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## **Youth perspectives on discrimination and racism in social media:**

A critical discourse study on the construction and reconstruction of exclusionary practices among Oslo students



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## **Abstract**

This research provides a critical analysis of racist and discriminatory discourse in Norwegian media. Findings show how contemporary structures in Norway is casual factor when explaining racial phenomenon in the society. Mechanisms, practices, and social relations examined in this paper, creates the casual factors for the production and reproduction of racial inequality at all levels (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, s. 476). Media plays a special role in this process. As elite actors, the media is particularly influential in reproduction of racism (Dijk T. V., 1993, s. 24). Presented findings exemplifies how Norwegian elites applies denial strategies and disclaimers as a part of their reproduction of white hegemonic power over those considered as ‘other’ (OHRC, 2004). At the same time, such mechanisms is a part of strengthening the majorities sense of national belonging. The presence of systematic denials of the existence of racism, and the reluctance to describe it as such, is a part of the contemporary concept of racism (Bangstad, 2017). Acknowledging the presence of racism in the society would question and shake the understanding of Norwegian society as a dominant democratic and humanitarian great power.

This research shows how different discourses is Norwegian social media contributes to the production and reproduction of discrimination of minorities. Identified discourses of colorblind racism, boundary construction and blaming the victim contributes to denials, minimalizations and naturalization of racism as a social and political phenomenon. The black face debate presented, exemplifies how white elites equate their experience with black experience and illustrate contemporary colorblind racism, “a discourse in which it is not permissible to raise the issue of race” (Doane, 2003, p. 13). Contemporary usage of the word ‘negro’ in the Norwegian society, exemplifies the present ‘perception gap’ between blacks and whites, and the existing white racial unconsciousness. Further this thesis finds that racist humor is a central component in reinforcing every day and systematic forms of white supremacy (Pérez, 2017, p.957). Findings presented in this thesis illustrate the harm racialized discourse creates, and the context youths develop their understanding of life and society.

**Keywords:** Racism, discrimination, youth, social media, nationalism

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*Vibeke Sørby*

## List of acronyms

<b>CDA</b>	Critical discourse analysis
<b>CERD</b>	Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
<b>OHRC</b>	Ontario Human Rights Commission
<b>OHCHR</b>	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
<b>SSB</b>	Statistics Norway
<b>BLM</b>	Black Lives Matter movement
<b>DD</b>	Discursive discrimination
<b>NSD</b>	Norwegian Centre for Research Data
<b>NESH</b>	Norwegian National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities

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## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Introductory context

After thousands of years of migration, most countries in the world are multi-ethnic. At the same time, several scholars are claiming a widespread backlash against multiculturalism, resulting in a racialization of ethnic difference (Castles, Haas, & Miller, *The age of Migration*, 2014, p. 293). Increasing ‘politicization’ of ethnic groups and emerging nationalist ideologies aligned with a tendency towards politicized majority – minority relations, reveal complex processes of integration where ethnic groups are seen mainly as political entities rather than cultural groups (Ma, *A New Perspective in Guiding Ethnic Relations in the Twenty-first Century: ‘De-politicization’ of Ethnicity in China*, 2007, p. 207). In contemporary Norway there is an increasing focus on border control and stricter national regulations targeting migrants. Increased cultural diversity and immigration have been perceived and constructed as a problem that needs political intervention and control (Kyllingstad, 2017). The idea that immigrants pose a cultural threat to *Norwegianness* itself, is connected to ‘egalitarian individualism’, which several researchers have found to be a characteristic feature of Norwegian society (Gullestad, 2002; Jonassen, 1983). Increasing focus on issues of cultural difference seem to contradict the compatibility of Islamic and basic Norwegian “values” (Castles, Haas, & Miller, *The age of Migration*, 2014, p. 64). Discourse of cultural incompatibility is increasingly adopted by public discourse, applied to legitimize accusations of racism and xenophobia (Hatlem, *Securing Norwegianness: Imagining Threats to a Cultural Community*, 2012, p. 5).

Several scholars have thematized universalized western conceptions, portraying Nordic countries as humanitarian great powers, “moral superpowers” who externalize domestic norms of solidarity, equality and (social) democracy (Langford & Schaffer, *The Nordic human rights paradox: Moving beyond exceptionalism*, 2015, p. 2). The Nordic countries unshakable self-image as tolerant and extraordinarily solidaristic relates to their emphatic denials of discrimination bias and racism. In the age of technology and emergence of social media, the digital media ecosystem is creating and providing a space where racist attitudes are flourishing (Ekman, 2015, p. 1986). The media plays a central role in the production and reproduction of racism, rhetorically and discursively contributing and supporting the problematization and marginalization of immigrants, refugees and other minorities. Today, generations are “growing

up in an era where digital media are part of the taken-for-granted social and cultural fabric of learning, play and social communication” (Everett, *Learning Race and Ethnicity: Youth and Digital Media*, 2008, p. vii). Youth are at the forefront of experimentation with new media forms, where “growing up digital” poses a dialectic notion of a benefit/threat. On the one hand, digital media enables youth to speak truth to power and forward their own generational concerns and agendas (Everett, *Learning Race and Ethnicity: Youth and Digital Media*, 2008, p. 2). A recent example of this is the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, which has galvanized the debate on racism in Norwegian media and has increased youth’s participation and knowledge about the persistent racism in society. At the same time, the construction of people of color, immigrants and refugees as ‘others’, presented together with “deviance” or “deficits”, is an example of how the media produces, reproduces and disseminates racist thinking through language and discourse.

In this thesis the intention is to demonstrate the wrongs of media discourses in their representation of racist discourse, acknowledging that the media as a collective institution is not homogenous and that this excludes examples where the media objectively records and describes reality. In light of this, this thesis provides a transdisciplinary approach (Fairclough, 2010, p. 164), providing insight into contemporary racialized representations in social media. Recognizing the prevalence of racism requires public attention and media coverage (Van Dijk, *Discourse and the denial of racism*, 1992, p. 96). This study applies critical discourse analysis (CDA) to uncover racialized discourse in Norwegian social media and presents information about Norwegian youths’ social cognition on public discourse. Applying Fairclough’s three-dimensional discourse analysis, three discursive categories emerged: 1) the discourse of boundary construction, 2) the discourse of colorblind racism and 3) the discourse of blaming the victim. In the rationalization of racist performance, white elites refuse to describe themselves as making racial jokes or engaging in discrimination, striving to be colorblind and ‘ignore race’ as an attempt to ignore the persistent racial discrimination in society (Picca & Feagin, *Two-Faced racism*, 2007, p. 235). Findings from this study confirm the persistent denial strategies applied by whites to maintain and legitimize their privilege. CDA on selected Instagram posts also confirm how racist discourse tends to include disclaimers and other denials. Selected texts are examples of “how some of the media constructed particular discursive events and their power to create, solidify, change and reproduce power relations” (Henry & Tator, 2002, s. 72). Further, the thesis has identified an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ dichotomy that produces and reproduces the mechanism of white privilege.

## **1.2 Research question and the purpose of the research**

In light of increasingly politicized and racialized representations in everyday communication, this study explores the social and critical dimensions of discourse and mass media's role in the production and reproduction of racism and discrimination. Accordingly, this study discursively investigates how youth perceive racist discourse and how it affects their perception of life and society. The context presented above provides the main background from which the research questions are formulated. This research aims to answer the following questions:

- a) How do patterns of racist discourse in Norwegian social media contribute to the production and reproduction of discrimination of minorities?
- b) How do youth perceive racist discourse and how does it affect their perception of life and society?

Research about perceived racism and discrimination among youth is insufficient. Revealing racialized and discriminatory discourse indicates that existing anti-discrimination laws and practices may be insufficient in protecting ethnic and racial minorities from the negative effects of stigma (Kunst, Sam, & Ulleberg, 2013, p. 225). The purpose of this study is to understand how patterns of racist discourse in Norwegian media contribute to the production and reproduction of discrimination of ethnic and racial minorities. Findings could potentially illustrate how social media contributes to defining, legitimizing and manufacturing the ethnic consensus that is drawn around minorities. Applying CDA, I want to understand how such discursive structures are involved in the reproduction of domination and resistance in Norwegian society (van Dijk T. , 2016, p. 84).

Findings from this thesis illustrate the potential harm racialized discourse creates and could be used to reveal patterns in western society at large. Hopefully this thesis can be a contribution to combating prejudice and the spread of hateful and racist attitudes in society, as well as increasing our knowledge concerning the effect of language and discourse. The thesis acknowledges that "creating resistance and realization of change depends on people developing a critical consciousness of domination and its modalities" (Fairclough N. , 1989, p. 4) and aims to raise consciousness about the power language has to contribute to the domination of some people by others (Fairclough N. , 1989, p. 4). Fairclough labels this as critical language

awareness, emphasizing how discourses function as a form of social practice that can potentially reflect and reinforce unequal power relations (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 88). Promoting awareness about the power of language and discourses might develop communication that encourages more equal distributions of power (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 89).

## **1.3 Clarification of Concepts**

### **1.3.1 Discourse**

When exploring social and critical dimensions of discrimination and discourse and mass media's role in the production and reproduction of racism/discrimination, a key concept is discourse. Discourse refers to how language is structured according to different patterns (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 1). In this study, discourse is understood in accordance with Norman Fairclough: "Discourse is commonly used in various senses including (a) meaning-making as an element of the social process, (b) the language associated with a particular social field or practice (e.g. 'political discourse'), (c) a way of construing aspects of the world associated with a particular social perspective (e.g. a 'neo-liberal discourse of globalization')" (Fairclough N. , 2016, p. 1). Adopting Fairclough's approach places language in society as "centrally involved in power, and struggles for power, and that it is so involved through its ideological properties" (Fairclough N. , 1989, p. 17). This considers language as a part of society, rather than external to it. Fairclough's approach to discourse is distinguished from other approaches in the sense that Fairclough understands discourse as one of many aspects of social practice (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 7). Fairclough understands discourse as both constitutive and constituted, as in a dialectic relationship with other social dimensions. Discourses contribute to the construction of social identities, social relations and systems of knowledge and meaning (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 67). Discursive practice reproduces and challenges existing discursive structures. On the other hand, it reflects, and actively contributes to, social and cultural change (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 78).

### **1.3.2 Discrimination**

As applied here, discrimination infers "the unfavorable treatment of people due to their (alleged) belonging to a particular group. Discrimination can be carried out by different means

(e.g. by violence and force, by economic means or by the use of language [...]) and in different contexts” (Wodak, KhosraviNik, & Mral, 2020, p. 294).

### **1.3.3 Race and racism**

To be able to investigate how patterns of racist discourse in Norwegian social media contribute to the production of discrimination and its effect on youth life and society, I wish to provide some reflections around some of the theoretical, conceptual and definitional issues surrounding the terms ‘race’ and racism. As well as the relationship between race and the construction of racism. The concepts of race and racism are highly contentious and cannot be explained and defined by a clear-cut definition. The concept of racism will therefore be explored briefly, acknowledging that this will exclude and leave out important aspects and features of the concept. Contemporary theories on racism emphasize cultural differences rather than biological features. In attempt to define and address racism, it seems to be necessary to explore the problematic concept of ‘race’. Sindre Bangstad (2019) describes in his article, *the past and present of the concept of race*, a brief history of the concept of race and its contemporary usages. Addressing that in Norwegian public discourse, the term “race” is primary visible in the public racialization of minorities. Bangstad questions the manifested understanding of race in public discourse, despite the contemporary scientific establishment of the concept. The notion of race is socially and historically anchored, based on the justification for a difference of treatment. Ideas about ‘race’ are dynamic and complex. Today we can determine that biological conceptions of ‘race’ cannot be classified as scientific and that ‘race’ is a result of social conceptions (Bangstad, 2017, p. 247). Some authors argue that there has always been transitions between understanding race in biological or cultural terms (Gilroy, 2000). Central historians on racism, such as George M. Fredrickson (2002) and Francisco Bethencourt (2013), make clear that racism historically and presently does not necessarily presuppose a biological conception of ‘race’ (Bangstad, 2017, p. 235).

Despite scientific verifiability and rationality, biologically oriented conceptions of racism are still conserved. Such an understanding is also visible in Norwegian jurisprudence, where defining something as racism or someone as racist implies a biological understanding of ‘race’. Denials of racism and an undermining of the usage of “race” are a part of contemporary understanding of the concepts. Sociologist Jon Rogstad remarks on the absence of the acknowledgment of racism in Norwegian public discourse. Acknowledging the presence of

racism in our society would question and shake the understanding of Norwegian society as a democratic society. The presence of systematic denials of the existence of racism and the reluctance to describe it as such is a part of the contemporary concept of racism (Bangstad, 2017). Denials of racism by white elites is “an example of White hegemonic power over those considered ‘other’” (OHRC, 2004). Bangstad (2014) also addresses the impact of the political and societal realization of ‘race’ as related to the nationalistic flows and a nation’s defense of its “imaginary border” initiated by immigration (p. 242). Contemporary racism is manifested in many coded and subtle forms. Subtle forms of racism are visible for instance in social media, where the normative belief system of the society is expressed and recognized.

For the purpose of my analysis, to understand how racism unfolds and finds expression in society today, I will examine the extent of racist discourse, its ideological foundations and how it is expressed. I will discuss the relationship between contemporary racism and power structures. For analytical purposes, Teun Van Dijk’s definition of racism will be applied:

“a social system of racial or ethnic domination, consisting of two major subsystems: racist social cognition (prejudices, racist ideologies) underlying racist practices (discrimination)” (Van Dijk, 2016, p. 76).

#### **1.3.4 Ethnic and racial minorities**

This thesis uses the following explanation of minority formation: “lies in practices of exclusion by the majority populations and the states of the immigration countries” (Castles, Haas, & Miller, 2014, p. 284). “Visible or phenotypical difference (skin colour, appearance) is a main marker for minority status [...], visible difference may coincide with recent arrival, with cultural distance or with socio-economic position, or, finally, it may serve as a target of racism” (Castles, Haas, & Miller, *The age of Migration*, 2014, p. 283). However, it is important to acknowledge the understanding that “immigrant groups and ethnic minorities are just as heterogenous as the rest of the population” (Castles, Haas, & Miller, 2014, p. 61). To explain group differences and inequality, it is appropriate to turn to external processes such as racialization (Modood & Khattab, 2015, p. 243). Ethnicity and race are closely related to the concept of minority. A multicultural society experiences increasing ethnic diversity. “Cultural difference serves as a marker for ethnic boundaries” (Castles, Haas, & Miller, 2014, p. 63). Addressing the conceptual differences amongst scholars concerning the origins of ethnicity,

ethnicity is seen as either primordial, situational or instrumental. Some sociologists also reject the concept (Castles, Haas, & Miller, 2014, pp. 58- 59). Ethnicity may be understood as “partially produced, shaped and reinforced by external processes such as racialization and associated unequal power relations” (Modood & Khattab, 2015, p. 243). Connecting race to the concept of minority is, in this thesis, helpful to understand racism and how race functions as a social construct produced by racism (Castles, Haas, & Miller, 2014, s. 59).

#### **1.4 Research design and structure of the study**

The aim of this thesis is to critically look at the media’s role in the production and reproduction of racism by examining ways the media legitimates and manufactures the consensus that are drawn around minorities in Norway (Van Dijk, p. 243). First, the thesis will present research and relevant literature that creates the context where the social practice, discursive practice and text is created. The first section provides a framework of the Norwegian context, as well as the interactions between media and youth. Further, concepts of white supremacy, colorblindness and discourse connected to racial ideology will be presented.ç

The third chapter presents the theoretical orientation of the study, employing Teun Van Dijk’s and Ruth Wodak’s theories on CDA as the theoretical foundation of this study. The section discusses concepts of racism, denials, power, nationalism and discursive discrimination and its relevance to the everyday talk and text of the media. Teun Van Dijk contributes an extensive body of research to the study of racism in the media. Van Dijk’s work is introduced to understand the complex links between everyday language and representation, public discourses in the media, and the construction and preservation of racism in Norwegian society (van Dijk T. , 2016, p. 84). The Discourse-Cognition-Society triangle is applied to understand how youth perceive racist and discriminatory discourse and how this affects their perception of life and society. Ruth Wodak discusses the complexity of national and transnational identity construction in a globalized world (Wodak, 2011). Wodak’s contribution to the understanding of identity is relevant to understand how youth perceive the racist and discriminatory discourse as well as how it affects their perceptions of life and society. The concepts of language, identity and power, and the connections between these provides important aspects to the understanding of racist discourse in Norwegian media.

Chapter four addresses the methodological framework for this study. This thesis adopts the framework of Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse analysis when analyzing the data collected from interviews and social media. CDA, I argue, is the suitable approach to interpret this data, as it enables insight into the ways in which language produces and legitimizes racism (Bryman, 2016, p. 557). In chapter two the theories on CDA by Teun Van Dijk and Ruth Wodak are introduced; their classifications will influence the theoretical aspects of the thesis in terms of understanding how racism is reproduced. On the other hand, Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse analysis has been applied as a method for establishing a relationship between semiotic and other social elements to reveal transparency of the practice of semiosis in society. Fairclough's systematic functional linguistic perspective provides an analysis of the dialectical relationship between language and other elements of social life.

Drawing upon material gathered from the literature review, theoretical framework and CDA of data collected from qualitative interviews with youth in Oslo and Instagram posts, chapter five discusses the themes that emerge from the findings. I further illustrate these discursive practices with three examples from an Instagram account. Chapter six provides some concluding remarks as well as suggestions for further research.

