

Racialized subjects in a colour blind school

Laila Colding Lagermann*

Aarhus University

In this paper I examine processes of racialization in a school in Copenhagen, Denmark. On the basis of the data produced in 2009, which is part of a larger study, I investigate themes of race as a difference-making and constituting category for subjective (human) becoming and racialization as contingent and negotiated processes (Butler, 1997). As part of the analyses I will discuss how difference and differentiation with regard to race and racialization is related to a denial of particularity as much as it can be a denial of universality (Hage, 2010), and further, how racialization intersects with marginalization.

Introduction

Since the introduction of the first OECD PISA survey results in 2000, Denmark has had an increased focus on students of non-Western descent, most often referred to as ethnic minority¹ students. This has to do with the PISA results showing how ethnic minority students in Denmark are struggling with issues concerning poor reading skills compared to their Danish peers, as well as the specific Danish phenomenon (compared to other OECD countries) that descendants of immigrants in Denmark perform almost at the same level as non-Danish speaking immigrants or worse (Holmen, 2006).

Currently in Denmark, approximately 8.1 per cent of the total population of some 5.6 million people are immigrants, and approximately 2.6 per cent are descendants of immigrants. Approximately 65 per cent of these immigrants and descendants come from non-Western countries² (Denmark's Statistics, 2012). Students with non-Western backgrounds are regularly the subject of extensive

* Corresponding author: LAC@dpu.dk

debate in Denmark, and they will be the main focus of this paper. Throughout the paper such students will be referred to as ‘Danish students with ethnic minority backgrounds’.

In the Danish context of ethnicity research, there is and has been a tradition of focusing on ethnicity rather than race (Myong, 2011). This tendency is in many ways understandable, viewed in the light of the biological concept of race and its consequences for European post-World War II history and politics (Gullestad, 2004). However, in this paper I pursue themes of race, not as biology, but as a difference-making and constituting category for subjective (human) becoming, and racialization as contingent and negotiated processes (Butler, 1997; Myong, 2011).

Research design

The empirical analyses that inform this paper are based on data produced during autumn 2009 at a school in Copenhagen, Denmark, where I spent approximately four weeks. The data are part of a larger project, running from 2009 to 2014, that investigates processes of marginalization and of transcending marginalization among ethnic minority students in Denmark and Sweden. Learning from marginal positions may include both *marginalizing learning* (Mørck, 2011), which often involves being caught up in contradictions, dilemmas, and/or double binds, as well as *expansive learning*, that is, collective struggles with these contradictions, dilemmas and double binds and *partly transcending them* (Mørck, 2011). Partly transcending marginalization involves a complex ‘zigzag movement’ made up of many small steps and complex changes that take place in and across various contexts and communities in which the person takes part. Hence, ‘partly’ becomes important, because there is rarely one precise and definitive way to transcend marginalization (Mørck, 2006).

The study combines anthropological and ethnographical inspired fieldwork (see for example Lave and Kvale, 1995) and is primarily based on the narratives and perspectives of 11 ninth grade students, aged 14 to 16, primarily³ with ethnic minority backgrounds. Initial interviews were conducted in 2009, and follow-up interviews and/or informal conversations with seven selected students were conducted during 2012. The qualitative methods used to collect the 2009 data that constitute the empirical basis of this paper include:

- planned participant observations, where predetermined observation guidelines helped me establish – in particular – differences and similarities in student (and teacher) positions and modes of participation (differentiating between more or less active/relatively passive)

- a less specific participation in the field on my part during the three to four weeks spent at each of the two schools, referred to elsewhere as ‘deep hanging out’ (see Lagermann, 2014: forthcoming)
- semi-structured interviews (with small groups and individuals) with eleven students, five teachers, a youth education counsellor (in Danish, ‘UU-vejleder’), and a teaching assistant
- informal conversations with students, parents, teachers, counsellors, headmasters, and others related to the field; and a review of various documents (from the school, the local press etc.).

