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The Cultural Politics of Sex Education in the Nordics

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Although comprehensive sex education (CSE) continues to be contested politically along liberal–conservative political division in Anglo-American cultural contexts (Alldred and David 2007; Kendall 2012; Moran 2009), it enjoys almost universal backing from the political establishment in Northern Europe (Lewis and Knijn 2002). Along with gender equality, liberal sexual politics are firmly established in the region's nationalisms as a trademark that set them apart from the rest of the world (Bredström 2005; Hekma and Duyvendak 2011; Keskinen et al. 2009). The Netherlands and the Nordic countries in particular take great pride in their "free" approach to sexuality generally, and seem satisfied with their scientifically sound and sex-positive approach to sex education. As Rebecca M. Ferguson and colleagues put it: "The Netherlands is not flawless, but public health practitioners, sex educators, teachers, policy makers and others can turn to the Netherlands for an alternative perspective and inspiration to guide the development of positive, rights based approaches to adolescent sexuality and sexual health" (R.M. Ferguson et al. 2008, p. 104). The confidence that sex education in the region represents the best practice when it comes to teaching sexual health has developed over the latter part of

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the twentieth century, with Sweden as the primary beacon presented for the rest of the world to follow (Sherlock 2012; Zimmerman 2015).

The seeming political harmony in Northern European approaches to sex education is a relatively new phenomenon, however. The discourse shifted during the belated realization that most European countries are in fact multicultural societies, where religious and cultural concerns, beyond those voiced by the Protestant state religions, could influence policy (El-Tayeb 2012; Zimmerman 2015). In the last decade of the twentieth century, sexuality again became a primary "optic" through which the difference and foreignness of Muslims in Europe was understood (Puar 2007). It has also become an "'operative technology' in the disciplining of the Muslim Other" (Mepschen et al. 2010, p. 963; Puar 2007, p. xiii).

Wendy Brown explained that a discourse of tolerance has developed in the West that produces *intolerance* as that which is intolerable, and that intolerance has been selectively applied to non-Westerners in public discourse in the USA (Brown 2006). In the Nordic countries, representations of intolerance toward homosexuals shifted their addressee from the Christian religious right, to Muslims over the past decades (Gressgård and Jacobsen 2008). Sindre Bangstad has argued that moralism has been construed as an indisputably negative faculty of intolerant male Muslims in contemporary European sexual politics. What he calls "absolutist secularism, with its particular understanding of gender and sexuality" posits Muslims as "the embodiment of gendered alterity" (Bangstad 2011, p. 29).

According to Brown, gender and sexual politics in the West has been marked by both depoliticization and culturalization. The culturalization of politics is based on the assumption "that every culture has a tangible essence that defines it and then explains politics as a consequence of that essence" (Mamdami in Brown 2006, p. 20). Depoliticization furthermore "involves construing inequality, subordination, marginalization, and social conflict, which all require political analysis and political solutions, as personal and individual, on the one hand, and as natural, religious or cultural on the other" (ibid., p. 15).

This shift in the cultural politics of sexuality has made "culture" a more pressing concern for sex education. In several countries, the issue has been addressed by teaching about the sexual norms of "other cultures" in addition to the norms of "Western countries" in sex education (Honkasalo 2014; Røthing and Svendsen 2011). Sexuality has also gained increasing prominence in civic education for adult migrants and refugees (Bredström 2008). Most famously, tolerance of public displays of homosexuality has been proposed in Dutch citizenship tests (Butler 2009). What I will address as the "culturalization"

of gender equality and sexual freedom (Brown 2006) is an international phenomenon which is especially pronounced in the Nordic countries, which are my focus here, and in the Netherlands.

