

Media and Education

Addressing Racism in Norway

Paul Thomas, Abdul-Razak Kuyini Alhassan
and Jocelyne Muhayimana von Hof



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By

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Introduction

Through education we seek to change attitudes and internal feelings (prejudice, hate, etc.); through legislation and court orders we seek to regulate behavior. Anyone who starts out with the conviction that the road to racial justice is only one lane wide will inevitably create a traffic jam and make the journey infinitely longer.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. (1998, p. 49)



Martin Luther King Jr.'s quote aptly encapsulates the multipronged approach necessary for realizing racial justice, which aligns with the purpose of this book. In the first chapter, our aim as educators is to shed some light on the historical omission of African/black Norwegian history, especially in regard to Norway's role in the transatlantic slave trade. We query the different ways in which schools and institutions of higher education can grapple with this challenging dimension of Norwegian history with the aim of altering societal attitudes and perceptions. We apply a critical lens to media coverage of the topic of Norway's role in the transatlantic slavery during the Danish-Norwegian union. Recent studies (for example, Løken, 2020, 2023; Engevold, 2022) have explored the historical details of this unsavory aspect of Norwegian history. We perceive our contribution as complementing these works, with a particular emphasis on the role of education in disseminating this suppressed history and empowering individuals to confront and engage with it.

Our research among others explores how Norwegian media, from 2015 to 2022, covered the discovery and recognition of the slave ship *Fredensborg* and its implications for contemporary antiracist struggles. Although the ship was discovered in 1974, it received little attention until recent global movements, such as Black Lives Matter, the murder of George Floyd, and the Rhodes Must Fall movement, ignited a national conversation about Norway's hidden slave trade history. These events brought Norway's role in Danish-Norwegian colonialism to the forefront of public discourse. The *Fredensborg* is significant as one of the best-documented slave ships, with records preserved in the National Archives in Copenhagen now available digitally. These records reveal that Norwegian ships transported approximately 110,000 enslaved Africans to the Americas between 1670 and 1804. Recent scholarship has recalibrated our

understanding of Denmark-Norway's involvement, demonstrating a much larger role in the transatlantic slave trade than previously acknowledged.

Our research employs a comprehensive methodological framework that integrates content analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA). This approach allowed us to examine how Norwegian media framed the history of the Fredensborg and the broader Danish-Norwegian slave trade during the period of significant global antiracist movements. We categorized the media narratives into several thematic frames, including historical focus, contemporary implications, and the portrayal of those involved in the slave trade. We found that many articles framed the slave trade through Norway's culpability, emphasizing the personal stories of both slave traders and slaves to humanize the past. While much of the media coverage focused on historical figures and events, few articles drew contemporary lessons or linked these past injustices to modern-day racist struggles in Norway. The portrayal of slaves was often inadequate, with media focusing more on historical details and the actions of Norwegian figures, thereby marginalizing the experiences of the enslaved and their descendants.

Despite some recognition of Norway's involvement in the slave trade, there remains a significant gap in addressing current antiracist struggles. Much of the media coverage tends to evoke feelings of shame rather than guilt, which can impede the sense of responsibility and action needed to combat contemporary racism. The connection to movements such as Black Lives Matter often lacks depth, failing to harness the lessons of the slave trade to address the ongoing challenges faced by Norway's non-white population. This analysis highlights the need for a more sustained and rigorous engagement with contemporary antiracist struggles in Norway. It also underscores the importance of integrating the history of Norway's colonial past into the discourse on current social issues, thereby promoting a more comprehensive understanding of racism in Norway. Through our research, we hope to contribute to this ongoing dialogue and support efforts to address these critical issues.

As black professors and lecturers in Norwegian academia, training the next generation of schoolteachers, our hope is that this book (perhaps a first in this regard) will amplify the voices of not only African-Norwegians but all marginalized communities by serving as a tool of empowerment in dismantling the silence and ignorance that have surrounded this topic for far too long. Through our book, we aim to inspire meaningful dialogue, foster empathy, and ultimately contribute to a more just and inclusive society in Norway and beyond. One reason for writing this book is the dissatisfaction with scholarly consensus on certain thorny issues, such as reparations, hence the need to forward dissonant views from our unique perspectives as black educators with African roots, highlighting the significance of diverse voices in forging historical narratives.

Dr. King's quote emphasizes the multidimensional nature of the quest for racial justice. The "father" of critical race theory, Derrick Bell (1995), warned specifically about the wisdom of a unidimensional approach that places unwarranted confidence in the efficacy of legal decisions in addressing systemic racism and inequality, as in *Brown v. Board*. By underscoring the limitations of depending merely on desegregation through legal means, Bell (1995) highlights the need for a broader, multidisciplinary approach to combating racial injustice. We recognize the intricacy of the situation, understanding that a comprehensive approach must not only involve legal and legislative measures but also engage the myriad teachers and other education stakeholders who shape impressionable minds at the chalkface level.

The book is also an acknowledgement of the burgeoning black and brown demographic in Norway, which has seen a seismic rise in recent decades. In regard to the USA, Rattansi (2020, p. 111) writes:

Another reason for the growth of studies of whiteness is the recognition that it is likely that by 2050, if not earlier, 'whites' will comprise a minority in the USA (data from the American Census Bureau in 2015 put the year at 2044). In other words, there is likely to be a crisis of American whiteness.

In parallel to the United States, where demographic changes have reshaped the black and brown population dynamics, Norway has also observed a comparable phenomenon, although not on the same scale. Both countries have experienced a notable surge in the representation and visibility of black and brown communities over the past few decades. This demographic transformation underscores a global trend towards greater ethnic diversity and multiculturalism, highlighting the interconnected nature of societal evolution across different regions. This swelling diversity increasingly yearns for recognition and validation of shared histories, contrasting starkly with the dominant trend of sidelining, bolstered by a narrative of delegitimization. Discounting these historical narratives perpetuates falsehoods and further marginalizes communities whose stories have long been omitted or disparaged. Our deliberate focus on the educational implications delineated at the conclusion of each chapter serves as a palpable manifestation of our commitment to a Freire-inspired praxis of mobilization – an active engagement in societal change advocating for a comprehensive response to racial injustice in Norway.

A note on the evolution of the term "black". Initially, the derogatory term "degos" was employed in Norway during the 1960s and 1970s to stereotype Southern and Eastern Europeans who immigrated as unskilled laborers. This term, while offensive, predominantly reflected the socio-economic status and

perceived ethnic differences of these groups rather than focusing solely on racial characteristics. It highlights a formative period in Norwegian racial classification, where factors such as ethnicity and economic status were particularly significant. The subsequent influx of immigrants from the global South brought about more pronounced shifts in racial terminology. As Norway saw an increase in immigrants from Pakistan, Sri Lanka (Tamils), Somalia, Eritrea, Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan, among others, the term “svarting” (blackie) began to surface. This term was used to collectively label and disparage individuals from these diverse backgrounds, indicating a shift towards a more color-centric form of racial othering.

Initially, Pakistanis, being one of the more visible Middle Eastern populations, were referred to pejoratively as “Pakkis”. However, with the diversification of Middle Eastern immigrants, this term became less applicable. The growing variety of Middle Eastern and South Asian immigrants led to the broader and more generalized term “innvanderer” (immigrant). This collective term became a convenient label for populists and racists to target all non-European and especially non-white individuals, ignoring the significant cultural and ethnic differences within this group. The shift from specific to broad terms reflects a deepening of racial abstraction to highlight an us-versus-them paradigm. The deployment of derogatory epithets like “Pakkis” in Norway mirrors those in the UK, revealing a disturbing common thread in the machinations of racism within predominantly white societies.

“Muslims” were *already racialized* as “Pakis” and “Arabs”. So, the point about whether Muslims are a race or not is somewhat beside the point. “Muslims” have only appeared in the frame of “race” after they had already put in an appearance in the framework of racialization, but under another guise, before they began to assert the Islamic aspect of their identities, a phenomenon that occurred in the wake of the 1979 Iranian revolution and the Salman Rushdie affair over his book *The Satanic Verses*. (Rattansi, 2020, p. 85)

Stuart Hall’s (2017) seminal work on the emergence of the self-identifier “black” within the UK context during the 1950s to 1970s offers a useful theoretical framework for understanding these processes in Norway. Hall argues that racial identities are constructed through socio-historical processes and are not static or merely biologically determined. The context of anti-racist struggles demonstrated that “black” could emerge as a unifying identity for various groups facing racial discrimination. Applying Hall’s theories to Norway, we observe that the pressure from immigration and the socio-political environment catalyzed a similar racial identity construction. The term “mørkhudet”

(dark-skinned) emerged within this context, highlighting the continued significance of skin color as a primary marker of identity and difference. Notably, this term underscores a broader, visually based categorization that transcends specific ethnicities and nationalities, indicating a pan-racial grouping based on observable characteristics.

Perhaps the starkest example of racial categorization and its pernicious impacts is the usage of the term “neger” directly translating to “nigger” in its offensive connotation, rather than the perhaps more neutral “negro” deployed as a biological descriptor. This term has been particularly weaponized against black football players and others in visible public roles, epitomizing crude racism based solely on skin color. In contemporary times, the discourse has further evolved, and terms like “innvanderer” remain prevalent, often used pejoratively in political rhetoric and public discourse. This broad categorization allows for the lumping together of a multitude of ethnic and racial groups under a single “othered” identity, simplifying the narrative for populist agendas and exacerbating xenophobic sentiments. Further academic insights can be drawn from Thomas Hylland Eriksen’s works, particularly in “Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives” (1993), which explore how national narratives, identity, and perceived threats influence racial categorization and vice versa. Eriksen’s analysis provides a deeper understanding of how contemporary Norwegian identity politics interplay with historical racial categories.

Stuart Hall’s reflections on the emergence of “black” as a personal and political identity shed light on the socio-political events that catalyzed this development globally. Hall noted, “Black as a personal identity had to wait for decolonization, the Alabama bus boycott, the Notting Hill riots, US Civil Rights, Martin Luther King’s ‘I have a Dream’, Sharpeville, Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, Angela Davis, and then later, in the 1970s, black resistance politics in Britain, Rock Against Racism, roots music, reggae, Bob Marley” (Hall, 2017b, p. 16). Applying Hall’s framework to the evolutionary trajectory of the term “black” in Norway, we observe parallels with the broader European and global racial discourse. As previously mentioned, derogatory terms like “degos” were used to categorize immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, reflecting ethnocultural distinctions rather than racial connotations. However, as Norway witnessed an influx of immigrants from the global South in subsequent decades, terms like “svarting” (blackie) emerged to distinguish these individuals based on visible racial markers like skin color. This transition signifies a nod towards Hall’s assertion that “black” as an identity emerges in response to both local and international racial dynamics.

Moreover, the evolution of terms like “Pakkis” indicates a shift towards broader racial categorizations in Norway, echoing Hall’s narrative of how broader sociopolitical movements influenced the consolidation of “black” as

a collective identity. The transition from specific ethnic slurs to more generalized terms like “innvandrere” aligns with Hall’s observations about the systematic formation of racial categories amidst changing demographics and political landscapes. The derogatory term “neger” in Norway, akin to “nigger” in its offense, aligns with Hall’s emphasis on the intersection between sociopolitical events and the shaping of racial identities. This pejorative term demonstrates how racial categorizations, laden with historical prejudices and power dynamics, have been used to marginalize and stigmatize individuals based on their perceived racial characteristics.

Hall’s insights provide a lens through which to understand how the concept of “black” in Norway evolved in response to historical events, immigration patterns, and societal transformations. His emphasis on the role of resistance movements, cultural expressions, and sociopolitical struggles in shaping racial identities resonates with the nuanced development of racial categorizations in Norway. By contextualizing Norway’s racial discourse within Hall’s framework, we gain a deeper understanding of how racial identities are constructed, contested, and transformed in response to broader historical and political contexts.

Moreover, recent sociological studies, such as those published in the “Journal of Nordic Migration Research”, have documented the shifting attitudes towards immigrants and the racialization of these groups. These studies illustrate that while terms and categories evolve, the underlying dynamics of exclusion, othering, and racial prejudice adapt and persist. The evolution of the category “black” in Norway is a complex and layered process, shaped by historical immigration patterns, socio-political changes, and broader racial dynamics. The shift from specific ethnic slurs to more generalized racial terms reflects a broader trend towards simplification and abstraction in racial categorization, which aligns with Stuart Hall’s theories on identity construction.

Our primary aim is to investigate phenomena such as the exhibition of black bodies from Senegal in Oslo and Norway’s involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. These are complex, transnational issues that demand an analytical framework extending beyond a strictly Norwegian or Nordic perspective. The works of theorists such as Frantz Fanon and W.E.B. Du Bois are particularly salient in this context, providing depth and breadth to our analysis that contemporary Scandinavian race theorization has not matched. We are of the opinion that theories of race and racism from the corpus of literature anchored in the Anglo-American tradition best facilitated our analysis of the cases. The Anglo-American theoretical frameworks have a rich history of addressing systemic and institutional racism, which proved invaluable in dissecting the particular instances of racism that this book explores. These theories bring to

light deeply entrenched societal and cultural structures that perpetuate racial inequalities, offering a comprehensive analysis suited to the case studies we have chosen.

As scholars of African descent, one reason we have authored this book is to address what we perceive as a gap in acknowledging and tackling racism within the Norwegian context. Our perspective, influenced by our lived experiences as individuals of color facing racism, aims to enrich the discourse by offering nuanced analysis to better comprehend the unique manifestations of racism in Norway. By integrating Anglo-American theories, which have a robust history of addressing both historical and contemporary racial issues, we aim to fill this gap. These theories helped us dissect not only the overt and systemic racism but also the more subtle, insidious forms that pervade daily life and institutional practices in Norway. Drawing from our combined experiences as three black authors residing in Norway, we bring a wealth of nearly 50 years of collective living in this country. This prolonged duration has granted us a singular, firsthand insight into the intricate facets of racism that are frequently disregarded in academic conversations lacking diversity. Over the course of several decades in Norway, we have observed the shifting landscape of racial relations, encountered manifestations of both overt and covert racism, and actively participated in local and national discussions surrounding issues of race.

Our book's specific focus on black bodies from Senegal in exhibition and Norway's role in the transatlantic slave trade necessitates the employment of foundational theoretical frameworks by Fanon and Du Bois, which have been extensively tested and structured to explore systemic and historical dimensions of race and racism. Employing their theories allows us to develop a nuanced and comprehensive understanding of these transnational issues, which recent Nordic scholarship has not yet fully addressed. This approach ensures our work contributes meaningfully to both national and international discourses on race and racism, bridging existing gaps and fostering a more profound understanding of these complex issues. Therefore, while we recognize the contributions of Norwegian scholars, the robustness and relevance of Fanon and Du Bois's theories to our specific analytical needs highlight why their work remains at the core of our theoretical framework.

This prolonged exposure and participation in Norwegian society afford us a profound understanding of the subtleties and complexities that theoretical and empirical studies might miss. Our collective experiences bridge the gap between abstract theoretical frameworks and the lived realities of racial minorities in Norway. This dual perspective is crucial in creating a narrative that not only analyzes but also contextualizes the instances of racism within

their social, cultural, and historical environments. Our commitment is to authenticity and depth, rather than to the performative aspect of academic citation.

To be clear, we value a wide range of scholarly contributions and acknowledge the importance of interdisciplinary perspectives. However, our choice of sources and theoretical frameworks is guided by their applicability and their capacity to illuminate the specific cases we are analyzing. The power of our work lies in its ability to draw from the most relevant and insightful scholarship, combined with deep personal experience, to present a detailed, authentic portrayal of racism in Norway. By doing so, we ensure that our work remains true to the lived experiences of racial minorities in Norway and contributes meaningfully to the broader discourse on racism, both within the country and in the global context. We are committed to producing a body of work that reflects a genuine, in-depth understanding of racism in Norway. This commitment necessitates a focus on the most relevant and impactful theories, coupled with our extensive lived experiences. Our aim is to offer a profound, authentic exploration of the subject, one that resonates deeply with those affected by these issues and informs those seeking to understand them.

Our thesis may be susceptible to critique, particularly the argument that Norway, as a welfare state, represents a markedly different societal context compared to the United States. We assert that the predominant focus of this book is on a period preceding the establishment of Norway as a welfare state. One third of our book is about racism at a time when Norway was not a welfare state (slave trade era and the “Human Zoo” project). In fact, one third of Norwegians migrated to the USA during the period (1825–1925) and assimilated, hence the relevance of the parallels. Furthermore, we argue that being a welfare state is no guarantee for experiencing lower levels of racism. It may be true that a welfare state cushions the impact of socio-economic deprivation but our focus on the stories about Eugene Obiora, the “negro” debate and Ali Farah demonstrate that the welfare state was compromised by racism in these cases. We maintain that being a welfare state does not inherently eliminate racism but rather underscores the need to critically examine how systemic inequalities can persist within seemingly egalitarian structures. Through narratives like those of Eugene Obiora and the insights on the “negro” debate, we aim to illuminate the ways in which racism can subvert the principles of social welfare and impede true societal inclusivity. By presenting diverse perspectives from different immigrant backgrounds, including the discrepancies in perceived national identity, we aim to shed light on the multifaceted nature of cultural integration and societal acceptance in Norway.

Research in Norway (Friberg, 2016; Thomas, Changezi, & Enstad, 2016) indicates that the social mobility of children of immigrants in Norway is not synonymous with acceptance and belonging. It varies to what extent young people with an immigrant background experience being accepted as Norwegian. Young people with a western immigrant background feel that others consider them more Norwegian than what they themselves feel. Young people with a visible non-Western minority background, on the other hand, experience that others see them as less Norwegian than they themselves feel, and Muslims in particular experience that others see them as Norwegian to a small extent. The findings indicate that both visible minority background and religion are experienced as one barrier to being accepted as part of the national community (Friberg, 2016, p. 82).

While we appreciate the Norwegian late anthropologist Marianne Gullestad's (2005) insights, we respectfully disagree with the singular focus on sameness and homogeneity in understanding exclusion mechanisms. Our argument extends to encompass the complexities of exclusion based on factors like pigmentation, ethnicity, and religion. By challenging notions of uniformity and highlighting the distinct experiences of various minority groups, we seek to elucidate the nuanced interplay of identity, power, and discrimination in societal structures. There is a difference between exclusion based on black skin color and exclusion based on being a Sami or Pole, for instance. It is dissatisfaction with such blurring that led us to write this book in the first place. The United Nations report highlights significant concerns articulated by UN experts regarding the presence of racial discrimination against individuals of African descent in Norway. This scrutiny raises pertinent questions regarding the efficacy of the welfare state model in addressing issues of racism within the country. Contrary to popular assumptions, the presence of a comprehensive welfare system does not function as a panacea against racism, as evidenced by persistent discriminatory practices experienced by people of African descent in Norway (UN, 15 March 2024):

“However, people of African descent continue to face racial profiling, hate speech, racist bullying in schools, barriers to access employment and forced removal of children by Child Welfare Services (Barnevernet)”, the experts said in a statement.

According to testimonies received during the visit, the forcible removal of children of African descent from their parents and their placement in Child Welfare services are not always done in the most appropriate manner for their wellbeing and, in some instances, has resulted in

traumatizing some children and generating fear among people of African descent in Norway” the Working Group said.

“According to information received from people of African descent, Child Welfare Services are perceived as policing their culture, presuming that they are guilty of the neglect of their children, which, in consequence, has reportedly had a negative impact on their family lives”, the experts said.

Non-Western immigrant children often navigate dual realities, excelling in their personal achievements while simultaneously facing racism and societal prejudices. Recognizing this duality and validating their experiences can foster empathy and awareness of the complexities they encounter. Embracing this duality as part of their narrative can help reconcile the coexistence of social mobility and racism. Du Bois’s theory of double consciousness highlights the psychological conflict and sense of duality experienced by individuals who are part of marginalized groups, particularly in relation to their own identities and how they are perceived by dominant society. This duality reflects the internal struggle of reconciling multiple identities and perspectives. In contrast, Gullestad’s (2005) focus on sameness and homogeneity may overlook the complexities of identity formation and the nuanced experiences of individuals who straddle multiple cultural, racial, and societal contexts. Emphasizing sameness can oversimplify the diversity of identities and experiences within immigrant communities.

Theoretically, we are inspired by critical race theory and postcolonial theory, where researchers focus on the social identity, location, and often taken-for-granted privilege and marginalization related to visible differences. In a public debate on critical race theory, Norwegian scholars such as Torkel Brekke have claimed that this theoretical tradition is mostly relevant within an American context and that this perspective is not relevant in a Norwegian context. We argue that while it may be true that race and racialization is done quite differently in Norway compared to, for example, in the US, where race is a much more present social category in everyday life, critical race theory is useful for understanding the implicit, but nevertheless powerful hierarchies that exist in Norwegian society. Racism is not something that only exists in the US. Even though race is a concept that has been taboo in Norwegian academia since World War II, being Norwegian or European is nevertheless in everyday life something that is still very much associated with being white (Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021, p. 2).

Allow us to elaborate on the rationale behind selecting classical race theorists and discuss the friction and tension points that arise when their theories

are applied to the Norwegian setting. In incorporating the perspectives of these classical authors, our intention is not merely to draw parallels but to delve into how their insights can unravel the intricacies of racial dynamics in Norway. For instance, the quote from the weekly newspaper *Urd* in 1914: “It is wonderful that we are white, white!” – echoes Fanon’s exploration of the internal schisms caused by a racialized gaze in his seminal work, “Fact of Blackness”. Here, Fanon’s initially colonial framework finds an echo in early 20th-century Norwegian society, which, despite its geographical distance from the colonies, was imbued with a similar racialized ideology. The crowd’s jubilant embrace of whiteness at the “Human zoo” is disturbingly reminiscent of the colonial mindset where whiteness was lauded as the epitome of human civilization – a theme Fanon tackles with critical depth.

In terms of friction and divergence, the racial dynamics in Norway are somewhat more implicit and involved internalized white supremacy without a substantial colonial complex. The overt manifestations of racial superiority, like those described by Fanon in colonial territories, are less apparent but no less significant in Norway. For instance, the framing of blackness in Norway often centered around folklore, racial exhibits, and symbolic representations rather than the direct colonial experience that Fanon describes. Further, Hitler’s depiction of Aryan supremacy in *Mein Kampf* ties into these local manifestations of racial superiority, providing a broader European context. This pseudo-scientific racism, claiming that advancements in art, science, and technology were the exclusive domain of whites, not only bolstered ideologies of Aryan privilege but also mirrored the racial hierarchies visible in Norwegian society at the time. The notion that “Human Zoos” provided psychological validation for white supremacy highlights the apparatus through which racial ideologies were both constructed and perpetuated in Europe, Norway included.

Turning to Du Bois, his concept of “double consciousness” is particularly useful in understanding the psychological consequences for black individuals navigating such a racially stratified society. The idea that one’s self-perception is constantly mediated by the external, often hostile, gaze provides insight into the lived experiences of black people in Norway and their complex negotiation of identity within a predominantly white population. This framework is imperative in examining how black Norwegians developed coping mechanisms akin to their African-American counterparts, albeit within a different but equally racialized environment. Of course there are caveats in the transnational application of theories. In Norway, the racial minorities have historically been much smaller, and the racial integration/segregation dynamic differs somewhat. The Norwegian society’s homogeneity means experiences of racial duality may manifest more in the context of social invisibility or forced assimilation rather

than Du Bois's sharp divide in the US. Additionally, black Norwegians might experience a different type of double consciousness, connected more to their visibility as minoritized "others" in small numbers rather than a pervasive socio-economic divide.

The juxtaposition of Césaire's notion of "thingification" with racial imagery in Norwegian media further cements these comparisons. His term captures the dehumanization process, turning individuals into mere objects – which resonates powerfully with the derogatory comparisons and depictions of black people in Norwegian newspapers. Such media representations serve as a form of knowledge production that reinforces racial inequalities, mirroring Foucault's ideas about power and discourse. These portrayals in the media do not operate in a vacuum but are part of a more extensive discourse that legitimizes racial hierarchies and justifies the continued marginalization of black individuals. While there are parallels in the way black bodies were exhibited and demeaned in Norway (e.g., the 1914 "Human Zoo"), the "thingification" in the Norwegian context also includes subtler psychological and cultural dimensions. The Norwegian cultural memory and media representation might involve less explicit dehumanization and more insidious forms of racial stereotyping and cultural erasure, creating a divergence in the mechanics and implications of thingification".

In contemporary times, the examination of residential segregation patterns in Oslo offers a tangible manifestation of these enduring racial ideologies. The tendency for black and brown residents to congregate in specific districts reflects not only economic disparities but also a conscious choice to mitigate the alienation experienced in predominantly white areas. This self-segregation can be viewed as a modern permutation of the racial containment strategies witnessed in the past, suggesting that the racial dynamics of 1914 still cast a long shadow over present-day Oslo.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o's work is intensely tied to the linguistic and cultural reclamation in post-colonial African societies, emphasizing the decolonization of language and literature as crucial to liberational identity. The indigenous Sámi people's decolonization parallels might intersect more directly with Ngugi's insights than the experiences of black people, who did not face a direct colonial imposition in their historical experience in Norway. However, the concept may diverge when applied to understanding contemporary racial issues faced by black Norwegians, as their struggle involves integrating and asserting identity within an already established Norwegian cultural framework rather than reclaiming an indigenous past dominated by external colonizers.

In sum, the application of these classical authors to the Norwegian context is not an attempt to force-fit their theories but rather to use their insights to

uncover the nuances of racial dynamics specific to Norway. This adaptation seeks to shed light on both historical and contemporary realities, offering a nuanced critique that acknowledges the unique cultural and social fabric of 20th-century Norway while drawing on the robust analytical tools these thinkers provide.

We are indebted to giants from diverse disciplines in the field of race and racism who understood, in the spirit of Dr. King, that the road to racial justice has many lanes. Effectively addressing the tenacious challenges posed by racism necessitates a multidisciplinary approach drawing on insights from diverse fields such as sociology, history, psychology, economics, and critical race theory to understand the complex dynamics of racism and its impact on education. In addition, we have benefited from the integration of perspectives from critical discourse analysis, critical pedagogy, critical media studies, legislative reforms and open dialogue within society, among others. Our aim is to lay the groundwork for a future that is not only more inclusive but also inherently equitable. Bonilla-Silva (2022, p. 833) reminds us of the multidisciplinary nature of systemic racism. “Systemic racism refers to societies where the social, political, economic, cultural, and even psychological rewards are *partially* allocated along racial lines. Partially because the distribution of rewards in any society involves more than one axis of social division”. By integrating diverse perspectives and disciplines, policymakers, educators, and activists can develop more comprehensive strategies for dismantling systemic racism and promoting equity in education.

Chapter 2 takes up where chapter left off with a view towards providing a heuristic timeline. The 1914 “Human Zoo” exhibition in Oslo, also called the “Congo Village” or “Negro Village”, offers important insight into extant racial ideologies and Norway’s participation in the broader European colonial project. Organizers put eighty people of African origin, incorrectly labeled as Congolese, on display for public viewing in Frogner Park, Oslo. Most contemporary Norwegians are unfamiliar with the scope and ambition of the 1914 Human Zoo exhibition, perhaps best encapsulated in the fact that more than half of the population paid to visit the exhibition and gawk at black bodies. The goal of showcasing Norway’s progress as a nation was orchestrated to coincide with the centennial celebrations of its constitution. However, behind the façade of progress and festivity lay an ominous reality: the fetishization and dehumanization of black bodies for the entertainment and curiosity of white spectators.

We argue that the embedded and tenacious legacy of racism and colonialism that rears its head at regular intervals in contemporary Norwegian society cannot be effectively combated without first locking horns with the historical

trajectory of the racism evident in, among others, the “Human Zoo” project. It is in the interstices of such historical events and contexts, we argue, that a particular habitus of white supremacy vis-à-vis black bodies has crystallized and continues to befuddle endeavors at discussing racism in contemporary Norway. Through a meticulous study of media coverage of the “Human Zoo project” both then and the bicentennial celebration of 2014, our chapter explores the ways in which racial hierarchies were constructed and reinforced through discourses of superiority and othering. Drawing on critical race theory and the works of scholars like Frantz Fanon and Michel Foucault, we unpack the machinations of power and control that underpinned the exhibition, uncovering how the white gaze served to dehumanize and exoticize black bodies.

Fanon’s (1986) introspection, especially his analysis of the psychological impact of racial prejudice, resonates deeply with the narrative of the Human Zoo exhibition. His iconic words, “Look, a Negro”, uttered by white spectators, fix blackness with a slur and epidermal character, thus sealing blackness into itself. This dehumanizing narrative, perpetuated by colonial discourses of racial superiority, served to construct and cement racial hierarchies, consigning black bodies to the status of “the other”. Fanon’s insights lay bare the nakedness of the “facts of blackness” and savage any attempt at seeking refuge in the comforting notion of colorblindness. The exhibition of black bodies in the Human Zoo served as a form of symbolic violence, in which blackness was associated with primitiveness and inferiority, while whiteness was endorsed as the archetype of civilization and progress. This dichotomy of race served to undergird the prevailing hegemony, wherein white Europeans positioned themselves as the custodians of knowledge and enlightenment.

We argue that schools and academia should spearhead the struggle against the legacy of Orientalism, which perpetuates stereotypes and essentialist views of non-Western cultures. By confronting Orientalist perspectives, education can contribute to a more inclusive and just society. The current status of education in Norwegian schools, where teachers tiptoe around issues of racism, is untenable. We call for a pedagogy of discomfort that takes seriously the task of fostering dialogue, critical reflection and understanding of how whiteness intersects with other forms of identity, such as gender, ethnicity, and class. The aim of antiracist education in this regard should be one that encourages critical consciousness among students, empowering them to recognize and challenge subtle forms of racism. This involves fostering empathy, dialogue, and an obligation to dismantle oppressive systems. Contra populist, right-wing politicians who question the existence of whiteness studies in academia, we advocate the importance of critically exploring the ideology of whiteness, white privilege and supremacy within educational settings.

Chapter three explores the legacy of Eugene Obiora, a Nigerian-born Norwegian citizen who died in 2006 after being strangled by a police officer during a tragic encounter outside the social services office in Trondheim. The case, which generated national attention, is poignant fourteen years later because of the striking parallels between his death and that of George Floyd in 2020. Obiora was Norway's George Floyd, and the latter's murder reinforces the relevance of themes such as systemic racism and the denigration of black bodies. As soon as the news of George Floyd's death filtered in, thousands of black, brown and white youth spontaneously marched in solidarity with George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement in one of Norway's biggest peacetime demonstrations. Some populist politicians were more concerned with the violations of the COVID-19 rules against public assembly than the frustration felt by the youth, a moment that exposed how out of touch these politicians were with the realities of systemic racism and police brutality faced by marginalized communities. The chapter also considers the contribution from the world of music in response to Obiora's death, particularly within the realm of rap and hip-hop music. It explores how artists such as Samvirkelaget used their platforms to address issues of social injustice and advocate for change, reminiscent of Dr. King's need for many lanes in the struggle for racial justice. The chapter explores the ongoing struggle for racial justice and accountability in relation to police brutality, despite the passage of time. It emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and addressing systemic racism within law enforcement and society as a whole.

Once again, we advocate, in direct opposition to the prevailing trend, particularly evident in milieus such as Governor Ron DeSantis's Florida, for educators to acquaint themselves with the vital insights offered by scholars well-versed in critical race theory. Norwegian educational curricula should integrate this analytical framework to enhance comprehension and promote critical thinking regarding racism. We argue that the broad contours of racism, despite the divergent historical trajectories between the Norwegian and, for example, Anglo-American contexts, exhibit significant parallels and displays notable similarities, underscoring the relevance of employing critical race theory, whiteness studies, and analogous approaches. The chapter also calls for schools and institutions of higher learning to incorporate media literacy education into the curriculum to equip students with skills to scrutinize media depictions, question narratives, and identify potential biases in news reporting. This will help foster an astute and well-informed citizenry capable of critically engaging with media messages about race and racism.

We also contend that there is a need to distinguish between the various permutations of racism, such as antisemitism, antiblack racism, and Islamophobia, among others, rather than subsume them under the umbrella term

“bullying”, as is often the case in Norwegian educational discourse. This distinction is crucial for understanding and addressing specific manifestations of racism. The chapter contends that categorizing these interconnected yet distinct forms of racism as mere “bullying” undercuts attempts to grasp and dismantle the unique racisms under scrutiny. This approach fundamentally perpetuates colorblind notions, which allow the devious structure of racism to persist unbridled. Not least, schools should boost artistic expressions that champion social justice, such as rap and hip-hop, which resonate with marginalized communities. Exploring alternative forms of resistance familiar to the world of students fosters a sense of agency and empowerment among students.

In Chapter 4, we consider the intricate dynamics of racial discourse in Norwegian media (1970–2014) as refracted through the epithet “neger” (negro). Using a systematic literature review of 30 Norwegian newspapers, the study shows that far from being a “neutral biological descriptor”, as some argue, “neger” has been employed as a racial slur to incarcerate black bodies in a web of disparagement. While overall societal attitudes have changed for the better, the epithet “neger” continues to make headlines, as evidenced by recent incidents like Finance Norway’s use of the term “negerarbeid” or “negro work” during a job interview. The chapter argues for a nuanced understanding of racial discourse and the need for inclusive language practices to combat systemic racism in Norway. We explore the manner in which the deliberate use of the prefix “Negro” in Norwegian media in the period studied cemented black “inferiority” – black music, athletes and literature, among others – were put beyond the pale with the invocation of “neger” as a premodifier. We draw on Eldrige Cleaver (1992) and Louis Althusser (2014) to show how “Negro” functions as an interpellation that hails individuals into a subjective position that subverts the talent and achievements of black artists, athletes and intellectuals.

The chapter employs the concept of the “Racial Contract” by Charles W. Mills to consider the shared disdain for the idea of a black Santa in both the USA and Norway, indicating underlying white supremacist beliefs. Following Emile Durkheim’s (2001) theory of tokenism, we posit the argument that figures like Santa Claus, along with superheroes like Superman or Batman, serve as totems of the modern Western world. The averseness of countenancing the idea of a black Santa Claus can be understood through this framework. For many in Western society, Santa Claus is a white figure because he personifies and reinforces white cultural values and norms. To visualize a black Santa would challenge the established order of white cultural hegemony and destabilize the symbolic power of Santa as a totemic figure of the West. Furthermore, the interrelatedness of this discussion to transnational whiteness is highlighted in the controversy surrounding the character of Black Pete in

Dutch tradition, further showcasing the fruitfulness of studying race and racism through a global prism. The chapter proposes steps that educational institutions can pursue to address issues of racism, including creating safe spaces for dialogue, promoting critical thinking, and empowering students to advocate for diversity and inclusion.

The final chapter explores the disturbing incident involving Ali Farah, a Somali-born Norwegian citizen, who was the victim of a violent assault in Sofienberg Park, Oslo, in 2007. Upon arrival, the ambulance drivers refused to drive Farah to the hospital despite visible injuries and the testimony of nurses, among others. This incident sparked a nationwide debate on systemic biases in healthcare, with claims of racism permeating the narrative. The role of a police officer, who was preoccupied with an injured Farah's legal status rather than his health and safety, also came under scrutiny. The chapter considers the phenomenon of racial profiling in medical response, drawing on research by Jennifer L. Eberhardt (2019), which studies the brain's bias for classifying faces based on race. We argue that Eberhardt's findings indicate that involuntary biases may have swayed the paramedics' actions towards Farah, shedding light on the intricacies of implicit racial biases in demanding situations. The chapter also makes reference to instances of racism against a growing number of black and brown junior doctors in Norway, which underscores the pervasive nature of systemic inequalities and the urgent need for reform.

The chapter concludes with recommendations for educational institutions, with a focus on developing awareness of implicit racial biases. We refer to research that regrettably identifies schools as arenas where students of color experience the most racism in Norway (UNICEF, 2022). Such findings oblige schools to uphold zero tolerance for racism as outlined in the Education Act. The experiences of these students of color, as well as the language of diversity and inclusion in government policies and educational curricula, are incongruent. We reiterate the importance of jettisoning the entrenched colorblind platitude all too common in Norwegian educational discourse and challenge all stakeholders in education to engage in open, empathetic conversations about implicit racial bias, microaggressions, and related concepts from the field of race and racism.

Slavery, Reparations and Black Lives Matter

1 Unspoken Histories: Norway's Silent Slave Trade Legacy

While there are significant differences in how countries like Norway, Britain, and the USA have grappled with their slave-trading past and the ongoing struggle for recognition and reparations, the overarching themes of historical amnesia and the critical role of social movements provide a unifying thread. These elements reveal a global, albeit uneven, journey towards acknowledging and addressing the long shadow cast by the history of slavery. There could have been as many as 100 African slaves who lived in Norway, yet the acknowledgment of this history is only now beginning to surface. This reluctance to fully engage with its past reflects a broader national reticence. The global recognition of the story of US slavery, which is not only widely known but also characterized by household names due to the country's influence through English and Hollywood (*Amistad*, *12 Years a Slave*, etc.), among others, highlights its enduring impact on the world stage. For instance, Harriet Tubman's evocative words, once she crossed the Mason-Dixon Line, "I looked at my hands to see if I was de same person now I was free. Dere was such a glory ober everything, de sun came like gold trou de trees and ober the fields, and I felt like I was in heaven" (Sadlier, 2012, p. 53), transcend time and place, resonating deeply within a global audience. Her profound expression of liberation and transformation ignites a universal empathy, stirring hearts worldwide and bridging the collective human experience of yearning for freedom.

The Nigerian-British former slave and abolitionist Olaudah Equiano's impactful autobiography, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*, along with the works of other notable figures like Frederick Douglass, underscores how enslaved individuals in the US and Britain transcended borders by teaching themselves to read and write. Through their written accounts of the brutality of slavery, these self-educated individuals not only exposed the horrors of the slave trade but also contributed to the transnational recognition of their experiences, amplifying the abolitionist movements in both countries. Equiano's and Douglass's literary accomplishments exemplify the power of education and self-expression in challenging the inhumanity of slavery on a global scale. Olaudah Equiano's narrative vividly depicted the personal struggles and resilience of enslaved individuals humanizing their experiences and evoking empathy. Through his powerful storytelling, Equiano personalized the

harsh realities of slavery, fostering a deeper understanding and compassion among readers. This empathetic response stirred public sentiment and played a significant role in the eventual abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in 1807. Equiano's ability to convey the human toll of slavery through his personal narrative exemplifies the transformative impact of individual stories in galvanizing social change.

It was about the beginning of the spring 1757 when I arrived in England, and I was near twelve years of age at that time ... One morning, when I got upon deck, I saw it covered all over with the snow that fell overnight: as I had never seen anything of the kind before, I thought it was salt; so I immediately ran down to the mate and desired him, as well as I could, to come and see how somebody in the night had thrown salt all over the deck. (Equiano, 2016, p. 48)

This global recognition of US slavery stands in stark contrast to the narratives of black Brazilians, which are not as transnationally renowned despite Brazil hosting the largest black population in the Western Hemisphere. In a country like Norway, where the history of a handful of black slaves has been sanitized and omitted from the national narrative, this omission can partly be attributed to the small numbers involved. The public and scholarly discourse frequently revisit the topics of slavery and reparations, influenced by detailed demographic tracking and a long history of racial categorization. This has fueled significant movements and debates around reparations, making it a contentious yet crucial conversation in American society.

Britain also shares a more extensive and publicly acknowledged history of slavery. This acknowledgment has been propelled by movements aimed at dismantling the legacies of colonialism, such as campaigns to remove statues of figures who were instrumental in the slave trade. These efforts have created a robust framework for understanding the nation's colonial past and its repercussions. Interestingly, the call for reparations is more pronounced in Caribbean nations such as Jamaica and Barbados. These countries, directly impacted by colonial exploitation, have vocal and organized movements demanding reparative justice from former colonial powers. The Caribbean Community Reparations Commission exemplifies this effort, demonstrating a proactive stance in seeking redress for historical injustices. Despite these differences, there are striking similarities across different countries and periods when it comes to historical amnesia. Whether in Norway, Britain, or the United States, there has been a recurrent theme of selective memory regarding the presence and impact of slavery. In Norway, this manifested as minimizing its

role in the Danish-Norwegian Union's slave trade, paralleling efforts in Britain and the USA to sanitize or ignore parts of their histories.

Present-day social movements like Black Lives Matter have played a pivotal role in pushing these historical narratives to the forefront. The George Floyd protests, for instance, catalyzed significant demonstrations in Norway, mirroring global activism aimed at addressing the enduring impact of racism. These movements underscore a commonality: the use of activism as a critical tool for historical reckoning and societal change. Media and academic narratives often follow a pattern of evasion when discussing reparations. In Norway, reports tend to focus on the specifics of historical events, such as the discovery of the slave ship *Fredensborg*, while shying away from discussing reparations. This mirrors tendencies in other nations to detail the historical atrocities without fully addressing the systemic culpability and the need for reparative justice.

For the slave remains an unknown warrior, invoked by moralists on both sides of the Atlantic, recalled now in museums in one-time slave ports from Liverpool to Elmina, but all the same unspeaking, and therefore remote and elusive. Like slaves in antiquity, African slaves suffered, but the character of their distress may be more easily conveyed by novelists such as Mérimée than by a historian. No doubts, though, the dignity, patience, and gaiety of the African in the New World is the best of all memorials. (Thomas, 1997, p. 799)

The eminent English historian Hugh Thomas's concluding words in his classic book *The Slave Trade: The History of the Atlantic Slave Trade 1440–1870* (1997) capture what we hope to approximate in this chapter: give a voice to the unknown slaves who walked on these shores in Norway over 400 years ago. Far from being a country devoid of people of color, and blacks in particular, recent studies about Norway's involvement in the trans-Atlantic slave trade have uncovered evidence of upwards of 20 (could be as high as 100) African slaves living as the property of various elites in Norway (Antirasistisk Senter, 2020). As Figure 1 shows, there were about 150,000 individuals in Norway in 2023 (in a population of ca. 5.5 million) who trace their heritage to the same continent the slaves came from. These statistics include non-black Africans north of the Sahara and exclude blacks from the USA, South America and other non-African countries. Hence, if all blacks in Norway were counted, the numbers would be much higher. In contrast to the USA, Norway eschews tabulation according to ethnicity or race. It is only recently, and with much reticence, that the term "race" is entering the academic discourse in Norway as an analytical framework (Andersson, 2022; Døving, 2022; Bangstad, 2017; Røthing, 2015; Thomas, 2016).

05183: Immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents, by year. Africa, Immigrants and Norwegian-born to immigrant parents.

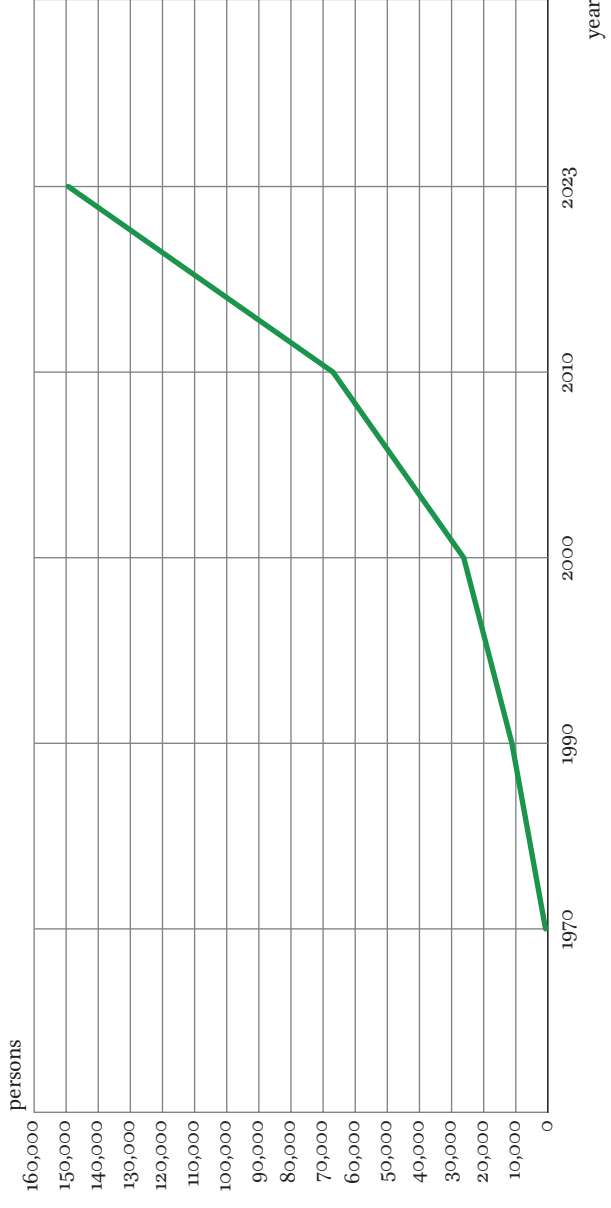


FIGURE 1 African demographic in Norway since 1970 (Source: Statistics Norway, 2023)

As scholars of African origin and commensurate with academic conventions on reflexivity and positionality, we do not pretend to approach this topic from a disinterested stance. Sadly, Hugh Thomas's statement about some slaves "recalled now in museums in one-time slave ports" is true of the slaves who knew no freedom in Norway. We, as a new generation of Africans, in a Norway considered a bastion of freedom, human rights and democracy, seek to pay homage to the struggles, patience and dignity of those ancestors in this chapter.

In 1974, amateur Norwegian divers discovered the wreck of the slave ship *Fredensborg* off the southern coast of Norway. This discovery of one of the trans-Atlantic slave trade's best-preserved slave ships came as a surprise to many in Norway and raised uncomfortable questions about the precise details and scope of Norway's complicity during the period of the Danish-Norwegian Union (1380–1814). The lingering reticence among the Norwegian public toward coming to terms with the country's complicity in the slave trade cannot be attributed to a dearth of scholarly literature. Several studies have broached the topic and documented this unsavory aspect of Norway's past. In his book *De Dansk-Norske Tropekoloniene [The Danish-Norwegian Tropical Colonies]* (2020), Roar Løken notes that many Norwegians participated in the Danish-Norwegian slave trade as officials, traders, craftsmen and in other capacities in the tropics, and that while Norway left the union with Denmark in 1814, many Norwegians were still active in the slave trade. Hilde Sandvik, professor of archaeology, conservation and history at the University of Oslo, notes that "in total, approximately 120,000 slaves were transported from the Danish forts in Africa. Many were sold to French and English slave owners. About 50,000 came to the Danish colonies, a significant proportion of these in the ten years after 1792" (Sandvik, 2023).

Another recent book that explores Norway's involvement in the trans-Atlantic slave trade is Per Ivar Hjeldebakken Engevold's *Nordmenn i slavefart: Og andre historier fra det danske koloniriket [Norwegians in the Slave Trade: And other stories from the Danish colonial empire]* (2022). Engevold's work commendably links Norway's colonial past to the present, exploring how contemporary antiracism debates, like those surrounding police violence following the George Floyd case in the USA, may be influenced by Norway's historical involvement in the slave trade. This conundrum is encapsulated in the current activism demanding that streets and even city districts should expunge the names of historical figures who enriched themselves through the slave trade in Norway – names like Jørgen Thormøhlen (Norway's largest shipowner), Peter Wessel Tordenskjold (vice-admiral) and Ulrik Frederik Gyldenløve (Governor-General of Norway from 1664 to 1699) (Engevold, 2022, p. 245). Unfortunately, Engevold's (2022) treatment of the nexus between

Norway's slave-trading past and contemporary debates taken up in the last chapter of his book under the subheading "The legacy after colonialism: 'Black Lives Matter' and racial symbolism", leaves much to be desired. He leans on another Norwegian historian, Øystein Sørensen, who feebly attempts to defend statues of Norwegian figures who benefitted from the slave trade by making a distinction between the purpose behind these statues in Norway and a defeated confederacy in the USA.

None of the disputed statues or monuments in Norway have been set up with the intention of paying tribute to racism or slavery, as is the case with some of the statues depicting Southern soldiers or slave owners in the United States. Several of these statues were set up long after the American Civil War was over as a deliberate provocation against the black population. (Engevold, 2022, pp. 246, 247)

The *raison d'être* behind the existence of these monuments is a red herring. One can hardly argue that the sculptors behind the busts and statues of figures such as Cecil Rhodes and Edward Colston in South Africa and Great Britain respectively plied their trade with the intention of antagonizing black people; money and self-aggrandizement are more plausible explanations. Engevold does nuance the earlier, for many, untenable apologia for these statues in stating, "This does not mean that these monuments should be left 'in peace' without a discussion. Statues and street names can easily be changed, but the real change – an attitudinal change – is a much more complicated process. Very often, this process begins by learning about history" (Engevold, 2022, p. 247). The above goes to show that there is a growing corpus of literature in Norwegian written by Norwegians and seeking to grapple with a dark chapter in the country's history – a history that has long been silenced, much like the shipwrecked slave ship *Fredensborg* discovered in 1974.

Even a cursory internet search turns up surprising facts unknown to the majority of Norwegians, such as "The African presence in Norway dates back to 1596". This statement is from an educational website run by *The Norwegian Centre Against Racism* and tailored towards high school students under the title "Black History in Norway" (Antirasistisk Senter, 2020). While the webpage does not mention critical race theory's tenet called "counter storytelling" or the "unique voice-of-color" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012), the writers marshal this tenet effectively. In a delicate coexistence with antiessentialist perspectives, the voice-of-color thesis posits that individuals from black, American Indian, Asian, and Latino/a backgrounds may possess the capacity to better articulate issues related to race and racism to their white counterparts. Essentially, minority status is accompanied by an inherent presumption of competence in

addressing issues related to race and racism (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 10). Here is one example:

Christian Hansen Ernst is said to have been a [black] slave in England approximately in the year 1660. As a child, he entered the service of Norway's governor, Ulrik Frederik Gyldenløve, when he stayed in London as the king's envoy. When Gyldenløve moved back to Norway, Ernst joined him.

Gyldenløve appointed Ernst as postmaster in Kragerø in 1681, likely based on his recommendation, after Ernst worked with him for just over 10 years. In 1683, Ernst also received the office of weigher and measurer. Ernst is said to have been stabbed in Kragerø in 1694 by a jealous man, because they had courted the same lady, and Ernst is said to have been the favorite. The place where Ernst was stabbed to death is now called Knivstikkersmauet [roughly "the alley of the stabbing"]. (Antirasistisk Senter, 2020)

In the tragic case of Christian Hansen Ernst, it is not so much about "black competence" to better articulate the predicament of black people but a moral obligation to simply document and publicize the fact that there were over 20 black individuals who were slaves in Norway and have been whitewashed out of history. The Norwegian film producer, Ole Bernt Tellefsen, believes the figure was closer to a hundred (Arnli, 2019). Malcolm X gave expression to this expunging of the black experience in the context of American chattel slavery and racism when he famously remarked, "We are a people who formerly were Africans who were kidnapped and brought to America. Our forefathers weren't the Pilgrims. We didn't land on Plymouth Rock; the rock was landed on us. We were brought here against our will; we were not brought here to be made citizens" (Malcolm X's Audubon address, March 29, 1964). In the subsequent section, we delineate the research and methodological concerns that form the basis for this chapter.

2 Media Research and Analysis of Content

2.1 *Content Analysis*

Retriever Research is Norway's largest media archive in the Nordic countries. News from radio, television, print, and digital media is archived. The key words were narrowed down to: Danish-Norwegian, slave trade, slave ship, and Arendal (city in Agder country, southeastern Norway, where the slave shipwreck was

discovered). Content analysis is defined as “any technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Holsti, 1969, p. 14). Others highlight content analysis’s suitability as a tool for exploring the way in which news, drama, advertising, and entertainment refract social and cultural issues, values, and related phenomena (Hansen & Machin, 2019, p. 89). As a research method, content analysis has been employed in the fields of media studies, communication, psychology, and social sciences to analyze audio, visual, and textual information, among others, with a view to identifying patterns, connections, and themes. While some draw up predetermined criteria in the search for objective and systematic categories, others adopt a grounded approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

In this study, grounded theory, deemed commensurate with the task of exploring intricate social phenomena, is deployed in shedding light on the complex phenomenon that is the Norwegian slave trade and its present-day implications. Detailed notes were maintained (memoing) where each author’s thoughts, ideas, and critical reflections were recorded with the intention of further refining these reflections during meetings at frequent intervals. The authors iteratively read through the media articles covering the topic of Norway’s involvement in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, discussing and refining the codes generated until a point of saturation was reached where no new information was generated. There was a consensus among the authors to utilize a content analysis protocol with guidelines for coding to bolster inter-coder reliability (Bryman, 2004). In the final reckoning, nine sources generated 24 hits. Of the 24, several overlapped, and the final number of media reports on the slave trade and Norway was whittled down to 16 papers. The 16 selected articles yielded an inter-coder reliability percentage of approximately 80%. All translations from Norwegian to English are the authors’.

The selection of media articles from the period 2015 to 2022 coincided with noteworthy global movements such as Black Lives Matter, Rhodes Must Fall and the George Floyd murder. The murder of George Floyd was not perceived as another in a long litany of antiblack American racism across the pond. According to one source, it quickly gelled into possibly the largest peacetime demonstration in front of the Parliament of Norway despite the ban on public gatherings during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The demonstration in front of the Storting [Parliament] today, in support of George Floyd and the victims of racism in the USA, is possibly the largest in front of the Storting ever, with between 12,000 and 15,000 people, according to the police. The entire Eidsvoll square is filled, and people stand close together, as if at a packed concert. (Velle & Kjernsli, 2020)

This groundswell, intensity and passion of demonstrators, mostly young and many brown and black, surprised many social commentators and triggered new discussions about racism in Norway, a phenomenon that many erroneously believed was not a major issue in Norway. Our research was interested in exploring the gaze of overwhelmingly white and Norwegian journalists and their coverage. Of interest was the nature of the factual information, the interpretation of the motives of those involved, the attribution of blame, the depiction of the slaves, and, importantly, the presence or absence of lessons extrapolated to modern times in light of the previously mentioned global antiracist mobilizations. Over 11% of the Norwegian demographic are people of color, and hence the answers gleaned from this study resonate with a burgeoning segment of the Norwegian population, informing notions of belonging and acceptance.

