This is a self-archived version of an original article. This version may differ from the original in pagination and typographic details.

Author(s): Mustonen, Sanna

Title: 'I'll always have black hair' : challenging raciolinguistic ideologies in Finnish schools

Year: 2021

Version: Published version

Copyright: © 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Franc

Rights: CC BY 4.0

Rights url: https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Please cite the original version:

Mustonen, S. (2021). 'I'll always have black hair' : challenging raciolinguistic ideologies in Finnish schools. Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy, 7(3), 159-168. https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2021.2000093

Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/znst20

‘I’ll always have black hair’ – challenging raciolinguistic ideologies in Finnish schools

Sanna Mustonen

To cite this article: Sanna Mustonen (2021) ‘I’ll always have black hair’ – challenging raciolinguistic ideologies in Finnish schools, Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy, 7:3, 159-168, DOI: 10.1080/20020317.2021.2000093

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2021.2000093

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

Published online: 21 Dec 2021.

Submit your article to this journal

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=znst20

NORDIC JOURNAL OF STUDIES IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY
2021, VOL. 7, NO. 3, 159–168
https://doi.org/10.1080/20020317.2021.2000093

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Research Article

OPEN ACCESS Check for updates

‘I’ll always have black hair’ – challenging raciolinguistic ideologies in Finnish schools

Sanna Mustonen

Department of Teacher Education, University of Jyväskylä, Jyvaskyla, Finland

ABSTRACT

This article discusses raciolinguistic ideologies in the Finnish educational context. Ethnographic interviews and observational data gathered during 2015–2020 from two young males who came to Finland from the Middle-East in autumn 2015 as unaccompanied minors were analysed applying the small stories approach. The research questions were: 1) What kinds of racializing discourses are circulated, negotiated, and resisted in the participants’ self- and other positionings? 2) How is valuation of their language and literacy skills and participation in education reflected in these positionings? Critical linguistic ethnography was used to identify the racializing discourses. The results indicate that structural raciolinguistic ideologies repeatedly impacted the participants’ educational paths: notwithstanding their good command of Finnish they may have been judged as deficient language users, weakening their chances of equal participation in classroom interaction and access to further studies or practical training. However, outside the educational context, they may successfully deploy their multilingual repertoires for networking and entrepreneurship. While intersecting factors such as race, gender, or religion influence participation, they are treated as language issues in a politically correct but vague way. This calls for a critical discussion of how students’ struggles with participation should be situated within broader structural biases.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 15 February 2021
Accepted 26 October 2021

KEYWORDS
Raciolinguistic ideologies; ethnography; education

Introduction

I was chatting with a young man, who had arrived in Finland a year and half earlier and recently entered the mainstream class. We were talking about his schooling, plans and dreams, and how learning Finnish would help him achieve his goals. As a researcher, I was interested in his language learning process and resources. The young man stated: ‘*I’ll always have black hair, I’ll always be recognized as an immigrant*’, indicating a self-positioning in which circulating racialized discourses explained the inequality of opportunity in the Finnish educational system and society. His words also challenged the discourse of language skills as key to participation. Learning Finnish and becoming a member of the new society turned out to be a more complex process than I had anticipated.

Idealizing discursive narratives of the Finnish educational system as a success story and Finnish society as an epitome of equality have been consciously constructed and widely circulated (Kosunen & Hansen, 2018). It is true that in Finland, unlike in many other Nordic countries, diversity sensitivity is emphasized in educational programmes and across curricula (Smith Jervelund et al., 2020, p. 21). However, closer scrutiny of Finnish schools reveals that equality of opportunity falls short of this ideal. For example, racialization and gendering in educational practices may lead to the unequal positioning of immigrant (or *immigrantisized*) students (e.g. Kurki, 2019). In Finland, immigrant student success in school is among the lowest in the OECD countries (Harju-Luukkainen et al., 2014) and immigrant academic degree completion and access to higher education is lowest in the Nordic countries (Dunlavy et al., 2020, p. 38–40).

These findings suggest that schools are not optimally managing diversity. While structural biases may not be conscious or, owing to political correctness, openly expressed, social inequity is justified by more subtle discourses and self-sufficient arguments (Augoustinous & Every, 2007, p. 134–137), including appeals to academic language and literacy skills (Valdés, 2017). While essential in most areas of social life, good language and literacy skills do not guarantee racialized people access to participation in, e.g. everyday encounters or education and employment; hence it is problematic to claim that learning a language will prepare them for this (Martin Rojo, 2017, p. 94; Kraft & Flubacher, 2020, p. 6).

Thus, applying a raciolinguistic approach (e.g. Chaparro, 2019; Rosa & Flores, 2017), which aims to understand the ideological links between language and racial positionings, this study sought to identify

CONTACT Sanna Mustonen sanna.s.mustonen@jyu.fi University of Jyväskylä, FI-40014 University of Jyväskylä, PO Box 35, Jyvaskyla, Finland

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

some aspects of structural bias in Finnish education. The lived experiences of two students who arrived in Finland as unaccompanied minors were investigated using ethnographic interviews and observational data over a 5-year follow-up, focusing on the racializing categorizations underlying 'language talk' about them. The research questions were: 1) What kinds of racializing discourses are circulated, negotiated, and resisted in the participants' self- and other positionings? 2) How is valuation of their language and literacy skills and participation in education reflected in these positionings?

Recent youth research in Finland has shown how racialization – namely stereotypical categories of ethnicity, race, religion, and gender, intertwined with the discourses of securitization, segregation, and integration – leads to identity negotiation in youth with an immigrant background (Kurki, 2019; Laakkonen & Juntunen, 2019; Peltola, 2018; Souto, 2011). Despite calls (Ennser-Kananen et al., 2017), little attention has been paid to how (alleged) language skills are intertwined with these categorizations and identity negotiations in Finnish contexts. This longitudinal study further aimed to reveal the dynamic nature of raciolinguistic processes, as earlier studies have mainly examined these over a shorter time span (Hudley, 2017, p. 381). The results invite discussion on how raciolinguistic ideologies might be challenged in the educational context.

