© The Author(s), 2024. Published by Cambridge University Press. This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. doi:10.1017/S1474746424000307

"We Pupils Had to Hear . . . " Marginalised Youths' Experiences of Racialising Language and Symbolic Violence in Swedish Schools

Jessica H. Jönsson*

*Örebro University, Örebro, Sweden
Email: jessica-hanna.jonsson@oru.se

Guided by Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical approaches of symbolic capital and symbolic violence, this article examines the everyday mechanisms of 'otherising' language practices in schools that reinforce racism against marginalised youths in Sweden. The empirical material is based on focus group discussions and individual in-depth interviews with youths with migrant backgrounds in Sweden. The stories told by the participants in this study indicate how young people with immigrant backgrounds are discursively racialised and otherised as a group that does not belong to Swedish society, through the articulation of negative opinions, attitudes, and ideologies as part of established colonial discourses. It is argued that the marginalisation of migrants in Sweden, which is a consequence of social policy, has even resulted in utilisation of a marginalised language — one that deviates from the majority language in several different ways.

Keywords: Belonging, colonial discourse, marginalisation, racialising language, symbolic violence, migrant youths, Sweden.

Introduction

Immigration to Western countries has been used by right-wing parties to reinforce racism, marginalisation, and nationalist and exclusionary welfare and social policies (Schierup, 2003; Kamali, 2015; Noble and Ottmann, 2020). Racialisation of marginalised groups, who can be heard as being linguistically 'deviant' when using majority language(s), includes social constructs imposed upon biological patterns by the human imagination and through human discourse (Schmidt, 2002). Mediatised political actions and debates, as well as related administrative procedures, are closely linked to the expert terminology and discourses of the majority language.

An extensive neoliberalisation of Swedish society since the 1990s has changed the traditional social policy positions of Sweden and its relatively strong welfare state aimed at reducing socioeconomic and cultural gaps between different groups in society and at promoting social integration (Jönsson, 2015; Kamali and Jönsson, 2018). This has led to increasing marginalisation of people with migrant backgrounds, reinforcement of discourses of 'Us-and-Them', and the political success of racist parties and groups (Kamali, 2008). A Swedish governmental investigation on 'Power, integration and structural discrimination' (Justitiedepartementet, 2004: 04) has shown the weakness of social policy instruments for counteracting institutionalised othering practices against

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746424000307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

migrant groups in many parts of Swedish society, including the school system. Meanwhile, a study of the Swedish school system and its educational practices (Sawyer and Kamali, 2006) demonstrates how youths with immigrant backgrounds are otherised by school authorities and teachers, and how colonial discourses of 'the others' force them to 'choose' low-skilled employment paths. Many later studies have confirmed the systematic and everyday racist discrimination of pupils with immigrant backgrounds in Swedish schools (Mulinari and Neergaard, 2010; Dovemark, 2013; Skowronski, 2013; Lundström, 2021; Wiltgren, 2023). Layal Wiltgren shows that even those pupils who are very well integrated within the Swedish school system, attending prestigious schools and receiving very good school results, are subjected to everyday discrimination. Although school staff believe that their classes are inclusive, that they welcome and accept all pupils irrespective of their background, pupils with migration backgrounds describe experiences of 'polite' exclusion, in the form of subtle and often unspoken discrimination (Wiltgren, 2023). In addition, colonial discourses dominate in schoolbooks and curricula, and subject pupils to symbolic violence (Sawyer and Kamali, 2006).

Although known as the bastion of equality, equity, and social cohesion, the last three decades of neoliberalisation of social policy and welfare has dramatically changed Swedish society. As a result, the inequality index in Sweden in 2021 reached 0,333, which is the highest since measurements began in 1975 (Oxfam, 2022). Given the existence of structural and institutional racism and discrimination in the country, inequality hits people with immigrant backgrounds more than it does majority society (De los Reyes, 2006; Kamali, 2008). Neoliberalisation of social policy, and the retreat of the welfare state, has led to privatisation of the public sector (Jönsson, 2015) and increasing marginalisation and privatisation of schools; this has meant that young people with migrant backgrounds are among the most vulnerable and affected of groups, often framed in public discourses as 'deviants' and 'criminals' (Kamali, 2005; Mulinari and Neergaard, 2010; De los Reyes and Hörnqvist, 2017; Dahlstedt and Fejes, 2019; Sernhede, 2022).

Neoliberalisation of social policy measures has reinforced a discourse of welfare nationalism, defining who is entitled to welfare and who is not. Such a development has been reinforced by the electoral success of the racist party Sweden Democrats (SD) and its direct and indirect influence on the re-organisation of the Swedish welfare state and its practices (Kamali, 2022). The welfare nationalism propagated by SD, and indeed, in turn, by the majority of other political parties in Sweden, has, over recent years, increasingly informed public debate and media communications in Sweden and popularised a language of demonising and excluding 'the other' (Östman, 2019; Kamali, 2022).

