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Kristin Gregers Eriksen & Sharon Stein

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Good intentions, colonial relations: Interrupting the white emotional equilibrium of Norwegian citizenship education

Kristin Gregers Eriksen  and Sharon Stein

Introduction

The national imaginary of Norway as a global champion of democracy and social welfare has served well to market its image as exceptional both nationally and internationally. Norwegian *national exceptionalism* (Browning, 2007; Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012; Susa, 2016) is also deeply embedded within the educational system, and manifests in the production of knowledge and social identities. Despite the country's exalted self-image and stated intentions for education to foster human dignity, equality and solidarity (The Norwegian Ministry of Education [KD], 2019), Norwegian educational institutions continue to support the reproduction of colonial structures that naturalize racism, epistemic violence and exploitative capitalist economic structures (Eriksen, 2018a; Svendsen, 2014a). In this article, we argue that discourses of exceptionalism may have the effect of absolving educational institutions of their pedagogical responsibilities to denaturalize and disrupt unjust social relations (Stein, 2018).

Discourses of national exceptionalism are not exclusive to Norway, and have been described in, among others, the Canadian (Stein, 2018; Susa, 2016) and Finnish contexts (Honkasalo, 2014; Rastas, 2009). Although this article emphasizes the particularities of the Norwegian context, applying a decolonial lens to national educational discourses also sheds light on global patterns of coloniality. Coloniality describes how epistemologies and power relations produced through and by centuries of European colonialism continue to inform present day society (Quijano, 2000). Coloniality is understood within decolonial critiques as the “underside” of modernity – that is, the true, but often disavowed cost of modernity's shiny promises (e.g. progress, security, certainty, universal reason). While particular expressions of national exceptionalism play out differently across national contexts, general patterns of exceptionalism in Western nations are shaped by modern/colonial logics, sensibilities, and modes of relationality that deny the true

(colonial) costs of a nation's achievements and global positioning. These modern/colonial patterns significantly shape Western national imaginaries.

National imaginaries shape which perspectives are deemed intelligible, legitimate, and consequential, and whose well-being is prioritized (Stein et al., 2019). Imaginaries are often understood as invisible grammars structuring frameworks of meaning and knowing (Taylor, 2002). Thus, different imaginaries have different "intellectual economies." However, national imaginaries also circulate through emotions. In Norway and elsewhere, we can thus also identify "affective economies" of feeling through which existing, uneven social relations are kept in place (Ahmed, 2004). Often these economies are focused on prioritizing the "good feelings" of dominant groups; the flip side of this is the pathologization of "bad feelings", especially those that are perceived to be embodied and/or caused by marginalized groups. Ahmed (2004) specifically identifies an affective economy of whiteness that seeks to maintain white innocence from complicity in racism (see also: DiAngelo, 2010; Shotwell, 2016; Wekker, 2016). For instance, if a person problematizes the ways that racialized communities have uneven access to civil rights, that person might be perceived as causing "bad feelings," and subsequently be silenced. Citizenship education that seeks to challenge colonization therefore cannot focus solely on the cognitive or intellectual dimension of coloniality. In this article, we emphasize the role of affect in reproducing coloniality in education as one small contribution toward wider efforts to denaturalize decolonize citizenship education.

This article draws on interviews and observations of student teachers, and classrooms conversations. However, our intention is not to understand the teachers in terms of individual traits, developmental stages or personal capacity building. Instead, we explore how imaginaries are expressed, constructed, reproduced and/or contested by looking at teachers' classroom practices, reflections and emotions. We argue that decoloniality offers perspectives that may challenge and supplement existing discourses and practices of citizenship education, both nationally and globally, as it "enables pluralizing possibilities for citizenship education in ways that address ethnocentrism, ahistoricism, depoliticization and paternalism in educational agendas" (Andreotti, 2011b, p. 381). In writing this article, we are inspired by Santos' (2015) description that the production of knowledge in a study such as this is always partial and situated, and should not be considered "knowledge-as-a-representation-of-reality," but rather "knowledge as-an-intervention-in-reality" (p. 201). This approach acknowledges that other researchers with different analytical lenses could have read the material differently. Our methodological orientation is not concerned with offering an alleged authentic representation of citizenship education in Norwegian primary schools as such, but rather with mobilizing knowledge in order to

trouble and interrupt current modes of thinking and practice with particular relevance for social justice and calls for decolonizing citizenship education.