## 2.0 Literature review

This section provides an overview of the most relevant academic literature related to the theoretical framework, methodology and themes of this research. The literature presented provides a framework for understanding the Norwegian context as well as its relation to youth and their activity on social media. There are several elements of a human rights framework that will influence my data analysis and discussion. A legal framework as well as an overview of Norway's national obligations to combat racial discrimination and hateful speech informs the context of discursive practice where the data is created. This will be followed by a review of literature on established superiority of whiteness over the racialized other and explores the discourse and concepts of everyday racism and colorblindness. It then returns to the theme of the media and its critical role in the production and reproduction of racism and their role in the representations of racial minorities. I will also introduce some research concerning the impact and scope of media manipulation and disinformation to understand the consequences of racist and discriminatory language in the virtual space.



## 2.1 The Norwegian context

### 2.1.1 Nationalism – Imagined sameness

“*It is typically Norwegian to be good*”, said the Norwegian prime minister, Gro Harlem Brundtland in the New Year speech of 1992. Claiming the role as the world’s peace maker, a “humanitarian great power”, the Norwegian people are represented as generous and kind-hearted by nature. Terje Tvedt suggests that such a notion of Norwegian goodwill is closely linked with national narcissism, claiming to have a unique role here on earth. Through “the cosmopolitan narcissist”, Norwegian values are understood as the universal goal of history and the conviction that Norway is a “humanitarian great power” has a special role to play in the global realization of this goal (Tvedt, 2017). Fuglerud problematizes the interplay between Norwegian notions of goodwill and their ability to analyze undesirable developmental features. Selective breach of attention could potentially result in practices that overlook polarized rhetoric and hate speech online (Fuglerud, 2017, p. 14).

Marianne Gullestad’s notion of imagined sameness is helpful to understand how the majority in the Norwegian society constitute their identity by maintaining nationalism and legitimizing their power. She reveals patterns among the majority that prevent immigrants from being seen as worthy immigrants. Gullestad describes how equality strategies are creating a gap between the majority and minorities and, at the same time, are strengthening the majority’s sense of equality and national belonging (Gullestad, 2002a, p. 84), identifying ‘egalitarian individualism’ as a characteristic feature of Norwegian society. In order to be perceived as equal in value, people need to feel a sense of sameness. Gullestad emphasizes how this also serves a bigger purpose, resolving tension between the individual and the community (Gullestad, 2002b, p. 46). Further, Gullestad connects the discourse of ‘building of the country’ to the current exclusion of ‘immigrants’ from the Norwegian ‘we’. ‘Building of the country’ and ‘building of the welfare state’ is perceived as a gigantic national project (*dugnad*), that ‘immigrants’ are not a part of. Examining the relationship between egalitarianism, nationalism and racism, Gullestad finds that the Norwegian debate on immigration functions as a site for racial and racist discourse (Gullestad, 2002b, p. 45).

Boreus (2013) contributes empirically to the connections of nationalism to discursive discrimination. She defines discursive discrimination as “unfavorable treatment through the

use of language; it is discrimination manifested in discourse” (Boreus, Nationalism and Discursive Discrimination against Immigrants in Austria, Denmark and Sweden, 2013, p. 294). Nationalism involves drawing borders between “us” and “them”, producing outsiders and insiders. Such mechanisms refer to ethnic nationalism, which determine attitudes towards immigrants (Boreus, Nationalism and Discursive Discrimination against Immigrants in Austria, Denmark and Sweden, 2013, p. 295). The most recent report from Statistics Norway (SSB) on Norwegian attitudes towards immigrants and immigration finds that fewer people believe that immigrants exploit the Norwegian welfare system and fewer experience immigrants as a source of insecurity in society. At the same time, they find that young people are more liberal than older. These differences are most visible when asking about assimilation and the understanding of immigrants as a source of insecurity in society. Fewer young people desire that immigrants should become as similar to Norwegians as possible, and there is a clear significant relationship between age and opinion of whether immigrants are a source of insecurity in society (Strøm & Molstad, Holdninger til innvandrere og innvandring 2020, 2020, p. 42). Norstat conducted an opinion poll on behalf of the Norwegian newspaper *Vårt Land*, uncovering that 4 of 10 Norwegians do not acknowledge racism as a problem in Norwegian society (Iqbal & Vadla, Én av tre nordmenn mener rasisme ikke er et problem i Norge, 2020). Norwegians strong sense of nationalism has a major impact on the ability to acknowledge the contemporary racial discourse and racism in the society (Sjøli, 2020). The tendency to minimize overt racial discourse and direct language to avoid the stigma of racism is well documented (Pérez, Racism without Hatred? Racist Humor and the Myth of “Color-blindness”, 2017, p. 956). Social science is concerned with the underlying causes of the development of political beliefs and prejudices. Human societies feature some form of hierarchy between social groups (Kleppestø, et al., Correlations between social dominance orientation and political attitudes reflect common genetic underpinnings, 2019, p. 17741). Social dominance theory acknowledges that through evolution, humans have been predisposed to represent and strategically navigate hierarchy versus equality between groups (Kleppestø, et al., Correlations between social dominance orientation and political attitudes reflect common genetic underpinnings, 2019, p. 17741). Social dominance orientation refers to people’s general attitudes toward intergroup hierarchy, including their desire for other groups to be actively oppressed by others (Kleppestø, et al., 2019, p. 17741).

For further analysis, it is important to address the Norwegian debate connected to the usage of the word “negro” and racial labeling of blacks in particular. The standard term for blacks has

shifted and varied between ‘colored’, ‘negro’ and ‘blacks’. The rapid proposal of new racial labels indicates the struggle blacks experience in asserting their group standing and their struggle for racial equality (Smith, 1992, s. 513). In Norway the term ‘negro’ was, according to the Language Council of Norway, in the 1970s applied as a ‘natural’ description of people with dark or black skin (Språkrådet, 2021). The word has a problematic and negative history, tied to discrimination, genocide and torture (Sørensen, 2019). A discreditable usage of the word today is understood as racist. In Norway, receivers of this label have long expressed a desire for people to stop using this word. To acknowledge their experience and perspective, this word should only belong to history (Steen, 2019).

### **2.1.2 Youth and discrimination**

Migration is a complex phenomenon that features mixed categories such as family, honor, culture and economy, which in different ways include philosophical and ethical dilemmas. In this globalized age of migration, transnationalism poses that migrants adopt social and economic relationships to both the origin and settlement societies (Castles, Haas, & Miller, *The age of Migration*, 2014, p. 66). Today’s migrants are transnational and transnational identities lead to differentiated forms of belonging (Castles, Haas, & Miller, 2014, p. 68). Several scholars refer to the term “translocations” which connect the past, the present and the future (Anthias, 2008, p. 15). Migrants’ connection to translocations results in divided loyalties, which could be understood as undermining of the nationalist ideal of cultural homogeneity.

In multicultural-transnational societies, minority youth are in the middle of building their identity, where culture plays a key role. Dominant groups may see cultural differences as a threat to the dominant culture and national identity because of their perception of ethnic cultures as static and regressive. On the other hand, a static culture does not guarantee an orientation of exclusion and discrimination in society. The development of ethnic cultures and identities are the result of constant interaction in the country of immigration and the country of origin. Castles, Haas and Miller (2014) understand an immigrant’s identity as “dynamic multiple or hybrid identities, influenced by a variety of cultural, social and other factors” (p. 64). Interacting with the social environment, minority cultures are continuously changing and adopting (Castles, Haas, & Miller, 2014, p. 63).

It is well documented that experiencing discrimination is associated with negative psychological outcomes (Banafsheh, Ellefsen, & Sandberg, 2021; Kunst, Sam, & Ulleberg, 2013). A survey from Statistics Norway (SSB) describes a correlation between experienced ethnic discrimination and subsequent mental health issues (2020). The correlation was even stronger for those who expressed lower interpersonal trust and affiliation to the society at large. The average immigrant expresses significantly lower interpersonal trust than the population as a whole (Vrålstad & Wiggen, 2017). One of the topics in the research project Radicalization and Resistance (Norwegian: *Radikalisering og motstand*), is to what extent Muslim youth experience negative attitudes. Participants expressed a constant need to justify their identity as Muslims and Islam as their religion (Banafsheh, Ellefsen, & Sandberg, 2021). Young Muslims appear to experience harassment, uttered in terms of abuse or belittling, for some resulting in the abandonment of visible religious garments or symbols (Kulturdepartementet, 2020, p. 27). Studying religious stigma among Muslim minorities identity formation, Kunst et al. (2012), find that religious stigma is a key obstacle to Muslims national affiliation. Furthermore, they find that “belonging to a stigmatized group may not only be a defining part of Muslims’ lives, but may also have crucial consequences for their orientation towards their society of settlement” (Kunst, Tajamala, Sam, & Ulleberg, 2012, s. 529).

### **2.1.3 The discourse on minority youth**

“Migration is politicized before it’s being analyzed”, (Collier, 2013, p. 12). Several scholars have pointed out that youth with minority background are often portrayed in connection to crime and social problems (Solhjell, Saarikkomaki, Haller, Wasterfors, & Kolind, 2018). Solhjell et al. (2018) present connections between young minorities narratives and how the police and majority in the society perceive them. According to The Norwegian Centre against Racism (Norwegian: *Antirasistisk senter*) (2017), several youth with minority background express issues with how they are approached by the police (Wasvik, 2017). Ung Oslo (2020) finds in their survey that youth usage of cannabis has increased since 2015. There is twice as high usage of cannabis in Fronger and Ullern (west side of Oslo) than at Alna and Stovner (east side of Oslo), although youth from the east side of Oslo are more often caught by the police for drug use. This illustrates some of the differences in the demographics and inequalities between west and east Oslo. Oslo is a divided city demographically. Citizens that live on the west side

of Oslo have on average a higher income, more wealth, larger housing, better school results, lower unemployment and lower poverty than on the east side (Kindt, 2019, p. 6).

Youth increasingly use more of their spare time on digital activities, specifically social media (Bakken, 2020). The Norwegian Centre against Racism's report (2017) finds that youth experience public debate as hostile and stressful, where social media is facilitating a place where racism and discrimination can grow (Wasvik, 2017, p. 46). Informants expressed that they consider their background when they decide whether they want to participate in the public debate or not (Wasvik, 2017, s. 46).

## **2.2 Human rights in a multicultural society**

Today most of world's countries are multi-ethnic, characterized by a variety of cultures, religions and lifestyles. In contemporary democratic societies there are fundamental rights such as the right to freedom of expression, freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as well as the right to be free from discrimination, rights equally protected by human rights conventions (Weber, 2009, p. 1). Conflicting rights and interests challenge authorities to manage the balance between those rights. OHCHR and UNESCO emphasize a greater attention to human rights, especially in a multicultural society, in light of the seeming "denial of equality to fellow human beings because of their race, ethnicity or nationality" (OHCHR and UNESCO, 2005, p. 3). According to Castles, Haas and Miller (2014), migratory processes are seemingly similar across societies, although differences are to be found in "public attitudes and government policies on immigration, settlement, education, housing, citizenship and cultural pluralism" (p. 264). Understanding why some societies seemingly show more acceptance to ethnic group formation and growing diversity while in other societies the result is marginalization and exclusion, are to be found in these differences (Castles, Haas, & Miller, *The age of Migration*, 2014, p. 264).

As outlined, the contemporary society still struggles to ensure equality of treatment for everyone. Universal human rights are to ensure that everyone is entitled to the same human rights and to equal human dignity. This provides a framework and values for the world to work towards ending inequalities and the prejudices and attitudes that uphold them (OHCHR and UNESCO, 2005, p. 3). The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination requires states to prevent and punish racial discrimination in all aspects of

public life (OHCHR and UNESCO, 2005, p. 4). Protection against discrimination is, from a human rights perspective, enshrined through international, regional and national law. The right not to be discriminated against and protections against hateful expressions are fundamental rights. Comparative law and politics are, on the other hand, creating a contrasting picture, questioning Nordic states possibly paradoxical behavior in the human rights practices (Langford & Schaffer, 2015, p. 5).

### **2.2.1 National legal instruments regarding racial discrimination**

There is a long, international legal foundation concerning the protection against racial discrimination. Ensuring an effective enforcement of protection against individual and structural discrimination is dependent on each state. “The Norwegian Comprehensive Act on Discrimination” contains of structural obligations, individual rights and the connection between them. Structural obligations refer to duties which the government, as well as different private actors should implement to prevent or reduce incidents of discrimination. Proactive obligations, which are aiming at changing economic, social and cultural structures, could result in less discrimination on individual level (Hellum & Strand, 2017, p. 14). Individual rights concern the individual’s possibility to determine whether they have been exposed for direct, indirect or complex discrimination, as well as a possible compensation (Hellum & Strand, 2017, p. 20)<sup>1</sup>. Up until 2005, Norway did not have an independent law concerning discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity or religion. There is, therefore, a small amount of relevant practice and literature, which makes the preparatory works central sources for the interpretation of the law (Hellum & Strand, 2017, p. 9). Norway is committed to racial anti-discrimination law and is therefore obligated to protect human rights concerning racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Norway has endorsed the Declaration and Programme of Action from the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Dublin (2001) and the outcome document from the Durban Review Conference (Geneva 2009). Despite these commitments, there has been an increase usage of the term “race” by the public and in social media. The UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) comments on Norway’s repeated

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<sup>1</sup>Hellum, A., & Strand, V. B. (2017). Solberg-regjeringens forslag til reformer på diskrimineringsfeltet: Uniformering, individualisering, privatisering og avrettsliggjøring [The Solberg Government’s Proposal of Reforms of Anti-Discrimination Law: Uniformity, Individualization, Privatization and De-Legalization]. *Hefte for kritisk juss*, 53, 4–34

reluctance to include the term “race” as a prohibited ground of discrimination (United Nations, 2019).

In 2018, a new Norwegian Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act was enforced that aims to gather all obligations on equality and discrimination under one act. The CERD<sup>2</sup> notes that the Convention has still not been incorporated into the Norwegian Human Rights Act (1999) (CERD/C/NOR/CO/21-22, paras. 11–12), after previous recommendations from the Committee. The Committee is concerned that the Convention would not be treated on the same basis as other human rights conventions that have been incorporated into the Human Rights Act (United Nations, 2019). A critical analysis of equality and anti-discrimination reform states that the Equality and Anti-Discrimination Act represents an uniformization, individualization, privatization and legalization of the protection (Hellum & Strand, 2017, p. 7). This act contains a neutral and uniform conceptualization of the regulations, that weakens the position and relationship between discrimination and structural, economic, social and cultural differences in society. Such individualization, they argue, weakens the impact the enforcement system could have on the society and their position to make changes and work towards equality. It also proposes a new law enforcement system which, in their opinion, will displace the responsibility from the society to individuals themselves and make it harder for individuals to pursue their case in the enforcement system. Insertion of court fees does not consider socioeconomic differences in society and could weaken the position of vulnerable and marginal groups. Their conclusion is that this reform could continue and consolidate discriminatory structures (Hellum & Strand, 2017, p. 34).

### **2.2.2 National legal instruments regarding hateful expressions and freedom of expression**

The primary legal protection against discriminatory hateful statements is governed by The Norwegian Penal Code (2005) section 185 as well as in section 77. The Penal Code section 185 on hate speech, states that “‘discriminatory or hateful statement’ means threatening or insulting a person or promoting hate of, persecution of or contempt for another person based on his or her a) skin color or national or ethnic origin, b) religion or life stance [...]” (The Penal Code, 2005, section 185). Freedom of speech is often seen in contradiction to regulations

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/099c01568a0e4ecaa8ac606847fd7542/cerd-concluding-observations-engelsk-versjon-2-januar-2019.pdf>

concerning hateful expression. Freedom of expression is enshrined in the Norwegian Constitution section 100, as well as in The European Human Rights Convention article 10.

NGO alternative reports to the CERD in 2015 and 2018 both address the issue of balancing the right to freedom of expression and protecting against the expressions of racist views (Linløkken, 2018, p. 14). The 2018 report expresses concern that protection against hate speech is not enforced in practice and that violations of the presented right do not reach the court system. It is argued that this is not in line with Norway's obligation to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. There has been few individuals sentenced for violations of these laws, despite an increased number of reported hate crimes, especially among Muslim women (LDO, 2015).

In January 2019, the CERD expressed concerns regarding the development of hateful expressions in Norway, especially by leading politicians and media actors on the internet (United Nations, 2019). Not all measures in the Strategy to Combat Hate Speech in Norway have been implemented and the Committee addresses concerns to the seeming deprioritization of investigating and prosecuting hate speech and hate crimes in all police districts. The Committee expresses further concerns regarding "the lack of information on investigations, prosecutions and convictions of public figures, including politicians, for hate speech" (United Nations, 2019).

The Norwegian Government's Action Plan against Racism and Discrimination on the Grounds of Ethnicity and Religion 2020 – 2023, contains information on how the government wants to facilitate public opinion exchange that has broad participation to ensure a persistent democracy in Norway. They point to digital media as the biggest arena for discriminatory and hateful expressions. The government wants to create a freedom of expression commission, that would examine the context and assumptions for freedom of expression in light of the government's responsibility according to section 100 of the constitution (Regjeringen, Regjeringens handlingsplan mot rasisme og diskriminering på grunn av etnisitet og religion 2020–2023, 2019, p. 45). There has been broad political consensus that it is media's sole responsibility to regulate their own editorial and media ethics (Linløkken, 2018). In December 2019, the Ministry of Culture launched a proposal on media responsibility law, concerning editorial independence and responsibility in a medium where the editor has the sole responsibility, such as online newspapers. The main goal is to strengthen the editor's responsibility to follow norms and ethical principles for journalism. Such a law would hold editors accountable for webpage



content on another level than today's common laws (Regjeringen, Regjeringens handlingsplan mot rasisme og diskriminering på grunn av etnisitet og religion 2020–2023, 2019, p. 42). Another proposal in the new Action Plan is to open up for the possibility to report hate crimes online, to reduce the number of unrecorded cases (Regjeringen, Regjeringens handlingsplan mot rasisme og diskriminering på grunn av etnisitet og religion 2020–2023, 2019, p. 76).

