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1 Confessions: Navigating the Third Space

Every good memoir is sprinkled with seasoning that whets the appetite. I must come clean with a confession of my own right at the outset, as it is integral to the author's identity and complex odyssey. I have hesitated because, like spices, it may be tantalizing to some palates but ward off others. A Somali Christian is as abnormal as, take your pick: a snowflake in the desert, a rainbow in the midnight sky, a blooming cactus in the Arctic, a shooting star in daylight, or a black swan in a sea of white. At the age of fifteen, I had a personal experience in 1986 that led me to convert to Christianity. The Anglo-Indian boarding school in India where this transpired was officially Anglican. Archdeacon George Barnes (1782–1847) from Devon, England, founded the Bombay Education Society in 1815 to care for wards in the aftermath of what was called the Indian Mutiny of the Sepoys in 1857 and the subsequent anti-miscegenation laws. There were few traces of Anglicanism observable in the school. Conversely, there was a smorgasbord of religions on offer: Hinduism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Jainism, and even some who considered the philanthropist Aga Khan a divine being. The India of the Congress Party and Indira Gandhi in the decades after independence was, in my experience, a haven of tolerance where global icons like the Beatles and Beach Boys could explore spiritually. The Beatles found Maharishi Mahesh Yogi. I found Jesus.

Divulging personal information of this nature can be tantamount to a death sentence in some countries. On the other hand, openly living an authentic life that mirrors one's true self is liberating. In Oscar Wilde's novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian's portrait, which reflected his true nature, aged and deteriorated because he espoused a life of debauchery, while, in his physical appearance, Dorian was young and handsome, unaffected by the impact of time. Throughout my life, I have existed in what the feminist and black scholar bell hooks called a "third space" of becoming (hooks, 1989). She defines it as the liberty to accept the essence of "who we can be and still be black". My aim is to put a critical spotlight on the imbrications of taken-for-granted norms, cultural uniformity, values, and collective pacts and explore these in the interstices of peripheral ones such as mine and other, non-Western cultures in the process of becoming. Exasperated, the third-century north African theologian Tertullian asked, "What has Athens got to do with Jerusalem?" Platonic concepts of metaphysics and Aristotelian philosophy crosspollinated with Christian theology in the works of Augustine of Hippo and the scholasticism of Thomas Aquinas, for instance. Within the discourse of "othering", I occupy this third space, a unique position that oscillates between encountering severe opposition and harmonious coexistence.

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Third space epistemologies (Soja, 1996) give expression to the boundary-making processes that minoritized and marginalized groups strategically adopt vis-à-vis mainstream society. Conceptually, this framework considers the physical architecture as the first space. The first space is the tangible material spaces – landscapes, cities, buildings, streets, and so on – in which human interactions transpire. The second space is the memories, meanings, interpretations, and experiences, real or imagined, that we project on the first space. Stereotypes, stigmas, accolades, and privileges can be secreted in first spaces. Third spaces rupture the possibilities of the imagined in the second space. In this third space, novel arenas of becoming are envisioned and enacted – arenas that are fluid and ever-evolving. Like the earth, unable to put a lid on the fiery and bubbly magma that follows fissures and explodes through volcanoes, third-space identities force themselves onto solid cultural landscapes, giving birth to new hybrid landscapes. Pivotal to this third space is the notion of hybridity, which forms an authentic and dynamic realm at the margins, not contingent on past trajectories but embodying a transformative space of authentic identity formation. This conceptual exploration links to the themes previously discussed, illuminating the intricate interplay between identity, faith, and societal expectations within the context of cultural and religious hybridity.

My personal journey as a "third spacer", embodying the fusion of Somali, Norwegian, and Christian identities, resonates with Paul Gilroy's (2013) concept of hybridity and interconnectedness among diverse cultures. Gilroy's notion underscores the transformative process where disparate cultural elements blend, giving rise to hybrid identities that transcend the constraints of conventional racial, religious, and national boundaries. Gilroy provocatively questions the presence of "Black in the Union Jack", signifying the dynamic and evolving contributions of black communities within complex societal frameworks. Inspired by Gilroy's perspective, I am intrigued to explore whether the Somali cultural landscape harbors identities that have been historically eschewed or laden with taboos, akin to the challenges faced by individuals embracing "transgressive" identity markers within the Somali context. This introspective, inner pilgrimage delves into the depths of cultural acceptance and challenges societal norms, inviting Somalis to consider the evolving nature of identity in our diverse and interconnected world. Can the Somali flag embrace diverse souls like stars in the night sky, where each unique identity finds its place in the extensive tapestry of the universe?

Third space identity tales put up a brave front but scarcely conceal the undercurrent of melancholy shedding silent tears of probationary belonging or one denied. Somali cultural gatekeepers are always vigilant and meticulous in ensuring the "purity" of Somaliness. Heads are shaken out of both pity and contempt at cultural transgressors. *Dhaqan celis* is a familiar trend in the Somali diaspora. The

term can be translated "return to culture" – a rehab of sorts for wayward Somali children who have become too "Westernized". Such was the scale of the problem that I was invited to a meeting to discuss this phenomenon in 2017 with Norway's then first Minister of Integration. No other non-Western community compares to Somalis when it comes to the number of children that are sent back to Somalia to be immersed in the culture. After a period of 10 years, only 25% returned to Norway. Despite the above stringent vigilance in regard to boundary maintenance and subsequent rejection of third spacers, we must find the strength to rise phoenix-like from the ashes of rejection and unwaveringly keep knocking on the door of belonging. For we are both Somali and much more, a fusion of horizons, to borrow from Hans Georg Gadamer; a fusion that refuses to be diluted or sacrifice aspects of who we are. These "deviant" aspects of our third space identities cling to us like shadows in the twilight, indomitable roars against confining structures of tradition. They goad us toward the infinite expanse of personal evolution as unapologetic anthems of self-discovery and elasticity.

Allow me to share an incident from relatively liberal Abdu Dhabi in 2002 as an illustration of the challenge of inhabiting the third space landscape I have sketched above. Tired of the homogeneity of cloned airports the world over that stifles the spirit of exploration, I decided to apply for a brief tourist visa and spend a few hours inside Abu Dhabi. Having feasted on my fair share of David Attenborough's tantalizing documentaries, I was eager to experience beguiling desert sand dunes, see majestic falcons and observe agile camels. The visa application did not pan out as expected. A burly officer took a long and hard look at my Norwegian passport as if it was a forgery. "How is it possible for your name to be Paul when you're a Somali?", he demanded to know. In that moment, the prospect of sightseeing lost its charm faster than a deflating balloon at a party. No point being cross at Attenborough for getting me into this mess. In some Muslim countries, the name must match one's Somali ethnicity – any incongruence is frowned upon, and I was not going to take a chance on discovering the consequences. With a glance around the airport, as if I had suddenly stumbled upon Aladdin's genie disguised as duty-free shopping, I declared, "You know what? I've had a change of heart. It would be a crime to ignore the offers at the airport and head to the city. Just hand me back my Norwegian passport, and I'll consider it a day well spent".

Before I proceed, perhaps I should explain the need for the confession to the uninitiated. By uninitiated, I am referring to those who are not Somalis specifically or members of the wider Muslim community, ummah, more broadly. Any Somali or Muslim who picks up this book and sees my name will immediately quip, "There is no Somali with the name Paul Thomas. Are you kidding us?" I must be either (a) a *murtadd* (apostate) with an axe to grind like Ayaan Hirsi Ali or her Norwegian equivalent Amal Aden; Somalis prefer *Gaal* (infidel); (b) a sellout; (c) someone who

changed his name to build the career he now has, or (d) he could be guilty of all the above. Yes, sadly, I have heard them all since 1986. The truth is, I am none of the above, but trying to convince anyone is a quixotic endeavor. One claim I found particularly incredulous was the notion that I embraced Christianity due to English missionaries luring me with sweets. I want to assure the reader that my commitment to this unique space, shaped by nothing other than a sincere quest to sculp the essence of my being, far transcends such trivial inducements as sweets. In this unique "third space" I occupy, the losses are manifold: relinquishing the cherished status of being the eldest son in the family, along with the associated rights, responsibilities, and privileges; the forfeiture of the right to inherit familial property; facing the stark reality that no Somali woman would consider sullying her reputation with an apostate; and encountering extreme difficulty, if not outright danger, in attempting to visit my ancestral homeland, a dream I have given up on.

1 Unraveling Identities: Embracing the Third Space

Contrary to perceptions among many Muslims I encounter, changing my name to a Western/Christian one was not done with career prospects in mind. I did this as a show of respect and acquiescence to requests from several Muslim leaders and laypeople over the years. On one occasion, when clerics arrived at my doorstep engaging in *dawah,* the act of proselytizing or inviting individuals to embrace Islam, they cited the example of the renowned British singer Cat Stevens, who changed his name to Yusuf Islam upon converting to Islam. These clerics strongly suggested I respect their religion and follow suit to avoid "shocking and disappointing" Muslims (in their own words) who might wrongfully assume a Muslim identity upon seeing my name and consider it an invitation to propagate Islam. The question of my new name since 2001 remains a nuanced and intriguing one.

The Apostle Paul, in my view, was the ultimate third spacer of the Bible. Of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, who sat and learned at the feet of Gamaliel, the grandson of none other than the revered sage Hillel. Yet Paul was a Roman citizen who quoted Epimenides, Menander and Plato. Saul of Tarsus forged a third space evinced in statements such as: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known" (I Corinthians 13:12). Paul appropriates the famous Platonic allegory (Book VI of the *Republic)* distinguishing true Forms and images of the cave into Christian service highlighting the imperfect reflection of this current world compared to heaven. It appears the apostle Peter, the one with the keys to the kingdom of heaven, was hamstrung by his prejudice towards gentiles, captured in his struggle with the household of Cornelius, a Roman centurion (Acts 10). Paul

appeared to be the solution – he crystallized into the apostle to the gentiles while Peter was earmarked for the Jews.

The story doesn't end there, however. Of relevance to my experience is the fact that Paul's great desire was to be accepted by his fellow countrymen. This appears to have never materialized, something which caused him much pain. "That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart" (Romans 9:2). It is incumbent upon anyone familiar with the trajectory of Christian antisemitism to acknowledge the myriad sufferings inflicted upon Jews on account of a distorted reading of St. Paul's Jewish statements. This must be unequivocally condemned. My focus, however, is on the hybridized, third space nature of St. Paul's new identity. Like Paul, this author with the eponymous name, I identify and empathize with his wide-encompassing affinities evident in statements such as "I am made all things to all men" (I Corinthians 9:22). And yet, like Paul, one aspect of his identity was denied by those from whom he sought acceptance and belonging. My family and other Somalis who have known me before conversion continue to address me by my former name, Saeed. One can't always choose everything in this third space. This dichotomy reflects the complexity of my identity, caught between the echoes of the past and the aspirations of the future.

The specter of bodily harm always loomed large and appeared irresistibly attracted to the biblical namesake, Paul. This unforeseen ordeal was an unsolicited offshoot I hadn't foreseen. Let me share a rather tragicomic episode from my days in a Norwegian refugee camp in 1990, shedding light on the peculiar predicament of my existence in this "third space". Picture the year 1990, where I, a mere eighteen-year-old, found myself ensconced in the bureaucratic intricacies of refugee life in Norway, sketched in more detail in the next chapter. Fate would have it that I share my humble abode, a portacabin, with a fellow Somali youth of my age. One fateful day, as I kneeled in prayer, a Bible gracing my bedside, my unsuspecting roommate entered. Imagine the sheer bewilderment that washed over his face! It was as if he had seen a ghost. His incredulous voice broke the silence. "Why do you pray in this manner? Muslims do not kneel in this fashion". Before I could muster a response, he vanished, reappearing minutes later with his sister draped in the traditional abaya. Her eyes were pools of anguish as she expressed vehement criticism in Somali, drowning out any attempts I made at an explanation. The scene soon escalated into a cacophony of sobs and shouts, and it seemed half the refugee camp had gathered, forming a veritable Babel of languages: Arabic, Somali, Farsi, Tamil, Serbo-Croatian, Tigrinya, etc.

In this turmoil of linguistic confusion, all was lost in translation and a false and terrible accusation was levelled against me. The hastily assembled motley crew concluded, despite the language disparities, that I had assaulted the lady. I decided, not unlike Brutus in *Julius Caesar,* that I would make my most eloquent

and persuasive oratory denying this wild claim in the best of the Queen's English. It all fell on deaf ears. The muffled voices and suspicious glares soon took on a more nefarious and threatening posture. Pandemonium threatened a riot on the verge of eruption. But lo and behold, just when despair seemed inevitable, a colossal figure appeared—a giant of a man from Iran, the "mustachioed savior" we affectionately called "André the Giant". With a strength that seemed to defy nature, he hoisted my then frail frame and whisked me away from the brewing tempest, carrying me on the metaphorical wings of this human "Iran Air". Now, at the reception, I found myself facing the perplexed Norwegian authorities. "Why did you harm the lady?" they demanded, their eyes narrowing in suspicion. "I didn't harm anyone", I countered, my voice resolute. "Then what caused this tumult?" they pressed further. "My only crime was reading a Bible and praying to Jesus on my knees", I replied. A profound silence fell, pregnant with the weight of their astonishment.

You see, the root of this chaos lay in their assumption, a taken-for-granted one that all Somalis are adherents of Islam. This assumption was what left the Norwegian receptionists befuddled when I first arrived at the camp, when I had requested a Bible from the library, assuming they had one. They instantaneously looked at me as if I had asked for a deadly cobra or a vial of arsenic. Their hushed conversations in Norwegian, punctuated by puzzled glances in my direction, spoke volumes. In the curious case of my story, the unsuspecting Norwegians, champions of tranquility whose name is synonymous with the prestigious Nobel Peace Prize, had their peaceful Nordic slumber rudely interrupted. As they confidently managed the diverse cultural kaleidoscope within their borders, a modern-day equivalent of delicately managing an uneasy coexistence between Genghis Khan, Attila the Hun, and Shaka Zulu (police coming to resolve interethnic conflicts in the refugee center were a daily occurrence), they were blindsided by a seemingly ordinary teenager from the uncharted realms of the "third space". This unexpected encounter shed light on a broader societal phenomenon.

In academically dissecting this amusing mishap, it becomes evident that nations and individuals comfortably nestled in the first and second spaces are ill-equipped for the future. The future, it appears, is increasingly resembling the complex and multifaceted third space. As globalization blurs the lines between traditional identities, societies find themselves confronted with individuals embodying a myriad of cultural, religious, and social intersections. While the first and second spaces adhere to established norms and familiar territories, the third space emerges as an unpredictable frontier, challenging these conventions. The comedic irony lies in their perplexed expressions when faced with this unanticipated encounter. It's comparable to chess players suddenly finding themselves in a game of Scrabble; the rules have changed, and they are left scrambling for the right moves. The

future, veiled in the enigmatic hues of the third space, demands flexibility, understanding, and an acceptance of diversity. As societies grapple with this new reality, the unpreparedness becomes glaringly apparent, underscoring the urgency for a paradigm shift in our approach to inclusivity and acceptance. So, as the future continues its journey into the uncharted territories of the third space, it is high time we all sharpen our Scrabble skills and embrace the delightful unpredictability that lies ahead.

The presence of third spacers triggers unease among the inhabitants of the first and second space. A barrage of questions are constantly hurled at us: "Who are you? Where are you from?" Our calm and confident reply can only be "residents of the third space". This only raises their ire all the more because first and second spacers can only imagine fixed, immutable values, norms and traditions forgetting they are socially constructed as Berger and Luckmann (1966) so aptly reveal in their classic *The Social Construction of Reality.* A curious first/second spacer once asked me, "Is your third space akin to John Lennon's song *Imagine?*" I responded that Lennon did undoubtedly inhabit third space, but the beauty of this space is its ability to imagine new spaces within this fluid sphere. Yes, I can imagine a world with no countries. Nationalism, especially the belligerent kind, has always been a blight on the conscience of third spacers. Yes, I can imagine a world without possessions. This must be nuanced, however. While I enjoy my Tesla X, a technological marvel of Uncle Sam's unfettered capitalism, its possession is also tempered by Marx's castigation of the "fetishism of commodities" in *Das Kapital* (1887). Economic value cannot be reified while neglecting the workforce and human relations that produce these technological wonders. And, no, I cannot not imagine a transcendent world, as Lennon invites us to. Such beliefs are inherent to espousing the Christian faith. Like the great Brazilian Christian-Marxist educator, Paolo Freire, the third space allows one to combine two apparently paradoxical views, in what I call a "MAD-relationship" (Mutually Assured Dissonance):

> Freire expressed his ideology as equal parts Jesus Christ and Karl Marx. He rejected both a magical Christianity of divine intervention, which led to passivity on the part of the poor, and a theology of social service, which sought only to alleviate the suffering of the poor. Instead, he advocated a spirituality of human action aimed at dismantling oppressive forces and structures. Although he often expressed frustration and disappointment with the institutional church's failure to take up the prophetic call for the revolutionary transformation of society, he maintained close ties with many Catholic clergy, particularly those associated with Liberation Theology (Harvard Divinity School, 2023).

The time has arrived when third spacers are weary of kowtowing to prima facie "fixed and immutable" norms and conventions and yearn to embrace authenticity, to be genuine beings. For the first and second spacers, enclosures are vital, as Fou-

cault (1975) observed. Walls and boundaries are essential for them, for within these structures lies the power to mold compliant bodies, Foucault's (1975) biopower – think of prisons, schools, psychiatric institutions, and military barracks. The primal instinct of the first and second spacers is to erect walls of identity closure. Their rallying cry echoes, "We will build a wall and make third spacers pay for it", embodying their desire for rigid boundaries and distinct identities.

2 Living Without Gods: Faith in a Non-Believing Nation

Little did I know, this incident also unveiled a startling truth: I was a peculiarity in Norway too, a Christian, in a land where Church attendance was a statistical oddity. In Norway, where only 2% graced the pews, a staggering 70% paradoxically stood registered in the annals of the Lutheran Church (Christiansen, 2018), a curious inversion where the collective revered the Church while bypassing its sacred halls. My introduction to the charming idiosyncrasies of Norwegian religiosity took an intriguing turn. Matters grew more complicated when certain Christians discovered my skepticism towards the Trinity doctrine. I told them I considered this dogma an irrational pinnacle of the philosophical musings of the Cappadocian Fathers – Gregory of Nyssa, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil the Great – in the fourth century AD (Olson, 2009). This exploration of the third space, perhaps verging on the fourth, became an even more isolating journey. The Cappadocian Fathers, in their intricate interweaving of Greek philosophical ideas, especially the Platonic concept of hypostasis, masterfully crafted the foundational doctrine of the Holy Trinity in Christianity. In stark contrast, the eminent mathematician and physicist, Sir Isaac Newton, vehemently rejected the Trinity, viewing it as a departure from the pure monotheism he fervently upheld. I found solace in the company of Newton's dissent, only to be met with a wry comment from a Norwegian cleric who noted Newton's flirtation with alchemy, mockingly wishing me luck in my pursuit of the elixir of immortality before swiftly excommunicating me from their community for rejecting the Trinity.

While pigmentation overshadows other marginalized identities in the third space, I am under no illusion: allegiance to Christianity places me in the category of historical oppressor. It doesn't help that I claim immunity on the basis of being a convert at the age of fifteen. As an adopted son, the sins of the fathers, from the Crusaders to neo-con Christian Zionists of the ilk of George W. Bush, who appear unable to also perceive Palestinians as "made in the image of God", have also become my legacy – one which I am loathe to bear. The fathers have indeed eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge. It is admittedly difficult to synthesize this uncomfortable Western hegemon into my third space. In his *Prison*

Notebooks (1929), Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony delves into the intricate dynamics of social control, where the ruling class establishes dominance not only through coercive means but also by shaping cultural narratives and ideologies. The best recourse would have been for the Church to issue a mea culpa rather than denounce the Marxes and Gramscis pointing out the obvious. Christendom was seduced by power and power corrupts. The church, as a significant institution, has historically been instrumental in perpetuating the ideologies that support the status quo. Internecine squabbles over doctrinal orthodoxy, claims to the keys and apostolic succession of St. Peter, divine right of kings and popes, speaking ex cathedra (infallibly), "holy offices" and inquisitions, the religiously-inspired sectarian "Troubles" of Northern Ireland, etc., have all informed the current Scandinavian perception of Christianity as an oppressive and dangerous force that must be avoided. Christianity, with its moral teachings and societal norms, has often been co-opted to validate existing power structures. The church, acting as a cultural apparatus, helps disseminate ideologies that align with the interests of the ruling class, thereby securing the consent of the masses.

In this way, Gramsci's notion of hegemony elucidates how Christianity, among other cultural institutions, becomes a tool for shaping societal beliefs, ensuring the acceptance of prevailing power structures, and perpetuating the status quo. I am aware I have inadvertently adopted the religion of the historical Western oppressor, a reality that further complicates the unique space I inhabit. Frederick Douglass, the prominent African American abolitionist, social reformer, and writer, had his faith profoundly tested when he witnessed his brutal slave master embracing Christianity. Contrary to Douglas's hopes, his master's conversion did not diminish his cruelty. Instead, in the deep South, Christianity seemed immune to Christ's teachings of love, compassion, and grace. In a cruel juxtaposition, the Bible and the whip became unholy allies, leading to a profound disappointment that shook Douglass's faith to its core.

> But in my expectations, I was doubly disappointed; Master Thomas was Master Thomas still… His conversion was not to change his relation toward men—at any rate, not toward black men. Though I heard him groan and saw a stray tear halting on his cheek, as if inquiring "Which way shall I go?", I could not wholly confide in the genuineness of his conversion. The hesitating behavior of that teardrop and its loneliness distressed me and cast doubt upon the whole transaction, of which it was a part. Slaveholders may, sometimes, have confidence in the piety of some of their slaves, but the slaves seldom have confidence in the piety of their masters. "He can't go to heaven with our blood in his skirts", is a settled point in the creed of every slave (Douglass, 1855, p. 195).

One objective of writing this memoir is to encourage those very few intrepid Somali (and other) individuals, who reject conformity and, like those who eschew

pre-fixed pizza menus or bouquets, determine to create their own bespoke and personalized ones. Such brave souls are aware of the ultimate sacrifice: the very forfeiture of their Somalihood. The agony is exacerbated knowing that a Norwegian or Dane, for instance, would experience no qualms and elicit no ethnic censure, if he or she embraces Buddhism, atheism, agnosticism, an LGBT orientation, or even Islam (although a few Scandinavians would look askance at them) – they would still enjoy the full benefits, social, economic and political – that are intrinsic to the category of nationality. Like a sailboat adrift, a Somali who dares embrace non-traditional identities, discovers the anchor lines severed and the sailboat desperately negotiating the merciless expanse of the sea at the mercy of the elements. However, for a Somali, conversion equates to banishment and exile. I speak from this place of exile, offering my perspective to illuminate the struggles of those who share this experience.

This confession can be a two-edged sword. I am conscious of the subtle manner (and not so subtle) in which some on the extreme right have endeavored to distort this knowledge; I do not intend to give a platform to Islamophobes. My subsequent research has challenged the ugly phenomenon of Islamophobia; hence, I can unequivocally declare that this memoir will disappoint those looking for an ally in castigating Islam or Muslims. In his article, *Europe's "New Jews"* (2018), Dorian Bell states that in contemporary Europe, Muslims have assumed a role similar to the historical position of Jews. The plight of Middle Eastern and African refugees who are Muslim and transported between dismal camps has evoked comparisons with the darkest periods of twentieth-century European history. According to political theorist Étienne Balibar (Balibar & Wallerstein, 1991), the modern fear of a widespread Muslim conspiracy against the West likely draws on the age-old narrative of Jewish world dominance found in historical antisemitism. I have agonized over the wisdom of confessing this fact in a book that purports to speak truth to power by sharing my life story and weaponizing it with the tools of academia with the aim of empowering the marginalized.

Half a century ago, the British-Jamaican cultural theorist Stuart Hall presciently locked horns with the rise of the contemporary kind of populism sweeping Western countries. He argued that given the fact that cultural diversity appears to be the fate of our modern condition, with the corollary of regressive ethnic absolutism relegated to late modernity, the greatest danger is new forms of exclusive national and cultural identities which deny the current facts on the ground. "The capacity to live with difference is, in my view, the coming question of the twenty-first century" (Hall, 1993, p. 361). Hall queries in his "multicultural question" how people from unrelated backgrounds who are pitted together in the same symbolic spaces can coexist peacefully. To his mind, "multiculturalism is a peculiar kind of way of trying to manage the problems which globalization created" (Hall, 2007,

p.151). While we share shared aims, Hall contends that accommodation must be made for the dissimilar historical trajectories that produce individuals. “I can’t pretend to be you. I don’t know your experience. I can’t live life from inside your head. So, our living together must depend on a trade-off, a process of translation” (Hall, 2007, p. 151). This “trade-off” is captured in Hall’s question, “If I give up my burka will you give up your union jack?” (Hall, 2007, p. 152). I do hope a new Somalia for the future is being forged, if not among Somalis in the homeland, then at least among the diaspora in the West. A Somalia in which the decades in the West since the collapse of the country will acknowledge differences – not as anomalies to be eradicated but negotiated and accommodated into the fabric of the nation.

In the labyrinth of my own autobiographical odyssey as a Christian Somali, I navigate a terrain shaped by intricate, hybrid, and multifaceted identities, emblematic of the complex nature of our existence in this age of globalization. The boundaries defining ethnicity are not rigid lines but malleable constructs, subject to the dynamic agency of individuals. Within the discourse explored in this article, the prevalent “ideal of sameness” (Gullestad, 2002) emerges as a seductive force, simultaneously alluring and alienating. In response, I, like many others, resist the confining binaries and craft a third space of self-identification, where contraction, blurring, and occasional crossovers (Wimmer, 2013) occur, mirroring what Soja (1996) terms “thirding as othering” (p. 5). This journey of self-identification transcends mere resistance; it evolves into a powerful act of reclamation. The stigma of difference metamorphoses into a source of empowerment, uniting us as “we immigrants”. In this niche of resistance, a unique domain emerges—a third space where the marginalized and “othered”, in a twist of irony, resist attempts at their ethnic, linguistic, cultural, or educational “incarceration”. This newfound third space terrain echoes what Foucault (1984) describes as heterotopologies (p. 252) – unchartered and shaped by an intricate web of unpredictable variables, encompassing definitions of citizenship, discourses of inclusion and exclusion, and political rhetoric. Michel Foucault’s concept of “heterotopias” refers to spaces or places that have multiple layers of meaning, contradictory functions, or divergent purposes in society. These spaces exist alongside and often challenge the conventional, normative spaces in our society. Heterotopias are real physical spaces that also carry symbolic meanings and social functions that challenge or subvert the dominant norms and values of society.

Heterotopias have a palpable existence unlike utopias denoting nebulous dreams, places, and spaces. Their advantage lies in galvanizing contrasting, even conflictual, members of society to embrace the need for sharing a single, common space. Heterotopias last only as long as we allow them to, their chief advantage lying in their capacity to juxtapose the sum total of the gamut of human creations

and experiences, such as Foucault's cemeteries, museums, gardens, prisons, ships, and festivals. In these heterotopias we reflect, challenge, invert, distort and reimagine the norms and rules of a broader society. While abiding by prescribed rules and functions, they also subvert these conventions making them heterotopic.

The concept of heterotopias invites us to critically examine the spaces we dwell in and consider how they replicate, support, or challenge collective norms and power structures. Foucault's exploration of heterotopias emphasizes the complexity and diversity of human experiences within the built environment.

3 Kebab Norwegian: Fusion of Cultures in the Land of the Midnight Sun

Amidst this complex tapestry of identities, a pressing question arises: Is there room in the new Norway and Somali diaspora for individuals like me, who embody a blend of black, Somali, and a cornucopia of "transgressive" identities? Just as Paul Gilroy questioned the place of black identity in the Union Jack, I find myself wondering if there exists a space where the diverse threads of my individuality can seamlessly merge into the fabric of these evolving societies. The conventional molds of social identities and spaces, as delineated by past norms, are shattered, refusing to be confined within the constraints of outdated containers (Soja, 1996, p. 163). Instead, what emerges is a vibrant mosaic, reflective of the intricate interplay between tradition and transformation, sameness and difference, and the ever-shifting boundaries of our shared human experience.

I place myself among the minoritized in this memoir but am often reminded that this positionality may be more aspirational at times. Here is another anecdote from my time as a high school teacher in a school with over 80 % minoritized youth, mostly adhering to the Muslim faith. I walked into the classroom the first day to be greeted with, *Wallah, brorshan! Du ser ut som Muslim. Schpaa ass!* This can loosely be translated as "Wallah, brother! You look like a Muslim. Respect!" This moment of bonding mirrored the linguistic fusion encapsulated in "Kebab norsk". The term "Kebab norsk [kebab Norwegian]" refers to a cultural phenomenon in Norway, particularly in East Oslo, where a vibrant blend of immigrants, cuisines, and cultures has given rise to a unique and diverse community. In this cultural melting pot, traditional Norwegian customs intermingle with the rich heritages of immigrants, creating a tapestry of experiences and flavors. I knew it was a badge of honor to be called "brother", but experience had taught me to lower expectations. I would mumble something like, "I appreciate the intentions behind the kind words, but let us remember where we are. I would prefer to be called by my name or just 'teacher', please. This is important in regard to treating everyone

equally – both teachers and students". They would laugh uncontrollably and succeed in getting me to break character.

In the bustling multicultural landscape of East Oslo, my experience at this school painted a vivid picture of the intricate threads of diversity and identity. Initially welcomed as a brother, I found acceptance among peers who embraced me as one of their own. However, the tapestry of harmony began to unravel when they discovered my Christian faith, a revelation that led to confusion within our tight-knit community. East Oslo, known for its multicultural neighborhoods, has become a hub where people from various backgrounds have settled. The term "Kebab norsk" symbolizes the integration of immigrant communities, particularly those from the Middle East, South Asia, and Africa, into the fabric of Norwegian society.

One of the most visible aspects of this cultural fusion is the culinary scene. Traditional Norwegian dishes find themselves side by side with an array of international cuisines, notably kebabs and other delicacies from the Middle East. Kebab shops, with their enticing aromas and flavors, have become emblematic of this multicultural culinary landscape. This blending of cultures is not limited to food; it extends to art, music, language, and daily life. East Oslo's streets are adorned with a vibrant mix of languages and dialects, reflecting the diversity of its inhabitants. Festivals and events celebrate a wide array of cultural traditions, fostering a sense of unity amid diversity. In essence, "Kebab Norsk" represents the harmonious coexistence and integration of different cultures, creating a rich and dynamic community where people from diverse backgrounds contribute to the colorful tapestry of East Oslo's social fabric.

Just as this language blends various linguistic elements, my identity, too, was a blend of cultural and religious affiliations. The initial confusion and subsequent cautious acceptance symbolized the complex mingling of identities in culturally diverse environments. In the face of the revelation of faith, my peers' willingness to learn and respect my hybrid identity highlighted the resilience of human connections. It reflected a collective understanding that our differences, whether linguistic, cultural, or religious, could coexist harmoniously. This acceptance showcased the beauty of diversity, embracing the multifaceted nature of our identities and languages. Just as "Kebab Norsk" and Pidgin English signify the adaptive and inclusive nature of language, my experience underscored the adaptability and acceptance present in human interactions. The threads of multiculturalism, linguistic diversity, and religious hybridity intertwined seamlessly, forming a tapestry of acceptance, mutual learning, and respect. In the heart of East Oslo, where languages merge and identities blend, my story stood as a testament to the harmonious coexistence of diverse cultures and beliefs. It served as a reminder that, despite the initial confusion, acceptance and understanding could prevail, weaving together the rich fabric of our shared humanity.

In the complex web of my life story, Zygmunt Bauman's (2013) theory of "liquid modernity" and Jan Blommaert's (2013) concept of "superdiversity" serve as lenses through which to examine the complex interplay of identities, affiliations, and societal dynamics. Bauman's notion of liquid modernity encapsulates the fluid, fleeting nature of our modern world. Traditional affiliations, once stable and concrete, have dissolved into dispersed, ephemeral, and fragile bonds. In this fluid landscape, my third space identity, navigating cultural and religious complexities, becomes emblematic of the challenges posed by liquid modernity. The pervasive influence of liquid modernity in the third space manifests in the dissolution of fixed religious and cultural boundaries. Growing up as a Somali, traditional affiliations were deeply ingrained, providing a sense of stability and belonging. However, as the world around me embraced liquid modernity, these affiliations transformed. The rigid structures of identity became pliable, blurring the lines between the "self" and the "other". Bauman's theory accentuates the alienating effects of this postmodern reality. My identity, once rooted in tradition, now exists in a state of constant flux, caught between the solid ground of heritage and the shifting sands of modernity.

Blommaert's concept of superdiversity further complicates this narrative. Superdiversity recognizes the unprecedented variety within contemporary societies, encompassing not only diverse cultural and religious backgrounds but also languages, social statuses, and lifestyles. In the context of my life, superdiversity accentuates the multiplicity of factors shaping my identity. The coexistence of diverse backgrounds and linguistic practices blurs the boundaries even further, creating a rich mosaic of affiliations. The theory of Blommaert's superdiversity encapsulates the unusually diverse and multicultural nature of modern societies. This diversity is colorfully exemplified in the bustling commercial districts, such as the high streets in many Western capitals. Here, a Turkish döner kebab takeaway shares space cheek-by-jowl with a Polish grocery store (*sklep*), a Somali *Hawala* money transfer business, an Indian restaurant, and a Kurdish barber shop. Despite their cultural variations, these small businesses share a common thread: they all maintain a bank account in the local bank located just across the street. This picture highlights the coexistence of various cultures and businesses within close proximity, mirroring the multicultural fabric of contemporary inner-city environments.

It is in the interstices of liquid modernity and superdiversity that third space identities are incubated and flourish. The modern condition is characterized by the ebb and flow of fluid and fragile affiliations Bauman and Blommaert's theories seek to approximate. In these intersections of growing cultural diversity, third space narratives are rich microcosms of what the future may look like. This is bewildering to populists who insist upon assimilation while refusing to let go of the

pejorative *innvandrer* (foreigner). Consider one such pronouncement by Christian Tybring-Gjedde, a member of Parliament since 2005. "Immigrants must uproot themselves from their countries of origin and plant them in Norway. They must put the past behind them and look forward. Immigrants must want to be a part of us" (Tybring-Gjedde, 2014 , p. 268). The term multicultural is put beyond the pale in the writings of this MP. The tables are turned on diversity and the word is pilloried as exclusive and discriminatory against the majority. The label is further delegitimized by coupling it with "illiterates from Mogadishu and Islamists from Islamabad" (Tybring-Gjedde, 2014 , p. 268). What is conveniently glossed over is the fact that terms like diversity and multicultural extend to include white feminists and the LGBT community, the majority of whom are white.

Populists cheer on any member of the minoritized community who bravely breaks ranks and seeks reform. Regrettably, their support is motivated by classic divide and conquer plots underpinned by racial concerns for the white ethnostate of yesteryear. Third space identity formations are for such reasons menacing to populists, as one can verify through the writings of an Anders Brevik or Philip Manshaus. The Norwegian Police Security Service, Norway's domestic intelligence and security service, has often warned about this rising phenomenon. In 2023, the agency warned about "Russian agents, Chinese computer attacks, offended Islamists and right-wing extremists who want to save 'the white race'" (Zaman, 2023). This is what worries the Police Security Service the most. Left unchallenged, we can only expect more recruitment among the ranks of those who are pining for a white nation, not unlike that which existed in apartheid South Africa. Lest we forget, Scher (2014, pp. 328–347) reminds us about some of the main features of the apartheid policy framed by South Africa's Prime Minister D.F. Malan's government in 1948.

> [T]he Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act of 1949; the Immorality Act of 1950 prohibiting sexual relations between white and black people; the Group Areas Act of 1950 making residential separation between the races compulsory; the race-based separation of public facilities enshrined in the Separate Amenities Acts of 1953 and the Bantu Education Act of 1953, which Hendrik Verwoerd justified on the basis that, it served no useful purpose to teach a black child a curriculum that was traditionally European. He went on to say that it would be unnecessary and even absurd to teach a black child mathematics, because he would never use it in practice. (Scher, 2014, p. 333).

The above ought to spur us to action. Future battles, and even now, are being fought on the turf of identity and belonging. But these are not trophies the winners can gloat over and enforce upon everyone. Uyghurs, Kurds, Rohingya, Oromo, etc., cannot just be assimilated or eradicated. If there is no tolerance of such long-established identities, then it follows that third space identities will fare worse. Com-

munities embedded in conventional norms and outlooks find themselves baffled by individuals like me, who represent a blend of diverse cultural and religious identities. This perplexity stresses the need for a nuanced understanding of identities in an era where diversity is not merely a feature but a defining characteristic. My journey becomes a testament to the intricate dance between tradition and transformation, stability and fluidity, in the face of a postmodern world shaped by liquid modernity and superdiversity.

2 Setting the Stage: A Prelude to the Odyssey

> This, reader, is an honest book. It warns you at the outset that my sole purpose in writing it has been a private and domestic one. I have had no thought of serving you or my own fame... I have intended it solely for the pleasure of my relatives and friends so that, when they have lost me – which they soon must – they may recover some features of my character and disposition, and thus keep the memory they have of me more completely and vividly alive.
>
> *Essays* – Michel de Montaigne (1580)

1 Defining Minoritization

I aspire to engage in a meaningful three-way dialogue between minoritized individuals and the broader Norwegian community, drawing from my three decades of experiences in Norway. Occasional references to experiences in India and the United Kingdom will be mentioned where pertinent to the discussion. I especially hope to strike a chord with minoritized youth who may identify with my odyssey and derive some edification. I use the term minoritized to refer to individuals and groups who are different from others and made to feel so in a harmful or unfair manner on account of their identities that may "deviate" from the mainstream norm (Cummins, 2017). This depreciation includes the way the group is portrayed, the resources available to them, and the justification for this unequal access. The passivized form "minoritized" is intended to give expression to the active dynamics that relegate certain vulnerable groups to the margins of society. I argue, as the title of this book suggests, that my status as a minoritized individual confers a particular advantage in naming some of these challenges and understanding some of the intricate processes at work with the aim of dismantling them and promoting inclusivity. While numerical strength is often a factor, the term minoritized is not about numbers but concerns itself with the machinations of power, privilege, cultural norms, and institutional biases that produce oppressive structures.

I sincerely hope that the book will serve a higher purpose than the inventor of the essay genre, Michel de Montaigne's, admission to self-indulgence for writing his *Essays* (1958). With typical insouciance, de Montaigne writes, "So, reader, I am myself the substance of my book, and there is no reason why you should waste your leisure on so frivolous and unrewarding a subject". Other philosophers, such as Marcus Aurelius (AD 121–180), the only Roman Emperor who was a philosopher, are of the opinion that there is not much more to see in life after forty. He writes in his *Meditations* (1996): "So for the study of human life, forty years are as good as ten thousand: what more will you see?" I have decided to write this book now for two reasons: like Aurelius, I am beginning to see a worry-

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ing pattern of repetition and some monotony at fifty-two years of age, and, on a more serious note, Aurelius warns that dementia may set in and compromise one's ability to "analyze impressions correctly". Having stated the above, let us remember that Aurelius was a stoic, specimens known to have spent their entire lives preparing themselves for some calamity. Like Montaigne, I believe in the value of candid self-exploration and the willingness to lay bare one's experiences and reflections without reservation. However, I also recognize the importance of tempering this openness with the stoic wisdom of Aurelius, ensuring that any introspection remains grounded, purposeful, and devoid of needless embellishment.

I have frequently been approached by students from minority backgrounds who wanted to express their surprise and gratitude at meeting someone who is from a visible minority background and has broken the proverbial glass ceiling in Norway by ascending to the ranks of academia, both as a schoolteacher and now a full professor. Several years ago, I was puzzled to see new students enrolled in a course I taught at the University of Oslo enter the classroom, look around and see me standing in the front beside the lecturer's desk, and exit the classroom. Later, when several minutes had passed, I went out and found all the students waiting outside in the corridor. When I mentioned the name of the course, the students appeared flabbergasted and walked sheepishly in. After the lecture was over, a Somali female student wearing an *abaya* walked up to me and apologized on behalf of everyone. "I honestly didn't think you, as a black man, was the lecturer", she quipped. Rather than take offense, I cherished these remarks because they were giving expression to a suppressed yearning only people of color could appreciate. Equally relevant and humbling was their references to good communication and pedagogical skills that resonated with them on a profound level and stirred up dormant ambitions. Hence, this book has been gestating for a long time with a view to motivating this subset of the population, perhaps starved of role models.

2 The Norwegian Welfare State: A Beacon of Equality

Indispensable to my success is the role that the Norwegian welfare state played and continues to play in "rooting" for the success of those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. To some degree, one has "won" in the "birth lottery" in Norway. The title of this book would perhaps lead one to believe that my achievement was entirely a result of hard work and undefined intrinsic qualities – the fabled meritocracy myth. I share the success with the Norwegian model. While many in the USA have become disillusioned with the "American Dream", there has always been what I dub an unassuming "Norwegian Reality" where access to equal opportunities is a taken-for-granted fact of life. In his second inaugural ad-

dress, President Obama may as well have been speaking about Norway when he stated in typically soaring language: "We are true to our creed when a little girl born into the bleakest poverty knows that she has the same chance to succeed as anybody else, because she is an American; she is free, and she is equal, not just in the eyes of God but also our own" (New York Times, 2013). Joseph E. Stiglitz, the winner of the Nobel Prize for economics, writes that "[t]he upwardly mobile American is becoming a statistical oddity… Economic mobility is lower in the United States than in most of Europe and lower than in all of Scandinavia" (Stiglitz, 2013, p. 161). The *World Economic Forum's* Global Social Mobility Report for 2020 places Norway as the second-best country overall for social mobility (World Economic Forum, 2020). Only the Netherlands beats Norway in terms of access to education. Not least, Norway is ranked sixth for inclusive institutions, as can be seen from Figure 1 below.

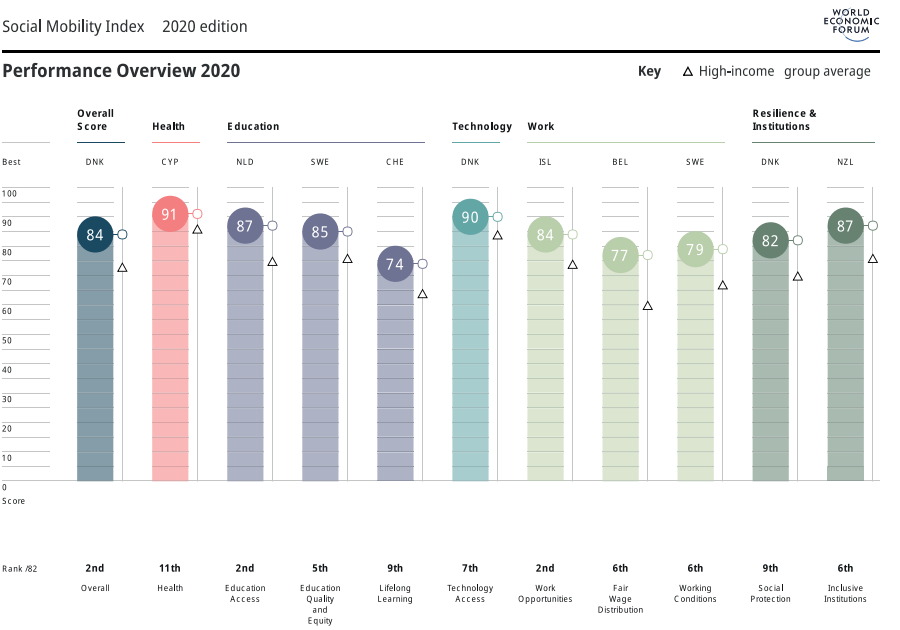

Figure 1: Social Mobility Index 2020. World Economic Forum.

One could add several other significant statistics to the above, such as Norway having one of Europe's lowest incarceration rates (less than half of the European average of 117 per 100,000 inhabitants (Statista, 2022)) and placing number one on the United Nation's Development Index sixteen times since 1990. I am aware that statistics can be bandied about for nefarious purposes. One is reminded of Mark

Twain's quip about "lies, damned lies, and statistics" attributed dubiously to Benjamin Disraeli and the French philosopher Michel Foucault's concerns about the "fetish of taxonomization" (Foucault, 1975), but I'll be making the case that minoritized adolescents in Norway have a powerful ally in the system's dedication to the principles of equity for all, regardless of color, gender, religion, etc. Unlike steady reports of structural racism in the USA (Bonilla-Silva, 2006; Omi & Winant, 2015) or deeply ingrained institutional racism, a concept initially coined by Black Panther activist Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael), these Norwegian statistics should offer aspiring minority youth a vital morale boost. As the term structural racism will be mentioned several times in this book, a definition is appropriate. The *American Medical Association* defines structural racism in the following manner:

> Structural racism refers to the totality of ways in which societies foster racial discrimination through mutually reinforcing systems of housing, education, employment, earnings, benefits, credit, media, health care and criminal justice (American Medical Association, 2021).

3 Facing Challenges: Stigma and Resilience

The above tribute to the accomplishments of Norwegian officialdom does not mean there are no challenges and obstacles to navigate for minoritized groups. The same powers that contributed to Norway's stellar accomplishments as a nation can turn around and stigmatize minoritized groups to further their own purposes. This was the situation recently when the head of the Conservative Party's youth wing, which is currently Norway's largest political party, demanded an end to all immigration. This call was prompted by two media reports from this summer (2023): one about a "native" Norwegian family withdrawing their 11-year-old daughter from school in the largely non-white neighborhood of Trosterud in Groruddalen, Oslo, citing irreconcilable cultural differences; the other about Muslim secondary school students in the same vicinity refusing to shake the hands of a female headmistress during the graduation ceremony because of religious convictions (Iversen, 2023). In the national daily *Vårt Land,* I published a rejoinder under the banner "Students cannot be forced into Western ideals". An excerpt (all translations from Norwegian to English are the author's) follows below:

> It is also disheartening to see certain politicians playing the populist card, believing that the solution to demographic segregation and students refusing to shake hands is a blanket ban on immigration. Minorities, who for various reasons now make up the majority in areas such as Grorud and Søndre Nordstrand [districts in Oslo], become scapegoats, while no one talks about white flight… What percentage of the 182,000 (Statistics Norway, 2023) Muslims in Norway follow this practice of not shaking hands for religious reasons? (Thomas, 2023).

To echo (and rephrase) the optimism of the philosopher Gottfried Leibniz, I would argue that despite the difficulties faced by marginalized groups in Norway, we still live in "the best of all possible countries". I will return and explore these thorny issues later. The legendary Dr. Pangloss character from Voltaire's *Candide* notoriously mocked Leibniz's optimism by repeatedly saying "the best of all possible worlds" whenever misfortune and evil occurred. The biggest difference may be that Norway's shortcomings and calamities are so outweighed by its progressive and wholesome principles that few things can dispel the belief that we are fortunate to live in this country. In his aptly entitled book, *The Almost Nearly Perfect People* (2014), Michael Booth entertainingly underscores this point when he describes a national day parade (17th of May) in Oslo:

> As a Somali girl passed by, struggling proudly with a flag three times her height, followed by a Sikh boy in authentic bunad [national costume], it was all I could do to suppress a full-blown snotting meltdown... It wasn't just the fact of their ethnicity that had so touched me, but the Somali, Turkish, Iraqi and Pakistani kids had committed just as fully to the *Dungeons and Dragons* aesthetic as their "pure" Norwegian peers. They, too, were proudly and unselfconsciously dressed up in their Hobbit Sunday best. And it doesn't get much more assimilated than that (Booth, 2014, pp. 168,169).

Obviously, a memoir that purports to explain how a minoritized refugee went from driving a cab to becoming a professor would be incomplete if it were all down to the good fortune of living in the world's best country. Angela Duckworth describes the US military's West Point Academy and its torturous seven-week training program known as the "Beast" in her book *Grit* (2017), where one in every five cadets drops out. She defined grit as, firstly, a fiery resolve characterized by resilience and hard work. Secondly, individuals with grit knew exactly what they wanted out of life – they had direction. "It was this combination of passion and perseverance that made high achievers special. In a word, they had grit" (Duckworth, 2017, p. 8). She created the Grid Scale to evaluate the extent to which one tackles life with grit in an attempt to approximate this ineffable attribute. Furthermore, recent studies (Blue Zones, 2023) indicate a correlation between a strong sense of purpose and longevity in blue zones – the places in the world with the healthiest, longest-living populations. In Okinawa, Japan, it is known as *ikigai,* or "reason for being". In Costa Rica, the term is *Plan de vida.* But most frequently, it's just referred to as your life's mission. Purpose has always been crucial to wellbeing and the extreme longevity that results in the blue zone regions of the planet. The topic of resilience has gained much attention in Norway in recent years, so much so that the new 2020 National Curriculum *Fagfornyelsen* mandates the crossdisciplinary teaching of *livsmestring,* which can loosely be translated as "the mastery of

one's life" – or what is referred to as Life Skills Education in the UK. In including this new crossdisciplinary subject, the authorities argue that:

> A society that facilitates good health choices for individuals is of great importance to public health. Dealing with life involves the capacity to comprehend and have an impact on the crucial factors relevant to managing one's own life. The theme should contribute to students learning to handle success, adversity, and personal and practical challenges in the best possible way (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2020).

Klomstein (2022), in her chapter on the topic of resilience or the mastery of life, highlights some disconcerting figures in Norway in recent years.

- About 25 % of adults will be affected by an anxiety disorder during their lifetime.
- 15 – 20 % of children have reduced functional capacity due to mental health problems.
- 7 % of Norwegian 4-year-olds have psychological problems in the form of behavioral difficulties, anxiety and depression.
- For the nation, this means a financial burden of the order of NOK 290 billion per year.
- It is concerning that a significant number of young individuals encounter harassment, experience loneliness, and exhibit diminished faith in the future.

Even before I became acquainted with the valuable insights derived from these pivotal studies, I inherently understood the importance of cultivating mental strength and nurturing a resilient personality while navigating the obstacles strewn along the journey to success. I will invite the reader into the mental and cognitive dissonance that I carried simply by virtue of being an *utlending* – something that, especially in the early 1990s, transmogrified into a "crime" in Norwegian populist media discourse. The term *utlending* (alien or foreigner) carries strong connotations of racial and cultural inferiority in everyday language. Similar to the word *innvandrer* (immigrant), it invokes themes of otherness and delegitimization. According to the Norwegian social anthropologist Marianne Gullestad:

> *Innvandrer* is today not only a word in the dictionary but a rhetorically powerful concept. Within such a frame of analysis, *innvandrer* has become a stigmatizing way of labeling "them" ... The meaning of the word now seems to oscillate between an implicit code based on "Third World" origin, different values from the majority, "dark skin", working class (unskilled or semi-skilled work) (Gullestad, 2002, p. 50).

Given that the management of an "assigned deviance" is a key aspect of this reflection, Goffman's (1963) theory of stigma is pertinent. According to his definition, stigma refers to "a deeply discrediting attribute". Stigma develops in the ambigu-

ous spaces between connections that are continually being negotiated. Stereotypes and stigma are intimately intertwined, and they work together as "judges" when the normal and the abnormal come into contact. I will explore what coping mechanisms I employed as a response if one way of viewing stigma is as "an ideology of inferiority" that tries to account for the threat the stigmatized represent. Stigma's fundamental problem is one of "acceptance" (Goffman, 1963, p. 19). If stigma is the crutches society insists an otherwise healthy individual use, then I hope to show that it is possible to play golf with the crutches (Goffman, 1963).

In summary, the book focuses on how the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness for minoritized individuals is interwoven with the reality of a strong Norwegian state inspired by a Keynesian welfare state "that tried to set 'the common good above profitability'" (Hall, 2011) and acts as a buffer against the vagaries of neoliberalism – an ideology particularly deleterious towards people of color. Despite being a stigmatized foreigner in Norway, I tenaciously persevered, conquering the challenges of learning Norwegian and managing a family and job, all the while embarking on a return to higher education at the age of thirty-two. The most rewarding compliment I ever received as a high school teacher was from a student who approached me furtively and said, "Had I not been engaged and challenged by your classes, I am quite certain I would have ended up joining ISIS". Such feedback fed into a sense of my *ikigai*, or life mission. In a time when the demographic in Norway and several other Western nations is "browning" (Omi & Winant, 2015), we need a pedagogy of love and hope (Freire, 2021) more than ever. The late Leo Eitinger, a Norwegian-Jewish psychiatrist who survived the Holocaust, presciently urged Norwegians in his 1981 book *Fremmed i Norge* [Foreigner in Norway] to take seriously "issues related to visible minorities, different cultures, issues of origins, background, etc.," because:

> We live in a world where the supremacy of the "white man" has ceased to exist. This applies to both the "white" and the "man". The principle of equality applies not only to a select few, i. e., the men in the leading European nations, but in theory to absolutely all people – women and men, white and black, brown and yellow. Contempt, at worst, or condescension, at best, one could afford towards people of an "inferior" race, no longer has a place in our world. This does not mean it has disappeared from the human mind; one could argue quite the opposite (Eitinger, 1981, p. 11).

