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## 'Ain't I also a migrant?' An ethnodrama of weaving knowledges otherwise in Finnish migration research

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### ABSTRACT

Previous Nordic migration and minority studies focus little on who produces research about migration and migrant education and in what ways. In contrast, by inquiring into how migrants and researchers themselves as knowing subjects are constituted through research and educational practices, this article seeks to destabilize established modes of knowing and of performing research. Through ethnodrama, it explores the effects of performing abilities to pass as non/not-quite/white, and the related abilities to pass as a knowing subject or not. This enables enquiring what counts as valid knowledges and ways of knowing, and who is considered a legitimate knowing subject in migrant educational and research settings and practices in Finland. This study joins a growing body of auto/ethnographic research exploring Eastern European proximities-to/distances-from whiteness in the Nordic space, through embodiment and discomfort with established ways of knowing. The ethnodrama brings into dialogue discussions on (epistemic) racism and (contested) whiteness with current controversies on racialized researcher positionality in feminist circles.

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Racialization; contested whiteness; epistemic racism; autoethnography; ethnodrama

### Introduction

When I came to Finland from Romania in 2014, I considered myself a so-called economic migrant, although my residence permit later was based on co-habitation with a Finnish partner. I also considered myself cosmopolitan and tolerant. I would later grasp the unequal power relations that only allow certain (white) bodies to pass as cosmopolitan, and the paternalism of tolerance. Shortly after my arrival, I joined a migrant integration training in an adult education centre, as suggested to me by the unemployment office. The training I attended in 2015–2016 consisted of one-year daily courses on Finnish language, 'culture' and work life coupled with job practices, supposed to prepare students aged 17 or higher for further secondary or vocational education or for employment, according to the 2012 National core curriculum for integration training for adult migrants.<sup>1</sup> Migrant students' possible higher education plans were seldomly discussed in class. My classmates were mostly from postcolonial and postsocialist spaces, and instances of both solidarity and racism would occur. Later I joined a doctoral studies programme to write about transformative shifts that come with migration, and deep reflections on privilege, racism, and what constitutes solidarity. As I progressed in my studies, I became interested in voices, whose voices matter in migration research, whose voices are silenced, and who has the right to write about which topics.

Previous Nordic migration and minority studies focus little on who produces research about migration and migrant education and in what ways (Alemanji, 2018; Keskinen et al., 2019). Migrants themselves are considered mainly as subjects in research, who can share their experiences but can contribute little insights if at all as knowledge producers (Țiștea, 2020). This can be seen as a form of epistemic racism that hinders migrants' contribution to knowledge production on and for themselves (Dotson, 2014). In contrast, by inquiring into how migrants and researchers themselves as knowing subjects are constituted through research and educational practices, this article seeks to destabilize established modes of knowing and of performing research.

Epistemic systems tend to be shaped around some unmarked privileged epistemic agents, thus having disabling consequences for marginalized agents due to gaps in how those systems are built (G. Pohlhaus, 2020, p. 6). Dominant knowers tend not to notice the gaps in a system that validates their worldview, which puts pressure on marginalized knowers to identify and explain those gaps. This leads to exploitation insofar as they vertically engage with dominant knowers' wilful epistemic/hermeneutic ignorance in decolonial terms (G. Pohlhaus, 2012) or their white ignorance in critical race and whiteness terms (Mills, 2007). Epistemic ignorance means ignoring marginalized knowledges to maintain one's own dominance

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or including marginalized knowers in epistemic systems that contain targeted gaps and extract epistemic labour coercively or in nonreciprocal ways, restricting marginalized knowers from shaping the direction of their own labour (G. Pohlhaus, 2012, 2020). White ignorance shapes whiteness, an orientation of seeing, inhabiting, and claiming to 'know' the world by placing certain things and actions within reach, rendering other worldviews invisible or inferior (Ahmed, 2007, p. 154), and normalizing white supremacy (Applebaum, 2010). Whiteness is not just about skin colour but also about upward social mobility towards the habitus of the white cosmopolitan body, by inhabiting or passing as such a body, or internalizing its style to varying degrees (Ahmed, 2007, p. 160). Within the Nordic space, Finland has had a historically shaky relation to whiteness given its in-between 'east'-'west' position, and inter-imperial position between the Russian and Swedish former empires, which intensified Finnish scientific and political efforts at asserting the nation's whiteness (Keskinen, 2019).

Through ethnodrama, this article explores the effects of performing abilities to pass as non/not-quite/white, and the related abilities to pass as a knowing subject or not. This enables enquiring what counts as valid knowledges and ways of knowing, and who is considered a legitimate knowing subject in migrant educational and research settings and practices in Finland. The study joins a growing body of auto/ethnographic research exploring Eastern European proximities-to/distances-from whiteness in the Nordic space (Krivonos, 2020; Lapiņa, 2018; Lapiņa & Vertelytė, 2020; Loftsdóttir, 2017; Van Riemsdijk, 2010) through embodiment and discomfort with established ways of knowing.