2.2 *Critical Discourse Analysis*

Critical discourse analysis explores the link between “language and power, or more precisely about connections between language use and unequal power” (Fairclough, 2013, p. 1). A preliminary step on the journey of emancipation, is the need to foster an understanding of how language is intricately woven into mechanisms of control. Several studies have employed critical discourse analysis in exploring media content. Fairclough and Wodak (1997) argue for the utilization of critical discourse theory as both a theory and a method and offer valuable insights on contemporary journalists’ depictions of the Danish-Norwegian trans-Atlantic slave trade in contemporary media. Scrutinizing the language and framing employed by the journalists – e.g., the gaze of the reporters, what is highlighted or disregarded, the lexicality and tone, among others – helps unpack underlying ideologies and power structures.

2.3 *Obfuscating Causality*

We first argue in this section that only one of the 16 newspaper reports covering the subject of Norway’s culpability in the trans-Atlantic slave trade mentions reparations. The media spotlight is on the shocking discovery of the shipwrecked *Fredensborg* off the coast of Norway in 1974, revisiting the gory details of the slave ship logbook, certain elite families from cities like Bergen and Arendal who benefitted from the slave trade and, a film by the producer Ole Bernt Tellefsen, and a couple of articles denying Norway’s culpability as a revision of history. The issue of reparations is conspicuous by its absence. From 1672 to 1917 the Denmark-Norway Union had a colony in the Caribbean called the Danish West Indies, which consisted of the islands St. Thomas, St. Jan and St. Croix. The issue of reparations may be muted in the Norwegian mediascape, but not in the Caribbean. Sir Hillary Beckles, the historian who

TABLE 1 Headlines in Norwegian media 2015–2022

No.	Media	Date	Headline
1	vG (The Course of the World)	19.06.16	When Norwegians had slaves. Black slaves became rich man's fashion in the 1700-hundreds.
2	Bergensavisen (The Bergen Newspaper)	21.01.17	The people of Bergen profited from the slave trade
3	Dagbladet (The Daily Magazine)	29.05.18	Norway's bloody slave history. Norwegians made themselves rich from the slave trade, while Africans worked their way to death
4	Agderposten (The Agder Post)	15.06.18	The slave ship's last journey
5	Klassekampen (The Class Struggle)	25.07.18	Norway, a colonial power
6	Agderposten (The Agder Post)	30.11.18	Everyone sought immediately to save his life
7	Museumsnytt (The Museum News)	05.07.19	Evades the important debates
8	Fædrelandsvennen (The Friend of the Fatherland)	09.11.19	Used African slaves as decoration
9	Agderposten	14.10.19	Arendalsfilm sheds new light on Norwegian slave history
10	Agderposten	17.10.20	Puts new light on Norwegian slave history
11	Bergensavisen	08.12.19	The Bergen slave trade
12	Birkenes Avisa	21.10.20	Christian Hestø plays the main character in new ground breaking film documentary "Slave ship" on NrK Monday 26 October.
13	Utrop (Outcry)	05.11.20	Norwegians' involvement in slave trade – new Norwegian documentary about Norway's dark colonial history.
14	Klassekampen	14.11.20	Norway's false colonial history
15	Klassekampen	19.11.20	On relativizing history
16	Agderposten	11.12.20	Zecharias Allewelt – China adventurer and slave captain

led the Caribbean Community Reparations Commission, gave expression to Norway's culpability when he articulated the rationale behind the threat of litigation against Norway and 10 other countries for their roles in the transatlantic slave trade. Under the heading *Norway asked to pay up for slave owning past*, the newspaper reported:

For over 400 years, Africans were classified by law as non-human, chattel, property and real estate. This history has inflicted massive psychological damage on African descendants. Only a reparatory dialogue can begin the process of healing and repair. (The Local, 2013)

Causality can be understood as “who is represented as causing what to happen, who is represented as doing what to whom” (Fairclough, 2013, p. 43). This is often achieved through nominalization, a process in which the noun is made to function as an entity obfuscating agency. This is evident in No. 2 (Table 1) with the heading “The people of Bergen profited from the slave trade”. A few prominent families from the city of Bergen are named, such as Jørgen Thormøhlen, Peter Wessel Tordenskjold and Ludvig Holberg, who is considered the founder of modern Danish and Norwegian literature. Nominalization often leaves the reader with the mistaken impression that only a small number of elites were involved in the evil of the slave trade, thus absolving the nation. On the whole, the report oscillates between this narrowing down of causality to a few aristocrats, the mention of Norway's insignificance in the Danish-Norwegian union and the country's peripheral arctic location, with the effect of obfuscating causality. Intermittently, allusions are drawn to a nebulous shared accountability within dialogues directed at a readership evidently presumed to be hesitant to acknowledge this responsibility.

This is a chapter in the history of the Norwegian defense forces that many would rather not talk about. We have been a small fringe, but we are part of the triangular trade. We were not rich enough to have our own slave colonies, but we participated on the Danish side, says Gammersvik, who does not think this part of history should be swept under the rug. “We have been sailors and traders and we have had ships. We have traveled, seen and participated. It says something about the fact that Norway is and always has been part of the world”. (No. 2; Bru, 2017)

Johnstone (2008, p. 56) notes that “nominalization is another way in which the representation of events, and actors, can be manipulated”. In the case of this report (No. 2), the nominalization “Bergensere” (people of Bergen) in the

title “The people of Bergen profited from the slave trade”, and the naming of a few prominent figures have the effect of misattributing the role of the state of Norway under whose auspices these families engaged in the slave trade. Deploying language in this manner echoes Bourdieu and Wacquant’s (1992) concept of symbolic violence, which, in contrast to physical violence, privileges and imposes certain meanings, representation and beliefs while suppressing others. In contrast to the evasive report in No. 2, the previously mentioned film producer, Ole Bernt Tellefsen, states the following:

but I had no idea of the scale or that we were actually that heavily involved from the Norwegian side. Thirty per cent of the Danish-Norwegian slave fleet was Norwegian. Half of the crews on all the ships were Norwegian. There have been several Norwegian governors, both at slave forts in India and in Ghana. Søren Schieldrup, the Norwegian priest’s son, was governor of the slave fort Christiansborg. (No. 13; Utrop, 2020)

2.4 *The White Racial Frame and Reparations*

The critical whiteness studies scholar, Joe Feagin defines the white racial frame as a dominant 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” (Feagin, 2020, p. 3). In regard to reparations, Feagin acknowledges the importance of “a significant remedial reparative action to restore groups unjustly oppressed for centuries to their rightful place in a just society” (Feagin, 2020, p. 216). This reparative justice includes granting socioeconomic and corollary compensations that the enslaved had rightfully earned but were denied due to chattel slavery. Feagin highlights the need for studies that center on the white groups who were the source of the dreadful traumas inflicted by slavery and the concomitant ongoing structures of white discrimination that persist in modernity.

The discerning analyst of African colonialism, Frantz Fanon, underscored how Western medicine, including psychoanalysis, had cleverly shifted the concept of trauma from the material wounds and losses of Africans and others exploited by Europeans to an array of the exploited’s psychological difficulties. (Feagin, 202, p. 216)

We argue that this evasion of the responsibility for redress is evident in the media coverage of the role of Norway’s involvement in the trans-Atlantic

slave trade. One way in which this is perpetrated is the obsessive preoccupation with the shipwrecked *Fredenborg's* logbook, recently released in digital format. Several of the newspapers meticulously pour over the smallest details in the logbook kept by the ship's captain, Ferentz. For instance, in the report with the title "The slave ship's last journey" (No. 4), Trysne (2018) writes the following:

Like other captains of slave ships, Ferentz wanted to get the slave cargo out quickly. He also wanted the slaves to be in the best possible condition when sold at the market at St. Croix. Under the tropical sun in the Pacific, with close to 300 people on board the small vessel of 31 meters in length, and with tropical diseases ravaging, this was no easy task. The slave cargo consisted of 144 male slaves, 78 female slaves, 20 boy slaves, 9 girl slaves, and in addition, 9 male slaves as deck slaves.

On June 2, both a male and a female slave died. They were immediately thrown overboard. On Sunday 5 June, Ferentz also wrote that 5 out of 6 female slaves who had stolen salt each received 10 strokes of the cat, i.e., 10 lashes from the nine-tailed cat. On 10 June, another male slave died and on Monday 13 June, another female slave died. The next death occurred on Thursday, June 23. This time, it was the sailor Jochum Bollevald who died. He was sewn into the company's hammock, the flag was raised at half-mast, a hymn was sung, and he was thrown overboard. 24 of the slaves died during the 78-day journey. Altogether, 15 members of the crew had lost their lives since Fredensborg left Copenhagen.

It is this "shifting of the focus" that is both puzzling and troubling. Of course, journalists are bound by duty to inform the public about such uncomfortable historical facts that do not sit well with contemporary sensitivities. However, it is duplicitous to pedantically obsess about the gory details of slave ship logbooks and ignore the weightier matter of reparative justice. The Chorzów Factory case, officially known as the "Merits Jurisdiction (1928)" and "Compensation (1928–1929)" cases, was a momentous decision by the Permanent Court of International Justice (PCIJ), the forerunner to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) (PCIJ, 1927). In adjudicating upon the case of a factory seized from Germany by Poland in 1924, the Court ruled in favor of Germany. The principles established in this case have been often cited as relevant to the calls for reparation for the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

1. *Principle of restitution*: this was resolved as the primary means of reparation. In particular, the court highlighted Germany's right to the enactment of the situation to its original status before the unlawful seizure of the Chorzów industrial complex.

2. *Principle of full reparation:* the Court further ruled that reparation in full, including monetary or other means, could substitute for the failure to make restitution in kind.
3. *Calculation of damages:* In accounting for the damages incurred, the Court acknowledged both moral and material damages.
4. *Prohibition of unjust enrichment:* Not least, the Court underlined the injustice of the guilty party in profiting through an illegal act – theft of a factory in this case. Hence the need for reparative justice that restores the violated party to the position prior to the injurious act transpiring (PCIJ, 1927).

Wittmann (2019, p. 121) outlines the toll on Africa due to the traffic in black bodies that caused profound and long-lasting devastation, hence warranting reparations guided by the Chorzow rule. She argues that the call for reparations extends beyond redress for the crime in the Americas alone to include the African continent and relevant spheres. Referring to a report in a UNESCO project, Wittmann states that between 1450 and 1870, Western demand for slaves surpassed the overall population of tropical Africa. This hemorrhaging of the African population depressed economic internal trade, diversification of the economy and the evolution of technology and commodities for export. The forced exportation of able-bodied men and women, at the height of their productive prowess, hamstrung the continent for decades and centuries. Not least, a deliberate policy of divide and conquer in securing access to black bodies ensured political and social upheavals, further exacerbating the crises. It was in such a drained and depleted state that European powers established colonies in Africa with little to no resistance. In light of the above and commensurate with Feagin's (2020) white racial frame, white audiences' romanticizing of, among others, Henry Morton Stanley's "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?" and Karen Blixen's condescending tone in the novel *Out of Africa*, is perverse.

In conclusion, considering the specific damage that has been done to Africa, and African people globally, by transatlantic slavery, reparations need to aim at "achieving nothing less than the total emancipation of all African people at home and abroad ... the uncompromising assertion of our full African sovereignty, particularly of our inalienable right to absolute self-determination" (Southey and Klu 1993, pp. 5–8). Since the Chorzow rule states a primacy of restitution over all other forms of reparation, this demand is perfectly in accordance with international law. (Wittmann, 2019, pp. 121, 122)

Feagin argues that one reason most whites are non-committal to reparations is because "most whites do not even realize they routinely operate from some

version of this dominant [white racial] frame” (Feagin, 2020, p. 199). We argue that this appears to be the case in our analysis of Norwegian media in relation to Norway’s complicity in the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Further studies will be required to understand the Norwegian public’s reticence to acknowledge this unsavory aspect of the country’s past, as many of the media reports confirm. However, the deafening silence in the media in regard to the moral obligation to commence discussions about reparations, something that the previously mentioned threat of litigation from Caribbean countries should have necessitated, is puzzling.

3 Encoding, Decoding and White Misrecognition

One way to grapple with the silencing of the mention of reparations is to explore the unstated hegemonic relations governing the relationship between Norwegian journalists and their audience, employing Stuart Hall’s (2009) analytical framework of encoding and decoding. As has been established through several studies, the production, circulation and interpretation of news are not done in a vacuum. “At the outset, in the encoding process, journalists are conscious of the ideological and political coloration of their audience. This is where messages are encoded or embedded with news that journalists assume will be received and interpreted (decoded) in alignment with the prevailing or hegemonic discourse” (Hall, 2009, p. 30). Gauging from the content of the 16 Norwegian newspapers analyzed, it’s clear that broaching the topic of Norway’s slave-trading past is at odds with the hegemonic discourse. The journalists often complain about the difficulty of reaching out to the Norwegian public with this message.

We Norwegians like to think it was the English who were the keenest slave traders, but we were equally involved. Slaves even came to Norway. (No. 9; *Agderposten*, 2020)

The intricacy involved in broaching such a difficult topic is palpable in such statements and no doubt impacts the production stage commensurate with Hall’s encoding within the prevailing hegemony.

Of course, the production process is not without its “discursive” aspect; it, too, is framed throughout by meanings and ideas: knowledge-in-use concerning the routines of production, historically defined technical skills,

professional ideologies, institutional knowledge, definitions and assumptions, assumptions about the audience, and so on, frame the constitution of the program through this production structure. (Hall, 2009, p. 30)

This could be one reason why the encoding stage in the Norwegian media does not crossover into the realm of reparations, given the presumed rejection of the message in the decoding stage. This perhaps further explains the choice to plod painstakingly through the minutiae of the logbook rather than adopt a birds-eye view that builds bridges from these morbid logbook details to modern implications in light of Black Lives Matter and corollary antiracist movements that would resonate with those who marched to the Norwegian Parliament in Norway's largest peacetime march in solidarity with the murder of George Floyd. Of pertinence is the question of how the audience will engage with media reports that pour over gory details written through the lens of 18th-century white colonial supremacy. How would the Norwegian readership encode the fixation with excruciating and numbing details of treating black bodies with no names as no different from cattle?

In his seminal *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), Michel Foucault unpacks the evolution of disciplinary mechanisms with the aim of molding docile bodies through an array of draconian measures of control. On a cellular level, prisons, schools and hospitals, among others, confined the objects of control within cells or restricted spaces as a means of surveillance and regulation of bodies. It is argued that the Norwegian media content on the slave trade, while rendering an important service in documenting the facts, has the unintended effect of coopting the reader into this sadistic disciplinary mechanism of the ship captain Ferentz. Foucault distilled a fetish of taxonomization in the evolution of Western systems of classification with a view towards imposing control over every aspect of human existence – education, mental and physical health, sex, crime and punishment, among others. Pouring over the numbing details of the inhumane treatment of black bodies in an 18th-century slave ship, the readership will fail to make any connections with contemporary black bodies that are still policed, taxonomized, and brutalized by police, as was the case with George Floyd.

The media are then complicit in failing to make this broader connection by fearing the readership's indisposition to understand how power operates in society through the punitive mechanisms of power. In fact, Foucault's (1975) insight, or archaeology of knowledge, was tailored towards raising critical awareness of how modern societies (regimes of truth) regulate and control individuals on both micro and macro levels. The readership, having been failed

by the journalists, can only tut-tut with disapproval at the daily entries of the ship captain, who seems indefatigable in his exercise of what Foucault (1975) astutely called a “microphysics of power”. This refers to practices enacted on a daily basis in a seemingly mundane manner, such as establishing routines (daily exercises on deck for the slaves, for instance), assigning spaces for the objects of control (narrow spaces in the sleeping areas), etc. In the context of the discipline of the body, the microphysics of power emphasizes the granularity of power relations, highlighting the ways in which individuals are subjected to continuous surveillance, normalization, and correction in various institutional settings. The cellular structure, fetish of taxonomization, control, punishment, and regiments are all part of this microphysics of power, illustrating how power operates on a minute scale in the regulation of individual bodies within disciplinary institutions.

Mills (1997, p. 11) defines the racial contract in this manner:

The Racial Contract is that set of formal or informal agreements or meta-agreements ... between the members of one subset of humans, henceforth designated ... as “white”, and coextensive ... with the class of full persons, to categorize the remaining subset of humans as “nonwhite” and of a different and inferior moral status, subpersons.

Mills (1997) argues that whites misrecognize the world that they have created in their own image – one that is a fantasy world. Hall (2009) emphasized that there is no guarantee of a seamless concord between the encoded message (journalists) and the one that is decoded by the audience. We argue that the journalists failure to confront the issue of reparations head-on while feeding the public with the macabre details of the logbook of the white captain only serves to trigger a predictable schema that relegates slavery and classic racism to an unenlightened era in the white readership and hence the absolution of all guilt. A golden opportunity to coopt the story about the slave ship and Norway’s culpability as a rare teachable moment that goes beyond the *Fredensborg* and draws parallels with current policing of black bodies, for instance, was lost. While obviously not anywhere near the scale and nature of Anglo-American racial profiling, unfortunately, the statistics in regard to ethnic profiling in Norway challenge the haughty notion of “Nordic exceptionalism”. According to one recent study,

Individuals and organizations have for several decades raised questions about ethnic profiling in Norwegian police operations. On two occasions, Norway has received international criticism related to ethnic profiling,

respectively, from the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and the UN Human Rights Council (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, 2022) ... In addition to the in-depth interviews, the ombudsman has also conducted a survey among nearly 1,600 students at upper secondary schools in Drammen and Oslo ... Respondents with a minority background were somewhat overrepresented in the group who have experienced police checks. In total, 26% answered that they belonged to an ethnic minority. In contrast, ethnic minorities made up almost 34% of those who experienced police checks in the past year. (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, 2022)

It is in this sense that the white readership misrecognizes the world they have created and perpetuate. This “inverted epistemology” or “epistemology of ignorance” is part of a “local and global cognitive dysfunction”, which leads to the “ironic outcome that whites will in general never be able to understand the world they themselves have made” (Mills, 1997, p. 18). Interlocutors in the debate on structural racism in Norway have often protested that US versions of racism cannot be imported to Norway. One professor, a former head of diversity studies, published an entire article denouncing, among others, structural racism in Norway and the concept’s founding father, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva:

It is naïve to embrace concepts developed by research activists with big egos and enormous ambitions that their concepts and perspectives will both establish completely new descriptions of reality and forge peace and justice. Eduardo and Johan Galtung, the fathers of the concepts of structural racism and structural violence, two enormously influential researchers, without a doubt come under this category. (Brekke 2021)

The ad hominem attacks aside, such sentiments are not uncommon among some academics and other professionals in Norway. The Norwegian state pursued an open policy of systemic and structural racism towards the indigenous Sami and the officially recognized five national minorities of Norway: Kvens/ Norwegian Finns (people of Finnish descent in Northern Norway), Jews, Forest Finns, Roma and Romani people/Taters. White misrecognition of recent history is solely to blame. Beach and Lunneblad (2011, p. 32) state that 60,000 racially mixed families, single mothers, and so-called travelers (Romany) were sterilized between 1935 and 1974 in Sweden. They add that “things were similar but not as severe in Norway, Finland and Denmark”. Curiously, most academic fields in Norway are dominated by theories native to the USA and the UK in the main, but rare is the occasion when one hears a complaint against,

for instance, Americans that dominate our field of pedagogy, such as John Dewey, Benjamin Bloom, Urie Bronfenbrenner, Jerome Bruner, Michael Apple, or the American-Canadian Henry Giroux. The exception to the rule appears to be reserved for studies of race, racism and whiteness studies, which trigger such discomfort that even progressive liberal academics in Norway call for its “deportation” back to the USA.

What is urgently needed is to go beyond the confines and expectations of negotiated codes in what Hall (2009) calls oppositional coding in the decoding process. This transpires when consumers of news actively resist or challenge the “pre-packaged” meaning inherent in the encoding process. Significantly, only one article, written by a critic, engages in oppositional coding, albeit in passing. It should come as no surprise that this is not so much an article in a national daily but as a journal about museums with the subtitle “journal for critique, ideas and debate”. The critical writer concludes his review:

But time does not heal all wounds, and the most central question – about how the slavery of the past constantly casts a shadow over our present – is an absent element, and something the museum should not leave to the imagination or individual interest. As recently as this week, Congress in the United States embarked on yet another debate on what can be done to provide reparation for the abuses committed against slaves in the United States between 1619 and 1865. If the new law is adopted in its current form, a commission will propose formats on a state apology and arrangements that compensate for the discrimination African Americans were subjected to directly and indirectly as a result of slavery. (No. 7; Dynna, 2019)

In summary, and with respect to the issue of reparations, only one of sixteen articles mentioned the subject. The discovery of one article in a journal of critical thinking that unabashedly makes the link with reparations does not bode well in terms of government objectives of raising the country’s critical thinking skills – an objective that was officially inscribed in the National Curriculum of 2020. The study so far highlights the role and responsibility of the media in going beyond uncovering unpleasant historical facts and presenting them knowing fully well that readers are loathed to go beyond a negotiated code into an oppositional one (Hal, 2009). It is argued that social media, while having the potential to play a useful role in oppositional coding, is severely truncated by its appeal to sound bites, unvarnished conspiracy theories, and taste for belligerence and polarization. Contrary to some Norwegian perceptions of

being different from whites in the USA, we have argued, commensurate with Charles Mills (1997) postulation, that many whites in Norway too misrecognize the degree to which their global cognitive dysfunction coheres with that of other whites. This has been demonstrated in the calls for stopping all economic-related immigration to Norway during the early waves of immigration from non-Western countries in the late 1980s and 1990s, until it was pointed out that one-third of Norwegians emigrated to the USA between 1825 and 1925 for no other reason than better economic prospects (Brochmann & Kjeldstadli, 2008).

4 A Counter-story of a Forgotten Life

Precious little is written about the lives of the slaves in the media reports about Norway's slave trade. Fleras (2011, p. 59) underscores the paucity of media focus on minorities in the context of the USA and Canada. Citing one major study by the Pew Research Center Project for Excellence in Journalism (2010), only 1.9 percent of the total news space (67,000 stories) was associated with African Americans, although this demographic represented 13 percent of the US population. The numbers were even worse for the Latino population who comprised 16 percent of the population but accounted for a paltry 1.3 percent of the newscast. Fleras (2011, p. 59) concludes: "Numerous studies have confirmed what many regard as obvious: Canada's multicultural diversity is poorly reflected in media processes and outcomes. Racialized (visible) minorities in Canada and the United States are rendered invisible in newscasting".

It is for such reasons, among others, that scholars of critical race theory have advanced the tenet of counter or subversive storytelling. Professor of law and critical race theory, Charles R. Lawrence, III, notes that blacks were rendered faceless because they were deprived of a voice. "That alone which separates the subject from the object is, for Hegel, the absence or presence of the voice; the blackness of invisibility is the blackness of this silence. Without a voice, the African is silent, or defaced, from history" (Lawrence, 1995, p. 341). He argues that self-representation is indispensable to the task of combating this silence in history, which was abused as "proof" of black people's lack of consciousness. Citing Henry Louis Gates, Lawrence (1995) highlights the crucial role slave narratives such as that of Frederick Douglass played in humanizing slaves. In narrating, or counter-narrating, the dreadful experience that is slavery, a few slaves demonstrated to an incredulous white world that they were capable of harnessing the creative power that is language in naming themselves and their

experiences while resisting the hegemonic white world's claim to a monopoly in defining the world. Douglass's incisive description of his paternal parentage is a case in point:

I say nothing of *father*; for he is shrouded in a mystery I have never been able to penetrate. Slavery does away with fathers, as it does away with families. Slavery has no use for either fathers or families, and its laws do not recognize their existence in the social arrangements of the plantation ... The name of the child is not expected to be that of its father, and his condition does not necessarily affect that of the child. He may be the slave of Mr. Tilgman; and his child, when born, may be the slave of Mr. Gross. He may be a *freeman*; and yet his child may be a *chattel*. He may be white, glorying in the purity of Anglo-Saxon blood; and his child may be ranked with the blackest of slaves. Indeed, he *may* be, and often *is*, master and father to the same child ... My father was a white man, or nearly white. It was sometimes whispered that my master was my father. (Douglass, 2014, p. 44)

Except for very brief references to certain slaves, and commensurate with the above, a perusal of the 16 media articles on Norway's involvement in the trans-Atlantic slave trade is conspicuous by their absence of slave narratives or any attempt to subjectivize the slaves and grant a sense of agency. When mentioned, the following is typical:

There are around thirty documented examples of slaves being transported to Norway, but the number was probably much higher. In 1782, merchant and shipowner Hans Herlofsen (1729–1802) from Arendal bought a slave on St. Croix. The 13-year-old Adam was bought for 300 riksdaler and was transported to Arendal on one of Herlofsen's ships. Adam's fate in Arendal is well documented and highlighted as an example of what in Norway was called "unfree servants". (No. 9; Agderposten, 2020)

Riksdaler was a monetary unit in Denmark-Norway and Sweden. It is noteworthy that in a country that meticulously registered the names of its inhabitants, ambiguity surrounds the precise number of slaves brought to Norway, as distilled in the sentence, "the number is probably much higher". As previously mentioned, the media gaze is on the activities of white Danes and Norwegians because they are the humanized subjects whose actions, even in this age of deplorable trade in black lives, are of interest to the readership in so far as they are portrayed as an unfortunate interlude – "a dark chapter" – into

an otherwise illustrious historical trajectory from the age of the Vikings to a modern, successful social democratic state. This tendency to sideline the black presence is not merely an oversight; it is a conscious or unconscious act of historical censorship. It's like reading a novel with certain chapters missing, denying readers the opportunity to fully grasp the complexity of the plot. The media, knowingly or unknowingly, becomes a gatekeeper of historical knowledge, shaping perceptions by highlighting certain aspects and muting others.

Fairclough (2013, p. 76) draws on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "recognition of legitimacy through misrecognition of arbitrariness" to suggest that one way in which power works is by so dominating, suppressing and containing dominated types that this discourse will no longer be perceived as arbitrary by "natural". The discourse of 400 years of black presence in Norway has been so thoroughly whitewashed out of existence that our students stare in disbelief when it is mentioned that Africans were in Norway for over 400 years, and not a novel presence piggybacking on the recent waves of immigration beginning in the 1970s. As linguistic architects, journalists spin the discourse that "naturalizes" historical narratives and hence a sense of nationhood. The edifice of this "Norwegian House", to borrow from a political slogan coined by the former Prime Minister Thorbjørn Jagland in 1996 about the goals of the government's policy until the turn of the millennium, ensures that the African presence was an anomaly through a process of misrecognition shot through with silence and omission and is putatively embraced as the order of things.

The 13-year-old slave boy, Adam, is mentioned as a case that is "well-documented" (No. 9; *Agderposten*, 2020). It begs the question of why Adam's story is virtually unknown in Norway. Løken (2023, p. 359) notes, for instance, that "It took a long time before the Danish-Norwegian contribution to colonial history and the slave trade were first mentioned in Norwegian school books. This happened in 1988 – in a history book for secondary school". Løken quotes the Danish writer, Mich Vraa, who wrote a novel based on the slave ship "Håbet" [The Hope]:

I was shocked by Denmark's past, partly because there is very little school children learn about it. I don't remember being taught about slavery and sugar cane, and in any case, not about how many human lives the Danish slave trade cost. We owe it to history and to each other to hold that mirror up to ourselves, and I hope that renewed awareness can reach the classrooms. (Løken, 2023, p. 360)

The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2023) has the following formulation in regard to slavery: "Through the subject, the students

should be able to identify areas where human dignity is challenged, for example, in connection with human trafficking and slavery in our time and point to measures to protect the basic needs that humans have". The formulation features under the new interdisciplinary subject "Folkehelse og livsmestring", which can loosely be translated as public health and life skills. Once again, the fear of broaching the subject of Norway's role in the slave trade and the presence of black slaves in Norway is palpable. In locating slavery to "our time", the Directorate frees schools from paying any attention to slavery and its legacy in Norway. Körber (2019) studied the enduring impact of Swedish colonialism in St. Barthélemy and employed the metaphorical construct "untaintedness" to capture the manner in which Sweden disentangles itself from its role in slavery. The term "untaintedness" resonates with Norway's erasure and silencing of its role in slavery too. Along with "Nordic exceptionalism", these concepts give expression to notions of pristine and unsullied states – nations that, while harboring racist views and colonialist ambitions commensurate with the zeitgeist of the times, weaved narratives of innocence.

Claims of white innocence are indeed what I suggest link Sweden's and St. Barthélemy's exceptionalist narratives ... Rather, my study suggests that Sweden is a specific, but nevertheless typical, example of European expansion and imperialism in the Caribbean that needs to be considered on equal terms with other colonial powers, and in its circum-Atlantic entanglements. The past years have seen a wealth of scholarship, activism, and artistic approaches to challenge Swedish and Nordic exceptionalist self-images and historiography – seemingly more so than on St. Barthélemy. (Körber, 2019, p. 94)

What was the slave Adam's real name? Lawrence (1995) notes that critical race theory's tenet of counter or subsversive story-telling is accentuated by American slavery's practice of prohibiting slaves from using their family, ancestral and tribal names. "Instead, they were required to use the 'Christian' names by which their masters chose to identify them" (Lawrence, 1995, p. 341). There are echoes of the biblical narrative in the Book of Genesis, where the power of naming all creatures was conferred on Adam. "And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof" (Genesis 2:19; King James Version). Furthermore, we see a nexus between this power to *name* and hence *own* in the encounter between the mysterious angel who wrestled with the patriarch Jacob (supplanter or deceiver) and changed his name to Israel (one

who has power with God). “And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed” (Genesis 32:27, 28; *Ibid*).

In Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* (Act 1, Scene 3), Antonio states, “Mark you this, Bassanio, The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose”. One can wonder whether the Bible-distorting Christians named the 13-year-old boy Adam because he was the first of his “kind” in that region of Norway. This practice of naming, and hence, owning black souls persisted after emancipation in the USA and denied blacks the power to name themselves, according to Lawrence (1995). The “divine” right to name and enslave was also buttressed by another biblical distortion: the story of Noah and the curse of Ham from Genesis 9: 20–27. Simply put, Africans were considered the descendants of Ham, and since Ham was cursed by his father Noah for failing to cover his father’s nakedness, all Africans are condemned to subservience under Shem and Japheth – the latter understood to be the progenitor of Caucasians. It is this so-called “curse of Ham” that Fredrick Douglass rebuts when he writes:

But, I may remark, that, if the lineal descendants of Ham are only to be enslaved, according to the scriptures, slavery in this country will soon become an unscriptural institution; for thousands are ushered into the world, annually, who – like myself – owe their existence to white fathers, and, most frequently, to their masters, and master’s sons. The slave women is at the mercy of the fathers, sons or brothers of her master. The thoughtful know the rest. (Douglass, 2013, p. 50)

One would have to search elsewhere for information about the slave boy Adam; the fate of Adam in Norway is clearly marginal to the focus of the Norwegian media in their coverage of the slave trade. The Norwegian historian Roar Løken takes up the story of Adam in his new book *Slaveri, Koloni-handel og Rasisme: Virkningene for Norge* (2023) [Slavery, Colonial trade and Racism: The Effects on Norway]. According to Løken, the ship owner Hans Herlofsen from Arendal in south Norway bought Adam in 1782 from a certain Gorm who worked in a lawyer’s office in St. Croix – one of the three Caribbean islands which along with St. Thomas and St. John, were known as the Danish West Indies. Løken (2023, p. 269) notes that Herlofsen paid 300 riksdaler for the 13-year-old Adam, which was 60 times the price of a cow in those days, and adds that while this was very expensive, “this was a one-time investment, and the boy would not be paid a salary”. Herlofsen did not really need a black slave

boy in Norway. He already had a peddler, two other boys in his service, and two maids.

Why did he wish to buy Adam? Most probably due to what we would today call a status symbol. It wasn't uncommon in those days for people from the Danish and Norwegian trading aristocracy to have slaves in the house, and Herlofsen would certainly bring back something really exotic to Arendal. (Løken, 2023, p. 269)

While it is commendable that Løken assigns a scant few pages to the stories of a handful of slaves in his book, one bemoans the glaring omission of the absence of any endeavor to explore the psyche of these slaves with a view towards engendering empathy. The failure to scrutinize the inner workings of the slaves' minds not only contracts the depth of their stories but also neglects a crucial aspect essential for cultivating a genuine understanding and compassion towards their plight. Frantz Fanon's "The Fact of Blackness" (Fanon, 2022) refers to the experience of being black in a racially stratified world. In his work, particularly in "Black Skin, White Masks", Fanon explores how the black individual is subjected to objectification, dehumanization, and racialization by colonial and white-dominated societies. The "Fact of Blackness" represents the racial gaze that defines black individuals primarily by their skin color, reducing them to stereotypes and denying them agency. Fanon argues that this racialization imposes psychological burdens on black people, impacting their identity and self-perception. He calls for a rejection of racial stereotypes and the establishment of a new, authentic identity beyond the constraints of colonial racism. Fanon captures the tortuous sense of self-consciousness triggered and sustained by a sea of whiteness, akin to what Adam must have experienced as a "status symbol" of Herlofsen:

The Negro is a toy in the white man's hands; so, in order to shatter the hellish cycle, he explodes. I cannot go to a film without seeing myself. I wait for me. In the interval, just before the film starts, I wait for me. The people in the theater are watching me, examining me, waiting for me. A Negro groom is going to appear. My heart makes my head swim. The crippled veteran of the Pacific war says to my brother, "Resign yourself to your color the way I got used to my stump; we're both victims. (Fanon, 2022, p. 487)

Fanon masterfully explores the fact of blackness through the encounter with the white gaze. As long as blacks are in the company of other blacks, they are unaware of their presumed inferiority, he asserts. "And then the occasion

arose when I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity" (Fanon, 2022, p. 480). Consider what the slave boy Adam had to endure surrounded as he was by the panoptical gaze of white Norwegians, who must have stared at him like one would gawk at a strange creature at a zoo.

It is important to keep in mind that this obsession with the black body appeared to be something of a national sport, as evidenced in what was called the "Human Zoo" exhibition, the topic of the next chapter. In 1914, Norway hosted a controversial Human Zoo in Frogner Park, showcasing Africans in a constructed "Congo Village". According to the *Guardian* (2014),

More than half of the Norwegian population at the time paid to visit the exhibition and gawk at the 'traditionally dressed Africans', living in palm-roof cabins and going about their daily routine of cooking, eating and making handicrafts. The King of Norway officiated at the opening of the exhibition.

This degrading spectacle invited Norwegians to gaze at individuals from Africa, reducing them to exoticized exhibits. The exhibition, now condemned for its racist and colonial undertones, stands as a stark reminder of the historical exploitation and dehumanization of marginalized communities for entertainment and spectacle. Today, it serves as a critical point of reflection of Norway's past and its commitment to fostering inclusivity and understanding.

Adam was confirmed in the Lutheran church tradition in Arendal Church in 1788 at the age of nineteen (Løken, 2023, p. 269). He was not happy in the service of Herlofsen. Løken writes that the cold plagued him and that he towed excessively heavy sacks of grain. Furthermore, he complained that he was scolded for no reason, especially when Herlofsen was in a bad mood. In 1791, Adam reported to the city clerk that he had run away from Herlofsen and did not dare return. Herlofsen wanted the boy detained and incarcerated in a penitentiary. The police interrogated Adam and the other staff at Herlofsen's house. Adam wished to return to St. Croix. Significantly, the city clerk and local authorities ruled that Adam was a free man in Norway because he was confirmed in the church and hence equal in standing to the rest of the community and did not commit any crimes worthy of punishment. "In Norway, serfdom and slavery were unknown at the time ... The town clerk decided therefore that Adam was to be released, and he was a free man the next day" (Løken, 2023, p. 270). The whereabouts of Adam after the court decision are unknown.

5 Implications for Education

The above raises questions about the incorporation of untold narratives into the Norwegian national curriculum. A first step in dispelling the ignorance surrounding the issue is the robust dissemination of the facts. Rather than dismissing this segment of Norwegian history as a transient “dark chapter”, Norway’s involvement in the transatlantic slave trade has the potential to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the country’s past. This history is particularly relevant to the current discussions about systemic or structural racism. Structural racism can be defined as the plethora of ways in which societal systems, institutions and policies consistently disadvantage particular racial or ethnic groups while favoring others. Often, persistent inequalities, evidenced in disparities in access to education, jobs, health care, housing and criminal justice, among others, are visible along racial or ethnic lines (Omi & Winant, 2015).

Educating the public about the historical injustices and contributions of marginalized communities fosters awareness of systemic issues. We have also argued for the usefulness of employing tenets of critical race theory as an analytical framework in education for the scrutiny of systemic racism and its endurance in contemporary structures. In his book *The War on Critical Race Theory* (2023), David Theo Goldberg argues that Europe’s history discourages gathering data on the basis of ethnicity but that this policy enables structural racism. He notes that while the French, for instance, eschew collecting data by ethnicity in the misguided belief that discriminating on the grounds of race is a relic of the past, they ignore the fact that “Muslims in its prisons make up at least four times their proportion of the general population” (Goldberg, 2023, p. 48). Putting the spotlight on historical foundations holds the promise of laying the groundwork for understanding the historical heritage of structural racism. One particularly problematic hurdle in sensitizing the Norwegian public to engage with the slave-trading past is a contemporary dogmatic attachment to the ideal of “colorblindness”. This aspiration is integral to the machinations of “untaintedness” or “Nordic exceptionalism”. Sadly, the platitude of colorblindness only serves to mask the discrimination that surfaces in intervals in the media: black and brown youth who complain about frequent police harassment, white employees who blow the whistle on employers who discard applications from applicants with “foreign” names and discrimination in relation to housing, among others.

As critics have repeatedly pointed out, colorblindness and racelessness – the individualizing response to structural and systemic racial injustice par

excellence – hide the underlying structural differences historic inequalities reproduce. Those who claim to be colorblind or practice racelessness, “not to see race”, are in fact revealing that they refuse to “see” racially driven injustices at all. (Goldberg, 2023, p. 60)

For instance, the term “kolonialbutikk” [colonial store] is one that many Norwegians are familiar with. A whole world of historic injustice confronts the consumer who is willing to contemplate the meaning of this term, which has even moved online (colonial.no) with the explosion in home deliveries. Most would associate the term with grocery stores. However, few are aware of the origins of these grocery stores concealed in the term “kolonialbutikk”. Christer Dynna pricks the nation’s conscience when he writes:

The nameless African people who did the forced labor on plantations were inextricably linked with the European consumers’ addiction to coffee and sugar at the time. Together with other products (colonial goods), which until today were traded by the “colonial”, the products reached an ever-increasing proportion of the population in the West, but what did they really know about what they were drinking at the time? ... we are both blissfully ignorant and also inveterately naive and unwilling to question products and things that are completely woven into our culture. After Finland, Norway is the country in the world with the highest consumption of coffee. (No. 7; Dynna, 2019)

Furthermore, acknowledging and including the full extent of Norway’s role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade can contribute to an inclusive curriculum that serves to challenge stereotypes in a country that appears ill at ease with its burgeoning black and brown population. A curriculum that acknowledges the contributions of diverse communities helps break down stereotypes perpetuated by structural racism. School children would have no qualms about empathizing with the 13-year-old slave boy Adam who arrived in Arendal as a slave, learned Norwegian, was confirmed like many children are in the Lutheran church, and even managed to win his freedom. This is a story of triumph that Norwegian children, whatever their pigmentation, can be proud of – that at a time runaway slaves could only dream of securing their freedom through local courts in Antebellum South USA or plantation era, the Norwegian authorities validated Adam’s claim to freedom and rendered him free in one day. We do not shield children from the harrowing fear contained in the diaries of an Anne Frank or Norway’s own Ruth Maier who both died in Nazi concentration camps. The absence of the story of an Adam is an anomaly.

In critical race theory's tenet of counter or subversive story-telling, books and teachers could employ vivid language and quotes from historical sources to reconstruct the daily lives, struggles, and aspirations of individuals such as Adam. Children in Norway are taught about the injustices meted out to the indigenous Sami people. Norwegian state policy, premised upon notions of unvarnished racial and cultural supremacy, deemed Sami language and culture so inferior that it embarked on a quest to eradicate this way of life and assimilate the Sami into Norwegian culture. Today, a myriad of legal frameworks, a shift in cultural attitudes, and ongoing efforts towards reconciliation characterize the relationship between the Sami and Norwegians. Counter storytelling is aptly suited to the task of underscoring the power of self-representation and the significance of narratives in countering historical silence.

We have also argued that the Norwegian media is instrumental in perpetuating the invisibility of the slaves. While we understand the dearth of historical records giving a voice to the nameless and faceless slaves, we contend, as Løken (2023) states, that several of the slave narratives are well-documented, such as Adam's. In light of this, the obsession with the minutiae of the captain Ferentz's logbook, the wreck of the *Fredensborg* outside the coast of Norway, and certain families from Bergen and other Norwegian cities, among others, to the exclusion of the slaves, is inexcusable. Fortunately, there has been a spate of new books on Norway's role in the slave trade, buoyed no doubt by the Black Lives Movement, Rhodes Must Fall, and George Floyd murder, among others, filling the void left by the media, which often tabloidize and sensationalize this important theme.

In higher education, students could usefully explore the intersectionality of race and social status, as seen in the case of Adam being a "status symbol" for ship owner Hans Herlofsen. This would furnish an excellent opportunity to incorporate Frantz Fanon's perspectives on the psychological impact of racialization, emphasizing the dehumanization and objectification experienced by black individuals. As black authors ourselves, we are aware of several black parents who have shared their children's loathing of their blackness and desire to be white in Norwegian schools. In opposition to the dominant notion of colorblindness and apprehensions about causing offense to black individuals, we argue for the necessity of delicately addressing such matters, including Fanon's concept of "epidermalization of inferiority", which underscores the profound influence of racial consciousness on the self-perception and identity formation of students of color.

On an institutional level, the degree to which educational institutions are themselves complicit in perpetuating myths of white innocence and exceptionalism will need to be explored. To what degree is the educational system's

silence on the topic of the slave trade indicative of a historical misrecognition attributable to the media's selective framing of the topic? Weaving these components into the tenet of counter storytelling allows for the construction of a narrative that not only imparts insights into the historical hardships of slaves in Norway, but also triggers reflective analysis of the mechanisms behind historical representation and the ramifications of maintaining silence in shaping collective memory.

Class activities could involve analyzing primary sources, engaging in historical simulations, or even conducting field research to deepen students' understanding of how Norway's past connects to present-day issues of racism and discrimination. Placing an emphasis on educating students about historical injustices and the enduring impacts of systemic racism can serve as a springboard for discussions on social justice and equity. Students could engage in debates or research projects that explore how historical contexts shape contemporary structures of power and privilege, fostering critical thinking skills and social awareness. Assignments that require students to create narrative essays, dramatic interpretations, or multimedia presentations can foster creativity and empathy while deepening their grasp of the complexities surrounding race and identity. Drawing attention to the role of media in shaping historical representation and societal perceptions provides a platform for students to dissect the influence of media narratives on collective memory. Teachers can facilitate discussions on how media depictions of historical events like the 1914 "Human Zoo" reflect and perpetuate societal biases and racial hierarchies. Students could engage in media analysis projects that explore the impact of visual and verbal representations of race, inviting critical reflections on the power dynamics at play in media narratives and the implications for historical understanding.

Encouraging students to delve into historical events with an intersectional analysis lens invites a deep exploration of race, social status, and power dynamics. Through guided inquiries into the case of Adam as a "status symbol" or the experiences of the Senegalese individuals in the 1914 "Human Zoo", students can analyze the complexities of race, identity, and colonial history. Teachers can facilitate guided discussions, Socratic seminars, or research projects that challenge students to critically assess the intersections of race, power, and historical representation, fostering a nuanced understanding of the enduring legacies of systemic oppression and the ongoing quest for racial justice.

Norway's 1914 "Human Zoo"

Norway's 1914 Human Zoo is not the most widely known historical fact in the country, or elsewhere. But, for five months, 80 people of African origin (Senegalese) lived in "the Congo Village" in Oslo, surrounded by "indigenous African artefacts". More than half of the Norwegian population at the time paid to visit the exhibition and gawp at the "traditionally dressed Africans", living in palm-roof cabins and going about their daily routine of cooking, eating and making handicrafts. The king of Norway officiated at the opening of the exhibition.

THE GUARDIAN (2014)

1 Introduction

Norway's 1914 "Human Zoo" is an unsettling chapter in history, where eighty individuals of African origin were exhibited in Oslo's Frogner Park. Named the "Congo Village", this event lasted for five months and saw over half of Norway's population visit, including the king who officiated at the opening. This exhibition of Senegalese families, mistakenly referred to as Congolese, coincided with the centennial celebrations of Norway's constitution, showcasing the nation's progress while dehumanizing its subjects through public display.

When comparing this event to similar instances in other countries and time periods, several differences and similarities emerge. Norway's involvement in such exhibitions is relatively unknown and underdiscussed. While extensive displays of marginalized people were commonplace in many Western countries during the 19th and early 20th centuries, Norway's reluctance to confront this aspect of its history contrasts sharply with the more prominent reckoning seen in other nations. In the United States, for instance, exhibits of indigenous peoples at World's Fairs are a well-documented part of the nation's history. These displays have come under significant scrutiny, driven by civil rights movements that have long pushed for recognition and redress of historical injustices. Similarly, France and Belgium, known for their colonial pasts, have faced extensive critique and public discourse regarding their ethnographic exhibitions and "human zoos", highlighting a discrepancy in how these histories are confronted and remembered.

In Norway, the initial portrayal of the 1914 "Human Zoo" in the media was steeped in curiosity and scientific justification, reflecting the colonial mindset prevalent at the time. Articles focused on the novelty and perceived educational value of displaying supposedly "traditional" African life. Contemporary media, however, has begun to adopt a more critical tone. The centennial reflections in 2014 and the ensuing controversies surrounding a proposed reenactment of the "Human Zoo" have spurred deeper considerations of the event's racist undertones and ethical implications. This shift in narrative is less pronounced in the early coverage of Norway compared to other nations where the scrutiny has often been continuous and more intense. For example, the United States and Britain have seen ongoing critical discourse surrounding similar events throughout the 20th century, driven by civil rights activism and scholarly critique.

The underlying mentality that justified such exhibitions in Norway mirrors that of other colonial powers. These displays were rooted in a pseudoscientific racism that sought to categorize and hierarchize human beings based on superficial traits, as highlighted by the work of figures like Carl Linnaeus. This mindset was not unique to Norway; it permeated Western societies that used exhibitions to reinforce their perception of racial superiority and to legitimize colonial endeavors. The practice of showcasing marginalized peoples to an inquisitive, often voyeuristic public, fostered a narrative of racial hierarchy that underpinned the colonial enterprise and its justifications for exploitation and domination. Despite the differences in how these histories are acknowledged and discussed, a common thread runs through these events: the use of public displays to reinforce racial hierarchies and the enduring challenge of confronting and rectifying these past injustices in contemporary times.

This chapter will explore what has been termed "the Human Zoo", "Congo Village" or "Negro Village", in 1914, when Norway exhibited 80 Senegalese – erroneously called Congolese – in Frogner Park in the capital Oslo. This exhibition of entire Senegalese families coincided with the Jubilee celebrations from May 15 to October 11, 1914, to commemorate the centennial anniversary of Norway's constitution (1814). The main aim was to showcase Norway's enormous progress from an agrarian society to an industrial one. On offer were a plethora of extensive displays, including outdoor activities, sports, arts, etc., celebrating one hundred years of economic, technological and cultural successes, staking a claim as a beacon of progress and achievement on the European stage.

This chapter asks the question: How is the 1914 "Human Zoo" project portrayed in the Norwegian media both then and now, and what lessons can be drawn in relation to contemporary antiracism struggles, especially in education? In essence, an examination of the media portrayal of the "Human Zoo"

project unfolds in two distinct epochs: the events at the Jubilee exhibition in 1914 and a subsequent phase in 2014, where two artists generated controversy by proposing a reenactment of the “Human Zoo” to instigate a fresh discussion on historical and contemporary racism in Norway.

Michel Foucault’s contributions are particularly influential in the analysis of power, knowledge and institutions. In particular, his theoretical model of a disciplinary society encapsulated in the concept of panopticon, articulated in his classic “Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison” (1977), is salient to the task of understanding the creation of an enclosure (Congo or Negro Village) where Africans were subjected to constant surveillance and control exercised by a condescending gaze of white supremacy. The central idea is the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham’s prison design which allows a single watchman to observe all inmates without the inmates being able to tell whether or not they are being watched. This straightjacketing and disciplining of the pathologized black body, it is argued, persists in contemporary society through a white gaze that continues to “incarcerate” black and brown individuals. Frantz Fanon’s “Fact of Blackness” is also apposite to this task in his incisive insights exploring racism and the psychological impact of colonization in his work *Black Skin, White Masks*. Of concern to Fanon were the dehumanizing and objectifying effects of racial prejudice. Furthermore, Cheryl Harris’s “whiteness as property”, an important component of critical race theory, provides a useful framework to help understand how whiteness functions as a valuable asset, often acquired and maintained at the expense of blackness.

2 White Gaze, Black Confinement

Originally, the Jubilee Exhibition’s committee had wanted to create a Sami Village, but the idea was abandoned because “The idea of letting Norwegian citizens with voting rights be shown for money is too distasteful”. (No. 9, Table 2; Rønsen, 2011)

It is significant that the architects behind the “Human Zoo” project in 1914 initially entertained the idea of exhibiting Sami people in the enclosure at Frogner in Oslo. Exploring racism against the Sami during the 1800s, Berg-Nordlie (2022, p. 427) highlights the implementation of methods such as body snatching and skull measurements to accumulate purported “evidence” for supporting the notion of the Sami as an inferior ethnic group. Despite their categorization as white, the Sami faced exclusion from the specific whiteness

prevailing in mainstream Norwegian society due to perceived differences in biology, culture, and ethnicity, marking them as the "other". This marginalization draws parallels with the historical denigration and subsequent rehabilitation of the Sami outlined in the US context in Noel Ignatiev's "How the Irish Became White" (Ignatiev, 1995). We are left to understand the statement, "The idea of letting Norwegian citizens with voting rights be shown for money is too distasteful", as one premised on whiteness and not ethnic parity with Norwegians.

According to Norwegian historians Brochmann and Kjeldstadli (2008), the formation of Norwegian racial hierarchies during the nation-building era (1814–1940) was rooted in Enlightenment ideologies. They assert that Norwegians shared prevailing nineteenth-century Western ideas of supremacy when interacting with other communities. This resulted in the marginalization of minorities within a white racial framework, emphasizing the perceived superiority of the "Germanic", "Nordic", or "Norwegian race". The Sami were labeled as "biologically degenerate" and deemed destined for decline amidst the progress of civilization, while the Kvens were categorized as Mongols, associated with traits such as "brutality" and "sentimentality". The Romani people were targeted for "dissolution" as a distinct group (Brochmann & Kjeldstadli, 2008, p. 94).

While the Sami were still denigrated in myriad ways, what was really "distasteful" was the notion of exhibiting white bodies in an enclosure for the public to gaze at, much as one would animals in a zoo. The Sami may have been denied access to equality with Norwegians, but they nevertheless shared a pigmentation that under no circumstances must be devalued and associated with the "primitiveness" that characterized black bodies. We argue that it is in this sense that the Sami were "Norwegian citizens with voting rights".

Panopticon was the English philosopher Jeremy Bentham's brainchild of an ideal architectural structure constructed as a central tower that gives the illusion of perpetual observation of inmates, even in the absence of actual surveillance. The objective was to cut costs as it was assumed the illusion of constant surveillance induced by the panopticon would discipline inmates to monitor and regulate their own behavior – the internalization of behavior deemed appropriate in the eyes of the disciplinary regime. Foucault extrapolated a conceptual panopticon from the physical edifice and applied panopticon as a metaphor to delve into the ways in which institutional apparatuses wield power. "The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A 'political anatomy', which was also a 'mechanics of power', was being born" (Foucault, 1977, p. 138).

TABLE 2 Headlines in Norwegian media about the “Human Zoo” project

No.	Media	Date	Headline
1	NTB	02.07.1992	The Negro as Norwegians see him
2	Dagbladet	12.17.2000	Short and sweet
3	Dagbladet	12.09.2002	Freaks for fun
4	Bergens Tidende	19.11.2002	Forgotten African stories
5	Aftenposten	17.02.2005	The everyday hero
6	Aftenposten	03.07.2005	Norway's previous centenary
7	Aftenposten	06.07.2005	Are we any better today?
8	Dag og Tid	15.05.2009	Time frame
9	Nordisk kunsttidsskrift	31.10.2011	When the Scandinavian self-image cracks
10	NrK	01.11.2011	Will create a new Congo Village
11	Dagbladet	29.03.2012	Dangerous art and harmless ideas
12	Aftenposten	14.02.2013	Will exhibit people from the Congo again
13	Nordisk kunsttidsskrift	04.03.2013	An uncomfortable project
14	Utrop	10.04.2014	Artist in the crossfire
15	A-Magasinet	09.05.2014	The anniversary frenzy
16	Osloby	15.05.2014	More than the Congo Village
17	Framtida	23.10.2020	Black history in Norway: 12 important things you should know about
18	ABC-nyheter	14.09.2020	Dealing with racism at school: We have been the brown girl in the school yard

In 1914, eighty Congolese were transported to Norway where they were made to live their daily lives in an enclosure at Frogner. People stood outside the wire fence and watched. It is obvious to draw a parallel to “Big Brother” and similar programs. They fit right into the old freak tradition. And if we look at magazines such as *Se og Hør* [a gossip magazine], we understand that the freaks phenomenon is still very much alive. Stories about people who look different and weird are constantly featured. It is man's [sic] basic curiosity that makes us find this exciting. And it isn't unequivocally negative; curiosity is the basis for all our creativity, says Berthelsen. (No. 3; Dagbladet, 2002)

Foucault (1977, p. 141) notes that "Discipline sometimes requires *enclosure*, the specification of a place heterogenous to all others and closed in upon itself. It is the protected place of disciplinary monotony". We mentioned earlier that the whiteness of the Sami precluded their incarceration in the "Human Zoo" because that would invert the warden-prisoner status as conceived through Bentham's panopticon. Some have commented that the Sami were ranked below Africans by figures like Linnaeus. However, our discussion focuses on the specific moment in 1914 when the Jubilee Exhibition's committee's decision reflects an aversion grounded in racial perception. The statement, "The idea of letting Norwegian citizens with voting rights be shown for money is too distasteful", illustrates that it was not merely the Sami's status as citizens but, crucially, their shared white skin that led to the rejection of their exhibition. This aversion highlights the societal boundary of whiteness that shielded the Sami from being subjected to the same dehumanizing exhibition practices imposed on black bodies, underscoring the racial dynamics at play in early 20th-century Norwegian society.

