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*Corresponding author: Paul Thomas,
Faculty of Education and International
Studies, Department of International
Studies and Interpreting, Oslo &
Akershus University of the Applied
Sciences, Oslo, Norway
Emails: paul.thomas@hioa.no,
hpaulsilas@hotmail.com

Reviewing editor:
Hau Fai Edmond Law, Education
University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Additional information is available at
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CURRICULUM & TEACHING STUDIES | RESEARCH ARTICLE

The portrayal of non-westerners in EFL textbooks in Norway

Paul Thomas^{1*}

Abstract: The discourse of equity and egalitarianism has a long pedigree in Norway. However, this discourse has recently come under severe strain as evidenced by the growing segregation of schools along ethnic lines in the capital Oslo. This paper considers the portrayal of non-westerners in four English textbooks used in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in upper secondary schools (vg1 & vg 2; 11th & 12th grade) in Norway. Eight short stories are critically explored employing a postcolonial theoretical framework. The findings reveal a consistent pattern in which representations of characters from non-western backgrounds (Asian, Native American, Black and Hispanic, in particular) tap into topoi of Orientalism and the “racialized Other”. The salience of contrapuntal pedagogy as a counterpoint in addressing the challenges thrown up by Orientalism in EFL textbooks is considered.

Subjects: International & Comparative Education; Multicultural Education; Curriculum Studies

Keywords: orientalism; English textbooks; Norway; upper secondary; representation



Paul Thomas

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Paul Thomas has a PhD from King’s College, London, in Education. He has experience teaching high school, undergraduate and postgraduate students. His research has explored the manner in which multicultural categories, such as ethnicity/race, religion, gender and language have intersected with education. Currently, he is associate professor at Oslo & Akershus University College for the Applied Sciences in the Faculty of Education and International Studies, Department of International Studies and Interpreting. He is also a member of the research group: “Teaching and Learning in Multicultural Societies” (TALMUS), at the Faculty of Education which, among others, researches issues pertaining to teaching and learning in schools, teacher education, vocational education and the world of work. TALMUS is further committed to developing theory, epistemology and methodology in relation to teaching, learning, education and development in multicultural societies. <https://www.cristin.no/as/WebObjects/cristin.woa/wa/presentasjonVis?pres=414140&type=GRUPPE>.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Textbooks are material incarnations of a hegemonic discourse—encompassing, but not limited to—politicians, stakeholders in education, the media and the clergy. The question of which views find their way into the textbooks is salient. This study was inspired by minority-background students’ responses to the portrayal of non-westerners in the short stories covered in English in one Norwegian high school in Oslo, Norway (academic year of 2013–2014). In total, 40 short stories featured in the four textbooks. Sixteen of these have protagonists and characters from non-western backgrounds. The study employs a postcolonial theoretical lens and critically explores how individuals from Asian, Native American, African and Hispanic backgrounds are represented. The study reveals that these short stories draw on Orientalist tropes. At the heart of the issue is the eclectic nature of “canonizing” particular epistemologies as “valid” knowledge that children are taught and examined in during the most vulnerable and malleable years of their lives. The article also suggests strategies (contrapuntal pedagogy) teachers can employ in destabilizing such readings.

1. Textbooks as cultural intermediaries

At the university I read some appalling novels about Africa (including Joyce Cary's much praised *Mister Johnson*) and decided that the story we had to tell could not be told for us by anyone else no matter how gifted or well-intentioned. (Achebe, 2016)

Textbooks play a central role as learners' primary source of information with regards to target language speakers (i.e. Norwegian speakers learning English in this case) and their cultures. In the absence of contact with non-westerners, the English textbooks assume the pivotal role of cultural intermediaries for most ethnic/white Norwegian students. This role as cultural intermediaries takes on greater salience given the recent influx of immigrants from non-western nations and the concomitant segregated educational landscape in the capital Oslo in particular. The term non-westerners is used here to refer to those who hail from countries that were subjugated under colonial rule. This overlaps with Statistics Norway's (2015) categorization where the "EU28/EEA, USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand" form one category, while "Asia, Africa, Latin America, Oceania except Australia and New Zealand, and Europe except the EU28/EEA" forms a separate category. This official way of labelling is what Gullestad (2002, p. 51) refers to as "statistical reification". Non-westerners also overlaps with the term "subaltern". For our purposes, the concern is with the question: how are the subalterns made to speak in these texts? In his *Prison Notebooks* (Gramsci, 1971), Gramsci first mentions the term "subaltern". The metaphor, which defined the work of the later South Asian scholars active in the Subaltern Studies Group, was drawn from the lowly military rank of the subaltern who found himself on the bottom of a hierarchal military order. Ultimately, however, Gramsci's conceptualization is one in which "... subaltern groups, who are subordinated and do not hold any sociopolitical power, will attempt to overcome their subordination through a broad struggle that will affect every aspect of society and, in turn, their social being" (Green, 2010, p. 23). The question: "how is the subaltern made to speak?" implies that the authentic voice of the racialized "other" has been silenced or misrepresented.