In this chapter, I argue that a discourse of sexual imperialism is reflected in Nordic sex education, and that this discourse builds on the epistemological foundations of the sex education project in Europe that were established in the first half of the twentieth century. Drawing a line from the early social hygienic movement, I argue that the strictly demarcated sexual health curriculum functions as a depoliticizing apparatus, through which a specific cultural notion of natural sex is produced as "objective" and based on scientific knowledge. I trace a distinction between "objective" and "subjective" sexual knowledges that correspond to the health–morality binary that Mary Lou Rasmussen has identified in sex education scholarship (Rasmussen 2010, 2012). She points out that the opposition that is construed between health and morality in sex education relies on a secular logic, through which religious and moral concerns are construed as illegitimate.

Rasmussen draws on Joan W. Scott in her critique of progressive CSE agendas. Scott seeks to undo the frequently conflated binaries of "modern/traditional, secular/religious, sexually liberated/sexually oppressed, gender equality/patriarchal hierarchy and West/East" (Scott 2011, p. 93). She argues that three perspectives are the key to understanding the secular frame for sexual politics that she names "sexularism." These are (1) the role of imperialism in the history of secularization, (2) the notion of individual agency that secularism invokes, and (3) the role of sexual difference in secular political organization (Scott 2011, p. 93). The problems with secular notions of individual agency in progressive CSE agendas have been fleshed out in Rasmussen's critique of the concept of "thick desire" (Fine 1988; Fine and McClelland 2006) and pleasure-oriented sex education agendas (Rasmussen 2012). In this chapter, I focus on the two other perspectives Scott highlights. I outline how the history of imperialism and the continuation of its epistemology are central to sex education as it is currently practiced in the Nordic countries. Second, I argue that the separation of sex from sexuality that persists in sex education in the region illustrates how heteronormative conceptualizations of gender and sexuality continue to frame sexual health education. Interrogating the health/morality binary from these perspectives highlights the significance of colonial knowledge formations to the division between health and morality. I draw on postcolonial critique and postcolonial feminism to illustrate how sex education employs discourses that are central in contemporary European racisms today, and argue that the health/morality binary is constitutive of the legitimization of these discourses.

My discussion focuses on sex education in the Nordic countries, and the examples I use are derived from the research in Norway, Finland, and Sweden. The issues I discuss are not unique to these contexts, however. The cultural politics of sexuality that I address in Nordic sex education is nested in a history and a contemporary discourse of sexuality that cuts across Europe, and has significant links to other Western countries. As David Theo Goldberg has explained, racism takes regional forms. In this chapter, I use the Nordic example to shed light on how "racial Europeanization," with its particular emphasis on Islamic Others, informs sex education (Goldberg 2009). Sexuality is central to the fierce and pervasive aversion toward Muslims in particular, and non-White immigrants in general, in Europe (El-Tayeb 2012; Mepschen et al. 2010). It is my hope that a critical engagement with the epistemology of Nordic sex education can contribute to a strategy for challenging rather than confirming sexualized racism in schools. This task prompts us to revisit investments in racial and cultural superiority, which have been part and parcel of European sex education throughout the twentieth century.

Sex Education as a Governing Tool

The early initiatives for sex education came from Progressives and Christian reformers in the USA and in Europe in the first two decades of the twentieth century, who voiced a social hygiene agenda where sex education figured alongside other measures to prevent prostitution, alcoholism, venereal disease, and illegitimacy (Zimmerman 2015). In the USA, and also in several European countries, the social hygiene movement had strong ties to the feminist movement, who argued that women's plight and responsibility for social hygiene and "civic housekeeping" should make them full citizens, with the right to vote.[1]

American Social Hygiene Association (ASHA) was a central actor in the effort to spread sex education in the first half of the twentieth century, both in the USA and abroad. Jonathan Zimmerman writes that the ASHAs role in spreading sex education material lead to a widespread notion in other countries of the project as an "American import" (Zimmerman 2015). This notion would stick to the project in many contexts, even though its leading agitators on the global scene would shift from being Americans in the first half of the century, to Scandinavians in the latter half (Zimmerman 2015).