Hostility, prejudice and negative attitudes towards Muslims is a real and increasing problem in Norway. This is the context for the development of the Norwegian Government's Action Plan against Discrimination and Hatred of Muslims 2020 – 2030 that aims to prevent and secure that Muslims are not targeted by racism and discrimination (Kulturdepartementet, 2020, p. 4). A Stop Hate Speech campaign was launched in Norway in 2014 by Ministry of Children and Families as a part of the European No Hate Speech Movement. Its purpose is to “mobilize young people to combat hate speech and promote human rights online” (Stopp Hatprat, 2019).

## **2.3 Race**

### **2.3.1 The West and the rest**

Hall (1992) describes the creation of the West as an idea and concept. He outlines four aspects on how this concept functions: (1) categorization and classification of the “western” and “the non-western”, and in that sense creating boundaries between them and us; (2) it creates a system of representation, where it evokes an image or a set of images on what different societies, cultures, people, and places are like; (3) it provides a model of comparison and in that sense can be used to explain difference; and (4) it creates an evaluation system, where societies are ranked (pp. 185-186).

A key role in maintaining white supremacy is the normalization or “universalization” of whiteness (Doane & Bonilla-Silva, *White out*, 2003, p. 12). According to Bonilla-Silva (2003) “whiteness is the foundational category of white supremacy, [...] embodied in racial power and [...] the invisible uniform of the dominant racial group” (p. 271). White racial unconsciousness and the way whites construct an understanding of race enables whites to be unconscious about their advantages and thereby promotes individualistic explanations for social and economic achievement (Doane & Bonilla-Silva, *White out*, 2003, p. 14). Bonilla-Silva (2003) argues that white supremacy is the “new racism” and is the “main force behind contemporary racial inequality” (p. 272). Experiences of racism create a “perception” gap

between blacks and whites. Consciousness about racism and awareness about “racial” specificity of whites is more likely to appear among black people. Whiteness is often invisible to white scholars, whereas people with personal experiences of racism are more sensitive to its subtle manifestation (Doane, 2003; Essed, 1991). Such a perception gap is also visible in different ways of understanding discourse (Stokke, Discourses of colorblind racism on an internet forum, 2021, p. 5). According to Essed (1991), one cannot understand the reality of racism without a general knowledge of racism (p. 72).

Rendi Eddo connects her book *White Fear of Multiculturalism* to the exploration of racism in the contemporary world. Her analysis highlights how power relations and structural racism is giving white people structural advantage. She is critical to how this power division exists for a social purpose (Lodge, 2017). Martin Baker (1981) outlines in his book *The New Racism* ideas and elements of the new racism theory, with focus on connections between racism and immigration politics (p. 17). Describing new racism as a structure of concepts that organize typical experience, then classifies them for their importance, for their acceptability or unacceptability and that makes policy formation possible (Barker, 1981, p. 29). He argues that he is producing a theory of human nature, which consists of common-sense political arguments within biological science (Barker, 1981, p. 11).

### **2.3.2 Colorblindness**

Eduardo Bonilla-Silva presents in his book *Racism without Racists* his theoretical framework on colorblind racism which is connected to the dominant racial ideology. He describes this ideology as the mechanisms and practices used for maintaining white privilege (Silva, 2018, p. 3). He introduces the key term in this context, white supremacy, which he describes as “a society of racial structure as the totality of the social relations and practices that reinforce white privilege” (Silva, 2018, p. 8). “Blaming the victim” is a part of the new ideology of colorblind racism that is carried out indirectly (Silva, 2018, p. 8). Jessie Daniles develops the concept of white supremacy further, connecting the structural, systemic white supremacy to the epistemological vulnerability that the internet is facilitating by allowing overt racism to grow. Daniles claims that white supremacy is not simply added to digital media but is constitutive of digital media. “The epistemological peril of white supremacy online lies in its ability to change how we know what we say we know about issues that have been politically

hard won, issues such as civil rights” (Byrne, *The Future of (the) “Race”: Identity, Discourse, and the Rise of Computer-mediated Public Spheres*, 2008, p. 146).

In a colorblind society, race is defined as an illegitimate topic of conversation (Doane & Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 13). Colorblindness is, by Ashley Doane, described as “a discourse in which it is not permissible to raise the issues of race” (2003, p. 13). Colorblindness enables whites to claim reverse racism (Stokke, 2021, p. 10). Denials of racism are essential for colorblindness and enables whites to equate their experiences with black experiences (Stokke, 2021, p. 10). In such way, colorblindness reinforces white hegemony, racial inequality and more subtle forms of exclusion (Doane & Bonilla-Silva, 2003, p. 9).

Osler & Lindquist (2018) find that students taking a teacher education lack the terminology to talk about race and racism with their future students. Their study finds that teachers often ignore racist utterances in school or treat racist utterances at the same level as other terms of abuse (Osler & Lindquist, 2018). Olser (2015) finds that there is lack of usage of the terms race and racism in educational research. Data from her interviews show that respondents understand questions concerning race as rude and divisive (Osler, 2015).

### **2.3.3 Racist discourse**

As indicated earlier, this thesis focuses on racist discourse, its ideological foundation and how its expressed, rather than the individual aspect of it. Racism manifests itself discursively. “Racial discourse has become coded and convert in public and multiracial discourse in recent decades” (Wodak, Delanty, & Jones, 2008, p. 56). Studies of racism on the internet have found that people bring their racial identities into their interactions online and that that racial identities matter even though the skin color is not visible (Stokke, 2021, p. 6). Stokke (2021) finds in his study on everyday racism and colorblind racism on an internet forum that “black participants see internet discourse as communicative events between people, while most white participants only perceive an exchange of words” (Stokke, 2021, p. 6).

Franz Fanon (1967) points out the limitations of related frameworks on the theory of racism; “The habit of considering racism as a mental quirk, as a psychological flaw, must be abandoned” (p. 77). He emphasizes how racism as an ideological phenomenon is a part of a larger racial system. Abandoning the conception of racism as constructed as a psychological

defect disengages the idea of racist utterance as only related to a racist personage (Helland, 2014, p. 142). Togrul Buruc links the discourse on racism and racist attitudes to the emerging modern racism, which capitalizes on “cultural differences” rather than biological ones to discriminate and subordinate certain groups of people (Buruc, 2011).

Anderson (2006) presents examples of how nationalism, in form of self-sacrificing love, is manifested in different forms and styles, such as poetry, prose fiction and music (p. 141). Any given society draws an imagined border around themselves, conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship (Anderson, 2006, p. 7). In portraying others as abnormal, impure and evil, they are able to establish their own communities as normal, pure and good. Racial discrimination differs widely – and has different targets – depending on the specific religion, nation and class, that is at issue. Expressions of racism are not static, but dynamic, and they will change character depending on time and space. To explain racist discourse, Anderson describes racial thinking and racialization as the combined effect of three parameters: imagined border, discrimination and doctrine (Dahlstedt and Neergaard, 2015, p. 161). His definition describes how racism is a system anchored in institutions. A typical process of racialization in the present is categorizing people on the basis of a Western norm of universalism (Dahlstedt and Neergaard, 2015, p. 163). We recognize this form of racism in contemporary Europe, where xenophobic parties often describe Islam as incompatible with universal values such as democracy, woman’s rights or freedom of speech and that Muslims therefore must be prevented from becoming European citizens (Dahlstedt and Neergaard, 2015, p. 165).

Henry and Tator (2002) introduce the concept of democratic racism, defined as “arising when “democratic” societies retain a legacy of racist beliefs and behaviors. Democratic racism is an ideology in which two conflicting set of values are made congruent with each other” (Henry & Tator, 2002, p. 228). In this context, racist attitudes and behaviors are coexisting and conflicting with democratic principles such as equality, fairness and justice (Henry & Tator, 2002, p. 228). Henry and Tator identify “the discourse of denial”, “the discourse of political correctness”, “the discourse of colour-blindness”, “the discourse of equal opportunity”, “the discourse of blame the victim”, “the discourse of otherness” and “the discourse of national identity” as some of the dominant discourses of democratic racism (Henry & Tator, 2002).

Joe R. Feagin and Leslie H. Picca apply Erving Goffman’s concepts of backstage and frontstage to describe the duality implicit in white’s racial performance in the frontstage/backstage dichotomy. In their book *Two-Faced Racism: Whites in the Backstage*

*and Frontstage*, they reveal how racism has changed character from overt racism in public space to private exchanges in small groups. They demonstrate how racial performance in backstage spaces perpetuates racist attitudes and behavior. Goffman's dramaturgical theory is applied to show that public expressions of racism vary to whether it occurs in a frontstage or backstage setting. Backstage behavior includes attributing minorities' behavior to their race, deeming these ascribed behaviors and qualities as inferior, dangerous or unsophisticated; telling racist jokes; and mocking minorities for racially distinctive culture and dialect (Hayes, 2009, p. 2183). The frontstage is a more public place, a multiracial place. "Yet, because whites generally have the great racial power in society, they usually control much of the use and meaning of these multiracial spaces" (Picca & Feagin, 2007, p. 43). Picca and Feagin identify performativity as a common component of white interaction in the frontstage arena. Meaning, whites attribute public disclaimers designed to present an altered image of themselves when interacting with persons of color. Thus, though frontstage interactions vary considerably, they all illustrate how "collective meanings are produced, reproduced and performed in a variety of verbal and physical actions" (Picca & Feagin, 2007, p. 44). Picca and Feagin find certain themes of behavior when analyzing frontstage interactions: attempting to prove tolerance, avoidance of people of color, various other defensive actions, and active confrontational strategies (Picca & Feagin, 2007, p. 44).

Joe R. Feagin's (2013) concept of the "white racial frame" is described as an "overarching white worldview that encompasses a broad and persisting set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, images, interpretations and narratives, emotions, and reactions to language accents, as well as racialized inclinations to discriminate" (p. 3). There are several levels of abstraction connected to Feagin's concept of "white racial frame"; common for all levels is the unquestionable white dominance and privilege, whereas the "white racial frame" is deeply imbedded in their minds. In relevance to my study, I will present the most general level of abstraction, viewing whites as "mostly superior in culture and achievement and views people of color as generally of less social, economic, and political consequence than whites – as inferior to whites in the making and keeping of the nation" (Picca & Feagin, *Two-Faced racism*, 2007, s. 9).

#### **2.3.4 Racist humor**

Raúl Pérez (2017) questions the lack of sociological attention to the role of racist humor in the reproduction and circulation of racism in society. Pérez's review gives an overview on the social functions of humor and challenges the illusion of humor as an inherently positive social activity (Pérez, 2017, p. 966). He contends that the internet is one arena where racist jokes are circulating and used to create racial hatred (Pérez, 2017, p. 965). Humor has essentially been understood as a tool to challenge and subvert racial meanings; Pérez discusses how the "negative" aspects of humor are rarely researched (Pérez, 2017, p. 956). His article points to the (re)circulation of racist jokes across various social contexts (Pérez, 2017, p. 957). Racist jokes can be understood as a mechanism to reinforce everyday and systematic forms of white supremacy (Feagin, 2013; Pérez, 2017, p. 957). Pérez (2017) discusses the social function of humor as:

"Those sharing a laugh at the expense of an "out-group" foster greater social affiliation and decreased social distance with their "in-group", while simultaneously creating and/or increasing social distance against their target(s) of ridicule and insult" (p. 958).

Humor can function politically to divide social groups and be used as a rhetorical tool to reinforce racially unequal social relations (Pérez, 2017, pp. 958 - 959). White blackface performance is a form of entertainment that through history has predominantly entertained a white male audience. Pérez links this form of humor to the superiority theory, allowing whites to feel racially superior, creating notions of white supremacy and black inferiority (Pérez, 2017, p. 960). Pérez asserts the fact that strategic use of equal opportunity offender rhetoric in contemporary society has allowed and stimulated the circulation of racist jokes in public. "Equal opportunity offender" discourse is based on the assertion that targets of racist jokes are "easily offended" and challenging the ones who are "politically correct" by creating an illusion that racist jokes are "just jokes" and "free expressions". Such discourse enables the circulation of racist humor in a time where overt racist discourse is unacceptable (Pérez, 2017, p. 965).

Picca and Feagin address the so-called colorblind society, observing a cognitive dissonance between the persistent racial discrimination in society and whites understanding it. They find that whites tend to agree that racism is a problem with others but strive to critically examine their own contribution to individual and systematic racism in the society (Picca & Feagin, 2007, p. 274). Racist joking has several dimensions and takes place at all levels of society. Picca and

Feagin (2007) assess the meaning and impact of joking in its social context. Addressing that “interactive joking serves several social functions: It relieves stress and tension in a social setting. It serves to unite a group, such as by showing how tight-knit a group must be to allow racially taboo joking” (p. 69). They further provide data from a study showing that black respondents viewed racial remarks, that are insisted as just a joke, as racist. There has been a transformation from overt public racist humor before the civil-rights era to the creation of racist ideology and rhetoric in more “colorblind” racial terms (Feagin, 2013; Pérez, 2017, p. 966).

Ruha Benjamin points to memes as an effective tool for dragging racism, allowing anyone to publicize racial transgression with the potential to have a global reach within a few minutes (Benjamin, *Race after Technology*, 2019, s. 25).

## **2.4 Race and technology**

Ruha Benjamin (2019) sheds the light on how emerging technologies and a growing media ecosystem features undiscovered discrimination; she questions how racism is embedded in technology. In her book *Race after Technology*, she introduces a concept the New Jim Code, which encompasses a range of discriminatory practices that reinforce white supremacy and deepen social inequity through technologies. The New Jim Code includes four dimensions: engineered inequity, default discrimination, coded exposure and technological benevolence (Benjamin, 2019, p. 46). Benjamin poses the question: “what happens when cultural coding gets embedded into the technical coding of software programs?”, referring to cultural codes, such as criminal as a code for Black, poor, immigrant and second-class (Benjamin, 2019, pp. 8-9). Benjamin argues that technical codes and AI are not just colorblind as some scholars understand, but they rise beyond human bias, erecting a digital caste system.

Media occupies a key position in society in terms of establishing and disseminating common cultural references. Everett and Naijanet (2008) find that “race and ethnic identities are the common ground out of which a vibrant online public life emerges” (Byrne, 2008, p. 22).

Data is produced through histories of exclusion and discrimination. Benjamin argues that social media amplifies and spreads obvious forms of racial hatred (Benjamin, 2019, p. 23). “Social media’s hands off approach when it comes to the often violent and hate-filled content of White supremacists actually benefits the company’s bottom line. In the sense that more traffic equals more profit” (Benjamin, 2019, p. 23). At the same time, she points out the potential opportunity

social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram and YouTube create in terms of putting blatant acts of racism on trial (Benjamin, 2019, p. 26).

On 11 November 2020, Fritt ord and Retriever launched their report and analysis of the debate on racism in Norwegian media from May 2020 to August 2020. Their report is a systematic mapping of how the murder of George Floyd and rise of the Black Lives Matter movement has affected coverage of racism in Norwegian media (Retriever, Fritt ord, 2020). Their main findings show that there has been a substantial increase concerning the reference to racism in Norwegian media after the death of George Floyd. The Black Lives Matter movement has galvanized the debate on racism in Norwegian media. The movement has created a platform to discuss themes such as everyday racism and structural racism. Their findings show that the content in the debate has included questions about who talks about racism and how racism should be defined. Themes such as reverse racism and alleged racism are what distinguished alternative media from the national and regional media. Reverse racism and alleged racism constituted eight and seven percent of references in the alternative media, while less than one percent respectively in national and regional media (Retriever, Fritt ord, 2020).

## **2.5 Digital media and disinformation – Can democracy survive the internet?**

The Norwegian media system features a high level of trust in the media and high levels of newspaper readership (Larsson, 2019). Today, mainstream media's journalistic authority is challenged by a network of far-right alternative online media sites. Their presence contributes to a wider range of news providers, which ensures greater diversity of information and opinion but also increases the visibility and impact of partisan information, disinformation and "fake news". Mourao and Robertson (2019) find that fake news is primarily characterized as biased perspectives rather than disinformation (Robertson & Mourao, 2019). Bente Kalsnes's book on fake news presents data from Reuters Digital News Report (Newman et al., 2018) which indicates Norwegian citizens are less exposed and less worried about being exposed to disinformation and fake news than respondents from the USA, Great Britain, Austria, Czech Republic and Bulgaria (Kalsnes, 2019, p. 47). This report indicates that Norwegians are more worried about faulty/bad journalism than articles that are totally fictitious for commercial or political reasons (Kalsnes, 2019, p. 48). Kalsnes's (2019) comparison indicates that Americans and Europeans have a significantly higher possibility of encountering fake news than



Norwegians (p. 51). The Data & Society Research Institute concludes in their 2017 report *Media Manipulation and Disinformation Online* that online media manipulation and disinformation potentially has grave impacts on democracy and civic participation in addition to the individual impact (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 48). The report indicates that media manipulation could potentially contribute to decreased trust of mainstream media, increased misinformation and further radicalization (Marwick & Lewis, 2017, p. 1). Persily (2017) explores in his article, “Can democracy survive the internet?”, how the digital age poses new democratic challenges, especially when considering these challenges with the combination of virality and anonymity that normalize misinformation (Persily, 2017). Social media is an arena in which political actors can contest power and influence (Tucker, et al., 2018, pp. 5-6 ). The internet and social media function as ideological echo chambers. Tucker et al. (2018) provide evidence that “the online news ecosystem in which misinformation and hyperpartisan stories are shared [is] at rates comparable to news stories by mainstream media outlets, reaching millions of people” (p. 16). Jessie Daniels (2008) poses concerns about developing knowledge about race, hate speech and civil rights in a digital environment without the traditional gatekeepers of editors and publishers. Moreover, he raises important questions and concerns about the shift from libraries to search engines as the primary source of information for young people (Daniels, 2008, p. 131). Addressing the persistent percentage of white supremacy online requires literacies of social justice, as well as developing critical thinking and evaluation about race, racism, and multiple intersecting forms of oppression in the pervasive digital media environments (Everett, *Learning Race and Ethnicity: Youth and Digital Media*, 2008, s. 130).