Textbooks legitimize a certain perspective of reality over other equally legitimate ones (Apple, 1993, p. 9). At the heart of the controversy is the eclectic nature of "canonizing" particular epistemologies as "valid" knowledge that children are taught and examined in during the most vulnerable and malleable years of their lives. Textbooks are material incarnations of a hegemonic discourse—encompassing, but not limited to—politicians, stakeholders in education, the media and the clergy (Willinsky, 1998). The question of which views find their way into the textbooks is salient. In their study of British English teachers' attitudes towards non-native teachers of English, Holliday and Aboshiha (2009) found that colleagues and students in Japan, the Gulf and Portugal were portrayed, among others, as hostile to change, subdued by memorization, lacking in academic skills, being out of touch owing to a lack of literature translated into English, lacking creativity and autonomy and motivated by a concern to pass exams rather than critically engaging with learning. Left unchallenged, these prejudices are often secreted into EFL textbooks.

Zagumny and Richey (2012) considered the portrayal of south-west Asians and North Africans in 10 American textbooks and found a false dichotomy that projects the West as modern and advanced as opposed to Muslims as traditional and underdeveloped. Part of the conundrum is the unconscious valorization and conflation of "proper English" with native British speakers (i.e. white) whose cultural prejudices may not be scrutinized and find their way into the curriculum. Kumaravadivelu (2003, p. 717) draws attention to the predominance of western perspectives in TESOL as compounding efforts to expunge stereotypes against Asian students. In the same vein, Kubota and Lin (2006, p. 488) lament the fact that although race, racialization and racism impact on various aspects of language teaching and learning, especially in a globalized age, the commercialized field of English teaching evinces a discourse of silence that suppresses and ignores the degrading portrayals of the "Other".

Hence portrayals of non-westerners inform notions of critical pedagogy and what some have called the nurturing of a *global cultural consciousness* and *intercultural citizenship* (Byram, 2008, 2011; Kumaravadivelu, 2008). For Freire (1985), the liberation of the oppressed is possible if a habitus of critical pedagogy can be inculcated. This would necessitate nothing less than a praxis understood as a fruitful tension between thought, reflection and action. The process resists any stasis acknowledging the constantly shifting scene of what goes on in education. Giroux (2006) considers critical pedagogy vital to the task of nurturing a sense of social responsibility that perceives education as a handmaiden of democratic and political change—what he calls a political pedagogy. Kumaravadivelu (2008) outlines five factors that take cognizance of the need for a culturally sensitive EFL (a global cultural consciousness): cultures are hybrid and interpenetrate (cultural connectivity); the familiarity with our own culture and concomitant “strangeness” of others often leads to stereotyping (cultural complexity); globalization impacts cultures in dissimilar ways, empowering some and undermining others (cultural globality); global realities such as the shrinking of space, time and borders and nationalism as a reaction to globalization must be accounted for (cultural realities) and, finally, the forces of commercialization in a global market shape identity in new ways (cultural identity).

Singh and Greenlaw (1998) draw on Said (1994) to suggest a contrapuntal pedagogy as a counterpoint addressing the challenges thrown up by Orientalism in textbooks. Contrapuntal has its origin in music where polyphonic sounds, diverse in rhythm and contour, mesh harmoniously. The objective is to read Eurocentric literature with a postcolonial lens. There are a myriad of reasons that makes the need for a contrapuntal pedagogical approach to teaching a pressing one in Norway. Although EFL textbooks have come a long way since the 1970s and 1980s, several recent studies from various parts of the world have drawn attention to the persistence of, among others, monocultural, classist, racist, sexist, insensitive and superficial depictions of non-westerners (Greil, 2004; Nault, 2006; Shin, Eslami, & Chen, 2011; Tomlinson, 2008). As the American poet, John Ashberry, writes, “Remnants of the old atrocity subsist, but they are converted into ingenious shifts in scenery, a sort of ‘English Garden’ effect, to give the required air of naturalness, pathos and hope” (Cited in Bennett & Royle, 2009, p. 234). Singh and Greenlaw (1998) give expression to this skewed depiction of the Other in western literature classrooms:

As they have been for many years, high school students in the Anglo-Pacific nations of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States are still being taught to misunderstand, fear and mistrust Asian peoples. (Singh & Greenlaw, 1998, p. 193)