Drawing on the data produced in the school in Denmark, the analyses that inform this paper include the narratives and perspectives of two teachers, Josef and Julie, together with my observations of Julie in the class, and the perspectives of a student, Aisha. The data produced in the school in Sweden are sometimes used to support claims being made and with regard to the overall study, of which the analyses of this paper, based on the data produced in Denmark, are parts.

A decentred analytical approach

Both the theoretical and the methodological approach taken in this study are based on a decentred analytical approach, which is based on the assumption that people’s lives and actions are related to opportunities and limitations manifested in and across contexts. In more concrete terms, a decentred analytical approach refers to analyses addressing the subject as participating in and across various social contexts and communities, where opportunities and limitations related to participation and action in these contexts and communities – e.g. with regard to the school – are also objects of analysis (Dreier, 2008). Hence, a decentred analytical approach breaks with dominant individualizing discourses (Osterkamp, 2000). According to Osterkamp, the individualistic view has a hidden function in the reproduction of unequal societal power structures, in the sense that we exclude other people from being our responsibility. Moreover, this exclusion is justified on the basis of presumed features of the marginalized individuals themselves, thereby holding them accountable for the way they are treated. This kind of individualistic discourse involves a tendency to make use of cultural, essentialized differential explanation models (Staunæs, 2004) as an overarching framework for explaining why some are excluded from ‘the norm’.

As part of this paper I draw in theories and concepts of race, racism, and racialization, which are briefly presented in the following sections, followed by the narratives and perspectives of Josef, Julie, and Aisha.

Race, racism, and racialization

I always get the comment from other people: ‘You’re not Danish, so how can you call yourself Danish?’ ...

I think I’m just as Danish as any other Danish girl, or any other Dane, but ... apparently I’m not ... in some people’s eyes ...

I think I am Danish.

(Aisha, interview, Denmark, 2009)

As is briefly glimpsed in Aisha’s narratives, the interview material contains subjectivating social categories, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and ‘Muslimness’. Critical race theorists often focus on how racism works with, against, and through additional axes of differentiation, including class, gender, sexuality, and disability and this concern with ‘intersectionality’ is especially strong within Critical Race Feminism (see for example Creenshaw, 1995 and Youdell, 2006). An interesting pattern running through the student interviews in this regard is that processes of racialization intersect with marginalization; themes concerning processes of racialization are brought up by students who are in many ways struggling with regard to school, schooling, and/or teachers – students who struggle with marginalization. Hence, it seems that students who conform to behavioural norms, the unmarked, seemingly have no reason or need to bring up themes of racialization. Furthermore, it appears that the teachers are following the same pattern; themes of racialization are brought up by teachers when explaining to me some of the ‘struggles’ that some students are dealing with, thereby intersecting with marginalization. This altogether emphasizes the point that even when focusing particularly on one social category (such as race) that category cannot be understood in isolation (Phoenix, 2006). I shall return to this point in the conclusion.

In the meantime, I use the term *racialization* as a concept for social practices by which people are being placed and place themselves and others in relation to discursively constituted racialized categories (Myong, 2011). This emphasizes important epistemological and ontological terms for the analyses of this paper:

... ‘racial’ phenomena (especially physical markers such as skin tone) are assigned different meanings in particular historical and social contexts. Far from being a fixed and natural system of genetic difference, ‘race’ is a system of socially constructed categories that are constantly recreated and modified through human interaction.

(Gillborn, 2008: 3)

Although the concept of race in the UK and USA has very often been presented as a ‘racial dualism’ (which partly reflects these nations’ histories), the black/white

racial binary thinking is less common in the wake of 9/11, and the subsequent increase in anti-Muslim racism that has characterized international political responses (Gillborn, 2008). Gullestad (2004) implies, with reference to sociologists, philosophers, and political scientists of the 1980s and 1990s, that although the ideologies of the biological sense of the concept of race have been rejected since the end of World War II, the term 'culture' has today replaced 'race' in a Nordic context, particularly in the rhetoric of the political Right. This implies that race as a concept for fundamental difference-making is understood as reshaped by using seemingly neutral and acceptable discourses with regard to cultural and ethnic differences. In using ethnicity and culture in this way, however, there is an incorporated idea that these differences are just as inherent and mutually insurmountable as are the biological differences attached to the biological concept of race (Rattansi, 2007). Hence, ethnicity and culture are part of the concept of racialization used in this paper and, in the analyses to come, I draw in Hage (2010) and his definition of racism as racialized interpellations.