Raciolinguistic ideologies in the educational context

Racialization refers to the categorizing of people according to alleged deficiencies and often combines physical, cultural, religion, gender, and class features. These categories may then be used to explain and justify inequalities (Hudley, 2017, pp. 381–384; Kubota & Lin, 2009; Souto, 2011). Consequently, racialization and essentialization define the material conditions and lived experiences of many people (Weber, 2015, pp. 94–112; Chun & Lo, 2016). In Finnish schools, racialization also is present in policies and practices.

A school-age student arriving in Finland should be integrated into mainstream education after one year of induction. Subsequent measures of support include studying Finnish or Swedish as a second language (EDUFI, 2016). While support is often necessary and valued, students have sometimes been reported to need remedial teaching based on their migrant background and not their actual skills. Their educational careers may further be impacted by the fact that L1 and L2 (Finnish as a first and second language) syllabi are not always equally valued in higher education (e.g. Airas et al., 2019). Despite their abilities, immigrant students are often channelled into vocational education and performative occupations (Kurki, 2019; Rättilä & Honkatukia, 2021). Furthermore, their multilingual resources may be ignored (Vaarala et al., 2021, p. 21–23). Overt racism also manifests in various ways in everyday school encounters (Aminkeng Atabong, 2016; Souto, 2013).

The concept of raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Kubota, 2015; Rosa, 2019; Rosa & Flores, 2017) refers to the complex bundling of language and race. The language proficiency of racialized people perceived by the white 'gaze and ears' is used to justify exclusion and societal stratification. Education is an important site where language-related power relations are constructed (Martin Rojo, 2017, p. 83–84). The interplay of race, language, and educational disadvantage has been acknowledged in recent sociolinguistic studies (Lo, 2020; see also Block & Corona, 2019). Revealing raciolinguistic ideologies may help understand the achievement gap between students of colour and their white counterparts, as the ideological link between language and race influences racialized students' academic trajectories (Chaparro, 2019, p. 11). Raciolinguistic ideologies refer not to the prejudices of individual teachers but to structural biases informing the long history of colonialism that sees western civilization as superior to the other, savage, uneducated world (e.g. Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017; on the Nordic context, see Kurki, 2019, p. 2, 3).

In raciolinguistic practices, intersecting factors such as race and gender may be treated as language issues, meaning that racialization plays a covert role in how language skills are valued, leading to unequal opportunities to use language in various situations. Challenges (or success) in navigating educational paths and employment may be perceived as linked solely to majority language skills, and hence modifying and repairing racialized students' linguistic performance is seen as key to accessing equality of opportunity. The language of schooling is a powerful tool for building hierarchies and separating students with immigrant backgrounds from native speakers (Rosa & Flores, 2017; Weber, 2015). However, language skills may be evaluated according to perceived race rather than empirical linguistic performance (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Chaparro, 2019, p. 11). Thus, raciolinguistic ideologies may also inform transitional phases (Rosa & Flores, 2017). Furthermore, emphasis on the importance of academic, dominant language and literacy skills may make it easy to ignore students' existing multilingual resources. These linguistic and cultural capitals may not be valued in their own right (Flores, 2020), and because these students' ways of knowing are unfamiliar and thus invisible to white gaze and ears, they are not encouraged to build on these resources in constructing knowledge (Kubota, 2015, p. 8; Ennser-Kananen, 2019). Martin

Rojo (2017) refers to such processes as *decapitalization*. Monolingualism – abandoning the existing linguistic capital and concentrating one's energy on the dominant language and literacy skills – as a condition for integration and equality has, however, been widely challenged (May, 2017).

For individual students, encountering raciolinguistic ideologies causes them constant identity struggles and negotiation (De Fina, 2015; Norton, 2000). In discourse-oriented narrative studies, identities, and how they are deployed in positionings, are seen as emerging in the stories people tell about themselves and others. Such stories entail the negotiation and recycling of discourses and, depending on the situation, revisioning of polyphonic identities (De Fina, 2015, pp. 352–353).

Data and methods

This study represents five years' ethnographic field work with a group of young people, who arrived in Finland from the Middle East in 2015 as unaccompanied minor asylum seekers. The data analysed in this article focuses on the experiences of two young men, Habib and Eylo. They lived in the same reception centre and became friends. Habib is a Muslim Dari-speaking Afgan, and Eylo a Christian Kurdish-speaking Kurd. Both entered the Finnish educational system late, at age 14–16, completed comprehensive school and started vocational studies. The present data comprise their own voices recorded in fieldnotes on conversations and in interviews on various aspects of their language learning resources and educational careers conducted by myself and three other researchers in 2016–2020. Six audio-recorded interviews were conducted with Habib in 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020 (twice) (total 251 min), and with Eylo in 2016, 2017, 2019 (twice), and 2020 (twice) (total 238 min). The background data comprise my participatory observations in various contexts of their everyday lives (school and leisure time; reception centre, neighbourhoods, youth spaces), discussions with their caretakers, friends, and family members in 2015–2020, team-ethnographical observations during their vocational education, and interviews (total 114 min) with their vocational education teachers in 2020.

Participants, their legal guardians and, after entry to vocational education, their education provider and teachers all gave their informed consent. The ethical guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK) were carefully followed and both participants gave their written informed consent for publication of their details.