This paper explores how the subalterns are made to speak in the following EFL upper secondary school textbooks for grades 11 & 12 that have been approved by the Department of Education and are used on a national basis: Access 2 (2013).¹ In total, 40 short stories featured in the four textbooks. Sixteen of these have protagonists and characters from non-western backgrounds. The study reveals that these short stories draw on Orientalist tropes. Space limitations will only allow two short stories from each textbook to be presented and explored (a total of 8). I have endeavoured to select stories that reflect a variety of ethno/racialized backgrounds from all over the globe. This study was inspired by students’ responses to the portrayal of non-westerners in the short stories covered in English in the first year of high school (academic year of 2013–2014). After a few complaints about the “prejudiced” portrayal of individuals from non-western backgrounds, I made it a point to include questions that considered the following: what are the “typical” stereotypes against a certain ethnic group (e.g. Indians) and in which ways, if any, do you think the short story plays on the stereotype? What textual evidence is there to back up accusations of prejudice? What is the theme of the story? Who are the authors and how do their backgrounds impact on the portrayal non-westerners? Such questions often complemented tasks where students were asked to rewrite the short stories with a different plot and conclusion. The discussions inspired my own critical analysis of the texts through the prism of a postcolonial theoretical framework. In what follows, postcolonial theory is explored with a view towards situating the findings from the textbooks analysed.

2. How is the Subaltern made to speak?

For Said (1979, p. 2), “Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between ‘the Orient’ and (most of the time) ‘the Occident.’” Employing Foucault’s notion of the power/knowledge discourse, Said (1979, p. 3) contends that Orientalism is a:

[...] corporate institution for dealing with the Orient—dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient.

Often these portrayals of colonized subjects beginning in the 18th century conformed to biased tropes that caricatured Orientals as despots, irrational, sensual, infantile or cruel. Following Gramsci, Said (1979, p. 6, 7) identifies schools, among others, as arenas acquiescent to Orientalism by virtue of the cultural hegemony they exercise. Editors of EFL textbooks in Norway for upper secondary school students are charged with the task of compiling a cornucopia of texts from around the world. The choices made—consciously or otherwise—give voice to the “subaltern” understood as those who are marginalized by the power structures.

Spivak (2006, p. 31) argues that the colonial project is “also the asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of the Other in its precarious Subject-tivity”. She calls this inflicting “epistemic violence” a phrase associated with Foucault’s (1965) exposition of the reconfiguration of the definition of madness in the 18th century. Spivak (2006, p. 33) asks the question: “can the subaltern speak?” She queries the manner in which “Western criticism constructs ‘Third World Woman’” distilled in the phrase “White men are saving brown women from brown men”. The selection of texts is not an innocuous exercise about the right mix of language learning activities, but the locus of issues of power and hegemony in ventriloquizing the voice of the subaltern.

Few have psychoanalysed the tortured relations between the colonized black subject and whites as well as Frantz Fanon (1986). For Fanon (1986, p. 14), “the fact of the juxtaposition of the white and black races has created a massive psychoexistential complex”. Furthermore, “White civilization and European culture have forced an existential deviation on the Negro” (Fanon, 1986, p. 16). Though he wrote in the context of French colonialism over half a century ago, the texts analysed in this study—especially the encounters between black and white characters—bring us back to Fanon’s jarring discourse on the subject. The individuals lose their subjectivity and the encounters morph into encounters between antagonistic colours—black and white—playing on primeval tribalistic allegiances and obfuscating race relations reminiscent of Fanon’s famous predicament:

Where am I to be classified? Or, if you prefer, tucked away? A Martinican, a native of “our” old colonies. Where shall I hide? “Look at the nigger! ... Mama”, a Negro! ... Hell, he’s getting mad ... Take no notice, sir, he does not know that you are as civilized as we ... (Fanon, 1986, p. 113)

At issue for Fanon (1986) is the racial interpellation by an objectifying white gaze (Bergner, 1995, p. 85). Certainly, for contemporary Norwegian adolescent students, the socio-economic conditions that existed in the day of Fanon are but relics of an unenlightened era. Nevertheless, textbook representations of blacks can either reify pre-existing stereotypes or destabilize them. The issue of which texts are selected and hence made to speak for the subaltern puts the onus on the editors and ultimately on the Department of Education, given that these textbooks are nationally approved and produced.