In any case, we will briefly explore the historical trajectory of the Sami's transition to being perceived as "white" despite enduring biases and stereotypes linked to their depiction in traditional Tundra settings with reindeer, cultural attire, and "joiking" in educational materials. Joiking is a traditional form of song or chant practiced by the indigenous Sami people of Northern Europe. It is a unique vocal style characterized by non-lexical syllables, melodic improvisation, and deep emotional expression. Joiking is often used to evoke specific landscapes, animals, or personal experiences, serving as a profound artistic and cultural expression within Sami society.

The evolution of the Sami people's racial categorization in Norway, paralleled with Noel Ignatiev's reflections on how the Irish navigated racial hierarchies in the United States, illuminates a nuanced narrative of indigenous activism and ethnic self-assertion. The Sami's journey from marginalization to recognition as part of the white ethnic majority embodies a multifaceted transformation rooted in historical resistance, cultural revitalization, and political empowerment. Drawing comparisons to Ignatiev's seminal work "How the Irish Became White", we can discern striking parallels in the Irish and Sami experiences of navigating oppressive racial frameworks toward social acceptance. While the Irish faced discrimination and marginalization in the United States before aligning themselves with whiteness for societal inclusion and privilege, the Sami in Norway embarked on a similar trajectory marked by activism, cultural resurgence, and demands for recognition within the national identity leading some to state:

One can also say that the Sámi gradually have become white through the strengthened position and acceptance of the Sámi on a cultural, political, and economic level and through their inclusion in the Norwegian welfare state. This is something that has influenced the cooperation between the Sámi and other Indigenous peoples, where the Sámi have often been understood as “the white Indians”. (Dankertsen & Kristiansen, 2021, p. 6)

The Alta case of the late 1970s, reminiscent of pivotal moments in Irish American history, emerged as a symbol of Sami resistance against cultural erasure and environmental exploitation. The Alta case in the late 1970s centered around indigenous Sami protests against a proposed hydroelectric dam in Alta, Norway, which threatened their lands and cultural heritage. The case became a pivotal symbol of Sami resistance, environmental activism, and the assertion of indigenous rights against encroaching industrial development. This landmark event foregrounded the Sami’s unwavering commitment to safeguarding their lands, traditions, and way of life, catalyzing a broader movement for indigenous rights and self-determination. Like the Irish community’s struggles for acceptance and agency in the face of systemic discrimination, the Sami’s activism in the Alta case exemplifies a collective assertion of identity and sovereignty in the face of historical injustices.

The revival of Sami culture and language, akin to the Irish cultural renaissance, underscores a profound reclamation of heritage and identity among the Sami people. Efforts to preserve traditional practices, language revitalization initiatives, and cultural celebrations have served as pillars of resistance against assimilation and cultural erasure, reinforcing the resilience and vibrancy of Sami cultural identity. The Sami’s cultural revival has played a pivotal role in reshaping societal perceptions and securing cultural autonomy. As we delve into the complexities of Sami activism and ethnic self-assertion, we witness a transformative process akin to Noel Ignatiev’s exploration of how the Irish community negotiated their place within the American racial landscape. The recognition of Sami sovereignty and inclusion within the Norwegian national identity represents a significant departure from their historical marginalization, echoing the journey of the Irish in transcending racial boundaries to claim their position within the dominant cultural milieu. This evolving narrative of indigenous empowerment and cultural resurgence embodies a profound interplay of historical legacies, present-day activism, and the enduring quest for recognition and equality.

The establishment of a Sami Parliament in 1989 in Norway captures a pivotal moment in the institutional recognition of Sami self-governance and political representation akin to Noel Ignatiev’s analysis of Irish political mobilization

in the United States. Through the formation of the Sami Parliament, the Sami community gained a formalized platform to articulate their rights, advocate for policy reforms, and engage in democratic decision-making processes. This significant institutional development marked a transformative shift in the political landscape, empowering the Sami to actively participate in shaping their collective destiny and asserting their rights within the national governance framework. By examining the historical trajectories of the Sami's journey towards ethnic recognition and equality in Norway through the lens of Sami activism and Noel Ignatiev's comparative insights on the Irish experience, we uncover profound interconnections between indigenous resilience, cultural resurgence, and political agency. The enduring legacy of the Sami's struggle for autonomy and self-determination mirrors the historic struggles of ethnic communities to navigate racial hierarchies, challenge stereotypes, and carve out spaces for cultural assertion and empowerment within dominant societal structures.

Echoing the experiences of the Irish diaspora in the United States, who underwent a process of cultural adaptation and integration as they settled in urban centers, a significant portion of the Sami populace today resides in Oslo and other major cities across Norway. This urban migration has brought about a reshaping of traditional Sami identities and cultural practices, blurring the previously distinctive markers that set them apart as the "Other" within Norwegian society. The vibrant tapestry of Sami clothing, costumes, and cultural traditions, once emblematic of their unique heritage and identity, has become interwoven with the fabric of Norwegian whiteness, leading to a subtle yet profound erosion of visible ethnic boundaries between the Sami and mainstream Norwegian populace. The convergence of Sami communities into urban landscapes has engendered a process of cultural blending and assimilation, reminiscent of Ignatiev's notion of ethno-cultural absorption into the dominant racial category of whiteness. As Sami individuals navigate the urban milieu and engage with diverse social contexts, their distinctive cultural markers and practices have gradually merged with broader Norwegian norms, contributing to a narrative of assimilation and cultural diffusion. This metamorphosis, characterized by a gradual fading of external identifiers and a growing alignment with dominant cultural norms, underscores the nuanced dynamics of ethnic identity negotiation and adaptation within the urban landscape.

The imperceptible yet transformative nature of this integration into urban centers illuminates the multifaceted evolution of Sami identity within contemporary Norwegian society. The Sami people's transition from rural enclaves to urban hubs represents a pivotal chapter in their historical trajectory, marked by a subtle yet profound intertwining of cultural assimilation and ethno-cultural

blending. The dissolution of visible markers of otherness and the growing coalescence of Sami cultural practices with mainstream Norwegian customs underscore a complex narrative of cultural negotiation and adaptation that transcends traditional paradigms of ethnic distinction and sameness.

Amidst the urban sprawl of Oslo and other major Norwegian cities, the Sami population finds itself at a crossroads of cultural flux and identity redefinition, profoundly shaping their interactions, visibility, and integration into the broader Norwegian social fabric. The fusion of Sami communities into urban centers speaks to a broader phenomenon of cultural convergence and hybridity, mirroring Ignatiev's insights on the porous boundaries of racial categorization and the transformative power of urban migration on ethnic identities. As Sami individuals navigate the multifaceted landscapes of urban living and negotiate their place within the diverse tapestry of Norwegian society, their distinct cultural practices and traditions are reshaped and reimagined through the prism of urbanity. The gradual erasure of visible ethnic markers and the assimilation of Sami cultural expressions into the mainstream cultural landscape reflect a dynamic process of cultural evolution and adaptation, where notions of ethno-cultural distinctiveness intersect with broader narratives of cultural exchange and integration.

Whiteness must not be hedged around in an enclosure for that would criminalize and devalue whiteness, to borrow from Harris's whiteness as property metaphor. The role of prisoner falls upon blackness – historically the most visible scapegoat of whiteness. It is significant that the Congolese “were *made to live* their daily lives in an enclosure at Frogner” [*italics ours*] (No. 3; Dagbladet, 2002). It was not enough that European elites and adventurers traveled to Africa and convinced themselves of the so-called “sub-humanity” of black bodies; black bodies had to be transported from Africa to the remotest regions of white Europe so that entire white populations could be interpellated into white supremacy's dehumanizing narrative, perpetuating a systemic belief in racial hierarchy and dominance.

It was as if the bourgeois colonizer needed to justify and absolve himself of the crime of colonization by interpellating every class of whites on home soil into the comforting myth of the necessity of playing the role of white savior – the white man's burden. Commensurate with the British imperial poet Rudyard Kipling's poem “The White Man's Burden” (1899), the Oslo “Human Zoo” was in some ways consistent with this catchphrase's perverted sense of the moral duty of white Western nations to colonize and “uplift” non-Western societies. The objective is to showcase the primitiveness and destitution of black Africa and hence justify the colonization of these Africans, to use one of the favorite appellations of the time, “savages”.

Take up the White Man's burden—
 Send forth the best ye breed—
 Go bind your sons to exile
 To serve your captives' need;
 To wait in heavy harness
 On fluttered folk and wild—
 Your new-caught sullen peoples,
 Half devil and half child.

Louis Althusser (2014) was interested in the machinations behind the subtle ways in which individuals are hailed or summoned into subject positions ideologically. This "hailing", which he compared to the banal act of a policeman addressing an individual on the street by uttering the words "Hey, you there!", has the effect of demarcating the subject addressed as a citizen, pedestrian or civilian. The policeman's utterance has that almost magical impact of summoning the individual to attention, triggering consciousness of his or her subjective position as citizen and hence beholden to the power of the state apparatus. The moment daylight streamed into the "Congo Village" in Frogner, the first white gaze fixated on the black bodies in the enclosure was sufficient to interpellate the Africans into a particular ideology: one that hailed and summoned them into a dehumanizing narrative, cementing the systemic belief in racial hierarchies and subjecting them to Eurocentric ideals of superiority.

That the ideology of racial hierarchy was among others "scientifically" delineated by a Swede, Carl Linnaeus, a botanist, physician, and zoologist considered by many to be the founder of the science of anthropology (News and Views, 1996) warrants further exploration in the context of the "Human Zoo" in neighboring Norway. Linnaeus, whose face features on the tail fin depicting Scandinavian heroes on the Norwegian airlines with the same name, was obsessed with taxonomizing plants, animals and even humans. He developed a racial hierarchy of humans in his "Systema Naturae" (10th edition, 1758). In this heyday of classic biological racism, Linnaeus drew up four distinct races premised on physical and superficial traits, echoing extant white supremacist perspectives. The following in brief were the four main races he delineated with a corollary of imagined characteristics. Table 3 fleshes out these characteristics.

1. *Europaeus* (*Europeans*): described as "white, serious, gentle; governed by laws".
2. *Asiaticus* (*Asians*): described as "yellow, melancholy, greedy; governed by opinions".

3. *Africanus* (*Africans*): described as “black, phlegmatic, lazy; governed by caprice”.
4. *Americanus* (*Native Americans*): described as “red, choleric, haughty; governed by customs”.

Foucault (1977, pp. 148, 149) was concerned with the machinations of the “cellular power”, or the “microphysics of power” encapsulated in his “tableaux vivants” which, according to him, “transform the confused, useless or dangerous multitudes into ordered multiplicities ... how was one to arrange botanical and zoological gardens, and construct at the same time rational classifications of living beings; how one was to observe, supervise, regularize” (Foucault, 1977, p. 148). The highest number of words are evident in cell number three (*Africanus*),

TABLE 3 Linnaeus’s classification of humans: physical and moral attributes added to geography and skin colour

Species	1	2	3	4	5
Americanus	Red, choleric and straight	Straight, black and thick hair; gaping nostrils; [freckled] face; beardless chin	Unyielding, cheerful, free	Paints himself in a maze of red lines	Governed by customary right
Europaeus	White, sanguine, muscular	Plenty of yellow hair; blue eyes	Light, wise, inventor	Protected by tight clothing	Governed by rites
Asiaticus	Sallow, melancholic, stiff	Blackish hair, dark eyes	Stern, haughty, greedy	Protected by loose garments	Governed by opinions
Africanus	Black, phlegmatic, lazy	Dark hair, with many twisting braids; silky skin; flat nose; swollen lips; Women [with] elongated labia; breasts lactating profusely.	Sly, sluggish, neglectful	Anoints himself with fat	Governed by choice [caprice]

SOURCE: THE LINNAEN SOCIETY OF LONDON (2024). [HTTPS://WWW.LINNEAN.ORG/LEARNING/WHO-WAS-LINNAEUS/LINNAEUS-AND-RACE](https://www.linnean.org/learning/who-was-linnaeus/linnaeus-and-race)

which is suddenly devoid of all rationality and is reduced to frothing at the mouth when it comes to the black anatomy: "Dark hair, with many twisting braids; silky skin; flat nose; swollen lips; women [with] elongated labia; breasts lactating profusely". It is obvious that the white gaze was simultaneously terrified of and fascinated by the black anatomy. There was a need to apply the discovery of a "new science" in the service of cellular taxonomization akin to the "Human Zoo" in Oslo with a view towards describing, dominating and forging a docile black body that, while no longer threatening the white gaze, simultaneously plays to the gamut of white sexual fantasies, as we shall allow Frantz Fanon to elucidate later.

Our analysis of article No. 3 would be incomplete without considering the last sentence: "And it isn't unequivocally negative; curiosity is the basis for all our creativity, says Berthelsen" (No. 3; *Dagbladet*, 2002). Somehow, the racist exhibition of black bodies to the white supremacist gaze of half the population of Norway for several months is absolved on the altar of "curiosity". This "curiosity" takes the form of reveling in all that is weird and wonderful – the freakshow includes black skin. Eighty Senegalese are erroneously labeled "Congolese", transported from Senegal to Norway, and then asked to reenact life in "Congo" in an enclosure where a sea of whiteness can gawk, point, shake heads, hurl insults, offer, and then watch the Africans eat chocolate – all in the name of satisfying white "curiosity". The irrationality of this "defense" unravels when considering a reversal of the scenario: imagine recreating a "Norwegian Village" in Dakar under matching conditions and motivations, allowing individuals of African descent to observe the idiosyncrasy of whiteness, all under the guise of innocent "curiosity". In her autobiography *The Desert Flower* (1998), Somali supermodel Waris Dirie describes her first encounter with white people on board a plane bound for London.

While I unwrapped and devoured my candy, I examined the white people around me. They looked cold and sickly to me. "You need sun", I would have said to them if I had known English; I assumed this problem was a temporary condition. They couldn't always look like that, could they? These people must have turned white because they'd been out of the sun too long. Then I decided I wanted to touch one of them the first chance I got, because maybe the white would rub off. Perhaps underneath, they were really black. (Dirie, 1998, p. 88)

Reports about the "Congo Village" at the time reveal the preoccupation with the fear of the black body and the need to reassure the Norwegian public of the Africans' harmlessness.

The “serious men” of the event committee, on the other hand, wanted to lessen the importance of the pleasure section and placed it behind a natural ridge “so that it (...) did not work together with and destroy the actual exhibition facility”. But if we are to believe the Secretary General Brinchmann, “the Negroes in the Congo Village, who were placed in a special fenced cubicle in the north-east corner of the Recreation Department”, were no great threat. They “were, on the other hand, a very quiet folk, who (...) exemplified a picture of sports, play, recreation, dance, and craftsmanship in their homeland, so convincingly portrayed that the visitors, for a while, must feel transported to the darkest land in Africa”. (No. 6; *Aftenposten*, 2005)

The theme of containing black bodies in a physical enclosure and monitoring them through the white gaze that functions as Foucault’s conceptual panopticon is once again underscored in the media report cited in article no. 6. Threats must be contained, as the phrases “special fenced cubicle” equated with “no great threat” imply. Historically, symbolic associations have linked the black body to metaphors such as the jungle, embodying notions of lawlessness, or to the metaphor of primordial chaos, representing a pre-creation stage before the imposition of order by divine light. “And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:2; King James Version). This association of darkness (blackness) with chaos stems from a European perspective influenced by biblical narratives, where the triumph of God’s illuminating light is correlated with the notion of white supremacy during the peak of racial discrimination. The association of the black body with chaotic or untamed imagery has profound implications for the ways in which racialized perceptions and prejudices are formed and sustained within societal narratives. Hence the white supremacist sincerely believed he was in the service of God and all that was benign in imposing order on black Africa: God divided the light from darkness, determined the borders of the seas and oceans, the plant, animal and human kingdoms, and white Europeans assembled in Otto von Bismarck’s Berlin to partition Africa.

Barely 30 years prior to the “Human Zoo” exhibition in Oslo, Bismarck convened an “international” conference in Berlin in 1884 with every European country present except Switzerland. Here was “a conference concerned with Africa held in Europe, by Europeans, and exclusively on behalf of European interests” (July, 1998, p. 295). Among others, the Congo region was partitioned, Germany’s claim to Cameroon was acknowledged, the extent of Portuguese territorial hegemony was clarified, the French accorded access to the north

bank of the Congo River, and, most surprising of all, the Belgian King Leopold II's sovereignty over the Congo was inscribed in treaty (July, 1998, p. 297). July (1998, p. 298) concludes, "In sum, the Berlin Conference neither precipitated nor regularized the so-called scramble for Africa; it merely punctuated the fact of Africa's partition". An interesting pattern emerges: the Berlin Conference imposed an artificial order on Africa. Tribal identities and territorial claims of Africans were ignored. In Norway, it was of no concern that the Senegalese were called "Congolese" – the white European gaze once again superimposed its own arbitrary identity, much as British writers superimposed the term "Hinduism" in the 19th – century to encompass – or discipline, in Foucauldian terms – "a rich cumulative tradition of texts and practices, some of which date to the 2nd millennium BCE or possibly earlier" (Britannica, 2023). The consequences of this arbitrary imposition of identities on Africans' cultures, languages and territorial integrity, among others, may long have been jettisoned by Europeans, but many flare-ups and even civil wars are the denouement of the European fetish of taxonomization, especially in regard to Africa.

To Foucault's mind, enclosure works in a much more flexible and detailed way – through *partitioning*. "One must eliminate the effects of imprecise distributions, the uncontrolled disappearance of individuals, their diffuse circulation, their unusable and dangerous coagulation; it was a tactic of anti-desertion, anti-vagabondage, anti-concentration ... Discipline organizes space" (Foucault, 1977, p. 143). The "negro's" land had to be partitioned in Africa, and slavery – the ultimate incarnation of Foucault's partitioning, we argue – was justified on the basis of the higher need of saving the black soul of the "depraved negro". Black Africa was the object of the white gaze because it had to be tamed for economic exploitation, with the purported aim of "civilizing" social relations, and not least, saving the black soul from eternal perdition.

The black body, abandoned to the whims of the white partitioner, finds no solace on earth but must be grateful for the white pity that in a final act of redemption, "partitions" the black soul to heaven. Erik Ludvigsen Pontoppidan was a Danish author, a Lutheran bishop of the Church of Norway, a historian, and an antiquarian. His *Catechism of the Church of Denmark* had a significant impact on Danish and Norwegian religious thought and practice for approximately the next 200 years following its publication in 1737. Pontoppidan justified the enslavement and physical dislocation of Africans in the following manner:

Pontoppidan emphasizes that by transporting the negro to the West Indies, most of them probably get to know God and his kingdom better, becoming liberated in Christ, though the servants of men ... Paganism

is far worse than the worst degree of Christianity ... It is no use preaching Christianity to the negroes in Africa, because one cannot hope that these poor people, deeply engulfed in and blinded by superstition, would accept the richer offer of Truth even if the same were given to them in their own country in their own natural environment. (Green-Pedersen, 1974, p. 86)

3 “Look, a Negro” in 1914 Oslo: Fanon’s Introspection

The weekly newspaper *Urd* wrote [i.e., in 1914], among other things: “We leave the village of the blacks animated by a happy feeling: It is wonderful that we are white, white!”. (No. 17; Leirfall, 2020)

In his seminal soliloquy in the “Fact of Blackness” (2022), Frantz Fanon captures the inner turmoil activated by the denigrating sea of white gaze in the opening three words: “Look, a Negro”. These words serve as the starting point for the depersonalized third-person consciousness he later grapples with upon encountering “the white other” and realizing the necessity of constructing his identity within the boundaries of a largely predetermined trajectory. The writer of the newspaper *Urd*’s statement “It is wonderful that we are white, white!” (No.17; Leirfall, 2020) reveals the mission of the white crowds, said to number half of the population of Norway at the time. They came to reassure themselves of the myth of white supremacy. That white supremacy is contingent on feeding off a “negro zoo” lays bare its pseudo-credentials and speaks volumes of the darker aspects of human psychology, where “Human Zoos” in Europe provided mental crutches in the desperate quest for some validation of being a member of the “chosen race”. “Human Zoos” with black bodies then were psychological incubators that nurtured and fostered the kind of ideology awash in Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*, which is worth citing at length:

Every manifestation of human culture, every product of art, science and technical skill, which we see before our eyes today, is almost exclusively the product of the Aryan creative power. This very fact fully justifies the conclusion that it was the Aryan alone who founded a superior type of humanity; therefore, he represents the archetype of what we understand by the term: MAN. He is the Prometheus of mankind, from whose shining brow the divine spark of genius has at all times flashed forth, always kindling anew that fire which, in the form of knowledge, illuminated the dark night by drawing aside the veil of mystery and thus showing man

how to rise and become master over all the other beings on the earth. Should he be forced to disappear, a profound darkness will descend on the earth; within a few thousand years, human culture will vanish, and the world will become a desert. (Hitler, 1939, p. 241)

It is significant that the ideology of white supremacy at the time equated scientific advancement and the like as "tokens" and "evidence" of a "superior type of humanity". It was as if advancement in the sciences was tantamount to a quantum leap in human evolution itself, one that applied only to white "Aryans" who were the guardians and custodians of this scientific prowess. What about the eras when the Sumerians, Babylonians and the African kingdoms of Egypt, Mali and Songhai, among others, were scientifically ahead of many of their peers in the West? If racial preeminence could be claimed on the basis of a country's or "race's" scientific advancement, every country and race would qualify at different junctures in world history. For instance, *The American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology* writes:

Sadly, the vast majority of discussions on the origins of science include only the Greeks, Romans and other whites. But in fact, most of their discoveries came thousands of years after African developments. While the remarkable black civilization in Egypt remains alluring, there was sophistication and impressive inventions throughout ancient sub-Saharan Africa as well. There are just a handful of scholars in this area. The most prolific is the late Ivan Van Sertima, an associate professor at Rutgers University. He once poignantly wrote that "the nerve of the world has been deadened for centuries to the vibrations of African genius". (Blatch, 2013)

To reiterate, blackness is an aberration for some white minds. It had to be confined, incarcerated and dissected in a "safe space". Only whiteness is trusted to roam free, hence the fact of the free, mobile white Norwegian crowds in Oslo in 1914 as opposed to the constrained "Congo Village". It is imperative for the critical reader to discern how, both then and now, blackness was restricted in its freedom of mobility. Cities in the West are conspicuous by their ethnic enclaves and voluntary segregation, captured in Trevor Philips' warning back in 2005 that Britain was "sleepwalking into racial and religious segregation". This is not to say that the confinement in the "Human Zoo" back in 1914, or current trends of segregation along ethnic and racial lines, were the result of deliberate policies pursued and implemented by Western governments. Rather, this chapter argues that residual permutations of the kind of white supremacy that

cordoned off black bodies in 1914 cannot be totally ruled out in contemporary residential patterns.

Studies have shown that many black and brown people who buy houses and apartments in the Capital, Oslo, have made a conscious choice to settle in districts where minorities predominate. “In Oslo, we can notice that ownership shares for those with a background from Africa, Asia, etc. are relatively high in the four districts where most people with an immigrant background live (i.e. Stovner, Søndre Nordstrand, Alna and Grorud)” (Statistics Norway, 2023). Statistics Norway attributes this to the relatively cheaper prices in these districts. However, this cannot be the only reason. Prices in Oslo, in even these relatively cheaper districts, are way higher than the rest of the country. One could easily buy a much bigger house a few kilometers to the north of Oslo for the price of a modest apartment in these districts in east Oslo. We argue that there appears to be a conscious choice to merge with “black and brownness” rather than be exposed to the alienating effects of color-based conspicuousness. This discomfort with black ontology is captured in Fanon’s writing:

Look at the nigger! ... Mama, a negro! ... Hell, he’s getting mad ... Take no notice, sir, he does not know that you are as civilized as we are ...” My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day. The negro is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly; look, a nigger, it’s cold, the nigger is shivering, the nigger is shivering because he is cold, the little boy is trembling because he is afraid of the nigger ... Mama, the nigger’s going to eat me up. (Fanon, 1986, p. 114)

The white world has never been comfortable with blackness in motion; it had to be immobilized and policed – first in plantations and then in prisons. As the boy in Fanon’s citation above demonstrates, whites often misinterpret and misconstrue the black presence. Whatever the true nature of the black’s bodily gesture, it inevitably is construed in terms of threat: Fanon shivers because he is cold can only be interpreted through the lens of an angry negro quaking with anger and on the verge of cannibalism. Initially, blackness was confined to the “dark continent” and when black bodies moved, they were often moved against their will – as in the case of slavery. It is perhaps for this reason that blacks have never had their Marco Polo or Ibn Battuta. Black mobility has always been the subject of suspicion in the white world, persisting to modern times as evidenced in frequent complaints about blacks being stopped and interrogated by police in Western countries. Just as the night harbors unseen perils in its depths, blackness became a symbol of danger, its very presence invoking a sense of

unease and caution. As nightfall descends, whiteness sought refuge in slumber, retreating into the safety of sleep. Yet, vigilant sentinels remained, standing guard against the encroaching darkness until the first light of dawn signaled the retreat of blackness, restoring clarity of vision and peace once more.

A historical paradox unfolds in the Olympic arena, where predominantly white crowds often witness the dominance of black athletes in the 100- and 200-meter sprint races. In a stark departure from the past, where whites paid to witness black bodies confined in "Human Zoos", today's narrative unfolds with cheers and applause. The contemporary scene is marked by jubilation, with cheers accompanying the mesmerizing, unrestricted movements of black athletes' hands and legs – a poignant departure from the constrained realities of 1914, at least in the stadiums of the West.

The disparities in mobility are still etched in pigmentation. In her book *Travelling While Black* (2020), the Kenyan writer Nanyala Nyabola states, "In Europe and North America, I am scrutinized intently – my dark skin held up against the bright surveillance lights, its secrets unpacked coarsely to determine if I am in fact a 'good' immigrant, simply passing through or loaded with enough cash not to be a burden on the state" (Nyabola, 2020, p. 3). The very act of ascribing and permitting mobility based on skin color becomes a lens through which one can analyze the profound implications of systemic racism in 1914 and today. Conversely, for white individuals, the ascribed and permitted mobility may have reflected a starkly different reality – one characterized by a comparatively broader range of movement, symbolizing a degree of privilege in stark contradistinction to the restricted experiences of their black counterparts. The "man", for instance, that President John F. Kennedy was determined to land on the Moon and back before 1970 was by default a white man. The same goes for climbing Mount Everest or any of the other great feats of mobility which whites take for granted.

Let us return once more to the Norwegian weekly newspaper *Urd's* remark in 1914: "We leave the village of the blacks animated by a happy feeling: It is wonderful that we are white, white!" (No. 17; Leirfall, 2020). What is the source of this happiness? Fanon is not sure that non-whites will understand his assertion: "In Europe, the black man is the symbol of Evil? ... The torturer is the black man, Satan is black, one talks of shadows, when one is dirty one is black – whether one is thinking of physical dirtiness or of moral dirtiness" (Fanon, 1986, p. 189). Such was the consensual understanding of this and its universal acceptance that the writers of this weekly newspaper held no qualms whatsoever in sharing this sentiment with their readership.

It would be quixotic to dismiss such statements and sentiments as relics of a bygone, unenlightened era. At regular intervals in the Norway of the 2020s,

the sentiments of 1914 resurface under the guise, among others, of the liberal and progressive celebrity comedian, Atle Antonsen. The comedian remarked to the Somali author Sumaya Jirde Ali in a pub that she was “too dark-skinned to be there” (NrK, 2023). Suffice it to state for now that this is commensurate with the assertion that the fear of blackness in Norway is not a relic of the past but haunts the present too. Once again, note the white discomfort and annoyance at the sight of blackness, which, to their minds, must be confined to an enclosure. Blackness is an aberration; it must be monitored, policed, and incarcerated.

Dagbladet expressed dissatisfaction with the Congo Village established during the jubilee exhibition at Frogner, as reported by Kjendstadli. Quoting a *Dagbladet* dispatcher, the sentiment was that it should have been a national and festive open-air theater. However, the reality was described as a group of begging, dancing individuals from the fever swamps of Zulu. The city’s young ladies were portrayed as participating in the affair by consuming chocolate and confectionery, which they placed between the shiny jaws of the Congo men. This statement reflects *Dagbladet’s* representation of the Norwegian self-understanding during that period. (No. 2; Dagbladet, 2000)

In the citation above from the Norwegian newspaper *Dagbladet*, the reporter back then was clearly upset by, among others, the “city’s young ladies consuming chocolate and confectionary, which they placed between the shiny jaws of the Congo men”. In “Black Skins, White Masks” (1986), Fanon explored the repressed sexuality of white women in relation to the black body within the contextual framework of the complex interplay of colonial power dynamics and sexual desire. Whites appear to mythologize the black body, reducing it to a phallic symbol, at the heart of which were both fantasies of superhuman sexual prowess and the fear of miscegenation. Fanon gives expression to this white fetish:

As for the Negroes, they have tremendous sexual powers. What do you expect, with all the freedom they have in their jungles! They copulate at all times and in all places. They are really genital. They have so many children that they cannot even count them. Be careful, or they will flood us with little mulattoes. (Fanon, 1986, p. 157)

In the case of the male reporter from the newspaper *Dagbladet*, Fanon’s analysis of this tortured sexual fantasy is salient, given the focus on the city’s

young ladies consuming chocolate and placing it in the shiny jaws of the Congo men. Certainly, there were a myriad other activities going on in regard to the "Congo Village", given that half the population of Norway had visited this exhibition. Of the countless interactions between members of the public and the "Congo men", it is indeed curious that the journalist felt an obligation to report back to his readership that young white Norwegian ladies were in such close proximity to the "shiny jaws" of the "Congo men".

The underlying fear cannot be attributed to cannibalism – another favorite phobia deep in the recesses of whiteness. Fanon, as always, is candid and explicit.

Still on the genital level, when a white man hates black men, is he not yielding to a feeling of impotence or of sexual inferiority? Since his ideal is infinite virility, is there not a phenomenon of diminution in relation to the Negro, who is viewed as a penis symbol? ... Is the Negro's superiority real? Everyone *knows* that it is not. But that is not what matters. (Fanon, 1986, p. 159)

The fear of blackness in the heyday of European colonialism distorted the white male's sexuality. Notions of innocence and purity were secreted into white womanhood, and the white male took on a new role that made him obsess over and fetishize the white female body. Foucault has been critiqued by perplexed feminists who, while lauding his brilliant analysis of power configurations, is silent when it comes to his failure to acknowledge centuries of disparagement of gender construction subverting the notion of female. For instance, King (2002) critiques Foucault's blind spot in failing to verbalize this when she states:

Woman [...] represents that which must be investigated and dissected until her secrets are relinquished. Consequently, the female body has been subjected to the scrutinizing gaze of the human sciences far more than the male. Every hint of abnormality has been thoroughly and enthusiastically ferreted out and classified by numerous "experts" eager to provide indisputable proof of its inherent pathology. (King, 2004, p. 3)

There is no such fear with Fanon. Fanon argued that within colonial contexts, particularly during the era of European colonialism, white women's sexuality was often repressed and controlled as part of the broader mechanisms of maintaining racial hierarchies. The perception of the black body played a crucial role in this dynamic. Fanon concluded that the white male's

phobia could be understood as the attribution of a raw sexual instinct to the black male which transcended the bounds of morality and prohibitions. “The women among the whites, by a genuine process of induction, invariably view the Negro as the keeper of the impalpable gate that opens into the realm of orgies, of bacchanals, of delirious sexual sensations ... We have shown that reality destroys all beliefs” (Fanon, 1986, p. 177). This paralogism on the part of the white male is due to comic books, Fanon argues (Ibid). The eight-year-old’s childhood fascination and fear of a black fantasy world concocted by an Edgar Rice Burroughs (Tarzan), or Georges Remi (Tintin) triggers a regression and fixation at pregenital levels of sexual development – self-castration, Fanon suggests (Fanon, 1986, p. 177).

4 Fanon’s Paradox in “Look, a Negro!”

The limited access to documentation about the original Congolese Village has made it difficult to fulfil all the demands of a reenactment, but Fadlabi and Cuzner try their best. “We only know the name of one of them who came from Senegal in 1914. There was nothing to be found in the police register in Oslo. We found no trace in the archives in Dakar either. Why it was called the Congo Village when the participants were from Senegal is still a mystery”, he says. (No. 14; *Utrop*, 2014)

In 2014, two artists, Fadlabi and Cuzner, came up with a controversial plan to reenact the “Human Zoo” of the 1914 project in connection with the bicentennial anniversary of Norway’s constitution. “The artists claim that the new project, which they named European Attraction Limited, is meant to provoke a discussion on colonialism and racism in a post-modern world, engaging with Norway’s racist past in the process” (*Guardian*, 2014). As the excerpt in article No. 14 shows, the task of shedding light on the precise identities of the so-called “Congolese” in the “Human Zoo” project of 1914 turned out to be Sisyphean. To begin with, they were not Congolese but Senegalese. Secondly, of the 80 participants, they managed to trace the name of just one individual. Previously, we have explored the manner in which Fanon’s “Look, a Negro” verbally incarcerates blacks, much like flood lights switched on to transfix and subject the black body to the scrutinizing and pathologizing gaze of whiteness.

“Look, a Negro!” encapsulates the oppressive panoptic summons that metaphorically irradiates the black body in the critical glare of a white prison warden determined to ferret out every sin and blemish that has ruminated in the recesses of white phobia and fantasy of the black body. The denouement of

this intrusive floodlight or interpellation (Althusser, 2014), "Look, a Negro!" is the deprivation of agency and internalizing of inferiority on the part of black individuals. The power of such a mechanism is summarized in Fanon's pessimistic estimation: "I believe that the fact of the juxtaposition of the white and black races has created a massive psychoexistential complex. I hope by analyzing it to destroy it" (Fanon, 1986, p. 14).

On the other hand, as the artists discover, there is the paradox of silencing and making invisible the very same black individuals that are so carefully and meticulously scrutinized. While other whites and blacks themselves are hailed or summoned in an Althusserian sense in the utterance, "Look, a Negro!"; it does not follow that this hailing is aimed at extracting facts and truth. Facts and the truth cannot stand in the way of shaping and conforming the "Negro" to an image compatible with white stereotypes and caricatures of blackness. Hence, confusing the Senegalese with the Congolese and failing to record the names of 80 individuals who lived in Norway for almost six months becomes an exercise in pedantry, or perhaps a form of hairsplitting for white authorities.

The parallels between the racialization of Jews and the Senegalese can be traced through various historical practices and societal attitudes in Norway and broader Europe. These practices highlight the similar mechanisms of exclusion and dehumanization that both groups faced, albeit in different forms. The "Human Zoo" of 1914 serves as a poignant example of how black bodies were objectified, but Judeophobia, as seen through the creation of Jewish ghettos and discriminatory laws, underscores a comparable process experienced by Jews. Senegalese individuals were displayed in the "Human Zoo" in Norway, where they were treated as exotic curiosities, stripped of their individual identities, and subjected to the scrutinizing gaze of the white public. They were mislabeled as "Congolese", illustrating a profound disregard for their true identities. This misnaming and the difficulty in tracing the identities of the participants reflect a broader trend of erasure and dehumanization, reducing them to objects that fit white supremacist narratives rather than recognizing their humanity.

In a similar vein, Jews in Europe were historically confined to ghettos, segregated from the broader population, and subjected to systemic discrimination. In Norway, Jews were concentrated in areas like Grünerløkka in Oslo, often facing significant challenges in maintaining their religious and cultural practices (Mendelsohn, 1969; Ulstein, 2006; Eriksen, Harket & Lorenz, 2009). For instance, Jewish ritual slaughter was forbidden in Norway, forcing Jews to travel to Sweden to procure kosher food. This restriction is indicative of the broader rejection of Jewish religious and cultural practices, paralleling the reduction of Senegalese individuals to mere spectacles in the "Human Zoo".

The historical backdrop of Norway's stance on Jews adds another layer to this parallel. The Norwegian Constitution of 1814 explicitly forbade the presence of Jews in the country, marking a legislative endorsement of their exclusion. This ban was only rescinded in 1851. The rescinding of this ban did not eliminate the societal prejudices that Jews faced, as evidenced by the later discriminatory practices and the hardships endured by the Jewish community. The Norwegian Holocaust further exemplifies these parallels. On the eve of October 26, 1942, Norwegian authorities, including police and taxi drivers, collaborated to apprehend Jews and deport them to concentration camps in Germany. This collaboration underscores the systemic rejection and dehumanization of Jewish bodies, viewing them as alien and disposable. This is not dissimilar to the perception of black bodies as foreign and only worthy of brief interest as objects of contempt or curiosity. The act of numbering Jews in concentration camps further dehumanized them, stripping them of their individual identities and reducing them to mere numbers, much like how the identities of the Senegalese in the "Human Zoo" were obscured and disregarded.

The rejection of both Jewish and black bodies was rooted in a broader ideology of racial and cultural superiority. Just as the "Human Zoo" exemplified the dehumanization of black individuals through their objectification and mislabeling, the treatment of Jews in Norway, including the restrictions on their religious practices and the eventual collaboration in their deportation, underscores a similar rejection and dehumanization. The actions of the Norwegian police and taxi drivers reveal a societal complicity in the dehumanization process, mirroring the broader societal indifference and contempt seen in the racialization of the Senegalese in the "Human Zoo". Moreover, the fact that Norwegian Jews felt the need to Norwegianize their surnames to better align with mainstream society further illustrates the pressure to assimilate and the rejection of their true identities. This forced assimilation is akin to the mislabeling and erasure of the Senegalese individuals' identities in the "Human Zoo". Both groups were coerced into conforming to the dominant society's expectations, at the cost of their own identities and humanity.

In summary, the parallels between the racialization of Jews and the Senegalese are evident in the shared experiences of exclusion, objectification, and systemic discrimination. Whether through the spectacle of the "Human Zoo", the historical exclusion mandated by the Norwegian Constitution of 1814, or the forced assimilation and deportation of Jews, both groups faced dehumanization rooted in ideologies of racial and cultural superiority. These historical examples highlight the persistence of these discriminatory practices and the enduring struggle for recognition and humanity faced by marginalized groups.

Facts and the truth are tools in the service of humanizing individuals, and these had to be done away with. In the USA, the Eisenhower Foundation (2023), among others has developed a Teacher Curriculum Packet for grades 6 to 8 where the aim is to sensitize students to the deleterious consequences behind the Nazi issuance of numbers to supplant names in concentration camps during the Holocaust, as the testimonies below highlight:

You were no more a human being, you were a number, and believe me, that number will never leave my mind. A24977: That's what I was (p. 6). Bella Miller.

When the cars finally opened, the ss received us with blows and dogs – we were the target. At this moment we ceased to be human. We were just numbers. Everything we had was taken away from us. Everyone, even the women and children were shaved, everyone, including my two little girls, numbers were tattooed. (Julius Hodosi, p. 6)

And you're given a pair of pants and a jacket. You are given two pieces of white cloth that will have your number on it already that they've stenciled quickly. They give you a needle and thread and you had to sew that on the left breast and on your right pant side That was my welcome to Auschwitz – Max Garcia. (Auschwitz no. 139829)

The warped logic inherent in the verbal incarceration of "Look, a Negro!" bears some resemblance to the machinations of antisemitism. The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre (1948) made an incisive analysis of antisemitism and astutely noted, "It is therefore the *idea* of the Jew that one forms for himself which would seem to determine history, not the 'historical fact' that produces the idea" (Sartre, 1948, p. 16). Likewise, an examination of the explicit antiblackness embedded within the "Human Zoo" project aims to confront the notion of black skin color itself, rather than any historical reality that gives rise to this perception. Sartre succinctly encapsulates the essence of this approach, asserting, "And we must ask, not 'What is a Jew?' but 'What have you made of the Jews?'" (Sartre, p. 69). Seeing these commonalities, Frantz Fanon called the Jew "my brother in misery" (Fanon, 1986, p. 122).

It was my philosophy professor, a native of the Antilles who recalled the fact to me one day: "Whenever you hear anyone abuse the Jews, pay attention, because he is talking about you". And I found that he was universally right – by which I meant that I was answerable in my body and in my heart for what was done to my brother. Later I realized that he meant, quite simply, an antisemite is inevitably anti-Negro. (Fanon, 1986, p. 122)

Antisemitism is propelled by a predetermined passion that zealously seeks out and coopts events to justify and sustain its antisemitism. Sartre notes, “It seeks them out to nourish itself upon them” (Sartre, 1948, p. 17). In such a skewed schema, the antisemite espouses hatred as a creed, which only fuels his ire if confronted, and hence laying bare its commitment and resistance to the possibility of error. This willful impenetrability, he suggests, underscores the deeply entrenched nature of the hatred – an emotion elevated to the status of an unwavering article of faith. In the cross-pollination of Sartre and Fanon’s quest for the holy grail of white revulsion towards Jews and blacks, Fanon takes the fact of blackness as a point of departure in distinguishing antiblack racism from antisemitism. The somatic fact of blackness is *sui generis* to the nature of racism unlike antisemitism where, Fanon, in his typically epigrammatic manner protests contra Sartre, that he is not the slave of the “idea” that others have of him but of his own black appearance (Fanon, 1986). While European Manichaeism lumps Jews and the “Negro” together in the cauldron of “problematic inferior races”, Fanon gives expression to the Jew’s ability to escape into whiteness further complexified by the divide and conquer tactics of white supremacy. “The Jew is told: You are not of the same class as the Arab because you are really white and because you have Einstein and Bergson” (Fanon, 1986, p. 103).

The key point for Fanon, as we will see, is that it is possible for Jews, in their essentialized whiteness, to assimilate or pass unnoticed in European society whereas it is impossible for blacks, in their essentialized blackness, to do so. Fanon spends much of his book recounting the failed assimilation of other black intellectuals such as the Antillean Jean Veneuse who was “unable to be assimilated, unable to pass unnoticed” in France. (Cheyette, 2005, p. xx)

We labor the point above because barely 28 years after the “Human Zoo” project in 1914 in Oslo, the Norwegian Holocaust was a grim reality. Of the 2,200 Jews residing in Norway, those who were unable to flee were rounded up on the eve of October 26, 1942. Tragically, only 30 of the 770 Jews deported on board the ship *ss Donau* and arriving in Auschwitz-Birkenau survived (Eriksen, Harket, & Lorenz, 2009). Norwegian-Jews prized their newfound connection to Norway – many had escaped the pogroms of the Baltic nations and Russia. They demonstrated a strong inclination to integrate, even assimilate, into Norwegian culture and lifestyle. Education held paramount importance, emphasizing the need for their children to attend school, receive a comprehensive education, become fluent in the Norwegian language, and forge friendships with Norwegians. The embrace of outdoor activities in the

Norwegian wilderness swiftly became ingrained in Jewish family customs. As part of assimilation efforts, children were bestowed with Norwegian first names alongside their Jewish ones, and some even modified their surnames to better align with mainstream society (Levin, 2015, p. 3).

Sartre speaks of Jews wanting to “disincarnate” into the ideals of reason championed by the Enlightenment which held out hope for the end of antisemitism. This occurred prior to the wave of pessimism sparked by the Alfred Dreyfus case, which elicited the impassioned response of Emile Zola in his renowned “J’Accuse...!” (1898). “We are horrified by the terrible light the Dreyfus affair has cast upon it all, this human sacrifice of an unfortunate man, a ‘dirty Jew’”. Commensurate with Fanon’s (1986) fact of blackness, however, it was not skin color that betrayed Jews. The Norwegian authorities had to summon every Jew in Norway and stamp a “J” in the passports to ensure no one evaded detection. In Germany, Jews were made to select names from a predetermined list such as Sarah, Israel, etc. “So, on August 18, 1938, the Nazi party stated that all children who were of Jewish faith – considered a race in Nazi Germany – would only be permitted to carry a set of names prescribed by the Nazi state. There were 185 names for male children, and 91 names for female children” (Bero, 2020).

Returning to the linguistic confinement inherent in “Look, a Negro!”, we observe together with Fanon the unique role black skin has played and continues to play in both putting the spotlight on blackness and simultaneously denying subjectivity to black individuals as seen in the misnomer “Congo Village” and refusal to grant names and hence bestow humanity on the 80 participants in the “Human Zoo”. We have not compared Jews with blacks in order to create a hierarchy of suffering by assessing the claims of one historically persecuted group up against another. The authors have paid some attention to the Norwegian Holocaust and plight of Jews in its aftermath in other publications. By studying the two in parallel, although cursorily, we hope to further flesh out the nuances of the bigotry that has plagued Jews and blacks over the centuries.

5 “Benign”, “Well-Intentioned” Liberal Racism

In the preamble to Oslo tour guide Yngve Leonhardsen’s chronicle in *Aftenposten* 3/7, about the “Congo Village” with exhibits of Africans at Frogner during the centenary in 1914, it is assumed that this feature “showed an attitude towards foreigners which would not be tolerated today”. Is that so? At the beginning of June 2005, i.e., one month ago, an exhibition of live Africans was organized in the German city of Augsburg.

Unlike our own constitutional anniversary, this exhibition took place in the city's zoo! The director of Augsburg's zoo was of course reported to the police for racism. The court, in all its wisdom, concluded that whether to exhibit Africans in a zoo in Germany in 2005 is solely a matter of taste, and therefore the court had no jurisdiction! What kind of a world do we live in? (No.7; *Aftenposten*, 2005)

The excerpt above from the daily national newspaper *Aftenposten* is from a Kjell Olaf Jensen from Oslo who wrote his opinion piece under the title "Are we any better today?" Writing in 2005, Jensen dismisses any notion of the "Human Zoo" project being a grotesque example of an unenlightened yesteryear highlighting a debacle that was just brewing in Augsburg, Germany. There was a backlash in Augsburg a town in southern Germany in 2005 due to a festival called "African Village". The festival had been held before, but the poor judgement exercised in the new location of the festival – an animal zoo – sparked accusations of racism and cultural insensitivity. Even more harrowing was the fact that the "African Village" was located between Augsburg zoo's monkey cage and Savannah exhibit. The organizer's subsequent defense did nothing to quell the groundswell of voices criticizing the festival for evoking colonialist imagery of Africans exhibited in zoos during the 19th and early 20th centuries. The event galvanized anti-discrimination groups throughout the world to counter what was considered unvarnished racism, emphasizing the problematic nature of associating Africans with a zoo setting. Many argued that the fact such a "Human Zoo" could be conjured up in 2005 was proof positive that antiblack racism was well and alive in the European psyche. Writing in *Spiegel International*, Charles Hawley quotes the Zoo director's attempt at an apology which only serves to further entrench the view that black-skinned Africans are still considered an exotic spectacle in parts of Europe.

Augsburg Zoo director Barbara Jantschke hasn't done herself any favors in her somewhat clumsy attempts to fend off the barrage of condemnation. In one effort to justify the festival, she commented that one of the organizers was "born in Africa and has black skin". Likewise, in a letter penned recently in response to mounting criticism, she wrote, "you can be sure that this wasn't a mistake in planning. I think the Augsburg zoo is exactly the right place to communicate an atmosphere of the exotic". (Hawley, 2005)

We argue that the above demonstrates the importance of constant vigilance and the need to raise public awareness of the many permutations of

racism in the past – not just as an academic exercise in knowing about the past but anticipating and equipping ourselves to grapple with this scourge that appears to have no date of expiry. It was William Faulkner who memorably said: “The past is never dead. It’s not even past”. There is a consensus that the vile kind of racism mostly associated with the ilk of neo-Nazis and dyed-in-the-wool racists is espoused by a few on the margins of society. Sadly, the bulk of scandalous cases in the contemporary era often emanates from either conservative right-wing circles or, worryingly, white liberal progressives. The director of Augsburg Zoo’s views can be subsumed under the latter. In her book *Nice Racism: How Progressive White People Perpetuate Racial Harm*, Robin DiAngelo (2021) cites Dr. Martin Luther King who called out “white moderate” racism placing it at the “far end of the spectrum” (DiAngelo, 2021, p. 3) when he wrote:

I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro’s great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen’s Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to “order” than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice. (King, 1963)

DiAngelo (2021) assigns blame to what the psychologist Joel Kovel called “aversive racism” – a racism that is suppressed from awareness because it contradicts white individuals’ commitment to the ideals of racial equality. “It is a subtle but insidious form, because it allows the person to enact racism while maintaining a positive self-image (“I have lots of friends of color”)” (DiAngelo, 2021, p. 7). This includes, among others, liberal whites who a priori assume the position of the previously mentioned “untaintedness” in regard to issues pertaining to racism. As educated, cosmopolitan and enlightened individuals, with pristine Wokist credentials, such as endorsing the pulling down of the statues of US confederate generals and a colonialist Cecil Rhodes, among others, many white liberals are offended at slightest accusation of racism. Among the several reasons for the stalemate, DiAngelo (2021) argues that white liberals turn a blind eye to racism because they are co-implicated in benefitting in a variety of ways from the status quo. Not least, because many white liberals live in what Joe Feagin has called “white bubbles” (Feagin & O’Brien, 2003, p. 25) – i.e. that there is no contact of substance to speak of between whites and people of color – whites can often be insensitive. Gentrification can easily be misconstrued as diversity (DiAngelo, 2021, p. 11):

Most white people have no lasting cross-racial relationships. Thus, the claims that young people today talk about how comfortable they are with diversity are based on the most superficial of shared experiences: being a fan of black musicians or sports figures of color, passing black people on the streets of large cities, and/or having a coworker of color. (DiAngelo, 2021, p. 11)

The “White bubble” metaphor helps explain the puzzling “benign, well-intentioned” racism of the Augsburg Zoo director and the even more puzzling conclusion of the court which ruled that the choice of exhibiting black bodies in 2005 in a European animal zoo near monkeys was a matter of “taste”. Not long ago, two Canadian professors (a mixed couple) visiting Oslo for the first time, expressed their delight at discovering the culturally diverse atmosphere of the city. Immigrants comprise about 33.8 per cent of the capital Oslo in 2022 (Oslo Kommune, 2022). The visiting professors had initially assumed Norway to be primarily white. However, upon closer scrutiny, their enthusiasm waned as they recognized the diversity as a mere facade, reflecting patterns of “voluntary segregation” seen in many Western capitals. This apparent diversity played out in dual spheres – one predominantly white and the other characterized by black and brown individuals. A similar phenomenon is evident in schools and Norwegian universities, where students of color tend to form close-knit groups, while white Norwegian students established their own separate social circles.

Hannah Arendt is considered one of the most influential political theorists of the 20th- century. In her seminal book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), Arendt contends that totalitarianism represents a “distinctive form of governance” that fundamentally deviates from other familiar forms of political oppression, such as despotism, tyranny, and dictatorship. In her view, what sets totalitarianism apart is its utilization of terror not solely against political adversaries but to subject entire populations on a mass scale. Arendt showed how the origins of fascism were not limited to Germany but had tentacles in global imperialism, antisemitism and racism. Arendt is famously credited with crystallizing the “boomerang effect” presciently adumbrating the unintended consequences of imperial actions. Owens (2017, p. 404) argues that Arendt pre-dates Michel Foucault by decades in this perspective. The scramble for Africa served as an incubator later spawning Nazi elites who packaged entire peoples into races with its apotheosis in the notion of the Aryan “master race”. Arendt’s work is salient to the canon of postcolonial studies and draws parallels with Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*. It stands among the early works to undertake a comprehensive historical and global examination of racist ideology, with

Arendt emphasizing the role of race thinking and racism in the dismantling of the European state system.

The fact that racism is the main ideological weapon of imperialistic politics is so obvious that it seems as though many students prefer to avoid the beaten track of truism. Instead, an old misconception of racism as a kind of exaggerated nationalism is still given currency. (Arendt, 2017, p. 209)

However, and regrettably, even in Arendt, black bodies find no refuge from the kind of racism that the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe referred to in his scathing attack of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*: "one which parades in the most vulgar prejudices and insults from which a section of mankind has suffered untold agonies and atrocities in the past ... a story in which the very humanity of black people is called into question" (Achebe, 2016, p. 1791). In her chapter entitled "Race-thinking before racism", Arendt's onslaught begins with the first meeting between Europeans and Africans on the "Dark Continent": "Ever since the Europeans peoples made practical attempts to include all the peoples of the earth in their perception of humanity, they have been irritated by the great physical differences between themselves and the peoples they found on other continents" (Arendt, 2017, p. 230). As a counter-argument, the reader may opine that this was an academic observation – not reflective of Arendt's own bias. However, subsequent statements are hard to explain away. Arendt writes about the European discovery of "human beings whom no European or civilized man could understand and whose humanity so frightened and humiliated the immigrants that they no longer cared to belong to the same species" (Arendt, 2017, p. 241).

Race was the Boers' answer to the overwhelming monstrosity of Africa – a whole continent populated and overpopulated by savages – an explanation of the madness which grasped and illuminated them like "a flash of lightning in a serene sky: Exterminate all the brutes". (Arendt, 2017, p. 241)

Owens (2017, p. 408) writes that "Some of the racist and ethnocentric tropes of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, in which she denigrated Africans, find their way into her later political theory and public policy interventions". The book is replete with the appellation "savages" in relation to black Africans. We note, even in this otherwise brilliant theoretical mind, the seeming powerlessness of erudition and culture to offset the deep-seated loathing of blackness that appears to be hardwired in many white liberal minds. Arendt is relentless in

providing what can only be understood as an apology for the detested policy of apartheid enacted by South African Boers: “Under a merciless sun, surrounded by an entirely hostile nature, they were confronted with human beings who, living without the future of a purpose and the past of an accomplishment, were as incomprehensible as the inmates of a madhouse” (Arendt, 2017, p. 248).