In what follows, I discuss Eastern European people's attempts to pass as non/white currently and historically, and how this shapes knowledge production. After I describe my methodological choices for ethnodrama, follows the script that draws on auto-ethnographic research I conducted during 2015–2016 in an adult education centre for migrants and a reception centre for asylum seekers in Finland, and attempts to analyse that material during earlier stages of my PhD studies. The ethnodrama brings into dialogue discussions on (epistemic) racism and (contested) whiteness with current controversies on racialized researcher positionality in feminist circles.

### Eastern European people's attempts to pass

'Eastern Europeanness' is a contested category based on discourses that conflate the geopolitical and racialized configurations of the various regions grouped under 'Eastern Europe', which are shaped by imperial histories. Regions that have been under the Austro-

Hungarian and Prussian empires may be seen as (almost) part of Central Europe, while regions that have been under the Ottoman and Russian empires may be seen as more 'backward'. My own geohistorical position from which I theorize my lived experiences connects to Southeast Europe's status of periphery to the Ottoman empire and then to Europe, positioning it as semi-'Oriental', semi-'civilized', semi-'developed', and making aspirations to 'proper Europeanness' (or whiteness) in the region 'the dominant attitude' (Boatcă, 2013, p. 6).

Passing is flexible, fluid, ongoing, and performative through actions or behaviours that maintain or break societal norms, that make one readable in a non/conventionalized way (Tudor, 2017a, p. 24). Passing may uphold societal norms through 'a re-enactment and a reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established' that prompt societal legitimacy and approval (Butler, 1988, p. 526). Passing may contest and disrupt societal norms by refusing to assume and by re-signifying social categories (Butler, 1990), though it can also secure the power in place through its very potential for destabilizing systems of power (Ahmed, 1999, p. 89). A transgressive performativity of social categories can also reproduce constraining discourses through the way subjects become intelligible in others' eyes—how they are read by others through conventionalized habits of seeing and perceiving, which may differ from how they wish to pass (Tudor, 2017a, p. 21). Intelligibility produces a separate realm of 'unthinkable, abject bodies' (Butler, 1993), for instance, when subjects distance themselves from a disadvantaged positioning to claim a privileged one (Tudor, 2017a, p. 21) or when they fetishize marginalized knowledges to pass as 'other' (Ahmed, 1999, p. 99). Passing is conditioned by prior histories and knowledges that are stored in the body (Ahmed, 1999). Bodies are read with gendering, sexualizing, and racializing gazes in varying degrees due to the unfinished histories that they inherit, which condition the way different bodies inhabit spaces that may or may not be shaped comfortably around the body (Ahmed, 2007).

Whiteness is the system of power sustaining post-Cold War tripartite divisions of the world and normalizing the supremacy of the 'first world' as unmarked centre of power and knowledge production, conferring positions of privilege that become invisible for those who occupy them (Applebaum, 2010; Bhambra, 2014). Eastern European people's attempts to pass as white emerge from these divisive positionings of the 'third world' as postcolonial, the 'second world' as postsocialist (marking territories of the former state socialist countries), and the 'first world' as the 'center' (Cervinkova, 2012). In area studies, the 'third world' is racialized and the 'second

world' is ideologized, and their being marked differently constitutes obstacles to bridge building and collaboration in knowledge production (Suchland, 2011). In critical race and whiteness studies, the 'second world' is seen as 'too white' to be postcolonial, yet always 'catching up' with the 'first world' (Tlostanova, 2015). Whiteness in Eastern Europe has historically also been claimed in opposition to Roma people, the region's largest ethnic minority and most marginalized internal 'other', through displacement, genocide, enslavement, and forced assimilation (Law & Zakharov, 2018; Matache & Bhabha, Matache and Bhabha, 2021). Currently, anti-Roma racism constructs Roma people as 'prone to crime and misconduct', but also attributes assumedly 'positive' cultural traits—'romantic', 'exotic', 'free-spirited', 'mysterious', 'nomadic'—all of which feed the stereotypical assumption of essential and irreconcilable difference between Roma and non-Roma (Mirga-Kruszelnicka, 2018, p. 11). Anti-Roma racism intensified after the 2000s expansions of the European Union eastward, which rested on the degree to which Southeast European countries could 'overcome' their 'connection to or overlap with the Ottoman, and therefore Oriental, legacy, constructed as the opposite of politically desirable Europeanness' (Boatcă, 2013, p. 8). Discourses of unwanted migration from Southeast Europe abounded during the EU expansions and constructed the Roma as the scapegoat in both the 'west' and the 'east', and these discourses still have resonance to present day (Țiștea, 2020; Tudor, 2017a).