C.L.R. James, the Caribbean radical intellectual, framed the struggle against racism in terms of a historical struggle for freedom. His analysis sought to avoid the extremes of reifying race and denying or diluting its reality. James did not see his mission as providing an apologia for blackness itself but the manifestation of universal principles in historically contingent situations that are universally applicable. “It is about recognizing how specific political struggles can surpass their own parochial

aims and serve to realize ‘a freedom greater than their own.’” (Smith, 2010, p. 493). This is why *Blackout* (one of the short texts analysed), for instance, set in James’ Caribbean, must be read as an encounter constrained by a specific, historically contingent racial discourse which, once de-constructed and re-configured through the prism of postcolonial and contrapuntal pedagogies, holds transformative promise. James precociously applied such a contrapuntal approach long before the dawning of postcolonial studies. In his analysis of the film *Gone with the Wind*, James (1939) picks apart the racism inherent in the film. An ex-slave, for example, who had earlier rescued Scarlett O’Hara, is relieved to leave the South for the North, not because of the atrocious racism, but because he was apparently fed up with carpetbaggers—Northern whites who moved to the South in the aftermath of the Civil War to exploit the instability. James concludes:

It is the duty of all revolutionaries wherever possible to point out the gross historical falsifications of this picture, and to do all in their power to counteract the pernicious influence that it is likely to have on the minds of the people, who, knowing no better, may be tempted to accept this as history. (James, 1939)

3. Findings

3.1. Textbook 1: Access

The Palmist (Access, p. 49) by Andrew Lam depicts an elderly Chinese man known only as “The Palmist”. A picture shows a finger tracing the contours of the palm of another person with candles lit on the table. In the short story, the palmist suffers burn out and is riding the bus home after his last ever reading when he sees the hand of an anonymous teenager standing in the bus aisle:

“You”, he said in his heavy accent. “I see wonderful life!” ... “This my last reading: no money, free, gift for you” ... “What—what you don’t know?” asked the palmist. “Maybe I know. Maybe I answer ...” “You know, reading palm not like reading map”. He touched his chest. “You feel and see here in heart also, in guts here also, not just here in your head. It is—how d’you say—atuition?” “Intuition”, the teenager corrected him, stifling a giggle. (p. 50, 51)

Lam employs an omniscient lens to tell the story of the palmist. He assumes the mantle of occultist responsibility for telling the story of the East which, as distilled through the palmist, is cast in the role of “passive object of Western knowledge, without consciousness or an independent voice of its own” (Panagopoulous, 2013, p. 71). The title, *The Palmist*, exploits tropes of the exotic, mysterious and irrational Oriental who, although having lived in America for several decades, speaks appalling English, dreams of the odour of “turned earth ... a golden rice field ...” (p. 50) and has the gall to badger members of the American public to acquiesce to his epiphanic seizures.

The encounter between the American teenager and the elderly Chinese-American palmist couldn’t be more incongruous. It is construed to maximize the dichotomy: youth vs. age: the teenager “didn’t know if he wanted to be touched by the old man with the wrinkled, bony hands and nauseating tobacco breath” (p. 51); values: the teenager wore a T-shirt with “PLAY HARD ... STAY HARD” written; language: the teenager’s “cool”, colloquial style (e.g. “dude” (p. 51)) is contrasted with the broken English of the palmist; rational vs. irrational: to the offer of the palmist to read his hand, the teenager retorts, “I don’t know if I believe in all that hocus-pocus stuff” (p. 51). The above alligns with Said’s (1979, p. 40) contention that “the Oriental is contained and represented by dominating frameworks”. While purportedly “revealing” the future to others, the palmist is portrayed as an anachronistic relic struggling to cope with modernity.

The second short story from Access (2013) is *Blackout* (p. 153) by Roger Mais. The story is set in Jamaica more than half a century ago. While waiting at a bus stop one night, a young white woman encounters a young black man who is described as “a black shadow that seemed to be materializing out of the darkness” (p. 154). The black young man is further described as having a curious look of “hunger and unrest about his eyes” (p. 154). The story is told through the gaze of a white female from the deep South of the USA. The silence is shot through with allusions to the eroticized black

male body and lust for the “white flesh that has been forbidden to us Negroes as long as white men have ruled the world” (René Maran in Fanon (1986)). The story is told with a twist: it occurs in Jamaica. However, the geographical dislocation does not turn the scales in the black male’s favour—at least not in the mind of the white female:

This won’t do, she thought, quickly. She had no intention of standing at a street corner jawing with—well, with a Black man. There was something indecent about it. Why doesn’t he move on ... In America they lynch them for less than this. (p. 155)

Once again the Oriental is racially incarcerated; this time as the “eroticized Black Other”. The story plays on the “fear of miscegenation” which actually was a “tacit affirmation of the desirability of the black male” (Sallant, 1995, p. 424). The encounter is not one between two subjects, but a belligerent meeting of colours. The objectifying white gaze (Bergner, 1995, p. 85) divests the black man of his subjectivity in his own country while, to her mind, the epistemology of colour—or what Fanon (1986, p. 13) calls “the epidermalization of inferiority”—demands his deference. Page 156 has a photo of a black male with an intoxicated look and a cigarette held lazily in his mouth. He is dressed in “typical ghetto attire” with a baseball cap (tilted sideways with NEW YORK written on it), gold chain and T-shirt. This iconosemiotic perspective no doubt subliminally activates an intertextual (Fairclough, 1995) topoi or repertoire of images from which the student constructs a picture of reality (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 47, 48). For Fairclough (1995) institutional subjects are often ideologically constructed according to a predetermined discourse often without their awareness and by “naturalizing” this construction as a Gramscian “common sense” understood as a derivative of an achieved consensus.