Methods and participants

This article is derived from a larger project exploring citizenship education in Norwegian primary schools. The project was registered by the *Norwegian Center for Research Data* [NSD] in 2017, and conducted in line with the Norwegian National Committee for Research Ethics' (NESH) *Guidelines for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences, Humanities, Law and Theology* (NESH, 2016). Collection of material for this article was carried out in the second half of 2018. Sixteen student teachers specializing in social studies participated in the study, which involved performing a lesson primarily designed by one of the authors, who is also a teacher educator. The student teachers collaborated in the development of the lesson by participating in a one-hour workshop on the draft for the lesson, and then conducted the lesson(s) as part of their mandatory teaching practice period in grades 5–7 (students aged 10–13). All the student teachers shared their experiences in a seminar after the lessons were conducted. The choice of classroom observations and interviews as research methods was based on the intention of tracing how coloniality and whiteness in citizenship education are reproduced and/or interrupted in teaching practice and with teachers. The research methods also reflect the researcher's desire to enable the student teachers to go beyond good intentions (Gorski, 2008) and engage in reflexive processes about their own practices, i.e. the research was also concerned with the learning of the student teachers. The teacher educator in charge of the social studies teacher education program as well as the mentor teachers at the schools also participated in observation and interviews. Interviews and observations were recorded and transcribed. The interviews were conducted in Norwegian, and the quotes featured in this article are translated into English by the authors (Table 1).

The lesson plan: Teaching citizenship and anti-racism in Norwegian primary schools

The lesson plan centered on topics of citizenship identity, diversity and racism. The lesson was constructed in correspondence with central learning outcomes in the mandatory subject of social studies in the Norwegian core curriculum, emphasizing democracy, identity and culture (The Norwegian Directorate of Education and Training [UDIR], 2013). The lesson combined perspectives on contemporary forms of racism and the history of

Table 1. Overview of methods, material and participants.

School, grade	Observation	Group interviews (participants)	Oral presentation
School A, grade 5	Two hours	3 student teachers	Group presentation by 3 student teachers
School B, grade 6	Two hours	1 student teacher, 1 mentor teacher, 1 teacher educator	Presentation by student teacher
School C, grade 6	One hour	3 student teachers, 1 mentor teacher, 1 teacher educator	Group presentation by 3 student teachers
School D, grade 6	Two hours	1 student teacher, 1 mentor teacher, 1 teacher educator	Presentation by student teacher
School E, grade 6	Two hours	4 student teachers, 1 teacher educator	Group presentation by 4 student teachers
School F, grade 6	Three hours	3 student teachers, 1 mentor teacher, 1 teacher educator	Group presentation by 3 student teachers
School G, grade 7	Two hours	1 student teacher, 1 teacher educator	Presentation by student teacher
7 schools	14 hours observation	16 student teachers, 4 mentor teachers, 1 teacher educator	7 presentations

assimilationist state politics toward national minorities in the 19th and 20th centuries, in particular the Romani/Tater groups.¹ The lesson started with showing a short video from a campaign made by the advertising agency *Gorilla Media*² in response to policies recently passed by the Danish government. The goal of the new laws was to make the country “a less attractive destination for refugees,” including through targeted cuts in welfare services to immigrants, and regulating the ethnic composition of inhabitants in designated zones to ensure that “immigrants” will not outnumber “proper Danes” in any residential areas. These laws sparked debate on who can be said to be ‘fully Danish’, and the video was a powerful campaign designed for social media, featuring voices of young Danish children with immigrant parents. Denmark is a neighboring country to Norway, and the policies were upheld as exemplary by the Norwegian government (Piene, 2019). The video was followed by exercises where students were asked to reflect upon their own national identity. The second part of the lesson explored connections between historical legacies through the example of the Romani/Tater, and present-day racism.

The intention of the lesson was to invite educational engagements with racism as a historically and structurally embedded phenomenon, with students and student teachers alike. Part of the exceptionalist national self-image of Norway is related to priding itself in a democratic school system and pedagogical culture, and the Education Act states that the overall goal of education is to promote democracy, equality and scientific thinking (The Education Act, 1998, §1.1). Even though these topics are explicitly spelled out in the core curriculum, previous research finds that the issues of racism and discrimination are absent from textbooks and teaching practice (Midtbøen et al., 2014). This absence can be understood in light of the elusive presence of discussions about racism in the Norwegian public sphere

as such. If addressed at all, racism is constructed as a nonsensical and past phenomenon (McEachrane, 2014), and the embeddedness of an imagined white, Nordic race within the affective economy of the nation-state is actively ignored (Myrdahl, 2010). Several scholars have identified a practice of ‘color-evasiveness’ in the educational system, based on the false presumption that race no longer holds power as social and political category (Annamma et al., 2017; Harlap & Riese, 2014; Svendsen, 2014b). These tendencies to evade engagements with the enduring significance of race and the ongoing realities of racism are also undergirded by the externalization of colonialism as irrelevant for the Norwegian context (Eriksen, 2018b).

The particular design of the lesson was informed by writings on decolonizing education (Andreotti, 2011b; Andreotti et al., 2018; Zembylas, 2018) emphasizing the need to turn the gaze away from the racial/cultural ‘Other’ and toward systems of power and control and historical and socio-political contexts (Gorski, 2008), such as notably white hegemony. In other words, the lesson sought to invite direct and explicit engagement with the enduring social and political realities of racism, rather than the more common approach of tokenistic celebrations of minoritized cultures. Another important didactical feature was the emphasis on the need for self-reflexivity and involving consideration of affect in learning processes, in particular for white students and teachers. The participating practice schools and mentor teachers welcomed this proposed approach, stating their wish to focus more on these topics and expressing a sense that they lacked sufficient competencies to address these topics in their classrooms.