In these contexts, Eastern European claims to knowledge production or to non/whiteness, though perhaps requiring considerable efforts, are also often made at the expense of knowledge producers, migrants, or Europeans racialized as non-white (Krivonos, 2020; Lapiņa, 2018; Lapiņa & Vertelytė, 2020; Todorova, 2018; Tudor, 2017a). Lapiņa (2018) and Krivonos (2020) show how Eastern European migrants in Denmark and Finland respectively may put additional effort into passing as white even when they already carry embodied markers of whiteness, such as working on their employability, education, accents, 'hipness', presentability, or changing their names, while racializing and exoticizing other bodies. Tudor (2017a) shows how, in their efforts to articulate their Europeanness and aspirations to white privileges, Southeast Europeans who perceive themselves as white and who are read as Roma in northern/western Europe convert their phenotypical whiteness into white capital through anti-Roma racism. Furthermore, Todorova (2018) interrogates recent studies from Eastern Europe that seek to counter the 'silence' and 'erasure' of postsocialist women in transnational feminist research by mapping and theorizing shared experiences with women

of colour. However, she argues, these studies claim 'racial and historical "innocence"' and 'shared racial victimization', without 'confronting the racial and racist formations' and the 'historical ethno-racial privilege' from which the researchers speak (Todorova, 2018, pp. 117, 134). I approach some of these discourses and controversies with the ethnodrama.

### Methodology: Ethnodrama and autoethnography

Theatre-based methods are increasingly being used for conducting and disseminating academic research in various fields, including education sciences, social sciences, anthropology, and health sciences (Balabuch, 2021; Beck et al., 2011; Davis, 2014; Malhotra & Hotton, 2019; Petersen, 2013; Saldaña, 2018). Ethnodrama (which is short for ethnographic drama) is a written script with dramatized narratives selected from interview transcripts, observation notes, journal entries, memory stories, or secondary print/digital sources (Saldaña, 2018, p. 662). Researchers use it for its theatrical immersiveness to evoke deep reflections in readers/audiences. Ethnodrama comes with the responsibility to create an 'entertainingly informative, aesthetically sound, intellectually rich, and emotionally evocative' experience (Saldaña, 2018, p. 664). It has been used in education to, for instance, vocalize tensions regarding participants' school experiences while honouring their voices (Davis, 2014), examine the role of positionality in education and invite readers to reflect on their own positionalities (Malhotra & Hotton, 2019), or to help students better understand social justice issues and inform educators on the possibilities of ethnodrama for social justice education (Balabuch, 2021).

By suspending the conventions of 'traditional' academic writing for the conversational tone of dramatic texts, ethnodrama enables me to delink from the standpoint of the authoritative researcher, *the one-who-knows*, thus destabilizing the knowing, 'meaning and writing subject' (Minh-ha, 1989, p. 42). However, I am still the one creating the drama's characters as research representations, which runs the risk of recentering my voice, unless I apply a reflexivity of discomfort with my representations (Petersen, 2013, p. 297). With ethnodrama, I therefore question how the characters' positionalities are constructed and linked with structures of power, challenge representations, mis/readings, and the problematic tendencies of giving voice and empowering or speaking on behalf of others, envision new subjectivities and relationalities, and acknowledge how knowing is tenuous, never quite right, always transforming, to show where epistemic and white ignorance may perpetuate (epistemic) racism (Pillow, 2015; Țiștea, 2020).

I collected the data through autoethnography, and then represented and analysed the data through ethnodrama. The data consists of daily autoethnographic notes taken while attending a migrant integration in an adult education centre in 2015–2016, and during my job practice (as part of the training) in a reception centre for asylum seekers, before starting my PhD studies 2018. I also conducted interviews with five Finnish language, society, and work life teachers for migrants working in the adult education centre. Furthermore, I used as data my attempts to analyse my autoethnographic material during earlier stages of my PhD studies. I informed the school and reception centre representatives, my classmates, and the teachers that I intended to apply for PhD studies to write an autoethnography of my lived experiences with Finnish migration systems, and they gave their informed consent for me to utilize this data in research publications. None of the participants is identifiable through the ethnodrama. The notes consist of reflections on my daily classroom or job practice experiences and interactions. Given my lack of critical race and post/decolonial knowledge at the time, the notes present conflicting and biased views within my own thinking on racialization and belonging. The interviews with teachers took place on school premises. I conducted them in Finnish due to school policies on teacher-student interaction only to be carried out in Finnish. Given my limited Finnish language skills at the time, the interviews contained pre-defined questions–based on the knowledge I had then about Finnish society and my experiences as a newly arrived migrant–and my engagement with the interviewees was limited. I audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated the interviews from Finnish to English. For the adaptation of interview transcripts into the ethnodrama, I included both verbatim extracts *and* edited and slightly revised passages, while trying to remain faithful to the interviewee’s voice (Saldaña, 2018, p. 667). For the adaptation of autoethnographic notes, I transformed the ‘in-my-head’ reflective narratives into engaging performances and added plausible conversation exchanges between characters (Saldaña, 2018, p. 677). I then considered how the resulting dialogues may be performed on stage and inserted italicized stage directions between brackets, like movements, gestures, acting recommendations, and interactions with other characters or with objects.

