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ABSTRACT

Against neoliberal and new managerial pushes in higher education, educators have a responsibility to engage students in transformational learning and prepare them for the complex world of work. This article describes the use of emancipatory praxis by engaging students in identifying structural sources of advantages and/or privilege, and reports on the data obtained from the written and oral reports of undergraduate social work students taking part in a teaching session on critical reflexivity at a Norwegian University. The data reveal the power of emancipatory praxis in heightening consciousness of intersecting social criteria, such as nationality, race, gender, religion and sexuality in creating obstacles and/or access to power, status and resources. The article lends voice to the students and details their responses to the exercise.

Introduction

Two important contemporary global phenomena that have become entrenched in social work education in Norway and other Nordic countries illustrate the importance of addressing issues of power, privileges and disadvantages. The first concerns the complexity of the ongoing discrimination and marginalization of individuals and groups based on the intersection of social criteria such as class, race, ethnicity, gender, ability, nationality and sexuality (Brekke et al., 2020; Flem et al., 2017; Kojan, 2011; Midtbøen, 2015, 2016; Rugkåsa et al., 2017; Sewpaul, 2013). The way in which educational institutions have responded to these issues is not homogenous. Some have responded by including explicitly critical and global components in theoretical courses and field training in order to connect global issues with local realities (Flem et al., 2017; Jönsson & Flem, 2018). Parallel to such curricula changes, emphasis has been placed on addressing diversity among students (Alseth & Flem, 2017; Lerner, 2021). A diverse student group in relation to criteria such as nationality, race, language, religion, culture sexuality and ethnicity[1] can, in itself, create powerful opportunities for educators to deal with issues of privileges and disadvantages in the classroom. However, these opportunities will require pedagogical practices addressing power and inequalities where differences among students can be articulated, analyzed and acted upon (Razack, 2009; Sewpaul, 2004; Sewpaul et al., 2011).

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Linked to the above is the second phenomenon of neoliberal and new managerial changes in health, welfare and education, with marked shifts manifesting in Nordic welfare states (Kamali & Jönsson, 2018). These changes privilege efficiency, with cost-reducing teaching methods, and reaching greater numbers of students, rather than on intensive teaching in small groups, which has a long tradition in social work education. Increased pressures to conduct research and publish, and to access grants have also led to more specialization of courses, challenging the integration of multidisciplinary knowledge to prepare students to treat people as whole persons (Alseth et al., 2018; International Association of Schools of Social Work [IASSW], 2018); (Sewpaul, 2004, 2013). The neoliberal ideology reinforces a belief that people are responsible for their positions in society, and that people remain in vulnerable positions because of poor choices and problematic behaviors (Alseth et al., 2018; Bauman, 1993; Jönsson, 2015; Sewpaul, 2015; Turbett, 2014). The focus on ´individualization´ narrows the spaces for a more critical analysis to appreciate the complex relationship between agency and structure. This is in contrast with the recommendations of the The Global Standards for Social Work Education (GSSWE) which calls for the 'development of the social worker who is able to deal with the complexities, subtleties, multi-dimensional, ethical, legal and dialogical aspects of power' (Sewpaul & Jones, 2005, p. 224).

As educators, welcoming new undergraduate social work students, we´re always inspired by the students expressed commitment to wanting to make the world a better place (Cree, 2013). Given the current neoliberal and managerial changes within higher education, we have several concerns. Firstly, how can social work educators prevent students from being ignorant of the contextual realities of people's lives with the risk of becoming agents of oppression (Edmonds-Cady & Wingfield, 2017; Garrett, 2010; Jönsson, 2018)? Secondly, how can educators inspire students to develop alternative consciousness that 'may serve as the basis for challenging structural determinants of oppression and privileges' (Sewpaul, 2013, p. 117)? And lastly, how can educators find space for developing pedagogical practices that inspire students to locate the complex intersection of structural constraints and relational oppressions in support of their initial passion and commitments of making society a better place?

Despite the current changes within social work education, we believe that educators can and must create spaces in the classroom which inspire students to adopt new perspectives with the aim of contributing to more just and humane societies. This is also necessary in order to uphold the core values and principles of the social work profession as set out in the Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles (IASSW, 2018) and the 2014 Global Definition of Social Work (IASSW, IFSW, 2014).