Theorizing decoloniality as an approach to citizenship education

The methodology in this study was informed by colonial discourse analysis, which “examine[s] processes of knowledge production and their role in the creation and perpetuation of (neo)colonial violences and inequalities” (Andreotti, 2011a, p. 85). Importantly, applying an understanding of race and racism as social constructs with material impacts, and discourse as manifestation and reproduction of the social order (DiAngelo, 2010), we are not interested in the intentionality of teachers, but how discourses and power structures work to reproduce (or interrupt) social relations. There are in particular three colonial dimensions of relevance to citizenship education that the decolonial lens renders visible. The first concerns the geopolitics of knowledge production that frame modern/colonial, Western ways of knowing as universal, while other perspectives and ways of knowing are erased or invalidated. This erasure of epistemic difference is not just an issue of what modern subjects *do not* imagine, but what they *cannot* imagine due to the invisible but powerful ontological underpinnings of an

Table 2. Mapping the material.

Generative framework	Universalized Western epistemology	Modern/colonial structures of race and inequality	National exceptionalism
Related questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What educational practices and discourses are made possible? • What practices and discourses are made invisible? • What are the main ideas about knowledge and rationality? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is racism understood, or avoided? • How is inequality seen as an individualized and/or structural matter? • How is complicity in systemic harm acknowledged or avoided? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How is the nation-state perceived and presented? • What positions of citizenship identity are available within the national imaginary? • What positions are invalidated?
Tendencies and presences in the material	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The possibility of neutral knowledge/knowers • Scepticisms toward alleged normative education • Fear of knowledge “out of control” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colorblindness/Colorevasiveness • Racism perceived as lack of knowledge • Willful and sanctioned ignorance of racism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Norway as a superior democracy • Being Norwegian as desired identity • Rendering invisible certain individuals, in particular Muslims

epistemology that upholds the vision of universal knowledge and the white individual as the knowing subject (Santos, 2018). The second dimension relates to ethnocentric perspectives that reproduce modern/colonial patterns of racism and inequality. Within the Western nation-state, relations of belonging and entitlement are constituted, policed, and sustained not only through purportedly universal epistemological categories and rationalities (i.e. an intellectual economy), but also through an affective economy in which the emotional equilibrium of white people is prioritized (Ahmed, 2004). The first and second dimensions feed into the third dimension, which is that the national imaginaries of countries like Norway elevate the nation-state to a place beyond critique and implicitly naturalize the white citizen subject (Eriksen, 2018b). Thus, the analytical framework for this article traced evidence of three interrelated dimensions of coloniality in Norwegian citizenship education: (1) a universalized Western epistemology that exalts the white knowing subject; (2) a racialized affective economy that naturalizes inequality through emotion, and seeks to protect whiteness from critique; and (3) national exceptionalism. Based on this framework, questions were used to analyze the data, generating a corresponding overview of findings (see Table 2).

Our decolonial analysis challenges educational approaches that seek to interrupt racism and coloniality simply by providing more knowledge, which presumes that the root of injustice is a lack of information. This is because it is not only at the level of knowledge, or intellectual economies, that coloniality is naturalized in education; it is also reproduced through affective economies. The notion of “affective economies” seeks to capture how emotions are not

simply individualized experiences, but are also embedded in, and can either reproduce or interrupt, wider political and social structures. Affective economies in Western nation-states like Norway tend to prioritize white comfort (i.e. white emotional equilibrium), and punish anyone that causes *discomfort* by challenging white innocence and the benevolent national self-image (Ahmed, 2004; Wekker, 2016; Zembylas, 2018). In these instances, the challenging party is framed as the threatening ‘cause’ of bad feelings (e.g. guilt, anger, defensiveness), and the larger socio-historical context is invisibilized. When the person who is perceived to be the source of the challenge, and thus the “cause” of bad feelings, is a racialized person (whether or not they are a citizen), generally they are more harshly punished than if they are white person offering the same challenge. In this way, “Whiteness is a problem of being shaped to think that other people are the problem” (Shotwell, 2016, p. 38). Individualistic discourses further allow white people to exempt themselves from complicity in systemic racism by claiming a moral identity as a non- or anti-racist (DiAngelo, 2010).

In sum, the modern/colonial approach to education in Western countries like Norway supports affective economies that leave many white people unprepared and unwilling to address complicity in systemic harm (Andreotti et al., 2018). These economies effectively constrain possibilities for countering issues of racism and coloniality in the classroom if they are not explicitly engaged with and denaturalized (Boler & Zembylas, 2003), and even then, these challenges are often resisted. This makes a decolonial analysis of citizenship education a necessary intervention, if not always a welcomed one. Our readings of the data are informed by this particular decolonial perspective, and the examples were chosen in order to illustrate and unpack colonial structures. Before reviewing the results, we offer some engagement with the particular ways that the coloniality of education is manifested in Norway.