3.2. *Textbook 2: Gateways: Engelsk for YF*

Deportation at Breakfast by Larry Fondation (p. 183) is about an illegal immigrant who runs a café and is abruptly arrested by the US authorities and deported. The deportee is described as, “a short man with dark, black hair, a moustache, and a youthful beard, one that never grew much past stubble ... He had a thick accent. The name ‘Javier’ was stitched on his shirt”. The narrative is told through the eyes of what the readers can only imagine to be a young, handsome, white American male, gauging from the picture on page 184. In an intriguing twist, the youngster assumes control of the café in the absence of “Javier”, serving the customers food and working the cash register. Business is so brisk that the “new owner” states:

More new customers begin arriving. By eight-thirty, I had my hands full. With this kind of business, I couldn’t understand why Javier hadn’t hired a waitress. Maybe I’d take out a help-wanted ad in the paper tomorrow. (p. 185)

The short story, as told through the eyes and perspective of the young white male, cements the stable and established values of Anglo-Saxon canonicity while delegitimizing the racial “Other”. Somehow, the fact that the first-person narrator, in usurping the business of the deportee is a criminal act, is lost on the reader. The legally dubious plans to hire a waitress and “take out a help-wanted ad” are transvaluated into a discourse of benevolence by “a textual unconscious: like the repressed contents of the Freudian unconscious” (Bennett & Royle, 2009, p. 235).

The second short story in *Gateways* is *Carapace* by Romesh Gunesekeera (p. 216). The story is set in Sri Lanka and told through the lens of a young Sri Lankan woman. She is in an ambiguous relationship with a local young man, Vijay, who appears to be interested in a casual fling rather than a serious commitment. However, with the arrival of Anura Perera, an affluent young Sri Lankan settled in Australia and looking for a prospective bride in Sri Lanka, she is frustrated by Vijay’s insouciance. She is convinced her mother would throw a fit if she knew about her relationship with Vijay. She verbalizes what her mother would like to say to Anura:

Do come and take my daughter away; transform her world with your brilliance—and your nice fat bank account. Give her a modern house, a big car, fancy clothes, shoes she can afford to throw away after every party. Give her expensive things ... Just take her Mr. Perera, please take her to Australia away from here, and don't forget her mother ... (p. 220)

Although the author is Sri Lankan, his audience is Western (Gunesekera, according to the textbook, is settled in the UK). Said (1979) critiqued the native elites who internalized Orientalist discourse. This discourse, when secreted through the writings of native elites is commensurate with the view that “minorities are looked at from a white-o-centric point of view, thus reinforcing pre-existing beliefs, while minority women and men internalize a white way of being looked at” (Fleras, 2011, p. 44).

The story triggers an intertextual repertoire that is parasitic upon notions of the “subservient and oppressed brown/black female” who is “sold off to the highest bidder”. Sri Lanka is contrasted disparagingly with Australia. One of the tasks related to the short story states: “Would your answer be different if you lived in a poor and turbulent country like Sri Lanka?” (Exercise 4, p. 36, 221). The repressive politics of identity in Orientalist discourse not only effaces and marginalizes the brown/black female, but when mentioned, constricts portrayals within a narrow template. There are echoes of the critique levelled against Joseph Conrad whose fiction “had the effect not of challenging but of confirming the fact and consolidating consciousness of it [i.e. imperialist ideology]” (Said, 1994, p. 200). In Conrad’s classic, *Heart of Darkness* (1899), the protagonist, Charles Marlow, describes the Congolese as “mostly black and naked”, “moved about like ants” and “they did not eat each other before my face: they had brought along a provision of hippo-meat which went rotten and made the mystery of the wilderness stink in my nostrils” (p. 35). There was “a suspicion of their not being inhuman ... the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar” (Conrad, 2006, p. 369). The above, among others, is the reason the African novelist Achebe (2016) calls Conrad a “thoroughgoing racist” (Achebe, 2016, p. 1789) and the novel “one which parades in the most vulgar prejudices and insults from which a section of mankind has suffered untold agonies and atrocities in the past ... a story in which the very humanity of black people is called into question” (Achebe, 2016, p. 1791). Achebe’s *An image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s heart of darkness* (2016) is an example of the “Empire writing back”—a contrapuntal subversive counter telling.