This paper explores pedagogical opportunities in raising awareness of privileges and disadvantages during the first semester among undergraduate students of social work within a diverse classroom context at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim. The empirical data are drawn from a one-day teaching session at the end of the introductory course titled ´Social work as a discipline and profession´,[2] The course duration is 17 weeks and builds upon four pillars. These pillars are: 1. Where and how social workers in various domains of the SW field carry on their profession 2. Social work challenges, history, values and ethical principles. Dilemmas related to power issues, othering and how global issues are connected with local realities are particularly highlighted. 3. Processes of change on

the individual, group and community level. In skills training, the emphasis is on communication and relationship building, critical reflection, and the social worker as the mediator between individual and society. 4. Human rights and social justice. Students participate in two seminars with a combination of lectures and group work: i) Human rights as a fundamental for ethical awareness and practice, ii) Racism and discrimination on individual and structural levels.

As there was extensive use of learning groups consisting of 5–7 students per group during the course, the students were used to cooperating in small groups prior to this specific seminar, which contributed to their ease of participation in a session that dealt with uncomfortable and complex issues.

The two main objectives of this study were to capture how social work students address privileges and disadvantages as applied to their own lives, within a broader societal context, and students' views regarding the benefits of the form of praxis used in the classroom.

The power of emancipatory praxis

In social work education, the self must be the site of awakening and politicization, as there is a dialectal relationship between individual and societal consciousness (Freire, 1973, 1998; IASSW, 2018; Sewpaul et al., 2011; Sewpaul, 2013). Freire (1970) defined praxis as 'reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed' (p. 126), with a focus on reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, with the key strategy being reflexive dialogue. The GSWSEP, as do emancipatory educators such as Althusser (1971), Freire (1970, 1973), Giroux (1997, 2010), Gramsci (1977) and Sewpaul (2004, 2013) address the importance of liberation from the entrapments of our own thinking. The *GSWSEP* has specific principles related to this with 4.7 and 4.8 reading as:

> Social workers recognize that dominant socio-political and cultural discourses and practices contribute to many taken-for-granted assumptions and entrapments of thinking, which manifest in the normalization and naturalization of a range of prejudices, oppressions, marginalizations, exploitation, violence and exclusions.

> Social workers recognize that developing strategies to heighten critical consciousness that challenge and change taken-for-granted assumptions for ourselves and the people whom we engage with, forms the basis of everyday ethical, anti-oppressive practice.

As social workers, we are products and producers of our socio-political, economic and cultural worlds. The ideologies that we hold are reflected in, and reinforced by, dominant social systems such as the family, education, culture, religion, economics, politics and the media (Sewpaul, 2013). It is, therefore, critical that we become aware of cultural, political and capitalist ideological hegemony and appreciate how we can shift from being the 'subjected being' to a free subject that is the 'author of and responsible for its actions' (Althusser, 1971, p. 182). With the development of critical consciousness (Freire, 1973, 1998) there is a greater chance that social workers would use their voice and skills to contribute to socio-economic, political and cultural change and development. The pedagogical and practice implications of principles 4.7 and 4.8 will be contextually interpreted and applied, as social work educators, researchers, practitioners and students adopt strategies that challenge and change ideological control of

consciousness that are usually at the heart of prejudices, discriminations, oppressions, poverty and inequality based in inter-sectional social criteria such as race, caste, gender, class, sexuality, religion, language and geographic location (Sewpaul, 2013; Sewpaul & Larsen, 2014).

The classroom constitutes an ideal site for the awakening and politicization of the self (Giroux, 2010; Sewpaul, 2004; Sewpaul et al., 2011). Emancipatory social work is directed at heightening awareness of external sources of oppression and/or privilege that hold the possibility of increasing people's self-esteem, courage and conviction so that they, themselves begin to confront structural sources of poverty, inequality, marginalization, oppression and exclusion (Sewpaul & Larsen, 2014). While not echewing the importance of understanding people who we work with, the GSWSEP (IASSW, 2018) emphasizes that, as social workers, we need to begin with ourselves. Without transformation of our consciousness, we are not going to be able to transform societal consciousness. The systems, structures, laws and policies 'out there' that we often criticize, are representations of the collectivities of consciousness of all of us, particularly of those who occupy powerful positions. All of us, as social work students, educators, researchers and practitioners, must be courageous enough to examine our complicities in reproducing the prejudices and harms that we wish to repudiate. Educators must provide safe spaces in the classroom to facilitate such self-examination, using strategies such as reflexive writing and dialogue, experiential teaching and learning (Freire, 1970, 1973), the biographies of students (Sewpaul, 2006; Sewpaul et al., 2011), journaling (Hubbs & Brand, 2005), art and drama (Montez, 2018) and real world lessons.