Despite the despicable antiblack racism in Arendt’s *Origins of Totalitarianism*, we argue it furnishes a window into the complexities and nuances of white discomfort and loathing of black skin which a theorist of the stature of Arendt gives free reign to – unlike other white liberals who suppress, dismiss and deny the phenomenon. In scrutinizing Arendt’s racism, one begins to see the faint contours of the seemingly ineradicable ideology of antiblack racism; the kind that imports 80 black bodies from Senegal for half the population of Norway to gawk at so they would never forget the value of whiteness – whiteness as property (Harris, 1995).

Arendt contradicts herself when she states that it was not the color of the skin of Africans but the fact “they behaved like a part of nature” (p. 251) which was the problem for the white Europeans. After diminishing the humanity of black Africans to the level of “nature” – i.e. the plants, trees, rivers and soil of the “Dark Continent” – Arendt appears to absolve the Boer and other white Europeans of genocide in further expunging the humanity of blacks who in contrast to nature are now “phantoms, unreal and ghostlike” (p. 251): They were, as it were, “natural” human beings who lacked the specifically human character, the specifically human reality, so that when European men massacred them they somehow were not aware that they had committed murder (Arendt, 2017, p. 251). One is reminded of Frantz Fanon’s location of antiblack racism in the inferiority induced by the epidermal schema. Arendt clearly is the victim of the type of white supremacist views that she actually did not share with contemporaries of her time.

Max Weber quit the pan-German League for not being racist enough. Martin Heidegger and Carl Schmitt are well known for their fascism. Emmanuel Levinas was unable to recognise “the face” of Palestinians, that is, to see the ethical demands they placed upon him as a Zionist; they remained a “faceless horde”. Unlike Weber and many of her contemporaries, Hannah Arendt was not consciously committed to white superiority, which makes her all the more interesting in a contemporary age of “neo-racism”. (Owens, 2017, p. 407)

Further “justification” is given for the senseless massacre of native black tribes in that this was purportedly what blacks did to each other anyway.

"Moreover, the senseless massacre of native tribes on the Dark Continent was quite in keeping with the traditions of these tribes themselves" (p. 251). Shaka Zulu's reputation in Europe vacillated from being "so civilized ... it was suggested that he must be of European extraction" to the dreaded savage "Black Attila" (Taylor, 1994). Arendt appears to subscribe to the "Black Attila" version. To Arendt's mind, Shaka massacred a million people and established "neither a people nor a nation of Zulus. He only succeeded in exterminating more than one million members of weaker tribes" (Arendt, 2017, p. 251). Once again, Arendt plays on the trope of the lazy, inefficient African of Carl Linnaeus whose work "barely sufficed to keep their masters alive and never reached the comparative abundance which nurtures civilization" (p. 252). In a final warning of the dangers of "going native", which anthropologists doing ethnographic research always guard against, Arendt appears to suggest that the white Boers degenerated into poverty because they adopted the lifestyle and mindset of black Africans:

The poor whites in South Africa, who in 1923 formed 10 per cent of the total white population and whose standard of living does not differ much from that of the Bantu tribes, are today a warning example of this possibility. Their poverty is almost exclusively the consequence of their contempt for work and their adjustment to the way of life of black tribes ... they firmly believed in themselves as the chosen people, with the essential difference that they were chosen not for the sake of divine salvation of mankind, but for the lazy domination over another species that was condemned to an equally lazy drudgery. This was God's will on earth as the Dutch Reformed Church. (Arendt, 2017, pp. 253, 255)

6 Implications for Education

This chapter explored the historical instances of racial prejudice, such as the "Human Zoo" project in 1914 Oslo where Africans were exhibited like zoo animals. We have used this event as a point of departure to consider the pervasive fear and distortion of blackness in European societies during the colonial era. In what follows, we suggest some implications for education in Norway. It is lamentable that very few if any know about the "Human Zoo" exhibition in Norway in 1914. There is a lacuna in the corpus of scholarly research examining current knowledge about this event among students. In our own informal references to this event among student-teachers, we find that barely a hand or two is raised in cohorts numbering anywhere between 20 to 50 students when asked about the "Human Zoo" project.

Consequently, as we also have suggested in relation to slavery in Norway in the previous chapter, raising levels of knowledge about these subjects in the general populace should be prioritized. We have drawn attention to the importance of critically examining historical events such as the “Human Zoo” project in 1914 despite the discomfort and push back such efforts will inevitably generate. This is important because approximating the facts and nuances of a country’s history is a desideratum in the pursuit of the “truth”. Modern Norway’s credentials as a country dedicated to and rightly recognized as a beacon of democracy, human rights and scientific excellence cannot be disputed. It is not coincidental that flashpoints in the global South – the Middle East, Sri Lanka, South Sudan, Somalia, Mozambique, Colombia and many more – trust and welcome little Norway’s judicious approach to conflict resolution. In addition, Norway along with other countries, such as Germany, have been admirable role models in acknowledging and doing their utmost to rectify grievous wrongs committed against indigenous groups such as the Sami and minorities like the Jews respectively.

If disseminating knowledge of uncomfortable aspects of history, such as colonialism and racism is to be achieved in order to promote a more nuanced understanding of the past, then schools and educational institutions must accept their responsibility in this regard. Edward Said’s influential work, *Orientalism* (Said, 2003) explores how Western universities and scholars have contributed to the development and perpetuation of Orientalism. According to Said, Orientalism is a way of seeing, understanding, and representing the “East” (primarily the Middle East, Asia, and North Africa) as a monolithic, exotic, and inferior “Other” to the West. Said (2003) argues that Western institutions of learning were weaponized as agents of colonial knowledge production in order to facilitate colonization. This was done through concocting images of the East which interpellated (Althusser) European populations into the myth of “civilizing” the “savages” equating it with doing “God’s work”. Said contends that Western academic institutions played a fundamental role in crafting images of the East amenable to subsequent colonization and exploitation. Scholars in various disciplines, including history, literature, anthropology, and political science, produced knowledge about the Orient that reinforced stereotypes, cultural generalizations and essentialist views. This academic misrepresentation contributed to shaping Western perceptions of the East as mysterious, primitive and fundamentally different.

Given the above, it stands to reason that schools and academia should be at the forefront of combatting the legacy of Orientalism. The so-called “Congolese” were “touring” other cities in Europe, and not just Oslo, as part of a broader strategy in “educating” entire European populations about the black

"savages" of whom Arendt (2017, p. 254) writes "it was indeed tempting simply to declare that these were not human beings". Significantly, Arendt goes so far as to weave in citations from Joseph Conrad's celebrated novella *Heart of Darkness* without challenging the appalling antiblack racism against the people of Congo. She writes about "the prehistoric man", "this suspicion of their not being human" and "the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar" (pp. 248, 249) with no detection of any moral disdain. There is serious scholarship that now asserts Arendt was influenced and relied upon antisemitic sources in the coining of her controversial phrase "banality of evil" which has generated as much controversy as her love affair with the philosopher Martin Heidegger even when the latter overtly praised Hitler. For instance, the distinguished British historian Bernard Wasserstein writes:

"More than a methodological error: it was symptomatic of a perverse world-view contaminated by over-exposure to the discourse of collective contempt and stigmatization that formed the object of her study – that object being anti-Semitism". In other words, he contends, Arendt internalized the values of the anti-Semitic literature she read in her study of anti-Semitism, at least to a certain extent. Wasserstein's conjecture will reignite the debate over Arendt's contemptuous remarks on certain Jews who were victims of Hitler in her Eichmann book and in her letters. (Rosenbaum, 2009)

We contend that there is a "banality of scholarship" that appears disinterested in seriously looking horns with the multi-headed-hydra of Orientalism in some Western institutions of learning. Eighty black bodies were subjected to the denigrating gaze of whiteness in Norway in 1914 as part of a larger Eurocentric plan to dehumanize black bodies and put blackness beyond the pale. There is, then, an academic "reparation" of sort that academia in Norway must pay. We do not refer to monetary compensation in this regard, but a debt owed in acknowledging the symbolic violence committed by thinkers, anthropologists, craniometrists, wordsmiths, researchers and ink and paper in perpetrating the myth of the "black savage".

The panoptic gaze of whiteness has for too long dissected and pathologized the black body. It is time for academia, schools and other institutions of learning to now put whiteness under the spotlight and ferret out its bigotry. Academia must ask what is the nature of this phenomenon that in the words of Chinua Achebe "parades in the most vulgar prejudices and insults from which a section of mankind has suffered untold agonies and atrocities in the past ... a story in which the very humanity of black people is called into question"

(Achebe, 2016, p. 1791). The task ahead is made more urgent when one keeps in mind the toll on vulnerable black children and youth in Norway. While anecdotal, and as mentioned previously, we have heard quite a few stories of black parents whose children have asked for skin treatment to become white like their Norwegian classmates.

We must not be misunderstood when we declare that education in Norway and other Western countries must now enact, not a “Whiteness zoo” for that would be wallowing in a caricature, but some way of daring to ask how the very ideology of whiteness, or more precisely, white supremacy, can be identified, quarantined and examined with the critical tools of academia. The issue is not white skin or, to reappropriate Fanon, the “fact of whiteness”, but an *ideology* that links white skin with “racial” supremacy and unearned privileges that trumps gender, class, ethnicity and other categories of identity. The late professor Noel Ignatiev, himself a white man and the author of the book *How the Irish became White* (1995), launched the journal “Race Traitor” with the controversial sub-heading, “Treason to whiteness is loyalty to humanity”. Among others, the following statements feature under “What we believe”:

The white race is a historically constructed social formation. It consists of all those who partake of the privileges of the white skin in this society ... The key to solving the social problems of our age is to abolish the white race, that is, to abolish the privileges of the white skin ...The existence of the white race depends on the willingness of those assigned to it to place their racial interests above class, gender, or any other interests they hold. The defection of enough of its members to make it unreliable as a predictor of behavior will lead to its collapse. (Race Traitor, 2005, p. 128)

Obviously, there is the risk of distortion of phrases such as “abolish the white race”. We understand Ignatiev’s (2005) call for abolition of the white race as referring to the attitudes, mindset and habitus (Bourdieu) that, among others, traded in black bodies, exhibited them in “Human Zoos” and believed in the hierarchy of human “races” as evidenced in Carl Linnaeus’ taxonomy. However, and as Lensmire (2008) contends, a narrow focus on white privilege only serves to antagonize and alienate white students if the concept is reduced to “nothing but the embodiment of White privilege” (Lensmire, 2008, p. 316). As critics often counter, there are many poor whites for whom the notion of white privilege is offensive. It is for this reason that Lensmire (2008) suggests a more fruitful approach where scholars need to make an inventory of the cornucopia of discourses and trajectories – resonating with the tradition of Foucault’s (1977) archaeology of knowledge. Such an historical, archaeological endeavor

would do justice to the distinct trajectory, mutability and parochial nuances of whiteness in various Western countries, as opposed to a universal, one-size-fits-all whiteness that is unable to imagine versions of white supremacy that are not indigenous to the USA.

This book is an attempt to answer, among others, Lensmire's (2008) challenge to provide an inventory of white supremacy as embedded in local histories. Norway has recently introduced "critical thinking" as an interdisciplinary part of the new curriculum. This is not to suggest that critical thinking is new in Norwegian education. However, and as some scholars of education have concluded,

Formulations of critical thinking in the curriculum are both vague and scarce, which is unfortunate because we know that many teachers lack an understanding of what critical thinking actually entails and they often feel unprepared to teach critical thinking (Alazzi, 2008; Munkebye & Gericke, 2022). To support teachers, critical thinking needs to be elaborated and concretized in the curriculum. (Scheie, Haug, & Erduran, 2022, p. 23)

In this day and age of "fake news" and the surge of racist populism poorly disguised in sloganeering such as "Make America great again", a critical pedagogical lens is indispensable to the objectives of education. In the early 2000s, the then Conservative government of Norway feigned a so-called "shock" at the mediocre results in the international PISA tests. A slew of reforms were introduced as a panacea including bolstering basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills. Not much was said about critical thinking. The "father" of critical pedagogy Paolo Freire reminds us that

Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world. As I suggested earlier, this movement from the word to the world is always present, even the spoken word flows from our reading of the world. (...). For me, this dynamic movement is central to the literacy process. (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 35)

To reiterate, education – from primary to university – must lock horns with the uncomfortable past in Norway; a past which must shed the quixotic notion of "untaintedness" and acknowledge that slavetrading and "Human Zoos" were not activities unique to the Portuguese, British, Americans and French, among others, but have indeed tainted the Norwegian soil and soul. Some academics in Norway are determined to quarantine structural and systemic racism as an Anglo-American problem which should not be "imported" into Norway

ignoring the historical contours of government-sanctioned institutionalized racism against the indigenous Sami and other national minorities.

There is a need for a new cadre of black and brown academics from the burgeoning 11% non-white demographic to speak truth to power commensurate with the postcolonial genre of the *The Empire Writes Back* taking inspiration from figures like Chinua Achebe, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Buchi Emecheta, Frantz Fanon, Jamaica Kincaid, Wole Soyinka and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who have exposed the power dynamics at play in our global narrative. Paulo Freire (1966) forwarded the shocking thesis that the oppressed are also duty-bound to emancipate the oppressor because healing is a relational dialectic – a pedagogy of love. The oppressor fears the oppressed and the humanity of both is devalued in a master-slave diabolical dyad. The oppressed are stripped off agency, fear the oppressor and replicate the oppressor's behavior in a cycle of oppression akin to Foucault's (1977) observation that power is productive and fruitful.

To break the cycle of oppression, Freire believed that it was essential for the oppressed to engage in a process of critical consciousness (conscientization). This process involves recognizing the structures and mechanisms of oppression, understanding their own role in their oppression, and developing the capacity to resist and transform oppressive systems. The notion that the oppressed bear the responsibility of “delivering” or “emancipating” the oppressor is rooted in the belief that liberation transcends merely overthrowing the oppressor. Rather, it entails a fundamental transformation of the oppressive system itself, aiming to cultivate a fairer and more just society. Paulo Freire contended that this transformation could only be achieved through the channels of dialogue, empathy, and mutual understanding between the oppressed and the oppressor. Essentially, Freire argued against a pursuit of vengeance or a replication of oppressive behaviors by the formerly oppressed upon gaining power. Instead, he advocated for a process wherein both parties engage in humanizing efforts, dismantling the structures of oppression, and fostering the creation of a more inclusive and compassionate society. This perspective resonates with Freire's broader vision of education as a catalyst for liberation and societal transformation, emphasizing the active involvement of both the oppressed and the oppressor in the emancipatory process.

Furthermore, education must challenge what we have termed “benign, well-intentioned” racism, as discussed in the text. Good intentions cannot substitute for a critically conscious struggle against antiblack racism; it may be a catalyst for racism. In an educational setting, it is crucial to teach students to recognize and challenge subtle forms of racism, often perpetrated by white progressives, fostering a more inclusive and equitable environment. Obviously,

the onus is on the teacher or lecturer to create an atmosphere or space for reflecting on racism that is non-threatening and invites students to engage in a pedagogy of understanding, critique and healing, as Freire advocates. This can promote a deeper understanding and help break down stereotypes. As the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw shows, a more promising approach to dealing with racism is through intersectionality in the curriculum. How do gender, ethnicity, class and even religion compound race? Years ago, one of our students from a country in the Caucasus region was in the habit of proudly referring to his "Aryan" and "Caucasian" heritage. "We are the real Caucasians and not Scandinavians", he would proudly declare in the classroom. It took some sensitive education (and patience) before this student, who was relatively new in Norway and was not aware of the Anglo-Saxon "hierarchy" of whiteness, understood with some displeasure that his ethnic group would have fared no better than the white Sami in Norway in the past.

Critical race theory's tenet of counter storytelling (Lawrence, 1995) can usefully be deployed in sensitizing students to antiblack racism by linking the tragic story of Ota Benga with that of the "Human Zoo" exhibition in Norway in 1914. Ota Benga, an Mbuti pygmy from the Congo, stands today as a prime example of the dehumanizing landscape of the racial exhibition typical of 20th-century white bigotry. The explorer Samuel Phillips Verner, who was searching for black people to exhibit in the USA, bought Ota Benga from slave traders. At the Bronx Zoo, Benga was exhibited in the zoo's Monkey House in 1906 and was put in a cage with an orangutan to lampoon Darwinism.

The black body of Ota Benga was sacrificed on the altar of the triune evils of colonial exploitation, pseudo-scientific theories and overt racism that was the hallmark of the era. Ota Benga's life took a tragic turn following his exploitation in the racial exhibition. After the St. Louis World's Fair and the Bronx Zoo exhibit, Benga struggled to find a place in American society. He faced discrimination and challenges adjusting to life outside the dehumanizing spectacle. In 1910, Ota Benga was committed to a mental institution in Virginia, where he lived for several years. Regrettably, his struggles persisted, and in 1916, at the age of 32, Ota Benga tragically took his own life.

The "Human Zoo" project of 1914 in Oslo, where Africans were exhibited like zoo animals, serves as a poignant departure point for examining racism. This section will outline specific strategies for educators to foster knowledge and critical thinking about racial prejudice in the classroom. Few people in Norway are aware of the 1914 "Human Zoo" exhibition, highlighting a significant gap in historical knowledge. To address this, teachers should prioritize raising awareness about such events to provide a more nuanced understanding of Norway's history. Educators can integrate lessons about the "Human Zoo"

and other colonial-era atrocities into history classes. They should use primary sources, such as photographs and articles, to bring the events to life. Facilitating classroom discussions about the implications of these historical events is equally important. Assigning research projects where students explore lesser-known historical events involving racism in Norway can promote deeper learning. Encouraging students to present their findings to the class helps enhance peer learning. Furthermore, inviting historians, activists, or members of the affected communities to speak about the “Human Zoo” and its impact can provide invaluable perspectives.

Education must play a vital role in confronting and understanding past and present racism. Taking inspiration from Edward Said’s work on Orientalism and the critical pedagogy of Paolo Freire, teachers can develop students’ critical thinking through debates and dialogues around historical events and current issues of racism. Critical analysis of how Western academic institutions have historically misrepresented non-Western cultures should be a key component. Additionally, incorporating an intersectional approach by highlighting how race intersects with other identities like gender, class, and ethnicity in lessons is crucial. Utilizing case studies such as the Sami people’s struggles and the experiences of Jewish communities can illustrate intersectional oppression.

The story of Ota Benga can be introduced alongside the events in Oslo to engage students in understanding the dehumanization and racial prejudice exemplified by the “Human Zoo”. Teachers can start with an introduction to Critical Race Theory (CRT), defining CRT and its importance, and discussing storytelling as a tool for examining racial experiences. Providing an overview of Ota Benga’s life and his exploitation, together with an analysis of primary sources related to his story, can offer students a clear insight into his lived experiences. Linking CRT principles to Ota Benga’s experiences will help students discuss systemic racism and the implications of scientific racism. A comparison of Ota Benga’s story with the events in Oslo, using primary sources, will further highlight the dehumanization and racialization of individuals for public spectacle.

Educators can assign group research topics, having each group compare specific aspects of Ota Benga’s story and the “Human Zoo”. Students should present their findings linked to CRT principles, reinforcing their understanding through collaborative exploration. Facilitating reflection and discussion on lessons learned and drawing connections to current issues of racism can help students brainstorm actionable steps towards addressing and dismantling racism. Assessing students through presentations, written reflections, and class discussions while providing documentaries, articles, and books related to Ota Benga and the “Human Zoo” will further enrich the learning experience.

Arranging guest lectures or virtual interviews with experts in CRT and historical events will offer additional depth.

Educators are tasked with fostering critical consciousness among students, which involves recognizing and challenging subtle forms of racism and the white supremacy mindset. Creating a non-threatening space for students to discuss and reflect on racism is essential, as is encouraging open dialogue and respect for diverse perspectives. Teachers can use counter storytelling to highlight narratives like Ota Benga's and assign interdisciplinary projects that engage students in thinking critically about race, power, and privilege. Regularly including intersectional perspectives in lessons and using examples from current events and history to illustrate the impacts of intersecting identities on experiences of oppression will further ensure comprehensive education on these issues.

Teaching about historical racism, such as the 1914 "Human Zoo" in Oslo, equips students with a deeper understanding of their country's past and its implications for the present. By integrating critical race theory, fostering critical thinking, and promoting an intersectional approach, educators can help create a more equitable and inclusive educational environment. With these strategies, teachers can encourage students not only to learn about history but to actively engage in dismantling oppression and promoting justice in their communities.

Eugene Obiora

Black Body, Broken Justice

1 “Breaking the Negro”: From Plantations to Police Brutality

Norway’s 2006 police killing of Eugene Ejike Obiora serves as a poignant lens to examine the complex and often disturbing parallels between historical and contemporary instances of racial violence across different countries and time periods. Fourteen years before the death of George Floyd catapulted the issue of police brutality into the global spotlight, Norway had its own George Floyd. Eugene Obiora was a Nigerian-born, naturalized Norwegian citizen who died from asphyxiation after a police officer put him in a chokehold. His death, much like that of Floyd, drew national attention and sparked debates about race and police brutality in Norway.

When comparing the Obiora case with similar incidents in other countries and eras, both significant differences and striking similarities come to light. The Obiora case highlights Norway’s struggle with acknowledging and addressing systemic racism within its own borders. Historically, the country’s narrative has often been one of egalitarianism and social welfare, a stark contrast to the United States with its well-documented history of slavery, segregation, and ongoing racial tensions. The immediate aftermath of Obiora’s death saw a national debate about brutal police methods and potential racial discrimination. Such discussions were not new in the U.S. context, where cases of police violence against black individuals have repeatedly sparked widespread protests and calls for reform. The U.S. has a long history of documented racial violence, from lynchings in the post-Reconstruction South to police killings in the 21st century, each followed by waves of civil rights activism and legal battles.

The media coverage of the Obiora case provides a window into how nationality and historical context shape the discourse around racial violence. Norwegian media initially portrayed Obiora as a disruptive individual at a social services office, a narrative that mirrored early reports in many U.S. cases, where black victims of police violence are often depicted in a negative light to justify the use of force. However, as more details emerged, the media narrative shifted, echoing the pattern seen in the U.S. where public outcry and further scrutiny reveal systemic issues of racial bias and brutality within law enforcement. The theories of race

and racism, particularly those developed in the U.S., provide a robust framework for understanding the dynamics of racial violence in Norway. The metaphor of “breaking a negro”, as articulated by Frederick Douglass in the context of slavery, is particularly apt. Historically, black bodies have been dehumanized and subjected to extreme violence, justified through metaphors that liken them to animals. This dehumanizing language and the resulting violence are not confined to the past. The police officer involved in Obiora’s death compared his physical power to that of a horse, echoing long-standing racist tropes that dehumanize black individuals to rationalize their subjugation.

Comparing a black body to an animal, as seen in the Obiora case, is part of a long tradition of bestialization that includes colonial-era exhibitions and contemporary police brutality. This form of visual and physical violence reflects a systemic effort to assert dominance and control over black individuals, reminiscent of the way slaves were monitored and disciplined on plantations. Historically, the white gaze has policed black bodies, whether through overt displays like the “Human Zoo” exhibitions or the more insidious act of racial profiling and police violence. Interestingly, the same police officer involved in Obiora’s death had previously been accused of choking another black person, a Ghanaian woman named Sofia Baidoo. This pattern underscores the persistence of racial violence across different contexts and individuals. It also illustrates how such violence is not limited to large black males but extends to black women, reflecting a broader spectrum of dehumanization and brutality faced by black individuals.

The legacy of racial violence, both historical and contemporary, reflects a systemic effort to control and dominate black bodies. This is evident in the enduring impact of police violence on black communities. Ta-Nehisi Coates, in his book “Between the World and Me”, describes the “philosophy of the disembodied” – a constant fear of physical violence that black individuals live with. This fear is a recurring theme, whether in the streets of American cities or in the relatively smaller and less diverse city of Trondheim, Norway. The symbolic power of George Floyd calling out for his mother during his final moments resonates deeply with the cries of Eugene Obiora for his father. These invocations are more than pleas for help; they are a call to a larger, ancestral memory, a connection to a time before the dehumanizing gaze of racism was cast upon them. This connection is reflected in the collective response to these deaths, uniting communities in a shared grief and a call for justice.

In Norway, the response to Obiora’s death saw musicians, activists, and human rights groups rallying in much the same way as communities in the U.S. did following the deaths of individuals like Eric Garner and Michael Brown. The use of rap music by the band Samvirkelaget to publicly name the police

officer involved in Obiora's death exemplifies the ways in which art becomes a weapon of the dispossessed. Like Tupac Shakur and other American rappers, Norwegian artists used their platform to highlight systemic issues and challenge the narratives that exonerate oppressive structures. Critical race theory, particularly Derrick Bell's concept of interest convergence, helps explain the eventual decision to transport Obiora's body to Nigeria for burial. As public outcry grew, the authorities were forced to align their actions with the interests of Obiora's family, reflecting Bell's assertion that racial progress often occurs when it aligns with the interests of those in power. The narrative around Obiora's corpse, lingering in the morgue and eventually securing a dignified burial, underscores the complex dynamics of race, power, and justice.

The difference in public acknowledgment and handling of these events between Norway and other countries like the U.S. highlights distinct national contexts and histories. However, the underlying sameness in the systemic structures of racism and violence is evident. The comparison between Norway's handling of the Obiora case and the historical and ongoing racial violence in the U.S. reveals a shared struggle against a legacy of dehumanization and the persistent fight for racial justice. In sum, while Norway and the United States have different historical trajectories regarding race and racism, the cases of Eugene Obiora and George Floyd reveal common threads of systemic violence, dehumanization, and the enduring struggle for justice faced by black communities in both countries. These events highlight the pervasive nature of racial oppression and the universal calls for accountability, recognition, and change.

Fourteen years before the death of George Floyd in 2020, Norway had its own "George Floyd". His name was Eugene Ejike Obiora (1958–2006). Obiora was originally from Nigeria but a naturalized Norwegian citizen who had lived in Norway for about two decades. Obiora was catapulted to national attention when on 7 September 2006 he succumbed to asphyxiation after police officer Trond Volden put him in a chokehold. Obiora was a student at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), required financial assistance and made his way to the Østbyen Servicekontor, a social services office in the city of Trondheim to voice his grievance over the denial of welfare support. Early reports indicated that Obiora was very upset and had taken some photographs of the staff. Having declined to comply with orders to leave the premises, the police arrived. A physical altercation ensued with the police officer applying a chokehold on Obiora who lost consciousness and was driven to the hospital. The four police officers maintained that Obiora was placed in a recovery position to keep the airway clear and allow the casualty to keep breathing. However, this account was contradicted by nurses who met the police car and

claimed that the body of Obiora was limp with face down on the floor of the supervisor vehicle.

This chapter relies on an examination of media coverage from 2006 and 2007, during the period when the incident, later dubbed the “Obiora case”, garnered significant national attention. In total, keywords referring to the “Obiora-case” in Retriever returned 5,452 hits (web: 4,524; paper: 885 and TV/radio: 43). Following closer analysis of the reports, twenty-two were chosen to serve as representative accounts of the key events or milestones in the case. We will draw upon theories of race and racism in fleshing out the black body as a locus of white violence. We posit that theories pertaining to race and racism, despite originating in the USA and the discernible distinctions in historical trajectories, nonetheless provide robust theoretical and conceptual frameworks. These frameworks illuminate oppressive phenomena that, in the end, result in similar effects for people of color across the pond. Fourteen years after the death of Eugene Obiora, the death of George Floyd triggered the biggest peacetime demonstrations in Norway, with several youth of color invoking the memory of Eugene Obiora.

My first thought when I saw the pictures from Minneapolis was “here we go again”. At first, I didn’t want to see the video, says Babu Katembo, spokesperson for *ARISE* and initiator and participant in the demonstration in Oslo ... He believes it is naive to believe that what is happening in the US does not have parallels in Norwegian society. The Obiora case in 2006 is one of the cases that has raised debate about brutal police methods and discrimination based on skin color here at home. (Lepperød, 2020)

I have had some of these experiences myself, as a black man living in Norway. My experience is that Norway is not as different from the USA as many like to believe, he says ... The situation we are in now is not the first time. If we do not learn we may be doomed to repeat history. We who are often at the bottom of a racial hierarchy are fed up. It is about us, and we see much of the same systemic oppression as in the US, says Katembo. (Zander, 2020)

In his book *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2014), Frederick Douglass painfully records the sadistic nature of violence visited upon the black body in the guise of Mr. Edward Covey. Mr. Covey takes pleasure in his reputation as a “negro-breaker” and an analogy is drawn with one who breaks horses. Covey is described as a poor farm renter who accrued immense benefits from this reputation as a “negro-breaker”. “Some slaveholders thought it an advantage to

let Mr. Covey have the government of their slaves a year or two, almost free of charge, for the sake of the excellent training such slaves got under his happy management” (Douglass, 2014, p. 164). He goes on to state:

Like some horse breakers, noted for their skill who ride the best horses in the country without expense, Mr. Covey could have under him, the most fiery bloods of the neighborhood, for the simple reward of returning them to their owners, *well broken*. (Douglass, 2014, p. 164)

The metaphor of “breaking a negro” is apt in analyzing racial violence visited upon the black body. Throughout history, racists have employed dehumanizing language and metaphors to justify discrimination, oppression and violence against black individuals. Black bodies have been compared to creatures in the animal kingdom: ants (Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*), vermin, monkeys, gorillas, horses etc. In fact, one policeman in the Obiora case explicitly compared Eugene Obiora to a horse. For instance, the daily national newspaper *Verdens Gang* writes the following under the title, “Muscles like a horse”:

According to VG’s experience, this must have come out in the interrogations of the official. To describe the Norwegian-Nigerian’s strength, the suspected policeman is said to have said the following: “He had powers that I have only seen in horses before”. Obiora was 177 [cms] tall and [weighed] 84 kilos. Several of the witnesses describe him as powerful. The two main suspects, the policemen, must have weighed over 100 kilos each, and also described as very powerful. The lawyer for the survivors of Eugene Obiora, Abid Raja, believes this illustrates the problem the Trondheim police have with racism. This could be illustrative of their view of people from Africa, claims Raja. (VG, 31.07. 2007)

The black body populates the white imagination as a threatening force of nature – an unrestrained brute force with associations to the jungle and reminiscent of Tennyson’s nature “red in tooth and claw”. The white gaze has historically never accorded the black body any measure of freedom. On a plantation, one might visualize vast stretches of fields with rows of crops, such as cotton or tobacco, extending into the distance. Slaves, often working under harsh conditions, would be engaged in painstaking tasks like planting, harvesting, or tending to the crops. The work was demanding, and the living conditions for slaves were typically harsh. The black body was patrolled and kept in check by armed men mounted on horses and overseeing the work. Their presence evoked much fear with punishments arbitrarily meted out, ranging from physical beatings to

more extreme forms of violence. Even in the absence of chattel slavery, black bodies were perceived as aberrations and the white gaze inflicted visual violence as we have seen in the “Human Zoo” exhibition in chapter two. Hence comparing the black body to animals, such as a horse, as the police officer in the Obiora case did, echoes a long tradition of bestialization aptly captured in Fanon’s research:

To suffer from a phobia of Negroes is to be afraid of the biological. For the Negro is only biological ... Over three or four years I questioned some 500 members of the white race – French, German, English, Italian ... in the midst of associational tests, I inserted the word *Negro* among some twenty others. Almost 60 per cent of the replies took this form: *Negro*: brought forth biology, penis, strong, athletic, potent, boxer, Joe Louis, Jesse Owens, Senegalese troops, savage, animal, devil, sin. (Fanon, 1986, p. 166)

Significantly, it was discovered that the police officer who had choked Obiora to death was earlier accused of doing the same in regard to a cleaner originally from Ghana.

After the death, accusations of racism have been made. The policeman who allegedly grabbed Eugene by the throat has been involved in another throat-grabbing episode in Trondheim in 1999. “That the same man is behind both of these episodes is something I seriously question”, says Raja. In October 1999, Sofia Baidoo was doing laundry in a bank when the alarm went off. The same policeman grabbed Sofia by the throat. He laid her down on the floor and sat on top of her. I find it striking that the same man is involved in this case. When I heard about Obiora’s arrest it was like hearing Sofia tell what it was like to lie on the floor under this man, says Baidoo’s lawyer, Venil Katharina Thisi. (Dagbladet, 17.11.2006)

The police officer in the Obiora murder appears to have a track record of resorting to violence, especially when blacks are involved. That Sofia Baidoo, a Ghanian woman, was his victim in 1999 adds the nuance that size, muscles and power (the “horse” metaphor) are not sufficient triggers for violence towards black bodies. Violence towards women have assumed both sexual, psychological and physical forms historically. Commensurate with Frederick Douglass’s metaphorical lens of “breaking a negro” borrowed from the world of breaking the spirit of horses with the intention of riding their backs unimpeded,

the violence inflicted upon the black body as evidenced through the cases of Eugene Obiora and Sofia Baidoo paints a troubling narrative.

While chattel slavery of the kind outlined in chapter when the Danish-Norwegian union transported around 120,000 black slaves to the Caribbean no longer exists, there is the perplexing phenomenon of black bodies still susceptible to the murderous violence that was *de rigueur* in the heyday of slavery, especially in chance encounters with contemporary law enforcement. The instances of brutality in these cases illustrate a systemic effort to assert dominance and control, echoing the historical dehumanization ubiquitous in Douglass's era, albeit manifesting in different forms today. It is this sense of loss of the black body – a haunting and peculiar type of unfreedom that Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015) calls the “philosophy of the disembodied”.

Black people love their children with a kind of obsession. You are all we have, and you come to us endangered. I think we would like to kill you ourselves before seeing you killed by the streets that America made. That is the philosophy of the disembodied, of a people who control nothing, who can protect nothing, who are made to fear not just the criminals among them but the police who lord over them with all the moral authority of a protection racket. (Coates, 2015, p. 82)

Coates's book “Between the World and Me” (2015), takes the form of a heartfelt letter the author pens to his teenage son Samori. Coates candidly considers the black condition in contemporary USA through a kaleidoscope of events, symbols and emotions. The narrative delves into a recapitulation of American history, as Coates undertakes to interpret the persistent presence of racist violence woven into the fabric of American culture. The condensed autobiographical narrative, punctuated by personal recollections from his own childhood in Baltimore, castigates the ways in which institutions such as schools, the local police, and even the streets themselves contribute to the disciplining, endangering, and threatening of black men and women, encapsulated in the concept of “disembodying”. If the black body is deemed expendable among members of law enforcement in white Norway, then life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for people of color becomes a cruel chimera. Left unchecked, the very notion of what it means to be Norwegian will develop as an antithesis to racial others and parasitic upon black disembodiment. The above is salient given the seismic changes in the Norwegian demographic where 11 per cent of the population are black and brown. The pursuit of liberation for black individuals cannot be separated from the imperative of “re-embodying”, signifying the necessity for black people to reclaim ownership and autonomy over their

bodies. It means that black people lose the capacity to experience fear and anxiety at the sight of uniformed police – to know what it means to breathe as freely as the next white person. Until such a time, black bodies are forced to live with a constant and heightened sense of danger – one of disembodiment.

One person who was interviewed is Michael Bekoe, a social worker in Trondheim municipality: “I think police chief Marum is trying to do something about the attitudes, but the way some police officers talk to you is alarming”, says Bekoe. He shares that he himself has experienced being strangled and has had other unpleasant experiences because of the color of his skin. “Is it normal for the police to choke people?” (Klassekampen, 16.09.2006)

There were and are relatively very few black people in Trondheim. The city is the third largest in Norway with a population of ca. 182,000 (ca. 158,000 in 2006). It is indeed alarming that in the same city where Obiora was choked to death, other black individuals such as Michael Bekoe have experienced the long arm of the law literally reach for his neck with malevolent intent. Unlike the USA, and perhaps to some extent the UK, black people in Norway do not necessarily share commonalities by virtue of a shared history, traumas, and triumphs. The abolition of slavery, Jim Crow and Malcolm X, to name a few, resonate deeply with African Americans, just as the Windrush, Brixton riots and Notting Hill Carnival is vocabulary familiar to people of Caribbean origin in Britain. On the contrary, and as Table 4 indicates, the majority of black people in Norway are originally from sub-Saharan Africa.

Furthermore, while the Horn of Africa dominates the statistics, one would be hard pressed to find bonds strong enough to create cohesive ties and communities between Somalis, Eritreans, Ethiopians and the Sudanese. Language, culture, and religion may create chasms, but when faced with police hostility towards black skin, these divisions crumble. To grip the neck of one black individual is to metaphorically grasp the collective neck of all blacks in Norway, creating a resonant lightning rod against prejudice. The historic disdain for black skin emerges as a colossal force, eclipsing all other disagreements, rendering them trivial in the wake of this behemoth of racism. Police brutality, aimed at subduing black individuals as though breaking the spirits of wild horses, renders conflicts within the black community immaterial, disappearing like mist at sunrise.

The hand of a police officer, purportedly the symbol of law and order, now embodies the struggle against the injustice of denying life-giving breath to black individuals, as evidenced by George Floyd’s heartfelt cry for a breath of

TABLE 4 Distribution of black (African) demographic in Norway (Statistics Norway, 2023)

Country background	Population
Somalia	43,000
Eritrea	32,838
Ethiopia	13,325
Sudan	6,899
Congo	5,782

air. In the wake of the murder of Eric Garner in 2014 by a New York police officer who put Garner in a forbidden chokehold, a widely seen poster featured a quote attributed to Frantz Fanon: “When we revolt, it’s not for a particular culture. We revolt simply because, for many reasons, we can no longer breathe”. The precise quote in Fanon’s “Black Skin White Masks” is: “It is not because the Indo-Chinese has discovered a culture of his own that he is in revolt. It is because ‘quite simply’ it was, in more than one way, becoming impossible for him to breathe” (Fanon, 1986, p. 226). The mangled body of Eric Garner which drew comparisons with that of Emmett Till’s funeral called an entire world to witness the black body – constantly struggling to cling to life, always suspended between this life and the next, and always one breath away from extinction. Eric Garner’s haunting refrain, “I can’t breathe”, encapsulates the asphyxiating grasp of injustice, vividly portrayed in the imagery of law enforcement’s hands closing in, igniting a collective call for change. While George Floyd called out for his mother, Eugene Obiora called for his father.

Witnesses observe the police grabbing him by the throat. A witness is said to have heard a desperate Eugene shout: “Are you f... killing me? Daddy, help me!” Shortly after, Eugene dies. Two weeks later, on September 21, the Obiora family is still waiting for Eugene to send money as this helps finance schooling for the youngest in the family. It has been three weeks since his brother last spoke to him. (Dagbladet, 17.11.2006)

Writing in the *National Geographic*, Lonnae O’Neal (2020), a black mother is not surprised that George Floyd called out for his “momma” calling this a “sacred invocation” and an “assurance of memory”. She goes on to write, “But I heard this black man had called out to his momma as he lay dying, and I too am a black mother. One of the ones since time immemorial who have to

answer the sacred call. Who have to answer the call for the divine sisterhood of black mothers. Even when they are not our own, we are asked to bear witness" (O'Neal, 2020). The guttural cry "daddy" and "momma" uttered as the last vestiges of life drained away from Eugene Obiora and George Floyd respectively, transcends the immediate context of these oppressed black bodies and becomes a spiritual and ancestral connection. The invocation is not merely a call for a familiar face; it is a reaching out to a maternal and paternal archetype – a lineage where fear and loathing of black skin was as yet to be invented, and one that that signifies comfort, protection, and the continuity of memory. "There are moments when it feels like life hangs in the balance, and in those moments, we want to go back to the beginning, when we were known" (O'Neal, 2020).

Lonnae O'Neal's exploration in *National Geographic* delves into the profound and multifaceted phenomenon surrounding George Floyd's poignant cry for his "momma" during his tragic final moments. This act, described as a "sacred invocation" and an "assurance of memory", taps into layers of cultural, historical and emotional depth associated with the experience of black motherhood. In analyzing Floyd's travail and plea, O'Neal (2020) teases out the broader implications as refracted through the collective black experience. "Momma" and "daddy" become sacred chants – invocations that seek hope and solace through contact with the resilient ancestors through whom these black bodies emerged and struggled in Western hemispheres determined to criminalize black skin. The pleas are profound acts of remembrance and tributes, a way of ensuring that the stories and struggles of black lives are not forgotten, echoing through time, and insisting on acknowledgment.

Black mothers bear a collective burden for their communities. Their pain, grief and tears cannot be for their children alone because the nature of systemic racism calls upon them to pay the wages of child-rearing for other black bodies too. The West weaned itself away from the burden of communal responsibility paving the way for the birth of the individual. Black mothers can only look askance at this new, tantalizing promise land of the intrepid "individual". Like the nineteenth century abolitionist, Sojourner Truth, many still ask the rhetorical question, "Ain't I a Woman?"

We are the ballast. The anchors. A way for those who are close to the edge to find their way back, or their way home. This is true for black mothers, who are especially tested and learned in all the dread fates of black bodies. We are the hedge against the people who don't see us. We are an assertion of black life ... As bystanders scream at Minneapolis officers, "He's dying. You're f—ing killing him", Floyd is no longer moving, he is

perhaps already dead. In the ways black people have trained themselves to look at these things, in his final breaths, he has already won. To call out to his mother is to be known to his maker. The one who gave him to her. I watched the Floyd video, for us, the living. It's my sacred charge. I am a black mother. (O'Neal, 2020)

2 “Re-Embodying”: Rap as the Weapon of the Dispossessed

[Artist] If we are reported, there is reason to worry about the conditions of freedom of expression. But personally, I have been in trouble before. If the song is controversial, I'll take it as a sign that I'm doing something right, artistically. We make songs and hold the microphone – then we should be required to say something worth saying, he points out.

[Reporter] On what basis do you make such strong accusations against a named person?

[Artist] This is the song I have done the most research on in my entire career. I have done about 15 interviews and read a lot.

[Reporter] On April 27, Samvirkelaget plays in Samfundet.

[Artist] We will certainly play the song, yes, confirms Elling Borgersrud (Adresseavisen, 13.04.2007).

The band Samvirkelaget from the city of Trondheim where Obiora was murdered released an album in May 2007 where they named the police officer accused of killing Eugene Obiora. This was while the trial was still ongoing. The album sparked a frenzy of threats of litigation and counter threats from the police union and diverse civil groups respectively. Despite the ongoing investigation and uncertainty about potential charges, the lyrics left no doubt about the band's viewpoint and the fact that they placed the blame squarely on the police officer who strangled Obiora. Elling Borgersrud from *Gatas Parliament*, a Norwegian rap group who have been fearless in speaking truth to power, and initiated the song in the Obiora case, suggested that the media declined to publicize the police officer's name for fear of jeopardizing their relations with the police (Adresseavisen, 13.04.2007). To his mind, this cover up along with the fact that the police officers represent the state, is tantamount to an act of racist violence perpetrated by the state of Norway itself. With this pessimistic assessment he was convinced there would be a miscarriage of justice because the government itself was in the dock. Hence the singers are left with no other recourse other than to coopt the weapons of artistic expression to increase pressure on the judiciary and the police to address such cases properly.

Borgersrud was adamant that neither racism nor police violence is taken seriously within law enforcement (Adresseavisen, 13.04.2007).

He further contended that investigations conducted by colleagues and friends of the accused officer lack fairness, asserting that police officers are often presumed innocent despite evidence to the contrary. In contrast, he claims, for an African person in Trondheim, skin color alone suffices as evidence. Among others, two verses (the refrain and a verse about Obiora) which lampoon the racist tropes of the police officers are reproduced below:

If you walk around with a criminal appearance, you should be careful
because if the occasion presents itself, he will lash out at you quickly.
And if you freely walk around Trondheim with skin of criminal value
You should think about being careful – have you never seen a policeman
before?

When the alarm goes off at the social services office
Because not everyone manages to behave here in Gnore.
It's typically blacks that are damn big
Make noise for those who work there and think they
Are entitled to free money by being jerks.
When the policeman comes, they should learn to listen.
If not, the violence that he is really itching for comes
To hold his arms around his neck until he stops breathing.

When queried about the dangers inherent in publishing the name of the police officer pending the outcome of the trial, the musician dismisses mention of defamation and other legal repercussions. According to the band members, freedom of expression is paramount for an artist. In their study on the salience of rap and Hip-Hop music to segments of the African American community, Brooks, Wolfgang, Adams, Armstrong, and Cassidy (2020, p. 470) write: "If the counselor is oblivious to themes expressed in rap music, then the counselor misses opportunities to contextualize the realities of oppression and injustice that exist in American society and to validate the experiences of clients of color. Moreover, the counselor is less likely to develop and provide culturally reflective assessments and interventions". While not condoning violence, the researchers nevertheless seek to understand the frustrations of many African Americans as crystallized through the therapeutic medium of rap and Hip-Hop music.

For instance, they draw attention to the 1991 track "Trapped" by Tupac Shakur and Luv where the artist broaches the issue of police brutality, both

as an enduring societal problem and a personal experience. The song not only addresses the broader issue involving communities of color but also serves as a narrative of Tupac's own encounters with law enforcement. The lyrics capture the artist's frustration with constant profiling and mistreatment by the police, offering a powerful commentary on the fraught relations between the police and the African American community. "Hip hop culture has long been the voice of the voiceless, and an alternative means of expression for those in the Black community (Lightstone, 2012). Rap and hip hop are connected to the Black community, opening access to share their experiences with the entire world" (Brooks et al., 2020, p. 458).

Rap is weaponized as the tool of the disenfranchised by furnishing a lyrical platform telling stories that rarely make it to mainstream society. It becomes a medium through which artists can convey the realities of their lives, addressing issues such as poverty, discrimination, and social inequality. Through spoken word poetry, deftly delivered rhythmically over a musical beat, rappers skillfully construct their intricate rhyme plots and intelligent wordplay demonstrating sophisticated linguistic skill. It is a testimony to the universal appeal of rap and Hip-Hop that a white rap band in Norway taps into the genre's potential to articulate the pain of a Eugene Obiora and Sofia Baidoo, challenge a hegemony that disembodies black individuals and speak truth to power, as the response below indicates:

I'm not a lawyer, I'm a rapper and poet. But one person died, lying on his stomach with a policeman sitting on top of him. I don't know what it's called in legal terminology, but in poetry it's called killing and murder, says Borgersrud, who denies that the song is a media stunt in preparation for the album launch in a month's time. I look at it the other way around. We use our position and our access to the media, yes, but it is our duty as artists to say something about an issue that is so important. I think it is sad that the media has not made more out of this case themselves, so this is also an indictment of the media. (Dagsavisen, 14.04.2007)

The insensitivity to the death of Obiora is captured in the response of the head of the Police Community association in Sør-Trøndelag who decries the naming of the police officer by the rap group Samvirkelaget. The spokesperson rejects the idea that rap musicians can invoke artistic license. To his mind the band is abusing freedom of expression because none of the four police officers have been charged or prosecuted yet. He further questions the band's decision given that they are not privy to the report's content and lack the qualifications to comment on the situation.

Rap and Hip-Hop have taken aim at systemic oppressive structures which are disseminated to the initiated in the ghettos and urban sprawls empowering the downtrodden to assert their agency, reclaim their narratives, and challenge stereotypes imposed upon them. Rap and Hip-Hop have a long pedigree in resisting and defying authorities and interrogating the status quo that paralyzes agency. In taking aim at racism, law enforcement, consumerism, exploitation, societal norms and politics, among others, the genre seeks to rally the oppressed, share experiences and create a critically conscious community willing to fight for change. Understood in this light, the music genre becomes a powerful tool embodying a Freirean praxis that combines reflection and action towards transformation and emancipation. In essence, rap and Hip-Hop act as a potent means for the oppressed to reclaim their voices, challenge dominant narratives, and advocate for social change. The genre's unique ability to convey powerful messages through rhythmic and poetic expression has made it a compelling weapon for those seeking to dismantle oppressive structures and speak their truth to power. Brooks et al. (2020) argue that inadequately exploring the dehumanizing experiences illustrated in rap music could hinder counselors' effectiveness in addressing the needs of black and brown individuals. They propose that there is a deficiency in "multiculturally" focused supervision skills within training programs. They recommend that counselor education and practice should incorporate comprehensive cultural expressions, including Hip-Hop, to enhance understanding of clients' environments when educating or assisting them.

3 Olaf the Holy and Eugene Obiora: A Tale of Two Corpses

The family's last wish is that Eugene Obiora, who died after being arrested by the police, be buried in his homeland. But the relatives have no money, and now the municipal superintendent is considering forced burial in Trondheim. Obiora was a Norwegian citizen, but originally came from Nigeria. Both the family in Nigeria and Obiora's twelve-year-old son in Norway want the deceased man to be laid to rest in Nigeria. But Obiora left no money, and the family in Nigeria can in no way pay the approximately NOK 50,000 (ca. 5000 USD) it will cost to send Obiora's body to Nigeria. (Adresseavisen, 24.10.2006)

One newspaper carried the headline "Fighting over a Nigerian corpse" (Dagbladet 24.10.2006). One would perhaps have to go back in the annals of history to the legacy of Norway's King Olaf the Holy (995–1030 AD) to find a

time when a corpse generated so much attention in the city of Trondheim. The only anomaly is that the corpse of Eugene Obiora was black while Olaf's was Nordic white. Olaf was king of Norway in the period 1015–1028. He is credited with uniting the country and played a fundamental role in the introduction of Christianity in Norway. Significantly, he is remembered as a national saint after his death in the battle of Stiklestad on 29 July 1030. In his *Heimskringla or The Lives of the Norse Kings*, the Icelandic historian, poet, and politician, Snorre Sturluson (1179?–1241) writes a hagiographic account about the corpse of King Olaf the Holy. Among others, there was a “precious fragrance” and when the Bishop Grimketel opened the coffin of the king a year later, his

countenance was in no wise changed; the cheeks were red as if he had just fallen asleep ... his hair and nails had grown almost as much as they would have done if he had been alive ... And then many kinds of miracles befell at the holy remains of King Olav. (Sturluson, 1932, pp. 467, 468)

Olaf is buried in Nidaros Cathedral in Trondheim, one of the country's top tourist spots.

Roughly a thousand years later, a black corpse makes national headline news in the same city where Olaf's corpse stirred waves. In contrast to Olaf's, however, the corpse of Eugene Obiora whose life was snuffed out by a police officer who was not even suspended, and later acquitted of the murder, became an uncomfortable burden for the authorities. The conundrum is encapsulated in the phrase “forced burial in Trondheim”. Left to their own devices, the authorities would have buried Obiora's corpse as quickly as possible. However, like the corpse of Olaf, a “miracle” of sorts was transpiring. Obiora's death, much like a stone dropped into a still pond, sent ripples of outrage and calls for justice reverberating through the nation. Just as a wave builds strength as it travels across the ocean, the movement for change gained momentum, uniting voices in a powerful call to challenge the authorities.

Gradually, as the grisly details of Obiora's murder circulated, musicians, activists, labor unions, human rights groups and academics began to raise their voices at the injustice. Several demonstrations in major cities across the country were held. The national broadcaster NrK wrote the following on the 4 January 2008:

In four cities – Oslo, Bergen, Kristiansand and Fredrikstad – there will be demonstrations on Saturday against racism and police violence and for justice and the rule of law. The reason for the demonstrations is that, just before Christmas, the Attorney General dropped the case against the four policemen who arrested Eugene Obiora in September 2006.

Opinion pieces, such as the one below, became regular features in Trondheim's newspapers (e.g., *Adresseavisen*) and other national ones.

The way the case with Eugene Obiora has been dealt with so far, I perceive it as public racism, it's chilling! That is one side of the story, the other is that for many centuries our Western culture made sure to rob the greatest assets from the African continent. There are large deposits of oil in Nigeria, no one doubts who benefits from them? Our Western oil companies! You don't need to rattle off names. And who has carried the biggest burdens of that oil extraction? Yes, it is the people of Nigeria.

Eugene Obiora's life situation, death and problems in getting him buried in a dignified manner reveal many sides of the condition of the world, the North-South problem and our own role in this drama. We and our society should now show insight and humility enough to allow Eugene Obiora to be given a dignified burial, without bureaucratic frills, in his own fatherland. Reading *Adresseavisen* 25.10. I note that Trondheim municipality has decided to guarantee the expenses so that Eugene Obiora is buried according to the family's wishes. This is a worthy solution to a case that has so many tragic sides. (*Adresseavisen*, 28.10.2006)

The "father" of critical race theory, Derrick Bell, states: "The interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites" (Bell, 1995, p. 22). As the conscience of the nation slowly began to comprehend the scale of the injustice, the stream of accusations of racism, police brutality, impunity and cover-up forced the authorities in Trondheim to align with the interests of Obiora's family – at least in death. This is classic interest convergence theory as expounded by Derrick Bell. Bell understood the decision of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) as the outcome of white interests which shifted to align with those of black ones because many whites were "able to see the economic and political advances at home and abroad that would follow abandonment of segregation" (Bell, 1995, p. 22). In the heyday of communism and McCarthyism, when left leaning Americans were repressed and persecuted, the decision to desegregate American schools was spun as "a timely reassertion of the basic American principle that 'all men are created equal'" (Bell, 1995, p. 23).