I met the participants weekly during the first years of this study (2015–2016). Thereafter, we talked at least once a month. I was intitially a volunteer Finnish teacher at the reception centre who also provided them and their peers with access to Finnish family life. While my dual role as a friend and researcher enabled ethnographic study and holistic understanding of the participants' lives, it also caused me to continuously negotiate the appropriate ethical balance between these two roles. However, long, intensive fieldwork and interaction with the participants promoted mutual confidence and understanding of the research process. From 2017 onwards, the data were gathered team ethnographically (Blackledge & Creese, 2010) and from 2019 formed part of a larger research project *Building Blocks – Developing second language resources for working life*, funded by the Academy of Finland (2019–2023), thereby confirming their validity and ethicality.[1] This also helped in interpreting the data, avoiding too narrow or biased views, and enabled some interviews to be conducted in the participants' native languages. All data excerpts cited below are translations from either Finnish or the participants' L1s.

Data were analysed applying the small stories approach to narrative and identity analysis (Georgakopoulou, 2015) and critical linguistic ethnography (Heller et al., 2018), which allows marginalized voices to be heard. Furthermore, it allows identification of the tensions concerning categories such as race, gender, and Finnish speaker that inform the discourses used in constructing identities (see also Georgakopoulou, 2015, pp. 256–257, 264).

Three interrelated aspects of the stories were analysed (see Georgakopoulou, 2015, pp. 258–259, 264). The first concerned the ways of telling, through the verbal and semiotic choices made, experiences narrated, and intertextual links identified to big stories and discourses – especially those regarding the self and other positionings these afford the teller (see also Dick & Wirtz, 2011, p. 9) – and how they are resisted (see Hudley, 2017, p. 78, 82). The second concerned the sites or social spaces invoked in the story and the storytelling itself: what kinds of choices does the particular storytelling situation allow, and what kinds of social spaces (or 'taleworlds') does the story invoke? The third concerned the interpretation of the tellers' narratives through their life histories, roles, and positions, especially in relation to their educational path in Finland and related hopes, beliefs, and fears. Combining the small stories approach with ethnographic methods promotes deeper understanding both of the recurrent elements of ordinary stories and the semiotic choices made (Georgakopoulou, 2015, p. 258). The longitudinal orientation enables tracking the trajectories of the positionings in the stories.

Applying critical linguistic analysis (Heller et al., 2018), the first step was to map recurring themes in

the data. Three themes were constantly foregrounded in the stories: race, religion, and gender. Thus, in the following sections, drawing on Habib's and Eylo's lived experiences of positionings, I trace and connect the mapped categories (Heller et al., 2018, p. 111–113) and discuss how they were intertwined with valuation of their language and literacy skills and reflected in their educational participation.

Results

Racial positionings

Throughout the study period, Habib and Eylo were observing their everyday encounters with their schoolmates and teachers and reflecting on their multilateral identities (see also Georgakopoulou, 2015, p. 263), even if the interview questions were broader in scope. The main theme of their stories was – especially during the first years with Eylo and throughout the data collection with Habib – exclusion, which was linked to racialization and language skills in a complex way.

They were among the first immigrant students in their local comprehensive school and experienced 'a honeymoon period' with the Finnish students before entering mainstream education. However, tensions arose when the town received more asylum seekers. Thereafter, both young men experienced embarrassment when chatting with Finnish students:

Habib I don't understand the Finnish culture yet. Also this year in school I have noticed that somebody is always looking at me but maybe doesn't dare to come and speak to me, and I am afraid as well, I am not sure if they want to talk with me or not. And that's why … **They don't dare to talk and I don't dare to talk either**. (2016)

Habib reflected on how mutual uncertainty and fear prevented interaction. When later (2019) asked if teachers supported them in getting to know their fellow students, Habib answered: *They didn't help at all either in ammattikoulu [vocational college] or in [name of comprehensive school]*. Eylo's experience was similar: *But a BFF … No, they didn't help, you have to help yourself*. The results support Souto (2013, p. 328): fear of 'others' was not mentioned, analysed, or dismantled in school. These may be interpreted as practices that maintain structural biases.

We researchers also often raised the networking theme, since contacts in school were rare, as narrated by Habib (2017):

R If you think of the early days, there was the group home and school, were there any other important places where you spent time or met friends?

Habib Maybe the youth center. But even there we were er … in a *mamu* group. **The Finns didn't like it if we talked.**

R Where did you learn the word *mamu*?

Habib I've heard it.

R What does it mean to you? Is it a good word?

Habib [–] I think it' s not a good word. Hearing it doesn't feel good. But I use it.

Habib hesitated before using the word 'mamu', meaning *maahanmuuttaja*, 'immigrant', and widely considered derogatory and exclusionary (see also Kurki, 2019, p. 31). During their first years in Finland, Habib and Eylo resisted being positioned simply as 'immigrants'. Instead, to distance themselves from the media-termed 'wave of immigrants' and partly also in reaction to the multicultural environment of their reception centre, they emphasized their ethnic background. Thus, Habib now started double-voicing his positioning by perpetuating the derogatory discourses circulating around him (see also Depperman, 2015, p. 370). He proposed this positioning – not his actual language skills – as the reason they were silenced (see also Chun & Lo, 2016, p. 226).

Habib's talk continued to double-voice the labels and even hate speech of the alt-right throughout the follow-up. For example, when visiting me with friends, he would shout outside my door: *The immigrants are invading!* Such ironical counter-speak in the identity construction of young Muslim immigrants has been analysed by Laakkonen and Juntunen (2019). At this specific site, our relationship seemed to be safe enough to raise and challenge these discourses.

Habib experienced difficulties in participation throughout his school career. According to him, interaction in the mainstream class was dominated by the Finnish students (see also Chaparro, 2019; Katz & Dasilva Iddings, 2009), while some of his teachers did not expect him to participate in all classroom activities, claiming that his language and literacy skills were inadequate. These teachers may have sought to protect the late arrivals from overly challenging tasks – it is a fairly common practice to differentiate teaching by cutting back the content – but Habib interpreted these kind of actions as exclusionary and positioning him as a marginalized and silenced member of the class. This led him to constantly skip classes during comprehensive school.