### **2.5.1 The role of the media in the reproduction of racism**

Henry and Tator (2002) examine in their book *Discourses of Domination* how the media produces, reproduces and disseminates racist thinking through language and discourse. Applying CDA on different case studies, they find that the media constructs people of color, immigrants, refugees and indigenous First Nations people as “others”. Exploring the nature and extent of racialized discourse in the media, they find that the media targets specific groups in society for marginalization (Henry & Tator, 2002, p. 202). Media has the power to influence attitudes and policies, as well as establishing boundaries of public discourse. The relationship between the media and the elite is reflected in the media’s interest to help produce and generate consensus (Henry & Tator, 2002, p. 235). Henry and Tator (2002) demonstrate how the media

in Canada advances the interests of those who have power and privilege (p. 238). This is also reflected in media's racialization of crime, where media has a crucial role in portraying young black males as enemies and overreporting crimes committed by people of color. "The public's view of crime reflects what the media thinks is newsworthy" (Henry & Tator, 2002, p. 163). Henry and Tator (2002) contend that "a truly democratic liberal society requires a less biased and more inclusive, responsible, and accountable media" (p. 240). John Miller (1998) finds that media elites do not show concern about the fact that minorities are constructed as a social problem. He illustrates that media's sole preoccupation is in the interest of shareholders and its profits, consequently subordinating media's public purpose to its private profits (Miller, 1998). Stuart Hall (1981) places media as a particular site for the production, reproduction, and transformation of ideologies. The media constructs ideas about what race is and what the problem of race is understood to be (Hall, 1981, p. 90).

Social media plays a complex role in the reproduction of racism. Gevan Titley recently launched his book *Is Free Speech Racist?*, moving beyond the current debate and discourse on today's limitations on freedom of speech, by questioning how the principle of free speech could function in today's multicultural society. Titley remarks that examining contemporary free speech discourse discloses the existing racism in a society. A key objective in Titley's book is to uncover how racism plays a central role in the public debate about the status and extent of free speech in Western societies. The digital media environment is based on circulation of opinion and debate, which is demanding space and generating publicity. Such an environment includes, in greater or lesser degree, a deliberate distortion of homogenization, polarization and domination manipulating the idea of free speech. Contemporary societies have forgotten history in terms of treating all ideas as equal, bringing racist ideas into the public realm. By responding to racism, antiracism becomes the problem (Titley, 2020). The principle of freedom of expression is based on an individual's own accountability to create a legitimate alteration, where the digital age and the current anti-migration discourse challenges this conception. The heated debate about freedom of expression is caught up in the debate about what is, and is not racism and, in such way, racism is seen as a way to shoot down free speech. Titley questions the content in such debates, why it is always concerned with principles and legal thresholds rather than how it contributes democratically, what free speech is and is not (Titley, 2020). Criticism of liberal free speech theory questions the shape of free speech and whether "ethical questions about the moral rights and wrongs of exercising ones freedom of expression is considered" (Mondal, 2018, p. 505).

Retriever, a data analysis company and communication provider, has conducted studies on integration and immigration in Norwegian media in 2000, 2008 and 2017. Their findings show that there has been a change in discourse concerning integration and immigration from labor migration to politics and debate (Retriever, 2017, p. 22). Integration is the most discussed theme in public debates (Retriever, 2017, p. 7). The study also shows a discourse change concerning Muslims and Islam. The studies from 2000 and 2008 show that when the media has been referring to Muslims, it has been primarily descriptive words. In 2017 there was a significant change, where Muslims are often featured by heated words, opinions and debate such as Islamophobia, extremism, prejudice and integration. When it comes to Islam, there was already a discourse change in 2008, towards negatively loaded concepts (Retriever, 2017, pp. 30-31). A CDA of the Islamophobic discourse at the Norwegian webpage document.no shows how Islamophobia is presented as a result of unsuccessful political development and that the political system can be used as a model to explain what is wrong with the Norwegian society. The author found that Muslims are viewed as “fortune hunters” and economic migrants that are dependent on the welfare state. Islam and Muslims – the external enemy – are understood as the symptom of an unsuccessful policy – the internal enemy (Solheim, 2017, s. iii).

### 3.0 Theoretical aspects of critical discourse analysis

The aim of this study is to understand youth’s perspective on discrimination and racism in social media, and how identified racist and discriminatory discourses is a part of producing and reproducing discrimination of minorities. For this purpose, this section present Teun Van Dijk and Ruth Wodak as the theoretical orientation, applied to answer the presented research questions. This section begins with presenting Teun Van Dijks concept of elites, and their relation to discourse and racism. The Discourse-Cognition-Society triangle is introduced as a framework to understand the relation between discourse, society, and cognition. Such provides a valuable orientation when presenting a youth perspective and understanding their perception of life and society. Van Dijks concept of denial is outlined as a tool to understand the production and reproduction of racist discourse in the Norwegian society. Further, Ruth Wodak theory on power in, of and over discourse is also a useful tool when addressing the dialectic relationship and complex boundaries between language, power and identity. Wodak’s close linkage between language and identity is useful when analyzing discourses

impact on youth's perception of life and society. Theory on nationalism and discursive discrimination is relevant to understand the Norwegian context of the study as well as the boundary constructions between majorities and minorities in Norway.

### **3.1 Teun Van Dijk: Elite discourse and racism**

Teun Van Dijk is among one of several authors that have contributed to an extensive body of research analyzing xenophobic and racist discourse in the media. His aim is to reveal how racism is a complex system of social and political inequality (Van Dijk, 2001, p. 362). Van Dijk defines racism as “a social system of racial or ethnic domination, consisting of two major subsystems: racist social cognition (prejudices, racist ideologies) and underlying racist practices (discrimination)” (Van Dijk, 2016, p. 76). Racism is socially learned (Van Dijk, p. 3). He connects racism to three components: discourse, cognition and society. Racism is a complex system that is by nature both social and structural, discursively reproduced in society (Van Dijk, 2016, p. 75). “Crucial for the reproduction of the system is the reproduction of the social representations on which is based” (Van Dijk, 2014, p. 136). Through discourse, racist prejudice and ideologies are reproduced, modified and confirmed. Discourse on minorities and immigrants serves to reproduce white group dominance (Van Dijk, 1992, p. 88). The cognitive dimension is central in the reproduction of racism. Hence, it enables linking overt action, including discourses, with social beliefs shared by members of groups or cultures and social structures (Van Dijk, p. 3). The social aspect refers to the control and domination that symbolic elites have over public discourse on immigrants and minorities (Van Dijk, 2016, p. 76).

The very notion of racism is associated with strong negative connotations, used to describe racism abroad or in the past. Moreover, racism is something that in general public discourse is reserved for others, attributed by elites to lower class whites or to right-wing parties. The use of euphemisms, such as terms like discrimination, prejudice, stereotypes, bias and racial motivation, “presupposes the denial of systematic racism of the ingroup or dominant society” (Van Dijk, 1992, p. 93). Hence, by attributing racism to the extreme right, racism is seen as something easier to manage, and denied as being a part of the ingroup of white citizens. Van Dijk points to the fact that contemporary conceptions of racism are still based on the classical ideological sense and do not include the more indirect forms of ethnic or racial inequality (Van Dijk, 1992, p. 93).

Van Dijk defines the elites as the groups in society that have special power resources. This access to power is not shared by the general population and especially not by marginalized groups such as immigrants. Social media is also a mediator and a reflection of this power. Van Dijk connects the power media elites have to Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital. Social media has an ideological and direct power to manufacture consent, an indirect power in the sense that they can contribute to the power of other elites. Access to a system of sociocultural discourse gives power to select and formulate problems, define situations, control and change the system of norms and values (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 46-47). This power is predominant in connection to ethnic affairs, because for most of the white population, public media is their main source of information on ethnic affairs (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 243). By having preferential access to and control over discourse, the powerful are limiting the freedom of the less powerful by affecting the minds of the recipients (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 22). Media is contributing to the "public reproduction of the ideologies of the political and other elites by publishing scare stories [...], and similar stories that do not fail to either instill or confirm top down xenophobic, or anti-minority resentment among the white population at large" (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 3). By doing so, media elites are "persuasively reformulating the ethnic consensus on ethnic affairs" (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 8). Van Dijk refers to studies that show the importance of topics and titles as effective interpretation, storage and recall of information (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 209). Terms like race, immigrant or color are often used in headings, which indicates that they belong to another radical, ethnic or national group (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 216). Van Dijk points out that negative opinions, attitudes and ideologies concerning minorities are a part of an everyday mundane racism that in his opinion contributes to the dominance of the white group and the subordinate position of minorities (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 5). To maintain such dominance and power, the elite is in constant need of legitimation (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 8). By preformulating the public forms of racism, racism is reproduced through discourse. Discourse is, in Van Dijk's opinion, the most effective way to expand and acquire general attitudes, such as ethnic prejudice (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 41). Public actions by the elites are predominantly discursive, where "ordinary people are passively participating in the many discourse types controlled by the elites" (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 9).

### **3.1.1 The Discourse – Cognition – Society triangle**

CDA is used to understand relations of power, dominance and inequality and the ways these are reproduced or resisted by social group members through text or talk. Working with CDA the aim is to uncover, reveal or disclose what is implicit, hidden or is not immediately obvious to the receiver (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 22). Discourse involves meaning, interpretation and understanding. Through discourse, news reports or political propaganda can communicate knowledge, affect opinions, or change attitudes (Van Dijk, 1993). Van Dijk is interested in the socio-cognitive or ideological functions of discourse about ethnic affairs and, by analyzing discourse, revealing the “everyday racism and the modalities of the management of the ethnic consensus within white society at large” (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 9).

Van Dijk applies a socio-cognitive approach to critical discourse studies, where he understands the relations between discourse and society as cognitively mediated. The integration of these three dimensions - cognitive, social and discourse - is crucial in the socio-cognitive approach. This multidisciplinary, triangular analysis shows how discourse is involved in the reproduction of domination and resistance in society (Van Dijk, 2016, p. 84). The socio-cognitive approach was established to theorize how social and communicative “environments” affect text and talk (Van Dijk, 2014, p. 122).

Analysis of discourse gives access to underlining social cognition and could potentially reveal socio-cognitive or ideological dimensions on ethnic beliefs. Discourse analysis could potentially reveal underlining cognitive representations and processes, such as “how beliefs are organized in memory, the relationship of causes of reasons, how the social beliefs of the speaker are related, what concepts or positions that are more important or in the mind of the speaker” (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 33-34). Van Dijk distinguishes between personal and social cognition. Hence, the approach to cognition is not through individual psychology, but as a social analysis, as the cognition shared by members of groups or cultures (Van Dijk, p. 3). Context models represent the cognitive interface between discourse and society, thus mental models of communicative situations. Through CDA information about socio-cognitive or ideological functions of discourse about ethnic affairs are made visible.

Hence, Van Dijk uses the Discourse-Cognition-Society triangle as a framework when analyzing racism. Racism among elites is, according to Van Dijk, something that is “fundamentally inconsistent with their own self-image” (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 9). For complex reasons people use strategies, such as “face-keeping” and positive self-presentation, to hide

their actual opinion; discourse, therefore, only reveals fragments of people's vast belief structures (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 31). The socio-cognitive basis of the system of racism is sustained by racist ideologies. Racist ideologies are organized by a bipolar schema of Positive Self-Presentation and Negative Other-Presentation (Van Dijk, 2014, p. 137). Such racist ideologies influence the structure of racist attitudes and further the concrete mental models. "Ideologically based polarized racist mental models, depending on context, may be expressed in racist practices such as discourse that is similarly organized between US vs. THEM" (Van Dijk, 2014, p. 137). Schema influences the structure of specific racist attitudes (e.g. on immigration or quotas), and these may finally influence the concrete mental models group members form of specific ethnic events they participate in, read or hear about.

Van Dijk finds that racist discourse is characterized by three topics, which overall represent a polarization between us and them, portrayed and featured in different ways. "The first step of in-group-out-group polarization in discourse implies that *They* are all the same (and *We* are all individually different)" (Van Dijk, 2004, p. 352). Negative portrayal of *Them*, as less smart, beautiful, fast, hardworking, democratic etc., than *We* are. Such portrayals are often combined with a positive representation of *Our-selves*, creating a distance between us and them. The second topic emphasis the Others behavior as deviant (Van Dijk, 2004, p. 352). The third group of topics, is connected to the manufacturing of the Other as a threat to us, hence presenting immigration as an invasion, where immigrants are occupying our space, taking our jobs etc.

### **3.1.2 Denials of racism**

Denial is a central component of contemporary racism. Van Dijk finds in his studies denial strategies such as disclaimers, mitigation, euphemism, excuses, blaming the victim, reversal and other moves of defense, "face-keeping" and positive self-presentation in negative discourses about minorities, immigrants and anti-racists (Van Dijk, 1992, p. 88). His findings show that the more racist discourse tends to have disclaimers and other denials. Denials of racism has both an individual and social dimension; it relates to resenting being perceived as a racist individually and for ingroups as a whole (e.g., a nation). The individual denial of the prevalence of racism is, by the elites, related to their positive self-image as tolerant citizens. Racism is therefore attributed to the white lower class or to the extreme right (Van Dijk, p. 3). Reproduction of dominance in relations - in action as well as in mind - is therefore a form of protecting the social self-image amongst the dominant group. Social forms of denial, however,

support the construction of a dominant white consensus (Van Dijk, 1992, p. 89). Accusations of racism could be understood as moral indictment of the nation as a whole, attributing racism to something happening elsewhere, by others (Van Dijk, p. 3). Denial of racism has social, political and cultural functions and supports the reproduction of hegemony. Accepting the existing racism in society means acknowledging that the attitudes and ideologies of the society are inconsistent with the dominant democratic and humanitarian norms and ideals (Van Dijk, 1992, p. 116). Denying the negative representation of intolerance and racism amongst the dominant group is a defense mechanism, used for maintaining the cognitive balance amongst the dominant group. Negative judgment may be found acceptable, with reference to negative actions or attitudes toward an outgroup. In such cases, accusations of racism are emphatically denied, and the charge is often reversed by accusing the victim of racism as oversensitive and exaggerating. Moreover, accusations of racism are understood to disrupt ingroup solidarity, impose taboos and prevent free speech (Van Dijk, 1992, p. 90). The denial of racism in and by the press is rejected violently and especially so if the accusations are directed toward the press itself. Editors' denial and reluctance to acknowledge their position as biased reflects societies general attitude toward identifying racist events (Van Dijk, 1992, p. 103).

Van Dijk distinguishes between four types of denial: 1) act-denial, 2) control-denial, 3) intentional-denial and 4) goal-denial. Act-denial appears when people deny their engagement in negative acts. Control-denial refers to the actions as an accident or something that did not happen on purpose. Distinction between cognition (intention) and activity is a strategy of defense when engaging in a negative action. This is intentional-denial, denying the negative cognitive counterpart. Moreover, it is hard to prove negative intentions; intentional-denials is, therefore, strategically very effective. Goal-denial is also linked to denial of responsibility and the lack of control over negative consequences (Van Dijk, *Critical Discourse Studies: A Sociocognitive approach*, 2016).

### **3.2 Ruth Wodak: Power in, of and over discourse**

Ruth Wodak is, in addition to Van Dijk, one of the most central authors of the academic discipline. Wodak describes the aim of CDA as “uncovering injustice, inequality taking sides with the powerless and suppressed” (Wodak, 1989, s. xiv). Wodak stresses the dialectic relationship and complex boundaries between language, power and identity, and bases her research on different assumptions connected to her theory on identity. Identity is, according to



Wodak, “co-constructed” in an interactive relationship; it is fragmented, dynamic and changeable. In such way everyone has multiple identities. Identity implies “inclusionary and exclusionary processes, i.e. the definition of oneself and others” (Wodak, 2012, p. 216). Identity is about meaning, and meaning is created in and dependent on context. Wodak refers to Jenkins (1996) understanding of meanings as always the “outcome of agreement or disagreement, always a matter of contention, to some extent shared and always negotiable” (p. 4- 5). National identities are generated and produced through discourse. Through a process of selection of language and use of language itself, identity is constructed and given meaning, which connects language and identity to the aspect of power. The aspect of power is connected to the issue of who is selecting, defining and manufacturing the popular language and who can use language for various interests. Wodak outlines three dimensions of power: “power in discourse”, “power over discourse” and “power of discourse” (Wodak, 2012, p. 217). Power in discourse concerns situated interaction and the ways dominance is negotiated (Wodak, Delanty, & Jones, 2008, p. 55). It refers to a struggle over semiotic hegemony in terms of specific linguistic codes, rules for interaction, rules for access to meaning-making forums, rules for decision making, turning-taking, opening of sessions, making contributions and interventions. Power over discourse means access to the public and thereby those who enforce dominant discourse. Gatekeepers determine who is included and excluded from access. Power of discourse relates to “the influence of historically grown macro-structures of meaning, of the conventions of the language game in which actors find themselves” (Wodak, 2009, pp. 35- 36).