After World War II, Sweden emerged as the undisputed champion of CSE. This was in no small part to the national and international efforts of

[1] See Addams 1996.

the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education from 1933 onwards, led by the enigmatic reformer Elise Ottesen-Jensen (1886–1973), which in 1956 resulted in compulsory sexuality education in schools (Sherlock 2012). Just like the Americans before, the Scandinavian reformers actively spread sex education through international organizations such as the United Nations, and development aid work.

The social hygiene movement that the sex education agenda in early twentieth century Europe was championed by, was strongly inspired by modern science, and popularizations of modern biology. At the time, Charles Darwin's ideas of the evolution of species and sexual selection had been adopted and applied as a theory of society, most notably by Sir Francis Galton (1882–1911). Galton was convinced that human evolution would benefit from design in the same ways that animal breeding did (Challis 2013). Eugenics became the dominant racial epistemology of the early twentieth century, replacing the dominant physiognomy of the 1800s (Challis 2013). It was also the scientific backdrop that informed solutions to the sexual problems of this era, of which the declining birth rates in White populations were paramount (Carter 2001). The supremacy of the White races in general, and the Nordic race in particular, was intrinsic in this project.

Not surprisingly, the Nordic states embraced this scientific legitimization of Nordic racial superiority. Sweden established the State Institute for Racial Biology in 1922, which was an intellectual hub for the eugenic movement. Its chairman, Herman Lundborg (1868–1943), explained that the aims and goals of eugenics were to "the extent possible, to prevent hereditary degeneration to appear and spread, and to organize the societal conditions in such a way, so that successive generations will be as well-positioned as possible in the struggle for existence" (Rudling 2014).

The basic ideas of hereditary vices, degeneration, and the importance of the effort to improve the "stock of the nation" were considered common sense among the educated in Western countries in the first half of the twentieth century. It was in this scientific and political climate that sex education was designed as a governing tool. In a proposition to the League of Nations to further "biological education" in 1928, the British delegation argued that "A carefully devised scheme of biological training could not fail to stimulate the sense of individual responsibility in the exercise of the racial function" (Zimmerman 2015, p. 14). The primary concern of this educational initiative was to prevent sex outside marriage, both for the purpose of combating "degeneration" through venereal disease and the idea that sexual promiscuity was a part of men's biological makeup (Carter 2001).

While the Eugenics movement's direct influence on sex education in Europe is contested (Weeks 2014), it is beyond questioning that the notion of a superior White race and European bourgeois family organization was central to the formation of the modern science of sexuality, and hence to the educational projects based on it. Sex education was a twentieth -century addition to those instruments through which the state tried to "transform the sexual conduct of couples into a concerted economic and political behavior" to influence what Michel Foucault called "the political economy of population" (Foucault 1995, loc. 332). As Foucault notes, despite the very limited treatment of race in the *History of Sexuality*; "In time these measures would become anchorage points for the different varieties of racism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (Foucault 1995, loc. 332). Ann Laura Stoler's seminal work on race and the history of sexuality suggests that we should understand the Western history of sexuality in light of the politics of governance, medicine, and education in the colonial project (Stoler 1995). Sex education has been one of the governing tools colonizers have used to police and control colonized people, in both colonial and postcolonial relations (Adams and Pigg 2005). Sex education's civilizing mission has been carried out by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Western state agencies, and missionaries as a form of development aid throughout the twentieth century (Zimmerman 2015).