Racism as racialized interpellations⁴

With a starting point in Althusser's (1972) concept of interpellation⁵, which was originally linked to ideological apparatuses of the state (for example the school, the church, the government, the family), Hage (2010: 121) defines racism as 'racial processes of interpellation', referring to three forms of processes of constructing racialized subjects. The first, *non-interpellation*, is 'a mode of racism linked with the experience of invisibility, where the racialized feels ignored and non-existent' (Hage, 2010: 121). A more common mode of interpellation associated with racism is *negative interpellation*, which constitutes the second mode in Hage's differentiation of racialized interpellations: here, the racialized subject is most definitely noticed and made visible. This mode of interpellation hails the racialized subject with negative attributes by which the racialized subject has to fight for valorization. The third form of racialization unfolds in two acts, and is referred to as *mis-interpellation*: the racialized person is first interpellated as belonging to a collectivity 'like everybody else'. The racialized subject is hailed by the cultural group or the nation, or in this case the school system, which claims to be addressing 'everyone', only to brutally remind them shortly after they respond to the interpellation, that they are *not* part of the 'everybody' by treating them differently to everybody else (Hage, 2010).

Drawing on the Fanonian racial drama (Fanon, 2008), Hage (2010) emphasizes this third form of racialized interpellation as particularly traumatizing, a 'traumatic betrayal', since it initially lures the subject into believing that they belong to a

universality, like everybody else, only to reject them as soon as they answer the call. At the core of Fanon's experience/expression of what constitutes racism is this rejection of universality constituted by 'fixing' the racialized subject in a negative (essentialistic) particularity. However, Hage (2010: 117) adds, 'racists can marginalize people by emphasizing their difference just as much as ignoring their difference', which has to do with the fact that experiences of racism are perceived as a denial of particularity, just as often as they are perceived as a denial of universality. Further, more often than not, the racialized person fluctuates between a desire for (positive) particularity and a desire for universality. This creates a double bind, which I shall return to in the analysis of Aisha's narratives later in the paper. In the following section, I look into what I see as mis-interpellations with regard to certain ethnic minority students in a Danish public *folkeskole*.

One school for all – or?

In 1993 the undivided comprehensive school was implemented in Denmark (EVA, 2011). The idea of the comprehensive school is 'one school for all', meaning that the Danish public *folkeskole* is meant for all children, regardless of their social, economic, religious, racial, or ethnic background. The idea of an education based on equality is a concept that Denmark shares with other Nordic countries, for example Finland (Antikainen, 2006). Since the implementation, schools are no longer allowed to group students permanently according to ability. Rather, the implementation was made to ensure that all students meet suitable challenges within the frames of class-based schooling, and differentiated teaching was made the prevalent pedagogical principle for all schooling in the Danish public *folkeskole*. Hence, all teachers in all subjects are now obligated to arrange a schooling that corresponds to the individual student's needs and potential (EVA, 2011). However, my observations and interviews show that this is far from always the case and, as the two analytical examples with Josef and Julie show, both racial essentialization and particularity (mis-interpellation) can explain why.

'A totally regular, white school'

It's a totally regular state school, ... you go by the old traditions, right, and old ways of teaching ... I don't know if you've heard of 'white schools' and 'black schools'? ... It's a totally regular white school ... It has to do with that there's not so much bilingual pedagogy here ... it's sort of an old school, with old traditions, ... if you are teaching a theme about Yemen, ... and if there are some students from Yemen in the class, then you could invite some parents ... That could easily be included in the schooling ... At any rate, involve the bilingual kids' cultural backgrounds in the schooling, so that they

can see the point in learning; learning shouldn't be mechanical, only academic – but it must also make sense, you know ...