This growing nationalism, then, deploys an established language ideology as a marker of belonging and of exclusion (Brown, 2018; Woolard, 2020). The politics of language means that language is morally and politically loaded because such politics 'represent not only how language is, but how it ought to be', while also endowing 'some linguistic features or varieties with greater value than others' (Woolard, 2020: 2). Neoliberal 'language games', to use Wittgenstein's term, indicate linguistic practices that are affected by, and included in, wider socioeconomic, political, and cultural structures and institutionalised inequality and domination.

Guided by Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical approaches of symbolic capital and symbolic violence, this article will examine the institutional and everyday mechanisms of language practices in reinforcing marginalisation of and racism against marginalised youths in

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746424000307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Sweden. The following questions have guided this study: *How is the belonging of marginalised youths defined in relation to the linguistic (symbolic) capital of Swedishness? What role do 'migrant accents' play in racialisation and marginalisation processes? How are non-linguistic symbolic attributes employed in practising symbolic violence against pupils with an immigrant background?* The empirical material here has been collected through focus group interviews and individual in-depth interviews with youths with migrant backgrounds in marginalised areas in Sweden.

Theoretical perspectives

Austin's (1962) classical work on speech act theory argues that words as speech acts have material consequences, when the speaker has the legitimate authority to make people act in real life. This is also what is referred to by Bourdieu (1989) as 'symbolic power', or the power to do things by words. Symbolic violence, meanwhile, is defined as the 'imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990: 5). Through mechanisms of symbolic violence, the speaker successfully imposes their worldview as legitimate and makes people internalise such visions of reality (Bourdieu, 2021). The exercise of symbolic violence against minorities or people with immigrant backgrounds comprises what is called linguistic racism (Ibrahim, 2011), which highlights overlap between language, race, and unequal power relations. Linguistic racism is reproduced and supported by the structural and institutional arrangements of a society, which constitute the practices of structural discrimination and racism. For example, media actors with interlocking interests (newspapers, TV, radio) help to reproduce racism by framing migrants or minority groups as a danger to society (Kamali, 2008). They can also generate a sense of fear, panic, and ressentiment (Kerr and Śliwa, 2020), in order to put the blame for the socioeconomic and social problems actually created by neoliberal social policy and the retreat of the welfare state onto 'the others' (Kamali and Jönsson, 2018).

Populist and racist parties reinforce racist discourses in society and create a 'political ontology' through medialised power and influence, to impose a vision of the world in the form of a taxonomy of entities, such as 'the people' and 'the nation' (Bourdieu, 1977). This leads to the reinforcement of the already existing 'Us-and-Them' divides in society, which is detrimental to people who are not considered to belong to the category of 'Us'.

In the postcolonial world and the era of reverse migration from periphery to the centre (Wallerstein, 1974), the majority of Western countries present themselves, through language, as 'the masters' — an imagery that aims at reproducing the position and privileges of 'the masters' within increasingly multilingual societies (Derrida, 1996). 'The master' hears 'his' own language, while, as Spivak (1999) says, when subalterns speak, they are not heard, because they are spoken for and silenced. This takes place within the realm of the symbolic mechanisms of power reproduced by symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990).

The 'necessity' of exercising physical and symbolic violence in order to both produce and reproduce the socio-political order in society has been recognised by classical social scientists (Durkheim, 1951; Weber, 1968; Bourdieu, 1986, 1991, 2001; Foucault, 2008) and in studies on modern governance, social policy, and social work (Garrett, 2007; Jönsson, 2019; Kamali, 2022). The aim is to produce obeisance to the existing socioeconomic and political order in society. However, this aim is subtle and hidden within a set of discourses through which, as Weber (1968) argues, privileged groups in society either

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746424000307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

deny their privileges or present them as an eternal reality of the natural order. This means that the privileged groups' domination and privileges are taken for granted and seen as natural, and this helps to reproduce the domination of these groups and their privileges. The naturalisation of privileges by dominant groups (or majority society, in this article) also depends on institutionalisation of the dominant groups' language as part of the dynamics of cultural capital. As Bourdieu (1986) argues, dominant groups' language becomes, therefore, a central part of recognised symbolic capital, which envoys power and provides the individual who masters the language with prestige and a higher position within a social hierarchy.

However, learning a language and being able to speak it does not automatically provide a person with a migrant and minority background the possibility of avoiding inferiorisation, racialisation, and oppression. According to Fanon (1986), even racialised groups who speak a master language perfectly are themselves part of the reproduction of racialisation and oppression of non-white groups. This is mainly because the discourses of colonialism and its values are embedded in the colonial powers' language but are presented as natural. Dominant groups do not believe or recognise that their values, beliefs, and decisions are forced upon others during the process of communication (Wright, 2022).

The idea that a certain commonality of cultural orientation has been a prerequisite for the building and maintenance of social and political institutions is often used to legitimise the idea of national belonging (Delanty *et al*., 2008). This is connected to the concept of the homeland, which has a fundamentalist and totalising core with sharp demarcation between 'Us' and 'the others' (Eliassi, 2010). Privileged individuals have the need to make distinctions between themselves and others as an act of preserving their privileges. Such distinctions, however, are not necessarily overt but often presented in a way to hide and make invisible the real intentions of users. This, as Bonilla-Silva (2014) argues, maintains and perpetuates a covert structure of White supremacy ideology. The latent utterances and functions of racism create a kind of internalised racism, through which these acts are neutralised and naturalised (Seet, 2019). This creates an implicit racialised order that positions 'Whiteness' as the hegemonic ability of the White racialised frame to predominantly define other structurally dominated, racialised realities (Sue *et al.,* 2008). Such a symbolically racialised reality is reproduced by acts in which those who comply to the established internalised racism are supported and rewarded, while those who reject it are punished.

