

“Papa, Am I a Negro?” The Vexed History of the Racial Epithet in Norwegian Print Media (1970–2014)

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Abstract This study explores the portrayal of blacks in Norwegian print media between 1970 and 2014 as refracted through the prism of the epithet “Negro” (neger). 4174 references covering 30 newspapers are analyzed employing a Critical Race Theory conceptual framework where the tenets of “racism as normal,” the principle of interest convergence, and subversive storytelling are salient. The findings reveal, contra some claims that “Negro” has been employed as a “neutral” biological descriptor in Norway, that the epithet verbally incarcerates blacks in a web of racist stereotypes that tap into topoi of blacks as either the eschewed or exotically essentialized “Other.”

Keywords Negro · Neger-debate · Norway · Racism · Critical race theory · Africans

For the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line.
– W.E.B. Du Bois (*The Souls of Black Folk*, 1903).

Introduction

Writing in 1972, Weisbord takes the widely held representations of Scandinavia as a “racial utopia” to task. He concludes presciently.

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

This study, conducted over 40 years after Weisbord’s (1972) in Norway, picks up the thread employing the analytical lens of the epithet “Negro” as refracted through Norwegian print media between 1970 and 2014. According to Statistics Norway (2015a, b), there are 104,635 people who are either direct immigrants from Africa to Norway or were born here with parents hailing from Africa in a total population of 5.1 million. As these numbers are not computed on a pigmentocratic basis, they include light-skinned North Africans (e.g., Moroccans and Algerians) but exclude all black and mixed descent people who are not citizens of an African country (e.g., black Americans, African-Norwegians with one Norwegian (white) parent, black Brazilians and black Pacific Islanders). What this means is that the number of blacks in Norway is considerably higher. Nevertheless, and relevant to this study, the majority of those categorized as Africans in Norway are overwhelmingly black with the Horn of Africa—Somalis (27,333), Eritreans (14,741), and Ethiopians (6716)—comprising the lion’s share (a total of 48,790) (Statistics Norway 2015a, b). In 1970, around the time Weisbord wrote, the number of Africans in Norway was a paltry 1179 persons (Statistics Norway 2015a, b). This seismic demographic shift has vital implications for race relations in Norway (Fig. 1).

Three fundamental tenets of Critical Race Theory (Bell 1980; Delgado and Stefancic 2001; Lawrence 2012) help

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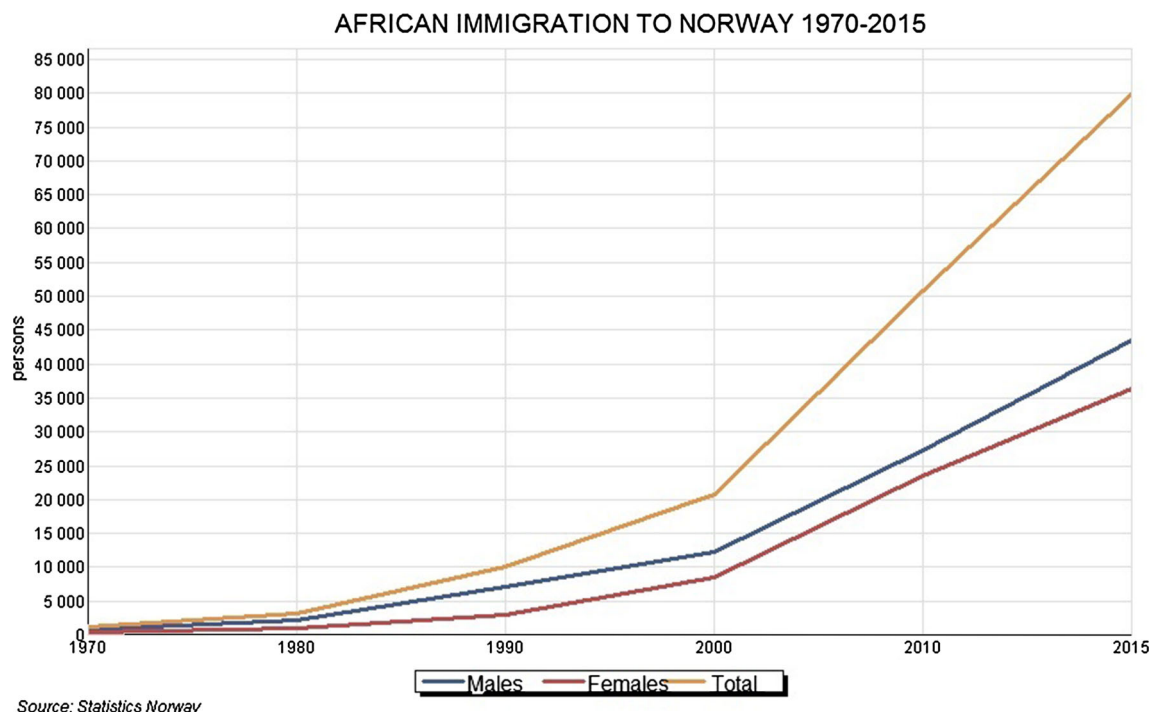