(Josef, interview, Denmark, 2009)

The teacher Josef, who is of Moroccan descent, is one of the teachers who emphasize the importance of meaningful elements regarding the schooling that takes place in this specific school, since many of the students according to him do not see the meaning in going to school and are struggling with marginalization – both in and outside school. According to Josef this lack of a meaningful element is very much related to a lack of integration of the students' cultural backgrounds into the schooling. Josef talks about how this particular school is 'going by the old traditions', and from Josef's perspective, these traditions have a certain colour: 'white', not black⁶. Moreover, from Josef's perspective there are certain meanings attributed to the colour white, meanings that are explained by the absence of black, and thereby with what the colour white is *not*. According to Josef, the colour white neglects to include black 'milieu'. White excludes a pedagogy that considers the colour black, for example a 'bilingual pedagogy'. And the definition of white encompasses a schooling that neglects to include 'bilingual children's cultural backgrounds', thereby non-interpellating 'black' students.

Josef is talking about presence and absence. He is defining 'white' presence by 'black' absence. The only thing about white presence that is not defined by black absence is how this school is 'going by the old (white) traditions', which seem to exclude the colour black, according to Josef. But here he stops defining white by what it is, and switches to explain white by what it is not.

The fact that Josef explains white with the absence of black emphasizes how dominating discourses, in this case an overall dominating discourse with regard to inclusion of ethnic minority children into the Danish public *folkeskole*, are rarely defined when pointing out those who fall outside of the norm, and what is named and what goes unnamed can be seen as an effect of power (Popkewitz and Lindblad, 2000):

In our society dominant discourse tries never to speak its own name. Its authority is based on absence. The absence is not just that of the various groups classified as 'other', although members of these groups are routinely denied power. It is also the lack of any overt acknowledgment of the specificity of the dominant culture, which is simply assumed to be the all-encompassing norm.

(Ferguson, 1990: 11)

So when Josef identifies categories of children, in this case the 'bilingual kids' (ethnic minority students), he does not only make difference visible, he also inadvertently

reproduces power imbalances and structural inequity by reifying unnamed (white) attributes that carry social, political, and cultural currency (Graham and Slee 2008: 287). Josef unintentionally reproduces a dominant white supremacy by keeping it unnamed. However, he does so in a highly critical way, by actually offering us a (critical) understanding and a definition of what it at any rate is not, thereby bringing us a bit closer to what it is, and not least, how changes can be made possible. This is what Sleeter (1993: 169) points out by stating that teachers ‘... of colour are much more likely to bring life experiences and viewpoints that critique white supremacy than are white teachers’.

Josef’s perspectives on how to bring in the ‘cultures’ and ‘backgrounds’ of the students may seem relevant in order to generate what Josef refers to as schooling that ‘makes sense’ to the students. However, drawing on Hage (2010) and his concept of essentialized racial particularity, and with reference to Gullestad’s (2004) point discussed earlier about how ‘race’ has been replaced with ‘culture’, this ‘fixing’ of a cultural particularity among certain racialized or culturalized students, can reflect substantialized and essentialized connotations, leading us to believe that culture and ethnicity is something fixed and static. According to Sleeter (2012) this means assuming a fairly fixed and homogeneous conception of the culture of an ethnic or racial group, and further assuming that students who belong to that group can identify with and relate to that conception of who they are. May and Sleeter (2010: 4) state that this leads to the (mis)understanding, that ‘[c]ulture, often equated or elided with ethnicity, is seen as a characteristic of individuals, and as a set of stable practices that can be described and taught’, when in fact different studies have shown otherwise (see, for example, Ginwright, 2004). In general, this point may reflect why hardly any (only one) of the student participants in this study bring in their cultural background as something that would ‘make sense’ to them to bring into schooling, as suggested by Josef. In particular, my forthcoming analyses of Aisha’s interview, in which I use Hage’s (2010) essentialized racial particularity, will demonstrate this point.