The study

The findings of the study are based on focus group discussions and in-depth interviews conducted with youths – female and male – aged between eighteen to twenty-one years and with migrant backgrounds from Swedish marginalised urban areas. The data was collected in the Swedish cities of Uppsala, Stockholm, and Gothenburg during February 2020. Participants in the focus groups had been recruited through contact with local informants who were facilitating different local activities and social projects designed to engage pupils from immigrant backgrounds. Each focus group was composed of both young men and women in order to consider gender dimensions in discussions about pupils' experiences of 'othering'. With the exception of a minority who immigrated to Sweden at a very early age (five persons), the majority of participants were born in

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746424000307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Sweden. Focus groups allow the bringing together of small groups of people with particular characteristics for a focused discussion of a particular topic (Krueger and Casey, 2000) and the method is used to collect data in participatory research, especially when involving young people (Bagnoli and Clark, 2010). Although important factors need to be considered when planning, conducting, and analysing focus groups with youths (Adler *et al*., 2019), such groups allow participants to tell their own stories, to express their opinions without having to adhere to a strict sequence of questions. Focus groups provide researchers with large amount of data on a specific topic in a relatively short period of time. Researchers can observe interactive discussions in which common experiences and diverse opinions are shared. Group interactions can stimulate debate and encourage participants to explore and clarify their views (Clarke, 1999). In this study, the purpose was to listen and gather information, but also to better understand how youths with immigrant backgrounds experience, feel and think about marginalisation, language, and belonging, and their effects on their everyday lives.

All research participants and respondents were given sufficient information about the aim of the study, relevant themes and the questions to be covered. All participants were also asked to provide written or verbal consent concerning participation in the study, and information given by the respondents has been confidentially reported in a respectful manner.

There were three focus groups in total, each comprising six or seven participants (so nineteen participants altogether), and each facilitated by the author who acted as moderator in posing questions for discussion. Subsequently, one youth from each of the focus groups was chosen for an individual in-depth interview; selection was based on the interviewee's knowledge and their experiences being particularly relevant for the research questions. The aim of the individual interview was to get more in-depth information about the everyday processes of marginalisation and othering, as focus groups may discourage some individuals from sharing sensitive or personal information because anonymity cannot be assured (Parahoo, 2007). The focus group discussions and individual in-depth interviews were all audiotaped for later transcription and analysis of the institutional and everyday mechanisms of language practices in reinforcing marginalisation of and racism against marginalised youths in Sweden.

The analysis of the collected empirical material is based on qualitative content analysis (Downe-Wamboldt, 1992; Kondracki *et al.,* 2002; Graneheim and Lundman, 2004), including the discursive aspects of the generated themes (Franzosi, 1989). By using this method of analysis, it was possible to structure, categorise, and analyse the empirical material and to provide a comprehensive understanding of its manifest and latent contents relating to the theoretical framework of the study. Emerging themes from the analysis process reported in this study are *symbolic otherisation* and *symbolic violence and resistance*.

Symbolic violence and the colonial discourses

Symbolic otherisation

One of the mechanisms embedded in communication between youths with a migrant background and individuals with a Swedish background involves the making of distinctions between 'Us' and 'Them', which can take many different forms. Almost all

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746424000307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

participants in focus group discussions had experience of being defined as 'the other' by Swedes who considered themselves to be members of the 'Us-group'. In many cases the communication became a means of otherising these youths on the basis of their background (Kamali, 2005). As one of the participants, 'Mohammad', says:

> You know, the way they see you is not the way they see Swedes, no matter how long you have been living in this country or how well you speak Swedish, even if you are born here. Questions like 'Where do you come from?', 'How long have you been here?', or when they just say 'You speak Swedish very well' or 'We have no experience of war', which means that 'you' have . . . .

Questions such as 'Where do you come from?' seem, of course, very trivial and are sometimes defined by majority society agents as 'an interest in getting to know' a person; but, according to focus group participants, it is just a reminder that youths with immigrant backgrounds are not 'really' Swedes. This is not a reminder of different geographical places, but a symbolic way of making the distinction between the 'superior Us', who live here, and the inferior 'others', who have left their countries and have come here without any invitation. As 'Maryam' says:

> One time, when we had a discussion in my school about migration, some of my Swedish classmates said that there are so many immigrants with strange cultures here and started to tell stories about how bad immigrants were. I expected that the teacher would stop them, but no, she was just silent and let them say whatever they wanted. I tried to be nice, you know, 'Immigrants are not bad, many help Sweden, work in industries, hospitals, etc., etc.', but they just continued with their bullshit. When I later on complained to the teacher, she said that I was sensitive and must understand that 'School is a democratic place' and 'You have to learn to listen to different ideas'. Also, she meant that I should listen to them, because it was me who obviously did not know what democracy was.