Transformative learning aims to assist students to become autonomous thinkers who continue to reflect on society, their roles as social workers, and how their worldviews might influence conceptualization of issues and the practice strategies that they adopt (DiAngelo, 2010; Sewpaul et al., 2011; Thompson & Thompson, 2018). In order for transformative learning to take place, students need to actively engage in redefining the context of their own lives and critically assess knowledge (Mezirow as cited in Bay & Macfarlane, 2011, p. 754). Students within a diverse classroom context, represent varied life experiences that influence their perceptions and frames of reference. Central to transformative learning is inviting students into processes of critical reflection from an early stage of their education, for them to become conscious of how intersectional social criteria create opportunities and challenges in society. This includes acknowledging how the emotional aspects shape practice, as well as the moral-political factors that are ever present in our relations (Thompson & Thompson, 2018, p. 27). Such learning opportunities involve participation from educators who act as facilitators or in the language of Freire (1973) cultural animators, rather than as authorities on a subject matter. The aim is to, by creating the ideal free speech conditions that Habermas (1996) proposes, help the students to listen to each other, respect and assist each other, foster peer collaboration and to model the critical, emancipatory roles expected of them (Bay & Macfarlane, 2011; Sewpaul, 2004)

Dialogue is critical to understanding and undoing our taken-for-granted assumptions, but it is not just any kind of dialogue. Freire (1973) asserted, 'Dialogue requires social and political responsibility, it requires at least a minimum of transitive

consciousness' (p. 21). This is paramount as Freire (1973) warned about the dangers of naïve consciousness, which can manifest in things like fanaticism, nostalgia or fatalism. In his words:

> A critically transitive consciousness is characterized by depth in the interpretation of problems; by the substitution of causal principles for magical explanations; by testing of one's 'findings' and by openness to revision; by the attempt to avoid distortion when perceiving problems and to avoid preconceived notions when analyzing them; by refusing to transfer responsibility; by rejecting passive positions; by soundness of argumentation; by the practice of dialogue rather than polemics; by receptivity to the new for reasons beyond novelty and by the good sense not to reject the old just because it is old – by accepting what is valid in both old and new. (p. 14)

Method and process

The empirical data in this study is based on the written and oral reports of a diverse student group who took part in a seminar on critical reflexivity. This emancipatory praxis oriented session was jointly designed by two experienced educators of social work who share a passion for transformative teaching to promote awareness about the hidden and overt power structures that reproduce discrimination and inequalities. As a model for reflection the two educators, from two different parts of the world, shared their narratives of being ´embedded in societies´, and their own possible complicities in reproducing varying degrees of oppressions, disadvantages and privileges. The idea was to get students to be cognisant of how structure constrains agency, renders us prisoners of our own thinking, and how reflecting on the nexus between the personal and the political may contribute to a transformed consciousness.

The following questions guided the consciously designed praxis session:

How do social work students experience and articulate privileges and/or disadvantages?

How do students view the transformative potential of emancipatory praxis in the context of a diverse classroom?

Inspired by critical theorists (Freire, 1970, 1973, 1998; Giroux, 1997, 2010; Gramsci, 1977; Jönsson & Flem, 2020; Sewpaul, 2004, 2013), who highlight the importance of everyday life experiences as a context for learning, deconstruction and action, where our own voices become the object of theoretical and critical analyses, we adopted a situated approach, and engaged students in small group discussions where they reflected on how the complex intersection of various social criteria constituted sources of oppression and/or privilege in their lives. Drawing on the GSWEP, which addresses the embodied vulnerability of humanity, and the 'need for a fundamental conceptual shift from situating human dignity primarily within the context of autonomy to recognizing the inter-subjectivity and inter-relatedness of human dignity and human rights [and the recognition that] as human beings we are all embedded in societies and dependent on their socio-political, economic and cultural structures and conventions' (IASSW, 2018, p. 1), our aim was to create a safe space where students could acknowledge vulnerabilities, and become aware of their own subject locations within their multi-dimensional contexts.

After the two educators shared their own narratives, students were invited to discuss the following in their small groups: *How does my race/caste, class, gender, geographic location (e.g. coming from the Global North or Global South and rural/*

urban), language, (dis)abiliy, sexuality (optional)—any other criteria—constitute sources of privilege and/or disadvantage in my life? Whether homosexual or heterosexual or on the continuum of sexualities, people generally think of sexuality as a private matter; a taboo and not to be discussed publicly. We did not want students to feel that they had to respond to this criterion, if they were uncomfortable with it. Students exercised choice in what they wanted to share in relation to all the criteria; there was no coercion. As the session was included as part of best practice of the curriculum, and that engaging students in such emancipatory praxis is an ethical requirement of educators (International Association of Schools of Social Work, 2018), ethical approval was not sought from the institution. The students were verbally informed that the data would be used for research purposes to which they consented, the importance of respectful dialogue was emphasized, and the students were assured that no identifying data would be included in the write-up.