Wodak includes the concepts of language ideologies and language policies; both concepts influence and define languages. Applying Susan Gale’s definition, language ideologies are defined as “cultural ideas, presumptions and presuppositions with which different social groups name, frame and evaluate linguistic practices” (Wodak, 2012, p. 220). Language ideologies are “produced in discourses, in news media, in politics, in narratives of national belonging, in advertising, in academic text, and in popular culture” (Blackledge, 2005, p. 44). Language policies influence how immigrants are dealt with in each nation. Multilingualism promotes diversity and integration; if the language of the majority is viewed as the only relevant communicative language this would be problematic. Wodak finds that proficiency in the official languages serves as a new criterion for determining citizenship, suggesting that there has to be an understanding of the close, emotional relationship between language and identity when moving forward (Wodak, 2012, pp. 229-230). Language policy should thus not be an instrument of hegemony or the imposition or exercise of power over individuals or social

groups.

### **3.2.1 Nationalism and discursive discrimination**

Despite multiple globalizing tendencies, Wodak suggests that we are experiencing a re/nationalization (Wodak, 2013, p. 173). Wodak relates different forms of nationalism to a specific kind of discrimination against immigrants, referred to as discursive discrimination (DD) (Wodak, KhosraviNik, & Mral, 2020, p. 293). DD is defined as “unfavorable treatment through the use of language; it is discrimination manifested in discourse” (Wodak, KhosraviNik, & Mral, 2020, p. 294). Nationalism involves drawing borders between ‘us’ and ‘them’. This theory of nationalism is built on Anderson’s (1991) concept of nations as imagined communities, as constructed rather than natural entities. Nationalism is context-bound and differs in the way each particular imagined community constructs itself. The strength of ethnic nationalism varies between imagined communities; if ethnic nationalism is strong, the imagined community is more closed for immigrants to become insiders. Separating outsiders from insiders is a part of how nations are constructed and expressed through discourse. Creation of otherness and outsiders is not the same as discrimination, but strong ethnic nationalism often leads to assimilation politics expressed as DD, either as negative other-presentations or as proposals of unfavorable treatment. Attitudes toward immigrants are related to how an imagined community constructs its members in relation to outsiders. This construction is affected by cultural and political traits.

Proposals of unfavorable treatment and negative other-presentations refer to two different conceptualizations of DD. Proposals of unfavorable treatment “are claims to the affect that a group of people should be denied the rights that others in society have as well as the defense of ongoing treatment of this kind” (Wodak, KhosraviNik, & Mral, 2020, p. 294). In relation to immigrants, social, political and cultural rights are often at stake. Attempts to assimilate immigrants is a proposal of negative other-presentations, denying their right to engage in cultural practices. Negative other-presentations refers to when one group portrays another group as inferior. Presumptions, as for example presumed knowledge of immigrants as threatening, is an example of negative other representations (Wodak, KhosraviNik, & Mral, 2020, p. 294). The separation of people into categories creates national outsiders and highlights the understanding that immigrants are not insiders. Wodak et al. point to two ways to create

categories. The first is creating categories based on the migration process, such as immigrant, refugee. The second kind is creating categories that highlight that people in these categories do not belong to the nation, such as foreigner (Wodak, KhosraviNik, & Mral, 2020, p. 298). The categorization of people alone does not constitute expressions of DD, but such a sorting mechanism and a creation of a conceptual separation is part of allowing and making discrimination against immigrants possible. How ethnic nationalism is expressed and which characteristics of “homo nationalis” and the nation state that are at play create an understanding of how immigrants are discursively discriminated against (Wodak, KhosraviNik, & Mral, 2020, p. 305).

“Discursive construction of ingroups and outgroups relates to positive self and negative other representation on strategies of justification and legitimation of exclusionary practices through argumentative devices; and finally, on the denial of racism which frequently accompanies and introduces discriminatory rhetoric” (Wodak, Delanty, & Jones, 2008, p. 57).

## 4.0 Methodology – critical discourse analysis as a method

### 4.1 Research design

In accordance with my interest in understanding human behavior I have chosen interpretivism as the epistemological foundation for this thesis, approaching the study of the social world with an emphasis to understand human behavior. Applying an interpretative understanding of social action to this study means to grasp the subjective meaning of social action and to gain access to people’s “common sense thinking” (Bryman, 2016, pp. 26-27). My ontological position for my research is constructionism. Social phenomena are, in relation to constructionism, understood as produced through social action and in constant state of revision (Bryman, 2012, p. 32). In light of the aim of my social research, I will emphasize how youth construct and reconstruct meaning. This research is concerned with how social entities are socially constructed and presented by social actors as a specific version of social reality. In light of this, constructionism gives the best position of understanding (Bryman, 2016, pp. 29-30).

In this thesis discrimination will be approached in a transdisciplinary way, first analyzing the dialectical relationship between semiosis and other social elements to understand how discrimination is established, reproduced and substantively realized in discourse. Different sources of data that complement each other have been collected. Semi-structured qualitative interviews were chosen to understand how youth experience discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnicity or religion in social media. An interview guide was developed based on a flexible research design. Questions were developed based on selected themes, allowing the interviewer to adapt in-depth questions and at the same time securing that the interviewee had flexibility in their response. Interviews give insight to the worldview and information about youth activity online. Applying Fairclough's method of CDA on the interviews, I aim to establish how discriminatory discourse on social media finds expression and is understood by Norwegian youth. CDA provides insights into the ideological foundation of racism (Bryman, 2016, p. 562).

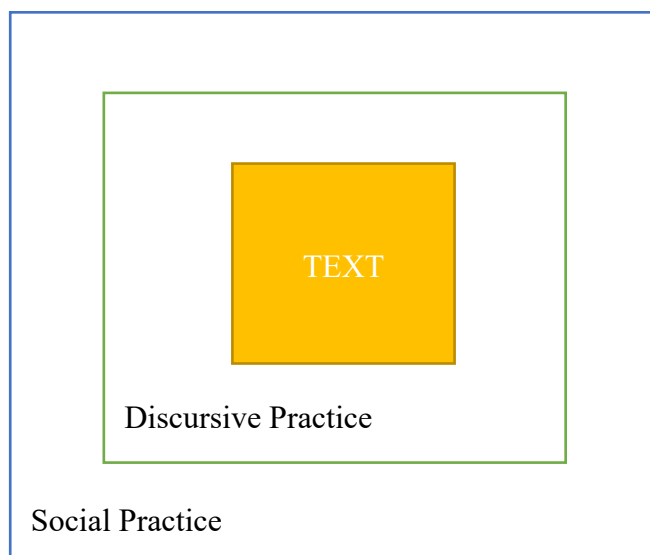
Fairclough's three-dimensional framework of discourse analysis was further adopted to the second form of data collection and further analysis. CDA was chosen because of its ability to reveal power structures. A second data collection enables a greater understanding of the social world of the participant, and secures trustworthiness in patterns discovered in the data. Further, I illustrate these discursive practices with three examples from an Instagram account. Analyzing Instagram posts selected on the grounds of the youths' own encounters with discrimination and racism online, enables the research to examine social meaning making.

## **4.2 Fairclough's three-dimensional framework of discourse analysis**

Norman Fairclough understands discourse as a "(a) meaning-making as an element of the social process, (b) the language is associated with a particular social field or practice, (c) a way of construing aspects of the world associated with a particular social perspective" (Fairclough N. , 2016, p. 87). A key aspect in the framework is the understanding of discourse not only as something constitutive but also as something that is constituted (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 65). Fairclough understands any source of language is a communicative event and a possible barer of change. Through CDA the relationship between semiotic and other social elements is established (Fairclough, 2010, 2016, p. 87). Applying CDA enables transparency of the practice of semiosis in the society (Fairclough N. , 2010, p. 231). CDA is critical in terms of

addressing social wrongs and reflecting upon in what sense the social wrong is inherent to the social order of society (Fairclough N. , 2016, p. 94). In that sense, CDA and discourse is tied to ideology. The social process refers to an interplay between three levels of social reality: social structures, practices and events (Fairclough N. , 2010, p. 232). CDA helps to identify possible obstacles to overcome the social wrong in question. Therefore, CDA could potentially create a better understanding of the nature and sources of discrimination in social media and an understanding of how Norwegian youth react to dominant discourse. Discrimination refers to a social wrong, a relevant issue and a wrong of contemporary society.

Fairclough's critical discourse analysis is based on three dimensions: text (an analysis on word level), discursive practice (an analysis on text level) and social practice (an analysis on norm level) as illustrated in Figure 1.



*Figure 1: Fairclough's three-dimensional model*

As illustrated in Figure 1, language and communication are closely linked to the society in which we are located. To gain an understanding of the relationship between text and societal and cultural processes and structures, its necessary to combine textual and social analysis

(Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 66). CDA focuses on the mutual relationship between the actual text, the discursive practice it is a part of and the social practice that creates the context. The given text is part of shaping the discourse that gives direction to the social practice, but is also created by the social practice that affects the discourse which is represented through text (Bratberg, 2014, p. 46).

### **4.3 Data collection**

The data consists of semi-structured interviews with eight youths currently studying in Oslo and three public posts from the Instagram account “racism in Norway”. Further, I will elaborate on the process of data collection.

#### **4.3.1 Semi-structured qualitative interviews**

The purpose of the qualitative research interview is to increase the knowledge of the “lived daily world from the subjects own perspectives” (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 27). Semi-structured interviews seek to understand the meaning of central themes of people’s lived world. Understanding the subjects experience of a theme is key, by registering and interpreting both at factual and meaning level. This approach effectively provides an interpersonal situation, where knowledge is constructed in the interaction between two people (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 35). The interviewer’s questions aim at understanding the subjects experience of at theme by letting the subject answer as freely as possible (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 29). Semi-structured interviews provide some flexibility, conducted according to an interview guide that includes certain themes. Interview guides secure a degree of structure by focusing on certain themes, but allow subjects to choose the dimensions of what is found important in the theme of inquiry (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 34). The interview guide is designed with open questions, and there is room for changes when asking questions and responding (Bryman, 2016, s. 482). There is an importance of flexibility, since the aim is to understand the worldview of the youth interviewed.

#### **4.3.2 Participant recruitment**

The research employed non-probability, purposive sampling as the sampling approach. The objective is to sample participants in a strategic way in line with the research question posed. Sample criteria was determined by relevance to the research question (Bryman, 2016, p. 418). As my objective was to interview youth in Oslo about their experience with discrimination in social media, the research question naturally guides the sampling of

participants. I established some criteria when recruiting youth: they needed to be between 16 to 18 years old and they had to attend school in Oslo. The sample should include variation of gender, ethnicity, age and geographic area. Here geographic area refers to schools in different districts in Oslo. This criteria is established to ensure that the resulting sample differs from each other within the limitations of the key characteristics relevant to the research question (Bryman, 2016, p. 418).

To recruit participants, I contacted the student organization in Oslo, which assisted with contacting pupils from schools in different districts in Oslo. I sent a participation information letter through my contact person at the student organization, including information about the project, voluntary participation, and anonymity. In need of several participants, I also used my social network to contact youth that fulfilled the sample criteria. Initially, I planned to recruit youth from all the 15 different districts in Oslo. I contacted different school organizations to get contact information to relevant participants, but there was little response and several of the participants that first agreed to be a part of the project resigned. Considering the limited amount of time, I decided to focus on my sample, which included eight participants. Therefore, the size of original sample differed from the final sample size. Five of the participants were boys, three of the participants were girls, which indicates a low degree of gender balance. All of the participants went to school in Oslo; in all, five different schools were represented. Seven of the participants lived in Oslo, distributed in five different districts, while one of the participants lived outside of Oslo. Three of the participants had personal experience with discrimination in social media on the grounds of race or ethnicity. In “Table 1: Demographics of Interview Participants”, I have outlined an overview of the demographic information of the participants; according to the requirement of confidentiality, personal data such as names, school and specific residence has been anonymized. The interviews were conducted in Norwegian. The participants were asked if they were comfortable with speaking Norwegian and were offered to choose between English or Norwegian.

No.	Pseudonym	Gender	Age range	District Residence	School District
1	Andre	Male	16 -18	St.Hanshaugen	Grünerløkka
2	Erik	Male	16 -18	St.Hanshaugen	Grünerløkka
3	Nora	Female	16- 18	Vestre Aker	St. hans haugen
4	Nils	Male	16 -18	Gamle Oslo	Grünerløkka
5	Line	Female	16 - 18	Gamle Oslo	Frogner

6	Martin	Male	16 - 18	Søndre Nordstrand	Nordre Aker
7	Nikolai	Male	16 - 18	Bærum	Frogner
8	Janne	Female	16 - 18	Alna	Østensjø

*Table 1 Demographics of Interview Participants*

### 4.3.3 Interviewing

The eight interviews were conducted individually in December 2020. Because of Covid-19 and subsequent restrictions, four of the interviews took place through a video call. Practical issues were identified and addressed to ensure good quality of the interviews, such as a quiet setting and good internet connection. The remaining four interviews took place in a relaxed and flexible setting. The duration of the interviews spanned from about 45 – 90 minutes. All of the interviews were recorded using a dictaphone machine and stored and locked in a location only accessible by me, in accordance to the USN guidelines for management of research audio recordings. Audio of the interviews were deleted after they were transcribed. All personal data has been treated confidentially in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act). Personal data about the informants is necessary to be able to organize and analyze my data. Information about the informant’s sex, age, district residence and school will give information that can give extended meaning to the data findings. Personal information enables insights about the participants social world and the complexity of the research. Personal data is also necessary when assessing quality criteria concerning how valid the research is, in terms of transferability and dependability. I have limited the amount of personal data recorded to that most necessary for my research.

An interview guide was developed, captured in Annex 1, for the semi-structured interviews. The guide contains topics to be covered and a flexible list of suggested questions to be asked. Pursuing individual subject answers, each interview question should “contribute thematically to knowledge production and dynamically to promoting a good interview interaction” (Kvale, 1996, p. 129). Interview questions were developed around themes of discrimination and racism on/in social media and freedom of speech (Bryman, 2016, p. 712). A hermeneutical approach was applied, involving an “interpretative listening to the multiple horizons of meaning involved in the interviewees statements, with an attention to the possibilities of continual



reinterpretations within the hermeneutical circle of the interview” (Kvale, 1996, p. 135). Approaching the interview with active listening created a variety of questions throughout the different stages of the qualitative interview. The participants were familiar with their power to decline to answer questions at any time during the interview.

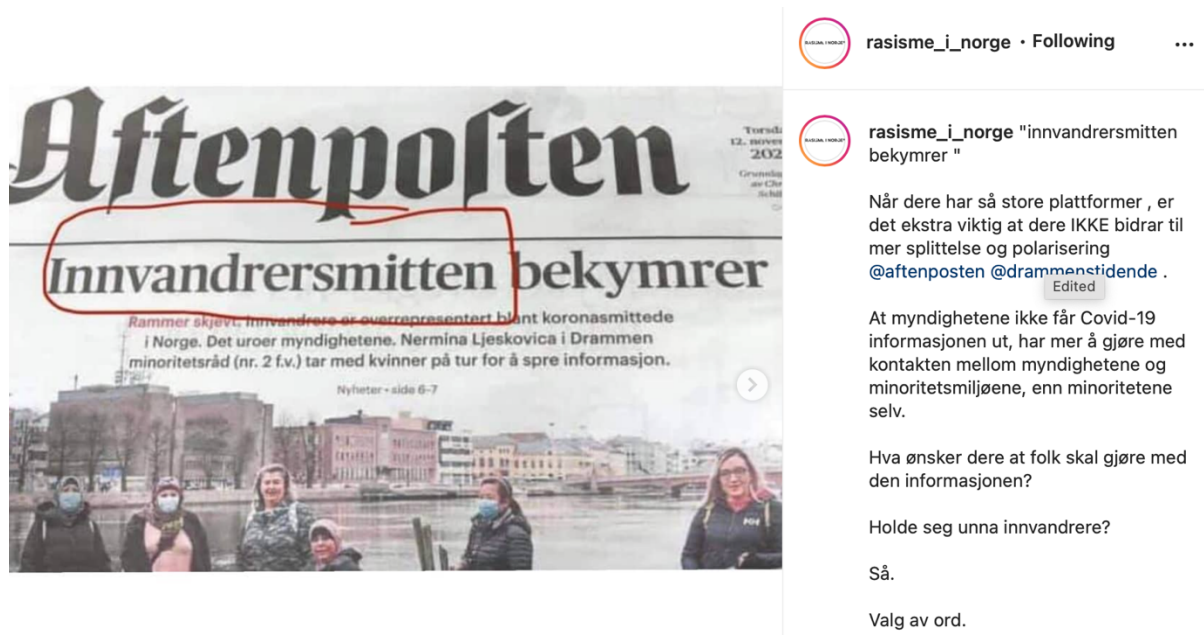
Transcribing the interviews gives the material structure and enables a closer analysis of the data. The process of transcribing is in itself a beginning of the analysis, allowing the interviewer to increase knowledge of the data, as well as starting the process of identifying key terms and discursive categories related to CDA. There were two stages included in the process of transcribing, first transcribing the interviews to Norwegian text and then translating the transcribed interviews to English. There is no standard form for transcription, the transcription process was therefore adjusted to the use and intention of the transcript. The desire to give an impression of the subject’s view gave direction to choices concerning how to transcribe. The entire interview was transcribed verbatim, aiming at translating subjects’ oral style into “a written form in harmony with the specific subjects’ general modes of expression” (Kvale, 1996, p. 170). Paralanguages, long pauses and emotional expressions were included in transcribing to the Norwegian text. For pragmatic reasons, this was excluded when translating to English, to give more structure to the text.

