

## ABSTRACT

Absences and Epistemology of Ignorance: A Critical Multi-Sited Study of the Teaching of the Danish Colonial and Slave Trading Past

by

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The present study is a critical investigation of the production of subjectivities through the teaching of the history of the Danish slave trade within the current neoliberal multicultural (Melamed, 2006) landscape of education. By conducting a study of teaching on this subject in the context of a Danish high school, the aim is to understand how the teaching-learning of the Danish slave trading history shapes the ground for Danish high school students to develop their own positionings with regards to the past as it ties into present day issues of nationalism and xenophobia in Denmark. Drawing on the concept of history-in-person (Holland & Lave, 2001, 2009) and premised on Marxist notions of history as the continuous and contradictory flows of social practices to which our contributions matter (Marx, 1975; Vygotsky, 1966; Stetsenko & Vianna, 2006), the aim is to explore how the teaching of the past of the Danish slave trade, as a particularly fertile ground for a critical pedagogical intervention, facilitates students' interrogation of both the past and the present, as well as their future orientations (Stetsenko, 2013; Taylor, 1991).

The design employed is a critical multi-site case study that draws on the insights of counter-topography (Katz, 2004) and multi-sited ethnography (Weis, Fine & Dimitriadis, 2009) of tapping into

the local-global nexus by moving across sites. The high school's participation in the UNESCO project *Breaking the Silence*, an international collaboration aimed at developing best practices in the teaching of the history of slavery and with corresponding goals of promoting global citizenship, provides the second site for interrogation. By first following a Danish high school classroom during the implementation of the curriculum on the Danish slave trading past in Denmark, and then later following two of those same Danish high school students in their educational visit to the U.S. Virgin Islands, the analytical focus is to explore how engaging with the same history across the two different geo-political sites affords students' positionings.

In exploring the local and global dynamics in education, including postcolonial tensions in the global citizenship paradigm, the study examines how global citizenship as an educational discourse intersects with, contradicts, or compliments the positionings of national identity and "Nordic Exceptionalism" (Jensen & Loftsdóttir, 2012) in the context of the teaching of the history of slavery. The analysis is conducted by drawing on insights from critical race theory (Solorzano, 1997; Nasir & Hand, 2006; Leonardo & Manning, 2017), including by exploring how collective colonial forgetting in Denmark is tied into epistemologies of ignorance (Tuana, 2006).

*Keywords:* history education, positioning, slavery, colonialism, nordic exceptionalism, critical race theory, epistemologies of ignorance.