My autoethnographic data reflects my ongoing journey of unlearning internalized prejudices and ‘habituated forms of epistemic domination’ (G. Pohlhaus, 2020, p. 11). With ethnodrama I turn this data into representations that remind readers of their responsibility to reflect on their own problematic histories, uncomfortable complicities, and subconscious racism, while using humour to help readers

breathe. I thus use ethnodrama as a vehicle for scripting and mocking the daily social performances I observed with autoethnography, to prompt in readers deep reflections on the problematics of passing in everyday life. Passing in ethnodrama differs from passing in everyday life. The latter refers to social performances of daily interactions that may or may not involve a self-conscious awareness that those interactions are socially scripted, while passing as enacted in ethnodrama involves self-conscious scripted acts set within certain cultural, political, or aesthetic conventions (Sughrua, 2020, p. 6). I performed a previous version of the ethnodrama through reader’s theatre in a guest lecture with bachelor’s and master’s students. The students critiqued the script, offered recommendations for improvement, and reflected on their own positionings in Finland in relation to paradigms of power, privilege, and oppression within which we all play different parts. I thus engaged with students as active producers rather than passive consumers of knowledge who were willing to accept ethnodrama as knowledge, relate their own knowledges to the drama, and to take part in meaning-making (Petersen, 2013, p. 297).

The script is composed of various characters in multiple, different positionings, interacting in scenes rife with dramatic tensions, ‘glitches’, discrepancies, mis/partial-understandings, and (sometimes conflicting) perspective shifts, which open it to multiple possible readings. The script is followed by a postscript presenting a few possible readings based on the recorded discussions I had with the students who engaged with the ethnodrama in my guest lecture and to whom I am deeply indebted. The students gave their informed consent for me to utilize the transcribed recordings in the analysis. In the postscript, I wrote the direct quotes from students’ feedback in *italics* for them to be recognizable. The students’ readings also present tensions and discrepancies, thus resisting the urge to synthesize the plotline, which would go against the ethnodrama’s rejection of a totalizing, authoritative interpretation of data (Petersen, 2013, p. 297). Both the script and postscript thus explore the potential and performativity of ethnodrama as a disruptive and decolonizing way of seeking knowledge.

## **‘Ain’t I also a migrant?’ The script**

### **Act 1 Adult education centre for migrants**

#### **Scene 1 Classroom**

*Three small desks and chairs on the stage, arranged in a triangle. One character is standing in the middle of the triangle. Three characters are sitting on the chairs, facing each other.*



**Talvikki:** Welcome, students. My name is  
[standing Talvikki. I'll be your teacher.  
in the centre]

*The students are distracted. Two of them are whispering to each other, one is checking her phone.*

**Talvikki:** In Finland, especially in adult education, the student has a major role, and the teacher is more of a guide. Perhaps in your countries the teacher is more of an authority. Am I right?

**Parimala:** Um ... Maybe ... [shrugs her shoulders]

**Ibiyemi:** Well, the way you're standing there in front of us, sorry to say, but you also look like an authority, to be honest ...  
[addresses Talvikki while smiling suggestively]

**Talvikki:** Oh, sorry ... [sits on the floor, her head at the level of the desks, then addresses Ibiyemi facing her upwards]: What I mean is that, in this training, you as students should strive to be active agents in your own learning process. In that sense, my teaching is modern.

**Ibiyemi:** What is modern teaching?  
[crosses her arms and addresses Talvikki facing her downwards]

**Talvikki:** Meaning, I don't provide any ready answers, and you must teach yourselves. I as a teacher cannot learn on your behalf, so you must take responsibility and keep yourselves motivated. In traditional teaching, teachers give instructions and students follow. But I believe the best way to learn is independently, through one's own mistakes and revelations. My role is just to guide you in your journeys.

**Parimala** [addresses Ibiyemi while smiling] Oh, that sounds nice! Looking forward! [Ibiyemi forces a smile back, hopelessness in her eyes. Parimala then addresses Talvikki]: So, what will we learn here?

**Talvikki:** In this training you'll learn [smiles delighted about mutual tolerance and at Parimala and Ibiyemi] multicultural collaboration. [addresses her] You'll learn basic skills to survive in Finnish society. If you keep yourselves motivated and maintain a positive attitude,

you'll have the same opportunities as Finnish people.

**Parimala:** Mm-hmm ... Just like Finnish people? [a look of slight disbelief on her face] Could you tell us more about the attitude we should have?

**Talvikki:** Well, you need to have a certain kind of flexibility, a kind of ... You must learn and understand how Finns act in certain situations, environments ... and that's what we try to teach here. It's an attitude question on how to react to certain things. You *must know*, understand, and *accept* that people do things differently in many ways ... One needs this attitude of accepting that, and to accept oneself as being different also, so you can be yourself within the mainstream ...

**Ibiyemi:** Shouldn't Finnish people also accept that we might do things differently in many ways?  
[nods her head in disapproval and whispers to Parimala]

**Talvikki:** I hear you, but my advice is that you should not try to fight against the majority culture, because you won't win that fight.

**Ibiyemi:** Um ... Okay, but you were saying earlier that we'll learn about this nice idea of multiculturalism, but it sounds like we can only be tolerated here until we become like you ... and also like we have to do all the work ...

**Parimala:** Well, of course we must put in more work to learn the Finnish ways ... It's their country after all ... That attitude won't get you far in this country.

**Ioana:** I agree with Ibiyemi. I always hear, this is how we do it in Finland. But I do it my own way. I brought here my own self when I came from Romania, my own culture, background, skills ... I'm *not* gonna change my name to Minna.

