

TITLE PAGE

"We don't throw stones, we throw flowers": Race discourse and race evasiveness in the Norwegian university classroom

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ABSTRACT

How do university students and instructors engage in discussions about race and racism in a country where speaking about race is perceived as racist? In Norway, as in much of Europe, the concept of 'race' is silenced, discarded as a wrong-headed remnant of Nazism, despite continued documentation of racial discrimination in labor, housing, education and interpersonal interaction. We used Membership Category Analysis to explore race-related interactions in classroom discourse in three university courses. We find that students and instructors implicitly equate Norwegianness with whiteness, peacefulness, and innocence, and characterize racism with deviance and non-Norwegianness. The national belonging of racialized 'Others' in Norway is ambiguous: accepted, but not unproblematically. The category race is elided with the concepts of culture, ethnicity and biology. We propose discursive meta-awareness as an educational approach to countering race evasiveness (formerly known as 'colorblindness').

KEYWORDS: race, racialization, discourse analysis, race evasiveness, colorblindness, higher education

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“Imagine an ignorance militant, aggressive, not to be intimidated, an ignorance that is active, dynamic, that refuses to go quietly – not at all confined to the illiterate and uneducated but propagated at the highest levels of the land, indeed presenting itself unblushingly as knowledge.” (Mills 2007, p.13)

Europe purged itself of racism after World War II, or so the story goes (Goldberg 2006; Lentin 2008). In the everyday telling of things, toxic ideas about human hierarchies were thrown out with the Nazis – and Nazism itself, its dehumanization and racism, was an aberration in the long European tradition of equality, democracy, Enlightenment. Furthermore, Europeans today see themselves as free of racism – with a few repugnant exceptions, such as the Norwegian mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik (Bangstad 2014) – and the concept of ‘race’ is discarded as an old-fashioned and wrong-headed relic (Applebaum 2015; Goldberg 2006). We know this narrative to be deeply ahistorical (Hall, 2017; Wekker 2016). Race was invented in Europe, as ‘human’ was universalized as a free, liberal being, against the boundaries of what is non-human (Balibar 1994, Grosfoguel 2013; Lentin 2008; Lowe 2015). The systematic schism between the human and non-human, ‘the civilized’ and ‘the savage,’ served as a rationale for European colonization (Grosfoguel 2013; Grosfoguel, Oso and Christou 2015; Hall 2017). The Third Reich, framed in the prevailing story as so exceptional, borrowed and developed techniques with origins from earlier European colonialism - and from U.S. apartheid in the Jim Crow era (Whitman 2017) - including the concentration camp, the idea of racial hygiene, and the structures of emergency law (Goldberg 2006). Yet these historical continuities are excised from contemporary European consciousness, the histories of colonialism and racism are uncoupled, and the relevance of race is denied (Goldberg 2006).

On the northern cusp of Europe, Norway's story about race can be similarly characterized, with its own local variations as to why race is not relevant. Norway is positioned as a small, rural and homogenous country with a collectivist orientation. Norway's national narrative depicts the country as the scrappy underdog of Scandinavia: subordinated to Denmark in a union for 400 years, followed by a 100-year union with Sweden until independence in 1905, and finally occupied by Nazi forces before liberation and the opportunity to become the peaceful, international development-focused country Norway is today. The nation is presented as innocent of racism primarily on two grounds: as a victim of Nazi Germany (with a heroic resistance movement), and with hands clean of colonial wrong-doing (Bangstad 2017; Gullestad 2002), though Denmark-Norway held colonies in Europe, Africa, India and the Caribbean (Bertelsen 2015). Taking a back seat in Norway's story about race is the still-recent history of Norwegian oppression of the indigenous Sámi people, using forced assimilation policies such as bans on language(s) and cultural practices and forced residential schooling – not to mention current struggles of Sámi people for autonomy and self-determination. Also absent from the story Norwegians tell themselves is the role the country played in race science and the notion of the Nordic master race, common among Norwegian anthropologists and eugenicists of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Kyllingstad 2012).

A Norwegian cultural norm of '*likhet*' – which means both 'sameness' and 'equality' – suggests, as posited by anthropologist Marianne Gullestad (2002), an "egalitarian logic" (p. 47) of 'imagined sameness,' in which equality is of high value but assumed to be shared among people who are more or less the same. Aphorisms like '*like barn leker best*' – similar children play best together – reveal an ideology in which difference is perceived as a threat. Preferences for sameness – what Essed and Goldberg (2002) call 'cultural cloning' – include

an enduring underlying preference for whiteness despite the concept of ‘race’ having become taboo. Research since the 2000s has demonstrated that racialization is linked to discrimination on individual, institutional and structural levels, in the labor market (Liebig 2019; Midtbøen 2014, 2016), housing market (Beatty & Sommervoll 2012), education sector (Fylkesnes 2018, Hansen et al, 2008; Svendsen 2014) and in the realm of personal interaction (Andersson 2010, McIntosh 2015). Recently, writings by melanin-rich¹ Norwegians about their experiences and analyses of racism (Ali 2018; Joof 2018; Sibeko 2019), along with op-ed pieces and demonstrations in the wake of the Movement for Black Lives (Taylor 2016), have made apparent to the Norwegian public that racism is part of everyday life. Racialized youth in the Nordic countries are increasingly identifying with anti-racist activism that includes an acknowledgment of the social reality of race (Rastas 2019). These new counter-narratives have unleashed a marked backlash, most commonly decrying a curtailing of free speech in the public domain (Titley 2020). Take-up of new ways of speaking about race has been slow in the academic and political spheres (Rastas 2019).