The class of about 80 students were divided into 16 groups, with each group representing as much diversity as possible in relation to gender, ethnicity and age. More than 20 of the 80 students represented ethnic minority students from a variety of contexts due to immigration or being born of immigrant parents.[3] The majority was female; only 12 were male students. The age range was between 19 to 38 years. The majority was in their late adolescent or early adulthood phase, having just completed school and entered university.

In engaging in dialogue with their peers, it was hoped that students would gain more empathic entries into each other's lives and recognise the relationship between the personal and the structural dimensions of life. Social work education is about preparing students for the complex, real world of work. Socialising students into particular ways of thinking towards human rights, social justice, and recognition of how structural factors constitute powerful determinants in accessing resources, status and power, hold potential for students to carry these into the world of work. Thus, 'the educator must … create a space for personal reflection on the students' own lives and identities.' (Sewpaul et al., 2011, p. 394).

After the group discussion, one student per group reported orally in English on their group discussions, and provided a written summary of these discussions. Fourteen written group reports were turned in and translated from Norwegian into English by the researcher who was fluent in both languages and cross checked. The oral reports were recorded by the researchers during the presentations in class. At the end of the seminar each student was invited to write an individual assessment of their perceived learning outcomes. Fifty individual assessment reports were turned in. These were also translated from Norwegien into English.

A general inductive approach was used in the analysis through a detailed reading of the raw data to elicit recurring codes and categories that were synthesized into the themes (Bryman & Burgess, 1994; Thomas, 2006) that we discuss. Some data are disguised to protect the identity of the participants.

Key findings of students´perceived privileges and disadvantages

Analysed in the following are the students´written and oral reports from the group discussions dealing with the following question: *How do social work students experience and articulate privileges and/or disadvantages?* This analysis revealed four major themes: On nationality, language, race and identity; The pervasive influence of gender; The influence of religion; The influence of sexual orientation: space and context.

On nationality, language, race and identity

Students' discourses reflected the inseparability of the intersection of nationality, language, race and identity. It was the most pervasive theme that emerged. One student said, 'One has no choice about one's place of birth, but it does make a difference in terms of advantages and disadvantages'. Being a native born and White with mastery of the Norwegian language in the local context provided for a more secure identity, and enhanced sense of wellbeing, with almost all students identifying the privileges of the education, welfare and health benefits of Norway. They also talked about how these privileges were so normalized and taken-for-granted. The typical responses included: 'As Norwegians we are really spoilt'; 'Privileges can make us blind to other things in the world'; 'As Norwegians we take our rights and privileges for granted.' They talked about having 'lots of benefits' that were so 'obvious', that they hardly ever paid attention to them. One of the major privileges that they highlighted was the power of the passport that allowed them to cross borders freely, which they knew was denied to many people from the Global South where stringent visa requirements applied. It is usually when they travelled outside of Norway, that they began to really appreciate what they had. One student e.g. said 'When I travelled outside of Norway to the USA I realized how expensive it is to be sick. Before that I didn't think of my privilege.' This is, indeed, a profound observation on the dynamics of normalization, that characterize taken-for-granted assumptions.

As educators, our observations, in this and other contexts, where we engaged in such emancipatory forms of praxis, was that it was generally much more challenging to engage with privilege than with oppression or disadvantage. Where groups were diverse, the discussion tended to focus on the experiences of those students who experienced more marginality and oppression. Acknowledging privilege tended to elicit feelings of discomfort. Within the emancipatory paradigm, Boler (1999), and Zembylas and McGlynn (2012), write about the pedagogy of discomfort, and the role of emotions in engendering personal and social change. In one context two Norwegian female students said: 'We tried to think of a single disadvantage in being White, Norwegian, and we could not come up with anything. We really felt bad about it'. This resonates with the views of Osthus in another study, who described being trapped in the guilt of whiteness, on coming from the Global North into a highly race conscious environment, South Africa, to study. In the words of Osthus, 'There was nothing I could do to change my skin colour and I experienced this as an existential crisis.' (Sewpaul et al., 2011, p. 394).

Dominelli (2002) draws attention to how paralysing it can feel to be identified as an oppressor, especially when it is difficult to get out of that particular social category. But, Osthus above went on to describe the benefits of her exposure to emancipatory education in the classroom, including the writing of her own biography. Important to this was that students had to make sense of the task. The writing of the biography was underscored by theoretical approaches to emancipatory pedagogy, emphasizing the dialectical relationship between structure and agency, and our roles in reproducing the world (Sewpaul et al., 2011).

Giroux (1997) calls for a multiculturalism that provides ' . . . dominant groups with the knowledge and histories to examine, acknowledge, and unlearn their own privilege' and to ' . . . [deconstruct] the centres of colonial power and [undo] the master narratives of

racism' (p. 236). Verwoerd (2019), the grandson of Hendrik Verwoerd—the chief architect of apartheid South Africa, describes his brutal and honest confrontations with his privilege of whiteness, and his painful awakenings, which is a process and not an end, that contributed to him becoming constructively engaged in peace and reconciliation efforts in South Africa and in Northern Ireland.