**Ibiyemi:** [addresses Ioana while smiling]: You *could* be a Minna ...

*Parimala and Ibiyemi slightly laugh between each other suggestively. Ioana looks at them puzzled. Talvikki taps Ioana on the shoulder. End of scene.*

## Scene 2 Lunch break

Ibiyemi, Parimala, and Ioana are sitting at a table and eating

**Ioana:** Wow, the teacher was so racist! Assuming we all come from places with ‘traditional teaching’ [shows quotation marks with her fingers] where teachers are authorities ...

**Parimala:** I wonder how much she *really* knows about the places we come from ...

**Ibiyemi:** Mm-hmm ... So how was that [looks at Ioana] racist?  
[intrigued and addresses her]

**Ioana:** Well, we all have our own unique [looks around] backgrounds, skills, many of us are as if lost for highly educated ... And still, we’re words, gathers treated based on assumptions, her thoughts, lumped together as ‘migrants’ and addresses [shows quotation marks with her fingers] Ibiyemi] irrespective of our backgrounds ...

**Ibiyemi:** Um ... I’m not sure if you understand what racism means ... Let me try to explain ... Once we leave this classroom, even if all three of us will speak Finnish equally well, who will have more difficulties or obstacles in getting by or getting a job?

**Ioana:** Um ... I’m not sure if that kind of divisive thinking is helpful ...

**Parimala:** Me neither. And as the teacher said, here we should focus on multicultural collaboration and mutual tolerance ...

**Ibiyemi:** Alright, but think about it ... While [laughs slightly, then addresses Parimala] we’re here learning about tolerance, the employers and bureaucrats out there, do *they* learn about tolerance? I don’t think so. The first thing they see is skin colour. [sighs and addresses Ioana] You are a white European in Europe. You have it easier than us.

**Ioana:** Yes and no. As an Eastern [sighs, nods her head in disapproval, and addresses Ibiyemi] European, I’m not seen as fully European or white ... So, I think we have more things in common than you may think ...

**Ibiyemi:** Hehe ... [eats a spoonful of her food slowly, while Ioana watches her suspensefully, then addresses Ioana] Alright, you’re not fully white, as you say. But when I look at you,

I see a white European. I could even say you’re Finnish.

**Ioana:** Um ... [clears her throat] You might see me like that, but most white Finns don’t, they notice that I have darker, curly hair or that I dress somehow differently, and they stare, and when I start to speak it’s all clear for them. And I still think this kind of thinking is divisive. Us women *must* stick together.

**Ibiyemi:** You can say that because you’re white. I know so many African women in Finland who end up doing the jobs white women don’t want. Are you sticking together with us then?

**Parimala:** Come on, Ibiyemi, don’t say that. I’m sure you also know successful African women here in Finland. I for example, have met quite a few South Asian women with well-paid jobs. We need to keep our faith, stay positive, and share our success stories as inspiration for more women ...

**Ioana:** There are also many Eastern [nods approvingly at Parimala] European women with a lot of work and education experience who work as cleaners and domestic workers when they migrate. Many also work as sex workers, others are [addresses Ibiyemi] looked at as sexual objects ... So, we also struggle, just like you.

**Ibiyemi:** Okay, that happens, but think about [clears her throat and addresses Ioana] this ... You will not have to worry when your children will go to school here because they will not stand out. My children are seen as less capable than other children at school because they are Black. And no matter if they lived all their lives in Finland, they will still be treated as migrants.

**Ioana:** [addresses Ibiyemi in a slightly raised voice]: My children might assimilate within Finnishness, depending on whom I have them with, but is that necessarily a good thing? They are still streamed into a different Finnish language class in school, for example, ... Anyways, me looking white, does that cancel the discrimination I experience? Also, not all Eastern Europeans are white. What about Roma people?

**Parimala:** Oh ... Are you Roma? [*looks at Ioana with increased interest*]

**Ioana:** No, but sometimes Finns think I'm Roma. So sometimes I experience the same racism that Roma people experience.

**Ibiyemi:** Mm-hmm ... The *same* racism ... [*a look of slight disbelief*] Why does that happen?

**Ioana:** When I say I'm from Romania people assume I'm Roma. I guess it stands for seeming exotic in their eyes ...

**Ibiyemi:** Right ... So, a Roma person would not think you're Roma ...

**Ioana:** Um ... [*looks around as if lost for words*] I don't ... I don't know ... Probably not ...

**Parimala:** Are there any Roma people in this training?

**Ioana:** I haven't met any.

**Ibiyemi:** Then maybe you should not speak on their behalf ...

**Ioana:** What makes you say that? [*defensiveness in her eyes, her voice trembling nervously*] I never claimed to speak on anyone else's behalf but my own.