During and in the wake of World War II, the racial sciences were discredited (Benedict 1983). The genocide that European eugenics rationalised, the Holocaust, would foreclose any mention of the discipline of eugenics. As Goldberg (2009) argues, in Europe after the Holocaust, even the term "race" was weeded out of academic and everyday discourse. Nevertheless, he points out:

> As diffuse as they are, racist implications linger, silenced but assumed, always already returned and haunting. Buried, but alive. Odorless traces but suffocating in the wake of their nevertheless denied diffusion. (Goldberg 2009: loc. 2128–2131)

One of the ways in which racial logics made its presence felt in the Nordic context was through the continuation of Eugenic political strategies such as forced sterilization of the traveler community and people with mental health problems that went on well into the 1970s.[2] The racializing representations of colonized people that Nordic people were accustomed to from missionaries and anthropologists would persist too (Gullestad 2007), and form a part

[2] The practice was initiated in the 1930s and would persist into the 1975 in Sweden, and 1977 in Norway.

of sex education curricula that continues to be taught in new forms, as I will address below. In recent years, scholars in critical race studies have argued that notions of racial superiority have lingered in the efforts of "developed countries" to offer their example for social progress to the rest of the world (Hübinette and Lundström 2011). The Scandinavian countries would continue to perceive themselves as unquestionable authorities in sexual politics. This perception is not only based on a perception of their own credentials in this field, but also affirmed by many progressives elsewhere in the West.

This historical backdrop is important for understanding scholarly debates about CSE in the Nordics today. It helps to highlight how the "scientific objectivity" and "reason" of European sex education is a social product that has gone through significant social changes. It also pinpoints how certain elements, notably the notion that European sexual culture is superior, have been sustained through these changes.

Nordic CSE and the Health/Morality Binary

CSE provision and scholarship in the Nordic countries has predominantly had a sexual health and sexual rights agenda. This has involved a sex education that includes knowledge about anatomy and sexual functions, reproduction, contraception, safer sex practices, and relationship competencies that enable young people to make independent decisions about sexuality (Kontula 2010; Sherlock 2015; Svendsen 2012). This knowledge has furthermore been construed as a right young people have. Sex education has typically been mainstreamed into curricula rather than singled out in programs. In these cases, CSE has been rooted in the discipline of biology, and biology teachers and health professionals have been responsible for the delivery (Sherlock 2015; Svendsen 2012). In addition, NGOs have offered substantial outside facilitation of sex education in the region. Typically, new directions in sex education content and pedagogies have been initiated by NGOs, and delivered to schools as supplementary programs (Bromseth and Wildow 2007; Svendsen 2012).

Moral and political concerns about sexual norms, practices, and identities have also been dealt with, but typically located within social science or ethics and religion curriculum. The significant inclusion of homosexuality in sex education has largely been done in these subjects, and has had little effect on the core sexual health curriculum. Similarly, cultural norms and differences that pertain to sexuality have been included in the social science part of sex education in Norway. Thus, the core sexual health curriculum is largely

taught independently of cultural and political issues. More significantly, the conception of "natural sex" and the pivotal position of reproductive sex practices in sex education do not seem to have been disturbed by either the acknowledgment of the significance of same sex practices and identities, or the acknowledgment of differing cultural conceptions of sexuality.

This situation produces a disciplinary distinction between knowledges about sexuality. On the one hand, there are the knowledges that are constituted as indisputable scientific facts through their inclusion in sexual health education in biology. On the other hand, there are knowledges that are constituted as cultural, political, and religious, situated in the social sciences and ethics curricula. The central pedagogical difference between these two parts of Nordic sex education is that sexual health is taught as a (scientific) fact, while questions of culture, sexual norms, identities, and religion have been largely treated as "topics for discussion" (Røthing 2008; Røthing and Svendsen 2009). Queer and feminist scholars in the region have been concerned with the problematic ethics of posing minority sexualities as a topic for classroom discussion, and implicitly also, peer judgment (Bromseth and Darj 2010; Bromseth and Wildow 2007; Røthing and Svendsen 2009). My concern here is that the separation of sexual health issues and sexual norms issues constitutes a distinction between what is cast as objective and subjective knowledges in sex education.