In this study, the students addressed the complexity of nationality, race and identity, raising the following question: "Who is actually Norwegian?" There are e.g. American Norwegians, British Norwegians, Polish Norwegians". Their interesting observation was that,"Those with the same colour are not separately defined—they are just Norwegian". One student said: "As a Norwegian [nationality withheld], I feel it is equally important to be both Norwegian and [withheld], but I am seen as more [withheld] than Norwegian". One of the students talked both the subtle and overt manifestations of nationality and race. "I do not fit into the super category, Norwegian. I am a [withheld] Norwegian, my parents gave me a Norwegian name so that I can have more opportunities. I can get away with it, but others (immigrants) who look different cannot". Another student from a European country said, "But I look Norwegian so I am privileged. My friends from Afghanistan tell me it is easy for me to be an immigrant it is a lot harder for them." What the students underscored was that it was the visible markers of difference in respect of skin colour and race, that played more profound roles in discrimination, exclusion and oppression, rather than nationality per se.

The dynamics of othering play themselves out in several ways that have huge implications for social work. E.g. children of ethnic minorities being over-represented in the child protection system in Norway (Skivenes, 2015; Ylvisaker et al., 2015). Reflecting on the discourses on "poverty, racism and oppression of immigrant groups", Skivenes (2015) asserted,"we know that immigrant children are grossly overrepresented [in child welfare systems]" (p. 41), while Ylvisaker et al. (2015) describe marked ethnocentric attitudes and interactions with ethnic minority families. The rates of unemployment are higher among immigrants than among Norwegians, with the lowest rate of employment being among those from Africa, with 30% of women and 45% of men being in employment (Statistics Norway, 2018).

Students also addressed the power of context. One student said:" Ethnicity can be an advantage or disadvantage. E.g. being an ethnic Norwegian in Norway is an advantage but being an ethnic Norwegian in Afghanistan can be a disadvantage as there will be more challenges with culture and language." Xenophobia and being treated differently on the basis of nationality, and more particularly skin colour were dominant in the students' discourses. One student who identified as Sami,[4] described her painful experiences of discrimination, indicating that she felt "unseen", adding "its best to change your body and your face." The student's view is understandable given that while "Norway has never been a colonial power; nevertheless Norway is a part of this discourse on 'We [the good] and the Other [the bad], not least through the presence of the most numerous Sámi populations in the Nordic countries' (Modeer & Petersen, 2009, p. 57). Saus and Boine (2019) have addressed the discriminations experienced by the Sámi people.

The influence of gender

Irrespective of nationality, there was an overwhelming consensus among the students that gender matters! One of the students said,"To be a woman can create oppressions in everyday life." Although occupying a more emancipated gendered space, compared with many other countries, Norwegain students spoke about the glass ceiling for women, and the challenges that women experience in the world of work in relation to lower wages and challenges in asserting authority. The Global Gender Gap report of the World Economic Forum (2018) placed Norway second, behind Iceland, which has closed over 85% of its overall gender gap. Norway scored 83.5%, and Sweden and Finland 82.2%. The top ten also featured Nicaragua, 5th, Rwanda, 6th, New Zealand, 7th, the Philippines, 8th, Ireland, 9th, and Namibia, 10th. Among the 149 countries surveyed Syria, Iraq, Pakistan and Yemen reflected the highest gender gap. Apart from men being more privileged with regard to work, the discourses on gender centered around, "being judged by dress" and "sexual harassment". While acknowledging discrimination on the basis of gender, one student reflected on the pecking order in which gender plays itself, "Being woman is sometimes a privilege compared e.g. with transgender people who experience prejudices and exclusions."

Despite being high on the gender parity scale with gains over time, Statistics Norway (2018) provides evidence that men have more financial capital, and even over comparable educational levels and occupations, men earn more than women. While women make up 47% of the workforce, they are in the minority in top management positions. In 2016, 38% of all managers were women. Statistics Norway (2018) reports on the impact of the General Quota Act that required all Public Limited Companies (PLCs) to have at least 40% women. Before this "the boardrooms were largely the preserve of men. In 2003 (when the law was passed), 91% of all board members in PLCs were men, and 97% of all board chairs were men. Since the Act came into force, the proportion of women on these boards has remained stable at around 40%. The proportion of women board representatives in Norwegian limited companies, on the other hand, amounted to 16% in 2017, and this proportion has remained stable over many years" (Statistics Norway, 2018, p. 26), suggesting that were it not for the mandatory representation of women, PLCs might have fewer women on their boards. This demonstrates the broad structural conditions reflecting male privilege. Simpson's (2004, p. 40) indepth interviews with men in predominantly female occupations reflected the privileges that men enjoyed in relation to enhanced leadership and differential treatment, and the strategies that males used to assert dominant masculinity in such settings.