Our project grew out of a curiosity about how a social milieu marked predominantly by silence about racial categorization and discrimination would interface with academic discourse and in particular undergraduate education. Many academic disciplines theorize race, if not in the mainstream then firmly enough at the margins that to exclude race from discussion would leave a oddly-shaped hole in students’ education in the discipline. How do Norwegian undergraduate students and instructors engage in classroom conversations when race is made relevant by their subject of study? Here, we share the answers we found when

¹ Melanin-rich (*melaninrik(e)* in Norwegian) is a term that emerged among African-Norwegian youth activists in the late 2000s, introduced by Thomas Thawala Prestø, and further circulated into mainstream public discourse alongside the Movement for Black Lives in spring 2020 and through Guro Sibeko's (2019) acclaimed book, *Rasismens poetikk* (The poetics of racism). Though the term melanin-rich emerged in a specific, African and Black activist milieu, it has often been enlarged to include other racialized communities, much like the American term ‘People of Color’. We are grateful to a reviewer for this historical contextualization.

we researched classroom interactions that took place in three university courses in 2013-2014. The paper is organized into three sub-questions that emerged from our analysis: who are ‘we’? Who are ‘they’? And what is racism? We provide both close readings to allow readers to judge for themselves whether our conclusions are founded, and glosses where we summarize other cases as supporting evidence. Finally, we ask the question: how should we respond to difference? We summarize how the students and instructors in our study addressed the question of what we should, or could, do, and close by offering our own reflections.

Methods

This study, part of a larger project² examining race, identity, exclusion and belonging in Norwegian higher education, asks how the concepts of race and racialization are constituted in classroom talk. ‘Discourse’ refers to language in use, not only to the words that are spoken but to what those words *do* (Wetherell, Taylor & Yates, 2001). Based on previous research, we expected that talk about race and racialization would be hidden under more explicit talk about immigration, religion and nation. The courses and class sessions we attended were selected based on their topics; we sought to ‘catch’ students and instructors discussing race and related topics.

We followed approximately 40% of four upper-level undergraduate courses in different social science or humanities disciplines at two Norwegian universities in 2013-2014. All audio files were transcribed in an adapted Jeffersonian transcription convention (Hepburn & Bolden, 2013; Jefferson, 2004). Our analysis derives from a selection of classroom interactions

² The project received funding from the People Programme (Marie Curie Actions) of the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme FP7 / 2007-2013/

(monologic lecturing was excluded, which meant we analyzed data from 3 of the 4 courses) where race and related concepts were made salient. From this selection we further selected 13 interactions (that contained multiple interlocutors and substantial talk related or potentially related to race/racialization) to analyse closely as cases using tools from Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA; Bushnell 2014, Schegloff 2007a, Stokoe 2012) and sequential features from Conversation Analysis (CA; Heritage 2005, Schegloff 2007b, Wooffitt 2005).

Membership categories (MCs) are marked by normative expectations. For example, the MC *mother* is associated with characteristics (Membership-Based Predicates) and activities (Membership-Based Activities) such as *provides comfort*, while the MC *child* is the one who *receives comfort* (Sacks 1992; Stokoe 2012). Both *mother* and *child* are MCs that fit under the umbrella Membership Category Device *family*: the overordinate context in which related MCs are given meaning. In conversation, a MC is used as a resource that interlocutors use both to interpret a person or group's actions, and to draw expectations for future actions (Wooffitt 2005). In conversation, MCs are often named explicitly, but also are employed indirectly when an interlocutor refers to membership-based predicates or activities.

In our analysis, we read the interactions for how a speaker used a category, its Membership Category Device, predicates, and activities. We looked closely at (a) how interlocutors took up or responded to the categories, using tools from Conversation Analysis (CA), such as overlapping speech, bids for responses, response tokens, and extreme case formulations (Pomerantz 1986) and (b) how the predicates and activities pointed to other, perhaps unnamed, categories. The way interlocutors build upon or otherwise demonstrate understanding of an utterance that refers to a MC is key to the analysts' ability to conclude that the interlocutors share a set of discursive resources which gives shared meaning to the

MC. In contrast, an utterance that were experienced as nonsensical or unintelligible would lead to a breakdown in conversation that requires repair; this is common in everyday talk when there are misunderstandings or when an utterance is difficult to hear (Schegloff, Jefferson & Sacks, 1977). A flow of conversation is dependent on interlocutors drawing on shared resources: mutually intelligible ways of speaking about a topic - including when categories are in play. Thus, even if a membership-based predicate only pops up one time across the 13 cases, if it is responded to in a way which makes obvious that the hearers understand it, that the interlocutors can carry on discussing the topic without any confusion having been caused, we regard that as a potentially meaningful insight into how a particular membership category is constructed.