Eitinger's observations resonate particularly well with the concept of "incels", or involuntary celibates, among others. These individuals, predominantly men, often express intense frustration and anger due to their perceived inability to establish romantic or sexual relationships. Eitinger's ideas regarding the shifting dynamics of gender equality highlight the evolving societal norms and expectations that may contribute to the grievances of some incels. The Norwegian terrorist An-

ders Breivik is infamous for carrying out mass killings in Norway on July 22, 2011. He first detonated a bomb in Oslo, targeting government buildings, which resulted in several deaths and extensive damage. Following the explosion, Breivik traveled to the island of Utøya, where a youth camp was being held by the Norwegian Labour Party's youth organization. He posed as a police officer and proceeded to open fire on the camp attendees. In total, Breivik's attacks left 77 people dead and many others injured. His actions were motivated by his extreme right-wing beliefs and anti-immigrant views. The "browning of society" with the accompanying "threat" of tolerance and growing acceptance of minorities – changes that Leo Eitinger warned about were among the reasons Breivik felt compelled to act. He lived in a fantasy world of medieval knights and crusaders, reflecting a desperate attempt to maintain the fading status quo.

Similarly, the blind hatred of Philip Manshaus, who attacked an Islamic center in 2019, can also be analyzed through the lens of Eitinger's observations. In his fanatical bigotry, Manshaus was convinced he had to initiate a race war, and anyone allied with non-Europeans were legitimate targets who would be subject to retribution, including the death penalty. Egged by this homicidal ideology, he killed his adopted sister, who was of Chinese descent. On August 10, 2019, Manshaus entered the Al-Noor Islamic Centre in Bærum, near Oslo, carrying firearms. Manshaus opened fire inside the mosque but was quickly overpowered by members of the congregation. Fortunately, there were no fatalities; only one individual was injured. Once again, and commensurate with Eitinger's warning, Manshaus too was beholden to previous fellow "crusaders" such as Breivik, with his radicalization indicative of responses to perceived challenges to traditional male dominance in society as well as a broader resistance to increased equality. In summary, Leo Eitinger's citation about the decline of white male hegemony and the rise of gender equality offers valuable context for understanding contemporary issues like incels and the actions of individuals like Breivik and Manshaus. The changing demographic signals the need to lock horns with critical whiteness studies, which consider the complex interplay between the notion of white supremacy in an age of migration, a changing demographic and power calculus.

4 Autobiographical Narratives: Power and Resistance

Issues of intent and ambition often lie at the heart of the autobiographical genre (Eakin, 2008, p. 148). With respect to politicians, for instance, strategic positioning and political aspirations abound, with some dubbing political memoirs the "art of the future". It is essential to clarify that this memoir is not driven by political objectives or strategic positioning for personal gain. Unlike political figures seeking

public office, my goal is not to promote a political agenda or career. As a relatively new professor, authoring a memoir isn't a routine pursuit. However, it is still helpful to explore issues in the autobiographical genre. Memoirs, as a literary form, offer a unique opportunity for individuals to share their personal narratives, experiences, and reflections. They act as a medium through which one can explore the intricacies of one's life journey and provide insights into character, perspectives, and the world one inhabits. As a paradigm of research, Creswell and Poth (2017) call attention to the significance of autobiographical exploration in educational contexts. The potential inherent in autobiographical inquiry was recognized by scholars such as Clandinin and Connelly, who offered rigorous critique and relevance of this genre to the field of education. While autobiographical writing dates back to antiquity, it is only in the last few decades that it has grown into a distinct genre of literary research. Having evolved a relevant methodology, the autobiographical genre broaches convoluted, amorphous, and fluid terms such as "authorship, selfhood, representation, and the division between fact and fiction" (Anderson, 2001, p. 1).

Notable autobiographical books like Augustine's *Confessions* have provided valuable context and insight into the autobiographical genre and its significance. *Confessions* is a classic example of an autobiographical work that holds enduring importance. Written in the 4th century, it is often regarded as the first Western autobiography. In *Confessions*, Augustine narrates his personal journey of spiritual transformation, reflecting on his early life, sinful behavior, and eventual conversion to Christianity. The book's introspective and reflective nature serves as a template for many autobiographical works that explore personal growth, identity, and the human condition. Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) is a powerful example of autobiographical writing. Angelou's work delves into her experiences growing up as a black woman in the American South during the era of segregation. Through vivid storytelling, she addresses themes of racism, identity, and resilience. Like Augustine, Angelou's work is characterized by its emotional depth and the author's willingness to confront personal challenges.

Populist movements often thrive on the rejection of traditional political channels and a preference for "direct communication with the electorate". In this context, the autobiographical genre has gained traction among populist politicians as a means of conveying their messages and connecting with grassroots supporters. Direct communication with the grassroots, the need to shape and control the narrative, evoking a particular set of emotions, and carefully doctoring a desirable persona are among the myriad reasons why politicians are inclined towards the autobiographical genre. Between 2006 and 2013, the most successful political autobiographies in Norway were authored by populists: Eli Engum Hagen, the wife of Carl Hagen (with *Married to Carl* selling 55,000 copies), and Carl I. Hagen himself

with *Honestly Speaking* (selling 45,000 copies) (Løwer, 2013). By comparison, Jonas Gahr Støre, leader of the center-left *Arbeiderpartiet* (Labor Party), who was then the Foreign Minister and currently Prime Minister, came in third place with 30,000 copies sold. Following closely was former Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik (center-right), with 22,000 copies.

The Bluest Eye (1970) is considered a classic of American literature. While not a memoir but a work of fiction, the novel, Toni Morrison's first, is refracted through the prism of Morrison's own experiences and observations as a black female growing up in a racially fragmented society. *The Bluest Eye* is a searing exploration of the impact of racism and societal beauty standards on the life of a young African American girl named Pecola Breedlove. It delves into uncomfortable truths about systemic racism, internalized self-hatred, and the profound longing for acceptance and love. Such narratives force readers to confront the darker aspects of society and question their own biases. This power often elicits strong reactions, including opposition from individuals like Ron DeSantis, the Governor of Florida, whose state has recently seen attempts to restrict or ban certain books in schools. As such, these books are more essential than ever in an age marked by the rise of Trump-inspired populism. The rise of populism in Norway, much like in many other countries, has seen a concerted effort to undermine diversity and challenge established norms.

5 Dialogue of Civilizations: Embracing Freire's Pedagogy of Love and Hope

In an era charged with calculated misrepresentation and characterized by what are often termed "culture wars" and battles against "Wokism", the importance of books that thwart this deluge cannot be overstated. The values we hold dear in a free, open, and democratic society do not simply emerge on their own; they must be actively defended. Having been a mere observer for far too long, I've come to understand that sitting on the sidelines does nothing to counter the dangerous slide toward the darkness of bigotry. My inspiration for writing comes from a lineage of colonial writers who, in the spirit of *The Empire Writes Back*, have made a profound impact on how we perceive the world. Figures like Chinua Achebe, Homi Bhabha, Edward Said, Aimé Césaire, Buchi Emecheta, Frantz Fanon, Jamaica Kincaid, Wole Soyinka, and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak have illuminated the power dynamics at play in our global narrative. In the Norwegian context, Thomas Hylland Eriksen's scholarly contributions delve into the complexities of antiracism, shedding light on its significance within contemporary discourses on ethnicity, identity, and social justice. Edward Said's groundbreaking work, *Oriental-*

ism (2003), exposed how, in 1798, the French, under the deceitful guise of Napoleon, deceived the Egyptians and rewrote their proud history as a mere footnote to European annals. It is imperative that we resist such imperial narratives and endeavor to reclaim our dignity and self-worth – for ourselves, our children, oppressed people worldwide, and, yes, even for the oppressors – as my favorite pedagogue, Paulo Freire, advocated. Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator and philosopher, proposed the idea that the oppressed must "deliver" or "emancipate" the oppressor as a central concept in his influential work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1996). This idea is rooted in Freire's critical pedagogy, which seeks to empower marginalized and oppressed individuals through education and consciousness-raising. Freire argued that oppression dehumanizes both the oppressor and the oppressed. The oppressors, while holding power and privilege, are also dehumanized by their role in perpetuating injustice and inequality. The oppressed, on the other hand, suffer from the dehumanizing effects of oppression, which strip them of their autonomy, voice, and agency. 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 idea that the oppressed must "deliver" or "emancipate" the oppressor stems from the notion that liberation is not solely about overthrowing the oppressor. Instead, it involves transforming the oppressive system itself and fostering a more just and equitable society. Freire believed that this transformation could only occur through dialogue, empathy, and mutual understanding between the oppressed and the oppressor. In essence, Freire argued that the oppressed should not seek revenge or replicate the same oppressive behaviors when they gain power. Instead, they should strive to humanize both themselves and the oppressor by dismantling the structures of oppression and creating a more inclusive and humane society. This approach aligns with Freire's vision of education as a tool for liberation and social change, where both the oppressed and the oppressor have a role to play in the process of emancipation. In his poignant conclusion to *The Wretched of the Earth* (2004), Frantz Fanon writes,

> Now, comrades, now is the time to decide to change sides... Let us leave this Europe which never stops talking of man yet massacres him at every one of its street corners, at every corner of the world... Two centuries ago, a former European colony took it into its head to catch up with Europe. It has been so successful that the United States of America has become a monster where the flaws, sickness and inhumanity of Europe have reached frightening proportions (Fanon, 2004, pp. 236, 237).

Fanon's frustration is palpable, shaped by the horrors of the Algerian War of Independence and the seemingly unyielding European bigotry of his time. However, we cannot afford to abandon Europe or the West. Instead, we should engage in a meaningful dialogue of civilization.

3 Beginnings

1 The Quest for Belonging

For many in the third space, much effort is exerted in trying to find a place we can call home. Bill Danoff co-wrote the classic song "Take Me Home, Country Roads" along with Taffy Nivert and John Denver. Curiously, Danoff had not been to West Virginia at the time of writing the song (Segraves, 2020). "I'm a songwriter, and I was on the hunt for words that would strike a chord. In that song, the phrases 'Blue Ridge Mountains' and 'Shenandoah River' resonated with me. They're words that carry the essence of songwriting, and they led me to West Virginia", he shared. The refugee experience resonates with Danoff's quest for "words that would strike a chord". For the displaced refugee, nothing stirs the soul more than songs about belonging. The search for the lyrics to a hit song can be as elusive as the quest to find belonging for the refugee.

It may be disappointing for West Virginians to discover that Danoff did not have their state (or any other) in mind when he co-penned his song. "I just started thinking, country roads, I started thinking of me growing up in Western New England and going on all these small roads", Danoff said. "It didn't have anything to do with Maryland or anyplace" (Segraves, 2020). Significantly, "Take Me Home, Country Roads" was adopted as the state song of West Virigina, and the title of honorary West Virginian was conferred on Danoff. "At the time, Danoff had never been to West Virginia, although he has since been to West Virginia several times and even waded into the Shenandoah River" (Segraves, 2020).

There are parallels between the songwriter's lyrics yearning for an imagined place where the need to belong will be fulfilled and the uprooted refugee who risks life and limb in the hope of finding belonging in a distant land. Like the writers of the age of Romanticism, Danoff touched a nerve among the people of West Virginia – one where nature was infused with idyllic subjectivity; West Virginia was "almost heaven". In the same vein, refugees romanticize and tenaciously hold on to their own pristine "West Virginia", although they have never set foot in one. For some refugees, the mythologized "West Virginia" of their fantasy becomes a reality. For perhaps many more, their "West Viriginia" drowns in the sea of oblivion, as evidenced in the refugee crisis of the Mediterranean Sea.

The Greek hero Odysseus was spurred on for twenty years after the Trojan War to persist in returning home to his beloved wife Penelope and the kingdom of Ithaca. The legendary figure encountered and overcame encounters with the Cyclops Polyphemus, the Lotus-Eaters, the Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis, Calypso, the nymph Calypso, Poseidon's wrath, the cattle of the Sun God, and the suitors at Itha-

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ca. Modern refugees have burned bridges back home and, inspired by an imaginary Ithaca, are prepared to fight whatever forces that seek to disrupt their journey. Upon arrival in their imagined West Virginia or Ithaca, they finally wade in the figurative Shenandoah River of their dreams. Both legendary heroes of fiction and refugees who resiliently take on and overcome insurmountable challenges are emblematic of the tenacious universal human quest to believe in a better place and a better tomorrow. "Take Me Home, Country Roads" thus becomes an anthem not just of nostalgia but also of the profound human pursuit for belonging and the collective aspiration that one day we'll discover our true home, wherever that may be.

To Hédi Ben Abbes's (2006) mind, Salman Rushdie's characters are portrayed as adrift and lacking a sense of rootedness common to humans. The refugee, whose existence is defined by uprootedness, would have no problem identifying with this portrayal of dislocation and the search for belonging in Rushdie's novels. There is a certain indescribable sense of loss experienced in one who is violently uprooted from native soil and forced to plant oneself in foreign soil that may or may not be responsive to this "foreign plant". Rather than a sapling planted in foreign soil, the agrarian metaphor of "grafting" appears closer to the refugee reality. The engrafted plant is always dependent on its host; always existing in an uneasy symbiosis like Rushdie's characters disoriented and adrift in unfamiliar lands and climates. These refugees, like "trees without roots", become compliant out of necessity. In their search for safety and a new place to call home, refugees often cross borders, cultures, and languages. This process of adaptation mirrors what Abes calls "cross-pollination", where refugees coopt aspects of their host societies while preserving their unique identities.

> Nevertheless, we often say that one should be rooted somewhere. I am convinced that the only beings that have roots, trees, would prefer not to have them. They might then, take the plane too (Brecht, 78, in Ben Abbes, 2006).

Bertolt Brecht's quote adds another interesting dimension to the analysis. To his mind, trees that are stationary and the very symbols of inertia might prefer to be rootless and mobile, much like refugees. He upends the convention that rootedness is the ideal state of existence and advocates for movement, change and adaptability. Such states, unlike stationary trees, are more conducive to flight when the situation calls for it. Such reflections provide an interesting lens through which to understand and empathize with the refugee. The intricacies of straddling multiple cultures, the adaptability and resilience of these contemporary Odysseuses, who negotiate displacement and countless formidable obstacles, are vividly illuminated. Bertolt Brecht destabilizes our smug notions of the desirability of rootedness and

suggests that mobility may contain a world of wisdom and liberation. Having considered both sides of the argument, I still lean towards rootedness.

2 Roots, Resistance, and Resilience

Somalis, my ancestors, appear to be incurably nomadic. Several studies demonstrate that this penchant for mobility has continued unabated among contemporary Somalis in urban western societies (Lewis, 1994; Thomas, 2016). A working knowledge of the broad contours and certain peculiarities of Somali culture is apposite before continuing with my own story. The vibrant, distinct and, at times, perplexing, culture of Somalis can be frustrating to outsiders but, for some, an anthropologist's delight. The preeminence of Islam and the almost "sacred" mores governing tribal allegiances are perhaps the most notable of Somali identity markers distilled in the arid plains of the Horn of Africa. It is not uncommon for children to be challenged to recite the genealogy of their tribal ancestors. I was often mocked for failing to memorize the names of my tribal ancestors.

The distinguished British anthropologist and leading expert on Somalia, Ioan Lewis, cites the famous 19th century English explorer Richard Burton who described Somalis as "a fierce and turbulent race of Republicans" (Lewis, 1994). In 1855, while searching for the source of the Nile, Burton was attacked while in Berbera by representatives of my own *Isaaq* clan. He was impaled in the cheek by a javelin which left a notable laceration below his left eye, easily visible on his portraits and photographs. Despite the solid foundations of Islam and tribal loyalty, the warrior ethos is accompanied by a puzzling undertone of nihilism. Although unacceptable to many Somalis, several scholars consider tribalism a more potent force than Islam. It derives its strength from relentless indoctrination from childhood, serves to adjudicate on the mercurial alliances of allies and adversaries and obfuscates attempts at modern nation-building. The nihilistic essence of Somali clan politics is encapsulated in a frequently cited proverb:

> Me and my clan against the world
> Me and my family against my clan
> Me and my brother against my family
> Me against my brother

It is a hazardous venture to seek to occupy, colonize, or straitjacket Somalis into predetermined agendas. The outcome is seldom promising. The British, who were omnipresent in the heyday of colonialism, cautiously employed the euphemism "protectorate" rather than colony to assuage the ire of the ever-suspicious

Somalis. The British wielded ultimate power and authority in Somaliland between 1884 and 1960, but the local and indigenous clan leaders were allowed a semblance of control in this protectorate of Burton's "fierce and turbulent race of Republicans". Officially, the British interest in Somaliland was specifically for the purpose of securing a meat supply market for their British Indian outpost in Aden, Yemen, maintaining order in the coastal regions, protecting the caravan routes from the interior, and considering geopolitical interests later during the Cold War. Livestock, including sheep and goats, were found in abundance in Somaliland, which gave rise to the nickname "Aden's butcher shop" (Samatar, 2005). Resilience and self-reliance are traits the arid and unforgiving landscape distils in Somalis. These traits are part of a proud folklore that values resilience and self-reliance. Somali pride, verging on hubris, has often intrigued visitors – a feature partly stemming from a long and noble connection to their history and unique culture. This ability to keep ancient norms and values alive through rich poetry and other vibrant oral traditions has proved remarkably effective in nurturing a unique cultural identity.

Another notable characteristic is the display of nonchalance and defiance in the face of danger and adversity, unveiling an inner strength and confidence whose source remains enigmatic to foreigners. John Drysdale, the British army officer (1925–2016) affectionately known as Abbas Idriss, dedicated a substantial part of his life to Somalia. He astutely noted that the strong aversion Somalis held towards collarless garments stemmed from their profound resistance to feeling subjugated. In his words, "The prejudice was all to do with the Somali aversion to being treated as 'slaves'. Somalis pride themselves in that they have never been slaves in their history" (Drysdale, 2010, p. 23). This resilience has enabled them to weather hardships and upheavals while maintaining their strong sense of self and community. It's a testament to their unwavering spirit and unyielding commitment to preserving their way of life.

Douglas Jardine, who was Secretary to the Administration of Somaliland, (1916–1921), wrote a book about Somalis in 1923 with the title *The Mad Mullah of Somaliland.* Imagine this scenario: a Western power embarks on a journey halfway across the globe only to encounter a Dervish leader who adamantly refuses to relinquish his autonomy to the British. Frustrated by this indomitable spirit, the British called him "mad", but Somalis know him as Mohammed Abdullah Hassan. There is clearly no incentive for a Western audience to encumber themselves learning and retaining this name in their colonial memory, hence the conceited convenience "Mad Mullah". Undaunted, Mohammed Abdullah Hassan was determined to rid Somalia of all foreign invaders in the early 20th century, be they British, Italian, or Ethiopian. Today, the charismatic Hassan is considered the father of Somali nationalism and is celebrated as someone who embodies the best of Somali qualities such as fearlessness, piety, and poetic skill. He was constantly a thorn in

the side of the British evading capture and inflicting pain through calculated guerilla warfare tactics. The colonial hubris and racism of the time is evident in autobiographies and other accounts. Writing in the forward to Jardine's book, the colonial administrator, Alfred Milner, 1st Viscount Milner states, "Despite the refractory nature of much of his material – the savage and repellent scenery, the uncouth and unpronounceable names – Mr. Jardine succeeds in being not only informative but entertaining" (Jardine, 1923, p. viii).

Contemporary Somalis brush off the epithet "Mad Mullah", seeing it as indirect validation of the significance of Mohamed Abdullahi Hassan. Somalis have often surprised outsiders with their skill in detecting deceit and hubris, however well-crafted and concealed they may be. Significantly, this cynicism extends to awareness of their own Somali counterproductive beliefs and practices, which, while critiqued, are paradoxically upheld and perpetuated. A passion for independence along with contempt for self-appointed foreign hegemons with a sense of racial superiority are traits with a long pedigree among Somalis.

One effective strategy of colonialists has been to concoct and attach contemptible and delegitimizing labels on the colonized. One is reminded of Winston Churchill who described Mahatma Gandhi as a "seditious Middle Temple Lawyer" now "posing as a fakir" because Gandhi opted to show solidarity with the countless impoverished people in India by donning their spartan attire. Pejoratives have been employed as part of an effective arsenal of discursive verbal weapons putting individuals and entire groups of people beyond the pale. It is precisely the machinations of such a discourse employed as part of a strategy to colonize the Middle East that Edward Said gave the term Orientalism a new interpretation, or rather, uncovered its true meaning. The West depicted Arabs as irrational, exotic, childlike, despotic, hysterical, and sexualized, among others, with the purpose of justifying and perpetuating Western imperialism and colonialism in the past and even the present. In this regard, "Mad Mullah" suggested that only mad people whose senses had been clouded by the fanaticism of a foreign religion (God was an Englishman) would dare to resist British rule. As Burton noted, however, a martial, almost anarchic spirit defined the Somali psyche and tribal relations, and, obviously, naked aggression threatening their proud heritage and sovereignty would meet severe opposition.

The use of the term "Mad Mullah" serves as a stark example of how racism and derogatory language have been employed to diminish the legitimate struggles of oppressed peoples. It underscores the importance of acknowledging the historical context and the true motivations behind such labels while recognizing the resilience and determination of the Somali people in the face of foreign hegemonies. Jardine's discourse extended beyond his prior derogatory remarks; he proceeded

by acknowledging the widely held perception of Somalis as "the Irishman of Africa".

> The most entertaining feature of Somaliland is undoubtedly the Somali; and much has been written about the "Irishman of Africa". It is freely admitted by experts that of all Africans he is the most difficult and consequently the most interesting to govern and control. Indeed, to pass from the administration of Somalis to the administration of African negroes must be like bestriding a donkey on Margate sands after riding a thoroughbred at Newmarket (Jardine, 1923, p. 23).

3 Colonial Shadows and Divisive Tactics

In addition to "Mad Mullah", the British conjured up one more epithet for the Somalis during their rule in the protectorate: "The Irishman of Africa". Far from being a compliment, the appellation gave expression to the British characterization of the nature of the resistance put up by the Somalis against colonial rule. Among the reasons for this designation was the resemblance of the opposition they encountered in Somaliland to the one familiar to their close neighbor, Ireland. Like the Irish fighting in the Irish War of Independence (1919 – 1921) the Somalis employed guerilla tactics, assassinations, ambushes and the local terrain to their advantage. Somalis adopted tactics reminiscent of the Irish Republican Army's: sporadic attacks on British strategic interests, convoys, and infrastructure made the task of governing fraught with danger. The Somali love of poetry was coopted as a propaganda tool to garner support among Somalis.

Both the Irish and the Somalis had nationalist and independence movements striving for self-determination. These movements aimed to rid their respective regions of foreign influence and establish their own independent nations. Some British colonial officials may have used this term due to certain sociocultural perceptions they held about the Somalis, such as a perceived sense of stubbornness or a tendency to resist authority. The phrase was a label that colonial authorities used to categorize and frequently stereotype those who opposed British rule in a similar way. The use of this term highlights the resilience and determination of the Somali people in their struggle for independence and self-determination during the colonial period.

The points above have been deliberately highlighted to help draw some limited analogies with the context in Norway, where Somalis constitute the largest African community. The first waves of Somalis began arriving as refugees in Norway in the mid-1980s, and, along with these waves, there was a clearly discernible anti-Somali sentiment among mainstream Norwegians. This opprobrium is unmistakable in

the citation below in the national broadcaster, NrK (2013), and has dogged Somalis for decades now:

> At the other end are the Somalis, vilified as khat-chewing, daytime parasites who generally take more of Norwegian welfare benefits with them than what they contribute in the opposite way. The statistics cement the image of this fourth largest immigrant group in Norway: only three out of ten are employed, the women stand out for their high use of transition allowance, and in the crime statistics, they are overrepresented (NrK, 2013).

To the above, one can add stereotypical images of pirates and Al Shabab. In the context of this memoir, these are the modern-day epithets that have supplanted "Mad Mullah" and the "Irishman of Somalia". Somali refugees and their progeny must not only navigate the typical challenges of language acquisition, education, housing, and jobs, among others, but must also grapple with the constant stream of stigmatization. While not every objection or critique raised by mainstream society is prejudice (e. g., the practice of female genital mutilation), the old Somali traits described previously have triggered disdain fueled by racism. Once again, Somalis have been compelled to tap into their age-old nation's transcending virtues of resilience, self-reliance, and hardiness with a dash of insouciance to survive in these new and alien urban settings. Standing at the crossroads of internalizing these Eurocentric stereotypes or taking command of how they view themselves, many are gradually emerging from the winter of discontent of the last three decades, determined to resist the prevailing demonization that often characterizes mainstream narratives and carve out new narratives.

Quite surprisingly, Somalis came out on top in a poll which asked immigrants from 12 countries about the degree to which they were satisfied with the quality of life in Norway. This raised eyebrows because Somalis have long been denigrated in Norwegian media. Respondents were assessed on a scale ranging from 0 to 10, with 10 being the most satisfied and 0 on the opposite end. The study states, "That the Somalis are so satisfied is startling, all the while both economic problems and other living conditions challenges are widespread among them. Over 40 percent state that they have difficulties making ends meet" (Aftenposten, 2018).

There are important lessons to be drawn from the contours of Somali history sketched so far. Somali resistance and aversion to any hint of disdain or, worse still, subjugation are firmly established. Add to this the surprising result from the poll in Norway suggesting that Somalis scoff at public opinion and maintain a positive self-regard, and one discerns a resilient national character that carves out its own destiny rather than conform to the disparaging image often presented in polls. If the intricacies of colonization are rooted in verbal discourses of power aimed at mentally subjugating a people, then Somalis, the "Irishmen of Africa", possess formidable cultural and other national traits that are counter hegemonic.

Indeed, the Somali narrative, despite decades of misery, has also been one of resilience and triumph over adversity.

As mentioned previously, some of my earliest childhood memories revolved around total strangers who took the liberty to approach me and ask me to recite my genealogy: *Qoloma tahay!* [Which tribe do you belong to?]. They appeared oblivious to the universal etiquette of first asking one's name before proceeding to other questions. Despite this annoying and unwelcome intrusion, in addition to my perception of the entire clan and tribe issue as a repository of antiquated nonsense, I habitually recited my genealogy because it was the only way to get rid of those rude intruders. My primary clan was *Isaaq;* the sub-clan was *Habr Jaalo*; and, at the micro-level, *Samene.* It always puzzled and disturbed me that my sub-clan's name was *Habr Jaalo,* which can be loosely translated as "the ones who love elderly women". Somalis discard political correctness in favor of plain-speaking, however uncouth or shocking, but I always settled upon sweeping this under the carpet rather than broach the subject. It was too risky to raise this troubling obsession with elderly women in a culture that decidedly was hyper masculine and untouched by the ideas and writings of notables like Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir, or a Nora from Ibsen's *A Doll's House.*

The anthropologist and Somali expert Ioan Lewis (1994) also underscores the carefree, fierce independence, and aversion to subjugation that characterize Somalis. To his mind, these traits have been nurtured over the centuries as a result of the famous Somali tradition of camel herding. While the biblical image of a shepherd is linked to pastoral tropes of grazing in lush meadows, protection, peace, and harmony, camel herding conjures images of harsh arid landscapes with herders aggressively in competition for scarce resources. Lewis and other observers of the Somali culture suggest that qualities such as high levels of adaptability and entrepreneurialism in the face of adversity, reinforced by strong kinship ties and generosity, have evolved from camel herding. The encounter with the British and other colonial powers only served to further cement Somali determination to safeguard their autonomy and way of life.

There is always a risk of assuming a shared identity confers the right to preach or moralize in your own community, as was the case with former President Obama. One notable instance was during his 2008 presidential campaign. In a speech at the Apostolic Church of God in Chicago, Obama criticized absentee fathers in the African American community. The speech triggered a counter response from the noted sociologist Michael Eric Dyson, who accused Obama of throwing African Americans under the bus to curry favor with white people for political purposes (Alexander, 2010). In providing a critique, my intention is to foster understanding and trigger critique among Somalis. By engaging in open dialogue and addressing crucial issues, we can work together to create positive change and pro-

mote unity within our community. It is through respectful conversation and a willingness to listen that we can bridge gaps, challenge stereotypes, and build a stronger, more supportive community for everyone involved. I had the option to choose from various topics widely discussed in Western media: absent fathers, low employment participation and integration rates, or the use of the stimulant khat among males, among others. Extensive publications on these subjects are available, easily accessible through an internet search. I prefer the lens of a topic that aligns with my field of study – critical pedagogy. Specifically, I want to delve into Somali's lack of engagement with the broader issue of racism in the West. Broaching this topic is far from comfortable, similar to addressing the proverbial elephant in the room. However, it is imperative that I bring it up, nonetheless. Perhaps a good place to start is the citation below from the previously mentioned British colonial officer Jardine's (1923) description of the Somali:

> They are generally of good physique, with heads well set on spare but athletic frames, with proud bearing and a superb carriage bespeaking their consciousness of a racial superiority over their neighbors. Their profile is often classic; the forehead is finely rounded and prominent; the eyes are moderately large and deep-set; the nose is usually straight but sometimes aquiline; the lips are not too thick, but never everted as in the Negro; and the hair is never woolly, but ringlet, and sometimes even straight. In color they vary from light to dark brown and from dark brown to black, but the last is comparatively rare (Jardine, 1923, p. 20).

While many observers have lauded Somali resilience, it is necessary, in my humble opinion, to discuss the thorny issue of Somali discomfort and even confusion in regard to our "blackness". Spend some time on social media where Somalis are active, and you will not fail to come across videos and discussion platforms where the origin, identity, and "Africanness" or "blackness" of Somalis become a lightning rod issue. Some Somalis have internalized false notions of racial superiority vis-à-vis other Africans, specifically those from West, central and southern Africa. I argue that these prejudices of "shades of black" are the denouement of colonial interests of divide and conquer emanating from the Arab legacy and later British colonial interests. Jardine (1923) accentuated the physical differences of Somalis to sow discord and create hierarchies, instilling a misguided sense of superiority by playing on their vanity and conferring a measure of "Europeanness" upon Somalis. Disturbing images of Nazi pseudo-scientific methods of measuring craniums, noses and jaws come to mind.

It is time to speak out clearly about this disturbing phenomenon among some Somalis. There has always been a certain apprehension about "diluting" one's perceived standing in what I call the "shades of black continuum" among many Somalis. Light-skinned individuals harbor a clandestine fear of diminishing their "racial value" by abstaining from matrimonial relationships with darker individuals. This

applies across the "people of color" spectrum. Stories abound about Arabs who eschew marital relations with Somalis and light-skinned West Indians hesitant to enter into romantic liaisons with darker compatriots, as Stuart Hall notes. Stories also abound through the grapevine of Somali women who harm themselves applying whitening skin cream in the hope of getting closer to the mythologized white ideal. In brief, Jardine's statements undergird the time-tested "divide and conquer" tactics with the aim of fracturing unity among the colonized and maintaining control. The fictitious physiological European ideal only worked so long as the colonized internalized these manufactured standards of beauty.

In a chilling parallel, this insidious tactic mirrors the divisive strategies employed by colonial powers in Rwanda, where the Belgians exacerbated existing ethnic differences between the Tutsis and Hutus. By emphasizing physical distinctions and fostering false hierarchies, they fueled deep-seated animosities, leading to the catastrophic Rwandan genocide. In both instances, the deliberate cultivation of racial prejudices by colonial powers has left enduring scars on these societies. The echoes of these manipulative tactics persist, fostering divisions and tensions even in post-colonial eras. Belgium's introduction of ID cards in 1933–1934 had profound implications for the social fabric of Rwanda, effectively dividing the Rwandan populace into two distinct ethnic groups: Hutus and Tutsis. This division was not merely administrative; it was a deliberate strategy fueled by deeply racist colonial policies. These policies were underpinned by a pseudo-scientific approach, measuring physical attributes like cranial and nasal protuberances (Fuji, 2008; Moghalu, 2005; Thomas & Skinstad, 2018). This method mirrored the dehumanizing ideologies employed by the Nazis, leading to the horrors of the Holocaust. The Belgian colonial authorities, influenced by these prejudiced beliefs, labeled Tutsis as more "European" and "noble", cementing an artificial social hierarchy based on physical characteristics. This division sowed the seeds of discord and inequality, laying the groundwork for the tragic ethnic tensions that would later erupt into the Rwandan Genocide in 1994.

4 Pan-African Solidarity: Embracing Blackness

In the aftermath of chattel slavery, systematic racism and colonialism, people of African origin in the Western hemisphere pushed for a global pan-African movement to spearhead the fight against global racism in the early 20th century. Visionaries like Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr. played pivotal roles in this struggle. The flamboyant Garvey advocated for black pride, unity and economic autonomy through his Universal Negro Improvement Association. Malcolm X emphasized self-defense, self-reliance, and the assertion of black identity. Martin

Luther King Jr., a key figure in the American civil rights movement, advocated for nonviolent resistance and equality for all. More recently, in the UK context for instance, Kehinde Andrews took up the baton in his book *Back to Black* (2018); advocating for a pan-African, black radicalism movement that acknowledges the interconnectedness of black people's struggles globally, transcending borders and artificial divisions imposed by colonial powers. He eloquently captures the sentiment in the phrase "Black is a country", and states:

> Embracing Blackness means uniting around not only our oppression but also our connection via Africa. It means taking on the responsibility for all those in the global Black nation. Blackness is a choice, a commitment to the "dead and unborn" to engage in a politics of true liberation. Black is crucially different to African in this regard. Black is politics, Africa is a place… As Malcom [X] made clear, if you're Black, you should be thinking Black, and if you're not thinking Black at this late stage, I'm sorry for you (Andrews, 2018, p. 285).

Local African communal ties and identity were shattered because of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Emerging from the horrors of slavery only to be ensnared in the quagmire of Jim Crow, the former slaves of the Western hemisphere understood the importance of fostering a new pan-African consciousness as an indispensable ally in the fight against the ubiquitous phenomenon of global racism. The people in the Horn of Africa did not undergo the same experience as their fellow Africans across the pond and hence evince a sense of guarded detachment tinged with some sympathy. Somalis are more likely to demonstrate in support of fellow Muslim Palestinians than a George Floyd. This is despite the knowledge of rife racism against black people in Arab and Muslim countries. The Ethiopian Emperor, Menelik II, famously remarked, "I am not a Negro at all; I am a Caucasian" (Marcus, 1995, p. 131) to the bewilderment of the Haitian delegation, who won their freedom from France under the leadership of Toussaint L'Ouverture.

While the above historical context explains the difficulty many Somalis in the West face in identifying with Pan-Africanism, the burgeoning Somali demographic in the West in the aftermath of the 1991 Somali civil war warrants a new appreciation of the legacy of anti-racist struggles going back to the likes of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman, and Sojourner Truth, to name just a handful, without whose efforts Somalis would find life unbearable in countries such as the USA, for instance. During visits to the USA, I have heard several African American friends and acquaintances complain in passing about what they called an unacknowledged debt among Somalis. They have felt the need to remind East Africans and others newly migrated from West Africa that there is a shared heritage of struggle and resistance that paved the way for the current freedoms. Clearly, this debt appears to still be outstanding, as long as Somalis and other Africans spin a narrative similar to Menelik II's "I am not a negro at all; I am a Caucasian".

A quick perusal of videos uploaded on social media platforms such as TikTok uncovers debates about whether Somalis are black or not.

5 Black Consciousness and Shifting Perspectives

Somalis, just like other black Africans, face racism and discrimination in the West. Their experiences, while unique, are part of a broader narrative of racial injustice. It is essential for Somalis to recognize the interconnectedness of their struggles with those of other black communities. By acknowledging shared experiences, they can actively join the antiracist movement, challenging stereotypes, dismantling prejudices, and fostering solidarity with the global struggle against racism. Understanding the shared history of oppression and resistance is crucial to fostering a united front against racism and injustice, both within Somali communities and in the broader global context. It is my firm belief, shaped by over three decades of observing the experiences of Somalis in the West, that many challenges faced by the youth, as highlighted by various negative statistics, can be attributed to a lack of what Professor Lewis R. Gordon astutely refers to as black consciousness. He profoundly states, "I was not born with a black consciousness. I very much doubt anyone could. The same applies to brown, red, white, yellow, or any other kind of racialized consciousness. Yet we eventually learn, and at times we are forced into them" (Gordon, 2022, p. 3). Some Somalis are in denial. This anecdote from Norway humorously captures the cultural shifts and social adaptations that occur when individuals from diverse backgrounds come together in a new country. In this story, a Somali male refugee rejects the task of washing floors, questioning his assigned role by saying, "Am I a Midgan?" The term "Midgan" refers to an outcast tribe in Somalia, akin to the untouchables (shudra or dalit) in India, highlighting the stigma associated with certain social groups in traditional Somali society. Someone responded to the offended Somali refugee, "In Norway, we are all Midgan!" reflecting the leveling effect of a more egalitarian society. This issue further extends to matters of race, particularly concerning interactions with other Africans. The prevalent but unspoken concern lies in the perception held by certain Somalis (and, to some extent, Ethiopians, Eritreans, and Rwandans) that they are somehow "superior" to other Africans. This perception not only legitimizes a sense of separation but also hampers the development of solidarity with anti-racist movements in the Western world. This situation bears a striking resemblance to George Orwell's allegorical tale, *Animal Farm*, where some animals are considered "more equal than others".

In both scenarios, the underlying theme is one of internalized hierarchy. Just as in *Animal Farm*, where some animals assert superiority over others, creating

divisions and disparities within the community, the perception of superiority among certain African communities perpetuates divisions, hindering the broader efforts for racial equality. This unfortunately results in the splintering and erosion of what should have been a united front against racism which clearly must be understood and fought as a global phenomenon. It is my humble contention that many Somalis either underestimate this important truth or, more troublingly, dissociate themselves from this Pan-Africanism because they still orient themselves towards the Arab and Muslim world, underscoring the depth of their religious convictions. A first step in rectifying this is to acknowledge the fact that anti-black racism is precisely that: anti-black. All black people are uniformly denigrated and devalued in this irrational ideology of prejudice, which gains added potency because it wields power. When a white customer declined to sit in my cab years ago, he justified his prejudice solely based on my blackness and not which part of Africa I hailed from. Anti-black racism, then, is parasitic upon pigmentation and not tribal or national affiliation. Orwell's *Animal Farm* is instructive in this regard. The pigs – Old Major, Snowball, Napoleon, Squealer and Boxer – came to symbolize the revolution in Russia and Stalinism, where, initially, all subscribed to the ideal of equality. Soon, however, this platitude of equality devolved into irony as the pigs unabashedly asserted their perceived superiority, encapsulated in the phrase "All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others". Allow me, at the risk of incurring further vitriol, to cut to the chase: Somalis and other East Africans must challenge and discard the unfounded notion of racial, religious, and ethnic superiority and proudly embrace the blackness they share with 1.2 billion other black people worldwide (World Population Review, 2023).

It was in France that Frantz Fanon experienced a profound racial awakening, which he graphically describes in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). Fanon drew lessons from the encounter with a child. "Where am I to be classified? Or, if you prefer, tucked away? A Martinican, a native of 'our' old colonies. Where shall I hide? '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… ." (Fanon, 1952, p. 85). Fanon argues that it is in the interstices of such encounters that blacks often develop what he called the "epidermalization of inferiority" (internalization process of colonial oppression) and "racial epidermal schema" (bodily embodiment of racial oppression).

This incident, as Fanon detailed, unveiled what he termed "the epidermal schema". In this schema, black individuals are stripped of their humanity, reduced to a mere "black body" devoid of personalization. This dehumanization, this reduction to a singular physical characteristic, encapsulates the struggles faced by many black individuals, including Somalis, in Western societies. The lack of racial consciousness, as aptly described by Gordon, perpetuates a sense of disconnection

and identity crisis among marginalized communities. It strips individuals of their rich cultural heritage and reduces them to mere stereotypes. For young Somalis growing up in the West, this absence of consciousness can lead to feelings of alienation and an internalized struggle with self-identity. Understanding and embracing one's racial and cultural identity, as Gordon implies, is not a natural or inherent process but a learned and often imposed one. Fanon's experiences underline the urgent need for reclaiming individuality and humanity in the face of dehumanizing stereotypes. This journey toward self-awareness and racial consciousness is not just a personal one but a collective endeavor. It forms a crucial part of the larger fight against racism and serves as a foundation for empowerment, resilience, and unity within marginalized communities, including Somali youth in the West.

In the context of the struggles against racism and colonialism, the words of Marx and Engels in the Communist Manifesto, "Workers of the world, unite!" resonate profoundly. This rallying cry transcends geographical boundaries and encapsulates the essence of solidarity in the face of oppression. It underscores the importance of unity among the marginalized, irrespective of their cultural or national backgrounds. For Somalis and other African communities facing racism in the West, this message serves as a powerful reminder that their fight for equality is part of a global movement. By uniting with others who experience similar injustices, they amplify their voices, strengthen their collective power, and stand together against the systemic racism deeply ingrained in societies. The Marxist call for unity not only echoes the struggles against racial discrimination but also emphasizes shared humanity and interconnectedness that binds people in the fight for justice and equality. Understanding this interconnected struggle is key to building a more just and inclusive world where every individual, regardless of their race or ethnicity, can thrive and live without fear of discrimination or prejudice.

6 The Elusive Search for Refugee Roots

I landed at Fornebu airport, Oslo, towards the end of December 1989. I was an eighteen-year-old Somali refugee, apprehensive of what this new journey would portend. My first impressions? Two heightened physical ones: the novelty of seeing blond and blue-eyed people everywhere and the suspicion that someone had just poured ice-cold water into my sneakers as soon as I walked out of the airport – it was minus 20 degrees Celsius. Fornebu Airport closed permanently in 1998. Obviously, it was a very emotional moment over thirty years later, precisely June 16, 2020, when an email from the deputy head of our Institute for Pedagogy dropped into my inbox with the words,

> Good afternoon, Paul! I hope you've had a great day so far. Well, I believe your day is about to get even better because I've just seen the report from the expert committee evaluating your professorship, and they unanimously recommend your promotion to professor. Congratulations! This is truly fantastic news!

This unleashed a slew of emotional displays, prompting my youngest son to run out of his room, concerned that his normally composed father had finally snapped. The promotion to this pinnacle of the academic order triggered a further series of peculiar behaviors. It was as if I harbored a psychological need to make a symbolic pilgrimage to places that held profound meaning in my odyssey in Norway. The first such "shrine" whose memory I have always carried in the deep recesses of my mind was Fornebu – the old, now defunct airport. I guess, as the philosopher Paul Ricoeur argues in *Oneself as Another* (1990), we are all engaged in a series of hermeneutical processes of actively interpreting the self through narrative (the distinction between *idem*-identity and *ipse*-identity). Before frowning at and dismissing these emotions as juvenile or vain, keep in mind that not many who receive such a message are former refugees or cab drivers. Full professors (5000) constitute a mere 0.093 % of the population of Norway (Larsen, 2024). Hence, the reader will, hopefully, excuse my indulgence.

Initially, I could not find any trace of the old airport where I first set foot on Norwegian soil in 1989. I asked around before being shown a swanky-looking building belonging to an IT company. This was the old terminal, I was informed. While I was thankful to have some tangible remnants to connect with a profound piece of my odyssey, I couldn't help feeling a sense of deep loss. There was nothing in the vicinity to remind one that there was a major airport operating between 1939 and 1998, transporting millions of passengers around the world. "Where is my Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty", I remember thinking aloud. Over eight million immigrants passed through the now-mythical gates of Ellis Island in New York between 1855 and 1890 (The Statue of Liberty – Ellis Island Foundation, 2023). It was disappointing to discover the old Fornebu terminal was an IT building – the "shrine" had been desecrated. Despite the dissonance, I somehow managed to reflect and connect with my eighteen-year-old self who landed and entered through this building one winter day in 1989.

The symbolic pilgrimage continued to the Tanum refugee camp in Baerum, where I had spent six months in 1990. Tanum is located approximately 30 minutes' drive southwest of Oslo.

To my surprise, I found myself driving in circles, unable to locate the Tanum refugee center. It seemed as if it had vanished, almost like a figment of my imagination. Finally, a local farmer informed me that the portacabins had long been demolished and the entire center had been razed to the ground. I delved into

the details mentioned earlier because my true quest was to uncover tangible mementos of my youth in Norway, elements I could weave into a captivating narrative about the person I had evolved into over the past three decades. The absence of a Norwegian counterpart to Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty became glaringly evident. In this context, the Oslo Museum/Intercultural Museum is making commendable efforts. Their website features the following appeal:

> Did you relocate to Norway during the 1960s, 1970s, or 1980s? The Oslo Museum is dedicated to safeguarding the heritage of immigration and actively gathers artifacts and narratives associated with migration in Norway. The items we welcome could include clothing, photographs, letters, or any ordinary item that held significance for you during your early days in Norway. They don't need to possess monetary value, but they should come with a meaningful story. When we acquire items for our collection, we also conduct interviews with the contributors (Oslo Museum, 2023).

The pair of shoes worn by Aslam Ahsan, a former local politician in Norway, is one of the items in its collection. In 1971, he left his Pakistani hometown with these shoes before traveling to Europe and Norway. It is about fostering a sense of belonging and carving out a space and narrative that integrates the fragmented experiences. Norway has witnessed a seismic demographic shift in regard to immigration in the last few decades (see Figure 2). The figures for non-Westerners or the global south show a steep rise from 0.9 % of a population of 3,875,546 in 1970 to 7.3 % of the total population of 5,474,360 in 2023. Why do people migrate? When the renowned Norwegian playwright who also penned the Norwegian national anthem, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, wrote in his poem *Fjelldikt [Mountain Poem]* (1859), *"Undrer meg på hvad jeg får at se over de høie fjelle, Øyet møter nok bare sne."* [I wonder what I will see over the high mountains, only snow meets the eye], he definitely did not have a refugee from Somalia in mind. He goes on to write in the sixth stanza:

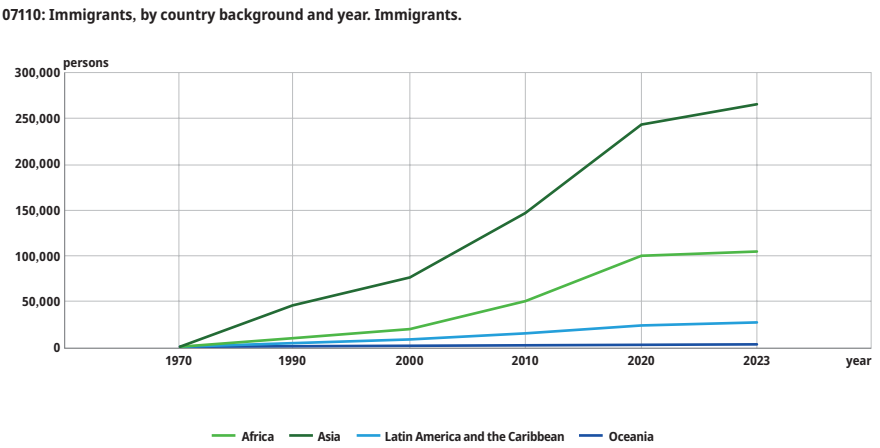
> Skal jeg da aldri, aldri nå
> over de høye fjelle?
> skal denne mur mine tanker slå,
>
> sådan med sne-is og redsel stå,
> stengende der til det siste,
> blive min dødningekiste?
>
> Should I never, never now
> reach over the high mountains?
> shall this wall my thoughts beat,
> so with snow and ice and horror stand,
> closing there to the last, -
> become my coffin?

Imagine replacing Bjørnson's protagonist, Arne, who agonized over leaving his oppressive snow-capped mountain abode with an Ali, Fatima, Abdi, or Amina. In addition, conjure up the image of a relentless desert or semi-arid landscape in place of Arne's snow and ice. Immigrants and refugees to Norway, irrespective of origin, will identify with and wholeheartedly relate to Bjørnson's *Mountain Poem* in this new, re-imagined setting. Those who bravely up sticks and undertake the daunting journey in the pursuit of a better tomorrow will immediately resonate with these themes of yearning and perseverance crystallized in the poem. It was this yearning for a better tomorrow that pushed a staggering 750,000 Norwegians to bid their kith and kin farewell and migrate to the USA between 1836 and 1915. The scale of this magnitude of migration was equivalent to the total population of Norway in the year 1801 (Finstad, 2020). Ultimately, the same factors driving migration today were behind this massive Norwegian exodus – improved economic prospects and the acquisition of new land, for instance.

While economic and demographic pressures are always fundamental and integral push and pull factors feeding into contemporary global migration patterns, there are a plethora of more complex reasons propelling the inexorable movement of people across the globe, mostly from impoverished to affluent countries. Environmental and climate degradation, conflict, political turmoil, and even the seductive imagery created by social media platforms where users perversely flaunt Western prosperity become instrumental in pushing many into the clutches of unscrupulous smugglers and onto flimsy boats. While an uncomfortable subject for some, the role of white privilege in granting favored migrant status to Norwegians and other Scandinavians cannot be overlooked. It came as no surprise when Donald Trump stated that he would prefer to see "more people from places like Norway" in the USA as opposed to African countries, which he infamously described as "shithole countries" (BBC, 2018). During the heyday of emigration from Norway to the USA, Scandinavians were classified as "Caucasian" (WASP variety) and enjoyed a privileged status within the framework of whiteness (Finstad, 202). Any discussions about contemporary migration ought to factor in these complex and nuanced historical antecedents and steer away from reactionary solutions such as building walls on borders and deploying minutemen for surveillance.

In today's context, discussions surrounding privilege, discrimination, and inequality continue to play a critical role in understanding the experiences of migrants worldwide. As global migration patterns evolve, it becomes increasingly important to acknowledge these historical foundations and engage in meaningful dialogue about how they shape contemporary migration realities.

With this burgeoning demographic will come the need to explore issues of belonging. Antonsich (2019, p. 8) lists the following five important aspects that affect belonging: autobiographical, relational, cultural, economic, and legal. The autobio-



Source: Statistics Norway

Figure 2: Immigrants from the Global South to Norway: 1970 – 2023.

graphical element includes early memories that cause emotional connections to a certain location (Dixon & Durrheim, 2004). Obviously, this is what I was seeking when I went back to the spot where my Norwegian odyssey began, and the same is true for the thousands of people who go to Ellis Island to honor an ancestor who took the risky step of leaving home and immigrating while placing faith in the famous promise from Emma Lazarus' poem *The New Colossus:* "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore."

7 Belonging Beyond Borders

While researching this topic for this book, I contacted Anders Bettum, who is an Associate professor of cultural history and museology at the University of Oslo. He is also senior curator at The Intercultural Museum (a part of Oslo Museum) and was behind the call for immigrants to contribute to preserving the history of immigration and collect objects and stories related to migration in Norway. Interestingly, Anders gave me the heartening news that plans were in the offing to erect monuments in former refugee camps in places like Tanum and Refstad, acknowledging their role and significance in providing safe havens and acting as crucial gateways into a new future. After all, hundreds of thousands of refugees and asylum seekers were accommodated and processed in these centers. The twin yet

paradoxical emotions of excitement and trepidation marked my stay in Tanum for six months. Every refugee learns to live with these two companions, for better or worse. The first, excitement, was on account of the indomitable optimism that characterizes youth. It is universally acknowledged then and now that in those halcyon days, before the hardening of attitudes towards immigrants, we were treated with the utmost respect and empathy – an experience for which I will be forever grateful. We were issued a standard black plastic bag with miscellaneous items: a winter jacket, diverse cooking and kitchen utensils, winter shoes, and other essentials. There were three long red buildings comprised of portacabins arranged in a horseshoe formation, and I heard the strange word "dugnad", or voluntary communal work, for the first time in the camp.

> *Dugnad* is voluntary, unpaid work that is done in a community. A charity can be started to help a neighbor or others with a larger job that is difficult to carry out alone. *Dugnad* is also a common form of work in teams and associations, such as spring volunteering in cooperatives or work to get orders (such as flea markets, concerts, and the like) in local organizations (Nordbø, 2021).

A list of domestic household tasks was drawn up on a roster, such as sweeping, cleaning, and kitchen duties, and our names would be written beside the task with a date and time. Remarkably, the camp was well-stocked with books in the languages of all the residents: Somali, Serbo-Croatian, Arabic, Tigrinya, Farsi, and many others. Sadly, these facilities were severely underused because many were unable to concentrate caught in the crossfire of a recent trauma, and worried about the outcome of their application to stay in Norway. One place that was well-visited was the recreation area, where we could engage in activities like table tennis or watch television. For some reason, the channel seemed permanently tuned to MTV, which played certain songs repeatedly, including MC Hammer's "Can't Touch This", Laila K's "Got to Get", and, serendipitously, Lisa Stansfield's "All Around the World". However, the experience at Tanum was also daunting because finding oneself in a foreign country without comprehending a single word of the native language is profoundly unsettling. Fortunately, Norwegians speak English, but I felt like I was starting anew in many ways. In the biblical narrative of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), the world originally shared one language. Paradoxically, it was their fear of dispersal that drove them to build a tower. "Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech" (Genesis 11:7; King James Bible). It wasn't race, physical appearance, religion, gender, or politics that caused this seemingly insurmountable separation; it was language.

In those days at the camp, Jan P. Syse was the Prime Minister of Norway, although his reign was short-lived. Gro Harlem Brundtland assumed power in No-

vember 1990 and ruled until October 1996. However, I could have been forgiven for assuming that the Progress Party's boisterous populist leader, Carl I. Hagen, was in charge. I discovered we were derogatorily referred to as *fremmedkulturelle* (meaning "people from alien cultures") and were regularly chastised in the media for failing to learn Norwegian. Interestingly, populists have remained conspicuously quiet in recent years when it comes to East Europeans and their acquisition of the Norwegian language. Approximately 241,634 East Europeans have migrated to Norway since their accession to the European Union in 2004 (Statistics Norway, 2023). This marks an eightfold increase and will constitute 23 % of the total immigrant population in 2023. It's hard to dispel the suspicion that populists' fixation on the language proficiency of the newer, more "swarthy" immigrants was driven more by our visible skin color and its potential for political exploitation than any genuine concern for our integration and success. In his autobiography, Carl I. Hagen referred to Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher as "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).