While Norway has very generous family-friendly policies, some scholars have argued that this might have negatively impacted the goal of gender equality as it affects women's participation in the labour market (Datta Gupta et al., 2008; Hakim, 2008), manifesting in a gender gap in wages, a gender-segregated labour market, higher rates of female part-time work, and fewer women in top positions in industry and commerce (Ronsen & Kitterod, 2012). Norway's family-friendly policies are lauded, but they should not disadvantage women in the world of work. The students' concerns about the lack of gender parity in the workplace are reality based.

The influence of religion

A minority view among the students regarding religion was that, 'Religion whether one is Muslim, Buddhist or Christian can be an advantage as it provides a sense of direction and safety.' The discussion centred more on how being religious is constructed as a disadvantage in Norway, and on Islampophobia. For non-native Norwegian female students´ gender and religion intersected in important ways. One of the students who was from a Middle-Eastern country said, "Religion and gender is different from my country. I came to Norway at 10 years of age. I was used to the Islamic religion, which is looked down upon here. It is difficult to adapt to different views about the rights of females." But this student pointed out to inter-generational differences and the influence of age as she added,"but it has been easier for me than for my mother." Dominant media representations of Islam, the tendency to associate Islam with terrorism, and growing Islamophobia, impacts one's sense of self. One male student said, 'Being an immigrant makes you privileged as you get to know other cultures and languages. But, being an Iraqi has lots of disadvantages; being Muslim and the way we are seen by the world . . . You do undergo identity crisis when experiencing stigma in connection with religion, experiencing being considered as the other, having to take responsibility for a whole group of immigrants with regard to we and them divides.' However, as with nationality, one group discussed the importance of context in determining advantage or disadvantage in relation to religion. 'Being a Muslim is a privilege in Saudi Arabia, but not in Norway. But being a Christian in Saudi is a disadvantage.'

Muslim students spoke of the experience of being othered and how they are expected to fit into dominant Norwegian norms, e.g. with the hijab (head scarf) being frowned upon. Research reflects that native Norwegians hold more negative views towards Muslim women who wear the hijab, irrespective of the educational level of the women who wear them (Strabac et al., 2016). While the hijab has become highly politicized, over the past two decades and has come to be associated with fear and threats, particularly after 9/11, it must be born in mind that it is a tradition of Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam (Zoreh & Ali, 2016), and it is not unusual in other religions e.g. in Hinduism for women to cover their heads, particularly during prayer times. Mother Mary, the epitome of purity and virtue in the Christian faith, is always depicted with a head covering. Both the similarities and differences within and across groups, insofar as they do not violate the bodily integrity, security, safety and life of others, must be respected and celebrated. Essentialist views about women who wear the hijab as being passive, subservient, and powerless must be challenged, and women's choice in the matter must be validated. Interestingly, one group had a lively debate about this in class, reflecting that the hijab has 'no homogenous meaning' (Modeer & Petersen, 2009, p. 30). Despite the brevity of time, the students reflected deep engagements and insights into issues regarding religion, nationality and dress, perhaps reflective of the trust developed in the classroom context, the open sharing by the two educators in the introduction, and the empathetic and non-judgmental listening and responsiveness of their peers and the educators/researchers.

Modeer and Petersen (2009) in their incisive report on beliefs in Norway, question the roles of popular public sentiments and the media that serve as 'moral authorities' (p. 34), which represent refugees and migrants as threats, in negotiating the complexities of

diversities. Its historical Protestant Christian homogeneity, 'makes it difficult in practice to accept freedom from religions and freedom to other religions' (ibid, p. 29). Religious diversities have brought core values into the spotlight, and the weight of globalization has seen 'the *displacement* of the state, its loss of regulatory power, and its loss of power to provide a common sense of identity' (Ferrari as cited in Modeer & Petersen, 2009, p. 38).

As the voices of the students reflect, the emphasis is primarily on the individual migrant adjusting to the host country. But as Modeer and Petersen (2009, p. 38) aver, 'the problem of *collective adjustments* of local societies to a changing and globalizing world, where both individuals and societies are becoming more interdependent and more confused in terms of collective orientation, may become as large in the near future'.