Fig. 1 Exponential rise of Africans in a population of just over 5 million

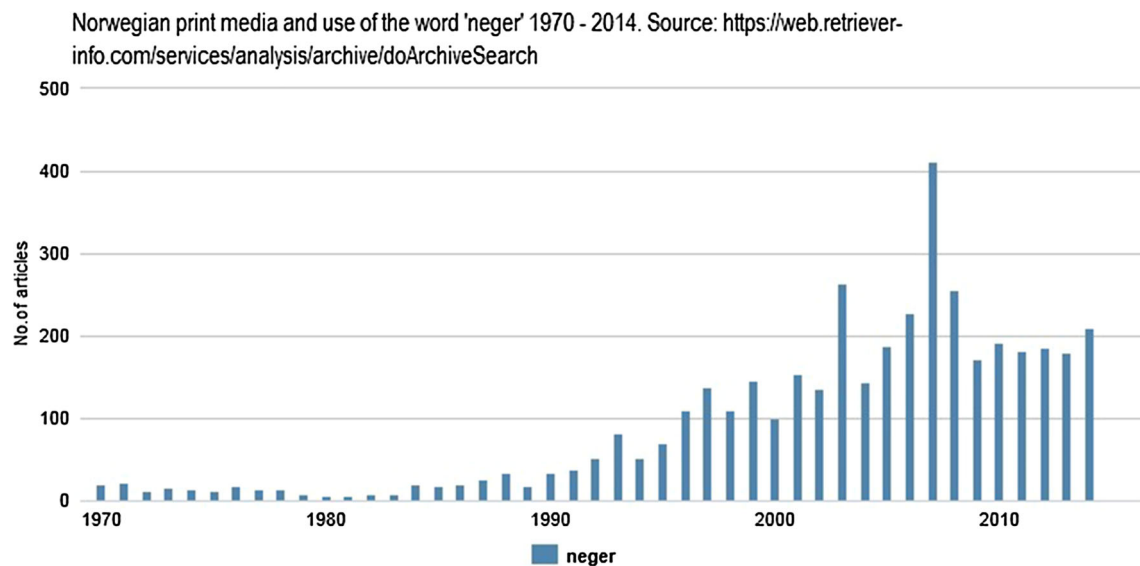


Fig. 2 Frequency of the word “Neger” in Norwegian print media (1970–2014)

situate and operationalize the study of racism as distilled through a brief genealogical exploration of “Negro” as employed in Norwegian mediascape: (1) racism as a deeply ingrained, “normal” feature of mainstream white society (2) the principle of interest convergence, and (3) subversive story telling. Genealogy is here understood in the Foucaultian (Foucault 1977) sense of unraveling historically contingent discursive knowledge systems (epistemes)

operating on a subconscious level and governing rules of thought. This is necessary in order to interrogate the widely held contention (i.e., among mainstream whites) forwarded by, among others, Finn Erik Vinje, professor of Scandinavian languages at the University of Oslo that “Negro,” as used in Norway (*neger* in Norwegian), is an innocuous epithet employed as a biological descriptor (Gullestad 2005: 32). From the above, the following question was

distilled: how is the epithet “Negro” framed in the media discourse in Norway between 1970 and 2014, and how did this feed into the so-called Negro-debate culminating in 2007 (see Fig. 2)?

Methodology

Access

A total of 4174 articles carrying the epithet *neger* (Negro) between 1970 and 2014 were sifted for meaning using the media research Website *Retriever*. The articles included editorials, regular columns by diverse contributors, op-eds, and letters to the editor. According to its Website:

Retriever is the Nordic Region’s leading supplier of media monitoring and tools for news research, media analysis and corporate information. We provide you with quick access to all the relevant information from newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, the Internet and social media (Retriever 2015).

The following coding has been appended to the numbered citations from the selected newspapers: NA to denote news articles often found in the front of a paper covering current events; FA to denote feature articles that explore news topics in depth and ECO to refer to editorials, columns, and opinion pieces which are penned by well-known personalities whose opinions are informed and entertained. The newspaper with the highest frequency for *neger* was *Aftenposten* (circulation in 2014: 187, 694) with 674 references, while *Glåmdalen* (circulation in 2014: 15, 424) had the least (14) references (Medienorge 2015). Rarely if ever was “Negro” found to be the main subject of Norwegian print media coverage between 1970 until the late 1990s. When found, the word seemed to be sandwiched almost inconspicuously between sentences as an appendage to other events or thoughts: for instance a white Norwegian lady shopping in an upmarket store in Nice, France, writes:

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

Beginning in the late 1990s and peaking in 2007, “Negro” began taking center stage as a news item in and of itself.

Analysis and Coding

Richardson (2007:13) writes: “Journalism...can shape social reality by shaping our *views* of social reality. For

these reasons and many more, the language of the news media needs to be taken very seriously.” The sentences were translated into English with the name of the newspaper and dates specified for purposes of validity. Where redundancy was evident (e.g., 38 references to the Norwegian punk rock band *Turboneger/Turbonegro* in 13 newspapers), *neger* was coded for context. Commensurate with Critical Race Theory, the question, “what is being said about the word ‘Negro?’” guided the coding process. After scouring the papers and determining the context of each reference to “Negro,” a point of saturation was arrived at after which references did not seem to turn up new categories. Either references to “Negro” repeated stories in other papers or gave expression to one of the categories coded for. It is argued that the choice of the 3 largest newspapers—*Aftenposten*, *VG* and *Dagbladet*—which account for over 40 % of the references to “Negro,” adequately capture the entire spectrum of 8 categories below. Due to space limitations, it was determined that each newspaper would stand for a particular decade. *VG*, the second largest newspaper, was the only paper of the big 3 which was clearly legible in the archived records of *Retriever* in the 1970s which is why its share is greater. The following coding has been appended to the numbered citations from the selected newspapers: NA to denote news articles often found in the front of a paper covering current events; FA to denote feature articles that explore news topics in depth and ECO to refer to editorials, columns, and opinion pieces which are penned by well-known personalities whose opinions inform and entertain. The following categories emerged:

- *Unease*: coded for references that are intended to highlight the “Negro” as de-spatialized, incongruous, and maladjusted.
- *Caricature*: Coded for stories where “Negroes” are parodied.
- *Crime*: Coded for stories where “Negro” is linked to criminal activities, perpetrates violence or is the victim of violence.
- *Descriptor*: Coded for statements which seek to distinguish “Negro” on a physiological basis.
- *Justice*: Coded for references where “Negroes” are portrayed as fighting for justice.
- *Racial slur*: Coded for references where “Negro” is explicitly racially offensive.
- *Essentializing*: Coded for statements that attribute a “genetic” quality to “Negroes.”
- *Miscegenation*: Coded for statements where “Negro” plays on racist sexual stereotypes of blacks, taboos, and awkwardness in regard to relations with families and children who are bi/multiracial loom large.

Studies of discourse and ideology in the press often focus on vocabulary or lexis as a determinant of ideational structure (e.g., Fowler 2013; Richardson 2007; Fleras 2011). The question: “What ‘word stock’ does the word ‘Negro’ purport to cover in the Norwegian media?”, guided this inquiry. Each sentence was critically analyzed with the help of the qualitative data analysis (QDA) computer software package NVivo where, after classifying, sorting and arranging the sentences, 8 codes emerged. Referring to this “taxonomic organization of vocabulary,” Fowler (2013: 84) writes “We will see that categorization by vocabulary is an integral part of the reproduction of ideology in the newspapers, and particularly, that it is the basis of discriminatory practice when dealing with such so-called groups of people as women, young people, ‘ethnic minorities,’ and so forth.” Two other colleagues were shown the data and asked to independently assign a code of their own choosing that best captures the sentence. Initially, over 13 categories were identified which were narrowed down to 8. One reason was that some sentences were not straightforward and could fit into the other categories. For instance, 7. (ECO) *He was brown like a Negro after a well-deserved holiday in Rio de Janeiro (21.06.1975)*. One colleague argued that this need not be caricature but an innocuous biological descriptor back then, albeit unacceptable today. Given our familiarity with some of the agents making these utterances in the media, there was a consensus that some statements, although shocking by contemporary standards, did not reflect an insidious commitment to a racist ideology.

