Sami.

Negotiating race: identity work and embodied otherness

It is a common conception in multicultural education that diversity is a resource, implying that the presence of cultural, religious, or racial minority students in class is a pedagogical asset. Diversity appears as a kind of branding presented as a quality of the school, serving as a containment strategy for troublesome constituents and obscuring oppressive relations (Ahmed 2012). The underlying racial landscapes of the classrooms I entered became tangible through the ways the students positioned themselves and others in discussions. It gave interesting access to how the students are socially coded, and perform their subject positions through modes of resistance, negotiation, and subjugation. A repeated pattern appeared where the students immediately located students in their groups with minority backgrounds. The majority students seemed concerned with including the minority students in the community, assuring them that they are 'just as Norwegian as us', in spite of for example that their parents are foreign-born, they have black skin or a different first language than Norwegian. The minority students often positioned themselves as outsider, commonly applying the term 'foreigner' about themselves. In some cases, these negotiations spurred a lot of emotions, such as in Sophia's group. Sophia is a 6th grade girl born in Norway from Bosnian-born parents:

Gina But like you, Sophia, you are kind of Norwegian even though your mom and dad are not.

Sophia No, I am from Bosnia! [insistent tone]

Ally Yes, but she means, you are Norwegian in spite of that. You speak Norwegian and everything.

[Sophia is on the verge of tears, approaching the researcher]

Sophia The others try to tell me I am Norwegian, but I am not automatically Norwegian even though I live here! My mom and dad are from Bosnia, my whole family lives there!

Researcher Well, who decides where you are from? Is it the Others?

Sophia No . . .

Researcher Can it be related to how you feel?

Sophia I feel Bosnian.

The example illustrates how belonging and self-identification is not independent of categorisation by others (Erdal and Strømsø 2018). Sophia is offered the label Norwegian, but at the same time not recognised as 'fully' Norwegian. It seemingly becomes a troubling position for her, as she chooses the more fixed position as 'foreigner'. Sophia's performance shows how difference is produced and reproduced in everyday interaction through hegemony, which is not only imposed from the outside but

internalised within Sophia's conception of herself (Fanon 2002). Her emotions, underlined by her pressing tears, reveal affect as the fabric of a coherent identity. Her opposition towards accepting the invitation from her co-students to be included can be seen as a form of resistance; she refuses to give up her right to define herself. The position of the co-students can be understood as influenced by a 'denial/sameness model' (Boler and Zembylas 2003, 110), where the dominant culture is marking its privileged capacity to decide what differences are significant.

Another example more explicitly connected to skin colour is the case of Sarah, a 7th grader who has parents born in Somalia, and is a visible minority by her skin colour as well as by her wearing a hijab. She tells me she has never been to Somalia, but she wants to go, and she feels an emotional connection. Born and raised in Norway, Sarah does not consider Somalia as her country of origin. At the time we spoke, there had recently been a big explosion in the Somalian capital Mogadishu, killing 231 people. Sarah explained how it made her frustrated and sad that no one talks about this in school. She follows news updates from Somalia, and she is reminded of the invisibility of certain parts of the world in Norwegian media. In the conversation in Sarah's group, her skin colour appears as a key signifier of national boundaries and essence, although her co-students struggle with acknowledging explicitly the need for talking about skin colour in order to make Sarah's body intelligible within the national community:

Tom If you only have a picture, you cannot tell if someone is Norwegian.

Elsa Or, well ... Sarah, not to be racist, but ... You could start to question Sarah a bit, since she is Muslim and all that.

Sarah How come?

Elsa Because ... Well ... You know it is a bit like you could wonder about you being Norwegian because most people ... [the rest of the students start mumbling in a quiet tone about 'brown skin'] you know she has a different skin colour.

Olaf Yes, and then she has the hijab and a foreign sweater.

Maria But if Sarah would have had hijab and a Marius sweater, then ... Then it would be strange ...

Olaf Or she had been like the world's greatest tourist!

Sarah Yeah, you know, the world's largest fan of Norway [laughing].

This illustrates the workings of Fanon's (Fanon 1952 [2008]) epidermal schema, in which skin operates as a key signifier of making cultural and racial difference intelligible. As Sarah becomes the object of knowledge, the conversation illustrates how the majority of students position themselves as entitled to gaze at and categorise Sarah. Even though Sara interrupts the conversation, the student insists on referring to her in third person. Elsa's apology for her ideas shows that she cares for Sarah as her friend, and she seems rather blinded to how Sarah is rendered as Other by the norm of Whiteness. Such encounters might not be overtly racist or even discriminatory, but they 're-inscribe notions of racial and ethnic boundaries which in turn trigger specific ways of thinking about belonging' (Sandset 2014, 14). This reminds us that the classroom is never a level

playing field. Even though the stereotyping in the conversation highlights the power of the majority, stereotypes might create a space for resistance, 'allowing for a form of agency that nevertheless is contained within the very discourse that it opposes' (Sandset 2014, 11). Sarah expresses this type of performative resistance when the students later in the same conversation discuss the requirements for being prime minister in Norway:

Tom Can you be prime minister in Norway if you originally come from a different country?