While Modeer and Petersen (2009) highlight the 'embeddedness of Protestantism in Norwegian legal and political culture' (p. 29) and the relationship between the monarchy and the Church, some students expressed the view that to be religious—of any faith—in Norway was to be looked down upon. One young man talked about his 'fear of being judged' or being seen as 'less intelligent' so much so that he was unwilling to let people know that he was Christian. Perhaps, reflective of the increasing secularization of Norwegian society, Staufenberg (2016) reported a substantial decrease in the percentage of Norwegians who say they believe in God. In 1985, 50% said that they did believe in God. In 2016, 39% indicated that they were not believers; 37% indicated that they did believe; and 23% indicated that they did not know. In Oslo, only 29% indicated that they believed in God (Staufenberg, 2016). Some students in class spoke about coming from the capital city of Oslo, which is 'rich' and 'posh', and the pressures of consumerism and competitiveness, and the media 'to be successful' and to 'look good'. It is possible that Oslo's being one of the most expensive cities in the world, it being most densely populated in Norway, and its heterogeneity are contributing to decreased levels of religiosity.

The influence of sexual orientation: Space and context

There was an overall consensus among the students, that to be heterosexual accorded one a more privileged space in society, compared with being homosexual or trans-gendered, with some groups indicating that they dealt with the issue of sexuality in a cursory way. The students asserted that heterosexuality meant not being stereotyped or discriminated against, whereas being homosexual meant having 'difficulties with family and the labour market' and being 'bullied.' In two of the groups much of the discussion centred on non heteronormative sexual orientation, with two students who were comfortable enough to discuss their gay and bisexual orientation openly. While acknowledging that homophobia exists in Norway, students expressed the view that they were more privileged. One of the students, who was gay, said: 'I come from Northern Norway which has an open-minded and outspoken culture, which can jar others.' She spoke about some of the challenges that she experienced as a gay woman, and concluded, 'there is still a lot to be done as gay people, but it is better than other countries, e.g. someone from Syria, who will struggle a lot more.' The other student talked about being bi-sexual. She said, 'people assume I am straight because I am in a committed relationship with a man, but I am bi-sexual . . . I want to be recognized for who I am, without fear and prejudice.' The students' candour in discussing their sexual orientation is reflective of their sense of safety of the Norwegian, and the classroom context. This is not surprising as

Norway was the first among Nordic countries to adopt a gender-neutral Marriage Act, and is, as is South Africa, one of the most liberal countries to secure the legal rights of same-sex couples. In some countries people are imprisoned or tortured, with their only 'crime' being that they do not fit into societal standards of heteronormativity. In several countries in the Caribbean, Asia and the Middle East, Africa, and some of the islands in Oceana, homosexuality is punishable by law, with some carrying life sentences and execution.

Hollekim et al. (2012) in a web-based survey of 1246 Norwegians found an overall positive attitude towards marriage rights for same-sex couples, but an unwillingness among people to take a stand on equal parenting rights, with over 50% reflecting concerns about the welfare of children who grow up with same sex parents. Citing prior research, they point to more liberal attitudes towards homosexuality over time, but suggest that Norway is by no means totally homophobia free, thus justifying the student's assertion, 'there is still a lot to be done.'

Benefits of the exercise

Students provided individual, anonymous feedback on their experience of the exercise and what they thought the benefits were. Apart from one student who expressed the view that the timing of the session was wrong, as she/he was more concerned about being prepared for the upcoming examination, the rest of the responses were overwhelmingly positive. Some of the students' responses, reflecting a greater appreciation of hidden stories, intersectionality, becoming more open-minded, enhanced reflexivity, the power of learning from and about peers, and the potential of the enhanced awareness to contribute to justice, are exemplified in the following:

"I have learnt that there often can be hidden stories and that privileges and oppressions can make us blind to these stories. I realized that we all have different privileges and disadvantages, and I have become more open to take into consideration differences between people."

"Understood more of the dynamics between the individual and society through belonging to different categories. It is important to enhance one's own reflexivity by asking why I think the way I do."

"I have gained insight into what can create privileges and disadvantages . . . . I will therefore become more reflexive of what influences me and others. This will be useful for me as a social worker."

"The intersectional perspective has taught us how our identities are influenced, how we address challenges and opportunities, as well as how injustices are created".

"I have realized that I can learn a lot from reflecting on why I´m thinking and doing as I am. Maybe I have to revise my values in order to live according to what I stand for?"

"I´ve learnt a lot about privileges and disadvantages connected with geography, age, ethnicity, sexuality and so forth. I´ve become more open minded and more conscious of the privileges I have and how we can change to promote more justice."

"I´ve become more aware of the challenges connected with ethnicity and gender and how important it is to be aware of how these oppressions are perpetuated."

"I have broadened my perspectives on power and intersectionality. I have discovered my privileges and I do think this is very important to understand at an early stage of the study."