Coloniality in the Norwegian context

Although decolonial perspectives have not yet been thoroughly discussed in the context of Norwegian education, scholarship on Nordic exceptionalism illustrates some of the interrelations between Western epistemology, modern/colonial structures of race, whiteness and inequality, and the idea of the inherent benevolence of the nation-state. Nordic exceptionalism points toward two different ideas about Nordic societies, including Norway. The first is that of Nordic countries’ peripheral status in relation to the broader European colonialism and contemporary globalization (Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012). This is despite the fact that the Nordic countries’ participation in colonial practices and exploitative modes of political and economic globalization is well documented (Mikander, 2015). For instance, there is

widespread denial about colonization of the ancestral homeland of the Sami peoples, *Sápmi/Sabmi/Saebmie*, as well as the Nordic colonial endeavors in Africa and the Americas. These denials have been enabling conditions for the production of the idea of Norway as a homogenous, harmonious nation-state (Fylkesnes, 2019).

With a growing number of immigrants appearing in Norway since the 1970s, immigration has become a subject of racist discourse. Within this discourse, a racialization of difference takes place, and an ‘imagined sameness’ has underpinned the ethnification of Norwegian national identity (Gullestad, 2002). Imagined sameness is based on racial principles of white Norwegian and Christian universality and superiority. In the context of this imagined sameness, sameness is seen as a precondition for equality among the citizenry, and difference is seen as a threat. This national myth is tied to the rejection of race as a relevant concept and a refusal to acknowledge racism as an existing social phenomenon.

Another aspect of Nordic exceptionalism is the idea that Nordic countries are distinct from the rest of Europe. Nordic exceptionalism frames Nordic countries as global good citizens who are conflict resolution-oriented, benevolent, and rational (Browning, 2007). The Norwegian nation is constructed as anti-racist and in solidarity with marginalized populations, nationally and globally (Eriksen, 2018a). Inclusion into the imagined community in Norway is therefore conditional upon ‘different’ subjects adhering to ‘Norwegian, liberal democratic norms’, and the imaginary of equality obscures racial injustices that provide or prevent access to the national community (Gullestad, 2002). In educational settings, this exceptionalist national imaginary presents a challenge for those who would seek to craft pedagogical interventions that can invite historical and counter-hegemonic engagements.

Student teachers’ practices, reflections and emotions

The neutral universal knower

The most striking feature of the conversations with student teachers after the lessons was their resistance to directly engaging with students about content related to inequity and politics, or examining their own role in racialized economies of knowledge production and transmission. The student teachers were mostly focused on practical matters, such as whether technical devices worked properly, or to what extent the students were able to sit quietly. However, one main concern related to knowledge production that appeared among many of the student teachers was that critical engagement with racism was perceived as a potentially problematic form of normativity. As two of the student teachers explained:

I think that there are several challenges [with normative education]. One is that you risk letting your own view influence the students. Another is that you don't manage to be completely neutral.

It becomes like a dual-edged sword, because I do not want to be placed on one or the other side, kind of.

This illustrates two typical tendencies in the student teachers' reflections on knowledge production. Firstly, the perceived ideal for the teacher to be 'objective', understood as neutral. Most of the student teachers considered it a problem that education addressing issues of structural inequality is 'non-neutral' and 'political'. Indeed, education that denaturalizes the myths of the dominant culture is often seen as political propaganda from the majority perspective (Boler & Zembylas, 2003), whereas education that naturalizes the dominant culture is perceived to be politically neutral. The assumption of objectivity is generally reserved for white students and teachers, and is largely unavailable to racialized people (DiAngelo, 2010). The second tendency among the teachers was the implication that a neutral middle ground exists. This conceptual framework reflects the workings of Western epistemology (Kerr & Andreotti, 2019), where the ideal practice of knowing is understood as based in abstraction and universalism. Colonial relations are reproduced and mask subordination and epistemic privilege when Western knowledge is posed as the invisible norm (Maldonado-Torres, 2004). Although the student teachers showed a positive attitude toward discussing the topic of racism, and stated their commitment to promote anti-racism, explicit use and discussion of the concepts of race and racism was generally avoided.

There was also a stated fear of discussing the existence of prejudiced ideas and practices toward certain groups. This can be understood to mirror the general tendency in the Norwegian educational discourse toward thinking that if one acknowledges the presence of racialization, one is reproducing racism. As one of the student teachers described:

Talking about the prejudices towards the Romani/Tater population was hard, so I did not want to say it out loud. Well, we did talk about it implicitly. [...] I was very afraid that it would be too much negative.