The disciplinary distinction between sexual health and sexual norms mirrors the relationship between sex and sexuality in the West, in which "sex" is strictly associated with reproductive sex, while "sexuality" denotes a larger culture and knowledge about sex. Writing about how the very concept of sex in the modern West grew out of the modern discourse about sexuality, Foucault wrote:

> we must not refer a history of sexuality to the agency of sex; but rather show how "sex" is historically subordinate to sexuality. We must not place sex on the side of reality and sexuality on that of confused ideas and illusions; sexuality is a very real historical formation; it is that which gave rise to the notion of sex, as a speculative element necessary to its operation. (Foucault 1995, loc. 2098)

The distinction between "biological sex" and culturally informed "sexuality" has been central to the production of reproductive sex as "natural" as opposed to "deviant" sexual practices, or "savage" sexual cultures. Vincanne Adams and Stacy Leigh Pigg note that:

> This analytic distinction between a biologically reproductive "sex" and a culturally constructed "sexuality" continues to hold currency in some sexuality

> literature, particularly when it is embedded in an often implicit separation between "the West" and "the rest." (Adams and Pigg 2005, p. 6)

In sex education, the distinction they problematize is central to privileging the epistemology of sexuality that has developed in the White European bourgeoisie in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries at the expense of alternative knowledge formations. As many feminist critics have noted over the years, the depictions of sex and reproduction in education has been heavily informed by gender stereotypes (Martin 1997; Myerson et al. 2007; Røthing and Svendsen 2009). Biological facts have been inscribed with gendered cultural meanings, through descriptions of cells and tissue as gendered agents (ibid). Textbooks that use this paradigm have likened the sperms journey to the egg cell after heterosexual intercourse without protection as a "race" where "the fastest and strongest" arrive to fertilize the egg (Røthing and Svendsen 2009). Notions of passive female bodies and active male bodies, and their biologically inherent relations to one another has thus been inscribed in the knowledges that are presented as pure fact in sex education. The gendered bodies that are described in this style of sex education derive their meanings from the modern Western notion of family, and present this social order as a product of nature. Furthermore, it has the effect that all non-reproductive sexual practices are rendered illegible; they seem superfluous to the purpose of "sex" and counter to supposedly inherent reproductive agency of gendered bodies (Bromseth 2009; Svendsen 2012). As several critics have pointed out, explaining same-sex desires, or the pleasure of oral sex and other non-reproductive sexual practices, is difficult within this framework (Bolander 2009, 2015; Bromseth and Wildow 2007). This biological discourse of sex in education illustrates the error of presenting "sex" as the agent that produces sexuality, rather than vice versa, precisely the position which Foucault lamented.

Postcolonial feminist critique has discussed and exposed how the concepts that the "objective" sexual health curriculum relies on, is based on a particular cultural understanding of gender and family. In the sexual health agenda in the Nordics, concepts of man, woman, sex, and reproduction are seen as self-explanatory and as naturally belonging to the same "objective" discourse of sex. Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues that the notion of "woman" as a unified category presupposes a male–female binary as the primary organizing principle of the social, which inscribes Western patriarchy as the principle of social organization (Mohanty 1988). Mohanty is concerned with extending this critique to Western feminists because she wants to address how they have failed to challenge this premise. The implication of this presumption is that other principles of social organization,

be they age, kinship, class, ethnicity, religion, or law, are presumed to be manifestations of male power, through which women are bereaved of agency. As Oyerunke Oyewumi has further specified, this universalization of the male–female binary, which is also pervasive in Nordic sex education, conceptually hinders theorization of societies in which gender categories have taken a more plural form. The effect of this universalization is that difference from the Western gender order is interpreted as a priori oppressive, rendering the non-Western woman "always, already oppressed." Implicit in the universalist category of "woman," Oyewumi argues, is the role of "wife" and "daughter," and "patriarchal husband"—all components of the nuclear family (Oyewumi 2002, p. 2).