"I have listened to many strong histories, and become more alert of the experience of immigrants' situation in Norwegian society. Have got respect for how everyday experiences can perpetuate oppression and disadvantages."

"I have learned many things from this group discussion. Especially it's a great privilege to know and feel other students' life experiences. I´ve also learnt from the teachers teaching methods. It creates something meaningful in life ... As a future social worker/student I will use your lecture as a good formula of interacting with people. This is by far the best session I´ve attended here at NTNU since I started in August."

"I realize now how little I knew even though I thought I did. I´ve also become more aware of my own privileges and disadvantages. I´m ethnic Norwegian with a religious background which does make people address me a bit differently, based on prejudices. I´ve also learnt that I can learn so much from my classmates, this was very interesting."

The students' feedback is instructive regarding the value of creating spaces for transformative learning. The purpose of emancipatory education is not to induce feelings of badness and guilt that immobilize, but to raise critical consciousness to educate about the systemic external sources of privileges through which people can begin to see themselves as part of the solution and not the problem. Osthus discussed how, "the transformation and liberation that I experienced rekindled the passion and desire to extend the liberation to others ... When Vishanthie looked me in the eyes and said: 'It is not your fault', it helped me to liberate myself from my guilt of belonging to a privileged social category. I needed the personal affirmation and not merely an abstract theory" (Sewpaul et al., 2011, p. 395). She went on to describe how an assignment, in which they had to discuss Giroux's concept of "insurgent multiculturalism", and apply it to their own lives constituted an epiphany in validating her sense of self.

Mhone (as cited in Sewpaul et al., 2011), who had the benefit of emancipatory education in his first year, that continued into other courses, and into the field practice context in his 3rd and 4th years of study, asserted that the emancipatory education, "had a profound impact on the deconstruction and reconstruction of my own identity [and] allowed me to see alternative worldviews that were more empowering and allowed me to see that I could be free from mental slavery" (p. 366–397). He also reported learning that, "oppression and privilege work in complex ways and appreciated the power of context in determining privilege and minority status." (p. 399), as reported by some of the students in this exercise. However, the importance of continuity was underscored by Mhone,"While I valued the emancipatory approaches in class and how they linked to my own life, I began to develop a deeper appreciation of the more substantive aspects of this in the field of practice." Osthus, wrote about the importance of a warm, supportive relationship between educator and student, in working towards emancipatory goals, and how these were transferred to meeting the challenges and messiness of field practice. "The mentoring relationship was the safe space where I could figure out all the contradictions of identity, privilege and oppression in my own life. It was the space where I could experience and live anti-oppressive practice ... and the space where I could identify inequities and injustices and wrestle with the way to act and live with integrity" (as cited in Sewpaul et al., 2011, p. 395).

Conclusion

The face-to-face dialogue, by the accounts of the students served to enhance understanding of self and of each other, particulary of greater understanding of immigrants, intersectional sources of privileges and/or disadvantages, the importance of deep reflexivity in preparing one to be a social worker, and in typical Gramsci (1977) language learning about how everyday experiences can perpetuate oppression and disadvantages and privileges. Such pedagogical praxis is aligned with the Norwegian Education Act, which underlines that education, should 'promote understanding, respect and ability to carry out a dialogue between people with different views concerning beliefs and philosophies of life' (as cited in Modeer & Petersen, 2009, p. 10). Such emancipatory forms of praxis can contribute to engaged citizenship and to the furthering of national development imperatives, which in Norway must embrace building social solidarity, cohesion, and building bridges across similarities and differences. These cannot be achieved by merely getting students to acquire career skills and credentials. Challenging oppression and/or privilege is extremely difficult. It takes time and consistency to change paradigms and ways of working, it is labour intensive, and cannot be moulded into neoliberal and new managerial commands. But, the silver linings of emancipatory praxis are immensely thick with enormous potential to counter the deep fissures of the social faultlines, based on criteria such as race, class, gender, religion, nationality and disability, which have been exercerbated in our bio-hazardous Covid-19 world.

Notes

1. The ethnicities in **Norway** are recorded as **Norwegian** 83.2% (includes about 60,000 Sami), other European 8.3% and other 8.5% (https://www.indexmundi.com/norway/demographics_profile.html)
2. https://www.ntnu.edu/studies/courses/BSA1001#tab=omEmnet
3. From 2001 onward this Social Work Programme was given permission by the State to include a quota system in order to secure that 20% of the students are either immigrants or Norwegian born children of immigrants. Internal statistics at NTNU show that the quota system has resulted in minimum five times more students with ethnic minority background at this specific programme compared to similar programs at NTNU(A. K. Alseth & Flem, 2012).
4. Sami people are one of five national minority groups of Norway. https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/indigenous-peoples-and-minorities/Sami-people/id1403/

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