All participants in the focus groups talked about various 'reminders' they had heard in conversations that indicated that they do not belong to Swedish society and that they hold the status of being foreigners. Comments such as "In Sweden, we do not . . . ", "Here is not like other countries . . . ", "Here, you do not do . . . ", "Migrants who come to us . . . ", "We have laws and rules here . . . " and "We have a bunch of norms which should be followed here" are part of symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), by which youths with migrant backgrounds are forcefully 'reminded' that they do not belong to Sweden, as part of a process of otherisation (Kamali, 2005).

The matter of belonging was one of the most important themes discussed in the focus groups. The imagery of belonging to a superior group or nation (Sweden), categorised in the use of the concepts of 'Us' and 'Them', is an inseparable part of daily communications in which the category of 'Us' meets 'the others'. This was considered by focus group participants as one of the most everyday mechanisms for the otherisation of them by both teachers and other school personals and pupils with a Swedish background. As one of the participants, 'Elahe', reflects:

> I wonder why they [pupils with a Swedish background] cannot just accept us as we are. We are not blond with blue eyes, and we may not pronounce a Swedish word 100 per cent 'the same' as them and maybe do not like pig meat or go to church and celebrate mid-summer, but we are

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746424000307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> as clever as them, if not cleverer, and are actually as perfect as anybody else. I am really tired of being always considered as someone else, who does not belong here and should 'go back to my country' . . . but which country? I came to Sweden when I was little.

Although the findings show that language is a significant means of 'linguistic racism' (Ibrahim, 2011) and otherisation (Kamali, 2005) relating to pupils with immigrant backgrounds, non-linguistic attributes such as headscarves or skin colour and their parents' national/immigrant backgrounds are also used as a marker for othering and exclusion (see also de los Reyes and Hörnqvist, 2017; Sernhede, 2022). As 'Aram' has experienced:

> It was not only the teachers, also Swedish pupils. You feel in different ways, in the classroom, in the school yard, in the school restaurant, in the gymnastic hall, everywhere, that you are not like them or, let me say better, they do not want you to be here, to be your friend, to accept you as you are. You even hear sometimes bad words about my skin colour, my hair, my accent, even about my parents, who they have never met. I can both speak and write Swedish better than they do, but have a different accent — they cannot accept that.

Backgrounds, such as parents' nationality or immigrant history, are used to otherise and inferiorise pupils with immigrant backgrounds. As one of the participants from the in-depth interviews, 'Alberto', says:

> We were a couple of football players with immigrant backgrounds who were in that football club. You had to hear all the time many things about how good Swedes were and how undisciplined and bad we were. You had to hear that 'We do not "mañana mañana" [take as long we like] here. All must come on time, listen and learn to play our kind of football'. We had to listen to them say that Sweden has a special kind of football which is not like other countries. You had to hear how strong Swedes were and why Swedish football is so successful. You know, I, who come from Argentina, could obviously not play football and should learn from Swedes?

It was not only the coach who racialised and otherised him but also other football players. He said that he had to listen to many criticisms and racist comments about migrants. He said that at the beginning he was mainly silent, because he was alone in the football club, but when a couple of other players with immigrant backgrounds joined the club, they felt they had to react to such comments. However, they also felt they had to be careful in their comments since this could lead to problems between them and the coach. And problems are what finally happened, and he said he felt forced to leave the club.

This subtle and internalised racism (Seet, 2019), which can involve internalisation of racial stereotypes by the people who are being subjected to them, was also discussed in focus groups in different ways and many illustrations were presented. 'Maryam', who was a member of a basketball club for girls, shares another example:

> I had to hear all the time comments about my headscarf. I am not short and weak; that is why I had always heard that I was aggressive, fast, and play differently than the others. No matter if I was the best player in the club and scored the most points for the team, I was different. I was several times told by the coach that some parents are uneasy with the way that I played basketball since their children, you know, big girls of sixteen, seventeen years old, complained that they cannot play their 'real' game because of me, the way I played. Even their gaze at me

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746424000307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

> gave me a sense of unease, a sense of hate or at least the feeling that they did not like me and wanted me to disappear from their Swedish world.

As 'Maryam' puts it, even the non-verbal communication that occurred between her, her teammates, and their parents contained elements of internalising racism against, and otherisation of, her. When discussing the consequences of not complying to this racialisation and otherisation of her, she said that she had to ultimately leave that club and start playing in another club with players and a coach with immigrant backgrounds. The symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1986) deployed against her, which forced her to quit her team, has been confirmed by many other participants' experiences.

There are many illustrations of the exercise of symbolic violence in schools. Schools, as one of the most important institutions of disciplination (Foucault, 2008), play a central role in the reproduction of White supremacy (Sue *et al.,* 2008), by forcing pupils to comply to majority societies' norms and rules through symbolic violence. The following citation is an illustration presented by 'Melody':

> When I was in high school, we pupils had to hear a lot of things from teachers and other Swedish classmates. You know, 'Are you allowed to do gymnastics? Are you allowed to dance? Are you allowed to have a boyfriend? Are you allowed swim?' But my answers did not matter; they had their own prejudices about me, and about every girl with an immigrant background. Even when I met my school counsellor for a discussion about my choice of studies in high school, she said that I had to choose human studies since this is what you are going to work with in the future. When I said that I am interested in studying physics or medicine, she became uncomfortable. I could see in her eyes how she was laughing at me, you know, 'Look at this migrant girl who wants to become a doctor. Forget it!'.