Important to note is that in MCA, as well as CA, the focus is almost exclusively on the *words* being spoken, and *how* they are spoken, rather than on *who* is speaking them - or the social identity of who is speaking them. In our analyses below, we occasionally point to the racialized status of the speaker when we perceive it as central to the interlocutors' own understanding of classroom talk, based on how *the speakers* respond to each other (such as when an instructor addresses our research assistant, who is a Korean adoptee). However, the speaker's identity is not a unit of analysis in MCA, or in this paper. Clearly, power differentials across speakers could affect what is said and how; in MCA and CA, this is an empirical rather than a theoretical question (Walsh, 2004). In our data, power differentials between instructors and students are often played out as epistemic differences (Heritage, 2005). We take into account who, in the institutional setting of the classroom, is expected to have high epistemic standing (i.e., the one who holds knowledge), and who is expected to have low epistemic standing (i.e., the less knowledgeable party) - and what happens when those expectations are breached. Many of our cases took place in seminars, led by more

experienced students; in those cases, we sometimes see typical teacher-student discourse patterns between participants with higher and lower epistemic standing, but we often see discourse patterns where the seminar leader recedes and the classroom talk is similar to natural conversation.

Each of us analyzed each case individually, discussed and debated our analyses together, and came to a collective (tentative) agreement that was returned to several times to question and confirm, in a process that called for multiple rounds of discussion for each case. It also involved, for two cases, confirmation through discussion with a larger cohort of discourse analysts in a data session. Then we read through the cases and analyses to identify thematic threads that emerged across the data, in response to the research question: How do students and instructors talk (or not talk) about race and racialization in Norwegian higher education?

Who are ‘we’?

The students spoke of ‘we’ and ‘they’. Often, the ‘we’ was a white ‘we’ and the ‘they’ was ‘the Other’. At times, the ‘we’ were the ‘good’ (white) Norwegians and the ‘they’ were deviants (white racists in Norway). These classroom interactions among students and between students and instructors/seminar leaders, reveal not only who the students and instructors perceive as ‘we’ and ‘they’, but also how they construct what racism really is, what accounts for human (racialized) difference, and what their ideal virtue position is regarding race. None of the findings are truly surprising; if anything, what is surprising is how little push-back we found to essentialist, biological ideas of racialization and a racialized *we/they* divide.

In our data, students and instructors only very rarely talk about race directly, even in disciplines where race is theorized. Rather, classroom discussions that reveal themselves to be racialized often are coded in terms of nationality. Students and instructors talk about being Norwegian assuming that Norwegians are white; the whiteness of Norwegian identity only becomes salient when its assumptions are disrupted.

The following case took place in a course with 3-hour weekly sessions where the instructor blends lecturing and class discussion. As context for the following excerpt: in this lesson, the instructor presented theoretical frameworks for understanding race and ethnicity, and for each she described its central ideas and some critiques that have been leveled against it.

Immediately before this excerpt, the instructor communicated that one critique of structurally-focused social theories is that they tend to flatten out nuances and individual differences. The instructor, who is white and Scandinavian (though not Norwegian), uses critical whiteness studies as an example, and makes use of herself and the few students of color in the class of about 20 to illustrate her point. Note that Nadia³ has spoken before about being Colombian, Zack is the only Black student in the class (and his Norwegian language skills and accent suggest he is not a native speaker), and Emilie is our research assistant and is a Norwegian international adoptee.

EXCERPT 1⁴

- 1 I: Because both e:::h Nadi:a (.) and I and Zack (.) are not
- 2 Norwegian (.)
- 3 We are just the same. (.)

³ All names are pseudonyms.

⁴ All excerpts have been translated from Norwegian by the authors.

4 We are just a min:ority.
 5 We are just (0.2) <immigrants,>
 6 .hh and- >and one could say that< is like a downside of that
 7 this perspective actually >only looks at the power position< .hh
 8 (0.1) a:lso that it isolates (1.0) those °that fall outside.°
 9 (1.0)
 10 [M-]
 11 S1: [I]'m not Norwegian either,
 12 (.)
 13 I: What?
 14 S1: I [am not Norwegian either,]
 15 I: [Are – are- you] not either?⁵ =fN:o.£ He he he
 16 S?: N[o:] ((short, unclear laughter in the background))
 17 S?: [fN:]o. Invisibilized?£
 18 I: He he [he]
 19 S: [He] he [he]
 20 S: [A hha] hha [hha]
 21 I: [He] he [he].hh £Where do you come=
 22 S: [£M]m:mm, £
 23 I: =from?£
 24 S1: Kosovo,
 25 (.)
 26 I: What?
 27 S1: <Kosov:o,>
 28 I: .hh °from Kos:ovo yeah so we are° four here who o:nly- =and
 29 there's maybe someone [I have overlooked,]

⁵ Note that a question mark in Jeffersonian transcription does not necessarily indicate a question, but rather a sharp rise in tone on the last word. “Are you not?” seems to function as a rhetorical question here, as the instructor provides the answer herself. On lines 21-22, “Where do you come from?” functions as a question that garners a response. However, we do not interpret “Invisibilized?” (line 17) to function as a question.