As the history of the Romani/Tater challenges the exceptionalist self-image of Norway, and also because it is traditionally not well covered in textbooks, the student teacher avoided explicit discussion of the atrocities.³ In this way, she evades the discomfort of reevaluating the dominant national imaginary, and potentially her own worldviews. The student teacher also adds that because, in her view, there is not much marginalization in Norway today, there is no need to discuss it with the new generation. This reflects a strategy of avoidance, where the teacher's expressed anxieties can be understood as part of a desire to maintain an

exceptionalist national imaginary. Further, the lesson elicited white discomfort, which caused the teacher to avoid explicit engagements with racism. The teacher's whiteness affords her the ability (and the perceived entitlement) to escape the possible discomfort of the topic. This privilege of being able to leave a dialogue if it becomes too arduous is a key facet of the affective economy of whiteness (Leonardo & Zembylas, 2013). For white people, there is a choice of whether or not to face the discomfort of such discussions, whereas racialized and Indigenous peoples do not have this privilege. In a wider perspective, this illustrates how coloniality works to obscure the dark sides of modern society through the performance of remembering, i.e. teaching history, in particular ways (Santos, 2018).

Epistemic erasure: Moves to multicultural innocence

Student teachers had several different strategies of avoidance. One common approach was the depoliticization of the ways that social differences are produced and engaged. A main strategy for handling the overt racism displayed in the video about Denmark was a reframing of the issues toward a celebration of diversity, which is a common strategy in citizenship and intercultural education to avoid addressing social and political inequalities (Markovich, 2018). A mentor teacher posed criticism toward the lesson plan in this regard:

Yes, this is a small rural school where everybody knows each other. So integration is not an issue here. We have different nations, but that has never been a challenge, always a strength, in our school. There might be bullying, but it is never about that. There are no secrets [...] The one boy in that class you saw, he is adopted, the one that is dark. He is really proud of it. Two countries. That is great! He is just really proud. [...] A lot of the questions in the lecture were problematizing. That it was like, the students couldn't understand, why is it a problem?

From this perspective, the right remedy for addressing racism is to provide sufficient knowledge and the 'right' attitudes – such as the attitude that racism is not a problem. The teacher epitomizes this approach, and describes the school as a place where race is irrelevant. This is a paradox in relation the teacher's perceived need to address the situation of a child that was visibly nonwhite, and thus embodies Otherness from a white, majority perspective.

At the end of the lecture, the students were asked whether they think they should learn about racism at school. They all seemed a bit confused by the question, and reluctantly most showed their thumb down signaling 'no'. When I asked the mentor teacher about this, she explained to me that they probably did not understand the question, as they associated racism with something bad and thus it was understood as a topic to be avoided.

She expressed a view that thematizing racism was not the preferred strategy at their school:

We have a lot of teachers with other minority statuses also, from other countries, so it has never been a focus. They are all just integrated into the school. We show respect, we work on respect for each other, and each other's opinions and attitudes.

The teachers further explained how the minority teachers and students are included by the school, a framing that presupposes a majority that is in the position to provide (or withhold) tolerance toward the minoritized Other. Ahmed (2012) identifies the phenomenon of “non-performative anti-racism” wherein schools brand themselves by stating their commitments to diversity, without actually bringing about the forms of equity to which they purport to be committed. In this way, the endurance of white supremacy and racism are obscured by a move to innocence (Tuck & Yang, 2012), and diversity is instrumentalized and depoliticized as a form of school branding. The main point is not, however, whether or not the teacher is right that no one in her school experiences racism, but rather that she has the privilege to engage with racism selectivity and presumes the authority to determine when it is necessary. Coloniality as the hidden, dark side of modernity is here exemplified through the ability to purposefully dismissing certain events, or even reframing them within the imaginary of the nation-state and its subjects as inherently good. However, as pointed out by Santos (2018), such absences are also socially productive on upholding coloniality.

Care as a deflection of white discomfort

The white discomfort expressed by several of the student teachers about discussing racism was frequently framed as a form of care for their students. In reality, this avoidance can be understood as an unwillingness to engage students in the difficult work of acknowledging and challenging their assumptions. One of the student teachers was particularly insistent in her efforts to reestablish the classroom as a “safe space” after the video about Denmark. As the students displayed their emotions through tears and body language, the student teacher seemingly felt the urge to diffuse these feelings, rather than engage those feelings as an opportunity for learning. Interestingly, she directed the care especially toward students whose belonging to Norway may be questioned. She wanted to make sure that no one was left “hurt or thinking that they cannot be Norwegian.” As the lecture started with the video featuring kids in Denmark being questioned as to whether they could consider themselves “real Danes,” this sparked classroom conversations on students’ identities and the boundaries of being Norwegian. In the conversation after the video, many students mentioned

that they had foreign-born parents, and thus they are formally classified as immigrants, or that they had a physical appearance that is not associated with being Norwegian (i.e. nonwhite). The student teacher met these comments by insisting on celebrating diversity, responding in ways that repositioned the differences as politically insignificant:

Then you get the best of two worlds. You have a little advantage there, then!

How amazing! Imagining having all those wonderful cultural pieces in you.