#### **4.3.4 Selecting public posts from social media**

Fairclough’s three-dimensional discourse analysis framework was applied to select data material from a social media platform. The sample was selected based on the coded discourses from the analyzed interviews. Employing Fairclough’s three-dimensional discourse analysis on the transcribed interviews developed an understanding of youth’s perception of discrimination and racism in social media. All of the participants emphasized that their main source of racist or other hateful statements online is through friends or other public profiles. Instagram was mentioned as the main platform for both sharing and gaining new information about the stated theme. The participants mentioned a public Instagram account called “*Rasisme\_i\_Norge*” as a source of information about racism in Norway. On these grounds I choose to analyze Instagram posts from this account, to understand a youth perspective on how racist attitudes are expressed in the virtual space. Instagram posts are spitting documents, created and posted by the owner of the account. Conducting CDA on Instagram posts may lead to the need to explain information and knowledge about the creator of the profile. Knowledge

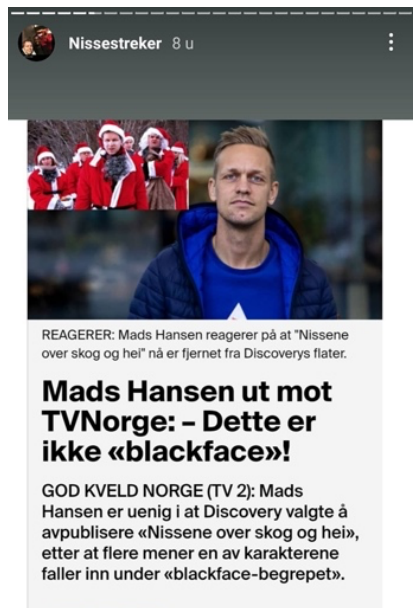
about how the creator of the profile selects stories to post or repost is relevant to understand the context where the posts are published. “*Rasisme\_i\_Norge*” was created in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd. Because of public discourse that there is no racism in Norway, the creator behind the profile wanted to illustrate everyday racism and the complexity of racism in Norway (Rasisme i Norge, 2021). By 19 April 2021 the profile had 31,000 followers and was also known by all of the participants. In the process of including or excluding stories or situations of racism, this profile may have the power to define and redefine the concept of racism amongst its followers. Insight into the creator’s perception of the concept of racism is therefore important knowledge in a further CDA. Instagram posts were then selected on the grounds of events mentioned by the youth and then selected according to themes, limited to a specific time period from May 2020 to May 2021. Based on this criteria three Instagram posts were selected.

### Text one: Response to the corona situation



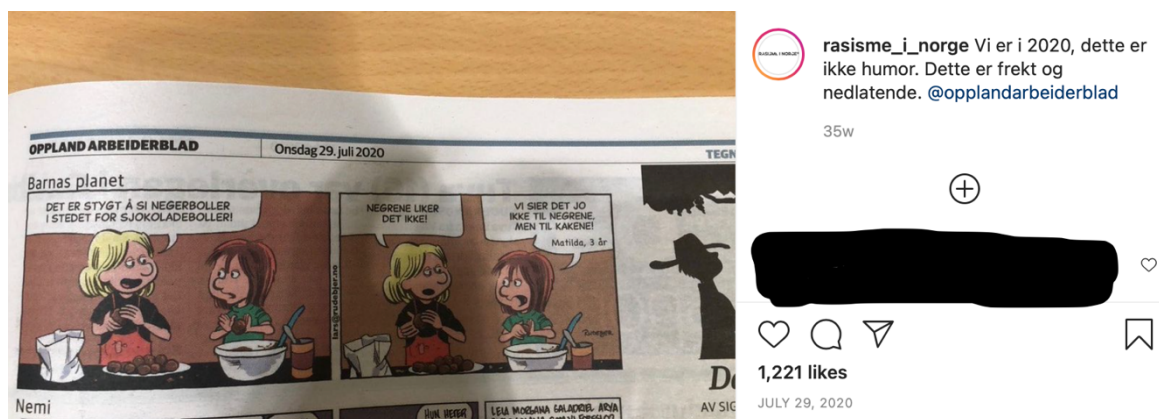
Text 1 *Published 13 November 2020. The post says, in English; “Immigrant contagion worry’s (headline). Befalls obliquely. Immigrants are overrepresented amongst those infected by corona in Norway. This worries the government. Nermina Ljeskociva in Drammen minority council brings women for a walk to spread information”.*

## Text two: Response to the black face debate



*Text 2. Published.. The text says in English: Mads Hansen out against TVNorge: - This is not "blackface"! GOD KVELD NORGE (TV2): Mads Hansen disagree with Discoverys decision to unpublish "the elves over forest and heath", after several people think that one of the characters falls under the "black face- concept".*

## Text three: Racist humor



*Text 3. Published 29 July 2020. The cartoon says, in English, its bad to say nigger bun, instead of chocolate bun (from picture one of the cartoon), Niggers don't like it. But we don't say it to niggers, but to the cakes. (from picture two of the cartoon).*

#### 4.4 Analysis of interviews and public posts from social media

This thesis adopted the framework of Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse analysis when analyzing the collected data from interviews and social media. CDA, I argue, is the suitable approach to interpret this data, as it enables insight into the way in which language produces and legitimizes racism (Bryman, 2016, p. 557). This method was applied to create awareness about how discourse functions as a form of social practice. Empirical analysis establishes a comprehensive understanding of the chosen text, the discourse it is a part of and concrete actions. Fairclough's three-dimensional model is based on three dimensions of discourse, discursive practice, text and social practice, which can be analytically separated. CDA understands the society as an interdependent relationship between discourse and our actual existing surroundings (Bratberg, 2014, p. 44). Following Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse analysis guide, I identified discursive categories based on the transcribed interviews and Instagram posts. Further, I applied Fairclough's systematic text condensation based on three elements of discourse, and hereafter three stages of CDA: (1) *Description phase*; (2) *Interpretation phase*, and (3) *Explanation phase* (Fairclough N. , 1989, p. 109). The first phase, *description* of text, is a microanalysis of text applying various tools of linguistic, semiotic and literary analysis. When describing the text, we distinguish between three types of values of a text: experiential, relational, and expressive. Social realities in discourse are always value-related and when analyzing the objective is to uncover the embedded values in the text with the aim to reveal hidden ideological frameworks. The experiential value of vocabulary is concerned with identifying how ideologically contested representations of discrimination discourse were coded in the interviews and Instagram posts. Meaning the choice of wordings, is evident in the producer's knowledge and beliefs, e.g. the use of racist vocabulary has experiential value, identifying different systems of beliefs. Through identifying classification schemes and over-wording, the writer's worldview is made available. Fairclough describes over-wording as an unusually high degree of wording, which often includes near synonyms (Fairclough N. , 1989, p. 115). Analyzing the interviews, there seems to be an absence of antonym and hyponymy within the conversations, whereas the interviewer and the interviewee mostly agreed on the values offered from both their sides. The idea of relational values of vocabulary is whether the choice of wording depends on and helps create a social relationship between participants (Fairclough N. , 1989, p. 116). For instance, the failure to avoid racist or discriminatory utterance has a relational value, indicating that racist ideology is common ground for the speaker and other participants. Expressive values are tied to subjects and social

identities, through the evaluation of the identities within the interviews and the Instagram posts. The expressive values of words are interconnected with the experiential values, through the feature of classification schemes in constructing social identities represented in the text. I created ideas by connecting the values from both texts to aspects of social practice to understand a possible relation of cause and effect. Fairclough emphasizes that the values of the text only become socially operative if they are embedded in social interaction (Fairclough N. , 1989, p. 140).

In the second phase of analysis, *the interpretation phase*, the objective is to establish the social significance of the text. Interpretation deals with a combination of “what is in the text and what is in the interpreter” (Fairclough N. , 1989, p. 141). In this phase what is implicit for the participants is made explicit (Fairclough N. , 1989, p. 162). Fairclough refers to members resources (MR, for short), as interpretive procedures, that are brought by the interpreter to the interpretation. When analyzing a discourse in the interpretation phase, it refers to the context, the discourse types and what differences and changes occur between the texts. Context includes the situational context, intertextual context and presupposition. Discourse processes are dependent on the background of common-sense assumptions, which are built upon ideologies. This is connected to participants’ presuppositions, their interpretations of intertextual context. Demystification of what is implicit, what is the subject’s position, principles, cohesion and grammar patterns, is a part of the process to draw upon a discourse type. A discourse type is understood as a meaning potential, “a particular constrained configuration of possible experiential, expressive and relational, and connective meanings” (Fairclough N. , 1989, p. 149). Reaching the point where all the relevant discursive categories were identified from the transcribed interviews, three categories of discrimination discourse emerged.

The third phase, *explanation*, is concerned with the social constitution and change of MR as well as its reproduction in discursive practice (Fairclough N. , 1989, p. 163). Fairclough explains the objective of this phase is to:

“Portray a discourse as part of a social process, as a social practice, showing how it is determined by social structures, and what reproductive effects discourses can cumulatively have on those structures, sustaining them or changing them” (Fairclough N. , 1989, p. 163).

Social structures refer in this context to relations of power and social processes, while practices refer to processes and practices of social struggle. Any discourse has determinants and effect which can be investigated at three levels of social organization: (1) *the societal level*, (2) *the institutional level*, and (3) *the situational level*. These different levels feature different perspectives of the same discourse. Fairclough describes the process of how social determinations and effects are mediated by MR as “social structures shape MR, which in turn shape discourses; and discourses sustain or change MR, which in turn sustain or change structures” (Fairclough N. , 1989, p. 163). In this explanation phase I am connecting the identified coded discursive categories to relations of power, domination, and related ideologies, gaining a rational understanding of society.

#### **4.5 Positionality**

In light of my area of study, human rights and multiculturalism, there is an urge to shed light on power imbalance and potential human rights violations. Particularly when applying CDA, awareness of the potential biases and potential clash of perspectives is important. I must always be aware and reflect upon on my positionality and impartiality. Critical research requires some sort of critical perspective, making it important to find a balance between objective research and adopting a critical approach. “Positionality refers to the stance of positioning of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study” (Coghlan & Miller, 2014, p. 628). Researchers position in terms of ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality and ability status will affect every phase of the research process (Coghlan & Miller, 2014). Approaching this study as an outsider, from a position of privilege and power, my research may be limited by a powerful, dominator position. Recognizing and stating my position is therefore crucial when studying this topic from the outside (Okolie, 2005, pp. 264-265). In my case, a white Norwegian female, I need to be aware of my socioeconomic background and position as white Norwegian writing about racism. Moreover, no matter how unpleasant, understanding my white privilege and how it affects my life, is necessary to fight racism. On the other hand, I want to use my position to enlighten others about their position, and hopefully create reflection. Writing this thesis, I have reflected upon whether my white privilege puts me in a position where I could reach several people, and from this point of view I want to use this opportunity to reach out to others with the same privilege, to create afterthought.

## 4.6 The quality of the study

There has been discussion concerning the relevance of measuring quality criteria in qualitative research in terms of validity and reliability. Adapting reliability and validity for qualitative research, some scholars have altered the meanings of the terms. Bryman refers to validity as “whether you are observing, identifying or measuring what you say you are” (Bryman, 2016, pp. 389 - 390). This includes measuring the level of congruence between concepts and observations, as well as the ability to generalize the findings across social settings (Bryman, 2016, p. 390). Data and knowledge from qualitative research about social phenomenon could be used to transfer knowledge to another setting.

Steinar Kvale address issues of quality criteria for interview research. The longer the respondent’s answer is, the better. After the interviews conducted for this study, respondents were asked about their experience and several stated that they felt they were able to talk freely and were comfortable expressing their opinions and answering questions. The length of the answers verifies this and can be used as a measurement of the quality of the interview. Some of the questions were interpreted differently from some of the participants. To secure the quality of the interview, the interviewer followed up with clarifying questions to secure that the intended meaning from the participants was clarified. By stating the interpretation of the participant’s answer, the interviewer is verifying if the assumptions are correct. The interviewer is also a research instrument and is a part of creating a good interview (Kvale, 1996, p. 147).

Considering the validity of a discourse analysis, coherence and fruitfulness should be determined. Steinar Kvale (1996) refers to validity as a process of quality control throughout the stages of knowledge production (p. 236). Evaluating the coherence of the analysis is a key aspect of validity. The fruitfulness of the analysis may be determined in part by, “the explanatory potential of the analytical framework including its ability to provide new explanations” (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 124). In terms of the adequacy of the research design, choices about the analysis should be expressed explicit and concrete to ensure quality in the analysis. Transparency throughout the research process strengthens the quality of the research. Regarding reliability issues relate to interviewing, transcribing and analyzing, an interview is highly contextual and it is not possible to do the same interview twice. A well-developed research design and transparency in the process secures reliability. When translating

the Norwegian transcriptions to English, intersubjective reliability was considered as well as the potential loss of meaning during translation.

#### **4.7 Ethical considerations**

As a researcher there are some ethical considerations to follow, outlined by the Norwegian National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH) (2006). Securing participants integrity and dignity is the most important ethical consideration in all humanities and social science research. Basic principles of research ethics concern voluntary and informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, and minimizing harm. Such ethical considerations become of greater importance when interviewing youth. Bryman states that the “criterion of the ethical integrity of an investigation is its quality” (Bryman, 2016, p. 143). I notified NSD (the Norwegian Centre for Research Data) before collecting data to ensure that all ethical concerns in relation to interactions with youth were being considered. The research was approved by NSD 7 December 2020.

There is a need to always uphold human dignity and respect, give the informants codetermination and sufficient information (NESH, 2016, ss. 12-22). Particularly when using interviews in social science work, it is a universal requirement to gain a fully informed consent. This includes the principles of informed consent as outlined by Bryman, including information about “what the research is about, its purpose, the nature of the involvement in the research, how long their participation is going to take, that their participation is voluntary, that they can withdraw from the participation at any time and storage of the data” (Bryman, 2016, p. 153). Participants were given an information letter prior to the interviews, stating the purpose, methods and intended uses of the research and what participation entails (Bryman, 2016, p. 146). At the interview this information was repeated and the participants were given the opportunity to ask questions if there were any loose ends. One aspect of ethical considerations is if there is compliance between the expectations of the informant and how the data is actually used. Especially when studying controversial topics, like racism, such considerations are particularly important.

Ethical considerations characteristic for CDA include the question of researcher’s integrity. Conducting an interview, the role of the researcher is critical for the quality of scientific knowledge. Kvale understands the integrity of the researcher as “his or her honesty and



fairness, knowledge and experience” (Kvale, 1996, p. 117). He points to three ethical aspects of this role: scientific responsibility, relation to the subjects and researcher’s independence. (Kvale, *InterViews*, 1996, p. 118). As personal interaction affects the interview, vigilance to power asymmetry is important. Concerning the relatively small age difference between the researcher and the subject, sensitivity and commitment to moral issues is important to maintain a professional distance. During interviews it is important to be aware of and respect differing opinions and approaches. The interviewer should provide a debriefing after each interview, which is especially important when conducting interviews about controversial and sensitive topics.

CDA is concerned with “wrongs” in social and political life, such as racism and discrimination. Adopting such an approach requires a balance of “objective” research and advocacy of human rights and desire to make right certain wrongs in social life (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2018, p. 3). The task of CDA should, according to Fairclough, be “subject argumentation, including their own argumentation, to systematic critical questioning in the spirit of open debate, with no ideological *parti-pris*” (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2018, p. 1). Addressing a social wrong, there is a desire to empower victims of discrimination as well as “speak truth to power”. The social researchers’ values intrude all phases of the research process (Bryman, 2016, p. 149). Ethical considerations concerning the role of values and politics were considered at every stage of the research. Critical evaluation is especially important when researching sensitive topics such as discrimination and racism; this includes the importance of factual justifications when applying labels such as “racist” (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2018, p. 19). Awareness and attention to the fact that there are different widespread conceptions of racism is important and that choosing one conception will impact the outcome and process of the research.

#### **4.8 Methodological challenges and limitations**

Reality is complex; data findings are therefore not the whole reality, but representations of it. Choice of theoretical perspective determines which aspects of reality are being researched/covered, and at the same time excludes other aspects. Researching racism and hateful expression in the virtual space showed that as a result of the discourse of Norway as a humanitarian great power, a society where racism does not exist, is that overt racism is seen as a social violation. Overt racism and other hateful expression have to some extent been limited to small, closed groups. At the same time, experiences of racism have been given little space

in the digital media ecosystem. Because I have worked with the public part of racism, I have excluded and have not had access to closed groups, where youth both share experiences of racism and express hate. There are few studies that examines racial attitudes, behaviors and incidences among whites in private settings (Picca & Feagin, 2007). This could potentially be something to work further with in a PhD.

## 5.0 Data findings and analysis

This chapter presents the findings and an analysis drawing on qualitative interviews and selected Instagram posts. I will present a combined analysis of all three levels of Fairclough's three-dimensional model: discursive practice, text and social practice. Applying Fairclough's three-dimensional discourse analysis, I identified three discursive categories: 1) the discourse of boundary construction, 2) the discourse of colorblind racism and 3) the discourse of blaming the victim. In this chapter I turn to Fairclough's explanation phase, connecting the identified coded discursive categories to relations of denial, power and nationalism, gaining a rational understanding of society. The focus of this study has been to understand how patterns of racist and discriminatory discourse are embedded in social media. Some discourses have a stronger impact in the mass media than others (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 74). Identified discourses encourage an alignment with certain social practice. To maintain the position of the discourses, sustaining and reproducing them is necessary. I find that the identified discourses are a part of producing and reproducing power relations between social groups. I will further answer how patterns of racist discourse in Norwegian social media contribute to the production and reproduction of discrimination of minorities and how youth perceive such discourse, and how it affects their perception of life and society.