8 Integration and Identity: Lessons from Norway's Jewish Community

In his book *Fremmed i Norge* (1981) [Foreigner in Norway], the internationally acclaimed Norwegian-Jewish psychiatrist Leo Eitinger astutely cautioned Norwegians against attempting to forcibly assimilate the new groups of immigrants, particularly those from non-Western backgrounds. Eitinger knew fully well the murderous hatred inherent in antisemitism; he had survived the Holocaust and returned to rebuild his life in Norway. He was prescient in perceiving the vacuity of the discourse of colorblindness so prevalent today. He urged Norwegians back in the 1970s and 80s, when immigration from the global south was still in its infancy in Norway, that there was a need to recognize and discuss the dynamics of racism. As the corpus of literature on racism evinces, colorblindness is a noble aspiration, but it is often invoked as a pretext to avoid grappling with the discomfort of the subject (Omi & Winant, 2015; Goldberg, 2023). Eitinger stated:

> These new immigrants stand out from the Norwegian population, not only in terms of cultural background, language and religion, like many other newcomers before them, but already their skin color and appearance are so different that all attempts at complete assimilation are doomed to fail (Eitinger, 1981, p. 65).

Eitinger goes on to write, "The minorities will one way or another be a separate group, with or without their consent. The Norwegian population is not prepared psychologically to receive and establish an adequate relationship with Turkish, Pakistani, North-African, or Indian immigrants" (Eitinger, 1981, p. 65). The raucous nature of the debate surrounding the integration of non-western immigrants, coupled with the increasing racially segregated landscape in major Norwegian cities, validates Eitinger's farsightedness. The red herring subject of colorblindness will be explored later, but it is important to underscore its prominence in all matters related to race and skin color in Norway. The words, *Her behandler vi alle likt* (Here we treat everyone equally), are waved like a magic wand to kill any attempt at a serious discussion of the topic. In teaching about racism in education in a master's module, students are taken aback to discover that experts on the subject criticize colorblindness as empty rhetoric or, even worse, a manipulative evasion tactic. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, the critical race scholar who introduced the concept of intersectionality, puts it succinctly: "This belief in colorblindness and equal process, however, would make no sense at all in a society in which identifiable groups had actually been treated differently historically and in which the effects of this difference in treatment continued into the present" (1995).

As the years passed and my proficiency in Norwegian improved, it became evident that the theme of immigrant integration (*integrating av innvandrere*) was a prominent focus. Integration was a frequently emphasized objective in Norwegian education, as documented by scholars such as Pihl (2010), Hovland (2001), and Hauge (2014). However, few immigrant groups in Norwegian history have embraced this goal with the same enthusiasm as the Jewish community. It is worthwhile to quote extensively from a document entitled *Jødene* (Jews), accessible on The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training's website, as it provides compelling evidence of the wholehearted commitment of Jews to integrate into Norwegian society.

> The majority of European Jewish immigrants regarded Norway as their primary homeland. This deep connection laid the groundwork for a robust desire to assimilate into Norwegian culture and way of life, all while preserving their Jewish heritage and faith. Education was paramount, and it was vital for their children to attend school, acquire an education, learn the Norwegian language, and establish friendships with Norwegians. Embracing outdoor life in the Norwegian wilderness quickly became a part of Jewish family traditions. Children

> were given Norwegian first names alongside their Jewish ones, and some even adapted their surnames to better assimilate into mainstream society (Levin, 2015, p. 3).

Based on the later experiences of Jews in Norway, it became evident that their desire to integrate, which included participation in the educational system, proved insufficient when the Nazi occupation during WWII rekindled deep-seated antisemitism. This antisemitic sentiment reached its pinnacle with the 1814 Constitution, which outright prohibited Jews from entering Norway. For marginalized Norwegians, while they appreciated the rights and opportunities offered in Norway, the term "integration" had always been seen as a double-edged sword. If Jews, who had lighter complexions than many of us, underwent processes like Norwegianizing their names, forming friendships with Norwegians, and embracing outdoor activities, only to face such a horrifying fate, it has led some marginalized individuals to adopt a "wait and see" approach.

4 From Cricket to Snowy Woods

1 Cricket Fades in Norway's Snowy Silence

My saga in Norway commences as a blissfully unaware eighteen-year-old when I was driven in a Caravelle van adorned with the Red Cross logo to Tanum refugee center half an hour outside of Oslo. The camp was tucked away in a picturesque, remote area deep in the Norwegian woods. I recall the marvel of strolling in the woods, trudging on powdery snow, with Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" echoing like a serene lyrical backdrop to this experience:

> The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
> But I have promises to keep,
> And miles to go before I sleep,
> And miles to go before I sleep.

A Somali refugee strolling through bitterly cold Norwegian snowy woods is odd enough, but quoting Robert Frost elevates the peculiarity to a new level, promoting the need for clarification. Perhaps one way to do this is to shed some light on the cultural capital that I had been a beneficiary of prior to my arrival in Norway. In unpacking this intricate tapestry, I will employ the analytical framework of cultural capital developed by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986), referred to as cultural capital. In 1979, my mother, now navigating the frustrations of single parenthood and juggling four children, decided to enroll me in Barnes High School. This is an Anglican, Anglo-Indian boarding school nestled in the idyllic hill station of Devlali, Nasik, India, about 260 kilometers northeast of Mumbai, the bustling commercial hub. I was eight years old. One Archdeacon, George Barnes, from Devon, England, founded this school in 1925.

In the ten years I was a student at the school, one would be forgiven for thinking the sun had never set on this corner of the British Empire, although India had ousted the British in 1947. We had porridge every morning, and pudding as desert occasionally after dinner, and a special delight called "Hot Cross Bun" on Good Friday. We had no clue as to why there was a cross on the bun or why that particular Friday was designated "good", but we wished every Friday was "good" so we could savor these delectable treats. There was a matron who ran a "tuck shop" (a small food-selling retailer), and we had prefects and captains to maintain order. The school hall was called "the mess", and the school Head Boy would bark "school, stand at ease", followed by "school, alert", before we entered the "mess" in orderly rows. There was a pervasive sense that the likes of Mahatma Gandhi and the emer-

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gence of a new, self-assured India were quietly disregarded. This was a new dawn in an India no longer beholden to William Shakespeare but was determined to revitalize its own revered sages, exemplified by figures like Swami Vivekananda, who famously proclaimed, *Garv se kaho hum Hindu hain* [say with pride, we are Hindus].

In our ninth-grade curriculum, we were tasked with the daunting challenge of memorizing and regurgitating lines from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* in its original early modern English from the Elizabethan period. I distinctly recall posing a question to my fellow classmates, wondering aloud, "How will this archaic language serve us once we step out into the real world?" Little did we know that this was a manifestation of what Pierre Bourdieu would have labelled "habitus" – the skill of acquiring an air of snobbery through the educational system. Habitus, in essence, encompasses the cultivation of specific dispositions that mark an individual as possessing sophistication and class, rendering them worthy of certain privileges. We questioned why Antonio harbored such disdain for Shylock, the Jewish character in *The Merchant of Venice* but our literature teacher encouraged us to focus instead on Shakespeare's literary brilliance.

Apropos Shakespeare, I almost "discovered" I was black when reading the Prince of Morocco's speech in *The Merchant of Venice.*

> Mislike me not for my complexion,
> The shadow'd livery of the burnish'd sun,
> To whom I am a neighbour and near bred.

The prince's speech underscores the racial prejudice prevalent in Shakespearean society. Despite his eloquence and self-assurance, he is acutely aware of how his complexion might influence others' perceptions. His plea, "Mislike me not for my complexion", reflects the burden of racial prejudice he carries. This moment in the play exposes the racism ingrained in the society where individuals are judged based on their skin color rather than their character or abilities. The prince's realization, as he eloquently defends his worth, becomes a poignant commentary on the struggle against racial discrimination. His words highlight the universal desire for acceptance and fairness, regardless of one's racial background. I inferred that Shakespeare, through this character, invites the audience to reflect on the absurdity of racial prejudice and challenges them to question their own biases, making this scene a powerful critique of racism and a call for empathy and understanding.

I alluded to the fact that I almost "discovered" that I was black at the time, however, I was still groping in the dark. The notion of attaining conscientization, which the pedagogue Paulo Freire associates with the development of a critical un-

derstanding of social reality through reflection and action, evaded me. While my Afro hair texture did invite some curiosity in India, many Indians are darker complexioned than I am, so I mostly blended in, oblivious to the machinations of racism. More importantly, it is the entrenched ancient caste system that bedevils social relations in India, not skin color. The American anthropologist Audrey Smedley writes, "The thing about the caste system in India is that it wasn't based on morphology or skin color. The British were the ones who tried to introduce this by attempting to elevate the light-skinned Brahmin people into positions of power, giving them Western education" (PBS, 2003).

During English literature lessons, we were puzzled by the Prince of Morocco's strange obsession with pigmentation with his statement "mislike me not for my complexion" in *The Merchant of Venice* because our familiarity with Moroccans was limited to individuals like Said Aouita, the Olympic track and field champion, and he was certainly not black. We were unfamiliar with the Moors of North Africa and Andalusia, who were also called black Moors by the Anglo-Normans. The trans-Atlantic slave trade, chattel slavery, Jim Crow, the treatment of the Aborigines in Australia, and the racism of Nazi Germany were not issues covered in our curriculum in India; hence, the topic failed to register on our teenage radars at the time. I recall years later, as a newly-arrived refugee in Norway, wondering why the Swastika, the equilateral cross with legs bent at right angles, a holy and ancient Hindu and Buddhist symbol, was considered a symbol of hate in Norway. The German perversion of this symbol (the Hakenkreuz, or hooked cross, is itself a distortion of the Hindu symbol) ensured its association with genocide and racial atrocities. In India, though, discrimination based on pigmentation was an alien concept – the "discovery" that I was black would occur in Europe.

There was a sense of empathy for the "Anglos", as we called them, who ran the school. One teacher bitterly told me "The British sowed their royal seed in India and abandoned us after independence". The sun had set on the British Empire, and one could discern the contours of the rise of the Hindutva nationalist movement vociferously demanding Hindu political and cultural hegemony. With Narendra Modi in the vanguard, many Hindus want to recover a lost pride in the rise of a great civilization that they argue has been wronged through colonization.

They discovered themselves to be out of place in an India under the leadership of people like Morarji Desai and Indira Gandhi, whose tragic assassination in 1984 left us all deeply shaken. While we diligently studied the exploits of British governors such as Robert Clive, Charles Cornwallis (who was also active in the American War of Independence), and Lord Dalhousie, our history books seemed to carefully sidestep any mention of the atrocities committed by the British East India Company. In his book, *Inglorious Empire* (2016, p. 2,3), 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 percent, 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.

I proudly graduated from the school as one of its top achievers, earning the esteemed Lumley Medal for Best Boy in 1988. This prestigious award recognizes excellence not only in academic pursuits but also in sporting achievements. Staying true to my East African heritage, I particularly excelled in middle- and long-distance running (Cross Country) events, even beating the indomitable Ethiopians. The Lumley Medal was named in honor of Sir Roger Lumley, the 11th Earl of Scarbrough – a distinguished British Conservative politician, British Army general, and former Governor of Bombay (1937–1943). Despite the ravages of colonization, one of the British inventions that found even greater enthusiasm in India than in Britain itself is the sport of cricket. I swiftly emerged as an all-rounder, excelling both in bowling and batting. Among the first books I acquired and distinctly remember reading from cover to cover was Clive Lloyd's *The Authorized Biography* (1985), authored by the legendary Black-British journalist, Sir Trevor McDonald. Irrespective of one's allegiances, the Windies, captained initially by Clive Lloyd and later by Sir Vivian Richards, were an indomitable force in the world of cricket. Looking back, in my quest for a sense of belonging and identity, it now appears perfectly natural that I wholeheartedly adopted the "invincible" West Indies cricket team of the late 1980s as "my" team. I even went to great lengths to emulate the formidable pace-bowling style of the intimidating Patrick Patterson.

All future cricket teams would be measured against this formidable team. Most captains since this "dream team" would be flattered to be mentioned in the same breath as the "Invincibles". The names of devastating fast bowlers such as Michael Holding, Malcolm Marshall, Colin Croft, and Joel Garner were enough to rattle the most accomplished batsmen of the time. The West Indian batsmen of the time were equally awe-inspiring. The "master blaster", Viv Richards, with his typical insouciance – no helmet and chewing gum – made a habit of effortlessly dispatching the balls for fours and sixes. He accumulated over 8,000 runs at an average exceeding 50 and notched up 24 centuries. This batting prowess was augmented by the likes of Gordon Greenidge, Desmond Haynes, and Richie Richardson – opening batsmen who were second to none in international cricket.

I labored over the above only to highlight the cultural capital that laid a lasting foundation for subsequent academic achievements. Without this "British heritage" acquired in a remote hill station, somehow stubbornly holding on to Victorian val-

ues, I doubt my story would be possible. The groundwork was laid for a host of values that would prove key to academic and all-round success in life. Among these are the following: a wholesome approach to education that holistically balanced academic and sporting success; rigor applied in covering the basics of every subject and continuing progressively; fostering a culture of appreciation for sporting and extracurricular competition; and instilling an ethos of discipline and resilience that mirrored military traditions. We even competed against the military in the final year, which had a large base in Devlali (Nasik) camp. Fast forward two decades into the future, and these values inculcated at Barnes High School would prove instrumental in completing a PhD in Education at King's College, London.

Returning to the Somali refugee who cited Robert Frost's poem in the snowy woods of a Norwegian forest, it was difficult to suppress an undercurrent of melancholy that welled up in my soul. The inspiring cheers of the cricket crowds when I hit a ball for four or six would remain echoes forever buried in my past. When I asked whether cricket was played in Norway, one Norwegian responded that cricket was the English way of twisting a relaxed stroll in the grass into a tactical scheme, complete with obscure rules and occasional shouts of "How's that?" Clearly, in this new land, cricket was the bizarre game the "bored" English invented. The very essence of part of my heritage seemed to dissipate in the face of the stark reality of my new surroundings – a world of skiing, ice hockey, slalom, and ice skating. This transformation, this sense of loss and resurrection in a foreign land, echoed the themes of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667). In Milton's epic poem, the expulsion from paradise represents a profound loss of innocence and identity, a forced departure from the familiar into the unknown. Similarly, as a refugee, I grappled with the dilemma of preserving my heritage while adapting to a new world. My passion for cricket, once a vibrant thread in the fabric of my identity, began to fade into the background, like a distant memory. It was a poignant reminder of the refugee's dilemma – the struggle to retain a piece of one's past while forging a new identity in a foreign land.

2 Education's Evolution from Corporal Punishment to Critical Inquiry

Of particular relevance to my experiences in Norway is the emphasis in India placed on memorization and the ability to recall information. During those times, the internet had not yet emerged, and calculators were strictly prohibited. The educational system placed a high value on high-achieving or "gifted" students. I remember a time when my teachers determined that I should undergo a "double

promotion" from the second grade to the fourth grade because they felt I needed more challenging coursework due to boredom. Unaware of their decision, I initially joined the third grade, only to be promptly informed that I should instead join the fourth-grade class. Finding myself among unfamiliar peers in the fourth grade, I resolved not to display any signs of exceptional aptitude to avoid potentially losing friends once again.

Today, the limitations of such an educational approach are widely recognized. The Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, referred to this as "banking education". The paradoxical nature of knowledge imposition within education deeply troubled Freire. In his view, "banking education" stands in stark contrast to a truly liberating pedagogy, which he characterized as problem-posing and dialogical (Freire, 1970, p. 65). "Banking education" is characterized by a series of binary principles. For instance, the teacher is the one who imparts knowledge, possesses knowledge, thinks, communicates, establishes discipline, takes action, makes choices, and is the focal point of the learning process. Meanwhile, students are relegated to the role of passive learners, devoid of knowledge, the subject of the teacher's thoughts, listeners, recipients of discipline, obedient followers, and so forth (Freire, 1970). A central tenet of a Freirean pedagogy of dialogue is the abandonment of these historically entrenched roles of "teacher-student and student-teacher". Instead, it embraces a paradigm in which both parties engage in a mutually enriching dialectic of learning.

> They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. In this process, arguments based on "authority" are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be on the side of freedom, not against it. Here, no one teaches another, nor is anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are "owned" by the teacher (Freire, 1970, p. 61).

The previously mentioned raft of values accrued at the boarding school in India, of course, cannot be gullibly swallowed; there is a need to apply some critique inspired by Freirean principles. For instance, I vividly remember the reaction of our seventh-grade mathematics teacher, who was nonplussed at the careless way I copied off his meticulous blackboard answers. This teacher possessed a fear-inspiring "imported" cane, as he affectionately called it, which he did not hesitate to apply to our backs to enforce his penchant for precision. All I needed was one such application, and I copied off the blackboard with the rigor a Jewish scribe applies to copies of the Torah. I knew the rigmarole: proceed to his desk, touch my toes with both hands, and the moment his cane met my rear, I pranced around the classroom until the searing pain subsided. Sitting comfortably down again would be an ordeal for some days.

When I visited the school years later, in 2002, another of my teachers, who had retired by then, brought up the subject of corporal punishment unsolicited. His conscience was obviously troubled by this old practice, which he shared was now banned. He offered a sincere apology if he ever disciplined me physically. I had invited this teacher, one of my favorites, out for dinner in a premier gastronomic establishment along with his family, and I assured him that I held no grudges against any of my former teachers. It may come across as an enigma for a Western audience, especially in Scandinavia, but many of the ex-students, including myself, were unable to outright condemn the school and these teachers for the corporal punishment that was de rigueur at the time. We were aware of the paradox of condemning the practice while simultaneously reminiscing about these teachers in endearing terms; they were the surrogate parents we never had.

Contrast the above with the culture shock I experienced in Norway when teachers asked me to address them by their first name and said that corporal punishment was forbidden and punishable by law. Let it be unequivocally clear: the detrimental effects associated with corporal punishment have been extensively documented in research. These effects encompass a range of issues, including children internalizing and externalizing behavioral problems, child mental health issues, limited moral internalization, strained parent-child relationships, child aggression, antisocial behavior in children, compromised cognitive abilities, low self-esteem, and the persistence of mental health problems and antisocial behavior into adulthood (Havighurst et al., 2023). Surprisingly, despite this substantial evidence, the *Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children* (2021) reports that there are still 63 countries where corporal punishment in schools remains legal. Notably, the USA falls into the category of "Lawful in some or all schools", while in Australia, it is deemed "Lawful despite policies against its use in some or all schools".

Conversely, in Norway, I came to appreciate the fallibility of epistemological certainties and developed a more critical mindset. Here, education and leisure need not be in conflict but can harmoniously coexist and complement each other. In Norway, formal grading of students (summative evaluation) is prohibited between grades one to seven, although teachers still employ various forms of formative evaluation to assess students' development and progress. Regrettably, as of the time of writing, there is a significant crisis in attracting students to the teaching profession in Norway. Various stakeholders have presented a multitude of "diagnoses" for this issue: teachers are expected to wear multiple hats, including roles as social workers, psychologists, organizers, parents, and friends; others point to the 2017 addition to the bullying clause, which mandates that any pupil who even "subjectively" believes they are being bullied must be taken seriously and

documented by headteachers; and some attribute it to the growing administrative workload.

The second aspect of belonging, relational ties, pertains to the strength of our connections with family, friends, and even strangers we encounter in public. According to Baumeister and Leary (1995), the length, significance, positivity, frequency, and quantity of physical contacts all influence the salience of our bonds with others. They argue that "Belongingness can be almost as compelling a need as food", placing it on the same level as physiological requirements in Maslow's (1968) hierarchy, such as air, water, sleep, and shelter. In his iconic book *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), W.E.B. Du Bois famously wrote, "For the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line". While the issue of race continues to bedevil the world 100 years on, it is also becoming abundantly clear that the problem of the 21st century is also one of belonging. According to the United Nation's *World Migration Report*, the latest worldwide figures suggests that in 2020, there were approximately 281 million international migrants, constituting about 3.6 percent of the global population. In general, the estimated count of international migrants has risen steadily over the past five decades. The total estimate of 281 million individuals residing in countries other than their birthplaces in 2020 exceeded the 1990 figure by 128 million and was more than three times the estimated number in 1970.

3 The Loneliness Epidemic: Belonging in a Disconnected Society

A burgeoning corpus of scholarly literature has been exploring the notion of belonging in recent years, buoyed perhaps by global migration patterns and the changing demographics, particularly in the West. It is intrinsic to the human condition to draw up boundaries, demarcating who belongs and who does not. For immigrants doing their utmost to seamlessly integrate or even assimilate, one of the most disheartening insults is the denigrating "go back to where you came from". This one crass utterance can wreak untold damage upon the vulnerable psyche of an immigrant who conscientiously has invested in the new homeland and covertly longs to pass off as a native like everyone else. There is a tacit understanding among the majority of minoritized individuals in Norway that, whereas racism in its manifold permutations can flare up at any given moment, they have a formidable ally in the official state institutions. Much ink has flowed in heaping praise on the enlightened and successful Scandinavian model of institutions underpinned by social democratic principles. It didn't take long for newcomers to perceive the trust Norwegians demonstrated in every layer of their governing institutions. The words

"kommune" [commune] and "fylke" [county] were always mentioned as authoritatively as religious persons would cite their sacred scriptures.

Perhaps because of the success of the Scandinavian model of state intervention and management in almost every sphere of society, I argue that either the state has at times failed to recognize the limits of its reach, or that citizens have lazily outsourced certain duties and responsibilities to the state. One such arena is interpersonal relationships, most evident in the epidemic of loneliness in an otherwise thriving country. This being a delicate topic, I apologize if I fail to treat it with the gravitas it deserves. The truth is, however, at the risk of being banal, the state does not drop in for a casual cup of coffee and attend to the mental welfare of its citizens. The call is always for more psychologists and psychiatrists. One cannot avoid the discomforting feeling that we have delegated the responsibility to be "our brother's keeper" to the nebulous concept of state. This is not a particularly controversial or revelatory statement. Any outsider and many Norwegians I have dared to raise this almost "taboo" subject have confirmed as much.

I recall a somber incident back in 1994 when news reports told the harrowing stories of elderly individuals whose lifeless bodies were discovered months after their passing. In one particularly tragic case, an elderly man passed away in his Oslo apartment, only to be found eight months later when concerned neighbors reported a foul odor emanating from the corridors. The discovery of his death eight months prior was based on the date of the newspaper resting in his lap, a fact later confirmed by the coroner. Back then, I recall the then Mayor of Oslo, Rune Gerhardsen, launching a campaign entitled *Det er lov å bry seg!* (It is ok to care). While a taboo subject, we cannot make any progress unless we discuss the epidemic of loneliness in Norway, which has been aggravated by the advent of the internet age. *Verdens Gang*, one of the leading national newspapers, reported in 2019 that two elderly residents of a municipal housing facility in Oslo were discovered lifeless after a prolonged period of emitting a strong and persistent odor. These individuals had been lying deceased for a staggering 191 days before their unfortunate discovery. Similarly, in 2017, a mother, aged 68, and her two daughters, aged 35 and 28, were found deceased in a municipal rental property located in Romsås, having remained unnoticed for an entire month following their passing (Fjellenger & Vågenes, 2019).

A recent investigation by another national daily, *Aftenposten* delved into instances where individuals remained undiscovered for more than a week after their deaths, uncovering that between 2003 and 2017, 140 such cases were documented (Eggesvik, 2018). Bewilderingly, there was a case about a pensioner who died in his flat in 2011 – the same day the world watched the royal wedding of Kate and Prince William – only to be discovered nine years later. This disheartening revelation underscores a deep-seated societal concern that warrants earnest

contemplation. In his New Year's speech in 2001, the then Prime Minister of Norway, Jens Stoltenberg, (now NATO General Secretary) questioned whether wealth and affluence had made Norway happier. It is worth quoting excerpts from his speech at length.

> As important as the question of what we should make a living from is the question of what we should live for. Becoming wealthier as a country and as individuals doesn't necessarily guarantee greater happiness. Since 1970, our wealth measured in monetary terms has nearly tripled. But have we become three times happier? Are we leading rich lives in this affluent country?
>
> Ole Paus [Ole Paus is a well-known Norwegian artist, singer-songwriter, and cultural figure] has described Norwegians this way: "We have everything, but it's also everything we have". Many of our dreams often boil down to calculations in terms of money and cents. However, when I reflect on it, I realize that as a human being, a spouse, a father to young children, and as a friend to my friends, the good life is about something else: It's about having people close to me with whom I can share joy and sorrow. It's about being part of a larger community and feeling that my contribution matters (Stoltenberg, 2001).

I have been exercised by this topic from the very beginning. The *Emotional Institute* (Palsdottir, 2023) states, "Loneliness is Norway's new national ailment. Statistics show that 20 % of the population experiences loneliness, and among the elderly, one in three reports feeling lonely. These are significant figures, and behind these numbers lies a great deal of fear, sorrow, and despair". Seen through the lens of Norwegian-minority relations, it becomes incumbent upon us to explore this delicate subject and the manner in which it further throws a wrench in the works of an already strained relationship. One can appreciate the formidable challenges associated with being a newcomer; limited language skills impede the formation of new friends and amplify feelings of loneliness. The integration of immigrants, something politicians constantly stress, is obviously connected to language proficiency, which in turn is intricately linked to socialization as an unstated means to prevent loneliness.

The reality, however, is that proficiency or mastery of the target language (e. g., Norwegian) does not automatically translate into the eradication of prejudices and an expanded network of friends for the immigrant. While the eloquent speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King stirred many hearts, his soaring rhetoric incisively denouncing injustice simultaneously further fueled the antipathy of many others, leading to his untimely demise. It is important, then, to decouple language proficiency from integration – while there is a correlation, there is no direct causality. Two first-time visiting Canadian professors shared how they were pleasantly surprised by the multicultural ambience of Oslo, as they assumed Norway was homogenously white. However, upon closer examination, they were disappointed to note

that the diversity was a façade aligning with "voluntary segregation" patterns evident in most Western capitals. This "diversity" was lived out in parallel worlds – one white and the other black and brown. The same pattern is mirrored in major universities in Norway – black and brown students mostly cluster together, while white Norwegian students form their own distinct social circles.

4 Fostering Honest Race Conversations in Schools

This phenomenon underscores the complexities of social integration and prompts us to delve deeper into the underlying factors that contribute to this separation. Beverley Daniel Tatum's book *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* (1997) primarily focuses on racial dynamics in American schools, many of its concepts and insights can be applied to the Norwegian setting, where there is also segregation in schools, albeit with its own unique characteristics. This issue, which has persisted for some time, calls for a comprehensive examination to better understand its intricacies and to work collectively towards fostering a more inclusive and harmonious society. Here are some ways the book's principles can be relevant to addressing school segregation in Norway:

- **Understanding Racial Identity Development:** Tatum's book highlights the importance of understanding how racial identity develops in students. In Norway, where there are diverse student populations, educators and policymakers can benefit from studying how students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds perceive themselves and others in a predominantly white society. This understanding can inform strategies for promoting positive racial identity development.
- **Open Dialogue about Race:** Tatum stresses the importance of open and honest discussions about race. In Norwegian schools, creating safe spaces for students to talk about their experiences, concerns, and perceptions of race can foster greater understanding and empathy among peers. Encouraging dialogue can help break down barriers and stereotypes.
- **Cultural Competence Training:** Tatum discusses the significance of cultural competence in education. In Norway, educators can undergo training to better understand the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students. Currently, cultural competence is sadly reduced to what has been lampooned as "sarees, samosas and steel bands" multiculturalism (Modood & Stephen, 2001) to describe the superficial treatment of the topic in Norwegian schools. As a high school teacher in one of the most multicultural districts in Oslo, the school celebrated "Diversity Day" with belly dancing, a "catwalk" displaying the national costumes of the countries represented, and everyone's favorite part: foreign cui-

sine, which even the most xenophobic would acknowledge enriches the bland Norwegian food. This training can help teachers create inclusive classrooms and adapt teaching methods to meet the needs of all students.

- **Diverse Curriculum:** Tatum's (1997) book advocates for a curriculum that reflects the experiences and contributions of people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. In Norway, incorporating diverse perspectives into the curriculum can help students of all backgrounds feel valued and included in the educational process.
- **Policy Changes:** Tatum's book underscores the importance of policy changes to address segregation and promote diversity. In the Norwegian context, policymakers can examine zoning policies, school funding, and admissions practices to ensure that they do not perpetuate segregation. They can also implement policies that promote diversity and inclusion in schools.
- **Student Support Services:** Tatum discusses the need for support services for students dealing with issues related to race and identity. In Norway, schools can establish support systems such as counseling services and peer mentorship programs to help students navigate these challenges.
- **Community Engagement:** Engaging with parents, community organizations, and local leaders is vital to addressing school segregation. Tatum's principles can be applied to encourage community involvement in promoting diversity and inclusion within schools.

Nevertheless, in the quest to empower and uplift young minds, compassionate adults, including family members and educators, possess a repertoire of strategies to mitigate the insidious effects of stereotype threats, ultimately fostering the growth and development of minoritized youth. One of these vital strategies entails the provision of role models hailing from stigmatized groups whose accomplishments boldly defy the confines of stereotypes (Tatum, 1997, p. 160). Indeed, research has illuminated the profound impact of this approach. When young black girls are exposed to strong role models who exemplify achievement and success, it not only bolsters their academic aspirations but also fortifies their sense of racial identity. This synergy becomes especially potent when it instills the belief that being African American is intrinsically linked with achievement and excellence, serving as a powerful antidote to the corrosive effects of stereotype threat. It's through such thoughtful and deliberate measures that we can nurture the potential of our future generations and empower them to shatter the shackles of bias and prejudice.

5 Janteloven: Impact on Social Interaction

The third aspect of belonging, culture, encompasses understanding not only the language but also the unspoken rules, signals, and gestures that constitute the same semiotic system (Cohen, 1982). It's important to remember that immigration from non-Western countries to Norway only began in the 1960s and 1970s. Even as late as 1990, the idea of a person with a darker complexion owning a house in Holmenkollen, one of Norway's most affluent areas, was seen as provocative. I distinctly recall my social worker's surprise in 1990 upon learning that Malik, the proprietor of the eponymous hamburger chain, had a residence in Holmenkollen. At the time, I had no knowledge of who Malik was or where Holmenkollen was located. My only understanding was that I should avoid Holmenkollen if I wanted Norwegians to accept me, although I had no reason to be concerned, as I instinctively knew that refugees posed no threat to the wealthy and famous.

In an interview in 2004 (Cheliah, 2004), Malik was asked by a journalist "In the garage, there's a Nissan station wagon. You were the first Pakistani who owned a Mercedes here back in the day; where is it now?" Malik replied tongue-in-cheek, "The Norwegian *Janteloven* has taken it from me!" and laughed heartily. The conversation in the passage highlights a concept deeply rooted in Scandinavian culture known as *Janteloven,* or "The Law of Jante". *Janteloven* is a social and cultural phenomenon in Nordic countries like Norway, and it reflects a set of unwritten rules or norms that discourage individualism and promote modesty and conformity within society. In the passage, when Malik mentions that the "Norwegian *Janteloven* has taken it from me", he is referring to the cultural phenomenon where, in a society influenced by *Janteloven,* there can be a strong sense of disapproval or resentment towards those who stand out or show signs of individual success or wealth. Envy can play a significant role in this context. Malik's statement implies that the envy and social pressure to conform to *Janteloven* may have influenced his decision to sell his Mercedes and replace it with a more modest Nissan. He suggests that the social expectation of modesty and not drawing too much attention to oneself, as dictated by *Janteloven,* led to the change in his car choice. In essence, *Janteloven* fosters an environment where individuals might feel reluctant to display their achievements openly due to the fear of being perceived as arrogant or inconsiderate of others' feelings. It can create social pressure to conform and downplay personal success, which can sometimes lead to choices that may not align with one's true desires or ambitions.

The concept of *Janteloven* was popularized by the Danish-Norwegian author Aksel Sandemose. He introduced these ten principles in his novel *En flyktning krysser sitt spor* (A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks) in 1933. It's important to note that these principles were not meant as a serious legal code but rather as a satir-

ical commentary on social norms and attitudes prevalent in small-town and rural Scandinavian communities during the early 20th century. Sandemose, through his novel, aimed to critique the conformity, social pressure, and self-imposed limitations that he observed in such communities. He portrayed the fictional town of Jante as a place where individuals were discouraged from standing out, pursuing individual success, or expressing confidence and ambition. The principles of *Janteloven* served as a literary device to illustrate the stifling effects of such attitudes on personal growth and individuality. In essence, Sandemose wrote these principles to highlight and critique what he perceived as a stifling and conformist mindset in certain Scandinavian communities. The *Janteloven* can be summarized with the following principles:

1. You're not to think you are anything special.
2. You're not to think you are as good as we are.
3. You're not to think you are smarter than we are.
4. You're not to imagine yourself better than we are.
5. You're not to think you know more than we do.
6. You're not to think you are more important than we are.
7. You're not to think you are good at anything.
8. You're not to laugh at us.
9. You're not to think anyone cares about you.
10. You're not to think you can teach us anything.

Over time, these principles were further secreted into the concept of *Janteloven* and they continue to be used to describe the tendency to discourage individualism and personal ambition in Nordic societies. In Norway, it is considered good etiquette to strive for consensus. This collective and nationwide inclination toward consensus is apparent in the frequent use of statements that are framed as questions. These questions may seem democratic on the surface but often carry an underlying implication of disapproval for those who disagree. For instance:

> *Er ikke du enig?* (Aren't you in agreement?)
> *Synes ikke du det?* (Don't you think so?)
> *Kanskje vi burde vurdere det annerledes?* (Perhaps we should consider it Differently?)
> *Skulle vi ikke heller gå den veien?* (Shouldn't we go that way instead?)
> *Er det ikke bedre slik?* (Isn't it better this way?)

These are just a few examples of statements that may subtly pressure individuals to conform to the prevailing consensus or discourage them from expressing dissenting opinions. The use of such language reflects the cultural emphasis on harmony and collective decision-making in Norwegian society. I've discovered that if I

want to stimulate lively discussions and challenge the tendency toward consensus among my postgraduate students, I should pose two questions: (1) Does *Janteloven* still influence society today? (2) Is there a sense of class consciousness in Norway?

Minoritized individuals must be patient. The initial novelty and the accompanying xenophobia of the early decades are gradually diminishing. Recent studies on attitudes towards immigrants seem to show improvement each year. Fortunately, Norway's history of immigration, compared to the UK's post-World War II experience, has been relatively free of major scandals. Norway has not witnessed an equivalent of the Windrush scandal, nor anything approaching the infamous "No Irish, no blacks, no dogs" signs, and certainly nothing comparable to the Brixton riots of 1981. The danger arises mainly from lone wolves, such as Anders Breivik and Philip Manshaus.

6 Double Consciousness: Navigating Identity in Multicultural Norway

Several years ago, in a study I co-conducted (Thomas et al., 2022), we delved into how issues of identity manifest among minorities who purchase the expensive Norwegian costume known as the *bunad* and proudly wear it on Norway's national day, the 17th of May. Our research uncovered a troubling pattern through six media case studies where individuals, including some prominent and successful minority-background politicians, faced discrimination and even received death threats for what was perceived as "transgressing" and "misappropriating" the national costume. For instance, when the study was conducted, Sahfana M. Ali was 37 years old, originally from Sri Lanka, served as a councilor in the city of Stavanger in southwest Norway, and held the position of deputy leader within the Stavanger Labor Party. She has called Stavanger her home since the age of ten. In 2016, she commissioned a traditional Norwegian bunad tailored to incorporate a bespoke hijab. This unique bunad was a gift from her Norwegian husband, Ingve, in preparation for their wedding. However, when Sahfana posted a photo of the bunad on Facebook, it unleashed a tidal wave of racist messages, replete with offensive language and physical threats. One particularly ominous comment included images of five guns. The report reveals that while some individuals expressed opprobrium regarding her ethnic background, it was the custom hijab that caused the most consternation, being derogatorily termed the "sharia hijab". Sahfana elucidated this cultural blend with the following statement: "I do not see anything wrong in wearing a hijab with the bunad. Traditionally, most bunads had headscarves. On the contrary, a hijab goes well with a bunad. In this manner, we exhibit the diversity we have in Norway today by combining these." She further empha-

sized the positive aspect of Norwegian society, stating, "This is what is great about Norwegian society. If other girls are in the same situation as I, and see my bunad, then it can be perceived as pioneering work for a more inclusive Norway, and I can be a symbol for a more diverse and tolerant society".

The severity of the online attacks prompted Sahfana to close her Facebook page. A nationally recognized activist, Mona Hodne, aged 46 and labeled as an "opponent of Islam" in the newspaper report, shared a manipulated image of Sahfana with the caption, "This is an insult against our Norwegian culture. Stay away from *Embla* bunads if you oppose this!" *Embla* refers to the retailer that produces bunads in Stavanger. Interestingly, Embla showcases a photo of five young women modeling various bunads, one of whom has African ancestry. On a contrasting note, the newspaper report also features a politician from Stavanger, Christian Wedler, affiliated with the Progress Party, a party widely perceived as anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim. Wedler staunchly defends Sahfana's credentials and expresses dismay at the animosity directed towards her. He describes her as an "integrated woman with a job and proud to be Norwegian", even going so far as to procure a bunad from Frafjord, a compelling opportunity to delve into the broader implications of such an act and its reverberations in contemporary society. Sahfana's choice highlights the growing diversity in Norwegian society. Her cultural amalgamation, combining a hijab with a bunad, reflects the evolving face of Norway and underscores the importance of recognizing and embracing this diversity. It's a testament to the idea that identity is not fixed but can adapt and evolve to incorporate new elements, reflecting the multicultural reality of modern Norway.

W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness" aptly encapsulates the experience of individuals who navigate multiple cultural identities. "Double consciousness" is a central theme in Du Bois's work and refers to the psychological and social experience of African Americans and other marginalized groups in a predominantly white society. Du Bois described it as the sensation of possessing two identities, two conflicting self-perceptions, and viewing oneself from two different, often contradictory, perspectives. One identity is rooted in an individual's own racial and cultural background, while the other is shaped by the dominant white culture and society. Du Bois argued that African Americans in the United States were constantly aware of how they were perceived by the dominant white society. This awareness resulted in a sense of "twoness", where they saw themselves through their own eyes and through the eyes of the white majority. It meant that African Americans were not just individuals; they were individuals living within a broader racial context. They had to navigate and reconcile these two identities, which often resulted in feelings of conflict, tension, and even a sense of "twoness" or "double consciousness".

> The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife – this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging, he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. (Dubois, 1990, pp. 8, 9).

For instance, African Americans might be aware of their cultural heritage, values, and experiences, which could differ from those of the white majority. However, they were also constantly aware of the stereotypes, biases, and prejudices held by white society, which could lead to self-doubt and internalized racism. This dual awareness, according to Du Bois, had profound implications for the African American experience, influencing how they perceived themselves, their place in society, and how they interacted with others. In conclusion, W.E.B. Du Bois coined the phrase "double consciousness" to describe the complex psychological and social experience of African Americans living in a society that is predominately white. It emphasizes the conflict between one's own identity and the identity that the dominant culture imposes, causing one to be constantly aware of how other people perceive them. This concept has had a lasting impact on the study of race, identity, and social psychology.

Sahfana, as a woman of Sri Lankan descent wearing a Norwegian bunad with a hijab, embodies this concept. She is negotiating both her ethnic heritage and her adopted Norwegian identity, experiencing the tensions and complexities associated with double consciousness. Her act invites reflection on the intricacies of identity in multicultural societies. In conclusion, Sahfana's decision to wear a hijab with her bunad serves as a microcosm of the broader challenges and opportunities associated with cultural diversity in contemporary Norway. It sheds light on the clash between tradition and progress, the persistence of prejudice, and the potential for social change. Her story underscores the importance of dialogue, understanding, and acceptance as Norway, like many other nations, grapples with the complexities of its evolving identity in a globalized world.

7 The King's Speech: Symbolic Leadership and the Evolving Notions of Belonging

In light of the inner conflict described earlier, it is advisable to approach the topic of someone's background or origin, particularly for individuals who identify as black or brown in Norway, with sensitivity and respect. The question "Where

are you from?" can be posed in a more considerate manner, avoiding any unintended crudeness. This approach acknowledges that the journey toward understanding, and acceptance is ongoing. It recently dawned on me that every passing year I have lived in Norway longer than all my postgraduate students, except one or two. It's important to recognize that this curiosity about my background often stems from a cultural context where identities are perceived as more certain and unchanging, given Norway's relative peace and stability. In contrast, many individuals around the world have experienced wars, conflicts, environmental crises, and political upheavals, such as the Cold War, that have disrupted their lives and led to fluid and complex identities. For these individuals, such as myself, the luxury of a fixed and cozy identity may not be readily available. Therefore, while it's essential to foster understanding and bridge cultural gaps, it is equally important to approach conversations about identity with sensitivity and an awareness of the diverse backgrounds and experiences of those we engage with.

The role of the King of Norway as an important symbol in *granting* belonging should not be overlooked. The King of Norway, as a symbol of the nation and its continuity, plays a pivotal role in defining and reinforcing national identity. The bunad itself is often considered a representation of Norwegian culture and heritage. When Sahfana chose to wear a hijab with her bunad, she was making a statement not just about her personal identity but also her sense of belonging within the broader Norwegian community. The King, as a unifying figure, holds the potential to influence the perception of inclusivity and acceptance. People like me were delighted when the King of Norway, Harald V, stated, among others,

> Norwegians are Northerners, people from Trondheim, Southerners – and people from all the other regions. Norwegians have also immigrated from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Poland, Sweden, Somalia, and Syria. My grandparents immigrated from Denmark and England 110 years ago. It's not always easy to say where we are from, which nationality we belong to. What we call home is where our heart is – and it cannot always be confined within national borders… Norwegians believe in God, Allah, the Universe, and Nothing (Njerve, 2016).

The King of Norway's speech exemplifies the evolving understanding of belonging in a multicultural and diverse society. His words emphasize several key points:

– **Inclusivity of Diversity:** The King acknowledges the diverse backgrounds and origins of the Norwegian population. By mentioning immigrants from countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Poland, Sweden, Somalia, and Syria, as well as his own family's immigration history, he underlines the rich tapestry of nationalities and ethnicities that make up modern Norway. This inclusivity challenges traditional notions of belonging based solely on birthright or heritage.

- **Fluidity of Identity:** The King's statement about the difficulty in pinpointing one's nationality or place of origin resonates with the discourse on identity discussed earlier. It highlights the fluid nature of identity, suggesting that where a person is from may not solely determine their sense of belonging. Home, in this context, is defined by one's emotional and cultural connections rather than rigid national boundaries.
- **Religious Pluralism:** The mention of beliefs in God, Allah, the Universe, and Nothing reflects the religious diversity within Norway. It emphasizes the coexistence of different faiths and worldviews, reinforcing the idea that belonging is not contingent upon a single set of beliefs. This resonates with the broader discourse on multiculturalism and the acceptance of various cultural and religious backgrounds.
- **Heart as the Center of Belonging:** The King's statement, "What we call home is where our heart is", encapsulates a contemporary understanding of belonging. It suggests that one's sense of belonging is deeply personal and emotional, rooted in the connections, values, and experiences that define an individual's life. This sentiment aligns with the idea that belonging transcends geographical or cultural boundaries.

In summary, the King of Norway's speech underscores the importance of inclusivity, diversity, and the evolving nature of belonging in a modern, multicultural society. His words are indicative of a larger shift in society's understanding that belonging is a complex interplay of personal experiences, values, and connections rather than solely based on birthplace or ethnicity. This perspective aligns with the discourse on belonging discussed earlier, emphasizing the need for societies to embrace diversity and create spaces where people from various backgrounds feel accepted and valued.

The fourth component of belonging involves economic factors, and research by Yuval-Davis and Kaptani (2008) suggests a correlation between higher income, professional standing, and a sense of belonging. This type of economic integration, as noted by Antonsich (2019, p. 10), "matters not only from a material perspective but also in terms of making a person feel invested in the future of the place they call home". Finally, the fifth component of belonging concerns the sense of safety and security that legal status confers, as described by Fenster and Vizel (2007) in the formal structure of belonging. A recent example of this was the anxiety experienced by European Union citizens caught up in the uncertainties surrounding Brexit.

5 Big Brother is watching out for you

1 Foucault's "Pastoral Power" in the Web of Hope and Dependency?

In the complex tapestry of refugee life, there existed a structured hierarchy, a bureaucratic ladder where dreams and fortunes hung in shaky balance. Three tiers marked the governmental apparatus for refugees and asylum seekers, each tier a chapter in the taxing saga of seeking safety and sanctuary. At the first tier, the Tanum reception center stood as a symbol of anticipation and ambiguity. Here, residents, their hearts echoing with hope, waited with bated breath for the day their names would appear on the coveted "interview list". The atmosphere buzzed with nervous energy as uniformed policemen, often accompanied by translators, held the keys to their destinies in their hands. For some, days stretched into months, an excruciating stretch of time, as they clung to the fragile threads of hope.

When the long-awaited interview arrived, a tempest of emotions overwhelmed the refugee. Success birthed joy, an initial burst of euphoria that lit up eyes weary from waiting. Rejection, on the other hand, devastated the interviewees and sent shivers down the collective spines of the camp's residents. These were souls who had dared the extraordinary, who had made the brave choice to leave behind the familiar and journey into the unknown. They had traversed the maze of interviews, proving their need for residence and protection. And yet, paradoxically, their victory led them into a peculiar limbo, a twilight zone. In this suspended reality, they neither faced the threat of deportation nor were permitted to crack on with the task of forging a future in their newfound, adopted homeland.

In those times, nothing brought greater relief than the sight of the Volkswagen Caravelle van adorned with the Red Cross emblem, a beacon signaling transfer day. It's crucial to note that even with the existence of tier 3, supposedly symbolizing self-reliance, the truth was starkly different. By that point, the passing months had transformed into enduring years, and the refugees found themselves ensnared in a web of dependency, a state I will elucidate as characterized by a patron-client relationship through the lens of Foucault's theory of "pastoral power". Michel Foucault (1926–1984) was a French philosopher, social theorist, historian of ideas, and literary critic. He is widely regarded as one of the most influential figures in 20th-century philosophy and social theory. Foucault's work focused on the relationship between power, knowledge, and society, and he is known for his critical explorations of various institutions, including psychiatry, medicine, the prison system, and sexuality. Foucault uses the term "pastoral power" (Foucault, 1975; Foucault, 2002) to describe a form of power that operates through care, guidance and individual-

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ized attention analogous to a shepherd tending to his flock. In this context, power is not exerted through brute force but through nurturing and managing the lives of individuals.

Foucault was French, a Catholic country, and had the Catholic ritual of confession within a confessional box in mind. His theory finds resonance within Norway's Lutheran-inspired yet secular framework. It's a power that seeks to mold, guide, and influence people's behavior and beliefs. Pastoral power is characterized by (a) *Individualization:* the focus is on individuals, understanding their needs, vulnerabilities, and aspirations on a personal level (b) *Confession and obedience:* individuals are encouraged to confess their thoughts, desires, and sins. This act of confession establishes a bond of trust but also reinforces the authority of the one receiving the confession (c) *Objective of salvation:* the ultimate objective is the well-being and salvation of the individuals being guided. In religious contexts, this refers to spiritual salvation; in governmental contexts, it can refer to social stability, conformity, or overall well-being.

Foucault's delineation of pastoral power resonates eerily with the experiences of refugees transitioning into clients of the state. Just as the shepherd holds a moral responsibility for the flock, the state assumes a similar duty, overseeing the lives of individual refugees. This responsibility, marked by individualization, parallels the way refugees are scrutinized not just collectively but also in the minutiae of their actions. Submission, a core element in Foucault's pastoral power, finds a mirror in the obedient posture refugees are often compelled to adopt. Their submission, though self-willed, is a testament to the power dynamic at play. The refugees, akin to sheep, must adhere to the mandates of their "pastors" – the government and its institutions. Individualized knowledge becomes a potent tool, reflecting the intimate relationship between the state and the refugees. The state, through various mechanisms, delves deep into the lives of refugees, demanding a level of self-disclosure akin to confession. This vulnerability, intertwined with obedience, shapes the refugees' subjectivity, blurring the lines between personal autonomy and state surveillance.

Furthermore, the concept of self-mortification, although metaphorical, finds its echo in the refugees' renunciation of their past lives and their journey into the unknown. The profound changes and sacrifices demanded by their new reality reflect this symbolic death, promising a supposed rebirth in a different world – one of stability, security, and acceptance. In this intricate interplay of pastoral power, refugees' lives are intricately woven into a narrative where responsibility, submission, individualized knowledge, and self-mortification converge. Their experiences reflect the shepherd-flock dynamic, mirroring the power structures that Foucault so keenly analyzed. This examination sheds light on the multifaceted lay-

ers of control and influence underpinning the refugees' journey as they navigate the complexities of state assistance and integration.

2 From Carefree Nomad to Pastoral Oversight

In the initial waves of welcoming non-Western refugees, Norway found itself in uncharted waters. Handling such a significant influx was a novel experience for the Norwegian government. Despite the challenges, a prevailing sense of gratitude permeated the refugee community. Little did we realize that this process, while providing immediate relief, would lead to an unintended consequence: a complete reliance on the government, eroding individual agency. The urgency of our needs at that time hid and obscured the long-term risks of this dependency. It's important to note that this reflection isn't an indictment of the government's efforts. Instead, it serves as an autobiographical exploration, a shared journey with hundreds of thousands who have faced similar circumstances. The goal is to administer a form of therapeutic self-reflection, a way to process our experiences and self-medicate the wounds left by the past. While the narrative is anecdotal, it carries insights that extend beyond personal stories. Society at large, especially the authorities, could glean valuable lessons from these reflections. The anecdotal nature of these narratives doesn't diminish their relevance. They serve as a collective mirror reflecting the complexities of refugee integration, highlighting the delicate balance between assistance and autonomy. This delicate balance, when disrupted, can inadvertently strip individuals of their ability to shape their destinies, perpetuating dependency.

The waves of refugees from the global south have not dwindled; instead, they have surged in the last few decades. This reality stands in stark contrast to the fortunate timing of our arrival. Hearing about the Mediterranean Sea transforming into a graveyard, swallowing dreams and hopes, and witnessing the dire conditions of refugees in places like Lampedusa, Italy, and Nauru, Australia, evokes a profound sense of gratitude. Consider this report from Human Rights Watch (2016):

> Refugees and asylum seekers on Nauru, most of whom have been held there for three years, routinely face neglect by health workers and other service providers who have been hired by the Australian government, as well as frequent unpunished assaults by local Nauruans. They endure unnecessary delays and, at times, denial of medical care, even for life-threatening conditions. Many have dire mental health problems and suffer overwhelming despair – self-harm and suicide attempts are frequent. All face prolonged uncertainty about their future.

We were fortunate to arrive when we did, but this realization also underscores the urgency of addressing the systemic challenges faced by refugees globally. In es-

sence, this reflection delves into the intricate dynamics of power, dependency, and hope. It serves as a poignant reminder of the delicate equilibrium required in refugee integration efforts, advocating for a system that fosters empowerment and autonomy while providing essential support. By analyzing these narratives, society and its institutions can pave the way for more inclusive, compassionate and sustainable solutions for the refugees of today and tomorrow. Picture a carefree nomad, his existence intertwined with the vast, untouched expanses of Somalia, where the idea of a modern, meticulously regulated government is as alien as the stars in the daytime sky. In his world, the nomad roams freely, untouched by the intricacies of bureaucratic machinery. Now, transpose this nomad into the structured realm of the West. Here, he finds himself engulfed in a demanding apparatus that is unyielding and all-encompassing. This system, unlike anything he has ever known, scrutinizes every facet of his existence. The transition can be abrupt and overwhelming.

In this foreign land, the nomad is confronted by a society that demands submission to its norms. He is no longer the untethered wanderer; he is expected to conform. Regular confessions, in various forms – attending courses, submitting to medical supervision – become obligatory rituals. These acts are not voluntary; they are prerequisites for the sustenance he needs. Failure to comply means risking the very financial support that ensures his survival. This stark transformation from a carefree nomad to a yielded entity highlights the clash between the nomadic, independent spirit and the structured, controlling nature of the Western system. It showcases the immense challenges faced by individuals as they navigate the labyrinthine pathways of a foreign bureaucracy, a journey riddled with cultural shock and a sense of displacement.

3 Between Westphalia and the Berlin Wall: Shifting Paradigms

The Treaty of Westphalia is often cited as the beginning of the modern state system. It ended the Thirty Years' War in Europe and established the principles of state sovereignty and non-intervention in the domestic affairs of other states (Meredith, 2013). This treaty laid the groundwork for the nation-state system, where states were defined by clearly demarcated borders and enjoyed sovereign authority within those borders. The Scramble for Africa refers to the period of intense European colonization and imperial expansion in Africa during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. European powers, driven by economic interests and colonial ambitions, divided Africa among themselves, often ignoring existing ethnic, cultural, and tribal boundaries. This arbitrary division resulted in numerous Afri-

can nations with diverse ethnic groups and cultures being forced to coexist within the same borders.