This tenet of critical race theory was on full display in regard to the conundrum surrounding the corpse of Eugene Obiora which languished in the hands of the morgue and undertaker in Trondheim. Obiora's corpse was once again subject to the white gaze in a white institution – none of them of his

choosing, just as the slaves who came to Norway 400 hundred years prior, and the participants of “Human Zoo” in 1914, had no say over the white gaze that inflicted visual violence on their black bodies. Mercifully, the difference was that Obiora’s corpse could no longer experience the range of emotions the white gaze elicited: self-pity, rage, despair, indifference, numbness etc. In the days of chattel slavery, the options were clear-cut in regard to the black body: comply and kowtow to every whim of the master, rebel and invite the ritual of “negro-breaking” or, as is the case with a lucky few, “break the negro-breaker”, as did Frederick Douglass:

Covey at length (two hours had elapsed) gave up the contest ... The fact was, *he had not whipped me at all*. He had not, in all the scuffle, drawn a single drop of blood from me. I had drawn blood from him ... During the whole six months that I lived with Covey, after this transaction, he never laid on me the weight of his finger in anger. (Douglass, 2014, pp. 196, 197)

Sadly, in the case of Obiora, outnumbered and overpowered by the agents of the law, he succumbed as millions of black bodies before him did as victims of antiblack racism. In his article, *The Black Body as Souvenir in American Lynching* (2005), Harvey Young considers the macabre specter of lynchings of black individuals whose bodies were burned and then dismembered to serve as souvenirs and objects of fetish for white collectors who witnessed the event.

On 2 April 1899, approximately two thousand white men, women, and children participated, as both witnesses and active agents, in the murder of Sam Hose in Newman, Georgia. Sam Hose was burned alive. In the final moments of his life, the assembled crowd descended upon his body and collected various parts of it as souvenirs.

Young understands the ghastly burning alive of black individuals with the ensuing frenzy for procuring body parts as rituals akin to collecting souvenirs, among others.

A souvenir is incomplete and serves to act as part of a whole. Young (2005) also suggests these “collectible” body parts played the role of fetish objects investing the owner with “power” over the whole. The whole in this sense refers to the halcyon days of chattel slavery when whites had total control and ownership of the black body. Lynchings occurred in the transition between chattel slavery and black citizenship. Burning black bodies and keeping body parts as souvenirs was white people’s way of fetishizing a past that they were

determined to hallow, much as some US southerners do the Confederate flag and similar values distilled in the slogan “the South Will Rise Again”.

In addition to referencing their status as contraband, lynching souvenirs embody the past in the present. They not only fix the black body within a historical moment, but also transform it into a captive object to be owned, displayed, and, quite possibly, traded. What makes them so interesting is that they, much like the contemporary mass-produced, stereotypical commercial images of the black body, sought to commodify the body at a time when it was gaining new liberties in the present. (Young, 2005, p. 646)

The authorities in Trondheim had no intention of making a fetish of Obiora's corpse. On the contrary, they frantically endeavored to bury the body and hence, hopefully, the memory of Obiora. The corpse of Obiora could serve no useful purpose – neither as souvenir nor fetish. Olaf the Holy's corpse continued the mission he had started while alive – to unite the Kingdom of Norway and Christianize the pagans. No wonder the Bishop Grimketel had an intense interest in his corpse. The metaphors of souvenir and fetish are apt in this instance, but none of this applies to Eugene Obiora. What is the “whole” that the corpse of Obiora could point to? Nothing! There was absolutely no motivation to hold on to Obiora's body to romanticize a past of black body ownership. However, Young's (2005) contention that lynchings and other violence meted out to the black body were effective strategies to stop black people from harboring aspirations of progress and equality with whites is relevant in regard to Obiora. After all, Obiora was murdered at a welfare office – the very apotheosis of equity and equality for all in a country famed for such values.

Obiora was a student in one of the country's most prestigious universities. His only crime was to fall upon hard times financially. Caricatures of so-called “welfare queens” spun by Ronald Reagan and people “sponging off” the system to malign the poor find no resonance in Norway, a country characterized by very high taxes and equally high rates of mutual trust. The police initially labored much to delegitimize him as a criminal, but this failed when several individuals vouched for Obiora's impeccable character. The authorities were the employers of the murderous police officers and, in yearning to be rid of Obiora's body hurriedly, exposed the sense of complicity and embarrassment they must have felt.

In finally acquiescing to pay for the transport of Obiora's corpse to Nigeria, we argue, underscores interest convergence principle's assertion that

advancements in racial justice and equality are more likely to occur when they align with the interests of those in power, particularly the dominant white majority. Black and brown voices are always at the forefront of calls for racial justice. The negative attention generated had to be appeased. Black interests are contingent upon the interests of whites who hold political, economic, or social power. As Derrick Bell (1995) theorized, substantial racial progress is often limited unless it benefits those in positions of power.

4 Beyond the Hues: The Mirage of Colorblindness

The head of the British special unit for police cases, upon learning about this case, unflinchingly insisted that the police must address the allegations of racism in the Obiora case seriously, highlighting the pervasive nature of racism in society, including within the police force. In contrast, the Norwegian police flatly denied any connection between this case and racism, with the special unit not even considering racism as a possible motive for the murder. (Dagbladet, 17.06.2007)

The contemporary phenomenon of colorblindness, invoked by the Norwegian police in the Obiora case came as no surprise to those versed in the machinations of racism in Norway. Several interlocutors in the public domain reacted with disbelief at the police's purported colorblindness given the fact that the policeman who strangled Obiora did the same to Sophia Baidoo originally from Ghana in 1999. Writing in 2001, in the aftermath of a court decision acquitting the same policeman, the daily national newspaper *Dagbladet* wrote:

This morning, the district court acquitted Trond Volden of racism in the so-called Baidoo case. The court found it proved that he had said 'black hell', but not that this was intentionally aimed at the cleaner Sophia Baidoo. The case has been pending in Trondheim for a long time. (Tronstad, 2001)

The paper goes on to write, "I think the verdict is disappointing, but not surprising. It is generally difficult to get police officers convicted. In addition, it is difficult to get people convicted in racism cases" (Ibid). In his book *Racism without Racists* (2017), Bonilla-Silva begins with the following assertion:

Nowadays, except for members of white supremacist organizations, few whites in the United States claim to be "racist". Most whites assert

they “don’t see any color, just people”; that although the ugly face of discrimination is still with us, it is no longer the central factor determining minorities’ life chances; and, finally, that, like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., they aspire to live in a society where “people are judged by the content of their character, not by the color of their skin”. More poignantly, most whites insist that minorities (especially blacks) are the ones responsible for whatever “race problem” we have in this country. (Bonilla-Silva, 2017, p. 1)

Most perturbing perhaps is the unabashed disavowal of any suggestion of racism in the face of the police officer’s track record, such as the pejorative “black hell” in relation to Sophia Baidoo. Bonilla-Silva (2017) explores this contemporary phenomenon of colorblindness and its deployment in disassociating oneself from bald-faced racism. We argue that the police’s denial that the Obiora case had anything to do with racism is a classic example of colorblindness or “racism without racists”, echoing Bonilla-Silva (2017). Individuals who invoke colorblindness as a form of self-absolution do so because the alternative, to accept the facts of the case and hence the conclusion that contempt of other “races” is the root cause, becomes unbearable.

In such instances, colorblindness offers an attractive escape route – a much-needed scapegoat. In the laws and ordinances governing the ritual of the scapegoat in the Bible, the high priest would lay the collective sins and guilt of the nation upon the scapegoat. “But the goat, on which the lot fell to be the scapegoat, shall be presented alive before the Lord, to make an atonement with him, and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness” (Leviticus 16:10; King James Version). The arbiters of justice, like the ancient high priest, have time and again laid the collective crimes and guilt committed in the name of racism upon the scapegoat of colorblindness – an entity that is never held accountable, but is free to roam the wilderness of unaccountability. Like the biblical spectacle, the “ritual” of colorblindness is repeated ad nauseum – all wait for a promised “Messiah” who will finally expunge this age-old and most obdurate of debts. The sins laid upon the head of the scapegoat encompassed both sins that were committed willfully and those committed out of ignorance further accentuating the relevance and nature of the violation that is colorblindness.

In subscribing to the notion that race was alien and irrelevant to the Obiora case, the police jumped on this perhaps most common defense of colorblindness. As Bonilla-Silva (2017) contends, normally, the appeal to colorblindness is calculated to shift the blame away from systemic and structural racism by pointing to a few bad apples or anecdotes as anomalous to an otherwise just law enforcement system. However, in the Obiora case, the police did not even

acknowledge the hackneyed excuse of one or two bad apples: the very insinuation of racism was considered absurd and extends to a broader refusal to acknowledge the systemic challenges that may contribute to racial disparities and injustices within law enforcement. In the US context, Bonilla-Silva (2017) shows the contradiction between the facts on the ground and puzzling claims of colorblindness.

Blacks and dark-skinned Latinos are the targets of racial profiling by the police, which, combined with the highly racialized criminal court system, guarantees their overrepresentation among those arrested, prosecuted, incarcerated, and if charged for a capital crime, executed. Racial profiling on the highways has become such a prevalent phenomenon that a term has emerged to describe it: driving while black. ... More important, how do whites explain the apparent contradiction between their professed color blindness and the United States' color-coded inequality? (Bonilla-Silva, 2017, p. 2)

While the scale of the problem in Norway is dwarfed by the context and tenacity of what has been called "America's Original Sin" (Wallis, 2016), research into racism in Norway in recent years has begun to unpack a reality that jarringly mirrors aspects of US racism. For instance, Norwegian police have faced international criticism for ethnic profiling from both the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and the UN Human Rights Council, as reported by The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud in 2022. The ombudsman's study was based on a survey of nearly 1,600 students from upper secondary schools in the cities of Drammen and Oslo. The survey revealed that respondents with a minority background were overrepresented in the group that had experienced police checks. Specifically, 26% of the respondents identified themselves as belonging to an ethnic minority. Conversely, ethnic minorities accounted for almost 34% of those who had undergone police checks in the past year, as indicated by The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud's findings in 2022 (The Equality and Anti-Discrimination Ombud, 2022).

The culture of colorblindness, which we assert has a deep-rooted history in Norway, hinders meaningful dialogue and reform. By overlooking critical moments for self-examination, such as the Obiora case, it fails to address and reflect on the potential presence of deeply ingrained racism within institutions. This evasion of culpability does a disservice to colorblindness – a wonderful ideal and aspiration if this only could be genuinely practiced. Many black scholars have objected to white liberals' misappropriation of Dr. Martin Luther King's ideal of colorblindness, a cornerstone of the civil rights movement. In

his celebrated and often-quoted dream of a society which judges individuals by the content of their character rather than their pigmentation, there has been a white selective discourse distorting King's words as a call to avoid seeing color altogether because it perpetuates division rather than addressing the root causes of inequality. The cooption of this repackaged colorblindness is in turn used to bludgeon affirmative action and corollary race-conscious policies seeking to redress decades and centuries of debilitating racism.

In Norway, the linguistic modality of colorblind racism includes tropes about "lazy" and "opportunistic" immigrants (read black and brown people) who are a burden on the welfare system, Muslims "taking over" the country and a portrayal of minority youth as "thugs" not unlike findings from Stuart Hall's co-authored groundbreaking book "Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order" (1978). The depiction of black youth as a threat to the public order in the 1970s in the UK was a carefully fabricated symbolic portrayal amenable to the political rhetoric of the ilk of Margaret Thatcher. Crime was racialized to play on the fears of an electorate who were told that the country was being "swamped" by immigrants. Once again, the language of racism is poorly veiled in the claim to "untaintedness" in relation to skin color. Populist politicians in Norway, who do quite well in elections (often third place) have made no bones about their admiration for neoliberals such as Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher calling them "strong role models" (Hagen, 2007). Thatcher famously declared in relation to her threats to drastically curtail immigration in 1978:

[B]y the end of the century there would be four million people of the new Commonwealth or Pakistan here. Now, that is an awful lot and I think it means that people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture and, you know, the British character has done so much for democracy, for law and done so much throughout the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in. (Margareth Thatcher Foundation, 2023)

The appeal to colorblindness in the Obiora case has the effect of undermining efforts at confronting structural racism in the police, justice system, education, housing and employment, among others. Bonilla-Silva (2017) employs four frames in fleshing out the manner in which whites in the USA enact colorblindness: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. Minimization of racism delegitimizes any mention of racism on the grounds that blacks are doing much better today than in the past. While acknowledging a modicum of racism, the gravity and consequences of racism

are dismissed and downplayed piggybacking on sentiments such as “It’s better now than in the past” or “There is discrimination, but there are plenty of jobs out there”. Bonilla-Silva refers to a slew of well-documented cases of racism in the USA – the murder of James Byrd Jr. in Jasper, Texas, the police attack on Rodney King, the Texaco case, the Tyson Foods lawsuit alleging a “Whites Only” bathroom, and the slow response to Hurricane Katrina. Despite the incontrovertible facts of these cases, whites activated the minimization of racism frame accusing minorities of being “hypersensitive” and playing the “race card”.

Dr. King’s dream of colorblindness was grounded in the pursuit of justice, equality and the dismantling of racial hierarchies. King’s aspiration in his “I have a Dream” speech at the center of the previously mentioned misrepresentation is the following: “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today” (NPR, 2023). The purveyors of this misrepresentation only need to read a few sentences down the speech where the following is stated: “I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together” (NPR, 2023). The distortion of King’s dream is evident through a brief analysis of this sentence’s intertextual underpinning in the Bible. King, a preacher, draws inspiration from John the Baptist’s fiery denunciation of socio-economic disparities and abuse of power.

Luke 3:10 And the people asked him, saying, What shall we do then?

Luke 3:11 He answereth and saith unto them, He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise.

Luke 3:12 Then came also publicans to be baptized, and said unto him, Master, what shall we do?

Luke 3:13 And he said unto them, Exact no more than that which is appointed you.

Luke 3:14 And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.

While few would agree to being content with one’s wages given the excesses of vulture capitalism that has impoverished the working class, John the Baptist’s message of reform can hardly serve as an apologia for colorblindness or neoliberalism. It is difficult to imagine Dr. King referring to any other valleys

beside those symbolizing black lower-income or marginalized communities. Seeing himself in the role of a modern John the Baptist, a forerunner preparing the way for black empowerment, King's vision suggests uplifting these communities, ensuring they are not left behind in the pursuit of prosperity. The hills and mountains can only allude to the systemic racism that impedes black progress and hence must be levelled. Rough places made plain and crooked places straight embodies the hope of rectifying systemic injustices that have dogged black progress. To a man of the cloth such as King, revealing the glory of the Lord must be understood in terms of restoring individuals (black in this case) to the former proto-stature of creatures made in the image of God, and hence deserving respect and dignity which Jim Crow denied. Of pertinence is John the Baptist's rebuke of the law enforcement officers of his day: "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely". As a herald of a world King dreamed of, clearly, the way to the imagined mountaintop cannot circumvent the violence of law enforcement disproportionately targeting black and brown people.

The brief analysis above makes a mockery of any suggestion that Dr. King was focused on "content of character" rather than discrimination based on skin color. King's speech is no haven for advocates of colorblindness. Just as the straight-talking John Baptist did not shy away from calling out the precise nature of the evils of the greedy hoarders, extortionist tax collectors and violent law enforcement agents who falsely accused and terrorized the citizens, King also called out the racism that shackled his people in the same speech:

But 100 years later, the Negro still is not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later the Negro is still languished in the corners of American society and finds himself in exile in his own land. And so, we've come here today to dramatize a shameful condition. In a sense we've come to our nation's capital to cash a check. (NPR, 2023)

5 The Banality of Racism

Drawings and texts with racist messages have hung on the wall of the police station in Trondheim for several years. Even after two serious allegations of police violence against dark-skinned people, the police in Trondheim did not remove the drawings and the texts with racist content.

In the canteen at the police station in central Trondheim, a drawing by a former employee has been hanging for a long time in the alien section, placed in a large cauldron with dancing dark-skinned cannibals around. The text is in a speech bubble “Please, you must believe me. I no longer work at the Immigration Department”. (Dagsavisen, 18.07.2007)

Almost a year after the murder of Eugene Obiora, reports began to leak about overtly racist pictures and messages hanging on the canteen wall of the very same police station where the police officers accused of strangling Obiora worked. Of note is the fact that these racist epithets featured on the wall for several years predating the Obiora case. The race and ethnic relations scholar, Joe R. Feagin, builds on critical race theory’s tenet of racism as normal when he states:

Not only do whites of various ages regularly make racist jokes, but they also call black Americans and other people of color the old racist epithets, dress in racist costumes, play supremacist music, mock black entertainers and leaders, yell racist epithets on the streets. (Feagin, 2013, p. 128)

Feagin (2013) concerns himself with the machinations of what he refers to as the “white racial frame” in exploring a 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” (Feagin, 2013, p. 3).

We have previously discussed how the police repudiated any reference to racism as totally immaterial to the Obiora case as illustrative of the hazards of colorblindness. The discovery of overtly racist caricatures of black people dressed as cannibals and preparing to eat a policeman who pleaded for his life on the grounds that he no longer worked at immigration office, is a case in point of how the white racial frame is performed across class, age, gender and other markers of identity among whites ensuring longevity and dominance. Feagin (2013, p. 10) argues that among the myriad aspects of the white racial frame are the “visual and auditory elements (racialized images and language accents)”. The aim is to inculcate a “strong and positive orientation to whites and whiteness (a pro-white subframe) and a strong negative orientation to racial ‘others’ who are exploited and oppressed (anti-others subframes)” (Ibid).

In light of the above, a disturbing picture emerges. The exhibition of the racist drawings in the police office a year after the Obiora murder clearly did not prick the conscience of the staff in the police office. While it defies the imagination, we argue that Feagin’s (2013) theorization of the dynamics at play

in regard to the white racial frame helps shed light on this intriguing enigma. Feagin (2013, p. 124) contends that anti-black racism is constantly revived and maintained through everyday interaction. In this daily reenactment, the stakeholders are often “a central protagonist and two white mild dissenters who tolerated the extreme anti-black performance for some time”. He emphasizes: “If whites do not articulate racist ideas in public, if they keep them to themselves or just express them in the backstage, then they or their white friends and relatives frequently do not see them as seriously ‘racist’” (Feagin, 2013, p. 124). This “backstage”, then, is the incubator for the perpetuation of the white racial frame. The police are well-versed in the cutthroat media tendency to forage for sensational, violent or dramatic news sometimes encapsulated in the phrase “If it bleeds, it leads”. The failure of the police to remove the racist drawings within their own precinct reflects a deep-seated sense of immunity. One of Feagin’s diarists concedes:

It is this sort of “joking” that helps to keep racism alive today. People know the places they have to be politically correct, and most people will be. However, until this sort of “behind-the-scenes” racism comes to an end, people will always harbor those stereotypical views that are so prevalent in this country. (Feagin, 2013, p. 125)

The police precinct in question is an example of what Elijah Anderson (2022) refers to as “white space”. The internal culture and attitudes among the police officers evince a space not only sanitized of black people but are fodder for racist entertainment. One must keep in mind that black-skinned Africans are a tiny few in terms of visa and related applications for residence, family reunions, etc. However, the numbers are beside the point – East Europeans or Arabs cannibalizing a white police officer who rejects visas is incompatible with the classic racist trope of black cannibals stirring a cauldron to devour a white missionary or similar figure. The act of creating and displaying such drawings in the police canteen was a bold statement to the effect that this precinct could never envision a day when a black employee would sit in the canteen reminiscent of Anderson’s “white spaces”:

The wider society is still replete with overwhelmingly white neighborhoods, restaurants, schools, universities, workplaces, churches and other associations, courthouses, and cemeteries, a situation that reinforces a normative sensibility in settings in which black people are typically absent, not expected, or marginalized when present. (Anderson, 2022, p. 320)

The complacency evident in a police officer hanging racialized caricatures of black people taking “revenge” on a white police officer (cannibals and cauldron) bespeaks a desperate need for inclusive spaces. As Anderson notes, “While white people usually avoid black space, black people are required to navigate the white space as a condition of their existence” (Anderson, 2022, p. 321). The question in the black and brown mind is how many other “white spaces” in Norway indulge in what Feagin (2013) refers to as “behind-the-scenes” or “backstage” racism. In Norway, government job vacancies have for some time now encouraged minorities to apply. In a small country such as Norway, where the black and brown demographic is growing fast, racial and cultural harmony is contingent upon disrupting such belligerent, antiblack white spaces, of which the police precinct in Trondheim is a prime example. It goes without saying that the “white space” of the police precinct in Trondheim would promptly have ripped the offensive racist drawings off the canteen walls had there been news of new, incoming black and brown employees. What Feagin and O’Brien assert about the US context is pertinent to conditions in Norway too.

A key to understanding the social context of much stereotyped thinking about racial matters is the fact that most whites live in what might be termed the “white bubble” – that is, they live out lives generally isolated from sustained and intensive equal status contacts with African Americans and other Americans of color. (Feagin & O’Brien, 2003, p. 25)

There is also the more disturbing thought that such belligerent “white spaces” articulate a tacit or categorical “code of honor” that commits to the perpetuation of such “white spaces”. If sufficient numbers of individuals in equal numbers of official institutions embrace such a “code of honor” we are talking about systemic and structural racism. This is precisely Bonilla-Silva’s point in his article “What Makes Systemic Racism Systemic?” (2022, p. 829). Simply put, he argues that everyone participates in perpetuating systemic racism in the same way that no one can be outside of capitalism or patriarchy. “Racism is systemic because it incorporates Whites from all stripes (conservatives, moderates, liberals, and progressives) in multiple ways” (Bonilla-Silva, 2022, p. 837). This is reminiscent of Foucault’s (1977) contention that power is not to be conceived of as a top-down repressive hypothesis, commensurate with Marxist thinking. Foucault (1977) envisioned the nexus of power-knowledge akin to a spider’s web – a matrix where the so-called “powerless” also exert power in for instance internalizing power, accepting and reproducing the desired discourse. Power is “fruitful” in this sense, according to Foucault. Hence Bonilla-Silva’s contention:

They [Whites] seldom acknowledge their *conscious decisions* to comply with parental racism, racial profiling, or discriminatory hiring practices. Hence, Whites conscious knowledge of their whiteness ... is shrouded in “structured blindness” or the epistemology of ignorance”. Without most Whites participating and acquiescing to the state of racial affairs in any historical period, systemic racism would collapse. In their “pursuit of (White) happiness”, regular White folks are the main cogs that maintain the systemic racism machine running smoothly. (Bonilla-Silva, 2022, p. 838)

Obviously, given the omnipresence of systemic racism, it would be futile to direct remedial measures at particular individuals or institutions alone. If systemic racism is the offshoot of a culture propelled by a white habitus that constantly secretes whiteness from the cradle to the grave – permeating every social and material action – than remedial measures must be equal to this challenging task. For instance, the university courses we teach approach home-schooling relations as one where, among others, minority-background families are “deficient” vis-à-vis the dominant culture. It would come as quite a surprise if one were to suggest home-schooling relations must interrogate the role of whiteness in perpetuating systemic racism. This underscores the herculean task ahead if society is willing to lock horns and grapple with the type of racism that indifferently portrays blacks in the role of cannibals in police precincts. Expunging this white habitus which preforms ideological work is paramount. Bonilla-Silva (2022) argues that white subjectivity is prefigured through unconscious habits and racialized practices of life.

The “souls of white folks” (Du Bois, [1920] 1999) are pre-wired for domination as Whites learn from infancy the habits of racial domination ... in a racially stratified society the culture, institutions, practices, family life, and even one’s friends teach members of the dominant race that they are good, smart, ethical people in contrast to non-whites, whom they regard as their antinomies. (Bonilla-Silva, 2022, p. 835)

6 From Cannibal Imagery to Muhammad Cartoons

In the surveillance room in the detention center at the police station hung a caricature of Muhammad with a racist text. The text is identical to a chain email that was sent around after the Muhammad cartoons were first published. Now the drawings are gone after pressure from outside. General manager Akhenaton Oddvar de Leon of the Organization

Against Public Discrimination (OMOD) is shocked that such drawings have been hung so openly. “I can’t believe that such obviously racist and Islamophobic statements can hang in a public place”. The picture in the canteen was framed and hung up as decoration, says de Leon. (Dagsavisen, 18.07.2007)

Chris Allen, a leading expert on Islamophobia, theorizes that the phenomenon must be conceptualized in terms of an ideology comparable to racism. This is premised on the function of Islamophobia in sustaining a “negatively evaluated meaning” in regard to Muslims and Islam. Islamophobia goes beyond Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) – a Western approach that often distorts and stereotypes the cultures of the East with a view to dominating them – in that the religion of Islam itself is racialized. In addition to a historical antipathy in the West predating the Crusades, the ingredients of “social action”, “power and domination” and “exclusionary practices” are evident in contemporary Islamophobia (Allen, 2010).

In 2005, the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published 12 editorial cartoons depicting the Muslim prophet Muhammad. This triggered outrage in the Muslim world leading to boycotts, protests, the burning down of Scandinavian and other embassies, debates about the limits of free speech and highlighted the intricate interplay between freedom of expression and the potential for offense in a globalized world with diverse religious and cultural perspectives. Two years later, a police precinct in Trondheim, Norway, which was in the limelight for the murder of an unarmed black man, hung up pictures of black cannibals and caricatures of Muhammad. In one fell swoop, the police, who ideally should embody cultural sensitivity and service to the community, lost the trust of minorities discriminated on the basis of skin color and those who adhere to the religion of Islam. It goes without saying that law enforcement is expected to champion principles of equality and non-discrimination. No police agency relishes the prospect of serving in communities that are hostile.

While free speech and the right to critique religion is a fundamental aspect of secular democracies, police officers are public servants who must do their utmost to avoid the taint of racism or Islamophobia. While not all black and brown people in Norway are Muslims, most Muslims tend to be phenotypically non-white. As such, many already suffer from the effects of systemic racism that disadvantages their demographic to inferior houses, jobs and overall quality of life. This is true in Norway despite the country dominating the United Nation’s Human Index for Development almost since its inception. While statistics must account for the variables of duration of stay and similar caveats, the fact obtains that non-Western minorities are socio-economically

disadvantaged. The display, then, of Islamophobic images in this disadvantaged demographic further erodes confidence in a police force deemed partial and racist with the potential for triggering riots and violence. This can only result in hostility from Muslim communities which in turn will negatively impact the morale of police.

Meer and Modood (2019) argue that contemporary biological racism has roots in historical antipathy towards adherents of particular religions. This is extrapolated to draw parallels with the racialization of non-Christians such as Muslims in Europe. The relationship between Christianity and Enlightenment secularism have oscillated from belligerence to a rapprochement of sorts but both have generally united in the “otherizing” of Islam. While “Muslim” is not a biological category analogous to “black” or “south Asian”, the historical transformation of faith groups into races, as illustrated by Jews, highlights the complex and non-linear nature of racialization. Islamophobia, hence, transvaluates into racism:

But if we accept that racism does not necessarily involve inherentism then we do not have to rule out cultural racism as an example of racism. This means that cultural racism is not merely a proxy for racism but a form of racism itself, and that while racism involves some reference to physical appearance or ancestry it does not require any form of biological determinism, only a physical identification on a group basis, attributable to descent. (Meer & Modood, 2019, p. 23)

This exploration of the nature of Islamophobia is essential because efforts at combating this phenomenon in Norway will only gain traction once a rigorous link can be established between racism and Islamophobia. Islamophobia has traditionally been recruited in the Western imagination as a device for constructing the “folk devil” rooted in historical events such as the Crusades, the fall of Constantinople in 1453, and colonialism. These watershed events have distilled the contemporary “folk devil” that has never been exorcized from the Western psyche according to Poynting and Morgan (2012). Informed by Orientalist justifications portraying Arabs as irrational and incapable of self-representation (Said, 1978), Islam was considered a wayward upstart which had to be managed through a combination of military force and mollification.

The British Prime Minister W.E. Gladstone (1808–1898) saw peace in Europe as indispensable to the absence of Muslims whom he called followers of the “accursed book” (Ansari, 2004). The celebrated sociologist Max Weber could only perceive Islam as a “warrior religion”. Fukuyama’s (1992) triumphant assertion that the fall of the Berlin Wall marked the “end of history”, where he

omitted Islam from the list of vanquished adversaries like fascism and communism, unmistakably implies this as an established and irreversible reality. But there was trouble on the horizon. The unassailability of Western liberal democracy and its intrinsic superiority now faced a so-called “Clash of Civilizations” one where Islam was highlighted as a particular danger. Huntington’s superficial division of the world into “civilizations” has been critiqued as “civilizational incarceration” by Amartya Sen (2006). Huntington himself concedes that the end of the Cold War deprived the USA of an enemy to bolster national identity and self-esteem, a role filled by Islam after the Cold War. “The cultural gap between Islam and America’s Christianity and Anglo-Protestantism reinforces Islam’s enemy qualifications. And on September 11, 2001, Osama bin Laden ended America’s search” (Huntington, 2004, p. 263).

Considering the above, it was unfortunate the police in Trondheim espoused the values inherent in Islamophobia. While the pictures hung up in the precinct cannot directly be proven to stem from the officers implicated in the Obiora case, the double whammy of racism and Islamophobia in the content makes a mockery of the earlier dismissal of racism as a factor in the case. Even if these images do not violate legal statutes, they nevertheless are unethical and undermine the professionalism of these members who are sworn to protect and serve their communities impartially and judiciously. Rather than taking no action against the officers implicated (they were not suspended and were later acquitted) disciplinary measures should have followed. More importantly, the much bandied about term “inclusion” was exposed as hollow. The cannibalism imagery and Islamophobic depictions send the unmistakable message that blacks and Muslims cannot expect to receive fair treatment by law enforcement members.

In summary, the exhibition of Islamophobic images in a police precinct in Trondheim, Norway, is incompatible with the values of professionalism, impartiality, and community trust that law enforcement agencies are expected to uphold. Addressing and rectifying such offenses is crucial in the quest for a positive and inclusive environment within the police force and the community at large.

7 Implications for Education

The Eugene Obiora case highlights the need for sensitizing students, teachers and other stakeholders in education to understand the machinations of systemic racism. The topic is best approached in an interdisciplinary manner given the matrix-like nature of racism. We argue that Norway is well-placed to

undertake such a challenge given the long pedigree of commitment to promoting values such as equity, equality and inclusion. We have critiqued the culture of colorblindness as evasive and counterproductive in the long run. Students enrolled in our courses, who are studying the complexities of racism in education, have provided positive feedback. They have emphasized the significance of incorporating such a course into every year of the five-year master's degree program for teacher education, advocating for it to be offered throughout the curriculum instead of being limited to a single semester in the fourth year. Once again, the salience of critical race theory as an effective analytical framework in unpacking the subtleties involved in racism is obvious in the Obiora case. Educators would be well-advised to familiarize themselves with the theory and its applicability, given the disturbing developments in the USA where right-leaning politicians have banned critical race theory and comparable analytical frameworks that threaten white supremacy in southern states (e.g., Ron DeSantis in Florida).

We have shown that Eugene Obiora was Norway's "George Floyd" sixteen years prior to the killing of the latter which triggered the biggest ever demonstration before Parliament in Norway. The fact that so many black and brown youth in Norway felt the need to show solidarity with global demonstrations protesting the death of George Floyd surprised many in Norway. The message, as many media reports confirmed in the aftermath of the demonstration, was crystal clear: several non-white youths complained about similar harassment from law enforcement agencies and systemic racism in Norway. Schools and educational institutions should no longer pretend that racism is a phenomenon alien to Norway – a preserve of Anglo-American societies. As the first tenet of CRT states, racism is not exceptional but normal (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). It should not be controversial to gain credence for the fact that non-white individuals, including students, may face biased treatment rooted in racist predispositions.

The Obiora case also establishes the importance of the media's role in influencing public perceptions of racism. It is our contention that, overall, the Norwegian media did a stellar job in holding the police officers and the justice system accountable for their actions in the Obiora case. The role of the media in a democracy encompasses, but is not limited to, the following: information dissemination/crisis communication, check on power, public accountability, facilitating debate and discussion, building civic engagement, promoting pluralism and diversity and fostering public trust. Results from the World Value Survey (Amundsen, 2017) show that Norwegians came out on top in Europe when it comes to emphasizing tolerance, respect for others and helpfulness. Critical thinking has already been incorporated in the new national

curriculum in 2020. Inculcating skills that promote media literacy education, such as analyzing media representations, questioning narratives and discerning the potential biases in news reporting must be regarded as imperative for cultivating an astute and well-informed citizenry.

Artistic expressions that fearlessly champion social justice as exemplified by the rap group Samvirkelaget underscores the merit of coopting artistic genres that empower minoritized groups in educational settings. Rap, MCing, DJing and other elements of Hip-Hop are artforms that resonate with voiceless minoritized communities. Bourdieu, in his seminal work “Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste” (2015), explored the subtle ways in which elites distinguish themselves from other classes employing cultural tastes as markers of social distinction. Distinct tastes become the arena for cultivating distinct classes. Bourdieu employed the term “habitus”: tastes and dispositions molded through an individuals’ social standing, to critique the manner in which the bourgeoisie commit symbolic violence in legitimating certain arbitrary forms of culture as “high” or “legitimate” while sidelining others. Classical music, opera and other forms associated with elite cultural tastes can be subsumed in this category of “high culture”. Understood in this sense, Hip-Hop and its permutations can be perceived as counter-hegemonic art forms – the music of the oppressed. Schools should encourage students to express themselves creatively through this medium, fostering a sense of agency and providing a platform for marginalized voices to be heard. In “Hip-Hop Revolution: The Culture and Politics of Rap” (2007), Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar writes:

Music cannot be separated from the social, political or cultural context from which it develops. Indeed, the contours, nuances, and personality of hip-hop music reflect the world that gives birth to the music. More specifically, the conscious rap that ascended to popularity in the late 1980s was a direct result of the desperate conditions of black communities in the 1980s. Crime, joblessness, drugs, and police abuse all converged to foment what many would consider “positive”, “conscious”, “message”, or “black nationalist” rap. (Ogbar, 2007, p. 144)

We have also highlighted the issue of colorblindness in the Obiora case where law enforcement agencies have denied any nexus between the Obiora case and racism. We have shown how colorblindness, while a noble aspiration, obfuscates the role of race perpetuating social injustices. A UNICEF (2022) study in found that 37% of pupils aged 13 to 19 experienced racism in Norway. Of these, 57% had experienced racism in schools in Norway. These statistics

demonstrate that there is a critical need for schools in Norway to “see color” and its deleterious consequences. Students were asked about remedial measures. Among the responses are the following:

Learn more at school about what racism is. Many teachers, for example, do not know that the n-word is racist and do not take it seriously. The management should also know the difference between racism and bullying because it is not quite the same. (19 years, Inlandet)

You should start with a project so that we learn more about racism and discrimination at school. We haven’t learned anything about it. There are some people at my school who say racist things now and then, but not many people react or do anything to stop it. (14 years, Viken)

The views of students in the excerpts lend succor to this chapter’s thesis in regard to the denial and downplaying of racism in Norway. It is our experience too as lecturers of courses in teacher education that there is both a dearth in scholarly literature about racism in the syllabus and poor knowledge among student-teachers about the subject. This lack of awareness among educators is worrying as teachers play a crucial role in shaping students’ perspectives and fostering an inclusive learning environment. As one of the excerpt’s also suggests, part of the problem is the blurring of concepts such as racism and bullying which are undifferentiated. Antisemitism, antiblack racism, Islamophobia and other specific forms of racism are all subsumed under the nebulous category “bullying”. The distinction is crucial: there is a world of difference when football fans single out a black player on the basis of skin color (monkey chants, n-word) as opposed to verbally abusing white players for being from the “wrong side of town” for instance. The England and Liverpool legend John Barnes has been outspoken about racism in football. “Speaking about that meeting with Everton, Barnes said: ‘It was 1988, and a banana comes on the field and a lot is made of it. Bananas came on every single week, it was normal! They were coming on all the time’” (Bryant, 2023). The proactive approach from students indicates a desire for a more inclusive and informed school environment.

Studies have shown that students desire more education on difficult topics such as racism, suicide, etc. UNICEF (2024) states:

Conversations about issues like hate, racism, sexism and xenophobia can be uncomfortable for many parents. But it is important to try to create a safe space for your child to be able to speak to you and share anything that is on their mind.

While there's an evident divide in adults' desire to protect children from uncomfortable topics, it's crucial to recognize that children's literature, like fairy tales, has a history steeped in violence and adversity. Instead of opting for a ban, these beloved stories have been harnessed to engage children in dramatic tales and convey important moral messages. Take, for instance, the tale of Little Red Riding Hood, where the wolf consumes her and her grandmother, emphasizing the crucial lesson for children not to trust strangers.

The Rise and Fall of “Neger” in Norway’s Racial Dialogue

1 Introduction

This chapter explores how the term “neger” (negro) has been deployed, challenged, and debated in Norway between 1970 and 2014, offering insights into how Norway has grappled with racial issues. By contextualizing this within the broader landscape of different countries and time periods, we observe both unique national trajectories and shared patterns in racial discourse. The term “neger” in Norway has gone through significant shifts in its perception and usage. Initially, it was often used as a biological descriptor, mirroring the reflective approach to language, which posits that words directly reflect the reality they describe. This is evident in historical media references, where “neger” was used uncritically to describe individuals of African descent. However, the emergence of more vocal African-Norwegian communities and critical race theory has challenged this usage, highlighting its offensive and dehumanizing connotations.

By contrast, countries like the United States and the United Kingdom have a longer and more contentious history with racial epithets. In the U.S., terms like “nigger” and later more derogatory words have long been part of a fraught dialogue on race, heavily influenced by the legacy of slavery, segregation, and the civil rights movement. These terms have been vigorously contested and have undergone significant shifts, much earlier than in Norway. The U.S. civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s played a pivotal role in challenging racial slurs and advocating for more respectful and dignified language surrounding race. This struggle has been deeply embedded in American socio-political discourse and legal battles, leading to a more widespread rejection of such terms.

In the U.K., the term “negro” also fell out of favor by the late 20th century, replaced by more politically correct terms through the influence of anti-racist movements and multicultural policies. The British experience with decolonization and immigration from former colonies brought racial language and its implications to the forefront of public debate. Terms that were once in common usage became recognized as harmful and were actively reformed through legislation and public campaign. The different trajectories of these countries reveal both unique national contexts and commonalities in how racial

language is contested. Norway's journey with the term "neger" reflects a later stage of this global struggle, influenced by its increasing ethnic diversity and the importation of critical race discourses.

Examining the three paradigms of the term "neger" in Norway helps illustrate these dynamics. Among the reflective group, many Norwegians initially viewed the term as a straightforward descriptor without malicious intent, reflecting a lack of engagement with its offensive history. The intentional approach, characterized by subjective meanings imposed by the speaker, saw usages where the term was employed with varying degrees of awareness and intent, sometimes leading to legal challenges, as in the case of one Martin Rognerud whose firm was called "diverse negerarbeid" [diverse negro jobs]. The constructionist approach, which understands that meanings are constructed through social actors and cultural systems, aligns with the broader shifts seen globally. This approach recognizes the power of words to perpetuate racism and calls for a re-evaluation of language. The insistence of African-Norwegians to eradicate the term from public discourse echoes similar movements in other countries where marginalized communities have fought to redefine and reclaim language.

In the earlier periods, such as the 1970s, Norwegian media often used "neger" in ways that mirrored racial biases common in other Western societies. The term was frequently associated with crime, inferiority, and caricatures, reflecting a deep-seated racial prejudice. This is similar to how black individuals were historically portrayed in American and British media, where negative stereotypes dominated and reinforced racial hierarchies. The intense debate over the term "neger" in Norway mirrors the broader global discourse on racial language and its impact. Although Norway's black population remains relatively small, the increasing diversity has fueled a more heated and complex discussion about racial terminology, reflecting similar struggles in other multicultural societies. A significant difference lies in the historical context. The U.S. and the U.K. have longer histories of racial diversity and conflict, influenced by colonialism and slavery. Norway, with its more recent demographic shifts, is grappling with these issues in a contemporary context, learning from and sometimes paralleling the experiences of these other nations.

The sense of privilege and racial dynamics in Norway also reflects broader themes of whiteness and racial othering seen globally. The notion of an "invisible knapsack" of white privilege, articulated by Peggy McIntosh, resonates with the Norwegian experience, where white individuals are often unaware of their racial advantages until confronted by their interactions with non-white individuals. Moreover, the fear of miscegenation and the exoticization of black culture found in Norwegian media echoes historical anxieties observed in many

Western societies. Musical genres and interracial relationships often became focal points for racial anxieties, reinforcing stereotypes and social boundaries.

In conclusion, the evolution of the term “neger” in Norway underscores both the uniqueness of the Norwegian context and the shared experiences of racial discourse across different countries and time periods. As Norway continues to engage with its growing diversity, the lessons from other nations provide both cautionary tales and hopeful precedents for creating a more inclusive and respectful society. The journey of racial terminology, from the reflective use of “neger” to its contested status, highlights the ongoing struggle to reconcile language with evolving understandings of race and identity.

If the percentage of Africans and Afro-Americans in Scandinavia instead of being a minute fraction of one percent were one or two percent as in England or ten or eleven percent as in the United States, it would not be difficult to predict the tragic results. Black “outsiders” would then compete with white Scandinavians for jobs, housing, and girls, and racial turmoil would surely ensue. (Weisbord, 1972, p. 486)

Weisbord’s dire prediction from 1972 has mercifully not been fulfilled in Norway, despite Africans now comprising almost 3% of the Norwegian population (Statistics Norway, 2023). The figures above are calculated based on pigmentation; the figures could also encompass North Africans with lighter skin tones (e.g., Moroccans and Algerians). On the other hand, the statistics leave out black-skinned populations from South and North America and even African-Norwegians with one white parent. Accounting for the latter would yield a higher percentage of people considered black. Either way, those classified as Africans by Statistics Norway (2023) are predominantly black Africans, the majority with roots from the Horn of Africa. We argue that one reason Weisbord’s (1972) “racial dystopia” has not materialized, a few minor challenges aside, is because of a pragmatic culture of public debate and discussion underpinned by robust democratic principles in Norway. What has been dubbed the “neger” debate in Norway, which is the focus of this chapter, is a case in point.

Thomas (2016) employed a systematic literature review method and focused on the word “neger” (negro) as the unit of analysis. His study examined 4174 references from 30 Norwegian newspapers spanning the period 1970 to 2014. During this time, the term “neger” became prominent as individuals of African descent were now present on Norwegian territory and had a say in the usage of this epithet, marking a significant shift in the dynamics surrounding its use, especially with the arrival of immigrants from the global South beginning in 1970. The findings were analyzed within the conceptual framework of critical

race theory's tenets of racism as normal, interest convergence and the use of subversive storytelling. The study concluded that contra assertions suggesting that the epithet "neger" was "exclusively" a biological descriptor in Norway, the term also performed the work of racism. Like a double-edged sword that cuts both ways, the term could be applied to describe black skin color devoid of any malicious intent while, simultaneously, "neger" could be hurled at a black football player, for instance, to deliberately cause racial offense by drawing on racist tropes. In this investigation, we have undertaken a reexamination of the term "neger" and its derivatives, utilizing the media archive retrieval tool Retriever. This endeavor has been guided by specific conceptual and theoretical frameworks, facilitating the generation of novel insights into the subject matter. Our analysis underscores the importance of examining the diverse ways in which this derogatory term is used and the subsequent discourse in the media. This scrutiny yields valuable insights into the crucial role of lexical choices in either perpetuating or challenging the persistence of racism.

2 Navigating "Neger": Three Paradigms

In setting the contextual stage in this chapter, we identify three groups in Norway and their deployment of the term "neger" in the media debate between 1970 to 2014. In his theory of representation, Stuart Hall (1997) posits three approaches: the first is the reflective or mimetic approach. This is the "theory which says that language works by simply reflecting or imitating the truth that is already there and fixed in the world" (Hall, 1997, p. 24). Understood through the reflective or mimetic approach, Norwegians who protest innocence, and even defiance, when challenged about their use of the term "neger" (without inverted commas from hence), appeal to this reflective approach. To their mind, neger is a neutral biological descriptor for a black-skinned individual – nothing more and nothing less. Language is intended to function as a mirror, "to *reflect* the true meaning as it already exists in the world" (Hall, 1997, p. 24).

For instance, this is how one newspaper described a tanned Norwegian returning from holiday: "He was brown like a negro after a well-deserved holiday in Rio de Janeiro" (21.06.1975). This statement captures the complexity involved in passing judgement on the reporter. During the mid-seventies (and similarly today), having a tan following a vacation in sunny destinations was considered attractive, so accusations of intentional racism may seem overly severe. However, to be "like a Negro" is not the same as *being a negro*. Chameleonlike, the white individuals such as the reporter, reserve the "right" and "privilege" to travel at will, "shift color" at will, and "revert" to whiteness at

will. A temporary or transient assumption of pseudo-blackness (think black-face) only adds insult to injury for black people who are victims of a culture of antiblack racism. One is reminded of Frantz Fanon’s remark that while the Jew is the black individual’s brother in misery, the “negro”, unlike the Jew, could not escape into whiteness. “The Jew is told: You are not of the same class as the Arab because you are really white and because you have Einstein and Bergson” (Fanon, 1986, p. 103).

In the second category are those who secrete their own subjective meanings into words such as *neger*. For instance, one young Norwegian entrepreneur, Martin Rognerud, called his firm “diverse negerarbeid [diverse negro jobs]” in 2005 and responded when challenged “I thought it was a dirty job ... and stressed that he did not think in terms of race when he chose the name for his firm” (21.04.2005). There is even a Wikipedia (2022) entrance in Norwegian for “Negerarbeid” with the following: “Negro work is an expression that is often perceived as derogatory and racist. It has been used to describe ill-regarded, tiring, and disrespected work that is done unwillingly. Previously, it was used for heavy, monotonous work”. Rognerud was sued and he changed the name of his firm a year later. In this second, intentional approach theory of representation, it is “the speaker, the author, who imposes his or her unique meaning on the world through language. Words mean what the author intends they should mean” (Hall, 1997, p. 25). It was this intentional approach that Humpty Dumpty epitomized in Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*. “When I use a word”, Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less.”

While the *neger*-debate in the media in Norway subsided after 2014, residual anecdotes continued to surface attesting to the tenacity of “old habits”. In 2022, Finance Norway, a trade and employers’ association for the financial industry representing 260 financial companies with 50,000 employees, informed Wahid Shah of Asian extract during a job interview: “At Finance Norway, as usual, we have some exciting tasks and other times tasks that are a chore. Sometimes we have tasks that are ... What should I call it? It is negro work [negerarbeid]”. When the applicant filed a complaint with the Anti-Discrimination Tribunal about the use of this offensive term, he was told:

The tribunal believes this is not discrimination on the grounds of ethnicity. The reason is that they believe it had no concrete consequence for Wahid Shah. The tribunal cannot therefore see that Shah was directly treated worse than others by the fact that Finance Norway AS described certain work tasks as “negro work” during the interview, the decision states. (NrK, 2023)

The twisted logic of the interpretation of the verdict clearly equates racism with the subjective meaning attached to the epithet by Finance Norway, and, even more curious, their assessment that the utterance of “negro work” did not disadvantage Wahid Shah’s suitability for the job. Ludwig Wittgenstein’s critique would likely center on the misinterpretation of language games in the verdict. He would argue that the dismissal of racial implications in the term “negro work” reflects a failure to recognize the complex linguistic contexts in which words gain their meaning. By reducing racism to subjective meanings detached from broader social realities, the verdict overlooks the inherent social aspects of language use, perpetuating harmful attitudes and systemic discrimination. Stuart Hall (1997) argues that “We cannot be the sole or unique source of meanings in language, since that would mean that we could express ourselves in entirely private languages. But the essence of language is communication and that, in turn, depends on shared linguistic conventions and shared codes” (Hall, 1997, p. 25). The 3% of Norway’s brown and black demographic are under no illusions as to the intention underpinning the racialized neologism “negro work”. How Finance Norway or Wikipedia interpret “negro work” is immaterial to this demographic for whom the term has associations with chattel slavery – the ultimate form of “negro work”. This burgeoning black demographic refuse to stay on the sidelines and grant white Norwegians a license to straitjacket them into lexical prisons – they demand a say, a seat at the table of the wordsmiths authorizing or excising words in the new dictionary of a diverse and pluralistic Norway.

The third category of interlocutors in the neger debate are those who can be subsumed under the “constructionist approach” (Hall, 1997). This group considers the first and second categories – i.e. words mirror phenomenon alone and that word meanings are dependent on the speaker’s private interpretation – insufficient. “It is social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others” (Hall, 1997, p. 25). Denotation and connotation can help illustrate the above. While both are dimensions of meaning in language, there are imbrications carrying distinct implications. Denotation implies the literal, explicit and objective meaning of a word. The primary dictionary definition would be the focus in this instance. The word “home” for instance would denote the place where one lives. Connotation on the other hand would encompass a whole range of emotional, cultural or subjective connections that a word could trigger beyond its literal definition. The word “home” could activate complex levels of emotion such as warmth, comfort, safety, belonging or

pain, abandonment, unresolves issues etc. Hall points to Saussure’s interest in the arbitrary and shifting nature of words:

For many centuries, Western societies have associated the word BLACK with everything that is dark, evil, forbidding, devilish, dangerous and sinful. And yet, think of how the perception of black people in America in the 1960s changed after the phrase “Black is Beautiful” became a popular slogan – where the *signifier*, Black, was made to signify the exact opposite (signified) to its previous associations. (Hall, 1997, p. 32)

The term *neger* was rarely the main topic in media coverage from 1970 until the late 1990s. It was often inserted as a biological descriptor, an afterthought, or a metaphor. For the white mainstream audience, these inconspicuous references to *neger* were “harmless” incidental details to other more significant events or reflections, which is why many underestimated the intensity of the opposition from African-Norwegians in particular who pushed for the term to be expunged from public discourse. At the time, the black demographic in Norway was minuscule. However, along with the steadily increasing numbers, one notes a concurrent rise in the term *neger* taking center stage as a response to calls from the black community to drop the use of the term. A case in point is when a Norwegian woman recalls the distress she experienced from a hostile shop assistant in Nice, France:

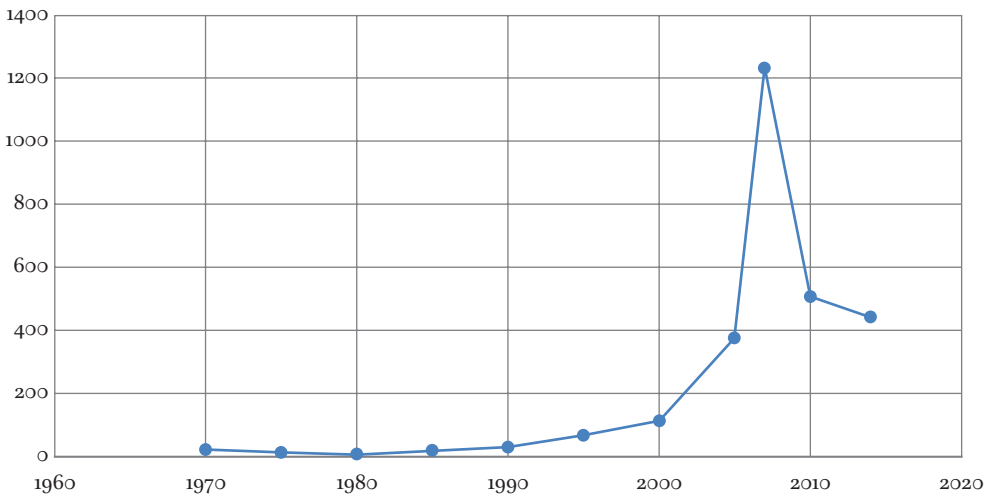


FIGURE 2 “Neger” frequency in Norwegian media (1970–2014) (Source: Retriever, 2024)

Last year I got that look from the shop assistant. I had never been a Negro. But I thought when I got that look: this is how it feels to be a Negro among whites, day in and day out to be looked upon with contempt. (Dagbladet, 08.06.1996)

Even in those “halcyon” days before whites were made to be accountable for their unhinged use of the term *neger*, such utterances reveal white individuals’ understanding of a sense of privilege inscribed in and ascribed to white skin color. Long before the concept of “invisible knapsack” (McIntosh, 1989) gained traction in Europe and Norway, white Norwegians were cognizant of the existence of such a privilege – a privilege that thrived by capitalizing on the denial of such advantages to black-skinned individuals labeled as “negroes”.

I have come to see white privilege as an invisible package of unearned assets that I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was “meant” to remain oblivious. White privilege is like an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, maps, passports, codebooks, visas, clothes, tools and blank checks. (McIntosh, 1989)

Indeed, the Norwegian woman who could only muster up the image of a *neger* in her quest to find a comparable metaphor for the denigration she faced while shopping in France resonates with one of McIntosh’s (1989) “items” of privilege in the invisible knapsack of white privilege: “I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed” (McIntosh, 1989, p. 2). Put differently, in a “normal” world, the white Norwegian shopper was accustomed to being met with a friendly face asking if she needed any assistance. When this was not forthcoming, and she detected antipathy (imagined or not) in the demeanor of the shop assistant, the “abnormal” schema had to be interpreted. To her mind, the only customer demographic who elicit such contemptuous treatment are blacks (*neger*). “Last year I got that look from the shop assistant. I had never been a Negro. But I thought when I got that look: this is how it feels to be a negro among whites, day in and day out to be looked upon with contempt”. Assuring the reader that “she had never been a negro”, did not stop her from sharing how she suffered humiliation like a “negro”. Whiteness purports to understand black denigration – in fact, it even claims victimhood rooted in blackness, while paradoxically disinvesting from the category of “negro”, encapsulated in the assertion “I have never been a negro”.

Du Bois (1903) coined the term double consciousness to approximate the conflictual nature of the struggle within African Americans to reconcile their

individuality with the racial stereotypes and prejudices imposed upon them by society. Du Bois studied the psychological and emotional toll that a racially stratified society such as the USA exacted upon people of color and the plethora coping mechanisms activated as a response. In a distortion or perversion of Du Bois’s (1903) double consciousness, the white consumer claimed to have been treated like a negro. This triggered some internal turmoil which she attempted to reconcile by naming the experience in one of Norway’s most popular daily newspapers. This is commensurate with Foucault’s perception of “how knowledge was put to work through discursive practices in specific institutional settings to regulate the conduct of others” (Hall, 1997, p. 47). The Norwegian media, then, ought not to be perceived as “neutral” purveyors of events and individual opinions. They play the role of what Foucault (1980) called an institutional apparatus that wields technologies (techniques) of power. The shopper along with the media become “co-conspirators” in secreting a particular knowledge linked to power with a view towards promoting what Foucault (1980) called a “regime of truth”:

Truth isn’t outside of power ... Truth is a thing of this world.; it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its general politics of truth; that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned ... the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1980, p. 131)

3 Negro in 1970s Norwegian Media: A Semantic Analysis

We have noted previously in this chapter that most of the utterances in the “neger-debate” could be subsumed under one of three categories delineated under Stuart Hall’s (1997) theories of representation. In addition, there is a further level of nuanced analysis which the statements in the three categories followed. In assigning codes to the findings from the media articles using the term neger, the following categories of representation were most common.