Conceptual Framework

Writing in 1995, Derrick A. Bell, who was the first tenured African American Professor of Law at Harvard, and considered the “father of critical race theory” (Delgado and Stefancic 1998) (CRT from hence), referred to it as:

A body of legal scholarship, now about a decade old, a majority of whose members are both existentially people of color and ideologically committed to the struggle against racism, particularly as institutionalized in and by the law. Those critical race theorists who are white are usually cognizant of and committed to the overthrow of their own racial privilege (Bell 1995: 898).

Three main tenets relevant to the findings in this paper will be culled from CRT and fleshed out in the following order: the deep-rootedness of racism which renders it “normal,” the tenet of interest convergence, and the tradition of subversive counter storytelling.

Clarke and Garner (2009: 1) maintain that “Whiteness as a form of ethnicity, is rarely acknowledged by its bearers, yet it has significant ramifications in terms of the construction of ‘other’ identities; in the creation of community; in processes of exclusion and inclusion; and discourses of ‘race’ and nation.” David Gillborn, a leading figure in the field of CRT in the UK, speaks of racism as “normal, not aberrant” (Gillborn and Ladson-Billings 2010: 343). Gillborn (2006: 319) and Delgado and Stefancic (2001) theorize that we have to go beyond notions of white *privilege* and speak about white *supremacy*, defined perhaps most adequately by Ansley (1997: 592) as:

A political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings.

In mainstream white society, racism is conflated with classical biological racism espoused by a tiny minority on the fringe of society, such as neo-Nazis for instance (van Dijk 1992). CRT considers this an illusory strategy of self-exoneration. A ritual of lip service is paid to notions of colorblindness and meritocracy in the public discourse which function as smoke and mirrors to conceal racism. For instance, race is undertheorized in Scandinavian educational research in favor of words like “immigrants” and “ethnicity.” Beach and Lunneblad (2011: 32) suggest these proxies serve to mask the tortured lineage of race in Sweden where 60,000 racially mixed families, single mothers, and so-called travelers (Romany) were sterilized between 1935 and 1974. They add that “things were similar but not as severe in Norway, Finland and Denmark” (Ibid). The objective of CRT, then, is to show to an often unwilling majority this propensity to circumlocute, euphemize or render invisible the machinations of racism, which is, on the contrary, ubiquitous. As one study concludes:

Sweden has one of the most established White Power music markets in Europe. In the Nordic countries of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland we have extreme right-wing parties (ERPs) that often poll well above 10 % in national elections (Sweden being the weak example in this case). To be shocked is to be in denial. To be shocked is to embody the privilege of white “innocence” (Mulinari and Neergaard 2012:14).

The second tenet is that of interest convergence. Simply stated, the interest convergence principle contends that “The interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be

accommodated only when it converges with the interest of whites” (Bell 1980: 523). White self-interest, then, and not a sudden “love-thy-neighbour-as-thyself” epiphanic seizure, lies at the heart of the interest convergence principle. Bell (1980) notes two watershed events that, among others, forced through the landmark *Brown v. Board* desegregation of schools in the USA: blacks returning from the Korean War during the 1950s, and having experienced a window of respite from American racism, were in no mood to return to states “sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression” to borrow from Dr. King. The second reason was the need to get nations in the Global South, many of whom were black or brown, alongside the USA and away from Soviet influence in the heyday of Communism. What transpired was “one of those rare times when the fortunes of blacks and of whites were aligned” (Delgado and Stefancic 1998: 472).

DeLorme and Singer (2010) have explored the integration of Major League Baseball in 1947 in the USA and show how this heralded the demise of what was called the *Negro Leagues* (NL). Using Bell (1980) convergence thesis, they argue that financial incentives and not moral elevation guided the decision which had deleterious effects on black communities which had prospered financially and socially through the NL. It is suggested in this study, commensurate with the convergence interest thesis, that the earlier tenacity in employing the racial epithet “Negro” in Norway was now confronted by a new reality on the ground: the rapidly changing demographic of the black and brown population which grew from a few hundred in the 1960s to over 550,000 (i.e., Asia, Africa, and South America) in a population of 5.1 million in 2015 (Statistics Norway 2015a, b).

Further to interest convergence, what I have elected to call “the architecture of virtue” in Norway also goes some way in explicating why we have seen a volta face in expunging “Negro” from some of the great Nordic classics (see findings). This can loosely be defined as the tangible and intangible assets that Norway carefully manages both nationally and internationally to constantly construct, maintain, and perpetuate itself as a champion of human rights, equity, and peace. Barthes (1972) speaks of symbols and signs intended to project a particular set of myths: The Nobel Peace Prize, countless participations in global peace-making efforts (e.g., The Oslo Peace Accords of 1993), generous contributions to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which states, “In 2014, Norway was UNDP’s top core contributor with 112,211,221 USD. Norway funds 218 projects through direct funding and 2588 projects through UNDP Regular Resources” (UNDP 2014). The list is by no means exhaustive but, as this study is about race relations, the “Architecture of virtue” must encompass the reception of asylum seekers and refugees,

the majority of whom hail from Africa and Asia. The late Norwegian anthropologist, Gullestad (2005) alludes to the “Architecture of virtue” when she states:

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. Accepting Ertzgaard’s [black Norwegian sprinter who objected to the use of “Negro”] plea would imply accepting the accusation that Norway was a part of the Europe who once treated blacks “like animals and a pest” (Gullestad 2005, p. 40).