- 30 S1: [fyeah::(h)aaf] >he he<
- 31 I: Where, ((in response to student who raised hand))
- 32 S2: =Icelandic,
- 33 I: What?
- 34 (.)
- 35 S2: I'm Icela:ndic,
- 36 (.)
- 37 I: From Iceland yeah. Yeah [that's] (?) that,
- 38 S: [(That's great,)]
- 39 S: Ha ha ha [hha ha]
- 40 I: [and] Emilie? (.) °Do you come-?°
- 41 L: °South Korea_°
- 42 I: What?
- 43 L: South Korea_
- 44 (0.2)
- 45 I: South Korea, I see. .hh

Here we see that the instructor generates the membership category (MC) *not-Norwegian* (lines 1-2). She places herself (white, not Norwegian) as well as the two students who are known in the group to have immigrated to Norway – Nadia and Zack – in that category. At this point, we can ask what Membership Category Device (MCD) the category *not-Norwegian* belongs to: what is the superordinate device that organizes the MC in relationship to other MCs. To do that, we need to understand what other contrasting categories are in play; for instance, Stokoe (2012) offers the example that the MC *baby* can belong to the MCD *stages of life* or the MCD *terms of endearment*. Because the MC *not-Norwegian* includes the word 'not', the contrasting category is easy to discern: the MC *Norwegian*. Both of these belong straightforwardly to the MCD *nationality*.

The instructor then immediately characterizes several category-based predicates of the MC *not-Norwegian*: the MC *not-Norwegian* is equated with being “only” a minority, being “only” an immigrant, and all being the same (lines 3-5). The instructor argues that the type of social theory she is describing reduces individuals unidimensionally to group members; she has generated an example by calling on a MC and populating it with herself, Nadia and Zack. This is followed by a 1-second pause, which is long for a natural conversation, though classroom interactions tolerate longer silences. Silence in natural conversation tends to indicate confusion or uncertainty, or it precedes a dispreferred response (e.g., one that might cause the initial speaker to lose face, such as “would you like to go out for a drink?” *pause* “not really, thanks”; Walsh 2004). Eventually a student takes the next turn of talk to make a claim: she has been misplaced, put into the wrong category, the MC *Norwegian*, and she seeks to correct that error by stating that she, too, is not Norwegian. The student, in deciding whether to speak, has a dilemma: the instructor has the authoritative role in the classroom, and is in a position of higher epistemic status (and therefore more power) - *when it comes to course content*. However, the student has the epistemic upper hand when it comes to defining her own (national) identity. The student risks causing the instructor to lose face in this interaction, by demoting the instructor's epistemic status. She chooses to make that move nonetheless, suggesting either that the category error was too unbearable for the student to let pass by, or that the power difference in this classroom was relatively flat, for a classroom situation - or both.

Note that there are multiple times in this sequence that the instructor asks “What?”, as she does in response to this student (lines 13, 26, 33, 42); this might be a result of surprise - indeed, in a follow-up conversation the instructor told the researchers that the student's

comment was surprising - but we were also told that the acoustics in the room were poor. This is followed on lines 15-21 by laughter, first from the instructor, and then in a sequence from a number of students, perhaps as a result of the overturning of the usual power relations built into epistemic status in the institutional setting of the classroom. Amongst the laughter, one student says, in a smiling tone that rises in pitch at the end of the word, “invisibilized” (line 17), which is a term used in sociology and the philosophy of recognition (Honneth & Margalit 2001) that the class had encountered in a previous session. This student suggests that the first student to speak, a white student who stated she is not Norwegian, was made invisible to the MC *not-Norwegian*; the instructor does not see her as not-Norwegian – *unlike* Nadia and Zack, whether by dint of her knowledge of their personal stories or by dint of their visual appearance as students of color. This surfacing of an ‘invisibilized’ student reveals a paradox: the MC *not-Norwegian* is *expected* to be visible, written on the body: racialized. In contrast, in this interaction, whiteness is revealed to be a membership-based predicate of the MC *Norwegian*: Norwegians are white/white students in a Norwegian classroom are Norwegian. A white student who has not made her nationality known is assumed to be Norwegian. Here that assumption – and the usual ordering of epistemic status in the classroom – is ruptured, which results in something unexpected and funny – thus, the laughter.