Racist experiences forced Eylo to relocate to another town after his induction course. There, he was not accepted as a commuter student despite being of compulsory school age as, owing to the increasing number of young asylum seekers, the city

was reorganizing late arrivals' education, and Eylo's Finnish skills were not deemed adequate for mainstream education. Hence, he was assigned to a group tailored for late arrivals, first for induction into vocational education and then adult comprehensive school. This turned out to be a double-edged sword: while practical in differentiating teaching, the classification meant that immigrant students were segregated from their Finnish counterparts, a situation that also defined their future educational paths (see also Valdés, 2017, p. 327).

Habib dreamed of an academic path, but as his – untested – language skills were deemed inadequate, he was guided into making 'a realistic' choice (see also Kurki, 2019, p. 51–52), i.e. vocational education. As Martin Rojo (2017, p. 84) has stated, if assessment takes place through interaction, where resources are unequally distributed, deficiencies may not be objective facts. When he applied for vocational education, Habib's Finnish language and literacy skills were assessed as CEFR level B2, indicating capacity for academic studies, i.e. fluency in interaction and ability to understand and produce complex, detailed texts on abstract and field-specific topics (see Council of Europe, 2001).

According to Habib's teachers, immigrant students in vocational education constantly encounter barriers in accessing practical training. This is justified by referring to insufficient language or vocational competence. Due to prejudice, and the conflict between his hopes and the educational path chosen for him, Habib dropped out of vocational college twice (see also Kalalahti et al., 2020). In 2020, he reflected on his position as a total outsider in school and in Finnish society:

R : **What kind of support would you like to have at the moment and from whom in relation to both studies and your general wellbeing?**

Habib Look, I have lived in Finland for 5 years. During the first 2 years, I was very enthusiastic about receiving support, I don't mean just financial, **I mean for joining a group and finding Finnish friends to escape from loneliness**. But I later realized that they had no such duty and that I had excessively high expectations. In societies like this, a person must build his life, find new friends, and stay alive by himself.

In this interview, Habib challenged the well-intentioned question concerning his support needs, and presented his understanding of a society in which all are responsible for themselves. When asked about the role of Finnish in his everyday life, his answer was uncompromising:

Habib It has had no role and will not have one in my life. **It was not even used in school**. Imagine how it is now for me. The role of Spanish is currently more relevant in my life. Learning it [Finnish]is useless. Just for communicating with 4 million people?!

Habib saw no point in learning Finnish 'for four million people' he was unable to talk to or learn with at school, let alone make friends with. Regarding the social space at hand, he told this story with uncompromising word choices to a researcher with a migrant background; he may not have told it to me, a legitimate Finnish speaker with 'yellow' hair. However, after this interview, Habib applied for his third vocational degree programme. To his astonishment, his language skills were again tested, an event he jokingly equated with the interviews during the asylum-seeking process.

The lacking language skills discourse was often presented as an explanation for Eylo's and Habib's challenges in mixing with Finnish students, lack of access to mainstream instruction, and their academic paths. I, too, occasionally argued that learning Finnish would eventually pave their way forward. Habib, however, challenged this self-sufficient argument, saying *I might learn to speak Finnish fluently, I might even get citizenship, but I'll always have black hair*, thereby positioning me as a person *with yellow hair*, making me conscious of my whiteness and the privileges it bestows (see also Keskinen et al., 2015).

Religion as a source of categorization

Another source of categorization, alongside external signs of race, was religion. According to Habib's experiences of his school's social spaces, his fellow students kept their distance from 'Muslims', and avoided talking to them (2017):

R Is religion raised elsewhere, in school or …

Habib Maybe, yeah, generally – when you are a mamu- immigrant, people are thinking what religion. And along with Islam comes fear. This is how it's always been.

R How does the fear manifest itself? Do people mention it?

Habib No, they just try to be [thinking] keep some space or stay far away

R keep a distance

Habib yeah, distance, yeah, and **try not to speak**

R So that nobody asks anything [–]

–

R What do you think of the - that Finns don't ask, let's say about religion? Why don't they?

Habib

They don't want to know, maybe. They don't *need* to get to know us.

R Or it might be an awkward topic somehow.

Habib Yeah, maybe yeah! Maybe they are afraid that it is impolite.

R Yeah, that might be one thing. They don't know how to ask or what to ask.

Habib But I had a friend, she asked a lot of questions, and when I said this, she said that we're the same. Our religions are quite similar. Yeah. And one reason may be that **they think that we can't speak**. Even if we can't, but …

(laughing together)

Habib somehow

R Yeah right, like you can't speak Finnish! (laughing)

Habib but somehow you can tell.

Habib experienced multiple categorizations in school: First, he was immigrantisized (see also Kurki, 2019). He used the term *mamu*, instantly swapping it for the more politically correct term *maahanmuuttaja, 'immigrant'*. Habib soon tired of challenging this categorization (even if he found it insulting, for example when food in the school's cafeteria was labelled 'for immigrants'). Second, as *an immigrant* he was positioned as a *Muslim*, and hence an *extremist* (see also Laakkonen & Juntunen, 2019). The process of immigrantisation and racialization categorized him as a dangerous 'other' (see also Dick & Wirtz, 2011). Habib's interpretation was that Finns are not interested in knowing him, although he accepted the researcher's suggestion that it was an awkward topic. He also felt that racialized students were positioned as those who 'cannot speak'. This interpretation amused the interviewers, who regarded Habib as a fluent speaker. Habib added that 'somehow' they are able to talk about themselves and their beliefs. However, he partly seemed to accept being positioned as a non-legitimate speaker (see Ruuska, 2020).

Raciolinguistic ideologies about religion and the right to speak were occasionally overt. After living in Finland for three years, Habib's schoolmate insulted him by referring to him as: *a Muslim immigrant who speaks Finnish*. This can be interpreted as a multiple insult: you, as a Muslim and immigrant, are not a legitimate Finnish speaker. Thus, Habib was positioned as a non-legitimate speaker at the intersection of religion and race. Habib's lived experiences support Creutz et al. (2015), who found that Muslims in every ethnic group in Finland encounter profound contempt and fears of terrorism because of their religion, long for dialogue, and assume that legitimacy in society involves abandoning their religious convictions and identity.