White teachers and the reproduction of ‘old (white) traditions’

The talk of a ‘white’ school is, from Josef’s perspective, nothing unusual, which is underpinned by his use of the adjective ‘regular’ – an adjective with a meaning that gains impact with the emphasis of the word ‘totally’ – ‘a *totally* regular white school’. Hereby the colour white is somehow legitimized, despite the exclusion of the colour black. Rather than being an expression of Josef’s own position, I see this as an expression of the reproduction of an overall political discourse, which has

influenced the integration debate in Denmark since 2001 regarding what should constitute the Danish public *folkeskole*. In that regard, it is interesting that Josef refers to this particular school as a ‘white school’, given that about 90 per cent of the students in this school have ethnic minority backgrounds. The term ‘white’ schools is most often used – by professionals, teachers, pedagogues, and social workers within the environment – to refer to schools with a majority of ‘white’ students, while ‘black’ schools refer to schools with a majority of ‘black’ or ethnic minority students (Kofoed, *et al.*, 2010). Hence, the whiteness in this ‘white school’ brought up by Josef has got very little to do with the diversity among the children, and much more to do with the white homogeneity among the teachers – including their (‘white’) approach to curriculum and pedagogy that forms the everyday practice of the school structure by going ‘by the old [“white”] traditions’ (Josef, interview, Denmark, 2009).

The white homogeneity among the staff is problematized by Josef on several occasions throughout the interview with regard to how the students, according to him, are not able to identify with any of the teachers in the school which, in effect, has an impact on how the (marginalized) students come to feel that they are not a part of the school. In this regard, Josef stresses the importance of having real educated class teachers with ethnic minority backgrounds in the school with whom the students can identify. Josef has made this point clear to the board, which has stated that only a few bilingual teachers are applying for these positions – a claim which Josef finds difficult to believe. Hiring more teachers with ethnic minority backgrounds in order for the young people to have something and/or someone to relate to in their schooling is, according to Josef, an important factor with regard to the children’s sense making, and hence their avoiding or transcending marginalization. However, this is a standpoint that in many ways stands out, since most of Josef’s Danish (white) colleagues seem to tone down differences with regard to colour and/or race/culture.

Colour blindness and racial silence

What is taking place in the school is, according to Josef, traditional ‘white stuff’, and this differentiation between black and white schooling makes Josef’s narrative stand out. As opposed to the white teachers of this study, Josef seemed concerned with issues/differences concerning student colour regarding the schooling that takes place within the school – a claim that is supported by a similar pattern in the school in Sweden. Hence, it seems that white teachers, as opposed to ethnic minority teachers, tend to tone down the differences between ‘black’ and ‘white’

students, most of them claiming that to them there are no differences between white and ethnic minority students.

Anthropologists such as Hervik (2001) and Gullestad (2004) have pointed out that ideologies of equality are quite prevalent in the national self-understanding of the Nordic countries. Inherent to these ideologies of equality, equal rights, and the potential of inclusion is an idea of appearing as minimally diverging from the norm as possible, and of asymmetric power and inequality being hard to point out and/or articulate (Myong, 2011). The ideal of equality creates colour blindness (reflected in a European Nordic setting by authors like Myong (2011), Gullestad (2004), and Hervik (2001)), and racial silence, referring to the idea of race as an insignificant category in a tolerant (Danish) sociality, and allowing ethnic white people to imagine that being white, black, or brown has no importance for an individual's or a group's relative place in the socio-economic hierarchy (Gallagher, 2003). Similar points have been made elsewhere in Europe (e.g. Gillborn, 2008; Van Dijk, 1993) and in the USA (e.g. Leonardo, 2004; Frankenberg, 1993; Sleeter, 1993; Foster, 1990). According to Gullestad (2004) and Hervik (2001) the colour blindness has, in a historical sense, been created in order to avoid the term 'racism', which in a Nordic context is associated with Nazism, the segregationist policies in the southern states of the USA, and the apartheid regime in South Africa. This implies that when the majority of people are being accused of racism, it usually leads to vigorous defence.