Another interviewee, 'Ali', who has a Muslim background, told a story about how he was taken as being an expert in Islam and felt always as being someone different to classmates with a Swedish background. He says:

> Several times my teacher in high school, when he talked about religion or migration, he looked at me or even sometimes pointed at me. I felt that I was observed by everybody else in the class, like it was me the teacher was talking about. Once, he even said to me, while everybody in the class listened, to prepare a presentation of Islam for the next lecture. I did not know much about Islam; I am not from a very religious family and I remember that I thought, 'Would he ask a Swedish classmate who was Christian to do a presentation about Christianity?' No, of course not, but, you know, I had to do my homework. I had to ask my father, mother, uncle, and even many friends, to prepare my presentation.

Ali's story was supported by many other participants in the focus group interviews. Many presented illustrations of how they had been asked in school to present 'their culture', 'their food', 'their countries', 'their language', 'why they had chosen to migrate to Sweden'.

Focus group participants thus discussed many ways by which they have been culturally otherised through what Goldberg (1993) calls 'colonial discourses'. Forcing youths with immigrant backgrounds into cultural categories that essentially are different from what is labelled and imagined as 'Swedish culture' is part and parcel of the overall

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746424000307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

process of cultural otherisation and racialisation (de Los Reyes and Kamali, 2005; Kamali, 2008). As 'Montazer', one of the participants from the in-depth interviews, said:

> It is really about how you look like, your skin colour, hair colour, and also how you speak. Many times, both teachers and Swedish classmates named 'migrant language' and 'migrant accent' as something which could automatically lead to, you know, criminality, conflict. When you ask them to explain how this is possible, they used to say that it has nothing to do with your background.

This narrative from 'Montazer' points to the way immigrants become subjected to social constructs imposed upon biological patterns by the human imagination and through human discourse (Schmidt, 2002).

Symbolic violence and resistance

As mentioned earlier, symbolic violence is about arbitrary use of institutionalised power and symbolic capital to reproduce the status quo and, through a system of reward and punishment, force people to accept and comply with established socioeconomic, political, and cultural power structures and institutions in society (Bourdieu, 1986; Kamali, 2022). The participants in this study provided many illustrations about the positive consequences, in some cases, of their compliance to their symbolic otherisations and racialisations, and the negative consequences when they did not comply with such actions and processes.

The following illustration provided by 'Mona', one of the participants in the focus groups, shows how one could be positively sanctioned when complying with otherisation and racialisation actions:

> I felt that I had to accept their prejudices; it was easier. In the past, I tried to protest against what they thought about me or others like me, you know, immigrants, Muslims, etc., but it just made things worse. I was among the few who had a migrant background in my school, and you could not be so demanding and deviant. Even if you knew that they say a lot of shit about migrants, our cultures, clothes, languages, foods, you had to 'play along' not to be considered 'a pain in the ass'. I even laughed at their racist jokes, and I am ashamed to say that I have even told some racist jokes myself when I followed them to cinema or clubs. It was easier for me, and I know that many of you think 'What the hell?' but this is the truth.

Mona's history indicates the circle of Swedishness, which allows a person with an immigrant background to be part of majority society only if they totally accept the 'rules of game', which includes even performing discursive racialisation of the 'others'. As Spivak (1999) argues, 'the masters' hear their own language and when subalterns speak, they are not heard. This forces Mona here to try to adjust herself to the language of 'the masters'.

Some other participants in the focus groups and in the in-depth interviews supported Mona's story in suggesting that such engagement was the only way to be accepted in homogenous groups of pupils with Swedish backgrounds. As mentioned, one of the aims of exercising symbolic violence is to generate compliance (Kamali, 2022).

Others talked about the consequences of not complying with established otherisation and racialisation in schools. The following stories are illustrations of negative

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746424000307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

consequences imposed on them by those in power and in possession of cultural capital. 'Arash', who was born in Iran but migrated to Sweden with his parents, tells a story concerning his high school studies:

> In one of the lectures in history, the teacher started to make jokes about 'mullorna' [conservative religious leaders] in Iran and said something like, 'All people deserve those governments they have' and made fun of Iranians – of course, not directly. I protested and said, like, 'This is not true; there are many Iranians who are fighting the Islamic regime', and that the way he presented Iran and Iranians was not correct. He became, like, uncomfortable and started becoming, like, aggressive and told me that I had to read and educate myself more about Sweden and other developed countries in order to be aware of how horrible Iran and its regime was. I tried to create some compromise and say to him that, like, I know that the regime is brutal but repeated that the people do not want the regime. But it was like he closed his ears and did not want to hear anymore from me. This created hell for me in his classes and in the examination of the course. He has even talked to other teachers, who changed their attitudes towards me. I felt it difficult to say what I knew and that I should just accept what that teacher said.