Somalia, historically, has had a clan-based social structure. Clan identity and allegiances were often stronger and more influential than allegiance to a centralized state. This historical context meant that the concept of sovereignty and fixed national borders, as imposed by colonial powers, did not align with the social reality on the ground. The imposition of artificial borders disrupted traditional clan territories and led to internal tensions and conflicts. According to Mohamed Egal (Egal, 1968), the first Prime Minister of Somalia in 1960, nascent nationalist groups such as the Somali Youth League (SYL) and even the Marxist-influenced Siyad Barre's government strove to eliminate clannism; they both failed. "But far from fading in the face of modernity, clannism has adapted, and flourished, and had proved to be more resilient than the Somali state itself" (Healey, 2010, p. 369) In many parts of the Global South, including Somalia, historical colonial experiences and the imposition of artificial borders resulted in weak national identities and limited trust in centralized state institutions. In post-colonial nations, the struggle to build effective state institutions and establish trust between the state and citizens often proved challenging, leading to weak governance structures, corruption, and social unrest.

In our conversations in the refugee camp in Norway, we found ourselves in a society vastly different from where we came from. Norway, a country with a strong, centralized state, appeared overwhelming in its presence. The contrast between the traditional clan-based social structure we had become accustomed to and the highly structured, state-controlled environment in Norway could have been disorienting. The all-powerful and all-knowing image of the Norwegian state, coupled with the historical context of weak state structures in Somalia, might create a sense of both security and apprehension. Similarly, this phenomenon extended to refugees from countries like Eritrea, Iraq, Ethiopia, Iran, and more. It's crucial to note that despite these nations having authoritarian leaders, the state's influence is predominantly manifested through oppressive tactics designed to instill fear and maintain control. In areas crucial to citizens' well-being, such as education, the economy, and healthcare, the government's presence was notably feeble, amplifying the void in essential societal domains. In Norway, the state provided stability and essential services. On the other hand, the omnipresence of the state might have felt intrusive, especially considering one's background in a society where clan structures often played a significant role in governance and dispute resolution.

In this context, the challenge lay in navigating the complex dynamics of trust, identity, and belonging. The strength of the state, while providing essential support, could have inadvertently reinforced feelings of dependency and disempower-

ment, echoing the dynamics of pastoral power discussed earlier. The tension between traditional identity markers and the state-imposed identity could have created a unique and complex experience for you as a Somali refugee in Norway. The process of transitioning to the Western world has not only reshaped the external landscape for refugees from non-Western backgrounds but has also deeply impacted their domestic dynamics. Traditionally, many in these societies were structured around well-defined gender roles, where males held the esteemed position of providers and protectors. However, with the influx of Western assistance and support, the government assumed the role of the primary "provider". Among those of Christian persuasion, the quip, "It is not *Jehovah Jireh* [i. e., God will provide], but the government will provide in Norway", was quite common. While the empowerment of Somali women, a much- needed and positive outcome, garnered praise, it also inadvertently challenged the traditional male identity. As the role of provider was gradually usurped, many Somali men grappled with a diminishing sense of self-worth. The very essence of their identity, rooted in their ability to provide for their families, was being eroded.

This shift not only created a sense of redundancy among Somali males but also introduced a complex dynamic within households. Traditional power structures were disrupted, leading to tensions and identity crises. The struggle to redefine roles and regain a sense of purpose became a poignant challenge, leaving many men searching for new ways to contribute meaningfully to their families and communities. In this transformation, the Somalis found themselves navigating not only a new societal structure but also an intricate web of changing gender dynamics within their homes. The empowerment of women, a crucial step towards gender equality, inadvertently triggered a reevaluation of male roles, prompting a profound reflection on identity and purpose in this evolving cultural landscape.

4 Building Trust Across Borders in the Era of Global Connectivity

While the Western world underwent a transition from the era of Westphalia, marked by a strong emphasis on the sovereignty of national borders, to a period where the fall of the Berlin Wall seemed to usher in a world without borders and the freedom that David Hasselhoff was looking for at the Brandenburg Gate on New Year's Eve in 1989, it was simultaneously experiencing massive waves of immigration from regions that did not adhere to the Westphalian model of statehood. Trust, in this context, had to be painstakingly built. In a sense, Somalis and other comparable immigrants found themselves inhabiting a reality akin to the aftermath of the Berlin Wall's collapse – an era marked by global interconnectedness

and fluid boundaries. This unique backdrop set the stage for various challenges, including disputes with Norwegian Child Services leading to the separation of children from their families, debates surrounding religion and social control, and issues related to freedom of speech. These circumstances led some families to choose to educate their children in Muslim countries – a theme that significantly impacted me as a high school teacher and one I will delve into further. Ultimately, what becomes evident is that the shifting global landscape, juxtaposed with the experiences of Somalis in the West, presents a complex narrative. It highlights the need for nuanced approaches to address the challenges posed by changing conceptions of statehood and the delicate balance between integration and cultural preservation.

Certainly, the recent statistics showcasing the high rate of trust among Norwegians from immigrant backgrounds in the Norwegian government offer a glimmer of hope and progress. This growing trust represents a significant step toward social integration and cohesion in a society where diverse cultural backgrounds frequently influence. Scandinavian countries, including Norway, have historically boasted exceptionally high rates of trust in their governments (OECD, 2023a). Nordic countries often dominate the top five spots in relation to statistics on trust in government statistics. In Norway, trust is consistently high despite Norwegians being taxed 2.7% above the OECD average (OECD, 2023b). This phenomenon is often attributed to robust social welfare systems, transparent governance, and a strong emphasis on social equality. In this context, the trust exhibited by non-Western Norwegians mirrors the broader societal trust prevalent in these nations. It reflects the effectiveness of Norway's social policies in fostering a sense of security and belonging among diverse communities. However, the anomaly emerges in the form of low trust among the Polish community in Norway. This unique finding warrants deeper exploration. Possible factors contributing to this disparity could be rooted in cultural differences, historical experiences, or specific challenges faced by the Polish community in Norway. Understanding these nuances is crucial for addressing the concerns of this particular group, fostering a more inclusive environment, and bridging the trust gap.

5 Challenges and Progress in Norway's Integration Landscape

The diminished trust levels observed within the Polish community in Norway can be traced back to multifaceted factors. One key aspect is the timing of their arrival; many Poles migrated to Norway after 2004 as immigrant workers, a period during which they did not receive essential benefits, including free Norwegian language lessons and assistance with housing. This absence of support created a sense of isolation and exclusion, making it challenging for them to fully integrate into Norwe-

gian society. Furthermore, historical experiences in Poland, caught in the crossfire between fascism and communism and insecurities exploited by populists, have also played a pivotal role in shaping their skepticism. Deep-rooted historical mistrust in the Polish government's ability to provide adequate support and resources may have influenced their perception of governmental policies in their new host country. This pre-existing skepticism, combined with the challenges faced upon their arrival in Norway, has contributed significantly to the lower levels of trust observed within the Polish community.

In essence, the convergence of these factors – limited support upon arrival and historical mistrust – has created a complex environment where the Polish community in Norway navigates integration with a sense of skepticism and apprehension, highlighting the need for targeted initiatives to rebuild trust and foster a more inclusive atmosphere. Despite the challenges, the overall trend of increasing trust among immigrants from non-Western countries is a positive indication of societal progress. It signifies the potential for integration, collaboration, and mutual understanding among diverse communities in Norway. By recognizing and addressing the concerns of communities with lower trust levels, the Norwegian government and society can work toward building a more inclusive and harmonious future for all residents, regardless of their cultural backgrounds. This evolving trust landscape highlights the importance of ongoing dialogue, cultural exchange, and policies that promote social cohesion to ensure a united and prosperous Norwegian society.

Indeed, the high trust rates observed among minoritized communities in Norway, although not directly translating to equal levels of participation with the native population, mark a significant shift in attitudes toward Western institutions. This changing perspective, especially among individuals from the global south, holds promising implications for successful integration efforts in the country. Globalization, a defining feature of the contemporary world, has introduced unprecedented opportunities for refugees and migrants. In contrast to historical waves of migration, individuals today benefit from extensive global networks and affiliations. This connectivity empowers them to maintain meaningful contacts with their home countries, families, and communities, facilitated by platforms like social media and messaging apps such as Viber and WhatsApp. Minoritized communities, particularly those from non-Western backgrounds, have been at the forefront of adopting these digital tools, showcasing a keen adaptability to evolving technologies. This proactive engagement not only preserves cultural ties but also fosters a sense of belonging and connection. These digital bridges enable the exchange of ideas, experiences, and support networks, enhancing the overall integration experience.

Furthermore, this newfound connectivity enables the sharing of valuable cultural insights, fostering mutual understanding between different communities. It promotes dialogue, breaks down barriers, and contributes to a more inclusive society where diverse perspectives are acknowledged and respected. In essence, the digital age has opened avenues for refugees and migrants, allowing them to navigate the complexities of integration while maintaining their cultural heritage. By leveraging these global networks, individuals from the global south are not only shaping their own narratives but also enriching the multicultural fabric of nations like Norway. As these connections continue to flourish, they contribute significantly to the social cohesion and diversity of the host society, fostering a more inclusive and harmonious coexistence.

The trust levels within immigrant communities, particularly those with refugee and asylum-seeker backgrounds, can indeed serve as a barometer of a nation's successful integration efforts. If these communities exhibit higher levels of trust in the government compared to individuals from Eastern European countries, it reflects positively on Norway's long-term investment in refugees and asylum seekers. Norway's robust integration programs, which include language classes, vocational training, cultural orientation, and social support, contribute significantly to the positive perception of the government among immigrant backgrounds. By providing these resources, Norway empowers immigrants to actively participate in society, fostering a sense of belonging and trust in governmental institutions. This trust surplus would serve as concrete evidence of the dividends yielded from Norway's investment in integration programs, highlighting the success of their inclusive policies and initiatives. Such data can further reinforce the importance of continued investment in integration efforts, not only for the well-being of immigrant communities but also for the overall social cohesion and harmony within the country.

6 Exploring Somali Experiences in the USA and Norway

1 Bureaucratic Labyrinths and Catch-22s

Certainly, being placed in such a tiered refugee resettlement system was an experience that brought a whirlwind of emotions. Initially, there was hope and gratitude for being in a safer environment, far removed from the perils I had fled. However, this sense of relief was swiftly replaced by a frustrating reality – the bureaucratic intricacies that came with the system. In conversations with social workers, I, like my fellow refugees, felt a growing impatience. We were eager to move forward and rebuild our lives independently. I suggested finding a job and becoming self-sufficient, believing it could expedite the process of integration. But I was met with a sobering truth: my autonomy was intricately tied to completing 500 hours of mandatory Norwegian language instruction. It was a catch-22 situation. On one hand, learning the language was essential for effective communication, employment, and social integration. On the other hand, this constraint became a double-edged sword, fostering a sense of dependency on the very system that was meant to empower us. The concept of being in an "invisible prison" dawned on me. Here I was, grateful for the support, yet paradoxically feeling confined. The safety net designed to catch me was also restricting my movements. I couldn't help but wonder if this dependency was intentional or a consequence of the system's design flaws.

This experience made me realize the nuanced challenges within refugee resettlement programs. While they offer vital support and opportunities, they also inadvertently create a psychological bind. Striking a balance between providing assistance and allowing refugees the freedom to regain control over their lives is a delicate art that requires a reevaluation of the system's structure and its impact on the people it aims to help. Experiencing this situation firsthand was profoundly disheartening. After investing substantial effort into completing the mandatory 500 hours of language instruction, I anticipated a tailored educational program that would harness my skills and experiences. However, the reality was starkly different. The curriculum offered was basic, akin to what one might find in lower secondary school. This discrepancy not only crushed my morale but also left others who shared my predicament equally demoralized. We were individuals with qualifications and aspirations far beyond the scope of the program presented to us.

The caliber of the teaching staff further compounded our disappointment. These educators, a disparate group pulled from the employment office and student

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ranks, lacked the necessary expertise. Witnessing an "English teacher" falter when a classmate struggled to learn the English word for "thigh" was emblematic of the systemic issues at play. The teacher's hesitation and subsequent reliance on me to write the word on the board underscored a fundamental lack of preparedness among the instructors. Emotionally, this experience was a rollercoaster. It wasn't merely a matter of academic frustration; it was a deep-seated feeling of being undervalued and misunderstood. Having spent years immersed in upper secondary education studying the works of Shakespeare, it was profoundly disheartening to realize that my knowledge seemed irrelevant within this system. The countless hours spent dissecting The *Merchant of Venice*, pondering the adventures in *Treasure Island*, and delving into the verses of Keats and Wordsworth felt squandered in an environment that offered no room for intellectual growth or application.

2 Turning Tides: Policy Shifts and Paradigm Changes

This situation bred a sense of alienation and unfulfilled potential, instilling a lingering feeling of inadequacy. I found myself questioning the very essence of the refugee integration system, wondering why a wealth of acquired knowledge was disregarded and overlooked. It wasn't just a personal setback; it was a broader reflection of a flawed system that failed to recognize the multifaceted abilities and potential contributions of refugees. This personal experience sheds light on the human toll of policy failures within the refugee integration system. It underscored the urgent need for a more nuanced and empathetic approach – one that recognizes the diverse skills and qualifications refugees bring and actively supports their integration into the host society. It also emphasizes the importance of investing in well-trained educators who understand the unique challenges faced by refugees and can appreciate the depth of their knowledge.

In 2021, the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion (*Arbeids- og inkluderingsdepartementet*) recognized the need for significant changes in the way refugees were being integrated into society. After almost three decades of slow progress and potential regression for refugees, a pivotal step was taken. One of the notable changes involved the implementation of § 6. Competency Mapping Before Settlement in a Municipality (Lovdata, 2021): Host municipalities for reception centers were mandated to assess the competencies of individuals residing in these centers who have been granted residence permits as stated in § 9. The Directorate of Integration and Diversity (Integrerings- og mangfoldsdirektoratet) was tasked with assessing the competencies of resettlement refugees before their entry into Norway. Resettlement refugees are individuals who have been granted refugee status, as per the Immigration Act § 28(1), before arriving in Nor-

way, or those who have been granted an entry permit while awaiting the processing of their refugee status application. This competency assessment aimed to facilitate settlement in a municipality with relevant opportunities for employment or education, ensuring that the introduction program would be tailored to meet the individual's specific needs. It was both the right and the responsibility of each individual to undergo this competency assessment.

Note that the assessment of competences was to be done *before* arriving in Norway, an incredible milestone indeed. The new law went further in § 10.

> *Competency Mapping After Settlement in a Municipality.* Individuals covered by § 8(1) have the right and obligation to undergo competency mapping after settling in a municipality, unless the person has undergone competency mapping according to § 6. Competency mapping aims to tailor the introduction program to meet the individual's needs. The assessment must include at least the person's language proficiency, education, work experience, and other relevant skills. The municipality is responsible for conducting competency mapping. This legal provision, outlined in § 10, signifies a crucial development in the Norwegian government's approach to refugee integration. By mandating competency mapping after refugees are settled in municipalities, the government is taking a proactive stance to assess and recognize the diverse skills and qualifications of refugees (Lovdata, 2021).

Firstly, the provision highlights the government's acknowledgment of the importance of individualized support in the integration process. By understanding the language proficiency, educational background, work experience, and other skills of each refugee, the government can design tailor-made integration programs. This approach recognizes the uniqueness of each refugee, moving away from a one-size-fits-all model to a more personalized, empathetic integration strategy. Secondly, the fact that the municipality is entrusted with conducting competency mapping demonstrates a decentralized approach to refugee integration. Local authorities, being closer to the communities and the individuals involved, are better positioned to understand the specific needs and challenges faced by refugees in their area. This decentralization allows for flexibility, enabling municipalities to design integration programs that are culturally sensitive and responsive to the local context.

Lastly, the provision underscores a shift in policy, reflecting a more comprehensive understanding of integration. It's not just about teaching language skills but also recognizing and leveraging the professional and life experiences that refugees bring with them. By valuing and utilizing the diverse competencies of refugees, Norway stands to benefit from a more skilled and culturally enriched society, promoting social cohesion and mutual understanding. In summary, this provision signifies a significant step forward in Norway's refugee integration policies. By focusing on the competencies of refugees, even after settlement, the government is

fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for refugees, ultimately contributing to their successful integration into Norwegian society. Looking back on this situation after three decades, it's difficult to escape the thought of what could have been if the authorities had recognized and assessed the competencies of myself and my fellow refugees during those crucial years. The missed opportunities for personal growth and meaningful contributions weigh heavily on my mind.

Today, as a full professor, I find it in myself to be generous and understanding, recognizing that policies evolve, lessons are learned, and society progresses. However, extending the same understanding to my peers from those days is a challenge. Many of them still find themselves stuck in low-paying jobs or, worse, trapped in a state of perpetual disillusionment and reliance on social welfare. This reflection brings to light the enduring impact of integration policies. It highlights the importance of timely, perceptive, and inclusive measures. The unexplored potential of refugees doesn't just affect them individually; it has a ripple effect on society. Those who could have been active contributors, innovators, and professionals find themselves on the margins, unable to unleash their full capabilities.

In a broader context, this personal experience underscores the necessity for proactive and inclusive policies. Acknowledging the competencies of refugees, appreciating their skills, and providing pathways for their integration can be transformative. It's not just about immediate support; it's about empowerment, enabling individuals to rebuild their lives and become valuable contributors to their adopted communities. This reflection serves as a poignant reminder of the need for compassionate and comprehensive refugee integration strategies. It's a call to action for societies to recognize the immense potential residing within refugees, fostering an environment where talents are nurtured and contributions are welcomed. Such an approach not only benefits the individuals involved but also enriches the fabric of society, creating a more diverse, skilled, and harmonious community for everyone.

This legislative change represents a significant shift in Norway's approach to refugee integration. By emphasizing competency mapping before settlement, the government acknowledged the diverse skills and qualifications that refugees bring with them. This recognition marks a departure from previous practices, where refugees often felt their capabilities were overlooked or undervalued. The focus on individualized assessments and tailored integration programs is a positive step. It acknowledges that refugees are not a homogeneous group; they come with varied educational backgrounds, skills, and experiences. By ensuring that the integration process is customized to meet these unique needs, Norway is taking a proactive stance in enabling refugees to contribute meaningfully toward society.

Additionally, the shift in policy reflects a broader understanding of the importance of integration as a two-way process. It's not just about refugees adapting to the host country's culture and society; it's also about the host country recognizing and appreciating the diversity and potential that refugees bring. This approach aligns with the principles of inclusivity and social cohesion, fostering a more harmonious and productive multicultural society. Overall, the change signifies a more empathetic and pragmatic approach to refugee integration in Norway. Ultimately, a compassionate and comprehensive reform of Norway's refugee integration policies is not just a bureaucratic necessity; it's a moral imperative. Every individual, regardless of their background, deserves the opportunity to rebuild their lives, contribute meaningfully to their new community, and, importantly, continue to explore and share the rich tapestry of human knowledge.

3 Minnesota and Norway: Divergent Paths in Somali Integration

In the exploration of the Somali diaspora experience, this chapter refrains from a direct comparison between the twin cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul in the USA, which house the largest Somali population, Norway. Countless analyses have already delved into comparing these two communities, but the objective here is not to wield statistics as ideological trump cards. Instead, the aim is to unearth the mutual lessons these nations might glean from each other, refracted through anecdotes from their own lives and those of other fellow sojourners. The primary focus lies in unraveling the persistent perception that Somalis fare better in the USA than in Norway. Minnesota is home to around 86,610 (2021) Somalis, which is roughly double the entire population of Norway, totaling 43,273 (2020). While close to 68 % of Somalis are employed in Minnesota (2017–2021) (Minnesota Compass, 2023), only 11 % males and 9 % females (10 – 15 years length of stay) were in employed in Norway in 2022.

This paradox becomes all the more perplexing when considering the stark disparity between Norway's significant financial investments in Somali integration efforts and the comparatively minimal resources allocated in the US context. This glaring discrepancy cannot be simply overlooked as an inexplicable anomaly. Scholars and experts, both in Norway and the USA, have been grappling with this puzzle for decades. The nuanced examination of Somali experiences in both nations reveals intricate layers of social, cultural, and systemic factors that contribute to this divergence. Understanding these complexities is crucial for unraveling the underlying reasons behind the varied outcomes of Somali integration efforts in Norway and the USA.

In the preceding chapters, I critiqued the romanticized notion of the "American Dream" while paying homage to what I termed a "Norwegian reality". However, the critique of the "American Dream" necessitates some modification when considering the perceived success of the Somali community in the USA in comparison to Norway. I emphasize "perceived" here deliberately, for within the realms of scholarly discourse, journalistic inquiry, and various stakeholder discussions, a contentious debate ensues regarding the facts and figures. It becomes evident that some official stakeholders might be hesitant to acknowledge the challenges of fully integrating Somalis in Norway. This reluctance could be attributed, in part, to the potential tarnishing of the frequently lauded "Nordic exceptionalism" model (we have always known Freddie Mercury and Queen sang *We Are the Champions* for Norway). The debate around integration and success extends far beyond mere statistics, delving into intricate social, cultural, and systemic factors that shape the narratives of these communities.

In delving into the experiences of Somalis in both Minnesota and Norway, it's imperative to tread cautiously, recognizing the inherent complexities of comparing situations in two distinct countries. Yet, amidst this caution, there are noteworthy commonalities. Minnesota, for instance, houses a population of approximately 1.5 million Scandinavian-Americans (IPUMS USA, 2023), a demographic resonance that echoes Norway's roots. Both places share a climactic kinship, fostering a sense of familiarity among immigrants. Notably, within the Somali diaspora, word of mouth has traversed continents, with kinship ties actively promoting Minnesota as the destination of choice. However, two significant differences emerge between the two countries. Firstly, Minnesota seems to take pride in its cultural diversity, embracing a rich tapestry of traditions and backgrounds. In stark contrast to this acceptance is the situation in Norway, where Islamophobia is rife and public forums frequently echo with xenophobia. The disparity in public attitudes shapes the experiences of Somali immigrants in profound ways, influencing their sense of belonging and societal integration.

Secondly, Norwegian journalist Gerhard Helskog, in his book *Innvandrernes Supermakt: Hva Norge kan lære av USAs suksess* (2008) [*The Immigrants' Superpower: What Norway Can Learn from the Success of the USA*], illuminates a critical distinction. He points to the ethos prevalent in the USA, where individuals are often left to navigate the waters of integration independently, epitomized by the "sink or swim" mentality. This ethos, coupled with minimal state intervention and a strong emphasis on self-reliance, has undoubtedly contributed to the high employment rates among Somalis in Minnesota. This emphasis on personal agency and self-determination shapes not just employment statistics but also the broader narrative of success and community empowerment within the Somali population in the USA. This viewpoint aligns with the perspective of Somali Professor Ahmed I.

Samatar, the founding Dean of Macalester's Institute for Global Citizenship, as he emphasizes:

> When a refugee arrives in the U.S., the State Department works with private, local volunteer resettlement agencies to determine where they'll live. Many of those decisions are based on employment opportunities, proximity to family and support from local agencies (CBSNEWS , 2023).

In the United States, the emphasis on personal agency and self-determination has significantly influenced the Somali population's narrative of success and community empowerment. This ethos is exemplified by the collaborative efforts between the State Department and local resettlement agencies. Upon arrival, refugees are strategically placed based on employment opportunities, family proximity, and support from local agencies. This approach fosters a sense of self-reliance and independence, shaping not only employment statistics but also the broader community dynamics among Somalis in the USA.

This American model sharply contrasts with several anecdotes from the Somali community in Norway. Here, the government's generosity manifested itself in providing housing for Somali families, often in remote and sparsely populated areas. While these homes were indeed beautiful, their locations offered negligible prospects for employment, leading to a toll on the residents' psychological well-being. Surprisingly, some families, despite the gift of housing, chose not to stay due to the lack of opportunities, highlighting the intricate challenges of integration faced by Somalis in Norway. This divergence in approach underscores the nuanced nature of refugee integration policies. While the U.S. model prioritizes individual initiative and self-reliance, Norway's generous housing provision, while well-intentioned, poses challenges when economic opportunities are limited. Recognizing these disparities is essential to shaping future integration strategies and fostering a balance between assistance and personal agency to enable refugees to thrive in their new homes. Integrative policies should be adaptable, considering not only the immediate needs but also the long-term prospects and mental well-being of refugees, ensuring a holistic and empathetic approach to their integration journey.

The persistent narrative surrounding Somali success in Minnesota raises intriguing questions, especially when contrasted with the challenges faced by the Somali community in Norway. While some analysts in Norway seem resolute in diminishing the accomplishments of Somalis in the US, focusing disproportionately on failures, a deeper examination reveals a more nuanced reality. In the realm of academia, there exists a paradoxical trend: an unusual emphasis on highlighting the hurdles faced by Somali entrepreneurs in Minnesota while sidelining their substantial achievements. For instance, some have disputed Gerhard Helskog's

analysis of Somali success in Minnesota, as evident in an entire master's thesis (Schulze, 2010) dedicated to critiquing his work. Furthermore, although acknowledging the existence of 550 Somali-owned businesses in Minnesota as far back as 2004 (the numbers have since only increased), certain academics persistently underscore the high failure rates.

> What draws many political leaders and scholars to the Twin Cities is the abundance of small businesses owned by Somalis. As Carlson notes, in 2004, there were roughly 550 Somali businesses in the state; by the end of 2005, the number had increased to about 800 (2007, 180–181). These figures are impressive, but the situation is not as promising as the figures suggest. Most importantly, the rate of Somali small-business failure is extraordinarily high (Chambers, 2017).

This skepticism, however, is not mirrored when examining the Somali business landscape in Norway, where red tape and bureaucratic complexities make establishing successful businesses a Sisyphean task. The glaring absence of flourishing Somali enterprises in places like Oslo further highlights the stark contrast between the two contexts. In the face of these disparities, the crucial aspect often overlooked is the resilience and determination exhibited by Somali entrepreneurs. Failure, a natural part of the business journey, does not negate the inherent entrepreneurial spirit within the community. This spirit, honed and proven successful in diverse global settings, remains stifled in Norway due to the intricate web of regulations. Somali businesses worldwide have showcased adaptability and acumen, thriving despite adversities. Yet, these global successes are conveniently sidelined, overshadowed by a focus on local struggles. The peculiar logic employed by these academics raises questions about their motivations. Is it a deliberate attempt to downplay the accomplishments of Somalis in the US, thereby diverting attention from Norway's restrictive policies? Or is it an unconscious bias that hinders a fair assessment of the community's potential and capabilities? Regardless of the underlying reasons, the narrative shaping Somali success stories demands a more comprehensive and unbiased analysis.

4 Empowering Refugees

Beyond academic circles, these discussions reverberate through society, affecting perceptions of refugees and their integration potential. The undue emphasis on failures disregards the remarkable resilience and tenacity demonstrated by Somalis globally. It perpetuates a skewed image, fostering a collective skepticism that hampers the community's aspirations in Norway. To truly understand the complexities at play, a holistic approach is imperative. It requires acknowledging not just

the hurdles faced but also the triumphs achieved in the face of adversity. The narratives of Somali success in Minnesota and other global settings underscore the potential that remains untapped within the community. By recognizing and appreciating these accomplishments, societies can cultivate an environment conducive to fostering entrepreneurial talent, ultimately benefiting both refugees and their host countries.

To those fortunate souls unburdened by the weight of our experiences, where data is a detached academic pursuit far removed from the tumultuous emotional odyssey of a refugee, I implore you to understand our profound desire – the fervent wish to shed the "refugee" label swiftly and embrace a life of belonging and purpose in our new homeland. To reframe Freud's inquiry, if we ask, "What does a refugee want?" the response becomes evident. Our hope was simple yet profound: to integrate seamlessly into society, contributing meaningfully and independently. However, our optimism waned as we perceived the system's mechanisms as seemingly designed to keep us in a perpetual state of dependency. It appeared that the state had created numerous jobs specifically for native Norwegians, contingent on our continued refugee status. This realization gave birth to a pervasive sense of disillusionment and skepticism, fostering the belief that the system was intended to perpetuate our reliance on state support. We knew this was not true, but explaining this to people who had been mentally quarantined for so long was futile. Indeed, despite debates and differing opinions, the undeniable truth remained: personal agency and the ability to be self-reliant should serve as the fundamental measure of a country's refugee integration policy. My fellow travelers and I were unequivocally certain in our stance – echoing the sentiments of Patrick Henry, we asserted, "Give us liberty [self-reliance] or give us death".

This revelation prompts a profound analysis of the system's intricacies. It sheds light on the subtle yet powerful forces at play within the refugee integration framework, where economic factors and vested interests intertwine. It raises questions about the underlying motivations behind policies and practices. Are these systems genuinely designed to empower refugees, or do they inadvertently create a cycle of dependency, ensuring a continuous clientele for state resources? This situation also underscores the larger societal dynamics at work. It reveals a complex interplay between economic considerations, social policies, and public sentiment. The creation of jobs for native citizens, while commendable in fostering employment, inadvertently poses challenges when juxtaposed with the integration of refugees. This delicate balance between securing opportunities for the existing population and welcoming newcomers with open arms is a challenge many societies face.

Furthermore, the sense of disillusionment experienced by refugees highlights the need for a more empathetic and inclusive approach. Policies should not merely

focus on short-term solutions but should be crafted with long-term empowerment and genuine integration in mind. Recognizing the potential and aspirations of refugees and aligning policies to facilitate their self-reliance is not just a moral imperative; it is an investment in social cohesion and the collective future. In essence, this revelation serves as a stark reminder of the intricate web of policies, economic interests, and societal perceptions that shape the refugee experience. It urges us to reevaluate existing integration strategies, fostering a system that nurtures self-reliance, independence, and a true sense of belonging for every newcomer.

In Norway, it's unfortunate to observe that some of the most prominent Somali figures in the media are those who criticize and attack their own community onesidedly with little or no nuance. These individuals often become the focal points of right-wing media attention. The concerns these outspoken individuals raise within the Somali community, such as addressing deeply rooted issues like female genital mutilation, are undeniably significant. Their bravery in highlighting these problems is commendable, and their efforts can bring about crucial awareness and change. However, it's essential to recognize that role models should not solely consist of those who critique and tear down existing norms. True role models not only identify problems but also actively contribute to positive change, offering solutions and alternatives to replace the harmful practices they criticize. In essence, while acknowledging the importance of addressing critical issues within the community, it is equally vital to uplift and celebrate individuals who not only identify problems but also actively work towards solutions. Role models should inspire by demonstrating resilience, empathy, and a proactive approach to fostering positive change within the Somali community, thus providing a more well-rounded representation of Somali achievement and progress.

This situation raises concerns about media representation and the narratives promoted by mainstream channels. Instead of uplifting positive stories of successful integration and contributions made by Somalis, the media often highlights dissenting voices, creating a skewed image of the community. Without positive role models and advocates like Ilhan Omar, who champion the causes of their community while promoting unity and understanding, Somalis in Norway might lack the inspirational figures needed for genuine empowerment and integration. The absence of a prominent figure akin to Ilhan Omar in Norway deprives the Somali community of a unifying voice, making it challenging to counter the negative stereotypes perpetuated by those within the community who criticize their own. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing and promoting diverse Somali voices, focusing on individuals who advocate for positive change and genuine integration, thus fostering a more inclusive society for everyone.

7 “Learning to See Whiteness”: An Unaddressed Education

1 Hedstrøm, the HIV/AIDS and Psychosomatic Accusations

> The proposer refers to the high risk of spreading dangerous diseases through immigration and expresses the impression that Norwegian authorities are pursuing a policy that could directly encourage HIV-infected individuals to come to Norway, as their chances of staying and receiving good treatment are significant. The economic and health consequences of such a policy could be catastrophic.
>
> 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.
>
> Parliamentary Bill drafted by MP Øystein Hedstrøm (1994/95).

The words above were not the ramblings of an unhinged racist, but the words of Øystein Hedstrøm, a former Norwegian Member of Parliament from Østfold for the Progress Party from 1989 to 2005. 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)). Around this time, I was becoming conversant in Norwegian and reading newspapers to improve my language skills and keep abreast of current affairs. It was not long before politicians from the Progress Party caught my attention; it was inevitable – populists are connoisseurs of the art of timing, scandal, and effect. Roughly four years after my arrival in Norway, and now well on my way to acquaint myself with my new countrymen, or so I thought, I began to inadvertently develop a Norwegian version of what Du Bois called “double consciousness” (Du Bois, 1903): the understanding that while I was on my way to constructing and incorporating a new “Norwegian” identity, there was already a delegitimizing discourse invested in the category *Innvandrer* [immigrant] that had already been irrevocably assigned by this party with the incongruously named *Fremskrittspartiet* [Progress Party].

A word about the Norwegian Progress Party. Lest foreign readers dismiss the party as a fringe, inconsequential one, the Progress Party is currently the third largest political party in Norway with about 15%. As of writing, 15% of voters asked about “national parliament voting intention” today would vote for the Progress Party (Politico, 2023). Since 1988, the party has oscillated between the second and third largest parties in the parliamentary elections and opinion polls. As I will argue that it is incumbent upon minoritized people in Norway to educate themselves in “seeing whiteness”, allow me to first quote at length from the Progress

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Party’s own website, where they applaud themselves on their seismic rise, boast about their resilience in the early days, appropriating the words of Mark Twain, “reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated”, and go on to state:

> The parliamentary election in 1989 was a new success for the Progress Party. The party increased from 2 to 22 representatives. The Progress Party had become the country’s third-largest party. In 1997, the party became the second largest in the Parliament, with 15.3 percent of voters backing it and 25 representatives. At the 2005 election, the party won 38 representatives after an election result of 22.1 percent. As a result of the good election results, Carl I. Hagen was elected vice president of the Parliament.
>
> During the national meeting at Gardermoen on May 6 2006, Siv Jensen was elected chairman. In 2009, the title was changed to Manager. In the general election the same year, the Progress Party received 22.9 percent of the vote, which is the party’s best result so far. This resulted in a record-breaking parliamentary group of 41 representatives … Nine days later, on October 16, 2013, party leader Siv Jensen came out on the lawn in front of the King’s Palace after leading the Progress Party into government for the first time in the party’s 40-year history (Fremskrittspartiet, 2023). (Fremskrittspartiet, 2023).

What concerned me even more than the ranting and raving of Øystein Hedstrøm was the fact that members of my then Norwegian in-laws were avid supporters of this party at the time. I had no reason to doubt that they did not share the unembellished racist views of Øystein Hedstrøm, but I remember looking at them with pain in my eyes at a loss as to how they could read these statements and not jettison support for this party, at least out of respect for me and my two children of Somali-Norwegian heritage. What would my children say when they came of age and discovered that the family members who were the apple of their eyes in their childhood, adolescence, and even now as adults, cast their votes in support of a party founded in 1973 by Anders Lange, a man with fascist leanings who “spoke strongly against the Jewish invasion and the colored races” in a meeting in 1930 (Møllersen, 2017).

Hedstrøm was our own Norwegian equivalent of Enoch Powell of the “Rivers of blood” (1968) fame in the UK context. Powell disingenuously claimed that his son was the only white child left in an unnamed school (Guardian, 2018), and in a speech now hallowed in the halls of hate, Powell quoted from Virgil’s epic poem *The Aeneid*: “As I look ahead, I am filled with foreboding; like the Roman, I seem to see ‘the River Tiber foaming with much blood’” (History Extra, 2019). This summer (2023), I was in Rome admiring the river Tiber among other famous landmarks. On the bank of the river, enthralled by the serene beauty of the majestic Tiber, I bemoaned the allegorical racial violence inflicted on the river; sadly, many more racists since Powell and Hedstrøm, clothed in the attire of politicians, have since been foaming at the mouth. The then British Prime Minister, Edward

Heath, sacked Powell from the shadow cabinet the next evening, although Powell continued to serve in the capacity of MP.

The Tiber is 405 kilometer long, meanders through breathtaking gorges and valleys, flows through the city of Rome, and, in a grand finale, surrenders its Roman essence to the Tyrrhenian Sea of the Mediterranean near Ostia Antica. It was as if the rustle of the waters of the Tiber whispered in a timeless voice in my ears: provincial bigotries, whether they be Roman, British, or Norwegian, will be dragged inexorably by the tide of time and meld together with the pluralistic and multicultural sea of nations into which their flotsam and jetsam drown and emerge with new identities, e. g., the Mediterranean in the case of the Tiber.

Returning to the then Member of Parliament, Øystein Hedstrøm, I can scarcely describe the anxiety bordering on paranoia his words triggered in my then rather innocent and naïve Panglossian mindset. I had to wrap my head around the perverted notion that we, as refugees, were the carriers of HIV/AIDS viruses and inflicted Norwegians with psychosomatic illnesses. Me? I thought I had brought Sir Viv Richards, Ian Botham, Imran Khan, Shakespeare, and R.L. Stevenson, among others, in my cultural baggage to Norway. Surely reports of my threat as a weapon of mass destruction had been exaggerated to appropriate Mark Twain back again for my own leftist cause! Few can appreciate the psychological turmoil such racist secretions into the public domain by influential politicians have on the vulnerable and impressionable minds of refugees who have escaped despots and are led to believe they are in a country where human rights, rule of law, democracy, and, not least, minimal adherence to a code of decency when talking about fragile groups such as refugees are the norm. After all, Norway is perceived to be a beacon of these virtues – the country synonymous with the Nobel Peace Prize.

A refugee is acquainted with the diabolical machinations of a despot of the ilk of a Pol Pot, Saddam Hussein, Ayatollah Khomeini, Siyad Barre, Slobodan Milosevic, or an Augusto Pinochet. But being accused of perpetrating "psychosomatic illnesses" upon the Norwegian populace was a crime no despot had ever leveled against anyone to my knowledge. This was a novel crime we were accused of, and I struggled to cope with it. At the time, I remember consulting every Norwegian and English dictionary (pre-internet era) in an effort to come to grips with the meaning of "psychosomatic illnesses" to no avail. Cervantes' Don Quixote of La Mancha tilted at windmills because, in his skewed perception of reality, he believed windmills were giants. If ever proof was needed about the irrationality of prejudice against minoritized groups, than look no further than these windmills of "HIV/AIDS" and "psychosomatic illnesses" that the dentist and MP, Øystein Hedstrom, leveled against non-Western immigrants and refugees in particular. Hans Blix would have had better luck finding weapons of mass destruction in Iraq

than the specific skills of skullduggery through which refugees imposed psychosomatic illnesses upon the good people of Norway.

For many Norwegians today, the sands of time obfuscate recollections of Øystein Hedstrøm and, some who remember, may be tempted to brush off his racist tirades as harmless – vestiges of an unenlightened era. For us, though, who were on the receiving end of this party’s toxic discourse, however, we are the ones still carrying the trauma of those “harmless” words decades later. No, we were not the ones to inflict any psychosomatic illnesses upon mainstream society, but rather, it was the other way around: we were scapegoated because the Progress Party, struggling at the polls, perceived us to be a stroke of luck to further their political ambitions. Time and modality – when and how immigrants were causing these terrible things – were masked. The trick was to construct what Stuart Hall (2017), building on Ernesto Laclau, called a “chain of equivalences”: just find diverse unrelated events and construct a narrative of doom and gloom that puts immigrants and refugees beyond the pale. So, on the one hand HIV/AIDS, and psychosomatic illnesses were cast into the sorcerer’s cauldron along with refugees and non-Western immigrants to deliver the *coup de grâce.* This is precisely why, writing in the postcolonial genre of the *Empire Writes Back*, I write to provide a cognitive and sympathetic roadmap that hopefully will guide other minoritized souls in Norway in their odyssey towards understanding and self-healing.

2 The Godlia Cinema Revelation

In 1995, a chilling revelation at the Godlia cinema in Oslo sent shockwaves through the nation’s conscience, exposing a disturbing connection between prominent politicians and extremist ideologies (Dagbladet, 1998). Among the attendees was Øystein Hedstrøm, a figure already under scrutiny for his racist remarks. During the meeting, Hedstrøm addressed a gathering that included some of Norway’s most notorious racists, including Jack Erik Kjuus, a key member of the “Hvit Valgallianse” (White Choice Alliance) party.

This revelation made one wonder how many more mainstream politicians cultivated secret ties with extremist groups. Hedstrøm’s association with individuals like Kjuus, who was later convicted for promoting policies like the voluntary sterilization of adopted children, highlighted the dangerous intersections between political power, racial prejudice, and eugenics. Examining this incident through the lens of whiteness theory, it becomes apparent that Hedstrøm’s actions were emblematic of a larger issue: the normalization of racist ideologies within influential circles. The Godlia Cinema revelation underscores the insidious ways in which white supremacy infiltrates even the highest echelons of society, perpetuating dis-

crimination and prejudice against marginalized communities. This event serves as a stark reminder of the importance of confronting Norway's historical and contemporary racial challenges, urging society to acknowledge the existence of racism and work towards dismantling the structures that sustain it. In the aftermath of the Godlia cinema incident, one might have expected severe consequences for those involved. However, the actual outcome was quite different. Øystein Hedstrøm, realizing the potential damage to the party's reputation, attempted to engage in some damage control. He wanted to address the media to mitigate the fallout but was silenced until after the elections – a strategy to prevent further damage during a crucial political period.

During this time, the party leader, Carl I. Hagen, stepped into the spotlight. Hagen's actions can be likened to Brutus' eloquent speech in Shakespeare's *Julius Caeser,* where Brutus manipulates public sentiment to defend his actions, claiming he killed Caesar out of love for Caeser and Rome. In a similar vein, Hagen used his persuasive skills, speaking as Brutus did in the language of the Plebeians, to defend the party and downplay the severity of the Godlia incident – in this case, no one was interested in seeing the mutilated body of Caesar carried by Mark Anthony. Through strategic communication and bamboozling the public, Hagen managed to secure a resounding victory for the party in the elections. Hedstrøm later unscrupulously took credit for the party's success, possibly indicating his willingness to exploit the situation for personal gain within the party. This analysis suggests that in the face of a scandalous incident, political leaders like Hagen employed rhetorical strategies and strategic moves to not only salvage the party's reputation but also secure a significant victory, showcasing the power of political manipulation and public perception in the realm of politics.

3 Symbolic violence: Promoting Critical Consciousness

In his book, *Policing the Crisis* (1978), British-Jamaican sociologist Stuart Hall, along with colleagues from the Birmingham School, (Hall et al., 1978), studied the manner in which Thatcher's government exploited the term "mugging" to create a sense of moral panic and breakdown of order that demonized youth from Caribbean backgrounds. Just as Thatcher, admired by the Norwegian Progress Party, recast "mugging" as a synecdoche for deviance and crime among Caribbean youth, Hedstrøm and his party accolades took a page out of the "iron lady's" modus operandi. "Mugging" and "psychosomatic illnesses" are part of what the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, would call "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu, 2015). In unraveling the mechanisms behind the perpetuation of power relationships and social inequalities in society, Bourdieu stated that symbolic violence refers to the discreet and elusive

ways through which hegemonic groups impose and uphold their beliefs, values and norms upon society. The imposition of these legitimizing hierarchies is accomplished without resorting to physical violence. Rather, symbolic violence is effectuated through symbolic systems such as language, education, and cultural norms to gain legitimacy for the values of the dominant class. One form of symbolic violence is whiteness, and Professor Zeus Leonardo provides a rationale for why minoritized youth must engage with it:

> Students of color benefit from an education that analyzes the implications of whiteness because they have to understand the daily vicissitudes of white discourses and be able to deal with them. That is, in order to confront whiteness, they have to be familiar with it. In the process, they also realize that their “colorness” is relational to whiteness’s claims of color-blindness and both are burst asunder in the process. Thus, the goal is for students of color to engage whiteness while simultaneously working to dismantle it (Leonardo, 2002, p. 31).

I often wistfully look back at my 23-year-old self and wish he had the knowledge and wisdom accrued through 33 years in which, like the process of fermentation in cheese-making catalyzed by enzymes and bacteria to produce unique and delicate flavors, I gradually started to see what was all around me but evaded my gaze – whiteness. Let me first attempt at a definition of whiteness. This analytical concept seeks to capture the social construction of white identity and the accompanying privileges that piggyback on being white in society (Feagin, 2020; Roediger, 2017; Lensmire, 2017). Critical race theorists and sociologists employ the term to elucidate the manner in which this phenomenon operates. To be clear, whiteness has no basis in a biological reality. How historical, cultural and social processes have evolved to confer systemic advantages upon people deemed white is the proper domain of whiteness studies.

Additionally, whiteness is broadened to understand how categories such as identity, gender, class, and sexuality, among others, intersect, and produce, and perpetuate social hierarchies and inequalities (Frankenberg, 2020). The crystallization of racial identity among white people is just one component of whiteness studies; of greater concern is the dynamics through which this social construct informs societal norms, institutions, and interactions. The denouement of such a study, at least in the field of academia, is to draw attention to the power dynamics, implicit biases and privileges often taken for granted among white people, with the aim of triggering a critical analysis that puts the spotlight on a phenomenon that until recently, derived its power from remaining silent and “invisible” while naming other “colors” and attributing meaning and consequences to these colors.

When Ignatiev states that the goal is not to interpret whiteness, but to abolish it, and one must die to whiteness, he gives expression to whiteness as a socially

constructed ideology, not the visual aspect (Ignatiev, 1997). Ignatiev's assertion underscores the crucial distinction between whiteness as a mere physical characteristic and whiteness as a pervasive social construct. It encapsulates a set of ideologies, privileges, and power structures deeply embedded in societies, often operating invisibly and shaping attitudes, behaviors, and institutional norms. When Ignatiev advocates for the abolition of whiteness, he delves into the heart of societal transformation. The call to "die to whiteness" metaphorically signifies the need for individuals to shed the privileges and prejudices associated with whiteness. It emphasizes a collective unlearning and dismantling of deeply ingrained biases, acknowledging the historical and systemic roots of racial disparities.

Professor Linda Martin Alcoff writes in *The Future of Whiteness* (2015), "It is common in writings by African Americans to describe the moment that one 'discovers' one has been placed within a distinct category of people with a particular racial concept that carries negative connotations" (Alcoff, 2015, p. 29). It may come as a surprise to some, but then again, perhaps not, that I "discovered" I was black in Norway in 1992 in an encounter with an American missionary from Louisiana. He was a protégé of sorts for the young white Norwegian lady I was courting, and he took it upon himself to visit me in my home and assert, "I am sure there are other ladies out there who would be interested in you. You cannot go ahead and marry a white lady. Back in Louisiana, I have relatives who wouldn't accept such a marriage. Think about your children in the future; they will be off-color". He was the same gentleman who once complimented me on my "olive" tan. Professor of History and International Relations, Ibram X. Kendi, spells out the dilemma aptly:

> Some white people do not identify as white for the same reason they identify as not-racist: to avoid reckoning with the ways that whiteness – even as a construction and mirage – has informed their notions of America and identity and offered them privilege, the primary one being the privilege of being inherently normal, standard, and legal. It is a racial crime to be yourself if you are not white in America. It is a racial crime to look like yourself or empower yourself if you are not white. I guess I became a criminal at seven years old (Kendi, 2019, p. 38).

Returning again to Øystein Hedstrom, it cannot be coincidental, given a lapse of almost 30 years, that the man credited with the seismic rise of the Progress Party, Carl I. Hagen, essentially regurgitates once more the same disease trope of "HIV/AIDs carrying, perilous immigrants" when he stated the following in 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic: "Now it appears that the whole of Norway will shut down because the immigrant population does not care about the influenza [sic] pandemic" (Facebook, March 5, 2021). Carl I. Hagen and his

wife Eli Hagen’s autobiographies were respectively number two and number one bestsellers in Norway between 2006 – 2013 (Løwer, 2013). Such intermittent racist secretions into the public space, uttered by those who seek to carve out an indigenous identity parasitic upon the alterity or “non-whiteness” of the minoritized, underscores my appeal to the minoritized to familiarize themselves with the whiteness studies.

4 Historical Prejudices and Indigenous Struggles

In particular, the indigenous Sami bore the brunt of Norwegian white supremacy. The Sami culture “did not exist”, and the Sami were to become part of the Norwegian population altogether. No other group in Norway was so abused and subjected to forced sterilization, electroshock, and lobotomy for the noble purposes of eugenics until 1970. Until the 1950s, Sami ethnicity was classified in public censuses in the same category as “mentally weak” and “insane” (Evensen & Reppesgard, 2017). The refusal to acknowledge racism persisted, even though national minorities like the Sami, Jews, and Tartars underwent state-sponsored discrimination rooted in classical racist convictions. For instance, in the 1800s, racist practices against the Sami included approaches like body snatching (stealing Sami corpses from graves) and skull measurements, all aimed at gathering so-called “evidence” that the Sami were inferior people (Berg-Nordlie, 2022, p. 427). Although the Sami were considered part of the White race, they were refused the distinctive Whiteness recognized in the majority Norwegian society due to their apparent biological, cultural, and ethnic deviations. The treatment of the Sami resonates with the historical denigration and eventual recognition of Irish whiteness in the USA, as demonstrated in Noel Ignatiev’s work, “How the Irish Became White” (Ignatiev, 1995).

During Norway’s nation-building era (1814 – 1940), historians Brochmann and Kjeldstadli (2008) observe that racial hierarchy ideas were profoundly embedded in Enlightenment thinking. Norwegians, like many Westerners in the nineteenth century, were beholden to beliefs of racial superiority. Minorities suffered significantly owing to a white racial framework built on the supremacy of the “Germanic”, “Nordic” or “Norwegian race”. The Sami were characterized as “biologically degenerate” and judged incapable of advancement, while the Kvens were classified as Mongols, associated with attributes like “brutality” and “sentimentality”. Romani people were targeted for assimilation, with a substantial number of Romani women subjected to sterilization methods, exhibiting a disturbing model of racial discrimination (Brochmann and Kjeldstadli, 2008, p. 149). The contours of these historical atrocities led to instilling a shared colonialist outlook among Norwegians,

even though Norway did not have colonies apart from the Sami areas (Brochmann and Kjeldstadli, 2008, 98).

The history of anti-Semitism in Norway dates back centuries and marked by discriminatory laws and social prejudices. In the 15th century, Archbishop Aslak Bolt prohibited observing the Sabbath in a Jewish manner. Despite a brief period in the 1490s when some Sephardic Jews were allowed to settle, King Christian V rescinded these privileges in 1687, reinforcing the exclusion of Jews from Norway (Mendelsohn, 1969). The anti-Semitic sentiments were perpetuated through various historical events, including the 1814 Constitution, which explicitly banned Jews from entering the country. Influenced by anti-Semitic views prevalent in Europe, the Norwegian architects of the Constitution justified their decision by labeling Jews as rebellious and treacherous, contributing to their exclusion from society. This prejudice persisted, leading to only a minimal Jewish presence in Norway by the mid-19th century.

The situation worsened during the Nazi occupation in 1940, when Jews faced persecution. Confiscation of radios forced registration, and the requirement of a "J" stamp on identity cards marked the beginning of their targeted isolation. The Nazis' anti-Semitic propaganda portrayed Jews as enemies, leading to their deportation and murder. Although some Norwegians protested these actions, many Jews were deported, with only a few surviving. In 2012, the Norwegian Prime Minister issued an official apology, acknowledging the deep-rooted anti-Semitism that allowed such atrocities to occur (Thomas, 2016). Scholars speculate that latent anti-Semitism within Norwegian society contributed to the exclusion of Jews, emphasizing their status as outsiders even after residing in Norway for generations.

5 Black Lives Matter in Norway too

While it is difficult to claim there is systemic or structural racism in Norway, the fact that the third largest political party, whose leaders secrete the most malicious racist statements intermittently in the public domain against an immigrant population that now comprises 7.2 %, can only be explained in grappling with whiteness studies. Racist attacks and anti-black violence are not new in Norway. Eugene Ejike Obiora was a Norwegian citizen of Nigerian extraction. His appeal for social assistance on September 7, 2006, was turned down, and so he made his way to the social office because of his dire economic situation. The staff called the police, who witnesses said behaved in an arrogant and threatening manner. A police officer strangled Obiora, who was lifeless when he arrived at the hospital, according to a nurse (Skipperø, 2021). The same police officer was involved in another high-profile case in 1999, where he had a Ghanaian female cleaner in a chokehold. The officer was

acquitted on both occasions. However, the Parliamentary Ombudsman concluded that Norway had violated Article 2 of the Human Rights Convention. The denouement was state compensation to Obiora’s bereaved family. This backdrop led one of the organizers behind the demonstrations in support of George Floyd in 2020 in Norway to state, “It is naïve to think 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). In addition to the Obiora case, Norwegian police have been accused of targeting people of color in so-called random stop and search policies, similar to the “sus” laws in the UK (Cole, 2016). Minority-background children under 16 years of age have been dragged down to police stations and kept in detention for several hours without the knowledge of the parents.

One major problem in tackling police brutality in Norway was the general indifference with regard to racism. The prevailing ethos of “colorblindness” refuses to acknowledge any notion of prejudice based on pigmentation. There have been calls for police in Norway to undergo antiracist programs with little or no success. The Police Superintendent of Oslo, Finn Abrahamsen, went on record in 2001 saying, “It is difficult to get somebody convicted on grounds of racism in Norway”. There have also been calls for police to register the frequency and ethnicity of those stopped and searched (with receipts issued), as is the practice in the UK, with only limited success.