According to the interview data, this story may not have been tellable in the social space of school, where, on grounds of neutrality and equality, religious bias, reflections on one's convictions, or fears were not openly discussed. This perplexed Habib, who explicitly challenged the egalitarian and liberal 'freedom of belief' discourse: *I've heard that you have freedom of religion in Finland, but I've never seen it*. He saw himself as having no genuine possibility to be visible as a Muslim.

However, Habib's story features one broker in his school, a girl who, as a Laestadian (a revivalist movement originating in Northern Sweden), had probably also experienced contempt. They found similarities in the values and behavioural norms of their religious convictions. Another empowering experience was a teacher-initiated intervention at the end of Habib's comprehensive education. Habib was asked to share experience-based knowledge on Islam in a class where the world religions were discussed, while the Finnish students were tasked with asking questions that they would not otherwise have dared to ask in person.

Eylo, in turn, was assumed to be a Muslim based on his appearance and ethnic background. He had constantly to correct his teachers' assumptions while discreetly assuring his Muslim classmates that he respected their convictions. However, although Eylo's Christian identity was questioned, he found 'freedom of belief' a relief, as his family had experienced persecution in their country of origin. He cited his religion as his *private, inner strength*. Eylo's Christianity – even if questioned – eventually decreased mutual prejudice: *truly, you can find friends easily. For example, there is youth space, or programmes like what the church runs*. (2019)

Gendered positionings

As the political atmosphere grew tenser, the young male asylum seekers became perceived as a threat: race and religion were constantly intertwined with gender. Habib and Eylo were afraid of encountering violence in their new hometown, where speculation and narratives about crimes committed by the new male arrivals against local girls were simultaneously circulating in the media and locally (see also Dick & Wirtz, 2011, p. 7). Throughout our discussions, while reserved about his struggles, Eylo occasionally also mentioned mockery and rumours of violence towards immigrants from Finns: *somebody did, I don't know but I heard that some Finns did bad things to us, because there were so many of us* (2016). As Souto (2013) points out, fear of 'others' is often intertwined with race and gender, and that naturalizing it may

justify exclusion and even prevent intervening in racist behaviour in school. Furthermore, fear felt by racialized students may be overlooked (Souto, 2013, p. 326), as also seemed to be the case with Habib and Eylo.

In reflecting on these gendered aspects of exclusion and why it was easier to become friends with girls, Habib was circulating a racializing discourse about immigrants (see also Chaparro, 2019, p. 10): *Maybe the boys think that 'these foreigners will steal our women'* (2017). Habib offered his explanation indexically in a Finnish dialect I had not previously heard him using. It appeared that he had taken this phrase from a YouTube video in which racism is ironically performed. Habib was using this double-voicing (see also Depperman, 2015, p. 378) to underscore his self-positioning as unlike that of the Finnish 'boys'. In the interview social space, Habib hesitated to show us the video, thinking we might find the performance insulting. However, this discussion resulted in jointly negotiating the multilayered meanings of the phrase and revealed some sources of the circulating discourses.

In Eylo's story, gender was also significant in vocational college, where he had chosen a female-dominated field:

R How are studies going?
Eylo Well, we only speak Finnish there. I am the only boy and a foreigner there (laughing), I study hairdressing – well yeah, it's going fine there, we're all together (2019)

At this point in his educational career as the 'only boy and a foreigner' in his group, Eylo had gained an approved position. Thus, in his story, gender and foreignness turned out to be advantages, and the social space invoked appeared equal. It is also noteworthy that, throughout the study, Eylo persistently positioned himself as 'a foreigner', not as an 'immigrant', a term with more negative connotations in Finnish (see also Kurki, 2019, p. 61–62). He also experienced positioning as a legitimate Finnish speaker by others: *I sound so native that Finns think I was born in Finland. They don't feel an immigrant is talking to them* (2020).

In Eylo's field, finding employment is also a gendered issue for immigrant students, especially Muslims. According to a teacher, while language issues are not explicitly raised, women with 'a headscarf culture' can expect challenges (see also Kurki, 2019, p. 46, 62), whereas whiter and more western immigrants are considered a 'richness'. In this social space, Eylo was privileged as a Christian male, even if his appearance often resulted in racialization such as questioning his religion and ignoring his language skills, as elaborated below.

Crossing linguistic and cultural borders

For both Habib and Eylo, acquiring Finnish, the language of education, was set as their main goal. It was a legitimate means of communication and a tool for knowledge construction (see also Kubota, 2015, p. 8). However, Eylo's story, in particular, demonstrates how having a multilingual repertoire serves as a tool for identity construction as a cosmopolitan. Eylo deployed multiple varieties of languages for both integration and crossing racial borders (see also Chun & Lo, 2016, p. 223):

Eylo Language and related issues are important. [–] I have learned Persian, think about it, there are 80 million people living in Iran, I can talk to 80 million people, in Kurdistan, there are 5 million people, among those 5 million, maybe, I can talk to 2 million [–] I've learned Finnish, [I can talk] to 5 million people. English, I can talk to the whole world.

Unlike Habib, Eylo saw himself as able to talk 'to the whole world'. Furthermore, despite being guided to forgo his dreams of an academic path, he did not abandon his other ambitions for a successful life. During his vocational studies, Eylo doggedly made his own way: before qualifying, he started his own business. He exploited his multilingual resources in navigating bureaucracy, marketing, and networking online and offline, and succeeded in building a wide, multilingual customer base (2020):

Eylo Mostly Finnish and Persian. There are also Afghanis. Kurds write mostly in Kurdish. Others mostly write in Finnish or English. English, I have a Canadian customer, I have a customer from England, they are students here, French, they just speak in English. – I have lots of customers, they are Arabs, they don't know Finnish, or Kurdish, we talk in Arabic [–]

Eylo's story shows that a young man with black hair from outside Europe, entering formal education late, need not be a deficient Finnish speaker in a vulnerable position, but instead a person rich in language and literacy resources, and hence with potential for success. As Flores and Rosa (2015) and Lo (2020) point out, while such skills may have been applauded in a white, native-born speaker, they were ignored in an immigrant in school.