Researcher All those who are Norwegian citizens can be prime minister.

Sarah So I can be prime minister, then?

Tom Can Sarah be prime minister?

Sarah Then that will happen!

Researcher Yes, but you have to get someone to vote for you.

Tom You can just like kill all the others [laughing]

Sarah But I have all the students in 7th grade here at the school!

Maria Yes, and all your family members in Somalia [laughing].

Olaf They don't have the right to vote, but they would have if they could . . .

Researcher Is it less chance that Sarah could become prime minister than the rest of you, since you seem a bit surprised?

Maria No, if someone could be prime minister, it is surely Sarah!

Tom I could never manage to be prime minister, I am not like Sarah!

In this case, racial boundaries are expanded and race as social construction is exposed. This is strongly signalled by Sarah's comment when she sees the possibility of her becoming prime minister, declaring with self-confidence that it 'will happen!'. It repositions Tom, starting out sceptical towards the possibility of a black prime minister, and concluding with how Sarah probably is much better for the job than he is. The conversations that appeared in these performances thus represent possible sites of affective learning, where the minority student is a resource for enabling reflection. Sophie and Sarah show this kind of transcendental capital; their comments challenge their peers' ideas, and help them expand their understanding of Norwegianness and agency. However, the flipside to the ideology of 'diversity as resource' is how the racialised student here is forced to perform boundary work, pushing the edges of conceptualisations. From this perspective Sophia and Sarah can never escape their embodied Otherness, and never choose not to participate in the conceptual and affective labour in the same way as the invisible white majority (Ahmed 2012).

The comfortable deconstruction of race through dialogue

Through the conversations during the teaching intervention, the students seemingly changed their perceptions about Norwegianness and citizenship quite dramatically.

Share of answers on "being Norwegian", after the lesson

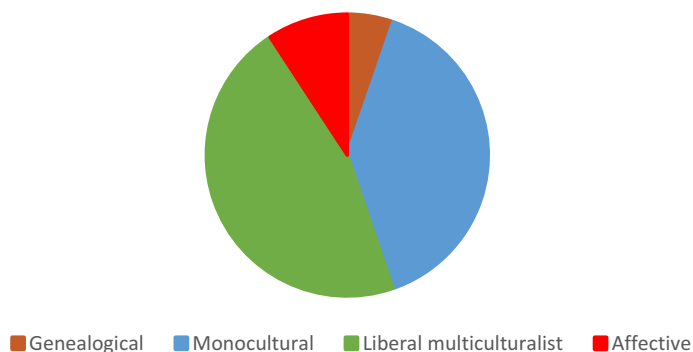


Figure 2. Answers on Norwegianness after class.

Did the lesson radically alter their views? Studying the thinking sheets at the end of lesson, genealogical aspects such as skin colour and place of birth were almost absent, and the proportion of answers related to cultural symbols or traditions had decreased. Proportionally more answers could be placed in the affective category and significantly more in the liberal multiculturalist category.

As illustrated by the results in [Figure 2](#), compared to [Figure 1](#). At first glance, this teaching intervention appears as a success. The goal was for the students to be exposed to their existing ideas, and deconstruct them. There were many examples of these kinds of seemingly deconstructive conversations, such as in the following discussion in a 5th grade classroom:

Allison The woman is the odd one out, because she is not Norwegian, the one in the sari.

Georg How do you know that?

Researcher Do you know that the others are Norwegians?

Allison Well, I think so ...

Teacher But why do you think that she isn't Norwegian?

Allison Because it looks like if she is wearing Indian clothes ...

Brian It might be that she has moved from Norway to India, maybe ...

Researcher Yes, possibly ... She is wearing a traditional Indian costume called sari.

Laura But the shoes aren't Norwegian either, they are from Germany.

Several students comment on how 'Nike' is not a Norwegian brand although it is widely used in Norway.

[...]

Researcher But you guys, could it be that the woman with the sari is Norwegian?

Brian Yes, it might be.

Rachel It might be that she is born in Norway, born and raised in Norway, or have Indian parents, or something like that.

Researcher So we cannot really know, because we haven't asked her. Can you live in Norway and wear a sari?

The class answer spontaneously Yes!

Michael My mom has several. She is from India. She is an expert on how to put it on!

The discourse is clearly modified through this dialogue. However, there is not much emotional labour happening, especially not with the majority. The woman in sari is reconstructed as an object of the conversation, happening at a distance from the majority students' self-perceptions; they are not implicated in the discussion, but positioned as privileged to include the woman in their existing community, to perform the White gaze.