Towards the end of the excerpt, after the instructor has invited other (invisible) non-Norwegian students to out themselves as category members, she turns to Emilie, our project’s research assistant. Emilie’s role is to operate the audio recorders and to take notes discreetly. She rarely appears in the audio data, but here the instructor addresses her directly (line 40), asking “Do you come-” and breaking off the question. In this context, Emilie seems to understand the question as expecting a country name as an answer; the authority of the instructor's role moves Emilie from the ‘silent research assistant’ into the position of

classroom participant, and she responds quietly and flatly, “South Korea.” International adoptees are granted Norwegianness once their ‘adoptability’ is made salient (Zhao 2013), and the instructor had spoken with Emilie before and knew that her Norwegian language skills (native-level) suggested Emilie was Norwegian, rather than, for example, an international student. However, Emilie is placed in the MC *not-Norwegian* because of the expectation that not-Norwegianness is visible – that there is an overlap between the MC *not-Norwegian* and the MC *not-white* – and therefore also an overlap between the MC *Norwegian* and the MC *white*.

To summarize, by reading this excerpt with close attention to the way MCs are deployed, we can see that nationality and race (as a visible, physical characteristic) overlap and are mutually substitutable, that Norwegianness is made equivalent to whiteness, and non-Norwegianness is associated with non-whiteness. Are the MCs *Norwegian/not-Norwegian* part of the MCD *nationality* in this context, or the MCD *race*? The MCs seem to have predicates that tie them both to citizenship and to race; nationality is racialized. In addition, the whiteness of Norwegian identity only becomes salient when its assumptions are disrupted. Thus, the Norwegian ‘we’ is seen here – not just by a single speaker, but in a collaborative sequence of conversation – to be a white ‘we’. In other cases, we see at least three additional membership-based predicates of the Norwegian ‘we.’ The most frequent is a positive assessment of Norwegianness: Norwegians are good, Norwegians are innocent of racism, Norwegians are agentic and the subjects of their stories, Norwegians are lucky, and – as we will explore later – Norwegians don’t see “race” – although as we have seen in the first case here, they do.

The first type of membership-based predicate is that Norwegians are good, that they are innocent of racism or race-thinking, and that they are lucky to be Norwegian. For example, in a case described in detail elsewhere (Riese and Harlap, in press), during a lecture on ethnic relations in South Africa, a white Norwegian student takes an extended turn of talk (with the rather neutral but good-natured encouragement of the instructor) to tell a story of her experience visiting a public swimming pool in South Africa. In her story, her tone of voice conveys herself as eager, naïve, and enthusiastic in an encounter with the pool attendant, an older Black woman. In the student's telling, the pool attendant's dream since childhood was to work at a pool, but she was disappointed that once the pool was desegregated, white people stopped coming to swim. The student positions the attendant as so surprised and pleased that a white woman wants to swim in her pool, that she waves her in for free. To gloss our analysis: the student portrays herself – as a Norwegian – as innocent of seeing (or caring about) race; her goodness and innocence are rewarded by being allowed to swim for free. In a seminar for the same course, in a discussion about diaspora, our analysis of membership categories demonstrates how a membership-based predicate of the MC *Norwegian* is that Norwegians are lucky. A student relates at some length how her internationally adopted friend talks about her adoption and coming to Norway from very poor conditions at an orphanage in Korea: “I think I could never win the lottery (0.3) I have already won the jackpot”. The student giving the account uses a number of discursive face-saving moves to distance herself from what might appear as immodest or overly nationalistic boasts, while still conveying the membership-based predicate that Norwegians are lucky to be Norwegian.

In contrast, another membership-based predicate of the MC *Norwegian* counters the predicate of Norwegian innocence: Norwegians *do* categorize others racially and are *not* innocent of racism. For example, in excerpt 1 above, the joking comment “Invisibilized” (line 17) could

be seen to function as a critique: the case of mistaken nationality let slip the veil of Norwegian innocence to reveal that 'we', too, categorize based on race. Whether the gentle critique is of the instructor having allowed the veil to slip or of the process of racial categorization itself, is up for grabs. In a different session of the same course, a student reporting on her observations of a class of schoolchildren reflects on her own assumptions about a racialized Other:

EXCERPT 2

- 1 S: There was also one (.) eh:: who was (.) a minority boy-
- 2 I: [Yeah]
- 3 S: [in] that class I was in,
- 4 =and that (1.0)
- 5 I guess that (0.1) all that is somehow (.3) >like excluded< was
- 6 =e::
- 7 There was like no one who (0.2)
- 8 He almost didn't talk at all in class,
- 9 =And there was no one who sat >together with him and talked with
- 10 h[im.]<
- 11 I: [yeah,] yeah.
- 12 S: And so of course I thought that eh: (0.2)
- 13 I: Yeah.
- 14 S: That is was because he i[s eh::]
- 15 I: [Yeah.hh] yeah.
- 16 S: ethnic
- 17 I: M:m
- 18 S: °minority.°
- 19 I: Yeah. [E:]

- 20 S: [It's] not certain that that was why.
 21 I: n.hho No.
 22 (0.5)
 23 I: And that >also that,<
 24 what does it mean,
 25 when we say this is because of that.