According to Hervik (2001: 42; my translation), colour blindness can be defined as a: '... rejection of treating people differently on the basis of their religion or race', and the colour blindness and racial silence that appear among the (white) Danish teachers of this study can be seen as part of the reason why the school neglects to integrate what Josef refers to as ethnic minority culture/background.

The following case with the teacher Julie, who in many ways reproduces this colour blindness in her narratives, shows how parts of Julie's narratives stand out from this reproduction, and how it does so with connotations of an essentializing racial particularity, which has excluding and marginalizing effects on, in this case, Hakim.

Non- and mis-interpellations

Hakim is a Danish student of Lebanese descent. Hakim's participation in the schooling during the lessons in class 9.a is somewhat sporadic. During the English lessons, however, Hakim seems very eager to participate, even though he struggles with the individual tasks he is presented with. Yet Hakim is a student who Julie, the

English teacher, refers to as a ‘troublemaker’. According to Julie, he is constantly joking about everything, and refuses to take anything seriously. In my interview with Julie, who is also Hakim’s French teacher, I asked her about how she handles it when some of her students keep asking for her help, and during the conversation, I chose to exemplify this with my observations of Hakim during the English lessons. Julie responded very clearly:

Well, there’s not much to do, really, and especially not ... for *him*; I think it’s very much related to some maturity... He is very, very detached in the French lessons, but he has been permitted to always sit there, because there was a certain prestige in being there, and not be removed from the class. He is from Lebanon. So it has a certain prestige [to say]: ‘I’m in the French class!’ And so nobody asks him whether he masters anything or not. But he is NOT taking the final exam! He is not ...

(Julie, interview, Denmark, 2009)

Julie is one of the Danish (white) teachers mentioned earlier in the paper who generally tone down (colour) differences between the Danish (white) and ethnic minority students, and is in this way taking part in the (re)production of the colour blindness mentioned earlier. Julie states:

... the moment I walk into the classroom to teach, I actually don’t see ... different nationalities ... and it’s... it doesn’t matter where they come from ... and that ... I think, is the only dignified way to behave towards the students.

(Julie, interview, Denmark, 2009)

To Julie, there are no differences between (white) Danish and ethnic minority students, and yet she emphasizes Hakim’s Lebanese descent in her explanation as to why Hakim has been *permitted* to even be in the class during her French-teaching, leaving the impression of being somewhat biased. According to Sleeter (1993: 161), white teachers (in the USA) commonly insist on being colour blind, but as she clearly states: ‘People do not deny seeing what they actually do not see’. Rather, they profess to be colour blind when trying to suppress negative images they associate with people of colour (Sleeter, 1993). This suppression can be viewed in the light of the discussions of colour/race in a historical sense mentioned earlier, the dominant ideology of equal opportunity both in the idea of the comprehensive school and in society in general, and also the relationship between ethnic minority background and observable measures of success (e.g. PISA).

If we bear in mind Gullestad’s (2004) point about how ‘culture’ has replaced ‘race’, we see what is at play in Hakim’s case, based on statements like Julie’s, as non- and mis-interpellations. In that sense, the essentializing racial connotations in Julie’s narrative regarding Hakim come to have excluding and marginalizing

effects, in this case for Hakim, which together with the rest of my data make me question the practice of ‘one-school-for-all’.

As mentioned I pursue processes of racialization as contingent and negotiated processes. The following analysis, drawing on my interview with Aisha, shows how the refusal of this ‘fixing’ of a person in an essential racial particularity is a constant fight.

Mis-mis-interpellations due to a denial of particularity and/or universality

Aisha was a 16-year-old Danish Muslim girl of Somali descent. Aisha was one of the students from the school in Denmark, where race was a recurring theme in her narratives about life in and outside school.