- *Discomfort*: in this category, neger signified displacement and maladjustment.
- *Hyperbole*: Hyperbole and ridicule accompanied the usage of neger.
- *Criminalization*: Neger was employed as a synecdoche for crime and violence.
- *Description*: neger was a biological, somatic or phenotypical descriptor.

- *Justice*: Designated for references where activists called for social changes.
- *Racial slur*: Identified in references explicitly maligning black skin color.
- *Essentialism*: statements attributing inherent genetic qualities to “Negroes”.
- *Miscegenation*: sexual tropes rooted in fear of interracial mixing and similar taboos.

How was the term *neger* employed in Norwegian media in the 1970s? The quote below is from the year 2002 but offers a glimpse into the connotations conjured up in Norway during the 1970s. The brackets are not in the original Norwegian (all translation ours) but added to facilitate contextual understanding for a non-Norwegian readership.

Rewind back to the beginning of the 1970s: Norway was a nearly blindingly white [(blendahvitt [i.e. racially; perhaps “snow-white” in English] society where Negro was something one read about in a high school book (Hottentot), pours into a cup (Ali coffee) or sprinkles on food (Black Boy spice)]. (VG, 28.12.2002)

The writer in this newspaper draws attention to the total “otherness” of black individuals in the 1970s when Norway was “Blendahvitt” – a Norwegian term that translates to “snow white” or “blindingly white” in English. Just last year (2023), a well-known Norwegian politician of Pakistani origin, Abid Raja, criticized the government cabinet of the Labor party Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre for being “blendahvitt” referring to the lack of diversity among the appointed cabinet ministers. “I think it is startling that the government is so ‘snow white’”. It is surprising that they cannot see the importance of minorities’ competence, says Raja” (Kallelid & Dorholt, 2023). In stating that *neger* (*negro*) was “something one read about in a high school book in Norway in the early 1970s”, the writer, although penning these words more than 30 years later, coopts the role of expressing Norwegians’ collective prejudices in relation to black-skinned individuals. At least the writer is honest about mainstream conceptions of blackness commensurate with Hall’s (1997) constructionist approach to meaning-making. The inconvenient truth in the Norway of the 21st century is that non-white Westerners are still stereotyped in textbooks selected for high school for instance. Thomas (2017) has explored the portrayal of non-Westerners in high school textbooks in English as a foreign language subject. The 16 short stories reify and straight-jacket depictions of the protagonists in Oriental tropes reducing them to subaltern positions.

There is a dearth of imagination when non-Westerners are portrayed. Texts selected aim at reproducing and perpetuating the hackneyed representations of the “rest” (as opposed to the “West”) spawned in the heyday of colonialism. Overt racism and denigration may have been ameliorated, but the gaze is still on that which makes the “rest” different from the “West”... some of the pre-modifiers distilled by students were: superstitious Chinese man; criminal black man; illegal Hispanic immigrant; greedy Sri Lankan woman; subdued Indian teacher and hysterical Hispanic woman. (Thomas, 2017, pp. 9, 11)

The majority of references to *neger* in the 1970s was in connection with the category of crime. For instance, “Some time ago, there was the case of an American negro who threatened to kill a waiter (29.01.1971)”; “In the other case, the criminal was a 15-year-old negro who threatened with a knife (14.04.1971)” and “The 48-year-old Colombo [American Mafia boss] was shot by a negro named Jerome Johnson (29.06.1971). *Neger* functioned as a synecdoche for crime. The ascription of crime, as if it were intrinsic to black corporeality, is not unique to Norway. This trope proliferates in many white-dominated societies. What perhaps is anomalous is the proliferation of the trope of black crime in Norway given the country’s pedigree as one dedicated to equity and equality in a social democracy. Investigating the underlying factors that produce structural and systemic inequalities is an ethos and practice that Nordic countries are rightly proud of. Yet, in the case of “negroes”, the myth appears unassailable, even in Norway. Sadly, then and now, utterances in Norwegian media commit the fallacy of equating color and race with crime, as Du Bois (1990) protested to the “Southern Gentlemen”:

And finally, when you fasten crime upon this race as its peculiar trait, they answer that slavery was the arch-crime, and lynching and lawlessness its twin abortion; that color and race are not crimes, and yet they it is which in this land receives most unceasing condemnation, North, East, South, and West. (Du Bois, 1990, p. 80)

The Norwegian media’s use of the term *neger* in the 1970s clearly further cemented the trope of crime and deviance as a quality intrinsic to black skin. Close to half of the media reports employing *neger* were about crime. In his study on elite discourse and racism, Teun A. van Dijk (1993, p. 288) argues that access to news media in the West is predominantly restricted to and overseen by white elites. Echoing findings from various studies, coverage of minority

groups tends to rely on stereotypes, highlighting problems, deviance and perceived threats. Commonly highlighted themes include illegal immigration, crime, cultural disparities and challenges in race relations. When seen in conjunction with Hall's (1997, p. 258) understanding of stereotypes as reducing, essentializing, naturalizing and fixing difference, the scale of the problem becomes evident.

The legacy of the past, one which has inscribed crime and deviance on the black body, still haunts us when young black boys are stopped several times in the same day by the police on the streets of Norway. A person of color can perhaps never truly know the degree to which this legacy is responsible for the job applications turned down, for the harsher sentencing in court, and why the teacher never seems to notice his or her black raised hand in the classroom to answer a question. One reason Malcolm X narrated his life story to Alex Haley is precisely to draw attention, not to any absurd notion of black propensity for crime, but systemic racism that provides little or no opportunity for black people.

I think that an objective reader may see how in the society to which I was exposed as a black youth here in America, for me to wind up in prison was really just inevitable. It happens to so many thousands of black you. I think that an objective reader may see how when I heard "The white man is the devil", when I played back what had been my experiences, it was inevitable that I would respond positively; then the next twelve years of my life were devoted and dedicated to propagating that phrase among the black people. (Malcolm, 1965, p. 436)

Once again, the question arises about where the media gaze is – and why (Fleras, 2011). What does it say about a country's willingness to be subjected to a constant media diet that harbors no qualms in refracting crime through black skin? In eulogizing Malcolm X after the latter's assassination, Martin Luther King concurred that Malcolm's life was the "Hate that Hate Produced". "He was clearly a product of the hate and violence invested in the Negro's blighted existence in this nation" (King, 1998, p. 267). What will antagonizing an entire demographic's skin color produce? Ta Nehisi-Coates captures this pithily: "My own father went to Vietnam dreaming of John Wayne, but came back quoting Malcolm X ... They act like they don't love their country, No, what it is, is they found out their own country don't love them" (Coates, 2017, p. 138). In addition to the category of crime, a perusal of Norwegian media's usage of *neger* in the 1970s evinces contempt and inferiority. We will consider an example of contempt first:

Similar to the charred part of a tree which reminds one of a domesticated Negro (Likedan med den svartbrente delen av et tre, som minner om underkuet neger...). (10.06.1977)

In his *Discourse on Colonialism* (1972) Aimé Césaire, the Francophone Martinican poet, author, and politician, coined the term "thingification" to describe the dehumanization or reduction of colonized societies and individuals to mere objects or things. "I am talking about societies drained of their essence, cultures trampled underfoot, institutions undermined, lands confiscated, religions smashed, magnificent artistic creations destroyed, extraordinary *possibilities* wiped out" (Césaire, 1972, p. 42). The writer who penned the words "Similar to the charred part of a tree which reminds one of a domesticated Negro" is not forwarding a personal, subjective perception of the link between the charred part of a tree which conjures up images of a negro: there is the assumption that the readership shares in this cognitive and emotional schema. Of the myriad images "the charred part of a tree" can potentially present, it is telling that the image of a black person trumps all others. Juxtaposing Césaire's (1972) "thingification" with "the charred part of a tree which reminds one of a Negro" one can discern a stark illustration of this concept in action in the Norway of the 1970s.

It is evident that the comparison infers that the negro is a mere physical entity – sentient, but like the charred part of a tree, is devoid of agency, dignity or a humanity at par with white people, who clearly are by default the standard of true humanity. The charred part of a tree analogy shrinks the spectrum of human experience and complexity to an unfeeling inanimate object. It is the accumulated secretion of such sentences that morph into particular discourses that "thingify" and reinforce oppressive power structures by debasing individuals and justifying their suppression. In addition, the citation from the newspaper makes reference to the negro as "domesticated". Why or how the writer could only equate black skin color with domestication is unclear. Perhaps it is not surprising given the state of affairs in the world for black people recently freed from the shackles of colonization and still in the grip of Jim Crow that a "blendahvitt" Norway internalized the notion of black skin as synonymous with domestication. Speaking in this same era, Césaire writes, "black people ... were doubly proletarianized: in the first place as workers, but also as blacks, because after all we are dealing with the only race which is denied even the notion of humanity" (Césaire, 1972, p. 94). Césaire (1972) took aim at precisely this dehumanization of black people when he sought to upend white (mis)use of "negro" by adopting *nègre* as a term of defiance and inaugurating the negritude movement.

We lived in an atmosphere of rejection; and we developed an inferiority complex. I have always thought that the black man was searching for his identity. And it has seemed to me that if what we want is to establish this identity, then we must have a concrete consciousness of what we are – that is, of the first fact of our lives: that we are black; that we were black and have a history. (Césaire, 1972, p. 91)

We must reiterate, as in previous chapters, the prevalence of a discourse in Norway that relegates biological racism to other countries; the USA in particular, and hence the importance of engaging with the current topic. It is our contention that one reason contemporary Norway is ill-equipped to deal with racism is there has never been an appropriate acknowledgement of its existence or prevalence in Norway in the past. In his *Archaeology of Knowledge* (2002), Foucault contends that knowledge production in different historical and social contexts is not done in a vacuum but is monitored and governed by the discursive formations: systems of language, institutions, practices, and power relations that shape what can be said and thought at any given time. Such a methodological approach discounts the notion of a teleological or neutral progression of ideas and contributions of individual thinkers.

Foucault posits an analysis that pays attention to the discursive ways in which knowledge is produced, classified and structured within identifiable discursive configurations or “epistemes”. Hence, when one of the largest daily newspapers in Norway equates the charred part of a tree with a domesticated negro, Foucault’s (2002) approach would subsume this as part of an epistemology which determines what counts as valid knowledge. It was only about two decades later that the episteme that governed what could be said about neger was challenged by brown and black individuals in the main. Foucault called such discontinuities or shifts in knowledge production “epistemic breaks” – the disruption of the former “regular dispersion of statements” (Foucault, 1980, p. 63) which leads to new ways of thinking and classifying. We do not rule out the presence of oppositional voices challenging the racist episteme of the day in the 1970s; there are in any given age a minority of competing discourses. Applying a Foucault-inspired genealogical analysis, where we pivot the historical contingencies, power relations, and struggles that shape the emergence and transformation of discursive formations over time, we can only conclude that Norwegian media perpetuated and reified classical racist conceptions of black skin in the 1970s.

Once again, we turn to Frantz Fanon whom Homi Bhabha in his foreword to *Black Skin White Mask* (1986) called “heir to the ingenuity and artistry of Toussaint and Senghor, as well as the iconoclasm of Nietzsche, Freud and

Stare. Fanon is the purveyor of the transgressive and transitional truth". Racism, the unvarnished kind found in the media of 1970s Norway, is responsible for what Fanon called the "epidermalization of inferiority" (Fanon, 1986, p. 13). As educators concerned with the psychosocial well-being of our students, an analysis of "charred part of a tree which reminds one of a domesticated Negro" cannot limit itself to an academic exercise alone with the narrow aim of proving the existence of biological or classical racism in Norway's recent past. We are unaware of studies that have attempted to demonstrate the extent and nature of the damage inflicted by racism on the vulnerable psyche of black and brown children in Norway. On the other hand, we are certainly cognizant of anecdotes where black and brown parents have shared heart wrenching stories about their children's disdain for their own black skins. One mother of a Tamil child stated that her son wished to rub off his black pigmentation. Another parent originally from Eritrea asked with exasperation why he had black skin unlike his Norwegian classmates. These children had barely existed for a decade, yet were saddled with Fanon's (1986, p. 13) "epidermalization of inferiority". For Fanon, contact with the white world has distorted non-white identity. It is these distortions he sought to understand.

I believe that the fact of the juxtaposition of the white and black races has created a massive psychoexistential complex. I hope by analyzing it to destroy it. Many Negroes will not find themselves in what follows. This is equally true of many whites. But the fact that I feel a foreigner in the worlds of the schizophrenic or the sexual cripple in no way diminishes their reality. (Fanon, 1986, p. 14)

One cannot begin to fathom the lifelong pain and humiliation such a sense of inferiority inflicts upon juvenile minds so violently and prematurely lurched out of their Panglossian childhood. If there is a "domestication", it is one saddled upon these children's shoulders by a regime or episteme that can only see black skin in terms of taming, control and individuals stripped of their autonomy and relegated to a position of subservience, akin to a domesticated animal. Fanon's declared purpose behind his classic book *Black Skin, White Masks*, was precisely to understand this "epidermalization of inferiority" by boldly challenging black people to acknowledge this phenomenon and, in the final instance, "liberate" themselves from this mental and psychological enslavement: "At the risk of arousing the resentment of my colored brothers, I will say that the black is not a man. There is a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinary declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born ... I propose nothing short of the liberation of the man of color from himself" (Fanon, 1986, p. 10).

As mentioned previously, after the category of crime, neyer was an object of caricature in the 1970s.

Today, we will see a Negro on TV. West Ham [English soccer team] is the only team in the first division which has a Negro [Clyde Best] good enough for its best side. (4.12.1971; Thomas, 2016)

Clyde Best, originally from Bermuda, was a pioneering black footballer in the English First Division football. Best played for West Ham United from 1968 to 1976 and scored an impressive tally of 47 goals during his tenure. Best suffered regular racist chants from the tribunes during his career. English football has an enthusiastic and loyal fan base in Norway. The citation above, “Today, we will see a Negro on TV”, discloses a sense of a looming spectacle which the newspaper alerts its readership to follow. Fifty-seven years after the public was invited to gaze at eighty “Congolese” at Frogner Park (chapter one), football fans were now invited to another black “freak show” – that of a neyer playing for West Ham. The Jamaican-English footballer, John Barnes, considered one of the greatest English players of all time, suggests that racism, which is rife in football, cannot be approached as a problem unique to football. “So, if they are racist, they are racist members of society who happen to be football fans, not the other way round. So, if we want to get rid of racism in football, we have to get rid of it in society first”. (Barnes, 2021, p. 42)

English and European football has evolved somewhat in terms of black sporting ability. Today racism in football no longer deliberates over whether black footballers are competent, encapsulated in the statement “West Ham [English soccer team] is the only team in the first division which has a Negro [Clyde Best] good enough for its best side”. As John Barnes states, the issue has shifted to a negative perception of black intellectual and moral equality when it comes to management or leadership (Barnes, 2021, p. 30). However, the implication that only Clyde Best, a sole representative of a certain phenotype, met the criteria for West Ham underscores doubts about the athletic competence of individuals sharing similar physical traits. This suggests that assessments were influenced more by outward appearance than by actual skill. This comes across as strange given contemporary black sporting prowess in field and track, boxing, football and many other sporting disciplines. Back in the 1970s, nonetheless, it would not be hard to imagine the unbearable pressure triggered by the transvaluation of incompetence – or doubtful competence – and inscribed on the black body of Clyde Best.

Barnes (2021) believes that the plight of black footballers has only deteriorated since the onset of diverse anti-racism campaigns. To his mind, fines,

banning, and even black players walking off the field is counter-productive. “I’ve said all along that the solution to racial bias in any industry is to tackle it in mainstream society first, then the industry will fall into line” (Barnes, 2021, p. 40). Regrettably, the racism inherent in the Norwegian media towards a black player such as Clyde Best in the 1970s is still with us. They both share one feature in common: a black player who, then and now, is a “credit” to his mainly white team is elevated out of blackness” (Barnes, 2021, p. 27) while a black player who misses a penalty or is the cause for his team to forfeit a game, unleashes racist abuse. Hence rather than bury the past and pretend contemporary Norwegians have moved on, we would do well to revisit the recent racist past, which is still with us, even in Norwegian football. In other words, and as Barnes argues, the absence of racial abuse directed at black players does not mean that racism has been defeated and expunged: it is just waiting for the next incident where a black player becomes the scapegoat. Barnes mentions the England international and Manchester United striker Marcus Rashford and Queens Park Ranger’s Bright Osayi-Samuel who were both racially abused for missing goal opportunities. It is worth quoting Barnes at length:

If we no longer hear or see any racist acts in football stadiums or on social media, that doesn’t mean it no longer exists. Just because someone doesn’t say something out loud (for fear of being punished) it doesn’t mean they don’t still believe it. If that was the case, then the easiest way to overcome racism would be for black players to never miss open goals. We wouldn’t hear any racist abuse then; we could feel that we have defeated racism. What a ridiculous way to think! (Barnes, 2021, p. 27)

The above underscores Bonilla-Silva’s (2022) contention that racism cannot be dealt with through clinical attempts focusing on aspects of society, such as law enforcement, employment, education or football in this instance. The entire society is implicated in racism – hence its “systemic” nature. All are sucked into the vortex that is racism, according to Bonilla-Silva (2022). Whether Clyde Best, Marcus Rashford or Bright Osayi-Samuel wanted to or not, they were already racialized subjects forced to play a role in a white majority world where the abusers acted racially in conscious or unconscious ways. White individuals do not perform this role in a racialized order as

Kevin, Crystal, Jonathan, or Jessica ... but as a (mostly) ‘unconscious personification of the American racial order ... Systemic racism is not about the ‘racists’, but about the racism. Whether you are a police officer or a regular white person in anywhere USA (or in any part of the racial

world-system), you participate in systemic racism. (Bonilla-Silva, 2022, p. 834)

This explains the tenacity of racism despite sincere efforts at its eradication from football, as Barnes (2021) argues. Black players are reduced to simplistic caricatures irrespective of achievements or abilities: either as superheroes (Pele, Usain Bolt, etc.) or subjected to racist vitriol if they fail. Success and failure never transcend race for black athletes. A white player is never asked to carry the burden of whiteness in the English Premier League, Italian Serie A or Spanish LaLiga. If a white player misses a penalty resulting in the team's loss, any mistreatment directed towards them is likely to focus on personal aspects of their life, excluding their white skin color from scrutiny.

Hence despite the outward displays of inclusivity, such as bands and banners stating "Kick racism out of football", the phenomenon of racism remains deeply embedded in the fabric of football culture because, to borrow an analogy from a tree, it is as ineffective as chopping off branches rather than grappling with the root. Black worth in sports is precariously contingent upon their perceived utility or contribution to dominant narratives of success not unlike French admiration for Senegalese contribution to the French army: "What a beautiful race – look at the Senegalese ... Weren't they called *our Black Devils* during the war" (Fanon, 1981, p. 167).

Barnes (2021) particularly challenges the concept of colorblindness by examining how the absence of overt racial abuse is often equated with the eradication of racism. Racism doesn't vanish but finds a haven within social norms and ideologies in the heat of passion that football rivalries appear to bring out in the most "tolerant" individuals. Here we meander into the territory of critical race theory's interest convergence. Black players are hailed and regaled as long as they ensure the success of white-owned and supported football teams. However, the age-old contempt of black skin, like magma impatient to surface through the fissures of disappointment, demonstrate the fragility of interest convergence. This lines up with the notion of colorblind racism, which proposes that racism endures through subtle, often unconscious biases and behaviors, even in ostensibly progressive environments. In his book *White Thinking: Behind the mask of Racial Identity* (2021), the World Cup-winning black-French footballer, Lilian Thuram, poignantly highlights the conundrum Barnes confronts:

I always remind my two sons that, whether they're in France or the US, they must never forget the color of their skin. I tell them: "You are perceived as Blacks, not as Whites". This fills me with a deep sadness but

there is no escaping that, sometimes, it’s a matter of life and death. If I am ever to escape the color of my skin, for it to become an insignificant detail, then white people must also escape the color of their skin. (Thuram, 2021, p. 4)

4 Negro Music and Miscegenation Fears in the 1980s

At the time it was unheard of that a Negro, who normally plays music in a whorehouse, should write opera. (23.11.88)

In the 1980s, one observes a ubiquitous media culture where *neger* is once again caricatured. This was especially the case in regard to black celebrities. The caricatures are undoubtedly racist, such as the citation above which informs its readership that a *neger* “normally plays music in a whorehouse”. The *neger* in question in the citation is Scott Joplin (1868–1917) considered the “King of Ragtime” with his model composition “Maple Leaf Rag”. Scott Joplin stated in an interview in 1913 that there had been “ragtime music in America ever since the Negro race has been here, but the white people took no notice of it until about twenty years ago [in the 1890s]” (New York Age, 1913). The citation in the Norwegian media reduces and establishes a misleading nexus between ragtime music, which is essentially black music, and brothels. Ragtime was popular in a broad range of venues in the US in the late 19th and 20th centuries. Just like any other trendy genre, ragtime made its way into theaters and concert halls. The media citation does injustice to ragtime with its crude and reductionist “Negro, who normally plays music in a whorehouse”.

It is common knowledge that diverse forms of musical genres provided entertainment in saloons, bars and even brothels or other establishments of ill repute when opportunities for work and performance were hard to come by. This included: folk music, early jazz, blues, Vaudeville and minstrelsy, to name some. To single out and allege that ragtime was music sung by blacks in brothels is not only inaccurate but cements the racist stereotype of blacks as licentious deviants. This nexus perpetuates a toxic trope that links African American culture and music with disreputable or immoral activities. Once again, we highlight the fact that few if any Norwegians had any significant contact of substance with people of color, even in the 1980s. Mediascape in Norway, as we have seen previously, fed the public a diet which criminalized *neger* in the 1970s. Now, in the 1980s, black music which has traditionally served as a tool of survival, resilience, spiritual sustenance, and community building, among others, is relegated to the “whorehouse” and put beyond the pale.

In his book *Soul on Ice* (1992), Eldridge Cleaver explores how “The illusion of the Negro’s inferior nature had to be maintained” (Cleaver, 1992, p. 103). One way this was accomplished was to “tab whatever the blacks did with the prefix ‘Negro’” (Ibid). “We had *Negro* literature, *Negro* athletes, *Negro* music, *Negro* doctors, *Negro* politicians, *Negro* workers” (Ibid). This mechanism is evident in not only the designation of ragtime as black music but in its confinement to the “whorehouse” in the Norwegian media. The French philosopher, Louis Althusser, introduced the concept of interpellation or hailing individuals in the sense that ideology functions much like a policeman who calls out to a citizen and summons the citizen to assume a particular subjectivity as a response to the policeman’s “hailing”.

Ideology “acts” or “functions” in such a way that it “recruits” subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or “transforms” the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation* or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: “Hey, you there!” (Althusser, 1971, pp. 162, 163)

Neger was prefixed to black athletes and black music with the intention of maintaining the imagined inferiority of black people, as Cleaver (1992) argued. The term became Althusser’s “policeman” effectively interpellating the Norwegian readership into a subjective position which is preconditioned to subvert black musicians and their art. Having delegitimized neger as a premodifier, black music becomes exoticized, marginalized and relegated to the realm of the “other” or the outsider. Black music and its artistic merit is then devalued cementing the hegemony of white cultural norms. Earlier it was shown that the same modus operandi was brought to bear upon black athletes such as Clyde Best. By inserting the neger as a premodifier, the media tap into racial stereotypes suggesting ineptitude and inadequacy vis-à-vis whiteness.

It is denigration of black achievement that Eldridge Cleaver seeks to upend in his iconoclastic assessment of the impact of Chubby Checker’s *the Twist*. “It was Chubby Checker’s mission, bearing the *Twist* as *good news*, to teach the whites, whom history had taught to forget how to shake their asses again” (Cleaver, 1992, p. 223). The crudeness and vulgarity aside, Cleaver does offer some interesting insights into the potential for racial harmony through the medium of music, especially black music and dance. Having described the phenomenal impact the *Twist*, a black invention, was having across the USA – “there were rumors that President Kennedy and his Jackie were doing the *Twist* secretly in the White House” (Cleaver, 1992, p. 229) – Cleaver lauded the *Twist*’s

potency as a form of cultural convalescence for the nation. It was a "guided missile" that originated from the marginalized spaces of the ghetto and penetrated the heart of suburbia.

Rather than being "Negro music" relegated to a "whorehouse" like ragtime, white people were crossing the "racial Maginot Line" (Cleaver, 1992, p. 229), a "cardinal sin" to learn to do the Twist. The dance craze may have been a passing fad but music's ability to crossover between the "racial Maginot Line" is testament to its power to subvert racism – the Twist was hailed as a symbol of rebellion, liberation and cross-cultural exchange. Music, regardless of its racial origins, has that enchanted effect which serves as a conduit for stifled energies. The unbending social norms of Jim Crow appeared to be no match for Chubby Checker's Twist which transcended racial borders. Debates about white appropriation of black music (Elvis Presley) are well known. Cleaver's (1992) analysis is a reminder to white America of its need for black artistic expressions in its mission for wholeness. The vitality and creativity of "Negro" music is unmistakable in its extensive reach – crudely put, it can entertain both whorehouses and the White House. This potential of black music to revitalize and enrich the myriad music traditions of the USA cannot selectively appropriate black music while demeaning black artists.

In summary, Cleaver's exploration of the Twist advances an absorbing viewpoint on the symbiotic relationship between black and white America, particularly in the domain of music and dance. It stresses the transformative power of black culture to challenge existing social norms and offer the possibility of genuine cultural exchange and regeneration. However, it also highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of how cultural appropriation and exploitation overlap with wider systems of racial oppression. In addition to caricatures of neger, the 1980s, echoing much of the past, portrayed blacks as figures of loathing with the fear of miscegenation always looming.

And this writer will venture the claim that there is still no Norwegian father who wants his daughter to marry a negro. I myself have had ample opportunity to experience Norwegians' racial prejudice through many years as a teacher of teenagers from distant countries. The worst example was when we were chased out of one café in a well-known shopping center in Oslo. After a lot of fighting and "threats", we were finally welcomed by a somewhat anxious proprietor, several days later. (Ola Tungesvik, *Aftenposten*, 21.06.1988)

One notes in the media citation above that the fear of interracial relations often entails white males saving white females from black males – "no

Norwegian father who wants his daughter to marry a negro". One barely hears voices raised in objection to white males having amorous liaisons with black females – or worse still, raping black women en masse as during chattel slavery. "Black peril" was the term deployed to express fears of miscegenation. In particular, it fed into white fears of predatory black males who fetishized white female bodies. This fear of racial asymmetry was enshrined in law in Southern Rhodesia in 1903 making it punishable by law for black on white rape or attempted rape (Bland, 2005). The discourse of miscegenation could not countenance any mutually consensual relationship between blacks and whites. Such frowned upon relations were explained away in several ways: white innocent women who were enticed by black males and hence prey, or that such "low class" women were immoral and bereft of decency.

The scholar of race and racism, George M. Fredrickson, explores Germany's obsession with racial purity in 1905 which culminated in a proscription of intermarriage between whites and nonwhites among its colonies in Africa including Christian "half-castes" (Fredrickson, 2002, p. 112). Interracial marriages which were legal before 1905 were now deprived of civil and political rights. Fredrickson (2002) mentions the Herero tribe in South-West Africa whose numbers were reduced from 60,000–80,000 to 16,000 in one year (1904–1905). The same policy, informed by ideologies of racial purity, were responsible for the genocide of the Nama tribe who were the descendants of the Khoikhoi. "Not only did the German official deliberately intend to wipe out the Nama race, but the majority of the settlers believed that the Nama were useless in the widest sense of the term, and that there was no further point in preserving the race" (Bley, 1971, pp. 164, 207). In contrast to the German policy and the US "one drop rule", the French, concerned with black "ugliness and stupidity", seriously debated the merits of crossbreeding between colonial whites and blacks "as a way of improving the latter" (Fredrickson, 2002).

Underpinned by the pseudo-science of eugenics, miscegenation was further delegitimized by a discourse raising alarm about the "ominous" consequences of miscegenation on procreation. The progeny of interracial relationships was presumed to inherit the least savory characteristics of both parents – for instance laziness and immorality. In the British historical context after the Great War, Bland (2005) shows how the press and other officials debated why some white women demonstrated a preference for black males which was "repugnant" to white societal norms of the time. The situation was no different in Norway. Such views were underpinned by the racist hypothesis that the "swarthier" races were in thrall to the fairer ones, and not vice versa. Unable or unwilling to accept any liaisons between black males and white women in Britain at the turn of 20th century, the media set about to stigmatize the white

women as “loose”, “low class” or atavistic prostitutes (Bland, 2005). British soldiers returning from the traumatic trench-warfare experience of the Great War perceived white interracial marriages and liaisons as a challenge to their masculinity. In their reduced physical and mental state, and goaded by political and media racism, black sexual potency and masculinity took on mythical proportions and intensified racialized sexual anxieties (black peril).

The writer Marek Kohn cogently sums up the sentiment: “It was as if alien men and women were conspiring to dispossess British manhood”. Miscegenation fears can perhaps be seen in part as a displacement of men’s disquiet as to the new demands and behaviors of women. Through a process of disavowal, female sexual desire and agency was simultaneously recognized and denied, with black men’s predatory sexuality necessitating white male protection and punishment. (Bland, 2005, p. 38)

The term “incel” is a portmanteau of “involuntary celibate”. Beginning a little over a decade ago, this movement romanticizes a mythical past where men (i.e. white men) were entitled to sex from servile women. This view, along with a sense of frustration and nihilism, has driven some to extreme acts of violence. The common denominator between the antifeminist or misogynistic views sketched above is white men’s alleged “ownership” of the white female body resonating with King’s (2002) contention that “Woman [...] represents that which must be investigated and dissected until her secrets are relinquished. Consequently, the female body has been subjected to the scrutinizing gaze of the human sciences far more than the male”. The objective is not only to provide what King (2004) calls “indisputable proof of its inherent pathology” (King 2004), but, we argue, ward off the “black male predator”. Much like a male lion asserting dominance over the territory it marks, the white woman represents this terrain of conflict in white supremacist discourse. In analyzing the misogyny white, male terrorists (“lone wolves”) such as Anders Breivik, the Norwegian writer, Audhild Skoglund, states in her book *Angry White Men* (2013) that the phenomenon is about:

women who have taken power from men, and about an idyllic past when the relations between the sexes were orderly and complementary. About the woman as a housewife and the one who will ensure that the white race does not die out by giving birth to many children. And about women who need the white man’s protection. It’s no accident: This kind of anti-feminism is very prominent within the white power movement. (Skoglund, 2013, p. 144)

Skoglund goes on to write that this misogyny is not the preserve of white supremacists alone, but prevalent in the broader society. Many of these “white, angry men” blame the changes that have taken place in Western society since the 1960s. “They claim that the white man has been relegated to the bottom of the ladder, and it is women and minorities of diverse kinds and have taken full control” (Skoglund, 2013, p. 144). Returning to Bland’s (2005) study of the evolving perception of interracial relationships in Britain since the Great War, she notes the attribution of qualities such as “naturally polygamous” and “sexually dominant” to black people. Hybridity was equated with degeneracy – scholars and public officials went so far as to warn about sexual diseases and inferiority associated with offspring of mixed races. In a strange twist, however, white women seized the freedoms accrued in the aftermath of the world wars and engaged in interracial relationships despite the censure from diverse quarters.

Today it is estimated that almost half of British-born African-Caribbean men, a third of British-born African-Caribbean women and one-fifth of Indian and African men have white partners. What a close examination of the 1920s reveals is that the slow shift towards a more racially mixed community began not with the arrival of the ship the *Windrush* in 1948, but in the years after the Great War, when certain white women made choices against the norms of respectable femininity as to their sexual partners. (Bland, 2005, p. 52)

In summary, the 1980s in Norway witnessed a media culture which caricatured black individuals and their artistic cultures. Scott Joplin, the “King of Ragtime’s” music was for instance misrepresented and relegated to brothels. Such mischaracterizations of ragtime, a genre with broad appeal across various venues, shore up racial stereotypes and degrade black artistic influences. The above is commensurate with Eldrige Cleaver’s critique pointing out how black achievements were belittled or diluted through the deployment of the prefix “Negro”. That “all” Norwegian fathers never could envision their daughters with a negeer reflects broader angst about interracial relationships that played out in the white Western imagination encapsulated in the foreboding “black peril”. Once again, we countenance the irrational fear of “black contamination” fueled by racist ideologies and pseudoscientific discourse parading as truth and warning about “degenerate hybridized offspring”. It is one thing to travel to Oslo in 1914 to gawk at black bodies and another to have “black blood” streaming through one’s veins.

We return once more to Cheryl I. Harris’ notion of whiteness as property. It appears that whites in Norway too are aware of the value imbued in

whiteness and zealously guard this whiteness for fear of dilution and devaluation. Harris (1995) mentions a study conducted in 1992 by Andrew Hacker. “The study asked a group of white students how much money they would seek if they were changed from white to black. ‘Most seemed to feel it would not be out of place to ask for \$50 million, or \$1 million for each coming black year’” (Harris, 1995, p. 286). Contrary to oppositional voices in Norway objecting to the difference in racial historical context between Norway and the USA, we argue that Norwegian “Negrophobia” did not develop in a vacuum but as one firmly situated in the crosscurrents that pollinated Western notions of racial purity. Norwegians were keenly conscious of the social currency imbued in whiteness and were motivated to protect and preserve it passionately. Having socially constructed an irrational, Manichaeian world of white versus black, it stands to reason based on this Manichaeian interpretation, that participants in Andrew Hacker’s study (Harris, 1995) demanded exorbitant sums of money to forego their whiteness and hence loss of social status and privilege. In demanding such sums, the participants were confirming the anticipated systemically-ingrained racial challenges they would encounter as newly “negrofied” individuals. The significant monetary figures, they hoped, would ameliorate the looming barrage of indignities and inequalities. In the next segment, we will consider the latter part of the citation following the fear of miscegenation:

I myself have had ample opportunity to experience Norwegians’ racial prejudice through many years as a teacher of teenagers from distant countries. The worst example was when we were chased out of one café in a well-known shopping center in Oslo. After a lot of fighting and “threats”, we were finally welcomed by a somewhat anxious proprietor, several days later. (Ola Tungesvik, *Aftenposten*, 21.06.1988)

In 2002, concerns about widespread reports of ethnic discrimination in pubs, restaurants and night clubs in Norway prompted a government inquiry into the matter. The report is published on the government of Norway’s website and in the public domain (Regjeringen.no; NOU 2002:12). Under the heading “Discrimination in Nightclubs”, the report references the Anti-Racist Center which documented increasing levels of discrimination in nightclubs. The Center enumerated a litany of pretexts nightclubs employed to deny non-whites access. Recorded examples include:

“We’ve had too many incidents with immigrants here before”.
 “Norwegian guests don’t want to go to places with many immigrants”.
 “Only members are allowed in”.

“Immigrants don’t buy anything; they just sit here”.

“There’s often trouble between immigrants and Norwegians”.

“We only let in a quota of immigrants each night” (Regjeringen.no, 2002).

The report further notes that “since 1977, only seven people have been prosecuted for racism under Section 135 (a) of the Penal Code. Six were convicted, and one was acquitted in the Supreme Court after first being convicted by the district court” (Ibid). At the time, what was called the “racism paragraph” had the following formulation:

In the same way, anyone who publicly mocks or incites hatred or contempt against a people or group characterized by a particular creed, lineage or origin in general or who threatens such a people or group or spreads false accusations against it will be punished. Complicity is punished in the same way. (Penal Code § 135 second paragraph, 9 June 1961, later revised)

In the 1980s, and commensurate with the media report about the teacher whose non-white students were denied entry to a restaurant, the media intermittently featured reports about discrimination at nightclubs. Several tests were conducted undercover with concealed cameras. Despite the overwhelming evidence uncovered by the media which was officially filed with the police, all cases were dropped. Such tests were conducted in 1988, 1991 and 1994 with the same outcome in each case. In another high-profile case years later, where Benjamin Hermansen, the son of a white Norwegian woman and a Ghanaian man, was stabbed to death in Oslo by neo-Nazis in 2001, the Police Superintendent of Oslo, Finn Abrahamsen, stated, “It is difficult to get somebody convicted on grounds of racism in Norway” (BBC, 2001).

Legal scholar and critical race theorist Derrick Bell advocated the concept of “Racial Realism” (Bell, 1995) to give expression to the need to come to terms with the enduring presence of racism as integral to social and legal structures in the USA. The concept is not to be confused with an acceptance of racial inequality. It is a pragmatic approach calling on blacks to cease from expecting the law to deliver on racial equality. “Racial equality is, in fact, not a realistic goal. By constantly aiming for a status that is unobtainable in a perilously racist America, black Americans face frustration and despair” (Bell, 1995, p. 302). The law was written by white people (mostly white middle-aged or elderly men) with this demographic in mind and, more importantly, is interpreted by this same demographic whose legal training and experience has not transcended conscious and unconscious racial bias. Too often black people

adopted optimistic beliefs about progress and redress through the legal system only to recurrently witness these idealistic views dashed. Racial realism is a call to level-headedness about the deeply entrenched nature of racism within institutions and systems.

Bell (1995) argues that racism is not a transient aberration that can be easily fixed through recourse to the law or policy changes, but a multi-headed hydra deeply ensconced in society and operates to uphold white dominance and privilege. Rejecting comforting notions of equality before the law, colorblindness and post-racialism, Bell’s racial realism calls for a mindset that acknowledges a skewed law in favor of whites – and yet defiantly fighting for racial equality.

By viewing the law – and, by extension, the courts – as instruments for preserving the status quo and only periodically and unpredictably serving as a refuge of oppressed people, blacks can refine the work of Realists. Rather than challenging the entire jurisprudential system, as the Realists did, blacks’ focus must be much narrower – a challenge to the principle of racial equality. (Bell, 1995, p. 302)

Racial equality entails the belief and adherence to the notion that all individuals possess the same rights under the law irrespective of their race, creed or gender. It comprises the view that no person should be discriminated against or disenfranchised because of their racial or ethnic background. Racial equality valorizes the worth and dignity of individuals with the corollary belief that violation of these principles must be prohibited and persecuted under a just system. There is, then, the understanding that racial inequality must be eliminated embedded in such a principle. When black individuals in Norway are given dubious reasons for being denied access to nightclubs, are hounded out of restaurants, informed that a house or job is no longer vacant on equally dubious grounds – then we are talking about racial inequality. While anecdotal, one of the authors of this book was openly told that a house contract would not have been signed had the owner known he was black. None of the authors in this book (nor do many others we know) harbor any hope in turning to the legal system for redress.

Bell (1995) recounts the hypocrisy of white America in pretending to be championing the interests of black Americans when in fact they were further undermining their rights. In the example of black American educator, author, and orator, Booker T. Washington, Bell (1995) details how Washington was regaled by white America because he discouraged blacks from pursuing racial equality with whites and rather “seek to gain acceptance in the society by becoming useful through trades and work skills developed through hard

work, persistence, and sacrifice” (Bell, 1995, p. 304). Washington’s speech was perceived as kowtowing to the ethos and dictates of white supremacy – a white call to resist racial equality ventriloquized through the mouth of one of black America’s most influential elites. Washington secretly also supported court challenges to segregation and to restrictions on voter registration. Black activists in the North, under the leadership of W. E. B. Du Bois, held a different stance and chose to establish the NAACP with the aim of advocating for political reform. In addition to Washington, Bell (1995) considers the hypocrisy of President Bush (senior) who manipulated race in the appointment of Judge Clarence Thomas and disparaged the black professor, Anita Hill. In summarizing the two cases, Bell (1995) reminds black people that their trust in America’s ability and willingness to bring about racial equality through the justice system is misplaced. Booker T. Washington and Judge Clarence Thomas are examples of *prima facie* racial uplift but are Trojan horses – or the unkindler “Uncle Toms” – in reality. Historically whites have paid lip service to the legal system’s formal and abstract rigidity, neutrality, and fairness, while in reality, it has proven to be malleable and pliable in the interests of maintaining white supremacy. The denouement was inescapable for Bell (1995, p. 306):

What was it about our reliance on racial remedies that may have prevented us from recognizing that abstract legal rights, such as equality, could do little more than bring about the cessation of one form of discriminatory conduct, which soon appeared in a more subtle though no less discriminatory form? ... Black people will never gain full equality in this country?

Despair and inertia were not an option either: “Racial Realism ... requires us to acknowledge the permanence of our subordinate status. That acknowledgment frees us to avoid despair and frees us to imagine and implement racial strategies that can bring fulfillment and even triumph” (Bell, 1995, p. 306). Racial equality, for black-Norwegians is rooted in the principles of human rights, justice, and equity. These moral values may be enshrined in Norwegian law but, as the media reports have shown, have given no reason for blacks in Norway to have faith in their judicious implementation. However, and commensurate with Bell’s Racial Realism, there is hope because the struggle is to challenge the principle of racial equality much as Martin Luther King recentered the meaning of America’s creed: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal”.

Racial equality is a universal truth rooted in philosophical principles, ethical frameworks, religious teachings, and human rights doctrines that transcend

any legal framework of a country – it is an edifice with many solid foundations. Philosophers such as Locke, Rousseau and Immanuel Kant labored theories about the inherent rights and dignity of individuals, although even these luminaries did not have black people in mind. Ethical frameworks, such as utilitarianism, deontology and virtue ethics have forwarded radical notions about the appropriate treatment of human beings in the Enlightenment era. Not least, and way before Europe imagined itself in the role of God and igniting the light of the Enlightenment that illuminated a purportedly “savage” world groping in the dark (let there be light), Middle-Eastern and Eastern religions had already proselytized diverse versions of the “Golden rule” inspiring adherents to advocate for equality and justice. Not least, those who fight for the principle of racial equality have a powerful ally in human rights doctrines such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which accord dignity and equal human rights for all members of the human family globally.

The Norwegian authorities are to be credited for the creation and maintenance of various watchdogs (e.g. Norwegian Centre Against Racism). This Center is an embodiment of Bell’s (1995) notion of Racial Realism and has done a sterling job over the past four decades. By acknowledging the reality of racism, and the risk of seeking redress through the law, proponents of racial realism, such as the Norwegian Centre Against Racism, advocate for strategies that prioritize the protection and advancement of the interests of marginalized racial groups. Hence, racial realism while acknowledging the limitations of the law hamstrung by a world designed with whites in mind and not blacks, refuses to kowtow to the status quo and embraces the struggle as a glorious and worthy cause – whatever the outcome. “We must realize, as our slave forbears did, that the struggle for freedom is, at bottom, a manifestation of our humanity which survives and grows stronger through resistance to oppression, even if that oppression is never overcome” (Bell, 1995, p. 308).

5 Neger in the 1990s – “Santa Claus: the Western Deity in White”

Can a Negro become Santa Claus? ... Any Santa Claus who manages to slide down an average Norwegian chimney would obviously look like a Negro. (26.11.97)

The epithet *neger* did not fare much better in Norway in the 1990s despite the emergence of a global zeitgeist somewhat empathetic to black-related issues embodied in Hip Hop, the Rodney King beating, and Denzel Washington’s brilliant portrayal of Malcolm X shown in cinemas in Norway. While these global

events triggered national conversations about racial identity and equality, it appears Norwegian media was oblivious to calls to countenance the shifting perceptions of racial terminology. The entrenched categories of caricature, crime, unease, racial slur and several others, persisted – a testament to the need for white supremacy to maintain the dichotomy of white versus black.

“Can a Negro become Santa Claus?” Santa Claus, as is common knowledge, is a fictive figure – a melanin-deficient creation in a white topography complete with snow, reindeer, sleigh etc. The white, bearded, rotund-bellied, well-fed Santa, always jovial, is the quintessential Christmas holiday icon of white people of European descent. It is with this backdrop in mind that the rhetorical question “Can a Negro become Santa Claus?” is asked in the Norwegian media of the 1990s. Put differently, the white imagination cannot imagine such a prospect – even in the world of fiction. A white Phantom or Tarzan in black Africa was unproblematic in the white imagination. These white crusaders were extensions of the white savior mentality engaged in the cause of civilizing the “savages” through the medium of comic books. Importantly, Santa’s mission is one of moral education: gifts were distributed as a means of reinforcing desirable values and behavior and discouraging unacceptable conduct. Santa’s gifts are deposited through chimneys hence the assumption of sturdy homes and some affluence. Santa is an American creation heavily influenced by Dutch tradition:

The name Santa Claus evolved from Nick’s Dutch nickname, Sinter Klaas, a shortened form of Sint Nikolaas (Dutch for Saint Nicholas). In 1804, John Pintard, a member of the New York Historical Society, distributed woodcuts of St. Nicholas at the society’s annual meeting. The background of the engraving contains now-familiar Santa images including stockings filled with toys and fruit hung over a fireplace. (History.com, 2010)

The entire scenario sketched above jars with the image of not only Africans in faraway Africa of the 1800s, but the reality of the black experience in Antebellum America. “Can a Negro become Santa Claus?” is the Freudian slip uncovering a fear of the usurping of white cultural hegemony.

That so many white Americans have remained invested in Santa’s racial identity betrays their commitment to whiteness as a default within American society. It also reveals a profound anxiety of, and animosity towards, depictions that would complicate the perceived authenticity of Santa’s racial hegemony. (West, 2023, p. 252)

When blacks in the USA played the role of Santa, this was fraught with many dangers. According to West (2023), in the face of bitter reality, black Santas often became targets for ruin, indicating deeper societal attitudes towards black individuals. Philemon Rastus Mercer, an elderly African American man, experienced this firsthand when his Santa Claus costume accidentally caught fire during a risky chimney descent on Christmas Eve in 1905 and was assaulted, as documented by the *New York Times*. Each mishap or chimney fall provided ammunition for white advertisers and newspaper editors to propagate fantasies of racial violence, boosting the view that black Santas were ineffective depictions for their audiences (West, 2023). This pattern highlighted a broader message: just as the black Santa could never replace the perceived authenticity of the white Santa Claus, black Americans were recurrently denied equal status to their white counterparts. Mercer himself expressed this sentiment, lamenting, “Dis Santa Claus bizness am a snare an’ a delusion ... him who is playin’ wif lies and sich things am bound ter be defiled’ (*New York Times* 1905; West, 2023, p. 257).

While the USA and Norway clearly diverge in many respects – e.g. the number of blacks in their respective territories – they unmistakably shared a common sense of disdain regarding the plausibility of a black Santa. One could argue that given the sheer numbers of Norwegian emigration to the USA between 1825–1925, when almost one-third of the population left to find better opportunities, there exists a significant cultural exchange between the two nations which might explain the shared white cultural hegemonic schema. Charles W. Mills (1997) employs the term “Racial Contract” to explain the above.

The “Racial Contract”, then, is intended as a conceptual bridge between two areas now largely segregated from each other: on the one hand, the world of mainstream (i.e., white) ethics and political philosophy, pre-occupied with discussions of justice and rights in the abstract, on the hand, the world of Native American, African, and Third and Fourth World political thought, historically focused on issues of conquest, imperialism, colonialism, white settlement, land rights, race and racism, slavery, Jim Crow, reparations, apartheid, cultural authenticity, national identity, *indigenismo*, afrocentricism, etc. (Mills, 1997, p. 4)

Commensurate with this binary, Santa Claus is part of the white side of the conceptual bridge, hence the disbelief inherent in “Can a Negro become Santa Claus?” Mills (1997, p. 51) posits that the ground zero of the racial contract is the “microspace of the body itself”. [...] the persons and subpersons,

the citizens and noncitizens, who inhabit these polities do so embodied in envelopes of skin, flesh, hair. The nonwhite body carries a halo of blackness around it which may make some whites physically uncomfortable” (Mills, 1997, p. 51). This is why the image of Santa Claus falling down a Norwegian chimney and becoming black is something so revolting and simultaneously intriguing that this conjured up apparition makes its way into one of the country’s leading daily newspapers. The transmutation of Santa, the benign carrier of white civilization’s notions of purity, affluence and generosity, assuming a black identity, evinces visceral reaction. A black Santa triggers discomfort, scoffing and tut-tutting.

The story of Santa Claus is rooted in the tradition of St. Nicholas, a Byzantine monk in 3rd century AD Turkey who went down in folklore as the embodiment of benevolence and compassion. The narrative of Santa Claus traces its origins back centuries to the figure of St. Nicholas, a monk renowned for his benevolence and compassion. Revered as a devout and generous monk, Nicholas became the stuff of legends. One story stands out: Nicholas rescued three impoverished sisters from the grueling prospect of slavery or prostitution. It is recounted that he intervened by furnishing them with dowries, enabling their marriages and averting their tragic fate.

Not surprisingly, Nicholas’ association with such acts of liberation, especially with respect to emancipating slaves, did not occur to the slaveholding class during Santa Claus celebrations in antebellum America. West (2023) notes how Santa was used to induce good behavior among slaves,

with his appearance to black folk becoming more contingent on their ability to adhere to white defined patterns of acceptable social behavior: ‘white folks would tell us if we stole chickens, eggs, ducks and things or go in the apple orchard ... Santa Claus would not come to us’.

We argue that Santa is emblematic of a distinctly Western, Christian idea of the divine: the white representative of the patriarchal godhead. Santa is “omniscient” in that he is aware of the moral conduct of children and embarks on what can be likened to a “Judgment Day” (Christmas), rewarding those who anticipate the arrival of this singular figure from the heavens. While Christ’s Parousia (second coming) transpires once, Santa reappears annually on this predetermined date “hallowed” in the Western calendar.

In addition, Santa displays the attribute of omnipresence traversing formidable distances in the clouds in his “chariot” – his legendary sleigh and reindeer. While his domain was delineated to the West in the past, his reach now

extends to the East in modern times. No doubt Santa is infinitely rich. His bottomless pockets have ensured that Christmas has never been cancelled, and he now effortlessly supplies his new flock or clientele in the East. Indeed, Santa is a boon to the purveyors of vulture capitalism. The slaves never experienced the Christmas cheer but were exploited as the demands for "King cotton" became global, leading Karl Marx to write, "But in proportion, as the export of cotton became of vital interest to these states, the over-working of the negro and sometimes the using up of his life in 7 years of labor became a factor in a calculated and calculating system ... It was now a question of production of surplus-labor itself" (Marx, 2013, p. 164).

What Santa *cannot* become (i.e. black) speaks volumes about the white Western imagination. Santa, like Superman, Batman, Spiderman, Tarzan and other superheroes, is by default white because the superpowers and moral fortitude invested in these fictitious characters embodies and must of necessity be limited to whiteness. In his theory of totemism, one of the founding fathers of sociology, Emile Durkheim, posited that societies venerated themselves through symbols such as totems. A group, tribe or nation preserve and nurture their perceived values, identity and unity through representative elements such as an animal or a plant. Rituals, proclamations and other momentous events are deliberately carried out in the presence of these totems which act as focal points for reinforcing the dignity and honor of the community. The iconic Santa Claus, Superman, Batman, Tarzan and other Western superheroes are the "totem poles" of the contemporary West. The tribe's selection of a particular animal, like a crocodile, as its totem, was more than a mere symbolic representation; it was a way for the tribe to assimilate and harness the perceived powers and attributes associated with that animal, effectively co-opting them as their own. Just as crocodiles are the powerful silent navigators of the deep, crocodiles as totems served as protectors that can help people navigate spiritual realms or overcome obstacles. Western culture elevates figures like Santa Claus and superheroes to iconic status, embodying cultural ideals and values. America's resistance to a black Santa (West, 2023) makes sense if we apply Durkheim's (2001) theory of totemism:

So, if the totem is both the symbol of god and of society, are these not one and the same? How could the group's emblem become the face of this quasi-divinity if the group and the divinity were two distinct realities? The god of the clan, the totemic principle, must therefore be the clan itself, but transfigured and imagined in the physical form of the plant or animal species that serve as totems. (Durkheim, 2001, p. 154)

We argue that Santa and the pantheon of Western superheroes fit the description of Durkheim's totemic principle. To "blacken" Santa is to commit a grave, "sacrilegious offence" against the "clan", understood as the white West. As previously argued, the totemic Santa has also been infused with quasi-divine qualities, a proxy for the divine, who is omniscient and omnipotent. The notion challenges entrenched perceptions of race and power, highlighting the intrinsic biases embedded within Western cultural narratives. Only within the framework of Western supremacy, it is suggested, can one conceive of an entity capable of transcending time and space, arbitrating between good and evil, and imposing sanctions – a role historically attributed to the West, exemplified by George W. Bush's notion of the "axis of evil" during the second Gulf War. The totem, embodied in this instance in the office of the so-called "leader of the free world", the President of the USA, sidelines the United Nations and coopts to himself the role of judge, jury, and executioner. The totems while claiming moral impeccability are simultaneously amoral – such is their sterling moral characters that these "protestant" versions of the papacy can pontificate, speak *ex cathedra* and claim infallibility all the while remaining silent on global issues of inequality. Whoever heard of a Santa, Superman or Batman brought before a court of law? Tarzan was created in 1912 and Superman in 1938 – a time when colonialism and racism held sway over much of the global South. The ills these parasitic systems were the villains and nemeses of the global South – Lex Luthor was a convenient white distraction. Through the medium of the superheroes genre, and the figure of Santa Claus, generations of children in the West have imbibed a discourse that equates altruism, kindness, bravery, fairness and moral fortitude with these white crusaders for justice. However, there has always been the "West and the rest". Seen from the perspective of the "rest", while white Santa was spreading Christmas cheer, colonialism ruthlessly plundered India for example. In his book *Inglorious Empire* Shashi Tharoor writes:

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, as the British economic historian Angus Maddison has demonstrated, India's share of the world economy was 23 per cent, as large as all of Europe put together. (It had been 27 per cent in 1700, when the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb's treasury raked in £100 million in tax revenues alone.) By the time the British departed India, it had dropped to just over 3 per cent. The reason was simple: India was governed for the benefit of Britain. Britain's rise for 200 years was financed by its depredations in India. (Tharoor, 2016, pp. 2, 3)

To dare to ask for an inventory of Santa's warehouse to ascertain how much of his goods had colonial origins would only be met with self-righteous

indignation. Western children received gifts of dubious origin gratis while those in the East were offered their own pilfered goods processed in the factories of north England for exorbitant sums. Lest we forget, a list of colonial goods includes, but is not limited to, the following: coffee, tea, spices, rice, sugar, cocoa and chocolate, and tobacco. As mentioned previously, there is the residual memory evident of goods produced through slave labor (Chapter 1) each time Norwegians mention “kolonialbutikk” [colonial store]. Certainly, these goods have always been part and parcel of the inventory that spread the Christmas cheer.