This type of care has been spelled out in other studies as the apparent relief displayed by white teachers when they get the opportunity to talk about racialized students in positive terms (Røthing, 2019). When discussing the question ‘what does it mean to be a Norwegian’, the teacher emphasized answers that focused on belonging based in individual feelings. As she told her students, “if you feel you are Norwegian, you are!”. This “will to include,” avoiding discussion of structures of racial exclusion, also manifested in a more insisting manner:

Student 1: My parents are from Kosovo.

Student teacher: Do you feel Norwegian?

Student 1: Yes.

Student teacher: Right. Then you are Norwegian.

Student 2: My father is Italian!

Student teacher: But I bet he feels Norwegian, too!

Although care is fundamental in the relation between student and teacher, the particular expression of care displayed here is one that naturalizes unacknowledged power relations. Through these conversations, the student teacher positions being Norwegian as the desired status. There is a clear tension; on one side, she works on expanding possible identifications related to the nation-state. On the other side, she also reproduces the exalted implicitly white Norwegian subject as the given position to which all should aspire. Such approaches are often undertaken with good intentions. However, when teachers fail to denaturalize the presumed neutrality of the white positionality, or to address the realities of existing racial and social hierarchies, this often places minoritized students in positions where they are perceived to “embody” diversity (Ahmed, 2012). The privilege of not automatically having one’s identity thematized and deconstructed is reserved for white students. Meanwhile, the realities of racism go unexamined. In theorizing discomfort in pedagogy, Boler (1999) points out how empathy often works by reducing the Other to a mirror-identification of oneself, rendering the discomfiting Other as less threatening. The student teacher explains to the students how she has friends with different

backgrounds, languages and traditions, that all are “as Norwegian as me,” in order to minimize the fact those perceived to embody these “differences” are granted unequal social power and indeed experience the harms of systemic racism.

Conditional inclusion of difference

Throughout the conversations, the idea of an ‘ideal’ classroom manifested in different ways as a non-emotional deliberative space. As Sharon Todd (2020) notes, discussions in Western classrooms often model themselves on parliamentary political processes, not acknowledging how classrooms are affectively charged. This masks the power relations that are always already present, invisibly centering certain perspectives as natural and neutral. Strikingly, many situations in the classroom positioned Muslims in the role of the Other. For instance, in one case the student teachers explained how they had made the necessary precautions for thematizing the ‘difficult’ topics by talking with the class teacher before the lecture:

Student teacher 1: We asked what we can say, and what we ought not to get into in a way. [...] He said we could just talk about religion, or basically anything.

Student teacher 2: He did not even think there were any Muslims in the class.

Here, there is an underlying implication that because there were no Muslims in the classroom, it made the topics easier to navigate. The presence of the Muslim Other would amount to a contamination of the “safe space.” This came up as a topic in several conversations. As one of the student teachers noted, “very often you talk about minorities in a way that, minority, that means Muslim.” Many of the student teachers expressed that they did not find it uncomfortable having Muslims in the classroom, as long as they were not too explicitly signaling their identities. Indeed, some discussed the *extent* of practicing Islam:

Teacher 1: I don’t think anyone thinks about Amal in any other ways than being an ordinary girl. I don’t think anyone thinks about her having another religion.

Student teacher: No, I don’t think so.

Teacher 2: No, there are so many degrees of it, also, as whether she eats halal in birthdays, and ...

Teacher 1: No, so there are not so much they may have noticed, really. She doesn’t even wear any head scarf.

In this conversation, the mentor and student teachers position the Muslim as the Other to be included, on the condition that the Muslim student does not appear as too different from the majority. This is reflective of the “invisible fences” described by Gullestad (2002), the fact that inclusion into

the Norwegian community is available on selective terms. Further, the fact that the student does not wear a headscarf is mobilized by the teachers as a means to avoid addressing the ways that racial differences structure their classroom dynamics and students' experiences (DiAngelo, 2010).

(Interrupting) white avoidance

Through the conversations described above, there is a common pattern: mentor teachers and student teachers explicitly state their commitment to anti-racist values and attitudes. They have good intentions. However, by upholding the ideals of celebrating diversity, discourses of individuality and value-neutral education, they fail to address the underlying power structures and epistemologies that reinforce unjust structures through knowledge production and everyday social relations (Gorski, 2008). The student and mentor teachers also exhibited strategies of avoidance in relation to discussions of racism, which they rationalized partly as a means of care toward students. However, this avoidance can also be understood as being rooted in a desire to protect themselves and their students from discomfort.

Emotions in the classroom were framed or treated by many student teachers as something to be avoided, at least if the emotions are difficult or negative. However, one student teacher, Guro, took a different approach and welcomed the possibility of learning from the emotions raised in the lesson:

Yes, the whole thing was set out by that video [about Denmark] and it was a clear way to start, because it spurs emotions, and you get a relation to the topic. [...] Because you can see what it does when you awake those emotions, I felt it myself, that wow, it got me thinking.