The nationwide demonstrations in 2020 in support of George Floyd were reminiscent of the largest peacetime demonstrations in Norway when thousands marched in protest at the death of Benjamin Hermansen, a 15-year-old boy of Norwegian-Ghanaian descent, on January 26, 2001. Benjamin was arbitrarily picked out by neo-Nazis and knifed to death in Oslo simply because of his skin color (Thomas, 2016b, p. 239). One editorial captured the zeitgeist of the time:

> How could this happen? we want to ask, and the experts will answer us with an exposition on neo-Nazism. But although this must be taken seriously, we all must ask ourselves: what are my attitudes? Was Benjamin someone I could have told a joke about, refused entrance to a discotheque, refused to rent out a room to, refused to date my daughter? Was Benjamin Hermansen first and last a Negro? That is what we must ask ourselves. Now that he is dead, we will answer no. He was a young boy who loved soccer, who was popular among his friends, and wanted to grow up and live in a Norway that was more open and less prejudiced (Thomas, 2016, p. 239b).

Bonds of kin altruism were stoked when Norwegians tuned into the news and countenanced not a nameless, faceless “damn Negro or blackie” (expletives uttered by the racists who killed the boys), but a devastated white mother who was relentless in appealing to the collective conscience of the nation and vowed to pursue

justice for her son. Commensurate with one of the tenets of critical race theory called interest convergence, I argued in a study that the outcome may have been different if Benjamin's mother had not been white (Thomas, 2016b). A Benjamin Hermansen Memorial Fund was created with generous donations pouring in. The case received massive media exposure, whereas a litany of other equally brutal, racially motivated murders dating back to 1959 were ignored. One feeble voice that went against the tide was the national newspaper *Aftenposten,* under the heading *They Say it is the First Time* and enumerated a litany (not exhaustive) of racially motivated attacks since 1959. Among others:

> 28 June 1989: Two ethnic Pakistanis have been killed in the open street in Oslo. The man who wielded the knife lived and worked in Norway but was a Polish citizen. The ones who encouraged the murder, and who shouted "kill them, kill them," were ethnic Norwegians. "Children and the young among our people are afraid to walk around in town after this. We fear more assault," said Aslam Ahsan after the murders (Olsen, 2001).

6 George Floyd's Ripple: Navigating Norway's Awakening

Once again, the traumatic murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement induced a reticent public to countenance the imbrications of structures that perpetuate racism – even in egalitarian Norway. The country was rattled by media coverage showing thousands of youths demonstrating in the streets of the capital, Oslo, and other metropolitan cities in Norway, marching in solidarity with fellow activists in the USA and worldwide. According to one source, "the demonstrations outside the Parliament today, in support of George Floyd and victims of racism in the USA, are perhaps the largest ever in front of Parliament, with between 12,000 and 15,000 individuals, according to the police" (Velle, 2020). This was a rare moment when righteous indignation, encapsulated in the slogan "No justice, no peace", triumphed over pigmentation. This is commensurate with Bonilla-Silva's (2020, p. 8) observation that "The notion of systemic racism, which surveys consistently showed was alien to whites, has gained currency and is propelling discussions and analyses that were not possible before".

In her analysis of Norwegian mainstream reluctance to jettison the racial epithet "neger" (negro), the late Norwegian anthropologist, Marianne Gullestad, assigned blame to this "architecture of virtue" in stating, "My interpretation is that the neutrality of the term [i. e., Negro] is linked to the perceived innocence and goodness of the nation in relation to slavery, imperialism and colonialism" (Gullestad, 2005, p. 40). Put differently and with a view towards theorizing a more nuanced white Norwegian inventory, the earlier homicidal whiteness was supplanted by one that perceived itself in terms of a "white savior" mentality. In

his research on white female teachers who elect to teach in urban schools in the US, Hancock (2011) writes about this “savior” or “missionary” mentality: “With good intentions and zeal, many white women teachers head for inner-city schools to ‘save’ urban students only to find out that they themselves were the ones who needed to change; to grow; to understand; to accept and remove the mask of superiority, self-righteousness, and judgement” (Hancock, 2011, p. 98). The latter, I argue, can be extrapolated to give expression to the emergent incarnation of whiteness. I would argue that extant whiteness in Norway has crystallized in the interstices between a historically bellicose strand tempered by a sterling global reputation and lubricated by the enormous oil resources discovered in the 1970s – as a champion of human rights, democracy, and development, among others.

8 Refugees, Self-Reliance, and Education

1 Cultural Capital and Educational Challenges

I was desperate in the early 1990s to dump the dependency-inducing social welfare system and strike it out on my own. I was warned I would end up on the street and would have to fend for myself. "Be patient and complete your 500 hours of stipulated Norwegian lessons", was the mantra. It was clear this system was a one-size-fits-all behemoth that brooked no opposition and, even worse, made no accommodations for differing cognitive abilities or occupational skills. I learned Norwegian faster than the others in my class. Lev Vygotsky's (1978) theory of scaffolding provides an insightful framework to understand my experience of learning Norwegian faster due to my proficiency in English, a language related to Norwegian in terms of vocabulary and structure. Scaffolding, in the context of education, refers to the support and guidance provided by more knowledgeable individuals, enabling learners to accomplish tasks they would not be able to do independently.

In my case, English proficiency served as a scaffold, facilitating my learning of Norwegian more efficiently than that of my peers from Iran, Iraq, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, etc. Languages like Farsi (spoken in Iran), Arabic (spoken in Iraq and parts of Afghanistan), Tamil (spoken in Tamil Nadu, India, and Sri Lanka), and Pashto/Dari (spoken in Afghanistan) belong to different language families than Norwegian, which is a North Germanic language. The linguistic dissimilarity between their native languages and Norwegian makes it challenging to find cognates and common grammatical structures. This lack of linguistic overlap makes learning vocabulary and grammar in Norwegian more complex. Furthermore, language learning resources, such as dictionaries and textbooks, then and now, are more readily available for languages that have a larger number of speakers or are widely taught around the world. My peers found it harder to access high-quality learning materials specifically tailored to their native languages, hindering their language acquisition process.

In my case, when I approached the Norwegian course leaders, they seemed to treat me like John Locke's *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, without acknowledging the cultural heritage I carried from my British-Indian education in India. Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital" is highly relevant in understanding this situation. Cultural capital refers to the knowledge, skills, education, and cultural experiences that an individual possesses, which can be a significant asset in social interactions and professional settings. In my situation, despite English being a part of this cultural habitus due to my education in India, as a refugee, I found myself struggling to tap into its potential at the time. Former British Prime Minister

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Gordon Brown emphasized the indispensable role of English in the project of what Harvard historian Niall Ferguson dubbed "Anglobalization": the adoption of English as a global lingua franca, undeniably accelerating the process of globalization.

> So, finally, I propose that together Britain and America strive to make the international language that happens to be our own far more freely available across the world. I am today asking the British Council to develop a new initiative with private-sector and NGO partners in America, to offer anyone in any part of the world help to learn English (Brown, 2008, *The Wall Street Journal*).

Roberts (2007) reiterates this point, stating, "Nothing has advanced what Harvard historian Niall Ferguson has dubbed 'Anglobalization' faster than the adoption of English as the second tongue of many countries around the world'" (Roberts 2007, p. 389). In the early 1990s, despite the English advantage, I, as a former refugee, struggled to capitalize on this cultural asset. Reflecting on my journey, I acknowledge the critical role that English played in my rapid career progression from a taxi-driving refugee to a fully-fledged professor. Looking back, it's evident that my understanding of how to leverage this heritage was limited at that time. Paradoxically, the Eurocentric lens through which refugees, including myself, were evaluated seemed to overlook the very Western heritage and experiences some of us brought with us.

The situation mirrors the plight of Nicodemus, a secret disciple of Jesus, as depicted in the Bible. Nicodemus faced skepticism and denigration due to his association with Galilee, a region perceived as lacking in significance: "They replied, 'Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee'" (John 7:52; NIV). Similarly, my English heritage, despite its potential, was not recognized for its value in the context of my refugee experience. The disparity between my cultural capital and my perception of its worth highlights the challenges faced by refugees when their diverse qualifications and backgrounds are not acknowledged and utilized effectively. These were valuable assets that should have been recognized and appreciated in the Norwegian academic context. However, the course leaders, unfortunately, turned a deaf ear to this cultural capital, treating my background as if it held no value. This situation is not unique to me; many individuals find their knowledge, qualifications, and skills wasted when they encounter institutions or individuals who fail to recognize their cultural capital. This oversight can lead to missed opportunities, underutilization of skills, and a sense of frustration among individuals who possess valuable cultural resources but are not given a chance to leverage them.

After completing the mandatory 500 hours, the subsequent year saw us being shuffled from one seemingly promising "program" or "course" to another. Every Somali refugee could boast a resume brimming with certificates from these cours-

es, but in reality, they amounted to nothing substantial. Curiously, these courses, designed to appear competitive and appealing to potential employers, were ironically facilitated and staffed by individuals we had encountered in the system before; it felt like a never-ending loop. We remained ensnared in the clutches of the "patron-client" Leviathan, represented by the state.

These lightweight courses were custom-made for refugees, yet they carried little weight in the eyes of employers, who, though feigning empathy, often rejected candidates holding such certificates. Frustrated, I eventually decided to break free from this system. Despite the immense challenges, I embarked on an ambitious journey. The prospect of leaving the system brought euphoria, but the newfound freedom to work and earn a living in Norway came with its own set of physical and mental strains, especially without a proper education.

2 Breaking Panoptic Chains

The years spanning 1993 to 1994 marked an extraordinarily challenging chapter in my life, a period etched with relentless toil and sacrifices. Each day would commence at the ungodly hour of 4 a.m. I would mount my bicycle and pedal my way to Elko in Sandvika, just outside Oslo, for my new temporary job. The task was monotonous yet grueling job – packing electrical switches and outlets into boxes for eight uninterrupted hours. My fingers were left raw and throbbing from the ceaseless handling of switches that seemed to haunt my dreams, falling relentlessly from an assembly line. After this exhausting shift, there was no respite. I would hurriedly make my way home and then embark on another educational journey at an adult education program in Stabekk, not far from Sandvika. There, I enrolled in subjects I believed would complement my incomplete high school education from India. This was what the student counselor from the university recommended. The hope was that these subjects would serve as steppingstones toward university admission. Once classes concluded, I would rush back home, desperate for a few hours of sleep. However, my day was far from over. During that same year, the Lillehammer Olympics unfolded. At midnight, I would brave the bone-chilling minus 20 degrees Celsius temperatures, determinedly delivering newspapers in two neighborhoods using my car. This routine subjected me to extreme conditions – the harsh cold outdoors and then the stifling sweat-generated warmth as I navigated staircases in buildings, all the while fearing death from hypothermia, pneumonia, or sheer exhaustion.

This grueling regimen persisted for an entire year, until I completed the required subjects and finally applied to university. However, my dreams were abruptly shattered when I received a rejection from the same university, citing the wrong

combination of subjects. It felt like I had reached the end of my reserves. Defeated, I made the heartbreaking decision to abandon my aspirations for higher education, resigning myself to a life of manual labor, an outcome I had hoped to evade.

Before I proceed to analyze the above with relevant theoretical frameworks, a caveat first. Contra Ronald Reagan and his conservatives, who, in the 1980s, maligned single, black mothers as "welfare queens", I still hold firm to the belief in the necessity of a state that aids the weak. As such, conservatives of the American variety should find no succor in manipulating these reflections as a rationale for smaller government. However, the core issue lay not in the idea of state assistance but in its implementation. The state, in my case, failed profoundly by disregarding the nuances of the refugee experience. It is disheartening to think about how many others might have faced similar situations where their unique cultural backgrounds and the knowledge they bring from their experiences are disregarded. Recognizing and valuing cultural capital is not only essential for the individuals involved but also crucial for fostering diversity and inclusivity within the educational and professional spheres. By appreciating the richness of cultural capital, institutions can tap into a wealth of knowledge and skills, creating a more vibrant and dynamic environment for everyone involved.

The problem was that all were judged alike, and a uniform panacea was offered, stripping me of my agency and individuality within Foucault's panopticon (Foucault, 1975). The panopticon is a theoretical prison design conceived by the English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham in the late 18th century. Foucault, however, used the concept as a metaphor to illustrate the pervasive nature of surveillance and control in modern societies. The panopticon is characterized by a central watchtower from which a single guard can observe all inmates without them knowing whether they are being watched or not. This constant surveillance creates a sense of self-discipline among the prisoners, as they modify their behavior due to the possibility of being observed at any moment. The panopticon represents a mechanism of power where individuals regulate their actions and behaviors internally, leading to a form of self-policing. It was in this desperate state that the government assumed the role of my Lord Protector, a seemingly benevolent dictatorship that, according to Hobbesian philosophy, was a necessary escape from the anarchic state of nature. The autocratic rule of Oliver Cromwell, justified as a means to bring order and stability to England, resonated with my own experiences. The government, much like the Lord Protector, offered a semblance of order in the chaos, promising security and protection in exchange for obedience.

Biopower, another concept introduced by Foucault (1975), refers to the ways in which modern societies regulate and govern the biological and social aspects of human life. It encompasses various strategies and techniques employed by governments and institutions to manage populations, not just at the individual level but at

the level of entire societies. Biopower operates through mechanisms such as public health policies, education systems, and social welfare programs. It aims to optimize the health, productivity, and overall well-being of the population, often through forms of surveillance and normalization. Biopower focuses on managing life itself, not just in terms of individual bodies but also in terms of entire populations, shaping societal norms and behaviors.

Applying Foucault's (1975) concepts of enclosure, *tableaux vivants,* and discipline provides a profound lens to examine the refugee experience of confinement in both physical and temporal dimensions. Refugees often find themselves enclosed within specific spaces – refugee camps, detention centers, or asylum-seeker accommodations. These spaces, while providing physical shelter, also act as confining environments. Within these enclosures, refugees are not merely individuals seeking safety; they are subjects of scrutiny and regulation. The physical confinement limits their freedom of movement, reducing their existence to a restricted area. Moreover, this enclosure extends beyond the physical boundaries; it permeates their psyche, limiting their aspirations and dreams to fit the confinements of the designated space.

Beyond spatial limitations, the refugee experience is also marked by the enclosure of time. Uncertain legal statuses, prolonged asylum processes, and indefinite waiting periods create temporary confinement. Time becomes an oppressive force, where days turn into weeks and months into years with no clear resolution in sight. The enclosure in time not only restricts refugees' immediate freedom but also limits their long-term planning, creating a sense of suspended animation, where life is put on hold, waiting for a decision that might never come. Within these enclosed spaces, refugees perform what Foucault (1975) called *tableaux vivants.* Constantly aware of being watched – by authorities, fellow refugees, and sometimes the broader society – they modify their behavior to align with the expectations of their circumstances. They perform gratitude for the assistance received, compliance with the rules imposed, and, sometimes, resilience in the face of adversity. This performative refugee identity, shaped by the necessity to fit the societal image of a "deserving" refugee, further confines their genuine emotions and experiences, leading to a disconnection between their true selves and the personas they must adopt. A refugee or a minoritized individual must not surrender their aspirations to the powers that be. We cannot outsource our best interests to impersonal bureaucracies for whom abilities and dreams are immaterial. Paramount in their worlds is a system that brings order to the menace that refugee hordes represent.

Discipline operates within these spaces, molding refugees into docile bodies. The strict regulations, curfews, and constant surveillance create an environment where any deviation from the prescribed behavior is met with consequences.

This disciplinary power not only controls their actions but also infiltrates their thoughts and aspirations, shaping them to conform to the expectations of the host country or the institution overseeing their stay. The fear of repercussions enforces conformity, transforming individual identities into homogenized, docile forms that adhere to the rules set by the authorities. We did our best to kowtow and were left, in many cases, disillusioned.

In conclusion, the refugee experience is a complex interplay of enclosure, temporal confinement, performative identity, and disciplinary control. These dynamics not only restrict physical and mental freedom but also shape the way refugees perceive themselves and are perceived by the world. Understanding these aspects through Foucault's concepts provides a profound insight into the challenges faced by refugees, illuminating the subtle yet powerful mechanisms that confine their lives and shape their identities within the boundaries of their circumstances.

3 The Power of Education in Overcoming Boundaries

As I wrote these words, the news headlines blared: "Norwegian ministers have the lowest level of education in the world" (Svendsen, 2023). Another source went on to report:

> A study among 40,000 ministers reveals that Norwegian governments are ranked lowest globally in terms of educational attainment. The study compared the educational backgrounds of political leaders from 126 countries between 1966 and 2021. Norway's neighbors, Sweden and Denmark, also share these low rankings. Researchers explain this by emphasizing that democratic rule is valued more than elite governance in the Nordic countries. Minister of Higher Education, Sandra Borch (Sp), believes that diversity in the government's educational backgrounds is a strength that reflects the population (Ertesvåg, 2023).

The case of Tonja Brenna, who has completed high school but lacks higher education qualifications, presents a peculiar situation, especially considering her role as the Minister of Education. According to the government's official website, the Minister of Education and Integration is entrusted with the oversight of primary and secondary schools, as well as upper secondary education (Government.no, 2023). In a position traditionally associated with advanced academic achievements and expertise, Brenna's background raises questions about the standards set for leaders in education in Norway. Her situation challenges conventional expectations, where policymakers in the education sector should typically be highly educated professionals. In the previously mentioned study, the USA tops the list of politicians with the highest educational qualifications, followed by Spain, Italy, Portugal, and France (Svendsen, 2023). This oddity sparks discussions about the criteria used for appoint-

ing key figures in crucial ministries and highlights the ongoing debate within Norwegian society about the balance between practical experience and formal education in positions of significant responsibility.

Many outside Norway would be surprised to read this. One would expect Scandinavian countries, which top the most coveted statistics in the world, to be governed by highly educated politicians. However, this comes as no surprise to many in Norway. In fact, brace yourself; it is quite common. Education, in the traditional sense, often takes a back seat in the Norwegian political landscape. The emphasis here is more on practical skills, experience, and a deep understanding of societal issues than formal education qualifications. Norwegians tend to prioritize a candidate's ability to connect with the public, their practical knowledge, and their hands-on experience over academic achievements. This approach often results in a different perspective on governance compared to countries where formal education is given paramount importance.

While all this may sound egalitarian and equitable, I wish to sound a word of caution for immigrants and those from refugee backgrounds. The saying "What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander" highlights the principle of equal treatment and fairness. In the context of educational qualifications in Norway, this proverbial expression suggests that the same standards should apply to everyone, regardless of their background. While it might be the case that some native Norwegians have successfully navigated political positions without extensive formal education, it is essential not to generalize this experience to all individuals, especially black and brown people.

Condoleezza Rice's biography, with the telling title "Twice as Good" (2007), emphasizes the challenges faced by minorities, particularly African Americans, and the expectations placed upon them to excel and achieve double the accomplishments of their white counterparts. No doubt Rice's image was tarnished as National Security Advisor and later as the Secretary of State during the George W. Bush administration (the Iraq War and weapons of mass destruction, torture, and interrogation techniques such as waterboarding and handling of Hurricane Katrina, to name a few). However, even her most ardent critics on the left cannot deny the steely resolve of this demure woman, who leaves an impressive resume. Condoleezza Rice is an accomplished individual with a diverse range of achievements and qualifications. She holds a Ph.D. in political science from the Graduate School of International Studies at the University of Denver. She served as the provost of Stanford University, making her not only the first woman but also the first African American to hold that position. Rice is also an accomplished musician, having studied piano since childhood. She performed publicly as a pianist, including playing with renowned cellist Yo-Yo Ma at a 2002 concert and the Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin. Rice has received numerous awards and honors for her contributions

to academia, diplomacy, and public service throughout her career. But the mindset which instilled these principles for success can perhaps be glimpsed in the excerpt from her biography:

> Then, as now, many African American parents told their children "You have to be twice as good". Meaning, they had to be twice as good as a white person to receive the same level of respect, opportunity, or status. "You were taught that you were good enough, but you might have to be twice as good given you're Black", Condoleezza Rice often recalled. "It wasn't 'You have to be twice as good and that's unfair'. It was 'You might have to be twice as good', end of story. Complaining may have been the only vocabulary young Condoleezza lacked (Mabby, 2007, p. 37).

"Twice as Good" illustrates the fact that individuals from non-Western backgrounds often need to exceed the standard expectations to prove their worth and capabilities. Hence, while some native Norwegians might have opportunities despite limited formal education, non-Westerners are often held to higher standards and might face additional hurdles due to prejudices and biases. The lack of educational qualifications might be overlooked by some, but non-Western individuals should be cautious not to be misled by these examples. Discrimination and biases persist, and those from minority backgrounds may need to work harder to break barriers and overcome challenges. It is crucial to recognize the existing disparities and advocate for equal opportunities, ensuring that individuals from all backgrounds are judged on their merit and abilities rather than their ethnicity or nationality.

4 Empowerment Among People Like Us

In his book, *People Like Us* Hashi Mohamed (2020) writes about what it takes to make it in modern Britain. Hashi, a barrister at No5 Chambers in London, delves deep into the intricate web of social mobility in modern British society. In his profound exploration, Mohamed sheds light on a societal landscape where one's future prospects are overwhelmingly influenced by parents' occupations – a stark reality that echoes not only in Britain but also resonates with minoritized youth in Norway. Mohamed's narrative dissects a society where power and privilege are disproportionately concentrated within the 7 percent of the population who received private education, perpetuating a cycle of advantage for the few and limited opportunities for the many. His keen observations unravel the challenges faced by individuals with names that sound Muslim or Asian, highlighting the inherent biases in the job market. This issue isn't unique to Britain; it extends its shadows to countries like Norway, where minoritized youth encounter similar hurdles and

are often compelled to send out twice as many job applications as their white counterparts.

In a different section of this book, I have contended that residing in Norway offers a relatively level playing field compared to many other nations, including Britain. However, it is essential not to harbor any illusions: a significant portion of individuals in Norway with immigrant backgrounds, fitting the description of "people like us", as borrowed from Hashi's book title, will readily concur with the realities he portrays. His insights resonate deeply with the experiences of minority communities in Norway, emphasizing that despite the comparatively egalitarian environment, there are still formidable barriers that impede social mobility and equal opportunities for all. Hashi Mohamed's observations serve as a stark reminder that, even in relatively progressive societies, there remains much work to be done in dismantling systemic inequalities and fostering genuine inclusivity.

In 2020, the national newspaper *Aftenposten* carried the dejecting headline "New Report: Norwegians with Immigrant Parents Experience as Much Discrimination as Their Parents" (Heiervang, 2020) and went on to state: "It's worst for Norwegians with parents from Iraq, Turkey, Somalia, and Pakistan". The report referred to a study conducted by Erdal and colleagues (2019), in which a deeply concerning reality about the experiences of minorities born and bred in Norway came to light. The research indicates that over 40 percent of young adults with immigrant backgrounds have faced discrimination in at least one of seven areas within the past year. These areas encompass encounters with law enforcement, public service personnel, workplaces or educational institutions, restaurants or cafes, stores, public transport, or on the streets. Of particular concern is the significantly higher prevalence of discrimination among the descendants of immigrants, with more than half of those with parents from Somalia, Pakistan, Iraq, and Turkey reporting such experiences. The disparities in perceptions and attitudes are equally troubling. For instance, over half of ethnic Norwegians with a high school education expressed skepticism towards individuals of Muslim faith, whereas only about a quarter of those with educational backgrounds equivalent to a master's degree held similar views (Brekke and Mohn, 2018).

This data reveals a stark reality: despite being born in Norway, individuals from minority backgrounds, especially those with roots in specific countries, continue to face pervasive discrimination. The high prevalence of discriminatory incidents indicates a deeply ingrained bias within society, affecting various aspects of life. Furthermore, the disparities in attitudes based on educational levels highlight the importance of education not just in knowledge acquisition but also in fostering empathy, understanding, and tolerance. The findings emphasize the urgent need for comprehensive societal efforts to combat discrimination and promote inclusivity, ensuring that every individual, regardless of their background, can live free

from prejudice and bias. In *People Like Us*, Mohamed provides a compelling analysis of these systemic disparities, offering a poignant perspective that forces readers to confront the harsh realities of social mobility. His words serve as a mirror, reflecting not just the struggles of individuals but also the collective need for societal change, urging us to question and challenge the existing norms that perpetuate inequality.

5 Empowering Tomorrow: Refugee Integration and Success

Memoirs are just that: memoirs. Media headlines bandied about the phrase "recollections may vary" attributed to the late Queen Elisabeth in regard to the Duke and Duchess of Sussex's accusation of palace racism. I would be the first to hurl, "The lady [man in this instance] doth protest too much" at myself. I could have chosen to respond like the earlier generation of African Americans, such as Condoleezza Rice's parents, who expected her to be twice as good without complaining. But these are my recollections. I am not bitter or angry with anyone; that would be a waste. As I mentioned previously, my recollections and analyses are intended for minoritized youth who may identify with my experiences and are looking to learn from them, and this is my advice. As I also mentioned in the beginning of the book, I hope to engage the wider community and authorities (forgive my hubris in thinking they will read this book) in empathizing with the condition of the aspirations, hopes (many dashed), and fears of refugees and immigrants.

Allow me to conclude with some concrete recommendations. Some of these are already being implemented in Norway, and the authorities should be applauded for this. But the point is to also draw lessons for other countries, perhaps that one day may embark on a national mission to receive refugees on a massive scale. Given the challenges of climate change, wars, bad governance in the global south (some due to nefarious Western interference), and other geopolitical issues, it is a matter of time before the next wave of refugees knock on Western doors.

1. **Tailored educational Programs:** Develop tailored educational programs that recognize and leverage refugees' diverse qualifications and skills. Instead of generic courses, offer specialized programs aligned with their prior education and expertise. Recognizing their qualifications will not only enhance their skills but also increase their employability.
2. **Language Support:** Provide comprehensive language support, including language classes and immersion programs. Language proficiency is crucial for integration and employment. Offering language courses that focus on practical, job-specific vocabulary can significantly enhance refugees' communication skills in professional settings.

3. **Mentorship and Counseling:** Establish mentorship programs where refugees can be paired with mentors from similar professional backgrounds. These mentors can provide guidance on navigating the Norwegian job market, networking, and understanding cultural nuances. Counseling services should also be available to address psychological challenges and provide emotional support.
4. **Recognition of Foreign Qualifications:** Streamline the process of recognizing foreign qualifications. Establish clear guidelines and pathways for refugees to validate their educational and professional credentials in Norway. This recognition is vital for refugees to pursue careers aligned with their expertise.
5. **Work-Integrated Learning:** Promote work-integrated learning programs, internships, and apprenticeships. Practical experience in real workplace settings enhances refugees' skills and understanding of Norwegian work culture. Collaborate with businesses to create opportunities for refugees to gain hands-on experience.
6. **Career Counseling and Job Placement:** Provide career counseling services that focus on refugees' individual strengths, skills, and aspirations. Job placement programs should connect refugees with suitable employment opportunities, ensuring a match between their qualifications and job requirements. While this is being done, many have complained they are exploited as cheap labor by employers who know that the government pays (a paltry sum) the wages of those on job placement programs.
7. **Promote Entrepreneurship:** Support entrepreneurial initiatives among refugees (think of the 600 Somali-owned businesses in Minnesota). Provide training, mentorship, and financial support for refugees interested in starting their own businesses. Entrepreneurship can create self-sustainable employment opportunities and contribute to the local economy.
8. **Cultural Sensitivity Training:** Offer cultural sensitivity training to employers and colleagues to foster an inclusive work environment. Educate the local community about refugees' diverse backgrounds and the value they bring to the workforce. A culturally aware workplace encourages collaboration and understanding.
9. **Continuous Support:** Establish long-term support programs that continue even after refugees secure employment. Ongoing assistance, mentorship, and upskilling opportunities can help refugees advance in their careers and integrate further into society.

By implementing these recommendations, Norway can create a supportive environment where refugees are empowered through education, recognized for their qualifications, and provided with opportunities to contribute meaningfully to soci-

ety. Proper education leading to valuable degrees and higher employment chances will break the cycle of dependency on superficial courses, allowing refugees to rebuild their lives with dignity and purpose.

9 Fare and Unfair: Perils and Pitfalls of Taxi Livelihood

1 How I met Lena

At the stroke of midnight, a pervasive calm settled over Oslo, interrupted only by the subtle ambient sounds, indicating the transition into the stillness of the night. The sultry summer air hung heavy over the city; the quietude broken only by the distant echo of fading revelry. In the main, police and taxis were the only cars combing the almost deserted streets; the former looking for trouble and the latter mad enough to welcome the trouble in their cars for financial gain. In the heart of this stillness, I found myself steering through the deserted streets; the city lights flickering dimly in my rearview mirror. Six long hours had trickled away in the monotony of my taxi nightshift, and the city had surrendered to a profound silence. The wise and weary had retreated to the sanctuary of their homes, leaving behind a ghostly calm. But in the shadows lurked the remnants of nightlife, clinging desperately to the dim glow of the city's pubs.

In those smoky, steam-filled taverns, a motley assembly of souls persisted – loners seeking solace, adventurers yearning for excitement, troublemakers stoking chaos, and the simple yet tragic figures of alcoholics, all woven into the fabric of the night. These stragglers were our final hope, the last flicker of a dying flame, promising a meager income before the night succumbed to dawn. In the murky underbelly of the night, where shadows whispered secrets and desperation loomed heavy, I was acutely aware of the Faustian bargain that governed our nocturnal world. Hygiene, a foreign concept, was sacrificed at the altar of survival. Bad manners, like jagged shards of broken glass, often grated against our patience, yet we tolerated them in the name of livelihood. And loquaciousness, the unending stream of words that poured from inebriated lips, became a bittersweet companion during those long, silent rides. These were the sacrifices, the toll exacted by the night, and we, the guardians of the city's secrets, accepted them begrudgingly.

Amidst this eerie silence, a man materialized out of the darkness, his hand raised in a desperate plea for a ride. To a weary taxi driver, any potential fare was a welcome sight, the promise of currency momentarily dispelling the fatigue. Money, whether in cash or plastic, was the unspoken password to entry, and the bar for acceptance was low – mere ability to stand upright and recollect an address would suffice. We, the drivers, had mastered the art of scrutinizing passengers, akin to an airport security scanner, sifting through the hopeful faces for signs of trouble. As I opened the door for this mysterious passenger, I steeled myself for

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whatever challenges lay ahead, for I knew that within the confines of my taxi, every journey held the potential for chaos or tranquility, danger or safety, and, in rare moments, the possibility of redemption.

There was an odd feature about this night creature. He wore a brown leather jacket that was three sizes larger than what now appeared to be a very thin torso. I remember sizing him up and taking in as much of him as I possibly could, assisted only by the dim streetlights. Remembering as much information as possible about a customer's description can be crucial if the person commits an offense or is already a person of interest to the police. We sat silently for a few minutes until I stopped at the first red light. There was pin drop silence. Normally, this would mean the reveler was about to doze off, but cab drivers had a sixth sense that could tell the difference. I knew this man was sober and vigilant. He then blurted out those words that still send a chill up my spine twenty-five years later. "Would you like to greet my friend, Lena?" His words slithered into the air, leaving a trail of unease in their wake.

The question hung there, pregnant with implications, taunting me with its ambiguity. Two immediate scenarios rushed through my mind. In the span of a short time, cab drivers encounter more seedy and perverse situations than most people do in their entire lifetime, all the while maintaining a professional silence. Was this an offer for a ménage à trois, or was Lena an imaginary companion, the fantasy of a mentally unstable man? Had the man escaped from a psychiatric ward? Was he a serial killer? I regretted binge-watching on documentaries on the "Son of Sam", Jeffrey Dahmer, and Charles Mason just the week before. Did my customer have any weapons on him? Was that why his jacket was so big? Perhaps he carried some military-grade machine gun in there. The traffic light had not yet turned green, so I decided to turn around. I found myself looking straight into the eyes of a python snake whose head must have been as large as the head of my customer, who now proudly held it in his hands a few centimeters from my head. Lena was a gigantic python, and like Mowgli of the *Jungle Book* fame, I couldn't move, paralyzed with morbid fear. Lena, as he had called her, was no ordinary snake. She was a behemoth, a creature of primal fear straight out of the pages of a dark fairy tale. Ophidiophobia is an extreme, overwhelming fear of snakes, and I am the world's biggest ophidiophobe. You can add herpetophobia, a fear of all reptiles, to this list too.

"Don't worry, a python's bite is not venomous; they only choke their victims slowly," the owner's perverse words slithered into my ears, amplifying the horror of the situation. Those chilling words, laden with the knowledge of an agonizing fate, jolted me back to reality like a splash of ice-cold water. Suddenly, the mesmerizing trance that Lena's unblinking eyes had cast over me shattered, and the grip of fear began to loosen. In an adrenaline-fueled surge, I found strength I never

knew I had. It was as if the sheer terror had endowed me with a superhuman burst of energy. With a primal instinct for survival, I propelled myself towards the door, my trembling hands fumbling for the handle. In a desperate frenzy, I pushed the door with a force that felt otherworldly, the hinges groaning under the pressure. The cab door swung open with a violent lurch, almost torn from its frame.

Without a second thought, I bolted out of the cab, my feet pounding the pavement with a speed that could have rivaled Michael Johnson's then 200-meter sprint record. Every fiber of my being screamed for escape, urging me to put as much distance as possible between myself and the cab and between me and the haunting specter of Kaa and her sinister owner. I ran without direction, without purpose, my lungs burning with each gasping breath, my heart racing in tandem with my pounding footsteps. The cityscape blurred into a chaotic mosaic as I sprinted, my mind a whirlwind of fear and adrenaline. I didn't care where I ran or to whom I fled, as long as it was away from the looming threat of Kaa and the malevolent presence that had ensnared me in this nightmare. I narrowly avoided colliding with a police patrol car. Gasping for breath, I appeared as though I was being pursued by an apparition. Hastily, I recounted the entire incident and gestured toward the cab, which remained exactly where I had parked it. In summary, Lena's owner was apprehended, and I was granted permission to reclaim the cab. Understandably, I proceeded with caution, conducting a nervous yet meticulous search of every crevice and corner within the vehicle.

In the aftermath of this event, I became overly vigilant, especially toward potential customers donning oversized jackets. A call from the police informed me that they had conducted a search at the snake man's apartment, uncovering a collection of eerie creatures, including baby crocodiles and iguanas in his bathtub and specially crafted tanks. This discovery became headline news in the media.

2 The Python in the Cab: A Metaphor for the "Melanin meter"

The python is not venomous, but it certainly kills through constriction. I use "melanin meter" metaphorically to shed light on the pervasive issue of overrepresentation of individuals from black and brown backgrounds, notably from Asia and Africa, in low-paying jobs such as the taxi industry in Oslo and various other Western cities. This phenomenon signifies systemic exploitation, where people from these racial and ethnic backgrounds find themselves disproportionately concentrated in poorly compensated positions. This exploitation is deeply rooted in societal structures and economic disparities. Individuals from these communities

often face limited opportunities, leading them to accept low-wage positions out of necessity.

The taxi industry, in this case, serves as a poignant example, highlighting the challenges faced by marginalized communities in accessing fair employment opportunities. Moreover, these individuals often encounter discrimination and a lack of access to resources, further perpetuating their disadvantaged position in the job market. Using the term "melanin meter" in this context emphasizes the urgency to address these systemic issues and advocate for equal opportunities and fair treatment for individuals from black and brown backgrounds. It underscores the need for social and economic reforms that dismantle barriers to education, decent employment, and overall socioeconomic advancement, promoting a more equitable society where all individuals have the chance to thrive regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds.

In my early years as a taxi driver, from 1995 onwards, I found myself entrenched in an unforgiving routine that demanded everything I had and more. Twelve-hour shifts were the norm, an unrelenting schedule that stretched across six consecutive days of the week. This was the privatized taxi business's harsh reality, a reality that left me physically drained and mentally fatigued. The authorities were aware of the illegality of the situation but turned a blind eye in the main. The toll these long hours took on our bodies was palpable, and the demands of navigating traffic with unwavering concentration would leave us depleted at the end of each day. The exhaustion I felt was not merely physical; it seeped into the very core of my being, leaving little room for personal life. Those few hours I could snatch for respite were overshadowed by sheer fatigue. Quality time with my family became a luxury I could ill afford. Playing with my children and enjoying a peaceful evening at home were distant dreams, as I often found myself collapsing on the sofa, utterly spent. The cycle was relentless, and sleep, while a temporary escape, provided no solace when I knew I would be back on the road at 4 a.m., repeating the same grueling routine.

Amidst this exhausting ordeal, a profound transformation was occurring within the taxi industry. The workforce was undergoing a visible shift, a shift that I could keenly observe. It was a phenomenon marked by what I term a "browning" of the industry. White Norwegians, perhaps more aware of their alternatives and uncomfortable with the burgeoning numbers of black and brown drivers, gradually withdrew from the profession, leaving behind a void filled by minorities like me. Many of us were unfamiliar with the intricacies of unionizing or were indifferent to the potential benefits of fighting for better wages. Consequently, our presence became more prominent, further altering the industry's landscape. Reflecting on those days, I recognize the deep disparities and challenges faced by those of us who were part of this predominantly minority workforce. The 25 NOK starting

rate (ca. 2.8 USD), an insultingly low figure even in 1995, symbolized not just our meager earnings but also the undervaluation of our hard work. It was a stark reminder of the uphill battle we faced, both physically and economically, as we struggled to make a livelihood in an industry that demanded everything from us and offered little in return.

As is often the case, the "melanin meter" conveniently remains in the shadows but gets some attention on rare occasions. In 2015, a media report raised alarm about immigrants who have become a new underclass in Norway (Kocabas, 2015). *Caritas* is an international Catholic humanitarian organization that operates in various countries, including Norway. In Norway, *Caritas* is involved in social and humanitarian work, focusing on providing assistance and support to vulnerable communities, immigrants, refugees, and people in need. They often collaborate with local organizations and authorities to address issues related to poverty, social exclusion, immigration, and humanitarian crises. The following is a translation of the text reported by *Caritas:*

> A total of 28 percent of those arriving are born in Africa, and 17 percent are born in South and Central America. More than half have completed high school, and 17 percent have a university or college education… Legal expert Olav Dalberg works voluntarily for the center. He observes an increase in cases related to social dumping and exploitation. "This could involve low wages, non-payment of vacation allowances, or other serious violations from the employer's side. Most disputes are resolved in conciliation boards, but some end up in court", he says. Westeng Odden notes that the sectors standing out concerning social dumping are cleaning, car wash services, and the restaurant and hotel industry (Kocabas, 2015).

Many labor immigrants are unfamiliar with Norwegian society and laws, making them easy targets for exploitation. Some of those seeking help at the Information Center recount hourly rates as low as 30 NOK (roughly 3.5 USD). While Norway does not have a minimum wage salary, according to one source, "the starting salary for workers over 20 years of age, or workers over 18 years of age, or with a minimum of four months of work experience is 175.47 NOK per hour (ca. 20 USD) (Bodahl, 2021). The practical exclusion of labor immigrants from society leads to other problems. *Caritas* reports attempts to recruit women into prostitution and cases of human trafficking. Some labor immigrants also report incidents of violence and threats. *Caritas* is concerned about health-related issues linked to poverty as well.

Although I have avoided the term structural racism in Norway, individuals like Hatem Ben Mansour, the leader of the *Norwegian Center against Racism*, have pointed fingers at entities like Oslo municipality, accusing them of being structurally racist. Mansour (2022) scrutinizes a report from the *Institute for Church, Reli-*

gion, and Worldview Research (KIFO) that delves into immigrants' interactions with the Oslo municipality, highlighting the report's deficiencies.

1. **Ethno-racial Hierarchies:** Mansour criticizes the report for not considering ethno-racial hierarchies, emphasizing that racism affects different racialized groups differently. It suggests that racism impacts individuals with East European appearances differently than those with African appearances.
2. **Exclusion of Minorities:** The report's exclusion of national minorities, indigenous people, and the Roma population in Oslo is criticized. It is emphasized that these groups should not be overlooked, especially considering their significant presence in the city.
3. **Asymmetry in Encounters with Municipality:** The article highlights that encounters with Oslo municipality often involve significant asymmetry, particularly in situations like interactions with the child welfare system, housing, or job-seeking processes. Discrimination is reported to be prevalent, and cultural biases affect decisions, hindering access to rightful assistance.
4. **Importance of Diversity in Leadership:** The lack of racial diversity in leadership positions, particularly in organizations like NAV (Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration), is pointed out. The absence of racially diverse leaders is seen as a significant barrier to fair treatment in employment and services.
5. **Need for Increased Knowledge and Recognition:** The article stresses the need to increase knowledge and recognition of structural racism within Oslo municipality. It emphasizes that addressing racism requires understanding and acknowledging the presence of both conscious and unconscious biases.
6. **Call for Racially Diverse Complaint Mechanism:** A specific complaint mechanism dedicated to handling racism and discrimination cases within the municipality is proposed. It is suggested that such a mechanism should have strict sanctions and be trusted by racialized individuals, implying that trust in non-racialized individuals to handle racism-related complaints is lacking.

In summary, the article critiques the report's limitations, emphasizes the importance of acknowledging ethno-racial hierarchies, calls for inclusive representation in leadership, and advocates for a specialized complaints system to combat structural racism within Oslo municipality.

3 Caught Between Cobras and Pythons

The python, despite lacking the venom that causes instant death, inflicts a gruesome demise through suffocation. In the grim choice between a venomous bite leading to swift fatality and the protracted agony of a python's constriction, some prefer the latter scenario. A 2016 news article recounted a chilling encounter between a king cobra and a python in Southeast Asia. The headline, *Final Embrace of the Dead Snakes: King Cobra is crushed by a python but injects it with lethal dose of poison in fierce battle that left BOTH dead,* described a fierce battle where the cobra injected the python with a lethal dose of poison, but the python coiled around the cobra, ultimately leading to both reptiles' demise.

This macabre spectacle draws a haunting parallel to the plight of many immigrants, where desperate choices mirror this deadly embrace. Comparisons can be drawn to the harrowing decisions faced by immigrants, particularly in regions of conflict. The Mediterranean Sea serves as a perilous crossing, akin to the instant death induced by cobra venom. According to the *International Organization for Migration,* a staggering 28,133 migrants have been reported missing in the Mediterranean since 2014. This number, shocking as it is, merely scratches the surface. The full extent of the tragedy remains incomprehensible, especially when considering those fleeing countries like Afghanistan, North Korea, Eritrea, and numerous nations in South America, to name a few.

For the fortunate few who manage to reach the safety of the West, a different kind of threat awaits. Here, the metaphorical python takes form as neoliberal forces, eagerly entangling immigrants in its coils. The struggle for survival does not end upon reaching safer shores; instead, many immigrants find themselves ensnared in economic challenges, discrimination, and systemic injustices. This sinister parallel between the relentless grip of the python and the pervasive obstacles faced by immigrants underscores the urgency of addressing global immigration policies and advocating for a more compassionate, equitable world.

The economic landscape, reminiscent of the historical exploitation inherent in Western cities built on the backs of slave labor, has evolved into a contemporary paradigm where supranational private conglomerates act as the new "feudal lords" (Varoufakis, 2023). These powerful entities have no qualms about profiting from the labor of vulnerable immigrants, who find themselves compelled to accept meager wages and inhumane working conditions. Their compliance stems not from choice but from the harsh reality that a family member's livelihood depends on the scant opportunities offered by these entities. This scenario evokes haunting memories of historical exploitation, mirroring the injustices prevalent during the Reagan and Thatcher eras, where exploitative economic policies were lauded as the distorted manifestation of the "trickle-down effect".

Much like the prey ensnared by a python, these exploited immigrants experience a state of consciousness where they are acutely aware of their circumstances yet immobilized by their lack of options. They endure a harrowing existence, akin to a momentary consciousness trapped in the python's grip. In this merciless scenario, the blessings that should naturally accompany a life lived in freedom are systematically extinguished. The promise of autonomy, dignity, and fair opportunity, essential components of a life of liberty, becomes a distant dream for these individuals. The parallel drawn here between the predatory tactics of supranational conglomerates and the python's methodical constrictions serves as a stark reminder of the enduring struggle faced by vulnerable populations. It underscores the urgent need for societal reflection, policy reform, and a collective commitment to dismantling these exploitative structures. Only through concerted efforts can we dismantle the metaphorical pythons that entangle the hopes and dreams of countless immigrants, allowing them to reclaim their rightful place in societies built on the principles of fairness, equality, and genuine freedom.

What hue characterizes economic exploitation in the West? It's undeniably black and brown. It's surprising that renowned economists like Thomas Piketty, in recounting the 2012 Marikana platinum mine massacre in South Africa, never address racism. He merely states, "As often in such strikes, the conflict primarily concerned wages: the miners had asked for a doubling of their wage from 500 to 1000 euros a month. After the tragic loss of life, the company finally proposed a monthly raise of 75 euros" (Piketty, 2014, p. 39). This perspective, akin to the color-blind ideology even criticized in Karl Marx's works, reflects a startling omission. People in South Africa perceive it differently. A commentary on this massacre, which was the most devastating since the 1976 Soweto massacre, stated,

> In the case of Marikana, racism played a particular ideological role, namely, to justify violent repression of workers' wage demands. It is in the interest of whites – who still largely remain at the apex of the economic power structure – to keep race thinking alive as a mainstay for black exploitation, and to demonize resistance to that exploitation (Rhodes University, 2012).

Piketty's analysis convincingly highlights the fundamental driver of global inequality: the equation he depicts as $r > g$, where "r" signifies the average annual rate of return on capital and "g" represents the rate of economic growth. Tragically, the discussion doesn't extend to the construction, maintenance, and manipulation of the average annual rate of return on capital, primarily orchestrated by white Western capitalists. These figures, who have transformed into what Yanis Varoufakis (2023) refers to as "Technofeudalism", remain conspicuously immune to scrutiny. This omission obscures a vital truth about the roots of economic disparity in our world today.

4 Examining Racial Disparities in Norway's Economic Landscape

An in-depth examination of the economic landscape in Norway reveals a complex tapestry that often obscures the struggles faced by black and brown people in low-paid jobs with long hours, such as those in the catering industry, cleaning sector, and taxi business. While the Norwegian Nordic model undoubtedly provides a safety net, shielding its citizens, including immigrants, from the worst excesses of vulture capitalism, a closer look at the ground realities challenges the idyllic narrative often painted. Engaging in conversations with individuals in these marginalized sectors unveils a different reality. For black and brown workers in Norway, the promise of the Nordic model doesn't always translate into equal opportunities. The catering industry, cleaning sector, and taxi business, often employing immigrants, can become breeding grounds for exploitation. Long hours, low wages, and limited job security characterize their work environment, highlighting the inherent vulnerabilities faced by these communities. For example, consider the numerous car wash facilities in Oslo, where the majority of workers endure extended, unregulated shifts for meager pay. Many of my fellow taxi drivers back then gained their initial work experience in this demanding industry before putting in significant effort to obtain their taxi licenses.

Professor George Lakey's *Viking Economics* (2016) stands as a commendable exploration of Norway's progressive economic evolution from the 1930s to the 1970s. Lakey's insightful historical analysis sheds valuable light on the development of Norway's welfare state, showcasing the country's journey toward economic democracy. His work is a testament to the effectiveness of the Nordic model, emphasizing Norway's commitment to social justice, fair employment, and accessible education. Lakey's research and engaging narrative paint a vivid picture of a nation's successful pursuit of shared prosperity. *Viking Economics* is a valuable contribution to the understanding of progressive economic systems and social inclusivity.

While the historical success of Scandinavian welfare states cannot be denied, a critical lens must be applied when contemplating their applicability to diverse, multicultural societies of today. It is insufficient to measure the success of a welfare system solely by its benefits to the native population alone, particularly in countries with growing non-white demographics. The true litmus test lies in how these systems accommodate and uplift the lives of immigrants and ethnic minorities. The Scandinavian success model, celebrated for its egalitarian principles, faces challenges when juxtaposed with the increasing diversity of contemporary Western nations. Immigrants, especially those from non-white backgrounds, often encounter unique barriers. These barriers include systemic racism, limited

access to quality education and employment opportunities, and cultural differences that may not be adequately addressed within the existing welfare frameworks.

In his book, Lakey delves into the economic disparities faced by marginalized communities, a topic often overlooked by some economists. Unlike these economists, Lakey addresses racism, discrimination, and the Nordic economic model's success in Norway. He highlights alarming statistics, such as the 25 percent reduced chance for job applicants with foreign names to reach the interview stage. Additionally, he points out that 40 percent of Norwegians perceive immigration as a threat to their nation's distinct identity. Furthermore, Lakey notes that less than half of Norwegian-born teenagers with immigrant backgrounds identify themselves as fully Norwegian, revealing a significant cultural divide as of 2012. To illustrate the depth of discrimination, Lakey references Norwegian anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen, who exposes the entrenched Islamophobia in Norway. Eriksen's observations shed light on the perception that Muslims are seen as incompatible with being good Europeans. In Norway, Islamophobia persists as a pressing issue, exacerbated by the legacies of individuals like Anders Breivik and Philip Manshaus. Their extremist acts have left a lasting impact, fueling prejudices and tensions within the country and highlighting the urgent need for societal introspection and efforts to combat discrimination. Lakey notes that as Sweden cut back on its public spending, immigrant communities struggled to secure enough grades to enter upper secondary school, with a concomitant high ratio of youth to general unemployment. Lakey concludes:

> Together, those trends increase the chance of social exclusion and resentment, followed by the blowback of racism from a majority population that is previously conditioned by its whiteness (Lakey, 2016, p. 187).

Despite these challenges, Lakey maintains an optimistic perspective. He emphasizes how the Nordic countries, including Norway, have successfully reduced poverty through their economic model. Lakey underscores the Nordic commitment to full employment with a living wage, highlighting that a higher percentage of immigrant girls attain higher education degrees compared to their ethnic Norwegian counterparts, especially when considering their parents' education levels. He praises the Nordic model's emphasis on accessible education and training, ensuring equal opportunities for all (Lakey, 2016, p. 199). Moreover, economic success cannot be divorced from social cohesion and integration. An egalitarian welfare system should not only provide economic safety nets but also foster a sense of belonging and equal opportunity for all residents, regardless of their racial or ethnic background. In today's multicultural landscape, merely extending benefits to the

majority population does not fulfill the fundamental principles of fairness and social justice.

Addressing the question of whether the Scandinavian success model can be extrapolated to other Western nations with diverse demographics requires a nuanced approach. Policymakers need to adapt these models to accommodate the specific needs and challenges faced by immigrants and ethnic minorities. This adaptation involves culturally sensitive policies, comprehensive anti-discrimination measures, targeted educational and vocational training programs, and inclusive social integration initiatives. Furthermore, it is essential to recognize that the success of a welfare system is not solely contingent upon economic indicators but also on the lived experiences and social mobility of all residents. Achieving true inclusivity requires dismantling systemic barriers, challenging ingrained prejudices, and fostering a society where every individual, regardless of their racial or ethnic background, can thrive and contribute meaningfully.

The efficacy of welfare models, including the Scandinavian success model, should be reevaluated in the context of today's multicultural societies. A truly egalitarian welfare system is one that extends its benefits equitably, ensuring that immigrants and ethnic minorities are not only recipients of economic support but also active participants in the social, cultural, and economic fabric of the nation. This recalibration is vital for creating a future where the ideals of social justice and inclusivity are not just theoretical concepts but tangible realities for everyone, regardless of their racial or ethnic identity. The rosy depiction of high taxes being willingly paid for abundant services disregards the disparities in service accessibility and quality experienced by these marginalized groups. In essence, while Norway's Nordic model provides a safety net, it is crucial to acknowledge the gaps that persist, especially for black and brown individuals laboring in low-paid jobs. Addressing these gaps requires not only economic reforms but also a genuine commitment to dismantling systemic racism and ensuring equal opportunities for all. Only by embracing a more inclusive and comprehensive approach can Norway truly fulfill its vision of social justice and equality for every citizen, regardless of their racial or ethnic background.

Six out of ten poor children in Norway come from immigrant backgrounds, highlighting a concerning trend rooted in racism. Child poverty continues to rise in Norway, affecting 115,000 children, as per the 2019 data from Statistics Norway (SSB) (Borgan, 2022). Since the turn of the millennium, the proportion of impoverished children has steadily increased. In the latest statistics, from the year before the pandemic hit, 11.7 percent of all Norwegian children were living in poverty. These children belong to families with persistently low income, significantly below the national average over a three-year period. Certain groups are disproportionately affected, with six out of ten of these impoverished children having immi-

grant backgrounds. Particularly alarming is the situation for children from specific countries. For instance, nine out of ten Norwegian-Syrian children are living in poverty, accounting for a total of 9,000 children. Similarly, many Norwegian-Somali children face dire circumstances, with 11,000 of them residing in families with enduring low incomes in segregated communities, constituting nearly eight out of ten children with Somali backgrounds.

Terje Wessel, a professor at the University of Oslo, warned about the consequences of such segregation. He emphasized that segregation undermines trust between different groups and erodes trust among people residing in various parts of a city. It also weakens the willingness to pay taxes, impacting the desire of those living in affluent neighborhoods to maintain high levels of social welfare benefits in impoverished areas. This data clearly reflects a disturbing reality where children's opportunities and well-being are significantly influenced by their racial and ethnic backgrounds, highlighting the deep-seated racism ingrained in the social fabric of Norway.

The prevalence of child poverty among black and brown children in Norway serves as a litmus test for the acclaimed welfare state and Nordic model. In his 2016 work, George Lakey, while analyzing the historical trajectory of the *Viking Economics* model, did not foresee the complex economic challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, Russian aggression against Ukraine, and soaring electricity and food prices, among other factors. These issues disproportionately affect vulnerable minorities, underscoring the multifaceted nature of the economic problems faced by marginalized communities. The stark reality of racial disparities in child poverty raises significant questions about the inclusivity of Norway's welfare system. As Norway grapples with this issue, it remains to be seen whether the principles of *Viking Economics* will extend their benefits to encompass and uplift the new, more diverse demographic of Norwegians. The outcome will undoubtedly shape the country's social policies and its commitment to combating systemic racism in the years to come.