Mohanty and Oyewumi offer tools for understanding how naturalization and universalization of a particular gender order are two sides of the same coin. To put it differently, naturalization is the means with which the European gender order posits itself as universal. The practice of the health/morality binary as a disciplinary divide between sexual health education and education in cultural and moral concerns efficiently separates the sexual health agenda from the queer, feminist, and postcolonial critique I have presented here.

The queer and feminist arguments I have outlined are not new to Nordic sex education, and the field has also been influenced by these agendas (Sherlock 2015). The model of mainstreaming a core sexual health agenda, which biology teachers and health professionals are responsible for insures that the conceptual basis that separates sex from sexuality and health from morality is kept intact despite the substantial efforts in the field to offer alternative messages. The continuation of this split is even evident in the queer and feminist norm critical approach to sex education in the region today. As one new norm critical program underlines: "This program focuses on the social aspects of sexuality. Therefore, we address sexuality and relationships without approaching the 'technicalities' (of sex) or personal feelings" (Svendsen 2015).[3]

It is striking that several of these queer and feminist programs do not address sexual practice at all, and are solely concerned with social norms and marginalization. While it is very valuable that norm critical sex education programs are developed, it is interesting that challenging the norms that the epistemology I have outlined here results in, seems to prompt a move away from the issue of human sexual practice.

[3] My translation from the Norwegian. See http://kfuk-kfum.no/aktiviteter/ressursmateriell/samtaleopplegg/samtaleopplegg-om-seksualitet-fra-risk

Culturalization of Sexual Politics

In Molly McGarry's terms, secularism can be meaningfully understood as naming "the product of a forward-moving modernity that swept magic from the world to make way for the capitalist market and the reign of reason" (McGarry 2008). Magic is here a code for unreason, especially religious beliefs. The secular ordering of knowledge as reasonable and unreasonable lends weight to sex education advocates who argue for the value of "scientific facts" in direct opposition to moral concerns in debates over sex education in the USA (Rasmussen 2010). Furthermore, secularism places religion in the private sphere (Rasmussen 2012). Rasmussen asserts that "there is a strong faith within secular sexuality education that if we can pull together medically accurate information, scientific reason and freedom from religion then 'we' can help young people to become more autonomous and liberated sexual subjects" (Rasmussen 2012, p. 478). Such advocates in the USA have also brought up the Swedish example, as a country where sex education is simply considered a "health issue," which does not pertain to moral issues (Zimmerman 2015).

One of the participants in Leslie Sherlock's research in Sweden, a sexuality researcher, explained the Swedish success noting that "since the medical exploration of sexuality, made sexuality be a part of people's health … there was also this belief in science and knowledge, that knowledge could actually change people into something better" (Sherlock 2012, p. 389). There are challenges to the "objective" sexual health agenda, even in Sweden. Sherlock writes that when participants in her study "discussed religious influences, the focus was not on Lutheranism," which is the dominant religion in the Nordic region, "but rather on non-Christian religions, and immigrant experiences were situated as being in conflict with sex education" (Sherlock 2012, p. 390). Sherlock highlights that the values and beliefs of immigrants in general, and Muslims in particular, is listed as a primary challenge to sex education in Sweden today.

Veronika Honkasalo's research on Finnish sex education illustrates how Islam and Western culture and science are presented in a dichotomy through the logics of culturalization (Honkasalo 2014). One of Honkasalo's informants, a health education teacher explains:

> Openness is important for us—I mean that the information we give is objective, that this is our custom, whereas in Muslim cultures and Islam they do not bring up the information in the same way or the children are not aware of the information, not before it is current for them when they grow up. What is specific

> with Finnish culture is that we are open and objective in relation to information on sexuality (Honkasalo 2014, p. 292).