The above lends further credence to Su’s (2014) point: “The question of whose perspectives, life, experiences, and cultural values are being transmitted in EFL textbooks, and importantly, who designs and promotes school curriculum and reading materials, is therefore important”.

3.3. Textbook 3: Workshop: Engelsk Bygg-og Anleggsteknikk VG2

Like the Sun (p. 32) is a short story set in India and written by R.K. Narayan. The protagonist, Sekhar, is determined to tell the truth one day in the year irrespective of the cost. He passes the first two tests, but faces a dilemma when his boss, the headmaster, insisted that he cancel his plans for the evening (an outing with his children) and go home with him. Initially, Sekhar was concerned that he was to be scolded for not having corrected 100 student papers for weeks. His task, however, was to appraise the headmaster’s musical ability. As a quid pro quo, the headmaster gave him 10 more days to hand in the papers. Sekhar endures two hours of horrid singing during which he comments to himself that the headmaster “croaks like a dozen frogs and bellows like a buffalo” (p. 35). Bound by his pledge to tell the truth, however exacting, he tells the headmaster that there is no point in pursuing music. The next day the headmaster calls Sekhar into his office, reneges on his earlier decision and demands that the test papers are handed in the next day, which meant that Sekhar had to stay up the whole night.

The story feeds into Orientalist conceptions of the despotic Eastern ruler. Sekhar cowers before the omnipotent headmaster who offhandedly rearranges his domestic plans. For students in Norway, accustomed to a low power index between employers and employees, Sekhar’s pledge to tell the truth one day in the year (the main theme) takes a back seat to the capricious power machinations built into the narrative. In their subconscious, the East transforms into a space where despotism is

not confronted directly, but is reaffirmed through a matrix-like network of rituals that morph into what Mbembe (2006, p. 66), in an African context, refers to as the “intimacy of tyranny”. The East is once again of interest in so far as information—be it fact or fiction—is commensurate with a pastiche of simplistic and stereotypical representations of the “Other” (Nozaki, 2009).

The Girl Who Can (p. 154) is written by Ama Ata Aidoo, a Ghanaian female writer. The first-person narrator is a seven-year-old unnamed Ghanaian girl. Her grandmother, the matriarch of the family, laments the girl’s skinny legs. “They are too thin. And they are too long for a woman” (p. 155) she would comment. Furthermore, the grandmother opined that school was a waste of time for girls, adding dismissively, “Ah, maybe with legs like hers, she might as well go to school” (p. 155). For the western reader, skewed preconceptions of Africa’s endemic sexism and infantilism are reaffirmed. The grandmother lives with her daughter and believes that the only viable future a girl can have is to be married off as early as possible. As a female, her skinny legs become a liability in that they deviate from a normative, male-legitimated, bodily aesthetic. Subtly, the discourse of the African’s dependency and helplessness runs like a red thread through the short story. Indeed, the only reason the girl’s predicament (“spindly legs”) is an issue must be understood within the framework of matrimony. The text “thingifies” the girl, to borrow from Aimé Césaire, and plays on the trope of the infantile Negro.

It is the destiny of the Occidental to face the obligation laid down by the commandment *Thou shalt leave thy father and thy mother*. This obligation is incomprehensible to the Madagascan. At a given time in his development, every European discovers in himself the desire ... to break the bonds of dependency, to become the equal of his father. The Madagascan, never! (M. Manoni cited in Césaire, 1972, p. 60)

In addition to pathologizing the female body, there is the perennial issue of superstition and the irrational, a staple diet of African Orientalist delineation. The grandmother’s rationale for the girl’s frail legs is attributed to capricious powers: “Once in a while, but only once in a very long while, somebody decides—nature, a child’s spirit mother, an accident happens, and somebody gets born without arms” (p. 155). One detects a sense of stasis—a determinism that precludes positive agency. The story does not furnish the reader with tools that destabilize a disempowering misogynous discourse, but leaves the tension hanging in the air and unresolved. Thomas (2012) argues for an approach that sheds light on the multipronged workings of such discourse as a first step in its elimination: “Foucault’s exposition, applied to the Ghanaian witchcraft discourse, challenges us to look beyond this dichotomisation and query the manner in which the victims themselves are co-implicated in their own imprisonment” (Thomas, 2012, p. 78).

The above does not imply that the writers behind the short stories cynically exploit western prejudice to further their careers. This thread is fleshed out further later. The main concern guiding the exploration was not the biography of the authors, but the content of the short stories as students and teachers discussed them over the course of a year. Furthermore, this does not preclude other readings of the texts, but I argue that the fact the high school in question is one of Norway’s most multicultural with over 40 languages represented—mainly from Africa, Asia and South America, is salient.