Many other participants had the same experience as 'Arash' in their resistance to symbolic violence. The legitimised agents of educational institutions have the means of power to punish resistance to the exercise of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1986, 2001; Kamali, 2015, 2022). 'Leyla', who was born in Sweden of Palestinian parents, tells the following story:

> When Israel attacked Gaza with fighter jets and killed many people, we had a discussion in our course 'Social Knowledge'. The teacher supported Israel and kept saying that Palestinians attacked first, and Israel just had to protect itself and its citizens. I, who have family members in Palestine, and knew that some are killed or injured, tried to nicely provide Palestinians' perspective as an occupied people and talk about the violence that Israelis subjected them to. She became more and more angry and accused me of having antisemitic attitudes . . . and my parents were called by the school to an 'emergency meeting' and my parents were told by the school that their daughter was antisemite. They even wanted to find out if my parents were antisemite too.

Accusing pupils with Muslim backgrounds of being antisemitic has been articulated by participants as being a way for teachers and some pupils with Swedish backgrounds to otherise and even to criminalise them. Some of participants said that they did not receive a fair grade because of their Muslim background. This punishment is a clear illustration of the mechanisms of symbolic violence and is also understood by the pupils as a punishment for being Muslim. One participant who wears a scarf, 'Asmar', describes it as follows:

> Everybody knows that I am not a weak pupil [some other participants interrupt and say 'You are the best in the class']; okay, I cannot pronounce some Swedish words as perfectly as them, but I am talking about my written exams. I do not receive the grade that I deserve and when I compare my grade with some other pupils with Swedish backgrounds, I see that it is not fair; they get better grades because the teacher does not like me, or my scarf, or my religion. This is the only reason I can find to not get better grades.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746424000307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This is an illustration of Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence (1989, 1991, 2001), by which a pupil is disciplined into the existing power structure of dominance and its related discourses. Some other participants explained that an increasing support for the racist party SD has made discrimination of them more overt. Some of the participants believe that their teachers and some of the school staff vote for SD and have racist attitudes.

Many examples were presented by the participants about the ways they have been stigmatised and racialised with reference to their accents and use of Swedish language. Making jokes about the ways immigrants speak or their 'inability' to say some Swedish words are among such stories. As one of the participants in the focus groups, 'Hossein', says, 'They even say that "When immigrants talk, I can tell you which country they come from because different immigrant groups like Arabs, Turks, Africans, Latinos, etcetera talk Swedish in different, funny ways"'. Mockingly mimicking the accents of immigrant pupils who mispronounce Swedish words is occurring alongside other processes of discursive racialisation that, as (Schmidt, 2002) argues, includes social constructs being imposed upon biological patterns by the human imagination and through human discourse.

A few participants had chosen to change their schools due to acts of symbolic violence against them. A young man, 'Morad', who was born in Sweden of Moroccan parents, shared his experiences about the processes through which he was made 'a deviant' and forced into 'social isolation'. He says:

> I moved from, [City A] to . . . [City B]. You know, I am born here and had been through a lot of things, you know, racism and so on, and was aware of the way school, like many other places, saw me as a foreigner who really does not belong here. But the first high school in . . . [City B] was worse than anything else. At the beginning, I decided not to protest against the things they said about migrants. But it got worse and one day I thought 'Enough is enough' and told the teacher that he did not know anything about migrants, those who have been forced to leave their homes and everything. The teacher got angry and claimed that he had, like, met many migrants and has members of his family as migrants in the US, etc. Even pupils were racist and put the blame for criminality on migrants, saying that it is part of their culture and so on . . . . I felt that no one wanted to have me as a friend, you know; I decided to change my school.

Some youths make the connection to a growing political racism, which influences public discourses and reinforces the racialisation of immigrants. The increasing electoral success of SD has influenced other political parties, who have been swayed towards adopting its racist discourses and policies (Kamali, 2008). As 'Mihan' framed it:

> Since the increasing votes for SD, it has become even worse. Many Swedes use the same language as SD and other racist parties and politicians. Things which were almost a taboo to say publicly are now 'everyday food' (*vardagsmat*). Even my parents are feeling increasing racism and tell that they hear racist comments and attacks that they rarely heard earlier. You know things like, 'There are too many migrants here', 'They commit crimes and make society insecure', 'They come here with many children', 'They cannot adjust to Swedish society'.

Youths with immigrant backgrounds who participated in this study tell stories about their resistance to the widespread symbolic violence in Swedish society. However, these youths are not passively accepting of this exercise of symbolic violence and resist it in

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746424000307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

different ways. Such defiance can, of course, be punished, but the majority of these youths, nevertheless, continue to show a strong will of resistance.

Final remarks

Neoliberalisation of Swedish society and its social policy, as well as the electoral success of the racist party SD and the mainstream parties' collaboration with SD, have led to increasing marginalisation of people with immigrant backgrounds, school segregation and related social problems.

The accounts shared by youths in this study indicate the ways young people with immigrant backgrounds are discursively racialised and, through the mechanisms of symbolic violence, otherised as a group who do not belong to Swedish society. This includes the articulation of negative opinions, attitudes, and ideologies as part of the established 'colonial discourses' (Goldberg, 1993). Racialisation of marginalised groups, who can be heard as linguistically 'deviant' when using the majority society's language(s), includes even relating immigrant pupils' 'biological attributes' to the way they use language (Schmidt, 2002).