In summary, that Santa cannot be black speaks to the deeper issues of race, identity and representation in Western culture. Santa cannot be black suggests the need to cordon off this ubiquitous icon’s racial identity perpetuating the cult of white supremacy, effectively marginalizing and excluding others. In this analysis, the denial or willingness to envision Santa Claus or superheroes as black symbolizes an averseness to challenge or subvert the status quo. It echoes a broader societal reluctance to confront issues of racial inequality and the systemic biases etched within Western culture.

As was previously mentioned, the American Santa Claus of the 1800s is in actuality an extension of the Dutch Sinterklass tradition. In recent years, the depiction of Black Pete in the Netherlands has been contentious and reinforces our postulation that the tradition of Santa Claus can be usefully approached from within the lens of Émile Durkheim’s theory of totemism – a civil religion of sorts (Robert Beulah) involving the worship of symbols venerating the collective identity and societal values of the West. In the Dutch context, Black Pete serves as a totemic figure embodying Dutch cultural traditions and values. Such is the rancor fueling the racialization of Santa Claus’ black and subservient assistant that the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination produced a report urging the Netherlands to eradicate this form of racial stereotyping.

Dutch folklore states that Pete, Santa’s subordinate is dark-complexion because he enters houses through the chimney. This leaves the children to figure out why Pete has Afro hair, red lips and pristine attire – falling down a chimney hardly produces these features. Certain scholars assert that Black Pete’s appearance may stem from German mythology or European rituals where faces were blackened to resemble fearful, diabolical beings. Furthermore, there are theories about possible links to slavery drawn from parallels to portrayals of black children in historical paintings sporting similar apparel or being depicted as servants. The majority of Dutch people today dismiss claims of racism in relation to the character of Black Pete (Mesman, Janssen, & Rosmalen, 2016). This dismissal has served to polarize Dutch society with

decibel levels so high that it has become impossible to ignore. Each year appears to bring out more protests, legal battles and intense debates in the media. Children, too, exhibit awareness of Black Pete's subordinate role to Sinterklaas, often describing him as a helper or servant, with some even using the term "slave". Black Peter executes menial tasks at the orders of Santa Claus. The perpetuation of this narrative alongside the overt depiction of Black Pete in blackface has prompted many to demand an end to the tradition, but the adults' tenacity to maintain the status quo is revealing:

We further found that children associate Black Pete more with clowns than with black people, both in the sorting task (where grouping by skin color was rare), and in the labeling task (where the Black Pete – black person combination of labels was rare). This is exactly what many Dutch people who want to keep the traditional Black Pete argue: children do not see Black Pete as a regular black person. (Mesman et al., 2016, p. 10)

The counter argument of white Dutch people fighting to keep Pete black is significant. They appear to suggest that associating blackness with clowns is unproblematic further cementing the racial insensitivity (colorblindness) of whiteness. Obviously, clowns are universally acknowledged as figures of entertainment for children par excellence. However, they are often depicted as foolish and clumsy characters in whom our collective ridicule and derision is channeled. That such disdain cannot be associated with whiteness is at the heart of the issue reminiscent of "Santa cannot be black". It is disingenuous to pretend that there is no racial connotation between Black Pete and his association with prima facie "good-natured" tomfoolery. For the less disciplined, it wouldn't take much prodding to perceive this as more ammunition in the formidable, imbricated arsenal of racial insensitivity and perpetuation of harmful stereotypes. So, while Santa cannot be black, Pete must be black – in fact, his name appears to be prefixed by the premodifier "black". Santa Claus is never "white" Santa, but Pete is always Black Pete. In the silence of this colossal hypocrisy, the voice of the child in Hans Christian Andersen's fable *The Emperor's New Clothes* pointing out that the emperor – i.e. Dutch adults refusing to see the self-evident – is naked, is deafening.

The debates revolving around Black Pete echo the conflicts present in discussions about race and representation in the United States and elsewhere. Both contexts grapple with the legacy of colonialism, slavery, and white supremacy, which are reflected and perpetuated through cultural symbols, icons and traditions. Durkheim's theory of totemism provides a framework for understanding the symbolic significance of figures like Black Pete and Santa

Claus within their respective cultural contexts, highlighting the complex interplay between tradition, identity, and power dynamics. Not least, Charles W. Mills (1997) suggestion that whites do not recognize the white world they have created is emblematic of the Dutch context in particular where whites appear offended and puzzled at the notion that Black Pete is racist.

Thus, in effect, on matters related to race, the Racial Contract prescribes for its signatories an inverted epistemology, an epistemology of ignorance, a particular pattern of localized and global cognitive dysfunctions (which are psychologically and socially functional), producing the ironic outcome that whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made. (Mills, 1997, p. 18)

Our humble mission, however feeble, is to mitigate this misrecognition which is another avatar of colorblindness. Mills (1997, p. 19) elaborates: "White misunderstanding, misrepresentation, evasion, and self-deception on matters related to race are among the most pervasive mental phenomena of the past few hundred years, a cognitive and moral economy psychically required for conquest, colonization, and enslavement". In what follows, we submit some recommendations in regard to steps the education sector can take in order to speak truth to power by equipping schools, teachers and higher education with a vocabulary and strategies that sensitize students to the machinations of racial epithets and ways of nurturing an empowered citizenry who are social agents of change.

6 What Can Schools and Higher Education Do?

The current zeitgeist in Norway regarding racism is elusive since Norwegians do not see color, only individuals, or, if one decides to mention the "taboo" word, it is best to subsume it under the more palatable and universal "bullying". The national psyche inclines towards the collective – "*alle skal være med*" [roughly, everyone must participate/be treated equally/be lifted up]. Hence suffering and pain must not be individualized or monopolized by any group. It must be seen through the eyes of the collective under the category of bullying. A postgraduate student in one of the universities in Oslo who wished to focus on racism in school was advised to instead consider bullying with racism being an offshoot. In this manner, the toxicity of racism is diluted and continued to live on unchallenged. As such, it follows that there is a clear need for open dialogue. Schools, teachers and higher education must

establish safe spaces where all feel comfortable in sharing their experiences and perspectives. Empathy, listening and eagerness to promote understanding and tolerance are salutary.

The critical pedagogue, Henry Giroux, rejects the approach to pedagogy as “merely a skill, technique, or disinterested method” (Giroux, 2011, p. 3), one in which young people “were at one time and are now again shamelessly reduced to ‘cheerful robots’ through modes of pedagogy that embrace an instrumental rationality in which matters of justice, values, ethics, and power are erased from any notion of teaching and learning” (Ibid). The term critical thinking has been inserted in the new Norwegian curriculum (2020). The architects no doubt look with alarm at this emerging brave new world of “fake news”, “deepfake” and “artificial intelligence” and countered by “critical thinking”. While laudable, what use is the term if there is little appetite for grappling with “uncomfortable” terms such as “neger”? Our informants have spoken of bystanders standing idly by and not disrupting racial bullying. This can be put down to the confusion prevalent regarding racism or old-fashioned self-preservation. Students, teachers and other stakeholders in education must receive intervention training to empower students to speak out against racial bullying when they witness it. Teaching strategies for carefully intervening or reporting incidents is salutary.

Schools and higher education could also empower student advocates with a mandate to combat racial bullying and promote social change. Class representatives are an established part of classroom cultures playing vital roles in a proud democratic tradition in Norway. Rather than leave the work of anti-racism to teachers, the formation of student-led organizations who are sensitized to and committed to fighting for diversity, equity and inclusion, can be more effective as peer support groups. The power of positive role models who are black is salient. Such role models, footballers, athletes, musicians, politicians, etc., are significant voices whose personal experiences resonate with youth. Indeed, it was black Norwegian sports figures such as the footballer John Carew and the sprinter John Ertzgaard who objected to the use of neger and engaged in a dialogue that resulted in the cessation of this epithet in polite discourse. Schools and higher education can invite guest speakers, host cultural events, and showcase achievements of individuals from marginalized communities to promote inclusivity and celebrate diversity. Individuals and organizations with cultural capital in the machinations of racism can help students organize events, workshops, and campaigns addressing racial issues. This is commensurate with Giroux’s theory of critical pedagogy which resists the silencing of the oppressed.

I develop a theory of critical pedagogy that provides a range of critiques against a traditional pedagogy operating under the sway of technical mastery, instrumental logic and various other fundamentalisms that acquire their authority by erasing any trace of subaltern histories, class struggles, and racial and gender inequalities and injustices. (Giroux, 2011, p. 5)

Combating racial bullying without involving guardians and parents will only bring limited success. Sadly, some children imbibe a vocabulary of racial bullying at home. In one instance, a child whose racist epithets triggered a meeting between a headmistress, several teachers and parents confessed to having learned the behavior at home. Subsequent meetings with the parent, while productive, ultimately led to the parent changing address. This bespeaks the need to provide resources and guidance on how families can support their children and contribute to a positive school climate. We suggest a radical rethink that explores ways of educating parents along with their children. In his radical and now classic book *Deschooling Society* (1970) Ivan Illich irreverently critiques the notion that school is the sole arena where learning occurs:

A second major illusion on which the school system rests is that most learning is the result of teaching. Teaching, it is true, may contribute to certain kinds of learning under certain circumstances. But most people acquire most of their knowledge outside school, and in school only insofar as school, in a few rich countries, has become their place of confinement during an increasing part of their lives. (Illich, 1970, p. 12)

Following Illich (1970), schools and other institutions of learning must explore alternative arenas where parents can learn or “unlearn” racism. Significantly, in his book with the title “Can We Unlearn Racism?” (Boersema, 2022) finds that the analytical concept of “peer culture” helps better understand racism as a process constantly produced, mediated, and unlearned among white youth in South Africa.

White identity politics has succeeded color blindness as the new racism in South Africa. Its politics is marked by the strategic politicization of White identity and the adoption of the language of marginalized communities. White youth use White identity politics to endorse multiculturalism and a limited form of antiracism, while positioning White South Africans as the new victims in South Africa. (Boersema, 2022, p. 199)

The above is crucial. We argue that in countries where white populations are undergoing either a seismic demographic shift – what Kaufmann (2018) calls “Whiteshift” – or seeing increasing numbers of nonwhites in their neighborhoods, similar strategies as the one outlined in South Africa by Boersema (2022) are proliferating. This is perhaps most demonstrable in the white sense of “victimhood” latent in slogans like “All lives matter” and “Make America great again”. Rather than vilify and dismiss these grievances, we argue that educators must be willing to take risks in the spirit of Paolo Freire’s pedagogy of love and hope. Such a risk-taking pedagogy will seek to reach out to parents in forums that transcend the boundaries of school. To perceive liberation from racial bullying narrowly through schooling is an illusion reminiscent of Illich’s (1970, p. 47) critique that “Many self-styled revolutionaries are victims of school. They see even ‘liberation’ as the product of an institutional process. Only liberating oneself from school will dispel such illusions”.

Applied to our context, if racial bullying is to be relegated to the dustbin of history, recruiting guardians and parents in “deschooled” settings is vital. By this we mean a milieu where all feel comfortable and responsible enough to engage in the task of unlearning racism. Way before the advent of the internet, Ivan Illich envisioned a community which self-organized to solve problems; people who “are able to meet around a problem chosen and defined by their own initiative” (Illich, 1970, p. 19). In the spirit of Vygotsky’s “knowledgeable other”, schools and institutions of higher learning can play the role of facilitators – scaffoldings that create environments where students, teachers, parents and the wider community together become a “network or service which gave each man the same opportunity to share his current concern [racial bullying in this instance] with others motivated by the same concern” (Illich, 1970, p. 19).

The Ali Farah Case

Blame Game and Reverse Racism

1 Park Assault and Paramedic Neglect

The case of Ali Farah, a Somali-born Norwegian citizen who was violently assaulted in Oslo in 2007 and later neglected by paramedics, opens a window into the ways different countries and periods handle racial issues. Farah was viciously attacked in Sofenberg Park, and despite his severe injuries, including a brain hemorrhage, paramedics refused to transport him, making derogatory remarks and leaving him in the park. This gross neglect ignited a national debate on systemic biases in Norway's healthcare system.

In comparing Norway to countries like the United States, stark differences emerge. The United States has a deeply ingrained history of racism, from slavery and segregation to contemporary issues of police brutality and racial profiling. High-profile incidents, such as the cases of Rodney King, Eric Garner, and George Floyd, have brought these issues to the fore, creating a sustained national and international discourse on racial injustice. The U.S. has a long history of civil rights activism, making the struggle against racism a prominent and ongoing battle. Norway, in contrast, has a more recent and smaller scale encounter with racial diversity and the associated issues. The country's relatively homogeneous past means that racial issues have not been as visible or as widely discussed for as long. The Ali Farah case, while shocking and significant within Norway, represents one of the fewer high-profile instances of racial bias compared to the multitude of cases that have occurred in the U.S. Nonetheless, Farah's case brought to light the underlying racial prejudices that can permeate Norwegian society, particularly within emergency medical services.

Despite these differences, there are significant similarities in how racial biases manifest across various societies. Both in Norway and in the U.S., instances of racial bias often involve a failure of systemic structures to protect and serve individuals of marginalized communities adequately. In both countries, emergency responders' biases – whether conscious or unconscious – can severely impact the quality of care that racial minorities receive. The refusal of paramedics to assist Farah and the derogatory remarks made, reflect similar patterns of racial prejudice seen in many high-pressure and public-facing roles in the U.S. The behavior of the Norwegian paramedics can be partially

explained through studies on implicit racial bias, which show that such biases are deeply embedded in the human brain. Jennifer L. Eberhardt's research on unconscious biases reveals that individuals often make rapid judgments based on racial stereotypes, which can significantly affect their actions and decisions. This insight is crucial to understanding why the paramedics might have dismissed Farah's urgent need for care, despite the apparent severity of his injuries. Similar studies in the U.S. have shown that racial biases in healthcare settings can lead to disparities in treatment and outcomes for racial minorities.

Furthermore, the systemic nature of racial biases in both countries is evident in the institutional responses to these incidents. In Norway, the initial denial by Ullevål University Hospital and later reversal to issue an apology mirrors the defensive stances often seen in U.S. institutions accused of racial misconduct. Whether it is law enforcement or healthcare, the tendency to minimize or dismiss allegations of racism is a common thread, highlighting the ongoing struggle to achieve accountability within these systems. When examining the broader socio-political context, Norway's handling of the Ali Farah case also reflects the influence of political rhetoric on racial issues. Similar to the populist tendencies seen in the U.S., where political leaders might exploit racial fears for electoral gains, Norway's political landscape at the time saw debates on immigration and ethnicity intersecting with the Farah case. This environment can exacerbate racial tensions and influence public sentiment, just as it does in America.

In terms of emotional and psychological impact, the ramifications for individuals in both countries are severe. Farah's case, much like those in the U.S., instilled fear within minority communities, highlighting their vulnerability and the precariousness of their rights and protection. The concept of "racial battle fatigue", as articulated by scholars, captures the chronic stress and health impacts of living under constant racial scrutiny and experiencing repeated microaggressions. In summation, while Norway and the U.S. may differ in the scale and history of their racial issues, the case of Ali Farah underscores a universal continuum of racial bias that affects marginalized communities globally. Both societies struggle with systemic prejudices that manifest in critical sectors like healthcare, and both face challenges in addressing and rectifying these deep-seated issues. Farah's story is a poignant reminder of the pervasive and insidious nature of racism, irrespective of the geographical and cultural context.

Ali Farah (37-year-old male) was a Somali-born Norwegian citizen who on the 6th of August 2007 was the victim of a violent physical assault in Sofienberg Park in Oslo. The perpetrator was a young African man with a

criminal background whom Farah chided for endangering children in the park. When he asked some men playing football near several small children lying on the grass to move, Farah was assaulted. He hit his head on the asphalt and lay there bleeding from his face and the back of his head. Farah was accompanied by his partner Mari Kohinoor Nordberg who came to Norway at the age of three and was adopted from Bangladesh.

When the ambulance arrived at the scene, they refused to take the man with them because he was restless and had urinated on himself. Several witnesses to the violent episode say that the ambulance personnel called the man “You swine” and refused to take him with them. They have now been taken out of service. (Thorenfeldt, 2007)

Farah sustained severe injuries, including a brain hemorrhage, and underwent surgery before being discharged from the hospital after being in a coma for three days. Due to the severe head injuries, Farah was incontinent and urinated on himself. The ambulance staff reacted with contempt for Farah and decided to leave him in the park rather than take him in the ambulance to the hospital. According to one source,

The ambulance arrived at the park at 17:13 and left again, without Farah, at 17:20. After seven minutes ... When witnesses called 113 and asked them to send another ambulance, they were refused. As a result, his partner Nordberg and others had to get hold of a taxi themselves, drag Farah into it and drive him to the emergency room in Storgata. (Herbjørnsrud, 2023)

The assailant was later convicted, but allegations of racism persisted due to derogatory remarks made by the ambulance workers and suspicions of bias in their actions. The Norwegian State’s Health Inspectorate instituted supervisory proceedings against Ullevål University Hospital after the paramedics failed to take Farah to the emergency unit. Two nurses and one assistant nurse who happened to be present in the park, claimed that the paramedics did not examine Farah and did not register their assessment of his conditions before abandoning him (The Norwegian Health Authority, 2009). Furthermore,

It is also recorded in the ambulance record that: “We are of the opinion that the man is using drugs”. However, no information was obtained about any drug use by those present in the park. (The Norwegian Health Authority, 2009)

In the aftermath of this incident which was dubbed “The Ambulance Case”, speculation arose that the paramedics were spurred by racism. The case of Ali Farah has become a lightning rod for discussions about racism in emergency medical response in Norway. The disturbing desertion by ambulance drivers despite his urgent need for medical care had ignited a nationwide conversation about systemic biases in healthcare. Although Ullevål University Hospital escaped criticism, both ambulance drivers were heavily reprimanded by The Norwegian Health Authority in April 2008 for their reckless actions, which were deemed inconsistent with the standards of careful assistance.

In January 2009, The Norwegian Health Authority upheld the decision after an appeal from one of the drivers, citing violations of the Healthcare Personnel Act, particularly regarding communication with the patient, relatives, bystanders, and the police, and displaying negligence of care during the execution of their duties. Both ambulance workers were fined by the Special Unit for Police Matters, although one of them was acquitted in the District Court. The Attorney General dropped the fine for the other driver. In January 2009, The Norwegian Health Authority stated in its warning decision that there were “no clear indications that the breaches of proper and careful healthcare were due to racism”. One of the ambulance workers, Erik Schjenken, later filed a lawsuit against *Dagbladet* and was awarded one million kroner in damages in May 2011 for defamation. However, the compensation was reduced to 200,000 kroner after an appeal process.

Ali Farah passed away in August 2023 at the age of 53. Over 7000 news media articles had been penned since the day he was assaulted in 2007. When asked whether the same could happen today, Hatem Ben Mansour, the leader of the Norwegian Center Against Racism answers in the affirmative because the same structures are still in place. “If you criticize someone for possibly being racist or for the existence of racist structures, you immediately get a response about emotions. That there’s nothing concrete. It’s like attacking goodness right away when talking about racism” (Aslam, 2023). While not comparable to the USA, France or England due to Norway’s small population, Mansour states that “when you see people not being taken in the ambulance, as in the Farah case, it creates fear among the melanin-rich population. This is because it could happen to you even though such incidents are not frequent, but the possibility exists simply because of racism” (Aslam, 2023). In eulogizing Farah, Herbjørnsrud (2023) asks the poignant question:

Ali Farah fell asleep quietly after suffering another epileptic fit the day before. He developed epilepsy and psychosis after the brain damage he suffered during the infamous August day in Sofienbergparken 16 years

ago. Could it have turned out differently for Farah if he had been better looked after in the Norwegian healthcare system, both in August 2007 and in the years afterwards?

2 Racial Profiling in Medical Response

Your tragedy, on the other hand, is downplayed by those responsible: No one will admit to having a different stamp in their pocket, no one will admit how they put on glasses right away they see you, glasses that enable them to read your place and identity on your forehead. Ullevål Hospital said that the treatment you had received in the park did not indicate racism, in the same way as the police believed that the stranglehold on Obiora had nothing to do with racism. (Alghasi, 2007; Morgenbladet, 17.08.2007)

What is the mechanism behind the broad social categorizations we humans are susceptible to? This is precisely what Professor Jennifer L. Eberhardt's research, encapsulated in her book entitled *Biased: Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice That Shapes What We See, Think, and Do* (2019) grapples with. According to Eberhardt (2019), the brain endeavors to economize the overload of stimuli by "making judgments more quickly and efficiently by instinctively relying on patterns that seem predictable" (Eberhardt, 2019, p. 24). The drawback of this process of economization is that the labor required for understanding and empathizing with those who do not look like us is sacrificed. The brain's predilection for a quick verdict dampens sensitivity. One of the most astounding and unnerving discoveries from Eberhardt's (2019) studies is the following:

For example, in one study I conducted with Brent Huges, Nicholas Camp, and other colleagues at Stanford, we found that white participants exhibited less brain activity in brain areas that specialize in processing faces when shown black faces than when shown white faces. I was struck by the dampened response to black faces because it suggests the brain registered those faces in categorical terms. (Eberhardt, 2019, p. 25)

Neuroimaging studies are now uncovering the machinations of how our racial biases can be mapped onto the brain and – the brain tunes into our racial prejudices. The fusiform face area (FFA) is an area in the brain which concerns itself chiefly with the processing and recognition of faces. Located in the fusiform gyrus, it is a part of the temporal lobe. Among others, it plays

an important role in the quick and automatic recognition of faces, as well as in differentiating between different faces. The citation from Eberhardt (2019, p. 25) provides a window into the mysterious and tenacious phenomenon of racial bias, especially in regard to the rapid and automatic tendency of the brain to identify and distinguish between faces. Referring to another study conducted by researchers at the University of Texas in El Paso, Eberhardt (2019, p. 25) writes that the Latino participants were shown computer-generated faces which were racially ambiguous.

The researchers displayed the same faces with hairstyles typically worn by African Americans or hairstyles worn by Latinos. When asked later which faces they recognized, the participants were better able to remember the ones with the Latino hairstyles – those faces that they perceived as belonging to their own group. (Eberhardt, 2019, p. 25)

Applying these groundbreaking findings to the case of Ali Farah, an intriguing prospect arises. Could we be speaking about processes in the brains of the paramedics which are barely perceptible because they are deeply embedded in the fusiform face area of the brain and make racially based decisions so fast that the paramedics may not even consciously recognize their own biases? Eberhardt's (2019) study raises important questions about the extent to which unconscious processes shape our behaviors and judgments, particularly in high-pressure settings such as policing and emergency medical care. The above is by no means an attempt to mitigate or eliminate the culpability of first responders.

This hypothesis, when applied to the case of Ali Farah, holds some promise in revealing the potential cognitive mechanisms underlying such biased behavior. We must keep in mind that there were no verbal utterances or exchanges at any time which were racist in nature on the part of the ambulance drivers, and yet their demeanor and desertion of Ali Farah, who without doubt was in a critical condition in the park, left little doubt in the public's mind that this was a racially motivated act. This subtle racism is what Alghasi (2007) alludes to when he writes: "no one will admit how they put on glasses right away they see you, glasses that enable them to read your place and identity on your forehead". What were the particular kind of "glasses" the paramedics put on when they approached the fallen and bloodied Ali Farah in the park?

Following Eberhardt (2019), there is the possibility that their brains would have exhibited reduced activity when assessing a black face compared with a white one. There are a number of other important considerations we must add to the calculus: (1) Sofienberg Park is also frequented by substance abusers

and petty criminals (2) In his early twenties, one of the ambulance-drivers was associated with the Nazi Boot Boys, according to the daily national newspaper *VG* (30.08.2007), and (3) a few days later, another newspaper, *Nettavisen*, interviewed a former ambulance driver at the same hospital (Ullevål) and wrote, “The man was employed at the Ambulance Department at Ullevål University Hospital for a long period, and believes that many of his former colleagues had racist attitudes ... “I have witnessed racist comments about work-related incidents in the break room” (*Nettavisen*, Paust, 10.08. 2007). There is no hard evidence to say that the factors enumerated above were instrumental in the drivers’ decision to refuse to abandon Farah but neither can one dismiss the possibility that these factors, when combined with Eberhardt’s theory on reduced brain activity when processing black faces, may have influenced the paramedics’ dereliction of duty. Accommodating such an expanded perspective opens up for a more nuanced analysis that acknowledges the probable interplay of various factors, including implicit biases, social dynamics, and personal histories, in shaping the paramedics’ actions.

The above indicates that the brain classifies faces along racial lines, which can lead to warped views and judgments. In the context of the paramedics’ refusal to treat Ali Farah, despite his unmistakable need for medical aid, Eberhardt’s (2019) research helps elucidate how racial predispositions might have influenced the paramedics’ decision-making process. As several editorials and opinion pieces pouring in in the aftermath of the Ali Farah incident also noted, there were strong reasons to suspect the paramedics conflated the black skin of Ali Farah with the park’s ambience of petty criminals and substance abusers. In other words, Farah like countless other blacks was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Black people have coined terms such as “driving while black” and “travelling while black” – Farah’s was a case of “needing medical attention while black”. These phrases highlight the persistent nature of racial discrimination and bias, exemplifying how black individuals often face heightened scrutiny, suspicion, and mistreatment in countless facets of daily life, including mundane activities like driving or traveling. Eberhardt’s (2019) research found that the neurons of white participants responded vigorously to a series of different white faces, but diminished intensity when the faces were the same white ones – what is referred to as repetition suppression. In a puzzling twist, she found that white participants neurons did not fire vigorously even when they saw new, hence different, black faces.

What is remarkable is that we observed repetition suppression even in response to black faces that the participants had never seen before. Although we were exposing the participants to faces of different black

individuals one at a time, the white study participants appeared to be processing the faces categorically, as though they were all the same stimulus. (Eberhardt, 2019, p. 26)

The conclusion: “We reserve our precious cognitive resources for those who are ‘like us’” (Eberhardt, 2019, p. 26). Working on this premise, several aspects of the Farah case would make sense. Repetition suppression – seeing a black face would suppress the cognitive resources required in ascertaining the facts around the circumstances. This is evident in several of the details: the police who were on the scene made no effort to apprehend the assailant, nurses who were eyewitnesses claimed that the ambulance drivers were disinterested in the information they had to share, and even Ullevål Hospital, the employers of the ambulance drivers, initially put out a statement that all routines had been followed and they did not regret the decision to abandon Farah in the park. Not long after, the hospital came with the following apology reported in the newspaper *Dagbladet*:

Today, the management at Ullevål University Hospital acknowledges that wrong judgements were made when paramedics refused to take injured Ali Haji Mohamed Farah (37) from Sofienbergparken on 6 August 2007. When we now look back at what happened, it is obvious that he should have been taken directly to Ullevål by the ambulance, says deputy managing director at the hospital, Erik Hope to *Dagbladet.no*. He explains that the hospital realized that incorrect assessments had been made when they understood that Farah had a brain hemorrhage. In the past, they have denied that wrong assessments were made. (Akkouh, *Dagbladet*, 10.07.2007)

The corpus of literature on race and racism has been burgeoning over the last few decades. Eberhardt’s research is a welcome addition from the realm of neuroimaging. It is clear that it will take a multifaceted approach to not only understand but keep abreast of the shape-shifting nature of racism. Indeed, if ever a case challenged the image of Norway as a nation untouched by the hydra-headed creature called systemic racism, it was the Ali Farah case. The case triggered soul-searching in every department of the government. Ministers appeared to outdo themselves in the hunt for racists in the system. The Minister for Inclusion back then, Bjarne Håkon Hanssen declared an investigation of public agencies to ascertain whether racism was structurally embedded in official institutions.

It is important not to limit the investigation to just the police and ambulance. I know that many people experience problems in the agencies that are under me. Among other things, I know that many people find the social welfare offices difficult to deal with. (Thorenfeldt, *Dagbladet*, 09.08.2007)

Echoing Bonilla-Silva's concept of "racism without racists" (2003), Eberhardt's (2019) theory of unconscious or implicit racial bias sheds light on one of the most bedeviling social ills of our time: racism. "Eberhardt addresses how racial bias is not the fault of or restricted to a few "bad apples", but is present at all levels of society, in media, education, and business ... racial bias is a human problem – one that all people can play a role in solving" (Eberhardt, 2019, cover jacket flap). She refers to Arthur Miller's novel "Focus" (1945) as an example of the power of social judgments that flow from categorization to not only influence "how we see others but how we perceive ourselves" (Eberhardt, 2019, p. 29). The novel explores themes of antisemitism and social injustice in the USA during World War II. The timorous protagonist Lawrence Newman is an accountant living in Brooklyn who is afflicted by a sudden onset of a condition called "accidental myopia" – while Newman is shortsighted, there is the allusion to ethical shortsightedness manifested in his complacency toward the anti-Jew and anti-black sentiments around him. His affliction distorts faces that are not stereotypically "Aryan" features. It all comes to a head when, paradoxically, the very same glasses his boss punitively told him to wear because he hired a Jew, make Lawrence resemble a Jew. This results in a Kafkaesque situation Newman transforming into a bigoted antisemite through whose actions, goaded on by his community, the theme of racism's destructive nature, and the importance of confronting one's own bigotry, are explored.

The novel shows the power of the gaze of others to define how you're seen in the world; it can shape the scope of your life and influence how you see yourself. But the story also illustrates the redemptive power of personal connections to break through the bias that categorization seeds. In the end, Newman's experience forces him to develop a nuanced understanding of and appreciation for Jewish identity ... and thus breaks free from the narrow, negative imagery that had begun to define him. (Eberhardt, 2019, p. 30)

However, Newman's trajectory toward healing and restoration could not have occurred without the involuntary ascription of "Jewishness" to his own,

until then “Aryan” self-perception. The question becomes: how can individuals break free from implicit racial bias without extraordinary circumstances – whether it be the fictional Lawrence’s experience or the non-fictional ambulance drivers in the Farah case – enforcing a reckoning with racial bigotry? We argue this cannot be a task for schools and educational institutions alone, although we will hazard some recommendations for this sector as educators ourselves. We are reminded of the aptness of Bonilla-Silva’s contention that “Accordingly, racism is systemic because it incorporates *all* actors into the game. We are all participants because we are racialized subjects, but also because we act *racially* in conscious and unconscious ways” (Bonilla-Silva, 2022, p. 834).

One way to drive home the urgency of grappling with racism in the medical profession is to consider a growing, inverse trend: the “browning” of the medical professions in the West, including Norway. What if these brown doctors refused to treat white, racially abusive patients? This is purely hypothetical as we are aware that even in the UK, Canada and USA, which have seen a substantial rise in the numbers of non-white and immigrant doctors, for instance, there are complaints of racism levelled against patients. For instance, in Canada, Vogel (2018) writes under the headline “Doctors on their own when dealing with racism from patients”:

Doctors who aren’t white often face racism at work, but there’s little recourse when they do. Medical regulators, professional organizations, schools and institutions don’t often have policies and protocols to guide or protect targeted doctors. “Institutions would rather just deal with it individually and quickly, trying to avoid any litigious situations”, says Wieman, president of the Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada. Sometimes, “your colleagues and the administrative structure are not really that supportive or culturally safe, either”. (Vogel, 2018, p. 1118)

Norway’s national flagship broadcaster NrK ran a disturbing headline in 2021: “Young doctors in Norway experience ethnic discrimination at work”. The report sheds light on widespread ethnic discrimination reported by young doctors from minority backgrounds. Seen in conjunction with the Ali Farah case, there is some cause for pessimism given the rise in the numbers of minorities in the medical profession since 2007. The doctors in the study report being mocked, stereotyped and their qualifications disregarded or questioned. One respondent, born and bred in Norway, stated that she had never experienced much racism in Norway until she became a doctor. She went on to state, “We also have patients who only want to be treated by Norwegian ethnic doctors. If there is no emergency, we have to accommodate their wishes” (NrK, 2021).

Assumptions about Muslims being terrorists and men of certain ethnicities being labeled as criminals, were also mentioned in the study. A young black doctor reported overhearing two nurses use racist language to refer to him:

A young doctor on duty who works in Northern Norway tells of an incident when he was a student and had practice at a hospital in Eastern Norway. "I spent extra time on a patient's medical record and sat in a corner by myself. Then I heard two nurses talking about me, and one wondered what was taking so long. Then the other answered: 'Oh, it's that nigger who has no idea what he's doing'". The young man says that he was shocked and very sad, but that he did not dare to say anything to the nurses. (NrK, 2021)

Additionally, these junior doctors from minority backgrounds did not report these microaggressions for fear of repercussions as many were in vulnerable rotation shifts with little autonomy desperate to get their medical license. This parallels the challenges faced by Ali Farah and his partner in seeking accountability for the racial profiling he endured, highlighting the need for systemic changes to ensure accountability and support for victims of discrimination. When allegations of racism emerge, the institutional response often mirrors the retreat of a turtle into its protective shell – marked by denial, defensiveness, and sometimes even the redirection of blame onto the victim – rather than acknowledging the systemic presence of racial prejudice. Rather than an inversion of the facts, what is required is an unconditional *mea culpa* which finds illustration in the testimony of the aforementioned retired ambulance driver, who corroborated the pervasive dissemination of racist ideologies within his former cohort at Ullevål Hospital.

3 The White Architecture of the Mind

sv [Socialist Left Party] leader Kristin Halvorsen [Finance Minister at the time] believes it is completely unacceptable that a person is treated in the way witnesses and photos from mobile phones have shown. "We have to ask ourselves: Would this have happened to a white man in Frognerparken? The answer is: Probably not!" (NTB, 09.09.2007)

Kristin Halvorsen, the leader of the Socialist Left Party, was Finance Minister in a coalition government in 2007 when the Ali Farah case occurred. The Frognerparken she refers to in her quote is located in the affluent district of Oslo as

opposed to Sofienbergparken which is a more socio-economically challenged part of Oslo, and where Farah was abandoned by the ambulance drivers. Collins and Jun (2017) operate with the overarching term “white architecture of the mind” to capture the nature matrix-like, capillary nature of white supremacy and privilege that goes beyond systemic racism and even global realities. Using the analogy of “thinking fast and slow”, they point to the rapid and automatic way in which the brain responds to “seemingly” easy problems such as 2+2 without exerting much effort. In this sense, their approach has parallels with Eberhardt’s (2019) neurological images which confirm racial implicit bias – the white brain falls into the “indolent” habit of conserving cognitive energy with respect to black faces.

The white architecture of the mind is a term and an analogy to highlight that the mind is a result of a set of blueprints, constructions, walls, doors, windows, and pathways that influence and predispose individuals to react based on a systemic logic that was socially constructed. Put differently, we use the term to indicate the individual actions, choices, behaviors, and attitudes that are guided by a socially constructed system that predisposes these attitudes and grants privileges and accessibilities to core members of a dominant group. (Collins & Jun, 2017, p. 6)

As a subset of the architecture of the mind, the authors coin the term “white out” which, akin to a snow blizzard that reduces visibility to zero, refers to white attempts to deny or silence the experience of non-whites in order to privilege white hegemonic definitions of reality. “The degree to which an experience can be denied creates room for a dominant conception to be defined as reality” (Collins & Jun, 2017, p. 2). In her statement, “We have to ask ourselves: Would this have happened to a white man in Frognerparken? The answer is: Probably not!” (NTB, 09.09.2007), Halvorsen demonstrates an understanding of the machinations of the white architecture of the mind. Put differently, Halvorsen insinuates that the ambulance drivers were guided by a cognitive and emotional schema that predisposed them to approach Farah hesitantly because of his skin color. As a black man, an entire cornucopia of “blueprints, constructions, walls, doors, windows, and pathways” (Collins & Jun, 2017, p. 6) militated against Farah. Lamentably, for Farah, the action of urinating near the paramedics, who were already predisposed to seek confirmation of bias, took precedence over considerations of upholding the Hippocratic oath or other forms of medical ethics to which they were obligated. Indeed, this was the justification offered by the drivers in response to allegations of abandonment:

When the seriously injured Ali stood up and urinated on the driver's legs and on the ambulance car, he committed two offences, according to the ambulance driver: He urinated in a public place. He used violence against a public servant. Therefore, they believed that Ali was out of order and a safety risk, not a man they intended to take to the emergency room. (VG, 18.08.2007)

One cannot overstate the fact that Farah's injuries to the brain induced his incontinence. Mads Gilbert, who at the time was professor of emergency medicine and head of the ambulance service at UNN, reprimanded the drivers in the media stating, "The fact that Ali urinated on himself and the ambulance, should have led the suspicion to a head injury, because it is not unusual when you lose consciousness" (Nordlys, 14.08.2007). Not least, Mads Gilbert, who is also well known for his courageous pronouncements and stance in regard to Palestinian victimhood and suffering in Gaza, went on to assert:

This head injury treatment is against all applicable guidelines. The Obiora case and the Ali case only show one thing: If you are colored, the chances are unfortunately high that you will not receive the same emergency medical treatment as if you were a white Norwegian. (Nordlys, 14.08.2007)

Gilbert did not mince his words when he implicated prominent politicians for setting a bad example in creating a climate where racism proliferates in Norway:

Among other things, Gilbert accuses the politicians, especially Ap [Labor Party] and Frp [Progress Party], for having contributed to such "dark, murky discrimination" being possible. We can thank key politicians in both Ap and Frp who show clear xenophobic attitudes in public. They are people in power who constantly make people who are not white Norwegians suspicious. Such attitudes are contagious, says Gilbert. (Nordlys, 14.08.2007)

The political theorist, Ernesto Laclau (2005), employed the term "chain of equivalences" in his study of populism. Populists are adept at identifying and marshaling a host of generally diverse and unrelated demands and grievances which they then link together under a common signifier or symbol, forming a cohesive political identity or movement. These demands become equivalent or analogous in the eyes of the populace, despite their inherent differences.

Laclau's privileging of rhetoric and discourse in political rallying at the expense of Marx's class relations and material conditions has been critiqued but remains a valuable tool for understanding the dynamics of populism. Elections were around the corner, at the time of the Farah case and the populist Progress Party was positioning itself by playing on the usual atavistic fears of the "black and brown peril". The novelty was the Labor Party, generally seen to be more left wing and popular with immigrants, engaged in a strategy of competing for voters with the Progress Party by adopting the "chain of equivalences" tactic.

Four years prior to the murderous terrorist actions of Anders Breivik, himself with former connections to the Progress Party, the Labor Party appeared to embark on a new strategy as it was seen as implicated in "opening the sluice gates" for Muslims and immigrants to "flood" the country. The Labor Party now took a page out of the "chain of equivalences" (Laclau, 2005) theory: issues like unemployment, immigration, and crime were woven into a single narrative, presenting them as interconnected problems caused by a corrupt elite or an external threat. Hence, Farah's plight must also be seen in light of the brewing toxicity of political expediency – Farah was caught in the political crossfire of the chain of equivalence; a vortex which was to see its apotheosis on the fateful day 22 July 2011.

Collins and Jun (2017, p. 19) write about how whites often feel a need to respond to the racialized pain of people of color "with their own stories of hurt, pain, suffering, and loss". In so doing, the aim is to delegitimize the pain of people of color and hence perpetuate the status quo of white supremacy. "White pain is a pattern of how white folks either unwittingly or with passive aggressive defense strategies place their own pain in the foreground of a discussion to the exclusion and erasure of pain that racialized others face" Collins and Jun (2017, p. 19). The ambulance drivers were more concerned with Farah's incontinence which was an affront to their dignity – Farah had violated their dignity. At the time they forwarded these "defenses", it was common knowledge that Farah's head injuries denied him the faculty of self-control. Even the hospital which employed the drivers came out with a public apology, yet the drivers persisted in privileging the so-called "misconduct" of Farah in inflicting pain on their persons.

In the aftermath of the incident in the park, mediascape was inundated with stories of the ambulance drivers receiving death threats, other ambulances being shown the middle finger, and even ambulances being physically hindered by members of the public. Every word and action by the ambulance drivers was scrutinized. Returning to the Socialist Party's Kristin Halvorsen, who daringly broached the taboo subject of whiteness in the Farah case, it

appears that left-wing credentials are indispensable if one is to “see and name whiteness”. The Labor Party, traditionally hailed as the bastion of the working class, back then and now, faces the perilous choice between navigating the treacherous waters of Charybdis and confronting the menacing cliffs of Scylla, representing the opposing forces of the left and right, respectively. Perhaps it is only now, as Labor politicians constantly flirt with the right, that the historically carefully crafted myth of “class solidarity” will be exposed as a myth that never really embraced people of color, while filling up the ranks of Labor with people of color – a misrecognition of their exploitation. In the foreword to *Black Marxism* (1983), Robin D.G. Kelley asks the question:

Why have “white” workers continually failed to recognize and embrace Black, Brown, Asian, and Indigenous working people as part of their class? What explains the overwhelming participation of white workers in anti-Black mob violence and racial pogroms, or their fierce defense of segregated neighborhoods and schools, or their reluctance to join picket lines in defense of Black workers? (Robinson, 1983, p. xvi)

One could ask the same of the ambulance drivers in Sofienberg Park. Both the ambulance drivers and Farah are members of the working class in Norway. The country has a proud post-war history of commitment to social justice, fair employment, and accessible education, built by socialist Labor Party architects such as *landsfaderen* (father of the nation) Einar Gerhardsen. Solidarity between the working class represented by the ambulance drivers and Ali Farah, who was industrious and juggled several unskilled jobs, has always been trumped by skin color. One writer, Kari Gåsvatn, while meaning well, reveals white misrecognition of real-world conditions, as Mills (1997) has argued in his racial contract theory. Gåsvatn assumed that what happened to Farah could not have transpired a few years prior. The myth of class solidarity and color blindness have been handmaidens perpetuating the status quo for people of color.

Such events could hardly have happened to anyone ten years ago. I think most people were less concerned with status and class then, and certainly more color blind. Attitudes have gradually crept in which are difficult to grasp for someone who came of political age in the 1970s. Then a dark-skinned person was an individual, and the color was barely registered. Now people with different skin color are more and more perceived as representatives of a group, which in broader circles become suspect. (Nationen, Gåsvatn, 14.08.2007)

Professor George Lakey's *Viking Economics* (2016) explores Norway's progressive economic evolution from the 1930s to the 1970s. He considers the efficacy of the Nordic model, highlighting Norway's dedication to social justice, fair employment, and accessible education. Lakey explores the economic inequalities confronting marginalized communities, a subject often overlooked by certain economists. In contrast to these economists, Lakey examines issues of racism, discrimination, and the success of the Nordic economic model in Norway. He draws attention to concerning statistics, such as the 25 percent decreased likelihood for job applicants with foreign names to progress to the interview stage. Additionally, he highlights that 40 percent of Norwegians perceive immigration as a threat to their nation's unique identity. Furthermore, Lakey observes that as of 2012, less than half of Norwegian-born teenagers with immigrant backgrounds identify themselves as fully Norwegian, indicating a significant cultural divide. Contra the imagined class solidarity and color blindness of Kari Gåsvatn (2007), the daily reality of Ali Farah's life, shot through with racialized struggles, was encapsulated by the academic Sharam Alghasi, a neighbor in whom Farah confided:

As I read, see and hear about the terrible tragedy you had to endure, I have thought about some of our previous conversations. I've been thinking about the time you told me that the only the reason you could live in the apartment on the floor above me was that you lived with your Norwegian girlfriend. You told that without her it would be almost impossible for you to get a place to live. I remember your job applications and all the negative responses you constantly got. I remember you as a good neighbor, but most vividly I remember that you were very tired of being treated like an inferior. And I admire you for never giving up on securing a life of dignity here in Norway. (Alghasi, 2007)

So, while Farah was an industrious and resourceful person, speaking Norwegian fluently and working, among others, as an interpreter for the police and even the same health sector that failed him in his hour of need, he was painfully aware that his access to a residence and other basic necessities were contingent on white gatekeepers. Media reports now posthumously heap tribute upon Farah for his activism and contribution to society – for instance joining a demonstration against female genital mutilation and volunteering to train children's football teams. Yet Farah had to live with the unsettling realism that only people of color know all too well, even in egalitarian Norway: microaggressions on a daily basis that demarcate the limits of brown and black liberty in subtle ways. Microaggressions are defined as the everyday verbal,

nonverbal, and environmental insults, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to individuals based solely on their marginalized group membership (Sue, 2017). The Harvard psychiatrist, Chester Pierce (1970), introduced the term microaggression. He described it as a health problem and a mental illness – a delusion that white people are superior to blacks and encourages behaviors and attitudes that demonstrate this superiority.

Microaggressions are layered and cumulative: consisting of several small incidents and mean that they can accumulate over time and lead to mounting feelings of stress, marginalization or inadequacy in the person on the receiving end. It is easy for mainstream white society to dismiss or doubt the validity of microaggressions because of the lack of clarity. This in turn leads victims to doubt their interpretation of the incident and wonder if they are easily offended or even just imagined the offense. Professor of psychology and education at Teachers College, Derald Wing Sue of Columbia University, rebuts the arguments of those who “cast doubt on the veracity of microaggression theory and questions their existence, manifestation, and dynamics” (Sue, 2017, p. 170). Sue outlines three types of microaggressions: (i) purposeful and intentional acts of racism at an interpersonal level (ii) unconscious rudeness, insensitivity, and group affiliation insults. (iii) denials of perceived reality and the psychological effects on victims. Citing an African proverb that states, “The true tale of the lion hunt will never be told as long as the hunter tells the story”, he contends that:

People of color, for example, often have their lived racial realities about bias and discrimination met with disbelief by our society. They are often told that they are oversensitive, paranoid, and misreading the actions of others. They are asked, “Aren’t you mind-reading? Aren’t you distorting the truth?” (Sue, 2017, p. 171)

Smith (2010) argues that microaggressions create a constant need for blacks to maintain vigilance in the face of threats. Smith introduced the term *Racial Battle Fatigue* (Smith, 2010) to capture the manner in which frequent experiences of racism and microaggression lead to a loss of the psychological resources needed to have energy and capacity in everyday life. “Racial battle fatigue is the psychological, physiological, emotional, and behavioral toll placed on people of color who are responding to daily racial macro- and microaggressions” (Smith, 2010, p. 266). Among others, microaggressions have been linked to higher incidence of depression, lower emotional well-being, chronic stress, high blood pressure and sleep problems. It takes a lot of mental

energy to understand and process what happened; microaggression saps and steals any energy surplus causing cognitive disorder. When experiences are questioned, it creates an experience of isolation and leads the victims to doubt their experience. Not least, it polarizes the wider community and cements status hierarchy. Collectively, microaggressions serve as reminders that members of the minoritized group are expected to confine themselves to certain roles or behaviors. Sue (2017) outlines the harmful macro effect of microaggressions:

Those in the majority group, those with power and privilege, and those who do not experience microaggressions are privileged to enjoy the luxury of waiting for proof. Meanwhile, people of color, LGBTQ brothers and sisters, and other socially devalued groups continue to be harmed and oppressed. To ask them to wait for individual, institutional, and societal change is to ask them to continue to suffer in silence and to maintain the status quo of power and privilege. (Sue, 2017, p. 171)

The reality, then, that bedevils the most progressive of societies, among which Norway no doubt is a shining example, is the nature of this mysterious, shifting and amorphous force called racism. It has derided the Enlightenment ideals as even one of its chief architects, Immanuel Kant, has stated that “the fact that someone as completely black from head to toe was clear proof that what he said was stupid” (Bernasconi, 2022, p. 40). Ali Farah was already disadvantaged in the mind of the ambulance drivers given the negative associations with his skin color compounded by the shady reputation of the park. Had the drivers perhaps known beforehand about Farah’s progressive or “integrated” credentials, he may have received better treatment approximating what “normal” white individuals can expect. One is reminded of the black Harvard Professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr. who was arrested for attempting to enter his own house in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Background information being unavailable, people of color can only hope that their skin color isn’t a liability when facing an emergency.

Clearly, what is required is a paradigm shift in terms of investing blackness with positive value. We have put a man [sic] on the moon but have been unwilling to credit black women whose significant contributions made the moon landings possible. Katherine Johnson’s crucial role in calculating trajectories and orbits for NASA’s Mercury and Apollo missions was long silenced until recently. Her precise computations were indispensable to the success of the first manned spaceflights, including the Apollo 11 mission that landed the first humans on the moon. In addition, Mary Jackson, an African American mathematician and aerospace engineer, transitioned from being a human computer

at NASA's Langley Research Center to conducting experiments in wind tunnels and analyzing data crucial for spacecraft design, including Apollo missions. Furthermore, Dorothy Vaughan, an African American mathematician and computer programmer at NASA's Langley Research Center, became the first African American manager at NASA and contributed significantly to the success of the moon landing through her work in data analysis and computer program development for the early space program.

What is urgently needed is a discourse that infuses and associates blackness with value. We argue that one form of redress for centuries of maligning blackness is to consciously and conscientiously engage in affirmative action that not only furnishes quotas for jobs and higher education among others, but an endeavor that perceives valorizing blackness as white psychological debt. Rather than crime, intellectual deficiency, indolence and other attributes latched onto blackness by pseudoscience of the ilk of Carl von Linnaeus, educators can begin by highlighting black achievement, such as the eulogy below to Katherine Johnson which appeared in one of the world's most prestigious journals *Science*:

In 1959, she married Jim Johnson and published her first research report under the name Katherine G. Johnson. That report and her subsequent work developing precise trajectory calculations for NASA's early human spaceflights were essential to establishing the United States as the leading spacefaring nation. Electronic computers were just being introduced into the space program, and their results were not always reliable. The human computers were there to backstop the machines. In the early 1960s, she worked on lunar orbits. Her contribution was crucial in helping to realize President Kennedy's goal of landing a man on the Moon. (Malcolm, 2020)

4 Black Body, White Identity Papers

Witnesses with cameras and video equipment have revolutionized the coverage of incident news. A few years ago, such an incident would not have been documented as it is. We would only have a claim against another claim. In Sofienbergparken, there were many witnesses present. They recorded videos and took photographs. The video clip from Sofienbergparken does not portray Norwegian civil servants at work in a good light. After the ambulance left, we see a policeman who is most concerned about whether Ali Haji Mohamed Farah has identity papers on

him. That his partner explains that Ali is a Norwegian citizen who needs immediate help bounces off, and the policeman continues to ask for ID papers. (Dagsavisen, 10.08.2007)

The black body is “deviant” and “anomalous” to white spaces. The policeman was most concerned with the legality of a black body in white spaces before the health of the black body could be appraised. With respect to the black body, ruling out its presumed deviance takes precedence over any medical condition. That life may be slipping away as precious minutes are lost, is of no consequence to a white policeman whose first call of order is to ensure the trope of crime and deviance attached to black bodies is contained or neutralized. In one sense, one can wonder at the almost “superpowers” attributed to a black body in that it exudes such trepidation even when incapacitated. The concern for the damage to white space that a black is still capable of, despite its debilitated state, is subordinate to any empathy for its well-being. The black body, whether vigorous or comatose, must be identified. Once again, and commensurate with the assertions of scholars of microaggression, such claims or analyses are struck down by the incredulity of white people. However, with the advent of smartphones and similar gadgets, whiteness can now “see” microaggressions as they unfold in real time. Bull Connor, the segregationist public safety commissioner in Birmingham, Alabama, during the US Civil Rights Movement, ordered the brutal use of fire hoses and police dogs against peaceful civil rights demonstrators, including children, in 1963, resulting in shocking images that galvanized support for the civil rights movement across the nation. In Bull Connor’s case, such images in the 1960s were rare compared to the contemporary omnipresence of mobile devices. Speaking about the white space, Anderson (2022, p. 323) writes:

When the anonymous black person enters the white space, others there immediately try to make sense of him or her – to figure out “who that is”, or to gain a sense of the nature of the person’s business and whether they need to be concerned ... not because of his merit as a person but because of the color of his skin and what black skin has come to mean as others in the white space associate it with the iconic ghetto.

One must keep in mind that the policeman appeared totally disinterested in apprehending the assailant. This happened several days later. This assailant was also black but the fact of its absence at that moment rendered it “harmless”. It is the visible, lingering black body which focuses white senses. Of immediate concern was the presence of a black body in a white space,

even if this space was somewhat more diverse than the previously mentioned Frognerparken. Anderson (2022) refers to the “iconic ghetto” as the “proper domain” of the black body in the white imagination. The ghetto is where the black body is cordoned off from the white gaze. Furthermore, the lack of interest in finding the assailant highlights a systemic failure to address and confront anti-black violence within society. This failure to hold perpetrators accountable not only perpetuates a culture of impunity but also sends a dangerous message that acts of violence against black individuals will go unchecked and unpunished. “Black on black” violence is overlooked as long as it confines itself to the “ghetto”. This lack of interest in finding the aggressor can be seen as characteristic of broader issues within law enforcement, including institutionalized racism, implicit bias, and a failure to prioritize the safety and protection of marginalized communities. By neglecting to investigate the assault or pursue justice for the victim, law enforcement perpetuates a cycle of impunity and indifference for the lives and dignity of black individuals.

In her book *Travelling While Black* (2020), Nanjala Nyabola explores the power of images to “force an audit on the values of the image-maker and the image-consumer” (Nyabola, 2020, p. 41). She raises the uncomfortable question of why it takes stark, unvarnished photographs of black and brown suffering to galvanize humanitarian support in the West.