The third tenet of CRT which lends itself well to this study is that of subversive counter storytelling. As Bell (1995 p. 902) writes, “In my case, I prefer using stories as a means of communicating views to those who hold very different views on the emotionally charged subject of race. People enjoy stories and will often suspend their beliefs, listen to the story, and then compare their views, not mine, but with those expressed in the story.” Rather than a “white-o-centric perspective,” story telling in CRT privileges the stories of those whose voices the media has rendered mute. Take for example, Joseph Conrad’s classic *Heart of Darkness* (1899) in which Conrad’s protagonist, Charles Marlow, who is really his alter ego, assumes the unilateral privilege of describing the Congolese to the world:

A lot of people, mostly black and naked, moved about like ants (15)...they did not eat each other before my face: they had brought along a provision of hippo-meat which went rotten and made the mystery of the wilderness stink in my nostrils (35)...The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us—who could tell? (Conrad 2006: 35).

It was left to the African novelist Achebe (1977) to unsettle Conrad’s reputation by calling him a “thorough-going racist” (Achebe 1977: 1789) and the almost unassailable novel “one which parades in the most vulgar prejudices and insults from which a section of mankind has suffered untold agonies and atrocities in the past... a story in which the very humanity of black people is called into question” (Achebe 1977: 1791). Achebe’s *An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s Heart of Darkness* (1975) is an example of the “Empire writing back”—subversive counter telling. Ever since, any reading of Conrad’s book is stalked by Achebe’s iconoclasm. At the heart of the matter is the question of the “gaze”—who tells our story? Leaving it to others is a risky venture as centuries of writing has shown. Thus, in contrast to Conrad, for whom the Congolese evoked a “suspicion of their not being inhuman...the thought of their humanity—like yours—the

thought of your remote kinshp with this wild and passionate uproar,” (Conrad 2006: 36),

Critical race theorists have often used narrative in our scholarship. We tell our stories because other scholars have not told them...to tell the world and ourselves that we are whole and fully human, that we are you, that our stories are yours” (Lawrence 2012: 251).

Findings

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean — neither more nor less.”

– Lewis Carroll, Through the Looking Glass

Print Media Coverage Between 1970 and 1979

The open and close brackets below [] are not part of the original Norwegian, but the parentheses () are. I have utilized [] to facilitate contextual understanding (Table 1).

1. (ECO) Rewind back to the beginning of the 1970s: Norway was a nearly “Blenda [washing-powder brand] white” nation [i.e. racially; perhaps “snow-white” in English] where Negro was something one read about in a high school book (Hottentot), pours into a cup (Ali coffee) or sprinkles on food (Black Boy spice). Ingrid Espelig Hovig has just mustered the courage to introduce the exotic vegetable paprika in the TV kitchen show (VG, 28.12.2002).

Indeed, as the quote above from 2002 indicates, people of African descent comprised a minuscule portion of the Norwegian population in the 1970s. Nevertheless, the cavalier racism inherent in the journalist’s portrayal of blacks in the 1970s, despite penning these words over 30 years later, is revealing. How were blacks portrayed in the print media back then? Clearly, the highest numbers obtain for the category “crime.”

Table 1 VG: 1970–1979

Year	Unease	Caricature	Crime	Descriptor	Justice	Essentializing	Racial slur	Miscegenation
1970–1979	7	12	26	4	5	2	1	2

Table 2 Aftenposten: 1980–1989

Year	Unease	Caricature	Crime	Descriptor	Justice	Essentializing	Racial slur	Miscegenation
1980–1990	6	22	8	9	3	11	2	2

2. (ECO) Some time ago there was the case of an American Negro who threatened to kill a waiter (29.01.1971).
3. (NA) In the other case, the criminal was a 15-year old Negro who threatened with a knife (14.04.1971).
4. (NA) The 48 year old Colombo [American Mafia boss] was shot by a Negro named Jerome Johnson (29.06.1971).

The overwhelming references to “Negroes” in the crime category did not report a name. Citation (4) is a rare example. Following this category, 12 of the references to Negroes (*neger*) have been subsumed under caricature.

5. (NA) Today, we will see a Negro on TV. West Ham [English soccer team] is the only team in the first division which has a Negro [Clyde Best] good enough for its best side (4.12.1971).
6. (ECO)...irritated many conservatives not only because he is Negro [i.e. Sammy Davis Jr.] but because he converted to Judaism... (29.12.1971).
7. (ECO) He was brown like a Negro after a well-deserved holiday in Rio de Janeiro (21.06.1975).
8. (ECO) Similar to the charred part of a tree which reminds one of a domesticated Negro (Likedan med den svartbrente delen av et tre, som minner om underkuet neger...) (10.06.1977).

Under the category of “unease,” one finds instances of a British “Negro soldier” who is reported as “shocked” by the Norwegian winter and a report that attributes disco’s ambivalent reception in the late 1970s to its genesis among “*Negroes, Puerto Ricans and homosexuals*”(03.05.1978). Finally, well-known civil rights era figures, such as Huey Newton and Alex Haley, are cited in connection with “Negro” militancy and self-esteem (Table 2).

Print Media Coverage Between 1980 and 1989

9. (NA) Finland and Norway are not represented in downhill skiing, but one finds participants from Egypt, Australia, Morocco, Chile...and don’t forget “massa” Gueye from Senegal, a genuine Negro and amateur (07.02.1984) [The Senegalese, Lamine

Guèye, was the first African skier to take part in the Winter Olympics].

10. (ECO) In Elverum [town in Norway], they haven't seen a Negro yet (19.10.85);
11. (ECO) Suzanne's surprise wouldn't have been greater had I transformed into a Negro right before her eyes (04.07.87).
12. (ECO) In 1946, a Norwegian from the North of Norway [i.e. white] was no different than a black-as-night-Negro [i.e. in the Capital, Oslo] (07.07.89).

Almost always the Negro is rendered textually mute. The very mention or sight of a black man (almost all references are to black males) appears to consciously or unconsciously trigger a host of racialized topoi: a *happy, little* Negro (07.08.86); *enormously huge* and *old* Negro (06.09.86); *confused* Negro (15.05.87); a *huge* Negro (24.12.87); a *coincidental* Negro (12.10.88); and a *huge* Negro (19.12.88). In addition, several pre-modifiers refer to his citizenship: an *American* Negro (14.5.85) or the *American* Negro (22.3.86). The sentences that follow have been subsumed under the "Caricature" category.