The national exceptionalism that this teacher implies is typical for representations of a sexual culture that is used to positively distinguish the nation, while simultaneously placing it within a Western secular tradition (Røthing and Svendsen 2011). In this quote, objectivity and openness are understood as specifically Finnish (and Western), indicating that information influenced by religion, especially Islam, should be seen as subjective and close-minded. The problem that Honkasalo points out with her informant's standpoint above is that it also clearly posits her own culture of "openness and objectivity" as superior to the Muslim culture which she uses as her point of contrast (Honkasalo 2014).

In this way, the binaries of health/morality conflate with the binaries of Western/non-Western and secular/Muslim in CSE agendas in the Nordics. Sex education in the region draws on these binaries to portray Western sexuality as free, liberal, and developed in explicit contrast to "other cultures" or "Muslim countries" which students are implicitly taught are unfree, illiberal, and underdeveloped (Bredström 2005; Honkasalo 2014; Røthing and Svendsen 2011).

The politics of tolerance has been particularly evident in Nordic sex education which makes *homotolerance* a key objective (Røthing 2008; Røthing and Svendsen 2010). Tolerance toward homosexuality has become a learning requirement for students. As Åse Røthing has shown, students' failure to comply with homotolerance is interpreted by teachers in light of culture and race. In her research, White ethnic Norwegian boys' homonegativism was interpreted as a sign of immaturity, while similar attitudes among Muslim boys were interpreted as an effect of the "home culture." In this case, the White boy is expected to be able to "grow out of it," while the Muslim boy is implicitly expected to remain intolerant (Røthing 2008).

As the example from Røthing's research above suggests, culturalization locks the culturalized subject in a position of arrested development; the Muslim boy in question is not expected to "grow out of" his intolerance because it is presumed to be inherent in his culture. Røthing's example illustrates how "homonationalism" makes its presence felt in sex education. The concept of "homonationalism" was coined by Jasbir Puar to describe how the nation-state has been rapidly transformed from a burden to a promise for White gays and lesbians in the USA (her focus), as well as in several European countries (Puar 2007). She argues that the "historical and contemporaneous production of an emergent normativity, homonormativity, ties the recognition of

homosexual subject, both legally and representationally, to the national and transnational political agendas of U.S. imperialism" (Puar 2007, p. 9). Lisa Duggan furthermore described "the new homonormativity" that Puar saw as constitutive of homonationalism as:

> a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption. (Duggan 2003, p. 50)

Through homonormativity and homonationalism, lesbian and gay inclusions in sex education curricula have been possible without challenging the heteronormative naturalized conception of sex. The discussion of homosexuality in sex education is intertwined with the discussion of culture and sexuality, and both issues are firmly placed on the morality side of the health/morality binary.

The secular logic that posits religion as the antithesis of reason and good-quality sex education involves a politics of race that is too often overlooked in the European context. Philomena Essed and Sandra Trienekens have traced a "muslimification of racism" in the European context, through which Islamophobia has become central to the racist harassment that people of color experience, whether they are Muslim or not (Essed and Trienekens 2008). The racialization of Islamic faith that these scholars address raises the issue of the interlaced nature of race, sex, and religion.

When discourses about sexuality are pervasive in public culture, they make their presence felt in schools, within and outside sex education curricula. During observations in a multicultural middle school Oslo, I witnessed how the public discourse about Muslim sexualities was a frequent starting point for racist bullying (Svendsen 2014). The issues of genital cutting, including both circumcision and female genital mutilation, and arranged and forced marriages, were topics that were frequently brought up by White boys in this multicultural school context. In this case, the sexualized Islamophobia that circulates in Norwegian society overshadowed the teachers attempt to address racism critically in the classroom. Judging from research in the Nordic context, it seems sex educators, too, are at loss when trying to address cultural difference and sexuality without drawing on racist representations of Muslim sexual norms and attitudes. The moral panics over Muslim sexualities that have been raised repeatedly over the past decades in many European countries (Poynting and Morgan 2012) come to matter in education, and will also seep into everyday encounters outside the classroom. It seems like the topics of

race, religion, and sexuality invoke each other in ways that demand that educators who deal with any one of these topics to also address the others.