The study suggests that even those participants who are born in Sweden and speak Swedish perfectly and without a 'foreign' accent are not accepted as 'adequately' Swedish. Their immigrant backgrounds, skin colour, and other potentially 'otherising' attributes play a central role in the exclusion of youths from the circle of Swedishness. In their everyday institutional environments, the youths are forcedly exposed to symbolic violence, in the form of racialising and othering language and practices. The lasting colonial discourses are part of not only individual but an institutionalised racialisation and otherisation of youths with immigrant backgrounds. In addition, the electoral success of SD has reinforced the colonial and racist discourses in Sweden. Such discourses have been normalised and adopted even by mainstream parties (Kamali, 2008; Östman, 2019). Public discourses have moved to the right wing of the Swedish political spectrum allowing many media outlets and people in positions of power to use racist discourses in the public sphere without moral constraints.

The study also shows that it is not enough for racialised youths to master the Swedish language to be accepted into the circle of Swedishness. The institutionalised mechanisms of the politics of language make language the exclusive property of white Swedes and a means of marking the borders of belonging to the category of 'Us' rather than 'Them'. Youths with immigrant backgrounds are not, thus, provided the right to use the Swedish language as a means for the symbolic construction of their realities. They are, instead, silenced by 'the masters', who like to hear their own voices and exercise symbolic violence to preserve and reproduce their privileges.

Acknowledgements

Much appreciation is owed to the youths in this study, for their participation and for their generosity in sharing their experiences of and reflections concerning marginalisation, language, and belonging.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746424000307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

References

Adler, K., Salanterä, S. and Zumstein-Shaha, M. (2019) 'Focus group interviews in child, youth, and parent research: an integrative literature review', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 18, 1–15.

Austin, J. L. (1962) *How to Do Things with Words*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bagnoli, A. and Clark, A. (2010) 'Focus groups with young people: a participatory approach to research planning', *Journal of Youth Studies*, 13, 101–109.

Bonilla-Silva, E. (2014) *Racism without Racists: Color-blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in America*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

Bourdieu, P. (1977) 'Questions de politique', *Actes de la Recherche en Sciences Sociales*, 16, 55–89.

Bourdieu, P. (1986) 'The forms of capital', in J. Richardson (ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, Westport, CT: Greenwood, 241–258.

Bourdieu, P. (1989) 'Social space and symbolic power', *Sociological Theory*, 7, 14–25.

Bourdieu, P. (1991) *Language and Symbolic Power*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (2001) *Masculine Domination*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (2021) *Microcosmes: Théorie des Champs*, Paris: Raisons d'agir.

Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J. C. (1990) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, London: Sage.

Brown, B. (2018) *Braving the Wilderness: The Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone*, London: Vermillion.

Clarke, A. (1999) 'Focus group interviews in health-care research', *Professional Nursing*, 14, 395–397.

Dahlstedt, M. and Fejes, A. (eds.) (2019) *Neoliberalism and Market Forces in Education: Lessons from Sweden*, London: Routledge.

Delanty, G., Wodak, R. and Jones, P. (2008) *Identity, Belonging and Migration*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

De los Reyes, P. (2006) *Arbetslivets (o)synliga murar*, Stockholm: Fritzes.

De los Reyes, P. and Kamali, M. (2005) *Bortom Vi och Dom: Teoretiska Reflektioner om Makt, Integration och Strukturell Diskriminering*, Stockholm: Fritzes.

De los Reyes, P. and Hörnqvist, M. (2017) *Bortom Kravallerna*, Stockholm: Stockholmia förlag.

Derrida, J. (1996) *Monolingualism of the Other, or The Prosthesis of Origin*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Dovemark, M. (2013) 'How private "everyday racism" and public "racism denial" contribute to unequal and discriminatory educational experiences', *Ethnography and Education*, 8, 1, 16–30.

Downe-Wamboldt, B. (1992) 'Content analysis: method, applications and issues', *Health Care for Women International*, 13, 3, 313–321.

Durkheim, M. (1951) *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, New York: The Free Press.

Eliassi, B. (2010) *A Stranger in my Homeland. The Politics of Belonging among Young People with Kurdish Backgrounds in Sweden*. (Doctoral Thesis). Sundsvall: Mid Sweden University.

Fanon, F. (1986) *Black Skin: White Masks*, Broadway: Grove Press.

Foucault, M. (2008) *Samhället måste försvaras: föreläsningar vid* Collège de France, 1975–76, Stockholm: Tankekraft Förlag.

Franzosi, R. (1989) 'From words to numbers: a generalized and linguistics based coding procedure for collecting textual data', Sociological Methodology, 19, 263–298.

Garrett, P. M. (2007) 'Making social work more Bourdieusian: why the social professions should critically engage with the work of Pierre Bourdieu', *European Journal of Social Work*, 10, 2, 225–243.

Goldberg, D. T. (1993) *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*, Cambridge: Blackwell.

Graneheim, U. H. and Lundman, B. (2004) 'Qualitative content analysis in nursing research: concepts, procedures, and measures to achieve trustworthiness', *Nurse Education Today*, 24, 2, 105–112.