3.4. Textbook 4: Tracts: Engelsk for Bygg-og Anleggsteknikk

No Speak English by Sandra Cisneros (p. 88) is about a Hispanic man who works hard to save money in the USA and bring his wife (the main characters) to join him from south of the border. She is described as *mamacita*, but one character opines that she should be called *mamasota* (p. 88). Both are Spanish slang that reinforce the stereotype of the “hot, feisty and curvy Latina”. Cisneros’ *mamacita* is caught in the interstices of what Goffman (1963, p. 12) calls stigma—“an attribute that is deeply discrediting” (Goffman, 1963, p. 12). Goffman (1963) makes a distinction between *virtual* and *actual* social identity. Attributes, assumptions and imputations assigned to a stranger “in effect” constitute virtual social identity as opposed to the category and attributes the stranger may be proved to

possess. In addition to the aforementioned epistemic violence meted out on the somatic level, a host of other stigmas are recruited in putting her beyond the pale:

Whatever her reasons, whether she is fat, or can't climb stairs, or is afraid of English, she won't come down. She sits all day by the window and plays the Spanish radio and sings homesick songs about her country in a voice that sounds like a seagull. (p. 89)

Some have construed Orientalism as a purely solipsistic theory that refers exclusively back to itself (Sim, 2012, p. 248). In other words, the denigration of the Orient is nothing more than the West's affirmation of its own superiority. However, as the story of the dislocated *mamacita* shows, it is not Spanish which is denigrated per se (Spanish is firmly rooted in Europe), but when Spanish is latched onto the "Otherized" Mexican immigrant (a "racialization" of Spanish), it becomes a liability. *Mamacita's* stubborn refusal to integrate by learning English puts her beyond redemption. The story climaxes with an Occidental triumph of sorts: her own son begins speaking English which brings her alienation to an apotheosis.

And then to break her heart forever, the baby boy who has begun to talk, starts to sing the Pepsi commercial he heard on T.V. No speak English, she says to the child who is singing in the language that sounds like tin. No speak English, no speak English, and bubbles into tears. No, no, no as if she can't believe her ears. (p. 89)

I turn next to the second short story in *Tracts1* entitled *Panache* (p. 113) by William Patrick Kinsella about three young Native Americans. Their English teacher, Mr. Nichols, tells them that panache is "... something like a proud warrior ... with big curled feathers. If we stand tall and have the right attitude then we can have panache ..." The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines *panache* as "an ornamental tuft (as of feathers) especially on a helmet and (2) dash or flamboyance in style and action". The boys get hired by a coal mine far away from the Indian reserve where they live. Their presence in the mine stirs up racial hatred.

"We ain't gonna have no so-and-so Indians work here," says a big man with a beer belly and yellow hair. "I don't like it any better than you, Gunderson", says the foreman. "Look' says the foreman, 'I'm going to put the tall one up in the tower with a pencil and the other two on odd jobs. You won't even know they're here". (p. 115)

In *Panache*, the Native American youth live in "reserves", romanticize about a bygone era of proud warriors (*panache*) and, like many of their ancestors, encounter devastating defeat in the encounter with the white man (one of the boys, Tom, dies in the attempt to save the anti-Indian Gunderson). There is a dearth of imagination when non-westerners are portrayed. Texts selected aim at reproducing and perpetuating the hackneyed representations of the "rest" (as opposed to the "West") spawned in the heyday of colonialism. Overt racism and denigration may have been ameliorated, but the gaze is still on that which makes the "rest" different from the "West". Foucault (1972) writes about the interiorization of the panoptic gaze of Bentham.

There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its own weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself. (Foucault, 1972, p. 155)

The short story writer functions much like a panoptic surveillance system who, by demarcating the boundaries of what may be presented and said about non-westerners, not only truncates alternative narratives, but prejudices the impressionable minds of adolescent students (most of whom have never met Native Americans in Norway), and, thus, lends support to Foucault's contention that power is not only repressive, but productive, in that "it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse" (Foucault, 1972, p. 119). The western writer and readership then risk the indictment of succumbing to the myth of Rousseau's "noble savage" and voyeurism of misery.

4. Conclusion

The challenge such short stories present for the English teacher investigating avenues that upend Orientalist discourse is immense. The challenge can be distilled as follows: whenever something is said about non-westerners, the only available template appears to be one which straightjackets them into predetermined Orientalist tropes. Several of the short stories explored in this paper are not of white European heritage but hail from the global south—i.e. countries like Jamaica (Roger Mais); India (R.K. Narayan), Sri Lanka (Romesh Gunesekeera) and Ghana (Ama Ata Aidoo). The question of their complicity in giving succour to orientalism arises often distilled in the pejorative phrase “native informants”. Hamid Dabashi, for instance, uses the unflattering phrase “comprador intellectuals” and states in regard to Azar Nafisi’s *Reading Lolita in Teheran* (2003):