Eylo challenged all the categorizations of race, gender, religion, and language. The following excerpt (2020) illustrates our negotiations of his identity:

R Do you feel Kurdish or Finnish?
Eylo Well, I think the world is one place, and we are the people of the world. Countries are constructed. They are given names, but we all

came from one place, so it doesn't matter where we are from.

R Mm. Did you have this idea already when you moved to Finland or do you think it has evolved since?

Eylo Yeah, yeah, when I came to Finland it evolved little by little as I saw a lot of different kinds of people around me. They differ in appearance, but all in all, we are the same, we are all people.

[−]

Eylo [−] I am what I am.

Eylo also challenged the categories I had suggested. He reflected on the trajectory of his positionings, shrugging, and presenting an independent self: 'I am what I am'. Thus, experiencing otherness may be also empowering. While Eylo defined this process as a struggle for life, it also enabled him to cross cultural, geographical, and linguistic borders, and see 'the world' as his home.

Discussion

The master discourse in the education of immigrant students is that learning a local language is key to participation. This self-sufficient yet complex argument (Flores, 2020) was also presented to Habib and Eylo. Analysis of their narratives, however, suggests that it was their positionings, manifesting racializing discourses, that repeatedly affected their participation in school. Race became a mediating factor in how their ability or right to speak was perceived (see also Chaparro, 2019, p. 3), and as racialized students, along with their religion and gender, they became objects of prejudice or questioning (see also Kurki, 2019, p. 24). Despite their good command of Finnish and willingness to participate, they were at times positioned as deficient language users in everyday encounters and especially during educational transitions (see also Airas et al., 2019; Rättilä & Honkatukia, 2021). They also felt their multilingual resources and religious convictions and worldviews were ignored in their knowledge construction (see also Ennser-Kananen, 2019; Kubota, 2015). It is easier to notice deficient academic skills in the majority language than value rich multilingual resources that are strategically and innovatively utilized in everyday life (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

Moreover, some of the participants' stories serve as counter discourses, illustrating individual identification processes and struggles for equity. Both were in high spirits on entering school, perceiving it as a space where everyone would be positioned as an equal. However, Habib experienced exclusion in the mainstream class and Eylo had to wait three years to enter one. For Habib, his identity as an *immigrant* (Kurki, 2019) strengthened during the five-year follow-up, whereas Eylo, by determinedly challenging other-positionings, positioned himself as a world citizen.

I should note that while my own privileged position as a white researcher and educator enables me to scrutinize some racializing structures, it also hinders me from recognizing other crucial aspects. Thus, this study created as well as captured narratives, and hence risks reinforcing categorizations (see also Keskinen et al., 2015). The findings were, however, constantly negotiated with the participants (see also Hudley, 2017, pp. 398–399).

Although raciolinguistic ideologies are present in various life contexts, they are particularly reinforced in school, where they can also be dismantled. This entails making raciolinguistic practices and discourses on language and race visible. Understandably, teachers may be wary of othering their students and avoid sensitive topics. However, the present participants appreciated their teachers' efforts to create a safe space for dialogue. This may mean taking risks (see also Souto, 2013, p. 326), but claims of colour blindness are even more problematic as they prevent the unmasking of racializing practices (see Dick & Wirtz, 2011, p. 8, 9; Delfino & Kosse, 2020, p. 2). Tackling raciolinguistic ideologies involves giving voice to marginalized worldviews, raising sensitive topics while also enhancing the majority students' ability to build understanding on how categorizations such as race, religion, and gender unconsciously determine who has the right to participate and legitimacy to speak. In these ways, exclusive practices could be challenged and collaboration promoted. Furthermore, there is a growing emphasis on dismantling linguistic hierarchies by developing translanguaging practices and pedagogies across curricula (Flores, 2020; Paris & Alim, 2014).

Conclusion

This ethnographic case study contributes to the research on raciolinguistic processes in educational contexts by offering a longitudinal analysis of two racialized students' educational paths. The analysis illustrates the diverse ways in which raciolinguistic processes can influence access to participation and academic trajectories over a period of several years. The study also contributes to the literature by focusing on late arrivals in the Finnish educational context.

Even if education officially promotes equality, structures exist that reinforce societal stratification (Hiss & Peck, 2020; Lappalainen et al., 2013). The neoliberal assumption that man is the master of his own destiny may result in dismissing structures that sustain economic and cultural inequalities, such as

postcolonial power relations and racialization, also found in the Nordic countries (Augoustinous & Every, 2007 .pp. 135–136; Keskinen & Tuori, 2015; Keskinen & Andreassen, 2017). However, in a democratic society one cannot expect assertiveness from every individual who encounters racism (Kurki, 2019). While immigrant students are only one of the groups that experience inequality, their stories illuminate how equality and social justice could be promoted in the school context, where students with differing backgrounds build their educational careers while sharing the same space.

Note

1. As the study participants were now adults, the project did not require ethical approval. Moreover, the prior data collection was kept maximally transparent. The participatory and collaborative ethnographic data were gathered together *with* the participants, not *about* them. Both pre- and post-selection of data were made by and with the research participants to ensure that sensitive data were not analysed or reported.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Saija Peuronen, Amin Rasti-Behbahani, and Pauliina Puranen for co-interviewing. Thank you, Eylo and Habib, for your steadfast commitment to this process.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author (s).

Funding

This work was supported by the Academy of Finland.