Aisha explained to me during the interview how she was caught up in struggles regarding her everyday school life. In particular, she was struggling with dyslexia, and had been in a special class in the school from the fourth to the ninth grade. After having finished ninth grade in the special class, she decided to do a regular ninth grade, in which she had participated for four months when I interviewed her. Many of Aisha’s narratives exemplify how she was and had constantly been struggling with and had been denied the help that she is in fact entitled to by her teachers regarding her dyslexia, for example extra time for preparation of a given task assigned by the teacher. Also, she was struggling with becoming a (legitimate) part of the class, as the other girls (all with Middle Eastern backgrounds) seemed to be giving her a hard time. In explaining what she felt that was about, Aisha described a big quarrel with some girls in her class. Aisha described how she and another girl were having a serious discussion about whether or not the use of the word ‘black’ was racist – Aisha claiming that it was, the other girl that it was not. Aisha explained how she told the other girl that naming a person by the colour of their skin is in fact racist behaviour (for example ‘there goes a black man’), and how the other girl kept refusing, explaining to Aisha that their teacher had told the class this a few days earlier, and that Aisha should talk to him, and let him explain to her why it is in fact *not* an act of racism. Aisha explained to me how this made her lose her temper and yell at the other girl:

You know what, *I’m* black! ... *I know* when it hurts and when it doesn’t hurt! ... I know it hurts, because I myself am black! ... I know that when people oppress you due to the colour of your skin, or the way you dress, or your faith, or your stance, it hurts!

Aisha continued:

I don't want to be called black all the time, because I'm dark. I'm not black, I'm brown, actually ... I can't do anything just because my pigment is black, really ... I can't help it, this is how God made me, and I'm content with it, but I don't want others to judge me in that way ...

(Aisha, interview, Denmark, 2009)

I see Aisha's wavering with regard to the colour of her skin, as an expression of the vacillation described by Hage (2010: 117), drawing on Spinoza, which describes the 'striving' for contradictory things, a kind of double bind. In the first passage I see Aisha fighting for a (racial) particularity that she feels she is being denied: 'I'm black', and: 'I know it hurts, because I myself am black!' – only to fight in the second passage for the universality which she feels she is denied: 'I don't want to be called black all the time'. Aisha's last passage I see as an attempt to avoid the essential understanding and connotations of the particularity of black commonly used within society and the school, which her experiences, as she explained, show over and over; she knows that she is counted in that category, but she does not want to be. As noted earlier, both the denial of particularity and of universality can be seen as ways to racially mis-interpellate, and be mis-interpellated, which many of Aisha's narratives reflect.

Aisha also brought up stories of what I term *mis-mis-interpellation*, referring to when the person mis-interpellated refuses to accept the rejection part of a mis-interpellation. For example, Aisha's teacher Eric had written an article for a Danish daily newspaper (*B.T.*) a few years earlier in which he claimed that 'Muslim women with head scarves have a darkened view of the world' and that they 'do not participate in society'. Aisha explained how she was shocked; the fact that Eric had this point of view concerning Muslim women wearing head scarves shocked her, but what shocked her even more was the feeling that his view should involve her as well, since she too is a Muslim woman wearing a head scarf. Eric's essentialization of 'Muslim women wearing head scarves' to include *all* Muslim women wearing head scarves made Aisha feel that he was addressing her as well. This made her feel different in his view; she was no longer just an 'everybody-student', a regular girl, any girl in Eric's class; she was a Muslim girl wearing a head scarf, with the connotations just described – a differentiation that Aisha clearly could not relate to. As a result, she refused the rejection, since the mis-interpellation was substantiated in arguments that Aisha could not relate to. Hence, she confronted Eric to, in Hage's terms, fight for her right to be seen as belonging to 'the everybody' – the universal. This was a fight for Eric to actually see her as both particular and universal among

women wearing head scarves. She is *not* like the women he describes in his article: ‘he maybe should have, like, looked back and said: “Aisha, she’s not like that”’, and then stopped saying ‘everybody’, since she is in fact different. She is particular. According to Hage (2010), this is common among racialized people, and is even to be considered to be somewhat inherent in the human condition – the vacillation between a desire for both the universal and the particular.