The current complicity with colonial and racist knowledge formations that exists within and outside sex education in the Nordics testifies to the continuation of an epistemology of sexual health that has constituted bourgeois European sexual culture as advanced in contrast to the sexual cultures of both Europeans in other social classes, and those of implicitly inferior other cultures. The distinction between sex and sexuality, health and morality, and objective and subjective knowledges helps to justify the continuation of an education that conveys the superiority of European sexual culture.

Feminism, Queer Critique, and the Potential for Non-Racist Sex Education

In an article on the pleasure discourse in progressive sex education literature, Louisa Allen pointed out that "Until now, the inclusion of a discourse of pleasure in sexuality education has been constituted as a 'progressive' and 'liberatory' undertaking." (Allen 2012). This "until now" illustrates how scholars who have not considered the racial and cultural politics of secularism in sex education, or even argued in the name of secularism against religious moralism, have been able to do so without having their progressive ethos questioned. Mathias Danbolt, among others, has pointed out that it is rather telling that issues of racism and imperialism appear as new to feminist and queer agendas, when colonial and racial politics have been constitutive of sexual politics throughout the modern era (Scott 2007; Stoler 1995). Danbolt suggests that the sense of surprise that can be traced among progressive scholars and activists over the fact that racial politics have entered the center stage of sexual politics, attests to the investments in color blindness in LGBT and feminist movements (Danbolt 2013, pp. 355–356). The same can be said about the sex education agendas that I address in this chapter. Nevertheless, the renewed fervor with which sexual liberation is recruited to Islamophobic and racist political agendas in Europe signals how politically acute the work of rethinking sex education agendas is (Mepschen et al. 2010). As I have shown in this chapter, this work requires both attention to sex education programs, and to the cultural politics they are nested in.

Heteronormativity was originally a concept that articulated the social work involved in producing straight gender and sexuality as self-evidently natural. The queer insistence on the imbrication of sexuality in material, political, and economic structures, summarized in the concept of "family," is a resource for forming a queer and anti-racist agenda for sex education in the Nordics today.

As Sedgwick noted in the 1990s, the "family" is also a system of blood relations and a patriotic formation (Epstein and Johnson 1998; Sedgwick 1994).

There has been a proliferation of scholarship using queer theory to dislocate questions of ethnicity and race from kinship imaginings (Danbolt 2013; Eng 2010; Haritaworn 2012; Petersen 2011; Reddy 2012). This has involved emphasis on the racialization of concepts of "home" and "family," and on the heteroimagery of concepts of "ethnic group" and "race." Queer of color critique has taken on the job of disarticulating the various connections that make the family a site for ethnic, racial, and national formation. It focuses on the ways in which "racist practice articulates itself generally as gender and sexual regulation, and that gender and sexual differences variegate racial formations." (R. A. Ferguson 2004, p. 4).

These theoretical developments suggest that there is potential for a queer anti-racist critique of sex education. In this chapter, I have shown how the distinction between sex and sexuality, and health and morality in sex education helps naturalize heteronormative concepts of gender and sexuality. Furthermore, I have illustrated how this naturalization is constitutive of a projection of cultural and religious policing of sexuality onto other cultures. As Puar and others have pointed out, the progressivism that is associated with liberal sexual politics in the West often obscures how minorities in Europe are demonized and policed in the name of sexual freedom (Puar 2007). By taking account of the role of sexuality in imperial knowledge formations that posit Europe as quintessentially modern, it is possible to see how this "new" sexual imperialism continues a long tradition. Currently, initiatives to challenge racism in contemporary Nordic sex education focus on challenging social norms that privilege certain lifestyles over others, and naturalize the continuation of marginalizing and discriminatory practices. My discussion here suggests that this effort should include a challenge to the separation of sexual health education from political, moral, and religious questions in sex education.

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