ORCID

Sanna Mustonen http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0060-1992

References

Airas, M., Delahunty, D., Laitinen, M., Saarilammi, M.-L., Sarparanta, T., Shemsedini, G., Stenberg, H., Vuori, H., & Väätäinen, H. (2019). Taustalla on väliä. ulkomaalaiset opiskelijat korkeakoulupolulla. [*Background matters. Students with an immigrant background in higher education*]. *Kansallinen koulutuksen arviointikeskus*. Finnish Education Evaluation Centre. Julkaisut 22: 2019 https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2020/01/KARVI_T0220.pdf.

Aminkeng Atabong, A., (2016). Is there such a thing … ? A study of antiracism education in Finland. [Doctoral dissertation. University of helsinki]. http://urn.fi

Augoustinous, M., & Every, D. (2007). The language of “race” and prejudice. A discourse of denial, reason, and liberal-practical politics. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 26(2), 123–141. doi:10.1177/0261927X07300075

Blackledge, A., & Creese, A. (2010). *Multilingualism: A critical perspective*. Continuum.

Block, D., & Corona, V. (2019). Critical LPP and the intersection of class, race and language policy and practice in twenty first century Catalonia. *Language Policy*, doi:10.1007/s10993-018-09508-7 https://link.springer.com/journal/10993/online-first

Chaparro, S. (2019). But mom! i’m not a spanish boy: Raciolinguistic socialization in a two-way immersion bilingual program. *Linguistics and Education*, 50, 1–12. doi:10.1016/j.linged.2019.01.003

Chun, E., & Lo, A. (2016). Language and racialization. In N. Bonvillain (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of linguistic anthropology* (pp. 220–233). Routledge.

Council of Europe. (2001) . *Common European framework of reference for languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. Cambridge University Press.

Creutz, K., Saarinen, J., & Juntunen, M. (2015). Syrjintä, polarisaatio, nuoriso ja väkivaltainen radikalisoituminen. SSKH Notat 5:2015. SYPONUR-väliraportti (Svenska social- och kommunalhögskolan vid Helsingfors universitet). http://hdl.handle.net/10138/159763

De Fina, A. (2015). Narrative and Identities. In A. De Fina & A. Georgakopoulou (Eds.), *The handbook of narrative analysis* (pp. 351–368). Wiley Blackwell.

Delfino, J. B., & Kosse, M. (2020). Racialization and the national body: (Re)defining selves and others in changing contexts of liberal democratic governance. *International Journal of Sociology of Language*, 2020 (265), 1–17. doi:10.1515/ijsl-2020-2100

Depperman, A. (2015). Positioning. In A. De Fina & A. Georgakopoulou (Eds.), *The handbook of narrative analysis* (pp. 369–387). Wiley Blackwell.

Dick, H. P., & Wirtz, K. (Eds). (2011). Introduction: Racializing discourses. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 21(S1), E2–E10. doi:10.1111/j.1548-1395.2011.01094.x

Dunlavy, A., de Montgomery, J., Lorentzen, C., Malin, M., T., & Hjern, A. (2020). *Equity in education? A comparative analysis of educational outcomes among refugee children in the Nordic countries*. Cage project Report 1 (Nordic Research Council https://cage.ku.dk/publications/dokumenter/Equity_in_education__CAGE_report_2020.pdf).

EDUFI. (2016) . *National core curriculum for basic education 2014*. Finnish National Agency for Education.

Ennser-Kananen, J., Leppänen, S., & Jäntti, S. (2017). Does Finland need Raciolinguistics?. Apples-*Journal of Applied Language Studies*, 11(4), 101–111. doi:10.17011/apples/urn.201711224341

Ennser-Kananen, J. (2019). Knowledge is power is knowledge: Can we break the cycle of epistemic and epistemological injustice?. *Tiedepolitiikka*, 44 4 , 22–40.

Flores, N., & Rosa, J. (2015). Undoing appropriateness: Raciolinguistic ideologies and language diversity in education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 85(2), 149–172. doi:10.17763/0017-8055.85.2.149

Flores, N. (2020). From academic language to language architecture: Challenging raciolinguistic ideologies in research and practice. *Theory Into Practice*, 59(1), 22–31. doi:10.1080/00405841.2019.1665411

Georgakopoulou, A. (2015). Small stories research: Methods - Analysis - Outreach. In A. De Fina & A. Georgakopoulou (Eds.), *The handbook of narrative analysis* (pp. 255–271). Wiley Blackwell.

Harju-Luukkainen, H., Nissinen, K., Sulkunen, S., Suni, M., & Vettenranta, J. (2014). *Avaimet osaamiseen ja*