The student uses the MC *minority boy* (line 1) – and later narrows the relevant category to *ethnic minority* (lines 16-18). She does some interesting category work here: performing reflection on her own categorization practice. She starts by carefully stating that she assumed that a membership-based predicate of the MC *ethnic minority* is exclusion by peers (lines 5-6) – and she supports that predicate by pointing to her evidence of exclusion: he didn't talk in class (line 8) and no one sat or talked with him (lines 9-10). Thus, the student begins this account by stating her assumption and the evidence that supports it, before turning to an explanation that casts doubt on her assumption that exclusion by peers is actually a membership-based predicate of the MC *ethnic minority* (lines 12-20).

The student begins interrogating her assumption by taking a strong epistemic stance: “of course” (line 12) she assumed that the child's exclusion was linked to his belonging to the MC *ethnic minority*. With “of course”, she positions the relationship between the MC and its predicate as a taken-for-granted truth, and by positing shared epistemic status makes her interlocutor complicit in asserting the link: *everyone knows* ethnic minority boys are (often/likely to be) excluded. The student puts forward a self-critique based on the membership based-predicate Norwegians are not innocent, Norwegians *do* categorize based on race.

However, from there her surety breaks down, both in content and sequential features. In content, the student takes responsibility for her assumption with “I think” – an epistemic standpoint that is more individual and open to question. The link between the evidence of exclusion and the MC *ethnic minority* is given haltingly, with fillers like “eh:” (lines 12 and 14) and hesitation (line 12), and the final word “minority” is spoken noticeably more quietly. Something about making this assertion is difficult, or makes demonstrating difficulty advantageous in conversation, despite taking the position that “of course” anyone would do the same. In line 20, the student rejects the prior assumption: “It’s not certain that was why.”

The instructor interjects confirmatory comments, starting on line 2, which can be interpreted as serving to encourage the student to continue. In this excerpt the confirmations are remarkably frequent, especially from line 13 where the student begins to evince difficulty in producing her explanation. We can interpret the confirmations as encouragement; we can also interpret them as the instructor being drawn into co-constructing with the student her statement that anyone would, “of course” (line 12), make the same assumption. Both of these take place at once. In addition, this sequence demonstrates a typical classroom discourse pattern (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975), whereby the instructor's authoritative role controls turn-taking through a pattern of initiation (by instructor), response (by student), evaluation or feedback (by instructor). Here the instructor has (before excerpt 2 begins) called on a student to report out to the class, we see the student's extended response (with frequent confirmation tokens from the instructor), ending with the instructor's overall evaluation (lines 23-25).

In this sequence-concluding evaluation (lines 23-25), the instructor questions the process not of categorization in itself, but of linking categories to predicates and activities. This is the only course in our data where we see this kind of questioning of assumptions. The instructor

produces a new MC: “we” (line 25) – and we cannot be sure (yet, at least) who the *we* refers to: it could be we Norwegians (which, as we saw above, typically signifies white Norwegians), it could be we academics or we observers or we-in-this-classroom. Later in the case (not shown in the excerpted talk here), the instructor uses the same “we” to say, still questioning the linkage between categories and predicates, “Or do we think that (0.5) there is something about >him coming from a culture where one should °be like very quiet and calm and°<”. The MC *we* here seems to be ‘we observers’ but also places the ‘we’ as part of the majority culture – creating a distance between the we’s cultural practices and the unfamiliar, guessed-at *ethnic minority* (MC) child’s cultural practices. Again, by implication, the instructor suggests the predicate: we (Norwegians/academics/observers/people in this classroom) are *not* innocent of seeing race.

The instructor concludes her extended turn of talk by stating, “that one must reflect over how these here categories (0.8) eh: (0.6) are used in s- some explanations of phenomena.” These kinds of reflections on category use and assumptions are not common in our data, but arise occasionally in this course, and like in this case, we see students modeling patterns of self-interrogation initially demonstrated by the instructor. In addition, we have in our data one instance of a student generating an alternative *we*: that ‘we’ don’t care about bombings in Syria and the mass deaths result from the Syrian conflict. In response, several students in the seminar group build on each other’s defense of Norwegians as simply unable to attend to the concerns of (less civilized) distant and racialized Others.

Who are ‘they’?

In the previous example, as well as in the rest of the data, we see the foil to the white Norwegian 'we': a 'they' that is racially Othered. The racially Othered 'they', when not in Norway, is characterized as less civilized than Norwegians. For example, in the South African swimming pool case, the racially Othered person is characterized as having simple ambitions. Norwegians, in that same account, are characterized as easily 'forgetting' that apartheid was not so long ago, and that because 'we' Norwegians do not have a racist history or way of thinking, 'we' have (overly) high expectations of South Africans to have come farther along in moving beyond their race-based way of thinking.