13. (ECO) Thursday will feature the white Negro, John Magne Bernes, from Bergen in the Norwegian/American Blues meeting (07.03.84).
14. (ECO) She [a white artist] shared that the sound engineer wanted her to sing like a Negro (12.10.85).
15. (ECO) He [the Norwegian heavyweight boxer, Steffen Tangstad] is the new white hope who can perhaps knock down a black world champion. Hope about what? That a non-Negro can beat up a Negro (12.07.86).
16. (ECO) Brown [boxing trainer Johnny Brown] is a happy, little Negro with rhythm and the right timing in the body, to use Steffen's own words (07.08.86);
17. (ECO) 40 per cent explain their excitement by saying that they think Bing Cosby sings White Christmas beautifully for a Negro (5.12.87).
18. (ECO) At the time it was unheard of that a Negro, who normally plays music in a whorehouse, should write opera (23.11.88).

Even if one grants that occasionally it was employed as a biological descriptor, "Negro" is hamstrung by the counter-argument that the same word was also marshaled as a racial slur to wound a black person. The word "white," for instance, is not susceptible to the same equivocation (Table 3).

19. (NA) And Lillehammer's dark-skinned football player was racially abused by the public for much of the game. "Damned Negro" (neger)... "blackie" (svarting)... "black-devil" were words repeatedly heard (08.08.88).

Print Media Coverage Between 1990 and 1999

"Negro" continued to be caricatured and vilified in the 1990s and appeared impervious to the zeitgeist of an emerging global black consciousness embodied in events as disparate as the release of Nelson Mandela, Rodney King, and the L.A. riots, hip-hop as political and social commentary channeled through bands like Public Enemy or even Denzel Washington's brilliant portrayal of Malcolm X shown in Norwegian cinemas. Below are some examples:

20. (ECO) Naked Count chases a Negro with an axe...Does one still wonder why the newspaper sales are sinking? (20.03.96).
21. (ECO) Wednesday evening he will take up themes from his forthcoming book, "The art of being a Negro" (03.05.96).
22. (ECO) So who next? Injection-Kåre? Too tragic. Lesbian-Laila? Lame-Svein? Negro-Finn? To hell with them. (02.06.96).
23. (ECO) [Review of a video game] The Americans speaking with a Russian accent are as credible as Carl I. Hagen [anti-immigrant Norwegian politician] as a Negro (10.01.97).
24. (ECO) I was given a crash course [in modeling] by a huge, feminine Negro (18.07.97).
25. (ECO) The year was 1979, disco was everywhere, and Michael Jackson was still a Negro (19.08.97).
26. (ECO) When I grew up it was a tourist attraction to see a Negro (13.11.97).
27. (ECO) Can a Negro become Santa Claus?...Any Santa Claus who manages to slide down an average

Table 3 Dagbladet: 1990–1999

Year	Unease	Caricature	Crime	Descriptor	Justice	Essentializing	Racial slur	Miscegenation
1990–1999	9	32	10	2	7	8	6	1

Norwegian chimney would obviously look like a Negro (26.11.979).

28. (ECO) At one time a Negro was such a rare sight that one forgot time and place just to see him (28.09.98).
29. (ECO) The Jubilee exhibition of 1914 [the Constitution of 1814] was the breakthrough for the Negro in the Norwegian public. 14 living Congo-Negroes were exhibited for the public (17.10.99).

In regard to crime, no difference is detected in the manner black people are mentioned as perpetrators of crime or victims of crime when compared to references in the preceding two decades. The “Negro” is linked to deviance and is a menace. One detects a notable change, however, in the fact that mediascape appears to be reporting about “Negroes” in Norway rather than the USA. This coincides with the rise in numbers of people of African immigrants, such as Somali and Eritrean refugee/asylum seekers whose numbers shot up during this decade which occurred in tandem with a rise in neo-Nazi hate crimes. Toward the end of this decade, a “Negro” is killed in Norway, a watershed moment which jars the complacent population.

30. (NA) [Report from Sweden] Last year the boy attacked an African who was unknown to him with a knife, after having agreed with a friend that they would “beat up a Negro.”
31. (ECO) The elderly don’t dare go out when they see a Negro (12.09.97);
32. (NA) Two men shouted racist abuse at Arve Beheim Karlsen. After shouting “kill him, kill the Negro.” Arve Beheim Karlsen ran (26.04.99).

Arve Beheim Karlsen was an adopted 17-year-old boy of Indian extract (see 32). On April 23, 1999, he was chased by two young men who, according to a witness, shouted “kill the Negro.” He was later found dead in Sogndal River in the west of Norway. Despite the witness, the accused were only convicted of violence and threats, not murder. The country had to wait for another 2 years before the first racially motivated murder was a legal fact. In tracing the trajectory of the word “Negro” in Norway, this assault is significant in that it seems to indicate that “Negro” is not reserved for blacks of sub-Saharan origin, but is elastic enough to encompass Asians, Latinos, and other brown-skinned people in a black–brown continuum. In one fell swoop, two violent racists redefined the epithet

and reconfigured alliances in what became known as the “Negro-debate” which picked up momentum even before Karlsen’s death, reaching its zenith in 2007. This is encapsulated, among others, in the increase in the category “Justice” where young Norwegians of African descent challenge the unilateral and hegemonic mis/use of “Negro”:

33. (ECO) [The black Norwegian rapper Michael George] Negro is a term that only considers the exterior. One doesn’t take the time to know a person as a fellow-human, but categorizes on the basis of skin color (06.03.97).
34. (NA) The African youth milieu in Oslo is tired of being called Negro. The aim is to remove the word from the Norwegian language. The use of the word has a racist effect, says Amani Olubanjo Buntu. He is the leader of African Youth in Norway. Many are not aware that the word is negatively loaded and use it in everyday speech. They contribute to unconscious racism, according to Buntu (06.03.97).
35. (ECO) If you say Negro in the USA, you will be labeled a racist. It is high time Norway comes of age, says Lamisi Gurah. We also wish to expunge internalized words, such as black-market, black-listed and black-job from the Norwegian language, say the youth (07.03.97).

Print Media Coverage Between 2000 and 2014

This decade evinces a further mobilization of anti-racism forces (“Justice” category) so much so that Norwegian and other Nordic classic works of the literature are censored for racist and post-colonial references. In addition, youth of African heritage continue to take on the media monopoly’s claim to use/abuse the term “Negro” as they see fit. One cannot, however, fail to notice the concomitant rise in a backlash among white Norwegians who consider the trend hysterical (Table 4).