Capitalism's remarkable resilience in the face of changing global landscapes is undeniably attributed to its adaptive nature. Scholars, including Stiglitz, Piketty, and Varoufakis, have meticulously exposed its fundamental driving force: insatiable greed. Despite the facade of progress, capitalism's core identity remains rooted in an unquenchable desire for wealth accumulation, as evident in the metaphorical Emperor's nakedness, glaringly exposed to those willing to see beyond the illusion. When neoliberal stakeholders venture into developing nations with promises of prosperity, a chilling saga unfolds. The World Bank, driven by the Washington Consensus, embarked on a mission that left a trail of devastation, beginning with structural adjustment policies. These policies, often imposed on predominantly black and brown countries, perpetuated economic upheaval and soci-

etal disintegration, exploiting vulnerable nations in the name of progress. Noam Chomsky's critique of Western ills is unparalleled, characterized by his unyielding, incisive, and unique ability to dissect and condemn the catalogues of injustices with unmatched precision, making his analysis an unrivaled force in the realm of social and political critique.

> Some of the worst atrocities in the world have been committed over the last few years in the Eastern Congo. Three to five million people have been killed. And who do you point the finger at? They have been killed by militias, but behind the militias are multinational corporations and governments. And they are not visible… You don't see the multinational corporations that are using the militias to slaughter people so that they can get access to the coltan that Westerners are using in their cell phones and other valuable minerals (Chomsky & Vltcheck, 2013, p. 7, 8).

The World Bank persists in its delusion, championing a utopian vision through what Moore (1999) termed "lean neoliberalism" and "Hayekian neo-statism". F.A. Hayek, the influential political philosopher and economist, advocated for statecraft, where the state's primary role was to safeguard market interests, competition, and prices through legal frameworks. Hayek's ideology justified "transitional dictatorships", such as Pinochet's regime in Chile, blurring the lines between authoritarianism and totalitarianism. The Bank's "partnership" with countries like Rwanda must be analyzed in the context of its evolving strategies. Initially aiming to "roll back the state", the Bank later embraced the East Asian Miracle model, incorporating elements like Japan's state-sponsored allocation of "directed credit". In this model, "strongmen" leaders are perceived as partners as long as they internalize the bank's neoliberal values, echoing Hayek's vision.

However, this so-called "partnership" has been exploitative. Liberalization ostensibly opened African markets to foreign goods, yet African countries found little demand for their own products abroad. Opening capital markets failed to attract investments; instead, investors sought to exploit Africa's abundant natural resources, exacerbating economic disparities and perpetuating exploitation (Stiglitz 2012, p. 41). This exploitative reality starkly contrasts the Bank's utopian rhetoric, underscoring the urgent need for critical examination, policy reform, and a global commitment to dismantling exploitative structures. Only through such concerted efforts can we challenge the naked truth behind the facade of progress and create a world where genuine development and prosperity are accessible to all.

Certainly, the link between the exploitative practices of capitalism, exemplified by the World Bank's policies in developing nations, and the phenomenon of "melanin meter" in Norway and other Western countries is palpable. Both instances underscore the pervasive nature of systemic exploitation, especially against marginalized communities. In developing nations, the exploitative policies driven

by neoliberal ideologies, as championed by institutions like the World Bank, perpetuate economic disparities. These policies often result in the depletion of natural resources, the exploitation of labor, and economic dependency on Western powers. The parallels are evident in the experience of black and brown communities in Western countries, including Norway. These communities often find themselves relegated to low-wage jobs, such as those in the catering industry, cleaning sector, or taxi business. Their labor is undervalued and exploited, mirroring the economic exploitation in developing nations.

Moreover, just as the World Bank's strategies perpetuate dependency, immigrants in Western countries, particularly those from black and brown backgrounds, often face systemic barriers that limit their opportunities for upward mobility. Discriminatory hiring practices, limited access to quality education, and racial biases further exacerbate their vulnerability, creating a cycle of economic exploitation. In both scenarios, the underlying theme is the exploitation of vulnerable communities for economic gain. This memoir serves as a specific lens through which to examine and challenge discrimination in Norway based on my personal experiences. It is important to note that the scope of this narrative does not allow for broad generalizations. However, anyone delving into this subject matter will quickly encounter numerous instances of racial indignities suffered by minorities. For instance, in the September 2023 issue of *Forskerforum* (Rønning, 2023), a journal dedicated to research and higher education published by *Forskerforbundet* and aimed at academic professionals in universities, colleges, and research institutions, I observed the striking cover featuring a woman wearing a hijab. The accompanying subtitle highlighted the story of Usma Ahmed, one of the few Norwegian-born individuals of immigrant background pursuing a career in research. The article detailed Ahmed's experiences, noting that after completing high school, she worked for several years, including at a major clothing chain. During her employment, Ahmed faced prejudice and racism, with some customers refusing to interact with her and others making sarcastic comments about her hijab. These incidents exemplify the pervasive discrimination faced by individuals like Ahmed in contemporary Norwegian society.

Whether in developing nations or Western countries, black and brown individuals often find themselves trapped in economic systems that undervalue their contributions and limit their potential. Addressing the "melanin meter" in Western nations necessitates recognizing the interconnectedness of global economic exploitation and dismantling the systemic barriers that perpetuate these injustices. It requires a collective commitment to fostering inclusive societies where individuals, regardless of their racial or ethnic background, can access equal opportunities and contribute meaningfully to their communities. Only through com-

prehensive policy reforms and societal changes can we break the chains of exploitation, promoting genuine equality and justice for all.

5 Fractured Solidarity: Racial Divides in the Working-Class Struggle

In the initial years of my taxi career in Oslo, a deeply unsettling reality began to unfold, revealing the underbelly of racism that tainted the industry. Some white customers, unabashed in their prejudice, made it clear that they would only ride with white, ethnic Norwegian drivers. This discriminatory behavior, brazenly displayed, struck me like a blow each time. One particular incident seared into my memory: after patiently waiting for over an hour as the first cab in the queue, I watched in disbelief as a customer engaged in a brief conversation with a newly arrived white driver behind me and jump into that cab, leaving me in stunned outrage. In the year 1995, as a new driver, taxi stands were equipped with wall-mounted telephones. When a customer called a specific stand, they would be connected to the first cab in line. One day, as I answered the phone, I was met with an unsettling query: "Are you an 'authentic' ethnic Norwegian driver?" I responded in the negative, to which the customer curtly replied, "Kindly pass the phone to a driver who matches the description". Naturally, I chose to disconnect the call.

These incidents marked the beginning of a series of similar experiences that stretched over seven years. Fueled by a sense of righteous anger, a group of us, black and brown drivers, decided to confront the company about this blatant racism. To our dismay, the response we received was as astonishing as it was infuriating: "Customers have the right to choose their cars", they said, trying to justify the unjustifiable. This absurd reasoning was not lost on us. "Are you suggesting that customers have the right to pick their drivers based on race? Is the company implicitly condoning racial profiling?" we retorted, demanding an explanation. The answer we received was far from satisfactory. "Absolutely not!" they exclaimed, attempting to deflect blame. "Customers merely prefer specific car makes". It was a feeble attempt to disguise the deep-seated racism within the industry. In those days, taxis predominantly consisted of Mercedes Benz, Volvos, and a handful of Japanese brands, mostly Toyotas. The selective bias of our white colleagues and the leadership was glaringly evident; it felt like a betrayal, a stabbing in the back by those we had considered our peers. In the face of racism, minoritized taxi drivers developed a witty survival tactic: when asked if the driver was white, they'd respond, "No, but the car I drive is white!" It was a humorous jab at customers lacking a sense of humor, leaving them puzzled and hanging up, proving that laughter was indeed the best defense against ignorance.

This incident was not just a singular event; it was a stark illustration of the racial discrimination entrenched in our daily lives as taxi drivers. It symbolized a struggle against not just individual prejudices but also systemic (taxi companies) biases that threatened our dignity and livelihood. In the face of such adversity, we stood united, determined to challenge these injustices and carve out a space where equality, not prejudice, dictated our worth as drivers and human beings. In the preface to Cedric J. Robinson's seminal work, *Black Marxism* (1983), Robin D.G. Kelley delves into a profound question that has echoed through the annals of history: Why have white workers consistently failed to recognize and unite with black, brown, Asian, and indigenous working people as part of their shared class struggle? Kelley's contemplation unearths a troubling reality, one riddled with anti-black mob violence, racial pogroms, staunch defense of segregated spaces, and reluctance to support black workers on picket lines. Black Marxism, according to Kelley, illuminates a fundamental truth that Marx and Engels acknowledged but were unwilling to confront: ideologies of racial difference, and to a lesser extent, individualism, have splintered the unity of the proletariat. This division shattered the notion of a universal working class, making it clear that the proletariat was never a homogenous and all-encompassing entity. Kelley's words resonate deeply, echoing the historical struggles faced by marginalized communities, particularly black individuals, in the face of a fractured working class. The phenomenon he describes mirrors a broader narrative, one that transcends geographical boundaries and permeates diverse societies, including Norway and other Western countries. This phenomenon finds a striking parallel in the concept of the "melanin meter", a term rooted in the exploitation of black and brown labor, often for economic gain and social dominance.

The history of the "melanin meter" is a tapestry woven with threads of racism, economic exploitation, and systemic oppression. It underscores the harsh reality that even within the working class, there exists a hierarchy, a pecking order dictated by racial prejudices and biases. Just as Kelley highlighted the divisions within the proletariat, the "melanin meter" exposes how racial differences have been weaponized to perpetuate economic disparities, limiting the opportunities and upward mobility of black individuals. In the world of the "melanin meter", the exploitation of black talent and creativity for profit stands as a stark reminder of how racial ideologies have not only fractured the working class but also fueled a cycle of exploitation that continues to this day.

The reluctance of white workers to embrace their black counterparts, as dissected by Kelley, finds a modern-day manifestation in the struggles faced by black individuals in various industries. In Norway and other Western nations, the exploitation of black labor in low-wage jobs, coupled with limited access to quality education and discriminatory hiring practices, perpetuates a cycle of economic vulner-

ability. This vulnerability, deeply rooted in historical racial biases, echoes the divisions Kelley observed within the working class. It showcases how ideologies of racial difference have created a rift, preventing a unified struggle for economic justice and equality.

As we delve deeper into the intricacies of the "melanin meter", it becomes evident that this phenomenon is not merely a historical artifact but a living, breathing reality faced by black communities today. It stands as a testament to the enduring power of systemic racism, highlighting the urgent need for solidarity within the working class, transcending racial boundaries. Just as black Marxism challenged the traditional narratives of class struggle, the "melanin meter" challenges us to confront the uncomfortable truths about racial biases within the working class and work collectively to dismantle the barriers that divide us. In the face of this challenge, the words of Kelley and the insights from black Marxism serve as guiding beacons, urging us to recognize the universal struggle for economic justice, regardless of race, and strive for a future where unity triumphs over division.

Cedric Robinson critically examined Karl Marx's perspective on race and revealed a significant blind spot. Robinson astutely points out the connection between Aristotle's influence on Marx's apparent neglect of the role of race in the context of slavery and capitalism. Aristotle, a foundational figure in Western philosophy, viewed slavery as a necessary component for the self-sufficiency of the polis, the ancient city-state. In his worldview, slaves were seldom expected to attain virtuous lives, relegating them to a status devoid of personal agency and virtue (Robinson, 1983, p. xiix). Marx, while challenging various aspects of the prevailing socio-economic systems, exhibited a glaring omission regarding the agency and experiences of enslaved individuals. In Marx's discourse, slaves were reduced to mere commodities, devoid of humanity and aspirations. He depicted them as individuals solely motivated by fear, devoid of a sense of ownership over their existence. In Marx's framework, their struggles and aspirations were conspicuously absent, casting a shadow over their narratives of freedom and resistance.

This omission stemmed from Marx's historical context and the prevailing attitudes of his time, reflecting the deeply entrenched racial biases of the era. By overlooking the complexities of enslaved lives, Marx inadvertently perpetuated the dehumanization of Black individuals and marginalized their experiences within the broader discourse on freedom and liberation. His oversight highlighted a significant blind spot that echoed the prejudices of his time, emphasizing the urgent need for a more comprehensive understanding of race, class, and power dynamics within the frameworks of capitalism and social change. Robinson's insightful analysis illuminates the inherent biases embedded in historical philosophical perspectives, underscoring the importance of acknowledging these blind spots to construct a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of the intersecting forces that shape

our world. By confronting these biases head-on, scholars and thinkers can work towards dismantling systemic prejudices, fostering a more equitable future for all.

10 Immigrant Workers in Norway's Taxi and Care Sectors

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,

As You Like It, (William Shakespeare)

1 Taxi Rides, Changing Demographics and Racial Complexities of Eldercare

In the hushed depths of Oslo's autumn night, the city lay cloaked in a tranquil stillness, the hour long past the grasp of midnight. Yet, amid this silence, a profound drama was unfolding, one that transcended the mundane rhythms of the night. While the majority of the city's workforce slumbered, their snores intermingling in a collective nocturnal melody, a handful of tormented souls remained adrift in the vast sea of loneliness. Unable to endure their isolation any longer, these desperate hearts sought solace in the anonymity of a taxicab. On that pivotal night in 1996, fate, with its enigmatic hand, guided me to one such soul. She entered my cab with a fragile smile, her eyes betraying the tumultuous thoughts within. "Just drive downtown", she whispered, her voice a mere echo in the obsidian night.

As the wheels of the cab spun, she took on the role of a director, guiding our nocturnal escapade through arbitrary turns and directions. "Turn right", she would say, and then "now left", her commands painted with the raw hues of her emotions. In that confined space, I donned my metaphorical psychologist's cap, listening not just with ears but with the empathetic understanding of a fellow traveler through life's complex tapestry. It was as if Shakespeare's immortal verses echoed through the cabin: "All the world's a stage… And one in his time plays many parts". In those moments, I was not merely a driver; I was a companion, a confidant, and a silent witness to her struggles. Indeed, if "All the world's a stage… And one in his time plays many parts", and there was a prize for the highest number of roles played in one night shift, then certainly cab drivers are contenders for this prize.

Amidst her arbitrary directions, she laid bare her soul, confessing the depth of her despair. It became apparent that she needed more than just a ride; she sought a sanctuary for her unspoken sorrows, a sanctuary she found within the sanctuary of my cab. Her words lingered in the air, mingling with the collective snores of a

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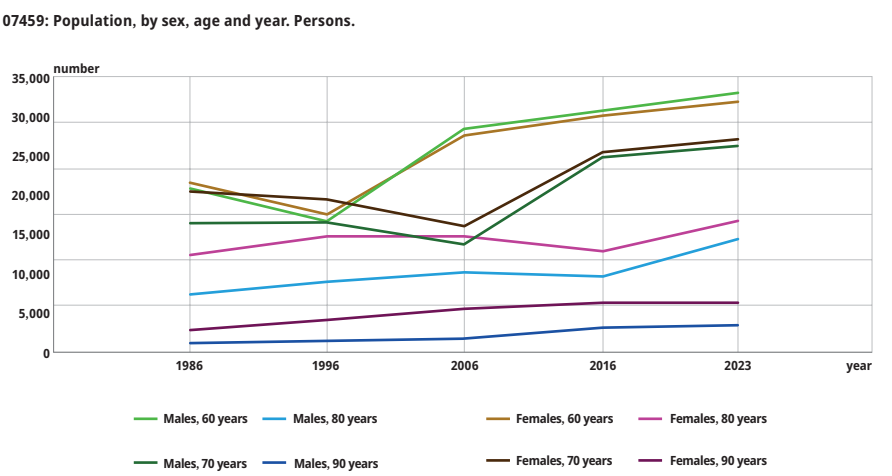
city at rest, each confession a poignant note in the symphony of the night. And then, as if revealing a clandestine secret, she uttered words that hung heavy in the air, "Actually, I just couldn't bear my loneliness anymore", her voice trembled. "I told myself that if I do not meet someone who gives me a good reason to continue living, I will return home and end it all. After talking to you, I feel there is hope. Thank you for being kind!" The weight of her revelation settled within the cab, the atmosphere pregnant with the magnitude of her words. In that profound moment, I silenced the relentless march of the meter, refusing her payment. "Why didn't you tell me sooner?" I inquired, my voice a gentle reassurance in the night. We spoke for what felt like an eternity, the cityscape passing us by in a blur, our words weaving a delicate tapestry of comfort amidst the collective snores of a city at rest.

I could fill the rest of this chapter with similar, gripping anecdotes, but my objective is not to broadcast and publicize the anguish of vulnerable souls – that would be perverse. My objective is to use this anecdote to draw attention to the burgeoning numbers of people of color disproportionately represented in the care sector – hospitals and elderly homes, for instance – and the paradox of racism and resentment many of them face in Norway. In Norway, various reports have long warned about what is called *eldrebølgen,* literally "the elderly wave", or the coming massive increase in the elderly in Norway. According to one recent source,

> Lower birth rates and the fact that we will live longer make Norway's population age relatively quickly... the population growth in Norway is expected to level off, while the number of people over 80 years of age will skyrocket. ... In 2100, 1 in 6 people in Norway could be 80 years or older (Blaker, 2023).

One recent study ran the headline, "Nursing home employees with minority backgrounds experience discrimination, harassment, and racism" (Henriksen, 2022). The report discusses a study conducted by Tone Lindheim, a researcher at VID Specialized University, highlighting discrimination, harassment, and racism experienced by healthcare workers with minority backgrounds in nursing homes. Lindheim's research reveals that individuals' skin color, rather than gender or origin, plays a significant role in determining their vulnerability to discrimination and harassment. It goes on to state, "Lindheim conducted observations and interviews at three different nursing homes in Oslo, one in the west, one in the center, and one in the east. At all the nursing homes, between 70 and 84 percent of the staff had minority backgrounds, with most of them having education and origins outside the EEA (European Economic Area)" (Henriksen, 2022). The study points out that current workplace systems are insufficient in addressing these issues, creating a challenging environment for employees to report incidents.

Lindheim's observations and interviews at nursing homes in Oslo with predominantly minority staff revealed that financial insecurity, uncertain employment conditions, and pressure to maintain extra shifts hinder employees from reporting discriminatory incidents. Additionally, the study underscores the role of leadership in addressing racism and discrimination within the workplace. Despite legal obligations, some institutional leaders were found to be less proactive in preventing and managing such incidents. Furthermore, the report emphasizes the need for improved processes to recognize qualifications earned abroad, particularly for healthcare professionals, to provide a more inclusive environment. The challenges faced by immigrant workers, including social isolation and stringent residency requirements, are highlighted. Efforts by organizations like *The Filipino Helping Society in Norway* to provide support, information on immigration laws, language exchange programs, and community-building initiatives are acknowledged as positive steps to mitigate the issues faced by immigrant healthcare workers. Overall, the report highlights the need for comprehensive solutions to address discrimination, racism, and social isolation faced by healthcare workers with minority backgrounds.



Source: Statistics Norway

Figure 3: The burgeoning elderly population in Norway.

The data presented in Figure 3 paints a clear picture of the demographic shift occurring in our society, particularly in the Western world. We are witnessing a significant increase in the number of individuals aged 60 and above. This trend is not merely a statistical blip, but rather a profound societal transformation that holds

immense implications for various sectors, including healthcare, social security, and the economy. The substantial rise in the population of 60-year-olds, especially highlighted by the almost 15,000 additional individuals compared to figures from 1986, is a cause for both celebration and concern. On one hand, it signifies advancements in healthcare, living conditions, and overall quality of life. People are living longer, healthier lives, which is undoubtedly a testament to progress in medical science and public health initiatives.

However, this demographic shift also brings challenges that cannot be ignored. As the number of elderly individuals increases, there will be a growing demand for healthcare services, long-term care facilities, and specialized medical professionals skilled in geriatric care. Additionally, there will be pressure on social security systems, as a larger portion of the population will be in the retirement phase, relying on pensions and public assistance. Furthermore, this aging population trend necessitates a reevaluation of societal attitudes and policies. There must be a concerted effort to combat ageism and promote inclusivity for older adults. Employment practices, healthcare services, and public spaces need to be adapted to accommodate the needs of an older demographic. Moreover, initiatives that encourage active aging, lifelong learning, and social engagement can enhance the overall well-being of this growing segment of the population.

This shift also underscores a pressing issue related to the workforce providing care to the elderly. Notably, individuals of color are disproportionately represented in these sectors, highlighting the need for cultural competence and inclusivity in eldercare. It is concerning, however, that the white elderly population appears unprepared for the imminent reality of receiving care from a diverse workforce, often composed of individuals from brown and black communities. This discrepancy in preparedness could exacerbate existing social disparities and further emphasize the need for comprehensive training programs that emphasize cultural sensitivity and understanding. Addressing this issue requires a multi-faceted approach, including educational initiatives, policy reforms, and community engagement efforts. As we navigate these demographic changes, it is crucial for societies to foster an environment where diversity is not only acknowledged but also embraced. By promoting understanding, empathy, and respect among all individuals, regardless of their background or ethnicity, we can create a more inclusive and harmonious society, ensuring that elderly individuals receive the care and support they need, irrespective of the color of their caregivers.

2 The Power of Care: Voices of the Compassionate Minority

Previously, I mentioned Michel Foucault (1926–1984) in connection with the manner in which governments coopt to themselves the role of a "pastor" looking after their sheep. One of Foucault's major contributions was his analysis of the relationship between power and knowledge. He argued that power is not just a negative, repressive force but also a productive and constitutive one. He explored how power operates in various social contexts, shaping individuals and societies through institutions such as prisons, schools, hospitals, and psychiatric asylums.

> Power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away, power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations [...] power comes from below, that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix (Foucault, 1990).

In the realm of Marxist analysis, power is traditionally perceived as a tool wielded from the top-down, where the powerful exert control over the powerless. However, Michel Foucault introduces a paradigm shift by suggesting that power is not confined to the dominant structures but is pervasive and intricate, seeping into every crevice of society. Even those considered oppressed possess a unique form of power, a concept vividly illustrated in the context of minoritized people in Norway, as exemplified in the taxi industry. In the taxi world, predominantly occupied by black and brown individuals ("melanin meter"), a transformation occurs. Despite enduring the trifecta of low wages, grueling hours and racism, these drivers extend compassion and understanding to the distressed passengers they encounter. The taxi metamorphoses into a "confessional box" with the driver assuming the role of a compassionate listener analogous to a "priest". In this setting, the power dynamics are temporarily inverted. A similar phenomenon unfolds in the caregiving sector, where black and brown individuals, despite working in a field notorious for modest wages and challenging hours, attend to the burgeoning population of the white sick and elderly.

This shift is emblematic of a broader trend in Norway: the increasing visibility of people of color in critical sectors such as healthcare, transportation, and education. The once-uncommon sight of diverse professionals, including doctors, pharmacists, and taxi drivers, has become as familiar as the native Norwegian pine tree. My own son, who is half-Norwegian, is a medical doctor. In this new reality, it becomes unsustainable for those receiving care to racialize the very hands that nurture, nourish, and heal them. However, confronting this paradox poses a significant challenge. Educating the younger generation about inclusivity is one thing, but addressing the deep-seated biases of those who should know better, especially

in their later years, presents a complex dilemma. The discomfort of confessing personal struggles to a priest who is black or brown mirrors the broader societal unease in acknowledging the authority and wisdom of individuals traditionally marginalized. Yet, as Foucault would argue, this discomfort signifies a shift in the power structure. The oppressed, in their newfound roles as caregivers, confidants, and professionals, possess transformative power. Their presence challenges established norms, forcing society to confront its biases and recognize the multifaceted nature of power dynamics. In this evolving landscape, the once powerless find strength in compassion and understanding, reshaping the narrative of power, one shared moment at a time.

In a quiet moment during another taxi ride, a poignant conversation unfolded, revealing the deep-seated societal paradoxes surrounding aging, care, and independence in Norway. An elderly white Norwegian passenger, her eyes brimming with melancholy, expressed a sentiment often unspoken: she viewed non-Western immigrants as fortunate for having family members to care for them in their old age. This perception, rooted in cultural differences, clashed with the prevailing Norwegian model of self-reliance and outsourcing elderly care to the government. At that time, I, too, was unfamiliar with the intricacies of Norwegian expectations. Naively, I asked if she didn't have children who would look after her, unaware of the complexities underlying her concerns.

This encounter epitomized the clash of cultural norms, revealing the disparity between individual expectations and the reality of government-managed elderly care. Foucault's metaphor of the government as a "pastor" resonates profoundly here. The Norwegian society, in its pursuit of independence and self-sufficiency, had placed its trust in the government, viewing it as the caretaker of its aging population. However, as the years passed and old age loomed nearer, doubts crept in. The passenger's moist eyes reflected a deep-seated fear, a realization that the independence cherished in youth might translate into isolation and neglect in old age. This narrative echoes Foucault's critique of governmentality, where the state assumes the role of a guiding pastor, directing the lives of its citizens. In this context, the elderly woman's apprehension highlighted the fragility of this relationship. The very independence that had once been a source of pride now seemed like a double-edged sword, distancing individuals from the familial support that many cultures consider essential in later years.

This incident underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of cultural expectations and the societal structures that shape our perceptions of care and independence. It challenges us to reevaluate the balance between individual freedom and communal responsibility. Moreover, it serves as a poignant reminder that the choices made in youth reverberate into old age, shaping not only individual experiences but also the societal fabric itself. The complex interplay of culture, govern-

ment intervention, and individual expectations paints a rich tapestry of challenges and opportunities as societies grapple with the evolving dynamics of aging and care. I have often discussed the aforementioned perception of reliance and dependency among non-Westerners. While the taxi customer admired and envied this culture, others have spewed out opinions that "thingify" people of color, to borrow from Aimé Césaire, and play on the trope of the infantile Negro.

> It is the destiny of the Occidental to face the obligation laid down by the commandment. Thou shalt leave thy father and thy mother. This obligation is incomprehensible to the Madagascan. At a given time in his development, every European discovers in himself the desire … to break the bonds of dependency, to become the equal of his father. The Madagascan, never! (Manoni cited in Césaire, 1972, p. 60).

The excerpt above delves into the complexities of cultural perceptions and societal expectations, exploring the contrasting ideologies of independence and dependency across different cultures. The upsetting words highlight the inherent biases and stereotypes that often color Western perceptions of non-Western societies, specifically in the context of dependency. Mannoni's analysis of a fictitious "Malagasy dependence complex", under the guise of offering insights into the psychological effects of colonization, raises critical concerns when viewed through the lens of postcolonial theory. One major critique lies in Mannoni's perspective, which inherently reflects the colonial gaze, perpetuating the idea of European superiority. His portrayal of the Malagasy as dependent on colonizers oversimplifies complex power dynamics and ignores the broader socio-political context of colonization.

In Norway, a nation proud of its self-reliance and strong social welfare system, there exists a paradoxical narrative. On one hand, Norwegians cherish their independence, epitomized by the societal emphasis on self-sufficiency and individual responsibility, even in old age, with some resenting relying on black and brown caregivers, as the earlier study showed (Henriksen, 2022). This ethos aligns with the Occidental desire, as mentioned in the text, to break the bonds of dependency and establish equality with their forebears. However, when juxtaposed with perceptions of non-Western immigrants, particularly black and brown people, a troubling double standard emerges. These individuals are often viewed through a lens that mirrors the colonial tropes described by Césaire. They are "thingified", reduced to stereotypes that perpetuate the image of the "infantile Negro", or, in a broader context, the perpetual dependent. This discrepancy in perception underscores the insidious presence of racial bias. While Norwegians may celebrate their journey towards independence and equality within their own cultural context, they may unwittingly project a patronizing lens onto others, particularly immigrants. This lens denies agency and perpetuates the myth of dependency, fueling racist narratives that undermine the capabilities and potential of black and brown

individuals. What happens, then, when the roles are reversed – white Norwegians now become involuntarily dependent on the "Malagasy", who will continue to be well represented in the care sector?

The reality, however, is far more nuanced. Immigrants, like any other community, aspire for self-reliance, independence, and the opportunity to break free from historical constraints. They, too, seek to establish themselves as equals within society, desiring to transcend the limitations imposed by stereotypes. To bridge this gap, it is imperative to challenge these deeply ingrained biases and confront the subconscious prejudices that shape our perceptions. Acknowledging the universality of the desire for independence and understanding that it transcends cultural, racial, and geographical boundaries can pave the way for a more inclusive society. By recognizing the agency and potential within every individual, regardless of their background, societies can move towards a future where equality is not just an ideal but a lived reality for everyone.

11 East is East and West is West: Bonding and Bridging cultural differences

Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth!

The Ballad of East and West, Rudyard Kipling

1 Clash of Civilizations on Four Wheels

The taxi profession appears to be perfectly tailored for drivers from Muslim backgrounds in particular, who clearly comprise a sizable number, if not the majority, among Oslo's taxi drivers. This compatibility is perhaps most evident in relation to two of the five pillars of Islam: *salah*, or the obligatory five daily prayers, and *sawm,* which governs the ritual of fasting between sunrise and sunset during the month of *Ramadan.* In addition to the flexibility and freedom of regulating one's driving schedule, there is the added element of exceeding the eight- or nine-hour statutory regulation for a twenty-four-hour timeframe. There is no extra remuneration for overtime, a foreign concept in the taxi industry, but that does not impede those who valorize the ability to observe tenets of their religion; having to work longer hours is perceived as a virtuous act with the promise of more spiritual blessings in the lexicon of the religious. Not least, cab drivers enjoyed the added perquisites of negotiating vacation times and duration. It was quite common to hear that so and so was in Pakistan or Somalia for an extended period of time. I knew a driver who worked intensely for six months and was in Somalia with family during the next six months of winter. Hence, the flexibility and freedom inherent in the taxi business partially explain the proliferation of drivers from Muslim backgrounds.

Contrast the above with another world that is antithetical to any notion of piety. The clientele in Oslo whom the Muslim cab driver serves at night appears anomalous for individuals committed to doctrines decreed in 7th-century CE Arabia. Consider the dictates of the previously mentioned third pillar of Islam: the observance of abstaining from food, drink, smoking, and sex between sunrise and sunset. Perhaps the jarring contrast can best be sketched by describing a typical Friday night in the Viking capital to appreciate the extrapolation of the metaphor of *East is East and West is West* (1889) of the Victorian balladeer, Rudyard Kipling. I

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remember my first Friday night shift in 1996. In one sense, the change in the dress, attitudes, expectations, and behavior of Norwegians can be approximated through the conceptual term "paradigm shift". In his 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* Thomas Kuhn Thomas argues that there comes a time when every day or "normal science" can no longer continue as "normal" due to the accumulation of irregularities that ultimately lead to a revolution in science. This process of a paradigm shift in science is rarely tranquil but is accompanied by dissent and turmoil. The German theoretical physicist Max Planck, whose discovery of energy quanta won him the Nobel Prize in Physics in 1918, famously said of paradigm shifts, "A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it" (Kuhn, 1970, p. 150).

It was as if the hustle and bustle of the daytime Friday scene, with stoic faces jumping on and off buses and trams, sharply dressed business professionals engrossed in phone conversations and gesturing, and tourists admiring the architectural facades of buildings that had become sore to the eyes of locals, all changed abruptly. There was a new breed in this "paradigm shift": revelers who had the smug look and swagger of conquerors who knew the town was "theirs" for the next twelve hours. Like triumphant Roman conquerors parading through the Arch of a Titus or Constantine, these modern-day Tituses were awash with the city's "booty" in the form of thick perfumes, the best clothing brands that money could buy, women with expensive purses, high heels, miniskirts, and the ubiquitous plastic bags clinking with the sound of beer bottles. Like neophyte teenage drivers, fueled by wild hormones, they were revving up their "party engines" poised to paint the town red. The boisterous customers would enter our taxis, demand some upbeat party music to match their celebratory mood, and inevitably ask, "Which pub would you recommend tonight? Where is it happening, driver?" Perhaps it was part of this perception of the city and everything in it as their fair share of the booty, including taxis, which perhaps explains why some perceived taxis and their "invisible" drivers as extensions of their homes.

The reader will appreciate the collision of schemas and this incongruous juxtaposition of opposing cultural paradigms in this "Western revelers meet austere Muslims" scenario. A job in which the sight of alcohol, pubs, scantily clad women, pop music, and fornication, among others, were not uncommon was not precisely what an observant Muslim envisioned but is part and parcel of the territory. The irony is perhaps best captured in one such Muslim driver's sardonic observation: "We as Muslims detest alcohol, pork, Western music, and pubs, and yet, because of our occupation, we know the address of every pub in this city". He gave expression to the internal moral dilemma these drivers face. It is a good feeling to earn a livelihood, but it comes at the cost of navigating a world that mocks their worldview

and has the potential to entice and erode faith. The nightlife tales are not what they would look forward to sharing with their families. Picture this surreal sitcom once again: a conservative Muslim cab driver in a car with blond and blue-eyed Norwegians, the former fueled by caffeine at this ungodly hour making a living while the latter noisily chug cans of Red Bull to banish sleep in order to rock and roll. Consider attempting a social commentary on a photo of this motley crew confined in the car. Piety meets hedonism, hot dog meets halal, sharia meets Shakira (or Shaggy), the beard of Islam meets the hipster's beard – it's like the universe played a cosmic joke on the devout. The much-bandied-about word "integrate" would have little meaning in such a scene. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, professor of social anthropology at the University of Oslo, takes a jab at Denmark's integration policy with similar implications for Norway.

> You know, Islam does seem a bit incompatible with the Danish way of life because, well, what do the Danes do in their leisure time? They go out and they drink a lot of beer, and they eat dead pigs, and then they go home and have sex with strangers afterwards. And they then they say to the Muslims, "Why don't you integrate better? Aren't you grateful for being in Denmark?" (Booth, 2014, p. 184,185).

Eriksen's reflection employs satire and exaggeration to show the incompatibility between Danish lifestyle preferences and the Islamic way of life. While one may chuckle at humor, there is a more serious invitation to discuss what grounds of commonality, if any, exist between a burgeoning Muslim demographic in Norway and mainstream Norwegian values, which, as the hegemon, demonstrates some lack of self-awareness in uncritically expecting Muslims to discard their dearly held beliefs and seamlessly assimilate into the Norwegian way of life. In 2106, the current leader of the populist Progress Party, Sylvi Listhaug, wrote the following on her Facebook page: "I am of the opinion that those who come to Norway must adjust to our society. Here we eat pork, drink alcohol, and show our faces. One must adapt to our values, laws, and rules, which are in Norway, when one comes here. Like and share!" (Eliertsen, 2016). Herein lies the crux of the problem – the ground zero of any discussion of the increasing problem of segregation in Norway.

2 Norway's Anne Frank, Ruth Maier and Historical Amnesia

As I pen these lines, pundits all over the world are once again trying to make sense of the implacable hostility between Israelis and Palestinians. Once again, we hear both sides vowing to make the other pay a heavy price. The vocabulary that many people around the world are familiar with, such as the Yom Kippur War, Entebbe,

Camp David, Intifada, Sabra and Shatila, Oslo Accords, PLO, Yitzhak Rabin, and so on and so forth, demonstrates the enormous impact that these ancient hatreds have had. I was there in 1994 to get a glimpse and wave outside the Grand Hotel in Oslo, where Nobel Laureates Yasser Arafat, Yitzhak Rabin, and Shimon Peres stayed. The Oslo Accords broke down subsequently, and the world has since paid lip service to the cycle of violence and stalemate among the warring factions.

Obviously, it would be unwarranted to extrapolate from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to the relations between various European countries and their minority Muslim populations, but I will nonetheless make a cautious comparison. One can wonder at the wisdom of juxtaposing two supposedly unrelated trajectories in drawing any useful lessons about the current Islamophobia bedeviling Norway, but I am convinced the two are interrelated, and we would do well to understand the machinations behind the two bigotries that are entwined. Both Jews and Muslims have for some reason served, and still are serving, as the "mirror" to Europe's soul. According to the Torah, Ishmael, considered the ancestor of all Arabs, had to leave his father Abraham's house. Sadly, like his brother Isaac's children, it appears that Isaac's descendants too are struggling to find acceptance and belonging among the third branch of the Abrahamic family – Christian Europe.

Much as few in Europe would like to be reminded, the Holocaust was first imagined in Europe. In his book *A World Without Jews: The Nazi Imagination from Persecution to Genocide* (2014), professor of History Alon Confino rejects the functionalism approach to the Holocaust, which sanitizes the human element out of the narrative. This approach, epitomized in Hannah Arendt's banality of evil after covering the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem (1961), assigns blame to men lacking qualities and emotions. In his quest for why the Nazis burned the Bible and Jewish synagogues all over Germany, he stumbles upon an insight triggered through a reading of Sigmund Freud's *Moses and Monotheism* (1939). Freud believed that Christianity suffered in its psychological unconscious from the Oedipus complex in relation to Judaism. Christianity turned murderously violent once it was clear that the "Father religion", Judaism, would never countenance any notion of salvation through the "Son religion" Christianity. While considered a wild speculation, Freud, Confino argues, was onto something in unpacking the true essence of antisemitism. Envy at its perpetual subordination as the "Son religion", Christianity. Confino then presents his epiphany, which is worth reproducing at length:

> The Nazis chose as their main enemy the Jews, an ancient people, with a long history and fundamental role in Christian, European, and German society, and a source of a long tradition of positive and negative moral, religious, and historical symbols. The Jews stood at the origins of the Bible, of Christianity, and, for many in Germany and Europe, of modernity's liberalism,

> communism, and capitalism. Origins is a metaphor of being in time that implies legitimacy, roots, and authenticity. By persecuting and exterminating the Jews, the Nazis eliminated the shackles of a past tradition and its morality, thus making it possible to liberate their imagination, to open up new emotional, historical, and moral horizons that enabled them to imagine and to create the empire of death (Confino, 2014, p. 14).

In what follows, I will draw upon my research into antisemitism in Norway, published in three peer-reviewed journals. I have, for years now, tried an experiment with my high school and university students. "How many of you have heard of Anne Frank?" and all the hands go up. "How many have heard of Ruth Maier?" and in close to fifteen years, I count on one hand the number who recognize Ruth Maier. Ruth Maier is often called Norway's Anne Frank. She escaped Austria during the Anschluss (1938) and fled to Norway. In her newly adopted homeland, Ruth Maier learned to read Knut Hamsun in Norwegian in the space of two years, kept a diary, and posed for the sculptor Gustav Vigeland in 1904. Ruth's diary documented her thoughts, observations, and experiences during the war. On November 26, 1942, she was arrested at her address in Oslo. The newspaper Aftenposten writes that two burly policemen apprehended her with many girls in pajamas, observing the scene upset. One of them looked at the beautiful golden wristwatch on her skinny wrist and said, "Take off the watch. We can take care of it for you until you return", to which Ruth replied, "I will never return" (Thomas, 2016, p. 201).

Ruth did not survive Auschwitz, but her diary was found later and, one would imagine, catapulted her hopes and fears onto the national and international stage. In Norway, taxi drivers and policemen collaborated in kowtowing to Nazi orders and apprehending Jews throughout the country. In the Norwegian government's *Action Plan against Antisemitism 2016–2020, t*he extent of the collusion is clear: "The police action against the Jews on November 26, 1942, was the largest in the history of Norway. All Jewish assets and property were confiscated on the initiative of the Norwegian Nazi party, *Nasjonal Samling.* Members of the civil service, taxi drivers, and civilians were also involved in the actions" (Ministry of Local Government and Modernization, 2016). Note that seventy long years transpired before the Prime Minister of Norway, and currently NATO General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg, crafted an official apology on behalf of the Norwegian Holocaust. This apology was strategically delivered at the dock in Oslo, where 532 Norwegian Jews were hounded into the cargo ship Donau on November 26, 1942. Below is an excerpt from his speech mentioning Ruth Maier:

> The Holocaust came to Norway on Thursday, November 26, 1942. Ruth Maier was one of the many who were arrested that day. What about the crimes against Ruth Maier and the other Jews? The murders were unquestionably carried out by the Nazis. But it was Norwegians who carried out the arrests. It was Norwegians who drove the trucks. And it happened in Norway.

> In the course of the war, 772 Norwegian Jews and Jewish refugees were arrested and deported. Only 34 survived" (Stoltenberg, 2012).

So, what connection exists between the Norwegian Holocaust, Muslim cab drivers, and their fellow Norwegian-Muslims whom Sylvi Listhaug chided in regard to the need to adapt to a Norwegian culture that, contra Muslims, drinks alcohol, eats pork, and uncovers the face? I argue, rather pessimistically, that antisemitism has not disappeared in Norway but, like the ten incarnations or avatars of Vishnu, has now crystallized in the form of Islamophobia. Earlier incarnations included but were not limited to the indigenous Sami and the five national minorities of Norway: Jews, Forest Finns, Roma, and Romani people/Taters—the mention of whose names evokes shame in the national conscience. What did these minorities have in common? What was so detestable about them collectively that warranted the wrath of Norway? Their "crime" was to be born "not Norwegian" and hence become, in the nomenclature of Noam Chomsky, "non people" (Chomsky & Vltcheck, 2013). Hamid Dabashi pulls no punches when he states Europeans assimilate a reading of the world into a predetermined schema of what they already know, which is "how to rule, how to own, how to possess, and how to map the world in defiance of its inhabitants' will, wishes, and resistance against their will to know" (Dabashi, 2015, p. 28). The English traveler and writer, Michael Booth, is spot on when he observes:

> But what of the man on the street? How racist are ordinary Norwegians? I mentioned to Bangstad that I was still routinely shocked by a fairly widespread brand of casual racism from the kinds of sources that should know better, not just in Norway, but in Denmark, and I'd seen it in Iceland too: broadsheet newspaper cartoons depicting Africans in tribal costume with exaggerated lips and bones through their noses, for instance; Asians with buck teeth and narrow eyes… (Booth, 2014, p. 182)

I will have more to say later on the issue of the use, or rather, Norwegian "demands" to have the right to call blacks "neger" or negroes, as part of free speech until recently. Peel away at the layers of European civility, the veneer of human rights and democracy, and you will find the Nietzschean will to power and *Übermensch* ideologies as distilled in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* well and alive in some European hearts. This unspoken sense of superiority, which we often heard as taxi drivers, is perhaps best encapsulated in the saying "Norsk, Nordmann fra Norge" (roughly Norwegian, Norwegian from Norway), which gave expression to the impossibility of non-natives or foreigners to ever naturalize or adapt as Norwegians. Norwegianness was racialized and essentialized. Norway's history vis-à-vis its minorities makes for depressing reading. At a time when there was not a single Jew in Norway, the Eidsvoll "fathers" wrote in the newly drafted Constitu-

tion that Jews were forbidden entry to Norway. Such was the fear the so-called "wandering, rootless Jew" struck in the hearts of the brave men who were unafraid to provoke the might of the Swedes and stake out the future of a proud nation. It is hard to deny the fact that after centuries of integration in Norway and Europe, Europe's racism was determined to deny the Jew any belonging in the European family, and the Muslim has good reason to be vigilant. In their soul-searching, some Norwegian scholars summarized the shock of the fate of Norwegian Jewry in this manner:

> Can one of the explanations be that Norwegian society already was so tainted by latent anti-Semitism that the Jews, after a presence of nearly a hundred years, were still considered an alien element? That they were as a group still excluded from the national "we", and therefore were in the main abandoned to their own destiny (Eriksen, Harket, & Lorenz, 2009, p. 420).

Returning to Ruth Maier, I stood before her statue called "Surprised" in Frogner Park in Oslo doing research. I politely asked passersby if they grew up in the area and were willing to answer a few questions. The majority, although born and bred in the vicinity, had no clue who Ruth Maier was or that her statue was just behind me. One mother pushing a pram embarrassingly confessed that she had walked by that statue for years without bothering to find out who she was. The statue was living up to its name in an unintended fashion. Why this historical amnesia with respect to the Norwegian Holocaust? In another study we found high school teachers convinced that either the subject of history, Norwegian or one of the other subjects covered the history of the Norwegian Holocaust. After going on this wild goose chase for days on end, everyone was taken aback when the most senior and knowledgeable teacher at the high school declared that no subject officially covered this topic. It was left to the national broadcaster NrK and other similar avenues to cover this subject. He acknowledged this was the source of the widespread ignorance about antisemitism in Norway. This information is important because, I argue, it goes some way in shedding light on the reason why few people react when politicians regurgitate antisemitic views from the dark Norwegian past and repackage them as novel and acceptable arguments against Muslims. Here I am thinking of the ban against Jewish kosher methods of butchery in 1929 in Norway.

3 Nightlife, Halal, and Intolerance: Norway's Complex Dilemma

Sit in the figurative passenger seat in my taxi once again as I have this conversation with a customer. "Driver, I am hungry! I know it's way past midnight, and everything in this area is closed, but I can't sleep on an empty stomach. Drive me somewhere I can grab some quick chow." I cannot help asking "Do you have any qualms about eating halal food because the only takeaways that are open at this hour are staffed by Muslims and the meat is halal". I cannot remember this ever being an issue for a hungry customer. And yet, that was the heyday of what was called the halal debate. The newspaper headlines below were emblematic of the way in which halal food was delegitimized between 2008 and 2014 (Thomas & Selimovic, 2015).

- [For Anders Breivik] It starts with halal meat and ends with cultural doom.
- The terror-charged Uyghur, Mikael Davud, now gets halal food in prison.
- It is not unusual for foreigners to smuggle halal meat.
- There is no one at Ila [prison] who gets halal food.
- Among other demands [Breivik] made was access to Wikipedia and that he wouldn't be served halal.
- One piece of evidence, according to the Progress Party chairperson (Siv Jensen), is that prisoners get halal meat in Norwegian prisons.

At the time, the leader of the populist Progress Party, Siv Jensen, launched the neologism *snikislamisering* which came as a boon to Islamophobes in the country. The term tapped into tropes of a "clash of civilizations", as articulated by Samuel Huntington. Huntington's thesis, which especially demonized the so-called Islamic civilization as the next big looming menace to Western civilization in the aftermath of the collapse of the Cold War and Communism, was catapulted to "national doctrine" in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. The difference with the Norwegian rendition was that this manufactured "clash of civilizations" was fought in the culinary trenches – over what deity's name was invoked or not over Norwegian food. The term, *snikislamisering*, can be loosely translated as "covert Islamization or Islamization by stealth" (Bangstad, 2013; Thomas & Selimovic, 2015). There was a frenzy in the media with references to what I call the purported halalization of Europe. Media coverage even attempted to bestow some editorial gravitas upon the insinuation that the Scandinavian flagship carrier, SAS Airlines, was planning to discontinue serving cherished Nordic dishes in favor of halal food. The airline was forced to issue a statement denying the above. The news headline read, "SAS has no plans to replace meatballs, ham and liver pâté" (Thomas & Selimovic, 2015). The culinary battle spread to Denmark, too. None other than the Prime Min-

ister waded into the debate. "The Prime Minister, Helle Thorning-Schmidt, joins the so-called "frikadelle-war" and says resolutely no to removing pork meat from the menu in public institutions. "One should not slowly sneak them (bacon roast and frikadeller) out of our public institutions because one should accommodate another culture […]" (Thomas & Selimovic, 2015, p. 346).

> "Frikadeller" are flat, pan-fried Danish meatballs made out of minced pork meat. *Aftenposten* [Norwegian newspaper] uses the hyperbole "Frikadelle-war". Here, the rhetorical trope of metonymy is recruited to suggest an all-out war between Denmark and Muslims. The war is a proxy one represented, on the one hand, by the beleaguered Danish "frikadeller" and "halal meat", on the other – a "clash of menus". The Sayer is none other than the Prime Minister of Denmark ergo the fact that she weighs in on this issue (the Norwegian phrase *kaster seg* inn literally means "throws herself into") imbues the status of "frikadeller" with some gravitas. Bacon roast and frikadeller are said to be "sneaked out", once again tapping into the topoi of "covert-Islamization" – not only in Norway, but this time in Denmark also. We are not enlightened as to who is sneaking out the "frikadeller", although not hard to guess (Thomas & Selimovic, 2015, p. 346, 347).

In the broad contours of history, it is understandable if one is tempted to dismiss the entire halal debate as trivial; however, a more ominous picture emerges when delving into the archives of the past, where one is alarmed by the resemblance of past debates to contemporary ones. The current halal debate is reminiscent of the debate surrounding the proscription of the Jewish kosher method of animal slaughter. Lunga (2013) writes, "The kosher method of butchery, called *shechita*, was fiercely debated in Norway and the rest of Europe before WWII, often with anti-Semitic undertones. Norway is one of three European countries that still forbids the practice".

One cannot deny the stark and disconcerting parallels between the two debates, although they are almost a hundred years apart. It appears that the fear of the "other" is always contemporary; it is never truly banished from that incredible human penchant for otherizing. The question is whether these time-tested and resilient undercurrents of prejudice and intolerance are doomed to reproduce themselves, like the "selfish gene" of Richard Dawkins. Of course, history does not repeat itself in precisely the same way – the oppressed have changed names, but the oppressor is the same. Yesteryear's Jews have a disconcerting mirror image in contemporary Muslim Europeans. Whiteness studies exist because scholars, many white themselves, reasoned that it is insufficient to study the effects of racism on black and brown people; we need to study the socialization, psyche and methods through which whites perpetuate racism. I argue, in the spirit of whiteness studies, that we need to study antisemitism and Islamophobia at their source. The unexamined life is indeed not worth living. The first step in demystifying phenomena which cause untold suffering and pain is to put them under the

magnifying glass, much as Antonio begins to grapple with the phenomenon of sadness in The *Merchant of Venice.*

> In sooth, I know not why I am so sad:
> It wearies me; you say it wearies you;
> But how I caught it, found it, or came by it,
> What stuff 'tis made of, whereof it is born,
> I am to learn;
> And such a want-wit sadness makes of me,
> That I have much ado to know myself.

Indeed, what "stuff" is racism, antisemitism, Romaphobia and Islamophobia, among others, made of? Where were they born? The fear that feeds into these phobias is not a relic of the past that we can afford to gaze at in our museums with some tut-tutting and contempt at the ignorance of the forefathers. These phobias are more like viruses that never die across time and space but linger in some ether, waiting to strike once the conditions are right. We know a lot, more than we can process, about these phobias afflicting humanity, and yet we have that sneaking feeling that we will never finish studying these phenomena because the human tendency to dominate, oppress, stigmatize, colonize, and dehumanize, is deeply ingrained in human psychology. The previously mentioned Norwegian-Jewish psychiatrist, Leo Eitinger, knew well the machinations behind otherizing; he survived Auschwitz.

> The Slavic people have called their Germanic neighbors *němci* which means "the mute ones", while they themselves were referred to as *slovane,* meaning people who can speak (who master words = *slova*). Conversely, the Germanic people referred to themselves as "tysk", which means "clear" or "distinct", while their neighbors were called "slaver", implying they were not fully human (Eitinger, 1981, p. 24).

4 Critical Education and Racism: A Call to Transformative Understanding

The recurring aspect of these parochialisms is most disconcerting. The increase in spending on education, the proliferation of unprecedented knowledge through modern technologies, and travel to every corner of the globe have failed to expunge these age-old biases, which tenaciously persist. The evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkin's concept of the "selfish gene" indicates that certain behaviors are innate and bestow an evolutionary advantage, hence being passed down to posterity. Tolerance is obviously pliable given contemporary amnesia in relation to calls for banning halal food – mentioning the Jewish ritual ban in Norway in

1929 is taboo for some. Consider the 17 United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) (United Nations, 2023).

> (1) No Poverty (2) Zero Hunger (3) Good Health and Wellbeing (4). Quality Education (5) Gender Equality (6) Clean Water and Sanitation (7) Affordable and Clean Energy (8) Decent Work and Economic Growth (9) Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (10) Reduced Inequalities (11) Sustainable Cities and Communities (12) Responsible Consumption and Production (13). Climate Action (14. Life Below Water (15) Life on Land (16) Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions (17) Partnerships for the Goals.

While the above goals are laudable, I argue that racism, in all its mutations, should be placed high on SDGs list. The world's most famous platform, the United Nations, which was created in the aftermath of the atrocities of WW2, appears reluctant to call a spade a spade. The raison d'être for placing racism high on the SDGs is the havoc racism has wreaked in the last five hundred years worldwide. No other people in the history of the world were coerced into migrating on the same scale as the 12–15 million Africans in the transatlantic slave trade. "It is estimated that over 2 million Africans died on the journey to the Americas, in a journey known as the Middle Passage" (BBC, 2023). At the risk of being reductionist, it was Hitler's rabid racism – *Lebensborn* and *Übermensch* ideologies, among others – which lay at the heart of WW2 and the deaths of close to 60 million people. The Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance underscores the inextricable link between racism and Hitler's pursuit of war and expansion in WW2, from citations in Mein Kampf in WW2. "It is evident from *Mein Kampf* and Hitler's speeches that he viewed racial conflict as the determining factor in all of human history. The racial question gives the key not only to world history, but to all human culture. Race was not simply a political issue to be used to curry the favor of the masses, but the 'granite foundation' of Hitler's ideology." (Jackson & Redles, 2023). There is something untoward when the United Nations fails to give racism the attention it should get, but the neoliberal International Monetary Fund puts the spotlight on the issue with the title *What Racism Costs Us All* (2020):

> For instance, the wealth gap between American whites and Blacks is projected to cost the US economy between $1 trillion and $1.5 trillion in lost consumption and investment between 2019 and 2028. This translates to a projected GDP penalty of 4 to 6 percent in 2028 … Or think of France, where GDP could jump 1.5 percent over the next 20 years – an economic bonus of $3.6 billion – by reducing racial gaps in access to employment, work hours, and education. Witness also Brazil, which is losing out on vast sums of potential consumption and investment because of its marginalized communities (Losavio, 2020).