**Ibiyemi:** Alright, calm down. Let's have some [*takes Ioana's hand into hers and gently squeezes it*]

**Parimala:** Oh, yes! Just the words I wanted to hear.

*Ioana smiles relieved. End of act.*

## Act 2 Reception centre for asylum seekers

Ioana is standing in the centre of the stage, facing the audience

**Ioana:** I'm doing my job practice in [*addresses a reception centre for asylum seekers. the audience*] It's part of my integration plan. I'm always accompanied by one of the social workers when walking within the centre's premises. They don't trust me to be alone with asylum seekers. Or maybe they don't trust the asylum seekers ...

*Aino enters the stage. She walks towards Ioana and stops, standing by her side and facing the audience.*

**Aino:** Asylum seekers must clean the [*addresses the reception centre premises as audience*] monthly work duties. If they fail to

complete their duties, sanctions are applied as monthly allowance cuts of up to 30%. We distribute these work duties amongst residents, supervise them, and check if they've cleaned properly. If not, we tell them to come back and finish the job. [*turns to Ioana and addresses her*]: There you are! I was looking for you, but couldn't recognize you ... When you're around them, I guess you also look ethnic, you blend in ... [*slight laughter*] Anyway, Mustafa is late for his cleaning duties. Let's go check on him.

*Mustafa enters the stage. He lays down on the floor. Aino and Ioana walk towards him.*

**Aino:** Wake up, it's time for your work task! [*addresses Mustafa*]

*Drowsy, Mustafa stands up and follows Aino and Ioana to the other side of the stage, where some cleaning products are lined up on the floor. Aino instructs him how to clean with some demonstrations.*

**Aino:** This product is for the floor. This is [*addresses how you do it. she takes one of the Mustafa*] cleaning products, pours a small amount in a bucket, soaks the mop, and then mops the floor briefly] These products are for the toilet [*she grabs another cleaning product in one hand and a toilet brush in the other hand*] When cleaning the toilet, it's important to also lift the seat and clean thoroughly with circular motions, with special attention to the backside of the toilet bowl. Now you do it.

*Mustafa takes the cleaning products for the toilet and mimics in the air the circular gestures of cleaning a toilet bowl.*

**Aino:** Good. No, not like that, remember [*addresses how I showed you. Good. Keep it Mustafa as he that way. addresses Ioana, who is mimics cleaning observing them*] Alright, now that a toilet] you've watched and learned from me how to do this, it's your turn to supervise Mustafa. I have some office duties [*she leaves the stage*]

**Mustafa:** After I finish with this, can you help me with my Finnish course? [*addresses Ioana*]

**Ioana:** Sure, I'll do my best. My Finnish is not that good yet ...



**Mustafa:** Oh, you're not Finnish? Where are you from?

**Ioana:** Romania ...

**Mustafa:** Oh ... [*he leaves the stage*]

*Ioana arranges the cleaning products in a neat row. End of act.*

### Act 3 Conference

#### Scene 1 Presentation

A podium in the centre of the stage. Ioana is standing on it.

**Ioana:** My conference presentation is titled [*addresses the audience*] of me as a migrant in Finland'. A white male Finnish musician claims Romanian language sounds sensual and that I smell like a trip to India, perhaps due to misreading me as Roma. How did it become possible for the categories Roma and Romanian to become conflated and exoticized? A white Finnish social worker in a reception centre for asylum seekers reads me as ethnic when she sees me in proximity to migrants from the Middle East. A migrant from the Middle East reads me as Finnish when he sees me among white Finnish social workers. Social work seems to be associated with normative whiteness, and my inclusion within that normative whiteness seems to be fragile and conditional.

*Most audience members are watching the stage confused. Some are whispering to each other. Two of them raise their hands to ask questions.*

**Audience1:** Thank you so much for this enlightening presentation. It looks to me like your experiences are very similar to those of women of colour. It's good you're fighting for your people.

**Ioana:** Thank you so much for this comment. Just a small clarification if I may. Whom do you refer to by my people?

**Audience1:** Um ... Roma people ... No?

**Ioana:** Um ... yeah ... no ... I am not Roma myself. In my presentation I tried to show how processes of racialization are contingent and relational.

**Audience1:** Right, I see ... What then are the practical implications of your study?

**throat and addresses** What do you plan to do with these findings?

**Ioana]**

**Ioana:** I want to help Roma migrants living in Finland, work for their rights. Most of them do not have access to any state or municipal systems such as education, welfare, or employment services. They rely on activists like me, or on NGOs.

**Audience2:** Thank you for your presentation and for your noble intentions. I am a bit confused by the statement 'how did it become possible for the categories Roma and Romanian to become conflated'. Since you are speaking about Roma migrants from Romania, they are already Romanian. So why problematize their national belonging and frame it as conflation?

**Ioana:** Um ... Thank you so much for the [*gazes at the audience puzzled, remains silent for a few seconds, gathers her thoughts and answers*]

**Audience2:** You should make that clearer in your study, because now it seems to me that you place the Roma in the background to highlight your experience of not fitting within normative whiteness, and I wonder how that benefits social justice. It also seems that you have an issue with being read as Roma, that you are offended by it. But is it you who should be offended, or is it the Roma?