36. (ECO) Negro–King is out, soon Hottentot also and the whole of “The song about little Hoa”....NRK’s [National TV broadcaster] “Children’s hour for the smallest” has changed the classics in the Nordic children’s treasures with the rationale that they do not want to offend anyone. That is why Astrid Lindgren’s Pippi has been assigned a new heritage. Pippi’s father is no longer

Table 4 VG: 2000–2014

Year	Unease	Caricature	Crime	Descriptor	Justice	Essentializing	Racial slur	Miscegenation
2000–2014	9	20	6	7	11	4	9	1

the Negro–King—he has been transformed into the “King of the South Seas Islands.” At the same time the publisher, Cappelen, got cold feet before publishing a new version of Thorbjørn Egner’s book “Captain Black Bill.” They are considering removing “The song about little Hoa,” he who was an authentic “Hottentot” (11.12.2006).

37. (ECO) I was 9 years old when I first was a victim of literary censor. It was summer, I lived with grandmother for some weeks and she read Mark Twain’s Huckleberry Finn for me every evening, perhaps the most famous American novel, the one from which all other American novels originate, according to Ernest Hemingway. It was only some years later when I read the book myself that I realized grandmother had consistently dropped the “Nigger” and read “Negro” instead, all 216 times it was used in the book (07.10.2014).
38. (NA) Finn-Erik Vinje, Professor of Linguistics [University of Oslo], maintains that the word Negro historically is neither discriminatory nor pejorative in Norwegian language usage (08.04.2001).
39. (NA) SOS racism argues that NRK ought to apologize concerning the question asked on NRK2’s chat program “Blender” [mixer]. The broadcasting board is also demanding an answer from the program leaders. It was during Monday’s broadcast that the chat program “Blender” asked the public who the man in the gold frame was. The question referred to a picture of John G. Bernander [NRK boss] which hangs partially hidden in the studio. The multiple choice answers about the “man” were: yellow-man, Negro or Arian—the public were supposed to send text messages (17.11.2004).

The writer’s invocation of “Nordic children’s treasures” (36) exploits nationalist discourses. One detects a sense of uncertainty and disempowerment—a yearning for the “good old days” when saying “Negro,” “Hottentot,” and “Nigger” were uncontested (a rewinding back to the 1970s and a “Blenda-white Norway”) (1). Note the introduction: “I was 9 years old when I first was a victim of literary censor” (37). As previously stated, while Afrikan Youth and others were making an impact in the public square, “Negro” was still being used to lampoon and give expression to a host of unsavory issues:

40. (ECO) Goodness! Is there a Negro in your family? (16.09.2000).
41. (ECO) Høgger’n [revue group] looks great in an Afro-wig. Now we need the brown color so we can get the right Negro-feeling (12.06.2002).
42. (ECO) At the same time he [Elvis Presley] cracked the ceiling in so many areas such as gender, class and race. Elvis was the white boy who looked like a cross between a homosexual, “harry” [Norwegian for “bad taste” or “vulgar”] and Negro. Today, we all look like him. Nearly. (11.08.2002).
43. (ECO) [From a quiz in the paper] Pale American Negro who sings “Thriller” (31.08.2002).
44. (ECO) The effects were shocking. I looked like a Negro in the face and my hair was burnt (28.12.2002).
45. (ECO) “I thought it was a dirty job,” says Ole-Martin Rognerud (21 years old) and called his business enterprise “Diverse Negro Jobs” (Diverse Neger Arbeid)... Ole-Martin Rognerud stresses that he did not think in terms of race when he chose the name for his firm (21.04.2005).
46. (NA) 6 out of 10 Norwegians think that it is fine to say Negro. Only 1 out of 4 think it is not ok reveals a poll conducted by Infact (18.10.2007).

For decades, and perhaps centuries in Norway, “Negro” has, among a litany of repulsive connotations, connoted work that is so degrading that only a “Negro” can do it. So when the 21-year-old (see 45) Ole-Martin registers his firm under *Neger arbeid* (Negro work), it is the distillation of a discourse where families, friends, schools, the media, sporting fans, politicians, and literary figures constantly project their worst fears, envy, ridicule, and fantasies onto people of African descent.

As alluded to earlier, it took another racially motivated murder, that of Benjamin Hermansen, a 15-year-old boy of Norwegian-Ghanaian descent January 26, 2001 to prick the conscience of the nation in an unprecedented way. He was knifed to death in Holmlia, an immigrant-dominated section of the Capital, Oslo, and appears to have been randomly picked out by neo-Nazis because of his skin color. The murder sparked one of the biggest peace-time demonstrations in the history of Norway ever. One editorial captured the zeitgeist of the time:

47. (FA) 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 (29.01.2001).

Discussion

“Negro” in the 1970s and 1980s

A “Blenda-white” media is in conversation with an equally “Blenda-white” readership in Norway in the 1970s about a “Negro” who did not live in Norway. The analysis reveals that it was overwhelmingly linked to crime and caricature during these decades. The other categories are equally unflattering. “Negroes” are represented as “waiter-threatening,” “knife-wielding,” “singing in whorehouses,” and mostly “American.” The above evinces a classic fixation with the black body. Essentialized images of Negroes as musicians, oversexed, or superhuman athletes loom large in white fantasy, especially in the 1980s. One citation has the following: *No, one does not need to be a Negro to run 10s flat* (25.5.1971). Furthermore:... *that I want our Norwegian girls to marry a Negro is something I have never said... Is there a Norwegian father who wants his daughter to marry a Negro?* (22.5.1973). The sentence below (8) reveals the explicit, “in-your-face” kind of racism that abounded commensurate with the maxim that “when racism, ethnicism or ethnocentrism are openly advocated or legitimated by the elites and the leading institutions of society, the less we should find denials, let alone excuses of racist acts and discourse” (van Dijk 1992: 94). I have included the original Norwegian words given the incredulity of this remark.

8. Similar to the charred part of a tree, which reminds one of a domesticated Negro (Likedan med den svartbrente delen av et tre, som minner om underkuet neger...) (10.6.1977).

14. She [a white artist] shared that the sound engineer wanted her to sing like a Negro (12.10.85)

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

The analysis confirms a fundamental theme of CRT: that white mainstream society appears oblivious to whiteness as a form of ethnicity and its ramifications for “the construction of ‘other’ identities; in the creation of community; in processes of exclusion and inclusion; and discourses of ‘race’ and nation” Clarke and Garner (2009: 1). In the absence of blacks in the national space, the average Norwegian’s perception of blacks was contingent upon the media gaze which is always eclectic.