To sustain the legitimacy of the predatory empire, the comprador intellectual must also do her or his share in re-accrediting the hitherto discredited ideologues of the imperial project. The comprador intellectual speaks with the voice of authenticity, nativity, Orientalized oddity. He is from “there”, and she “knows what she is talking about”, and thus their voices carry the authority of a native informer. (Dabashi, 2006)

The conundrum is perhaps best approximated in the following: while it is “natural” for these writers to draw from experiences rooted in cultures they intimately know, this is not done in a vacuum, but is often intended for a target western audience that appears primed to cherry pick information that lends succour to a predetermined orientalist schema. While every work is subject to misrepresentation, there rests a particular ethical responsibility on the shoulders of these writers to consider the unintended consequences of their work. For instance, Khan (2005) gives expression to this ethical dilemma in her criticism of the practice of *zina* (illicit sex) in Pakistan when she states.

I am aware that criticism of third-world cultures often serves to further demonize and stereotype third-world peoples, reinforcing a view that, as Spivak (2006) reminds us, seeks to free brown women from brown men’. (Khan, 2005, p. 2018)

Furthermore, as is the case with several of the aforementioned writers in this study, many of whom have lived for extended periods of time in diverse countries, identities are more transnational and fluid than a generation ago. Bhabha’s (1994) concept of “cultural hybridity” is salient in this regard. Identities are no longer isomorphic phenomena that neatly follow cultural cartographies, but more polyvalent and “super-diverse” (Blommaert, 2013).

Contrapuntal pedagogy suggests the application of postcolonial readings to a text suffused with orientalist assumptions (Singh & Greenlaw, 1998). The exploration of the short texts in this paper has been informed by precisely such a contrapuntal approach. Admittedly, the high school students that I teach EFL would find Said, Fanon, Bhabha and Spivak’s writings, to name a few, inaccessible. My own *modus operandi* has been one where, commensurate with contrapuntal approaches, I have devised tasks that sensitize students to discourses of othering. For instance, students have been asked to list the ethnic origins of the main characters, their occupations, sex and concretize the positive and negative statements made about them. They have then been asked to discuss their findings in groups. This is followed up in another lesson with a task that requires the students to write an alternative story told from the perspective of the silenced and racialized other.

The above becomes an exercise in what DeJaeghere and Tudball (2007, p. 51) refer to as the nurturing of students’ “sense of subjectivity” or “the self”. The text *Blackout* for instance was studied in conjunction with the film (and excerpts from the book) *12 Years a Slave*. Solomon Northup’s harrowing experience, as narrated by him, helped provide a contrapuntal backdrop to an audience of teenagers who were astonished to learn that many white slave owners fathered children with black slave women. In working with tasks related to *12 Years a Slave*, students were given a framework within which to understand the context in *Blackout*. Another contrapuntal strategy I have employed, adapted from the field of critical discourse analysis, is to study the pre-modifiers in regard to the main characters. With respect to the short texts considered in this study, some of the pre-modifiers

distilled by students were: superstitious Chinese man; criminal black man; illegal Hispanic immigrant; greedy Sri Lankan woman; subdued Indian teacher and hysterical Hispanic woman. These were in turn used to start a discussion on the portrayal of non-westerners.

Given the rapid pace of the demographic changes in Norway, the above will necessitate a rethinking of several aspects of the pedagogical landscape. Teacher-training institutions will need to inject a robust dose of multi- and intercultural studies into courses and modules; what is inserted into the curriculum must be carefully assessed along with stakeholders sensitized to Orientalist depictions and armed with contrapuntal pedagogies; despite the seismic shift in demography, the teaching profession is struggling to keep pace with this change: although 11 per cent of students in lower secondary schools come from “immigrant” backgrounds, only 4.7% of teaching staff hail from the same background (Mellingsæter & Øhman, 2014). It is argued that the presence of teachers with dual/multiple heritages is salient in challenging an Orientalist hegemony. The objective is to create space for “the adjunction of other texts to generate metaphors, to reveal absences, to expose the scribal power of [neocolonialism] even when it denies or deprecates its control of utterances” (Tiffin & Lawson, 1994, p. 234).

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Author details

Paul Thomas¹

Emails: paul.thomas@hioa.no, hpaulsilas@hotmail.com

ORCID ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1366-3781>

¹ Faculty of Education and International Studies, Department of International Studies and Interpreting, Oslo & Akershus University of the Applied Sciences, Oslo, Norway.

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- Gateways: Engelsk for YF (Vocational English) (2010); Workshop: Engelsk Bygg- og Anleggsteknikk VG2 (English for the Building and Construction Industry) (2007) and Tracts 1: Engelsk for Bygg- og Anleggsteknikk VG1 (English for the Building and Construction Industry (2006)).

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