Sadly, there is no silver bullet that disrupts and breaks the cycle of intolerance. The undercurrents of bigotry appear to have an inbuilt ability to perpetuate themselves

perpetually. All individuals and societies can do is tap into that higher level of critical consciousness that Paolo Freire championed or W.E.B. Dubois' concept of "double consciousness". Education is always cited as the antidote, but when the prevailing ethos regarding racism is colorblindness, then this becomes miseducation. As mentioned previously, colorblindness is a noble aspiration but Freire reminds us:

> 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).

Only then will we be better positioned to dismantle structures that empower prejudice.

The history of the breakup of the former Yugoslavia should serve as a harrowing testament to the false comfort of colorblindness in the battle against racism. The U.N. peacekeeping forces were tasked with protecting the people of Srebrenica under Security Council Resolution 836. When faced with the real possibility of engaging in battle with the Serb forces of Mladic and Milosevic, self-preservation trumped the duty to protect the weak (US House of Representatives, 1998). Changing the definition of their mandate as they retreated into the role of passive observers was a factor in the subsequent massacre. In handing over Bosnian Muslims who had entrusted their safety to the peacekeepers was a betrayal of colossal proportions. The peacekeepers became silent witnesses to a genocide within earshot and rendered them morally bankrupt. Evasion and detachment are the illegitimate children of self-preservation, and decades later, the peacekeepers are revisited by this haunting legacy.

Norway, Europe and the international community cannot risk having several "Srebrenicas" on their conscience. Bishop Desmon Tutu is credited with the rise of the "Rainbow Nation" aspiration in a supposedly post-racial South Africa, which Mandela further promoted. However, under the ideology of "rainbowism", systemic racism persists in South Africa. According to two South African academics: "This worldview is problematic on many levels. It focuses on the parts of multi-culturalism that are comfortable for a white minority. Simultaneously, it rejects any attempts to deal with structural inequality. It ends up invalidating and silencing people's lived experiences of oppression" (Gachago & Ngoasheng, 2016). We cannot afford the sedating and misleading ideology of colorblindness to continue to profilerate. Colorblindness is a copout not dissimilar to the U.N. peacekeepers who believed that rewording their assignment from "enforcers" to "observers" would absolve them of genocide. On the contrary, solidarity, active intervention and an uncompromising commitment to the tenets of justice are paramount.

I had earlier refracted the issue of Islamophobia through the lens of halal food in Norway. Halal is by definition a religious practice and a religious invocation which is invisible to the consumer, unless one purchases for example frozen meat, which explicitly displays the halal branding. However, one would be hard-pressed to expect a white, non-Muslim customer to enter a takeaway outlet and begin to diligently inquire about his or her meal's halal credentials. Let us say the same customer pleads colorblindness in this discussion. Once while discussing the issue with a customer in the cab, I was told, "I don't care about the color of the people who work in these takeaways or whether they say 'halal' when they slaughter the animal. What matters is the quality and the taste". I had no choice (at the risk of losing a tip) but to educate the customer. "Muslims don't stand with a knife in front of an animal and say 'halal'". More importantly, I inquired, "How can one be colorblind when one sees immigrants who leave their families to work the entire night for a paltry sum and put up with some disgusting behavior from inebriated customers?" Confronted with discrimination and violence, pleading colorblindness is too expensive a luxury for Western societies to afford, as evidenced by the catastrophic chapters of history.

I believe, in the spirit of Freire, in the transformative and emancipatory potential of critical education. It was not knowledge that the sycophantic Germans who shouted "Heil Hitler" lacked, but the kind of critical thinking skills and courage demonstrated by the German pastor and theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who was killed for his opposition to National Socialism. According to the Holocaust Encyclopedia:

> One of Bonhoeffer's most famous texts was his April 1933 essay, "The Church and the Jewish Question". Addressing the challenges facing his church under Nazism, Bonhoeffer in this essay argued that National Socialism was an illegitimate form of government and hence had to be opposed on Christian grounds. He outlined three stages of this opposition. First, the church was called to question state injustice. Secondly, it had an obligation to help all victims of injustice, whether they were Christians or not. Finally, the church might be called to "put a spoke in the wheel" to bring the machinery of injustice to a halt (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2023).

Once again, education cannot be merely a matter of covering prescribed topics in the syllabus. As a professor of Pedagogy, I have agonized over students who clearly are determined to secure an education without being encumbered by the searing soul-searching that comes with critical thinking. Robin DiAngelo's (herself white) *White Fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism* (2018) is a good read for those who wish to familiarize themselves with the assortment of methods some white individuals employ when confronted with white privilege and concomitant inequalities.

In summary, be it Islamophobia, antisemitism, or antiblack racism, we cannot afford a colorblind ideology that settles into the role of complacent "peacekeeper" while we fully well know that racism, like the bloodthirsty Mladices and Milosevices not only will never be appeased but will be emboldened by our spinelessness and equivocation. Once again, it is worth reiterating that while education and knowledge are vital, it must be an education that transforms and emancipates. The tide is up for naked racism that parades under the guise of "the science of racial IQ", such as the infamous "Bell Curve" (1994), which posits that "Latino and black immigrants are, at least in the short run, putting some downward pressure on the distribution of intelligence". From fascists to imperialists, from Germany to Japan, politicians and soldiers marched to the drumbeat of jingoism, ethnocentrism, and racism. The horrendous denouement of that saga is writ large in blood in the annals of human history. The tome for the 21st century ought to be a culture that fosters empathy, champions intercultural understandings and explores ways to connect communities, not put a wedge between them.

5 Bridging divides: Unity in Diversity

Social capital theory refers to features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that are conducive to the objective of aiding coordinated actions (Putnam, Leonardi, & Nanetti, 1993, p. 167). Theorists often distinguish between bonding and bridging as two subclassifications of social capital (Halpern, 2005). Bonding describes the ways in which communities (e. g., Muslims in Norway) reinforce exclusive identities. Sharing common religious and cultural values and interests, such as mosques and the call for Muslim schools in Oslo, for instance, can furnish a much-needed sense of support, solidarity and belonging. On the flip side, a one-sided preoccupation with bonding values can lead to segregation and isolation from the wider mainstream community.

Bridging, on the other hand, refers to the manner in which these groups look beyond their provincialism and build bridges with, for example, mainstream society (Norwegian in this case). In the US context, Robert Putnam (2000, pp. 22 – 23) cites church-based women's groups, reading groups, and fashionable country clubs as examples. Examples of bridging include civil rights movements, youth service groups, and ecumenical religious organizations. (Putnam, 2000). The degree to which minorities seek to look beyond their insularity and reach out to the broader community will determine integration. Bridging in this instance can include exploring commonality through interfaith dialogue, intercultural exchange programs and various joint community projects that include Norwegians and Norwegian Muslims.

There is a very good reason to understand these processes. Media headlines have for years now publicized the rapidly increasing levels of segregation in Oslo and other major cities in Norway along religious-ethnic lines. One recent study concluded: "It may be time to do something to stop systematic segregation in Oslo. The primary schools in Oslo are relatively strongly segregated socially, ethnically and economically compared to other cities in Europe. Researchers and authorities are working together to do something about this" (Norwegian University of Life Sciences, 2023). Nine out of twenty-two high schools in Oslo, for example, have a majority of students who do not have Norwegian as their native language. The numbers range from 92% for Bjørnholt school to 64% for Valle Hovin (Byrådsetaten for oppvekst og skole, Oslo Kommune, 2023).

The biggest minority community in Norway is the Polish community numbering, 124, 025 in 2023 (Statistics Norway, 2023). Most of the Poles migrated to Norway for work once Poland became a member of the European Union in 2004. However, studies evince several problems in relation to integration, even for the white European Poles. One report had the following headline: "Many Polish immigrants live a Polish life in Norway. Both the food, the culture, and the friends are from the home country" (Jakobsen, 2015). The report mentioned a litany of challenges: a strong skepticism towards the Norwegian Child Care Services (*Barnevernet*), which has a ruthless reputation among Poles; disappointment with the quality of Norwegian schools that are deemed lacking in rigor; and high tuition fees blamed as a lack of incentive for learning Norwegian and hence undermining integration. It is important to make a distinction between East European immigrants to Norway and non-Westerners, mainly those with roots in Asia and Africa. While the latter may share some commonalities with East Europeans, for instance, troubled relations with the Child Care Services, it is fair to say that there are precious little bridging efforts between the two communities. Several studies and polls conducted in Poland indicate strong Islamophobic sentiments. In a study in Poland on the attitude of future Catholic priests towards Muslims, Pędziwiatr (2018, p. 462) writes:

> The Polish public has voiced some of the strongest dissent in Europe against taking in refugees fleeing the war-torn Middle East, and continues to express one of the highest rates of fear of Muslims among European countries… These future Polish priests fear the Muslim Other and strongly uphold stereotypical views of Muslim and Islam. They are poorly prepared to carry out their work in an increasingly diverse Polish society and the super-diverse societies inhabited by the Polish diaspora.

In *The Ballad of East and West*, Rudyard Kipling narrates the story of an encounter between Kamal, a Muslim chief from the East, and a British Colonel whose son pursues Kamal to retrieve a horse. Their differences notwithstanding, the two com-

batants grudgingly learned to admire and respect each other's valiant qualities. The vast gulf of cultural and geographical differences is bridged by the mutual recognition of a code of honor that warriors understand. There was more uniting them in their common humanity than racial pride and old prejudices would have it. Clearly, all sides in the debate about the new culturally diverse Norway will have to explore such commonalities that transcend old prejudices. In an open, global world where distances across time and space no longer mean much because of new technologies, any notion of total assimilation is a chimera. Poles, Latvians, Somalis, Iraqis, Syrians, and now Ukrainians, among others, will always live with one foot firmly planted in Norwegian soil while the other is, to varying degrees, planted in "home" soil.

The hopefully empathetic approach to defending the Muslim community as a minoritized community does not mean that one turns a blind eye to issues many in the West criticize and cannot accept. The list includes female genital mutilation, the wearing of the *niqab,* and forced marriages, to name a few. Consider the following case: As a teacher years ago in one minority-dominated school, a young Somali high school-aged girl, wearing an *abaya* (a black, long, flowing outer garment), asked to talk with me as I sat in the staff room. Having found a private room, it was clear she was distraught and shared that her fiancée demanded she drop out of school because of his conservative interpretation of the Muslim *sharia* law. He deemed it inappropriate for her to rub shoulders with males. The girl was about to finish high school and I found the advice of her fiancée unacceptable. "It is unwise for you to rely on this man to secure a good future for you", I advised her quite passionately, temporarily forgetting that I was not her father. "You are too young to consider marriage. Focus on your studies! Remember, the divorce rates among Somalis are very high. What makes you think your marriage will be an exception?"

The girl was just seventeen years old. As I ranted about her fiancée, I noticed a puzzled look writ large on her face. "Aren't you a Muslim? she asked! You know what the sharia says." Until then, I tried very hard to hide the elephant in the room that I have written about in the confession chapter, but I realized that I had blown my cover. In my zeal to help the girl, I overreacted and couldn't shake off the feeling that perhaps I was guilty of a "white savior syndrome" that minorities hurl on well-meaning whites who lack self-introspection. Gayatri Spivak (2006, p. 33) asks the question, "Can the subaltern speak?" She interrogates the manner in which "Western criticism constructs 'Third World Woman'" as distilled in the phrase "White men are saving brown women from brown men". The Somali student obviously assumed there would be some counseling with a religious premise, citation of scriptures, etc. The student was left bewildered. Later, when I found her in the library with the school counselor, the girl concocted a new story. She

now stated that there was a misunderstanding and that she had inquired on behalf of a friend of hers.

I have hazarded the anecdote above in the interest of balancing the hitherto almost unconditional support and apologia on behalf of Muslims in Norway. There will be more to come. However, such anecdotes demonstrate the need for nuance and open dialogue between the mainstream community and Muslims. Such dialogues, be they interfaith or otherwise, build on common values but they cannot neglect shared concerns encapsulated in the anecdote just divulged. The issue of who the interlocutors are in such cross-cultural or bridging exercises is not immaterial. There is a world of difference between a schoolteacher and a politician. There has long been a culture of interfaith and intercultural dialogue in Norway. Years of studying the nature of conflict and peace, both with regard to the Nobel Peace Prize and countless engagements as peace brokers in Israel-Palestine, Colombia, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, Somalia, Nepal, and many more conflict zones, have distilled a habitus of discussion, pragmatism and compromise. There is a consensus that Norway has avoided the current climate of breakdown in law and order in the inner cities of Swedish cities with large minority communities precisely because of a culture that does not shy away from grappling with controversial issues. For instance, in his article with the title *Do we still have time to learn from the mistakes of the Swedes?* (2023), Hans Geelmuyden, a former editor-in-chief and entrepreneur, lists the following as some of the reasons Norway has avoided the spiral of violence in Sweden:

- Norway has focused more on integration than Sweden.
- This includes better settlement policy and a faster route into employment after arrival.
- The Progress Party was instrumental in government in restricting uncontrolled numbers of immigrants.
- The authorities have been transparent in reporting about crime and challenges related to immigration.
- More immigrants in Norway are homeowners in contrast to Sweden.
- Immigrants are artists, sports stars and leaders in politics and society.
- Second-generation children of immigrants aspire to become lawyers, doctors and engineers.
- According to a survey by Statistics Norway, 87 percent believe that immigrants make an important contribution to working life.

Based on the above, there is reason to be optimistic in relation to integration in Norway, despite formidable challenges. Few countries are as dedicated to the creed of life, liberty and happiness as Norway is. Cooler heads have prevailed

when the hawks on both sides of the debate have bayed for blood. Focusing on dealing with core issues such as structural discrimination in housing, employment, education and policing, among others, have paid greater dividends.

12 From the "Melanin Meter" to Scholar

1 Twin Towers and Turning Points

September 11, 2001. There are moments in one's life that are forever linked to place and memory, leaving an indelible mark on the psyche. I was behind the wheel, chauffeuring a confident-looking businessman who asked me to turn up the volume on the radio as the news about the attacks started filtering in. "Another Oklahoma-style attack", I said, not understanding the scale and repercussions this was about to unleash. "No, this is going to destroy everything I have built up", said the now distraught businessman. He kept repeating this as if experiencing a personal tragedy. Ironically, all this transpired as we passed the former embassy of the USA at Solli Plass, Oslo. I decided to go home, turn on the TV, and make sense of the foreboding words of the businessman whose prescient response began to spook me. In the months and years to come, this event would become the defining geopolitical milestone of our era.

In seven years of driving a cab in Oslo, I have talked to people from all over the world. I had heard eyewitness accounts from elderly Americans who were at Pearl Harbor and Brits who fought in pivotal WW2 battles like El Alamein and Normandy Beach. One customer lined the streets in Dallas, Texas, and caught a glimpse of President John F. Kennedy as his ill-fated motorcade raced past. I talked to one customer who chipped away euphorically at the Berlin Wall in 1989, an event I vividly remember watching live on TV as an 18-year-old in India. One elderly Russian customer claimed to have been the personal bodyguard of none other than Nikita Khrushchev, and another Bolivian customer, an admirer of Castro, cursed his brother, who he claimed participated in the CIA-led hunt that killed Che Guevara in 1967. There was this unsettling intuition, however, as I sat immobilized and glued to CNN that day, that indeed, as the businessman had intimated, this would impact the world in a way very different from previous calamities.

Of course, the toll 911 unleashed can be calculated in terms of figures and concrete geopolitical consequences. For instance, not only has 911 unleashed the longest ongoing war in US history, but according to Boston University (2021), "the estimated costs of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars are $8 trillion and 900,000 lives, not including the ongoing regional political instability and the human security tolls of refugee displacement". I do not, by any means, intend to dishonor the memory of those victims by redirecting the focus towards my relatively insignificant existence. But, on a personal level, seeing the surreal live footage of individuals in free fall as they plummeted towards their deaths from the Twin Towers triggered an existen-

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tial crisis in me. It was an almost epiphanic realization about individuals who had scaled great heights both literally and metaphorically in life, only to have everything unexpectedly and unhappily come crashing down in an unspeakably tragic manner, all because of a simmering hatred that had been fanned into genocidal proportions on the other side of the globe. Remember that hardly a couple of years prior to 911, we had "survived" the Y2K, or Millennium Bug, scare as the calendar transitioned from December 31, 1999, to January 1, 2000. The fear revolved around the fact that as the year 2000 arrived, computers would confuse "00" with the year 1900 rather than 2000. Pandemonium would break out as the data corruption would lead to a breakdown in all sectors contingent upon these computer systems: utilities, transport, education, health sector, etc. I have to explain to my incredulous young students today what this was about. It doesn't help when I ask them to imagine billions of programmers desperately typing and trying to teach their computers to decipher whether we are living in the year 1900 or 2000.

As the debris and dust of the Twin Towers settled and the gargantuan mounds of wreckage were cleared away, I felt a need to reset the button of my own life – a controlled demolition of the edifices of my past – and contemplate what new structures would arise in their place. The Twin Towers first opened in 1973 and were just two years older than I was at the time. I felt a profound craving to rewrite the story of my life for the next thirty years and beyond, into the sunset. In the months that followed, our heads were spinning in the miasma of a new vocabulary indelibly etched into our collective psyches: waterboarding, Guantánamo, the axis of evil, extraordinary renditions, weapons of mass destruction, etc. It is indeed a curious thing that cataclysmic events far off can disrupt the present and give new impetus to imagine the resilient rise of new edifices of tomorrow.

I decided I had to have a change of career. First, though, I packed up and left Norway. For two years, I became a globetrotter – India, Kenya, Uganda, and the USA – before I felt, like the protagonists in fables, that I returned home wiser and ready to embark on a new journey. In the rubble of the past edifices of refugees and cab drivers was a bold new one: a scholar. It is difficult not to compare these three phases. While they appear disconnected, I see a common thread of transience and vulnerability, much like the Twin Towers. As a refugee, the portacabin that was my residence gave expression to the tenuousness and fragility of my circumstances. During my stint as a cab driver, despite better integration into society, the transience was reflected in the incessant cycles of hellos and goodbyes and small talk that characterize a typical conversation each day. My life since then as an academic has been lived in the proverbial ivory tower. It is as if the refugee in me has moved into this intellectual space, looking for a different haven. My co-residents in this ivory tower are not other refugees or customers from different walks of life as in the taxi, but disembodied ones: research, analysis, critique, peer-

review, viva, and dissemination, among others. I now understand why someone once remarked that professors appear to live in their heads alone, and the sole purpose of their bodies is to carry their heads. When surveying these stages from the vantage point of this ivory tower, the ephemerality comes into sharp relief. Each phase, from the improvised sanctuary of the portacabin to the taxi hustle and now the erudite quests, highlights the temporary nature of our encounters and the ever-fluctuating landscapes that define our journey.

2 From Camels to PhDs: Stretching for Leaves

During my two-year hiatus, having left Norway, I pressed the reset button of my life and returned to my alma mater, Barnes High School, India. This was the ground zero of my academic journey, and I returned to find inspiration in resuscitating the comatose *homo cogitans* (thinking human) in the recesses of my soul. I met Mr. Michael Thorpe, our math teacher. "So, what is your line of work, Paul?" He asked. "I drove a cab until recently", I answered sheepishly. He had that expression of disappointment and exasperation when my fellow-students would raise their hands and give an inaccurate explanation of Pythagoras' theorem that he had spent three lessons meticulously explaining. Mr. Thorpe's questions were relentless. Where did you veer off course? He took me to the school hall and reminded me with a gentle rebuke that my name was on almost one-third of the honors boards for the year 1987. Mr. Thorpe was the father figure many students in that boarding school never had. "It is not too late, Paul! Is money an impediment for you to continue your studies in Norway?" he probed deeper. "No, sir. Actually, Norwegian citizens have access to higher education through the state-run Norwegian Loan Fund", I answered.

He stared at me, looking even more stunned, and fiddled with his famous beard like he was on the verge of plucking out a tuft on his chin. "Paul, if people in India had access to such a loan fund, trust me, everyone would have jumped at the opportunity. Go back and take at least one degree! Someone with your capacity cannot throw away his life behind a taxi wheel. Don't insult your brains. You owe it to God and yourself to honor the intelligence you have demonstrated in this institution." Those words seared into my being like a branding iron. The "beard of wisdom", as we called him, had spoken; every syllable reverberated like a haunting melody in the caverns of my soul. He triggered a process of introspection. He served as my Descartes and Gramsci simultaneously.

Like a modern-day Descartes, I approached every facet of my life up until then with unsentimental skepticism: everything had to be reassessed, torn down, and built up. The deceiving demon of Descartes that had obfuscated my judgment had

to be excised and banished. To Gramsci's (1929) mind, common sense refers to ideas discursively constructed by the ruling class but passed off as "the natural order of things". Through the constant and calculated secretion of elite perspectives into the public sphere, audiences lap up these "common sense" statements as if they were disentangled and peripheral to the interests of the powerful. Unless we critically evaluate every facet of the political, social, economic, cultural, technological, environmental, healthcare system, educational and media, to name some, the status quo is perpetuated. Mr. Thorpe was right, I grudgingly concluded. I was almost thirty-two years old with a broken marriage and two children. To return to university would be a herculean challenge, but I was now more determined than ever to make a go at it. If there was one characteristic in my arsenal of both formidable and not so formidable qualities that I knew I could count on, it was grit: an iron resolve coupled with military-grade discipline inculcated at Barnes High School.

Among the many sporting activities at Barnes High School was boxing. We would all be forced to weigh in and begin sparring with partners in the same weight category. The torture included but was not limited to long distance running, shadow boxing, rope skipping to the point of exhaustion, and various assortments of push-ups and pull-ups, to name a few. I once heard the coach, Mr. Mainguy (precisely his name), shout over a boxer who was knocked down and lying on the ground, "Get up, son; the British Empire did not rule the world by staying down." I didn't know what boxing had to do with the British Empire, and I had no ambitions to rule the world, but I was determined never to stay down. While a good boxer, my aquiline nose would often bleed profusely, forcing the referee to stop the match, ignoring my protests and desire to continue. When I lost, it was mostly through split decisions. Now, however, in the aftermath of Mr. Thorpe's barrage of verbal blows of tough love, I was determined to take on the biggest fight of my life. Perhaps goaded by the pain of the past twelve years (1990 – 2002), I made a promise to myself and Mr. Thorpe: I will get a PhD and come back. By the time I earned my PhD from king's College, London, and I was about to visit Barnes High School, I was told that Mr. Michael Thorpe had passed away. R.I.P sir!

> Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;
> I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.
> The evil that men do lives after them;
> The good is oft interred with their bones;
> *Julius Caesar,* Act 3, Scene 2

Indeed, good deeds, such as Mr. Thorpe's, can go unnoticed and dissipate into the mists of oblivion – "the good is oft interred with their bones", as Mark Anthony states. He was a teacher who endeared himself to us through his long, extravagant stories we called "Mr. Thorpe's yarns". It is my humble hope that my success will be

one more feather in the hat of Mr. Thorpe's "yarns"; a legacy forged not in medals but in the hearts of those he inspired. More than anyone though, I owe the lion's share of my success to my dear mother. She single-handedly juggled raising four children. When the task became unmanageable, she sent three of us to a more predictable and stable environment far away in the boarding school in India rather than throw in the towel completely. All the while she did what she could in securing the fees for the school and visiting us when possible.

In addition to my mother and Mr. Thorpe, there is the shadow of the biological father I had never known, who passed away when I was ten years old. I was playing football in school at the time, in 1981, when a somber-looking teacher took me aside and broke the news of my father's death. I felt nothing. I looked at her and said, "Thank you, ma'am! Am I free to go and play with friends?" She was appalled and could hardly muster an audible yes. I thought of my father when I stood before 800 graduates at the Barbican Hall in London. I was among the tiny few with pinkish-purple gowns who had earned their PhDs. My father was an orphan with a troubled personality. He reared camels as a child and was raised by his eldest sister. A story with legendary status circulated among Somalilanders about my father's antics. When the British built a school in the second-largest city of Burco, they proudly assembled for the inaugural ceremony, only to discover that no pupils showed up. The story goes that my father spread the rumor that the British had ulterior, unseemly interests in the boys, and hence no pupils ought to show up.

It was said that few could out-rival him in the Somali poetry genre (*gabi*), where he used his wit and lyrical talent in inter-tribal ritual insults, among others, to the approval of the audience, including opponents on rare occasions. For a Western audience, this ancient and proud genre bears some, albeit limited, resemblance to the American hip-hop scene, where counter-culture norms allow participants to insult their opponents on community-approved topics, such as disparaging their style, rap skills, their status, and even race and ethnicity (Johnson & Schell-Busey, 2016). Sir Richard Burton said of the Somali love of poetry: "The country teems with poets… the fine ear of this people causes them to take the greatest pleasure in harmonious sounds and poetical expressions, where a false quantity or a prosaic phrase excite their violent indignation" (Andrzejewski & Andrzejewski, 1993). Here is a sample from the poem *To the camels* by Raage Ugaas, a 19th century pastoralist (Andrzejewski & Andrzejewski, 1993, pp. 7, 8):

> When the sky is shorn of clouds
> And the moon has doffed her halo,
> Then parching heat dries up the land.
> Many trees have lost their leafy shade
> And even the *garas* leaves are green no longer.
> The supply of milk grows scanty –

But on her one can still depend
For she will never fail her master.

It is you I call –
You who stretch your neck to find the leaves
That sprout on branches high above the ground,
When elsewhere there is nothing to be found
See! The round bowl is full of frothy milk!

The hardy camel, surviving and thriving in some of the most unforgiving terrains of our planet, aptly captures the resilience of my father, who found his way to better pastures through sheer wit and self-reliance. Somehow, against all odds, he found ingenious ways of having a "bowl full of frothy milk when elsewhere there was nothing to be found", as Ugaas' poem declares. Speaking of resilience, the psychologist, Boris Cyrulnik (2009) reminds us of how Charles Dickens did not compartmentalize and suppress his wretched childhood but harnessed the themes of suffering and victory over suffering. "I saw no reason ... why the dregs of life ... should not serve the purpose of a mortal, as well as its froth and cream ... It involved the best and worst shades of our nature; much of its ugliest hues and something of its most beautiful" (Dickens, 1960, pp. xix, xxi). The camel is the symbol of resilience par excellence in the Somali imagination. My father found his own way to "stretch his neck to find the leaves", and I had to find my own. When I hung up the PhD certificate on the wall and one later confirming my promotion to professor beside it, I celebrated with many, but my resilient and resourceful father and Mr. Thorpe were sorely missed. Here was the frothy camel-milk bowl, and how I wished they could sip it with me.

Yet, I've let the narrative run ahead of me. I must rewind a bit and explore my experiences as a student in higher education in Norway.

3 Cultivating Cultural Capital in Unconventional Ways

I was walking around aimlessly at Ilford Center, located between London and coastal Essex, in the summer of 2004 when I entered an internet café and logged on to receive news that I had been offered a place at Oslo and Akershus University College (now Oslo Metropolitan University). The new academic adventure was now airborne. In the first year, I struggled with Norwegian as a subject. I scored a D, which to me was as good as a failed grade (F). It was around this time that I learned to appreciate the value of a good basic education – the one from my old school, Barnes High School. I read Jim Cummins' (2008) theory of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in the field of bilingual education. Simply

put, CALP posits that, contrary to the surface-level verbal proficiency demonstrated by bilingual students, it is the not-so-visible cognitive functions and processes in the brain that are better indicators of academic success.

Language acquisition pivots on two points: Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). The first has to do with the everyday language skills pertinent to academic and cognitive tasks. BICS argues that comprehending complex academic concepts with the corollary of extrapolating this knowledge to other contexts is relevant for academic success. This is not unlike Paulo Freire, who was concerned with learning to read the world rather than just the word. BICS challenges the learner to go beyond mastering vocabulary and grammar. The good news I gleaned from Cummins' theory was that a well-developed first language was a huge advantage in the effective transfer of this knowledge to the second or target language.

For instance, in the CALP theory context, a student who already has a solid grasp of an intricate topic such as photosynthesis in her first language would only need to negotiate the transfer of this knowledge to the target language. The brain's cognitive processes, rather than mere verbal proficiency, are crucial in this transfer of knowledge. The psychologist Lev Vygotsky is associated with the term "the zone of proximal development" (ZPD). It refers to what a learner can learn and accomplish independently, as opposed to what the learner can learn and accomplish with guidance and support from a more knowledgeable other (teacher, peer, etc.). Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of cognitive development echoes Cummin's CALP theory, with crucial implications for bilingual students. In the absence of a teacher who could bridge the difference and gap between the two languages, I realized I had to find my own scaffolding. English and the knowledge I acquired at Barnes High School were removed from the metaphorical, dusty vaults and polished. Once I felt confident enough, I tapped into this prior conceptual knowledge to navigate and negotiate the demands of the target language, Norwegian. There is evidence to suggest that such bilingual approaches serve to enhance academic achievement by furnishing a powerful framework that takes cognizance of the interplay between cognition, language, and the sociocultural context. The layers of knowledge and skills acquired through past learning are not ignored but acknowledged as vital to the process of transitioning effectively to the target language. I had to shrug off the memory of the painful days as a refugee, a time when we were perceived as John Locke's *tabula rasa* – empty vessels waiting to be filled and sealed with new knowledge.

In addition to the strategy above, I bought a tiny digital radio and heard *NrK Alltid Nyheter* constantly during my free time. This was the Norwegian equivalent of BBC radio. I picked up quickly from the likes of Basil Bernstein (language code theory) and Pierre Bourdieu's (2015) theory of cultural capital that I had to find a

way to compensate for the lack of cultured and sophisticated Norwegians in my friends circle. Bernstein posits a connection between social class and linguistic codes, proposing that the working class predominantly employs restricted code, while the middle class utilizes both restricted and elaborated codes. Bourdieu was concerned with the question of why academic success is often the reserve of the highly educated. Why are the chances higher for the child of a doctor or lawyer to do well at university than, say, the child of a school drop-out? If schools are the custodians of knowledge and the “conveyor belts” to higher education and hence better jobs, why aren’t they able to level the playing field given their commitment to equality and equity? Equality and equity are used interchangeably, but there is a distinction. While equality is concerned with treating everyone the same, irrespective of individual differences or circumstances, equity is about fairness and justice. Equity differentiates by redressing disparities and challenges; not everyone needs the same level of support or access to the same resources. Equity sees the differences and goes about endeavoring to level the playing field. Bourdieu understood that even subtle things such as hand gestures, music taste, club membership, choice of holidays, choice of sporting activities like golf, and a host of other seemingly unrelated preferences – encapsulated in his term habitus – conferred advantages upon certain individuals and continually served as arbiters of inclusion and exclusion.

I do not mean to malign Norwegians when I say they are reserved and notoriously difficult to befriend. Norwegians wax philosophical in their attempts to explain their introversion. The anthropologist Longva (2003) once observed Norwegians at an airport, noticing instances where they avoided raising their voices to request people to move aside on the escalator despite their obvious stress while racing to their gates. Everyone bent over backwards to avoid speaking. Her conclusion is that Norwegians prefer the silence of the forest. The forest does not encumber with unnecessary tittle tattle. Silence is golden!

> That silence is so highly valued in Norway I think is related to Norwegians’ relationship with nature… I would argue that in addition to nature being imagined as the “real home”, it is also imagined as the ideal conversation partner, because, paradoxically, it is silent (Longva, 2003, p.23).

The most cited culprit for Norwegian shyness is the cold weather. Whatever theory one prefers, the fact remains that foreigners will struggle to learn Norwegian effectively and faster through contact with Norwegians. This phenomenon reminds me of a couple of Mormons (always in twos) who spoke a strange, muddled Norwegian in Oslo. They later revealed they learned Norwegian while training for the mission’s work in Salt Lake City. They spoke Norwegian, but a lingo that was cul-

tivated in isolation and for the purposes of bringing Norwegians into the fold of Joseph Smith.

There is something unnerving and synthetic about a language learned in such remoteness for parochial purposes. Is the reason many immigrants speak poor Norwegian even after a lifetime in Norway due to similar reasons? Is their Norwegian fit for and limited only to the specific jobs they do? Unlike the Mormons, they learn their Norwegian within the geographic territory of Norway, but often in compartmentalized schools and classes. A language is a lived experience, and if socializing with Norwegians is severely constrained – that is, immigrants do not fraternize in Norwegian homes and can barely name any close and genuine friendships, they might as well learn their Norwegian in Salt Lake City. This is especially, and sadly, truer for those from black and brown backgrounds. I will nuance this, however, by adding that blacks considered "cool", especially from the USA or Britain, often find it easier to strike friendships and acceptance among ethnic Norwegians. I should know; I am treated very differently when I speak in English compared to the moment I transition to Norwegian or reveal that I am Somali. These are uncomfortable observations, but this is a candid autobiography, after all. Besides, concealing honest opinions in the interest of pleasing any one segment of the interlocutors in this autobiography would definitely do a disservice to all, the pendulum swings in both directions.

The above brings to mind one of the most famous film quotes, Jack Nicholson's line, "You Can't Handle the Truth!" from the movie *A Few Good Men* (1992). It is difficult to sugarcoat the perception that black and brown individuals in Norway in general experience huge challenges in integrating into Norwegian society, despite efforts to advance equality and inclusion. It is not the fact of pigmentation alone that determines racial perceptions of "cool" or "uncool". Blacks who conform to certain stereotypes, rap artist, for instance, and fulfill the caricatured expectations, seen on MTV or Hollywood would be forgiven if they remarked, "There is no racism in Norway". In this sense, Bourdieu's incisive insights regarding subtle cultural markers and boundary-making based on norms and values that cannot be acquired through mainstream schools are relevant. As the title of Beverly Tatum's book reminds us, we need to ask, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* if we are to have a serious discussion about inclusion in Norway and beyond.

So, what was the outcome of my insights in those days from scholars such as Jim Cummins, Vygotsky and Bourdieu? It worked: I was shocked to discover that I was one of two students in the class who scored a B grade while almost half the class, all ethnic Norwegians, failed. In case one forgets, we are talking about Henrik Ibsen and Jon Fosse on the syllabus. As of writing, Jon Fosse has won the Nobel Prize for literature. The lecturer could not conceal her astonishment, as I was the

only student from an African background. "Paul, the other lecturer and I were quite amazed that you wrote such a solid paper. At first, we were certain it could not be you, but upon closer examination, we were blown away", she blurted in front of the entire classroom. The exam was handwritten under supervision with no aids of any sort. She may have violated some ethical clauses at the time, as the exams were supposed to be anonymously examined. The papers only had candidate numbers. Everyone was uncomfortable. What is certain is that the lecturer certainly violated the *Janteloven* I wrote about previously. Specifically, she implicated me in Laws 3 and 5, respectively: "You're not to think you are smarter than we are" and "You're not to think you know more than we do".

4 Decolonizing Education: Unveiling Hidden Narratives

Whereas the Teacher Education program (a four-year teaching degree with an integrated Bachelor of Education) was conventional and lackluster, the Master of International Education at the now-Oslo Metropolitan University was the period of my conscientization, to borrow from Paolo Freire. The goal of education, according to Freire, ought to be the awakening of the critical faculties with regard to political, social, and economic issues, among others, with a view towards empowering individuals. Education and critical reflection are then to be consciously applied towards effecting social transformation. The element of power and its machinations was absent in the bachelor's degree, where there was a preponderance of the usual diet of classical learning theories of the likes of John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, Albert Bandura, Urie Bronfenbrenner, etc. Nothing was mentioned about John Dewey's prescient fight against racial injustice in the Odell Waller case (1940), for example, where Dewey states, "When white people speak of fighting to preserve freedom, they mean freedom for their own race" (Dewey, 1942). Dewey characterized the social, economic, political, and psychological causes of racism in the USA as "a social disease" as far back as the 1920s. We were also left to accidentally stumble upon Dewey's openness towards eastern philosophies and cultures during his lifetime, exemplified by his acquaintance with individuals such as D.T. Suzuki, credited with promoting Zen Buddhism in the West. Ask any teacher or student-teacher in Norway about John Dewey, and his extensive and sophisticated scholarly repertoire will inevitably be reduced to the simplistic notion of "learning by doing".

In addition, almost none of us were aware that one of the greatest psychologists, Lev Vygotsky, was Jewish in a Russia foaming with antisemitism. In his early unpublished manuscripts from 1914–1917, half of Vygotsky's literary works were dedicated to Jewish affairs and interests. As student-teachers, we were left in

the dark about the fact that Russian antisemitism forbade Vygotsky from aspiring to become a teacher. "Vygotsky knew all too well about the virulent Russian anti-Semitism: Gomel [the city in Belarus] witnessed pogroms in 1903 and 1906, universities used quotas for Jewish students, and positions as a civil servant (e. g., teacher at a state school or college) were not open to Jews" (Zavershneva & van der Veer, 2018). In general, nearly all learning theories taught in pedagogy courses in teacher training degree programs in Norway sanitize such "controversial" aspects from the curated syllabus. All the lecturers and students are left with is a tame, watered-down version that is carefully selected and tailored towards teaching methods. The upshot is a focus on the creation of a convenient learning environment, which, regrettably, hampers aspiring student-teachers from locking horns with the complexities and nuances of educational theories and the need to apply them to current, real-world problems. I share the above with some culpability as I am part of the system as a professor of pedagogy. However, along with colleagues, we have been agitating for a change and are pleased to report some modest successes in infusing a crucial dose of more contemporary critical pedagogy.

Furthermore, the pedagogy syllabus is entirely dominated by mostly white, elderly men whose theories were forged in the early half of the last century. In contemporary Norwegian teacher-training institutions, males are conspicuous by their scarcity; both lecturers and students are predominantly female. Given our status as a "threatened species" in teacher education, there is a cruel irony bordering on misogyny when lecturers present a series of PowerPoints with the stern visages of exclusively white, elderly men from almost a century ago. While Scandinavian countries are among the most gender-equal, female contributions in female-dominated academic fields over the decades are inadequately recognized. One is reminded of the Indian political activist and freedom fighter, Sarojini Naidu's witty remark in her essay *The Education of Indian Women* (1906), "What", they cried, "educate our women? What, then, will become of the comfortable domestic ideals as exemplified by the luscious 'halwa' and the savory 'omelet'? Others were neither for 'Jove nor for Jehovah', but were for compromise, bringing forward a whole syllabus of compromises. 'Teach this', they said, 'and not that'" (Dawson, 2023, p.129) Many student-teachers graduate without becoming familiar with the works of renowned female pedagogues, such as Maria Montessori and even Norway's own illustrious Anna Sethne. Below are some of her sterling accomplishments:

> Anne Sethne was a trailblazer for modern pedagogical methods in primary schools. She aimed to unleash children's creative powers by building on their natural interests, and she was a passionate advocate for the work-school and activity-based education ... Home Economics became a core subject for integration in primary school, and essay writing and drawing

> gained significant importance, linked to a more liberal approach to the curriculum in secondary school. Experiments with reading instruction at Sagene School [Oslo] led to the establishment of the country’s first public school library with a reading room for students (Grankvist, 2022).

As mentioned previously, the master’s degree program with a focus on the global south was an eye-opener. Perhaps this stemmed from the fact that the key founders of the program were themselves well-versed in critical thinking, with PhDs from the School of African and Oriental Studies and New York University, among others. This expertise was further augmented by the years they spent in the global south working for one of the several Norwegian non-governmental organizations involved with foreign aid, education, and related forms of capacity development. Whatever the motivation, students were fed a constant intellectual diet replete with neo-Marxists and radical thinkers such as Freire, Fanon, Said, Althusser, Gramsci, Foucault, Bourdieu, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, to name a few. I recall becoming slightly worried when Fidel Castro’s Cuban radical educational model was the topic of an entire module. Batista, Marxism-Leninism, the Granma, Che Guevara, Bay of Pigs, the 1961 literacy campaign, the embargo, the impact of the collapse of the Soviet Union, etc., all became part and parcel of a new, foreboding and simultaneously stirring lexis, especially for someone who came of age in the era of Reagan and Thatcher. The program became an intellectual banquet of knowledge, spiced with a touch of rebellion. I remember one Norwegian student electing to drop out because he felt a sense of acute culpability in the West’s colonization and exploitation of the global South.

Along with Norwegian and other Western students, the program recruited students from the global south, from countries such as South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Zambia, and Nepal. As seen through the prism of the past, this was a novel experiment. East met West in a Western educational crucible where all were expected to learn about colonization, its continuing impact, and how to shake off the hydra-headed yoke of colonialism’s oppressive chains. In our classes, there was no talk of colonialism being a relic of the annals of the past but a living, parasitic entity as evidenced in both tangible edifices (e. g., the World Bank) and conceptual architectures of the mind (e. g., neoliberalism). This cornucopia of global students, some the children of former colonizers and others the offspring of the colonized, critically exchanged perspectives in a mutually edifying manner. Personal experiences from both ends of the spectrum offered incisive insights into the nature of the obnoxious phenomenon of colonization and its enduring influence on shackling development in the global South. The colonized and colonizer were not abstract entities but sat side by side and were hence compelled to behold each other’s faces in an endeavor to humanize.

The philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas highlighted the significance of encountering the face of the Other. Lévinas draws attention to the unique moment of the face-to-face encounter when proximity to the other's face confronts one with their vulnerability, dignity, and individuality. This close, unmediated physical encounter summons us to embrace our ethical obligation towards the Other and requires a divestment of our own self-centeredness and conceit. Lévinas says that the human face "orders and ordains" us. It calls the subject into "giving and serving" the Other (Levinas, 1985, p. 95–119). In a similar vein, the philosopher Martin Buber (Buber, 1970) juxtaposes two contradictory ways of relating to the world. The first is the "I-It" relationship, where the other is objectified as a means to an end. The Other is distant, in the "dark continent" of Africa, for instance, and is faceless and nameless (only white Tarzan has a name and story). The "I-It" relationship objectifies and caricatures humans, as in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, where the protagonist, Marlow, is ambiguous about the humanity of the Congolese, described as "mostly black and naked, moving about like ants". On the other hand, there is the "I-Thou" relationship, characterized by a recognition and esteem for the other's humanity as equal to one's own. Only when we dare to jettison the "I-It" dichotomy to others can we make strides towards the "I-Thou" rapport characterized by genuine, authentic bonds inherent in Buber's "I-Thou". The archaic "thou" echoes the sanctity of this term, traditionally reserved for the deity and humans made in that image.

There was no doubt that the students in the master's program were gradually shifting from an "I-it" to an "I-Thou" sense of mutual respect and shared existence. On the syllabus was the novel *Matigari* by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. European students would remark that it was the first time they had ever read an African novel. Some African students said the same about the abnegation of African literature in their own countries. Prior to this, one Norwegian student commented that her education on Africa was imbibed through Tintin and Tarzan comics. In 2012, one of Sweden's most national dailies blew up an article on its front page critiquing the cultural director at Stockholm Culture House, Berhang Miri (a Swede of Iranian descent), for reshelving Hergé's Tintin books because of racism and colonial taint (Palme, 2012). I heard one African student in the master's program remark that he had to come all the way to Europe to discover his own heritage, which was not valued back home. Matigari takes up the theme of enduring corruption and oppression in the aftermath of colonial rule. The protagonist, Matigari ma Njirũũngi, a veteran of the armed rebellion against the colonizers, is compelled to leave his abode in the forest and fight a new war – one against the enduring legacies of corruption, nepotism, and oppression now adopted by his own people. In brief, the novel's message of the continuing struggle against the legacy of colonialism, now adopted and adapted by the "native elites", was effectively communicated.

Obviously, one can be cynical and reproach the program initiators for perpetuating the patronizing theme of white saviors changing their colonial attire for university robes. One African fellow-student opined rather astutely that the West birthed colonialism and now financially sponsors our decolonization with some of the wealth accrued through centuries of that very same colonization. Can the proletariat take lessons from the bourgeoisie on the importance of organizing labor unions? Colonialism, it appeared to us, was now the illegitimate child of the West, Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, who must be killed. Matigari appears to emerge, not out of the forests of Africa, but from Europe. The fratricidal West, now embodied in these white savior intellectuals, is still perpetuating the notion of white people "saving black and brown people" from the poisoned chalice of colonialism, its monster. Whatever one's opinion on the above cogitations, these thoughts were at least commensurate with the program's aim of nurturing a spirit of critique. Education was no longer about the accumulation of knowledge approved by a Western university. We were beginning to heed Gramsci's (1988, pp. 56–57) iconoclastic call: "We need to free ourselves from the habit of seeing culture as encyclopedic knowledge and men as mere receptacles to be stuffed full of empirical data and a mass of unconnected raw facts". He goes on to lampoon this type of knowledge:

> It serves only to create maladjusted people, people who believe they are superior to the rest of humanity because they have memorized a certain number of facts and dates and who rattle them off at every opportunity. It serves to create the kind of weak and colorless intellectualism that Roman Rolland has flayed so mercilessly, which has given birth to a mass of pretentious babblers who have a more damaging effect on social life than tuberculosis or syphilis germs have on the beauty and physical health of the body (Gramsci, 1988, p. 57).

5 The Hidden Curriculum: Interest convergence and nepotism in Academia

In what follows, I wish to share a deeply troubling truth that, while disheartening, I hope will serve its more important purpose of conveying an important truth to minoritized groups whose own struggles would resonate with my odyssey. In my experience, most people of color in Norway and the West, by extension, would not be surprised by the nature of this information but indeed seek validation of such occurrences and ways to negotiate these challenges. Being the only student in the masters who had scored straight A grades in all the modules and the thesis, I inquired about opportunities for a PhD scholarship only to be told there were no funds. Disappointed but undeterred, I decided to apply through the Loan Fund for a PhD position in the UK. To my delight, I was accepted into 10 Russell Group uni-

versities, the UK equivalent of the USA's Ivy League universities, including the likes of Durham, Bristol, Liverpool, Southampton, and King's College, London, among others. Being part of the Russell Group indicates a university's status as one of the UK's most esteemed and significant institutions. The financial drain would be staggering. The tuition fees were around £13,000 annually, not to mention the added living costs. I was staring at the daunting prospect of leaving a wife, two small children, and accumulating a massive debt that would cast a long shadow until my retirement years. And yet I was determined to hazard all for this dream.

I settled for King's College, London. Once my decision was known, I was approached by the same academic who had earlier glibly regretted the lack of funds for a PhD scholarship. This individual sycophantically asked if I could proofread another student's thesis as a favor before I left. Not sensing any foul play, I went about the task as conscientiously as possible. It soon dawned on me that this thesis required more than just proofreading. Entire sentences, arguments and paragraphs had to be rewritten. In the final instance, the thesis, which should have scored a D grade, was incredibly upgraded to an A. Imagine my surprise when I later discovered that this student, who was the beneficiary of my extensive revisions, was awarded a PhD scholarship. And, yes, the student was white. This episode unambiguously illuminates the nepotism and unequal treatment I experienced in my academic journey. Back then, I was not versed in critical race theory and its second tenet, interest convergence, in particular. This tenet posits that most whites are generally indifferent to issues of racial equality until the plight of black and brown people conflates with white interest.

> The second feature, sometimes called "interest convergence" or material determinism, adds a further dimension. Because racism advances the interests of both white elites (materially) and working-class Caucasians (psychically), large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 8).

Derrick Bell, considered the "father of critical race theory", was unenthusiastic about the so-called great triumph of civil rights litigation in the USA's *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), where schools were forcibly desegregated. The sudden change of heart of the Supreme Court, according to Bell, was due to a shift in local and global circumstances, which necessitated a new look at Jim Crow laws in the USA. Black war veterans had experienced a degree of autonomy and respect in Europe during WW2 and the Korean War and were ill prepared to prostrate themselves before regimes built on the denigration of black skin and refuse to countenance their claims to humanity and equal rights before the law encapsulated in Dr. King's "Alabama with its vicious racists, with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of interposition and nullification". In addition to the spec-

ter of racial unrest in the streets of America, the white establishment was aware that the Soviet Union had cast aspersions upon US racism in the hope of uniting the black and brown so-called "Third World" under the banner of communism. This was the age of McCarthyism, or the "Red Scare," when the epithet "communist" was bandied about willy-nilly and applied to figures such as Robert J. Oppenheimer, Martin Luther King, Orson Welles, and even Charlie Chaplin. Dismissing *Brown v. Board* as white interest convergence, Derrick Bell cites W.E.B. Dubois:

> The Negro needs neither segregated schools nor mixed schools. What he needs is education. What he must remember is that there is no magic, either in mixed schools or in segregated schools. A mixed school with poor and unsympathetic teachers, hostile public opinion, and no teaching of truth concerning black folk is bad. A segregated school with ignorant placeholders, inadequate equipment, poor salaries, and wretched housing is equally bad (Bell, 1975).

Dubois's quote ends with an acknowledgement that, other things being equal, mixed schools prima facie are more advantageous in that they offer more contacts, inspire greater confidence, and suppress the inferiority complex. However, he concludes, "But other things seldom are equal, and in that case, sympathy, knowledge, and the truth outweigh all the mixed school can offer" (Ibid.).

It was plain to see that I was ensnared by interest convergence or material determinism. Sadly, other colleagues of color have also learned against their will to understand this principle of interest convergence in white academia. Black and brown academics have no choice but to become adept at understanding the intrigues and dynamics of white supremacy and privilege. Failure to be vigilant exacts a huge toll in both material, physical and psychological terms. It was not the last time the aforementioned academic sought to capitalize on my vulnerability. One thing is certain: nepotism and corruption exist in Norway too, despite the country placing fourth in the *Corruption Perceptions Index* (2022). The last few years have witnessed a spate of high-profile government cases where several top politicians were found to be in violation of commuter flat perks, failing to recuse themselves in crucial appointments, and spouses breaching rules against trading in shares.

A critical whiteness studies lens has several implications for the burgeoning members of the minoritized population in Norway. While a systematic study of the experiences of black and brown scholars (a paltry number) in Norwegian academia is yet to be done, the experiences of Abhik Ghosh, a professor of Chemistry originally from India with 25 years of experience, resonate with the views of several colleagues of color I have spoken to and is worth quoting at length:

> Yet it has been a dispiriting journey. A small selection of incidents will illustrate why. With a few notable exceptions, I would describe my superiors as indifferent, and a small handful even hostile, to my scientific ambitions. On multiple occasions, I have had colleagues and su-

> periors suggest to me that I should not apply for a regionally or nationally advertised grant so as not to create "undue competition" for another ethnic Norwegian or European colleague. I have also had little say in policy and decision-making at any level. Likewise, never in my 25 years of serving as a faculty member in Norway have I been asked to serve on, let alone chair, a selection committee for new faculty members. Many non-Western employees of color have confided in me that they are employed at slightly lower pay grades relative to their European counterparts with similar qualifications. Finally, I have witnessed highly accomplished black and brown collaborators shabbily treated – in my view – and let go when funding ran out, while less qualified European researchers in similar positions were enthusiastically appointed to permanent positions (Ghosh, 2020).

The erasure of the black and brown presence and accomplishments lamented above is echoed by white ethnic Norwegian academics, such as Associate Professor Alf Gunvald Nilsen (2017), who, under the headline ""The unbearable whiteness of the Holberg Prize", critiques the prestigious Holberg Prize. According to its website, "The Holberg Prize is awarded annually to a scholar who has made outstanding contributions to research in the humanities, social science, law, or theology, either in one of these fields or through interdisciplinary work". Speaking about the prize's until then fourteen years of recognizing white academics alone, Nilsen writes: "In the end, I am not surprised by the unbearable whiteness of the Holberg Prize and its role in the reproduction of Eurocentric power structures in academia". What Nilsen (2017) finds unbearable in particular is the subtext of what he calls "whiteness and Westernness" that considers research done in the global south, or by academics from minority backgrounds in the global north, undeserving of attention. He mentions the work of academics such as Paul Gilroy, Angela Davis, Patricia Hill Collins, Seyla Benhabib, and Hamid Dabashi as examples of noteworthy contributors worthy of the prize. Significantly, Paul Gilroy won the Holberg Prize in 2019.

Perhaps, as Professor Abhik Ghosh acknowledges, racism in Norway is not overt, which is why it took the racist murder of George Floyd for him to decide to break his 25-year-long silence. The corrosive, "drip, drip, drip" effects of microaggression have detrimental effects on the health of minoritized people. I argue that the impact of whiteness on blackness should be a regular part of the public discussion and not piggyback on global, headline-grabbing events such as the George Floyd murder. In a country with high levels of trust in politicians (threatened in recent months) and the government, there is a danger of alienating the growing black and brown demographic, if many more were to conclude, as professor of chemistry, Abhik Ghosh said, "I had faith in a meritocratic system, but in my heart of hearts, I, as a brown person of Indian origin, of course knew better".

The time had arrived for me to bid family and friends farewell. The next three years were spent in London, where I relentlessly pursued my PhD while, fortunate-

ly, returning roughly every month for a few days to reconnect and maintain some semblance of family life.