Why should black and brown bodies be immortalized in the archives of humanitarianism solely as helpless objects of pity, often devoid of nuance and complexity? What habits do we cultivate in audiences that are fed a steady diet of The Other – hungry, beaten down and helpless? (Nyabola, 2020, p. 41)

She notes that white bodies are almost never subjected to the same packaging of black and brown suffering for Western consumption in order for a white photographer to shoot to fame; few would risk the collective opprobrium of whiteness by capturing and selling images of white bodies in states of crises.

The contours of the debate were a right and justifiable demand for equality before the lens: the bodies of white victims of terror are almost never published in Western newspapers and magazines, even when the images are made available by the terror groups themselves, as is the case of Daesh in Syria. (Nyabola, 2022, pp. 48, 49)

There is no doubt that Ali Farah’s case would have fizzled out very early on had it not been for the eyes behind the lens that captured his black and

bloodied body lying unconscious in the park. Nyabola (2022) explores how the apathy of white audiences appears to only be ameliorated through photographic corroboration whereas words would suffice with respect to white bodies. Drawing a poignant comparison, she invokes Billie Holiday's soul-stirring jazz composition, "Strange Fruit", which poetically depicts the harrowing reality of black lynching in America. In her analysis, Nyabola juxtaposes this with the iconic imagery depicting the lifeless bodies of Alan Kurdi, a three-year-old child, and his five-year-old brother Galip, found washed ashore on the Turkish coast. These images ignited a global outcry and spurred extensive discourse surrounding the refugee crisis and Europe's perceived indifference encapsulated in the metaphorical "fortress Europe". In his scathing letter written when the dust had settled, Farah himself gives expression to the tendency of white society to distrust black suffering in the absence of visual validation. Nyabola (2020) critiques this fetish for photographing black crises:

Similarly, Demir's photograph of little Alan and Galip deals with the ugliness of war. It tears at the guts of collective apathy. It reminds us that war happens to people – that behind every statistic is a name, a face and a family. But I don't think we should need photographs of dead infants to be reminded of this. Instead, we probably need to spend more time unpacking why we needed a thousand words before we could empathize with other people's suffering. (Nyabola, 2020, p. 50)

The white gaze can suffer cognitive and emotional dissonance at the mere sight of what it considers a spatially displaced black body. In 1994, a Norwegian member of Parliament, a dentist by profession, was so disturbed by the sight of non-white bodies that he actually put forward a proposal in Parliament with the following words: "Furthermore, the proposer points out that it is a little-discussed phenomenon that Norwegians develop psychosomatic illnesses due to frustration, anger, bitterness, fear, and worry caused by immigration". The excerpts can still be found on the website of the Norwegian Parliament under the title "Proposal from Member of Parliament Øystein Hedstrøm" (Stortinget, Innst. S. nr. 185 (1994–1995)). Psychosomatic illnesses are physical ailments that are believed to be primarily caused or exacerbated by psychological factors such as stress, anxiety, or emotional distress.

In this context, the suggestion that Norwegians develop psychosomatic illnesses due to the presence of non-white bodies reflects a distorted perception of racialized others as inherently threatening or harmful to the well-being of the dominant white population. It suggests a belief in the inherent pathology

or contagion associated with blackness, reinforcing racist notions of inferiority and otherness. The juxtaposition of disease and black bodies has historical precedents. Black bodies were subjected to medical experimentation in the infamous Tuskegee syphilis study without their consent. Between 1932 and 1972, scores of black men with syphilis were intentionally left without treatment by the US Public Health Service as guinea pigs in a study aimed at understanding the progression of the disease. Black bodies must be policed, monitored, measured and quarantined because of its perceived pathologies. Anderson (2022) states:

Accordingly, the most easily tolerated black person in the white space is often one who is “in his place” – that is, one who is working as a janitor or a service person who has been vouched for by white people in good standing. Such a person may be believed to be less likely to disturb the implicit racial order – whites as dominant and blacks as subordinate. (Anderson, 2022, p. 324)

In Farah’s case, his partner was also black – as someone adopted from Bangladesh as a child, her Norwegianess struggled to “vouch” for Farah’s “good standing”. This presents an unsettling case on the ever-present danger of the miscarriage of justice in the encounter between black bodies and white law enforcement. Following the member of Parliament, Øystein Hedstrøm, nothing then is more sacrosanct than assuaging the fears of whiteness. Taken to its extreme, such a demand or expectation would only be appeased when every trace of non-whiteness is expunged. We would then be dangerously flirting with *Lebensraum* notions of Nazi Germany that involved enlarging German territories to the east to provide land and material resources for the German people, while driving out Jewish and Slavic people. Fortunately, several media reports at the time of the Farah case were outraged at the behavior of the police, such as the excerpt below:

How is it possible that both the police and the ambulance fail to help a victim of violence who is lying bleeding in one of Oslo’s parks? Would the same have happened if it was not Ali, but Ola who was lying there with blood on his face? Let us overlook the fact that they might have misinterpreted the situation. Maybe they didn’t realize how badly injured he was. But to call him a fool and a pig and then fuss about ID papers? It is simply hard to believe that this has nothing to do with the fact that it was Ali who lay there. (Dagsavisen, 10.08.2007)

Credit must be given to the role played by several Norwegian media outlets at the time. While not versed in the nuances of race and racism, this was a case of the “children” refusing to tow the absurd line that the Emperor actually was clothed. Norwegian media was on trial given the undeniable facts of the case already recorded on various devices and circulating on social media (this was three years after the launch of Facebook and two years since YouTube). Much of the media and its readership were clearly uncomfortable with images of first responders overtly discriminating in ways that, it was obvious to all, would never happen to white Norwegians – differential treatment for “Ali” and “Ola”. The notion of “acceptable” black individuals in white spaces, suggesting that those in service roles or deemed to be “in their place” are more tolerable to white individuals (Anderson’s “janitor”), was despicable to some Norwegians. The inherent racism in societal structures, where black individuals are expected to conform to subservient roles and are only accepted when they fit within predetermined stereotypes, was seriously challenged.

The above has positive implications despite the pessimism on the part of some scholars of race. One thing is certain: many in the white media and white readership were quick to see through the racist machinations in the Farah case. Ministers dared to apply vocabulary such as “white” and “systemic racism” which enrages right-wing politicians who accuse academics of manufacturing hate against white people. For instance, the populist Progress Party politician, Jon Helgheim, stated that he “has no reason to believe” that Norway has a racist system ... that such racist systems are probably a conspiracy theory created at a university” (Vartdal, 2020). Sadly, while some whites disparage whiteness studies, incidents like the Farah case furnish opportunities for “crash courses” in the machinations and intricacies of white supremacy. People of color can often feel like Kafka’s Josef K. who in the *Trial* is entangled in a nightmarish legal system in which they are charged for a crime which is never really disclosed to them. Diligent efforts at familiarizing themselves with the legal proceedings (systemic racism) only elicit confusion, absurdity, and ultimately, a sense of powerlessness in the face of an opaque and incomprehensible bureaucracy. Despite earnest attempts at understanding and navigating the complexities of racial dynamics, they are often met with barriers, microaggressions, and institutionalized racism that can feel insurmountable.

The elusive nature of whiteness, not unlike Kafka’s *Trial*, frustrates attempts at asserting people of color’s agency from within the framework of an arbitrary system of oppression that appears designed for the benefit of white people alone. Fortunately, however, the ranks among white brothers and sisters who discern a deeper existential absurdity in the human condition of whiteness is promising. In the case of Ali Farah and his partner, the country learned that

even when an individual has connections to white society, such as through a Norwegian partner, their acceptance is conditional and may still be questioned based on racial biases. Overall, the analysis underscores the ubiquitous influence of the white gaze in shaping perceptions of race and immigration, as well as the harmful outcomes of such attitudes on individuals and communities of color.

It calls for a critical examination of ingrained biases and systemic racism in order to work towards a more equitable and inclusive society. "The Trial" by Franz Kafka ends abruptly and ambiguously, leaving readers with more questions than answers. In the final chapter, Josef K. is taken to a remote location where he is executed by two unidentified men. The novel ends with the famous line: "Like a dog!" Those who combat racism in all its permutations cannot entertain the fear of such a demise, although despots often came close to fulfilling their distorted dreams of a world without blacks, Jews, indigenous peoples, etc.

If society is to "die to whiteness" as an ideology, according to Noel Ignatiev (2009), it will take a concerted effort from laypeople and scholars from within and across every discipline. If "systemic" then it would be incumbent upon every custodian and guardian of every "system" to engage. Martin Luther King reminded us that the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. The challenge of the 21st century, according to Stuart Hall, is to learn to live with the difference that globalization has created. This means there is no viable alternative: despite setbacks and challenges, we must believe that society tends to move towards greater fairness, equality, and justice. It implies that, over the course of history, societies have moved towards greater recognition of human rights, dignity, and equality for all individuals, regardless of race, gender, religion, or other characteristics.

In his introduction to *Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Marx (1884) wrote that

religious suffering is at the same time an expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the spirit of a spiritless situation. It is the opium of the people.

Evidently, whiteness piggybacked on Christianity as a hegemonic force (Gramsci). Any critique that aims to challenge and dethrone generalized conventions must commence with an analysis of religion as a handmaiden of racialized systems, which is why Marx considered the critique of religion as the *arche* of all critique (Yilmaz, 2018).

This is because religion serves as a cornerstone archetype for prevailing opinion construction and the management of mass psychology, galvanizing spheres of belief, imagination, and emotion. Scholars such as Spinoza and Marx highlight the decisive role of religion in shaping human freedom and democracy (Yilmaz, 2018). To unfetter the human mind from deep-rooted conventions, enforced prejudices, and reactionary emotional states, it is imperative to explore the complex nexus between religion, political economy, and politics, thus laying the foundation for true emancipation. This resonates with Mahatma Gandhi's admiration of the teaching of Christ and disillusionment with his followers.

Seeing Gandhi live, the Christian missionary E. Stanley Jones asked him: "Mr Gandhi, though you quote the words of Christ often, why is it that you appear to so adamantly reject becoming his follower (Christian)?" The latter's reply was clear: "Oh, I don't reject your Christ. I love your Christ. It is just that so many of you Christians are so unlike your Christ". (MKGandhi.org, 2024)

For those of a Christian persuasion, the example of St. Peter speaks volumes about the tenacious nature of prejudice. The New Testament records that Peter, the man whom Jesus gave the "keys to the kingdom of heaven", was afflicted by racial prejudice towards Samaritans, Romans and basically anyone who was a gentile (non-Jew). It appeared *prima facie* that Jesus' keys were in the wrong hands. He had commanded the apostles to take the Gospel from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. However, as long as the keys were in the hands of the xenophobic Peter, Christianity looked more like it would be a micro-sized cult mostly popular with a motley crew from Galilee. In the Book of Acts chapter 10, St. Luke records that Peter saw a vision in which "unclean beasts" on a sheet were lowered down from heaven. Peter was commanded to rise, kill and eat from the buffet of what clearly was a provocation to his religious sensibilities. He rejected the offer only to learn later that these creatures were a metaphorical rebuke to his racial contempt towards foreigners encapsulated in the Italian centurion whom he was to visit not long after. Later, a more "humanized" Peter would humbly state, "Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34; KJV).

5 White Habitus across Borders

We have referred previously to the philosophy of the disembodied, as articulated by Ta-Nehisi Coates who explored the themes of race, identity and

culture in the form of a letter to his adolescent son in the book *Between the World and Me* (2015). In the context of the United States, the philosophy of the disembodied is a critique of structures in society that decouple or dissociate black individuals from their bodies, their history and culture. It encompasses the historical and contemporary racially informed enactments that perpetuate the marginalization or erasure of the experiences, identities, and agency of black people in America. Coates presents an unvarnished portrayal of the ways in which law enforcement, for instance, is invested with powers to disembody black bodies.

And you know, if you did not before, that the police departments of your country have been endowed with the authority to destroy your body. It does not matter if the destruction is the result of an unfortunate over-reaction. It does not matter if the destruction originates in a misunderstanding. (Coates, 2015, p. 9)

It is difficult to make sense of the Norwegian police officer's preoccupation with the legal status of Farah Ali's black body desperately in need of medical attention without the prism of Coates' (2015) philosophy of the disembodied. To neglect Farah's urgent medical needs while he teetered on the edge of life and death is essentially to perpetrate violence against a black body. Like the ambulance drivers, law enforcement had essentially arrived a priori suspicious of black bodies. Both groups of first responders were concerned with law and order: the ambulance drivers abandoned Farah because he "broke the law" when he urinated in a public place, while the police officer checked to see if Farah was not an illegal immigrant. Clearly, the black body is criminalized by virtue of pigmentation. Nothing, not even what is a clear medical emergency, can mitigate sections of white officialdom's delegitimization of the black body. Coates notes, "And destruction is merely the superlative form of a dominion whose prerogatives include frisking, detainings, beatings, and humiliations. All of this is common to black people. And all of this is old for black people. No one is held responsible" (Coates, 2015, p. 9). Both the ambulance drivers and the police state unequivocally after the Farah debacle that they were not racist. Coates goes on the state:

But my experience in this world has been that the people who believe themselves to be white are obsessed with the politics of personal exoneration. And the word *racist*, to them, conjures up, if not a tobacco-spitting oaf, then something just as fantastic – an orc, troll, or gorgon. "I am not racist", an entertainer once insisted after being filmed repeatedly yelling at a heckler: "He's a nigger! He's a nigger!" Considering segregationist

Strom Thurmond, Richard Nixon concluded, “Strom is no racist”. There are no racists in America, or at least none that the people who need to be white know personally. (Coates, 2015, p. 97)

To the above, one can add many contemporary versions of personal exoneration, such as presidential contender Nikki Haley’s denial of America ever being a racist country (CNN, 2024). Whiteness persists because, like the many avatars of capitalism, it adapts by occasionally recruiting non-whites among its ranks. Nikki Haley was born Nimarata Nikki Randhawa to Sikh parents from Amritsar, India. As Noel Ignatiev noted, the Irish “became white”, and, we argue, Haley too has “become white” and performs whiteness, although she described herself as a “brown girl”. Her declaration that America has never been racist can usefully be understood through W.E.B. Du Bois’ term “wages of whiteness”. In his seminal work, “Black Reconstruction in America” (1935), Du Bois coined this concept to describe the psychological and social benefits that white workers in the United States received as a result of their racial identity, particularly in contrast to Black Americans. The “wages of whiteness” features various benefits and advantages that white individuals historically amassed simply by virtue of being white in a racially segmented society. These advantages include a higher social standing, economic advantages, political power and psychological reinforcement, among others.

Once again, and as we have periodically stated in this book, the similarity of antiblack racism in the USA and Norway since the first black slave landed on the shores of Norway over 400 years ago, is to say the least, more than coincidental. Despite the distinct historical paths and demographic differences between the United States and Norway, an intriguing question arises regarding the universal relevance of the poignant narratives articulated by figures such as Martin Luther King, James Baldwin, Joe Feagin, Charles W. Mills, and Ta-Nehisi Coates within the Norwegian context. We argue that this explanatory resonance bears testament to a particular white habitus that many white nations share and must be further researched. We are alluding to the same white habitus that among others decreed the “weeding out of blackness” among stolen aborigine children in Australia. “The Stolen Generations policy” was executed from the late 19th century until the 1970s, and it had distressing and long-lasting effects on Indigenous Australians, their families, and communities. The white supremacist Australian government was convinced that indigenous blackness, associated with degeneracy to their minds, could be eliminated through forced assimilation. Forcibly placing children in white institutions was justified on the basis that the children were being given a “better” upbringing and education. However, it resulted in significant trauma,

loss of cultural identity, and the breakdown of Indigenous communities and family structures.

Habitus, as explained by Bourdieu (1977), refers to subconscious dispositions, attitudes, and behaviors that individuals obtain through socialization within a particular cultural context. Such dispositions inform the outlook and actions of individuals in their as they navigate social structures and interact with others. In the context of race and ethnicity, white habitus gives expression to the unconscious prejudices, privileges, and assumptions that are embedded within white-dominated societies. Of interest to theorists of race and racism, is the kinship and commonalities evident in countries with diverse historical and cultural trajectories such as the United States, Norway, Australia, New Zealand, to name a few. Despite the diverse cultural and historical backgrounds of these countries, the underlying mechanisms of white habitus persist, perpetuating racial hierarchies and privileging whiteness while disparaging blackness.

In Brazil, white habitus maneuvers within the context of a complex racial hierarchy which goes under the euphemism “racial democracy” and perpetuates the myth of racial harmony while masking pervasive racial discrimination. According to the human rights organization Minority Rights Group, “An estimated 91 million Brazilians are of African ancestry, according to the 2010 census, which found that more than half (50.7 per cent) of the Brazilian population now identified as *preto* (black) or *pardo* (mixed ethnicity)” (Minority Rights Group, 2024). Despite being a racially diverse country, Brazil’s social and economic structures disproportionately favor white Brazilians while marginalizing Afro-Brazilians and other non-white populations. This is exemplified by disparities in income, education, healthcare access, and representation in positions of power. Racism is also manifest in what Gondar (2020, p. 159) calls the “architecture of residential buildings ... in micropolitics, in the architecture of residential buildings that do not let workers (such as janitors, cleaners, delivery boys or maintenance people) use the same entrance hall and elevators as the residents”. Racism in Brazil is subtle and interwoven with the historical traumas of colonization and slavery, which continue to shape social relations in the country. In 1998, during the centennial anniversary of slavery abolition, the University of São Paulo conducted a study on racism (Gondar, 2020). Participants were first asked if they held any prejudices, with 97% denying it. However, when asked if they knew someone who did, 99% acknowledged knowing someone, often friends or close relatives, who held prejudiced views. Brazil’s self-understanding as a racially mixed and tolerant country is at loggerheads with a porous and disavowed system, where black individuals are subtly marginalized and discriminated against.

The problem is not miscegenation; it is the use of the miscegenation discourse to ensure the existence of an overvaluation of the white, that is, to hide that our ideal of the white European remains, persisting in people's minds and everyday life. In this way, we use miscegenation as a kind of fetish. I know quite well, but still ... It is precisely for this reason that I point out, in Brazilian racism, a mechanism of disavowal and not of repression. (Gondar, 2020, p. 161)

The white habitus of racism across Western societies is well established. That this habitus curiously extends to Brazil and even predominantly white Israel reinforces the pervasive “universal credentials” of whiteness. For instance, Hanan Chehata (2012) wrote an article entitled *Israel: Promised Land for Jews ... As Long As They're Not Black?* published in the *Journal of Race & Class*. Chehata chronicles the deeply ingrained and persistent racism that black Ethiopian Jews (Beta Israel) face in Israel. The much-celebrated rescue-missions of the past, beginning in the 1970s and culminating in “Operation Solomon” in 1991 have been dampened by the dismal facts on the ground decades later. Ethiopian Jews have found themselves relegated to an underclass, facing discrimination in various aspects of life including housing, employment, education, and even within the Israeli Defense Forces. The philosophy of the disembodied (Coates, 2015) appears to hound black bodies in Israel even after death.

But even this is not enough; try as they might to become fully-fledged Israeli citizens, the mere colour of their skin is enough to ensure that Ethiopians are always seen as outsiders and inferior to non-black Jews. According to one report, this discrimination even carries on after death; some “graves in a Jewish cemetery are separated according to the colour of the corpses; a fence has been built between the graves of Ethiopian Jews and the others in the graveyard”. (Chehata, 2012, p. 72)

Black Jews experience disproportionately high rates of poverty, unemployment, and juvenile delinquency compared to other Jewish communities such as the Ashkenazi, Sephardi or Mizrahi. Reports indicate overt racism in schools, hospitals, housing associations, and the workforce, with instances of segregation, derogatory language, and discriminatory practices. Ethiopian Jews are also imperiled by systemic racism in religious institutions, facing challenges to practicing their faith freely. The discrimination extends to where they can live, with some areas having policies against selling apartments to non-white Jews. Moreover, they have been used as pawns in political games. Despite efforts to integrate, Ethiopian Jews continue to face obstacles and systemic

racism, exposing deep-seated issues within Israeli society. Chehata (2012) mentions several appalling examples. In 2009, a bus driver refused to allow a black woman onboard, citing derogatory remarks about her ethnicity and background. The bus driver stated, "I don't allow *Kushim* [derogatory term for black people] on board. Were there buses in Ethiopia? In Ethiopia you didn't even have shoes and here you do, so why don't you walk?" (Chehata, 2012, p. 71). Furthermore, disconcerting reports reveal settlers demonstrating antagonism towards black IDF soldiers during arrests, Israeli children engaging in acts of aggression against Ethiopian soldiers, and the frequent use of racial slurs levelled at Ethiopians, including the degrading term "niggers" (Chehata, 2012).

6 The Empire [Farah] Writes Back

And because you have managed to keep generations down, you still try to trivialize our feelings when we say that the sons and daughters of old colonies have to struggle more than those of European and North American (read governments) identity and origin ... When white people travel the world, they like to be served. They are considered freedom-seeking, good people, who like to drink tea around the neighborhood. Whereas when we travel, we are seen as vermin and criminals, and are rarely invited to a single party, unless you need someone to clean your floors or cook your food. Even when we sit peacefully and eat our own food, we run the risk of abuse. (Ali Farah, Ny Tid, 09.10.2008)

On the 9th of October 2008, Ali Farah finally verbalized his side of the story in an article entitled "The way I see it" (Ny Tid, 2008). Farah mentions in the introduction that due to his reduced health condition, he had to solicit help in order to write the article. What Farah's letter lacked in articulateness and erudition in relation to Emile Zola's "J'accuse" (1898), accusing the French government of anti-Semitism and wrongful conviction in the Dreyfus Affair, it made up for in its bald truthfulness and impassioned plea for justice, mirroring the fervent call to action found in Zola's "J'accuse". Zola boldly criticized the government's actions, calling for justice and exposing the flaws in the legal system. It does not take long for Farah to launch into a scathing, no holds barred literary condemnation of the ambulance driver and by extension, the entire apparatus of white supremacy such as colonization, white privilege in Africa, blacks disenfranchised through structural racism in Norway and the West and the hypocrisy of social democracy and the rule of law, among others. The ambulance driver, who is named, is accused of being egoistic and attempting

to portray himself as a victim after the refusing to drive Farah to the hospital. Farah questions the competence of the driver describing him as negligent and dismissive of Farah's grim medical condition. This dereliction of duty and the driver's depiction of himself as a victim rather than a perpetrator of a racist crime, acted as the catalyst for Farah to explore the ongoing legacy of colonialism and the broader spectrum of racism experienced by black individuals like himself in modern Norway and the broader Western context.

The ambulance driver served as a lightning rod embodying racism within the framework of a broader societal context. Farah saw the driver as the face of systemic racism which evades justice because white empathy which wields the levers of power, will inevitably absolve white guilt. In that sense, nothing has changed since the days of colonization, according to Farah. Contemporary whites, the descendants of colonizers, continue to benefit at the expense of formerly colonized peoples. Not least, Farah urges the driver to show humility and accountability by acknowledging his offence and issuing a sincere apology. He stresses the importance of addressing systemic issues of racism and colonialism to prevent similar injustices from happening in the future. Farah's pain is palpable when he asks: "How on earth did you manage to pass the exam? Not even after I had surgery for a life-threatening brain hemorrhage would you regret your deed of not taking me. Do you know how many brothers I have, who have been in prison for far less misdeeds than what you did to me?" The scathing indictment of white absolution of guilt and crime is extrapolated from the driver to whiteness in general:

Whereas every time you people are almost caught, you are declared insane at the time of the crime, have been exposed to a lot of stress, or have been declared to have diagnoses that you willfully get away with. Have you had post-traumatic stress disorder?

According to some commentators, the sympathy reserved for Farah dissipated with his scathing letter. One commentator wrote in a response entitled "Find the Racist":

Sympathy no longer went only one way. Erik Schjenken [ambulance driver] was also a victim. Reactions after Ali Farah's column in the magazine *Ny Tid* last Friday suggests that his case is weakened. We can go further and claim that Farah with this chronicle stands out as the real racist in the Sofienberg park. (Slotnæs, *Morgenbladet*, 17.10.2008)

Farah seemed to have committed the cardinal sin of daring to articulate his own pain and views by extrapolating from the drivers to indicting whiteness

itself. The pronoun in his letter changed very early on from criticizing one of the ambulance drivers to a collective “you Norwegians and white people”. Juliet Hooker (2022) in her exploration of the phenomenon of “black protest and white grievance”, mentions African American antilynching crusader Ida B. Wells who observed “that the cause of the pervasive antiblack violence and racial terror that characterized the post-Reconstruction era was the white Southerner’s *resentment* that the Negro was no longer his plaything, his servant, and his source of income” (Hooker, 2022, p. 733). This, we argue, appears to propel the resentment towards Farah.

While Farah was comatose, several people, mostly among the elites, took it upon themselves to spearhead an assessment and response on behalf of Farah. They would determine the boundaries of the discourse – to whom and in what measure blame was to be apportioned. The moment the Farah case broke, various pundits and “talking heads” were exercised in manufacturing a particular kind of consent, to borrow from Herman & Chomsky (1988) who proposed the thesis that mainstream media, despite claims of being neutral and independent, actually serve the interests of powerful elites and corporations. In essence, they posit that the media ultimately maintains the status quo by furthering the interests of the ruling class contra *prima facie* claims of providing a genuinely independent and detached depiction of reality. Farah’s letter ran roughshod over a mainstream media discourse which was aimed at eliciting white empathy, a phenomenon which has always been suspicious of black activism.

Refusals to contain black rage are said to be counterproductive because they alienate potential white allies ... What is often left uninterrogated in calls for more “civil” forms of black protest, moreover, are the very conditions of possibility for the production of “white empathy”. Indeed, there is a certain irony in the expectation that the aim of black politics should be to elicit white empathy. (Hooker, 2022, p. 733)

Put differently, Farah contravened the “rules of engagement” as a condition for procuring white empathy. Farah was expected to stay quiet; some felt he did himself a disfavor by lashing out and linking the incident at Sofienberg Park with unsavoury aspects of Western history. In fact, many Norwegians do not even see themselves as part of this “unenlightened” chapter of Western history. We have previously mentioned Körber’s (2019, p. 94) use of the term “untaintedness” or Nordic exceptionalism to describe the sense of moral purity and integrity often associated with the Nordic countries. Farah was now tarnishing the notion of “untaintedness” by attributing the racist negligence of the ambulance drivers to a legacy of white supremacy, suggesting that this legacy was

as deeply ingrained in Norwegians as their own genealogies. Farah's grievance now triggered white grievance because invoking the "ancestral sins" of white supremacy has rarely led to a *mea culpa* – rather, whiteness retreats into the shell of victimhood. "As a result, in moments when the white privilege is in crisis because white dominance is threatened, many white citizens not only are unable or unwilling to recognize black suffering; they mobilize a sense of white victimhood in response" (Hooker, 2022, p. 734).

Farah was the subaltern who spoke (Spivak, 1995). His "J'Accuse" was problematic for the hegemonic order which had assumed guardianship and responsibility for this comatose and brain hemorrhaged black body lying in the park. Black bodies have been gawked at (as slaves and the "Human Zoo" project at Frogner), strangled (Eugene Obiora), knifed to death (Benjamin Hermansen) and gawked at some more, as in bloodied face of Farah lying on his back at the Park. This time, however, the black body of Farah which seemingly lacked agency, and hence had to be "spoken for", began to articulate not only its pain but the source of its pain. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1995, p. 33) famously encapsulated this dilemma forcefully in the homology: "White men are saving brown women from brown men". She searches in vain for the voice of the widow in the Hindu rite of *sati* where the widow ascends the funeral pyre of the dead husband and immolates herself upon it.

The abolition of this rite by the British has been generally understood as a case of "White men saving brown women from brown men. White women – from the nineteenth century British Missionary Registers to Mary Daly – have not produced an alternative understanding. Against this is the Indian nativist statement, a parody of the nostalgia for lost origins: "The women wanted to die", still being advanced. (Spivak, 1995, p. 33)

Following Spivak's focus on Indian nativist views suggesting a different narrative, where women themselves desired the rites that were abolished, no one appeared to be interested in Farah's narrative. Few considered whether this "subaltern" had a voice at all. The white media thought they were saving a black man from a few "bad white apples". As previously mentioned, the media referred often to one of the ambulance driver's connections to Boot Boys, a neo-Nazi group in the past. They set out from the first day to control the narrative of Farah: one or two politicians were bravely broached the subject of whiteness, but this was drowned in the cacophony of analyses from doctors, lawyers, politicians, journalists etc. This "undeclared" alliance of progressive elites tacitly spun the narrative that the ambulance drivers were "flotsam" from

the lower echelons of a class system that is often denied in Norway but exists. Put differently, this is not “us”. Analogous to the COVID-19 virus, accusations of racism in Norway are always quickly identified, quarantined, and monitored carefully. The black body did not stay put in the park, however. The “Empire” wrote back. To their dismay, the subaltern accused his “saviors” of colonization, racism and even war-profiteering through corporate greed.

Our view of the connection is that by weapons production, distribution, money laundering and capitalization, you ensure that you have control over what is produced, distributed, made more efficient, but not verbalized. You create guidelines and profit from crises and wars that you still organize and finance in Asia and Africa. Employ yourselves in NATO, UN, EU and EEA – millions of bureaucrats and correspondents to maintain this system. (Farah, Ny Tid, 09.10.2008)

Mainstream Norwegian media, like the British colonizers, had congratulated themselves on saving the “Hindu widow”. To their astonishment, this was a case of the Hindu widow willfully ascending the pyre and self-immolating because the “widow” had never asked to be saved. Farah needed saving when he was hurt in the park. It is this need to speak one’s own mind, what is called “the work of being sovereign” (Hooker, 2022, p. 735) which is central to the discussion. Hooker (2022) explores the demographic changes transpiring in the USA where the white majority are decreasing annually and its consequences for democracy. “In other words, if acceptance of loss is necessary for democracy, what happens when a group that is unaccustomed to loss is confronted with it?” (Hooker, 2022, p. 735). She goes on to reference Du Bois’s essay “The White World” in which he mentions a white friend who in his thirties “had noticed with some disturbed feeling that Negroes in particular were not nearly as agreeable and happy as they used to be. He had for years been able to get a good, cheap colored cook and the last back yard man asked quite exorbitant wages” (in Hooker, 2022, p. 736). Farah’s righteous indignation was misconstrued as the “real racism”.

Farah’s speech qualifies for the label racist in this sense. Especially, the link to the colonial era that makes it so impossible – and not even necessary – for Schjenken [ambulance driver] to respond to the allegations. Farah’s text is a pure outburst of rage directed against all white people in the West. And in Asia. And Africa. Before and now. (Slotnæs, Morgenbladet; 17.10.2008)

The tables were turned on Farah. As in Du Bois' narrative, Farah's case is reminiscent of the "Negros" who were not nearly as agreeable and happy as they used to be" (Hooker, 2022, p. 736). Significantly, the rebuttal of Farah's article was published in *Morgenbladet* which has the following entry in Wikipedia: "Morgenbladet is Norway's oldest daily newspaper, covering politics, culture and science, now a weekly news magazine primarily directed at well-educated readers. The magazine is notable for its opinion section featuring contributions exclusively from Norwegian academics and other intellectuals" (Wikipedia, *Morgenbladet*, 2023). In her book *Nice Racism: How Progressive White People Perpetuate Racial Harm* (2021), Robin DiAngelo cites Martin Luther King who was not as concerned with the racism of the White Citizen's Councilor or the Klu Klux Klan as he was with the racism of moderate whites. In effect, these moderate whites were part of the problem because they inadvertently reinforced and perpetuated racism by seeking to slow down efforts, demonstrate more patience and "give the oppressor time to change only functions to protect the oppressor's position" (DiAngelo, 2021, p. 3). In addition:

Progressive white people are more likely to manifest *aversive racism*, a term coined by psychologist Joel Kovel. Aversive racism is racism that is suppressed from awareness because it conflicts with a consciously held belief in racial equality. It is a subtle but insidious form, because it allows the person to enact racism while maintaining a positive self-image ("I have lots of friends of color"). (DiAngelo, 2021, p. 7)

The reality is that Farah was right. He was a victim of a racism that did not have its genesis in the ambulance drivers – racism was not *sui generis* in the personage of the ambulance drivers – but, in Farah's case, that amorphous racism was channeled and became the face of the racism that marked him for life. Albert Memmi reminds us that racism "is found all around us; at birth, we imbibe it with our mother's milk. It comes to us with our first words" (Memmi, 2000, p. 30). He goes on to state, "If racism is first of all a lived experience, it is also a social experience that is widely shared" (Memmi, 2000, p. 30). In other words, to limit racism to the act of the ambulance drivers is quixotic. The so-called differences in an imaginary biological hierarchy of races was first imagined, verbalized and acted upon when white Europeans first encountered black bodies in Africa. The taxonomy of races drawn up by Carl von Linnaeus is a case in point.

In contemporary iterations, it is commonly recognized that racism perpetuated by white individuals is not confined to isolated incidents but rather stems from a pervasive global phenomenon deeply rooted in the legacies of

colonialism and slavery. Examples such as Anders Breivik and Philip Manshaus, often portrayed as “lone wolves”, illustrate how individuals like them sustain and propagate their racist ideologies through extensive global networks. These networks serve as conduits for the dissemination and reinforcement of racist beliefs, indicating that the roots of white racism extend far beyond national borders and are intertwined with historical processes of exploitation and domination. The cases analyzed in this book, we argue, demonstrate that racism in Norway was and continues to be influenced by a broader cross-pollination of racist ideas originating from various global contexts and historical legacies, precisely the point Farah made in his critique.

Whether Farah was warned about the wisdom of attacking “white munificence” and its consequences we will never know given his premature demise. Perhaps Farah knew all too well Audre Lorde’s (2003) words “the tools of the master can never dismantle the master’s house”. Lorde asked, “What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow perimeters of change are possible and allowable” (Lorde, 2003, p. 25). Farah, we are told, was well integrated and hence must have considered the pros and cons of his decision to write the letter which predictably would ensure the decline of white empathy. Clearly, in writing his letter, Farah’s frontal assault shows an awareness of the limitations inherent in challenging systems of oppression using the tools provided by those very systems. After all, Farah had to live with the physical token of racism in the form of epilepsy and other symptoms resulting from the physical assault in the park and subsequent neglect on the part of the health apparatus in Oslo. He had no patience with the moderates of whom Dr. King wrote, “I agree with you in thr goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct acition” (King, 1963).

In the final analysis, Farah chose his own tools in chipping away at the master’s house given the fallacy of expecting the powers that be to effectuate any meaningful change within systems of oppression using the same tools and methods that sustain those systems. The existing structures and frameworks have barely made a dent in the edifice of racism that some were beginning at the time to see the contours of as epitomized in the Sofia Baidoo and Obiora cases which were still fresh in public memory at the time. To depend on oppressive systems may limit the possibilities for genuine transformation and liberation. Farah’s determination to exercise the “work of being sovereign” started an important discussion and encouraged some to consider the complexities inherent in confronting systems of oppression and the importance of critically examining the tools and methods employed in these efforts. Unlike the slaves who set foot on Norwegian soil over 400 years ago and left nothing behind, or

the 80 Senegalese whose feelings will never be known, Farah articulated his feelings with a clarion call. Unlike Obiora who was strangled and did not have the opportunity to make his views known, Farah ensured he left behind a legacy – one that spoke truth to power using his own tools. In this sense, Farah did not die as a victim only, he asserted that his black life mattered, not just that of the ambulance drivers.

For instance, the rejoinder that “all lives matter” to “black lives matter” protests perfectly captures the seeming absurdity of how attempts to redress existing injustices (in this case the disproportionate police killings of unarmed black citizens) can generate feelings of exclusion. In other words, if all lives already mattered equally, it would not be necessary to assert that black lives *also* matter. (Hooker, 2022, p. 737)

7 Implications for Education: Paolo Freire and the Act of Reading

The Farah case highlights the need for schools and higher education in Norway to prioritize knowledge and skills aimed at raising awareness of implicit biases, particularly racial biases, among students, faculty, and staff. This is further warranted by studies where minority background students have mentioned schools as the arena where racism is most widespread. 37% answered that they have experienced racism because of appearance. According to the UNICEF (2022) report, of those who answered that they had been exposed to racism, 57% stated that it happened at school, 13% on the internet or social media, 4% on a leisure activity, 7% with friends/family, 2% at work and 17% selected “elsewhere”. (UNICEF, 2022). The national broadcaster NrK cites followed up on the report:

Schools are obliged to have zero tolerance towards bullying, violence, discrimination and harassment, according to the Education Act. It is unacceptable that so many young people say they experience racism, says Kristin Oudmayer. She is Director of Children’s Rights and Sustainability at Unicef Norway. She submitted the report to Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre (Ap) last week, and believes that the teachers’ competence on racism must be strengthened. (NrK, 2022)

There is clearly a mismatch between the experiences of students of color and serious efforts at mitigating racial bias in courses on healthcare, emergency response, and interpersonal interactions. Schools and institutions of

higher learning must not shy away from dedicating resources centering on the Farah case. Rather than a colorblind approach, teachers and students would benefit from an open, empathetic conversation where implicit racial bias, microaggressions and similar terms from the field of race and racism are grappled with. The current dominant discourse in Norway where the use of terms such as whiteness are delegitimized is unsustainable – it is only postponing the inevitable given the rapid demographic changes among others. We argue that the time is ripe for stakeholders in education to take the bull by the horns. Regrettably, the current climate is one where clichés such as “diversity” and “inclusion” abound but prove to be unhelpful platitudes upon closer scrutiny. True diversity and inclusion, we argue, will take seriously the knowledge and insight generated through serious research particularly in the Anglo-American context. We have previously posited that although the local context holds significance, rejecting references to perspectives such as that of the United States as unrelated is a diversionary tactic. It is essential to recognize that local manifestations of racism have historically been influenced and sustained by connections with analogous prejudices abroad.

The Farah case also highlighted the importance upholding ethical principles such as the Hippocratic oath in healthcare situations. Students could be invited to critically reflect on their own ethical and moral moorings especially in heuristic scenarios such as Sofienberg Park. How would that which strikes one as the “other” or repugnant impact upon the discharge of one’s duties or even obligation as a fellow-human being? The story of the Good Samaritan is often recounted in schools in Norway in the subject of Christianity, religion, outlook on life and ethics. One influential lecturer, during the main author’s time as a student studying the subject as an elective for the degree of Bachelor of Education, creatively applied the story of the Good Samaritan to a contemporary Palestinian. Teachers in the subject could usefully analyze the Farah case in conjunction with the Good Samaritan parable and trigger discussions on the ways in which racial prejudices impact individuals’ access to essential services and support. The focus ought not to be the maligning of the health services – that would be counterproductive and even unfair to the many who do a sterling job. The objective should be to laud actions of individuals who, like the Good Samaritan, was a figure of scorn, made it his business to intervene and advocate for the seriously injured man from Jerusalem.

In his essay, *The Importance of the Act of Reading* (2020), Paulo Freire states, “Reading the world always precedes reading the word, and reading the word implies continually reading the world” (Freire, 2020, p. 7). Employing what the anthropologist Clifford Geertz referred to as “thick description”, Freire begins by sharing the world of his childhood in which he was literate before

he learned to read the word. In other words, every student enters the classroom immersed and literate in a world which preceded the classroom. “I see myself in the average Recife house where I was born, encircled by trees. Some of the trees were like persons to me, such was the intimacy between us ... Truly, that special world presented itself to me as the arena of my perceptual activity, and therefore as the world of my first reading” (Freire, 2020, p. 4). Like Freire, schools and institutions of higher learning in Norway, could benefit from authentically engaging with and valuing the lived realities of students of color – welcoming and understanding this world that precedes the word of students of color in combating antiracism. Currently, and incommensurate with Freire’s pedagogical framework, schools appear to neglect, or even worse, negate, the world of prejudice and racism that students of color have long claimed to have experienced in and out of the classroom.

Much emphasis is laid on “cracking the reading code” [knekke lesekode] in Norwegian schools. Without diluting the importance of such an important breakthrough, Freire reminds us that children are already literate in a world that precedes the mechanical act of “cracking reading codes”. “Deciphering the word flowed naturally from reading my particular world; it was not something superimposed on it ... The earth was my blackboard; sticks my chalk” (Freire, 2020, p. 5). While six and seven-year-olds obviously have a limited vocabulary to communicate the pain of complex words such as prejudice and racism, we would be amiss to assume this is not a part of their “act of reading” in a Freirean sense. This is why Freire insists on the importance of creating an atmosphere and platform for students to articulate the world of their experience rather than teachers and schools superimposing theirs on students.

For this reason, I have always insisted that words used in organizing a literacy program come from the word universe of the people who are learning, expressing their actual language, their anxieties, fears, demands, dreams. Words should be laden with the meaning of the people’s existential experience, and not of the teacher’s experience. (Freire, 2020, p. k7)

Unless the experience of students of color in regard to racism is valorized and serves as a precursor to combating racism, we cannot expect to see a reduction of numbers of students of color reporting experiencing racism in Norwegian schools, and, sadly, occasionally these numbers will be epitomized in public scandals – a new Eugene Obiora, Ali Farah or Benjamin Hermansen. Freire’s memory of his childhood in Recife, surrounded by trees that were like acquaintances to him, emphasizes the intimate connection between individuals and their lived experiences. Just as Freire distilled meaning and insight in

his environment before formal education, students of color bring their own rich and complex worlds into the classroom. If all teachers do in schools is celebrate “diversity day” with a “catwalk” of national costumes, ethnic cuisine and belly dancing, what Tariq Modood and others have lampooned as the three S’s: saris, samosas and steel bands, then deeper issues of equality, representation and social justice will remain unaddressed. At the heart of Freire’s educational endeavors was the term praxis. In the setting of education, Freire promoted a pedagogy of praxis where students engage in critical dialogue, reflection, and action to challenge social inequalities and injustices. This approach urges learners to examine their own experiences, query prevalent narratives, and work collaboratively to enact positive change in their communities. While learning towards democratic literacy is valorized in Norway, we argue it stops short of broaching race and racism. Obviously, if there is incompatibility between students of color’s reading of the world where they experience discrimination and reading of the word in the classroom, in Freirean terms, then fatalism sets in.

This more critical *reading* of the prior less critical *reading* of the world enables them to understand their indigence differently from the fatalistic way they sometimes view injustice. In this way, a critical reading of reality, whether it takes place in the literacy process or not, and associated above all with the clearly political practices of mobilizing and organizing, constitutes an instrument of what Gramsci called counter-hegemony. (Freire, 2020, p. 7)

The aim of education should be, in the words of Freire (2020), to *re-write* what is read. In Gramsci’s (1999, pp. 56, 57) words: “We need to free ourselves from the habit of seeing culture as encyclopedic knowledge, and men [sic] as mere receptacles to be stuffed full of empirical data and a mass of unconnected raw facts, which have to be filed in the brain as in the columns of a dictionary enabling their owner to- respond to the various stimuli from the outside world”. There is the temptation, given the many pitfalls of talking about race and racism, that educators opt for the pedagogy of comfort, or “neutral knowledge” encapsulated in the “encyclopedic knowledge ... empirical data and a mass of unconnected raw facts” that Gramsci (1999) disparages. The iconoclastic Ivan Illich (1970) calls precisely for the deschooling of such a society which reduces learning to what is taught in school alone to the detriment of learning imbibed outside of school. In this sense, Illich’s (1970) argument dovetails with Freire’s (2020) valorization of reading the world before reading the word.

A second major illusion on which the school system rests is that most learning is the result of teaching. Teaching, it is true, may contribute to certain kinds of learning under certain circumstances. But most people acquire most of their knowledge outside school, and in school only insofar as school, in a few rich countries, has become their place of confinement during an increasing part of their lives. (Illich, 1970, p. 12)

We have earlier mentioned the uncertainty surrounding the degree to which systemic racism exists in Norway. The jury is still out deliberating this issue with contradictory statements secreted in intervals into the public space. Teachers can nevertheless confidently present the Farah case as an example of systemic racism, howbeit on a micro scale and with several caveats. The case implicates health workers, law enforcement officers and journalists. While avoiding suggestions of a conspiracy at work, educators can demonstrate the deleterious cumulative effects when professional workers in varying degrees and disparate ways fail a black victim of blind violence. Consider the testimony of the retired ambulance driver who declared in an interview that his former workplace was shot through with racism, and the actions of the two ambulance drivers was an extension of that milieu. Clearly, all it takes for systemic racism to become a culture is for a certain number in a particular office, factory or firm to feed off each other's racism and tacitly agree to perpetuate this culture.

In higher education, lecturers should adopt a critical pedagogical approach inspired by scholars like Paulo Freire, which emphasizes the importance of dialogue, critical thinking, and social action in the classroom. We argue that the teaching of pedagogy focuses on traditional theories and figures from the beginning or mid twentieth century – nearly all white males. We have made reference to how the prescient antiracist views of a John Dewey are unknown in pedagogy syllabi, as if Dewey was narrowly preoccupied with the pragmatic machinations of learning in the classroom. This critique would extend across the board to figures like Vygotsky, Piaget, Skinner, Bruner, Bandura, Bronfenbrenner, and many more. The theories of learning are carefully selected and sanitized of anything vaguely reminiscent of conflict theories. Hence Vygotsky's "knowledgeable other" can only be envisioned in positive terms in the guise of a teacher or peer. That the teacher or peer may be riddled with prejudices and susceptible to racially biased views only elicits a confused look on the face of our students. Even Bronfenbrenner's theory, which in essence provides a promising model in exploring racism, with its multiple, interlocking and holistic levels, is rarely ever marshaled in the service of antiracism.

We argue for the inclusion of critical pedagogy to update contemporary "traditional pedagogy". We also reiterate the importance of the inclusion of

female pedagogues and feminist perspectives and other marginalized perspectives given the highly skewed gender representation. Echoing Gayatri Spivak, we also ask how the subaltern can speak through school and university syllabi. Educators should strive to be culturally responsive by understanding and valuing the cultural backgrounds and experiences of their students. Many people were taken aback at the sight of animated students calling for the decolonization of universities and statues of Cecil Rhodes and Edward Colston, among others, to be removed.

The icons of West and their “glorious” adventures may not chime with the stories of the subalterns – i.e. the colonized peoples. It is here that the radical voices of a Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, bell hooks, Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o are salutary. These thinkers have played fundamental roles in confronting dominant narratives of colonialism, imperialism, and oppression, while also offering alternative frameworks for understanding resistance, liberation and social change. The aim should be to incorporate culturally relevant teaching materials, adapting instructional strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners, and creating inclusive classroom environments where all students feel respected and valued.

Conclusion

Salvaging the Fredensborg

In the context of the Negro problem neither whites nor blacks, for excellent reasons of their own, have the faintest desire to look back; but I think that the past is all that makes the present coherent, and further, that the past will remain horrible for exactly as long as we refuse to assess it honestly.

JAMES BALDWIN (*Notes of a Native Son*, 1955, p. 6)



The inadvertent discovery of the slave ship *Fredensborg* off the coast of Arendal in southern Norway in 1974 is an apt metaphor capturing the buried history of Norway's complicity in the transatlantic slave trade. The shipwreck analogy mirrors the elusiveness of racism in that it is obscured and even denied so long as physical tokens remain hidden from view. Until the watery depths uncover glimpses of the nation's past crimes, the stain of slavery is dismissed as the abhorrent practice of imperial powers such as the Portuguese, British, French and Americans. The silent wreckage of the *Fredensborg*, stubbornly refusing to drift away from the crime scene, is a poignant metaphor for racism's tendency to resurface and demand accountability. The facade of national innocence and non-complicity is shattered when a baffled public ask an explanation for the paraphernalia of slavery recovered from the centuries old shipwreck.

The discovery of the *Fredensborg* in Norwegian waters is significant as a stark reminder of the sheer reach and interconnectedness of the slave trade. For historians, new and significant details are emerging attesting to the scope of the transatlantic slave trade incorporating countries such as Norway which until recently were considered far removed from the traditional slavery trading hubs. These new discoveries challenge the prevailing narrative of Norway as a nation untouched by the stain of slavery and forces a reckoning with uncomfortable truths. We have argued that this deferment in the recognition of Norway's complicity reflects a broader phenomenon of historical amnesia and discriminatory recall. The wreckage of the ship is a plea to shine a critical light on the dark chapters of the country's past and banish collective blindness akin to contemporary discourses of colorblindness which obfuscate discussions about race and racism.

The illusion of guiltlessness in regard to the transatlantic slave trade was shattered by the discovery of the *Fredensborg* compelling Norwegians to confront their nation's role in engendering one of history's greatest atrocities. It serves as a potent reminder that historical absolution cannot be achieved through ignorance or denial but requires a courageous reckoning with the past. The *Fredensborg*, consequently, stands not only as a tangible artifact but as a symbol of Norway's voyage towards accepting and grappling with its complex historical legacy.

The intricate complexities of a history of Norwegian racism is distilled in synthesizing the stories of the *Fredensborg* slave ship discovery, the "Human Zoo" project in Frogner, Oslo, the Eugene Obiora case, the evolution of the word "neger" in Norwegian media, and the Ali Farah case in Sofienberg park. We argue that the work of antiracism in Norway can usefully be approached through the metaphorical lens of "salvaging the *Fredensborg*". By this we mean that the shipwreck serves as a powerful and indisputable tangible manifestation of Norway's complicity in the transatlantic slave trade – an artefact whose discovery demands a national response and reckoning with slavery, racism and its contemporary permutations.

Significantly, *Fredensborg* means "fortress or castle of peace" and, taking artistic liberty, we would like to believe that the ship has resurfaced in this era as an omen of dialogue and peace. The Danish-Norwegian Union is reported to have transported over 120,000 black bodies across the Atlantic to lives marked by indescribable pain and suffering in plantations as the property of white traders. Today, there are over 150,000 individuals in Norway from the same continent as those who were transported across the Atlantic as slaves in ships like the *Fredensborg*. There could be no better legacy for the *Fredensborg* than to serve as a symbol triggering a much-needed national soul-searching about the unsavory past of slavery that continues to mar the present because, while black bodies are no longer bought or sold, the prejudice and even hatred towards black bodies continues to linger.

We have explored this antiblack sentiment in the "Human Zoo" project in Frogner, Oslo, in 1914, an episode that reflects the perpetuation of racial exploitation and othering. The exhibition of indigenous peoples from colonized regions as exotic spectacles underscores the deeply entrenched colonial attitudes prevalent in Norwegian society at the time. Furthermore, the Eugene Obiora case illustrates contemporary versions of racism in Norway's criminal justice system. Obiora's catastrophic encounter with law enforcement highlights systemic issues of racial profiling, police brutality, and the marginalization of minority communities. We have also shown how the discourse of the word "neger" in Norwegian media demonstrates deeply entrenched

antipathies towards black pigmentation. “Salvaging the Fredensborg” in this context challenges the collective to engage in a critical inventory of words, utterances and other linguistic secretions into the public and private spheres – nothing short of an archaeology of knowledge (Foucault, 2013) – in order to combat discriminatory practices.

The Ali Farah case in Sofienberg park unpacks the pervasive reality of racial discrimination and violence faced by immigrants and people of color in Norway. The case drew national attention to the extent to which racism had permeated systemic and structural institutions, such as first responders, whose actions unsettled the previously unchallenged belief among non-white individuals that everyone is entitled to and will receive fair and equal treatment. While each case exhibits unique circumstances, there are overarching parallels that distil commonalities. They all uncover the enduring legacy of racism in Norway, whether embedded in historical injustices, institutional prejudices, linguistic tactlessness, or interpersonal violence. These cases jointly explain the prevalent nature of racism and the ongoing struggles faced by non-white (especially black) communities in Norway.

Studied together we argue Norway can glean several important lessons about racism. Firstly, acknowledging and challenging the nation’s historical collusion in racist practices is fundamental for fostering reconciliation and understanding. Secondly, addressing systemic issues within institutions such as law enforcement is decisive for guaranteeing equal treatment and justice for all citizens. As we write, one city in Norway, Drammen, has forwarded a proposal to accept only refugees from Ukraine. Speaking of this pigmentation-based prioritization, which some have likened to South Africa’s apartheid system, Simon Nordanger of the Center Party in Drammen states; “It is systemic racism. The Discrimination Act, section 6, is clear that ethnicity is not allowed to be the basis of discrimination. That’s what this is. And discrimination is based on ethnicity, national origin, language, color and culture” (NrK, 2024). Clearly, “salvaging the Fredensborg” will necessitate constant vigilance against such attempts at banishing black and brown bodies from cities in Norway. Fostering cultural sensitivity and challenging disparaging language is vital for creating an inclusive and respectful society. Lastly, fighting racism demands collective action, solidarity, and ongoing dialogue to dismantle embedded prejudices and advance genuine equality.

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Media and Education

Addressing Racism in Norway

**Paul Thomas, Abdul-Razak Kuyini Alhassan and
Jocelyne Muhayimana von Hof**

In this volume, we explore critical questions about Norway's hidden history of racism and its implications today. Why has Norway largely overlooked its role in the transatlantic slave trade? How do media representations shape public perceptions of race? What can education do to confront and dismantle systemic racism?

This book uncovers the complex interplay between historical narratives, media portrayals, and educational practices, offering fresh insights into the ongoing struggle for racial justice in a diversifying society. We present rare archival images and previously unpublished data that challenge conventional understandings of Norwegian identity and history.

Through compelling case studies—like the “Human Zoo” exhibition and the tragic death of Eugene Obiora—we engage you with powerful stories that highlight the lived realities of racism in Norway. You will witness how these histories resonate within contemporary antiracist movements and educational discourse. This timely work is essential for educators, policymakers, and anyone interested in understanding and addressing racial issues in Norway and beyond. Join us in sparking meaningful conversations and actions towards a more inclusive future.

Paul Thomas holds a PhD in Education from King's College, London. He is Professor of Pedagogy at the University of South-Eastern Norway (USN), specializing in critical pedagogy and diversity in education. He has published extensively on addressing racism in classrooms and he is the lead author of the forthcoming book *Education and Cultural Evolution in Norway's Multiethnic Society: Bridges to Belonging* (Springer, 2025).

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