Once again, Aisha is struggling to get out of the ‘fixing’ of the *black* Muslim young woman with a head scarf in an essential racial particularity (Hage, 2010) that in her words is very much related to the attributing of negative characteristics to this racial particularity: ‘black is used as a negative word all the time: black cat [meaning bad luck], bad luck [in Danish, *sort uheld* (black bad luck)], black money, ... black is always related to something bad, whereas white, “the man on the white horse”, it’s like positive all the time’ (Aisha, interview, Denmark, 2009). I see Aisha’s statements as a reflection of her knowledge; that she is more than just a colour (universal), and that not all black/brown people are the same (particular). In this sense Aisha’s narrative reflects a fluctuation between a desire for universality and a desire for (positive) particularity. So finally, what is given to us by Aisha, and what links her narrative with Josef’s and Julie’s is the question of essentialization with regard to racial processes of (non-, negative-, and mis-) interpellation and how this is related to students who struggle with marginalization.

Conclusion

This paper touches upon several double binds regarding ethnic minority students in a school in Copenhagen, Denmark. Ethnic minority teachers plead that differences due to race and ethnicity need to take up much more space in the everyday school practice than is the case today, which the analysis of Josef’s narratives exemplifies. Contrary to this, white teachers tend to tone down differences regarding race and ethnicity thereby reproducing what several researchers have referred to as colour blindness and racial silence. However, as the example with Julie shows, people do not deny seeing what they actually do not see, which in this study becomes particularly distinct when trying to explain why some students fall outside of the norm, as is the case with Hakim. However, the analyses emphasize that rather than being a question of either/or – either we enhance differences or we act colour blind – it is a question of the extent of essentialization. Hence, the analysis of Aisha’s narratives show how it is the essentialization of a racial particularity more than the particularity in itself that offends her, and further that it is the essentialization

of racial particularity expressed by one of her teachers that seemingly robs her of being universal – of being like ‘everybody else’.

Finally, this paper exemplifies what seems to recur in the overall collected data produced in 2009, namely that there is an overlap between racialization and marginalization; they intersect. Hence, it appears that race only seems to be an issue with regard to the students that in many ways already struggle with being partly marginalized. In this sense, race and, as the case with Aisha demonstrates, also ‘Muslimness’, becomes a social predictor: the more you struggle with marginalization the more ‘black’ or Muslim you become.

Endnotes

- 1 I use the term (ethnic) *minority* not as a distinction with numerical proportions but rather as a term related to societal power relations (Phoenix, 2001: 128), and I use the term *ethnic* with reference to the students with non-Western background mentioned in the introduction.
- 2 Western countries include: the Nordic countries, countries of the EU and Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino, Switzerland, Vatican City State, Canada, USA, Australia, and New Zealand. Non-Western countries include all other countries (Denmark’s Statistics, 2012).
- 3 Occasionally my project and/or I seemed to be of relevance to people I met in the field, who I had not immediately thought of as potential participants. This was the case with Luis, a Danish (white) student – the only one – in the ninth grade in Denmark, as well as with Alice, a Swedish (white) student of Danish descent in the ninth grade in Sweden. Both students were struggling in and/or outside the school with regard to marginalization, and in Luis’s case also with regard to themes of race.
- 4 *Interpellation* (Althusser 1983, in Mørck 2006: 262) is a concept that deals with how people become subjects and the concept implies that the social position is ahead of an individual’s subjectification.
- 5 In this study I am currently working on specifying a concept of ‘intra-pellation’ by which interpellation is read (diffracted) through Barad’s (2007) concept of intra-action. However, this work is far from complete, which is why I use the original concept of interpellation in this paper.
- 6 The term ‘black’, brought up by Josef, is referring to ethnic minority students.

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