**Ioana:** Wow, you gave me a lot to reflect on! [*bewildermen on her face*] Thank you for that ... [*to herself as she leaves the stage*] Am I reproducing anti-Roma racism? [*her voice fading away*]

*Applauses from audience. End of scene.*

#### Scene 2 Coffee break

*Four audience members are standing on stage, sipping coffee from small cups. They are divided in two groups, at a slight distance from each other. The first group engages in conversation.*

**Audience3:** That was such a waste of time, don't you think?

**Audience4:** Oh, yes! Feel like I've heard all this before ...

**Audience3:** Exactly! Another white researcher who thinks she suffers from racism. For them, racism goes beyond skin colour now, it's *cultural*.

**Audience4:** Ah, tell me about it! They claim their experiences are just the same as ours. I'm so glad someone from the audience picked up on that!

**Audience3:** Oh yes, such a brilliant intervention! I keep hearing these claims lately ... about how racist attitudes from white Eastern European migrants against people of colour should be understood in the context of them experiencing classism and precarious employment.

**Audience4:** Oh my ... They just refuse to engage with race and make it all about *class* instead ...

**Audience3:** Right?! And I wonder, so what? Is that an excuse for their racist behavior? Should we be more understanding and tolerant towards their racism just because they suffer too? Ah, give me a break!

**Audience4:** The thing is, *they* must do the work! *They* must dismantle their racism and whiteness. Sounds like they are asking *us* to do it for them just because they entered the stage later and are now catching up on the social justice warrior agenda.

**Audience4:** Oh, those white social justice warriors ...

*They burst into laughter. The second group engages in conversation.*

**Audience5:** Such a wonderful presentation!

**Audience6:** For sure! We need these fresh new voices. It's about time our voices get heard.

**Audience5:** We have been saying it for so long, that as postsocialist scholars we have so much in common with postcolonial ones. But they still refuse to engage with us.

**Audience6:** But now we have learned the postcolonial language, we *know* how to make our case. I really hope we will start listening to each other.

**Audience5:** I hope so too! By the way, what did you think about the second intervention from the audience?

**Audience6:** It was very harsh! I mean, there aren't that many young scholars decolonizing knowledge on Eastern Europe. Why

discourage them? Aren't we all in the same boat, after all?

*End of act. To be continued.*

## Postscript

*In integration discourses Finns are presented as morally superior, as if they know better and can tell migrants what to do. They present it as if all Finns belong to one homogenous group and all migrants belong to another (although they come from different backgrounds and countries), and as if there's a clear distinction between the two groups. But at the same time, we're saying that we're equal, but that's not equality, it's the opposite. I think the discourse of equality is very misleading. We want migrants to be like Finns and claim they have equal opportunities, but that's a myth, it's not true even for Finns. We claim we are multicultural but in fact we want to assimilate migrants. There are so many contradictions.*

*I don't want to criticize that you are criticizing the system, but there were very shocking things that happened, and I was wondering if those were the worst cases, or was it always like that? Did you find that there were also good things about the integration training or the reception centre, or was it always just like shit? Also, where are the 'normal' Finnish people in the script? Not just authorities and teachers, but equal people. The ethnodrama explores how migrants, teachers, social workers, and researchers navigate educational and research settings/practices in Finland. It highlights discrepancies and conflicts because, from those tensions, openings/cracks can emerge as disruptive ways of seeking knowledge.*

*I think it's important to remember that we're all part of social reality and social structures that are racist even if we don't agree with them and feel like we ourselves are not racist. To reflect on which ways and processes is a start to find out how I can be a part in breaking and transforming them. Being anti/racist is not a fixed state, but an ongoing process of un/becoming. Being racist is not just about holding racist beliefs, but about not questioning those beliefs. Being anti-racist is thus about being open to reconfiguring racist habits as an ongoing process (Monahan, 2011, p. 150).*

*There are differences between characters, how critical they are towards the system. It happens everywhere, like for example, in school, if a teacher or authority says something, someone is like why are we doing this, and someone is like shut up and do it, trying to please the teacher. Also, because you are in a minority position it does not necessarily mean that you must be a social critic. One may be incorporated within whiteness from a non-white social positioning, since the assimilation of differences legitimates the national phantasy of multiculturalism (Ahmed, 1999, p. 101)*

Still, passing as white from a white social positioning implies a degree of comfort and security, whereas passing as white from a non-white positioning brings with it fear of being caught out that limits one's mobility (Ahmed, 1999, p. 93).

*As I was reading the lines by Finnish characters from the script you sent us in text format, before you performed it to us, I was imagining white, blond, blue-eyed bodies. So, it was refreshing in a way to then watch you perform those characters. This made me reflect on how the performance of these characters by non-white bodies can challenge these assumptions of what it means to be Finnish.* It is tempting to try to pass as non-white in attempts for bridge building with racialized migrants, especially when one is already sometimes read as 'ethnic' by others. But passing as non-white from a white positioning involves access to knowledges embedded in white and colonial privileges that approximate a 'knowable' and decontextualized subjectivity and assume that one can pass for 'others' by adopting their ways of being, thus fixing those ways of being as indicators of what it may mean to be 'woman of color' for instance, as the drama explores (Ahmed, 1999, p. 102). *Do you think that the people who are constructing or maintaining power relations, are they aware of that? Do they intentionally maintain the hierarchies? Or is it something that they are not aware of?* It can be both, but even if it is unintentional, that does not make it innocent. White female desires to pass as 'woman of color' may be a technique of epistemic racism that allows the narrativization of the white subject's knowledge of herself through her sympathetic, seemingly 'innocent' incorporation of others within that narrative (Ahmed, 1999, p. 100). Claiming shared racial 'victimization' with women of colour from a white Eastern European positioning (Todorova, 2018) invisibilizes and appropriates the experiences of Eastern European women of colour, especially Roma women, who would have more reasons to claim shared experiences with women of colour across the 'three worlds' (Brooks, 2012; Kóczé et al., 2018; Oprea, 2012).