In excerpt 1 above, the belonging of racialized Others within Norway is contested; people of color are presumed to be not-Norwegian, and Norwegians are assumed to be white. This arises in a number of other interactions. The clearest example is discussed in detail elsewhere (AUTHORS, under review). In that case, the MC *internationally adopted children* is linked to the predicate having a "different genetic package" from the MC *ethnic Norwegian* – although it is ethnicity under question (literally, the question at the heart of the classroom conversation), nationality/race is biological. This is soon followed by a statement in which the racially visibly-similar family (all white, or all not-white) is described as a "flock" that is easy to identify as a family. In the same class session, one student describes the family of her friend (with confirmatory comments from the seminar leader):

EXCERPT 3

- 1 S: I have a friend who has two adopted children from Korea () eh:
- 2 and they are totally clear about that they () come from Korea,
- 3 right? And when they have international day at school () eh::
- 4 they take initiative themselves to bring the Korean flag and they

HARLAP & RIESE

- 5 know a lot about their home-place and () or- their country I
6 mean-
- 7 I: Mhm?
- 8 S: but they are maybe too young to talk more about eh: parent
9 background and why they have been adopted but they do know- they
10 are clear about that they come from () Korea.
- 11 I: Mhm?
- 12 S: But whether they are () they are really ethnic Norwegian first
13 and foremost.

Here the student takes up a MC *adopted children from (likely South) Korea* (line 1) and attaches to it a variety of membership-based activities and predicates: they know they come from Korea (lines 2 and 9-10); they bring the Korean flag to school (on their own initiative; lines 3-4), they know about their home(country) (lines 4-5), and so on. The short sequence concludes with the student taking up the MC *ethnic Norwegian* (line 12): the friend's children fall into two MCs: *adopted children from Korea* and *ethnic Norwegian*. We have seen already that the MC *ethnic Norwegian* is characterized by whiteness; here this appears to be genuinely disavowed – and yet the adopted children are not *unproblematically* positioned as members of the *ethnic Norwegian* category. The student does a good deal of work to demonstrate the ways that they deviate from predicates and activities one would typically expect from members of the MC *ethnic Norwegian*. It is not that they entirely do not belong, yet their belonging is contested.

However, none of the associations we have explored so far are characterized by the students and instructors as examples of racism. Racism and racists are positioned in an entirely separate discursive space.

What is racism?

Students and instructors also construct a completely different ‘they’ – Norwegians who are separate from the ‘we’ of good, innocent white Norwegians – and that is avowed racists and white supremacists. An emblematic example arises in the media studies course, when the seminar leader presents a video of an phone-filmed racist demonstration by the Norwegian Defence League (NDL), alongside an anti-racist counter-protest, in the North Norwegian city of Trondheim. Because this excerpt is long and interspersed with long segments of video, we offer a summary of the relevant student and seminar leader talk. Both groups of demonstrators in the video are very small, much to the mirth of the students in the class. The MC *NDL protesters* is described by the students as comprised of “super-racists” and the protest itself as “pathetic”. There is a great deal of laughter about the NDL protesters being protected by police – because they are such a small, and implicitly non-threatening, group. The conversation turns to a well-known far-right racist organization, Vigrid, whose leader is described as a “fucking psycho”, “crazy”, and “psychotic”. The MC *Vigrid members* is described by a student as comprised of former drug users and others who have nowhere to turn and who find belonging in Vigrid “because there the door is open to all as long as you hate Muslims, (0.5) and so you: are surely willing to hate Muslims a little (.) if you are like (.) lonely” (AUTHORS, under review). In other words, racists are not like ordinary people; they are marginalized outcasts.

Significantly, the MC *racists* is structured in contrast, and opposition to, the MC *Norwegian*. The students observe the counter-demonstrators in the video footage pull up flowers from the park and throw them at the NDL demonstrators. Several students laugh, and one cracks a

well-received joke, saying, “That is Norwegian, (.) (we) don’t throw stones we throw flowers”. The MC *Norwegian* is associated with being peaceful to the point of gentle ridicule – in contrast to the MC *racists* as pitiable, crazy outcasts. Racists are excluded from the MC *Norwegian*, and by implication, Norwegians are not racist.

In our data, students also describe racism as difficult to eradicate. In the media studies course seminar (a different session than the NDL protest discussion), students discuss a situation in which a police officer was fired for explicit racist posts on Facebook. One student states, “The thing is that we cannot st- we cannot prevent racism. Like, racism and xenophobia, they will always be there.” The students seem to conclude that in certain public jobs, it is important to be careful with what one expresses publicly.

In conclusion: How should we respond to difference?

Our data encompasses many hours of classroom talk in two Norwegian universities, from which a much smaller subset comprises interactions. Even when theory and research on race would be relevant to course topics, race scholarship is taken up for discussion in relatively few interactions (race scholarship could be present in monological course lecturing that we did not analyze). This could be idiosyncratic to our data but is more likely a reflection of the taboo nature of race as a membership category in Norway, even in academic spaces. When race talk does arise, it largely is through the lens of a racialized nationalism (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991) where Norwegianness is implicitly equated with whiteness, as well as peacefulness, goodness, and innocence, and set in contrast to (deviant) racism and racists. This is in line with the research literature on Norwegian, and central European, whiteness (Gilroy 2006; Gullestad 2002, 2006; Rastas 2019; Wekker 2016). Furthermore, the MC *race*

in the student and instructor discussions is blended with culture, ethnicity, and biology/genetics, also characteristic of everyday race talk outside the academy (Hall 2017). In our data, we see very limited application of disciplinary terms or vocabulary when race or race-related topics are at play. We see a few examples of an instructor modelling (and students demonstrating) more self-reflective and critical approaches to talking about race, and in one case a student fiercely pushing back on her classmates' dehumanizing talk of racialized Others.