tulevaisuuteen. Selvitys maahanmuuttajataustaisten nuorten osaamisesta ja siihen liittyvistä taustatekijöistä PISA 2012 -tutkimuksessa. Finnish Institute for Educational Research. University of Jyväskylä.
Heller, M., Pietikäinen, S., & Pujolar, J. (2018). *Critical ethnographic research methods. Studying language issues that matter*. Routledge.
Hiss, A., & Peck, A. (2020). "Good schooling" in a race, gender, and class perspective: The reproduction of inequality at a former model C school in South Africa. *International Journal of Sociology of Language*, 2020 (264), 25–47. doi:10.1515/ijsl-2020-2092
Hudley, A. H. C. (2017). Language and Racialization. In O. García, N. Flores, & M. Spotti (Eds.), *The oxford handbook of language and society* (pp. 381–402). Oxford University Press.
Kalalahti, M., Jahnukainen, M., Kivirauma, J., Varjo, J., & Zacheus, T. (2020). Koulutuspolun löytämistä ja sitoutumista – Toisen asteen opintojen uudelleen suuntaaminen ja maahanmuuttotaustaisuus. *Kasvatus*, 51(4), 409–425.
Katz, L., & Dasilva Iddings, C. (2009). Classroom positionings and children's construction of linguistic and racial identities in english-dominant classrooms. In R. Kubota & A. Lin (Eds.), *Race, culture, and identities in second language education. exploring critically engaged practice* (pp. 138–157). Routledge.
Keskinen, S., & Andreassen, R. (2017). Developing theoretical perspectives on racialisation and migration. *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*, 7(2), 64–69. doi:10.1515/njmr-2017-0018
Keskinen, S., Näre, L., & Tuori, S. (2015). Valkoisuusnormi, rodullistamisen kritiikki ja sukupuoli [normative whiteness, the critique of Racialization and gender]. *Sukupuolentutkimus [Gender Studies]*, 28(4), 2–5 http://elektra.helsinki.fi/se/s/2342-0634/28/4/valkoisu.pdf.
Keskinen, S., & Tuori, S. (2015). Taloudesta, globaaleista valtasuhteista ja jälkikoloniaalista näkökulmasta [on the economy, global power relations and the postcolonial perspective]. *Sukupuolentutkimus [Gender Studies]*, 28 (1), 47–49 http://elektra.helsinki.fi/se/s/2342-0634/28/1/taloudes.pdf.
Kosunen, S., & Hansen, P. (2018). Discursive narratives of comprehensive education politics in Finland. *European Educational Research Journal*, 17(5), 714–732. doi:10.1177/1474904118764938
Kraft, C., & Flubacher, M. (2020). The promise of language: Betwixt empowerment and the reproduction of inequality. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 2020(264), 1–23. doi:10.1515/ijsl-2020-2091
Kubota, R., & Lin, A. (2009). Race, culture, and identities in second language education: Introduction to research and practice. In R. Kubota & A. Lin (Eds.), *Race, culture, and identities in second language education: Exploring critically engaged practice* (pp. 1–23). Routledge.
Kubota, R. (2015). Race and language learning in multicultural Canada: Towards critical antiracism. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 36(1), 3–12. doi:10.1080/01434632.2014.892497
Kurki, T. (2019). Immigrant-ness as (mis)fortune? Immigrantisation through integration policies and practices in education. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Helsinki]. http://urn.fi
Laakkonen, V., & Juntunen, M. (2019). "Mitä te tutkitte? Että mikä meissä mamuissa on vikana?" Musliminuorten yhteiskuntakriittinen ironia Turun Varissuolla. *Nuorisotutkimus*, 37 (2) , 70–83.
Lappalainen, S., Odenbring, Y., & Steen-Olsen, T. (2013). Welfare, social justice and equality in educational settings in Nordic countries. *Nordic Studies in Education*, 33(4), 249–253 https://doi.org/10.18261/ISSN1891-5949-2013-04-01.
Lo, A. (2020). Systems, features, figures: Approaches to language and class vs. language and race. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 24(3), 293–307. doi:10.1111/josl.12414
Martin Rojo, L. (2017). Language and power. In O. García, N. Flores, & M. Spotti (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of language and society* (pp. 77–102). Oxford University Press.
May, S. (2017). Language, imperialism, and the modern nation-state system. implications for language rights. In O. García, N. Flores, & M. Spotti (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of language and society* (pp. 35–53). Oxford University Press.
Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change*. Longman.
Paris, D., & Alim, H. S. (2014). What are we seeking to sustain through culturally sustaining pedagogy? A loving critique forward. *Harvard Educational Review*, 84(1), 85–100. doi:10.17763/haer.84.1.982l873k2ht16m77
Peltola, M. (2018). Toinen sukupolvi ja tavallisen suomalaisuuden saavuttamisen vaikeus. *Siirtolaisuus - Migration*, 44(3), 15–17 https://siirtolaisuus-migration.journal.fi/article/view/89561.
Rättilä, T., & Honkatukia, P. (2021). . Tutkien ja tarinoiden kohti pakolaistaustaisten nuorten hyvinvointia. (Nuorisotutkimusseura/Nuorisotutkimusverkosto).
Rosa, J., & Flores, N. (2017). Unsettling race and language: Toward a raciolinguistic perspective. *Language in Society*, 46(5), 621–647. doi:10.1017/S0047404517000562
Rosa, J. (2019). *Looking like a language, sounding like a race: Raciolinguistic ideologies and the learning of Latinidad*. Oxford University Press.
Ruuska, K. (2020). At the nexus of language, identity and ideology: Becoming and being a highly proficient second language speaker of Finnish. [Doctoral dissertation, University of Jyväskylä]. https://jyx.jyu.fi/handle/123456789/72334
Smith Jervelund, S., Krasnik, A, & Rosenkrantz de Lasson, A.-K. (Eds.) (2020). *Coming of age in exile. health and socio-economic inequalities in young refugees in the nordic welfare societies*. University of Copenhagen, Department of Public Health.
Souto, A.-M. (2011). . Arkipäivän rasismi koulussa: etnografinen tutkimus suomalais- ja maahanmuuttajanuorten ryhmäsuhteista. (Nuorisotutkimusseura: Nuorisotutkimusverkosto) .
Souto, A.-M. (2013). Pelko ja rasismi koulussa. *Kasvatus*, 44(3), 323–329 http://elektra.helsinki.fi/se/k/0022-927-x/44/3/pelkojar.pdf.
TENK. Finnish National Board on Research Integrity. https://tenk.fi/en
Vaarala, H., Riuttanen, S., Kyckling, E., & Karppinen, S. (2021). . Kielivaranto. nyt! monikielisyys vahvuudeksi -selvityksen (2017) seuranta (University of Jyväskylä, Center for Applied Language Studies). https://www.jyu.fi/hytk/fi/laitokset/solki/tutkimus/julkaisut/pdf-julkaisut/kielivaranto-nyt-_julkaisu_sivuittain-1.pdf
Valdés, G. (2017). Entry visa denied. the construction of symbolic language borders in educational settings. In O. García, N. Flores, & M. Spotti (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of language and society* (pp. 321–348). Oxford University Press.
Weber, J. J. (2015). *Language Racism*. Palgrave Pivot.