### 5.1 Discourse one: boundary construction

Van Dijk finds that racist discourse is characterized by polarization between us and them, a construction of boundary and a 'imagined community'. Findings from the interviews and the Instagram posts uncover a discourse of boundary construction. As outlined in the literature review and theoretical framework, drawing borders between us and them can be used as mechanism for producing ethnic nationalism. My findings show examples of how a discourse of boundary construction is a part of the problematization, marginalization, exclusion of the

human rights of ethnic/religious/minority out-groups in Norway (Wodak, Delanty, & Jones, 2008, p. 55).

Data from the interviews provide information about youth experiences of criminalization of migrants by the police. Informants, regardless of their ethnic or racial background, express concerns about the clear proposal of unfavorable treatment of youth with minority background from the east side of Oslo. One of the participants from west side of Oslo commented on the latest report by Ung Oslo (2020):

“I have more friends who live in Oslo east, and they experience being stopped by the police, often for no reason. I live quite centrally on the west side and I am almost never stopped, I have been stopped once, then I was asked if I was okay and if I wanted a ride home and that’s all. I think I read the other day that young people in Oslo east, were caught three times as often for smoking weed, even though there is actually more smoking of hashish on the west side, this says something about the whole situation really” (Andre, Participant).

This statement is an example of how youth experience that ethnic or racial background is a casual factor for the result of encounters with the police. This participant expresses that youth on the west side are met with help and protection by the police, while youth on the east side are meet with punishment. These findings are also supported by the presented literature on media’s racialization of crime and construction of minorities as a problem (Hall, 1981; Henry and Tator, 2002; Miller, 1998). Polarization between the east and the west is also something that another participant expresses concerns about:

“Let’s say that many people have a negative opinion about a certain group in our society, in the sense that it’s damaging for the relations, like in Oslo, if you develop too much prejudices towards people from east or people from the west, the result might be that people don’t look at each other as the same” (Martin, Participant).

Applying CDA on Text one identifies a discourse of boundary construction. This text is an example of how text constructs particular versions of reality, social identities and social relations (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 83), which may be illustrated by turning to analysis

of the linguistic features of the text. The headline: “Immigrant contagion worries”, implies an objective modality, which both reflects and reinforces authority among the majority (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 84; Van Dijk, 1993). By placing immigrants and contagion in the same sentence, a connection between corona and immigrants is established. Such a statement promotes a divide and distance between the ones that are worried and immigrants. Using terms like immigrant indicates that they belong to another ethnic or national group (Van Dijk, 2016). Immigrant then becomes a stigmatizing way of labelling “them”. Such construction of difference between us (Norwegians) and them (immigrants) is conveying a meaning of immigrants as ‘not Norwegian’ and contributes to an existing hierarchy of power between ‘immigrants’ and ‘Norwegians’ (Gullestad, 2002b, p. 51). Applying the word immigrant in relation to politics and debates is an example of the broader development concerning discourse on immigration. Such a development is a part of maintenance of nationalism and legitimation of power by the majority in the Norwegian society. The notion of “imagined community” by Anderson (2006) is a useful concept in the context of my study, as this text is an example on how the majority of the Norwegian society has drawn an imagined border around themselves, excluding immigrants from their communities. Discourse on ethnic nationalism is identified to construct borders between immigrants and the majority. In order to maintain and confirm the internal sameness, unity and sense of belonging, many Norwegians turn to the production of difference and demands of sameness (Gullestad, 2002b, p. 59). Immigrants is in this context employed to strengthen the national imagination of the Norwegian ‘us’ (Gullestad, 2002b, p. 53). Marianne Gullestad’s theory on imagined sameness could be applied to understand the demand of constructions of “outsiders”. “Outsiders” could in this context be understood as a threat to the narrative, concerning Norway as a tolerant, anti-racist and peace-loving society (Gullestad, 2002b, p. 59).

Further, the text uses different linguistic features to reduce agency and emphasize effect, which supports the statement that “migration is politicized before its being analyzed” (Collier, 2013, p. 12). The sentence below the headline emphasizes the effect, while disregarding the action and process that caused it. Stating that the government is worried reduces the responsibility of the government, instead of placing the responsibility on the government’s action plans to reduce and control the spread of the contagion. This can be connected to Van Dijk’s concept of goal-denial, where the government is denying responsibility and has lack of control of over the negative consequences (spread of the corona contagion). This article actively constructs an immigrant identity as uninformed, irresponsible and as a threat. Such rhetoric could be

interpreted as resting on negative other representations (Wodak, KhosraviNik, & Mral, 2020, p. 304). The text is implying categorical modalities, referring to all immigrants as less worried about corona or less informed than others and as a threat to spreading the virus. Constructing immigrants as generally of less aware of social, economic, and political consequences than the majority is, according to Feagins, a part of the “white racial framing”, constructing whites as superior in the making and keeping of the nation (Picca & Feagin, 2007, p. 9). Such a construction creates an image of immigrants as less liable and loyal to the keeping of the nation. Analyzing the text as social practice, the public discourse concerning the corona situation, is characterized by the call for a national project (*dugnad*), uniting the society to fight it together<sup>3</sup>. There is an intertextual link between the discourse on the national project against Corona and immigrants exclusion from those who ‘built the country’ in contemporary discourse (Gullestad, 2002b, p. 53). This excludes ‘immigrants’ from being a part of the national project (*dugnad*).

Such demonstrates certain established attitudes towards immigrants. Reflecting several of Van Dijk’s identified characteristics of racist discourse. Van Dijk points to implying that ‘they’ are all the same and ‘we’ are all individually different as the first step of in-group out-group polarization. Further, portraying immigrants as less informed than ‘we’ are creates a distance between us and them. Following Van Dijk’s Discourse-Cognition-Society triangle, positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation is applied to sustain racist attitudes and polarized mental models.

This text signals a low degree of interdiscursivity, which according to Fairclough contributes to the reproduction of established order. As a consequence, the established unequal power relations between minorities and the majority in Norway is concealed and strengthened by the discourse in question. This text is an example of how media elites are actively contributing to public reproduction of anti-minority resentment, and the potential power media has to influence the minds of the receiver. When put into a broader social context, this text indicates the ongoing struggle for immigrants to establish a Norwegian identity.

Analyzing this headline in terms of Wodak’s conception of discursive discrimination, there is a clear separation between immigrants and Norwegians. Such a creation of otherness and

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/meninger/i/OpAz6q/corona-viruset-en-nasjonal-dugnad-er-noedvendig>,  
<https://sykepleien.no/2020/03/korona-hoie-oppfordrer-til-dugnad-og-solidaritet>

outsiders imposes negative other-presentation or proposal of unfavorable treatment. Investigating the dialectical relationship between this text, its discursive practice and a wider social practice, the result of such a discursive practice is both proposals of unfavorable treatment and negative other representations (Wodak, KhosraviNik, & Mral, 2020). Stavanger municipality asked Somalian health workers to provide a negative corona test before coming to work based on their ethnic background (Stavanger Aftenblad, 2020). This is an example of exclusionary practices through argumentative devices. Presumptions of immigrants as less responsible is an example of negative other representations. This separation of people into categories is part of the creation of insiders and outsiders.

These are examples of how discourse has the power to marginalize, exclude and limit the human rights of minority out-groups. Findings are in line with the literature on Norwegian nationalism. Strong feelings and pride in being a Norwegian point to the presence of ethnic nationalism. Differentiating themselves from others contributes to strengthening the feeling of nationalism.

## **5.2 Discourse two: colorblind racism**

The discourse of colorblind racism has multiple facets. Henry and Tator (2002) identified the discourse of colorblindness as one of the dominant discourses of democratic racism. Avoidance of public race talk has both an individual and social dimension. In order to maintain the narrative as a humanitarian and moral superpower, elites need to reproduce such an understanding. Van Dijk's concept of denial is useful to identify the overall assumption that racism does not exist in a democratic society (Henry & Tator, 2002). Whites tend to think of racism as a social problem rooted in a distant past. Colorblindness is especially asserted in frontstage arenas through white moral assertive ignorance of race. Elites maintain their identity by reproducing the understanding that they are "colorblind", that they "do not notice race", and that "race no longer matters" (Bonilla-Silva, 2013). Operating from the perspective of racial transparency, white's ignorance of 'race', reproduces and perpetuates the privilege, normalcy and power of whiteness. Such colorblind ideology is also visible in the public that has internalized the thought that racism is not something that concerns Norwegian society, which is a comfortable thought. Acknowledging existing racism in society would, in the case of Norway, have social, political and cultural implications. Accepting existing racism in society

would, at the same time, mean acknowledging that today's legal protection against discrimination is insufficient.

As described in my literature review, whites are in charge of how minorities are presented and represented in the virtual space. Presenting ideas that are detached from minorities own story, creates a gap between narratives about minorities and their self-understanding. Minorities have little power to control or resist the stereotypical images constructed by media elites, creating problems with identification for victims of discrimination. This is even more problematic when racist events occur in the media. First, racist events are described from a white perspective, which is problematic when acknowledging that a person's racial identity influences their perspective and consciousness (Stokke, 2021). This is reflected in the presented literature from Doane and Essed on the "perception" gap between blacks and whites. The "perception" gap is visible in different ways of understanding discourse, e.g. the presented Instagram post, Text two: Response to the black face debate.

Text two illustrates a contrast in understanding of the black face debate between blacks and whites. Connecting Text two to Van Dijk's society component reflects the power that symbolic elites have over public discourse on immigrants and minorities. Text two presents an utterance from a Norwegian public figure; according to Van Dijk, he is in a position of special power resources by having the power and influence to utter his beliefs in one of Norway's biggest newspapers. These findings support the general notion of a "perception" gap between blacks and whites, resulting from differentiated white and black experiences of racial privilege and discrimination (Stokke, 2021, p. 14). This text shows how a white, powerful Norwegian celebrity is equating his experience of what racism is and is not above black experience. Constructing white racial unconsciousness is a part of reproducing whiteness and an unconsciousness among whites about their white privilege. This is also confirmed by the participants, when talking about the effect racism has on Norwegian society:

"For example, this case with Mads Hansen who posts a picture himself painted in blackface on Instagram and expresses that it isn't black face and stuff like that. When you see such big names in Norway, great persons with a lot of influence on the Norwegian people speaking about such a big topic as racism, and then they are not taking the side you wished they would. That is really sad and I think that you do get worried that it will make more people less open to receive information that comes about

racism [...] I think that stuff like this has a really negative effect on the society in Norway” (Janne, Participant).

This statement can be placed in two contexts. First, the participant expresses concerns about the fact that a powerful and influential person like Mads Hansen does not acknowledge a black perspective and the further consequences that his example will influence other whites to be less critical about their white privilege. Mads Hansen has power and influence to produce and generate consensus.

Secondly, the presented reluctance of the Norwegian society to ascribe a sentiment or an action as racist is also persistent through the interviews. Racism is universally designated as immoral, ascribing something as racism would explicitly question the morality of the entire society. This is consistent with the interviews, where participants seem reluctant to describe something as racism and appear insecure in their conceptual understanding of the term. Findings from the interviews show that concrete examples of racism are hard to establish. When discussing racist topics, one of the participants points to something as “hard racism” and another as “not racism racism” (Martin, Participant). CDA uncovers the social structures and practices that have established the discourses on racism. The participants’ utterances are examples of Norway’s discursive and social practices on racism. Norway’s social practice towards racism appears through Norwegian attitudes towards minorities and a multicultural society; their discursive practice is visible through national legal instruments regarding racial discrimination as well as through media’s portrayals of racial events. Norway’s repeated reluctance to include the term “race” as a prohibited ground of discrimination is a part of the discursive practice of a colorblind society. CDA uncovers how such social and discursive practices construct the complex creation of meaning: “the knowledge and beliefs of the producer in question, which is evident in the choice of wording”. Van Dijk emphasizes that the use of terms like discrimination, prejudice, stereotypes, bias and racial motivation “presupposes the denial of systematic racism of the ingroup or dominant society” (Van Dijk, 1992, p. 93). By using the word discrimination instead of racism, this choice of wording indicates that it is more ‘harmless’ and it is easier to cope with. Referring to something as racism challenges our understanding of our personal values, while discrimination is to some extent a more acceptable part of the society. The choice of wording could potentially contribute to denial, minimalizing, and naturalization of racism as a social and political phenomenon.



People often avoid public race talk. Several of the participants uttered the lack of learning about race and contemporary racism in school. Despite the emergence of technologies and the growing digital media ecosystem, students report that they do not learn about how to communicate online and how to react to hateful expressions. This is also confirmed by previous literature (Osler & Lindquist, 2018; Osler, 2015).

White participants with Norwegian origin found it hard to analyze how they themselves contribute to individual and systematic racism. This supports Picca and Feagin's findings that whites struggle to critically examine their own contribution to racism in society. This may relate to the socialization processes whites go through in internalizing ideas of white superiority. According to the presented literature, being able to reflect upon one's own racial position is related to fully and seriously acknowledging the present realities of racial oppression, inequalities and white privilege in society (Picca & Feagin, 2007, p. 274). Such a reluctance could also be understood in terms of a Norwegian notion of goodwill and strong sense of nationalism, resulting in a selective lack of attention that overlooks undesirable features. Applying CDA on the interviews, findings show that the participant with majority background that lived on the east side of Oslo showed the most reflections over racial position in society. For example, in expressing that racism is not static:

“I think it's important that people have to almost just realize that you can't behave the way you've done normally, and you have to develop all the time as well, just suddenly it becomes wrong to say something that's perfectly normal to say now, but you almost just have to 'get with the program'” (Line, Participant).

As well as expressing the advantage with growing up and interacting with people from different cultures:

“I have gone to a school with people from different cultural backgrounds and have become extra conscious that one should respect everyone and be good at looking at the advantages and disadvantages one has individually” (Line, Participant).

These findings support the understanding that interracial dialogue is an important part of understanding a minority perspective and creates consciousness about one's racial position.

Accepting that perspectives and awareness are learned would be an important feature in an multicultural society based on equality and human dignity for all.

Several of the participants relate racism to the far right, either at an individual level or in the media. Limiting these ideological elements to the far right, creates distance between the majority's responsibility and role in such. in terms of being exposed for far rights opinions. Van Dijk addresses that racism is something that in general public discourse is reserved for others, either the lower-class whites or to right-wing parties. In this way, racism is denied as being a part of the ingroup of white citizens (van Dijk, 1992, p. 94).

“I believe that because of the way algorithms are organized you interact with people you agree with, and you are exposed to posts that support your worldview; that makes people more polarized. If that is everything you see and your opinions are at all times confirmed by others and you always get confirmations by other things, I believe that makes people more polarized and that people are pushed to extreme points where they get so extreme that they become racist” (Nils, participant).

Several of the participants point to changes in how racism is conceptualized. There is a difference in how the participants describe the concept of racism. Participants with a minority background express more consciousness around indirect racism than the participants with majority background. One of the participants focuses what she defines normalized racism:

“Such as slang words that I mentioned earlier, which might just be thrown around, such as ‘nigger’ and stuff like that, words that you don’t necessarily think could be perceived personal because for that person it's normalized, at least in some environments and at some schools” (Andre, Participant).

“There is a lot of normalized racism in Norway [...], those small things like the way people treat you and that people may look at you a bit closer and that they expect for example, I hear very often, ‘but you speak Norwegian so well’” (Janne, Participant).

Several interviewees express experiences with racism in the form of a compliment. By stating that a person is well-articulated, infers that they are contradicting something other than which was expected, they are an exception of the norm. This supports an understanding of normalized

racism as something internalized which plays out in the form of treating and expecting different things from people with minority background, and these specific expectations based on someone's appearance come in clear contrast with the discourse of being colorblind. Van Dijk defines this form of argumentation strategy as intentional-denial. In practice, this denial may appear as a person making a distinction between their intention (giving a compliment) and their activity (saying that the other person is good or better in Norwegian than what they expected based on their appearance). Further, a person may empathically deny this as racism and reverse the accusation to the victim of racism as oversensitive and exaggerating.

Janne gives several examples of what she understands as normalized racism, such as cultural appropriation and usage of the word "negro". Such expressions of racism support the general notion of Essed's understanding of everyday racism, where racism becomes a part of the expected, unquestionable and normal practice of the dominant group (Stokke, 2021, s. 13).

### **5.2.1 Racist humor**

This study identifies racist humor as a discourse. Most of the interview participants shared the perception that racism in social media is characterized by racist humor. For some it is hard to express how it unfolds, which can be explained by the growing subtle forms and aspects of racism in the media ecosystem. Racist humor allows and reinforces everyday and systematic forms of white supremacy (Pérez, 2017, p. 957). Humor challenges constraints on public racist discourse and functions as a form of legitimizing racist utterance (Pérez, 2017). The participants verified the existence of today's recirculation of racist jokes across the internet, supporting the presented literature on the role of racist humor in the reproduction and circulation of racism in society.

Several of the participants highlight the public consensus of racist jokes as "just a joke":

"Also, there probably other things as well, like normalized racism in Norway, so that it is just a joke it is only something for laughs, so it is probably a lot that has gone by unseen as well" (Janne, Participant).

"Some people just look at it as a joke, not that they actually mean it sort of, let's say I share an anti-Semitic post, but it doesn't mean that I actually have something against Jews, many look at it as satire, while others think it is offensive" (Martin, Participant).

Denying the negative cognitive counterpart is, according to Van Dijk, identified as an argumentative strategy called intentional-denial, allowing the individual making the joke to spread racist jokes without concern of the consequences. Intentional-denial asserts that the individual making the joke should not be criticized for it. Thus, justifying joking behavior with accusations of the receiver of being too sensitive, the offended becomes a target of racialized hostility. Such a discourse allows racist humor to reinforce everyday and systemic forms of white supremacy (Feagin, 2013). Pérez labels this as “equal opportunity offender” rhetoric, implying that targets of racist jokes are “easily offended”, creating the illusion that racist jokes are “just a joke” (Pérez, 2017, p. 965).