On balance, however, what we see in the classroom, implicitly and explicitly, is a virtue position that has traditionally been called colorblind ideology (Gotanda 1991, Bonilla-Silva 2009), in which the solution to racism is to not see or not notice race (or to profess as such). The silence on race in Europe, and Norway, is linked to this rejection of the recognition that race has anything to do with Europe (Lentin 2008). Many scholars have pointed out that the idea of being 'colorblind' is less about not 'seeing' race, and rather an "ideology of insisting that racial difference be ignored" (Appelbaum 2015, 450; other relevant scholars include Frankenberg 1993, Gotanda 1991, Leonardo 2007, Mills 2007). Gloria Wekker (2016), writing about the Netherlands, states: "I am led to suspect bad faith; innocence is not as innocent as it appears to be" (18).

Annamma, Jackson and Morrison (2017) have reframed 'colorblindness' as color-evasiveness, a theoretical move that links an active *individual* refusal to engage with race to the *system of white supremacy* that maintains power in the hands of the dominant caste, defined as whiteness.⁶ In our data, students and instructors enact color-evasiveness in a

⁶ In addition, Annamma et al. (2017) argue that the term 'colorblind' is problematic in embedding notions of disability in the refusal to acknowledge racial oppression. Their argument is nuanced and powerful; seek out their paper.

variety of ways, subtly promoting ‘not seeing race’ as an ideal; the student rewarded for her ignorance about racial politics in South Africa by swimming for free at the pool is just one example. Another is identifying the core of the problem with the racist police officer as the public expression on Facebook of his racism (rather than his racism itself). Another is the membership-based predicate that avowed racists are deviants (because ordinary Norwegians are not racist; they are peace-loving; they throw flowers). It is worth pointing out that a denial of race as relevant, and an active refusal to engage with race, still points back to race, and the use of nation as a euphemism for race is above all else a demonstration of the racialized nature of nationalism and the nation-state (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991).

Preparing educators – including seminar leaders and teaching assistants – to recognize and interrupt the ahistorical, decontextual ‘innocence’ of color-evasive argumentation is critical, but not easy. Yet even if one’s own learned reaction is knee-jerk color-evasiveness – and it is important to note that the investment in whiteness and white ignorance is recalcitrant because it carries benefits (Appelbaum 2015) – it should be possible to develop the analytical and facilitation skills to recognize and interrupt talk that Others, that assumes that racism is inevitable, that race is genetic/biological, that Norwegians are white, that Norwegians are innocent of historical and contemporary racism.

In our analysis process, we routinely pressed ourselves to imagine alternative routes in the classroom conversations; we would ask each other, “What else could s/he have said?” This approach is in line with the thinking behind the Conversation Analytic Role-Play Method (CARM; Stokoe 2014), in which conversation analytic research on a particular context – say, mediation services – is used in a workshop to help mediators learn what kinds of questions and responses encourage callers to sign up for mediation, rather than steering them away.

Naturally-occurring talk is presented to participants line by line, and they brainstorm what they might say next, discuss in groups, are offered feedback based on conversation analytic research findings, and then continue to the next turn of talk. This approach might be one way to enact Barbara Appelbaum's (2015) suggestion that a fruitful pedagogical approach to overcoming meta-ignorance (such as color-evasiveness) involves teaching the distinction between language as representation and language as discourse (in the Foucauldian sense of power/knowledge).

Appelbaum (2015) argues that understanding language as discourse opens up for new kinds of questions that implicate learners themselves in structures of power and oppression. Imagine an intervention involving university educators in responding to real classroom conversations, imagining different routes through the conversation and discussing advantages and pitfalls of different approaches. For that CARM-like approach, one would need a larger corpus and more conversation analytic research precisely on classroom discussions of race – a particular challenge given consent procedures for audio recording in classroom settings⁷, as well as the paucity of race talk in naturally-occurring classroom discussions, at least in Norway. This is a challenge for future research: to build considerations for intervention work into the research design, towards building capacity in university teachers to interrupt troublesome talk that centers a white 'we' and marginalizes racialized Others, and to do this in an educative manner, so that students emerge with more nuanced, knowledgeable, historicized and contextualized perspectives on their disciplines of study and the world around them.

⁷ At the time we collected data, the ethics review board determined that (public) university lectures/classes were public space, and that we were therefore not required to acquire informed consent from participants for *audio* recording (unlike video). The guidelines have now changed and require active consent.

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