6 Chronicles of a Scholar in London

King’s College, London, 2009. The Thames, as resilient and resolute as Queen Boudica, with its silvery threads meanders through the city’s labyrinth of historic architecture. The United Kingdom is the most popular destination for Norwegian students studying abroad. A Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) is the apotheosis of academic pursuit in terms of formal scholarly achievement, the final testament conferred by peers confirming and welcoming the newly baptized into the revered ranks of PhD holders. Some PhD candidates have no choice but to settle for the university and, hence, the city where a scholarship has been awarded. I had the liberty, thanks to the Norwegian Loan Fund, to cast a wider global net. The degree, city, and personal growth of the scholar are interwoven in a symbiotic dance that leaves ineffaceable prints. Occasionally, while daydreaming in Kløfta, Norway, looking outside my rural house overlooking farmlands as far as the eye can see, with hardly a soul around in my neighborhood, I see myself in my mind’s eye jostling in the crowd, huffing and puffing, ascending up the escalator at Waterloo station, London, hastening to make it on time for a lecture. London, with its academic heritage, teeming libraries, bookshops, highbrow (and not so highbrow) culture, cutting-edge research, and technology, is, in my opinion, the best backdrop and nurturing crucible for scholarly excellence. The sheer scale of diversity and the privilege of rubbing shoulders with some of the best minds on the planet are bound to expand and enrich the most unbending and parochial of minds.

It made sense to forever link this zenith of scholarly effort with that great city immortalized by Dickens and praised by Shakespeare. Like the timeless verses of Shakespeare, the bard whose characters and wisdom spellbound my childhood fantasies, settling upon a PhD in London was my way of paying homage to his enduring literature and the many august minds that call universities in this city their alma maters. If education is the key to unlocking the limitless vistas of the mind, then London is well-placed to claim the number one spot for student satisfaction. In fact, London is empirically the best student city in the world, according to the *QS World University Rankings* (2023). London has held this distinction for the last seven years. In this global epicenter of erudition, earning a doctorate transcends Bourdieu’s mere habitus concretized in tangible accomplishments like certificates; it transmutes into an heirloom, reverberating the footsteps of past luminaries and stirring the potential of future innovations.

The former refugee was now in exalted company, standing on the shoulders of giants: Florence Nightingale, James Clerk Maxwell, Sir Charles Lyell, Virginia Woolf, Maurice Wilkins, Rosalind Franklin, Sir James Black, Dame Cicely Saunders, and Bishop Desmond Tutu, among others, were all alumni of the prestigious King’s College, London. Those of us specializing in the field of education spent most of our time in the Franklin-Wilkins building. Rosalind Franklin laid the foundation for the discovery in 1953 of the double helix, the twisted-ladder structure of deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), by Watson and Crick. Franklin’s X-ray crystallography work, along with Chargaff’s findings that adenine (A) pairs with thymine (T) and cytosine (C) pairs with guanine (G), was instrumental in paving the way for Watson and Crick’s proposal of the iconic DNA structure, where complementary bases adhere through hydrogen bonds, commensurate with Chargaff’s rule.

I could identify with Virginia Woolf’s fascination with something as banal as walking down the streets of London in her essay *Street Haunting: A London Adventure* (1927). The city is described as a labyrinthine treasure trove, where every corner and crevice has a story to tell. I reveled in the sights and sounds of London, albeit eighty-two years after Woolf’s *Street Haunting.* Buskers from every corner of the globe entertaining equally global crowds outside underground stations; the unrivaled international culinary choices; spending entire days at Europe’s largest book shop, Waterstones Piccadilly, and Foyles Charing Cross Road; the melodic hum of football fans making their way in a hypnotic cadence towards the revered gates of Wembley Stadium; dapper women and men, donned in sartorial finery, resolutely head off to the realms of finance: Canary Wharf, where the skyline kisses the sky; Square Mile and the storied length of Lombard Street. London affords one the privilege of silently studying society under the cloak of anonymity – a literary escapade where each inhabitant of the city feeds the curious spectator’s imagination, with the changing urban landscape providing the backdrop of mystique. The mundane streets become enchanted and infused with subjective meaning as one wanders down their endless lefts and rights. Indeed, as Woolf opines, “To walk alone in London is the greatest rest”. Paradoxically, one’s solitude is amplified in the frenetic masses and bustling throngs of a Paddington or Victoria station’s rush hour, and yet I enjoyed the most fulfilling amity among lecturers and fellow academics, ever eager to share their symphony of ideas.

7 From “Hug-a-Hoodie” to Brexit

The above hagiographic depiction of London must be tempered with recollections from the underbelly of the metropolis. First, a rough sketch of the political discourse roughly 14 years ago. Gordon Brown didn’t last long as prime minister.

My time in London was dominated by the politics of the coalition government of the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats, or the "Cameron-Clegg coalition". Yes, the same David Cameron to whom Labor Party spin doctors successfully attached the derisory phrase "Hug-a-hoodie". All he said was, "For young people, hoodies are more defensive than offensive. They are a way to stay invisible on the street. In a dangerous environment, sometimes the best thing is to keep your head down, to blend in, and don't stand out" (BBC, 2011). With a touch of humor, Labor seized the "hug-a-hoodie" slogan to paint the Tories as warm and cuddly about tackling crime.

This was the era of austerity measures in the aftermath of the global financial paroxysm of 2008/09. Wall Street and London City's insatiable appetite for low taxes and minimum regulation rode the wave of turbo-charged global markets with a boomerang effect: Lehman Brothers collapsed, there were huge subprime mortgage losses incurred by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac (collateralized debt obligations labeled "toxic waste"), the Conservative British government had decided to disregard competition laws and persuade Lloyds TSB to pay £12 billion to steady the vulnerable HBOS group (Halifax and Bank of Scotland), and the country of Iceland was bankrupt, all of which triggered the ensuing Keynesian-style bailout of global financial institutions totaling trillions of dollars. The chickens were now coming home to roost. Nick Clegg reneged on his promise not to raise tuition fees, which mushroomed from £3000 to £9000 annually. It was painful to watch some of my new friends first demonstrate in the streets and then drop out. The death knell seemed to toll for the era of vulture capitalism:

> The world has changed utterly during the past 15 months. For the disciples of anything-goes finance, the events of 2007 and 2008 have been as traumatic as the demolition of the Berlin Wall in 1989 for communist apparatchiks and their Western apologists. The collapse of communism marked the dawn of market fundamentalism; the necessity for the US government to take a stake in Goldman Sachs and Morgan Stanley saw the sun going down on that era. (Elliott & Atkinson 2008, p. 335).

Compared to the relative economic and social stability of socialist-inclined Norway, the vulgar, in-your-face streak of market-dominated neoliberal reality in the UK often assaulted my sensibilities. In addition to the student demonstrations unleashed by Nick Clegg's U-turn, there was the distressing menace of the 2011 Tottenham riots. In his book *Tribes: A Search for Belonging in a Divided Society* (2020), David Lammy, a British MP of Guyanese descent, writes, "Many of those who participated in the looting did not have jobs, a decent education, homes, or the opportunity to acquire through hard work any of the goods they were stealing. It was not their fault that, in effect, they were isolated from progress in the modern world" (Lammy, 2020, p. 140). Lammy draws some parallels between the Tottenham rioters

and the bankers behind the financial crisis of 2008. While both groups were reckless and did not care for the consequences of their actions, the bankers could not plead desperation as a cause for their greed and irresponsible actions that plunged an entire world into recession. Lammy concludes:

> What this tells us is that deeply harmful consequences can emerge if individualism trumps collective belonging. If we leave individuals to fend for themselves in this way, it should not be a surprise when some people quench their thirst for social belonging by feeding off opportune scraps (Lammy, 2020, p. 141).

Much was made of the fact that, during the Tottenham riots, bookshops like Waterstones were unscathed. The fact that the bookshops, carriers of civilization, symbols of intellectual illumination, repositories of knowledge, and avenues for personal advancement were left intact was, on the one hand, a metaphor for the resilience and enduring power of knowledge and education embodied in these intellectual sanctuaries. On the other hand, the fact that the bookshops were of no interest whatsoever to the rioters offers a sobering commentary on the rioters' socio-economic backgrounds and values. Pierre Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital, among others, states that books are concretized forms of habitus; their possession and valorization are indicative of one's cultural wealth, social mobility aspirations, and status.

The riots, then, seen in the contrasting fate of a Footlocker store and a Waterstones, shine a dismal light into the levels of educational and aspirational poverty in those communities. Delayed gratification is an abomination to those who have for years patiently waited for their fortunes to change when, all around them, the tokens of perverse wealth and affluence taunt them in increasingly gentrified boroughs. Lammy and others make a compelling case for the terrifying phenomenon of what was labeled "the poverty of aspiration" during my time in London. The riots underscored the urgency of attending to issues of educational inequality and the need to inculcate values amenable to social harmony and empathy. Neglect this, and the chasm between the cultural capital "haves" and "have-nots" will only expand.

The initial love affair with the superdiversity of London gave way to new questions. To begin with, I began to wonder if I had finally found the home of "third spacers" such as myself, the Shangri-La of identity nomads looking for a lush and inviting oasis. Having lived in Ilford, Walthamstow, Kilburn, Perivale, and Wembley, among others, I soon began to detect the source of the inner dissonance I felt. It hit me like an epiphany one day as I sat in an enormous steam room in a gym in Ilford, Redbridge. I listened carefully as I counted almost 10 languages being spoken simultaneously. The entire world made its home in London, and

the superdiversity was paradoxically insufficient as a condition for belonging. It is as if those whose languages were similar at the Tower of Babel gravitated towards each other and were determined to live cheek by jowl in London with those whose tongues were alien to theirs. As a black man in the world's second-most diverse city (after Toronto), I should have laid such gloomy thoughts to rest and enjoyed London's famed tolerance and magnanimity. After all, I had just left Norway, where the mainstream media was still embroiled in debates about why they could not use the term *neger* (negro). Readers of the right-wing *Daily Mail* constantly reminded black and brown people that Britain was their promised land, arguing that the debate about racism had not even started in East Europe. That did not translate into *Daily Mail* readers welcoming foreigners, be they brown, black, or a certain shade of East European white. I soon realized they were dreaming of a Britain comprised of a nebulous stock of "native Britons". I thought of Queen Boudica and the Druids – but that would rule out the Romans, Vikings, Normans, Huguenots, Jews, West Indians, Africans, Poles, and other East Europeans, etc.

The xenophobia I stumbled upon in the public discourse at the time was briefly spearheaded by the BNP's Nick Griffin, who was later expelled from the party. The new xenophobia next crystallized in the form of Nigel Farage, who perceived his role as akin to a modern-day Churchill liberating Britain from the "oppressive" forces of the European Union and wrestling back control over immigration from black, brown, and Slavic people. This new "Battle of Britain" was fought not with Spitfires and Lancasters but with a growing crescendo of bigoted discourse, which found its apotheosis in Brexit on June 23, 2016.

As I sat glued to the TV, shaking my head in disbelief, friends asked me what happened to Britain. I was an associate professor back then in Oslo and had assured my colleagues prior to the referendum that the "Remainers" would carry the vote. How wrong I was! I found my thoughts returning to Cameron's "Hug-a-hoodie" slogan, admittedly not the best conceptual framework for an academic to make sense of such a significant event, but every theory seemed to fail me at that moment. "Hug-a-hoodie" encapsulated the two-faced nature of political bluster. The actions of Cameron's government often contradicted this sentiment of empathy with struggling and marginalized youth. The words of some politicians are often duplicitous soundbites, with the decision to ransom Britain's future to the vagaries of a referendum manipulated by Farage and his acolytes serving as the final climax in this political farce. Not just the hoodies, but an entire nation was hoodwinked.

It is still painful to witness a country once considered the beacon of stability and equanimity capitulate to the forces of propaganda and sophistry, relegating my second favorite European nation (after Norway) into an outlier within the fraternity of European nations. The legacy of Brexit, deep-seated divisions, and the potency of misinformation and emotional casuistry exposed the vulnerabilities of the

democratic system. The need for more accountable political discourse and informed transparency has never been greater since World War II. Monumental decisions of national and international consequence must be grounded in facts, analysis, and a sincere commitment to the welfare of society. But, then again, there are politicians who deny there is such a thing as society, as Thatcher said in 1987 (Guardian, 2013). It used to be said that all revolutions took place on the continent, not England. In his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1990), Edmund Burke called for cooler heads to prevail. He may as well have been writing his admonition in 2016 when he wrote:

> I wish you may not be going fast, and by the shortest cut, to that horrible and disgustful situation. Already, there appears to be a poverty of conception, a coarseness, and a vulgarity in all the proceedings of the Assembly and of all their instructors. Their liberty is not liberal. Their science is presumptuous ignorance. Their humanity is savage and brutal (Burke, 1790).

13 Beneath the City Lights: Anomie, Crime, and Urban Despair

1 Break-Ins and Naivete

I lived for almost a year in an undisclosed residential estate between Wembley and Stonebridge in London. I had suffered an excruciating herniated disc in the lower back a few days prior and was convalescing on the sofa when I heard a deafening crash in the corridor outside my flat. I was in no condition to stand up and explore the cause of the din but given the crime-ridden nature of the estate, I knew something ominous had just transpired. Summoning almost superhuman effort, I stood up and shuffled like a zombie towards the door. I froze as I opened the door and stood face-to-face with a hooded thug wielding a crowbar, stationed just outside my neighbor's flat, barely five meters away. As soon as I saw my neighbor's shredded door and the crowbar, I realized I was witnessing a real-time break-in. We stared at each other like a scene out of the film *Gunfight at the O.K. Corral*. The main difference was that the hoodie who represented the "Cowboys" had a crowbar, while the "Earps" had the hunchback of Notre Dame in me with a herniated disc. In my favor was perhaps the empirical fact of a muscular six-footer weighing 120 kg and doing a series of squats with 220 kg at the time – the main cause of the herniated disc. I coerced my body into a straight posture – the sight of the hoodie with a crowbar serving as a painkiller that miraculously sedated the throbbing pain in my lower back. The faintest grimace or whimper was successfully subdued, although every fiber of my being wanted to unleash an almighty scream.

Fortunately, the hoodie turned and agitatedly called out to his partners in crime to leave immediately while he kept a wary eye on me. Horror-stricken I witnessed three other hoodies emerge from the flat, and follow the lookout with the crowbar down the stairs, and vanish in a flash. I let out the sweetest sigh of relief ever, reassumed my zombie-like stance, wobbled back into the flat, and called the police. It was all so surreal. What occurred next was even more surreal: a van packed with police officers appeared. They were armed to the teeth and fanned out like they had just alighted off a military helicopter in the mountains of Afghanistan and were hunting for Bin Laden himself in the estate. Having had enough of the heroics, I decided to open the window and talk to them. Their leader looked at me with a look that said "idiot". I was clueless.

Soon, he came up and knocked on my flat door. "Sir, are you the gentleman who reported the burglary?" "Yes", I responded, expecting a nice thank you for doing my civil duty. As soon as he entered the flat, he began berating me for open-

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ing the window and broadcasting my identity to the entire estate. "You've put yourself in danger, mate. I suggest you find a new place to live, pronto! What are you doing here anyway?" As soon as he heard that I was a PhD student, he looked at me mystified and exclaimed, "What on earth are you doing in this sinkhole? "If you want to live long enough to use that fancy degree, pack your bags! This estate is a criminal's paradise." Once he found out I was from Norway, he assumed a more friendly tone, realizing he was dealing with a clueless foreign student. "It is very quiet there in Scandinavia, init, mate?", he asked with that uneasy grin of a no-nonsense, hardened British Metropolitan officer thrust into the unfamiliar role of courteous public relations liaison.

He asked me to log onto a website run by the police with an overview of the crime statistics in every street and borough in London. My heart skipped a beat when I noted several knife-stabbings, burglaries, and even two murders in the vicinity two weeks prior to this meeting with the officer. Having explained that moving was financially unfeasible, he looked at me like a priest about to administer the last rites, sighed, and gave me an alarm to carry on my person and notify the police if I were assaulted. I gulped nervously as soon as he left, and with the alarm serving as a stark reminder of the unforgiving reality I was caught up in – one where personal safety was a luxury and relentless vigilance a necessity. My worst fears were confirmed a few days later when I dialed to order a pizza, only to be told my address was too dangerous for delivery. The safety of Norway was sorely missed. The closest to the constant fear, suspicion, and impending doom I experienced in London would be to travel to the Svalbard Archipelago north of mainland Norway and live in polar bear territory.

I lost count of the many run-ins I had with burglars, gangsters, and hustlers in the three years I was in London doing my PhD. Living on a shoestring budget, it was inevitable that I would end up living among the most socio-economically challenged. I am still traumatized by some of these incidents, but rather than shift political allegiances and call for knee-jerk reactions such as tougher policing and harsher prison sentencing to deter criminals, my reluctant immersion in these dystopian realities dotting London's urban landscape helped me better understand the web of complex issues bedeviling these communities.

Whether it was the eastern or Western parts of London, there were entire estates that metastasized into pockets of dystopian misery. I was given a front-row seat in the intricate social fabric of these communities. The importance of addressing the root causes of such misery was forcefully impressed upon me. I can understand why such experiences would stoke primordial fears and resentment of the "Other", but I chose to stay, befriend some of these desolate individuals, and allow their narratives to give me the education I couldn't get at King's College, London, or any other institution for that matter. Sometimes, only disarming oneself

and choosing to live among society's browbeaten will cultivate the necessary education and empathy in order to understand why these individuals gravitate towards crime and self-destruction. Ignoring them does not solve the problem because their condition is an indictment of our collective neglect, and it will only boomerang back on us. I should know; I was almost collateral damage.

2 An Anomie Odyssey in the Urban Jungle

Studies broaching the phenomenon of expanding urban sprawls and the accompanying diminishing value of the individual reach for the sociological lexicon and find some analytical promise in the French theorist Émile Durkheim's (2005) concept of anomie. This term has become central to understanding what enormous, urban, heterogeneous conurbations do to the psyche of vulnerable individuals. In his early work, Durkheim considered anomie an abnormal form of division of labor – a compartmentalization of human existence. Durkheim understood human nature as characterized by endless ambition, unquenchable desires, and self-centeredness. He contended that these egocentric traits had to be curbed through the collective inculcation of morals, conscience and a set of shared norms and sanctions deemed beneficial for the greater good. Put differently, such moral parameters cultivated a sense of purpose and meaning by coupling individual nature to a collective one that granted clarity, warmth and safety for all.

Durkheim acknowledged the liberal and newfound freedoms that cities such as 19th century Paris conferred upon individuals. Europe had smashed the stifling chains of the tyranny of the few and the collective and was now entering a period where the earlier outlandish notion of the individual was gradually maturing. On the flip side, Durkheim intimated that the denizens of capitalist modernity in these metropolises would experience an enduring anomie that would manifest itself in the following ways: a diversity or heterogeneity that would undermine society's collective conscience; the relentless pursuit of goals and material wealth; sudden and severe forms of segregation and compartmentalization as capitalist economies experienced periods of booms and busts piggybacking upon and further exacerbated by the vagaries of war; the erosion of traditional social certainties, such as durable, idyllic marriages, was devastated by the rise of liberalism and the acceptance of phenomena like divorce.

Anomie sought to encapsulate a state in modern, capitalist societies where individuals had a diluted or even a non-relationship with society. Crudely put, one feels no relation to a community and hence is unconstrained by society's sense of shared moral order and its moorings anchored in laws, norms, values, traditions, and collective aspirations. In his renowned book *Suicide* (1951), Durkheim ar-

gued that suicide is the extreme pathological upshot of this breakdown in normlessness. Several studies have operationalized the concept of anomie as it relates to densely populated urban conurbations. Metropolises such as London are prime examples of breeding grounds for states of normlessness, where the ceaseless cycles of expansion, decline and gentrification contribute to feelings of greater alienation, a lack of sense of common purpose, and despair. It appears that the higher the skyline, the more the individual contracts, so to speak.

If Durkheim had mainstream white populations in mind when he fleshed out his theory of anomie, I would argue that the effects of anomie hit the minoritized black and brown communities even harder. Consider the phenomenon of gangs that carve up the urban landscape into "war zones". One of the young boys who smoked cannabis every now and then in the corridor once told me he never ventured outside of his "turf" – that would be tantamount to a death sentence. He wondered one Sunday where I was off, and I invited him to join me as I took the underground to the famous Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park, nearest Marble Arch and Oxford Street. I tried to pique his interest by citing historical figures such as Karl Marx, Vladimir Lenin and George Orwell, who exercised free speech in the area. He said he never heard of them and rattled off various alien-sounding gang names and assigned them to different boroughs in London. His geographic understanding of London was limited to this belligerent zone of gangs.

It was evident that these youngsters lived in a world fractured by anomie. They unanimously dismissed the police as racist. "Have you ever heard of the 1993 Stephen Lawrence case?", one teenager in the estate once asked me. I assured him I did. This case stood as a stark reminder of the stubborn phenomenon of institutional racism within the UK police force. The adolescent looked at me with anguish in his eyes and said, "Stephen was my age when he was murdered by those white racists". It didn't surprise me that these black British youth, who perhaps were ill-informed about other headline-grabbing events in the UK, were well versed in the minutiae of the Stephen Lawrence case. It is often the case that black and brown people in predominantly white societies reach a point where they conclude that mainstream whites are just unable or unwilling to genuinely comprehend the abhorrent nature of racism. In her book *Why I Am No Longer Talking to White People About Race* (2017), Reni Eddo-Lodge decries the fact that some white people shift the conversation from racism rooted in whiteness to one of the following: what it means to be black, identity politics, or the need to resist divisions and acknowledge the common humanity of all. She writes, "Discussing racism is about discussing white identity…Why am I saying one thing, and the white people are hearing something completely different?" (Eddo-Lodge, 2017, pp. 214, 215). It appears scholars of whiteness studies confirm the same across the pond in the US context:

> 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).

The sharp-witted black analyst, Ta-Nehisi Coates, gives bald expression to this sentiment: "For most African Americans, white people exist either as a direct or indirect force for bad in their lives. Biraciality is no shield against this; it often just intensifies the problem" (Coates, 2017, p. 311). Clearly, the teenager who mentioned Stephen Lawrence and others I tried to befriend, understand, and "mentor" in the "sink estates", lived in mental and physical spaces of anomie. These youth were toddlers when Stephen was murdered, and yet they carried the painful legacy of that murder and the ensuing miscarriage of justice like a ton of bricks on their shoulders. There was something profoundly disconcerting in encountering such young lives that inherited this enormous burden of racial injustice with echoes of the blood of the biblical Abel crying for vengeance. How much research has been conducted to gauge the degree to which such accumulated microaggressions wreak havoc on these already socio-economically vulnerable teenagers? The Harvard psychiatrist Charles Pierce (Pierce, 1974), who introduced the concept of microaggression, described it as a health problem and a mental illness – a delusion that white people are superior to blacks – and encouraged behaviors and attitudes that demonstrate this superiority. William Smith focuses on the toll microaggressions exert through the constant need for blacks to maintain vigilance in the face of threats. Smith (2004) introduced the term *Racial Battle Fatigue* to explain how frequent experiences of racism and microaggression lead to a loss of the psychological resources needed to have the indispensable levels of energy and capacity required to function optimally in everyday life. In addition, Derald Wing Sue (2010) outlined three types of microaggressions:

1) Microaggressions: purposeful and intentional acts of racism at an interpersonal level.
2) Microinsults: unconscious rudeness, insensitivity, and group affiliation insults.
3) Micro-recognitions: denials of perceived reality and the psychological effects on victims.

3 "Sink Estates": A Kafkaesque Tale

The echoes of Stephen's murder reverberated through their lives, shaping their perceptions of society and fueling their determination to challenge the systemic racism that had allowed such a tragedy to occur. Like a haunting specter, the un-

resolved case served as a constant reminder of the uphill battle they faced in their quest for equality and justice, motivating them to advocate for change and ensure that future generations would not have to carry the same burden of pain and injustice. Some of these youth from Caribbean backgrounds were depositories of the legacy of racism meted out to their parents and grandparents since coming to Britain. In one conversation, one teenager mentioned that his grandparents were on board the famous passenger liner *HMT Empire Windrush* in 1948. This iconic ship, while carrying one of the first and largest groups of West Indian immigrants to the United Kingdom, has also become emblematic of the postwar generation of Commonwealth citizens who made Britain their home between 1948 and 1971. The teenager continued: “They thought they were British, init!” The reality hit them hard when they saw the posters: ‘No Irish, no blacks, no dogs.’” At the time, my knowledge about the black British community was woefully inadequate, and I found myself reduced to taking mental notes, which I later researched more carefully.

I was deeply struck by the recognition that these young individuals were indeed educated. However, what became agonizingly manifest was that their narrow education was selectively shaped by a sense of racial injustice to the detriment of a good, rounded education offered through mainstream schooling. Their reflective connection to family narrative “heirlooms”, a birthright that should have been cherished, seemed lost on the broader society. All the youth could see was a generational pattern – from the Windrush to the Brixton riots, the footballer John Barnes pelted with bananas in the 1980s to Stephen Lawrence, and now their own encounters, a denial and repudiation of their contribution to British society. It was difficult not to see the link between the life of crime they had espoused, and the sense of anomie triggered by the narratives and experiences of their families, which appear to be vindicated in their own encounters. In such milieus shaped by normlessness, the racialized and minoritized may resort to antisocial behavior as a coping mechanism , a buffer against social disintegration. Of course, two wrongs do not make a right, but we are talking about a perpetual series of racially-inspired wrongs that at first weaken societal bonds and gradually obliterate the remaining few perfunctory ones.

Simply relocating to begin a new chapter in life is far from straightforward for these youth. There is the obvious constraint of financial barriers, but I argue there are other less tangible psychological phenomena, such as a variety of the Stockholm syndrome. These youth are crippled by the crushing weight of not only their own encounters with racism but also the aggregated racial trauma of earlier generations. They are incarcerated in the web of these epic injustices, their thoughts and actions immobilized within an unfathomable abyss. This historical legacy of accumulated racial trauma mirrors the Stockholm syndrome, a state in

which those taken hostage and psychologically abused forge peculiar bonds with their abusers. I have often challenged these youth to question the wisdom of obsessing about these smothering memories, seeing the unpleasant consequences they have on their lives. I shared the importance of critical consciousness and the need to understand the machinations of power in exposing political, social and economic contradictions, among others, but and equally, if not more important, this critical consciousness must be translated into action. To Freire's mind, praxis entails not only critical consciousness but also the need to channel this newfound cognizance into proactive measures with a view towards reforming the structures and architectures of oppression and suffering.

Regrettably, it appears these youth are only familiar with the first part of the equation. While cultivating critical consciousness is commendable, failure to channel the reservoirs of knowledge will only lead to a sense of stasis and incapacitated agency, echoing King Solomon's frustration: "For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow" (Ecclesiastes 1:18). Worse still, some seem to believe that engaging in harmful behavior is synonymous with a form of action, aggravating their dilemma. Placing the burden of generational racism, straddling the unspeakable terrors of chattel slavery in the West Indies to the more recent Windrush scandal in 2018, on such young shoulders, with little or no recourse to emancipatory action, creates a Stockholm syndrome of sorts. Racism becomes an omniscient, omnipresent, and all-powerful Leviathan. This Leviathan ensnares the youth, who then exist in the twilight zone: a nebulous state of mind where reality, fantasy, dreams and hallucinations all cohere. With time, a warped nexus develops where the youth become victims of this legacy because they are reduced to becoming hosts for the parasite of racism; the cycle of abuse is passed on unimpeded. This is commensurate with Foucault's analysis that power is not only repressive but productive. In this cruel dynamic, the legacy becomes the master, and the youths, its ill-fated internees, lose sight of any possibility of escape.

It would be wrong to assume that my time as a doctoral student in London consisted of grappling with crime-ridden black and brown youth and the causes of their antisocial behavior. These challenges are not the exclusive reserve of youth of color. It was during this time that I came across the curious phenomenon of "chavs", a pejorative used to describe a young, antisocial, mostly white, individual from the lower class who is typically dressed in sportswear. In contrast to Norway, the UK has a distinct category of white youth who are stereotyped and caricatured by the media, concealing the dynamics of class hatred perpetrated by the elites, as Owen Jones exposes in his book Chavs: *The Demonization of the Working Class* (2019). Earlier in this chapter, I made brief references to the many attractions

of London. The subject of this book, though, is the more somber topic of the condition of the minoritized in the West.

In summary, an analysis of the crime-ridden “sink estates” of London paints a disturbing picture of the lasting impact of generational racism on young individuals, particularly those of Caribbean heritage in the UK. The ghosts of historical racism, compounded by contemporary personal experiences, accumulate and transmogrify into mental penal colonies. Echoing Franz Kafka’s *In the Penal Colony*, there is the danger that these youths have stoically resigned themselves to the gruesome torture inflicted by the contraption of the inherited legacy of racism, which becomes their own undoing. Living isolated in the estate agents, which become “penal colonies” of sorts, my role became the involuntary traveler of Kafka, who must protest the entire ordeal. In this account, racism emerges not merely as an exploitive force but as a fecund one, shaping the psyche of these young individuals and robbing them of agency. Ultimately, this narrative serves as a powerful call to action. It is a clarion call to society to get to grips with the urgent need for systemic reform, a plea to break the cycle by offering these youths an opportunity to escape the clutches of a defeatist mindset that looms large and seeks to claim each individual. Justice and liberty for these youth will require galvanizing collective, proactive forces with a view towards creating a more equitable future.

14 Melanin in Ivory Towers: Sharp Elbows and Steely Resolve

1 Tales of an Academic Traveler

I drove back to Norway in my little Nissan Note bearing British license plates, packed with whatever valuable possessions I could squeeze in, mostly books. It was past midnight when I disembarked from the Color Line ferry at Larvik. The queues progressed painfully slowly due to a meticulous police investigation. As soon as I rolled down the window, a police officer shone a bright flashlight into my face, blinding my eyes, and demanded, "Are you known to the police?" Struggling with temporary vision impairment, I stuttered, "I hope not". He asked why I had British license plates as a Norwegian citizen, given the fact that I was relocating to Norway. "What were you doing in the UK for so long, anyway?" he inquired. "I've just completed my PhD in Education from King's College, London", I responded. His expression turned into one of uncertainty. He asked to see some "hard evidence" for this. The officer consulted with his colleague or senior and chose to pull me aside for further questioning. The black American professor and intellectual celebrity, Cornel West, wrote in *Race Matters* (2001):

> Years ago, while driving from New York to teach at Williams College, I was stopped on fake charges of trafficking cocaine. When I told the police officer I was a professor of religion, he replied, "Yeh, and I'm the Flying Nun. Let's go, nigger!" I was stopped three times in my first ten days in Princeton for driving too slowly on a residential street with a speed limit of twenty-five miles per hour (West, 2001, p. xxv).

Having been satisfied, as he put it, that I was not in violation of any laws, the officer managed to force a smile and extend best wishes for my future endeavors. I began to discern the contours of a pattern that I had experienced intermittently since starting my PhD, but only then coalesced into a discomforting truth. When commuting between the UK and Norway, I would often be subjected to comparable circumstances. Immigration officers smugly demanding to know the purpose of my travels; then the sudden surprise at hearing about a PhD, followed by further cross-examination, before the officers embarrassingly realized they had overstepped their authority and bid me farewell. Several other black and brown academics affirmed the recurrence of similar shared experiences. Although I used to find myself frequently agitated by these encounters, I have since adopted a more stoic disposition when faced with this stymieing microaggression.

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This stoic disposition is informed by the awareness that some white minds in unform equate blackness and brownness with an impalpable threat but a threat, nonetheless. Picture professor Cornel West being stopped three times for driving slowly at Princeton on a residential street with a speed limit of twenty-five miles per hour. What is going on in the white uniformed mind, which serves as the extended law enforcement arm of white society? 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).

Black and brown Norwegians have no choice but to explore ways of coping with such humiliations. Once, an immigration officer threatened to deport a friend who had come to visit from the UK if I did not promptly appear for a meeting. My friend is black. I was handed a form where, curiously, my salary, residence, and other private and sensitive details had to be declared. The officer emphasized his expectation to find my friend at my residence during surprise checks. Upon entering my salary, the officer looked in disbelief at the figure and quipped, "Do you really earn this much?" I now confess to the derivation of some mischievous pleasure at the sight of a law enforcement officer and the entire rigmarole of ethnic profiling, beginning with the typical prejudicial interrogation, through to the raised eyebrows struggling to believe how a black man managed to acquire a better education, and salary and ending with the confused, embarrassed look that says, "This was one interrogation I could have done without". What other weapons does the subaltern have? Gayatri Spivak asked if the subaltern could speak – yes, is the answer, through concretized forms of cultural capital, among others. I've done my job; now it's for prejudiced minds to agonize. Damien Sojoyner and Tiffany Willoughby-Herard write in the preface to black American Professor Cedric Robinson's classic *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983) about Cedric's hilarious response to police officers who interrupted him as he

walked towards his car after an American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) meeting. Santa Barabara police officers demanded to know what was in his briefcase.

> The officers looked down at Robinson's briefcase and barked an order to reveal its contents: "What's in your briefcase?" He moved back, startled, as if he had been caught with the very evidence needed to crack open the case. He pulled himself together and sternly issued a muted shout that rippled as it crackled through his vocal cords: "Fried chicken!" The now large group watching from behind the window fell out in laughter. The simple case was that a black man with a briefcase at a library elicited consternation at best and rage at worst (Robinson, 1983, p. xxxix).

2 Persistence in Norwegian Academia

In total, I applied for over 400 jobs, both in Norway and internationally, with no luck. I was desperate to begin at any level, including primary school. Finally, I was called in for an interview. The high school advertised a temporary, 50 % position as a high school lecturer (*lektor* in Norwegian) in a troubled area of Oslo. "Have you noticed the students as you entered the school campus?", the deputy head inquired. I didn't know what she was alluding to, prompting her to explain further: "The majority look like you. We have several behavioral problems in this school, and we think you may have the necessary skills and aptitude to handle these challenges unlike our predominantly white staff." No questions were asked about my academic qualifications.

What they appeared to be looking for was an ethnic affiliate of the students who could double up as an "academic bouncer" and mitigate potential accusations of racism. Fortunately, I developed a rapport with the students (the same ones who called me *bror* (brother)), and before the six-month deadline approached, I was hounded by the leadership to sign a permanent contract. One member of the committee later disclosed that I was given the job because I wasn't Muslim. Additionally, it was assumed that I would socialize with colleagues at a local pub, an observation he based on my English-sounding name and British license plates, indicative of a presumed inclination towards pub culture. I still recall the horrified looks and dashed expectations when I mentioned that I was a teetotaler.

I only venture to share these troubling experiences to shed light on the deeply ingrained issue of racial and cultural stereotyping in the hiring process, even in egalitarian Norway, where applicants are appraised based on ethnicity, religion, and assumed cultural predilections rather than their qualifications and skills. Diversity, inclusion, transparent hiring practices, sensitizing staff members to cultural differences, etc., sometimes have the ring of hollow platitudes in Norway. It is time to hold perpetrators accountable for discriminatory practices, provide profes-

sional mentorship and support for individuals from minority backgrounds, and strengthen the current governmental practice of monitoring hiring practices.

I found some solace in entering the teaching sector, even though my position fell far below the level my PhD qualification should have warranted. Of the 113 staff, we were just two who had PhDs. The other, a Norwegian academic who was nearing retirement age, shared that she was content with being a high school teacher. I, on the contrary, continued to dispatch off applications for positions at universities. This was a testing time. It was hard to convince my black and brown students that the system is equitable, and they should work hard to achieve their dreams. One student asked with a smirk, "If you claim to have a PhD, Paul, you would not be stuck in this dump! Either you don't have a PhD, or you are living proof of the racism we know exists in Norway". I brushed those words off and assured the student and his classmates who seconded him that I would make it to university someday.

The day finally came three years later, when I did get a foothold at a university, but the circumstances were depressingly familiar. I am aware that divulging this sensitive information may further weaken the resolve of some minoritized individuals to avoid the realm of higher education in Norway, but it is my earnest wish that this information will serve a useful purpose in understanding some of the challenges they may encounter and persevering towards their goals. It all began with an email from, of all places, Prince Sultan University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, with an offer for a position as an assistant professor. The reader will be familiar with my third space identity sketched previously. As a convert from Islam to Christianity, I was understandably nervous about making such a move. I decided to boldly raise the issue of religious freedom and the dictates of sharia law for someone such as myself in the Skype interview. The committee leader assured me that as long as I did not proselytize my religious convictions, there should be no problem. I was willing to risk prison and possible death just to get a foothold into university. I had reached the end of my tether and was determined to achieve my goals. I went so far as to contact the Norwegian Embassy in Riyadh, which assured me that they would keep a close eye on me.

My family and acquaintances were all skeptical and did their best to dissuade me. Finally, I contacted an academic, one whom I perceived as a mentor, and asked for his opinion. He too cautioned me against accepting this position, fearing for my safety. Fortunately, and with the help of this academic, I applied and was called in for an interview for a position as associate professor at a university in Oslo. It was a one-year temporary position with the possibility of an extension or permanent appointment. I was hired. I wanted to celebrate but was emotionally exhausted by the fact that I almost, once again, stood on the precipice of leaving my family and delving into an unknown and potentially perilous future. Had this white academic

gatekeeper with the clout to pull strings not taken an interest in my predicament, I would perhaps still have languished in high school. Blood, sweat, tears and merit were apparently not enough to open doors: the keepers of the holy grail of advancement are white, and without their pity and good will, progress is hamstrung, I pessimistically reasoned. It is in such moments that Dr. King's quip about Malcolm X's "fiery, demagogic oratory" makes more analytical sense than King's dreams. When Malcolm castigates so-called "communications" between blacks and whites in the USA, he writes:

> Its characteristic design permitted the white man to feel "noble" about throwing crumbs to the black man ... Because all this has steadily helped this American white man to build up, deep in his psyche, absolute conviction that he is "superior". In how many, many communities have, thus, white men who didn't finish high school regarded condescendingly university-educated local Negro "leaders" , principals of schools, teachers, doctors, other professionals? (Haley, 164, p. 315).

3 White Privilege in Academic Tenure

There are few things as devastating as having to exercise supreme control over expressing true feelings and opinions as a scholar because one's position is precarious and at the mercy of capricious and self-centered academics. Norway's academic landscape has faced severe criticism for its practice of conferring tenured associate professor positions merely upon completion of a PhD and a successful interview. A curious trend even involves academics without completed PhDs holding the title of "Associate Professor". In most other comparable Western countries, a tenured associate professor position must be earned within roughly five years in which the candidate demonstrates teaching excellence, research and scholarly achievements, professional engagement, contributions to the field, and a slew of other benchmarks. For instance, under the headline, *Easier to become a professor in Norway than outside Europe,* a Professor of pedagogy, originally from Germany, states:

> I understand that such a claim is provocative, but it is true and not a secret in an international context. First and foremost, it is almost a matter of course to be employed as an associate professor, "Associate Professor" in English, after completing your dissertation. Many are also employed before they have completed their dissertation. In the intermediate step to get this type of competence approved, there is too little quality assurance, and it looks a bit strange when you compare it to the requirements for this type of position in almost the rest of the world (Fanghol, 2022).

While I subscribe to the above international standards, I was extremely glad for this practice of granting a full associate professor position as a person of color

in Norway. This occurred at the university where I am currently employed in the summer of 2017, and I will forever be grateful for this. In my case, though, I was granted the position after a PhD from a prestigious university, worked three years as a high school teacher, and even published seven peer-reviewed articles in top journals of education approved on either level 1 or 2 (two being the most rigorous) in *The Norwegian Centre for Research Data,* which regularly reviews the quality of journals, weeding out predatory ones. The relentless sense of insecurity had become a constant companion in my academic journey. It has not dissipated, but knowing that I had finally been offered a permanent, tenured position as an associate professor in pedagogy was an indescribable relief.

I have rubbed shoulders with colleagues over the years with only a master's degree who have matter-of-factly told me they don't need to publish anything because they have secured permanent jobs. One such colleague had been employed for over 10 years when he shared the above. There are associate professors who barely have published four or five serious articles in over 15 years of employment. Whatever happened to "publish or perish"? I am not divulging this with the intention of impugning their characters but as an indictment of a system that clearly operates on an arbitrary basis, with many examples of nepotistic practices. The disparity in opportunities is glaring. This situation often arises due to networks, connections, or biases that favor certain "preferred" individuals, and not their qualifications necessarily.

McIntosh & Cleveland (2020) and Robin DiAngelo (2018), among others, define white privilege as unearned benefits and advantages that accrue to white individuals solely on the basis of their race. Whites are meant to remain oblivious to these privileges and the machinations of whiteness, they argue. Obviously, such opportunities and privileges are off- limits to people of color. People of color are keenly aware of these prejudices, which adversely impact their life chances. It would be mistaken on the part of whites to assume people of color are just jumping onto the bandwagon of Black Lives Matter or some other modern "identity politics" fad. The pages of the autobiography of Fredrick Douglass or Ida Bell, the crusading journalist, anti-lynching activist, and feminist, validate that black people were long aware of white privilege before the phenomenon was studied and labeled as such by white academics. It has often been observed that people of color major in white behavior because of the myriad ways this phenomenon constricts, monitors and imposes itself on black aspiration.

Robin DiAngelo, in her work on white fragility, teases out the concept of white privilege by exploring the defensive reactions and opposition that white people often mount when confronted with issues of race. She argues that recognizing and understanding white privilege is critical for undoing systemic racism and that white individuals must vigorously engage in self-critique and education to

combat the perpetuation of racial inequality. In essence, both McIntosh and DiAngelo underline the fact that white privilege is a systemic and persistent boon that grants advantage to white individuals, often at the expense of people of color. Recognizing and confronting white privilege is a crucial step toward achieving racial equity and social justice.

4 Racism: Not Invited to the Hygge Party

Had I been a wee bit complacent, I doubt I would have made it thus far. Regrettably, I have too often had to restrain myself from unloading the same mindset onto my children. They have heard me complain ad nauseum about their lax attitude towards their homework, books and the future for several years now. On the one hand, I do worry about the relaxed approach to grades (no grades until the eighth grade) and achievement in Norway, given my upbringing characterized by cutthroat competition and the winner-takes-it-all approach. On the other hand, I am grateful that the Scandinavian outlook is one that seeks a healthy balance between work and leisure, encapsulated in the now famous term *hygge*. Before mindfulness became mainstream, Scandinavians made an art form of the importance of being present in the moment, appreciating the everyday pleasures, contentment and wellbeing. Yes, I would love to lower my shoulders and wallow in *hygge* but the black experience refracts a different reality – one where *hygge* is a luxury that we enjoy cautiously while looking behind our shoulders. We cannot seem to stop deviating towards the language of alarm and disturbing statistics, such as the one below by black British writer and journalist Afua Hirsch (2018):

> In 2016, 45 percent of black children in the UK were growing up in poverty, compared with 25 percent of white children. This affects their chances at school; a poor child's vocabulary lags one whole year behind that of a child growing up in an affluent household. Only 4 per cent of black students obtained the three As at A level needed for a top university, compared to 10 per cent of white pupils (Hirsch, 2018, p.247).

Why, then, do we wallow in these disheartening realities? Well, clearly, we cannot commit the fatal errors raised previously in the UK context during my encounters with Caribbean youth in "sink estates". Knowledge and awareness are ubiquitous in the information age we live in. However, unless we convert and channel this critical consciousness into concrete action that transforms and emancipates (Freirian praxis), we will become prisoners of the Leviathans of despair. "Philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it", is a statement from the renowned work "Theses on Feuerbach", written by Karl Marx in 1845. These words, also inscribed on Marx's grave, are critical of earlier

philosophers, particularly the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach, whom Marx accused of merely interpreting the world in different ways without taking action to change it. Of course, Marx did not advocate the kind of violence erroneously associated with communist revolutions. The point is that critical thinking is not a case of simply discerning and plumbing the depths of human deception and debauchery (and its capacity for immense good), but a matter of taking small steps towards inspiring change and addressing social and economic injustices.

The celebrated Cuban essayist, journalist, and revolutionary, José Martí (1853–1895), was of Spanish descent. His parents were white Spaniards, and he could have passed off as white with its corollary privileges in the 1860s USA. However, in his 1863 essay, *My Race,* Martí appears to transcend the racial bigotry so prevalent at the time, which is one of many reasons why his political and intellectual work appealed to and inspired a multiracial Cuba and several Latin American countries towards independence. In it, he writes:

> No man has any special rights because he belongs to one race or another... What sensible white man thinks he should be proud of being white, and what do blacks think of a white man who is proud of being white and believes he has special rights because he is? What must whites think of a black man who grows conceited about his color? ... In Cuba, there is no fear whatsoever of a race war... On the battlefields, the souls of whites and blacks who died for Cuba have risen together through the air. In that daily life of defense, loyalty, brotherhood, and shrewdness, there was always a black man at the side (Martí, 2002, p. 318, 319).

It would be simplistic to claim that race was not an issue in Cuba before and since José Martí. There is a robust debate today about the impact of Castro's 1959 revolution upon race relations in Cuba, often bifurcating into two camps: that the revolution sounded the death knell of racism, or that it misappropriated the "raceless" Cuba of Martí and hence aggravated the problem (Alejandro, 2001). Whatever one's stance, the sincerity of Martí is not in doubt. Unlike the British, who overstate the importance of a William Wilberforce, who, while instrumental in abolishing slavery, wrote nothing resembling the antiracism of José Martí. Afua Hirsch draws attention to the irony of celebrating the bicentennial of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and the laying of a wreath at the statue of Wilberforce in 2007 when she writes, "I have always wondered how we managed to contort our memories in such a way as to celebrate abolishing something while forgetting how fundamental a prior role we played in developing it in the first place" (Hirsch, 2018, p. 51).

We need both a William Wilberforce and, more importantly, a José Martí residing in us as we fight the pervasive menace that is racism. Yes, black and brown people too dream of the day we can fully enjoy *hygge* without the burden of con-

stant vigilance. But until the dawning of that glorious day, our experience in a white-dominated world has taught us to be hyper-vigilant, be twice as good, work twice as hard, and prepare for the worst-case scenario. The dream of enjoying life without the weight of racial scrutiny feels distant, yet not unattainable.

15 Conclusion: Bridging Worlds

"Do you think you will become a professor without having any networks? You are a prolific publisher, but that alone will not be sufficient." These words were hurled unsolicited at me by a professor some years ago. I had no ambition to become a professor at the time, and I certainly did not appreciate the colleague who uttered these words condescendingly in front of several colleagues. A couple of years later, I became a full professor. This, in a nutshell, is the story of my life. The world straightjackets an individual into hermetically sealed categories: refugee, taxi driver, black, female, gay, brown, disabled, etc. The label is followed by a full stop, the sum total of who and what you can be. I have always believed the sky is the limit, although I met naysayers, especially at crucial crossroads that signaled progress and transformation. No wonder I was intrigued and inspired by a black senator from Illinois who seemed to encapsulate my mindset and the journey I have described in this book with the three words, "Yes, we can!".

Obama's victories, thousands of miles away across the pond, served as benchmarks to inspire and propel my own modest accomplishments. I was brimming with confidence as I embarked on my doctoral journey in the UK, knowing that the office of the world's most powerful individual was occupied by a black man. I was in Oslo, intoxicated with pride when the Norwegian media, and the entire world zoomed in their cameras on Air Force One and the President when he landed at Gardermoen airport to receive the Nobel Peace Prize on October 9, 2009. His re-election coincided with the year of my graduation in 2012 , and I had finally cracked the academic ceiling and achieved the rank of associate professor when Obama's presidency concluded in 2016.

For people of color, marginalized, and minoritized in the West and the global South, it is undeniable that there exists an unspoken connection, a "telepathic" cross-national empathy that transcends languages, cultures and other boundaries. Much of it is anchored in the historical fact of the dehumanization of the black race, most cruelly exemplified in the institution of chattel slavery. We rooted for Obama when the ugly forces of racism reared their heads through Fox News, the Birther movement, the Tea Party, and Trump, whom Ta-Nehisi Coates called "America's first white president" (Coates, 2017, p. 344):

> Trump truly is something new – the first president whose entire political existence hinges on the fact of a black president. And so, it will not suffice to say Trump is a white man like all the others who rose to become president. He must be called by his correct name and rightful honorific – America's first white president (Coates, 2017, p. 344).

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In his 1992 song *Changes*, Tupac Shakur declared that the world was not ready for a black president. That applies even after the event of the black presidency. It is as if Trump went about iconoclastically determined to erase and sanitize the White House and the USA of every vestige of the presence and memory of a black presidency. Nevertheless, and borrowing from the title of Coates' (2017) book, indeed, *We Were Eight Years in Power.* The words "Yes, we can!" give expression to the hope, unity, and collective empowerment of a people's aspirations for positive change. They echo the spirit of possibility, inspiring confidence and marshaling individuals to believe in their power to effectuate meaningful transformations.

To have lived in the same era and witness the first US black president come to your city with the accompanying extensive security measures that affected every aspect of life in Oslo was awe-inspiring. I wasn't born when Dr. King was in Oslo to receive the Nobel Prize in 1964, but the legacy of his achievement resonates deeply with people of color (and whites) in Norway. Obama's presence in Oslo felt like a tangible, personal, and intimate connection to the legacy of civil rights activism that King embodied. These moments serve as powerful reminders of the strides made in the fight against racial inequality and inspire a sense of pride, hope, and determination for a more inclusive future.

Of particular significance is Obama's own "third space" identity and journey, which encompasses countries and cultures as different as the USA, Kenya, and Indonesia. In addition, Obama had to incorporate another strand of his roots from Moneygall, Ireland, into his already very multicultural identity. His maternal great-great-great-grandfather, Falmouth Kearney, immigrated to New York City in 1850. Clearly, as global migration continues unabated, given the unending push and pull factors, not only will countries and communities be more culturally and ethnically diverse, but individuals will espouse third space or third culture identities. In his memoirs, Obama first seeks to make sense of and reconcile his own complex background before, it appears, he capitalizes on this diversity to unite and heal the country, which put him in the White House.

As I sit at my desk thirty-three years later, I reflect on the anxious eighteen-year-old refugee I once was, observing how far I've come on this transformative journey. As conflicts and wars continue to rage, new waves of people will be displaced and come as refugees to Norway and other affluent countries. Since Russia attacked the Ukraine, 65,000 Ukrainian refugees have come to Norway (NrK, 2023). Compare this to the total of 43,000 people of Somali origin living in Norway. Another refugee youth is sitting in some camp somewhere in Norway as I write, whose life has been turned upside down. This refugee will go through the painful process of letting go of a familiar and perhaps cherished past and will have to navigate a new journey in Norway. Like me, this individual will have to learn a new language and negotiate new ways of thinking and doing things. Skin color will definitely be

an issue – sometimes in subtle ways, while it can be overt on other occasions. Even for the white Ukrainian, there will be the unsettling discovery that there are shades of white in a hierarchy where the Anglo-Saxons place themselves at the apex.

Success will depend on the individual's ability to understand mainstream society and the mirror effect it has on his or her evolving personality. In George Mead's "looking glass" theory, individuals develop a sense of self through interactions with others in society. The feedback one receives as an individual or group through family, friends, and wider society is reflected back as an image of who we are and interpreted in an iterative process that acts as a barometer to regulate self-identity and self-concept. Our sense of self does not develop in a vacuum in isolation but is constructed through social interactions and the perceptions of others. Obviously, our personalities play an important role in the judgements we arrive at.

The refugee, whatever the background or shade on the continuum of skin color, will have to dig deep into the confluence of societal encounters to achieve and maintain a healthy sense of self. I end this journey by reiterating, despite its many flaws, that I am fortunate to live in the world's best country. The institutions in place in Norway were erected and are carefully maintained by people who genuinely believe in equity and equality for all. A testament to this commitment is the little-known story of Norway's oil discovery in the 1960s and the crucial role Farouk Al-Kasim, an Iraqi-born geologist and petroleum engineer, played in this regard. He was Norway's first petroleum engineer and was hired by the Norwegian government to work on offshore exploration projects. He has been called Norway's most lucrative foreigner (Lilleås & Stavrum, 2009). His pivotal role not only enriched Norway's economy but also showcased the country's dedication to fairness and equal representation within its workforce. Al-Kasim landed the job of writing Norway's blueprint for how its nascent oil industry would be organized. He became the director of resource management at the Norwegian Petroleum Directorate. Speaking to the *Financial Times*, Statoil (Equinor today) spokesman Willy Olsen stated:

> Farouk is perhaps the biggest value creator Norway has had, says Olsen, and points out that al-Kasim pressured the oil companies to extract more of the oil by forcing through new methods such as water injection (injecting water to squeeze out more oil), horizontal drilling, and other methods, which meant that Norway extracted 45 percent of the resources in oil fields – compared to 25 percent abroad. It is this culture, a culture of squeezing out the last drop, that he created, says Olsen (Lilleås & Stavrum, 2009).

Farouk Al-Kasim was appointed Knight of the 1st Class of the Order of St. Olav in 2012. Over the years, my students with Iraqi backgrounds in Norway were often

positively taken aback upon hearing about this. I have looked them in the eyes and said, “You can be the next Farouk Al-Kasim”. Here is an early example of Norway’s commitment to equity and equality, reflected in its inclusive approach to governance and societal values in harnessing talent from diverse backgrounds. There are several contemporary examples of highly successful individuals from the global south, some with refugee backgrounds too. Whatever the challenges facing refugees and those living in the third space, it should be comforting to know there are institutions in place in Norway underpinned and dedicated to great universal principles, such as democracy, rule of law, individual liberty, human rights, secularism, equality, etc., of which Farouk Al-Kasim and we are the beneficiaries. Ultimately, it was the lack of respect for these values in our countries of origin that brought us to the West. Farouk too appears to live in the third space: born in Iraq, with a degree in petroleum engineering from the prestigious Imperial College London, a Norwegian wife, and relocating to Norway. The task of the third spacer, which I have hopefully demonstrated in this memoir, is to harmonize these diverse and at times, conflicting strands and build bridges that unite and heal a fractured world.

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