Pérez understands white blackface performance as a form of humor allowing whites to feel racially superior (Pérez, 2017, p. 960). The presented Instagram post Text two: Response to Blackface, illustrates the cognitive dissonance and “perception” gap between persistent racial discrimination in society and whites’ perception of it. One of the participants with minority background refers to the blackface debate in their interview.

Joking allows feelings and views that are repressed by social pressure to be expressed. When participants were asked, several of the participants state that they often receive or are exposed to what they define as “edgy” memes. This indicates that edgy memes work as a site for the reproduction and circulation of racism in society (Pérez, 2017).

“I have seen many memes that are, I don’t think that I have ever seen memes that are, it’s hard to explain, but that has racist content, it’s not in the sense that they target someone, there are some memes that makes fun of what happened to George Floyd, so, its racism because you ‘undermine’ everything that happened, but in a sense, how can I explain it but yes, just kind of not taking what happened seriously” (Nikolai, Participant).

When asking how this racism is expressed, several of the participants find it difficult to name. This illustrates the development of the concept of racism, from overt racism to a more subtle manifestation. Presented literature illustrates the development around the concept of racism, as moving towards a manifestation that is coded and covert.

One participant points to the fact that these memes and jokes are often only shared in private groups:

“If you have an opinion that you like such memes, and share such to each other, but wouldn’t dare to add these to a public story with let’s say 200 followers with friends and acquaintances because you could get criticism for it” (Martin, Participant).

This can be conceptualized with Goffman’s concepts of backstage and frontstage, where backstage behavior allows for overt racism to continue. Following Picca and Feagin’s analysis of the meaning and impact of joking in social context, this exemplifies the how jokes serve to unite a group and decrease social distance within their “in-group”.

Text three, a post from the Instagram profile “*Rasisme\_i\_Norge*”, is an example of how racist humor allows people to partake in the “forbidden fruit” of racist discourse (Pérez, 2017). In Text three, it is argued that the word “negrobun” is something that is not accepted because “negros” do not like the usage of the word. By attributing the argumentative cause of not using the word, to the feelings of “negros”, the text indicates that using the word “negro” is legitimate if there are not any “negros” present. This text is an illustration of the concept of backstage behavior. The word “negrobun” uses the word “negro” to describe something. Using the word “negro” as an adjective is also something that participants described:

“I’ve heard people say ‘negro’ like they actually mean that what happened was bad, and then use the word to explain that, so instead of using a regular swear word term of abuse, they use a racist expression to describe how bad it is” (Martin, Participant).

### **5.3 Discourse three: Blaming the victim**

In the process of legitimizing white group dominance, my case studies demonstrate how any actions taken to challenge this ideology are likely to result in a backlash against minorities (Van Dijk, 1991). An analysis of conducted interviews, as well as data from Instagram posts, identify a discourse of blaming the victim. Blaming the victim, is according to Van Dijk, a denial strategy. This denial of racism has both an individual and social dimension.

“I feel that black lives matter, together with cancel culture, there are still people that say like, they are just sensitive, so if you call too many things racist, and then if you point to something as racist people believe you are exaggerating. Calling people racist has in a sense been used up” (Martin, participant).

Several of the participants that have personal experiences with racism express that people often react to their experience with, “you are too sensitive” (Martin, Participant), “don’t make it a racial thing” (Janne, Participant), “if you perceive it like racism then it becomes racism” (Janne, Participant). Such rhetoric implies that victims of racist jokes are easily offended, and blameworthy. At the same time it infers that the person telling the joke is not to blame resigning the responsibility to the victim and their reaction. Such victim blaming could be understood as the persons telling the jokes failure to empathize with the victims as well as their human drive for self-preservation. As illustrated, participants with minority background often encounter the culture of victim blaming, resulting in stigmatization. Implying that victims of racist jokes are easily offended is according to Pérez labeled as equal opportunity offender rhetoric. Equal opportunity offender rhetoric is a part of enabling racist jokes to circulate. Helland understands such reactions are a result of the fact that “racism” as a concept is never used in public discourse in Norway, because of the fact that Norwegians recognize themselves as non-racist. Despite such reactions to racism, describing someone as racist seems to arouse much more resistance (Helland, 2014, p. 108). Implying that all reasonable citizens are against discrimination and racism indicates that, from the privileged point of view, their actions are natural and reasonable, and they are not able to be racist or discriminative. This makes it difficult for victims of discrimination to have their experiences legitimized (Agora 2014).

Applying CDA to the interviews, I find that some of the participants with minority background express an internalization of blaming the victim. The analysis identifies contradictions between participants and reactions to racism. This could be understood as insecurity towards designating something as racism. Following the literature review, defining, and acknowledging something as racism affects the victim:

“It’s okay for me because it’s not like I expect that they will be able to put themselves in the same situation” (Janne, Participant).

### **5.3.1 Minimizing racial experience**

Two of the participants interviewed experienced in conversations that some people express that an increased focus on racism is too much and that the scope and extent of it is exaggerated:

“A topic that often occurs is the premises of white privilege, if it’s something that is real or not. I think that many people have changed their opinion, concerning how far it goes, but I don’t feel like it necessarily has led to many changes, like for example calling people racist, is something that has been lost its power. I feel like there has been an increased awareness, but people that have disagreed think that it has been too much, that it’s not a huge problem. So, maybe more polarized than before” (Martin, Participant).

“In my school there has been people that have questioned the extent of racism and if it’s really just bullshit and that the police don’t kill that many, and there are also white people that are being murdered” (Nikolai, Participant).

The current debate surrounding the sources of racism has, to some extent, moved from human dignity and equality to whether people are too sensitive. If youth with minority background are to be questioned about their experience with racist encounters, this would make them question their intuition and their ability to be rational human beings. This entails that they must defend why they experience something as racism, which could potentially make them question themselves and further internalize that they are too sensitive, and that their feelings are not appropriate.

#### **5.4 The discourse of freedom of speech**

Analyzing interviews showed how most of the participants repeatedly focused on the importance of one’s right to free speech, and the importance of that right in a democracy. Talking about minorities right to be protected from hateful expressions, democracy was not mentioned. This shows the constructed and internalized discourse around freedom of expression in Norway, and the central place it has as a core and highly valued right. This is consistent with findings from the CDA of Text two, where the Text emphasizes his disagreement concerning the canceled TV show. In contrast, Gevan Titley questions how the content and focus of such debates are concerned with the limitations of one’s freedom of expression, rather than how it contributes democracy. The debate is caught up on what is and is not racism; racism is, therefore, understood as a way to shoot down free speech. Hateful expression often challenges the freedom of speech, challenging the balance between expressions that are interdict and expressions that should be tolerated.

As previously emphasized, all the participants talked about how BLM has raised their awareness about racism in Norway and that more people talk about it. This illustrates the importance of creating a space to talk about racism. One of the participants expressed how BLM has brought the power back to black people. Another expresses the polarization that the movement has created:

“Yes, definitely. I believe that there are more people that would say that racism is wrong now than some months ago. But it’s not like its only has had a good influence (...) it has also showed those who that don’t agree, who that believe that racism doesn’t exist or it’s not a problem in the society, so it complicated, and it creates in a way a divide. But on the other hand, you need to see the problem to find a solution to it, so in that sense it is positive that we know who has such opinions so that we can talk to them and make it better, but yes it creates a distinction” (Nikolai, Participant).

The hostile environment that is developing in the comment sections has negative psychological outcomes for the ones who are exposed to racism. Moving forward, media’s own responsibility in combating racism and discrimination should be addressed. This implies addressing how and if they should be accountable for their angle on a subject, especially in cases where they expect a polarized comment section, making journalists and media accountable and strengthening their responsibility with how they portray minorities and Muslims. To hold media accountable for their production and reproduction of racism, as well as their power to manufacture a better and more reflected construction.

## 6.0 Concluding remarks

To conclude, I find that there is a tension between democratic liberalism as a defining characteristic of Norwegian society and the racist ideology embedded in the majority culture and public discourses. The majority’s seemingly increasing need to defend majority culture and protect their “imagined community”, results in proactive immigration and naturalization of policies. The Norwegian context present a paradoxical behavior, between taking care of minorities needs and defending the majority’s values (Kogan, 2017, p. 388). Although this research does not represent the full discursive universe in Norwegian social media, my findings



present clear proposal of unfavorable treatment of migrants in public discourse, resulting in boundary construction between Norwegian minorities and majorities. Selected texts are example of “how some of the media constructed particular discursive events and their power to create, solidify, change and reproduce power relations” (Henry & Tator, 2002, s. 72). These findings show how racist discourse in Norwegian social media is a part of producing and reproducing discrimination against minorities in the Norwegian society, and how elite racism is particularly influential in the process. Further, these findings show how racist humor exists and is widely practiced and circulated across various social contexts, and how jokes function to increase social distance against the ones targeted. Social media provides a platform for the circulation of racist jokes, whereas racist humor allows the majority, in the name of ‘colorblindness’, to partake in racist discourse.

In a time where there never has been so much speech, free speech is said to be in crisis, ‘threatened’ by anti-racists who respond to and claim justice for victims of racial discrimination (Titley, 2020). Moreover, the dominant consensus in western discourse is that there is no racism. I find that denials of the existence of racism, result in a remanence of bias and the remanence of discrimination as unacknowledged and invisible. Upholding ideas of the Norwegian society as a liberal democracy, there is a seeming consensus that Norwegians cannot possibly be racist. Concluding that there is an overall refusal and denial of the existence of racism on both an individual and structural level in the Norwegian society.

The presented Norwegian society illustrates the context that youths develop their understanding and perception of life and society. This thesis has addressed youths increasingly usage of social media and how such effect their construction of identity and perception of a multicultural society. Increasing challenges concerning partisan information, disinformation and ‘fake news’, requires critical thinking amongst their users, as well as places a greater responsibility to the government in securing that media editors his hold accountable for following norms and ethical principles of journalism. Data findings from the interviews show how youth emphasize the potential opportunity social media platforms creates in putting blatant acts of racism on trial. Participants emphasize the increase of awareness around racism in Norway after the murder of George Floyd. This highlights the importance of creating a space to talk about racism and need to create “crack in the mirror” to pressure whites to critically examine their own contribution to individual and systematic racism in the society (Picca & Feagin, 2007, p. 274).

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## APPENDIX

### APPENDIX 1: Interview guide

# Interview guide

#### Introduction

- Purpose of the research
- Confidentiality
- Use of information
- Right to withdraw
- Right to ask questions and report concerns
- Permission for audio recording
- Consent of participation and publication of the project after completion

#### Demographic Information

- Gender
- Age
- School area
- Place of birth
- Citizenship

#### Political engagement in social media

- Which platforms do you have accounts and what websites do you most often visit?
- Which social
- Are you engaged in political or other social debates? If so, where would this come to play? in school, between friends, social media etc.? To what extent do you think your friends engage with political or other social debates?
- To what extent would you say your teachers facilitate for discussion about social events in the society? Do you discuss about topics that are heated in social media in school? Do you articulate events in school? Do you experience that school activities reflect socially relevant issues? How do you perceive the role of social media framing political debates in your school?
- How would you describe the debate climate on social media? Please give examples (closed groups, public groups, facebook, twitter, Snapchat, Tik-tok, Instagram, any other?).
- Do you create post, or share content about, for or against racist movements in social media? If so, give examples?
- Do you often experience racism in social media? If so, what type of content do they share? How do you react (passively or actively)?
- Are there platforms where you more frequently experience discriminatory or racist content?
- Can you give examples of memes, posts, and content that you consider racist or is disrespectful to human rights/minorities rights?

- Can you give examples of memes, posts, and content that represent hate speech?
- Do you receive/send politically incorrect memes from friends even though the meme's message doesn't correlate with your or your friends' political views? (What do you think is the impact of these memes?)
- Have you engaged with any political movement related to discriminatory practices in Norway? Would you be able to name one political movement related to discriminatory practices? Have you read any content related to discriminatory practices in Norway?
- Over the last year, the movement black lives matters have gained a lot of attention. Have you engaged in this movement? If so, how? In such case, from which platforms do you get or share your information?
- An organization called SIAN (Stopp Islamiseringen av Norge), have for the past months held a series of demonstrations. What do you know about their demonstrations, and from which platforms do you get your information?

### **Racism**

- How would you describe racism?
- How do you perceive the terms race and ethnicity?
- Do you learn about racism in school? Do you learn about how to handle racism in school?
- Do you or others in your acquaintances experience racism in your everyday life? Is so how do you talk about it?
- How do you perceive racism in the platforms that you use, can you give examples? How do you respond to such content, do you act passively or actively?
- What role social media plays in the production and reproduction of racism and social inequality?
- When you think about racism do you see a man or a woman? Why? In what way do you think gender matters for the experience of racism?
- Do you think black people are treated differently? Are there different opportunities for white or black people in Norway? How do you know this? Have you ever witnessed someone being treated unfairly?
- What's the role of poverty in your conception of race? What comes to your mind when you hear structural racism? Institutional racism?
- Ethnic minority youths are often portrayed in connection to crimes and social problems, how would you say this stereotypical image have disseminated?
- Do you experience that racist jokes are often used in social media?
- In terms of music, have you reflected on its role shaping racist/anti-racist awareness?
- How would you explain that racist attitudes and actions have outlived so many generations?

### **Freedom of expression in a multicultural society**

- Can you share some reflections concerning limitations on freedom of speech in connection to hateful expressions? Would you say that all ideas and opinions should be equalized and expressed?
- How can the principle of freedom of expression function in today's multicultural society?
- What are your take on «**Cancel culture**», meaning public shaming of opinions that are viewed as social violation, for example racist opinions? How do you react and act when you meet opinions that are different from your own? Give examples.
- Online news sites have adopted a variety of strategies to deal with offensive comments (including turning “comments off,” adopting aggressive comment moderation policies), how do you perceive this in your digital media ecosystem?
- How do you perceive the current public debate on integration and the related discourse drawn around ethnic- minority youths?
- How does your experience with Norwegian discursive discrimination affect your perception of our society?

## APPENDIX 2: letter of consent

### **Are you Interested in Taking Part in the Research Project:**

“Discourse and discrimination: Social medias role in the production and reproduction of discrimination of ethnic minorities in Norway”

You are welcome to join this project “Discourse and discrimination: Social medias role in the production and reproduction of discrimination of ethnic minorities in Norway”, exploring how Norwegian youths experience racism and discrimination in social media. In this letter I will inform about the project and what participation will involve for you.

#### **Background and Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to understand how social media contributes to the production and reproduction of discrimination of ethnic minorities in Norway. This study discursively examines how youths perceive topics such as racism, hate speech and their reflections concerning the balancing of ones right of freedom of expression and the protection against hate speech. Interviews with youths will increase knowledge about the power of language in the digital age, as well as the extent and impact of racist and discriminatory statements online. Research about perceived racism and discrimination among youths are deficient. This study could potentially contribute development of knowledge and competence in the area.

This project is being complete through the University of South-Eastern Norway (USN) as part of a Master’s thesis in Human Rights and Multiculturalism.

#### **Why are you being asked to participate?**

The individuals that have been selected for interview are based on the criteria that they are:

- Youths from 16 – 18 years old
- Lives in Oslo commune or go to school in Oslo commune

#### **What does participation involve for you?**

The main features of the project will include interviews of approximately one hour. Questions will concern political engagement in social media, personal relationship to racist and discriminatory expressions in social media, thoughts about hateful expressions online and social medias role in the production and reproduction of racism. Audio recordings will be used during interviews.

#### **Participation is voluntary**

It is voluntary to participate in this study, and you can at any moment withdraw your consent without giving a reason. You have the right not to answer a particular or any single question, as well as request the interviewer not to use a particular or any of your interview material. If you withdraw, all information about you will be deleted.

### **Your personal privacy - how we will store and use your personal data**

All personal data will be treated confidentially. Only I as a researcher and the project supervisor will have access to your data during the project period. We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified in this information letter. We will process your personal data confidentially and in accordance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and Personal Data Act).

Personal data will be stored separately from interview recordings and protected from unauthorised access by using encrypted passwords. The original recording will be deleted from the equipment (mobile telephone) as soon as the interview is transferred to an encrypted unit (USB or external hard drive), and then transcribed. The publication of this project could include information regarding your gender, age range, country of residence, place of birth and school affiliation.

### **What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?**

The data will be anonymised to safeguard your confidentiality. The project is scheduled for completion by June 2021. Once the project is completed, all data will be deleted and only anonymized data will be stored after the project is scheduled to end.

### **Your rights**

As long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Data Protection Officer or The Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

### **What gives us the right to process your personal data?**

Your personal data will be processed based on your consent. The project has been notified and approved by the Data Protection Official for Research, NSD - Norwegian Centre for Research Data AS.

### **Where can I find out more?**

If you have further questions about this project or want to exercise your rights, please contact Vibeke Sørby at [Vibeke\\_s@msn.com](mailto:Vibeke_s@msn.com) or by telephone: +47 46 42 42 56.

Additionally, you can contact the project supervisor Associate Professor Gabriela Mezzanotti Faculty of Culture, Religion and Social Studies at the University of South-Eastern Norway (USN) by telephone: +4741312507 or by email: [Gabriela.Mezzanotti@usn.no](mailto:Gabriela.Mezzanotti@usn.no).

Yours sincerely,

*Gabriela Mezzanotti*  
Researcher/supervisor

*Vibeke Sørby*  
Project Leader Student

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## **Consent**

I have received and understood information about the project “Discourse and discrimination: Social medias role in the production and reproduction of discrimination of ethnic minorities in Norway” and have been given the opportunity to ask questions.

### **I give consent:**

participate in interview

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(Signed by participant, date)