*We sometimes treat Finnish Roma people worse than we treat non-white migrants. The police always suspect Roma people of stealing or other crimes, they think that making crimes leads to suspicious thinking about all members of a given group, so they should 'maintain a good image', and what disturbs me is that it's not their responsibility just because one person who happened to be Roma makes a crime. That should be seen as a problem of Finnish society.*

*How does not addressing the reproduction of whiteness in and through one's research stand in the way of solidarity with researchers of colour?* The reading that bothers the character Ioana the most is being read as 'Roma', which she considers to be racist, not against the Roma, but against herself. But taking offence with being misread

as Roma perpetuates anti-Roma racism, since one could only perceive the misreading as Roma as hurtful if she reproduces whiteness as a desirable norm and being Roma as something negative (Tudor, 2017a, p. 34). Furthermore, it may equate nationalizing discriminatory readings from a white social positioning with racializing ones (Tudor, 2017b, p. 27). While these readings can sometimes be mutually constitutive and entangled, by equating them one may foreground the discrimination experienced from a white social positioning, while appropriating the experiences of racialized migrants and Europeans (Tudor, 2017b, p. 30). This happens very often in migration research (Tudor, 2017b) and researchers of colour often have to engage vertically with white activist-scholars' epistemic ignorance and explain to them the gaps in their own knowledge systems.

*When watching you read the lines of non-white characters, it made me wonder if you were colonizing the characters' voices, and if your work troubles whiteness or rather recenters it.* The aim of my performances and of my use of ethnodrama was to recognize and take responsibility for the role of whiteness in one's own life and the world around us, while also contesting it by showing different intersubjective ways of manifesting, conditioning, and altering whiteness. By emphasizing white resistance to white supremacy, I do not deny or downplay the realities of white privileges and supremacy (Monahan, 2011, pp. 116, 132). Through my resistance or through the problematization of my context-dependent abilities to pass as non-white, I do not overcome whiteness. I treat whiteness as a process, not as a fixed object that can be overcome because that would indeed mean recentering whiteness.

## Conclusion

The script enacts multiple power/knowledge dynamics of being read and/or passing as non/not-quite/white that re/emerge as the characters move across different socio-temporal contexts, and how these shape and influence access to knowledge claims within three educational settings: migrant integration training in an adult education centre, reception centre for asylum seekers as migrant education training place, and academic conference. The script thus explores multiple connections and tensions between white, epistemic, and pedagogic privileges in Finnish migrant education and migration research, while also contesting the ways those privileges can be changing in different situations. It further explores how discussing and learning about one's own whiteness and (epistemic) racism are contested, thus offering new views and critiques of whiteness that relate to histories of privileges and oppressions yet actively resist those histories' continued legacies (Monahan, 2011, p. 132). The postscript shows how readers/audiences–

in this case students—may respond to different formats/genres of writing and presenting research. It shows how ethnodrama can have the potential to enable different responses and knowledges than more conventional genres by engaging with a multiplicity of voices, which can be seen as a disruptive and decolonizing way of seeking knowledge. One limitation, due to my status as guest-lecturer, arose from not having the time to explore more pedagogical uses of ethnodrama, like inviting students to write, perform, and discuss their own ethnodramas, which I plan to do in further experimentations with this research method.

The ethnodrama is the result of ‘slow’ research carried out during a prolonged timespan, from 2015 to 2021. The current neoliberal university is attuned to the labour market and built for capital generation, treating students as clients, and researchers as resources to be used in short-term, outcome-driven, grant-dependent projects. The university is also framed as the highest source of legitimate knowledge production. Slowing down research and long-term reflections, like a time-traveller re-visiting past research processes with future knowledges, as well as creating knowledge collaboratively and beyond academic frames, through for instance, ethnodrama or other collaborative artistic methods, are possible ways of re-imagining research and education. But do they enable us to delink from the current capitalist model of knowledge for profit, since they do not completely dismantle academia? By being in the university, one unavoidably causes harm. But one can minimize the harm by inviting more bodies, making institutions more open to multiple knowledges, moving away from mastery, failing, and getting better at noticing and generating knowledges from one’s failures.

## Note

1. The 2012 curriculum was replaced in 2017 by the National core curriculum for basic education for adults <https://www.oph.fi/en/statistics-and-publications/publications/national-core-curriculum-basic-education-adults-2017>

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