“Negro” in the 1990s to the Present

27. Can a Negro become Santa Claus?... Any Santa Claus who manages to slide down an average

Norwegian chimney would necessarily look like a “Negro” (26.11.1997)

Although the 1990s continued in the same vein, with caricature and parody of the “Negro” at an all time high (32 cases), the killing of the adopted Indian boy, Arve Beheim Karlsen (see 32 in findings) was the first serious challenge. My contention, however, is that the principle of interest convergence was at play in this and the next killing of the Ghanaian-Norwegian Benjamin Hermansen which followed in January 2001. Bonds of kin altruism were stirred when the nation was confronted with daily images, not of the muted and nameless “damn Negro or blackie” (expletives uttered by the racists who killed the boys), but weeping and gutted white mothers who vowed to confront the murderers in court and see justice done to the memory of their children. A Benjamin Hermansen Memorial Fund was set up. They were given profuse media exposure in contrast to a litany of other equally brutal murders in Norway going all the way back to 1959. For example, the respected national newspaper *Aftenposten*, under the heading, *They say it is the First Time*, produces 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).

There were no marches, funds, or national soul-searching on previous occasions. One more reason for the slow changes must be factored in. Norway no longer had the luxury of determining the parameters of what constituted racism alone. The *BBC* had this to report in the aftermath:

The brutal killing of Norwegian teenager Benjamin Hermansen united the Norwegian people in horror in a way never seen before....Since 1970 it has been a criminal offence in Norway to expose a person to hatred or lack of respect on the grounds of their color of skin or ethnicity. But critics point out that so far only six people have been convicted under this clause... Now that racism has become an acknowledged problem in Norway, a fierce debate is raging on how the authorities should deal with it (BBC 2001).

In the same report, the Police Superintendent of Oslo, Finn Abrahamsen, went on record back then saying, “It is

difficult to get somebody convicted on grounds of racism in Norway” (Ibid).

The above aligns with CRT’s maxim: “The interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interest of whites” (Bell 1980: 523).

The mothers of the “Negroes” being murdered were confirming that they were not nameless, faceless blacks akin to Conrad’s “black people moving about like ants” (Conrad 2006: 15), but were being forced through the white mothers to confront their humanity and, indeed, “remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar” (Conrad 2006: 36). In addition, what I have called the “Architecture of virtue” was now under threat from supranational media, such as the *BBC* and *The New York Times*.

The data suggest that the lion’s share of references to Negro was determined by the darker skin color, especially in the earlier decades before the increase in the African population. However, although Benjamin Hermansen and Arve Beheim Karlsen were not “black-skinned” (the former was mixed and the latter Indian), this did not stop their murderers from hurling the Negro slur at them. As per the data, the following stereotypes obtain: In the early decades, Negro is associated with the ultimate other. Statements, such as, “Today, we will see a Negro on TV” (5) and “In Elverum (town in Norway), they haven’t seen a Negro yet” (10), attest to the Negroes almost mythical and exotic status. Crime and Negroes also appear to go hand in hand. Furthermore, the data reveal that Negroes were incarcerated in stereotypical roles as exceptional singers and athletes. Trends in the USA often impact upon perceptions in Norway thanks in part to the American entertainment industry in general and Hollywood in particular. The absence of black celebrities on Norwegian TV screens in the early decades (1970s, 1980s) is contrasted with the current proliferation in the film and music industry. In addition, as an important US and NATO ally (the current General Secretary of NATO is the Norwegian former Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg), Norway has always enjoyed a robust relationship with the USA. The fact that the current US President happens to be black and has been awarded a Nobel Peace Prize by the Norwegian Nobel Committee has no doubt impacted positively on the perception of blacks. Nevertheless, social observers have been exercised in trying to explain the current vexed relations between the police and blacks in the USA.

“Papa, Am I a Negro?” Storytelling as a Subversive Act

I have elected to give some prominence to 2 moving personal narratives in this section highlighting CRT’s subversive storytelling tradition. At the height of what was

dubbed the “Negro-debate” in 2007, one small, but perhaps equally gripping story grabbed national attention because a cabinet Minister was moved to intervene in the case of a racially abused 9-year-old girl, Cecilie, who is of Norwegian-Kenyan ancestry (48). This is followed by the story of a 14-year-old boy.

48. After Cecilie (9 years old) started school, she has come home weeping on several occasions. Older pupils have called her “Negro,” “blackie” and “chocolate-cake”. Bjarne Håkon Hanssen [Norwegian Minister for Labor and Inclusion] wants an end to this. Cecilie has a Norwegian mother and Kenyan father. The parents have experienced the bullying of their daughter as extremely difficult and have turned in despair to the Minister for help. Last year, her father wrote the book, “Papa, am I a Negro?” when his daughter came home and told him that she hated her skin color. This is how he described the scene from Cecilie’s room: “She is crying. The tears run down her cheeks. The sound of her voice tears me to bits inside. I feel immense pain and the little princess feels the same also. It requires great strength to keep the tears back because she has said something which has both shocked and hurt me deep inside. After I consoled her a while, she asks: “Papa, am I a Negro” (11.10.2007).

49. Enough is enough! I am very tired of people calling me Negro (neger) and using the word as if it isn’t negative! Many believe that the word Negro means someone who is dark-skinned...In school there was once a teacher who wanted to say something about the use of the word. There I sat alone—the only African in the class. Suddenly the teacher said, “this is who we can call a Negro”, and pointed at me. I was so shocked! We had other dark skinned pupils in the class from Asia, but that the teacher did not use these pupils as examples was proof enough for me that the teacher believed I was the only “Negro” in the word’s “original” sense... Some people are of the opinion that the word means dark skinned, and is not degrading. So why does the word crop up when they for example quarrel with a dark skinned person? Can’t people just stop with racism and the use of such words? It only leads to war and unrest (14 years old boy, Lørenskog, a few kilometers outside of Oslo (Aftenposten 14.09.2007).