On the question of whether the topic of racism was difficult, she was the only student teacher replying clearly 'no!'. She explained that she sees the topic as political, but that does not make it more difficult:

I think that diversity could be a resource but we should be careful in making someone a representative for a minority group. The other thing is that if you are really into that thinking that diversity is a resource it might lead to the color-blindness that teaches us that there are no differences. But there are, and we must face them. People have different privileges.

As the teachers and student teachers were almost exclusively white, it may also explain the fact that racism and whiteness was avoided by most. However, the counter-discourse Guro posed was made possible through awareness of her own emotional investment in the topic:

Everyday racism, that was something we talked a lot about. [...] But I have children with a father from Congo, so we are a lot... We experience it all the time. Or not me, but they, that people want to touch their hair, and that is... And it is hard for

some people to accept, that when they like ask where my kids are really from, that it is not completely okay. [...] But they [the students] are really engaged, you know. So I think it is, it has been a nice entry into a lot of other topics, you know.

This example illustrates that the affective economy of whiteness is not totalizing, and signals that there are generative opportunities for interruptions for those who wish to engage them. However, it also suggests that to engage this work requires not only intellectual knowledge about systemic racism, but also (self-) reflexivity about one's positionality within that system, as well as the emotional stamina to engage with uncomfortable conversations. For Guro, this was apparently spurred by her personal experiences and investments related to having racialized children. She was used to and trained in explicitly dealing with racism and whiteness. This kind of response is of course not an automatic response of all white people with racialized children. Further, such self-reflexivity is available to white teachers if they actively seek it out and are provided with appropriate support through their teacher education.

Implications for denaturalizing the coloniality of citizenship education

The examples given through this article point to some of the challenges and complexities involved in unraveling coloniality in the practice of citizenship education. Not least, they illustrate a certain sense of "failure" in our intentions to interrupt coloniality through exposing the student teachers to affective encounters with racism and social injustice. Instead of treating these encounters as opportunities for deeper, self-reflexive learning, the student teachers' treated them as threats to the perceived imperative to maintain white emotional equilibrium. Hence, the research process also deepened our own reflexivity concerning the embeddedness and power of colonial structures of being and knowing. To conclude, we discuss some implications from the experiences and analysis offered by the study.

Firstly, it is clear that the coloniality of Norwegian citizenship education cannot be interrupted through knowledge alone. All of the participating teachers were at least somewhat aware of Norwegian historical and contemporary racism and colonization, yet most remained hesitant to explicitly discuss this with the students. Within an intellectual economy of whiteness, the teachers perceived the introduction of critical perspectives to be too overtly political, which implicitly affirmed the presumed neutrality of mainstream approaches presenting Norway as a benevolent and non-racist nation. Teachers also generally failed to address the politics of knowledge itself, expressing hesitancy around engagements that would invite students to relate self-reflexively to questions about where particular ideas come from, or why certain perspectives spur discomfort. It was felt that to engage

these questions would introduce unnecessary tensions into what would otherwise be neutral discussions. This approach disavows the possibility that *all* knowledges are partial, and allows the majority, white perspective to prevail as unmarked norm disguised as neutrality.

Secondly, beyond the ways that the *intellectual* economy of whiteness regulated what conversations were and were not had, an *affective* economy of whiteness was equally if not more significant in shaping classroom discourse. Most of the student teachers appeared intent to maintain the emotional equilibrium of the classroom, which precluded certain challenging conversations from taking place. Even when the video about Denmark introduced racism, teachers generally oriented discussions toward celebrations of diversity and minimized the role of racism in Nordic societies. When potential openings for critical discussions about the politics of difference did arise, teachers tended to diffuse them and sought to allay any feelings of discomfort amongst the students. This avoidance was framed as a form of care, which suggests a perception that students would be harmed by being invited to rethink Norwegian exceptionalism, or to question the naturalization of structural inequality or perceived Western epistemic neutrality. Yet, this particular way of caring safeguards white affective equilibrium at the expense of minoritized students, who pay the highest costs for the failure to address the existence of racism in the classroom as well as in society more generally.

We argue that the reproduction of white affective equilibrium resulted in many lost opportunities for (self-) reflexive learning among the students and teachers alike. Moments of disequilibrium created by the video, lecture content, or student comments could have been more critically examined in highly educational, if unsettling ways. Indeed, this was evident in the example of Guro's distinct response. For instance, the student teachers might have asked the students to reflect on where their discomfort might be coming from, or what those feelings might teach about collective investments in Norwegian innocence. In the case where the student teacher displayed care through insisting on the Norwegianness of her students, she could have discussed how constructed boundaries, such as of the nation-state, force us to define ourselves in particular ways that privilege the self-image of some over others. That most student teachers did not do so is particularly significant given the fact that, at the start of the research, both schools and student teachers expressed enthusiasm about addressing racism. In other words, it is notable that the teachers' stated commitments to addressing racial inequality did not necessarily translate into a commitment to address it in practice, particularly if it raised 'negative' emotions that challenged self-/national images.