Discomfort does not necessarily function to put students out of their comfort zones, but can work to keep them within through the affective technology of Whiteness. The resistance towards being exposed to the presence of race in their categorisations as well as the possibility of Whiteness as a racial existence, might simply have made the students obscure the impossible presence of race at the end of the lesson, rather than extend their comfort zones. During the process of conversation, the topics discussed were navigated in relation to the logic of the colourblind discourse. As Bonilla-Silva (2014) describes, this is recognised by phenomenon such as semantic manoeuvres and abstract liberal discourse. This was also partly enabled by the comments from the teacher as well as me as researcher, asking the rhetorical question 'Can you live in Norway and wear a Sari?'. In this way, the colourblind rhetoric structured the conversation in a tacit way. The deconstructive conversations were not counterhegemonic or radically re-evaluating the position, privilege, and worldviews of the majority. Rather, the affective technology of Whiteness worked to incline the students to avoid the discomfort of a possible racist presence, the colourblind rhetoric functioning as a psychological defence mechanism. The challenge with the deconstruction happening in the teaching interventions was related to the underlying premise of the idea of safe space, and my fear as teacher-researcher of violating my ethical responsibilities by engaging in a more explicit discussion of Otherness.

Implications, opportunities and challenges for pedagogical strategies

This article is not intended to distribute guilt and shame, but rather to illustrate that knowledge production to a high degree is structured by colonial archives of knowledge, and obscured by the affective technologies of Whiteness, race, and racism. The research displays how the traditional focus on individual knowledge and attitudes in anti-racist education is insufficient. A person may be deeply committed to anti-racist values, but nonetheless be complicit in reproducing structural oppression. The dialogue analysis made me question the workings of my own emotional investments during the teaching intervention. The reflexivity spurred by acting in the role as teacher-researcher helped me gain important insights, not least from the fear and discomfort at play in my own encounters with the students. This is a reminder that if we claim or attempt neutrality,

we practice colonising education. In order to avoid this, we must accept the risk of losing likeability, altering our subjectivities, and be willing to be disliked by the powerful who will continue to resist (Gorski 2008). These are vital insights when reconsidering the role of the so often white teacher.

In this article, I have argued for the importance of pedagogies that invoke emotions in a historicised sense (Boler 1999), shedding light on what race, racism and Whiteness *do* as both affective and structural phenomena influencing bodies and relations in Norwegian classrooms. Both the suggested remedies of increased awareness as well as the need for the white majority to face their discomfoting feelings do not necessarily serve to interrogate the wider structures that trigger such feelings in the first place (Zembylas 2018). Thus, the unconsidered embrace of pedagogy of discomfort as a strategy runs at least two fundamental risks: the risks of *individualising* the phenomenon as well as *intellectualising* or pedagogising it at the expense of decolonisation.

Firstly, by focusing on the discomfort of white individuals, the already existing violence of the classroom is overlooked. In the cases of both Sarah and Sophie, it is clear that they are forced to perform an emotional labour that they cannot escape. Difference is situated in their bodies. Whiteness is invisible to those who inhabit it, and although it can be ‘discovered’ through educational processes, it has a different quality than the minority position. The space of the encounters is organised by the affective technology of Whiteness, and embodied by minoritized students through the presence of the White gaze (Yancy 2008). In other words, the ways in which pedagogy of discomfort might position the discomfort of the white majority and the emotions of the Other as similar phenomena might reinforce the unjust power-relations it aims at dismantling. What is more, discomfort is a quite elusive term, and needs to be clarified through pointing out the historically and politically situated embodied emotions at play in particular encounters between specific individuals and bodies. However, this does not imply that the idea of a pedagogy of discomfort cannot be an expedient starting point, or that approaching the micro-level processes of affective economies is not important. Significantly, it can provide a new framework for considering what amount to safe spaces in the classroom. By acknowledging the violent dimension to education for social justice, and allowing for the majority students to risk loss of their positions through challenging dialogues, the epistemological playing field might be levelled. This perspective is vital in understanding the processes of knowledge production in the classroom: ‘The aim of discomfort is to explore beliefs and values; to examine when visual “habits” and emotional selectivity have become rigid and immune to flexibility; and to identify when and how our habits harm ourselves and others’ (Boler 1999, 185). This flexibility depends on recognising how emotions influence cognition and learning.

Secondly, decolonisation as a complex but yet inherently binding political project might be superficially adopted into education for social justice (Tuck and Yang 2012, 2). Decolonisation demands a change in the systems of the world that is not yet tangible. It is not an ‘and’, but an elsewhere. When constructing the affective technologies of Whiteness, race and racism as matters to be treated pedagogically in schools, the very material and political project of decolonising colonial structures and practices both within and beyond the education sector might be overlooked (Zembylas 2018). Acknowledging how decolonialism is a broader political project than transformative education, I argue that it is not necessarily a question of either/or. To sort out these entanglements, the vision of ‘system hospicing’ might be helpful. Although decolonialism demands radically new

systems and structures, it is a complex process of tensions and paradoxes that cannot serve the modern requirement for immediate resolution and prescriptive action. The idea of system hospicing is about doing the work within the current, dying system in order to clear the space for something new (Andreotti et al. 2015). For anti-racist education, the implications is that although decolonisation postulates the search for pedagogical strategies that enables ‘new and more ethical, responsible and responsive ways of seeing, knowing and relating to others in context’ (Andreotti 2010, 234), there is a pressing imperative to create more safe and humanising environments for all students in the current classrooms while gesturing towards something new. The role of education in dismantling the complex affective and discursive structures of racial injustices is but one process, not to be mistaken for the broader and highly material political work demanded by decoloniality.

Note

1. Traditional Norwegian dress.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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