Bell (1995: 902) writes, “In my case, I prefer using stories as a means of communicating views to those who

hold very different views on the emotionally charged subject of race.” One powerful feature of the anti-racism response in Norway in mediascape during the height of the so-called Negro-debate in 2007 was the moving stories of Norwegian-African youth who were coming of age and locking horns with those who insisted on monopolizing the use of the epithet “Negro.” The two cases above (48 and 49) speak volumes. Cornell West states, “The genius of our black foremothers and forefathers was to create powerful buffers to ward off the nihilistic threat, to equip black folk with cultural armor to beat back the demons of hopelessness, meaninglessness, and lovelessness” (West 1993: 23). Subversive memories and storytelling are examples of powerful buffers. The potency of storytelling to upend the denigration of black people lies precisely in its ability to name one’s own reality (Delgado 1989).

The decades of deprecation and abuse of blacks, bottled up in that dehumanizing epithet “Negro,” is poignantly distilled in that at once desolate and yet subversive moment when Cecilie asks the question—“Papa, am I a Negro?” Desolate because she begins to hate her color after suffering abuse and bullying in school and subversive because her story, her experienced reality, strikes a powerful chord in every heart and singularly unpacks the frigid world inhabited by the likes of the linguist Finn-Erik Vinje (see 38) who “maintains that the word *Negro* historically is neither discriminatory nor pejorative in Norwegian language usage” (08.04.2001). From the unlikely source of Cecilie’s bleakness and weakness emerges the voice, the counter story containing the seeds of emancipation. Blacks have often tapped into biblical tropes to muster strength in the heat of slavery (West 1993) and here in Cecilie’s story one finds echoes of the anagogic Pauline oxymoron

captured in his words, “for when I am weak, then am I strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10; KJV). Like Cecilie, the unnamed 14-year-old boy (see 50) furnishes perhaps the best response to Professor Finn-Erik Vinje a testimony to the power of experiential knowledge:

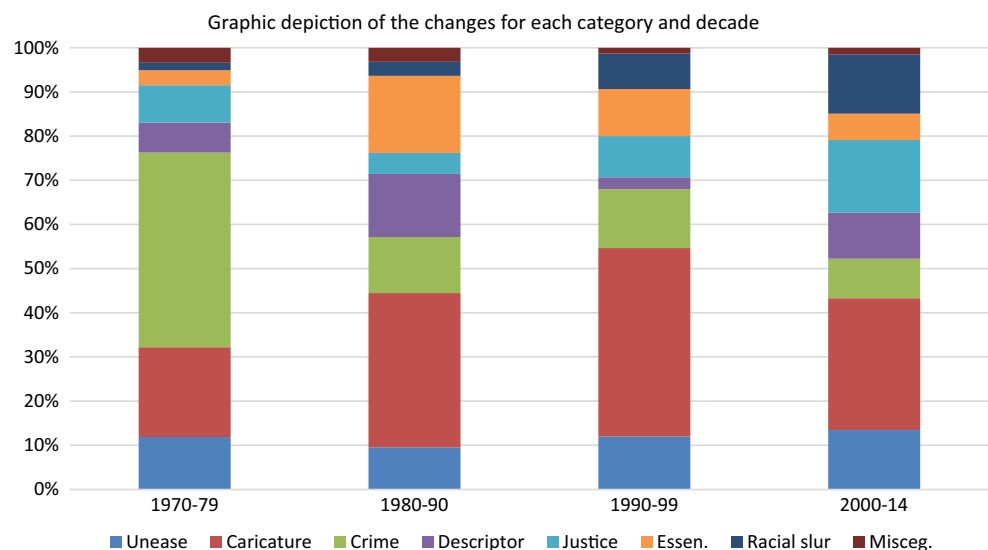
Some people are of the opinion that the word means dark skinned, and is not degrading. So why does the word crop up when they for example quarrel with a dark skinned person?

There is cause for optimism as the changes for each category in Fig. 3 demonstrate. The gray area representing “crime” has shrunk considerably in 2000–2014. This was accompanied by a concomitant increase in the “justice” category over the decades, which means that a growing share of references to “Negro” in the media is on account of individuals and groups who seek to interrogate and destabilize the use of the word. Regrettably, the segment on “caricature,” although reduced from the last decade, is still considerable.

Conclusion

This study has considered representations of the epithet “Negro” as employed in the Norwegian media since 1970. The salience of studying the media is captured in the axiom: “The white audience has few ideological or socio-economic reasons *not* to adopt the definition of the ethnic situation as it is proposed by the media and the other white elites” (van Dijk 1995: 86). The findings reveal that “Negro” has become a bogeyman into which the distorted fantasies of segments of the white imagination have been

Fig. 3 Graphic depiction of the changes for each category and decade



channeled. The contours of its usage in Norway in the last 45 years demonstrate that despite the lack of a history of slavery, Jim Crow, or Montgomery, the pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness for black people was hamstrung through linguistic incarceration. No amount of denial can assuage the pain of 9-year-old Cecilie who understood the word “Negro” to be a denial of her humanity. Cecilie most probably had no cognizance of the broader history and context of the debate raging around her at the time. Long before she would discover a shared supranational heritage with names such as Elmina Castle, Frederick Douglass, Apartheid, Harriet Tubman, and Jackie Robinson, she felt verbally lacerated by the taunts of “Negro.” No amount of academic skullduggery insisting that “Negro” is “neutral” in Norway can assuage the pain of a 9 years old who is so traumatized by the racial slur that she hates her skin color and asks “Am I a Negro, papa?”

Cecilie’s is a case of the oppressed teaching the oppressors pedagogy (Freire 1996). The pedagogy of this oppressed child is an indictment upon adults who must bear the responsibility for a laissez faire approach to this important topic. In 2002, after some wrangling, the Norwegian Language Council “quietly changed their policy concerning the word *neger*. They now advise people to be cautious when using this word” (Gullestad 2005: 35). The data do show an increase in racial tolerance over the studied period. This can be attributed to the following factors: an increase in the number of people with African roots, many of mixed heritage who challenged the “monopoly” on the use of the word in the media; the high profile murder cases of Benjamin Hermansen and Arve Beheim Karlsen which garnered international attention and sensitized the public at large to the treatment of blacks in Norway and, finally, the involvement of politicians, such as the Labor Minister in the Cecilie case. One would be hard pressed to attribute the increased racial tolerance to any parallel in a corresponding legal trend as few are convicted in Norway of racial crimes. In challenging the top-down, unilateral “licence to name” practice in mainstream media, organizations such as Afrikan Youth (their preferred spelling) have recognized a vital truth: The ability to name one’s own reality (Delgado 1989) is pivotal in upending subversive myths.

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