Most student teachers effectively prioritized maintaining a sense of individual and collective (national) 'goodness' over the imperative to address

enduring forms of colonial violence. This suggests that affective investments in feeling, looking, and being seen as good can override a stated intellectual or moral commitment to equity. Further, within existing intellectual and affective economies, engagement with difficult topics remains optional for those in dominant social positions. As shown through many of the examples, part of the privilege of being white is the option to choose not to “see” the social and political significance of race and racism. Our inability to foresee the strength of this denial of race and racism also partly explains why the project did not spark the depth of reflection with the student teachers that we aspired to when designing it. Further, this inability to accurately assess the depth of the problem of the denial of race and racism was at least partly a product of our own whiteness. In order to counter the strength of white resistance, teacher education would need to provide student teachers with more explicit tools for interrupting patterns that reproduce white supremacy, coloniality, and structural power. In retrospect, we could have prepared the student teachers better by making them more aware of common colonial patterns of avoidance in advance of the lessons, and offering strategies for interrupting these patterns.

These efforts would need to address colonial patterns as they manifest in both intellectual and affective ways, as our findings suggest that simply transmitting more knowledge about racism and coloniality, in Norway or elsewhere, will not necessarily translate into a transformation in educational practice. This is because coloniality is maintained not only through a lack of knowledge about other ways of knowing or about Norway’s complicity in colonial violence, but also through an active investment in the promises and presumed entitlements that are offered to white Norwegian subjects by a supposedly universal Western epistemology, structural racism, and Norwegian (white) national exceptionalism. In other words, in whiteness we don’t simply have a knowledge problem: “we have a habit-of-being problem; the problem of whiteness is a problem of what we expect, our ways of being, bodily-ness, and how we understand ourselves as ‘placed’ in time” (Shotwell, 2016, p. 38). To denaturalize this white “habit-of-being,” we need to notice how potential educational openings for talking about race and coloniality are foreclosed through the affective economy of whiteness. However, we also need to ask what lies behind these affects. What are people trying to protect, such that a critique of whiteness, racism, and colonialism is perceived as hurtful or even threatening? We suggest that the continuity of the colonial habit-of-being is challenged in moments that name the existence and harmful impacts of whiteness. Thus, in order to unsettle the coloniality of education, we will need to go beyond addressing how colonial patterns are kept in place at the level of knowing (i.e. the epistemological level), and also look toward the level of being (i.e. the ontological level).

A common critique toward, or even frustration with, decolonial approaches in education is that they offer much in terms of critique, but they do not always provide the immediate solutions the modern/colonial habit-of-being has taught us to desire. Indeed, engaging with decoloniality raises difficult-to-answer questions, such as how we might gesture toward other possibilities for knowing and being that are not yet known, and how we might dislodge the nation-state as the presumptive “natural” mode of social and political organization. While we encourage teacher educators to stay with these questions, we also understand the desire for more instant practical implications. Probably the most crucial and immediate concern that emerged in this study is the need for teachers (especially white teachers) of citizenship education to deepen their stamina and their capacities to address race and racism in their classrooms, and in themselves. Failure to do so is a detriment to everyone, but particularly to the racialized students in those classrooms. What is more, teachers’ own learning and self-reflexivity must take into account the multiple dimensions through which white supremacy and racism are reproduced, not only the cognitive dimension. Students and student teachers alike must be provided time, space, and frameworks with which to explore, sit with and learn from their own affective responses to discussions of race and coloniality. Ultimately, this might also facilitate the deepening of student teachers’ capacity to question their inherited social imaginaries and identities without seeking immediate replacements, thus enabling them to hold space for the complexity, complicity and uncertainty that inevitably arise in efforts to interrupt coloniality and move toward the possibility of decolonization.

Notes

1. The Romani/Tater is an ethnic minority group that has been living in Norway since at least 1500, officially recognized as a national minority and thus subject to the rights in the European Council (CoE) *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*. See <https://www.coe.int/en/web/minorities/at-a-glance> for more information. We use the dual term Romani/Tater as the group agree on being regarded as one group, but there are internal disputes about their name.
2. See the video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=e7mqfmZS5xM.
3. The policies towards the Romani/Tater carried out by the Norwegian Government in the 19th and early 20th centuries included among other measures forced sterilization of women, forced adoption of newborn children, and forced settlement of Romani/Tater families in work camps.

Notes on contributors

Kristin Gregers Eriksen is an Assistant Professor in Social Studies Teacher Education at the University of South-Eastern Norway in Drammen, Norway. Her research explores the

coloniality of Norwegian citizenship education and the possibilities of interrupting and transforming dominant narratives toward doing education otherwise.

Sharon Stein is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Studies at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada. Her research examines the complexities, tensions and contradictions of divergent imaginaries of justice in the context of higher education and the educational challenges of pluralizing possible futures.

ORCID

Kristin Gregers Eriksen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8240-2163>

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