Ibrahim, A. (2011) 'Will they ever speak with authority? Race, post-coloniality and the symbolic violence of language', *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 43, 6, 619–635.

Jönsson, J. H. (2015) 'The contested field of social work in a retreating welfare state: the case of Sweden', *Critical and Radical Social Work*, 6, 3, 357–374.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746424000307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Jönsson, J. H. (2019) 'Servants of a 'sinking Titanic' or actors of change?: contested identities of social workers in Sweden', *European Journal of Social Work*, 22, 2, 212–224.

Justitiedepartementet (2004) *Utredningen om Makt, Integration och Strukturell Diskriminering*. Stockholm: Fritzes.

Kamali, M. (2005) *Sverige Inifrån: Röster om Etnisk Diskriminering*, Stockholm: Fritzes.

Kamali, M. (2008) *Racial Discrimination: Institutional Patterns and Politics*, London: Routledge.

Kamali, M. (2015) *War, Violence and Social Justice: Theories for Social Work*, Farnham: Ashgate.

Kamali, M. (2022) *Neoliberal Securitisation and Symbolic Violence: Silencing Political, Academic and Societal Resistance*, Cham: Palgrave MacMillan.

Kamali, M. and Jönsson, J. H. (eds.), (2018) *Neoliberalism, Nordic Welfare States and Social Work: Current and Future Challenges*, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.

Kerr, R. and Śliwa, M. (2020) 'When the political becomes (painfully) personal: org-studying the consequences of Brexit', *Organization*, 27, 3, 494–505.

Kondracki, N. L., Wellman, N. S. and Amundson, D. R. (2002) 'Content analysis: review of methods and their applications in nutrition education', *Journal of Nutrition, Education and Behavior*, 34, 4, 224–230.

Krueger, R. A. and Casey, M. A. (2000) *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research*, Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Lundström, M. (2021) 'Barns perspektiv på svensk vardagsrasism', *Sociologisk Forskning*, 58, 4, 433–454.

Mulinari, D. and Neergaard, A. (2010) 'The "others" in Sweden: neoliberal policies and the politics of "race" in education', *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies*, 8, 2, 131–163.

Noble, C. and Ottmann, G. (eds.) (2020) *The Challenge of Right-wing Nationalist Populism for Social Work: A Human Rights Approach*, London: Routledge.

Oxfam (2022) The Commitment to Reducing Inequality Index 2022, https://oxfam.se/en/nyheter/globalt-index-visar-sverige-samst-i-norden-pa-att-bekampa-ojamlikhet/ [accessed 25.03.2024].

Östman, C. (2019) *Unaccompanied Refugee Minors and Political Responses in Sweden: Challenges for Social Work* (Doctoral thesis), Sundsvall: Mid Sweden University.

Parahoo, K. (2007) 'Focus groups are enjoying increased in popularity as a research method', *Nursing Research*, 14, 4–6.

Sawyer, L. and Kamali, M. (2006) *Utbildningens Dilemma: Demokratiska ideal och andrafierande praxis*, Stockholm: Fritzes.

Schierup, C-U. (2003) 'What creed in Europe? Social exclusion, citizenship, and a changing EU Policy Agenda', in G. Brochmann (ed.), *Multicultural Challenge (Comparative Social Research, Vol. 22)*, Leeds: Esmerald Group Publishing Limited, 205–244.

Schmidt, R. (2002) 'Racialisation and language policy: the case of the U.S.A', *Multilingua*, 21, 2–3, 141–161.

Seet, A. Z. (2019) 'Serving the White nation: bringing internalised racism within sociological understanding', *Journal of Sociology*, 57, 2, 213–230.

Sernhede, O. (2022) 'Pantrarna och Ortenrörelsen: Marginaliserad ungdom, postkolonial kritik och politisk mobilisering', *Nordisk Tidsskrift for Ungdomsforskning*, 3, 1, 96–108.

Skowronski, E. (2013) *Skola med Fördröjning: Nyanlända Elevers Sociala Spelrum i "En Skola för Alla"*, Lund: Lunds University, Centrum för Teologi och Religionsvetenskap.

Spivak, G. (1999) *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Nadal, K. L. and Torino, G. C. (2008) 'Racial microagressions and the power to define reality', *American Psychologist*, 63, 4, 277–279.

Wallerstein, I. (1974) *The Modern World-System: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century*, New York: Academic Press.

Weber, M. (1968) *Economy and Society*, Berkley: University of California Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746424000307 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Wiltgren, L. (2023) '"So incredibly equal": how polite exclusion becomes invisible in the classroom', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 44, 3, 435–451.

Woolard, K. A. (2020) 'Language ideology' in Stanlaw, J. (ed.), *The International Encyclopedia of Linguistic Anthropology*, Wiley, 1–21, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/9781118786093.iela0217 [accessed 12.02.2024].

Wright, N. (2022) '(Re)production of symbolic boundaries between native and non-native teachers in the TESOL profession', *Asian-Pacific Journal of Second and Foreign Language Education*, 7, 1, 1–13.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1474746424000307 Published online by Cambridge University Press